



EXCEL QUEST

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India-based Neutrino Observatory - INO@tifr



Moqui Marbles and Martian Blueberries



Shigmo Festival : Spring festival of Goa



MULLA PERIYAR DAM ISSUE



FRAMEWORK FOR WATER QUALITY TESTING, MONITORING



Heart of Asia meeting adopts 'Istanbul Declaration'



EASTERN RAJASTHAN CANAL PROJECT (ERCP)

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Director's message

Dear Aspirants,

Union Public Service Commission has released the CSE Mains Examination 2020 result on 23rd March 2021 and the Personality Tests scheduled from April 26th to June 18th. I take this opportunity to congratulate all the successful candidates and wish them best of luck in the Personality Test which is the final phase of the most grueling selection process for the appointment to the Country's elite civil services. Those who have not made it need not despair but prepare well once again learning from the mistakes committed in the earlier attempt and plug the loop holes so that they can bounce back in the next attempt.

Of late, the civil services are increasingly coming under public scanner particularly on the issue of Police-Politician-Bureaucrat-Criminal nexus after Mumbai Commissioner of Police, Param Bir Singh, has been unceremoniously shunted out by the state government following the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case and posted in an innocuous assignment as DGP in charge of Home Guards. He, in turn, has dropped a bombshell by writing a letter to the Chief Minister, making a string of allegations against the State Home Minister, Sh Anil Deshmukh, who had to subsequently resign after the Mumbai High Court ordered CBI investigation into the allegations made by Param Bir Singh.

These murky developments followed the arrest of Sachin Vaze, an Assistant Inspector of Police, by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Vaze is the main suspect in the case where a Scorpio with 20 Gelatin sticks was found parked outside the residence of industrialist Mukesh Ambani and murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran. He was suspended earlier for his questionable role in a case of custodial death in the year 2004. However, he along with three others were reinstated in June 2020, under the pretext of overcoming the shortage of Officers for handling the COVID related crisis and posted to the Criminal Intelligence Unit, a specialized arm of the Mumbai Crime Branch by Param Bir Singh obviously for extraneous considerations as things unfolded subsequently. Since then, he was leading investigations into several sensational and high profile criminal cases, all obviously under political patronage. The letter bomb of Param Bir Singh narrates how the Home Minister was using Vaze as a collection agent. His letter to the CM leveling serious allegations against the Home Minister created a political storm. Constant political interference in police work, misuse of the police for partisan political ends and willingness of some Officers to play ball in the last two decades have taken a toll. No doubt, there are some upright and conscientious officers, but they are sidelined.

Corruption in the police and bureaucracy is prevalent in all States and has become well entrenched and well spread. Evidently, during the last two decades, the situation has undergone a sinister transformation and political interference has become more pronounced. Nowadays, the heads of the police force have very little say in the recruitment, transfers and postings of Officers in sensitive posts. They are decided by the political bosses. According to one estimate, in 80 per cent of the 12,000 odd Police Stations in the Country,

the Superintendents of Police have very little say in this regard. Blatant use of unscrupulous Police Officers for collection of money by the political bosses marks the lowest watermark of the police-politician collusive corruption.

In 1993, the Government of India commissioned an one man Committee headed by Sh NN Vohra, the then Union Home Secretary to study the malaise of Police-Politician-Bureaucrat-Criminal nexus and suggest remedial measures. The Committee after an exhaustive study of various aspects submitted a report to the government highlighting the role of organized crime syndicates which used the money power for building up contacts with bureaucrats and politicians and expansion of activities with impunity and develop a network of muscle-power which is used by the politicians during elections and that the crime Syndicates have become a law unto themselves. Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/armed senas and over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies, Parliament and have acquired substantial financial and muscle power and social respectability and have successfully corrupted the government machinery at all levels and wield enormous influence in decision making process.

Mumbai's extortion case has exposed an enduring collusion i.e., politico-police-mafia nexus. An ordinary citizen can only watch helplessly while the drama unfolds, hoping for a drastic overhaul of the police set-up and political establishment. But in a country where grassroots politics is run through police thanas and tehsils, no political party will let go its firm grip on public institutions. The signs aren't encouraging. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently lamented over the power of IAS and administrative reforms in the Parliament, while the Supreme Court has been expressing anguish over non implementation of police reforms for the last 15 years.

The crying need of the hour is to depoliticise the police and insulate it from extraneous pulls and pressures as recommended by the National Police Commission and re-emphasised in the directives of the Supreme Court in Prakash Singh's case. One of the Court's directives to the State governments was to set up State Security Commissions to ensure that governments function as per the rules, laws and procedures and implement Vohra Committee's report in which he recommended setting up of a special cell headed by the Union Home Secretary to monitor all such activities and bring it to the notice of the Government for appropriate action but unfortunately, all the successive governments have taken little initiative to curb the menace. It is only the enlightened and empowered community which can break this unholy nexus and put the governance on the right track by way of electing only those public representatives with clean image and making all public institutions including the police strictly accountable to law through various checks and balances. The transformation is inevitable though it might take longer than expected.

Best wishes.



K. Rajendra Kumar IPS (Retd.)

Table of Content

1. NATIONAL.....	(01 – 42)
1.1	CITY INNOVATION EXCHANGE (CIX)
1.2	NORTH EAST CANE AND BAMBOO DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (NECBDC)
1.3	TECHNICAL EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (TEQIP)
1.4	REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES
1.5	LATERAL ENTRY IN CIVIL SERVICES
1.6	KARNATAKA’S ENGINEERING RESEARCH POLICY
1.7	LAND PORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (LPAI)
1.8	HC PUNISHES TWO COLLECTORS FOR CONTEMPT
1.9	UDYOG MANTHAN
1.10	SUGAMYA BHARAT APP
1.11	EASE OF LIVING INDEX
1.12	MUNICIPAL PERFORMANCE INDEX
1.13	HARYANA JOB QUOTA LAW
1.14	INDIAN SPECIAL FORCES
1.15	FSSAI GUIDELINES ON GMO CROPS
1.16	SATTRAS
1.17	HEALTH POLICY ON RARE DISEASES
1.18	WORLD HERITAGE SITES
1.19	VAN DHAN VIKAS KENDRAS
1.20	SUN TEMPLE AT KONARK
1.21	DISHA BILL, 2020
1.22	NO-TRUST VOTE
1.23	NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021
1.24	PRADHAN MANTRI SWASTHYA SURAKSHA NIDHI (PMSSN)
1.25	CABLE TELEVISION NETWORKS (REGULATION) ACT, 1995
1.26	DANDI MARCH
1.27	SC’S RULE OVER STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONERS
1.28	PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT
1.29	INDEX MONITORING CELL (IMC)
1.30	ELECTION COMMISSION ON PARTY SYMBOLS

- 1.31 ANTI-DEFECTION LAW
- 1.32 ORUNUDOI SCHEME
- 1.33 MULLAPERIYAR DAM ISSSUE
- 1.34 NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEXTILES MISSION
- 1.35 CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED CASTES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021
- 1.36 SAAMAR CAMPAIGN
- 1.37 VOTER VERIFIABLE PAPER AUDIT TRAIL (VVPAT)
- 1.38 LEGAL DRINKING AGE IN DELHI REDUCED
- 1.39 RIGHT TO COUNSEL IN CUSTODY
- 1.40 CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019 (CAA)
- 1.41 ATTORNEY GENERAL
- 1.42 NATIONAL SCIENCE DAY
- 1.43 KHUJLI GHAR
- 1.44 CATCH THE RAIN CAMPAIGN
- 1.45 SWACHHTA SAARTHI FELLOWSHIPS
- 1.46 JANAUSHADHI DIWAS 2021
- 1.47 SUB-MISSION ON AGROFORESTRY (SMAF) SCHEME
- 1.48 MT SWARNA KRISHNA VESSEL
- 1.49 Techbharat 2021
- 1.50 ANNUAL DEMOCRACY REPORT
- 1.51 Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal
- 1.52 CHENAB BRIDGE
- 1.53 EASTERN RAJASTHAN CANAL PROJECT (ERCP)
- 1.54 GANDHI PEACE PRIZE
- 1.55 SHAHEED I DIWAS
- 1.56 GRAM UJALA
- 1.57 LACHIT BORPHUKAN
- 1.58 SHIGMO
- 1.59 HAPPINESS CURRICULUM
- 1.60 TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY DESK

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS(43 – 60)

- 2.1 PAKISTAN TO REMAIN ON FATF GREY LIST
- 2.2 FREEDOM IN THE WORLD REPORT, 2021
- 2.3 INDIA-EU
- 2.4 FIRST COUNTER-TERRORISM DIALOGUE BETWEEN INDIA-NIGERIA
- 2.5 INDIA – SWEDEN VIRTUAL SUMMIT

- 2.6 CHINA'S PLANS FOR NEW DAMS ON BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER
- 2.7 AIR STRIKES ON SANA'A
- 2.8 INDIA ATTENDS FIRST QUAD SUMMIT
- 2.9 MAITRI SETU
- 2.10 BAMMIAN BUDDHAS
- 2.11 INDIA, JAPAN SPACE AGENCIES REVIEW TIES
- 2.12 BIDEN'S AFGHANISTAN PEACE PLAN
- 2.13 EXERCISE DUSTLIK-II
- 2.14 ILO REPORT ON INDIAN WORKERS
- 2.15 CHINA CUTS HONG KONG'S ELECTED SEATS
- 2.16 UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR PROJECT SERVICES (UNOPS)
- 2.17 WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY FORUM 2021
- 2.18 SUEZ CANAL BLOCKAGE
- 2.19 HEART OF ASIA-ISTANBUL PROCESS
- 2.20 INDO-KOREAN BILATERAL FRIENDSHIP PARK
- 2.21 VIRUS PASSPORT
- 2.22 VAJRA PRAHAR 2021

3. INDIAN ECONOMY(61 – 78)

- 3.1 ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB)
- 3.2 SPECTRUM AUCTIONS
- 3.3 PURCHASING MANAGERS' INDEX
- 3.4 CESS AND SURCHARGE
- 3.5 AMENDMENT IN INSURANCE OMBUDSMAN RULES 2021
- 3.6 MINIMUM SELLING PRICE FOR SUGAR
- 3.7 PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION (PCA)
- 3.8 HURUN GLOBAL RICH LIST 2021
- 3.9 ANTI-DUMPING DUTY
- 3.10 BANKS BOARD BUREAU (BBB)
- 3.11 DELHI'S PER CAPITA INCOME DIPS BY 5.9%
- 3.12 INDIA'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES
- 3.13 ATMANIRBHAR NIVESHAK MITRA PORTAL
- 3.14 NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)
- 3.15 UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME
- 3.16 SUPPLEMENTARY DEMANDS FOR GRANTS
- 3.17 PANEL TO EVALUATE APPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL BANKS, SMALL FINANCE BANKS

- 3.18 THE CONSUMER PROTECTION (E-COMMERCE) RULES, 2020
- 3.19 NO DIGITAL TAX IF GOODS SOLD VIA INDIA ARM
- 3.20 LABOUR CODE FOR INFORMAL SECTOR
- 3.21 CAIRN TAX RULING

4. ENVIRONMENT(79 – 89)

- 4.1 WORLD WILDLIFE DAY
- 4.2 THE HIMALAYAN SEROW
- 4.3 NAG RIVER POLLUTION ABATEMENT PROJECT
- 4.4 FSI REPORT ON FOREST FIRES
- 4.5 RED SANDERS
- 4.6 FRAMEWORK FOR WATER QUALITY TESTING, MONITORING
- 4.7 WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT, 2020
- 4.8 GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD
- 4.9 WHALE SHARK
- 4.10 FISHING CATS
- 4.11 PROJECT RE-HAB
- 4.12 IRENA
- 4.13 DIGITAL GREEN CERTIFICATES BY EU
- 4.14 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS
- 4.15 BACTERIA FOUND ON INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION NAMED AFTER INDIAN SCIENTIST
- 4.16 INTER-STATE TIGER RELOCATION PROJECT

5. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY.....(90 – 97)

- 5.1 Direct Energy Weapons (DEW)
- 5.2 Negev Light Machine Gun
- 5.3 Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology
- 5.4 INS Karanj
- 5.5 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missile
- 5.6 Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet
- 5.7 Martian Blueberries
- 5.8 The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG)
- 5.9 PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1
- 5.10 NISAR Mission
- 5.11 Fukushima nuclear disaster completes 10 years
- 5.12 Baikal Gigaton Volume detector

1. NATIONAL

1.1 CITY INNOVATION EXCHANGE (CIX)

- The City Innovation Exchange (CiX) platform was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

City Innovation Exchange

- The CiX will connect cities to innovators across the national ecosystem to design innovative solutions for their pressing challenges.
- The platform will ease the discovery, design & validation of solutions through a robust, transparent and user-centric process that will reduce barriers for innovators and cities to discover fitting solutions.
- Built on the concept of ‘open innovation’, the platform will help in the flow of ideas ‘outside in and inside out, enhancing the skills and capacity required to deliver smart urban governance.
- Through interaction with Academia and Businesses/Startups, the platform will benefit cities in the transfer of ideas from ‘labs’ to the real environment.
- Similarly, by helping urban governments interact with citizens, the platform will ensure the adoption of tested solutions that will be impactful and sustainable.

Benefits of CiX

- The CiX platform will be a significant addition to the growing innovation ecosystem of India and focuses on fostering innovative practices in cities.
- CiX, through an ‘open innovation’ process, engages with innovators to design-test-deliver on solutions to pressing urban challenges.
- This initiative is among the ongoing efforts to realize PM’s vision of New and Atma Nirbhar Bharat, by making cities more self-reliant and enabled to meet the needs of and provide services to their citizens.
- The platform in due time will help our cities in adopting solutions that will enhance the quality of life for their residents and significantly improve the Ease of Doing Business.

1.2 NORTH EAST CANE AND BAMBOO DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (NECBDC)

- The Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir will set up three Bamboo Clusters through technical know-how and collaboration from North East Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC).
- Each of the three clusters will be devoted to the production of Agarbatti, baskets, and charcoal respectively.

What is NECBDC?

- Formerly known as the 'Cane and Bamboo Development Council' (CBDC), NECBDC was incorporated with the objective of organizing the hitherto untapped bamboo sector of North East India.
- Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has huge Bamboo reserves that can boost its economy in the future.
- Bamboo cultivation can revolutionize the industry in Jammu and Kashmir in a cost-effective manner and can open new gates for young start-ups.
- The UT Govt. is in the process of identifying 100 venues and will identify the programs to be held there in the first phase.

National Bamboo Mission (NBM):

- The mission was launched in April 2018.
- It aims to-increase the area under bamboo cultivation and also adopting regional based strategies to promote bamboo products.
- The NBM envisages promoting holistic growth of the bamboo sector by adopting the area-based, regionally differentiated strategy and increasing the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.
- The NBM will be a sub-scheme of the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) under the umbrella scheme KrishonnatiYojana.

1.3 TECHNICAL EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (TEQIP)

- TEQIP [Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme] is coming to an end in March, leaving more than 1,200 assistant professors out of a job and some rural colleges bereft of half their faculty.
- The Centre is preparing its own MERITE project with some similar objectives to improve technical education, but that may be too late for the faculty employed under the current project.

About TEQIP:

- In the year 2002, the ministry of Human Resource and Development launched the TEQIP scheme. The project commenced with the World Bank assistance to Government of India to launch TEQIP as a long term programme of 10-12 years, to be implemented in a phased manner, in 2 or 3 phases.
- The scheme was focused on low income states such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Other states also included Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Aim of TEQIP:

- The programme aims to overhaul the quality of technical education in the Low Income States and Special Category States (SCS) in India.
- **The measures under TEQIP**
- **Institution based measures:**
 - Accreditation of the courses through National Board of Accreditation (NBA),
 - Reforms in the manner in which the institutions are governed,
 - Improving the processes followed in the institutions
 - Digital initiatives
 - Securing autonomy for the colleges
- **Student based measures:**
 - Improving the quality of teaching,
 - Providing quality training to the teachers,
 - Equipping the class rooms,
 - Revision of syllabus,
 - Industry interaction,
 - Compulsory internships for students,
 - Training the students in industry- equipping them with relevant skills, preparing them for various exams such as GATE exam etc.

1.4 REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

- The Commission has announced the General Elections for the Legislative Assemblies of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry on 26.02.2021.
- The Election Commission has given relaxation and has reduced the notice period from 30 days to 7 days for the parties who have published their public notice on or before 26.02.2021.
- The relaxation in notice period would remain in force till the last dates of nomination for the Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry and West Bengal elections, that is March 19 and April 7 respectively.
- Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- A party seeking registration under the said section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Commission in the exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

- As per existing guidelines, the applicant association is, inter-alia asked to publish the proposed Name of the party in two national daily newspapers and two local daily newspapers, on two days for submitting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from such publication.

To be eligible for a ‘National Political Party of India:

- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly.
- In addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States.
- It wins at least two percent seats in the House of the People (i.e., 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different States.

To be eligible for a ‘State Political Party:

- It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in the State at a general election, either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned
- In addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned.
- It wins at least three percent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

1.5 LATERAL ENTRY IN CIVIL SERVICES

- The term lateral entry relates to the appointment of specialists, mainly those from the private sector, in government organizations.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Government of India has submitted a requisition for Lateral Recruitment of Joint Secretary and Director level officers. The official notification states “Online Applications are invited from talented and motivated Indian nationals willing to contribute towards nation-building to join the Government at the level of Joint Secretary or Director, Group ‘A’, in the under mentioned posts in different Ministries/Departments with Headquarters at New Delhi on Contract Basis.”
- This is the second batch of recruitment for the lateral entry and prior to this eight persons, mostly domain experts, were selected for various Departments and Ministries.

Advantages of Lateral Entry Recruitment

- Recruiting Experts of the Field: The government’s idea is to bring in domain expertise from the private sector to the Central administration, with the objective of inducting specialists to improve efficiency and create competition in governance delivery.

- **Minimize the Shortage of Officers:** According to Department of Personnel and Training data, there is shortage of about 1500 IAS officers in India. Lateral entry would minimize the shortage of IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officers working on deputation in the Centre.
- **Transparency in Service:** Allegations of corruption, mediocrity, stagnation, and inefficiency have been made against the Civil Servants. A study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace addressed the need for reforms on various fronts in the civil services. Transparency in services is one of the bases for the recommendation.

Disadvantages of Lateral Entry Recruitment

- **Transparency in recruitment:** One of the many reasons for the opposition against lateral entry recruitment is the transparency is the lateral entry process. It is essential to select the right people in a manner that is manifestly transparent.
- **Demotivation for Existing Officers:** The direct recruitment of officers at mid-levels of the bureaucracy will affect the existing balance of Officers. This can also demotivate current officers who would have struggled hard to get through to the services in the first place after clearing the UPSC Civil Services Exam.
- **The difference in Organisational Values:** The value systems between the government and the private sector are quite different. It is important to ensure that the people who come in are able to have the skills to adjust to a totally different system of functioning. This is because the government imposes its own limitations.

1.6 KARNATAKA'S ENGINEERING RESEARCH POLICY

- India's first Engineering Research & Development (ER&D) Policy was launched recently by Karnataka.
- **Objective:** To raise Karnataka's contribution to the sector to 45% in the next five years.
- The policy has the potential to create over 50,000 jobs in the ER&D space in five years.
- ER&D has the potential to become a \$100-billion industry in India in the next five years.
- The sector is the fastest growing industry in India with a CAGR of 12.8%.
- The global engineering research and development industry is also expected to reach \$2 trillion by 2025.
- **Five key focus sectors:** Aerospace and defence; auto, auto components and EV; biotechnology, pharma and medical devices; semiconductors, telecom, ESDM; and software products.

1.7 LAND PORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (LPAI)

- 9th Foundation Day of the Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI).
- LPAI is a statutory body established under Land Ports Authority of India Act, 2010.

- The Act gives powers to LPAI to develop, sanitize and manage the facilities for cross-border movement of passengers and goods at designated points along the international borders of India.
- LPAI endeavours to provide safe, secure and systematic facilities for movement of cargo as well as passengers at its ICPs (integrated check-posts).

1.8 HC PUNISHES TWO COLLECTORS FOR CONTEMPT

- The Sircilla Collector and his two subordinates were sentenced to three months' jail by the Telangana high court for wilful violation of the court's order in a contempt case.
- The court also imposed a penalty of Rs 2,000 and directed the convicted officials to pay Rs 10,000 towards legal costs to each of the 11 farmers who moved the court against the errant officials.
- What is the issue?
- Petitioners said land and houses were taken over by the state for constructing Ananthagiri reservoir as part of its Kaleswaram irrigation project.
- They were dispossessed from their fields without awarding compensation and rehabilitation as laid down under the land acquisition Act, 2013.
- Upon completion of the construction of the reservoir, water was released from it resulting in the submergence of their fields and houses.

1.9 UDYOG MANTHAN

- UdyogManthan is being organised from January to March 2021.

About UdyogManthan:

- Organised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, UdyogManthan is a series of focused webinars on promoting quality and productivity in Indian industry.
- The webinars are supported by the National Productivity Council, Bureau of Indian Standards as well as industry chambers like CII, FICCI & ASSOCHAM.
- The webinars aim to draw in best practices and experiences of sector and industry experts to identify challenges related to quality and productivity faced by the Indian industry, with a view of solving them to promote Vocal for Local and ultimately Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- UdyogManthan will cover various sectors including pharma, medical devices, closed circuit camera, electronics system design and manufacturing, new and renewable energy, robotics, aerospace and defence, toys, furniture, etc.

1.10 SUGAMYA BHARAT APP

- Union Minister virtually launches "Sugamyia Bharat App" and handbook "Access – the Photo Digest".

Sugamya Bharat App:

- This crowd sourcing Mobile Application is a means for sensitising and enhancing accessibility in the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign: built environment, transportation sector and ICT ecosystem in India.
- The app provides five main features, 4 of which are directly related to enhancing accessibility, while the fifth is a special feature meant only for Divyangjan for COVID related issues.
- This crowd sourcing will serve the two-fold purpose of generating sensitisation and awareness about the need for accessibility and also bring in a perceptible change in accessible features being provided in built-up spaces, the transportation sector and other services to the disabled.
- The app is available in Hindi and English and several other Indian languages.
- The App is made accessible for ease of use for persons with disabilities also with features such as font size adjustment, colour contrasting option, text to speech, and having an integrated screen reader in Hindi and English.
- The App will be monitored through a Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD).
- The PMU will forward the complaints received through the App to Appropriate Authorities across India.

1.11 EASE OF LIVING INDEX

- Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020 was recently released by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Key Highlights:

- Aim of EoLI: To measure the well-being of Indian citizens in 111 cities, across the pillars of Quality of Life, Economic-ability, and Sustainability
- The EoLI 2020 has also added Citizen Perception Survey in the index, having a weightage of 30%.
- The rankings were announced for cities with a population of more than a million, and cities with less than a million people.
- Top performer in the Million+ category: Bengaluru
- Top performer in Less than Million category: Shimla

How were the cities ranked?

- The analysis categorises them into:
 - 1. Million+ populated cities (those with a population of more than a million).
 - 2. Less than Million populated cities (those with a population of less than a million) along with all the cities under the Smart Cities Program.



1.12 MUNICIPAL PERFORMANCE INDEX

- Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has released the Municipal Performance Index 2020.
- It seeks to simplify and evaluate the complexities in local governance practice and promote the ethos of transparency and accountability.
- Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020:
- The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC, and the three Municipal Corporations) across five verticals which comprise of 20 sectors and 100 indicators in all totality.
- The five verticals under MPI are Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance.

Ranking of cities:

- The assessment framework under MPI 2020 has classified municipalities based on their population- Million+ (municipalities having over a million population) and Less than Million Population.
- In the Million+ category: Indore has emerged as the highest ranked municipality, followed by Surat and Bhopal.
- In the Less than Million category: New Delhi Municipal Council has emerged as the leader, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.

Rank	Municipal Performance Index			
	Population Million+		Population Less than Million	
	Municipality	Score	Municipality	Score
1	Indore	66.08	New Delhi MC	52.92
2	Surat	60.82	Tirupati	51.69
3	Bhopal	59.04	Gandhinagar	51.59
4	Pimpri Chinchwad	59.00	Karnal	51.39
5	Pune	58.79	Salem	49.04
6	Ahmedabad	57.60	Tiruppur	48.92
7	Raipur	54.98	Bilaspur	47.99
8	Greater Mumbai	54.36	Udaipur	47.77
9	Visakhapatnam	52.77	Jhansi	47.04
10	Vadodara	52.68	Tirunelveli	47.02

1.13 HARYANA JOB QUOTA LAW

- Recently the Haryana government notified a new law that requires 75% of private sector jobs in the state, up to a specified salary slab (under Rs 50,000 per month), reserved for local candidate (born in the state or living there for five years)
- Objective: The legislation, the government argued, is aimed at boosting local employment particularly for the youth in unskilled jobs.
- Applicability of the law: The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020, requires all companies, LLPs, trusts, societies and partnership firms with more than 10 employees to follow these local employment requirements
- Enforcement Power: The law specifically empower the district administrations to enforce the new regulations through inspections with a 24-hour notice.

What are the legal issues in such laws?

- The question of domicile reservation in jobs: While domicile quotas in education are fairly common, courts have been reluctant in expanding this to public employment. It raises questions relating to the fundamental right to equality of citizens.
- The issue of forcing the private sector to comply with reservations in employment. For mandating reservation in public employment, the state draws its power from Article 16(4) of the Constitution.

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

- It may not be able to withstand judicial scrutiny on the touchstone of Article 19(1)(g).

What is the Government's rationale in bringing such laws?

- Public sector jobs constitute only a minuscule proportion of all jobs. Therefore, talks about extending the legal protections to the private sector to really achieve the constitutional mandate of equality for all citizens has been on.
- Since private industries use public infrastructure in many ways — from accessing land through subsidised allotment to receiving credit from public banks, tax exemptions and in many cases subsidies for fuel etc, the state has a legitimate right to require them to comply with the reservation policy.

Challenges ahead:

- It poses challenges for industrial development and private investment in Haryana.
- It could also provide a shield to some firms indulging in unethical practices to retrench the existing workforce.
- Investors and businesses may start moving out of the state in search for best human resources.
- Against the spirit of the Constitution, which gives citizens of India the freedom to work anywhere in the country.

1.14 INDIAN SPECIAL FORCES

- Turkmenistan Special Forces Commence Combat Free Fall Training at Indian Special Forces Training School.

Background:

- The Indian Special Forces (SF) have over a period earned immense respect and reputation of being one of the finest Special Forces in the world due to its professionalism, operational expertise, and sacrifice.
- Special Forces of friendly nations including the USA, Australia, countries of Central Asian Region & the Middle East have increasingly shown their desire to train with the battle-hardened Indian SF troops.

What are Indian Special Forces (SF)?

- India has several Special Forces (SF) units.
- These are working under the Command of the Indian Armed Forces, Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.
- There are other special forces which are not controlled by the military but operate under civilian organisations such as Home ministry.

- Major Special Forces (SF) of India:
- MARCOS (Marine Commandos), is a Special Forces unit that was raised by the Indian Navy in 1987 for direct action, special reconnaissance, amphibious warfare and counter-terrorism.
- Para Commandos: Formed in 1966, the Para Commandos are part of the highly-trained Parachute Regiment of the Indian Army and are the largest part of the Special Forces of India. The parachute units of the Indian Army are among the oldest airborne units in the world.
- Ghatak Force: True to its name ghatak, this infantry platoon goes for the kill and spearheads strikes ahead of a battalion. Every infantry battalion in the Indian Army has one platoon and only the most physically fit and motivated soldiers make it to the Ghatak Platoon.
- COBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) is a specialised unit of the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) that was formed to counter Naxalism in India. It's one of the few Indian Special Forces, that's exclusively trained in guerrilla warfare.
- Force One came into being in the year 2010 after the deadly 26/11 terrorist strikes in Mumbai. The prime role of this special elite force is to protect the city of Mumbai from terrorist attacks.
- The National Security Guard is India's premier counter-terrorist force. The NSG provides security to VIPs, conducts anti-sabotage checks, and is responsible for neutralising terrorist threats to vital installations.
- The Special Protection Group: It is a security force of the Government of India that is responsible for the protection of the Prime Minister of India and his immediate family members.

1.15 FSSAI GUIDELINES ON GMO CROPS

- FSSAI issued an order on February 8 setting the permissible limit for genetically modified organisms (GMO) in imported food crops at 1%.
- However, trade organisations have said that this threshold is unacceptably high.
- It amounts to an advocacy for zero presence of GMO in food and some other consumables.

GMO regulation in India:

- The task of regulating GMO levels in imported consumables was initially with the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under the Union environment ministry.
- Its role in this was diluted with the enactment of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and FSSAI was asked to take over approvals of imported goods.

What are Genetically Modified Organisms (Transgenic Organism)?

- In GMO, genetic material (DNA) is altered or artificially introduced using genetic engineering techniques.
- Genetic modification involves the mutation, insertion, or deletion of genes.

- Inserted genes usually come from a different organism (e.g. In Bt cotton, Bt genes from bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* are induced).
- Genetic modification is done to induce a desirable new trait which does not occur naturally in the species.

GM techniques are used in:

- 1. Biological and medical research,
- 2. Production of pharmaceutical drugs,
- 3. Experimental medicine (e.g. gene therapy),
- 4. Agriculture (e.g. golden rice, Bt cotton etc.),
- 5. Genetically modified bacteria to produce the protein insulin,
- 6. To produce biofuels from some GM bacteria, etc.

1.16 SATTRAS

- In poll-bound Assam, the campaigns are sought to be held in the Bartadrava Than/Sattra (monastery) in Nagaon, which is the birthplace of renowned Vaishnavite saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva.

What are Sattras?

- Sattras are monastic institutions created as part of the 16th-century Neo-Vaishnavite reformist movement started by Vaishnavite saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1596).
- As the saint travelled across Assam, spreading his teachings and propagating an egalitarian society, these Sattras/Thans were established as centres of religious, social and cultural reforms in the 16th century.
- These institutions are of paramount importance and lie at the heart of Assamese culture.
- Today, Sattras are spread across the state, promulgating Sankardeva's unique "worship through art" approach with music (borgeet), dance (sattriya) and theatre (bhauna).

Composition of Sattra

- Each Sattra has a naamghar (worship hall) as its nucleus and is headed by an influential "Sattradhikar".
- Monks, known as bhakats, are inducted into Sattras at a young age.
- They may or may not be celibate, depending on the kind of Sattra they are inducted into.

What is Sankardeva's philosophy?

- Sankardeva propagated a form of Bhakti called eka-sharana-naam-dhrama.
- He espoused a society based on equality and fraternity, free from caste differences, orthodox Brahmanical rituals and sacrifices.

- His teaching focused on prayer and chanting (naam) instead of idol worship. His dharma was based on the four components of deva (god), naam (prayers), bhakats (devotees), and guru (teacher).

1.17 HEALTH POLICY ON RARE DISEASES

- The Delhi High Court has asked the Centre to finalise and notify the National Health Policy for Rare Diseases by March 31.

What is a rare disease?

- A rare disease, also referred to as an orphan disease, is any disease that affects a small percentage of the population.
- Most rare diseases are genetic, and are present throughout a person's entire life, even if symptoms do not immediately appear.
- The most common rare diseases recorded in India are:
- Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia and primary immuno deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.

Concerns and challenges:

- They pose a significant challenge to health care systems because of the difficulty in collecting epidemiological data, which in turn impedes the process of arriving at a disease burden, calculating cost estimations and making correct and timely diagnoses, among other problems.
- Many cases of rare diseases may be serious, chronic and life-threatening. In some cases, the affected individuals, mostly children, may also suffer from some form of a handicap.
- As per the 2017 report, over 50 per cent of new cases are reported in children and these diseases are responsible for 35 per cent of deaths in those below the age of one, 10 per cent of deaths between the ages of one and five, and 12 per cent between five and 15.

Efforts by India towards this:

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has published a national policy for the treatment of 450 'rare diseases'.
- The policy intends to kickstart a registry of rare diseases, which will be maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- Under the policy, there are three categories of rare diseases — requiring one-time curative treatment, diseases that require long-term treatment but where the cost is low, and those needing long-term treatments with high cost. Some of the diseases in the first category include osteopetrosis and immune deficiency disorders, among others.

- Financial assistance: As per the policy, the assistance of Rs 15 lakh will be provided to patients suffering from rare diseases that require a one-time curative treatment under the RashtriyaArogyaNidhi scheme. The treatment will be limited to the beneficiaries of PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana.

Justification for State's intervention:

- State has responsibility for providing affordable, accessible and reliable health-care services to every citizen.
- Constitution also mentions importance of health-care services under articles like 21, 38 and 47 and thus state cannot evade this responsibility under the pretext of non-justifiability of articles.
- Even if pharmaceutical companies are incentivized to develop drugs to treat rare diseases, pharmaceutical companies remain beholden to the laws of economics and, given the low demand for orphan drugs, price these drugs as high as they choose to. Hence there has to be regulation of the government in restricting the exorbitant prices of the drugs.

1.18 WORLD HERITAGE SITES

- Lok Sabha was informed about the Declaration of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Key takeaways

- At present, India has 38 World Heritage Properties.
- All the sites are conserved as per ASI's Conservation Policy.
- India has 42 sites listed under Tentative List which is a prerequisite condition for inscription as World Heritage Site.
- 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' has been submitted for nomination of World Heritage Site in 2019-2020.
- Nomination dossiers of 'Santiniketan, India' and 'Sacred Ensemble of Hoysalas' have been submitted to UNESCO for the year 2021-22 cycle.
- Sites are selected on the basis of their potential for fulfilling criteria under Operational Guidelines and demonstration of Outstanding Universal Value.

1.19 VAN DHAN VIKAS KENDRAS

- The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans.
- It mainstreams the tribal community by promoting primary level value addition to MFP at grassroots level.
- 1770 Van Dhan Kendras Sanctioned so Far in 22 States and One UT.

- Significance: Through this initiative, the share of tribals in the value chain of Non-Timber Forest Produce is expected to rise from the present 20% to around 60%.

Implementation:

- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.
- Composition: As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van DhanVikasKendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas.

1.20 SUN TEMPLE AT KONARK

- Several steps have been taken by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to mitigate the impact of saline action, water logging, erosion and vegetative intrusions on monuments, including the Sun Temple, Konark.

About Sun Temple, Konark:

- The Konark Sun temple is dedicated to the Hindu sun god Surya, and, conceived as a giant stone chariot with 12 wheels, it is the most famous of the few sun temples built in India.
- It was built around 1240 or 1250 CE by King Narasimhadeva I (r. 1238-1264 CE) of the Eastern Ganga dynasty.
- It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984.

Architecture:

- The temple is built in the Kalinga style of temple architecture, which is a sub-type of the Nagara style.
- Its shikhara which was said to be 70m high fell in the 19th century.
- The jagamohana (mandapa) has survived. This is the largest enclosed space in Hindu architecture although it is not accessible any more.
- The temple is set on a high base. There are detailed carvings. There are 12 pairs of gigantic wheels sculpted with spokes and hubs representing the chariot wheels of the sun god. The whole temple resembles a processional chariot.
- On the southern wall, there is a huge sculpture of Surya or sun god made of greenstone. It is believed that there were 3 more such images in different directions made out of different stones. The fourth wall had the doorway from which the sun rays would enter the garbhagriha.

- The temple is beautifully sculptured with visually overwhelming narratives.
- It attracts many tourists every year.
- The Konark Sun Temple is depicted on the reverse side of the Indian currency note of Rs 10 to signify its importance to Indian cultural heritage
- The temple was called 'Black Pagoda' in European sailor accounts as early as 1676 because it looked a great tower which appeared black.
- This temple, along with the Puri Jagannath Temple, served as important landmarks for sailors in the Bay of Bengal.

1.21 **DISHA BILL, 2020**

- The Union government informed the Lok Sabha that an inter-ministerial consultation for the Andhra Pradesh Disha (Special Courts for Specified Offences against Women and Children) Bill, 2020, had been initiated.
- The Bill paves the way for awarding the death penalty for rape and gang rape.
- The Bill was reserved by the Governor for the assent of the President.
- Bills received from States for the assent of the President are processed in consultation with the nodal ministries/departments.

Key features of the Bill:

- It envisages the completion of the investigation in seven days and the trial in 14 working days, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months.
- It prescribes life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children and includes Section 354 F and 354 G in IPC.
- In cases of harassment of women through social or digital media, the Act states two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions. For this, a new Section 354 E will be added in IPC, 1860.
- As per the Bill, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called the 'Women & Children Offenders Registry'. This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.

The government will establish exclusive special courts in each district to ensure a speedy trial.

- These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.
- The government will constitute special police teams at the district level to be called District Special Police Team to be headed by DSP for investigation of offences related to women and children.

- The government will also appoint a special public prosecutor for each exclusive special court.

1.22 **NO-TRUST VOTE**

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

What is a No-Confidence Motion?

- A Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly and it remains in office till it enjoys the confidence of majority.
- Therefore, a motion of no-confidence is moved to remove the council of ministers and to remove the government from the office.

Constitutional provisions:

- According to the Article 75 of the Indian Constitution, council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha and as per Article 164, the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the State.
- Lok Sabha/Legislative Assembly can remove the ministry from the office by passing a no-confidence motion.
- Lok Sabha Rule 198 specifies the procedure for a motion of no-confidence.
- What is the procedure to move a No-Confidence Motion?
- Against the Government, a motion of No-Confidence Motion can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha under rule 198.
- There should be a minimum of 50 members to accept the motion. If not, then the motion fails. Before 10 am, any member may provide written notice.
- The motion of no-confidence is read by the Speaker within the House and asks all those favouring the motion to rise.
- If 50 MPS are there in favour then the Speaker could allot a date for discussing the motion. But this has to be done within 10 days.
- Then, the motion is put to vote and can be conducted through Voice Vote, Division of Votes or other means.
- If the government loses a confidence motion or if the no-confidence motion is accepted by the majority then the government has to resign.

What are the conditions related to no-confidence motion?

- It can be moved only in the Lok Sabha or State Assembly as the case may be. It cannot be moved in the Rajya Sabha or State Legislative Council.
- The no-confidence motion is moved against the entire Council of Ministers and not individual ministers or private members.

1.23 NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) moved the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to the Lok Sabha where it proposed that “government” in Delhi means the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.
- The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G of Delhi even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.
- The Delhi state govt has criticized the bill saying that it seeks to drastically curtail powers of the elected government”, which is “against” the Supreme Court judgment of 2018.

KEY CHANGES PROPOSED

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Govt must obtain 'opinion' of LG before implementing any decision, including ones taken by council of ministers ➤ 'Government', referred to in any law to be made by assembly, shall mean LG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ LG can specify all matters on which his 'opinion' is to be sought ➤ Assembly or any of its committee can't conduct inquiries on administrative decisions and all rules made in contravention shall be void
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“
 BJP seeks to drastically curtail powers of elected government... Bill is contrary to Constitution Bench judgment. We strongly condemn BJP's unconstitutional and anti-democracy move
 - Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal

NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- Among the major proposed amendments, one makes it explicitly clear that the term “government” in any law made by the Legislative Assembly shall mean the L-G.
- This, essentially, gives effect to the former L-G 2015 assertion that “Government means the Lieutenant Governor of the NCT of Delhi appointed by the President under Article 239 and designated as such under Article 239 AA of the Constitution”.
- The Bill adds that the L-G’s opinion shall be obtained before the government takes any executive action based on decisions taken by the Cabinet or any individual minister.

What purpose does the 1991 Act serve?

- Delhi’s current status as a UT with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the 69th Amendment Act through which Articles 239AA and 239BB were introduced in the Constitution.
- The Act was passed simultaneously to supplement the constitutional provisions relating to the Assembly and the Council of Ministers in the national capital.
- For all practical purposes, it outlined the powers of the Assembly, the discretionary powers enjoyed by the L-G, and the duties of the CM with respect to the need to furnish information to the L-G.
- What is the 2018 Supreme Court Verdict?

- In its 2018 verdict, the five-judge Bench had held that the LG's concurrence is not required on issues other than police, public order and land.
- It had added that decisions of the Council of Ministers will, however, have to be communicated to the LG.
- The L-G was bound by the aid and advice if the council of ministers, it had said.
- The Bench of then CJI status of the LG of Delhi is not that of a Governor of a State, rather he remains an Administrator, in a limited sense, working with the designation of Lieutenant Governor".
- It had also pointed out that the elected government must keep in mind that Delhi is not a state.

Special Status for New Delhi

- Article 239AA of the Constitution of India granted Special Status to Delhi among Union Territories (UTs) in the year 1991 through the 69th constitutional amendment.
- It provided a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers responsible to such Assembly with appropriate powers.
- That's when Delhi was named as the National Capital Region (NCT) of Delhi.
- As per this article – Public Order, Police & Land in NCT of Delhi fall within the domain and control of Central Government which shall have the power to make laws on these matters.
- For remaining matters of State List or Concurrent List, in so far as any such matter is applicable to UTs, the Legislative Assembly shall have the power to make laws for NCT of Delhi.

1.24 PRADHAN MANTRI SWASTHYA SURAKSHA NIDHI (PMSSN)

- Union Cabinet recently approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN), a single non-lapsable reserve fund for health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.
- In the 2018 Budget, the Central government while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3% Education Cess by 4% Health and Education Cess.
- Major benefits of PMSSN: It will enhance access to universal and affordable health care

PradhanMantriSwasthyaSurakshaNidhi scheme features

- 1.A non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account.
- 2.Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
- 3.Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare namely, Ayushman Bharat – PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana (AB-PMJAY), Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya SurakshaYojana (PMSSY)
- 4.Emergency& disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies

- 5. Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017. Administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- 6. In any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the MoHFW would be initially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).

1.25 CABLE TELEVISION NETWORKS (REGULATION) ACT, 1995

- The Karnataka High Court has ordered issue of notices to the Centre and the State government and 70 media platforms, including newspapers, on a petition seeking a direction to the authorities to take steps to safeguard the right to privacy of individuals and ensure that media outlets don't invade the privacy of individuals by breaching law.

What has the Court said?

- Any broadcast in the media, governed by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, should be strictly in conformity with the terms of "Programme Code" defined under this Act.
- The media platforms also include TV channels, online news portals, news agencies, social networking and micro-blogging service providers, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

About the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995:

- The law prescribes imprisonment up to two years or fine up to Rs. 1,000 or both for the first offence, and imprisonment up to five years and with fine up to Rs. 5,000 if any media governed under the CTN Act violates the provisions and the "Programme Code".
- The code, which contains an elaborate list of don'ts for cable TV channels, states that no programme should be aired that contains anything obscene, defamatory, false, and suggests innuendos and half-truths.

Challenges in implementation of the law:

- Section 20 of the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, states that the government can regulate or prohibit the transmission or retransmission of any programme that it feels is not in conformity with the Programme and Advertising Code, which oversees television content in India.
- However, there is no body to pre-certify content for TV. The Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC), under the I&B Ministry, monitors the content telecast on private TV channels to check if they adhere to the Programme and Advertising Code.
- Specific complaints on code violations are looked into by an inter-ministerial committee (IMC).

Role of tv channels:

- As per Rule 6 of the Cable TV Network Rules, it is also the responsibility of the channel to ensure its programmes are not violative of the programme code.

- Sub-section ‘c’ of Rule 6 specifically mentions that programmes that contain attacks on religions or communities or visuals or words contemptuous of religious groups or which promote communal attitudes should not be carried in the cable service.

Need for these measures:

- Airing of sensitive video footages may be a total disregard to a person’s right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution”.
- With private lives of the citizens being splattered over the media be it through social networking sites or spy cameras, protection is needed so that citizens can function in a way they want to and not think of others before their actions.

1.26 DANDI MARCH

- The Prime Minister has flagged off a commemorative ‘Dandi March’ (on 12th March) to launch the celebrations of the 75th year of Independence – ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’.

About the 2021 Dandi March:

- The padayatra is being undertaken by 81 marchers from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi in Navsari, a journey of 386 km. The march will end after 25 days, on 5th April 2020.
- Descendants of those who walked the Salt March (in 1930) will be honored.
- Marchers will traverse the route in memory of the 78 who accompanied Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 from Ahmedabad to Dandi and two others who had joined mid-route.
- Big events will be organized at six places associated with Gandhi. These include MK Gandhi’s birthplace Porbandar, along with Rajkot, Vadodara, Bardoli (Surat), Mandvi (Kutch), and Dandi (Navsari).
- Cultural programs are planned at 21 spots on the route at the nightly stops for the walkers.

About the 1930 Dandi March:

- The Dandi March, also known as the Salt March and the Dandi Satyagraha was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.
- The march lasted from 12th March 1930 to 6th April 1930 as a direct action campaign of tax resistance and non violent protest against the British salt monopoly.
- On 12th March, Gandhiji set out from Sabarmati with 78 followers on a 241-mile march to the coastal town of Dandi on the Arabian Sea.
- There, Gandhi and his supporters were to defy British policy by making salt from seawater.
- At Dandi, thousands more followed his lead, and in the coastal cities of Bombay and Karachi, Indian nationalists led crowds of citizens in making salt.
- Civil disobedience broke out all across India, soon involving millions of Indians, and British authorities arrested more than 60,000 people.

- Gandhiji himself was arrested on 5th May, but the satyagraha continued without him.
- On 21st May, the poet Sarojini Naidu led 2,500 marchers on the Dharasana Salt Works, some 150 miles north of Bombay.
- The incident, recorded by American journalist Webb Miller, prompted an international outcry against British policy in India.
- In January 1931, Gandhiji was released from prison.
- He later met with Lord Irwin, the viceroy of India, and agreed to call off the satyagraha in exchange for an equal negotiating role at a London conference on India's future.
- In August 1931, Gandhiji traveled to the conference as the sole representative of the nationalist Indian National Congress.
- The meeting was a disappointment, but British leaders had acknowledged him as a force they could not suppress or ignore.

1.27 SC'S RULE OVER STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

- The Supreme Court has held that independent persons and not serving bureaucrats should be appointed as State Election Commissioners.
- **Key takeaways**
- Giving Government employees the additional charge of State Election Commissioners is a "mockery of the Constitution".
- It directed that the States should appoint independent persons as Election Commissioners all across India.

Article 243K

- Article 243K deals with the Elections to the Panchayats.
- It states that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for and the conduct of all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission.
- It shall consist of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.
- The conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may by rule determine.
- The State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court.
- The conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

1.28 PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT

- The Supreme Court has asked the government to respond to a plea challenging the Places of Worship Act enacted in 1991 which freezes the status of places of worship as it was on August 15, 1947.

What is the issue?

- A petition has been filed in the court terming the law as “arbitrary, irrational and retrospective”.
- The cut-off date (August 15, 1947) as per the law bars Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from approaching courts to “re-claim” their places of worship which were “invaded” and “encroached” upon by “fundamentalist barbaric invaders”.
- The petitioner also said the Sections of the Act that dealt with the bar on legal claims were against the principles of secularism.

What is the objective of the Act?

- The aim of the Act was to freeze the status of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.
- It was also to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of such a place of worship as on that day.
- It was intended to pre-empt new claims by any group about the past status of any place of worship and attempts to reclaim the structures or the land on which they stood.
- It was hoped that the legislation would help the preservation of communal harmony in the long run.

Key features:

- The Act declares that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947.
- It says no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- It declares that all suits, appeals or any other proceedings regarding converting the character of a place of worship, which are pending before any court or authority on August 15, 1947, will abate as soon as the law comes into force. No further legal proceedings can be instituted.

Exceptions:

- These provisions will not apply to:
- Ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- A suit that has been finally settled or disposed of; and any dispute that has been settled by the parties or conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence before the Act commenced.

- The Act also does not apply to the place of worship commonly referred to as Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. This law will have overriding effect over any other law in force.

1.29 INDEX MONITORING CELL (IMC)

- Pointing out that the right to dissent should be the central focus of press freedom, independent journalist P. Sainath struck a dissenting note in the report submitted by the Index Monitoring Cell (IMC).



About:

- The Index Monitoring Cell (IMC) was set up by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry with stakeholders to improve India's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index and to evolve an objective yardstick to gauge media freedom.
- The 15-member committee, which had four meetings between May and December last year, has four journalists and government functionaries.
- Chaired by Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia, Principal Director General of the Press Information Bureau, the committee has 10 government employees.

Recommendations of report

- Among the key recommendations is the decriminalising of defamation. India is one of the few countries in the world to criminalise defamation.
- The panel has also recommended that consent of the Press Council of India is a prerequisite before filing an FIR against the media or a publication.

1.30 ELECTION COMMISSION ON PARTY SYMBOLS

- The Supreme Court had upheld Kerala High Court's confirmation of an Election Commission order declaring a group led by Jose K. Mani as the official Kerala Congress (Mani) and granting it the official election symbol of 'Two Leaves'.

Background:

- The Kerala High Court had, in November 2020, dismissed the petitions challenging the Election Commission's order declaring the group led by Jose K Mani as the official Kerala Congress (M) and granting it the official election symbol of "two leaves".
- The Court said it cannot, in the exercise of the jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, interfere with the finding of the Commission.

How are symbols allotted to political parties?

- As per the guidelines, to get a symbol allotted:
- A party/candidate has to provide a list of three symbols from the EC's free symbols list at the time of filing nomination papers.
- Among them, one symbol is allotted to the party/candidate on a first-come-first-serve basis.
- When a recognised political party splits, the Election Commission takes the decision on assigning the symbol.

Powers of Election Commission:

- The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the EC to recognise political parties and allot symbols.
- Under Paragraph 15 of the Order, it can decide disputes among rival groups or sections of a recognised political party staking claim to its name and symbol.
- The EC is also the only authority to decide issues on a dispute or a merger. The Supreme Court upheld its validity in Sadiq Ali and another vs. ECI in 1971.

How many types of symbols are there?

- As per the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) (Amendment) Order, 2017, party symbols are either:
- Reserved: Eight national parties and 64 state parties across the country have "reserved" symbols.
- Free: The Election Commission also has a pool of nearly 200 "free" symbols that are allotted to the thousands of unrecognised regional parties that pop up before elections.

1.31 ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

- Nominated MP Swapan Dasgupta has resigned from Rajya Sabha, a year before completion of his term.

Issue

- The opposition had raised the issue of his disqualification from Rajya Sabha under the anti-defection law because the BJP had fielded Dasgupta as its candidate for Tarakeswar constituency in the West Bengal Assembly elections.

Who are Nominated members?

- The Rajya Sabha has 12 nominated members from different walks of life.
- The broad criterion for their nomination is that they should have distinguished themselves in fields like literature, science, art, and social service.
- The President nominates such individuals as recommended by the Centre.
- Nominated members have the same rights and privileges as elected members, with one notable difference — they cannot vote in the election of the President.

Anti-defection law:

- In 1985 the Tenth Schedule, popularly known as the anti-defection law, was added to the Constitution.
- The purpose of the Amendment was to bring stability to governments by deterring MPs and MLAs from changing their political parties on whose ticket they were elected.
- The penalty for shifting political loyalties is the loss of parliamentary membership and a bar on becoming a minister.
- The law specifies the circumstances under which changing of political parties by MPs invite action under the law. It covers three types of scenarios with respect to an MP switching parties:
- When a member elected on the ticket of a political party “voluntarily gives up” membership of such a party or votes in the House contrary to the wishes of the party.
- When an MP who has won his or her seat as an independent candidate after the election joins a political party.
- For nominated MPs, the law specifies that within six months of being nominated to the House, they can choose to join a political party. But, if they join a party thereafter, then they lose their seat in Parliament.

1.32 ORUNUDOI SCHEME

- Through Orunodoi — announced in the 2020-21 Budget — monthly assistance of Rs 830 is transferred to women members of marginalised families of Assam.
- On account of being a DBT, or a Direct Benefit Transfer scheme, the money is credited directly to the bank account of the woman head of a family because they are primary caretakers of the household.
- The scheme gives a choice to the poor and needy households on how they want to spend their money.

Eligibility criteria

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

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

1.33 MULLAPERIYAR DAM ISSUE

- The Supreme Court has issued a warning to Tamil Nadu in the Mullaperiyar case.

What did the court say?

- Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary will be “personally responsible” and “appropriate action” will be taken on failure to give information on the ‘rule curve’ for the Mullaperiyar dam to the Supreme Court-appointed Supervisory Committee.
- The Supervisory Committee should issue directions or take steps to address the three core safety issues — the monitoring and performance of the instrumentation of the dam, finalising the ‘rule curve’ and fixing the gate operating schedule — and submit a compliance report in four weeks.

What is the issue?

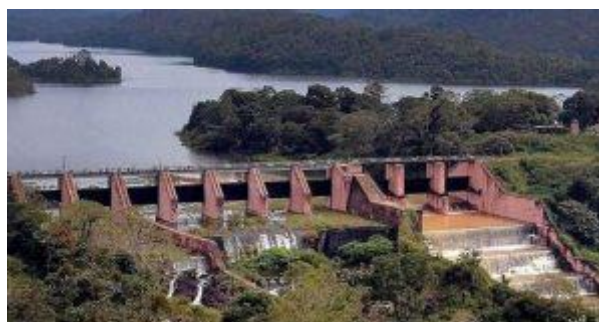
- The Kerala government has accused Tamil Nadu of adopting an “obsolete” gate operation schedule dating back to 1939. It has also expressed apprehensions about the lack of proper supervision of water levels in the dam located along the Periyar tiger reserve.

What is the rule curve?

- The ‘rule curve’ in a dam decides the fluctuating storage levels in a reservoir. The gate opening schedule of a dam is based on the ‘rule curve’. It is part of the “core safety” mechanism in a dam.

Mullaperiyar Dam

- Although the dam is located in Kerala, it is operated by Tamil Nadu following an 1886 lease indenture for 999 years (the Periyar Lake Lease Agreement) that was signed between the Maharaja of Travancore and the Secretary of State for India for the Periyar Irrigation works.
- Constructed between 1887 and 1895, the dam redirected the river to flow towards the Bay of Bengal, instead of the Arabian Sea and provide water to the arid rain region of Madurai in Madras Presidency.
- The dam is located on the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Kerala’s Idukki district.



- What does Tamil Nadu say?
- Tamil Nadu claims that although it has undertaken measures to strengthen the dam, the Kerala government has blocked any attempt to raise the reservoir water level – resulting in losses for Madurai farmers.

Kerala's arguments:

- Kerala, however, highlights fears of devastation by residents living downstream in the earthquake-prone District of Idukki.
- Scientists have argued that if there is an earthquake in the region measuring above six on the Richter scale, the lives of over three million people will come under grave danger.

1.34 NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEXTILES MISSION

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) had, in 2020, approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at a total outlay of Rs. 1,480 Crore.
- Aim:
- To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.
- The Mission will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components:
- The first component will focus on research and development and innovation and will have an outlay of Rs. 1,000 crores.
- The research will be at both fiber level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports, and mobile textiles and the development of bio-degradable technical textiles.
- The second component will be for the promotion and development of the market for technical textiles.
- The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to \$40 billion to \$50 billion by 2024.
- The third component will focus on export promotion so that technical textile exports from the country reach from the Rs. 14,000 crore now to Rs. 20,000 crore by 2021-2022 and ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.
- The last component will be on education, training, and skill development.

Technical textiles:

- Technical textiles are defined as textile materials and products manufactured primarily for their technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics.
- Depending upon their application areas, Technical Textiles products are divided into 12 broad categories: Agrotech, Buildtech, Clothtech, Geotech, Homotech, Indutech, Mobiltech, Meditech, Protech, Sportstech, Oekotech, Packtech.

1.35 CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED CASTES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021

- Passed in Lok Sabha recently.
- It seeks to put seven castes under one nomenclature of “DevendrakulaVellalars” with some exceptions for some of the castes in certain districts of Tamil Nadu.
- The castes include Devendrakulathan, Kadaiyan, Kalladi, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Vathiriyan.

1.36 SAAMAR CAMPAIGN

- The Jharkhand government announced the launch of SAAMAR (Strategic Action for Alleviation of Malnutrition and Anemia Reduction) campaign to tackle malnutrition in the state.
- The campaign aims to identify anaemic women and malnourished children and converge various departments to effectively deal with the problem in a state where malnutrition has been a major problem.
- SAAMAR has been launched with a 1000 days target, under which annual surveys will be conducted to track the progress.

1.37 VOTER VERIFIABLE PAPER AUDIT TRAIL (VVPAT)

- The Election Commission has decided to use Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) along with Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) at all the Polling Stations in the upcoming assembly elections in four states and Union territory.

Q WHAT IS VVPAT?

A. Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) helps voters to physically confirm the choice they have made. It consists of:

- A printer that gives a record of voters' selection
- A display unit that shows any error

Q HOW IT WORKS?

A. The printed VVPAT slip is displayed for 7 seconds before it is automatically cut and delivered to a sealed ballot compartment

Q WHAT THE VVPAT SLIP CONTAINS?

A.

- A candidate serial number
- Name of the candidate
- Corresponding symbol.

VVPAT paper roll is designed for printing **1,500** ballot slips for each election

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

Significance and the need for VVPATs:

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

1.38 LEGAL DRINKING AGE IN DELHI REDUCED

- The Delhi government announced that the legal drinking age in the national capital has been lowered to 21 from the existing 25.
- Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said an international test lab will be set up here to check the quality of liquor being supplied into the city, and the concept of 'Age Gating' will be introduced.
- As per new norms, the shops will not have any counter facing towards the road. Liquor sale and pick up will only take place inside the shop and nothing will take place outside the shop.
- The liquor shop owner will have to ensure law and order outside the shop. If needed, they can take the help of police or CCTV or security guard but ensuring law and order will be the responsibility of the liquor-shop owners. No drinking outside the shop, no hawkers will be allowed.

1.39 RIGHT TO COUNSEL IN CUSTODY

- Arrested Mumbai policeman Sachin Waze has sought his lawyer's presence during questioning, while the NIA has argued that this insistence is hampering the probe.

Is access to a lawyer the right of an accused?

- In India, the safeguards available to a person in such circumstances are enshrined in the Constitution.

- Article 20 (3) states: “No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself”.
- Article 22 states that a person cannot be denied the right to consult and to be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. This includes provisions that grant an accused the “right to consult” a lawyer.
- Section 41D of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) states that an accused is entitled to “meet an advocate of his choice during interrogation, though not throughout interrogation”.

Supreme Court judgments:

In the D K Basu case of 1997:

- The Court considered the guiding principles to be followed by investigating agencies in cases of arrest or detention.
- The judgment states that “an arrestee may be permitted to meet his lawyer during interrogation, though not throughout the interrogation”.
- The Supreme Court stressed the safeguards for accused, but also spoke of “difficulties in detection of crimes”, especially in cases of “hardcore criminals”, and ruled that a lawyer cannot be permitted to remain present throughout the interrogation.
- In Senior Intelligence Officer vs Jugal Kishore Sharma (2011):
- It allowed the accused’s lawyer to “watch the proceedings from a distance or from beyond a glass partition”, but said “he will not be within the hearing distance and it will not be open to the respondent to have consultations with him in course of the interrogation”.
- However, in many criminal cases, it is left to the discretion of the Court that has remanded an accused to the custody of the police, to decide on whether the lawyer can be permitted to meet the person for a stipulated time in private when interrogation is not in progress.

1.40 CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019 (CAA)

- The government has been granted time till April 9 by Lok Sabha and July 9 by Rajya Sabha to frame rules under the citizenship law.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was notified on December 12, 2019 and came into force from January 10, 2020.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The Citizenship Act, 1955 provides various ways in which citizenship may be acquired.
- It provides for citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and by incorporation of the territory into India.

About CAA:

- The objective of the CAA is to grant Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities — Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian — from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.
- Those from these communities who had come to India till December 31, 2014, facing religious persecution in their respective countries, will not be treated as illegal immigrants but given Indian citizenship.
- The Act provides that the central government may cancel the registration of OCIs on certain grounds.

Exceptions:

- The Act does not apply to tribal areas of Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya because of being included in the 6th Schedule of the Constitution.
- Also, areas that fall under the Inner Limit notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, will also be outside the Act's purview.

1.41 ATTORNEY GENERAL

- Attorney General of India K.K. Venugopal has denied consent to the initiation of contempt proceedings against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on the basis of a plea that he scandalised the judiciary in an interview.
- The Attorney General said no specific mentions were made about the Supreme Court or its judges.

What is the law on Contempt of courts?

- The Contempt of Courts Act 1971 defines Civil and Criminal contempt, and lays down the powers and procedures by which courts can penalise contempt, as well as the penalties that can be given for the offence of contempt.
- Contempt of Court is the offence of being disobedient to or disrespectful toward a Court of law and its officers in the form of behavior that opposes or defies the authority, justice and dignity of the Court.
- Why is the consent of the Attorney General required to initiate contempt proceedings?
- The objective behind requiring the consent of the Attorney General before taking cognizance of a complaint is to save the time of the Court.
- This is necessary because judicial time is squandered if frivolous petitions are made and the court is the first forum for bringing them in.
- The AG's consent is meant to be a safeguard against frivolous petitions, as it is deemed that the AG, as an officer of the court, will independently ascertain whether the complaint is indeed valid.

Under what circumstances is the AG's consent not needed?

- The AG's consent is mandatory when a private citizen wants to initiate a case of contempt of court against a person.

- However, when the Court itself initiates a contempt of Court case the AG's consent is not required.
- This is because the Court is exercising its inherent powers under the Constitution to punish for contempt and such Constitutional powers cannot be restricted because the AG declined to grant consent.

What happens if the AG denies consent?

- If the AG denies consent, the matter all but ends.
- The complainant can, however, separately bring the issue to the notice of the Court and urge the Court to take suomotu cognizance.
- Article 129 of the Constitution gives the Supreme Court the power to initiate contempt cases on its own, independent of the motion brought before it by the AG or with the consent of the AG.

1.42 NATIONAL SCIENCE DAY

- National Science Day is celebrated every year on 28 February to mark the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by Sir C.V. Raman on 28 February 1928.
- It was this discovery that got Sir C.V. Raman a Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930.

Significance of National Science Day

- The NSD is celebrated with a view to spread the message about the significance of science and how it improves the daily lives of the common folk. In addition its celebration also has the following objectives in mind.
- 1. Display all activities, efforts and achievements in the field of science
- 2. To provide opportunity those citizens of India interested in science
- 3. To foster and encourage interest in science and technology.
- Theme: "Future of STI: Impacts on Education, Skills, and Work".

1.43 KHUJLI GHAR

- Some villages in Nagaland are trying to revive a traditional form of punishment that seeks to check crime with an itch in time.

What is Khujli Ghar?

- Social offenders or violators of Naga customary laws have over the ages dreaded a cramped, triangular cage made from the logs of an indigenous tree that irritates the skin.
- The dread is more of humiliation or loss of face within the community or clan than of spending at least a day scratching furiously without any space to move.
- Such itchy cages are referred to as khujli ghar in Nagamese but each Naga community has its own name.
- The Aos, one of the major tribes of Nagaland, call it Shi-ki that means flesh-house.

- The cage is usually placed at a central spot in the village, usually in front of the morung or bachelor's dormitory, for the inmate to be in full public view.
- The cage is made of the logs of Masang-fung, a local tree that people avoid because of the irritation it causes.
- It does not affect the palm but people who make the cages have to be careful.

1.44 CATCH THE RAIN CAMPAIGN

- National Water Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti had launched a campaign "Catch the Rain" with the tag line "Catch the rain, where it falls when it falls" in 2020.
- It aims to nudge the states and all stakeholders to create Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suitable to the climatic conditions and sub-soil strata, with people's active participation.
- Launched in collaboration with the "Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan" (NYKS) involving Youth Clubs in 623 districts across the country.

1.45 SWACHHTA SAARTHI FELLOWSHIPS

- Swachhta Saarthi Fellowships launched by The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser.

Details:

- The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to GOI launched the "Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship" to recognize students, community workers/self-help groups, and municipal/sanitary workers who are engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably.
- It is part of the "Waste to Wealth" Mission.
- The Waste to Wealth Mission is one of the nine national missions of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).
- The fellowship is an initiative to empower young innovators who are engaged in community work of waste management/awareness campaigns/waste surveys/studies, etc. as Swachhta Saarthis and implement actions to reduce waste for a greener planet.
- This fellowship is aimed to empower interested students and citizens to continuously engage in their attempts to reduce waste in cities and rural areas. The fellowship invites applications from students and community workers who have done previous work or are currently engaged in waste management activities, including awareness campaigns, surveys & studies.
- The three categories of awards under the fellowships are as below:
- Category-A – Open to School students from 9th to 12th standards engaged in waste management community work
- Category-B – Open to College students (UG, PG, Research students) engaged in waste management community work

- Category-C – Open to Citizens working in the community and through SHGs, municipal or sanitary workers working beyond specifications of their job requirement/descriptions.

1.46 JANAUSHADHI DIWAS 2021

Context:

- Celebrations of the 3rd Janaushadhi Diwas 2021 kicks off.
- Janaushadhi Diwas is observed on March 7 all over the country.
- The week-long celebrations such as health camps, interactions and rallies have started, especially in the Jan Aushadhi Centres.
- Janaushadhi Diwas 2021 theme: “Sevabhi – Rozgarbhi”.
- Janaushadhi centres are run as part of the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).
- In these centres which are run by the Bureau of Pharma PSUs in India (BPPI), generic medicines are sold at 50% to 90% lesser prices as compared to the market prices of branded medicines.

1.47 SUB-MISSION ON AGROFORESTRY (SMAF) SCHEME

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Central Silk Board on a convergence model for the implementation of Agroforestry in the silk sector under the ongoing Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme.

Significance:

- The signing of this MoU aims to incentivize the farmers to take up sericulture based Agroforestry models thereby contributing to the Make in India and Make for the World vision.
- This linkage will add another dimension to agroforestry for faster returns to the growers as well as support the production of the range of silks that India is famous for.

About the Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF):

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC & FW) has been implementing the Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) since 2016-17 as part of the recommendation of the National Agroforestry Policy 2014.
- This sub-mission is under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- India was the first country to have such a comprehensive policy which was launched at the World Agroforestry Congress held in Delhi in February 2014.
- At present, the scheme is being implemented in 20 States and 2 UTs.

Aim of the mission:

- SMAF aims to encourage farmers to plant multi-purpose trees together with the agriculture crops for climate resilience and an additional source of income to the farmers, as well as enhanced feedstock to inter alia wood-based and herbal industry.

1.48 MT SWARNA KRISHNA VESSEL

- Union Minister has flagged off an all-women crew onboard Shipping Corporation of India(SCI) vessel named “MT Swarna Krishna”. This initiative was taken to celebrate International Women’s Day.
- This is the first time in the world maritime history that a ship is being sailed by all women officers.
- The move also demonstrated the gradual shift in the perception of seafaring as a male-oriented profession and the principles of Diversity & Inclusion that SCI upholds.
- MT Swarna Krishna was built in 2010. It is a shipping tanker of the Shipping Corporation of India Limited(SCI).

Shipping Corporation of India Limited(SCI):

- SCI is a Government of India Public Sector Enterprise. It was established in 1961 by an amalgamation of Eastern Shipping Corporation and Western Shipping Corporation.
- Purpose: It operates and manages vessels that service both the national and international lines.
- Strategic Disinvestment: In 2019, the Union Cabinet had accorded ”in-principle” approval for strategic disinvestment of SCI.
- Headquarters: Mumbai.

1.49 Techbharat 2021

- Techbharat 2021 inaugurated by the Union Health Minister
- It is an e-conclave bringing together stakeholders from HealthTech&Edutech sectors.
- This is the second edition of the e-conclave organised by Laghu Udyog Bharati and the IMS Foundation.
- Techbharat is facilitating interactions & deliberations between thousands of domestic & global participants, including policymakers, government representatives, industry members, investors & start-ups to nurture resourceful partnerships and boost growth in the sectors.

1.50 ANNUAL DEMOCRACY REPORT

- Fifth annual democracy report, titled ‘Autocratisation goes viral’, has been released by Sweden’s organisation Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute.
- The report summarises the state of democracies of the world against the backdrop of developments that have taken place over the past decade.

Highlights of the report:

- **Regarding India:**
- India’s position has been downgraded from “the world’s largest democracy” to an “electoral autocracy”.

- Reasons behind the downgrade: Alleged “muzzling” of the media, and overuse of defamation and sedition laws.
- In censorship, India is now as autocratic as is Pakistan, and worse than both its neighbors Bangladesh and Nepal.
- The use of defamation “frequently used to silence journalists” and the use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) have placed constraints on civil society and gone against the Constitution’s commitment to secularism.
- Universities and authorities have also punished students and activists in universities engaging in protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).”
- However, the report notes that civil society is being increasingly muzzled while organisations aligned with the “Hindutva movement” have gained freedom.

1.51 Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal

- PM pays respects to Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal.
- Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal (1809-1851) was a great thinker and social reformer of the 19th century.
- According to the PM’s message, Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal’s teachings helped society overcome social barriers and united people.
- He emphasised on equality.
- He lived in the princely kingdom of Travancore in the early decades of the 19th century.
- Being the founder of ‘SamathwaSamajam’, an early socio-reform movement in India (1836), AyyaVaikundar is considered as the pioneer of such revolutionary movements in India.
- He was the first to install a mirror for worshipping in South India.
- He was the exponent of a new path of spiritual thoughts named ‘AyyaVazhi’.
- His said, ‘One caste, One religion, One clan, One world, One God’.
- He led an agitation known as the Mel MunduSamaram.

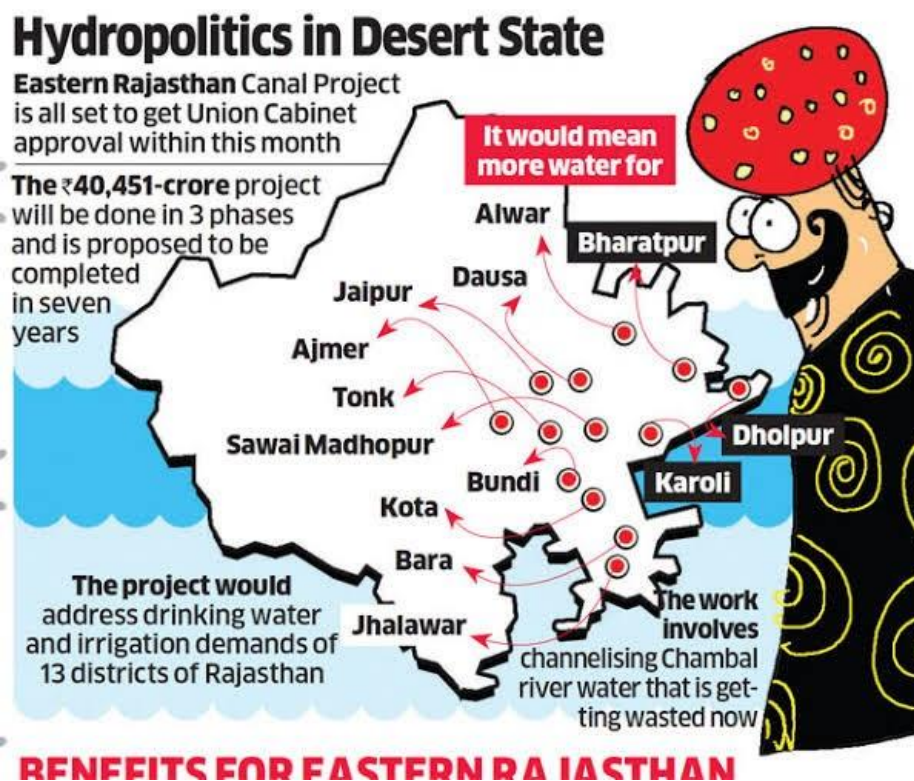
1.52 CHENAB BRIDGE

- The Prime Minister has lauded the completion of Arch closure of the Chenab Bridge, the World’s Highest Railway Bridge in Jammu & Kashmir by Indian Railways.
- The length of the Chenab bridge will be 1,315 metres with 17 spans, of which the span of the main arch across the Chenab river will be 467m.
- The bridge is part of an ambitious 272-km rail link project and is being constructed by the Northern Railway at an estimated cost of ₹28,000 crores.
- The bridge will be able to withstand earthquakes with a magnitude of up to eight and high-intensity blasts.

- The bridge, which will include a 14-metre dual carriageway and a 1.2-metre-wide central verge, will have a design speed of around 100 kilometers per hour with a lifespan of 120 years.

1.53 EASTERN RAJASTHAN CANAL PROJECT (ERCP)

- Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has been strongly demanding national project status for the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP).
- The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project aims to harvest surplus water available during the rainy season in rivers in southern Rajasthan such as Chambal and its tributaries including Kunnu, Parvati, Kalisindh.
- Besides supplying drinking water in 13 districts, the mega project will also provide irrigation water to an additional 2 lakh hectares of land.
- It will also supply water to the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and take care of the flood and drought situation in the area.
- According to the state Water Resources Department, Rajasthan, the largest state of India with a geographical area of 342.52 lakh hectares which amount to 10.4 per cent of the entire country, holds only 1.16 per cent of India's surface water and 1.72 per cent of groundwater.
- Among the state's water bodies, only the Chambal river basin has surplus water. But, this water cannot be tapped directly because the area around the Kota barrage is designated as a crocodile sanctuary.
- Therefore, the ERCP aims to create a network of water channels which will cover 23.67 per cent area of Rajasthan along with 41.13 per cent population of the state.



- Why is the demand of declaring the ERCP as a national project?
- The reason cited by the Chief Minister for wanting the ERCP to be a national project is that its estimated cost is around Rs 40,000 crore, which is not possible to be borne by the state government.

1.54 GANDHI PEACE PRIZE

- The Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by the Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi.
- This annual award will be given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations who have worked selflessly for peace, non-violence and amelioration of human sufferings particularly for the less-privileged sections of society contributing towards social justice and harmony.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
- The 2019 award has been given to (Late) His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman.
- The 2020 award has been conferred upon Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh is celebrating Mujib Borsho (Mujib Year) in 2020-21.
- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.
- The Award may be divided between two persons/institutions who are considered by the Jury to be equally deserving of recognition in a given year.
- The Award is given for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence.
- Some of the previous recipients of the award include Nelson Mandela, Gerhard Fischer (German diplomat), Baba Amte, Ramakrishna Mission, ISRO, AkshayaPatra Foundation, Sulabh International, etc.
- The jury for Gandhi Peace Prize is chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprises two ex-officio members, namely the chief justice of India and leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

1.55 SHAHEED I DIWAS

- PM pays tributes to Martyrs on Shaheedi Diwas.

About Shaheedi Diwas:

- On 23 March 1931, freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar were hanged to death by the British government for their revolutionary activities.
- This day is observed as Shaheedi Diwas or Martyrs' Day in India.
- The day is also known as 'Sarvodaya Day'.
- Read more about the hanging of the young revolutionaries in 'This Day in History' dated March 23.

1.56 GRAM UJALA

- It was launched recently.
- Under this program Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL), a wholly owned subsidiary of Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), will distribute high quality LED bulbs, at an affordable cost of Rs. 10 per bulb in rural areas.

Implementation:

- 7 watt and 12-watt LED bulbs with 3 years warranty will be given to rural consumers against submission of working Incandescent bulbs.
- Each household will get up to 5 LEDs.
- Participating rural households will also have metres installed in their houses to account for usage.

Financing Mechanism:

- The programme will be financed entirely through carbon credits and will be the first such programme in India.
- The revenue earned from carbon credits will contribute Rs. 60 per LED bulb piece, with the balance Rs. 10 to be paid by the rural consumer.

1.57 LACHIT BORPHUKAN

- The Prime Minister (in an election campaign) has called 17th-century Ahom General Lachit Borphukan a symbol of India's "atmanirbhar" military might.
- In 1671, the decisive Battle of Saraighat was fought on the raging waters of the Brahmaputra.
- On one side was Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's army headed by Ram Singh of Amer (Jaipur) and on the other was the Ahom General Lachit Borphukan.
- He was a commander in the Ahom kingdom, located in present-day Assam.
- Ram Singh failed to make any advance against the Assamese army during the first phase of the war.
- Lachit Borphukan emerged victorious in the war and the Mughals were forced to retreat from Guwahati.

Lachit Diwas

- On 24 November each year, Lachit Divas is celebrated statewide in Assam to commemorate the heroism of Lachit Borphukan.
- On this day, Borphukan has defeated the Mughal army on the banks of the Brahmaputra in the Battle of Saraighat in 1671.
- The best passing out cadet of National Defence Academy has conferred the Lachit gold medal every year since 1999 commemorating his valour.



1.58 SHIGMO

- Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa. It is a vibrant celebration full of colour, song and dance rooted in Goan culture and traditions.
- Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.
- Folk dances like Ghodemodini (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi are among the many dances performed by the participating communities.



1.59 HAPPINESS CURRICULUM

- Uttar Pradesh government is likely to introduce a 'happiness curriculum' as a pilot project from this academic session.
- To be called 'realisation curriculum', it would be introduced in Mathura schools this session onwards.

Objectives:

- The purpose to launch the curriculum in UP is to support students in their journey to sustainable happiness through engagement in meaningful and reflective stories and activities.
- What is Happiness Curriculum?
- The happiness curriculum was first introduced by the Delhi government in 2018.

- The curriculum calls for schools to promote development in cognition, language, literacy, numeracy and the arts along with addressing the wellbeing and happiness of students.

How is the curriculum implemented?

- The curriculum is designed for students of classes nursery through the eighth standard.
- Group 1 consists of students in nursery and KG, who have bi-weekly classes (45 minutes each for one session, which is supervised by a teacher) involving mindfulness activities and exercise. Children between classes 1-2 attend classes on weekdays, which involves mindfulness activities and exercises along with taking up reflective questions.
- The second group comprises students from classes 3-5 and the third group is comprised of students from classes 6-8 who apart from the aforementioned activities, take part in self-expression and reflect on their behavioural changes.

The learning outcomes of this curriculum are spread across four categories:

- Becoming mindful and attentive (developing increased levels of self-awareness, developing active listening, remaining in the present).
- Developing critical thinking and reflection (developing strong abilities to reflect on one's own thoughts and behaviours, thinking beyond stereotypes and assumptions).
- Developing social-emotional skills (demonstrating empathy, coping with anxiety and stress).
- Developing better communication skills and developing a confident and pleasant personality (developing a balanced outlook on daily life reflecting self-confidence, becoming responsible and reflecting awareness towards cleanliness, health and hygiene).

How is assessment carried out?

- For the evaluation, no examinations are conducted, neither will marks be awarded. The assessment under this curriculum is qualitative, focusing on the “process rather than the outcome” and noting that each student's journey is unique and different.

1.60 TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY DESK

- A ‘Transgender Community Desk’ was inaugurated at Gachibowli Police Station, Telangana.
- It is India's first-of-its-kind gender inclusive community policing initiative.
- The desk will be managed by a police liaison officer and a transgender person who is designated as community coordinator.
- It will be the focal point for all grievance redressal (violence, discrimination, etc.) among the transgender community of the district.
- It will also provide counselling, legal aid, soft skills training, job placements, etc. in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and District Legal Services Authority.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1 PAKISTAN TO REMAIN ON FATF GREY LIST

- FATF has decided to keep Pakistan on its terrorism financing “grey list”.
- Pakistan must demonstrate in taking action against UN-designated terrorists and their associates to get removed from the grey list.
- Once Pakistan completes three unfulfilled tasks, decision will be taken on its present status in June.
- Pakistan has failed to fulfil six out of 27 obligations of the FATF.

Important value additions

- The FATF is an inter-governmental body set up in 1989.

Objective:

- To combat money laundering, terror financing and other related threats to the international financial system.
- Currently, it has 39 members.
- Pakistan has been on the grey list since June 2018.

2.2 FREEDOM IN THE WORLD REPORT, 2021

- US-based human rights watchdog Freedom House has accused the present government of driving India toward authoritarianism with a lockdown scapegoating of minorities and a crackdown on critics, and downgraded India’s status from ‘Free’ to ‘Partly Free’, in its annual report.

Freedom in the World Report

- It is Freedom House’s flagship annual report, assessing the condition of political rights and civil liberties around the world.
- It is composed of numerical ratings and supporting descriptive texts for 195 countries and 15 territories.
- The report has been published since 1973, allowing Freedom House to track global trends in freedom over more than 40 years.
- Freedom House, which is largely funded through U.S. government grants, has been tracking the course of democracy since 1941.

What did the report say?

Political and civil rights

- India’s freedom score, calculated using indicators of political rights and civil liberties, dropped four points to 67 this year, pulling the country down into the ‘Partly Free’ category.

- India appears to have abandoned its potential to serve as a global democratic leader, elevating narrow nationalist interests at the expense of its founding values of inclusion and equal rights for all.

Reference to Kashmir

- In a year when social media censorship has been hotly seated, while the government shut down Internet connectivity in Kashmir as well as on Delhi's borders, India's Internet freedom score dropped to just 51.

Crackdown on protesters

- Last year, the government intensified its crackdown on protesters opposed to a discriminatory citizenship law and arrested dozens of journalists who aired criticism of the official pandemic response.

Judicial Independence

- It noted that judicial independence had also come under strain.
- It pointed to the case of a Delhi HC judge who was transferred immediately after reprimanding the police for taking no action during riots in the capital that left over 50 people dead.

Religious freedom

- Minorities were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the virus and faced attacks by vigilante mobs.
- Uttar Pradesh's law prohibiting forced religious conversion through interfaith marriage was also listed as a concern.

Rising Authoritarianism

- Rather than serving as a champion of democratic practice and a counterweight to authoritarian influence from countries such as China, the government is tragically driving India itself toward authoritarianism, the report stated.

2.3 INDIA-EU

- India's Export Potential to EU
- India has an untapped export potential of \$39.9 billion in the EU and Western Europe.
- The top products with export potential include apparel, gems and jewellery, chemicals, machinery, automobile, pharmaceuticals and plastic. India benefits from tariff preferences under the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for several of these products.
- India is among the major beneficiaries of the EU's GSP, with exports under the GSP valued at nearly \$19.4 billion in 2019, accounting for nearly 37% of India's merchandise exports to the EU.

Concerns

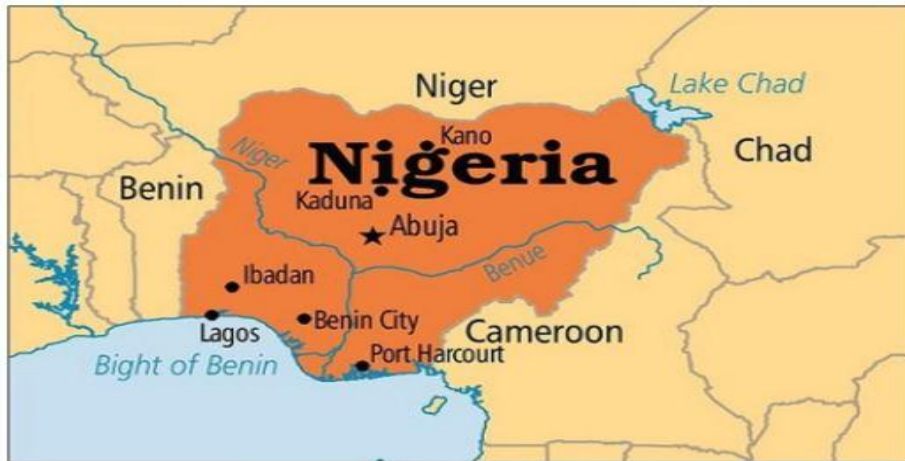
- There are several products where India has export potential in the EU, but these have “graduated” or are at the brink of “graduation” under EU GSP.
- Product graduation applies when average imports of a product from a beneficiary country exceed 17.5% of EU-GSP imports of the same product from all beneficiary countries over three years.
- India’s exports of products such as textiles, inorganic and organic chemicals, gems and jewellery, iron, steel and their articles, base metals and automotives are already out of the ambit of EU-GSP benefits.
- There is also a likelihood of losing EU-GSP benefits in other categories such as apparel, rubber, electronic items, sports goods and toys due to product graduation.
- India’s competitors in apparel exports such as Bangladesh would continue to receive tariff benefits in the EU under Everything but Arms Initiative.
- Another competitor, Vietnam, concluded a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU in 2019.
- India’s negotiation for a Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement is yet to materialise due to lack of concurrence in areas like automotives and dairy and marine products.

Way Ahead

- In light of the declining preferential access and the plausible erosion of competitiveness in the EU market, there is clearly a need to deepen trade and investment ties with the region.
- A thorough assessment of the benefits from FTA for domestic producers is warranted, with due consideration to the impact on sensitive sectors, and possibility of inclusion of safeguards such as sunset clause on concessions for some items.
- There should also be provisions for aspects such as investment and non-tariff measures (NTMs).
- India also needs to negotiate on investment-related aspects with the EU to enhance bilateral investments and foster stronger value chains, especially in technology-intensive sectors in which the EU has a comparative advantage.

2.4 FIRST COUNTER-TERRORISM DIALOGUE BETWEEN INDIA-NIGERIA

- The First Strategic and Counter-Terrorism Dialogue was held between India and Nigeria.
- Discussions were held on the threats and challenges faced by democratic societies from terrorism, extremism, and radicalization.
- Specific areas of cooperation were identified to enhance fight against terrorism.



Key facts:

- Nigeria is a country in West Africa bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west.
- Its southern coast is on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean.
- It's capital is Abuja.

2.5 INDIA – SWEDEN VIRTUAL SUMMIT

- Indian Prime Minister held a Virtual Summit with the Prime Minister of Sweden to discuss bilateral issues and other regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest.
- The Summit provided an opportunity to discuss the international situation and response to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as regional and global issues of mutual importance including climate action, sustainable development, gender equality, counter-terrorism and disaster resilient infrastructure, among others.

Key Points

Economic Cooperation:

- Welcomed the launch of a second joint industrial R&D call on Smart and Sustainable Cities, Transport Systems, Clean Technologies and Digitalization and Internet of Things under India-Sweden Collaborative Industrial Research & Development Programme.
- Confirmed the ambition to scale up bilateral research and innovation on Circular Economy including the themes of Health and Life Sciences and Waste to Wealth during 2021.
- Cooperation in Other Sectors: Welcomed the creation of a Sweden-India Health Hub at AIIMS-Jodhpur.
- Noted advances in hydrogen research and their possible applications, i.e. in the Energy and other key industries.

Cooperation at Multilateral Forums:

- Welcomed Sweden's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

- Sweden congratulated India on its eighth term as an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2021-2022.
- Reaffirmed the importance of the urgent reform of the UN Security Council, including its expansion not only to sustain credibility of multilateralism but also to deliver on the several serious common challenges facing humanity.
- India thanked Sweden for its support to India's permanent membership of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council.
- India congratulated Sweden on assuming the Chairmanship of the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

Climate Action:

- Welcomed the USA re-entry into the Paris agreement which gives new momentum to global climate action ahead of COP 26 to be held in Glasgow, UK.
- Agreed to continue their outreach to expand the membership of the Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT).
- Agreed further to intensify their collaboration within the framework of the Arctic Council to address global environmental protection and combating climate change.

Security:

- Welcomed the finalization of the General Security Agreement in 2019 on the exchange and mutual protection of classified information, enabling a comprehensive partnership in all defence sectors.
- Indian Prime Minister invited Swedish defence firms to participate in the "Make in India programme", especially in the two Defence Production Corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

India – Sweden Relations:

- **Political Relations:** The first India-Nordic Summit took place in the year 2018.
- The King and Queen of Sweden gave a Royal Visit to India in December, 2019.
- **Economic and Commercial relations:** The bilateral trade between two countries presently stands around USD 2 billion. After China and Japan, India is Sweden's third largest trade partner in Asia.
- The main items of Indian exports to Sweden are articles of apparel, clothing accessories; textiles yarn, fabrics, made-ups; manufactures of metals; road vehicles; general industrial machinery and equipment.
- The main items of Indian imports from Sweden are pulp and waste paper; road vehicles; paper and paper board, general industrial machinery and equipment etc.
- Being a member of European Union, Sweden can play an important role in India's partnership with the European Union and EU countries.

- The close relations will further the values of democracy, rule of law, pluralism, equality, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights.

2.6 CHINA'S PLANS FOR NEW DAMS ON BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER

- The Chinese government's new five-year plan(2021-2025) is about to approve the construction of dams in the lower stretch of the Brahmaputra River (YarlungZangbo in China). It is a matter of serious concern for the lower riparian states namely India and Bangladesh. The move is expected to give China an edge in International diplomacy as it would gain substantial bargaining power post dam construction.

Why is China developing dams on the Brahmaputra?

- The construction would help the country develop clean energy and curb the rising pollution levels. This would improve citizens' health and augment water security.
- The dam would also allow it to fulfill its international climate commitments under multilateral agreements like the Paris Agreement.
- China's location of the upper riparian state would allow it to control water flow towards the lower riparian states (India and Brahmaputra). This will give greater bargaining power to China in international relations.
- Further, the project in the lower stretch is part of the country's significant planned investments in infrastructure for serving national interests.

About Brahmaputra river

- It is one of the longest rivers in the world that flows from Tibet to India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam) and further into Bangladesh. The river finally drains out in the Bay of Bengal.
- The river flows for about 1,625 kilometres in Tibet, parallel to the main range of the Himalayas. After that, it enters India in Arunachal Pradesh where it is called Siang.
- The Siang flows down the Himalayas, enters the Assam valley. Here two other major tributaries, Dibang and Lohit will join the Siang river. The culmination of all finally becomes the Brahmaputra.

Rules or statutes governing Brahmaputra water sharing

- There is a lack of a cooperative framework for managing river systems in South Asia. There are no binding agreements between India and China on Brahmaputra water sharing.
- India and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2002 for the sharing of hydrological data.
- Under this China agreed to share information about the discharge of water at three stations from June 1 to October 15 each year. This would improve planning and flood control in India during the monsoon region.
- The two countries have even signed an MoU in 2013 regarding the sharing of water flow data.

- A unilateral stoppage in data sharing was seen from the Chinese side during the 2017 Doklam Standoff but data sharing resumed in 2018.

Way ahead

- The construction of a multi-purpose reservoir in Arunachal Pradesh to offset the impact of the Chinese Dam should be done promptly. The proposed 9.2 BCM 'Upper Siang' project on the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh will be able to take the excess load of water discharge. Further, it can even store water in case of any deficit.
- As water is a state subject, the riparian states in India should be encouraged to use Brahmaputra's water in a rational way to minimize future shortages.
- The focus of integrated river basin management should be based on hydrological boundaries and not on administrative state boundaries.
- India needs to restrengthen its relationship with Bangladesh. India needs to finalise the Teesta river agreement and restore its image as a responsible upper riparian. By doing that, Bangladesh may also cooperate with India against China.
- The country should engage in bilateral talks and enter into a water-sharing agreement with China similar to the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan. The new China-India water-sharing agreement should include provisions like,
- The treaty should regulate the amount of water to be released, preserve the quality of the water and the aquatic life.
- It should have a mechanism for water-sharing during times of droughts and abnormal weather.
- If necessary, the international community should also be involved.

2.7 AIR STRIKES ON SANA'A

- A Saudi-led military coalition mounted air strikes on Yemen's capital Sana'a.
- Saudi had intercepted 10 drones launched by Houthis before the strikes.
- Sana'a is the largest city in Yemen.
- Constitutionally, Sana'a is the capital of Yemen.
- In the aftermath of the Houthi occupation, the capital moved to Aden – the former capital of South Yemen.
- Aden is located next to the Sarawat Mountains of Jabal An-NabiShu'ayb and JabalTiyal, considered to be the highest mountains in the country and amongst the highest in the region.
- Sana'a is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- It has a distinctive architectural character, most notably expressed in its multi-storey buildings decorated with geometric patterns.

2.8 INDIA ATTENDS FIRST QUAD SUMMIT

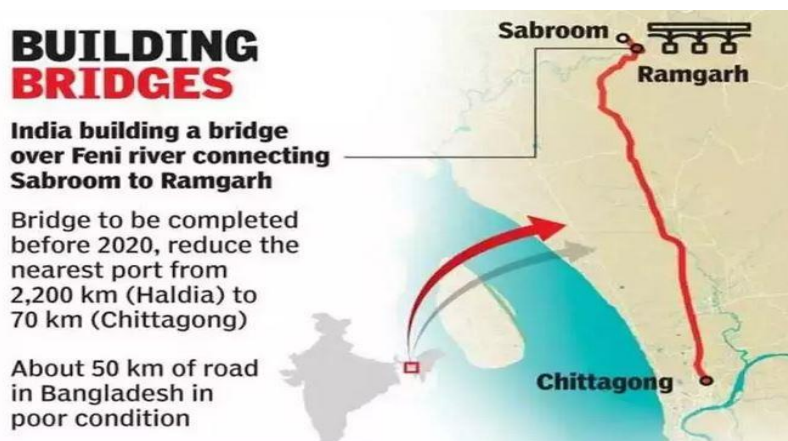
PM Modi recently attended the first Quad Summit.

Key takeaways

- Other countries that attended: U.S.A's President, Australian PM and Japanese PM
- Access to COVID-19 vaccines, cooperation on technology, and climate change were discussed.
- Quad vaccine initiative was announced in which India will manufacture American vaccines with Japanese funding and Australian logistical support for countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Three working groups were also launched — Quad vaccine experts group, Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group, and Quad Climate Working Group.

2.9 MAITRI SETU

- The bridge 'Maitri Setu' has been built over the Feni River which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura State and Bangladesh.
- The 1.9 Km long bridge joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
- The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd.



Significance of the bridge

- With this inauguration, Tripura is set to become the 'Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 kms from Sabroom.
- The name 'Maitri Setu' symbolizes growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.

About Feni River

- Feni is a river in southeastern Bangladesh and Tripura.
- It is a trans-boundary river with an ongoing dispute about water rights.
- It originates in the South Tripura district and flows through Sabroom town and then enters Bangladesh.

- The question of sharing the waters of the river between India and Pakistan was first discussed in 1958.

2.10 BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

- Two decades later after its destruction, the Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called “A Night with Buddha”.

Bamiyan Buddhas

- In their Roman draperies and with two different mudras, the Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
- They are said to date back to the 5th century AD and were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.
- Salsal and Shamama, as they were called by the locals, rose to heights of 55 and 38 metres respectively, and were said to be male and female.
- Salsal means “the light shines through the universe”; Shamama is “Queen Mother”.
- The statues were set in niches on either end of a cliffside and hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs.

The significance of Bamiyan

- Bamiyan is situated in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan.
- The valley, which is set along the line of the Bamiyan River, was once integral to the early days of the Silk Roads, providing passage for not just merchants, but also culture, religion and language.
- When the Buddhist Kushan Empire spread, acting as a crucible of sorts, Bamiyan became a major trade, cultural and religious centre.
- As China, India and Rome sought passage through Bamiyan, the Kushans were able to develop a syncretic (mix) culture.
- In the rapid spread of Buddhism between the 1st to 5th centuries AD, Bamiyan’s landscape reflected the faith, especially its monastic qualities.

Taliban’s destruction of the Buddhas

- The hardline Taliban movement, which emerged in the early 1990s, was in control of almost 90 per cent of Afghanistan by the end of the decade.
- The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was part of this extremist culture.
- In February 2001, the Taliban declared its intention to destroy the statues, despite condemnation and protest from governments and cultural ambassadors’ world over.

The aftermath of the destruction

- The Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas met with global criticism, many of whom saw it as a cultural crime not just against Afghanistan but also against the idea of global syncretism.
- Following the fall, UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003, with subsequent efforts made to restore and reconstruct.

2.11 INDIA, JAPAN SPACE AGENCIES REVIEW TIES

- Bilateral meeting between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

Background:

- India-Japan space collaboration:
- India and Japan are working on a joint lunar polar exploration (LUPEX) mission.
- The Lunar Polar Exploration mission is a robotic lunar mission concept by the Indian Space Research Organisation and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency that would send a lunar rover and lander to explore the South Pole region of the Moon in 2024.

Details:

- Indian and Japanese space agencies have reviewed cooperation in earth observation, lunar cooperation and satellite navigation, and also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in “space situational awareness and professional exchange programme”.
- With respect to earth observation collaboration, ISRO and JAXA have signed an Implementing Arrangement for collaborative activities on rice crop area and air quality monitoring using satellite data.

2.12 BIDEN'S AFGHANISTAN PEACE PLAN

- The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace plan to the Afghan government and the Taliban, seeking to bring violence to a halt and form an interim government.

What is Biden's proposal?

- The US has asked the Afghan President to show “urgent leadership in the coming weeks”.

The proposal included many elements:

- It has proposed an UN-led conference of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the US to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan.
- It urges both sides including the Taliban to reach a consensus on Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements.
- It asks to find a road map to a new “inclusive government”; and agree on the terms of a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”.

Why is US is Pushing this peace process ?

- The US has pointed out that accelerating the peace process is the best way to advance the shared interests of the US and the Afghan government.
- According to the agreement the U.S. signed with the Taliban in February 2020, American troops – currently some 2,500 troops are in Afghanistan – are set to vacate by May 1.
- The Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha in September last year but reached no breakthrough.
- The Biden administration is concerned about the slow pace of the talks.

Why is the US delaying troops withdrawal?

- The US assessment is that if American troops are pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban would make quick gains.
- So, the Biden administration's believes that the Taliban are on the ascent.
- It hopes that the best way to prevent a complete Taliban takeover is a regional peace process and an interim unity government.
- The Taliban are yet to respond to America's proposal.

What is the Afghan government's stand?

- The Ghani administration has consistently been critical of the US's direct outreach to the Taliban.
- The Trump administration held direct talks with the Taliban, excluding the government.
- Later, Washington put pressure on Kabul to release Taliban prisoners as part of an agreement it reached with the insurgents.
- Even when the Doha talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government were underway, Mr Ghani made it clear that he, as elected President, is the only legitimate representative of the Afghan people.
- He resisted making concessions to the Taliban.

India's position in the process

- Since the Afghan peace process began two years ago, India's role in it has been peripheral at best.
- Our EAM has iterated India's long-held support for an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled" peace process.

What lies ahead ?

- While the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban is well known, it is not clear whether Mr Ghani could continue to resist American pressure.
- And if the Biden administration decides to stick to the Taliban deal and withdraw troops by May, Mr Ghani would be in a tougher spot.
- The people of Afghanistan do not have any good options. If Ghani rejects the American offer, the war will continue forever.

- The Taliban have already taken over much of the country's hinterlands and are breathing down the neck of its cities.

2.13 EXERCISE DUSTLIK-II

- It is a bilateral defence exercise held between the Indian Army And Uzbekistan Army.
- It is named after Dustlik, a town in the Jizzakh region of Uzbekistan.
- The first edition of the exercise, Dustlik-I was held in Uzbekistan, near Tashkent, from November 3-13, 2019.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had flagged off the exercise along with his Uzbek counterpart, Major General BakhodirKurbanov in 2019 for the first time.
- The joint exercise focused on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in urban settings.

2.14 ILO REPORT ON INDIAN WORKERS

- 'Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19' was recently released.
- It is released by International Labour Organisation .

Key takeaways

- The Report comments on various issues including on Indian workers having low average wages, longer hours.
- It also reported that the workers in Asia and the Pacific enjoyed the highest real wage growth among all regions over the period 2006–19.
- The report has taken into account the National Floor Level Minimum Wage which is Rs.176/- per day.
- However, actual wages are far higher.
- If the median of the minimum wages in different states is drawn, it would be Rs.269/- per day in India.

Code on Wages, 2019

- It universalises and creates a statutory right of minimum wages for all workers whether in organized or unorganised sector.
- A new concept of statutory floor wage has also been introduced in the Code on Wages.
- The Code also provides that the minimum wages are to be ordinarily reviewed and revised by the appropriate Governments in intervals not exceeding five years.

2.15 CHINA CUTS HONG KONG'S ELECTED SEATS

- China's legislature formally approved sweeping changes to Hong Kong's electoral system that will see a sharply reduced share of directly elected representatives and a tightening of Beijing's control in the Special Administrative Region (SAR).
- The changes were passed by the 167 members of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee.
- China's President signed orders to promulgate the amended annexes to Hong Kong's Basic Law, the constitution that has governed the SAR under the "one country, two systems" model since its return to China in 1997.

What has changed?

- The amendments mark the biggest changes to Hong Kong's political system since the handover, and reduce the share of directly elected representatives in its Legislative Council (LegCo).
- While previously, 35 of its 70 members were directly elected, that number has been reduced by 15.
- Now, Hongkongers will only be able to directly vote for 20 representatives while the size of LegCo has been expanded to 90, thereby drastically reducing the share of elected representatives.
- The 70 others will be broadly chosen from pro-establishment bodies.
- The other big change is the setting up of a Candidate Eligibility Review Committee "for reviewing and confirming the eligibility of candidates".
- Also, a Committee for Safeguarding National Security will be set up that will make findings as to whether a candidate for Election Committee member or for the office of Chief Executive meets the legal requirements.
- There will be no scope for legally challenging the findings.
- District Councillors, who are directly elected, will no longer have a place either in the Election Committee or in LegCo.

"One Country, two systems":

- Since the return to China in 1997, Hong Kong, a former British colony, has been governed by the Basic Law, which allows the territory "to enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication", barring matters of defence and foreign affairs.
- Article 23 of the Basic Law requires Hong Kong to pass national security legislation, but past attempts to do so were shelved amid protests.

2.16 UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR PROJECT SERVICES (UNOPS)

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) entered into a partnership with the Government of Denmark to support the Union Government's flagship programme, JalJeevan Mission in Uttar Pradesh

- The purpose of partnership between the Government of Denmark and UNOPS is to provide strategic technical support to Jal Jeevan Mission (Water program).
- UNOPS shall be focussing on instituting scalable delivery models in focused 11 water-scare districts of Uttar Pradesh in Bundelkhand and Vindhya regions.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide functional household tap connection to every rural household by 2024. This coincides with the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal-6.

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS):

- The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is an operational arm of the United Nations, dedicated to implementing projects for the United Nations System, international financial institutions, governments and other partners around the world.
- The organization’s global headquarters is located on the UN City campus in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- UNOPS was established in 1973 as part of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It became an independent, self-financing organization in 1995.

2.17 WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY FORUM 2021

- Union Minister of Telecom has represented India at the World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2021.
- World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is one of the world’s largest annual gathering of the ‘ICT for development’ community.
- The UN General Assembly approved the holding of WSIS in two phases. One in 2003 at Geneva and the other in 2005 at Tunis.
- Aim: WSIS’s chief aim is to bridge the global digital divide separating rich countries from poor countries. The WSIS aims to achieve this by increasing internet accessibility in the developing world.
- Organized by: The summit is co-organized by International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD.

About International Telecommunication Union (ITU):

- International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs.
- It was originally established in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union. It is one of the oldest international organizations in operations.
- Members: It is open to all Member States of the United Nations. There are currently 193 Member States of the ITU. This includes all the UN member states except the Republic of Palau.
- Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland

2.18 SUEZ CANAL BLOCKAGE

- The Suez Canal has been blocked after a large cargo ship ran aground while passing through it, bringing traffic on the busy trade route to a halt.

Why is Suez Canal significant?

- Suez Canal is a critical shipping artery that connects the Mediterranean and Red Seas through Egypt.
- It carries over 12% of world trade by volume.
- A human-made waterway, the Suez Canal is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes.
- Built in 1869, it provides a major shortcut for ships moving between Europe and Asia.
- Before its construction, these ships had to sail around Africa to complete the same journey.

Why is the Suez Canal blocked now?

- The vessel blocking Suez is the Ever Given, a Panama-registered container ship.
- It was on its way to Rotterdam in the Netherlands from China.
- The 2018-built vessel, which is 400-m long and 59-m wide, got stuck here due to a mishap caused by bad weather.
- It was passing northwards through the Suez Canal in order to enter the Mediterranean Sea.
- The ship weighing 2 lakh tonnes ran aground and got stuck sideways across the canal.
- It is suspected of being hit by a sudden strong wind, causing the hull to deviate and accidentally hit the bottom and run aground.
- It is thus blocking the path of other ships waiting to cross through on both sides.
- None of the crew members was injured.
- The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) is now trying to refloat the Ever Given using rescue and tug units.
- Diggers are also trying to free the ship from the canal's bank, where it is lodged.

What are the implications?

- The Ever Given is the largest vessel to go aground in the Suez Canal.
- Incidents such as this are rare, but can have massive ramifications for global trade when they happen.
- The effort to remove the ship and make the canal fully functional again could take several days.
- The alternative route between Europe and Asia around Africa is a week slower than the Suez route.
- So, a daylong blockage could have a severe impact on global trade.
- Any such delay could also lead to a shortage of container vessels and boxes.
- This is because 30% of all container ships in the world pass through the Suez.

- As per SCA data, in 2020, nearly 19,000 ships, or an average of 51.5 ships per day, with a net tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes passed through the canal.

How significant the canal is to Egypt?

- The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years.
- But, it was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt's then leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.
- Over the years, the canal has been widened and deepened.
- In 2015, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal.
- This was aimed to reduce the waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.
- Egypt heavily depends on revenues from the canal.
- After the blockage, it is diverting the ships to an older channel to minimise disruption to global trade.
- The blockage has already led to a long queue of vessels waiting to cross the canal.

2.19 HEART OF ASIA-ISTANBUL PROCESS

- India will attend the 9th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process on Afghanistan in Tajikistan.



- The Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) is an initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey, which was officially launched at a conference hosted by Turkey in Istanbul in 2011.
- Since then, Afghanistan supported by 14 Participating Countries of the Heart of Asia Region, 16 Supporting Countries beyond the region and 12 Regional and International Organizations are leading and coordinating this Process.
- It is a platform for promoting regional security, economic and political cooperation centred on Afghanistan through dialogue and a set of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).
- De facto Secretariat: The Directorate General for Regional Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan

- The geographical area covering the 15 Participating Countries of the HoA-IP is defined as the Heart of Asia Region.
- It is one of the biggest regions in the world with a collective geographical area covering around 27% of the land area of the Earth.
- As the lead country for Trade, Commerce and Investment Confidence Building Measure under HoA-IP, India has made concerted efforts for strengthening regional connectivity for the greater economic integration of Afghanistan with the region.
- A dedicated Air Freight Corridor between cities of India and Afghanistan and operationalisation of Chabahar Port in Iran are steps in that direction.
- External affairs minister also visited the Dushanbe-Chortut Highway Project and lauded the work being done by Border Roads Organisation under Indian grant assistance. The 8-lane highway will decongest Dushanbe.

2.20 INDO-KOREAN BILATERAL FRIENDSHIP PARK

- Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh and South Korean Defence Minister, SuhWook have inaugurated the “Indo-Korean Bilateral Friendship Park” in Delhi Cantt on March 26, 2021. Friendship Park has been built to commemorate the contribution of Indian peacekeepers in the Korean War from 1950 to 1953.

India-South Korea Relations

- India-South Korea relations have strengthened in recent years with the convergence of Act East Policy (AEP) of India and New Southern Policy (NSP) of South Korea. Bilateral ties have grown multi-dimensional in the fields of Maritime security, nuclear disarmament, regional economic cooperation, counterterrorism, and energy cooperation.
- India had played a crucial role in the Korean wars from 1950 to 1953.
- In the year 1947, India’s first foreign secretary, K P S Menon, served as Chairman of the United Nations (UN) Commission which was set up to look after elections in South Korea.
- During the Korean War, warring sides accepted UN resolution which was sponsored by India to call a ceasefire.
- The official bilateral and diplomatic ties between both countries were started in 1962 at the consular level. In 1973, the relation was upgraded to Ambassador-level.

2.21 VIRUS PASSPORT

Launched by China

- Basically, it is a health certificate programme for Chinese International travellers.
- The digital certificate shows a user’s vaccination status and virus test results.

- Although the certificate is meant for travel in and out of China, it is currently only available for use by Chinese citizens, and it is not yet mandatory. There is also no indication authorities in other countries will use it when Chinese travellers go abroad.

2.22 VAJRA PRAHAR 2021

- Indian and US Special Forces conclude Joint Training Exercise.

About VajraPrahara 2021:

- The 11th edition of the Indo-US Joint Special Forces Exercise VAJRA PRAHAR 2021 was conducted at Special Forces Training School located at Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh.
- The joint exercise by the Special Forces of both the countries is conducted alternatively between India and the United States to share the best practices and experiences in areas such as joint mission planning and operational tactics as also to improve interoperability between the Special Forces of both nations.

3. INDIAN ECONOMY

3.1 ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB)

- Centre signs \$304 million pact with AIIB for power transmission network in Assam.
- The fund will be utilised for the ‘Assam Intra-State Transmission System Enhancement Project’, aiming to improve reliability, capacity and security of the power transmission network in the state.

What is AIIB?

- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.
- The Parties (57 founding members) to agreement comprise the Membership of the Bank.
- It is headquartered in Beijing.
- It commenced operations in January 2016.

Aim:

- By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, it aims to connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

Membership:

- There are more than 100 members now.
- Fourteen of the G-20 nations are AIIB members including France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Voting Rights:

- China is the largest shareholder with 26.61 % voting shares in the bank followed by India (7.6%), Russia (6.01%) and Germany (4.2 %).
- The regional members hold 75% of the total voting power in the Bank.

Various organs of AIIB:

- **Board of Governors:** The Board of Governors consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country. Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.
- **Board of Directors:** Non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank’s general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors.
- **International Advisory Panel:** The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank’s strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues.

3.2 SPECTRUM AUCTIONS

Context: Recently, government concluded its first auction of telecommunications spectrum in five years generating revenue of Rs. 77,815 crore from the exercise.

Key Outcomes of the auction

- Reliance Jio accounted for close to 60% of the spectrum bought, followed by BhartiAirtel and Vodafone Idea.
- On offer was over 2,308 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum valued for the auction by the government at Rs. 3.92 lakh crore, and bids were successfully received for 37% or 855.6 MHz.

How has the industry been since the last auction?

- More Competitors in 2016: During 2016 auctions participants then included Tata Teleservices, Idea Cellular, Reliance Jio, BhartiAirtel, Vodafone India, Reliance Communications and Aircel.

Consolidation of Sector:

- In the last few years, there has been a consolidation in the industry, as a result of which there are only three major players now — Reliance Jio, BhartiAirtel and Vodafone Idea.

Moving towards Duopoly:

- Jio and BhartiAirtel are, by increasing their market share, shaping the industry toward “a near two-player structure”. On the other hand, Vodafone Idea is struggling financially.
- Financial Stress in Sector: In recent years, while the user base has grown, the industry itself has witnessed unforeseen financial stress in the form of an important court case against it i.e. Supreme Court verdict on AGR issue

Why was an auction needed now?

- All three players needed to renew some of their spectrum as the validity was set to expire later this year.
- Wasn't this for the 5G rollout?
- No. The auction for that is likely to happen later. In the auction that was held on March 1 and 2, the government offered spectrum for 4G in the following bands: 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz and 2,500 MHz.

What do these bands stand for?

- To explain this, we have to begin with the term ‘spectrum’, which, in this context, stands for the portion of the electromagnetic wave range that is suitable for communication purposes. As this is a huge economic resource, which also provides unimaginable benefits to any population, it is controlled by the government.
- Spectrum bands have different characteristics, and this makes them suitable for different purposes.

- In general, low-frequency transmissions can travel greater distances before losing their integrity, and they can pass through dense objects more easily. Less data can be transmitted over these radio waves, however.
- Higher-frequency transmissions carry more data, but are poorer at penetrating obstacles.
- In this context, hertz is a measure of the number of cycles per second, and 1 megahertz stands for 1 million hertz. Telecom providers cover their bases by using both low and high-frequency bands.
- Why did the 700 MHz band have no takers?
- The 700 MHz band, as also 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,300 MHz bands, are seen playing an important role in the 5G rollout (the fifth generation of mobile networks that promises to connect everybody as also everything much faster and at much lower latency).
- The 700 MHz band was not expected to find any takers given its prohibitive floor price.
- Some see this as an opening for the government to scale down the reserve price when it comes up for bidding in future. Also, the “king” in 5G, the C-band, which is the band between 3,300 MHz and 4,200 MHz, was not on offer in this round of auctions.

How did this auction compared to the last round?

- In 2016, about 40% of the 2,355 MHz of spectrum (at a reserve price of Rs. 5.6 lakh crore) was sold, giving the government Rs. 65,789 crore in revenue. This time, the Centre has managed to get more.
- The government said the revenue generated by the auction has exceeded its expectations, which was about Rs. 45,000 crore.
- The expectations were low because of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the top three telecom players were looking to renew expiring spectrum and consolidate holdings in select bands.

Do you know?

- In 2020 U.S. economists Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson won the Nobel Economics Prize for their work on commercial auctions, including for goods and services difficult to sell in traditional ways such as radio frequencies

What is auction theory?

- Auction theory is a branch of economics that deals with, as the name suggests, auctions.
- Auctions are important to economists because they are the most widely used and also the most efficient mechanism to allocate scarce resources.
- In particular, auction theory deals with the various ways in which auctions can be designed to improve seller revenues, increase benefits to consumers, or even achieve both these goals at the same time.

3.3 PURCHASING MANAGERS' INDEX

- PMI or a Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an indicator of business activity — both in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- It is a survey-based measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception of some key business variables from the month before.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is constructed.
- A figure above 50 denotes expansion in business activity. Anything below 50 denotes contraction.
- Higher the difference from this mid-point greater the expansion or contraction.

3.4 CESS AND SURCHARGE

The share of cess and surcharge in the gross tax revenue (GTR) of the Centre has almost doubled to 19.9% in 2020-21 from 10.4% in 2011-12, leading to the 15th Finance Commission (FC) recommending a higher grant-in-aid and lower tax devolution to the States, as per a report.

What is Cess?

- It is a form of tax levied or collected by the government for the development or welfare of a particular service or sector.
- It is charged over and above direct and indirect taxes.
- Cess collected for a particular purpose cannot be used for or diverted to other purposes.
- It is not a permanent source of revenue for the government, and it is discontinued when the purpose levying it is fulfilled.
- Currently, the cess and surcharge collected by the Centre are not part of the tax devolution.

Examples:

- Education Cess, Swachh Bharat Cess, Krishi Kalyan Cess etc.

What is Surcharge?

- 'Surcharge' is an additional charge or tax levied on an existing tax.
- Unlike a cess, which is meant to raise revenue for a temporary need, surcharge is usually permanent in nature.
- It is levied as a percentage on the income tax payable as per normal rates. In case no tax is due for a financial year, then no surcharge is levied.
- The revenue earned via surcharge is solely retained by the Centre and, unlike other tax revenues, is not shared with States.
- Collections from surcharge flow into the Consolidated Fund of India.

3.5 AMENDMENT IN INSURANCE OMBUDSMAN RULES 2021

The government has amended insurance ombudsman rules.

As per the new rules:

- Insurance brokers are now covered under ombudsman rules.
- Policyholders are now allowed to file online complaints.
- The scope of complaints has been enlarged to ombudsmen from only disputes earlier to deficiencies in service on the part of insurers, agents, brokers, and other intermediaries.
- The ombudsman may use video-conferencing for hearings.

About Insurance Ombudsman:

- The Insurance Ombudsman scheme was created by the Government of India for individual policyholders to have their complaints settled out of the court system in a cost-effective, efficient, and impartial way.

3.6 MINIMUM SELLING PRICE FOR SUGAR

The Indian Sugar Mills' Association (ISMA) has asked for an increase in the Minimum Selling Price of Sugar.

Minimum Selling Price (MSP) for Sugar

- The price of sugar is market-driven & depends on the demand & supply of sugar.
- However, with a view to protecting the interests of farmers, the concept of MSP of sugar has been introduced since 2018.
- MSP of sugar has been fixed taking into account the components of Fair & Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane and minimum conversion cost of the most efficient mills.

How is the pricing of Sugarcane done?

- With the amendment of the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, the concept of Statutory Minimum Price (SMP) of sugarcane was replaced with the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)' of sugarcane in 2009-10.
- The cane price announced by the Central Government is decided on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- This is done in consultation with the State Governments and after taking feedback from associations of the sugar industry.

3.7 PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION (PCA)

- Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) is a framework in which banks with weak financial records are placed under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of India.
- The first time PCA was used by the RBI was in 2016 when the number of Non-Performing Assets (NPAS) belonging to state-run banks rose beyond acceptable levels.

- The PCA framework allows a regulator to place specific restrictions like stopping payment of dividends or setting up new bank branches. It also gives powers to place a cap on a bank's lending limit to one sector.

Other corrective actions are as follows:

1. Special audits
2. Restructuring operations
3. Activation of a recovery plan
4. Superseding the banks board of directors
5. Bringing in new management

A Prompt Corrective Action framework is evoked when certain limitations placed on banks are exceeded; these limitations are based on levels of asset quality profitability, and capital. Another restriction is when the number of negative returns on assets run into four consecutive years.

What is the impact of PCA?

- Prompt Corrective Actions have the following impact:
- The PCA is an unprecedented, if not exceptional action that impacts the customer relationship with the bank. This is not good in the long run as it will impact the credit history of the bank and will raise questions about its management.
- It can accelerate loss of market loss and further decline the position of public sector banks, allowing foreign or private banks to fill in the gap.
- The Government of India feels that the PCA measures are an economic hindrance and thus feel certain norms should be relaxed. In addition it is also perceived that the dispute between the government and the RBI may impact India's images as an investment destination.

3.8 HURUN GLOBAL RICH LIST 2021

- The world added 607 new billionaires or more than three billionaires in two days.
- India added 55 new billionaires, or more than one billionaire every week, in 2020.
- Tesla's Elon Musk added \$151 billion to become the richest man in the world for the first time with a net worth of \$197 billion, followed by Amazon's Jeff Bezos (\$189 billion), the chairman and CEO of LVMH Moet Hennessy.
- Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, who emerged as the richest man in India with a net worth of \$83 billion, came in at number eight.
- India retained the third spot in the number of billionaires from a country with a total of 177 billionaires living in the country.
- In the list of Indian billionaires, Mr.Ambani was followed by Adani Group's Gautam Adani and family with his wealth almost doubling to \$32 billion.

- Country-wise, China leads with the most number of billionaires at 1058, followed by the US (696), India (177), Germany, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland at over 100 each.
- By continent, Asia accounts for 51 percent of the billionaires.
- Among cities, Mumbai hosts the maximum number of billionaires (60), followed by New Delhi (40) and Bengaluru (22).

3.9 ANTI-DUMPING DUTY

- The U.S. Department of Commerce is preparing to tax aluminium sheet exporters from 18 countries including India after determining that they had benefited from subsidies and dumping.
- The US International Trade Commission (ITC), an independent body, must approve the final decision by April 15 to impose anti-dumping or countervailing duties.

What is Dumping?

- In international trade practise, dumping happens when a country or a firm exports an item at a price lower than the price of that product in its domestic market.
- Dumping impacts the price of that product in the importing country, hitting margins and profits of local manufacturing firms.

What is anti-dumping duty?

- Anti-dumping duty is imposed to rectify the situation arising out of the dumping of goods and its trade distortive effect.
- According to global trade norms, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime, a country is allowed to impose tariffs on such dumped products to provide a level-playing field to domestic manufacturers.

How is it different from CVD?

- Anti-dumping duty is different from countervailing duty. The latter is imposed in order to counter the negative impact of import subsidies to protect domestic producers.
- Countervailing Duties (CVDs) are tariffs levied on imported goods to offset subsidies made to producers of these goods in the exporting country.
- CVDs are meant to level the playing field between domestic producers of a product and foreign producers of the same product who can afford to sell it at a lower price because of the subsidy they receive from their government.

3.10 BANKS BOARD BUREAU (BBB)

- The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) may be entrusted with the job to select MDs and DMDs of a proposed Rs. 1-lakh crore development financial institution (DFI) being set up to accelerate infrastructure financing.

About the proposed DFI:

- The infrastructure financier, to be called the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development, is to anchor the ambitious National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP).

About BBB:

- It was set up in February 2016 as an autonomous body– based on the recommendations of the RBI-appointed Nayak Committee.
- It was part of the Indradhanush Plan.
- It will make recommendations for appointment of whole-time directors as well as non-executive chairpersons of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and state-owned financial institutions.
- The Ministry of Finance takes the final decision on the appointments in consultation with the Prime Minister’s Office.

Composition:

- Banks Board Bureau comprises the Chairman, three ex-officio members i.e Secretary, Department of Public Enterprises, Secretary of the Department of Financial Services and Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, and five expert members, two of which are from the private sector.

3.11 DELHI’S PER CAPITA INCOME DIPS BY 5.9%

- The per capita income of the people of Delhi has fallen by 5.91% (at current prices) to ₹ 3, 54,004 during 2020-21, compared to ₹ 3, 76,221 in 2019-20.
- Also, the Gross State Domestic Product (at current prices) fell by 3.92% in 2020-21 to ₹ 7,98,310 crore from ₹ 8,30,872 crore in 2019-20, as per the Economic Survey of Delhi 2020-21 tabled in the Delhi Assembly recently.
- Business was less in the market and because of this revenue was less for the government.
- This was due to the effect of COVID-19 and the series of lockdowns, which disrupted the economy across the world, according to the survey report.

LESS BUSINESS, REVENUE:

- Experts said that the fall in income and GSDP shows that there was less money in the hands of people, which reduced their purchasing power, and it also shows that investments had reduced.
- The actual per capita income will be even lesser, as this data does not take into account the unorganised sector, such as daily wage labourers, who were heavily hit during the pandemic.
- Also, the unorganised sector has not recovered compared to organised sector.
- Delhi government should work to “generate employment” and spend more money on health, education, or small infrastructure projects, which generates employment.
- The government should also try to look for an “urban employment scheme” on lines of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to (MGNREGA).

- The year 2020 witnessed unrivalled turmoil with the novel COVID-19 virus and the resultant pandemic emerging as the biggest threat to economic growth in a century.
- The pandemic has been unique in its wide-ranging effects on almost every section of the economy and the society.
- The government expects the economic condition to pick and register growth.
- In 2021-22, a sharp recovery of real GSDP of Delhi with a double-digit growth is expected based on a low base effect and inherent strengths of the economy.
- Delhi has maintained its consistent revenue surplus which was? 7,499 crore during 2019-20 (Prov.) as compared to? 6,261 crore during 2018-19. Also, about 30.74 lakh Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) was recorded in Delhi during 2019.

3.12 INDIA'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

- India's foreign exchange reserves surpass Russia's to become the world's fourth-largest.
- India's reserves, enough to cover roughly 18 months of imports, have been bolstered by a rare current-account surplus, rising inflows into the local stock market, and foreign direct investment.
- India's foreign currency holdings fell by \$4.3 billion to \$580.3 billion as of March 5.
- China has the largest reserves, followed by Japan and Switzerland on the International Monetary Fund table.

3.13 ATMANIRBHAR NIVESHAK MITRA PORTAL

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry is in the process of finalising a dedicated digital portal "Atmanirbhar Niveshak Mitra".
- The portal is being developed for handholding and facilitation, information dissemination, and facilitation of domestic investors.
- The portal will be launched in May 2021.
- The webpage will also be available in regional languages and mobile App in due course.
- It will digitally support investors throughout their doing business journey in India and help them to get all the information starting from finding an investment opportunity to exploring incentives & taxes applicable to their businesses, information and assistance for doing business in India, sources of funding, information on raw material availability, training, management requirement and tender information.
- Daily updates on policies and new initiatives by the Central and State Government will be made available on the portal.
- It will give information about approvals, licenses, and clearances required for businesses.

- It will also help investors connect to various stakeholders on single platform like Central Ministries, Industry Associations, State Departments.
- This Project is under the “Invest India” agency which was set up in 2009 as a non-profit venture under the DPIIT.

3.14 NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)

- Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has urged the New Development Bank (NDB) to consider working closely with India’s new development financing institution for funding infrastructure.
- NDB has so far approved 18 projects in India, including emergency loans of \$2 billion to support health spending and economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

About NDB:

- It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
- It was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- It was established in 2014, at the 6th BRICS Summit at Fortaleza, Brazil.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.
- Headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- In 2018, the NDB received observer status in the United Nations General Assembly, establishing a firm basis for active and fruitful cooperation with the UN.

Voting:

- Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

Roles and functions:

- The Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

3.15 UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has released the Trinamool Congress manifesto for the 2021 Assembly election.
- The manifesto, among other things, promises universal basic income for every family.

- Under the income scheme, all the 1.6 crore families under the general category will get Rs. 500 a month and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population Rs. 1,000 a month.
- The direct transfers will be in the name of the women head of the family.

What is Universal Basic Income?

- It is a programme for providing all citizens of a geographic area (a country or state) with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status.
- The main idea behind UBI is to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens.
- The essential principle behind Universal basic income is the idea that all citizens are entitled to a livable income, irrespective of the circumstances they're born in.

UBI has the following important components:

- Universality (all citizens included).
- unconditionality (no prior condition).
- Periodic (Payments at periodic regular intervals).
- Payments in cash (not food vouchers or service coupons).

Benefits of Universal Basic Income (UBI):

- Provide secured income to individuals.
- Reduce poverty and income inequality in society.
- Increase the purchasing power of every poor which will further increase aggregate demand.
- Easy to implement because no identification of the beneficiary is involved.
- Reduce the wastage of government money because its implementation is very simple.

Supporters of the idea:

- The Economic Survey of India 2016-17 has advocated the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an alternative to the various social welfare schemes in an effort to reduce poverty.
- Other Supporters of the UBI programme include Economics Nobel Laureates Peter Diamond and Christopher Pissarides, and tech leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk.
- Challenges in Implementing Universal Basic Income in India:
- High cost involved in implementing UBI is a major factor contributing towards lack of political will in working towards the universal basic income in India.
- It would reduce the motivation for work and might encourage people to live off assured cash transfers and it is simply unaffordable.

3.16 SUPPLEMENTARY DEMANDS FOR GRANTS

- The Lok Sabha has passed the supplementary demand for grants (second batch for 2020-21).
- What are Supplementary Demands for Grants?

- The supplementary demand for grants is needed for government expenditure over and above the amount for which Parliamentary approval was already obtained during the Budget session.

Constitutional provisions:

- Supplementary, additional or excess grants and Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants are mentioned in the Constitution of India 1949.
- Article 115: Supplementary, additional or excess grants.
- Article 116: Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants.

Procedure to be followed:

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

Other grants:

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

3.17 PANEL TO EVALUATE APPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL BANKS, SMALL FINANCE BANKS

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced the creation of a Standing External Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Shyamala Gopinath for evaluating applications for Universal Banks and Small Finance Banks.
- This is part of the central bank's earlier announced plan to give banking permits on a continuous basis to candidates, a process that is commonly known as 'on-tap' licensing.

What is On tap licensing?

- It means the RBI window for granting banking licences will be open throughout the year.

What is Universal banking?

- It is a system of banking where banks undertake a blanket of financial services like investment banking, commercial banking, development banking, insurance and other financial services including functions of merchant banking, mutual funds, factoring, housing finance, insurance etc.

RBI's universal bank licensing guidelines:

- Individuals/professionals who are 'residents' and have minimum 10 years of experience in banking and finance at a senior level.
- The initial minimum paid-up voting equity capital for a bank shall be ` five billion. Thereafter, the bank shall have a minimum net worth of ` five billion at all times.
- The requirement of Non-Operative Financial Holding Company (NOFHC) is not mandatory for individual promoters or standalone promoting/converting entities who/which do not have other group entities.
- Not less than 51% of the total paid-up equity capital of the NOFHC shall be owned by the Promoter/Promoter Group. No shareholder, other than the promoters/promoter group, shall have significant influence and control in the NOFHC.
- The bank shall get its shares listed on the stock exchanges within six years of the commencement of business by the bank.
- The bank is precluded from having any exposure to its promoters, major shareholders who have shareholding of 10 per cent or more of paid-up equity shares in the bank, the relatives of the promoters as also the entities in which they have significant influence or control.
- The bank has to open at least 25 per cent of its branches in unbanked rural centres.
- The bank shall comply with the priority sector lending targets and sub-targets as applicable to the existing domestic scheduled commercial banks.
- The board of the bank should have a majority of independent directors.

- The validity of the in-principle approval issued by the Reserve Bank will be 18 months from the date of granting in-principle approval and would thereafter lapse automatically.

3.18 THE CONSUMER PROTECTION (E-COMMERCE) RULES, 2020

- A parliamentary panel has submitted its report on ‘The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020’.

Key recommendations:

- The government should offer a more clear-cut definition of what constitutes ‘unfair’ trade practice.
- The government should spell out a practical legal remedy to tackle the issue.
- Fix a cap on delivery charges levied by e-commerce firms.
- Provide for penal provisions for violation of rules related to misinformation.
- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution should issue broad guidelines for the fixation of delivery charges charged by the marketplace entities along with a cap on the highest limits of the delivery charges in peak hours of service.
- The Ministry should also clearly define ‘drip pricing’— wherein the final cost of the product goes up due to additional charges, and provide for protecting consumers against this by including penal provisions for violation.
- While e-commerce enterprises offer many benefits, the development of the segment has rendered consumers vulnerable to new forms of unfair trade practices, violation of privacy, and issues of unattended grievances.
- Predatory pricing is one such issue and it may result in the competition being wiped out and prove detrimental to consumers in the long run.
- Predatory pricing is a short-term strategy, adopted by some of the market giants with deep pockets to sustain short-term losses and reduce the prices of their products below the average variable costs.
- This may lead to wiping out competition from the market and could be detrimental to the consumers in the long run.

Recent rules:

- The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, notified on July 23, regulate all commercial transactions sold over a digital or electronic network.
- The e-com rules currently recognize two e-commerce business models, namely, marketplace model and the inventory-based model.
- The rules have separate specified provisions for the marketplace- and inventory-based entities.

- The e-com rules require that all information on the return, refund, exchange, warranty and guarantee, delivery, and shipment of the goods or services being sold, including their country of origin, be provided on the platform.
- Such details enable consumers to make an informed decision.

3.19 NO DIGITAL TAX IF GOODS SOLD VIA INDIA ARM

- Through the amendment to Finance Bill 2021, the government has clarified that offshore e-commerce platforms don't have to pay 2 per cent equalisation levy if they have permanent establishment or they pay any income tax here.
- However, foreign firms who are not paying any tax will have to pay.

Who has to pay the digital tax?

- The digital tax introduced in April 2020, applies only to non-resident companies with annual revenues in excess of Rs 2 crore, and covers online sales of goods and services to Indians.
- The "Equalization Levy" in India:
- It is a tax aimed at foreign digital companies. It has been in place since 2016.
- The new amendment, effective from April 1, 2020, expands the equalization levy from online advertising to nearly all online commerce activities done in India by businesses that do not have taxable presence in India through applicability of 2% on its revenues.
- Specifically, it is levied on consideration receivable by the e-commerce operator for supply or services or facilitation of supply or service to – Person resident in India, Non-resident under specified circumstances such as through sale of data collected from a person resident in India, and Person who buys goods or services through an IP address located in India.

3.20 LABOUR CODE FOR INFORMAL SECTOR

- Finance Minister in her budget speech referred to the implementation of the four labour codes, closing the process that started 20 years ago.

Do You Know?

- India's estimated 450 million informal workers comprise 90 per cent of its total workforce, with 5-10 million workers added annually.
- Nearly 40 per cent of these employed with MSMEs.
- According to Oxfam's latest global report, The Inequality Virus
- Out of the total 122 million who lost their jobs in 2020, 75 per cent, which translates to 92 million jobs, were lost in the informal sector.
- The report further highlights that over 300 informal workers died due to the lockdown, with reasons ranging from starvation, suicide, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care

- While there is an urgent need to revive the economy by generating employment, the COVID-19 experience tells us that there is also a need to provide social protection, especially to the 450 million informal sector workers.

Issues

- Government diluted the labour laws; then they drafted the rules of the Code on Social Security without really taking into consideration the plight of the informal sector workers.
- Issues of Exclusion: While on paper, the draft rules envisage wider coverage through the inclusion of informal sector and gig workers, at present the draft rules apply to manufacturing firms with over 299 workers. This leaves 71 per cent of manufacturing companies out of its purview.
- Burden of Administrative Processes: The draft rules mandate the registration of all workers (with Aadhaar cards) on the ShramSuvidha Portal to be able to receive any form of social security benefit. Failure to register (Aadhaar –driven exclusion or lack of adequate knowledge about process) will make them ineligible for the benefits. Also, migrant workers face the challenge of mandatory updating information on the online portal at regular intervals.
- Ambiguity on applicability of benefits: It is unclear if a migrant worker with an Aadhaar card registered in her/his home state of Bihar be eligible for social security benefits in Gujarat where she/he is currently employed.
- No-Right Based Framework: The Code does not emphasize social security as a right, nor does it make reference to its provision as stipulated by the Constitution. In addition, it does not stipulate any appropriate grievance redressal mechanism which will leave millions of workers vulnerable without clear social protections.

Conclusion

- The Code on Social Security was envisaged as a legal protective measure for a large number of informal workers in India but unless the labour codes are made and implemented keeping in mind the realities of the informal sector workers, it will become impossible to bridge the inequality gap.

3.21 CAIRN TAX RULING

- Context: In December 2020, a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Netherlands ruled against India in its long-running tax dispute with the U.K.-based oil and gas company Cairn Energy Plc and a subsidiary, Cairn UK Holdings Ltd. The tribunal ordered India to pay about \$1.4 billion to the company.

Action by Cairn:

- Cairn Energy has successfully moved courts in five countries- The Netherlands, France, Canada, USA and UK, to recognise its claim as per the arbitration award.

- Such recognition by courts opens the door for Cairn Energy to seize assets of the Indian government in these jurisdictions by way of enforcing its claim, in case the latter doesn't pay its dues.

What is the case about?

- The year in reference, 2006-07, was one in which big corporate changes and developments took place in Cairn Energy.
- It was the year in which it not only undertook a corporate reorganisation, but also floated an Indian subsidiary, Cairn India, which in early 2007 got listed on the Indian bourses.
- Through the corporate reorganisation process, Cairn Energy had transferred all of its India assets, which were until then held by nine subsidiaries in various countries, to the newly-formed Cairn India.
- But the tax authorities claimed that in the process of this reorganisation, Cairn Energy had made capital gains worth Rs. 24,500 crore. This, the department asserted, was the basis of the tax demand of 1.6 billion USD.
- In 2011, the U.K.-based Vedanta Resources bought a nearly 60% stake in Cairn India. In fact, four years after this, Cairn India received a tax notice for not withholding tax for the gains ascribed to its former parent company.

What happened after the tax claims in the Cairn Energy dispute?

- After receiving a draft assessment order from the tax authorities, Cairn UK Holdings Ltd. appealed before the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal. The tribunal, while providing the company relief from back-dated interest demands, however, upheld the main tax demand.
- The company had initiated proceedings of arbitration under the U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty.
- But during this time, “the government sold Cairn's almost 5% holding in Vedanta Ltd” (the residual stake the firm owned after selling Cairn India), “seized dividends totalling Rs. 1,140 crore due to it from those shareholdings”, and “set off a Rs. 1,590-crore tax refund against the demand”.

What was the main argument of Cairn Energy during the arbitration?

- The claimants, Cairn Energy and Cairn UK Holdings, argued that till the amendment was made to tax retrospectively in 2012, there was no tax on indirect transfers (transfer by a non-resident of shares in non-Indian companies which indirectly held assets in India).
- They also said the government had approved the 2006 reorganisation.
- The application of the 2012 amendments, they alleged, constituted manifest breaches of the U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty.

What was India's defence during the arbitration?

- India's counter to the main charge of Cairn Energy was that its 2006 transactions were taxable irrespective of the 2012 amendments.
- It argued that "Indian law has long permitted taxation where a transaction has a strong economic nexus with India".
- It said even if it is retrospective, it is "valid and binding applying the longstanding constitutional, legislative and legal framework in which the claimants have invested".

What did the arbitration tribunal rule?

- The tribunal said the tax demand violated the U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty. The tribunal said India "failed to accord Cairn Energy's investments fair and equitable treatment" under the bilateral protection pact it had with the United Kingdom. It also ordered India to compensate Cairn Energy and its subsidiary for "the total harm suffered" as a result of the breaches of the treaty.

4. ENVIRONMENT

4.1 WORLD WILDLIFE DAY

- In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March – the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973 – as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world’s wild animals and plants.
- The UNGA resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of World Wildlife Day.
- Theme this year: “Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet”.

About CITES:

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international regulatory treaty between 183 party states.
- Formed in 1973 and regulates the international trade in over 35,000 wild species of plants and animals.
- The focus of the convention is not solely on the protection of species. It also promotes controlled trade that is not detrimental to the sustainability of wild species.

How does CITES work?

- The convention works primarily through a system of classification and licensing.
- Wild species are categorised in Appendices I to III. This often reflects species’ threat status on the Red List of the IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List of Threatened Species first created in 1964.
- Appendix I prohibits trade in species classified as highly endangered.
- Appendix II allows trade under very specific conditions. This requires exporting countries obtain a permit, but not the importing country.
- Appendix III species require only a certificate of origin to be traded.
- National CITES management authorities may issue permits once scientific authorities show non-detriment findings.
- CITES is legally binding on state parties to the convention, which are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement its goals.

4.2 THE HIMALAYAN SEROW

- Himalayan Serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*) has been spotted in the Manas Tiger Reserve, Assam.



- About the Species: Himalayan serow is a subspecies of the mainland serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*). It resembles a cross between a goat, a donkey, a cow, and a pig.

Conservation Status:

- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- CITES: Appendix I
- The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
- Habitat: They are found at high altitudes between 2,000 metres and 4,000 metres. They are known to be found in the eastern, central, and western Himalayas but not in the Trans Himalayan region.
- Distribution: There are several species of serows in the world. All of them are found in Asia. However, the Himalayan serow is restricted to the Himalayan region.

4.3 NAG RIVER POLLUTION ABATEMENT PROJECT

- The Nag River Pollution Abatement Project has been approved at a cost of Rs. 2,117.54 crores.

Key takeaways

- The project was approved under the National River Conservation Plan.
- It will be implemented by the National River Conservation Directorate (NRCD).
- It will reduce the pollution level in terms of untreated sewage, flowing solid waste and other impurities flowing into the Nag river and its tributaries.
- The Nag River is a river flowing through Nagpur, Maharashtra.
- The city derives its name from the Nag river
- Forming a part of the Kanhan-Pench river system, the Nag River originates in Lava hills near wadi.

4.4 FSI REPORT ON FOREST FIRES

- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has released a report on forest fires in the country.

Key findings:

- At least 5,291 forest fires were recorded in Odisha between February 22 and March 1, 2021 — the highest in the country for the same period.
- Collection of mahua flowers and kendu leaves, practice of shifting cultivation and grazing in forest areas are some of the reasons for forest fires in Odisha.

- Telangana recorded the second-highest fires in the country at 1,527 during the same period, followed by Madhya Pradesh (1,507) and Andhra Pradesh (1,292), according to FSI data.

Concerns:

- Forest fires have become an issue of global concern. In many countries, wildfires are burning larger areas, and fire seasons are growing longer due to global warming.
- Globally, forest fires release billions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere, while hundreds of thousands of people are believed to die due to illnesses caused by exposure to smoke from forest fires and other landscape fires.

Causes of Forest Fire:

- Forest fires are caused by Natural causes as well as Man-made or anthropogenic causes.
- Natural causes such as lightning which set trees on fire. High atmospheric temperatures and low humidity offer favourable circumstance for a fire to start.
- Man-made causes like flame, cigarette, electric spark or any source of ignition will also cause forest fires.
- Traditionally Indian forests have been affected by fires. The problem has been aggravated with rising human and cattle population and the increase in demand for grazing, shifting cultivation and Forest products by individuals and communities.
- High temperature, wind speed and direction, level of moisture in soil and atmosphere and duration of dry spells can intensify the forest fires.

India's Initiative to Tackle Forest Fire:

- National Action Plan on Forest Fires (NAPFF): It was launched in 2018 to minimise forest fires by informing, enabling and empowering forest fringe communities and incentivising them to work with the State Forest Departments.
- The Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) is the only centrally funded program specifically dedicated to assist the states in dealing with forest fires.

4.5 RED SANDERS

- Red sanders (*Pterocarpussantalinus*) is known for its rich hue and therapeutic properties.
- The tree is endemic to several districts in Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The species was listed in Appendix II of CITES in 1995, and subsequently export of red sanders was prohibited in 2004.
- But, in 2019, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has revised its export policy to permit the export of red sanders if it is obtained from cultivated land.

- Red Sanders usually grow in the rocky, degraded and fallow lands with Red Soil and hot and dry climate.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has put it under the category of near threatened from earlier endangered species in the Red List.



4.6 FRAMEWORK FOR WATER QUALITY TESTING, MONITORING

- Jal Shakti Ministry launches framework for water quality testing, monitoring.

Key points:

- The framework is part of the Centre's flagship Jal Jeevan Mission. Of the Rs. 3.6 lakh crore Jal Jeevan budget, 2% has been earmarked for quality monitoring.
- The guidelines mandate a network of the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited labs to be set up in every State, district and block over the next year.
- At the panchayat level, teams of women in the village water and sanitation committees will be given field testing kits.
- State governments can include private players as part of the network, but the Centre has capped tariffs to ensure that they remain within the reach of the common man.



- Apart from voluntary tests by members of the public, officials have been mandated to do regular inspections. All results of testing will be fed into the Water Quality Information Management System.
- The basic water quality parameters prescribed under the guidelines are:
- pH value, total dissolved solids, turbidity, chloride, total alkalinity, total hardness, sulphate, iron, total arsenic, fluoride, nitrate, total coliform bacteria, e.coli or thermo-tolerant coliform bacteria.

4.7 WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT, 2020

- Delhi remained the most polluted capital city in the world but India, on the whole, had improved its average annual PM 2.5 (particulate matter) levels higher in 2020 than in 2019, according to a report from World Air Quality Report Air.
- World Air Quality Report
- It is released by a Swiss air quality technology company **IQAir**.
- IQAir is an air quality technology company that since 1963 seeks to empower individuals, organizations and communities to breathe cleaner air through information, collaboration and technology solutions.
- The 2020 Report is based on PM2.5 data from 106 countries that have been measured by ground-based monitoring stations.

Highlights of the report

- Of the 14 most polluted cities, 13 were in India.
- When ranked by cities, Hotan in China was the most polluted, with an average concentration of 110.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, followed by Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh at 106.
- Delhi's concentration level, based primarily on data from the Central Pollution Control Board, was 84.1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2020, a 15% improvement from the 98.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ recorded in 2019 — a consequence of the lockdown.
- Bangladesh and Pakistan were the countries in 2020 with worse average PM 2.5 levels than India, says the report.
- China ranked 11th in the latest report, a deterioration from the 14th in the previous edition of the report. In the 2020 report, 106 countries were evaluated.

4.8 GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

- The Supreme Court intervened on behalf of the Great Indian Bustards over the birds falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Key takeaways

- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India will examine on a priority basis whether overhead power cables can be replaced with underground ones to save the bird.

- The court also noted that an alternative mechanism — to install flight bird divertors — to guide the birds away from the power lines would be expensive.

Great Indian Bustard

- Scientific Name: *Ardeotisnigriceps*.
- They feed on grass seeds, insects like grasshoppers and beetles, and sometimes even small rodents and reptiles.
- Distribution: India, effectively the only home of the bustards, now harbours less than 150 individuals in five States.
- Today, its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small population also occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- It is the State bird of Rajasthan.
- Conservation status: (1) Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972;
- (2) Appendix I of CITES;
- (3) Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

4.9 WHALE SHARK

- The whale shark is the largest living species of fish and is endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- It is protected under the Wildlife Protection Act.
- The whale shark has a lifespan of around 130 years and has a unique pattern of dots on its body.
- It can grow up to 10 metres in length and weigh around 20 tonnes.
- Habitat: Whale sharks are found in all the tropical oceans of the world. Whale sharks are found along the coast of India.



4.10 FISHING CATS

- The first-ever survey of the elusive fishing cat in and around Asia's biggest brackish water lagoon, the Chilika lake in Odisha, started March 1, 2021.
- Fishing cats are almost twice the size of the house cat.
- They are generally found in the marshy wetlands of northern and eastern India and on the mangroves of the east coast.
- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

4.11 PROJECT RE-HAB

- The forest authorities intend to mitigate human-elephant conflict by installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages under the Project RE-HAB.



- Project RE-HAB stands for Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees. It is an initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).
- It intends to create “bee fences” to thwart elephant attacks in human habitations using honeybees.
- Bee boxes have been placed on the ground as well as hung from the trees.
- The boxes are connected with a string so that when elephants attempt to pass through, a tug causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds and dissuade them from progressing further.
- This idea stems from the elephants’ proven fear of the bees.

Areas covered by the project

- The pilot project was launched at four locations around Chelur village in the Kodagu district of Karnataka.
- These spots are located on the periphery of Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zones.

Benefits offered

- The biggest advantage of Project RE-HAB is that it dissuades elephants without causing any harm to them.
- It is extremely cost-effective as compared to various other measures such as digging trenches or erecting fences.

4.12 IRENA

- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) released the World Energy Transitions Outlook report.
- It estimated that by 2050, 90% of total electricity needs would be supplied by renewables, followed by 6% from natural gas and the remaining from nuclear.
- The agency has identified 30 innovations for the integration of wind and solar PV in power systems.

About IRENA

- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) is an intergovernmental organisation mandated to facilitate cooperation and promote the adoption and sustainable use of renewable energy.
- It was founded in 2009 and its statute entered into force in 2010.
- The agency is headquartered in Masdar City, Abu Dhabi.
- IRENA is an official United Nations observer.

4.13 DIGITAL GREEN CERTIFICATES BY EU

- On March 17, 2021, the European Commission proposed to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe and free movement of citizens within the European Union (EU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The certificates are expected to be rolled out by the summer, after countries have had the time to set up the required digital infrastructure.
- So, what exactly is the Digital Green Certificate?
- No danger of COVID-19 transmission: A Digital Green Certificate is proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result or has recovered from COVID-19.

- **Digital Format & Free:** The key features of the certificate are that it will be in digital or paper format complete with a QR code and will be free of charge.
- **Issuing Authorities:** The certificate can be issued by authorities, including hospitals, testing centres and health authorities.
- **Lifting of restrictions in coordinated manner:** Once the proposal for digital certificates is finalised, it will be accepted in all EU countries and will help to ensure that the restrictions imposed in different areas within the EU can be lifted in a coordinated manner.
- **Eligibility:** All EU citizens or third-country nationals who are legally staying in the EU will be able to use these digital certificates and thereby will be exempted from free movement restrictions.
- **Notifying Commission:** In case an EU member country requires a person to quarantine or undergo a test, it will have to notify the Commission and all other member states justifying its decision

What is the need for such a document?

- **Waives free movement restrictions:** In the EU and across the world, the tourism industry has been severely impacted due to the spread of the disease. Many countries have, therefore, been contemplating digital certificates or passports that will be proof that a person has been vaccinated or has recovered from COVID-19.
- **Israel's Vaccine Passport Model:** In February, Israel became the first country to issue certificates called "vaccine passports" that will allow vaccinated individuals to use some facilities and attend events.
- **Global Practice:** Denmark also said that it was in the process of rolling out digital passports that would act as proof for those individuals who have been vaccinated. Even so, as early as May 2020, countries such as Chile had proposed "release certificates" meant for those who had recovered from COVID-19

Concerns

- **Stance of WHO:** However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had advised against using such certificates because of lack of evidence that a person infected with Covid-19 could not get the infection again.
- **Possibility of re-infection:** However, it is now known that re-infection in case of COVID-19 is rare. Research published in the journal Lancet recently points out that most people who have had COVID-19 are protected from re-infection for at least a period of six months. However, the study says that elderly patients are more prone to reinfections.

4.14 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

- The United Nations observes March 21 as the International Day of Forests, commemorating the green cover around the world and reiterating its importance.

- The theme for 2021 is “Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being”.



- This year’s theme aims to emphasize how restoration and sustainable management of forests can help address climate change and the biodiversity crisis.
- It can also help produce goods and services for sustainable development, fostering an economic activity that creates jobs and improves lives.
- Themes of the International Day of Forests are aimed to fit into the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), which calls for the protection and revival of ecosystems around the world.
- The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21 as the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012.
- The Day is celebrated by the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, and other relevant organizations in the field.

4.15 BACTERIA FOUND ON INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION NAMED AFTER INDIAN SCIENTIST

- Four species of bacteria have been discovered onboard the International Space Station (ISS), one of which has been named after Indian biodiversity scientist SeyedAjmal Khan (*Methylobacteriumajmalii*).
- Four strains of bacteria belong to the family
- While one strain was identified as *Methylorubrumrhodesianum* bacteria, the other three strains were previously undiscovered.
- These bacteria aid in plant growth.

4.16 INTER-STATE TIGER RELOCATION PROJECT

- Sundari — a tigress shifted as part of India’s first inter-state translocation project in 2018 from Madhya Pradesh to Odisha has returned home.

What is the news?

- The five-year-old tigress Sundari spent 28 months in captivity in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Odisha.

- The two states lingered on the process for her relocation despite the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) shelving off the much-vaunted inter-state tiger translocation drive.

What was the Tiger Relocation Project?

- The tiger relocation project was initiated in 2018 wherein two big cats, a male (Mahavir) from Kanha Tiger Reserve and a female (Sundari) from Bandhavgarh from MP were relocated to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha.
- The relocation was meant to serve two purposes;
 1. To reduce the tiger population in areas with excess tigers to majorly reduce territorial disputes and
 2. To reintroduce tigers in areas where the population has considerably reduced due to various reasons

How were Mahavir and Sundari chosen for the project?

- Both the big cats were selected for the translocation project as per the NTCA guidelines and in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India and the GoI.
- Two key factors were considered for choosing the animal — first, a dispersing young animal which is to find a new and second, an adult transient which was yet to establish any territory.
- What is the Satkosia Tiger Reserve and why was it chosen?
- Encompassing an area of 963.87 sq km, the Satkosia Tiger Reserve spreads across four districts and has as its core area 523 sq km.
- According to NTCA, Satkosia falls under reserves where “there is a potential for increasing tiger populations”.
- Declared as a Tiger Reserve in 2007, Satkosia had a population of 12 tigers then. The numbers reduced to two in 2018.
- The purpose of the relocation was to repopulate tigers in the reserve areas.

5. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.1 Direct Energy Weapons (DEW):

- The concept of using lasers or high energy beams to destroy a target has been mulled by many militaries across the world. DRDO has been pursuing to develop DEWs for Indian armed forces.

What is DEW?

- Directed-energy weapon(DEW) damages or destroys its target using focussed energy by means of lasers, microwaves or particle beams.
- Directed-energy weapons are already in service in the role of 'drone defence' systems. In such systems, laser beams are used to knock out parts of drones, which are becoming an integral part of the military arsenal of most nations.
- Their use goes beyond drones and can be used to shoot aircraft, missiles or any other hostile object.

Why in news?

- DRDO has sought \$100 million from the ministry of defence to develop a high-power laser weapon.
- The classified project, dubbed DURGA II (Directionally Unrestricted Ray-Gun Array), will see the Indian Army receive the 100-kilowatt, lightweight directed-energy system.
- In 2017, DRDO tested a 1KW laser weapon mounted on a truck at a test facility in Chitradurga.
- Laser Science and Technology Centre at Delhi is the lead laboratory in developing laser weapons. "The center has so far made a 25-kilowatt laser that can target a ballistic missile during its terminal phase at a maximum distance of 5 kilometers.

Similar systems:

- Lockheed Martin delivered the first unit of its High Energy Laser with Integrated Optical-dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS) laser system to the US Navy. The HELIOS has power in excess of 60KW and is used primarily to damage smaller surface ships and drones.

Advantages with DEW:

1. Transmit lethal force at the speed of light (about 300,000 kilometers per second).
2. Their beams are not affected by the constraining effects of gravity or atmospheric drag.
3. They are extremely precise.
4. Their effects can be tailored by varying the type and intensity of energy delivered against targets.

Challenges developing DEW:

1. High-power laser weapons are difficult to develop, a notable problem being provision of adequate power to the system.
2. Developing a cooling mechanism for the system that heats up when the laser beam is fired.
3. Ensuring a focused beam towards a distant target.

4. Developing of optoelectronics involving lenses to create that focus.

5.2 Negev Light Machine Gun:

- Indian Army has received the first batch of Negev Light Machine Guns (LMG) from Israel as it seeks to boost the firepower of frontline troops.
- India ordered 16,479 LMGs under the Fast Track Procedure in March, 2020.
- The first batch of 6,000 guns were delivered.
- The LMG was needed to meet urgent operational requirements. Notably, India has been engaged in a border standoff with Chinese forces in the Ladakh region since May.



What is Negev?

- A robust light machine gun with powerful target acquisition.
- Adopted by the Israeli Defence Forces in 1997.
- Also has semi-automatic mode to provide accurate, controlled fire in close quarter battle.
- Automatic mode for maximum firepower.

5.3 Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology:

- DRDO has successfully completed the test run of land based prototype of AIP system on March 8, 2021. With this test India has joined a select club of countries namely China, Germany, Sweden, France, Spain and Russia.
- The plant was operated in endurance mode and max power mode as per navy's requirement. Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System jointly developed by Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

What is AIP?

- Conventional Submarines cannot stay inside water for long. They need to visit the surface every day for want of oxygen to recharge their batteries. This undesirable situation can be negated by using Air Independent Propulsion system.

- AIP allows even conventional submarines to stay inside water for up to one week. India has used Phosphoros
- This system will be fitted in Scorpene Class Submarines.
- Note: Nuclear submarines do not have to come up frequently.

Why is it important for India?

- India sees itself as a security provider for Indian ocean, and to do so it needs indigenous platforms which are reliable and lethal. One such system is a submarine. Submarines will play a key role in defending India's interest against an assertive China.

5.4 INS Karanj

- The Indian Navy on March 10, 2021 inducted its third Scorpene-class conventional diesel electric submarine, INS Karanj, into service. It is named after an Indian Submarine which took part in 1971 war.
- The first submarine of the class, INS Kalvari, was commissioned in December 2017 and the second, INS Khanderi, in September 2019.
- A fourth submarine, Vela, was launched into the water in May 2019 and the fifth, Vagir, in November 2020, and both are undergoing sea trials. The sixth is in an advanced stage of outfitting.

What are Scorpene-class submarines?

- The Scorpene class submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world.
- The submarine has superior stealth features, such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels and ability to attack with precision-guided weapons on board.

The Indian Navy intends to use the submarines for missions such as:

- Area surveillance.
- Intelligence gathering.
- Anti-submarine warfare.
- Anti-surface warfare.
- Mine laying operations.

The attack submarines can travel at a maximum submerged speed of approximately 20 knots and have the ability to remain submerged for 21 days. It has a diving depth of more than 350m. The Scorpene class of submarines were designed by French naval shipbuilding firm DCNS in partnership with Spanish shipbuilding firm Navantia.

Project 75I

Under this project of the Indian Navy, six latest-generation attack submarines are being built. They are expected to be completed by 2022. The project is taking shape at Mazagon Dock in Mumbai.

5.5 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missile:

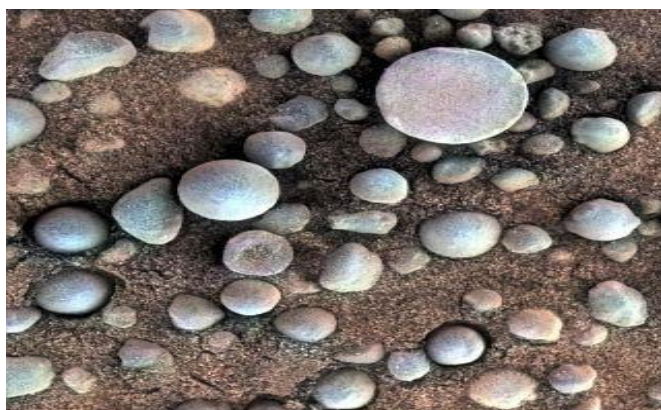
- It is a portable medium-range, anti-tank weapon produced by BDL under licence from French firm MBDA Missile Systems in India.
- The Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD) has announced the signing of a contract with Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for the supply of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) to the Indian Army.
- The contract will see BDL supply 4,960 MILAN-2T ATGMs for \$163m.
- In a statement, the MoD said: “This project is a big opportunity for the defence industry to showcase its capability and will be a step in the direction of achieving the goal of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ in the defence sector.”

5.6 **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet:**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range Chandipur off the coast of Odisha on March 05, 2021.
- This test gives DRDO a technological advantage which will enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles.
- India made Astra an air-air missile will be fitted with this engine in future which will increase its range from 120 to 160 km and beyond. At present India is importing air-air missiles like Meteor to meet its Beyond Visual Range Air-Air Missile (BVRAAM) requirements.

5.7 **Martian Blueberries:**

- NASA's Opportunity rover touched down on Mars in 2004 and spotted a geological curiosity: tiny, iron-rich spheres scattered across the rock surface near the robot's landing site.
- Even though they were given a cute name, they were actually Haematite (Iron Oxide). Such rocks are found On Earth too.



India Connection:

- The team from Physical Research Laboratory has been studying the Jhuran formation in Gujarat which is between 145 and 201 million years old. Detailed geochemistry and spectroscopic investigations of the haematite concretions on this space revealed that they resemble those on Mars.

- Why do we need to study these rocks?
- Haematite is known to form in oxidising environments, we can infer that water must have also played a crucial role in the formation of grey haematite on Mars.
- Water is believed to have disappeared from Mars rocks about three billion years ago. Studies from the newly landed Perseverance rover may help find new clues and signs of life and other organic compounds, thus helping us paint a detailed picture of the history of Mars.

5.8 The 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, Government of India on 25/12/2020.
- INSACOG is since then carrying 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.
- It has found 771 variants of concerns (VOCs) have been detected in a total of 10787 positive samples shared by States/UTs. These include 736 samples positive for viruses of the UK (B.1.1.7) lineage. 34 samples were found positive for viruses of the South African (B.1.351) lineage. 1 sample was found positive for viruses of the Brazilian (P.1) lineage. The samples with these VOCs have been identified in 18 States of the country.
- The analysis of samples from Maharashtra has revealed that compared to December 2020, there has been an increase in the fraction of samples with the E484Q and L452R mutations. Such mutations confer immune escape and increased infectivity. These mutations have been found in about 15-20% of samples and do not match any previously catalogued VOCs.
- From Kerala 2032 samples (from all 14 districts) have been sequenced. The N440K variant that is associated with immune escape has been found in 123 samples from 11 districts. This variant was earlier found in 33% of samples from Andhra Pradesh, and in 53 of 104 samples from Telangana.
- This variant has also been reported from 16 other countries including UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia. As of now these can be at best said to be variant under investigation.

5.9 PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1:

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C51 successfully launched Amazonia-1 along with 18 co-passenger satellites on February 28, 2021 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR, Sriharikota.
- Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite of National Institute for Space Research (INPE). This satellite would further strengthen the existing structure by providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.



- PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 is the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under Department of Space.
- With this launch, the total number of customer satellites from foreign countries placed in orbit by PSLV is 342 satellites from 34 countries.

5.10 NISAR Mission:

- ISRO on March 8, 2021 sent its S-Band SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar) payload to JPL, Pasadena to integrate it with L-band SAR payload of JPL, NASA under the joint mission named NISAR(NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar).
- NISAR is a joint collaboration between ISRO and NASA for a dual-frequency L and S-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar for earth observation.
- The satellite will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequencies.
- NISAR would provide a means of disentangling highly spatial and temporally complex processes ranging from ecosystem disturbances to ice sheet collapses and natural hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides.
- The satellite will be launched from SDSC-SHAR in 2022.



5.11 Fukushima nuclear disaster completes 10 years:

- On March 11, 2011 a Tsunami was triggered by an earthquake of magnitude 9.
- The waves left nearly 20,000 people dead or missing and knocked out the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant's cooling system, triggering a meltdown.
- The flooding of the power plant dispersed lots of radioactive material, including the isotopes caesium-137 and caesium-134, which take 30 and 2 years, respectively, to decay to half their initial amounts. Iodine-131 was also released, but with a half-life of just eight days, it decayed quickly.
- Over 154000 people were evacuated, a recent report has found that no major health problems have been observed due to radiation.

Major nuclear accidents:

1. Three-Mile island incident- cooling system malfunction- 1979.
2. Chernobyl nuclear disaster- A explosion in one of the reactors lead to release of harmful radiation- 1986.
3. Fukushima nuclear Disaster- Tsunami destroys the cooling system of the nuclear plant leading to meltdown of the three reactor cores- 2011.

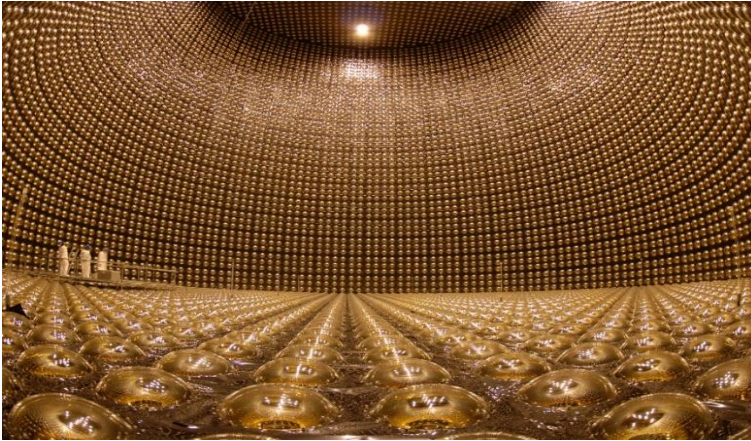
5.12 Baikal Gigaton Volume detector:

Russia has deployed a gaint telescope beneath Lake Baikal to detect one of the fundamental particles in nature, Neutrinos. Neutrino detectors are typically built underground to shield them from cosmic rays and other sources of interference. Clear freshwater and thick, protective ice cover make Lake Baikal an ideal place to search for neutrinos.

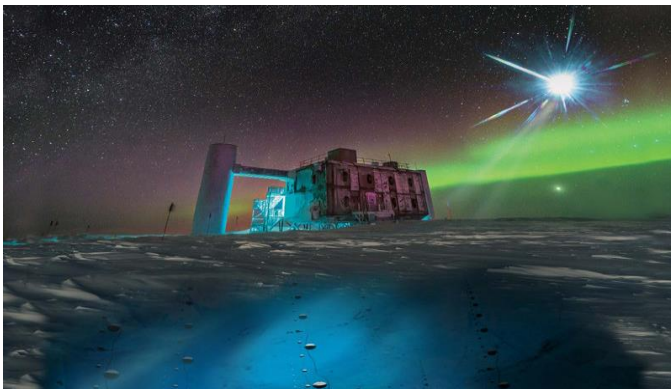
How does Baikal GVD work?

The glass spheres hold what are called photomultiplier tubes, which detect a particular kind of light that's given off when a neutrino passes through a clear medium (in this case, lake water) at a speed faster than light travels through that same medium. This light is called Cherenkov light after one of its discoverers, Soviet physicist Pavel Cherenkov.

Other such detectors are:



1. Super-Kamiokande detector in Japan is shown in figure below:
2. The IceCube Neutrino Observatory is the first detector of its kind, designed to observe the cosmos from deep within the South Pole.



3. India based Neutrino observatory:

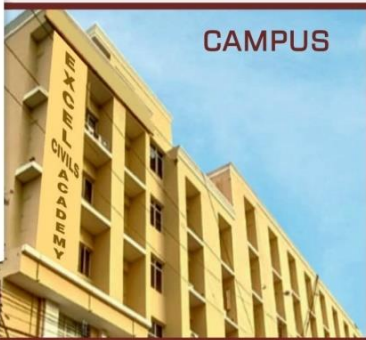


What are neutrinos?

1. These are charge less, massless particles.
2. They were postulated by Pauli.
3. They are released during Beta-decay.

Why do we need to study neutrinos?

- These high-energy astronomical messengers provide information to probe the most violent astrophysical sources: events like exploding stars, gamma-ray bursts, and cataclysmic phenomena involving black holes and neutron stars.



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