

UPSC Monthly Current Affairs **April 2021**

HISTORY, ART AND CULTURE, GEOGRAPHY

Dadasaheb Phalke award

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre has recently announced the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award for **Rajinikanth** for his contribution as an actor, producer and screenwriter.
- About Instituted in 1969, the award is the highest honour for an artiste in Indian cinema.

About Dadasaheb Phalke Award



- The Dadasaheb Phalke Award is India's highest award in cinema.
- It is presented annually at the National Film Awards ceremony by the Directorate of Film Festivals, an organisation set up by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The recipient is honoured for their "outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian cinema".

Prime Minister's Yoga Awards

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

Why in the news?

- The nomination process for this year's Prime Minister's Yoga Awards (PMYA) has begun recently.

About Prime Minister's Yoga Awards

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- It is one of the key initiatives of the Ministry of AYUSH (MoA), the International Day of Yoga (IDY), has gained international recognition.
- It has announced for two categories
 - a. For International
 - b. For National
- The purpose of the awards is to recognize and felicitate the individual(s)/organization(s) who/which have made a significant impact on the society, for a sustained period, by the way of promotion and development of Yoga.

Indian summer monsoon

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, a new study show details how dust coming from the deserts in the West, Central and East Asia plays an important role in the Indian Summer Monsoon.

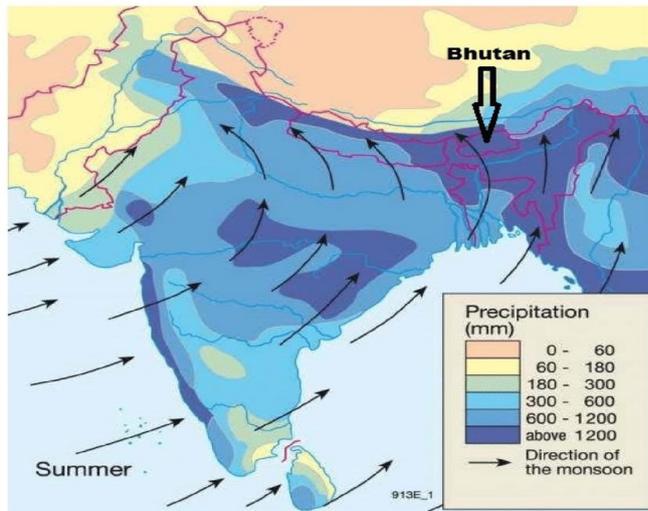
Reverse effect

- The researchers also explain how the Indian Summer Monsoon has a reverse effect and can increase the winds in West Asia to produce yet more dust.

Dust particles and winds from the Middle East

- When carried by strong winds into the atmosphere, the dust particles from the Middle East absorb solar radiation and become extremely hot.
- The heat from these particles raises the heat of its surrounding environment enough to change air pressure and circulation patterns of the wind.
- This phenomenon is termed an “**elevated heat pump**” that is responsible for driving moisture from the sea to the Indian subcontinent.
- "The Indian summer monsoon is characterized by strong winds in the summers so once the winds change, the moisture transport from ocean to land will change, and consequently they will increase the precipitation.

About Indian summer monsoon rainfall



- The Indian summer monsoon rainfall (ISMR) during June to September contributes most of the annual rainfall over India and plays an important role in Indian agriculture and thus the economy.
- It exhibits high spatio-temporal variabilities forced from both internal and external factors, which are important for better understanding and prediction of ISMR.

Tropical cyclone Seroja

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, MALAKA, Indonesia (Reuters) - Floods and landslides triggered by tropical cyclone Seroja in a cluster of islands in southeast Indonesia and East Timor have killed 113 people.

About Tropical Cyclone Seroja

- It is a currently active tropical cyclone that is responsible for a series of significant and deadly flash floods and landslides in East Timor and southern Indonesia.
- It is a twenty-second tropical low and seventh tropical cyclone of the 2020–21 Australian region cyclone seasons, the precursor of Seroja formed off the south coast of Timor island.

Related Information

Timor Island



- Timor is an island at the southern end of Maritime Southeast Asia, in the north of the Timor Sea.
- The island is divided between the sovereign states of East Timor on the eastern part and Indonesia on the western part.
- The Indonesian part, also known as West Timor, constitutes part of the province of East Nusa Tenggara.

La Soufriere Volcano

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the La Soufriere Volcano located on the eastern Caribbean island has been erupted after decades of inactivity.

About La Soufriere Volcano



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- La Soufrière or Soufrière Saint Vincent is an active volcano on the island of Saint Vincent in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
- It is the highest peak in Saint Vincent, and has had five recorded explosive eruptions since 1718, most recently in April 2021.
- Soufrière is a stratovolcano with a crater lake and is the island's youngest and northernmost volcano.

Doomsday Glacier

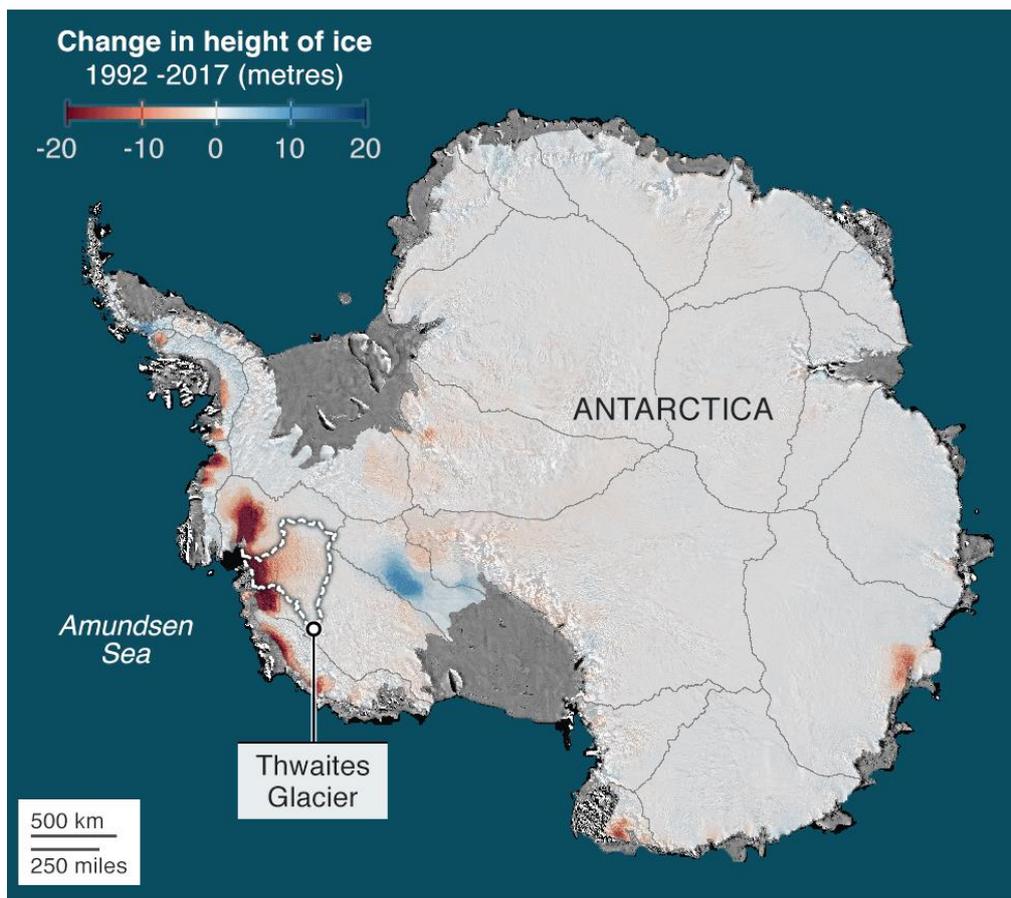
(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the researchers at Sweden's University of Gothenburg have said that fears related to Doomsday Glacier's melting ice are worse than previously thought.

About Doomsday Glacier

Ice sheets in West Antarctica have thinned the most



Source: Tom Slater, CPOM

BBC

- It is also known as Thwaites Glacier, located in Antarctica.
- It is 120 km wide at its broadest, fast-moving, and melting fast over the years.

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- It contains enough water to raise the world sea level by more than half a metre.

What has the new study revealed?

- Studies have found the amount of ice flowing out of it has nearly doubled over the past 30 years.
- The researchers discovered that there is a deep connection to the east through which deep water flows from Pine Island Bay, a connection that was previously thought to be blocked by an underwater ridge.
- The study also looked at heat transport in one of the three channels which brings warm water towards the glacier from the north.

Lost golden city of Egypt

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, three-millennia-old “lost golden city” from the era of 18th-dynasty king Amenhotep III, who ruled ancient Egypt from 1391 to 1353 B.C., has been found in the southern province of Luxor in Egypt.

About Lost golden city



- It is the most important find since the unearthing of King Tutankhamun’s tomb almost 100 years ago.
- It is called as ancient Egyptian Pompeii because the mud-brick houses, artefacts, and tools discovered from the reign of the Pharaohs.
- As per Egypt’s antiquities ministry, a bakery, ovens and storage pottery were found in the southern part of the city, while the northern part — which is yet to be fully unearthed — includes administrative and residential districts.

Location

- The newly discovered city is located on the west bank of the Nile River.

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Significance

- The archaeologists are said to have found city walls and even rooms filled with utensils used in daily life.
- They have found clay caps of wine vessels, rings, scarabs, coloured pottery, and spinning and weaving tools.
- The mud bricks discovered bear the seal of Tutankhamun's grandfather King Amenhotep III, who is considered to be one of Egypt's most powerful pharaohs.
- The site contains a large number of ovens and kilns for making glass and faience, along with the debris of thousands of statues.
- The city is also believed to have been used by Tutankhamun and his successor Ay during a period widely believed to be the golden era of ancient Egypt.

Kopili fault zone

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

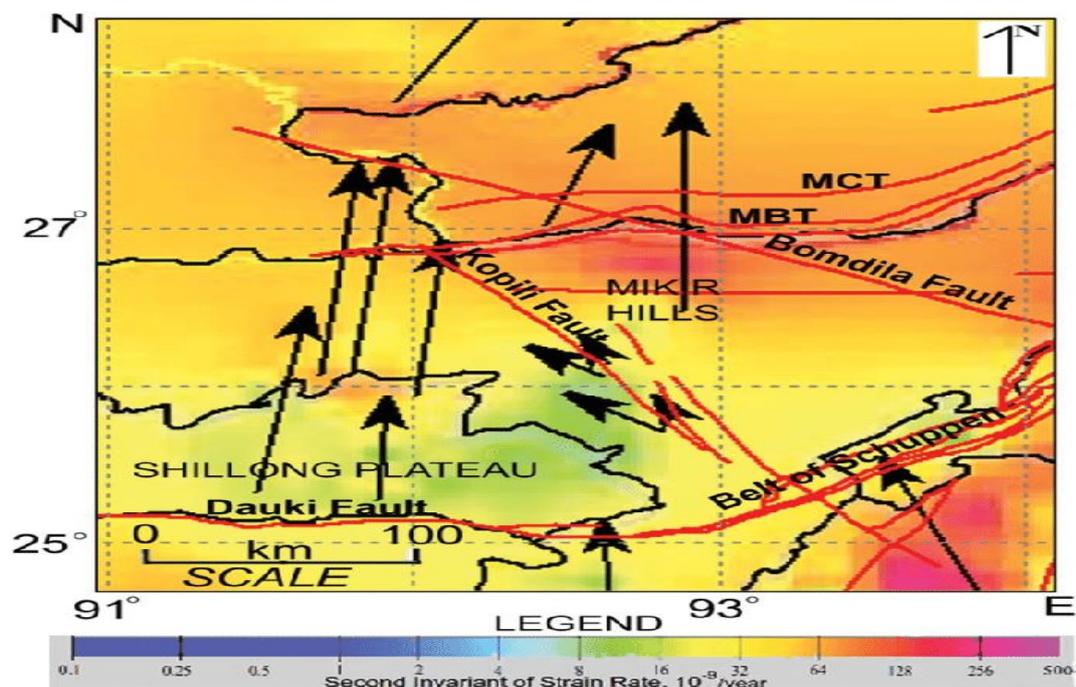
Why in the news?

- The National Centre for Seismology (NCS) has recently said that the tremors in Assam can be attributed to the Kopili Fault Zone which is located closer to Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT).

More on the news

- Assam tremor highlights vulnerability of northeast India to large earthquakes.
- The quake, measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale, occurred near Dhekiajuli in the Sonitpur district of Assam.

About the Kopili fault



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- This is a seismically active area falling in the highest **Seismic Hazard Zone V**.
- It is associated with collisional tectonics because of the Indian Plate subducting beneath the Eurasian Plate.
- The Kopili fault zone is a 300 km long and 50 km wide lineament (linear feature) extending from the western part of Manipur up to the tri-junction of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- The fault itself is a transpressional fracture that generates lower crustal dextral strike-slip earthquakes.

Past Seismic Activities

- The Kopili fault zone has witnessed many seismic activities in the past including the 1869 earthquake (7.8 magnitude) and the 1943 earthquake (7.3 magnitude).

About Himalayan Frontal Thrust

- It is also known as the Main Frontal Thrust.
- It is a geological fault along the boundary of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, **the consensus report SASCOF-19** was prepared and released by the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF).

Key finding of the report

- The report states that above normal rainfall is likely along the Himalayan foothills, central and western India whereas normal rain is expected along most parts of India, including the southern peninsula, north Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Pakistan.
- The SASCOF statement is in line with the first stage Long Range Forecast (LRF) issued by the India Meteorological Department earlier this month.
- Below normal rain is likely along southern Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, northeast India, Afghanistan and its adjoining areas of Pakistan and south Myanmar during the monsoon season this year.

About South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF)

- It is a forum of climate experts representing Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.
- It has also the expertise from members of the World Meteorological Organisation, Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early warning System, Japan Meteorological Agency and Korea Meteorological Administration.

- It is conducted by South Asian nations and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) since 2010.
- It prepares consensus seasonal climate information on a regional scale that provides a consistent basis for preparing national level outlooks.

POLITY, GOVERNANCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Global gender gap report Index 2021

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

Why in the news?

- World Economic forum has recently published ‘**Global gender gap report Index 2021**’.

About the Global Gender Gap index

- It is published by the World Economic Forum.
- The WEF published its first gender gap index in 2006.
- The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 153 countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions:
 - a. Economic Participation and Opportunity
 - b. Educational Attainment,
 - c. Health and Survival
 - d. Political Empowerment
- The Index aims to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics.

Score

- Over the Index, the highest possible score is 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score is 0 (inequality).

Key Highlights

Global Scenario



- The report showed that South Asia was the lowest performer on the index followed only by the Middle East and northern Africa, West Asia and North Africa.
- Within the region, a wide gulf separates the best-performing country, Bangladesh, which has closed 71.9% of its gender gap so far, from Afghanistan, which has only closed 44.4% of its gap.
- **India is the third-worst performer in the region, after Afghanistan and Pakistan.**
- Globally, Iceland, Finland, Norway, New Zealand and Sweden are the world’s most gender-equal countries.
- The report showed that in South Asia, only Bhutan and Nepal had shown progress towards gender parity in 2021.

India and Index

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- India has fallen 28 spots to rank 140th among 156 countries on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap index.
- **In 2020, India was ranked at 112th among 153 countries on the index.**
- India has fallen 28 places in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021.
- It is one of the worst performers in South Asia, trailing behind neighbors Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.
- In the two indices where India has fared the worst are “**Health and Survival**”, which includes the sex ratio, and **economic participation of women**.

Economic Participation and Opportunity

- The report notes that the economic participation gender gap actually widened in India by 3 percent this year.
- The share of women in professional and technical roles declined further to 29.2 per cent.
- The share of women in senior and managerial positions also is at 14.6 per cent and only 8.9 per cent firms in the country have top female managers.
- The estimated earned income of women in India is only one-fifth of men’s, which puts the country among the bottom 10 globally on this indicator

Political Power Index

- India has declined on the political empowerment index as well by 13.5 percentage points.
- It has also a decline in the number of women ministers, from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021.

Education Attainment

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- In the index of education attainment, India has been ranked at 114.

Health and Survival index

- In Health and Survival index, India has fared the worst, ranking at 155 — the only country to have fared worse is China.
- The report points to a skewed sex ratio as a major factor.

DSIR-PRISM Scheme

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

Why in the news?

- Union Minister for Science & Technology has recently inaugurates the Event for Publicity of the PRISM (Promoting Innovations in Individuals, Startups, and MSMEs) scheme.

About PRISM Scheme

- It is an initiative of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Ministry of Science and Technology.

Aims

- To help an individual innovator to become a successful technopreneur.
- It promotes, supports, and funds implementable and commercially viable innovations created for society.

Eligibility

- Under the initiative, an innovator of Indian nationality – student, professional and common citizen is eligible.

Features

- Eligible candidates are provided with technical, strategic, and financial assistance by DSIR-PRISM. Assistance is provided on the stages like idea development, prototype development, and pilot scaling and patenting.

Sectors Covered

The proposals under the scheme will be accepted for the following sectors:

- a. Green technology
- b. Clean energy
- c. Industrially utilizable smart materials
- d. Waste to Wealth
- e. Affordable Healthcare
- f. Water & Sewage Management and
- g. any other technology or knowledge-intensive area.

Giga Mesh

(Topic- GS Paper II + III– Women Organisation + Science and technology, Source-Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently Astrome, a women-led startup, has developed an innovative wireless product called **Giga Mesh** that gives fibre-like bandwidth at fraction of cost of fibre to help telecom operators deliver reliable low-cost internet services to suburban and rural areas.

About Giga Mesh



**INNOVATION
CONNECTING
THE UNCONNECTED**

*Women-led Startup 'Astrome'
Develops Low-cost Internet Services*

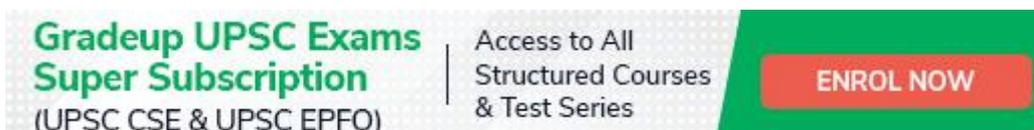
Astrome, a women-led startup has developed an innovative wireless product called 'Giga Mesh', a fibre-like bandwidth, that can provide reliable low-cost internet service

The wireless product could enable telecom operators to deploy quality, high-speed rural telecom infrastructure at 5 times lower cost

Due to the reliable low-cost, this product may prove to be a boon for rural internet connectivity

- It is an innovative wireless product that gives fibre like bandwidth at fraction of cost of fibre to help telecom operators deliver reliable low-cost internet services to suburban and rural areas.
- It is a multi-beam E-band product which packs 6 point-to-point E-band radios in one, thereby distributing the cost of the device over multiple links.

Features



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- It has an automatic link alignment, dynamic power allocation between links and remote link formation help operators achieve significant operating expenditure cost reduction.

Benefits of Giga Mesh

- It provides the internet access at remote places in countries such as India is difficult because laying fibre is too expensive.
- It reduces network congestion and also makes the existing infrastructure 5G ready.
- A single GigaMesh device can provide upto 40 links with 2+ Gbps capacity each, communicating upto a range of 10 kilometers.
- The flexibility in range makes it suitable for both decongesting the dense urban networks as well as extending rural coverage.
- It brings in Software Defined Networks (SDN) capability to telecom backhaul thereby reducing the operational costs significantly.

Related Information

Internet penetration in India

- As per the latest Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) data, about 54% of India's population has access to the Internet.
- The 75th round of the National Statistical Organisation survey shows that only 20% of the population has the ability to use the Internet.
- The India Internet 2019 report shows that rural India has half the Internet penetration as urban, and twice as many users who access the Internet less than once a week.

Healthcare sector expected to reach USD 372 billion in 2022: Niti Aayog report

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, a report titled 'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector' has been released by NITI Aayog.

Key finding of the Report

- Healthcare has become one of the largest sectors of the Indian economy and is expected to reach USD 372 billion in 2022.
- The report outlined a range of investment opportunities in the country's healthcare sector across hospitals, pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

Generate new job

- India's healthcare sector has the potential to generate 27 lakh jobs in India between 2017 and 2022 -- over 5 lakh new jobs per year.
- "India's healthcare industry has been growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 22 per cent since 2016.

- According to the report, FDI inflows in the healthcare sector in India increased from USD 94 million in 2011 to USD 1,275 million in 2016, a jump of over 13.5 times.
- It also pointed out that in the hospital segment, the expansion of private players to tier-II and tier-III locations, beyond metropolitan cities, offers an attractive investment opportunity.
- As per the report, non-metros (**Tier-II and III cities**) are expected to recover faster than the metropolitan areas and tier-I cities, as they were less badly hit by the Covid-19 outbreak.

Article 244 (A)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promised to implement Article 244 (A) of the Constitution to safeguard the interests of the people in Assam’s tribal-majority districts.

About Article 244(A)

- It was inserted into the Constitution in 1969.
- Article 244(A) allows for creation of an ‘autonomous state’ within Assam in certain tribal areas.
- It also has a provision for a Legislature and a Council of Ministers.
- The 22nd Amendment, amended article 275 in regard to sums and grants payable to the autonomous State on and from its formation under article 244A.

How is it different from the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution?

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution — Articles 244(2) and 275(1) — is a special provision that allows for greater political autonomy and decentralised governance in certain tribal areas of the Northeast through autonomous councils that are administered by elected representatives.
- In Assam, the hill districts of Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi and the Bodo Territorial Region are under this provision.
- Article 244(A) accounts for more autonomous powers to tribal areas.
- In Autonomous Councils under the Sixth Schedule, they do not have jurisdiction of law and order.

AIM-PRIME

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

Why in the news ?

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog has recently launched AIM-PRIME (Program for Researchers on Innovations, Market-Readiness & Entrepreneurship), an initiative to promote and support science-based deep-tech startups & ventures across India.

- In this regard, AIM has joined hands with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to launch this nationwide program which will be implemented by Venture Center - a non-profit technology business incubator

About AIM-PRIME (Program for Researchers on Innovations, Market-Readiness & Entrepreneurship)

- The first cohort of the program is open to technology developers (early-stage deep tech start-ups, and scientists/ engineers/ clinicians) with strong science-based deep tech business ideas.
- The program is also open to CEOs and Senior incubation managers of AIM Funded Atal Incubation Centers that are supporting deep tech entrepreneurs.
- Candidates selected for the program will get access to in-depth learning via a comprehensive lecture series, live team projects, exercises, and project-specific mentoring.
- They will also have access to a deep tech startup playbook, curated video library, and plenty of peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

Benefits

- The benefits of this program are aimed at addressing specific issues through training and guidance over a period of 12 months.

Jal Jeevan Mission deploys sensor-based IoT devices to monitor rural drinking water supply systems

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

Why in the news?

- National Jal Jeevan Mission with TCIT and Tata Trusts recently completed pilot projects in remote villages of Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Himachal Pradesh

Background

- In a bid to monitor the rural drinking water supply systems in villages, the Ministry of Jal Shakti has decided to take the digital route to use sensor-based IoT devices to effectively monitor the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in more than six lakh villages.

Key Features

- A key feature of these pilots has been the use of frugal yet sturdy sensors, which makes the solution scalable and sustainable.
- It helps to reduce the water infrastructure costs (<10-15% of total scheme capex) without compromising on quality or functionality.

Related Information

About Internet of Things (IoT)

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- The Internet of Things (IoT) based remote monitoring provides near real-time information without any manual intervention by using sensors.
- This would not only allow effective monitoring and management on-ground, but also enable real-time visibility to State water supply/ PHED officials, and citizens, said the government.

About Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

- It is government flagship programme, which is implemented in partnership with States/ UTs to provide tap water connection to every rural household by 2024.
- It has a envisions creating a Digital Wall and Remote Command & Control Centre for monitoring and managing supply of prescribed quality water in adequate quantity (55 Liters Per Capita per Day - LPCD) every day through household tap connections across all rural villages.

Biden allows H1-B visa ban to expire

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

Why in the news?

- Recently the White House has allowed a 2020 ban on H1-B skilled worker and certain other temporary visas to expire on March 31.
- Visas for intra-company transfers (L1), exchange visitors (J1), temporary non-agricultural workers (H-2B) and dependents of H1-B holders (H4) were also impacted by the expiring ban.

Related Information

What are H-1B, H-2B, L and other work visas?

- In order to fill a vacuum of highly-skilled low-cost employees in IT and other related domains, the US administration issues a certain number of visas each year which allows companies from outside the US to send employees to work on client sites.
- Of these work visas, the H-1B remains the most popular among Indian IT companies.

About H-1B for

- This type of Visas will be given the person is specialty occupation which requires a higher education degree of its equivalent.
- It also includes fashion models of distinguished merit and ability and government-to-government research and development, or co-production projects administered by the Department of Defence.

About L1 visas

- This VISAS which allows companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years.

About H-2B visas

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- This type of visas will allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.

Reasons for suspension

- The technology boom coupled with the arrival of the internet and low-cost computers in developing nations such as India and China saw a large number of graduates willing to work at relatively low costs in the US.
- The low cost outsider worker hurts the domestic worker.

How does it impact Indian IT companies?

- Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime, and have since 1990s cornered a lion's share of the total number of visas issued each year.
- Indian IT companies also offer subcontracts to Indian nationals already present in the US with valid H-1B visas.
- Bangalore-based Wipro spends as much as 20 per cent of its revenue to subcontract Indian workers with valid H-1B visas.

BIMSTEC meet skirts Myanmar violence

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, at the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial meeting, which held virtually, India expressed commitment about taking the Bay of Bengal community to “new heights”.

About the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial meeting

- The meeting drew participation from all the seven-member States, including Myanmar which is witnessing a large-scale crackdown against anti-military protesters.
- Cohesion among the members has been difficult to achieve mainly because of the Rohingya refugee crisis which created bitterness between Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- This affected the working of the organisation to some extent as it could not develop a common charter.

Related Information

About BIMSTEC

- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization came into being in 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.

Members

- **It is a unique sub-regional grouping of seven countries.**

- Out of the 7 members, Five are from South Asia –Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka,
- **Two are from Southeast Asia** – Myanmar and Thailand
- BIMSTEC not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
- It mainly aims to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development; accelerate social progress; and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.

Objective

- The Objective of BIMSTEC is to harness trade and accelerated growth with mutual cooperation in different areas of common interest by utilising the regional resources and geographical advantage

Significance for India

- It allows India to pursue three core policies:
 - a. Neighborhood First - primacy to the country's immediate periphery;
 - b. Act East - connect India with Southeast Asia
 - c. Economic development of India's northeastern states – by linking them to the Bay of Bengal region via Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- It also allows India to counter China's creeping influence in countries around the Bay of Bengal due to the spread of its Belt and Road Initiative.

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Financial Express)

Why in the news?

- The Delhi High Court has issued notice to the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) on a plea by a Hindu couple, living in the U.S., seeking a no-objection certificate (NOC) to adopt a child born to Christian parents.

Present issue

- The present petition raises an issue of enormous importance as it relates to a legal vacuum in respect of adoptions carried out prior to the coming into force of the Juvenile Justice [Care and Protection of children] Model Rules, 2016 in respect of a child born to Christian parents, as in the present case.
- As per the couple, they adopted a minor child, who was born on December 11, 2014, - from Ferozepur, Punjab.
- The biological parents of the child got the legal formalities done for completion of adoption of the child with them by preparing an adoption deed which was signed and executed between the biological and the adoptive parents of the child.
- The adoption deed was duly witnessed by the village sarpanch as well as the relative - social worker and was also registered on December 18, 2014 under the provisions of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956.

Related Information

About Central Adoption Resource Authority

- It is a statutory body of Government of India and also an autonomous body of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It will promote and facilitates in –country adoption and regulates Inter-country adoption as Central Authority under the Hague Convention for Inter-country adoptions.
- It is also mandated to frame regulations on adoption related matters from time to time as per Section 68 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

About the Hague Adoption Convention

- It is also known as Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

Objectives:

- To protect children and their families against illegal or ill-prepared Inter-Country adoptions.
- To prevent the abduction, the sale of, or trafficking of children.
- The Convention establishes minimum standards, but does not intend to serve as a uniform law of adoption.

Background:

- The Convention was developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.
- This Convention gives effect to the Article 21 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Niramaya scheme

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

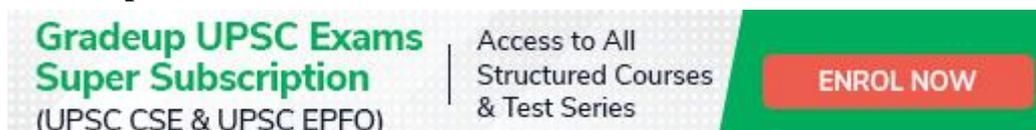
Why in the news ?

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has recently exposed massive irregularities by the Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd (OSMCL) in procurement of drugs and medical consumables along with showing undue favour to suppliers under the Niramaya Scheme.

About NIRAMAYA (Health Insurance Scheme)

- The Odisha government had launched the Niramaya scheme in 2016 under which patients are being provided drugs free of cost at all public health facilities in the State.
- The objective of Niramaya scheme is to provide affordable Health Insurance to persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities

Scheme Description



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- The scheme envisages delivering comprehensive cover which will • Have a single premium across age band.
- It provides same coverage irrespective of the type of disability covered under the National Trust Act.
- The Insurance cover up to Rs.1.0 lakh
- All persons with disabilities under the National Trust Act with valid disability certificate will be eligible.

UN Women

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, India has contributed \$300,000 to the United Nations agency for gender equality and women empowerment, a contribution lauded by the UN entity.

About UN Women

- It is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- It is a global champion for women and girls; it was established to accelerate progress on meeting the needs of women worldwide.

National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Financial Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Union Health & Family Welfare Minister has approved the “National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021”.

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**.

Key highlights of the National Policy for Rare Diseases:

- The policy aims to bring down the high cost of treatment for rare diseases and was brought about after "multiple consultations with different stakeholders and experts in the area.
- Those who are suffering from rare diseases (diseases listed under Group 1 in the rare disease policy) that require one-time treatment will have the financial support of up to Rs20 lakh under the umbrella scheme of **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi**.
- It will cover about 40 per cent of the population who are **eligible under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**.

- The policy will make use of a crowdfunding mechanism to cover the cost of treatment of rare diseases.
- As part of it, corporates and individuals will be encouraged to extend financial support through a robust IT platform.
- A national hospital-based registry of rare diseases will be created to ensure adequate data and comprehensive definitions of such diseases are available for those interested in research and development.
- Through the help of Health and Wellness Centres, District Early Intervention Centres and counselling, the policy aims to screen and detect rare diseases early at early stages, which will in turn help in their prevention.

“Sankalp se Siddhi”- Village and Digital Connect Drive

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

Why in the news?

- Recently the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) under Ministry of Tribal Affairs has now launched “Sankalp se Siddhi” - Village and Digital Connect Drive.

About Sankalp se Siddhi

- It is a 100 day drive which was started from 1st of First April 2021.
- The drive will entail 150 teams visiting ten villages each of which 10 in each region from TRIFED and State Implementation Agencies, visiting ten villages each.

Aim

- The main aim of this drive is to activate the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in these villages.
- The visiting teams will also identify locations and shortlist potential Van Dhan Vikas Kendras for clustering as TRIFOOD, and Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries- SFURTI units as larger enterprises.
- TRIFOOD aims to enhance the income of tribals through better utilization of and value addition to the Minor Forest Produce collected by the tribal forest gatherers.

Significance

- They will also identify tribal artisans and other groups and empanel them as suppliers so that they can have access to larger markets through the Tribes India network - both physical outlets and TribesIndia.com.
- It is expected that Sankalp Se Siddhi will aid in effecting a complete transformation of the tribal ecosystem across the country.

Mukhya Mantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana (MMCSBY)

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

Why in the news?

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- Recently, the Rajasthan government has launched the registration process for Mukhya Mantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana (MMCSBY).

About Mukhya Mantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana

- It is the flagship scheme for providing universal health coverage in the state.
- The Mukhya Mantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana (MMCSBY) is a part of the Rajasthan Model of Public Health' (RMPH). RMPH model.
- Under the scheme, each family in the state is entitled to health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh every year in all government hospitals and select private facilities.
- It is a cashless treatment for all which is aimed at providing medical relief to all residents of Rajasthan.
- Under the scheme, the state will provide health coverage up to Rs 50,000 for common ailments and up to Rs 5 lakh for more serious diseases.

Eligibility

- The eligibility under the scheme is NFSA Card Holder, SECC 2011 Registered Family, All Department Samvida Worker, Small Farmers and All other Family.

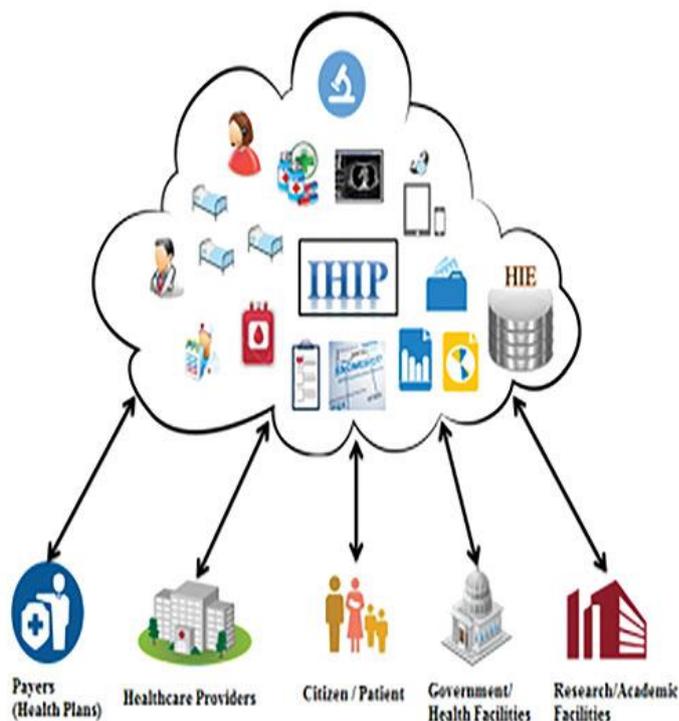
Integrated Health Information Platform

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

Why in the news?

- The Union Minister of Health has recently launched the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP).

About the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP)



- It is the next generation highly refined version of the presently used Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).
- It is in sync with the **National Digital Health Mission**.
- The new version of IHIP will house the data entry and management for India's disease surveillance program.
- In addition to tracking 33 diseases now as compared to the earlier 18 diseases, it shall ensure near-real-time data in digital mode, having done away with the paper-mode of working.

Note:

- India is the first country in the world to adopt such an advanced disease surveillance system.

John Kerry visit to India

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, United States (US) Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry has visited India between 5 and 8 April as part of his ongoing three-nation tour to discuss climate change.
- Kerry's visit will be the second official engagement between the US and India since Biden assumed office in January, after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's visit last month.

Key Highlights of his visit

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- John Kerry will discuss US President Joe Biden’s upcoming Leaders Summit, a 40-nation meeting on climate scheduled to be held between 22 and 23 April, and the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate **Change (COP26), slated for 1-12 November in Glasgow.**
- The US is expected to announce new, ambitious 2030 emissions targets under the Paris Agreement, and will encourage “leaders to use the summit as an opportunity to outline how their countries also will contribute to stronger climate ambition”.

About COP 26

- The COP26, which will be co-hosted by the UK and Italy.

Significance

- It will be significant because countries will report on the progress with respect to their targets, and are expected to commit to further reductions in emissions.

About Paris Agreement

- It is a legally-binding framework signed by 196 parties that seeks to “limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels”.
- The aim is to “reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century”.
- The US is the world’s second-largest carbon emitter after China. India is third.

India’s Paris Agreement targets and COP26

- Under the Paris Agreement, all signatory countries have Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets that outline the steps they plan to take by 2030 to tackle climate change.
- India has pledged to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 per cent below 2005 levels.

- It also aims to generate 40 per cent of India's power through renewable energy, and create a carbon sink capable of sucking in 2.5 billion-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide through additional forest and tree cover.

Justice N V Ramana to be sworn in as new Chief Justice of India

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

Why in the news ?

- Justice N V Ramana, the most senior judge of the Supreme Court after Chief Justice S A Bobde, was appointed as the 48th Chief Justice of India with effect from April 24.
- Justice Ramana will have tenure of over sixteen months — until August 26, 2022.

A brief profile of **Justice N.V. Ramana**

- Aug. 27, 1957:** Born in an agricultural family in Ponnavaram village in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh
- Feb. 10, 1983:** Enrolled as an advocate
- June 27, 2000:** Appointed permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court
- March 10-May 20, 2013:** Functioned as the Acting Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court
- Sept. 2, 2013:** Elevated as the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court
- Feb. 17, 2014:** Elevated as a judge of the Supreme Court

- He has practised in the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, Central and Andhra Pradesh Administrative Tribunals and the Supreme Court in civil, criminal, constitutional, labour, service and election matters
- Justice Ramana specialises in constitutional, criminal, service and inter-State river laws



Appointment of CJI

- The Chief Justice of India and the Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution.
- As far as the CJI is concerned, the outgoing CJI recommends his successor.
- The Union Law Minister forwards the recommendation to the Prime Minister who, in turn, advises the President.

Selection through Collegium

- Supreme Court in the Second Judges Case (1993), ruled that the senior most judge of the Supreme Court should alone be appointed to the office of the CJI.
- The Supreme Court collegium is headed by the Chief Justice of India and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.

- The collegium system is the system of appointment and transfer of judges that has evolved through judgments of the Supreme Court (Judges Cases), and not by an Act of Parliament or by a provision of the Constitution.

Administrative Powers of CJI (Master of Roster)

- It is common to refer to the office as primus inter pares - first amongst equals.
- In his administrative capacity, the Chief Justice exercises the prerogative of allocating cases to particular benches.
- The Chief Justice also decides the number of judges that will hear a case.
- Thus, he can influence the result by simply choosing judges that he thinks may favour a particular outcome.
- Such administrative powers can be exercised without collegial consensus, and without any stated reasons.

Related Information

- In 2019, a five-judge Constitution Bench of SC ruled that the office of Chief Justice of India (CJI) comes under the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.
- The Supreme Court is a “public authority” and the office of the CJI is part and parcel of the institution.

Appointment High Court Judges

- **Article 217:** Indian Constitution's article states that the Judge of a High Court shall be appointed by the President consultation with the Chief Justice of India, the Governor of the State, and, in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of the High Court.

Ukraine urges NATO to speed up membership

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

Why in the news?

- Ukrainian President has recently urged NATO to speed up his country’s membership in the alliance, saying it was the only way to end fighting with pro-Russia separatists.
- Ukraine recently accused Russia of massing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the Crimean peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014.



About Ukrainian crisis

- The Ukrainian Crisis is the collective name for the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests associated with emergent social movement of integration of Ukraine into the European Union, the subsequent February 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the ensuing pro-Russian unrest.

Background of Ukraine crisis

- In 2013, then-President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, decided to reject a deal for greater economic integration with European Union.
- His decision led to a series of protests and conflicts that led to a violent crackdown by the security forces.
- However, the administration's decision to forcefully stop the protesters backfired, and the number of protesters increased exponentially on the streets.
- As a result, President Yanukovich had to flee the country in February 2014.

Russia's control over the Crimean region

- In March 2014, Russian troops took control of the Crimean region in Ukraine.
- Crimea is located in the south of the Ukrainian region of Kherson.
- It is connected to Kherson by the Isthmus of Perekop and west of the Russian region of Kuban.
- Though Crimea is under Russian control since 2014 internationally, it is still considered to be a part of Ukraine.

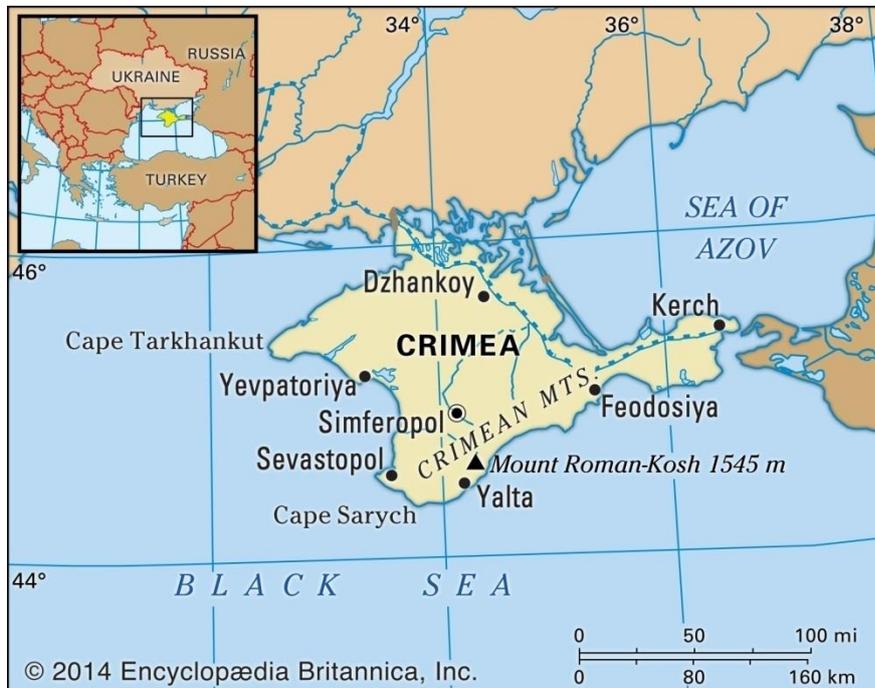
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- After Russia took control over the Crimean region, a local referendum was done where Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation.
- After the referendum, it was formally annexed in Russia.
- **In 2018, Russian Navy seized three Ukrainian ships in the Crimea Peninsula.**

About Crimea



- Crimea is a peninsula located on the northern coast of the Black Sea in Eastern Europe that is almost completely surrounded by both the Black Sea and the smaller Sea of Azov to the northeast.
- Crimea is located south of the Ukrainian region of Kherson, to which it is connected by the Isthmus of Perekop, and west of the Russian region of Kuban, from which it is separated by the Strait of Kerch though linked by the Crimean Bridge since 2018.
- The Arabat Spit is located to the northeast, a narrow strip of land that separates a system of lagoons named Sivash from the Sea of Azov.
- Across the Black Sea to its west is Romania, and to its south, Turkey.
- The Peninsula is important as it had port access to the Black sea.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization

- It is an intergovernmental political and military alliance among 29 independent member countries across North American and European states.
- It's Headquarter at **Brussels, Belgium.**
- The key member States included the United States, Canada, and American allies in Europe.
- NATO is committed to the principle that an attack against one or several of its members is considered as an attack against all.

- This is the principle of collective defence, which is enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

Recent Developments

- Recently Members of NATO are gathered in London to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the defence alliance.

E9 Digital Learning Initiative

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

Why in the news?

- Minister of State for Education has recently attended consultation meeting of Education Ministers of E9 countries on **E9 initiative: Scaling up digital learning to accelerate progress towards SDG4.**
- The consultation is the first of a three-phased process to co-create an initiative on digital learning and skills, targeting marginalised children and youth, especially girls.

About E9 Digital Learning Initiative

The screenshot shows the UNESCO website for the 'E9 Digital Learning Initiative: Scaling up digital learning to accelerate progress towards SDG4'. The page includes the UNESCO logo, the tagline 'Building peace in the minds of men and women', and a language selector set to 'ENGLISH'. The event details are as follows:

- When, Local Time:** From Apr 6, 2021, 1:45 PM To Apr 6, 2021, 4:00 PM
- Contact:** E9 Secretariat
- Event Type:** Meeting by Member States or Institutions
- Where:** Online from Paris, , Online, , France

There are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a calendar icon. A 'TOP' button is visible in the bottom right corner.

The UN is spearheading a **global initiative on digital learning and skills** for all, targeting marginalized children and youth and **aiming to close the digital divide and drive rapid change in education systems.** This initiative focuses on three of the five priorities of the 2020 Global Education meeting Declaration: supporting teachers; investing in skills; and narrowing the digital divide.

- It is a forum of nine countries, which was formed to achieve the goals of UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) initiative.
- It is spearheaded by the United Nations with nine countries, namely Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan the opportunity to benefit from this global initiative and accelerate progress on digital learning and skills towards the achievement of **Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education.**
- The initiative aims to accelerate recovery and advance the Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda by driving rapid change in education systems in three of the 2020 Global Education Meeting priorities:
 - (i) support to teachers

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- (ii) investment in skills
- (iii) narrowing of the digital divide

Background

- It was launched in 1993 at the UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Summit in New Delhi, India.
- The forum represents over half of the world's population and 70% of the world's illiterate adults.
- It has become a forum for the countries to discuss their experiences related to education, exchange best practices, and monitor EFA-related progress.

Vivad Se Vishwas scheme

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre's tax resolution scheme 'Vivad Se Vishwas' has recently resolved nearly one-third of all direct tax disputes and has netted Rs 54,005 crore in tax revenue.

About Vivad Se Vishwas scheme

- The scheme was announced by Union Finance Minister during her budget speech on February 1, 2020.
- The scheme aims to settle the huge number of pending **direct tax cases**.
- It offers a complete waiver on interest and penalty to the taxpayers who pay their pending taxes by March 31.
- The scheme aims to benefit those whose tax demands are locked in dispute in multiple forums.
- If a taxpayer is not able to pay direct taxes by March 31st then, he will get further time till June 30th.
- However, in that case, he would have to pay 10 percent more on the tax.

IMF raises India's FY22 growth forecast to 12.5%

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

Why in the news ?

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recently raised India's growth projections for 2021-22 to 12.5% from its January estimate of 11.5%, making it the fastest growing major economy in the world.
- The latest upgrade from the IMF for India's economy comes against the backdrop of a surge in Covid-19 infections, which have prompted some local lockdowns and could have an impact on overall growth.

Key Highlights

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- The IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) showed that China is projected to grow 8.4% in 2021 and 5.6% next year.
- India, at 6.9%, is also expected to grow faster than China in 2022-23 and retain its title as the fastest growing major economy for the second consecutive year.
- For 2021-22 if the IMF's projection is realised, India would be the only major economy to post double digit growth.

Views of the other organization

- Reserve Bank of India has projected a 10.5% GDP growth projection for 2021-22.
- The World Bank had recently forecast the Indian economy to grow in the 7.5% to 12.5% range in 2021-22.
- It had also said that it expects India's economy to grow more than 10.1% in the 2021-22 — a sharp upward revision of 4.7 percentage points from its January 2021 forecast.

Robots made from stem cells of frogs

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

Why in the news?

- Researchers at Tufts University have developed first living robots known as **Xenobots** from stem cells of frogs

About Xenobots



- They have been named after the *Xenopus laevis* frog that supplied its cells to create the robot.
- These robots are to be used to detect diseases and deliver drugs to specific areas of the body.
- They are comprised of 500-1000 living cells.
- These biological robots can record information about their surroundings and move using cilia -- minute hairlike particles present on their surface.

About African clawed frog (*Xenopus laevis*)



- The African clawed frog is also known as *Xenopus laevis*.
- The species is found throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria and Sudan to South Africa), and in isolated, introduced populations in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia.

Conservation Status

- IUCN Status: These are listed as **Least Concern** in IUCN Red List.

Govt issues tribunal reforms ordinance

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre has recently amended 10 laws to remove several appellate bodies through an ordinance – the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021.

Key highlights of the ordinance

- It has made amendments to the Cinematograph Act, Copyright Act, Customs Act, Patents Act, Airports Authority of India Act, Trade Marks Act, Geographical Indications of Goods (registration and protection) Act, Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act, Control of National Highways (land and traffic) Act, and Finance Act.
- Now the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) set up to hear appeals of filmmakers, and transfers their functions to other existing judicial bodies.
- In the Cinematograph Act, 1952 by omitting some sections and replacing the word “Tribunal” with “**High Court**” in other sections.
- **In the Cinematograph Act**, the appellate body will now be the high court.
- **By the Finance Act, 2017, seven tribunals were abolished or merged based on functional similarity and their total number was reduced to 19 from 26.**

About Film Certification Appellate Tribunal

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- FCAT was a statutory body constituted set up by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in 1983, under Section 5D of the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- Its main job was to hear appeals filed under Section 5C of the Cinematograph Act, by applicants for certification aggrieved by the decision of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

Members

- The tribunal was headed by a chairperson and had four other members, including a Secretary appointed by the Government of India to handle.

Headquarter

- The Tribunal was headquartered in New Delhi.

Related Information

About Central Board of Film Certification

- The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) is a statutory film-certification body in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India.

Members

- It consists of a Chairperson and 23 members, all appointed by the Government of India

Functions

- It is tasked with "regulating the public exhibition of films under the provisions of the Cinematograph Act 1952."
- Films screened in cinemas and on television may only be publicly exhibited in India after certification by the board.
- In India, all films must have a CBFC certificate if they are to be released theatrically, telecast on television, or displayed publicly in any way.
- It certifies films under four categories:
 - a. U: Unrestricted public exhibition (Suitable for all age groups)
 - b. U/A: Parental guidance for children under age 12
 - c. A: Restricted to adults(Suitable for 18 years and above
 - d. S: Restricted to a specialised group of people, such as engineers, doctors or scientists.
- The CBFC can also deny certification a film.

[China flanks Taiwan with military exercises in air and sea](#)

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

Why in the news?

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- China's armed forces have recently conducted simultaneous military exercises to the west and east of Taiwan.

About the Exercise



Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning sails through the Miyako Strait near Okinawa in this photo released by Japan's Defense Ministry on April 4, 2021.

- It was a routine training exercise organized according to the annual work plan to test the troops' training effectiveness and beef up their capability to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.
- According to Taiwan's Defense Ministry, at least 10 People's Liberation Army (PLA) warplanes, including four J-16 and four J-10 fighter jets, a Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft and a KJ-500 early warning aircraft, entered Taiwan's **self-declared air defense identification zone (ADIZ)**.

Definition of Air defense identification zone

- The US Federal Aviation Administration defines an ADIZ as "a designated area of airspace over land or water within which a country requires the immediate and positive identification, location, and air traffic control of aircraft in the interest of the country's national security."

Related Information

About Miyako Strait

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SOURCE: REUTERS STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

- It is also known as the Kerama Gap which is a waterway lies between Miyako Island and Okinawa Island.
- The Miyako Strait is of global geopolitical significance, as it is one of the few international waterways for China's People's Liberation Army Navy to access the Pacific Ocean from the East China Sea.
- It is become an issue between Japan and China recently.

[Centre seeks nod to close Italian marine's case](#)

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

Why in the news?

- The government has recently asked the Supreme Court to schedule an urgent hearing of its application to close the criminal trials pending in India against two Italian marines accused of killing two fishermen off the coast of Kerala in 2012.
- The victims' families have been compensated and the case needs to be disposed of.

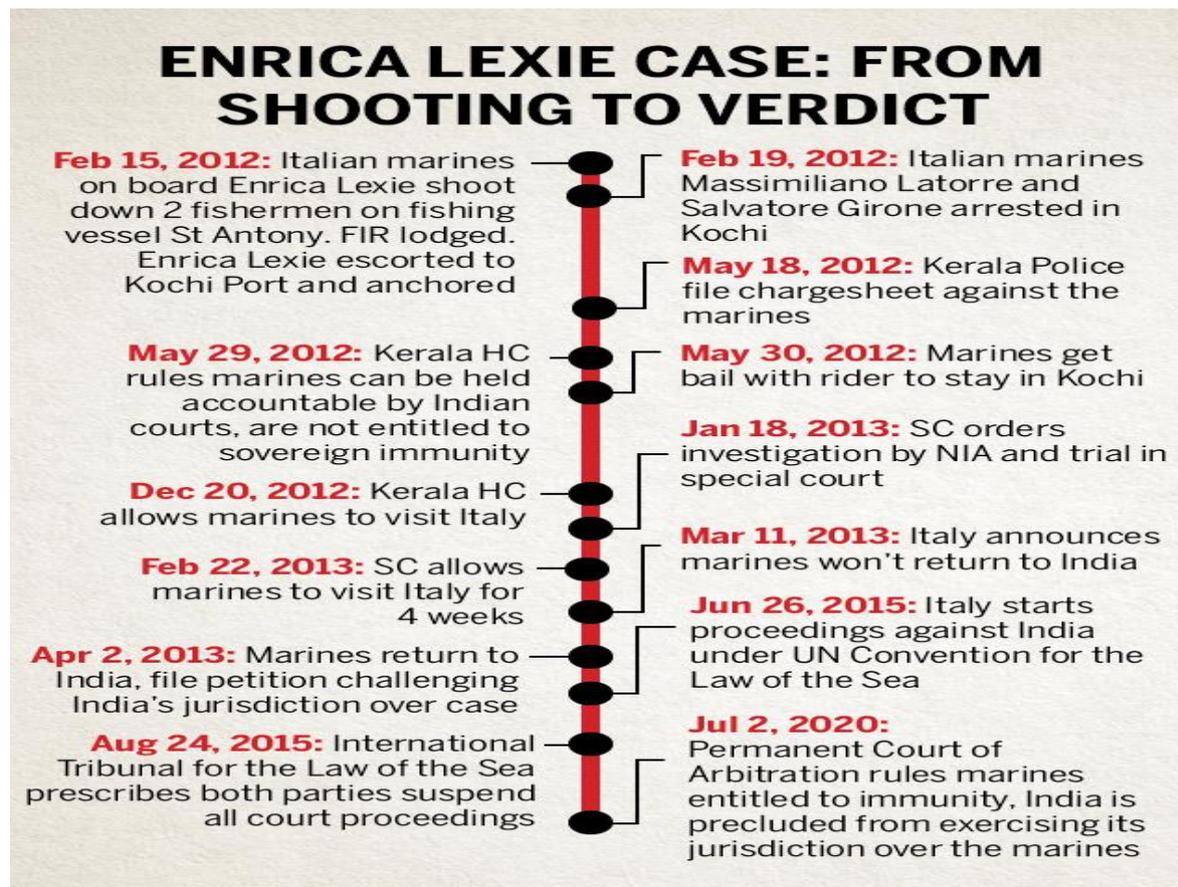
About the Italian Marines Case

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ENRICA LEXIE CASE: FROM SHOOTING TO VERDICT



Feb 15, 2012: Italian marines on board Enrica Lexie shoot down 2 fishermen on fishing vessel St Antony. FIR lodged. Enrica Lexie escorted to Kochi Port and anchored

Feb 19, 2012: Italian marines Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone arrested in Kochi

May 18, 2012: Kerala Police file chargesheet against the marines

May 29, 2012: Kerala HC rules marines can be held accountable by Indian courts, are not entitled to sovereign immunity

May 30, 2012: Marines get bail with rider to stay in Kochi

Dec 20, 2012: Kerala HC allows marines to visit Italy

Jan 18, 2013: SC orders investigation by NIA and trial in special court

Feb 22, 2013: SC allows marines to visit Italy for 4 weeks

Mar 11, 2013: Italy announces marines won't return to India

Apr 2, 2013: Marines return to India, file petition challenging India's jurisdiction over case

Jun 26, 2015: Italy starts proceedings against India under UN Convention for the Law of the Sea

Aug 24, 2015: International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea prescribes both parties suspend all court proceedings

Jul 2, 2020: Permanent Court of Arbitration rules marines entitled to immunity. India is precluded from exercising its jurisdiction over the marines

- In 2020, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) has published an extract of the final award of the ad-hoc tribunal constituted to settle disputes related to the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regarding Italian marine Case between India and Italy.
- It has rejected India's contention that the soldiers, who were accused of killing Indian fishermen, could be tried in Indian courts and ordered India to cease all criminal proceedings.

About United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- It is the international agreement that resulted from the 3rd United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea.
- It provides a regulatory framework for the use of the world's seas and oceans, to ensure the conservation and equitable usage of resources and the marine environment and to ensure the protection and preservation of the living resources of the sea.
- **The convention has created 3 new institutions on the international scene,**
 - a. International **Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.**
 - 2. International Seabed Authority,**
 - 3. Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.**

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- The convention gives a clear definition on Internal Waters, Territorial Waters, Archipelagic Waters, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Continental Shelf.
- Mineral resource exploitation in deep seabed areas beyond national jurisdiction is regulated through an International Seabed Authority and the Common heritage of mankind principle.

Special Provision for the Land locked Countries

- According to UNCLOS, Landlocked states are given a right of access to and from the sea, without taxation of traffic through transit states.
- Land-locked and geographically disadvantaged States have the right to participate on an equitable basis in exploitation of an appropriate part of the surplus of the living resources of the EEZ's of coastal States of the same region or sub-region.

World Cities Cultural Forum (WCCF)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will be representing Delhi and India at the World Cities Cultural Forum (WCCF).

About World Cities Cultural Forum

- It is a network of local governments and cultural sector leaders from 40 world cities.
- The World Cities Culture Forum was established in London in 2012 with eight cities (London, New York City, Tokyo, Shanghai, Paris, Istanbul, Sydney and Johannesburg) convened by the Mayor of London.
- The WCCF enables the policy makers of member cities to share research and intelligence, while exploring the vital role of culture in prosperity.
- Forum members collaborate via a program of events including themed symposia, regional summits and workshops.

Report

- The World Cities Culture report is published by the forum every three years, with data and details on innovative projects from cities across the world.

PS Zoroaster: fast patrol vessel

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

Why in the news?

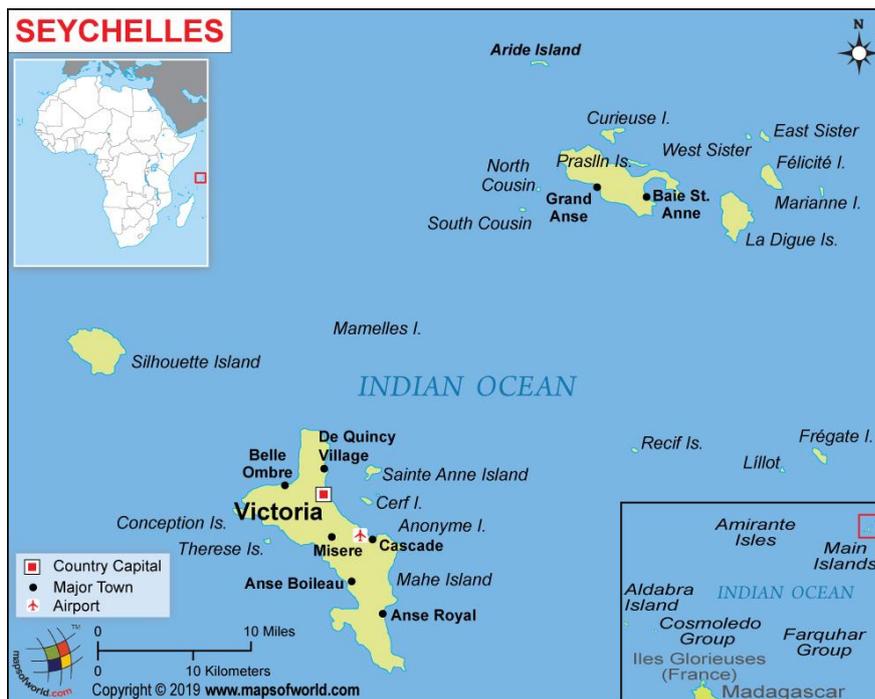
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- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hand over a fast patrol vessel called **PS Zoroaster** to the Seychelles Coast Guard.

About PS Zoroaster

- The fast petrol vessel PS Zoroaster will help the Seychelles in carrying out anti-piracy operations.
- The vessel, built by the Kolkata-based Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineering Limited.

About Seychelles



- It is officially called the Republic of Seychelles is an archipelagic island country in the Indian Ocean at the eastern edge of the Somali Sea.
- It consists of 115 islands.
- **Its capital and largest city, Victoria.**

Anamaya

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

Why in the news?

- Union Minister has recently launched **tribal health collaborative 'Anamaya'** through a video conference.

About Tribal Health Collaborative (Anamaya)

- It is a multi-stakeholder initiative supported by Piramal Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

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- The initiative aims to build a sustainable, high-performing health eco-system to address the key health challenges faced by the tribal population of the country.
- As a part of this Collaborative, the Ministry will undertake several activities such as
 - a. setting up of the National Council on Tribal Health to drive policy initiatives in tribal health,
 - b. establishment of a Health Cell to closely monitor healthcare delivery in the tribal areas and
 - c. devising mechanisms to implement the Tribal Health Action Plan.
- The Tribal Health Collaborative will begin its operations with 50 tribal, aspirational districts (with more than 20 per cent ST population) across six high tribal population states.
- It will be extended to 177 tribal districts over the next 10 years.

Significance

- This Collaborative is a unique initiative bringing together governments, philanthropists, national and international foundations, NGOs/CBOs to end all preventable deaths among the tribal communities of India.
- It will begin its operations with 50 tribal, Aspirational Districts (with more than 20% ST population) across 6 high tribal population states.
- Over a 10-year period, the work of the THC will be extended to 177 tribal Districts as recognised by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court's Efficiency (SUPACE)

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

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently unveiled its Artificial Intelligence (AI) portal **Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court's Efficiency (SUPACE)**, designed to make research easier for judges, thereby easing their workload.

About Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court's Efficiency (SUPACE)

- It is a tool that collects relevant facts and laws and makes them available to a judge.
- It is not designed to take decisions, but only to process facts and to make them available to judges looking for an input for a decision.
- It is a perfect blend of human intelligence and machine learning and 'a hybrid system', which works better with human intelligence.

Significance

- The introduction of Artificial Intelligence tool is a big step in ensuring access to justice and will be helpful to Judiciary in reducing pendency and delivering justice to needy people.
- The portal has ensured that Artificial Intelligence only collects all relevant facts & law and makes it available to Judge on their fingertips.

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- The Artificial Intelligence doesn't have access to feelings and emotions and operates in areas of cognition, where understanding takes place only through language and symbols.

NITI Aayog to launch Online Dispute Resolution handbook

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

Why in the news ?

- NITI Aayog has recently launched a new first-of-its-kind, Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) handbook in India.
- This new handbook has been launched in association with Agami and Omidyar Network India and with the support of ICICI Bank.

About Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

NITI Aayog launches Online Dispute Resolution handbook



Source credit: <https://disputeresolution.online>

What is ODR?

ODR is a mechanism to **resolve disputes collaboratively outside of court**. It integrates technology with trusted mechanisms of dispute resolution: negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. It is built on the vision that disputes can be resolved seamlessly, from anywhere, by anybody, at a fraction of the cost and time incurred by traditional mechanisms.

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- It is the resolution of disputes outside courts, particularly of small and medium-value cases, using digital technology and techniques of alternate dispute resolution (ADR), such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.
- While courts are becoming digitized through the efforts of the judiciary, more effective, scalable, and collaborative mechanisms of containment and resolution are urgently needed.
- ODR can help resolve disputes efficiently and affordably.

Iran unveils advanced nuclear centrifuges

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

Why in the news?

- Iran has recently launched an advanced IR-6 uranium enrichment centrifuges.
- The IR-6 semi-industrial centrifuges were injected with gas and became fully operational at Iran's **uranium enrichment plant in Natanz**.
- Iran is restricted to only a few first-generation (IR-1) uranium enrichment centrifuges until 2025 under the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

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More in the news

- Recently Vienna talks are intended to create a road map for a synchronized return of both Iran and the United States to compliance with the 2015 deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Related Information

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.
- Iran is restricted to only a few first-generation (IR-1) uranium enrichment centrifuges until 2025.

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.

Lilavati Awards 2020 on women empowerment

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Union Minister of Education has presented the AICTE Lilavati Awards 2020 on women empowerment to the winners in New Delhi.
- Theme of 2020 : **Women Empowerment**

About Lilavati Awards 2020

- The award has been named after the 12 century book called "Lilavati".

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- The book was written by the mathematician Bhaskara II.
- She was the daughter of Indian Mathematician Bhaskara II.

Objectives

- To create awareness about issues like sanitation, hygiene, health, nutrition, literacy, employment, technology, credit, marketing, innovation, skill development, natural resources and rights among women. Areas Covered: Women's health, self defense, sanitation, literacy, entrepreneurship and legal awareness.

Benefit

- Ensures the participation of women and enables them to hold higher positions in educational institutions.

Other Initiatives launched by government for overall development of girls and women in various fields,

- a. Sukanya Samridhi Yojana
- b. Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao Yojana
- c. Udaan scheme which aims to enable girls of weaker socio-economic status at school level to gain access to higher education.
- d. Pragati Yojana to give young women opportunity to further their technical education, he added.

Chief Election Commissioner

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

Why in the news?

- President has recently appointed Election Commissioner **Sushil Chandra** as the next Chief Election Commissioner.
- The incumbent CEC Sunil Arora's tenure ended on April 12.

About Election Commission

- The Election Commission is a permanent and an independent body established by the Constitution of India directly to ensure free and fair elections in the country.
- **Article 324** of the Constitution provides that the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections to parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India shall be vested in the election commission.

Composition

- Article 324 of the Constitution has made the following provisions with regard to the composition of election commission:
 - The Election Commission shall consist of the chief election commissioner and such number of other election commissioners, if any, as the president may from time to time fix.

- The appointment of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners shall be made by the president.
- When any other election commissioner is so appointed, the chief election commissioner shall act as the chairman of the election commission.
- The president may also appoint after consultation with the election commission such regional commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the election commission.

Appointment & Tenure of Commissioners

- The President appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- They have tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.
- All Election Commissioners have equal say in the decision making of the Commission

Aahaar Kranti

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

Why in the news?

- Union Health Minister will launch a mission called 'Aahaar Kranti'.

About Aahaar Kranti Mission

- Vijnana Bharati (Vibha) and Global Indian Scientists' and Technocrats' Forum (GIST) have come together to launch this mission.
- The Moto of the mission is **उत्तम आहार-उत्तम विचार (Uttam Aahaar Uttam Vichaar)** or 'Good Diet-Good Cognition'.

Aims

- The mission will aim to spread the message of the need for a nutritionally balanced diet.
- Further, it will highlight the importance of being accessible to all local fruits and vegetables.
- The mission will address the current situation of hunger in abundance.
- It will work to arouse the people to the values of India's traditional diet, local fruits and vegetables, and a balanced diet.

Key Features of the Mission:

- The mission will work on multiple dimensions simultaneously. It will seek to promote:
 - a. Better awareness
 - b. Better nutrition and
 - c. Better agriculture

- These messages will be imparted through the curriculum in the form of `what's and `why's of nutrition, or through the forms of games.
- The content will be available both online and offline and in all vernacular languages besides English and Hindi.
- The mission will especially focus on training teachers.
- The mission will also utilize India's rich knowledge of Ayurveda-based nutrition to practice.

Note:

- The **United Nations** has also declared **2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables**, which vibes very well with Aahaar Kranti.

SDG 3

- Further, UN sustainable goal # 3 that emphasizes on human well-being reads, “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- **This goal too makes Aahaar Kranti more meaningful.**

‘Poshan Gyan’

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

Why in the news ?

- NITI Aayog, in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Centre for Social and Behaviour Change, Ashoka University has launched Poshan Gyan.

About Poshan Gyan



Theme of April: Ante Natal Care

- It is a national digital repository on health and nutrition.

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- The Poshan Gyan repository was conceptualized as a resource, enabling search of communication materials on 14 thematic areas of health and nutrition across diverse languages, media types, target audiences and sources.
- Content for the repository was sourced from the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare and Women and Child Development and developmental organizations.
- The website provides an intuitive interface (multi-parametric search, multiple downloads at a point in time, easy sharing of materials via social media and easy viewing on any type of smartphone).

e-Santa

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

Why in the news?

- Commerce and industry minister has recently launched e-SANTA.

About e-SANTA

- It is an e-marketplace to connect aqua farmers and the buyers, will enable farmers to get a better price and the exporters to directly purchase quality products from them.

Key features

- e-SANTA is a completely paperless, electronic trade platform between fish and aqua farmers and exporters.
- The farmers list their produce and quote their price, while exporters can list their requirements based on location, harvest dates, among others.
- The platform will also act as an alternative marketing tool between farmers and buyers, thereby eliminating middlemen.
- The platform will change the traditional way of carrying out business on word-of-mouth basis and will make the system more formal and legally binding.
- It will ensure fair prices for farmers & traceability.

Note :

- National Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture (NaCSA) is an extension arm of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), under the department of commerce.

Tribal body flags concerns over Nagaland's version of NRC

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, an apex body of Naga tribes has asked the Nagaland government not to be hasty with the exercise to prepare the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN), seen as a variant of Assam's National Register of Citizens.

- The Nagaland government has reportedly been trying to revive the RIIN exercise that was launched in July 2019 with the stated objective of preventing outsiders from obtaining fake indigenous certificates for seeking jobs and benefits of government schemes.

Formed a three-member panel

- The State government had formed a three-member panel for “examining and advising” on the implementation of RIIN.
- The Naga Hoho, the apex tribal body that had objected to the RIIN in 2019, has reacted to the State government’s alleged bid to implement RIIN with a tentative timetable for different stages of the updating process.
- The issue of RIIN should be handled with utmost care as it could have unforeseen and dangerous implications for the Nagas as a people.

About Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN)

- Four years after Assam started revising the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Nagaland government had initiated a move to implement its own version of citizenship register, albeit only for indigenous communities of the state.
- The Government of Nagaland had decided to set up a Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN) with the aim of preventing fake indigenous inhabitants’ certificates.
- The RIIN will be the master list of all indigenous inhabitants of the state.

About Unique identity through Indigenous Inhabitant Certificate

- Based on the adjudication and verification, a list of indigenous inhabitants will be finalised and each person will be given a unique ID.
- The final list or the RIIN will be created and its copies will be placed in all villages and ward.
- Electronic copies of the list will also be stored in the State Data Centre.
- All indigenous inhabitants of the state would be issued a barcoded and numbered Indigenous Inhabitant Certificate.
- The process will be conducted across Nagaland and will be done as part of the online system of Inner Line Permit (ILP), which is already in force in Nagaland.

About Inner Line Permit (ILP)

- It is an official travel document required by Indian citizens residing outside certain “protected” states while entering them.
- It is issued by the Government of India and is obligatory for all those who reside outside the protected states.
- With the ILP, the government aims to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.

Background of ILP

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- ILP's origin dates back to the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873**, which protected the British Crown's interest in tea, oil and elephant trade.
- It prohibited "British subjects" or Indians from entering into these protected areas.
- After Independence, in 1950, the word "British subjects" was replaced by Citizens of India and the focus of the ban on free movement was explained as a bid to protect tribal cultures in northeastern India.

Quad navies enjoy high degree of interoperability

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Quad navies of India, the U.S., Japan and Australia —already enjoy a "high degree of interoperability" and have the capability and capacity to come together in a —almost plug and play mechanism if the opportunity arises.

More on the news

- The Quad was —evolving organically, referring to the vaccine cooperation announced recently, among others.
- As far as the military part is concerned, navies of Australia, Japan, U.S. and India already enjoy a high degree of interoperability.
- If an opportunity arises, they have the capability and capacity to come together in an almost plug and play mechanism.
- The Indian Navy stressed the idea of —collective maritime competence where each nation brings something to the table and can learn from each other and harness individual capabilities.
- The Navy's aim was to be the —preferred security partner, be credible and forward-leaning in engagements and first responder in the region.
- Indo-Pacific region is in competition between a closed and authoritarian 'Beijing vision' and the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Related Information

About Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

- It is the informal strategic dialogue between **India, USA, Japan and Australia** with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.
- The Ministers met also discuss collective efforts in our shared commitments and close cooperation on counter terrorism, mentoring, assistance in disaster relief, airtime security, cooperation, development, finance and cyber security efforts.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**.
- However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- In December 2012, **Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's "Democratic Security Diamond"** involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.

- In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).
- **Quad is criticised by China as Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).**

How India's stance changes with circumstances on 'refugees' and 'illegal immigrants' ?

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Supreme Court appeared to accept the Centre's contention that the Rohingya people in India are illegal immigrants when it refused to order the release of 300 members of the community, most of whom are in a detention camp in Jammu, and others in Delhi.
- It said they should be deported according to procedures under the Foreigners Act, 1946.

Illegal immigrant vs refugee

- Under the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and the subsequent 1967 Protocol.

Definition refugee

- The word refugee pertains to any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- Stateless persons may also be refugees in this sense, where country of origin (citizenship) is understood as 'country of former habitual residence'. (Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies)

India & UN convention

- India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention or the 1967 Protocol.
- Nor does India have a refugee policy or a refugee law of its own.
- This has allowed India to keep its options open on the question of refugees.
- The government can declare any set of refugees as illegal immigrants — as has happened with Rohingya despite the UNHCR verification — and decide to deal with them as trespassers under the Foreigners Act or the Indian Passport Act.
- The closest India has come to a refugee policy in recent years is the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, which discriminates between refugees on the basis of religion in offering them Indian citizenship.

World Refugee Day 2020

- World Refugee Day is observed on 20th June of every year.

- The theme of this year is “**Every Action Counts**”
- It is celebrate to provide the strength and courage of the people who were forced to leave their homes and flee their country due to conflicts or persecution.

Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System App

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

Why in the news?

- The Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India has virtually launched the “MANAS” App to promote wellbeing across age groups.

About MANAS App

- MANA stands for Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System was endorsed as a national program by the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).
- It is a comprehensive, scalable, and national digital wellbeing platform and an app developed to augment mental well-being of Indian citizens.
- MANAS App integrates the health and wellness efforts of various government ministries, scientifically validated indigenous tools with gamified interfaces developed/researched by various national bodies and research institutions.
- The app must be integrated with the public health schemes like the National Health Mission, Poshan Abhiyan, e-Sanjeevani.

NCSC Grievance Management portal

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

Why in the news?

- Government of India launched the “Online Grievance Management Portal of National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)”.

About the Portal



- The portal is designed in collaboration with the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics (BISAG-N).
- BISAG-N is a Centre of Excellence under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The portal would make it easier for Scheduled Castes population to register their complaint from any part of the country.

About National Commission for Scheduled Castes

- It was set up under the Article 338 of the Constitution of India with the objective to investigate and monitor all issues pertaining to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes under any law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government of India.

Chinese port in Sri Lanka

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

Why in the news?

- Recently at the Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court about a dozen petitions has been filed by the opposition parties, civil society groups, and labour unions challenged a recently-gazetted Bill on the Chinese-backed Port City in capital Colombo.

Recent Issue

- The ruling Rajapaksa administration tabled a Bill, titled **Colombo Port City Economic Commission**, in Parliament last week, outlining proposed laws for the \$1.4 billion-Port City being built on reclaimed land at Colombo’s seafront.

Constitutional validity

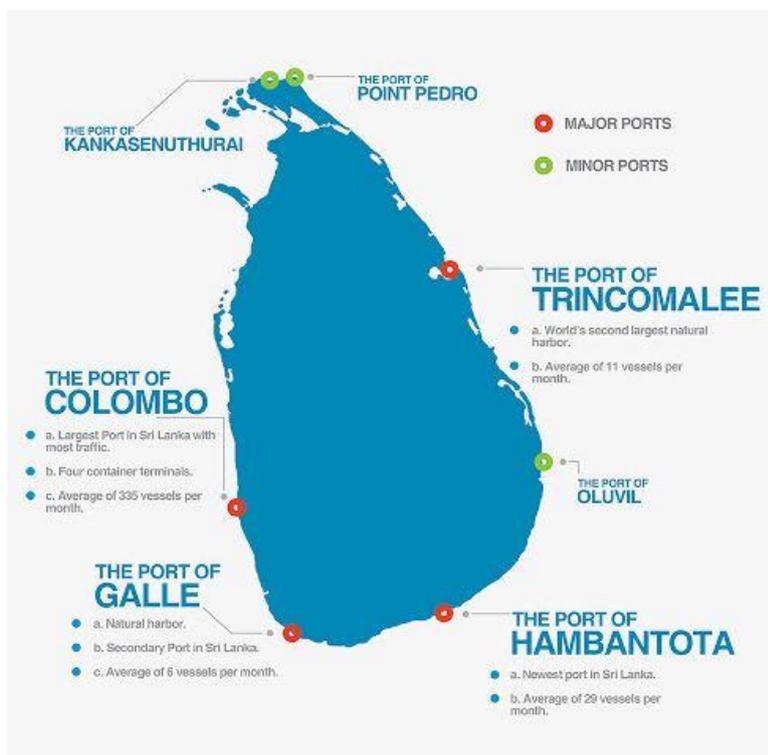
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- Sri Lanka’s Opposition parties Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People’s Front), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the United National Party (UNP), Colombo-based NGO Centre for Policy Alternatives, and labour organisations have challenged the constitutional validity of the proposed legislation for the Port City, touted by the government as an investment hub for foreign capital.

Highlights of the bill

- The clauses prohibit investment in the Port City in Sri Lankan rupees, which will keep out Sri Lankan.
- It will be like a forbidden city within Colombo.
- The government claims it stands for ‘one country, one law’, but the Bill allows for running the Port City like a foreign country with special laws.”

About Port City



- The Port City was launched by President Xi Jinping during his state visit to the island nation in September 2014, during former President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s second term in office, months before his poll defeat.
- The successor government, led by President Maithripala Sirisena and PM Ranil Wickremesinghe, vowed to develop the site into an “Indian Ocean financial hub”.

Drone attack on US forces

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

Why in the news ?

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- Recently, a drone dropped explosives near U.S. forces stationed at Erbil airport in northern Iraq.
- It was the first known attack carried out by an unmanned aerial drone against U.S. forces in Erbil, amid a steady stream of rocket attacks on bases hosting U.S. forces and the embassy in Baghdad that Washington blames on Iran-backed militias.

Iraq, Turkey and US

- **Turkey also has troops in Iraq both as part of a NATO** contingent and a force that has attacked Kurdish separatist militants in the north.
- The Iran-backed militias oppose both the presence of the United States and Turkey and demand a full withdrawal of all foreign troops.
- The United States has sometimes responded with air strikes against Iran-aligned militias including on the Iraqi-Syrian border.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization

- It is an intergovernmental political and military alliance among 29 independent member countries across North American and European states.
- It is headquartered at Brussels, Belgium.
- The key member States included the United States, Canada, and American allies in Europe.
- NATO is committed to the principle that an attack against one or several of its members is considered as an attack against all.
- This is the principle of collective defence, which is enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

Recent Developments

- Recently Members of NATO are gathered in London to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the defence alliance.

Inclusive Internet Index

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

Why in the news?

- Recently according to a Facebook-Economist Intelligence Unit study, India ranked very low in Inclusive Internet Index.

About Inclusive Internet Index

- The Face book 'Inclusive Internet Index' looked at 120 countries, representing 98 per cent of global GDP and 96 per cent of global population.
- Nearly 70 per cent of people around the world believed that their increased internet usage in all aspects of life signified a "new normal" that will continue indefinitely in the future.

Key highlights

- India has the cheapest data plans, and nearly 700 million internet users.
- India is tied with Thailand in 49th place.
- The score has been given of internet availability (77th position globally), affordability (20th spot), relevance (49th position) and readiness (29th) categories.
- India is set to reach one billion internet users by 2025.
- There were over 687.6 million internet users in India in 2020.
- The majority of countries (77 out of 120) saw improvements in internet inclusion overall, in part because of increased availability.

Time for India to have a woman CJ

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Chief Justice of India said time has come for India to have a woman Chief Justice of India.

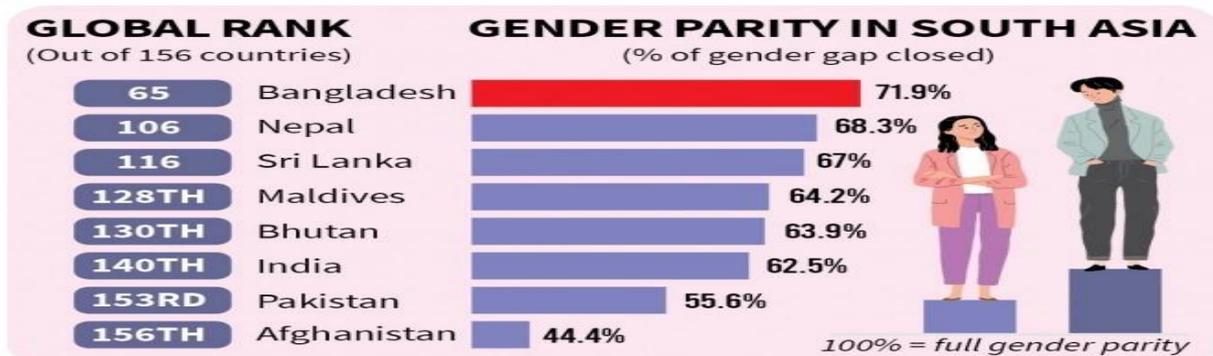
Sidelined for judgeships

- Chief Justices of High Courts have stated that many women advocates, when invited to come as judges, declined the offer citing domestic responsibilities about children studying in Class 12, etc.
- The court was hearing a plea by the Supreme Court Women Lawyers Association that talented women advocates are sidelined for judgeships.
- There is only one woman Chief Justice in all of the 25 HCs - Chief Justice Hima Kohli leading the Telangana High Court.

Gender Gap in Judiciary

- The SC only has 2 women judges, as against the 34 seats reserved for women judges and there has never been a female Chief Justice of India.
- There are only 80 women judges out of the total sanctioned strength of 1,113 judges in the SC and the High Courts.
- Out of these 80 women judges, there are only two in the SC, and the other 78 are in various High Courts, comprising only 7.2% of the total number of judges.
- In the senior designation of lawyers, there are only 17 women senior counsel designates in the SC as opposed to 403 men.

GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2021



BANGLADESH'S PERFORMANCE ON 4 KEY DIMENSIONS OF GENDER GAP
(% of gender gap closed)

	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
GLOBAL RANK	147TH	121ST	134TH	7TH
% OF GENDER GAP CLOSED	41.8%	95.1%	96.2%	54.6%

Source: WEF

Importance of Women in Judiciary

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 and SDG 16 in particular), address the global responsibility of having gender equality and women's representation in public institutions such as the judiciary

India-France sign agreement for cooperation on ISRO's Gaganyaan mission

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Space agencies of India and France inked an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission Gaganyaan.

Background

- The first space agreement between France and India dates back to 1964.
- Existing partnerships between the two nations cover almost all areas of space activity.

How this help to Gaganyaan Mission

- French space agency CNES will help to help prepare for Gaganyaan missions.
- Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CADMOS centre for the

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development of microgravity applications and space operations at CNES in Toulouse and at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany.

- The agreement provides for CNES to support implementation of a scientific experiment plan on validation missions, exchange information on food packaging and the nutrition programme.

About the Gaganyaan mission

- The Gaganyaan orbital spacecraft project was kicked started in August 2018.
- It is India's first Human Space Flight Programme to be launched by Indian Space Research Organisation.
- It originally intended to send an astronaut from Indian soil to mark the 75th anniversary of the country's independence in 2022.
- Test flights will carry an instrumented humanoid robot.
- The capsule will orbit at an altitude of 400 kilometres for seven days before splashing down in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Ahmedabad.

About Vyom Mitra: Lady Robot for Gaganyaan

- The Indian Space Research Organisation has unveiled a human robot, named Vyommitra, which will be sent to space as part of the Gaganyaan mission.

About Vyommitra

- Vyommitra is a half-humanoid who can mimic human actions and her body stops at the torso and has no legs.

Role of Vyommitra in Gaganyaan mission

- She is capable of switching panel operations, performing Environment Control and Life Support Systems functions, conversations with the astronauts, recognising them and solving their queries.
- The humanoid can detect and give out warnings if the environment changes within the cabin.
- This humanoid will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022.
- She will be sent in a space capsule around the end of 2020 or early 2021 to study how astronauts respond to living outside earth in controlled zero-gravity conditions.
- She has been developed by the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit, Thiruvananthapuram.

Other Robots in Space

- a. Robonaut 2: NASA, USA
- b. Fedor (Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research): Russia
- c. Kirobo: Japan.

National Pension System to ease entry-age norms

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the National Pension System (NPS) is set to get more fund managers and expand the age-related entry criteria for investors.
- The NPS will raise the entry age limit from 65 years to 70, with those joining after 60 allowed to stay invested till 75.

About National Pension System and associated issues

- It has been introduced with effect from January 01, 2004 (**except for armed forces**).
- NPS is being implemented and regulated by Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority in the country.
- National Pension System Trust (NPST) established by PFRDA is the registered owner of all assets under NPS

NPS is structured into two tiers:

Tier-I account

- This is the non-withdrawable permanent retirement account into which the accumulations are deposited and invested as per the option of the subscriber.

Tier-II account

- This is a voluntary withdrawable account which is allowed only when there is an active Tier I account in the name of the subscriber.
- The withdrawals are permitted from this account as per the needs of the subscriber as and when claimed.

Available to all Citizens

- It was made available to all Citizens of India from May 01, 2009.
- Any individual citizen of India (both resident and Non-resident) in the age group of 18-65 years (as on the date of submission of NPS application) can join NPS.
- However, OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin) card holders and Hindu Undivided Family (HUFs) are not eligible for opening of NPS account.

State of the World Population 2021

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

Why in the news?

- Recently the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) has launched its Flagship State of World Population Report 2021 titled „**My Body is My Own**”.

About United Nations Population Funds report

- This is the first time a United Nations report has focused on bodily autonomy, defined as the power and agency to make choices about your body without the fear of violence or having someone else decide for you.

Key findings

- In countries where data is available, only 55% of women are fully empowered to make choices over healthcare, contraception and the ability to say yes or no to sex.
- Only 75% of countries legally ensure full and equal access to contraception.
- Some examples of violation of bodily autonomy include child marriage, female genital mutilation, a lack of contraceptive choices leading to unplanned pregnancy, unwanted sex exchanged for a home and food or when people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities cannot walk down a street without fearing assault or humiliation.
- Under its ambit also fall people with disabilities stripped of their rights to self-determination, to be free from violence and to enjoy a safe and satisfying sexual life.
- Women around the world are denied the fundamental right of bodily autonomy with the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbating this situation.

Related Information

Reproductive and Sexual Rights of Women in India

- The recognition of sexual and reproductive rights of women in the country still remains negligible.
- Reproductive rights in India are understood only in the context of selective issues like child marriage, female foeticide, sex selection and menstrual health and hygiene issues.
- This is reflected in election manifestos of various parties where political parties have promised to make registration of marriages compulsory, implement the laws prohibiting child marriages, provide reproductive and menstrual health services to all women across India, make marital rape an offence.
- They also ensure strict implementation of the Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT) Act.

About United Nations Population Fund

- It is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly and works as a sexual and reproductive health agency.
- It was established as a trust fund in 1967 and began operations in 1969.
- In 1987, it was officially renamed the United Nations Population Fund but the original abbreviation, 'UNFPA' for the United Nations Fund for Population Activities was retained.

Budget

- UNFPA is not supported by the UN budget; instead, it is entirely supported by voluntary contributions of donor governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, foundations and individuals.

SDG

- It works directly to tackle Sustainable Development Goals on health (SDG3), education (SDG4) and **gender equality (SDG5)**.

Govt Launches Transport4All Challenge to Transform Public Transport In India

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

Why in the news ?

- Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs has recently launched the **EatSmart Cities Challenge and Transport4All Challenge at an online event.**

About the Transport4All Challenge

- The Transport4All Digital Innovation Challenge aims to develop digital solutions that will make public transport safe, affordable, comfortable, and reliable for all.
- This will also complement the remarkable work being done in the Smart Cities Mission”.
- It will support cities to recover from this mobility crisis.

About the EatSmart Cities Challenge

- It aims to motivate Smart Cities to develop a plan that supports a healthy, safe and sustainable food environment supported by institutional, physical, social, and economic infrastructure along with the application of ‘smart’ solutions to combat food related issues.
- This will nudge the urban populace to make the right food choices and help build a healthier and happier nation.

Italy launches first ever mega food park & food processing unit in India

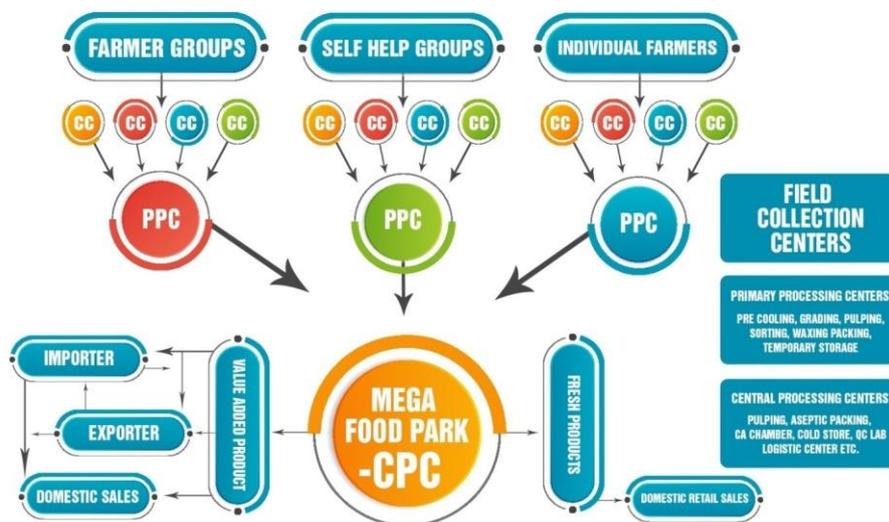
(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Italy has launched its first ever mega food park project in India involving food processing facilities.
- The project aims to create synergy between agriculture and industry of the two countries and focuses on the research and development of new and more efficient technologies in the sector.

About Mega Food Park Scheme

MEGA FOOD PARK MODEL



- The scheme has been launched in 2008-09 under the purview of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

Aim

- To provide a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastage, increasing farmers income and creating employment opportunities particularly in the rural sector.

Components

- The Scheme is based on the “Cluster” approach and envisages creation of state of art support infrastructure in a well-defined agri/horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units in the industrial plots provided in the park with a well-established supply chain.
- A Mega food Park typically consists of supply chain infrastructure including collection centers (cc), primary processing centers (ppc) central processing centers (cpc), cold chain and around 25-30 fully developed plots for entrepreneurs to set up food processing units.

Financial Assistance

- The central government provides financial assistance financial assistance upto Rs. 50.00 Crore for the Mega Food Park project.
- The MFP project is implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which is a Body Corporate registered under the Companies Act, 2013.

Gender Samvaad

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, Ministry of Rural Development has organized the Gender Samvaad event.

About the Gender Samvaad

- It is a joint attempt between DAY-NRLM and the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) to create a common platform to share experiences.

Gender Samvaad provides states with opportunities to:

- Understand best practices/initiatives that other states have been undertaking to improve women's agency (e.g. facilitating women's access to land rights, their engagement in farmer producer organizations (FPOs), best practices around Food, Nutrition, Health and Water and Sanitation (FNHW), in establishing strong institutions for public service delivery, and in protecting and providing redress to vulnerable groups within women (e.g. to victims of witch hunting));
- Understand gender interventions globally;
- Engage with experts and other colleagues on suggestions regarding how to handle issues/implementation barriers;
- Contribute to creation of a 'gender repository' with resource materials on best practices for gender interventions across the country/other countries; and
- Build advocacy around the need to focus on gender issues across SRLMs and the NRLM.

Related Information

About Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)

- It is a poverty relief programme of the Central government.
- It was launched as 'Aajeevika – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)' by the GOI's Ministry of Rural Development in the year 2011.
- **It was renamed as DAY-NRLM in 2015.**
- The scheme is an improved version of the earlier Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY).
- **The scheme started with an agenda to cover 7 Crore rural poor households via Self Help Groups (SHGs) and federated institutions and support them for livelihoods collectives in 8-10 years.**
- It aims at creating effective and efficient institutional platforms to enable the rural poor to increase their household income by means of sustainable livelihood enhancements and better access to financial services.

Mission

- The mission aims at harnessing the inherent capabilities of the poor and equip them with capacities (such as knowledge, information, tools, finance, skills, and collectivization for them to take part in the economy.

Tripura begins shifting of Mizoram Bru refugees

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

Why in the news?

- Recently shifting of Mizoram Bru refugees for permanent settlement at various places in Tripura started on April 19.
- The first batch of 515 refugees was moved out of camps in north Tripura district and sent to two places for their settlement in Dhalai district.

About Brus

THE GOVT OFFER & WHAT BRUS SEEK

- > Each family gets Rs 4L in FD, after three years of uninterrupted stay in Mizoram | Brus reject three-year caveat
- > A family gets Rs 1.5L housing aid, in three instalments | Brus want money to build houses before they shift to Mizoram
- > Free ration for 2 years in Mizoram and monthly assistance of Rs 5,000 per family | Brus want cluster housing in one place for security but govt has earmarked three districts

BRU-ISED HERE, BATTERED THERE
Refugees make do with puffed rice from NGOs as they protest (Nov 6) in North Tripura, seeking Centre resume food to the camps they call home

37,000 Brus had fled Mizoram's Mamit, Kolasib & Lunglei districts during ethnic clashes in 1997

WHO THEY ARE
> Brus form largest minority tribal group in Mizoram, also live in Assam and Tripura. An animist tribe, they are now in Hinduism's fold. Brus migrated from Shan state, Myanmar. The Mizos have always tagged Brus as 'outsiders'

Population

Tripura	2 lakh
Mizoram	1 lakh
Assam	40,000

20 Years Of Impasse

- 1994 | Bru National Union formed, demands autonomous dist council
- 1996 | Amid pushback by Mizos against demand, Brus take up arms, form Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)
- 1997 | Ethnic violence breaks out; Brus flee to Tripura, where refugee camps are set up
- 2005 | BNLF lays down arms after Mizoram promises to repatriate refugees; Fresh clashes in 2009 see another Bru exodus
- 2018 | Centre signs deal to repatriate Brus with financial aid. Deal falls through later that year

Map: Shows Tripura, Assam, and Mizoram. Mizo border is 65 km from camp Naisingpara. 7 camps of Bru refugees are marked.

- **The Brus, also referred to as the Reangs,** are spread across the northeastern states of Tripura, Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram.
- They are spread across Tripura, Mizoram and parts of southern Assam, are said to be the most populous tribe in Tripura.
- In Tripura, they are recognised as a **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group.**
- They are essentially ethnically different from the Mizos, and have their own distinct language and dialect **and thus form one of the 21 scheduled tribes of Tripura.**
- In Mizoram, they have been targeted by groups that do not consider them indigenous to the state.

Issue related with Brus

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- Due to ethnic violence forced thousands of people from the Bru tribe to leave their homes in Mizoram.
- The displaced Bru people from Mizoram have been living in various camps in Tripura since 1997.
- In 1997, the murder of a Mizo forest guard at the Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram Mamit district allegedly by Bru militants led to a violent backlash against the community, forcing several thousand people to flee to neighbouring Tripura.
- The Bru militancy was a reactionary movement against Mizo nationalist groups who had demanded in the mid-1990s that the Brus be left out of the state's electoral rolls, contending that the tribe was not indigenous to Mizoram.

Recent Development

About Bru accord 2020

- The process of settlement of some 35,000 Brus is taking place to respect a quadripartite accord signed in New Delhi on January 16, 2020.
- The accord was signed in presence of Union Home Minister after a meeting with the representatives of the refugees, the Tripura and the Mizoram governments.
- The Home Ministry had accepted a proposal by Tripura Chief Minister and the State's royal scion to rehabilitate them in the State to end over-two-decade-old impasse.

Vande Bharat becomes one of top civilian evacuations

(Topic- GS Paper II–Government Policies, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Vande Bharat Mission (VBM), which started repatriating Indians stranded abroad due to COVID-19 and the resultant lockdowns since May 7 last, has turned out to be one of the largest evacuations of civilians by a country.

About Vande Bharat Mission



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- It is considered as the largest exercise to bring back Indian citizens since the evacuation of 177,000 from the Gulf region in the early 1990s at the start of hostilities **between Iraq and Kuwait during the first Gulf War.**
- The mission has given priority to Indian citizens with “compelling reasons to return” – like those whose employment have been terminated, those whose visas have expired and not expected to be renewed under the present circumstances and those who have lost family members in recent times.
- Under the repatriation plan, the government will be facilitating the return of Indian nationals stranded abroad on compelling grounds in a phased manner.
- Air India and its subsidiary Air India Express will operate 64 flights to bring back stranded Indians from 12 countries.
- The entire cost of travel will be borne by the passengers under the mission.

Related Information

About Operation Samudra Setu



- The program named Samudra Setu by Indian navy entails to bring back around two thousand Indians in two ships during the first phase of evacuation.
- INS Jalashwa and INS Magar are being operated as part of efforts to repatriate Indian nationals from foreign shores.

[2021 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report](#)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, according to the **2021 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report** about 52% of adults admitted that they do not know how to protect themselves from cybercrime.

About 2021 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report

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- The ‘**2021 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report**,’ based on the research conducted online by ‘The Harri Poll’ among 10,030 adults in 10 countries, including 1,000 adults in India, also found that cybercrime victims collectively spent 1.3 billion hours trying to resolve these issues.

Key Findings

- The report suggested that many Indian consumers (90%) were taking proactive steps to safeguard their data, 2 in 5 still felt it was impossible to protect their privacy (42%) in this age or say they don’t know how to do so (42%).
- As per the research 7 in 10 Indian adults (70%) believe that remote work has made it much easier for hackers and cybercriminals to take advantage of people.
- Around half (52%) say they do not know how to protect themselves from cybercrime, and even more (68%) say it is difficult for them to determine if the information they see online is from a credible source.

Recent Initiatives to Tackle Cybercrime

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.

World Press Freedom index 2021

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

Why in the news?

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- Recently, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has published the World Press Freedom Index 2021.

Key Highlights

2021 World Press Freedom Index

(Selected countries and territories)

Ranking		Country/ territory	Ranking		Country/ territory
2020	2021		2020	2021	
1	→ 1	Norway	119	↗ 113	Indonesia
2	→ 2	Finland	101	↘ 119	Malaysia
4	↗ 3	Sweden	140	↗ 137	Thailand
9	↗ 8	New Zealand	136	↘ 138	Philippines
26	↗ 25	Australia	139	↘ 140	Myanmar
42	→ 42	South Korea	142	→ 142	India
43	→ 43	Taiwan	158	↘ 160	Singapore
45	↗ 44	U.S.	175	→ 175	Vietnam
66	↘ 67	Japan	177	→ 177	China
80	→ 80	Hong Kong	180	↗ 179	North Korea

Source: Reporters Without Borders

World Scenario

- It ranks 180 countries, topped by Norway followed by Finland and Denmark, while Eritrea is at the bottom.
- China is ranked 177, and is only above North Korea at 179 and Turkmenistan at 178.
- In the South Asian neighbourhood, Nepal is at 106, Sri Lanka at 127, Myanmar (before the coup) at 140, Pakistan at 145 and Bangladesh at 152.
- It also highlighted that the ‘dictatorial democracies’ have used it as a pretext for imposing especially repressive legislation with provisions combining propaganda and suppression of dissent.
- The report noted that only 12 of the Index’s 180 countries (7%) can claim to offer a favourable environment for journalism.
- It shows that journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organisation.

India and World Press Freedom Index 2021

- India is ranked 142, same as last year, after it had consistently slid down from 133 in 2016.
- It continues to be counted among the countries classified “bad” for journalism.
- India shares the “bad” classification with Brazil, Mexico and Russia.

Reasons for downgrade

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- The latest report has blamed an environment of intimidation created by government supporters for any critical journalist, who is marked as “anti-state” or “anti-national”.
- The journalists are exposed to every kind of attack, including police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.

Other Reasons are

- Police violence against the journalists and attacks and threats to journalists for not adherence to the government’s ideology.
- In some cases politically motivated arrests of the media house owner also taken place.
- Coordinated hate campaigns against the journalists on social media by the pro Hindutwa followers.

About the World Press Freedom Index

- It is published annually by Reporters without Borders (RWB) since 2002.
- The World Press Freedom Index is based on the suppression of press freedom around the world.
- To index is prepared on the basis of a questionnaire in 20 languages completed by experts all over the world.
- This questionnaire has quantitative data related to the abuses and acts of violence against journalists, media houses during the period evaluated.
- The ranking of the participating countries is done on the basis of some parameters.

These includes

- a. Media environment and self-censorship
- b. Legislative framework
- c. Transparency in the news
- d. Media independence
- e. Pluralism
- f. Quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information

About Reporters Without Borders

- It is also known as Reporters sans frontières (RSF), is a leading international non-profit and non-governmental organization that safeguards the right to freedom of information.
- **Its headquarter located at Paris** which has been got the consultative status with UNESCO, United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the International Organization of the Francophonie.
- Its mandate is to promote free, independent and pluralistic journalism and to defend media workers.

Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) grant program

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

Why in the news ?

- Australia’s High Commissioner to India, Barry O’Farrell, has launched the Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) grant program.

About the Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) grant program

- It is a 1.4 million (INR 8.12 crore) grant program is a practical initiative to advance Australia and India’s shared vision for the Indo-Pacific.
- It will help to support a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific underpinned by the rule of law and respect for sovereignty.
- The AIPOIP grants program will help deliver practical outcomes under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), launched by **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 14th East Asia Summit in November 2019.**

Background

- AIPOIP is an outcome of the Australia-India Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, signed by Australia’s Foreign Minister Senator the Hon Marise Payne and India’s External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar in June 2020.
- It is a part of the Australia-India Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership Agreement.

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme

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

Why in the news?

- Union Minister for Commerce and Industry has recently launched the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS).

About Startup India Seed Fund Scheme

- The scheme was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2021 to support startups and help budding entrepreneurs pursue innovative ideas in his Grand Plenary address of ‘**Prarambh: Startup India International Summit**’ marking the five-year anniversary of the Startup India initiative.
- The scheme is being launched by **DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) to support this early-stage startup funding.**
- It will be implemented from April 1, 2021.
- The Rs 945 crore corpus will be divided over the next four years for providing seed funding to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India.

- The government has constituted an Experts Advisory Committee(EAC) which will be responsible for the overall execution and monitoring of the scheme.

Features

- The online portal created by DPIIT, for the scheme, will allow incubators to apply for funds under it.
- An Experts Advisory Committee (EAC) has been created by DPIIT to execute and monitor the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme.
- Grants of upto Rs 5 Crores shall be provided to the eligible incubators selected by the Experts Advisory Committee.
- The selected incubators shall provide grants of up to Rs 20 lakhs for validation of Proof of Concept, or prototype development, or product trials to startups.
- Furthermore, investments of up to Rs 50 lakhs shall be provided to the startups for market entry, commercialization, or scaling up through convertible debentures or debt-linked instruments.

Significance

- It will Secure seed funding, Inspire innovation, Support transformative ideas, Facilitate implementation, and Start startup revolution.
- The scheme aims to support an estimated 3,600 entrepreneurs through 300 incubators.
- The Scheme will create a robust startup ecosystem, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns of India, which are often deprived of adequate funding.
- It is especially encourage innovators from rural areas to come forward and benefit from this scheme.

Finance Bill, 2021

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

Why in the news?

- The Union Cabinet has recently given ex-post facto approval for the Government amendments to the Finance Bill, 2021 (enacted on 28th March, 2021 as the Finance Act, 2021).

About the Finance Bill, 2021 (Amendments)

- The amendments were essential to clarify and rationalise the proposals further and address stakeholders concerns arising out of amendments proposed in the Finance Bill.
- The Government amendments to the Finance Bill, 2021 shall provide equity and inclusiveness to all the taxpayers by addressing stakeholders concerns arising out of amendments proposed in the Bill.
- The Government amendments to the Finance Bill, 2021 are tax proposals which shall generate timely revenue for the Government and streamline existing provisions by addressing grievances of the taxpayers.

- The amendment also clarified that the equalization levy would not be applicable on consideration of the sale of goods or services which are owned by persons resident in India or by a permanent establishment of a non-resident in India.
- The bill has also provided a **10-year income tax exemption to the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development.**
- The **Private development finance institutions** were provided a **five-year tax exemption, which can be extended by another five years.**

Oxygen Express

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the first '**Oxygen Express**' departed from Central Railway's Kalamboli yard to ferry liquid oxygen for Maharashtra from Vishakhapatnam steel plant in Andhra Pradesh.



Created Green Corridor

- The central government was also created a green corridor for fast movement of '**Oxygen Express**' trains to facilities for the smooth transport of oxygen to states.

Significance

- Oxygen Express" trains to transport liquid medical oxygen (LMO) and oxygen cylinders across the country over the next few days.
- The availability of oxygen was crucial in the treatment of certain medical conditions due to Covid infection.

India should be a ‘country of particular concern’: U.S. panel

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

Why in the news?

- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recently put India on a list (‘Countries of Particular Concern’ or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2021.

Recommendations by USCISRF

- US commission has recommended for the second year in a row that India be placed on a blacklist for religious freedom.
- A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums “such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral (the Quad).
- Another recommendation - to the U.S. Congress - was to raise issues in the U.S.-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.
- The USCIRF recommendations are non-binding and the Trump administration had rejected the USCIRF recommendation to designate India a CPC last year, when it released its own determinations in December.

Key Concerns

- The key concerns of the 2021 report include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
- The report says, “Mobs sympathetic to Hindu nationalism operated with impunity,” and used “brutal force” to attack Muslims in Delhi’s riots in February 2020.
- On the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the report says, “The consequences of exclusion — as exemplified by a large detention camp being built in Assam — are potentially devastating.
- Efforts to prohibit interfaith marriage — such as those in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh — are also highlighted as a concern.
- In an apparent reference to the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz in March 2020, the USCIRF says, “At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and hateful rhetoric — including from government officials — often targeted religious minorities, continuing familiar patterns.”

Related Information

- The U.S. has recently designated Pakistan and China among eight other countries that area of particular concern for violation of religious freedom.
- Pakistan and China along with Myanmar, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were placed in the list for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.

About U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- It is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission, dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- **It is headquartered at Washington DC.**

Functions

- It acts as an advisory body to the United State Congress.
- USCIRF reviews the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

Note:

- The ministry of external Affairs had dismissed the USCIRF's assessment, by highlighting the dissension from three commissioners in the 2020 annual report on the proposal about India.
- They term it as "biased and tendentious".

Sri Lanka detects nuclear material on China-bound vessel

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

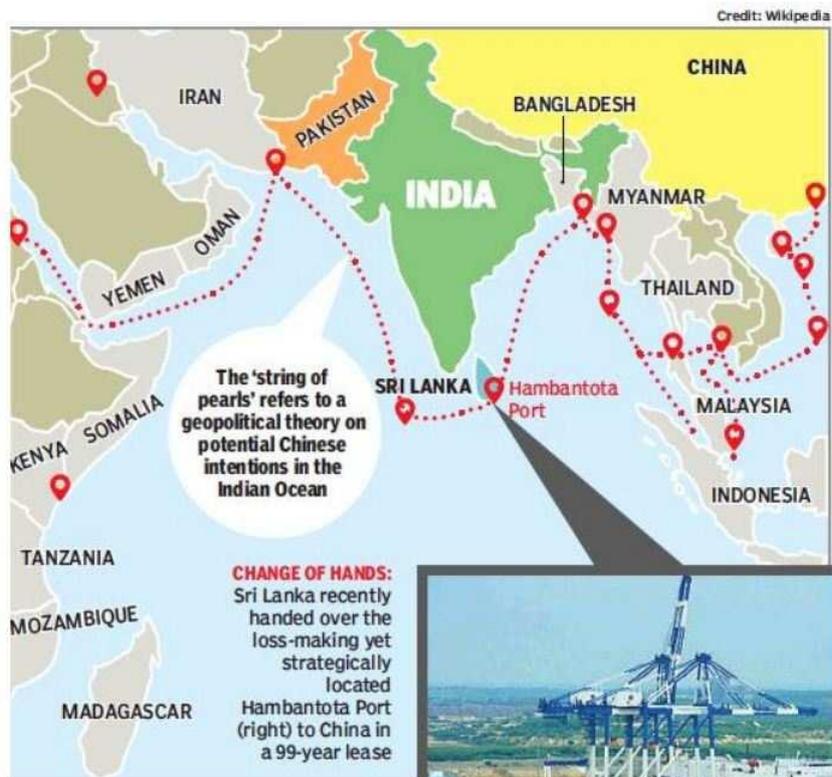
Why in the news?

- Recently, Sri Lanka detected Uranium hexafluoride (radioactive material) on a China-bound vessel berthed at the southern Hambantota Port.
- The vessel has been asked to leave the Port as the shipping company failed to obtain prior clearance for "dangerous cargo", as per Sri Lankan law.

About Uranium Hexafluoride

- The uranium hexafluoride has been classified under "dangerous cargo".
- Uranium hexachloride is nuclear material that is commonly transported from one country to another.
- Uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), colloquially known as "hex" in the nuclear industry.
- It is a compound used in the process of enriching uranium, which produces fuel for nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons.
- Hex forms solid grey crystals at standard temperature and pressure, are highly toxic, react with water, and are corrosive to most metals.

About Hambantota Port



- It is also known as the Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port.
- It is a maritime port in Hambantota, Sri Lanka.
- It is named after former President Mahinda Rajapaksa.
- Hambantota Port is built inland and operated by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority.

Indian ads further gender stereotypes, shows study

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

Why in the news?

- Recently UNICEF and the Gene Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDI) has released a study titled “**Gender bias and inclusion in advertising in India**”.
- The research measures over 1,000 television and YouTube advertisements aired across India in 2019.

Key finding of the study

- An analysis of Indian advertisements on television and YouTube has shown that while they are superior to global benchmarks insofar as girls and women have parity of representation in terms of screen and speaking time, their portrayal is problematic as they further gender stereotypes.
- They are more likely than male characters to be shown as married, less likely to be shown in paid occupation, and more likely to be depicted as caretakers and parents.

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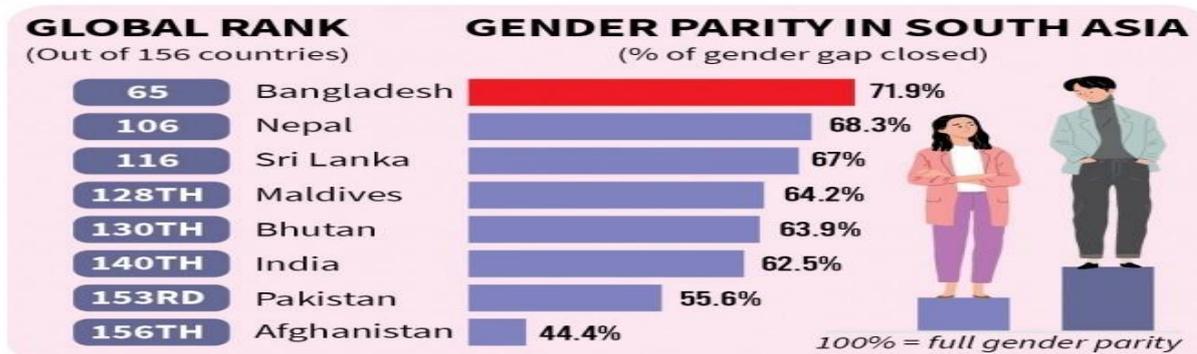
- Women characters dominate screen time (59.7%) and speaking time (56.3%), but one of the drivers of this is their depiction for selling cleaning supplies and food and beauty products to women consumers.
- In comparison, in a separate study by the GDI for setting global benchmarks, it was found that ads in the U.S. show women with half the screen time (30.6%) and nearly half the speaking time (33.5%).
- A greater percentage of female characters are depicted as married than male characters (11% compared with 8.8%).
- **Female characters are three times more likely to be depicted as parents than male characters (18.7% compared with 5.9%).**
- While male characters are more likely to be shown making decisions about their future than female characters (7.3% compared with 4.8%), the latter are twice as likely to be shown making household decisions than male characters (4.9% compared with 2.0%).
- Female characters are more likely to be shown doing the following activities than male characters –
 - Shopping (4.1% compared with 2.3%)
 - Leaning (4.8% as against 2.2%);
 - Being involved in the purchase or preparation of meals (5.4% against 3.9%)
- For characters where intelligence is part of their character in the ad, male characters are more likely to be shown as smart as female characters (32.2% compared to 26.2%).
- Male characters are almost twice as likely to be shown as funny than female characters (19.1% compared to 11.9%).
- Two-thirds of female characters (66.9%) in Indian ads have light or medium-light skin tones - a higher percentage than male characters (52.1%).
- Female characters are nine times more likely to be shown as “**stunning/very attractive**” than male characters (5.9% compared with 0.6%).
- Female characters are also invariably thin, but male characters appear with a variety of body sizes in Indian advertising.

Related Information

Gender Gap Report 2021

- India ranked 140 among 156 countries in Gender Gap Report 2021 released by World Economic Forum's.
- India had ranked 112th among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020.

GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2021



BANGLADESH'S PERFORMANCE ON 4 KEY DIMENSIONS OF GENDER GAP
(% of gender gap closed)

	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
GLOBAL RANK	147TH	121ST	134TH	7TH
% OF GENDER GAP CLOSED	41.8%	95.1%	96.2%	54.6%

Source: WEF

Steps taken by the Government to reduce the gender gap

Educational initiatives

- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Right to Education, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas are some of the educational initiatives.

Health sector initiatives

- Integrated child development services (ICDS), Matritva Sahyog Yojana for Pregnant and lactating women, Matru Vandana yojna, and Janani Suraksha Yojna are some of the health sector initiatives for women.

Gender gap reduction

- STEP scheme, MGNREGA are some of the initiatives for gender gap reduction.

Reservation in Parliament

- The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) was introduced in the parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women but the bill has yet to be passed by Lok Sabha.

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‘Crisis in HCs’, Supreme Court sets timeline for Govt to clear judges’ names

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India S a Bobde, has said that if the Supreme Court Collegium reiterates a recommendation sent back by the government, the “appointment should be made within 3 to 4 weeks”.

Timeline fixed by the Bench

- The Intelligence Bureau (IB) should submit its report/ inputs within 4 to 6 weeks from the date of recommendation of the High Court Collegium, to the Central Government.”
- It would be desirable that the Central Government forward the file(s)/ recommendations to the Supreme Court within 8 to 12 weeks from the date of receipt of views from the State Government and the report/ input from the IB”.
- It would be for the Government to thereafter proceed to make the appointment immediately on the aforesaid consideration and undoubtedly.
- If Government has any reservations on suitability or in public interest, within the same period of time it may be sent back to the Supreme Court Collegium with the specific reasons for reservation recorded.”
- But if the Supreme Court Collegium, after consideration of the aforesaid inputs, still reiterates the recommendation(s) unanimously, such appointment should be processed and appointment should be made within 3 to 4 weeks.”

Related Information

About Memorandum of Procedure

- In setting a fixed timeline for the government for the process of appointment of judges, the **Supreme Court has recently in its ruling has essentially altered the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) through a judicial order.**
- The MoP does not prescribe a timeline for the Centre to forward the recommendations.

About Memorandum of Procedure

- It is an agreement between the judiciary and the government.
- It contains a set of guidelines for making appointments to the Supreme Court and High Court.

Not mention in Constitution

- It is a crucial document as the Collegium system of appointing judges is a judicial innovation that is not mandated through legislation or text of the Constitution.

Evolution of Memorandum of Procedure

- It has evolved based on three SC decisions – the First Judges Case (1981), Second Judges Case (1993), and the Third Judges Case (1998).
- However, in 2016, the MoP was re-negotiated, following the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the constitutional amendment that brought in the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) that sought to change the system of appointments and give the government a foot in the door.
- In this judgment the court recommended “appropriate measures” to improve the working of the Collegium system - these included eligibility criteria, transparency in the appointment process, secretariat and complaints — for preparing the MoP.

The proposed MoP had following provisions –

- Seniority & Merit** - While promoting a High Court Chief Justice or a judge to the Supreme Court, the criteria of seniority, merit and integrity would be followed. Preference should be given to Chief Justices of the High Courts keeping in view their “inter-se seniority”.
- Reasons in writing** - In case a senior Chief Justice being overlooked for elevation to the Supreme Court, the reasons for the same be recorded in writing”.
- Three-judge quota** - The government proposed that up to three judges may be appointed from the Bar or from distinguished jurists with proven track records.
- Committee & Secretariat** - To set up an institutional mechanism in the form of a committee to assist the Collegium in evaluation of the suitability of prospective candidates.
- The government has also proposed that there be a secretariat that maintains a database of judges, schedules Collegium meetings, maintains records and receives recommendations and complaints related to judges’ postings.
- National Security** - The government also insists on adding criteria of “national security” and “larger public interests” for rejection of recommendation by the Collegium.

Recent Development in Memorandum of Procedure

- As per the MoP, the High Court Collegium headed by the Chief Justice of the HC initiates the process of appointment of other judges.
- Once the recommendation is made, the opinion of state governments and the input from the Intelligence Bureau are sought.
- The recommendations are then processed by the central government in all manners, before they are sent to the Supreme Court Collegium.

Serum Institute of India

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Serum Institute of India will sell its COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, to the States at ₹400 a dose and to private hospitals at ₹600 a dose from 1st may 2021.

- Covishield constitutes over 90% of India's vaccine supply and is learnt to be sold to the Centre at ₹150-₹200 a dose.

About Serum Institute of India

- Serum Institute of India is an Indian biotechnology and pharmaceuticals company.
- It is the world's largest vaccine manufacturer.
- It is located in the city of Pune, Maharashtra, India.

Supreme Court gives life to Art 224A to bring back retired judges

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Supreme Court has activated Article 224A of the Constitution that had been dormant for 58 years, allowed high court chief justices to start appointing retired HC judges as ad hoc judges for two to five years.

About Article 224A

- Article 224A of the Constitution allows the Chief Justice of a High Court to appoint a person who has been a judge earlier to sit as a judge of the court with the previous consent of the President.

History of Article 224A

- This article was there in the original Constitution adopted in 1949 but was deleted in 1956 only to be reintroduced in 1963.
- This has only been invoked thrice in the past.
- In the last 58 years, only three retired judges have been appointed as ad hoc judges to HCs for a period of one year each — Justice Suraj Bhan to Madhya Pradesh HC in 1972, Justice P Venugopal to Madras HC in 1982, and Justice O P Srivastava to Allahabad HC in 2007 for the Ayodhya case.

Reasons for activating Article 224A

- (a) if vacancies are more than 20% of the sanctioned strength
- (b) cases in a particular category are pending for over five years,
- (c) more than 10% of the backlog of pending cases are over five years old
- (d) the percentage of rate of disposal is lower than the institution of cases either in a particular subject matter or generally in the court, and
- (e) even if there are not many old cases pending, but depending on the jurisdiction, a situation of mounting arrears is likely to arise if the rate of disposal is consistently lower than the rate of filing over a period of a year or more

Data on Pending Cases

- According to National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) showed that 56.4% of pending cases were filed within the past five years whereas 40% of pending cases were filed between five and 20 years ago.
- The primary purpose of appointing ad hoc judges was to deal with the latter group of cases that have been pending for over five years, it said.
- As per NJDG data, five HCs — Allahabad, Punjab & Haryana, Madras, Bombay, and Rajasthan — are responsible for 54% of pendency of over 57, 51,312 cases.
- Madras HC has among the highest arrears in the country of 5.8 lakh cases despite having fewer vacancies than most other HCs (7%).
- Calcutta HC has one of the highest vacancies of regular appointments (44%) but less than half the arrears as compared to Madras (2.7 lakh cases).

National Green Tribunal appointment issue

(Topic- GS Paper II + III–Governance + Environment, Source- The Hindu Editorial)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Supreme Court has observed that the establishment of tribunals as adjudicatory bodies in specific fields is based on the idea that specialisation and expertise are required to decide complex cases of a technical nature.
- The criteria came under focus recently when the appointment of a former IAS officer as Expert Member in the Southern Bench of the NGT was challenged in the Madras High Court.

About the Issue

- The Centre was prompt in issuing an ordinance to set-up an exclusive commission to combat rising air pollution in the National Capital Region, but has been dragging its heels on notifying **appointments of six expert members and seven judicial members to the existing National Green Tribunal (NGT).**

Present Structure of NGT

- There are currently six members in the tribunal — three judicial members and three expert members — apart from the chairman, former Supreme Court judge.
- They shall hold office for term of five years and are not eligible for reappointment.
- The Chairperson is appointed by the Central Government in consultation with Chief Justice of India (CJI)

About National Green Tribunal

- It is a specialised body set up under the National Green Tribunal Act (2010) for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.

- It draws inspiration from India's constitutional provision of Article 21, which assures the citizens of India the right to a healthy environment.
- It aims for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any legal right relating to the environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Original Jurisdiction

- It has **Original Jurisdiction on matters of “substantial question relating to environment” and & “damage to the environment due to specific activity” (such as pollution).**
- It follows principles of Natural Justice.

The NGT deals with civil cases under the seven laws related to the environment, these include:

- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,
- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977,
- The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980,
- The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,
- The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,
- The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 and
- The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- Any violation pertaining to these laws or any decision taken by the Government under these laws can be challenged before the NGT.

Israel strikes Syria after attack near nuclear site

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

Why in the news ?

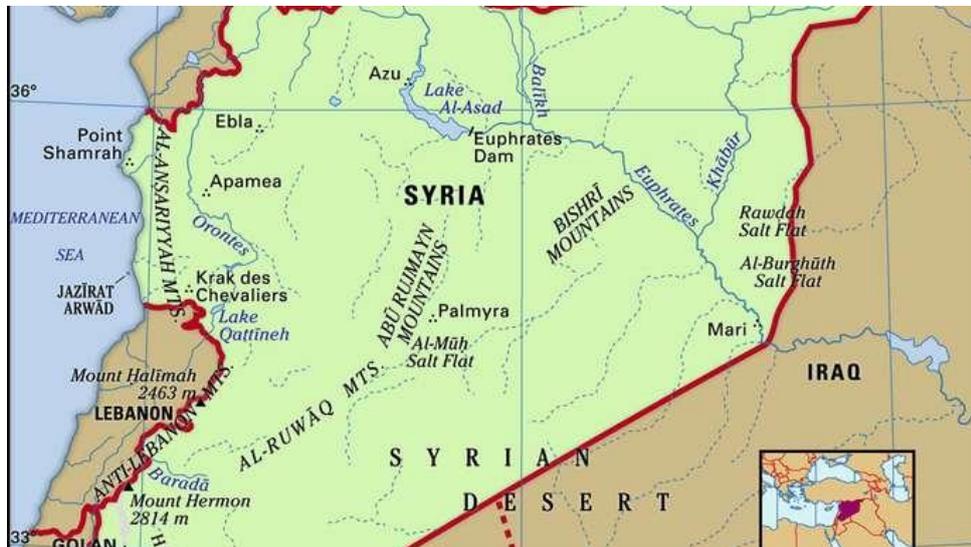
- Recently, a Syrian officer was killed and three soldiers were wounded in strikes launched by Israel after a missile was fired towards a secretive nuclear site in the Jewish state.
- Since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011, Israel has routinely carried out aerial raids on the country, mostly targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as government troops.

About Syrian Crisis

- The root of crisis can be traced to sectarian conflicts in the region existing there for centuries.
- Shia Islam and Sunni Islam are the two major denominations of Islam Religion.

- With Saudi Arabia regarding itself as the leader of Sunni Muslims and Iran as the protector of Shia Muslims, the West Asian region is divided under these two leaders.
- Saudi and Iran started playing an important role in the geopolitical conflicts in the region.

About Syria



- Syria is located on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea in southwestern Asia.
- Its area includes territory in the Golan Heights that has been occupied by Israel since 1967.
- The present area does not coincide with ancient Syria, which was the strip of fertile land lying between the eastern Mediterranean coast and the desert of northern Arabia.
- The capital is Damascus (Dimashq), on the Baradā River, situated in an oasis at the foot of Mount Qāsiyūn.

Bordering countries

- Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel as its bordering countries.
- It also has a coastline with the Mediterranean Sea on its west.

SWAMITVA scheme

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

Why in the news?

- Recently the Prime Minister has launched the distribution of e-property cards under the SWAMITVA scheme on **National Panchayati Raj Day**.
- **National Panchayati Raj Day** is the national day of Panchayati Raj System in India celebrated by **Ministry of Panchayati Raj on 24 April annually**.

Key Highlights

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- The distribution of e-property cards will mark the rolling out of the SVAMITVA scheme for implementation across the country.
- Nearly 4.09 lakh property owners will be given their e-property cards on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day.

About SWAMITVA scheme

- SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) was launched by Prime Minister on 24th April 2020.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme.

Nodal Ministry

- Its nodal ministry is Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR).

Aims

- It aims to promote a socio-economically empowered and self-reliant rural India.
- The Scheme has the potential to transform rural India using modern technical tools of mapping and surveying.
- It paves the way for using the property as a financial asset by villagers for availing loans and other financial benefits.
- It will cover around 6.62 Lakh villages of the entire country during 2021-2025.
- The pilot phase of the Scheme was implemented during 2020–2021 in the States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and select villages of Punjab and Rajasthan.

Objectives of SVAMITVA Scheme

The scheme seeks to achieve the following objectives:-

- To bring financial stability to the citizens in rural India by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
- Creation of accurate land records for rural planning.
- Determination of property tax, which would accrue to the GPs directly in States where it is devolved or else, add to the State exchequer.
- Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS maps that can be leveraged by any department for their use.
- To support in preparation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) by making use of GIS maps.
- To reduce property related disputes and legal cases

[Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana \(PMGKAY\)](#)

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

Why in the news?

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- The Union government has recently announced that 5 kg of food grains would be provided to 80 crore beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for the months of May and June 2021.

About Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

- PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana was announced as part of the first relief package during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The aim of the scheme is to ensure sufficient foods with the poor and needy amid the coronavirus crisis.

Silent features of the Scheme

- The scheme covered 80 crore ration card holders in the country.
- The foodgrains were to be distributed to all the beneficiaries under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS) for Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and priority household (PHH) ration cardholders.

Net Zero Producers Forum

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently Saudi Arabia will join the United States, Canada, Norway, and Qatar in forming ‘Net Zero Producers Forum’ for oil and gas producers to discuss how they can support the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

About Net Zero Producers Forum

- It is a platform for oil and gas–producing countries to discuss how the sector can support the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.
- The forum will discuss ways
 - to improve methane abatement;
 - advance the circular carbon economy approach;
 - develop and deploy clean-energy and carbon capture, use and storage technologies;
 - diversify from reliance on hydrocarbon revenues;
 - and other measures in line with each country's national circumstances.
- Government of Canada has recently announced in the forum to increase its Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions by 40 to 45 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 and move forward on a path to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

Related Information

- Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had said the kingdom aims to reduce its carbon emissions by generating 50% of the country's energy from renewables by 2030.

About Paris Agreement

It is also known as the Conference of Parties 21 or COP 21 which is a landmark environmental accord that was adopted in 2015 to address climate change and its negative impacts.

It replaced the Kyoto Protocol which was an earlier agreement to deal with climate change.

Aims

To reduce global GHG emissions in an effort to limit the global temperature increase in this century to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing means to limit the increase to 1.5°C by 2100.

It includes:

Addressing the financial losses vulnerable countries face from climate impacts such as extreme weather.

Raising money to help developing countries adapt to climate change and transition to clean energy.

This part of the deal has been made non-legally binding on developed countries.

Before the conference started, more than 180 countries had submitted pledges to cut their carbon emissions (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs).

Intended Nationally determined contributions

The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead.

This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.

It is not legally binding.

India also reaffirmed its **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions** commitments to meeting the goals under the Agreement in order to combat the climate change.

India's INDC, to be achieved primarily, by 2030

India promised to reduce the “emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35 % by 2030 from 2005 level.

It will achieve about “40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources (mainly renewable like wind and solar power) by 2030” with the help of transfer of technology and low-cost international finance, including from the Green Climate Fund.

India also promised an additional carbon sink (a means to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere) of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by the year 2030.

Note:

- Canada, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States —collectively representing 40 percent of global oil and gas production.

Chandler Good Government Index

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

Why in the news?

- India has been ranked 49th in the Chandler Good Government Index (CGGI), which classifies 104 countries in terms of government capabilities and outcomes.

Key highlights



- Finland topped the Chandler Good Government Index list.

About the Chandler Good Government Index

- The index is published by Chandler Institute of Governance, Singapore.
- The Chandler Good Government Index shows the importance of measuring and investing in governance capabilities that matter.
- It highlights a key need for ‘pracademics’ in government – people who combine a rigorous understanding of research and data with a practical and grounded sense of what governments need to do to succeed.”
- The CGGI shows the importance of investing in governance capabilities.

The index focuses on seven pillars:

- Leadership and foresight;
- Robust laws and policies;
- Strong institutions;
- Financial stewardship;

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- Attractive marketplace;
- Global influence and reputation;
- Helping people rise.

China's first Mars rover named 'Zhurong'

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

Why in the news?

- The China National Space Administration has recently announced the China's first Mars rover will be named **Zhurong**.



Background

- China in 2019 became the first country to land a space probe on the little-explored far side of the moon and in December returned lunar rocks to Earth for the first time since the 1970s.
- China would become the third country after the former Soviet Union and the United States to put a robot rover on Mars.

About Zhurong

- It will be named Zhurong after a traditional fire god.
- The rover is aboard the Tianwen-1 probe that arrived in Mars orbit on February 24 and is due to land in May to look for evidence of life.
- It is part of Chinese space plans that include launching a crewed orbital station and landing a human on the moon.
- According to the China National Space Administration the rover's title fits with the Chinese name for Mars — “Huo Xing,” or fire star.
- The top candidate for the landing site is Utopia Planitia, a rock-strewn plain where the U.S. lander Viking 2 touched down in 1976.

About Tianwen-1 (TW-1)

- It is an interplanetary mission to Mars by the China National Space Administration (CNSA) to send a robotic spacecraft, which consists of an orbiter, a lander and a rover.
- It is named after the ancient Chinese poem ‘Questions to Heaven’.

Objectives

- It helps to search for evidence of underground water, if it's present, as well as evidence of possible ancient life.
- It will also assess the planet's environment.

Related Information

CHANDRAYAAN 2 Mission

- ISRO has launched Chandrayaan-2 mission to the Moon in July, but its lander failed to reach the lunar surface.
- It is a completely indigenous mission, is India's second lunar exploration mission which the following basic components.

These are

- **Orbiter**
 - It will observe the lunar surface and relay communication between Earth and Chandrayaan 2's Lander.
- **Lander (called Vikram)**
 - It has designed to execute India's first soft landing on the lunar surface.
- **Rover (called Pragyan)**
 - It is a 6-wheeled, AI powered vehicle, which will move on the lunar surface and perform on-site chemical analysis.

Launcher

- It was launched by Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle GSLV MkIII-M1.
- It is India's most powerful launcher to date, and has been completely designed and fabricated from within the country

5th session of “Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs”

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

Why in the news?

- Recently India has hosted the fifth session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH).

About Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs

- It was established in 201 which the support of more than a hundred countries under the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC).

Purpose

- To develop and expand worldwide standards for spices and culinary herbs.
- To consult with other international organisations in the standard development process.

About Codex Alimentarius Commission

- The Codex Alimentarius Commission or CAC is the body responsible for all matters regarding the implementation of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.
- It was established in 1963 within the framework of the Joint Food Standards Programme.

Purpose

- To establish international food standards to protect the health of consumers.
- To ensure fair practices in the food trade.
- Especially while promoting coordination of food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organisations.
- The Commission meets in regular session once a year alternating between Geneva and Rome.

Headquarters

- Its headquarters' is in Rome, Italy.

Membership

- Membership of the Commission is open to all Member Nations and Associate Members of FAO and WHO.
- The countries interested in international food standards can become a member of CAC.
- **The Commission works in the six UN official languages.**

Funding

- The programme of work of the Commission is funded through the regular budgets of WHO and FAO with all work subject to approval of the two governing bodies of the parent organizations.

Centre notifies Act giving more powers to Delhi L-G

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

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has recently issued a gazette notification stating that the provisions of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021, would be deemed to have come into effect from April 27.

Key features of the Act

ANOTHER FRONT OPENS?

GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2021 COMES INTO FORCE

WHAT IT MEANS

- > The word, "government", referred to in any law made by the legislative assembly, shall now mean "lieutenant governor"
- > The elected government will need to obtain LG's opinion before taking any executive action under any law
- > The legislative assembly, or its committees, shall not consider matters of day-to-day administration or conduct inquiries in relation to the administrative decisions



- > Amendment also seeks to ensure that the assembly is run in accordance with rules of procedure and conduct of business in Lok Sabha

- > It will put an end to any scope for criticising any leader or person who is not member of the house

- > In the past, there have been several instances where names of top central government ministers were taken on the floor of Delhi assembly

LIKELY IMPACT

- > All files need to be sent to LG for approval
- > No decision of the council of ministers can be implemented without LG's approval
- > Judgment of LG will prevail



- > Powers delegated among HoDs and secretaries will remain unchanged
- > Elected govt may raise an issue when LG does not approve its decisions
- > There is ambiguity on what all falls under 'matters of day

- to day administration'
- > Volume of files going to LG office may increase and may require the LG to set up a mechanism for faster disposal
- > LG versus elected govt tussle may become more frequent



WHAT HAPPENS TO COVID MANAGEMENT?

Not likely to be affected much because all Delhi Disaster Management Authority decisions are already being taken with LG's approval LG is the chairman of DDMA

- The Act, which gives the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi more teeth and significantly waters down the powers of both the elected government and the Legislative Assembly, will clarify the expression "Government" and address "ambiguities" in the legislative provisions to promote "harmonious relations between the legislature and the executive".
- The Act defines the responsibilities of the elected government and the L-G along with the "constitutional scheme of governance of the NCT" interpreted by the Supreme Court in recent judgments regarding the division of powers between the two entities.
- It will also seek to ensure that the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunity" to exercise powers entrusted to him under proviso to clause (4) of Article 239AA of the Constitution.
- This particular clause provides for a Council of Ministers headed by a Chief Minister for the NCT to "aid and advise the Lieutenant-Governor" in the exercise of his functions for matters in which the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws.

Need of the Amendment

- The Ministry of Home Affairs' statement on "objects and reasons" of the Bill stated that Section 44 of the 1991 Act deals with conduct of business and there is no structural mechanism for effective time-bound implementation of the said section.
- Also, there is no clarity as to what proposal or matters are required to be submitted to Lieutenant Governor before issuing order thereon.
- Section 44 of the 1991 Act says that all executive actions of the LG, whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the LG.

Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

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

Why in the news?

- In a move to counter China's dominance of supply chain in the Indo-Pacific region, trade ministers of India, Japan and Australia has formally launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) in a virtual trilateral ministerial meeting.

About Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

- The SCRI aims to create a virtuous cycle of enhancing supply chain resilience with a view to eventually attaining strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region.
- SCRI will focus on sharing best practices on supply chain resilience and holding investment promotion events and buyer-seller matching events to provide opportunities for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains.
- The ministers instructed officials to implement the initial projects and further develop the initiative.
- The ministers decided to convene at least once a year to provide guidance to the implementation of the SCRI as well as to consult on how to develop the initiative.

Reasons for the Initiative

Covid-19 Realization

- With spread of Covid-19 globally, it has been realized that dependence over a single nation is not good for both global economy and national economies.

USA-China Trade Tensions

- The tensions began when the United States and China both applied tariff sanctions on each other.

India as an Emerging Supply Hub

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- The businesses have started seeing India as a “hub for supply chains”.

Study: Migrants who returned earned five-fold of those who stayed back

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

Why in the news?

- According to the survey conducted over phone by researchers from Yale and the Inclusion Economics India Centre at KREA University with Bihar and Chhattisgarh as “source states” has released the data of 5,000 migrants across north and central India from April 2020 to February 2021.

Key highlights of the survey

- **Migrant Workers** who returned to cities for work after the first Covid lockdown earned roughly five times as much as those who stayed back, and last year’s exodus affected women more than men.
- After the first lockdown it shows that only 45 per cent of female migrants returned to their urban workplaces — 40 per cent of them earned no income across a week in which they were tracked in February 2021.
- In comparison, 55 per cent of men returned to their workplaces and only a quarter of them had no income across the same week in February,
- Besides, the survey shows, male migrant workers who returned to urban areas for work had managed to earn up to 90 per cent of their pre-pandemic earnings.
- But the women who did so earned up to 72 per cent of their pre-pandemic income.
- On average, this came to Rs 2,355 a week, or 85 per cent of pre-pandemic earnings, the survey found.
- The survey found, male migrant workers who remained at home earned only 23 per cent of their pre-pandemic income, and female migrant workers just 13 per cent.
- On average, this came to Rs 451 per week, or 18 per cent of pre-pandemic earnings, the survey found.

Conclusion of the survey

- Those who remained at home in rural areas were more likely to report being unemployed, reducing food consumption, mortgaging or selling assets, spending down savings, and taking loans to make ends meet.
- To the extent it is possible to help those who returned to urban areas remain in cities through localized lockdowns, such as by providing economic support through employers and rations, we can protect migrants from another costly return to rural areas and enable a speedier economic recovery.
- These migrants have not recovered economically and remain extremely vulnerable.

Article 223 - Appointment of acting Chief Justice

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

Why in the news?

- The President of India has recently exercise of the powers conferred by Article 223 of the Constitution of India, appointed Shri Justice Rajesh Bindal, senior-most Judge of Calcutta High Court, to perform the duties of the office of the Chief Justice of that High Court.

About Article 223 of the Indian Constitution

- When the office of Chief Justice of a High Court is vacant or when any such Chief Justice is, by reason of absence or otherwise, unable to perform the duties of his office, the duties of the office shall be performed by such one of the other Judges of the Court as the President may appoint for the purpose.

Related Information

- Recently, the Supreme Court has also activated Article 224A of the Constitution that had been dormant for 58 years, allowed high court chief justices to start appointing retired HC judges as ad hoc judges for two to five years.

About Article 224A

- Article 224A of the Constitution allows the Chief Justice of a High Court to appoint a person who has been a judge earlier to sit as a judge of the court with the previous consent of the President.

Human Rights Watch

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, Human Rights Watch has said that Israel is committing the crime of "apartheid" by seeking to maintain Jewish "domination" over Palestinians and its own Arab population, an explosive allegation Israel firmly rejected.
- Currently under investigation by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes, Israel blasted HRW's accusations as "preposterous and false", accusing the New York-based group of having "a long-standing anti-Israeli agenda".

About Human Rights Watch



- It is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and documents human rights violations and advocates for policies to prevent such abuses.
- It has been founded in 1978 as Helsinki Watch to monitor the Soviet Union's adherence to the Helsinki Accords, the group subsequently expanded in size and scope.
- It adopted its current name in 1988.
- **Its headquarters are in New York City.**

Works

- Human Rights Watch conducts fact-finding investigations of human rights abuses and monitors various countries to ensure they are not in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which outlines fundamental civil, social, and political rights.

Russia to leave the International Space Station

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

Why in the news?

- Russia has recently announced that it would be withdrawing from the International Space Station in 2025, and build and manage its own floating laboratory that will be launched into orbit by 2030.
- The decision to leave also comes at a time when relations between Russia and the US have been steadily deteriorating on multiple fronts, with the two powers also accusing each other of militarising space.



Reasons for leaving International Space Station

- Russia has decided to build and manage its own floating laboratory that will be launched into orbit by 2030.
- The station will reportedly orbit the Earth at higher latitude, enabling it to better observe the Polar Regions, especially since Russia plans to develop the Arctic sea route as the ice melts.
- The new station would help Russia tide over challenges that its cosmonauts currently face on the ageing ISS, such as conducting experiments and adapting the latest technology.

About International Space Station

- The Mir space station of the former Soviet Union, and later operated by Russia, was functional from 1986 to 2001.
- The International Space Station is a modular space station in low Earth orbit which has been in space since 1988.
- It is a multinational collaborative project involving five participating space agencies: NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), and CSA (Canada).

What does the International Space Station do?

- A space station is essentially a large spacecraft that remains in low-earth orbit for extended periods of time.
- It is like a large laboratory in space, and allows astronauts to come aboard and stay for weeks or months to carry out experiments in microgravity.

‘Vaccine Maitri’

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

Why in the news ?

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- India is unlikely to resume its Vaccine Maitri programme for the neighbourhood, including Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, until at least July 2021.
- India has had to suspend the export of both commercial and grant-based vaccine doses to countries, including those in the neighbourhood who had already paid for the shipments.

More on the news

- Sri Lanka had placed a commercial order for 1.5 million (15 lakh) doses of Covishield, of which just 5 lakh doses have arrived so far.
- Sri Lanka and Nepal were last sent shipments through the COVAX alliance on March 6 and 28, respectively, while commercial shipments stopped at the end of February.
- Meanwhile, China has supplied several South Asian countries vaccines over the past few weeks and offered more.

Vaccine Maitri programme

- India under its massive Vaccine Maitri programme, India exported more than 66 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 95 countries worldwide. Of these about 10 million were grants from the government, 20 million were sent as part of the global COVAX facility, and the rest 36 million were commercial export.

International Commission of Jurists

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

Why in the news?

- The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has recently called on the Centre and the State governments to comply with court orders regarding oxygen supply, hospital beds and medicines for COVID-19, adding that the governments had failed to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic.
- It urged the Centre and the State governments to follow judicial orders regarding medical care and vaccines.

About International Commission of Jurists

- It is an international human rights non-governmental organization.
- It is a standing group of 60 eminent jurists—including senior judges, attorneys and academics—who work to develop national and international human rights standards through the law.
- The composition of the Commission aims to reflect the geographical diversity of the world and its many legal systems.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Culex or common house mosquitoes

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently with the change in season and rise in temperature, culex or common house mosquitoes have made reappearance across the capital.

About Culex mosquitoes

- Culex mosquitoes are known carriers of **Japanese encephalitis**, a potentially life-threatening but rare viral disease that causes “acute inflammation” of the brain.
- They breed in dirty, stagnant water.
- The preferred oviposition habitats such as rainwater barrels, catch basins, storm drains, and septic tanks are rich in organic material.
- Warmer temperatures are the **main reason for the appearance of these mosquitoes**.

Related Information

About Japanese Encephalitis (JE)

- Japanese encephalitis is a disease caused by a **flavi virus** that affects the membranes around the brain.
- Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) is also a major cause of **Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)** in India.

Government initiative

- In India, mass vaccination with JE vaccine was started in a phased manner subsequent to the major outbreak in 2005.
- Its vaccination is also included under the Universal Immunization Program of the Government of India.

Govt. retains 4% inflation target for RBI’s rate panel for 2021-26

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre has recently decided to retain the inflation target of 4%, with a tolerance band of +/- 2 percentage points for the Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI for the coming five years (2021-26).
- RBI had previously introduced a number of measures in its Monetary Policy Report for dealing with the Covid-19 induced economic setback.

- **The inflation target for the period April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2026**

Other Decision of Monetary Policy

Unchanged Policy Rates

- The RBI has kept the repo rate under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) unchanged at 4%.
- The reverse repo rate under the LAF remains unchanged at 3.35% and the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate at 4.25%.

Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)

- The RBI has decided to restore the CRR in a non-disruptive manner from 3% to 4% in two stages by May 2021.

Related Information

About Monetary Policy Committee of India

- It is a committee of the Reserve Bank of India that is responsible for fixing the benchmark interest rate in India.
- **Section 45ZB** of the amended RBI Act, 1934 provides for an empowered six-member monetary policy committee (MPC) to be constituted by the Central Government to determine the interest rate that is required to achieve the inflation target.
- The MPC is required to meet at least four times a year.

Members

- It is a 6-member body and is headed by RBI governor.
- There are 3 members from RBI and three nominated members.

South Asia Economic Focus report

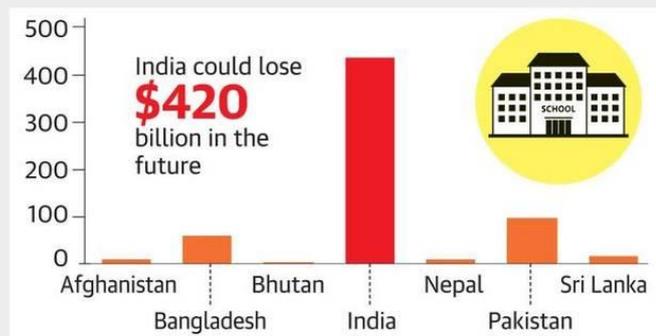
(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, as per the World Bank's South Asia Economic Focus South Asia Vaccinates report, India's economy is expected to grow at 10.1% for the year starting April 1, 2021.
- However, given the significant uncertainty pertaining to both epidemiological and policy developments, the real GDP growth for FY21-22 can range from 7.5 to 12.5 per cent, depending on how the ongoing vaccination campaign proceeds, whether new restrictions to mobility are required, and how quickly the world economy recovers

Closure effect

Among South Asian nations, India's future earnings are projected to be impacted the most due to school closures. The chart shows the amounts (in USD billion) some countries are projected to lose due to school closures



Key finding of the Report

- The economy contracted 8.5% in FY20-21 as per the World Bank's estimate.
- The Bank expects public consumption to contribute positively, but pent-up private demand to fade by end 2021, as investment will pick up very gradually as a result of a large government capital expenditure push.
- Negative spillovers from financial sector distress (particularly concessions to debtors) are a risk to the growth outlook, the report warned.
- However, the Reserve Bank of India is expected to maintain an accommodative monetary policy stance during FY22.
- These new waves and new variants of the virus were part of the risk factors to the outlook

Related Information

- Recently in World Economic Outlook of International Monetary Fund, also projected 11.5 per cent growth rate for India in 2021.
- This makes India the only major economy of the world to register a double-digit growth in 2021.
- China is next with 8.1 per cent growth in 2021 followed by Spain (5.9 per cent) and France (5.5 per cent).

US "2020 Human Rights Report" flags curbs on Indian media

(Topic- GS Paper III- Internal Security, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The US State Department released the "2020 Human Rights Report" also known as "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices".

About 2020 Human Rights Report

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- It is an annual report which is submitted by the US State Department to the US Congress every year.
- The report is retrospective and contains a country-wise discussion on the state of human rights.
- The Report is based on the rights listed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Key Findings with Respect to India

- India has several human rights issues, including unlawful and arbitrary killings.
- Restrictions on freedom of expression and the press, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists;
- Restrictions on political participation
- Widespread corruption at all levels in the government
- Tolerance of violations of religious freedom
- Crimes involving violence and discrimination targeting members of minority groups, including women based on religious affiliation or social status.
- According to the Report, Muslims and lower-caste Dalit groups continued to be the most vulnerable.
- The government's requests for user data from Internet companies increased dramatically.
- In 2019, the Government made 49,382 user data requests from Facebook, a 32% increase from 2018.
- Over the same period, Google requests increased by 69% while Twitter requests saw a 68% increase.

Bandhavgarh National Park

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, a wildfire had spread across several zones in Bandhavgarh National Park has been brought under control.

About Bandhavgarh National

- Bandhavgarh National Park is located in the Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh.
- Bandhavgarh was declared a national park in 1968 and then became Tiger Reserve in 1993.
- The name Bandhavgarh given to the reserve is due to the presence of an ancient fort in the hillock of the Vindhya ranges of Umaria.
- It has been believed that Lord Rama gifted this amazing fort to his younger brother Lakshmana.

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme

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

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Why in the news?

- Recently, the Government has extended the scope of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) through introduction of ECLGS 3.0 to cover business enterprises in Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, Leisure & Sporting sectors.

About ECLGS 3.0

- ECLGS 3.0 would involve extension of credit of upto 40% of total credit outstanding across all lending institutions as on 29.02.2020.
- The tenor of loans granted under ECLGS 3.0 shall be 6 years including moratorium period of 2 years.

Related Information

About Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme

- The scheme was the biggest fiscal component of the ₹20-lakh crore 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' package announced by Finance Minister.
- Under the Scheme, 100% guarantee coverage to be provided by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) for additional funding of up to Rs. 3 lakh crore to eligible MSMEs and interested MUDRA borrowers.
- The credit will be provided in the form of a Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility.
- The Scheme would be applicable to all loans sanctioned under GECL Facility during the period from the date of announcement of the Scheme to 31.10.2020.

Aims and objectives

- The Scheme aims at mitigating the economic distress faced by MSMEs by providing them additional funding in the form of a fully guaranteed emergency credit line.
- The main objective is to provide an incentive to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), i.e., Banks, Financial Institutions (FIs) and NBFCs to increase access to, and enable the availability of additional funding facility to MSME borrowers.
- It aims to provide a 100 per cent guarantee for any losses suffered by them due to non-repayment of the GECL funding by borrowers.

Salient features

- The entire funding provided under GECL shall be provided with a 100% credit guarantee by NCGTC to MLIs under ECLGS.

Loan tenor

- The tenor of the loan under Scheme shall be four years with a moratorium period of one year on the principal amount.
- No Guarantee Fee shall be charged by NCGTC from the Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) under the Scheme.
- Interest rates under the Scheme shall be capped at 9.25% for banks and FIs, and at 14% for NBFCs.

MyNEP2020 Platform

(Topic- GS Paper III–Education, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Union Education Minister has launched the “MyNEP2020” Platform of National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Web Portal.

About MyNEP2020 Platform

- The platform seeks to invite suggestions/inputs/membership from the stakeholders for preparing draft for development of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and National Mission for Mentoring Program membership (NMM).
- The NCTE will work in close consultation with individuals/organizations for the preparation of documents on NPST and NMM.
- It envisages the participation of teachers, education professionals, academicians, & other stakeholders in preparing the documents on teacher policy.
- The platform will help in creating a sustainable and positive change in the teacher’s education sector.

Cotton Corporation of India

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

Why in the news?

- According to Cotton Corporation of India, Cotton exports have clocked 47 lakh bales and are expected to touch 60-70 lakh bales by the end of the season.

Cotton Corporation of India

- The Cotton Corporation of India Limited or CCI is a Government of India agency, engaged in diverse activities related to trade, procurement, and export of cotton.
- CCI is a public sector agency responsible for equitable distribution of cotton among the different constituents of the industry and aid imports of cotton.
- It was incorporated on 31 July 1970 under the Companies Act 1956.
- CCI is governed by Textile Policy 1985 issued by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

Joint Logistics Node (JLN)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat operationalised and dedicated to the Armed forces the 3rd Joint Logistics Node (JLN) in Mumbai.

About Joint Logistics Node (JLN)

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- It will provide integrated logistics cover to the Armed Forces for their small arms ammunition, rations, fuel, general stores, civil hired transport, aviation clothing, spares and also engineering support in an effort to synergise their operational efforts.
- The JLN would enhance joint inter-operability between the Services.
- The Joint Operations Division (JOD) under the aegis of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (Hq IDS) enabled establishment of the JLN

Govt Slashes Rates On Small Savings Schemes By Up To 1.1%

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Economics times)

Why in the news?

- The government has recently cut interest rates on small savings schemes, including NSC and PPF, by up to 1.1 per cent for the first quarter of 2021-22 in line with falling fixed deposit rates of banks.

More on the news

- Interest rate on Public Provident Fund (PPF) has been reduced by 0.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent while National Savings Certificate (NSC) will now earn 0.9 per cent less at 5.9 per cent.

Lowest Since 1974

- The new interest rate on PPF will be the lowest since 1974.
- According to reports, the PPF interest rate was 7 per cent between August 1974 and March 1975. Prior to that, the rate was 5.8 per cent.
- **Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis.**

Change in Interest Rate

- The interest rate for the five-year Senior Citizens Savings Scheme has also been reduced steeply by 0.9 per cent to 6.5 per cent.
- The interest on the senior citizens' scheme is paid quarterly.
- For the first time interest rate on savings deposits has been reduced by 0.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent from the existing 4 per cent annually.
- The steepest fall of 1.1 per cent has been effected in the one-year term deposit.
- The new rate will be 4.4 per cent as compared to 5.5 per cent at the moment.
- Similarly, two-year fixed deposit will earn 0.5 per cent less at 5 per cent, three-year term deposit rate will be down by 0.4 per cent and five- year term deposit rate will be lower by 0.9 per cent at 5.8 per cent.

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

- The girl child savings scheme **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana** account will offer 0.7 per cent lower rate at 6.9 per cent rate during the first quarter of the next fiscal.

Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP)

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- The annual interest rate on **Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP)** has been reduced by 0.7 per cent to 6.2 per cent from 6.9 per cent.

India Extends 2022 Deadline for Coal-Fired Plants to Adopt New Emission Norms

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

Why in the news?

- India has pushed back deadlines for coal-fired power plants to adopt new emission norms by up to three years, and allowed utilities that miss the new target to continue operating after paying a penalty.
- The new order dated April 1 from the Environment Ministry says plants near populous regions and the capital New Delhi will have to comply by 2022, while utilities in less polluting area shave up to 2025 to comply or retire units.

Background

- India had initially set a 2017 deadline for thermal power plants to install Flue Gas Desulphurization units that cut emissions of sulphur dioxides.
- This was later changed to varying deadlines for different regions, ending in 2022.

Proposal of the Ministry of Power

- It has proposed a "**graded action plan**," whereby areas where plants are located would be graded according to the severity of pollution, with **Region 1 referring to critically polluted areas and Region 5 being the least polluted**.
- It could help avoid immediate increase in power prices in various relatively clean areas of India and avoid unnecessary burden on power utilities and consumers.
- Strict control of emissions shall be required in such key areas for thermal power stations categorised under **Region 1**.
- Plants in Region 2 could begin to take action one year after those in Region 1.
- Presently no action is required for power plants that are situated under Region 3, 4 & 5.

Sulfur Dioxide Pollution

- The largest source of SO₂ in the atmosphere is the burning of fossil fuels by power plants and other industrial facilities.
- The thermal power companies has produce three-fourths of the country's electricity and account for some 80% of its industrial emissions of particulate matter, sulphur- and nitrous-oxides, which cause lung diseases, acid rain and smog.

Smaller sources of SO₂ emissions include

- Industrial processes such as extracting metal from ore; natural sources such as volcanoes; and locomotives, ships and other vehicles and heavy equipment that burn fuel with a high sulfur content.
- It can affect both health and the environment.

About Flue-gas desulfurization

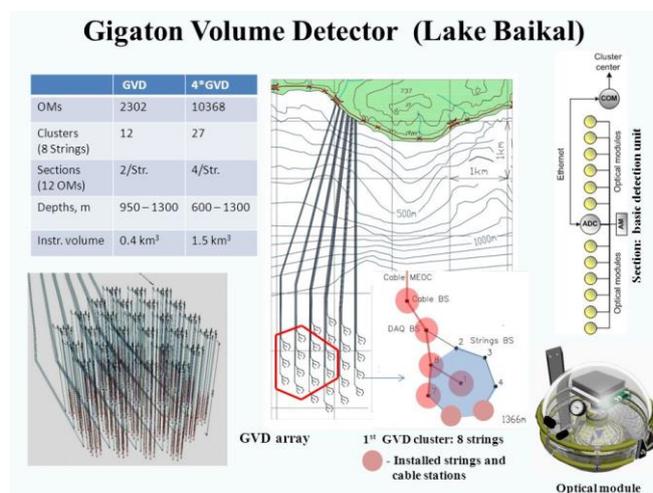
- It is a set of technologies used to remove sulfur dioxide (SO₂) from exhaust flue gases of fossil-fuel power plants, and from the emissions of other sulfur oxide emitting processes such as waste incineration.

Baikal-GVD (Gigaton Volume Detector)

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

- Recently, Russian scientists have launched one of the world’s biggest underwater neutrino telescopes called the Baikal-GVD (Gigaton Volume Detector) in the waters of Lake Baikal.

About Baikal-GVD (Gigaton Volume Detector)



- The construction of Baikal-GVD telescope, which started in 2016, is motivated by the mission to study in detail the elusive fundamental particles called neutrinos and to possibly determine their sources.

Location

- The Baikal-GVD is one of the three largest neutrino detectors in the world along with the IceCube at the South Pole and ANTARES in the Mediterranean Sea.

What are fundamental particles?

- Elementary particles, also known as fundamental particles, are subatomic particles which cannot be broken down into further sub-structures.
- These particles are not made up of any other particles.
- Therefore, elementary particles can be visualized as the fundamental constituents of all substance (matter and antimatter).

Examples :

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- The fundamental fermions (leptons, quarks, antileptons, and antiquarks) are an important example of elementary particles.
- Another important example of an elementary particle is a boson (such as the gauge boson and the Higgs boson).

About Lake Baikal



Lake Baikal.

Image: *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

- Lake Baikal is also spelled as Ozero Bajkal which is located in the southern part of eastern Siberia within the republic of Buryatia and Irkutsk oblast (province) of Russia.
- It is the oldest existing freshwater lake on Earth (20 million–25 million years old), as well as the deepest continental body of water.
- It is also the world's largest freshwater lake by volume, containing about one-fifth of the fresh water on Earth's surface.
- **UNESCO declared Lake Baikal a World Heritage Site in 1996.**

Digital payments: India pips China, US, others in 2020

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, a report been published by the UK-based payments system company ACI Worldwide regardin the Digital Payment in the World.

Key highlights

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- India was home to the highest number of real-time online transactions in 2020 ahead of countries such as China and the US.
- The transaction volume share for instant payments India, among real-time transactions, was 15.6 per cent and 22.9 per cent for other electronic payments in 2020.
- However, this is expected to change by 2025 as volume shares for instant payments and other electronic payments are likely to grow to 37.1 per cent and 34.6 per cent respectively.
- Consequently, the share of paper-based transactions would contract to 28.3 per cent.
- Moreover, the share of real-time payments volume in overall electronic transactions will exceed 50 per cent by 2024.

India and Report

- India's journey of creating a digital financial infrastructure has been characterized by collaboration between the government, the regulator, banks, and fintechs.
- India's digital payments market led by Paytm, PhonePe, Pine Labs, Razorpay, BharatPe, and others has surged during the pandemic even as incentives such as cash backs, rewards, and offers have helped businesses to attract more customers.

Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, 27 migratory birds found dead at Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary due to avian influenza (H5N1).

About Pong Dam Wildlife Sanctuary

- Pong Dam Sanctuary also known as Pong Dam Reservoir or Pong Dam Lake which is located in Himachal Pradesh.
- In 1975, it was created as a result of a dam built across Beas River.
- **Pong Dam Sanctuary is also a national wetland.**

- It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1983, and is now also a Ramsar site.

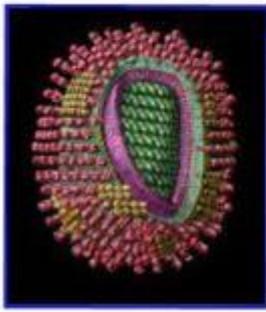
Related Information

About Bird Flu or Avian Influenza

- Avian influenza (AI) commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds.
- These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.

About H5N1

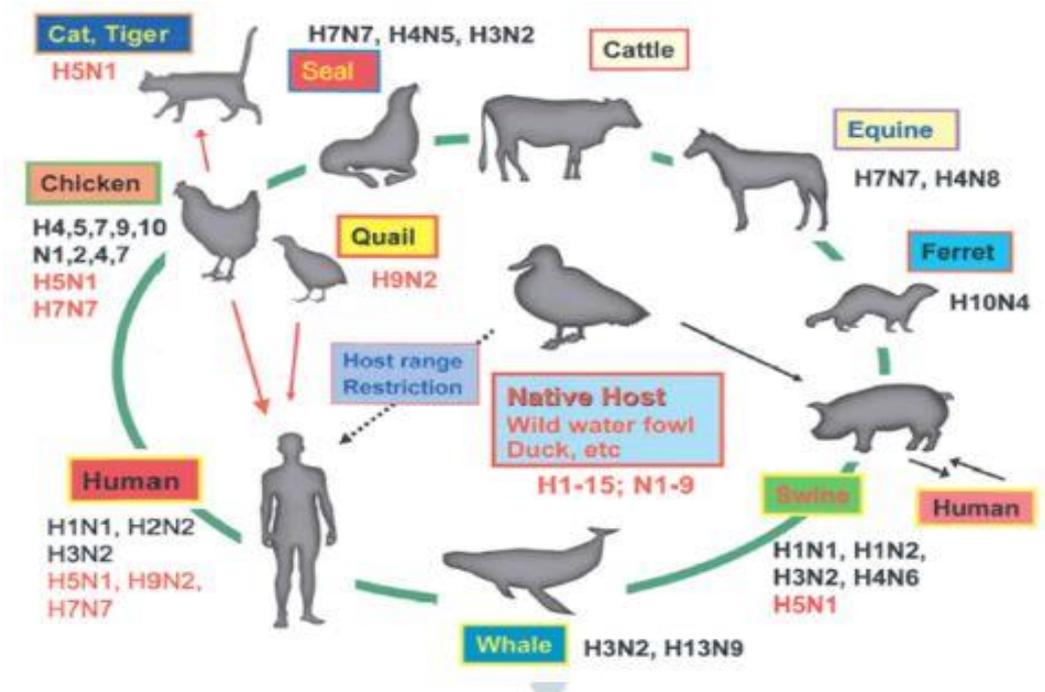
What Is H5N1?



- Influenza A from the family of Orthomyxoviridae
- Negative single-strand RNA virus with segment genome
- Haemagglutinin and Neuraminidase viral proteins
- 15 subtypes of haemagglutinin and 9 subtypes of neuraminidase
- All subtypes exist in wild aquatic birds

- H5N1 is a type of influenza virus that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds called avian influenza.
- Most avian influenza viruses do not infect humans.
- However, some, such as A (H5N1) and A (H7N9), have caused serious infections in people.
- Human cases of H5N1 avian influenza occur occasionally, but it is difficult to transmit the infection from person to person.

How does H5N1 influenza spread to people?



Harmonised System of Nomenclature Code

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Government makes the 6 digit HSN (Harmonized System of Nomenclature) code mandatory for a GST taxpayer having a turnover of more than Rs 5 crore in a financial year.

About Harmonised System of Nomenclature Code

- The HSN Code is a six-digit identification code which was developed by the World Customs Organization in 1988.
- It helps in systematic classification of goods across the globe.
- HSN codes for goods at 6 digits are universally common.**
- The Harmonized System is governed by "The International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System"**
- Those with turnover of up to ₹5 crore in the preceding financial year would be required to mandatorily furnish four-digit HSN code on business to business transaction (B2B) invoices.
- Earlier, the requirement was four-digits and two-digits respectively.
- The Common HSN codes apply to Customs and GST.**
- The HSN code currently comprises around 5,000 commodity groups.

Significance

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- The HS contributes to the harmonization of Customs and trade procedures, and the non-documentary trade data interchange in connection with such procedures, thus reducing the costs related to international trade.
- It is also extensively used by governments, international organizations and the private sector for many other purposes such as internal taxes, trade policies, monitoring of controlled goods, rules of origin, freight tariffs, transport statistics, price monitoring, quota controls, compilation of national accounts, and economic research and analysis.
- It will also help tax officers with deeper data analytics for every item supplied and help them in arresting tax evasion emanating from fake invoices and irregular tax credit claims.

Related Information

About World Customs Organisation

- It has been established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) is an independent intergovernmental body whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
- At present, it represents 183 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.
- It is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters and which can rightly call itself the voice of the international Customs community.
- **It has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.**

Some Important Conventions/Mechanism under WCO

- The SAFE Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade.
- The International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS Convention).
- The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs procedures (revised Kyoto Convention or RKC).

Note:

- **India had become the vice-chair (regional head) of the Asia Pacific region of the WCO for a period of two years to June, 2020.**

[NASA's InSight lander records two strong quakes on Mars](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

- NASA's InSight lander detected two strong, clear quakes on Mars recently, recording over 500 quakes to date since its touch down on the Red Planet in November 2018.
- According to the mission control, the two quakes of magnitude 3.3 and 3.1 originated in a region called Cerberus Fossae, the same place where two other strong quakes were recorded earlier in the mission. The previous strong marsquakes were of magnitude 3.6 and 3.5.

About InSight Mission Lander

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- NASA has launched the lander under NASA's InSight mission in 2018.

Purpose

- InSight is the first robotic explorer to make a detailed study of the "inner space" of Mars: its crust, mantle, and core including Earth and the Moon, formed.

The scientific instruments used for the mission are:

- a. seismometer for detecting quakes;
- b. sensors for gauging wind and air pressure;
- c. Magnetometer and a heat flow probe designed to take the planet's temperature.

[Government amends Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code for MSME Resolution](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- CNBC news + the Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Central Government has promulgated Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 to allow pre-packaged insolvency process for MSMEs.
- The Ordinance amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 to allow the Central Government to notify such pre-packaged process for defaults up to Rupees One Crores.

Objective of the Ordinance

- It will allow the stressed debtor- in this case the MSMEs- and its creditors to quickly work out a plan to revive the company outside the bankruptcy process, which would then be sanctioned by the courts.
- It is considered expedient to provide an efficient alternative insolvency resolution process for corporate persons classified as micro, small and medium enterprises under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, ensuring quicker, cost-effective and value-maximizing outcomes for all the stakeholders.

Applicability

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- The pre-pack framework will be applicable for MSMEs with a maximum default value of Rs 1 crore only.
- It can be filed under a newly inserted Section 54C of the IBC.
- For defaults of more than Rs 1 crore, IBC or other resolution mechanisms can continue to be used.
- A pre-packaged insolvency resolution process or PIRP cannot run in parallel to another corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP), and must have a three-year cooling-off period from the closure of any other pre-pack or CIRP, as per the rules notified.
- If a pre-pack application is filed within 14 days of the filing of any application under section 7 or section 9 or section 10 which is pending, then the Adjudicating Authority would have to first dispose of the application under section 54C.
- If more than 14 days have passed since an IBC plea was filed under Sections 7, 9, or 10, then the court would have to give the existing plea a preference.
- Sections 7, 9 and 10 deals with the initiation of the corporate insolvency resolution process by financial creditors, operational creditors and the corporate debtor himself respectively.

Timelines

- The entire pre-packaged insolvency resolution process would have to be completed within 120 days from the commencement date.
- The resolution professional is expected to submit the resolution plan, as approved by the committee of creditors, to the Adjudicating Authority within 90 days of the commencement date.
- If the plan is not approved by the committee of creditors (CoC) within the time period, the PIRP would be terminated.

Pre-pack insolvency resolution framework vs normal IBC process

Eligibility

- PIRP is applicable only to MSMEs. On the other hand, IBC is applicable to all the corporate debtors.

Default threshold

- PIRP has a default threshold of Rs 1 crore whereas IBC deals with threshold greater than Rs 1 crore.

Timeline

- PIRP provides 90 days of timeline to submit a resolution plan whereas the IBC provides 180 days.

Management Control

- The management control lies with the corporate debtor in possession with creditor in control on the other hand, the management control in IBC lies with the creditor in control.

Chaff Technology: To safeguard naval ships from missile attack

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

Why in the news?

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) have developed an Advanced Chaff Technology to safeguard naval ships against missile attack.

About Advanced Chaff Technology

- It has been developed by Defence Laboratory Jodhpur (DLJ), a DRDO laboratory.
- The laboratory has indigenously developed three variants of this critical technology namely
 - a. Short Range Chaff Rocket (SRCR)
 - b. Medium Range Chaff Rocket (MRCR)
 - c. Long Range Chaff Rocket (LRCR)
- Chaff is a passive expendable electronic countermeasure technology used worldwide to protect naval ships from enemy's radar and Radio Frequency (RF) missile seekers.
- The importance of this development lies in the fact that very less quantity of chaff material deployed in the air acts as decoy to deflect enemy's missiles for safety of the ships.

Chenab Arch bridge

(Topic- GS Paper III–Infrastructure, Source- TOI)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Chenab Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge has been constructed by Railways.

About Chenab Arch bridge

TOI
THE WORLD'S HIGHEST RAILWAY BRIDGE
CHENAB BRIDGE

- Connects Kashmir valley to rest of nation
- Highest railway bridge in the world (359 metres above river bed level)
- 35 metres higher than France's Eiffel Tower
- 1,315 metres long
- Cost of the bridge is 1486 Cr

- Process of arch closure started on February 20, 2021
- Overall weight of arch is 10,619 MT
- The last 5.6-metre piece of metal was fitted at the highest point today, joining the two arms of the arch

- Designed to withstand high wind speed up to 266 km/hour
- Can bear earthquake forces of highest intensity zone-V in India
- Design speed: 100 kmph
- Structural steel suitable to withstand -10°C to 40°C

- It is a part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link project (USBRL).

Salient Features of the Arch of the iconic Chenab Bridge:

- Indian Railways is constructing the iconic Arch Bridge on River Chenab as a part of the USBRL project to connect the Kashmir valley to the rest of the nation.
- This bridge is 1315m long.
- This is the highest Railway Bridge in the world being 359m above the river bed level.
- **It will be 35 meters higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris (France).**

'Shantir Ogroshena -2021'

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- AIR)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Indian Army has been participated in Multinational Military Exercise namely SHANTIR OGROSHENA -2021 in Bangladesh.
- The theme of the exercise : **Robust Peace Keeping Operations**

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About Shantir Ogroshena -2021

- It is also known as **Front Runner of Peace exercise**.
- It will be a nine days exercise commemorates the birth centenary of Bangladesh Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and mark glorious 50 years of liberation.
- The aim of the exercise is to strengthen the procedures and enhance interoperability amongst neighbourhood countries to ensure robust peace keeping operations in the region.

Military observers

- Military observers from the USA, UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore will also be in attendance throughout the exercise.

RBI extends fresh support of ₹50,000 crore to NABARD, NHB, SIDBI

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

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently announced to provide additional liquidity support of Rs 50,000 crore for fresh lending in 2021 to the India financial institutions (AIFIs) such as NABARD, NHB and SIDBI.

More in the news

- Accordingly, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will be provided a special liquidity facility (SLF) of Rs 25,000 crore for a period of one year to support agriculture and allied activities, the rural non-farm sector and non-banking financial companies-micro finance institutions (NBFC-MFIs).
- The SLF of Rs 10,000 crore will be extended to National Housing Bank (NHB) for one year to support the housing sector.
- To meet the funding requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), SIDBI will be sanctioned Rs 15,000 crore under this facility for a period of upto one year.
- **All these three facilities will be available at the prevailing policy repo rate.**

Related Information

About Asset Reconstruction Company

- It is a specialized financial institution that buys the NPAs or bad assets from banks and financial institutions so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets.
- This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities.
- Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.

Background

SARFAESI Act 2002– origin of ARCs

- The Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002; enacted in December 2002 provides the legal basis for the setting up ARCs in India.
- Section 2 (1) of the Act explains the meaning of Asset Securitization.
- Similarly, ARCs are also elaborated under Section 3 of the of the Act.
- The SARFAESI Act helps reconstruction of bad assets without the intervention of courts.
- Since then, large number of ARCs was formed and was registered with the RBI which has got the power to regulate the ARCs.

Capital needs for ARCs

- As per amendment made on the SARFAESI Act in 2016, an ARC should have a minimum net owned fund of Rs 2 crore.
- The RBI plans to raise this amount to Rs 100 crore by end March 2019.
- Similarly, the ARCs have to maintain a capital adequacy ratio of 15% of its risk weighted assets.

Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine: 7 died, 30 blood clot cases in UK

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, UK medical regulator has acknowledged that of the 30 people who suffered blood clots after receiving the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine, seven have died.

Response from the EU's (European Union) drug regulator

- The EMA (European Medicines Agency), of European Union Drug regulator stated that blood clots must now be listed as a "very rare" side effect of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine and people should continue to take the vaccine.
- The COVID-19 sub-committee of WHO GACVS met to review the recent information from the British, EMA, and other medicines regulators.

Related Information

About Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety

- The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) is a group of experts that provides independent and authoritative guidance to the World Health Organization (WHO) on the topic of safe vaccine use.
- In order to clarify its independence, GACVS members may not represent WHO in any way.
- The Committee was established by the WHO in 1999, and as part of its responsibilities, oversees the Vaccine Safety Net. The group meets twice yearly and publishes its findings in the WHO Weekly Epidemiological Record.

- Engagements and topics undertaken by the GACVS have included the safety of vaccines for measles, influenza, human papilloma virus, Japanese encephalitis, rotavirus and hepatitis B.
- In May 2020, as part the WHO's aim to coordinate global research on tests, treatments and vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2, the GACVS addressed the issue of rapidly developing COVID-19 vaccines during a global emergency and growing misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.

Lab on Wheels' programme

(Topic- GS Paper III- Education, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Delhi Education Minister has inaugurated Delhi Technological University's 'Lab on Wheels' programme.

About 'Lab on Wheels' concept

- The idea is to impart education in the fields of Mathematics and Science to those students who come from marginalised and poor economic backgrounds, in order to pique their interests in these subjects while pursuing higher education.
- In the end, the hope is that it becomes mutually beneficial, if some of these students decide to take admission in DTU once they finish schooling.

What equipment will be present in the bus?

- The 'Lab on Wheels' will comprise 16 computers, two televisions, one 3D printer, one laptop, cameras and one printer.
- It will be Wi-Fi enabled, with 100 per cent power back up and fully air-conditioned.

What all will be taught in the programme?

- The focus will be on Mathematics and Science.
- Some of the things that will be covered include basic computer training to students, regular classwork for Class 10 and 12 students, and 3D printing training.

'Seechewal Model' of wastewater management

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Down to Earth)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the wastewater treatment plant in **Dhingi village in Punjab** uses the **Seechewal method** to use treated wastewater for irrigation and prevent further pollution of groundwater.

About Seechewal Model



- The plant in Dhingi village of Patiala aims to achieve the following objective using the ‘Sechewal Model’ of wastewater management:
 - a. Recycling and reusing the treated wastewater for irrigation
 - b. Preventing further contamination of groundwater
- The model is a pipe-and-pump formula used to remove heavy solid particles, oil and other material from water.
- The project aims to implement a combination of processes through four-well systems of wastewater treatment for reuse apart from human consumption.
- The water wells need to be cleaned regularly; otherwise, they produce extremely poor effluents with high suspended solids, which can be detrimental to the constructed wetland and cause clogging of beds.
- The project will reduce the usage of freshwater by providing an option of treated water to farmers.
- It will aim at water sustainability with appropriate technologies of water recycle-reuse-recharge.”

Benefits of Sechewal Model

- It is easy to install and operate.
- It is very effective in keeping environment and natural water resources neat and clean.
- The method of treatment of polluted water is aerobic and eco-friendly.
- The water thus treated is recycled for use in agriculture, which promotes organic farming.
- It saves a lot of agricultural expenditure on fertilizers.
- Underground pipelines laid for conveying treated waters to fields do away with open rains that nourish flies and mosquitoes.
- It checks diseases.
- It promotes water table recharge.

BASIC nations bat for finances from developed world to fight climate change

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

Why in the news?

- Recently at the 30th session of the ministerial committee on Climate Change of BASIC countries asked the developed economies to provide climate finance to developing nations.
- The ministers also urged the developed countries to present a roadmap on their existing obligations at COP26 to mobilize \$100 billion per year from 2021 to 2025.

About The BASIC group

- It was formed as the result of an agreement signed by the four countries namely Brazil, South Africa, India and China on November 28, 2009.
- These nations have a broadly common position on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and raising the massive funds that are needed to fight climate change.
- The BASIC countries constituted one of the parties in the Copenhagen Accord reached with the US-led grouping.

Other Group fights for Climate change

- BASIC is one of several groups of nations working together to fight climate change and carry out negotiations within the UNFCCC.
- Other than BASIC, there are the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the group of countries of Central Asia, Caucasus, Albania and Moldova (CACAM), the Cartagena Dialogue, the Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA in Spanish), etc.
- There is also the Group of 77 developing countries, the African Group, the Arab States, the Environmental Integrity Group, the Least Developed Countries the Small Island Developing States, etc.

About Copenhagen Accord

- The Copenhagen Accord is a document which delegates at the 15th session of the Conference of Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to "take note of" at the final plenary on 18 December 2009.
- The accord is not **legally binding**.

Payments bank balance limit doubled

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

Why in the news?

- The RBI has recently doubled the limit of maximum balance that an individual customer can hold with payments banks (PBs) to ₹2 lakh from ₹1 lakh earlier, with immediate effect to expand the ability of lenders to cater to the needs of MSMEs and other businesses.

About Payments Banks

- A payments bank (Airtel Payments Bank, India Post Payments Bank, etc.) is like any other bank, but operating on a smaller or restricted scale.
- It can offer remittance services, mobile payments/transfers/purchases and other banking services like ATM/debit cards, net banking and third party fund transfers.
- The main objective of payments bank is to widen the spread of payment and financial services to small business, low-income households, migrant labour workforce in secured technology-driven environment.
- With payments banks, RBI seeks to increase the penetration level of financial services to the remote areas of the country.
- Payment Bank has been constituted by the recommendation of **Dr. Nachiket Mor Committee**.
- The objective of the committee was to propose measures for achieving financial inclusion and increased access to financial services.

Regulation

- The Payments Bank will be registered as a public limited company under the Companies Act, 2013.
- It is governed by the provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949; RBI Act, 1934; Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, other relevant Statutes and Directives.
- They need to maintain a Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR).
- It required investing a minimum 75% of its "demand deposit balances" in Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) eligible Government securities/treasury bills with maturity up to one year.
- It needs to hold maximum 25% in current and time/fixed deposits with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

Difference between Payment bank and Small Banks

	PAYMENTS BANKS	SMALL BANKS
WHO CAN PROMOTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Prepaid card issuers, telecom companies, NBFCs, business correspondents, supermarket chains, corporates, realty sector co-ops & PSUs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Individuals/professionals with 10 years experience in finance, NBFCs, microfinance cos, local area banks
WHAT THEY MUST DO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Have a minimum capital of Rs 100cr > Maintain 75% of deposits in govt bonds > Maintain 25% of deposits in other banks > Have at least 26% investment by Indians > Get listed if net worth crosses Rs 500cr > Have 25% of branches in unbanked areas > Be fully networked and technology driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Have a minimum capital of Rs 200cr > Extend 75% of loans to priority sector > Have 25% of branches in unbanked areas > Maintain reserve requirements > Cap loans to individuals and groups at 10% and 15% of net worth
WHAT THEY CAN DO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Offer internet banking > Sell mutual funds, insurance, pensions > Offer bill payment service for customers > Have ATMs and business correspondents (BC) > Can function as BC of another bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sell forex to customers > Sell mutual funds, insurance, pensions > Can convert into a full-fledged bank > Expand across the country
WHAT THEY CAN'T DO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Offer credit cards > Extend loans > Handle cross-border remittances > Accept NRI Deposits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Extend large loans > Float subsidiaries > Cannot deal in sophisticated financial products

Related Information

About India Post Payment Bank (IPPB)

- The Prime Minister launched India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) on September 1, 2018.
- It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Department of Post, with 100 percent Government of India equity.

IPPB's Vision

- Building most accessible, affordable and trusted bank for common man.
- Spearheading Financial Inclusion- agenda for under-banked populace.

180 AEFI deaths reported in India

(Topic- GS Paper III–Health issue, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- According to a presentation made to the National AEFI Committee there have been 617 severe and serious (including deaths) adverse events following immunization (AEFI).
- As on March 29, a total of 180 deaths (29.2%) have been reported following vaccination across the country. Complete documentation is available only for 236 (38.3%) cases.

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TIME SINCE LAST VACCINE DOSE					
AEFI*	<3 days	4-7 days	8-28 days	>28 days	Total
Deaths	93	18	11	0	124
Hospitalisation	276	15	13	1	305
Severe AEFI	55	4	4	0	63
Data pertains to those AEFI for which such details were presented to the committee					

About Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI)

- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), any untoward medical occurrence which follows immunisation and does not necessarily have a causal relationship with the usage of the vaccine is known as **Adverse Events Following Immunization**.

Copyright (Amendment) Rules, 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Business Today)

Why in the news?

- The Government of India has recently notified Copyright (Amendment) Rules, 2021.

About Copy Right

- In India, the copyright regime is governed by the Copyright Act, 1957 and the Copyright Rules, 2013. The Copyright Rules, 2013 was last amended in the year 2016.

Key highlights of the amendments

- The amendments have harmonised the Copyright Rules with the provisions of Finance Act, 2017 whereby the Copyright Board has been merged with Appellate Board.
- The amendments have been introduced with the objective of bringing the existing rules in parity with other relevant legislations.
- It aims to ensure smooth and flawless compliance in the light of the technological advancement in digital era by adopting electronic means as primary mode of communication and working in the Copyright Office.
- A new provision regarding publication of a copyrights journal has been incorporated, thereby eliminating the requirement of publication in the Official Gazette.
- The said journal would be available at the website of the Copyright Office.
- The new provision also deal with the undistributed royalty amounts and use of electronic and traceable payment methods while collection and distribution of royalties.
- To reinforce transparency in working of copyright societies a new rule has been introduced, whereby the copyright societies will be required to draw up and make public an Annual Transparency Report for each financial year.

- The compliance requirements for registration of software works have been largely reduced, as now the applicant has the liberty to file the first 10 and last 10 pages of source code, or the entire source code if less than 20 pages, with no blocked out or redacted portions.
- The time limit for the Central Government to respond to an application made before it for registration as a copyright society is extended to one hundred and eighty days, so that the application can be more comprehensively examined.

RBI's first purchase under G-SAP 1.0 set for April 15

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the Open Market Purchase of Government of India Securities under the **Government Security Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0)**.
- The Reserve Bank will conduct open market purchase of government securities of ₹1 lakh crore under the **Government Security Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0)** in Q1 2021-22 with a view to enabling a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve.
- The first auction under G-SAP aggregating Rs 25,000 crore will be held on April 15, 2021.

Significance of G-SAP 1.0

- It will provide more comfort to the bond market. As the borrowing of the Government increased this year, RBI has to ensure there is no disruption in the Indian market.
- The programme will help to reduce the spread between repo rate and the 10-year government bond yield.
- It will also help to reduce aggregate cost of borrowing for the centre and states in fiscal year 2022.

Related information

About Open Market Operation

- It is the sale and purchase of government securities and treasury bills by RBI or the central bank of the country.
- It is one of the quantitative monetary policy tools.
- The objective of OMO is to regulate the money supply in the economy.
- RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public.

RBI employs two kinds of OMOs

- a. **Outright Purchase (PEMO)** - this is permanent and involves the outright selling or buying of government securities.
- b. **Repurchase Agreement (REPO)** - this is short-term and are subject to repurchase

New species from Arunachal added to India's bird list

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, three-banded rosefinch bird spotted in Arunachal Pradesh at an altitude higher than its recorded perch in adjoining China has become the 1,340th species of the bird family in India.

About Three-banded rosefinch



- The three-banded rosefinch (*Carpodacus trifasciatus*) is a species of finch in the family Fringillidae.
- It is found in central China and far northeastern India.
- Its natural habitat is temperate forests.

Conservation Status

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

Clean Ganga Fund

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Jal Shakti has informed that as on March 2021, funds of Rs 453 crore have been deposited in the **Clean Ganga Fund**.
- It is set up with voluntary contributions from residents of the country and Non-Resident Indian (NRIs) / Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and others.

About Clean Ganga Fund

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Background

- In September 2014, the Union cabinet had approved the formation of the CGF for Ganga cleaning.
- It was finally set up in January 2015, with the objective of collecting funds from the general public, as well as private and public sector companies, non-resident Indians and people of Indian origin.
- It is set up as a trust under the Indian Trusts Act.
- It is managed by a Trust to be headed by Finance Minister.
- The secretariat of the Trust is set up in Ministry of Jal Shakti under the Mission Director, Clean Ganga.
- The proposal to set up CGF was to attract private contributions globally for increasing people's participation in this massive task.

Features of Clean Ganga Fund

- The domestic donors to the Fund shall be eligible for tax benefits as applicable in the case of the Swachh Bharat Kosh.
- It will be operated through a bank account by a Trust.
- It will explore the possibility of setting up daughter funds in other jurisdictions/countries of high donor interest such as USA, UK, Singapore, UAE, etc. to enable tax benefits to donors in their respective jurisdictions.

Indus and Ganges River Dolphins

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

Why in the news?

- Recently a detailed analysis of South Asian river dolphins has revealed that the Indus and Ganges River dolphins are not one, but two separate species.

About Indus and Ganges River Dolphins

- Currently, Indus and Ganges River dolphins are classified as two subspecies under **Platanista gangetica**.
- But according to a new study, this classification needs a revision.
- The study estimates that Indus and Ganges river dolphins may have diverged around 550,000 years ago.

About Ganga River Dolphin



- Its scientific name is *Platanista Gangetica*.
- The Gangetic river dolphin is India's national aquatic animal and is popularly known as 'Susu'.

Distribution

- The Ganges river dolphin is found in parts of the Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- It is among the four freshwater dolphins in the world- the other three are:
 - a. The 'Baiji' now likely extinct from the Yangtze River in China,
 - b. The 'Bhulan' of the Indus in Pakistan, and
 - c. The 'Boto' of the Amazon River in Latin America.

Conservation Status of Ganges Dolphin

- They are listed as '**Endangered**' in IUCN Red List.
- It is listed on CITES Appendix-I.
- It is classified under Schedule 1, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 providing absolute protection as offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.
- **Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur district is India's only sanctuary for its national aquatic animal.**



About the Indus river dolphin

- The scientific name for the Indus river dolphin is, “**Platanista gangetica minor**”.
- The Indus river dolphin is a marine mammal.

Features

- They are fresh water, and functionally blind species of dolphins which rely on echolocation to navigate communicate and hunt prey including prawns, catfish and carp.
- The Punjab Government has stated that Indus river dolphin would be the key species for conservation of the Beas eco-system.
- Punjab Government has declared the Indus river dolphin as Punjab’s state aquatic animal.

Conservation Status of Indus Dolphin

- The Indus listed as ‘**Endangered**’ by IUCN red list.

Muslim Brotherhood

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Cairo’s Criminal Court sentenced Mahmoud Ezzat to life imprisonment for murder and terrorism charges who was the deputy supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood.

What is the Muslim Brotherhood?

- It is a designated as terrorist group.
- During a meeting between former US President Donald Trump and Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2019 at the White House, al-Sisi urged the US to impose sanctions on the Brotherhood, which opposes his government

Background

- They are a movement that was founded in Egypt in 1928 by a schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna, who preached that an Islamic religious revival would help Muslim nations improve their situation and defeat their colonial masters.
- While Hassan al-Banna was not specific about the kind of Muslim revivalist government he was advocating, his ideas travelled all over the world, and inspired a large number of Islamist groups and movements — not just political movements and parties, but also powerful missionary and charitable initiatives.
- Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia are among the countries that have large parties that trace their origins to the Brotherhood.

Why Is Rupee Falling Against US Dollar?

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Livemint)

Why in the news?

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- Recently, the rupee recently dropped sharply against the US dollar, approaching the 75 mark.
- The rupee has lost nearly 2.4% against the US dollar so far this year.

Possible reasons behind the Rupee drop to Eight-Month Low against the US dollar

- The rupee witnessed pressure after RBI's announcement of \$1 billion in bond purchases, the unwinding of carrying trades, the perception of a full lockdown due to rising cases, and panic buying by importers.
- Investors believe the RBI's bond-buying plan will be negative for the currency due to inflationary concerns.
- Moreover, fears that a rapid revival of Covid cases in the country could derail the country's economic recovery also weighed on the rupee.
- Also narrowing interest rate differential between India and US could prompt some outflows from the Indian bond and equity market led to fall in rupee.
- **The dollar index, which measures the strength of the greenback against a basket of six currencies, increased 0.25% to 92.305**

RBI Recent Initiatives

- RBI has recently announced its intention to buy Rs1 trillion in bonds from secondary markets in a G-SAP programme this quarter, to keep borrowing costs low and support economic recovery

Impact of Falling Rupee

- The cost of imports rises when the rupee falls, putting the country's households at a disadvantage.
- This has a negative impact on India's economy, which is based on imports.
- However, NRIs, of whom India has a large number, can profit from depreciating currency.

Currency Depreciation

- It is a fall in the value of a currency in terms of its exchange rate versus other currencies.
- It can occur due to factors such as economic fundamentals, interest rate differentials, political instability, or risk aversion among investors.
- Orderly currency depreciation can increase a country's export activity as its products and services become cheaper to buy.

Joe Biden's radical tax proposal

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

Why in the news?

- US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen recently urged the world's 20 advanced nations to move towards the adoption of a minimum global corporate income tax.

- The government is open to engaging in discussions around the minimum global corporate tax being initiated by the United States (US) and also the issue of equalisation levy or digital taxes

Proposal by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen

- The US plan envisages a **21 per cent minimum corporate tax rate**, coupled with cancelling exemptions on income from countries that do not legislate a minimum tax to discourage the shifting of multinational corporation operations and profits overseas.
- The benchmark minimum corporate tax rate that Yellen has propounded for other **G20 countries**.
- It aims to somewhat offset any disadvantages that might arise from the Biden administration's proposed increase in the US corporate tax rate.
- The proposed increase to 28% from 21% would partially reverse the previous Trump administration's cut in tax rates on companies from 35% to 21% by way of 2017 tax legislation.

India's corporate tax

- In September 2019, the Finance Ministry announced a sharp cut in corporate taxes for domestic companies to **22 per cent and for new domestic manufacturing companies to 15 per cent**.

About equalization levy or digital Tax

- 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.

Recent Amendments

- In amendments to the Finance Act, 2020 in March-end — had expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operators involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services, with the levy at the rate of 2 per cent.

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

- Online advertisement;
- 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.

Carbon border tax

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, at a time when the European Union is toying with the idea of ‘carbon border tax’ as part of its green push, the BASIC nations — Brazil, South Africa, India and China — have jointly opposed the move.

About Carbon Tax

- A carbon border tax is a tax on carbon emissions attributed to imported goods that have not been carbon-taxed at source.
- The carbon border tax proposal is part of the European Commission’s European Green Deal that endeavours to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.
- A carbon border tax is arguably an improvement from a national carbon tax.

National carbon tax

- It is a fee that a government imposes on any company within the country that burns fossil fuels.
- However, this often results in an increase of electricity costs in households and industry, which may lead to local business closures and other economic hardships for businesses and citizens.

Related Information

- Recently European Union (EU) Environment Ministers have signed a deal that aims to make the EU’s 2050 net-zero emissions target legally binding on the states.
- China also announced that it would be carbon net-zero by 2060, and apparently advanced the deadline for reaching peak emissions.

Related Terms

Net zero emissions

- It refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere.

Zero Carbon law

- It was passed by New Zealand with the aim to tackle climate change by setting a net-zero targets for almost all greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Carbon neutrality

- It refers to achieving net zero carbon emissions by balancing a measured amount of carbon released with an equivalent amount sequestered or offset, or buying enough carbon credits to make up the difference.

India and Intended nationally determined contributions

- The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead.
- This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.
- **It is not legally binding.**
- India also reaffirmed its **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions** commitments to meeting the goals under the Agreement in order to combat the climate change.

India's INDC, to be achieved primarily, by 2030

- India promised to reduce the “emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35 % by 2030 from 2005 level.
- It will achieve about “40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources (mainly renewable like wind and solar power) by 2030” with the help of transfer of technology and low-cost international finance, including from the Green Climate Fund.
- India also promised an additional carbon sink (a means to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere) of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by the year 2030.

Advanced Antiquities Mgmt System

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

Why in the news?

- The Directorate of Archives and Archaeology (DAA) of the Goa government have recently inaugurated the Advanced Antiquities Management System.

About Advanced Antiquities Mgmt System

- The AAMS is a software-driven automated storage used for the storage of various objects.
- It has been used for storage of industrial equipment but now became first in the country for storing valuable antiquities.

- It will ensure safety of antiquities, clean storage space, access control and data management and also enhance utilisation of space.
- With antiquities preserved within the system, it will provide access to these in one place with the help of a screen on which the preserved antiquities can be searched and accessed within the system for viewing.
- It will also provide information about the age of the antiquity, the material it is made of and its brief history.

What are the various antiquities stored in the system?

- At present, there are 83 antiquities in the system the oldest one being a tenth century Shivlinga.
- It also includes 12 sculptures found under a waterfall in the Ladfem village in North Goa's Bicholim, remains of a 13th century temple in South Goa's Navelim.
- There are also 18th century artifacts found at the Allorna Fort including glasses made in Germany and Holland.

Shaphari scheme

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

Why in the news?

- Centre has recently kicked off a new scheme called **Shaphari scheme** to certify hatcheries and farms that adopt good aquaculture practices.

About Shaphari scheme

- It is a certification scheme developed by **Marine Products Exports Development Authority** (MPEDA) for aquaculture products.
- **Shaphari** is a Sanskrit word that means superior quality of fishery products suitable for human consumption.
- The Shaphari scheme is based on the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's technical guidelines on aquaculture certification.
- It will have two components
 - a. certifying hatcheries for the quality of their seeds
 - b. approving shrimp farms that adopt the requisite good practices.

Eligibility

- Those who successfully clear multiple audits of their operations shall be granted a certificate for a period of two years.
- The entire certification process will be online to minimise human errors and ensure higher credibility and transparency.
- The guidelines for certification of farms are under preparation in consultation with stakeholders.

Importance of Certification

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- Certification of hatcheries for production of antibiotic free seed has emerged as one of the main interventions to free Indian aquaculture from the use of antibiotics.
- This is also seen as a tool to improve consumer confidence.
- Quality Certifications issued by international bodies are expensive and beyond the reach of small and marginal producers.

About Marine Products Exports Development Authority

- It is a statutory body that was established in 1972 under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry for promotion of export of marine products from India.

Functions

- MPEDA is given the mandate to promote the marine products industry with special reference to exports from the country.
- It is the nodal agency for the holistic development of seafood industry in India to realise its full export potential as a nodal agency.
- This organization would take all actions to develop and augment the resources required for promoting the exports of “all varieties of fishery products known commercially as shrimp, prawn, lobster, crab, fish, shell-fish, other aquatic animals or plants or part thereof and any other products which the authority may, by notification in the Gazette of India, declare to be marine products for the purposes of (the) Act”.
- The Act empowers MPEDA to regulate exports of marine products and take all measures required for ensuring sustained, quality seafood exports from the country.

COVID-19 vaccine - Sputnik V

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Russia’s COVID-19 vaccine - Sputnik V - has been recommended for emergency use authorisation in India following a meeting of the Subject Expert Committee (SEC).
- If approved by the **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)**, Sputnik V would be the third vaccine to be made available in India after the Serum Institute of India’s Covishield and Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin.

About the 'Sputnik V' vaccine



- Russia named the newly approved vaccine "Sputnik V," in reference to Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, launched in 1957 during the space race.
- It uses two strains of adenovirus that typically cause mild colds in humans.

Developed by

- The vaccine has been developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute in collaboration with the Russia's defence ministry.

Related Information

About Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

- It is the Central Drug Authority for discharging functions assigned to the Central Government under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

Major Functions:

- Regulatory control over the import of drugs, approval of new drugs and clinical trials.
- Approval of certain licences as Central Licence Approving Authority

About Drug Controller General of India

- DCGI is responsible for approval of licences of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines and sera in India.
- It comes under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

AT-1 bonds case

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

Why in the news?

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has recently imposed a penalty of Rs 25 crore on Yes bank and three senior executives of its private wealth management team for allegedly perpetrating fraud on its customers by influencing them to alter their investment positions from fixed deposits (FD) to risky AT-1 (additional tier-1) bonds.

About Additional Tier-1 bonds

WHAT IS THE FUSS ABOUT AT1 AND TIER-2 BONDS?

THE ISSUE

- AT1 and Tier-2 bonds are risky
- Debt funds holding them should specify the risk
- How should AT1 and Tier-2 bonds be valued?
- SEBI RULE**
Value AT1 bonds as 100-year securities, but in graded manner

HOW AT1 BONDS WILL BE VALUED

Time period	Maturity to be considered for AT1 bonds (years)	Maturity to be considered for Tier -2 bonds (years)
From April 1, 2021	10	10 years or maturity, whichever is higher
From April 1, 2022	20	Maturity
From Oct 1, 2022	30	Maturity
From April 1, 2023	100*	Maturity

- AT-1, short for Additional Tier-1 bonds, are a type of unsecured, perpetual bonds that banks issue to shore up their core capital base to meet the Basel-III norms.

Key features of AT-1 bond

- These have higher rates than tier II bonds.
- These bonds have no maturity date.
- The issuing bank has the option to call back the bonds or repay the principal after a specified period of time.
- The attraction for investors is higher yield than secured bonds issued by the same entity.
- Individual investors too can hold these bonds, but mostly high net worth individuals (HNIs) opt for such higher risk, higher yield investments.
- Due to its higher risk, the rating for these bonds is one to four notches lower than the secured bond series of the same bank.

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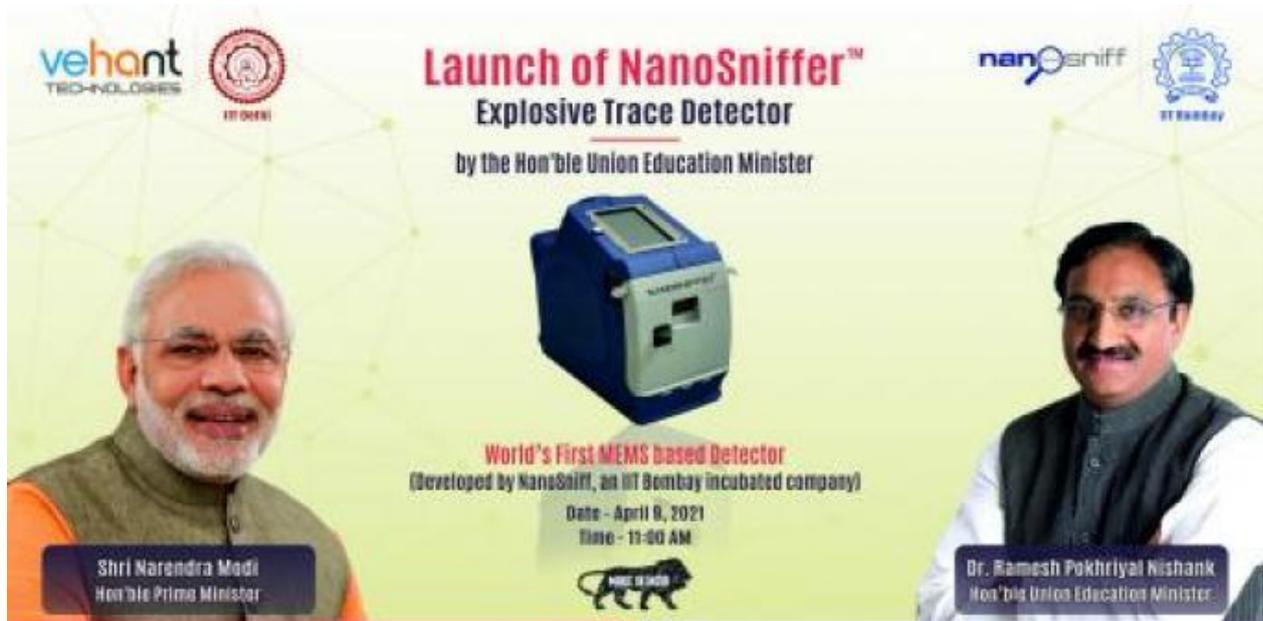
NanoSniffer

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- AIR)

Why in the news?

- Union Education Minister has recently launched NanoSniffer, the world's first Microsensor-based Explosive Trace Detector (ETD).

About NanoSniffer



- The Nanosniffer has been developed by NanoSniff Technologies which is an IIT Bombay incubated startup.
- NanoSniffer can detect explosives in less than 10 seconds and it also identifies and categorizes explosives into different classes.
- It detects all classes of military, conventional and homemade explosives.
- NanoSniffer gives visible & audible s with sunlight-readable color display.

Significance

- It is affordable device will reduce our dependency on imported explosive trace detector devices.
- NanoSniffer is a 100 per cent Made in India product in terms of research, development & manufacturing.

Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV2020)

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

Why in the news ?

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- Recently, Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV2020) came to a close with the release of two rhinos — an adult male and a female — in Assam's Manas National Park transported from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

About Indian Rhino Vision 2020

- It has been launched in 2005 which is an ambitious effort to attain a wild population of at least 3,000 greater one-horned rhinos spread over seven protected areas in the Indian state of Assam by the year 2020.
- The seven protected areas are Kaziranga, Pobitora, Orang National Park, Manas National Park, Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary, Burachapori wildlife sanctuary and Dibru Saikhowa wildlife sanctuary.
- It is a collaborative effort between various organisations, including the International Rhino Foundation, Assam's Forest Department, Bodoland Territorial Council, World Wide Fund - India, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Distribution of Rhino in Asia

- They are spread across India, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- These countries are also known as Asian Rhino Range Countries.
- Only the Great one-horned rhino is found in India.
- At present, there are about 2,600 Indian rhinos in India, with more than 90% of the population concentrated in Assam's Kaziranga National Park.

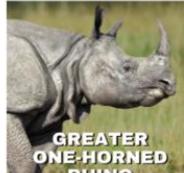
DNA Database for Indian Rhinos

- The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has begun a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country in 2019.
- **The Indian rhino could be the first wild animal species in India to have all its members DNA-sequenced.**
- The project is a subset of the Centre's larger, ongoing rhino conservation programme.
- **The deadline of the project is 2021.**
- The project will help in curbing poaching and gathering evidence in wildlife crimes involving rhinos.
- The database will be hosted in the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII) headquarters in Dehradun.**

Conservation Status of Rhino

STATE OF THE RHINO 2020

INTERNATIONAL
RHINO
FOUNDATION

 WHITE RHINO <i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	 GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINO <i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>	 BLACK RHINO <i>Diceros bicornis</i>	 JAVAN RHINO <i>Rhinoceros sondaicus</i>	 SUMATRAN RHINO <i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i>
Estimated Population: ~18,000	Estimated Population: >3,600	Estimated Population: ~5,630	Estimated Population: 74	Estimated Population: <80
DECREASING	INCREASING	INCREASING	STABLE	DECREASING
IUCN Status: NEAR THREATENED	IUCN Status: VULNERABLE	IUCN Status: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	IUCN Status: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	IUCN Status: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

www.rhinos.org

- There are three species of rhino in Asia — Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran.
- **Javan and Sumatran Rhino** are listed as **Critically endangered** in the IUCN Red list.
- The **Greater one-horned** (or Indian) rhino is vulnerable In IUCN Red List which is the only large mammal species in Asia to be down-listed from endangered to vulnerable from the IUCN Red list in 2008.

Related Information

About Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a wildlife sanctuary on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in Morigaon district in Assam, India.
- It has the highest density of one-horned rhinos in the world and second highest concentration in Assam after Kaziranga National Park.
- It is often called ‘**Mini Kaziranga**’ due to similar landscape and vegetation.

[Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve \(NNTR\)](#)

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, three labourers were killed and two others injured during an operation to douse a forest fire at Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR).

About Nawegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR)

- It is situated in Gondia and Bhandara Districts in the North–Eastern corner of Maharashtra.

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- Gondia district shares common boundaries with the states of Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh on North and Eastern side respectively.
- **Its 5th Tiger reserve of Maharashtra.**
- **It was notified as 46th tiger reserve of India on 12th December, 2013.**
- Strategically the Tiger Reserve is located in the heart of central Indian Tiger landscape which contributes almost 1/6 of the total tiger population of the country.

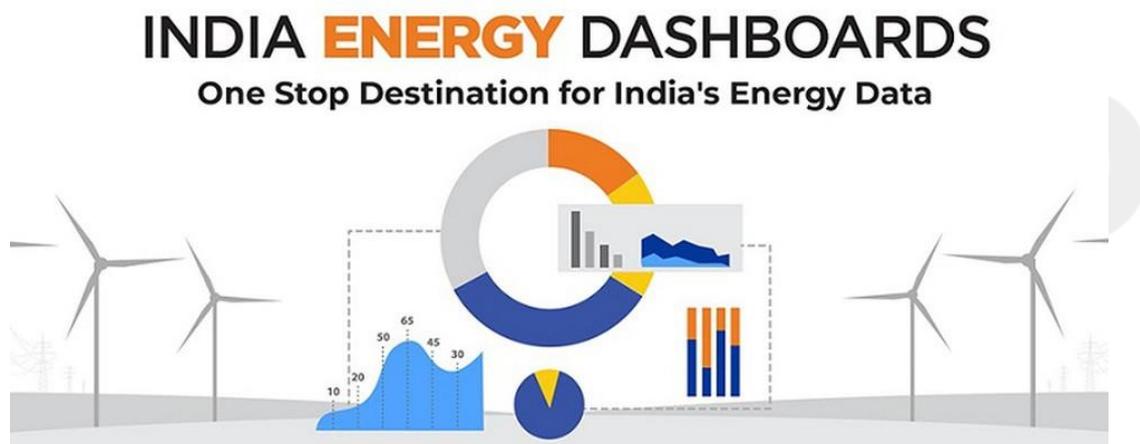
India Energy Dashboards (IED) Version 2.0.

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- NITI Aayog has recently launched India Energy Dashboards (IED) Version 2.0.
- The first version was launched 1.0 in May 2017.

About India Energy Dashboards



- It is an endeavour to establish a central energy database of the country.
- IED is an initial step towards building a comprehensive, open and freely accessible energy data portal for India.

Aims

- It aims to provide single-window access to the energy data for the country.

Key features of India Energy Dashboards (IED) Version 2.0.

- It provides time-series data from FY 2005-06 until FY 2019-20 and also the data at sub-yearly frequencies as well.
- This includes monthly data and API linked data from some portals maintained by the government agencies.
- The monthly data is sourced from the monthly reports that are regularly published for the electricity, petroleum and natural gas sectors.

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- Energy data published/provided by Central Electricity Authority, Coal Controller's Organisation, and Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas is compiled in the Dashboards.
- The goal is to turn data into information, and information into insights to inspire those in a position to make a difference
- A '**Feedback and Suggestions**' forum for the engagement of energy data user community has been incorporated;
- **Enhanced data download**
 - It enables easy downloading of data into convenient spreadsheet formats in a cleaner, more intuitive way;

Japan plans to release contaminated Fukushima water into the ocean

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Japan plans to release into the sea more than a million tonnes of radioactive water from the destroyed Fukushima nuclear station.

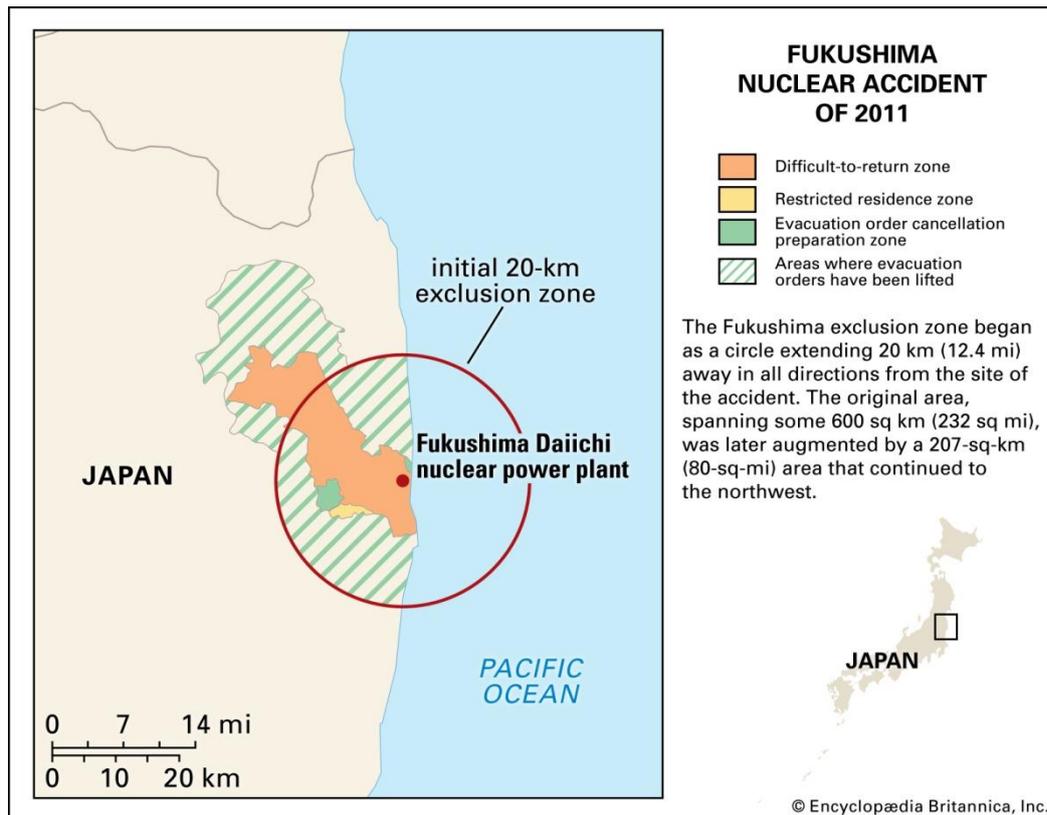
More on the news

- Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc (Tepco) will begun pumping out water in about two years after treatment in a process that will take decades to complete.

Harmful effect of Tritium

- Tepco plans to filter the contaminated water again to remove isotopes, leaving only tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen hard to separate from water.
- Tepco will then dilute the water until tritium levels fall below regulatory limits, before pumping it directly into the ocean from the coastal site.
- **Water containing tritium is routinely released from nuclear plants around the world** and releasing the Fukushima water to the ocean is supported by regulatory authorities.
- Tritium is considered to be relatively harmless because it does not emit enough energy to penetrate human skin.
- But when ingested it can raise cancer risks, a Scientific American article said in 2014.

About Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, 2011



- Fukushima accident, also called Fukushima nuclear accident or Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, accident in 2011 at the Fukushima Daiichi (“Number One”) plant in northern Japan.
- The site is on Japan’s Pacific coast, in northeastern Fukushima prefecture about 100 km (60 miles) south of Sendai.
- The facility, operated by the Tokyo Electric and Power Company (TEPCO), was made up of six boiling-water reactors constructed between 1971 and 1979.
- At the time of the accident, only reactors 1–3 were operational, and reactor 4 served as temporary storage for spent fuel rods.

Skymet forecasts a ‘healthy normal’ monsoon

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Private weather forecast company, Skymet Weather, has said monsoon this year is likely to be 103% of the Long Period Average (LPA).
- **The agency classified the forecast as ‘healthy normal’.**

About Long Period Average (LPA)

- It is the average rainfall received by the country as a whole during the south-west monsoon, for a 50-year period.

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- This acts as a benchmark against which the rainfall in any monsoon season is measured.
- **The current LPA is 89 cm, based on the average rainfall over the years 1951 and 2000.**

Deficient rainfall

- The country is said to have received deficient rainfall if the actual rainfall falls below 90 percent of LPA.

Excess rainfall

- The country is said to have received excess rainfall if the rainfall is greater than 110 percent of LPA.

Normal rainfall

- When the actual rainfall received falls between 96 and 104 percent of LPA.

Note:

- A temperature rise greater than 1 degree Celsius for three months at a trot is considered a “strong” El Nino (and threatening to the monsoon).
- A 0.5 degree Celsius-1 degree Celsius rise is called “weak El Nino conditions.” Currently, El Nino is 0.9 degree Celsius.

Gangavaram Port

(Topic- GS Paper I+III–Geography + Infrastructure, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has recently approved acquisition of 89.6 per cent of equity shareholding in Gangavaram Port Ltd (GPL) by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones Ltd (APSEZ) under Section 31(1) of the Competition Act 2002.

About Gangavaram Port



- It is located in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- It is India's deepest port.

About Competition Commission of India

- Competition Commission of India is a statutory body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India.
- It was established on 14 October 2003.
- It became fully functional in May 2009 with Dhanendra Kumar as its first Chairman.

Monkeydactyl : the flying reptile with the 'oldest opposable thumbs'

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source-Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Researchers have recently described a pterosaur species called **Monkeydactyl** with opposable thumbs, which could likely be the earliest-known instance of the limb.

About the Monkeydactyl



A newly discovered pterosaur (illustrated) from the Jurassic Period may have used its opposable thumbs to cling to tree branches and catch food such as cicadas.

- The pterosaur species were reptiles, close cousins of dinosaurs and the first animals after insects to evolve powered flight.
- They evolved into various species; while some were as large as an F-16 fighter jet, others were as small as paper airplanes.
- The new pterosaur fossil was discovered in the Tiaojishan Formation of Liaoning, China, and is thought to be 160 million years old. It has been named *Kunpengopterus antipollicatus*, also dubbed “Monkeydactyl”.

Older than Cryodrakon boreas

- The recently found pterosaur fossil is far older than the *Cryodrakon boreas* which was identified in 2019. Paleontologists had identified that species as a pterosaur that lived over 77 million years ago in Western Canada.
- It was believed to be one of the largest flying animals, which “flew over the heads of dinosaurs”, with a wingspan of over 10 metres.

HGCO19 vaccine

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source-Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) in Ministry of Science & Technology has recently announced that it has approved additional funding towards clinical studies of India’s ‘first of its kind’ mRNA-based Covid-19 vaccine - HGCO19.
- This funding has been awarded under the ‘**Mission Covid Suraksha- The Indian Covid-19 Vaccine Development Mission.**’

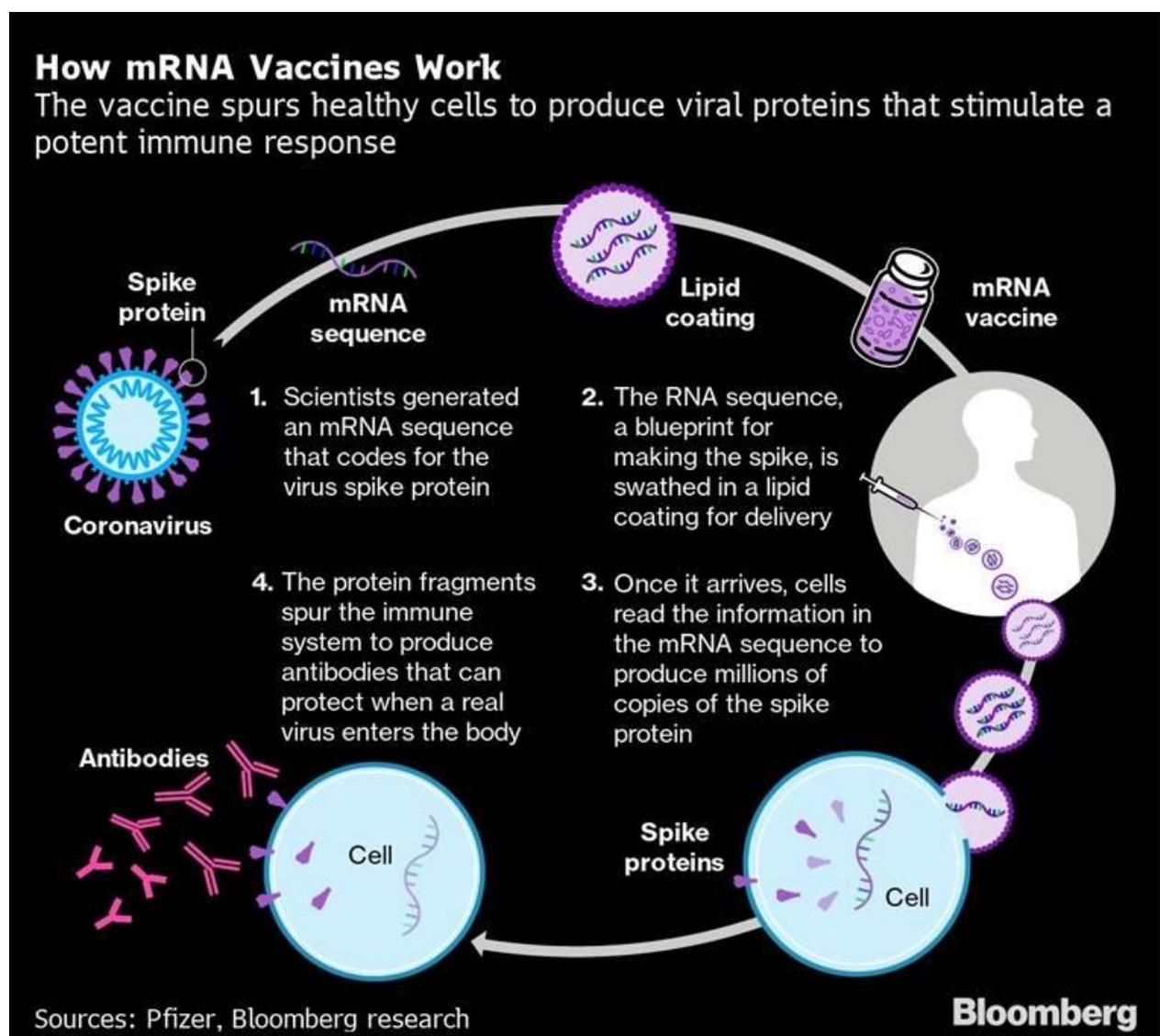
About HGCO19 vaccine

- It is India's ‘first of its kind’ mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine.
- It is developed by Pune-based biotechnology company Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd.
- **Gennova, in collaboration with HDT Biotech Corporation USA, has developed the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine HGCO19.**

What is mRNA Vaccine?

- The coronavirus vaccine based on mRNA, once injected into the body, will instruct the body's cells to create copies of the spike protein.
- The mRNA is coded to tell the cells to recreate the spike protein of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19.
- It is the spike protein which appears as spikes on the surface of the coronavirus that initiates the process of infection and it allows the virus to penetrate cells, after which it goes on to replicate.
- The mRNA vaccines work by using mRNA or messenger RNA, which is the molecule that essentially puts DNA instructions into action.

How its work?



- A coronavirus vaccine based on mRNA, once injected into the body, will instruct the body's cells to create copies of the spike protein.

- In turn, this is expected to prompt the immune cells to create antibodies to fight it.
- These antibodies will remain in the blood and fight the real virus if and when it infects the human body.
- The mRNA, in this case, is coded to tell the cells to recreate the spike protein of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19.
- It is the spike protein — which appears as spikes on the surface of the coronavirus — that initiates the process of infection; it allows the virus to penetrate cells, after which it goes on to replicate.

Note:

- Other types of vaccine include the non-replicating viral vector category, an example of which is the vaccine developed by Oxford and AstraZeneca.

About Mission COVID Suraksha- The Indian COVID-19 Vaccine Development Mission

- The Centre had announced this package during the third economic stimulus.

Objective

- The Mission with its end-to-end focus from preclinical development through clinical development and manufacturing and regulatory facilitation for deployment would consolidate all available and funded resources towards accelerated product development.

Grant

- The Phase-I of the Mission has been allotted Rs. 900 Crore for a period of 12 months.
- The grant will be provided to the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) for Research and Development (R&D) of Indian Covid-19 vaccines.

Currency chest

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the theft to the tune of Rs 4.04 crore by a private security guard from the currency chest of Axis Bank in Chandigarh’s Sector 34 has put the affairs of currency chests in the spotlight.

About Currency chest

- Currency chest is a place where the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stocks the money meant for banks and ATMs.
- These chests are usually situated on the premises of different banks but administrated by the RBI.
- Representatives of the RBI inspect currency chests time-to-time, and update their senior officers about it.

- The money present in the currency chest belongs to the RBI and the money, kept in the strong room outside the currency chest belongs to the bank.

Mandatory gold hallmarking from June 1

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source-Economics Times)

Why in the news?

- The government has recently announced that to implement mandatory hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts from June 1, 2021.
- Previously, the Centre in November 2019, had announced that hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts would be made mandatory across the country from January 15, 2021.

About Gold hallmarking

- It is a purity certification of precious metal. At present, It is voluntary in nature.

Gold Hallmarking in India

- In 2019, as per the Government announcement, hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts became mandatory across the country.
- The government had given jewellers more than a year to shift to hallmarking and register themselves with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

Key Features

- Hallmarked gold jewellery will only available in three grades – 14-carat, 18-carat and 22-carat.
- Currently, it is available in ten grades.
- The Hallmarked Gold jewellery will contain four marks. Such as BIS mark, purity in carat, assay centre's name and jewellers' identification mark.

Benefits of Gold Hallmarking

- It will protect the public against lower caratage.
- It also ensures consumers do not get cheated while buying gold ornaments.

About Bureau of Indian Standards

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986 which came into effect on 23 December 1986.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.

Note: India is the largest importer of gold.

National task force to combat air pollution, monitor remedial steps

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

Why in the news?

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has constituted an eight-member National Task Force to combat air pollution and monitor remedial steps to improve air quality.

About National task Force

- It will comprise senior officials from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ministries of Housing and Urban Affairs, Petroleum, Transport, Power, Agriculture, Health and the Central Pollution Control Board. Monitoring process
- The NTF may also monitor enforcement of laid down air quality standards beyond nonattainment cities in other identified air polluted areas where air quality is poor and above.
- The Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories may continue to monitor progress in execution of action plans at the State-level with the assistance of monitoring cells in their offices and the Air Quality Monitoring Committee.

Government Initiatives to Combat Air Pollution

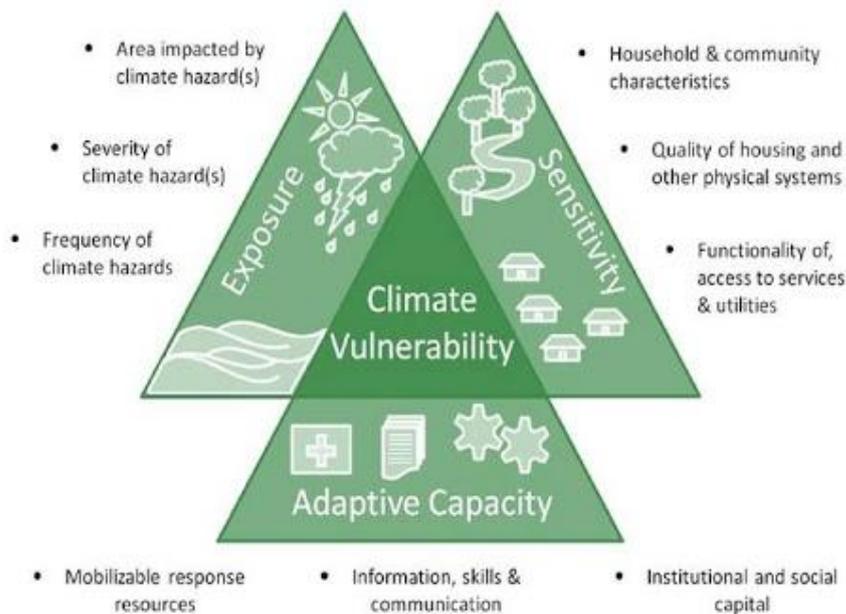
- Introduction of cleaner gaseous fuels like CNG, LPG etc and ethanol blending;
- Launching of National Air Quality Index (AQI);
- Leapfrogging from BS-IV to BS-VI standards for vehicles by 1st April 2020;
- Notification of National Ambient Air Quality Standards and sector-specific emission and effluent standards for industries;
- Setting up of monitoring network for assessment of ambient air quality;
- Notification of graded response action plan for Delhi identifying source wise actions for various levels of air pollution, etc.

National climate vulnerability assessment report

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the report titled ‘**Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Adaptation Planning in India Using a Common Framework**’ has been released by **Department of Science and Technology**.



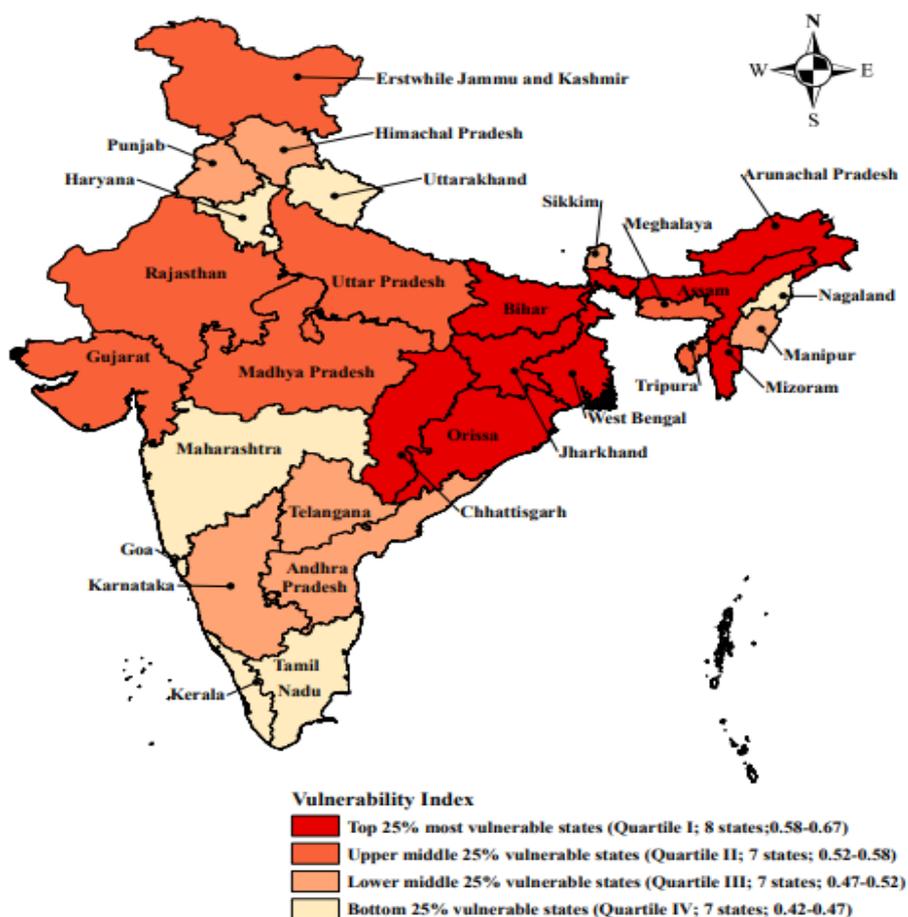
Key finding of the report

- National climate vulnerability assessment has identifies **eight eastern states as highly vulnerable to climate change.**

State Level Vulnerability

Highly vulnerable states

- State-level vulnerability indices developed in this report vary over a small range: 0.42-0.67.
- The states with a relatively high vulnerability, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Assam,
- Jharkhand received the highest Vulnerable Index of 0.67. Maharashtra received the lowest Vulnerability Index of 0.42.
- This means that Jharkhand is highly vulnerable to Climate Change and Maharashtra is least vulnerable.
- Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, and West Bengal, are mostly in the eastern part of the country, requiring prioritisation of adaptation interventions.



Lower-middle vulnerable states

- Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim and Punjab have been categorised as lower-middle vulnerable states

Low vulnerability state

- Uttarakhand, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Nagaland, Goa and Maharashtra have been categorised as states with low vulnerability.

Relatively Moderately vulnerable states

- Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Tripura, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Meghalaya are the relatively moderately vulnerable states.
- Their Vulnerability Index was between 0.42 and 0.50.

District-level vulnerability

- District-level vulnerability indices are also within a small range: 0.34 - 0.75.

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- Assam, Bihar, and Jharkhand have over 60% districts in the category of highly vulnerable districts.

Major Drivers of Vulnerability

The states were ranked based on their different drivers of vulnerability.

These are :

- a. High yield-variability of food grains
- b. Very low coverage of crop insurance
- c. Prevalence of rainfed agriculture
- d. Lack of forest area per 1,000 rural population
- e. Low road density and lack of railway network
- f. Low number of health care workers
- g. High incidence of vector-borne diseases
- h. High Proportion of Below Poverty Line population
- i. Prevalence of marginal and small landholdings
- j. High proportion of natural resource-based income
- k. lack of implementation of MGNREGA
- l. Low road density
- m. Lack of rail network
- n. Low dependence on horticulture trees

Application of the vulnerability assessment

- The vulnerability assessment can assist in ranking and identification of the most vulnerable districts and states and help states prioritise adaptation planning and investments.
- It is critical for developing adaptation projects for the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and funds from multilateral and bilateral agencies.
- The vulnerability assessments carried out by the states could become a chapter in their revised State Action Plan on Climate Change, as per the outline provided by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It will also facilitate Nationally Determined Contributions, which aims to adapt better to climate change by enhancing investments in development programmes in sectors vulnerable to climate change, particularly agriculture, water resources, health sector and regions such as Himalayan region, coastal regions, etc.
- It may also aid to plan disaster management.
- A vulnerability assessment contributes to reporting under the **Paris Agreement, Article-9** through the assessment of climate change impacts and vulnerability; the formulation and implementation of a National Adaptation Plan, monitoring and evaluation of adaptation plans, policies and programmes; and the development and implementation of resilience of socio-economic and ecological systems.

Double Mutant: B.1.617 variant of Coronavirus

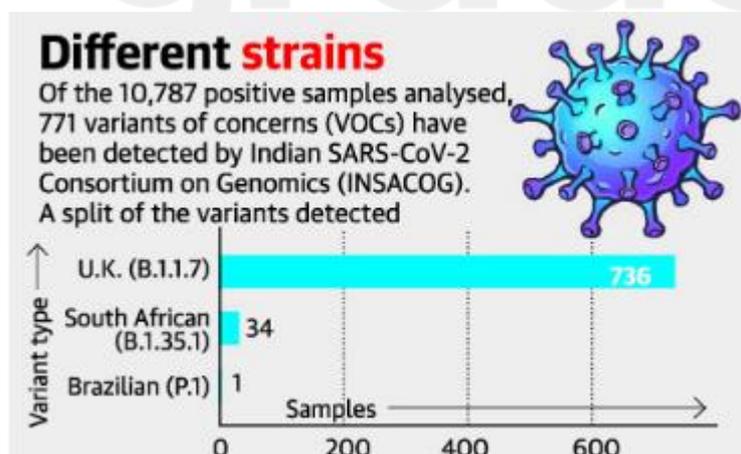
(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the presence of a double mutation also known as “B.1.617” variant was detected in 220 — almost 61 per cent — of the samples collected by the National Institute of Virology in Maharashtra.

What is the B.1.617?

- **The B.1.617 variant of SARS-CoV-2 carries two mutations, E484Q and L452R.**
- Both are separately found in many other coronavirus variants, but they have been reported together for the first time in India.
- The two mutations are found in the virus’s spike protein.
- The spike protein helps the virus to bind itself to the human cell’s receptors and gain entry into a host cell.
- The E484Q mutation is similar to E484K, a mutation found in the United Kingdom (lineage B.1.1.7) and South Africa (B.1.351) variants of the coronavirus.
- The L452R mutation has been found in fast spreading variants in California (B.1.427 and B.1.429).
- It can increase the binding power of spike proteins with ACE2 receptors on human cells, making it more transmissible.
- L452R can also potentially enhance viral replication.
- **Together, E484Q and L452R are more infectious, and can evade antibodies.**



About Double mutant’ virus

- The 'double mutation' is when two mutated strains of a virus come together to form a third strain.
- The one reported in India is the result of the E484Q and L452R strains combining.
- **The L452R strain is found in California in the United States and the E484Q strain is indigenous.**
- A 'double mutation' potentially allows the virus to escape from the body's immune system and make itself more resistant to our antibodies.

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- In some cases, the virus can also defend itself from the vaccine.

About Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG)

- It is a grouping of 10 National Laboratories that was established by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India.

Functions

- It carries out genomic sequencing and analysis of circulating COVID-19 viruses, and correlating epidemiological trends with genomic variants.
- Genomic variants of various viruses are a natural phenomenon and are found in almost all countries.

U.K. approves Nirav Modi's extradition in PNB fraud case

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

Why in the news ?

- The U.K.'s Home Department has approved the extradition of diamond merchant Nirav Modi to India in connection with the ₹13,758-crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud.

About Extradition

- The Supreme Court defined **Extradition as the delivery on the part of one State to another of those whom it is desired to deal with for crimes of which they have been accused or convicted and are justifiable in the Courts of the other State.**
- The extradition of a fugitive from India to a foreign country or vice-versa is governed by the provisions of the Indian Extradition Act, 1962.

Nodal Authority of Extradition in India

- **Consular, Passport and Visa Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, administers the Extradition Act and it processes incoming and outgoing Extradition Requests.**

How is it Implemented?

- Extradition can be initiated in the case of under-investigation, under-trial and convicted criminals. In cases under investigation, abundant precautions have to be exercised by the law enforcement agency to ensure that it is in possession of prima facie evidence to sustain the allegation before the Courts of Law in the Foreign State.

About the Extradition Treaty

- **Section 2(d) of The Indian Extradition Act 1962** defines an ‘Extradition Treaty’ as a Treaty, Agreement or Arrangement made by India with a Foreign State, relating to the extradition of fugitive criminals which extends to and is binding on, India.
- These treaties are **traditionally bilateral in character**.

Generally, there are five principles which are followed under the treaty:

- a. The extradition applies only to such offences which are mentioned in the treaty,
- b. It applies the principle of dual criminality which means that the offence sought to be an offence in the national laws of requesting as well as requested country,
- c. The requested country must be satisfied that there is a prima facie case made against the offender,
- d. The extradition should be made only for the offence for which extradition was requested,
- e. The accused must be provided with a fair trial.

UN Food Systems Summit 2021

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the United Nations Secretary-General has called for the first-ever UN Food Systems Summit to be held in **September 2021** to strategize the actions for positive change in Agri-food systems.

About the Summit

- The summit will be held as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.
- The Summit will focus on levers and pathways to shape food systems nationally and globally to accelerate progress in the SDGs.
- **Action Tracks:** The Summit’s Action Tracks offer stakeholders to learn and share new actions, partnerships and to amplify existing initiatives.

The five Action Tracks are:

1. **Track 1:** Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all.
2. **Track 2:** Shift to sustainable consumption patterns.
3. **Track 3:** Boost nature-positive production.
4. **Track 4:** Advance equitable livelihoods.
5. **Track 5:** Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stress.

Related Information

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About Ramesh Chand Committee

- Recently, the government has constituted the Group under Chairmanship of **Ramesh Chand** along with the representatives from Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoAFW), Rural Development and others.

Functions

- The prime function assigned to this group is to conduct National Dialogues with all the stakeholders of agri-food systems for exploring national pathways towards creating sustainable and equitable food systems in India and suitably contribute to transformation in global food systems to meet the needs of present and future.

National-startup-advisory-council

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- AIR)

Why in the news ?

- Recently Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs and Food & Public Distribution has chaired the first meeting of National Startup Advisory Council (NSAC).

About National-startup-advisory-council

- It was constituted by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Objective

- The main objective of the council is to advise the Government of India on measures needed to build strong ecosystem to nurture innovation and startups in the country.
- This is to drive sustainable economic growth in the country and also to generate large scale employment opportunities.

Members

- The council is constituted with both Ex-officio and non-official members.
- These members are nominated by the Government of India.
- They include members from the central ministries and also founder of successful startups.

Disk-footed bat

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

Why in the news?

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- Recently, a new species of bat with a disk-like pad in its thumb has been found in India for the first time inside a bamboo patch near Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary in Meghalaya.

About Disk-footed bat



- It is a Bamboo-dwelling species.

Distribution

- The disc-footed known from specific localities in southern China, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar.

Conservation status

- According to the IUCN, about 5% of bats are categorised as endangered and another 11 per cent are data deficient.
- Further, some species of fruit bats are categorised **under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1973**, along with other vermin species like rats, making it difficult to legally conserve them.

Related Information

About Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located near Lailad village in the Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya and covers an area of 29 square kilometres.
- The animals here include the Bengal tiger, the black bear, the leopard and many such species at the verge of extinction such as the necked hornbill and the brown hornbill bird.

[U.S. Treasury keeps India on currency watch list](#)

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

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Why in the news ?

- According to U.S. Treasury April 2021 edition of the semi-annual report, India is one of the 11 countries on the U.S. Treasury’s ‘Monitoring List’ with regard to their currency practices.

Key points

- The report on Macroeconomic and Foreign Exchange Policies of Major Trading Partners of the United States, which is submitted to the U.S. Congress, reviews currency practices of the U.S.’s 20 biggest trading partners.

Three criteria are used to review partners:

- A significant (at least \$20 billion) bilateral trade surplus,
- A material current account surplus, and
- The ‘persistent one-sided intervention’ in forex markets.
- The other 10 countries on the list with India are China, Japan, Korea, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Mexico.
- All of these, except Ireland and Mexico, were on the December 2020 list.

India met two of the three criteria -

- a. The trade surplus criterion and
- b. The “persistent, one-sided intervention” criterion

Implications for India

WHAT IT MEANS...

<p>For India There will be pressure on RBI to cut down intervention, allow the rupee to appreciate</p>	<p>For economy A stronger rupee would partially offset the impact of rising oil prices on imports</p>
<p>In terms of restrictions The tag does not involve any kind of trade restrictions</p>	<p>For RBI The central bank can increase diversification of its reserves to include non-dollar assets</p>



- India has traditionally tried to balance between preventing excess currency appreciation on the one hand and protecting domestic financial stability on the other.
- India being on the watch list could restrict the RBI in the foreign exchange operations it needs to pursue to protect financial stability.

The two most obvious consequences could be an appreciating rupee as well as excess liquidity that messes with the interest rate policy of the RBI.

RBI sets up committee to review ARC rules

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

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently constituted a committee to evaluate the role of **asset reconstruction companies (ARCs)** in stressed debt resolution and review their business model.

About the Committee

- It is a six-member panel which will be headed by former RBI executive director Sudarshan Sen.

Terms of reference of the committee

- The panel will review the existing legal and regulatory framework applicable to ARCs and recommend measures to improve efficacy of ARCs.
- It will also review role of ARCs in resolution of stressed assets including under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and give suggestions for improving liquidity in and trading of security receipts.
- Besides, it has also been asked to review business models of the ARCs.
- **The committee will submit its report within three months from the date of its first meeting.**

Related Information

About Asset reconstruction companies (ARCs)

- It is a specialized financial institution that buys the NPAs or bad assets from banks and financial institutions so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets.
- ARCs clean up the balance sheets of banks when the latter sells these to the ARCs.
- This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities.
- Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.
- It is also being considered as the **government's version of a bad bank.**

Background

- **Narasimham Committee** (1998) recommended setting up an ARC specifically for purchasing NPAs from banks and financial institutions.
- Subsequently, the SARFAESI Act, 2002 created the legal framework for establishing multiple private ARCs.

SARFAESI Act 2002– origin of ARCs

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- The Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002; enacted in December 2002 provides the legal basis for the setting up ARCs in India. Section 2 (1) of the Act explains the meaning of Asset Securitization.
- The SARFAESI Act helps reconstruction of bad assets without the intervention of courts.
- Since then, large number of ARCs was formed and was registered with the RBI which has got the power to regulate the ARCs.

Capital needs for ARCs

- As per amendment made on the SARFAESI Act in 2016, an ARC should have a minimum net owned fund of Rs 2 crore.
- The RBI plans to raise this amount to Rs 100 crore by end March 2019. Similarly, the ARCs have to maintain a capital adequacy ratio of 15% of its risk weighted assets.
- SARFAESI Act stipulates various measures that can be undertaken by ARCs for asset reconstruction.

These include:

- a) taking over or changing the management of the business of the borrower,
- b) the sale or lease of the business of the borrower
- c) entering into settlements and
- d) restructuring or rescheduling of debt.
- e) enforcement of security interest

Note:

- **In the Budget 2021-22, Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)** have been proposed to be set up by state-owned and private sector banks, and there will be no equity contribution from the government.

[NASA Mars helicopter makes first flight on another planet](#)

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

Why in the news?

- NASA has recently successfully flew its tiny helicopter Ingenuity on Mars.
- It is the first powered flight on another planet and a feat a top engineer called “**our Wright brothers’ moment**.”

About Ingenuity Mars Helicopter

- It is a part of NASA’s Mars 2020 mission.

- It is a small coaxial, drone rotorcraft will serve as a technology demonstrator for the potential use of flying probes on other worlds, with the potential to scout locations of interest and support the future planning of driving routes for Mars rovers.

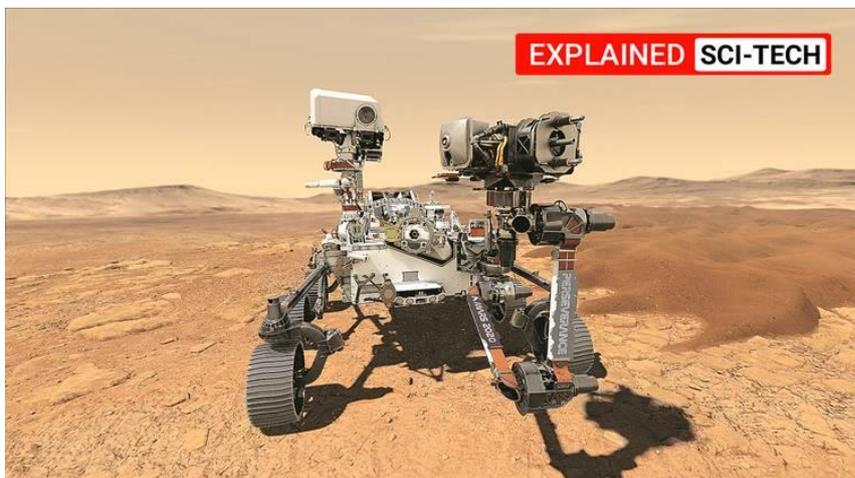
Related Information

About Perseverance mission

- It has been launched on July 2020.

Objective

- A key objective for Perseverance mission on Mars is astrobiology, including the search for signs of ancient microbial life.
- The rover will characterize the planet's geology and past climate, pave the way for human exploration of the Red Planet, and be the first mission to collect and cache Martian rock and regolith (broken rock and dust).
- NASA has recently launched its Mars 2020 Perseverance a fourth-generation rover.



Feature of the rover

- This Perseverance rover will carry a unique instrument, MOXIE or Mars Oxygen ISRU Experiment.
- It is for the first time will manufacture molecular oxygen on Mars using carbon dioxide from the carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere.

Advantage of MOXIE

- If oxygen can be successfully extracted on Mars in some significant scale, this can have two direct advantages:
 - a. First, the oxygen can be used for human visitors to Mars.
 - b. Second, the oxygen can be used to manufacture rocket fuel for the return journey.
- NASA can easily scale up the oxygen generation rate per day for MOXIE by a hundred times, this would be of great use for a future human mission to Mars if this technology demonstration is successful.

NASA' S past generations of Mars rovers

- NASA's incredible journey of driving on Mars started about 23 years ago, in 1997: when the Mars Pathfinder Mission with the Sojourner rover egressed on the Martian soil.
- Then in 2003 NASA send the twin rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, to Mars.
- It is followed by Curiosity in 2012.

About India's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) or Mangalyaan

- It was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh by Indian Space Research Organisation in November 2013.
- It was launched on board a PSLV C-25 rocket with aim of studying Martian surface and mineral composition as well as scans its atmosphere for methane (an indicator of life on Mars).

Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants

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

Why in the news?

- Recently Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have informed that 162 Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants have been sanctioned by the Centre for installation in public health facilities in all states.
- These 162 Pressure Swing Adsorption plants are to be installed under PM-CARES fund.

About Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants

- It is an Oxygen generator separates this oxygen from Compressed Air through a unique process called Pressure Swing Adsorption.
- The Pressure Swing Adsorption process for the generation of enriched oxygen gas from ambient air utilizes the ability of a synthetic Zeolite Molecular Sieve to absorb mainly nitrogen.
- While nitrogen concentrates in the pore system of the Zeolite, Oxygen Gas is produced as a product.

Related Information

- Recently DRDO also develops **supplemental oxygen delivery system for soldiers, COVID-19 patients**

About Supplemental oxygen delivery system

- It is automatic system delivers supplemental oxygen based on the SpO₂ (blood oxygen saturation) levels and prevents the person from sinking in to a state of hypoxia, which is fatal in most cases.
- The system helps those soldiers serving in extremely high altitude areas and COVID-19 patients.

- **The soldiers are suffering from the hypoxia like conditions.**

Hypoxia

- Hypoxia is a condition in which the amount of oxygen reaching the tissues is inadequate to fulfill all the energy requirements of the body.

Benefits

- The new oxygen delivery system is of great value not only to the Indian Army soldiers fighting in the extremely high altitude areas but also to the country in this severe crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The system is indigenously developed for operation in field conditions; it is unique with its dual qualities of robustness and cheap and is already in bulk production with industry.

Bitcoin: UK new digital currency

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

Why in the news?

- British finance minister Rishi Sunak has recently told the Bank of England to look at the case for a new "Bitcoin", or central bank-backed digital currency.



About Bitcoin

- The term Bitcoin refers to a cryptocurrency that was launched and based in the United Kingdom.
- It is a central bank-backed digital currency of the United Kingdom.
- The BoE-backed digital version of sterling would potentially allow businesses and consumers to hold accounts directly with the bank.
- It could speed up domestic and foreign payments and reduce financial stability risks.

- Like other cryptocurrencies, Bitcoins allowed traders to execute transactions safely and privately without having to use a bank account.
- **Bitcoin was delisted from most exchanges by 2019.**

Related Information

About Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)

- A central bank digital currency (CBDC) uses an electronic record or digital token to represent the virtual form of a fiat currency of a particular nation (or region).
- It is centralized.
- It is issued and regulated by the competent monetary authority of the country.
- China is a front-runner to launch a CBDC.

RESPOND programme

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

Why in the news?

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has recently announced that it will support eight joint research projects mooted by the Space Technology Cell (STC), IIT-Delhi under its RESPOND programme with varying duration of 1-3 years.



About RESPOND Programme

- The main objectives of the RESPOND Programme is to establish strong links with premiere academic institutions in the country to carry out research and developmental projects which are of relevance to Space and derive useful outputs of such R&D to support ISRO programmes.
- RESPOND programme aims to enhance academic base, generate quality human resources and infrastructure at the academic institutes to support the Indian Space programme.
- Under RESPOND, projects in the advanced areas of relevance to Space programme are encouraged to be taken up by premiere universities/academic institutions.
- ISRO helps these institutions to establish the necessary technical facilities and also provide fellowships to researchers to work on cutting edge research topics.

- The research studies conducted by the STC/ Academia are expected to be directed towards some of the future Space activities, which would be a good supplement to various missions undertaken by ISRO.
- **Some of the projects include developing a system for drought and flood forecasting and understanding land-atmosphere interactions.**

Global Energy Review 2021

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

Why in the news ?

- The International Energy Agency has recently published a report '**Global Energy Review 2021**'.

Key highlights of the report

- The IEA's Global Energy Review 2021 estimates global economic output will rebound by 6% in 2021, pushing global GDP more than 2% higher than 2019 levels.
- Energy demand worldwide is set to increase by 4.6% in the year, more than offsetting the 4% contraction in 2020 and pushing demand 0.5% above 2019 levels.
- Almost 70% of the projected increase in global energy demand is in emerging markets and developing economies, where demand is set to rise to 3.4% above 2019 levels.
- Energy use in advanced economies is on course to be 3% below pre-COVID levels.

CO2 Emissions

- The report estimates that CO2 emissions will increase by almost 5% this year to 33 billion tonnes, based on the latest national data from around the world as well as real-time analysis of economic growth trends and new energy projects that are set to come online.
- The key driver is coal demand, which is set to grow by 4.5%, surpassing its 2019 level and approaching its all-time peak from 2014, with the electricity sector accounting for three-quarters of this increase.

Electricity Demand

- Electricity demand is forecast to increase by 4.5% in 2021, or over 1000 terawatt-hours.
- This is almost five times greater than the decline in 2020, the IEA says, "cementing electricity's share in final energy demand above 20%".
- Almost 80% of the projected increase in demand in 2021 is in emerging market and developing economies, with China alone accounting for half of global growth.
- Demand in advanced economies remains below 2019 levels.

Increase in Demand of Fossils fuel

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- Demand for all fossil fuels is on course to grow significantly in 2021, with both coal and gas set to rise above their 2019 levels.
- More than 80% of the projected growth in coal demand in 2021 is set to come from Asia, led by China.
- Coal use in the USA and the European Union is also on course to increase but will remain well below pre-crisis levels.
- Oil is also rebounding strongly but is expected to stay below its 2019 peak, as the aviation sector remains under pressure.

Related Information

About International Energy Agency

- The International Energy Agency is an autonomous Intergovernmental Organisation established in 1974 in Paris, France.
- It mainly focuses on its energy policies which include economic development, energy security and environmental protection. These policies are also known as the 3 E's of IEA.
- India became an Associate member of IEA in March 2017 but it was in engagement with IEA long before its association with the organization.

Covaxin phase 3 trial shows vaccine has 78% efficacy

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the efficacy of Covaxin has dropped a tad lower to 78% from the 81% reported in March 2021.
- The analysis was on a data set of 127 COVID-19 positive volunteers.

About Efficacy

- It is a measure of risk reduction from a vaccine, varies among vaccines commercially available.
- According to a review article in the Lancet Microbe provide the percentage of Efficacy of different vaccine.
 - **Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine- 95%**
 - **The Moderna shot- 94%**
 - **Sputnik V- 90%**
 - **The J&J and AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccines - 67%**
- Based on the achievement of the success criteria, placebo recipients have now become eligible to receive two doses of Covaxin.

Dogecoin: \$34 billion cryptocurrency

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Dogecoin’s value has risen phenomenally– adding around \$19.9 billion in the last 24 hours and now valued at \$34 billion.

What is Dogecoin?

- According to CNBC, the digital token was created in 2013 by software engineers Billy Markus and Jackson Palmer as a faster but “fun” alternative to Bitcoin.
- It was started as a satire on the numerous fraud crypto coins that had sprung up at the time, and takes its name and logo from a Shiba Inu meme that was viral several years ago.
- Unlike Bitcoins, whose maximum possible number is fixed at 21 million (a figure that is estimated to be reached by 2040), Dogecoin numbers do not have an upper limit, and there are already more than 100 billion in existence.

What is behind Dogecoin’s rise?

- The main reason believed to be behind Dogecoin’s meteoric surge is the same that has propelled the value of Bitcoin and Ethereum recently listing of Coinbase, the most popular virtual currency exchange in the US.

8th Edition of Exercise Khanjar

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, India and Kyrgyzstan Special Forces started a military exercise named “Exercise Khanjar” in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
- This is the Eighth Edition of the Exercise

About Exercise Khanjar

- It is a Joint Special Forces Military Exercise between India and Kyrgyzstan.
- The exercise was started in the year 2011..
- The exercise aims to boost the strategic partnership between India and Kyrgyzstan. It also focuses on high-altitude, mountains and counter-extremism drills.

About Kyrgyzstan



- It is a landlocked country in Central Asia bordering Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- It is often referred to as ‘Central Asia’s only democracy.’
- Its capital is **Bishkek**.

Earth Day 2021

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

Why in news?

- Every year World Earth Day is celebrated on April 22 every year.
- The theme of Earth Day 2021 is to '**Restore Our Earth**'.
- It focuses on adopting natural processes and emerging eco-friendly technologies that can restore ecosystems.
- Last year the World Earth Day 2020 was celebrated under the theme : **Climate Action**

About Earth Day

- It is observed every year on April 22.
- It is also recognized as the largest civic event in the world.

History

- It was first celebrated in 1970. On April 22, 1970, millions of people took to the streets to protest the negative impacts of 150 years of industrial development.

- The day marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970.

Objective

- To increase the awareness among common public, especially among youngsters, to get full effect of the campaign of environmental safety.

Organization

- Earth Day Network (EDN) is the not for profit organisation that leads Earth Day worldwide.

About Earth Day Network

- Earth Day Network is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide.
- The main office is located in Washington DC, USA.

COVIRAP diagnostic technology

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the IIT Kharagpur has successfully commercialised its flagship healthcare product COVIRAP the novel diagnostic technology to zero on infectious diseases including COVID-19.
- It is a generic machine, which means that it can perform tests beyond Covid-19 — for influenza, malaria, dengue, Japanese encephalitis, TB etc, under the category of isothermal nucleic acid-based tests.



Working of COVIRAP

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<h3>Novel solution</h3> <p>A look at how the new COVID-19 testing device works</p>  <p>Virus alert: Researchers with the COVIRAP device at IIT Kharagpur. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ COVIRAP machine resembles a box and comes with a kit▪ Kit has three master mixes which are markers of different genes to confirm the virus▪ RNA samples are extracted from nasal swabs and mixed with the master mix in tubes▪ Tubes are put in the machine which is set at a specific temperature and programmed to run for a fixed period▪ Once the heating is over,	<p>it's mixed with another solution and reheated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A paper strip is dipped into reaction product▪ Coloured lines develop, like in a pregnancy kit, to indicate presence or absence of virus▪ A smartphone app can grab image of the strip and convey results▪ COVIRAP can deliver results in an hour <p>DIFFERENCES WITH RT-PCR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ While RT-PCR machines can cost up to ₹25 lakh, the COVIRAP machine cost the IIT researchers only ₹5,000▪ COVIRAP test kits cost about ₹500▪ RT-PCR needs to be operated by a molecular biologist▪ COVIRAP can be operated with minimal training
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- It has an automated pre-programmable temperature control unit, a special detection unit on genomic analysis, and a customised smartphone app for results.
- Three master mixes work as markers of different genes to confirm the presence of SARS-CoV-2.
- Samples collected react with these mixes.
- When paper strips are dipped into these reaction products, coloured lines indicate the presence of the virus.
- The coloured lines indicate the presence of the COVID-19 virus.

Why it's special?

- Current tests include RT-PCR, which are highly accurate but require advanced lab infrastructure, and antigen tests that can give results in minutes but have a lower accuracy.
- It cost around Rs 500.

Results in 45 minutes

- The results can be made available within 45 minutes of obtaining the patient sample.

First Human cells grown in monkey embryos sparked ethics debate

(Topic- GS Paper III + IV – Science and technology+ Ethics, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Researchers at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in the US have for the first time grown human cells in monkey embryos.
- The research is also called “chimera research”.

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What have the researchers done?

- By integrating human cells into the embryos of macaque monkeys, researchers have created what is called a **chimeric tool**.
- **Chimeras** are organisms that are made up of the cells of two distinct species, in this case humans and monkeys.
- For instance, if this hybrid embryo was placed in the womb of a monkey, it could possibly grow into a new kind of an animal (however this was not the aim of this study).
- In this study, the monkey embryos containing human stem cells stayed alive and grew outside the body for a period of 19 days.

Purpose of chimeric research

- Researchers believe that this ability to grow cells of two different species together offers scientists a powerful tool for research and medicine, advancing current understanding about early human development, disease onset and progression and ageing.
- Further, research of this kind could also help in drug evaluation and address the critical need for organ transplantation.

What are the ethical concerns about this?

- Some rare hybrid animals exist naturally and were probably the result of unintentional cross breeding between animals of different species.
- In 2014, a rare hybrid animal called “Geep” was born in an Irish farm.
- **Geep was a hybrid between a goat and a sheep, a result of the two mating.**
- However, the birth of this geep was not artificially induced and the cross-breeding is believed to have happened unintentionally.
- Generally, different species don’t cross-breed and if they do, their offspring don’t survive for long.
- The genetic modification like chimera studies continues to be a subject of major debate.
- **In developing countries like India, genetically modified crops are also a contentious topic.**
- Tampering with the genetic code in human beings is more controversial, as any such change can be passed down to future generations.

Special Task Force (STF)

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

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir administration has set up a Special Task Force (STF) to initiate action against government employees suspected of activities against “security of the State”.

- **The order has been passed under provisions of Article 311(2) (C).**

Provision of Article 311 of the Constitution

- It gives the administration power to terminate an employee without constituting an inquiry against him or her on grounds of security of the State.
- Article 311 provides two safeguards to civil servants against any arbitrary dismissal from their posts:
 - a. A civil servant cannot be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.
 - b. A civil servant cannot be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an inquiry in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges.
- The above two safeguards are available only to the members of the civil services of the Centre, the all-India services, the civil services of a state or to persons holding civil posts under the Centre or a state.
- It is not available to the members of defence services or persons holding military posts.

Purpose of Special Task Force

- The Special Task Force (STF) has been set up to initiate action against government employees suspected of activities against “**security of the State**”.
- The sanction is accorded to the constitution of a Special task Force for identifying and scrutinizing cases of government employees, to initiate the process under Government Order for action in terms of provisions of Article 311(2) (C) of the Constitution of India.

World Malaria Day 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III–Health (Government Policies), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 25 countries, including three from Africa, with the potential to eradicate malaria by 2025 under its ‘**E-2025 Initiative**’, ahead of World Malaria Day 2021.
- The report, titled **Zeroing in on malaria elimination** recently released by WHO brings out the progress made through the E-2020 initiative.

About World Malaria day

- The World Malaria Day is observed on 25th April every year.
- The theme of World Malaria Day 2021 is “**Reaching the zero malaria target.**”
- The day is celebrated to spread awareness about malaria disease and to promote efforts to prevent malaria.

Background

- The idea of World Malaria Day was developed from Africa Malaria Day.

- The Africa Malaria day is basically an event that has been observed by African governments since 2001, first held in 2008.
- In 2007, at the 60th session of the World Health Assembly, a meeting sponsored by the World Health Organisation (WHO) proposed that Africa Malaria Day be changed to World Malaria Day.
- It will help to identify the existence of malaria in countries worldwide and will also help to bring awareness among people globally to fight against malaria.

About Malaria

- It is caused by Plasmodium parasites.
- The parasites are spread to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes, called "malaria vectors",

Related Information

About E-2025 Initiative

- This has been launched by WHO in 2017 to support a group of countries to achieve zero indigenous cases of malaria by 2020.
- Some 21 countries across five regions were identified as having the potential to reach the milestone of eliminating malaria.
- Of the 21 countries, eight reported zero cases of malaria, as of April 2021. The countries included, Algeria, Belize, Cabo Verde, China, El Salvador, Iran, Malaysia, and Paraguay.
- In February 2021, El Salvador became the first Central American country to achieve the milestone of being classified as malaria-free.
- **The number of cases fell from more than 9,000 in 1990 to less than 30 in 2010.**
- The report '**Zeroing in on malaria elimination**' brings out the progress made through the E-2020 initiative of WHO.
- The E-2025 countries will receive technical and on-the-ground support by WHO and its partners. In return, they are expected to audit their elimination programmes annually, participate in elimination forums, conduct surveillance assessments, and share malaria case data periodically.

The new countries were selected based on four criteria:

- a. the establishment of a government-endorsed elimination plan;
- b. meeting the threshold of malaria case reductions in recent years;
- c. having the capacity of malaria surveillance and a designated governmental agency responsible for malaria elimination;
- d. and being selected by the WHO Malaria Elimination Oversight Committee.

Key finding of the Report

- The Report has identified 25 countries, including three from Africa, with the potential to eradicate malaria by 2025.
- Three of these countries are from Africa namely Botswana, Eswatini and South Africa.

- The 25 countries were included in the WHO's E-2020 initiative too, but anti-malaria efforts were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The African continent shares over 94 per cent of the global malaria death burden. Recent evidence has shown drug-resistant mutations in the malaria parasite **Plasmodium falciparum**.
- Some 39 countries were 'malaria-free' as of February 25, 2021, according to the WHO.

Initiatives Taken by Indian Government

National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) 2016-2030

It outlines India's strategy for elimination of the disease by 2030.

The objectives of the national framework are:

- Eliminate malaria from all low (Category 1) and moderate (Category 2) endemic states/UTs (26) by 2022;
- Reduce incidence of malaria to less than 1 case per 1000 population in all States/UTs and the districts and malaria elimination in 31 states/UTs by 2024;
- Interrupt indigenous transmission of malaria in all States/ UTs (Category 3) by 2027;
- Prevent re-establishment of local transmission of malaria in areas where it has been eliminated and to maintain malaria-free status of the country by 2030.

Malaria Elimination Research Alliance-India (MERA-India)

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recently established '**Malaria Elimination Research Alliance-India (MERA-India)**' which is a conglomeration of partners working on malaria control.

Malaria Mukht Abhiyan

- Malaria Mukht Abhiyan in the Bastar Region of Chhattisgarh was successfully carried out wherein 3.78 million people were screened for malaria.

Role of nitric oxide in fighting coronavirus

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a multinational collaboration has announced the results of phase 2 clinical trials indicating that a nitric oxide nasal spray can be an effective viral treatment.

About the Nitric Oxide therapy

- Nitric oxide is known to have a broad antimicrobial effect against bacteria, fungi, helminths, protozoa and viruses.
- To assess the potential of NO as a treatment for SARS-CoV-2 infection, researchers evaluated its vitro antiviral effect on SARS-CoV-2 replication and published their

findings in September 2020. ('Mitigation of the replication of SARS-CoV-2 by nitric oxide in vitro', Redox Biology).

What is Nitric Oxide nasal spray?

- It has been developed by a Vancouver-based biotech firm, SaNOtize Research and Development Corporations.
- The other partners are St Peter's hospitals, NHS Foundation Trust in Surrey, and Berkshire and Surrey Pathology Services.
- The spray releases a small, topical amount of nitric oxide that is well known to kill viruses including SARS-CoV-2.
- It is non-specific and thus kills any virus.
- The patients treated with the spray saw an average reduction of around 95% in viral load in the first 24 hours, and more than 99% within 72 hours.
- The self-administered nasal spray releases a small topical amount of nitric oxide and aims to kill the virus in the upper airways, preventing it from incubating and making its way to the lungs.

Note:

- The World Health Organization has yet to give an emergency use authorisation (EUA).
- Israel and Bahrain have given EUA to the spray, as a medical device.

'No volunteer list under cyber scheme'

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, during the RTI reply the Union Home Ministry has said it does not maintain a centralised list of volunteers enrolled under the cybercrime volunteer programme since the police is a "State subject" under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Cybercrime Volunteer Framework

- The Cybercrime Volunteer Framework has been rolled out as 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 in their endeavour to curb cybercrimes.
- The volunteers are registered, and their services utilised, by the respective State/UT LEAs as per their requirement.
- The programme was expected to include 500 volunteers, 200 "cyber awareness promoters" and 50 "cyber experts".

National Cybercrime Ecosystem Management Unit

- The National Cybercrime Ecosystem Management Unit, of which the Cybercrime Volunteers Programme is a constituent, is part of the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) scheme launched by Union Home Minister in January 2020.
- The project was approved in October 2018
- The I4C scheme that includes other components also has been allocated ₹69.80 crore in the 2021-22 Budget.

Related Information

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

- It has been established under the Ministry of Home affairs (MHA) to act as a nodal point at National level in the fight against cybercrime.
- The scheme to set up I4C was approved in October 2018, to deal with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- This state-of-the-art Centre is located in New Delhi. Various States and Union Territories have given their consent to set up Regional Cyber Crime Coordination Centres.

Objectives

- To provide a platform to deal with cybercrimes in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

It has seven components:

- National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit
- National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal
- National Cyber Crime Training Centre
- Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit
- National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre
- National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem
- Platform for Joint Cyber Crime Investigation Team.
- This state-of-the-art Centre is located in New Delhi.

RBI extends States' Ways and Means credit to Sept.

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

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to continue with the existing interim Ways and Means Advances (WMA) scheme limit of ₹51,560 crore for all States/ UTs shall for six months i.e., up to September 30, given the prevalence of COVID-19.
- It is based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee Chaired by Sudhir Shrivastava on WMA to State Governments, 2021 that the RBI had revised the WMA Scheme of States and Union Territories (UTs).

- The WMA limit arrived at by the Committee based on total expenditure of States/ UTs, works out to ₹47,010 crore.

About Ways and Means Advances (WMA) scheme

- These are temporary loan facilities provided by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the central and state government.
- It was introduced in 1997.
- Under this, the government can avail immediate cash from the RBI, but it has to return the amount within 90 days.
- Interest is charged at the existing repo rate.
- The limits for Ways and Means Advances (WMA) are decided by the government and RBI mutually and revised periodically.

Types of Ways and Means Advances

Special WMA

- It is extended against the collateral of the government securities held by the State Government.

Normal WMA

- It is based on a three-year average of actual revenue and capital expenditure of the state.
- It is not collateral based.

Crew-2 Mission

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, four astronauts were launched to the International Space Station (ISS) from Florida under Crew-2 mission.
- Out of the four astronauts, two are from NASA and two are from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the European Space Agency (ESA).

About Crew-2 Mission

- It is a part of collaboration between NASA and SpaceX under the Commercial Crew Program.
- It is the second crew rotation of the SpaceX Crew Dragon and the first with international partners.

Significance of Crew-2 Mission

- The Crew-2 astronauts will join the members of Expedition 65.
- They will stay aboard the ISS for six months during which time they will conduct science experiments in low-Earth orbit.

- The central focus during this time will be to continue a series of Tissue Chips in Space studies.
- Tissue Chips are small models of human organs that contain multiple cell types that behave similarly to the human body.

India third highest military spender in 2020

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

Why in the news?

- Recently the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has published the latest military expenditure database of the world in 2020.

Key finding of the report

- India was the third largest military spender in the world in 2020, behind only the US and China.
- The US accounted for 39 per cent of the money spent on military globally, China accounted for 13 per cent, and India accounted for 3.7 per cent of the globe's share.
- The US spent a total of \$778 billion in 2020, China spent \$252 billion and India's military expenditure was \$72.9 billion.
- All three countries saw their military spending go up compared to 2019, even during a pandemic year.
- The other top spenders included Russia with \$61.7 billion, the UK at \$59.2 billion, Saudi Arabia at \$57.5 billion, followed by Germany and France at just under \$53 billion each.

Percentage of GDP

- The United States' military spending was 3.7 per cent of its GDP while the corresponding numbers for China and India were 1.7 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively.
- The military spending in Asia and Oceania “was 2.5 per cent higher in 2020 than in 2019.

About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- It is an international institute based in Sweden.
- It is dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament which has been established in 1966.
- It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

Crisis in Chad

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, Chad's longest serving president Idriss Deby died of injuries sustained during clashes with the rebel group FACT (Front for Change and Concord in Chad) on the frontlines.

Highlights of crisis

- Soon after the death of President, Chad's government and parliament were dissolved so that a military council led by Déby's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, can govern for the next 18 months.
- The former French colony is now prime outpost of the West in fighting Islamist militants across the Sahel — the vast region between the Sahara and the Sudanian savanna.
- France still has a strong military presence in the region and had provided support to Déby in fighting political opponents and allies.
- France, however, has been looking to disengage from the region ever since the 2013 rebellion in the Central African Republic. With Déby's death, this might not be an easy exit.

What is France's military presence in the region?

- The motive behind military operations in the Sahel countries is to fight Islamist groups, monitor political ambitions, and train future African leaders.
- Chad has been France's most effective and stable Sahel ally in achieving these goals.
- France says its objective is to help Sahel nations maintain territorial integrity and prevent rise of Islamist groups that threaten France and the West.
- France has provided tremendous military and intelligence support to Chad over the years, including when it deployed troops and fighter jets to push back a Libyan and Sudanese offensive. It continues to maintain military bases in Chad's border cities as well.

Why has France been unable to exit?

- France is aware that if it pulls out its troops, it would create a security vacuum and domestic troops and UN peacekeeping missions won't be able to sustain operations and fight by themselves.
- Whatever France and its allies have achieved would be lost.

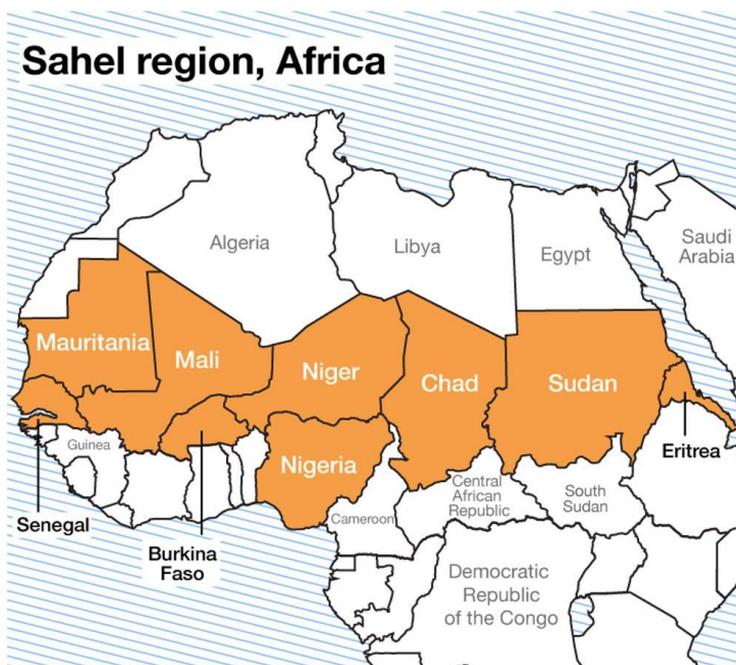
Related Information

About Chad



- Chad officially known as the Republic of Chad is a landlocked country in north-central Africa.
- It is bordered by Libya to the north, Sudan to the east, the Central African Republic to the south, Cameroon to the south-west, Nigeria to the southwest (at Lake Chad), and Niger to the west.
- Chad has several regions: a desert zone in the north, an arid Sahelian belt in the centre and a more fertile Sudanian Savanna zone in the south.
- Lake Chad, after which the country is named, is the second-largest wetland in Africa.
- The capital **N'Djamena** is the largest city.
- **Chad's official languages are Arabic and French.**

About Sahel region of Africa



- It is a semi-arid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to Sudan.
- It forms a transitional zone between the arid Sahara (desert) to the north and the belt of humid savannas to the south.
- The Sahel stretches from the Atlantic Ocean eastward through northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, the great bend of the Niger River in Mali, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), southern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, south-central Chad, and into Sudan.

Centre bars use of liquid oxygen for non-medical purposes

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

Why in the news?

- The Centre ordered States by Invoking the Disaster Management Act 2005 that all liquid oxygen, including the existing stock with private plants shall be made available to the government and will be used for medical purposes only.

More on the news

- The order by Union Home Secretary who is the Chairman of the National Executive Committee under the DM Act, 2005.
- **The order said that under section 10(2) (I) and section 65 of the DM Act**, States had to ensure that “liquid oxygen is not allowed for any non medical purpose” and all stocks to be made available to the government without any exception to any industry to use liquid oxygen.

Previous order uses under DM Act 2005

- Earlier on April 18, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had written to States prohibiting supply of oxygen for industrial purposes, except for exempted nine industries that include the pharmaceutical, petroleum, nuclear energy and the steel sectors.
- **In April 22**, Centre issued order under the DM Act making the district magistrates and senior superintendent of police personally liable to allow unhindered inter-State movement of vehicles carrying medical oxygen and to ensure that the supply is not restricted to a particular State where the oxygen plant is located.

DRDO develops critical crystal blade technology for aero engines

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

Why in the news?

Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) have developed single crystal blade technology.

About Single crystal blade technology

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Single Crystal Blades for Helicopter Engine Application

- The technology has been developed as a part of their indigenous helicopter development programme for helicopter engine application.
- It is part of a programme taken up by the Defence Metallurgical Research Laboratory (DMRL).

Material Used

- It has made using a nickel-based superalloy.

Features

- The blades feature a complex geometrical design and can withstand high temperatures.
- The blades are used in the development of engines to allow helicopters to operate reliably in complex conditions.

Note:

- Very few countries such as the U.S., the U.K., France and Russia have the capability to design and manufacture such single crystal components.

Breakthrough infections

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The Union health ministry has recently said that the breakthrough infection rate after taking the first and the second dose of the Covid-19 vaccines approved in India remained low for both Covaxin and Covishield vaccines.

What is breakthrough infection?

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- It is an infection which occurs after vaccination it is known as breakthrough infection.”

Data on Breakthrough infection

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) puts the rate of reinfections in the country at 4.5% and that of breakthrough infections at two to four infections per 10,000.

Covishield data

- After the first dose two per 10,000 people get reinfected and after the second dose, three per 10,000 people get reinfected.

Covaxin data

- After the first dose four per 10,000 people get reinfected after the number remains the same for the second dose too.
- This type of Infections are mostly mild or asymptomatic because the individuals still have partial

Possible Reasons for Breakthrough Infections

- India’s healthcare and frontline workers were on the priority list for vaccination during the first phase.
- They were always prone to more occupational exposure to the coronavirus disease.
- The second wave of Covid-19 is highly transmissible; it might also have contributed to the breakthrough infection rates.

U.S. study

- People with no symptoms transmit more than half of all cases, according to a recent model developed by the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.
- This essentially means that having a grip on silent transmission from persons without symptoms is very important for controlling the pandemic.
- According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, vaccines have been only evaluated for their efficacy against symptomatic cases.
- But none of the vaccine trials have been designed to measure reduction in transmission risk from infected vaccinated individuals.

Oxygen concentrators

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a volunteer prepares beds with oxygen concentrators at a Covid Care Centre inside Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya.

About Oxygen concentrators



- An oxygen concentrator is a medical device that concentrates oxygen from ambient air. Atmospheric air has about 78 per cent nitrogen and 21 per cent oxygen, with other gases making up the remaining 1 per cent.
- The oxygen concentrator takes in this air, filters it through a sieve, releases the nitrogen back into the air, and works on the remaining oxygen.
- This oxygen, compressed and dispensed through a cannula, is 90-95 per cent pure.
- A pressure valve in concentrators helps regulate supply, ranging from 1-10 litres per minute.
- According to a 2015 report by the WHO, concentrators are designed for continuous operation and can produce oxygen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for up to 5 years or more.

How are concentrators different from oxygen cylinders and liquid medical oxygen (LMO)?

- Oxygen concentrators are the easiest alternatives to cylinders but can only supply 5-10 litres of oxygen per minute (critical patients may need 40-50 litres per minute) and are best suited for moderately ill patients.
- Concentrators are portable and unlike LMO that needs to be stored and transported in cryogenic tankers, need no special temperature.
- And unlike cylinders that require refilling, concentrators only need a power source to draw in ambient air.

Large Area Certification' scheme

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

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Government of India has certified 14,491 ha of such area under Car Nicobar and Nancowry group of islands in UT of A&N Islands.

- This area becomes the first large contiguous territory to be conferred with organic certification under the 'Large Area Certification' (LAC) scheme of the PGS-India (Participatory Guarantee System) certification programme.

About Large Area Certification' scheme

- Under LAC, each village in the area is considered as one cluster/group. Documentations are simple and maintained village-wise.
- All farmers with their farmland and livestock need to adhere to the standard requirements and on being verified get certified en-mass without the need to go under conversion period.
- Certification is renewed on annual basis through annual verification by a process of peer appraisals as per the process of PGS-India.

Related Information

About Participatory Guarantee Scheme

- It is a process of certifying organic products to ensure that production takes place in accordance with the laid down quality standards.
- The certification is in the form of a documented logo or a statement.
- It is a quality assurance initiative, operates outside the framework of third-party certification.
- The pillar of PGS in India is its participatory approach in which peer groups will appraise the products instead of third-party inspections.
- It certifies the producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.
- Mutual recognition and support between regional PGS groups ensures better networking for processing and marketing.

Other Organic farming Scheme

About Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana

- It is to promote organic farming and the products will be linked with the market.
- It will be implemented in a cluster-based approach and farmers will be funded to meet the expenditure from farm to market.
- There is no liability for farmers for expenditure on certification.

Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** that seeks to capitalise on the organic farming potential of North-East India.

State Covers

- It covers the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.
- The scheme aims at development of certified organic production in a value chain mode to link growers with consumers.

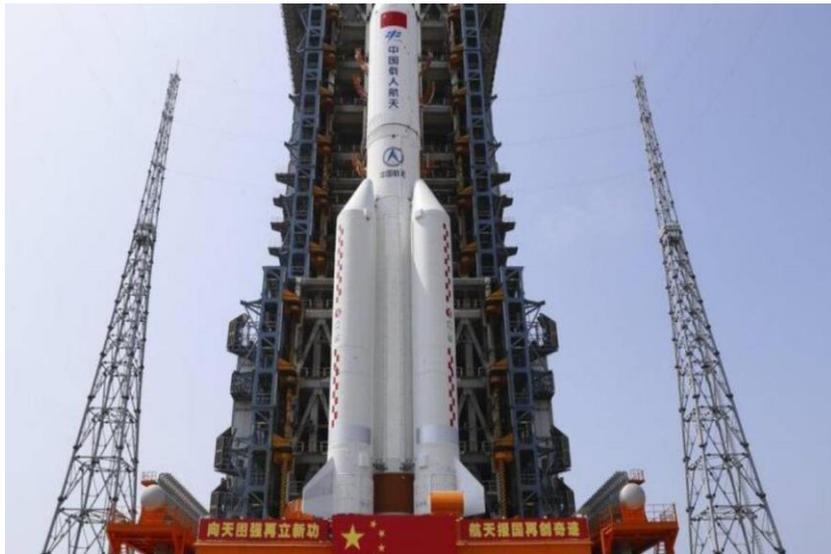
China launches the core module of its space station

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

Why in the news?

- China has recently launched the core module called “**Tianhe module**” of its space station.

About Tianhe module



- The module is known as “**Harmony of the Heavens**”, was launched on the China largest carrier **Long March 5B** from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre on the southern island of Hainan.
- The Tianhe module will act as the management and control hub of the space station Tiangong.
- Tianhe forms the main living quarters for three crew members in the Chinese space station, which will have a life span of at least 10 years.

11 Missions Planned To Complete Space Station by End Of 2022

- Another 10 launches will send up two more modules; four cargo supply shipments and four missions with crews.

Previous Attempt

- China has launched two experimental modules over the past decade in preparation for a permanent station.
- One, **Tiangong-1**, which means “**Heavenly Palace-1**” was abandoned and burned up during an uncontrolled loss of orbit.
- Its successor, **Tiangong-2**, was successfully taken out of orbit in 2018.

Significance

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- China aims to become a major space power by 2030.
- It has ramped up its space programme with visits to the moon, the launch of an uncrewed probe to Mars and the construction of its own space station.
- It was only the third country to independently do so after the former Soviet Union and the United States.
- The Chinese space station was expected to be a competitor to the aging International Space Station (ISS) which is a modular space station in low Earth orbit.

Note :

- Russia has recently announced that it would be withdrawing from the International Space Station in 2025, and build and manage its own floating laboratory that will be launched into orbit by 2030.

Python-5 air to air missile

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

Why in the news?

- India's indigenous Light Combat Aircraft, Tejas, has added the 5th generation Python-5 Air-to-Air Missile (AAM) in its air-to-air weapons capability.

About Python-5



- It is a fifth-generation air-to-air missile (AAM) manufactured by Israeli Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.
- It was first used in the 2006 Lebanon war.

Key Features

- The missile can be launched from very short to beyond-visual ranges with greater kill probability and excellent resistance.

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- It is capable of “lock-on after launch” (LOAL). The missile also has a full-sphere/all-direction (including rearward) attack ability.
- The missile also features an advanced seeker with an electro-optical and imaging infrared homing seeker.
- This seeker scans the target area for hostile aircraft, then locks on for the terminal chase.

Trachoma Disease

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

Why in the news?

- The Gambia has become the second country in Africa to eliminate trachoma, one of the leading causes of blindness.
- **Ghana was the first country in Africa to eliminate the disease in 2018.**

About Trachoma

- Trachoma is one of the WHO’s 20 **neglected tropical diseases**, which predominantly affect low-income countries and are historically underfunded in research for treatments.
- The disease is caused by bacterium **Chlamydia trachomatis**.

Affect eyes

- The infection causes a roughening of the inner surface of the eyelids.
- This roughening can lead to pain in the eyes, breakdown of the outer surface or cornea of the eyes, and eventual blindness.
- Untreated, repeated trachoma infections can result in a form of permanent blindness when the eyelids turn inward.

About Gambia

- The Gambia officially the Republic of the Gambia, is a country in West Africa.
- It is the smallest country within mainland Africa.
- It is surrounded by Senegal, except for its western coast on the Atlantic Ocean.



Related Information

- India has recently joined the world to **Light up Qutub Minar** as a sign of unity to combat the Neglected Tropical Diseases on the second annual World Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Day.
- **World NTD Day has been observed on January 30 every year.**



Why are some tropical diseases called "neglected"?

- The people who are most affected by these diseases are often the poorest populations, living in remote, rural areas, urban slums or conflict zones.
- Neglected tropical diseases persist under conditions of poverty and are concentrated almost exclusively in impoverished populations in the developing world.
- Lacking a strong political voice, people affected by these tropical diseases have a low profile and status in public health priorities.
- Lack of reliable statistics and unpronounceable names of diseases have all hampered efforts to bring them out of the shadows.

- They diseases include dengue, rabies, blinding trachoma, Buruli ulcer, endemic treponematoses (yaws), leprosy (Hansen disease), Chagas disease, human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), leishmaniasis, cysticercosis, dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease), echinococcosis, foodborne trematode infections, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis (bilharziasis), soil-transmitted helminthiases (intestinal worms).

Kills billion of people

- Neglected tropical diseases affect more than 1 billion people, primarily poor populations living in tropical and subtropical climates.
- They are frequently clustered together geographically and individuals are often afflicted with more than one parasite or infection.
- More than 70% of countries and territories that report the presence of neglected tropical diseases are low-income or lower middle-income economies.

Caused by

- Infections are caused by unsafe water, poor housing conditions and poor sanitation.

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, but it does not specifically tackle neglected diseases
- **The National Policy on Treatment of Rare Diseases (2018)** includes infectious tropical diseases and identifies a need to support research on treatments for rare diseases.
- It has not yet prioritised diseases and areas for research funding or how innovation would be supported.
- **The Draft National Pharmaceutical Policy (2017)** states that one of its objectives is to create an enabling environment to develop and produce innovator drugs, but 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.

Operation Twist

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Business Standard)

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Why in the news ?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently said that it will be simultaneously buying and selling Rs 10,000 crore of secondary market bonds under its special open market operations programme.
- This is the first such 'Operation Twist' this fiscal in which the RBI will purchase long-term bonds and sell short-term bonds maturing this year.

About Operation Twist

- 'Operation Twist' is when the central bank uses the proceeds from the sale of short-term securities to buy long-term government debt papers, leading to easing of interest rates on the long-term papers.
- Operation Twist first appeared in 1961 as a way to strengthen the U.S. dollar and stimulate cash flow into the economy.
- In June 2012, Operation Twist was so effective that the yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury dropped to a 200-year low.

About Open Market Operations

- It is one of the quantitative (to regulate or control the total volume of money) monetary policy tools which is employed by the central bank of a country to control the money supply in the economy.
- It is conducted by the RBI by way of sale or purchase of government securities (G-secs) to adjust money supply conditions.
- The central bank sells government securities to remove liquidity from the system and buys back government securities to infuse liquidity into the system.
- These operations are often conducted on a day-to-day basis in a manner that balances inflation while helping banks continue to lend.
- RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public.
- The RBI uses OMO along with other monetary policy tools such as repo rate, cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio to adjust the quantum and price of money in the system.

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