



# CURRENT AFFAIRS

FORTNIGHTLY JULY 16 - 31

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## 1. ECONOMY

### 1. Periodic Labour Force Survey (2019 –2020)

#### Why in News?

- The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report for July, 2019 to June 2020 was recently released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

#### Periodic Labour Force Survey:

- Considering the importance of the availability of labour force data at more frequent time intervals, National Statistical Office (NSO) launched PLFS in April 2017.

#### The objective of PLFS is Primarily Twofold:

- to estimate the key employment and unemployment indicators (viz. Worker Population Ratio, Labour Force Participation Rate, Unemployment Rate) in the short time interval of three months for the urban areas only in the Current Weekly Status (CWS).
- to estimate Employment and Unemployment Indicators in both ‘Usual Status’ and CWS in both rural and urban areas annually.

#### Various Dimensions of the Survey:

- The PLFS gives estimates of Key employment and unemployment Indicators:
- Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): LFPR is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
- Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** WPR is defined as the percentage of employed persons in the population.
- Unemployment Rate (UR):** UR is defined as the percentage of persons unemployed among the persons in the labour force.
- Activity Status- Usual Status:** The activity status of a person is determined on the basis of the activities pursued by the person during the specified reference period. When the activity status is determined on the basis of the reference period of the last 365 days preceding the date of the survey, it is known as the usual activity status of the person.
- Activity Status- Current Weekly Status (CWS): The activity status determined on the basis of a reference period of the last 7 days preceding the date of the survey is known as the CWS of the person.

#### Highlights of the Third Report:

- The Labour force participation ratio has increased to 40.1% in 2019-20 from 37.5% and 36.9%, respectively, in the last two years.

- Worker population rate improved to 38.2% in 2019-20 compared with 35.3% in 2018-19 and 34.7% in 2017-18.
- The unemployment rate fell to 4.8% in 2019-20. In 2018-19, it stood at 5.8% and 6.1% in 2017-18.

## 2. UK Court declares Vijay Mallya Bankrupt

### Why in News?

- A British court recently granted a bankruptcy order against Vijay Mallya, paving the way for a consortium of Indian banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI) to pursue a worldwide freezing order to seek repayment of debt owed by the now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

### What is Insolvency and Bankruptcy?

- Insolvency is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt.
- Bankruptcy, on the other hand, is a situation whereby a court of competent jurisdiction has declared a person or other entity insolvent, having passed appropriate orders to resolve it and protect the rights of the creditors. It is a legal declaration of one's inability to pay off debts.

### About the IBC:

- The IBC was enacted in 2016, replacing a host of laws, with the aim to streamline and speed up the resolution process of failed businesses.
- The Code also consolidates provisions of the current legislative framework to form a common forum for debtors and creditors of all classes to resolve insolvency.
- The code stipulates that the resolution process of a stressed company will have to be completed in a maximum of 270 days.

### When does the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) apply?

- In March 2020, the government raised the threshold for invoking insolvency under the IBC to Rs 1 crore from Rs 1 lakh with a view to prevent triggering of such proceedings against small and medium enterprises that are facing currently the heat of coronavirus pandemic.
- The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is the Adjudicating Authority for **insolvency proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016**.
- The Code creates various institutions to facilitate resolution of insolvency. These are as follows:

- ✓ **Insolvency Professionals:** A specialised cadre of licensed professionals is proposed to be created. These professionals will administer the resolution process, manage the assets of the debtor, and provide information for creditors to assist them in decision making.
- ✓ **Insolvency Professional Agencies:** The insolvency professionals will be registered with insolvency professional agencies. The agencies conduct examinations to certify the insolvency professionals and enforce a code of conduct for their performance.
- ✓ **Information Utilities:** Creditors will report financial information of the debt owed to them by the debtor. Such information will include records of debt, liabilities and defaults.
- ✓ **Adjudicating Authorities:** The proceedings of the resolution process will be adjudicated by the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT), for companies; and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), for individuals. The duties of the authorities will include approval to initiate the resolution process, appoint the insolvency professional, and approve the final decision of creditors.
- ✓ **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board:** The Board will regulate insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities set up under the Code. The Board will consist of representatives of Reserve Bank of India, and the Ministries of Finance, Corporate Affairs and Law.

## 1.1 ECONOMY SNIPPETS

### 1. New Solar Project

#### Why in News?

- National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) Renewable Energy Ltd (REL) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Union Territory of Ladakh to set up the country's first Green Hydrogen Mobility project.

#### Highlights:

- NTPC REL will also set up a solar park at Rann of Kutch in Gujarat from where it will also generate green hydrogen on a commercial scale under the Ultra-Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPP) scheme.
- Hydrogen produced from renewable sources is called green hydrogen.
- Ultra-Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPP) scheme
- It is a scheme to develop Ultra Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPPs) under the existing Solar Park Scheme.

- The scheme was rolled out by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) in 2014.
- Solar Park Scheme is also a scheme of MNRE to set up a number of solar parks across various states in the country. It proposes to provide financial support by the Government of India to establish solar parks.
- The objective of the UMREPP is to provide land upfront to the project developer and facilitate transmission infrastructure for developing Renewable Energy (RE) based Power Parks with solar/wind/hybrid and also with storage systems.

### Green Hydrogen Mobility Project:

- NTPC REL has planned to ply 5 hydrogen buses, to start with, in the region and the company will be setting up a solar plant and a green hydrogen generation unit in Leh towards this end.
- This will put Leh as the first city in the country to implement a green hydrogen based mobility project. This would be zero emission mobility in true sense.
- This is also in line with the Prime Minister's vision of a 'carbon neutral' Ladakh.
- It will help Ladakh develop a carbon free economy based on renewable sources and green Hydrogen.
- NTPC REL will set up a 4.75 gigawatt (GW) renewable energy park at Rann of Kutch in Khavada, Gujarat. This will be India's largest solar park to be built by the largest power producer of the country.
- Kutch region in Gujarat, the largest salt desert in the country and host to two of India's largest coal-fired power plants, will now add another feather to its cap.

## 2. Livestock sector

### Why in News?

- Recently, The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved implementation of a special Livestock Sector Package.

### Highlights

- **Aim:** To boost growth in the livestock sector and thereby making animal husbandry more remunerative to 10 crore farmers engaged in Animal Husbandry Sector.
- **Total Amount:** The Central government will spend Rs. 9,800 crore on livestock development over the next five years in a bid to leverage almost Rs. 55,000 crore of outside investment into the sector.

- It includes the share of investments by State Governments, State Cooperatives, Financial institutions, External funding agencies and other stakeholders.
- The package has been designed by revising and realigning various components of the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying' Schemes for the next five years, starting 2021-22.
- All the schemes of the Department will be merged into three broad categories as:
- Development Programmes: It includes Rashtriya Gokul Mission, National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD), National Livestock Mission (NLM) and Livestock Census and Integrated Sample Survey (LC & ISS) as sub-schemes.
- Disease Control Programme: It is renamed as Livestock Health and Disease Control (LH & DC) which includes the present Livestock Health and Disease Control (LH & DC) scheme and National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP).
- Infrastructure Development Fund: The Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development fund (AHIDF) and the Dairy Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF) are merged and the present scheme for support to Dairy Cooperatives and Farmer Producer Organizations engaged in Dairy activities is also included in this third category.

### National Livestock Mission (NLM)

- NLM was launched in the 2014-15 financial year and seeks to ensure quantitative and qualitative improvement in livestock production systems and capacity building of all stakeholders.
- The scheme is being implemented as a sub scheme of White Revolution - Rashtriya Pashudhan Vikas Yojana from April 2019.
- The mission is organised into the following four Sub - Missions:
- Sub -Mission on Livestock Development.
- Sub - Mission on Pig Development in North-Eastern Region.
- Sub - Mission on Feed and Fodder Development.
- Sub -Mission on Skill Development, Technology Transfer and Extension.

### 3. World Youth Skill Day

#### Why in News?

- Recently, 15<sup>th</sup> July was observed as the World Youth Skills Day every year. It was designated by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2014.

#### Highlights:

- To equip young people around the world with essential skills for employment, work, and entrepreneurship.
- To achieve the Incheon Declaration:** Education 2030, “which devotes considerable attention to technical and vocational skills development, specifically regarding access to affordable quality technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions.”
- This vision is fully captured by Sustainable Development Goal-4, which aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. To eliminate gender disparity.
- Theme for 2021 is '**Reimagining Youth Skills Post-Pandemic**'.
- According to the estimates of UNESCO, schools were shut down for over 30 weeks in 50% of the countries between March 2020 and May 2021.
- Respondents to a survey of the TVET, which was jointly collected by UNESCO, the ILO and the World Bank, revealed that distance learning was the most common way of imparting skills. Youth employment fell 8.7% last year, compared with 3.7% for adults.

#### Steps taken by India:

- Industrial Training Centres (ITIs) is Conceptualized in the year 1950, aims to expand and modernize the existing Long-Term Training ecosystem in India.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) was Launched in 2015, it aims to provide free skill training avenues to youths of India.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 is launched 2021 in a bid to empower India's youth with employable skills by making over 300 skill courses available to them.
- Recognition of Prior Learning was launched in 2015 to recognize the prior skills acquired by individuals. It is one of the key components of PMKVY.

## 4. Curbs on Mastercard

### Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has banned Mastercard from issuing new debit and credit cards to customers in India.

### RBI's data Localisation Policy:

- In 2018, the Reserve Bank of India had issued a circular ordering card companies such as Visa, Mastercard, and American Express to store all Indian customer data locally.
- The underlying reasons for this were stated as follows:
- Local storage of consumer data is necessary to protect the privacy of Indian users and to address National Security Concerns. Regulator could have necessary supervisory access over the card companies. RBI strict implementation of the guidelines:
- Earlier, American Express and Diners Club International were banned by the RBI from issuing new cards after they failed to comply with the 2018 circular.
- According to the RBI, Mastercard has failed to comply with the local data storage rules announced in 2018.

### Concerns:

- The move to ban Mastercard would impact the operation of banks operating in India that use Mastercard's services to issue cards to their customers.
- Given that Mastercard accounts for almost one third of the card market in India, new card registrations might take a hit.
- Some believe the data localisation rules are being used by governments as tools of economic protectionism. This sort of economic protectionism could affect the business of foreign card companies. Thus, the card payments sector may end up being restricted to a few Domestic Companies, which in turn can lead to reduced competition. This could mean higher costs and lower Quality Services for customers.

## 5. Bad Bank launched for stressed assets

### Why in News?

- The Government has launched a Bad Bank with all the regulatory approvals in place.

### What is a Bad Bank?

- A bad bank conveys the impression that it will function as a bank but has bad assets to start with.

- Technically, it is an asset reconstruction company (ARC) or an asset management company that takes over the bad loans of commercial banks, manages them and finally recovers the money over a period of time.
- Such a bank is not involved in lending and taking deposits, but helps commercial banks clean up their balance sheets and resolve bad loans.
- The takeover of bad loans is normally below the book value of the loan and the bad bank tries to recover as much as possible subsequently.

### **Global Examples of Bad Bank:**

- US-based BNY Mellon Bank created the first bad bank in 1988, after which the concept has been implemented in other countries including Sweden, Finland, France and Germany.
- However, resolution agencies or ARCs set up as banks, which originate or guarantee to lend, have ended up turning into reckless lenders in some countries.

### **Do we need a Bad Bank?**

- The idea gained currency during Rajan's tenure as RBI Governor.
- The RBI had then initiated an asset quality review (AQR) of banks and found that several banks had suppressed or hidden bad loans to show a healthy balance sheet.
- However, the idea remained on paper amid lack of consensus on the efficacy of such an institution.
- ARCs have not made any impact in resolving bad loans due to many Procedural Issues.

### **What is the stand of the RBI and Government?**

- While the RBI did not show much enthusiasm about a bad bank all these years, there are signs that it can look at the idea now.
- Experts, however, argue that it would be better to limit the objective of these asset management companies to the orderly resolution of stressed assets, followed by a graceful exit.

### **Good about the Bad Banks:**

- The problem of NPAs continues in the banking sector, especially among the weaker banks.
- The bad bank concept is in some ways similar to an ARC but is funded by the Government initially, with banks and other investors co-investing in due course.
- The presence of the government is seen as a means to speed up the clean-up process.
- Many other countries had set up institutional mechanisms such as the Troubled Asset Relief Programme (TARP) in the US to deal with a problem of stress in the Financial System.

## 6. One District One Focus Product Scheme

### Why in News?

- The One District One Focus Product (ODOFP) programme cover products of agriculture and allied sectors for 728 districts of the country.

### ODOFP programme:

- The ODOFP programme cover products of agriculture and allied sectors for 728 districts of the country. The products have been identified from agricultural, horticultural, animal, poultry, milk, fisheries, aquaculture, marine sectors across the country.
- These identified products will be supported under the PM-FME scheme of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, which provides incentives to promoters and micro-enterprises
- This scheme is being implemented for a period of five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.
- The scheme adopts One District One Product (ODOP) approach to reap the benefits of scale in terms of procurement of inputs, availing common services and marketing of products.

### ODOP:

- The ODOP scheme aims to identify one product per district based on the potential and strength of a district and national priorities.
- A cluster for that product will be developed in the district and market linkage will be provided for that. It is operationally merged with 'Districts as Export Hub' initiative implemented by the Director-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Department of Commerce.
- Under the initial phase of the ODOP programme, 106 Products have been identified from 103 districts across 27 States.

## 7. Nord Stream 2 Pipeline (NS2P) project

### Why in News?

- The US has recently approved the Germany-Russia Nord Stream 2 Pipeline (NS2P) project - which significantly increases Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

### Highlights:

- The US had previously imposed sanctions to prevent the completion of this gas pipeline between Russia and Germany.
- This is a 1,200-km pipeline that runs from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany through the Baltic Sea. It will carry 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year. It was decided to build this pipeline in 2015.

- It is already completed and together with NS2P, it will supply 110 billion cubic metre of gas a year to Germany.
- It will increase Europe's dependence on Russia for Natural Gas, currently EU (European Union) countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.
- There is an existing pipeline between Russia and Europe through Ukraine, once the NS2P project is completed it would bypass Ukraine and deprive it of a significant transit fee of around \$ 3 billion per year. It can be a generational geopolitical win for Russia and a catastrophe for the United States and its allies.

## 8. Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021

### Why in News?

- The Minister of State for Defence has introduced the Essential Defence Services Bill in the Lok Sabha.

### Essential Defence Services Bill:

- Essentially, the bill is aimed at preventing the staff of the government-owned ordnance factories from going on strike. Around 70,000 people work with the 41 ordnance factories around the country.
- It is aimed to provide for the maintenance of essential defence services so as to secure the security of the nation and the life and property of the public at large and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

### Why Need such a bill?

- Indian Ordnance Factories is the oldest and largest industrial setup that functions under the Department of Defence Production of the Ministry of Defence.
- The ordnance factories form an integrated base for indigenous production of defence hardware and equipment, with the primary objective of self-reliance in equipping the armed forces with state-of-the-art battlefield equipment.
- It is essential that an uninterrupted supply of ordnance items to the armed forces be maintained for the defence preparedness of the country and the ordnance factories continue to function without any disruptions.

### What does it allow the Government to do?

- The Bill empowers the Government to declare services mentioned in it as essential defence services the cessation of work of which would prejudicially affect the production of defence Equipment or goods.

- It also prohibits strikes and lockouts in “any industrial establishment or unit engaged in Essential defence services”.

### Why does the Government Feel its need?

- In June the government announced the corporatization of the Ordnance Factory Board.
- The OFB was directly under the Department of Defence Production and worked as an arm of the Government. The Government has claimed that the move is aimed at improving the efficiency and Accountability of these Factories.
- The Bill mentioned that there is a threat, though, that the employees of these factories can go on a strike against the Decision.

## 9. Economic Liberalisation

### Why in News?

- On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the economic liberalisation reforms, former Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, raised concerns over the macro-economic stability of the country.

### Highlights:

- 1991 Crisis: In 1990-91, India faced a severe Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis, where its foreign exchange reserves were just adequate to finance 15 days of imports. There were many factors that led to the BOP crisis:
  - The fiscal deficit during 1990-91 was around 8.4% of GDP. In 1990-91, the situation was aggravated by the rise in the price of oil due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.
  - The inflation rate increased from 6.7% to 16.7% due to a rapid increase in money supply and the country's economic position became worse.
  - In order to get out of the macro-economic crisis in 1991, India launched a New Economic Policy, which was based on LPG or Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation model.
  - Then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, was the prime architect of the historic 1991 liberalisation.
  - Abolition of industrial license permit raj, Reduction in import tariffs, etc. Deregulation of markets, Banking reforms, etc.
  - Exchange rate correction, liberalising foreign direct investment and trade policies, Removal of mandatory convertibility cause, etc.
  - These reforms are credited and applauded for the high economic growth seen from 1991 to 2011 and substantial reduction of poverty from 2005 to 2015.

## About 2021 Crisis:

- The World Economic Outlook Report 2021, states that the Indian economy is expected to grow by 12.5% in 2021 and 6.9% in 2022.
- However, the pandemic has massive unemployment in the informal sector and poverty is increasing after decades of decline.
- The social sectors of health and education have lagged behind and not kept pace with our Economic Progress.
- Too many lives and livelihoods have been lost that should not have been, during the pandemic. Inspector Raj is set to make a comeback through the policy for e-commerce entities. India is back to the old habits of borrowing excessively or extracting money (in form of dividends) from the RBI to finance the fiscal deficit. The migrant labour crisis has laid bare the gaps in the growth model.
- India foreign trade policy is again suspecting trade liberalisation, as India has already decided to opt-out of the 16-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal.

## 10. National Farmers Database

### Why in News?

- The Centre's new National Farmers Database will only include land-owning farmers for now as it will be linked to digitized land records.

### National Farmers Database:

- The Central government had proposed an Agristack initiative to create a digital database that focuses on farmers and the agricultural sector.
- As part of the first step of this initiative, the government has initiated a farmers database that would serve as the core of the Agristack.
- The database would be linked to the digital land record management system and would thus only include farmers who were legal owners of agricultural land.
- The database would facilitate online single sign-on facilities for universal access and usher in proactive and personalized services to farmers such as DBT, soil and plant health advisories, Weather Advisories.
- It would also facilitate seamless credit & insurance, seeds, fertilizers, and pesticide-related information.

## Need for such Database:

- India has 140 million operational farmland holdings.
- The availability of a database would serve an important role in the formulation of evidence-based policies for the agricultural sector.
- Also, the government can make use of the database for targeted service delivery with higher efficiency and in a focused and time-bound manner.
- The database could be used to select beneficiaries of government schemes.
- The availability of data will make it possible to implement digital technologies like AI/Machine Learning, IoT in the agricultural domain, thus opening up the sector to immense opportunities for improvement in productivity.

## AgriStack Initiative:

- The AgriStack is a collection of technologies and digital databases proposed by the Central Government focusing on India's farmers and the agricultural sector.
- The central government has claimed that these new databases are being built to primarily tackle issues such as poor access to credit and wastage in the agricultural supply chain.
- Under AgriStack', the government aims to provide 'required data sets' of farmers' personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for 'smart and well-organized agriculture'.
- The digital repository will aid precise targeting of subsidies, services, and policies.
- Under the program, each farmer of the country will get what is being called an FID, or a farmers' ID, linked to land records to uniquely identify them.

## 2. ENVIRONMENT

### 1. What is Gross Environment Product?

#### Why in News?

- The Uttarakhand government recently announced it will initiate valuation of its natural resources in the form of ‘Gross Environment Product’ (GEP), said to be along the lines of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

#### Why such a Move?

- The idea of the valuation of the Components of the Environment is not new.
- But it got impetus following rapid degradation of Ecosystems, which led to adverse impacts on more than 60 percent of services we get from the Ecosystems.

#### What is Gross Environment Product (GEP)?

- GEP is the measure of ecosystem services of any area.
- It reflects the aggregated annual value of goods and services provided by ecosystems (forests, water bodies, oceans, etc.) to people in a given region, such as at district levels, state, and country.
- It entails the establishment of a natural capital accounting framework by integrating Ecological benefits into common measures of economic growth such as GDP.
- It summarizes the value of ecosystem services in a single monetary metric.

#### Evolution of GEP:

- Several attempts were made to find ways to address Environmental Issues.
- The term “ecosystem services” was coined in 1981 to attract academics towards this aspect.
- Ecosystem services represent the benefits humans get: Forests, lakes, and grasslands; timber and dyed; carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling; soil formation and productivity; and Tourism.
- The definition is still in the process of evolution. The concept received attention and now is part of Global Knowledge.

#### Advantages offered:

- GEP can be applied as a scientific basis for Eco-Compensation and public financial transfers.
- For example, Finance Commission’s revenue-sharing formula between the Union and the states including forest cover as a determining factor in a state’s share.
- GEP can be applied to measure the status of ecosystem services, which is an important indicator of sustainable development.

- It is also a critical indicator for measuring the progress of Eco-civilization.
- Its implementation can help assess the impact of anthropological pressure on our ecosystem and natural resources- air, water, soil, forests.

### The Himalayan Context:

- The Himalayas contribute substantially to the sustainability of the Gangetic Plains where 500 million people live.
- The Union government incorporated the value of ecosystem services of its states in National Accounting. According to the recommendation of the 12th and 13th Finance Commissions, grants were transferred to forest-rich states in amounts corresponding to their forest covers.
- However, considering only the forest cover in transferring funds to states is inadequate.

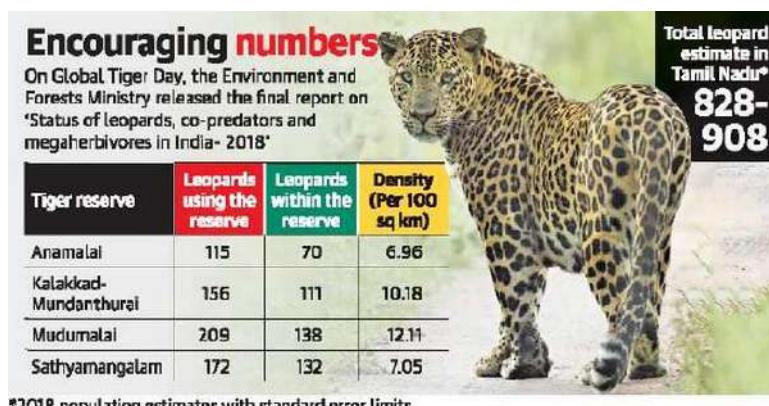
## 2. Srivilliputhur Sanctuary has the Highest leopard Density in Western Ghats

### Why in News?

- The Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu has the highest leopard density (per 100 sq km), not just in the State but in the entire Western Ghats landscape in the State which is in the range of 828-908.

### About the News:

- The data is based on the final report on the ‘Status of Leopards, Co-predators and Megaherbivores in India - 2018’, released by the Environment and Forests Ministry on Global Tiger Day 2021.
- According to the report, 14 sites were camera trapped in Tamil Nadu that yielded 2,017 pictures of 629 leopards. The 2014 report pegged its population at 815 with a range of 587-1,043. An additional number of 100 sq km grids sampled in 2018 was 29, out of which four had leopard presence. The density of leopards in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve was 12.11. In parts of Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, the number stood at 7.05. Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve supported high density of leopards with 10.18.



## Conservation Status of Leopard:

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN): Vulnerable
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix I - It lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants.
- Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule 1 - Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide absolute protection to threatened species. Offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

## About the Global Tiger Day:

- International Tiger Day is celebrated on July 29 every year to raise awareness about the dwindling population of the endangered cat.
- It is the anniversary of the agreement of Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit in Russia in 2010.
- It was declared by representatives that the tiger populated countries would make efforts to double the tiger population by the year 2022.
- The theme for the 2021 International Tiger Day is “Their survival is in our hands”

## Key facts related to Tiger Population:

- As per the World Wide Fund for Nature, the number of tigers dropped by 95 per cent over the past 150 years. India is the land of royal tigers and current tiger population stands at 2967 which is 70 per cent of the global tiger population.
- Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442).
- Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh is the first tiger reserve in India to officially introduce a mascot, Bhoorsingh the Barasingha.

## Conservation efforts- National and Global:

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has launched the M-STrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status), a mobile monitoring system for forest guards.
- At the Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan ‘T X 2’.
- The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.

- Over the years, the initiative has institutionalised itself as a separate entity in the form of the Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), with its two arms –the Global Tiger Forum and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program.
- The Project Tiger, launched way back in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country's geographical area.

### Conservation Status of Tigers:

- **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I.
- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List:** Endangered.
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES):** Appendix I.

## 3. Water Pollution

### Why in News?

- Water pollution caused by detergents has become a big concern in the global context.

### Highlights:

- The per capita (per person) detergent consumption in India is around 2.7 kilogram per year.
- It is around 3.7 kg in the Philippines and Malaysia and 10 kg in the United States of America.
- Water pollution occurs when harmful substances—often chemicals or microorganisms—contaminate a stream, river, lake, ocean, aquifer, or other body of water, degrading water quality and rendering it toxic to humans or the environment.
- Water is uniquely vulnerable to pollution. Known as a “universal solvent,” water is able to dissolve more substances than any other liquid on earth.
- Some of the causes for water pollution are sewage water, industrial Wastes, Agricultural sources, thermal and radiation pollution, marine pollution, invasive species, underground water pollution etc.

### Detergents:

- A detergent is a surfactant or mixture of surfactants that has cleaning properties in dilute solution with water. A detergent is similar to soap. Surfactant, also called surface-active agent, substance such as a detergent that, when added to a liquid, reduces its surface tension, thereby increasing its spreading and wetting properties.
- Surface Tension is the property of the surface of a liquid that allows it to resist an external force, due to the cohesive nature of its molecules.

- They tend to be more soluble in hard water than soap because the sulfonate of detergent doesn't bind calcium and other ions in hard water as easily as the carboxylate in soap does.

### Detergents & Pollution:

#### Bioaccumulation of Nonylphenol:

- Nonylphenol, a hazardous chemical present in detergents, is known to enter water bodies and the food chains. It bio-accumulates and can pose serious environmental and health risks. It has been detected in human breast milk, blood and urine, and is associated with reproductive and developmental effects in rodents.

#### Inhibition of Biodegradation:

- Many laundry detergents contain approximately 35 to 75% phosphate salts. Phosphates can cause a variety of water pollution problems. For example, phosphate tends to inhibit the biodegradation of organic substances. Non-biodegradable substances cannot be eliminated by public or private wastewater treatment. Biodegradation is the process by which organic substances are broken down into smaller compounds by living Microbial Organisms. Some phosphate-based detergents can also cause eutrophication. Phosphate-enrichment can cause the water body to become choked with algae and other plants.
- **Eutrophication:** When a water body becomes overly enriched with minerals and nutrients which induce excessive growth of algae or algal bloom. It deprives the water of available oxygen, causing the death of other organisms.
- In Belgium, phosphates have been restricted for use in household detergents since 2003.

#### Oxygen-Reducing Substances:

- Detergents also contain oxygen-reducing substances (ie, a chemical compound that readily transfers oxygen atoms) that may cause severe damage to the fishes and other marine animals.

#### Destruction of Mucus:

- Detergents are capable of destroying the external mucus layers that protect the fish from bacteria and parasites, causing severe damage to the gills. Mostly fish die when detergent concentrations are near 15 parts per million (ppm); however, detergent concentrations as low as 5 ppm will kill Fish Eggs.

#### Makes Water Turbid:

- A few more harmful components of detergents which are anthropogenic components such as herbicides, pesticides and heavy metal concentrations (like zinc, cadmium and lead) can cause the water to grow dark. This blocks out light and disrupts the growth of plants.

- Turbidity also clogs the respiratory system of some species of fishes. Pathogens from these toxic water bodies cause diseases, some fatal, in human or animal hosts diseases.

### Hazardous for Humans:

- The detergents contain suspected carcinogens, and ingredients that do not fully Biodegrade.
- A carcinogen is an agent with the capacity to cause cancer in humans.

### Indian Initiative:

- **ECOMARK Scheme:** The Government has instituted this scheme on labeling of Environment Friendly Products.
- The scheme is operating on a national basis and provides accreditation and labeling for household and other consumer products which meet certain environmental criteria along with quality requirements of the Indian Standards for that product.
- The Ecomark Scheme covers various product categories like Soaps and Detergents, paints, food items etc.

## 4. Amazon Forest

### Why in News?

- Recently, Amazon Forests have started emitting Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) instead of absorbing it. Growing trees and plants have taken up about a quarter of all fossil fuel emissions since 1960, with the Amazon playing a major role as the Largest Tropical Forest.

### Highlights:

- A significant amount of deforestation (over the course of 40 years) in eastern and southeastern Brazil has turned the forest into a source of CO<sub>2</sub> that has the ability to warm the planet.
- It might have also affected a long-term decrease in rainfall and increase in temperatures during the dry season.
- Not only the Amazon rainforests, some forests in Southeast Asia have also turned into carbon sources in the last few years as a result of formation of plantations and fires.
- Forest fires have doubled since 2013. One reason that they happen is when farmers burn their land to clear it for the next crop. Most of the Emissions are caused by fires.
- A part of the Amazon emitting carbon even without fires was particularly worrying. This was most likely the result of each year's deforestation and fires making adjacent forests more susceptible the next year.

## Deforestation:

- State policies that encourage economic development, such as railway and road expansion projects have led to “unintentional deforestation” in the Amazon and Central America.
- Deforestation started in the 1970s and 1980s when large-scale forest conversion for cattle ranching and soy cultivation began.

## 5. Flash Flood and Landslide

### Why in News?

- The heavy rains have recently caused flash floods and landslides in many parts of Himachal Pradesh.

### Highlights:

- A landslide is defined as the movement of a mass of rock, debris, or earth down a slope.
- They are a type of mass wasting, which denotes any downward movement of soil and rock under the direct influence of gravity.
- The term landslide encompasses five modes of slope movement: falls, topples, slides, spreads, and flows. Slope movement occurs when forces acting downward (mainly due to gravity) exceed the strength of the earth materials that compose the slope.
- Landslides are caused due to three major factors: geology, morphology, and human activity.
- Geology refers to characteristics of the material. The earth or rock might be weak or fractured, or different layers may have different strengths and stiffness.
- Morphology refers to the structure of the land. For example, slopes that lose their vegetation to fire or drought are more vulnerable to landslides.
- Vegetation holds soil in place, and without the root systems of trees, bushes, and other plants, the land is more likely to slide away.
- Human activity which includes agriculture and construction increases the risk of a Landslide.

### About Flash Floods:

- These are sudden surges in water levels generally during or following an intense spell of rain.
- These are highly localised events of short duration with a very high peak and usually have less than six hours between the occurrence of the rainfall and peak flood.
- The flood situation worsens in the presence of choked drainage lines or encroachments obstructing the Natural Flow of Water.

- It may be caused by heavy rain associated with a severe thunderstorm, hurricane, tropical storm, or meltwater from ice or snow flowing over ice sheets or snowfields.
- Flash Floods can also occur due to Dam or Levee Breaks, and/or Mudslides (Debris Flow).
- In areas on or near volcanoes, flash floods have also occurred after eruptions, when glaciers have been melted by the intense heat.
- The intensity of the rainfall, the location and distribution of the rainfall, the land use and topography, vegetation types and growth/density, soil type, and soil water- content all determine just how quickly the Flash Flooding may occur, and influence where it may occur.

## 6. Gecko Species

### Why in News?

- Odisha's forest officials have recently announced measures to preserve the newly discovered tiny gecko species of the genus Hemiphyllodactylus.

### Highlights:

- This was first spotted in Ganjam district, Odisha in 2014. The new species of Hemiphyllodactylus minimus is the smallest member of the genus with a maximum body size of little over six cm. It is called Ganjam Slender Gecko.
- The new species is the seventh Indian species of the genus, the second from the northern Eastern Ghats and 41st globally. It is the first non-island species of the genus which is distributed in lowland habitats.
- Geckos are reptiles and are found on all the continents except Antarctica. These colorful lizards have adapted to habitats from rainforests, to deserts, to cold Mountain Slopes.
- Most geckos are nocturnal, which means they are active at night, but day geckos are active during the day and depend on insects, fruits, and flower nectar.
- Geckos are spread across six families: Carphodactylidae, Diplodactylidae, Eublepharidae, Gekkonidae, Phyllodactylidae, and Sphaerodactylidae.
- Indian Golden Gecko (family Gekkonidae) is native to India (Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh). It is listed in Schedule 1 of WPA (Wildlife Protection Act), IUCN Red List: Least Concern (LC)
- Tokay Gecko (family Gekkonidae) is widespread in the Indo-Malayan region Protection Status, Schedule 4 of WPA and IUCN Red List: Least Concern (LC).

## 7. Alps Mountain

### Why in News?

- Recently, a study by the ETH technical university in Zurich, Switzerland shows that climate change has dramatically altered the Swiss Alp landscape.

### Highlights:

- Melting glaciers have created more than 1,000 new lakes across the mountains.
- The inventory of Swiss Glacial lakes showed that almost 1,200 new lakes have formed in formerly glaciated regions of the Swiss Alps since the end of the Little Ice Age around 1850 and around 1,000 of them still exist today. Glaciers in the Swiss Alps are in steady decline, losing a full 2% of their volume last year alone. Even if the world were to fully implement the 2015 Paris Agreement, two-thirds of the Alpine glaciers will likely be lost.
- The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, in December 2015.

### About Alps:

- The Alps emerged during the Alpine orogeny (mountain-building event), an event that began about 65 million years ago as the Mesozoic Era was drawing to a close.
- Alps are young fold mountains with rugged relief and high conical peaks.
- They are the most prominent of western Europe's physiographic regions. Some 750 miles long and more than 125 miles wide at their broadest point between Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and Verona, Italy, the Alps cover more than 80,000 square miles.
- The Alps extend north from the subtropical Mediterranean coast near Nice, France, to Lake Geneva before trending east-northeast to Vienna, Austria. There they touch the Danube River and meld with the adjacent plain. Because of their arclike shape, the Alps separate the marine west-coast climates of Europe from the Mediterranean areas of France, Italy, and the Balkan region. The Alps form part of France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Albania.
- Only Switzerland and Austria can be considered true Alpine countries

## 8. Centre launches Secured Logistics Document Exchange (SLDE) and GHG Calculator

### Why in News?

- With an aim to further improve ease of doing business, Centre today launched the “Secured Logistics Document Exchange” along with a Calculator for Green House Gas Emissions.

## Secured Logistics Document Exchange (SLDE):

- The SLDE platform is a solution to replace the present manual process of generation, exchange and compliance of logistics documents with a digitized, secure and seamless document exchange system.
- It is set to improve logistics efficiency, reduce logistics cost, and promote multi-modality and sustainability in a big way.
- This will enable generation, storage and interchange of logistics-related documents digitally using Aadhaar and blockchain-based security protocols for data security and authentication.
- It will also provide a complete audit trail of document transfer, faster execution of transaction, lower cost of shipping and overall carbon footprint, easy verification of authenticity of documents, lowered risk of fraud, etc.
- The proof of concept of the platform has been developed and executed with banks (ICICI, Axis Bank, State Bank of India and HDFC Bank) and stakeholders including freight forwarders, exporters, importers and vessel operators.

## Green House Gas (GHG) Emission Calculator:

- The GHG Calculator is an efficient, user-friendly tool and provides for calculating and comparing GHG emissions across different modes.
- It allows for a commodity-wise comparison of GHG emissions and total cost of transportation, including their environmental cost, between movement by road and rail.
- The tool is intended to facilitate appropriate modal choice for all concerned.

## Green House Gases (GHGs):

- A greenhouse gas (GHG) is a gas that absorbs and emits radiant energy within the thermal infrared range, causing the Greenhouse Effect.
- The primary greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere are water vapor ( $H_2O$ ), carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ), methane ( $CH_4$ ), nitrous oxide ( $N_2O$ ), and ozone ( $O_3$ ).
- Without greenhouse gases, the average temperature of Earth's surface would be about -18 °C (0 °F), rather than the present average of 15 °C (59 °F).
- The atmospheres of Venus, Mars, and Titan also contain Greenhouse Gases.

## 9. Kendu Leaf

### Why in News?

- There are several children were recently seen collecting kendu (Tendu) leaves in Odisha's Kalahandi district.

### Highlights:

- Kendu leaf is called the green gold of Odisha. It is a nationalised product like bamboo and sal seed. It is one of the most important non-wood forest products in Odisha.
- Botanical name of the Tendu (Kendu) leaf is *Diospyros Melanoxylon*.
- The leaves are used to wrap bidis, a popular smoke among the locals.
- The states producing bidi leaves in India comprises mainly Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- Odisha is the third-largest producer of kendu leaf, after Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- The Uniqueness of Odisha's Tendu (kendu) leaf is in processed form whereas the rest of the states in India produce in Phal Form.
- In processed form the Kendu leafs are graded into different qualities that are Grade I to Grade IV as per the specification of color, texture, size and body condition of the leaf and packets will be done by taking Five Kilograms as a Bundle.
- Traditional medical practitioners use these tiny fruits of Kendu to treat malaria, diarrhoea and dysentery.
- Due to their antimicrobial properties, the leaves are applied on cuts and bruises as well.
- Kendu leaves are the major source for tribal villages, since it is the most prominent Minor Forest Produce of the state.
- MFP includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin and includes bamboo, canes, fodder, leaves, gums, waxes, dyes, resins and many forms of food including nuts, wild fruits, honey, lac, tusser etc.
- They form a major portion of their food, fruits, medicines and other consumption items and also provide cash income through Sales.

### 3. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Notice issued to 3 MPs under Anti-Defection Law

##### Why in News?

- Ahead of the Monsoon session that begins on June 19, the Lok Sabha Secretariat has issued separate letters to Sisir Adhikari and Sunil Kumar Mondal (Trinamool Congress) and K. Raghu Ramarishna Raju (YSR Congress), after their parties petitioned Speaker Om Birla, seeking their disqualification under the Anti-Defection Law.

##### 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.

## 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 **Shriman 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 91<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment introduced in 2003 deleted the provision allowing split.**

- The 91st 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 (170<sup>th</sup> 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.

## 2. Commission to Examine the Issue of Sub-Categorization

### Context:

- Cabinet approves Extension of term of the commission constituted under Article 340 of the constitution to examine the issue of Sub-categorization within other Backward Classes in the Central List.

### Background:

- National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) proposed the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) back in 2015.
- In October 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 340 of the Constitution, appointed a commission to examine the issue of sub-categorisation of OBCs, chaired by retired Justice G. Rohini, to ensure social justice in an efficient manner by prioritising the Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs).

### What is Article 340?

- It lays down conditions for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of the backward classes.
- The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India.

### Constitutional Basis:

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

### Need for sub- categorization:

- Sub categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.
- At present, there is no sub-categorisation and 27% reservation is a Monolithic Entity.

### 3. No nod for Mekedatu sans Cauvery panel approval: Centre

#### Why in News?

- The Centre has given its assurance that Karnataka will not be allowed to carry out any construction on the Mekedatu dam project on the Cauvery River until its Detailed Project Report (DPR) is approved by the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA).

#### What's the Issue?

- Earlier this month, Karnataka chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa unilaterally announced plans to go forward with the long-pending project, exacerbating Tamil Nadu's concerns that their farmers further downstream will be affected.
- Karnataka has submitted its pre-feasibility report first and having studied it, CWC (Central Water Commission) granted permission for the development of DPR in 2018.
- It was a conditional permission and the number one condition was that the DPR will only be accepted and considered further if it comes with the approval of CWMA.
- All stakeholder States are members of CWMA last discussed at the CWMA's virtual meeting two months ago where the DPR was submitted online in 2020.
- Karnataka and Telengana representatives urged that further discussions be held when the CWMA is able to meet in person, as it is a sensitive issue, added the Minister.

#### About Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:

- According to its provisions, if a State Government makes a request regarding any water dispute and the Central Government is of opinion that the water dispute cannot be settled by negotiations, then a Water Disputes Tribunal is constituted for the adjudication of the water dispute.
- The act was amended in 2002, to include the major recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission.
- The amendments mandated a one-year time frame to setup the water disputes tribunal and also a 3-year time frame to give a Decision.

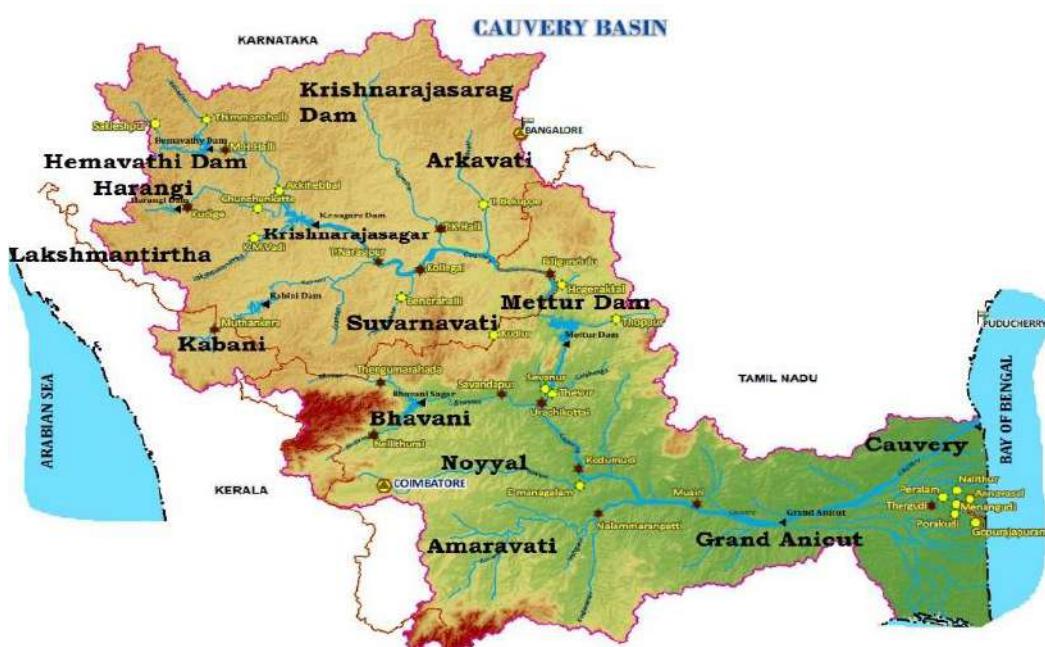
#### Provisions related to Interstate River Water Disputes:

- Entry 17 of State List deals with water i.e., water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.
- Entry 56 of Union List empowers the Union Government for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.

- **Article 262:** In the case of disputes relating to waters, it provides
  - ✓ **Clause 1:** Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.
  - ✓ **Clause 2:** Parliament may, by law provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint as mentioned above.

### About Mekedatu and Cauvery River:

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



## 4. Midday Meals have a long lasting Impact, says study

### Why in News?

- Girls who had access to the free lunches provided at government schools, had children with a higher height-to-age ratio than those who did not, says a new study on the inter-generational benefits of India's midday meal scheme published in Nature Communications recently.

### About the News:

- Using nationally representative data on cohorts of mothers and their children spanning 23 years, the paper showed that by 2016, the prevalence of stunting was significantly lower in areas where the mid scheme was implemented in 2005.
- More than one in three Indian children are stunted, or too short for their age, which reflects chronic undernutrition.
- The fight against stunting has often focussed on boosting nutrition for young children, but nutritionists have long argued that maternal health and well-being is the key to reduce stunting in their offspring.
- Noting that "interventions to improve maternal height and education must be implemented years before those girls and young women become mothers", the study has attempted a first-of-its-kind inter-generational analysis of the impacts of a mass feeding programme.

### About the Mid-Day Meal Scheme:

- The scheme guarantees one meal to all children in government and aided schools and madarsas supported under Samagra Shiksha.
- Students up to Class VIII are guaranteed one nutritional cooked meal at least 200 days in a year.
- The Scheme comes under the Ministry of HRD.
- It was launched in the year 1995 as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP – NSPE), a centrally sponsored scheme. In 2004, the scheme was relaunched as the Mid Day Meal Scheme.
- The Scheme is also covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

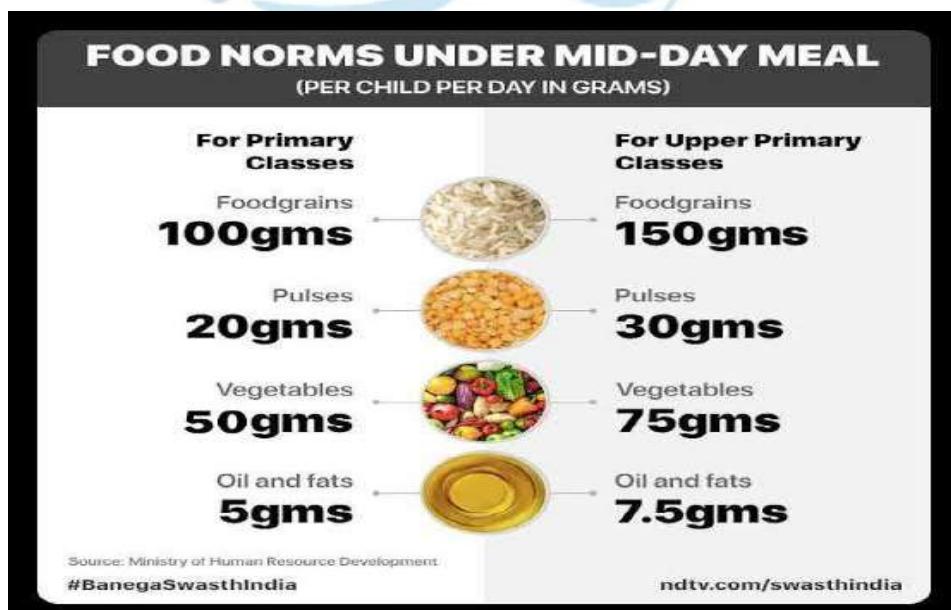
### Objective:

- Address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.
- The MDM rules 2015, provide that:

- ✓ The place of serving meals to the children shall be school only.
- ✓ If the Mid-Day Meal is not provided in school on any school day due to non-availability of food grains or any other reason, the State Government shall pay food security allowance by 15th of the succeeding month.
- ✓ The School Management Committee mandated under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 shall also monitor implementation of the Mid-day meal Scheme.

### Nutritional Norms:

- In terms of calorie intake, as per the MDM guidelines, the children in primary schools must be provided with at least 450 calories with 12 grams of protein through MDM while the children in upper primary schools should get 700 calories with 20 grams of protein, as per MHRD.
- The food intake per meal by the children of primary classes, as provided by MHRD is 100 grams of food grains, 20 grams of pulses, 50 grams of vegetables and 5 grams of oils and fats. For the children of upper-primary schools, the mandated breakup is 150 grams of food grains, 30 grams of pulses, 75 grams of vegetables and 7.5 grams of oils and fats.



## 5. Supreme Court Mulls limit to role as Policy Watchdog

### Why in News?

- The resolve voiced by a Division Bench of the Supreme Court in July to “examine” the extent to which the judiciary can question the government’s COVID-19 policies drifts from the court’s three-judge Bench judgment in May, which held that courts cannot be “silent spectators when Constitutional Rights of citizens are infringed by executive policies”.

### About the News:

- The May 31 judgment by a Supreme Court Bench is associated with the Centre’s reversal of its dual vaccine pricing policy. On July 14, a Bench of Justices said courts should not undermine the executive at a time when a “collective effort” was required to overcome the public health crisis. It is being claimed that, in many recent judgments, the Supreme Court has become hyper-activist in making laws. Neither is the broad separation of powers among the three organs of the state maintained nor is the law being preserved.

### What is Judicial Activism?

- The judiciary performs an active role to uphold constitutional values and ethics under the constitutional pattern. For addressing civic dilemmas, the judiciary applies its intellect and creativity to fill the gap between the positive and normative aspects of legislations. For this reason the judicial activism has emerged. The term “Judicial Activism” refers the court’s decision, based on the judges personal wisdom that do not go rigidly within the text of the statutory passed by the legislature and the use of judicial power broadly to provide remedies to the wide range of social wrongs for Ensuring Proper Justice.

### Doctrine of Separation of Power:

- The Constitution, under various provisions, has clearly drawn the line between Legislature and the Judiciary to maintain their independence in their respective functioning.
- Where Article 121 and 211 forbid the legislature from discussing the conduct of any judge in the discharge of his duties, Articles 122 and 212, on the other hand, prevent the courts from sitting in judgment over the internal proceedings of the legislature.
- Article 105(2) and 194(2) protect the legislators from the interference of the Courts with regards to his/her freedom of speech and freedom to vote.

### Pros of Judicial Activism:

- It provides a system of checks and balances to the other government branches. Judicial Activism is a delicate exercise involving creativity. It brings out required innovation in the form of a solution.

- Judicial Activism provides judges to use their personal wisdom in cases where the law failed to provide a balance.
- Judicial Activism also provides insights into the issues. The reason why this is a good thing is that it shows the instilled trust placed in the justice system and its judgments.
- Many a time public power harms the people, so it becomes necessary for the judiciary to check misuse of public power.
- It provides speedy solutions where the legislature gets stuck in the issue of majority.

### **Cons of Judicial Activism**

- Judges can override any existing law. Hence, it clearly violates the line drawn by the constitution.
- The judicial opinions of the judges become standards for ruling other cases.
- Judgment may be influenced by personal or selfish motives. Which can further harm the public at large. Repeated interference of courts can erode the faith of the people in the quality, integrity and efficiency of Governmental Institutions.
- Courts limit the functioning of government, when it exceeds its power and to stop any abuse or misuse of power by Government Agencies.

### **What makes the Judiciary to step-in?**

- When the legislature fails to make the necessary legislation to suit the changing times and governmental agencies fail miserably to perform their administrative functions sincerely, it leads to an erosion of the confidence of the citizens in the constitutional values and democracy. In such a scenario, the judiciary steps into the areas usually earmarked for the legislature and executive and the result is the judicial legislation and a government by judiciary.
- In case the fundamental rights of the people are trampled by the government or any other third party, the judges may take upon themselves the task of aiding the ameliorating conditions of the citizens.
- The greatest asset and the strongest weapon in the armoury of the judiciary is the confidence it commands and the faith it inspires in the minds of the people in its capacity to do even-handed justice and keep; the scales in balance in any dispute.

### **Instances where the judges may have encroached upon the legislature:**

- Arun Gopal v. Union of India (2017): the Supreme Court fixed timings for bursting Diwali fireworks and prohibited the use of non-green fireworks, although there are no laws to that effect.

- M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (2018): the court annulled the statutory Rule 115(21) of the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989, when it directed that no BS-4 vehicle should be sold after March 30, 2020, and that only BS-6 vehicles can be sold after that date.
- Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra (2018): the court amended the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, by annulling Section 18 which said that no anticipatory bail will be granted to persons accused under the Act; by requiring a preliminary enquiry; and by prohibiting arrest under the Act except with permission in writing by the appropriate authority.
- Rajesh Sharma v. The State of Uttar Pradesh (2017): the court felt that Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code was being misused. So it amended that Section by requiring complaints under that provision to be sent to a Family Welfare Committee constituted by the District Legal Services Authority, although there is no such requirement in Section 498A.
- National Green Tribunal (NGT): ordered that no 15-year-old petrol-driven or 10-year-old diesel-driven vehicle will ply in Delhi, and the Supreme Court has directed impounding such vehicles, though neither the NGT nor the Supreme Court are legislative bodies.

### Way Forward:

- Judicial activism is not backed by the Constitution; it is a product devised solely by the judiciaries.
- When the judiciary steps over the line of the powers given to it, in the name of judicial activism, one can say that the judiciary then begins to nullify the concept of separation of powers specified in the Constitution.
- If judges are free to make laws of their choices, not only would that go against the principle of separation of powers, it could also lead to uncertainty in the law and chaos as every judge will start drafting his own laws according to his whims and fancies.
- Judicial discipline has to be observed to maintain a clear balance.
- Making laws is the function of the legislature. It is the duty of the legislature to fill the gap of laws and it is the duty of executive to implement it in a proper manner. So that only the interpretation remains as a work for the judiciary. Only the fine equilibrium between these organs of Government can sustain the constitutional values.

## 6. Karnataka Opposes River linking project of Tamil Nadu

### Why in News?

- The Chairman of the Karnataka Border and Rivers Protection Commission has advised the State government to approach the Union government to restrain Tamil Nadu from taking up its project of inter-linking the Cauvery with the Gundar and the Vaigai till Karnataka's legitimate share of surplus water is determined.

### What's the Issue?

- Tamil Nadu is trying to utilize surplus 45 Tmcft of water.
- The 262 km river-linking project will divert 6,300 cubic feet of surplus water during floods and increase the groundwater levels in the state's southern districts to meet drinking water needs. Karnataka Government says, "this project is not in accordance with the Interstate River Water Disputes Act.
- According to the Act, surplus water should also be adjudicated and the tribunal has to decide on it.

### About Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:

- According to its provisions, if a State Government makes a request regarding any water dispute and the Central Government is of opinion that the water dispute cannot be settled by negotiations, then a Water Disputes Tribunal is constituted for the adjudication of the water dispute.
- The act was amended in 2002, to include the major recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission.
- The amendments mandated a one-year time frame to setup the water disputes tribunal and also a 3-year time frame to give a decision.

### Provisions related to Interstate River Water Disputes:

- Entry 17 of State List deals with water i.e., water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.
- Entry 56 of Union List empowers the Union Government for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.
- Article 262:** In the case of disputes relating to waters, it provides
  - Clause 1:** Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.

- ✓ **Clause 2:** Parliament may, by law provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint as mentioned above.

### About Cauvery River:

- Cauvery is a sacred river of southern India. It rises in the Brahmagiri range of the Western Ghats and falls in the Bay of Bengal south of Cuddalore, in Tamil Nadu.
- It forms the sacred islands of Srirangapatna and Shivanasamudra and Shivanasamudra falls and also a wide delta.
- Total Length of the river is about 760 km.
- Its main tributaries are Amravati, Bhavani, Hemavati, Kabini, Shimsha, and Lakshmana Tirtha. Its basin drains parts of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

## 7. SC Annuls part of Amendment related to Cooperative Societies

### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently upheld the validity of the 97th constitutional amendment that deals with issues related to effective management of cooperative societies but struck down a part inserted by it which relates to the Constitution and working of cooperative societies.

### About the News:

- The 97<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, which dealt with issues related to effective management of co-operative societies in the country was passed by Parliament in December 2011 and had come into effect from February 15, 2012.
- The change in the Constitution has amended Article 19(1)(c) to give protection to the cooperatives and inserted Article 43 B and Part IX B, relating to them.
- The Centre has contended that the provision does not denude the States of its power to enact laws with regard to cooperatives. The top court's verdict came on the Centre's plea challenging the Gujarat High Court's 2013 decision striking down certain provisions of the 97th constitutional amendment while holding that Parliament cannot enact laws with regard to cooperative societies as it is a State subject.

### About 'Co-operatives':

- According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

- There are many types of cooperatives such as Consumer Cooperative Society, Producer Cooperative Society, Credit Cooperative Society, Housing Cooperative Society and Marketing Cooperative Society.
- The United Nations General Assembly had declared the year 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives.
- India is an agricultural country and laid the foundation of World's biggest cooperative movement in the world.
- In India, a Co-operative based economic development model is very relevant where each member works with a spirit of responsibility.

### Constitutional Provisions Related to Cooperatives:

- The Constitution (97<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 2011 added a new Part IXB right after Part IXA (Municipals) regarding the cooperatives working in India.
- The word "cooperatives" was added after "unions and associations" in Article 19(1)(c) under Part III of the Constitution. This enables all the citizens to form cooperatives by giving it the status of fundamental right of citizens.
- A new Article 43B was added in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) regarding the "promotion of cooperative societies".

### Importance of Cooperatives:

- It provides agricultural credits and funds where state and private sectors have not been able to do very much.
- It provides strategic inputs for the agricultural-sector; consumer societies meet their consumption requirements at concessional rates.
- It is an organization for the poor who wish to solve their problems collectively.
- It softens the class conflicts and reduces the social cleavages.
- It reduces the bureaucratic evils and follies of political factions;
- It overcomes the constraints of agricultural development;
- It creates a conducive environment for small and cottage industries.

### Challenges:

- **Mismanagement and Manipulation:** A hugely large membership turns out to be mismanaged unless some secure methods are employed to manage such co-operatives.
  - ✓ In the elections to the governing bodies, money became such a powerful tool that the top posts of chairman and vice-chairman usually went to the richest farmers who manipulated the organization for their benefits.

- **Lack of Awareness:** People are not well informed about the objectives of the Movement, rules and regulations of co-operative institutions.
- **Restricted Coverage:** Most of these societies are confined to a few members and their operations extended to only one or Two Villages.
- **Functional Weakness:** The Co-operative Movement has suffered from inadequacy of Trained Personnel.

## 8. J&K to Grant Domicile Certificates to Non-Local Spouses

### Why in News?

- The J&K administration has rolled out the process to issue domicile certificates to the spouses of erstwhile State subjects who have a domicile certificate, which will allow husbands of women married outside to acquire the documents for the First Time.

### About the News:

- “In exercise of the powers conferred by proviso to Article 309 of the Constitution of India read with Section of the J&K Civil Service (Decentralisation and recruitment) Act, 2010, the government hereby grants domicile certificates to spouse of a domicile.
- The government has authorised tahsildars to issue such certificates against “valid proof of marriage”. A deputy commissioner will be the appellate authority for the same.
- Prior to August 5, 2019, when the Centre ended J&K’s special constitutional position, husbands of local women married outside J&K had no right to buy property or apply for jobs in J&K. According to ‘J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate Procedure Rules 2020’, domicile certificates will be issued to all Permanent Resident Certificate holders and their children living outside the Union Territory.

### What is Domicile?

- In law, domicile is the status or attribution of being a lawful permanent resident in a particular jurisdiction.

### As per the Changes, who is now Deemed to have Domicile?

- Anyone “who has resided for a period of fifteen years in the UT of J&K”.
- Or has studied for a period of seven years and appeared in class 10th/12th examination in an educational institution located in the UT of J&K.
- Or those registered as migrants and their children.
- Or the children of those central government officials, All India service officials, Officials of Public sector undertaking, autonomous body of central government, public sector banks,

officials of statutory bodies officials of central universities and recognized research institutes of central government who have served in J&K for a period of ten years.

- Or children of residents of J&K who reside outside the Union Territory in connection with employment or business or for other professional or vocational reasons, but whose parents fulfil any of the conditions provided in the latest gazette notification will also be entitled to domicile status.

### **What else the Order Says?**

- The Order says that the domiciles will be eligible for the purposes of appointment to any post carrying a pay scale of not more than Level 4. The Level 4 post comprises positions such as gardeners, barbers, office peons and watermen, and the highest rank in the category is that of a junior assistant.

### **Who can Issue Domicile Certificates?**

- The orders also empower tahsildars to issue domicile certificates.
- The government has been empowered to notify any other officer as the competent authority to issue the certificate.

### **Implications:**

- The order formally allows people from outside J&K to apply for jobs in the UT.
- While Level IV jobs have been reserved for people with domicile status – as per their definition in the order – other non-gazetted and gazetted jobs have been opened for people from across the country, including people domiciled in J&K.

## **9. Speedy Trial a Fundamental Right, says HC**

### **Why in News?**

- In the Bhima Koregaon caste violence case, highlighting the issue of undertrials, the Supreme Court has said that “speedy trial is a fundamental right”.

### **What's the issue?**

- Charges are not framed in the case. Many witnesses are still being examined. They are languishing in jail without trial.

### **About the Constitutional Right to Speedy Trial:**

- The main aim of the Right to Speedy trial is to inculcate Justice in the society.
- It was first mentioned in that landmark document of English law, the Magna Carta.
- In India, it is covered under Article 21 which declares that “no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure laid by law.”

## Evolution of the Right to Speedy Trial:

- **1978 Babu Singh v. State of UP:** The court remarked, “Our justice system even in grave cases, suffers from slow motion syndrome which is lethal to ‘fair trial’ whatever the ultimate decision. Speedy justice is a component of social justice since the community, as a whole, is concerned in the criminal being condignly and finally punished within a reasonable time and the innocent being absolved from the inordinate ordeal of criminal proceedings.”
- **Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar, 1979:** It formed the basis of the concept of the Speedy Trial. It was held that where under trial prisoners have been in jail for duration longer than prescribed, if convicted, their detention in jail is totally unjustified and in violation to fundamental rights under article 21.
- **Katar Singh v. State of Punjab 1994:** It was declared that the right to speedy trial is an essential part of fundamental right to life and liberty.

## What are the factors for Pendency of the Cases?

- Delay in disposition of cases because of huge pendency.
- Delay due to lawyers/ advocates.
- **Infrastructure issue:** The Courts have no convenient building or physical facilities due to which it takes more time to dispose off a case.
- Provision for adjournment.
- Vacation of the court.
- The Investigation agencies such as Police also play a role in Delay of cases.

## What are the Measures that could Prevent Delay?

- Effective management of the courts.
- Judges should be provided with proper training and vocations on a regular basis to improvise drafting, hearing and writing skills along with the skill of taking correct and fast judgment.
- The ratio of judges to population should be increased which will help in disposal of cases very fast. Cases must be assigned according to the specialized area of judges.
- Arbitration should be done wherever possible and in particular small and petty cases arbitration should be made compulsory.
- Nyaya Panchayats should be authorized to dispose off small and petty cases.
- The procedure of Adjournment should be modified in a way so as it is reduced to a limit and fine should be imposed on the person who files application for an adjournment on flimsy grounds.

- The technological development made by the human being in the field of science can be highly useful in realization of this objective.

## 10. Director of Inquiry for Lokpal

### Context:

- More than two years after the Lokpal came into being, the Centre is yet to appoint a director of inquiry.

### Who is a Director of Inquiry?

- According to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:
  - ✓ There shall be a director of inquiry, not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.
  - ✓ He/she shall be appointed by the Central government for conducting preliminary inquiries referred to the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) by the Lokpal.

### What's the Issue?

- Though Director of Inquiry has not been appointed by Govt. of India, cases are being received in the commission for conducting preliminary inquiries.
- Forty-one cases have been received for preliminary inquiry as of March 2021.

### Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level. The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members. The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistle-blowers are protected.

### Powers:

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.

- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

## 11. Over 35% of Government Schools, Anganwadis do not have Tap Water

### Why in News?

- Over a third of government schools and Anganwadis still do not have tap water access even ten months after the Jal Jeevan Mission launched a 100-day campaign to provide the facility.

### About the News:

- The 100-day campaign to achieve 100% coverage, and provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes as well as tap water for hand washing and in toilets in every school, Anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school, was launched on October 2, 2020.
- At the time, about 40% of schools and Anganwadis already had tap water access.
- According to the JJM dashboard from 4.1 lakh before the campaign started, the number of schools with taps rose to 6.35 lakh by February and for Anganwadis, the increase was from 4.3 lakh to 6.3 lakh.

### About Jal Jeevan Mission:

- Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- JJM focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level.
- Creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse, would be undertaken in convergence with other government programmes/schemes.
- The Mission is based on a community approach to water and includes extensive Information, Education and Communication as a key component of the mission.
- JJM looks to create a jan andolan for water, thereby making it everyone's priority.
- Funding Pattern: The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.

## Operation Guidelines for JJM:

- The Central government has recently released the operational guidelines for JJM. For the implementation of JJM, following institutional arrangement has been proposed:
  - ✓ National Jal Jeevan Mission (NJJM) at the Central level
  - ✓ State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) at the State level
  - ✓ District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) at the District level
  - ✓ Village Water Sanitation Committee (VWSC) at Village level
- Every village will prepare a Village Action Plan (VAP) which will have three components:
  - ✓ Water source & its maintenance
  - ✓ Water supply and
  - ✓ Greywater (Domestic Wastewater) Management.

## Need for and Significance of the Mission:

- India has 16% of the world population, but only 4% of freshwater resources. Depleting groundwater level, overexploitation and deteriorating water quality, climate change, etc. are major challenges to provide potable drinking water.
- It is an urgent requirement of water conservation in the country because of the decreasing amount of groundwater level. Therefore, the Jal Jeevan Mission will focus on integrated demand and supply management of water at the local level.

## 12. Vulture Population on the rise in Tiger Reserve

### Why in News?

- A recent study of the population of vultures in the Sigur plateau has found that the population of all four resident vulture species have seemingly been on the rise over the past Few Years.

### About the News:

- A study titled Population status and seasonal distribution of vultures in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, published in the Journal of Science and Technology, recorded vulture sightings between January and October of 2018, along 61 km of roads through the reserve.
- The roads pass through key vulture habitats in Siriyur, Vazhaithottam, Masinagudi, Moyar, Theppakadu and Kakkanallah. The researchers had 1,602 encounters with vultures, with a majority of them being with the critically-endangered white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), followed by the long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*), the red-headed vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) and the egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*).

- Though white-rumped vultures were the most frequently recorded, with 1,405 encounters, researchers said there were also encouraging signs that the populations of long-billed vultures, asian king vultures and egyptian vultures using the landscape was increasing.
- It was interesting that data pointed to a clear increase in the number of sightings of vultures between the months of January and May, indicating that vultures were using the tiger reserve as a key nesting habitat.
- The study is indicative that there are good nesting sites for vultures here, as well as excellent food availability, which in turn points to a healthy number of carnivores, whose kills the vultures depend on for food.

### **About Action Plan for Vulture Conservation:**

- The action plan was approved by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) October 5, 2020. An earlier one was formulated in 2006 for three years.
- Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu will get a vulture conservation and breeding centre each, according to the Action Plan for Vulture Conservation 2020-2025.
- The new plan has laid out strategies and actions to stem the decline in vulture population, especially of the three Gyps species:
  - ✓ Oriental white-backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)
  - ✓ Slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*)
  - ✓ Long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*)
- These three vulture species were listed by IUCN, in 2000 as ‘Critically Endangered’, which is the highest category of endangerment.
- This would be done through both ex-situ and in-situ conservation
- The plan has also suggested that new veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) be tested on vultures before their commercial release. NSAIDS often poisons cattle whose carcasses the birds pray on.

### **Why Protect Vultures?**

- Vultures are often overlooked and perceived as lowly scavengers, but they play a crucial role in the environments in which they live.
- The scavenging lifestyle that gives them a bad reputation is, in fact, that makes them so important for the Environment, Nature and Society.
- Vultures, also known as nature’s cleanup crew, do the dirty work of cleaning up after death, helping to keep ecosystems healthy as they act as natural carcass recyclers.

## About Vulture Multi-Species Action Plan:

- It was adopted at the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) held in 2017. The first strategy of the plan was launched at the CMS COP 13 held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

## Major Threats for the species:

- The major threats leading to decline in vulture population are unintentional and intentional poisoning, death due to power grid infrastructure (collision or electrocution), reduction in food availability, diseases, habitat loss (fragmentation and degradation), disturbance from human activities and climate change.
- The poisoned carcasses were dumped to kill some local stray animals. But when vultures fed on them, it became one of the vital reasons leading to their death. It is imperative to manage our carcass dumps and make sure that poisoned carcasses are not dumped for the vultures to feed on. The forest department cremates the animal carcasses instead of burying them, to keep the poachers away. But this practice is denying food to vultures leading to their death out of starvation.

## 13. National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

### Why in News?

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), conceived as a Rs. 20,000-crore programme in 2014 to clean up the river, has so far been allocated Rs. 15,074 crore.

### About the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG):

- It was registered as a society on 12th August 2011 under the Societies Registration Act 1860.
- It acted as the implementation arm of National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) which was constituted under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986.
- Please note, NGRBA was dissolved with effect from the 7th October 2016, consequent to the constitution of the National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga (referred as National Ganga Council).

### What is Namami Gange Programme?

- It is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as a 'Flagship Programme' in June 2014.
- It has a Rs. 20,000-crore, centrally-funded, non-lapsable corpus and consists of nearly 288 projects.
- It seeks to accomplish the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution and conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.

- It is being operated under Ministry of Jal Shakti.

### Implementation:

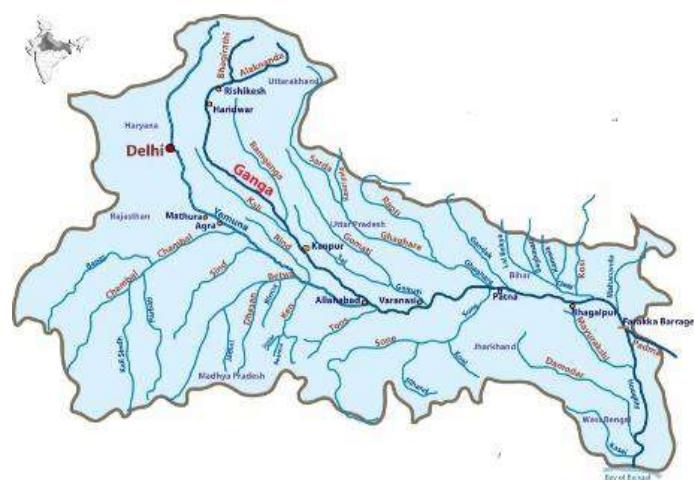
- The program is being implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- NMCG is the implementation wing of National Ganga Council (set in 2016; which replaced the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NRGBA)).
- National Ganga Council (NGC) was Created in October 2016 under the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016. It is Headed by Prime Minister.

### Funding:

- Main Pillars of the Namami Gange Programme are:
  - ✓ Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure
  - ✓ River-Surface Cleaning
  - ✓ Afforestation
  - ✓ Industrial Effluent Monitoring
  - ✓ River-Front Development
  - ✓ Bio-Diversity
  - ✓ Public Awareness
  - ✓ Ganga Gram

### About Ganga River System:

- The Ganga is the most important river of India both from the point of view of its basin and cultural significance.
- It **rises from the Gangotri glacier near Gaumukh** (3,900 m) in the **Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand**. Here, it is known as the **Bhagirathi**.
- The important tributaries of Ganga are the **Ramganga, the Gomati, the Ghaghara, the Gandak, the Kosi and the Mahanada**.
- The river finally discharges itself into the **Bay of Bengal near the Sagar Island**.



## 14. Centre Seeks more time for CAA rules

### Why in News?

- The Union Home Ministry told the Lok Sabha recently that the Committees on Subordinate Legislation, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, has been requested to grant further extension of time up to January 9, 2022, to frame the rules under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

### 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 republics 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.

### 3.1. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE SNIPPETS

#### 1. Issues with Making Welfare Conditional

##### Why in News?

- Recently, the government of Uttar Pradesh released a “Population Policy” in which it stated its intention to bring the gross fertility rate in the State down from the existing 2.7 to 2.1 by 2026.

##### Provisions in the Bill:

- This draft law, titled the Uttar Pradesh Population (Control, Stabilisation and Welfare) Bill, 2021, seeks to provide not only a series of incentives to families that adhere to a two-child norm.
- The Bill also intends on disentitling families that breach the norm from benefits and subsidies. It promises public servants who undergo sterilisation and adopt a two-child norm several benefits. The draft Bill also contains a list of Punishments.
- A person who breaches the two-child norm will be debarred from securing the benefit of any government-sponsored welfare scheme and will be disqualified from applying to any State government job.
- Existing government employees who infringe the rule will be denied the benefit of promotion.
- Transgressing individuals will be prohibited from contesting elections to local authorities and bodies.
- Issues with coercive population control policies

##### 1. Counter-productive measure:

- Through an affidavit filed in court, the central government argued that “international experience shows that any coercion to have a certain number of children is counter-productive and leads to demographic distortions”.

## 2. Against international obligations:

- India is committed to its obligations under international law, including the principles contained in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, 1994. Foremost in those principles was a pledge from nations that they would look beyond demographic targets and focus instead on guaranteeing a right to reproductive freedom.

## 3. Against right to Reproductive Freedom and Privacy:

- In Suchita Srivastava & Anr vs Chandigarh Administration (2009), the Court found that a woman's freedom to make reproductive decisions is an integral facet of the right to personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21. This ruling was endorsed by the Supreme Court's nine-judge Bench verdict in K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017).
- A reading of the plurality of opinions there shows us that the Constitution sees a person's autonomy over her body as an extension of the right to privacy.
- A simple reading of U.P.'s draft law will show us that, if enacted, it will grossly impinge on the right to reproductive freedom.
- However, In Javed & Ors vs State of Haryana & Ors (2003), the Court upheld a law that disqualified persons with more than two children from contesting in local body elections.
- But the present UP Bill is far more disproportionate, therefore, the judgment in Javed can no longer be seen as good law. The UP government will likely argue that there is no violation of privacy here because any decision on sterilisation would be voluntary.
- But, as we ought to by now know, making welfare conditional is a hallmark of coercion.
- Therefore, the proposed law will fall foul of a proportionality analysis.

## 4. Negative consequences:

- An already skewed sex ratio may be compounded by families aborting a daughter in the hope of having a son with a view to conforming to the two-child norm.
- The law could also lead to a proliferation in sterilisation camps, a practice that the Supreme Court has previously deprecated.
- In Devika Biswas vs Union of India (2016), the Court pointed to how these camps invariably have a disparate impact on minorities and other vulnerable groups.

## Way Forward:

- Experiences from other States in India show us that there are more efficacious and alternative measures available to control the growth of population, including processes aimed at improving public health and access to Education.

## 2. Sedition Law and its Discontents

### Why in News?

- The CJI is now convinced that sedition law (IPC 124A) is being misused by the authorities to trample upon citizens' fundamental rights of free speech and liberty.

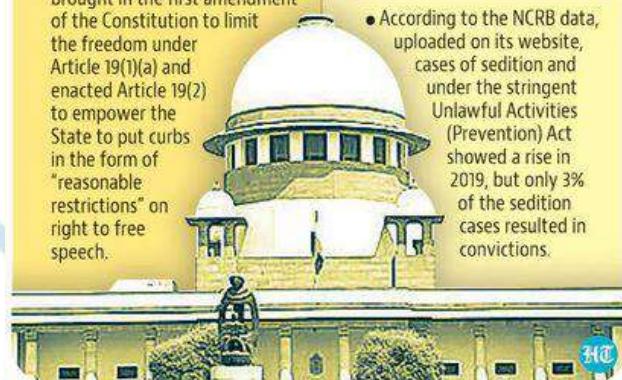
### What does Section 124A of the IPC say?

- The section deals with the offence of sedition, a term that covers speech or writing, or any form of visible representation, which brings the government into hatred or contempt, or excites disaffection towards the government, or attempts to do so.
- It is punishable with three years in prison or a life term.
- "Disaffection", it says, includes disloyalty and feelings of enmity.
- However, it also says expressing disapproval of government measures or actions, with a view to getting them changed by lawful means, without promoting hatred or disaffection or contempt towards the government will not come under this section.

## Contentious history

Section 124 A of the IPC penalises sedition as punishable with either imprisonment ranging from 3 yrs to a lifetime, a fine, or both

- Sedition law was introduced by the British in 1870, and almost dropped from the Constitution in 1948
- The word "sedition" disappeared from the Constitution on November 26, 1949 and Article 19 (1)(a) gave absolute freedom of speech and expression. However, Section 124A continued to stay in IPC.
- In 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru brought in the first amendment of the Constitution to limit the freedom under Article 19(1)(a) and enacted Article 19(2) to empower the State to put curbs in the form of "reasonable restrictions" on right to free speech.
- In its judgment in the Kedar Nath case in 1962, a Constitution bench upheld the validity of the sedition law. The bench held that Section 124A only penalised words that reveal an intent or tendency to disturb law and order or that seem to incite violence. This definition has been taken as precedent for all matters pertaining to section 124A ever since.
- According to the NCRB data, uploaded on its website, cases of sedition and under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act showed a rise in 2019, but only 3% of the sedition cases resulted in convictions.



### What is its Origin?

- Colonial past: Sedition was introduced in the penal code in 1870, a decade after the Indian Penal Code came into force.
- It was a colonial law directed against strong criticism of the British administration.
- Putting curb on Freedom fighters: Its most famous victims included Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.
- Gandhi called it "the prince among the political sections of the IPC designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen".

### Is it constitutionally valid?

- Violative of FRs: Two high courts had found it unconstitutional after Independence, as it violated the freedom of speech and expression.

- Reasonable restrictions: The Constitution was amended to include ‘public order’ as one of the ‘reasonable restrictions’ on which free speech could be abridged by law.
- Kedar Nath Case: Thereafter, the Supreme Court, in *Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar* (1962) upheld its validity.
- At the same time, it limited its application to acts that involve “intention or tendency to create disorder” or incitement to violence.
- Thus, even strongly worded remarks, as long as they do not excite disloyalty and enmity, or incite violence, are not an offence under this section.

## Why the Controversy Now?

- Frequent use: In recent times, the resort to this section is seen as disturbingly frequent.
- **Curbing Dissent:** Activists, cartoonists and intellectuals have been arrested under this section, drawing criticism from liberals that it is being used to suppress dissent and silence critics. Misuse for propaganda: Authorities and the police who invoke this section defend the measure as a necessary step to prevent public disorder and anti-national activities.
- **Irrelevance:** Many of them have also been detained under the National Security Act and UAPA.

## What is Being Debated about it?

- Liberals and rights activists have been demanding the scrapping of Section 124A.
- It is argued that the provision is “overbroad”, i.e., it defines the offence in wide terms threatening the liberty of citizens.
- The Law Commission has also called for a reconsideration of the section.
- It has pointed that Britain abolished it more than a decade ago and raised the question of whether a provision introduced by the British to put down the freedom struggle should continue to be law in India.
- Some argue that a presumption of constitutionality does not apply to pre-constitutional laws as those laws have been made by foreign legislature or bodies.

## What has the Apex Court Observed?

- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud had flagged the indiscriminate use of the sedition law against people who aired their grievances about the Government’s COVID Management.
- People have been charged even for seeking help to gain medical access, equipment, drugs and oxygen cylinders, especially during the second wave of the pandemic.
- Justice U.U. Lalit, in his recent judgment, quashed a sedition case against a person for his alleged remarks about the PM and the Union Government.

## Way Forward:

- The time is long past when the mere criticism of governments was sufficient to constitute sedition.
- The right to utter honest and reasonable criticism is a source of strength to a community rather than a weakness, the CJI has recorded.

## 3. Kisan Sarathi

### Why in News?

- The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) has recently celebrated its 93rd foundation day and on the occasion, the Kisan Sarthi platform was launched.

### Highlights:

- It was jointly launched by the Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and the Union Minister of Electronics & Information Technology.
- It is a digital platform to facilitate farmers to get 'right information at right time' in their desired language.
- It will help farmers to interact and avail personalised advisories on agriculture and allied areas directly from the respective scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs).
- Farmers can also learn new farming methods using it.
- Indian Council of Agriculture Research
- It is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- It was established in July 1929 and was formerly known as the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research.
- It is headquartered at New Delhi.
- It is the apex body for coordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country.

### Krishi Vigyan Kendra:

- It is an agricultural extension center in India. Usually associated with a local agricultural university, these centers serve as the ultimate link between the ICAR and farmers, and aim to apply agricultural research in a practical, localized setting.
- It is an integral part of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).
- The first KVK was established in 1974 at Puducherry.

- The mandate of KVK is technology assessment and demonstration for its application and capacity development. KVKs also produce quality technological products (seed, planting material, bio-agents, livestock) and make it available to farmers.
- The KVK scheme is 100% financed by the Government of India and the KVKs are sanctioned to Agricultural Universities, ICAR institutes, related Government Departments and Non Government Organizations (NGOs) working in Agriculture.
- KVKs act as a bridge between the laboratories and farmland. According to the Government, these are crucial to fulfilling the target of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

#### **4. UMANG App**

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

- The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) has recently enabled map services in UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) App.

##### **Highlights:**

- It is a Government of India all-in-one single, unified, secure, multi-channel, multi-lingual, multi-service mobile app.
- It provides access to high impact services of various organizations of Centre and States. Presently it has 2000+ services.
- The aim of UMANG is to fast-track mobile governance in India.
- It enables 'Ease of Living' for Citizens by providing easy access to a plethora of Indian government services ranging from – Healthcare, Finance, Education, Housing, Energy, Agriculture, Transport to even Utility and Employment and Skills.
- The key partners of UMANG are Employee Provident Fund Organization, Direct Benefit Transfer scheme departments, Employee State Insurance Corporation, Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Staff Selection Commission (SSC).
- It was developed by the National e-Governance Division (NeGD), Ministry of Electronics & IT. It is a 'Digital India' initiative.
- The international version called 'UMANG International' was launched in 2020 to mark three years of UMANG. The international version is for select countries that include USA, UK, Canada, Australia, UAE, Netherlands, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.
- It will help Indian international students, NRIs and Indian tourists abroad, to avail Government of India services, anytime.

- It will also help in taking India to the world through ‘Indian Culture’ services available on UMANG and create interest amongst foreign tourists to visit India.
- It attained ‘Best m-Government service’ award at the 6th World Government Summit held at Dubai, UAE in February 2018.

## 5. Addressing the issues of undertrials

### Why in News?

- After the death of Stan Swamy, questions about the conditions of jails and treatment of the incarcerated have been Raised Anew.

### Issue of Deaths of Prisoners:

- The National Crime Records Bureau data reports the death of over 1,800 prisoners in the year 2018. An estimated 70 per cent of prison inmates are undertrials, so it can be safely assumed that a large percentage of those dying in prison are not convicted of any offence.
- Despite the promise of Article 21, that no person shall be denied life or liberty except by the due process of law, the NCRB data reveals that the number of those dying in prison as they await their trials is only going up.

### How Prisoners are Subjected to Additional Torture:

- Overcrowding, delayed medical attention, unhygienic conditions and malnutrition exist in all Indian prisons. Given that incarcerated people are unable to access medical facilities and healthy food, it is the responsibility of the State and the judiciary to ensure that they are only deprived of their liberty and are not exposed to any additional torture in the form of medical deprivation, unhygienic conditions, bad or inadequate food etc.
- Yet, thousands are dying every year and the prison authorities are not made accountable.

### Way Forward:

- Acts of extreme neglect that could result in the death of inmates should be acknowledged as extrajudicial torture and made an offence.
- The Constitutional Bench judgment in Sunil Batra (I) v. Delhi Administration (1978), held that “the humane thread of jail jurisprudence that runs right through is that no prison authority enjoys amnesty for unconstitutionality”.
- This judgment has been followed by several similar judgments by various high courts for the improvement of prison conditions. The collective interest of the community is not best served by subjecting undertrials to torturous and medieval prison conditions.

- The collective interest of the community also demands an introspection by the judicial institution on whether it is really in the public interest to make jail the rule and bail the Exception.

## 6. Indian Labour Conference

### Why in News?

- Recently, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (labour union) wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to convene the Indian Labour Conference (ILC).

### Highlights:

- ILC also known as the 'labour parliament' of the country formed on the lines of International Labour Conference is the apex level tripartite (Government, Employers and Workers) consultative committee in the Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- It argued that since Indian Parliament has ratified Convention No 144 of the International Labour Organisation, it is now India's legal obligation to hold the ILC in order to strengthen the tripartite mechanism. International Labour Conference also known as International Parliament of Labour is a conference organized by ILO every year.
- Each member State is represented by a delegation consisting of two government delegates, an employer delegate, a worker delegate, and their respective advisers.
- The first meeting of the ILC (then called Tripartite National Labour Conference) was held in 1942 and so far a total of 46 Sessions have been held. The most recent session of which was held in 2015. The agenda of the ILC is finalised by the Standing Labour Committee which is again a tripartite body after detailed discussions. To advise the Government on the issues concerning the working class of the country. Central Trade Union Organisations, Central Organisations of employers, all State Governments and Union Territories and Central Ministries/Departments concerned with the agenda items, are the members of the ILC.

## 7. Dragon Fruit

### Why in News?

- Recently, India exported its first consignment of dragon fruit from a farmer of Maharashtra to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

### Highlights:

- The dragon fruit (*Hylocereus undatus*) is indigenous to the Americas. It is a member of the cacti family.

- It is also known as ‘Pitaya’, ‘Pitahaya’, strawberry pear, noblewoman and queen of the night throughout the world. In India, it is also known as ‘Kamalam’.
- It is hardy and grows in diverse climatic conditions with varied soils, especially in the semi-arid and arid regions of India.
- It prefers slightly acidic soil and can tolerate some salts in soil too.
- Flowering and fruiting of dragon fruits coincide with the monsoon season in India (June to November).
- Its flowers are hermaphrodites (male and female organs in the same flower) in nature and open at night.
- The plant sustains yield for more than 20 years, is high in nutraceutical properties (having medicinal effects) and good for value-added processing industries.
- It is a rich source of vitamins and minerals.
- The dragon fruit was introduced to home gardens in India in the 1990s.
- The low maintenance and high profitability of dragon fruits has attracted the farming community throughout India.
- This has led to a steep increase in dragon fruit cultivation in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as in many north eastern states.
- The country produces approximately 12,000 tonnes of the fruit every year.
- The Government of Maharashtra has taken the initiative to promote dragon fruit cultivation in different areas of the state by providing good quality planting material and subsidies for its cultivation through the Mission on Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).

## 8. Vintage Vehicles Policy

### Why in News?

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH) has made amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989. It has some special provisions for vintage vehicles that are over 50 years old.

### Highlights:

- All two- and four-wheelers that are 50+ years old and have been maintained in their original form and which have not undergone any substantial overhaul, shall be defined as Vintage Motor Vehicles.

- These will not be driven for regular and commercial purposes and will have to get a special registration.
- Other than that, the owners can use their vintage cars in any way they wish - such as an exhibition, or a ride from time to time.
- The new registration rules say vehicles that are already registered can retain their original Registration Mark and fresh registrations will take place under a unique VA (Vintage) series.
- Registration information will be on the Parivahan portal of the MORTH.
- The registration certificate will be valid for 10 years, renewable thereafter.
- Sale and purchase of vehicles registered as vintage is permissible; the buyer and seller have to inform their respective State Transport Authorities.
- Vintage vehicles are insulated from the scrappage policy. If a vehicle is more than 15 years old but within 50 years, the owner can continue to keep it by passing fitness tests every five years.

### **Advantages:**

- No existing rules for regulating the process of registration across different states for Vintage Vehicle. The new rules will provide a hassle-free process for Fresh Registration.
- This is aimed at preserving and promoting the heritage of old vehicles in India.

## **9. Dying Declaration**

### **Why in News?**

- A special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court has recently awarded two policemen life sentences for the custodial death of a murder accused on the basis of the ‘Dying Declaration’ made by the victim prior to his death.

### **Highlights:**

- It is the premier investigating police agency in India. It functions under the superintendence of the Dept. of Personnel, Ministry of Personnel, Pension & Public Grievances - which falls under the prime minister’s office.
- Section-32(1) of Indian Evidence Act, 1872, defines dying declaration as a statement written or verbal of relevant facts made by a person, who is dead. It is the statement of a person who had died explaining the circumstances of his death.
- This is based on the maxim ‘nemo mariturus presumuntur mentri’ i.e. a man will not meet his maker with a lie on his Mouth.

- The general rule under Section 60 of the Act is that all oral evidence must be direct - he heard it, saw it or perceived it.
- The grounds of admission under a dying declaration have been based on two broad rules:
- The victim being generally the only principal eye-witness to the crime.
- The sense of impending death, which creates a sanction equal to the obligation of an oath in a court. Anyone can record the dying declaration of the deceased as per law. However, a dying declaration recorded by a Judicial or Executive Magistrate will add an additional strength to the prosecution case.
- A dying declaration may in several cases be the “primary piece of evidence to prove the genesis of occurrence”.
- The only requirement for such a declaration to be held perfectly accountable in court is for the victim to volunteer the statement and be of conscious mind.
- The person who records the dying declaration must be satisfied that the victim is in a fit state of mind. Though a dying declaration is entitled to great weight, the accused has no power of cross-Examination. This is the reason the courts have always insisted that the dying declaration be of such a nature as to inspire full confidence of the court in its correctness.
- The courts are on guard to check if the statement of the deceased was a result of either tutoring, prompting or a product of imagination.

## 10. Gaon Buras

### Why in News?

- The Assam Cabinet has recently announced that Gaon Buras, village-level functionaries of the district administration, will be called ‘Gaon Pradhans’.

### Highlights:

- The Government has reasoned that a number of young men (and women) become Gaon Buras, and thus, the word ‘Bura’ (meaning old in Assamese) is no longer appropriate.
- Gaon Buras are the village headmen. They are the eyes, nose, ear of the district administration at the village level.
- There are about 6,000 Gaon Buras in Assam. Women ‘Gaon Buras’ are not very common and they take over, if their husbands die.
- Maintaining a population register of the village, maintaining land records, helping police investigate crime, etc. It involves now maintaining a log of Covid-19 cases in the village, organising vaccination camps, functioning as booth-level officers during elections etc.

- To issue a ‘Gaon Bura certificate’, a certificate that determines the permanent residency in a particular village. It became crucial during the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for women to establish linkages with their husbands and parents.

## 11. Getting India's Military Jointness Formula Right

### Why in News?

- The Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat’s recent description of the Indian Air Force (IAF) as a supporting arm and the IAF chief Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria’s rebuttal highlights turbulent journey marking the reorganisation process of the armed forces.

### Issues before IAF:

- The IAF is warning against splitting it into packets.
- Reports suggest that counting even ageing aircraft, the IAF is 25% short on fighter squadrons.
- A pan service shortage of about 400 pilots, almost 10% of their authorised strength, further aggravates this.
- Therefore, the IAF has a point when it warns against splitting assets, for, there may be nothing much to split.

### Way Forward:

- **Confidence Building:** A common understanding of the nuances of military airpower is the key.
- With the experience of operating almost every kind of aircraft the IAF operates, the naval leadership understands air power.
- This applies to the Indian Army too, in its own way.
- Confidence needs to be developed that rightly staffed apex joint organisations can draw up professional operational plans for air power.
- Enhancing military education: Confidence building will need some effort in the short term towards enhancing professional military education though, at the staff level.
- Analysis before implementation: Major reorganisations must strictly follow the sequence of written concepts, their refinement through consultation, simulation or table top war gaming, field evaluation and final analysis before implementation.
- This would help address command and control, asset adequacy, individual service roles, operational planning under new circumstances and the adequacy of joint structures.

- Who gets to lead what also matters.
- The Western Command between the Indian Army and the IAF, the Northern Command with the Indian Army, Maritime Command with the Indian Navy and the Air Defence Command with the IAF may be an acceptable formula.

### Why Jointness?

- With dwindling budgets, a steadily deteriorating security situation and the march of technology, the armed forces understand the need to synergise.

### Challenges:

- Challenges in co-existence: Different services do not co-exist well where they are colocated.
- Bitter fights over land, buildings, facilities, etc. harms optimal operational synergising.
- Allocation challenge: Then there is the issue of giving each other the best, or of wanting to be with each other.
- Lack of operational charter: The Andaman and Nicobar Command suffered from the lack of a substantial operational charter, and the services not positioning appropriate personnel or resources there.
- Lack of interest in joint tenure: As a joint tenure did not benefit career, no one strove for it.
- The U.S., when faced with the same problem, made joint tenures mandatory for promotions.

### Steps to be taken:

- **Security Strategy:** We need a comprehensive National Security Strategy to guide the services develop capacities required in their respective domains.
- **Professional Education:** We need to transform professional education and inter-service employment to nurture genuine respect for others.
- **Mutual resolution of Difference:** The armed forces must resolve their differences among themselves, as the politicians or bureaucrats cannot do it.
- **Quality Staff:** Good quality staff, in adequate numbers, at apex joint organisations, will help to reassure individual services and those in the field that they are in safe hands.
- **Tailored Approach:** There is need for the acceptance of the fact that what works for other countries need not work for us.

## 12. Assam-Mizoram Boundary Dispute

### Why in News?

- Five Assam police personnel were killed in an exchange of fire with the Mizoram Police after the protracted border row between the two northeastern States took a violent turn.

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

### **Creation of New States:**

- But in 1933, the boundary between Lushai Hills and the then princely state of Manipur was demarcated – it said the Manipur boundary began from the trijunction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district of Assam and Manipur state.
- The Mizos do not accept this demarcation, and point to the 1875 boundary which was drawn in consultation with their chiefs. In the decades after Independence, states and UTs were carved out of Assam – Nagaland (1963), Arunachal Pradesh (UT 1972, formerly NEFA), Meghalaya (UT 1972), Mizoram (UT 1972).

### **A matter of Perception:**

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

## **13. Telangana's Dalit Bandhu Scheme**

### **Why in News?**

- Telangana CM has recently informed to spend Rs 80,000 crore to Rs 1 lakh crore for Dalit Bandhu Scheme, touted as the country's biggest direct benefit transfer scheme, to empower Dalits across the state.

## Dalit Bandhu Scheme:

- Dalit Bandhu is the latest Flagship programme of the Telangana Government.
- It is envisioned as a welfare scheme for empowering Dalit families and enable entrepreneurship among them through a direct benefit transfer of Rs 10 lakh per family.
- This is, once implemented on the ground, going to be the biggest cash transfer scheme in the country.
- Apart from monetary assistance, the government plans to create a corpus called the Dalit Security Fund permanently to support the beneficiary in the event of any adversities.
- This fund will be managed by the district collector concerned, along with a committee of beneficiaries. The beneficiary would be issued an identity card with an electronic chip, which will help the government monitor the progress of the scheme.

## Where is the Scheme being Implemented?

- The CM decided to implement it on a pilot basis in the Huzurabad Assembly constituency.
- Based on the experiences of implementation in Huzurabad, the scheme will be rolled out across the state in a phased manner. Officials were asked to visit Dalit colonies and interact with Dalit families to find out their views and opinions before preparing guidelines for the scheme. The pilot project will focus on monitoring the implementation of the scheme, evaluating the results, and also creating a safety fund for the beneficiaries with the Government's participation.

## How is Dalitha Bandhu being implemented?

- The CM has ensured that the Dalit Bandhu is free.
- The governments in the past came out with some schemes and asked for bank guarantees.
- This is not a loan. There is no need to repay it. There is no chance of any middlemen in this.
- To promote Dalit entrepreneurship, the government has decided to start a system of reservation for Dalits in sectors where the government issues licences.
- The government will provide reservations for Dalits in issuing licenses for wine shops, medical shops, fertilizer shops, rice mills, etc.

## 14. NEET's All India Quota, and OBC & EWS Reservation

### Why in News?

- The Union government has approved reservations for the OBC and EWS (Economically Weaker Section) categories within the All India Quota (AIQ) for NEET, the uniform entrance examination for medical and dental colleges across the country.

## What is NEET?

- The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is the entrance examination for entry to all undergraduate (NEET-UG) and postgraduate (NEET-PG) medical and dental courses in the country.
- Until 2016, the All India Pre-Medical Test (AIPMT) was the national-level entrance examination for medical colleges.
- State governments used to hold separate entrance tests for seats that were not contested at an all-India level. NEET was held for the first time in 2003, but discontinued the following year. On April 13, 2016, the Supreme Court upheld the newly inserted section 10-D of the Indian Medical Council Act.
- This provided for a uniform entrance examination to all medical educational institutions at the undergraduate level and postgraduate level in Hindi, English and various other languages.
- Since then, NEET has been the uniform entrance test for medical courses across the country.

## What is the All-India Quota?

- Although the same examination is held across the country, a chunk of the seats in state medical/dental colleges is reserved for students domiciled in their respective states.
- The remaining seats — 15% in UG and 50% in PG — are surrendered by the states to the All India Quota.
- The AIQ scheme was introduced in 1986 under the directions of the Supreme Court to provide for domicile-free, merit-based opportunities to students from any state to study in a good medical college in any other state.
- A student domiciled in Uttar Pradesh, for example, may be eligible for admission to a seat in a state government medical college in West Bengal, provided she scores high enough in the national merit list. If her score is not high enough for AIQ, she may still hope for admission under the state quota in her home state.
- In deemed/central universities, ESIC, and Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), 100% seats are reserved under the AIQ.

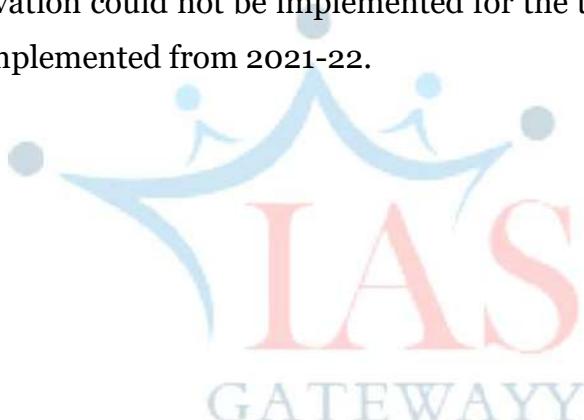
## What was the Reservation Policy followed so far?

- Until 2007, no reservation was implemented within the All-India Quota for medical admission. On January 31, 2007, in *Abhay Nath v University of Delhi and Others*, the Supreme Court directed that reservation of 15% for Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes be introduced in the AIQ.

- The same year, the government passed the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2007 providing for 27% reservation to OBC students in central government institutions. While state government medical and dental colleges provide reservations to OBCs in seats outside the All India Quota, this benefit was so far not extended to seats allocated under the AIQ in these state colleges.
- The 10% EWS quota under the Constitution (One Hundred And Third Amendment) Act, 2019, too, has been implemented in central educational institutions, but not in the NEET AIQ for state institutions.

### What led to the decision?

- The denial of OBC and EWS reservations has been the subject of protests for years.
- In July last year, the Madras High Court ruled that OBC students too can avail reservation in the AIQ.
- It held that the reservation could not be implemented for the then academic year for want of time, and can be implemented from 2021-22.



## 4. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### 1. Centre Proposes Simpler Drone Rules

#### Why in News?

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation on Wednesday released Draft Drone Rules, 2021, for public consultation until August 5.

#### About the News:

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation on Wednesday released Draft Drone Rules, 2021, for public consultation until August 5.
- The rules will replace the Unmanned Aircraft System Rules, 2021, notified on March 12, 2021.

#### What is a Drone?

- Drone is a layman terminology for Unmanned Aircraft (UA). There are three subsets of Unmanned Aircraft- Remotely Piloted Aircraft, Autonomous Aircraft and Model Aircraft.
- Remotely Piloted Aircraft consists of remote pilot station(s), the required command and control links and any other components, as specified in the type design.
- Besides combat use, drones are used for a range of purposes like package delivery, in agriculture (spraying pesticides etc), monitoring environmental changes, aerial photography, and during search and relief operations, among others.

#### What are the New Rules Proposed?

- The number of forms to be filled to seek authorisation before operating a drone has been reduced from 25 to six, according to a statement issued by the Ministry.
- While most drones will need a unique identification number, a certificate of airworthiness, a remote pilot licence for the person controlling the drone and prior permission, no such approvals will be required for drones used for research and development by entities and educational institutions recognised by the Central government, State governments or Union Territory Administrations, start-ups recognised by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade and drone manufacturers having a Goods and Service Tax Identification Number.
- Unlike the previous rules, which required drone operators to have a principal place of business within India, and the chairman and at least two-thirds of its directors were required to be citizens of India, in the new proposed rules there are no such restrictions for foreign-owned companies registered in India.

- However, import of drones and drone components will be regulated by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.
- Drones will also not need security clearance before registration or licence issuance.

### Present Rules for Drone Regulations in India:

- **Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2020:**

- ✓ It is a set of rules notified by the government that aims to regulate the production, import, trade, ownership, establishment of the drone ports (airports for drones) and operation of UAS.
- ✓ It also seeks to create a framework for drones use by businesses.

### National Counter Rogue Drones Guidelines 2019:

- The guidelines had suggested a number of measures to counter rogue drones depending on the vitality of assets being protected.
- For places of critical national importance, the rules called for deployment of a model that consists of primary and passive detection means like radar, Radio Frequency (RF) detectors, electro-optical and infrared cameras.
- In addition to this, soft kill and hard kill measures like RF jammers, Global Positioning System (GPS) spoofers, lasers, and drone catching nets were also suggested to be installed.

### Other Initiatives:

- **Directed-Energy Weapon:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed two anti-drone Directed-Energy Weapon (DEW) systems, with a 10-kilowatt laser to engage aerial targets at 2-km range and a compact tripod-mounted one with a 2-kilowatt laser for a 1-km range. But they are yet to be productionized in large numbers.
- **Smash-2000 Plus:** The armed forces are now also importing a limited number of other systems like Israeli 'Smash-2000 Plus' computerized fire control and electro-optic sights, which can be mounted on guns and rifles to tackle the threat from small hostile drones in both day and night conditions.

## 2. Renowned Political Personalities on list of Spyware Targets

### Why in News?

- Renowned political personalities like former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, former election commissioner Ashok Lavasa, election strategist Prashant Kishor, Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee and two Union Ministers appeared on a leaked list of “potential” or actual targets for spying by Israeli company NSO's Pegasus spyware.

### What are Cyber Attacks?

- It is a malicious and deliberate attempt by an individual or organization to breach the information system of another individual or organization.
- There are various types of cyberattacks like malware, phishing, denial of service attacks, etc.

### Different Types of Malware:

- Malware** is the shortened form of malicious software. It is the general term for any program that is designed to damage, disrupt, or hack a device. Malware includes viruses, Ransomware, spyware, Trojan, adware, etc.
- Viruses** are malicious pieces of code that infect your device without your knowledge. They can affect your device's performance, delete files, send spam, and even corrupt your hard drive. They multiply and spread to other machines, often before you're aware of an infection.
- Ransomware** is malicious programs that block access to your device until you pay a ransom fee to its creator. It is often very difficult and expensive to remove.
- Spyware** is software that spies on you, tracking your internet activities in order to send advertising (Adware) back to your system.
- Worm** is a program that replicates itself and destroys data and files on the computer. Worms work to “eat” the system operating files and data files until the drive is empty.
- Trojan** is a type of malware that are written with the purpose of discovering your financial information, taking over your computer's system resources, and in larger systems creating a “denial-of-service attack” which is making a machine or network resource unavailable to those attempting to reach it. Example: Google, AOL, Yahoo or your business network becoming unavailable.
- Phishing** is a cybercrime in which a target or targets are contacted by email, telephone, or text message. This is done by someone posing as a legitimate institution to lure individuals into providing sensitive data such as personally identifiable information, banking and credit card details, and passwords.

## Steps taken by the Government to Spread Awareness about Cyber-Crimes:

- Online cybercrime reporting portal has been launched to enable complainants to report complaints pertaining to Child Pornography/Child Sexual Abuse Material, rape/gang rape imageries or sexually explicit content.
- A scheme for establishment of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has been established to handle issues related to cybercrime in the country in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. Establishment of National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) for protection of critical information infrastructure in the country. All organizations providing digital services have been mandated to report cyber security incidents to CERT-In expeditiously.
- Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) has been launched for providing detection of malicious programmes and free tools to remove such programmes. Formulation of Crisis Management Plan for countering cyber-attacks and cyber terrorism.

## 3. SC reserves order on Telecos pleas in AGR Case

### Why in News?

- The Supreme Court, recently reserved orders on pleas made by major telecoms such as Voda-Idea and Airtel for a chance to place their grievances about arithmetical errors in Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues before the Department of Telecom (DoT).

### What is AGR?

- Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) is the **usage and licensing fee** that telecom operators are charged by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT).
- It is divided into **spectrum usage charges and licensing fees**, pegged between 3-5 percent and 8 percent respectively.
- **Spectrum usage charges** is the charge that is required to be paid by the licensees providing mobile access services, as a percentage of their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR).
- The spectrum slabs/rates for the same are notified by the Government from time to time.

### How AGR is Calculated?

- The definition of AGR has been under litigation for 14 years.
- While telecom companies argued that it should comprise revenue from telecom services, the DoT's stand was that the AGR should include all revenue earned by an operator, including that from non-core telecom operations.

- The AGR directly impacts the outgo from the pockets of telcos to the DoT as it is used to calculate the levies payable by operators.
- Currently, telecom operators pay 8% of the AGR as licence fee, while spectrum usage charges (SUC) vary between 3-5% of AGR.

### What is the Issue?

- An October 2019 judgment of the court in the AGR issue originally wanted the telcos to make the repayments in three months. The court had concluded that the private telecom sector had long reaped the fruits of the Centre's liberalized mode of payment by revenue sharing regime.
- However, the Bench softened its stance somewhat to allow the companies a "reasonable time" of a decade to pay their dues in "equal yearly installments". The court said it changed its mind taking into consideration the financial stress and the involvement of the banking sector.
- The concession is granted only on the condition that the dues shall be paid punctually within the time stipulated by this court. Even a single default will attract the dues along with interest, penalty and interest on penalty at the rate specified in the agreement.

### What are the Series of Directions given by SC?

- In a series of directions to the telcos, the court said they shall raise no dispute nor will they be any reassessment of the dues.
- The telecom operators would make the payment of 10% of the total dues as demanded by Department of Telecom by March 31, 2021.
- The yearly installments would commence from April 1, 2021 up to March 32, 2031. The installments would be paid by March 31 every year.
- The Managing Director/Chairman or other authorized officer should give an undertaking within four weeks, to make payment of arrears.
- The telcos shall keep alive the existing bank guarantees they had submitted regarding the spectrum until the payment is made.
- In the event of any default in making payment of annual installments, interest would become payable as per the agreement along with penalty and interest on penalty automatically without reference to court. Besides, it would be punishable for contempt of court.
- Compliance of the court order should be reported by the telcos and the telecom department every year on April 7.

- Besides, the court has referred to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) a series of questions on whether “deferred/default payment installments of spectrum acquisition cost can be termed to be operational dues besides AGR dues”.
- The court wants the tribunal to decide whether a scarce natural resource like spectrum can be used without pay of requisite dues. The court wants the NCLT to decide the issue within the “outer limits of Two Months”.

### **What are issues with Telcos on paying Huge Amount?**

- Telecom companies now owe the government not just the shortfall in AGR for the past 14 years but also an interest on that amount along with penalty and interest on the penalty.
- While the exact amount telcos will need to shell out is not clear, as in a government affidavit filed in the top court, the DoT had calculated the outstanding license fee to be over Rs. 92,000 crore.
- However, the actual payout can go up to Rs. 1.4 lakh crore as the government is likely to also raise a demand for shortfall in SUC along with interest and penalty.
- Of the total amount, it is estimated that the actual dues is about 25%, while the remaining amount is interest and penalties.

### **What are the Concerns?**

- The telecom industry is reeling under a debt of over Rs. 4 lakh crore and has been seeking a relief package from the Government.
- Even the Government has on various occasions admitted that the sector is indeed undergoing stress and needs Support.
- Giving a ray of hope to the telecom companies, the government recently announced setting up of a Committee of Secretaries to examine the financial stress in the sector, and recommend measures to mitigate it.

### **Way Forward:**

- To enhance the growth of the telecom sector, improve the quality of service, and generate resources for the Telecom Service Providers (TSPs), a new infrastructural policy is the need of the hour.
- The government needs to provide an enabling environment for telecom operators. In order to achieve that, a long-term vision plan must be made accordingly.
- Enhanced accessibility of the broadband services will enable the digital empowerment of India; hence adequate steps must be taken by the government to strengthen the overall telecom sector.

## 4. Delhi HC Notice to Centre on Fresh Plea against IT Rules

### Why in News?

- The Delhi High Court recently issued notice to the Centre on a fresh petition against certain provisions of the IT Rules 2021 that claimed they give excessive power to social media platforms to voluntarily remove content and place users under constant surveillance.

### About the News:

- A petition has challenged Rules 3 and 4 of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, brought into force from February 25, 2021.
- The Rules have been made in gross disregard of the fundamental rights of the petitioner, guaranteed under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India, 1950, who is a user of Social Media Intermediaries (SMIs) such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc.
- The rules have given private SMIs the power to entertain and act upon complaints received by private persons, as well as on a voluntary basis to delete access to any information available on their platform if the conditions prescribed in Rule 3(1)(b) and 3(1)(d) are met.
- The petition stated, was against the judgment of the Supreme Court in Shreya Singhal v. Union of India case, in which it was held that intermediaries cannot be given the power to judge as to which requests for taking down any information are legitimate and which are not.
- While giving powers in excess of those given under the parent legislation (IT Act) to voluntarily remove access to information that does not conform to Rule 3(1)(b), the Impugned Rules have allowed the SMIs to place the users of these platforms under constant surveillance, which is a gross breach of the right to privacy.
- It added that the rules also are unclear on the basis and mechanism by which the social media platforms can voluntarily take action “without peeping into all conversations that take place over the SMI platform”.
- Communications over WhatsApp are end-to-end encrypted, meaning that only the two users communicating with each other can view the messages and no other third party has access to the same. In order to voluntarily act under the Impugned Rules, it would empower WhatsApp to constantly watch all communications taking place on the platform.
- The High Court is seized of several other petitions in connection with the new IT Rules filed by different online news platforms and individuals.

## Overview of the New Rules:

- It mandates a grievance redressal system for over the top (OTT) and digital portals in the country. This is necessary for the users of social media to raise their grievance against the misuse of social media.
- Significant social media firms have to appoint a chief compliance officer and have a nodal contact person who can be in touch with law enforcement agencies 24/7.
- **A grievance officer:** Social media platforms will also have to name a grievance officer who shall register the grievance within 24 hours and dispose of it in 15 days.
- **Removal of content:** If there are complaints against the dignity of users, particularly women – about exposed private parts of individuals or nudity or sexual act or impersonation etc – social media platforms will be required to remove that within 24 hours after a complaint is made.
- **A monthly report:** They also will have to publish a monthly report about the number of complaints received and the status of redressal.
- There will be three levels of regulation for news publishers — self-regulation, a self-regulatory body, headed by a retired judge or an eminent person, and oversight from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, including codes of practices and a grievance committee.

## What is a significant Social Media Intermediary and Benefits obtained under it?

- Social media companies with more than 50 lakh registered users will be considered ‘significant social media intermediaries’, as per the new norms.

## What happens in case of Non Compliance?

- Social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp messenger could face a ban if they do not comply with the new Information Technology rules.
- They also run the risk of losing their status as “intermediaries” and may become liable for criminal action if they do not comply with the revised regulations.

## What are the Concerns being Raised?

- Various industry bodies have written to the government for up to a one-year compliance window, particularly in view of the pandemic.
- Concerns have also been expressed over potential unavailability of ‘safe harbour’ protection given to intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act, under the new rules.

- They have requested a re-think over a clause in the new rules which can lead to imposition of criminal liability upon the employees for non-compliance by intermediaries, asking for it to be dropped in the interest of ease of doing business. Originator traceability mandate in end-to-end encrypted platforms could end up weakening the security architecture of the platform. This could render the entire citizenry susceptible to cyberattacks by hostile actors. Additionally, the extant data retention mandate entailed risking privacy of users in India and abroad in addition to security risks and technical complexities which requires a lot of time for development and testing before integration with the existing ecosystem.

## 4.1. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY SNIPPETS

### 1. Coronavirus variants infecting at a same time

#### Why in News?

- Two different variants of SARS CoV-2 virus have infected a woman at the same time. It is the first such documented case in the world.
- The Belgian woman was infected with both the Alpha (UK) and Beta (South Africa) variant before she ultimately succumbed to the infection.

#### Highlights:

- The instance of an individual getting infected with two variants of a virus at a same time is rare but it is possible. If an individual is exposed to multiple infected persons, they may pick up infection from one or all of them. This harbors multiple strains.
- It is also possible that a new virus can infect an individual when initial one is in incubation period and symptoms have not been shown by the body.
- This is not unique to Covid-19. Such instances have been previously seen in HIV AIDS patients. The threat of multiple infections may depend on severity.

#### Chances of occurrence:

- The chances are low as getting infected from multiple persons is rare. Person picking up infection from multiple sources also occurs in some isolated cases only.
- To identify such cases, genome sequencing has to be performed. If individual is infected with same strain multiple times, only minor changes can be visible.

#### Threats:

- Scientists have stressed that there is no need to worry as all strains are neutralized by vaccine. The cases are too rare to worry for.

- The health concerns of infected individuals will depend on their body immunity, lethal capability of the virus among Many.

## 2. Pegasus Spyware

### Why in News?

- The Wire, an independent news website recently reported that the telephone numbers of some 40 Indian journalists figure snooped upon by an unidentified agency using Pegasus software.

### About:

- The spyware named ‘Pegasus’ is developed by the Israeli cyber arms firm NSO in 2016.
- Pegasus exploited a weakness in WhatsApp’s video-call feature that allowed attackers to inject the spyware on to phones simply by ringing the number of targets’ device. It enters the phone even if the call is not answered.
- Once Pegasus is installed, it can access the targeted users’ private data, including passwords, contact lists, calendar events, text messages, and live voice calls from popular mobile messaging apps.
- It can also turn the phone into a spying device by switching on its camera or microphone.

## 3. Near-Earth Asteroid Scout Mission



### Why in News?

- Last week, NASA announced that its new spacecraft, named NEA Scout, has completed all required tests and has been safely tucked inside the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket.

### For landing on Moon:

- NEA Scout is one of several payloads that will hitch a ride on Artemis I, which is expected to be launched in November.
- Artemis I will be an uncrewed test-flight of the Orion spacecraft and SLS rocket.
- Under the Artemis programme, NASA has aimed to land the first woman on the Moon in 2024 and also establish sustainable lunar exploration programs by 2030.

### What is NEA Scout?

- Near-Earth Asteroid Scout, or NEA Scout, is a small spacecraft, about the size of a big shoebox. Its main mission is to fly by and collect data from a near-Earth asteroid.
- It will also be America’s first interplanetary mission using special solar sail propulsion.

- This type of propulsion is especially useful for small, lightweight spacecraft that cannot carry large amounts of conventional rocket propellant.
- NEA Scout will use stainless steel alloy booms and deploy an aluminium-coated sail measuring 925 square feet.
- The large-area sail will generate thrust by reflecting sunlight.
- Energetic particles of sunlight bounce off the solar sail to give it a gentle, yet constant push.

### How will it Study the Asteroid?

- NEA Scout is equipped with special cameras and can take pictures ranging from 50 cm/pixels to 10 cm/pixels. It can also process the image and reduce the file sizes before sending them to the earth-based Deep Space Network via its medium-gain antenna.
- The spacecraft will take about two years to cruise to the asteroid and will be about 93 million miles away from Earth during the asteroid encounter.
- Why should we study near-Earth asteroids?
- Despite their size, some of these small asteroids could pose a threat to Earth.
- Understanding their properties could help us develop strategies for reducing the potential damage caused in the event of an impact. Scientists will use this data to determine what is required to reduce risk, increase effectiveness, and improve the design and operations of robotic and human space exploration.

## 4. What is Monkey B virus?

**IAS**  
GATEWAYY

### Why in News?

- China has reported the first human death case with the Monkey B virus (BV).

### What is Monkey B virus?

- The virus, initially isolated in 1932, is an alpha herpesvirus enzootic in macaques of the genus Macaca.
- B virus is the only identified old-world-monkey herpes virus that displays severe pathogenicity in humans.
- How is it transmitted?
- The infection can be transmitted via direct contact and exchange of bodily secretions of monkeys and has a fatality rate of 70 per cent to 80 per cent.
- According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Macaque monkeys commonly have this virus, and it can be found in their saliva, feces, urine, or brain or spinal cord tissue.

- The virus may also be found in cells coming from an infected monkey in a lab. B virus can survive for hours on surfaces, particularly when moist.
- Humans can get infected if they are bitten or scratched by an infected monkey.

### Symptoms:

- Symptoms typically start within one month of being exposed to B virus but could appear in as little as three to seven days.
- The first indications of B virus infection are typically flu-like symptoms such as fever and chills, muscle ache, fatigue and headache.
- Following this, a person may develop small blisters in the wound or area on the body that came in contact with the Monkey. Some other symptoms of the infection include shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, Abdominal Pain and Hiccups. As the disease progresses, the virus spreads to and causes inflammation (swelling) of the brain and spinal cord, leading to neurologic and inflammatory symptoms.
- Is there a vaccine against B virus?
- Currently, there are no vaccines that can protect against B virus infection.
- The virus might pose a potential threat to laboratory workers, veterinarians, and others who may be exposed to monkeys or their specimens.
- To date, only one case has been documented of an infected person spreading the B virus to Another Person.

## 5. Akash - NG and MPATGM

### Why in News:

- The Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully flight-tested the New Generation Akash Missile (Akash-NG) and the Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM).

### Highlights:

- In June 2021 a new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile Agni-P (Prime) was successfully test-fired by the DRDO.
- In February 2021 India also successfully test-fired indigenously-developed anti-tank guided missile systems 'Helina' and 'Dhruvastra'.
- It is the Research & Development wing of the Ministry of Defence, Govt of India, with a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies.

- It was established in 1958 after combining the Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).

### About Akash Missile (Akash-NG):

- It is a surface-to-air Missile. It is a new variant of the Akash missile that can strike targets at a distance of around 60 km and fly at a speed of up to Mach 2.5.
- Once deployed, the Akash-NG weapon system will prove to be a force multiplier for the air defence capability of the Indian Air Force. Developed by Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories.
- It is being produced by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL). Akash is India's first indigenously produced medium range Surface to Air missile that can engage multiple targets from multiple directions.
- The missile is unique in the way that it can be launched from mobile platforms like battle tanks or wheeled trucks. It has nearly 90% kill probability.
- The missile is supported by the indigenously developed radar called 'Rajendra'.
- The missile is reportedly cheaper and more accurate than US' Patriot missiles due to its solid-fuel technology and high-tech radars.
- It can engage targets at a speed 2.5 times more than the speed of sound and can detect and destroy targets flying at low, medium and high altitudes.
- The Akash missile system has been designed and developed as part of India's 30-year-old Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
- Man Portable Anti Tank Guided Missile:
- It is an indigenously-developed anti-tank guided missile.

## 6. Antimicrobial Resistance

### Why in News?

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has recently highlighted various measures to address the challenges posed by Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the country.

### Highlights:

- Antimicrobial resistance is the resistance acquired by any microorganism (bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasite, etc.) against antimicrobial drugs (such as antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals, antimalarials, and anthelmintics) that are used to treat infections.

- As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.
- Microorganisms that develop antimicrobial resistance are sometimes referred to as “superbugs”.
- **National Programme on AMR containment:** Launched in 2012. Under this programme, AMR Surveillance Network has been strengthened by establishing labs in State Medical College.
- National Action Plan on AMR: It focuses on One Health approach and was launched in April 2017 with the aim of involving various stakeholder ministries/departments.
- AMR Surveillance and Research Network (AMRSN): It was launched in 2013, to generate evidence and capture trends and patterns of drug resistant infections in the country.
- AMR Research & International Collaboration: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has taken initiatives to develop new drugs /medicines through international collaborations in order to strengthen medical research in AMR.
- ICMR along with Research Council of Norway (RCN) initiated a joint call for research in antimicrobial resistance in 2017.
- ICMR along with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Germany has a joint Indo-German collaboration for research on AMR.
- ICMR has initiated antibiotic stewardship program (AMSP) on a pilot project across India to control misuse and overuse of antibiotics in hospital wards and ICUs.
- DCGI has banned 40 fixed dose combinations (FDCs) which were found inappropriate.
- Integrated One Health Surveillance Network for AMR is to assess the preparedness of Indian Veterinary laboratories to participate in integrated AMR surveillance network.
- ICMR has also created a veterinary standard operating procedure (Vet-SOPs) for enabling comparison of antimicrobial resistance patterns in Animals and Humans.

## 7. FASTags

### Why in News?

- More than 3.54 crore FASTags have been issued in the country, the government has told Parliament recently.

### About:

- The FASTag is a reloadable tag that allows automatic deduction of toll without having to stop for carrying out the cash transaction.

- The tag uses radio frequency identification (RFID) technology and is fixed on the windscreen of the vehicle once active.
- Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) is the use of radio waves to read and capture information stored on a tag attached to an object. A tag can be read from up to several feet away and does not need to be within direct line-of-sight of the reader to be tracked.
- The tag is valid for five years and comes in seven different colours – violet, orange, yellow, green, pink, blue, black. Each colour is assigned to a particular category of vehicles.
- To encourage the use of FASTags, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) refunds 5% of the total monthly transactions.
- Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL) (a company incorporated by National Highways Authority of India) and National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) are implementing this program.
- FASTag is presently operational at both, National and State Highways.

## 8. Forming Regions Around Exoplanets

### Why in News?

- The scientists for the first time have recently spotted a Moon-Forming Region around a planet beyond our solar system, such as Exoplanet.

### Highlights:

- The Scientists detected a disc of swirling material accumulating around two exoplanets seen orbiting a young star called PDS 70.
- The PDS 70 is located a relatively close 370 light years from Earth. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, about 9.5 trillion km.
- It is called a circumplanetary disc, and it is from these that moons are born. The disc around PDS 70c (The Exoplanet), with a diameter about equal to the distance of the Earth to the sun, possesses enough mass to produce up to three moons the size of Earth's moon.
- The PDS 70c orbits its star at 33 times the distance of the Earth from the sun, similar to the planet Neptune in our solar system.
- The orange-coloured star PDS 70, roughly the same mass as our Sun, is about 5 million years old. The two planets are even younger. Both planets are similar (although larger) to Jupiter, a gas giant.
- It was around one of the two planets, called PDS 70c, that a moon-forming disc was observed.

- Both planets are still in their youth and are at a dynamic stage in which they are still acquiring their Atmospheres.
- They used the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) observatory in Chile's Atacama desert. It is the most complex astronomical observatory ever built on Earth.
- Teams from North America, East Asia, and Europe merged projects to develop this breakthrough scientific instrument.
- It uses 66 high-precision dish antennas of two sizes: 54 of them are 12 meters across and 12 of them are 7 meters across.

### **Exoplanets:**

- An exoplanet or extrasolar planet is a planet outside the Solar System. The first confirmation of detection of exoplanets occurred in 1992. More than 4,400 exoplanets have been Discovered till now. Exoplanets are very hard to see directly with telescopes. They are hidden by the bright glare of the stars they orbit. So, astronomers use other ways to detect and study exoplanets such as looking at the effects these planets have on the stars they orbit.

## **9. Chandrayaan-3 Mission**

### **Why in News?**

- ISRO chief K. Sivan has recently said that Chandrayaan-3, India's third mission to Moon, is likely to be launched in 2022.

### **About the Mission:**

- The Chandrayaan-1 Moon Mission, launched in 2008, data indicates that the Moon's poles are home to water.
- Chandrayaan-2, aimed at landing a rover on unchartered Lunar South Pole, was launched in 2019 on board the country's most powerful geosynchronous launch vehicle.
- ISRO is planning to land the Chandrayaan 3 lander at the same location as the Chandrayaan 2 – the lunar South Pole, which is a singularly promising part of the moon's surface.
- It will be a mission repeat of Chandrayaan-2 but will only include a lander and rover similar to that of Chandrayaan-2.
- Unlike its predecessor, Chandrayaan-3 will not have an orbiter.
- The lander for Chandrayaan-3 will have only four throttle-able engines unlike Vikram on Chandrayaan-2 which had five 800 N engines with a fifth one being centrally mounted and with fixed thrust.
- The Chandrayaan-3 lander will also be equipped with a Laser Doppler Velocimeter (LDV).

## 10. Forming Regions Around Exoplanets

### Why in News?

- The scientists for the first time have recently spotted a Moon-Forming Region around a planet beyond our solar system, such as Exoplanet.

### Highlights:

- The Scientists detected a disc of swirling material accumulating around two exoplanets seen orbiting a young star called PDS 70.
- The PDS 70 is located a relatively close 370 light years from Earth. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, about 9.5 trillion km.
- It is called a circumplanetary disc, and it is from these that moons are born. The disc around PDS 70c (The Exoplanet), with a diameter about equal to the distance of the Earth to the sun, possesses enough mass to produce up to three moons the size of Earth's moon.
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## 11. Geo-imaging Satellite EOS-03

### Why in News?

- Geo-imaging satellite for earth observation EOS-03, which would enable near real-time monitoring of natural disasters like floods and cyclones, is scheduled for launch in the third quarter of 2021.

### EOS-03:

- ISRO has realized a geo-imaging satellite, “EOS-03”, for Earth Observation from Geostationary Orbit.
- EOS-03 is capable of imaging the whole country four-five times daily and would enable near real-time monitoring of natural disasters like floods and cyclones.
- In addition to natural disasters, EOS-03 would also enable monitoring of water bodies, crops, vegetation condition, forest cover changes.

### Other developments: Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):

- The first developmental flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2021 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
- The SSLV is a cost-effective, three-stage and all-solid launch vehicle with a payload capability of 500 kg to 500 km planar orbit or 300 kg to Sun-Synchronous Polar Orbit.
- It is ideal for the on-demand, quick turn-around launch of small satellites.
- The major technologies developed as part of SSLV are flexible nozzle control with electro-mechanical actuators for all stages, miniaturized avionics, and a velocity trimming module in the upper stage for precise satellite injection.

## 12. Near-Surface Shear Layer (NSSL)

### Why in News?

- Indian astronomers from Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), and Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, have recently for the first time given the theoretical explanation of the existence of a near-surface shear layer (NSSL) in the Sun.

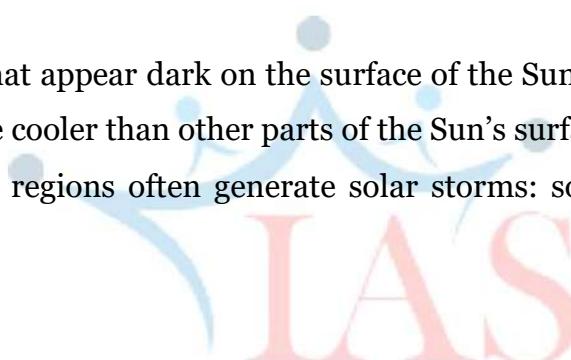
### Highlights:

- Apart from differentiation rotation between equator and poles, the helioseismology has revealed that the Sun has a Near-Surface Shear Layer (NSSL).
- The NSSL is the region very close to the visible solar surface, where there is a change in the rotation profile of the Sun.

- This layer exists very close to the solar surface, within which the angular velocity decreases rapidly with radius.
- This NSSL is thought to play a significant role in defining the nature of large-scale convective patterns that drive the Sun's magnetism.

### About Differential Rotation of the Sun:

- It was long known that the Sun has Differential rotation, which means different parts of the Sun rotate at different speeds.
- The Sun rotates faster at the equator than at the poles.
- Over time, the Sun's differential rotation rates cause its magnetic field to become twisted and tangled.
- The "tangles" in the magnetic field lines can produce very, very strong localized magnetic fields. These localised magnetic fields on the surface of the Sun are active regions where sunspots occur.
- Sunspots are areas that appear dark on the surface of the Sun (photosphere). They appear dark because they are cooler than other parts of the Sun's surface.
- Further, these active regions often generate solar storms: solar flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs).



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## 5.1. ART AND CULTURE & MISCELLANEOUS SNIPPETS

### 1. Various Initiatives for Minorities

#### Why in News?

- The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs has informed about various initiatives for minorities.
- A brief of the schemes/programmers being implemented by the Ministry for the educational/Economic Empowerment of Minority students/candidates are as under:

#### Educational Empowerment:

- Scholarship Schemes: Pre-Matric Scholarship, Post-Matric Scholarship and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship.
- Maulana Azad National Fellowship Scheme: It provides financial assistance to students from notified minority communities and whose annual income is below Rs. 6.0 lakh per annum from all sources, to pursue higher education such as M.Phil and Ph.D.
- Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship: It provides scholarship for meritorious girls belonging to notified minority communities studying in Classes IX to XII.
- **Naya Savera:** It is a free coaching scheme which aims to enhance skills and knowledge of students and candidates from notified minority to get employment in Government Sector/PSU, jobs in private sector, and admission in reputed institutions in technical and professional courses at UG and PG levels.
- **Nai Udaan:** Support for notified minority community students, on clearing Prelims conducted by UPSC, State Public Service Commission (PSC) Staff Selection Commission (SSC) etc.

#### Economic Empowerment:

- Seekho aur Kamao (Learn & Earn): It is a skill development initiative for minorities and aims to upgrade the skills of minority youth in various modern/traditional skills depending upon their qualification, present economic trends and market potential, which can earn them employment or make them suitably skilled to go for self-employment.
- Upgrading the Skill and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development (USTTAD): A mission has been launched under scheme to give an effective platform to minority artisans and culinary experts from across the country to showcase and market their finest handicraft and exquisitely crafted products through “Hunar Haats” organized by the Ministry.
- Nai Manzil: A scheme to provide education and skill training to the youth from minority communities.

- Gharib Nawaz Employment Training Programme: It provides for short-term job oriented skill development courses to youths belonging to minority communities.
- National Minorities Development Finance Corporation (NMDFC) Loan Scheme: It provide concessional loans for self-employment and income-generating activities for the socio-economic development of the ‘backward sections’ amongst the notified minorities.

### **Others: Equal Opportunity Commission:**

- Among several recommendations, the Sachar Committee opined for an Equal Opportunity Commission to ensure the upliftment of deprived Muslims in the country.
- It was formed during the first United Progressive Alliance government in 2006 to recommend policy measures for the upliftment of linguistic and religious minorities.
- It stormed the country when it stated that the condition of Muslims in some states are worse than Dalits.



## 6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1. Dholavira in Gujarat on UNESCO World Heritage List

#### Why in News?

- Dholavira, the archaeological site of a Harappan-era city, received the UNESCO world heritage site tag recently.

#### About the News:

- While Dholavira became the fourth site from Gujarat and 40th from India to make the list, it is the first site of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) in India to get the tag.
- All the sites under the Ministry are conserved as per ASI's Conservation Policy and are in Good Shape.

#### About Dholavira - A Harappan City:

- In Dholavira there has been found the inner enclosure of the citadel too which has not been found in any other cities of the Harappan culture.
- Dholavira is located in Gujarat. It is located in the Khadir Bet Island of the Kutch Desert Wildlife Sanctuary in the Great Rann of Kutch.
- It is one of the largest Harappan sites.

#### Findings from Dholavira:

- Some of the significant findings from the site includes a stadium, dams, embankments, water harnessing system, water reservoirs, a stepwell three times as big as the Great Bath of Mohenjo-Daro etc.
- It is the only site that is divided into 3 parts as opposed to the usual two part system. Other findings include painted pottery, seals, stone figures, weights, sign board etc.

#### What are the other Major Harappan Sites?

- There are 8 major Harappan sites in the Indian subcontinent: Lothal, Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Rakhigarhi, Kalibangan, Rupnagar, Ganeriwala and Dholavira.
- Dholavira is the 5th largest of these sites. Rakhigarhi is the largest Harappan site. While Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Ganeriwala are in Pakistan, the rest are in India.

#### About UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

- A World Heritage Site is a landmark or area, selected by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance, which is legally protected by international treaties.

- The sites are judged to be important for the collective and preservative interests of humanity.
- To be selected, a WHS must be an already-classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area).
- It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet. The sites are intended for practical conservation for posterity, which otherwise would be subject to risk from human or animal trespassing, unmonitored/uncontrolled/unrestricted access, or threat from local administrative negligence. The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Program administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 “states parties” that are elected by their General Assembly.

### **About UNESCO World Heritage Committee:**

- The World Heritage Committee selects the sites to be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.
- It monitors the state of conservation of the World Heritage properties, defines the use of the World Heritage Fund and allocates financial assistance upon requests from States Parties.
- It is composed of 21 states parties that are elected by the General Assembly of States Parties for a four-year term.
- India is NOT a member of this Committee.

## **6.1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SNIPPETS**

### **1. India's Afghan Investment**

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

- After a break between 1996 and 2001, when India joined the world in shunning the previous Taliban regime (only Pakistan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia kept ties).
- One-way New Delhi re-established ties with the country in the two decades after the 9/11 attacks was to pour in development assistance, under the protective umbrella of the US presence.
- India built vital roads, dams, electricity transmission lines and substations, schools and hospitals, etc. India's development assistance is now estimated to be worth well over \$3 billion.

- And unlike in other countries where India's infrastructure projects have barely got off the ground or are mired in the host nation's politics, it has delivered in Afghanistan.

### A Soft Corner:

- Afghanistan is vital to India's strategic interests in the region.
- It is also perhaps the only SAARC nation whose people have much affection for India.
- Taliban takeover would mean a reversal of nearly 20 years of rebuilding a relationship that goes back centuries.

### Projects Across the Country:

- **SALMA DAM:**
  - ✓ Already, there has been fighting in the area where one of India's high-visibility projects is located — the 42MW Salma Dam in Herat province.
  - ✓ The hydropower and irrigation project, completed against many odds and inaugurated in 2016, is known as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam.
  - ✓ In the past few weeks, the Taliban have mounted attacks in nearby places, killing several security personnel. The Taliban claim the area around the dam is now under their control.
- **ZARANJ-DELARAM HIGHWAY:**
  - ✓ The other high-profile project was the 218-km Zaranj-Delaram highway built by the Border Roads Organisation. Zaranj is located close to Afghanistan's border with Iran.
  - ✓ With Pakistan denying India overland access for trade with Afghanistan, the highway is of strategic importance to New Delhi, as it provides an alternative route into landlocked Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar port.
- **AFGHAN PARLIAMENT:**
  - ✓ The Afghan Parliament in Kabul was built by India at \$90 million.
  - ✓ It was opened in 2015; PM Modi inaugurated the building.
  - ✓ A block in the building is named after former PM AB Vajpayee.
- **STOR PALACE:**
  - ✓ In 2016, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and PM Modi inaugurated the restored Stor Palace in Kabul, originally built in the late 19th century. It is famous for the 1919 Rawalpindi Agreement by which Afghanistan became an independent country.
- **POWER INFRA:**
  - ✓ Other Indian projects in Afghanistan include the rebuilding of power infrastructure such as the 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province to the north of Kabul.

- ✓ Indian contractors and workers also restored telecommunications infrastructure in many provinces.

- **HEALTH INFRA:**

- ✓ India has reconstructed a children's hospital it had helped build in Kabul in 1972 — named Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health in 1985 — that was in shambles after the war.
- ✓ 'Indian Medical Missions' have held free consultation camps in several areas.
- ✓ Thousands who lost their limbs after stepping on mines left over from the war have been fitted with the Jaipur Foot.
- ✓ India has also built clinics in the border provinces of Badakhshan, Balkh, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nooristan, Paktia and Paktika.

- **TRANSPORTATION:**

- ✓ According to the MEA, India gifted 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan Army.
- ✓ It also gave three Air India aircraft to Ariana, the Afghan national carrier, when it was restarting operations.

- **OTHER PROJECTS:**

- ✓ India has contributed desks and benches for schools, and built solar panels in remote villages, and Sulabh toilet blocks in Kabul.
- ✓ New Delhi has also played a role in building capacity, with vocational training institutes, scholarships to Afghan students, mentoring programmes in the civil service, and training for doctors and others.
- ✓ Various ongoing project
- ✓ India had concluded with Afghanistan an agreement for the construction of the Shatoot Dam in Kabul district, which would provide safe drinking water to 2 million residents.
- ✓ Last year, India pledged \$1 million for another Aga Khan heritage project, the restoration of the Bala Hissar Fort south of Kabul, whose origins go back to the 6th century.
- ✓ Bala Hissar went on to become a significant Mughal fort, parts of it were rebuilt by Jahangir, and it was used as a residence by Shah Jahan.

- **Bilateral trade:**

- ✓ Despite the denial of an overland route by Pakistan, the India-Afghanistan trade has grown with the establishment in 2017 of an air freight corridor.
- ✓ In 2019-20, bilateral trade crossed \$1.3 billion.

- ✓ The balance of trade is heavily tilted — exports from India are worth approximately \$900 million, while Afghanistan's exports to India are about \$500 million.
- ✓ Afghan exports are mainly fresh and dried fruit.
- ✓ Some of this comes overland through the Wagah border; Pakistan has permitted Afghan trade with India through its territory.
- ✓ Indian exports to Afghanistan take place mainly through government-to-government contracts with Indian companies.
- ✓ Exports include pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, computers and related materials, cement, and sugar.
- ✓ Trade through Chabahar started in 2017 but is restricted by the absence of connectivity from the port to the Afghan border.

## 2. World Heritage Status

### Why in News?

- The city of Liverpool, England has been removed from UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) list of world heritage sites. Earlier six Indian places were added to the tentative list of UNESCO's world heritage sites.

### Highlights:

- The port city was included in the prestigious list for its architectural beauty and in recognition of its role as one of the world's most important ports during the 18th and 19th centuries.
- It was named a World Heritage Site in 2004, joining cultural landmarks such as the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- The city is only the third place to be removed from the prestigious list.
- The new buildings including a football stadium undermine the attractiveness of its Victorian docks and were destroying the heritage value of its waterfront.
- The over development would irreversibly damage the heritage of the historic port.

### World Heritage Site:

- A World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by UNESCO for its special cultural or physical significance. The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by the international 'World Heritage Programme', administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

- It seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.
- This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.
- It provides a framework for international cooperation in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world.
- Cultural heritage sites include historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting.
- Natural heritage sites are restricted to natural areas. Mixed heritage sites contain elements of both natural and Cultural Significance

### 3. Ramappa Temple gets World Heritage Tag

#### Why in News?

- The historic Rudreswara Temple, popularly known as Ramappa Temple, near Warangal has received the coveted World Heritage status by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).



#### About the Temple:

- The Ramappa Temple is a jewel of the Kakatiya era and it stands out.
- An inscription in the temple dates it to the year 1213 AD and says it was built by a General Recherla Rudra, during the period of the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati Deva.
- The Siva temple is perhaps the only one in the country that is known by the name of the architect rather than the king who commissioned it or its presiding deity.
- The stunning dance sculptures and friezes of the temple appear as if they have been machined into shape on black dolomite, rather than being chiseled.
- The temple is built on a valley and it rests on bricks that are scientifically shown to float in water.

#### About UNESCO's World Heritage Sites:

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

- This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.
- The World Heritage Fund provides about US\$4 million annually to support activities to preserve monuments that require international assistance.
- The World Heritage Committee allocates funds according to the urgency of requests, priority being given to the most threatened sites.

#### **4. The Case for Reviving SAARC**

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

- Despite the framework SAARC provides for cooperation amongst South Asian nations, it has remained sidelined and dormant since its 18th summit of 2014 in Kathmandu. No alternative capable of bringing together South Asian countries for mutually beneficial diplomacy has emerged.

##### **Common Challenges facing South Asia:**

- The region is beset with unsettled territorial disputes, as well as trans-border criminal and subversive activities and cross-border terrorism.
- The region also remains a theatre for ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions and rivalries besides a current rise in ultra-nationalism
- Nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan are at loggerheads.
- US military withdrawal from Afghanistan has fuelled fears of intensification of these trends.

##### **Significance of SAARC:**

- As the largest regional cooperation organisation, SAARC's importance in stabilising and effectively transforming the region is becoming increasingly self-evident.
- SAARC is needed as institutional scaffolding to allow for the diplomacy and coordination that is needed between member-states in order to adequately address the numerous threats and challenges the region faces.
- Though SAARC's charter prohibits bilateral issues at formal forums, SAARC summits provide a unique, informal window — the retreat — for leaders to meet without aides and chart future courses of action.
- The coming together of leaders, even at the height of tensions, in a region laden with congenital suspicions, misunderstandings, and hostility is a significant strength of SAARC that cannot be overlooked.

- In March last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi seized the Covid-19 crisis and utilised SAARC's seal to convene a video conference of SAARC leaders.
- Such capacity to bring member-states together shows the potential power of SAARC.

### What role SAARC can play in Afghanistan:

- **Commitment to get rid of Terrorism:** The third SAARC summit in 1987 adopted a Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and updated it in 2004 with the signing of an Additional Protocol.
- These instruments demonstrate the collective commitment to rid the region of terror and promote regional peace, stability, and prosperity.
- **Using the Network of Institutions:** In 36 years of existence, SAARC has developed a dense network of institutions, linkages, and mechanisms.
- SAARC members are among the top troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping Missions. Joint peacekeeping force: With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, a joint peacekeeping force from the SAARC region under the UN aegis could be explored to fill the power vacuum that would otherwise be filled by terrorist and extremist forces.

