



# CURRENT AFFAIRS

FORTNIGHTLY DECEMBER 01 - 15

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## 1. ECONOMY

### 1. MGNREGA Seeks more 25, 000 Crore

#### Why in News?

- After the demand-driven rural jobs scheme ran out of funds midway through the year, the Centre has sought ₹25,000 crore as additional funding for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme as part of the supplementary demand for grants which was submitted to Parliament recently.

#### About the News:

- Overall, ₹3.73 lakh crore of additional funding is planned for the current financial year, with an equity infusion into Air India Assets Holding Company, additional fertiliser subsidy, food storage and warehousing, and payment of pending export incentives being the big ticket items accounting for three-fourths of the total.
- The additional budget for MGNREGA was among the most keenly awaited, as pending payments for wages and materials have threatened to cripple implementation of the scheme.
- Continuing economic distress in rural India has led to increased demand for jobs under the scheme, which promises 100 days of unskilled work for every household at a pay of about ₹210 per day.
- With four months remaining in the financial year, MGNREGA has finished spending the ₹73,000 crore initially allocated in the budget, and its financial statement now shows a negative net balance of ₹10,244 crore, including payments due.

#### What is the Contention?

- Despite the additional allocations, the funds available for the scheme stand at ₹76,340 crore, well below the ₹86,229 crore which have been incurred as expenditure, including payments due for wages and materials.
- The scheme's balance sheets remain in the red in 24 States and Union Territories.
- In the meanwhile, more than ₹1,170 crore worth of wage payments for MGNREGA workers are still pending. Lack of funds results in suppression of demand for work and delayed payment of wages to workers.
- These are violations of the Act; they also constrain economic recovery.
- It also noted that 13% of households which demanded work had failed to get the same, adding that the unmet demand is as high as 20% in Gujarat, Telangana and Bihar.

## What is Supplementary Grant?

- It is granted when the amount authorised by the Parliament through the appropriation act for a particular service for the current financial year is found to be insufficient for that year.
- It is specified by the Article 115 of the constitution of India, along with Additional and Excess Grants.

## About MGNREGA:

- The scheme was introduced in 2005 as a social measure that guarantees “the right to work”. The key tenet of this social measure and labour law is that the local government will have to legally provide at least 100 days of wage employment in rural India to enhance their Quality of Life.

## Key Objectives:

- Generation of paid rural employment of not less than 100 days for each worker who volunteers for unskilled labour. Proactively ensuring social inclusion by strengthening the livelihood base of rural poor. Creation of durable assets in rural areas such as wells, ponds, roads and canals. Reduce urban migration from Rural Areas.
- Create rural infrastructure by using untapped Rural Labour.

## What are the Eligibility Criteria for receiving the benefits under MGNREGA scheme?

- Must be Citizen of India to seek MGNREGA benefits.
- Job seeker has completed 18 years of age at the time of application.
- The applicant must be part of a local household (i.e. application must be made with local Gram Panchayat). Applicants must volunteer for unskilled labour.

## Implementation of the scheme:

- Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, wage employment will be provided to the Applicant.
- Right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory, which lends to accountability and transparency. The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands.
- It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

## 2. Afforestation Funds released to States

### Context:

- The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) has so far disbursed ₹48,606 crore to 32 States.

### About the News:

- CAMPA funds are part of long-pending dues of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF), a ₹54,000-crore tranche collected for nearly a decade as environmental compensation from industry, which has razed forest land for its business plans.
- Chhattisgarh and Odisha have had the maximum amount transferred to them, or close to ₹5,700 crore each followed by Jharkhand and Maharashtra at around ₹3,000 crore.

### What are CAMPA funds?

- CAMPA funds are part of long-pending dues of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF), a ₹54,000-crore tranche collected for nearly a decade as environmental compensation from industry, which has razed forest land for its business plans.

### About CAMPA:

- The CAF Act 2016, which came into being more than a decade since it was devised, established an independent authority — the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority — to execute the fund.
- However, it was not until last August that the rules governing the management of the fund were finalised.

### What is Compensatory Afforestation?

- Compensatory afforestation means that every time forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes such as mining or industry, the user agency pays for planting forests over an equal area of non-forest land, or when such land is not available, twice the area of Degraded Forest Land.

### Fund Sharing:

- As per the rules, 90% of the CAF money is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre.
- The funds can be used for treatment of catchment areas, assisted natural regeneration, forest management, wildlife protection and management, relocation of villages from protected areas, managing human-wildlife conflicts, training and awareness generation, supply of wood saving devices and allied Activities.

## 1.1. ECONOMY SNIPPETS

### 1. Import Duty levied on cotton

#### Why in News?

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has recently requested the Union Textiles Minister to direct the concerned ministries to remove import duty levied on cotton.

#### Highlights:

- The textile industry is the second largest employment provider in the state and Tamil Nadu accounts for 1/3rd size of the textile business of the country.
- Removal of the 11% Import duty levied on cotton imports. Also Yarn manufacturers may be given priority over traders in cotton procurement.
- Extension of 5% interest subvention to spinning mills for cotton procurement during the peak season (December-March). Reducing the minimum lot size of e-auction of cotton to 500 bales, which is sustainable for the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), has also been urged. The demand is because of the grave situation of cotton and yarn price volatility and its impact on the prices of fabrics and garments.
- The present crisis has led to mass cancellation of export orders and hardships in fulfilling long term export commitments.
- One of the major reasons for the cotton price volatility is due to the imposition of 5% Basic Customs Duty (BCD), 5% Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC) and 10% Social Welfare Cess in the Budget 2021-22 which amounts to an overall import duty of 11%. The import duty on raw cotton would erode the competitiveness of the value-added segments that have a business size of around Rs 50,000 crores in exports and Rs 25,000 crores in the domestic market. These segments provide jobs to around 12 lakh people.

### 2. Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC):

#### Why in News?

- Recently, leading banks have made a pitch for setting up an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) specifically to deal with collections and recovery of farm loans.

#### Highlights:

- Some member banks of the Indian Banks' Association suggested the need for the Central government to bring legislation on agriculture land somewhat like the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002.

- It is a specialized financial institution that buys the Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) from banks and financial institutions so that they can clean up their balance sheets.
- This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities. Banks, rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.
- The SARFAESI Act, 2002 provides the legal basis for the setting up of ARCs in India.
- The Act helps reconstruction of bad assets without the intervention of courts. Since then, a large number of ARCs were formed and were registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) which has got the power to regulate the ARCs.
- To meet its funding requirements, an ARC can issue bonds, debentures and security receipts.

### National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL):

- In the Budget 2021-22, ARC has been proposed to be set up by state-owned and private sector banks, and there will be no equity contribution from the government.
- The ARC, which will have an Asset Management Company (AMC) to manage and sell bad assets, will look to resolve stressed assets of Rs. 2-2.5 lakh crore that remain unresolved in around 70 large accounts.
- This is being considered as the government's version of a bad bank.

## 3. The Brush with Crypto Offers some Lessons for Regulation

### Why in News?

- The fact that crypto exchanges successfully managed to signal legitimacy for their services and offer these tokens to a mostly-uninformed public for over a year provides lessons on how the Government and sectoral regulators may need to act before the game gets out of hand.

### Regulating the Technology Innovation:

- Technology innovation typically remains a step ahead of regulatory frameworks, which are designed with current practices in mind.
- Problems occur when these innovations push the envelope beyond accepted codes of social and ethical behaviour.
- **Digital Lending Apps:** The joint parliamentary committee (JPC) on a proposed data privacy law that recently released its controversial report has pointed to dubious “digital” lending apps proliferating on the Android platform.

- Blockchain technology, of which cryptos are a part, is an innovation that can facilitate transactions across Assorted Functions.

### Issues with unregulated cryptocurrencies in India:

- Some estimates show that over 15 million Indians have invested in cryptos, many of whom live in Tier-II or Tier-III towns.
- But crypto exchanges in India have pushed the boundaries of this invention.
- Important disclaimer not communicated properly: They have been advertising aggressively across media platforms often announcing important disclaimers at warp speed.
- These provisos were supposed to communicate that cryptos are neither currencies nor strictly “assets”, and that these trading platforms are not truly “exchanges”, that crypto values are not determined by the usual dynamics governing other income-yielding assets, and that investing in cryptos was an exceedingly risky proposition.
- In the meantime, with advertising overload stimulating viewer interest, many scam crypto issuers and exchanges have sprung up in attempts to separate the gullible from their savings.

### Regulation challenges and how Government is Tackling It:

- The government has now stepped in, seized with the political perils of speculative Investments Turning Sour.
- Unfortunately, sectoral regulators, such as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi), were unable to step in and act earlier because they are governed by specific Acts which do not mention cryptos as a category that needs regulation.
- **Need for Enabling Clauses:** This episode provides a valuable lesson on how these Acts should perhaps include some enabling clauses that allow financial sector regulators to intervene whenever any intermediary tries to sell a financial service or any new innovative financial service poses the risk of disrupting financial stability.
- Two important documents have recently been released which discuss entry norms into formal banking, both further strengthening RBI's hands.
- Think-tank Niti Aayog's paper on licensing digital banks recommends an evolutionary path for digital banks that's RBI-regulated at all stages: first a restricted licence, then a regulatory sandbox offering some relaxations, and finally a “full-stack” digital banking Licence.

- Simultaneously, RBI has accepted some of the suggestions of its internal working group and modified a few to make entry norms stricter, but has maintained silence on the entry of private sector corporate houses into banking.
- The JPC's concerns over unregulated digital lending have also focused attention on an RBI-appointed committee's report on digital lending, given that multiple fintech-based online lenders have mushroomed during the Pandemic.

### **Conclusion:**

- This highlights the need for principle-based regulations, rather than rule-based regulations, to allow for flexibility and adaptability in a fast-changing Technology Environment.

## **4. Fertilizer Subsidy to cost 62% more on Input Costs**

### **Why in News?**

- An unprecedented spike in natural gas prices and other raw materials is set to inflate the fertilizer subsidy bill by a whopping 62% or ₹50,000 crores to ₹1,30,000 crore this fiscal.

### **Fertilizer Subsidy in India:**

- Fertilizer subsidy is purchasing by the farmer at a price below MRP (Maximum Retail Price), that is, below the usual demand-and-supply-rate, or regular production and import cost.
- Subsidy as a concept originated during the Green Revolution of the 1970s-80s.

### **How does it Work?**

- Fertilizer subsidy ultimately goes to the fertilizer company, even though it is the farmer that benefits. Before 2018, companies were reimbursed after the material was dispatched and received by the district railhead or designated godown.
- 2018 saw the beginning of DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer), which would transfer money directly to the retailer's account. However, the companies will be paid only after the actual sale to the farmer. With the DBT system, each retailer — there is over 2.3 lakh of them across India — now has a point-of-sale (PoS) machine linked to the Department of Fertilizers' e-Urvarak DBT portal.

### **What about Non-Urea Fertilizers?**

- **Decontrolled System:** The non-urea fertilizer is decontrolled or fixed by the companies.
- The non-urea fertilizers are further divided into two parts, DAP (Diammonium Phosphate) and MOP (Muriate of Phosphate).

## Issues with such subsidies:

- **Flawed Subsidy Policy:** This is harmful not just to the farmer, but to the environment as well.
- **No Permanent Remedy:** Indian soil has low Nitrogen use efficiency, which is the main constituent of Urea.
- **Excessive use:** Consequently, excess usage contaminates groundwater.
- **Emission:** The bulk of urea applied to the soil is lost as NH<sub>3</sub> (Ammonia) and Nitrogen Oxides causing emissions.
- **Health hazards:** For human beings, “blue baby syndrome” is a common side ailment caused by Nitrate contaminated water.

## 5. RBI must tackle surplus liquidity on way to Policy Normalisation

### Why in News?

- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted to maintain status quo on policy rates, with one member continuing to dissent on the “accommodative” stance of policy.

### Overview of RBI Policy Measures during Covid-related Lockdown:

- Cut in policy rates and injection of liquidity: The RBI had moved proactively to cut the repo and reverse repo rate and inject unprecedented amounts of funds into banks and other intermediaries.
- The short-term interest rate at reverse repo level: a combination of the lower reverse repo rate and the large liquidity injection had resulted in a drop in various short-term rates down to (and occasionally below) the reverse repo rate, making it the effective operating rate of monetary policy.
- Gap between repo and reverse repo increased to 65 bps: In addition, both the repo and reverse repo rates had been cut to 4.0 and 3.35 per cent, respectively, with the gap – the “corridor” – between the rates widening from the usual 25 basis points to 65 bps.

### Central bank's role in Modern Monetary Policy:

- Determining basic overnight interest rate: A central bank's main role in modern monetary policy operating procedures is to determine the basic overnight interest rate, deemed to be consistent with prevailing macroeconomic conditions and their economic policy objectives, in balancing the ecosystem for sustained growth together with moderate inflation.

- This is achieved through buying and selling very short-term (predominantly overnight) funds (mainly) from banks to keep a specified operating rate (the weighted average call rate in our case) very close to the policy rate.
- Liquidity management: Key pillar of monetary policy normalisation
- Liquidity management: Liquidity management in the extended banking and financial system (which includes non-banking intermediaries like NBFCs, mutual funds and others) will now be the key pillar of normalisation.
- This process is the domain of RBI and not MPC.
- These operations will be conducted within RBI's liquidity management framework.
- There are two sources of **Liquidity Additions:**
  1. **Exogenous:** which are largely due to inflows of foreign currency funds and outflows of currency in circulation (cash) from the banking sector.
  2. **Voluntary or endogenous:** which is the result of the creation of base money by RBI through buying and selling of bonds, thereby injecting or extracting rupee funds.

### How RBI is Managing Liquidity Surplus?

- Stopped GSAP and OMOs: Post the October review, RBI had stopped buying bonds under the Govt Securities Asset Purchase (GSAP) and done negligible Open Market Operations (OMOs), thereby stopping addition of voluntary liquidity injection into the system, our own version of “tapering”.
- Union government balances with RBI, arising from cash flow mismatches between receipts and expenditures, has hybrid characteristics and also impacts liquidity.
- Use of reverse repo window: RBI has used the reverse repo window to absorb almost all this liquidity surplus from banks.
- Allowed repaying TLTROs: It has again allowed banks the option to prepay the outstanding borrowings from the Targeted Long Term Repo Operations (TLTROs), thereby potentially extracting another Rs 70,000 crores.

### How RBI is managing interest rate in the Policy Normalisation Process:

- Increased rates and closed the gap between repo and reverse repo: RBI – post the October review – has gradually guided short-term rates up with a sure hand from near the reverse repo rate to close to the repo rate.
- It has shifted its liquidity absorption operations from the predominant use of fixed rate reverse repos (FRRR) into (largely) 14-day variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) auctions to Guide a rise in interest rates.

- Since early October, these rates had steadily moved up in a smooth and orderly fashion up to 3.75-3.9 per cent.
- The VRRR rates moving up have also resulted in various short-term funding interest rates like 90-day Treasury Bills, Commercial Papers (CP) and banks' Certificates of Deposits (CD) moving up from the reverse repo rate or below in September to 3.5 per cent and higher since December.
- The OMO and GSAP operations have also helped in managing medium- and longer-term interest rates in the yield curve.

## 6. Monetary Policy Report (MPR)

### Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently released the Monetary Policy Report (MPR) for the month of December 2021.

### Highlights:

- It kept the policy rate unchanged for the Ninth time in a row maintaining an accommodative stance.
- Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for 2021-22 has been retained at 9.5%.
- RBI has retained the projection for Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at 5.3 %.
- It increased the amount of money it will absorb VRRR to Rs 7.5 lakh crore by the end of December 2021.
- In order to absorb additional liquidity in the system, the RBI announced conducting a VRRR program in August 2021 because it has higher yield prospects as compared to the fixed rate overnight reverse repo.
- RBI decided to continue with an accommodative stance until there is sustainable recovery in the economy.
- An accommodative stance means the MPC is willing to either lower rates or keep them unchanged.

### Advantages:

- It encourages more spending from consumers and businesses by making money less expensive to borrow through the lowering of short-term interest rates.
- When money is easily accessible through banks, the money supply in the economy increases. This leads to increased spending.

- It allows the fiscal reserve to increase in relation to national income and the positive function of money demand. It helps energize the national money stock and prevent a weak aggregate demand obviating an Economic Recession. Therefore, it can be said that an accommodative stance will help improve India's growth.

### No Permission for Infusing Capital:

- The RBI allowed banks to infuse capital in their overseas branches as well as repatriate profits without seeking its prior approval, subject to fulfilling certain regulatory capital requirements. At present, banks incorporated in India can infuse capital in their overseas branches and subsidiaries, retain profits in these centres and repatriate/ transfer the profits with prior approval of the RBI.
- With a view to providing operational flexibility to banks, it has been decided that banks need not seek prior approval of the RBI if they meet the regulatory capital requirements.

### Monetary Policy Report:

- It is published by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of RBI. It is a statutory and institutionalized framework under the RBI Act, 1934, for maintaining price stability, while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
- It determines the policy interest rate (repo rate) required to achieve the inflation target of 4% with a leeway of 2% points on either side. The Governor of RBI is ex-officio Chairman of the MPC.

## 7. Coal Stocking Norms at Thermal Power Generation

### Why in News?

- The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has recently revised Coal Stocking Norms at thermal power generation plants with an aim to prevent a repeat of the low coal stock situation at various plants.

### Highlights:

- CEA is an organization under the Electricity Act, 2003. Its objective is to formulate a National Electricity Plan every five years for optimum utilization of available resources for power generation.

### Highlights:

- It mandates the coal stock of 17 days at pit head stations and 26 days at non-pit head stations to be maintained by power plants from February to June every year.

- Non-pit head plants are power plants where the coal mine is more than 1,500 km away.
- The daily coal requirement at the power plant at any given day will be calculated based on 85% Plant Load Factor (PLF).
- The previous norms determined coal stock volumes according to the average consumption pattern of the plant over the last seven days at a minimum 55% PLF.
- PLF is the ratio between the actual energy generated by the plant to the maximum possible energy that can be generated with the plant working at its rated power and for a duration of an entire year. The new methodology implies power plants which have lower utilisation rates will need to stock more coal than they did earlier.
- Power plants will have to strictly follow these parameters, failing which penalties will be levied — an aspect that was not present in CEA regulations so far.

### **Significance:**

- It will prevent a situation like the one that faced the country recently when post monsoons, several of the 135 coal-based power plants in the country were found to be sitting with critical coal stock levels sufficient to meet just three to four days of supply.
- Relaxed coal stocking norms will also better distribution the fuel amongst generating stations. This will prevent shortages and ensure uninterrupted power supply irrespective of the demand situation in the country. It will also lower the fuel requirement for each power plant and enable better distribution amongst all stations.

## **8. Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)**

### **Why in News?**

- Several banks have recently entered into co-lending ‘master agreements’ with registered Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and more are in the pipeline. In 2020, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed the co-lending model based on a Prior Agreement.

### **Highlights:**

- However, there are some criticisms associated with the co-lending.
- In September 2018, the RBI had announced co-origination of loans” by banks and NBFCs for lending to the Priority Sector.
- The arrangement entailed joint contribution of credit and sharing of risks and rewards. Co-lending or co-origination is a set-up where banks and non-banks enter into an arrangement for the joint contribution of credit for priority sector lending.

- These guidelines were later amended in 2020 and rechristened as co-lending models (CLM) by including Housing Finance Companies and some changes in the framework.
- Under priority sector norms, banks are mandated to lend a particular portion of their funds to specified sectors, like weaker sections of the society, agriculture, MSME and social infrastructure. The primary focus of the ‘Co-Lending Model’ (CLM) is to “improve the flow of credit to the unserved and underserved sector of the economy.
- It also envisages making available funds to the ultimate beneficiary at an affordable cost.
- CLM seeks to better leverage the respective comparative advantages of the banks and NBFCs in a collaborative effort.
- The lower cost of funds from banks
- Greater reach of the NBFCs.
- For example, CLM will enhance last-mile finance and drive financial inclusion to MSMEs.
- SBI, the country’s largest lender, signed a deal with Adani Capital, a small NBFC of a big corporate house, for co-lending to farmers to help them buy tractors and farm implements.

## 9. Q-Commerce Model

### Why in News?

- Online Grocer Grofers has rebranded itself “Blinkit”, in line with its new focus on “quick commerce”, which essentially involves delivering customer orders much faster than it does currently.

### Q-Commerce Model:

- Q-commerce (‘Quick Commerce’) – sometimes used interchangeably with ‘on-demand Delivery’ and ‘e-grocery’ – is e-commerce in a new, faster form.
- It combines the merits of traditional e-commerce with innovations in last-mile delivery.
- The premise is largely the same, with speed of delivery being the main differentiator. Delivery is not in days but minutes – 30 or less, to be competitive.
- This has in turn expanded the breadth of what individuals can order, with perishable goods – like groceries – being a large niche q-commerce companies speak to.
- It tends to focus on the micro – smaller quantities of fewer goods.

### Features of this Model:

- **Countering Pandemic:** The supply chain disruptions triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic led to the emergence of a new sub-vertical in the online grocery segment.

- **Quickest Delivery:** It is the unique selling proposition (USP) of which was the promise of delivery within 10-30 minutes of ordering.
- **Micro-Warehousing:** The focus of most of these ventures is on setting up micro-warehouses located closer to the point of delivery, and of restricting stocks of high-demand items. Marketplace and Inventory-Based Model

### **1. Marketplace Model:**

- ✓ It provides an IT platform by an e-commerce Entity on a digital & electronic network to act as a facilitator between the buyer and seller. Ex. India Mart, Amazon, Flipkart.
- ✓ The e-commerce firm does not directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods or services and is required to offer a level playing field to all vendors.

### **2. Inventory-Based Model:**

- ✓ Inventory based model of e-commerce means an e-commerce activity where the inventory of goods and services is owned by an e-commerce entity and is sold to the consumers directly.
- ✓ Ex. Alibaba

## **10. What true MSP means**

### **Why in News?**

- Amid the demand for a guarantee of MSP, many commentators fail to understand the true spirit of the demand for a legal MSP.

### **How demand for Legal Backing for MSP is misinterpreted?**

- Mandatory enforcement of price above MSP: The demand has been interpreted as a mandatory enforcement of trade in agricultural produce, including private trade to be necessarily at or above the MSP for that crop.
- Nationalisation of agricultural trade: Another interpretation is the nationalisation of Agricultural trade whereby the government promises to buy all the crop produced at MSP.
- Commentators have been using these two interpretations to project large estimates of Government expenditure needed to implement.
- They fail to understand the true spirit of the demand for a legal MSP.

### **Current Nature of MSP:**

- **It is not an Income support Program:** By definition MSP is not an income support programme.

- **Intervention to Stabilise Prices:** It is designed to be used as government intervention to stabilise prices, to provide remunerative prices to farmers.
- Public procurement program to meet requirements of NFSA: Currently, it is no more than a public procurement programme to meet the requirements of the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
- **Only rice and Wheat Procured:** As against the official announcement of MSP for 23 crops, only two, rice and wheat are procured as these are distributed in NFSA.
- Larger context of demand for legal backing to MSP
- **Droughts and Declining Commodity Prices:** In addition to the twin droughts of 2014 and 2015, farmers have also suffered from declining commodity prices since 2014.
- **Impact of Demonetisation and GST:** The twin shocks of demonetisation and hurried rollout of GST, crippled the rural economy, primarily the non-farm sector, but also agriculture.
- **Impact of pandemic:** The slowdown in the economy after 2016-17 followed by the pandemic has ensured that the situation remains precarious for majority of the farmers.
- Increased input prices: Higher input prices for diesel, electricity and fertilisers have only contributed to the misery.
- In this context, the demand for ensuring remunerative prices is only a reiteration of the promise by successive governments to implement the Swaminathan Committee report.

### **What should be the True Nature of MSP?**

- Intervene to stabilise price: A true MSP requires the government to intervene whenever market prices fall below a pre-defined level, primarily in case of excess production and oversupply or a price collapse due to International Factors.
- It does not require the government to buy all the produce but only to the extent that creates upward price pressures in the market to stabilise prices at the MSP level.

### **Way Forward:**

- Mechanism for market intervention: What is needed is a mechanism to monitor the prices.
- While such a mechanism already exists, a policy for requisite market intervention is missing.
- Use MSP as incentive to achieve nutritional security and reduce import dependence: MSP can also be an incentive price for many of the crops which are desirable for nutritional security such as coarse cereals, and also for pulses and edible oils for which we are dependent on imports.

- Include pulses, edible oil and millets in PDS: Despite repeated demands from food activists, there has not been any progress in including pulses, edible oils and millets in PDS.
- A guaranteed MSP then is nothing more than restoring the true spirit and functions of MSP, applicable to a broad range of crops and all sections of farmers.

### **Issues:**

- The current MSP regime has no relation to prices in the domestic market.
- Its sole raison d'être is to fulfil the requirements of NFSA making it effectively a procurement price rather than an MSP.
- It is basically a lack of understanding of what agriculture needs and above all a lack of political commitment to ensure remunerative prices to farmers.

## **11. Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project**

### **Why in News?**

- The Prime Minister has recently inaugurated Phase 1 of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project in Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi. 23 buildings – tourist facilitation centre, Vedic Kendra, Mumukshu Bhavan, Bhogshala, city museum, viewing gallery, food court among others – have been inaugurated as part of the project.

### **Highlights:**

- It is the massive makeover and the first after the 1780 AD when the Maratha queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore renovated the Kashi Vishwanath temple and the area surrounding it.
- The foundation was laid in March, 2019. The project was conceptualised to create an easily accessible pathway for the pilgrims, who had to meander through congested streets to take a dip in the Ganga and offering the water of the holy river at the temple.
- More than 40 ancient temples were rediscovered during the work on the project. They were restored while ensuring there is no change in the original structure.

### **Advantages:**

- It connects the iconic Kashi Vishwanath temple and the ghats along the river Ganga.
- Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the most famous Hindu temples dedicated to Lord Shiva.

- The temple stands on the western bank of the holy river Ganga, and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest of Shiva temples.
- It will help boost tourism by providing the pilgrims and travellers with amenities such as wider and cleaner roads and lanes, better lighting with bright street lights, and clean Drinking Water.



## 2.1. ENVIRONMENT SNIPPETS

### 1. Africa's Great Green Wall (GGW) Program

#### Why in News?

- Africa's Great Green Wall (GGW) program to combat desertification in the Sahel region is an important contribution towards combating climate change, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a study.

#### GGW Program:

- The Great Green Wall project is conceived by 11 countries located along the southern border of the Sahara and their international partners, is aimed at limiting the desertification of the Sahel zone.
- Led by the African Union, the initiative aims to transform the lives of millions of people by creating a mosaic of green and productive landscapes across North Africa.
- The initial idea of the GGW was to develop a line of trees from east to the west bordering the Saharan Desert.
- Its vision has evolved into that of a mosaic of interventions addressing the challenges facing the people in the Sahel and the Sahara.

#### Why was such Project Incepted?

- The project is a response to the combined effect of natural resources degradation and drought in Rural Areas.
- It aimed to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030; only four million hectares had been restored between 2007 and 2019.
- It is a partnership that supports communities working towards sustainable management and use of forests, rangelands and other natural resources.
- It seeks to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as improve food security.

### 2. Emission caused by Nuclear Energy

#### Why in News?

- Supporters of the Nuclear Energy source say that it is a climate-friendly way to Generate Electricity. However, this is subjected to various considerations often not discussed.

#### Why focus on Nuclear Energy?

- The main factors for its choice were reliability and security of supply.

- The latest figures on global carbon dioxide emissions call into question the world's efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

### Soaring CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:

- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are set to soar 4.9% in 2021, compared with the previous year, according to a study published earlier this month by the Global Carbon Project (GCP), a group of scientists that track emissions. In 2020, emissions dropped 5.4% due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. The energy sector continues to be the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, with a share of 40% — and rising.

### Is nuclear power a Zero-Emissions energy source?

- No. Nuclear energy is also responsible for greenhouse gas emissions.
- Uranium mining: Uranium extraction, transport and processing produces emissions.
- Construction of power plants: The long and complex construction process of nuclear power plants also releases CO<sub>2</sub>, as does the demolition of decommissioned sites.
- Nuclear waste and its transportation: This also has to be transported and stored under strict conditions — here, too, emissions must be taken into account.
- Water consumption: Power plants depend on nearby water sources to cool their reactors, and with many rivers drying up, those sources of water are no longer guaranteed.

### How much CO<sub>2</sub> does nuclear power produce?

- Results vary significantly, depending on whether we only consider the process of electricity generation, or take into account the entire life cycle of a nuclear power plant.
- A report released in 2014 by the IPCC estimated a range of 3.7 to 110 grams of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per kilowatt-hour (kWh).
- It's long been assumed that nuclear plants generate an average of 66 grams of CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh.
- How climate-friendly is nuclear compared to other energies?
- If the entire life cycle, nuclear energy certainly comes out ahead of fossil fuels like coal or Natural Gas.
- But the picture is drastically different when compared with renewable energy.
- Nuclear power releases 3.5 times more CO<sub>2</sub> per kilowatt-hour than photovoltaic solar panel systems.
- Compared with onshore wind power, that figure jumps to 13 times more CO<sub>2</sub>.
- When up against electricity from hydropower installations, nuclear generates 29 times more carbon.

## Can we rely on Nuclear Energy to help stop Global Warming?

- Around the world, nuclear energy representatives, as well as some politicians, have called for the expansion of atomic power. Other countries have also supported plans to build new nuclear plants, arguing that the energy sector will be even more damaging for the climate without it.

### Feasibility of Nuclear Energy:

- High cost of construction: Due to the high costs associated with nuclear energy, it also blocks important financial resources that could instead be used to develop renewable energy.
- Renewables are better: Those renewables would provide more energy that is both faster and cheaper than nuclear. High water consumption: During the world's increasingly hot summers, several nuclear power plants have already had to be temporarily shut down due to water scarcity.

### Conclusion:

- Taking into account the current overall energy system, nuclear energy is by no means CO<sub>2</sub> neutral. The contribution of nuclear energy is viewed too optimistically.
- In reality construction, times are too long and the costs too high to have a noticeable effect on climate change. It takes too long for nuclear energy to become available.

## 3. India's Electric Vehicle push will lead to Brighter, Greener Future

### Why in News?

- The transition to electric mobility is a promising global strategy for decarbonising the Transport Sector.

### Electricity Mobility Revolution:

- The global electric mobility revolution is today defined by the rapid growth in electric vehicle (EV) uptake. This phenomenon is today defined by the rapid growth in EV uptake, with EV sales for the year 2020, reaching 2.1 million.
- Falling battery costs and rising performance efficiencies are fueling the demand for EVs globally.

### Significance of India's Transition to Electric Mobility:

- India is the fifth largest car market in the world and has the potential to become one of the top three in the near future.

- India is among a handful of countries that supports the global EV30@30 campaign, which aims for at least 30 per cent new vehicle sales to be electric by 2030.
- **Part of Global Climate Agenda:** The push for EVs is driven by the global climate agenda established under the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions in order to limit global warming.
- **Ensuring Energy Security:** It is also projected to contribute in improving the overall energy security situation as the country imports over 80 per cent of its overall crude oil requirements, amounting to approximately \$100 billion.
- **Job Creation:** The push is also expected to play an important role in the local EV manufacturing industry for Job Creation.
- **Strengthen Grid Operation:** Through several grid support services, EVs are expected to strengthen the grid and help accommodate higher renewable energy penetration while maintaining secure and stable grid operation.
- **Battery storage:** Opportunities and challenges
- **Promoting Sustainable Development:** With recent technology disruptions, battery storage has great opportunity in promoting sustainable development in the country, considering government initiatives to promote e-mobility and renewable power (450 GW energy capacity target by 2030).
- **Economic Opportunity:** With rising levels of per capita income, there has been a tremendous demand for consumer electronics in the areas of mobile phones, UPS, laptops, power banks etc. that require advanced chemistry batteries.
- This makes manufacturing of advanced batteries one of the largest economic opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Concern of absence of manufacturing base: It is estimated that by 2020-30 India's cumulative demand for batteries would be approximately 900-1100 GWh, but there is concern over the absence of a manufacturing base for batteries in India, leading to sole reliance on imports to meet rising demand.

### Government schemes to Promote EV Ecosystem:

- To develop and promote the EV ecosystem in the country, government has remodeled Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME II) scheme (Rs 10,000 crore) for the consumer side. It has also launched production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) ( Rs 18,100 crore) for the supplier side.
- Finally the recently launched PLI scheme for Auto and Automotive Components (Rs 25,938 crore) for manufacturers of electric vehicles was launched.

- All these forward and backward integration mechanisms in the economy are expected to achieve robust growth in the coming years and will enable India to leapfrog to the environmentally cleaner electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

### **Benefits of EV Ecosystem:**

- This will not only help the nation conserve foreign exchange but also make India a global leader in manufacturing of EVs and better comply with the Paris Climate Change Agreement..
- **Battery Demand Creation:** All three schemes cumulatively expect an investment of about Rs 1,00,000 crore which will boost domestic manufacturing and also facilitate EVs and battery demand creation along with the development of a complete domestic supply chain and foreign direct investment in the country.
- **Reduction of oil Import Bill:** The programme envisages an oil import bill reduction of about Rs 2 lakh crore and import bill substitution of about Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

## **4. Kyhytsuka sachicarum**

### **Why in News?**

- An international team of researchers has recently discovered a new marine reptile named Kyhytsuka sachicarum.

### **Highlights:**

- Kyhytsuka translates to ‘the one that cuts with something sharp’ in an indigenous language from the region in central Colombia where the fossil was found.
- It has been named so to honour the ancient Muisca culture that existed there for millennia.
- The fossil is a stunningly preserved meter-long skull, is one of the last surviving ichthyosaurs – ancient animals that look eerily like living swordfish.
- They are the members of an extinct group of aquatic reptiles, most of which were very similar to porpoises in appearance and habits.
- They had a very wide geographic distribution, and their fossil remains span almost the entire Mesozoic Era. They are first known from the Triassic Period of Asia, where they began as long-bodied, undulating swimmers without many of the specializations seen in later species. The species comes from an important transitional time during the Early Cretaceous period when the Earth was coming out of a relatively cool period, had rising sea levels, and the supercontinent Pangea (A supercontinent that incorporated almost all the landmasses on Earth) was splitting into northern and southern landmasses.

## 5. Greater Tipraland

### Why in News?

- The several tribal outfits in Tripura have recently joined hands to push their demand for a separate state, Greater Tipraland for Indigenous Communities in the region.

### Highlights:

- Among the political parties that have come together for the cause are TIPRA Motha (Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance) and IPFT (Indigenous People's Front of Tripura).
- The parties are demanding a separate state of 'Greater Tipraland' for the indigenous communities of the north-eastern state.
- They want the Centre to carve out the separate state under Article 2 and 3 of the Constitution.
- Among the 19 notified Scheduled Tribes in Tripura, Tripuris (aka Tipra and Tiprasas) are the largest. According to the 2011 census, there are at least 5.92 lakh Tripuris in the state, followed by Bru or Reang (1.88 lakh) and Jamatias (83,000).
- The churn in the state's politics with the rise of TIPRA Motha and the Assembly polls due in early 2023 are the two major reasons behind the development.
- The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTADC) was formed under the sixth schedule of the Constitution in 1985 to ensure development and secure the rights and cultural heritage of the tribal communities.
- 'Greater Tipraland' envisages a situation in which the entire TTADC area will be a separate state. It also proposes dedicated bodies to secure the rights of the Tripuris and other aboriginal communities living outside Tripura.
- The TTADC, which has legislative and executive powers, covers nearly two-third of the state's geographical area.
- The council comprises 30 members of which 28 are elected while two are nominated by the Governor.
- Also, out of the 60 Assembly seats in the state, 20 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

## 6. A white touch to a refreshed Green Revolution

- November 26, 2021 was celebrated in Anand, Gujarat as the 100th birth anniversary of Verghese Kurien, the leader of India's '**white revolution**'.

## Analysing the Green Revolution:

- Purpose of green revolution: The purpose of the green revolution was to increase the output of agriculture to prevent shortages of food.
- Technocratic enterprise: The green revolution was largely a technocratic enterprise driven by science and the principles of efficiency.
- It required inputs, like chemical fertilizers, to be produced on scale and at low cost.
- Therefore, large fertilizer factories were set up for the green revolution. And large dams and irrigation systems were also required to feed water on a large scale.
- Monocropping on fields was necessary to apply all appropriate inputs — seeds, fertilizer, water, etc., on scale.
- Monocropping increased the efficiency in application of inputs.
- Thus, farms became like large, dedicated engineering factories designed to produce large volumes efficiently.
- Diversity in the products and processes of large factories creates complexity.
- Therefore, diversity is weeded out to keep the factories well-focused on the outputs they are designed for.

## The contrast between White and Green revolution:

- The contrast between the two revolutions provides valuable insights. Their purposes were different. Purpose of white revolution: The purpose of the white revolution was to increase the incomes of small farmers in Gujarat, not the output of milk.
- The white revolution was a socio-economic enterprise driven by political leaders and principles of equity.

## Understanding the Success of Amul:

- Amul has become one of India's most loved brands, and is respected internationally too for the quality of its products and the efficiency of its management.
- The fledgling, farmer-owned, Indian enterprise had many technological problems to solve.
- That is why they enrolled Kurien, who had studied engineering in the United States.
- **Indigenous Solutions:** Kurien and his engineering compatriots in the organisation were compelled to develop solutions indigenously when Indian policy makers, influenced by foreign experts, said Indians could not make it.
- The enterprise achieved its outcome of empowering farmers because the governance of the enterprise to achieve equity was always kept in the foreground, with the efficiency of its production processes in the background as a means to the outcome.

## Increasing Productivity and Issues with it:

- ‘Productivity’, when defined as output per worker, can be increased by eliminating workers. This may be an acceptable way to measure and increase productivity when the purpose of the enterprise is to increase profits of investors in the enterprise.
- It is a wrong approach to productivity when the purpose of the enterprise is to enable more workers to increase their incomes, which must be the aim of any policy to increase small farmers’ incomes. The need for new solutions to increase farmers’ incomes has become imperative. Moreover, fundamental changes in economics and management sciences are necessary to reverse the degradation of the planet’s natural environment that has taken place with the application of modern technological solutions and management methods for the pursuit of Economic Growth.

## Suggestions to increase Inclusion and Improve Environmental Sustainability:

- Ensure inclusion and equity: Increase in the incomes and wealth of the workers and small asset owners in the enterprise must be the purpose of the enterprise, rather than production of better Returns for Investors.
- Social side: The ‘social’ side of the enterprise is as important as its ‘business’ side.
- Therefore, new metrics of performance must be used, and many ‘non-corporate’ methods of management learned and applied to strengthen its social fabric.
- Local solution: Solutions must be ‘local systems’ solutions, rather than ‘global (or national) scale’ solutions.
- The resources in the local environment (including local workers) must be the principal resources of the enterprise.
- Practical use of science: Science must be practical and useable by the people on the ground rather than a science developed by experts to convince Other Experts.
- Moreover, people on the ground are often better scientists from whom scientists in universities can learn useful science.
- Sustainable solution through evolution: Sustainable transformations are brought about by a steady process of evolution, not by drastic revolution.
- Large-scale transformations imposed from the top can have strong side-effects.

## 7. Issi Saaneq

### Why in News?

- Recently, researchers have discovered the first dinosaur species that lived on Greenland 214 million years ago (Late Triassic epoch).

### Highlights:

- This medium-sized, long-necked dinosaur was a predecessor of the sauropods, the biggest land animals ever to have thundered across our planet.
- Issi Saaneq differs from all other sauropodomorphs discovered so far, but has similarities with dinosaurs found in Brazil, such as the Macrocollum and Unaysaurus, which are almost 15 million years older.
- It was the first sauropodomorph to have reached altitudes over 40 degrees north.
- The name of the new dinosaur (Issi Saaneq) pays tribute to Greenland's Inuit language and means "coldbone".
- The Inuit language, the northeastern division of the Eskimo languages, spoken in northern Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.
- The new species lived during an important time in Earth's history. It will help the researchers to understand the climatic changes according to that time.
- The fact that this is a new species unique to Greenland is important, because it helps researchers to understand more about the range of Late Triassic dinosaurs, as well as how sauropods evolved.
- The discovery of Issi saaneq will broaden the knowledge about the evolution of plateosaurid sauropodomorphs.

## 8. Semeru Volcano

### Why in News?

- Mount Semeru volcano of Indonesia has recently erupted which killed at least 14 persons and left dozens injured.

### Highlights:

- Semeru, also known as the Great Mountain – is the highest volcano in Java and one of the most active.
- Semeru volcano is also the part of the Island arcs formed by the subduction of the Indo-Australian plate below Sunda Plate (part of Eurasian Plate).

- The trench formed here is called Sunda trench whose major section is the Java Trench.
- Indonesia, with the maximum number of active volcanoes in the world, is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific's Ring of Fire.
- The Ring of Fire, also referred to as the Circum-Pacific Belt, is a path along the Pacific Ocean characterized by active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes.
- Its length is approximately 40,000 kilometers. It traces boundaries between several tectonic plates—including the Pacific, Cocos, Indian-Australian, Nazca, North American, and Philippine Plates.
- 75% of Earth's volcanoes i.e. more than 450 volcanoes are located along the Ring of Fire. 90% of Earth's earthquakes occur along its path, including the planet's most violent and dramatic seismic events.

## 9. Ambergris: The Floating Gold

### Why in News?

- The Crime Branch in Pune had seized 550 grams of ambergris, also known as 'floating Gold'.



### What is Ambergris?

- Ambergris, which means gray amber in French, is a waxy substance that originates from the digestive system of the protected sperm whales.
- It is incorrectly referred to as 'whale vomit'.
- It is produced in the gastrointestinal tract of some of the sperm whales for the passage of hard, sharp objects that are ingested when the whale eats large quantities of marine animals.

### Why is it so Expensive?

- Investigating agencies from across India who have seized ambergris in the recent past estimate its value to be somewhere between Rs 1 to 2 crores per kilogram, depending on the purity and quality. Being extremely rare contributes to its high demand and high price in the international market.

### Its uses:

- Traditionally, ambergris is used to produce perfumes that have notes of musk.
- While there are records of it being used to flavor food, alcoholic beverages and tobacco in some cultures in the past, it is rarely used for these purposes presently.

## Legalities and recent cases of seizure in India:

- While there is a ban on possession and trade of ambergris in countries like the USA, Australia and India, in several other countries it is a tradable commodity.
- In the Indian context, the sperm whales are a protected species under Schedule 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and possession or trade of any of its by-products, including Ambergris is illegal. It has been observed that the gangs smuggling the ambergris procure it from coastal areas and ship it to destination countries via some other countries with whom India has comparatively less stringent sea trade.

## 10. Cyclone Management Framework

### Why in News?

- Recently, Cyclone Jawad has hit the east coast of India particularly the State of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.
- Hazard mapping for cyclones represents the results of cyclone hazard assessment on a map, showing the frequency/probability of occurrences of various intensities or durations.
- Policies should be in place to regulate land use and enforcement of building codes.
- Vulnerable areas should be kept for parks, grazing grounds or flood diversion instead of Human Settlements.

### Some examples of General Good Construction Practice Include:

- Constructing buildings on stilts or on earthen mounds.
- Buildings should be wind and water resistant.
- Buildings storing food supplies should be protected against the winds and water.
- Cyclone Shelters are necessary for areas vulnerable to recurrent cyclones.
- The construction of cyclone shelters requires substantial funding, therefore, generally linked to support from government or external donors.
- For construction of cyclone shelters, the most appropriate sites should be selected, using the Geographical Information System.
- **Flood Management:** Flooding will result from a cyclonic storm. Storm surges will flood the coastal areas. Heavy rains will bring in flash floods.
- Embankments along the rivers, sea walls along the coasts may keep water away from the flood plains. Water flow can be regulated through construction of reservoirs, check dams and alternate drainage channels/routes.

- Mangroves protect the coastal area from storm surge and wind accompanied with cyclones. Communities should participate in the mangrove plantation which could be organized by the local authorities, NGOs or the community itself.
- Mangroves also help in erosion-control and coastal conservation.
- **Public Awareness Generation:** Public awareness through education is the key to saving many lives. It has been proved that most of the damage to lives and livelihoods are due to lack of public education and awareness.
- **End to End Warning System:** There is a need for an end to end early warning which will enable people at all levels to respond quickly and effectively.
- The community should be well aware of the warning system, the warning signals and the source where they can get the early warning of cyclones.
- **Community Participation:** Since the local people are the persons best aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their area, location, culture and customs, some mitigation measures should be developed by the community themselves.
- These community mitigation activities can be achieved with the support from government and other civil Society Organizations.

## 11. Srivilliputhur Meghamalai Tiger Reserve

### Why in News?

- Activists concern for noticing defects and shortcomings in the Tangedco's proposal for laying a new underground electric cable to the Arulmigu Sundara Mahalingam Swami temple, on top of the Sathuragiri Hills in Tamil Nadu would disturb the core habitat of the newly formed Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve.

### About Srivilliputhur Meghamalai Tiger Reserve:

- Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve is the fifth Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu and 51<sup>st</sup> tiger reserve of the country which was accorded shortly before Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary received all clearances to become the Rajasthan's fourth and country's 52nd tiger reserve.
- Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve was established in February 2021. It was jointly declared by the Centre and Tamil Nadu governments.
- For this, the Megamalai WLS and the adjoining Srivilliputhur WLS were clubbed together.
- **Ecological Diversity:** Animals seen here are Bengal tiger, elephants, gaur, Indian giant squirrel, leopard, Nilgiri Tahrs, etc.

- It has a mix of tropical evergreen forests and semi-evergreen forests, dry deciduous forests and moist mixed deciduous forests, grassland.
- **Other four Tiger reserves of Tamil Nadu:**
  - ✓ Anamalai Tiger Reserve
  - ✓ Kalakkad - Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve
  - ✓ Mudumalai Tiger Reserve
  - ✓ Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve

## 12. Global Methane Initiative (GMI)

### Why in News?

- India has co-chaired along with Canada the Global Methane Initiative leadership meet held virtually.

### Methane:

- Methane is a greenhouse gas, which is also a component of natural gas.
- There are various sources of methane including human and natural sources.
- The anthropogenic sources are responsible for 60 per cent of global methane emissions.
- It includes landfills, oil and natural gas systems, agricultural activities, coal mining, wastewater treatment, and certain industrial processes.
- The oil and gas sectors are among the largest contributors to human sources of methane.
- These emissions come primarily from the burning of fossil fuels, decomposition in landfills and the agriculture sector.

### Global Methane Initiative (GMI):

- GMI is a voluntary Government and an informal international partnership having members from 45 countries including the United States and Canada.
- The forum has been created to achieve global reduction in anthropogenic methane emission through partnership among developed and developing countries having Economies in transition.
- The forum was created in 2004 and India is one of the members since its inception and has taken up Vice-Chairmanship for the first time in the Steering Leadership along with USA.
- National Governments are encouraged to join GMI as Partner Countries, while other non-State organizations may join GMI's extensive Project Network.

## Focus Areas:

- The initiative currently focuses on five sectors, which are known sources of anthropogenic Methane Emissions:
  - ✓ Agriculture
  - ✓ Coal mining
  - ✓ Municipal solid waste
  - ✓ Municipal wastewater
  - ✓ Oil and gas systems

## Why focus on Methane?

- The emission of methane is a big concern as it is a greenhouse gas having 25-28 times Harmful Effect than carbon dioxide. According to the UN, 25 % of the warming that the world is experiencing today is because of methane. Methane is the second-most abundant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, after Carbon Dioxide. According to IPCC, methane accounts for about half of the 1.0 degrees Celsius net rise in Global Average temperature since the pre-industrial era.

## 13. Buxa Tiger Reserve

### Why in News?

- A Royal Bengal tiger was recently sighted at the Buxa reserve – a first such sighting in 23 years.

### Highlights:

- Tigers were distributed throughout the Reserve including the southernmost ranges and fringe areas. However, the reserve has a low tiger density at present.
- Buxa Tiger Reserve is situated in the Alipurduar Sub-division of Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal. It was created in 1983 as the 15<sup>th</sup> tiger reserve of India.
- It was declared as a National Park in January 1992. The northern boundary of Buxa Tiger Reserve runs along the international border with Bhutan. The Sinchula hill range lies all along the northern side of Buxa National Park and the Eastern boundary touches that of the Assam State. The main rivers flowing across the Tiger Reserve are Sankosh, Raidak, Jayanti, Churnia, Turturi, Phashkhawa, Dima and Nonani.
- The reserve has corridor connectivity across the border with the forests of Bhutan in the North, on the East it has linkages with the Kochugaon forests, Manas Tiger Reserve and on the West with the Jaldapara National Park.

## 14. Great Indian Bustard

### Why in News?

- Recently, the Centre has approached the Supreme Court seeking modification of its order directing that all transmission cables in the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) be laid underground.

### Highlights:

- It is the State bird of Rajasthan and is considered India's most Critically Endangered Bird.
- It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the Grassland Ecology. Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- The bird is under constant threats due to collision/electrocution with power transmission lines, hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan), habitat loss and alteration as a result of widespread agricultural expansion, etc.

### Protection Status:

- International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List: Critically Endangered
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix 1
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): Appendix I
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule 1
- Species Recovery Programme is kept under the species recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- National Bustard Recovery Plans is currently being implemented by conservation agencies.
- MoEF & CC, Rajasthan government and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have also established a conservation breeding facility in Desert National Park at Jaisalmer in June 2019. The objective of the programme is to build up a captive population of Great Indian Bustards and to release the chicks in the wild for increasing the population.
- It has been launched by the Rajasthan government with an aim of constructing breeding enclosures for the species and developing infrastructure to reduce human pressure on its habitats. Task Force for suggesting eco-friendly measures to mitigate impacts of power transmission lines and other power transmission infrastructures on wildlife including the Great Indian Bustard.

### 3. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Contempt case: Cannot wait for Vijay Mallya ‘forever’, says SC

##### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently said it cannot wait for fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya “forever” and listed the sentence hearing in a contempt case against him on January 18.

##### About the News:

- It has been over four years since the Supreme Court found Mr. Mallya, who fled to the U.K., guilty of contempt for wilful disobedience of its order to come clean about his assets and not disclosing \$40 million (₹600 crore) he had received from British liquor major Diageo Plc following his resignation as Chairman of United Spirits Limited in February 2016.

##### Who is a Fugitive Economic Offender?

- A person can be named an offender under this law if there is an arrest warrant against him or her for committing any offence listed in the schedule of the act and for involvement in economic offences involving at least Rs. 100 crore or more and has fled from India to escape Legal Action.
- Major criteria that have to be satisfied are:
  - ✓ The Person has left the country to avoid facing prosecution.
  - ✓ He refuses to return to India to face prosecution.

##### About Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018:

- The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 seeks to confiscate properties of economic offenders who have left the country to avoid facing criminal prosecution.
- Offences involving amounts of Rs. 100 crore or more fall under the purview of this law.
- Some of the offences listed in the schedule of the bill are—counterfeiting government stamps or currency, cheque dishonour for insufficiency of funds, money laundering, Transactions Defrauding Creditors etc.

##### What are its Proceedings as per the Act?

- To declare a person an FEO, an application will be filed in a Special Court (designated under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002) containing details of the properties to be confiscated, and any information about the person’s whereabouts.
- The Special Court will require the person to appear at a specified place at least six weeks from issue of notice. Proceedings will be terminated if the person appears.

- Attachment of the property of a fugitive economic offender.
- Confiscation of the property of an individual declared as a fugitive economic offender resulting from the proceeds of crime. Confiscation of other property belonging to such offender in India and abroad including benami property.
- Disentitlement of the fugitive economic offender from defending any civil claim.
- All cases under the proposed law will be tried under the Prevention of Money Laundering (PMLA) Act and the administrator will sell the fugitive's properties to pay off the lenders.
- The proposed law will have an overriding effect over all other pieces of legislation.

### What is Extradition?

- It is the formal process of one state surrendering an individual to another state for prosecution or punishment for crimes committed in the requesting country's jurisdiction.
- This is generally enabled through a bilateral or multilateral treaty.
- The legal basis for extradition with countries with which India does not have an Extradition treaty is provided by Section 3 (4) of the Indian Extradition Act, 1962.

### About Indian Extradition Act, 1962:

- In India, the extradition of a fugitive criminal is governed under the Indian Extradition Act, 1962. This is for both extraditing of persons to India and from India to foreign countries. The basis of the extradition could be a treaty between India and another country. India has extradition treaties with 39 countries currently.
- Example, underworld don Abu Salem was extradited from Portugal to India to face charges. He, along with his wife, was extradited on the conditions that they would not be given the death penalty in India. This was so because European law prevents extradition to a country where capital punishment is in practice.

### What is the Extradition Procedure in India?

- Information about the fugitive criminals wanted in foreign countries is received from the country or through Interpol.
- The Interpol wing of the CBI then passes the information to the concerned police departments.
- The information is also passed on to the immigration authorities.
- Then, action can be taken under the 1962 act.

### Way Forward:

- Extradition is as much a political process as it is a judicial one.

- The expeditious processing of extradition requests and the commitment to prepare for and defend the case before Courts depends on bilateral relations and the opportune use of diplomacy and negotiations to push for the process by the requested country.
- India needs to take steps to dispel concerns regarding poor prison conditions and potential human rights violations of the requested person.
- India could consider signing International Instruments, such as the UN Convention against Torture (1984) to establish India's zero tolerance towards torture and custodial violence. For addressing investigational delays, it is imperative to improve the capacity and organizational efficiencies of law enforcement agencies so that they may conduct speedy investigation in these cases.
- To ensure that India's extradition requests are in compliance with treaty conditions and documentary requirements, India must put in place suitable organizational mechanisms to familiarize itself with laws and regulations of treaty states.
- India could adopt the good practices of the US' Office of International Affairs (OIA), Washington's primary body to handle extradition requests, and employ lawyers and station trained liaison officers in countries with which the country has extradition relations.

## **2. MoEFCC states 1,160 Elephants were Killed in a decade**

### **Why in News?**

- According to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), a whopping 1,160 elephants were killed in the country due to reasons other than natural causes in the past 10 years up to December 31, 2020.

### **What does the report say?**

- A document accessed from the Ministry through the Right to Information (RTI) Act revealed that While electrocution claimed the lives of 741 elephants, train hits led to the death of 186 pachyderms, followed by poaching - 169, and poisoning - 64.
- Karnataka and Odisha lost 133 elephants each due to electrocution during the period and Assam reported 129 deaths.
- Among elephant casualties due to train hits, Assam stood first with 62 deaths, followed by West Bengal at 57. A total of 169 mammals were killed by poachers in the 10 years and Odisha reported the highest - 49 deaths, followed by Kerala 23.
- Assam reported the highest number of elephants poisoned - 32, and Odisha stood second with 15 deaths.

## What are the Government Efforts in Project Elephant?

- The document said financial and technical assistance were provided to elephant range States under the Centrally sponsored ‘Project Elephant’ scheme to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors to address issues of man-elephant conflict and welfare of captive elephants.
- The Ministry released ₹212.5 crore under the Project Elephant to 22 States in the 10 years.
- Among various measures taken, the document said that guidelines for the management of human-elephant conflict had been issued by the Ministry in October 2017 and elephant range States had been requested to implement the same.
- Critical elephant habitats are notified as ‘elephant reserve’ for focus and synergy in elephant conservation and to reduce conflict. A total of 30 elephant reserves have been established in 14 major elephant States.
- To reduce man-elephant conflict and to avoid retaliatory killing of elephants, compensation is provided to local communities for loss of property and life caused by wild elephants.
- A Permanent Coordination Committee has been constituted between the Ministry of Railways and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths due to train hits.

## What is the Concern?

- Few regions like Gudalur in Tamil Nadu has been in the centre of the human-elephant conflict for the past few decades with research studies indicating that the disappearance of forest cover and swamp lands, and the associated micro habitats, had led to this trend.
- The death of humans, more males than females, after attacked by the wild elephants and the number of deaths of elephants caused by human beings has also been high in these range in the past few decades.
- Likewise, the property damaged by elephants has also been high in the range.

## What is Human-Elephant Conflict?

- Human-Elephant Conflict is broadly defined as “any human-elephant interaction that brings negative effects on social, economic or cultural life of humans, on elephant conservation or on the environment”.
- Human-Elephant Conflict can be categorised as ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’.
  - ✓ **Direct Conflicts:** Direct conflicts impacts upon economic and physical well being of the rural communities. Examples of direct conflict are crop damage, human death and Injury, damage to food stores, damage to other properties.

- ✓ **Indirect Conflicts:** Indirect conflicts results in indirect social impacts upon people. For example, the efforts put on by the farmers to their crops and property, the fear of injury or death, and psychological stress etc. However unlike the direct conflicts, the impact of indirect conflicts cannot be translated to economic value.

## Why Human-Elephant Conflicts Occur?

- Unlike tigers whose territories are within the protected areas, the elephants have only 20% of their range falling in the protected areas like national parks and sanctuaries. There are about 28 elephant reserves across India covering 61,830 sq. km.
- Due to deforestation and thinning out of forests, the elephants tend to disperse into areas with high density of human population.
- This has made the elephants to foray into areas where they had no history of presence for several decades, even centuries. Destruction of elephant habitat has made them to move constantly.
- Second, the growing human population has resulted in the expansion of human settlements in the elephant migration routes.
- This often results in the human-elephant conflicts. As of now, there are approximately 100 elephant corridors in the country. The conflict gets intensified when people try to chase away elephants with searchlights, crackers or guns, making the elephants even More Aggressive.

## Key Facts Regarding the Conflicts:

- Between 2015 and 2020, nearly 2,500 people have lost their lives in elephant attacks across India out of which about 170 human fatalities have been reported in Karnataka alone, according to KVIC. India has the largest number of wild Asian Elephants, estimated at 29,964 according to the 2017 census by Project Elephant.
- The figure amounts to about 60% of the species' global population.
- Over 500 humans are killed in encounters with elephants annually, and crops and property worth millions are also damaged. Many elephants are also killed in retaliation due to Conflict.

## Other practices to ward off Elephants:

- A pilot project launched in Kodagu entails installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages with the belief that the elephants will not venture anywhere close to the bees and thus avoid transgressing into human landscape. This idea stems from the elephants' proven fear of the bees.

- A variety of management strategies and practices has been developed and customised for implementing at different scales by the State Forest Departments for preventing and mitigating human-elephant conflict. These best practices have been discussed under several categories such as retaining elephants in their natural habitats by creating water sources and management of forest fires. The other best practices include elephant-proof trenches in Tamil Nadu, hanging fences and rubble walls in Karnataka, use of chilli smoke in north Bengal and playing the sound of bees or carnivores in Assam.

### **Use of technology in avoiding conflicts:**

- The process of individual identification and monitoring of elephants in south Bengal. Other ideas include sending SMS alerts to warn of elephant presence.
- The elephant expert recommended cost-benefit analysis for these policies and said that it should be done in context of the economic damage caused by elephants to crops.
- Practices such as elephant-proof trenches should be discouraged in areas that receive more than 1,500 mm rainfall a year. “Hanging wire electric fences that produce electricity for milliseconds have given positive results. These practices have been tried in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu”.

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

### **What is Project Elephant?**

- Project elephant is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in February 1992. The scheme helps and assists in the management and protection of elephants to the States having free-ranging populations of wild elephants, in order to ensure the survival of elephant population in the wild and protection of elephant habitat and Elephant Corridor.
- Project elephant is mainly implemented in 16 States / UTs, which includes Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

- The union government provides financial and technical assistance to the states to achieve the goals of this project. Help is also provided for the purpose of the census, training of field officials and to ensure the mitigation and prevention of human-elephant conflict.
- There are around 32 elephant Reserves in India notified by the state governments. The first elephant reserve was the Singhbhum elephant Reserve of Jharkhand.

### What are its other Conservation Efforts?

- '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.

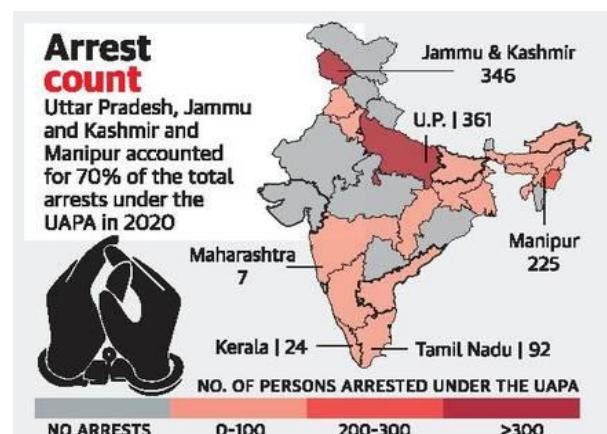
### 3. U.P. reports most UAPA Arrests

#### Why in News?

- According to the data tabled by the Government in Rajya Sabha, Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of arrests under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, followed by Jammu and Kashmir, and Manipur recently.

#### About the News:

- Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said in a written reply that as per the National Crime Record Bureau's report, "the number of persons arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the years 2019 and 2020 are 1,948 and 1,321 respectively."
- He also said that since 2016, 7,243 persons were arrested under UAPA and during the same period 212 persons were convicted. As many as 286 cases ended in acquittal, 25 cases were abated and 42 cases were discharged by courts.
- Uttar Pradesh recorded 361 UAPA arrests, Jammu and Kashmir 346 arrests, and Manipur 225 arrests in the year 2020 alone.



## About UAPA:

- UAPA passed in 1967 aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Unlawful activity refers to any action taken by an individual or association intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.
- The Act assigns absolute power to the central government, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as Highest Punishments.
- Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged. It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.
- Under the UAPA, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
- The 2004 amendment, added “terrorist act” to the list of offences to ban organisations for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits were banned.
- Till 2004, “unlawful” activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory.
- In August 2019, Parliament cleared the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019 to designate individuals as terrorists if the individual commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes terrorism or is otherwise involved in terrorism.
- The Act empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency. The Act also empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

## Criticisms of UAPA:

- The law is often misused and abused. It could be used against political opponents and civil society activists who speak against the government and brand them as “terrorists.”
- The 2019 amendment gives unfettered powers to investigating agencies.
- The law is against the federal structure; given that ‘Police’ is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

## What needs to be done?

- Anti-terror laws should not be used as tool to silence the critics of government.

- A committee may be set up to examine and supervise the process of designating individuals as terrorists and investigation of cases with objectivity and fairness.
- Arbitrariness under the law should be checked through Judicial Review.

#### **4. Rajya Sabha passes Dam Safety Bill**

##### **Why in News?**

- While Lok Sabha is discussing COVID-19 situation in the country, Rajya Sabha has recently passed the Dam Safety Bill.

##### **About Dam Safety Bill, 2021:**

- The Bill provides for surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of dams to prevent disasters, and institutional mechanisms to ensure safety.
- It applies to over 5,000 dams across the country, many of which are currently in poor conditions.
- It has been met with significant opposition, particularly from several states that claim the bill oversteps the Centre's mandate.

##### **What is its Constitutional validity?**

- According to Entry 17 of State List, the states are eligible to make laws on irrigation, water supply, canals, embankments, drainage, water power and water storage.
- According to Entry 56 of the Union List, the Parliament is allowed to make laws on regulation of river valleys and interstate rivers. Article 252 allows the Parliament to make laws on subjects in State list if two or more states pass resolution requiring a law. In this issue, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh have passed resolution asking for a law on dam safety.

##### **Which Dams are Covered?**

- All dams in India with a height above 15 metres come under the purview of the bill.
- Dams between 10 to 15 metres of height are also covered but only if they meet certain other specifications in terms of design and Structural Conditions.

##### **National Committee on Dam Safety:**

- The Bill provides for the constitution of a National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS) which is to be chaired by the Central Water Commissioner (CWC).
- The other members of the NCDS will be nominated by the Centre and will include up to 10 representatives of the Centre, 7 state government representatives, and 3 experts on dam safety. The NCDS is to formulate policies for dam safety and to prevent dam failures.

- In the event of a dam failure, the NCDS will analyse why the failure occurred, and suggest changes in dam safety practices to ensure there aren't any repetitions.

### National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA):

- The bill provides for the formation of a NDSA which will be responsible for implementing the policies of the NCDS, and will resolve issues between State Dam Safety Organisations (or SDSOs) and dam owners. The NDSA will also specify regulations for the inspection of dams and will provide accreditation to the various agencies working on the structure of dams and their alteration.

### State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs)

- The bill will also result in the establishment of SDSOs, and State Committees on Dam Safety (SCDSs). The jurisdiction of the SDSOs will extend to all dams in that specific state.
- SDSOs will be in charge of scrutinizing dams under their jurisdiction and maintaining a database of the same.
- The SCDS will review the work of the SDSO, and will also have to assess the impact of dam-related projects on upstream and downstream states.
- The NDSA will, in some cases, possess this jurisdiction, for example, if a dam owned by one state is situated in another or crosses multiple states, or if a dam is owned by a central public sector undertaking.
- The bill gives the Central government the power to amend the functions of any of the above bodies through a notification, whenever it is deemed necessary to do so.

### How does Bill change the Functioning of dams?

- If the bill is made into a law, then dam owners will have to provide a dam safety unit in each dam. The dam safety unit will be required to inspect the dam before and after the monsoon session, and also during and after natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. The bill requires dam owners to prepare Emergency action plans. Risk-assessment studies will also have to be undertaken by owners, regularly.
- At specified, regular intervals, and in the event of either a modification to the dam's structure or a natural event that may impact the structure, dam owners will have to produce a comprehensive safety evaluation by experts.

### What are the Issues with Bill?

- The primary objection to the bill is that it is unconstitutional, as water is one of the items on the State List.

- Tamil Nadu, which currently possesses four dams situated in Kerala, is opposed to the Bill as it would result in the four dams falling under the NDSA.
- This will be doing away with Tamil Nadu's rights over the maintenance of the dam.
- The Bill states that the NCDS will be chaired by the Central Water Commissioner.
- However the Supreme Court has ruled in the past that such a scenario is prohibited, as it involves the CWC, an advisor, functioning both as a regulator and the head of the NCDS.

## 5. India revokes PepsiCo's potato patent

### Why in News?

- Two years after PepsiCo India provoked outrage by suing nine Gujarati farmers for allegedly infringing patent rights by growing its registered potato variety, the company's registration has been revoked by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights' Authority (PPV&FRA).

### About the Issue:

- The company has said that farmers infringed its patent rights by growing the potato variety used in its product called as Lays chips.
- PepsiCo has previously invoked Section 64 of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 to claim infringement of its rights.
  - ✓ The section prohibits anyone other than the breeder of seeds or a registered licensee of that variety to sell, export, import or produce such variety.
- The farmers were allegedly growing a variety of potato namely FL 2027, also called FC5, on which PepsiCo claimed exclusive rights by virtue of a Plant Variety Certificate (PVC).
- However, farmers groups have said that section 39 of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 allows farmers to grow and sell any variety of crop or even seed as long as they don't sell branded seed of registered varieties.
- The farmers requested the government to interfere on their behalf and ask Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA) to make a submission in court and fund legal costs through the National Gene Fund.

### About National Gene Fund:

- In 2007, the National Gene Fund was constituted under the PPV&FR Act 2001.
- It started with an initial amount of Rs 50 lakh from the Central government and gets a contribution from the money paid by plant breeders as registration and annual fee.

## What is Contract Farming?

- Contract farming can be defined as agricultural production carried out according to an agreement between a buyer and farmers, which establishes conditions for the production and marketing of a farm product or products.
- In contract farming, the Farmer Agrees to provide agreed quantities of a specific agricultural product which meet the quality standards of the purchaser and be supplied at the time determined by the Purchaser. On the other hand, the buyer commits to purchase the product and, in some cases, to support production through the supply of farm inputs, land preparation and the provision of Technical Advice.

## About Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001:

- The aim of the act is the establishment of an effective system for the protection of plant varieties, the rights of farmers and plant breeders and to encourage the development of new varieties of plant.
- The act also establishes Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- The major function of Authority includes Registration of new plant varieties; documentation of varieties registered; Preservation of plant genetic resource; Maintenance of the National Register of Plant Varieties and Maintenance of National Gene Bank (for conserving seeds of registered varieties).

## What are the Rights under the Act?

- **Breeders' Rights:** Breeders (Seed Producers) will have exclusive rights to produce, sell, market, distribute, import or export the protected variety.
  - ✓ A breeder can exercise for civil remedy in case of infringement of rights
- **Researchers' Rights:** Researcher can use any of the registered variety under the Act for conducting an experiment or research.
  - ✓ Researchers can use the initial source of variety for the purpose of developing another variety but repeated use needs the prior permission of the registered breeder.
- **Farmers' Rights:** A farmer who has evolved or developed a new variety is entitled to registration and protection in like manner as a breeder of a variety.
  - ✓ A farmer can save, use, sow, re-sow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce including seed of a variety protected under the PPV&FR Act, 2001.
  - ✓ However, the farmer shall not be entitled to sell branded seed of a variety protected under the PPV&FR Act, 2001.

- ✓ There is also a provision for compensation to the farmers for non-performance of variety.
- ✓ The farmer shall not be liable to pay any fee in any proceeding before the Authority or Registrar or the Tribunal or the High Court under the Act.

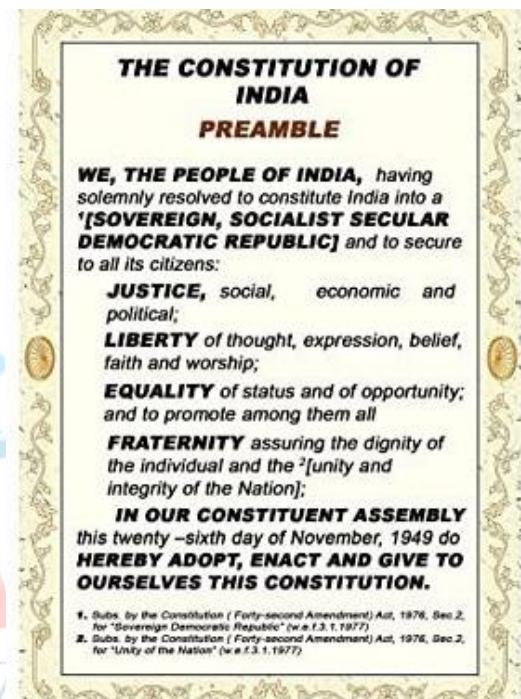
## 6. Bill to Amend Preamble

### Context:

- Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh has reserved his decision to allow the introduction of a private member's Bill to amend the Preamble to the Constitution.

### About the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2021:

- It was introduced by BJP Member from Kerala K J Alphons.
- The Bill seeks to change the words in the Preamble “EQUALITY of status and of opportunity” to “EQUALITY of status and of opportunity to be born, to be fed, to be educated, to get a job and to be treated with dignity”.
- It also seeks to replace the word “socialist” with “equitable”.
- The Bill also proposes adding “access to information technology” and “happiness” as objectives.



### What are the Four Important Aspects can be Ascertained from the above text of the Preamble?

- **Source of authority of the constitution:** It derives its authority from the people of India.
- **Nature of Indian state:** It declares India to be a sovereign, socialistic, secular democratic and republican polity.
- **Objectives of the constitution:** It specifies justice, liberty, equality and fraternity as the objectives.
- **Date of adoption:** Nov 26th, 1949.

## Is Preamble a part of the constitution?

- In the Berubari Union Case (1960), the Supreme Court opined that the Preamble was not part of the constitution.
- The above opinion was reversed in Keshavananda Bharati case in 1973; the SC held that Preamble is part of the constitution. This opinion was further clarified by the SC in LIC of India case (1995). Though preamble is part of the constitution;
- It is neither a source of power to legislature nor a prohibition upon the powers of legislature. It is a non-justiciable, that is, its provisions are not enforceable in any courts of law.

## Preamble and its Amendability:

- In Keshavananda Bharati case, the court held that the basic elements or the fundamental features of the constitution as contained in the preamble cannot be altered by an amendment under article 368.
- The preamble has been amended only once. That is- 42nd constitutional amendment act, 1976 when three new terms were added- Socialist, secular and integrity.

## 7. Anti-Defection Law

### Why in News?

- The Congress Party has written to the Speaker, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly seeking disqualification of 10 of the 12 MLAs that recently deserted the Party to join the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC).

### About Anti-Defection Law:

- The Tenth Schedule of Indian Constitution is popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act.
- Original constitution had no such provisions. It was included in the Constitution in 1985 by the Rajiv Gandhi government.
- The main intent of the law was to deter “the evil of political defections” by legislators motivated by the lure of office or other similar considerations.
- The grounds for disqualification under the Anti-Defection Law includes
  - a) If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
  - b) If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorized to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
  - c) Going against the party whip.

- As a pre-condition for his disqualification, his abstention from voting should not be condoned by his party or the authorized person within 15 days of such incident.
- Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2) deals with anti-defection.
- The law disallows MPs/ MLAs to switch parties after elections, make the members follow the whips issued by their party.
- It also applies to a nominated member if he/ she join a political party after 6 months of nomination and to an independent candidate if he/she joins a party after the election.

### **What is not a Defection?**

- A split in a political party won't be considered a defection if a complete political party merges with another Political Party.
- If a new political party is created by the elected Members of one party
- If he or she or alternative members of the party haven't accepted the merger between the two parties and opted to perform as a separate group from the time of such a merger.

### **Why the 10<sup>th</sup> schedule might not apply here?**

- The 10<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian Constitution commonly referred to as the Anti-defection Act says that disqualification on ground of defection will not apply in case of a split.
  - ✓ Where a member of a House claims that he/she and any other members of his/her legislature party constitute the group representing a faction which has arisen as a result of a split in the original political party and such group consists of not less than two-thirds of the members of such legislature party, he/she shall not be disqualified.
  - ✓ From the time of such split, the faction shall be deemed to be the political party to which he/she henceforth belongs.

### **What are the loop-holes?**

- Resignation as MLA was not one of the conditions.
- Exploiting this loophole, the 17 rebel MLAs in Karnataka resigned, their act aimed at ending the majority of the ruling coalition and, at the same time, avoiding disqualification.
- However, the Speaker refused to accept the resignations and declared them disqualified. This was possible as the legislation empowers the presiding officer of the House (i.e. the Speaker) to decide on complaints of defection under no time constraint.
- The law originally protected the Speaker's decision from judicial review.
- However, this safeguard was struck down in **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu and Others (1992)**.

- While the SC upheld the Speaker's discretionary power, it underscored that the Speaker functioned as a tribunal under the anti-defection law, thereby making her/his decisions subject to judicial review.
- This judgment enabled judiciary to become the watchdog of the anti-defection law, instead of the Speaker, who increasingly had become a political character contrary to the expected neutral constitutional role.
- The same could be witnessed in **Shrimanth Balasaheb Patel & Ors vs. Speaker Karnataka Legislative Assembly & Ors (2019)**, where the three-judge SC bench upheld the then Karnataka Speaker's decision of disqualification of the 17 rebel MLAs.
- However, it struck down his ban on the MLAs from contesting elections till 2023, negating the only possible permanent solution to the problem.
- The Supreme Court played the role of a neutral umpire in this political slugfest.
- But, the spectacle of MLAs hoarded in a bus, and being sent to a resort, openly exposed not just the absence of ideological ties between a leader and his party, but also her/his weak moral character.
- It was also upsetting to see public acceptance of such malpractices as part of politics, with some even calling it Chanakya niti!

### Is there any Safeguard for Anti-Defection?

- The Anti-Defection Law provided a safeguard for defections made on genuine ideological differences. It accepted "split" within a party if at least one-third of the members of the legislative party defect, and allowed the formation of a new party or "merger" with other political party if not less than two-thirds of the party's members commit to it.
- **The 91st Constitutional Amendment introduced in 2003 deleted the provision allowing split.**
- The 91<sup>st</sup> Amendment also barred the appointment of defectors as Ministers until their disqualification period is over or they are re-elected, whichever is earlier.
- But, obviously, such laws have not put to rest the trend of defections.

### What should be done?

- The main issue, as witnessed in Karnataka, is that the defectors treat disqualification as a mere detour, before they return to the House or government by re-contesting.
- This can only be stopped by extending the disqualification period from re-contesting and appointment to Chairmanships/Ministries to at least six years.

- The minimum period limit of six years is needed to ensure that the defectors are not allowed to enter the election fray for least one election cycle, which is five years.
- Of course, MLAs can still be bought from the ruling dispensation to bring it to a minority by being paid hefty sums, simply to stay at home for Six Years.

### Contradictory Reforms to the Law:

- Nowadays, no real democratic discussions happen inside political parties about major issues affecting the country. Individual MPs and MLAs need to be empowered to think independently.
- Anti-defection law should be applied only to confidence and no-confidence motions (**Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms, 1990**) or only when the government is in danger (**Law Commission (170th report, 1999)**).
- The rationale that a representative is elected on the basis of the party's programme can be extended to pre-poll alliances.
- Instead of making Speaker the authority for disqualification, the decision should be made by the president or the governor on the advice of the Election Commission. This would make the process Similar to the Disqualification procedure as given in **Representation of Peoples Act (RPA)**.
- There can be additional penalties for defectors as well.

## 8. Kasturirangan Committee on Western Ghats

### Why in News?

- Recently, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai informed the Centre that the state is opposed to the Kasturirangan Committee report on Western Ghats.

### About the News:

- He said that declaring Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive zone would adversely affect the livelihood of people in the region. However, the experts called the state's opposition disastrous for the ecologically fragile Western Ghats.

### What did the Gadgil Committee say?

- It defined the boundaries of the Western Ghats for the purposes of ecological management.
- It proposed that this entire area be designated as Ecologically Sensitive area (ESA).
- Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as Ecologically Sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their Existing Condition and Nature of Threat.

- It proposed to divide the area into about 2,200 grids, of which 75 per cent would fall under ESZ I or II or under already existing protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or natural parks.
- The committee proposed a Western Ghats Ecology Authority to regulate these activities in the area.

### Why was Kasturirangan Committee setup?

- None of the six concerned states agreed with the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee, which submitted its report in August 2011.
- In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to “examine” the Gadgil Committee report in a “holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of responses received” from states, central ministries and others.
- The Kasturirangan report seeks to bring just 37% of the Western Ghats under the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) zones — down from the 64% suggested by the Gadgil report.

### Recommendations of Kasturirangan Committee:

- A ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining.
- No new thermal power projects, but hydro power projects allowed with restrictions.
- A ban on new polluting industries.
- Building and construction projects up to 20,000 sq m was to be allowed but townships were to be banned.
- Forest diversion could be allowed with extra safeguards.

### Importance of the Western Ghats:

- The Western Ghats is an extensive region spanning over six States. It is the home of many endangered plants and animals. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- It is one of the eight “hottest hot-spots” of biological diversity in the world.
- According to UNESCO, the Western Ghats are older than the Himalayas.
- They influence Indian monsoon weather patterns by intercepting the rain-laden monsoon winds that sweep in from the south-west During late Summer.

## 9. Union Cabinet clears Ken-Betwa River Interlinking Project

### Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet recently approved the funding and implementation of the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project at a cost of ₹44,605 crore at the 2020-21 price level.

### About the Project:

- The Centre would fund ₹39,317 crore for the project, with ₹36,290 crore as a grant and ₹3,027 crore as a loan.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is the River interlinking project that aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP. Ken-Betwa is one of the 30 rivers inter linking projects conceived across the country.
- Ken and Betwa rivers originate in MP and are the tributaries of Yamuna.
- Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda district of UP and with Betwa in Hamirpur district of UP. Rajghat, Paricha and Matatila dams are over Betwa river.
- Ken River passes through Panna tiger reserve.

### Constitutional Provisions Involved:

- Article 262(1) of the constitution deals with the adjudication of interstate water disputes.
- Article 262(2) holds that neither Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of interstate water disputes.
- Water being a state subject requires a mutual water sharing arrangement between two Riparian States.

### Need for Interlinking of Rivers:

- India receives 80% of the water through its annual rains and surface water flow happens over a 4-month period June through September.  
This spatial and time variance in availability of natural water versus year-round demand for irrigation, drinking and industrial water creates demand supply gap, which can be balanced by interlinking of rivers. Interlinking of rivers involves joining rivers by the network of canals and reservoirs that solves twin problems of drought and flood by maintaining a water balance between the water deficit and surplus areas.
- Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme, has already interlinked the Godavari river and the Krishna river in Andhra's West Godavari district.

## Advantages of Interlinking Rivers:

- River linking will be a solution to recurring droughts in Bundelkhand region.
- It will curb the rate of farmers suicide and will ensure them stable livelihood by providing sustainable means of irrigation (6 lakh hec of land) and reducing excessive dependence on groundwater. It will not only accelerate the water conservation by construction of multipurpose dam but will also produce 75MW of electricity and will supply drinking water to 13 lakh people. Few are of the view that the introduction of dam inside the water scarce regions of panna tiger reserve, will rejuvenate the forests of Panna Tiger reserve that in turn will pave the way for Rich Biodiversity in the region.
- It will provide employment during the execution of the project.
- The afforestation programme could be implemented on canal banks resulting in environmental improvement. The communication system will improve because of canal roads and CD works raising Marketing Opportunities.
- The formation of the reservoirs will help tourism development, fish and aquaculture, bird sanctuaries etc.

## What are its Concerns?

- Construction of Daudhan dam will result into submergence of 10% of critical tiger habitat of MP's Panna Tiger Reserve that will adversely affect the tiger conservation efforts.
- Height of the dam (77 meters) will affect the nesting sites of vulture.
- Construction of one of the barrages inside the Ken Gharial Sanctuary will adversely affect the sustainability of the sanctuary.
- Submergence by Daudhan and Makodia reservoirs will result into displacement of 20,000 people of the Bundelkhand region and will give rise to rehabilitation issues.

## Challenges Ahead:

- **Political:** Politicization of Ken Betwa project is making project more complex and resulting into its further delay. According to the draft project report, MP was to get 2,650 million cubic metres (MCM) of water and UP 1,700 MCM. While none of the states has objection to their share, Uttar Pradesh wants more water (935 MCM) in pre-monsoon months for rabi crops and less for the monsoon months. MP, however, is not willing to release the quantity in months with the least rain.
- **Environmental:** Because of certain environmental and wildlife conservation concerns like passing of project though critical tiger habitat of panna tiger reserve, project is stuck in for the approval from NGT, and other higher authorities.

- **Economic:** There is a huge economic cost attached with the projects implementation and maintenance, which has been rising due to delays in project implementation.
- **Social:** Reconstruction and rehabilitation caused due to displacement resulting from submergence of two dams will involve social cost as well.

## 10. Haiderpur Wetland becomes the 47th Ramsar Site of India

### Why in News?

- India has designated the Haiderpur wetland in Uttar Pradesh as the country's 47th Ramsar site and 2,463rd Ramsar site Internationally.

### About the News:

- Haiderpur Wetland covers an area of 6,908 hectares and is situated on the Muzaffarnagar-Bijnor border in Uttar Pradesh.
- It was formed in 1984 by the construction of Madhya Ganga Barrage at the confluence of Solani and Ganga rivers and is a part of Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary.
- A source of freshwater and Groundwater Recharge, Haiderpur Wetland supports a variety of plant species, and is home to numerous animals, including swamp deer, otters, gharial and Fishing Cat.
- It plays host to more than 300 species of birds, many of which come for wintering.

### Why Wetlands are Crucial for a Healthy Planet?

- The health of people on our planet depends on healthy wetlands.
- 40% of the world's species live or breed in wetlands.
- Wetlands are "nurseries of life" – 40% of animals breed in wetlands.
- Wetlands are "kidneys of the earth" – they clean the environment of pollutants.
- Wetlands "matter for climate change" – they store 30% of land based carbon.
- Wetlands "minimize disaster risks" – they absorb storm surge.

### About Ramsar Convention:

- The Ramsar Convention is an international agreement promoting the conservation of wetlands.
- The Convention was adopted at Ramsar in Iran in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Almost 90% of the UN member states are part of the Convention.

### About Montreux Record:

- Montreux Record under the Convention is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have

occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.

- It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List.
- The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990). Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.
- Currently, two wetlands of India are in Montreux record: Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan) and Loktak Lake (Manipur).
- Chilka lake (Odisha) was placed in the record but was later removed from it.

## **11. Rule for CAA not yet Notified after 2 Years Passed**

### **Why in News?**

- Two years after the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was passed by parliament the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is yet to notify the rules governing the act.

### **About the News:**

- The CAA was passed by the Lok Sabha in Dec 9, 2019, by the Rajya Sabha on Dec 11, 2019 and was assented by the President on December 12, 2019.
- The MHA issued a notification later that the provisions of the act will come into force from Jan 10, 2020. But still the rules are not yet notified.
- The legislation cannot be implemented without the rules being notified.

### **About the CAA and Foreigners Tribunal:**

- The Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 that seeks to give citizenship to refugees from the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities fleeing religious persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who came to India before 31st December, 2014.
- Residential requirement for citizenship through naturalization from the above said countries is at least 5 years. Residential requirement for citizenship through naturalization for others is 11 years.
- The Act applies to all States and Union Territories of the country.
- The beneficiaries of Citizenship Amendment Act can reside in any state of the country.
- In 1964, the govt. brought in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order.
  - ✓ Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) Retired IAS of ACS

Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.

- ✓ The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
- ✓ Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.
- ✓ Typically, the tribunals there have seen two kinds of cases: those concerning persons against whom a reference has been made by the border police and those whose names in the electoral roll has a “D”, or “doubtful”, marked against them.

## Who are Illegal Immigrants?

- According to the Citizenship Act, 1955, an illegal immigrant is one who enters India without a valid passport or with forged documents, or a person who stays beyond the visa permit.

## What is NRC?

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is meant to identify a bona fide citizen.
- In other words, by the order of the Supreme Court of India, NRC is being currently updated in Assam to detect Bangladeshi nationals who might have entered the State illegally after the midnight of March 24, 1971.
- The date was decided in the 1985 Assam Accord, which was signed between the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the AASU.
- The NRC was first published after the 1951 Census in the independent India when parts of Assam went to the East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.
- The first draft of the updated list was concluded by December 31, 2017.

## Arguments against the Act:

- The fundamental criticism of the Act has been that it specifically targets Muslims. Critics argue that it is violative of **Article 14** of the Constitution (which guarantees the right to equality) and the principle of secularism.
- India has several other refugees that include Tamils from Sri Lanka and Hindu Rohingya from Myanmar. They are not covered under the Act.
- Despite exemption granted to some regions in the North-eastern states, the prospect of citizenship for massive numbers of illegal Bangladeshi migrants has triggered deep anxieties in the states.

- It will be difficult for the government to differentiate between illegal migrants and those persecuted.

### Arguments in Favour:

- The government has clarified that Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh are Islamic republic's where Muslims are in Majority hence they cannot be treated as persecuted minorities. It has assured that the Government will examine the application from any other community on a case to case basis.
- This Act is a big boon to all those people who have been the victims of Partition and the subsequent conversion of the three countries into theocratic Islamic republics.
- Citing partition between India and Pakistan on religious lines in 1947, the government has argued that millions of citizens of undivided India belonging to various faiths were staying in Pakistan and Bangladesh from 1947.
- The constitutions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh provide for a specific state religion. As a result, many persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities have faced persecution on grounds of religion in those countries.
- Many such persons have fled to India to seek shelter and continued to stay in India even if their travel documents have expired or they have incomplete or no documents.
- After Independence, not once but twice, India conceded that the minorities in its neighbourhood is its responsibility. First, immediately after Partition and again during the **Indira-Mujib Pact in 1972** when India had agreed to absorb over 1.2 million refugees. It is a historical fact that on both occasions, it was only the Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Christians who had come over to Indian side.

## 12. Manipur and Assam wanted to retain AFSPA

### Why in News?

- After the recent civilian killings in Nagaland, there is a clamour in the northeast States to revoke the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act or the AFSPA.

### What is the Issue?

- However, four years ago, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) decision to remove areas under the AFSPA was resisted by at least two States — Assam and Manipur.
- The AFSPA that has been in force in the northeast since 1958 gives unbridled power to the armed forces and the Central Armed Police Forces deployed in “disturbed areas” to kill anyone acting in contravention of law, arrest and search any premises without a warrant

and protection from prosecution and legal suits without the Central Government's Sanction.

### Concurrent Powers to Issue Notification:

- Both the Centre (MHA) and the State Governments have got the concurrent powers to issue notification under Section 3 of AFSPA. For instance, the notification extending it in Manipur, right from the 1980s, has been issued by the Government of Manipur.
- In the last 40 years, the MHA has not issued any notification under the AFSPA for Manipur.

### What does the AFSPA mean?

- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in "Disturbed Areas".

### Powers given to Armed Forces:

- They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in Contravention of the Law.
- If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.
- Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

### What is a "Disturbed Area" and who has the Power to Declare it?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The Central Government or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.

### Has there been any Review of the Act?

- On November 19, 2004, the Central government appointed a five-member committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy to review the provisions of the act in the north eastern states.
- **The committee submitted its report in 2005, which included the following recommendations:** (a) AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967; (b) The Unlawful Activities Act

should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and (c) grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

### 13. SC has Taken note of Section 124-A misuse

#### Why in News?

- Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju's reply in Parliament that there is no proposal to scrap sedition charge from the Indian Penal Code comes almost five months after Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana made scathing remarks in open court to the Government about the chilling effect of the "colonial law", which suppresses the freedoms of ordinary people.

#### About the Issue:

- In a hearing on July 15, the CJI compared the use of sedition charge (Section 124A of the IPC) to a tool given to a carpenter "to cut a piece of wood and he uses it to cut the entire forest itself".
- The CJI wondered why a democracy needed such a law which was used by the British to imprison Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- "The Ministry of Home Affairs has informed that there is no proposal under consideration to scrap Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- Further, the question of law regarding Section 124A is pending for adjudication before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India," Mr. Rijiju said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

#### What is Sedition?

- Sedition, which falls under **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code**, is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring hatred or contempt towards the government of India and has been illegal in India since 1870.

#### Need for a Proper Definition:

- The sedition law has been in controversy for far too long. Often the governments are criticized for using the law — Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) — against vocal critics of their policies. Therefore, this Section is seen as a restriction of individuals' freedom of expression and falls short of the provisions of reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech under Article 19 of the Constitution.
- The law has been in debate ever since it was brought into force by the colonial British rulers in 1860s. Several top freedom movement leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were booked under the sedition law.

- ✓ Mahatma Gandhi described it as the “prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen.”
- ✓ Nehru had described it as “highly objectionable and obnoxious” which “should have no place in any body of laws that we might pass”. Nehru said, “The sooner we get rid of it the better.”

### Relevant Supreme Court judgements:

- **Kedarnath Singh vs State of Bihar:** Section 124A has been challenged in various courts in specific cases. The validity of the provision itself was upheld by a Constitution Bench in 1962, in **Kedarnath Singh vs State of Bihar**.
  - ✓ That judgment went into the issue of whether the law on sedition is consistent with the fundamental right under **Article 19 (1) (a)** which guarantees each citizen’s **freedom of speech and expression**.
  - ✓ The Supreme Court laid down that every citizen has a right to say or write about the government, by way of criticism or comment, as long as it does not “incite people to violence” against the government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder.
- **The Balwant Singh vs State of Punjab (1995) case:** In this case, the Supreme Court had clarified that merely shouting slogans, in this case Khalistan Zindabad, does not amount to sedition. Evidently, the sedition law is being both misunderstood and misused to muzzle dissent.

### What does the Data Shows?

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), though, has only been collecting separate data on sedition cases since 2014. In 2014, there were 47 cases of sedition but that number increased to 70 in 2018 (the latest year with available data).
- Compared to other offences, sedition remains a rare crime (it accounts for less than 0.01% of all IPC crimes).
- But within India, some parts are emerging as sedition hotspots. Assam and Jharkhand, for instance, with 37 sedition cases each, account for 32% of all sedition cases between 2014-2018. In 2018, there were 1,182 cases registered under **UAPA** (The Act gives special procedures to handle terrorist activities, among other things).
- And almost all these cases (92%) were concentrated in five states (Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Jharkhand and Manipur).

- “There has been a dramatic jump in charging a person with the offence of sedition since 2016. In 2019, 93 cases were on the ground of sedition as compared to the 35 cases that were filed in 2016.
- The same constitutes a 165% increase. Of these 93 cases, charge sheets were filed in a mere 17% of cases and even worse, the conviction rate was an abysmally low 3.3%.

### Why Sedition Law is a Hindrance?

- Sedition leads to a sort of unauthorised self-censorship, for it produces a chilling effect on free speech. It suppresses what every citizen ought to do in a democracy — raise questions, debate, disagree and challenge the Government’s Decisions.
- Sedition systematically destroys the soul of Gandhi’s philosophy that is, **right to dissent** which is the core Principle of Democracy.

## 14. Call from within Judiciary to change Collegium System

### Why in News?

- Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju told the Rajya Sabha recently that there was a call from within the Judiciary and Parliamentarians to change the collegium system for appointment of Judges.

### About the News:

- He said a draft memorandum of procedure for bringing transparency and accountability to the system was submitted by the Government to the Supreme Court and it was pending.
- The National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Bill passed by both the Houses of Parliament was declared ultra vires by the Supreme Court in 2015.
- There is a call from several quarters to bring transparency to the appointment of judges. Till 1993, the appointments were taking place as per the Constitution, the President of India appointed the judges in consultation with the SC. Soon this changed and from 1998, the collegium system kicked in. So consultation was changed to concurrence.
- He said the Government should carry out its duty diligently in consultation with the SC.
- He said the Government has written to the Chief Justices of all High Courts to include names of members from the reserved categories while recommending names for appointment as Judges.

### What is Collegium System?

- It is the system of appointment and transfer of judges that has evolved through judgments of the SC, and not by an Act of Parliament or by a provision of the Constitution.

- The SC collegium is headed by the CJI and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.
- A HC collegium is led by its Chief Justice and four other senior most judges of that court.
- Names recommended for appointment by a HC collegium reaches the government only after approval by the CJI and the SC collegium.
- Judges of the higher judiciary are appointed only through the collegium system and the Government has a role only after names have been decided by the collegium.
- The Government's role is limited to getting an inquiry conducted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court.
  - ✓ **Intelligence Bureau (IB):** It is a reputed and established intelligence agency. It is authoritatively controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
  - ✓ It can also raise objections and seek clarifications regarding the collegium's choices, but if the collegium reiterates the same names, the government is bound, under Constitution Bench judgments, to appoint them as judges.

### **Evolution of the Collegium System:**

- **First Judges Case (1981):**
  - ✓ It declared that the “primacy” of the Chief Justice of India (CJI)s recommendation on Judicial Appointments and transfers can be refused for “cogent reasons.”
  - ✓ The ruling gave the Executive primacy over the Judiciary in judicial appointments for the next 12 Years.
- **Second Judges Case (1993):**
  - ✓ SC introduced the Collegium system, holding that “consultation” really meant “concurrence”. It added that it was not the CJI’s individual opinion, but an institutional opinion formed in consultation with the two senior-most judges in the SC.
- **Third Judges Case (1998):**
  - ✓ SC on President’s reference expanded the Collegium to a five-member body, comprising the CJI and four of his senior-most colleagues.

### **Procedure for Various Judicial Appointments:**

- **For CJI:**
  - ✓ The President of India appoints the CJI and the other SC judges.
  - ✓ As far as the CJI is concerned, the outgoing CJI recommends his successor.
  - ✓ In practice, it has been strictly by seniority ever since the supersession controversy of the 1970s.

- **For SC Judges:**

- ✓ For other judges of the SC, the proposal is initiated by the CJI.
- ✓ The CJI consults the rest of the Collegium members, as well as the senior-most judge of the court hailing from the High Court to which the recommended person belongs.
- ✓ The consultees must record their opinions in writing and it should form part of the file.
- ✓ The Collegium sends the recommendation to the Law Minister, who forwards it to the Prime Minister to advise the President.

- **For Chief Justice of High Courts:**

- ✓ The Chief Justice of High Court is appointed as per the policy of having Chief Justices from outside the respective States.
- ✓ The Collegium takes the call on the elevation.
- ✓ High Court judges are recommended by a Collegium comprising the CJI and two senior-most judges.
- ✓ The proposal, however, is initiated by the outgoing Chief Justice of the High Court concerned in consultation with two senior-most colleagues.
- ✓ The recommendation is sent to the Chief Minister, who advises the Governor to send the proposal to the Union Law Minister.

### Criticism of the Collegium System:

- Opaqueness and a lack of Transparency.
- Scope for nepotism.
- Embroilment in public controversies.
- Overlooks several talented Junior Judges and Advocates.

### Attempts to reform the Appointment System:

- The attempt made to replace it by a ‘National Judicial Appointments Commission’ was struck down by the court in 2015 on the ground that it posed a threat to the independence of the Judiciary.

### Related Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 124(2) of the Indian Constitution provides that the Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President after consultation with such a number of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary for the purpose.

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

### Way Forward:

- Filling up of vacancies is a continuous and collaborative process involving the executive and the judiciary, and there cannot be a time frame for it. However, it is time to think of a permanent, independent body to institutionalize the process with adequate safeguards to preserve the Judiciary's independence guaranteeing judicial primacy but not judicial exclusivity. It should ensure Independence, reflect diversity, demonstrate professional competence and integrity.
- Instead of selecting the number of judges required against a certain number of vacancies, the collegium must provide a panel of possible names to the President to appoint in order of preference and other valid criteria.

## 15. SC puts off Krishna Water Dispute hearing till 2022

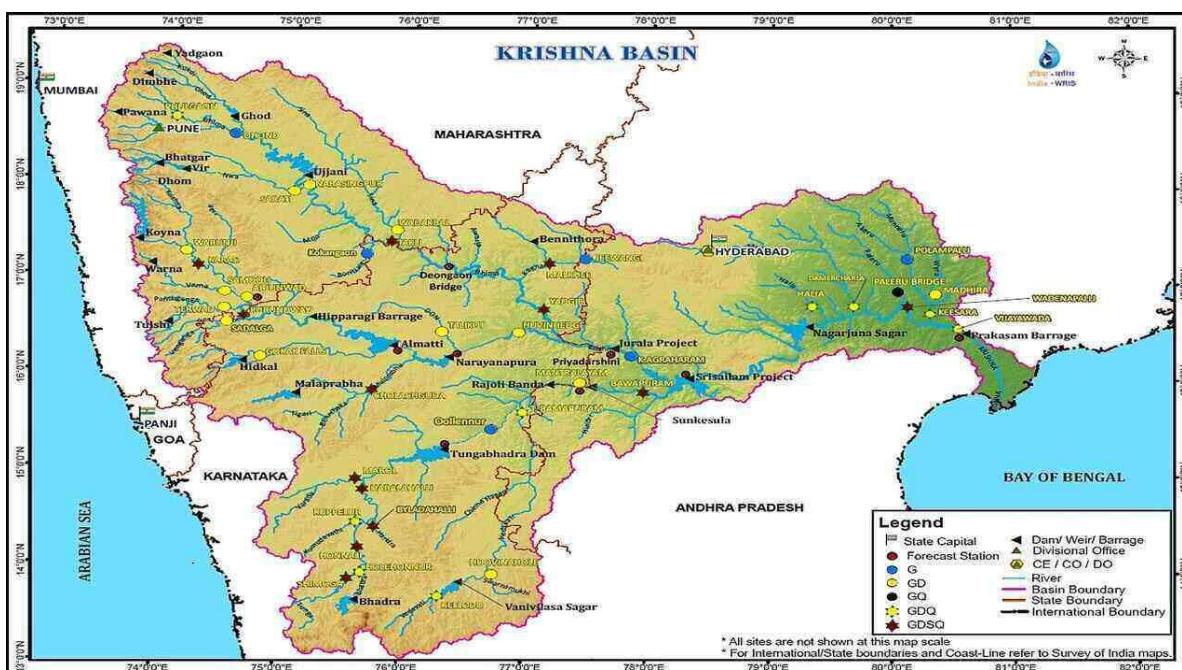
### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently adjourned to next year the hearing of the dispute among the neighbouring States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka on the allocation of Krishna Water.

### About the Issue:

- Karnataka has sought the vacation of a November 16, 2011 of the Supreme Court which stopped the Centre from publishing in the Official Gazette the final order of the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal II (KWDT) pronounced in December 2010, allocating the river water to Karnataka, erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- The KWDT had further modified its final order and report on November 29, 2013 to allot surplus water to Karnataka, Maharashtra and the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh while preserving the allocation of 2130 TMC already made amongst them.
- However, following the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, its successors Telangana and Andhra Pradesh had moved the Supreme Court challenging the KWDT's allocation of shares.
- Karnataka has argued that the dispute raised by Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was between them and did not concern it.

- The State said the decision of the KWDT was enforceable only till 2050, after which it has to be reviewed or revised. Ten years have already lapsed in litigation since 2010.
- Karnataka required at least 10 years to complete several irrigation projects whose costs were pegged at ₹60,000 crore in 2014-15. The costs would escalate annually by 10% to 15%.
- Even if the irrigation projects are completed in 10 years, the Central Water Commission clearances would take time.
- The life of the KWDT award is 40 years, out of which 10 years have already lapsed and 10 years is required to complete the work. As a result, Karnataka will not be in a position to utilise water 20 out of 40 years.



## About Inter-State River Water Disputes:

- Article 262 of the Constitution provides for the adjudication of inter-state water disputes.
- Under this, Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution and control of waters of any inter-state river and river valley.
- Parliament may also provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court is to exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint.
- The Parliament has enacted the two laws, the River Boards Act (1956) and the Inter-State Water Disputes Act (1956).

- The River Boards Act provides for the establishment of river boards by the Central government for the regulation and development of inter-state river and river valleys.
- A River Board is established on the request of state governments concerned to advise them.
- The Inter-State Water Disputes Act empowers the Central government to set up an ad hoc tribunal for the adjudication of a dispute between two or more states in relation to the waters of an inter-state river or river valley.
- The decision of the tribunal is final and binding on the parties to the dispute.
- Neither the Supreme Court nor any other court is to have jurisdiction in respect of any water dispute which may be referred to such a tribunal under this Act.

### About Krishna River:

- **Source:** It originates near Mahabaleshwar (Satara) in Maharashtra. It is the second biggest river in peninsular India after the Godavari River.
- **Drainage:** It runs from four states Maharashtra (303 km), North Karnataka (480 km) and the rest of its 1300 km journey in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh before it empties into the Bay of Bengal.
- **Tributaries:** Tungabhadra, Mallaprabha, Koyna, Bhima, Ghataprabha, Yerla, Warna, Dindi, Musi and Dudhganga.

## 16. Rajya Sabha Passes Bill to extend CBI and ED Chiefs Tenure

### Why in News?

- The Rajya Sabha recently passed the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to amend the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, and the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

### About the News:

- Currently, the tenure of chiefs of ED and CBI is two years.
- The change in tenure of the CBI Director was done by amending the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
- On the other hand, the changes to the tenure of the ED Director was brought in by amending the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.
- Both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha has passed the bill to amend the Fundamental Rules, 1922 adding the two posts to the list whose services can be extended by up to two years beyond the two-year fixed tenure in “public interest”.

- The previous list comprised Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Director, Intelligence Bureau and Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing.

## What is the Contention?

- Both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha has passed the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to replace ordinances that had been brought in the recess period.
- Opposition have raised objections to the two Bills, stating that it completely disregarded the Supreme Court's observations that were clear in the view that extenions of tenure to superannuated officials should only be done in rare cases.
- The government's move was Mala Fide.

## About the CBI Director and his Appointment:

- The Director of the CBI is appointed as per section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act of 1946.
- The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act (2013) says that the Central Government shall appoint the Director of CBI on the recommendation of a three-member committee consisting of the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India or Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him.
- Further, the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Act, 2014 made a change in the composition of the committee related to the appointment of the Director of C.B.I. It states that where there is no recognized leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, then the leader of the single Largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha would be a member of that Committee.

## About Enforcement Directorate:

- The origin of this Directorate goes back to 1st May, 1956, when an 'Enforcement Unit' was formed, in the Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947 (FERA '47).
- In the year 1957, this Unit was renamed as 'Enforcement Directorate'.
- Presently, it is part of the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
- The Organization is mandated with the task of enforcing the provisions of two special fiscal laws – Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) and Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

## Composition:

- Besides directly recruiting personnel, the Directorate also draws officers from different Investigating Agencies, viz., Customs & Central Excise, Income Tax, Police, etc. on Deputation.

## 17. SC approves widening of three Chardham Highways

### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently upheld the government's mandate to broaden three Himalayan highways, considered crucial by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for quick troop build-up along the Indo-China border.

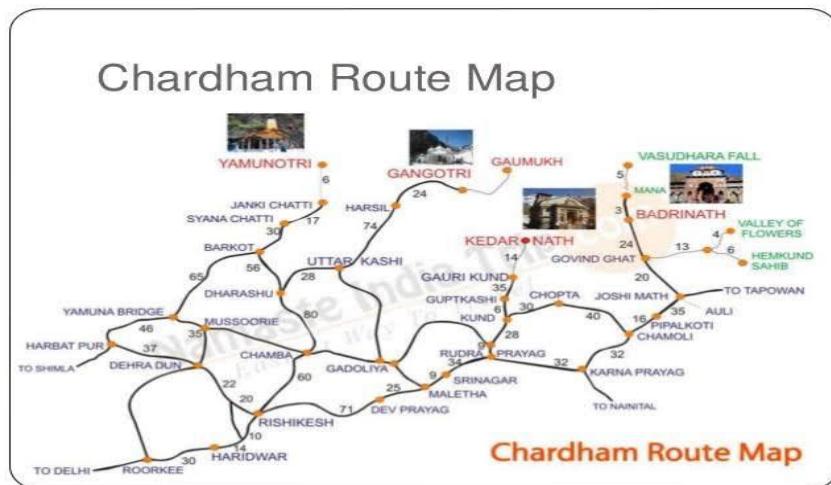
### About the News:

- The three national highways — Rishikesh to Mana, Rishikesh to Gangotri and Tanakpur to Pithoragarh — act as feeder roads to the northern border with China. They are part of the Char Dham project.
- These highways would now be developed in accordance with the Double Lane with Paved Shoulder (DLPS) system.
- The Bench in its judgement held that the court in its judicial review cannot second-guess the infrastructural needs of the armed forces.
- The verdict is based on an application filed by the MoD to modify the court's September 8, 2020 order, which directed that mountain roads for the Char Dham Highway project should be 5.5 m in width in compliance with a 2018 circular of the Roads and Highways Ministry.

### About Chardham Project:

- It is a programme taken up by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for connectivity improvement for Chardham (Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri) in Uttrakhand and part of the route leading to Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.
- The cost of the project is around Rs. 12,000 Crore.
- It envisages improvement as well as development of 889 km length of national highways.
- Implementing Agencies are Uttarakhand State Public Works Department (PWD), BRO and the National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).
- The work under the programme is being implemented on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode.
  - Under the EPC mode, the project cost is completely borne by the government.

- ✓ However, the contractor is directly responsible for ensuring quality of the work as well as rectification of defects and maintenance of the project stretch for a period of 4 years after completion of construction.



### Impact of Developmental Projects in Himalayas:

- Himalayas are the world's youngest mountain range. They are prone to erosion, landslides and seismic activity and rainstorms lashed the region. Therefore, this region is vulnerable and fragile.
- There is a clear link between climate change and changing rainfall patterns in the Himalayas. Scientists are now certain that rainfall in India will become more extreme. There are higher possibilities of cloudbursts and “unprecedented” high rainfall over the region.
- There is a link between the disaster and the manner in which “development” has been carried out in this ecologically fragile region. E.g hydropower projects. Currently, there are roughly 70 projects built or proposed on the Ganga. Hence the river would be modified through diversion to tunnels or reservoirs to such an extent that 80 per cent of the Bhagirathi and 65 percent of the Alaknanda could be “affected”.
- The construction itself would have devastating impacts on the mountains – because of blasting to build tunnels and barrages. Also construction is carried out without the necessary precautions, thus the risk of landslides increases.
- The situation is the same when it comes to the building of roads, buildings or mining for minerals. Cases of illegal mining and construction are becoming familiar.
- Tourism is being considered as the major engine driving the economy of Himalayan states which has provided valuable economic and livelihood opportunities to the locals and profits for the state governments. On the other hand, air and noise pollution, overbooked

hotels, increasing and unregulated tourist footfall, urbanization, haphazard infrastructure non-availability of parking places, and local water and energy security are becoming recurrent problems.

- Over exploitation of natural resources, food insecurity, ill-planned urbanization, loss of indigenous culture, natural disasters, increase in municipal sewage are impacting the Himalayan ecology. Cold climate in the mountains also restricts faster decomposition of garbage, thus often leading to their draining into rivers.
- This contaminates aquatic life downstream and degrades the quality of the river water on which depends a large population. Places like Shimla are already battling with water crisis and outbreak of waterborne hepatitis because of improper sewage and garbage management

#### **About Border Roads Organisation:**

- It was conceived and raised in 1960 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for coordinating the speedy development of a network of roads in the North and the North Eastern border regions of the country. It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence. It has diversified into a large spectrum of construction and development works comprising airfields, building projects, defence works and tunnelling and has endeared itself to the people.

### **3.1. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE SNIPPETS**

#### **1. India Young Water Professional Programme**

##### **Why in News?**

- Ministry of Jal Shakti has recently launched the first edition of the India Young Water Professional Programme.

##### **Highlights:**

- Its launch marks a significant milestone in Australia-India Water relationship. This Programme looks to prepare future water leaders.
- This program has been taken up under the National Hydrology Project. It will be implemented by Australia India Water Centre (a consortium of Australian and Indian universities).
- It is focused on Engaged Training and Learning Model. The Program will aim to achieve its objectives through the 70-20-10 framework, which states that three types of experience are required to learn:

- Experience 70% (learn and develop on the job)
- Exposure 20% (learn and develop through others)
- Education 10% (learn and develop through formal training)
- It also focuses on gender equality and diversity, because sustainable water management can only benefit from the views and skills of all members of society.
- It is outcome-driven and the participants will be having certain tools and techniques by the time they are finished with the Programme.
- Based on the success of this edition, a second phase of YWP will be planned in the later half of the year 2022.
- It aims to provide a structured platform for capacity building with strategic and long-term investment to support the water management reforms in India.
- To equip water professionals with the necessary skills, knowledge, behaviours and networks that will better enable them to contribute to the development and management of water resources in India, and to address the competency needs and priorities of the water sector in India.
- It will help in breaking the silos of surface water vs groundwater and participants will learn to take a comprehensive view of water resources management.

## 2. Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

### Why in News?

- NITI Aayog has recently released the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

### Highlights:

- The MPI seeks to measure poverty across its multiple dimensions and in effect complements existing poverty statistics based on per capita consumption expenditure.
- According to Global MPI 2021, India's rank is 66 out of 109 countries. The National MPI is aimed at deconstructing the Global MPI and creating a globally aligned and yet customised India MPI for drawing up comprehensive Reform Action Plans with the larger goal of improving India's position in the Global MPI rankings.
- It has three equally weighted dimensions – health, education, and standard of living.
- These three dimensions are represented by 12 indicators such as nutrition, school attendance, years of schooling, drinking water, sanitation, housing, bank accounts among others.

- The national MPI measure uses the globally accepted and robust methodology developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the UNDP.
- This baseline report of the national MPI measure is based on the reference period of 2015-16 of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4).
- NFHS-4 data has been used to derive an idea of baseline multidimensional poverty to know the situation on ground before the full rollout of various central government schemes. NFHS-4 precedes the full roll out of (central government's) flagship schemes on housing, drinking water, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, financial inclusion, and other major efforts towards improving school attendance, nutrition, mother and child health, etc. However, it has to be noted here that the NFHS-5 data suggests improvement in access to clean cooking fuel, sanitation, and electricity which translates to reduction in deprivation. Bihar has the highest proportion of people of the state's population followed by Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh who are multidimensional poor.
- Kerala registered the lowest population poverty levels, followed by Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Goa and Sikkim.
- Bihar also has the highest number of malnourished people followed by Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.
- The development of the Index is an important contribution towards instituting a public policy tool which monitors multidimensional poverty, informs evidence-based and focused interventions, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind.
- This presents an overall picture of poverty in the country, while also enabling closer and more in-depth analyses of areas of interest such as regions – state or districts, and specific sectors and complements the existing monetary poverty statistics.

### **3. Zero Defect Zero Effect Scheme (ZED)**

#### **Why in News?**

- Recently, 23,948 Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) had registered with intent to adopt the principle of the Zero Defect Zero Effect Scheme (ZED).

#### **Highlights:**

- It is launched in 2016 by the Ministry of MSME, the scheme is an integrated and Comprehensive Certification System.
- It accounts for productivity, quality, pollution mitigation, energy efficiency, financial status, human resource and technological depth including design and IPR in both products

and processes. Its mission is to develop and implement the 'ZED' culture in India based on the principles of Zero Defect & Zero Effect.

- The Rating is a weighted average of the marks obtained on each parameter.
- The MSMEs will be assessed & rated on defined enabler & outcome parameters on operational level indicators and organisational level indicators at the operational level.
- Based on the assessment, the MSME will be ranked as Bronze-Silver-Gold-Diamond-Platinum enterprises.
- There are 50 parameters for ZED rating and additional 25 parameters for ZED Defence rating under ZED Maturity Assessment Model.
- Quality Council of India (QCI) has been appointed as the National Monitoring & Implementing Unit (NMIU) for implementation of ZED.
- The Quality Council of India (QCI) is a non-profit organization registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.

#### 4. What is Dual Command System of Policing?

##### Why in News?

- The Dual Command System of Policing is being implemented in Bhopal and Indore.

##### What is the 'Dual Command' System?

- Under the dual command system, the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police (SP) share powers and responsibilities in a district.
- Under this structure, the DM is entrusted with issuing arrest warrants, licenses while the SP has powers and responsibilities to investigate crime and make arrests.
- The system is designed to ensure a lower concentration of power and making the police more accountable to the DM at the district level.

##### How does the Commissionerate System Empower the Police?

- Under the police Commissionerate system, the powers of both policing and magistracy are concentrated with the commissioner, who is directly accountable to the state government and the state police chief.
- The commissioner of police under the Commissionerate system exercises the powers and duties of a District Magistrate.
- These powers are also available to any officer under the commissioner who is not below the rank of an Assistant Commissioner of Police.

- The police are also empowered to conduct externment proceedings and issue written orders to remove a person from their jurisdiction of the Commissionerate for a maximum of two years.

### Need for such System:

- Various committees constituted to suggest police reforms have recommended implementation of a police commissioner system.
  - ✓ **Rapidly Urbanized Cities:** This is for cities which have witnessed rapid urbanization and have a population of more than 10 lakhs.
  - ✓ **Better Accountability:** In the 6th report of the National Police Commission, it noted that as compared to police in districts, police in Commissionerate in small areas had a better account of themselves.
  - ✓ **Complex Security Threats:** It further pointed out that in urban areas, the changing dynamism and growing complexities of security threats required a swift and prompt response.
  - ✓ **Quick Responsivity:** Usually in large urban areas, law and order situations develop rapidly, requiring a speed and effective operational response from the police.
  - ✓ **Avoiding Delayed Action:** In districts where the SPs and DMs do not have an understanding, orders to swiftly act are rarely issued in time which aggravates the situation.

### Issues with the System:

- Power-sharing: There needs to be some clarity on what powers will be taken away from the revenue officers, collectors, SDMs and how it will impact the society before implementing it.

## 5. Over 6 lakh Indians renounced Citizenship

### Why in News?

- More than six lakh Indians renounced citizenship in the past five years, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha.

### Citizenship in India:

- Citizenship is in the Union List under the Constitution and thus under the exclusive Jurisdiction of Parliament.
- The Constitution does not define the term 'citizen' but gives, in Articles 5 to 11, details of various categories of persons who are entitled to citizenship.

- Unlike other provisions of the Constitution, which came into being on January 26, 1950, these articles were enforced on November 26, 1949 itself, when the Constitution was adopted.

## Various Provisions for Indian Citizenship:

- **Article 5:**
  - ✓ It provided for citizenship on the commencement of the Constitution.
  - ✓ All those domiciled and born in India were given citizenship.
  - ✓ Even those who were domiciled but not born in India, but either of whose parents was born in India, were considered citizens.
  - ✓ Anyone who had been an ordinary resident for more than five years, too, was entitled to apply for citizenship.
- **Article 6:**
  - ✓ Since Independence was preceded by Partition and migration, Article 6 laid down that anyone who migrated to India before July 19, 1949, would automatically become an Indian citizen if either of his parents or grandparents was born in India.
  - ✓ But those who entered India after this date needed to register themselves.
- **Article 7:**
  - ✓ Even those who had migrated to Pakistan after March 1, 1947 but subsequently returned on resettlement permits were included within the citizenship net.
  - ✓ The law was more sympathetic to those who migrated from Pakistan and called them refugees than to those who, in a state of confusion, were stranded in Pakistan or went there but decided to return soon.
- **Article 8:**
  - ✓ Any Person of Indian Origin residing outside India who, or either of whose parents or Grandparents, was born in India could register himself or herself as an Indian citizen with Indian Diplomatic Mission.

## Various Amendments for Citizennships:

- According to Article 11, Parliament can go against the citizenship provisions of the Constitution.
- The Citizenship Act, 1955 was passed and has been amended four times – in 1986, 2003, 2005, and 2015.
- The Act empowers the government to determine the citizenship of persons in whose case it is in doubt.

- However, over the decades, Parliament has narrowed down the wider and universal principles of citizenship based on the fact of birth.
- Moreover, the Foreigners Act places a heavy burden on the individual to prove that he is not a foreigner.

### **1. 1986 Amendment:**

- ✓ The constitutional provision and the original Citizenship Act gave citizenship on the principle of *jus soli* to everyone born in India.
- ✓ However, the 1986 amendment to Section 3 was less inclusive as it added the condition that those who were born in India on or after January 26, 1950 but before July 1, 1987, shall be an Indian citizen.
- ✓ Those born after July 1, 1987 and before December 4, 2003, in addition to one's own birth in India, can get citizenship only if either of his parents was an Indian citizen at the time of birth.

### **2. 2003 Amendment:**

- ✓ The then government made the above condition more stringent, keeping in view infiltration from Bangladesh.
- ✓ Now the law requires that for those born on or after December 4, 2004, in addition to the fact of their own birth, both parents should be Indian citizens or one parent must be Indian citizen and other should not be an illegal migrant.
- ✓ With these restrictive amendments, India has almost moved towards the narrow principle of *jus sanguinis* or Blood Relationship.
- ✓ This lay down that an illegal migrant cannot claim citizenship by naturalization or registration even if he has been a resident of India for seven years.

### **3. Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019:**

- ✓ The amendment proposes to permit members of six communities — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan — to continue to live in India if they entered India before December 14, 2014.
- ✓ It also reduces the requirement for citizenship from 11 years out of the preceding 14 years, to just 6 years.
- ✓ Two notifications also exempted these migrants from the Passport Act and Foreigner Act. A large number of organisations in Assam protested against this Bill as it may grant citizenship to Bangladeshi Hindu illegal migrants.

## Losing of Indian Citizenship:

- The Citizenship Act, 1955 also lays down the three modes by which an Indian citizen may lose his/her citizenship.
- It may happen in any of the three ways: renunciation, termination and deprivation.

### 1. Renunciation:

- ✓ An Indian Citizen of full age and capacity can renounce his Indian citizenship by making a declaration to that effect and having it registered.
- ✓ But if such a declaration is made during any war in which India is engaged, the registration shall be withheld until the Central Government otherwise directs.
- ✓ When a male person renounces his citizenship, every minor child of him ceases to be an Indian citizen. Such a child may, however, resume Indian citizenship if he makes a declaration to that effect within a year of his attaining full age, i.e. 18 years.

### 2. (2) Termination:

- ✓ If a citizen of India voluntarily acquires the citizenship of another country, he shall cease to be a citizen of India.
- ✓ During the war period, this provision does not apply to a citizen of India, who acquires the citizenship of another country in which India may be engaged voluntarily.

### 3. Deprivation:

- ✓ Deprivation is a compulsory termination of citizenship of India.
- ✓ A citizen of India by naturalization, registration, domicile and residence, may be deprived of his citizenship by an order of the Central Government if it is satisfied that the Citizen has:
  - Obtained the citizenship by means of fraud, false representation or concealment of any material fact. Shown disloyalty to the Constitution of India
  - Unlawfully traded or communicated with the enemy during a war
  - Within five years after registration or neutralization, been imprisoned in any country for Two Years. Ordinarily resident out of India for seven years continuously

## 6. Natural Farming

### Why in News?

- NITI Aayog has recently conducted a national workshop on Natural Farming.

### Highlights:

- There are many working models of natural farming all over the world, the Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is the most popular model in India.

- This comprehensive, natural, and spiritual farming system was developed by Padma Shri Subhash Palekar. It can be defined as a “chemical- free farming and livestock based ”. Soundly grounded in agro-ecology, it is a diversified farming system that integrates crops, trees and livestock, allowing the optimum use of functional biodiversity.
- It holds the promise of enhancing farmers’ income while delivering many other benefits, such as restoration of soil fertility and environmental health, and mitigating and/or reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- This farming approach was introduced by Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese farmer and philosopher, in his 1975 book The One-Straw Revolution.
- It builds on natural or ecological processes that exist in or around farms. Internationally, Natural Farming is considered a form of regenerative agriculture—a prominent strategy to save the planet.
- It has the potential to manage land practices and sequester carbon from the atmosphere in soils and plants, where it is actually useful instead of being detrimental.
- In India, Natural farming is promoted as Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati Programme (BPKP) under Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).
- BPKP is aimed at promoting traditional indigenous practices which reduce externally purchased inputs.
- Natural Farming, as the name suggests, is the art, practice and, increasingly, the science of working with nature to achieve much more with less.
- To make farming viable and aspirational by increasing net incomes of farmers on account of cost reduction, reduced risks, similar yields, incomes from intercropping.
- To drastically cut down production costs by encouraging farmers to prepare essential biological inputs using on-farm, natural and home-grown resources.
- It is considered as a cost- effective farming practice with scope for raising employment and rural development. As Natural Farming does not use any synthetic chemicals, health risks and hazards are eliminated. The food has higher nutrition density and therefore offers better health benefits.
- It generates employment on account of natural farming input enterprises, value addition, marketing in local areas, etc.
- The surplus from natural farming is invested in the village itself. As it has the potential to generate employment, thereby stemming the migration of rural youth.

## 7. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

### Why in News?

- Recently, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana saw a spurt in new distribution just before the 2019 general election as per RTI (Right To Information) plea.

### Highlights:

- The target under the scheme was to release 8 crore LPG connections to the deprived household by 2020. This was achieved in August 2019, seven months ahead of the March 2020 deadline.
- In August 2021, the Prime Minister launched the second phase of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) or Ujjwala 2.0 Scheme.
- PMUY-I is Launched in May 2016 to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.
- PMUY-II is aimed to provide maximum benefit to the migrants who live in other states and find it difficult to submit address proof.
- Now they will only have to give “Self-Declaration” to avail the benefit.
- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning fossil fuel.
- The scheme provides a financial support of Rs 1600 for each LPG connection to the BPL households.
- Along with a deposit-free LPG connection, Ujjwala 2.0 will provide the first refill and a hotplate free of cost to the beneficiaries.
- Under Ujjwala 1.0, the target was to provide LPG connections to 50 million women from the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households, by March 2020. However, in August 2018, women from seven other categories were brought under the purview of the scheme:
- SC/ST, those under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), beneficiaries of the Antyoday Anna Yojana (AAY), Forest Dwellers, most backward classes, tea gardens and Islands.
- Under Ujjwala 2.0, an additional 10 million LPG connections will be provided to the beneficiaries.
- Government has also fixed a target of providing piped gas to 21 lakh homes in 50 districts.

## 8. PAT Scheme

### Why in News?

- A recent report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has attributed the inefficiency of the PAT scheme to non-transparency, loose targets and overlooked deadlines.

### PAT Scheme:

- Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme is a flagship program of Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE).
- NMEEE is one of the eight national missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) launched by the Government of India in the year 2008

### Working of the Scheme:

- PAT is a market-based compliance mechanism to accelerate improvements in energy efficiency in energy-intensive industries.
- The energy savings achieved by notified industries is converted into tradable instruments called Energy Saving Certificates (ESCert).
- The ESCerts after issuance by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency are traded at Power Exchanges.

### What is PAT Cycle?

- The Government Shortlists industries and restricts the amount of energy they can consume and defines a time limit of three years by when this restriction should be met as part of PAT. These three years of time are called one PAT cycle.
- The industries are chosen after in-depth, sector-wise analysis by the government.
- Industries that participate in this scheme are called designated consumers (DC).
- Those that overachieve their targets are issued energy savings certificates (ESCert) that can be traded with industries that have not achieved their targets.
- Non-achievers have to buy the ESCerts after the three years for compliance.

### Various PAT Cycles:

- PAT covered about 13 energy-intensive sectors
- Sectors included are thermal power plants (TPP), cement, aluminium, iron and steel, pulp and paper, fertilizer, chlor-alkali, petroleum refineries, petrochemicals, distribution companies, railways, textile and commercial buildings (hotels and airports)
- Announcements for six cycles since 2012 have been made so far

## 9. SC pushes for National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC)

### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court orally said that courts cannot wait on the whims and fancies of the Government, but need a proper mechanism for funding the Development of judicial Infrastructure.

### National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC):

- The idea for such NJIC was first proposed by CJI Ramana in March this year, even before he took office. It mooted the idea of an “umbrella national organization” that would take care of the need for judicial infrastructure. Such a corporation would bring the uniformity and standardization required to revolutionize judicial infrastructure, said CJI.
- Soon after he was sworn in, the CJI commenced work on the NJIC and a survey of 6,000 trial courts in various states was undertaken as part of this exercise.

### CJI recommends the composition of NJIC:

- The CJI has said that the Judiciary is least interested in retaining control of the council.
- The composition can be of the Union Minister for Law and Justice, the Secretary, Finance, etc. The States can also be represented. The benefit of having a senior judge or Chief Justice on it would be that they are in the know of things.

### Why need NJIC?

- No Central Agency:** Presently, there is no agency to ensure use of funds allocated to augment judicial infrastructure
- Infrastructure Gap:** There is a substantial gap in infrastructure and availability of basic amenities in the lower judiciary.
- Lack of basic Amenities:** There is a lack of court halls, residential accommodation, and waiting room for litigants in trial courts, especially in smaller towns and rural areas.
- Budgetary Lapses:** Experience shows that budgetary allocation for state judiciary often lapses since there is no independent body to supervise and execute works.
- NJIC is expected to fill this vacuum and overcome problems related to infrastructure.

### Significance of NJIC:

- The modernization of judicial infrastructure did not mean building more courts or filling up vacancies or ploughing through vacancies.
- An efficient “**judicial infrastructure**” means providing equal and free access to justice.
- This could be realized through a barrier-free and citizen-friendly environment.

## 10. Demand for Greater Tipraland in Tripura

- Several tribal outfits in Tripura have joined hands to push their demand for a separate state called Greater Tipraland for indigenous communities in the region.

### Demand for Greater Tipraland:

- The Protestants are demanding a separate state of 'Greater Tipraland' for the indigenous communities of the north-eastern state.
- They want the Centre to carve out a separate state under Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Greater Tipraland envisages a situation in which the entire Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTADC) area will be a separate state.
- It also proposes dedicated bodies to secure the rights of the Tripuris and other aboriginal communities living outside Tripura.

### What does the Constitution say?

- Article 2 of the Indian Constitution deals with the admission or establishment of new states. Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions, as it thinks fit," it states.
- Article 3 comes into play in the case of "formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States" by the Parliament.

### How did the Demand Originate?

- Accessed state: Tripura was a kingdom ruled by the Manikya dynasty from the late 13th century until the signing of the Instrument of Accession with the Indian government on October 15, 1949. Demographic changes: There is an anxiety among the indigenous communities in connection with the change in the demographics of the state due to the displacements from the erstwhile East Pakistan.
- Existential threats: From 63.77 per cent in 1881, the population of the tribals in Tripura was down to 31.80 per cent by 2011. Ethnic conflicts: In the intervening decades, ethnic conflict and insurgency gripped the state, which shares a nearly 860-km long boundary with Bangladesh.
- What has been done to address the grievances of indigenous communities?
- The TTADC was formed under the sixth schedule to ensure development and secure the rights and cultural heritage of the tribal communities.
- The TTADC, which has legislative and executive powers, covers nearly two-third of the State's Geographical Area.

## 11. High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2021

### Why in News?

- High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Bill, 2021 was recently introduced in Lok Sabha.

### Highlights:

- The Bill seeks to amend the High Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1954, and the Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1958.
- It seeks to bring clarity on when Supreme Court and High Court judges are entitled to an additional quantum of pension or family pension on attaining a certain age.
- The Bill clarifies that the increase in pension of retired judges which come after attaining a certain age shall be implemented from the first day of the month in which they complete the age specified and not from the first day of his entering the age specified.
- The High Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1954, and the Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Act, 1958 regulate the salaries and conditions of service of the judges of High Courts and the Supreme Court of India.
- Through the High Court and Supreme Court Judges (Salaries and Conditions of Service) Amendment Act, 2009, section 16B and section 17B were respectively inserted (in the 1954 Act and 1958 Act).
- The 2009 act aims to provide that every retired Judge or after his death, the family will be entitled to an additional quantum of pension or family pension in accordance with the scale specified therein. Accordingly, the additional quantum of pension to retired Judges of the High Court and Supreme Court is being sanctioned on completing the age of 80 years, 85 years, 90 years, 95 years and 100 years, as the case may be.
- The additional quantum increases with age (from 20% to 100% of the pension or family pension).

## 12. Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna

### Why in News?

- Ministry of Culture has recently launched a Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art under “Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY)”.

## Highlights:

- Financial assistance is provided to the voluntary Buddhist and Tibetan Organizations including Monasteries engaged in the propagation and scientific development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and tradition, located in any part of the country. The quantum of funding is Rs.30 lakhs per year for an organization.
- KSVY is an umbrella scheme under the Ministry of Culture for the promotion of art and culture in the country. It is a central sector scheme.
- The ministry implements many schemes under KSVY, where the grants are sanctioned/approved for holding programs/activities.
- Scheme of Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture.
- Scheme of Financial Assistance for Creation of Cultural Infrastructure.
- Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which aims to promote the 13 intangible cultural heritage of India, recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

## 13. National Energy Efficiency Innovation Awards (NEEIA)

### Why in News?

- The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has recently felicitated various industrial units, institutions and establishments with 31<sup>st</sup> National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA) on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day (14<sup>th</sup> December) to showcase India's achievements in energy efficiency and conservation.

### Highlights:

- A new award – National Energy Efficiency Innovation Awards (NEEIA) is also institutionalized. The BEE is a statutory body established through the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 under the Union Ministry of Power.
- It assists in developing policies and strategies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian Economy.
- BEE coordinates with designated consumers, designated agencies, and other organizations to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing its functions.
- The Ministry of Power had launched a scheme in 1991, to give national recognition through awards to industries and establishments that have taken special efforts to reduce energy consumption while maintaining their production.

- The awards were given away for the first time on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1991, which was declared as the National Energy Conservation Day.
- It recognizes the energy efficiency achievements in 56 sub-sectors across industry, establishments and institutions.

### Energy Efficiency in India:

- India's energy sector is set for a transition with recent developmental ambitions of the government e.g.
- 175 GW of installed capacity of renewable energy by 2022, 24X7 Power for all, Housing for all by 2022, 100 smart cities mission, promotion of e- mobility, electrification of railway sector, 100% electrification of households, Solarization of agricultural pump sets, and promotion of clean cooking.
- India can avoid building 300 GW of new power generation up to 2040 with implementation of ambitious energy efficiency policies.
- Successful implementation of energy efficiency measures contributed to electricity savings of 7.14% of total electricity consumption of the country and emission reduction of 108.28 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> during 2017-18.

## 14. Law Commission of India

### Why in News?

- The Government has informed the Supreme Court that the appointment of Chairperson and Members of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Law Commission of India is under consideration.
- The setting up of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Law Commission was constituted by the Government on February 21, 2020.
- However, no progress has been made in the appointments till date.
- The Government invoked the 'doctrine of separation of power', which says that one arm of governance should not encroach into that of another.

### Issues Over Appointment:

- The last chairman of the law commission was retired Supreme Court judge, Justice B.S. Chauhan, who completed his tenure on 31 August 2018.
- Subsequently, the Commission has not been reconstituted.
- In February 2020, the Government of India announced its intention to reconstitute the Commission with no visible progress.

## Law Commission:

- Law Commission of India is a currently-defunct executive body established by an order of the Government of India. The Commission's function is to research and advise the GoI on legal reform, and is composed of legal experts, and headed by a Retired Judge.
- The commission is established for a fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice.
- The last chairman of the Commission retired in August 2018, and since then, it has not been reconstituted.

## Colonial Background:

- The first Law Commission was established during colonial rule in India, by the East India Company under the Charter Act of 1833.
- It was then presided by Lord Macaulay.
- After that, three more Commissions were established in pre-independent India.

## Post-Independence Functioning:

- The first Law Commission of independent India was established in 1955 for a three-year term. Since then, twenty-one more Commissions have been established.

## Major Reforms Undertaken:

- The First Law Commission under Macaulay It suggested various enactments to the British Government, most of which were passed and enacted and are still in force in India.
- These include the Indian Penal Code (first submitted in 1837 but enacted in 1860 and still in force), Criminal Procedure Code (enacted in 1898, repealed and succeeded by the Criminal Procedure Code of 1973), etc.
- Thereafter three more Law Commissions were established which made a number of other recommendations the Indian Evidence Act (1872) and Indian Contract Act (1872), etc. being some of the significant ones.

## Role in legal reforms:

- The Law Commission has been a key to law reform in India.
  - ✓ Its role has been both advisory and critical of the government's policies
  - ✓ In a number of decisions, the Supreme Court has referred to the work done by the commission and followed its recommendations.
  - ✓ The Commission seeks to simplify procedures to curb delays and improve standards of justice.

- ✓ It also strives to promote an accountable and citizen-friendly government that is transparent and ensures the people's right to information.

## 15. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM)

### Why in News?

- Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) has recently performed significantly well in the last four years.

### Highlights:

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2016 by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) to deliver integrated project based infrastructure in the rural areas, which also include development of economic activities and skill development.
- A predecessor to SPMRM was the Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA), announced in 2003. Main objective of the scheme is bridging the rural-urban divide-viz: economic, technological and those related to facilities and services.

### Rurban Clusters (Non-Tribal and Tribal):

- They are identified across the country's rural areas showing increasing signs of urbanization – i.e. increase in population density, high levels of non-farm employment, presence of growing economic activities and other socioeconomic parameters.
- For the purposes of SPMRM, Rurban areas refer to a cluster of 15-20 villages having about 30 to 40 Lakh Population. The clusters will be Geographically contiguous Gram Panchayats with a population of about 25000 to 50000 in plain and coastal areas and a population of 5000 to 15000 in desert, hilly or tribal areas.
- The State Government identifies the clusters in accordance with the Framework for Implementation prepared by the MoRD.
- For the selection of clusters, the MoRD is adopting a scientific process of cluster selection which involves an objective analysis at the district, sub district and village level, of the demography, economy, tourism and pilgrimage significance and transportation corridor impact.

### Advantages:

- SPMRM growth clusters are playing a role in reducing urban migration by ensuring that basic infrastructure, utilities are provided and industrialization is promoted.
- It is very relevant for ensuring transformational developments as against transitional Developments in India's rural development sector.

## 4. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### 1. Two Samples in India found with Omicron Variant

#### Why in News?

- The Union Health Ministry has confirmed that two cases of Omicron variant of coronavirus have been detected in India for the First Time.

#### About the News:

- The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) that monitors the genomic variations of the pandemic causing virus too confirmed this.
- The new variant B 1.1. 529, which was designated as a 'Variant of Concern' by World Health Organisation has been assigned the name Omicron.
- Reported by public health officials of South Africa, the new variant has triggered a lot of concern worldwide over a probable resurgence of Covid infections.

#### How Different it is from the Original Virus?

- The B1.1.529 has more than 2 times the number of bad spike mutations than the Delta variant. The new variant has an extremely high 32 worrisome mutations in the spike protein, which is a real concern than the Delta variant.
- The WHO currently lists 5 VARIANTS OF CONCERN:
  - ✓ Omicron (B.1.1.529), identified in southern Africa in November 2021.
  - ✓ Delta (B.1.617.2), which emerged in India in late 2020 and spread around the world.
  - ✓ Gamma (P.1), which emerged in Brazil in late 2020.
  - ✓ Beta (B.1.351), which emerged in South Africa in early 2020.
  - ✓ Alpha (B.1.1.7), which merged in Britain in late 2020.
- VARIANTS OF INTEREST– There are currently two:
  - ✓ Mu (B.1.621), which emerged in Colombia in early 2021.
  - ✓ Lambda (C.37), which emerged in Peru in late 2020.

#### What is Variant of Interest (VOI) and Variant of Concern (VOC):

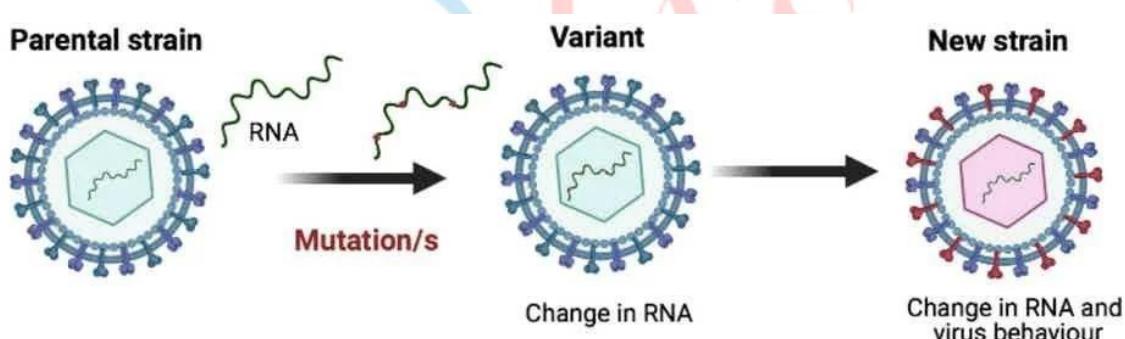
- A SARS-CoV-2 VOI is a SARS-CoV-2 variant:
  - ✓ with genetic changes that are predicted or known to affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, disease severity, immune escape, diagnostic or therapeutic escape; AND
  - ✓ that has been identified as causing significant community transmission or multiple COVID-19 clusters, in multiple countries with increasing relative prevalence alongside

increasing number of cases over time, or other apparent epidemiological impacts to suggest an emerging risk to global public health.

- A SARS-CoV-2 VOC is a SARS-CoV-2 variant that meets the definition of a VOI and, through a comparative assessment, has been demonstrated to be associated with one or more of the following changes at a degree of global public health significance:
  - ✓ increase in transmissibility or detrimental change in COVID-19 epidemiology; OR
  - ✓ increase in virulence or change in clinical disease presentation; OR
  - ✓ decrease in effectiveness of public health and social measures or available diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics.

## How do Variants of a Virus Emerge and why?

- Variants of a virus have one or more mutations that differentiate it from the other variants that are in circulation.
- Essentially, the goal of the virus is to reach a stage where it can cohabitiate with humans because it needs a host to survive.
- Errors in the viral RNA are called mutations, and viruses with these mutations are called variants. Variants could differ by a single or many mutations.



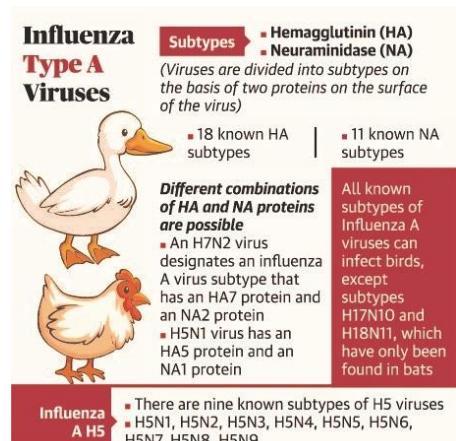
## 2. Bird Flu in Kerala

### Why in News?

- Fresh cases of bird flu have been confirmed in the Kuttanad region of Kerala. Response teams have been formed for culling birds in Affected Areas.

### What is Bird Flu?

- It is also called avian influenza.
- It is a disease caused by avian influenza Type A viruses found naturally in wild birds worldwide.



- Symptoms have ranged from mild to severe influenza-like illness.

### Classification:

- Avian Influenza type A viruses are classified based on two proteins on their surfaces – Hemagglutinin (HA) and Neuraminidase (NA).
- There are about 18 HA subtypes and 11 NA subtypes.
- Several combinations of these two proteins are possible e.g., H5N1, H7N2, H9N6, H17N10, etc.

### Spread:

- There have been reports of avian and swine Influenza Infections in Humans.
- The infection is deadly as it has a high mortality rate of about 60%.
- The most common route of virus transmission is direct contact. They can also be affected if they come in contact with contaminated surfaces or air near the infected poultry.

### Can the virus Transfer to Humans?

- There are no known cases of H5N8 in human beings. Risk to general public is very low.
- There is also no evidence that consumption of poultry meat or eggs could transmit the virus to humans. But necessary precautions are required while handling sick/dead birds and contaminated material during control and containment operations.
- It is considered safe to eat properly cooked Poultry Products.

### Control Measures:

- Culling is usually undertaken to control the infection when it is detected in animals. Besides culling, safe disposal of all such culled animals and animal products is also important. The authorities also need to strictly enforce decontamination of infected Premises and undertake Quarantine of Contaminated vehicles and Personnel.

## 4.1. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SNIPPETS

### 1. Lithium in Stars

#### Why in News?

- Scientists have recently found a clue to the mystery behind the high abundance of Lithium in some Evolved Stars.

#### Highlights:

- The mystery is the reason behind the high abundance of Lithium in stars, which according to predicted models must get destroyed in the hot plasma of the star.

- Lithium is a trace element on Earth, and a key component of rechargeable batteries.
- The research involved the investigation of lithium among red giants showed that just about 1% of sun-like red giants had a lithium-enriched surface.
- The research surveyed (called GALAH - named after a common Australian bird) a collection of about 500,000 stars with well-determined physical and chemical properties, including lithium abundances.
- Regarding the reason for Lithium production, scientists have for the first time confirmed that all the lithium-rich stars are burning helium in their core.
- They speculated that lithium production is linked to the violent helium-core flash.
- It is proposed to be a simple and short sequence of nuclear reactions involving a collision between the two stable helium isotopes which led to a stable lithium isotope.
- The survey revealed the rare presence of lithium-rich giants in all the Sun-like low-mass stars.
- Lithium has become the new 'white gold' as the demand for high performing rechargeable batteries is rising.
- Rising global lithium demand and surging prices have drawn increased interest in the so-called 'lithium triangle' that spans parts of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

## 2. A launch Window for India as a Space start-up Hub

### Why in News?

- After the launch of Sputnik in 1957, space race is on again, but this time, Private Players are on the power field.
- This has huge implications for original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) in the space sector in India and is a promising Venture for Global Investors.

### Insignificant share of India in Space Economy:

- 2% India's share: The space economy is a \$440 billion global sector, with India having less than 2% share in the sector. While total early-stage investments in space technologies in FY21 were \$68 billion, India was on the fourth place with investments in about 110 firms, totalling not more than \$2 billion.

### Reasons for India's Insignificant Private Participation:

- Absence of a framework: The reason for the lack of independent private participation in space includes the absence of a framework to provide transparency and clarity in laws.

- Brain drain: Another aspect to throw light on is the extensive brain drain in India, which has increased by 85% since 2005. Policy bottlenecks: Brain drain can be linked to the bottlenecks in policies which create hindrances for private space ventures and founders to attract investors, making it virtually non-feasible to operate in India.

### Suggestions:

- The laws need to be broken down into multiple sections, each to address specific parts of the value chain and in accordance with the Outer Space Treaty.
- Dividing into upstream and downstream: Dividing activities further into upstream and downstream space blocks will allow legislators to provide a solid foundation to products/services developed by the non-governmental and private sectors within the value chain. Timeline on licensing: With the technicalities involved in the space business, timelines on licensing, issuance of authorisation and continuous supervision mechanism need to be defined into phases.
- Insurance and indemnification clarity: Another crucial aspect of space law is insurance and indemnification clarity, particularly about who or which entity undertakes the liability in case of a mishap. In several western countries with an evolved private space industry, there is a cap on liability and the financial damages that need to be paid.
- Need to generate own IP: Currently, many of the private entities are involved in equipment and frame manufacturing, with either outsourced specifications or leased licences.
- However, to create value, Indian space private companies need to generate their intellectual property for an independent product or service with ISRO neither being their sole or largest customer nor providing them IP and ensuring buy-backs.

### Possibilities for India and the Government's Effort:

- India currently stands on the cusp of building a space ecosystem and with ISRO being the guiding body, India can now evolve as a space start-up hub for the world.
- Already 350 plus start-ups such as Agni Kul Cosmos, Skyroot Technologies, Dhruva Space and Pixel have established firm grounds for home-grown technologies with a practical unit of economics.
- Last year the Government of India created a new organisation known as IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) which is a “single window nodal agency” established to boost the commercialisation of Indian space activities.
- A supplement to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the agency promotes the entry of the Non-Government Private Entities (NGPEs) in the Indian space sector.

### 3. Facial Recognition Technology

#### Why in News?

- Passengers will be able to use a face scan as their boarding pass at four airports (Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata and Vijayawada) in the country from 2022.

#### Highlights:

- It is a biometric technology that uses distinctive features of the face to identify and distinguish an individual. Over a period of almost 6 decades, it has evolved in many ways - from looking at 3D contours of a face to Recognizing Skin Patterns.
- In the Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS), the large database (containing photos and videos of peoples' faces) is used to match and identify the person.
- Image of an unidentified person, taken from CCTV footage, is compared to the existing database using Artificial Intelligence technology, for pattern-finding and matching.
- The facial recognition system works primarily by capturing the face & its features through the camera and then using various kinds of software to reconstruct those features.
- The captured face along with its features is stored into a database, which can be integrated with any kind of software that may be used for security purposes, banking services, etc.

### 4. Exercise EKUVERIN

#### Why in News?

- the 11<sup>th</sup> Edition of Joint Military Exercise EKUVERIN between India & Maldives has recently been started at Kadhdhoo Island, Maldives.

#### Highlights:

- India and Maldives have been conducting Exercise Ekuverin meaning 'Friends' in the Maldivian language since 2009.
- The 14 days Joint Exercise is held alternatively in India and Maldives.
- Earlier, the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the biennial trilateral Coast Guard Exercise 'Dosti' involving India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka was held in the Maldives
- It focuses on enhancing interoperability between the two forces for carrying out counter insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in a semi-urban environment under the United Nations mandate.
- This year's exercise will also include cultural and sports activities to enhance defence cooperation and bilateral relations. The exercise will go a long way in strengthening India's relations with Maldives amidst emerging security dynamics in the Indian Ocean Region.

## 5. Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM)

### Why in News?

- Recently, The Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) is successfully flight tested by the Defence Research & Development Organization (DRDO) for the second consecutive time since February this year.

### Highlights:

- It was launched from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur.
- It is a quick reaction surface-to-air-missile indigenously designed and developed by DRDO for the Indian Navy, is meant for neutralising various aerial threats at close ranges, including sea-skimming targets.
- The missile has an operational range of 50 to km distance and features mid-course inertial guidance through fiber optic gyroscope and active radar homing in terminal phase
- The launch of the System was conducted to validate integrated operation of all weapon system components, including the vertical launcher unit with controller, canisterised flight vehicle and weapon Control System.
- The successful testing of these systems is crucial for future launches of the missile from Indian Naval ships. It will further boost the defence capability of Indian Naval Ships against aerial threats. It has also paved the way for integration of weapon systems onboard the Indian naval ships. The key DRDO facilities that contributed to the development of the system are the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) and Research Centre Imarat (RCI), both from Hyderabad, and Research & Development Establishment (Engineers), based at Pune. Defence Research & Development Organization is the Research & Development wing of the Ministry of Defence, with a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence Technologies.

## 6. Main Bhi Digital 3.0

### Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) launched 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' Campaign under PM SVANidhi ( Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi) Scheme.

### Highlights:

- It is a special Campaign for Digital Onboarding and Training (DOaT) for Street Vendors (SVs).

- It is aimed at digital onboarding of SVs who have already been provided loans under PM SVANidhi Scheme.
- Lending Institutions (LIs) have been instructed to issue a durable QR Code & Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ID at the time of disbursement and train the beneficiaries in conduct of digital transactions.
- An Integrated IT Platform has been developed for implementation of this Scheme. SVs can apply for loans directly through PM SVANidhi Portal.
- PM SVANidhi Scheme was announced as a part of the Economic Stimulus-II under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- It has been implemented since 1st June 2020, for providing affordable working capital loans to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to Covid-19 lockdowns, with a sanctioned budget of Rs. 700 crore.
- To benefit over 50 lakh street vendors who had been vending on or before 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, in urban areas including those from surrounding peri-urban/rural areas.
- To promote digital transactions through cash-back incentives up to an amount of Rs. 1,200 per annum.
- As of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021, the PM SVANidhi scheme has disbursed loans to 13.82 Lakh beneficiaries amounting to Rs 1,363.88 Crores.
- The vendors can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments in the tenure of one year.
- On timely/early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy of 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer on a quarterly basis.
- There will be no penalty on early repayment of the loan. The vendors can avail the facility of the enhanced credit limit on timely/early repayment of the loan.

## **7. Laser Communications Relay Demonstration (LCRD).**

### **Why in News?**

- NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) has recently launched its new Laser Communications Relay Demonstration (LCRD).

### **Highlights:**

- It is the first-ever laser communications system that will pave the way for future optical communications missions.

- Currently, most NASA spacecraft use radio frequency communications to send data.
- The LCRD payload is hosted onboard the US Department of Defense's Space Test Program Satellite 6 (STPSat-6). It will be in a geosynchronous orbit, over 35,000km above Earth.
- It will be controlled by engineers at the LCRD mission's ground stations in California and Hawaii.
- The team will send test data through radio frequency signals and the LCRD will reply using optical signals.
- It has two optical terminals. One to receive data from a user spacecraft, and the other to transmit data to ground stations.
- The modems will translate the digital data into laser signals. This will then be transmitted via encoded beams of light.
- These capabilities make LCRD NASA's first two-way, end-to-end optical relay.
- Laser uses infrared light and has a shorter wavelength than radio waves. This will help the transmission of more data in a short time.
- Using infrared lasers, LCRD will send data to Earth at 1.2 gigabits-per-second (Gbps). At this speed, it will take less than a minute to download a movie.
- It takes roughly nine weeks to transmit a completed map of Mars back to Earth with current radio frequency systems. With lasers, we can accelerate that to about nine days.
- Optical communications will help increase the bandwidth 10 to 100 times more than radio frequency systems. Optical communications systems are smaller in size, weight, and require less power compared with radio instruments.
- A smaller size means more room for science instruments.
- Less weight means a less expensive launch.
- Less power means less drain on the spacecraft's batteries.
- With optical communications supplementing radio, missions will have unparalleled communications capabilities.

## 8. Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IXPE)

### Why in News?

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has recently launched a new mission named Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IXPE).

### Highlights:

- IXPE observatory is a joint effort of NASA and the Italian Space Agency.

- It will study “the most extreme and mysterious objects in the universe – supernova remnants, supermassive black holes, and dozens of other high-energy objects.”
- Its primary length is two years and the observatory will be at 600 kilometers altitude, orbiting around Earth’s Equator.
- It is expected to study about 40 celestial objects in its first year in space.
- It will complement other X-ray telescopes such as the Chandra X-ray Observatory and the European Space Agency’s X-ray observatory, XMM-Newton.
- It will help observe polarized X-rays from neutron stars and supermassive black holes. By measuring the polarization of these X-rays, we can study where the light came from and understand the geometry and inner workings of the light source.
- It will help scientists understand how black holes spin and their location in the past.
- It will help unravel how pulsars shine so brightly in X-rays.
- It will help learn what powers the jets of energetic particles that are ejected from the region around the supermassive black holes at the Centers of Galaxies.

## 5.1. ART AND CULTURE & MISCELLANEOUS SNIPPETS

### 1. Mullaperiyar Dam

#### Why in News?

- Kerala CM recently wrote to Tamil Nadu CM to ensure that shutters of Mullaperiyar Dam are opened only after Sufficient Warnings and during daytime.

#### About Mullaperiyar Dam:

- The Mullaperiyar Dam is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River in the Indian state of Kerala.
- The dam situated at the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers
- It is located 881 m (2,890 ft) above mean sea level, on the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats in Thekkady, Idukki District of Kerala, South India.
- It was constructed between 1887 and 1895 by John Pennycuick and also reached in an agreement to donate water eastwards to the Madras Presidency area (present-day Tamil Nadu).
- The Periyar National Park in Thekkady is located around the dam’s reservoir.
- The dam is located in Kerala on the river Periyar, but is operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu state.

- Dam was given to British-ruled Madras Presidency on a 999-year lease in 1886.
- The agreement was renewed in 1970.
- Tamil Nadu was given rights to the land and the water from the dam as well as the authority to develop hydro-power projects at the site, and Kerala would receive rent in return.

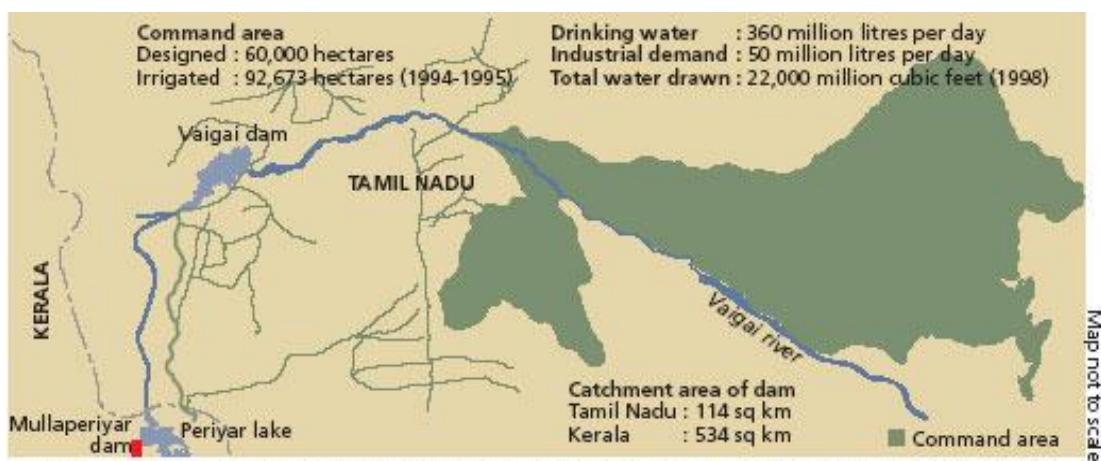
## 2. Hornbill Festival

### Why in News?

- The Nagaland State government has decided to call off the ongoing Hornbill Festival in protest against the killing of 14 civilians by Security Forces.

### About:

- Nagas celebrate this festival to revive, protect, sustain and promote the richness of the Naga heritage and traditions.
- It occurs during 1 – 10 December on an annual basis.
- It is also called the “Festival of Festivals”.
- The festival pays tribute to Hornbill, the most admired and revered bird for the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and grandeur.
- It is organized by State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments and also supported by Union Government.
- Hornbill Festival was established on 1st December 1963 and was inaugurated by the then President Dr. S Radhakrishnan.



*Mullaperiyar dam is in Kerala, Tamil Nadu its main beneficiary*

## 6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. Iran strikes hard line as talks over nuclear deal resume

#### Why in News?

- Iran struck a hard line after just one day of restarted talks in Vienna over its tattered nuclear deal, suggesting everything discussed in previous rounds of diplomacy could be renegotiated.

#### What is the Iran Nuclear Deal?

- Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
- Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.



#### JCPOA: Timeline & Background

- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, or the EU).
- It happened after the backchannel talks between the U.S. (U.S. President Barack Obama) and Iran, quietly brokered by Oman, in an attempt to repair the accumulated mistrust since the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- The JCPOA obliged Iran to accept constraints on its enrichment program verified by an intrusive inspection regime in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.

- However, faced with a hostile Republican Senate, President Obama was unable to get the nuclear deal ratified but implemented it on the basis of periodic Executive Orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- When Donald Trump became president, he withdrew from the deal and called it a “horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made”.
- The U.S. decision was criticized by all other parties to the JCPOA (including the European allies) because Iran was in compliance with its obligations, as certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- Tensions rose as the U.S. pushed ahead with its unilateral sanctions, widening its scope to cover nearly all Iranian banks connected to the global financial system, industries related to metallurgy, energy, and shipping, individuals related to the defense, intelligence, and nuclear establishments.
- For the first year after the U.S. withdrawal, Iran’s response was muted as the E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the EU promised to find ways to mitigate the U.S. decision.
- The E-3’s promised relief Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), created in 2019 to facilitate limited trade with Iran.
- However, by May 2019, Iran’s strategic patience ran out as the anticipated economic relief from the E-3/EU failed to materialize. As the sanctions began to hurt, Tehran shifted to a strategy of ‘maximum resistance’.

### **Iran’s Policy of ‘Maximum Resistance’.**

- Beginning in May 2019, Iran began to move away from JCPOA’s constraints incrementally: exceeding the ceilings of 300kg on low-enriched uranium and 130 MT on heavy-water; raising enrichment levels from 3.67% to 4.5%; stepping up research and development on advanced centrifuges; resuming enrichment at Fordow, and violating limits on the number of centrifuges in use.
- In January 2020, following the drone strike on Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Gen.
- Qasem Soleiman, Iran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA’s restraints.
- The collapse of the JCPOA drags Iran towards nuclear brinkmanship, like North Korea, which has created major geopolitical instability in the region and beyond.

### **Impacts on India for Restoration of JCPOA:**

- Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:

- **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar option, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
- Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.
- **Energy Security:** Due to the pressure linked to the US' Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has to bring down oil imports to zero.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in Energy Security.

## 2. India- Russia Annual Summit

### Why in News?

- 21<sup>st</sup> annual India-Russia summit was held recently.

### About the News:

- It was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- Alongside, the inaugural 2+2 ministerial meeting was also held.
- The meeting saw the signing of 28 agreements across sectors from defence to energy to space exploration, science and technology, heavy engineering, to trade and investment.

### Key Aspects of the Meeting:

- Russia's President Vladimir Putin extended an invitation to PM Modi to visit Russia for the 22<sup>nd</sup> India-Russia Annual Summit in 2022.
- The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the sustained progress in the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership' between both countries despite the challenges posed by the Covid. The role of connectivity through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor figured in the discussions. The two leaders looked forward to greater inter-regional cooperation between various regions of Russia, in particular with the Russian Far East, with India's states.
- They agreed that both countries share common perspectives and concerns on Afghanistan and appreciated the bilateral roadmap charted out at the NSA level for consultation and cooperation on Afghanistan.

## Significance of the Meeting:

- The completion of 5 decades of the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation and 2 decades of Declaration on Strategic Partnership is symbolic of the long standing and time-tested India-Russia relations characterized by mutual trust, respect for each other's core national interests and similarity of positions on various international and Regional Issues.

## About the 2+2 Dialogue:

- It is held between the foreign and defence ministers of two countries and is generally seen to be aimed at creating a mechanism under which the bilateral relationship takes a decisive strategic turn with Greater Integration of defence, Security and Intelligence Apparatus.

## Why is Russia Important for India?

- Even as India is diversifying its defense trade partners, Russia still dominates the Indian defense inventory to the tune of about 70 per cent.
- Russia remains the only partner that is still willing to give India critical technologies, such as a nuclear submarine.
- The emerging Russia-China strategic relationship has important security consequences for India.
- Russia also reaffirmed its “unwavering support” to India for a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council.
- Russia expressed its support for India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- Both countries have mutual benefits in supporting struggle against terrorism, Afghanistan, climate change; organisations like SCO, BRICS, G-20 and ASEAN.

## 6.1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SNIPPETS

### 1. G20 Troika

#### Why in News?

- India has recently joined the G20 ‘Troika’ in which India has started the procedure for taking over the G20 presidency next year.

#### About:

- The G20 is an annual meeting of leaders from the countries with the largest and fastest-growing economies.
- Its members account for 85% of the world's GDP, and two-thirds of its population.
- The G20 Summit is formally known as the “Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy”.

- After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998, it was acknowledged that the participation of major emerging market countries is needed on discussions on the international financial system, and G7 finance ministers agreed to establish the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in 1999.
- The group has no permanent staff of its own, so every year in December, a G20 country from a rotating region takes on the presidency. Indonesia is the current Presidency of G20 which took charge from Italy, the previous presidency.
- The Presidency country is then responsible for organising the next summit, as well as smaller meetings for the coming year.
- **Troika** refers to the top grouping within the G20 that consists of the current, previous and the incoming presidencies — Indonesia, Italy and India.
- India will assume the G20 presidency on December 1, 2022 from Indonesia, and will convene the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in India in 2023.
- They can also choose to invite non-member countries along as guests.
- The first G20 meeting took place in Berlin in 1999, after a financial crisis in East Asia affected many countries around the world.
- Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union are full members of G20.

## 2. Barbados

### Why in News?

- Barbados has recently officially removed Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state and become the world's newest republic nearly 400 years after the country became a British colony.

### Highlights:

- The Caribbean island nation, 55 years after its independence, got rid of the remnants of colonial rule by Separating from Britain.
- Barbados, however, will continue to be one of the 54 Commonwealth nations. It is a small island country in the south-eastern Caribbean Sea.
- Its neighbours include Saint Lucia, to the north, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, to the west, and Trinidad and Tobago to the south.
- Its Capital is Bridgetown. On November 30, 1966, Barbados gained its independence.

- Dame Sandra Prunella Mason is the current President of Barbados.
- Mia Amor Mottley is the current Prime Minister of Barbados.
- Part of CARICOM: Barbados is part of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which was formed in 1973. Barbados first became an English colony in 1625. It was a part of the British Empire for over 400 years, a link in the lines of trade, commerce and oppression that English mercantilism and colonialism fostered for centuries.
- Slaves, indentured labour, a lack of democracy — the Caribbean was home to some of the most institutionalised and invisibilised horrors in history.
- India and Barbados enjoy close and cordial relations and interact actively in the United Nations (UN), Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other international fora.
- Barbados is also a signatory to International Solar Alliance and has ratified it in January, 2021. Air Services Agreement: India and Barbados have signed the Air Services Agreement in 2015, for facilitation of travel arrangements for the citizens and the possibility of direct air connectivity and chartered flight operations between the two countries.
- The first ever Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between India and Barbados was held in Bridgetown, Barbados in 2015.

### 3. Global Gateway Plan

#### Why in News?

- European Commission has recently announced a plan, called Global Gateway, to mobilise EURO 300 billion by 2027 in public and private infrastructure investment around the world.

#### Highlights:

- Developmental Dimensions: With Global Gateway, the EU, in a Team Europe approach, will offer its partners a response to the urgent needs:
- To develop sustainable and high quality digital, climate and energy and transport infrastructures.
- Strengthen health, education and research systems across the world.
- To finance the project, the EU will use its European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus.
- Under this, 40 billion euros are made available in guarantee capacity, and will offer grants of up to 18 billion euros from external assistance programs.

- The plan will need funding from international institutions and from the private sector if it is to get anywhere near its target.
- The financing will be done under fair and favourable terms in order to limit the risk of debt distress.
- Offshoot of B3W Project: The EU strategy is an offshoot of the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative.
- B3W is an international infrastructure investment initiative announced by the Group of Seven (G-7) richest democracies in June 2021.
- The BRI project was launched in 2013, it broadly aims to facilitate cross-border transportation of goods, access to energy, creating demand for existing excess capacity in Chinese industries.
- Officially, it aims to develop land and sea infrastructure to better connect China to Asia, Europe and Africa for trade and development, and it has found many partners around the world. China had an overall exposure of investment of around USD 750 billion between 2013 to mid-2020. China argues that it respects its partners' sovereignty while providing loans that benefit joint projects, while critics say Beijing's contractual terms ignore abuses of human, labour and environmental rights.
- BRI project has been heavily criticized by the western world for the following reasons:
- China's Debt Trap Policy: BRI is being seen as a part of China's debt trap policy, wherein China intentionally extends excessive credit to another country with the intention of extracting economic or political concessions from the debtor country.
- The western countries see it as a tool for China to influence poorer countries.

#### 4. Worldwide Cost of Living report

##### Why in News?

- Worldwide Cost of Living report has recently been released highlighting that Tel Aviv (Israel's capital) is the world's most expensive city to live in. It is compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).
- It compares the cost of living indices in different cities.

##### Highlights:

- **Most Expensive City are:**
- The Israeli city of Tel Aviv topped the rankings for the first time, overtaking last year's leader Paris, which is now at second place along with Singapore.

- Paris and Singapore came joint second, followed by Zurich and Hong Kong. New York was in sixth, with Geneva in seventh. It is benchmarked against prices in New York City, hence cities with currencies that are stronger against the US dollar are likely to appear higher in the rankings. In India, Ahmedabad, Gujarat has been listed in the top ten cheapest cities of the survey. Among the cheapest cities, Damascus (capital of Syria) is at the top. It is followed by Tripoli (Libya,) Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Tunis (Tunisia) and Almaty (Kazakhstan') in the ranking of cheapest cities.

## 5. Global ARMS TRADE

### Why in News?

- Recently a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks global arms trade, three Indian companies are among the world's top 100 for combined arms sales in 2020.

### Highlights

- The three Indian companies are Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Indian Ordnance Factories, and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).
- The three were ranked among the top 100 in arms sales in 2019 as well.
- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
- The SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966 at Stockholm, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
- The USA has the high-est number of companies in the top 100 worldwide.. Together, their arms sales amounted to USD 285 billion, an increase of 1.9 % compared with 2019.
- China was second at 13 %, followed by the UK at 7.1 %
- Russia and France were fourth and fifth with 5 % and 4.7 % respectively of the combined arms sales for the top 100 companies.

### Increasing India's Share in Arm Sales:

- Domestic procurement has helped to shield Indian companies against the negative economic consequences of the pandemic.
- In 2020, the Indian Government announced a phased ban on imports of more than a hundred different types of military equipment to support domestic companies and Enhance self-reliance in Arms Production.

## 6. PANEX-21

### Why in News?

- A Curtain Raiser Event for PANEX-21 for the member nations of countries was held recently. The exercise is planned to be conducted later this year (2021).

### Highlights:

- ✓ It is a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise.
- ✓ It will be participated by subject matter experts and delegates from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.
- ✓ A Multi-Agency Exercise (MAE) comprising a static display showcasing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HDR) equipment employed by the Indian Armed Forces and various civil agencies will also take place.
- ✓ To foster joint planning and build regional cooperation for responding to Natural Disasters.
- Natural disasters are sudden ecological disruptions or threats that exceed the adjustment capacity of the affected community and require external assistance.
- Natural disasters can be broadly classified into categories including geophysical such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, hydrological such as floods, meteorological such as hurricanes; climatological such as heat and cold waves and droughts; and biological such as epidemics.

### BIMSTEC:

- It is a Regional Organization which Comprises Seven Countries.
- Five of these seven countries- India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Bangladesh- are from South Asia while the remaining two, Thailand and Myanmar, are from Southeast Asia.

## 7. Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics (RELOS) Agreement with Russia

### Why in News?

- India and Russia are set to ink the RELOS logistics exchange pact during the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the Indo-Russia summit.

### What are Logistics Agreements, in General?

- Logistical exchange agreements are designed so that partner countries can enjoy ease of access to use each other's military facilities like ports, bases, and military installations.

- Such agreements save enormous time and also frees up the need for constant paperwork when one military obtains assistance on matters like refuelling, berthing, use of aviation infrastructure, etc.
- RELOS Agreement with Russia
- RELOS agreement with Russia would grant “access to Russian naval port facilities in the Arctic”, thus enhancing “Indian Navy’s reach and operational experience in Polar waters”.

### Need for RELOS:

- Despite growing engagement with the US on military hardware and tech, Russia remains a partner with whom India has shared traditionally deep defence ties.
- Russia’s growing proximity to China and Pakistan has of late been seen as casting a shadow on the Moscow-New Delhi engagement.
- To that extent, RELOS will be an important step forward in the military sphere as it aims at fostering interoperability and sharing of logistics.
- The “long overdue” agreement was to have come up for signing in 2019 but that was put off pending finalisation of its terms.

### Strategic significance of RELOS Agreement:

- **Naval Cooperation:** It is usually the Indian Navy, the most outgoing force of the three services, that stands to benefit the most from a logistical exchange agreement.
- **Interoperability:** These impart enhanced operational turnaround and strengthened interoperability on the high seas.
- **Military Enhancements:** Given the percentage of Russian military hardware in the Indian armed forces, the two sides can take advantage, through RELOS, of increased interoperability “in any hostile situation in the future”.
- **Future Defence Purchases:** India has acquired advanced defence systems from Russia, including fighter jets, and is looking to again obtain a nuclear-powered attack submarine on a long-term lease from Moscow.

### Fulfilling Arctic aspirations of India:

- Navigation: From a geostrategic point of view, it would give Indian Navy better access to northern sea routes and Russian ports in the Arctic, where India is looking to set up an Arctic station.
- Energy cooperation: Russia and India are also exploring enhanced energy cooperation in the Arctic region.

- Competing China: India's presence in Arctic will act as a strategic counterweight to China's strategic posturing with Beijing and Moscow sharing "synergy" in the Arctic.
- Does India have similar arrangements with other Countries?
- India has logistical exchange agreements with six other countries, including Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, partners US (LEMOA), Japan and Australia.
- Singapore, France and South Korea are the other countries with which similar arrangements have been effected.
- India has become more comfortable in concluding such arrangements with other countries and is currently pursuing one with the UK while exploring arrangement with other partners like Vietnam.

### **Other Defence trade between the Two Countries:**

- Russia continues to be among India's biggest defence suppliers.
- The two sides are now looking to move from licence manufacture to joint research and co-development of Defence Equipment.
- Both nations have agreed for the manufacture of over six lakh AK-203 assault rifles by a Joint Venture, Indo-Russian Rifles Private Ltd, at Korwa, Amethi, in UP.
- Russia has started deliveries of the S-400 Triumf long-range air defence systems to India. The first division will be delivered by the end of 2021.
- There are several other big such as procurement of 21 Mig-29s and 12 Su-30MKI fighters, Igla-S short-range air defence systems and the manufacture of 200 K-226T utility helicopters.
- Future trajectory of the defence cooperation
- Timely supply of spares and support to the large inventory of Russian hardware in service with Indian military has been a major issue from India.
- To address this, Russia has made legislative changes allowing its companies to set up joint ventures in India to address it following an Inter-Governmental Agreement signed in 2019.
- This is in the process of being Implemented.
- With increased competition from the U.S., France, Israel and others who have bagged major deals in recent years, Russia is also focusing on timely deliveries and lifetime Support.

## 8. UN confers Observer Status on International Solar Alliance (ISA)

### Why in News?

- The UN General Assembly has conferred Observer Status to the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

### Significance of 'Observer' Status:

- Observer status is a privilege granted by some organizations to non-members to give them the ability to participate in the Organization's Activities.
- It is often granted by intergovernmental organizations (IGO) to non-member parties and international nongovernmental organizations (INGO) that have an interest in the IGO's activities. Observers generally have a limited ability to participate in the IGO, lacking the ability to vote or propose resolutions.

### International Solar Alliance (ISA):

- The ISA is an alliance of more than 121 countries, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The primary objective of the alliance is to work for efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization.
- The initiative was launched by PM Modi at the India Africa Summit and a meeting of member countries ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.
- A total of 80 countries have signed and ratified the ISA Framework Agreement and 101 countries have only signed the agreement.

### Objectives of the ISA:

- To mobilize investments of more than USD 1000 billion by 2030
- To take coordinated action for better harmonization, aggregation of demand, risk and resources, for promoting solar finance, solar technologies, innovation, R&D, capacity building etc. Reduce the cost of finance to increase investments in solar energy in member countries. Scale up applications of solar technologies in member countries
- Facilitate collaborative research and development (R&D) activities in solar energy technologies among member countries.
- Promote a common cyber platform for networking, cooperation and exchange of ideas among member countries

## What does ISA Formation Signify?

- **Climate Action commitment:** It symbolizes about the sincerity of the developing nations towards their concern about climate change and to switch to a low-carbon growth path.
- **Clean Energy:** India's pledge to the Paris summit offered to bring 40% of its electricity generation capacity from non-fossil sources (renewable, large hydro, and nuclear) by 2030.
- **Global Electrification:** India has pledged to let solar energy reach to the most unconnected villages and communities and also towards creating a clean planet.
- **Global Cooperation:** It is based on world cooperation irrespective of global boundaries.
- **India's Soft power:** For India, possible additional benefits from the alliance can be a strengthening of ties with the major African countries and increasing goodwill for India among them.

## 9. India stands committed to UNCLOS

### Why in News?

- India remains committed to promoting a free, open and rules-based order rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, the Centre informed Parliament while reiterating support for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

### Background:

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- UNCLOS replaces the older 'freedom of the seas' concept, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- According to this concept, national rights were limited to a specified belt of water extending from a nation's coastlines, usually 3 nautical miles (5.6 km; 3.5 mi).
- This was considered according to the 'cannon shot' rule developed by the Dutch rulers.

### UNCLOS:

- UNCLOS is sometimes referred to as the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty.
- It came into operation and became effective from 16th November 1982.
- It defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of Marine Natural Resources.
- It has created three new institutions on the international scene :
  - ✓ International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea,

- ✓ International Seabed Authority
- ✓ Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf

### **Major conventions:**

- There had been three major conferences of UNCLOS:
  - ✓ **UNCLOS I:** It resulted in the successful implementation of various conventions regarding Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zones, Continental Shelf, High Seas, Fishing Rights.
  - ✓ **UNCLOS II:** No agreement was reached over breadth of territorial waters.
  - ✓ **UNCLOS III:** It introduced a number of provisions. The most significant issues covered were setting limits, navigation, archipelagic status and transit regimes, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), continental shelf jurisdiction, deep seabed mining, the exploitation regime, protection of the marine environment, scientific research, and settlement of disputes. The convention set the limit of various areas, measured from a carefully defined baseline.

### **These Terminologies are as Follows:**

#### **1. Baseline:**

- ✓ The convention set the limit of various areas, measured from a carefully defined baseline. Normally, a sea baseline follows the low-water line, but when the coastline is deeply indented, has fringing islands or is highly unstable, straight baselines may be used.

#### **2. Internal waters:**

- ✓ It covers all water and waterways on the landward side of the baseline.
- ✓ The coastal state is free to set laws, regulate use, and use any resource. Foreign vessels have no right of passage within internal waters.
- ✓ A vessel in the high seas assumes jurisdiction under the internal laws of its flag State.

#### **3. Territorial Waters:**

- ✓ Out to 12 nautical miles (22 km, 14 miles) from the baseline, the coastal state is free to set laws, regulate use, and use any resource. Vessels were given the Right of Innocent Passage through any territorial waters.
- ✓ “Innocent passage” is defined by the convention as passing through waters in an expeditious and continuous manner, which is not “prejudicial to the peace, good order or the security” of the coastal state.

- ✓ Fishing, polluting, weapons practice, and spying are not “innocent”, and submarines and other underwater vehicles are required to navigate on the surface and to show their Flag.
- ✓ Nations can also temporarily suspend innocent passage in specific areas of their territorial seas, if doing so is essential for the protection of their security.

#### **4. Archipelagic Waters:**

- ✓ The convention set the definition of “Archipelagic States”, which also defines how the state can draw its territorial borders.
- ✓ All waters inside this baseline are designated “Archipelagic Waters”.
- ✓ The state has sovereignty over these waters mostly to the extent it has over internal waters, but subject to existing rights including traditional fishing rights of immediately adjacent states.
- ✓ Foreign vessels have right of innocent passage through archipelagic waters, but Archipelagic states may limit innocent passage to designated sea lanes.

#### **5. Contiguous Zone:**

- ✓ Beyond the 12-nautical-mile (22 km) limit, there is a further 12 nautical miles (22 km) from the territorial sea baseline limit, the contiguous zone.
- ✓ Here a state can continue to enforce laws in four specific areas (customs, taxation, immigration, and pollution) if the infringement started or is about to occur within the state’s territory or territorial waters.
- ✓ This makes the contiguous zone a hot pursuit area.

#### **6. Exclusive economic zones (EEZs):**

- ✓ These extend 200 nm from the baseline.
- ✓ Within this area, the coastal nation has sole exploitation rights over all natural Resources.
- ✓ In casual use, the term may include the territorial sea and even the continental shelf.

#### **7. Continental shelf:**

- ✓ The continental shelf is defined as the natural prolongation of the land territory to the continental margin’s outer edge, or 200 nautical miles (370 km) from the coastal state’s baseline, whichever is greater.

#### **8. Baseline:**

- ✓ The convention set the limit of various areas, measured from a carefully defined baseline.

- ✓ Normally, a sea baseline follows the low-water line, but when the coastline is deeply indented, has fringing islands or is highly unstable, straight baselines may be used.

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### **India and UNCLOS:**

- As a State party to the UNCLOS, India promoted utmost respect for the UNCLOS, which established the international legal order of the seas and oceans.
- India also supported freedom of navigation and overflight, and unimpeded commerce based on the principles of international law, reflected notably in the UNCLOS 1982.
- India is committed to safeguarding maritime interests and strengthening security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to ensure a favourable and positive maritime Environment.

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