



person, debtor, risk, rehabilitation, liquidation, analysis, insolvent, creditors, strategic bankruptcy, Consumer Protection, financial, business, law, management, debt restructuring, organization

BANKRUPTCY



CURRENT AFFAIRS

FORTNIGHTLY AUGUST 01 - 15

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1. ECONOMY

1. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment Bill), 2021

Why in News?

- The Rajya Sabha recently passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021 moved by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman by a voice vote.

About the News:

- The Bill is set to replace the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Amendment Ordinance 2021 promulgated in April 2021.
- It introduced an alternate insolvency resolution process for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with defaults up to Rs 1 crore called the Pre-packaged Insolvency Resolution Process (PIRP).
- In March 2021 a sub-committee of the Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) recommended a pre-pack framework within the basic structure of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016.

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code:

- It is a reform enacted in 2016. It amalgamates various laws relating to the insolvency resolution of business firms.
- It lays down clear-cut and faster insolvency proceedings to help creditors, such as banks, recover dues and prevent bad loans, a key drag on the economy.
 - ✓ **Insolvency:** It is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt.
 - ✓ **Bankruptcy:** It is a situation whereby a court of competent jurisdiction has declared a person or other entity insolvent, having passed appropriate orders to resolve it and protect the rights of the creditors. It is a legal declaration of one's inability to pay off debts.

Major Provisions of the bill:

- Distressed Corporate Debtors (CDs) are permitted to initiate a PIRP with the approval of two-thirds of their creditors to resolve their outstanding debt under the new mechanism.
 - ✓ A corporate debtor is a corporate person who owes debt to any other person.
- The PIRP also allows for a Swiss challenge to the resolution plan submitted by a CD in case operational creditors are not paid 100 % of their outstanding dues.
 - ✓ A Swiss Challenge is a method of bidding, often used in public projects, in which an interested party initiates a proposal for a contract or the bid for a project.

About PIRP:

- A pre-pack is the resolution of the debt of a distressed company through an agreement between secured creditors and investors instead of a public bidding process.
- This system of insolvency proceedings has become an increasingly popular mechanism for insolvency resolution in the UK and Europe over the past decade.
- Pre-packs are largely aimed at providing MSMEs with an opportunity to restructure their liabilities and start with a clean slate while still providing adequate protections so that the system is not misused by firms to avoid making payments to creditors.
- Unlike in the case of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), debtors remain in control of their distressed firm during the PIRP.
- Under the pre-pack system, financial creditors will agree to terms with a potential investor and seek approval of the resolution plan from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

Need of Pre-Packs:

- CIRP is a time taking resolution. At the end of December 2020, over 86% of the 1717 ongoing insolvency resolution proceedings had crossed the 270-day threshold.
- Under the IBC, stakeholders are required to complete the CIRP within 330 days of the initiation of insolvency proceedings.
- One of the key reasons behind delays in the CIRPs are prolonged litigations by erstwhile promoters and Potential Bidders.

What are the Key Features of Pre-Packs?

- **Insolvency Practitioner:** Pre-Pack usually requires services of an insolvency practitioner to assist the stakeholders in the conduct of the process. The extent of authority of the practitioner varies Across Jurisdictions.
- **Consensual Process:** It envisages a consensual process - prior understanding among or approval by stakeholders about the course of action to address stress of a CD, before invoking the formal part of the process.
- **No requirement of Court Approval:** It does not always require approval of a court. Wherever it requires approval, the courts often get guided by commercial wisdom of the parties. Outcome of the pre-pack process, where approved by the court, is binding on all stakeholders.

Benefits of Pre-Packs:

- **Quick resolution:** It is limited to a maximum of 120 days with only 90 days available to the stakeholders to bring the resolution plan to the NCLT. Besides offering a way for MSMEs

to restructure their debts, the pre-pack scheme could also reduce the burden on benches of the NCLT by offering a faster resolution mechanism than ordinary CIRPs.

- **Minimises Disruptions to the Business:** Existing management retains control in the case of pre-packs rather than resolution professionals in CIRP, hence avoids the cost of disruption of business and continues to retain employees, suppliers, customers, and investors.
- **Addresses the entire liability side:** PIRP will help CD to enter into consensual restructuring with lenders and address the entire liability side of the company.

Challenges of PIRP:

- **Raising additional capital:** Initially CDs may not raise additional capital or debt from Investors or Banks, because of the risk involved in recovering the money being provided by these Investors and lenders.
- **Small timeline:** Resolution Plan under PIRP is 90 days with an additional 30 days to AA (Adjudicating Authority) for support of the scheme. It is challenging for CoC (Committee of Creditors) members to decide on the Base resolution Plan within this short period without any broad parameters on which the Resolution Plan be approved.

Way Forward:

- While the PIRP is a timely effort to protect viable MSMEs, it is likely that operationalising it only for MSMEs now may just be the first step towards a sound Pre-pack and will lead to a much wider coverage in the future which, like the IBC, is expected to evolve with time and jurisprudence.
- The Government should consider setting up specific benches of the NCLT to deal with pre-pack resolution plans to ensure that they are implemented in a time-bound manner.

2. RBI Keeps Policy Rates unchanged for seventh time in a Row

Why in News?

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India, (RBI) based on an assessment of the evolving domestic and global macroeconomic and financial conditions and the outlook, voted unanimously to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 4%.

About the News:

- The MPC also decided on a 5 to 1 majority to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, while ensuring that inflation remains within the

target, going forward. The marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate remain unchanged at 4.25%. The reverse repo rate also remains unchanged at 3.35%.

- The projection of real GDP growth is retained at 9.5% in 2021-22 consisting of 21.4% in Q1; 7.3% in Q2; 6.3% in Q3; and 6.1% in Q4 of 2021-22. Real GDP growth for Q1:2022-23 is projected at 17.2%.

What are the optimistic Plans for Future?

- The Reserve Bank is optimistic about a pick-up in demand and expansion of business activity into financial year 2021-22.
- The juxtaposition of high frequency lead and coincident indicators reveals that economic activity is normalising in spite of the surge in infections.
- Rural demand remains buoyant and record agriculture production in 2020-21 bodes well for its resilience. Urban demand has gained traction and should get a fillip with the ongoing vaccination drive.

What are the Concerns?

- The recent surge in COVID-19 infections, however, adds uncertainty to the domestic growth outlook amidst tightening of restrictions by some state governments, he added.
- In India, we are now better prepared to meet the challenges posed by this resurgence in infections. Fiscal and monetary authorities stand ready to act in a coordinated manner to limit its spillovers to the economy at large and contain its fallout on the ongoing recovery.

What about Inflation?

- Headline CPI inflation edged up sharply to 6.3% in May and it may remain close to the upper tolerance band up to Q2:2021-22, but these pressures should ebb in Q3:2021-22 on account of kharif harvest arrivals and as supply side measures take effect.
- “Taking into consideration all these factors, CPI inflation is now projected at 5.7% during 2021-22: 5.9% in Q2; 5.3% in Q3; and 5.8% in Q4 of 2021-22, with risks broadly balanced.
- CPI inflation for Q1:2022-23 is projected at 5.1%.

What is Monetary Policy Committee?

- Strong recommendations to set monetary policy committee in India had come from Urjit Patel panel report.
- Monetary Policy Committee is an executive body of 6 members. Of these, three members are from RBI while three other members are nominated by the Central Government.

- Each member has one vote. In case of a tie, the RBI governor has casting vote to break the tie. MPC is required to meet for two days before deciding on rates. Further, it is needed to meet at least four times a year and make public its decisions following each meeting.
- The core mandate of MPC is to fix the benchmark policy interest rate {Repo Rate} to contain inflation within the target level.
- In that context, RBI is mandated to furnish necessary information to the MPC to facilitate its decision. Government also, if wishes to convey its views, can do so in writing to MPC.

Different Terminologies in Banking Sector:

- **Loan moratorium** period refers to a particular period of a loan tenure during which the borrower does not have repay anything. It can be described as a waiting period before the borrower will have to start paying the equated monthly instalments (EMIs) for his or her loan. It doesn't mean that he is completely waived off his loans.
- **REPO rate** (now 4%) denotes Re Purchase Option – the rate by which RBI gives loans to other banks. In other words, it is the rate at which banks buy back the securities they keep with the RBI at a later period.
- Bank gives loan to the public at a higher rate, often 1% higher than REPO rate, at a rate known as **Bank Rate**.
- RBI at times borrows from banks at a rate lower than REPO rate, and that rate is known as **Reverse REPO rate** (now 3.35%).
- **CRR or Cash Reserve Ratio** corresponds to the percentage of cash each bank have to keep as cash reserve with RBI (in their current accounts) corresponding to the deposits they have. For example, say if State Bank of India (SBI) got a total deposit of Rs. 1 crore with them, they need to keep 3 % of that as cash reserve with RBI (around 3 lakh rupees).
- The banks and other financial institutions in India have to keep a fraction of their total net time and demand liabilities in the form of liquid assets such as G-secs, precious metals, approved securities etc. The Ratio of these liquid assets to the total demand and time liabilities is called **Statutory Liquidity Ratio** (18%).

3. Economic Blockade on Mizoram Lifted

Why in News?

- The economic blockade on Mizoram was lifted by residents in Assam recently night after more than four hours of parley between them and two Assam Ministers and officials.

About the News:

- Nine goods trucks, stranded at Lailapur in southern Assam's Cachar district, proceeded to Mizoram on National Highway 306 after the residents were assured of justice for six Assam policemen and a civilian killed in firing allegedly by Mizoram police personnel and armed civilians on July 26.

What leads to these Clashes?

- The border between the two neighbouring states is an imaginary line that changes with the natural obstacles of rivers, hills, valleys and forests.
- People of Assam and Mizoram have attributed the border conflicts to the differences over this not-so-clear boundary. Hence, often people living in the border areas cross over to the other side as they are not fully aware of the border demarcation.

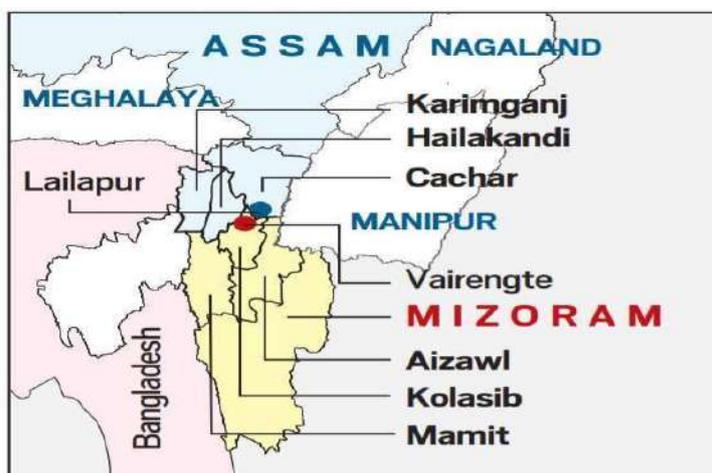
About Assam-Mizoram Boundary Dispute:

- At the heart of the dispute over the 165-km Assam-Mizoram boundary are two border demarcations that go back to the days of British colonial rule, and disagreement over which demarcation to follow. British tea plantations surfaced in the Cachar plains – the Barak Valley that now comprises the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj – during the mid-19th century.
- Their expansion led to problems with the Mizos whose home was the Lushai Hills. In August 1875, the southern boundary of Cachar district was issued in the Assam Gazette.
- The Mizos say this was the fifth time the British had drawn the boundary between the Lushai Hills and the Cachar plains, and the only time when it was done in consultation with Mizo chiefs.

Creation of New States:

- But in 1933, the boundary between Lushai Hills and the then princely state of Manipur was demarcated – it said the Manipur boundary began from the trijunction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district of Assam and Manipur state.
- The Mizos do not accept this demarcation, and point to the 1875 boundary which was drawn in consultation with their chiefs.

- In the decades after Independence, states and UTs were carved out of Assam – Nagaland (1963), Arunachal Pradesh (UT 1972, formerly NEFA), Meghalaya (UT 1972), Mizoram (UT 1972).



A Matter of Perception:

- Mizoram says Assam has been pushing its people 10-12 km inside their territory.
- Mizoram's official stand is that the boundary should be demarcated on the basis of notification in 1875 that distinguished the Lushai Hills (erstwhile district of Assam that became Mizoram) from the plains of Cachar.
- The notification is based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873, which makes it obligatory for Indians beyond to possess a travel document to enter Mizoram.
- Assam also has border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland.

4. Census Activities put off due to COVID-19

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has said in the Lok Sabha that owing to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, Census 2021 and other Census-related field activities have been postponed until further orders.

About the News:

- In Census, data is collected on demographic and various socio-economic parameters like education, SC/ST, religion, language, marriage, fertility, disability, occupation and migration of the individuals.
- The forthcoming Census is to be the first digital Census and there is a provision for self-enumeration.

- The Census exercise was to be conducted in two phases – House Listing and Housing Census from April to September 2020 and Population Enumeration from February 9 to February 28, 2021.
- The first phase of the Census and the updating of the National Population Register (NPR) were initially to be rolled out in some States on April 1, 2020, but were postponed due to the pandemic.

What is Census?

- The census provides information on size, distribution and socio-economic, demographic and other characteristics of the country's population.
- The Census was first started under British Viceroy Lord Mayo in 1872. It helped in framing new policies, government programs to uplift areas of improvement in the community.
- The first synchronous census in India was held in 1881. Since then, censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every ten years.

Who Conducts Census?

- The responsibility of conducting the decennial Census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- The Census is one of the most credible sources of information on the following:
 - ✓ Demography.
 - ✓ Economic Activity.
 - ✓ Literacy and Education.
 - ✓ Housing & Household Amenities.
 - ✓ Urbanization, Fertility, and Mortality.
 - ✓ Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
 - ✓ Language.

Historical Significance:

- 'Rig-Veda' reveals that some kind of population count was maintained during 800-600 BC in India.
- Arthashastra by 'Kautilya' written in the 3rd Century BC prescribed the collection of population statistics as a measure of state policy for taxation.
- During the regime of the Mughal king Akbar, the administrative report 'Ain-e-Akbari' included comprehensive data pertaining to population, industry, wealth and many other characteristics.

1.1 ECONOMY SNIPPETS

1. Strategic Petroleum Reserves

Why in News?

- Under Phase II of the petroleum reserve program, the Government has approved two additional commercial-cum-strategic facilities at Chandikhole (Odisha) and Padur (TN) on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves Programme:

- To ensure energy security, the govt had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storage at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore, and Padur (near Udipi).
- These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storage of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any supply disruptions.
- The petroleum reserves established are strategic, and the crude oil stored in these reserves will be used during an oil shortage event, as and when declared so by the Government of India. The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle.



Why need SPR?

- The Gulf War in 1990 caused a sharp rise in oil prices and a massive increase to India's imports.
- During the subsequent 1991 Indian economic crisis, foreign exchange reserves could barely finance three weeks' worth of imports while the government came close to defaulting on its financial obligations.
- India was able to resolve the crisis through policies that liberalized the economy. However, India continued to be impacted by the volatility of oil prices.
- In 1998, the AB Vajpayee administration proposed building petroleum reserves as a long-term solution to managing the oil market.

- Three storage facilities were built in underground locations in Mangalore, Visakhapatnam and Padur.

Construction of ISPR:

- The crude oil storages are constructed in underground rock caverns and are located on the East and West coasts of India.
- Crude oil from these caverns can be supplied to the Indian Refineries either through pipelines or through a combination of pipelines and coastal movement.
- Underground rock caverns are considered the safest means of storing hydrocarbons.

2. India-Indonesia CORPAT

Why in News?

- Recently, the 36th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (India-Indonesia CORPAT) between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy is being conducted.

Highlights:

- To reinforce maritime links, the two navies have been carrying out CORPAT along their International Maritime Boundary Line since 2002.
- Indian Naval Ship (INS) Saryu, an indigenously built Offshore Patrol Vessel is participating in the 36th edition along with Maritime Patrol Aircraft, to forge strong bonds of friendship across the Indo Pacific.
- It aims to Ensure safety and security of shipping and international trade in the region.
- CORPATs build up understanding and interoperability between navies and facilitate institution of measures to prevent and suppress Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and piracy.
- As part of Government of India's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region), the Indian Navy has been proactively engaging with countries in the Indian Ocean Region for coordinated patrols, cooperation in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance, passage exercises and bilateral/multilateral exercises.
- The main objective is towards enhancing regional Maritime Security.

3. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME)

Why in News?

- The report from TransUnion Cibil and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), there has recently been a growth in the credit outstanding amount of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector to Rs 20.21 lakh crore, with a year-on-year growth rate of 6.6%.

Highlights:

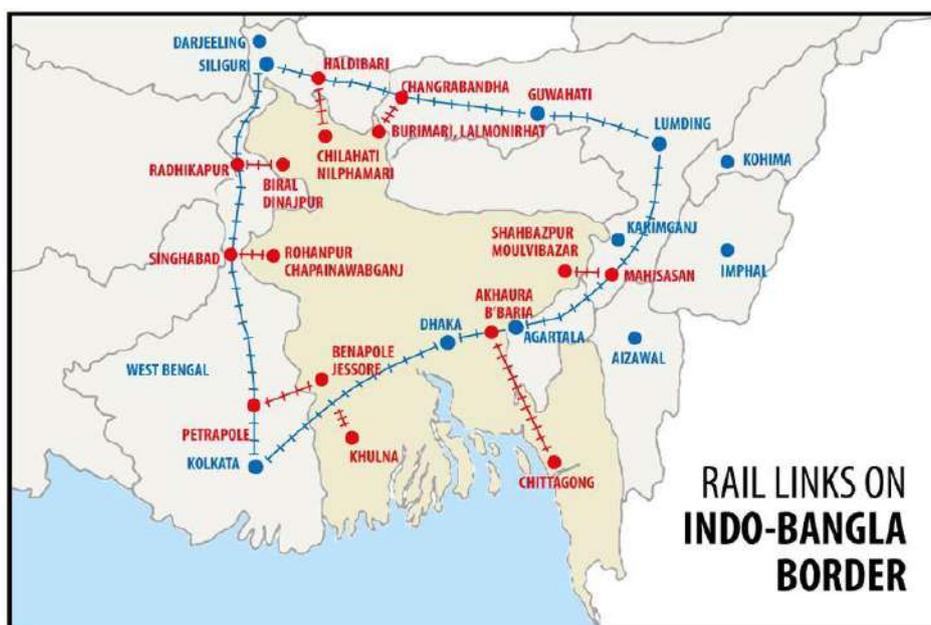
- Even according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), credit growth to micro and small industries accelerated to 6.4% in June 2021, compared to a contraction of 2.9% in 2020.
- SIDBI set up in April 1990 under an Act of Indian Parliament, acts as the Principal Financial Institution for Promotion, Financing and Development of the MSME sector as well as for coordination of functions of institutions engaged in similar activities.
- It is a credit information company operating in India. It maintains credit files on 600 million individuals and 32 million businesses.
- In Financial Year (FY) 2021, the country disbursed loans worth Rs 9.5 lakh crore to MSME sector, higher than preceding year of Rs 6.8 lakh crore in FY 2020.
- MSME credit outstanding has grown by 6.6% in March'21, with the micro segment growing the fastest at 7.4%
- Micro segment was followed by the small segment at 6.8% and medium segment at 5.8%.
- The Credit to agriculture and allied activities continued to perform well, registering an accelerated growth of 11.4% in June 2021, compared to 2.4% in June 2020.
- Within industry, credit to food processing, gems & jewellery, glass & glassware, leather & leather products, mining & quarrying, paper & paper products, rubber, plastic & their products, and textiles registered high growth in June 2021.
- The Credit growth to the services sector decelerated to 2.9% in June 2021, from 10.7% in June 2020, mainly due to contraction in credit growth to commercial real estate, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and tourism, hotels & restaurants.
- The Credit to trade segment continued to perform well, registering accelerated growth of 11.1% in June 2021 as compared to 8.1% a year ago.
- The rise in credit offtake by MSMEs is due to a host of government initiatives like the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to tackle the economic downturn created by the Covid pandemic.

- ECLGS scheme was launched as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package announced in May 2020 to mitigate the distress caused by coronavirus-induced lockdown, by providing credit to different sectors, especially MSMEs
- Its objective was to support small businesses struggling to meet their operational liabilities due to the imposition of a nationwide lockdown.
- Recently, the government has widened its scope to new sectors, including hospitality, travel and tourism.

4. Haldibari- Chilahati Rail Link

Why in News?

- The freight trains have started commuting via the restored Haldibari (India) – Chilahati (Bangladesh) rail link.



Haldibari- Chilahati Rail Link:

- The Haldibari – Chilahati rail link between India and then East Pakistan was operational till 1965.
- The distance between Haldibari Railway Station till the international border is 4.5 km, while that of Chilahati is around 7.5 km till the ‘zero points’.
- This was part of the Broad-Gauge main route from Kolkata to Siliguri during the partition.
- Trains traveling to Assam and North Bengal continued to travel through the then East Pakistan territory even after partition.

- However, the war of 1965 effectively cut off all the railway links between India and then East Pakistan.
- The link was reopened in 2020 for the movement of passenger and goods traffic.
- Other railway links between India and Bangladesh:
- As of now, five links connecting India with Bangladesh have been made operational which include:
 - ✓ Petrapole (India) – Benapole (Bangladesh)
 - ✓ Gede (India) – Darshana (Bangladesh)
 - ✓ Singhabad (India) – Rohanpur (Bangladesh)
 - ✓ Radhikapur (India) – Birol (Bangladesh)
 - ✓ Haldibari (India) – Chilahati (Bangladesh)

5. Kuthiran Tunnel

Why in News?

- The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has inaugurated the Kuthiran Tunnel in Kerala

Kuthiran Tunnel:

- Kuthiran Tunnel is a Twin-tube tunnel at Kuthiran in Thrissur District of Kerala.
- It is located on National Highway 544, owned and operated by the National Highways Authority of India.
- It is Kerala's first-ever tunnel for road transport and South India's Longest 6-lane road tunnel. Kuthiran gradient is situated in the Kuthiran Hills, situated in the western part of Anaimalai Hills. The hills are a notified Peechi- Vazahani wildlife sanctuary.
- It will drastically improve connectivity to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The road will improve connectivity to important ports and towns in North-South Corridor without Endangering Wildlife.

6. e-RUPI

Why in News?

- The Government of India is going to launch an electronic voucher based digital payment system e-RUPI. There are already many countries using the voucher system for example the US, Colombia, Chile, Sweden, Hong Kong, etc.

Highlights:

- It is a cashless and contactless method for digital payment. It is a Quick Response (QR) code or SMS string-based e-voucher, which is delivered to the mobile of the users.
- The users will be able to redeem the voucher without needing a card, digital payments app, or internet banking access, at the service provider.
- It connects the sponsors of the services with the beneficiaries and service providers in a digital mode without any physical interface.
- The mechanism also ensures that the payment to the service provider is made only after the transaction is completed.
- The system is pre-paid in nature and hence, assures timely payment to the service provider without the involvement of any intermediary.
- In effect, e-RUPI is still backed by the existing Indian rupee as the underlying asset and specificity of its purpose makes it different to a virtual currency and puts it closer to a voucher-based payment system.
- The one-time payment mechanism has been developed by the National Payments Corporation of India on its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platform, in collaboration with the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, and National Health Authority.
- It has boarded banks that will be the issuing entities. Any corporate or government agency will have to approach the partner banks, which are both private and public-sector lenders, with the details of specific persons and the purpose for which payments have to be made.

Advantages:

- The government is already working on developing a Central Bank Digital Currency and the launch of e-RUPI could potentially highlight the gaps in digital payments infrastructure that will be necessary for the Success of the Future Digital Currency.
- There is increasing penetration of Digital Payments in the country that exists alongside sustained interest in cash usage, especially for Small Value Transactions.
- India's high currency to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio holds out another benefit of CBDCs. Cash-to-GDP Ratio or Currency in Circulation (CIC) to GDP Ratio or simply currency-to-GDP ratio shows the value of cash in circulation as a ratio of GDP.
- The spread of private virtual currencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum may be yet another reason why CBDCs become important from the point of view of the central bank.

7. What India needs for a just energy transition

Why in News?

- Increasing pace of vaccination and normalising of monetary policy hold key to Economic Rebound.

K-shaped Recovery and its impact:

- Growth indicators so far suggest resilience in the short term — a shallow dent in May’s economic activity followed by a recovery in June, back to April’s levels.
- **K-shaped Recovery:** The external, investment and industrial sectors have been relatively resilient, with consumption and services bearing the brunt.
- Notwithstanding signs of some fatigue in ultra-high frequency indicators in July, damage from the second wave seems largely limited to April-June 2021.
- However, K-shaped recovery means light cracks on the top conceal much larger structural faultlines below.
- **Rising poverty:** The Pew Research Centre estimates that the pandemic has led to India’s poor rising by 75 million while the middle and upper-middle class has shrunk by 39 million.
- MSMEs and informal workforce worst hit: A recent survey by the ILO finds that the worst-hit — MSMEs and their informal workforce — have struggled to access the government’s pandemic support programmes.
- These more structural scars may become blurred in the GDP data in coming quarters but will almost certainly affect the medium-term growth story.

Way forward in the Near Term:

1. Policy

- ✓ Achieving two objectives: When inflation is under control, then flush liquidity and ultra-accommodative monetary policy will help achieve two objectives—
- ✓ Ensuring easy Financial Conditions.
- ✓ Help control borrowing costs of the Government’s Expansive borrowing programme.
- ✓ **Inflation risk:** The above strategy is not costless, it effectively uses the central bank’s credibility in controlling inflation as “collateral”.
- So when inflation flares up and remains sticky, this arithmetic becomes increasingly complicated.
- The RBI’s consistent message recently has been to view the current inflation surge as a “temporary hump”.

- Much as the current monetary policy stance maintains that the economy is ill-equipped to handle policy normalisation, it is a matter of when rather than if.
- As growth strengthens and the RBI's inflation-targeting credibility comes under Greater Scrutiny, a policy pivot would become increasingly likely.

2. Vaccination

- The “ultimate unlocking” of the economy remains contingent on a critical mass getting vaccinated, which on materialising should trigger a revival in consumer and business sentiment.
- The uptick in the pace of vaccination over the last few days and higher seroprevalence reported in some states are welcome news.

K-shaped Recovery:

- A K-shaped recovery occurs when, following a recession, different parts of the economy recover at different rates, times, or magnitudes.
- This is in contrast to an even, uniform recovery across sectors, industries, or groups of people. A K-shaped recovery leads to changes in the structure of the economy or the broader society as economic outcomes and relations are fundamentally changed before and after the recession.
- This type of recovery is called K-shaped because the path of different parts of the economy when charted together may diverge, resembling the two arms of the Roman letter “K.”

8. The Goal of making the Rupee a Global Reserve Currency

Why in News?

- India will celebrate 100 years of Independence in 2047. This article makes the case that prosperity is possible and best accomplished by the goal of making the rupee a global reserve currency by India@100.

What is the Purpose of having Forex Reserves?

- Official foreign exchange reserves of about \$12 trillion across 150 countries are currently stored in eight currencies: 55 per cent in US dollars, 30 per cent in euros, and 15 per cent in six other currencies.
- Protection in case of volatility: This concentration is inevitable given exploding trade, rising capital flows, and the less acknowledged motivation of protecting your reserves from your currency's volatility.

- A reserve currency has to serve as a medium of exchange, a store of value, and a unit of account.

Steps India would require to take:

- **Full Capital Account Convertibility:** To fulfil the ambition of becoming the reserve currency, the first step is full capital account convertibility, as suggested by the Tarapore Committee in 1997.
- Advocate rupee invoicing: Dollar investors in the last decade not experiencing the usual big bite out of rupee returns is useful for advocating trading partners to start rupee invoicing.
- Offshore corporate rupee borrowing: Raising corporate rupee borrowing offshore and onshore will also help.
- **Digital Currency:** We need to accelerate our CBDC (central bank digital bank currency) plans.
- Take payment networks to a global level: We need to take our UPI payment technology to the world, the dollar gets heft from global networks like Visa, MasterCard and Swift.
- Raise tax to GDP ratio: Fiscal policy must raise our tax to GDP ratio, raise the share of direct taxes in total taxes, and keep our public debt to GDP ratio under 100 per cent.
- **Monetary Policy:** Monetary policy must control inflation while moderating central bank balance sheet size.
- **Economic Policy:** Economic policy must raise the productivity to reach goals in formalisation, urbanisation, financialisation (100 per cent credit to GDP ratio), industrialisation (less than 15 per cent farm employment), internationalisation (higher share of global trade) and skilling.
- **Institutional reforms:** These goals must be complemented by reinforcing institutions that signal rule of law; cooperative federalism, press freedom, civil service effectiveness, and judicial independence.

How it will help India?

- Becoming a global reserve currency is helpful because it indirectly aligns fiscal, monetary, and Economic Policy.
- Low-interest rate: The main advantage is the “exorbitant privilege” of lower real interest rates.
- Edge over China: The 2 per cent renminbi share in global reserves — despite a 25 per cent increase last year — doesn’t reflect their status as the world’s second-largest economy and biggest trading nation.

- China's astounding economic success seems to be making China overconfident.
- Chinese overconfidence creates an opportunity for India.
- Prosperity for all Indians by India at 100 — a precondition for a country where the mind is without fear and the head is held high — needs bold reforms in the next 25 years. These reforms are best measured by the wholesome and achievable goal of the rupee becoming a global reserve currency by 2047. The journey is the reward.

9. General Insurance Business (Nationalization) Amendment Bill, 2021

Why in News?

- The General Insurance Business (Nationalization) Amendment Bill, 2021, was recently passed by both houses of parliament.
- The Bill seeks to amend the General Insurance Business (nationalization) Act, 1972.

What is the GIB Act?

- The 1972 Act set up the General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC).
- The businesses of the companies nationalized under the Act were restructured in four subsidiary companies of GIC: (i) National Insurance, (ii) New India Assurance, (iii) Oriental Insurance, and (iv) United India Insurance.
- The Act was subsequently amended in 2002 to transfer the control of these four subsidiary companies from GIC to the central government, thereby making them independent companies. Since 2000, GIC exclusively undertakes the reinsurance business.

Key Highlights of the Amendment Bill:

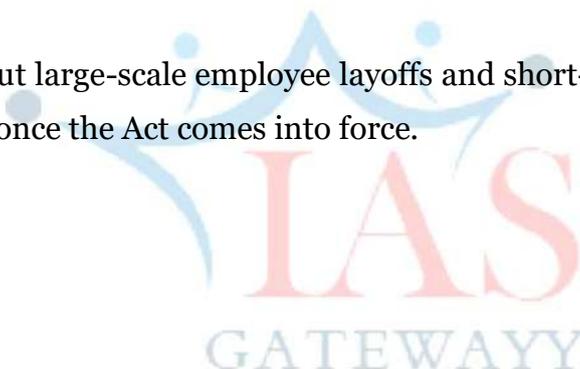
- **Government shareholding threshold:** The Act requires that shareholding of the central government in the specified insurers (the above five companies) must be at least 51%. The Bill removes this provision.
- **Change in definition of general insurance business:** The Act defines general insurance business as fire, marine or miscellaneous insurance business.
- **Transfer of control from the government:** The Bill provides that the Act will not apply to the specified insurers from the date on which the central government relinquishes control of the insurer.
- **Notifying terms and conditions:** The Bill provides that schemes formulated by the central Government in this regard will be deemed to have been adopted by the insurer.
- **Liabilities of directors:** The Bill specifies that a director of a specified insurer, who is not a whole-time director, will be held liable only for certain acts.

Significance of the Bill:

- **De-regulation:** The move is part of the government's strategy to open up more sectors to private participation and improve efficiency.
- **Capital Infusion:** Privatization will bring in more private capital in the general insurance business and improve its reach to make more products available to customers.
- **Insurance Coverage:** This will enhance insurance penetration and social protection to better secure the interests of policyholders and contribute to faster growth of the economy

Concerns of the Opposition:

- The Opposition is of the view that privatization will be detrimental to the interests of the public.
- They wanted a proper discussion on the pros and cons of the Bill rather than passing it in a hurry.
- They wanted an expert committee of the Cabinet to study the impact before passing the legislation.
- They are worried about large-scale employee layoffs and short-term investors entering and exiting these entities once the Act comes into force.



1.1. ENVIRONMENT SNIPPETS

1. Team CLAW

Why in News?

- The Government of India has recently accorded sanction to Team CLAW to lead a team of people with disabilities to scale Siachen Glacier and create a new world record for the largest team of people with disabilities.

Highlights:

- This is the land world record expedition part of 'Operation Blue Freedom Triple World Records' being undertaken.
- Triple Elemental World Records is a series of world records being attempted by the team in 2021 of collectives of people with disabilities achieving great feats on land, in air and underwater. Initially, a team of 20 people with disabilities would be selected to undergo training, after which the final expedition team shall be selected.
- Final expedition team (including a minimum of 6 people with disabilities), who will trek from the Siachen Base Camp to Kumar Post.

Team CLAW and Operation Blue Freedom:

- Team CLAW (Conquer Land Air Water) is a team of ex-Indian Special Forces commandos. Generally, all are either from Indian Army Para Commandos or the Naval Marine Commandos, also known as the MARCOS.
- These veterans have multiple specialisations - not just in combat but also in other elite skills such as skydiving, scuba diving, mountaineering, emergency medical response and all-terrain survival amongst others. The initiative was taken by Major Vivek Jacob, a Para (Special Forces) officer. Operation Blue Freedom is a social impact venture aimed at rehabilitating people with disabilities through adaptive adventure sports.
- It aims to shatter the common perception of pity, charity and inability associated with people with disabilities and recreate it to one of dignity, freedom and ability.
- Further, their focus is to 'design and implement sustainable large-scale employment solutions' for people with disabilities, especially in the 'Environment conservation and Sustainability' space.
- It is in the process of setting up centres across the globe where-in Special Forces Veterans and People with Disabilities are merging in action for creating a better life experience, for not only persons with disability but the non-disabled as well.

- The Siachen Glacier is located in the Eastern Karakoram range in the Himalayas, just northeast of Point NJ9842 where the Line of Control between India and Pakistan ends.
- It is the Second-Longest glacier in the World's Non-Polar areas. The Siachen Glacier is part of Ladakh which has now been converted into a Union Territory.
- The Siachen Glacier is the world's highest battlefield. The entire Siachen Glacier has been under the administration of India since 1984 (Operation Meghdoot).

2. Pangolin

Why in News?

- A Pangolin was recently rescued by a team from Noida and handed over to the Forest Department.

Highlights:

- It is also called scaly anteater, is an elongated, armour-plated insectivore mammal.
- It uses these scales as armour to defend itself against predators by rolling into a ball when threatened.
- Its long claws help it to dig the ground for termites, which is its staple food.
- Seven species of pangolin are found across the world, of which, two are found in India, namely Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).
- The Indian Pangolin is found throughout the country south of the Himalayas, excluding the north-eastern region while the Chinese Pangolin ranges through Assam and the eastern Himalayas.
- It is adaptable to a wide range of habitats including primary and secondary tropical forests, limestone and bamboo forests, grasslands and agricultural fields.
- Once known to be found in large numbers, its population is rapidly declining in its range due to habitat loss and rampant poaching for its skin, scales, and meat.
- It is a highly trafficked mammal; due to their huge demand for medicinal purposes, pangolins are smuggled through roads and rails and sent to China.

Protection Status:

- As per International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the pangolin is part of the “red list”.
- While the Indian pangolin is listed as “endangered” and the Chinese pangolin has been listed as “critically endangered”.

- All pangolin species are listed in Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix I.
- In India, pangolins, both Indian and Chinese, are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- The hunting, trade or any other form of utilisation of the species or their body parts and derivatives is banned.
- In India, hunting and poaching can invite prison time up to 7 years since it involves maximum protection under the section of the Wildlife Act.

3. Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle

Why in News?

- Recently, a lot of efforts have been put by the conservationists to save the world's most endangered turtle, Swinhoe's softshell turtle from the brink of extinction.

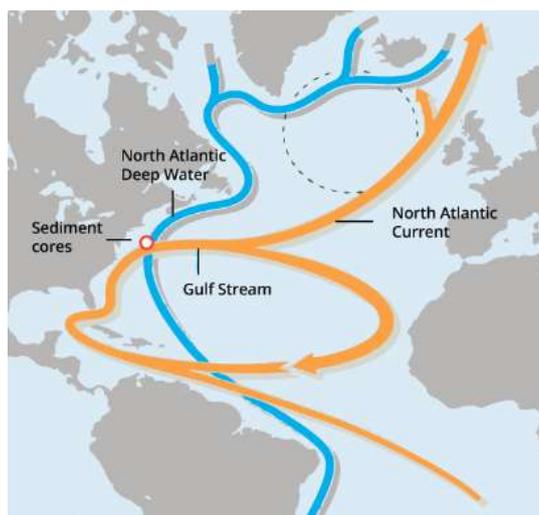
Highlights:

- The animal is also known as the Hoan Kiem turtle or Yangtze giant softshell turtle.
- In Vietnam, these animals have great cultural significance as people in Hanoi revere this creature as a living god.
- Its Scientific Name is Rafetus swinhoei. These turtles are gray with light gray or yellow spots.
- Some researchers have highlighted their importance to the seafloor biosystem, where they contribute by enriching soil nutrients and facilitating seed dispersion.
- The natural habitat for these turtles are wetlands and large lakes. Native to China and Vietnam.
- Its Protection Status are IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered, CITES: Appendix II
- They have been driven to the brink by hunting for its meat and eggs, as well as by destruction of its habitat.

4. Tipping Point

Why in News?

- A new study published in Nature Climate Change shows that the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) may have become unstable over the last century and reached a tipping point.



Highlights:

- For the past 15 years, Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) has been weakening, signs show that AMOC may be slowing, which could have drastic consequences on the global climate.
- A new study suggests a link between Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) and the Indian Ocean and the rising temperatures in the Indian Ocean can help to boost the AMOC and delay slow down.

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC):

- The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is a major current in the Atlantic Ocean and can be considered as a large system of ocean currents.
- AMOC is characterized by a northward flow of warm, salty water in the upper layers of the Atlantic, and a southward flow of colder, deep waters that are part of the thermohaline circulation
- Since it aids in distributing heat and energy, AMOC maintains the temperature equilibrium of Europe and influences world weather.

Thermohaline Circulation:

- Thermohaline Circulation (THC) is a part of the large-scale ocean circulation that is driven by global density gradients created by surface heat and freshwater fluxes.
- It is also called the Global Ocean Conveyor or Great Ocean Conveyor Belt, the component of a general oceanic circulation controlled by horizontal differences in temperature and salinity.
- It continually replaces seawater at depth with water from the surface and slowly replaces surface water elsewhere with water rising from deeper depths.

5. Kaziranga National Park

Why in News?

- Assam's Kaziranga National Park (KNP) became the first national park in India to be equipped with satellite phones.

About:

- The KNTPR is a national park in the Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam.
- The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses, is a World Heritage Site.
- Kaziranga is home to the highest density of tigers among protected areas in the world and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006 (now the highest tiger density is in Orang National Park, Assam).
- The park is home to large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.
- It is also recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for the conservation of avifaunal species.
- The entire area of Kaziranga — formed by alluvial deposits from the Brahmaputra and its tributaries — is centred on the river.
- There is a consensus that floods are necessary for Kaziranga by virtue of it being riverine ecosystem.
- The regenerative nature of floods helps replenish Kaziranga's water bodies and maintain its landscape, a mix of wetlands, grasslands and semi-evergreen deciduous forests.
- The floodwaters also function as a breeding ground for fish.
- The same fish are carried away by the receding waters into the Brahmaputra — in a way, the park replenishes the river's stock of fish too.
- The waters also help get rid of unwanted plants such as water hyacinth which collect in huge masses in the landscape.



6. Olympian bat

Why in News?

- A variety of bat has been successful in travelling a distance of 2000 km from London to the Pskov region of Russia, earning the nickname ‘Olympian bat’.

Highlights:

- The female bat belongs to Nathusius’ pipistrelle species and was found near the village of Molgino, located in Pskov region of Russia. The observers found tag on the bat’s arm that read “London Zoo”. This is not the first instance when bats travelled such far.
- In 2019, a bat belonging to the similar species was found in Spain. The bat had travelled about 2,224 km from Latvia. These species of bats are smaller than a toothbrush and weigh less than 10 grams. They are known to migrate from cold northern Europe to warmer areas for breeding purpose. The distance of 2,224 is likely to be an estimate based on shortest distance between Spain and Latvia. It could be more.



Significance:

- The study will offer insights into the migration pattern of bats and also effects of climate change on habitat. The range expansion of the Nathusius’ pipistrelle is said to be effect of climate change. Further climate change will impact the species.

Conservation:

- The National Nathusius’ Pipistrelle Project was launched by Bat Conservation Trust of Great Britain in 2014 for conservation and understanding of the species.
- One of the goals include studying the migration pattern of the species to determine the effects of climate change on its habitat.

7. World Lion Day

Why in News?

- Every year, World Lion Day is observed on 10th August to raise awareness about the conservation of lions.

Highlights:

- The initiative to protect the big cats started in 2013 and the first World Lion Day was celebrated that year. There has been a decline in 80% of the population of lions in the past 100 years.

- Its Scientific Name is Panthera leo. It is divided into two subspecies: the African lion (Panthera leo leo) and the Asiatic lion (Panthera leo persica).
- It holds an indispensable place in the ecosystem, they are an apex predator of their habitat, responsible for checking the population of grazers, thus helping in maintaining the Ecological Balance.
- It also contributes to keeping the population of their prey healthy and resilient as they target the weakest members of the herd. Thus, indirectly helping in disease control in the prey population. The major threats are Poaching, genetic inbreeding arising from a single population inhabiting one place, diseases such as plague, canine distemper or a natural disaster. Its Protection Status are IUCN Red List: Vulnerable, Asiatic Lion – Endangered and CITES: Appendix I for populations of India, all other populations are included in Appendix II and Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule I.
- India is home to the majestic Asiatic Lion, who inhabit the protected territory of Sasan-Gir National Park (Gujarat). According to the data from 2020, there are 674 lions in India, which were 523 in 2015.

Government Conservation Efforts:

- The Six new sites apart from the Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) have been identified under Project Lion that was announced in August 2020, on the lines of Project Tiger and Project Elephant. The programme has been launched for the conservation of the Asiatic Lion, whose last remaining wild population is in Gujarat's Asiatic Lion Landscape (ALL). The Lion census is conducted once every five years.

8. A Circular Economy for Plastic

Why in News?

- The India Plastics Pact, the first in Asia, will be launched in September at the CII Annual Sustainability Summit.

Issue of Plastic Waste:

- A 2019 report by the Center for International Environmental Law suggests that by 2050, greenhouse gas emissions from plastic could reach over 56 gigatonnes, 10-13% of the remaining carbon budget.
- Connection with livelihood: Viewed from the angle of livelihoods, post-consumer segregation, collection and disposal of plastics make up about half of the income of 1.5- 4 million waste-pickers in India.

- For India, the solution must be multi-pronged, systemic, and large scale, to create a visible impact. The Plastics Pacts model offers such a solution.

Plastics Pacts Model:

- **Business-led initiative:** The Plastics Pacts are business-led initiatives and transform the plastics packaging value chain for all formats and products.
- The Pacts bring together everyone from across the plastics value chain to implement practical solutions.
- Integral to the Pact's framework is the involvement of the informal waste sector crucial to post-consumer segregation, collection and processing of plastic waste.
- **All Pacts unite behind four targets:**
 - ✓ To eliminate unnecessary and problematic plastic packaging through redesign and innovation.
 - ✓ To ensure all plastic packaging is reusable or recyclable.
 - ✓ To increase the reuse, collection, and recycling of plastic packaging.
 - ✓ To increase recycled content in plastic packaging.
- It is active in a number of countries including the U.K., South Africa, and Australia.
- The first Plastics Pact was launched in the U.K. in 2018, by WRAP, a global NGO based in the U.K.
- It is now being brought to India by CII and WWF India.

Advantages:

- **Economic Advantage:** It can be expected to boost demand for recycled content, investments in recycling infrastructure, jobs in the waste sector, and beyond.
- Support EPR framework: The Pact will support the Extended Producer Responsibility framework of the government and improve solid waste management as envisioned in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- The India Plastics Pact focuses on Solutions and Innovation.
- Plastic production and management development: The Pact will encourage the development and maturing of the entire plastics production and management ecosystem.
- Drive circularity of plastic: Apart from benefits to society and economy, delivering the targets will drive the circularity of plastics and help tackle pollution.

3. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. Row Over Lakshadweep Beach Villa Plan

Why in News?

- Ignoring what marine biologists have warned of as a serious “developmental misstep”, the Lakshadweep administration is pressing ahead with plans to construct beach and lagoon villas on three islands of the Union Territory with its fragile coral ecosystem.

What is the issue?

- Praful Khoda Patel, who took additional charge as Administrator, Lakshadweep, in December last year, introduced a slew of draft legislation that have brought a wide-ranging impact on the islands:
 - ✓ The Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation, 2021;
 - ✓ The Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA);
 - ✓ The Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation, 2021 and
 - ✓ Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021.
- Addressing the media in the face of widespread criticism of these measures, Mr. Patel says he intends to develop Lakshadweep like neighbouring Maldives, “a renowned international tourist destination”.

About Lakshadweep Islands:

- India’s smallest Union Territory, Lakshadweep is an archipelago consisting of 36 islands with an area of 32 sq km. It is directly under the control of the Centre through an administrator.
- The Capital is Kavaratti and it is also the principal town of the UT. Pitti island, which is uninhabited, has a bird sanctuary.
- There are three main group of islands:
 - ✓ Amindivi Islands
 - ✓ Laccadive Islands
 - ✓ Minicoy Island.
- Amindivi Islands are the northernmost while Minicoy island is the southernmost. All are tiny islands of coral origin (Atoll) and are surrounded by fringing reefs.



About Lakshadweep society:

- The society in all islands is matriarchal. The religion is Islam of the pristine Shafi school of law. When Islam came to the islands is debated.
- A paradise set in the Arabian Sea, the archipelago of Lakshadweep also gives India a vast and exclusive economic zone with three distinct ecosystems: land, lagoon and ocean.
- Fishery is a primary occupation here. The language, except in Minicoy, is Malayalam; in Minicoy, Mahl is spoken, a language akin to the 17th century Divehi of the Maldives.
- Vatteluttu was the earliest script used with its heavy Sanskrit component and this system of autography is in evidence in the sailing manuals of local pilots (malmis), on inscriptions on tombstones and those in some mosques/pallis.
- With the introduction of Islam, Arabi-Malayalam, with Malayalam in Arabic script and associated with the literature of the Mappilas that developed on the mainland, also came into use on the islands.

Administration and Tourism of the Island:

- The office of the Administrator, Lakshadweep was also among the first in India to be computerised with a mainframe and fax machine; every island in Lakshadweep had a computer by 1990. Endorsed with outlays by the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Finance Commissions (1984-2005), this established, in the words of the last of these Commissions “speedy and accurate generation of accounting information that might be needed for purposes of better planning, budgeting and monitoring”.
- Admittedly, there is much room for improvement. Today, long lines and refrigeration have aided the expansion of the fishing sector but income disparities have grown.

- Indiscriminate trawling endangers the coral, as experienced in the Maldives and now banned there.
- Revenue from tourism has declined with the closure of resorts (including at Bangaram) from litigation.

Recently introduced Beef Ban and Goonda Act:

- The people of Lakshadweep have also opposed the administrator of trying to interfere in the traditional life by introducing a ban on buying or selling beef products.
- The Goonda Act being introduced in the island that has negligible crime rate and revoking of restrictions on alcohol for benefit of tourism also have attracted criticism from the islanders.
- Some things that were equally non satisfactory were that the island descended from being COVID 19 free region to developing more than 6800 cases in a year.
- Also the mandatory quarantine if the island bound travellers was done away with in the leadership of Praful Khoda Patel.
- Other initiatives by the administrator include panchayat rules designed to restrict the population growth in a territory where, according to the National Health and Family Survey-5 (2019-20), the total fertility rate is 1.4 (which is far behind the national average of 2.2) and relaxing prohibition, extant in the Union Territory because of public demand.
- Worse still is the relaxation of quarantine restrictions for travel which have introduced the novel coronavirus into a pandemic-free archipelago.

What are the Criticisms?

- Deliberations of the IDA wanted that Lakshadweep, with its land ownership constitutionally protected, be opened to international tourism not as a means of generating wealth for investors from the mainland but to bring prosperity to the islanders.
- Specifically rejecting the Maldives model, the plan for Lakshadweep required that the industry had to be people-centric and enrich the fragile Coral Ecology.
- Lakshadweep today has rainwater harvesting facilities, first introduced in government buildings on every island and now accessible in every home.
- Solar power, which covers 10% of lighting needs, makes Lakshadweep a pioneer in India's present flagship initiative.
- All islands have been connected by helicopter service since 1986, and high-speed passenger boats were purchased in the 1990s by an international tender.

- A study by the National Institute of Oceanography found practical applications, helping a redesign of the tripods reinforcing the beaches against sea erosion, and ensuring piped water supply especially designed to draw from the fresh water lens that, in every coral island, floats on the saline underground seawater at the core of every coral island, so as not to disturb the slim lens.
- The islands boast total literacy. Minicoy had among the country's first Navodaya Vidyalayas.
- Vernacular building traditions are the theme of all government housing projects undertaken in the islands in the 1980s, with leading architects providing the designs.
- Kavaratti has a desalination wind-powered plant gifted by the Danish government.
- And although the poverty line in terms of GDP is only slightly higher than the World Bank's poverty threshold, Lakshadweep today has no poor people; they have a high calorific consumption from plentiful foods harvested from the lagoons and islands.

2. States too must Ensure Cases are not filed under Section 66A

Why in News?

- The MHA requested states and UTs to direct all police stations under their jurisdiction not to register cases under the repealed Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Background:

- Section 66A had been dubbed as “draconian” for it allowed the arrest of several innocent persons, igniting a public outcry for its scrapping. This had led to the Supreme Court striking it down as unconstitutional in March, 2015 in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*.

Why SC Struck Down Section 66A?

- The SC had noted that Section 66A arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech, under article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution, and upsets the balance between such right and the reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on such right and the definition of offences under the provision was open-ended and undefined.
- The court also said that the provision, introduced in 2009 to the original Act of 2000, used expressions “completely open-ended and undefined” and every expression used was “nebulous” in meaning.
- “What may be offensive to one may not be offensive to another. What may cause annoyance or inconvenience to one may not cause annoyance or inconvenience to another. Even the expression ‘persistently’ is completely imprecise.

What is Section 66A all about?

- Section 66A defines the Punishment for sending “offensive” messages through a computer or any other communication device like a mobile phone or a tablet. A conviction can fetch a maximum of three years in jail and a fine.

3. Experts Raise Concerns over Mandatory Fortification

Why in News?

- In a pushback against the Centre’s plan to mandatorily fortify rice and edible oils with vitamins and minerals, a group of scientists and activists have written to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), warning of the adverse impacts on health and livelihoods.

About the News:

- The letter was recently sent to the FSSAI as well as the Food, Agriculture and Health Ministries and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, was signed by 170 individuals and organisations including eminent nutritionists, economists, doctors and farmers groups.
- They cited multiple studies to show that dietary diversity and higher protein consumption are key to solving undernutrition in India, rather than adding a few synthetic micronutrients which could harm the Health of Consumers.

Background of Fortification:

- In February, 2019, the government approved a centre-sponsored “Rice Fortification and Public Distribution System” pilot scheme.
- The three-year pilot scheme from the start of 2019-20 has been accepted. The budget allocated is a total amount of Rs 42.65 crore.
- During the initial implementation phase, the scheme focuses on 15 districts preferably one District per State.

What is Food Fortification?

- Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as Iron, Iodine, Zinc, and Vitamins A & D to staple foods such as rice, wheat, oil, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- These nutrients may or may not have been originally present in the food before processing or may have been lost during processing.

- It does not alter the characteristics of the food like the taste, aroma or the texture of the food.

What is Rice Fortification?

- Rice fortification is the practice of increasing the content of essential micronutrients in rice and to improve the Nutritional Quality of the rice.
- Fortifying rice involves grinding broken rice into powder, mixing it with nutrients, and then shaping it into rice-like kernels using an extrusion process.
- These fortified kernels are then mixed with normal rice in a 1:100 ratio, and distributed for consumption.

Why Rice Fortification?

- Rice is the world's most important staple food. An estimated 2 billion people eat rice every day, forming the mainstay of diets across large of Asia and Africa.
- Regular milled rice is low in micronutrients and serves primarily as a source of carbohydrate only. The fortification of rice is a major opportunity to improve nutrition.
- Fortified rice are contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.

Significance:

- Micronutrient malnutrition, also known as hidden hunger, is a serious health risk. Sometimes due to lack of consumption of a balanced diet, lack of variety in the diet or unavailability of food one does not get adequate micronutrients.
- According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4)
 - ✓ 4 percent of children (6-59 months) are anaemic.
 - ✓ 1 percent of women in the reproductive age group are anaemic.
 - ✓ 7 percent of children under 5 are underweight.
- Hence fortification of food is a safe method of improving nutrition among people as the addition of micronutrients to food does not pose a health risk to people.

Food Fortification in India:

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has formulated a comprehensive regulation on fortification of foods namely 'Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016'.
- These regulations set the standards for food fortification and encourage the production, manufacture, distribution, sale and consumption of fortified foods.
- The regulations also provide for specific role of FSSAI in promotion for food fortification and to make fortification mandatory. This sets the premise for the national summit on fortification of food.

- Packaging and labelling has to state the food fortificant added, +F logo and the tagline “SampoornaPoshanSwasth Jeevan”.
- It should be in compliance with the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labeling) Regulations, 2011.

What are the Concerns?

- The letter argued that mandatory fortification would harm the vast informal economy of Indian farmers and food processors including local oil and rice mills, and instead benefit a small group of multinational corporations who will have sway over a ₹3,000 crore market.
- “Just five corporations have derived most of the benefits of global fortification trends and these companies have historically engaged in cartelising behaviour leading to price hikes,” noting that the European Union has been forced to fine these companies for such behaviour and asked how the FSSAI proposed to regulate price in India.
- Dietary diversity was a healthier and more cost-effective way to fight malnutrition. Once iron-fortified rice is sold as the remedy to anaemia, the value and the choice of naturally iron-rich foods like millets, varieties of green leafy vegetables, flesh foods, liver, to name a few, will have been suppressed by a policy silence.
- It is also ridiculous that the government is promoting polished rice, which has lost a lot of its nutrition on the one hand, and talks about chemical fortification on the other hand.

4. Preventive Detention only to Prevent Public Disorder, says SC

Why in News?

- Preventive detention, the dreaded power of the State to restrain a person without trial, could be used only to prevent public disorder, the Supreme Court held in a recent Judgment.

Observation of the Apex Court:

- The State should not arbitrarily resort to “preventive detention” to deal with all and sundry “law and order” problems, which could be dealt with by the ordinary laws of the country.
- Whenever an order under a preventive detention law is challenged, one of the questions the court must ask in deciding its legality is: was the ordinary law of the land sufficient to deal with the situation? If the answer is in the affirmative, the detention order will be illegal.
- The court said two drunks fighting on a road was a law and order problem, and not ‘public disorder’. The solution here was not preventive detention.

About National Security Act:

- It is a stringent law that allows preventive detention for months, if authorities are satisfied that a person is a threat to national security or law and order.
- The person does not need to be charged during this period of detention. The goal is to prevent the individual from committing a crime.
- It was promulgated on September 23, 1980, during the Indira Gandhi government.
- As per the National Security Act, the grounds for preventive detention of a person include:
 - ✓ Acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India.
 - ✓ Regulating the continued presence of any foreigner in India or with a view to making arrangements for his expulsion from India.
 - ✓ preventing them from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.

Duration:

- Under the National Security Act, an individual can be detained without a charge for up to 12 months; the state government needs to be intimated that a person has been detained under the NSA. No such order shall remain in force for more than 12 days unless approved by the State Government.
- A person detained under the National Security Act can be held for 10 days without being told the charges against them.
- The detained person can appeal before a high court advisory board but they are not allowed a lawyer during the trial.

History of Preventive Detention in India:

- Preventive detention laws in India date back to early days of the colonial era when the Bengal Regulation III of 1818 was enacted to empower the government to arrest anyone for defence or maintenance of public order without giving the person recourse to judicial proceedings.
- A century later, the British government enacted the Rowlatt Acts of 1919 that allowed confinement of a suspect without trial.

Constitution of Advisory Boards:

- The Central Government and each State Government shall, whenever necessary, constitute one or more Advisory Boards for the purposes of this Act.

- Every such Board shall consist of three persons who are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as, Judges of a High Court, and such persons shall be appointed by the appropriate Government.
- The appropriate Government shall appoint one of the members of the Advisory Board who is, or has been, a Judge of a High Court to be its Chairman, and in the case of a Union territory, the appointment to the Advisory Board of any person who is a Judge of the High Court of a State shall be with the previous approval of the State Government concerned.

Reference to Advisory Boards:

- As provided in this Act, in every case where a detention order has been made under this Act, the appropriate Government shall, within 3 weeks from the date of detention of a person under the order, place before the Advisory Board constituted by it, the grounds on which the order has been made and the representation if any made by the person affected by the order and in case where the order has been made by an officer.

Concerns associated with NSA and how is it different from normal arrests?

- In the normal course, if a person is arrested, he or she is guaranteed certain basic rights.
 - ✓ These include the right to be informed of the reason for the arrest.
 - ✓ Section 50 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.PC) mandates that the person arrested has to be informed of the grounds of arrest, and the right to bail.
 - ✓ Sections 56 and 76 of the Cr.PC also provide that a person has to be produced before a court within 24 hours of arrest.
 - ✓ Additionally, Article 22(1) of the Constitution says an arrested person cannot be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice.
- But none of these rights are available to a person detained under the NSA.
 - ✓ A person could be kept in the dark about the reasons for his arrest for up to five days and in exceptional circumstances not later than 10 days.
 - ✓ Even when providing the grounds for arrest, the government can withhold information which it considers to be against public interest to disclose.
 - ✓ The arrested person is also not entitled to the aid of any legal practitioner in any matter connected with the proceedings before an advisory board, which is constituted by the government for dealing with NSA cases.

5. Governor's Pardon Power overrides 433A, says SC

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently held that the Governor of a State can pardon prisoners, including death row ones, even before they have served a minimum 14 years of prison sentence.

What did the SC observed?

- In fact, the Governor's power to pardon overrides a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure — Section 433A —which mandates that a prisoner's sentence can be remitted only after 14 years of jail. "Section 433-A of the Code cannot and does not in any way affect the constitutional power conferred on the President/Governor to grant pardon under Articles 72 or 161 of the Constitution. If the prisoner has not undergone 14 years or more of actual imprisonment, the Governor has a power to grant pardon... de hors the restrictions imposed under Section 433-A. Such power is in exercise of the power of the sovereign, though the Governor is bound to act on the aid and advice of the State Government.
- In fact, the court noted that the sovereign power of a Governor to pardon a prisoner under Article 161 is actually exercised by the State government and not the Governor on his own.
- The advice of the appropriate government binds the Head of the State," the SC observed in the judgment which referred to the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench judgment in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case on the power of remission.
- The action of commutation and release can thus be pursuant to a Governmental decision and the order may be issued even without the Governor's Approval.
- However, under the Rules of Business and as a matter of constitutional courtesy, it may seek approval of the Governor, if such release is under Article 161 of the Constitution.

What's the Issue?

- The concept of Mercy Petition is followed in many nations like the USA, UK, and Canada etc. including India. In India, the power to grant pardon is entrusted to the President and the Governors of various states under Article 72 and Article 161 of the Constitution.
- It adds a human touch to the country's judicial process by conferring powers to grant pardon or show Mercy to criminals sentenced to death.

Pardoning Power of the President in India:

- Under Article 72 of the Constitution, the President shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence where the sentence is a sentence of death.

- **Limitation:** The President cannot exercise his power of pardon independent of the government. In several cases, the SC has ruled that the President has to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers while deciding mercy pleas. These include Maru Ram vs Union of India in 1980, and Dhananjay Chatterjee vs State of West Bengal in 1994.
- **Reconsideration:** Although the President is bound by the Cabinet's advice, Article 74 (1) empowers him to return it for reconsideration once. If the Council of Ministers decides against any change, the President has no option but to accept it.

Governor's Pardoning Power:

- **Article 161:** The Governor of a State shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.

Difference between Pardoning Powers of President and Governor:

- The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161 which differs in the following two ways:
- **Court Martial:** The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
- **Death Sentence:** The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is the sentence of death but the pardoning power of the Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

6. Shutdown Marks day when J&K lost Special Status

Why in News?

- On August 5, the day the Central government ended Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019, people observed a shutdown, most markets remained closed and the regional parties expressed their anguish.

What is the Issue?

- On 5th of August 2019, the President of India promulgated the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.
- The order effectively abrogates the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir under the provision of Article 370 - whereby provisions of the Constitution which were applicable to other states were not applicable to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

- According to the Order, provisions of the Indian Constitution are now applicable in the State.
- This Order comes into force “at once”, and shall “supersede the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954.”
- A separate Bill - the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill 2019 - was introduced to bifurcate the State into two separate union territories of Jammu and Kashmir (with legislature), and Ladakh (without legislature).
- Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 was also introduced to extend the reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in educational institutions and Government jobs in Jammu and Kashmir.

Historical Background:

- J&K acceded to the Dominion of India after the Instrument of Accession was signed by Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, on 26 October 1947.
- Article 370 of the Indian Constitution provided that only Articles 1 and 370 itself would apply to J&K. The application of other Articles was to be determined by the President in consultation with the government of the state.
- The Constitution Order of 1950 specified the matters on which the Union Parliament would be competent to make laws for J&K, in concurrence with the Instrument of Accession - 38 Subjects from the Union List were added.
- The Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954 settled the constitutional relationship of J&K and the Union of India. It made the following provisions-
 - ✓ Indian citizenship and all related benefits (fundamental rights) were extended to the 'permanent residents' of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - ✓ Article 35A was added to the Constitution (empowering the state legislature to legislate on the privileges of permanent residents with regard to immovable property, settlement in the state and employment)
 - ✓ The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India was extended to the State.
 - ✓ Central Government was given the power to declare a national emergency in the event of external aggression. The power in case of internal disturbances could be exercised only with the concurrence of the State Government.
 - ✓ Normalized the financial relations between the Centre and J&K



What was article 370 and article 35A Guaranteed by Constitution of India?

- The Article 370 is defined under Part XXI of the Indian Constitution which deals with Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions.
- Though in this part (Part XXI) special provision are given to the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa, the special power and provision of J & K are nowhere when compared.
- Article 370 restricts Indian parliament to make any laws for the state and it can only preside over the subjects like Defence, External Affairs, and communication.
- Laws related to union and concurrent list in J & K can be passed only after consultation with the state government.
- Article 35A is a provision incorporated in the Constitution giving the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature a carte blanche to decide who all are 'permanent residents' of the State and confer on them special rights and privileges in public sector jobs, acquisition of property in the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare.
- The provision mandates that no act of the legislature coming under it can be challenged for violating the Constitution or any other law of the land.

What were the Key Changes Made?

- The President had used his powers under Article 370 to fundamentally alter the provision, extending all Central laws, instruments and treaties to Kashmir. However, the drastically altered Article 370 will remain on the statute books.
- While the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have a legislature, the one in Ladakh will not.

- The notification by the president has effectively allowed the entire provisions of the Constitution, with all its amendments, exceptions and modifications, to apply to the area of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Bill proposes wide powers to the Lieutenant Governor of the proposed Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and makes it the “duty” of the Chief Minister of the Union Territory to “communicate” all administrative decisions and proposals of legislation with the LG.
- All Central laws and State laws of J&K would apply to the new Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.
- Assets and liabilities of J&K and Ladakh would be apportioned on the recommendation of a Central Committee within a year.
- Employees of State public sector undertakings and autonomous bodies would continue in their posts for another year until their allocations are determined.
- The police and public order is to be with the Centre.
- The notification amends the expression “Constituent Assembly”, contained in the proviso to clause (3) of Article 370, to mean “Legislative Assembly”.

Legislative powers of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir:

- The Legislative Assembly may make laws for the whole or any part of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the state list except on subjects “public order” and “police” which will remain in the domain of the Centre vis-a-vis the LG.
- In case of inconsistencies between laws made by Parliament and laws made by the Legislative Assembly, earlier law shall prevail and law made by the Legislative Assembly shall be void.
- The role of the Chief Minister will be to communicate to the L-G all decisions of the Council of Ministers relating to the administration of affairs of the Union Territory and proposals for legislation and to furnish such information relating to the administration of affairs as the L-G may call for.

Role and Powers of the Lieutenant Governor:

- The Bill specifies that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Ladakh will have a common Lieutenant Governor.
- Appointment of L-G in Ladakh: The President shall appoint the L-G under article 239. The L-G will be assisted by advisors appointed by the Centre since the Union Territory will not have a Legislative Assembly.

- In the case of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the L-G shall “act in his discretion” on issues which fall outside the purview of powers conferred on the Legislative Assembly, in which he is required to exercise any judicial functions, and/or matters related to All India services and the Anti-Corruption Bureau
- The Chief Minister shall be appointed by the L-G who will also appoint other ministers with the aid of the CM. The L-G shall also administer the oath of office and of secrecy to ministers and the CM.
- The L-G will have the power to promulgate ordinances which shall have the same force and effect as an act of the Legislative Assembly assented by the L-G.

Way Forward:

- A 10-year strategy for Education, Employment and employability should be deployed for uplifting Kashmir.
- The Gandhian path of non-violence and peace should be adopted to solve the legitimacy crisis in Kashmir.
- The government can mitigate the challenges emanating out of Action on article 370 by launching a comprehensive outreach programme to all Kashmiris.
- In this context, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's version of Kashmiriyat, Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat (inclusivity culture of Kashmir, humanitarianism and democracy) for Kashmir solution, should become a cornerstone of the forces of reconciliation in the State.

7. Suspension of MPs for Disorderly Conduct

Context:

- Six Trinamool Congress MPs were ordered to leave the Rajya Sabha for rest of the day by the Rajya Sabha Chairman over “grossly disorderly” conduct, after they entered the well of the house and displayed placards while protesting over the Pegasus scandal.

About Rule 255 of the General Rules of Procedure of the Rajya Sabha:

- The Chairman invoked rule 255 to suspend them.
- Under Rule 255 (‘Withdrawal of member’) of the General Rules of Procedure of the Rajya Sabha, “The Chairman may direct any member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the Council and any member so ordered to withdraw shall do so forthwith and shall absent himself during the remainder of the day’s meeting.”

How is Suspension under Rule 255 Different from Suspension under Rule 256?

- Rule 256 provides for ‘Suspension of Member’; whereas Rule 255 provides for lesser punishment. Under Rule 256, “the Chairman may, if he deems it necessary, suspend a member from the service of the Council for a period not exceeding the remainder of the Session.

Differences in powers of Speaker and Chairman of Rajya Sabha:

- Like the Speaker in Lok Sabha, the Chairman of Rajya Sabha is empowered under Rule Number 255 of its Rule Book to “direct any Member whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately” from the House. Unlike the Speaker, however, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a Member.

Procedure to be followed for suspension of Rajya Sabha MPs:

- The Chairman may “name a Member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council by persistently and wilfully obstructing” business.
- In such a situation, the House may adopt a motion suspending the Member from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.
- The House may, however, by another motion, terminate the suspension.

Efforts to bring order in the House:

- As Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Vice-President Ansari had attempted several steps to bring order to the House. In 2013, he mooted a number of radical solutions to maintain decorum. This included:
 - ✓ Naming and shaming MPs in the Rajya Sabha bulletin for stepping outside House rules.
 - ✓ Those named were to include members who came into the Well, or indulged in other grossly disorderly behaviour.
 - ✓ The telecast of proceedings to be deferred to prevent visuals of disorder from being made public.

How can suspension of MPs be justified?

- The solution to unruly behaviour has to be long-term and consistent with democratic values. There can be no question that the enforcement of the supreme authority of the Presiding Officer is essential for smooth conduct of proceedings.
- However, a balance has to be struck. It must be remembered that the job of the Presiding Officer is to run the House, not to lord over it

8. SC backs Amazon plea against Future-Reliance Merger Plan

Why in News?

- The SC Bench recently upheld the validity and enforceability of a Singapore-based Emergency Arbitrator (EA) award, which restrained Future Retail Limited (FRL), India's second largest offline retailer, from going ahead with the disputed transaction.

About the News:

- **What is the Future-Reliance deal?** In 2020, Biyani's Future Group has entered into an agreement with Reliance Retail. Under this deal, Future was to sell its retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing to Reliance.
- **Why has Amazon objected to the deal?** In 2019, Amazon had acquired a stake in Future Coupons in an agreement. As per Amazon, under this agreement, it has the first right of refusal in any stake sale in future retail.
- **Why did Amazon approach Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC)?** Amazon and Future Group have under their agreement agreed to refer their disputes to SIAC. Hence, Amazon approached SIAC to appoint an emergency arbitrator to get urgent interim relief.
- **What was SIAC ruling:** SIAC emergency arbitrator had ruled in Amazon's favour. It put the Future-Reliance deal on hold.

What did the Delhi HC say?

- Noting that the intention of FRL and its promoters "do not appear to be honest", the high court directed attachment of the assets of Future Coupons Private Limited (FCPL), FRL, Mr. Biyani and 10 other promoters.
- It issued show-cause notices to all the promoters "to show cause why they be not detained in civil prison for a term not exceeding three months" for violation of the emergency arbitrator's order.
- The high court also imposed a cost of ₹20 lakh on Future Group which will be deposited in the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for providing COVID-19 vaccines to senior citizens of Below Poverty Line (BPL) category.

What was the SC Ruling?

- Justice Nariman upheld the validity of the EA award. The judgment laid down that the award is "exactly like an order of an arbitral tribunal" contemplated under Section 17 of the 1996 Act. Hence, an award by the EA was like an order under Section 17(1) (interim measures ordered by an arbitral tribunal) of the Act.

- The 103-page judgment authored by Justice Nariman dismissed FRL's argument that the "Emergency Arbitrator is not an arbitral tribunal" under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act of 1996.
- They had argued that the EA, which functions under the Arbitration Rules of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, is a foreigner to the Indian Arbitration Act.
- He had contended that Amazon, represented by senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam, by urging to enforce the EA award, was trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

About NCLT and NCLAT:

- NCLT was formed based on the recommendations of the Justice Eradi Committee that was related to insolvency and winding up of companies in India.
- As of now, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has 15 NCLT benches.
- Each Bench is headed by a President, 16 judicial members, and 9 technical members.
- All proceedings under the Companies Act such as arbitration, arrangements, compromise, reconstruction, and winding up of the company will be disposed of by the Tribunal.
- The NCLT is also the Adjudicating Authority for insolvency proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.
- In the above-mentioned subjects, no civil court will have jurisdiction.
- The NCLT has the authority to dispose of cases pending before the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR), as well as, those pending under the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act, 1985.
- It can take up those cases pending before the Appellate Authority for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction.
- It can also take up cases relating to the oppression and mismanagement of a company.
- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) is a tribunal which was formed by the government under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013. NCLAT is responsible for hearing appeals from the orders of the National Company Law Tribunal.
- Decisions taken by the NCLT can be appealed to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The decisions of the NCLAT can be appealed to the Supreme Court on a point of law.

9. Human Rights at Risk in Police Stations, says CJI

Why in News?

- Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana recently said police stations pose the “highest threat” to human rights and dignity, which are ‘sacrosanct’.

What is the Issue?

- CJI has said that the threat to human rights and bodily integrity is the highest in police stations. Going by recent reports, even the privileged are not spared third-degree treatment.
- Custodial torture and police atrocities still prevail despite constitutional guarantees.
- Lack of effective legal representation at police stations is a huge detriment to arrested or detained persons. The first hours of arrest or detention often decide the fate of the case for the accused.

What are the Human Rights Violation faced by the accused?

- **Encounters** – At 2018 in UP within 10 months, 34 alleged criminals were gunned down in 1,142 encounters. In which sixteen encounters took place in two days.
- **Custodial deaths** - According to data released by the National Crime Record Bureau about 591 custodial deaths were recorded across India between 2010 and 2015.
- The death toll in custody in 2016 alone was 92 and the data may not be complete since there could be several custodial deaths that go unreported.

What are the reasons behind such Human Rights Violations?

- Custodial deaths largely occur due to torture by third degree methods, police personnel resort such methods to draw confessions from the accused in the shortest possible time.
- Interrogation is a highly skilled form of investigation and most policemen are not, despite the training, equipped to carry it out deftly.
- The lack of patience and technical skills drive them to adopt unlawful methods like encounters, the tendency of superior officers and even politicians to shield them prevents action against them.
- If stringent and timely action is not taken against delinquent policemen, custodial deaths are bound to become more frequent.

Absence of torture law Endangers Constitutional Rights of People:

- The original petition submitted that “by virtue of Article 51 of the Constitution of India, an international obligation is cast upon India to prevent custodial violence and torture” since India was a signatory to the 1997 convention.

- The Central Government vide its letter on 8th July, 2017 asked the Law Commission to examine the issue of ratification of UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and submit a report on the matter.

Custodial torture violated Human Dignity: Need for a Legislative Protection:

- The Prevention of Torture Bill was first introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha in 2010.
- In August 2010, it was referred to a select committee of parliament, which was chaired by Kumar and comprised 13 members of Rajya Sabha.
- Kumar submitted that “after long and comprehensive deliberations, we unanimously proposed a standalone legislation against torture so as to comply with the requirements of UN Convention on Torture.” Subsequently, the Prevention of Torture Bill, 2017 was appended to the Law Commission Report. According to analysts, the proposed text largely followed the recommendations of the select committee of the Rajya Sabha. However, there were some differences, too especially in “what constitutes torture.”
- A petition before the Supreme Court stated that custodial torture was a naked violation of human dignity and degradation that destroys the self-esteem of the victim.
- It said: “Since there is no scientific method of investigation, torture remains integral to the investigation to obtain confessions from suspects.
- Despite the guarantee under Article 21 and directions from the apex court, it pointed out there were “no checks and balances against the personnel who commit custodial torture” and thus “an intervention from Judiciary has become imperative.”
- However, despite the commitment, it charged, “the entire constitutional framework, the legislature and executive in India have abjectly failed to discharge their constitutional obligations.” The absence of a standalone, comprehensive and purposeful municipal legislation for the prevention of custodial violence, “has resulted in a disturbing void in law endangering the constitutional right of persons”.

What are the Measures Needs to be taken?

- The responsibility devolves on senior police officers, who need to devise methods to monitor the number of suspects in each police station and the reasons for their detention.
- Any detention or arrest should be promptly reported to district superintendents, who should, thereafter, ensure that SC and NHRC guidelines are strictly adhered to
- It is important that fake encounters and custodial deaths need probed impartially and if necessary by outside agencies, so that the rule of law can't be compromised.

10. Parliament Passes Bill Restoring States right to maintain OBC lists

Why in News?

- Parliament recently passed a constitutional amendment aimed at restoring the rights of the States and the Union Territories to maintain their own list of socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs), commonly known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Why it is Needed?

- On May 5, while scrapping a separate quota for the Maratha community in Maharashtra, the Supreme Court had ruled that after a 2018 amendment in the Constitution (102nd constitutional amendment), only the central government could notify socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs) – not the states.
- The 102nd constitutional amendment (Inserted Articles 338B and 342 A after Article 342) was related to giving constitutional status to the National Commission of Backward Classes and interpretation of this constitutional amendment effectively struck a blow to the authority of state governments in identifying backward classes and provide them with reservation benefits.

Constitutional Basis:

- Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law. That means un-equals cannot be treated equally. Measures are required to be taken for the upliftment of un-equals to bring them on par with the advanced classes.
- Article 16 (4) provides that the State can make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens who, in the opinion of the state, are not adequately represented in the services under the State.

Highlights of the 127th Amendment Bill:

- The Bill seeks to restore the power of State governments to identify Other Backward Classes that are socially and economically backward.
- Please note that In May 2021, the Supreme Court, in an order, had empowered only the Central government for such identification.
- The Bill amends this to provide that the President may notify the list of socially and educationally backward classes only for purposes of the central government.
- This central list will be prepared and maintained by the central government. The Bill enables states and union territories to prepare their own list of socially and educationally backward classes.
- This list must be made by law, and may differ from the central list.

List of socially and Educationally Backward Classes:

- The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) was established under the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. The Constitution 102nd Amendment Act, 2018 gave constitutional status to the NCBC, and empowered the President to notify the list of socially and educationally backward classes for any state or union territory for all purposes.

Consultation with the NCBC:

- Article 338B of the Constitution mandates the central and state governments to consult the NCBC on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.

Implications of the New Bill:

- After passing, the 127th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 671 castes in the country would benefit from it and restore the States' rights to make their own list of OBCs.

11. Tamil Nadu moves SC against NGT order on Mekedatu

Why in News?

- The Tamil Nadu government has moved the Supreme Court against a National Green Tribunal (NGT) decision to close proceedings against the Mekedatu dam project.

What's the Issue?

- The tribunal had in June expressed its satisfaction over the Karnataka government's submissions that requisite environmental clearances were pending consideration before the concerned statutory authorities. Tamil Nadu submitted in the top court that the case had been closed by the NGT without giving it (Tamil Nadu) an opportunity to present its side of the case.
- Tamil Nadu said, "NGT failed to consider that the pending adjudication relates to the challenge to the preparation of Detailed Project Report for Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir Cum Drinking Water Project, while, the issue raised in the original application was with regard to taking up road laying work without taking any forest and environment clearances under the Forest Conservation Act, 2003 and Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 and the impact on the nearby Reserve Forests and Wildlife Sanctuaries."

About Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:

- According to its provisions, if a State Government makes a request regarding any water dispute and the Central Government is of opinion that the water dispute cannot be settled by negotiations, then a Water Disputes Tribunal is constituted for the adjudication of the water dispute.

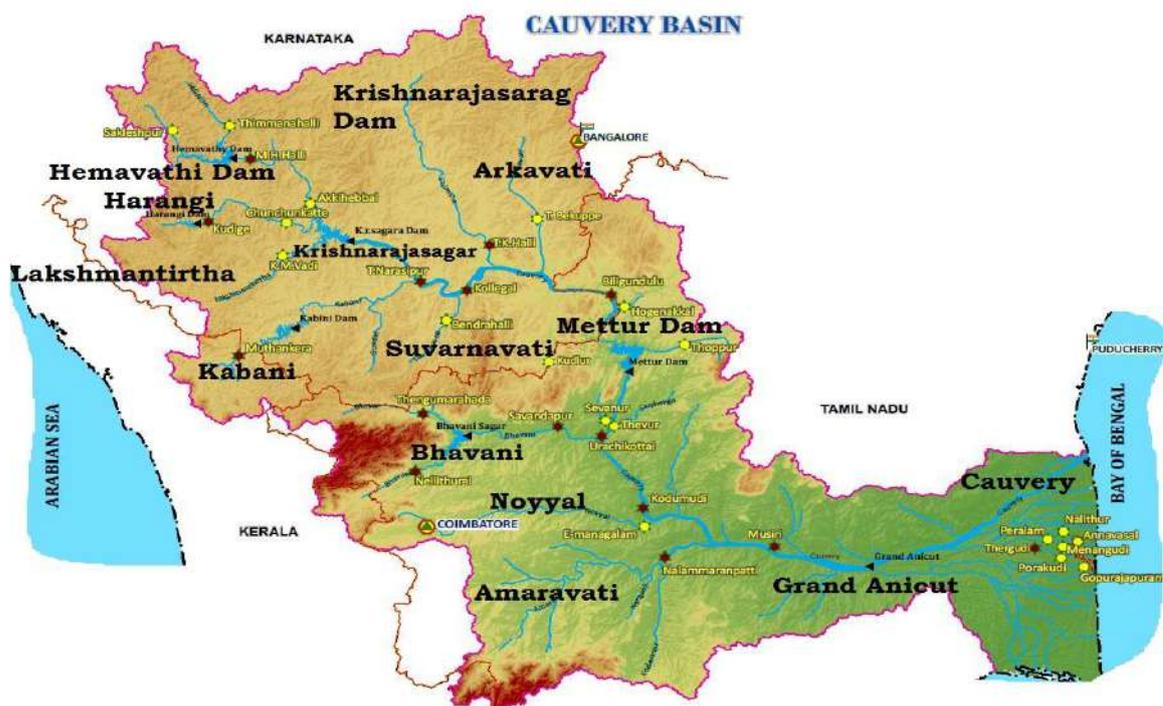
- The act was amended in 2002, to include the major recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission.
- The amendments mandated a one-year time frame to setup the water disputes tribunal and also a 3-year time frame to give a decision.

Provisions related to Interstate river Water Disputes:

- Entry 17 of State List deals with water i.e., water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.
- Entry 56 of Union List empowers the Union Government for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.
- **Article 262:** In the case of disputes relating to waters, it provides
 - ✓ **Clause 1:** Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.
 - ✓ **Clause 2:** Parliament may, by law provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint as mentioned above.

About Mekedatu and Cauvery River:

- Mekedatu is a location along Cauvery in Kanakapura Taluk of Ramanagara District of Karnataka.
- Karnataka wants a reservoir across Cauvery at Mekedatu, to meet Bengaluru's water problem.
- Cauvery is a sacred river of southern India. It rises in the Brahmagiri range of the Western Ghats and falls in the Bay of Bengal south of Cuddalore, in Tamil Nadu.
- It forms the sacred islands of Srirangapatna and Shivanasamudra and Shivanasamudra falls and also a wide delta.
- Total Length of the river is about 760 km.
- Its main tributaries are Amravati, Bhavani, Hemavati, Kabini, Shimsha, and Lakshmana Tirtha.
- Its basin drains parts of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



12. Common Survey to count India's Elephant and Tiger Populations

Why in News?

- From December, India will move to a system that will count tigers and elephants as part of a common survey.

About the News:

- The tiger survey is usually held once in four years under the aegis of Project Tiger by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) with technical help from the Wildlife Institute of India. It is done with cooperation from the state Forest Departments and partners. According to the most recent 2018-19 survey, there were 2,997 tigers in India.
- Elephant census is conducted once in 5 years under the aegis of Project Elephant. Last Elephant Census was conducted in 2017 which counted 29,964 elephants in India.
- However, in 2019, it emerged that Kerala may have under-counted almost 2,700 elephants in the latest elephant census and the updated 2017 figures showed 29,964 elephants on average, or a slight increase from 2012's mean.
- This was because Kerala initially relied on a direct count method and then switched to an indirect method when the count showed a decline in its elephant population.

About Project Tiger:

- It was launched in 1973 with 9 tiger reserves for conserving our national animal, the tiger.

- It is an ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- Currently, the Project Tiger coverage has increased to 52 Tiger reserves, spread out in 18 tiger range states which amounts to around 2.21% of the geographical area of our country.
- Jim Corbett National Park was the first tiger reserve created in 1936 for tiger conservation.
- The largest tiger reserve in India is Nagarjunsagar Srisaillam Tiger Reserve, Andhra Pradesh and the Smallest is Bor Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra.
- The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy. The core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary, whereas the buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.
- The NTCA was launched in 2005, following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force. It is a statutory body of the Ministry, with an overarching supervisory/coordination role, performing functions as provided in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- M-STrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) is an app based monitoring system, launched across Indian tiger reserves by the NTCA in 2010.
- The system would enable field managers to assist intensity and spatial coverage of patrols in a geographic information system (GIS) domain.
- **Protection Status:**
 - ✓ **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I
 - ✓ **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:** Endangered.
 - ✓ **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):** Appendix I.

About Asian Elephants:

- There are three subspecies of Asian elephant – the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan.
- The Indian has the widest range and accounts for the majority of the remaining elephants on the continent. African elephants are listed as “vulnerable” and Asian elephants as “endangered” in IUCN Red List of threatened species.
- The elephant has been accorded the highest possible protection under the Indian wildlife law through its listing under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Appendix I under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

- Government of India has launched various initiatives for conservation of elephants.

About Elephant Corridors:

- As estimated, there are 101 elephant corridors, of which almost 70% are used regularly.
- Nearly three-quarters of the corridors are evenly divided among southern, central and north-eastern forests.
- The rest are found in northwest Bengal and the north-western region.
- Some of these passages are precariously narrow, at only a hundred metres wide.
- Nilgiris - There are an estimated 6,500 elephants in just the Brahmagiri-Nilgiris-Eastern Ghats ranges. Karnataka has the highest number of elephants, followed by Assam and Kerala. There are around 32 Elephant Reserves in India. The very first elephant reserve was the Singhbhum Elephant Reserve of Jharkhand.

What are the its Conservation Efforts?

- Project Elephant launched by the Government of India in the year 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- 'Gaj Yatra' a nationwide awareness campaign to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors.
- The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), had come out with a publication on the right of passage in 101 elephant corridors of the country in 2017, stressed on the need for greater surveillance and protection of elephant corridors.
- The Monitoring the Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme launched in 2003 is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.

13. NCPCR Report on Minority Schools

Why in News?

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has released a report assessing minority schools in the country. The report has analysed the impact of exemptions provided to Minority institutions under Article 15(5).

What is Article 15(5)?

- It empowers the country to make reservations with regard to admissions into educational institutions both privately run and those that are aided or not aided by the government. From this rule only the minority run institutions such as the Madarsas are exempted.

Background:

- Please note, Minority schools are exempted from implementing The Right to Education policy and do not fall under the government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

How are minority schools exempt from RTE and SSA?

- In 2002, the 86th Amendment to the Constitution provided the Right to Education as a fundamental right.
- The same amendment inserted Article 21A, which made the RTE a fundamental right for children aged between six and 14 years.
- The passage of the amendment was followed by the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) that aimed to provide “useful and relevant, elementary education” to all children between six and 14 years.
- In 2006, the 93rd Constitution Amendment Act inserted Clause (5) in Article 15 which enabled the State to create special provisions, such as reservations for advancement of any backward classes of citizens like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in all aided or unaided educational institutes, except Minority Educational Institutes.

Why bring them under RTE now?

- The Commission is of the view that the two different sets of rules Article 21A that guarantees fundamental right of education to all children, and Article 30 which allows minorities to set up their own institutions with their own rules and Article 15 (5) which exempts minority schools from RTE creating a conflicting picture between fundamental right of children and right of Minority Communities.

Need for their Inclusion under RTE:

- The Commission has observed in the report that many children who are enrolled in these institutions or schools were not able to enjoy the entitlements that other children are enjoying.
- For example, Missionaries school are elite cocoons. Such schools are admitting only a certain class of students and leaving underprivileged children out of the system, thus becoming what the Commission has called “cocoons populated by elites”.
- Also, students in madarasas which do not offer a secular course along with religious studies – such as the sciences – have fallen behind and feel a sense of alienation and “inferiority” when they leave school.

3.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE SNIPPETS

1. Tamil Nadu Legislature turns 100

Why in News?

- The Assembly chambers at Fort St. George, the 17th-century vestige of the colonial era, and Tamil Nadu's seat of power have completed 100 years of existence.

Elections in Tamil Nadu:

- Tamil Nadu witnessed elections in November 1920 as a result of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report and the Government of India Act of 1919.
- The electors included only men, accounting for just 3% of the population.
- The concept of dyarchy came into being with Ministers, who were Indians, gaining limited control over certain subjects, such as local self-government and education.
- It was then that the office of the Chief Minister, also called Premier, got instituted.

Key Works Accomplished:

- Reservations in public employment: For the first time, caste became the basis for appointment to public services. It took over 70 years for the Central government to follow the principle in its institutions for education and employment.
- Above 50% cap in reservation: In December 1993, the scheme of 69% reservation for Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, SCs and STs got legal safeguard. The law was subsequently included in the IX Schedule of the Constitution, through an amendment passed in Parliament, so that its validity could not be challenged.

Other facts:

- **Women's suffrage:** In early 1927, Muthulakshmi Reddy, the well-known medical practitioner and social activist, became the first woman member of the Council and, in no time, became the Deputy President of the Council.
- **Gopuram as an Emblem:** The symbol features a 'gopuram' (temple tower) – characteristic of south Indian temples has been adopted as the state emblem.
- **Change of Name:** During the two-year rule of the DMK founder C.N. Annadurai, the Assembly, in July 1967, adopted a motion renaming Madras State as Tamil Nadu, which later got the approval of Parliament.
- **Social Reforms:** It has passed several landmark laws for the welfare of women, such as Devadasi abolition, equal rights to women in property and the constitution of the State Commission for Women.

Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms:

- Central Legislature thereafter called the Indian Legislature was reconstituted on the enlarged and more representative character.
- **Bicameral Legislature:** The act set up bicameral legislatures at the centre consisting of two houses- the Council of the States (Upper House) and the Central Legislative Assembly (Lower House).
- **Election and Nominations:** It consisted of the Council of State consisted of 60 members of whom 34 members were elected and the Legislative Assembly consisted of about 145 members, of whom about 104 were elected and the rest nominated.
- **Separation of Power:** The central and provincial subjects were demarcated and separated.
- **Diarchy:** The Provincial subjects were further divided into Transferred Subjects and Reserved Subjects, the legislative council had no say in the latter.
- Communal representation: The principle of separate electorate was further extended to Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans.
- **Working Review:** It provided for the appointment of a statutory commission to report the working of the act after ten years.

2. Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Finance has amended the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957 to exempt listed public sector companies from the minimum public shareholding norm.

Highlights:

- The government can now exempt any listed public sector enterprise from the Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS) norm, which mandates at least 25% public float for all listed entities.
- The framework for the MPS has been revised to make it easier for large companies to launch IPOs (Initial Public Offers).
- The move comes as the government prepares for the IPO of Life Insurance Corp (LIC) of India, likely to be the biggest listing ever.
- The Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS) rule requires all listed companies in India to ensure that at least 25% of their equity shares are held by non-promoters, i.e. public.

- The Public shareholders could be individual or financial institutions and they normally buy shares through public offer or secondary markets.
- In order to bring more transparency in the working of listed companies, the concept of minimum public shareholding was introduced.
- In 2010, SEBI amended the Securities Contracts Regulation Rules to insist on this 25% public float for private sector companies.
- The average promoter holding in India is among the highest globally.
- In the 2019-20 Budget, the government had proposed to increase the minimum public float from 25% to 35%. While the timeline for achieving 25% MPS for listed companies was 2013, the timeline for public sector companies i.e. PSUs and public sector banks (PSBs), were extended multiple times closer to the deadline due to lack of efforts from such companies towards compliance.
- The previous such extension granted them time till 2nd August, 2021 for compliance.
- With the latest amendment, the Central government has empowered itself to exempt selected public sector companies from the 25% MPS norm.

Advantages:

- Adequate free float in a listed company is essential for providing sufficient liquidity in trading stocks thereby facilitating efficient price discovery and maintaining market integrity.
- The Public float ensures that there is lesser price manipulation in the stock.
- Forcing promoters to relax their grip on listed companies can improve corporate governance by giving public shareholders and institutions greater say in corporate actions.
- There are very few investment opportunities in the stock market and so forcing promoters to sell shares would improve the supply of shares.

3. State of Food Insecurity

Why in News?

- The latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, released jointly by five UN organisations in July, reveals that the pandemic and failure on the part of state to combat its effects, has led to a significant increase in the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in the country.

Highlights:

- Estimates on food insecurity presented in the SOFI report are based on two globally-accepted indicators of food insecurity:

- The Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU), which estimates the proportion of people suffering from chronic deficiency of calories.
- A more recently developed an experience-based indicator called the Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI).
- The PoU estimates are based on estimates of per-capita supply of food and distributional parameters estimated using the national consumption surveys
- On the other hand, PMSFI estimates are based on data collected through surveys that attempt to capture people's experiences of food insecurity (such as eating less, modifying diet to eat cheaper food etc). No assessment of food insecurity during a pandemic: The PMSFI estimates presented in the report are particularly important because, since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Indian government has not undertaken any official assessment of food insecurity in the country. Not only has the government not conducted its own consumption or food security surveys, it does not approve the publication of results based on the Gallup World Poll. As a result, estimates for India are not published in the SOFI reports. However, these can still be obtained indirectly because the data are presented for South Asia and for "South Asia (excluding India)".
- Estimates for India can be obtained by comparing the two sets of data.

What the Report Says:

- According to the data presented in the report, the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity in India rose by about 6.8 percentage points in 2018-20.
- Data show that there were about 43 crore of moderate to severe food-insecure people in India in 2019.
- As a result of the pandemic-related disruptions, this increased to 52 crore in one year.
- In terms of prevalence rates, moderate to severe food insecurity increased from about 31.6 per cent in 2019 to 38.4 per cent in 2021.

Causes of Food Insecurity in India:

- **Economic Distress:** The problems of hunger and food insecurity are grave in India because of widespread economic distress, high unemployment and high levels of inequality.
- **Dependence on Informal Economy:** A large proportion of the poor is dependent on the informal economy in which incomes are too low and uncertain.
- **Unemployment:** Unemployment rates have risen sharply over the last few years, shrinking public investment and the economic slowdown have compounded the distress among working classes and the peasantry.

- With low and uncertain incomes, families dependent on the informal economy do not have assured access to adequate and nutritious food.

Way forward:

- **Monitoring system:** There is an urgent need for the government to establish systems for regular monitoring of the food security situation in the country.
- **Universal access to food:** It is ironic that the country with the largest stock of grain in the world — 120 million tonnes as of July 1, 2021 — accounts for a quarter of the world's food-insecure population. Universalising access to the public distribution system is the need of the hour at least during the pandemic.

4. E-Prison Project

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has provided financial assistance of Rs. 99.49 crores to the States and Union Territories (UTs) for the E-Prisons Project.

Highlights:

- This project aims at computerization of the functioning of prisons in the country. It has been operationalised in all States and Union Territories.
- e-Prisons data has been integrated with the Police and Court system under the Inter-operable Criminal Justice System.
- ePrisons application suite has been developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC), Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).

It has 3 Components:

- e-Prison Management Information System (MIS) is used at the prisons for their day to day regular activities. National Prisons Information Portal is a citizen centric portal showing statistical data of various prisons in the country.
- Kara Bazaar Portal for showcasing and selling the products manufactured in various prisons of the country by inmates.
- It is a common platform for information exchange and analytics of all the pillars of the criminal justice system comprising Police, Forensics, Prosecution, Courts, Prisons.
- **Purpose:** To reduce errors and time taken in sharing of necessary information between the pillars, which often lead to larger challenges like longer duration of trials, poorer convictions, transit losses of documents etc.

- Some other critical benefits arising out of the ICJS ecosystem are usable analytics products like the National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO) to identify & track repeat and habitual sexual offenders.

About 'Persons detained therein'

- It is a State subject under Entry 4 of List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India.
- Administration and management of prisons is the responsibility of respective State Governments.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs provides regular guidance and advice to States and UTs on various issues concerning prisons and prison inmates.
- The Supreme Court had in September 2018 appointed the Justice Roy Committee to examine the various problems plaguing prisons, from overcrowding to lack of legal advice to convicts to issues of remission and parole.

5. Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has recently renamed the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, the country's highest sporting honour, after hockey wizard Major Dhyan Chand.

Highlights:

- This came a day after the Indian men's hockey team won the bronze medal in the ongoing Tokyo Olympics and hours after the women's team finished fourth.
- The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award will hereby be called the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award.
- The now renamed Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award comes with a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh. It is the highest sporting award given by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for the spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over a period of Four Years.
- The award comprises a medallion, a certificate, and a cash prize of Rs 7.5 lakh.
- The Khel Ratna award was instituted in 1991-1992 and the first recipient was Chess legend Viswanathan Anand. Among the other winners were Leander Paes, Sachin Tendulkar, Dhanraj Pillay, Pullela Gopichand, Abhinav Bindra, Anju Bobby George, Mary Kom and Rani Rampal in 2020.

About Major Dhyan Chand:

- He is known as The Wizard, Major Dhyan Chand, a field hockey player, played international hockey from 1926 to 1949, scoring over 400 goals in his career.
- He is born in Allahabad, was part of the Olympic team that won gold medals in 1928, 1932 and 1936.
- Apart from the Khel Ratna award, the country's highest award for lifetime achievement in sports is known as the Dhyan Chand Award. It was instituted in 2002.
- The National Stadium in New Delhi was also renamed as the Dhyan Chand National Stadium in 2002.
- The National Sports Day is observed every year across India on 29th August to mark the birth anniversary of Major Dhyan Chand who was born on 29th August 1905.
- The President of India on this occasion honours the eminent athletes from various sports with the prestigious Khel Ratna, Arjuna Awards, Dronacharya Awards, and Dhyan Chand Award.

6. The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Why in News?

- The Government of India has recently introduced The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the Lok Sabha.

Highlight:

- The bill seeks to withdraw tax demands made using a 2012 retrospective legislation to tax the indirect transfer of Indian assets.
- The Amendments to the Income-tax Act and Finance Act, 2012 to effectively state that no tax demand shall be raised for any indirect transfer of Indian assets if the transaction was undertaken before 28th May 2012.
- Tax raised for the indirect transfer of Indian assets before May 2012 would be "nullified on fulfillment of specified conditions" such as the withdrawal of pending litigation and an undertaking that no damages claims would be filed.
- It also proposes to refund the amount paid by companies facing trail in these cases without interest thereon.
- The bill marks a step in the direction of addressing the long-pending demand of foreign investors seeking the removal of retrospective tax for the sake of better tax clarity.

- This would help in establishing an investment-friendly business environment, which can increase economic activity and help raise more revenue over time for the government.
- This could help restore India's reputation and improve ease of Doing Business.

About Retrospective Taxation:

- It allows a country to pass a rule on taxing certain products, items or services and deals and charge companies from a time behind the date on which the law is passed.
- The Countries use this route to correct any anomalies in their taxation policies that have, in the past, allowed companies to take advantage of such loopholes.
- It hurts companies that had knowingly or unknowingly interpreted the tax rules differently.
- Apart from India, many countries including the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada, Belgium, Australia and Italy have retrospectively taxed companies.

7. China surging ahead, says NITI Aayog

Why in News?

- The NITI Aayog officials opine that China has been recovering well in the aspects of trade flows, financial markets, etc.

Highlights:

- To discuss the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Standing Committee on Finance has been set up. The committee has been mandated to view the developments on the global economy, trade flows and financial markets.
- It has been found that the Chinese had been recovering well, inching well ahead of India and also at a rate that is bridging the gap between China and the USA in the post-pandemic era. The officials however did not give any specific details about the current economic state of India.

State of the Global Economy:

- A NITI Aayog official said the global economy was going through a similar phase like the one it witnessed post the first world war.
- The NITI Aayog officials were quizzed if the pandemic had turned out to be a critical point in the global supply chain and if there was any evidence to suggest if China would persist as the factory of the world.
- The officials in response replied that China had been doing well on the economy front, and it was fast narrowing the gap with the USA.

- China has adapted itself better than most other countries to the post-pandemic era.

The Reforms Suggested:

- India has to initiate reforms that are deep-rooted similar to the one witnessed during the 1991 reforms. With reference to the Current State of the Indian economy, it was said that India should focus on becoming an export-based economy.

8. Tribunal

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court (SC) has recently expressed displeasure against the Central government by asking whether it intends to “close” tribunals across the country by not filling up vacancies that have been pending for years.

Highlights:

- Tribunal is a quasi-judicial institution that is set up to deal with problems such as resolving administrative or tax-related disputes.
- It performs a number of functions like adjudicating disputes, determining rights between contesting parties, making an administrative decision, reviewing an existing administrative decision and so forth.
- Tribunals were not part of the original constitution, it was incorporated in the Indian Constitution by 42nd Amendment Act, 1976. Article 323-A deals with Administrative Tribunals. Article 323-B deals with tribunals for other matters.
- The Tribunals were set up to reduce the workload of courts, to expedite decisions and to provide a forum which would be manned by lawyers and experts in the areas falling under the jurisdiction of the Tribunal.
- The SC noted that, the vacancies of 20 presiding officers, 110 judicial members and 111 technical members were pending across the country in various tribunals. For example, in the National Green Tribunal, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, Central Administrative Tribunal.
- These persisting vacancies make them redundant. Ignoring Recommendations: Recommendations of names by the selection committees led by sitting Supreme Court judges to fill up the vacancies have been largely ignored by the government.
- The Court pointed out that with tribunals defunct and High Courts having no jurisdiction over the areas of law wielded by tribunals, litigants have nowhere to go for justice.

- Added to this is the problem of non-uniformity across tribunals with respect to service conditions, tenure of members, varying nodal ministries in charge of different tribunals.
- These factors contribute significantly to malfunctioning in the managing and administration of tribunals.

9. Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

Why in News?

- Recently, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) system has resulted in a 10% savings in public procurement costs in five years, but has still tapped only 5% of India's total government purchases of about Rs 20 lakh crore a year.

Highlights:

- It is a one-stop National Public Procurement Portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Central and State Government Departments/Organizations/Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).
- The procurement of goods and services by Ministries and the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) is mandatory for goods and services available on GeM.
- It also provides the tools of e-bidding and reverse e-auction to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- It has more than 30 lakh products, over Rs. 10 lakh crore worth of transactions have happened so far at the portal. It was launched in 2016 to bring transparency and efficiency in the government buying process. The Nodal Ministry is Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It has made it mandatory for sellers to enter the Country of Origin while registering all new products on GeM. This has been enabled on the portal so that the buyers can choose to buy only those products that meet the minimum 50% local content criteria.

Advantages:

- It is enabling quick, efficient, transparent and cost-effective procurement, especially when government organizations require products and services urgently to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been promoting the Atmanirbhar Bharat policy, introduced in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, meant to encourage self-reliance and boost small Indian manufacturers.
- The Marketplace has facilitated entry of small local sellers in Public Procurement, while implementing 'Make in India' and MSME Purchase Preference Policies of the Government in the true sense.

- The online marketplace can aggregate demand from multiple entities for similar products, and build on the preferences provided by State governments to small enterprises.

10. PM_KISAN

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has recently released the 9th instalment of financial benefit under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

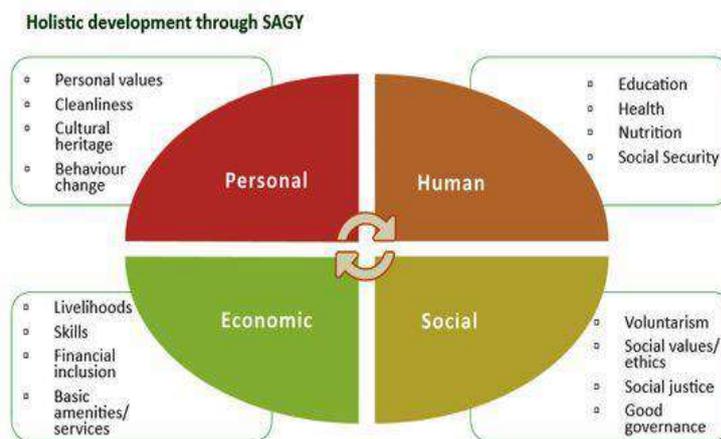
Highlights:

- The Prime Minister also interacted with farmer beneficiaries during the event.
- The Centre transfers an amount of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal instalments, directly into the bank accounts of all landholding farmers irrespective of the size of their land holdings.
- It was launched in February 2019. It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State/UT Governments.
- To supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.
- To protect them from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.
- India has reached among the top-10 countries of the world in terms of agricultural exports.
- Biggest ever purchase from farmers at Minimum Support Price (MSP), Rs 1,70,000 crore have reached directly into the accounts of rice farmers and about Rs. 85,000 crore to wheat farmers.
- The Small farmers are now being given utmost priority in the agricultural policies of the country. Initiatives like Food Parks, Kisan Rails and Kisan Infrastructure Fund will help small farmers.
- These steps increase the small farmer's access to market and his bargaining power through Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs).
- Indian agriculture and farmers have a big role in determining the condition of India in 2047, when the country completes 100 years of independence.

11. Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Rural Development has taken several measures for the successful implementation of the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) Gram Panchayats.



Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY):

- SAGY is a village development project launched in October 2014, under which each Member of Parliament will take the responsibility of developing physical and institutional infrastructure in three villages by 2019.
- SAGY aims at instilling certain values in the villages and their people so that they get transformed into models for others.

These Values Include:

- Adopting people's participation as an end in itself – ensuring the involvement of all sections of society in all aspects related to the life of village, especially in decision-making related to governance Adhering to Antyodaya – enabling the “poorest and the weakest person” in the village to achieve well being
- Affirming gender equality and ensuring respect for women
 - ✓ Guaranteeing social justice
 - ✓ Instilling dignity of labour and the spirit of community service and voluntarism
 - ✓ Promoting a culture of cleanliness
 - ✓ Living in consonance with nature – ensuring a balance between development and ecology
 - ✓ Preserving and promoting local cultural heritage
 - ✓ Inculcating mutual cooperation, self-help and self-reliance
 - ✓ Fostering peace and harmony in the village community

- ✓ Bringing about transparency, accountability and probity in public life
- ✓ Nurturing local self-governance
- ✓ Adhering to the values enshrined in the Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties of the Indian Constitution

Identification of an Adarsh Gram:

- A Gram Panchayat would be the basic unit.
- It will have a population of 3000-5000 in plain areas and 1000-3000 in hilly, tribal and difficult areas. In districts where this unit size is not available, Gram Panchayats approximating the desirable population size may be chosen.
- The MP would be free to identify a suitable Gram Panchayat for being developed as Adarsh Gram, other than his/her own village or that of his/her spouse.
- Lok Sabha MP has to choose a Gram Panchayat from within his/her constituency and Rajya Sabha MP a from the rural area of a district of his/her choice in the State from which he/she is elected. Nominated MPs may choose a Gram Panchayat from the rural area of any district in the country. In the case of urban constituencies, (where there are no Gram Panchayats), the MP will identify a Gram Panchayat from a nearby rural constituency.
- The newly elected MPs will have the option to select the GP of their choice.

12. Definition of Minority

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Minority Affairs has provided some useful information about various initiatives for minorities.

Defining a Minority Community:

- The Central has notified minority communities at the national level in consultation with various stakeholders under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), Act,
- The six communities notified as minority communities under Section 2(c) of the NCM Act, 1992 are Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Parsis, and Jains.
- Notification of any community-specific to a State as a minority community within a State comes under the purview of the State
- Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution provide for the protection of interest of minorities which includes linguistic minorities also.

Who are Linguistic Minorities?

- Linguistic Minorities are group or collectivities of individuals residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language or script of their own.
- The language of the minority group need not be one of the twenty-two languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- In other words, linguistic minorities at the State level mean any group or groups of people whose mother tongues are different from the principal language of the State, and at the district and taluka/tehsil levels, different from the principal language of the district or taluka/tehsil concerned. The linguistic minorities are therefore identified by the respective States/UTs. The State/UT wise, broad linguistic profile is available in the 52nd Report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (CLM).

National Commission for Minorities:

- The Government has already enacted the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act, 1992 to constitute a National Commission for Minorities.
- The NCM receives petitions/grievances from the aggrieved persons and the said petitions/grievances being received by Commission.
- They are dealt with by calling for reports from the concerned authorities under the Union and State Governments.
- On receipt of the reports, the Commission makes appropriate recommendations to the respective authorities for redressal of the grievances.

13. Upholding the human rights of people with disabilities

Why in News?

- Twenty years ago on August 6 in Erwadi in Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram, a fire broke out in a thatched shelter, engulfing 43 chained people who had psychosocial disabilities.

Legal Provision for the Persons with Disabilities:

- India ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007.
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted in 2016.
- The Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA) was enacted in 2017.

Failure of the States:

- States have failed to uphold the human rights of people with disabilities in general and those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities in particular.

- Only eight states/UTs — Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Odisha, Kerala, and West Bengal — have framed rules for implementation of MHCA. Unless we implement the law in letter and spirit, the Global Mental Health Movement will remain a mere buzzword and the CRPD-reliant MHCA will remain a law only on paper.

Violations of Rights in Private Asylums:

- Private asylums survive because of their close proximity to faith-based healing centres.
- Because mental health conditions carry a high stigma, caregivers flock to these faith-based facilities in the hopes of finding a cure. Private players take advantage of their vulnerabilities, forcing such persons with psychosocial issues to be grouped together and chained in these shelters. Chaining in any way or form is outlawed under Section 95 of the MHCA.

Way Forward:

- **Human right Approach:** We must work to ensure that the human rights approach to disability is integrated into mental health systems, education, law, and bureaucracy.
- We move away from Pathologisation, segregation, and a charity-based approach.

14. Electricity Amendment Bill, 2021

Why in News?

- The Electricity Amendment bill, 2021 of the centre is facing opposition even before introduction in the parliament. Many state governments, including West Bengal have asked the centre not to introduce the bill in the parliament.

Highlights:

- The bill will deregulate electricity distribution sector and allow private companies to compete with state-owned distribution companies (DISCOMS).
- This would give options to the consumers to choose the distribution company they want without relying on inefficient state owned ones.
- At present many private distribution companies exist in major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad. But these are exceptions.

Need for Private Distribution Companies:

- Government-owned DISCOMS are suffering from large debts and losses. The government had introduced many schemes to restructure their loans without success.

- Scheme such as UDAY brought temporary respite to the sector but they still are relying on Government Funds to stay afloat.

Objections to de-licensing:

- There is a fear that private players will cherry pick supply targets in form of industrial and consumer players who pay high tariffs.
- They may not provide supply for domestic and agricultural consumers as the margin for profits are low due to low rates. Poor and unaffordable consumers will be on the mercy of public distribution companies, which may not be efficient as they lose commercial revenue to private players. Higher penalties will be levied on companies who fail to meet Renewable energy Purchase Obligations (RPOs).

Addressing Concerns:

- There can be a universal service obligation agreement by private players to supply power to agricultural as well as domestic users to prevent cross subsidy.
- There is a plan to define the minimum area to be covered by private sector competitors to include a universal service obligation and also ceiling subsidy.

15. Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Food Processing industries (MoFPI) has shared some information regarding Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY).

Highlights:

- The MoFPI had launched the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises (PM FME) Scheme, under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- The key sub-segments of the Food Processing industry in India are Dairy, Fruits & Vegetables, Poultry & Meat processing, Fisheries, Food retail, etc.
- In the year 2016, MoFPI had introduced an umbrella Scheme Called “Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters” or SAMPADA, which was proposed to be implemented with an allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for the period of 2016-20.
- The government renamed the SAMPADA scheme as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY). It is a Central Sector Umbrella Scheme. Its objectives are Objective are To supplement agriculture, To create processing and preservation capacities and To modernise and expand existing food processing units with a view to increasing the level of processing.

- To add value leading to the reduction of wastage.
- The sanctioned projects across the country under component schemes of PMKSY are estimated to benefit about 34 lakh farmers on completion.
- In an evaluation study, NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) in Year 2020, estimated that captive projects under the scheme have resulted in an increase in farm-gate prices by 12.38% and each project is estimated to benefit more than 9500 farmers.

16. Income Limit of OBCs and Creamy Layer

Why in News?

- A proposal for revision of the income criteria for determining the Creamy Layer amongst the OBCs is under consideration of the Government.

What is the Creamy Layer?

- Creamy Layer is a concept that sets a threshold within which OBC reservation benefits are applicable.
- While there is a 27% quota for OBCs in government jobs and higher educational institutions, those falling within the “creamy layer” cannot get the benefits of this quota.

Basis of Creamy Layer:

- It is based on the recommendation of the Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission).
- The government in 1990 had notified 27% reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) in vacancies in civil posts and services that are to be filled on direct recruitment.
- After this was challenged, the Supreme Court in the Indira Sawhney case (1992) upheld 27% reservation for OBCs, subject to exclusion of the creamy layer.

How is it Determined?

- Following the order in Indra Sawhney, an expert committee headed by Justice (retired) R N Prasad was constituted for fixing the criteria for determining the creamy layer.
- In 1993, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) listed out various categories of people of certain rank/status/income whose children cannot avail the benefit of OBC reservation.
- For those not in government, the current threshold is an income of Rs 8 lakh per year.

- For children of government employees, the threshold is based on their parents' rank and not income.
- For instance, an individual is considered to fall within the creamy layer if either of his or her parents is in a constitutional post; if either parent has been directly recruited in Group-A; or if both parents are in Group-B services.
- If the parents enter Group-A through promotion before the age of 40, their children will be in the creamy layer.
- Children of a Colonel or higher-ranked officer in the Army, and children of officers of similar ranks in the Navy and Air Force, too, come under the creamy layer.
- Income from salaries or agricultural land is not clubbed while determining the creamy layer (2004).

What is Happening Now?

- MPs have raised questions about the pending proposal for revising the criteria.
- They have asked whether the provision of a creamy layer for government services only for OBC candidates is rational and justified.

Has it ever been Revised?

- Other than the income limit, the current definition of the creamy layer remains the same as the DoPT had spelled out in 1993 and 2004.
- The income limit has been revised over the years.
- No other orders for the definition of the creamy layer have been issued.
- While the DoPT had stipulated that it would be revised every three years, the first revision since 1993 (Rs 1 lakh per year) happened only in 2004 (Rs 2.50 lakh), 2008 (Rs 4.50 lakh), 2013 (Rs 6 lakh), and 2017 (Rs 8 lakh).
- It is now more than three years since the last revision.
- What does the government propose to do about the revision?
- A draft Cabinet note has stated that the creamy layer will be determined on all income, including salary calculated for income tax, but not agriculture income.
- The Government is considering a consensus on Rs 12 lakh but salary and agriculture Income are also being added to the gross Annual Income.

17. Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)

Why in News?

- The Election Commission of India has handed over the Chair of FEMBoSA to the Election Commission of Bhutan for 2021-22.

FEMBoSA:

- Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) was established at the 3rd Conference of Heads of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of SAARC Countries in 2012. The forum aims to increase mutual cooperation in respect to the common interests of the SAARC's EMBs.
- The Forum has eight Member Election Management Bodies from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- The Election Commission of India was the latest Chair of the Forum (now Bhutan).

Its Establishment:

- The first meeting of the representatives of Election Management Bodies of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in the year 2010.
- It was then decided at the conclusion that an organization representing those countries should be established. Consequently, annual meets were held in the member countries and the charter for the organization also was adopted with the aim of fulfilling the objectives of the organization. Since the creation of FEMBoSA, Annual Meetings were held in Pakistan (2011), in India (2012), in Bhutan (2013), in Nepal (2014), in Sri Lanka (2015), in Maldives (2016), in Afghanistan (2017) and in Bangladesh(2018).

Objectives of FEMBOSA:

- Promote contact among the Election Management Bodies of SAARC countries
- Facilitate appropriate exchange of experience and expertise among members
- Share experiences with a view to learning from each other
- Foster efficiency and effectiveness in conducting free, fair, transparent and participative election

Significant activities under FEMBoSA:

- Member organizations celebrate National Voter's Day in a calendar year in their respective countries
- Initiative of establishing South Asia Institute for Democracy and Electoral Studies (SAIDES) in Nepal

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- In order to increase knowledge related to elections, take initiatives to include voter education in the school-level textbooks of their respective countries
 - Implementation of recommendations of South Asian Disabilities Organizations for the inclusion of disabled people in the electoral system and the creation of suitable election environment



4. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

1. Karnataka to get Bulk Drug Park

Why in News?

- Karnataka has sought the Centre's approval for the development of the Bulk Drug Park in Yadgir district under the Centre's Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks Scheme.

What are bulk drugs or APIs?

- A bulk drug is also called an active pharmaceutical ingredient (API).
- It is the key ingredient of a drug or medicine, which lends it the desired therapeutic effect or produces the intended pharmacological activity.
- Take for example- Paracetamol– It is a bulk drug, which acts against pain. It is mixed with binding agents or solvents to prepare the finished pharmaceutical product, ie a paracetamol tablet, capsule or syrup, which is consumed by the patient.

How are APIs Prepared?

- They are prepared from multiple reactions involving chemicals and solvents.
- The primary chemical or the basic raw material which undergoes reactions to form an API is called the key starting material, or KSM.
- Chemical compounds formed during the intermediate stages during these reactions are called drug intermediates or DIs.

Why is India Promoting Bulk Drug Parks?

- India has one of the largest pharmaceutical industries in the world (third largest by volume).
- But this industry largely depends on other countries, particularly China, for importing APIs, DIs and KSMs.
- So, any disruptions in those countries would definitely affect the pharmaceutical industries here in India. For instance, this year, drug manufacturers in India suffered repeated setbacks due to disruption in imports due to COVID-19.
- The border conflict between India and China exacerbated the situation.

How it is significant?

- **Call for greater self-reliance:** In June, the department of pharmaceuticals announced a scheme for the promotion of three bulk drug parks in the country.
- A bulk drug park will have a designated contiguous area of land with common infrastructure facilities for the exclusive manufacture of APIs, DIs or KSMs, and also a common waste management system.

- These parks are expected to bring down manufacturing costs of bulk drugs in the country and increase competitiveness in the domestic bulk drug industry.

Key features of the Scheme for Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks:

- The scheme will support three selected parks in the country by providing a one-time grant-in-aid for the creation of Common Infrastructure Facilities.
- The grant-in-aid will be 70 percent of the cost of the common facilities but in the case of Himachal Pradesh and other hill states, it will be 90 per cent.
- The Centre will provide a maximum of Rs 1,000 crore per park.
- A state can only propose one site, which is not less than a thousand acres in area, or not less than 700 acres in the case of hill states.

4.1 . SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY SNIPPETS

1. NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar

Why in News?

- The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite, aimed at making global measurement of land surface changes using advanced radar imaging, is proposed to be launched in early 2023, informed Earth Sciences Minister.

NASA-ISRO SAR:

- NISAR is a joint collaboration for a dual-frequency L and S-band SAR for earth observation.
- NASA and Bengaluru-headquartered ISRO signed a partnership on September 30, 2014, to collaborate on and launch NISAR.
- The mission is targeted to launch in early 2022 from ISRO's Sriharikota spaceport in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district, about 100km north of Chennai.
- It is capable of producing extremely high-resolution images for a joint earth observation satellite mission with NASA. It will be the first satellite mission to use two different radar frequencies (L-band and S-band) to measure changes in our planet's surface less than a centimeter across.

Objectives of the NISAR:

- NISAR will observe Earth's land and ice-covered surfaces globally with 12-day regularity on ascending and descending passes, sampling Earth on average every six days for a baseline three-year mission.

- It will measure Earth's changing ecosystems, dynamic surfaces, and ice masses, providing information about biomass, natural hazards, sea-level rise, and groundwater, and will support a host of other applications.
- It would also provide data on natural hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, and landslides.

What are L and S Bands?

- L band waves are used for GPS units because they are able to penetrate clouds, fog, rain, storms, and vegetation.
- The S-band is used by airport surveillance radar for air traffic control, weather radar, surface ship radar, and some communications satellites, especially those used by NASA to communicate with the Space Shuttle and the International Space Station.
- NISAR uses a sophisticated information-processing technique known as SAR to produce extremely high-resolution images.
- Radar penetrates clouds and darkness, enabling NISAR to collect data day and night in any weather.

What is Collaboration?

- NASA is providing the mission's L-band SAR, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers, a solid-state recorder, and payload data subsystem.
- ISRO is providing the spacecraft bus, the S-band radar, the launch vehicle, and associated launch services for the mission, whose goal is to make global measurements of the causes and consequences of land surface changes using advanced radar imaging.

2. Zika Virus

Why in News?

- The Union Health Ministry has rushed a multidisciplinary team to Maharashtra to monitor the Zika virus situation and support the State government in management of infections..

About:

- Zika virus is similar to dengue fever, yellow fever and West Nile virus. Carried by infected Aedes aegypti mosquitos, Zika is largely transmitted through bites, but can also occur through Intrauterine Infection.
- It was first identified in 1947 in Zika Forest, Uganda from where it derives its name.

- If a woman is bitten by an infected mosquito and becomes infected, Zika can cross into the placenta and affect the foetus. While anyone can contract Zika, pregnant women are the most at risk due to the potential for foetal microcephaly and other neurologic abnormalities.
- Symptoms include fever, headache, red eyes, skin rash, fatigue, muscle pain etc.
- **Treatment and Prevention:** There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika. Instead, the focus is on relieving symptoms and includes rest, rehydration and acetaminophen for fever and pain. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites and clearing stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

3. INS Vikrant

Why in News?

- The Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) 1 named INS Vikrant, started sea trials (one of the last phases of trials).

Highlights:

- It is likely to be commissioned in 2022. At present, India has only one aircraft carrier, the Russian-origin INS Vikramaditya. The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved issuance of Request for Proposal (RFP) for six advanced submarines for the Indian Navy under Project-75I. The vessel, to be named Vikrant after the decommissioned maiden carrier of the Navy. India acquired the Vikrant from the United Kingdom in 1961, and the carrier played a stellar role in the 1971 war with Pakistan that led to the birth of Bangladesh.
- Over 76% of the material and equipment on board IAC-1 is indigenous.
- It will have an air component of 30 aircraft, comprising MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31 airborne early warning helicopters and the soon-to-be-inducted MH-60R multi-role helicopter, besides the indigenous Advanced Light Helicopters.
- It is expected to have a top speed of 30 knots (approximately 55 kmph) and is propelled by four gas turbines. Its endurance is 7,500 nautical miles at 18 knots (32 kmph) speed.
- The shipborne weapons include Barak LR SAM and AK-630, while it has MFSTAR and RAN-40L 3D radars as sensors. The vessel has a Shakti EW (Electronic Warfare) Suite.
- It has a pair of runways and a 'short take off but arrested recovery' system to control aircraft operations.

Advantages:

- It adds Combat and Sea Control Capability, especially in the Indian Ocean Region.

- **Increased Ability of Air Power:** It would offer an incomparable military instrument with its ability to project air power over long distances, including air interdiction, anti-surface warfare, offensive and defensive counter-air, airborne anti-submarine warfare and airborne early warning. Only five or six nations currently have the capability of manufacturing an aircraft carrier — India joins this elite club now.

4. CERT-In tracks 6.07 lakh cybersecurity incidents

Why in News?

- Cybersecurity incidents noted by CERT-In.

Highlights:

- The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) observed more than 6.07 lakh cybersecurity incidents in the first six months of 2021, of which about 12,000 were related to Government Organisations.
- The IP addresses of the computers from where the attacks appeared to originate belonged to various different countries.

CERT-In:

- CERT-IN was established in 2004 under Section (70B) of the Information Technology Act.
- It is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.
- It strengthens the security-related defence of the Indian Internet domain.

Functions of CERT-In:

- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
- Providing forecasts and alerts of cybersecurity incidents.
- Emergency measures for handling cybersecurity incidents.
- Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
- Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers relating to information security practices, procedures, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.

5. Plastic-Mixed Paper

Why in News?

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has recently secured Patent registration for its innovative Plastic-mixed Handmade Paper developed to reduce plastic menace from nature.

Highlights:

- The plastic-mixed handmade paper (which is recyclable and eco-friendly) was developed under Project REPLAN (Reducing Plastic from Nature).
- The project was launched in September 2018 as part of KVIC's commitment to Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan.
- It aims to make carry bags by mixing processed and treated plastic waste with cotton fibre rags in the ratio 20:80.
- This is the first of its kind project in India, where plastic waste is de-structured, degraded, diluted and used with paper pulp while making handmade paper and thus reduces plastic waste from nature.
- The invention is aligned with the Prime Minister's call for fighting the menace of single-use plastic.
- The production of waste-plastic mixed handmade paper is likely to serve the twin objectives are Protecting the environment and Creating sustainable employment
- The technology developed by KVIC uses both high- & low-density waste polythene that not only adds extra strength to the paper but also reduces the cost by up to 34%.
- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)
- It is a statutory body established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956.
- It is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programmes for the development of Khadi and other village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- It functions under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- It has developed products such as carry bags, envelopes, files/folders, etc. using plastic mixed handmade paper.

6. Marburg Virus

Why in News?

- The West Africa's first case of the extremely contagious and deadly Marburg virus was recently confirmed in Guinea.

Highlights:

- It is a highly virulent disease that causes haemorrhagic fever, it is carried by bats with a fatality ratio of up to 88%. It is in the same family as the virus that causes Ebola virus disease.
- The Two large outbreaks that occurred simultaneously in Marburg and Frankfurt in Germany, and in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1967, led to the initial recognition of the disease.
- The outbreak was associated with laboratory work using African green monkeys (*Cercopithecus aethiops*) imported from Uganda.
- Subsequently, outbreaks and sporadic cases have been reported in Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda.
- There have been 12 major Marburg outbreaks since 1967, mostly in southern and eastern Africa. Human infection with Marburg virus disease initially results from prolonged exposure to mines or caves inhabited by Rousettus bat colonies.
- Rousettus is a genus of Old World fruit bats or megabats. They are sometimes referred to as dog-faced fruit bats, or flying foxes. Once an individual is infected with the virus, Marburg can spread through human-to-human transmission via direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and with surfaces and materials (e.g. bedding, clothing) contaminated with these fluids. Headache, vomiting blood, muscle pains and bleeding through various orifices.
- Symptoms become increasingly severe and can include jaundice, inflammation of the pancreas, severe weight loss, liver failure, massive hemorrhaging, and multi-organ dysfunction. Since many of the disease's symptoms are similar to those of malaria and typhoid fever, making a diagnosis is difficult.
- However, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) testing can be used to confirm a case.
- There is no specific treatment or approved vaccine for Marburg hemorrhagic fever. Supportive hospital therapy should be utilized.
- Supportive hospital therapy includes balancing the patient's fluids and electrolytes, maintaining oxygen status and blood pressure, replacing lost blood and clotting factors, and treatment for any complicating infections.

7. GSLV- F10 Failure

Why in News?

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has recently suffered the loss of an important earth observation satellite (EOS-03) during launch when the GSLV rocket carrying it malfunctioned about five minutes from the lift-off.

Highlights:

- Earth observation satellites are the satellites equipped with remote sensing technology. It is the gathering of information about Earth's physical, chemical and biological systems.
- The EOS-03 was capable of imaging the entire country four to five times every day.
- It was riding on a GSLV rocket (GSLV-F10), which has a new payload carrier designed to significantly reduce aerodynamic drag and thus carry larger payloads.
- It is part of the new generation of earth-observation satellites, was meant to provide almost real-time images of large parts of the country.
- The images could be used for monitoring natural disasters like floods and cyclones, water bodies, crops, vegetation and forest cover.
- It was being sent ahead of EOS-02 which has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- EOS-02 was supposed to be launched around March-April this year, but now has been rescheduled for September-October. It was supposed to ride on ISRO's new SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) rocket
- SSLVs will broaden ISRO's current rocket range that comprises PSLVs and GSLVs, and cater to the increasing demand for launching of small commercial satellites.

5.1. ART AND CULTURE & MISCELLANEOUS SNIPPETS

1. RRTS (Rapid Rail transit system)

Why in News?

- Recently, the Supreme Court-Appointed Committee has permitted construction of a stretch of the proposed Delhi-Alwar RRTS (Rapid Rail transit system) corridor.

Highlights:

- The committee observed that the project is in public interest and since the proposed rail corridor will run 20 metres below the ground, trees will not have to be cut.
- There will be no construction on the surface in the Morphological Ridge area. This is under the Aravalli Biodiversity Park and the extended ridge area.
- A ridge or a mountain ridge is a geographical feature consisting of a chain of mountains or hills that form a continuous elevated crest for some distance.
- The Aravalli ridge areas, which are essentially extensions of the Aravalli ranges and extend over 7,000 hectares in Delhi, are considered the lungs of the capital (Delhi).

About Delhi-Alwar RRTS Corridor:

- It is a 164-km rapid rail corridor. It will be a mix of elevated tracks and tunnels. It is slated to be implemented in three phases.
- A 3.6-km stretch of the corridor is supposed to pass below the extended or 'morphological' ridge in South Delhi.
- 1.7-km of the 3.6-km stretch under consideration will pass below the Aravalli Biodiversity Park near Vasant Kunj, Delhi.
- It is expected to reduce travel time between these places to 117 minutes – a little less than two hours.
- It is expected to improve the air quality in Delhi/NCR (National Capital Region), because the share of public transport is expected to increase.
- About Aravalli Biodiversity Park
 - It is developed on 699 acres of land located in South Delhi near Vasant Vihar.
 - The area is highly degraded due to past mining and infested with *Prosopis juliflora* (an Invasive Shrub). The biodiversity of Delhi is nearly extinct.
 - The prime objective of ABP is to bring back the lost biodiversity of Delhi Aravallis. The other objective of ABP is to promote nature education among students and create environment awareness among the public.

- It is also helping in preserving the threatened medicinal plants of the Aravallis.

2. Quit India Movement

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has greeted the nation on the eve of the anniversary of Quit India Movement Day.

Highlights:

- The Quit India Movement is also known as the Bharat Chhodo Andolan was launched by Mahatma Gandhi on August 8, 1942, at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC).
- The movement demanded an end to British rule in India.
- Since the protest was held in August, it also went on to be known as August Kranti or August Movement.
- The 'Do or Die' speech was etched in the hearts of Indians, and many faced the consequences of the movement.
- Every year, the day is celebrated by paying tribute to freedom fighters who laid their lives for the country.

Quit India Movement:

- The movement began on August 8, 1942, with its foundations being laid back in 1939 when the Governor-general of India was Lord Lilinghow.
- In 1942, Stafford Cripps was sent to India by the British Establishment to negotiate with the leaders of the All India Congress Committee for gaining their support in exchange for their freedom.
- July 1942- The Quit India Movement Resolution was passed at the Wardha Conference of All India Congress Committee.

Series of Events:

- Mahatma Gandhi delivered his speech at Mumbai's Gowalia Tank Maidan, also called August Kranti Maidan, on 08th August 1942.
- Gandhi Ji was arrested and jailed at Pune's Aga Khan Palace and his wife Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and secretary Mahadev Desai.
- Many other senior members of the Indian National Congress were also arrested, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad, and were kept in the Yerwada Jail.

- The British Government banned the Congress Committee declaring it an unlawful association.
- Aruna Asaf Ali, popularly known as the 'Grand Old Lady' of the Independence Movement, hoisted the National Flag at Mumbai's Gowalia Tank Maidan.
- This event was followed by an uproar among the people and the emergence of several young leaders such as Ram Manohar Lohia, JP Narayan, SM Joshi, and others who continued to fuel the fire of the movement throughout India during the period of World War II.

Causes of the Movement:

- Involvement of India in World War II without prior consultation with the leaders: The Indian Nationalists were disgruntled with the Governor-General of India, Lord Linlithgow, as he brought India to the verge of World War II without consulting them.
- Failure of Cripps Mission: The British sent Stafford Cripps to India to gain the cooperation of India, which failed because the Cripps Mission offered India not complete freedom but the Dominion Status to India, along with the partition. After the failure of Cripps Mission, the Indian Nationalist Leaders knew that the Britishers were in no mood to amend the Constitution before the end of World War II.
- Shortage of essential commodities: There was widespread discontent due to the shortage of essential commodities and rising prices of salt, rice, etc., and commandeering of boats in Bengal and Orissa.
- There were fears that the Britishers would follow a scorched earth policy in Assam, Bengal, and Orissa in reaction to the advancement of the Japanese. The Economy also shattered as a result of World War II.
- **Prevalence of anti-British sentiment:** The sentiments were widely anti-British, and the masses were demanding complete independence from the British Government.
- Centralization of many small movements: The Ground for the movement was already prepared by various associated and affiliated bodies of the Congress, like Forward Bloc, All India Kisan Sabha, and others. They were leading the mass movements on a much more radical level for more than two decades. They also channelized many militant outbursts, which were happening at several places in the country.

Phases of Quit India Movement:

- The Quit India Movement can be viewed in three phases from its inception to end. The phases are as follows:

- **First Phase:** The first phase or the inception of the movement had no violence. It began with civil disobedience, boycotts, strikes that the British Government quickly suppressed. Almost all members of the Congress Committee, including Gandhiji, were arrested and kept in Jail till 1945 without any trial.
- **Second phase:** In its second phase, the movement shifted to the countryside. The second phase of the movement took a violent and aggressive turn. Any building or offices which were the symbol of the colonial authority was attacked and distracted. Communication systems, railway stations & tracks, telegraph poles and wires were also targeted.
- **Third and last phase:** In the last phase of the movement, there was the formation of many independent national or parallel governments in the isolated pockets of the country, such as Ballia, Satara, Tamluk, etc.

Successes:

- **Women Empowerment:** Aruna Asif Ali hoisted the national flag on the Gowalia tank maidan; Usha Mehta, on the other hand, helped set up the underground radio station to spread awareness about the movement.
- **Rise of Future Leaders:** This movement also gave some future prominent leaders such as Biku Patnaik, Aruna Asif Ali, Ram Manohar Lohia, Sucheta Kriplani, J.P. Narayan, etc. These leaders were helping the movement through underground activities.
- **Rise of Nationalism:** A greater sense of unity and brotherhood emerged due to the Quit India Movement. Many students dropped out of schools and colleges, people gave up their jobs and withdrew money from the banks.

Failure of the Movement:

- The movement did not have the support of many organizations of the country itself.
- The Britishers were supported by the Princely States, British Indian Army, Indian Civil Services, Viceroy's Council (which had Indians in the majority), All India Muslim League, Indian Imperial Police.
- The Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) & Muslim League also opposed the Quit India Movement.
- Many Congress members like C Rajagopalachari resigned from the provincial legislature as they did not favor Mahatma Gandhi's idea.

3. Quality of Life for Elderly Index

Why in News?

- Quality of Life for Elderly Index was released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM).

Quality of Life for Elderly Index:

- The Index has been created by the Institute for Competitiveness at the request of EAC-PM and it sheds light on an issue often not mentioned- problems faced by the elderly.
- The report identifies the regional patterns of ageing across the Indian States and assesses the overall ageing situation in India.
- The report presents a deeper insight into how well India is doing to support the well-being of its ageing population.
- **The Index Framework includes four pillars:**
 - ✓ Financial Well-being
 - ✓ Social Well-being
 - ✓ Health System and
 - ✓ Income Security
- **It has Eight Sub-pillars:** Economic Empowerment, Educational Attainment & Employment, Social Status, Physical Security, Basic Health, Psychological Wellbeing, Social Security and Enabling Environment.

Features of the Index:

- This index broadens the way we understand the needs and opportunities of the elderly population in India. It goes far beyond the adequacy of pensions and other forms of income support, which, though critical, often narrows policy thinking and debate about the needs of this age group. The index highlights that the best way to improve the lives of the current and future generations of older people is by investing in health, education and employment for young people today.

Why Need such an Index?

- India is often portrayed as a young society, with a consequent demographic dividend.
- But, as with every country that goes through a fast process of demographic transition, India also has greying cum aging problem.
- Without a proper diagnostic tool to understand the implications of its ageing population, planning for the elderly can become a challenge for policymakers.

Key Highlights from the Report:

- The Health System pillar observes the highest national average, 66.97 at an all-India level, followed by 62.34 in Social Well-being.
- Financial Well-being observes a score of 44.7, which is lowered by the low performance of 21 States across the Education Attainment & Employment pillar, which showcases scope for improvement.
- States have performed particularly worse in the Income Security pillar because over half of the States have a score below the national average, i.e., 33.03 in Income Security, which is the lowest across all pillars.

Performance of the states:

- Among all the states, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh are top-scoring regions in the aged states and relatively aged states categories.
- Rajasthan has a score of 54.61 in the aged states category while Himachal Pradesh has a score of 61.04 in relatively aged states.
- Mizoram has a score of 59.79 among northeastern states while Chandigarh scored 63.78 among the Union Territories.
- Jammu and Kashmir scored the lowest 46.16 among Union Territories.
- Arunachal Pradesh, among the northeastern states, scored the lowest score with 46.16.
- In the aged states and relatively aged states categories, Telangana and Gujarat scored the lowest with 38.19 and 49.00, respectively.

6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India Assumes UNSC Presidency

Why in News?

- India recently assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the month of August and is set to organise key events in three major areas of maritime security, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.

About UNSC:

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
- **Members:** The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

What are India's Claims on UNSC Permanent Member?

- India's claims to a permanent seat in the UNSC are based on the following grounds:
 - ✓ Represents one-sixth of the global population.
 - ✓ Among the founding members of the U.N.
 - ✓ Always upheld its principles and credentials while some other countries consider the organisation as merely a talk shop.
 - ✓ Impressive contribution towards the UN Peace Keeping Force (UNPKF).
 - ✓ An emerging Economic Power.
 - ✓ An independent foreign policy which is very often not in sync with that of the five permanent members of UNSC (P5). Ex.: At first, India opposed authorising the use of force in Libya and then abstained from voting on the matter.
 - ✓ A substantially increasing international clout.
 - ✓ Victory at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) election in which the UK lost for the first time.

- ✓ International day of Yoga which was celebrated by 177 countries.

What about other Candidates?

- G4 was created in the mid-2000s to voice a collective campaign of India, Germany, Japan and Brazil.
- Even though India perceived herself a weak campaigner, it came out to be the strongest.
- In 2016 Delivering a joint G4 statement, India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin, stated that the grouping was eager for a forward discussion on UNSC permanent membership and reforms.
- **Japan:** A 'fanatic' opposition from China combine with a recent decline of the economic clout weakens the claims of Japan. Chinese diplomats have informally urged India to leave G4 so that they would be able to support India alone (and not along with Japan).
- **Germany:** Opposition from the UK, France, and other European powers such as Spain and Italy. A declining economic clout within Europe. Opposition from Africa, Latin America and Arab countries against the entry of another European country.
- **Brazil:** Opposition from Argentina and Mexico (a country with a GDP comparable to that of Brazil).
- **Africa:** One of the biggest stumbling blocks in terms of UNSC expansion, since there are internal divisions over who should be the candidate. South Africa is economically powerful but Nigeria tops in terms of population. Egypt also wants to be a candidate. With an African counterpart on board, G4 would have been G5.

Views of Other P5 Members:

- France views that it is a strategic need that India be a part of the permanent circle of UNSC. Russia also never refused support to India.
- USA generally holds the view that bigger countries with bigger population need to be present in the permanent council. US never said that they wouldn't support India. They support Japan and Brazil. They would like India to be on their side rather than being independent.
- However, when it comes to the actual processing, none of the P5 wants to expand the UNSC. They only entangle every candidate into the webs of passive statements of support and opposition.

What are the other Challenges?

- Apart from bilateral dialogues, and committee recommendations, there is no actual movement in the direction of UNSC reforms, even though the parent organization, UN, had reformed in the past few years.

- The process must go through a systematic way which is time consuming.
- There are problems within different groups of candidates.
- Group of 77 (a coalition of 134 developing countries within UN) prefers text based negotiations but other countries do not agree. However, out of the 122 countries who gave their comment on text negotiations, 113 supported reforms in the UN and the UNSC.
- Uniting for Consensus (Coffee Club) members counter the claims raised by the G4 countries.
- The issue of expanding the UNSC and the Text Based Negotiation is expected to come up in the next UN General Assembly session in September.
- Like every year, those countries with a direct stake will take up the issue of UNSC reforms forward.
- But, the issue is not generating as much enthusiasm as it used to be.
- Countries have gone through a number of motions and they have realised that it will be a much more complicated task than expected.

Way Forward:

- India has to continue its demands by mobilising a favourable public opinion at the global level.
- It is important to maintain the support we receive from the majority of the UNGA and UNSC members. As former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed, our priority must be to achieve a sustained growth rate of 10% for at least ten years, so that we will be eventually invited to be a permanent member of the UNSC.
- Hence, instead of over-investing on our diplomatic capital, India need to devise strategies to become a more economically, militarily and Diplomatically Important Power.
- The P5 members need to abide by the Original Premises of the UN charter and agree to reflect the present Global Power structure in the composition of permanent UNSC members.

2. Home Ministry Flags Illegal Migrants

Why in News?

- According to a written reply from the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Lok Sabha there are reports of some Rohingya migrants indulging in Illegal Activities.

What's the Concern?

- India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereon.

- All foreign nationals (including refuge seekers) are governed by the provisions contained in the Foreigners Act, 1946; the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939; the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and the Citizenship Act, 1955, and rules and orders made thereunder.
- The foreign nationals who enter the country without valid travel documents are treated as illegal migrants.
- Since illegal migrants enter into the country without valid travel documents in clandestine and surreptitious manner, accurate data regarding number of such migrants living in the country is not centrally available.

Who are Rohingyas?

- They are an Ethnic group, mostly Muslims. They were not granted full citizenship by Myanmar.
- They were classified as “resident foreigners or associate citizens”.
- Ethnically they are much closer to Indo-Aryan people of India and Bangladesh than to the Sino-Tibetans of the Country.
- Described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as “one of, if not the, most discriminated people in the world”.

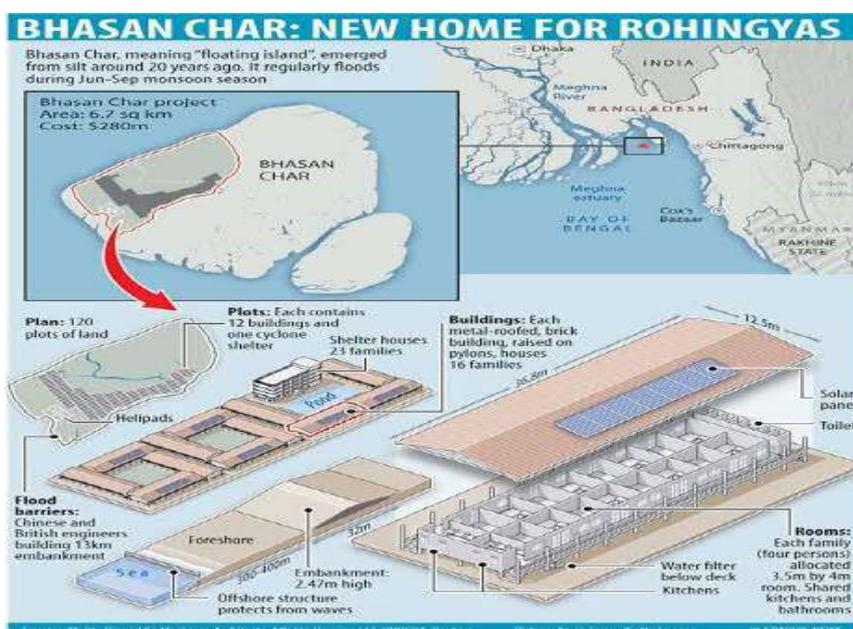
Where are they now?

- About 860,000 Rohingya live in the world’s largest and most densely populated refugee camp in southern Bangladesh.
- The Myanmar and Bangladesh governments continue to negotiate terms for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are approximately 40,000 Rohingyas living in India.

About Rohingya Crisis:

- The Rohingya people being a Muslim minority group reside in the Rakhine state (in the south western Myanmar), formerly known as Arakan and are considered to be a variation of the Sunni religion.
- The 1982 Citizenship Law denies the Rohingya Muslims citizenship despite the people living there for generations. They are considered “stateless entities”.
- They are regarded as mere refugees from Bangladesh, face strong hostility in the country.
- United Nations classifies them as one of the most persecuted refugee groups in the world.
- To escape the dire situation in Myanmar, the Rohingya try to illegally enter Southeast Asian states like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, begging for humanitarian support from potential host countries

- As per the United Nations refugee agency from August almost 400,000 Rohingya have crossed Naf river over to Bangladesh from the northern Rakhine state in Myanmar, putting Bangladesh under immense strain
- The dominant group, the Rakhine, rejects the label “Rohingya” and has started to persecute the Rohingya.
- The latest surge follows attacks on police posts by an extremist Rohingya group, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).
- People from all over the world started calling this crisis and bloodshed “campaign of ethnic cleansing.”



What is India’s Stance Regarding the crisis?

- India lacks specific legislation to address the problem of refugees, in spite of their increasing inflow.
- The Foreigners Act, 1946, fails to address the peculiar problems faced by refugees as a class. It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen.
- Further, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2019 strikingly excludes Muslims from its purview and seeks to provide citizenship only to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The majority of the Rohingya are Muslims.
- This limitation on the basis of religion fails to stand the test of equality under Article 14 of the Constitution and offends secularism, a basic feature of the Constitution.

Way Forward:

- As per the devastated condition of Rohingyas, they should be provided with basic facilities of sanitation, proper drinking water, and medical facilities and gradually arrangements for their deportation should be made.
- Any host country considerably should protect them from further difficulties rather than throw them again into the same. The right of living of any individual is a priority and cannot be abridged.
- India hasn't ratified international convention validating refugee status in the country. However, India has done the best it can in the circumstances. India had also built 250 homes for the refugees in Myanmar's Rakhine province for when they return.

6.1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SNIPPETS

1. Pakistan Grants statehood to Gilgit-Baltistan

Why in News?

- Pakistan has finalized draft legislation to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan, the region known before 2009 as Northern Areas, as a province of the country.

Gilgit-Baltistan: History of the region:

- Gilgit was part of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir but was ruled directly by the British, who had taken it on lease from Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of the Muslim-majority state. When Hari Singh acceded to India on October 26, 1947, the Gilgit Scouts rose in rebellion, led by their British commander Major William Alexander Brown.
- The Gilgit Scouts also moved to take over Baltistan, which was then part of Ladakh, and captured Skardu, Kargil and Dras.
- In battles thereafter, Indian forces retook Kargil and Dras in August 1948.

Accession with Pakistan:

- In November, 1947, a political outfit called the Revolutionary Council of Gilgit-Baltistan had proclaimed the independent state of Gilgit-Baltistan.
- It declared GB was acceding to Pakistan only to the extent of full administrative control, choosing to govern it directly under the Frontier Crimes Regulation.
- It was a law devised by the British to keep control of the restive tribal areas of the northwest.
- Following the India-Pakistan ceasefire of January 1, 1949, Pakistan entered into an agreement with the "provisional government" of "Azad Jammu & Kashmir".

- Much of its parts had been occupied by Pakistani troops and irregulars and were later taken over by Pak defence and foreign affairs.
- Under this agreement, the AJK government also ceded administration of Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan.

Not being incorporated as a province:

- In 1974, Pakistan adopted its first full-fledged civilian Constitution, which lists four provinces —Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakthunkhwa.
- Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan were not incorporated as provinces.
- One reason ascribed to this is that Pakistan did not want to undermine its international case that the resolution of the Kashmir issue had to be in accordance with UN resolutions that called for a plebiscite.
- In 1975, PoK got its own Constitution, making it an ostensibly self-governed autonomous territory. This Constitution had no jurisdiction over the Northern Areas, which continued to be administered directly by Islamabad (the Frontier Crimes Regulation was discontinued in 1997). In reality, PoK too remained under the control of Pakistani federal administration and the security establishment, through the Kashmir Council.

Reasons behind:

- The main difference was that while the people of PoK had rights and freedoms guaranteed by their own Constitution, which mirrors the Pakistan Constitution.
- However the people of the minority Shia-dominated Northern Areas did not have any political representation. Although they were considered Pakistani, including for citizenship and passports, they were outside the ambit of constitutional protections available to those in the four provinces and PoK.

Why GB is in Focus Now?

- Pakistan began considering changes to its administrative arrangements with increasing Chinese involvement in strategic development ventures.
- GB was vital to those projects, given that it provides only land access between the two countries. Since 2009, it has had a namesake legislative assembly.

Suppression of a Movement:

- There is anger against Pakistan for unleashing sectarian militant groups that target Shias, but the predominant sentiment is that all this will improve once they are part of the Pakistani federation. There is a small movement for independence, but it has very little traction. Some factions argue for its accession with India.

- While some reports have suggested that Pakistan's decision is under pressure from China, wary that Gilgit-Baltistan's ambiguous status might undermine the legality of its projects there.

Significance for India:

- Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of India by virtue of the legal, complete and irrevocable accession of Jammu & Kashmir to the Union of India in 1947.
- The area's strategic importance for India has increased in light of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor agreement.
- India is also concerned of a two-front war (with China as well as Pakistan) after the standoff in Eastern Ladakh last year.

2. World Tribal Day

Why in News?

- World Tribal Day or International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples has recently observed on 9th August every year.

Highlights:

- It is aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of the world's indigenous population and to acknowledge the contributions that indigenous people make towards world issues such as environmental protection.
- The day recognizes the first meeting of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva in 1982.
- It has been celebrated every year since 1994, in accordance with the declaration by the United Nations.
- To date, numerous indigenous peoples experience extreme poverty, marginalization, and other human rights violations.
- The Theme for 2021 is "Leaving no one behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract."
- Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live.
- There are over 476 million indigenous peoples living in 90 countries across the world, accounting for 6.2% of the global population.

Advantages:

- Around 80% of the world's biodiversity is inhabited and protected by indigenous populations.
- Their innate, diverse knowledge about lands, nature, and its development are extremely crucial to ensure the protection of the critical ecosystem, natural resources.
- With 370-500 million indigenous peoples representing the majority of the world's cultural diversity, they speak the greater share of almost 7000 languages in the world.
- The crops grown by indigenous people are highly adaptable. They can survive drought, altitude, flooding, and any kind of extremes of temperature. As a result, these crops help create Resilient Farms.

3. International Baccalaureate

Why in News?

- The Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with International Baccalaureate (IB) to implement IB programmes in 30 government schools, including 20 of its new Schools of Specialised Excellence (SOSE) in 2021.

Highlights:

- It is a worldwide, non-profit education program founded to give to students aged 3 to 19 the opportunity to receive an education fit for a globalizing world. Its Foundation Office is in Geneva (Switzerland).
- It emphasizes personal student development as one of its main achievements.
- The government school students will get access to international level of educational facilities.
- Students of these schools will be issued joint certification by the IB and the Delhi board when they complete schooling.
- There are four IB education programs, all of which are intended to develop students' intellectual, emotional, personal and social skills.
- It has around 5,000 schools globally. There are currently 193 IB schools in India, all of which are top-end elite private schools.
- The Fostering critical thinking and building problem-solving skills, while encouraging diversity, international mindedness, curiosity, and a healthy appetite for learning and excellence.

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- High quality programmes of education, which support development of knowledgeable and inquiring students.
 - Professional development that supports effective educators and collaborative professional learning communities.
 - Students will be able to engage with people in an increasingly Globalized, rapidly changing world.

