

## ABOUT CURRENT CONNECT

It gives us immense pleasure to present an innovative approach to master current affairs. Current is a passing wind and diverse issues happen at the same time. It is to an extent chaotic. Newspapers, magazines and various other sources report the chaos per se. With our experience of current affairs we have tried to give “the current” a medium to travel. It is the syllabus of the UPSC with their components that are the medium through which the "Current is Passed" to the readers. Ever since the new syllabus of the UPSC came into existence, current has been gaining significance both at prelims as well as mains examination. This book is meant to cover current affairs and related questions arising from those events. We have not only covered the current events for their factual contents but also presented it in such a way that any question asked from that topic gets covered. Moreover, topics are also "peppered" with the relevant facts/key concepts that are related to the theme. We have also given questions for practice both, subjective and objective, so that candidates are oriented to the examination mode. It is a collection covering myriad source yet in a manageable size. To use this book we recommend you to master the components of general studies (GS) syllabus as broken into rows and columns (provided in the beginning after preface). Each cell comprising of the portion of GS becomes the connect for the current and every news subsequently covered guides the reader to the address of the syllabus. It is logical to expect that same issue may be connected to more than one topic of the syllabus. Further, the news also has some additional vistas opened for the readers by adding a box with a title “PEPPER IT WITH” where we expect the students to build further around the theme.

We are also trying to reach the remotest part of the country with our spirit and zeal of “Mains Answer Writing”, which has been admired by students, CSE rankholders and other scholars. Continuing in line with the effort, we have started with programs like 7 Question (7Q) Challenge, Shell Points, Stock Points, Content Enrichment Booklet etc.

When it comes to evaluation, we are altogether at a different level. We are also reaching every nook and corner with this expertise for the aspirants of CSE. Now you can write a Mains Answer and get it evaluated from our Expert Team and can get Feedback. [Drop a mail at evaluation@ksgindia.com for registering yourself in our race to perfection.](mailto:evaluation@ksgindia.com) Don't wait, it's your golden chance to crack this exam and fulfill your passionate dream.

Team KSG

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GS - IV	Ethical issues related to family society, education, Corruption etc.	Ethics in public and private administrative	Issues	Related laws and rules	Governance/ Governance	Ethics in international issues	Personalities and their	Other important topics			
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## POLITY

### Issues of the Reservations

#### News Excerpt

The Supreme Court recently mentioned that states should take more steps to promote education and establish institutes for the upliftment of socially and educationally backward classes as "affirmative action" is not limited to just the reservation. A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan, hearing the Maratha quota case, said that several other things can be done by the states for this purpose.

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#### Pre-Connect

The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act of 2018 inserted Articles 338B, which deals with the structure, duties and powers of the National Commission for Backward Class (NCBC), and 342A dealing with power of the President to notify a particular caste as SEBC as also of Parliament to change the list.

#### Background

- The pleas before the Constitution Bench challenges the Bombay High Court judgment passed in June 2019, and submits that the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018 which provides for 12% and 13% quota to the Maratha community in education and jobs respectively, violated the principles laid in the case of Indira Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) as per which the Apex Court capped the reservation limit at 50%.
- The Bombay High Court, while upholding the Maratha quota, held that 16% reservation is not justifiable and ruled that reservation should not exceed 12% in employment and 13% in education as recommended by the State Backward Commission.
- On September 9, 2020, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court referred the cases to a larger bench to determine the issue whether state government has the power to declare a class has socially and economically backward after the Constitution (102) Amendment Act.

#### Highlights

- The SEBC Act 2018 of Maharashtra was enacted to grant reservation to people of the Maratha community in the state in jobs and admissions.
- The top court is examining issues including whether the landmark 1992 judgement in Indra Sawhney case, also known as the Mandal verdict which caps quota at 50 per cent, requires a re-look by a larger bench "in the light of subsequent Constitutional amendments, judgments and changed social dynamics of the society".
- Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Jharkhand government, said this would involve issues including financial resources of the state, number of schools and teachers there.
- According to experts, extent of reservation would differ from state to state in the country depending on the population and thus, there cannot be a "straight jacket formula" for this.
- During the hearing conducted through video-conferencing, senior advocate P S Patwalia, appearing for Maharashtra, referred to the protests held earlier in the state on this issue and said it was a "burning issue" there.
- The top court had earlier sought to know for how many generations would reservations in jobs and education continue and had raised concerns over "resultant inequality" in case the overall 50 per cent limit was to be removed.
- Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Maharashtra, had said that the Mandal judgement on capping the quota needed a re-look in the changed circumstances.

#### PEPPER IT WITH

Second Backward Classes Commission, Article 16(4) and 340 of the Constitution; Recommendations Ram Nandan Committee

- Rohatgi had said there were many reasons for the re-look of the Mandal judgment which was premised on the census of 1931 and moreover, the population has increased many folds and reached to 135 crores.
- Attorney General K K Venugopal had last week told the top court that the 102nd amendment to the Constitution does not deprive state legislatures to enact law determining the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) and conferring benefits on them.
- Karnataka, also came in support of its right to specify a particular community as 'socially and educationally backward' for inclusion in the State List for grant of reservation benefits.

### Right Issues: Right to counsel in custody

#### News Excerpt

Recently arrested Mumbai policeperson in a high pro has sought his lawyer's presence during questioning, while the NIA has argued that this insistence is hampering the probe. Separately, accused inspector filed an application seeking to be allowed to meet his lawyer in privacy while he is in police custody.

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#### Pre-Connect

- Around the globe, various rights are available to a person while in custody of an investigating agency to prevent him or her from being forced into giving self-incriminating statements through means including torture.
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms the right of an accused to be informed of the reasons for an arrest, the charges against him and the right to be provided legal assistance.
- The "Miranda rights" or "Miranda warning", as they are referred to in the US, require a police officer to inform a suspect being arrested that he has the right to talk to a lawyer for advice before being questioned, and the right to have a lawyer with him during questioning.
- 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 Cr. P. C. states that an accused is entitled to "meet an advocate of his choice during interrogation, though not throughout interrogation".

**Rights of an Arrested Person**

1. Right to Silence.
2. Right to know the Grounds of Arrest.
3. Information regarding the Right to be Released on Bail.
4. Right to be taken before a Magistrate without delay.
5. Right of not being detained for more than 24 Hours without judicial scrutiny.
6. Right to a fair trial.
7. Right to a speedy trial.
8. Right to consult a legal practitioner.
9. Rights of free Legal Aid.
10. Right to be examined by a Medical Practitioner.
11. Right of the accused to produce an evidence.

### Are lawyers allowed to remain present during interrogation of an accused in custody?

- Unlike in some countries, lawyers in India are not allowed to be with an accused throughout their investigation. Apart from the provisions of Section 41D of the Cr. P. C., courts also rely on the Supreme Court judgment in the D. K. Basu case of 1997, considered the guiding principles to be followed by investigating agencies in cases of arrest or detention.



- The judgment in the D. K. Basu case 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), the Supreme Court took into consideration alleged threats given to an accused of being subjected to third degree methods, as well as his medical condition as he had suffered a heart attack. 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”.
- 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.

#### PEPPER IT WITH

Salient features of the Mallimath Committee Report, Sec. 24, 25, 26, 27 and 138 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872

### Analytica

- ✓ It is generally believed that in spite of the various safeguards in the Cr. P. C. as well as the in the Constitution, the power of arrest given to the police is being misused till this day.
- ✓ It is also believed that the police often use their position of power to threaten the arrested persons and take advantage of their office to extort money. There have also been innumerable reports on custodial violence that lead many to believe that deprivation of basic rights of the arrested persons has become common place nowadays.
- ✓ The Mallimath Committee in its report on the reforms in the Criminal Justice System has stated that the accused has the right to know the rights given to him under law and how to enforce such rights.
- ✓ There have also been criticisms that the police fail to inform the persons arrested of the charge against them and hence, let the arrested persons flounder in custody, in complete ignorance of their alleged crimes.
- ✓ This has been attributed to the colonial nature of our Criminal Justice System where the duty of arrest was thrust upon the Indian officers while the Britishers drew up the charge against the accused. Thus, it is entirely possible that the English origins of the Indian Criminal Justice system may have resulted unwittingly in the rights of the arrested persons falling through the cracks.
- ✓ There is imminent need to bring in changes in Criminal Justice Administration so that state should recognize that its primary duty is not to punish, but to socialize and reform the wrongdoer and above all it should be clearly understood that socialization is not identical with punishment, for it comprises prevention, education, care and rehabilitation within the framework of the social defence.
- ✓ Thus, in the end we find that the Rule of law regulates the functionary of every organ of the state machinery, including the agency responsible for conducting prosecution and investigation which must confine themselves within the four corners of the law.
- ✓ It is the duty of the police to protect the rights of society. It must be remembered that this society includes all people, including the arrested. Thus, it is still the police’s duty to protect the rights of the arrested person.
- ✓ Hence, in light of the discussed provisions, a police officer must make sure that handcuffs are not used unnecessarily, that the accused is not harassed needlessly, that the arrested person is made aware of the grounds of his arrest, informed whether he is entitled to bail and of course, produced before a Magistrate within twenty-four hours of his arrest.

### Conclusion

One of the basic tenets of our legal system is the benefit of the presumption of innocence of the accused till he is found guilty at the end of a trial on legal evidence. In a democratic society even the rights of the accused are sacrosanct, though accused of an offence, he does



not become a non-person. Rights of the accused include the rights of the accused at the time of arrest, at the time of search and seizure, during the process of trial and the like.

### Digital Freedom and the issues with Free Speech

#### News Excerpt

The Government of India through the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MietY) has issued a notification, for implementing the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

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#### Pre-Connect

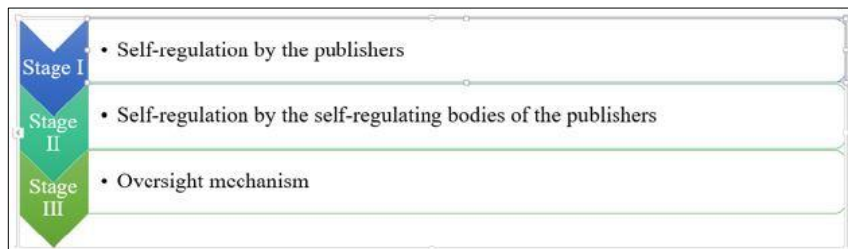
- The Rules—issued under the Information Technology Act, 2000—are intended to curb harmful content on social media, streaming services, and digital news services.
- They require the players involved to set up a grievance redressal system to address the concerns of users and the government.

#### Facts and Figures

- According to the information released by The Press Information Bureau, there are 530 Million WhatsApp users in India.
- While there are 448 Million users of YouTube and there are 410 Million as well as 210 Million, Facebook and Instagram users, respectively.

#### Social Media Control- How to Bell the Cat!!

- ✓ The lockdown and corona phase in India provided the country with a threshold and introduced one to the stark reality of their reliance over social media platforms.
- ✓ The deliberations clearly bring to the dawn that the reliance of people on social media is highly treacherous as there is a high possibility of its misuse at this juncture.
- ✓ In the recent years, there has been a rampant use of social media to abuse women and to even infringe with people’s privacy.
- ✓ There had been a devoid of a specific mandate which restrained the abusers or the misusers of social media.



- ✓ In such circumstances, the absence of a robust complaint mechanism wherein the ordinary users of social media and OTT (over-the-top) platforms could register their complaint and get their grievances redressed within defined timeline further aggravated the victim’s helplessness.
- ✓ It was also found that usually the social media platforms are supposed to work as intermediaries but more often than not, they adopted to the role of publishers or editors of information.

#### Key Provisions of the Guidelines Related to Social Media to Be Administered by Ministry of Electronics and IT

- **Due Diligence To Be Followed By Intermediaries:** The Rules prescribe due diligence that must be followed by intermediaries, including social media intermediaries. In case, due diligence is not followed by the intermediary, safe harbour provisions will not apply to them.
- **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** The Rules seek to empower the users by mandating the intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, to establish a grievance redressal mechanism for receiving resolving complaints from the users or victims. Intermediaries shall appoint a Grievance Officer to deal with such complaints and share the name and contact details of such officer.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India, Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995

Grievance Officer shall acknowledge the complaint within twenty four hours and resolve it within fifteen days from its receipt.

- **Ensuring Online Safety and Dignity of Users, Specially Women Users:** Intermediaries shall remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals, show such individuals in full or partial nudity or in sexual act or is in the nature of impersonation including morphed images etc. Such a complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf.
- **Two Categories of Social Media Intermediaries:** To encourage innovations and enable growth of new social media intermediaries without subjecting smaller platforms to significant compliance requirement, the Rules make a distinction between social media intermediaries and significant social media intermediaries. This distinction is based on the number of users on the social media platform. Government is empowered to notify the threshold of user base that will distinguish between social media intermediaries and significant social media intermediaries. The Rules require the significant social media intermediaries to follow certain additional due diligence.
- **Additional Due Diligence to Be Followed by Significant Social Media Intermediary:**
  - Appoint a **Chief Compliance Officer** who shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act and Rules. Such a person should be a resident in India.
  - Appoint a **Nodal Contact Person** for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies. Such a person shall be a resident in India.
  - Appoint a **Resident Grievance Officer** who shall perform the functions mentioned under Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Such a person shall be a resident in India.
  - Publish a **monthly compliance report** mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints as well as details of contents removed proactively by the significant social media intermediary.
  - Significant social media intermediaries providing services primarily in the nature of messaging shall enable **identification of the first originator of the information** that is required only for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order or of incitement to an offence relating to the above or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than five years. **Intermediary shall not be required to disclose the contents of any message** or any other information to the first originator.
  - Significant social media intermediary shall have a physical contact address in India published on its website or mobile app or both.
  - **Voluntary User Verification Mechanism:** Users who wish to verify their accounts voluntarily shall be provided an appropriate mechanism to verify their accounts and provided with demonstrable and visible mark of verification.
  - **Giving Users An Opportunity to Be Heard:** In cases where significant social media intermediaries removes or disables access to any information on their own accord, then a prior intimation for the same shall be communicated to the user who has shared that information with a notice explaining the grounds and reasons for such action. Users must be provided an adequate and reasonable opportunity to dispute the action taken by the intermediary.
- **Removal of Unlawful Information:** An intermediary upon receiving actual knowledge in the form of an order by a court or being notified by the Appropriate Govt. or its agencies through authorized officer should not host or publish any information which is prohibited under any law in relation to the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, friendly relations with foreign countries etc.
- The Rules will come in effect from the date of their publication in the gazette, except for the **additional due diligence for significant social media intermediaries**, which shall **come in effect 3 months after** publication of these Rules.

## Analytica

- ✦ Social Media today has not been just a mode of entertainment but it has evolved into an arena for trade and commerce activities as well.
- ✦ It has also upheld the basic criteria of transmission of information and it has also accommodated a space for people to freely express their views as well as opinions.
- ✦ The new IT Rules, 2021 have been a welcome step which puts the users of the information and the intermediaries in the form of social media on the same platform.
- ✦ The Rules at present are under the scanner and are being objected by several groups for being anti-democratic and taking away digital rights.
- ✦ The Rules though stringent will play a major role in evolving social media control mechanism in the coming days and also the enforcement action undertaken against violation of IT Rules, 2021 will determine the extent of social media misuse in India in future.

### Conclusion

Social media platform can certainly be used for asking questions and criticism and therefore they are an imperative tool and should be used wisely. Social media platforms have empowered the ordinary users but they need accountability against its misuse and abuse. The new Rules empowers ordinary users of social media, embodying a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievance. The proposed framework is progressive, liberal and contemporaneous. It seeks to address peoples’ varied concerns while removing any misapprehension about curbing creativity and freedom of speech and expression.

## Rights of the OCI Cardholders

### News Excerpt

New rules have been announced recently by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India (MHA) for Overseas Citizens of India cardholders (OCI cardholders).

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### Pre-Connect

- The Constitution of India does not allow holding Indian citizenship and Citizenship of a foreign country simultaneously. Based on the recommendation of the High-Level committee on Indian Diaspora, the Government of India decided to register Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) of certain category as has been specified in the Section 7A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 as Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Cardholder.
- Persons registered as OCI Cardholder have not been given any voting rights, election to Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha/Legislative Assembly/Council, holding Constitutional posts such as President, Vice President, Judge of Supreme Court/High Court etc.
- A person registered as an OCI Cardholder is eligible to apply for grant of Indian citizenship under section 5(1) (g) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 if he/she is registered as OCI Cardholder for five years and is ordinarily resident in India for twelve months before making an application for registration. Central Government, if it is satisfied that special circumstances exist, may after recording the circumstances in writing, relax the period of twelve months, up to a maximum of thirty days which may be in different breaks.

### Highlights of the New Rules

- The government has notified a consolidated list of rights that Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) enjoy, spelling out that holders of OCI cards would need prior permission for a set of activities that include research, journalism, mountaineering, missionary or Tablighi work, and visits to restricted areas.
- The notification in the Gazette granted OCIs the right of multiple entry lifelong visa to India for any purpose; exemption from registration with the Foreigners’ Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) for any length of stay in India; and parity with Indian nationals in the matter of domestic air fares, entry fees to monuments and public places.
- It also said that OCI cardholders will enjoy parity with Non Resident Indians (NRIs) in adoption of children, appearing in competitive exams, purchase or sale of immovable property barring agricultural land and farmhouses, and pursuing professions such as doctors, lawyers, architects, and chartered accountants.

➤ However, many of these rights have been subjected to certain restrictions. The notifications says that the right of multiple entry lifelong visa for “any purpose” can be enjoyed provided the OCI obtains a special permission from “the competent authority” or the FRRO “to undertake research; to undertake any Missionary or Tablighi or Mountaineering or Journalistic activities; to undertake internship in any foreign Diplomatic Missions or foreign Government organisations in India or to take up employment in any foreign Diplomatic Missions in India; to visit any place which falls within the Protected or Restricted or prohibited areas as notified by the Central Government or competent authority”.

➤ The restrictions on missionary and Tablighi activities on foreigners and OCIs have existed since the 90s when the latter were known as Persons of Indian Origin (PIO). In February 2018, the government published broad guidelines for Indian visa wherein it mentioned the restrictions on foreigners and OCIs from engaging in Tablighi activity.

➤ In the latest notification, exemption from registration with the FRRO can be enjoyed provided the OCI cardholder intimates the FRRO by email whenever there is a change in their permanent residential address and occupation.

➤ The notification says OCIs can appear for all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or such other tests to make them eligible for admission only against any Non-Resident Indian seat or any supernumerary seat.

➤ The “OCI cardholder shall not be eligible for admission against any seat reserved exclusively for Indian citizens”.

➤ In respect of all other economic, financial and educational fields not specified in this notification or the rights and privileges not covered by the notifications made by the Reserve Bank of India under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (42 of 1999), the OCI cardholder shall have the same rights and privileges as a foreigner.

**Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Cardholder Scheme:**

- The following categories of persons (except from Pakistan and Bangladesh) are eligible to apply under OCI scheme:
  - i. Who is a citizen of another country, but was a citizen of India at the time of, or at any time after, the commencement of the constitution; or
  - ii. Who is a citizen of another country, but was eligible to become a citizen of India at the time of the commencement of the constitution; or
  - iii. Who is a citizen of another country, but belonged to a territory that became part of India after the 15th day of August, 1947; or
  - iv. Who is a child or a grand-child or a great grandchild of such a citizen; or
- A person, who is minor child of a person mentioned in clause (a); or (c) A person, who is a minor child, and whose both parents are citizens of India or one of the parents is a citizen of India; or (d) Spouse of foreign origin of a citizen of India or spouse of foreign origin of an Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder registered under section 7A, Citizenship Act 1955 and whose marriage has been registered and subsisted for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the application under this section: Provided that no person, who is or had been a citizen of Pakistan, Bangladesh or such other country as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify, shall be eligible for the registration as Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

Non-Resident Indian, Persons of Indian Origin, PIO Cardholders, Overseas Citizen of India, Salient Features of the Citizenship (Amdt.) Act, 2019

**Criticism of the new rules**

✓ According to critics, the leap from contemplating giving OCIs dual citizenship to granting them the status of foreign nationals has baffled many. There are contradictions galore. An OCI, who by definition was an Indian citizen, albeit one who did not have an



Indian passport, and under the Citizenship Act, could not hold public office or vote, has now (under the new rules) been decreed a foreign national in certain categories. If OCIs were indeed “foreigners”, they would not be referred to as citizens of India but instead would be covered by the Foreigners Act 1966 or the Foreign Exchange Management Act 2003.

- ✓ The idea of singling out OCIs who were missionaries and Tablighis seems to have been prompted by hitherto unspecified considerations which can only be speculated about.
- ✓ The notification also does not mention which research activities can be undertaken and which ones are proscribed, leaving the scope for interpretation far and wide and in the hands of the executive. For its part, the Home Ministry claimed that there was nothing new about the rules and that they were part of a brochure it published in November 2019. The difference is that what was then a brochure is now a gazetted notification.
- ✓ Observers feel that the new rules could be a reaction to certain liberal judgments, given the recent propensity of courts to rule in favour of the rights of OCIs, including the right to propagate religion.
- ✓ It has also been highlighted that there are a good number of journalists who are OCIs, and not necessarily favourites of the government, who will now have to go through much red-tape in order to get clearances.
- ✓ There is also no guarantee that the rules will be applied objectively and without malice. Even if there is any evidence of the latter, there is no grievance redress system to address it. The fact that some kinds of religious activities have been singled out in contrast to other kinds of religious activities, smacks of a latent bias and a general anathema to any kind of proselytising activity.

## Transgender Rights

### News Excerpt

The Kerala High Court allowed a transwoman to apply for enrolment into the National Cadet Corps (NCC) in the senior girls division as per her self-perceived gender identity in a landmark judgment. The judgment is another significant step in a state which is already ahead of others when it comes to its transgender policy.

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### Background

- A writ petition had been filed last year by HinaHaneefa, a student at the University College in Thiruvananthapuram, opposing her exclusion from the NCC unit at the college on the basis of her gender.
- The petition challenged Section 6 of the National Cadet Corps Act, 1948 which only allows either ‘male’ or ‘female’ cadets.
- The petitioner argued that the ‘inclusion of sexual minorities like transgender persons’ is important to address the ‘rampant marginalisation and discrimination’ that they face. Haneefa has undergone two sex reassignment surgeries and has an identification card under Kerala’s transgender policy.
- In November last year, when the Centre told the High Court that transgender persons cannot be allowed into the NCC as there is no provision for the same, the court took exception to the position and stressed that it goes contrary to Kerala’s Transgender Policy and other applicable statutes.

**National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC)** is a Govt. of India Undertaking under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. NBCFDC was incorporated under Section 25 of the Companies Act 1956 on **13th January 1992** as a Company **not for profit** with an objective to promote economic and developmental activities for the benefit of Backward Classes and to assist the poorer section of these classes in skill development and self-employment ventures. NBCFDC provides financial assistance through State Channelizing Agencies (SCAs) nominated by the State Governments/UTs. NBCFDC also provides **Micro Financing** through SCAs/ Self Help Groups (SHGs).

- The court also told the university authorities to keep a seat vacant for Haneefa till the disposal of the writ petition.

**What is the Kerala High Court judgment?**

- A single bench of the High Court said the fact that NCC Act does not recognise the third gender or that detailed guidelines are required to be drawn up for integration of persons of the third gender into the armed forces or the NCC cannot be a justification to deny the petitioner’s entry into the NCC.
- The court said the provisions of the NCC Act, 1948 cannot preclude the operation of the Transgender Rights Act, 2019.
- The High Court also ordered the NCC to amend Section 6 of the Act within six months so that the law offers equal opportunities for everyone.

**Problems Faced by the transgender Community in India**

- ✓ The main problems that are being faced by the transgender community are of discrimination, unemployment, lack of educational facilities, homelessness, and lack of medical facilities: like HIV care and hygiene, depression, hormone pill abuse, tobacco and alcohol abuse, penectomy, and problems related to marriage and adoption.

- ✓ In 1994, transgender persons got the voting right but the task of issuing them voter identity

cards got caught up in the male or female question. Several of them were denied cards with sexual category of their choice.

- ✓ The other fields where this community feels neglected are inheritance of property

**The LGBTIQ Freedom Zone**

The European Parliament symbolically declared the entire 27-member bloc as an “**LGBTIQ Freedom Zone**” – the acronym meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer.

The move comes as a response against member state Poland’s controversial move to create more than 100 “LGBTIQ ideology-free zones” around the country since 2019, and more generally against the backsliding of LGBTIQ rights in some EU countries, particularly in Poland and Hungary

The resolution reads, “LGBTIQ persons everywhere in the EU should enjoy the freedom to live and publicly show their sexual orientation and gender identity without fear of intolerance, discrimination or persecution, and authorities at all levels of governance across the EU should protect and promote equality and the fundamental rights of all, including LGBTIQ persons.”

The declaration is the latest flare-up between Poland and **Hungary** on one side and the rest of the EU on the other. The two former Communist states, now run by conservative nationalist governments, have in recent years been criticised by the bloc for deteriorating democratic standards.

or adoption of a child. They are often pushed to the periphery as a social outcaste and many may end up begging and dancing. This is by all means human trafficking.

- ✓ Transgenders have very limited employment opportunities. Transgenders have no access to bathrooms/toilets and public spaces. The lack of access to bathrooms and public spaces access is illustrative of discrimination faced by transgenders in availing each facilities and amenities.They face similar problems in prisons, hospitals and schools.
- ✓ Transgender people face a number of difficulties within the family. Most families do not accept gender nonconforming behaviour in their children. Family reactions undermine the self-esteem and sense of self-worth of gender nonconforming and transgender children.

**Steps Taken for the Transgender Welfare in India**

- The government has enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 with an aim to prohibit discrimination against transgender persons. The Act provides for greater accountability on the part of central and state governments for issues concerning transgender persons. It provides every transgender person a right to reside and be included in his household. It prohibits discrimination against such persons including denial of service, unfair treatment in education, employment, healthcare, facilities, opportunities available to the public, right to movement and right to reside. No government or private entity can discriminate against a transgender person in employment matters including recruitment and promotion.
- The government has constituted a National Council for Transgender Persons – a platform for the representatives of the community — to act as an apex body to address the community’s concerns. The Council is headed by the Minister of Social justice and Empowerment and draws participation from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Home Affairs, Housing and Urban Affairs, Education, Rural Development, Labour and Employment, Legal Affairs, Niti Aayog, etc.
- A national portal, launched by the Ministry of Social Justice in November last year, enabled the transgender community to apply for identity certificates from the District Magistrate concerned, and the portal has received 259 applications so far.
- The government has provided for one-time assistance of Rs 1,500 for each member of the community through the NCBCFDC during the pandemic, and 5,711 people have benefited from direct transfers.
- The government is also working on an umbrella scheme to address issues of access to health, education, welfare, skill upgradation, shelter, and economic support and livelihood for the transgender community.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

Article 14, 15, 16 of the Constitution of India, Salient features of the transgender persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, Transgender policy of the Kerala Government

**Conclusion**

India has a long road ahead to gender justice, and the transgender community wants concerted efforts made to bring about legal reform so that transgender people are as free and empowered in their public and private lives as any other citizen of India.

**Appointment of Election Commissioners**

**News Excerpt**

The Supreme Court recently ruled that any persons employed with the central or state governments could not be appointed as election commissioners “across the length and breadth of the country”. The ruling aims at ensuring independence of the election commissions.

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**Pre-Connect**

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

**Highlights**

- A bench of justices Rohinton F Nariman and BR Gavai issued the direction exercising its powers under Articles 142 and 144 of the Constitution. Under Article 142, the apex



court is empowered to issue directives to do “complete justice” whereas Article 144 obligates all authorities to act in aid of the Supreme Court.

- The court held that the independence of the election commission cannot be compromised in a democracy. Entrusting additional charge of state election

**Independence of the Election Commission of India**

Article 324 of the Constitution has made the following provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of the Election Commission:

1. The chief election commissioner is provided with the security of tenure. He cannot be removed from his office except in same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court. In other words, he can be removed by the president on the basis of a resolution passed to that effect by both the Houses of Parliament with special majority, either on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity. Thus, he does not hold his office till the pleasure of the president, though he is appointed by him.
2. The service conditions of the chief election commissioner cannot be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.
3. Any other election commissioner or a regional commissioner cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the chief election commissioner.

Though the constitution has sought to safeguard and ensure the independence and impartiality of the Election Commission, some flaws can be noted, viz.,

1. The Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications (legal, educational, administrative or judicial) of the members of the Election Commission.
2. The Constitution has not specified the term of the members of the Election Commission.
3. The Constitution has not debarred the retiring election commissioners from any further appointment by the government.

commissioner to a government official is a mockery of the Constitution.

- The bench held that election commissioners have to be “independent persons” and that nobody, who has been employed or holds an office of profit under the central or any state government, could be appointed as election commissioners.
- The judgment came as the top court censured the Goa government for appointing its law secretary as the state election commissioner for conducting municipal council elections in the state. The law secretary was given the additional charge as the state election commissioner.
- Calling this a “disturbing feature”, the bench ordered that henceforth, no such person shall be appointed as election commissioner by the Centre or state government.
- The Goa government had appealed in the Supreme Court against the order of the high court which had cancelled elections to five municipalities in the state for not reserving the wards for women as per the law.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

Finance Commission of India, State Election Commission, State Finance Commission, Union Public Service Commission, Goods and Services Tax Council, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, Appointment of the CBI Director

**Concerns related to Unlawful Prosecution**

**News Excerpt**

Recently, the Supreme Court sought the Centre's reply on two separate pleas seeking directions to the government to frame guidelines for compensation to victims of wrongful prosecution and to ensure strict action against fake complainants in criminal cases.

**Pre-Connect**

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- Article 21 of the Constitution of India confers, on every person, the fundamental rights of life and personal liberty. As per this Article, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."
- The Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, (1978)** while re-defining the contour of Article 21 of Constitution had, *inter alia*, held that the procedure envisaged under this Article must be "right, just and fair" and not "arbitrary, fanciful or oppressive".
- Further, the Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Hussainara Khatoon (I) v. Home Secy., State of Bihar, (1980)**, recognizing the right to speedy trial as one of the offshoots of the rights conferred under Article 21 of the Constitution has held, "No procedure which does not ensure a reasonably quick trial can be regarded as "reasonable, fair or just" and it would fall foul of Article 21."

### Highlights

- A bench headed by Justice U. U. Lalit issued notices to the Centre on the pleas.
- The pleaders had sought directions to the Centre, all states and Union Territories to frame and implement guidelines to compensate victims of "wrongful prosecution" through government machineries.
- The pleaders have sought directions to the Centre for framing guidelines to ensure strict action against fake complainants in criminal cases and for compensating victims of such wrongful prosecutions.
- The petitions were filed in the apex court in the backdrop of a case in which the Allahabad High Court had in January declared a man, earlier convicted in a rape case and jailed for around 20 years, innocent observing that the motive behind the FIR was related to a land dispute.
- The pleaders have alternatively urged the top court to use its plenary constitutional power to frame the guidelines for compensation to victims of wrongful prosecutions and direct the Centre and states to implement them till the recommendations of the Law Commission on miscarriage of justice are implemented religiously.
- The pleaders requested to direct the Centre to frame guidelines for compensation to victims of wrongful prosecution and implement the recommendations of Law Commission Report No. 277 on miscarriage of justice.
- Due to cases of malicious prosecution, the injury caused to the citizens is extremely large and "because of the Centre's inaction, citizens' right to life, liberty and dignity, guaranteed under Article 21, is being brazenly offended.
- There are many startling cases which show the gross abuse of power and authority by the State and vexatious complainant, which caused absolute 'miscarriage of justice' by irreparable damage to the right to life, liberty and dignity of innocent citizens in the justice dispensation with no relief given by the courts.

### Analytica

- ✓ The Indian justice system works on the principle of, "*Fiat iustitiam aeternum*". Despite this, instances of malicious prosecution/ conviction and wrongful incarceration of innocent persons are quite common.
- ✓ In all such cases, individuals who are wrongfully prosecuted, implicated and incarcerated for several precious years of their lives, even on an honourable acquittal, have not much to gain.
- ✓ Besides being forced to live under social stigma, absence of statutory provisions or state mechanisms providing for rehabilitative, restorative and compensatory measures to such victims and their family members (who suffer equally), aggravates their agony.
- ✓ Courts in India have often expressed their concerns on the pitiable conditions of the under trial prisoners and in appropriate cases, to an extent, compensated for the wrong done to such victims of malicious and wrongful prosecution, detention and conviction. However, there is no uniform mechanism which ensures remedy in all such instances of "miscarriage of justice".

## International Mechanism for Wrongful Prosecution

- Article 14(6) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR") confers right on victims of wrongful conviction, which is subsequently reversed or pardoned on discovery of facts establishing conclusively that there has been miscarriage of justice, to be compensated according to law.
- Further, Article 9(5) of ICCPR provides, "Anyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention shall have an enforceable right to compensation".
- Several countries throughout the world have converted their commitment under Article 14(6) ICCPR into law by either verbatim adoption of the said Article under their domestic legislation, or by conferring discretion on administrative or judicial bodies to determine whether or not to award compensation, or by utilizing general power of the domestic government to make ex-gratia payment.

## Case of India

- ✚ India, despite ratifying ICCPR, has till date failed to provide any domestic legislation for rehabilitation and compensation of victims of wrongful/ malicious prosecution and incarceration.
- ✚ The victims are left to rely on limited remedies available to them under the exiting legal framework. Therefore, relief may be sought by filing a suit for damages for the tort of malicious prosecution or by invoking provisions under the criminal law.
- ✚ Indian Courts, recognizing the sanctity of individual's right to life and personal liberty, have also exercised their Writ and Inherent Jurisdiction by granting compensation to such victims in appropriate cases.
- ✚ However, experiences have shown that such remedies have remained episodic and often proved grossly inadequate to cater to the requirements of all situations.

## Views and Recommendations of the Law Commission

- As per the Law Commission, the standard of miscarriage of justice provided under Article 14(6) of the ICCPR is insufficient to overcome the shortcoming of the criminal justice system in India.
- Law Commission has acknowledged that such limited definition would fail to cater to all situations.
- Commission opined that a situation where, though, the victim is finally acquitted, however, had to undergo illegal and wrongful detention, torture in police custody, long incarceration, etc. is not covered under the limited parameters provided under this Article.
- Law Commission has further acknowledged that limited technical advancement and lack of zeal of investigative agencies hardly leaves any scope of discovery of "new facts proving factual innocence of the convict".
- At the same time, as per the Law Commission, if the standard of miscarriage of justice is set as long period of incarceration, it would leave out cases where the victim may not be in prison during his period of prosecution (being released on bail), however, suffered on account of such wrongful prosecution, prolonged trial, social stigma, loss of employment, etc.
- Therefore, the Law Commission has proposed that the standard to determine "miscarriage of justice" in India should be of wrongful prosecution. As per the Law Commission, "the standard of wrongful prosecution should be the most effective for identifying the cases of miscarriage of justice as it directly targets procedural and prosecutorial misconduct, which appears to be one of the primary sources of factual errors that results in innocent people being held guilty of offences they did not commit."
- The Law Commission, accordingly, has recommended the insertion of new Chapter under the Code providing for mechanism for adjudication upon the claims of wrongful prosecution and payment of compensation to the victims by State.

- Further, Law Commission has recommended insertion of provision for providing monetary compensation by State on final adjudication of victim's claim(Section 365C), considering the factors as provided under proposed Section 365 E.
- Further, under Section 365 H, providing for Appeal to the High Court against the order of compensation is also proposed.
- These recommendations are also noteworthy for the fact that the liability is proposed to be fixed not only on the state but also in the erring public officer (Section 365C).
- The recommendations made in the Report have not yet been incorporated under the statute. However, they certainly show the way ahead.

### Conclusion

India, being a welfare State needs to take progressive steps towards emancipation of the victims of injustice. It is travesty of justice if the society and State continues its apathy towards its fellow beings, penalizing and stigmatizing them for offences never committed by them. Indian justice system works on the maxim, "Ubi jus ibiremidium". Though, absence of remedy is no justification for non-protection of individual's rights, however, statutory provisions do form a guiding framework for the justice system to work. Substantial time has lapsed in the absence of statutory provision for protection of victims of wrongful prosecution. It is high time that State stopped disregarding the plight of such victims of wrongful prosecution. State can further no longer shy away from its responsibility to provide compensatory and rehabilitative measures to the victims of such "miscarriage of justice". It is only when that the State fulfils its commitment towards its nationals, who have been subjected to injustice in the name of law, it can truly claim itself to be a welfare State.

## The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

### News Excerpt

The Supreme Court recently sought the Centre's response on a PIL challenging the Constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 which mandates that the nature of all places of worship, except the one in Ayodhya that was then under litigation, shall be maintained as it was on August 15, 1947, and that no encroachment of any such place prior to the date can be challenged in courts.

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### Pre-Connect

- Article 25 says that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion.
- According to Article 26, every religious denomination or any of its section shall have the following rights:
  - Right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
  - Right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
  - Right to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
  - Right to administer such property in accordance with law.
- Article 27 lays down that no person shall be compelled to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.
- In other words, the State should not spend the public money collected by way of tax for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion.
- Above provision prohibits the State from favouring, patronising and supporting one religion over the other. This means that the taxes can be used for the promotion or maintenance of all religions.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Freedom of conscience, Right to profess, practice, propagate, Freedom to Manage Religious Affairs, Freedom from Taxation for Promotion of a Religion

### Background

- When the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute was at its height, few religious organisations also laid claim to two other places of worship.
- In this backdrop, the P.V. Narasimha Rao government enacted, in September 1991, a special law to freeze the status of places of worship as they were on August 15, 1947.



- The law kept the disputed structure at Ayodhya out of its purview, mainly because it was the subject of prolonged litigation.
- It was also aimed at providing scope for a possible negotiated settlement.

### 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.

### What are its main 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.
- Section 3 of the Act, bans the conversion of a place of worship or even a section of it “into a place of worship of a different religious denomination or of a different segment of the same religious denomination”.
- Section 6 mandates a three-year “imprisonment and a fine for contravening the provisions of Section 3”.
- However, there is an exception to the bar on instituting fresh proceedings with regard to suits that related to conversion of status that happened after August 15, 1947. This saves legal proceedings, suits and appeals regarding change of status that took place after the cut-off date.
- 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 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.

### Why is the law under challenge?

The plea has opposed the law even when it was introduced, arguing that the Centre has no power to legislate on “pilgrimages” or “burial grounds” which is under the state list. However, the government had said it could make use of its residuary power under Entry 97 of the Union List to enact this law. Entry 97 confers residuary powers to the Centre to legislate on subjects that are not enumerated in any of the three lists.



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## SOCIAL ISSUES, SCHEMES, REPORTS & INDICES

### Universal Primary Healthcare

#### News Excerpt

India marked another key milestone in universalising Primary Health Care. The planned target of operationalizing 70,000 Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) by 31st March 2021 has been realised ahead of time.

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#### Pre-Connect

- The launch of Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC) in April 2018 marked a watershed moment in India's public health history.
- Ayushman Bharat (AB) is an attempt to move from a selective approach to health care to deliver comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care.
- It has two components which are complementary to each other. Under its first component, 1,50,000 Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) will be created to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care, that is universal and free to users, with a focus on wellness and the delivery of an expanded range of services closer to the community.
- The second component is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) which provides health insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per year to over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families for seeking secondary and tertiary care.

#### About Health and wellness centre

- HWCs demonstrate a high potential for positive outcomes in terms of gender equity for care seeking, and promoting wellness as a critical component of primary health care. To date, about 41.35 crore people have accessed care in these AB-HWCs. About 54% of them are women.
- The HWCs also focus on wellness and healthy lifestyles through various activities like Yoga, local sports, Zumba.
- Tele-consultation services are another key component of the HWCs. More than 9.45 lakh Teleconsultations have been done at the HWCs.
- Preventive Health Care is the essential component of the services delivered through HWCs. Population enumeration of 30yrs+ population through Community Based Assessment Checklist (CBAC) is done through community health workers (ASHA and ANMs) and based on risk stratification, the screening of the individuals for NCDs have been carried out.

#### HWCs performance during COVID-19:

- ✓ During the COVID-19 pandemic, AB-HWCs played a significant role in undertaking public health action related to COVID prevention and enabling non-COVID essential health services.
- ✓ About 75% of total NCD Screenings have been conducted during this COVID period (between 1st February 2020 to till date) itself, showing the confidence reposed by people in these AB-HWCs during the present public health challenge.
- ✓ More than 60% of team leaders (CHOs and Medical Officers) and more than 90% of field workers of HWC teams are women.

#### Rural Health Care

Rural Health care is one of biggest challenges facing the Health Ministry of India. With more than 70 percent population living in rural areas and low level of health facilities, mortality rates due to diseases are on a high.

## Healthcare in Rural India

- Healthcare is the right of every individual but lack of quality infrastructure, dearth of qualified medical functionaries, and non-access to basic medicines and medical facilities thwarts its reach to 60% of population in India.
- A majority of 700 million people lives in rural areas where the condition of medical facilities is deplorable.
- Though a lot of policies and programs are being run by the Government but the success and effectiveness of these programs is questionable due to gaps in the implementation.
- In rural India, where the number of Primary health care centers (PHCs) is limited, 8% of the centers do not have doctors or medical staff, 39% do not have lab technicians and 18% PHCs do not even have a pharmacist.
- India also accounts for the largest number of maternity deaths. A majority of these are in rural areas where maternal health care is poor.
- Even in private sector, health care is often confined to family planning and antenatal care and do not extend to more critical services like labor and delivery, where proper medical care can save life in the case of complications.

## The Problems

- ✦ Due to non-accessibility to public health care and low quality of health care services, a majority of people in India turn to the local private health sector as their first choice of care.
- ✦ If we look at the health landscape of India 92 percent of health care visits are to private providers of which 70 percent is urban population.
- ✦ However, private health care is expensive, often unregulated and variable in quality. Besides being unreliable for the illiterate, it is also unaffordable by low-income rural folks.
- ✦ To control the spread of diseases and reduce the growing rates of mortality due to lack of adequate health facilities, special attention needs to be given to the health care in rural areas.
- ✦ The key challenges in the healthcare sector are low quality of care, poor accountability, lack of awareness, and limited access to facilities.

## Challenges for Primary Healthcare System in India

- > In India, communicable diseases, maternal, perinatal, and nutritional deficiencies continue to be important causes of deaths noncommunicable diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory disorders, cancers, and injuries are showing the rising trends. Mental health disorders are also on the rise also taking a substantial toll of human lives.
- > The health issues related to elderly population are common due to increase in life expectancy. India has been witnessing rapid urbanization particularly in recent decades. Currently one-fourth of the urban population lives in slums with severely compromised health and sanitary conditions. While the primary healthcare system is struggling to provide services, there is an emerging need for addressing above mentioned issues. This presents huge challenge to the current primary healthcare system in India.
- > The current primary healthcare structure is extremely rigid, making it unable to respond effectively to local realities and needs. The lack of resources, which is acute in some states, is certainly a contributing factor to the poor performance of the primary healthcare system.
- > There is a need to explore and understand the reasons that prompt people to visit health facilities and the reasons driving them away from free government care.
- > Large diversity in India calls for local adaptation of the basic healthcare package and its delivery mechanism.



- > In India, considerable progress has been made in the field of basic universal education, gender equality in education, and global economic growth. However, there is slow progress in the improvement of health indicators related to mortality, morbidity, and various environmental factors contributing to poor health conditions.

### Role of Private Sector in Healthcare

- o India is encouraging investment in healthcare sector; over the years, the private sector in India has gained a significant presence in all the sub-segments of medical education and training, medical technology and diagnostics, pharmaceutical manufacture and sale, hospital construction and ancillary services, as also the provisioning of medical care.
- o Over 75% of the human resources and advanced medical technology, 68% of hospitals and 37% of total beds in the country are in the private sector.
- o The composition of private sector in India is diverse with large number of sole practitioners or small nursing homes having bed capacities of less than 20. There are also several corporate entities, including pharmaceutical firms, and nonresident Indians (NRIs), who have invested in the Indian healthcare sector and are providing world-class care at a fraction of the cost compared to many developed countries.
- o In addition, there are also traditional healthcare providers, such as Ayurveda and Yoga, who have set up facilities. It is reported that there are 1369 hospitals with a bed capacity of over 53000 in India catering to the needs of traditional Indian healthcare; about 726,000 registered practitioners are working under the traditional healthcare system.
- o Indian hotels are also entering the wellness services market offering Spas and Ayurvedic massages, tying up with professional organizations in a range of wellness fields.

### Conclusion

India’s health scenario currently presents a contrasting picture. While health tourism and private healthcare are being promoted, a large section of Indian population still reels under the risk of curablediseases that do not receive adequate attention of policymakers. India’s National Rural Health Missionis undeniably an intervention that has put public health care upfront. Although the government has beenmaking efforts to increase healthcare spending via initiatives like the National Rural Health Mission,much still remains to be done. Thepriority will be to develop effective and sustainable health systemsthat can meet the dual demands posed by the growth in non-communicable diseases and peoples’ needsfor better quality and higher levels of health care.

## India TB Summit

### News Excerpt

Recently, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare delivered the keynote address at the India TB summit. The summit was organized to highlight the global and national prevalence of Tuberculosis in the run up to World TB Day celebrations on 24th March, 2021.

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### Pre-Connect

The India TB Summit 2021 is India’s only virtual public summit led and curated by TB experts and survivors. This summit focuses on key issues in TB in India to identify and discuss critical challenges from diverse perspectives. In doing so, it examines possible innovative solutions to address these challenges and creates an informed and nuanced public narrative on TB in India. The theme for the summit this year is Reimagining TB Care in India.

### Keynotes Addressed in at the summit

- Government have accorded high priority to eradicating Tuberculosis in India by 2025, five years ahead of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) target of 2030.

- The Government of India is committed to scale up access to free diagnosis through rapid molecular tests also providing information on drug resistance, free treatment for all people with TB, with best-quality drugs and regimens, financial and nutritional support to patients, use of digital technologies for notification and adherence and linking with interface non-governmental agencies to strengthen private sector engagement.”
- The movement would make India step forward as a leader for a TB-free world, detailing about the National TB Elimination Programmer’s ambitious National Strategic Plan (NSP) to achieve the said target by 2025.
- The NSP embraces bold strategies with commensurate resources to rapidly decline TB incidence and mortality.
- NTEP has instituted many innovations such as contracting of Patient Provider Support Agencies (PPSAs) to enhance engagement with the private sector, strengthening community engagement through TB Forums at the National, State and District levels, and integrating TB services across all levels in the Health System, including the Ayushman Bharat- Health & Wellness Centres, thereby, making TB an essential part of Comprehensive Primary Health Care.

### **Stop TB Partnership**

The Stop TB Partnership is leading the way to a world without tuberculosis (TB), a disease that is curable but still kills three people every minute. Founded in 2001, the Partnership's mission is to serve every person who is vulnerable to TB and ensure that high-quality diagnosis , treatment and care is available to all who need it.

over 1700 partners are a collective force that is transforming the fight against TB in more than 100 countries. They include international and technical organizations, government programmes, research and funding agencies, foundations, NGOs, civil society and community groups and the private sector.

### **The new initiatives taken at sub-national level to strengthen community level engagement and to make it a part of Comprehensive Primary Health Care:**

- Through enhanced access to molecular diagnostics by decentralizing CBNAAT and TruNat services, India has enabled earlier detection of drug resistance.
- Through Active Case Finding, India has reached out to the unreached and vulnerable groups. Sub-national surveillance of TB and disease-free certification has been introduced, wherein States/Districts that have achieved significant reduction in incidence of TB from 2015 baselines were assessed and have been likewise awarded Bronze, Silver, Gold and even TB Free certifications.
- India has established TB Forums which provide a common platform to govt officials, physicians, civil society and representatives from patient groups to discuss all concerns pertaining to service delivery and patient care.

### **NikshayPoshan Yojana (NPY)**

The objective of the NPY direct benefit transfer scheme is to provide nutritional support to TB patients at the time of notification and subsequently during the course of their treatment.

The amount that is paid is Rs. 500 for each month of treatment and up to Rs. 1000 as an advance.

It is left to the discretion of each state as to whether they provide benefits in cash or in kind. For example Chhattisgarh provides food baskets as nutritional support. There is more about food for people with TB.

### **National TB Elimination Programme:**

- ✓ The NSP for TB elimination 2017–25 is a framework to guide the activities of all stakeholders including the national and state governments, development partners, civil society organizations, international agencies, research institutions, private sector, and many others whose work is relevant to TB elimination in India.

- ✓ The NSP 2017-2025 which builds on the success and learnings of the last NSP, and articulates the bold and innovative steps required to move towards TB elimination, is a 3 year costed plan and a 8 year strategy document.
- ✓ It provides goals and strategies for the country's response to the disease during the period 2017 to 2025 and aims to direct the attention of all stakeholders on the most important interventions or activities that the RNTCP believes will bring about significant changes in the incidence, prevalence and mortality of TB. These strategies and interventions are in addition to the processes and activities already ongoing in the country.

### **Vision, Goals and Targets of NSP**

The NSP proposes bold strategies with commensurate resources to rapidly decline TB in the country by 2030 in line with the global End TB targets and Sustainable Development Goals to attain the vision of a TB-free India.

**VISION:** TB-Free India with zero deaths, disease and poverty due to tuberculosis

**GOAL:** To achieve a rapid decline in burden of TB, morbidity and mortality while working towards elimination of TB in India by 2025.

### **Burden of TB in India**

- India accounts for about a quarter of the global TB burden. In 2019 the estimated TB incidence was 2,640,000.
- In 2019 an estimated 9,700 HIV positive people died due to TB disease, and an estimated 440,000 HIV negative people died. 1. There are some more TB statistics for India.
- India is also the country with the second highest number (after South Africa) of estimated HIV associated TB cases.

### **Government Initiatives to eradicate TB:**

#### **Nutritional Support for TB Patients**

In 2018 the government launched the NikshayPoshan Yojana, a direct benefit transfer scheme to provide nutritional support for TB patients. This was one of a number of Direct Benefit Transfer schemes.

#### **United Nations High Level Meeting on Tuberculosis**

2018 also saw the first ever UN General Assembly (UNGA) high level meeting on Tuberculosis. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a Political Declaration on Tuberculosis which reaffirmed the commitment to end the tuberculosis epidemic by 2030.

#### **Launch of TB HaregaDeshJeetega Campaign**

By September 2019 it was clear that in many areas more effective action was needed. The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, launched the new TB HaregaDeshJeetega Campaign.

#### **The National Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025**

- The NSP 2020-25 is a framework to guide the activities of all stakeholders. It is a five year strategy document that aims to direct the attention of all stakeholders to the most important interventions that the GoI believes will bring about significant changes in the incidence, prevalence and mortality of TB.
- These strategies and interventions are in addition to the processes and activities already ongoing in the country.

#### **Sub-national certification of "Disease Free" Status**

- To achieve the targets of the elimination of a number of communicable diseases, and of TB in particular, by 2025, certain new disease control initiatives are to be taken.

- One of the most significant of these is the Sub-National Certification of Disease Free Status, a new important initiative of the NTEP. The intention is that this will provide awards for those States/Districts which achieve TB free status.

### Conclusion

- ✦ The government is calling for the elimination of TB by 2025, and there is a new National Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025 with ambitious ideas endorsed by the government. The NSP 2020 - 2025 sets out a results framework, containing a number of indicators, through which the progress of the NSP can be monitored on a year by year basis.
- ✦ Initially this looks encouraging with the Target Notifications having been achieved for 2020. However, the change from the NSP 2017 - 2025 to the NSP 2020 -2025 means that the Targets for 2020 have been lowered, and have been more easily met. This means that there is even more to be achieved in the next four years.
- ✦ In a similar way another encouraging indicator is the number of MDR/RR TB Patients Notified. But again the Target Notification has been achieved for 2020, but possibly at the expense of what needs to be achieved in future years.

## MERITE project: Improving Technical Education

### News Excerpt

A World Bank funded project to take graduates from elite institutions to rural and remote engineering colleges in poorer States 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.

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### Pre-Connect

- The TEQIP-III Project will be implemented as a “Central Sector Scheme” (CSS) which means 100% funding by the Government of India. An around 190 engineering institutions will be participating in the Project.
- It is aimed at (1) Improving Quality and equity in low-income and special category state (2) System-level initiatives to strengthen sector governance and performance (3) Sustaining excellence in engineering education and widening impact through competitively-selected institutions in non-LIS/SCS.

### Issues Related to TEQIP and MERITE

- Three phases of the ₹3,600-crore TEQIP project have been completed since it was launched in December 2002. The third phase focussed on improving quality and equity in engineering institutions in seven low income, eight northeastern and three hilly States.
- Among the initiatives was a bid to recruit more than 1,500 faculty from top institutions — four out of five are from the NITs and the IITs — and send them to colleges that could never have afforded them.
- About 300 faculty have already quit TEQIP for other jobs, but 250 of those remaining have filed cases in the Delhi High Court. The next hearing is on March 15. Other cases have also been filed in the High Courts of Rajasthan, Bihar and U.P. Already, following protests by Bihar-based faculty shortly before that Assembly elections, the project was extended by six months, moving its closure date from September 2020 to March 2021.
- MERITE was still in the conceptual stage, did not yet have Cabinet approval and was unlikely to be approved before the end of TEQIP phase III.
- It is the responsibility of States to ensure that the gains of the project are sustained even after the World Bank funding is over.

- Some States, such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu have been able to sustain and build on the benefits of TEQIP over the last 17 years.
- But institutions in these poorer States are in a more difficult situation. Many are in deficit. They are not even getting regular grants from the State governments, let alone setting aside funds for sustainability.
- They may be willing to absorb TEQIP faculty, but at a fraction of the salary pointing out that countrywide, there is a 45% vacancy level in technical faculty.

### Conclusion

- ✓ An amicable solution needs to be evolved to make them stay beyond the project period since these faculties have been selected through quite a rigorous process. They have contributed significantly to the project institutes. Also they will become jobless after the completion of the project. Due to the pandemic, private institutions are not hiring any faculty which does not show a good future for the TEQIP faculties.
- ✓ The Ministry of Education request the State governments to hire them on an ad-hoc basis.
- ✓ All the relevant documents for new project MERITE for technical education shall be circulated.” Senior officials at the Education Ministry also indicated that MERITE may carry on some aspects of TEQIP.

## Food Security Act, 2013

### News Excerpt

The NITI Aayog recently circulated a discussion paper on a proposed revision in the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.

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### Pre-Connect

#### National Food Security Act, 2013

- As passed by the Parliament, Government has notified the National Food Security Act, 2013 on 10th September, 2013 with the objective to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.
- The Act provides for coverage of up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized food grains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population.

### Need for revision in the NFSA, 2013?

- The NFSA provides a legal right to persons belonging to “eligible households” to receive foodgrains at subsidised price– rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse grain at Rs 1/kg — under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).



### Salient features of the National Food Security Act, 2013

- ❖ Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) :Upto 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population will be covered under TPDS, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, since Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households constitute poorest of the poor, and are presently entitled to 35 kg per household per month, entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month.
- ❖ State-wise coverage : Corresponding to the all India coverage of 75% and 50% in the rural and urban areas, State-wise coverage will be determined by the Central Government. Planning Commission has determined the State-wise coverage by using the NSS Household Consumption Survey data for 2011-12 and also provided the State-wise "inclusion ratios".
- ❖ Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision :Foodgrains under TPDS will be made available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains for a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act. Thereafter prices will be suitably linked to Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- ❖ In case, any State's allocation under the Act is lower than their current allocation, it will be protected upto the level of average offtake during last three years, at prices to be determined by the Central Government. Existing prices for APL households i.e. Rs. 6.10 per kg for wheat and Rs 8.30 per kg for rice has been determined as issue prices for the additional allocation to protect the average offtake during last three years.
- ❖ Identification of Households : Within the coverage under TPDS determined for each State, the work of identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs.
- ❖ Nutritional Support to women and children : Pregnant women and lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Higher nutritional norms have been prescribed for malnourished children upto 6 years of age.
- ❖ Maternity Benefit : Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000.
- ❖ Women Empowerment : Eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above to be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing of ration cards.
- ❖ Grievance Redressal Mechanism : Grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. States will have the flexibility to use the existing machinery or set up separate mechanism.
- ❖ Cost of intra-State transportation & handling of foodgrains and FPS Dealers' margin : Central Government will provide assistance to States in meeting the expenditure incurred by them on transportation of foodgrains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers' margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose.

Transparency and Accountability : Provisions have been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees in order to ensure transparency and accountability.

Food Security Allowance : Provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals.

Penalty : Provision for penalty on public servant or authority, to be imposed by the State Food Commission, in case of failure to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer.

- These are called central issue prices (CIPs). A revision of CIPs is one of the issues that have been discussed. The other issues are updating of the population coverage under the NFSA, and beneficiary identification criteria.

- Under sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Act, the term “eligible households” comprises two categories — “priority households”, and families covered by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).
- Priority households are entitled to receive 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month, whereas AAY households are entitled to 35 kg per month at the same prices.
- For how long are these prices valid, and how are they to be revised?
- Under Schedule-I of the Act, these subsidised prices were fixed for “a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act”. While different states began implementing the Act at different dates, the deemed date of its coming into effect is July 5, 2013, and the three-year period was therefore completed on July 5, 2016.
- However, the government has yet not revised the subsidised prices. The government can do so under Schedule-I of the Act, after completion of the three-year period. To revise the prices, the government can amend Schedule-I through a notification, a copy of which has to be laid before each House of Parliament as soon as possible after it is issued.
- Even the Economic Survey of 2020-21 had recommended a revision in the CIPs.
- The revised prices cannot exceed the minimum support price for wheat and coarse grains, and the derived minimum support price for rice.

**What is the extent of coverage, and how is it to be updated?**

- ✓ The Act has prescribed the coverage under “eligible households” — 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population. On the basis of Census 2011 figures and the national rural and urban coverage ratios, 81.35 crore persons are covered under NFSA currently.
- ✓ This overall figure has been divided among the states and Union Territories, based on the NSSO Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2011-12.

**What has the NITI Aayog proposed?**

- In its discussion paper, the NITI Aayog has suggested that the national rural and urban coverage ratio be reduced from the existing 75-50 to 60-40. If this reduction happens, the number of beneficiaries under the NFSA will drop to 71.62 crore (on the basis of the projected population in 2020).
- To make these changes in the law, the government will have to amend sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the NFSA. For this, it will require parliamentary approval.
- Besides the Food Ministry and the NITI Aayog, discussions on the proposed revisions include the Chief Economic Adviser and top officers of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

**What is the implication of the revision for the Centre and the states?**

- ✚ If the national coverage ratio is revised downward, the Centre can save up to Rs 47,229 crore (as estimated by the NITI Aayog paper). However, the move may be opposed by some of the states.
- ✚ On the other hand, if the rural-urban coverage ratio remains at 75-50, then the total number of people covered will increase from the existing 81.35 crore to 89.52 crore —an increase of 8.17 crore. This estimate by the NITI Aayog is based on the projected 2020 population, and, according to the paper, will result in an additional subsidy requirement of Rs 14,800 crore.

**Swachhta Saarthi Fellowships**

**News Excerpt**

Recently, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India under its “Waste to Wealth” Mission launched the “SwachhtaSaarthi 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.

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**About the Initiative**

- 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 SwachhtaSaarthis 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.

### Need of Such Initiative

India is a diverse cultural wonder with our practices and lifestyle being confronted by many environmental challenges. Managing the waste we generate is one issue that has deep implications—those who generate waste are often not those who clear it. The SwachhtaSaarthi Fellowships will recognize exemplary people from any walk of life who go beyond the call of duty in tackling waste and manage it scientifically and sustainably. The fellowships will target the very grassroots of Indian community participation and recognise efforts made by citizens to make India a zero-waste nation.

### Who can participate?

The SwachhtaSaarthi Fellowships 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

## Availability of tap water for Schools and Anganwadis

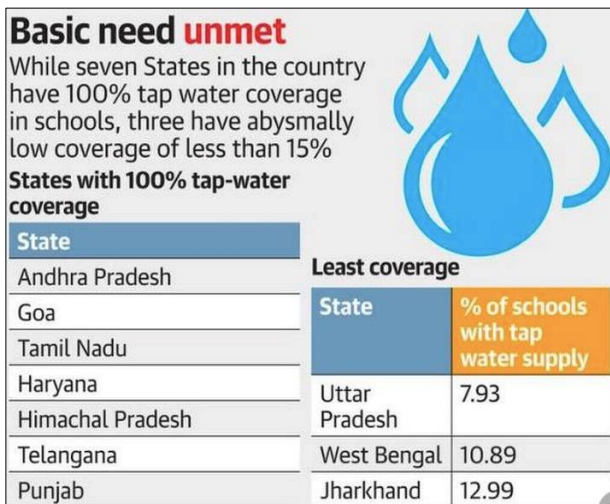
### New Excerpt

Recently, a report released by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resource shows that Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the Jal Shakti Ministry in October 2020.

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### What report says?

- Less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it, while it is available in only 2-6% of anganwadis in Assam, Jharkhand, U.P., Chhattisgarh and Bengal.
- At a time when schools and anganwadis are just starting to reopen after a yearlong shutdown, COVID-19 safety protocols require repeated handwashing by students and teachers.
- Seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab — achieved 100% coverage.
- A number of other States also made significant progress in that time, and 1.82 lakh grey water management structures and 1.42 lakh rainwater harvesting structures were also constructed in schools and anganwadi centres.
- “However, some States/ UTs have indicated that they need more time to complete the task and sustain the efforts. Therefore, the campaign has been extended till March 31, 2021.
- Children are more susceptible to water borne diseases, more so, when there is also a need for repeated washing of hands as a precautionary measure during the pandemic.



### What is current status?

The campaign to provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for hand washing and in toilets in every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school was launched on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti. The 100-day period should have ended on January 10, 2021. However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply, the Ministry told the Parliamentary panel.

### Role of Jal Jeevan Mission'

Jal Jeevan Mission, which aims to provide tap water to every rural household by 2024, it is noted that “mere provision of tap connection without ensuring assured availability of water in the pipeline would not serve the purpose and will defeat the very objective of JJM”. It called for real-time monitoring of water supply at the district level. In many areastaps are being fitted but water supply is not there,”

### Way forward

- Considering the health hazards in the children on account of lack of potable drinking water government to take up the matter with those States which are lagging in providing drinking water and toilet facilities in their schools and anganwadi centres.
- The Centre should also take measures to set up water purification or reverse osmosis (RO) plants on an urgent basis so that children do not suffer due to contamination of drinking water.

## **UNDP report on State of Women amid Pandemic**

### News Excerpt

Recently, State of Women amid Pandemic report has been by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed a temporary basic income (TBI) for poor women in developing countries can help millions of them cope with the effects of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

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### What report Says?

- Women’s earnings have been persistently lagging behind men’s despite a narrowing of human capital gaps over the recent years.
- Globally, the median share of women aged 25 or older with at least a completed short-cycle tertiary education is higher (21.2 percent) than the corresponding share of men (19.5 percent), whereas the weighted average gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education is 41.7 percent among women and 36.2 percent among men.
- Yet, the gender wage gap reached 22 percent on average before the pandemic, ranging from 21-25 percent in middle- and high-income countries.
- Critical drivers of this unequal outcome are pervasive social norms that place a disproportionate burden of unpaid work on women, the lack of opportunities for them to reconcile unpaid work with paid work, the vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labour market where women are overly represented in low-paid occupations, and power imbalances within the household.
- Beyond complex gendered norms, some of the economic vulnerability imposed on women also
- comes from policy and political decisions that have persistently deprived them of compensation in the form of equal pay, paid maternity leave, universal health, unemployment, and care benefits.
- The latter are critical as about seven in ten female workers worldwide are in the informal economy with little or none of these benefits, and those with care responsibilities in particular are more likely to engage in self-employment, domestic work, and occupations that often expose them to health hazards, precarious working conditions, and exploitation.

### Women have been left in a precarious position

- The advent of the shock of COVID-19, the third factor affecting women’s income generation, has had disproportionate economic impacts on women that have only intensified the preexisting disadvantages —and could likely reverse more than 20 years of efforts in support of gender equality.

- In the short term, those impacts have landed particularly hard on paid employment and earnings. Available data for some Latin American countries reveals that women’s employment in the second quarter of 2020 dropped by more than 13 percent in comparison to the same period in 2019, and that the effect has been between 10 and 70 percent higher in comparison to the corresponding decline among male workers.

### **Need for Universal basic Income to overcome the effects:**

- ✓ The large-scale TBI scheme proposed by UNDP in a policy brief showed that a monthly investment of 0.07-0.31 per cent of a developing countries’ gross domestic product (GDP) could provide reliable financial security to 613 million working-aged women living in poverty.
- ✓ The benefits of such a meaningful investment could not only help women and their families absorb the shock of the pandemic, but also empower women to make independent decisions about money, livelihoods and life choices
- ✓ Women have been hit harder than men by the pandemic, losing income and leaving the labour market at a greater rate. This vulnerability is due to gender inequality.
- ✓ As these countries are likely operating under limited fiscal capacity and prioritization, a special TBI for women may emerge as a paramount policy instrument that recognizes the disproportionate effect of the crisis on a group that faces persistent and cumulative vulnerabilities across several dimensions.
- ✓ s. Beyond supporting women in securing their basic needs and compensating for their job and income losses, such an instrument might help boost women’s freedom of spending and economic independence, as well as balance the control of economic resources within the household.
- ✓ Hence, a TBI for women is an emergency measure of affirmative action that could start paving the road towards a public good that the whole society can benefit from: gender equality.
- ✓ Crucially, a TBI for women is not a substitute but an urgent complement to the response policies already in place. This is critical as most of the response to the crisis has not been designed to be gender sensitive.
- ✓ The proposed TBI focuses on working-age women, aged 15-64, in the developing world and considers a monthly transfer that is homogeneous within a given country but varies across countries according to the cost of living.

#### **About International Women's Day**

International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. Significant activity is witnessed worldwide as groups come together to celebrate women's achievements or rally for women's equality.

Marked annually on March 8th, International Women's Day (IWD) is one of the most important days of the year to:

- celebrate women's achievements
- raise awareness about women's equality
- lobby for accelerated gender parity
- fundraise for female-focused charities

The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2021 is 'Choose To Challenge'. A challenged world is an alert world. And from challenge comes change. So let's all #ChooseToChallenge.

### **Would a Temporary Basic Income (TBI) reach the intended recipients?**

- Critical conditions for TBI to contribute to women’s economic security and independence is that the scheme is provided at the individual level and not be subject to behavior and spending conditions. While specific fiscal and political implementation challenges are discussed at some length in UNDP’s TBI report and need to be addressed on a country-by-country basis, for women to receive the transfer, they also need to have bank or mobile money accounts, which is still not a reality for 35 percent of women worldwide. Hence, a TBI may need to be tied to initiatives to improve financial inclusion to work.
- In some cases, alternative solutions such as partnering with local social networks that have greater proximity to women in remote areas or informal settlements may be necessary to fill in for an absent state. Additional efforts for establishing functioning civil registration systems, especially birth registration, would be critical for women to

access TBI benefits — and for citizens in general to exert their rights and have access to social protection services, among other services.

- All these elements may facilitate transfer payments sent directly to women, thus ideally providing them with economic support and independence. The question of whether they would control their own bank or mobile accounts remains open. Depending on household dynamics and power relations, some women may not have full control over their own resources if pervasive gender norms are not disrupted.

### Way Forward

- ✦ A TBI for women is urgent and only fair TBI on its own terms and could prove to be a critical vehicle for gender equality, though certainly not the only one. Long-term, sustainable gender equality is a multidimensional challenge that requires a number of structural interventions: changes in complex and rigid social norms, legislation on several fronts, institutional and fiscal reform, coordinated responses both across sectors and across different levels of government, and a clear visualization of the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work to national accounting.
- ✦ Some interventions would demand significant resources and coalitions that seem difficult to achieve in the current context. Nevertheless, some policies capable of yielding significant returns along and beyond monetary emergency responses, and at a relatively low cost, seem attainable as the first building blocks of more equitable societies.
- ✦ Beyond reconciling paid work and family responsibilities, governments must address other sources of the gender pay gap such as horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market. The response should include anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action initiatives

## UN Food Waste Report 2021

### News Excerpt

Recently, the Food Waste Index Report 2021 released, 2021 has revealed that 17 per cent of all food available at consumer levels was wasted in 2019. That year, some 690 million people had to go hungry.

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### Pre-Connect

- The Food Waste Index Report aims at supporting the goals of SDG 12.3.
- It does so by presenting the most comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis and modelling to date, generating a new estimate of global food waste; and publishing a methodology for countries to measure food waste, at household, food service and retail level, to track national progress towards 2030 and to report on SDG 12.3.
- Countries using this methodology will generate strong evidence to guide a national strategy on food waste prevention, that is sufficiently sensitive to pick up changes in food waste over two- or four-year intervals, and that enables meaningful comparisons between countries globally.

### About the report

Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 (SDG 12.3) captures a commitment to halve food waste at the retail and consumer level and to reduce food loss across supply chains. This Food Waste Index Report aims to advance progress on SDG 12.3 in two ways:

- Firstly, it presents the most comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis and modelling to date, generating a new estimate of global food waste. Country-level food waste estimates have been calculated, and while confidence intervals for estimates vary by region and by sector, they offer new insight into the scale of the problem and into the substantial prevention potential in low-, middle- and high-income countries.
- Secondly, this report publishes a methodology for countries to measure food waste, at household, food service and retail level, in order to track national progress towards 2030 and to report on SDG 12.3. Countries using this methodology will generate strong evidence to guide a national strategy on food waste prevention, food waste estimates that are sufficiently sensitive to pick up changes in food waste over two- or four-year intervals, and that enables meaningful comparisons among countries globally.
- In complement to the Food Loss Index, developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Food Waste Index covers the later stages of food’s journey – food waste – occurring at household, food service and retail level.



### Key Findings

- ✓ This report estimates that around 931 million tonnes of food waste was generated in 2019, 61 per cent of which came from households, 26 per cent from food service and 13 per cent from retail. This suggests that 17 per cent of total global food production may be wasted (11 per cent in households, 5 per cent in food service and 2 per cent in retail).
- ✓ Household per capita food waste generation is found to be broadly similar across country income groups, suggesting that action on food waste is equally relevant in high, upper-middle and lower-middle income countries. This diverges from earlier narratives concentrating consumer food waste in developed countries, and food production, storage and transportation losses in developing countries.
- ✓ Previous estimates of consumer food waste significantly underestimated its scale. While data doesn't permit a robust comparison across time, food waste at consumer level (household and food service) appears to be more than twice the previous FAO estimate (Gustavsson et al., 2011)
- ✓ There is insufficient data on the edible fraction of food waste to allow comparative analysis across country income groups, but even if inedible parts (bones, pits, eggshells, etc.) predominate in lower income countries, there is sufficient total food waste in these areas for circular approaches or other food waste diversion strategies to be important.
- ✓ On the other hand, countries like Nigeria and Rwanda are producing waste at 189 kg / capita / year and 164 kg / capita / year respectively. For India, the waste in kg / capita / year was 50. However, this estimation is based on only three studies, all of which had a sample size or length that was either small or unclear.
- ✓ Food waste also has a substantial environmental, social and economic impact. For example, 8-10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with food that is not consumed.
- ✓ Food loss and waste causes about \$940 billion per year in economic losses. Reductions can save money for farmers, companies, and households.

#### Scope and definition of food waste

For the purposes of the Food Waste Index, “food waste” is defined as food (see below) and the associated inedible parts removed from the human food supply chain in the following sectors:

Retail, Food service , Households

“Removed from the human food supply chain” means one of the following end destinations: landfill; controlled combustion; sewer; litter/discards/refuse; co/anaerobic digestion; compost / aerobic digestion; or land application.

Food is defined as any substance – whether processed, semi-processed or raw – that is intended for human consumption. “Food” includes drink, and any substance that has been used in the manufacture, preparation or treatment of food. Therefore, food waste includes both:

- “edible parts”: i.e., the parts of food that were intended for human consumption, and
- “inedible parts”: components associated with a food that are not intended to be consumed by humans.
- Examples of inedible parts associated with food could include bones, rinds and pits/stones

### Conclusion

- Reducing food waste would cut greenhouse gas emissions, slow the destruction of nature through land conversion and pollution, enhance the availability of food and thus reduce hunger and save money at a time of global recession.
- If we want to get serious about tackling climate change, nature and biodiversity loss and pollution and waste, businesses, governments and citizens around the world have to do their part to reduce food waste. The UN Food Systems Summit this year will provide an opportunity to launch bold new actions to tackle food waste globally

## Ease of Living Index

### News Excerpt

BENGALURU HAS been adjudged the most liveable city in India, followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai and Surat, according to the government’s Ease of Living Index released recently.

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### About the Index

- The Ease of Living Index (EoLI) is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development. It provides a comprehensive understanding of participating cities across India based on quality of life, economic-ability of a city, and its sustainability and resilience. The assessment also incorporates the residents' view on the services provided by city administration through a Citizen Perception Survey.
- The Municipal Performance Index (MPI) was launched as an accompaniment to the Ease of Living Index. It seeks to examine local government practice in municipalities across areas of services, finance, policy, technology and governance. It seeks to simplify and evaluate the complexities in local governance practice and promote the ethos of transparency and accountability.
- Both the indices represent an attempt to gauge the performance of cities across India on various parameters of urban living. The Ease of Living Index encapsulates the outcome indicators while the Municipal Performance Index captures the enabling input parameters. These indices provide a holistic assessment of cities based on their efforts to cultivate better quality of life, create infrastructure, and address challenges of urbanization.

### Key Findings

- Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the million-plus population category, Delhi ranks 13th. At the bottom of the list are Amritsar, Guwahati, Bareilly, Dhanbad and Srinagar.
- Shimla topped the category of cities with population of less than million. It is followed by Bhubaneswar, Silvassa, Kakinada and Salem. At the bottom of the list of 62 cities are Aligarh, Rampur, Namchi, Satna and Muzaffarpur.
- More than 32 lakh people across 111 cities participated in a ‘Citizen Perception Survey’, holding a weightage of 30 per cent.
- No city from the north with over a million people figured in the top 10 of the Municipal Performance Index, involving 51 municipal corporations. Indore topped the index, followed by Surat, Bhopal, Pimpri Chinchwad and Pune. The last five were Aurangabad, North Delhi, Srinagar, Kota and Guwahati.
- New Delhi, however, topped the list of cities with less than a million people in the Municipal Performance Index, followed by Tirupati, Gandhinagar, Karnal and Salem. At the bottom were Itanagar, Pasighat, Kohima, Imphal and Shillong.
- While the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act – instituted almost three decades ago to allow decentralised urban governance – has enough provisions to address the problems facing cities today, the report said implementation of the Act has been compromised.
- Only 20 cities out of the 111 cities surveyed have the power to borrow and invest funds without state approval, “a serious blow to the goal of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
- It suggested creating a five-year mayoral term across India, and consolidating planning, development, housing, water, and environment activities to report to municipalities rather than state governments. As financial autonomy of cities varies by state municipal laws, the report said cities with more financial autonomy fare better in service and governance delivery.

## Technology and Innovation Report 2021: UNCTAD

### News Excerpt

India was the biggest ‘overperformer’ in frontier technologies than the country's per capita gross domestic products (GDP) would suggest, according to a recent country-readiness index released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

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### Pre-Connect

- The Technology and Innovation Report 2021 urges all developing nations to prepare for a period of deep and rapid technological change that will profoundly affect markets and societies.
- All countries will need to pursue science, technology and innovation policies appropriate to their development stage and economic, social and environmental conditions. This requires strengthening and aligning Science, Technology and Innovation systems and industrial policies, building digital skills among students and the workforce, and closing digital divides.
- Governments should also enhance social protection and ease workforce transitions to deal with the potential negative consequences of frontier technologies on the job market.

### What are Frontier technologies

Frontier technologies include artificial intelligence, the internet of things, big data, blockchain, fifth-generation mobile telephony, three-dimensional printing, robotics, drones (remotely controlled flights), gene-editing, nanotechnology and solar power — the ones that take advantage of digitalisation and connectivity.

### What report says?

- Not only India, but several developing countries showed stronger capabilities to use and adapt frontier technologies above their GDPs, the report highlighted. And yet, most of the 158 countries assessed were lagging behind.
- India’s actual index ranking was 43, while the estimated one based on per capita income was 108. This meant that India overperformed other countries by 65 ranking positions. It was followed by the Philippines, which overperformed by 57 ranking positions.

➤ China was at position 25; both India and China performed well in research and development. This was reflective of their abundant supplies of qualified and highly skilled human resources available at a comparatively low cost.

	Country	Overperformance (positions)		Country	Overperformance (positions)
1	India	65	11	Morocco	29
2	Philippines	57	12	Kenya	28
3	Ukraine	47	13	Nepal	28
4	Viet Nam	45	14	Serbia	25
5	China	40	15	Korea, Republic of	24
6	Jordan	34	16	Russian Federation	24
7	Brazil	33	17	Lebanon	24
8	Republic of Moldova	33	18	Togo	23
9	South Africa	29	19	United Kingdom	21
10	Tunisia	29	20	Ghana	20

- The Philippines has a high ranking for industry—because of high levels of foreign direct investment in high-technology manufacturing, especially electronics.
- The United States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom were “best prepared” for frontier technologies.

### Conclusion

- ✓ New technologies hold the promise of the future, from climate action and better health to more democratic and inclusive societies. As this report highlights, the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind provides a compelling incentive for harnessing frontier technologies for sustainable development.
- ✓ Developing countries should align science, technology and innovation policies with industrial policies. New technologies can re-invigorate traditional production sectors and speed up industrialisation and economic structural transformation.

### World Happiness Report

#### News Excerpt

Finland has been declared the world’s happiest country for the fourth year running, according to the World Happiness Report 2021 published recently

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by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

### Pre-Connect

The World Happiness Report 2021 focuses on the effects of COVID-19 and how people all over the world have fared. Our aim was two-fold, first to focus on the effects of COVID-19 on the structure and quality of people’s lives, and second to describe and evaluate how governments all over the world have dealt with the pandemic. In particular, reporttry to explain why some countries have done so much better than others.

### Key Finding

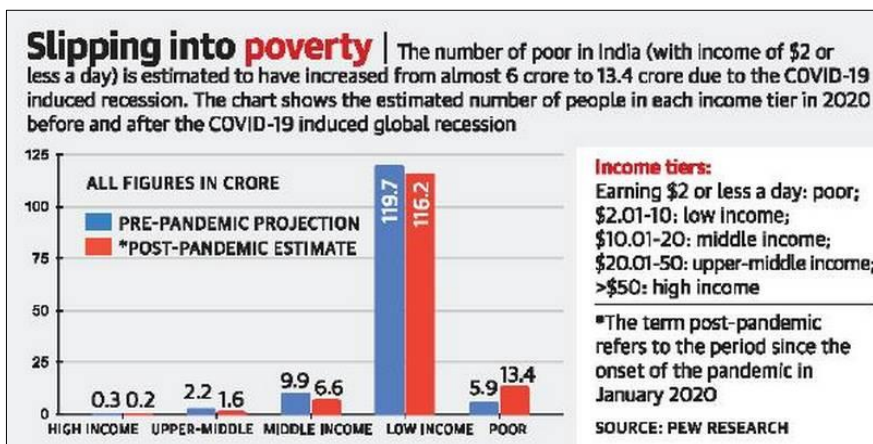
India ranked 139th out of the 149 countries in the list — a slight improvement since last year, when it was ranked 140th.

The report evaluated levels of happiness by taking into account factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation. But this year, the authors had a unique new challenge to address in the report — the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on nations around the world.

### Analytica

#### Poverty in India due to Pandemic:

- Pew Research report suggests middle class may have shrunk by 30% and number of poor risen by 7.5 crore.
- India’s middle class may have shrunk by a third due to 2020’s pandemic-driven recession, while the number of poor people — earning less than ₹150 per day — more than doubled, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center. In a comparison, Chinese incomes remained relatively unshaken, with just a 2% drop in the middle class population.
- World Bank projections of economic growth to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on Indian incomes. The lockdown triggered by the pandemic resulted in shut businesses, lost jobs and falling incomes, plunging the Indian economy into a deep recession. China managed to avoid a contraction, although growth slowed.
- The middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 3.2 crore in 2020 as a consequence of the downturn, compared with the number it may have reached absent the pandemic.



- The number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 7.5 crore because of the COVID-19 recession. This accounts for nearly 60% of the global increase in poverty.
- Estimating an increase from almost 6 crore to 13.4 crore poor people. It also noted the record spike in MGNREGA participants as proof that the poor were struggling to find work.
- The vast majority of India’s population fall into the low income tier, earning about ₹150 to 700 per day.
- Pew’s projections suggest this group shrank from 119.7 crore to 116.2 crore per day, with about 3.5 crore dropping below the poverty line.
- The middle income group is likely to have decreased from almost 10 crore to just 6.6 crore, while the richer population who earn more than ₹1,500 a day also fell almost 30% to 1.8 crore people.
- In contrast, China’s middle class is likely to see a miniscule dip of just one crore, while the number of poor people may have gone up by 10 lakh.

- If the COVID-19 recession has worsened inequality, the increase in the number of poor is likely greater than estimated in this analysis, and the decrease in the number who are high income is likely less than estimated. The middle class may have shrunk by more than projected.

### Conclusion

- The pandemic reminds us of our global environmental threats, the urgent need to cooperate, and the difficulties of achieving cooperation in each country and globally.
- The World Happiness Report 2021 reminds us that we must aim for wellbeing rather than mere wealth, which will be fleeting indeed if we don't do a much better job of addressing the challenges of sustainable development.

## WHO's COVAX Facility

### News Excerpt

Recently, The World Health Organization (WHO) has signed an agreement on behalf of the international vaccines-sharing facility COVAX for a no-fault compensation programme for rare serious side effects associated with vaccines distributed via the scheme.

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### Pre-Connect

#### About COVAX

- COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, is co-convened by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) and the World Health Organization (WHO) – working in partnership with UNICEF as key implementing partner, developed and developing country vaccine manufacturers, the World Bank, and others.
- It is the only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide to both higher-income and lower-income countries.

#### About the Programme

- According to the WHO, the programme is the first vaccine injury compensation mechanism operating on an international scale. It covers all 92 low- and middle-income countries and economies that are eligible for support from the COVAX Facility until 30 June 2022.
- The compensation programme will offer all eligible individuals a 'fast, fair, robust and transparent' process for gaining compensation in the rare event that they experience a serious side effect associated with a COVAX-distributed vaccine
- The COVAX programme will provide a no-fault lump sum compensation in full and final settlement of any claims.
- This strategy aims to reduce the need for making use of law courts, which could potentially be a lengthy and costly process.
- The no-fault compensation fund will be accessible via a web portal by 31 March 2021, although eligible individuals can apply for compensation under the programme even if they received a COVAX-distributed vaccine prior to this date.
- The programme will initially be financed through Gavi COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) funding.
- This no-fault compensation mechanism helps to ensure that people in AMC-eligible countries and economies can benefit from the cutting-edge science that has delivered COVID-19 vaccines in record time.
- The COVAX Facility – which is the vaccine pillar of the World Health Organization's (WHO) ACT Accelerator – is aiming to deliver at least two billion doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021 to all participating countries.

#### What are the Challenges?

- ✓ In line with the challenges of the current global supply environment, this is due to challenges the company faces in rapidly scaling up supply and optimising production processes for these early deliveries.

- ✓ The UN organisation said it was working to confirm whether doses from the Serum Institute of India, the largest supplier to Covax, were subject to an export ban but said it understood there had been a “setback in securing export licences”
- ✓ Covid-19 vaccines to lower-income economies participating in the Covax facility will likely face delays following a setback in securing export licences for further doses of Covid-19 vaccines produced by the Serum Institute of India expected to be shipped in March and April.
- ✓ The Serum Institute has competing commitments to AstraZeneca, the Indian government and to the contracts it signs privately to supply overseas governments, and it is not clear how the Pune-based manufacturer prioritises customers.

### India Contribution in COVAX Facility

- Collaboration among the Serum Institute of India (SII), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will accelerate manufacturing and delivery of up to an additional 100 million doses of future vaccines, if proven to be safe and effective, for low- and middle-income countries in 2021.
- The expansion follows August’s announcement of up to 100 million doses to be delivered by the collaboration, bringing the total now to be delivered by the partnership to up to 200 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, priced at a maximum of US\$ 3 per dose, with an option to secure more.



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## ECONOMY

### Recovery of the Indian Economy

#### News Excerpt

India's economy resurfaced to growth territory in the third quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2020-21, clocking a 0.4% rise in the gross domestic product (GDP), as per data from the National Statistical Office (NSO).

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#### Highlights

- GDP had shrunk in the first two quarters by 24.4% and 7.3% as per revised data, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, marking a technical recession.
- The NSO has also revised its advance national income estimates for FY21 to project an 8% decline in GDP, compared with the 4% growth seen in FY20. The NSO had earlier estimated a 7.7% shrinkage for FY21.
- The Finance Ministry termed the 0.4% real GDP growth in Q3 as a return to 'the pre-pandemic times of positive growth rates' and a reflection of a 'further strengthening of V-shaped recovery that began in Q2'.
- India's farm sector remained resilient, clocking a 3.9% growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the economy in the October-to-December quarter, after recording a 3.3% and 3% rise in the first two quarters, respectively.
- For the full year FY21, the NSO expects only two sectors to record positive growth in GVA — agriculture (3%) and electricity, gas, water & other utilities (1.8%).
- Overall GVA is expected to contract 6.5% in the year, led by an 18% dip in trade, hotels and other services, a 10.3% decline in construction, and an about 9% fall in mining and manufacturing GVA.
- In Q3, manufacturing, construction and financial, real estate and professional services staged a return to growth for the first time in the year after two bad quarters. Manufacturing GVA grew 1.6% after dipping 35.9% and 1.5% in the first two quarters. Construction saw the sharpest recovery – with GVA rising 6% after falling 49.4% and 7.2%.
- Services including trade, hotels, transport and communication remained in trouble, with GVA declining 7.7%, though it was better than the -47.6% and the -15.3% reading in Q1 and Q2.
- The Finance Ministry said the resurgence in manufacturing and construction augured well for them to drive growth in FY22 and added that services, which account for more than 50% of India's GVA and the biggest source for pushing consumption, had done remarkably better in Q3. Real GVA in services has also improved from a contraction of 21.4% in Q1 to a negligible contraction of 1% in Q3.

#### Analytica

- On March 24 last year, the government announced one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world to curb the spread of coronavirus pandemic in India
- The pandemic not only prompted a major health crisis, but also endangered the largest economic shock, both in the country as well as globally.
- According to the Economic Survey 2021, India's humane policy response that focused on saving human lives, recognised that the short-term pain of an initial, stringent lockdown would lead to long-term gains — both in terms of lives saved and in the pace of economic recovery.

#### India's first technical recession

- ✓ The Indian economy witnessed its first ever technical recession in the year 2020, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth remaining in the negative territory for two consecutive quarters.
- ✓ GDP contracted by a record 24.4 per cent in the first quarter of the last fiscal. This was majorly induced by stringent nationwide lockdowns during April and May which stalled economic activity, shut out consumption, investment and led to loss of jobs and income for many.
- ✓ In the second quarter again, the GDP contracted but the pace of decline narrowed sharply.



However, even with a 7.3 per cent contraction, crucial services segments remained in the negative zone.

- ✓ However, with easing of Covid restrictions and resumption of business activities, India exited the technical recession phase in third quarter with a growth of 0.4 per cent.
- ✓ Recovery of activities have also been reinforced by some degree of rollout of Covid-19 vaccines. The centre now predicts annual GDP to contract by 8 per cent in the year 2020-21.
- ✓ Globally, almost all countries resorted to lockdown to flatten the curve of the virus. This led to disruptions in businesses, ceasing of economic activities and confining people inside homes even for official work.
- ✓ Thus, the pandemic pushed the global economy into recession. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) described it as the worst decline since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

### Technical Recession

- ❖ A technical recession is a term used to describe two consecutive quarters of decline in output.
- ❖ In the case of a nation's economy, the term usually refers to back-to-back contractions in real GDP.
- ❖ The most significant difference between a 'technical recession' and a 'recession' is that while the former term is mainly used to capture the trend in GDP, the latter expression encompasses an appreciably more broad-based decline in economic activity that covers several economic variables including employment, household and corporate incomes and sales at businesses.
- ❖ Another key feature of a technical recession is that it is most often caused by a one-off event (in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns imposed to combat it) and is generally shorter in duration.

### Scenario of the Employment

- The coronavirus crisis proved to be a major blow for the job market too. With businesses shut and activities coming to a halt, unemployment rate spiked to

**Economic stimulus packages announced to combat Covid**  
(Fiscal policy measures announced by the Centre after the lockdown was imposed.)

---Atmanirbhar Bharat package 1.0---
* Rs 3 lakh crore collateral-free automatic loans for businesses, including MSMEs
* Rs 20,000 crore subordinate debt for stressed MSMEs
* Rs 50,000 crore equity infusion through MSME fund of funds
* Global tenders to be disallowed upto Rs 200 crore
* Relief of Rs 1,500 crore to Mudra- Shishu loans
* Extension of Partial Guarantee Scheme to help NBFCs & MFIs
* Special credit facility to street vendors
* Housing credit linked subsidy scheme - MIG
* Additional emergency working capital through Nabard
* Additional credit through KCC
* Creation of agri infrastructure fund, animal husbandry infrastructure development fund
* Beekeeping initiative
* Viability gap funding scheme for social infrastructure projects
* Rs 90,000 crore liquidity injection for Discoms
---Atmanirbhar Bharat package 2.0---
* Rs 25,000 crore as additional capital expenditure to the ministry of road transport and ministry of defence
* Boost capital expenditure
* LIC voucher scheme
* Festival advance
---Atmanirbhar Bharat package 3.0---
* Rs 1.46 lakh crore boost for Atmanirbhar manufacturing production-linked incentives for 10 champion
* Rs 18,000 crore additional outlay for PM Awaas Yojana (PMAY) – Urban
* Boost for Rural Employment
* R&D grant for Covid Suraksha – Indian vaccine development
* Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana
* Industrial infrastructure, industrial incentives and domestic defence equipment
* Support for agriculture – fertiliser subsidy
* Boost for project exports – support for Exim Bank

23.52 per cent in April last year as several firms recorded job losses. It remained at 21.7 per cent in May.

- According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data, the unemployment rate started tapering off from June onward when it was recorded at 10.2 per cent in the month and further improved to 7.4 per cent in July.

- However, the unemployment rate again rose slightly to 8.3 per cent in August and improved to 6.7 per cent in September 2020.



- The Centre took many steps to boost fresh hiring in the country. Unemployment was recorded at 6.9 per cent in February 2021 which is slightly better than 7.8 per cent in the same month last year and 8.8 per cent in March 2020.

**Rise in number of billionaires**

- ✚ Even at a time when unemployment rate in the country was at its peak, the number of billionaires surged in India.
- ✚ India now has 177 billionaires with 40 of them entering the coveted club during the pandemic-stricken 2020.

**Economic and Structural Reform Measures announced by the Government**

Monetary measures adopted by RBI
* Lowered repo and reverse repo rate by 115 and 155 bps, respectively
* Injection of durable liquidity through open market operation (OMO)
* Targeted long-term repo operations (TLTROs) of up to 3 years
* Reduction in CRR requirement of banks
* Raised bank's borrowing limit
* Working capital support- term loan moratorium, deferment of interest and easing of financing requirements
* Enhanced WMA borrowing limits and relaxation of CSF withdrawal rules
* Easing of compliance to stressed asset classify
* Deferment, easing of capital buffer & liquidity coverage requirements
* Deferring compliance requirements for FPIs under voluntary retention route (VRR)

**Industrial activity witnessed V-shaped recovery**

- > The headline purchasing managers' index (PMI) plunged to a low of 27.4 in April last year.
- > Amid widespread business closures, demand conditions were severely hampered. New orders fell for the first time in two-and-a-half years and at the sharpest rate in the survey's history, far outpacing that seen during the global financial crisis.
- > The PMI industrial data remained in contraction for four months till August 2020.
- > With phased easing of restrictions over time, a V-shaped recovery was observed in industrial production as manufacturing rebounded and industrial value started to normalise.
- > Latest data shows manufacturing growth held steady in February at 57.5 on back of strong increases in new work intakes as firms lifted production.

**Service sector**

- The services sector bore the brunt of the pandemic as hotels, restaurants, cinemas had been shuttered for the longest time and people stayed away due to the fear of infections.
- The sector, which accounts for nearly 60 per cent of GDP, declined to its lowest level in 14 years in April 2020 as a result of the lockdown.
- The services PMI plummeted to 5.4 in April and remained in contraction for the next 6 months as well.
- Gradually, with resumption of economic activities, the service sector expanded for the first time in eight months in October.
- At present, the sector is witnessing its fastest growth in almost a year. Driven by extended robust recovery in domestic demand, services PMI rose to 55.3 in February 2021 -- staying above the 50-level mark for the fifth straight month.

**Prices and inflation**

- The headline consumer price inflation (CPI) has remained on a higher trajectory during the Covid-induced lockdowns and

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V-Shaped Recovery, Atmanirbhar Bharat

also in the subsequent period due to persistence of supply side disruptions.

- Rise in inflation was majorly driven by rising food prices. Inflation witnessed a sharp rise to 9.1 per cent during the lockdown period.

## Merchant Digitization Summit 2021

### News Excerpt

The Government of India, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and UN-based Better Than Cash Alliance recently hosted Merchant Digitization Summit 2021: Towards Aatmanirbhar (Self Reliance) Bharat with special focus on Himalayan Regions, North East Regions and Aspirational Districts of India.

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### Highlights

- The Summit brought together leaders from the public and private sectors for the Responsible Merchant Digitization Summit to accelerate responsible digitization of merchants in India's North-Eastern and Himalayan regions, and Aspirational districts.
- Empowering women merchants who play critical roles in their communities is one of the priorities to help achieve the mission of Digital India.
- This Summit is part of the series of Learning Exchange amongst all States and Union Territories under which DEA had also co-organized the webinar titled "Unlocking the value of Fintech in promoting Digital Payments".

### The National Language Translation Mission

- Announced in Union Budget 2021-22, The National Language Translation Mission aims to use artificial intelligence, machine learning and speech recognition technologies to build the next generation government apps and websites that will be "conversational" like Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri.
- The Mission will work towards creating a "voice-based internet" which will be accessible in popular Indian languages and not be dominated by Hindi or English.
- The idea behind the language mission is to push for internet access in Indian languages. The mission will build on existing projects in the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) which has been working on various applications like text-to-speech, text-to-text, etc.
- A national level mission focusing on local language translation will provide big boost to regional language initiatives.
- It will also encourage agencies to translate science and technology related content, currently available mostly in English language, in Indian languages. This will enhance access to digital content to wider demographic of Indian users.

#### Context

- More and more Indians from tier 2 and tier 3 cities are using online services since the pandemic hit. As a result, several consumer facing businesses and government agencies started offering services in local Indian languages.
- 2020 also saw increase in investments in start-ups offering services in local languages. According to Venture Intelligence, local language startup ecosystem in India raised \$217million (approx ₹1600 crore) until October 2020.

### Analytica

- From an average of 2-3 billion digital transactions monthly, India has set ambitious target for 1 billion digital transactions per day.
- Person to merchant (P2M) digital payment transactions will scale to 10-12 billion transactions every month to contribute to India's digital economy. This is an enormous opportunity for digitized merchants.
- However, most digital payments solutions designed for smart phone whose penetration amongst merchants in these focus regions is very low.

- There was consensus during Merchant Digitization event that an industry-level approach was required to address the unique and fundamental challenges including gender targeting in national, regional and state-level merchant initiatives.
- The participants agreed that **the National Language Translation Mission** can be used to disseminate digital payments information, privacy clauses and consent in local languages for trust and empowerment.
- They also identified opportunities to address the challenges of connectivity, access to smart phones, and digital literacy for merchants at the last mile.

### Conclusion

Active measures need to be taken to ensure that merchants are protected from risks such as loss of privacy, exposure to fraud, and unauthorized fees which are considered as the tenets of the responsible digital payments guidelines.

## Maritime India Summit 2021

### News Excerpt

Prime Minister recently inaugurated 'Maritime India Summit 2021' through video conferencing. It is the maiden flagship initiative of the Minister of State for Ports, Shipping & Waterways (I/C) Government of India.

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### Pre-Connect

- According to the Ministry of Shipping, around 95% of India's trading by volume and 70% by value is done through maritime transport.
- India has 12 major and 205 notified minor and intermediate ports.
- The Indian ports and shipping industry play a vital role in sustaining growth in the country's trade and commerce.
- India is the sixteenth largest maritime country in the world with a coastline of about 7,517 kms.
- The Indian Government has allowed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of up to 100% under the automatic route for port and harbour construction and maintenance projects. It has also facilitated a 10-year tax holiday to enterprises that develop, maintain and operate ports, inland waterways and inland ports.

### Analytica

#### Recent updates: The Maritime Sector

- Capacity of major ports have increased from 870 million tonnes in 2014 to 1550 million tonnes today.
- Indian ports now have measures such as: Direct port Delivery, Direct Port Entry and an upgraded Port Community System (PCS) for easy data flow. Indian ports have reduced waiting time for inbound and outbound cargo.
- Mega ports with world class infrastructure are being developed in Vadhavan, Paradip and Deendayal Port in Kandla.
- Domestic waterways are found to be cost effective and environment friendly ways of transporting freight. Therefore, the government aims to operationalise 23 waterways by 2030.
- India has as many as 189 lighthouses across its vast coastline. A programme for developing tourism in the land adjacent to 78 lighthouses. The key objective of this initiative is to enhance development of the existing lighthouses and its surrounding areas into unique maritime tourism landmarks.
- Steps are also being taken to introduce urban water transport systems in key states and cities such as Kochi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Goa.
- The Government of India is also focusing on the domestic ship building and ship repair market. To encourage domestic shipbuilding approval has been given to the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy for Indian Shipyards.
- **The Sagar-Manthan:** Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre was also launched at the summit. It is an information system for enhancing maritime safety, search and rescue capabilities, security and marine environment protection.

- **The Sagarmala project** for promoting port led development was announced by the Government in 2016. As part of the Programme, more than 574 projects at a cost of 82 billion US Dollars or Rs 6 lakh crores have been identified for implementation during 2015 to 2035. Under the National Perspective Plan for Sagarmala, six new mega ports will be developed in the country.
- Ship repair clusters will be developed along both coasts by 2022. Domestic ship recycling industry will also be promoted to create 'Wealth from Waste'. India has enacted **Recycling of Ships Act, 2019** and agreed to the **Hong Kong International Convention**.
- In November 2020, the Ministry of Shipping was renamed as the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.



**What needs to be done?**

- ✓ Increased investments together with the 'Make in India' impetus can increase the sector's contribution to GDP and trade volumes.
- ✓ The government has launched a number of major initiatives such as the Sagarmala project, ports modernization and Inland Waterways & Coastal Shipping development. The increasing public-private partnership in response to these initiatives adds to the vibrancy of the sector and is a clear sign of resurged interest in its potential.
- ✓ While the positive signs of progress in the sector have opened up massive opportunities, they have also exposed bottlenecks to progress.
- ✓ It is crucial to unblock these bottlenecks and capitalise on the opportunities to give direction to the country's maritime sector.

**Conclusion**

- As it grows to be one of the major economies in the world, India will require a vibrant and strong maritime industry for economic as well as strategic reasons.
- There are many factors conducive to the development of a robust and sustainable maritime sector. Finally, it will depend on how the different stakeholders utilise the opportunities presented to them to transform the sector into an engine of growth for India.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
Sagarmala Program,  
SetuBharatam, Bharatmala

**MSME Credit Health Index**

**News Excerpt**

The latest MSME Credit Health Index indicates that credit growth has accelerated, as the overall growth index inched up to 114 points, which is a three-point increase from 111 in June. The overall Strength Index also

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improved to 89 from 83 over the same period.

According to a recent report, **the emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECGLS)** has helped in the credit growth for small businesses, aiding an index of growth in loans for the crucial sector ending a notch higher at the end of the September quarter.

### **What is MSME Credit Health Index?**

- In order to provide a measure of the growth and strength of the MSME sector in India, TransUnion CIBIL in partnership with Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has launched MSME Credit Health Index.
- The MSME Credit Health Index aims to provide government, policy makers, lenders and MSME market participants, a numeric indicator for benchmarking the health of the MSME sector.
- This measurement model will facilitate better MSME credit risk management, formulation of strategies and policies to support the revival and resurgence of the MSME sector and the economy.
- The MSME Credit Health Index is built using credit data submitted by lending institutions to TransUnion CIBIL. The index measures the credit health of India's MSME industry on two parameters: growth and strength.
- Growth is measured by plotting increase in exposure value (outstanding balances) over time and strength is measured by decrease/increase in credit risk in terms of non-performing assets (NPA).
- Both the growth and strength indices follow the principle of higher the better – i.e. an increasing Growth Index indicates improvement in credit growth; and an increasing Strength Index implies better asset quality and therefore denotes an improvement in the structural strength of the sector.

### **Need of the Index**

- The MSME sector comprises of over six crore enterprises, contributes nearly 29% of India's GDP and provides employment to over 11 crore workers.
- It is important to continuously monitor and measure the strength, growth and progress of the MSMEs, so that policies can be aligned and timely interventions taken.
- The Index is available at national level and granularly across MSME segments, lender categories and geographies. The ongoing monitoring of the index will provide insights for aligning strategies and policies towards efficient implementation of funds and resources for sustained development of the MSME sector.

### **Findings of the Report**

- ✓ Private banks and public sector banks (PSB) have seen a surge in growth in the June and September quarters, while non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) show a muted growth.
- ✓ Absolute credit disbursements data showed that the PSBs have emerged as the leading MSME lender group in the period starting June 2020 to September 2020, while disbursements by private banks, which were also impacted during the lockdown, are back to pre-COVID-19 levels.
- ✓ Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat have shown higher growth momentum during the quarter, while Uttar Pradesh has also sustained its growth in the last two quarters.
- ✓ Among the top 10 states with respect to exposure, the southern states have shown more growth than the northern states cumulatively with respect to microloans, it said.
- ✓ West Bengal and Telangana, which are also in the top 10, have stable Strength.

### **MSME Sector in India**

- The Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector is a major contributor to the socio-economic development of the country.
- In India, the sector has gained significant importance due to its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country and exports.
- The sector has also contributed immensely with respect to entrepreneurship development especially in semi-urban and rural areas of India.



- According to the provisions of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006 the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are classified in two classes i.e. Manufacturing Enterprises and Service Enterprises. For details, refer box.
- The Indian MSMEs sector contributes about 29% towards the GDP through its national and international trade.
- MSME Ministry has four statutory bodies namely, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), Coir Board, National Small Industries Corporation Limited (NSIC), National Institute for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, (NI-MSME), Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialisation (MGIRI).

### Challenges in the MSME Sector

#### Infrastructure bottlenecks:

MSMEs are inadequately equipped with necessary support systems which not only impede their day-to-day business operations but

Criteria	Manufacturing		Service	
	Turnover	Investment	Turnover	Investment
Micro	Rs. 5 crore (US\$ 0.6 million)	Less than Rs. 25 lakh (US\$ 0.03 million)	Rs. 5 crore (US\$ 0.6 million)	Less than Rs. 10 lakh (US\$ 0.01 million)
Small	Rs. 50 crore (US\$ 6.8 million)	More than Rs. 25 lakh (US\$ 0.03 million) but less than Rs. 5 crore (US\$ 0.6 million)	Rs. 50 crore (US\$ 6.8 million)	More than Rs. 10 lakh (US\$ 0.01 million) but less than Rs. 2 crore (US\$ 0.3 million)
Medium	Rs. 250 crore (US\$ 34 million)	More than Rs. 5 crore (US\$ 0.6 million), but less than Rs. 10 crore (US\$ 1.4 million)	Rs. 250 crore (US\$ 34 million)	More than Rs. 2 crore (US\$ 0.3 million) but does not exceed Rs. 5 crore (US\$ 0.6 million)

also their future growth prospects. MSMEs need to shed their inhibition to adopt new technologies; accept e-payments; and foster in-house innovation which will help them manage their businesses digitally and compete globally.

- **Lack of expertise and Competition:** Lack of expertise in product development, designing, packaging and marketing strategy due to their small size add up to the pressure of adapting to the changing environment around them. The strategy for MSMEs should be to gradually expand in size and reduce the dependence on the incentive structure provided by the Government. Their aim should be eventually to compete on a global scale.
- **Access to Credit and Formalisation:** Credit disbursement to this sector has remained sluggish in recent periods. As many MSMEs mainly operate in the informal space, assessing their creditworthiness can be difficult due to information asymmetry, particularly with respect to the financial performance of their businesses. Due to their small-scale operations, MSMEs are not able to raise risk capital. They are also unable to take advantage of most of the Government schemes which are mostly based on digital infrastructure and require beneficiaries to have some form of digital identity and presence.
- **Delayed Payments:** MSMEs often face the problem of delayed payments, affecting their cash flow and working capital availability. Most of the time, delay in realisation of such receivables increases their operating cycle and reduces their ability to procure new orders or fulfil the existing ones.

### Government Policies for MSME Sector

- > In October 2020, the Ministry of MSME in a major initiative onboarded the latest IT tools of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) for providing assistance and solutions to MSMEs. The ministry has implemented AI & ML on its robust Single Window System 'Champions'.
- > **Udyog Aadhaar Memorandum:** Udyog Aadhaar Memorandum (UAM) is a one-page online registration system for MSMEs based on self-certification. The information sought is on a self-certification basis and no supporting documents are required at the time of online filing of UAM.
- > **MSME DataBank:** MSME DataBank enables the Ministry of MSME to streamline and monitor the schemes and pass on the benefits directly to MSMEs. It is helpful for MSME

units that can update their enterprise information as and when required without visiting any government office and updating information about their products/services.

- > **My MSME:** In order to facilitate the enterprises to enjoy benefits of various schemes, the MSME office launched a web-based application module in the form of a mobile app called My MSME. This allows enterprises to make their applications and check for schemes on their mobile phone using the app.
- > **MSME Sampark:** Launched in 2018, the MSME Sampark portal is a digital platform wherein jobseekers and recruiters can register themselves for mutual beneficial interactions.
- > **Digital Payment:** As part of the Digital India initiative, the Ministry of MSME has taken numerous initiatives to digitally enable the entire MSME ecosystem all MSME offices have been digitally empowered, efforts have been taken to spread awareness on the benefits of digital mode of payment such as BHIM, UPI and Bharat QR Code.
- > To encourage local production, the government is working on policies to increase MSME exports and lower imports. In addition, Rs. 200 crore (US\$ 28.4 million) scheme has been sanctioned to set up 12 technology centres, which are expected to be completed by 2021.

### Way Forward

- As the MSME sector holds immense potential, the need is to have a right set of policies and enabling framework which guide and support MSMEs to effectively handle their existing problems and venture into new areas.
- With increased availability of data from several sources, including GSTN, income tax, credit bureaus, etc., it is now possible to appraise the MSME loan proposals expeditiously by doing due diligence online.

#### **The emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECGLS)**

- ❖ ECGLS was introduced by the government to mitigate the economic distress faced by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) because of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing them additional funding of up to Rs 3 lakh crore in the form of a fully guaranteed emergency credit line.
- ❖ The scheme was expanded to cover 26 distressed sectors through ECLGS 2.0 and was extended till March 31, 2021.
- ❖ The government recently extended the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) further till June 30 and expanded its scope to cover enterprises in hospitality, travel and tourism, leisure and sporting sectors.
- ❖ ECLGS 3.0, which will cover the newly added service sectors, will involve extension of credit of up to 40 per cent of total credit outstanding across all lending institutions as on February 29, 2020. The tenor of loans granted under the scheme will be for 6 years, including a moratorium period of 2 years.
- ❖ The modifications introduced in the scheme, while providing an incentive to lending institutions to enable availability of additional funding facility to the eligible beneficiaries will go a long way in contributing to economic revival, protecting jobs, and creating conducive environment for employment generation.

- Emergence of FinTech companies has made it possible to assess credit worthiness of MSMEs by utilising unexplored data sources such as digital transaction trails, data generated through e-commerce sites, etc.
- Public Credit Registry (PCR) can fundamentally address the information asymmetry that impedes access to credit for micro and small entrepreneurs. The PCR has been envisaged as a database of core credit information. The registry would play crucial role in reducing credit gap in the segment.
- MSMEs should be integrated with global value chains (GVC) to remain competitive as it offers unique opportunity to become technologically and digitally empowered. Being part of GVC would enable MSMEs to produce quality goods and services which will have greater acceptability in the global market.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
KVIC, Coir Board, NSIC,  
NI-MSME, MGIRI

## RBI Panel for Bank Licenses

### News Excerpt

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up a five-member committee, headed by former RBI Deputy Governor Shyamala Gopinath, for evaluating applications for universal banks and small finance banks. The panel is termed as Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC).

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### Pre-Connect

- An internal working group of the RBI, last year, proposed an overhaul of the licensing policy for private banks and suggested allowing large corporate and industrial houses to float banks in India after suitable amendments to the Banking Regulation Act.
- Although several large corporate houses had applied for a banking licence in the past, the regulator had rejected these proposals.
- However, the RBI has not yet approved or rejected the recommendations of the working group.
- Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan and ex-Deputy Governor Viral Acharya have criticised the proposal to allow corporate houses to float banking entities, saying it will lead to “connected lending” which, according to them, is “invariably disastrous”.

### Highlights

- The Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC) comprises eminent persons with experience in banking, financial sector and other relevant areas. From now on, they will evaluate applications for universal banks and small finance banks.
- The tenure of this SEAC will be for three years.

### Analytica

#### What is Universal bank?

- ✓ A **universal bank** is a bank that combines the three main services of banking under one roof. The three services are **wholesale** banking, **retail** banking, and **investment** banking.
- ✓ A typical universal bank also offers other financial services such as insurance.
- ✓ Retail banking includes the following services: savings accounts, *current accounts*, overdrafts, personal loans, and mortgages.
- ✓ Wholesale banking involves borrowing and lending money on a very large scale. Wholesale banks’ customers include pension funds, giant companies, governments, and other financial institutions.
- ✓ Investment banks focus on services for major investors and companies. They specialize, for example, in the investment requirements of pension funds. Investment banks do not take deposits. The main activities of investment banks are asset management, M&A, raising capital, securities trading, and securities underwriting.

#### What is Small Finance Banks?

- Small Finance Banks is a specific segment of banking created by RBI under the guidance of Government of India with an objective of furthering financial inclusion by primarily undertaking basic banking activities to un-served and underserved sections including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganized entities.
- **Like other commercial banks, these banks can undertake all basic banking activities including lending and taking deposits.**
- After the announcement during Union Budget for the year 2014-15, RBI issued the guidelines of Small Finance Bank in November 2014.
- Eligibility Criteria:

- Resident individuals/professionals with 10 years of experience in banking and finance;
- Companies and societies owned and controlled by residents will be eligible to set up small finance banks.
- Existing Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs), Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), and Local Area Banks (LABs) that are owned and controlled by residents can also opt for conversion into small finance banks.

**Guidelines for the on-tap licensing by RBI**

✚ According to the guidelines on on-tap licensing of universal banks issued in August 2016, resident individuals and professionals having 10 years of experience in banking and finance at a senior level are also eligible to promote universal banks.

**Note:**

The government has decided to cancel its Rs 20,000 crore borrowing scheduled for March 26 on review of position of cash balance. This means, the government would be borrowing Rs 20,000 crore less than its target of Rs 12.8 lakh crore announced in the Budget on February 1 for the current fiscal. The government raises money from the market to fund its fiscal deficit through dated securities and treasury bills.

- ✚ However, large industrial houses are excluded as eligible entities but are permitted to invest in the banks up to 10 per cent.
- ✚ A non-operative financial holding company (NOFHC) has been made non-mandatory in case of promoters being individuals or standalone promoting/converting entities who/which do not have other group entities.
- ✚ Not less than 51 per cent of total paid-up equity capital of the NOFHC should be owned by the promoter/ promoter group, instead being wholly owned by the promoter group.
- ✚ The RBI guidelines say existing specialised activities have been permitted to be continued from a separate entity proposed to be held under the NOFHC subject to prior approval from the RBI and subject to it being ensured that similar activities are not conducted through the bank as well.
- ✚ The initial minimum paid-up voting equity capital for a bank will Rs 500 crore. Thereafter, the bank should have a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore at all times.
- ✚ The promoters or the NOFHC should hold a minimum of 40 per cent of the paid-up voting equity capital of the bank, which should be locked-in for five years from the date of commencement of business of the bank.
- ✚ The promoter group shareholding shall be brought down to 15 per cent within a period of 15 years from the date of commencement of business of the bank.

**NSE Glitch: SEBI Issues Guidelines for MII**

**News Excerpt**

The Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has asked the governing board of National Stock Exchange (NSE) to determine why the NSE management failed to shift NSE’s operations from the primary site to the Disaster Recovery site (DRS) within the time frame specified by SEBI, on the day trading was halted last month.

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**What is the issue?**

- Brokers and market participants have condemned the way the National Stock Exchange (NSE) handled the crisis following a complete shutdown of trading for nearly four hours.
- Timely communication and clarification could have averted panic sell-off by online brokers on the BSE and prevented huge losses to investors.
- Brokers urged SEBI to allow the benchmarks Nifty and Sensex to trade on all the stock exchanges.
- In a statement, NSE said failure of telecom links and of the storage area network (SAN) system led to the outage. Instability in telecom links was primarily due to ‘digging and

construction' along the path between the two sites'. On the day of glitch, the primary SAN also became inaccessible to host servers.

**What is the impact of the glitch?**

While there was no impact to the trading system, this instability resulted in an impact to the online risk management system, which is configured in a high availability mode. Given that the risk management system was unavailable, market functioning had to be shut down.

**What needs to be done?**

- According to experts, if there is uniformity of products across the exchanges, the problem would have got resolved due to the interoperability feature.
- In such a situation of crisis, there should be well-defined policies and measures to manage such situations to avoid panic among markets and traders, market participants and exchanges.
- The regulator said it has put in place a framework to deal with incidences of technical glitches at the market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) such as stock exchanges and clearing corporations.
- SEBI said MIIs will have to submit a detailed root cause analysis in a time bound manner after due vetting by the technology committee and governing board of the MII.
- SEBI also directed all Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs) to move to disaster recovery sites within 45 minutes of declaring an incident a 'disaster'.

**National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**

- It is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.
- It has been incorporated as a "Not for Profit" Company under the provisions of Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 (now Section 8 of Companies Act 2013), with an intention to provide infrastructure to the entire Banking system in India for physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems.
- The Company is focused on bringing innovations in the retail payment systems through the use of technology for achieving greater efficiency in operations and widening the reach of payment systems.
- It operates various payment systems such as RuPay, NACH, Aeps, BBPS, ABPS, IMPS, NFS,UPI, NETC

**National Stock Exchange (NSE)**

- ❖ National Stock Exchange of India Limited is the leading government owned stock exchange of India, located in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- ❖ NSE was established in 1992 as the first dematerialized electronic exchange in the country.
- ❖ NSE was the first exchange in the country to provide a modern, fully automated screen-based electronic trading system that offered easy trading facilities to investors spread across the length and breadth of the country.

**Standardization of skill certification systems**

**News Excerpt**

The government has recently decided that all workers executing government contracts must have official certification for their skills.

**Pre-Connect**

- Only 2.4% of India's workforce is formally trained as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2018-19.
- India's skill regulator, the National Council for Vocational Education and Training, has standardised skill certification systems for 4,000-odd job roles, as part of an effort to change the labour market structure from a largely unskilled one to a predominantly formally skilled workforce.

**Analytica**

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- The Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Ministry has asked all government departments to mandate this requirement for all contracts issued under their watch, citing contractors’ preference to employ informal workers on lower wages in contrast to the government’s push to train and certify skilled workers.
- If the above provision cannot be applied in toto immediately, then a phase-wise application is on the cards.
- According to officials, it can be mandated that up to 10% of the strength of skilled workers utilised in 2021-22 will be certified skilled workers, which shall be progressively increased to 100% by 2026-27.
- Government contractors in particular, prefer to rely on informal workers with low salaries for meeting their labour needs, thus creating a dichotomy where the government is trying to promote skilling in the workforce without insisting on the use of skilled manpower for its own projects.

### Impact of the move

- ✓ Besides higher productivity and output quality in government contract works, a beneficial impact would be the improvement in wages for the skilled manpower hired.
- ✓ Stipulating engagement of certified skilled workers would make more people seek certification and influence industry hire practices as well.
- ✓ Given the quantum of manpower engaged in government and government contract works, this would help in making skilling aspirational for our youth and spread the culture of certified skilling.
- ✓ And demand for skilling would start coming from the industry and labour force itself, which will prefer to pay for skilling itself, doing away with the present system of the Government trying to drive skilling through funding.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
National Skill development corporation, Skill India, eSkill India

### Umbrella Entities for Retail Payment Systems

#### News Excerpt

Companies with any presence in India’s tech or financial services ecosystem are making a beeline to **set up new umbrella entities (NUEs)** for payment systems — an idea floated by the Reserve Bank of India to create an alternate mechanism to the existing National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The RBI has set a deadline of March 31 for firms to submit their applications for setting up NUEs.

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#### What are NUEs?

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

#### Which players are planning to set up NUEs?

- Only those entities that are owned and controlled by Indian citizens with at least three years of experience in the payments segment can become promoters of NUEs.
- Also, foreign investment is allowed in NUEs as long as they comply with the existing guidelines.
- According to reports, several companies have either tied up banks or major tech players to apply for NUEs. For Ex. Reliance Industries, along with Facebook and Google — which have invested in Jio Platforms — are planning to apply as a consortium.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
UPI 2.0, RBI’s various acts, Monetary policy Committee, Usha Throat committee

What is the need for NUEs?

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

### The National Council of Vocational Education and Training (NCVT)

NCVT, notified on December 5, 2018 has been set up as an overarching umbrella regulator establishing regulations and standards to ensure quality in the TVET space, subsuming the responsibilities of National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and the erstwhile National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT).

The major functions of NCVET include:

- A. Recognition and regulation of Awarding Bodies (ABs), Assessment Agencies(AAs) and Skill related Information Providers
- B. Approval of qualifications as per the NSQF (National Skills Qualification Framework)
- C. Monitoring, Evaluation and Supervision of recognized entities
- D. Grievance Redressal of the varied stakeholders

## National Project Status to ERCP

### News Excerpt

In recent times, Rajasthan Chief Minister has been strongly demanding national project status for the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP).

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### Pre-Connect

- Government of India approved a scheme of National Projects to be implemented during XI Plan with a view to expedite completion of identified National Projects for the benefit of the people.
- Such projects will be provided financial assistance by the Government of India in the form of Central grant which will be 90% of the estimated cost of such projects for their completion in a time bound manner.

### Criteria for Selection of National Projects

- (a) International projects where usage of water in India is required by a treaty or where planning and early completion of the project is necessary in the interest of the country.
- (b) Inter-State projects which are dragging on due to nonresolution of Inter-State issues relating to sharing of costs, rehabilitation, aspects of power production etc., including river interlinking projects.
- (c) Intra-State projects with additional potential of more than 2,00,000 hectare (ha) and with no dispute regarding sharing of water and where hydrology is established

### What is 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 and use this water in south-eastern districts of the state where there is a scarcity of water for drinking and irrigation.
- 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.
- Through the help of diversion structures, intra-basin water transfers, linking channels and construction of pumping main feeder channels, 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.

**The benefits estimated in the project**

- ✓ According to the Rajasthan Water Resources Department, ERCP is estimated to create an additional command area of 2 lakh hectares and an area of 4.31 lakh hectare will get irrigation facilities because of this project.
✓ The ERCP also intends to improve the groundwater table in rural areas of the state, positively influencing the socio-economic conditions of people from these areas.
✓ It also adds special emphasis on the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), hoping that sustainable water sources will enhance and help industries grow in these areas resulting in investment and revenue. There are multiple sub-projects under the ERCP with budgets allocated for each phase.

**Present Status**

- 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.
▪ At present, the state is bearing all the costs. The state wants the Centre to declare this as a national project so that the cost-sharing ratio between the Centre and the state becomes 90:10, with the central government bearing 90 per cent of the cost.

PEPPER IT WITH National Infrastructure Pipeline, Indira Gandhi Canal, National Green Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission

**UDAN-4.1**

**News Excerpt**

On the commencement of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (India@75)' launched by Government of India, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has proposed about 392 routes under UDAN 4.1 bidding process.

GS CONNECT grid with columns 1-11 and rows I-M. Black cells are present at (I, 5), (II, 5), (III, 1), and (III, 5).

**Pre-Connect**

- The Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS)- UdeDesh Ka AamNagrik (UDAN) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) envisaged to make air travel affordable and widespread in the country.
• The scheme intends to boost inclusive national economic growth, employment opportunities, and air transport infrastructure development across the nation.
• Till date, 325 routes and 56 airports including 5 heliports and 2 Water Aerodromes have been operationalised under the UDAN scheme.

Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav It is a series of events to be organised by the Government of India to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of India's Independence. The Mahotsav will be celebrated as a Jan-Utsav in the spirit of Jan-Bhagidari. The Prime Minister at the launch event of this initiative, reiterated five pillars i.e. Freedom Struggle, Ideas at 75, Achievements at 75, Actions at 75 and Resolves at 75 as guiding force for moving forward keeping dreams and duties as inspiration.

**UDAN-4.1**

- The UDAN 4.1 round is focused on connecting smaller airports, along with special helicopter and seaplane routes.
➤ In addition to these, some new routes have been proposed under the Sagaramala Seaplane Services in consultation with the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways.
➤ Some of the operational flexibilities are extended to Airlines under the UDAN 4.1 to ensure suitable operation models to connect smaller cities/ airstrips.
➤ Additionally, awarded under UDAN 4.1.

**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code**

**News Excerpt**

The Supreme Court has recently ruled that promoters of insolvent companies, which are barred from bidding for their own companies under Section 29A of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) cannot use any

GS CONNECT grid with columns 1-11 and rows I-M. Black cells are present at (III, 1), (III, 5), and (IV, 5).

scheme or arrangement to gain control of their company even if it goes into liquidation.

### Pre-Connect

- In a case involving the liquidation of Gujarat NRE Coke Limited, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) had in 2019 held that any person who was ineligible, under Section 29A of IBC, to bid for his company, was also barred from proposing a scheme of compromise and arrangement under Section 230 of the Companies Act.
- Section 230 of the Companies Act allows promoters or creditors of the company to propose a scheme of arrangement or compromise under which the debt of the company can be restructured.

### Apex Court Judgement

- In its judgment upholding the NCLAT decision, the apex court said that while Section 230 would be applicable for promoters and creditors in normal course of the workings of the company, it would not be applicable if the company is facing liquidation under IBC.
- According to SC Judges, The company has to be protected from its management and a corporate death. It would lead to a manifest absurdity if the very persons who are ineligible for submitting a resolution plan, participating in the sale of assets of the company in liquidation or participating in the sale of the corporate debtor as a 'going concern', are somehow permitted to propose a compromise or arrangement under Section 230 of the Act of 2013.

### Impact of Judgement on Promoters of Companies

- ✓ The clarification by the Supreme Court with respect to participation of promoters in liquidation process of an insolvent company will speed up the resolution process.
- ✓ Since the objective of the IBC is to find a suitable buyer for the company and liquidation is ordered only in cases where there are no viable plans submitted, experts believe that a quick liquidation is of utmost importance to maximise the value of assets of the company.
- ✓ According to experts, any other interpretation would have left a gaping hole in the scheme of IBC and defeated the very object of Section 29A bar introduced both for resolution and liquidation processes under the IBC.
- ✓ Apart from this, it also settles down the conflicting judgments given by different benches of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), wherein these forums had, in order to follow the IBC's principle of value of asset maximisation, allowed some of the promoters to re-bid for the company or propose some arrangement when it was sent to liquidation.

### Analytica

#### What is Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code?

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) 2016 was implemented through an act of Parliament. It got Presidential assent in May 2016.
- Centre introduced the IBC in 2016 to resolve claims involving insolvent companies.
- The bankruptcy code is a one stop solution for resolving insolvencies, which previously was a long process that did not offer an economically viable arrangement. The code aims to protect the interests of small investors and make the process of doing business less cumbersome. The IBC has 255 sections and 11 Schedules.
- IBC was intended to tackle the bad loan problems that were affecting the banking system.
- The IBC process has changed the debtor-creditor relationship.
- It provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency. When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over debtor's assets and must take decisions to resolve insolvency. Under IBC, debtor and creditor both can start 'recovery' proceedings against each other.

#### Section 29A, IBC

- ✚ To reduce the chances of likely default brought forth by the abovementioned loophole, Section 29A was added to the Code by **The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2017**.
- ✚ As a consequence of inclusion of section 29A in the Code, persons who have contributed to the defaults of the corporate debtor or are undesirable due to incapacities as specified in the section or are a 'related party' to another defaulting party, are prevented from



gaining control of the corporate debtor by being declared ineligible to submit a resolution plan under the Code.

- ✦ This provision asserts protection to the creditors of the company by safeguarding them against unscrupulous persons who irrespective of their earlier defaults are trying to reward themselves by undermining the whole objective of the Code and do not aim to contribute to the revival of the corporate debtor.

### Criticisms of Section 29A

- > While the insertion of Section 29A cured a few gaps in the law under the Code, the insolvency resolution procedure had become complicated as the resolution professional or liquidator had been accorded with an additional responsibility of inspecting the eligibility of resolution applicants putting a strain on the 180-day deadline for completion of the corporate insolvency resolution process.
- > Another contention raised in a plethora of cases at the NCLT was whether section 29A will be applicable prospectively or retrospectively as the same was left unanswered in IBC 2017.
- > IBC 2017 had been highly criticized and required necessary changes and clarifications specifically pertaining to section 29A. In view of this, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 was introduced which was replaced by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
SARFAESI Act, Bad Bank,  
PARA, Asset Reconstruction  
companies, Companies act,  
Haircut

### IBC 2018

- It has modified the eligibility criteria and clarified the extent and applicability of the law under Section 29A.
- The exemptions that could be resorted to by resolution applicants to escape ineligibility are reduced and limited under IBC 2018 and the ambit of section 29A has become wider with the term 'related party' being defined under the Code.
- The definition of 'related party' in relation to an individual is extensive bringing a large number of people in the ineligibility criteria.
- Moreover, in determining the connected persons of an individual where he/she is married, the relatives of the spouse of the individual will also be included in the scope of the term 'connected persons' for the purpose of section 29A.
- Additionally, IBC 2018 has excluded 'financial entity' from the purview of 'related party' in the Code.
- It also provides for limited exemptions to the micro, small and medium sector enterprises ('MSMEs') from the application of section 29A and allows its promoters to submit a resolution plan provided he is not a wilful defaulter as concerns with respect to third party interest in submitting a resolution plan for the MSMEs was recognized.
- Supreme Court in its various judgements has described insertion of section 29A as a 'plugging loophole' and has ruled that strict adherence to Section 29A is mandatory and that wilful defaulters shall not be permitted to participate in the corporate insolvency resolution process.



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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Afghanistan Peace Plan

#### News Excerpt

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.

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#### Highlights of Peace Plan

- The proposal includes many elements like an UN-led conference of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. “to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan”.
- Second, it urges both sides to reach a consensus on Afghanistan’s future constitutional and governing arrangements; find a road map to a new “inclusive government”; and agree on the terms of a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”.



#### Why India strives to be a major stakeholder in the Afghan issue?

- Afghanistan derives its political significance because of its geo-strategic position i.e. it is situated at the crossroads of ancient civilizations – Indian, European, Chinese.
- As a landlocked country neighboring China, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian countries, Afghanistan has significant geostrategic and geopolitical importance. It is the only country in the region which gives open access to the United States and NATO Allies.
- Insecurity and instability in Afghanistan would destabilize the region and provide fertile ground for terrorist groups, posing a threat to all nations.
- India cannot afford to allow Pakistan to gather a strong-hold in the decision making process of Afghan government. Moreover, setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan can help tackling Pakistan supported terrorism.
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan since it has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.
- India hopes to have a role in setting the terms especially concerning terrorism, violence, women’s rights and democratic values.

#### Impact on India and its engagement with other stakeholders

- ✓ Biden Administration’s new peace initiative, unveiled over the last few days, could mark the beginning of a new chapter in Afghanistan’s violent contemporary history that has played a major role in South Asia’s regional and international relations.
- ✓ India should draw comfort from the fact that it has been offered a seat on the decision-making table along with China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and the US. This is a big opportunity, given the fact that India has been losing leverage in Afghanistan ever since the Taliban came back to battle in 2004, getting stronger and stronger.
- ✓ This move positions India as a major stakeholder in the Afghan issue and the regional dynamics surrounding it.

#### Challenges involved

- The new emphasis for an Istanbul process over the current process in Doha, might indicate a greater role for Turkey, as well as Turkish troops as a part of a proposed “NATO stabilisation force”, something that New Delhi might have concerns about, given close ties between Turkey and Pakistan.

- In addition to that the U.S.’s outlined discussions on a “negotiated settlement and ceasefire” don’t include a reference to democratic principles, the elected government, or the rights of women and minorities, something New Delhi, with major stakes in Afghanistan’s development and infrastructure, has always emphasised.
- India, which has never publicly opened talks with the Taliban, has remained hopeful that the U.S. will retain some forces in Afghanistan in order to ensure leverage and interest in the reconciliation process.

Analytica

**What should be India’s approach?**

- ✚ No doubt, the Afghan government is an elected body, but one may also not overlook that the Taliban have come to enjoy a considerable following among the rural masses and cannot be wished away. It represents the Pashtuns, which is the biggest and most dominant ethnic tribe and has ruled Kabul in the past. The Taliban have also recently been taking recruits from all ethnicities, including the Hazaras, who are Shia Muslims.
- ✚ So, if the Taliban agree to a ceasefire and also to take part in the elections, it may not be a bad option to work with them in the larger interest of peace.
- ✚ It is logical to conclude that, it is better to get them to agree to join the democratic process and moderate their policies.
- ✚ In the past, India had good reasons for not getting involved militarily in Afghanistan, but as a part of the UN contingent, it is a good opportunity to send troops to Afghanistan. This is likely to give India more leverage in Afghanistan against Pakistan than what it has today.
- ✚ Its soft power in Afghanistan will multiply manifold if it is able to put boots on the ground under the UN mandate. Its presence will help take care of its immediate interests as well as build a lasting relationship with Afghanistan, irrespective of the composition of the future governments.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
Heart of Asia Conference, Sahtoot Dam, NATO, War on terror, Istanbul process

Conclusion

An independent, sovereign, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive Afghanistan is crucial for peace and stability in the region. Though the new initiative by the USA is a good step, the road ahead would not be easy. Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan will require patience and compromise among all stakeholders.

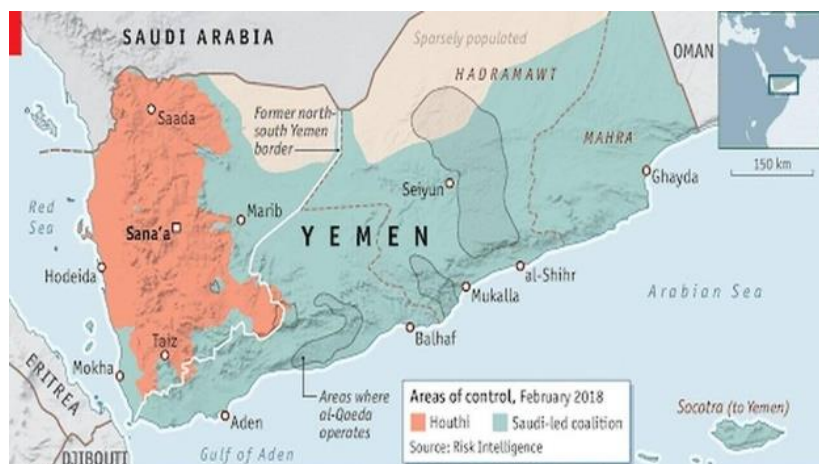
**Airborne Assaults on Saudi Oil Installation**

News Excerpt

A drone attack struck an oil installation in Saudi Arabia's capital of Riyadh, ignited blaze at the oil facility deep in the kingdom's territory.

About

- Yemen, one of the Arab world’s poorest country, has been devastated by a civil war.
- The conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring of 2011, when an uprising forced the country’s long-time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.
- The political transition was supposed to bring stability to Yemen, but President Hadi struggled to deal with various problems including militant attacks, corruption, food insecurity, and continuing loyalty of many military officers to Saleh.



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- Fighting began in 2014 when the Houthi Shia Muslim rebel movement took advantage of the new president’s weakness and seized control of northern Saada province and neighbouring areas.
- The Houthis went on to take the capital Sanaa, forcing Mr Hadi into exile abroad.
- Saudi Arabia leads a military coalition which intervened in Yemen in March 2015 against Houthi forces, which ousted the internationally-recognised Yemeni government from power in Sanaa in late 2014.
- Now mired in stalemate, the war has killed about 130,000 people — including more than 12,000 civilians — and spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.
- The Iran-aligned Houthis have stepped up attacks into Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter.
- While Houthi-claimed attacks on Saudi Arabia rarely cause damage, strikes on major oil facilities in the kingdom, the world's largest oil exporter, raise the risk of a disruption in world oil supplies.
- In the fall of 2019, a drone and missile attack struck two key Saudi oil installations and halted about half of the country's oil supplies.
- The kingdom is facing more frequent airborne assaults as Saudi-led coalition forces battle Iran-backed Houthi rebels across the southern border in Yemen.
- Most recently, drones struck Ras Tanura, the country's largest crude oil refinery with capacity of 550,000 barrels a day, raising concerns about the expanding capabilities of Saudi Arabia's regional foes.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 OPEC, OPEC+, Arab  
 Spring, Aramco

**Conclusion**

In renewed diplomatic efforts to end the war, the United Nations and United States have urged the Houthis, who are also pressing an offensive against the government-held city of Marib in Yemen, to turn to negotiations rather than military escalation.

**India – USA Relations**

**News Excerpt**

The U.S. seeks to resolve long-standing market access impediments affecting U.S. exporters with India, says the 2021 President’s Trade Agenda and 2020 Annual Report — an annual report submitted by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to Congress.

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**Key Highlights**

- The report terms India’s policies “trade-restrictive” and saying the “Make in India” campaign epitomises the challenges to the trade relationship.
- While India’s large market, economic growth, and progress towards development make it an essential market for many U.S. exporters, a general and consistent trend of trade-restrictive policies have inhibited the potential of the bilateral trade relationship.
- Recent Indian emphasis on import substitution through a Make in India campaign has epitomized the challenges facing the bilateral trade relationship.
- Bilateral trade is about 3% of U.S. world trade. It is more consequential for India; in 2019, the United States was India’s largest goods export market (17% share), and third-largest goods import supplier (7%), after China (14%) and the European Union (9%). U.S.-India foreign direct investment (FDI) is limited, but growing. Defense sales also are significant in bilateral trade.

**India-US Trade issues and challenges**

- In general, India has relatively high average tariff rates, especially in agriculture.
- India’s recent tariff hikes, including on cell phones and other telecommunication goods, went from 0% originally to 15-20%. The United States and several other countries requested to join various WTO dispute consultations against India related to its technology tariffs, also questioning its compliance with the WTO Information Technology Agreement (ITA).



- India opposes the 25% steel and 10% aluminum national security-based “Section 232” tariffs that the Trump Administration imposed in 2018.
- After India lost its eligibility for a U.S. trade preference program, India imposed higher tariffs of 10% to 25%, affecting about \$1.32 billion of U.S. exports (2019 data), such as nuts, apples, chemicals, and steel. The two sides are challenging each other’s tariffs in the WTO.
- Effective June 2019, President Donald Trump removed India from GSP, a U.S. trade and development program, for failure to provide “equitable and reasonable” market access. GSP provides nonreciprocal, duty-free tariff treatment to certain products imported from qualifying developing countries.
- The United States and India are competitive in certain services industries. Barriers to U.S. firms’ market access include India’s limits on foreign ownership and local presence requirements. A key issue for India is U.S. temporary visa policies, which affect Indian nationals working in the United States.
- In a country-wise section on Digital Service Tax (DST), a Section 301 investigation on India’s DST, which began in June last year, is highlighted by the report.
- Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers in India limit U.S. agricultural exports. The United States questions the scientific and risk-based justifications of such barriers. Each side also sees the other’s agricultural support programs as market-distorting; India’s view of its programs from a broad food security lens complicates matters.
- The two sides differ on how to balance IP protection to incentivize innovation and support other policy goals, such as access to medicines, including for COVID-19 treatments and vaccines.
- India remained on the Priority Watch List of the U.S. 2020 Special 301 report, which cited India’s insufficient progress in addressing IP challenges and noted concerns over India’s treatment of patents, high IP theft rates, and lax trade secret protection.

### **Current Negotiations and Agreements: Bilateral Engagement**

- ✓ Under the Trump Administration, the United States and India held concerted negotiations to address trade frictions. A potential trade deal could include partial restoration by the United States of India’s GSP benefits in exchange for certain market access commitments.
- ✓ Yet, the long expected limited trade deal has not materialized to date. Negotiations under prior Administrations on a bilateral investment treaty (BIT) are stalled due to differences on approaches on investor protections.
- ✓ The government-to-government Trade Policy Forum has not met regularly in recent years amid trade frictions. The private sector-based CEO Forum has met periodically.
- ✓ **Regional Integration:** Both India and the United States are absent from the Indo-Pacific region’s two major trade pacts. India negotiated, but opted not to join, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signed by China and 14 other countries in November 2020. India cited concerns about RCEP’s fairness and balance, and reportedly also was concerned about the effects of opening its markets to Chinese exports. The United States withdrew from the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017.
- ✓ India also has long sought to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), composed of the United States, China, and 19 other economies, but its willingness to make sufficient economic reforms to join is uncertain.
- ✓ **WTO:** The United States and India often have opposing stances in the WTO, whose future direction is unclear amid debate over institutional reforms and negotiations. With India’s growing integration in the global economy, some policymakers have called on India, like China, to be a more responsible stakeholder in the rules-based global trading system.
- ✓ They blame India for impeding WTO progress on issues such as e-commerce customs duties and fisheries subsidies. India previously blocked the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which ultimately entered into force in 2017, until a compromise was reached on treatment of certain food security programs.

<p><b>PEPPER IT WITH</b> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, WTO, IMF, RCEP2.0, TPP</p>
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- ✓ The United States and some developed countries also are critical of India, China, and others for self-designating as developing countries to claim special and differential treatment under WTO rules— criticisms that these countries refute.

### Way Forward

- India continues to seek a “totalization agreement” to coordinate social security protection for workers who split their careers between the two countries.
- India is eager for more technology-sharing and co-production initiatives, while the United States urges more reforms in India’s defense offsets policy and higher FDI caps in its defense sector.

## Vaccine passports

### News Excerpt

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

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### Highlights

- The idea is modelled on the proof of vaccination that several countries required even before the pandemic. For example, travellers from many African countries to the US or India are required to submit proof that they have been vaccinated against diseases such as yellow fever.
- Even though the nomenclature comes from passports, most vaccine passports have been envisaged as digital documents. They are supposed to function as proof that the holder has been vaccinated against Covid-19.
- Another key function that vaccine passports will perform is that of digitising vaccination records across countries.
- In addition to those like the ones issued by the Israeli government, several associations and non-profits have been issuing their own versions for international travel.
- The International Air Transport Association — the global trade body representing airlines — is developing an app called IATA Travel Pass that will provide airlines and other aviation industry stakeholders with a common platform to check for the proof of vaccination and its validity.
- Non-profit Commons Project has been trying out an app called CommonPass, which contains a passenger’s vaccination record.

### India Science and Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021

- ❖ As a part of India’s initiatives to engage with neighbouring countries to develop S&T partnerships, the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India has launched ISRF Programme for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand researchers to work in Indian Universities and Research Institutions.
- ❖ This fellowship is a platform to establish research cooperation with neighbouring countries of India, which is **one of the mandates of DST’s International Science and Technology Cooperation.**

### Analytica

- The primary benefit will be to the tourism and the hospitality industries, which are both seen as being at the heart of Covid-19 spread and are the worst hit by the pandemic. This includes international air travel, which suffered massively because of the outbreak.
- However, a major difficulty in implementation will be the lack of uniformity across jurisdictions in requirement and issuance of proofs of vaccination.
- WHO’s position that national authorities and conveyance operators should not introduce requirements of proof of Covid-19 vaccination for international travel as a condition for departure or entry, given that there are still critical unknowns regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission.
- Moreover, in the current context, introducing a requirement of vaccination as a condition for travel has the potential to hinder equitable global access to a limited



vaccine supply and would be unlikely to maximize the benefits of vaccination for individual societies and overall global health.

- In addition there are privacy concerns of the digital data.

## International North South Transport Corridor

### News Excerpt

India has proposed the inclusion of strategically located Chabahar Port in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that proposes to connect the country with Russia via Iran juxtaposing BRI in Eurasian region.

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### Pre-Connect

- The INSTC project was originally decided between India, Iran and Russia in 2000 in St Petersburg and later came into force in the year 2002 after being ratified by the three countries. Since then, 11 more nations joined the project: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria (observer status), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Ukraine.



- It envisions a 7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail and road route for transporting freight, aimed at reducing the carriage cost between India and Russia by about 30% and bringing down the transit time from 40 days by more than half.
- INSTC is aimed at bringing down time taken for trade between India and Russia and may also enable smoother connectivity with Eurasia and Central Asia. It is one of the key connectivity corridors in the region where Russia has proposed greater Eurasian connectivity.
- India has also welcomed the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multilateral corridor project. Establishing an eastern corridor through Afghanistan would maximize its potential, which is in the interest of India's Afghan policy.

**Connecting to Thrive: Challenges and Opportunities of Transport Integration in Eastern South Asia (World Bank report)**

- ❖ Seamless movement of vehicles between the two neighbouring countries for trade could raise India's national income by eight per cent and Bangladesh's by 17 per cent; provide faster and cheaper access to products from Northeast and boost real income in states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- ❖ A "broad trust deficit throughout the region" was a major reason behind lack of seamless transport between the two countries, the report found that it is about 15-20 per cent less expensive for a company in India to trade with a company in Brazil or Germany, than with a company in Bangladesh, despite the two neighbours being party to an international motor vehicles agreement.

### Significance of INSTC for India

- Once fully operationalized, INSTC will cut down the transportation costs of goods as well the transportation time.
- INSTC will help India to gain smooth access into Central Asia and beyond. With a hostile neighbour like Pakistan, which is situated between India and the Central Asian region, previously India was unable to extend its reach to Central Asia.
- Under India's Connect Central Asia policy, the Central Asian region has already been given a lot of prominence. With the operationalization of INSTC, India-Central Asia relationship will only strengthen. The Central Asian region is part of India's "extended

neighbourhood” and of great geostrategic value to India, especially as New Delhi is trying to balance China’s huge presence in the region.

- In addition, India-Russia trade relations will also get new energy with the help of INSTC.
- The INSTC is also being seen as New Delhi’s answer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is not only India’s most powerful neighbour in the region but its competitor as well in the economic arena. India’s ambition to balance China will gain some traction with INSTC’s operationalization.

### Way Forward

- ✓ Predicting that Chabahar will change the “geo-economy” of the region, Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development called for assistance from India in developing the project, both through the provision of cranes and other equipment at the port as well as rail tracks, signal and switching equipment for the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project.
- ✓ New Delhi is deftly decoupling its connectivity-centric policy in Iran from its increased engagement with the United States and Israel. Pushing the INSTC forward will now require New Delhi to pay close attention to the opportunities at hand in Central Asia.
- ✓ For the connectivity initiative to succeed, it would be prudent to take advantage of the existing transport initiatives in the Central Asian region. The two most important are the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) which leans heavily towards Europe and the recent Ashgabat Agreement, which is more Central Asia-centric.
- ✓ The current nature and volumes of INSTC trade would favour road transport over rail as the latter requires sufficient volumes in order to take advantage of the economy of scale that railways provide. This highlights the next biggest hurdle of the INSTC.
- ✓ Taking into account the importance of expanding trade volumes between INSTC members, fast-tracking the India-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Free Trade Agreement would be a crucial next step.
- ✓ In the medium term improved visa facilitation for the region’s businessmen and investors should also be looked into.
- ✓ Fostering Private Sector Involvement will be crucial to ensure the flow of investment and viability of the project.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Central Asia policy, Ashgabat Agreement, India-Eurasian Economic Union

## India-Bangladesh Bilateral relations

### News Excerpt

Ahead of Prime Minister’s visit to Bangladesh, External Affairs Minister made a strong outreach to Dhaka on his bilateral visit, describing the country as a “key neighbour” and a “valued partner” not only “in South Asia but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region”. India’s ties with Bangladesh “transcend even India’s strategic partnership”.

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### Pre-Connect

- India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours.
- India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. A bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) has been working since June 1972 to maintain liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems.
- Bangladesh is India’s biggest trade partner in South Asia.
- Both nations signed the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT).
- Indian prime minister will be visiting Bangladesh as both countries mark the Mujib Barsho, 50 years of Bangladesh’s Liberation and 50 years of bilateral relations.

- Vijay Diwas is observed on 16th December every year to mark India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war.
- New Initiatives like conducting a trial run of container cargo through Chattogram port to Agartala, adding two new Protocol routes to inland waterways connecting Tripura to Bangladesh national waterways, handing over 10 broad gauge locomotives, commencing movement of container and parcel trains and forming a joint venture in the energy sector.
- Petrapole–Benapole is the most important border post between the two countries.
- Bangladesh government had declared its Chittagong and Mongla ports as Port of Call to facilitate India’s uninterrupted international and domestic trade activities through waterways in Bangladesh.

**MaitriSetu**

- ❖ The India-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge (MaitriSetu) was recently inaugurated over the Feni river (Feni that demarcates international boundary between India and Bangladesh) at Sabroom in south Tripura.
- ❖ The 1.9-km- long ‘MaitriSetu’ would herald a new chapter in relations between the two neighbours. The bridge, which was first mooted a decade ago, would immensely benefit Northeast India in trade matters as the same would connect the Chittagong sea port just 100 km from Agartala.

**Current state of bilateral ties**

- Covid cooperation, connectivity, trade, water, security, border and lines of credit are some of the areas of discussion between the two neighbours.
- The steady improvement in bilateral relations over the last decade has reflected in growing trade volumes, expanding trans-border connectivity, mutual cooperation on terrorism, and widening regional cooperation.
- Bangladesh is the largest recipient of Made-in-India vaccines.
- Enhanced cooperation in connectivity. For example, Countries agreed to an early operationalization of the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative Motor Vehicles Agreement through the expeditious signing of the Enabling MoU for Bangladesh, India and Nepal to commence the movement of goods and passengers.
- While India celebrates its role in the second Partition, the lingering issues from the first Partition continue to cast a shadow over Delhi’s relations with Dhaka. These include the rights of minorities, cross-border movement of people, and river water sharing (Teesta dispute).
- Bangladesh has raised concerns over roll out of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam.
- Bangladesh is an active partner of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that creates unease in Delhi.
- Active participation in Multilateral and Regional forums. For example, working together towards achieving early reforms of the UN Security Council, combating climate change, attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and protection of the rights of migrants.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

SAARC, BBIN initiative, IMT Trilateral Highway, ASEAN, Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)

**Way Forward**

- ✓ India should work hard to expand its relationship in all dimensions, ranging from security, trade, transport and connectivity, culture, people-to-people ties, energy, joint development of our shared resources and defence.
- ✓ The two countries need to focus on priority areas, such as investments, security connectivity development, cross border energy cooperation, blue economy, cultural economy, environment and disaster management etc.
- ✓ The Rohingya Refugee crisis is still a sticking point in the relationship which needs to be eased.
- ✓ Effective efforts to resolve pending issues concerning sharing of waters, resolving continental shelf issues in the Bay of Bengal and bringing down border incidents to zero.

## International Arms Transfers: SIPRI Report

### News Excerpt

Recently, a report has been released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on global arms transfer regime. Report cited that India's arms imports fell by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20.

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### Key Highlights of the Report

- The report on international arms transfers attributed the drop in India's arms imports mainly to an attempt to reduce its dependence on Russian arms and complex procurement processes. It has come at a time the country has taken measures to cut dependence on imported military hardware.
- Russia was the most affected supplier, although India's imports of US arms also fell 46%. India was the biggest importer of Russian military hardware during the last five years, accounting for 23% of Russia's total exports.
- India's top three arms suppliers during 2016-20 were Russia (accounting for 49% of India's imports), France (18%) and Israel (13%).
- According to Sipri, India accounted for 0.2% of the share of global arms exports during 2016-20, making the country the world's 24th largest exporter of major arms.
- This represents an increase of 228% over India's export share of 0.1% during the previous five-year period - 2011-15. Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Mauritius were the top recipients of Indian military hardware.
- But the US, the world's largest arms exporter, saw its exports rise. Its global share of arms exports went up from 32% to 37% between 2011-15 and 2016-20.
- The five largest arms exporters in 2016-20 were the US, Russia, France, Germany and China, while the top importers were Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and China.
- India has set aside ₹70,221 crore - 63% of the military's capital budget for 2021-22 - for buying locally produced weapons and systems to boost defence indigenisation.
- The budget will be used for making milestone payments for several domestic acquisitions through the year. Such payments refer to a certain percentage of the total deal amount that has to be paid at different stages of the execution of a contract.

#### Greater thrust on indigenization

- The 48,000-crore contract for 83 LCA Mk-1A jets, awarded to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited last month, is the biggest indigenous defence procurement deal so far.
- Airbus Defence and Space and Tata Advanced Systems Limited will jointly execute the project to equip the air force with 56 C-295 transport aircraft under the Make-in-India initiative in the aerospace sector.
- Last year, the ministry spent over 51,000 crore, or 58% of the capital budget, on domestic purchases.

#### PEPPER IT WITH

Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), the Arms Trade Treaty, MTCR, Australia Group

### Conclusion

It is a clear indicator that the country's drive towards Atmanirbharta is showing results. India is finally at an inflection point and the Indian defence industry is coming of age.

## Issue of illegal influx from Myanmar

### News Excerpt

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has written to the Chief Secretaries of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to take appropriate action as per law to check illegal influx from Myanmar into India.

### About

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- The directive comes weeks after the military coup and subsequent crackdown in the neighbouring country which led to several persons crossing over into India. The Tatmadaw, or Myanmar military, had taken over the country after a coup.
- MHA reiterated that the State governments have no powers to grant refugee status to any foreigner and India is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol.
- A **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** exists between India and Myanmar under which every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar and who is resident of any area within 16 km on either side of the Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB) can cross the border with a border pass (with one-year validity) issued by the competent authority and can stay up to two weeks per visit.



**Analytica**

- Unlike its border with Bangladesh, the state's border with Myanmar is completely unfenced. Since 2017, there have been multiple proposals to fence parts of it, especially around the Champhai region, but there has been no progress.
- The job of holding them back, as per the Centre's instructions, is almost impossible, given the porous 510-km border along Mizoram alone.
- Apart from the state administration and locals, the Myanmar nationals were getting help from the Chin Nation Army, an insurgent group in Myanmar active in the central and northern areas of the border.
- North Eastern States readily provide shelter to people from across the border as some of the states have cultural ties with some border areas of Myanmar and many people have family relations as well. For example, Mizoram CM Zoramthanga conveyed to centre that this could not be done, pointing out the shared ancestry of people on both sides of the border.
- Already there are clashes among the tribes (example Bru), more refugees will further aggravate the situation.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Inner Line Permit,  
 Citizenship, Bru tribe,  
 Border Road Organisation

**First Quad Summit**

**News Excerpt**

Recently, the first ever leadership summit of the members of the Quadrilateral Framework or 'Quad' has been organised.

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**Pre-Connect**

- After several rounds of meeting in 2007, Quad fizzled out due to changing national priorities of some of the members and a bellicose reaction from China.
- After a gap of ten years, the 'Quad' returned in November 2017, when joint secretary-level officials met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila.
- The first meeting of the Quad foreign ministers was held in 2019 in New York.
- Since its first senior official-level meeting in 2007, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) among Japan, the United States, India, and Australia has operated both as a meeting format for senior officials to discuss regional security issues and as the basis for a single naval exercise and a single tabletop exercise.

**Why is QUAD significant for its members?**

- The quadrilateral template had established a successful track record as a vehicle for addressing issues of regional concern. (Example- Rule of law and democracy in Myanmar)



- Destabilization in the region has led to a growing convergence in foreign policies among the four states, with a focus on securing a free and open Indo-Pacific, taking joint action against terrorism, and promoting a rules-based system.
- For the US, the early push for the Quad engagement is part of USA (Joe Biden)’s promise that “America is back” in terms of global leadership, reaffirming regional alliances, and taking on the growing challenge from China.
- Due to maritime tensions with China, trade, and telecommunication issues, Australia and Japan are keen on taking the Quad partnership to deeper levels of cooperation.
- It will also provide a boost for India’s pharmaceutical prowess, opportunities for technology partnerships, and more avenues for regional cooperation on development projects and financing infrastructure.
- Quad presents an opportunity for these four democracies to work as a group & with other countries on economics, technology, climate & security.

### Challenges

- ✓ Ideological and geographic bounding has naturally led to contrasting presumptions about the intent and future of the Quad: that it is the genesis of an “Asian NATO,” that it is a network to contain the rise of China, or that it is simply a disparate grouping of countries that will never unite behind a common strategic vision.
- ✓ India, given its own ties with China, sensitivities over ongoing LAC disengagement talks, and its other multilateral commitments at the BRICS and SCO groupings, also displayed caution in the Quad engagement.
- ✓ For Japan and Australia, China remains the biggest trading partner, a relationship that will only grow once the 15-nation RCEP gets operationalized. In this context, it would be difficult for Quad members countries like Japan and Australia to strategically align with the US and India.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 ASEAN, RCEP, SCO,  
 Beijing Declaration,  
 Fortaleza declaration

### Conclusion

Quad will now remain an important pillar of stability in the region. All the members must take actionable steps forward to deepen the Quad’s reach and scope as a mechanism for dialogue and security in the Indo-Pacific. Quad may not be a full-scale alliance yet, but a new “minilateral” is taking shape. If Quad emerges as an economic powerhouse, it will be beneficial to the entire region.

### IBSA Women’s Forum Meeting

#### News Excerpt

The Sixth India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Women’s Forum meeting was held virtually and led by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, the event witnessed participation of Ministers and officials responsible for Women Affairs of IBSA Countries.

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#### Pre-Connect

- The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trilateral Cooperation Forum is a unique platform which brings together India, Brazil and South Africa, three large democracies and major economies from three different continents.
- All three partners are developing pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious nations.
- Established in June 2003, IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to:
  - contribute to the construction of a new international architecture
  - bring their voice together on global issues
  - deepen their ties in various areas

**The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Fund**

The IBSA Fund, which was established in 2004 and became operational in 2006, supports projects on a demand-driven basis through partnerships with local governments, national institutions and implementing partners.

- IBSA is committed to inclusive sustainable development, in pursuit of the well-being for their citizens and those from the other developing nations.
- The principles, norms and values underpinning the IBSA Dialogue Forum are participatory democracy, respect for human rights, the Rule of Law and the strengthening of multilateralism. IBSA lays efforts in the South-South cooperation beyond the conventional areas of exchange of experts and training.

### Highlights of the summit

- The summit shed light on how the year 2020 has seen that the rights of women and girls gaining prominence, universality with more urgency than ever before.
- During the consultation, the Forum discussed key issues that contribute towards the transformation of women's lives; by highlighting initiatives, policies and best practices for gender inclusive economy for transformation as well as for elimination of gender based discrimination and violence against women, which in the coming time will help not only in understanding each other's systems and programmes but will also carve a strategic roadmap to promote gender equality agenda for achieving sustainable development goals.
- The Forum emphasized on the necessity to raise voice on various multilateral issues to highlight the development priorities of the associate countries and emphasized how gender equality makes sound economic sense.
- The Forum has resolved to carry forth its vision to ensure improving the status and condition of women by addressing structural and institutional barriers as well as strengthening gender mainstreaming.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
BRICS, SAARC, South South  
Cooperation, FTA, New  
Development Bank Agreement



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## ENVIRONMENT

### NDC Synthesis Report and Climate Commitments

#### News Excerpt

Recently, UNFCCC published a synthesis report of new and updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) made by more than 70 parties under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

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#### Pre-Connect

- The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It entered into force in 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- The Paris Agreement requires each country to outline and communicate their post-2020 climate actions, known as their NDCs.
- In accordance **with Article 4 of the Paris Agreement**, Each party requires to prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that it intends to achieve.
- NDCs are submitted every five years to the UNFCCC secretariat and the next round of NDCs (new or updated) being submitted by 2020. In 2021, five years after the Paris Agreement, countries are obliged to renew and upgrade their successive NDCs.
- The Paris Agreement recognizes the long-term goals specified in its Articles 2 and 4.1.

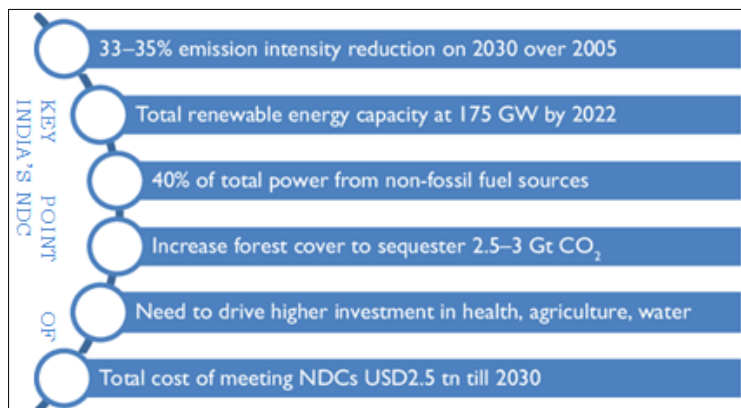
#### Key Points of the Report

- The report was sought ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), that was to be conducted in November 2020 but was deferred to November 2021 due to the COVID-19. The NDC synthesis report is prepared in response to the entreaties from COP-21.
- The report while highlighting the NDC targets of countries has cited that current levels of climate action are not enough to put the world on a 1.5°C pathway by the end of this century. However, the report finds that individual countries have increased their ambitions to respond the climate change.
- The United Kingdom and the European Union are the only regions among 18 of the world's biggest emitters that have significantly increased their GHG reduction targets. However, not adequate.
- Out of the 197 Parties to UNFCCC, only 75 have submitted new or updated NDC till December, 2020. These Parties account for 30 per cent of the global greenhouse emissions. Major GHG emitters have not presented updated NDCs so far.
- Other major emitters either submitted NDCs presenting a very low increase in their ambition level or have not presented NDCs yet.
- Report also highlighted that in comparison with earlier NDCs, the adaptation component receives greater focus, particularly adaptation planning and national adaptation plans.
- Despite the majority of countries which have increased their individual NDC's ambitions, their combined impact will help to achieve only a 1 per cent reduction by 2030 compared to 2010 levels. Global emissions, however, need to reduce by 45 per cent in order to meet the 1.5°C goal, according to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

#### India's Progress for INDC

- ✓ India had earned international praise for exceeding its commitments to reduce India's emissions under the Paris Agreement in 2016.
- ✓ To achieve NDCs, India has begun to tread on the objectives of promoting a variety of renewable energies, introduction of newer, more efficient and cleaner technologies in thermal power generation, reduction in emissions from industries, transportation sector, buildings and appliances, waste etc.
- ✓ The implementation of the Green India Mission remains a priority. India's emission intensity has reduced by 21% over the period 2005-2014. By 2030, India's emission intensity is projected to be even lower—in the range of 35 to 50 percent.

- ✓ The share of installed capacity from renewable energy sources increased from 13% to 24% (36 GW in July 2015 to 88 GW in July 2020) while the share of thermal capacity declined from 70% to 68%. This indicates India’s efforts towards reducing energy emissions.
- ✓ To curb vehicular emission, Under Phase-II of Faster Adoption and Manufacture of (Hybrid and) Electric Vehicles (FAME) Scheme, India allocated 10,000 crore (\$1.4 billion) for advancing electric mobility in public transportation fleets.
- ✓ Thirteen states have notified the Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) to reduce energy demands of the buildings.



**Analytica**

- The politics of climate change finance are centered on the recognition that the Global North has disproportionately benefited from fossil fuel production and use, while the Global South experiences more severe hazard events, such as droughts and storms, with higher levels of vulnerability to them.
- Therefore, the Global North has both the moral responsibility to fund climate change mitigation and adaptation responses and the greater capacity to do so.
- Climate change finances are dangling between the cynicism of developed countries and the developing countries. A big chunk of finance has been devolved during the last decade to developing countries under Kyoto protocol. Developed countries have cited that their commitment for climate change has been gratified and now developing countries should contribute equally to the climate change.
- While developing countries has asserted that they have already pledged under NDCs and country like India is on well track to achieve its climate commitments. Now the developed countries are showing reluctance to finance developing countries, and developing countries got insufficient funds by the Global North to cope with climate change. The former is certainly irresponsible and the latter seems inconceivable.
- India Economic survey expressed disappointment on insufficient fund allocation under Green Climate Fund of Paris agreement.
- Moreover, the Paris Agreement establishes that there should be a balance in funding between adaptation and mitigation. However, approximately twice the amount of finance goes towards projects that are mitigation-only compared to adaptation-only. This has consequences for the mode of climate financing because most mitigation funding comes in the form of debt financing that needs to be paid back, while most adaptation funding consists of grants. Moreover, the amount of global funding that does go towards mitigation and adaptation is grossly insufficient.

	Reductions (%)	Base year	Target year	Remarks
China	60-65	2005	2030	20 per cent of energy production from clean sources by 2030
USA	26-28	2005	2025	Will absorb 3 b t of CO2 through energy efficiency
EU	40	1990	2030	More action by 2050: targets described as 'ambitious' read as 'unrealistic'
Japan	18	1990	2030	Criticised as highly inadequate
India	33-35	2005	2030	40 percent of energy capacity from non fossil fuels by 2030

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Kyoto Protocol, IPCC, World Meteorological Organization, National Action plan on climate change, CAMPA

### Conclusion

Climate change will not be solved by one country. To succeed rational, data driven, effective and legitimate policy should be adopted to cope with this rising issue. Moreover, in context of this report, an increase in ambition must be accompanied by a significant increase in support for climate action in developing nations. The longer the delay in acting, the larger the required action becomes. It is already almost too late to avoid destructive and irreversible changes in climate. For that reason vibrant policies are needed which establish stronger institutional mandates, Global climate financing and proper review and monitoring mechanism.

### Issue of Mining in Aravalli

#### News Excerpt

The Haryana Government has appealed to the Supreme Court (SC) to resume mining in Aravalli Hills. Additionally, CAG's report was also tabled in assembly.

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#### Pre-Connect

- The Aravalli hills spanning Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi are an ecologically sensitive zone.
- In 2009, the SC imposed a ban on mining in the Aravalli hills in Faridabad, Gurugram and Mewat. A 2018 report by a Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) said 25% of the Aravalli range has been lost due to illegal mining since 1967-68.
- In 1992, the Aravali ranges in Gurgaon and Alwar (Rajasthan) were notified as an ecologically sensitive area by the National Capital Region Planning Board.

- ❖ Recently, CAG's report tabled in Haryana Assembly.
- ❖ The CAG has insisted that the delicate ecology under the forest cover in Aravalli and Shivalik range constantly suffered due to encroachments and unauthorised activities.
- ❖ The CAG has detected parcels of forest land being used for non-forest purposes.
- ❖ The report alleged that the Government of Haryana was ineffective in checking illegal mining, controlling offenders and expenditure incurred on surveillance.
- ❖ Ecological degradation in the Aravalli region is in alarming situation due to increasing population of human and cattle, injudicious use of natural resources, unscientific mining, uncontrolled grazing and felling of trees.

#### Reason for such Step

- The ban on mining in Haryana was forcing the state to pay extra for sourcing minerals from adjoining states, and this higher cost was also affecting public projects.
- Government also contended in SC that opening up mining would also help to address the issue of unemployment.
- The Haryana government has enticed that **due to pandemic the state's economy has come to a halt**. Resumption of mining operations may help to fetch more income for State.

#### Importance of Aravalli Range

- ✓ **Climatic Factor:** For many hundreds of years, the Aravali hills have been instrumental in shaping the climate of the upper Indo-Gangetic plain. From rainfall, temperature and aquifer recharge to soil conservation, biodiversity and ecology, every factor has been dependent on this millennia-old hill range.
- ✓ **Combat Desertification:** The Aravalis checks the spread of the Indian Desert (Thar) towards eastern Rajasthan and Indo-Gangetic Plains, Haryana and western UP.
- ✓ **Recharge Groundwater:** This range play an important role in recharging groundwater especially in urban pockets of Delhi NCR region and Haryana. With high porosity levels it recharges northern aquifers.
- ✓ **Ecological Balance:** Aravalli's forest patches act as a green lungs for Delhi NCR region and Haryana. This range is a home to the tropical dry-deciduous forests and several wildlife species.

#### Threat to the Aravalli Range



- **Ambiguous Laws:** The Haryana Government has been ambiguous about declaring the entire Aravalli in the state as ‘notified forest’. The uncertainty leads to many environmental violations. Additionally, the menace of illegal mining is rampant in Rajasthan and State government failed to curb that.
- **Illegal Mining and Deforestation:** Mining of Stones in Rajasthan and Haryana continues despite a 2002 ban by SC. Destruction of the hills has opened up 12 Gap areas that have allowed the desert to progress towards north India. Recently, the occurrence of stand storm was also attributed from this. Many villages are losing grazing lands due to irrational mining.
- **Lack of Research:** There has been no comprehensive government study to understand the ground level challenges.

### Analytica

- ✚ While economic growth is essential for improving the lives and livelihoods of citizens, governments should understand that unsustainable development may lead to short-term gains, but will spell disaster for citizens, the economy and the country in the long-term. Extensive mining may have significant impact on ecological balance of the region.
- ✚ Widespread mining have severe impact on forest habitats, agricultural surfaces and mismanaged urban growth can create **a fertile ground for man-made pandemic.**
- ✚ Therefore, States must choose their development path wisely. For instance- Haryana has the lowest forest cover in India (3.62%), and most of this is concentrated in the Aravalli hills in south Haryana. Allowing mining in the little forest cover remaining will lead to a deep environmental impact not only on State income but its citizens will suffer more in omnivorous ways.

### Way Forward

There is dire need to involve citizenry in preserving the old mountain range and check the menace of illegal mining. Citizens can play an effective role in monitoring such instances and State Government including local administration should take serious action to enforce the laws. Various campaign and schemes can be launched to restore the damages which have been done.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

MMDR Act, District Mineral foundation, Pradhan Mantri KhanijKshetra Kalyan Yojana, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

### Need of Independent Environment Regulator

#### News Excerpt

The Supreme Court (SC) has asserted the need for the establishment of an independent environmental regulator to oversee green clearances and SC has also asked Government to do so.

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#### About Independent Environmental Regulator

- In 2011, the SC in case of Lafarge Umiam Mining Private Limited v. Union of India had directed the Central government to set up an independent environment regulator to oversee the clearance process.
- After many years of flip-flops by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), the SC gave a deadline of April 30, this year to the ministry to start the process of setting up a nationwide environmental regulator under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, with offices in as many states as possible.
- As per the SC, the regulator will carry out independent, rational, objective and transparent appraisal and approval of projects for environmental clearances. It will also monitor the implementation of the conditions laid down in the clearances and impose penalties on polluters. While exercising such powers, the regulator will ensure the National Forest Policy, 1988 is duly implemented.

#### SC’s Observation on Present Environmental Laws

- The SC has experienced major problems with the way environment and forest clearances are granted by concerned authority and highlighted the unambiguity of law.

- SC cited that too many clearances for the same thing; and none of them seem to be working for the environment or for protecting the rights of communities. Additionally, they are adding to the burden of industry in terms of high transaction costs.
- Court has found conflict of interest in the way an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report is prepared and forest area is identified, demarcated and finally diverted for non-forest uses.
- Court has to deal with poor EIA reports and bad decisions of the Forest Advisory Committee which recommends diversion of forestland for developmental projects. In the court’s view, therefore, an independent national regulator is the solution to the problem.

### Present Laws and related Issues

Present Law/Procedure	Key Issues regarding inefficiency of Laws
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ EIA notification, 2006 provided for environmental clearance. Big projects are appraised by an Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) and cleared by MoEF.</li> <li>○ Small projects are handled by the State-level EAC (SEACs) and State-level Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Most EIA reports are not worth the paper they are written on and the entire process of clearances is just a lot of paperwork.</li> <li>○ The regulators – EAC, SEAC or SEIAA – are not accountable to anyone.</li> <li>○ There are now many cases in which the clearances granted by regulators have been rejected by the courts.</li> <li>○ There is no post-clearance monitoring is done.</li> <li>○ The regional offices of the MoEF that are supposed to enforce the clearance conditions do not have the human power or the resources to do this.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Under Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Forest clearance is provided by Forest Advisory Committee which appraises the projects and recommends diversions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Unlike environment clearance, there is no impact assessment report required for forest diversion.</li> <li>○ There is no Law defined rational study regarding number of trees, girth of trees, types of trees, etc.</li> <li>○ There is no assessment of the impact the forest diversion on the ecology, water resources or the people living in the area.</li> <li>○ None of the reports are made available in the public domain.</li> <li>○ Additionally, the CAMPA provisions are also inefficient as the funds are disproportionately devolved to the States against the pre-defined and pre-determined funds by law itself.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Under the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2011, coastal clearance is given by Coastal Zone Management Authorities (CZMA).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Under this, State Coastal Zone Management Authorities (SCZMAs) and the National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA) are supposed to map the coastal zone of the states and develop integrated coastal zone management plans.</li> <li>○ But very few states have mapped their coastal zones and developed integrated coastal management plans.</li> <li>○ Further, In the case of environment clearance, there is a conflict of interest in preparing the EIA report and demarcating the coastal areas.</li> <li>○ Although preserving the livelihood of the coastal community is one of the main objectives of the CRZ notification, the law does very little in this regard.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wildlife clearance under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is required for taking up non-forestry activities in wildlife habitats and within 10 km from boundaries of national parks and wildlife</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The state boards for wildlife (chaired by respective chief ministers) and the National Board for Wildlife (chaired by the prime minister) are involved in giving these clearances.</li> <li>○ Expert opinion and adverse impacts can be weight over by the political intention.</li> </ul>

sanctuaries.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) are the biggest pollution regulators of the country.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ When a project comes up, it has to take Consent to Establish and Consent to Operate under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981 from SPCBs.</li> <li>○ Only some of the SPCBs demand EIA reports before giving the consent.</li> </ul>

### Analytica

#### Can Independent regulator solve the problem?

- ✓ Standard-setting is an important area of concern in the environmental sphere in India (As highlighted in table). An independent regulator could be allowed to choose the consultant to prepare the EIA report and be empowered to ensure that quality parameters are strictly adhered to by the former.
- ✓ As of today, the MoEF still holds all the power on policy scale, implementation and monitoring. There is need to segregate powers for effective enforcement and monitoring. The major concerns regarding EIA norms, such as the compliance monitoring and ex-post regularization, could be tackled with proper standard-setting by an independent regulator. In this, context independent regulator can formalize and bring out effective formation of bodies backed by adequate rational legislative and executive powers.
- ✓ Moreover, regarding sectoral regulations, it is important to emphasize the independence of regulatory design of an environmental regulator. Lack of an independent body to oversee the entire environmental regulatory process could lead to a possible political interest in the decision making. Independence in standard-setting, monitoring, and enforcement are important characteristics of an effective regulatory body. Setting-up of a stand-alone independent body must precede fragmented revamping of environmental laws.
- ✓ The existence of a regulatory authority that could integrate the clearance processes embedded in other environmental laws is much needed.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 CPCB, NGT, Environment protection act 1986, Draft EIA notification 2020, The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006

#### Way Forward

- As the industry 4.0 is about to a reality and economic growth is taking place, there is dire need of second-generation reform for the environmental regulation, which aims to safeguard environment in more holistic way and community rights as well as reduce time and transaction costs for the industry. In order to make laws more effective and responsive, there is need to reduce multiplicity, remove archaic laws and streamline regulatory procedures.
- Therefore, in this reform process, there certainly needs a thinking regarding a possibility of setting up a national regulator that can consolidate all clearances like environment, forests, wildlife and coastal, so that the project's impact is fully understood and decisions taken accordingly.
- This regulator should be given enough power and resources to do proper post-clearance monitoring and assessment and also impose fines and sanctions. The regulator must be transparent and accountable and promote deepening of public assessment, participation and scrutiny.

### Vehicle Scrapping Policy

#### News Excerpt

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has introduced the Vehicle Scrapping Policy or Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernization Program to create an ecosystem for phasing out unfit and polluting vehicles.

#### Key points of the Policy

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- India's first formal vehicle scrappage policy focuses on the replacement of old and unfit commercial and personal vehicles.
- The policy mandates that State governments should give a 15% road tax rebate for commercial vehicles and 25% for personal vehicles including the registration fees.
- Those opting for the scheme can also avail 5% discount to be offered by the manufacturer against the scrapping certificate and also a waiver can be availed in form registration fees. The owners of old vehicles will get strong incentives to scrap old and unfit vehicles.
- The policy calls for de-registration of commercial vehicles after 15 years if they do not get the fitness certificate. Similarly, private vehicles will be de-registered after 20 years upon failing to renew the registration certificate.
- The government owned vehicles may be de-registered and scrapped after 15 years from the date of original registration.
- A vehicle failing the fitness test or failing to renew the registration certificate may be declared as 'End of Life Vehicle'. The scrapping policy is not applicable to vintage cars.
- The policy has proposed increased prices for new fitness tests, issuance of fitness certificates, and re-registrations to dissuade the usage of old vehicles.
- The incentives to be offered to vehicle owners for scrapping their old vehicles and procure new vehicles like-
  - Scrap value for the old vehicle (approximately 4% to 6% of ex-showroom price of a new vehicle) will be provided by the registered scrapping centre. The scrapping centres shall also provide scrapping certificates to the vehicle owners.
  - State governments may be advised to provide road-tax rebates of up to 25% for personal vehicles and up to 15% for commercial vehicles.
  - Vehicle manufacturers may also provide a discount of 5% on submitting the scrapping certificate while purchasing a new vehicle. The registration fees may also be waived.
- The policy implementation is to be done in a phased manner starting with the implementation of new rules from October 2021, scrapping of government vehicles from April 2022, and mandatory fitness tests from April 2023.

❖ According to the estimates of MoRTH, In India, there nearly 51 lakh light motor vehicles (LMV) that are above 20 years of age, while another 34 lakh LMVs are above 15 years.

❖ Additionally, there are over 17 lakh medium and heavy motor vehicles, which are above 15 years, and running currently without valid fitness certificates. These vehicles are estimated to cause 10-12 times more pollution than the latest vehicles.

### **Possible Outcomes of the Policy**

- The policy will likely to increase India's automobile industry turnover to ₹10 lakh crore from the current ₹4.5 lakh crore and create as many as 35,000 jobs. This policy will result in increase of about ₹40,000 crore in Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- The objectives of the policy are to reduce the population of old and defective vehicles, achieve a reduction in vehicular air pollutants to fulfill India's climate commitments, improve road and vehicular safety, achieve better fuel efficiency, formalize the currently informal vehiclescrapping industry, and boost the availability of low-cost raw materials for automotive, steel and electronics industry.
- Policy will be ensured that the scrapping centers have adequate parking facilities, de-pollution equipment for air, water and sound pollution and adequate facilities for hazardous waste management and disposal. Therefore, it seeks to develop a holistic Scrappage infrastructure.

### **Key Concerns**

- ✓ If this policy is going to be implemented, India will have over 2.18 crore vehicles nearing the end of their lives by 2025. The number of vehicles that need to be scrapped, the volume of non-biodegradable waste that will be generated, will be huge. Managing huge chunk of garbage in effective way is key challenge in the absence of robust scrappage infrastructure.



- ✓ The policy encourages the purchase of new vehicles only by providing incentives for the same when old vehicles are scrapped. However, the benefits for those not purchasing a new vehicle are low especially considering that COVID-19 has affected the economy and people’s ability to purchase new vehicles in the next few years.
- ✓ Regarding the incentives there is uncertainty involved since the onus to provide tax rebates is on the state governments. State governments will already be incurring a heavy price to replace their fleet of vehicles that are older than 15 years. Therefore, expecting from State to provide further benefits may not be feasible. This may lead to the policy paralysis.
- ✓ The principal of ‘Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)’ which holds manufacturers responsible for the safe disposal of the waste from their products and produce safe products for lifetime use is sidelined under the policy.
- ✓ There are growing concerns that around 50% of the goods carriers in India would be required to be dismantled if the government proceeds with the new policy. Therefore, scrappage policy will never be a practical option for thousands of vehicle owners.
- ✓ There are already existing good policies intended to reduce and control emissions but their implementation remains unachieved.
- ✓ If the environment really is the concern, pending and improper execution of existing environmental policies should come first. In the given context, the announcement of New Scrappage Policy which claims to be aimed at reducing pollution seems to be nothing more than a paper document.
- ✓ Most of the vehicle scrappers are unorganised and do not have proper equipment or processes to recycle vehicles.
- ✓ leet renewal as this can stimulate the marketat the time of economic slowdown.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Green Tax, Production linked Subsidies, BS-VI emission, Ethanol Bending Programme

**Way forward**

- The opportunity for maximizing these co-benefits lies in early implementation of the regulations and guidelines in the pipeline, legal enforceability, and time bound infrastructure creation. It is necessary that these policies and guidelines are amended as required and notified for implementation quickly.
- The informal sector plays an important role in the collection, dismantling, and recycling of outdated vehicles. The spare part recovery business generates livelihood and also serves the market for in-use vehicles. It is important to create a system of monitoring of these units based on MoRTH/CPCB guidelines.
- There is need to adopt broad based criteria for establishing targets of the scrappage programme and adopt complementary measures to disincentivize old vehicles. State governments should adopt state level scrappage policy to add holistic feature in the policy for the implementation of robust scrappage infrastructure.
- Government should increase the test centers to increase regulatory ambit, along with it strict monitoring is required to make roads worthy.

**The World Air Quality Report 2020**

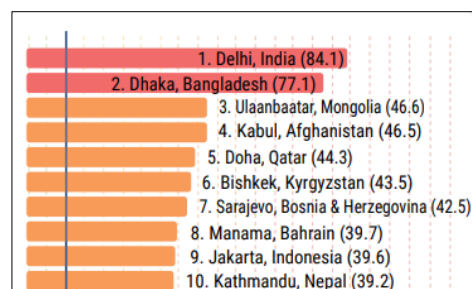
**News Excerpt**

The World Air Quality report 2020 was released by IQAir. It mentions that 22 of the top 30 most polluted cities globally are in India.

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**Pre-Connect**

- As per WHO, air pollution contributes to about 7 million early deaths annually, while burdening the global economy upwards of \$2.9 trillion per year (3.3 percent of global GDP). Pollution also contributes to a range of severe environmental problems.



**Key Findings**

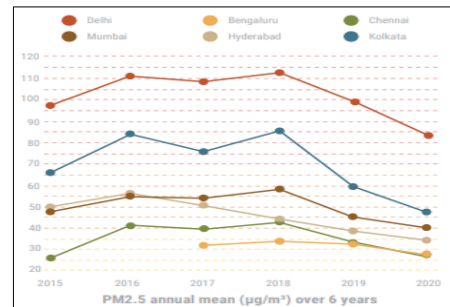


- This report only includes PM2.5 data that has been reported by ground-based monitoring stations in real time or close to real time.
- Countries and regions in East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia suffer from the highest annual average PM2.5 concentration weighted by population. Notably, the Africa region has least data representation.
- The 'World Air Quality Report, 2020', shows that Bangladesh, China, India, and Pakistan account for 49 of the 50 most polluted cities worldwide.
- The report reveals the impact of COVID-19 lockdown and behavioural changes on global particulate pollution (PM2.5) levels.
- Report has cited that air quality awareness remains low in areas where real time monitoring is sparse but pollution levels are high.
- Between 7 and 33% of deaths from COVID-19 are attributable to long term air pollution.

Rank	City	2020 AVG
1	Ghaziabad, India	106.6
2	Bulandshahr, India	98.4
3	Bisrakh Jalalpur, India	96.0
4	Bhiwadi, India	95.5
5	Noida, India	94.3
6	Greater Noida, India	89.5
7	Kanpur, India	89.1
8	Lucknow, India	86.2
9	Delhi, India	84.1
10	Faridabad, India	83.3

### India and Report

- ✓ India has observed markedly improved air quality in 2020 despite still experiencing dangerously high pollution levels with severe health consequences.
- ✓ Almost every city in India observed air quality improvements compared to 2018 and earlier, while 63 percent saw direct improvements against 2019. However, India continues to feature prominently at the top of the most polluted cities ranking with 22 of the top 30 most polluted cities globally.
- ✓ 2020 was a particularly severe year for agricultural burning, an illegal but common practice in which farmers set fire to crop residue after a harvest. Farm fires in Punjab increased 46.5 percent over 2019.
- ✓ Delhi's most polluted months correlate with the agricultural burning season, which spans October through December. During these months, average pollution exposure often exceeds the WHO annual target (10 µg/m<sup>3</sup>) by more than 14 times.
- ✓ Besides Delhi, the 21 other Indian cities among the 30 most polluted cities in the world are—Ghaziabad, Bulandshahar, Bisrakh Jalalpur, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Agra and Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Bhiwari in Rajasthan, Faridabad, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad, Bandhwari, Gurugram, Yamuna Nagar, Rohtak and Dharuhera in Haryana, and Muzaffarpur in Bihar.



### Links between PM2.5 and COVID-19

Several factors link PM2.5 pollution to increased COVID-19 vulnerability, including:

- **Increased incidence of comorbidities:** chronic air pollution exposure increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular complications associated with more severe COVID-19 outcomes.
- **Weakened lungs and autoimmune responses:** particle pollution triggers cellular inflammation and promotes the production of free radicals that induce cellular damage
- **Increased virus susceptibility:** evidence suggests that particle pollution can stimulate a receptor (ACE-2) on cell surfaces and promotes uptake of the virus
- **Increased virus transmission:** COVID-19 cases have been linked to greater levels of air pollution, a trend that may be attributed to air pollution extending the longevity of the viral particle load in the air.

### Challenges for India

- Transportation constitutes one of India’s leading PM2.5 emission sources, responsible for emitting pollutants and re-suspending road dust.
- Major sources of India’s air pollution include transportation, biomass burning for cooking, electricity generation, industry, construction, waste burning, and episodic agricultural burning.
- Biomass cook stoves are the main source of indoor pollution nationally, particularly affecting women and children.
- While India promotes access to fuels which emit less particulate pollution like liquefied gas and increases the share of clean energy extending electricity access across the country, coal remains the major domestic source of India’s energy supply.

**Indoor Air Pollution**

- Indoor air quality is influenced by the habits of the residents – fuels used for heating and cooking, customs, traditions and habits; concentrations of outdoor air pollutants; poorly ventilated and confined living space; and characteristics of the building.
- Additionally, indoor air pollution may arise from gas stoves or badly installed wood-burning units, use of open fires or combustion of biomass fuels; building materials such as wood preservatives, asbestos and cement; tobacco products; volatile organic compounds released by paints, glues, polishing materials, spray propellants, perfumes and cleaning agents; newly installed flooring or carpet; central cooling and heating systems and humidification devices; and outdoor sources such as pesticides and outdoor air pollution.

**Why there is need of Air Purifiers?**

- Air purifiers reduce the chances of acute as well as chronic health issues caused by indoor pollutants by refreshing stale air.
- Purifiers eliminate harmful chemicals from indoor environments, neutralising unpleasant odours, removing harmful radon, reducing the chances of airborne diseases, eliminating hazardous asbestos particles and ultimately increase life expectancy.
- Air purifiers are popularising as there is an increasing lack of ventilation in homes.

- In India’s Punjab and Haryana province, open burning practices have provided a means for quickly and affordably transitioning fields from the summer rice crop to the winter wheat crop. 57 During 2020, there was a record number of stubble-burning incidents in Punjab (76,537), increasing 46.5% over 2019.58.

**Way Forward**

- ✚ Growing access to public air quality data is a critical first step towards tackling the air pollution problem and mitigating its impact on public health. Accessible air quality data increases both public awareness and demand for action.
- ✚ It is pertinent to governments to prioritise sustainable and clean energy sources, as well as the cities, need to encourage low cost, active and carbon-neutral mobility choices such as walking, cycling, and accessible public transport.
- ✚ There is need to Speed up the transition to clean energy and clean transport to not only saves lives but also dramatically reduces healthcare-related costs.
- ✚ In order to reduce agricultural burning, the government should provide viable alternative solutions.

**PEPPER IT WITH**

National clean air programme, Commission for air quality management in National Capital Region, BS-VI emissions, Fog/Smog Tower

**Project RE-HAB**

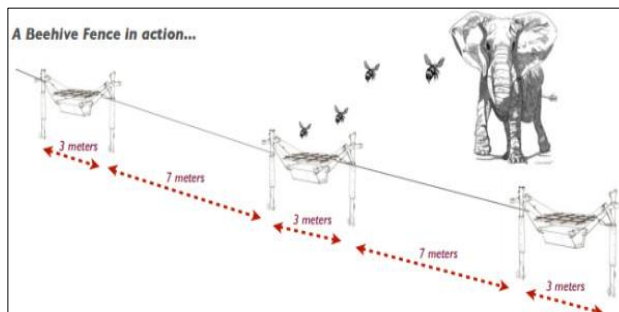
**News Excerpt**

Recently, an innovation project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant Human Attacks using Bees) was launched on pilot basis to mitigate human-elephant conflict.

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**About Project RE-HAB**

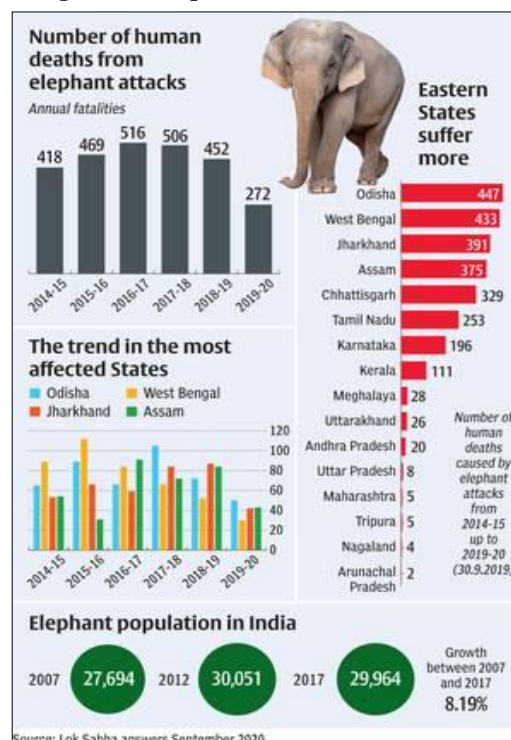
- Project RE-HAB is a sub-mission of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)'s National Honey Mission.
- KVIC has set up 15 to 20 interspersed bee boxes; these boxes are set up in the passage ways of human-elephant conflict zones to block the entrance of elephants to human habitations.
- The 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.
- Bee boxes are installed along the periphery of Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zones.
- The biggest advantage of Project RE-HAB is that it dissuades elephants without causing any harm to them. It is extremely cost-effective method which not only avoids conflict but conserve the bees in their in-situ environment.
- The elephants will not venture anywhere close to the bees and thus avoid transgressing into human landscape, because generally, Elephants fear that the honey bees might sting them.
- Previously, various State governments have taken several measures in the past like digging up trenches, erecting rail fencing and spiked pillars, and putting up electric fences and electric wire curtains to keep elephants away from human territories. Not only all these efforts failed but also ended up killing more elephants.



### Human Elephant conflicts in India

Human-elephant conflict is a major conservation concern in India.

- **Scenario:** According to KVIC, between 2015 and 2020, nearly 2,500 people have lost their lives in elephant attacks across India out of which about 170 human fatalities have been reported in Karnataka alone.
- **Major reasons:** Encroachment into elephant corridors is the main reason for the heavy toll. The expansion of human settlements and the resulting biotic pressure, linear infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, canals and encroachments into corridor areas are a key reason for elephant entering human settlements.
- Around 48 per cent of instances related to Human-elephant conflict have been from reported from Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand. These three States, along with Assam, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu, have accounted for 85 per cent of the total deaths.
- Farmers across the States have been complaining of wild elephants destroying their crops, leading to heavy losses. In order to protect farm electric fencing is done by farmers which kills most elephants. Elephant could be encroaching into agriculture fields and human habitations near forest borders due to insufficient food and water, thus posing a danger to lives.



### Importance of Elephant Corridors

- ✓ Wildlife corridors are linear patches of natural vegetation that provide habitat for elephants. Corridors are so much important for elephant movement and to maintain a healthy population.

- ✓ As forest lands continue to be lost, these relatively narrow, linear patches of vegetation form vital natural habitat linkages between larger forest patches. They allow elephants to move between secure habitats freely, without being disturbed by humans. In many cases, elephant corridors are also critical for other wildlife.
- ✓ In terms of land use, only 12.9 per cent of the corridors are currently under forest cover, compared to 24 per cent in 2005.

**Way Forward**

- To secure a sustainable future for wild elephants it is essential to ensure uninterrupted movement of elephant between key habitats. And to do this, designated corridors must be legally secured and protected.
- There is dire need to Priorities the securement of corridors that require purchase of land or setting aside of land by local communities.
- Governments should allocate adequate resources for corridor securement, and providing them technical assistance and ‘soft hands’ NGO interfaces with local communities wherever appropriate.
- Running a national-level public campaign and setting up a network of Green Corridor Champions (GCC) all across India could help to protect elephant and minimize the instances of human-elephant conflict across the nation.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 Project Elephant, Elephant bond, African Elephant, Wild life protection act

**Global Water Scarcity: UNICEF**

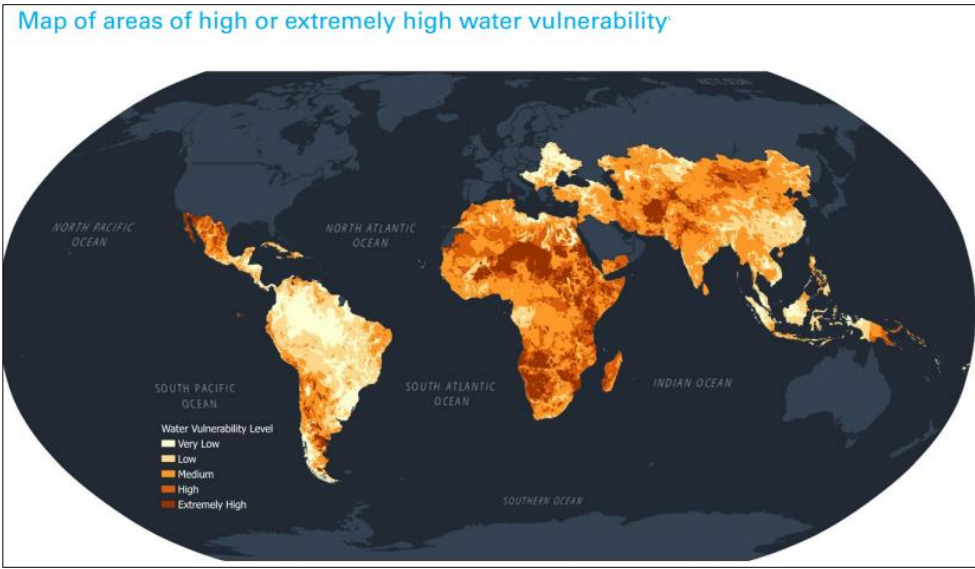
**News Excerpt**

Recently, UNICEF releases ‘Water Security for all’ report. It has highlighted global water deficiency across the world.

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**Key Points of the Report**

- Today, 1.42 billion people including 450 million children live in areas of high or extremely high water vulnerability.
- Less than 3 per cent of the world’s water resources are fresh water, and it is growing increasingly scarce.
- Eastern and southern Africa had the highest proportion of children living in such areas.  
 More than half of children (58 per cent) here face difficulty accessing sufficient water every day.
- More than 155 million children in South Asia lived in areas with high or even extremely high water vulnerability.
- The report has identified 37 hot-spot countries where children faced especially dire circumstances in terms of absolute numbers, the proportions of children affected and where global resources support and urgent action must be mobilized.





- In India, around 25% of children are vulnerable to High and Extremely High Water scarcity.

### Reasons for water insecurity

- Decades of misuse, poor management, and over-extraction of groundwater and contamination of freshwater supplies have exacerbated water stress.
- At the same time, demand for water is rising due to rapid population growth, urbanization and increasing water needs from a range of sectors, notably agriculture, industry and energy.
- Climate change is also compounding water scarcity through changing precipitation patterns and increased water demand.

### Implications of water Scarcity

- ✓ Water scarcity and climate change are also drivers of conflict and migration, as communities and entire populations compete for shrinking water resources. Families may be forced to leave their homes in search of reliable water supplies and livelihood opportunities, often moving to urban areas and towns, putting even more pressure on already strained services.
- ✓ The resulting impact on children’s health, development, and safety threatens the significant progress made in child survival and sustainable development over the past several decades. It is putting children’s lives at risk today and threatens future generations.

### Way forward

There is dire need to scaling up climate-resilient water services. Early warning groundwater system should be equipped to communicate on possible shortage of water quality. The monitoring network should be streamlined to generate data from manual measurements as well as automated systems where data are transmitted over the dedicated planning centers.

## Recycling Framework for Non-Ferrous Metal Scraps

### News Excerpt

The Centre has issued a framework for scrap recycling of non-ferrous metals.

### Key points of the framework

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- National Non-ferrous Metal Scrap Recycling Framework, 2020 seeks to use life cycle management approach for better efficiency in mineral value chain process.
- It envisages bringing both product and processing stewardship to enhance Non-Ferrous Metal recycling.
- This framework promotes a formal and well organized recycling ecosystem by adopting energy efficient processes for recycling leading to lower carbon footprints and to work towards sustainable development and intergenerational equity.
- It aims to minimize the effect of end of life products on landfills and environmental pollution by promoting an

### Non-Ferrous Metal Sector

- ❖ The Non-ferrous metals can be classified in broad categories as Base metals (e.g. aluminium, copper, zinc, lead, nickel, tin), Precious metals (e.g. silver, gold, palladium, other platinum group metals), Minor metals including refractory metals (e.g. tungsten, molybdenum, tantalum, niobium, chromium) and Specialty metals (e.g. cobalt, germanium, indium, tellurium, antimony, and gallium).
- ❖ **Aluminium** is the second most used metal in the world after iron. India is third largest consumer of aluminum in the world with a consumption of 3.7 MT in FY 2020.
- ❖ **Copper** is the third most important base metal by value, accounting for roughly a \$130 billion industry annually at global level.
- ❖ **Zinc** is the fourth most widely used metal across the globe. According to International Lead and Zinc Study Group, around 13 million tonnes of Zinc is produced and consumed every year in the world.
- ❖ **Lead** is one of the most recyclable metals in the world. Although hazardous to our health, humans have been extracting and using lead for over 6000 years.



environmentally sound processing and recycling system for secondary industry.

- Framework promotes 6Rs principles of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Redesign and Remanufacture through scientific handling, processing and disposal of all types of non-ferrous scrap, through authorized centers /facility.
- It is intended to make a shift towards a circular economy in the coming years for base metals, critical raw materials and other essential materials.
- This Framework is likely to facilitate the development of EV technology in India, as most of non-ferrous materials are widely used in EV technology. Adopting recycling measures will help to make a switch towards cleaner energy.

**Challenges faced by the Non-Ferrous Metals Industry**

A major share of metal scrap demand is served by imports owing to the underdeveloped metal scrap collection, segregation and processing infrastructure in the domestic market. Material recycling in India faces multifarious challenges, some of which are—

- Lack of an organized / systematic scrap recovery mechanism
- Lack of sustained implementation of existing regulations on waste collection and recycling
- Lack of standardization of recycled products adversely affecting market adoption
- Import barriers adversely affecting input cost of operations
- Lack of public awareness on the necessity of recycling
- Lack of specific skill sets on responsible methods and technologies
- Highly skewed business share between the formal and informal recyclers

**Advantages of Non-Ferrous Recycling**

Social benefits	Environmental benefits	Economic benefits	Employment Generation Potential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•India’s mineral rich areas are under dense forests and inhabited by indigenous communities. Most of the impacts of material extraction, use and disposal occur domestically and negatively on a sizeable population.</li> <li>•Extraction pressures have contributed significantly to conflicts due to displacement, loss of livelihood and have led to opposition by tribal and other local communities including fishermen in coastal areas.</li> <li>•These social and political conflicts also pose significant threat to internal security.</li> <li>•Recycling would put fewer burdens on the need of extraction thereby offsetting some of the risks arising out of social conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Mineral rich areas overlap with heavily forested areas in the country. Extraction activities often result in ecological degradation.</li> <li>•Reduced pressures from mining by way of recycling will help to reduce this ecological degradation. Reduced waste generation will not only reduce pollution associated with disposal but also save related costs.</li> <li>•Also, resource extraction and use is highly energy intensive leading to significant GHG emissions. Recycling of material will help to curb the GHG emissions. Furthermore, smelters of copper, zinc, lead ore etc. are significant contributors of CO2 and SOx.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•In manufacturing sector alone, Indian companies could save up to Rs. 60,855 million by implementing resource efficiency measures, thereby improving competitiveness and profitability.</li> <li>•Recycling based innovations can also give industries an edge in the export market. New industries can be created in the recycling sector with focus on innovative design and manufacturing from recycled material. As per an estimate from the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, with efficient recycling, India can hope to recover by the year 2020 over 0.18 million tonnes of aluminium scrap. Also, reduced import dependence for critical minerals will help to improve country’s trade balance and promote economic stability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recycling and adoption of related innovative methods may altogether give rise to the need of setting up of new industries that can contribute significantly to employment generation.</li> <li>•Innovation in recycling process and manufacturing has the potential to create highly skilled jobs benefitting domestic industries and developing potential for export market. This may further prompt global companies to locate efficient design and/or manufacturing units here leading to increased skilled / unskilled labour demand.</li> <li>•Working on improved recycling rates, it is estimated that 3 million direct jobs may be created in recycling facilities and conservatively, between 10 to 15 million indirect jobs in upstream related activities.</li> </ul>

**Way Forward**

In order to achieve the ambitions of framework, there is dire need to strengthening scrap value chain by segregating waste at source and then channelizing the disaggregated scrap through a network of scrap pickers and collectors and eventually to the scrap recycler through appropriate policy interventions. This would not only earn rich dividends but harness sustainable practices.

**Sea-buckthorn Plantations**

**News Excerpt**

The Himachal Pradesh Government has decided to start planting sea-buckthorn in the cold desert areas of the State.

**About Sea-Buckthorn Plantations**

- It’s a shrub which produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry.

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- In India, it is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region, generally in dry areas such as the cold deserts of Ladakh and Spiti.
- In Himachal Pradesh, it is locally called chharma and grows in the wild in Lahaul and Spiti and parts of Kinnaur.
- Around 15,000 hectares in Himachal, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are covered by this plant.
- The forest departments of various Himalayan states/UTs aimed to plant seabuckthorn on arid and marginal lands using compensatory afforestation or CAMPA funds.
- The Himachal Pradesh has now announced that seabuckthorn will be planted on 250 hectares in the state over the next five years.
- Recently, the union ministry of environment, forest and climate change asked these states to submit proposals for taking up such plantations, especially in the light of reduced water flow from Himalayan glaciers and its impact on ecology.

### Benefits of Sea-Buckthorn Plantations

- As a folk medicine, sea-buckthorn has been widely used for treating stomach, heart and skin problems. In the last few decades, scientific research worldwide has backed many of its traditional uses. Its fruit and leaves are rich in vitamins, carotenoids and omega fatty acids, among other substances, and it can help troops in acclimatising to high-altitude.
- Besides being an important source of fuelwood and fodder, seabuckthorn is a soil-binding plant which prevents soil-erosion, checks siltation in rivers and helps preserve floral biodiversity. In the Lahaul valley, where willow trees are dying in large numbers due to pest attack, this hardy shrub is a good alternative for protecting the local ecology.
- Seabuckthorn also has commercial value, as it is used in making juices, jams, nutritional capsules etc.

### Energy Efficiency Enterprise (E3) Certifications

#### News Excerpt

Ministry of Power and New & Renewable Energy launches Energy Efficiency Enterprise (E3) Certifications Programme for Brick manufacturing Sector.

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#### Pre-Connect

India is the world's second largest producer of bricks and this demand is expected to multiply three to four times over the next 20 years.

#### About

- Brick Manufacturing Enterprise adopting and demonstrating energy-efficient manufacturing shall be endorsed through a BEE certification as Energy Efficient Enterprise (E3).
- Energy Efficient Enterprise (E3) Certification is an initiative to recognise burnt clay brick manufacturers who adopt energy-efficient manufacturing and encourage customers to source bricks from such E3 certified manufacturing units.
- E3 certificate will be awarded to Brick Manufacturing Enterprises that meet the minimum Specific Energy Consumption performance criteria specified in this Scheme like-
  - Improving energy efficiency in manufacturing, and
  - Producing Bricks having lower (bulk) densities e.g. porous, perforated and hollow bricks.

#### India's Floating Solar Plant

- ❖ In Telangana, India's biggest floating solar power plant, by generation capacity (100MW), till date being developed by NTPC. This plant is set to be commissioned by June.
- ❖ It would be one of the renewable (solar) energy plants being developed by NTPC with an installed capacity of 447MW in the Southern Region and the entire capacity would be commissioned by March 2023.
- ❖ Floating solar plants is an opportunity to generate power with low cost. This practice required no land acquisition.

#### PEPPER IT WITH

Klin-Furnance Brick method, Enhanced Energy Efficiency mission

- o Low density Bricks provide better thermal insulation and hence assist in reducing operational energy in buildings.
- Implementation of E3 Certification will lead to multiple benefits in terms of energy savings in brick manufacturing process and improved quality of bricks resulting in cost savings to builders as well as energy savings to occupiers of buildings due to better thermal comfort and improved insulation properties.
- The E3 Certificate will be awarded to those enterprises whose specific energy consumption will be 25% lower than the national baseline. The enterprises can qualify for E3 through adoption of energy efficient brick manufacturing process and technology and Production of lower density bricks (hollow, perforated or porous bricks).
- The adoption of the E3 Certification is currently voluntary for the Brick industry.

**Expected Outcomes**

- By availing E3 Certification, the brick units are likely to shift towards adoption of more efficient technologies for making energy efficient bricks. Such bricks will be useful in complying the requirements of Energy Conservation Buildings Code (ECBC).
- Energy saving of 7 Million Tonnes of oil equivalent (MTOE) per year and CO<sub>2</sub> savings of about 25 Million Tonnes by 2030 are estimated through adoption of E3 Certification by 7500 Bricks manufacturing units.
- E3 Certification Scheme seeks to accelerate brick sector modernization, using market incentives to create customer demand to fulfill the vision for Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- Energy-efficient transformation in brick manufacturing is expected to create an enabling policy environment for promoting manufacturing and utilization of energy efficient Bricks, technologies and practices in India’s construction sector.
- This will push towards phasing out of inefficient technology in Brick production and enhance awareness and access of energy efficient bricks and technology.

**Ken Betwa Link Project**

**News Excerpt**

On the occasion of World Water Day, a memorandum of agreement was signed between Jal Shakti Ministry and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP).

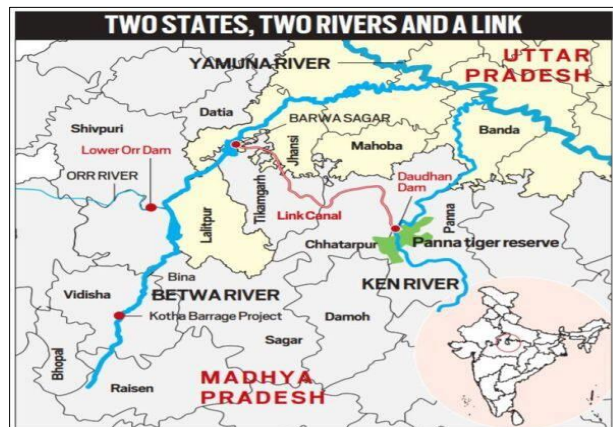
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**Pre-Connect**

- In the 1970s, the idea of transferring surplus water from a river to water-deficit area was mooted by the then Union Irrigation Minister (earlier the Jal Shakti Ministry was known as Ministry of Irrigation) Dr K L Rao.
- National Perspective Plan (NPP) is intended to augment water resources development envisaging inter basin water transfer in the country. The NPP comprised two components–
  - o Himalayan Rivers Development
  - o Peninsular Rivers Development
- Based on the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) identified 30 river links—16 under Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component.

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

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



- Later, the river linking idea was revived under the then Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government. Ken Betwa Link Project is one of the 16 river linking projects under the Peninsular component.
- In the past, several river linking projects have been taken up. For instance—under the Periyar Project, transfer of water from Periyar basin to Vaigai basin was envisaged.

### **About Ken Betwa Link Project**

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the NPP for interlinking of rivers.
- Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases. Under Phase-I, one of the components — Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses — will be completed. While in the Phase-II, three components — Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage — will be constructed.
- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.
- According to the Comprehensive Detailed Project Report, the cost of Ken-Betwa Link Project is estimated at Rs 35,111.24 crore at 2017-18 prices.

### **Benefits**

- ✓ The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand, especially in the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh.
- ✓ It will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.
- ✓ The project is supposed to irrigate 1.06 million hectares of land, provide drinking water to 6.2 million and generate 103 MW of hydel power.

### **Environmental Concerns**

- Several committees, including the Supreme Court-appointed panel, have raised doubts about the project. This project will be very harmful to the Panna Tiger reserve, which is located in Madhya Pradesh and is home to more than 52 tigers and endangered vulture species like the white-rumped vulture.
- Further the forest advisory committee said that an estimated 4.6 million trees will be cut down for the project which will adversely affect the rain in the already dry Bundelkhand region.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
Interstate River Water Disputes Act,  
Article 262, CWC, National Park, EIA

### **Conclusion**

- ✚ Though Interlinking of rivers have multifold benefits but such projects can cast more harm than good. Therefore, it is crucial to do a detailed hydrological, geological, meteorological, environmental and social impact analysis of the project before moving ahead. Until then, the Government should focus on alternative solutions to address the issue of water crisis in the region.
- ✚ Moreover, India gets abundant rainfall, but most of rainwater is wasted by going into drains. If we capture all these rainwater, India will not face water scarcity in the coming years. If India invests on water conservation mechanisms such as rainwater harvesting, watershed management etc. on a war-footing, India may not need Inter-basin water transfer projects.



### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

## Shadowpad Malware

### News Excerpt

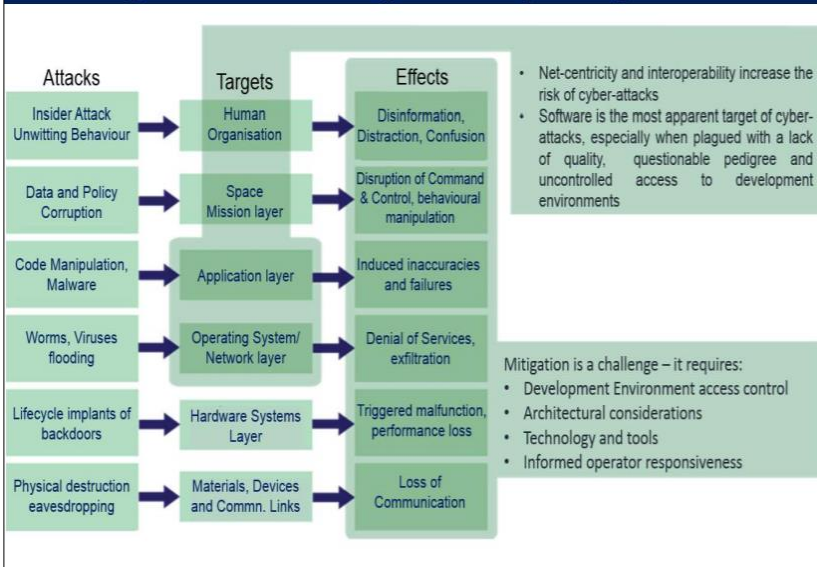
The massive power outage in Mumbai in October 2020 may have been the result of a Chinese cyber campaign against India, timed as a ‘show of force’ warning to New Delhi about what could happen if the country pushed its border claims too vigorously in the context of the standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

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### Highlights

- A report compiled by Recorded Future, a Massachusetts-based company that studies the use of the internet by state actors, details a campaign conducted by a China-linked threat activity group it calls ‘RedEcho’, which targeted the Indian power sector through malware.

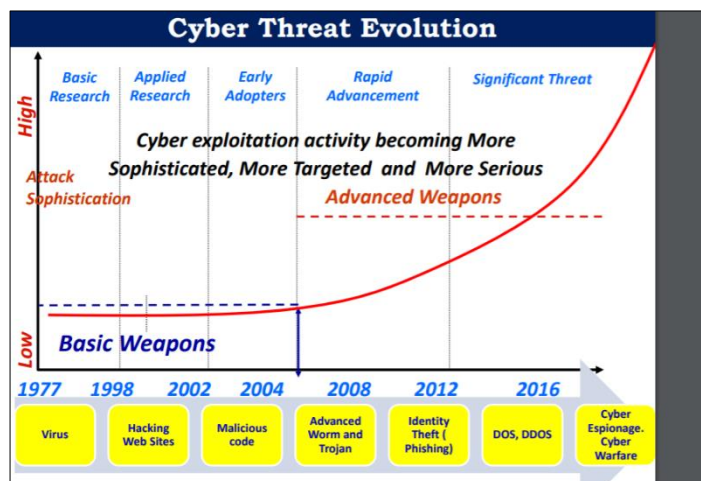
### Challenges are increasing in the Cyber Space Domain



- Though Recorded Future observed a large increase in suspected targeted intrusion activity against Indian organisations from the Chinese state-sponsored group, the campaign gained momentum after the standoff in Ladakh. Tensions between the two countries escalated after a violent clash in Galwan, which resulted in the death of at least 24 soldiers.

Recorded Future said the targeted activity was identified through a combination of large-scale automated network traffic analytics and expert analysis.

The October 12 grid failure in Mumbai resulted in massive power outages, stopping trains on tracks, hampering those working from home amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and hitting the stuttering economic activity hard. It took two hours for the power supply to resume for essential services, prompting Maharashtra chief minister to order an enquiry into the incident.



- In November, media reports suggested that the power failure in Mumbai was the result of ‘sabotage’ by foreign entities. The government’s enquiry into the outage is expected to be completed soon.
- The Massachusetts-based company’s report comes soon after the two armies disengaged in some regions after being locked in a standoff for over eight-months in eastern Ladakh, with talks to ensure complete disengagement underway.

- It identified 12 critical infrastructure entities in India that could have been targeted, which includes 10 power sector organisations and two maritime sector organisations.

### Shadowpad

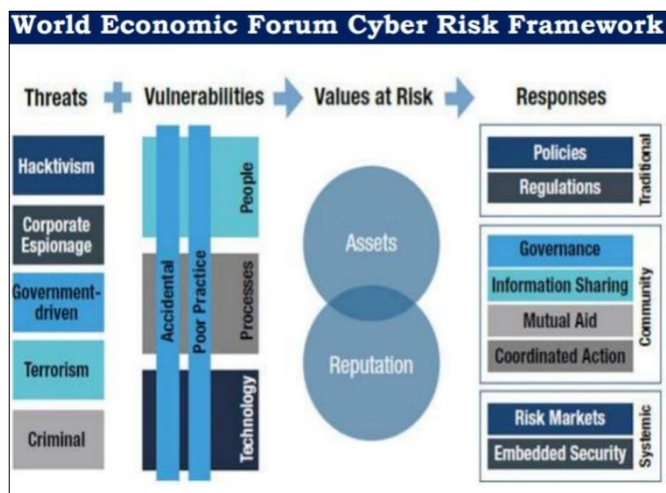
- ShadowPad was discovered in 2017. The malware had been injected into software updates provided by a legitimate software provider, NetSarang, that is headquartered in the US and South Korea.
- The ShadowPad malware steals data from a 'victim' computer and is able to automatically communicate with the computer servers at the hacker's end. Once every eight hours, ShadowPad sends back information like user name, domain name, host name to the hacker's computer system.
- When an "interesting" target is found, the hacker's computer server can seek more information from the victim system via the malware and even deploy more malicious code.
- The Recorded Future report said that the 2017 ShadowPad hack was attributed to 'APT41'.
- According to cybersecurity firm FireEye, APT41 is a prolific cyber threat group that carries out "Chinese state-sponsored espionage activity" apart from financially motivated activity "potentially outside of state control".
- Since 2012, the group has targeted organisations in at least 14 countries and is known to steal intellectual property.
- Recorded Future said that in the lead-up to the May 2020 border skirmishes, it observed a noticeable increase in the provisioning of PlugX malware C2 infrastructure, much of which was subsequently used in intrusion activity targeting Indian organisations.
- The PlugX activity included the targeting of multiple Indian government, public sector and defence organisations from at least May 2020, it said.
- While not unique to Chinese cyber espionage activity, PlugX has been heavily used by China-nexus groups for many years.

### Main Cyber Players and their Motives

- **Cyber Criminals:** Seeking commercial gain from hacking banks & financial institutions as well a phishing scams & computer ransom ware
- **Cyber Terrorists:** Mission to penetrate & attack critical assets, and national infrastructure for aims relating to political power & "branding"
- **Cyber Espionage:** Using stealthy IT Malware to penetrate both corporate & military data servers in order to obtain plans & intelligence
- **Cyber Hackivists:** Groups such as "Anonymous" with Political Agendas that hack sites & servers to virally communicate the "message" for specific campaigns

### Impact of Cyber Attacks

- ✓ According to the report, the targeting of Indian critical infrastructure offers limited economic espionage opportunities but poses "significant concerns" over potential pre-positioning of network access to support Chinese strategic objectives.
- ✓ Pre-positioning on energy assets may support several potential outcomes, including geostrategic signalling during heightened bilateral tensions, supporting influence operations, or as a precursor to kinetic escalation.
- ✓ The newspaper also reported that cyberattacks such as these give countries a "less devastating" option than a nuclear attack, one capable, however, of giving a country "a strategic and psychological edge".



- ✓ Report says that Russia was a pioneer in using this technique, targeting both Ukraine and the US.
- ✓ Until recently, China focused on “information theft” but the country has been “increasingly active” in placing code into infrastructure systems, “knowing that when it is discovered, the fear of an attack can be as powerful a tool as an attack itself”.

**State of Cyber Security in India**

- In January 2020, India touched a milestone in terms of Internet users by becoming the 2nd largest internet user base with 560 million (mn) internet users.
- The number of internet users in India will continue to increase – by 2021, the country is expected to have over 600 mn internet users, the user base more than doubling from the approximate 300 mn in 2016.
- The Indian cybersecurity market is poised to experience significant growth across various segments, including cybersecurity services, organization capabilities, startups, jobs and salaries.
- The evolving nature of cybersecurity attacks such as web application breaches, ransomware, reconnaissance, cyber espionage and DDoS attack establishes cyber-risk as a new challenge for enterprises and government authorities
- The digital economy contributes approximately 15% to India’s GDP and it is expected to grow to 20% by 2024. eCommerce as an industry is expected to grow to \$25 Billion by 2024.
- Digital payments in India are growing at 13% CAGR, while the mobile wallets domain will soon experience growth of 50% CAGR
- With greater inclusion of services such as artificial intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), data analytics, cloud computing and Internet of Things (IoT), across all industry and functional domains, the scope of cybersecurity has become a challenging and necessary function across all organizations and enterprises.
- Currently, the Information Act, 2000 is the primary law for dealing with cybercrime and digital commerce in the country.
- The National Cyber Security Policy, 2013 was developed to build a secure and resilient cyberspace for India’s citizens and businesses. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the policy aims to protect information and the information infrastructure in cyberspace, build capabilities to prevent and respond to cyber threats, reduce vulnerabilities and minimise damage from cyber incidents through a combination of institutional structures, people, processes, technology and cooperation.

PM OFFICE/CAB INET SECY (PMO/CAB SEC)	MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (MHA)	MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (MEA)	MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (MOD)	MINISTRY OF COMMON INFO TECHNOLOGY (MCIT)	NON GOVT ORGANIZATION (NGO)
National Security Council (NSC)	National Cyber Corrd Centre (NCCC)	Ambassadors & Ministers	Tri Service Cyber Commad	Department Of Information Technology (DIT)	Cyber Security And Anti Hacking Organisation (CSAHO)
National Technical Research Org (NTRO)	Directorate of Forensic Science (DFS)	Defence Attaches	Army (MI)	Department of Telecom (DoT)	Cyber Society of India (CySI)
National Critical Info Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)	National Disaster Mgt Authority (NDMA)	Joint Secretary (IT)	Navy (NI)	Indian Computer Emergency Response Team CERT-IN	Centre of Excellence for Cyber Security Research & Development in India (CECSRDI)
Joint Intelligence	Central Forensic Science Lab (CFSLs)		Air Force (AFI)	Educational Research Network (ERNET)	Cyber Security of India (CSI)
National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)	Intelligence Bureau (IB)		Def Info Assurance & Research Agency (DIARA)	Informatics Center (NIC)	National Cyber Security of India (NCSI)
Research & Analysis Wing (RAW)			Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)	Centre for Development of Advanced Computing C-DAC	Cyber Attacks Crisis Management Plan of India (CACMP)
Multi Agency Center			Defence Research Dev Authority (DRDO)	Standardisati on, Testing and Quality Certification (STQC)	
National Information Board (NIB)					

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
 IT Act, 2008, CERT-In, NCIIPC,  
 National Cyber Security Policy-2013



- The National Technical Research Organisation is the main agency designed to protect national critical infrastructure and to handle all the cybersecurity incidents in critical sectors of the country.
- Additionally, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is responsible for incident responses including analysis, forecasts and alerts on cybersecurity issues and breaches.

### COVID-19: Parosmia

#### News Excerpt

While loss of smell (anosmia) and taste is a well known symptom of COVID-19, some people may experience parosmia, which is characterised by a change in perception of odours. Some other unusual symptoms associated with the disease include COVID-toe and COVID-tongue, which is an inflammatory disorder that usually appears on the top and sides of the tongue.

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#### What is parosmia?

- Parosmia is a medical term used to describe a condition in which affected individuals experience “distortions of the sense of smell”.
- A person with parosmia is able to detect certain odours, but they might experience the smell of certain things as different and often unpleasant. For instance, to someone with parosmia, coffee may smell like burnt toast.
- Experts say that these unpleasant smells are often described by people as being similar to that of chemicals, burning, faeces, rotting flesh and mould.

#### What causes parosmia?

- This abnormality is typically experienced by those people who are recovering their sense of smell following loss from a virus or an injury.
- Parosmia is a temporary condition and is not harmful in itself. Even so, it can continue for several weeks, which means that affected individuals may have to change their eating patterns, diets and avoid foods that trigger the certain odours.
- It can affect relationships with others, and cause feelings of low mood or depression. While there is no cure or medication for this abnormality, individuals may find some relief with “smell training”.
- If parosmia or phantosmia (sensation of an odour being present when it is not) becomes more disabling than the loss of smell or is the only symptom, then the person should be given specific treatment such as using nasal drops or tablets etc.

### First dedicated mission of New Space India

#### News Excerpt

Recently, ISRO successfully launched Brazil’s optical earth observation satellite, Amazonia-1, and 18 co-passenger satellites from India [5] and the U.S.A. [13] from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SHAR) at Sriharikota.

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#### Highlights

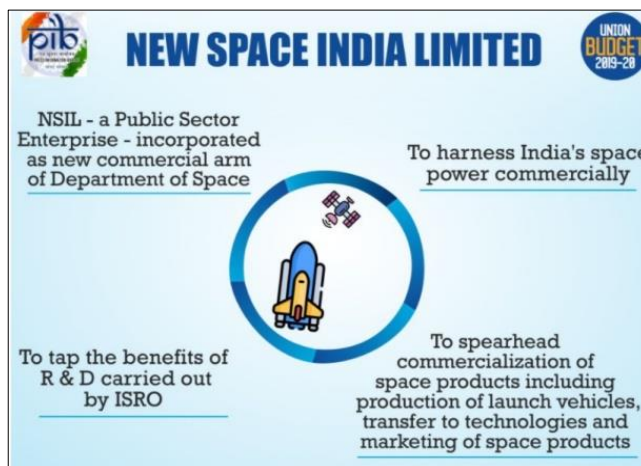
- Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite of National Institute for Space Research (INPE). This satellite will provide remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.
- PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 is the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under Department of Space.

#### Analytica

- With the launch of Brazil’s Amazonia-1 satellite, a new chapter has begun in India’s space history.
- The satellite, a 637-kilogram entity, was the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited, a two-year-old commercial arm of the Department of Space.
- This is not the first time that NSIL has organised a launch of foreign satellites aboard an Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launch vehicle.



- The organisation has had launches last November as well as in December 2019. However, the primary satellites aboard both these missions were Indian satellites — the RISAT-2BRI and the EOS-01 — with smaller satellites from several other countries, as well as India, piggybacking on them.
- The Amazonia mission also saw 18 other satellites being launched and was the first fully commercial mission.
- India has so far launched 342 foreign satellites from 34 countries using its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle platform and many of them have involved ISRO’s first commercial entity, the Antrix Corporation.
- There is still confusion on how exactly the responsibilities of NSIL differ from those of Antrix. But with the formation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe) — a regulatory agency — as well as plans of an independent tribunal to adjudicate disputes among private space entities, there is a potential explosion of market opportunities from space applications on the anvil.



### Conclusion

- ✓ NSIL is seen as a move by India’s space establishment to insulate the prospects of the space industry in India from repercussions of the Devas-Antrix imbroglio.
- ✓ NSIL has a broad ambit and will be involved in collaborations spanning from launches to new space-related industries.
- ✓ NSIL is also expected to be more than just a marketer of ISRO’s technologies; it is to find newer business opportunities and expand the sector itself.
- ✓ It must conceive of ways to aid space start-ups reach out to rural India and facilitate more recruits from India’s young to facilitate careers in space applications and sciences.
- ✓ It must see itself both as an Indian ambassador and disruptor in the space arena.

## Global Bio India 2021

### News Excerpt

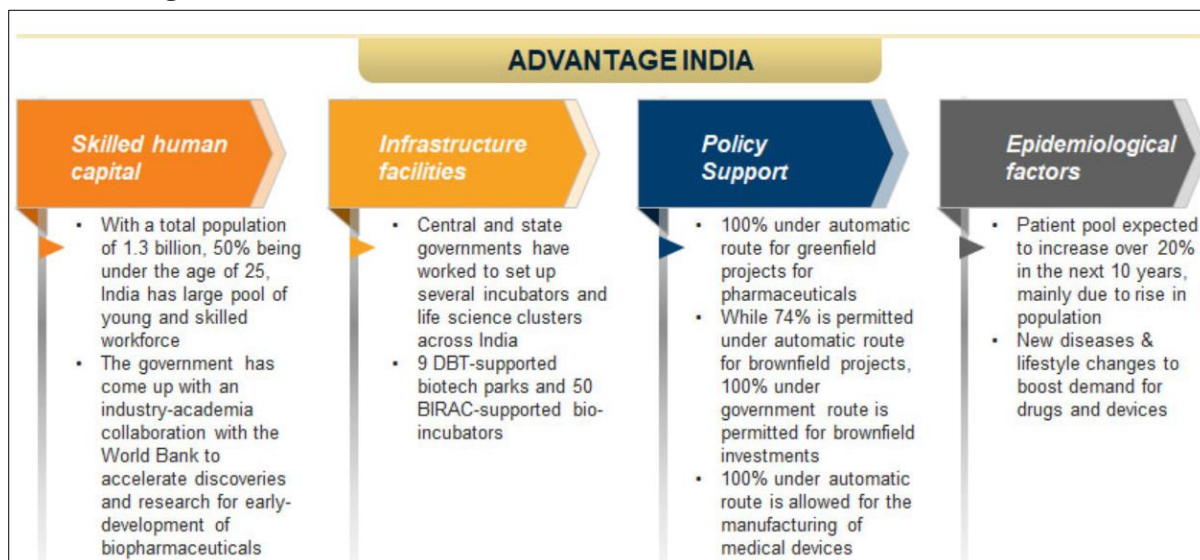
The Union Minister for Science & Technology, recently inaugurated the second edition of Global Bio-India-2021 in New Delhi through virtual mode. The 3-day event showcased the strength and opportunities of the India’s biotechnology sector at national level and to the global community. The theme for this year is “Transforming lives” with the tag line “Biosciences to Bio-economy”.

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### The Biotechnology sector in India

- The Biotechnology sector in India has emerged as an integral part of the Indian economy over the past few decades, and the Government of India is playing a transformative and catalytic role in building a USD 150 billion bio-economy by 2025. The Indian Biotechnology industry that was valued at \$70 bn in 2020.
- The sector is recognized as one of the key drivers for India to achieve its USD 5 trillion target.
- The sector is divided into five major segments: BioPharma, BioAgriculture, BioIndustrial, and the combined segment of BioServices comprising of BioIT, CROs, and Research Services.
- The percentage share of the biotechnology segments is:
  - Bio-Pharmaceuticals: 62%
  - CRO/BioIT/Research: 15%
  - Bio-agriculture: 16%

- **Bio-Industrial: 7%**
- India is also one of the first countries to have a department dedicated to Biotechnology. Moreover, the Department has also set up BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council) which is a not-for-profit agency to strengthen and empower emerging Biotechnology enterprises to undertake strategic research and innovation, by handholding them from ideation to the commercialization of their products/ technologies.



### Government Initiatives

- **National Biopharma Mission, 'Innovate India' 2017**, a DBT programme worth US\$ 250 million, aims to bring together industry and academia in order to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in biopharma.
- **Clinical Trials**
  - The Union Ministry for Health and Family Welfare introduced new Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019, changing the regulatory landscape to approve new drugs and conduct clinical trials in the country.
  - The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) selected 12 institutes for the clinical trials of the country's first indigenous COVID-19 vaccine.
  - In 2020, ICMR developed indigenous COVID-19 vaccine (BBV152 COVID) in partnership with Bharat Biotech International Limited.
- **Biotech Parks**
  - Biotechnology Parks and Incubators are established across the country by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science and Technology, to translate research into products and services by providing necessary infrastructure support.
  - These biotechnology parks offer facilities to scientists, and small & medium sized enterprises (SMEs) for technology incubation, technology demonstration and pilot plant studies to accelerate the commercial development of biotechnology.
  - The government, at present, supports nine biotechnology parks in various states with the bulk being in the southern region of the country.

### Way Forward

- ✓ Indian biotechnology is built on entrepreneurship, innovation, developing domestic talent and demonstrating value-based care.
- ✓ Given the long history of diseases in India, the country has accumulated years of experience and scientific knowledge to prevent and treat them. India is working to boost the biotechnology sector under the flagship programmes such as 'Make in India' and 'Start-up India'.
- ✓ Increase in the number of biotech incubators will boost research and promote growth of start-ups; this is critical for the success of the Indian biotech industry.

## SMS scrubbing

### News Excerpt

Recently, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) temporarily suspended the scrubbing of short message service or SMS by telecom service providers (TSP) for seven days to allow principal entities to register their messaging templates.

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### Pre-Connect

- Trai, in 2018, released a framework under which telcos could use a distributed ledger technology or blockchain to verify the sender information and content of every commercial SMS before it was delivered on the user’s device.
- Blockchain ensures two things — non-repudiation and confidentiality. Only those authorised to access details are able to access subscriber details and only when they need to deliver service.
- All unregistered commercial senders were banned from sending any SMSes by the new technology.

### Analytica

- The action by Trai comes after the functioning of several SMS-based services of banks and e-commerce platforms was hit recently as TSPs implemented the second phase of SMS regulation.
- As per Trai norms, the content of all SMSes will now be verified before it is allowed to be delivered on the users’ device.
- This process, known as scrubbing, was implemented recently after several delays.
- The new Trai regulations for principal entities, which will be allowed to send SMSes to customers, seek registration of senders, telemarketers, headers, content, templates, consent templates and subscriber preference.
- Despite reminders from telcos and Trai, most principal entities or agencies that send commercial SMSes had not registered themselves, following which their messages were not getting delivered.
- According to Trai, the old technology and platform allowed unscrupulous telemarketers to override the stated preference of the subscriber by claiming consent that may have been surreptitiously obtained.

## Quasar- Most distant source of radio emission

### News Excerpt

An international team of astronomers have discovered the most distant ‘radio-loud’ quasar with the help of European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope (ESO’s VLT). According to a paper published in *The Astrophysical Journal*, it took 13 billion years for the quasar’s light to reach earth.

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### Analytica

- Quasars are very luminous objects in faraway galaxies that emit jets at radio frequencies.
- They are only found in galaxies that have supermassive blackholes which power these bright discs. However, 90 per cent of them do not emit strong radio waves, making this newly-discovered one special.
- Most active galaxies have a supermassive black hole at the centre which sucks in surrounding objects. Quasars are formed by the energy emitted by materials spiralling around a blackhole right before being sucked into it.
- Named P172+18, the quasar emitted wavelengths which had a redshift of 6.8. Only three other ‘radio-loud’ sources with redshift greater than six have been discovered so far and the most distant one had a redshift of 6.18. The higher the redshift of the radio wavelength, the farther away is the source.

- Moreover, this particular quasar appears to the scientists as it was when the universe was just around 780 million years old. The glowing disc around a blackhole 300 million times more massive than our Sun, thus, holds clues about the ancient star systems and astronomical bodies.
- It is also one of the fastest accreting quasars, which means it is accumulating objects from the galaxy at an enormous speed. This has led team that discovered it to infer that the blackhole at its centre is consuming from its galaxy at a stunning rate.
- The scientists think that the powerful radio jets shooting out of the quasar fuelled the appetite of the blackhole. The jets are thought to be capable of disturbing the gas around the black hole, increasing the rate at which gas falls in.
- A detailed study of these ‘radio-loud’ superbright objects can lead astronomers to understanding how the supermassive blackholes in their core grew to be as big so rapidly since the Big Bang.
- The team believes that more such quasars that tell stories about the ancient universe will be found, perhaps even farther away from earth.

### Air Independent Propulsion Technology

#### News Excerpt

Recently, the strategically important Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) crucial for diesel electric submarines, being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), achieved a key milestone by undergoing further land-based tests in tune with requirements of the Indian Navy. The Defense Ministry said that the technology has reached ‘maturity’ to be fitted on submarines.

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#### Analytica

- The system is being developed by DRDO’s Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL), located at Ambernath in Thane district of Maharashtra.
- Indian Navy has both conventional and nuclear submarines in its arsenal. The fleet of conventional submarines use diesel-electric engines, which require them to surface almost daily to get atmospheric oxygen for fuel combustion.
- With the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system on board, these submarines will be required to surface much less frequently, thus increasing their lethality and stealth multifold.
- Similar tests of the AIP prototype were conducted back in October 2019.
- While nuclear-powered submarines are considered as key assets for deep sea operations, the conventional diesel electric ones are vital for coastal defence and operations close to the shore.
- The indigenously-developed AIP, which is one of the key missions of the NMRL, is considered one of the ambitious projects of the DRDO for the Navy.
- The project aims at fitting the technology on India’s Scorpene class submarine INS Kalvari around 2023. While there are different types of AIP systems being pursued internationally, fuel cell-based AIP of NMRL is unique as the hydrogen is generated onboard.
- The technology has been successfully developed with the support of industry partners L&T and Thermax. It has now reached the stage of maturity for fitment into target vessels.

### US India Artificial Intelligence (USIAI) Initiative

#### News Excerpt

The Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) has launched a ‘US-India Artificial Intelligence Initiative’ for cooperation in priority areas for both countries.

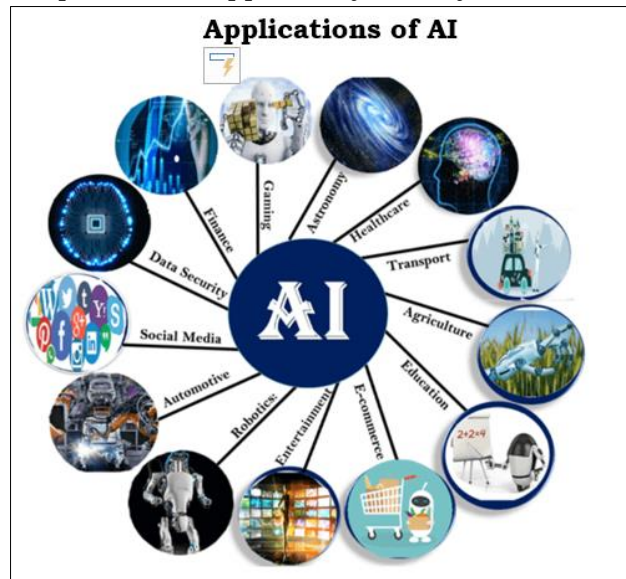
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#### Analytica

- USIAI will serve as a platform to discuss opportunities, challenges and barriers for bilateral R&D collaboration, enable AI innovation, share ideas for developing an AI workforce, and recommend mechanisms for catalysing partnerships.



- Research, technology in artificial intelligence is being promoted and implemented in the country through a network of 25 technology hubs working as a triple helix set up under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems.
- The initiative focuses on AI cooperation in critical areas that are priorities for both countries. The U.S.-India AI Initiative will provide an opportunity for key stakeholder groups to share experiences, identify new R&D areas and opportunities that would benefit from synergistic activities, discuss the emerging AI landscape, and address the challenges of developing an AI workforce.
- The ambitious flagship initiative, USIAI, leverages IUSSTF's unique ability to bring together key stakeholders from India and the United States to create synergies that address challenges and opportunities at the interface of science, technology, and society.
- Over the next year, IUSSTF will conduct a series of roundtables and workshops to gather input from different stakeholder communities and prepare White Papers that identify technical, research, infrastructure, and workforce opportunities and challenges, and domain-specific opportunities for R&D in healthcare, smart cities, materials, agriculture, energy, and manufacturing.



**Artificial Intelligence**

- Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think like humans and mimic their actions.
- The term may also be applied to any machine that exhibits traits associated with a human mind such as learning and problem-solving.
- A subset of artificial intelligence is machine learning, which refers to the concept that computer programs can automatically learn from and adapt to new data without being assisted by humans.
- Deep learning techniques enable this automatic learning through the absorption of huge amounts of unstructured data such as text, images, or video.

**First moving supermassive black hole**

**News Excerpt**

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

**Highlights**

- According to a paper published in The Astrophysical Journal, the black hole was travelling within its own galaxy, J0437+2456, which is around 228 million light years away from Earth.
- According to scientists, spotting a black hole in motion was surprising even though the phenomenon always existed in theory.
- Besides the empirical evidence, the enormous size of these black holes had led people to imagine them to be stationary objects planted in the middle of galaxies as opposed to object floating around in space.
- The team of scientists was studying whether velocities of black holes are same as that of the galaxies they reside in. They studied 10 faraway galaxies with supermassive black holes in the centre. They expect them to have the same velocity. If they don't, that implies the black hole has been disturbed.

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- The focus of their study was the water in the accretion disk — the spiralling mass around a supermassive black hole made of matter that is eventually ingested by the black hole.
- As the water circles around the black hole before falling into it like liquid in a sink it produces a laser-like beam of radio light known as a maser. These masers can tell the velocity of black holes very accurately.
- They used radio antennas placed at great distances from each other to form a giant reception net for masers emitting from the roving black hole. Then, using a technique called very long baseline interferometry (VLBI) they calculated the velocities of the 10 black holes under survey.
- Only one, whose velocities didn't match with the other objects in the host galaxy, stood out.
- The study noted that the supermassive black hole is moving with a speed of about 110,000 miles per hour (177,027.84 kilometre per hour) inside the galaxy J0437+2456.”.
- The scientists are not sure what is causing this motion but they have narrowed down on two possibilities: Two black holes merging and a binary system of blackholes. Researchers might have spotted the resulting black hole moving in a rearward motion after the merger before settling down in a position.
- The second, more exciting theory is that of a binary black hole system where not one but two supermassive black holes might exist within the host galaxy held together by a shared centre of gravity, which they might be orbiting.
- The team said that the twin of the newly-discovered wandering black hole might not be emitting masers, keeping it from being detected by the radio antenna network.

## Genome Mapping in the Indian Ocean

### News Excerpt

A 30-member team of scientists and researchers from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in Panaji and another 30 crew members onboard its research vessel Sindhu Sadhana will spend the next three months traversing the course of over 10,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean on a research project to reveal the internal working of the body of the ocean at a cellular level.

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### Highlights

- The first-of-its-kind research project in the country is aimed at understanding the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.
- Conceptualised over the last two to three years, the research project has been undertaken at a cost of Rs 25 crore and will take three years to complete.

### Analytica

- The research project that will be flagged off at Visakhapatnam will see the team of 30 scientists and researchers — including six women — course the Indian Ocean from India's east coast, all the way to Australia, then onward towards Port Louis in Mauritius and up to the border of Pakistan, off India's west coast, gathering samples for genome mapping of microorganisms in the Indian Ocean.
- The researchers will collect samples from various stretches of the ocean at an average depth of about 5 km.
- Just like gene mapping is carried out on blood samples collected from humans, the scientists will map these in the bacteria, microbes found in the ocean.
- The mapping of the Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and Ribonucleic acid (RNA) will show the nutrients present in them, and also those lacking in different parts of the ocean.

### Expected Outcomes of the Study

- ✓ It will help scientists understand the internal working of the ecosystem of the Indian Ocean.
- ✓ The research will enable scientists to identify the factors controlling the changes in RNA, DNA in the oceans, and various stressors impacting them.

- ✓ The ocean has several micronutrients like nitrates, sulphates and silicates, minerals like iron ore and zinc, and trace metals like cadmium or copper. The genome mapping will show the presence of which these microbes have adapted to, in addition to their reaction to atmospheric carbon dioxide. This will help in identifying which part of the ocean has a greater concentration of which mineral or element.
- ✓ Scientists will then use these as tracers to tackle the causative factors for excess or lack of a certain mineral or element and suggest possible solutions for their mitigation.
- ✓ In addition, the large pool of RNA, DNA library of the oceans will be utilised for using the Indian Ocean to human benefit in the future.
- ✓ According to the NIO, rapid advances in sequencing technologies and bioinformatics have enabled exploration of the ocean genome. Exploring the ocean genome will enable an increase in the growing number of commercial biotechnology applications, extending from multiple anticancer treatments to cosmetics and industrial enzymes, to antiviral molecules etc.
- ✓ Exploration of the ocean at a genetic level will result in new insights into taxonomy and adaptive capacity that can help optimize conservation efforts.

### What is the objective of studying the interactions of trace metals and marine plant and animal life?

- Trace metals like cadmium or copper are supplied to oceans via continental run-offs, atmospheric deposition, hydrothermal activities and continental shelf interaction. They are essential for ocean productivity.
- Scientists say that it is important to understand the interactions of trace metals with marine biota “for having a holistic understanding about nutrient cycling and productivity of the oceans”.
- Apart from their reactions on marine life, isotopic forms of trace metals can be utilised to track the movement of water masses responsible for ocean circulation and as tools to study the biological, geochemical and ecosystem processes and food web analyses.
- The NIO’s project is expected to generate new information about trace metals from underexplored regions of the Indian Ocean, the third largest water body in the world, covering about 20 per cent of the Earth’s water surface.



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## SECURITY

### The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) and Sarang helicopter

#### News Excerpt

Recently, the Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) and Sarang helicopter display team along with the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) has performed at an air show at Galle Face in Colombo as part the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF).

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#### The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT)

- The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT), also known as 52 Squadron or The Sharks, is based in Bidar.
- The team was born in 1996 with Kiran Mk-II aircraft and had enthralled spectators across the country till 2011.
- It was revived in 2015 with Hawk trainers initially with four aircraft and grew to the nine aircraft formation.
- Since its inception, the SKAT team has carried out over 600 displays all around the country, it has also represented India across southeast Asia including China.
- The team currently has 13 pilots and is led by Group Captain Anoop Singh.

#### Sarang Helicopter Display Team

- The Sarang team flies four indigenously built ALH Dhruv helicopters painted in red and white and a peacock figure at the each side of the fuselage. It was formed in 2002 and coincidentally the first public display was on February 23, 2004 during Asian Aerospace at Singapore.
- It has the unique distinction of being one of the two operational helicopter display teams in the world, the other being 'Blue Eagles' of the British Army.
- The team, initially located in Kolar, was formally christened in October 2003 as 'Sarang' (peacock in Sanskrit) and was accorded a new identity as 151 Helicopter Unit (HU) in June 2004. In April 2005, 151 HU was relocated at Air Force Station at Yelahanka, north of Bangalore. In late 2009, for operational compulsion, 151 HU was moved to the Air Force Station at Sulur, near Coimbatore.

### EX Desert FLAG VI

#### News Excerpt

For the first time ever, Indian Air Force is participating in Exercise Desert Flag-VI in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

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#### Pre-Connect

- It is for the first time ever that IAF will be taking part in an air drill at a multilateral level and in the Gulf Region.
- The IAF has in the last five years participated in multilateral drills. These include in 2016 the American 'Red Flag'; the Israeli 'Blue Flag' in 2017 and the Australian 'Pitch Black' drill in 2018.

#### Highlights

- Ex Desert Flag is an annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates Air Force.
- The Indian Air Force is participating for the first time in Exercise Desert Flag-VI along with air forces of United Arab Emirates, United States

#### Exercise DUSTLIK II

Recently, the second edition of India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise "DUSTLIK II" was commences in Chaubatia, Ranikhet (Uttarakhand).

The broad aim of the exercise is Counter Insurgency (CI) and Counter Terrorism (CT) operations in mountainous, rural and urban scenarios under United Nations (UN) mandate.

Uzbekistan is important to India for security and connectivity to Central Asian region and also Iran, it is also one alternative India has with respect to Afghanistan.



- of America, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Bahrain.
- The aim of the exercise is to provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.
- Besides the maritime cooperation with the Gulf countries, India has also been focusing on enhancing cooperation in the air Force as well as the Army level.
- The participating forces will get an opportunity to enhance their operational capabilities along with mutual exchange of best practices.

**Analytica**

- ✓ The large-scale exercise involving diverse fighter aircraft from across the globe will provide the participating forces, including IAF, a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, experience, enhance operational capabilities and interoperability.
- ✓ Exercising and interaction with the participating nations in a dynamic and realistic warfare environment will also contribute to strengthen international relations.
- ✓ Over the last decade, IAF has regularly hosted and participated in multi-national operational exercises, wherein collaborative engagements are undertaken amongst the best air forces of the world.
- ✓ According to experts being part of such a drill will also boost international relations.

**France conducts first military exercises in space**

**News Excerpt**

France has begun its first military exercises in space to test its ability to defend its satellites, in a sign of the growing competition between world powers in Earth's orbit.

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**Pre-Connect**

- In 2017, a Russian “spy-satellite” had tried to approach a Franco-Italian satellite in what Paris called “an act of espionage.”
- In 2018, Russia’s Olymp-K attempted to intercept transmissions from the Athena-Fidus satellite which is used by both Italian and French armies for secure communications.
- Last year, Washington accused Russia of having “conducted a non-destructive test of an anti-satellite weapon from space.”
- The French Space Forces Command, Commandement de l'Espace (CdE) was created in 2019 and is set to have 500 personnel by 2025.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
IndSpaceEx., Mission Shakti

**Highlights**

- The exercise, codenamed "AsterX" in memory of the first French satellite Asterix from 1965.
- The exercises are part of France's strategy to become the world's third-largest space power, after the US and China.
- These space military exercises are the first for the French army and even a first in Europe.
- France also planned to develop anti-satellite laser weapons and to strengthen surveillance capabilities in an area that it believes could become a major theater of confrontation between powers on Earth.
- During the drill, the French military will monitor a potentially dangerous space object as well as a threat to its own satellite from another foreign power possessing a considerable space force.
- Along with France, the new US Space Force and German space agencies are taking part in the exercises.

## INS Karanj

### News Excerpt

Recently, Indian Navy’s third stealth Scorpene class Submarine INS Karanj has been commissioned at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai.

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### Pre-Connect

- The earlier version of the submarine, which belonged to the Foxtrot class, was first commissioned in 1969 at Riga in the erstwhile USSR, had played a key role during the 1970-71 Indo-Pak war.
  - The INS Karanj went on to serve the nation for 34 years till 2003.
- Six Scorpene Class submarines are being built in India by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) Mumbai, under collaboration with M/s Naval Group, France.
- 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.
- This year is being celebrated as the ‘Swarnim Vijay Varsh’ which marks 50 years of 1971 Indo – Pak war.

### Highlights

- INS Karanj is Indian Navy's third Scorpene-class conventional diesel electric submarine to be inducted into service.
- INS Karanj would form part of the Western Naval Command’s Submarine fleet and would be another potent part of the Command’s arsenal.
- Karanj has been equipped with the best sensors in the world and is fitted with an integrated platform management system to provide centralised propulsion and machinery control. The powerful diesel engines can quickly charge batteries for a stealthy mission profile. Also, its modular construction enables upgradation to air independent propulsion in future.
- She is fitted with a permanent magnetic synchronous motor, making it one of the quietest submarines in the world.
- The induction of Karanj is another step towards the Indian Navy, consolidating its position as a builder’s Navy, as also is a reflection of MDL’s capabilities as a premier ship and submarine building yard of the world.
- Project – 75 also marks a critical milestone in the Yard’s continued importance in the field of Defence Production.

### What are Scorpene-class submarines?

- ✓ The Scorpene Submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world. These platforms are equipped with the latest technologies in the world. More deadly and stealthier than their predecessors, these submarines are equipped with potent weapons and sensors to neutralise any threat above or below the sea surface.
- ✓ The Indian Navy intends to use the submarines for missions such as area surveillance, intelligence gathering, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare and minelaying operations.

**Project 75:** 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.

## ART & CULTURE

### Anangpal II

#### News Excerpt

The government has recently formed a committee to popularize the legacy of 11th-century Tomar king, Anangpal II.

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#### Highlights

- Anangpal II, popularly known as AnangpalTomar, belonged to the Tomar dynasty that ruled parts of present-day Delhi and Haryana between the 8th and 12th centuries.
- The capital of Tomars was Dhillikapuri (Delhi) during the reign of Anangpal II.
  - Initially at Anangpur (near Faridabad) during the reign of Anangpal I (who founded the Tomar dynasty in the 8th century).
- AnangpalTomar II was succeeded by his grandson Prithviraj Chauhan.
- The Delhi Sultanate was established in 1192 after Prithviraj Chauhan’s defeat in the Battle of Tarain (present-day Haryana) by the Ghurid forces.

#### His connection with Delhi

- ✓ Anangpal II is credited to have established and populated Delhi during his reign in the 11th century.
- ✓ The region was in ruins when he ascended the throne in the 11th century; it was he who built Lal Kot fort (Qila Rai Pithora) and Anang Tal Baoli (in South Delhi).
- ✓ The Tomar rule over the region (present-day Delhi and Haryana) is attested by multiple inscriptions and coins.
  - The most reliable evidence about the early history of Delhi is inscribed on the iron pillar of Masjid Quwaatul Islam, adjacent to the Qutab Minar.
  - According to this inscription, Anangpal of the TomarRajputs founded Delhi between 1053 and 1109 AD.
- ✓ According to KA Nizami’s Urdu book, Ehd-e-WustakiDilli, translated in English as Delhi in Historical Perspectives, looks at Delhi across six centuries (from 1300 to 1800). Tracing the antecedents of Delhi, Nizami refers to Persian annals that describe it as “Inderpat”.
- ✓ According to KA Nizami’s Urdu book, Delhi formally emerged as a city only in the 11th century when TomarRajputs took over the mountainous Aravalli region.

**About Tomar Dynasty:** Tomara (also called Tomar, Tanwar and Tuar) is a Hindu clan, the members of which ruled parts of North India at different times. Anangpal I founded the Tomar dynasty in the 8th century. Their ancestry can be traced to the Pandavas (of the Mahabharata).

The Tomara dynasty of Delhi lasted till AnangpalTomar-II. Part of his legacy was the construction of Lal Kot, a fortified wall around Delhi, likely in reaction to the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni. This is one of the oldest defence structures in Delhi.

The Tomar rule over the region (present-day Delhi and Haryana) is attested by multiple inscriptions and coins.

A 13th century inscription states that the Tomaras ruled the Hariyanaka (Haryana) country before the Chahamanas and the Shakas (Muslims in this context).

### Kathakali maestro Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair

#### News Excerpt

Recently, Veteran Kathakali exponent Guru ChemancheriKunhiramanNairdied at the age of 105in Koyilandy, Kerala.

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#### Highlights

- Guru ChemancheriKunhiraman Nair was Born on June 16, 1916.
- He had relentless journey for nearly nine decades with his specialization in “Kalladikodan” style in Kathakali.

- Originally, the 3 major styles of Kathakali were VettathuSampradayam, KalladikkodanSampradyam and KaplingaduSampradayam. But these styles then narrowed down to northern (Kalluvazhi) and southern (Thekkan) styles.
- Kalladikodan style gives equal importance to the three aspects of nritta (pure dance where body movements do not express any mood (bhava), nor do they convey any meaning), nritya (expressional, performed specifically to convey the meaning of a theme or idea) and natya (the dramatic element of the dance).
- He could not study beyond the primary level and was more drawn to the classical dance form.
- ChemancheriKunhiraman Nair’s tryst with Kathakali, the ancient dance drama of Kerala, began at the age of 14, when he left his home to join a kathakali troupe run by Guru Karunakaran Menon.
- After years of practice and hard work, he founded BharatiyaNatyakalalayam in 1945, which was the first school of dance in north Kerala and later went on to establish several other dance schools, including the Cheliya Kathakali Vidyalayam(1983) in his native village.
- His portrayal of Lord Krishna and Kuchela on stage always left the audience spellbound and his last notable public performance was at the age of 100.
- He had been honoured with the Padma Shree in 2017 in recognition of his glorious contribution to the art form.
- Several awards and recognitions came his way over the years including that of the Kerala Sangeeta NatakaAkademi and Kerala Kalamandalam.

**PEPPER IT WITH**  
Classical dance forms of India

**About Kathakali:**Kathakali is one among the eight classical dances of India. Kathakali is a blend of dance, music and acting and dramatizes stories, which are mostly adapted from the Indian epics.

It is a stylised art form, the four aspects of abhinaya - angika, aharya,vachika, satvika and the nritta, nritya and natya aspects are combined perfectly.

The dancer expresses himself through codified hastamudras and facial expressions, closely following the verses(padams) that are sung. Kathakali derives its textual sanction from Balarama BharatamandHastalakshana Deepika.

Kathakali is a visual art where aharya, costume and make-up are suited to the characters, as per the tenets laid down in the Natya Shastra.

**Ahom general Lachit Borphukan**

**News Excerpt**

Recently, The Prime Minister called 17th century Ahom general LachitBorphukan a symbol of India’s “atmanirbhar” military might.

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**Highlights**

- Born on November 24, 1622, Borphukan was known for his leadership in the 1671 battle of Saraighat that defeated an attempt by Mughal forces to capture Assam.
- The battle of Saraighat was fought on the banks of the Brahmaputra in Guwahati.
  - They used guerrilla tactics, military intelligence, psychological warfare, and exploited the only weakness of the Mughal army, that is the navy.
- The Ahom general had died on April 25, 1672, two centuries before the starting of India’s freedom struggle.
- The National Defence Academy (NDA), ever since 1999 has been conferring the best passing out cadet with the LachitBorphukan gold medal,' named after soldier LachitBorphukan.

**About the Ahom kingdom**

- ChaolungSukapha a 13th-century ruler who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled Assam for six centuries. Contemporary scholars trace his roots to Burma.
- It was in Charaideo that Sukapha established his first small principality, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.



- With the defeat of the Burmese after the First Anglo-Burmese War and the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, control of the kingdom passed into East India Company hands.

### Why is Sukapha important?

- Sukapha’s significance — especially in today’s Assam — lies in his successful efforts towards assimilation of different communities and tribes. He is widely referred to as the architect of “BorAsom” or “greater Assam”.
- Sukapha developed very amiable relationships with the tribal communities living here — especially the Sutias, the Morans and the Kacharis. Intermarriage also increased assimilation processes.
- To commemorate Sukapha and his rule, Assam celebrates “Asom Divas” on December 2 every year.

### Analytica

- ✓ The founders of the Ahom kingdom had their own language and followed their own religion. Over the centuries, the Ahoms accepted the Hindu religion and the Assamese language.
- ✓ The Tai-Ahom ethnic community, seen as the descendants of the Ahom dynasty who reside in Upper Assam, represent Assamese sub-nationalism.
- ✓ Today, the Ahom community is estimated to number between 4 million and 5 million.

## Shigmo Festival/ Shigmotsav

### News Excerpt

With a rise in Covid-19 cases in the state, the Goa government has limited the Shigmo festivities/ Shigmotsavparades to three locations only – Panaji, Ponda and Mapusa.

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### Highlights

- The Shigmo festival, also known as Shigmotsav, is one of the most popular spring festivals that take place in Goa every year. It is a vibrant celebration full of colour, song and dance rooted in Goan culture and traditions.
- Shigmo is the celebration of a ‘rich, golden harvest of paddy’ by the tribal communities of Goa.
- Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.
- Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

### Activities take place during the Shigmocelebrations

- ✓ The festival begins with ‘Naman’ that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village ‘maand’ or the village stage to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.
  - This is called the ‘romta mell’ that moves from one village to another.
- ✓ The celebration is replete with traditional, colourful costumes, mythological installations, painted faces and costumes of various hues.
- ✓ Folk dances like Ghodemodini (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi are among the many dances performed by the participating communities.

## Miscellaneous

### Self Help Groups (SHGs) Award Function

National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) National Awards are intended to provide public recognition to the outstanding performance of the community institutions- Self-Help Groups and Village Organizations promoted under DAY-NRLM.

30 SHGs and 10 VO's from different states were shortlisted for the awards.

The event witnessed the launch of 4 e-books showcasing thematic collection of success stories and case studies. A brief about the e-books that were launched are mentioned below-

1. A compendium of Livelihood Best Practices
2. A compendium of FNHW case studies
3. Covid-19 response by Women SHG warriors
4. Culinary Wonders from Grameen Bharat

**Self-help groups:** Self-help groups are informal groups of people (10-25 members) who come together to address their common problems. Members are usually women from similar social and economic backgrounds, all voluntarily coming together to save small sums of money, on a regular basis.

SHGs promote small savings among their members. The savings are kept with the bank. This is the common fund in the name of the SHG. The SHG gives small loans to its members from its common fund.

**Aajeevika - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** It was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India in June 2011.

The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor, enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.

In November 2015, the program was renamed Deendayal Antayodaya Yojana (DAY-NRLM). DAY-NRLM covers more than 7.3 crore women who have been organised into their institutions and supported for credit linkage and livelihoods activities.

### Sangay volcano erupts

Recently, Ecuador's Sangay volcano erupted, spewing clouds of ash as high as 8,500 meters (about 28, 890 feet) into the sky. The ash spurted from the volcano has damaged crops and cattle in several areas.

- Sangay has had frequent eruptions in historic times, mostly of strombolian type.
- Ecuador, part of the Pacific Rim's "Ring of Fire" region, has eight volcanoes in its territory.

Sangay volcano is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world and one of Ecuador's most active ones. Located isolated east of the Andean crest, with its perfect steep cone shape and glacier-covered top, it towers majestically at 5230 m high above the Amazonian rainforest. The volcano is located in a jungle in the Morona Santiago province.

- The Andes is the longest mountain range in the world and boasts some of the highest peaks. The range is also known for its volcanoes.

Due to its remoteness, Sangay hosts a significant biological community. Since 1983, its ecological community has been protected as part of the Sangay National Park. The park has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983.

### Sinabung volcano unleashes new burst

Recently, Indonesia's Mount Sinabung, on the island of Sumatra was shooting smoke and ash as high as 1,000 meters (3,280 feet) into the air and hot ash clouds traveled up to 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) southeast.

Sinabung is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific Ring of Fire, an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

- The Ring of Fire is home to about 75 per cent of the world's volcanoes and about 90 per cent of its earthquakes.

Mount Sinabung's activity has increased since August last year and the alert for the volcano in North Sumatra province has been placed at second highest level.

- Sinabung had been inactive for centuries before it erupted again in 2010.

### King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), has received the prestigious International King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award conferred by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Rome.

- The Award was announced on the eve of World Soil Day - 2020 in view of the ICAR's excellent contributions in "Soil Health Awareness" on the theme "Stop soil erosion, save our future".
- Launched in 2018, the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award acknowledges individuals or institutions that raise public awareness of soils by organising successful and influential World Soil Day celebrations. The award, sponsored by the Kingdom of Thailand, is named after King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand for his lifelong commitment to raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management and rehabilitation for food security, poverty alleviation and more.
- The Former winners of the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award include Practical Action in Bangladesh in 2018 and the Costa Rican Soil Science Society (AACCS) in 2019.

### Gandhi Peace Prize

Recently, the Culture Ministry announced that the father of the nation of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the late Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said Al Said, would be awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 and 2019 respectively.

#### **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman:**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was chosen in "recognition of his outstanding contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods".

He was a champion of human rights and freedom, and is a hero to Indians as well.

The legacy and inspiration of Bangabandhu has made the heritage of both countries more comprehensive and deep-rooted, and that the path shown by Bangabandhu has laid a strong foundation for the partnership, progress and prosperity of both countries over the last decade.

#### **Qaboos bin Said Al Said:**

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was a visionary leader whose twin policy of moderation and mediation in addressing international issues won him praise and respect across the globe. H.M. Sultan Qaboos was the architect of the special ties between India and Oman.

He had studied in India and always maintained a special relationship with India.

The Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 recognizes his leadership in strengthening the ties between India and Oman and his efforts to promote peace in the Gulf region.

**Gandhi Peace Prize Awards:** Gandhi Peace Prize Awards is for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence was instituted in the year 1995. The Award comprises an amount of Rs. One Crore and a Citation.

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 open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or gender.

**Selection Committee:** the jury, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprising the Chief Justice of India, the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak.

### Shaheed Diwas

Prime Minister of India paid homage to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru on Shaheed Diwas (23 March). It was on this day that Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed by the British government.

- March 23 is observed as Shaheed Diwas/ Martyrs' Day to pay tribute to the trio who were hanged for killing British police officer J.P. Saunders. The trio wanted to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.
- Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were tried and then executed for fatally shooting a 21-year-old British police officer by the name of John Saunders, whom

they had mistaken for British police superintendent James Scott, whom they had originally targeted. The trio believed Scott was responsible for the death of the popular nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai, who succumbed to injuries sustained during a lathi charge.

- While Singh, who had publicly announced avenging Rai's death, went into hiding for many months after this shootout, he resurfaced along with an associate BatukeshwarDutt, and the two, in April 1929, set off two explosive devices inside the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi, and then allowed themselves to be arrested, while shouting the famous slogan: "Inquilab Zindabad", or "Long live the revolution".



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### Concept Clearing Assignment

1. Continuance of the reservation provisions nurtures question on universal utilization of limited public resources. Discuss. Do you think there is need to refine, revise and improve reservation policy in India to achieve maximum social inclusion and harmony?
2. What does it mean to be a transgender in the Indian context? Highlight the challenges faced by transgender community in India? Suggest measures to enrich relationship of transgender with mainstream Indian society?
3. Highlight the causes associated with social media which make people anti-social. Analyze in the light of recently released Guidelines Related to Social Media? Suggest Way forward?
4. Climate change will not be solved by one country but the efforts from each country is required. Elucidate. Do you think that it is already being too late to avoid destructive and irreversible changes in climate? Substantiate your views.
5. Do you think that establishment of independent environmental regulator will not only ease out the burden of litigation on judiciary but also assures environmental protection? What kinds of more efforts are required to sustain economic growth without having implications on environment?
6. Explain the ominous objectives of the Vehicle Scrapping Policy of India. Also bring out issues, challenges and opportunities related to it. Give suitable examples.
7. The Human-elephant conflict is a major conservation concern in India? Suggest way forward to minimize the instances of Human-elephant conflict?
8. Digitization has permeated from urban regions to the rural pockets and even to the agricultural sector. Elucidate. Suggest ways which are required to ensure merchant's loss of privacy.
9. MSME sector is not only important from economic growth point of view but also with respect to entrepreneurship development especially in semi-urban and rural areas of India. Comment.
10. Not the employment but employability is the major problem for India. In this context, assess the role of Standardization of skill certification? Suggest measures for making Skill India programme a paradigm shift.
11. Why India strives to be a major stakeholder in the Afghan issue? Do you agree that India's engagement with Afghanistan has reduced the strategic depth for Pakistan in the region? What should be India's approach in this regard?
12. Discuss the bilateral agreements between India and USA? Bring out challenges in terms of technology-sharing and co-production initiatives.
13. India's healthcare system is out of reach of millions of Indians owing to high costs and its limited reach across regions. In this context critically Analyze the potential of Ayushman Bharat Scheme in transforming rural healthcare system in India.
14. Explain the recent issues associated with SMS scrubbing? Highlight its impact on banking services.
15. Explain the contribution of Ahom general LachitBorphukan?

**P.T. Oriented Questions**

1. Consider the following statements regarding the 'refugee status' in India:

1. The State governments have no powers to grant refugee status to any foreigner.
2. India is founding signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. Recently, a report has been released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on global arms transfer regime. In this context, consider the following statements:

1. As per the report, India's top arms supplier during 2016-20 was France which accounting for more than 60% of India's imports.
2. According to the report, India accounted for 0.2% of the share of global arms exports during 2016-20.
3. The report has cited that India's arms imports fell by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

3. Which of the following countries have been joined the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project:

1. Iran
2. Azerbaijan
3. Turkey
4. Afghanistan

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

4. With reference to the Paris Agreement, consider the following statements:

1. The Paris Agreement requires each party to communicate their post-2020 climate actions.
2. In accordance with the Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, Each party requires to prepare and communicate nationally determined contributions (NDCs).
3. The Paris Agreement recognizes the long-term climate change goals specified by Gutenberg convention.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 2 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

5. Which of the following outcomes are likely to be the result of adoption of Vehicle Scrapping Policy by Government?

1. Increase in India's automobile industry's turnover
2. Reduction in the vehicular air pollutants
3. Reduction in the Goods and Services tax collection
4. Enhancing the availability of low-cost raw materials

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

6. With reference to the World Air Quality Report 2020, consider the following statements:

1. This report only includes PM2.5 data that has been reported by ground-based monitoring stations.
2. As per the report, almost every city in India observed air quality improvements as compared to the 2018 level.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only

- (c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. Which of the following can be cited as source for Indoor Air pollution?  
1. Fuels used for heating and cooking  
2. Badly installation of wood-burning units  
3. Use of Tobacco products  
4. Central cooling and heating systems  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
(a) 1, 2 and 3 only  
(b) 2, 3 and 4 only  
(c) 1, 3 and 4 only  
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
8. Which of the following type of clearances are required for the interlinking of river projects?  
1. Techno-economic clearance given by the Central Water Commission.  
2. Forest Clearance by central empowered committee of Prime minister's office.  
3. Resettlement and Rehabilitation Plan of Tribal Population by Ministry of Tribal Affairs.  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
(a) 1 and 2 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only  
(c) 1 and 3 only  
(d) 1, 2 and 3
9. Consider the following statements regarding Sea-Buckthorn Plantations:  
1. It is a shrub which produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry.  
2. In India, It is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region.  
3. It is a soil-binding plant which prevents soil-erosion, checks siltation in rivers and help to preserve floral biodiversity.  
Which of the statements given above are correct?  
(a) 1 and 2 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only  
(c) 1 and 3 only  
(d) 1, 2 and 3
10. Recently, the Project RE-HAB was seen in the news. It is related to-  
(a) Tiger  
(b) Crocodile  
(c) Elephant  
(d) None of the above
11. Consider the following statements regarding Indian Economy:  
1. The Indian economy witnessed its first ever technical recession in the year 2020.  
2. The GDP contracted by a more than 48.56 per cent in the first quarter of the last fiscal.  
3. A technical recession is the term usually refers to back-to-back contractions in real GDP.  
Which of the statements given above are correct?  
(a) 1 and 3 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only  
(c) 1 and 2 only  
(d) 1, 2 and 3
12. Consider the following statements:  
1. The Indian Government has allowed FDI of up to 76% under the automatic route for port and harbour construction.  
2. India has 12 major and 205 notified minor and intermediate ports.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
13. The Micro-Small and Medium enterprises (MSME) Credit Health Index were launched by which of the following?  
(a) NITI Aayog  
(b) Finance Ministry  
(c) Reserve Bank of India  
(d) None of the above
14. With reference to the emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECGLS), consider the following statements:  
1. It was introduced by the Government to mitigate the economic distress faced by MSMEs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.  
2. Under ECLGS 3.0, the tenor of loans granted under the scheme will be for 60 years including a moratorium period of 7-8 years.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
15. Which of the following can be cited as eligibility criteria to set up Small Finance Banks?  
1. Resident individuals and professionals with 10 years of experience in banking and finance  
2. Companies and societies owned and controlled by residents  
3. Existing Non-Banking Finance Companies  
4. Local Area Banks that are owned and solely controlled by foreigners  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
(a) 1, 2 and 3 only  
(b) 2, 3 and 4 only  
(c) 1 and 4 only  
(d) 2 and 3 only
16. Consider the following statements regarding National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI):  
1. It is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.  
2. It operates various payment systems such as RuPay, NACH and UPI.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
17. A Space military exercise 'AsterX' was conducted by which of the following country?  
(a) China  
(b) Japan  
(c) India  
(d) France
18. Consider the following statements regarding Gandhi Peace Prize Awards:  
1. It is exclusively given to indigenous person regardless of race, language, caste, creed or gender.
2. Its Selection committee is headed by the president of India.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
19. The World Happiness Report 2021 is published by-  
(a) The United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network  
(b) The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
(c) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
(d) The World Bank group
20. Consider the following statements regarding Quasars:  
1. They are very luminous objects in faraway galaxies that emit jets at radio frequencies.  
2. They are only found in galaxies that have supermassive blackholes which power these bright discs.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
21. Consider the following statements regarding Reservation in India:  
1. The 99<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Act of 2018 inserted Articles 338B, which deals with the structure, duties and powers of the National Commission for Backward Class.  
2. In Indira Sawhney case the Supreme Court has capped the reservations limit at 50%.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
22. Which of the following rights can be exercised by an Arrested person?  
1. Right to be examined by a Medical Practitioner  
2. Right of the accused to produce evidence



3. Right to know the Grounds of Arrest  
4. Right to Silence  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
(a) 1, 3 and 4 only  
(b) 2, 3 and 4 only  
(c) 1 and 4 only  
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
23. Consider the following statements regarding the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991:  
1. It aims to freeze the status of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.  
2. 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.  
3. It provided that a person can convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.  
Which of the statements given above are correct?  
(a) 1 and 2 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only  
(c) 1 and 3 only  
(d) 1, 2 and 3
24. Consider the following statements regarding Tomar Dynasty:  
1. Anangpal I founded the Tomar dynasty in the 8th century.  
2. The battle of Saraighat led to the decline of Tomar dynasty.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
25. Consider the following statements regarding NikshayPoshan Yojana (NPY):  
1. The objective of the NPY direct benefit transfer scheme is to provide nutritional support to TB patients.  
2. Under the Scheme, the amount paid to the beneficiary is wholly given by Union Government.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
26. With reference to Manipuri Sankirtana, consider the following statements: (UPSC-2017)  
1. It is a song and dance performance.  
2. Cymbals are the only musical instruments used in the performance.  
3. It is performed to narrate the life and deeds of Lord Krishna.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1, 2 and 3  
(b) 1 and 3 only  
(c) 2 and 3 only  
(d) 1 only
27. Consider the following statements: (UPSC-2020)  
1. In terms of short-term credit delivery to the agriculture sector, District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) deliver more credit in comparison to Scheduled Commercial Banks and Regional Rural Banks  
2. One of the most important functions of DCCBs is to provide funds to the Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.  
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither It nor 2
28. Consider the following statements: (UPSC-2017)  
1. The Factories Act, 1881 was passed with a view to fix the wages of industrial workers and to allow the workers to form trade unions.  
2. N.M. Lokhande was a pioneer in organizing the labour movement in British India.  
Which of the above statements is/are correct?  
(a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

29. With reference to the Indian economy, consider the following statements: (UPSC-2020)

1. 'Commercial Paper' is a short-term unsecured promissory note.
2. 'Certificate of Deposit' is a long-term instrument issued by the Reserve Bank of India to a corporation.
3. 'Call Money' is a short-term finance used for interbank transactions.
4. 'Zero-Coupon Bonds' are the interest bearing short-term bonds issued by the Scheduled

Commercial Banks to corporations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 4 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 2, 3 and 4 only

30. With reference to Indian history, who among the following is a future Buddha, yet to come to save the world? (UPSC 2018)

- (a) Avalokiteshvara
- (b) Lokeshvara
- (c) Maitreya
- (d) Padmapani

**ANSWERS KEY**

1-A	11- A	21-B
2-A	12-B	22-D
3-B	13-D	23-A
4-C	14-A	24-A
5-C	15-A	25-A
6-C	16-C	26-B
7-D	17-D	27-B
8-C	18-D	28-B
9-D	19-A	29-C
10-C	20-C	30-C