



CURRENT AFFAIRS

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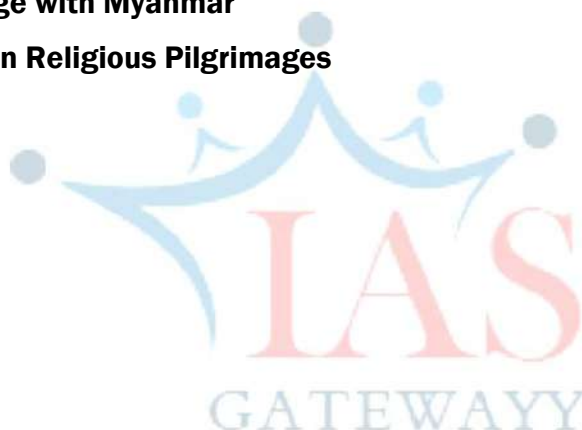
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1. ECONOMY

1. GI Tag Sought for Kumbakonam Vetrilai, Thoivalai Manikka Malai

Why in News?

- Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai has received applications seeking GI tag for Two Famous products from Tamil Nadu — Kumbakonam Vetrilai and Thoivalai Manikka Malai.

About the News:

- The application for Kumbakonam Vetrilai was filed by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore while the application for Thoivalai Manikka Malai was given by the Thoivalai Manikkamaalai Kaivinai Kalaingargal Nalasangam, Kanniyakumari.

About the Kumbakonam Betel Leaves:

- The Kumbakonam betel leaves were heart shaped and grown in the Cauvery delta region by small and marginal farmers. It is particularly grown in Ayyampettai, Rajagiri, Pandaravadai and Swamimalai in Thanjavur district.
- On an average, about 60-80 lakh betel leaves were harvested annually from a one-hectare plot. A betel leaf cultivator spends ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 to grow land. Harvested leaves are washed, cleaned, and graded according to their size and quality. They were traditionally packed in bamboo baskets but now there are several options such as Plantain Leaves and Cloth Bags.

About the Thoivalai Manikka Malai:

- Thoivalai Manikka Malai is a special type of garland that is made only in Thoivalai, a small village in Kanniyakumari. The flowers used in this particular garland are positioned in a way that when folded they look like a gem.
- The flowers are generally arranged in five rows, but at times for other decorations, 20 rows are used. The height ranges from one foot to 24 feet and above.
- Chamba fibre, nochi leaves, oleander and rose flowers are the key materials used for making this garland. Thoivalai is famous for its abundance of flowers and most of flowers are procured locally.



What is GI Tag?

- A GI or Geographical Indication is a name or a sign given to certain products that relate to a specific geographical location or origins like a region, town or country.

- Using Geographical Indications may be regarded as a certification that the particular product is produced as per Traditional Methods, has certain specific qualities, or has a particular reputation because of its geographical origin.



- Geographical indications are typically used for wine and spirit drinks, foodstuffs, agricultural products, handicrafts, and industrial products.
- GI Tag ensures that none other than those registered as authorized users are allowed to use the popular product name. In order to function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place.

Who Accords and Regulates Geographical Indications?

- Geographical Indications are covered as a component of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.
- At the International level, GI is governed by the World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from September 2003.
- The first product in India to be accorded with GI tag was Darjeeling tea in the year 2004-05.

What are the Benefits of GI Tags?

- The Geographical Indication registration confers the following benefits:
 - ✓ Legal protection to the products
 - ✓ Prevents unauthorised use of GI tag products by others
 - ✓ It helps consumers to get quality products of desired traits and is assured of Authenticity.
 - ✓ Promotes the economic prosperity of producers of GI tag goods by enhancing their demand in national and International Markets.

What are the Significances of GI Tags?

- A geographical indication right facilitates those who have the right to use the indication to prohibit its usage by a third party whose product does not conform to the applicable standards. For example, in the purview in which the Darjeeling geographical indication is protected, Producers of Darjeeling tea can omit the term "Darjeeling" for tea not grown in their tea Gardens or not produced according to the norms set out in the code of practice for the Geographical Indication.

- However, a protected GI does not permit the holder to forbid someone from making a product using the same approaches as those set out in the standards for that indication. Protection for a GI tag is usually procured by acquiring a right over the sign that constitutes the Indication.

Challenges in GI Tags:

- The special treatment to wines and spirits in TRIPS Agreement appears to be developed Country Centric.
- Developing countries, including India, seek the same higher level of protection for all GIs as was given under TRIPS for wines and spirits.
- The battle for GI tag between states.
- False use of geographical indications by unauthorized parties is detrimental to consumers and Legitimate Producers.
- Cheap Power loom saris are sold as reputed Banarsi handloom saris, harming both the producers and consumers.
- Such unfair business practices result in loss of revenue for the genuine right-holders of the GI and also misleads consumers.
- Protection of GI has, over the years, emerged as one of the most contentious IPR issues.

Way Forward:

- The benefits of GI tag are realised only when these products are effectively marketed and protected against illegal copying.
- Effective marketing and protection require quality assurance, brand creation, post-sale consumer feedback and support, prosecuting Unauthorised Copiers, etc.
- For internationally recognised products like Darjeeling tea, international protection is of Crucial Importance.
- Legal protection to GIs also extends to protection of traditional knowledge and traditional Cultural Expression contained in the products.
- Hence Intellectual Property is a power tool for economic development and wealth creation particularly in the Developing World.
- GIs have the potential to be our growth engine. Policy-makers must pay a heed to this and give Indian GI products their true Reward.

1.1. ECONOMY SNIPPETS

1. Taxing Cryptocurrency Transactions

- Notwithstanding the eventual introduction of the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill in Parliament, cryptocurrencies continue to proliferate.

Provisions in Income Tax Act 1961 to Tax Cryptocurrencies:

- Cryptocurrencies not mentioned in Income Tax Act, 1961: Although the Income Tax Act, 1961 (“IT Act”) does not specifically mention cryptocurrencies, it does cast a wide enough net to bring crypto transactions under its ambit.
- Capital asset: Trading in cryptocurrency may be classified as transfer of a ‘capital asset’, taxable under the head ‘capital gains. Business income: If such cryptocurrencies are held as stock-in trade and the taxpayer is trading in them frequently, the same will attract tax under the head ‘business income’. Even if one argues that crypto transactions do not fall under the above heads, Section 56 of the IT Act shall come into play, making them taxable under the head ‘Other sources of income’.

Challenges in Taxing Cryptocurrencies

- The above provisions in themselves are not sufficient in order to put in place a simple yet effective taxation regime for cryptocurrencies.

Varied Interpretations:

- First, the absence of explicit tax provisions has led to uncertainty and varied interpretations being adopted in relation to mode of computation, applicable tax head and tax rates, loss and carry forward, etc.
- For instance, the head of income under which trading of self-generated cryptocurrency (currencies which are created by mining, acquired by air drop, etc.) is to be taxed is unclear. Since there is no consistency in the rates provided by the crypto-exchanges, it is difficult to arrive at a fair market value.
- Similarly, when a person receives cryptocurrency as payment for rendering goods or services, how should one arrive at the value of the said currency and how should such a transaction be taxed?

Identifying Tax Jurisdiction

- It is often tricky to identify the tax jurisdiction for crypto transactions as taxpayers may have engaged in multiple transfers across various countries and the cryptocurrencies may have been stored in online wallets, on servers outside India.

The Anonymity of Taxpayer

- The identities of taxpayers who transact with cryptocurrencies remain anonymous.
- Exploiting this, tax evaders have been using crypto transactions to park their black money abroad and fund criminal activities, terrorism, etc.

Lack of third-party information on crypto transaction

- The lack of third-party information on crypto transactions makes it difficult to scrutinise and identify Instances of Tax Evasion.
- One of the most Efficient Enforcement tools in the hands of Income Tax Department is CASS or ‘computer aided scrutiny selection’ of assessments, where returns of taxpayers are selected inter alia based on information gathered from third party intermediaries such as banks.
- However, crypto-market intermediaries like the exchanges, wallet providers, network operators, miners, administrators are unregulated and collecting information from them is very difficult.

Physical Goods/Services may change hand in Return for Cryptocurrencies

- Even if the crypto-market intermediaries are regulated and follow Know Your Customer (KYC) norms, there remains a scenario, where physical cash or other goods/services may change hands in return for cryptocurrencies.
- Such Transactions are hard to trace and only voluntary disclosures from the parties involved or a search/survey operation may reveal the tax evaders.

Steps need to be taken:

- **Statutory Provision:** The income-tax laws pertaining to the crypto transactions need to be made clear by incorporating detailed statutory provisions.
- **Awareness Generation:** This should be followed by extensive awareness generation among the taxpayers regarding the same.
- **Separate Mandatory Disclosure:** The practice of having separate mandatory disclosure requirements in tax returns (as is the case in the United States) should be placed on the taxpayers as well as all the intermediaries involved, so that crypto transactions do not go unreported.
- **Strengthen international legal framework:** Additionally, the existing international legal framework for exchange of information should be strengthened to enable collecting and sharing of information on crypto-transactions.

- This will go a long way in linking the digital profiles of cryptocurrency holders with their real identities.
- **Training Tax Officers:** The Government must impart training to its officers in blockchain technology. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 'Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering' Section (UNODC CMLS) has developed a unique cryptocurrency training module, which can aid in equipping tax officers with requisite understanding of the underlying Technologies.

2. World Economic Forum's Davos Agenda '22

Why in News?

- PM Modi has made a special address ahead of the theme-setting World Economic Forum (WEF) Agenda on the 'State of the World' at Davos.

World Economic Forum (WEF):

- WEF is an international non-governmental and lobbying organisation based in Cologny, canton of Geneva, Switzerland. It was founded on 24 January 1971 by German engineer and economist Klaus Schwab. The foundation, which is mostly funded by its 1,000 member companies – typically Global Enterprises with more than five billion US dollars in turnover – as well as public subsidies. It aims at improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas.

Major Reports Released:

- Engaging Tomorrow Consumer Report
- Inclusive growth & Development Report
- Environmental Performance Index
- Global Competitive Index, Global Energy Architecture Performance Index Report
- Global Gender Gap Report, Global Information Technology Report
- Human Capital Report
- Inclusive growth & Development Report
- Global Risk Report
- Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report by WEF

Important Agenda: Davos meeting:

- The WEF is mostly known for its annual meeting at the end of January in Davos, a mountain resort in the eastern Alps region of Switzerland.

- The meeting brings together some 3,000 paying members and selected participants – among which are investors, business leaders, political leaders, economists, celebrities and journalists.

Why is WEF Important?

- **Common platform:** The WEF summit brings together the who's-who of the political and corporate world, including heads of state, policymakers, top executives, industrialists, media Personalities, and Technocrats.
- **Influence Global Decision-making:** Deliberations at the WEF influence public sector and corporate decision-making.
- **Discusses Global Challenges:** It especially emphasizes on the issues of global importance such as poverty, social challenges, climate change, and global economic recovery.
- **Brings in all Stakeholders:** The heady mix of economic, corporate, and political leadership provides an ideal opportunity for finding solutions to global challenges that may emerge from time to time.

What are the Main Initiatives?

- Agenda 2022 will see the launch of other WEF initiatives meant for:
- Accelerating the mission to net-zero emissions
- Economic opportunity of nature-positive solutions
- Cyber resilience

Criticisms of WEF:

- WEF has been criticized for being more of a networking hub than a nebula of intellect or a Forum to find effective solutions to global issues. It is also criticized for the lack of representation from varied sections of the civil society and for falling short of delivering effective solutions.

Way Forward:

- WEF sees large-scale Participation of top industry, business leaders, civil society, and International Organizations every year. This collaboration is necessary for addressing global concerns such as climate change and Pandemic Management. It is one of such few platform, that provides an opportunity for collaboration through Comprehensive Dialogue.

3. High Tariffs on The Import of Electronics Components

Why in News?

- A report by the Indian Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) has recently said that India's policy of adopting high tariffs on the import of electronics components may prove to be counterproductive.

Highlights:

- ICEA is the apex industry body of the mobile and electronics industry comprising Manufacturers. India has adopted high tariffs on the import of electronics components to reduce risks from global competition and save Domestic Companies.
- However, it may prove to be counterproductive to its schemes aimed at increasing domestic production of electronic products.
- India vs Other Nations: All the countries have tried to encourage the domestic production of electronic goods in their geographies by adopting almost similar strategies such as attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), improving domestic capabilities and competitiveness, increasing exports and then linking their markets with global value chains.
- China: Since 1980 China has improved its ranking in terms of office and telecom equipment export from 35 to 1, while Vietnam, which did not export any such electronic products up until 1990s has climbed the ladder to become the eight largest export in just 20 years.
- Mexico: Similarly, Mexico, which was 37th in terms of electronics product export in the 1980s has steadily risen through the ranks to gain 11th place, a position it has maintained over the last two decades.
- Thailand ranked 45 in 1980, has also consolidated its position in the top 15 electronic product exporters, according to the report.
- India, which started at 40th position in the 1980s has gained and lost positions to reach 28th position by 2019. Though all the countries followed nearly the same policy to boost domestic electronics manufacturing, one major difference between India and the rest of the countries was heavy reliance on tariffs.
- It is due to such high tariffs that investors and electronic component makers from global markets shy away from India as a market since the participation of the country in global value chains has remained low.

- Further, despite the size of the Indian economy, its participation in exports and international trade has remained low.
- Even for the domestic markets, the assumption that it will be beneficial to most companies since it is large and growing is wrong.
- For example, in the case of mobile phones, where one of the largest PLI schemes is currently operational, the size of the domestic market is expected to increase to USD 55 billion by 2025-26, whereas the global market is expected to reach USD 625 billion by the same time.
- Thus, at present, the Indian domestic market is about 6.5% of the global market, with a possibility of growing to 8.8%, if the growth forecasts are reasonably robust.
- At present, India's market share is not attractive enough for FDI to choose India as a location primarily on the basis of its domestic market per se, especially if India's policies result in cost inefficiencies which create obstacles to accessing a much larger global market.

4. One District One Product (ODOP) Initiative

Why in News?

- As a major boost to Centre and State collaboration in promoting products under the ODOP Initiative – a State Conference was recently held by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

One District One Product (ODOP):

- ODOP spearheaded by the Uttar Pradesh government in 2018, is an important initiative that is being adopted all over India to realize the true potential of each district.
- ODOP is an Initiative which is seen as a transformational step forward towards realizing the true Potential of a district, fuel economic growth and generates employment and rural Entrepreneurship. It is operationally merged with 'Districts as Export Hub' initiative being implemented by DPIIT as a major stakeholder.
- The main philosophy is to select, brand and promote one product from each district of India that has a specific characteristic feature to enable profitable trade in that product and generate employment.

Why needs this Scheme?

- India is home to several agricultural and non-agricultural (including manufacturing) products that are region-specific.

- Every district has products that are unique and provide livelihoods and generate income.
- This scheme is in tune with the PM's call to transform every district into an export hub and realize the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

What needs to be Done for its Success?

- The important aspect that the policy initiatives in India should thus be mindful of are:
- Ownership of the initiative should lie at the center of implementation.
- The stakeholders irrespective of the sector along the value chain need to be identified and provided information and awareness.
- It is important to streamline other initiatives such as registration of Geographical Indications (GI), formation and development of farmer producer organizations etc.

5. ICE360 Survey 2021

- Recently ICE360 Survey 2021, K-shaped recovery emerges from the economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The survey, between April and October 2021, covered 2,00,000 households in the first round and 42,000 households in the second round.

Highlights:

- It was conducted by People's Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE), a Mumbai-based think-tank.
- The annual income of the poorest 20% of Indian households, constantly rising since 1995, plunged 53% in the pandemic year 2020-21 from their levels in 2015-16.
- In the same five-year period, the richest 20% saw their annual household income grow 39% reflecting the sharp contrast Covid's economic impact has had on the bottom of the pyramid and the top.
- The survey shows that the pandemic hit the urban poor most and eroded their household income.
- This resulted in job losses and loss of income for the casual labour, petty traders and household workers.
- The pandemic brought economic activity to a standstill for at least two quarters in 2020-21 and resulted in a 7.3% contraction in GDP in 2020-21.
- While 90% of the poorest 20% in 2016, lived in rural India, that number had dropped to 70% in 2021.
- On the other hand, the share of the poorest 20% in urban areas has gone up from around 10% to 30% now.

- The Government needs to do more to prevent a K-shaped recovery of the economy hit by the Coronavirus Pandemic.
- The Indian Economy has "some bright spots and a number of very dark stains" and the Government should target its spending "carefully" so that there are no huge deficits.
- The bright spots are the health of Large Firms, the roaring business the IT and IT-enabled sectors are doing, including the emergence of unicorns in a number of areas, and the strength of some parts of the Financial Sector.
- The "dark stains" are the extent of unemployment and low buying power, especially amongst the lower middle-class, the financial stress small and medium-sized firms are experiencing, "including the very tepid credit growth, and the tragic state of the schooling".

K-Shaped Recovery:

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

6. 'Bad Bank'

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) approval for the implementation of the proposal for setting up a 'Bad Bank' is still pending.

Highlights:

- The National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL) has been set up and issued a license by the RBI to conduct business as an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC).
- NARCL will acquire stressed assets worth about Rs 2 lakh crore from various commercial banks in different phases.
- Public Sector Banks (PSBs) will maintain 51% ownership in NARCL.
- Simultaneously, a separate company has been set up to function as an Asset Management Company, named India Debt Resolution Company Limited (IDRCL), which will provide management and resolution of assets and also help in the operational aspects, relating to price discovery and aim at evolving the best possible recovery and the resolution process.

- PSBs and Public Financial Institutes (FIs) will hold a maximum of 49% stake in IDRCL. The remaining 51% stake will be with private-sector lenders.
- The NARCL is majorly owned by public sector banks with 51% ownership but in the case of the IDRCL, 51% shares are in private hands.
- The NARCL will first purchase bad loans from banks.
- It will pay 15% of the agreed price in cash and the remaining 85% will be in the form of “Security Receipts”.
- When the assets are sold, with the help of IDRCL, the commercial banks will be paid back the rest. If the bad bank is unable to sell the bad loan, or has to sell it at a loss, then the government guarantee will be invoked.
- The difference between what the commercial bank was supposed to get and what the bad bank was able to raise will be paid from the Rs 30,600 crore that has been provided by the Government. This guarantee is extended for a period of five years.

Demand of Indian Banks:

- Normally, a single entity to be held accountable as owner, and for recovery of the assets, is the practice followed across geographies.
- Possibly a ‘Principal and Agent mechanism’ or similar arrangement may evolve to resolve this Issue.
- The Indian Banks’ Association is learnt to have wanted a dual structure, with the AMC as a privately held entity, to be out of the purview of the regulatory entities.

About Bad Bank

- The bad bank is an ARC or an Asset Management Company (AMC) that takes over the bad loans of commercial banks, manages them and finally recovers the money over a period of time. The bad 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.
- Commercial Banks’ Perspective: Commercial banks are saddled with high NPA (Non-Performing Assets/loans) levels, setting up of the Bad bank will help.
- That’s because such a bank will get rid of all its toxic assets, which were reducing its profits, in one quick move.
- When the recovery money is paid back, it will further improve the bank’s position. Meanwhile, it can start lending again.

7. Unlock India's Food Processing Potential

Why in News?

- One of the largest producers of fruits and vegetables in the world to boost processed food in large quantities, India has formulated a unique Production-Linked Incentive Scheme (PLIS) which aims to incentivise incremental sales.

Progress made so far:

- A sum of ₹10,900 crore has been earmarked for the scheme.
- Beneficiaries have been obliged to commit a minimum investment while applying for the scheme. Under Category 1, firms are incentivised for incremental sales and branding/marketing initiatives taken abroad.
- Assuming the committed investment as a fixed ratio of their sales and undertaking execution of at least 75% of the projects, the sector is likely to witness at least ₹6,500 crore worth of investment over the next two years.
- New alternatives are being explored which have immense potential in replacing the staples of rice and wheat in the form of Nutri-cereals, plant-based proteins, fermented foods, health bars and even fresh fortified foods for pets.
- By welcoming the new brands in the category, PLIS aims to create an Enabling Ecosystem for innovation in both food Products and Processes.

Way Forward:

• **Improve Infrastructure:**

- ✓ A study in the United States concluded that a 1% increase in public infrastructure increased the food manufacturing output by 0.06% in the longer run.
- ✓ This correlation holds good for India too as a higher investment is being concentrated in States such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- ✓ These States as reported by the Good Governance Index 2020-21, ranked among the highest in the 'Public Infrastructure and Utilities' parameter with 'Connectivity to Rural Habitations' showing the highest improvement.
- ✓ Improve profitability in export:
- ✓ For the exports market, it is now established that sales promotion is positively related to increased sales volume, but inversely related to profitability.
- ✓ To bridge this gap, of the 13 key sectors announced under the PLIS, the 'Food Processing PLIS' earmarks a dedicated Category 3 for supporting branding and marketing activities in foreign markets.

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- ✓ This ensures that India's share of value-added products in the export's basket is improved, and it may leverage on its unique geographical proximity to the untapped markets of Europe, the Middle East/West Asia, Africa, Oceania and Japan.

Access to Credit:

- The access of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to finance is a perennial problem in the country, predominating due to a lack of proper credit history mechanism for MSMEs.
- Smart financing alternatives such as peer-to-peer (P2P) lending hold potential for micro-food processors.
- Access to working capital has in theory been addressed by the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS), a platform for facilitating the financing/discounting of trade receivables of MSMEs through multiple financiers.
- With growing populations, changing food habits and unrestricted use of natural resources, nations must come together and lay out a road map for a common efficient food value chain.

8. US Federal Reserve (central bank of US)

Why in News?

- The US Federal Reserve (central bank of US) has recently signalled a possible hike in interest rates. This has led to a nervous reaction in Indian markets.

Highlights:

- Rate hikes by the Federal Reserve affects not only the US economy, but also shapes the Macroeconomic Outlook and exerts a certain degree of influence on the monetary policies in other Emerging Economies.
- Emerging economies such as India tend to have higher inflation and higher interest rates than those in developed countries such as the US and many of the (primarily Western) European nations.
- As a result, financial institutions, particularly Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) would want to borrow money in the US at low interest rates in dollar terms and then invest that money in government bonds of emerging countries such as India in local currency terms to earn a higher rate of interest.
- When the US Federal raises its domestic interest rates, the difference between the interest rates of the two countries decreases.

- This makes India less attractive for the currency carry trade, consequently, some of the money may be expected to move out of the Indian markets and flow back to the US.
- A currency carry trade is a strategy whereby a high-yielding currency funds the trade with a low-yielding currency.
- Therefore, decreasing the value of India's currency against the US dollar.
- Bond yields will rise due to growing dollar shortage in the global market.
- Previously, in India, the debt and equity markets witnessed outflows of over Rs 40,000 crore rupees, due to the strengthening dollar and uncertainties perpetrated by the trade war between the US, China, European Union, and other major nations.
- India's exports on the other hand, notably IT and IT-enabled services – will benefit to some extent from a stronger dollar with respect to the rupee.
- However, the same benefit may not fully accrue to exporters due to strong competition in the export market.



2. ENVIRONMENT

1. Tonga Volcanic Eruption

Why in News?

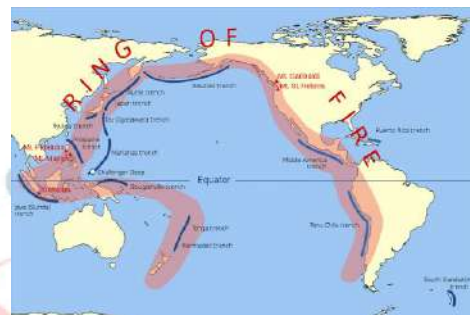
- Recently, a volcano erupted in the southern Pacific Island of Tonga, which triggered Tsunami waves around the Pacific.

About the News:

- It is an Undersea Volcanic Eruption consisting of two small uninhabited islands, Hunga-Ha'apai and Hunga-Tonga.
- The Tonga Islands occur along the Ring of Fire—a perimeter of heightened volcanic and seismic activity that encircles the Pacific Ocean basin.

What is the Ring of Fire?

- The Ring of Fire is a Pacific region home to over 450 volcanoes, including three of the world's four most active volcanoes – Mount St. Helens in the USA, Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. It is also sometimes called the circum-Pacific belt.
- Around 90% of the world's Earthquakes occur in the Ring of Fire, and 80% of the world's Largest Earthquakes.



Location:

- It stretches along the Pacific Ocean coastlines, where the Pacific Plate grinds against other, smaller tectonic plates that form the Earth's crust – such as the Philippine Sea plate and the Cocos and Nazca Plates that line the edge of the Pacific Ocean.
- The 40,000 kilometre horse-shoe-shaped ring loops from New Zealand to Chile, passing through the coasts of Asia and the Americas on the way.

Risk:

- The people most at risk from activity in the Ring of Fire are in the US west coast, Chile, Japan and island nations including the Solomon Islands.
- These areas are most at risk because they lie on so-called subduction zones – which are boundaries that mark the collision between two of the planet's tectonic plates.

How was the Ring of Fire formed?

- The Ring of Fire is the result from subduction of Oceanic Tectonic Plates beneath lighter Continental Plates. The area where these Tectonic Plates meet is called a subduction zone.

Why does the Ring of Fire Trigger Earthquakes?

- The world's deepest earthquakes happen in subduction zone areas as tectonic plates scrape against each other – and the Ring of Fire has the world's biggest concentration of subduction zones.
- As energy is released from the earth's molten core, it forces tectonic plates to move and they crash up against each other, causing friction. The friction causes a build-up of energy and when this energy is finally released it causes an earthquake. If this happens at sea it can cause devastating tsunamis.
- Tectonic plates usually only move on average a few centimetres each year, but when an earthquake strikes, they speed up massively and can move at several metres per second.



2.1. ENVIRONMENT SNIPPETS

1. Ring of Fire

Why in News?

- A Volcano erupted in the southern Pacific Island of Tonga, which recently triggered Tsunami waves around the Pacific.

Highlights:

- The Tonga Islands occur along the Ring of Fire—a perimeter of heightened volcanic and seismic activity that encircles the Pacific Ocean basin
- It is an Undersea Volcanic Eruption consisting of two small uninhabited islands, Hunga-Ha'apai and Hunga-Tonga.
- The Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcano has erupted regularly over the past few decades
- During events in 2009 and 2014/15, hot jets of magma and steam exploded through the waves. But these eruptions were small, dwarfed in scale by the January 2022 events.
- This is one of the massive explosions the volcano is capable of producing roughly every thousand years.
- One of the reasons for it being highly explosive is the Fuel-Coolant interaction. Huge volcanic eruptions can sometimes cause temporary global cooling as sulfur dioxide is pumped into the stratosphere. But in the case of the Tonga eruption, initial satellite measurements indicated the amount of sulfur dioxide released would only have a tiny effect of perhaps 0.01 Celsius global average cooling.

- The eruption altered atmospheric pressure that may have briefly helped clear out the fog in Seattle, in the United States.
- The waves crossed the Pacific, drowning two people in Peru and causing minor damage from New Zealand to Santa Cruz, California.
- The US Geological Survey estimated the eruption caused the equivalent of a magnitude 5.8 Earthquake.

2. Rare Earth Metals

Why in News:

- The US has recently proposed a law aiming to end China's alleged "chokehold" on rare-Earth Metal Supplies.

Highlights:

- The Bill aims to "protect the US from the threat of rare-earth element supply disruptions, Encourage Domestic production of those elements, and reduce its reliance on China.
- The law would require the creation of a "strategic reserve" of rare earth minerals by 2025.
- That reserve would be tasked with responding to the needs of the army, the tech sector and other essential infrastructure "for one year in the event of a supply disruption".
- They are a set of seventeen metallic elements. These include the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table in addition to scandium and yttrium that show similar physical and chemical properties to the lanthanides.
- The 17 Rare Earths are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium TM, ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- Even futuristic technologies need these REEs (For example high-temperature superconductivity, safe storage and transport of hydrogen for a post-hydrocarbon economy, environmental global warming and energy efficiency issues).
- They are called 'rare earth' because earlier it was difficult to extract them from their oxides forms technologically.
- They occur in many minerals but typically in low concentrations to be refined in an economical manner.
- India has granted government corporations such as IREL a monopoly over the primary mineral that contains REEs: monazite beach sand, found in many coastal states.

- IREL produces rare earth oxides (low-cost, low-reward “upstream processes”), selling these to foreign firms that extract the metals and manufacture end products (high-cost, high-reward “downstream processes”) elsewhere.
- IREL’s focus is to provide thorium — extracted from monazite — to the Department of Atomic Energy.

3. Domestic Hazardous Waste

Why in News?

- Recently, Segregation of domestic hazardous waste remains a distant dream for most Indian cities in absence of robust framework and infrastructure.

Highlights:

- Domestic Hazardous Waste is any chemical or product that can cause serious illness or pose an environmental or health threat if improperly stored, transported or disposed of.
- Indore is the only city in the country that safely handles its domestic hazardous waste.
- When hazardous waste is disposed of in the trash, down the drain, or on the ground, our water and soils can be contaminated or trash collectors can be harmed.
- Most products labelled dangerous, flammable, poison, combustible and corrosive are considered Hazardous Waste.
- **Examples:** Auto batteries, Fertilizers, Batteries (non-alkaline), Paint.
- In 2020, a significant level of toxic heavy metals and persistent organic contaminants like Pesticides have been found by the researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and IIT Bombay.
- They analysed fine particles from eight dump sites across the country.
- Household waste is governed by the rules outlined in the Solid Waste Management Rules 2016. These rules divide household waste into dry and wet waste.
- Wet waste is categorised as any waste that decomposes or degrades by itself.
- All other waste falls into dry waste according to the rules.

4. Declaration on Forests and Land Use

Why in News?

- At COP-26 in Glasgow, countries got together to sign the Declaration on Forests and Land Use (or the Deforestation Declaration). However, India was among the few countries that did not sign the Declaration.

What is this Deforestation Declaration?

- It was signed by 142 countries, which represented over 90 percent of forests across the world. The declaration commits to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural Transformation.
- The signatories committed \$19 billion in private and public funds to this end.

Why did India abstain from joining?

- India had concerns about the linkage the declaration makes between deforestation, Infrastructure development and trade.
- Any commitment to the environment and climate change should not involve any reference to trade, cited India.
- Analysts in India have linked the decision to a proposed amendment to the Forest Conservation Act 1980 that would ease the clearances presently required for acquiring forest land for new infrastructure projects.
- India abstained from many things
- A look at India's positions on some other recent critical pledges and decisions related to climate change reveals a clear pattern of objections or absence.
- At CoP26, India was not part of the dialogue on Forests, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT). FACT, which is supported by 28 countries seeks to encourage "sustainable development and trade of agricultural commodities while protecting and managing sustainably forests and other critical ecosystems".
- India also voted against a recent draft resolution to allow for discussions related to Climate change and its impact on international peace and security to be taken up at the UNSC.

Why should India join this Declaration?

- Broadly speaking, all of India's objections are based on procedural issues at multilateral fora.
- Although justifiable on paper, these objections seem blind to the diverse ways in which climate change is linked to Global Trade, Deforestation, Agriculture, and International Peace, among Other Issues.
- For context, consider India's palm oil trade. India is the largest importer of crude palm oil in the world.
- Palm oil cultivation, covering roughly 16 million acres of land in Indonesia and Malaysia, has been the biggest driver of deforestation in the two countries.

5. Towards Low Emissions Growth

Why in News?

- While many developing Countries made net-zero pledges at COP26 in Glasgow, they face Enormous Developmental Challenges in their Attempts to grow in a climate-constrained World.

Developmental Challenges for India:

- For India, the national context is shaped by high youth unemployment, millions more entering the workforce each year, and a country hungry for substantial investments in hard infrastructure to industrialise and urbanise.
- Growth with low emission footprint: India's economic growth in the last three decades, led by growth in the services sector, has come at a significantly lower emissions footprint.
- But in the coming decades, India will have to move to an investment-led and manufacturing-intensive growth model to create job opportunities and create entirely new cities and infrastructure to accommodate and connect an increasingly urban population.
- All of this requires a lot of energy. Can India do all of this with a low emissions footprint?
- What could India do to pursue an industrialization pathway that is climate-compatible?
- A coherent national transition strategy is important in a global context where industrialised countries are discussing the imposition of carbon border taxes while failing to provide developing countries the necessary carbon space to grow or the finance and technological assistance necessary to decarbonise.
- What India needs is an overarching green industrialisation strategy that combines laws, policy instruments, and new or reformed implementing institutions to steer its decentralised economic activities to become climate-friendly and resilient.
- Issues with India's domestic manufacturing of renewable technology components
- India's industrial policy efforts to increase the domestic manufacturing of renewable energy technology components have been affected by policy incoherence, poor management of economic rents, and contradictory policy objectives.
- India managed to create just a third of jobs per megawatt that China has managed to in its efforts to promote solar PV and wind technologies.
- China has created more jobs in manufacturing solar and wind components for exports than domestic deployment.
- India could have retained some of those jobs if it were strategic in promoting these technologies. Opportunities in decarbonising transport and industry sector.

- Technologies needed to decarbonise the transport and industry sectors provide a significant opportunity for India.
- However, India's R&D investments in these emerging green technologies are non-existent.
- PLI is a step in right direction: The production-linked incentives (PLIs) under 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' are a step in the right direction for localising clean energy manufacturing activities.
- Focus on R&D: Aligning existing RD&D investments with the technologies needed for Green Industrialisation is crucial for realising quantum jumps in economic activities.
- Encourage private entrepreneurship: India also needs to nurture private entrepreneurship and experimentation in clean energy technologies.
- Besides China, Korea's green growth strategy provide examples of how India could gain economic and employment rents from green industrialisation without implementing restrictive policies.

Way Forward:

- India should set its pace based on its ability to capitalise on the opportunities to create wealth through green industrialisation.
- India should follow a path where it can negotiate carbon space to grow, buying time for the hard-to-abate sectors; push against counterproductive WTO trade litigations on decarbonisation technologies; all while making R&D investments in those technologies to ensure that it can gain economic value in the transition.

6. Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)

Why in News?

- The officials of Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) has recently estimated that RRTS will reduce CO₂ Emissions by taking around 1.5 Lakh Private Vehicles off the Road.

Highlights:

- The corridor will start from Sarai Kale Khan in Delhi, pass through Ghaziabad, and reach Modipuram in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh).
- The RRTS, the first of its kind in the national capital, will run at a speed of 100 km per hour and commuters will reach Meerut in 50-60 minutes.
- RRTS is a new, dedicated, high speed, high capacity, comfortable commuter service connecting regional nodes in NCR.

- RRTS is different from conventional Railway as it will provide reliable, high frequency, point to point regional travel at high speed along dedicated path way.
- RRTS is different from metro as it caters to passengers looking to travel a relatively longer distance with fewer stops and at higher speed.
- **Environment Friendly:** The corridor is estimated to reduce 2.5 lakh CO₂ tonnes/year of total annual greenhouse gas emissions, making the city a cleaner and a much better place to live.
- **Economic Development:** It is estimated to increase the share of public transportation usage along the corridor from 37% to 63%.
- High-speed connectivity will result in balanced economic development across the region, leading to economic benefits to all strata of society and many nodes of development rather than all economic activity happening at one place.
- **Sustainable Urbanization:** The project will serve as a demonstration for developing high-capacity rapid urban transit corridors in other urban areas of India.
- It will help in reducing traffic congestion and total emissions from the transport sector in NCR.

7. 'Fly Ash Management and Utilisation Mission

Why in News?

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has recently directed the constitution of a 'Fly Ash Management and Utilisation Mission.

Highlights:

- The order by the NGT takes note of the 'unscientific handling and storage' of the fly ash by coal thermal power stations.
- For example, the draining of industrial effluents and fly ash in the Rihand Reservoir.
- The Fly Ash Management and Utilisation Mission, besides monitoring the disposal of annual stock of unutilised fly ash, will also see how 1,670 million tonnes of legacy (accumulated) fly ash could be utilized in the least hazardous manner and how all safety measures could be taken by the power plants.
- The Mission will hold its first meeting within one month to assess the fly ash management situation in coal power plants and to prepare action plans to build road maps for ash utilisation by individual plants.
- These meetings shall be conducted each month, for a year.

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- To 'coordinate and monitor issues relating to the handling and disposal of fly ash and associated issues.'
 - The Mission is to be jointly headed by the secretaries of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Union Ministry of Coal and Power, keeping on board chief secretaries of respective states where the mission is being implemented.
 - The secretary of MoEF&CC will be the nodal agency for coordination and compliance.
 - Fly Ash Notification 2021 was issued under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986.
 - Prohibiting dumping and disposal of fly ash discharged from coal or lignite based thermal power plants on land or into water bodies, the Centre has made it mandatory for such plants to ensure 100% utilization of ash in an eco-friendly manner, and introduced for the first time a penalty regime for non-compliance based on 'polluter pays' principle.



3. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. India State of Forest Report 2021

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021.

Highlights of the Report:

- The biennial report by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) is an assessment of the country's forest resources.
- India's forest and tree cover has risen by 2,261 square kilometers in the last two years with Andhra Pradesh growing the maximum forest cover of 647 square kilometers.
- The total tree-and-forest cover in the country includes an increase of 1,540 square kilometres of forest cover and 721 sq km of tree cover compared to the 2019 report.
- India's total forest and tree cover is now spread across 80.9 million hectares, which is 62 per cent of the geographical area of the country.
- The top five states in terms of increase in forest cover are Andhra Pradesh (647 sq km), Telangana (632 sq km), Odisha (537 sq km), Karnataka (155 sq km) and Jharkhand (110 sq km). The Gain in forest cover or improvement in forest canopy density may be attributed to better Conservation Measures, Protection, afforestation activities, tree plantation drives and Agroforestry. Among the mega cities in the country, Ahmedabad has been the biggest loser when it comes to forest cover.

States with Maximum Forest Cover:

- Area-wise, Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.
- 17 states/UTs have above 33 per cent of the geographical area under Forest Cover.
- Out of these states and UTs, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have more than 75 per cent forest cover.

Mangrove Cover in the Country:

- There is an increase of 17 sq km in mangrove cover in the country as compared to the Previous Assessment of 2019.
- Total mangrove cover in the country is 4,992 sq km.
- Top three states showing mangrove cover increase are Odisha (8 sq km) followed by Maharashtra (4 sq km) and Karnataka (3 sq km).

Carbon Stock:

- The total carbon stock in the country's forest is estimated to be 7,204 million tonnes and there is an increase of 79.4 million tonnes in the carbon stock of the country as compared to the last assessment of 2019.
- The annual increase in the carbon stock is 39.7 Million Tonnes.

Concerns:

- The north-east did not show positive results as the current assessment showed a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 1,020 sq km in the region.
- Arunachal Pradesh lost the maximum forest cover of 257 sq km, followed by Manipur which lost 249 sq km, Nagaland 235 sq km, Mizoram 186 sq km and Meghalaya 73 sq km.
- In total 140 hill districts of the country, the forest cover reduced by 902 sq km in the last two years. In the 2019 report, the forest cover in the hill regions had increased by 544 sq km.

Efforts by Government to Increase Forest Cover in the Country:

- To achieve India's aim of increasing additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent by 2030, Nagar Van Yojna has been introduced to increase the tree cover and joined with the second phase of Green Mission in the Next Five Years.

Significant features of ISFR 2021:

- In the present ISFR 2021, FSI has included a new chapter related to the assessment of forest cover in the Tiger Reserves, Corridors and Lion conservation area of India.
- A new initiative of FSI has also been documented in the form of a chapter, where the 'Above Ground Biomass' has been estimated. FSI, in collaboration with Space Application Centre (SAC), ISRO, Ahmedabad, initiated a special study for estimation of Above Ground Biomass (AGB) at pan-India level, using L- band of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) data.
- FSI in collaboration of with Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS) Pilani, Goa Campus has performed a study based on 'Mapping of Climate Change Hotspots in Indian Forests'. The collaborative study was carried out with the objective to map the climatic hotspots over the forest cover in India, using computer model-based projection of temperature and rainfall data, for the three future time periods i.e. year 2030, 2050 and 2085.
- The Report also contains information on various parameters State/UT wise. Special Thematic Information on forest cover such as hill, tribal districts, and north eastern region has also been given Separately in the report.

2. Suspension of 12 Maharashtra MLAs

Why in News?

- 12 Maharashtra BJP MLAs have gone to the Supreme Court against their year-long suspension from the Assembly.

About the Issue:

- During the recent hearing, the Supreme Court observed that the suspension of MLAs for a full year is prima facie unconstitutional, and “worse than expulsion”.
- The MLAs were suspended for misbehaviour in the Assembly pertaining to disclosure of data Regarding OBCs.

What have the Suspended MLAs argued?

- In July 2021, Maharashtra Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anil Parab moved a resolution to suspend 12 BJP MLAs. The suspended MLAs argue that the suspension can only be made by the presiding officer under the rules of the house.
- The petition has Submitted that their suspension is “grossly arbitrary and Disproportionate”. The challenge relies mainly on grounds of denial of the principles of natural justice, and of violation of laid-down procedure.
- The 12 MLAs have said they were not given an opportunity to present their case, and that the suspension violated their fundamental right to equality before law under Article 14 of the Constitution.

Procedure to be Followed for suspension of MLAs:

- Under Rule 53 of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rules, the power to suspend can only be exercised by the Speaker, and it cannot be put to vote in a resolution.
- Rule 53 states that the “Speaker may direct any member who refuses to obey his decision, or whose conduct is, in his opinion, grossly disorderly, to withdraw immediately from the Assembly”.
- The member must “absent himself during the remainder of the day’s meeting”.
- Should any member be ordered to withdraw for a second time in the same session, the Speaker may direct the member to absent himself “for any period not longer than the remainder of the Session”.

How does the State Government Defend its move?

- Under Article 212, courts do not have jurisdiction to inquire into the proceedings of the legislature.

- Article 212 (1) states that “The validity of any proceedings in the Legislature of a State shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure”.
- Under Article 194, any member who transgresses the privileges can be suspended through the inherent powers of the House.
- Thus, the state government has denied that the power to suspend a member can be exercised only through Rule 53 of the Assembly.

Concern Expressed by the Supreme Court over the Length of the Suspension:

- The basic structure of the Constitution would be hit if the constituencies of the suspended MLAs remained unrepresented in the Assembly for a full year.
- Article 190 (4) of the Constitution says, “If for a period of sixty days a member of a House of the Legislature of a State is without permission of the House absent from all meetings thereof, the House may declare his seat vacant.”
- Under Section 151 (A) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, “a bye-election for filling any vacancy shall be held within a period of six months from the date of the occurrence of the vacancy”.
- This means that barring exceptions specified under this section, no constituency can remain without a representative for more than six months.
- Therefore, the one-year suspension was prima facie unconstitutional as it went beyond the six-month limit, and amounted to “not punishing the member but punishing the constituency as a whole”.

What are the Rules on the Length of Suspension of a Member of Parliament?

- Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provide for the withdrawal of a member whose conduct is “grossly disorderly”, and suspension of one who abuses the rules of the House or wilfully obstructs its business.
- The maximum suspension as per these Rules is “for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less”.
- The maximum suspension for Rajya Sabha under Rules 255 and 256 also does not exceed the remainder of the session. Several recent suspensions of members have not continued beyond the session.
- Similar Rules also are in place for state legislative assemblies and councils which prescribe a maximum suspension not exceeding the remainder of the session.

3. SC to consider hearing PIL challenging use of EVMs in polls

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently agreed to consider listing a PIL challenging the constitutional validity of a provision of the Representation of People Act which had led to the Introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in elections.

What does the Petition Say?

- Section 61A of the Representation of People Act, which permitted the use of EVMs, was not passed by Parliament and hence cannot be imposed. The petition wants the provision to be declared null and void.

What is an EVM?

- The Electronic Voting Machine, also known as EVM, is an electronic device used for casting votes. The EVM aims to make the electoral process secure, fair and transparent.
- The voting in India is done using electronic voting machines since 1999 to simplify the voting Process and do Away with Paper Ballots.

Can EVMs be Tampered With?

- The EVM is a tamper-proof machine. It is made of a one-time programmable chip, which cannot be connected to any external device or network such as the internet, Wi-Fi, USB or Bluetooth. Hence, it cannot be corrupted or Modified in any way possible.

What is the Process of Allotment of EVMS to Polling Booths?

- The EVMS are allotted to the polling booths through an elaborated randomization process. This way, there is no prior knowledge on which unit will go to which polling booth almost until the polling date. The machines undergo mock polls at every stage to ensure that they are in the right working condition.

How do the EVMS work?

- An EVM is designed with two units: the control unit and the balloting unit. These units are joined together by a cable.
- While the control unit of the EVM is kept with the presiding officer or the polling officer, the balloting unit is kept within the voting compartment for electors to cast their votes. This is done to ensure that the polling officer verifies your identity.

How to use an EVM?

- In order to enable the voter to cast their vote, the polling officer instead of issuing a ballot paper presses the ballot button. The balloting unit of the machine will have a list of

candidate names and party symbols with a blue button next to it. The voter can press the button next to the candidate's name they wish to vote for.

- When the Voter presses a button of his/ her choice, the machine locks itself and a printed VVPAT slip is displayed for 7 seconds before it's automatically cut and delivered to a sealed ballot compartment. The votes are stored in the VVPAT or Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail machine. The EVM can then be opened only with a new ballot number. This way, EVMs ensure that one person gets to vote only once.

About VVPATs:

- VVPAT is a slip generated in a printer-like machine attached to EVM and shows voter's choice of candidate as well as the party. Generated slip is displayed for a few seconds to the voter to verify before it falls into a sealed drop box which can be opened during counting.
- **Advantages:** Initially, election results are announced based on the recording of votes given by EVMs. If the election results are disputed, then the votes recorded under VVPATs shall be counted and announced. If there is any mismatch between the two results, then the VVPAT's result will prevail over the EVMs.
- **Disadvantages:** However, VVPATs address only the issues at the voting part and the counting part still stays an opaque operation. Furthermore, currently, the EC's VVPAT auditing is limited to one randomly selected polling booth per constituency. But, this sample size will not detect faulty EVMs 98-99 percent of the time.
- VVPATs can be an effective deterrent to fraud, but, the detection of even one faulty EVM in a constituency is followed by the VVPAT auditing of all the EVMs (at all booths) in that constituency = poses a serious logistical challenge and hence VVPATs are not the solution to counting Level Failures.

Why are EVMs used in India?

- The electronic voting machine came in India as a replacement to ballot papers and was first used in No. 70 Parvur assembly constituency in Kerala in 1982.
- In a large scale, the machines have been in use in India since 1999. The machines have been credited with making the voting process simpler, as now vote can be registered with just a click on the button. The machines are also cost-effective in the long run. Although the initial cost of an EVM is between Rs 5,000 and Rs 6,000, the machine, on an average, lasts for 15 years.

- Further, the machines run on batteries and hence don't require electricity. They are also lighter and easily portable compared to the huge ballot boxes.
- The machines also make vote counting process faster, delivering results within hours as against Manual Counting of votes which could take days.

4. Sedition Law

Why in News?

- Calling for abolishing the law on sedition, former Supreme Court judge Rohinton Nariman has expressed concern on booking critics of the Government for sedition.

What are his Concerns?

- While those Exercising free speech were being booked under the stringent sedition law, those giving hate Speech are not being dealt with by Authorities.
- He said, it is time to completely do away with sedition laws and allow free speech so long as it does not exhort somebody to Violence.

What is Sedition?

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

Need for a Proper Definition:

- The sedition law has been in controversy for far too long. Often the governments are criticized for using the law — Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) — against vocal critics of their policies. Therefore, this Section is seen as a restriction of individuals' freedom of expression and falls short of the provisions of reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech under Article 19 of the Constitution.
- The law has been in debate ever since it was brought into force by the colonial British rulers in 1860s. Several top freedom movement leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were booked under the sedition law.
 - ✓ Mahatma Gandhi described it as the “prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen.”
 - ✓ Nehru had described it as “highly objectionable and obnoxious” which “should have no place in any body of laws that we might pass”. Nehru said, “The sooner we get rid of it the better.”

Relevant Supreme Court judgements:

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

What does the Data Shows?

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), though, has only been collecting separate data on sedition cases since 2014. In 2014, there were 47 cases of sedition but that number increased to 70 in 2018 (the latest year with available data).
- Compared to other offences, sedition remains a rare crime (it accounts for less than 0.01% of all IPC crimes).
- But within India, some parts are emerging as sedition hotspots. Assam and Jharkhand, for instance, with 37 sedition cases each, account for 32% of all sedition cases between 2014-2018.
- In 2018, there were 1,182 cases registered under **UAPA** (The Act gives special procedures to handle terrorist activities, among other things). And almost all these cases (92%) were concentrated in five states (Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Jharkhand and Manipur).
- “There has been a dramatic jump in charging a person with the offence of sedition since 2016. In 2019, 93 cases were on the ground of sedition as compared to the 35 cases that were filed in 2016. The same constitutes a 165% increase. Of these 93 cases, charge sheets were filed in a mere 17% of cases and even worse, the conviction rate was an abysmally low 3.3%.

Why Sedition Law is a Hindrance?

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

Need of the Hour:

- The top court has observed that the “ambit and parameters of the provisions of Sections 124A, 153A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 would require interpretation, particularly in the context of the right of the electronic and print media to communicate news, information and the rights, even those that may be critical of the prevailing regime in any part of the Nation”.

5. Anti-Defection Law

Why in News?

- Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati recently called for a more stringent anti-defection law amid a string of politicians switching parties ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election Beginning Next Month.

What’s the Issue?

- The practice of politicians deserting Parties just ahead of elections is not unusual. And every time there are defections, the anti-defection law, which penalises individual Lawmakers for Switching Parties, comes into the Picture.

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.

When does the 10th schedule might not apply?

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

What are the Loop-Holes?

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

that the Speaker functioned as a tribunal under the anti-defection law, thereby making her/his decisions subject to Judicial Review.

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

Is there Any Safeguard for Anti-Defection?

- The Anti-Defection Law provided a safeguard for defections made on genuine ideological Differences. It accepted “split” within a party if at least one-third of the members of the legislative party Defect, and allowed the formation of a new party or “merger” with other political party if not less than two-thirds of the party's members commit to it.
- **The 91st Constitutional Amendment introduced in 2003 deleted the provision allowing split.**
- The 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 (170th report, 1999)**).
- The rationale that a Representative is elected on the basis of the party's programme can be extended to pre-poll alliances.
- Instead of making Speaker the authority for disqualification, the decision should be made by the president or the governor on the advice of the Election Commission. This would make the Process similar to the Disqualification procedure as given in **Representation of Peoples Act (RPA)**.
- There can be Additional Penalties for defectors as well.

6. SC upholds validity of OBC quota in NEET Admissions

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently upheld the constitutional validity of quota for Other Backward Classes candidates in National Eligibility cum Entrance Test's (NEET) All India Quota seats for undergraduate and postgraduate medical and dental courses, noting that "Reservation is not at odds with merit" in open competitive examinations.

What was the Apex Court's ruling?

- If open examinations present equality of opportunity to candidates to compete, reservations ensure that the opportunities are distributed in such a way that backward classes are equally able to benefit from such opportunities which typically evade them because of structural barriers. This is the only manner in which merit can be a democratising force that equalises inherited disadvantages and privileges.
- Otherwise claims of individual merit are nothing but tools of obscuring inheritances that underlie achievements. The court said an open competitive exam only ensures formal equality and does not end widespread ingrained inequalities in the availability of and access to educational facilities to certain classes of people, including the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

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.

Way Forward:

- The privileges that accrue to forward classes are not limited to having access to quality schooling and access to tutorials and coaching centres to prepare for a competitive Examination but also includes their social networks and Cultural Capital (communication Skills, accent, books or Academic Accomplishments) that they inherit from their family.
- The cultural capital ensures that a child from the forward classes is trained unconsciously by the familial environment to take up higher education or high posts commensurate with their family's standing.
- This works to the disadvantage of individuals from social backward classes who are first-generation learners and come from communities whose traditional occupations do not result in the transmission of necessary skills required to perform well in open examination.
- Thus, merit is not solely of one's own making. The rhetoric surrounding merit obscures the way in which family, schooling, fortune and a gift of talents that the society currently values aids in one's advancement.
- Thus, the exclusionary standard of merit serves to denigrate the dignity of those who face barriers in their advancement which are not of their own making.

7. Centre Seeks Time in HC on Marital Rape

Why in News?

- The Centre recently told the Delhi High Court that the issue of criminalisation of marital rape involves “Family Issues” and the dignity of a woman and cannot be looked at from a “Microscopic Angle”.

What’s the Issue?

- The petitions before the Delhi High Court asking for marital rape to be criminalised are an outcome of the Government’s refusal to pay heed to the landmark report by the Justice J. S. Verma Committee, constituted in the aftermath of the horrific Nirbhaya gang rape in 2012. Though the Government has said on multiple occasions that such a move will threaten the institution of marriage, experts say recent judgments, including on the right to privacy, have rendered this Argument Untenable.

Key Recommendations made by the Verma Committee:

- The Verma panel proposed that “the exception for marital rape be removed” and the law must “specify that a marital or other relationship between the perpetrator or victim is not a valid defence against the crimes of rape or Sexual Violation”.

What are the Arguments by the Government against Criminalising marital rape?

- The Government in its affidavit submitted that it had to be ensured marital rape did not become a Phenomenon that destabilises the institution of marriage and “an easy tool for harassing the husbands”. It added, “What may appear to be marital rape to an individual wife, it may not appear so to Others.”

Recent Judgments that Question the Government’s stand on this:

- Independent Thought vs. Union of India verdict of October 2017, in which the Supreme Court criminalised rape with a minor wife.
- The Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India (September 2018) case, where the apex court unanimously recognised the Fundamental Right to privacy of every individual guaranteed by the Constitution. The Joseph Shine vs. Union of India case of October 2018, where a five-judge Bench of the SC struck down Adultery as a crime.

Need for an Overhaul:

- The origin of the marital rape exception lies in the influential treatise on criminal law of England called the ‘History of the Pleas of the Crown’ in which the then British Chief Justice,

Matthew Hale, pronounced in 1736, “The husband cannot be guilty of rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given herself up in this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract.”

- This immunity has since been withdrawn in several jurisdictions, including in England, where the House of Lords in 1991 held marriage to be a partnership of equals, and no longer one in which the wife must be a “subservient chattel of the husband”.
- Also, according to the World Bank, there are at least 78 countries, including Nepal, that have legislation Specifically Criminalising Marital Rape.

Legal provisions in this regard:

- Currently marital rape is not a ground for a divorce in Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Muslim Personal Law [Shariat] Application Act, 1937 and Special Marriage Act, 1954, it cannot be used as a ground for divorce and cruelty against husband.
- Section 375 of the IPC holds that “sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under 15 years of age, is not rape”.
- No other statute or law recognises marital rape.
- Victims only have recourse to civil remedies provided under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

Criminalisation of Marital Rape is Necessary Because:

- There are several studies to show the prevalence of non-consensual sex with their wives, and physically forcing their wives to have sex.
- Marriage is an equal-relationship contract and not a one-time consent to everything.
- The legal exception to the rape laws gives men unequal privilege.
- Marital rape victims suffer from long-lasting psychological scars.
- Exception under Section 375, violates Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of a woman.
- The patriarchal nature of Indian society, ingrains it in the minds of men that women are expected to comply when their husbands demand sex.
- The victim suffers physical abuse, and she also has to undergo mental trauma of her dignity being violated.
- In the last 70 years, the exemption in Section 375 has remained untouched.
- The prevalence of Child marriages and in many cases women are forcefully married off.

However, there are cons of Criminalizing Marital Rape:

- It “may destabilise the institution of marriage apart from being an easy tool for harassing the husbands”.

- “Rising misuse of Section 498A of IPC”, known as the dowry law, “for harassing the husbands”. Other countries, mostly western, have criminalised marital rape does not necessarily mean India should also follow them blindly.
- Law Commission on Review of Rape Laws has examined the issue but not recommended the criminalisation of marital rape.
- What may appear to be marital rape to an individual wife, it may not appear so to others.
- There can be no lasting evidence in case of sexual acts between a man and his own wife.

8. Consent of AG to initiate contempt proceedings

Why in News?

- Attorney General K K Venugopal has recently granted consent to initiate contempt proceedings against ‘Dharam Sansad’ leader Yati Narsinghanand over his alleged remarks against the Constitution and the Supreme Court.

Need for Consent:

- As per Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act, the nod of the Attorney General or the Solicitor General is a Condition precedent to set the criminal contempt proceedings in motion before the Apex Court.

What is the law on Contempt of courts?

- The Contempt of Courts Act 1971 defines civil and criminal contempt, and lays down the powers and procedures by which courts can penalise contempt, as well as the penalties that can be given for the offence of contempt.
- Contempt of court is the offense of being disobedient to or disrespectful toward a court of law and its officers in the form of behavior that opposes or defies the authority, justice and dignity of the court.

Why is the consent of the Attorney General required to Initiate Contempt proceedings?

- The objective behind requiring the consent of the Attorney General before taking cognizance of a complaint is to save the time of the court.
- This is necessary because judicial time is squandered if frivolous petitions are made and the court is the first forum for bringing them in.
- The AG’s consent is meant to be a safeguard against frivolous petitions, as it is deemed that the AG, as an officer of the court, will independently ascertain whether the complaint is Indeed Valid.

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

- The AG's consent is mandatory when a private citizen wants to initiate a case of contempt of court against a person.
- However, when the court itself initiates a contempt of court case the AG's consent is not required. This is because the court is exercising its inherent powers under the Constitution to punish for contempt and such Constitutional powers cannot be restricted because the AG declined to Grant Consent.

What happens if the AG Denies Consent?

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

9. Recognition/Derecognition of Political Parties

Why in News?

- A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to seize the election symbol or de-register a political party that promises or distributes "irrational freebies" from public funds before elections.

About the News:

- It said there should be a total ban on such populist measures to gain undue political favours from the voters as they violate the Constitution and the ECI should take suitable Deterrent Measures.

Why it is Needed?

- The plea urged the court to declare that the promise of irrational freebies from public funds before elections unduly influences the voters, disturbs the level playing field and vitiates the purity of the poll Process. This unethical Practice is just like giving bribes to the electorate at the cost of the exchequer to stay in power and must be avoided to preserve democratic principles and practices.

Registration of Political Parties:

- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

- A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Election Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Commission of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Eligibility for a 'National Political Party of India:

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

Eligibility for a 'State Political Party:

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

What are its Benefits?

- If a party is recognised as a State Party', it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.
- Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.
- They also get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general Elections. The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense Accounts of Candidates of their Party.

10. SC Quashes One-Year Suspension of 12 Maharashtra MLAs

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently revoked the one-year suspension of 12 Maharashtra BJP legislators, calling it an “irrational” act that would impact the democratic set-up, leave constituencies unrepresented and help “thin majority” Governments Manipulate Numbers.

About the Issue:

- During the recent hearing, the Supreme Court observed that the suspension of MLAs for a full year is prima facie Unconstitutional, and “Worse than Expulsion”.
- The MLAs were suspended for misbehaviour in the Assembly pertaining to disclosure of data regarding OBCs.

What did the SC Ruled?

- A suspension beyond the remainder period of the ongoing session would not only be grossly irrational measure, but also violative of the basic democratic values owing to Unessential Deprivation of the member concerned, and more importantly, the constituency would Remain Unrepresented in the Assembly.
- It would also impact the democratic set-up as a whole by permitting the thin majority government [coalition government] of the day to manipulate the numbers of the Opposition party in the House in an undemocratic manner.

Procedure to be followed for Suspension of MLAs:

- Under Rule 53 of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rules, the power to suspend can only be exercised by the Speaker, and it cannot be put to vote in a resolution.
- Rule 53 states that the “Speaker may direct any member who refuses to obey his decision, or whose conduct is, in his opinion, grossly disorderly, to withdraw immediately from the Assembly”.
- The member must “absent himself during the remainder of the day’s meeting”.
- Should any member be ordered to withdraw for a second time in the same session, the Speaker may direct the member to absent himself “for any period not longer than the remainder of the Session”.

How does the State Government defended its Move?

- Under Article 212, courts do not have jurisdiction to inquire into the proceedings of the legislature.

- Article 212 (1) states that “The validity of any proceedings in the Legislature of a State shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure”.
- Under Article 194, any member who transgresses the privileges can be suspended through the inherent powers of the House.
- Thus, the state government has denied that the power to suspend a member can be exercised only through Rule 53 of the Assembly.

Concern expressed by the Supreme Court over the Length of the Suspension:

- The basic structure of the Constitution would be hit if the constituencies of the suspended MLAs remained unrepresented in the Assembly for a full year.
- Article 190 (4) of the Constitution says, “If for a period of sixty days a member of a House of the Legislature of a State is without permission of the House absent from all meetings thereof, the House may declare his seat vacant.”
- Under Section 151 (A) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, “a bye-election for filling any vacancy shall be held within a period of six months from the date of the occurrence of the vacancy”. This means that barring exceptions specified under this section, no constituency can remain without a representative for more than six months.
- Therefore, the one-year suspension was prima facie unconstitutional as it went beyond the six-month limit, and amounted to “not Punishing the member but punishing the Constituency as a Whole”.

What are the rules on the Length of Suspension of a Member of Parliament?

- Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provide for the withdrawal of a member whose conduct is “grossly disorderly”, and suspension of one who abuses the rules of the House or willfully obstructs its business.
- The maximum suspension as per these Rules is “for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less”. The Maximum Suspension for Rajya Sabha under Rules 255 and 256 also does not exceed the Remainder of the session. Several recent suspensions of members have not continued beyond the Session.
- Similar Rules also are in place for state legislative assemblies and councils which prescribe a Maximum Suspension not exceeding the remainder of the session.

11. States must Decide on SC/ST Quota in Promotions, says SC

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court recently refused to lay down the “Yardstick” for determining the inadequacy of representation for Granting Reservation in promotions for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates in Government Jobs.

About the News:

- The court stuck firm by its Constitution Benches decisions in Jarnail Singh and M. Nagaraj cases that the question of Adequate Representation of an SC/ST communities ought to be left to the respective States to determine.

What did the SC Observe?

- It held ‘cadre’ and not class, group or the entire service as the unit for purpose of collection of quantifiable data for giving promotion quotas.
- It said that, in the light of Jarnail Singh and Nagaraj, we cannot lay down any yardstick for determining the inadequacy of representation.
- In respect of the unit of collection of quantifiable data, the court held that the State was “obligated to collect quantifiable data on the inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- The court, however, noted that the “collection of information on inadequacy of representation of SC/ST communities cannot be with reference to the entire service or class/group, but should be relatable to the grade/category of posts to which the promotion is Sought.”

Significance of the Case:

- With the recognition of ‘cadre’ as the unit for collection of quantifiable data, the court set aside its earlier judgment in the B.K. Pavithra case. The court Further left it to the State to assess the Inadequacy of the representation of SCs and STs for promotional posts by taking into account the relevant factors. A review had to be conducted regarding the data for the purpose of determining the inadequacy of representation in promotions, the court ordered. The court left it to the Union government to fix a “reasonable” time for the States to conduct the review.

M. Nagaraj Case (2006):

- **Reversed the stance in the Indra Sawhney case:** In this case applying the creamy layer concept in SC/ST reservation in promotions, the Supreme court reversed its earlier

stance in the Indra Sawhney case (1992), in which it had excluded the creamy layer concept on SCs/STs (that was applicable on OBCs).

- **Directives to the states:** The five-judges Bench in Nagaraj case upheld the constitutional validity of all 77th, 81st, 82nd, and 85th constitutional amendments enabling reservation of SC/ST communities in promotions, but made certain directives for the states:
 - ✓ State is not bound to make reservations for SC/ST in the matter of promotions.
 - ✓ If a State wants to provide reservation to the SC/ST communities in promotions:
 - ✓ It has to collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of the class.
 - ✓ Show inadequacy of representation of that class in public employment in addition to compliance of Article 335.
 - ✓ State needs to ensure that its reservation provision does not lead to excessiveness-breaching the ceiling-limit of 50%, or destroying the creamy layer principle.

Other Related Judgements:

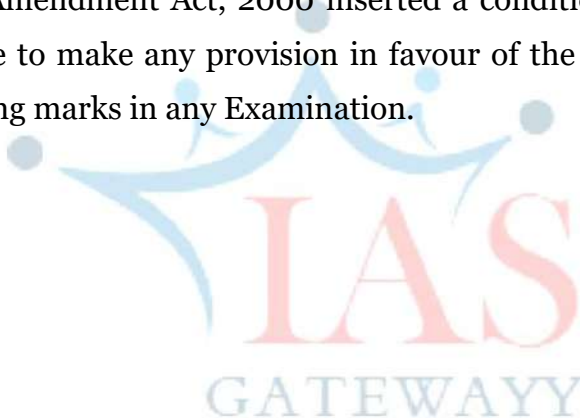
- In Jarnail Singh v L.N. Gupta (2018) case, SC refused to refer the Nagaraj judgment to a higher bench but later altered the decision by saying that states will not be required to present quantifiable data of backwardness of SC/ST communities.

Reservation in Promotions is not a Fundamental Right:

- Reaffirming its stand in Nagaraj case, the Supreme Court in 2020 ruled that reservation in the matter of promotions in public posts is not a fundamental right, and a state cannot be compelled to offer the quota if it chooses not to.
- **Current Demand by the Centre:** The Centre asked the Court to review its stance of introducing the concept of creamy layer in SC/ST promotions on various issues:
- **Could deprive Backward Classes from Reservation:** The government believes that the 'creamy layer' will become a trick to deprive the backward classes of the benefit of reservation.
- **Redundancy of proving Backwardness Again:** It is presumed that once they are added in the Presidential List under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India, there is no question of proving backwardness of the SCs and STs all over again.
- The said List cannot be altered by anybody except Parliament under Articles 341 and 342-defining who will be considered as SCs or STs in any state or Union Territory.

Constitutional Provisions for Promotion in Reservation

- **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.
- **Article 16 (4A):** Provides that the State can make any provision for reservation in matters of promotion in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes if they are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- It was inserted by the 77th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1995.
- **Article 16(4B):** Added by the 81st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2000 which enabled the unfilled SC/ST quota of a particular year to be carried forward to the next year.
- **Article 335:** It recognises that special measures need to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs to services and posts, in order to bring them at par.
- 82nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2000 inserted a condition at the end of Article 335 that enables the state to make any provision in favour of the members of the SC/STs for relaxation in qualifying marks in any Examination.



3.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956

Why in News?

- Karnataka CM has said irrigation projects are bogged down by river water sharing disputes and asked the Centre to 'revisit the Inter-State River Water Disputes (IWRD) Act since the law is creating more disputes than Resolving Them'.

IWRD Act:

- The IWRD Act, 1956 aims to resolve the water disputes that would arise in the use, control and distribution of an Interstate River or River Valley.
- Article 262 of the Indian Constitution provides a role for the Central government in Adjudicating Conflicts surrounding inter-state rivers that arise among the state/regional Governments.
- This act is confined to states of India and not applicable to union territories.
- Only concerned state governments are entitled to participate in the tribunal adjudication and Non-Government Entities are not Permitted.

Jurisdictions Over Rivers:

- River waters use / harnessing is included in states jurisdiction.
- However, Union government can make laws on regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys to the extent such water resources are directly under its control when expedient in the public interest.
- When union government wants to take over a interstate river project under its control by law, it has to take approval of the riparian states' legislature assemblies before passing such bill in the Parliament per Article 252 of the constitution.
- When public interest is served, President may also establish an interstate council as per Article 263 to inquire and recommend on the dispute that has arisen between the states of India.

Resolution of Disputes:

- Dispute resolution is a layered process, as mandated by the ISWD Act.
- After receiving a complaint from a state, the Union government first tries to mediate. It is only when negotiations fail that the Centre is required to form a tribunal to adjudicate the Dispute.

- 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 Tribunal is constituted.

Constitution of Tribunal:

- Whenever the riparian states are not able to reach amicable agreements on their own in sharing of an interstate river waters, section 4 of IRWD Act provides for a Tribunal.
- The tribunal shall not only adjudicate but also investigate the matters referred to it by the central government and forward a report setting out the facts with its decisions.
- The tribunal responsibility is not limited to adjudication of issues raised by the concerned states and but investigation of other aspects such as water pollution, water quality deterioration, flood control etc., Time-frame for dispute resolution
- The tribunals have been allotted three years to arrive at a final decision, extendable by two years. The 2002 Amendment to the ISWD Act specified a one-year limit on the timeline allowed to carry out the process of dispute resolution.

Active Tribunals in India:

- Ravi & Beas Water Tribunal (1986) – Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan
- Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal II (2004) – Karnataka, Telangana, Andra Pradesh, Maharashtra
- Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal (2010) – Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra
- Vansadhara Water Disputes Tribunal (2010) – Andra Pradesh & Odisha
- Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (2018) – Odisha & Chhattisgarh

Need for the IWRD Act:

- **Major inter-state River Basins:** India has 25 major river basins, with most rivers flowing across states.
- **Equitable Distribution of water:** As river basins are shared resources, a coordinated approach between the states is necessary for the preservation, equitable distribution and sustainable utilization of River Water.
- **Hydro-politics:** Much recently, interstate rivers in India have become sites of contestations, fuelled by conflicting perceptions of property rights, flawed economic Instruments for Food Security.
- **Sustainability:** This has led to a lack of an integrated ecosystems approach, and the prevalence of reductionist hydrology for water resource development.

Issues with IRWD Act:

- Centre's dilemma: Since river water falls within the ambit of State Subjects, its governance remains confined to the limits of the state political discourse.
- **Interference of Judiciary:** The apex court has limited the role of the tribunals to quantification and allocation of water between riparian states, and its own role is to be an interpreter of the awards and agreements.
- **Colonial Award:** The history of colonial rule has led to the creation of asymmetries between states, and the present water disputes stem from the reproduction of this imperial and colonial power relation.
- **Structural Issues:** Various operational characteristics of the tribunals as problematic, since they do not adhere to any established system.
- **Operational Issues:** For instance, the sittings are not routine, the functioning is outside the regular court system, and day-to-day or week-to-week hearings are few and far in between.

Why this has become a Sensitive Topic?

- Associated ethnicity: At the state level, river water is politically perceived as part of the larger issue of “regional sharing of resources,” which is linked with the ethnic and cultural identity of the state and its people.
- Matter of autonomy: The political narrative around river disputes is subsumed within the question of regional rights, and any possibility of water sharing is seen as a compromise or infringement on the regional autonomy of a state.
- Identity politics: Hence, the political narrative around the river disputes jumps to a larger scale of identity politics.

Way forward:

- For such dispute resolution, all other recourses such as mediation and conciliation must remain viable options.
- These should operate simultaneously along with adjudication and political consensus among the riparian states.
- Directly approaching the Supreme Court may result in adversarial outcomes, with the Conflict Reaching a point of no return.

2. Desh ke Mentor Programme

Why in News?

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has recently suggested that the Delhi government suspend its flagship ‘Desh ke Mentor’ Programme till “the time when all the loopholes pertaining to the safety of the children are overhauled.

Highlights:

- It was launched In October 2021, aiming at connecting students in classes IX to XII with voluntary mentors.
- People between the ages of 18 and 35 can sign up to be mentors through an app created by a team at the Delhi Technological University and will be connected with students based on mutual interests.
- The mentorship entails regular phone calls for a minimum of two months, which can optionally be carried on for another four months. The Idea is for the young mentors to guide students through higher education and career options, preparation for higher education entrance exams, and dealing with the pressure of it all.
- So far, 44,000 people have signed up as mentors and have been working with 1.76 lakh children. Assigning children to a mentor of the same gender as them does not necessarily assure their safety from abuse.
- Lack of police verification of the mentors.
- A psychometric Test Is not a full proof assessment of a person in terms of potential threat to any child. Limiting interactions to phone calls also does not ensure the safety of children since “child related crime can be initiated through phone calls as well.”
- The responsibility and accountability of preventing children from such situations lies with the Department. The consent of parents cannot be used as a cushion in case of any Untoward Incident.

3. Antrix -Devas Deal

Why in News?

- Recently, the controversial deal between Indian Department of Space’s commercial entity Antrix and Bengaluru-based startup Devas Multimedia has been under the scanner for more than a decade now.

Highlights:

- The International Telecommunication Union granted India S-band spectrum in the 1970s.

- By 2003, there was a fear that the spectrum would be lost if not used effectively; 40 MHz of S-band was given to the Department of Telecom (DoT) for terrestrial use.
- 70 Mhz was to be put to efficiently used by the Department of Space (DoS) or in effect to be used by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Global Negotiations for Growth of Communication Systems: Initially, an MoU was signed by Forge (a US Consultancy) and Antrix in July 2003 for use of the satellite spectrum for the growth of communication systems in India, but later a start-up was envisaged, and Devas Multimedia was floated.
- In 2005, the deal was signed to provide multimedia services to mobile users using the leased S-band satellite spectrum.
- Under the deal, ISRO would lease to Devas two communication satellites (GSAT-6 and 6A) for 12 years.
- In return, Devas would provide multimedia services to mobile platforms in India using S-band transponders on the satellites.
- As a result of the deal, Devas introduced and utilised technologies like never before and was a huge revenue generator for Antrix.
- The deal was Cancelled in 2011 on the ground that the auction of the broadband spectrum was mired in Fraud.
- The decision was taken in the midst of the 2G scam and allegations that the Devas deal involved the Handing over of communication spectrum valued at nearly Rs 2 lakh crore for a pittance. The Government also held that it needed the S-band satellite spectrum for national security and other Social Purposes.
- Meanwhile, in August 2016, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a charge sheet against officials from Devas, ISRO and Antrix linked to the deal for “being party to a Criminal Conspiracy”.
- Amongst them, were the former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair and former Antrix executive director K R Sridharamurthi.
- International Tribunal Arbitration: Devas Multimedia initiated arbitration against the annulment at the International Chambers of Commerce (ICC).
- Two separate arbitrations were also initiated under the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) by Mauritius investors in Devas Multimedia under the India-Mauritius BIT and by Deutsche Telekom -- a German company -- under the India- Germany BIT.
- India lost all three disputes and has to pay a total of USD 1.29 billion in damages.

- Due to the Indian Government not paying the compensation, a French court has recently ordered the freezing of Indian government property in Paris, to enforce a USD 1.3 billion arbitration award. Recently, the Supreme Court reiterated the Government's 2011 stance and directed the winding up of Devas Multimedia business in India.
- The Supreme Court also upheld the previous award by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) and National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
- Antrix filed a plea in the NCLT in January 2021 for the liquidation of Devas in India, which it said was incorporated in a fraudulent manner. These tribunals directed the winding up of Devas Multimedia and appointed a provisional liquidator for the purpose.

4. Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)

Why in News?

- Recently, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) wrote to the States that the Union government proposes to amend Rule 6 (deputation of cadre officers) of the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954.

Highlights

- In normal practice, the Centre asks every year for an “offer list” of officers of the All India Services willing to go on central deputation, after which it selects officers from that list.
- Officers have to get a no-objection clearance from the State government for Central deputation.
- States have to depute the All India Services (AIS) officers, to the Central government offices and at any point, it cannot be more than 40% of the total cadre strength.
- If the State government delays posting a State cadre officer to the Centre and does not give effect to the Central government's decision within the specified time, the officer shall stand relieved from cadre from the date as may be specified by the Central government.
- The Centre will decide the actual number of officers to be deputed to the Central government in consultation with the State and the latter should make eligible the names of such officers.
- In case of any disagreement between the Centre and the State, the matter shall be decided by the Central government and the State shall give effect to the decision of the Centre.
- In specific situations where services of cadre officers are required by the Central Government in “public interest,” the State shall give effect to its decisions within a specified Time.

- The DoPT said that it is taking this decision in the wake of a shortage of All India Services (AIS) officers in Union Ministries.
- According to the DoPT, states are not sponsoring an adequate number of officers for Central deputation, and the number of Officers is not sufficient to meet the requirement at the Centre.
- It Is against the spirit of Cooperative Federalism.
- The proposed amendment would weaken the State's political control over the bureaucracy.
- It would hobble effective governance and create avoidable legal and administrative disputes. The Centre could weaponise the Bureaucracy against an elected State Government.

5. Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956

Why in News?

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has ruled that daughters will have equal rights to their father's property even prior to the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956.
- The case involved a dispute over the property of a person who died in 1949 leaving behind a daughter who also died issueless in 1967.
- Earlier, the trial court held that since the person had died prior to the enforcement of HSA, 1956 therefore the petitioner and her other sisters were not the heirs as on the date of his death and was not entitled to partition of share in the suit properties. Later, the High Court, too, dismissed the appeal against the trial court.

Key Points:

- Daughters Inheritance: It ruled that the property of a man who had died without executing a will and is survived only by a daughter will devolve upon the daughter and not others such as his brother.
- Earlier in 2020, the SC has already expanded the Hindu women's right to be the coparcener (joint legal heir) and inherit ancestral property on terms equal to male heirs.
- Ancient Texts & Judicial Pronouncements: The SC referred to ancient texts (smritis), commentaries by various renowned learned persons and even judicial pronouncements which have recognised the rights of several female heirs, the wives and the daughter's being the foremost of them.
- Tracing the sources of customary Hindu law on inheritance, the SC discussed Mitakshara law.

- SC also looked into Vyavastha Chandrika, a digest of Hindu Law by Shyama Charan Sarkar Vidya Bhushan which quoted ‘Vrihaspati’ as saying ‘the wife is pronounced successor to the wealth of her husband, in her default, the daughter. As a son, so does the daughter of a man proceed from his several limbs.
- The SC also noted that the book quoted Manu as saying “the son of a man is even as himself, and the daughter is equal to the son.
- How then can any other inherit his property, notwithstanding the survival of her, who is, as it were, himself”. Old Law: Right of a widow or daughter to inherit the self-acquired property or share received in partition of a coparcenary property of a Hindu male dying intestate is well recognised not only under the old customary Hindu Law.
- If a property of a male Hindu dying intestate is a self-acquired property or obtained in partition of a coparcenary or a family property, the same would devolve by inheritance and not by survivorship, and a daughter of such a male Hindu would be entitled to inherit such property in preference to other collaterals”.
- Property After Woman's Death: The court also said that if a female Hindu dies intestate without leaving any issue, then the property inherited by her from her father or mother would go to the heirs of her father whereas the property inherited from her husband or father-in-law would go to the heirs of the husband.
- In case a female Hindu dies leaving behind her husband or any issue, then Section 15(1)(a) of the HSA 1956 will come into operation and the properties left behind including the properties which she inherited from her parents would devolve simultaneously upon her husband and her issues.

6. Budgeting for the Education Emergency

Why in News?

- Faced with an unprecedented education emergency, this is the time to substantially ramp up public spending on education and make it more effective.

Low Allocation for Education:

- UNESCO’s 2030 framework for action suggests public education spending levels of between 4% and 6% of GDP and 15%-20% of public expenditure.
- A recent World Bank study notes that India spent 14.1 % of its budget on education, compared to 18.5% in Vietnam and 20.6% in Indonesia, countries with similar levels of GDP.

- But since India has a higher share of population under the age of 19 years than these countries, it should actually be allocating a greater share of the budget than these countries. Public spending on education in most States in India was below that of other middle-Income Countries even before the pandemic.
- Most major States spent in the range of 2.5% to 3.1% of State income on education, according to the Ministry of Education's Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education.
- This Compares with the 4.3% of GDP that lower-middle-income countries spent, as a group, between 2010-11 and 2018-19.
- In the 2021-22 Budget, the Central Government's allocation for the Education Department was Slashed compared to the previous year, even though the size of the overall budget increased. Of the major States and Delhi, eight either reduced or just about maintained their budget Allocation for education departments in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21.

Way Forward:

- The vast majority of the 260 Million Children enrolled in preschool and school, especially in Government Schools, did not have meaningful structured learning opportunities during the 20 months of school closures.
- **Infusion of Resources:** The education system now needs not only an infusion of resources for multiple years, but also a strengthened focus on the needs of the poor and Disadvantaged Children. What it is spent on and how effectively resources are used are important. It is clear what additional resources are required for.
- **The Needs Include:** back-to-school campaigns and re-enrolment drives; expanded nutrition programmes; reorganisation of the curriculum to help children learn language and mathematics in particular, and support their socio-emotional development, especially in early grades; additional learning materials; teacher training and ongoing support; additional education programmes and collection and analysis of data.
- **Focus on Teacher Training:** How does expenditure on technology compare with the amounts spent on Teacher Training, which represents just 0.15% of total estimated Expenditure on Elementary Education? Teachers are central to the quality of education, so why does India spend so little on teacher training?

The opacity of Education Finance data in India:

- The opacity of education finance data makes it difficult to comprehend this.
- For instance, the combined Central and State government spending on education was Estimated to be 2.8% of GDP in 2018-19, according to the Economic Survey of 2020-21.

- This figure had remained at the same level since 2014-15.
- On the other hand, data from the Ministry of Education indicates that public spending on Education had reached 4.3% of GDP in the same year, rising from 3.8% of GDP in 2011-12.
- The difference in the figures is due to the inclusion of expenditure on education by departments other than the Education Department. Including expenditure on education by, for example, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (on Anganwadis, scholarships, etc.), the Ministry of Science and Technology (for higher education) is of course legitimate.
- However, the composition of these expenditures is not readily available.

7. Worries over the electoral bond scheme go beyond its Unconstitutionality

Why in News?

- Ever since its introduction, the electoral bond scheme has Envenomed the Democratic process, by destroying altogether any notion of Transparency in political funding.

Issue of Anonymity in Electoral Bond:

- The electoral bond scheme is designed to allow an individual, or any “artificial juridical person”, including body Corporates, to purchase bonds issued by the State Bank of India during notified Periods of time.
- These instruments are issued in the form of promissory notes, and in denominations ranging from ₹1,000 to ₹1 crore.
- Once purchased, the buyer can donate the bond to any political party of their choice and the party can then encash it on demand.

Supreme Court's Opinion:

- The Supreme Court has allowed the scheme to continue unabated and has denied an interim stay on its operation.
- In one such provisional order, the Court asserted that the bonds were not, in fact, Anonymous.
- According to the Court, since both the purchase and the encashment of bonds are made through banking channels, all it would take for a person to glean the identity of a donor was for her to look through every corporation's financial statement — these records, the Court said, ought to be available with the Registrar of Companies.
- What the order ignored was that there is no attendant obligation on political parties to provide details to the public on each donation received by them through electoral bonds.

- Companies are also under no obligation to disclose the name of the party to whom they made the Donation.

Violation of Voter's Right:

- The Supreme Court has consistently held that voters have a right to freely express themselves during an election and that they are entitled to all pieces of information that give purpose and vigour to this right.
- Surely, to participate in the electoral process in a meaningful manner and to choose one's votes carefully, a citizen must know the identity of those backing the candidates.
- Electoral bond does not eliminate the role of black money in funding elections:
- As affidavits filed by the Election Commission of India in the Supreme Court have demonstrated, the scheme, if anything, augments the potential role of black money in Elections.
- It does so by, among other things, removing existing barriers against shell entities and dying concerns from donating to political parties.
- Moreover, even if the bonds were meant to eliminate the presence of unaccounted currency, it is difficult to see what nexus the decision to provide complete anonymity of the Donor bears to this objective.
- It is for this reason that the Reserve Bank of India reportedly advised the Government against the scheme's introduction.

Conclusion:

- The worries over the electoral bond scheme, however, go beyond its patent unconstitutionality. This is because in allowing anonymity it befouls the basis of our democracy and prevents our elections from being truly free and fair.

8. Anganwadis should Provide Early Childhood Care and Education

Why in News?

- The National Education Policy, 2020 has rightly highlighted the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE), vital for the young child's early cognitive, social, and emotional development.
- Need for focus on early childhood care and education (ECCE):
- The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) finds only 13.6 per cent of children enrolled in pre-primary schools.

- With its overriding focus on health and nutrition, ECCE has hitherto been the weakest link of the anganwadi system.
- Multiple administrative duties have left anganwadi workers with little time for ECCE.
- A child's early learning begins at birth, initially through stimulation, play, interactions, non-verbal and verbal communication.
- Unfortunately, due to a lack of parental awareness compounded by the daily stresses of poverty, disadvantaged households are unable to provide an early learning environment.
- The existing system at best serves the age group of 3-6 years, ignoring infants and toddlers.

Way forward:

1. A meaningful ECCE Programme in Anganwadis

- A meaningful ECCE programme in anganwadis is not only a more intelligent and cost-effective strategy but is also feasible to implement through seven concerted actions.
 1. Activity-based framework which reflect local context: To design and put in place a meaningful activity-based ECCE framework that recognises the ground realities with autonomy to reflect the local context and setting.
 2. Remove non-ICDS work: Routine tasks of anganwadi workers can be reduced and non-ICDS work, such as surveys, removed altogether.
 3. Extend Anganwadi time: Anganwadi hours can be extended by at least three hours by providing staff with an increase in their present remuneration, with the additional time devoted for ECCE.

Karnataka has already taken the lead; its anganwadis work from 9.30 am to 4 pm.

This will have the added benefit of serving as partial daycare, enabling poor mothers to earn a livelihood.

4. Change in policy mindset: ICDS needs a change in policy mindset, both at central and state levels, by prioritising and monitoring ECCE.
5. Engagement with parents: Anganwadi workers must be re-oriented to closely engage with parents, as they play a crucial role in the cognitive development of young children.

Responsive parenting requires both parents to play an active role in ECCE activities at home; therefore, anganwadi workers should be asked to consciously engage with fathers too.

Appropriate messaging and low-cost affordable teaching materials can be designed and made accessible to parents.

6. Activity-based play material: ICDS must supply age-appropriate activity-based play material in adequate quantities regularly, and anganwadi workers encouraged to utilise them in a liberal manner.
7. Invest in research and training: States should invest in research and training to support early childhood education, and ensure that the ECCE programme is not a downward Extension of School Education.

2. Pre-primary sections in Government Primary Schools:

- Some educationists have suggested that owing to the high workload of anganwadi workers, ECCE in anganwadis would remain a non-starter.
- Therefore, all government primary schools should open pre-primary sections, with anganwadis limiting themselves to the 0-3 age group.
- Challenges: It would require a massive outlay to build over a million classrooms with a million nursery teachers and helpers — even a conservative estimate would put the additional annual outlay at over Rs 30,000 crore.
- Moreover, with child stunting levels at 35 per cent in India, would children enrolled in pre-schools would require supplementary nutrition and health monitoring.
- This would overburden the nursery teacher.
- Nearly 1.4 million anganwadis of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) across India must provide ECCE for the millions of young children in low-income households.

4. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

1. Government Response Awaited on law on inter-faith Marriages

Why in News?

- The law that governs inter-faith marriages in the country, the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954, is being challenged for endangering the lives of young couples who seek refuge under it.

About the News:

- More than a year after a writ petition was moved before the Supreme Court, seeking striking down of several of its provisions, the government is yet to submit its response.
- The petition has sought to quash section 6 and 7 of SMA, which mandates publication of the public notice, on the ground that it is unreasonable and arbitrary.
- The petitioner argues that the 30-day period offers an opportunity to kin of the couple to Discourage an inter-caste or Inter-Religion Marriage.

What are Interfaith Marriages?

- The matrimonial relationship developed between two individuals having different religious faiths. Although marrying into a different religion is a matter of choice of an adult, there are certain issues Regarding the same.

Issues with Interfaith Marriages:

- Interfaith marriages are believed to be a forced conversion of one of the spouses (mostly women).
- As per the Muslim Personal law, in order to get married to a non-Muslim, conversion of religion is the only way.
- Hindu religion allows only monogamy and those who want to marry second time take another course.
- There is no provision regarding caste determination of children born out of such marriages.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 is not compatible with backwardness of the society.
- There is debate over the validity of Article 226 in context of annulling the interfaith marriage by High Court.

About the Special Marriage Act:

- The Special Marriage Act is a special law enacted to provide for a unique form of marriage by registration wherein the parties to the marriage do not have to renounce their religion.

- This Act includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists marriages.
- This act applies to all Indian states, except Jammu & Kashmir.
- This Act applies not only to Indian citizens who belong to different castes and religions but also to Indian nationals who live abroad.

Requirements for the Special Marriage:

- The Fundamental Requirement under this Act for a valid marriage is the consent of both parties to the Marriage.
- If both parties to the marriage are willing to marry each other, that's enough; caste, religion, race, etc. is not a Restriction.

Conditions for Marriage:

- The bridegroom must be at least 21, and at the time of the marriage, the bride must be at least 18 years of age. This is the minimum age limit respectively for a boy/girl to marry.
- At the time of their Marriage, both parties must be monogamous; i.e., they must be unmarried and at that time should not have any living spouse.
- In order to be able to decide for themselves, the parties should be mentally fit, i.e., they must be sane at the time of Marriage.

Challenges with Contemplating Laws for Interfaith Marriage:

- Contemplating laws to regulate matrimonial relationships between two consenting adults would not be just against the constitutional guarantees but would offend the very notion of individuality and basic freedoms.
- Interference of the law in an individual's choice of marriage violates the existing constitutional rights such as the Right to equality, Right to Freedom & Personal Liberty, Freedom of Religion and Right to Life.
- **Article 21:** It declares that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. This right is available to both Citizens and Non-Citizens.
- **Article 25** of the Indian constitution provides the freedom to practice any religion of one's choice and Personal Laws of the religions have specified various laws relating to marriage for the followers of that religion.
- Hence, in India inter-faith marriages are allowed as the constitution allows one to convert to a different religion from what one was born with and further the personal laws of the religion have provisions.

Way Forward:

- In order to avoid inclusion of any further laws, there should be acceptance of the special marriage act, 1954 at the mental and social level.
- The rights should not be exploited; conversion of religion for marriage only is not at all wise.
- The marriage of two adults is a complete matter of their own choice, neither a law is to impose any decision, nor any individual. The Freedom of decision of his/ her marriage shall lie with the person only. The Need is to Accept the fact.

2. Probe sought into Pegasus case

Why in News?

- Supreme Court advocate Manohar Lal Sharma has circulated in the media a signed online copy of a plea he claims to have filed in the Supreme Court for an investigation into an allegation made in a New York Times report that India bought Pegasus spyware from NSO of Israel.

Historical Background of the News:

- The Apex Court stressed that the power of the state to snoop in the name of national security into the “sacred private space” of individuals is not absolute.
- The court said it consciously avoided “political thickets” but could not cower when allegations involved a “grave” threat to the privacy and free speech of the entire citizenry and raised the possibility of involvement of the Government, or even a foreign power, behind the surveillance. The court said the petitions filed before it, including ones by veteran journalists N. Ram and Sashi Kumar, Editors Guild of India and victims of alleged snooping, had raised “Orwellian concerns” about an all-pervasive technology like Pegasus.
- The court said India could not remain mute in the face of Pegasus allegations when other countries across the globe had taken them seriously.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana had, in a 46-page order on October 27, set up an expert technical committee monitored by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, Justice R.V. Raveendran, to inquire into the allegations of spying and file a report.
- The order came after the Union government did not file a “detailed affidavit” in the court in response to the petitions, citing national security reasons, among others.

- The Justice Raveendran committee recently invited persons who suspect themselves of being snooped on to come forward and hand over their electronic equipment for technical examination to detect the presence of the spyware.

What is Pegasus?

- It is a type of malicious software or malware classified as a spyware designed to gain access to devices, without the knowledge of users, and gather personal information and relay it back to whoever it is that is using the software to spy.
- Pegasus has been developed by the Israeli firm NSO Group that was set up in 2010.
- The earliest version of Pegasus discovered, which was captured by researchers in 2016, infected phones through what is called spear-phishing – text messages or emails that trick a target into clicking on a malicious link. Since then, however, NSO's attack capabilities have become more advanced. Pegasus infections can be achieved through so-called “zero-click” attacks, which do not require any interaction from the phone's owner in order to succeed. These will often exploit “zero-day” vulnerabilities, which are flaws or bugs in an operating system that the mobile phone's manufacturer does not yet know about and so has not been able to fix.

Who were the Targets?

- Human Rights activists, journalists and lawyers around the world have been targeted with phone malware sold to authoritarian governments by an Israeli surveillance firm.
- Indian ministers, government officials and opposition leaders also figure in the list of people whose phones may have been compromised by the spyware.
- In 2019, WhatsApp filed a lawsuit in the US court against Israel's NSO Group, alleging that the firm was incorporating cyber-attacks on the application by infecting mobile devices with malicious software.

Recent Steps Taken in India against Cyber Crime:

- **Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative:** It was launched in 2018 with an aim to spread awareness about cybercrime and building capacity for safety measures for Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) and frontline IT staff across all government departments.
- **National Cyber security Coordination Centre (NCCC):** In 2017, the NCCC was developed to scan internet traffic and communication metadata (which are little snippets of information hidden inside each communication) coming into the country to detect real-time cyber threats.

- **Cyber Swachhta Kendra:** In 2017, this platform was introduced for internet users to clean their computers and devices by wiping out viruses and malware.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** I4C was recently inaugurated by the government.
- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** has also been launched pan India.
- **Computer Emergency Response Team - India (CERT-IN):** It is the nodal agency which deals with cybersecurity threats like hacking and phishing.
- **Legislations in India:**
 - ✓ Information Technology Act, 2000.
 - ✓ Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019.

International Mechanisms:

- **International Telecommunication Union (ITU):** It is a specialized agency within the United Nations which plays a leading role in the standardization and development of telecommunications and cyber security issues.
- **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime:** It is an international treaty that seeks to address Internet and computer crime (cybercrime) by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations. It came into force on 1st July 2004. India is not a signatory to this convention.

4.1. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY SNIPPETS

1. BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile

Why in News?

- An extended range sea-to-sea variant of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile was recently test fired from stealth guided missile destroyer INS Visakhapatnam.

Highlights:

- The BrahMos missile was initially developed with a range capped at 290 km.
- The range of the missile was Originally capped at 290 km as per obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- However, following India's entry into the MTCR club in June 2016, the range is planned to be extended to 450 km and to 600km at a later stage.
- BrahMos is a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organisation of India (DRDO) and the NPOM of Russia.

- BrahMos is named on the rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva.
- It is a two-stage (solid propellant engine in the first stage and liquid ramjet in second) missile. It is a multiplatform missile i.e. it can be launched from land, air, and sea and multi capability missile with pinpoint accuracy that works in both day and night irrespective of the weather conditions.
- It operates on the “Fire and Forgets” principle i.e. it does not require further guidance after launch. Brahmos is one of the fastest cruise missiles currently operationally deployed with a speed of Mach 2.8, which is nearly 3 times more than the speed of sound.

2. Xenotransplantation

Why in News?

- Recently, in a medical first, doctors transplanted a pig heart into a patient in a last-ditch effort to save his life in the US.

Highlights:

- It involves the transplantation of nonhuman tissues or organs into human recipients.
- This is the first successful transplant of a pig’s heart into a human being. However, it’s too soon to know if the operation really will work.
- This time, a heart from a pig that had undergone gene-editing has been used to remove a sugar in its cells that’s responsible for that hyper-fast organ rejection.
- Genome editing (also called gene editing) is a group of technologies that give scientists the ability to change an organism’s Deoxy-Ribonucleic Acid (DNA).
- Prior attempts at such transplants — or xenotransplantation have failed. One of the biggest obstacles to transplantation is organ rejection.
- This has re-sparked a debate over the use of pigs for human transplants, which many animal rights groups oppose.
- This development could bring us one step closer to solving the global organ shortage.
- In India, patients need 25,000-30,000 liver transplants annually. But only about 1,500 end up receiving them.
- Pigs are increasingly becoming popular candidates for organ transplantation.
- Pigs offer advantages over primates for organ procurements, because they are easier to raise and achieve adult human size in six months.
- Pig heart valves are routinely transplanted into humans, and some patients with diabetes have received Porcine Pancreas Cells.

3. 6GW of Rooftop Solar (RTS) Power

Why in News?

- Recently, the data available on the website of the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), India could install just 6GW of Rooftop Solar (RTS) power by the end of October 2021 under the rooftop solar scheme.

Highlights:

- The major objective of the scheme is to generate solar power through the installation of solar panels on the roof of the houses.
- Also, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has announced the implementation of Phase 2 of the grid-connected Rooftop Solar Scheme.
- The aim of the scheme is to achieve the final capacity of 40 GW from Rooftop Solar Projects by 2022.
- The 40GW goal is part of India's ambitious target to achieve 175GW renewable energy (RE) capacity that includes 100GW of solar power by 2022.
- According to a report released in September, 2021, the lockdowns slowed renewable energy installations in the country and the pace of such installations is lagging India's 2022 Target. Although many companies began using solar energy, flip-flopping (sudden real or apparent change of policy) policies remained a major hurdle, especially when it came to power distribution companies (discoms).
- Industry executives point out RTS was becoming attractive for several consumer segments when Discoms and state governments started tightening regulations for the sector.
- India's Goods and Service Tax (GST) Council recently hiked the GST of many components of the solar system from 5% to 12%.
- It will increase RTS's capital cost by 4-5%.

4. 5th Generation Mobile Network

Why in News?

- The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has recently warned that the new 5G technology could interfere with sensitive navigation equipment such as altimeters, which could lead to "Catastrophic Disruptions."
- Airlines across the world, including India, are adjusting their scheduled flights to the US due to the rollout of 5G by telecom companies near American airports.

Highlights:

- The higher the frequency in the spectrum, the faster the service. So in order to get full value from 5G, operators want to operate at higher frequencies.
- Some of the C band (a radio frequency band between 3.7 and 4.2 GHz) spectrum auctioned had been used for satellite radio but the transition to 5G means there will be much more Traffic.
- The new C band 5G service could render a significant number of aircraft unusable, causing chaos for US flights and potentially stranding tens of thousands of Americans overseas.
- The United States auctioned mid-range 5G bandwidth to mobile phone companies in early 2021 in the C band, for about USD 80 billion.
- FAA warned that the functioning of Altimeters, which measure how far above the ground an aeroplane is travelling, operating in the 4.2-4.4 GHz range which sits too close to the frequency of C range, may get hampered.
- In addition to altitude, altimeter readouts are also used to facilitate automated landings and to help detect dangerous currents called wind shear.
- Companies have argued that C band 5G has been deployed in about 40 other countries without aviation interference issues. They have agreed to buffer zones around 50 airports in the United States, similar to those used in France, for six months to reduce interference risks.
- In the short-term, Companies agreed to temporarily defer turning on some wireless towers near key airports to avert a significant disruption to US flights.
- In the Longer-term, the FAA needs to clear and allow the vast majority of the US commercial aeroplane fleet to perform low-visibility landings at many airports where 5G C-band will be deployed. This means certifying altimeters to operate near 5G base stations.

5. Saaṛṛthi App

Why in News?

- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has recently launched Saaṛṛthi – a mobile app on investor education. ‘R’ represents ‘₹’.

Highlights:

- It aims to create awareness among investors about the basic concepts of the securities market. The app will also explain about KYC process, trading and settlement, Mutual Funds (MF), recent market developments, investor grievances redressal mechanism, etc.

- A recent surge is seen in individual investors entering the market, and more importantly a large proportion of trading being mobile phone based.
- According to NSE (National Stock Exchange) data, the share of Individual investors increased to 45% in 2021 from 39% in 2020.
- The NSE is India's Largest Financial Market.
- Securities are financial instruments issued to raise funds.
- The primary function of the securities markets is to enable the flow of capital from those that have it to those that need it.
- Securities markets provide channels for allocation of savings to investments and thereby decouple these two activities.
- As a result, the savers and investors are not constrained by their individual abilities, but by the economy's abilities to invest and save respectively, which inevitably enhances savings and investment in the economy.
- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is a statutory body established on 12th April 1992 in accordance with the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.
- Its basic function is to protect the interests of investors in securities and to promote and regulate the Securities Market.

6. Dark Matter

Why in News?

- Recently, scientists investigating how the shape of dark matter affects the motion of stars in the centre of some galaxies (stellar bars) have found that out-of-plane bending can be explained through dark matter halos in Barred Galaxies.

Highlights:

- Out of plane bending of the bar in barred galaxies is a rare violent bar thickening mechanism known as buckling.
- A dark halo is the inferred halo of invisible material (dark matter) that permeates and surrounds individual galaxies, as well as groups and clusters of galaxies.
- Dark matter, though never detected, is believed to be present in the entire universe.
- It is presumed that primordial black holes, those that were formed in the early age of the universe, are a source of dark matter. It was proposed by Professor Stephen Hawking.
- It is believed that combined with dark energy, it makes up more than 95% of the universe.

- Its gravitational force prevents stars in our Milky Way from Flying Apart.
- However, attempts to detect such dark matter particles using underground experiments, or accelerator experiments including the world's largest accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), have failed so far.
- The Big Bang occurred nearly 15 billion years ago and expanded.
- Earlier, astronomers believed that eventually the expansion of the Universe will slow down because of gravity and it will recollapse.
- However, data from the Hubble Telescope suggested that the Universe's expansion is Accelerating.
- The Astronomers Theorize that the faster expansion rate is due to a mysterious, dark force or energy that is pulling Galaxies Apart.
- The term 'dark' is used to denote the unknown.
- The following diagram reveals changes in the rate of expansion since the universe's birth 15 billion years ago.

7. Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)

Why in News?

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman has recently mentioned the launch of an “SSLV-D1 Micro SAT in April 2022”.

Highlights:

- The SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) aims to cater to the market for the launch of small satellites into Earth's low orbits that has emerged in recent years to cater to the needs of developing countries, universities for small satellites, and private corporations.
- It is the smallest vehicle weighing only 110-tonne. It will take only 72 hours to integrate, unlike the 70 days taken now for a launch vehicle.
- It can carry satellites weighing up to 500 kg to a low earth orbit while the tried and tested Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) can launch satellites weighing in the range of 1000 kg.
- SSLV is a three-stage all solid vehicle and has a capability to launch up to 500 kg satellite mass into 500 km Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and 300 kg to Sun Synchronous Orbit (SSO).
- It is perfectly suited for launching multiple microsattellites at a time and supports multiple orbital drop-offs.

- The key features of SSLV are low cost, with low turn-around time, flexibility in accommodating multiple satellites, launch on demand feasibility, minimal launch Infrastructure Requirements, etc.
- The Government has sanctioned a total cost of Rs. 169 Crores for the development project including the development & qualification of the vehicle systems and the flight demonstration through three development flights (SSLV-D1, SSLV-D2 & SSLV-D3).
- ISRO's new chairman Dr Somanath is credited with designing and developing the SSLV during his tenure as director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram since 2018. The maiden flight of the SSLV was scheduled to launch in July 2019 but that has since been delayed due to setbacks from Covid-19 and other issues.
- The development and manufacture of the SSLV are expected to create greater synergy between the space sector and private Indian industries – a key aim of the space ministry.
- Indian industry has a consortium for the production of PSLV and should come together to produce the SSLV as well once it is tested. One of the mandates of the newly-created ISRO commercial Arm, New Space India Limited (NSIL) is to mass-produce and manufacture the SSLV and the more powerful PSLV in partnership with the private sector in India through technology transfers. Its aim is to use research and development carried out by ISRO over the years for commercial purposes through Indian industry partners.
- Small satellite launches have so far depended on 'piggy-back' rides with big satellite launches on the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) — ISRO's work-horse with more than 50 successful launches. As a result, small satellite launches have relied on ISRO finalising launch contracts for larger satellites.

5.1 ART AND CULTURE SNIPPETS

1. Amar Jawan Jyoti and its Relocation

Why in News?

- The iconic Amar Jawan Jyoti (AJJ) at India Gate was extinguished as a part of its merger with the flame at the National War Memorial (NWM). This has sparked a political controversy.

What is the Amar Jawan Jyoti?

- The eternal flame at the AJJ underneath India Gate in central Delhi was an iconic symbol of the nation's tributes to the soldiers who have died for the country in various wars and Conflicts since Independence.

- Established in 1972, it was to mark India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.
- The then PM Indira Gandhi had inaugurated it on Republic Day 1972, after India defeated Pakistan in December 1971.

Description of the Bust:

- The key elements of the Amar Jawan Jyoti included a black marble plinth, a cenotaph, which acted as a tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
- The plinth had an inverted L1A1 self-loading rifle with a bayonet, on top of which was a soldier's war helmet.

How the Eternal Flame was Kept Burning?

- For 50 years the eternal flame had been burning underneath India Gate, without being extinguished.
- But on Friday, the flame was finally put off, as it was merged with another eternal flame at the National War Memorial.
- Since 1972, when it was inaugurated, it used to be kept alive with the help of cylinders of liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG.
- One cylinder could keep one burner alive for a day and a half.
- In 2006 that was changed. Though a project that cost around Rs 6 lakh the fuel for the flames was changed from LPG to piped natural gas, or PNG.
- It is through this piped gas that the flame marking the tribute to Indian soldiers had been kept alive Eternally.

Why was it Placed at India Gate?

- The India Gate, All India War Memorial, as it was known earlier, was built by the British in 1931. It was erected as a memorial to around 90,000 Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army, who had died in several wars and campaigns till then.
- Names of more than 13,000 dead soldiers are mentioned on the memorial commemorating them.
- As it was a memorial for the Indian soldiers killed in wars, the Amar Jawan Jyoti was established underneath it by the government in 1972.

Reasons for its Relocation:

- The correct perspective is that the flame will not be extinguished, but just moved to be merged with the one at the National War Memorial.

- The flame which paid homage to the soldiers killed in the 1971 War, does not even mention their name, and the India Gate is a “symbol of our colonial past”.
- The names of all Indian martyrs from all the wars, including 1971 and wars before and after it are housed at the National War Memorial.
- Hence it is a true tribute to have the flame paying tribute to martyrs there.
- Further, it can also be seen as part of the government’s redevelopment of the entire Central Vista, of which India Gate, the AJJ and the National War Memorial are parts of.

What else is planned with the extinguish?

- The canopy next to the India Gate will get a statue of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- The new statue will be 28 feet high.
- Till the statue is completed, a hologram statue of Bose will be placed under the canopy, which he will unveil on January 23.
- The canopy used to have a statue of King George V, which was removed in 1968.

Why Netaji?

- January 23 this year marks his 125th birth anniversary.
- From this year onwards, Republic Day celebrations will start on January 23, as opposed to the usual practice of starting it on January 24, to mark the birth anniversary of Bose.
- It will end on January 30, the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.
- The Government had earlier announced that Bose’s birth anniversary would be celebrated as Parakram Divas.

What is the National War Memorial and when was it made?

- The National War Memorial, which is around 400 meters from India Gate was Inaugurated in February 2019, in an area of around 40 acres.
- It was built to commemorate all the soldiers who have laid down their lives in the various battles, wars, operations and conflicts of Independent India.
- There are many independent memorials for such soldiers, but no memorial existed commemorating them all at the national level.
- Discussions to build such a memorial had been ongoing since 1961, but it did not come up.

Its Architecture:

- The architecture of the memorial is based on four concentric circles.
- Largest is the Raksha Chakra or the Circle of Protection which is marked by a row of trees, each of which represent soldiers, who protect the country.

- The Tyag Chakra, the Circle of Sacrifice, has circular concentric walls of honour based on the Chakravyuh.
- The walls have independent granite tablets for each of the soldiers who have died for the Country since Independence.
- As of today, there are 26,466 names of such soldiers on these granite tablets etched in Golden Letters.
- A tablet is added every time a soldier is killed in the line of duty.
- The final is the Amar Chakra, the Circle of Immortality, which has an obelisk, and the Eternal Flame.
- Busts of the 21 soldiers who have been conferred with the highest gallantry award of the country, Param Vir Chakra, are also installed at the memorial.

2. Sri Ramanuja

Why in News?

- Work is going apace on the 216-ft tall ‘Statue of Equality’ of the 11th century reformer and Vaishnavite saint, Sri Ramanuja, to be unveiled by PM Modi next month in Hyderabad.

Statue of Equality:

- The ‘Statue of Equality’, as it is called, is being installed to mark the 1,000th birth Anniversary of Sri Ramanuja.
- It was built of panchaloha, a combination of gold, silver, copper, brass and zinc, by the Aerospun Corporation in China and shipped to India.
- It is the second largest in the world in sitting position of the saint.
- The monument will be surrounded by 108 “Divya Desams” of Sri Vaishnavite tradition (model temples) like Tirumala, Srirangam, Kanchi, Ahobhila, Badrinath, Muktinath, Ayodhya, Brindavan, Kumbakonam and others.
- The idols of deities and structures were constructed in the shape at the Existing Temples.

Who was Sri Ramanuja?

- Ramanuja or Ramanujacharya (1017–1137 CE) was a philosopher, Hindu theologian, social Reformer, and one of the most important exponents of Sri Vaishnavism tradition within Hinduism.
- His philosophical foundations for devotionism were influential to the Bhakti movement.

His Works:

- Ramanuja's philosophical foundation was qualified monism and is called Vishishtadvaita in the Hindu tradition.
- His ideas are one of three subschools in Vedanta, the other two are known as Adi Shankara's Advaita (absolute monism) and Madhvacharya's Dvaita (dualism)

Important writings include:

- Vedarthasangraha (literally, "Summary of the Vedas meaning"),
- Sri Bhashya (a review and commentary on the Brahma Sutras),
- Bhagavad Gita Bhashya (a review and commentary on the Bhagavad Gita), and
- The minor works titled Vedantapida, Vedantasara, Gadya Trayam (which is a compilation of three texts called the Saranagati Gadyam, Sriranga Gadyam and the Srivaikunta Gadyam), and Nitya Grantham.

3. Tipu Sultan

Why in News?

- Naming a playground on Tipu Sultan in Mumbai has recently sparked a controversy.

Key Points:

- **Brief Profile:**
 - ✓ Born in November 1750, Tipu Sultan was Haidar Ali's son and a great warrior, also known as the Tiger of Mysore.
 - ✓ He was a well-educated man fluent in Arabic, Persian, Kanarese and Urdu.
 - ✓ Mysore had grown in strength under the leadership of powerful rulers like Haidar Ali (ruled from 1761 to 1782) and his famous son Tipu Sultan (ruled from 1782 to 1799).
 - ✓ Tipu introduced a number of administrative innovations during his rule, including his coinage, a new Mauludi lunisolar calendar, and a new land revenue system which initiated the growth of Mysore silk industry.
 - ✓ Embracing western military methods like artillery and rockets alongside traditional Indian weapons including war elephants, he ensured his forces could overwhelm his Indian rivals and match the British armies sent against him.

Maintenance of Armed Forces:

- He organised his army on the European model with Persian words of command.
- Though he took the help of the French officers to train his soldiers, he never allowed them (French) to develop into a Pressure Group.

- He was well aware of the importance of a Naval Force.
- In 1796, he set up a Board of Admiralty and planned for a fleet of 22 battleships and 20 large frigates.
- He established three dockyards at Mangalore, Wajedabad and Molidabad. However, his plans did not fructify.
- Fought Against Marathas:
- In 1767, Tipu commanded a corps of cavalry against the Marathas in the Carnatic (Karnataka) region of western India, and he fought against the Marathas on several occasions between 1775 and 1779.

Role in Anglo-Mysore Wars:

- The British saw Haidar and Tipu as ambitious, arrogant and dangerous – rulers who had to be controlled and crushed.
- Four wars were fought with Mysore, 1767-69: Treaty of Madras, 1780-84: Treaty of Mangalore, 1790-92: Treaty of Seringapatam and 1799: Subsidiary Alliance.
- Only in the last – the Battle of Seringapatam – did the Company ultimately win a victory. Tipu Sultan was killed defending his capital Seringapatam.
- Mysore was placed under the former ruling dynasty of the Wodeyars and a subsidiary alliance was imposed on the state.

6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Israel- Palestine issue

Why in News?

- India, at the UN Security Council open debate on the Middle East, has reiterated its firm and Unwavering Commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Palestine issue and supported a Negotiated two-state solution.

About the Issue:

- Resolution 2334 was adopted by this Council to reaffirm the international community's firm commitment to preventing the erosion of the two-state solution.

Israel- Palestine Conflict– Historical Background:

- The conflict has been ongoing for more than 100 years between Jews and Arabs over a piece of land between Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.
- It was between 1882 to 1948, when the Jews from around the world gathered in Palestine. This movement came to be known as
- Then in 1917, Ottoman Empire fell after World War 1 and the UK got control over Palestine.
- The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- The Balfour Declaration was issued after Britain gained control with the aim of establishing a home for the Jews in Palestine. However during that period the Arabs were in majority in Palestine.
- Jews favored the idea while the Palestinians rejected it. Almost 6 million Jews lost their lives in the Holocaust which also ignited further demand of a separate Jewish state.
- Jews claimed Palestine to be their natural home while the Arabs too did not leave the land and claimed it.
- The international community supported the Jews.
- In 1947, the UN voted for Palestine to be split into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem becoming an International City.
- That plan was accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab side and never implemented.



The Creation of Israel and the ‘Catastrophe’:

- It was in the year 1948 that Britain lifted its control over the area and Jews declared the creation of Israel. Although Palestinians objected, Jews did not back out which led to an armed conflict.
- The neighboring Arabs also invaded and were thrashed by the Israeli troops. This made thousands of Palestinians flee their homes. This was called Al-Nakba, or the “Catastrophe”.
- Israel had gained maximum control over the territory after this came to an end.
- Jordan then went on a war with Israel and seized control over a part of the land which was called the West Bank, and Egypt occupied Gaza.
- Jerusalem was divided between Israel in the West and Jordan in the East. However, no formal peace agreement was signed, each side continued to blame each other for the tension and the region saw more wars.
- Israeli forces captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank, various areas of Syrian Golan Heights, Gaza and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula in the year 1967.

What is the Present scenario?

- Israel still occupies the West Bank, and although it pulled out of Gaza the UN still regards that piece of land as part of Occupied Territory.
- Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.
- Tensions escalated in Recent Month over Israel’s actions concerning Al-Asqa mosque in East Jerusalem.

Where is the West Bank?

- It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.

What are the Disputed Settlements here? Who lives there?

- The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since. During this war, the country defeated the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.
- It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
- Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

- The territory is still a point of contention due to a large number of Palestinians who live there and hope to see the land become a part of their future state.
- When Israel took control of the land in 1967 it allowed Jewish people to move in, but Palestinians consider the West Bank illegally occupied Palestinian land.

Are these Settlements Illegal?

- The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.
- Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.

2. North Korea Test-Fires most Powerful Missile since 2017

Why in News?

- North Korea recently tested its most powerful missile since 2017, ramping up the firepower for its record-breaking seventh launch this month as Seoul warned nuclear and long-range tests could be next.

About the News:

- North Korea has never test-fired this many missiles in a calendar month before and last week threatened to abandon a nearly five-year-long self-imposed moratorium on testing long-range and nuclear weapons, blaming U.S. “hostile” policy for forcing its hand.
- With peace talks with Washington stalled, North Korea has doubled down on leader Kim Jong-un’s vow to modernise the armed forces, flexing Pyongyang’s military muscles despite biting international sanctions.
- South Korea said that North Korea could soon restart nuclear and intercontinental missile tests. North Korea “has come close to destroying the moratorium declaration”, South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in said in a statement.
- North Korea is continuing its missile program despite several UN Security Council resolutions and the international community’s calls for diplomacy and denuclearization.

Origin of Divide in Korean Peninsula:

- The present-day conflict between the US and North Korea can be traced from the Cold War between the USSR and US.
- After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the Allied forces at the Yalta Conference (1945), agreed to establish a “four-power trusteeship over Korea”.
- The fear of the spread of communism (state ownership over economic resources of a country) and the mutual distrust between the USSR and the US led to the failure of the trusteeship plan.
 - ✓ Before a concrete plan could be formulated, the USSR invaded Korea.
 - ✓ This led to a condition where the north of Korea was under the USSR and the south under the rest of the allies, mainly the US.
 - ✓ The Korean peninsula was divided into two regions by the 38th parallel.
- In 1948 the United Nations proposed free elections across all of Korea.
 - ✓ The USSR rejected this plan and the northern part was declared as Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea).
 - ✓ The election took place in the American protectorate resulting in the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).
- Both North Korea and South Korea tried to enhance their reach, territorially and ideologically, which gave birth to the Korean Conflict.



About the Korean War:

- On 25th June 1950, North Korea, backed by the USSR, launched an attack on South Korea and occupied most of the country.
 - ✓ In response, the United Nations force led by the US retaliated.

- In 1951 the US forces led by Douglas MacArthur crossed the 38th parallel and triggered the entry of China in support of North Korea.
 - ✓ To prevent further escalation, peace talks began later in 1951.
- India was actively involved in negotiating peace in the Korean peninsula by engaging all the major stakeholders – US, USSR and China.
 - ✓ In 1952, the Indian resolution on Korea was adopted at the United Nations (UN).
- On 27th July 1953, the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed between the UN Command, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. It led to an official ceasefire without a Peace treaty. Thus, the war officially never ended.
- This also led to the establishment of the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) – a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula to serve as a buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea.
- In December 1991, North and South Korea signed a pact agreeing to refrain from Aggression.

About the US-North Korea Conflict:

- During the Cold War era, (allegedly with the support of Russia and China) North Korea accelerated its nuclear programme and developed nuclear capabilities.
 - ✓ During the same time, the US extended its Nuclear Umbrella (guarantee of support during a nuclear attack) to its allies i.e South Korea and Japan.
- North Korea withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003 and afterwards, under present leader Kim Jong-un, it increased nuclear missile testing.
 - ✓ North Korea is barred from testing ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons under international law.
- In response to this, the US started deploying THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) in South Korea in March 2017. The territorial conflict which started between North and South Korea has transformed into a tussle between the US and North Korea.
- Following the failure of diplomatic efforts to improve relations with North Korea, the US has imposed sanctions.

What is India's Stand?

- India has consistently voiced its opposition to North Korean nuclear and missile tests. However, it has maintained a neutral stance Regarding Sanctions.

3. India's Watchwords in a not so Bright 2022

Why in News?

- In this article, the author examines the uncertainties and impermanence India would face in the context of domestic and geopolitical world affairs for the year 2022.

What are the Geopolitical Challenges and Risks for India in 2022?



China as Disruptor:

- The role of China in 2022 is possibly the most disrupting one, given the challenge it poses to the existing international order.
- Militarily, China is openly challenging U.S. supremacy in many areas, including 'state-of-the-art weaponry' such as hyper-sonic technology.
- China has abandoned the 'one country two systems' policy, stripping Hong Kong of its freedom and inviting international opprobrium.
- It is now threatening Taiwan, which could well become one of the flash points of conflict in 2022. Concerns in Indo-Pacific: China might well be tempted to demonstrate its ability in the Indo-Pacific region. This, in the context of US ambitions in the same region, could constitute a serious risk.
- Russia-Ukraine Conflict: The Russia and Ukraine conflict has grave possibilities and could result in a series of cyclical outcomes with considerable damage potential.
- Kazakhstan Crisis: The current unrest in Kazakhstan demonstrates a sharper cleavage between the U.S.-led West and its principal opponents, Russia and China.
- Return of the Taliban: Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has led to a material shift in the balance of power in an already troubled region on India's periphery.
- Taliban's return to power represents a significant victory for Pakistan.
- Developments in Afghanistan have fuelled the ambitions of quite a few 'anti-state militant Groups' across the region.

- **Concerns with Indonesia:** In Indonesia, a resurgence of radical activities is taking place which provides fertile ground for other radical groups to enlarge their activities across the Asian region.
- **Border issues with China:** The Chinese transgressions across the Line of Actual Control in different sectors in Ladakh could well be expanded in 2022 at many more points on the Sino-Indian border.
- **Challenges in Central Asia:** In Central Asia, India will be challenged on how best to manage its traditional friendship with Russia with the pronounced tilt seen more recently in India-U.S. relations. **Challenges in West Asia:** In West Asia, the challenge for India is how to manage its membership of the Second Quad (India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the U.S.) with the conflicting interests of different players in the region.

Way Forward:

- India's foreign policy needs to demonstrate more flexibility to manage the contradictions that exist.
- India needs to develop a strategy on how to counter the publicity given by China to its low-yield nuclear weapons meant for battlefield use even during conventional military operations and against conventional targets.
- India would need to strengthen its military posture to convince India's neighbours that it can stand up to China.

4. Great Resignation

Why in News?

- Recently, large numbers of people are embracing the credo of "antiwork", and walking out of their jobs, especially in the US and European countries.

Highlights:

- A record 4.3 million people resigned in August 2021, up 2,42,000 from July, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).
- The American psychologist Anthony Klotz has called it the "Great Resignation" — a call to remap priorities in the work-life equation.
- While those opting out of work include, prominently, employees in the retail and hospitality sectors, many were willing to switch jobs or to re-evaluate their options.
- Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, have recorded a fall in the skilled labour force.

- However, this could be due to stronger social safety nets.
- Living through and surviving pandemic lockdowns nudged many to see “work-free” living as a viable option.
- Grievances about low pay, unrealistic deadlines and bad bosses bubbled up from subconscious depths to feed the impulse.
- This also means that these workers have market values beyond their existing employers.
- They are relying on their experience and contacts to bag better job opportunities or choose start-ups.
- There is a general apprehension that not enough capital allocation has been made in capacity building.

5. World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends (WESO Trends) 2022.

Why in News?

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has recently released a report titled World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends (WESO Trends) 2022.
- The Outlook remains fragile because the future path of the pandemic remains uncertain.
- The WESO Trends includes comprehensive labour market projections for 2022 and 2023. It gives assessments of how labour market recovery has unfolded worldwide, reflecting Different National Approaches to pandemic recovery and analysing the effects on different Groups of workers and economic sectors.

Highlights:

- Global unemployment is expected to remain above pre-Covid-19 levels until at least 2023.
- The 2022 level is estimated at 207 million, compared to 186 million in 2019.
- In 2022, it will be almost 2% below their pre-pandemic level – that is equivalent to the loss of 52 million full-time jobs. This deficit is twice as large as the ILO’s forecast in 2021.
- It is estimated that in 2022 around 40 million people will no longer be participating in the global labour force.
- The impact has been particularly serious for developing nations that experienced higher levels of inequality, more divergent working conditions and weaker social protection systems even before the pandemic.
- Many low and middle-income countries have low access to vaccines and limited scope to expand government budgets to address the crisis.

- The report warns of stark differences in the impact that the crisis is having across groups of workers and countries – deepening inequalities within and among nations – while weakening the economic, financial and social fabric of almost every State, regardless of development status.
- The damage is likely to require years to repair, with potential long-term consequences for labour forces, household incomes, and social and possibly political cohesion.
- Some sectors, such as travel and tourism have been particularly hard hit, while other sectors such as those related to information technology have thrived.
- Women have been worse hit by the labour market crisis than men and this is likely to continue. The closing of education and training institutions will have long-term implications for young people, particularly those without internet access.
- There can be no real recovery from this pandemic without a broad-based labour market Recovery.
- Sustainable recovery is possible, but it must be based on the principles of decent work, including health and safety, equity, social protection, and social dialogue.
- The new labour market forecast can be vital for policy planning for a country like India, where most of the work is informal, to prevent further employment losses and reductions in Working Hours.

6. Preventing Genocide

Why in News?

- Incendiary speeches at a religious assembly include calls for the genocide of Muslims in India and can be seen as part of an ongoing pattern of Targeting Minorities.

Background of the Convention against Genocide:

- India's role: India has signed and ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948.
- In 1946, Cuba, India and Panama co-sponsored General Assembly Resolution 96(I), which affirmed genocide as a 'crime under international law'.
- As a result of this resolution, a convention on the prohibition of genocide was drafted, which was passed by the General Assembly in 1948 and came into effect in 1951, with more than 150 states party to the convention presently.
- Legal obligation: Legal obligations on states that are party to the convention include:
 - ✓ The obligation not to commit genocide,

- ✓ To prevent genocide, and to punish genocide (Article I),
- ✓ To enact legislation to give effect to the provisions of the convention (Article V);
- ✓ To provide for effective penalties for those found guilty of criminal conduct (Article V); and
- ✓ The obligation to try those charged with genocide in a competent tribunal (Article VI).

No Legislation Enacted by India:

- Since signing the Genocide Convention and ratifying it, to date India has not enacted any Legislation in accordance with Article VI of the Genocide Convention.
- At the outset, India is in violation of its international obligation to criminalise genocide within its domestic law per Articles V, VI and VII, and to take all means to ensure the Prevention of genocide.
- Indian domestic law shows that there are no comparable provisions for the prosecution of any Mass Crimes, least of all genocide.
- Indian Penal Code provisions relating to rioting, unlawful assembly and ‘promoting Enmity between different groups’ do not embody the basic elements of the crime of Genocide, which is against a collectivity or a group, with the specific intent to cause its Destruction. These also do not pertain to another key aspect of the Genocide Convention – that of prevention, and creating the conditions in which such hate speech and other associated acts are not allowed to flourish.

Significance of the Gambia’s proceedings before the ICJ against Myanmar:

- The Gambia has initiated proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Myanmar on the basis of the Convention.
- The ICJ, relying on a previous case of Belgium v. Senegal, stated, “It follows that any State party to the Genocide Convention, and not only a specially affected State, may invoke the responsibility of another State party with a view to ascertaining the alleged failure to comply with its obligations erga omnes partes, and to bring that failure to an end.”

7. Global Research on Antimicrobial Resistance (GRAM) report

Why in News?

- the Global Research on Antimicrobial Resistance (GRAM) report, 1.27 million people died in 2019 as a direct result of AMR (AntiMicrobial Resistance).

Highlights:

- The death due to AMR Is now a leading cause of death worldwide, higher than HIV/AIDS or malaria.

- Most of the deaths from AMR were caused by lower respiratory infections, such as pneumonia, and bloodstream infections, which can lead to sepsis.
- MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) was particularly deadly, while E. coli, and several other bacteria, were also linked to high levels of drug resistance.
- 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”.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified AMR as one of the top ten threats to global health.
- India, with its combination of large population, rising incomes that facilitate purchase of antibiotics, high burden of infectious diseases and easy over-the-counter access to antibiotics, is an important locus for the generation of resistance genes (such genes help bacteria in surviving on being exposed to antibiotics).
- The multi-drug resistance determinant, New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1 (NDM-1), emerged from this region to Spread Globally.
- Africa, Europe and other parts of Asia have also been affected by multi-drug resistant typhoid originating from South Asia.
- In India, over 56,000 newborn deaths each year due to sepsis are caused by organisms that are resistant to first line antibiotics.
- A study reported by ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) from 10 hospitals showed that when Covid patients acquire drug-resistant infections in hospitals, the mortality is almost 50-60%.

8. Joint India-UK Meet

Why in News?

- Recently, the Union Minister of Science & Technology addressed the joint India-UK meet on “Sustaining Food Production under Environmental Stress” and called for collaboration between the two nations on issues of mutual concern like achieving the goals of Food Security and Zero Hunger.

Highlights:

- India and the UK must invite global collaborations in various dimensions of science like agriculture, medicine, food, pharma, engineering or defence.
- India-UK joint collaboration may include programmes like student exchange, basic research, technology development, product development as well as product/process demonstration and their implementation in joint collaboration.
- Dwelling on the issue of Sustainable Food Production, the South Asian region is facing the shrinking arable land, besides the problem of Global Climate Change that needs to be addressed.
- Arable land in South Asia was reported at 43.18% in 2018 which has been stagnant since the early 1970s and recently declining.
- Growth yields and more intensive use of land will account for all of the growth in crop production and will also compensate for losses in the arable land area.
- NABI (National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute) could provide an impetus to the nations need for addressing nutritional security even under the climatic changes happening around the world.
- NABI is a premier institute that works at the interface of Agri-Food and Nutrition Biotechnology.
- Underlining that the global pattern of food production and distribution may need to shift significantly as climate change progresses.
- Need of joint funding to develop a coherent and stakeholder-relevant R&D (Research and Development) program that will address this challenge.

9. Global Counter Terrorism Council (GCTC).

Why in News?

- The International Counter Terrorism Conference 2022 was recently organised by the Global Counter Terrorism Council (GCTC).

Highlights:

- GCTC is an International Think-Tank Council with an overarching mission of reducing the vulnerability of people worldwide to terrorism by preventing, combating and prosecuting terrorist acts and countering incitement and recruitment to terrorism.
- Earlier, in the 13th BRICS Summit held in 2021, BRICS counter terrorism action plan was adopted.

- Emergence of new “religiophobia”, especially against Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, is a matter of serious concern and needs to be recognised, just like Christian phobia, Islamophobia and anti-semitism, to bring a balance in discussions on such issues.
- An irrational or obsessive fear or anxiety of religion, religious faith, religious people or religious organisations.
- In the past two years, several Member States have been trying to label terrorism into categories such as racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism, violent nationalism, right wing extremism, etc.
- Calling it a “dangerous” tendency, India said this goes against some of the accepted principles agreed to by all UN Member States in the recently adopted Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.
- Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy states that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations should be condemned and there cannot be any justification for any act of terrorism, whatsoever.
- India’s annual resolution on the issue of counter-terrorism was adopted by consensus in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
- India, a victim of state-sponsored cross-border terrorism, has been at the forefront in highlighting the serious threat to international peace and security emanating from acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups.
- Amid growing fears that terrorists will again nest in Afghanistan and increase attacks in Africa, India’s foreign minister has recently urged for the adoption of the convention.
- In 1996, with the objective of providing a comprehensible legal framework to counter terrorism, India proposed to the UNGA the adoption of the "Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism” (CCIT).
- CCIT seeks a universal definition of terrorism, prosecution of terrorists under special laws, making cross-border terrorism an extraditable offence worldwide, among others.

10. Environmental Emergency

Why in News?

- Recently, the Peruvian government declared a 90-day “environmental emergency” in damaged coastal territories, after an oil spill that saw 6,000 barrels of crude oil pour into the sea.

Highlights:

- The spill was caused by freak waves, which resulted from the eruption of a volcano in Tonga.
- The oil spill came out of a tanker belonging to the Spanish energy firm Repsol. The incident occurred at the La Pampilla refinery, some 30 kilometers north of the Peruvian capital of Lima in the Ventanilla district of the port city of Callao.
- A freak wave or rogue wave is usually defined as a wave that is two times the significant wave height of the area.
- The significant wave height is the average of the highest one-third of waves that occur over a given period. Rogue waves can disable and sink even the largest ships and oil rigs.
- These so-called “freak waves” are not confined to the Atlantic Ocean or North Sea.
- One of the places rogue waves appear to happen most frequently is off the southeast coast of South Africa. An oil spill refers to any uncontrolled release of crude oil, gasoline, fuels, or other oil by-products into the Environment.
- Oil spills can pollute land, air, or water, though it is mostly used for oceanic oil spills.
- Oil spills have become a major environmental problem, chiefly as a result of intensified petroleum exploration and production on continental shelves and the transport of large amounts of oils in vessels.
- Oil spills that happen in rivers, bays and the ocean most often are caused by accidents involving tankers, barges, pipelines, refineries, drilling rigs and storage facilities.
- Threat to Indigenous people: Oil pollution poses health hazards for the indigenous population who depend on seafood.
- **Harmful to Aquatic Life:** Oil on ocean surfaces is harmful to many forms of aquatic life because it prevents sufficient amounts of sunlight from penetrating the surface, and it also reduces the level of dissolved oxygen. Crude oil ruins the insulating and waterproofing properties of feathers and fur of birds
- Thus, oil-coated birds and Marine Mammals may die from hypothermia (decrease in body temperature to below-normal levels). Threat to Mangroves: Saltwater marshes and Mangroves frequently suffer from oil spills. If beaches and populated shorelines are fouled, tourism and commerce may be severely affected. The power plants and other utilities that depend on drawing or discharging sea water are severely affected by oil spills.
- Major oil spills are frequently followed by the immediate suspension of commercial fishing.

Suggestions

- Bacteria can be used to clean up oil spills in the ocean through bioremediation.
- Specific bacteria can be used to bioremediate specific contaminants, such as hydrocarbons, which are present in oil and gasoline.
- Using bacteria such as *Paraperlucidibaca*, *Cycloclasticus*, *Oleispira*, *Thalassolituus* *Zhongshania* and some others can help remove several classes of contaminants.
- Floating barriers, called booms, are used to restrict the spread of oil and to allow for its recovery, removal, or dispersal.
- They are devices used for physically separating spilled oil from the water's surface.
- Various sorbents (e.g., straw, volcanic ash, and shavings of polyester-derived plastic) that absorb the oil from the water are used.
- These are chemicals that contain surfactants, or compounds that act to break liquid substances such as oil into small droplets. They accelerate its natural dispersion into the sea.

11. Burkina Faso

Why in News?

- Burkina Faso's army has recently announced that it had ousted President Roch Kabore, suspended the constitution, dissolved the Government and the national assembly, and closed the Country's Borders.

Highlights:

- Army has toppled governments over the past 18 months in Mali and Guinea.
- The Military also took over in Chad last year (2021) after President Idriss Deby died Fighting rebels on the battlefield in the Country's North.
- A former French colony, Burkina Faso has suffered chronic instability since gaining independence in 1960, including several coups.
- The country's name, meaning "land of the honest men", was picked by revolutionary military officer Thomas Sankara who took power in 1983. He was toppled and killed in 1987. The country has been fighting an Islamist insurgency that spilled over from neighbouring Mali. This has Fuelled anger in the military and damaged the once important tourist industry.
- Landlocked Burkina Faso, one of West Africa's poorest countries despite being a gold producer, has experienced numerous coups since independence from France in 1960.

- Islamist militants control swathes of Burkina Faso's territory and have forced residents in some areas to abide by their harsh version of Islamic law, while the military's struggle to quell the insurgency has drained scarce national resources.
- Kabore had faced waves of protests in recent months amid frustration over killings of civilians and soldiers by militants, some of whom have links to Islamic State and al Qaeda.
- The discontent escalated in November 2021, when 53 people, mainly members of the security forces, were killed by suspected jihadists.
- The announcement cited the deterioration of the security situation and what the army described as Kabore's inability to unite the West African nation and effectively respond to challenges, which include an Islamist Insurgency. The statement was made in the name of a previously unheard-of entity, the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration, or MPSR, its French-language acronym. MPSR, which includes all sections of the army.
- The MPSR said it would propose a calendar for a return to constitutional order "within a reasonable time frame, after consultations with various sections of the nation."
- The military also announced the closure of Burkina Faso's borders.

12. Why India must engage with Myanmar

Why in News?

- Notwithstanding the unfortunate developments since the Tatmadaw took over, a Recalibration exercise for developing a robust relationship with Naypyidaw is the need of the hour.

Need for Proactive Neighbourhood Policy with Myanmar:

- Security and economic interests: India should implement an unbiased and proactive "Neighbourhood First" strategy that facilitates the Act East policy crucial for India's long-term security and economic interests.
- Myanmar — regardless of who governs its polity — is not only the decisive lynchpin for India's Act East policy but critical for the economic development and security of India's Northeast. China factor: Such a policy should take into account the measures that China has taken to arm the Tatmadaw.

How to Support Myanmar?

- Critical requirements: India should find ways to support Naypyidaw for its critical requirements of systems and platforms like UAVs, surveillance systems and Communication Equipment.

- Economic engagement: There is a need for dynamic economic engagement with Myanmar, to expedite the completion of the earlier agreement on the operationalisation of the Sittwe port, the establishment of an oil refinery and joint vaccine production facilities at a cost of \$6 billion. People-to-people goodwill: India also needs to proactively employ the existing “people-to-people” goodwill and proximate ties between the two armies.
- Engage with military leadership to stop highhandedness: India has the singular advantage of acceptability from both factions in Myanmar and it is, therefore, imperative that it takes the lead in engaging with the ruling military leadership, to stop the highhandedness.
- The visit by India’s Foreign Secretary to Myanmar in the last week of December 2021 was significant. It conveyed the message that India, notwithstanding its commitment to democracy, is amenable to conduct business with the country, regardless of who is in the seat of power. It is of the utmost importance for India to positively engage Naypyidaw and stave off attempts to exploit Myanmar by countries inimical to India’s growth. Any ambiguity or delay in India’s constructive engagement with Myanmar would only serve the interests of anti-India forces.

13.1974 Joint Protocol on Religious Pilgrimages

Why in News?

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has recently announced that India is “positive” and “willing to engage” in talks with Pakistan on upgrading the 1974 Joint Protocol on Religious Pilgrimages.

Highlights:

- It will allow air travel as well as increase the number of shrines pilgrims from both countries could visit.
- The Government also reopened the Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara corridor to Pakistan to allow Sikh pilgrims to cross over, more than 20 months after it was shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Earlier, India and Pakistan had exchanged a list of their nuclear installations.
- Under the protocol both the countries agreed on the following principles for facilitating **visits to such shrines** :
- Pilgrimage visits from one country to the other shall be allowed without discrimination as to religion or sect. The list of shrines to be visited shall be finalised shortly through correspondence.

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- The agreed list may be enlarged from time to time by Mutual Agreement.
 - The protocol currently includes five Muslim shrines on the Indian side and 15 shrines on the Pakistani side, a majority of them gurdwaras.
 - Upto 20 parties may be allowed to visit from one country to the other every year. This number may be revised from time to time.
 - Every effort should continue to be made to ensure that places of religious worship mentioned in the agreed list are properly maintained and their sanctity preserved.
 - Such visitors will be given Visitor Category visas.
 - The Kartarpur corridor connects the Darbar Sahib Gurdwara in Narowal district of Pakistan with the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur district in India's Punjab province.
 - The corridor was built to commemorate 550th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev, founder of Sikhism on 12th November 2019.

