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UPSC Civil Services (Prelims) Examination 2021 was conducted on 10th October 2021. The analysis of the question paper shows that majority of the questions were current affairs oriented. For those who are going to appear in Civil Services (Mains) Examination, current affairs will play an important role to make the answers attractive, effective and scoring. For those, who are preparing for UPSC CSE 2022, needless to say, a thorough study, understanding, and revision of Current Affairs is a must!

To ease the preparation, we are providing monthly current affairs compilation for the aspirants. The magazine contains subject-wise distribution of comprehensive news articles, which have been derived from the sources like PIB, The Hindu, The Indian Express, etc.

A separate section – ‘The Editorials Corner’ has been added to discuss the important Editorial articles published in The Hindu and Indian Express Newspaper

"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

Index

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Polity & Governance | 7 |
| • Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA)..... | 7 |
| • Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav | 8 |
| • Beej Gram Yojana | 9 |
| • Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: 80% funds spent on advertisement | 9 |
| • Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)..... | 10 |
| • Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021..... | 10 |
| • Improvements in Quality of Life of Scheduled Tribes | 11 |
| • KAPILA Campaign..... | 12 |
| • Ken Betwa Link Project..... | 13 |
| • Logo of Conformity Assessment Scheme of Milk Products..... | 14 |
| • National Conference on Women Winning against TB..... | 14 |
| • National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates..... | 15 |
| • National Leprosy Eradication Programme..... | 16 |
| • National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Business Summit | 17 |
| • NDPS (Amendment) Act 2021..... | 17 |
| • NITI Aayog signs a SoI with the UNWFP | 18 |
| • NITI Aayog's State Health Index..... | 19 |
| • Online Dispute Resolution Policy Plan for India | 20 |
| • Performance of UDAY Scheme | 21 |
| • PM-EAC Calls for Unified Labour Law..... | 22 |
| • PM SVANidhi Scheme: 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' Campaign for Digital Onboarding of Street Vendors..... | 22 |
| • PM-KISAN Scheme | 23 |
| • Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) Extended for 2021-26 | 24 |
| • Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021- Personal Laws in Marriage..... | 24 |
| • Smart Cities Mission Extended | 25 |
| • Underutilized POSHAN outlays..... | 26 |
| International Relations | 27 |
| • 3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue: Afghanistan Meet | 27 |
| • 21st India-Russia Annual Summit | 28 |
| • India Votes Against the UN Resolution of Climate Change | 29 |
| • International Maritime Organization (IMO) Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea..... | 29 |
| • International Solar Alliance (ISA) gets UN Observer Status..... | 30 |
| • South-South Innovation Platform: First Agri-tech cohort announced | 31 |
| • Democracy Summit: India Participated in the first Summit for Democracy..... | 31 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Economy | 33 |
| • Aatamanirbhar Skilled Employee-Employer Mapping (ASEEM) Portal..... | 33 |
| • Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge 2.0 | 33 |
| • Anti-Dumping Duty: India imposed Anti-Dumping Duty on 5 Chinese products | 34 |
| • Belt and Road Initiative | 35 |
| • CAG Report on Indian Railways..... | 35 |
| • Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules, 2021 | 36 |
| • Digitalisation of Agricultural Sector: Steps by Government..... | 37 |
| • Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture | 38 |
| • Impact Study of Soil Health Card Scheme..... | 39 |
| • India Loses WTO Dispute over Sugar Subsidies..... | 39 |
| • Legal Entity Identifier..... | 40 |
| • Localization of SDGs through PRI report..... | 41 |
| • 'One Commodity One Exchange' Policy | 41 |
| • RBI brings NBFC under PCA..... | 42 |
| • Regulate Algo-trading, says SEBI | 43 |
| • Rupee Depreciation in 2021 | 44 |
| • SEBI Bans Derivative Trade in Agricultural Commodities..... | 44 |
| • State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2021-22..... | 45 |
| • Tariff guidelines for PPP projects in Major Ports | 46 |
| Social Issues | 47 |
| • DIKSHA for Children with Disabilities | 47 |
| • National Helpline Against Atrocities on SCs/STs..... | 47 |
| • Raising Legal Age of Marriage for Women | 48 |
| • State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India Report..... | 49 |
| • Schemes for Transgenders | 50 |
| • SOLAW Report 2021 | 51 |
| • State of India's Livelihood (Soil) Report 2021..... | 51 |
| • World Inequality Report 2022..... | 52 |
| Environment & Biodiversity | 54 |
| • Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 | 54 |
| • Depletion of Groundwater Level: Steps by Government | 54 |
| • ESG Funds: Environmental Social and Governance Funds | 55 |
| • Expansion and Land Degradation in Thar Desert | 56 |
| • Global Methane Initiative..... | 57 |
| • Golden Peacock Environment Management Award 2021..... | 58 |
| • Green Hydrogen Production in India: Scaling-up Alkaline Electrolyser Technology..... | 59 |
| • Indian Pangolin..... | 59 |
| • Kasturirangan Committee on Western Ghats | 60 |
| • Olive Ridley Turtle: Olive Ridley Turtles tagging by Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)..... | 61 |
| • Policy Guidelines for Promoting Behaviour Change for Strengthening Waste Segregation at Source...62 | |
| • Roadmap Launched to make Urban India 'Garbage Free' | 63 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Science & Technology | 64 |
| • Gaganyaan Mission..... | 64 |
| • Ghost Particles Detected in LHC for the First Time | 64 |
| • India International Science Festival (IISF) 2021 | 65 |
| • James Webb Telescope..... | 66 |
| • NASA Parker Solar Probe Mission | 66 |
| • AIM NITI Aayog releases ‘Innovations for You’ & ‘The Ingenious Tinkerers’ | 67 |
| • Online Gaming: Rajya Sabha Flags Issue | 67 |
| • PRALAY: Successful launch of surface-to-surface missile..... | 68 |
| • Context | 68 |
| • Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India | 69 |
| Security | 71 |
| • Exercise EKUVERIN..... | 71 |
| • AFSPA Explained: Know everything about the Act..... | 71 |
| • PANEX-21 Exercise: Pune hosted PANEX-21 Military Exercise..... | 72 |
| History, Art & Culture | 74 |
| • Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY): Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art..... | 74 |
| • Mahaparinirvana Diwas: Death Anniversary of BR Ambedkar..... | 74 |
| • National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) Organizing ‘Kala Kumbh’ Artist Workshop..... | 75 |
| • Kashi Vishwanath Corridor..... | 76 |
| • Kolkata Durga Puja Inscribed on the UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List..... | 76 |
| • Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav..... | 77 |
| • Dr. BR Ambedkar: International Ambedkar Conclave..... | 78 |
| The Editorials Corner | 79 |
| • Age and Marriage | 79 |
| • Omicron Shadow | 79 |
| • Births and Rights..... | 80 |
| • COP27, in Egypt, must focus on food systems..... | 80 |
| • The gaps in the plan to tackle plastic waste | 81 |
| • High LPG prices are scorching the air pollution fight | 82 |
| • Home truths on climate change..... | 83 |
| • Lack of Political will | 84 |
| • Looking beyond the Forest Rights Act..... | 85 |
| • A whiff of trouble in the Nord Stream pipeline | 86 |

- Road to Recovery86
- The challenge of achieving 9.5% growth rate.....87
- The Elders are assets, not dependents88
- The Need to Reopen Anganwadis89
- The Price of food must figure in the policy90
- Thinking before Linking91
- What rising inequality means91
- Drawing a Line92
- The NMP is hardly the Panacea for Growth in India93
- The Stepping Stones in the Post-pandemic World.....94
- Wrong Forum.....95



Polity & Governance

Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA)

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Education's innovation cell released the Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) 2021.

Key Points

- About:** Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) is an initiative of Ministry of Education to systematically rank all major higher educational institutions and universities in India.
- Ranking Indicators:** ARIIA ranks institutions on indicators related to "Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development" amongst students and faculties.
- Classification of Institutions:** Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) classifies participating institutions into five major categories-
 - Technical and
 - Non-technical.
- Major Indicators for consideration:** The overall score can take a maximum value of 100. ARIIA uses following indicators to prepare ranking of institutions-
 - Budget & Funding Support.
 - Infrastructure & Facilities.
 - Awareness, Promotions & support for Idea Generation & Innovation.
 - Promotion & Support for Entrepreneurship Development.
 - Innovative Learning Methods & Courses.
 - Intellectual Property Generation, Technology Transfer & Commercialization.
 - Innovation in Governance of the Institution.
- Categorize for Classification:** Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) classifies institutions in six categories-
 - Non-technical higher educational institutions
 - Centrally-funded institutions,
 - State-funded universities,
 - State-funded autonomous
 - Institutions, private/deemed universities,
 - Private institutions

Key Significance

- ARIIA ranking will inspire Indian institutions to reorient their mind-set and build ecosystems to encourage high quality research, innovation and entrepreneurship.
- ARIIA will focus on quality of innovations and will try to measure the real impact created by these innovations nationally and internationally.
- ARIIA will set tone and direction for institutions for future development for making them globally competitive and in forefront of innovation.

ARIIA 2021 Ranking list

- Institute of National Importance, Central Universities & CFTIs**
 - Rank 1:** IIT-Madras
 - Rank 2:** IIT-Bombay
 - Rank 3:** IIT-Delhi
 - Rank 4:** IIT, Kanpur
 - Rank 5:** IIT-Roorkee
 - Rank 6:** IISc
 - Rank 7:** IIT-Hyderabad
 - Rank 8:** IIT-Kharagpur
 - Rank 9:** NIT-Calicut
 - Rank 10:** Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology
- In government and government-aided universities, the rank-holders were -**
 - Rank 1:** Panjab University
 - Rank 2:** Delhi Technological University
 - Rank 3:** Netaji Subhas University of Technology
 - Rank 4:** Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University
 - Rank 5:** Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women
 - Rank 6:** Institute of Chemical Technology
 - Rank 7:** Gujarat Technological University
- Govt. and Govt. Aided College/Institutes**
 - Rank 1:** College of Engineering Pune
 - Rank 2:** PSG College of Technology
 - Rank 3:** L. D. College of Engineering
 - Rank 4:** Thiagarajar College of Engineering
 - Rank 5:** Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute

- **Private or Self-Financed Universities**
 - **Rank 1:** Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology Khordha
 - **Rank 2:** Chitkara University
 - **Rank 3:** Lovely Professional University
 - **Rank 4:** S.R.M. Institute of Science And Technology
 - **Rank 5:** Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University
- **Private or Self-Financed College/Institutes**
 - **Rank 1:** G H Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur
 - **Rank 2:** R.M.K. Engineering College
 - **Rank 3:** KIET Group of Institutions
 - **Rank 4:** Sri Krishna College of Engineering And Technology
 - **Rank 5:** Nitte Meenakshi Institute of Technology
- **Institute of National Importance, Central Universities & CFTIs (non-technical)**
 - **Rank 1:** Indira Gandhi National Open University
 - **Rank 2:** Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode
- **General (Non-Technical): Top 5 Ranks**
 - **Rank 1:** Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India
 - **Rank 2:** Sree Narayana College
 - **Rank 3:** Mahatma Gandhi University
 - **Rank 4:** PSG College of Arts And Science
 - **Rank 5:** Holy Cross College, Tiruchirappalli

- **Participation:** Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav brought together leaders from the Government, banking sector, fintech companies and startups.
- **Objective:** The Digital Payment Utsav aims to bring together players of the BFSI and fintech space under one roof for cooperation and innovation.
 - It also aims to celebrate their hard work and commitment towards the growth of digital payments backed up by constant innovation.
- **Parent Ministry:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is entrusted with the responsibility to organize Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav.

Key Initiatives

- ‘Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav- Digital Payment Utsav’ saw launch of the following innovative solutions
- **Payments On the Go:** Wearables are re-defining the true paperless contactless payments, catalysing them further, Bank of Baroda and City Union Bank launched Rupay-on-the-Go.
 - **Inclusive Credit for All:** Credit cards represent the next big in fintech and contactless is truly the way forward. To drive it to the next level, India Post Payments Bank-Punjab National Bank, Kotak Bank, YES Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, ICICI Bank, Indian Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, and City Union Bank launched Contactless Credit cards on the RuPay network.
 - **Empowering Small Merchants:** India has close to 1.5 crore retail stores/ Kiryana stores. Union Bank announced an android-based SOFTPOS mobile app for point of sales, which will further the cause of digital payment adoption.

Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) hosted a unique event ‘Digital Payment Utsav’ as part of the week-long ‘Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav’.
 - The **Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav** event held at the India Habitat Centre.
- **Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav event** witnessed the unveiling of-
 - The DIGIDHAN logo,
 - **Digital Payments Sandesh Yatra:** an awareness campaign.
 - Digital payments anthem titled ‘Chutki Baja ke’ (cashless, touchless, paperless).

Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav

- **About:** ‘Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav- Digital Payment Utsav’ is being held to celebrate the journey and rise of digital payments in India.



Beej Gram Yojana

Context

- Recently, the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare released various implantation details of the Beej Gram Yojana in the Lok Sabha.

Key Points

- About:** Seed Village Program (Beej Gram Yojana) is being implemented by the government since 2014-15 to upgrade the quality of farmer's saved seeds.
- Key Objective:** To upgrade the quality of farmer-saved seed, which is about 80-85% of the total seed used for crop production. Key Objectives of the Seed Village Program are-
 - Increasing the seed production,
 - Increasing the seed replacement rate,
 - Organizing seed production in cluster/compact area, replacing existing local varieties with new high yielding varieties,
 - Self-sufficiency and self-reliance of the village in terms of quality seed production
 - To meet the local demand and timely supply of quality seeds.
- Funding:** Under Seed Village Program, financial assistance for distribution of foundation/certified seeds at 50% of seed cost for cereal crops and 60% for pulses, oilseeds, fodder and green manure crops is available for up to one acre per farmer.

Implementation of the Scheme

- Implementation:** Union Government organizes Zonal Seed Review Meeting twice a year before onset of each sowing season (Kharif & Rabi).
 - Department of Agriculture of different States/UTs, National & State Level Seed Producing Agencies, Seed Certification Agencies are called to assess the requirement and availability of seed across the country prior to every season.
 - This is done to ensure timely availability of seed to farmers.
- Implementing Agencies:** One implementing agency will be identified for the area/locality and is to be authorized by the State Government. Implementing agencies will be-
 - State Departments of Agriculture,
 - State Agriculture Universities,
 - Krishi Vigyan Kendras,
 - State Seeds Corporation,
 - National Seeds Corporation,

- State Farms Corporation of India (SFCI),
- State Seeds Certification Agencies,
- Department of Seed Certification.
- Monitoring of the Beej Gram Yojana:** The Seed Village Program will be monitored by the Seeds Division of the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation.
 - The implementing agencies will be required to send quarterly progress to the Seeds Division of the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: 80% funds spent on advertisement

Context

- Recently, the Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women tabled a report in Lok Sabha and said that the Central Government has spent around **80% of the total funds allocated to BBBP scheme on advertisement.**

Key points

- In the same period, the scheme has underperformed at the state level despite Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) pointing out **"very less spending"** in 2016-17.
- Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, the states have utilised only 25% of the total funds released by the central government.
- The committee has reported that the underutilisation has caused **ill performance** of the scheme.
- Poshan Abhiyan, a scheme to address malnutrition has also witnessed underutilisation of funds.
- The panel has emphasised on the **need to focus on education and health** under BBBP rather than on advertisements.
- The panel has recommended a **regular review of proper utilisation** of funds at the state and central level.

Girl enrolment during COVID

- The committee has also informed that the COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately **affected adolescent girls**, especially among the socially and economically backward groups.
- The education ministry said that the school closure in India has affected **320 million children** enrolled from pre-primary to tertiary levels of education.
 - It has been estimated that of these, about **158 million are female students.**

- There is a growing concern that the pandemic will disproportionately affect adolescent girls.
- Post pandemic, this can lead to a higher risk of girls permanently dropping out of school and reversing the gains made in recent years.

Recommendations

- Noting the highest dropout rates are at the secondary and high school levels, the committee suggested “**incentivizing participation**” to help more girls continue their schooling.
- Provisions of **targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and bicycles for transport** can significantly increase the retention of girls in schools.

About BBBP scheme

- This is a joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Government has announced Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child.
- Social construct discriminating against girls on the one hand, easy availability, affordability and subsequent misuse of diagnostic tools on the other hand, have been critical in increasing Sex Selective Elimination of girls leading to **low Child Sex Ratio**.

BBBP scheme objectives

- Prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination
- Ensuring survival & protection of the girl child
- Ensuring education and participation of the girl child

Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)

Context

- The coal stock at the power plants in the country have come under severe stress in the recent past.
- This has happened due to increased demand of power, less power generation by imported coal-based power plants and some interruption in supply of coal due to heavy rains

Key Points

- **About:** Coal Controller Organisation (CCO), established in 1916, is one of the oldest offices in Indian Coal sector.
 - Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) is responsible for ensuring fair production and commercial transaction.

- **Mandate:** Coal Controller Organisation (CCO), Ministry of Coal collects and maintains coal production data of all private and public sector coal mines in the country.
 - The information is collected on monthly basis.
- Parent Ministry: Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) works as a subordinate office under Ministry of Coal.

Key Responsibilities

- Inspection of collieries so as to ensure the correctness of the class, grade or size of coal.
- To issue directives for the purpose of declaration and maintenance of grades of coal of a seam mined in a colliery.
- To act as the appellate authority in case of dispute between consumers and owner arising out of declaration of grade and size of coal.
- To regulate disposal of stock of coal or the expected output of coal in the colliery.
- Quality surveillance with respect to maintenance of grade, loading of coal in wagons/ trucks according to laid down procedures regarding grades and sizes.
- To grant opening / re-opening permission of coal mine, seam or a section of seam or to sub-divide a mine.
- Assessment and collection of excise duty levied on all raw coal raised and dispatched.
- Submission of monthly coal data to different ministries of Central and State Government, national and international organization.

Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021

Context

- Recently, the Lok Sabha passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem without any substantial discussion.

Key Features

- **Aadhar linking of Voter Id:** The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to allow electoral registration officers to seek Aadhaar number of people who want to register as voter.
- **Eliminating duplication by reauthentication of Voter Id with Aadhar:** The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to allow the electoral registration officers to ask for Aadhaar numbers from persons already included in the electoral roll for the purposes of-

- Authentication of entries in the electoral roll, and
- To identify registration of the name of the same person in the electoral roll of more than one constituency or more than once in the same constituency.
- This aims to curb the menace of multiple enrolments of the same person in different places.
- **Voluntary in Nature:** Aadhar linking with Voter Id is voluntary in nature and concerned authorities cannot deny inclusion in the electoral roll only due to the inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar number.

Amending the Representation of People's Act

- The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill seeks to amend certain sections of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and 1951. These are-
- **Amendment to the Representation of People's Act 1950:**
 - **Section 23:** It will be amended by the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 to allow linking of electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem.
 - **Section 14:** It will be amended by the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 to allow having four "qualifying" dates for eligible people to register as voters.
- As of now, January 1 of every year is the sole qualifying date.
- Now, the 1st day of January, April, July, and October in a calendar year will be the qualifying dates in relation to the preparation or revision of electoral rolls.



- **Amendment to the Section 20 of the RP Act, 1950 and section 60 of the RP Act, 1951:** these will allow the elections to become gender-neutral for **service voters**.
 - It will replace the word "**wife**" of **service voter** with the word "**spouse**" of **service voter**, making the statutes "gender-neutral".
 - This seeks to redress any discrimination against male spouses of women armed services employees.

Improvements in Quality of Life of Scheduled Tribes

Context

- Recently, Minister of State for Tribal Affairs has informed the Lok Sabha about steps taken so far for the development of the Scheduled Tribes that has led to improvement in their quality of life.

Improvements in living conditions of the Scheduled Tribes (STs)

Education

- Literacy rate for STs has improved from 47.1% in 2001 to 59% in 2011.
- Further, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report (July 2019 - June 2020) reveals that literacy rate for STs increased to 70.1%.
- According to UDISE+ reports, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for ST students at senior secondary (classes IX-X) level has increased from 62.4% in 2012-13 to 76.7% in 2019-20.

Health

- As per National Family Health Surveys (NFHS), in respect of Scheduled Tribes,
 - **Infant Mortality Rate** has declined from 62.1 (2005-06) to 44.4 (2015-16);
 - **Under Five Mortality Rate** has declined from 95.7 (2005-06) to 57.2 (2015-16), and Institutional Delivery has increased from 17.7% in 2005-06 to 68.0 % in 2015-16.
 - Further, **percentage of Underweight** (weight-for age) ST children under age five years has declined from 54.5 in 2005-06 to 45.3 in 2015-16

Poverty

- Erstwhile Planning Commission estimated that percentage of **ST people living below the poverty line in rural areas** has declined from 62.3% in 2004-05 to 45.3% in 2011-12.
- Also, percentage of **ST people living below the poverty line in urban areas** has declined from 35.5% in 2004-05 to 24.1% in 2011-12.

Steps taken by government

Educational steps

- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** The scheme of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) was introduced in the year 1997-98 to impart quality education exclusively to ST children.
- **Strengthening Education among ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts:** Scheme is exclusively for ST girls in 54 districts identified in the country, where the ST population is 25% or more and ST female literacy rate is below 35% or its fractions, as per 2001 Census.
- **Pre-Matric and post Matric Scholarships to ST students**
- **National Overseas Scholarships for ST Candidates for Studying Abroad:** The Scheme provides for financial assistance to selected students to pursue Post Graduation, PhD & Post-Doctoral study abroad.
- **National Fellowship & Scholarship for Higher Education of ST students**

Other developmental steps

- **Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS):** Under scheme of Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS) 100% grants is provided to the State Governments for the development of STs.
- **Grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution:** Grants are released to 26 States, having ST population for raising the level of Administration in Scheduled Areas and for the welfare of tribal people.
- **Grant-in Aid to Voluntary Organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes:** Under this, the Ministry funds projects in the fields of Education and Health, covering residential schools, non-residential schools, hostels, mobile dispensaries, ten or more bedded hospitals, etc.
- **Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):** The scheme of Development of PVTGs covers 75 identified PVTGs among Scheduled Tribes in 18 States and UT of Andaman & Nicobar-Islands.

- **Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP:** This scheme was introduced by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in the year 2013-14, to provide safety net and support to people belonging to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers whose livelihood depends on collection and selling of MFP.

Institutional steps

- Institutional Support for Development & Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce (Central Sector Scheme): The **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED)** functions both as a service provider and market developer for tribal products. It markets tribal products through the network of its retail outlets 'TRIBES INDIA' in the country.
- **National/State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations (NSTFDC/STFDCS):** National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) is an apex organization set up in 2001, exclusively for economic development of Scheduled Tribes.
- **Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs):** The Ministry extends support to the State Governments through the Scheme to set up new TRIs where it didn't exist and to strengthen functioning of existing TRIs to carry out its core responsibility towards Research & Documentations, Training and capacity building, promotion of rich tribal heritage etc.

KAPILA Campaign

Context

- The Union Government launched a campaign KAPILA Campaign for Intellectual Property Literacy and creating patent awareness in 2020.
 - **KAPILA Full Form:** Kalam Program for Intellectual Property Literacy and Awareness Campaign.
- According to the recent data provided by the Ministry of State for Education, more than 46,000 users have registered for KAPILA awareness programs.

Key Points

- **About: KAPILA campaign** is an IP literacy program that seeks to increase awareness regarding protection and exploitation of Intellectual Property (IP).
 - KAPILA Kalam Program was launched on the 89th birth anniversary of former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.

- **Key Objectives:** KAPILA Awareness Program aims-
 - To provide funding support in order to promote filing of the Intellectual Property (IP) in Higher Education Institutions. KAPILA Portal has been launched for the same.
 - To create awareness regarding Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),
 - To enable of IP protection of inventions originating from faculty and students of HEIs,
 - Development of Credit Course on IPR,
 - Training program on IPR for faculty and students of HEIs and
 - Sensitization and development of vibrant IP filing system.
- **Key initiatives under KAPILA Campaign:** Under the KAPILA initiative, the following noteworthy activities have been conducted-
 - Intellectual Property (IP) Clinic,
 - Case Studies/ Articles regarding Innovation and Intellectual Property and
 - Online awareness programs and
 - National Intellectual Property Literacy Week (NIPLW) KAPILA Campaign

- **About:** The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.
 - Under the Ken-Betwa link project, water will be transferred from Ken to Betwa river through the construction of Daudhan Dam and a canal linking the two rivers.
- **Location: Ken Betwa Link Project** lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Implementation:** Ken Betwa Link Project will be implemented in two phases by the Ken-Betwa Link Project Authority (KBLPA).
 - **Phase 1:** Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses will be completed.
 - **Phase 2:** Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage will be constructed.

Expected Benefits

- **According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the Ken Betwa Link project is expected to provide-**
 - Annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.
- **Geographical Reach:** According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, Ken Betwa River Link Project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand, especially in the districts of-
 - Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of **Madhya Pradesh** and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of **Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Developmental Benefits to the Region:** Ken Betwa River Link Project will also ensure that the Bundelkhand Region is not left behind in terms of development only due to water scarcity.
 - The Ken Betwa project is expected to boost socio-economic prosperity in the backward Bundelkhand region on account of increased agricultural activities and employment generation.
 - Ken Betwa River Inter-linking Project would also help in arresting distress migration from this region.
- **Multiplier Effect on other states:** The Ken Betwa River Link project will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects in India.

Ken Betwa Link Project

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the funding and implementation of Ken-Betwa inter-linking of rivers project with a total cost of Rs 44,605 crore.
 - The Union Cabinet has approved central support of Rs 39,317 crore for the Ken Betwa Link project, covering grant of Rs 36,290 crore and loan of Rs 3,027 crore
- **Ken-Betwa Link Project Authority (KBLPA)**, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), will be set up to implement the Ken Betwa River Linking project.

Key Points

- **Background:** In march 2021, Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoU) to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP).
- **Tenure of the Ken Betwa River Linking Project:** Ken Betwa Link Project is proposed to be implemented in 8 years with “state of the art technology.”

Logo of Conformity Assessment Scheme of Milk Products

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister has launched a portal and logo dedicated to the **Conformity Assessment Scheme** of milk products.

Key points

- This is a novel and first of its kind **certification scheme** considering the perishable nature and short shelf-life of **milk and milk products**, as well as the extensive cold-chain involved in the production and supply of milk and milk products.
- This has brought **'Product-Food Safety Management System-Process'** certification under one umbrella with a unified logo featuring the earlier respective logos BIS-ISI mark & NDDB-Quality Mark and Kamdhenu Cow.
- Portal and logo have been **developed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** with the help of National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).



Pic. Conformity Assessment Scheme logo

Why needed?

- There was **no unification of product and process certification** that was making it difficult to dairy plants to avail end to end certification.
 - NDDB has been awarding **'Quality Mark'** to the dairy plants of cooperatives adhering to the process standards across the dairy value chain helping in building the brand identity for cooperative dairies and enhanced consumer confidence.
 - On the other hand, **BIS has a product certification scheme** for manufacturers, including dairy product processors which also ensured food safety at product level allowing licensees to use 'ISI Mark' on their products.
- Moreover, the **consumer awareness was also lacking** towards quality of milk and products.

Benefits of the scheme

- Simplify** the certification process
- Create** an instantly recognisable logo for public to be reassured about dairy product quality
- Increase** the sales of milk and milk products in organized sector and in turn enhancing income of farmers
- Develop** a quality culture in the dairy sector.

About NDDB

- National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) is a **statutory body** set up under National Dairy Development Board Act, 1987.
- It was created by Dr. Verghese Kurein and NDDB headquarter is located in Anand, Gujarat. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verghese_Kurien
- It was created to **promote, finance and support** producer-owned and controlled organisations.
- NDDB's programmes and activities seek to **strengthen farmer owned institutions** and support national policies that are favourable to the growth of such institutions.
- NDDB's efforts transformed India's rural economy by **making dairying a viable and profitable economic activity** for millions of milk producers while addressing the country's need for self-sufficiency in milk production.

National Conference on Women Winning against TB

Context

- Recently, the Vice-President of India addressed the National Conference on Women Winning against TB that is being organized at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.
 - He is the Chief Guest at the National Conference **on Women Winning against TB.**

National Conference on Women Winning against TB

- About:** Ministry of Women and Child Development is organizing a National Conference on Women Winning Against TB at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.
- Objective:** National Conference on Women Winning against Tuberculosis -
 - Aims at discussing various policy interventions and Intends to garner the support of parliamentarians to own and support the implementation of gender-sensitive policies at the ground level.
 - Also aims to deliberate upon various issues with the participants to ensure/inculcate Gender-Responsive TB Care.

Tuberculosis in India- Present Situation

- **Affected People in India:** Tuberculosis remains a public health challenge worldwide, negatively impacting the lives of around 26 lakh individuals every year in India alone.
- **Societal Impact:** On the social front, social stigma and discrimination is faced by those affected by TB, and by their families.
- **Impact on Women:** Societal constraints restrict women affected by TB from freely accessing prompt and continued care.
 - This affects their role as caretakers and prevents prioritization of their nutrition, health, and well-being.

Fight against Tuberculosis in India: Steps Taken by the Government

- As India is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), our national development agenda has been aligned to eradicate TB from the grassroots level.
- **Eliminating TB by 2025:** which is ahead of the SDG timeline of 2030. It is envisaged to make a TB-free India with zero deaths and zero TB disease.
 - **Gendered approach to ending TB:** we must adopt a comprehensive approach to ending TB— including a shift towards gender-sensitive and gender- specific interventions.
- **Gender-Responsive TB Care:** Awareness regarding this is being spread through a series of National and Regional Conferences, jointly organized by the Ministry of Women & Child Development, and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Fight against Tuberculosis in India: Way Forward

- The national focus is based on recognizing various socio-cultural barriers to tuberculosis prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services especially for the vulnerable section of the society or also those in vulnerable situations.
- There is a need to develop integrated, people-centred, community-based and gender-responsive health services based on human rights.
- Focus should be based on the principles of non-discrimination, informed choice, informed consent, confidentiality, respect for all, access for all, working in partnership, promoting rights of individuals and groups, fostering accountability, and empowering communities.

- TB advocacy program should leverage the heightened awareness about lung health in people because of the pandemic to spread the message about the disease.

National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates

Context

- The National Health Accounts estimates for India for 2017-18 was released recently by the Union Ministry of Health.
- National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates for India for 2017-18 findings shows that Out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure and foreign aid for health has both come down.

National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates 2017-18: Key Findings

- As a share of total health expenditure, OOPE has come down to 48.8% in 2017-18 from 64.2% in 2013-14.
- Even in case of per capita OOPE, there has been decline from ₹2,336 to ₹2,097 between 2013-14 to 2017-18.
- **Increase in share of government health expenditure as % of GDP:** It has increased from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.35% in 2017-18.
- **Increase in share of Government Health Expenditure in total health expenditure:** It has increased from 28.6% in 2013-14 to 40.8% in 2017-18.
- **Increase in the Government health expenditure in per capita terms:** It has increased from ₹1,042 to ₹1,753 between 2013-14 to 2017-18.
- **Increase in share of primary healthcare in current Government health expenditure:** It has increased from 51.1% in 2013-14 to 54.7% in 2017-18.
- **Share of Primary, Secondary and tertiary Health expenditure in total government health expenditure:**
 - The primary and secondary care accounts for more than 80% of the current Government health expenditure.
 - There has been an increase in share of primary and secondary care in case of Government health expenditure.
 - Between 2016-17 and 2017-18 in Government sector the share of primary and secondary care has increased from 75% to 86%.

- **Share of Primary, Secondary and tertiary Health expenditure in total private health expenditure:**
 - Share of tertiary care has increased but primary and secondary care show a declining trend.
 - Share of primary and secondary care has declined from 84% to 74%.
- **Increase in the share of social security expenditure on health:** It includes the social health insurance program, Government financed health insurance schemes, and medical reimbursements made to Government employees.
 - As a per cent of total health expenditure, the increase is from six per cent in 2013-14 to around nine per cent in 2017-18.
- **Reduction in the Share of Foreign aid for health:** It has come down to 0.5%, showcasing India's economic self-reliance.

National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates 2017-18

- **About:** National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates for India is a report produced by National Health Systems Resource Centre, designated as National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat in 2014 by the Health Ministry.
 - National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates 2017-18 is the fifth such report produced by National Health Systems Resource Centre.
- **Estimation method:** National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates are prepared by using an accounting framework based on internationally accepted **System of Health Accounts 2011**, provided by the World Health Organization (WHO).

National Leprosy Eradication Programme

Context

- Recently, the Minister of Health and Family Welfare has informed the Rajya Sabha about the **progress achieved** in National Leprosy Eradication Programme.

Progress achieved under NLEP

| Year | 2014-15 | 2021-22 (Sep) |
|--|---------|---------------|
| Prevalence Rate | 0.69 | 0.40 |
| Percentage of Child Cases | 9.04 | 5.31 |
| Annual New Case Detection Rate/ 100000 | 9.73 | 4.74 |

About National Leprosy Eradication Programme

- National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the umbrella of **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
 - India has achieved the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem i.e., defined as less than 1 case per 10,000 populations, at the National level.
- The NLEP aims at **eliminating leprosy** in each of the districts by 2030.
- Under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme action is taken for early case detection; complete treatment of detected cases, and to contain the onset of disease in close contacts of the index cases (persons diagnosed with leprosy).

Major Initiatives under NLEP

- Leprosy Case Detection Campaigns (LCDC) for **14 days in high endemic districts**
- ASHA Based Surveillance for Leprosy Suspects (ABSULS)
- Focused Leprosy Campaign (FLC) in low endemic districts for case detection
- **Special plans for Hard-to-Reach areas** for early case detection and treatment on time
- The first two activities, namely, LCDC and ABSULS have now been clubbed together as "**Active Case Detection and Regular Surveillance**" (ACDRS) both in rural and urban areas in order to ensure detection of leprosy cases on regular basis and at an early stage in order to prevent Grade II disabilities.
- **Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaigns** on 30th January.
- Convergence of leprosy screening under **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)** for screening of children (0-18 years) and under Ayushman Bharat for screening of people above 30 years of age
- **NIKUSTH** - A real time leprosy reporting software implemented across India
- Joint Monitoring and Investigation Group (JMIG) formed.
- For encouraging the district health functionaries, provision of **certification and award** to the districts for achieving leprosy elimination. Under two categories :1) Gold Category 2) Silver category
- **Contact tracing** is done and Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) with Single dose of Rifampicin (SDR) is administered to the eligible contacts of index case in order to interrupt the chain of transmission

- Various services are provided under the programme for **Disability Prevention and Medical Rehabilitation** (DPMR), i.e., reaction management, provision of Microcellular Rubber (MCR) footwear, Aids & Appliances, self-care kits, etc.
- **Reconstructive Surgeries** are conducted at District Hospitals/Medical Colleges/ Central Leprosy Institutes, and welfare allowance @ Rs 8000 is paid to each patients undergoing RCS.

National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Business Summit

Context

- Recently, the National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Business Summit for states other than North Eastern States was inaugurated in Hyderabad by the Union Minister of Agriculture.

Oil Palm Business Summit: Key Points

- **About:** National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Business Summit is being organized by the government across the country.
 - This is the second such summit of the Mission, the first was held in Guwahati for North Eastern states in early October this year.
- **Aim:** National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Business Summit aims to give wide spread information on newly launched centrally sponsored scheme on edible oils.

Oil Palm Cultivation in India

- Currently about 3 lakh hectares of land in India is under palm oil cultivation while studies have shown that about 28 lakh hectares of land is suitable for the oil palm cultivation in the country.
- Government through various missions aims to bring 28-lakh hectares of land under cultivation to make India Aatmanirbhar in edible oil.

National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm Scheme: Key Points

- The National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm scheme has a special focus on the North east region and the Andaman and Nicobar.
- Under the National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm scheme, it is proposed to cover an additional area of 5 lakh hectare (ha.) for oil palm till the year 2025-26 and thereby reaching the target of 10 lakh hectares.
- The production of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) is expected to go upto 20 lakh tonnes by 2025-26 and upto 28 lakh tonnes by 2029-30.

- The National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm scheme has been proposed to increase the area and production of CPO in the country.
- National Mission on Edible Oil- Oil Palm scheme will subsume the National Food Security Mission-Oil Palm programme.

Funding and Pricing Mechanism

- **Viability Price:** The centre will give a **price assurance** to oil palm farmers to protect them from the fluctuations of the international market. This will be known as the **viability price**.
 - It shall be the annual average price of the last 5 years adjusted with the wholesale price index to be multiplied by 14.3 per cent.
- **Formula Price:** A **formula price** will also be fixed which will be **3 percent of crude palm oil price** and will be fixed on a monthly basis.
- **Viability gap funding:** The viability gap funding will be **difference between the viability price and formula price** and if the need arises, it would be paid directly to the farmers.

NDPS (Amendment) Act 2021

Context

- Recently, the Lok Sabha passed NDPS (Amendment) Bill that corrects a drafting error in the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Act retrospectively.
 - NDPS (Amendment) Act 2021 replaced an ordinance promulgated on September 30 this year.
- Government said that these retrospective provisions were not "substantive" in nature.

Key Points

- **Background:** The anomaly crept in when the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act was amended in 2014.
 - NDPS (Amendment) Act 2014 allowed better medical access to narcotic drugs and removing state barriers in transporting and licensing of essential narcotic drugs.
 - Before the 2014 amendment to the NDPS Act, sub-clauses I to v of Section 2 clause (viii-a) defined the term "illicit traffic."
 - The NDPS (Amendment) Act 2014 changed the number of definitions for such illicit activities.
 - Section (27A) on penalties for financing these illicit activities, on the other hand, was not amended during 2014 amendment of NDPS Act and remained to refer to the definition's earlier clause number.
 - Tripura High Court, in June 2021, found the error in the law and directed the Union Home Ministry to amend the provisions of Section 27.

- **Anomaly in the NDPS Act:** NDPS (Amendment) Act rectified an error that made provisions in Section 27 of the NDPS Act- providing for punishment of those financing illicit trafficking- inoperable.
 - NDPS (Amendment) Act 2014 enabled ease access of narcotic drugs for medical necessities, but did not amend the penal provision accordingly.

Associated Concerns

- **Retrospective Implementation:** Changes made through NDPS (Amendment) Act 2021 will come in force with retrospective effect which have raised concerns as criminal laws can't be implemented retrospectively.
 - **Violative of the Fundamental Rights (Article 20) of the Constitution:** Art 20 provides that a person can be punished for an offense retrospectively by the State.
- **Setting a Dangerous Precedent:** Legal Experts believe that the proposed amendment will set a dangerous precedent and shake people's confidence in the supreme legislative institution.

NITI Aayog signs a SoI with the UNWFP

Context

- Recently, NITI Aayog signed a Statement of Intent with United Nations World Food Program (WFP) to promote millet production in India.
- The Statement of Intent (SoI) focuses on strategic and technical collaboration between NITI Aayog and UNWFP for strengthening climate resilient agriculture in India.

Key Points

- The partnership focuses on mainstreaming of millets and supporting India in taking lead globally in knowledge exchange using the opportunity of 2023 as an International Year of Millets.
- Further, the partnership will aim at building resilient livelihoods for small-holder farmers and adaptation capacities to climate change and transforming food systems.
- The NITI Aayog and UNWFP partnership also aims to strengthen the climate resilient agriculture for enhanced food and nutrition security in India.

Key Activities and Collaboration

- **Joint development of a compendium of good practices** around millets mainstreaming in priority states and development of a scaling up strategy.
- **To provide technical support** for scaling up of millets mainstreaming through intense engagement in select states with support from state governments, IIMR & other associated institutions.
 - Parties will jointly organize a national consultation for line ministries of the Government of India, concerned departments of State governments, select academic institutions and organizations working in the field of millets mainstreaming.
- **To support leveraging of India's expertise to benefit other developing countries for millets mainstreaming** by creation of knowledge management platforms and facilitation of knowledge exchange.

Plan of Action

The outcome of this partnership will be achieved in following four phases:

- **Phase I:** Development of a best practice compendium around millet mainstreaming and a scale-up strategy.
- **Phase II:** Support scale-up of millet mainstreaming through knowledge sharing and intense engagement with select states
- **Phase III:** Leverage India's expertise to support developing countries for millet mainstreaming
- **Phase IV:** Working on building capacities for climate resilient and adaptive livelihood practices



Other steps taken by government for promoting Millet Production

- Recognizing the importance of millets, Government of India observed 2018 as a year of millets to encourage and promote the millet production.
 - Leading this initiative further, GoI spearheaded the UNGA resolution for declaring 2023 as International Year of Millets.
- Establishment of centre for Excellence, Integration of nutri-cereals in National Food Security Act and establishment of Millet Mission in multiple states.

Way Forward

- Government should shift the focus of food distribution programs from 'calories fundamentalism' to providing a more diversified food basket.
- The calory rich food basket should including coarse grains and millets to improve the nutritional status of pre-school children and women of reproductive age.

NITI Aayog's State Health Index

Context

- Recently, NITI Aayog released the fourth edition of the State Health Index for 2019-20.
- focuses on measuring and highlighting the overall performance and incremental improvement of states and UTs over the period 2018-19 to 2019-20.

State Health Index- Key Points

- **Background:** The State Health Index is annual tool to assess the performance of states and UTs. The State Health Index has been compiled and published since 2017.
- **About:** State Health Index ranks states and Union Territories on their year-on-year incremental performance in health outcomes as well as their overall status.
- **Agencies Involved:** State Health Index report has been developed by NITI Aayog, with technical assistance from the World Bank, and in close consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- **Key Objective:** The **State Health** report aims to nudge states/UTs towards building robust health systems and improving service delivery.

- **Assessment Indicators:** **State Health Index** is a weighted composite index based on 24 indicators grouped under the domains of-
 - 'Health Outcomes',
 - 'Governance and Information', and
 - 'Key Inputs/Processes'.
- **Categorization:** To ensure comparison among similar entities, the **State Health Index** ranking is categorized as 'Larger States', 'Smaller States' and 'Union Territories'.

Fourth edition of State Health Index

- **Fourth edition of State Health Index:** State Health Index for 2019-20 focuses on measuring and highlighting the overall performance and incremental improvement of states and UTs over the period 2018-19 to 2019-20.
- **State Health Index theme:** State Health Index for 2019-20 report has been titled "Healthy States, Progressive India".

State Health Index 2019-20: Key Findings

- **Among Larger States:**
 - On overall ranking based on the composite state health index score in 2019-20, The top-ranking states were Kerala followed by Tamil Nadu.
 - In terms of annual incremental performance, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Telangana are the top three ranking states.
- **Among Smaller States:**
 - On overall ranking based on the composite state health index score in 2019-20, Top Ranking states were Mizoram followed by Tripura
 - Mizoram and Meghalaya registered the maximum annual incremental progress.
- **Among Union Territories:**
 - On overall ranking based on the composite state health index score in 2019-20, Top ranking UTs were DH&DD followed by Chandigarh.
 - Delhi, followed by Jammu and Kashmir, showed the best incremental performance.

Significance

- The State Health Index can be used by states in their policymaking and resource allocation.
- State Health Index report is an example of both competitive and cooperative federalism.
 - The State Health index encourages healthy competition and cross-learning among States and UTs.

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has also decided to link the State Health index to incentives under National Health Mission.
 - This has been instrumental in shifting the focus from budget spending and inputs to outputs and outcomes.

Online Dispute Resolution Policy Plan for India

Context

- NITI Aayog has recently released a report named 'Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India' to scale dispute avoidance, containment and resolution online.

Key points

- The report is a culmination of the action plan made by a committee constituted at the peak of the Covid crisis by NITI Aayog on ODR in 2020 and chaired by Supreme Court Justice (Retd) AK Sikri.

What is ODR?

- In its most basic sense, ODR is the **use of technology** to 'resolve' disputes.
- ODR is the resolution of disputes, particularly **small- and medium-value cases**, using digital technology and techniques of ADR, such as arbitration, conciliation and mediation.
- It refers to the process of using technology for dispute avoidance, containment and resolution **outside the traditional court system**.
- As a dispute resolution avenue, it can be provided both as an extension of the public court system and outside of it.
- World over, the potential of dispute resolution mechanisms, especially through technology, is being recognized.
- Increasingly, ODR has received impetus across Government, businesses and even the judicial processes to tide over the constraints due to Covid-19.

ODR benefits

- It is **cost effective, convenient, efficient, allows for customizable processes** to be developed and can limit unconscious bias that results from human interactions.
- In terms of layers of justice, ODR can help in **dispute avoidance, dispute containment and dispute resolution**.
- Its widespread use can **improve the legal health of the society**, ensure increased enforcement of contracts and thereby improve the Ease of Doing Business Ranking for India.

Why Do We Need ODR?

- The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a large section of society **unable to receive timely access to justice**.
- The pandemic also led to a **deluge of disputes** further burdening the already lengthy court processes.
- ODR has the potential to help **reduce the burden on the court** and efficiently resolve several categories of cases.
- It may also be integrated to support the judiciary through technology integration in court-annexed **Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR)** centres, via e-lok adalats and also be introduced within Government departments for internal disputes.

Adoption of ODR by Government Departments and Ministries

- **National Internet Exchange of India's (NIXI) Domain Dispute Settlement Mechanism**.
- **Integrated Consumer Grievance Redressal Mechanism (INGRAM)** initiative by Department of Consumer Affairs.
- **Department of Justice** initiated the discourse on the use of ODR to address disputes involving Government bodies by releasing a list of ODR Platforms and urging Government Departments to resolve their disputes online.
- Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises launched the **SAMADHAAN** portal, with facilities for e-filing and online settlement of Micro and Small Enterprises' (MSE) dues against Public Sector Enterprises.
- Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) released the **Draft National e-commerce Policy**.
- In 2019, the Nandan Nilekani led High Level Committee on Deepening Digital Payments, established by the RBI recommended the setting up of a **two-tiered ODR system** to handle complaints arising out of digital payments.

Recommendations

- The report recommends measures at **three levels** to tackle challenges in adopting ODR framework in India.
- At the **structural level**, it suggests actions to increase digital literacy, improve access to digital infrastructure and train professionals as neutrals to deliver ODR services.
- At the **behavioural level**, the report recommends adoption of ODR to address disputes involving Government departments and ministries.

- At the **regulatory level**, the report recommends a soft-touch approach to regulate ODR platforms and services.
 - This involves laying down design and ethical principles to guide ODR service providers to self-regulate while fostering growth and innovations in the ecosystem.
- The report also stresses on **strengthening the existing legislative framework** for ODR by introducing necessary amendments to statutes.
- Keeping in mind that the capacity of the ecosystem, which is still largely untested, and technological innovations are still developing, it is recommended that ODR be progressively **implemented in a phased manner**.

Performance of UDAY Scheme

Context

- Recently, Union Minister of Power has said in Rajya Sabha that UDAY scheme did not meet its stated objectives.

Key points

- The Minister said that private sector power distribution companies (discoms) **improved efficiency levels faster** than state-owned discoms under UDAY scheme between FY16 and FY20.
- The Minister has also said that **discoms have faced mounting debt** due to large accumulated losses and have repeatedly required financial support through government schemes.
- He also informed that state utilities have reported a **fall in average reduction** in (AT&C) losses to 21% in FY20 from 23.7% in FY16 and a reduction in the ACS-ARR gap to Rs 0.30 per kWh in FY20 from Rs 0.48 per kWh in FY16.
 - UDAY scheme was aimed at reducing aggregate technical and commercial **(AT&C) losses for discoms to 15%** and to reduce the gap between average cost of power supply and average revenue realised (ACS-ARR gap) per unit (1 unit = 1 kilowatt hour) to zero.
- UDAY was aimed at providing a **permanent resolution to the financial issues** in the power sector, but did not meet its stated objectives.
 - It led to government announcing a new Rs 3.03-lakh crore incentive-based reform scheme for discoms earlier this year with similar operational targets to be achieved by FY25.

About UDAY scheme

- In 2015, Ministry of Power had launched Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) to achieve the **following objectives** in the power sector:
 - Financial Turnaround
 - Operational improvement
 - Reduction of cost of generation of power
 - Development of Renewable Energy
 - Energy efficiency & conservation

UDAY Scheme: Salient features

- States will take over **75% of the DISCOM debt** as on Sept 30, 2015 - **50% in FY 2015-16** and **25% in FY 2016-17**.
- States to issue **non-SLR including SDL bonds**, to take over debt and transfer the proceeds to DISCOMs in a mix of grant, loan, equity.
 - Maturity period of bonds - 10-15 years.
 - Moratorium period – up to 5 years.
- Rate - G-sec plus 0.5% spread plus 0.25% spread for non-SLR.
- **Borrowing not to be included** for calculating fiscal deficit of the State.

UDAY: Targeted activities

| Activity | Expected date for achievement |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Feeder Metering | 30 June 2016 |
| DT Metering | 30 June 2017 |
| Consumer indexing & GIS Mapping | 30 Sept 2018 |
| Upgradation of DT, Meters etc | 31 Dec 2017 |
| Smart meter for consumers | > 500 Unit by Dec 17; >200 unit by Dec 2019 |
| AT&C losses | 15% by FY 2019 |
| Elimination ACS-ARR gap | FY 2019 |

UDAY scheme: Benefits to Participating States

- Increased supply of domestic coal
- Allocation of coal linkages at notified prices
- Coal price rationalization
- Coal linkage rationalization & allowing coal swaps
- Supply of washed & crushed coal
- Additional coal at notified prices
- Faster completion of Interstate Transmission lines
- Power purchase through transparent competitive bidding

PM-EAC Calls for Unified Labour Law

Context

- The Economic Advisory Council to PM has submitted its report on state-level labour reforms in India, to the Prime Minister's Office in which it has vouched for a **unified labour code**.

Key points

- The report has called for a need to **focus on urban areas**, given their significance from a national income as well as overall employment standpoint.
- EAC has said that a single unified labour code would **further simplify** the labour laws.
- The EAC has backed a unified labour code, on the lines of **Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006**.
- EAC mooted for other alternative policy efforts to **boost employment generation and industrial growth**.
- EAC has said that enhanced **focus is needed** on
 - Skill building
 - Public infrastructure investment
 - Reducing policy barriers to trade and investment
 - Simplifying laws, and procedures

EAC on 4 labour codes

- EAC has said that the four labour codes **did not take a comprehensive view** of all labour laws.
- EAC also was of the opinion that the four labour codes has **only standardised and streamlined** the existing laws without addressing various inconsistencies.
- The EAC-PM is of the view that labour law reforms, though important, are **not a magic bullet** to boost employment generation, address the high degree of informality or even boost industrial growth.
- EAC has questioned a need for **spending political capital** on some labour law reforms, which are not enough for employment generation.

Benefits of unified labour law

- EAC said that A 'single unified labour law' or reforms aimed at all sectors and nature of jobs would create a **supportive business environment** for the urban economy.
- It would also allow the service sector and the **new-age urban economy** to reach new heights.

About four labour codes

- The Ministry of Labour & Employment had amalgamated **29 central labour laws** into four Codes.
- These include the Code on Wages, 2019, the Code on Social Security, 2020, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.
- These codes are yet to be notified and the Government has planned to introduce it from **FY 2022-23**.

PM SVANidhi Scheme: 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' Campaign for Digital Onboarding of Street Vendors

PM SVANidhi Scheme- 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' Campaign

- Recently, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs and Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) jointly launched 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' to complement the efforts of Lending Institutions in adoption of digital transactions by the PM SVANidhi beneficiaries.

'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' Campaign- key points

- About:** 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0' campaign is aimed at digital onboarding of Street Vendors (SVs) who have already been provided loans under PM SVANidhi Scheme.
- PM SVANidhi Scheme and 'Main Bhi Digital 3.0':** Digital onboarding and training of Street Vendors (SVs) is an integral part of PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme.
 - Lending Institutions (LIs) have been instructed to issue a durable QR Code & UPI ID at the time of disbursement and train the beneficiaries in conduct of digital transactions.

PM SVANidhi Scheme: Micro Credit Scheme for Street Vendors

- About:** PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme is a Special Micro-Credit Facility Scheme for providing affordable loans to street vendors.
- Parent Ministry:** PM SVANidhi scheme is being implemented by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Urban Local Bodies will play pivotal role in the implementation of the scheme.

- **Beneficiaries:** over 50 lakh people, including vendors, hawkers, thelewalas, rehriwala, theliphadwala etc. in different areas/ contexts are likely to benefit from PM SVANidhi scheme.
 - The goods supplied by them range from vegetables, fruits, ready-to-eat street foods, tea, pakodas, breads, eggs, textiles, apparel, footwear, artisan products, books/ stationaries etc.
 - The services include barber shops, cobblers, pan shops, laundry services etc.
- **Implementation:**
 - An Integrated IT Platform has been developed for implementation of PM SVANidhi Scheme. The application process is fully online.
 - Street Vendors can apply for loan directly through PM SVANidhi Portal. The application can also be submitted at Municipal Offices and Common Service Centres (CSCs).
 - In addition, the SVs can approach municipal functionaries or representatives of Lending Institutions to apply through PM SVANidhi mobile App.
- **Providing Capital (Loan facility):** The street vendors can avail a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which is repayable in monthly instalments within a year.
 - This loan would be collateral free and there will be no penalty on early repayment of loan.

- **Funding:** PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- **Implementation:** PM-KISAN Scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
- **Identification of Beneficiaries:** Under PM-KISAN, the State / UT Governments are entrusted with the responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families.

Key Objectives

- PM-KISAN aims to supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers in procuring various inputs.
 - This is to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.
- PM-KISAN also aims to protect farmers from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their continuance in the farming activities.

PM-KISAN Mobile App

- **About:** PM-KISAN Mobile App has been designed and developed by the National Informatics Centre in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- **Objective:** PM-KISAN Mobile App has been developed with an aim to ensure seamless and hassle-free accessibility to farmers regarding various aspects of the PM-KISAN Scheme.
- **Associated Benefits:** PM-KISAN Mobile App will help in following benefits to farmers
 - Farmers can view the status of their application,
 - Farmers can update or carry out corrections of their Aadhaar cards and
 - Farmers can also check the history of credits to their bank accounts.

PM-KISAN Scheme

Context

- In line with the continued commitment and resolve to empower grassroot level farmers, Prime Minister will release the 10th instalment of financial benefit under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme on 1st January, 2022.
- This will enable the transfer of an amount of more than Rs. 20,000 crore to more than 10 crore beneficiary farmer families.
- Under the PM-KISAN scheme, Samman Rashi of over Rs. 1.6 lakh crore has been transferred to farmer families so far.

Key Points

- **Background:** PM-KISAN Scheme was launched by the Prime Minister in 2019 to provide financial assistance to small and marginal farmers.
- **About:** Under PM-KISAN scheme, a financial benefit of Rs. 6000/- per year is provided to the eligible beneficiary farmer families, payable in three equal 4-monthly installments of Rs.2000/- each.



Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) Extended for 2021-26

Context

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has approved implementation of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).
 - The CCEA approved an outlay of Rs. 93,068 crores, including Rs.37,454 crore central assistance to States for PMKSY 2021-26.
- The CCEA has also approved central support of Rs.37,454 crore to States and Rs.20,434.56 crore of debt servicing for loan availed by Government of India for irrigation development during PMKSY 2016-21.

Key Points

- About:** PMKSY is an umbrella scheme launched in 2015, providing central grants to the State Governments for specific activities related to irrigation infrastructure development in rural areas.
 - Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation:**
- Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP), and
- Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)
 - Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare:** it is implementing the 'Per Drop More Crop' scheme.
- Components of PMKSY:** All the three components of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) have been approved for continuation during 2021-26. The three components of the PMKSY are-
 - Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP),
 - Har Khet ko Paani (HKKP) and
 - Watershed Development components

Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Program

- About:** AIBP is a flagship programme of Government of India aims for financial support to irrigation projects.
- Targets for 2021-26:** Total additional irrigation potential creation targeted during 2021-26 under AIBP is 13.88 lakh hectare.
 - Apart from focused completion of 60 ongoing projects including their 30.23 lakh hectare command area development, additional projects can also be taken up.
 - The inclusion criteria have been relaxed for projects under tribal and drought prone areas.

Har Khet ko Paani (HKKP)

- About:** HKKP aims for enhancement of physical access on the farm and expansion of cultivable area under assured irrigation.
- Targets for 2021-26:** Surface minor irrigation and repair-renovation-restoration of water bodies component of PMKSY is targeted to provide additional 4.5 lakh hectare irrigation.
 - Significant expansion of inclusion criteria for rejuvenation of water bodies, and enhanced the central assistance from 25% to 60% in general area.
 - Ground Water component of HKKP, approved provisionally for 2021-22, targets creation of irrigation potential of 1.52 lakh hectare.

Watershed Development Component

- Watershed Development Component:** It focuses on development of rainfed areas towards soil and water conservation, regeneration of ground water, arresting runoff and promoting extension activities related to water harvesting and management.
- Targets for 2021-26:** Completion of sanctioned projects covering 49.5 lakh hectare rainfed/degraded lands to bring additional 2.5 lakh hectare under protective irrigation, during 2021-26.
 - A specific provision for development of springsheds has been included in the program.

Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021- Personal Laws in Marriage

Context

- Recently, the Union Government introduced the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 in Lok Sabha.
- Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 has been referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

Proposed Amendments

- Equal Minimum age of Marriage:** Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 aims to amend the definition of a "child" in section 2(a) to mean "a male or a female who has not completed twenty-one years of age".
 - The Bill makes the minimum age of marriage same for both men and women.
 - This will help in improving health and social indices such as infant mortality, maternal mortality, and nutrition levels among mothers and children.

- **Increases window for Filing a petition to declare a child marriage void:** Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 also increases the window for a “child” to file a petition to declare a child marriage void.
 - Presently, section 3(4) of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act allows a woman to file for declaration of the child marriage as void before she turns 20 and for the man before he turns 23.
 - Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 proposes to extend this window for both the woman and the man to five years after attaining the age of 18.
- **Voidable Child Marriage:** Under the law, child marriages, although illegal, are not void but “voidable.”
 - A child marriage can be declared null and void by a court when either party to the marriage files a petition under Article 3(4) of the 2006 Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.
 - A “void” marriage, in legal terms, would mean that the marriage had never taken place.
- **Introduction of a “notwithstanding” clause:** This provides for equal application of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act across religions, notwithstanding any customs.

Associated Concerns

- Since the age of majority is 18, increasing the age of marriage is viewed as a paternalistic approach by the state in personal matters of an individual.
- Critics believe that the application of the child marriage law across faiths also sets a precedence of the state’s interference in the personal laws
- **Violating Article 25 of the Constitution:** Many believe that Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021 violative of Article 25 of the Constitution.
 - Article 25 guarantees the freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.
- Increasing the minimum age of marriage may further push many marriages to the brink of illegality and marginalise vulnerable sections.
 - Since the existing Act does not make child marriage automatically illegal, the increase in minimum age might not really benefit women.
- It could also bring those who aid the marriage of a woman over the age of 18 under the ambit of a law that sanctions imprisonment of up to two years.

Smart Cities Mission Extended

Context

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has informed that the Government has extended the timeline for the implementation of the **Smart Cities Mission to June 2023**.

Key points

- The ministry has informed that the delay has been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The physical progress of Smart Cities programme, aimed at developing citizen-friendly and self-sustainable urban settlements, was earlier expected to be **measurable only by 2021**.

Smart Cities meaning

- Smart Cities focus on their **most pressing needs** and on the greatest opportunities to improve lives.
- They tap a **range of approaches** - digital and information technologies, urban planning best practices, public-private partnerships, and policy change - to make a difference.
- In the approach to the Smart Cities Mission, the objective is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' Solutions.
- The focus is on **sustainable and inclusive development** and the idea is to look at compact areas, create a replicable model which will act like a light house to other aspiring cities.

Smart Cities Mission

Vision

- The purpose of the Smart Cities Mission is to **drive economic growth** and **improve the quality of life of people** by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart outcomes.

Smart Cities Mission strategy

- Pan-city initiative in which at least one Smart Solution is applied city-wide
- Develop areas step-by-step – three models of area-based developments
- Retrofitting,
- Redevelopment,
- Greenfield.

Smart Cities Mission: The core infrastructure elements

- Adequate water supply,
- Assured electricity supply,
- Sanitation, including solid waste management,
- Efficient urban mobility and public transport,
- Affordable housing, especially for the poor,
- Robust IT connectivity and digitalization,
- Good governance, especially e-Governance and citizen participation,
- Sustainable environment,
- Safety and security of citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly, and
- Health and education.

Coverage and duration

- The Mission will cover **100 cities** and its duration will be five years (FY2015-16 to FY2019-20).

How Many Smart Cities in Each State/UT?

- The total number of 100 Smart Cities have been distributed among the States and UTs on the basis of an equitable criteria.
- The formula gives equal weightage (50:50) to urban population of the State/UT and the number of statutory towns in the State/UT.
- Based on this formula, each State/UT will, therefore, have a certain number of potential Smart Cities, with each State/UT having at least one.

Financing of smart cities

- The Smart City Mission will be operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) and the Central Government proposes to give financial support to the Mission to the extent of Rs. **48,000 crores over five years** i.e., on an average Rs. 100 crore per city per year.
- An equal amount, on a matching basis, will have to be contributed by the State/ULB; therefore, nearly Rupees one lakh crore of Government/ULB funds will be available for Smart Cities development.

Underutilized POSHAN outlays

Context

- According to the data released by Ministry of Women and Child Development, funds released under the POSHAN Abhiyan Programme stand severely under-utilised.

Key points

- The data revealed that out of the total fund allocated for POSHAN Abhiyan, **around 50% were not utilised.**

- Out of the 36 states and UTs for which the ministry has released data, **no state or UT has completely used its funds** for POSHAN Abhiyan.
- The Ministry has also informed that in 2020-21, funds released for POSHAN programme were **cut by 85 percent** compared to the amount released in the previous financial year.

POSHAN Abhiyan: Underutilization of funds

- In 2020-21, all **anganwadis, women** and child development centres that serve as primary locations for implementation of POSHAN Abhiyan, were closed because of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19.
- As the beneficiaries could not come these centres, angawandi workers were asked to distribute supplementary nutrition material at their doorsteps.
- Actual fund utilisation under POSHAN Abhiyaan has itself been at just **about 56 percent since the scheme was launched in 2018.**
- A parliamentary standing committee examining the demand for grants of the women and child development ministry has also flagged the “**gross underutilisation**” of funds allocated to POSHAN Abhiyan.

Recommendations of the committee

- The committee has recommended that the ministry should utilise the funds allocated under various heads to the **fullest extent** and strive to achieve results at the grass-root level.
- It has also said that the outlook of the ministry needs to change from **outlays to outcomes** and the ministry should be able to spend, execute and give measurable outcome-driven results, in the upcoming Financial Year.

Present status

- The target under the government’s POSHAN Abhiyan was to reduce stunting by two percentage points per annum. Even the pace of reduction seen in NFHS5 **has slowed down** compared to NFHS 3 and NFHS4.
- The target under POSHAN Abhiyan was for India to become free of malnutrition by 2022. The latest health data and spending anomalies indicate this is **unlikely to be achieved.**

International Relations

3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue: Afghanistan Meet

Context

- Recently, the 3rd meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of the External Affairs Minister of India.

Key Points

- Background:** 1st India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in Samarkand in January 2019 while the 2nd India-Central Asia Dialogue held in the virtual format in October 2020.
 - India-Central Asia Dialogue** is held annually between India and Central Asian Countries since 2019. Fourth India Central Asia Dialogue is scheduled to be held in 2022.
- About:** the 3rd meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue was held on 19 December 2021 between India and five central Asian Countries.
 - Chairmanship:** India was the chair for the 3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue 2021.
- Participation:** Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan took part in the 3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue meeting.
- 4th India- Central Asia Dialogue 2022:** 4th India-Central Asia Dialogue will be organized and chaired by Central Asian Countries in 2022.

India-Central Asia Dialogue- Afghanistan Meet

- Afghanistan Meet:** In 3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue, the participating countries discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the region.
- Peaceful Co-existence:** India-Central Asia Dialogue countries reiterated strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan.
 - Three central Asian countries — Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan — share borders with Afghanistan.
- Respecting Sovereignty:** India-Central Asia Dialogue countries emphasized the respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and non-interference in its internal affairs.

- Aligned with UNSC Resolution:** India and Central Asian countries reaffirmed the importance of UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021).
 - UNSC Resolution 2593:** It demands that Afghan territory not be used for sheltering, training, planning, or financing terrorist acts, and called for concerted action against all terrorist groups
- Concurred with Delhi Regional Security Dialogue Outcomes:** There is a broad regional consensus on following points related to Afghanistan-
 - Formation of a truly representative and inclusive government,
 - Combating terrorism and drug trafficking,
 - Central role of the UN,
 - Providing immediate humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people and
 - Preserving the rights of women, children and other national ethnic groups.

Key Outcomes

- India- Central Asia Relations:** Planned to host joint celebrations, marking the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Central Asian States in 2022.
- Business cooperation:** Ministers welcomed the outcomes of the 2nd meeting of the India-Central Asia Business Council (ICABC) held in October 2020.
 - India-Central Asia Business Council (ICABC):** a B-2-B body under the India-Central Asia Dialogue, to continue its efforts to promote business linkages, facilitate greater understanding of business regulations and incentivize mutual investments.
 - They welcomed the proposal of the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Uzbekistan to host the 3rd meeting of ICABC in the first quarter of 2022.
- Need to establishing cooperation between specialized national institutions:** including in the fields of finance, renewable energy, information, digital and other advanced technologies.
- Global Climate Cooperation:** They agreed on the implementation of commitments under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement in line with equity, national circumstances and principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC).

- **Need for large-scale and long-term economic cooperation:** between Central Asian countries and India in order to strengthen and expand interconnectivity.
 - In this context, the Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan stressed on the importance of TAPI gas pipeline project.
- **Utilizing Transit Agreements:** Ministers emphasized on optimum usage of various transit agreement to enhance connectivity between India and the Central Asian countries. For example-
 - International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
 - Ashgabat Agreement on International Transport and Transit Corridor

21st India-Russia Annual Summit

Context

- Recently, 21st India-Russia Annual Summit was held in New Delhi, India between Prime Minister of India and President of the Russia.
- Along with India-Russia Annual Summit 2021, the first 2+2 ministerial dialogue of India's foreign and defence ministers with their Russian counterparts was also held.
- Last India-Russia Annual Summit was held in September 2019 in Vladivostok (Russia). India-Russia Annual Summit 2020 was postponed due to covid-19.

Key Outcomes

- **Progress in 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership':** continued between both countries despite the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic.
- **The 2+2 Dialogue Mechanism of Foreign and Defence Ministers** and the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military & Military-Technical Cooperation mechanism was institutionalized at India-Russia Summit 2021.
- **New drivers of growth for long term predictable and sustained economic cooperation:** Leaders at 21st India-Russia Annual Summit underscored the need for greater economic cooperation.
 - The role of connectivity through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed Chennai - Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor was also discussed.

- **Greater inter-regional cooperation** between various regions of Russia, in particular with the Russian Far-East, with the States of India.
- **On Afghanistan:** They agreed that both countries share common perspectives and concerns on Afghanistan and appreciated the bilateral roadmap charted out at the NSA level for consultation and cooperation on Afghanistan.
- **Cooperation on International Forums:** At 21st India-Russia Annual Summit, both sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation at multilateral fora, including at the UN Security Council.
- **'India-Russia: Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity':** This was the title of Joint statement that aptly covers the state and prospects of bilateral ties.
- Several agreements and MOUs were signed in different sectors such as trade, energy, science & technology, intellectual property, outer space, geological exploration, cultural exchange, education, etc.
- **22st India-Russia Annual Summit:** President Putin extended an invitation to Prime Minister Modi to visit Russia for the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit in 2022.
- **Defense cooperation:** The two countries signed a contract for the manufacture of nearly 6 lakh AK-203 rifles, but "put off" a reciprocal military logistics support agreement (RELOS).
 - They also signed an agreement for military technology cooperation for the next decade- from 2021 to 2031.

India-Russia Annual Summit- Key Points

- **About:** India-Russia Annual Summit is the highest level of institutionalized dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between India and Russia.
- India-Russia Annual Summit is held annually. India-Russia Annual Summit is held alternatively in Indian and Russia.
- **Constitution of 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue Mechanism:** at 21st India-Russia Annual Summit, 2+2 ministerial dialogue mechanism was created.
 - With this, Russia became the fourth nation, along with the US, Japan and Australia, with which India has 2+2 ministerial dialogue in place.

India Votes Against the UN Resolution of Climate Change

Context

- Recently, India has voted against a draft resolution seeking to create a **formal space for climate change**-related discussions at the UN Security Council.

Key points

- India and Russia** were the only two countries to oppose the draft resolution, China abstained from voting.
- Due to a veto from Russia, the draft resolution **could not pass**.
- The draft resolution was sponsored by **Ireland and Nigeria**.
- It sought to enable the Security Council to take up routine discussions on climate change from the perspective of its **impact on peace and conflicts worldwide**.

What the sponsors say?

- The sponsors argue that one of the lesser discussed aspects of climate change is its impact on international peace and security, which is a **direct effect of climate-induced** food and water shortages, loss of land or livelihoods, or migration.
- The sponsors, and supporters, also believed that this had implications for the **UN field missions deployed** to maintain peace and security, and therefore, it was a subject appropriate to be taken up at the Security Council.

Why India, China and Russia objected?

- The three countries believed that **UNFCCC is an appropriate UN forum** to discuss all matters on climate change.
- Security Council interventions on climate change will undermine the UNFCCC process, and provide **disproportionate influence to a handful of developed countries** on climate change decision-making.

What India said?

- UNFCCC process addresses both **immediate needs** of the developing and the **commitments** of the developed countries.
- UNFCCC seeks a balance between **mitigation, adaptation, financing, technology, transfer, capacity building** etc.

- India believed that that there is **no real requirement** for the resolution except for the purpose of bringing climate change under the ambit of Security Council, and the reason for that is decisions can be taken without involvement of most developing countries and without recognising consensus.
- India also said that ironically, many **UNSC members are the main contributors** of climate change due to historical emissions. If the Security Council indeed takes over the responsibility on this issue, a few states will then have a free hand in deciding on all climate related issues.
- India also advocated that climate change may have exacerbated conflicts in the Sahel region and across Africa, and viewing conflicts through the prism of climate change was misleading and an oversimplification that could **worsen conflicts rather than resolving them**.

International Maritime Organization (IMO) Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea

Context

- Recently, International Maritime Organization (IMO) council presented exceptional bravery at sea award to Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and Master along with crew members of tugboat Ocean Bliss.
- IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea was given for exceptional and courageous efforts towards rescue operation of M/T New Diamond.
 - M/T New Diamond caught fire and was drifting towards the coast, laden with inflammable cargo.

Key Points about IMO Bravery Award

- About:** IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea is given in order to internationally recognise extraordinary seamanship skills and outstanding courage displayed by individuals at sea.
 - IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea is given annually by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
- Objective:** IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery is conferred to individuals or groups who, at the risk to their own lives, perform acts of exceptional bravery in attempting to save life at sea or in attempting to prevent or mitigate damage to the marine environment.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)- Key Points

- **Background and Formation:** In 1948 an international conference in Geneva adopted a convention formally establishing International Maritime Organization (IMO).
 - The original name was the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, or IMCO, but the name was changed in 1982 to IMO.
 - The IMO Convention entered into force in 1958 and the new Organization met for the first time the following year.
- **About:** International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships.
- **Key Mandate:** As a specialized agency of United Nations,
 - IMO is the global standard-setting authority for the safety, security and environmental performance of international shipping.
 - IMO is also responsible for creating a regulatory framework for the shipping industry that is fair and effective, universally adopted and universally implemented.

Key Objectives

International Maritime Organization (IMO) aims-

- To provide machinery for cooperation among Governments in the field of governmental regulation and practices relating to technical matters of all kinds affecting shipping engaged in international trade;
- To encourage and facilitate the general adoption of the highest practicable standards in matters concerning maritime safety, efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of marine pollution from ships
- IMO is also empowered to deal with administrative and legal matters related to these purposes.

International Solar Alliance (ISA) gets UN Observer Status

Context

- Recently, the UN General Assembly has conferred Observer Status to the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- In a short span of six years, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) has become an example of how positive global climate action can be taken forward through partnerships.

Key Points

- **About:** UN Observer status is granted by the United Nations Member by adopting a resolution conferring Observer Status to the concerned organization.
- **UN Observer Status to ISA:** UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolution 76/123 & unanimously decided to invite the International Solar Alliance to participate in the sessions & work of the General Assembly in the capacity of an 'Observer'.
- **Associated Benefit:** UN Observer Status to International Solar Alliance (ISA) would help provide for a well-defined cooperation between the Alliance and the United Nations that would benefit global energy growth and development.

Key Points

- **Background:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA) was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries (which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn) to address their special energy needs.
- **Foundation:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA) was co-founded by India and France during the 2015 climate change conference in Paris.
 - **Headquarter:** Gurugram, India.
- **About:** ISA is an intergovernmental treaty-based organization. It has been conceived as to be an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform-
 - For increased deployment of solar energy technologies to enhance energy security and sustainable development, and
 - To improve access to energy in developing member countries.

Key Interest and Objectives

- International Solar Alliance aims to collectively address key common challenges to scale up solar energy applications in line with their needs;
- International Solar Alliance aims to mobilize investments of more than USD 1000 billion by 2030;
- International Solar Alliance aims to take coordinated action through programs and activities launched on a voluntary basis, aimed at better harmonization, aggregation of demand, risk and resources, for promoting solar finance, solar technologies, innovation, R&D, capacity building, etc.;
- International Solar Alliance aims to reduce the cost of finance to increase investments in solar energy in member countries by promoting innovative financial mechanisms and mobilizing finance from Institutions;

- International Solar Alliance aims to scale-up applications of solar technologies in member countries, and
- International Solar Alliance aims to facilitate collaborative research and development (R&D) activities in solar energy technologies among member countries.
- International Solar Alliance aims to promote a common cyber platform for networking, cooperation and exchange of ideas among member countries.

South-South Innovation Platform: First Agri-tech cohort announced

Context

- Recently, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) rolled out their first **AgriTech Challenge** cohort for its ambitious innovative Agri-tech program.

Key points

- The Agritech Challenge is an inaugural initiative of the **South-South Platform** created to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and solutions between the **smallholder farmers in Asia and Africa**.
- The cohort aims to help smallholder farmers across Asia and Africa to address their challenges in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- The Cohort represents a diverse range of solutions across the value chain of the smallholder farmer, including soil analysis, farm **management & intelligence, dairy ecosystem, carbon credits, solar-based cold storage**, among others.
- The Agritech Challenge focuses on improving the financial health of smallholder farmers and will work towards helping the participants build and test their solution in the new market.
- The Challenge is also engaging with AIM (**Atal Innovation Mission**)-incubated early-stage innovators under a dedicated AIM-track, to help build readiness for international expansion.
- An additional 15 promising AIM-incubated innovators have been selected across irrigation technology, fintech, online marketplace, smart farming, cold storage, among others.
- They will receive support to explore expansion through masterclasses by global experts and opportunity to engage with industry mentors.

AgriTech Challenge Cohort and Agri-Fintech innovators: Two tracks

- Applications were invited to facilitate agriculture expansion to the international markets through two tracks- **Main track and AIM track**.
- A total of 10 high-growth innovators have been selected in the Main track, out of a total 100 applications.
- The key objective of the main track applications was **'Expansion – Support solution** pilot in the chosen international market.

Why important?

- In India, more than **50% of the population** is dependent on agriculture and it contributes to about **15-18% of the GDP**.
- As agriculture is a sector that **emotionally appeals the masses**, Indian agencies are prompted to undertake policy measures to stimulate industry landscape.

About South-South innovation platform

- In July 2021, AIM, **NITI Aayog in partnership with UNCDF**, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Rabo Foundation launched a South-South innovation platform to enable cross-border exchange of innovations, insights and investments.
- Through this platform, **cross-border collaborations** among emerging markets across India, Indonesia, Malawi, Malaysia, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia would be enabled.

Democracy Summit: India Participated in the first Summit for Democracy

Context

- Recently, Indian Prime Minister attended the first Democracy Summit convened by the U.S.A.
- Participating in the first Summit for Democracy, Prime Minister said that the “democratic spirit, including respect for rule of law and pluralistic ethos, is ingrained in Indians”.

Key Outcomes

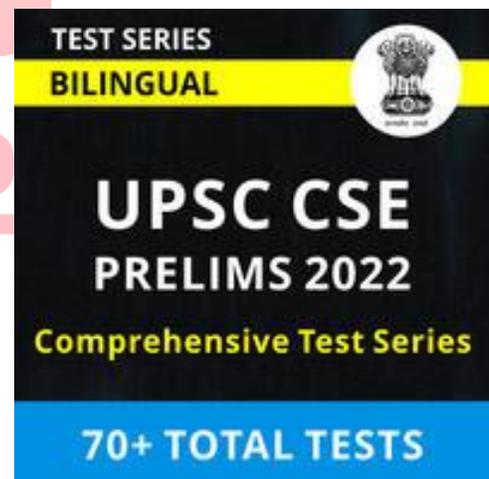
- **India's observations at first Democracy Summit 2021**
 - International community must jointly shape global norms for technology such as “social media and cryptocurrencies” so that they are used to empower democracy, “not undermine it”.

- While accepting the technology's ability to affect democracies, India said that technology companies should contribute to preserving open and democratic societies.
- At the U.S Democratic Summit, India conveyed that the democratic spirit is integral to Indian civilization ethos by highlighting that the elected republican city-states such as Licchavi and Shakya flourished in India as far as 2,500 years back.
- While speaking at virtual summit for democracy, Indian PM said that the democratic spirit, including respect for rule of law and pluralistic ethos, is ingrained in Indians.
- **Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal:** US President at first Democratic Summit announced establishment of the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal that will provide foreign assistance initiatives.
 - **Funding:** The initiative for **Democratic Renewal** will be powered by \$424.4 million.
 - **Key Objective:** It will be aimed to support free media, fight corruption, strengthen democratic reforms, for use of technology for democracy and for defence of free and fair elections.
- **Pakistan, China and Democratic Summit 2021:**
 - Pakistan skipped the Democracy Summit hosted by US President, who invited around 110 countries to a virtual summit on December 9-10.
 - China was not invited by the US President at the Virtual Summit for Democracy while Taiwan was invited at the Democratic Summit 2021.

Democracy Summit- Important Details

- **About:** The Summit for Democracy is an initiative the US President with an aim to "renew the spirit and shared purpose" of the nations of the Free World.

- Global Summit for Democracy is to be an annual summit. Summit for Democracy 2022 is expected to be in-person meeting.
- **Key Objective:** Global Summit for Democracy aims to bring together the world's democracies-
 - To strengthen their democratic institutions,
 - Honestly confront the challenge of nations that are backsliding, and
 - Forge a common agenda to address threats to our common values.
- **Key Themes of Democratic Summit:** Global Summit for Democracy will be held around three themes:
 1. Defending against authoritarianism,
 2. Fighting corruption,
 3. Promoting respect for human rights.
- **Participation:** This virtual Democratic Summit envisages participation of leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector.
 - The invitees from the Asia-Pacific region to the Democratic Summit 2021 included India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Pakistan, Maldives and the Philippines.
 - Countries like China and Bangladesh were not invited at the first Summit for Democracies.



Economy

Aatmanirbhar Skilled Employee-Employer Mapping (ASEEM) Portal

Context

- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched Aatmanirbhar Skilled Employees Employer Mapping (ASEEM) portal, which acts as a directory of skilled workforce.

ASEEM Portal- Key Points

- **About:** The ASEEM Portal provides a platform that acts as a bridge for both employees and employers. The ASEEM Portal seeks to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- **Objective:** The key objective of the ASEEM Portal is to provide a platform that matches supply of skilled workforce with the market demand.
 - ASEEM Portal will facilitate better livelihood opportunities for youth and availability of ready skilled manpower to employers.
- **Implementing Agency:** ASEEM Portal is being managed by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
 - National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is also responsible for managing and maintaining all the data in order to maintain data sanity and data security.
- **Performance of ASEEM Portal:**
 - By end of July 2021, around 1.3 crore candidates were registered on ASEEM portal which included directly registered candidates and the candidates registered on Skill India Portal (SIP).
 - Also, at present, there is around 10 lakh migrant's data/profile are available on ASEEM.

AI driven interfaces for stakeholder interactions

ASEEM as such consists of three IT based AI (artificial intelligence) driven interfaces for stakeholder interactions:

1. **For Employees:** A job application for individuals with access to hyper local jobs using machine learning and automated match based on persona.
2. **For Employers:** A demand and campaign management system for employers to forecast the current and future demand.
3. **Dashboard for Policy Makers:** A management dashboard for analytics and insights. This could also be used for future decision making.

Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge 2.0

Context

- Recently, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, in partnership with Startup India, launched the **second edition of 'Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge'**.
- The second edition of '**Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge**' was launched at an event celebrating '**National Milk Day**' in Anand, Gujarat.
 - National Milk Day is celebrated to commemorate the birth centenary of Dr. Varghese Kurien.

Key Points

- **About:** The first edition of the **Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge was launched by the Prime Minister of India in 2019.**
- **Objective:** Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge aims to scout for innovative and commercially viable solutions to address six problems faced by the animal husbandry and dairy sector.
- **Implementing Ministry:** Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge is being conducted by the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge 2.0-Focus Areas

- Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge 2.0 is open for application on the Startup India portal – www.startupindia.gov.in – to all startups for the following problem statements-
 - Cost-effective, Long-term, and User-friendly Alternatives for Storage and Supply of Semen Doses
 - Development of Cost-effective Animal Identification (RFID) and Traceability Technology
 - Development of Heat Detection Kits
 - Development of Pregnancy Diagnosis Kits for Dairy Animals
 - Improvement of existing milk supply-chain from village collection centre to the dairy plant
 - Development of Low-cost Cooling and Milk Preservation System and a Data Logger

Incentives for Winners

- **Cash Prizes:** For each of the above 6 problem areas, a winner to be awarded with INR 10 Lakh and a runner-up with INR 7 Lakh each as cash prizes
- **Incubation:** Up to 12 winners of the Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge 2.0 will get incubation facility.
 - The incubator would be responsible for virtual incubation of these startups for up to 3 months, mentor matchmaking, lab facility for POC development and testing facilities.
- Along with above, **incentives also include Virtual Masterclasses, Mentorship, Showcase Opportunity and a virtual demo day** for the top 30 startups selected from the applicant pool, across problem areas.

Anti-Dumping Duty: India imposed Anti-Dumping Duty on 5 Chinese products

Context

- Recently, India has imposed **anti-dumping duty on five Chinese products for five years** to protect local manufacturers from cheap imports from China.

5-products

- Flat rolled products of aluminium;
- Sodium hydrosulphite (used in dye industry);
- Silicone sealant (used in manufacturing of solar photovoltaic modules, and thermal power applications);
- Hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) component R-32; and
- Hydrofluorocarbon blends (both have uses in refrigeration industry).

Key points

- These duties were imposed following recommendations of the **Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)**, investigation arm of Ministry of Commerce and Industries.
- DGTR concluded that these products were exported at a **price below normal value** in Indian markets, which has resulted in dumping.
- Similarly, CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs) has also slapped the duty on imports of calcined gypsum powder from **Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates** for five years.

Impacts

- **Positive impact:** It would help manufacturers garner the market share and hence increase the ease of doing business for these targeted manufacturers.
- **Negative impact:** It will increase the price of the products and hence the end customer will have to pay the passed-on cost.

What are anti-dumping duties?

- To understand the anti-dumping duties, let us first understand what is dumping.
- **Dumping** is said to occur when the goods are exported by a country to another country at a price lower than its normal value.
- Dumping is an **unfair trade practice** which can have a distortive effect on international trade.
- Anti-dumping, therefore, is a measure to **rectify the situation** arising out of the dumping of goods and its trade distortive effect.
- Thus, the purpose of anti-dumping duty is to rectify the trade distortive effect of dumping and **re-establish fair trade**.
- Anti-dumping is **not synonymous with cheap or low-priced imports**. Dumping implies low priced imports only in the relative sense (relative to the normal value), and not in absolute sense.

Anti-Dumping Duty and the WTO

- The WTO Anti-Dumping Agreement allows governments to act against dumping where there is **genuine (“material”) injury** to the competing domestic industry.
- In order to do that the government has to be able to show that dumping is taking place, calculate the extent of dumping (how much lower the export price is compared to the exporter’s home market price), and show that the dumping is causing injury or threatening to do so.

Anti-Dumping Duty Vs Customs Duty

Though both the taxes are levied and collected by the Customs Authorities, both are completely different.

| Anti-Dumping Duty | Customs Duty |
|---|--|
| Linked to fair trade principles. | Means to raise revenue for the overall growth of the nation. |
| These are trade-remedial measures. | They belong to trade and fiscal policies of the Government. |
| These are exporter specific or country specific | These are universal and are applicable to all exports. |

Belt and Road Initiative

Context

- Investments in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have **fallen by 54 per cent** since 2019 due to criticism over loan conditions and environmental concerns.

Key points

- Belt and Road Investments last year were **at their lowest** since the programme was unveiled in 2013.
- Ruined deals, COVID-19 pandemic** and a more cautious approach adopted by China has led to fall in investment.
- BRI is facing a **wide range of issues** ranging from strikes, public protests, corruption scandals, loan defaults, among other reasons.

What is BRI?

- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) development strategy aims to build connectivity and co-operation across **six main economic corridors** encompassing China and
 - Mongolia and Russia;
 - Eurasian countries;
 - Central and West Asia;
 - Pakistan;
 - other countries of the Indian sub-continent; and Indochina.
- The Belt and Road Initiative formerly known as One Belt One Road or OBOR for short, is a global infrastructure development strategy **adopted by the Chinese government in 2013** to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations.
- The Chinese President has originally announced the strategy as the "**Silk Road Economic Belt**" during an official visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013.
- "Belt" is short for the "**Silk Road Economic Belt**," referring to the proposed overland routes for road and rail transportation through landlocked Central Asia along the famed historical trade routes of the Western Regions; whereas "road" is short for the "**21st Century Maritime Silk Road**", referring to the Indo-Pacific Sea routes through Southeast Asia to South Asia, the Middle East and Africa.
- Examples of Belt and Road Initiative** infrastructure investments include ports, skyscrapers, railroads, roads, airports, dams, coal-fired power stations, and railroad tunnels.

Reasons for decrease in investment

- Environmental concerns:** Chinese projects in Europe, particularly in Serbia coal mining is facing public flak as the project would pollute both land and water.
 - In Ghana, the bauxite mine is located in key biodiversity areas and the project could pollute the source of clean drinking water.
- Dangerous working condition:** In Georgia, local workers are complaining about low wages and dangerous working conditions in the railway project.
- Privatization:** In Greece, people protested against privatization of ports and long working hours.
- Transparency:** Transparency remains an issue for Chinese projects. For example, Belgrade metro system in Europe drew criticism from people as there was no public tender was placed.
- Major changes in public sentiment:** Some low-and-middle income countries have to cancel BRI projects because of major change in public sentiment.
- Delay in project completion:** The Tehran-Mashaad High-Speed Railway Electrification Upgrading project was expected to be completed within 48 months from the date of commencement (2016), however, till 2019, the project has completed only 3% of the project.
- Counter initiatives by the western countries:** Initiatives like Build Back Better World (B3W), Global Gateway initiative by EU have also affected investments in BRI.

CAG Report on Indian Railways

Context

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has recently tabled a report on Indian Railways in Parliament and noted that the financial health of Indian Railways is actually **worse than the number shows**.

Key points

- CAG reported that the Indian Railways' **operating ratio was 98.36%** in 2019-2020. However, if the actual expenditure on pension payments is taken into account, the **ratio will be 114.35 %**.
 - Railways had **earlier targeted** to reduce its operating ratio to 95%.
- It means that the operating ratio of 98% **does not reflect the true financial performance**.

- CAG was of the view that Indian Railways **needs to revisit** the passenger and other coaching tariffs so as to recover the cost of operations and reduce losses in its core activities.
- In 2019, CAG reported that Indian Railways has the **worst operating ratio** in the past 10 years at 98.44% and its revenue surplus has decreased by more than 66%.
- Last year, the Indian Railways reduced its expenditure and the shortfall was managed through **revenue generated by freight operations**.
- Also, Indian Railways' pension bill of **more than Rs 51,000 crore** in the current financial year has been converted into a loan by the finance ministry, which has also helped in managing its balance sheet.

What is Operating Ratio?

- In finance, the Operating ratio is a company's operating expenses as a **percentage of revenue**.
- It is calculated by **dividing the operating expenses by the net sales**.
- Greater the Operating Ratio, the weaker is the organization's ability to generate profit and vice versa.

Reasons of mounting losses of Railways

- The government in its Medium-Term Fiscal Statement 2019-20 said that the **operating expenses and pension payments** have soared in the recent past.
- Since the implementation of **6th and 7th Central Pay Commission**, the working expenses have seen a substantial growth.
- Moreover, the **earning growth has also not sustained**.
- Due to COVID-19, Indian Railways has suffered a **huge loss in passenger** revenues due to pandemic induced restrictions.

Way forward

- **Growing freight and passenger revenues:** Dedicated freight corridors and running of private passenger trains could help in increasing revenue. Economic Survey has also National Rail Plan's objective to increase the share of freight trains from present 27% to 45%.
- **Demand-driven approach:** Indian Railways should cater to high demand routes commodities. For example, in the passenger segment, there is a high demand for overnight travel, which should be met.

- **Multi-modal approach:** For freight customers, the promise of end-to-end connectivity via tie-ups with ports and inland waterways could help railways earn revenues better.
- Indian Railways should focus on **corporatizing its structure**, monetising and PPP so that revenue earned could be invested back in improving trains.
- **Improving Operating Ratio:** Four priority areas
 - Expedite organisational reforms
 - Second, enhance staff productivity and efficiency.
 - Third, digitisation, automation and use of high-end technologies in Indian Railways
 - Fourth, professional selection and management of projects to minimise costs and time overruns.

Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules, 2021

Context

- Recently, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution has notified the **Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules, 2021** under Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

What is direct selling?

- Direct selling is a business model in a **non-retail segment** like at home, online or other venues, where people sell products or services **directly to end customers**.

Direct selling companies in India

- **Amway**, Oriflame and Tupperware are the most prominent players in the direct selling segment.
- Vestige, Avon, **Modicare**, RCM, Herbalife, Keva Kaipo Industries Pvt. Ltd, Mi Lifestyle Marketing Global Private Limited have also gained grounds in the recent years.

Key points

- These Rules shall apply to:
 - All goods and services bought or sold through direct selling,
 - All models of direct selling,
 - All direct selling entities offering goods and services to consumers in India,
 - All forms of unfair trade practices across all models of direct selling and also to also to a direct selling entity which is not established in India, but offers goods or services to consumers in India.

- Existing direct selling entities need to comply of these rules **within ninety days** from the date of publication of these rules in the Official Gazette.

Direct selling entity and direct sellers are prohibited from:

- Promoting a Pyramid Scheme** or enrol any person to such scheme or participate in such arrangement in any manner whatsoever in the garb of doing direct selling business;
- Participate in **money circulation scheme** in the garb of doing direct selling business.

What is a pyramid scheme?

- A pyramid scheme is a **fraudulent system of making money** based on recruiting an ever-increasing number of "investors."
- The initial promoters recruit investors, who in turn recruit more investors, and so on.
- The scheme is called a "pyramid" because at each level, the number of investors increases.
- The small group of initial promoters at the top require a large base of later investors to support the scheme by providing profits to the earlier investors.

Rules for direct selling

- Grievance Redressal Officer:** Every direct selling entity to establish an adequate grievance redressal mechanism.
 - Grievance redressal officer to acknowledge the receipt of any consumer complaint **within forty-eight working hours** of receipt of such complaint and redresses the complaint normally within a period of one month.
- Nodal Officer:** Every direct selling entity shall appoint a nodal officer who shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Act.
- Filing complaints:** Every direct selling entity shall establish a mechanism for filing of complaints by consumers through its offices or branches or direct sellers.
- Advertisements:** Every direct selling entity shall ensure that the advertisements for marketing of goods or services are consistent with the actual characteristics, access and usage conditions of such goods or services.
- Fake reviews:** No direct selling entity shall, directly or indirectly, falsely represent itself as a consumer and post reviews about its goods or services or misrepresent the quality or features of any of its goods or services.

- Liability of the product:** A direct selling entity which explicitly or implicitly vouches for the authenticity of the goods or services sold, or guarantees that such goods or services are authentic, shall bear the liability in any action related to the authenticity of such goods or services.
- Monitoring:** Notwithstanding the distribution system adopted by it, a direct selling entity shall monitor the practices adopted by its direct sellers and ensure compliance with these rules by means of legally binding contract with such direct sellers.
- Seller identification:** Every direct selling entity shall maintain a record of relevant information allowing for the identification of all direct sellers who have been delisted by the direct selling entity and such list shall be publicly shared on its website.

Digitalisation of Agricultural Sector: Steps by Government

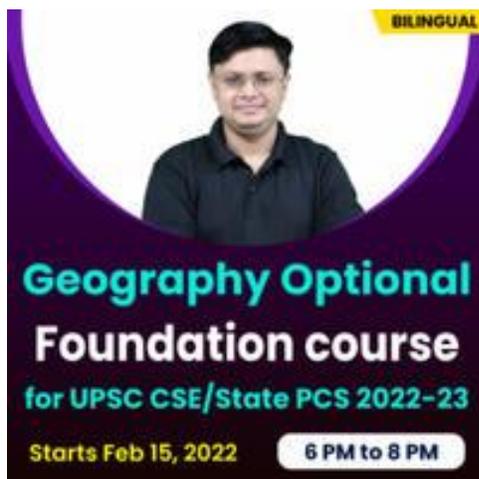
Context

- Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in a written reply has informed the House about the various initiatives/steps to enable digitalisation of agricultural sector in the country and to promote agri-tech business.

Government steps

- Government has finalized an India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA) framework which would lay down the architecture for the federated farmers' database.
 - The IDEA would serve as a foundation to build innovative agri-focused solutions leveraging emerging technologies to contribute effectively in creating a better Ecosystem for Agriculture in India.
- Under National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGP-A), funds are released to the State(s)/UT(s) for project involving use of modern technologies viz. Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Robotics, Drones, Data Analytics, Block Chain etc.
- Government of India has launched National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Scheme with the objective of creating online transparent competitive bidding system to facilitate farmers with remunerative prices for their produce. Also, 1000 mandis of 18 States and 3 UTs have been integrated with e-NAM platform till now.

- To make provisions of subsidy for farm machinery more transparent Government has developed Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) portal, Centralized Farm Machinery Performance Testing Portal and FARMS Mobile App.
- A Central Sector Scheme of financing facility under 'Agriculture Infrastructure Fund' for investment in digital Connectivity and optic fibre infrastructure is an eligible activity for the projects covered under the scheme.
- Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal (ICAR-CIAE) under Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed Krishi Yantra App to augment research, operations and technology dissemination process in the field of agricultural engineering.
- Besides, ICAR-CIAE has also developed the following Mobile Apps:
 - 'Farm mech' App: The App is related to decision support for selection of suitable farm machineries for five major crops of Tamil Nadu. It also has dynamic Networking of 2250 Custom hiring service operators in Android platform.
 - 'Farm Safety': Provides information about Safety Guidelines and Safety Gadgets to avoid accidents while using different type of agricultural machinery.
 - Water Balance Simulation Model for Roof Water Harvesting (Mobile App): It is helpful to decision makers to make recommendations for design requirements where roof water harvesting system adoption may lead to water saving and water security.



Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture

Context

- Recently, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has informed the House about the gender-based components of the various schemes implemented by the Government.

Key schemes

- Schemes like **National Food Security Mission, National Mission on Oilseed & Oil Palm, National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture**, among others, provides for at least 30% expenditure should be incurred on women farmers.
- The **Central Institute for Women in Agriculture (ICAR-CIWA)**, Bhubaneswar functioning under ICAR is mandated to undertake research on gender issues in agriculture and allied fields. 100% budget of this institute is allocated to conduct research on gender specific issues in agriculture and allied areas.
 - CIWA is functioning through its 13 All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP) centres spread across 12 States in the country.
- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)**, a sub-component of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) aims to empower women by making systematic investments to enhance their participation in agriculture-based livelihoods.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW) under Central Sector Scheme of '**Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)**' has made special provisions to empower women farmers such as including women farmers/women SHGs, as members to make FPOs more effective and inclusive; and making provision to prefer women farmers' as its shareholders.
- Under **DAY-NRLM**, women owned Producers Enterprises are being promoted to provide better market access to their farm produce through aggregation and value addition.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is promoting FPOs under its dedicated funds viz. **PRODUCE Fund** and **Producers Organizations Development Fund (PODF)** towards collectivization of farmers for enhancing income by way of providing better market accessibility for their farm produce.
 - Women are an integral part of FPOs and therefore, farmer members both men & women are mobilized during its formation stage through awareness creation.

- NABARD has promoted 5073 FPOs under PRODUCE Fund and PODF, out of which 178 FPOs are exclusive women FPOs comprising of 0.74 lakh shareholder women members.
- Various activities have been undertaken by these women FPOs in the areas of animal husbandry, poultry, seed, mushroom, spices, millets, beekeeping, etc.

Impact Study of Soil Health Card Scheme

Context

- National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad conducted an impact study of Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme.
- **Major Findings:** The findings are overall positive and shows a healthy sign of moving towards balanced use of fertilizers. Overall, paddy farmers reduced-
 - Use of urea by 9%,
 - Use of Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP)/ Single Super Phosphate (SSP) by 7%,
 - Increased use of Potassium by 20%.

Soil Health Card Scheme

- **About:** Soil Health Card Scheme aims to provide farmers status of soil nutrients of their agricultural landholding.
 - Under Soil Health Card (SHC) Scheme, it also provides suggestions to the farmers on the dosage of fertilizers and the application of soil amendments that are needed to maintain soil health in the long run.
- **Periodic Analysis of Soil Health:** Under Soil Health Card (SHC) Scheme, State governments provides the analysis of soil composition once in every three years so that remedial steps can be taken to improve soil nutrients.
 - Soil samples are taken from a grid of 2.5 ha in the irrigated area and 10 ha in the rain-fed area with the help of GPS tools and revenue maps.
- **Parent Ministry:** Soil Health Card Scheme is being promoted by the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
- **Coverage:** Soil Health Card Scheme has been implemented in all parts of the country including Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)

- **About:** MANAGE was established as the National Centre for Management of Agricultural Extension at Hyderabad, by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
 - National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) was established as an autonomous institute by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare in 1987.
 - MANAGE is the Indian response to challenges of agricultural extension in a rapidly growing and diverse agriculture sector.
- **National Institute Status:** It was upgraded to the status of National Institute in 1992 and re-christened to its present name i.e. MANAGE.

Key Mandate

- Developing linkages between prominent state, regional, national and international institutions concerned with agricultural extension management
- Gaining insight into agricultural extension management systems and policies
- Forging collaborative linkages with national and international institutions for sharing faculty resource
- Developing and promoting application of modern management tools for improving the effectiveness of agricultural extension organizations
- Organizing need-based training for senior and middle level agricultural extension functionaries
- Conducting problem-oriented studies on agricultural extension management
- Serving as an international documentation center for collecting, storing, processing and disseminating information on subjects related to agricultural management.

India Loses WTO Dispute over Sugar Subsidies

Context

- Recently, a World Trade Organisation (WTO) panel has ruled **against India's sugar export subsidy** and domestic support to sugarcane growers.

Key points

- **Australia, Brazil and Guatemala** had challenged some of India's policy measures in the sugar sector at the WTO dispute panel in 2019.
- The countries complained that domestic support provided by India to sugarcane producers was in **excess of the limit allowed** by the WTO and India provides prohibited export subsidies to sugar mills.

- The panel ruled that India has **violated international trade** rules as it offered excessive subsidies for the production and export of sugar and sugarcane.
- However, India has said that it will appeal against the verdict.

Violation of Agreement of Agriculture

- The WTO panel has found that India provided non-exempt product-specific domestic support to sugarcane producers in **excess of the permitted level of 10 per cent** of the total value of sugarcane production.
- The panel has asked the Indian Government to **withdraw the subsidies within 120 days**.
- According to the panel, India has provided subsidies contingent upon export performance, which are inconsistent with the SCM (**Subsidies and Countervailing Measures**) Agreement.
 - The Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (“SCM Agreement”) addresses two separate but closely related topics: multilateral disciplines regulating the provision of subsidies, and the use of countervailing measures to offset injury caused by subsidized imports.

Impact

- The commerce department has said that there will be **no impact of the panel’s findings** on any of India’s existing and ongoing policy measures in the sugar sector.
- India — the world’s largest sugar producer after Brazil — has already pledged to **refrain from subsidizing sugar** exports this year due to high global prices. So, there is **no export subsidy for sugar as of now**.
- For the current 2021-22 marketing year, India dropped an export subsidy that was in place for the last three years. These subsidies helped Indian mills to **export a record 7.2 million tonnes** of sugar in the 2020/21 season.
- Indian sugar mills are already contracted to export 3.5 million tonnes of sugar this year and could ultimately export more than 6 million tonnes

What next?

- The panel report shall be adopted by the WTO’s Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) within **20 to 60 days of circulation**, unless the DSB decides by consensus not to adopt it or either party notifies its decision to appeal.
- **India can appeal** the ruling at any point in the next 60 days, a move that would act like a veto because the WTO’s appellate body is not functioning.

Legal Entity Identifier

Context

- RBI has recently said that from October next year, companies will have to quote the legal entity identifier (LEI) number so as to undertaking **cross-border transactions** of Rs 50 crore or more.

What is LEI?

- The Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) is a **20-character alpha-numeric code** used to uniquely identify parties to financial transactions worldwide.
- The Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) is a reference code — like a bar code — used across markets and jurisdictions to uniquely **identify a legally distinct entity** that engages in a financial transaction.
- The LEI is designed to be a **linchpin for financial data** — the first global and unique entity identifier enabling risk managers and regulators to identify parties to financial transactions instantly and precisely.

Why LEI needed?

- When **Lehman Brothers collapsed** in September 2008, regulators and private-sector firms were unable to assess quickly and fully the extent of market participants’ exposure to Lehman and how the vast network of market participants was connected.
- The financial crisis underscored the **need for a global system** to identify financial connections, so regulators and private sector firms could better understand the true nature of risk exposures across the financial system.
- The establishment of the global LEI system is a significant achievement that responds to these vulnerabilities and provides **meaningful, long-term benefits** for the public and private sectors.

LEI purpose

- To improve the **quality and accuracy** of financial data reporting systems for better risk management.
- To create a **global reference data system** that uniquely identifies every legal entity in any jurisdiction that is party to a financial transaction.

LEI can be obtained from?

- Any of the **Local Operating Units (LOUs)** accredited by the Global Legal Entity Identifier Foundation (GLEIF), the body tasked to support the implementation and use of LEI.
- In India, LEI can be obtained from **Legal Entity Identifier India Ltd. (LEIL)**, which is also recognised as an issuer of LEI by the Reserve Bank.

Which transactions should include LEI information?

- All single payment transactions of **₹50 crore and above undertaken** by entities (non-individuals) should include remitter and beneficiary LEI information.
- It is applicable to transactions undertaken through the **NEFT and RTGS payment systems**.
- In case of RTGS, both customer payment and inter-bank transactions, meeting the above criterion, should include LEI information.

Is LEI required for Central Government or State Governments and/or their departments?

- It is **not necessary for Governments** or their Departments / Ministries to obtain LEI or mention LEI number for payment transactions in NEFT and RTGS.
- However, **Corporations / Undertakings**, including those fully owned by the Government, shall need to obtain LEI.

Is LEI required for individual customer transactions?

- No, **LEI is not required for customer transactions** where both remitter and beneficiary are individuals.

Localization of SDGs through PRI report

Context

- Recently, Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has released Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Panchayati Raj Institutions report which will serve as plan for action towards achieving the SDGs.

Background

- India is a signatory of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030.
- The **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)** scheme mandates to capacitate elected representatives for good governance through attainment of SDGs through participatory local planning at Gram Panchayat level.
- In May 2021, an **Expert Group** was constituted by MoPR to provide policy guidance to the Ministry on Localization of SDGs at the Panchayat level.
- The Expert Group after thorough deliberations submitted a detailed report in October 2021 with recommendations on the strategies and initiatives to be taken **for localization of the SDGs at the Grassroot level** engaging Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and all relevant stakeholders in rural India.

Key points

- The minister has launched **GPDP Monitoring Dashboard** on monitoring the progress of GPDP and Training Management Portal.
- Report on "Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Panchayati Raj Institutions" will serve as a **roadmap for taking the benefits of development** to the last person in the society.
- **Enhanced level of knowledge** and proper planning will pave the way for overall progress and end poverty in rural areas.

Suggestions

- He has exhorted **32 lakh elected representatives** of Panchayati Raj Institutions to consider achieving the SDGs as a challenge and start working in a focussed and concerted manner at grassroots level.
- A lot can be achieved through effective convergence with MGNREGA works in a well-planned and well-coordinated manner.
- The minister expressed confidence that if the elected representatives and functionaries of the Panchayats resolve to set-up **digital libraries in all Panchayats**, alike Panchayat Libraries in various Gram Panchayats across the State of Karnataka, it can also become a reality and it requires simply a firm resolve.
- Odanthurai Gram Panchayat Tamil Nadu became **self-sufficient in electricity generation**.
- If other Gram Panchayats are determined, they can also become self-sufficient in energy production or other areas.
- In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, all concerned Departments need to make concerted efforts and start working on wide ranging issues and strategies which require a **whole-of-government approach**.
- A whole of government approach is an essential and important element in bringing all stakeholders on-board in order to achieve SDGs through active involvement of the community at grassroots level.

'One Commodity One Exchange' Policy

Context

- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has recently proposed a 'one commodity one exchange' policy to **reduce fragmentation of liquidity** and help every stock exchange develop an exclusive set of un-fragmented liquid contracts.

Key points

- In a consultation paper, SEBI said that it has prepared a concept note on developing exchange specific unique set of commodities for trading in commodity derivatives segment and reducing fragmentation in commodity derivatives markets.
- It has proposed that the concept should only be applicable for **narrow agri-commodities**.
- The regulator proposed that derivative contracts on new commodities would be traded only on a single stock exchange for a period of **3-5 years** during which the exchange would be allowed to launch all kind of permissible products -- futures, futures on options and options on goods, among others.

Agri commodities

- SEBI has also advocated that it may **not be appropriate** to segregate non-agri commodities into 'narrow' and 'broad' for the purpose of adopting the 'One Commodity One Exchange' policy, as in the case of agri commodities, based on annual physical market size.
- The regulator has suggested that the 'One Commodity One Exchange' **should not be allowed** in those non-agricultural commodities where India is not a major producer.
- The agricultural commodities have been classified into **three categories** -- sensitive, broad and narrow.

Exclusivity status

- The 'exclusivity' status of a commodity will last for a period of **around of 3-5 years** from the date of Sebi's approval.
- However, the exchange can discontinue the exclusivity status before this period.
- The exchange has to take a call on whether they want to remove the exclusivity from the product only after it becomes **continuously liquid for 12 months**.

Objectives

- The main objectives of developing the concept is to **help every exchange** to develop an exclusive set of un-fragmented liquid contracts on specific commodities.
- Moreover, the concept will ensure that the concerned exchange develops all kinds of derivative contracts on a specific commodity exclusively and bring about comprehensive development and **deepening of the Indian commodity derivatives markets**.

- The concept will eventually help India to be in a position so as to be able to **influence the global benchmark** pricing of such commodities.
- A single exchange launching contracts on a **specific commodity** may have bigger impact locally as well as internationally. This may be more efficient and low cost in the long run.

RBI brings NBFC under PCA

Context

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently decided to bring Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) under the ambit of the **Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)** framework.

Key points

- The PCA framework for NBFCs will come into effect **from October 1, 2022**, based on the financial position of NBFCs on or after March 31, 2022.
- **Applicability:** It will be applicable for all deposit-taking NBFCs — excluding government NBFCs, primary dealers and housing finance companies — and other non-deposit taking NBFCs in the middle, upper and top layers.
 - PCA framework is **already available for banks**.
- The PCA framework **does not preclude the Reserve Bank from taking any other action** as it deems fit at any time in addition to the corrective actions prescribed in the framework.

Why needed?

- NBFCs have been **growing in size and have substantial inter-connectedness** with other segments of the financial system. So, a PCA framework for NBFCs would strengthen the supervisory tools applicable to NBFCs.
- Moreover, four big finance firms — IL&FS, DHFL, SREI and Reliance Capital — which collected public funds through fixed deposits and non-convertible debentures **collapsed in the last three years** despite the tight monitoring in the financial sector.
- They collectively owe **over Rs 1 lakh crore** to investors.
- It has necessitated the current RBI move to bring NBFCs under the PCA framework.

Objectives

- To **enable supervisory intervention** at appropriate time and so that the supervised entity could initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner, so as to restore its financial health.
- The PCA framework is also intended to act as a tool for **effective market discipline**.

PCA framework for NBFCs: Risk Thresholds

There are three risk thresholds in the PCA framework for NBFCs.

| Thresholds | Parameters | Implications |
|-------------|---|--|
| Threshold 1 | If the net non-performing assets is between 6-9%. If the capital adequacy ratio falls 300 basis points from the current level of 15-12%. | NBFCs will be restricted on dividend distribution. Promoters will be asked to infuse capital and reduce leverage. The RBI will also restrict issuance of guarantees or taking other contingent liabilities on behalf of group companies, in case of core investment companies. |
| Threshold 2 | If the net non-performing assets is between 9-12% If the capital adequacy ratio falls 300-600 bps from 12-9%. | NBFC will be prohibited from opening branches |
| Threshold 3 | If the net non-performing assets is more than 12%. If the capital adequacy ratio falls by 600 bps from 9%. | All capital expenditure will be stopped, other than for technological upgradation. |

Regulate Algo-trading, says SEBI

Context

- Recently, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed that all orders emanating from **application programming interface (API)** of stockbrokers should be treated as algorithmic trading, commonly known as algo.

What is algo trading?

- Algorithm trading is a system of trading which **facilitates transaction decision making** in the financial markets using advanced mathematical calculations.
- In algorithm trading, also known as '**Black-box trading**', the computer program uses a set of instructions that helps make trading decisions and earns profits at a pace that would be difficult for a human trader to achieve.
- Algo trading, while giving profit opportunities for traders, makes markets **more liquid and trading more systematic** by eliminating the effect of human emotions on trading.

What is the role of API?

- Many stock brokers in India provides Application Programming Interface (API) access to their clients which **establishes an online connection** between a data provider (stock broker) and an end-user (client).
- API access permits the investors to use a **third-party application** that help them analyse market data or back-test a trading or investment strategy.
- These APIs are being used by the investors for **automating their trades**.

SEBI Proposal

- Regulation:** SEBI said that there is a need to create a regulatory framework for algo trading.
- API:** All orders emanating from an API should be treated as an algo order and be subject to control by stock broker
- Algo ID:** The APIs to carry out algo trading should be tagged with the unique algo ID provided by the stock exchange granting approval for the algo.
- Approval:** Stock broker needs to take approval of all algos from the exchange. Each algo strategy, whether used by broker or client, has to be approved by exchange.
- System development:** Stock exchanges have to develop a system to ensure that only those algos which are approved by the exchange and having unique algo ID provided by the Exchange are being deployed.



- **Two factor authentication:** It should be built in every such system which provides access to an investor for any API/algo trade.

Algo trading advantages

- **Rule-based decision making:** It ensures that all trades follow a set of rules. It is important because traders and investors are frequently influenced by feelings and emotions while taking trade decisions.
- **Reduce market impact:** A trading algorithm can purchase shares and check immediately to see if the transaction has influenced the market price. It lowers the transaction costs and make automated checks on several market situations simultaneously.
- **Minimize human fallacy:** Since algorithmic trading works based on predefined instructions, it lowers the possibility of human traders making mistakes.

Algo trading disadvantages

- **Monitoring:** Even though the decisions are rule-based, automated trading systems do need constant supervision. Incidents of irregularities may be quickly detected and handled if the system is monitored.

Rupee Depreciation in 2021

Context

- Indian rupee is expected to end 2021 as **Asia's worst-performing currency** due to outflow of foreign currency from the Indian market.
- Among the most regional markets, **global funds pulled \$4 billion of capital** out of the India's stock market, thus leading to the decline of 2.2% in the Indian rupee in this quarter.

Reasons of outflow of Foreign Currency

- **Lowering of outlook:** Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Nomura Holdings Inc. have recently lowered their outlook for equities due to lofty valuations.
- **Trade deficit:** India is experiencing high current account deficit thus leading to record-high trade deficit.
- **Policy divergence:** RBI's policy divergence with the Federal Reserve have also led to outflow of foreign reserve from India.

What is depreciation of rupee?

- Currency depreciation, in our case rupee, means that the **domestic currency is losing** its value against foreign currencies.
- Just like a commodity, a currency is subject to **demand and supply** fluctuations (in a floating exchange rate system).

- As **US Dollar (USD) is the most traded currency** in the world, most currencies are benchmarked against USD, including Indian rupee.
- For **example**, if rupee has depreciated from 70 to 75, it means that earlier when we paid Rs. 70 to buy a product of worth 1 USD, now we are paying Rs. 75 to buy the same product. However, in case of exports, it means we will get Rs. 75 in case of Rs. 70 for selling a product of worth 1 USD.

Is depreciation of rupee bad?

- Depreciation in rupee is a **double-edged sword**.
- A weaker currency, under normal circumstances, is expected to boost exports, thus leading to **increase in foreign currency** in the country.
- However, it also poses **risk of inflation** (due to higher imports) and may make it difficult for the central bank to maintain low interest rates for longer period.
- So, for an export driven country like China, depreciation of rupee is a good thing. For India, however, depreciation is not good as we are an import-dependent country, and in such cases, depreciation leads to outflow of foreign currency from India.

Way forward

- A likely **reversal in foreign inflows** can be seen in the coming quarter on account of share sales in companies including Life Insurance Corp. of India - India's **biggest initial public offer**.

SEBI Bans Derivative Trade in Agricultural Commodities

Context

- Recently, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) banned the derivative trade of **seven agriculture commodities** on the future's platform of National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) **for one year** with immediate effect.

Key points

- **Banned commodities:** chana, wheat, paddy (non-basmati), soyabean and its derivatives, mustard seed and its derivatives, crude palm oil and moong.
- SEBI had **earlier banned chana and mustard** seed derivative trade on August 16 and October 8 respectively.

Why this decision?

- Speculators:
 - It is believed that speculators are playing a critical role in **shooting up the prices**, which needed to be discouraged to curb inflation and support growth in the post-pandemic situation.
- Inflation:
 - **Rise in prices of essential commodities** is fuelling inflation.
 - According to the recently released monetary policy statement by RBI, CPI inflation went up in October to 4.5% from 4.3% in September. Moreover, RBI has projected CPI inflation at 5.3% for FY22.
 - The persistence of **high core inflation** since June 2020 has been an area of policy concern as input cost pressures could rapidly be transmitted to retail inflation as demand strengthens.
 - Also, it is expected that **headline inflation** will peak in Q4 of 2021-22 and soften thereafter.

Impact of this decision

- India is the **world's biggest importer** of vegetable oil and oil importers and traders use Indian exchanges to hedge their risk
- This measure will make it **difficult for edible oil importers** and traders to transact business.
- By **banning future's trade**, the government is trying to insulate any price shock the market might feel in the days to come in case the production is not up to par.

Issues

- While chana (Bengal Gram) has already been removed from three months ago, **inclusion of rabi crops** like wheat, mustard and moong has raised various questions.
- Some traders believe that this decision **shows nervousness in the policy circles** about rabi output due to fertilizer shortage that many parts faced in the country.
- Most traders felt this move was regressive and took the fledgling trade in commodities markets years back.

About NCDEX

- NCDEX is a trading platform, where buyers and sellers could put commodities on sales which were to be **closed at a "Future's" date**.
- In case either the buyer or seller refused to honour these contracts, they could **exit the same** by paying a small fee.

- Future's contracts give an **accurate information about price trends** for the commodities trade and acted as a guide for hedging.

What are derivatives?

- A derivative is a contract **between two parties**, where the contract derives its value/price from an underlying asset.
- The most common **types of derivatives** are forwards, futures, options, and swaps.
- **Underlying assets** could include commodities, stocks, bonds, interest rates, and currencies.
- People enter into derivative contracts to earn a **large number of profits** by contemplating the underlying asset's value in the future.

What is derivative trading?

- In derivatives trading, **traders trade in contracts** as compared to trading in physical assets.
- This type of trading takes place when traders speculate on the future price of an asset through buying or selling of derivative contracts to **maximise profit**.
- Traders also use derivatives for **hedging to minimise risk** against an existing position.

State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2021-22

Context

- Recently, RBI has released its annual publication titled 'State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2021-22' and stated that states debt-to-GDP ratio worryingly higher than FY23 target.

Key findings

- The combined debt-to-GDP ratio of states is expected to **remain at 31%** by end-March 2022 which is worryingly higher than the target of 20%, which is to be achieved by 2022-23.
- The report also stated that as the impact of the second COVID-19 wave wanes, state governments need to take credible steps to address debt sustainability concerns.
- The report also noted that the budgeted consolidated gross fiscal deficit (GFD) of 3.7 per cent of GDP for states for the year 2021-22 is **lower than the 4 per cent** level as recommended by the FC-XV (15th Finance Commission), which reflect the state governments' intent towards fiscal consolidation.
 - **15th Finance Commission**, in view of the pandemic induced slowdown, projected the debt-GDP ratio to peak at 33.3 per cent in 2022-23 (in view of the higher deficits in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23), and gradually decline thereafter to reach 32.5 per cent by 2025-26.

- To partially offset the revenue shortfall, **states hiked their duties on petrol**, diesel and to make room for higher expenditure on healthcare and social services.

Reforms in power sector

- In the medium term, improvements in the fiscal position of state governments will hinge upon the following reforms in the power sector as recommended by FC-XV and specified by the Centre.
 - Creating transparent and hassle-free provision of **power subsidy to farmers**;
 - Preventing leakages; and
 - Improving the **health of the power distribution** companies (DISCOMs) by alleviating their liquidity stress in a sustainable manner.
 - Timely payments of state dues** to DISCOMs and, in turn, by them to Generation Companies (GENCOS) hold the key to the sector's financial health.
- The report acknowledged that undertaking power sector reforms will not only facilitate additional borrowings of 0.25 per cent of GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) by the states but also **reduce their contingent liabilities** due to improvement in financial health of the DISCOMs.
- The report has also highlighted that the impact of the second wave on state finances is likely to be **less severe** than the first wave due to less stringent and localised restrictions imposed this time as opposed to the nationwide lockdown during the first wave of COVID-19.

Tariff guidelines for PPP projects in Major Ports

Context

- Recently, Ministry of Shipping has announced the Tariff Guidelines, 2021 for PPP projects in **Major Ports** to make the major ports more competitive.

Key points

- The need for new guidelines arose consequent upon the new **Major Port Authority Act, 2021** coming into force from November 2021.

- In the new Act, the provision of the erstwhile **Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP)** stands abolished.
- The Guidelines **allow the concessionaires** at Major Ports to set tariffs as per market dynamics.
- Currently, Major Port's PPP concessionaires handle around **50% of the total traffic** handled by all the Major Ports in India.
- PPP concessionaires at Major Ports were constrained to operate under the stipulations of these guidelines (by TAMP) whereas private operators/PPP concessionaires at non-major ports were free to charge tariff as per market conditions.

Key guidelines

- These new guidelines will be **applicable for future PPP projects** including the projects which are currently under the bidding stage.
- Government mandated concessions in tariff for **trans-shipment and coastal shipping** shall continue to apply to all PPP future Concessionaires.
- In fact, the government has gone a step further and made further concessions to promote trans-shipment and coastal shipping. The royalty payable for trans-shipment cargo will now be **1.0 times** (from 1.5 times earlier) the normal container.
- Similarly, for the coastal cargo, the concessionaire has to pay **only 40% of the royalty** payable for foreign cargo (from 60% earlier) in accordance with coastal concession policy of the government.
- For transparency, the tariffs so fixed are to be hosted on the website of the concessionaire.

Benefits of the guidelines

- The biggest benefit of transition to market linked tariff is that a **level playing field** will be provided to the PPP concessionaires at Major Ports to compete with private ports.
- These guidelines will usher in an **era of market economy** for the sector and go a long way in making the Major Ports competitive.
- Moreover, the market linked tariff guidelines will also be a step towards **good governance**.

Social Issues

DIKSHA for Children with Disabilities

Context

- DIKSHA complies with World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 level AA.
- This enables people with visual impairments to access the website using assistive technologies, such as screen readers.

Key Steps taken by Government

- Special e-content for visually and hearing impaired developed on Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY) and in sign language on NIOS website/ YouTube.
- In all 767 textbooks based ISL videos have been recorded. Out of these 510 textbooks based on ISL videos are uploaded on DIKSHA.
- The 10,000 words ISL dictionary has been uploaded on DIKSHA.
- 3,142 audio books chapters are also uploaded on DIKSHA.

DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing)- Key Points

- **About:** DIKSHA serves as the National Teacher Platform, to be used by teachers and students across the nation to provide school education through distance mode.
 - **DIKSHA Full form:** DIKSHA stands for Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing.
- **Key Objective:** DIKSHA is the platform for providing quality e-content for school education in States/UTs and QR coded Energized Textbooks for all grades (**one nation, one digital platform**).
- **Implementing Ministry:** DIKSHA Platform was launched and being implemented by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) and Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD).
- **Accessibility:** DIKSHA Portal can be accessed by Teachers and Students alike. DIKSHA Portal is accessible in more than eighteen languages, ensuring easy access of educational content to students.

DIKSHA Portal: Key Features

- **QR code-based access:** NCERT books are available in QR code which can be downloaded by scanning it. After scanning the QR code, the DIKSHA portal will also provide suggestions and topics for learning.
- **Location-Based Knowledge:** DIKSHA Portal also shows the courses that are going on in your region after you provide your location on the DIKSHA Portal.
- **Class-Based Study Materials:** DIKSHA portal provides class-based material to a student. A student has to click on the needed study material and enter the SUBMIT button.

National Helpline Against Atrocities on SCs/STs

Context

- Recently, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment launched a National Helpline Against Atrocities (NHAA).
- The National Helpline Against Atrocities on SCs/STs is now available round the clock on toll-free number "14566" across the country in Hindi, English and regional language of the State/UTs.

Basic details about the Help line

- Toll free service.
- It can be accessed by making a voice call /VOIP on "14566" either from mobile or land line number of any Telecom Operator across the country.
- Availability of services: Round the clock
- Services would be available in Hindi, English and regional language of the State/UTs
- Mobile application is also available.

Features of the Helpline

- **Grievance Redressal:** Docket number shall be given for each complaint received from Victim/Complainant/NGOs regarding non-compliance of the PCR Act, 1955 and the POA Act, 1989.
- **Tracking system:** Status of the Grievance can be tracked by complainant/NGOs Online.
- **Auto compliance of the Acts:** Every provision of the Acts related to victim shall be monitored and compliance shall be ensured by triggering communication/ reminders with State/UT implementing authorities in the form of sending messages / E-mails.

- **Generation of awareness:** Any inquiry shall be replied by IVR or operators in Hindi, English and Regional languages.
- **Dashboard for the States/UTs:** KPIs of States/UTs will also be made available on the Dashboard itself on their performance towards the vision (stipulates reducing atrocity cases also) of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme which is meant for implementing the PCR Act, 1955 and the POA Act, 1989
- **Feedback system is available**
- **Concept of Single Point of contact has been adopted.**

Key Significance

- National Helpline for SCs/STs will ensure proper implementation of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) [PoA] Act, 1989.
 - The PoA Act was enacted with a prime objective view of preventing atrocities on members of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- National Helpline number can be accessed by making a voice call /VOIP either from a mobile or land line number of any Telecom Operator across the country.
- **National Helpline for SCs/STs** will generate informed awareness about the various provisions of the Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act, 1989 and the Protection of Civil Right (PCR) Act, 1955.
 - These legislations are aimed at ending discrimination and provide protection to all.
- It will also ensure that every complaint is registered as FIRs, relief is provided, all registered complaints are investigated and all chargesheets filed are prosecuted in the Courts for decision.

Raising Legal Age of Marriage for Women

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet took the decision to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years. If implemented, it will bring the age of marriage for both men and women at par.

Legal Age of Marriage for Women- Rationale

- **Legal Issue:** Laws provide minimum age of marriage to essentially outlaw child marriages and prevent the abuse of minors.

- **Personal Laws:** Personal laws of various religions that deal with marriage have their own standards, often reflecting custom.
 - **For Hindus, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:** It sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
 - In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.
 - **The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:** prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men, respectively.

Need for Raising Legal Age of Marriage for Women

- **Foe Ensuring gender-neutrality:** Different age limit of marriage for male and female goes against achieving a gender-neutral society.
- **Early marriage and Nutritional Impacts:**
 - An early age of marriage, and consequent early pregnancies impacts nutritional levels of mothers and their children, and their overall health and mental wellbeing.
 - It also has an impact on Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate. And
- **Women Empowerment:** Affects the empowerment of women who are cut off from access to education and livelihood after an early marriage.
- **Help in eliminating Child Marriage:** National Family Health Survey (NFHS) revealed that child marriage has come down marginally from 27% in 2015-16 to 23% in 2019-20 in the country.

Jaya Jaitly Committee Recommendation

- It recommended the age of marriage to be increased to 21 years, on the basis of feedback they received from young adults from 16 universities across the country.
 - Over 15 NGOs were also engaged to reach out to young adults in far-flung areas and marginalised communities.
- The committee also asked the government to look into increasing access to schools and colleges for girls, including their transportation to these institutes from far-flung areas.
- Skill and business training has also been recommended, as has sex education in schools.
- It also recommended that an awareness campaign should be undertaken on a massive scale on the increase in age of marriage, and to encourage social acceptance of the new legislation.

State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India Report

Context

- Recently, the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) released the report on the State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India.

Key Findings

- About Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** FLN refers to basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills.
 - Falling behind in the Foundational Learning years which encompass of pre-school and elementary education makes children more vulnerable as it negatively impacts their learning outcomes.
- Mandate:** State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India Report highlights the importance of early education years in the overall development of a child.
 - Report on State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India** further highlights the role of well-planned early interventions like the **National Education Policy (2020)** and the **NIPUN Bharat guidelines**, leading to long-term improved learning outcomes.
- Preparing Authority:** State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India report was prepared by the Institute for Competitiveness.
- Key Findings:** For comparing alike, the report has provided ranking of States and UTs in four Category- Small States, Large States, Union Territories and North-Eastern States.
 - Performance among Large States:** West Bengal bagged top position with a score of 58.95, while Bihar finished at bottom with a score of 37.
 - Performance among Small States:** Kerala finished on top with 68, while Jharkhand languished at the bottom with a score of 45.
 - Performance among UTs:** Lakshadweep (52.69) was the top scoring UT while Ladakh ranked at the bottom in the list of UTs.
 - Performance among North-Eastern States:** Mizoram (51.64) was the top performer while Arunachal Pradesh came last in the North East State Category.

State of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in India- Key Significance

- Access to quality early childhood education is a fundamental right for all children:** The earliest years of a child's life needs to be understood in the backdrop of the socio-economic, psychological, and technological hindrances they face.
 - Lack of access to quality early childhood education** further affects the potential of a child in numerous ways.
- Positive Externalities:** Education leads to positive externalities and the quality of Education imparted is important especially during the formative years.
 - The present attainments in literacy and numeracy and the variations among states should be the focus for remedial action.

Index on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy- Key Points

- About:** The Index on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy is the first step in this direction, establishing an understanding of the overall state of Foundational Learning across children aged below ten years in Indian States and Union territories.
- Key Parameters:** The Index includes five pillars comprising of 41 indicators. The five pillars are-
 - Educational Infrastructure,
 - Access to Education,
 - Basic Health,
 - Learning Outcomes and
 - Governance.

Key Suggestions

- Learning From Each other:** Some states may serve as role models for others in certain aspects, but they too need to learn from other states while addressing their challenges.
 - Ex- Kerala has the best performance in the small state but can learn from states such as Andhra Pradesh (38.50), which outperforms Kerala (36.55) with respect to access to education.
- Poor Performance in 'governance' Pillar:** States have performed particularly worse in the Governance pillar.
 - Over half of the states have a score that is below the national average, i.e., 28.05, the lowest across all pillars.
 - These pillar-wise analyses help states assess the state of the budgetary measures and steps needed to improve the state of education and identify existing gaps that obstruct their growth.

- **Focus on 'Access to Education':** The issue of Access to Education is one that demands prompt action on the part of the States.
 - The performance of Large States such as Rajasthan (25.67), Gujarat (22.28), and Bihar (18.23) is noticeably below average.
 - Whereas the North-eastern states have the highest scores as a result of their superior performance.

Conclusion

- Focus on the foundational learning is the need of the hour to ensure universal access to quality levels of education for all children in pre-primary and primary classes in India.

Schemes for Transgenders

Context

- Recently, the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment in a written reply in Rajya Sabha gave information about various government **Schemes for Transgenders**.
- Few important government Schemes and Initiatives for Transgenders are discussed below.

SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise

- **About:** SMILE scheme focuses on rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counseling, basic documentation, education, skill development, economic linkages etc.
- **Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons:** It is a sub-scheme under SMILE Scheme.
 - The focus of the sub-scheme is on rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities and intervention, counseling, education, skill development, economic linkages to the transgender persons.
- **Implementation:** SMILE Scheme would be implemented with the support of State/UT Governments/Local Urban Bodies, Voluntary Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), institutions and others.

PM-DAKSH

- **About:** PM-DAKSH is a skill development scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 - PM-DAKSH provides Skill development training to the Transgender beneficiaries.
- **Features:** Short Term Training Program; Up-Skilling/Reskilling; Entrepreneurship Development Program, and Long-Term Training Program are conducted for transgenders under PM-DAKSH scheme.

National Council for Transgender Persons

- **About:** National Council for Transgender Persons was constituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in August, 2020.
- **Objective:** National Council for Transgender Persons was set up to advise Government on policies, programs, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons.

National Portal for Transgender Persons

- **About:** National Portal for Transgender Persons was launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in November, 2020.
- **Benefits:**
 - Any Transgender applicant can obtain Certificate of Identity and Identity Card without any physical interface with the office of issue.
 - The person who has been issued a certificate of identity are entitled to change the first name in the birth certificate and all other official documents relating to the identity of such person.
- During lockdown period in COVID pandemic a helpline was also setup to provide psychological support through trained Psychologists to Transgender Persons in distress during COVID period.

Garima Greh: Shelter Home for Transgender Persons

- **About:** Garima Greh- Shelter Home for Transgender Persons is a pilot scheme of the ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to provide shelters to transgender persons.
- **Key Objective:** The main aim of Garima Greh shelter homes is to provide safe and secure shelter to Transgender persons in need.
- **States covered:** These Garima Greh shelter homes are in States of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Odisha.
- **Funding:** Ministry has provided full financial assistance to community-based organizations (CBOs) for setting up of these Garima Greh shelter homes.
- **Benefits:** **Garima Greh** shelter homes provide basic amenities like food, shelter, medical care, recreational facilities to the Transgender persons.
 - **Garima Greh** shelter homes also conduct capacity-building and skill development programs for Transgender persons.

SOLAW Report 2021

Context

- Recently, FAO has released the State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture (SOLAW) Report 2021 to enable policymakers to assess the direction and nature of changes needed to **advance sustainable management of land and water resources**.

Key findings

Climate change

- Climate change has **increased pressure on rain-fed and irrigation production** over and above the environmental consequences of decades of unsustainable use.

Human-induced land degradation

- Human pressure on land, soils and freshwater have intensified, pushing these resources to their **production limits**.
- Grassland and shrub-covered areas** used to graze animals or as sources of fodder have declined by 191 million hectares over two decades, to 3,196 million ha in 2019, and converted to cropland.
- Population increases have meant agricultural land available per capita for crops and animal husbandry **declined by 20 per cent** between 2000 and 2017 to 0.19 ha /capita in 2017.
- Almost a third of rain-fed cropland** and nearly a half of irrigated land are subject to human-induced land degradation.

Soil salinity

- Soil salinity is estimated to take up **1.5 million ha of cropland** out of production each year.

Urban areas

- Urban areas occupied less than 0.5 per cent of the Earth's land surface in 2000.
- The rapid growth of cities had a **significant impact on land and water resources**.
- In 2018, 55 per cent of the world's population were urban dwellers.

Agricultural encroachment

- Most pressures on the world's land, soil and water resources are from agriculture. There has been an **increase in use of chemical** (non-organic) inputs; uptake of farm mechanisation; and overall impact of higher mono-cropping and grazing intensities are concentrated on a diminishing stock of agricultural land.

Addressing hunger

- By 2050, agriculture will need to produce almost 50 per cent more food**, livestock fodder and biofuel than in 2012 to satisfy global demand and keep on track to achieve "zero hunger" by 2030.
- Progress made in reducing the number of undernourished people in the early part of the 21st century **has been reversed**. The number has risen to 768 million in 2020 from 604 million in 2014.

SOLAW message to the countries

- The interconnected systems of land, soil and water are stretched to the limit.
- Current patterns of agricultural intensification are **not proving sustainable**.
- Farming systems are becoming polarized**. It means Large commercial holdings now dominate agricultural land use, while fragmentation of smallholders concentrates subsistence farming on lands susceptible to degradation and water scarcity.

SOLAW suggestions

- Land and water governance has to be **more inclusive and adaptive**.
- Integrated solutions need to be **planned at all levels** if they are to be taken to scale.
- Technical and managerial innovation can be targeted to address priorities and accelerate transformation.
- Agricultural support and investment can be redirected towards social and environmental gains derived from land and water management.

State of India's Livelihood (Soil) Report 2021

Context

- The State of India's Livelihood (SOIL) Report 2021 was released by **Access Development Services**, a national livelihoods support organisation where the report has analysed the Farmer Producer Companies of India.

About the report

- The State of India's Livelihoods (SOIL) Report is an **annual Report on policy and programmes of the government**, potential opportunities for the poor, on the role of the private sector and the civil society in livelihoods promotion.

Key points

- The report has revealed that **only 1-5%** of the Farmer Producer Organisation have received funding under various schemes of central government that were introduced in the last seven years.
- The report has only analysed FPCs as they comprise the **largest form of organisations** started in recent years.
- **FPCs are the FPOs registered** under The Companies Act, 2013.
- The number of FPOs registered as societies or cooperatives **are very small**.

What is a Producer Organisation?

- A Producer Organisation (PO) is a legal **entity formed by primary producers**, viz. farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen.
- A PO can be a producer company, a cooperative society or any other legal form which provides for **sharing of profits/benefits** among the members.

What is FPO?

- FPO is a legal entity which consist of **collectivization of producers** especially small and marginal farmers to collectively address many agricultural challenges ranging from seed purchasing to crop marketing.

Government steps

- Since 2011, the Central government has intensively promoted FPOs under the **Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC)**, **NABARD**, state governments and NGOs.
- Union Budget 2018-19 announced the launched of **"Operation Greens"** for onion, potato and tomato crops on the lines of Operation Flood with an allocation of Rs. 500 crores.
- It aims to address price fluctuation in vegetables for the benefit of farmers and consumers. It will **promote FPOs**, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
- To encourage enabling environment for aggregation of farmers into FPOs and take advantage of economies of scale, the Government announced a **100% tax deduction** for FPOs with an annual turnover of up to Rs. 100 crores.
- In 2020, **"Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organisations"** was launched to promote 10,000 FPOs in the next five years, starting 2019-20, which would help small, marginal and landless farmers to enhance their income.

- **PMFME**: Under the PMFME, the Centre aims to promote formalisation in the unorganised micro-processing food enterprises as well as support the FPOs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with the support to develop infrastructure, branding and marketing.

World Inequality Report 2022

Context

- According to the World Inequality Report 2022 recently released by Paris-based World Inequality Lab, India is **among the most unequal countries** of the world.

World Inequality Report 2022: India

- The top 10% of Indian population earns **20 times more** than the lower 50% of the population.
- While the top 10% and top 1% hold respectively 57% and 22% of total national income, the share of the **bottom 50% has gone down to 13%**.
- India stands out as a **poor and very unequal country**, with an affluent elite.

World Inequality Report 2022: World

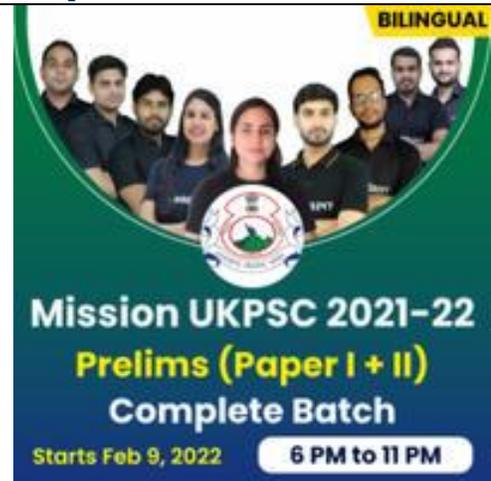
- The richest 10% of the global population currently **takes 52% of global income**, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8% of it.
- While the poorest half of the global population possesses just 2% of the total wealth, the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth.
- Though inequality has increased within most countries, it has declined between countries over the past two decades.
- MENA (Middle East and North Africa) is the **most unequal region** in the world, while **Europe** has the **lowest inequality levels**.
- The gap between the incomes of the top 10% and the bottom 50% of the people within countries has **almost doubled**.

Private wealth

- Emerging economies like China and India has experienced **faster increase in private wealth** than wealthy countries.
- China, despite being a communist country, has had the **largest increase in private wealth** in recent decades.
- In India, however, the **private wealth has increased** from 290% in 1980 to 560% in 2020.

Nation becoming richer, government becoming poorer

- In the last 40 years, countries have become richer while their governments have become poor. It means that the increase in national wealth is **largely due to private wealth**.
- The share of wealth held by **public sector is close to zero or negative** in rich countries, which signifies that all the wealth is in private hands.
- COVID-19 has only **worsened the situation** as the governments across the world has borrowed 10-20% of GDP from private sector.
- The **global billionaire wealth** increased by more than 50% between 2019 and 2021.



Environment & Biodiversity

Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Context

- Government has recently introduced the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in Lok Sabha to facilitate fast-tracking of research, patent application process and transfer of research results.

Key points

- The Bill, once passed by the Parliament, would amend the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- The said Act seeks to fulfil India's obligations under the Convention of Biological Diversity and Nagoya Protocol.
- The Bill seeks to **reduce the pressure on wild medicinal plants** by encouraging the cultivation of medicinal plants.
- The Bill proposes to **exempt AYUSH practitioners from intimating biodiversity boards** for accessing biological resources or knowledge.
- The Bill also **facilitates fast-tracking of research**, simplify the patent application process, decriminalises certain offences.
- The Bill brings **more foreign investments** in biological resources, research, patent and commercial utilisation, without compromising the national interest.
- The bill **focuses on regulating** who can access biological resources and knowledge and how access will be monitored.
- The Bill has also **clarified and strengthened the role** of state biodiversity boards.
- **Decriminalising of offences:** Violations of the law related to access to biological resources and benefit-sharing with communities, which are currently treated as criminal offences and are non-bailable, have been proposed to be made civil offences.

Why is the Biodiversity Act 2002 being amended?

- People from AYUSH medicine urged the government to **simplify, streamline and reduce the compliance burden** to provide for a conducive environment for collaborative research and investments.
- They also sought to **simplify the patent application process**, widen the scope of access and benefit-sharing with local communities.
- Ayush companies have been seeking **relaxation of the benefit-sharing provisions**.

- Case study: Divya Pharmacy founded by Swami Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna in Uttarakhand. The Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board (UBB) sent a notice to Divya Pharmacy in 2016 stating that the company was in violation of the Biodiversity Act for using biological resources from the state for its ayurvedic formulations, without intimating the board and that it was liable to pay an access and benefit-sharing fee.
 - The company filed a writ petition in the Uttarakhand high court challenging the powers of the biodiversity board to determine benefit-sharing by Indian companies.
 - The court in 2018 upheld the powers of the biodiversity board in its judgement.
 - Under the Biodiversity Act 2002, national and state biodiversity boards are required to consult the biodiversity management committees while taking any decision relating to the use of biological resources.

Concerns with the Bill

- The main focus of the bill is to **facilitate trade in biodiversity as opposed to conservation**, protection of biodiversity and knowledge of the local communities.
- The amendments to the Bill seem to be **completely contrary** to the aim and objective of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002

Depletion of Groundwater Level: Steps by Government

Context

- In order to assess the decline in water level on a long-term basis, the water level data collected by CGWB (Central Ground Water Board) during November 2020 has been compared with the decadal average (2010-2019).

Key points

- Analysis of water level data indicates **about 33% of the wells** monitored have registered decline in ground water levels in the range of 0 – 2 m.
- Decline of **more than 4.0 m has also been observed** in few pockets of Delhi, Chennai, Indore, Coimbatore, Madurai, Vijayawada, Dehradun, Jaipur, Allahabad, Ghaziabad, Kanpur, and Lucknow.

Groundwater depletion: Government steps

- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA)** in 2019: a time bound campaign with a mission mode approach intended to improve water availability including ground water conditions in the water stressed blocks of 256 districts in India.
- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain:** Theme “Catch the Rain - Where it Falls When it Falls; to cover all the blocks of all districts (rural as well as urban areas) across the country during 22nd March 2021 to 30th November 2021.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** Sustainable management of ground water resources with community participation. It is a Rs.6,000.00 crore central sector scheme, being implemented in 81 water stressed districts and 8774 Gram Panchayats of seven States viz. Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- **National Aquifer Mapping and Management program (NAQUIM):** NAQUIM envisages mapping of aquifers (water bearing formations), their characterization and development of Aquifer Management Plans to facilitate sustainable management of Ground Water Resources in the country.
- **Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Groundwater – 2020:** Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) in consultation with States/UTs has prepared this plan, which is basically a macro level plan indicating various structures for the different terrain conditions of the country including estimated cost.
- **Guidelines for states:** Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has formulated guidelines for the States to adopt measures suitable to local conditions, such as Unified Building Bye Laws (UBBL) of Delhi, 2016, Model Building Bye Laws (MBBL), 2016 and Urban and Regional Development Plan Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) Guidelines, 2014, wherein adequate focus has been given on requirement of rainwater harvesting and water conservation measures.
- **States initiatives:** ‘Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan’ in Rajasthan, ‘Jalyukt Shibir’ in Maharashtra, ‘Sujalam Sufalam Abhiyan’ in Gujarat, ‘Mission Kakatiya’ in Telangana, Neeru Chettu’ in Andhra Pradesh, Jal Jeevan Hariyali in Bihar, ‘Jal Hi Jeevan’ in Haryana among others.

- **Jal Jeevan Mission:** Ministry of Jal Shakti in partnership with States, is implementing Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) to provide potable tap water supply of prescribed quality to every rural household in the country by 2024.
- **AMRUT:** The Mission focuses on development of basic urban infrastructure in 500 AMRUT cities, such as water supply, sewerage & septage management, storm water drainage, green spaces & parks, and non-motorized urban transport.

ESG Funds: Environmental Social and Governance Funds

Context

- The asset size of ESG funds has increased to **nearly five times** over the last couple of years. Also, recently, National Stock Exchange (NSE) has launched **NSE Prime** to submit to standards of corporate governance.

About NSE Prime

- NSE Prime is a framework that allows companies to submit to standards of corporate governance that are **higher than those required** by existing regulations.
- The framework is **stricter than the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations.**
- **Key requirements** for companies to qualify for NSE Prime are
 - A minimum 40 per cent public shareholding;
 - mandatory segregation of the posts of chairman and CEO; independent directors as chairpersons of the risk management, stakeholder relationship, nomination remuneration, and audit committees.

About ESG fund

- ESG investing means **sustainable investing** or socially responsible investing.
- To select a stock for investment, the ESG fund shortlists companies that **score high on** environment, social responsibility and corporate governance, and then looks into financial factors.
- It focusses on companies that have high environment-friendly practices, ethical business practices and an employee-friendly record.
- ESG funds use parameters such as **greenhouse gas and carbon emissions**, and employment generated to assess the ESG impact of the companies.

Which companies gets priority vs Which companies loose out?

- Companies like those in the technology, renewable energy, healthcare, and FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) space feature **heavily in these portfolios**.
- While, companies with higher carbon footprints such as tobacco manufacturers, coal miners, oil and gas companies, and fossil fuel-based power generators **do not find much space** in ESG fund portfolios.

ESG funds India

- Houses like SBI Magnum Equity, Aditya Birla Sun Life, ICICI Prudential, Quantum India, Kotak Mutual Fund, and Axis Mutual Fund offer ESG investment opportunities in India.

Are ESG funds promoting the shutdown of chemical factories?

- No. Companies like chemical and refining are needed for undertaking various operations. ESG funds advocates that these companies need to **operate responsibly**, utilise the technology available, effluent treatment, should not discharge untreated waste in soil, water or air, and should also take care of their minority shareholders and society.

ESG growth drivers

- Greater policy focus on subjects like cleanliness, skill development, health, and education indicate potential public investment in these **sensitive sectors of the economy**.
- Younger investors also have become **more aware about the impact** of business on social development and environment.
- According to experts, companies that are part of the ESG or NSE Prime will not only abide by the regulations and benefit from it in the long term, but will also have a **better reputation** and potentially command a premium on valuation in the long run.

ESG funds issue

- ESG funds, in the absence of clear guidelines, can lead to “**greenwashing**”.
- Greenwashing is an act of conveying a “false impression or providing misleading information about how a company’s products are more environmentally sound”.
- World Economic Forum has also noted that greenwashing is a top concern among global institutional investors.

- Moreover, the experts have also argued that fund managers often tend to **over-weigh certain stocks** and companies in a situation where most large investment-friendly companies have fallen short of the qualitative and quantitative parameters used for ESG investing.

Expansion and Land Degradation in Thar Desert

Context

- Recently, a study was undertaken within the framework of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In this study, the scientists studied the climate and vegetation in Thar, to understand the desertification process.

Expansion of Thar desert

- The study has revealed that Thar desert, the world’s **ninth largest hot subtropical desert**, is expanding fast.
- **Reasons of Thar expansion:** migration of people, changes in the rainfall pattern, spread of sand dunes and unscientific plantation drives.
- The scientists have said that over-exploitation of resources had led to reduction in vegetation cover in the areas adjacent to the Thar desert, contributing to its expansion beyond four districts in western Rajasthan.
- In the Thar desert, the **degradation of land** is posing a threat to the desert ecology, while the climate change has contributed to the spread of arid region.
- With the gradual destruction of the Aravali ranges, the scientists have predicted that the sandstorms from the desert will **travel to the National Capital Region (NCR)** in the years to come.

Loss of Aravali hills

- Aravali Ranges act as a **natural green wall** between the desert and the plains.
- They play an important role in the **recharge of groundwater** and are home to a vast array of biodiversity including many forests and 20 wild life sanctuaries.
- Although Supreme Court, in 2002, **banned quarrying** in this 10 mile long area of the range, a group of men are working to extract rocks to sell to the construction sector.

Reasons:

- However, in the recent past, excavation of the Aravali hills has become a **lucrative industry** and a way of life in the Aravalis outside New Delhi.
- A 2018 report by the Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) found that **31 out of the 128 hills located in Rajasthan have vanished** in last 50 years due to illegal quarrying.

Impact

- Loss of the hills implies a **huge loss of biodiversity**.
- Disappearance of Aravalis means **irreparable damage** to the environment.
- The desert sandstorms will travel as far as the NCR, **increasing pollution** in the already polluted areas.

Steps

- **No mechanism** has evolved so far to control the spread of sand dunes.
- **New plans should be evolved** for conservation of the Aravali ranges to stop the desertification towards eastern parts of Rajasthan.

Global Methane Initiative

Context

- India co-chairs Global Methane Initiative Steering Leadership Meeting which has been held virtually.
- At Global Methane Initiative (GMI) Steering Leadership Meeting, India informed its participants about the work being carried out by India to mitigate the emission of methane.

Key Points

- **Background:** Global Methane Initiative (GMI) was launched by the USA as the "Methane to Markets Partnership" in 2004.
 - The partnership assumed a new name—the Global Methane Initiative (GMI) -- under the Obama Administration, in 2010.
- **About:** The Global Methane Initiative (GMI) is an international public-private partnership focused on reducing barriers to the recovery and use of methane as a valuable energy source.
- **Mandate:** Global Methane Initiative (GMI) forum has been created to achieve global reduction in anthropogenic methane emission through partnership among developed and developing countries having economies in transition.
 - Global Methane Initiative provides technical support to deploy methane-to-energy projects around the world that enable Partner Countries to launch methane recovery and use projects.

- **Participation:** Global Methane Initiative (GMI) brings together state and non-state actors in a collaborative public-private partnership.
 - Global Methane Initiative (GMI) is a voluntary Government and an informal international partnership having members from 45 countries including the United States and Canada.

Key Focus Areas

- Decreasing greenhouse gas emissions
- Improving air and water quality
- Improving human health
- Enhancing energy security
- Increasing worker safety
- Expanding economic growth

Global Methane Challenge

- **About:** The Global Methane Challenge is an international campaign to catalyze ambitious action around the world to reduce methane emissions and highlight policies and technologies being used to recover and use methane.
- **Participation:** The Global Methane Challenge is open to all public- and private-sector organizations interested in showcasing their actions to address methane emissions.
- **Significance:** Since 2019, more than 70 organizations joined the Global Methane Challenge, highlighting their significant contributions around the world to reduce methane emissions and inspiring others to take action.

Methane- Key Points

- **About:** Methane (CH₄) is a hydrocarbon that is the primary component of natural gas and a very potent and important greenhouse gas (GHG).
 - Unlike other GHGs, methane can be converted to usable energy.
- **Sources of Methane:**
 - **Natural Source:** Approximately 40% of methane emitted is from natural sources and
 - **Anthropogenic Sources:** About 60% of Methane comes from human-influenced sources, including livestock farming, rice agriculture, biomass burning and so forth.
- **Warming Potential of Methane:** Emission of methane is a big concern as it is a greenhouse gas having 25-28 times harmful effect than carbon dioxide (CO₂).

- **Benefits of reducing Methane:**
 - Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, and emissions are on the rise. So reduction will control global warming.
 - Methane is a short-lived climate pollutant, so reductions made now can have significant short-term benefits
 - Cost-effective technologies to capture and use methane are widely available today

Additional Information- Global Methane Pledge

- **About:** Global Methane Pledge is a U.S.–EU-led effort to cut methane emissions by a third based on 2020 levels, by 2030.
 - Global Methane Pledge was launched by the USA at the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF).
 - Global Methane Pledge was formalized at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021.
- **Expected Outcomes of Global Methane Pledge:**
 - **Reduced Global Warming:** Global Methane Pledge is expected to reduce global heating by 0.2 Degree Celsius by the 2040s, compared with likely temperature rises by then.
 - **Promote Global Cooperation:** Global Methane Pledge will nudge other countries to take similar pledges and cooperate on various global warming-related issues in a more cooperative and complimentary manner.
 - **Other Benefits:** Global Methane Pledge will also produce a very valuable side benefit, like improving public health and agricultural output.

- **Company's environmental protections measures** are focused on adopting various environmental measures including-
 - Upgrading of pollution control facilities,
 - Water conservation efforts with aim to achieve Zero Liquid Discharge,
 - Efficient handling of different solid wastes (viz. process waste, hazardous waste, canteen/township waste),
 - Carbon sequestration through afforestation,
 - Eco-restoration of mined out area, etc.

Key Points

- **About:** Golden Peacock Environment Management Award is an annual award instituted by World Environment Foundation (WEF) in 1998.
 - Golden Peacock Environment Management Award is given at the annual 'World Congress on Environment Management', each year.
- **Award:** Golden Peacock Environment Management Award is presented to organizations adjudged to have attained significant achievements in the field of Environment Management.
 - Award winners are eligible to use the Golden Peacock Awards Logo with year on all printed and promotional materials, which evidences the highest accolade received by the organisation.
 - Golden Peacock Environment Management award also encourages the corporates to enhance their environmental performances.
- **Eligibility:** All institutions whether public, private, non-profit, government, business, manufacturing and service sector are eligible to apply.

Key Significance

- The Award has a meticulously defined and transparent selection criteria and is determined by a highly elaborate and independent assessment process.
- The award builds a **company's BRAND EQUITY** and worldwide recognition.
- Award winners are eligible to use the **Golden Peacock Awards LOGO** with year on all promotional literatures.
- Preparation for award application helps to inspire and align the entire workforce and rapidly accelerates the **PACE OF SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**.
- Even, if you don't win the award, the **PREPARATION & FEEDBACK** helps organization's strategic learning process to put it, on its way to achieving world-class status.

Golden Peacock Environment Management Award 2021

Context

- The Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) has been awarded with the prestigious Golden Peacock Environment Management Award for the year 2021 in the Steel Sector by the Institute of Directors.
 - SAIL has been the winner of this award for successive three years.

Key Environmental Protections Measures by SAIL

- **Golden Peacock Environment Management Award** was given to SAIL for efforts it made for sustainable and environmentally responsible steel making.

Green Hydrogen Production in India: Scaling-up Alkaline Electrolyser Technology

Context

- Recently, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has collaborated with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) to scale-up Alkaline Electrolyser technology for Green Hydrogen production.
 - Presently, Electrolyser Plants are imported.
- This is a first of its kind initiative to support the country's commitment to achieve renewable energy targets and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Production Mechanism

- **Present Mechanism:**
 - Refineries use large quantities of Hydrogen for de-sulfurization to make petrol, diesel and other chemicals.
 - Currently, Hydrogen is made at the Refinery via. Steam Reforming of Natural gas, but this results in high CO₂ emission.
- **Proposed Mechanism:**
 - To limit CO₂ emissions, Refiners are setting up large scale electrolyzers to produce Green Hydrogen from water and thereby decarbonize Hydrogen production.

Significance

- **Sustainable Growth:** Green hydrogen production will help in reducing the pollutants and green house gas emission, hence, supporting green and sustainable development.
- **Promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat:** BPCL's collaborated with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) for producing green hydrogen by scaling up Indigenous Alkaline Electrolyser Technology is another important step towards "Atmanirbhar Bharat".
- **Supporting Net Zero Emissions by 2040:** Green Hydrogen Production in the country is another important step that will India achieve Net Zero Emissions by 2040.

Importance of Hydrogen

- Combusting one kilo of hydrogen releases three times more energy than a kilo of gasoline and produces only water.
- Hydrogen fuel cells, which is an electrochemical cell that converts the chemical energy of hydrogen and oxygen into electricity, has only water as a waste product.
- Fuel cells can produce electricity continuously for as long as hydrogen and oxygen are supplied.

Other steps for Promoting Hydrogen Fuel

- **National Hydrogen Mission (NHM):** launched on the India's 75th Independence Day, National Hydrogen Mission aims to make India a global hub for the production and export of green hydrogen.
- **Hydrogen-CNG busses:** government has already rolled out 50 buses which use H-CNG as its fuel.
- **National Hydrogen Portal:** It is a one-stop information source for research, production, storage, transportation and application of hydrogen across India.
 - Link of National Hydrogen Portal- Greenhydrogen-India.com.

Indian Pangolin

Context

- Recently, the Odisha Forest and Environment Department has completed its first-ever radio-tagging of the Indian pangolin.
- Radio-tagging of the Indian pangolin was done in an attempt to standardise the rehabilitation protocol for the **Indian pangolin** in the State.

Indian Pangolin - Radio-Tagging

- **Radio-Tagging:** A male Pangolin, which was rescued by the Paralakhemundi Forest Division last month, was radio-tagged and released in the Nandankanan Wildlife Sanctuary after treatment.
- **Tracking:** The Odisha Forest department said the animal would be tracked using a **Yagi antenna** and receiver.

Pangolins in India: Key Points

- **About:** The pangolins (also called scaly anteaters) are an elongated, armour-plated insectivore mammal, found across the world.
- **Species:** There are eight Pangolin species spread across the world. Of these eight, Indian Pangolin and Chinese Pangolins are found in India.
 - **Chinese Pangolin:** Listed as Critically Endangered under the IUCN Red List, and under Appendix 1 of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).
 - **Indian Pangolin:** Listed as Endangered under the IUCN Red List, and Appendix 1 of the CITES.

- **Feeding Pattern:** Pangolin feeds primarily on insects (insectivore) eating ants and termites, digging them out of mounds and logs.
 - The pangolin depends on its tongue to feed itself as it lacks any teeth. Digestion in the Pangolins is aided by its strong stomach.
 - Pangolin is active during night and it rests in deep burrows during daytime
- **Threats to Survival:** Pangolins face survival threats due to habitat loss and rampant poaching for its skin, scales, and meat.
 - Pangolins are highly trafficked mammals due to their huge demand for medicinal purposes, pangolins are smuggled through roads and rails and sent to China.

Indian Pangolin: Key Points

- **About:** Indian pangolin, also called thick-tailed pangolin is one of the eight pangolin species found across the world.
 - **Indian Pangolin Scientific Name:** *Manis crassicaudata*.
 - **Characteristics:** Indian Pangolins have overlapping scales that acts as an armor for its body.
- **Habitat:** Indian pangolin is a pangolin native to the Indian subcontinent. Indian pangolins are mainly found in rainforests and in hills of India and parts of Sri Lanka.
 - Indian Pangolin is also found in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal.
 - Indian pangolin inhabits grasslands and secondary forests.
 - Indian pangolin can also can survive in dry and desert regions.

Indian pangolin- Conservation Efforts

- **CITES:** Indian pangolin are listed under Appendix I of the CITES since January 2017.
- **IUCN Red List:** Indian Pangolin is listed as 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red List.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Indian Pangolin along with Chinese Pangolin are protected under Schedule I, Part I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Kasturirangan Committee on Western Ghats

Context

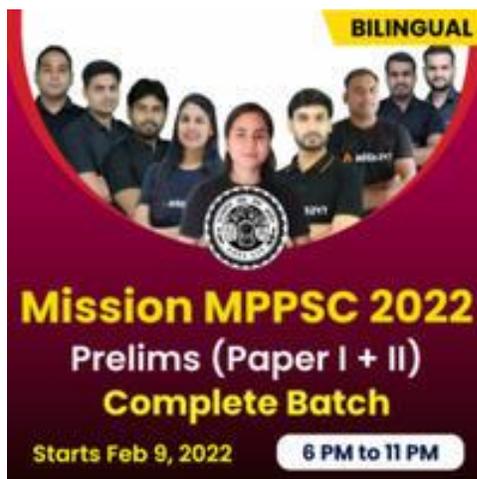
- Recently, Karnataka Chief Minister has informed the Centre that the **state is opposed** to the Kasturirangan Committee report on Western Ghats.

Key points

- The Chief Minister has said that declaring Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive zone would **adversely affect the livelihood** of people in the region.
- The experts, on the other hand, called the state's opposition **disastrous for the ecologically fragile** Western Ghats.

Kasturirangan committee recommendations

- The Kasturirangan committee report proposes **37 per cent of the total area of Western Ghats to be declared as eco-sensitive area (ESA)**.
 - 37% of western ghats roughly makes **60,000 square kilometres** of the total area.
 - Out of this, **more than 20,000 sq km** of the area falls in Karnataka.
- The report recommended a **blanket ban** on mining, quarrying, setting up of red category industries and thermal power projects.
- The committee also advocated that the **impact of infrastructural projects** on the forest and wildlife should be studied before permission is given for these activities.
- Moreover, the committee was of the opinion that the **UNESCO Heritage tag** is an opportunity to build global and domestic recognition of the enormous natural wealth that exists in the Western Ghats.
 - The 39 sites are located across the Western Ghats and distributed across the states (Kerala 19), Karnataka (10), Tamil Nadu (6) and Maharashtra (4).
 - The boundary of the sites, are in most cases, boundaries of the legally demarcated national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves and forest divisions and therefore, already accorded with high level of protection.



- The Eco-Sensitive Area mapping and demarcation done by the committee also indicates that all sites are within this area.
- The state governments should view this development and build a **plan to protect, conserve and value the resources** and opportunities of the region.
- The state of Karnataka has the **highest percentage of the ESA**- 46.50 per cent.

Why the successive governments have rejected the report?

- The state government believes that implementation of the report will **halt the developmental activities** in the region.
- The state government was of the opinion that the Kasturirangan report has been prepared **based on the satellite images**, but the ground reality is different. People of the region have adopted agriculture and horticultural activities in an eco-friendly manner.
- Also, priority has been accorded for environment protection under the **Forest Protection Act**.
- So, in this background, bringing one **more law that would affect the livelihood** of the local people is not appropriate.
- Moreover, the political representatives from Uttara Kannada district have always opposed the Kasturirangan report since **more than 600 villages will fall under the eco-sensitive area** if the report is implemented.

Impacts due to non-implementation of the report

- Dr TV Ramachandra, a professor of Indian Institute of Science (IISc), said that climate change is **causing irreversible damage** through events like recurring floods, droughts, landslides, etc.
- These events are **affecting the livelihood of all people** (irrespective of poor or rich) and hurting the nation's economy.
- In such a situation, it is better to **conserve the fragile ecosystems** that costs less rather than spending money /resources for restoration / rejuvenation.
- Wildlife conservationist Joseph Hoover said that if the government truly cares for the welfare of 22 crore people who are sustained by the Western Ghats, it would **accept at least 85 per cent of the recommendations** of the Kasturirangan Committee. Else, it would be the reason for the sufferings of the people.

Deemed forests in Karnataka

- The planning of state government to **further shrink the deemed forest** area from 3,30,186 hectares to 2 lakh hectares has further aggravated the concerns over the forest encroachments in Karnataka.
- The state expert committee in 1997 had identified 10 lakh hectares of deemed forest area which over the years were shrunk by the successive governments.

Olive Ridley Turtle: Olive Ridley Turtles tagging by Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)

Olive Ridley Turtle- Olive Ridley Turtle tagging and benefits

- **Olive Ridley Turtle Project:** Researchers of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) are carrying out tagging of the Olive Ridelys at three mass nesting sites- Gahirmatha, Devi River mouth and Rushikulya.
 - The **Olive Ridley Turtle tagging** exercise was undertaken in Odisha in January 2021 after a span of about 25 years and 1,556 turtles had been tagged.
- **Associated Benefits:**
 - Olive Ridley sea turtles tagging would help in identifying the migration path and places visited by Olive Ridley turtles after congregation and nesting.
 - Besides, the growth of **Olive Ridley Sea Turtles** could be measured during the current study.
 - The study would also reveal the inter-rookery movement of **Olive Ridley** turtles in Odisha.
 - The migration pattern of **Olive Ridley Turtle of Odisha** to other countries would be recorded in detail.

Olive Ridley Turtle- Key Points

- **About:** Olive Ridley Sea Turtles derive their name from their olive-coloured carapace. Olive Ridley Sea Turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
 - **Eating habit:** Olive Ridley Sea Turtles are **carnivores**.
- **Habitat:**
 - **Globally:** Olive Ridley Turtles are found in warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
 - **In India:** Odisha Coast is known for its breeding grounds for Olive Ridley Turtles. Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is the world's largest colony of breeding of **Olive Ridley** turtles.

- **Arribada (Mass Nesting):** Mass nesting of **Olive Ridley Turtle** in Odisha is also known as Arribada where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
 - The olive ridley turtles turn up in millions for mass nesting along the Odisha coast every year namely at three river mouths- Dhamara, Devi and Rushikulya.

Olive Ridley Turtle- Protection Status

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Olive Ridley Turtle is listed under Scheduled 1 of WLP Act.
- **IUCN Red List:** Olive Ridley Sea Turtles are put in the 'Vulnerable' category in the Red Book List of IUCN.
- **CITES:** Olive Ridley Turtle is listed under 'Appendix I' of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Policy Guidelines for Promoting Behaviour Change for Strengthening Waste Segregation at Source

Context

- NITI Aayog has recently released policy guidelines for promoting behaviour change for strengthening waste segregation at source.

Waste Segregation at Source (WSS) meaning

- The **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016**, states it is the responsibility of generators to segregate waste into three categories — wet, dry and hazardous waste — and hand over the segregated waste to authorised waste collectors or local bodies. It is often called Waste Segregation at Source (WSS).

Waste Segregation at Source: Why needed?

- India generates about **49.8 million tonnes** of solid waste annually.
- World over annual waste generation estimates are pegged at almost 2 billion tonnes, and are expected to grow to 3.4 billion tonnes, an increase of 70% by 2050.
- Countries like India that fall in the world's fastest growing regions of South-Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, are projected to witness a much higher, **three-fold rise in waste generation** by 2050.
- Studies suggest that despite waste management increasingly occupying a position of priority, globally about **33% of the waste is still not being managed** in an environmentally sound manner.

- India is facing the issue of **legacy waste** i.e., waste that has been left unattended and untreated in dumps for years.
- Most Indian cities are struggling with **inadequate finances** and infrastructure to effectively collect, treat and dispose-off waste.
- Biodegradable waste in landfills **releases methane**, which has a 34 times higher global warming potential over 100 years as compared to carbon dioxide
- It is estimated that while 70-95% waste is collected in the major metropolitan cities, collection can be as low as **50% in small cities**.

WSS: Advantages

- Source segregation **reduces the need for secondary segregation**, which is capital, energy and land intensive.
- Waste segregated at source is **least likely to be contaminated** with other waste types, and therefore more likely to be recycled. As it is also more likely to be clean, the cost of pre-treatment before recycling or re-purposed is also reduced. For the above reasons, waste segregated at source is more attractive to recyclers.
- The treatment or recycling options for different waste types depends on the nature of waste. More often than not, the processes are cumbersome and expensive. Waste segregation contributes towards **reducing the quantum of waste** to be treated or recycled, thereby reducing cost.
- It also **supports decentralized treatment** options like community composting units and dry waste collection centres that are more efficient in waste management.
- Source segregation and recycling results in waste minimization, or lesser waste reaching landfills. This directly translates into **longer life spans of landfills**, and reduced demand for land for new landfills.
- Waste minimization resulting from primary and secondary segregation also translates into **reduced greenhouse-gas emissions** from waste dumps and landfills.
- Source segregation reduces the attractiveness of the existing in-human, unhealthy and hazardous practice of rag pickers rummaging through waste piles to salvage saleable waste items.

Roadmap Launched to make Urban India 'Garbage Free'

Context

- Recently, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has launched a roadmap to make Urban India 'Garbage Free'.
- The Ministry has also launched 'Azadi@75 Star Rating Protocol of Garbage Free Cities- Toolkit 2022', the most important governance tool of waste management – the Star Rating Protocol for Garbage Free Cities.

Key points

- The earlier 25 components/ indicators have now been reduced to 24, of which only 16 indicators are mandatory for 1-star and 3-star levels. The remaining 8 indicators are aspirational in nature, and will be relevant for 5-star and 7-star aspirants;
- The multi-step calculation of the previous GFC protocol has now been changed to a single step marking, which will help ULB to easily self-assess themselves for applying;
- The revised protocol is aligned with SBM-U 2.0 priorities, with higher weightages (50%) allotted to Door-to-Door Collection, Source Segregation, Waste processing & Dumpsite remediation;
- The entire process of applying for certification and subsequent assessment have been simplified and made completely digital, paperless; for example, digital declarations, geo-tagged waste-processing facilities, end-to-end digital monitoring of progress;
- Components pertaining to IEC, capacity building, revenue from sale of waste by-products have been added to encourage cities to build an ecosystem to strengthen the waste management system.

- Continuous assessment throughout the year to help cities plan assessment.
- In the recently concluded certification exercise for GFC, nearly 50% of ULBs participated in the certification exercise, of which a total of 299 cities have been certified.
- 9 cities have been rated as 5-star, 143 cities rated as 3-star and 147 cities as 1-star.

Star rating of cities

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MOHUA) has launched the Protocol for Star Rating of Garbage Free cities.
- The star rating conditions have been designed in a way as to enable cities to gradually evolve into a model (7-star) city, with progressive improvements in their overall cleanliness.
- The protocol, with increasing levels of stringency with increasing star rating, will also be aspirational in nature, feeding cities' ambitions and dreams of becoming an ideal city for its residents, and a role model for other cities to follow.



Science & Technology

Gaganyaan Mission

Context

- Recently, Union Minister of Science & Technology said that India's maiden human space mission "Gaganyaan" will be **launched in 2023**.

Key points

- The Minister has said that with this launch, India will become the **fourth nation** in the world to launch a Human Spaceflight Mission after USA, Russia and China.
- More than 500 Industries** are involved in the launch of Gaganyaan with several research modules including indigenous health research module.
- The major missions viz., **Test vehicle flight for the validation** of Crew Escape System performance and the **1st Uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan (G1)** are scheduled during the beginning of 2nd half of 2022.
- This will be followed by **second uncrewed mission** at the end of 2022 carrying "Vyommitra" a spacefaring human robot developed by ISRO and finally the first crewed Gaganyaan mission in 2023.

What is Gaganyaan Programme?

- The Gaganyaan Programme envisages undertaking the **demonstration of human spaceflight** to Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in the short-term and will lay the foundation for a sustained Indian human space exploration programme in the long run.

What are the goals/objectives of Gaganyaan programme?

- The objective of Gaganyaan programme is to demonstrate indigenous capability to undertake human space flight mission to LEO.
- As part of this programme, **two unmanned missions and one manned mission** are approved by Government of India (GoI).

Gaganyaan programme benefits

- Progress towards a **sustained and affordable human and robotic programme** to explore the solar system and beyond.
- Advanced technology capability** for undertaking human space exploration, sample return missions and scientific exploration.
- Future capability to actively **collaborate in global space station** development & to carry out scientific experiments of interest to the nation.

- Create a **broad frame work for wider Academia** – Industry partnership in taking up development activities for national development.
- Ample scope for **employment generation** and human resource development in advanced science and R&D activities.
- Unique opportunity to **inspire and excite Indian youth** and steer many students toward careers in science and technology towards challenging jobs that encourage knowledge, innovation and creativity.
- The programme will **strengthen international partnerships** and global security through the sharing of challenging and peaceful goals. Having a vibrant human spaceflight programme can be leveraged as a potent foreign policy tool.

Gaganyaan programme cost

- The total cost of Gaganyaan Programme is around 9023 crores.

Gaganyaan programme implementation

- The overall programme co-ordination, systems engineering and implementation will be carried out by **ISRO**.

Gaganyaan Mission: Implementing agencies

- Indian Armed Forces
- Defence Research Development organisation
- Indian maritime agencies - Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Shipping corporation of India, National institute of Oceanography, National Institute of Ocean Technology.
- Indian Meteorological Department
- CSIR Labs
- Academic institutes
- Industry partners

Ghost Particles Detected in LHC for the First Time

Context

- Recently, for the first time, researchers have detected neutrino candidates produced by the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at the CERN facility.

Key points

- In what could be referred as a major milestone in particle physics, researchers have reported observing six neutrino interactions during an experiment at the LHC.
- Prior to this project, no sign of neutrinos has ever been seen at any particle collider, and not just at LHC.

Significance

- This significant breakthrough is a step toward developing a deeper understanding of these elusive particles and the role they play in the universe.
- Detecting collider neutrinos provides access to neutrino energies and types that are rarely seen elsewhere.

What are neutrinos?

- Neutrinos are subatomic particles that have a very small mass like an electron. Neutrinos, however, have no electrical charge. This characteristic of neutrinos makes them extremely difficult to detect.
- Neutrinos are actually everywhere. They're one of the most abundant subatomic particles in the Universe.
- As they carry no charge and have almost zero mass, they stream through the Universe at almost the speed of light, and barely interact with it at all.

Why are neutrinos called ghost particle?

- Billions of the things are streaming through us right now. To a neutrino, the rest of the Universe is basically incorporeal; that's why they're also known as ghost particles.

LHC working

- The LHC—which includes four main detectors: ALICE, ATLAS, CMS and LHCb—generally works by colliding two high-energy particle beams with one another close to the speed of light.
- When the charged particles, like protons, smash into one another at such high speeds, the energy of the impact becomes matter in the form of new particles or subatomic particles.
- So, the LHC can essentially “produce” subatomic particles.

What this detection of neutrinos revealed?

This reported detection of neutrino interactions reveals two major things:

- First, it verified that the position forward of the ATLAS interaction point at the LHC is the right location for detecting collider neutrinos.
- Second, the efforts demonstrated the effectiveness of using an emulsion detector to observe these kinds of neutrino interactions.

What is an emulsion detector?

- FASERnu, a neutrino subdetector, is what is known as an emulsion detector.
- Lead and tungsten plates are alternated with layers of emulsion: During particle experiments at the LHC, neutrinos can collide with nuclei in the lead and tungsten plates, producing particles that leave tracks in the emulsion layers.

India International Science Festival (IISF) 2021

Context

- Recently, India International Science Festival (IISF) 2021 was launched by Union Minister of Earth Sciences (MoES) at Panaji, Goa.

Key Points

- **About:** IISF is an annual event considered to be the biggest platform in the country which brings together students, the public, researchers, innovators and artists from around the globe to experience the joy of doing science for the wellbeing of people and humanity.
 - First India International Science Festival (IISF) was organized in 2015.
- **IISF 2021 Theme:** The theme of IISF 2021 is 'Celebrating Creativity in Science, Technology and Innovation for Prosperous India'.
 - All IISF 2021 program will reflect the spirit and idea of 'Aazadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' of the Govt of India.
- **Nodal Agency for IISF 2021:** The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, an autonomous institute under the MoES, is the nodal agency organising IISF 2021.
- **Organizing Institutions:** IISF 2021 is being organised jointly by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Ministry of Science & Technology (Department of Science & Technology, Department of Biotechnology, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research), in collaboration with Vijnana Bharati.
 - **IISF 2021 is being organised in a hybrid model:** it will be available for both virtual and in-person meet.

Additional Information: Vijnana Bharati

- **About:** Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA) is a non-profit organization in India that works for the popularization of sciences in a nationalist manner.
 - Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA) was previously known as 'Swadeshi Science Movement' before it was changed to its current name in 1991.
 - **Vijnana Bharati Headquarter:** Vijnana Bharati headquarter is located in New Delhi.
- **Mandate:** Vijnana Bharati aims to rejuvenate the Swadeshi Movement in this age of science and technology for the purpose of national reconstruction.

Key Objectives:

- Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA) aim to start a vibrant movement for the development of Swadeshi Sciences.
- As a dynamic Science Movement with a Swadeshi Spirit, interlinking traditional and modern sciences on the one hand, and natural and spiritual sciences on the other hand.
- Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA) also aims to create a Swadeshi Movement with modern sciences adapted to national needs.

Context

- NASA has recently launched the **largest-ever space telescope** by the Ariane 5 rocket from European Space Agency's Spaceport in French Guiana, South America.

Key points

- It is a joint project of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), ESA (European Space Agency) and the **Canadian Space Agency**.
- It is an **infrared telescope**, and being adjudged as the successor of the Hubble Space Telescope and the Spitzer Space Telescope.
- It is also said to be the **most powerful space telescope** ever built.
- JWST will be positioned much deeper into the space, at a spot known as L2.
 - L2 is one of the five points, known as **Lagrange's points**, in any revolving two-body system like Earth and Sun, where the gravitational forces of the two large bodies cancel each other out.
 - Objects placed at these points are relatively stable and require minimal external energy to keep themselves there.
 - L2 is a position directly behind Earth in the line joining the Sun and the Earth.
 - It would be shielded from the Sun by the Earth as it goes around the Sun, in sync with the Earth.

Significance

- It is expected to **unveil many secrets** of the universe, particularly those related to the formation of stars and galaxies in the early period after the Big Bang.
- **Time machine:** These telescopes are also known as time machine of space due to their ability to see very faraway objects.

- The images of stars and galaxies shown by the telescope are images of stars or galaxies as they were millions of years ago.
 - It is because the light coming from those objects, stars or galaxies, which is captured by these telescopes, began its journey millions of years earlier.
- The images sent by Hubble form the basis for much of our **present-day understanding** of the early universe and the formation and destruction of planets, stars and galaxies.
- James Webb Telescope has the ability to look in the infrared spectrum, which will allow it to peer through much deeper into the universe, and see-through obstructions like **gas clouds**.

JWST functions

- **Infrared camera** will take images of astronomical objects
- **Spectrometers** will break the incoming infrared light into different colours for analysis.

NASA Parker Solar Probe Mission

Context

- NASA's Parker Solar Probe Mission becomes the first spacecraft in history to touch the sun. NASA's Parker Solar Probe has now flown through the Sun's upper atmosphere – the corona – and sampled particles and magnetic fields there.

Key points

- Parker solar probe is making new discoveries that other spacecraft were too far away to see, including from within the solar wind – the flow of particles from the Sun that can influence us at Earth.
- In 2019, Parker discovered that magnetic zig-zag structures in the solar wind, called switchbacks, are plentiful close to the Sun.
- These measurements from the corona will be critical for understanding and forecasting extreme space weather events that can disrupt telecommunications and damage satellites around Earth.
- But how and where they form remained a mystery. Halving the distance to the Sun since then, Parker Solar Probe has now passed close enough to identify one place where they originate: the solar surface.

About Parker Solar Probe Mission

- Parker Solar Probe was launched in 2018 to explore the mysteries of the Sun by traveling closer to it than any spacecraft has done before.
- The NASA spacecraft spent more than three years winding its way by planets and creeping gradually closer to sun to learn more about the origin of the solar wind, which pushes charged particles across the solar system.

Parker Solar mission objective

- Since solar activity has a large effect on living on Earth, from generating auroras to threatening infrastructure like satellites, scientists want to know more about how the sun operates to better make predictions about space weather.
- It helped in estimating the location of Alfvén critical surface.
 - Alfvén critical surface is a point, at a particular distance from the sun, where gravity and magnetic fields are no longer able to keep solar material close.
 - It's from that point where the solar wind flows away from the sun, never to return. The point of no return is called the Alfvén critical surface and scientists had not been able to measure exactly where it was, before Parker reached it.
- It will help explore aspects of the Sun-Earth system that directly affect life and society.
- Understanding where and how the components of the fast solar wind emerge could help scientists answer a longstanding solar mystery: how the corona is heated to millions of degrees, far hotter than the solar surface below.

AIM NITI Aayog releases 'Innovations for You' & 'The Ingenious Tinkerers'

Context

- Recently, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) NITI Aayog released the second edition of 'Innovations for You' & 'The Ingenious Tinkerers'.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) NITI Aayog- 'Innovations for You'

- **About:** 'Innovations for You' is a compendium of innovations focused on agriculture featuring 70 startups supported by Atal incubation Centers (AICs) of AIM.
 - The 'Innovations for You' is a compilation of successful innovations by the entrepreneurial minds of India solving problems of present for future.

- **Second edition of 'Innovations for You'** focuses on the startups and innovations in field of Agriculture and Allied services.
 - The first edition of this book was focused on innovations in Health Care.
- The '**Innovations for You**' book is a compilation of 70 Ag-Tech startups, incubated at Atal Incubation Centres spread across the country.
- These startups are leveraging frontier technologies such as AI, IoT, ICT and others to provide socially relevant solutions to problems of modern farming.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) NITI Aayog- 'The Ingenious Tinkerers'

- **About:** 'The Ingenious Tinkerers' is a compendium on the innovations on technology featuring 41 innovations from Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) of India.
 - 'The Ingenious Tinkerers' is a compilation of the top innovations created by young student innovators who participated in the ATL Marathon.
 - ATL Marathon invites school students to address a problem that they see or face on a day-to-day basis.
- 'The Ingenious Tinkerers' leveraged the up-and-coming technologies available at ATLs to devise a solution.
- These 'The Ingenious Tinkerers' identify problem statements by interacting with the members of their community and design a prototype in a manner that fits their needs and demands.
- Their determination to make a difference in their community has paved a way for their innovation to reach the top 41 innovations of India for the ATL Marathon 2019.

Online Gaming: Rajya Sabha Flags Issue

Context

- Recently, Rajya Sabha Chairman has asserted that online gaming has become a "**big menace**" and has asked the Minister of MeitY to consult with the Law Ministry to take note about the issue.

Key points

- Sushil Kumar Modi has raised the issue during Zero Hour. He said that online gaming has become a big problem for the youngsters in this country as crores of youngsters have become addicted to it.
- Because it is online, it is very difficult to prevent the kids from becoming addicted to this online gaming and now this online gaming has been converted into gambling or betting.

- During pre-Covid, the weekly time spent on mobile gaming was 2.5 hours and 11 per cent of total smartphone time was spent on gaming. During the lockdown, it increased **from 2.5 hours to 4 hours** and as of today, **more than 43 crore people** are using online gaming.
- He also said that the online gaming sector, like the crypto industry, has a regulatory lacuna and asked the Government to impose uniform tax on online gaming and come up with a comprehensive framework to regulate the sector.

Online gaming issues

- **Cyber bullying:** Although cyber bullying has countless forms, some forms are particular to gaming platforms. In "whispering", cyber bullies target players directly with hurtful and harmful messages, or by spamming global chat channels with derogatory comments about their victims.
- **Privacy Problems:** By piecing together data from games and other sources, hackers are able to access other existing accounts such as social media or establish new accounts in the child's name.
- **Personal Information on Consoles, Computers and Devices:** Another online gaming danger comes from consoles or PCs themselves. When these devices outlive their usefulness, many families take them to the local electronics recycling center or sell them on swap sites. Users often fail to delete their profiles and information, putting their financial and private data at risk.
- **Webcam Worries:** Whether internal or external, any connected recording device—such as a webcam or microphone—can be controlled remotely by attackers and can be used to exploit the children.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Online predators are older gamers who use video games to lure and groom younger victims. This can result in inappropriate messages, webcam chats or even face-to-face meetings that could lead to sexual exploitation.
- **Hidden Fees:** Some online games use the "freemium" model, which means they give us some content for free, however, for full game features, functions and access payment is required. In most of these cases, the games require users to attach a credit card to their gaming profile. Their card is automatically charged whenever users purchase new items or service.
- **Malware:** Malware such as adware and Trojans may modify a legitimate app and upload the malicious version to Google Play or another legitimate marketplace thus infecting our devices.

PRALAY: Successful launch of surface-to-surface missile

Context

- Recently, an indigenous new surface to surface Conventional ballistic missile was successfully tested from Dr. **APJ Abdul Kalam Island** off the coast of Odisha.

Key points

- For the first time, two consecutive flight tests of a ballistic missile have been conducted successfully on two consecutive days.
- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) started working on the project to develop a short-range solid-fuel surface-to-surface missile, **around 2015**.
- Pralay can hit the target at a range of **150 to 500 kilometres** with an accuracy of less than 10 metres.
- the 'Pralay' missile was tested for **heavier payload** and different range to prove the precision and lethality of the weapon.
- This launch was monitored by all the range sensors and instruments, including Telemetry, Radar and Electro-Optic Tracking System deployed across the eastern coast and the down range ships positioned near the impact point.
- Pralay missile can be **launched from a mobile launcher**, and has a guidance system that includes state-of-the-art navigation mechanisms and integrated avionics.
- Pralay is a new-generation surface-to-surface missile **equipped with modern technologies** and the induction of the weapon system will provide the necessary impetus to the armed forces.

What is a ballistic missile?

- A ballistic missile is targeted as a projectile from a single launch force with **not much-added guidance**.
- It travels outside the atmosphere, detaches the warhead and falls back to earth.
- It follows the path of a ball thrown upwards which falls down.
- Since it **depends on gravity** to reach its target, it's called a ballistic missile.

What is a quasi-ballistic missile?

- A quasi-ballistic missile (also called a semi ballistic missile) is a category of missile that has a **low trajectory** and/or is largely ballistic but **can perform manoeuvres** in flight or make unexpected changes in direction and range.

Classifications of ballistic missile

There are four general classifications of ballistic missiles based on their range, or the maximum distance the missile can travel:

- **Short-range:** less than 1,000 kilometers (approximately 620 miles), also known as “tactical” ballistic missiles.
- **Medium-range:** between 1,000 and 3,000 kilometers (approximately 620-1,860 miles), also known as “theater” ballistic missiles.
- **Intermediate-range:** between 3,000 and 5,500 kilometers (approximately 1,860-3,410 miles)
- **Long-range:** more than 5,500 kilometers (approximately 3,410 miles), also known as intercontinental or strategic ballistic missiles. Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) can fly much further than the minimum range;

Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved ‘Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India’.

Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India

- **About:** Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India aims to provide a globally competitive incentive package to companies in semiconductors and display manufacturing as well as design.
 - The program will give an impetus to semiconductor and display manufacturing by facilitating capital support and technological collaborations.
- **Key Objectives:** Comprehensive program for the development of sustainable semiconductor and display ecosystem in India was launched with following objectives-
 - Furtherance of the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and
 - Positioning India as the global hub for Electronic System Design and Manufacturing
- **Funding:** Program for development of semiconductors and display manufacturing ecosystem provides an outlay of Rs.76,000 crore for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing.

- **Beneficiaries:** Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India aims to provide attractive incentive support to companies / consortia that are engaged in-
 - Silicon Semiconductor Fabs,
 - Display Fabs,
 - Compound Semiconductors / Silicon Photonics / Sensors (including MEMS) Fabs,
 - Semiconductor Packaging (ATMP / OSAT), and
 - Semiconductor Design.

Semiconductor Ecosystem in India- Government Support

- In total, Government of India has committed support of Rs. 2,30,000 crore (USD 30 billion) to position India as global hub for electronics manufacturing with semiconductors.
- Government of India has announced incentives for every part of supply chain including **electronic components, sub-assemblies, and finished goods.**
 - Incentive support to the tune of Rs.55,392 crore have been approved under
- PLI for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing,
- PLI for IT Hardware,
- SPECS Scheme and
- Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme.
 - In addition, PLI incentives to the quantum of Rs.98,000 crore have been approved for allied sectors comprising of
 - ACC battery,
 - Auto components,
 - Telecom & networking products,
 - Solar PV modules and
 - White goods.

Significance

- This shall pave the way for India’s technological leadership in these areas of strategic importance and economic self-reliance.
- In the current geopolitical scenario, trusted sources of semiconductors and displays hold strategic importance and are key to the security of critical information infrastructure.
- **Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India** will propel innovation and build domestic capacities to ensure the digital sovereignty of India.

- **Program for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem in India** will also create highly skilled employment opportunities to harness the demographic dividend of the country.
- Development of semiconductor and display ecosystem will have a multiplier effect across different sectors of the economy with deeper integration to the global value chain.
- The program will promote higher domestic value addition in electronics manufacturing and will contribute significantly to achieving a USD 1 Trillion digital economy and a USD 5 Trillion GDP by 2025.



Security

Exercise EKUVERIN

Context

- 11th Edition of Exercise EKUVERIN between India & Maldives will be conducted at Kadhdhoo Island, Maldives from 06 to 19 December 2021.
 - 10th edition of the Joint Military Exercise Ekuverin was organised at Aundh Military Station in Pune, Maharashtra in 2019.

11th Exercise EKUVERIN- Key Points

- **Key Objectives:** The EKUVERIN exercise is expected to enhance synergy & inter-operability between Armed Forces of both the Nations in terms of-
 - Understanding transnational terrorism both on land & at sea,
 - Conducting Counter Terrorism & Counter Insurgency Operations and
 - Sharing best military practices and experiences.
- **Key Activities:** Besides rigorous training, the joint EKUVERIN military exercise will also include cultural and sports activities to enhance defence cooperation and bilateral relations.

Exercise EKUVERIN

- **About:** Exercise EKUVERIN is a 14 days joint military exercise held between India and Maldives since 2009.
 - **Exercise EKUVERIN meaning:** Ekuverin meaning 'Friends' in the Maldivian language (Dhivehi language).
 - **Joint Military Exercise EKUVERIN** is held alternatively in India and Maldives.
- **Participation:** Exercise EKUVERIN is conducted between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force.
- **Mandate:** Exercise EKUVERIN focuses on enhancing interoperability between the two forces for carrying out counter insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in a semi-urban environment under the United Nations mandate.
- **Significance:** India shares very close ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial ties with the Maldives and Exercise Ekuverin will assist in further strengthening of these ties between the two nations.
 - The exercise Ekuverin will go a long way in strengthening India's relations with Maldives amidst emerging security dynamics in the Indian Ocean Region.

AFSPA Explained: Know everything about the Act

Context

- Recently, 14 civilians were killed in a case of alleged mistaken identity by the security forces in Nagaland.
- The incident triggered violence in the area and has **rekindled the debate** over the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Key points

- Six civilians who worked in a coal mine, were killed in an ambush by security forces in Nagaland's Mon district.
- The incident triggered violence in the area, in which eight more civilians were killed after security forces allegedly opened fire. A soldier too succumbed to injuries while several others were severely injured.
- The incident has made the relatively calm state, a volatile region where people, including the Nagaland government is **demanding repeal** of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

What is AFSPA?

- The AFSPA Act was first promulgated by the **British in response to the Quit India movement** in 1942.
- After Independence, Indian government decided to **retain the Act in 1958**.
- AFSPA law provides for special powers to the armed forces that can be imposed by the Centre or the Governor of a state, after it is declared "disturbed" under **Section 3 of AFSPA**.
- The Act defines these as areas that are "disturbed or dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary".

AFSPA states

- AFSPA 1958 has been used in areas where militancy has been prevalent. Specifically, it has been imposed on the Northeast states, Jammu & Kashmir, and Punjab during the militancy years.
- It remains in force in **Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, J&K, and parts of Arunachal Pradesh**.

AFSPA removed from which state?

- Punjab was the first state from where it was repealed, followed by Tripura and Meghalaya.

Why was AFSPA necessary?

- AFSPA came into force mainly to **curb violence** in the North-eastern states
- The region was too much volatile at the time of independence and the **demand of secession** from the Indian state was common. E.g., the demand for the creation of Greater Nagalim.
- **Insurgency**: The military insurgency made the Act even more imperative. The state machinery has not been considered equipped enough to deal with these trans-national security issues.

AFSPA: Safety provisions

- Though AFSPA gives powers to security forces to open fire, this **cannot be done without prior warning** given to the suspect.
 - In the recent Mon firing, it has been an issue of discussion whether the security forces gave prior warning before opening fire at the vehicle carrying coal miners.
- The Act further states that suspects apprehended by security forces should be handed over to the local police station **within 24 hours**.
- AFSPA states that armed forces must act in cooperation with the district administration and not as an independent body.
 - In the Mon operation, local law-enforcement agencies have said they were unaware of the operation and this has made the Act more debatable.

Attempts to repeal AFSPA in the past

- In 2000, Manipur activist **Irom Sharmila began a hunger-strike**, which continued for 16 years, against AFSPA.
- In 2004, the Union Government set up a five-member committee, **Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission**, which submitted its report in 2005.
 - The committee stated that AFSPA had become a symbol of oppression and recommended its repeal.
- The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** has also endorsed the above recommendations.

AFSPA criticisms

- **Nagaland and Mizoram** faced the brunt of AFSPA in the 1950s, including air raids and bombings by the Indian military.
- The **Malom massacre** in 2000 in Manipur, and the killing and alleged rape of Thangjam Manorama led to the subsequent repeal of AFSPA from the Imphal municipal area.

- **Fake encounters**: EEVFAM (Extra Judicial Execution Victims Families Association) has alleged that since the 1970s, there have been 1,528 fake encounters in Manipur alone.
- Human rights activists have said the Act has often been used as a **quid pro quo** where forces and some people with vested interest settle private scores, such as property disputes, with false tip-offs provided by local informants to security forces.
- Allegations have been made against security forces of **mass killings and rape**.
- **Probing issue**: Barring one Army major, who was accused of fake encounter of 12-years old Azad Khan's death in 2009, no prosecution has been made against security forces in other cases. The Army major himself was persecuted after 9 years in 2018.
- Activists also note that AFSPA creates an **atmosphere of impunity** among even state agencies.

Supreme Court on AFSPA

- In 2016, the Supreme Court **rebuked the government** over the continuation of AFSPA.
- The SC judgment clarified that the notion that the Act provides a free hand to security forces is flawed.
- The Court has held that due process needs to be followed in civilian complaints reported from areas under the AFSPA and that the **Act doesn't provide blanket immunity** to army personnel in anti-insurgency operations.
- The apex court has even said that the continuance of the Act in any region for extended periods symbolises "**failure of the civil administration and the armed forces**".

PANEX-21 Exercise: Pune hosted PANEX-21 Military Exercise

Context

- Recently, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercise PANEX-21 was held at Pune from 20-22 Dec 2021.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic and PANEX-21**: in backdrop of a Covid pandemic, Participants also held discussion on various aspects related to challenges faced, envisaged contingencies and Mitigation measures in conduct of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.
 - PANEX-21 also involved the equipment capability demonstration by the Indian Industries in tackling any future pandemic like situations.

PANEX-21: Key Points

- **About:** PANEX-21 is a multi-national Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercise held among BIMSTEC Countries.
- **Objective:** PANEX-21 aims to build regional cooperation among BIMSTEC Member countries in responding to various natural disasters.
- **Participation:** PANEX-21 exercise witnessed participation from the senior officials from BIMSTEC countries, government officials and subject matter experts as speakers.
 - **BIMSTEC Countries-** Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand.
 - **BIMSTEC Full Form:** Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

PANEX-21: How it was conducted?

- The participants of the exercise will be divided into eight syndicates. One syndicate from the participating countries and two from India.

- It will analyze the capabilities of member states in responding to the natural disasters. The countries will share their best practices.
- The exercise will review the procedures of preparedness and response. It will then recommend the evolution of organized structure.
- During the exercise, the countries will discuss military-to-military cooperation protocol.

PANEX-21- Significance

- **Countering Natural Disasters:** Due to climate change and associated issues, the Bay of Bengal region has witnessed many cyclones and disturbances in the recent past like Cyclone Amphan and Jawad.
 - **PANEX-21** exercise will help India and other bordering countries prepare well and manage these disasters effectively.
- PANEX-21 promotes regional cooperation which will also help in effectively managing COVID-like pandemic in future and minimize the human and material loss in the region.

History, Art & Culture

Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY): Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art

Context

- Ministry of Culture implementing a financial grant scheme known as Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art under “Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY)”.

Key Points

- About:** Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art is being implemented by the ministry of culture under Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna.
- Objective:** it aims to strengthening the voluntary Buddhist/Tibetan Organizations including the monasteries engaged in propagation and scientific development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and tradition and in research in related fields.
- Funding Support:** Under Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Culture and Art, financial assistance is provided to the voluntary Buddhist and Tibetan Organizations.
 - These organizations include Monasteries engaged in the propagation and scientific development of Buddhist/ Tibetan Culture and tradition, located in any part of the country.
 - The quantum of funding is Rs.30.00 lakhs per year for an organization.
 - The Expert Advisory Committee (EAC) on the scheme is empowered to recommend the amount beyond the maximum limit but not exceeding Rs.1.00 crore from this scheme.

Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY)- Key Points

- About:** Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojana (KSVY) is an umbrella Central Sector scheme for the promotion of art and culture in the country.
- Parent Ministry:** Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojana (KSVY) is being implemented under Ministry of Culture.
- Sub-Schemes under Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY):** Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojna (KSVY) has the following sub-schemes through which financial assistance is provided to cultural organizations-
 - Scheme of Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture.
 - Scheme of Financial Assistance for Creation of Cultural Infrastructure.
 - Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage: to promote the 13 intangible cultural heritage of India, recognised by the UNESCO.

Mahaparinirvana Diwas: Death Anniversary of BR Ambedkar

Context

- Recently, ‘Mahaparinirvana Diwas’ was observed nationwide on 66th death Anniversary of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (BR Ambedkar).

Mahaparinirvana Diwas

- About:** Mahaparinirvan Diwas on December 6, 2021 as part of the major commemoration of ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’.
- Key Activities**
 - Dr. Ambedkar Foundation displayed a documentary film highlighting the importance of Panchtirthas, associated with Baba Saheb.
 - A special book named “**Social Justice and Empowerment: Reflections from Dr. Ambedkar Chairs**” was launched by Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 - A brochure was released on **Dr. Ambedkar’s Panchteerthas** and schemes and scholarships for Scheduled Caste students by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- ‘Shreshtha Yojna’ and National Fellowship Management and Grievance redressal Portal** was also launched.
 - Shreshtha Yojna:** It will aid socio-economic upliftment and overall development of the Scheduled Castes students by providing quality residential education in reputed private schools.
 - National Fellowship Management and Grievance redressal Portal:** It was launched with a view to enable an area-based development approach. The initiative aims at integrated development of Scheduled Castes majority villages.

Key Points about Dr. BR Ambedkar

- About:** BR Ambedkar was an Indian philosopher, political leader, writer, economist, socio-religious reformer and best known as the one of the main architects of the Indian Constitution.
 - He is popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar.
 - BR Ambedkar faced many injustices and discrimination in society as he was born in a caste that was considered untouchable in the contemporary society.
 - His work was centered around eliminating the caste-based discriminations in society and motivated the Dalits to organize and demand their rights.

- **Birth and Death:** Babasaheb Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in Madhya Pradesh in Hindu Mahar Caste.
 - Babasaheb Ambedkar died on 6 December 1956 in Delhi, India.
- **BR Ambedkar Education:** He was an economist and had doctoral degrees in economics from Columbia University and the London School of Economics.
- **Important works of BR Ambedkar:** Mook Nayak (weekly) 1920; Janta (weekly) 1930; The Annihilation of Caste 1936; Pakistan or the Partition of India; 'Buddha and His Dharma'; The Untouchables 1948; Buddha or Karl Marx 1956, etc.
- **Other Key Facts:**
 - 'Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association)' was launched by BR Ambedkar in 1923 for spreading education and culture amongst the downtrodden.
 - Dr. Ambedkar attended all the three Round Table Conferences (1930-32) in London representing the interests of Untouchables of the Indian Society.
 - Ambedkar became the first Law Minister in 1947 under the Congress-led government.
 - BR Ambedkar was appointed as the member of the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and remained a member till his death.
 - Dr. BR Ambedkar was bestowed with Bharat Ratna in 1990.

National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) Organizing 'Kala Kumbh' Artist Workshop

Context

- The National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi is celebrating Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav with Kala Kumbh artist workshops for painting scrolls representing the heroic lives and struggles of unsung heroes of India's freedom movement.
- The National Gallery of Modern Art is celebrating this as an integral part of the Republic Day celebrations 2022 in collaboration with Ministry of Defense.

Kala Kumbh' Artist Workshop- Key Points

- **About:** Kala Kumbh' Artist Workshop is being organized by the National Gallery of Modern Art from 10th – 17th December, 2021 at Bhubaneswar.
 - Similar workshops will also be held in other parts of the country.

- **Objective:**
 - Kala Kumbh' Artist Workshop aims to creatively showcase the legacy of India's freedom struggle and our national pride on five scrolls of seventy-five meters.
 - Kala Kumbh workshop intends to showcase our rich cultural heritage of indigenous and contemporary visual art practices, focusing on diverse geographical locations of India.
- **Organizations involved:** National Gallery of Modern Art has joined hands with Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology and Silicon Institute of Technology in Bhubaneswar for Kala Kumbha artists' workshop.

National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA)- Key Points

- **Background:** National Gallery of Modern Art is a national premier Institute that was established in 1954 by then vice-president Dr S Radhakrishnan in the presence of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.
- **About:** National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) is a repository of the cultural ethos of the country and showcases the changing art forms through the passage of the last hundred and fifty years starting from about 1857 in the field of Visual and Plastic arts.
 - **Headquarters:** National Gallery of Modern Art headquarter is situated at New Delhi.
 - **Branch:** National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai and National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru are the two branches of the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA).
- **Parent Ministry:** National Gallery of Modern Art is run and administered as a subordinate office to the Department of Culture, Government of India.

National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA)- Key Aims and Objective

- To acquire and preserve works of modern art from 1850s onward
- To organize, maintain and develop galleries for permanent display
- To organize special exhibitions not only in its own premises but in other parts of the country and abroad.
- To develop an education and documentation centre in order to acquire, maintain and preserve documents relating to works of modern art
- To develop a specialized library of books, periodicals, photographs and other audio-visual materials

- To organize lectures, seminars and conferences, and to encourage higher studies and research in the field of art history, art criticism, art appreciation, museology and the inter-relations on visual and performing arts.

Kashi Vishwanath Corridor

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India inaugurated Shri Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- The statue of Mother Annapurna, which was stolen from Kashi, has also now been re-established in Kashi after a wait of a century.

Key Points

- About:** The Kashi Vishwanath corridor project was conceptualised to create an easily accessible pathway for the pilgrims who had to meander through congested streets to take a dip in the Ganga and offering the water of the holy river at the Kashi Vishwanath temple.
- Funding:** Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is a Rs 339-crore project, the foundation of which was laid on March 8, 2019, has been completed in less than three years, despite the Covid pandemic.

Key Changes

- 23 buildings- tourist facilitation centre, Vedic Kendra, Mumukshu Bhavan, Bhogshala, city museum, viewing gallery, food court among others were inaugurated as part of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor project.
- During the process of destruction of the old properties, more than 40 ancient temples were rediscovered.
- These temples have been restored and beautified, while ensuring that there is no change in the original structure.
- Facades of buildings located on streets leading to the shrine have been painted in uniform light pink colour
- Earlier the **Kashi Vishwanath** temple area was only 3000 square feet which has now been enlarged to about 5 lakh square feet.
- Now 50000 - 75000 devotees can visit the **Kashi Vishwanath** temple and **Kashi Vishwanath** temple premises.

Kashi Vishwanath Temple- Key Points

- About:** Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the most famous temples in Varanasi, also known as the Golden temple dedicated to the Lord Shiva.
 - Location:** The Kashi Vishwanath temple stands on the western bank of the holy river Ganga.
 - Kashi Vishwanath Temple is also part of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest of Shiva temples.
- Origin:** Kashi Vishwanath Temple was constructed in the year 1780 by the Maratha monarch, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of the Indore.

Kolkata Durga Puja Inscribed on the UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List

Context

- Recently, the UNESCO inscribes 'Durga Puja in Kolkata' on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
 - The Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO took this decision during its 16th session being held at Paris, France.
- The UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee commended Durga Puja for its initiatives to involve marginalized groups, and individuals as well as women in their participation in safeguarding the element.
- With this, the **Kolkata Durga Puja** became the 1st festival in Asia to achieve recognition as UNESCO ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) of Humanity.

Kolkata Durga Puja- Key Points

- History:** In literature from around the 16th century we find the first mentions of the grand celebration of Durga puja by zamindars (landlords) in West Bengal.
 - Different scripts point to different rajas (kings) and zamindars who celebrated and financed the Durga puja for the whole village.
 - The Boendo Bariri Pujo (Puja in the house of zamindars) still remains a custom in Bengal.
- About:** Kolkata Durga Puja is a celebration of the feminine divinity. Kolkata Durga Puja is also a consummate expression of dance, music, crafts, rituals, practices culinary and cultural aspects.
 - The Kolkata Durga Puja festival transcends the boundaries of caste, creed and economic classes and joins the people together in its celebration.
- Time Period of Durga Puja:** **Kolkata Durga Puja** is celebrated in the month of Ashvin (September - October) each year.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity

- **Origin:** UNESCO ICH of Humanity list was established in 2008 when the Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into effect.
- **About:** UNESCO maintains a list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity with an aim to-
 - Ensure better protection of important intangible cultural heritage across the world and
 - To create awareness about significance of the Intangible Cultural Heritages among people.
- **Publishing Authority:** UNESCO ICH list is published by the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
 - Members of the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage are elected by State parties meeting in the United Nations General Assembly.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages in India

- India is a culturally diverse country. With the Inclusion of Kolkata Durga Puja, India has now 14 cultural heritages that are included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages List.
- UNESCO Recognized Intangible Cultural Heritage of India List is given below-
 1. Tradition of Vedic chanting (2008)
 2. Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana (2008)
 3. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre (2008)
 4. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas (2009)
 5. Mudi yettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala (2010)
 6. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan (2010)
 7. Chhau dance (2010)
 8. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir (2012).
 9. Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur (2013)
 10. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab (2014)
 11. Yoga (2016)
 12. Nawrouz (2016)
 13. Kumbh Mela (2017)
 14. Kolkata Durga Puja (2021)

Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav

Context

- Recently, the **Grand Finale of All India Vande Bharatam, Nritya Utsav** was hosted at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium Auditorium on 19th December.
- 73 groups comprising 949 dancers from 4 zones have made it to the Grand Finale of the Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav.

Key Points

- **About:** Vande Bharatam is an All-India dance competition being organized as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to commemorate 75 years of independence of India.
- **Organizing Ministry:** Vande Bharatam is a unique initiative of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Culture.
- **Key Objective:** Vande Bharatam competition aims to select the top dancing talent from across the country and provide them the opportunity to perform during the Republic Day Parade 2022.
- **Participation:** Over 2,400 participants from 200 plus teams were short-listed for the zonal level competition under Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav.
 - Participating groups performed specially choreographed acts in various dance categories like classical, folk, tribal, and fusion.
- **Award:** Winners of the Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav will get a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to display their talent at the Republic Day Parade which is watched not only in India, but across the globe.

Vande Bharatam Nritya Utsav- Selection Procedure

- **Step 1:** The Vande Bharatam competition began at the district level and saw the participation of more than 3,870 contestants in 323 groups.
- **Step 2:** Those who cleared the screening at the district level took part in the state-level competition. More than 20 virtual events were conducted for the state-level competition.
- **Step 3:** Over 300 groups were selected for the state-level comprising over 3,000 dancers/participants. Thus, the event allowed all aspirants to showcase their talent to win a slot at the National level.

Dr. BR Ambedkar: International Ambedkar Conclave

Context

- Recently, The President of India inaugurated the fifth International Ambedkar Conclave, in New Delhi, India.

Key Points

- About:** International Ambedkar Conclave is a forum that highlights key issues of social and economic justice and play an important role in spreading the thoughts and ideas of Dr Ambedkar.
- Organizers:** International Ambedkar Conclave is being organised by the Forum of SC and ST Legislators and Parliamentarians and Dr. Ambedkar Chamber of Commerce.
- Focus Areas of 5th International Ambedkar Conclave:** It focuses on education, entrepreneurship, innovation and economic development along with issue of constitutional rights.
- Objective: International Ambedkar Conclave** aims to take forward the people of scheduled castes and tribes who have been left behind in the developmental journey.
 - International Ambedkar Conclave also aims to ensure awareness among scheduled castes and tribes about their rights and various government initiatives for their welfare.

BR Ambedkar- Key Points

- About:** BR Ambedkar was an Indian philosopher, political leader, writer, economist, socio-religious reformer and best known as the one of the main architects of the Indian Constitution.
 - He is popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar.
 - BR Ambedkar faced many injustices and discrimination in society as he was born in a caste that was considered untouchable in the contemporary society.
 - His work was centered around eliminating the caste-based discriminations in society and motivated the Dalits to organise and demand their rights.

- Birth and Death:** Babasaheb Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 in Madhya Pradesh in Hindu Mahar Caste.
 - Babasaheb Ambedkar died on 6 December 1956 in Delhi, India.
- BR Ambedkar Education:** He was an economist and had doctoral degrees in economics from Columbia University and the London School of Economics.
- Important works of BR Ambedkar:** Mook Nayak (weekly) 1920; Janta (weekly) 1930; The Annihilation of Caste 1936; Pakistan or the Partition of India; 'Buddha and His Dharma'; The Untouchables 1948; Buddha or Karl Marx 1956, etc.
- Other Key Facts:**
 - 'Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association)' was launched by BR Ambedkar in 1923 for spreading education and culture amongst the downtrodden.
 - Dr. Ambedkar attended all the three Round Table Conferences (1930-32) in London representing the interests of Untouchables of the Indian Society.
 - Ambedkar became the first Law Minister in 1947 under the Congress-led government.
 - BR Ambedkar was appointed as the member of the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and remained a member till his death.
 - Dr. BR Ambedkar was bestowed with Bharat Ratna in 1990.



The Editorials Corner

Age and Marriage

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved a proposal to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years, the same age as for men.

Key Points

- Background:** In the Budget 2020, Finance Minister announced that the Government would set up a task force to look into the age of a girl entering motherhood with an aim to-
 - Lower maternal mortality rates,
 - Improve nutrition levels as well as
 - Ensure opportunities to women to pursue higher education and careers.
- Jaya Jaitly Committee:** It recommends raising the age of marriage along with initiating a strong campaign to reform patriarchal mindsets, and improved access to education.

Associated Concerns

- Poor Implementation of Laws:** As per the National Family Health Survey (2019-2021), 23.3% of women aged 20-24 years married before 18.
 - This shows that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, has not been wholly successful in preventing child marriages, especially among the poor.
- Misuse of the Law:** Women's rights activists found that Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 was often misused by the parents to punish their daughters who marry against their wishes or elope to evade forced marriages, domestic abuse, and lack of education facilities.
- Patriarchal Nature of Society:** it is feared that the change in the age limit will increase parents' authority over young adults instead of increasing the age of marriage for women.

Way Forward

- Prioritizing Women's Health:** Government should take steps to counsel girls on early pregnancies, and provide them the network to improve their health.
- Generating Awareness:** The focus must be on creating social awareness about women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and ensuring girls are not forced to drop out of school or college. Laws cannot be a short cut in the path to social reform.

Conclusion

- Coercive laws without wide societal support often fail to deliver even when their statement of objects and reasons aims for the larger public good. Laws cannot be a short cut in the path to social reform.

Omicron Shadow

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its latest bimonthly monetary policy action, maintained status quo on benchmark interest rates.
- The RBI's policy stance, as well as the full-year GDP growth and inflation projections, stems largely from a wariness of the risks posed by the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus.

Key Factors affecting Domestic Outlook

- The RBI governor said that 'headwinds from global developments' were the main risk to the domestic outlook, which was now "somewhat clouded by the Omicron variant of COVID-19".
- Private investment and private consumption- the key drivers of economic growth still lacking meaningful momentum.
- High Inflation:** RBI's continued stance on growth rather than stability may flame upside risks to long-term inflation and to inflation expectations.
 - The RBI's November round of 'Inflation Expectations Survey of Households' shows that households expect inflation to accelerate in the near and medium term.

RBI's Stance

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** opted to continue with its growth supportive 'accommodative' policy stance so as to enable a durable and broad-based recovery.
- Reason:** Prices of non-durable consumer goods, especially vegetables and other food grains, will decline with winter arrival, taming the inflation in near term.
 - RBI also asserted that the 'slack in the economy' may limit the pass-through of cost-push pressures that have kept core retail inflation persistently high for 17 months.

Way Forward

- **Balancing stability and growth:** RBI's Monetary Policy Committee should balance these two as price stability remains the cardinal principle for monetary policy as it fosters growth and stability.
- Though the RBI has begun to slowly tighten the liquidity spigot it opened in the wake of the pandemic last year, a more robust response to ward off price pressures must be taken.

Births and Rights

Context

- Recently, the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 was passed in the Lok Sabha.

Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020- Key Provisions

- **Regulation of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) field:** Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 seeks to establish a national registry and registration authority for all clinics and medical professionals in the segment.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill has provisions to protect the rights of the donors, the commissioning couple and the children born out of ART.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) seeks to grant and withdraw licences for clinics and banks depending on performance factors.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill proposes to make it impossible for outlaws to operate within the system and profit from it, while exploiting patients.
- The ART Bill also plans to put an end to illegal trafficking in embryos, and mistreatment of the poor coerced by their circumstances into donating eggs or sperm.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill has made provisions for single women, apart from a commissioning heterosexual couple.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 excludes two categories — LGBTQIA+ and single men from using Assisted Reproductive Technology.
 - As citizens, these groups too have the right to exercise reproductive rights.

Parliamentary Standing expert committee recommendation

- Parliamentary Standing expert committee recommended to include both categories- LGBTQIA+ and single men from using Assisted Reproductive Technology.
- It also recommended that it would not be appropriate to allow live-in couples and same sex couples to avail the facility of ART' citing the best interest of the child born through ART.
 - It recorded that 'given the Indian family structure and social milieu and norms, it will not be very easy to accept a child whose parents are together but not legally married'.

Way Forward

- While the law would do well to be cognizant of the sentiments of the people, its purpose is also to nudge retrograde social norms out of their freeze-frames towards broader acceptance of differences and preferences.
- The Surrogacy Bill intrinsically connected with the ART Bill was pending in the Rajya Sabha, and that it would be appropriate that both Bills be considered together before they are passed.

COP27, in Egypt, must focus on food systems

Context

- Climate change is seriously impacting the food system across the world and the next COP, COP27, must address the issue.

Key points

- COP 26: The commitment to put forth a record-shattering U.S.\$356 million to support the most vulnerable population is commendable, however, it is not enough to stay below the limit of 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

Climate crisis and hunger

- SDG 2 mentions about ending world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. However, the agenda is facing critical issues due to various issues.
- The link between climate crisis and hunger is well-acknowledged across the world.
 - Analysis by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) shows that a 2°C rise in average global temperature from pre-industrial levels will see around 190 million additional people in the grip of hunger.
 - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report has also stated that the climate crisis will not only impact food production and livelihoods but also threaten nutrition through multi-breadbasket failures.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation as it has doubled the population under chronic hunger from 130 million to 270 million.
- Vulnerable communities like farmers, fishermen who contribute the least to the climate crisis, will continue to bear the brunt of the impacts. The absence of social protection measures such as food safety nets forces the food insecure to depend on humanitarian aid for survival.
- The top 10 most food-insecure countries contribute just 0.08% of global carbon emissions.

Adaptation is urgent

- In its outcome document, COP 26 has acknowledged that rising temperature will continue to have adverse impacts on the vulnerable people.
- There is a strong emphasis on the urgency of scaling up action and support, including finance, capacity-building, and technology transfer, to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change.

Adaptation finance

- COP 26 observed that the contributions made to the Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund, represent significant progress when compared with previous efforts.
- However, current climate finance for adaptation remains insufficient to respond to worsening climate change impacts.
- There is a need for funding for developing nations, 50% for adaptation and resilience to the climate crisis. Moreover, developing countries already need \$70 billion for adaptation, and that figure could more than quadruple to \$300 billion a year by the end of this decade.
- In India, the WFP and the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Forestry are planning to develop a best practice model on adaptation and mitigation with potential support from the Adaptation Fund.

Key areas to focus on

- Creating resilient livelihoods and food security solutions by protecting and improving the livelihood of vulnerable communities.
- The adaptation of climate-resilient food crops, such as millets, for nutritional security.
- Enabling women's control and ownership of production processes and assets and increased value addition and local solutions.

- Promoting a resilient agriculture sector by creating sustainable opportunities, access to finance, and innovation for small-holder farmers, with climate information and preparedness.
- Building capacity and knowledge of civil society and governments for vulnerability analysis to increase food security by addressing the link between food security and climate risk.

Fixing broken food systems

- UN Food Systems Summit, held a few months before COP 26, revealed that food systems are unequal, strained, or broken as 811 million people are going to bed hungry.
- This critical issue requires reimagining the food system towards balancing growth and sustainability, mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe, quality, and affordable food, with investment from governments and the private sector in supporting farmers while maintaining biodiversity, improving resilience, and offering attractive income and work environment to smallholders and youth.

The gaps in the plan to tackle plastic waste

Context

- The draft regulations on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), will come into effect by the end of 2021. These regulations, however, are criticised by the experts for being retrogressive in their approach.

What is Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)?

- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a critical policy tool that hold manufactures accountable for their plastic products and packaging's end-of-life impacts.
- It is a mechanism to encourage holistic eco- design in the business sector.
- For example: An FMCG company is responsible not only account for the costs of making, packing and distributing a packet of chips, but also for the collection and recycling/reuse of the packet.

EPR Guidelines India: Criticism

- Disregards the informal sector: The draft guidelines discredit the waste collectors by not mentioning
- Increase unemployment: The draft guidelines direct producers to set up a private, parallel plastic waste collection and recycling chain. It will dispossess waste pickers of their means of livelihood.

- Limited scope of EPR: The draft guidelines leave a lot of multi-material plastic items like sanitary pads, chappals, and polyester from its ambit.
 - Multi-layered and multi-material plastics form the abundant type of plastic waste. These are low weight and voluminous, making them expensive to handle and transport.
 - Since they are primarily used in food packaging, they often attract rodents, making storage problematic. Even if this plastic is picked, recycling is technologically challenging as it is heterogeneous material.
 - The Plastic Waste Management Rules mandated the phase-out of these plastics. However, in 2018, this mandate was reversed.
- Unsustainable processing: Processes like waste-to-energy, co-processing and incineration releases carbon dioxide, particulate matter, among other harmful chemicals. They have negative impact on climate and also have health impacts.
- Moreover, technologies like chemical recycling and pyrolysis are capital-intensive, yielding low returns and running into frequent breakdowns and technological problems.

Recommendations

- People: EPR funds could be deployed for mapping and registration of the informal sector actors, building their capacity, upgrading infrastructure, promoting technology transfer, and creating closed loop feedback and monitoring mechanisms.
- Plastic: To recycle all the recyclable plastics, the government could support and strengthen the informal recycling chain by bridging gaps in adequate physical spaces, infrastructure, etc.
 - The scope of plastics covered by the guidelines could be altered to exclude those plastics which are already efficiently recycled and to include other plastic and multi-material items.
- Processing: And end-of-life processing technologies should be closely evaluated, based not only on their health and environmental impacts, but also on the implications for continued production of low-quality and multi-layered plastics.

Way forward

- An effective EPR framework should address the issue of plastics and plastic waste management in tandem with the existing machinery, minimise duplication and lead to a positive environmental impact, with monitoring mechanisms including penalties for non-compliance.

High LPG prices are scorching the air pollution fight

Context

- The price of LPG refills has risen by **more than 50% to over ₹900 per cylinder** in November this year compared to around ₹600 over the past year.
- With **no refill subsidies** in place since May 2020, there are concerns about many households who could now go back to using polluting sources of energy, such as firewood and dung cakes.

Key points

- Solid fuel use for cooking is the **leading contributor to air pollution** in India.
- It is also causing related **premature deaths** in India, which is estimated to be around over 600,000 every year, as per the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019.
- Government has launched **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** scheme to promote cleaner fuel.
- Under this scheme, the Government distributed more than 80 million subsidised LPG connections.

Success of UJJWALA

- As per the India Residential Energy Survey (IRES) 2020, conducted by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy:
 - **LPG has now replaced biomass** as the most common cooking fuel in India.
 - Nearly **85% of Indian homes have an LPG connection** and 71% use it as their primary cooking fuel, compared to only 30% a decade back.
 - This **reversal of trends** could be attributed to the success of the Ujjwala.
- This decline in the use of solid cooking fuel would have significantly influenced the sector's contribution to air pollution.

Present issues

- Due to high LPG prices, around **30% of Indian households continue to rely on biomass** as their primary cooking fuel.
- The practice of biomass usage is predominantly **concentrated in rural areas**, particularly among States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal.
- **Urban slums** are also critical hotspots where the use of biomass for cooking is widely prevalent.
- Moreover, **easy availability of free biomass** and lack of home delivery of LPG refills further reduce the efficacy of LPG as a reliable and affordable replacement of solid fuel.

Proposed solution

Reinstate subsidies

- Reinstate the subsidies on LPG **refill for low-income households**.
- COVID-19 has already impacted the ability of households to afford LPG on a regular basis. Thus, resuming subsidies would be critical to support LPG use in many households.
- The Government can also explore diverse approaches to **identify beneficiaries**. This may include limiting the subsidy provision to seven to eight LPG refills annually and excluding well-to-do households using robust indicators.

Boost timely availability of LPG for all consumers

- **Poor accessibility** of LPG cylinders is a major factor behind the use of biomass among urban slum households. Moreover, only half the rural LPG users receive home delivery of LPG refills.
- There is a need to **strengthen the LPG supply chain** and enforce timely service delivery, particularly in States with a large number of Ujjwala connections and slum population.
- Self-Help Groups could be roped in for this cause. They will not only help aggregate demand but also create jobs in distant areas.

Create a new market for locally available biomass

- Pilot initiatives should be launched that focusses on promoting the **use of locally available biomass in decentralised processing units** that manufacture briquettes and pellets for industrial and commercial establishments.
 - For instance, the National Thermal Power Corporation recently invited applications to supply biomass pellets to fire their power stations.
- The Government can also **incentivise entrepreneurs** to participate in such activities.
- Similarly, households can be incentivised to supply locally available biomass (including crop stubble or dung cakes) to Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) production plants being set up under the **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)** scheme.
- Such measures would help enhance local income and livelihood opportunities, in turn encouraging rural families to use LPG on a regular basis.

Conclusion

- The Government has recently launched the Ujjwala 2.0 scheme to distribute 10 million additional free LPG connections to poorer households.
- However, ensuring **affordability and timely availability** of LPG cylinders for refills would be imperative if we want that households should stay away from polluting biomass.
- Such efforts would go a long way in **improving the health and well-being** of our citizens.

Home truths on climate change

COP 26

- In the recently held COP 26 at Glasgow, UK, developed countries put the blame of carbon emission on the developing countries like India and China.
- The developed countries, at Glasgow, pushed for the global acceptance of net zero emissions by 2050 while they should have led the race.
- The efforts by some countries to equate India and other similar countries as the worst emitter also stands flawed as according to carbonbrief.org, the U.S., Russia, the U.K., Japan and Canada account for 10% of the world's population, but 39% of cumulative emissions", while China, India, Brazil and Indonesia account for 42% of the world's population but just 23% of cumulative emissions.

India: International commitments vs national laws

There were many issues which that India flagged in COP 26 but in our own country those issues are safely bypassed. Following are some of the examples:

- The Central Government tried to protect its sovereign decisions on the use of fossil-based energy requirements. However, in India, the government's coal use policy is driven by its determination to hand over mineral resources, including coal, to the corporate sector.
- Even as India boasts of switching to solar energy to meet its emission control targets, it is privatising the coal industry, auctioning coal mines and encouraging open cast mines for commercialisation and export.
- India has not signed the land degradation agreement at COP 26 as the Government believes that the declaration linked trade to land use and trade falls under the purview of the World Trade Organization. However, at home, policies towards corporatisation of agriculture and the encouragement to contract farming undermines food security.

- Similarly, the Government was against the declaration on “recognise and (extend) support to smallholders, indigenous peoples and local communities”. However, at home, proposed Forest Policy of 2018, suggested amendments to the Forest Act of 1927, the amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, among others, make it easier to handover forests to the private sector.

Setting an example

- At COP 15, the Government committed to develop carbon sinks to the equivalent of 2 billion to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ by 2030.
- However, the Estimates Committee of Parliament in its 2018-2019 report said that to fulfil the promise of sequestering the CO₂ target, 30 million hectares of land are required to plant indigenous trees.
- These trees should not be monocultures or plantations as was being done.
- Planting trees along national highways or along railway tracks as is being planned will be a very small component of the required target.

Way forward

- The government must reverse its pro-corporate policies reflected in privatisation.
- It is only with the cooperation of those who have protected forests that India can make a real contribution in the efforts to control climate change and be an example to the rest of the world.

Lack of Political will

Context

- Recently, the fishermen conflict between India and Sri Lanka has flared up again with the arrest of 68 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan authorities.
- Palk Bay, an important marine zone between south-eastern India and northern Sri Lanka, has been a source of dispute for long.

India-Sri Lanka Fisherman Conflict- Background

- The genesis of the dispute can be traced to the October 1921 negotiations between representatives of the Governments of Madras and Ceylon.
- The negotiation started on the need for the delimitation of the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar.
- It was in the mid-1970s that two agreements were signed by India and Sri Lanka, under which the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) came into being.

- The IMBL made Katchatheevu a part of Sri Lanka, even though the islet, was once an area under the zamindari of the Raja of Ramanathapuram.
- Contrary to the expectations that the agreements gave way to new problems, including the recurring incidents of Tamil Nadu fishermen crossing the IMBL and getting caught by the Sri Lankan authorities.

Associated Issues

- **Loss of Lives:** On many occasions, several fishermen lost their lives.
 - This year, five fishermen died in collisions between their fishing boats and vessels of the Sri Lankan authorities.
- **Asymmetric nature of fishing practices:** While Tamil Nadu’s fishing community uses mechanized bottom trawlers, its counterpart uses conventional forms of fishing, as trawling is banned in Sri Lanka.
- **Good Fishery Resources:** fishermen of Tamil Nadu continue to cross the IMBL, as the Sri Lankan side of the Bay is considered to have more fishery resources than the Indian side.

Step taken by India

- **Restricting Bottom Trawling:** Many attempts are on to wean away the fishermen of Tamil Nadu from bottom trawling.
- **Deep Sea Fishing Project:** It was launched in July 2017, has not yielded the desired results.
 - Relaxation of norms of the project is under the consideration of the Union Government, to draw greater response from the fishermen.

Way Forward

- **Promoting Deep Sea Fishing:** Government should continuously promote Deep Sea Fishing as it takes a longer duration and has a higher recurring cost per voyage than what the fishing community experiences currently.
- **Promoting Strategies for Sustainable Fishing:** Experts say various strategies, including the promotion of seaweed cultivation, open sea cage cultivation, seaweed cultivation and processing, and sea/ocean ranching should be adopted.
- **Promoting formation of Fish Farmer Producer Organizations:** Fishing community should be encouraged to form fish farmer producer organizations.
 - Forming Fish Farmer Producer Organizations may take to sustainable fishing practices.

Looking beyond the Forest Rights Act

Context

- As on April 2020, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has distributed forest-land claims to 46% of the applicants. However, the supporters of tribal rights allege that the Forest Department has **overlooked the genuine claims** of the tribal people.

What is Forest Rights Act?

- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, was enacted to **protect the marginalised socio-economic** class of citizens and balance the right to environment with their right to life and livelihood.

Issues in implementation

- Bypassing Gram Sabha:** The Act provides for the constitution of a Forest Rights Committee comprising members from within the village by conducting a Gram Sabha with two-thirds of the members present at the meeting. These committees were mostly constituted by the Panchayat Secretaries upon the directives received from District Magistrates at short notice, bypassing the Gram Sabha.
- Nominated members:** The nominations for members for the taluk-level and district-level committees were also not transparent.
- Subjugation of women:** FRA provides for equal rights in titles issued under the Act for women. However, at the ground-level, the implementation of this provision is far from reality.
- Ignorance of admissible proofs:** In the initial stages of implementation, there was insistence on satellite images as evidence while other admissible proofs were ignored. It has resulted in mass rejections of claims by the authorities.
- Poor awareness:** Poor awareness levels among the tribal people about the Act has also affected their decision to place their claim effectively. For example, in some villages in Chhattisgarh, the extent of land that was awarded was far smaller than what was claimed within the ceiling. The claimants did not protest anticipating that whatever little they had received could be taken back by the authorities.

Issues in tribal areas

- A majority of the tribal communities in India are **poor and landless**.
- Tribals are witnessing a **decline in the quality** of forest produce. Moreover, influx of labourers from Bihar, who were willing to work for low wages, has led to **reduced earnings** of tribals.
- Lands with the tribals, including the lands recognised under the FRA, are **not very fertile**. Moreover, **lack of irrigation** facilities forces them to depend only on rainfall.
- To enhance their income, they migrate to work as **construction or road-laying labourers**.

Way forward

- Focus on horticulture:** Livelihoods of the locals would improve if horticulture practices are promoted in addition to bamboo and aloe vera plantations with an assured market.
- Ecotourism:** Medical and ecotourism, along the lines of the Kerala model, could also increase the tribal income, and help address the cause of tribal poverty.
- Skill-based education:** Providing skill-based education with assured jobs would do wonders in these areas.
- Proper implementation of schemes and Acts:** To improve the condition of the tribal people, the already available schemes like PM Van-Dhan Yojana and Acts like FRA and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 should be properly implemented.



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A whiff of trouble in the Nord Stream pipeline

Context

- Last month, Germany's network regulator suspended the certification procedure for Nord Stream 2. It has raised questions over its possible development in the near future.

What is Nord Stream pipeline?

- It is a gas pipeline that will provide a **direct supply of natural gas** under the Baltic Sea from **Russia to Germany**, avoiding transit through Ukraine and other European countries.

Nord Stream pipeline: Why the controversy?

- The Ukrainian authority has called the project a **'dangerous geopolitical weapon'**.
- The United States and most of the European countries (except for Austria, Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands) have also opposed the proposed pipeline.
- Opposing countries have concern that once operational, the project would render more **leverage and bargaining power** to Russia while dealing with Europe and its energy market.
- Some experts are also of the view that Russia is trying to use Nord Stream 2 as a political weapon to put pressure on European security and **'undermine the democratic resilience of European institution'**.

Nord Stream pipeline: Russia's view

- Russia claims that Nord stream 2 is purely a commercial project, which is **shorter, cheaper, and economically more viable**, compared to the gas transit through multiple European countries.

US on Nord stream pipeline

- In 2019, Donald Trump had signed a law that **imposed sanctions on any EU company** that was involved in completing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.
- US administration also feared that the pipeline would give Russia **more influence over Europe's energy supply** and reduce its own share of the lucrative European market for American liquefied natural gas (LNG).
- Germany, apparently, opposed the **'extraterritorial sanctions'**, stating that they were able to decide their own energy policies without an 'interference in autonomous decisions taken in Europe'.

- In May this year, the Joe Biden administration decided to issue a **national security waiver** for the Nord Stream 2 AG.
- The main reason was to **restore trust and close cooperation** between the U.S. and Germany.

What makes Nord pipeline significant?

- Germany has set out a plan to **shut down its nuclear and coal power plants**, with an objective of gradually moving towards renewable sources of energy.
- In order to fill the supply gap and diversify the sources, the country plans to build its **first LNG terminal** to receive gas from Qatar, the U.S., and others.
- Europe is facing a **'perfect storm'** in its energy market, whereby wholesale energy prices have more than doubled in 2021, and there is a limited supply of fossil fuels altogether.
- Russia is blamed for an **intentional decrease in gas supplies** to Europe, aiming to speed up the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline by European Union (EU) market regulators.

Way ahead

- Some EU leaders have called for **stronger actions toward the Nord Stream pipeline** from Germany, some even **asking for possible termination** in the event of further military escalation in Ukraine by Russia. How the German chancellor responds will decide the fate of the ambitious project.

Road to Recovery

Context

- National Statistical Office has recently released the GDP and GVA estimates that has affirmed that the **economy is now on the path to recovery** after last fiscal's record contraction.

Key points

GDP

- Second quarter **GDP expanded 8.4%**, rebounding from the last year's 7.4% contraction.
- This rebound in economy is both due to **base effect and the actual growth** in the GVA as the growth is even more than the second quarter of the pre-pandemic 2019-20 fiscal year.

GVA

- Gross Value Added also underscore the improvement, as the July-September 2021 GVA figure registered a 0.5% expansion from the July-September period of 2019.
 - GVA captures the extent of activity across the **eight major formal sectors** of the real economy.
- **Five of the eight sectors** posted growth not just from the year-earlier quarter but also surpassed the pre-COVID-19 performance.
- Manufacturing, which has the second-largest share of GVA, appears to have regained traction as it showed **3.9% expansion** from the pre-pandemic second quarter of fiscal 2020.
- The key employment-providing services categories, including construction **are yet to fully recover** from the pandemic's devastating impact.
- Moreover, as the potential impact of the Omicron variant is not known, the outlook here may stay hazy for now.

Issues

- **Private final consumption expenditure** is not showing promising results.
 - Private final consumption measures spending on everything from essentials to luxury goods and the entire gamut of services by all consumers.
 - It has the largest share of GDP at 55%.
- **Reduced consumer spending:** The uncertainty induced by the pandemic, coupled with reduced or lost incomes, continues to depress demand and is reflected in consumer spending still remaining 3.5% less than the pre-COVID level.
- **Government consumption spending:** Since the Union Government is taking fiscal consolidation measures, it is spending less on consumption. The expenditure on consumption is even less than the pre-COVID levels.
- **Manufacturing PMI** data by IHS Markit has revealed that rising input costs could force manufacturers to raise prices that will further increase the inflation.

Way forward

- Policy makers need to **increase the demand-supportive measures** including increasing government spending to ensure that the recovery sustains and gains traction.

The challenge of achieving 9.5% growth rate

Context

- Recently, National Statistical Office (NSO) has released the second quarter gross value added (GVA) and gross domestic product (GDP) numbers, which indicated the pace of economic recovery in India after the two COVID-19 waves.
- The growth of first and second quarters are largely driven by the strong base effect. As the base effect weakens in the third and fourth quarters of 2021-22, a strong growth momentum would be needed to ensure that at the end of this fiscal year, GVA and GDP in real terms exceed their corresponding pre-COVID-19 levels of 2019-20.

Key points

Improved sectors

- In the first half of 2021-22, four of the eight GVA sectors have exceeded their corresponding 2019-20 levels. These are agriculture; electricity, gas; mining and quarrying; and public administration, defence and other services.
- Growth in these sectors is majorly due to Central government's emphasis on capital expenditure which started gathering momentum in recent months.
- Emphasis of Government on expenditure, supplemented by private investment resulted in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) showing a positive growth of 1.5% in the second quarter of 2021-22 over its corresponding level in 2019-20.
- However, to ensure a positive growth at the end of this fiscal year, investment as well as consumption demand have to pick up strongly in the remaining two quarters

Growth projections

- Both the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have projected annual growth at 9.5% for 2021-22.
- To achieve this target, we require a growth of 6.2% in the second half of 2021-22.
- Moreover, if we achieve the growth rate 9.5% in 2021-22, we can be confident that 2022-23 will see a growth rate of 6% to 7%.

Economic recovery: government capital expenditure

- Government capital expenditure forms the core of measures needed to achieve the requisite GDP-targets.
- Moreover, the Centre's gross tax revenues have shown an unprecedented growth rate of 64.2%, which could facilitate the government expenditure.
- However, the increase in fiscal expenditure might bring pressure to fiscal deficit target of 6.8% because of upward revisions in some expenditure items such as food and fertilizer subsidies, MGNREGA and extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.
- In spite of these pressures, it would be advisable for the Centre to continue infrastructure spending.
- The Centre's incentivisation of state capital expenditure through additional borrowing limits would also help in this regard.
- The gross tax revenues of Centre in 2021-22 as compared to 2019-20 would also supplement the Government emphasis on increased expenditure.

High frequency indicators

- PMI (Purchasing Managers Index) manufacturing increased to a 10-month in October 2021.
- PMI services remained high at 58.1 in November 2021, its second-highest level since July 2011.
- Gross GST collections at ₹1.31 lakh crore remained above the benchmark of ₹1 lakh crore for the fifth consecutive month in November 2021.
- Core IIP growth increased to 7.5% in October 2021 from 4.4% in September 2021.
- Merchandise exports growth was at 26.5% in November 2021 and 43.0% in October 2021 as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year.

The Elders are assets, not dependents

Context

- Countries around the world is focussing towards demographic dividend—a blessing in disguise of population explosion.

Key points

- In India, the government is taking various measures for the young generation, ranging from education, entrepreneurship, sports training to innovation and entrepreneurship.
- NFHS-5, however, indicates that while much progress has been made, the metrics for infant and child health continue to be dismal.

- Though attention should be paid on the young generation for the benefits they would accrue if given the right platform at the right time, focus should also be on the elderly population (those above 60 years of age) of the society.

Focus on the elderly population: Why needed?

- Life expectancy in India has risen from 50 (1970-75) to 70 years (2014-18);
- The number of elders is already 137 million, and expected to increase by 40% to 195 million in 2031, and 300 million by 2050.

Elders: Assets or dependents?

- While one perspective would look at them as dependents, a rather different view would look at them as a potential asset: a massive resource of experienced, knowledgeable people.
- Converting them from dependents to productive members of society depends on two primary factors: their health and their capabilities.

Issues of elderly population

- Familial neglect, low education levels, socio-cultural beliefs and stigma, low trust on institutionalised health-care services and affordability exacerbate the issues of elderly population.
- As per the first ever Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI), 11% of the elderly suffer from at least one form of impairment (locomotor, mental, visual and hearing).
- Cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevalence is estimated to be 34% amongst 60-74-year-olds.
- Inadequate government schemes: A NITI Aayog report indicates that 400 million Indians do not have any financial cover for health expenses. Despite Ayushman Bharat, and pension schemes by Centre and States, a very large number of elders are among the uncovered.
- No bed/ward dedicated to elders: a status report filed by the Government in the Supreme Court of India in 2019 stated that 16 States and Union Territories did not have a single ward/bed dedicated to elders.

Steps needed

- Provide quality, affordable, and accessible health and care services to the elderly.
- Senior first approach: COVID Vaccination, first to seniors, portrays an image of caring State towards its elderly population.
- Creation of adequate services for them as they require the most diverse array of health-care services.

- Increase public health-care spending, and invest in the creation of well-equipped and staffed medical care facilities and home health-care and rehabilitation services.
- Accelerate and expand implementation of programmes such as the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE), The Ayushman Bharat and PM-JAY.
- Digital literacy campaigns: To achieve the objectives of National Digital Health Mission.

The Need to Reopen Anganwadis

Context

- Karnataka, Bihar and Tamil Nadu are opening or considering opening their anganwadis shortly. The anganwadis are closed since the April 2020-lockdown.
- Their closure significantly impacted service delivery and weakened an important social safety net.

The Need to Reopen Anganwadis

- **About:** Anganwadis are created as a part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). ICDS covers about 88 million children aged 0-6 years in India.
- **Key Function:** anganwadis play a crucial role in supporting households, particularly from low-income families, by providing childcare, health and nutrition, education, supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral services.
- **Need for Re-opening of Anganwadis:**
 - According to National Family Health Service (NFHS)-5 data, in 2019-20, less than 15% of five-year-olds attended any pre-primary school at all.
 - An estimate shows that the time women spend on unpaid work may have increased by 30% during the pandemic.
 - In a COVID-19 rural household surveys across eight States, 58% of women cited home-schooling as the biggest contributor to increase in unpaid work.

Key Significance

- **Child welfare:** Surveys by IDinsight across five States in November 2018 and November 2019 found that anganwadi workers were a primary source of nutrition information for families.
 - The National Education Policy, 2020, places anganwadis at the centre of the push to universalise access to early childhood care and education (ECCE).

- **Promote Economic activity:** Sending younger children to anganwadis will free up women's time, including for economic activities.
- **Crucial for Early childhood Development:** As platforms for early childhood education and nutrition support, anganwadis can play an important role for children to achieve their potential.

Associated Challenges

- **Lack key Knowledge:** A 2018-19 survey found that among mothers listed with anganwadi workers, knowledge about key health behaviour such as complementary feeding and handwashing was low, at 54% and 49%.
- **Lack of proper training:** Anganwadi workers often do not have the support or training to provide early childhood care and education (ECCE).
- **Burden of Administrative work:** Administrative responsibilities take up significant time, and core services like pre-school education are deprioritised.
 - A typical worker spends an estimated 10% of their time (28 minutes per day) on pre-school education, compared to the recommended daily 120 minutes.
- **Poor Infrastructure:** NITI Aayog found that only 59% of anganwadis had adequate seating for children and workers, and more than half were unhygienic.
- **Poor utilization of Anganwadi services, especially in Urban areas:** According to NFHS- 4 data, in urban areas, the utilisation of early childcare services at anganwadis is only 28%, compared to 42% for rural areas.

Way Forward

- **Invest resources:** India must invest robustly in the Anganwadis that are the world's largest social programme on early childhood services.
- **Universalize the access to early childhood care and education (ECCE):** In this context, recently, government proposed a phased rollout of ECCE program across all anganwadis, covering one-fifth each year, starting from 2021-22.
- **Promote home visits:** Studies in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh (and globally) have found that home visits, where volunteers work with children and caregivers, significantly improved cognition, language, motor development and nutritional intake while also reducing stunting.

- **Promoting home-based newborn and young child care:** they need to extend beyond the first few months of a child's life, with seamless coordination with anganwadi workers.
- **Remuneration and career opportunities of Anganwadis:** Many States will have to improve career incentives and remuneration for anganwadi workers.
- **Deployment of Additional Anganwadi workers:** A recent study in Tamil Nadu found that an additional worker devoted to pre-school education led to cost effective gains in both learning and nutrition.

Conclusion

- As the world's largest provider of early childhood services, anganwadis perform a crucial role in contributing to life outcomes of children across India.
- To improve these outcomes, we need to invest more significantly in anganwadis, and roll out proven innovative interventions.

The Price of food must figure in the policy

Context

- The farm laws—which have been repealed— were projected as a means of raising farm revenues via higher prices of agricultural commodities. It is similar to other attempt by the Government where the focus is on Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and other subsidies and less on the food prices.

Impact of higher price of food

- High price of food can trigger economic insecurity for the individual.
- For the household, a high price of food crowds out expenditure on other items ranging from health and education to non-agricultural goods.
- This prevents the market for non-agricultural goods from expanding, which is necessary for the non-agricultural economy to grow.
- Share of food in a household's budget is very large for India. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2016) show that this share ranges from over 30% for India to less than 10% for the U.S. and the U.K.
- Countries with higher per capita income have a lower share of food in consumption expenditure

- This is in line with Ricardo's understanding of how economies progress i.e., as food gets cheaper, growth in the non-agricultural economy is stimulated.

Flawed agricultural policy of India

- Agricultural policy in India has remained quite unaccountable as the food prices are continuously increasing. For instance, the relative price of food has risen over 50% since 1991.
- This increase in food prices is out of line with the global experience of development.
- 1991 reforms led to success in services sector. However, it has also led to increase in food prices.
- This increase in price of food has led to lack of expansion of the manufacturing sector in India.

Agriculture sector

- Agriculture, unlike industrial production, is affected by fluctuation in the weather, which makes it risky.
- Public investment in the 1960s—when India was facing food shortage— had raised the agricultural production.
- However, it introduced the strategy of ensuring farm profitability though favourable prices assured by the state.
- Further, due to unconditional purchase from the state, grain stockpiles started accumulating.
- These stocks have often rotted, resulting in deadweight loss, paid for by the public through taxes or public borrowing.
- Finally, with all costs of production reimbursable and all of output finding an assured outlet, supply has outstripped demand. This has led to an unimaginable pressure on the natural environment, especially water supply.

Way Forward

- India needs an agricultural policy that ensures that farming is profitable but not at the cost of a high price of food.
- The 'food problem' should no longer be seen only in terms of the availability of food from domestic sources.
- Raising yields will ensure profitability without raising producer prices, which will inflate the food subsidy bill. When negotiating with the farmers, the government must protect the interests of the poor of India.

Thinking before Linking

Election Laws (Amendment) Bill

- Recently, the parliament has passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 that aims to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem along with many other electoral reforms.

Linking Electoral Roll Data with the Aadhaar Ecosystem- Key Points

- Key Objectives:** Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 aims to-
 - To purify the rolls and weed out bogus voters,
 - Ensure Gender neutrality among service voters
 - Easing the procedure for inclusion in Electoral roll by providing four qualifying dates for revision of rolls instead on one.
- Expected Benefits:**
 - Seeding of Aadhaar data with voter is expected to result in eliminating the problem of multiple entries of same person in a constituency of in multiple constituencies.
 - Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 may allow remote voting which is beneficial especially to the migrant voters.
 - Providing multiple dates for revision of electoral rolls will help in faster enrolment of those who turn 18.

Associated Concerns

- Inadequate Discussion and Consultation:** Lack of consultation with all stakeholders and poor discussion on the floor of the Rajya Sabha/Lok Sabha could undermine progressive aspects of a problematic legislation.
 - Government pushed through the **Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021** in Parliament to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem without much discussion.
- Exclusion of Voters:** Critics believe that the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 may result in disenfranchisement of legitimate voters unwilling or unable to submit Aadhaar details.
 - The choice not to submit is linked to a “sufficient cause”, which will be separately prescribed.
 - Whether the few permissible reasons not to intimate one’s Aadhaar number include an objection on principle is unknown.

- Violation of Individual Privacy:** In the absence of any comprehensive Privacy Law in the country, Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 may result in-
 - Possible violation of privacy, and
 - Possible misuse of demographic details for profiling of voters.

Way Forward

- Using other methods to identify bogus voters:** other identification processes can be deployed to eliminate the duplicate voter IDs.
 - Aadhaar database may be irrelevant to verify voter identity because it is an identifier of residents and not citizens.
- Consultation and Participation of relevant stakeholders:** Government must invite public opinion and allow deeper parliamentary scrutiny before implementing the new provisions of the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021.

What rising inequality means

Context

- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the stark divide between the rich and the poor. Inequality in our country can be seen from the following facts.
- Top 10% of the global population share 52% of the total income, while the bottom half survives with a mere 8.5% of it.
- In terms of wealth, the top 10% of the global population own 76% of the total wealth, while the bottom 50% share a mere 2%.

Inequality around the world

- The top 10% have an income share of 36% in Europe vis-à-vis the top 10% with a share of 58% of the total income in West Asia and North Africa. It means inequality is moderate in Europe and sharp in Africa.
- There is a theory that with increase in national income, inequality increases. This theory, however, does not hold true in many cases.
- For example, high-income countries such as the U.S. have higher levels of inequality as against countries such as Sweden, which have moderate levels of inequality.
- Similar contradictions are also seen when we contrast middle-income nations such as Brazil, India and China as against Malaysia and Uruguay.
- So, it can be said that inequalities around the world are less due to rise in the average income and more due to the poor redistributive policies.

What rising inequalities means

- Wealth concentration and rising inequality is making nations wealthier but government poorer. It is because resources are limited that are gradually moving into private hands.
- The scenario is undoubtedly an outcome of the ineffectiveness of redistribution measures and also a complete absence of measures that discourage accumulation.
- Some additional features of this exposition of inequality also relate to imbalance of women's share in income.
- It also shows the ecological inequities indicated by the differential carbon emission levels.

- This is likely to benefit the Rajouri-Poonch belt with the highest concentration of STs, mainly non-Kashmiri speaking Muslims.

Associated Concerns

- **Opposition from Local Political Parties:** shift of political power to the Jammu region has led to protest by political parties.
 - Fear has grown especially after reorganization of the erstwhile J&K State into two UTs and the controversial elimination of its special constitutional status in 2019.
- **Shift of Political Power:** Proposed remapping of Assembly constituencies may result in the shift of political power from the Muslim region to the Hindu region.
- **Enhancing the share of Jammu:** The allocation seems to enhance the electoral prospects of the Jammu-based parties at the cost of the Kashmir-based ones.
 - Valley parties have opposed the draft as "unacceptable" and "divisive" and question its legality.
- **Constitutional Validity:** There is a national freeze on delimitation, and the constitutional challenge to the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019, is still pending before the Supreme Court.

Conclusion

- Continuing arbitrariness and heavy-handed measures to repurpose the politics of J&K may appear successful momentarily, but that may not be the sustainable route.
- Government must adopt a democratic path driven by more conversations and accommodative measures with ultimate goal of providing statehood to the J&K.



Drawing a Line

Context

- J&K Delimitation Commission in its report proposed remapping of Assembly constituencies in the Union Territory (UT).
- This has got the entire spectrum of regional parties in the Kashmir Valley up in arms. At the core of their protest is the fear of a shift of political power to the Jammu region.

J&K Delimitation Commission

- **Background:** The J&K Delimitation Commission was constituted on March 6, 2020, by virtue of the Parliament Act under the provisions of Part V of the J&K Reorganization Act, 2019.
- **Mandate:** J&K Delimitation Commission was mandated to redraw and delineate seven additional Assembly segments to the 83-member Legislative Assembly of the UT.

Key Recommendation

- **Factors considered for additional constituencies-**
 - Inadequate communication and
 - Lack of public conveniences due to their excessive remoteness or inhospitable conditions on the international border.
- The J&K Delimitation Commission has suggested six additional Assembly segments in Jammu, from 37 to 43, and one in the Valley, from 46 to 47.
- **Reservation for SC/ST:**
 - The J&K Delimitation Commission has suggested reserving seven seats for Scheduled Castes (Hindus) that mainly populate the Samba-Kathua-Jammu-Udhampur belt.
 - The commission, for the first time ever, has also earmarked nine seats for Scheduled Tribes.

The NMP is hardly the Panacea for Growth in India

Context

- The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) envisages an aggregate monetisation potential of ₹ 6-lakh crore through the leasing of core assets of the Central government in various sectors.
 - These sectors include roads, railways, power, oil and gas pipelines, telecom, civil aviation, shipping ports and waterways, mining, food and public distribution, coal, housing and urban affairs, etc.

Key Points

- **About: National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP)** policy advocates unlocking idle capital from non-strategic/underperforming government owned assets and reinvesting the funds.
- **Investment:** National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) aims to invest realized assets into new infrastructure projects and augmentation of assets such as greenfield infrastructure creation.
- **Objective:** National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) is to unlock the value of investments in public sector assets by tapping private sector capital and efficiencies.
- **Need:** India needs to invest about \$1.5 trillion on infrastructure development in order to aspire to become \$5 trillion economy by the year 2024-25.
- **Significance:** National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) is expected to boost the economy, generate better employment opportunities, and drive the competitiveness of the Indian economy.

Status of PSUs in India

- There are 256 operationally-run central public sector undertakings (CPSUs), employing about one million people;
- All PSUs together posted a net profit of ₹93,294 crore (FY 2019-20).
- Out of all PSUs, 96 have been conferred the Ratna status (72, 14, and 10 are Miniratnas, Navaratnas, and Maharatna companies, respectively).

Associated Concerns

- **Cost overruns:** In some cases, project completion time is exceeded, leading to elevated project cost.
 - This often results in either the project itself becomes unviable at the time of its launching or delays its break-even point.

- **Overcapitalization of Projects:** optimum input-output ratio is seldom observed in a majority of government infrastructural projects leading to their overcapitalization.
- **Other Issues with PSUs:** Few other reasons for the failure of public infrastructural assets are listed below-
 - A reluctance to implement labour reforms,
 - A lack of inter-ministerial/departmental coordination,
 - Poor decision-making,
 - Ineffective governance and
 - Excessive government control

Other Steps taken by Government- PM Gati Shakti Master Plan

- **About: Pradhan Mantri Gati Shakti National Master Plan** was launched by the Prime Minister of India for multi-modal connectivity.
 - It is basically a digital platform for information sharing among different Ministries and departments at the Union and State levels.
- **Objective:** PM Gati Shakti Master plan aim 'to synchronise the operations of different departments of 16 Ministries including railways and roadways for seamless planning and coordinated execution of infrastructure projects in a timely manner'.
- **Implementation:** PM Gati Shakti Master Plan entails analytical decision-making tools to disseminate project-related information and prioritise key infrastructure projects.
 - It also fosters a periodical review and monitoring of the progress of cross-sectorial infrastructure projects through the GIS platform in order to intervene if there is a need.

Way Forward

- **Identifying the Concerning Areas in PSUs:** policy makers shall introspect the decline of profit-making government assets before reinvesting the funds received to create fresh assets, post the NMP exercise.
 - In the absence of above introspection, nation may find itself in a vicious cycle of creating new assets and then monetising the same when they become liabilities for the Government at a later stage.

- **Revamp corporate governance structure of PSUs:** in order to enhance operational autonomy augmented with strong governance practices including listing on stock exchange for greater transparency and accountability.
 - The Department of Public Enterprises has initiated revamping of the performance monitoring system of central public sector enterprises to make them more transparent, objective and forward looking, based on sectoral indices/benchmarks.

- These reforms can help India attain a faster growth path, provided its integration with the world economy and trade gains strategic intensity.
- **Leadership Role Played during COVID Crisis:**
 - Besides protecting its own citizens, India provided medical supplies and equipment to more than 150 countries in the world.
 - India also played a leadership role in the supply of COVID-19 vaccines, besides undertaking a massive vaccination programme for its own citizens.
 - India is undertaking serious action in meeting its other global commitments including climate change where its targets will make a difference.

The Stepping Stones in the Post-pandemic World

Context

- In the Post pandemic world, the Governments, global institutions, industry, academia and non-profit organisations around the world have joined hands to tackle the global challenge and help countries rebuild their economies.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted lives and livelihoods across the world; an economic catastrophe that affected growth, trade and investments, and employment, among others.

Impact of COVID-19

- **Economic Impact:** Covid pandemic has led to an economic catastrophe that affected growth, trade and investments, and employment, among others.
 - Exit from the massive stimulus packages itself may pose risks of economic and financial instability.
- **Deepening of Inequality:** COVID-19 led to growing inequality of incomes among countries as well as within countries.
- **Global Supply Chain Disruption:** the pandemic severely disrupted global supply chains and set the global trade trajectory on a downward path.
- **Structural Changes:** certain structural changes are likely to become permanent in the future and this is especially true of the digital economy. For example, telemedicine, remote work and e-learning, delivery services, etc.

India's Role

- **Economic Reforms:** India's recent reforms, role in combating the pandemic, and startup vibrancy, among other factors, have attracted global attention.

Positive signs of economic recovery

- For this year, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) indicates an increase of 22.4% in the value of global merchandise trade compared with 2020.
- World trade is expected to stand about 15% higher than before the COVID-19.
- The global foreign direct investment (FDI) flows in the first half of 2021 reached an estimated \$852 billion, showing stronger than expected rebound momentum.
 - FDI flows in developing economies also increased significantly, totalling \$427 billion in the first half of 2021.

Way Forward

- **International Collaboration and Cooperation:** to ensure economic growth, building competitiveness of the investment climate, ensuring sustainable development paths and adapting to technology acceleration.
 - Partnership Summit organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) could be a good starting point for India.
 - The convergence of the global scientific community for vaccine development and genome sequencing has set a new precedent in international cooperation.
- **Ensuring Global Partnership:** Global Partnership will help in building resilience to cope with the threats posed by pandemics and other man-made and natural disasters.
 - Global partnerships help in building mutual trust and understanding by agreeing upon common rules and standards and sharing of best practices.

- **Focus on Trade and Investment:** It is important as Trade and investment flows have proved to be an engine of growth for many countries, in spite of temporary supply chain glitches due to covid-19 pandemic.
 - Facilitate trade partnerships at both regional and multilateral levels to better protect consumers and producers.
 - Cooperation on trade facilitation for enhancing open and transparent markets, technical assistance and reduction of complex process and arrangements must be promoted.
- **Addressing the Economic Inequality:** Economic Inequality among countries as well as within countries must be addressed for the long-term sustainability of the growth process.
- **Building sustainable and disaster proof supply chain:** should be the top priority for the countries, especially for ensuring effective and timely medical supplies.
- **An ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation:** this must be created with targeted policies and interventions with an aim to enhancing productivity and generating employment.
- **Filling Technological Gap by ensuring Equitable adoption of Technologies:** Digital economy completely transformed the future of work and the business landscape.
 - This necessitates equitable adaptation to advanced technologies and tools, building robust infrastructure, and occupational transitions.
 - Technological gap can be reduced by ensuring skill development and worker training, investments in education and vocational training, and capacity building.
- **International alliances and cooperation on Building sustainable solutions:** Like green technology, resource efficiency, sustainable finance, etc.,
 - These sustainable solutions must be promoted to fast-track meeting the sustainable development goals and for ensuring all-round development.

Conclusion

- In the post-pandemic world, it will be critical for India to improve on its investment climate and systematically target its export capabilities across sectors and regions.
- Ease of doing business and new free trade agreement with major markets will help it integrate closely with the world through trade and investment partnerships.

Wrong Forum

Draft resolution on Climate Change

- Recently, India voted against the UN Security Council (UNSC) on a draft resolution on climate change.
- Draft resolution on climate change had the support of a majority of the UNSC members but was voted down by India and Russia (it has veto powers) while China abstained.

India voted against UNSC Climate Resolution

- **Background:** Germany had circulated a similar draft last year which was never put to vote in the Security Council as the Trump administration opposed it.
- **About:** draft resolution on climate change was piloted by Ireland and Niger. Through this the developed world is pushing to include “climate security” in the agenda of the UNSC.
- **Arguments in Favour:** Climate Change is creating security risks in the world, which will exacerbate in the future with water shortage, migration and a destruction of livelihoods.
 - Supporters believe that due to this reason Climate Security should be included in the UNSC Mandate.
- **Grounds of Opposition:**
 - It is a reflection of India’s long-held opposition to expanding the UNSC’s mandate into areas that are already being dealt with by other multinational fora.
 - UNSC’s primary responsibility is “maintenance of international peace and security” and climate change-related issues are outside its ambit.

Present Mechanism

- **UNFCCC Role:** Currently, all matters related to climate change are being discussed in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a specialised agency of UN.
 - UNFCCC has over 190 members.
 - UNFCCC has put in place an international approach to combat global climate change.
- **Performance of UNFCCC:** its framework has made progress in tackling climate change. It is this process that led to the-
 - Kyoto Protocol,
 - Paris Agreement and
 - Recent COP26 summit (Glasgow Summit)
- **Key Concern:** Decision making at UNFCCC conferences is slow and there has to be faster collective action to tackle climate change and associated challenges.

Impact of bringing Climate Security within UNSC's Mandate

- **Creating Imbalance:** It will also give more powers to the world's industrialised countries, which hold a veto power, to decide on future action on climate-related security issues.
- **Economic Disparity:** it is wrong to look at climate change through the prism of security. Each nation faces different challenges in transitioning into a greener economy.
- **Elite Representation:** UNSC has only five permanent members who hold veto powers. An important issue like climate security can't be left to only their decision-making discretion.

Way Forward

- **Fulfilling the Prior Commitments:** Developed Countries, all big polluters, have not met the promises they made with regard to climate action.
 - They must fulfill them at earliest for ensuring climate justice and security.
- **Assistance to Least Developed and Developing Countries:** Developed countries must provide financial and technical assistance to least developed and developing countries.

- This will encourage them to keep their climate promises.
- **Reforming UNFCCC:** UNFCCC should make sure that the promises made by member countries, especially the powerful ones, in previous conferences are kept.
 - UNFCCC forum should also expand the scope of discussions to include climate-related security issues.

