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**JULY 2021**



## e-Book July 2021

It is the time to start and target the UPSC Civil Service Examination preparation for Prelims 2021. To ease the preparation we are providing monthly basis important news (section wise) and with that some expected questions.

*"Every day is a chance to begin again. Don't focus on the failures of yesterday, start today with positive thoughts and expectations." - Catherine Pulsifer*

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Why in news?

The Government of India extends powers related to Citizenship Application

#### Key points are:

- The Government of India has issued a notification granting powers related to citizenship applications under existing rules to authorities of five states. It includes power to accept, verify and approve citizenship applications from members of minority communities i.e., Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians hailing from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- The order has been issued under the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the Citizenship Rules, 2009 and not under the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 since its rules have not yet been framed.
- The five states and their districts where the Central Government issued a notification granting powers related to citizenship applications under existing rules to authorities are; Gujarat (Districts- Morbi, Rajkot, Patan and Vadodara), Chhattisgarh (Districts- Durg and Balodabazar), Rajasthan (Districts-Jalore, Udaipur, Pali, Barmer and Sirohi), Haryana ( District- Faridabad) and Punjab (District- Jalandhar).

### Bell of Faith' Scheme

#### Why in news?

The Government of Kerala has launched the 'Bell of Faith' scheme that will be implemented for senior citizens staying alone in villages. Previously, this scheme was successfully implemented in a number of urban households in Kerala.

#### Key points are:

- The 'Bell of Faith' scheme is a safety project conceived under Kerala's Community Policing Scheme. It will help elderly citizens attract the attention of their neighbours using a loud, remote-controlled alarm in emergencies.
- It has been under implementation in Kerala since 2018.

### Telangana State Formation Day

#### Why in news?

Telangana State Formation Day on June 2 will be a low-key affair for the second consecutive year in view of COVID-19.

#### Key Points are:

- The State government has issued a series of instructions regarding the celebration of the State Formation Day, a State function, restricting the participation to a maximum of 10 people.
- Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar asked the Special Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries and Heads of departments to give instructions to departments under their control accordingly.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that Flag Code 2002 was followed strictly and there should be no use of plastic flags. Use of masks, distancing, sanitisers, and sanitising sprayers should be ensured while conducting the function.
- Speeches, prize distribution, asset distribution, and others should not be organised in view of COVID-19.
- Following the COVID-19 outbreak, State Formation Day was a low-key affair last year too with Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao paying tributes at the martyrs memorial and unfurling the tricolour at a simple ceremony.

### Gujarat govt to grant Centre of Excellence status to 7 private universities

#### Why in news?

The Gujarat government has decided to grant Centre of Excellence (CoE) status to seven private universities in the state, an official said on Tuesday (1 June, 2021).

#### Key points are:

- As per an official release, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani on Monday 31st May, 2021) gave in-principle approval to grant seven universities the CoE status, so that they make their mark globally.

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- The list includes Nirma University, CEPT University, Pandit Deendayal Energy University, Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DAIICT), Ahmedabad University, Charotar University of Science and Technology, and Marwadi University.
- The decision will improve the quality of education at these universities and give them an “international touch”, Rupani said in a statement, adding that the move will also boost research, innovation and culture for creating start-ups.
- A detailed action plan on how these universities can contribute internationally will be prepared soon, the release stated.
- Students will get quality infrastructure and facilities such as best faculties, laboratories, libraries and hostels, it said.

**Government Launches Seed Minikit Programme**

*Why in news?*

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Wednesday (2 June, 2021) launched a seed minikit programme by distributing high yielding varieties of seeds of pulses and oilseeds to farmers.

*Key points are:*

- A total of 20,27,318 seed minikits of pulses, more than 8 lakh soybean seed minikits and 74,000 groundnut minikits are to be provided free of cost directly to the farmers under the National Food Security Mission.
- The mini-kits are being provided by the central agencies National Seeds Corporation (NCS), NAFED and Gujarat State Seeds Corporation and wholly-funded by the Centre through the National Food Security Mission.
- The Seed Minikit Programme was launched by the agriculture minister by distributing seed minikits (higher yielding varieties of seeds) to farmers, an official statement said.
- Tomar said the Centre, in collaboration with states, has been implementing various activities to enhance production and productivity of pulses and oilseeds under the National Food Security Mission.
- From the year 2014-15, there has been a renewed focus on increasing the production of pulses and oilseeds, the agriculture ministry said.
- Oilseeds production has increased from 27.51 million tonnes in 2014-15 to 36.57 million tonnes in 2020-21. Pulses output has increased from 17.15 million tonnes in 2014-15 to 25.56 million tonnes in 2020-21.

- Though trends in area, production and productivity of oilseeds and pulses are encouraging, the minister said there was a need for further acceleration. He said the seed minikit programme is a major tool for introducing new varieties of seeds in fields and instrumental for increasing the seed replacement rate.
- The distribution of seeds will continue till June 15, 2021 so that the seeds reach the farmers before the Kharif sowing commences.
- A total of 20,27,318 seed minikits of pulses, more than 8 lakh soybean seed minikits and 74,000 groundnut minikits are to be provided free of cost directly to the farmers under the National Food Security Mission.
- ‘India is making tremendous progress in the agriculture sector and country is estimated to produce a record 305.43 million tonnes during 2020-21,’ the statement said.
- India imports pulses and edible oils to meet domestic demand.

**Indian Railways’ RDSO becomes the first institution to be declared SDO**

*Why in news?*

Indian Railways’ Research Design & Standards Organization (RDSO) has recently become the nation’s first institution to be declared as Standard Developing Organization (SDO) under the mission called “One Nation One Standard” on Bureau of Indian Standards.

*Key points are:*

- BIS is an institution under the Department of Consumer Affairs. According to the Railway Ministry, this unique initiative of two organizations under the Government of India is going to set a template for all the rest of India’s leading research and standard development organizations to follow and adapt world-class standards.
- To attain the government’s “Nation One Standard” vision, a scheme was launched by BIS- the National Standards Body, which provides for “Recognition of SDO”.
- BIS, through this scheme, aims at aggregating as well as integrating the existing capabilities and dedicated domain specific expertise that are available with the country’s various organizations engaged in standards development in their specific sectors, and allow the convergence of India’s all standard development activities resulting in “One National Standard for One Subject”.



- The RDSO in Lucknow, which is the sole Research and Design Wing of the Railway Ministry, is one of the nation's leading standard formulating body undertaking standardization work for the railway sector.
- Now with this recognition, the RDSO's standard formulation procedures will be more focused on consensus-based decision making and will entail the extensive engagement of all stakeholders including Academia, Industry, Users, Test Houses, Recognized Labs, etc, in the standard making process from the very initial stages.

### National AI Portal

*Why in news?*

The 'National AI Portal', celebrated its first anniversary on 28th May, 2021.

*Key points are:*

- National AI Portal is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), National e-Governance Division (NeGD) and NASSCOM.
- NeGD: In 2009, NeGD was created as an Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation (a not-for-profit company set up by MeitY).
- NASSCOM: A not-for-profit industry association, is the apex body for the IT and IT enabled products and services sector in India.
- It serves as a central hub for Artificial Intelligence (AI) related news, learning, articles, events and activities etc., in India and beyond.

*About Artificial Intelligence (AI):*

- It describes the action of machines accomplishing tasks that have historically required human intelligence.
- It includes technologies like machine learning, pattern recognition, big data, neural networks, self algorithms etc.
- AI involves complex things such as feeding a particular data into the machine and making it react as per the different situations.
- AI is being used across different industries including finance and healthcare.
- As per a report by PwC, India reported a 45% increase in the use of AI, the highest among all countries, following the outbreak of the virus.

### MoU between Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

*Why in news?*

The Ministry of Culture (MoC) and Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for 'Cooperation in Development of National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal, Gujarat' in New Delhi on 16 June.

*Key points are:*

- Union Minister of State (I/C) for Culture Prahlad Singh Patel and Union Minister of State (I/C) for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Mansukh Mandaviya were present during the MoU signing ceremony held at Transport Bhawan, New Delhi.
- This MoU and the museum will play a big role in highlighting the cultural heritage of the country both domestically as well as to the world. The Maritime Museum at Lothal is only a beginning. The Culture Ministry will extend all support as a knowledge partner to other similar projects at other locations.
- Recent excavations at different locations are bringing new historical facts to light which could become the basis of re-writing history. These findings will bring out the glory of our ancient culture.
- NMHC is to be developed as a first of its kind in the country dedicated to the legacy of Maritime Heritage of India, to showcase India's rich and diverse maritime glory.

*About National Maritime Heritage Complex*

- It is a world-class facility is to be developed in the vicinity of the ASI site of Lothal, located about 80 kms away from Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
- NMHC would be developed as an international tourist destination, where the maritime heritage of India from ancient to modern times would be showcased and an edutainment approach using the latest technology would be adopted to spread awareness about India's maritime heritage.
- NMHC would be developed in an area of about 400 acres with various unique structures such as National Maritime Heritage Museum, Light House Museum, Heritage Theme Park, Museum Themed Hotels & Maritime themed eco-resorts, Maritime Institute etc. which would be developed in a phased manner.



*Feature of NMHC*

- The unique feature of NMHC is the recreation of ancient Lothal city, which is one of the prominent cities of the ancient Indus valley civilization dating to 2400 BC.
- Apart from that, the evolution of India’s Maritime Heritage during various eras would be exhibited through various galleries. NMHC would have pavilion for each coastal states and union territories to showcase the artefacts/maritime heritage of the respective states and union territories.
- Various theme parks would be developed at NMHC such as Maritime & Naval Theme Park, Monuments Park, Climate Change Theme Park, Adventure & Amusement Theme Park through a public-private partnership which would provide a complete tourist destiny experience to the visitors.
- MoC will provide required support for showcasing the maritime heritage of India at NMHC in the form of gallery contents, sharing relevant documents, books, artefacts, electronic media, articles, original artefacts/ replicas etc.

**Model Tenancy Act**

*Why in news?*

After releasing the draft in 2019, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday (2 June, 2021) approved the Model Tenancy Act (MTA) to streamline the process of renting a property in India and aid the rent economy in the estate sector.

*Key points are:*

- Mandatory for there to be a written agreement between the property owner and the tenant.
- Establishes an independent authority in every state and UT for registration of tenancy agreements and even a separate court to take up tenancy-related disputes.
- Limit the tenant’s advance security deposit to a maximum of two months rent for residential purposes and to a maximum of six months for non-residential purposes.
- A landowner will have to give 24-hour prior notice before entering the rented premises to carry out repairs or replacement.

*Reason behind the Act*

As per Census 2011, more than 1 crore houses were lying vacant in urban areas. “The existing rent control laws are restricting the growth of rental housing and discourage owners from renting out their vacant houses due to fear of repossession. One of the potential measures to unlock the vacant house is to bringing transparency and accountability in the existing system of renting of premises and to balance the interests of both the property owner and tenant in a judicious manner,” says the new Act, piloted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

States can adopt the Act as it is with fresh legislation, since it is a state subject, or they can amend their existing rent acts to factor in the new MTA. States and Union Territories have MoUs with the Centre under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban which has this provision.

The government says the Act aims to formalise the shadow market of rental housing, unlock vacant properties, increase rental yields, ease/remove exploitative practices, reduce procedural barriers in registration, and increase transparency and discipline.

*Coverage*

- It will apply to premises let out for residential, commercial or educational use, but not for industrial use.
- It also won’t cover hotels, lodging houses, inns, etc.
- It will be applied prospectively and will not affect existing tenancies.
- Need for it: As per Census 2011, nearly 1.1 crore houses were lying vacant in the country and making these houses available on rent will complement the vision of ‘Housing for All’ by 2022.

*Significance and Challenges*

- The authority will provide a speedy mechanism in resolving disputes and other related matters.
- It will help overhaul the legal framework with respect to rental housing across the country.
- It will enable creation of adequate rental housing stock for all the income groups thereby addressing the issue of homelessness.
- It will enable institutionalisation of rental housing by gradually shifting it towards the formal market.
- It is expected to give a fillip to private participation in rental housing as a business model for addressing the huge housing shortage.
- The Act is not binding on the states as land and urban development remain state subjects.



- Like in the case with RERA (Real Estate (Regulation and Development Act), the fear is that states may choose not to follow guidelines, diluting the essence of the Model Act.

### The history of Tulu and the demand for official language status

*Why in news?*

Various organisations initiated a Twitter campaign demanding official language status to Tulu in Karnataka and Kerala and received an overwhelming response. More than 2.5 lakh people tweeted in support of the campaign on Sunday (13 June, 2021).

*Key points are:*

- Tulu is a Dravidian language spoken mainly in two coastal districts Dakshina Kannada and Udupi of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala.
- As per the 2011 Census report, there are 18,46,427 Tulu-speaking people in India.
- Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), in his book, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages, called Tulu “one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family”.
- Tulu has a rich oral literature tradition with folk-song forms like paddana, and traditional folk theatre yakshagana.
- Part XVII of the Indian constitution deals with the official languages in Articles 343 to 351.

*The Constitutional provisions related to the Eighth Schedule are:*

Article 344: Article 344(1) provides for the constitution of a Commission by the President on expiration of five years from the commencement of the Constitution.

Article 351: It provides for the spread of the Hindi language to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri are the 22 languages presently in the eighth schedule to the Constitution.

### Amendments to the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020

*Why in news?*

For the purposes of preventing unfair trade practices in e-commerce, the Central Government had notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 with effect from 23 July 2020.

*Key points are:*

- It was observed that there was an evident lack of regulatory oversight in e-commerce which required some urgent action.
- Moreover, the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms has also brought into the purview the unfair trade practices of the marketplace e-commerce entities engaging in manipulating search result to promote certain sellers, preferential treatment to some sellers, indirectly operating the sellers on their platform, impinging the free choice of consumers, selling goods close to expiration etc.
- To protect the interests of consumers, prevent their exploitation and encourage free and fair competition in the market, the Government of India is sharing a draft of the proposed amendments to the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020.
- The proposed amendments aim to bring transparency in the e-commerce platforms and further strengthen the regulatory regime to curb the prevalent unfair trade practices.

*The proposed amendments are as follows:*

#### A. Chief Compliance Officer

To ensure compliance of the rules, the appointment of Chief Compliance Officer, a nodal contact person for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies, officers to ensure compliance to their orders and Resident Grievance Officer for redressing of the grievances of the consumers on the e-commerce platform, has been proposed.

This would ensure effective compliance with the provisions of the Act and Rules and also strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism on e-commerce entities.

#### B. Registration of e-coms

Putting in place a framework for registration of every e-commerce entity with the DPIIT for allotment of a registration number which shall be displayed prominently on the website as well as invoice of every order placed by the e-commerce entity.

This would help create a database of genuine e-commerce entities and ensure that the consumers are able to verify the genuineness of an e-commerce entity before transacting through their platform.

#### C. Prohibition of miss-selling

The goods and services entities selling goods or services by deliberate misrepresentation of information have been prohibited.

#### D. Expiry dates

This would ensure that consumers are aware of the expiry date of the products they are buying on the e-commerce platform.

It compels all sellers on marketplace e-commerce entities and all inventory e-commerce entities to provide the best before or use before the date to enable consumers to make an informed purchase decision.

#### E. Fair and equal treatment

It has been provided that where an e-commerce entity offers imported goods or services, it shall incorporate a filter mechanism to identify goods based on country of origin and suggest alternatives to ensure fair opportunity to domestic goods.

#### F. Fall-back liability

This would ensure that consumers are not adversely affected in the event where a seller fails to deliver the goods or services due to negligent conduct by such seller in fulfilling the duties and liabilities.

### Government to Reduce Road Accident Deaths by 50%

#### Why in news?

Minister for Road Transport and Highways and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Nitin Gadkari on Thursday (17 June, 2021) said that the Centre's target is to reduce road accident deaths by 50 percent by the year 2024.

#### Key points are:

- Addressing the virtual session on 'Role of Corporates in Arresting Road Fatalities' organised by FICCI, Gadkari emphasised the need for identification of 'black spot' in every state, district, and city.
- The Minister said that the World Bank and ADB have already sanctioned a scheme by which the Government is allocating Rs.14,000 crores for states, NHAI, and other stakeholders to remove black spots.
- The Minister further stated that his Ministry is striving hard to reduce the road accident deaths by restructuring and strengthening four 'E' of road safety, which are, Engineering (including road and automobile engineering), Economy, Enforcement, and Education.

### The Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949

#### Why in news?

The Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949 is being challenged before the Gujarat High Court, more than seven decades after it came into effect as the Bombay Prohibition Act. The court is to give its verdict soon on the maintainability of the petitions.

#### About The Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949

- Introduced by the then Bombay province as Bombay Prohibition Act, 1949 to overhaul the law relating to intoxicating drugs and narcotics total prohibition.
- It is an Act relating to the promotion and enforcement of alcohol prohibition in the Bombay State.
- The Bombay state was divided into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960.
- Gujarat adopted the prohibition policy in 1960 and subsequently chose to enforce it with greater rigidity.
- In 2011, it renamed the Act as Gujarat Prohibition Act.
- The first hint at the prohibition of liquor was through the Bombay Abkari Act, 1878. This Act dealt with levying of duties on intoxicants, among other things and aspects of prohibition via amendments made in 1939 and 1947.
- Rationale behind this law is that the state government says that it is "committed to the ideals and principles of Mahatma Gandhi and firmly intends to eradicate the menace of drinking liquor."

Arguments below indicate that such ban was the need of the hour:

- The Constitution places a responsibility on all state governments to "at least contain, if not curtail, consumption of alcohol" (Article 47).
- Strict state regulation is imperative to discourage regular and excessive consumption of alcohol.
- Alcohol denudes family resources and reserves and leaves women and children as its most vulnerable victims. A social stigma at least as far as the family unit is concerned is still attached to the consumption of alcohol.
- Vulnerable persons, either because of age or proclivity towards intoxication or as a feature of peer pressure, more often than not, succumb to this temptation.

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**Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announces stimulus package**

*Why in news?*

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announce Rs 6.28 lakh crore stimulus package on June 28, 2021 with the aim of boosting Covid-affected sectors following the eight measures proposed by Ministry of Finance.

*Key points are:*

*Free visas, loan for travel agencies*

- As issuance of visa resumes, first five lakh tourist visas will be issued free of cost. This visa incentive will cost government around Rs 100 crore. She also announced loan guarantee scheme for tourism sector because it has been one among worst-hit sectors by covid-19 pandemic. Under the scheme, loan will be given with 100 per cent guarantee of up to Rs 10 lakh for travel agencies and Rs 1 lakh for regional tourist guides.

*Rs 33,000 crore for NEIA*

- Ministry of finance announced a corpus that will enable National Export Insurance Account (NEIA) to underwrite an additional Rs 33,000 crore of project exports over five years. NEIA facilitates cover for buyer’s credit to project exporters and borrowers having lesser creditworthiness, through EXIM Bank.

*Expansion of healthcare infrastructure*

- Credit guarantee scheme and an amount of Rs 23,220 crore was earmarked to expands medical infrastructure for one year. Funding aims to increase the number of ICU beds and enhance availability of equipment & liquid medical oxygen (LMO). It will emphasise on preparedness of healthcare infrastructure in terms of child and paediatric care.

*Rs 1.1 lakh crore loan guarantee scheme*

- A Rs 1.1 lakh crore loan guarantee scheme was announced for Covid-affected sectors. Out of Rs 1.1 lakh crore, Rs 50,000 crore will be provided to health sector. It will benefit 25 lakh beneficiaries as they will be able to borrow up to Rs 1.25 lakh through micro-finance institutions (MFIs). Both public and private hospitals can avail a maximum of Rs 100 crore with a guarantee duration of three years.

*PPP projects, DISCOMs, BharatNet*

- New process is being adopted for speedy clearance of public-private partnership projects. Rs 3.03 lakh crore was allocated to revamp DISCOMs. Additional Rs 19,041 crore was allocated to BharatNet to improve broadband connectivity to villages.

*Fertiliser subsidy, PMGKAY*

- Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) for fertilizers was increased to Rs 42,275 crore. Additional Rs 14,775 crore will be given to stakeholders, for DAP (Di-ammonium Phosphate) and NPK-based complex fertilisers, etc.

**Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)**

*Why in news?*

A 50 kWp Solar rooftop was recently inaugurated in Solan, Himachal Pradesh under the Integrated power development scheme of the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

*Key points are:*

- The project further reinforces the ‘Go Green’ Initiative of the government envisaged in the Urban Distribution scheme of the government of India.
- The scheme will help in reduction in AT&C losses; establishment of IT-enabled energy accounting/auditing system, improvement in billed energy based on metered consumption, and improvement in collection efficiency.

*About IPDS:*

Power Finance Corporation(PFC) is the Nodal agency for the implementation of the scheme.

- Launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Power with the objectives of:
- Strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution network in the urban areas.
- Metering of distribution transformers /feeders/consumers in the urban areas.
- IT enablement of distribution sector and strengthening of distribution network under R-APDRP.

**Franklin Templeton case – SEBI**

*Why in news?*

On 28 June 2021, Franklin Templeton (FT) has been given interim relief from Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) .

*Key points are:*

- SAT put stay on Securities Exchange Board of India’s (SEBI) order on FT that prevented it from launching new debt scheme.
- Tribunal also put a temporarily stayed on SEBI’s order of recovery of Rs 512 crore from Franklin Templeton and its direction on FT to deposit Rs 250 crore in three weeks.
- Next hearing on Franklin Templeton-SEBI’s matter will be on August 30, 2021. Order of SAT will be applicable until further orders from it.

**About Franklin Templeton**

It is a global investment firm which was founded in New York City in 1947. It is listed on the New York Stock Exchange under ticker symbol BEN. Company has been named so in honor of Benjamin Franklin.

**Schemes are:**

Six of the schemes namely, Franklin India Low Duration Fund, Franklin India Credit Risk Fund, Franklin India Dynamic Accrual Fund, Franklin India Ultra Short Bond Fund, Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, and Franklin India Income Opportunities Fund, together had an estimated Rs 25,000 crore as assets under management.

**Jammu Drone Attacks****Why in news?**

Recently, Drones were used for the first time to drop explosive devices, triggering blasts inside the Air Force Station's technical area in Jammu.

**Key points are:**

- Over the past two years, drones have been deployed regularly by Pakistan-based outfits to smuggle arms, ammunition and drugs into Indian territory.
- Drones fly low and therefore cannot be detected by any radar system.
- According to government figures, 167 drone sightings were recorded along the border with Pakistan in 2019, and in 2020, there were 77 such sightings.
- With the rapid proliferation of drone technology and exponential growth of its global market in recent years, the possibility of a drone attack cannot be ruled out even in the safest cities in the world.
- Drones are becoming security threats particularly in conflict zones where non-state actors are active and have easy access to the technology.

**Reason for Increasing Drone Attacks are:**

- The primary reason for this proliferation is that drones are relatively cheaper in comparison to conventional weapons and yet can achieve far more destructive results.
- The biggest advantage that comes with using a drone for combat purposes is that it can be controlled from a remote distance and does not endanger any member of the attacking side.
- It is this easy-to-procure, easy-to-operate, and proven damage potential that makes it important for any country to equip its forces with anti-drone combat technology.

**West Bengal approves Student Credit Card scheme****Why in news?**

The West Bengal Cabinet recently approved the Student Credit Card scheme.

**Key points are:**

- A student can get a soft loan of up to ₹10 lakh to pursue higher studies with the help of a credit card.
- Anyone who has spent 10 years in West Bengal can avail the benefits of it.
- Loan will be available for undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, and post-doctoral study in India or abroad.
- One person is eligible for the scheme till 40 years of age.
- Fifteen years will be given to a student to repay the loan after getting a job.
- The programme will be launched on June 30.

**Centre to link innovative agriculture technologies to farms to help farmers in Northeast region****Why in news?**

The government is working towards linking innovative agricultural technologies with farms to benefit small and marginal farmers in northeast India. It will primarily focus on women under the Biotech-KISAN programme.

**Key points are:**

- Department of Biotechnology issued a special call for the Northeast region under the programme which will help in understanding local issues of farmers & provide scientific solutions to them.
- Programme will specifically focus on the Northeast region because it is predominantly agrarian where 70% of its workforce were engaged in agriculture & allied sectors for livelihood.
- Biotech-KISAN programme will be implemented in NE Region with the objective of linking innovative agriculture technologies with farms for small & marginal farmers.
- Northeast region produces 1.5% of India's foodgrain and continues to be a net importer of food grains for its domestic consumption.
- Region has untapped potential to enhance the income of the farming population by promoting location specific crops, horticultural & plantation crops, fisheries & livestock production.
- Under the programme, hubs in NER will collaborate with scientific institutions of India and State Agricultural Universities or Krishi Vigyan Kendras, etc.

## Extension of FAME Scheme till 2024

### Why in news?

The Union government decided to extend the second phase of the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicle (FAME) scheme by two years to 31 March 2024.

### Key points are:

- It will help push sales of electric vehicles, especially in the two and three-wheeler segment, in the coming years, said, industry executives and analysts.
- The scheme, started in 2019 for promoting sales of electric vehicles, was supposed to end by 2022.
- Date was extended after the Department of Heavy Industries increased the demand incentive for electric two-wheelers (e2W) from Rs 10,000/KWh to Rs 15,000/KWh.

### About FAME Scheme

- This scheme is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. The scheme was launched to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies.
- This scheme aims to incentivise all vehicle segments. It was launched in two phases. Phase 1 was started in 2015 & ended on 31st March, 2019.
- While, phase II was started from April 2019 and will end in 2024 (Earlier to end in 2022). The scheme is monitored by Department of Heavy Industries under the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

## Statistics Day

### Why in news?

It has been designated as one of the Special Days to be celebrated at the national level and is celebrated on the birth anniversary of Late Prof. P C Mahalanobis, on 29th June, in recognition of his invaluable contribution in establishing the National Statistical System.

### Key points are:

- The Government has been celebrating Statistics Day, to popularise the use of Statistics in everyday life and sensitise the public as to how Statistics helps in shaping and framing policies.
- This year, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the main event of Statistics Day, 2021 is being organized through Video Conferencing/ Webcasting at NITI Aayog, New Delhi.

- The Chief Guest of the event is Rao Inderjit Singh, Hon'ble Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and Ministry of Planning. Prof. Bimal Kumar Roy, Chairman, National Statistical Commission (NSC); Dr. G. P. Samanta, Chief Statistician of India & Secretary, MoSPI; Prof. Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay, Director, Indian Statistical Institute; Mr. Pietro Gennari, Chief Statistician, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Ms. Renata Lok-Dessallien, UN Resident Coordinator, is also scheduled to address the participants on the occasion.
- Moreover, senior officers of Central/ State Governments and other stakeholders will also participate in the event through video conferencing/ webcasting.
- Every year, one particular theme of current national importance is chosen for focused discussions towards improvements in statistical systems of the area and filling the Data Gaps.
- The theme of Statistics Day, 2021 is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)- 2 (End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture).
- On this occasion, MoSPI also recognizes the outstanding contribution for high-quality research work in the field of applied and theoretical statistics benefiting the official statistical system.
- This year, the winners of Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis National Award in Official Statistics, 2021, and Prof C. R. Rao National Award for Young Statistician, 2021 will be announced during the event.
- The winners of 'On the Spot Essay Writing Competition, 2021' for Post Graduate Students on the subject relevant to statistics organized at All India level will also be felicitated.

## ED transfers assets worth ₹8,441.50 cr. to banks

### Why in news?

The Enforcement Directorate has transferred assets worth ₹8,441.50 crore to public sector banks that suffered losses to the tune of ₹22,585.83 crore due to frauds committed allegedly by Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi.



*Key points are:*

*About the issue*

- ED had taken up a money-laundering probe which helped unearth a complex web of domestic and international transactions and stashing of assets abroad by the accused persons and their associates.
- They had used dummy entities controlled by them for rotation and siphoning of the funds provided by the banks. But, All three accused had fled overseas.
- Prosecution complaints were filed against all the three accused after completion of the investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.
- The extradition of Mr. Mallya has been ordered by the Westminster Magistrates Court and confirmed by the U.K. High Court. The matter is pending with the U.K.'s Home Department for quite some time now.
- The Westminster Magistrates Court had also ordered the extradition of Mr. Modi to India. Mr. Choksi was recently found in Dominica.

*About Enforcement Directorate*

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

### **Nutrient Loss in Wheat & Rice**

*Why in news?*

Recently, researchers from various institutes under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya found depleting trends in grain density of zinc and iron in rice and wheat cultivated in India.

*Key points are:*

- The researchers collected seeds of rice (16 varieties) and wheat (18 varieties) from the gene bank maintained at the ICAR's Cultivar repositories.
- Zinc and iron concentrations in grains of rice cultivars released within the 1960s were 27.1 mg/kg and 59.8 mg/kg. This depleted to 20.6 mg/kg and 43.1 mg/kg, respectively within the 2000s.

- Concentrations in Wheat: The concentrations of zinc and iron were 33.3 mg/kg and 57.6 mg/kg in cultivars of the 1960s, dropped to 23.5 mg/kg and 46.4 mg/kg, respectively in cultivars released during the 2010s.

*Reason for the Decrease:*

- Dilution effect' that is caused by decreased nutrient concentration in response to higher grain yield.
- This means the rate of yield increase is not compensated by the rate of nutrient take-up by the plants. Also, the soils supporting plants could be low in plant-available nutrients.

### **Hallmarking of gold, and for whom is it now mandatory**

*Why in news?*

The government on Tuesday (15 June, 2021) announced the phased implementation of mandatory hallmarking of gold jewellery with effect from June 16.

*Key points are:*

- In the first phase, gold hallmarking will be available only in 256 districts and jewellers having annual turnover above Rs 40 lakh will come under its purview.
- The government, through a notification issued on June 14, 2018, notified two categories – gold jewellery and gold artefacts; and silver jewellery and silver artefacts – under the purview of hallmarking.

*About hallmarking of gold*

- The Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS), which operates a gold and silver hallmarking scheme in India, defines hallmarking as the "accurate determination and official recording of the proportionate content of precious metal in precious metal articles." So, it is a "guarantee of purity or fineness" of precious metal articles.
- Hallmarking in India is available for the jewellery of only two metals – gold and silver.
- However, a certain category of jewellery and items will be exempted from the mandatory requirement of hallmarking.
- According to the Department of Consumer Affairs, "Export and re-import of jewellery as per Trade Policy of Government of India – Jewellery for international exhibitions, jewellery for government-approved B2B domestic exhibitions will be exempted from mandatory Hallmarking."
- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said that watches, fountain pens and special types of jewellery such as Kundan, Polki and Jadau will be exempted from hallmarking.



**Hallmarking has been made mandatory only in 256 districts**

- The ministry said that “based on extensive consultations with stakeholders,” it has been decided that hallmarking will be initially be starting with 256 districts of the country which have assaying marking centres.
- However, the ministry has given no date from which the next phase of the mandatory hallmarking will begin in the remaining districts.

**What was the need of making hallmarking mandatory?**

- India is the biggest consumer of gold. However, the level of hallmarked jewellery is very low in the country. According to the ministry, at present, only 30% of Indian gold jewellery is hallmarked.
- One of the reasons responsible for a low level of hallmarked jewellery is the non-availability of sufficient assaying and hallmarking centres (A&HC). There are about only 35,879 jewellers across the country, who are certified by BIS. The number of A&HC is 945.
- According to the ministry, one A&H centre can hallmark 1500 articles in a day and the estimated hallmarking capacity of A&H centres per year is 14 crore articles.

**NSDC, WhatsApp Launches Digital Skills Course**

*Why in news?*

NSDC and WhatsApp launched the Digital Skill Champions Program to train India’s youth on digital skills, in order to make them employment ready.

*Key points are:*

- Through this program, school and university students will be coached on digital skills including digital safety and online privacy.
- At the end of the course, students will receive the ‘Digital Skill Champions’ certification.
- The initiative will kick off with a pilot across 50 campuses in five states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.
- Through this program, WhatsApp will conduct training sessions to familiarise Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra trainers with the WhatsApp Business app.
- The training will cover modules on leveraging benefits of the WhatsApp Business app and small business entrepreneurship.
- The trained students will further manage and administer the WhatsApp Business app training to youth aspiring to become small business entrepreneurs.

**Inland Vessel Bill 2021**

*Why in news?*

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the Inland Vessels Bill, 2021, which will replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917 after passing in Parliament. The Bill will regulate safety, security and registration of inland vessels.

*Key points are:*

- A key feature of the Bill is a unified law for the entire country, instead of separate rules framed by the States.
- The certificate of registration granted under the proposed law will be deemed to be valid in all States and Union Territories, and there will be no need to seek separate permissions from the States.
- The Bill provides for a central database for recording the details of vessel, vessel registration, crew on an electronic portal.
- All non-mechanically propelled vessels will also have to be enrolled at the district, taluk or panchayat or village level.
- It enlarges the definition of ‘inland waters’, by including tidal water limit and national waterways declared by the Central Government.
- It also deals with pollution control measures of Inland Vessels. This Bill directs the Central Government to designate a list of chemicals, substances, etc. as pollutants.

**Quality Council of India (QCI) launches Indian Certification of Medical Devices (ICMED) Plus Scheme;**

*Why in news?*

Quality Council of India (QCI) and Association of Indian Manufacturers of Medical Devices (AiMeD) have launched “Indian Certification of Medical Devices Plus (ICMED) Scheme”.

*Key points are:*

- About ICMED 13485 scheme ICMED scheme added further features to the ICMED Scheme that was launched in 2016 for Certification of Medical Devices. This scheme will undertake verification of quality, safety .

*About ICMED 13485 scheme*

- ICMED scheme added further features to the ICMED Scheme that was launched in 2016 for Certification of Medical Devices.
- This scheme will undertake verification of quality, safety and efficacy of medical devices.

- Scheme has been designed to integrate Quality Management System components and product related quality validation processes by witness testing of products with respect to the defined product standards and specifications.
- This is the first such scheme across the world in which quality management systems & product certification standards are integrated with regulatory requirements.
- It will be an end-to-end quality assurance scheme for medical devices sector in India and much-needed institutional mechanism to assure product quality and safety.

### Deep Ocean Mission

*Why in news?*

Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave its approval for the Deep Ocean Mission proposal submitted by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).

*Key points are:*

- The mission is expected to explore the deep ocean for resources and at the same time, develop deep sea technologies that can be used for sustainable use of ocean resources.
- The move comes after the United Nations (UN) declared the upcoming ten years (2021-2030) as the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
- As of now, around 95 per cent of the deep ocean remains unexplored. In the case of India, the country is surrounded by the ocean on three sides and has around 30 per cent of its population living in coastal areas.
- Therefore, the ocean is a major economic factor that supports fisheries and aquaculture, livelihoods, tourism, and blue trade, the government said in a statement.
- Apart from this, oceans are also a storehouse of energy, food, medicines, minerals, modulator of weather and climate and underpin life on Earth.
- Also, according to the government, India has a unique maritime position and there is a need to consider the importance of the oceans on sustainability.
- The government is envisioning the new India by 2030 where the focus is also on the Blue Economy. To be sure, the Blue Economy can simply be known as economic opportunities that are related to marine ecosystems and oceans.

- The mission has been given an estimated cost of Rs 4,077 crore for a period of 5 years. This will be implemented in a phased manner. The first three phases will utilise a cost of Rs 2,823.4 crore.

### Flag Satyagraha

*Why in news?*

The Ministry of Culture on 18th June had organised a programme to observe the Flag Satyagraha in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

*Key points are:*

- The Flag Satyagraha movement by the freedom fighters shook the British government and it infused a new life into the freedom movement.
- Also called the Jhanda Satyagraha, it was held in Jabalpur and Nagpur in 1923.
- The news of flag hoisting in Jabalpur spread like fire in the country and after flags were hoisted at several places across the country.
- It is a campaign of peaceful civil disobedience that focused on exercising the right and freedom to hoist the nationalist flag and challenge the legitimacy of the British Rule in India through the defiance of laws prohibiting the hoisting of nationalist flags and restricting civil freedoms.

### Revised Subsidy for Electric Vehicles

*Why in news?*

Recently, the central government has decided to increase the subsidy by 50% on electric two-wheelers under the FAME-II (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) scheme in view of the adoption of eco-friendly vehicles.

*Key points are:*

- The Centre has made a partial modification of the FAME-II, including increasing the demand incentive for electric two-wheelers to Rs. 15,000 per KWh from an earlier uniform subsidy of Rs 10,000 per KWh for all EVs, including plug-in hybrids and strong hybrids except buses.
- The government has also capped incentives for electric two-wheelers at 40% of the cost of vehicles, up from 20% earlier.
- It will bring down the prices of electric two-wheelers nearer to the IC (internal combustion engine) vehicles and remove one of the biggest blocks of the high sticker price of electric two-wheelers.
- Together with the other important factors like extremely low running cost, low maintenance and zero emission, such price levels will surely spur a substantial demand for electric two-wheelers.



*About FAME-II*

- FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission (NEMM) Plan. Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies.
- NEMM intends to allow hybrid and electric vehicles to become the first choice for the purchasers so that these vehicles can replace the conventional vehicles and thus reduce liquid fuel consumption in the country from the automobile sector.

*Two Phases of the Scheme:*

Phase I: Started in 2015 and was completed on 31st March, 2019

Phase II: Started from April, 2019, will be completed by 31st March, 2022.

- The scheme covers Hybrid & Electric technologies like Mild Hybrid, Strong Hybrid, Plug in Hybrid & Battery Electric Vehicles.
- Monitoring Authority: Department of Heavy Industries, the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

**Yoga Day 2021**

*Why in news?*

The celebration for the International Day of Yoga in India is being held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is celebrated on 21 June.

*Key points are:*

- India is celebrating the seventh International Day of Yoga virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic. The lead programme of the event, held by the Union Ministry of AYUSH, began at 6:30 am.
- During the programme, Union Minister of State for AYUSH Kiran Rijju and Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation.
- During his address, PM Modi announced that India, along with United Nations and WHO, is launching an app called M-Yoga aiming to provide easy access to Yogic practice all over the world.
- Meanwhile, images from various parts of the country have started emerging, showing people marking World Yoga Day by practicing Yoga in small groups.
- Yoga is an ancient Indian practice that helps in maintaining physical and mental well-being, and over the years, it has found popularity in other countries as well.

- In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed marking a day as the International Day of Yoga in his address at the UN General Assembly, and the proposal was endorsed by 175 member states, post which the United Nations recognised June 21 as the day to celebrate Yoga.
- Over the past one and a half years, Yoga has gained more importance due to the coronavirus pandemic, and accordingly, the theme for International Yoga Day 2021 has been decided by the UN to be “Yoga for well-being”.

**EAGLE Act**

*Why in news?*

The Equal Access to Green cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act, 2021 needs to be passed by the Senate before it can be sent to the White House for the president to sign it into a law.

A bipartisan legislation was re-introduced in the US House of Representatives on Wednesday (2nd June, 2021) to eliminate the per country cap on employment-based green card.

*Key points are:*

- The legislation was introduced by Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren and Congressman John Curtis and it is likely to benefit Indian IT professionals anguishing over decades of green card wait.
- It is called the Equal Access to Green cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act, 2021. The legislation needs to be passed by the Senate before it can be sent to the White House for the president to sign it into a law.

*How it will benefit Indian IT professionals?*

- The bill proposes to phase out the seven per cent per-country limit on employment-based immigrant visas.
- The bill also seeks to raise the seven per cent per-country limit on family-sponsored visas to 15 per cent.
- Explaining the logic behind introducing the bill, Lofgren said that due to the cap, a person from a large-population country with extraordinary qualifications who could contribute greatly to US economy and create jobs waits behind a person with lesser qualifications from a smaller country.
- “It makes no sense. Because of this, we are now seeing recruiters from outside America luring those with the highest skills away from the US. That hurts our economy,” she further said.

- The basic framework for allocating immigrant visas dates back to the middle of the 20th century and was last seriously updated in 1990, when the Congress established the worldwide numerical limits on visas and the seven per cent per-country cap that still exists today, the politician said.
- Over time, these limitations have led to backlogs.
- The EAGLE Act's predecessor, the Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act, was passed in the House in the 116th Congress with a resounding bipartisan vote of 365 to 65.

### AEFI Panel confirms first Death linked to Vaccines

*Why in news?*

National AEFI (Adverse Events Following Immunisation) panel has confirmed first death linked to covid-19 vaccine. A 68-year-old person got severe allergic reaction after he was vaccinated in March who died later.

*Key points are:*

- The panel was set up to study side effects of covid-19 vaccine.
- Panel confirmed, the first death was due to anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction caused due to venom, food or medication) following vaccination.
- Panel released data for vaccinations only till first week of April and examined deaths that caused post vaccination in February, March and April.
- According to panel, reported death rate was 2.7 deaths and while hospitalisation rate was 4.8 per million vaccine doses administered. However, this does not imply that deaths or hospitalisations were caused after vaccinations. Proper investigation and causality assessments can establish any relation between both.
- Panel assessed 31 cases out of which, 18 were having inconsistent causal association to vaccination, 7 cases were indeterminate, 3 were vaccine-product related, 1 was anxiety-related reaction while 2 were unclassifiable.
- According to Panel, vaccine-product related reactions were expected. Indeterminate reactions are reactions that are occurring soon after vaccination but no clinical trial data shows that, it could have been caused due to vaccine.
- Unclassifiable events are those which have been investigated but there is not enough evidence to assign a diagnosis. Coincidental events are events reported following vaccination. However, a clear cause associated with such events has been found.

### Research Design & Standards Organization (RDSO)

*Why in news?*

Indian Railways' Research Design & Standards Organization (RDSO) has recently become the nation's first institution to be declared as Standard Developing Organization (SDO) under the mission called "One Nation One Standard" on Bureau of Indian Standards.

*Key points are:*

- Larger participation of industry/vendors/technology developers/MSME's in Indian Railways supply chain.
- The competitiveness amongst the industry will increase.
- There will be a reduction in cost and quantum improvement in the quality of product and services.
- There will be smooth induction of latest evolving & emerging technologies on Indian Railways.
- Dependence on imports will reduce and "Make-in-India" will get a boost.
- Improved ease-of-doing-business.
- RDSO will be recognized on international standards-making bodies and there will be integration with global supply chain/global trade.

*About "One Nation One Standard"*

- The mission was envisioned on the line of 'one nation, one ration card' scheme in order to ensure quality products in the country.
- The purpose is to converge multiple standards with the BIS which is a recognised national body for standardisation in India.
- The idea is to develop one template of standard for one given product instead of having multiple agencies set it.

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*Need for it:*

- The strength and character of a nation is often exemplified by the standards it sets for the quality of its products and services.
- Bringing a national uniformity and standardization in all kinds of public procurement and tendering can be an immediate deliverable.
- The uniform national standards will help in making it mandatory for more products.

### **NITI Aayog & Piramal Foundation Launch Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan**

*Why in news?*

NITI Aayog and Piramal Foundation today launched Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan in 112 Aspirational Districts to assist district administrations in providing home-care support to Covid-19 patients who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.

*Key points are:*

- NITI Aayog and Piramal Foundation today launched Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan in 112 Aspirational Districts to assist district administrations in providing home-care support to Covid-19 patients who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.
- Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan will be led by district magistrates in partnership with over 1000 local NGOs, which will enlist and train over 1 lakh volunteers to connect with patients through inbound/outbound calls.
- Piramal Foundation will work with district magistrates to support the training of NGOs and volunteers.
- While launching the campaign, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said, 'Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan is a significant initiative that responds to immediate needs and will provide long-term support to India's poorest communities in the Aspirational Districts by addressing the lasting impact of Covid-19.'

*Significance of the campaign*

- The campaign is expected to play a key role in district preparedness for managing nearly 70% of Covid cases at home, reducing pressure on the health system, and stemming the spread of fear amongst the people.
- The campaign will also undertake capacity building of citizens for correct usage of Oxygen concentrators that have been supplied to these districts.

- NGOs will mobilize local volunteers to provide home-care support to those affected, based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Volunteers will be trained to support 20 affected families each by educating caretakers to follow Covid protocols, provide psycho-social support, and timely updates about patients to the administration.
- 'In line with Piramal Foundation's value of sewa, we aim to reach every affected person in the 112 Aspirational Districts. We call all stakeholders Government, NGOs, communities, and others to join hands and offer their service in this initiative of the Aspirational Districts Collaborative,' said Piramal Group Chairman Ajay Piramal.

### **Raja Parba: Festival of Odisha**

*Why in news?*

Raja Parba festival has started being celebrated in Odisha on June 14, 2021. It is a 3-day festival that celebrates womanhood.

*Key points are:*

- During this period, it is believed that Mother Earth menstruates and prepares herself for future agricultural activities with the arrival of monsoon said Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC), chairperson S Mishra.
- This festival is synonymous with varieties of cakes (pithas). Thus, Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) has also launched a special programme named 'Pitha on Wheels'.
- During 3 days, women don't work.

*About Raja Parba*

- Raja Parba is also known as Mithuna Sankranti. It is a three-day-long festival of celebrating womanhood in Odisha.
- Second day of the festival marks the beginning of solar month of Mithuna, on which season of rains starts. It is believed that mother Goddess Earth undergoes menstruation during first three days. Fourth day is called Vasumati Snana or ceremonial bath of Bhudevi.
- Name Raja came from Sanskrit word 'Rajas' which means menstruation. When a woman menstruates, she is called 'Rajaswala' or a menstruating woman.
- This festival became more popular in medieval times as an agricultural holiday marking worship of Bhudevi.

## Education index ranking

### Why in news?

The Ministry of Education has released the Performance Grading Index for 2019-20.

### Key points are:

- PGI is a tool to grade all States and UTs on their performance across 70 indicators on school education.
- First published in 2019 with reference year 2017-18.
- The Indicators have been grouped into 2 Categories – Outcomes and Governance & Management with 4 Domains under the first category and 1 under the second.

### What is the objective?

To encourage States & UTs to adopt best practices like online recruitment and transfer of teachers, electronic attendance of students & teachers.

### Importance

Grading system assists the States & UTs to identify gaps and design appropriate interventions to bridge them.

### Some of the latest findings are:

- Punjab, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Kerala occupy the highest grade A++ in 2019-20.
- Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Puducherry, Dadra and Nagar Haveli are in the A+ category.
- Punjab has scored the maximum points for governance and management.
- Bihar and Meghalaya have scored the lowest in terms of infrastructure and facilities.

## Vehicle scrappage policy

### Why in news?

Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has called for expediting the implementation of the vehicle scrappage policy.

### Key points are:

- Old vehicles will have to pass a fitness test before re-registration and as per the policy government commercial vehicles more than 15 years old and private vehicles which are over 20 years old will be scrapped.
- As a disincentive, increased re-registration fees would be applicable for vehicles 15 years or older from the initial date registration.
- The state governments may be advised to offer a road-tax rebate of up to 25% for personal vehicles and up to 15% for commercial vehicles to provide incentive to owners of old vehicles to scrap old and unfit vehicles.

## New Policy issues

- Limited incentive and poor cost economics for trucks.
- Lack of addressable volumes for other segments.
- The potential benefit from scrapping a 15-year-old, entry-level small car will be ₹70,000, whereas its resale value is around ₹95,000. That makes scrapping unattractive.

## Beed model' of the crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY)

### Why in news?

The Maharashtra Government asked the Prime Minister for state-wide implementation of the 'Beed model' of the crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY) recently.

### Key points are:

- Beed is a district of Maharashtra located in the drought-prone Marathwada region.
- 80-110 Formula: This model is also called 80-110 Formula.
- Under this plan, the insurer's potential losses are restricted.
- The insurance firm does not have to entertain claims above 110% of the gross premium. The state government has to bear the cost of compensation above 110% of the premium collected to insulate the insurer from losses (bridge amount).
- However, if the compensation is less than the premium collected, the insurance company would keep 20% of the amount as handling charges and reimburse the rest to the state government (premium surplus).

### Reason behind implementing the Model

- Another Source of Fund: In most years, the claims-to-premium ratio is low. In the Beed model, the profit of the insurance company is expected to reduce and the state government would access another source of funds.
- Reduce the Burden of Financing PMFBY: The reimbursed amount can lead to lower budgetary provision for PMFBY by the state for the following year, or help in financing the paying the bridge amount in case of a year of crop loss.

- Fiscally-stressed states have over the years dissented to footing the premium bill for the PMFBY, resulting in insurers not honouring the farmers' claims on time.
- In 2020, far-below-normal monsoon rainfalls in central Maharashtra's Beed district dissuaded insurers from covering farmers in the district under the PMFBY for kharif 2020.

#### About PMFBY

It was launched in 2016. It provides a comprehensive insurance cover against failure of the crop thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers.

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## International News

### India-Australia cooperation and collaboration in the field of Agriculture

#### Why in news?

A virtual meeting between Narendra Singh Tomar, Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and Mr. David Littleproud MP, Australian Minister for Agriculture, Drought & Emergency Management, was held on 1st June, 2021.

#### Key points are:

- It was acknowledged that the frequent engagement between the two Nations at the highest level has resulted in significant progress in many spheres of bilateral relations during the last five years.
- The two Ministers met to follow up on the collaboration in the field of agriculture highlighted in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership announced by Prime Ministers of India and Australia at their Summit on 4th June 2020.
- India - Australia Grains Partnership was a significant inclusion aiming to use Australia's expertise in post-harvest management to strengthen rural grain storage and supply chains so as to reduce losses and wastage.
- Shri Tomar expressed satisfaction at the progress being made in this area of cooperation between the two countries and informed that the National Institute of Agricultural Marketing will be the nodal organisation from India.
- Both the Ministers expressed satisfaction with the progress of giving Market access to the respective Agricultural products and shared technical information with each other. Australia has recently given market access for the export of Indian pomegranates.

- There would be a joint strategy for deeper access for Indian mangoes and pomegranates in Australian markets led by the Indian High Commission in Canberra also. The Australian Minister assured to fast-track the Indian requests for market access for okra and pomegranate arils.
- On the issue of closer cooperation between India and Australia in multilateral fora like FAO and G20 raised by the Minister of Australia, Shri Tomar said that he looked forward to closer dialogue between like-minded countries.
- He suggested that climate change was one area where there was a great opportunity for India and Australia to work together since both countries had similar commitments.
- He mentioned the flagship program of National Innovation for Climate Resilient Agriculture and said the collaboration could be set up with the research organisations of Australia.

### Indo-Israel Agriculture project

#### Why in news?

- For taking forward the Israeli technologies in the field of Horticulture, the Government of India jointly inaugurated the 3 Centers of Excellence (COEs) established in Karnataka under the Indo-Israel Agricultural Project (IIAP).

#### Key points are:

- MIDH Division of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer's Welfare, Government of India and MASHAV- Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation- are leading Israel's largest G2G cooperation, with 29 operational Centres of Excellence (COEs) across India in 12 States, implementing advanced Israeli Agro-Technology tailored to local conditions.

- Out of these 29 fully functional COEs, 3 are from Karnataka, viz., COE Kolar for Mango, COE Bagalkot for Pomegranate and COE Dharwad for Vegetables. These Centres of Excellence generate knowledge, demonstrate best practices and train officers and farmers.

### New Zealand signs space agreement with NASA

*Why in news?*

New Zealand has become the latest country to sign a “space agreement with NASA” with the objective of boosting the nascent space industry of New Zealand.

*Key points are:*

- New Zealand is the eleventh signatory to Artemis Accords.
- Artemis Accords is a blueprint for space cooperation and supporting NASA’s plan to return humans to the moon by 2024. It also supports NASA’s plan of launching a historic human mission to Mars.
- New Zealand wants to ensure, future space exploration is conducted in a safe, sustainable and transparent manner in accordance with international law. New Zealand is also interested in ensuring that minerals are taken from the moon or elsewhere in space are used sustainably.
- California-based company Rocket Lab started commercial launches for New Zealand in 2018. The company specializes in putting small satellites into orbit. It made history in 2017 by launching test rocket into space from the remote Mahia Peninsula.
- Artemis accords are an international agreement and American-led effort which seeks to relaunch humans to Moon by 2024.
- Agreement was signed by governments participating in Artemis programme with the objective of expanding and deepening space exploration.
- It was drafted under the aegis of NASA. It provides a framework for cooperation in civil exploration and peaceful use of Mars, Moon, and other astronomical objects. The accord was signed on October 13, 2020.

### India and UK launch new workstream to promote industrial energy efficiency

*Why in news?*

India along with Govt. of the United Kingdom launched a new workstream to promote industrial energy efficiency under the Clean Energy Ministerial’s (CEM) Industrial Deep Decarbonization Initiative (IDDI) co-ordinated by UNIDO, at the 12th Chief Energy Ministerial (CEM). The 12th CEM is ongoing from May 31st and will continue till 6th June 2021 .

*Key points are:*

- The IDDI initiative has been supported by Germany and Canada, with more countries expected to join soon. The objective is to infuse green technologies and stimulate demand for low-carbon industrial material
- Shri Alok Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Power highlighted that India is committed to cut emissions intensity per unit of GDP by 33 to 35 per cent by 2030.
- The commitment hinges on effective deployment of low carbon technologies in Energy Intensive Sectors like Iron & Steel, Cement and Petrochemicals. He elaborated that Govt policies have resulted in substantial savings in energy on the demand side.

### Children and Digital Dumpsites report

*Why in news?*

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its recent report “Children and Digital Dumpsites” has underlined the risk that children working in informal processing are facing due to discarded electronic devices or e-waste.

*Key points are:*

- This report summarizes the latest scientific knowledge on the links between informal e-waste recycling activities and health outcomes in children.
- As many as 18 million children and adolescents and 12.9 million women, including an unknown number of women of childbearing age, may be at risk from adverse health outcomes linked to e-waste recycling.
- The report is intended to increase awareness and knowledge among health professionals of the dangers that e-waste recycling poses to the health of future generations and is a call to action to reduce children’s exposure to harmful e-waste activities

### UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration Report

*Why in news?*

UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Food & Agriculture Organisation of UN (FAO) launched ‘UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration’ report for 2021-2030 and called on nations to meet commitments of restoring 1 billion hectares of land.

*Key points are:*

- As per the report, world is facing triple threat of climate change, loss of nature and pollution. So, world must deliver on its commitment to restore at least one billion degraded hectares of land (equal to size of China) in next decade.
- Report highlights, countries also need to meet similar commitments for oceans.



- Humanity is using 1.6 times the number of services that nature can provide sustainably.
- Thus, conservation efforts alone are insufficient to prevent ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss on larger scale.
- Communities living across two billion of degraded hectares and include world's poorest and marginalized people.
- Report estimates Global terrestrial restoration costs, excluding the cost of restoring marine ecosystems, to be USD 200 billion per year by 2030. Every 1 USD invested in restoration can create up to USD 30 in economic benefits.
- Ecosystems like forests, farmlands, forests, grasslands, savannahs, urban areas, mountains, peatlands, freshwaters, and oceans requires urgent restoration.

*UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration*

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 has called for protection and revival of ecosystems across the world. It aims to stop degradation of ecosystems and restore them to achieve global goals.

**India extends \$100 mn loans to Sri Lanka**

*Why in news?*

India and Sri Lanka on Wednesday (16 June, 2021) signed an agreement for a \$100-million loan from the Export-Import Bank of India to support the island nation's efforts to expand solar power coverage.

*Key points are:*

- Issuing a press statement on the bilateral initiative, the Presidential Media Division said one of the "key plans" of the government was to generate solar power, with the contribution of state-owned buildings, places of worship and houses of the low-income families.
- "Steps will also be taken to provide facilities to store solar energy in batteries for the low-income families that are unable to access the national power grid," the statement said.
- Sri Lanka has an installed capacity of 4,213 MW of power. While 1,400 MW of that is hydropower, some 900 MW is produced from coal.
- Over the last five years, Sri Lanka has sought to tap more renewable sources of power, particularly solar power. The country's electricity demand is expected to grow at an average 5.3% from 2015-2034, according to the Public Utilities Commission.

- A press release from the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka said the \$100 million line of credit will help finance various projects Sri Lanka's solar energy sector, including those announced at the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) held in March 2018, in New Delhi, such as rooftop solar photo-voltaic systems for households and government buildings.
- As many as 89 countries, including Sri Lanka, signed the framework agreement of the ISA, jointly launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former French President Francois Hollande in 2015, with the aim of bringing together countries to promote large-scale deployment of solar energy.
- The line of credit extended by India, according to officials, is for a period of 20 years, with an interest of 1.75 %. Sri Lanka owes about \$960 million in debt repayment.

**FATF retains Pakistan on its grey list**

*Why in news?*

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on Friday (25 June, 2021) retained Pakistan on its grey list despite the country meeting 26 of the 27 conditions and handed it over a new six-point action plan, keeping Islamabad exposed to global pressure tactics.

*Key points are:*

- The FATF had issued the 27-point action plan after placing Pakistan on the 'Grey List' in June 2018. The action plan pertains to curbing money laundering and terror financing.
- During the October-2020 Plenary, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Pakistan was given an extension for full compliance with the 27-point action plan till February 2021.
- It had then not fully complied with 6 of the 27 directives.
- In February 2021, FATF acknowledged Pakistan's significant progress in combating terrorism, however, it was still to fully comply with three of the 27-point action plan.
- The three points pertained to effective steps in terms of financial sanctions and penalties against the terror funding infrastructure and the entities involved.
- About FATF
- The FATF said Pakistan had failed to take appropriate action against UN-designated terrorists such as 26/11 accused Hafiz Saeed and JeM chief Masood Azhar. However, Pakistan has completed 26 of the 27 action items.

- The FATF encourages Pakistan to continue to make progress to address as soon as possible the one remaining Countering Finance of Terrorism (CFT)-related item by demonstrating that Terror Financing investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terrorist groups.
- In addition, the FATF has handed down another 6-point list of tasks mainly on money laundering actions to be completed as well.

### Conference of BRICS Network Universities

*Why in news?*

IIT Bombay has hosted the conference of BRICS Network Universities on the theme of electric mobility. This conference is part of the engagements that India is hosting under the education stream during its Chairship of the 13th BRICS Summit this year.

*Key points are:*

- Eighteen experts from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa talked about various aspects of electric mobility like traffic management, hydrogen technology, hybrid vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and linkage between e-mobility and livelihoods over the next three days.
- Over 100 students, researchers and faculty from the BRICS Network Universities of the five-member countries are expected to participate in the conference.
- The chief guest of the conference was Union Minister Shri Nitin Gadkari.

### World Competitiveness Index 2021

*Why in news?*

According to the World Competitiveness Yearbook (WCY), India maintained 43rd rank on the annual World Competitiveness Index.

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*Key points are:*

- The World Competitiveness Index is a comprehensive annual report and worldwide reference point on the competitiveness of countries.
- Published by: WCY was first published in 1989 and is compiled by the Institute for Management Development (IMD).
- In 2021, the IMD examined the impact of Covid-19 on economies around the world.
- It provides extensive coverage of 64 economies.
- India's strengths lie in investments in telecoms (1st), mobile telephone costs (1st), ICT services exports (3rd), remuneration in services professions (4th) and terms of trade index (5th).
- India's performance is the worst in sub-indices such as broadband subscribers (64th), exposure to particulate pollution (64th), human development index (64th), GDP per capita (63rd) and foreign currency reserves per capita (62nd) among others.
- The top-performing Asian economies are, in order, Singapore (5th), Hong Kong (7th), Taiwan (8th) and China (16th). Singapore was 1st in the 2020 World Competitiveness Index.
- The UAE and the USA remain in their same spots as last year (9th and 10th, respectively).
- Among the BRICS nations, India ranked second (43rd) after China (16th), followed by Russia (45th), Brazil (57th) and South Africa (62nd).

### Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate

*Why in news?*

Recently, the Finance Ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) nations reached a landmark accord setting a Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate (GMCTR).

*Key points are:*

- The agreement could form the basis of a worldwide deal. It will now be discussed in detail at a meeting of G20 financial ministers and central bank governors in July 2021.
- G7 also agreed to move towards making companies declare their environmental impact in a more standard way so investors can decide more easily whether to fund them.

*About Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate*

- G7 would back a minimum global corporation tax rate of at least 15%, and put in place measures to ensure taxes were paid in the countries where businesses operate.
- Corporation tax is a direct tax imposed on the net income or profit that enterprises make from their businesses.

*Where it will be applicable?*

- It would apply to companies' overseas profits. Therefore, if countries agree on a global minimum, governments could still set whatever local corporate tax rate they want.
- But if companies pay lower rates in a particular country, their home governments could "top-up" their taxes to the agreed minimum rate, eliminating the advantage of shifting profits to a tax haven.
- A tax haven is generally an offshore country that offers foreign individuals and businesses little or no tax liability in a politically and economically static environment.

*What is the need of GMCTR?*

- Increasingly, income from intangible sources such as drug patents, software and royalties on intellectual property has migrated to low tax jurisdictions, allowing companies to avoid paying higher taxes in their traditional home countries (tax base erosion of the higher-tax jurisdictions).
- These companies typically rely on complex webs of subsidiaries to hoover profits out of major markets into low-tax countries such as Ireland or Caribbean nations such as the British Virgin Islands or the Bahamas, or to central American nations such as Panama.
- India's annual tax loss due to corporate tax abuse is estimated at over USD 10 billion.

*Why is this done?*

GMCTR will end a decades-long race to the bottom in which countries have competed to attract corporate giants with ultra-low tax rates and exemptions. And it will bring uniformity in corporate taxation worldwide.

*What are the challenges?*

- Getting all major nations on the same page is a problem, since the GMCTR impinges on the right of the sovereign to decide a nation's tax policy.
- A global minimum rate would essentially take away a tool that countries use to push policies that suit them.
- A lower tax rate is a tool they can use to alternatively push economic activity. Also, a global minimum tax rate will do little to tackle tax evasion.

## The World Drug Report 2021

*Why in news?*

Recently, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its World Drug Report 2021, has highlighted that the lockdown restrictions during Covid-19 have accelerated drug trafficking using the Internet.

*Key points are:*

- Between 2010-2019, the number of people using drugs increased by 22%, owing in part to an increase in the global population.
- Around 275 million people used drugs worldwide last year, while over 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders.
- Opioids continue to account for the largest burden of disease attributed to drug use.
- A rise in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs was also observed during the coronavirus pandemic.
- In the last 24 years, cannabis potency had increased as much as four times in some parts, even as the percentage of adolescents who perceived the drug as harmful fell by as much as 40%.
- The major psychoactive constituent in cannabis,  $\Delta^9$ -THC, is responsible for the development of mental health disorders, in the long term.

The reason behind this is the aggressive marketing of cannabis products and promotion through social media channels.

- Access to drugs has also become simpler than ever with online sales, and major drug markets on the dark web are now worth some \$315 million annually.
- In Asia, China and India are mainly linked to a shipment of drugs sold on the 19 major darknet markets analysed over 2011-2020.
- Cannabis dominates drug transactions on the Dark web and on clear web involves the sale of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) and substances used in the manufacture of synthetic drugs.

## 'Sea Snot' Outbreak in Turkey

*Why in news?*

Recently, Turkey's Sea of Marmara, which connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, has witnessed the largest outbreak of 'sea snot'.

*Key points are:*

- A 'sea snot' outbreak was first recorded in the country in 2007.
- It is marine mucilage that is formed when algae are overloaded with nutrients as a result of water pollution combined with the effects of climate change.
- The nutrient overload occurs when algae feast on warm weather caused by global warming.
- It looks like a viscous, brown and foamy substance.

*Concerns related to it are:*

- It has caused mass deaths among the fish population, and also killed other aquatic organisms such as corals and sponges.
- It is now covering the surface of the sea and has also spread to 80-100 feet below the surface which eventually can collapse to the bottom and cover the sea floor.
- As the sludge is getting collected in their nets, making them so heavy that they break or get lost.
- Moreover, the mucilage coating the strings makes the nets visible to fish and keeps them away.
- It can cause an outbreak of water-borne diseases such as cholera in cities like Istanbul.

*Steps taken are:*

- The entire Sea of Marmara will be turned into a protected area.
- Moreover, steps are being taken to reduce pollution and improve treatment of waste water from coastal cities and ships.
- Turkey's biggest maritime clean-up operation is being launched and called on local residents, artists and NGOs to join hands to extend assistance.

### **China raising new militia near borders with India**

*Why in news?*

Recently, Chinese Military has raised new militia units comprising local Tibetan youth for high-altitude warfare.

*Key points are:*

- "The PLA has deployed a new set of militia, which is known as Mimang Cheton (MC), in the Chumbi Valley under Yatung County in Tibetan Autonomous Region," said a source.
- The MC consists of local Tibetan youths recruited and trained by the PLA.
- "Two batches of MC, each comprising about 100 youths, have been recruited, with the first 100 having completed their training and currently deployed at various locations in Chumbi Valley viz Yutung, Cheema, Rinchengang, PB Thang and Phari," the source said.
- The second batch is currently undergoing training at Phari.
- The PLA raised the STAU keeping the locals' adaptability, knowledge of the language and awareness of weather conditions and general terrain, with altitude ranging between 11,000 ft towards Arunachal Pradesh and nearly 18,000 ft close to Karakoram in Ladakh.

- It wants to exploit the locals' familiarity with the area to its advantage by deploying these troops mostly in the bordering areas, the source said.
- Currently the unit personnel have neither uniform nor ranks. The troops of the new unit, after completing their training, are taken to Tibetan monks for their blessings. China being a communist nation, there has no such previous practice. "This is possibly a new strategy of PLA to get some mileage in Tibet region."
- PLA raised STAU keeping the locals' adaptability, knowledge of the language and awareness of weather conditions and general terrain, with altitude ranging between 11,000 ft towards Arunachal and nearly 18,000 ft close to Karakoram in Ladakh.

### **Atlantic Charter**

*Why in news?*

Recently, the US' President and UK's Prime Minister signed a new version of the 80-year old Atlantic Charter.

*Key points are:*

- The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration released by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on 14th August, 1941 (during World War II) following a meeting of the two heads of government in Newfoundland.
- The Atlantic Charter was subsequently incorporated by reference in the Declaration of the United Nations in 1942.
- World War II was a conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939-45.
- The Atlantic Charter provided a broad statement of US and British war aims such as:
  - They desired no territorial changes without the free assent of the peoples concerned.
  - They respected every people's right to choose its own form of government and wanted sovereign rights and self-government restored to those forcibly deprived of them.
  - They would try to promote equal access for all states to trade and to raw materials.
  - They hoped to promote worldwide collaboration so as to improve labour standards, economic progress, and social security.
  - The destruction of "Nazi tyranny," (Germany) they would look for a peace under which all nations could live safely within their boundaries, without fear or want.



## G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting

*Why in news?*

Recently, the Union Minister for Labour and Employment has said that India is making collective efforts to reduce gender gaps in labour force participation. He was delivering the Ministerial Address on Declaration and Employment Working Group Priorities at G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting.

*Key points are:*

*Issues discussed are:*

- The Employment Working Group deliberated upon key issues, including women's employment, social security, and remote working. The subject for the meeting being Fostering an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery of labour markets and societies.
- In 2014, G20 Leaders pledged in Brisbane to reduce the gap in labour force participation rates between men and women by 25% by 2025, with the aim of bringing 100 million women into the labour market, increasing global and inclusive growth, and reducing poverty and inequality.

*India highlighted initiatives*

- The duration of paid maternity leave has been increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana provides financial support to women entrepreneurs to start small enterprises. Collateral free loans worth Rupees 9 thousand billion have been disbursed under this scheme. There have been around 70% accounts of women in this Scheme.
- The new Code on Social Security may now include even self-employed and all other classes of workforce into the folds of social security coverage. A voluntary and contributory pension scheme introduced in 2019 for the unorganised sector workers provides for minimum assured pension after the age of 60 years.
- G20 Leaders at the Riyadh Summit called for a roadmap to achieve the Brisbane goal along with improving the quality of women's employment.
- G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target has been developed for achieving equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men in our labour markets as well as societies in general.

- This Roadmap builds upon the G20 Policy Priorities for Boosting Female Participation, Quality of Employment and Gender Equity (Australia, 2014) and the G20 Policy Recommendations to Reduce Gender Gaps in Labour Force Participation and Pay by Improving Women's Job Quality (Germany, 2017).

## First electric train in Tibet

*Why in news?*

China is all set to operationalise the first electric train in the remote Himalayan region of Tibet.

*Key points are:*

- -It will connect the provincial capital Lhasa with Nyingchi – a strategically located Tibetan border town close to Arunachal Pradesh.
- The 435.5-km Lhasa-Nyingchi section of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway is expected to be inaugurated ahead of the centenary celebrations of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) on July 1, according to official media reports.
- The electricity transmission process has been completed and tested, Liu Yuxiang, Chief Engineer of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway, was quoted as saying by the state-run CCTV earlier.
- The Sichuan-Tibet Railway will be the second railway into Tibet after the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. It will go through the southeast of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, one of the world's most geologically active areas.
- In November, Chinese President Xi Jinping had instructed officials to expedite construction of the new railway project, connecting Sichuan Province and Nyingchi in Tibet, saying the new rail line would play a key role in safeguarding the border stability.
- The Sichuan-Tibet Railway starts from Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, and travels through Ya'an and enters Tibet via Qamdo, shortening the journey from Chengdu to Lhasa from 48 hours to 13 hours.
- Nyingchi is prefecture-level city of Medog which is adjacent to the Arunachal Pradesh border.

## Global Wind Day

*Why in news?*

June 15 is celebrated as Global Wind Day, also known as World Wind Day.

Key points are:

- Wind energy is one of the many sustainable forms of energy that everyone is being encouraged to use.
- This day is observed to raise awareness about wind energy and how its harnessed. Not only that, its benefits and workings are also looked at.
- According to WindEurope, onshore wind is now seen as the cheapest form of energy, especially in Europe. The usage of wind turbines has been beneficial in generating electricity as well. In many areas around the world, huge turbines in order to harness wind energy.
- Global Wind Day was first inaugurated back in 2007 as 'Wind Day.' The current name was given only two years later in 2009. This day was the brainchild of the European Wind Energy Association that had 18 countries from the continent. Around 35,000 have taken part in it and more people become a part of this every year.

#### 47th G7 Summit

Why in news?

Recently, the Indian Prime Minister addressed the 47th G7 Summit 2021 through video conferencing.

Key points are:

- Apart from India, Australia and South Korea were also invited to participate in the proceedings of the summit as "guest countries".
- This year's summit was hosted by the UK. The last G-7 summit was in France in 2019, with last year's event in the US canceled due to the pandemic.
- The G7 signed the Carbis Bay Declaration. It is aimed at preventing future pandemics.
- The G7 also pledged over 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses for poorer nations with half of that coming from the United States and 100 million from Britain.

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- 11 billion doses are needed to vaccinate at least 70% of the world's population by mid-2022.
- The doses would come both directly and through the international COVAX program.
- Signed off on a joint statement (Democracies 11) by G-7 and guest countries on "open societies" that reaffirm and encourage the values of freedom of expression, both online and offline, as freedom that safeguards democracy and helps people live free from fear and oppression.
- The statement also refers to politically motivated internet shutdowns as one of the threats to freedom and democracy.
- While the statement is directed at China and Russia, India has been under scrutiny over Internet curbs in Jammu and Kashmir even as the Government is locked in a face-off over its New IT rules 2021 with tech giants.
- Democracies 11 is facing threats to freedom and democracy from rising authoritarianism, electoral interference, corruption, economic coercion, manipulation of information, including disinformation, online harms and cyber attacks, politically motivated internet shutdowns, human rights violations and abuses, terrorism and violent extremism.
- Renewed a pledge to raise their contributions to meet an overdue spending pledge of USD 100 billion a year to help poorer countries cut carbon emissions.
- Promised to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.
- Pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- Build Back Better for the World Project: It is aimed squarely at competing with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, which has been widely criticised for saddling small countries with unmanageable debt but has included even G7 member Italy since launching in 2013.
- It will collectively catalyse hundreds of billions of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries (in Asia and Africa) and offer a values-driven, high-standard and transparent partnership with G7.

#### Rare earth metals lie at the heart of China's rivalry with the US, Europe

Why in news?

Recent measures of America and other countries to reduce import dependency on China for rare earth minerals.



Key points are:

About rare earth minerals

- The rare earth minerals (REM) 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 REMs have unique catalytic, metallurgical, nuclear, electrical, magnetic and luminescent properties. While named 'rare earth', they are in fact not that rare and are relatively abundant in the Earth's crust.

What is the importance of REM?

- Its usage range from daily use (e.g., lighter flints, glass polishing mediums, car alternators) to high-end technology (lasers, magnets, batteries, fibre-optic telecommunication cables).
- Even futuristic technologies need these REMs (For example high-temperature superconductivity, safe storage and transport of hydrogen for a post-hydrocarbon economy, environmental global warming and energy efficiency issues).
- Due to their unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties, they help in technologies perform with reduced weight, reduced emissions, and energy consumption; therefore give them greater efficiency, performance, miniaturization, speed, durability, and thermal stability.

Heavy dependence on China for REM

- In 2019, US imported 80% of its rare earth minerals from China
- European Union (EU) gets 98% of its supply from China
- India has the world's fifth-largest reserves of rare earth elements, nearly twice as much as Australia, but it imports most of its rare earth needs in finished form from its geopolitical rival, China
- Such high dependence on China might result in creating geopolitical issues for importing countries if China excludes others from accessing these crucial resources.
- US Senate passed a law recently aimed at improving American competitiveness that includes provisions to improve critical minerals supply chain.
- US also aims to boost production and processing of rare earths and lithium, another key mineral component while "working with allies to increase sustainable global supply and reduce reliance on competitors".

## India all set to host a two-day summit on Green Hydrogen initiatives

Why in news?

India is all set to host a two-day summit on Green Hydrogen initiatives beginning tomorrow (22 June, 2021) involving the BRICS nations. The event will be held through video conference and conclude on Wednesday (23 June, 2021).

Key points are:

- India is scheduled to host a two-day summit on green hydrogen, with countries like Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa set to take part in it.
- The countries will discuss their initiatives around emission-free fuel.
- It will be anchored by India's largest power producer and one of the global energy majors, NTPC Ltd.
- The virtual summit will bring the best brains, policymakers, and major stakeholders from the BRICS nations deliberating and discussing at length the future of Hydrogen in the energy mix.
- "Hydrogen, when produced by electrolysis using renewable energy, is known as green hydrogen which has no carbon footprint. This gives hydrogen the edge over other fuels to unlock various avenues of green usage. However, challenges lie in terms of technology, efficiency, financial viability, and scaling up which the summit will aim to address," NTPC said.
- Global hydrogen initiatives have been gaining traction. Recently, the US-India hydrogen task force was launched under the aegis of the US-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership.
- India also plans to extend the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing electrolyzers, which are used for producing green hydrogen.
- Leveraging India's landmass and green energy sources for exporting green hydrogen is one of the steps for achieving energy sufficiency for the country, according to a draft proposal circulated by the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), for the planned National Hydrogen Energy Mission.
- The draft proposal, which recommends green hydrogen exports to Japan, South Korea, and Europe, also suggests setting up four integrated hydrogen hubs and running long-range public transport buses fuelled by hydrogen cells.

## MOU signed between India and Bhutan

*Why in news?*

India and Bhutan today inked an MoU for developing cooperation between two countries in the area of environment.

*Key points are:*

- The MoU was signed virtually by Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar from the Indian side and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson of the National Environment Commission Lyonpo Dr. Tandi Dorji from the Bhutanese side.
- The MoU will open new vistas of bilateral cooperation in the area of climate change, waste management etc.
- The MoU is a platform to further enhance Indian and Bhutanese partnership and support, exchange best practices in areas like prevention of Air Pollution, Waste Management, Chemical Management, Climate Change, etc.
- It also provides the possibility to have joint projects in areas of mutual interest.
- The MoU will also strengthen technological, scientific and management capabilities and expand the areas of cooperation in the field of environment to promote a mutually beneficial partnership between the two countries.

## Juneteenth in US

*Why in news?*

US President Joe Biden is to sign a law to make June 19 or "Juneteenth" a national holiday. This holiday will be recognized by the federal government to commemorating end of slavery after the American Civil War.

*Key points are:*

- Bill to establish Juneteenth National Independence Day was supported in both houses of US Congress and now needs to be approved by the White House to become law.
- It was passed in the backdrop of the killing of George Floyd that triggered anti-racism protests in US.
- Juneteenth is going to be the first new federal holiday created in almost four decades.
- About Juneteenth
- Juneteenth, a combination of June and nineteenth, is observed on June 19 every year. It is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in America.

- The day is recognized as holiday in 47 US states and District of Columbia. Juneteenth is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day.

## UK and Australia free trade deal

*Why in news?*

Britain and Australia announced a free trade deal on Tuesday (15 June, 2021) which the British government hailed as an important step in building new trade relationships following its departure from the European Union.

*Key points are:*

- The deal is the first bilateral trade accord Britain has negotiated from scratch since leaving the EU last year.
- The government sees it as an important piece of its post-Brexit strategy to shift Britain's economic centre away from Europe and seek new opportunities in higher-growth Indo-Pacific nations.
- Britain said cars, Scotch whisky and confectionery would be cheaper to sell in Australia because of the agreement, which removes tariffs and reduces red tape.
- Australia said it was a "great win" for Australian agriculture.
- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Johnson overcame sticking points during talks after the Group of Seven advanced economies met in Britain at the weekend. Morrison attended the summit as a guest.
- Britain is Australia's eighth-largest trading partner and Australia is Britain's 20th largest, with two-way trade worth A\$26.9 billion (\$20.7 billion).
- "This is the most comprehensive and ambitious agreement that Australia has concluded," Morrison said.

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- Prior to Britain joining the then European common market in 1973, Britain was Australia's most lucrative trading market.
- The full agreement is yet to be published. According to British official estimates, it could add 500 million pounds to the country's economic output over the long term, a small fraction for an economy worth around 2 trillion pounds.
- The bigger economic prize could be the precedent the deal sets for freer access in trade that allows Britain's services sector to export financial, legal and other professional services.
- Britain has applied to join a trans-Pacific trading bloc, of which Australia is also a member, that includes other countries where minister predict demand for digital, legal and professional services will grow rapidly.
- That deal, Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, is also seen as important economic counterweight to China's influence in the region.
- The deal with Australia will be scrutinised by British farmers, who fear they could be forced out of business if the deal eliminates tariffs on lamb and beef imports.
- CPTPP, also known as TPP11 or TPP-11, is a trade agreement among Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, Peru and Vietnam. It evolved from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), that never entered into force because of withdrawal of United States.

## NATO Summit

*Why in news?*

NATO Summit was held recently in Brussels. It brought together the leaders of all 30 Allied nations.

*Key points are:*

- The heads of the NATO countries said they "remain firmly committed to NATO's founding Washington Treaty, including that an attack against one Ally shall be considered an attack against us all, as enshrined in Article 5."
- It included language about updating Article 5 to include major cyberattacks, which have become a significant and growing concern.
- About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- It is an intergovernmental military alliance. Established by Washington treaty. The treaty was signed on 4 April 1949. Its headquarter is at Brussels, Belgium.

- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations at Mons, Belgium.
- Since its founding, the admission of new member states has increased the alliance from the original 12 countries to 30. The most recent member state to be added to NATO was North Macedonia on 27 March 2020.
- NATO membership is open to "any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area."

## Global Investors Roundtable organised by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF)

*Why in news?*

The Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman on 24 June, 2021 participated in the Global Investors Roundtable organised by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) through video conferencing which witnessed participation from some of the largest foreign investors, including Mastercard, MetLife, Prudential, Air Products, Dell, SoftBank and Warburg Pincus amongst others.

*Key points are:*

- The event provided investors with an opportunity to engage with the Union Finance Minister and senior officials of the Indian Government to discuss potential investment opportunities and deliberate on the role of ongoing policy reforms that will enable greater Ease-of-Doing-Business in India.
- Smt. Sitharaman discussed India's opportunities for growth and investment pertaining to India's wide-ranging reforms which continues to position the country as an attractive destination for foreign investors.

*The broad messages conveyed to the investors were:*

- A significant drop in new COVID infections in the country and decline of the second wave
- Strong Relief and Reforms were undertaken by Government during the pandemic times
- Continued macro-economic stability and resilience in economic recovery in the recent months
- Vision to make India Self-Reliant (Aatma Nirbhar Bharat)

- Steps taken for Infrastructure led to economic growth
- Creating multi-sectoral opportunities for investors
- Strong track record of reform implementation in the last 6 years
- Other strengths/advantages of India as an investment destination
- Opportunities for investment in Climate, ESG, and Sustainability focused investments.
- An overall vision to build a self-reliant modern India driven by 5 "I's" viz. Intent, Inclusion, Investment, Infrastructure and Innovation.

#### About USISPF

The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) is a non-profit organization, with the primary objective of strengthening the India-US bilateral and strategic partnership through policy advocacy in the fields of economic growth, entrepreneurship, employment-creation, and innovation.

#### International Day of the Tropics 2021

##### Why in news?

June 29 is observed as the International Day of the Tropics, every year.

##### Key points are:

- The event is a UN initiative that aims to promote tropical regions on Earth, raise awareness about the conservation strategies, and celebrate the remarkable diversity that abounds the planet.
- The inaugural State of the Tropics Report was launched on 29 June 2014, as the culmination of a collaboration between twelve leading tropical research institutions.
- The report offers a unique perspective on this increasingly important region.
- Marking the anniversary of the report's launch the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/70/267 in 2016, which declared

that 29 June of each year is to be observed as the International Day of the Tropics.

- The international Day of the Tropics was designated to raise awareness to the specific challenges faced by tropical areas, the far-reaching implications of the issues affecting the world's tropical zone and the need, at all levels, to raise awareness and to underline the important role that countries in the tropics will play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- International Day of the Tropics theme this year, as per the 'State of the Tropics Report 2021' is The Digital Divide in the Tropics.

#### About Tropics

- The Tropics are a region of the Earth, roughly defined as the area between the tropic of Cancer and the tropic of Capricorn.
- Although topography and other factors contribute to climatic variation, tropical locations are typically warm and experience little seasonal change in day-to-day temperature.
- An important feature of the Tropics is the prevalence of rain in the moist inner regions near the equator, and that the seasonality of rainfall increases with the distance from the equator.



## Science and Technology and Environment

### India's first indigenous temperature data logger for the cold chain management

*Why in news?*

Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar (IIT Ropar) in Punjab has developed a first-of-its-kind IoT device called AmbiTag. It is India's first indigenous temperature data logger for the cold chain management.

*Key points are:*

- It also records real-time ambient temperature during the transportation of perishable products, vaccines and even body organs and blood.
- Recorded temperature further helps to know whether that particular item transported from anywhere in the world is still usable or perished because of temperature variation. This information is particularly critical for vaccines including Covid-19 vaccine, organs and blood transportation.

### The Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Sajag got commissioned

*Why in news?*

The Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Sajag got commissioned into the Indian Coast Guard (ICG).

*Key points are:*

- It is third out of five OPV indigenously designed and built by the Goa Shipyard Limited. Other four OPVs are; Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Saksham, ICGS Sachet, ICGS Sujeet, and ICGS Sarthak.
- It is fitted with advanced technology equipment, weapons and sensors capable of carrying a twin-engine helicopter and four high speed boats.
- The OPVs are long-range surface ships capable of coastal and offshore patrolling, policing maritime zones, control & surveillance, anti-smuggling & anti-piracy operations with limited wartime roles.

### Horticulture Cluster Development Programme

*Why in news?*

The Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, virtually launched the Horticulture Cluster Development Programme (CDP) to ensure holistic growth of horticulture.

*Key points are:*

- In a pilot phase, the programme will be implemented in 12 horticulture clusters out of the total 53 clusters selected for the programme.

- A central sector programme implemented by the National Horticulture Board (NHB) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, CDP aims at growing and developing identified horticulture clusters to make them globally competitive.
- The clusters of the pilot phase include; Shopian (J&K) and Kinnaur (H.P.) for Apple, Lucknow (U.P.), Kutch (Gujarat) and Mahbubnagar (Telangana) for Mango, Anantpur (A.P.) and Theni (T.N.) for Banana, Nasik (Maharashtra) for Grapes, Siphahijala (Tripura) for Pineapple, Solapur (Maharashtra) and Chitradurga (Karnataka) for Pomegranate and West Jaintia Hills (Meghalaya) for Turmeric.
- These clusters will be implemented through Cluster Development Agencies (CDAs) which are appointed on the recommendations of the respective State/UT Government.

### New Controller Warship Production and Acquisition

*Why in news?*

Vice Admiral Kiran Deshmukh, AVSM, VSM, has assumed charge as the Controller Warship Production and Acquisition on 31 May 21.

*Key points are:*

- The Flag Officer has held various important appointments in the Staff, Personnel and Materiel Branch at Naval Headquarters, trial agencies, MO, Naval Dockyard and Command staff at HQENC.
- The Flag Officer has served onboard frontline ships like Rajput Class, Delhi Class and Tabar Class in various capacities.
- The Admiral is a recipient of the AtiVisishtSeva Medal and VisishtSeva Medal for his distinguished service.

### Digitized versions of Flagship Health Schemes

*Why in news?*

From Paper-based to Paper-less - Dr. Harsh Vardhan launches Digitized versions of Flagship Health Schemes on National Health Authority (NHA)'s IT platform.

*Key points are:*

- Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare today launched the revamped Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) and the Umbrella schemes of Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) and Health Minister's Discretionary Grant (HMDG) on National Health Authority (NHA)'s IT platform in the presence of Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare.

- This will enable seamless delivery of healthcare services to eligible beneficiaries under these schemes by making the whole process paperless.
- The Union Health Minister remarked that the CGHS, a comprehensive Health Scheme for Serving Employees, Pensioners, Members of Parliament, ex-MPs, etc., and their dependent family members, during the last 7 years has expanded to 72 Cities with more than 38 lakh beneficiaries are covered under the scheme.
- He noted that although CGHS started in 1954 in New Delhi, wherein till 2014 only 25 cities were covered. CGHS retired pensioners are provided Cashless treatment at empanelled centres which will now be made seamless in the new platform
- The present Unit Trust of India Infrastructure Technology and Services Limited (UTI-ITSL) bill clearing platform will run concurrently till midnight of 10/11 June 2021 to ensure that the CGHS pensioner beneficiaries don't have face any inconvenience.
- Dr. Harsh Vardhan informed that under RAN, financial assistance up to Rs 15 lakhs is provided to poor patients suffering from major life-threatening diseases/cancer/rare diseases, for medical treatment at Government hospitals.
- ICMR issued an advisory on use of self-test kits. According to it, the Rapid Antigen test is advised only for symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of positive cases.
- Apart from that, home testing mobile app available in Google play store and Apple store, which users has to mandatorily download. This mobile app is a comprehensive guide of testing procedure.
- It will also provide a positive or negative test result to patient. All users need to click picture of test strip after completing test procedure with same mobile phone that was used to download the app and for registration.
- Individuals who test positive will be considered as true positives while symptomatic individuals who test negative will be tested again by RT PCR.

### First-ever APAC cybersecurity council

*Why in news?*

With the aim of building a strong communications channel for addressing cyber threats and sharing best practices across the participating countries, Microsoft has launched the first Asia Pacific Public Sector Cyber Security Executive Council.

*Key points are:*

- Consisting of policymakers and influencers from Brunei, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, supported by cybersecurity professionals, the council aims to accelerate public-private partnerships in cybersecurity, share threat intelligence, Microsoft said in a statement on Monday (1 June, 2021).
- "Our joint mission is to build a strong coalition, to strengthen our cybersecurity defense," said Sherie Ng, General Manager, Public Sector, Microsoft Asia Pacific.
- The APAC countries continue to experience a higher-than-average encounter rate for malware and ransomware attacks – 1.6 and 1.7 times higher respectively than the rest of the world.
- "This collective marks a significant commitment towards accelerating public-private partnerships in cybersecurity, while promoting a broader sharing of threat intelligence to be better positioned to respond in the event of an attack," the tech giant said.
- The council is set to meet virtually on a quarterly basis to maintain a continuous exchange of information on cyber threats and cybersecurity solutions.

### PanBio Test Kit approved by ICMR

*Why in news?*

Indian Council of Medical Research, ICMR has approved a second home-based Rapid Antigen Test kit named "PanBio COVID-19". This test kit was developed by Abbott Rapid Diagnostics Division, Chicago.

*Key points are:*

- The self-use kit has been given provisional approval till 5th July. The price of the kit will be declared by after July 5. Earlier, ICMR had given its approval to the "CoviSelf test kit" which was developed by Pune-based Mylab Discovery Solutions.
- PanBio COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test kit comprises a membrane strip. The strip is pre-coated with immobilized anti-SARS-CoV-2 antibody on test line and mouse monoclonal anti-chicken on the control line.
- Two types of conjugates move upward on the membrane chromatographically to react with anti-SARS-CoV-2 antibody as well as mouse monoclonal anti-chicken.

- “This coalition certainly establishes stronger partnerships with industry leaders and practitioners that allow us to fortify our security postures and combat cybercrime,” said Dato’ Ts Dr. Haji Amirudin Abdul Wahab FASc, CEO of CyberSecurity Malaysia.
- As part of the council, government agencies and state leaders will join a forum that includes Microsoft and its ecosystem of cybersecurity industry advisors.
- “With similar threat landscapes, this partnership will ensure that we are steps ahead of the perpetrators, establishing higher standards for the cybersecurity eco-system as well,” added ChangHee Yun, Principle Researcher of AI/Future Strategy Center, National Information Society Agency Korea.
- The aim of the forum is to share best practices, learn from Microsoft security certification trainings, dedicated workshops, and hands-on lab sessions, with a goal of driving improvements to the digital skills of the workforce to reduce the talent gap in cybersecurity across the participating nations.

### NASA announces two new robotic missions to Venus

#### *Why in news?*

NASA is returning to sizzling Venus, our closest yet perhaps most overlooked neighbor, after decades of exploring other worlds. The space agency’s new administrator, Bill Nelson, announced two new robotic missions to the solar system’s hottest planet, during his first major address to employees Wednesday (3 June, 2021).

#### *Key points are:*

- “These two sister missions both aim to understand how Venus became an inferno-like world capable of melting lead at the surface,” Nelson said.
- One mission named DaVinci Plus will analyse the thick, cloudy Venusian atmosphere in an attempt to determine whether the inferno planet ever had an ocean and was possibly habitable.
- A small craft will plunge through the atmosphere to measure the gases. It will be the first US-led mission to the Venusian atmosphere since 1978.
- The other mission, called Veritas, will seek a geologic history by mapping the rocky planet’s surface.
- “It is astounding how little we know about Venus,” but the new missions will give fresh views of the planet’s atmosphere, made up mostly of carbon dioxide, down to the core, NASA scientist Tom Wagner said in a statement. “It will be as if we have rediscovered the planet.”

- NASA’s top science official, Thomas Zurbuchen, calls it “a new decade of Venus.” Each mission launching sometime around 2028 to 2030 will receive \$500 million for development under NASA’s Discovery program. The missions beat out two other proposed projects, to Jupiter’s moon Io and Neptune’s icy moon Triton.
- The US and the former Soviet Union sent multiple spacecraft to Venus in the early days of space exploration.
- NASA’s Mariner 2 performed the first successful flyby in 1962, and the Soviets’ Venera 7 made the first successful landing in 1970.
- In 1989, NASA used a space shuttle to send its Magellan spacecraft into orbit around Venus. The European Space Agency put a spacecraft around Venus in 2006.

### UNICEF signs COVID-19 vaccine supply agreement with Moderna

#### *Why in news?*

UNICEF has signed a long-term agreement with Moderna for the supply of COVID-19 vaccine on behalf of the COVAX Facility.

#### *Key points are:*

- Through the supply agreement, UNICEF, along with procurement partners including the PanAmerican Health Organization (PAHO), will have access to up to 34 million doses of the vaccine for around 92 countries and territories in 2021.
- This is the fifth supply agreement UNICEF has signed for COVID-19 vaccines, following previously announced agreements with the Serum Institute of India, Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Human Vaccine.
- Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine received a WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) on 30 April. On 3 May, the COVAX Facility announced that it had signed an Advance Purchase Agreement to secure access to 34 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna in the fourth quarter of 2021 and up to 466 million doses in 2022.
- Deliveries of the vaccine are scheduled to begin in the fourth quarter of 2021, with allocations to COVAX participants determined by the COVAX Allocation Framework that focuses on equity in access, considering amongst other parameters country readiness and supply through COVAX to date, and operating and supply considerations.



- The goal of the COVAX Facility is to help address the acute phase of the global pandemic by the end of 2021 by providing rapid, fair and equitable access to safe and effective vaccines to all participating countries and territories regardless of income level.
- The COVAX Facility, co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO, together with UNICEF, aims to provide access to approved COVID-19 vaccines, enabling the protection of frontline health care and social workers, as well as other high-risk and vulnerable groups.

**WHO: Only Delta is a variant of concern**

*Why in news?*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said only B.1.617.2, one of the three strains of the B.1.617 COVID-19 variant first detected in India, is a “variant of concern” now.

*Key points are:*

If we see the background: The B.1.617 variant was first detected in India and was divided in three lineages – B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3.

*Why and how variants of a virus emerge?*

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

*About Mutation*

- A mutation means a change in the genetic sequence of the virus.
- In the case of SARS-CoV-2, which is a Ribonucleic acid (RNA) virus, a mutation means a change in the sequence in which its molecules are arranged.
- A mutation in an RNA virus often happens when the virus makes a mistake while it is making copies of itself.

**European Space Agency’s EnVision mission to Venus**

*Why in news?*

Following NASA’s footsteps, the European Space Agency (ESA) on Thursday (10 June, 2021) announced that it has selected EnVision as its next orbiter that will visit Venus sometime in the 2030s.

*Key points are:*

- EnVision is an ESA led mission with contributions from NASA. It is likely to be launched sometime in the 2030s.
- Last week, NASA selected two missions to the planet Venus, Earth’s nearest neighbour.
- The missions called DAVINCI+ and VERITAS have been selected based on their potential for scientific value and the feasibility of their development plans.
- NASA is expected to allot \$500 million to each of these missions that will launch between 2028-2030.

*What is EnVision?*

- EnVision is an ESA led mission with contributions from NASA. It is likely to be launched sometime in the 2030s.
- The earliest launch opportunity for EnVision is 2031, followed by 2032 and 2033.
- Once launched on an Ariane 6 rocket, the spacecraft will take about 15 months to reach Venus and will take 16 more months to achieve orbit circularisation.
- The spacecraft will carry a range of instruments to study the planet’s atmosphere and surface, monitor trace gases in the atmosphere and analyse its surface composition. A radar provided by NASA will help to image and map the surface.
- EnVision will follow another ESA-led mission to Venus called ‘Venus Express’ (2005-2014) that focussed on atmospheric research and pointed to volcanic hotspots on the planet’s surface.
- Other than this, Japan’s Akatsuki spacecraft has also been studying the planet’s atmosphere since 2015.

**Advanced Light Helicopters Inducted at INS Dega**

*Why in news?*

The induction ceremony of ‘322 Dega Flight’ was held in the presence of Vice Adm Ajendra Bahadur Singh, AVSM, VSM Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command (ENC) with three indigenously built Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) MK III helicopters flying into Naval Air Station, INS Dega on 07 Jun 21.

*Key facts are:*

- With the induction of these Maritime Reconnaissance and Coastal Security (MRCS) helicopters, the ENC got a major boost towards enhancing the capabilities of the force, in pursuit of the maritime interests of the nation.
- These helicopters, built by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, are state-of-the-art flying machines and constitute a major step in our quest for “Atma Nirbhar Bharat”.

### About ALH MK III helicopters

- Helicopters feature an array of systems previously seen only on heavier, multi-role helicopters of the Indian Navy.
- These helicopters are fitted with modern surveillance radar and electro-optical equipment, which enable them to undertake the role of maritime reconnaissance in addition to providing long-range Search and Rescue, both by day and night.
- In addition to special operations capabilities, ALH MK III is also fitted with a heavy machine gun to undertake constabulary missions.
- A removable Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) is also fitted on ALH MK III helicopters to airlift critically ill patients. The helicopter also has a host of advanced avionics, making it truly an all-weather aircraft.
- The flight is being led by Cdr SS Dash as the first flight commander who is an experienced ALH Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) with extensive operational experience.

### First CAR-T cell therapy

#### Why in news?

Department of Biotechnology supported First CAR-T cell therapy conducted at ACTREC, Tata Hospital in Mumbai.

#### Key points are:

- The Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR-T) therapy has emerged as a breakthrough in cancer treatment. Clinical trials conducted globally have shown promising results in end-stage patients, especially in patients suffering from Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia.
- Though this technology has a remarkable therapeutic potential for cancer patients, at present this technology is not available in India.

- Each patient's CAR-T cell therapy costs 3-4 crore (INR). The challenge therefore is to develop this technology in a cost-effective manner and make it available for the patients.
- The manufacturing complexity is a major reason for the therapy cost.
- In order to promote and support the development of CAR-T cell technology against cancer and other diseases, BIRAC and DBT have taken initiatives and launched specialized calls to invite proposals in the last 2 years.

#### Why 4th June, 2021 was a historic day for TMH?

The 4th June, 2021 was a historic day for TMH, IIT Bombay team and cancer care in India as the first CAR-T cell therapy (a type of gene therapy) was done at the Bone Marrow Transplant unit at ACTREC, Tata Memorial Center in Mumbai.

The CAR-T cells were designed and manufactured at Bioscience and Bioengineering (BSBE) department of IIT Bombay.

- This work is partly supported by BIRAC-PACE scheme. The TMC-IIT Bombay team are further supported to extend this project for conducting Phase I/II trial of their CAR-T product by DBT/BIRAC, through National Biopharma Mission.

#### "First in India" gene therapy

- This is a "first in India" gene therapy in early phase pilot clinical trial and the dedicated efforts and excellent collaboration between IIT Bombay and Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai.
- The central government's National Biopharma Mission-BIRAC has approved 19.15 Cr crore to the team for conducting a first-in-human phase-1/2 clinical trial of the CAR-T cells.
- The clinical trials are being done by Dr (Surg Cdr) Gaurav Narula, Professor of Paediatric Oncology and Health Sciences, and his team from TMC, Mumbai, and the novel CAR-T cells that will act as drugs that were manufactured by Prof Rahul Purwar, Bioscience and Bioengineering (BSBE) department and his team at IIT Bombay.
- The design, development, and extensive pre-clinical testing was carried out by IIT-B as a collaborative project with Tata Memorial Center, Mumbai by the two Investigators.
- National Biopharma Mission is also supporting the development of Lentiviral vector manufacturing facility for packaging plasmids used to transfer the modified T cell inside the body, cGMP facility for T-cell transduction and expansion for CAR T-cell manufacturing to two other organizations.

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- The development of CAR-T cell technology for diseases including acute lymphocytic leukemia, multiple myeloma, glioblastoma, hepatocellular carcinoma and type-2 diabetes is supported through DBT.

*About DBT*

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science & Technology, promotes and accelerates the development of biotechnology in India, including growth and application of biotechnology in the areas of agriculture, healthcare, animal sciences, environment and industry.

*About BIRAC*

Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) is a not-for-profit Section 8, Schedule B, Public Sector Enterprise, set up by Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India as an Interface Agency to strengthen and empower the emerging Biotech enterprise to undertake strategic research and innovation, addressing nationally relevant product development needs.

**Resolution 75/260 of UNGA: HIV/AIDS**

*Why in news?*

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare digitally addressed the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on Friday (11 June,2021) through Video Conference.

*Key points are:*

- The Resolution 75/260 of UNGA deals with the Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the political declarations on HIV/AIDS.
- HIV/AIDS Prevention Model: India's unique HIV prevention model is centered around the concept of 'Social Contracting' through which the 'Targeted Interventions Program' is implemented with support from civil society.
- The program is aimed at behaviour change, communication, outreach, service delivery, counselling & testing and ensuring linkages to HIV care.
- The HIV & AIDS Prevention and Control Act, 2017, provides a legal and enabling framework to safeguard the human rights of infected and affected populations.
- India is providing free anti-retroviral treatment to close to 1.4 million people.
- Anti-retro-viral therapy is a combination of daily medications that stop the virus from reproducing.

- The therapy helps in protecting CD4 cells thus keeping the immune system strong enough to fight off the disease.
- It, besides reducing the risk of transmission of HIV, also helps in stopping its progression to AIDS (a spectrum of conditions caused by infection due to HIV).

*About National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)*

- The National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) launched the first phase of the National AIDS Control Programme in (1992-1999).
- NACO is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- It was constituted in 1992 to provide leadership to HIV/AIDS control programmes in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.

**CHIME telescope yields unprecedented results**

*Why in news?*

Scientists with the Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment (CHIME) Collaboration, who include researchers at the Pune-based Tata Institute for Fundamental Research (TIFR) and the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), have assembled the largest collection of fast radio bursts (FRBs) in the telescope's first FRB catalogue.

*Key points are:*

- While catching sight of an FRB is considered a rare thing in the field of radio astronomy, prior to the CHIME project, radio astronomers had only caught sight of around 140 bursts in their scopes since the first FRB was spotted in 2007.
- FRBs are oddly bright flashes of light, registering in the radio band of the electromagnetic spectrum, which blaze for a few milliseconds before vanishing without a trace.
- These brief and mysterious beacons have been spotted in various and distant parts of the universe, as well as in our own galaxy.
- Their origins are unknown and their appearance is highly unpredictable.
- But the advent of the CHIME project a large stationary radio telescope in British Columbia, Canada has been a game-changer and has nearly quadrupled the number of fast radio bursts discovered to date. With more observations, astronomers hope soon to pin down the extreme origins of these curiously bright signals.



- The telescope has detected a whopping 535 new fast radio bursts in its first year of operation itself, between 2018 and 2019.
- With the help of CHIME, we can observe a large swathe of the sky round the clock and were able to detect FRBs at an unprecedented rate.
- The new catalogue significantly expands the current library of known FRBs, and is already yielding clues as to their properties. For instance, the newly discovered bursts appear to fall in two distinct classes: those that repeat, and those that don't.
- Scientists have identified 18 FRB sources that burst repeatedly, while the rest appear to be one-offs.
- When the scientists mapped their locations, they found the bursts were evenly distributed in space, seeming to arise from any and all parts of the sky. From the FRBs that CHIME was able to detect, the scientists calculated that bright fast radio bursts occur at a rate of about 800 per day across the entire sky the most precise estimate of FRBs overall rate to date.
- The first FRB catalogue is to be presented later this week at the American Astronomical Society Meeting.

#### *About CHIME*

- It comprises four massive cylindrical radio antennas, roughly the size and shape of snowboarding half-pipes, located at the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory, operated by the National Research Council of Canada in British Columbia. The telescope receives radio signals each day from half of the sky as the Earth rotates.
- While most radio astronomy is done by swivelling a large dish to focus light from different parts of the sky, CHIME stares, motionless, at the sky, and focuses incoming signals using a correlator a powerful digital signal processor that can work through huge amounts of data, at a rate of about seven terabytes per second, equivalent to a few per cent of the world's Internet traffic.

#### **PASIPHAE: A Sky Surveying Project**

##### *Why in news?*

The Wide Area Linear Optical Polarimeter (WALOP), a vital instrument for the PASIPHAE Project, is being developed at Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), India.

##### *Key points are:*

- Polar-Areas Stellar-Imaging in Polarisation High-Accuracy Experiment (PASIPHAE) is an international collaborative sky surveying project.

#### *About PASIPHAE Survey*

- It is an Opto polarimetric survey aiming to measure the linear polarization from millions of stars.
- The survey will use two high-tech optical polarimeters to observe the northern and southern skies, simultaneously.
- The survey will be conducted concurrently from the South African Astronomical Observatory in Sutherland, South Africa in the southern hemisphere, and the Skinakas Observatory in Crete, Greece, in the north.
- It will focus on capturing starlight polarisation of very faint stars that are so far away that polarisation signals from there have not been systematically studied.
- The distances to these stars will be obtained from measurements of the GAIA satellite.
- GAIA is on a mission to chart a three-dimensional map of our Galaxy, the Milky Way, in the process revealing the composition, formation and evolution of the Galaxy. It is a European Space Agency astronomical observatory mission.
- Scientists from the University of Crete, Greece, Caltech, USA, IUCAA, India, the South African Astronomical Observatory and the University of Oslo, Norway, are involved in this project, steered by the Institute of Astrophysics, Greece.

#### *Significance of the Project*

- Since its birth about 14 billion years ago, the universe has been constantly expanding, as evidenced by the presence of Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) radiation which fills the universe.
- The Milky Way Galaxy contains a lot of dust clouds that are present in the form of clusters. When starlight passes through these dust clouds, they get scattered and polarised.
- The PASIPHAE polarimetric map will be used to perform magnetic tomography of the Milky Way Galaxy.
- That is, it will deduce the 3-dimensional structure of the magnetic field and the dust that resides in our own Galaxy.
- This map will provide invaluable information for future CMB B-mode experiments searching for inflationary gravitational waves.
- The B-mode experiment was used to test the theory of cosmic inflation and distinguish between inflationary models of the very early universe by making precise measurements of the polarization of the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB).

- According to the theory of inflation, the early Universe expanded exponentially fast for a fraction of a second after the Big Bang.
- Beyond studies of the early Universe, the survey will lead to leaps forward in some of the most actively pursued areas in Astrophysics, including high-energy astrophysics, stellar astrophysics, and the interstellar medium dynamics.

### New Shephard rocket system by Blue Origin

*Why in news?*

Last week, Amazon founder and billionaire Jeff Bezos's space company called Blue Origin concluded the online auction for the first seat on New Shephard, a rocket system meant to take tourists to space. Over 7,600 people registered from 159 countries to bid for this seat, which ultimately went for a winning bid of \$28 million.

*Key points are:*

- New Shephard has been named after astronaut Alan Shepard – the first American to go to space – and offers flights to space over 100 km above the Earth and accommodation for payloads.
- The winning bidder will get to fly aboard New Shephard along with Bezos and his brother, when it takes its first human flight on July 20, which marks the 52nd anniversary of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's moon landing.
- New Shephard completed its seventh test launch successfully in October 2020 when it took off from Texas.
- In 2018, Blue Origin was one of the ten companies selected by NASA to conduct studies and advance technologies to collect, process and use space-based resources for missions to the Moon and Mars.
- In 2019, both signed an agreement that gives Blue Origin permission to use NASA's historic test stand, as a part of a growing number of partnerships between the space agency and the commercial space industry.

*About New Shephard*

- New Shephard has been named after astronaut Alan Shepard – the first American to go to space – and offers flights to space over 100 km above the Earth and accommodation for payloads.
- Essentially, it is a rocket system that has been designed to take astronauts and research payloads past the Karman line – the internationally recognized boundary of space.

- The idea is to provide easier and more cost-effective access to space meant for purposes such as academic research, corporate technology development and entrepreneurial ventures among others.
- Apart from its academic and research-oriented goal, New Shephard will also allow space tourists to experience microgravity by taking them 100 km above the Earth.

### Neutrinos

*Why in news?*

Scientists have shown that the geometry of space-time can cause neutrinos to oscillate.

*Key points are:*

*About Neutrinos*

- Detected for the first time in 1959, neutrinos are the second most abundant particles in the world, after photons, or the light particle.
- Neutrinos are mysterious particles, produced copiously in nuclear reactions in the Sun, stars, and elsewhere.
- They also “oscillate” – meaning that different types of neutrinos change into one another.
- Probing of oscillations of neutrinos and their relations with mass are crucial in studying the origin of the universe.
- Neutrinos are created by various radioactive decays; during a supernova, by cosmic rays striking atoms etc.

### The VivaTech

*Why in news?*

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi delivered the keynote address at the 5th edition of VivaTech via video conference.

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**Key points are:**

- The Prime Minister was invited as a Guest of Honour to deliver the keynote address at VivaTech 2021, one of the largest digital and startup events in Europe, held in Paris every year since 2016.
- Viva Technology (VivaTech) is an annual technology conference, dedicated to innovation and startups, held in Paris, France.
- VivaTech was founded in 2016 by Publicis Groupe and Groupe Les Echos. The first two days of VivaTech are for startups, investors, executives, students and academics, and it is open to the general public on the third day.

**Cabinet approves Deep Ocean Mission***Why in news?*

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) on "Deep Ocean Mission", with a view to explore deep ocean for resources and develop deep sea technologies for sustainable use of ocean resources.

*Key points are:*

- The Deep Ocean Mission consists of the following six major components:
- Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining, and Manned Submersible;
- Development of Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services;

III. Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity; Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration; Energy and freshwater from the Ocean; and Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology.

- The technologies required for deep sea mining have strategic implications and are not commercially available. Hence, attempts will be made to indigenise technologies by collaborating with leading institutes and private industries.

**AY.1 variant of Coronavirus***Why in news?*

The 'Delta' variant of SARS-CoV-2 has further mutated to form the 'Delta plus' or 'AY.1' variant. Speaking about the new strain, the Centre said an additional mutation of this variant, known as Delta Plus, has been detected and submitted to a global data system.

*Key points are:*

- "It has been seen in Europe since March and was brought into the public domain on 13 June," Dr VK Paul, Member-Health, Niti Aayog, said
- Dr Paul further said that the 'Delta plus' variant of Covid-19 is a variant of interest and has not yet been classified as a variant of concern.
- "As per data available in the public domain, this variant nullifies the use of a monoclonal antibody. We will study and learn more about this variant," the Niti Aayog member said.
- The B.1.617.2 strain or the 'Delta' variant of SARS-CoV-2 was identified as one of the drivers of the second wave of Covid-19 infections that devastated parts of India earlier this year.
- During the second wave of Covid-19, the government said, about 11.62% cases were seen in the below 20 years age group, while it was 11.31% during the first wave.

**Ebola Outbreak***Why in news?*

An Ebola outbreak in Guinea that started in February, infecting 16 people and killing 12, has been declared over by WHO.

*Key points are:*

- The Ebola outbreak in 2014-2016 killed 11,300 people, mostly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- In May 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) officially declared the end of the 12th Ebola outbreak.
- Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans.
- Transmission: The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission.
- The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%. Case fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks.
- Prevention: Community engagement is key to successfully controlling outbreaks. Good outbreak control relies on case management, surveillance and contact tracing, good laboratory service, and social mobilisation.
- Treatment: Early supportive care with rehydration, symptomatic treatment improves survival. There is yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralise the virus but a range of blood, immunological and drug therapies are under development.

## Global Tuberculosis Programme

*Why in news?*

A virtual high-level event on 'Global Drive to Scale-up TB Prevention' was recently organized by WHO Global Tuberculosis Programme.

*Key points are:*

- The purpose of this special high-level event was to discuss key actions needed at the global and country-level to scale up TB prevention strategies and drive progress towards achieving the 2022 UN High-Level Meeting target on TB preventive treatment.
- India is aggressively implementing its fully-funded National Strategic Plan to End TB.
- In the last few years, 50 million people have been treated.
- India seeks to achieve national scale-up of TB preventive treatment (TPT).
- It also seeks to achieve the UN High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) targets of 40 million persons started on TB treatment and 30 million on TPT globally in the remaining 18 months.
- Sub-national Certification of States and Districts instituted in 2020- The initiative marks districts/States-UTs on "Progress towards TB Free Status" under different categories measured with graded milestones of decline in TB incidence.

## Severe droughts to impact 2-5% of India's GDP: UN report

*Why in news?*

The report titled "Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Special Report on Drought 2021" was published on June 18, 2021 by UNDRR (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction).

*Key points are:*

- It will be a part of discussions at vital UN climate talks called Cop26, scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November 2021.
- As per the report, Drought is a hidden global crisis that can become "the next pandemic" if no urgent action is taken on water & land management and tackling climate emergency.
- About 1.5 billion people are directly affected by drought this century.

- Economic cost was roughly estimated at \$124bn. However, True cost is likely to be many times higher as these estimates do not include much impact in developing countries.
- Most of the world will be with water stress in the next few years and demand will outstrip the water supply during certain periods.
- Report highlights, drought is now widespread and by end of this century, most of the countries will experience it in some form.
- Report highlights that, even the developed countries are not immune to drought. US, Australia, and southern Europe have experienced drought in the recent past.
- Drought costs more than US dollar 6 billion a year in the US while euro 9 billion in the EU. As per the report, Population growth is also exposing more people to the impacts of drought in many regions.
- Changing rainfall patterns because of climate breakdown are the key drivers of drought. However, the report identifies inefficient use of water resources, degradation of land under intensive agriculture, and poor farming practices also play a crucial role.
- Deforestation, overuse of fertilisers & pesticides, overgrazing & over-extraction of water for farming are some other factors.

## Nanodecoy' therapy binds and neutralizes the SARS-CoV-2 virus

*Why in news?*

A recent study finds that Nano-decoys can bind to and neutralize SARS-CoV-2 viruses.

*Key points are:*

- Nanodecoys made from human lung spheroid cells (LSCs) can bind to and neutralize SARS-CoV-2, promoting viral clearance and reducing lung injury in a macaque model of COVID-19.
- By mimicking the receptor that the virus binds to rather than targeting the virus itself, nanodecoy therapy could remain effective against emerging variants of the virus.

### *How the therapy will work?*

SARS-CoV-2 enters the cell when its spike protein binds to the angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptor on the cell's surface. LSCs, which is a natural mixture of lung epithelial stem cells and mesenchymal cells, also express ACE2. It making LSCs a perfect vehicle for tricking coronavirus.

### *How testing was done?*

Scientists confirmed that spike protein did bind to ACE2 receptors on decoys in vitro. They then used a fabricated SARS-CoV-2 mimic virus for in vivo testing in a mouse model. Decoys were delivered by inhalation therapy. In mice, Nano-decoys remained in lungs for 72 hours after the first dose and accelerated clearance of the mimic virus.

### *About Nano-decoys*

They are cell ghosts. One LSC can generate about 11,000 Nano-decoys. When these Nano-decoys are deployed, they exponentially increase the surface area of fake binding sites to trap the virus.

## **European Space Agency to Hire First Disabled Astronaut**

### *Why in news?*

The European Space Agency hopes to hire and launch the world's first physically disabled astronaut and several hundred would-be para-astronauts have already applied for the role, ESA head Josef Aschbacher told Reuters recently.

### *Key points are:*

- The 22-member space programme has just closed its latest decennial recruitment call for astronauts and received 22,000 applicants, Aschbacher said.
- The ESA, whose Ariane rocket once dominated the market for commercial satellite launches, faces ever stiffer competition from tech-funded upstarts like Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin and Elon Musk's SpaceX.

- Amazon founder Bezos hopes next month to become the first man to go into space on his own rocket, highlighting the growing role tech billionaires are playing in a field that was once dominated by public agencies.
- The challenges are immense: the ESA's 7 billion euro budget is a third of NASA's, while its seven or eight launches a year are dwarfed by the 40 carried out by the United States.
- This year's job ad attracted almost three times the 8,000 applications received a decade ago, and a quarter of them were women, up from just 15% before. The ESA has promised to develop technologies to ensure those with disabilities, like shortened legs, play a full part.
- And those astronauts will go beyond the International Space Station: some will deploy to the United States's planned Gateway station on the moon, while the ESA's member states are considering an invitation from Chinese and Russian space agencies to participate in their similar moonbase project.

### *About European Space Agency (ESA)*

ESA is an intergovernmental organization comprising 22 member states. The agency, established in 1975, is dedicated to the exploration of space. It is headquartered in Paris. Its space flight programme includes human spaceflight, launch & operation of unmanned exploration missions to other planets & Moon, Earth observation, science & telecommunication etc.

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## Person in News

### The new Chief of Materiel

Vice Admiral Sandeep Naithani has assumed charge as the Chief of Materiel of the Indian Navy on 01 June 2021. In recognition of his distinguished services, the Admiral has been awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal and Vishisht Seva Medal.

The Admiral relieves Vice Admiral SR Sharma who superannuated on 31 May 21.

### 16th Commander-in-Chief, Andaman & Nicobar Command

Lt Gen Ajai Singh assumed charge as the 16th Commander-in-Chief of the Andaman & Nicobar Command (CINCAN) on June 01, 2021. The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) is the only tri-service theatre command of the Armed Forces, based at Port Blair

### Milkha Singh

*Why in news?*

Indian sprint legend Milkha Singh, 91, succumbed to post covid-19 complications Friday (18 June, 2021) night after a month-long battle with the virus.

*Key points are:*

- The 1958 Commonwealth Games champion and 1960 Rome Olympian had tested positive for the virus on May 20 and was admitted to a private hospital in Mohali on May 24.

- Singh had been discharged on May 30 before he was admitted to the Covid ward at the Nehru Hospital Extension at PGIMER on June 3 due to dipping oxygen levels.
- The former Indian athlete had tested negative on Thursday earlier this week and was shifted to the medical ICU.
- Singh, born in Gobindpura – in present day Pakistan – was the first Indian track and field athlete to win gold in the then British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff in 1958.
- He remained the only one for more than 50 years before discus thrower Krishna Poonia won gold at the 2010 CWG in Delhi. Singh had beaten Malcolm Spence of South Africa with a timing of 46.6 seconds in the Scottish city.
- Singh's then-national record timing of 45.6 seconds, set in Rome, was broken by Paramjeet Singh in 1998.
- Singh is survived by three daughters – Mona Singh, Aleeza Grover and Sonia Sanwalka as well as son Jeev Milkha Singh.
- Golfer Jeev, a 14-time international winner, is a Padma Shri awardee like his father and had been coordinating with the medical staff at PGIMER along with elder sister Dr Mona Singh since last month.

## India- European Union Relations

### Context

European Union (EU) plans to institute a “green pass” (also called EU digital Covid Certificate) from July 1, 2021.

India has warned EU to introduce a “reciprocal policy” only allowing ease of travel for those European countries that recognise Indian vaccines Covishield and Covaxin.

### Green Pass and Associated Issues

Green pass: It is a digital proof showing that a person has either been vaccinated against Covid-19, received a negative test result or recovered from Covid-19.

The certificate is both in digital and paper format, comes with a QR code is free of charge, is in the national language and English, is safe and secure and valid in all EU countries.

Four approved vaccines by European Medicines Agency (EMA): Comirnaty of Pfizer/BioNTech; Moderna; AstraZeneca's Vaxzervria; and Janssen by Johnson & Johnson.

### Associated Concerns:

Exemption of Indian vaccines: like Covishield (the version of the AstraZeneca vaccine being manufactured in India by SII) and Covaxin (manufactured by Bharat Biotech), are not eligible for the EU Digital Covid certificate or “green pass”.

Protest by the African Union: on the grounds of promoting “inequality” for those from India and “lower-income” countries for whom the Covishield vaccine was the “backbone” of the international COVAX alliance programme.

**India-EU relations: Areas of cooperation**

Connectivity partnership: launched during India-EU virtual summit held in May, 2021.

Aim: to ensure connectivity in the sectors like digital, energy, transport, and people-to-people and enabling the two countries to pursue sustainable joint projects in regions spanning from Africa, Central Asia to the wider Indo-Pacific.

**Economic Importance:**

The EU is India's third largest trading partner, accounting for €62.8 billion worth of trade in goods in 2020 or 11.1% of total Indian trade after China (12%) and the US (11.7%).

The EU is the second-largest destination for Indian exports (14% of the total) after the USA.

Strategic partnership: India is a suitable partner for India to balance growing influence of China while EU can be a reliant partner of India to ensure stability in the Indo-pacific theatre.

Climate change: India can learn from a new industrial strategy called the 'Green Deal' of EU to render its carbon-emission neutral by 2050.

Cooperation: between India and EU to achieve the goals of Paris Agreement and Other Sustainable Development targets.

Cooperation on global health: EU member-states have rallied to support India by sending critical medical supplies in the last few weeks in recognition for the role India had played in helping others over the last year.

**Challenges Ahead****Economic issues:**

Unmet potential: India is the EU's 10th largest trading partner (1.8% of EU total trade in goods in 2020) well behind China (16.1%), the USA (15.2%), and the UK (12.2%).

Bilateral Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA): started in 2007, is yet to be finalized. Recently both India and EU had agreed to accelerate the process.

Restrictive regulatory environment: Technical barriers to trade (TBT), sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures, and discrimination based on legislative or administrative measures by India, affect a wide range of sectors, including goods, services, investment and public procurement.

Strategic issues: Growing influence of China in economic and other strategic sectors in EU is a concern for India.

EU recently signed a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China, which has drawn a lot of criticism and its ratification has now been suspended because of diplomatic tensions.

*Way forward*

Geo-Economic Cooperation: India can pursue EU countries to engage in Indo-pacific narrative, geo-economically if not from security prism.

Potential for economic growth: India can leverage EU's market to expand its export market, resulting in more sustained growth in the national income and industrial sector as suggested by Economic Survey, 2020-21.

Conclude India-EU BIT treaty: to achieve full trade potential of the two countries.

Investment in clean energy technologies: EU can help India in achieving carbon-neutral status by 2050 by investing in clean energy technologies.

They can also cooperate for implementing clean energy technologies in other resource-deficient countries.

Combating after effects of COVID-19 pandemic: EU shall include Indian vaccines under its green pass system to ensure barrier free movement of vaccinated Indian people, resulting in quick recovery in goods and services trade between the two countries.

Ensuring resilient medical supply chains: should be the priority for both India and EU in order to fight against current COVID-19 pandemic and other future health challenges.

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# Technology in Agriculture: India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA)

## Context

Task Force constituted under the chairmanship of the Shri Sanjay Agarwal, has prepared a Consultation Paper on India Ecosystem Architecture (IndEA) Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA) with a view to keep farmers at the centre of agro-ecology by promoting free digital technologies.

This sets in motion the ministry's plan of creating 'AgriStack' (a collection of technology-based interventions in agriculture), on which everything else will be built.

## Importance of Agriculture

Agricultural GDP: accounts for about 15.9 % of the country's US\$ 2.7 trillion economy (2018-19).

Employment: Provides 49% of total employment in India (2018-19).

PM Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM-FME)

## Objectives of India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA)

To build a National Digital Agriculture Ecosystem, to elevate Indian Agriculture Sector to higher levels of efficiency and productivity, and to improve the welfare and income of farmers.

Increasing farmer's income: through access to right information at the right time, and from innovative services. It will help in doubling farmers income by 2022.

Ensuring sync between various planning and execution: of policies, programs, and schemes of the Central and State governments, and, also of the private sector and Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs).

Efficient use of resources: including land, water, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and farm mechanization by providing easier access to information.

To provide location-specific and personalized extension services across agriculture lifecycle, with simultaneous protection of privacy of personal data.

To build capacities: across the gamut of digital agriculture and precision agriculture.

Promotes R&D and Innovations: in agriculture through access to high-quality data.

Adoption of standards for interoperability and seamless exchange of information across ecosystem.

## Pilot projects by private players (approved by the agriculture ministry):

MOU with Microsoft: requires Microsoft to create a 'Unified Farmer Service Interface' through its cloud computing services.

MoU with Star Agribazaar: mentions 'farmer data sanitisation', land profiling and crop estimation using remote sensing along with building a generalised advisory platform for farmers, including mobile applications, for pre- and post-harvest advisories.

MoU with Patanjali: talks about developing a mobile application for advising farmers on soil nutrition, accurate quantification on farmer crop and yield, fertiliser recommendations, and training farmers for using this application.

MoU with Amazon Internet Services: to build a "National Agri Data Stack" that can serve as a foundational data layer on which "agri focused solutions" will be built.

Esri India MoU: discusses how the company will support the ministry in establishing a 'national agriculture geo hub', provide the required GIS tools and technologies and create and collate farmer and other agriculture data services on GIS platform.

## Advantages of technology in agriculture

Enhances productivity and profitability of the farmers: by eliminating deficiencies in information and enhancing productivity of various tools. This will also result in freeing up of extra labor force from the agriculture sector.

Increases efficiency of logistics and supply chain system: as it removes hurdles associated with the physical system.

Help in providing localized solutions and tailored recommendations to the farming community as per their needs.

Coordinated approach in policy formulation and implementation: will result in effective utilization of limited resources in the agriculture.

Integration with the market economy: may result in better realization of prices to farmers by eliminating long list of intermediaries.

Reducing gap between farm to fork (between farmers and consumers): will benefit both farmers (better prices for food grains) and consumers (low cost of food items).



**Associated Concerns**

Issue of data privacy and consent: especially in the absence of a data protection legislation (The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 is currently still with the Joint Parliamentary Committee).

This may result in exploitation of the farmers data by private players.

Information asymmetry: tilted towards the technology companies, might further exploit farmers, especially small and marginal ones.

Digital divide: as there is digital divide in rural India both in terms of the 'access' and 'digital education' of the farmers.

Commercialization of agriculture extension activities: implied by the formation of 'Agristack', as they shift into a digital and private sphere. This may lead to exorbitant prices for these services, charged by the private companies.

Risk of commodifying agriculture and farmer data: as Agristack could strengthen the asymmetry in information flow by providing all information about farmers and their farming easily to corporations.

For example: supply of data to corporations who looked at farmers as a consumer base, be it agri inputs – seed,

chemical fertiliser and pesticides, or fin-tech companies and to those for whom farmers were suppliers like the food industry, garment industry, etc.

Exclusion of landless cultivators: As they don't have any digital land records.

Poor quality and implementation of the digital land records program: Many states have not implemented the digitization of land program and many have implemented partially.

**Way forward**

Diversifying the composition of the task force: by including experts and representatives of the farmers to ensure inclusive and accommodative policies.

Create proper privacy and data security infrastructure: to ensure protection of farmers data. In this context, parliament should enact long pending 'Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019' with requisite modifications.

Educating farmers to bridge information asymmetry and digital divide: this can be done by effectively utilizing various government schemes like PM Grameen Digital Saksharata Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) and other schemes.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) can also play very important role in this respect.

**Expected Questions and Answers for UPSC 2021 Prelims**

**1. What is the theme of International Day of Yoga 2021?**

- (a) Yoga for Health-Yoga at Home
- (b) Climate Action
- (c) Yoga for well-being
- (d) Yoga for Peace

**Ans. c**

**2. Consider the following statements regarding the Flag Satyagraha.**

- 1. Also known as Jhanda Satyagraha, it was held in Jabalpur and Nagpur in 1923.
- 2. The Flag Satyagraha movement by the freedom fighters shook the British government and it infused a new life into the freedom movement.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

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

**Ans. c**

**3. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about the election petition?**

- 1. It is the only legal remedy available to a voter or a candidate who believes there has been malpractice in an election.
- 2. Such a petition has to be filed within 35 days from the date of the poll results.

Choose the correct answer

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

**Ans. a**

**4. Which of the following organisation has recently released the new report titled Children and Digital Dumpsites?**

- (a) WHO
- (b) DRDO
- (c) UNICEF
- (d) None of the above

**Ans. a**

5. Recently, a study has projected that sea levels will rise around which islands due to the impact of global warming?

- (a) Andaman and Nicobar Island
- (b) Lakshadweep Islands
- (c) Both a and b
- (d) Neither a nor b

**Ans. b**

6. Consider the following statements regarding Herbicide Tolerant Bt (HTBt) Cotton.

- 1. The HTBt cotton variant adds another layer of modification, making the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate.
- 2. Fears include glyphosate having a carcinogenic effect.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

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

**Ans. c**

7. Consider the following statements regarding the UNGA.

- 1. It is composed of 190 Members of the United Nations.
- 2. It provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

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

**Ans. b**

8. Which of the following is/are the main organs of the United Nations (UN)?

- (a) The Trusteeship Council
- (b) The Security Council
- (c) The International Court of Justice
- (d) All the above

**Ans. d**

9. Which of the following is/are the features of Neutrinos?

- 1. A neutrino's spin always points in the opposite direction of its motion.
- 2. The phenomenon of neutrino oscillations requires neutrinos to have tiny masses.

Choose the correct answer

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

**Ans. c**

10. Consider the following statements.

- 1. SHADE is an international operational counter-piracy platform, convened in Bahrain.
- 2. The maiden Indian Navy - European Union Naval Force (IN-EUNAVFOR) Exercise is being conducted in the Gulf of Aden.

Which of the following statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

**Ans. c**

11. Recently, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry has amended the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and provides for a three-level grievance redressal mechanism. Which of the following options is the three-level grievance redressal mechanism?

- (a) Self-regulation by broadcasters.
- (b) Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the broadcasters.
- (c) Oversight by an Inter-Departmental Committee at the level of the Union government.
- (d) All of the above

**Ans. d**

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**12. What is hallmarking of gold? Choose the correct option in context to this.**

- Hallmarking is the accurate determination and official recording of the proportionate content of precious metal in precious metal articles.
- It is like a guarantee of purity or fineness of precious metal articles.
- The Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) operates gold and silver hallmarking scheme in India.

Options:

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2 and 3
- 3 only
- 1 only

**Ans. a**

**13. Consider the following statements about the features of Neutrinos.**

- Neutrinos interact very weakly with everything else - trillions of them pass through every human being every second without anyone noticing.
- A neutrino's spin always points in the opposite direction of its motion.
- It is now generally believed that the phenomenon of neutrino oscillations requires neutrinos to have tiny masses.

Choose the correct answer by using the given options:

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2 and 3
- 3 only
- 1 only

**Ans. a**

**14. What is Juneteenth? Choose the correct option in context to this.**

- The day is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US and is observed on June 19.
- It is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day.
- On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. Since then, Juneteenth has become a largely symbolic date representing freedom for African Americans.

Options:

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2 and 3
- 3 only
- 1 only

**Ans. a**

**15. Consider the following statements regarding Kerala's Silver Line project.**

- It is Kerala's flagship semi high-speed railway project aimed at reducing travel time between the state's northern and southern ends.
- It links Kerala's southern end and state capital Thiruvananthapuram with its northern end of Kasaragod.
- The line is proposed to be 529.45 kms long, covering 11 districts.
- The project is being executed by the Kerala Rail Development Corporation Limited (KRDCL). KRDCL, or K-Rail, is a joint venture between the Kerala government and the Union Ministry of Railways.

Choose the correct answer by using the given options:

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2 and 3
- 1, 3 and 4
- 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Ans. d**

**16. Consider the following statements about the desertification and land degradation Atlas of India.**

- It has been published by Space Application Centre, ISRO, Ahmedabad.
- The Atlas provides state wise area of degraded lands for the time frame 2018-19.
- It was released on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, observed on 17 June.
- The theme for 2021 is "Restoration; Land; Recovery; We build back better with healthy land".

Choose the correct answer by using the given options:

- 1, 2 and 3
- 2 and 3
- 1, 3 and 4
- 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Ans. d**

**17. Read the following statements with respect to the card tokenization and choose the correct option.**

- Card tokenization is a feature that lets users make debit or credit card payments through a secure digital token that is attached to their phone.
- It does not require to physically share credit or debit card details. Currently, this feature can be availed at about 2.5 million Visa merchant locations.
- With latest extension, it will allow users to scan and pay at about 1.5 million Bharat QR enabled merchants.
- All the above statements are correct.

**Ans. d**

18. India has extended a USD 100 million Line of Credit to which of the following countries to finance projects in solar energy sector?

- (a) Bhutan
- (b) Bangladesh
- (c) Sri Lanka
- (d) Maldives

Ans. c

19. Which of the following mission has been envisaged several activities in the field of energy efficiency across different sectors of economy and its aim to reduce CO2 emissions by more than 550 million tonnes by 2030?

- (a) UNNTEE
- (b) ROSHANE
- (c) SAMRIDDHI
- (d) KALYAAN

Ans. b

20. Consider the following statements regarding Covid-19 vaccine passport.

- 1. Japan is going to make a vaccine passport available from next month for Japanese travellers in a bid to relaunch tourism and business trips abroad.

- 2. European Union is working on digital vaccine passport for summer of 2021 to reboot tourism and attract tourists. EU version of certificate will comprise of information on whether a person has been vaccinated or had the virus, tested negative or had been recovered.

Choose the correct answer by using the given options.

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

Ans. c

The advertisement is for the UPSC (CSE) Prelims 2021. It features a group of seven people (four men and three women) in the background. The text on the advertisement includes: "BILINGUAL" in a yellow box at the top right; "UPSC" in a white circle with the Indian emblem; "UPSC (CSE) Prelims 2021 Target 10th Oct Complete Batch" in large, bold, white and yellow text; "Starts May 31, 2021" in a yellow box at the bottom left; and "1PM to 5 PM" in a white box at the bottom right.



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