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(Preliminary Examination)

Current Issues

(February 2021)

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15 All India 1st Ranks in ESE

62 All India 1st Ranks in GATE

Current Issues

(February 2021)

1. The government has decided to include 14 new minor forest produce items under **the mechanism for marketing of minor forest produce through a minimum support price scheme**.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs has announced Inclusion of 14 additional Minor Forest Produce (MFP) items and stipulation of their Minimum Support Price (MSP) under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme titled "Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and development of value chain of MFP"

Minimum Support Price(MSP) for Minor Forest Produce(MFP)

The MSP for MFP scheme was started by the government in 2013 to ensure fair and remunerative prices to MFP gatherers.

MFP is an important source of livelihoods for tribal people). This includes non-timber forest produce of plant origin such as bamboo, canes, fodder, leaves, gums, waxes, dyes, resins and many forms of food including nuts, wild fruits, honey, and lac.

Minor Forest Produces provide both subsistence and cash income for an estimated 100 million people who live in or near forests. MFP forms a major portion of their food, fruits, medicines and other consumption items and also provide cash income through sale. **Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from Minor Forest Produce** on which they spend major portion of their time. This activity has strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the Minor Forest Produces are collected and used/sold by women. Minor Forest Produce sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

2. The NITI Aayog released the '**Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island - Vision Document**'.

This, the vision proposes to leverage the strategic location and natural features of the island by building a new **greenfield coastal city** there, that will be developed as a **free trade zone** and will **compete with Singapore and Hong Kong**.

The proposal is pivoted along three development anchors and zones:

- Zone 1 — spread over 102 sq km along the east coast of Little Andaman — will be the financial district and medi city and will include an aerocity, and a tourism and hospital district.
- Zone 2 - Spread over 85 sq km of pristine forest, the leisure zone, will have a film city, a residential district and a tourism SEZ.
- Zone 3 — on 52 sq km of pristine forest — will be a nature zone, further categorised into three districts: an exclusive forest resort, a nature healing district and a nature retreat, all on the western coast.

Further it states that there will be 'underwater' resorts, casinos, golf courses, convention centres, plug-and-play office complexes, a drone port with fully automated drone delivery system, nature cure institutes and more.

Blocks to development

The vision document notes that there are certain factors that could prevent Little Andaman from becoming the new Singapore. These include lack of good connectivity with Indian mainland and global cities, and certain Supreme Court notifications that pose an impediment to development. Another key factor is the **presence of indigenous tribes** and concerns for their welfare.

Environmental Concerns

There are other concrete obstacles that the vision takes note of: 95% of Little Andaman is covered in forest, a large part of it the pristine evergreen type. Some 640 sq km of the island is Reserve Forest under the Indian Forest Act, and nearly 450 sq km is protected as the Onge Tribal Reserve, creating a unique and rare socio-ecological-historical complex of high importance. The vision needs 240 sq km (35%) of this land.

Divisional Forest Officer, Little Andaman noted that said such large diversion of forest land would cause obvious environmental loss leading to irreversible damage (more than 2 million trees stand in the forest land sought for these projects), that habitats of various wild animals including endangered sea turtles would be affected, and that the impact could not even be assessed because there was no environment impact assessment report and neither were there any detailed site layout plans for the proposed diversion.

3. The 15th Finance Commission report with recommendations for the 2021-26 period was tabled in Parliament

Background: The Finance Commission is a constitutional body formed by the President of India to give suggestions on centre-state financial relations. The 15th Finance Commission, Chaired by Mr. N. K. Singh, was required to submit two reports. The first report, consisting of recommendations for the financial year 2020-21, was tabled in Parliament in February 2020. The final report with recommendations for the 2021-26 period was tabled in Parliament on February 1, 2021.

Key recommendations in the report for 2021-26 are as follow:

Share of states in central taxes : The share of states in the central taxes for the 2021-26 period is recommended to be 41%, same as that for 2020-21. This is less than the 42% share recommended by the 14th Finance Commission for 2015-20 period. The adjustment of 1% is to provide for the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh from the resources of the centre.

Criteria for devolution

- **Income distance:** Income distance is the distance of a state's income from the state with the highest income. Income of a state has been computed as average per capita GSDP during the three-year period between 2016-17 and 2018-19. A state with lower per capita income will have a higher share to maintain equity among states.
- **Demographic performance:** The Terms of Reference of the Commission required it to use the population data of 2011 while making recommendations. Accordingly, the Commission used 2011 population data for its recommendations. The demographic performance criterion has been used to reward efforts made by states in controlling their population. States with a lower fertility ratio will be scored higher on this criterion.
- **Forest and ecology:** This criterion has been arrived at by calculating the share of the dense forest of each state in the total dense forest of all the states.

- **Tax and fiscal efforts:** This criterion has been used to reward states with higher tax collection efficiency. It is measured as the ratio of the average per capita own tax revenue and the average per capita state GDP during the three years between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

Fiscal roadmap

- The Commission suggested that the centre bring down **fiscal deficit** to 4% of GDP by 2025-26. For states, it recommended the fiscal deficit limit (as % of GSDP) of: (i) 4% in 2021-22, (ii) 3.5% in 2022-23, and (iii) 3% during 2023-26. If a state is unable to fully utilise the sanctioned borrowing limit as specified above during the first four years (2021-25), it can avail the unutilised borrowing amount in subsequent years (within the 2021-26 period).
- **Extra annual borrowing** worth 0.5% of GSDP will be allowed to states during first four years (2021-25) upon undertaking power sector reforms including: (i) reduction in operational losses, (ii) reduction in revenue gap, (iii) reduction in payment of cash subsidy by adopting direct benefit transfer, and (iv) reduction in tariff subsidy as a percentage of revenue.
- The Commission recommended forming a high-powered inter-governmental group to: (i) review the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM), (ii) recommend a new FRBM framework for centre as well as states, and oversee its implementation.
- The commission stated that **Income and asset-based taxation should be strengthened.**
 - To reduce excessive dependence on income tax on salaried incomes, the coverage of provisions related to tax deduction and collection at source (TDS/TCS) should be expanded.
 - Stamp duty and registration fees at the state level have large untapped potential. Computerised property records should be integrated with the registration of transactions, and the market value of properties should be captured. State governments should streamline the methodology of property valuation.
- The inverted duty structure between intermediate inputs and final outputs present in GST needs to be resolved. Revenue neutrality of GST rate should be restored which has been compromised by multiple rate structure and several downward adjustments. Rate structure should be rationalised by merging the rates of 12% and 18%. States need to step up field efforts for expanding the GST base and for ensuring compliance.
- A comprehensive **framework for public financial management** should be developed. An **independent Fiscal Council** should be established with powers to assess records from the centre as well as states. The Council will only have an advisory role. A time-bound plan for phased adoption of standard-based accounting and financial reporting for both centre and states should be prepared. A standardised framework for reporting of contingent liabilities should be devised. Both centre and states should strive to improve the accuracy and consistency of macroeconomic and fiscal forecasting.
- States should amend their fiscal responsibility legislation to ensure consistency with the centre's legislation, in particular, with the definition of debt. States should have more avenues for short-term borrowings other than the ways and means advances, and overdraft facility from the Reserve Bank of India. States may form an independent debt management cell to manage their borrowing programmes efficiently.

Other recommendations by the commission:

- **Health:** States should increase spending on health to more than **8% of their budget** by 2022. Primary healthcare expenditure should be two-thirds of the total health expenditure by 2022. Centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) in health should be flexible enough to allow states to adapt and innovate. Focus of CSS in health should be shifted from inputs to outcome. All India Medical and Health Service should be established.
- **Funding of defence and internal security:** A dedicated non-lapsable fund called the **Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS)** will be constituted to primarily bridge the gap between budgetary requirements and allocation for capital outlay in defence and internal security. The fund will have an estimated corpus of Rs 2.4 lakh crore over the five years (2021-26). Of this, Rs 1.5 lakh crore will be transferred from the Consolidated Fund of India. Rest of the amount will be generated from measures such as disinvestment of defence public sector enterprises, and monetisation of defence lands.
- **Centrally-sponsored schemes (CSS):** A threshold should be fixed for annual allocation to CSS below which the funding for a CSS should be stopped (to phase out CSS which outlived its utility or has insignificant outlay). Third-party evaluation of all CSS should be completed within a stipulated timeframe. Funding pattern should be fixed upfront in a transparent manner and be kept stable.

4. The Myanmar military grabbed power in a coup – the third time in the nation's history since its independence from British rule in 1948.

Background: The military has alleged that the **general elections** held in November 2020 were **full of “irregularities”** and that therefore, the results are not valid. It has questioned the veracity of some 9 million votes cast in the election. The elections were won by the National League for Democracy led by Ms. Suu Kyi with a landslide victory

India-Myanmar Relations

India on Monday expressed “deep concern” over the reports of an unfolding military coup in Myanmar. Especially because India been building a robust relationship with Myanmar over the past two decades which intensified after the democratic process began in 2011. On January 22, India sent 15 lakh doses of the Covishield vaccine to assist Myanmar in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. On October 15, 2020, India announced the handing over of a kilo-class submarine INS Sindhuvir to the Myanmar navy. The Indian gift is the first submarine for the Myanmar navy.

Importance of Myanmar to India

Myanmar lies on the crossroads between India and Bangladesh, on the one hand, and ASEAN countries, on the other. It is on the crossroads of South and South-East Asia. It forms a vital part of India's Act East Policy

Strategically, India has established its presence across the shores of Myanmar, in the Bay of Bengal, as a result of participation of ONGC in successful offshore oil exploration projects. It also has a presence in Sittwe Port that it has built on the Bay of Bengal, principally for transportation of goods from Mizoram and other north-eastern States, across the Bay of Bengal, to Kolkata

Further, virtually every armed insurgent group in our North-East has links with armed insurgent groups in north-western Myanmar. The Myanmar-China border has become the epicentre of local armed separatist groups operating on Myanmar soil, and Indian groups, ranging from ULFA in Assam to the NSCN (IM) in Nagaland

Moreover it was also noted that these groups are armed and used as leverage by China to interfere in and influence Myanmar's internal affairs. China even has an Ambassador to liaise with armed groups operating along and across the China-Myanmar border.

5. On the occasion of the **World Wetland Day** the government announced the establishment of a **Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM)**, as a part of the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM)

India has nearly 4.6% of its land as wetlands, covering an area of 15.26 million hectares and has 42 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 1.08 million hectares. The year 2021 also commemorates the **50th anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention** on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, celebrated annually as World Wetlands Day.

The convention of wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Centre will help in building partnership and networks with relevant national and international agencies. **WCM** would serve as a **knowledge hub and enable exchange between State/ UT Wetland Authorities**, wetland users, managers, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. The Centre would also assist the national and State/ UT Governments in the design and implementation of policy and regulatory frameworks, management planning, monitoring and targeted research for its conservation.

What are Wetlands?

Wetlands are ecologically as well as economically important systems which harbour rich natural resources and play a crucial role in various hydrological cycle, carbon sequestration and global greenhouse gas emission.

Wetlands act as buffers for terrestrial run-off and thus prevent eutrophication of inland and coastal waters. Further, it not only acts as a reservoir of biodiversity but also triggers the mass movement of living creature, i.e. refuge for migratory birds.

6. The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**, has crossed 1.75 crore eligible women till financial year 2020

PMMVY is the government's **maternity benefit scheme**. Under the scheme pregnant women and lactating mothers receive Rs. 5,000 on the birth of their first child in three instalments, after fulfilling certain conditions.

The **direct benefit cash transfer** is to help expectant mothers meet enhanced nutritional requirements as well as to partially compensate them for wage loss during their pregnancy.

The eligible beneficiaries would receive the incentive given under the **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for Institutional delivery** and the incentive received under JSY would be accounted towards maternity benefits so that on an average a woman gets Rs 6000 / - .

The scheme is implemented in all the districts of the country in accordance with the provision of the **National Food Security Act, 2013**.

7. A **Parliamentary** Standing Committee has recommended that the government assuage concerns raised over the **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019**, including over creation of a **national databank of crime scene DNA profiles** and **fears of communities being targeted**.

Context: Members have expressed concern about the use of DNA technology — or more accurately its misuse — to target different segments of our society based on factors like religion, caste or political views.

The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill provides for the regulation of use of DNA technology for establishing the identity of certain persons.

Some of the Highlights of the bill are as follows:

- **Use of DNA Data:** Under the Bill, DNA testing is allowed only in respect of matters listed in the Schedule to the Bill. These include offences under the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and for civil matters such as paternity suits. Further, the Schedule includes DNA testing for matters related to establishment of individual identity.
- **Collection of DNA:** While preparing a DNA profile, bodily substances of persons may be collected by the investigating authorities. Authorities are required to obtain consent for collection in certain situations. For arrested persons, authorities are required to obtain written consent if the offence carries a punishment of up to seven years. If the offence carries more than seven years of imprisonment or death, consent is not required. Further, if the person is a victim, or relative of a missing person, or a minor or disabled person, the authorities are required to obtain the written consent of such victim, or relative, or parent or guardian of the minor or disabled person. If consent is not given in these cases, the authorities can approach a Magistrate who may order the taking of bodily substances of such persons.
- **DNA Data Bank:** The Bill provides for the establishment of a National DNA Data Bank and Regional DNA Data Banks, for every state, or two or more states. DNA laboratories are required to share DNA data prepared by them with the National and Regional DNA Data Banks. Every Data Bank will be required to maintain indices for the following categories of data: (i) a crime scene index, (ii) a suspects' or undertrials' index, (iii) an offenders' index, (iv) a missing persons' index, and (v) an unknown deceased persons' index.

The Bill also provides for the establishment of a **DNA Regulatory Board**, which will supervise the DNA Data Banks and DNA laboratories. The Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, will be the ex officio Chairperson of the Board. The Board will comprise additional members including: (i) experts in the field of biological sciences, and (ii) Director General of the National Investigation Agency and the Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.

The functions of the Board include: (i) advising governments on all issues related to establishing DNA laboratories or Data Banks, and (ii) granting accreditation to DNA laboratories. Further, the Board is required to ensure that all information relating to DNA profiles with the Data Banks, laboratories, and other persons are kept confidential.

8. The Centre has extended the tenure of The Commission to Examine **Sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**

Case for sub-categorisation of OBCs

OBCs are granted 27% reservation in jobs and education under the central government. However, some have stated that only a few affluent communities among the over 2,600 included in the Central List of OBCs have secured a major part of this 27% reservation. The argument for sub-categorisation — or creating categories within OBCs for reservation — is that it would ensure “equitable distribution” of representation among all OBC communities.

To examine this, the Rohini Commission was constituted on October 2, 2017.

Terms of reference of the Commission

It was originally set up with three terms of reference:

- To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
- To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such OBCs;
- To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

A fourth term of reference was added on January 22, 2020, when the Cabinet granted it an extension:

- To study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

Progress of the commission

In 2018, the Commission analysed the data of 1.3 lakh central jobs given under OBC quota over the preceding five years and OBC admissions to central higher education institutions, including universities, IITs, NITs, IIMs and AIIMS, over the preceding three years. The findings were: 97% of all jobs and educational seats have gone to just 25% of all sub-castes classified as OBCs; 24.95% of these jobs and seats have gone to just 10 OBC communities; 983 OBC communities — 37% of the total — have zero representation in jobs and educational institutions; 994 OBC sub-castes have a total representation of only 2.68% in recruitment and admissions.

Extent of OBC recruitment in central jobs

As per the report submitted to the NCBC by the Department of Personnel and Training on July 24, 2020, OBC representation is 16.51 % in group-A central government services, 13.38 % in group-B, 21.25 % in group-C (excluding safai karmacharis) and 17.72 % in group-C (safai karmacharis). This data was for only 42 ministries/departments of the central government.

In a meeting with the NCBC on July 21 last year, Home Minister Amit Shah was told that a number of posts reserved for OBCs were being filled by people of general category as OBC candidates were declared “NFS” (None Found Suitable). As reported in The Indian Express quoting sources, Shah has asked the NCBC to collect countrywide data. Sources say that NCBC is yet to collect and process the data of the “NFS”.

9. The Centre told the Delhi High Court that though the **right to privacy has been held to be a “sacred fundamental right”** and is being “respected” by the government, the **“veil of privacy” can be lifted for certain “legitimate state interest”**.

Context: The government was responding to a petition seeking permanent halting of the Centre’s surveillance projects — **Centralized Monitoring System (CMS), Network Traffic Analysis (NETRA) and National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)**. The petitioners have contended that these enable government authorities to intercept, store, analyse and retain telephone and internet communications data in bulk in **violation of the fundamental right to privacy**.

The government said lawful interception, monitoring or decryption of any messages or information stored in any computer resources is done by authorised agencies after due approval in each case by the competent authority.

Right to Privacy

In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court of India in 2017 stated that the **right to privacy is Fundamental Right**, provided by the Constitution of India primarily from the guarantee of life and personal liberty in **Article 21** of the Constitution.

Elements of privacy also arise in varying contexts from the other facets of freedom and dignity recognised and guaranteed by the **fundamental rights** contained in **Part III**.

Privacy includes

- Preservation of personal intimacies, the sanctity of family life, marriage, procreation, home and sexual orientation.
- A right to be left alone.
- Safeguards individual autonomy, recognises the ability of the individual to control vital aspects of his or her life.
- Personal choices governing a way of life are intrinsic to privacy.
- Protection of heterogeneity and recognition of plurality and diversity of our culture.
- By being in public place doesn't mean an individual has surrendered privacy, even as the legitimate expectation of privacy may vary from the intimate zone to the private zone and from the private to the public arena.

However, like other rights which form part of the fundamental freedoms protected by Part III, including the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21, privacy is **not an absolute right**.

10. The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Council held its first meeting and approved the establishment of the world's largest radio telescope.

SKAO is a new intergovernmental organisation dedicated to radio astronomy and is headquartered in the UK. At the moment, organisations from ten countries are a part of the SKAO. These include Australia, Canada, China, India, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK.

Radio telescope

A Radio telescope is an astronomical instrument consisting of a radio receiver and an antenna system that is used to detect radio-frequency radiation between wavelengths of about 10 metres (30 megahertz [MHz]) and 1 mm (300 gigahertz [GHz]) emitted by extraterrestrial sources, such as stars, galaxies, and quasars.

The Arecibo telescope in Puerto Rico, which was the second-largest single-dish radio telescope in the world, collapsed in December 2020. The telescope was built in 1963 and because of its powerful radar, scientists employed it to observe planets, asteroids and the ionosphere, making several discoveries over the decades, including finding prebiotic molecules in distant galaxies, the first exoplanets, and the first-millisecond pulsar.

Significant Square Kilometre Array telescope

The telescope, proposed to be the largest radio telescope in the world, will be located in Africa and Australia whose operation, maintenance and construction will be overseen by SKAO. The completion is expected to take nearly a decade at a cost of over £1.8 billion.

Some of the questions that scientists hope to address using this telescope include the beginning of the universe, how and when the first stars were born, the life-cycle of a

galaxy, exploring the possibility of detecting technologically-active civilisations elsewhere in our galaxy and understanding where gravitational waves come from.

As per NASA, the telescope will accomplish its scientific goals by measuring neutral hydrogen over cosmic time, accurately timing the signals from pulsars in the Milky Way, and detecting millions of galaxies out to high redshifts.

- 11.** The NITI Aayog has asked Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International to conduct a study on the **“economic impact” of the “judicial activism”** of courts and tribunals

The study is a part of the larger umbrella project undertaken by NITI Aayog under which it wants to establish a **judicial performance index**, which would measure the performance of judges at district courts and subordinate levels, as per senior government officials.

The objective of the study, being funded completely by the NITI Aayog, aims a “narrative building for sensitising the judiciary on the economic impact of their decisions” and the findings will be used as a “training input for judges of commercial courts, National Green Tribunal, High Courts and Supreme Court

- The first study is on the economic impact of the ban that was imposed by the apex court in March 2019 on the construction of a greenfield airport at Mopa in Goa. The top court had suspended an economic clearance granted for the airport and had then asked the Expert Appraisal Committee to revisit its decision. The ban on construction was lifted by an order of the top court in January 2020 but had several revised conditions.
- The four other judgments, for which the economic impact assessment study will be carried out by CUTS International, include the SC’s February 2018 ban on iron ore mining in Goa, a 2013 NGT ban on sand mining in the Yamuna river in Gautam Buddha Nagar, the recurring SC ban on construction of buildings in Delhi and National Capital Region as well as the apex court’s decision rejecting the opening of Vedanta’s Sterlite copper plant, which has been closed since April 2018.

Judicial Activism

Judicial activism in India implies the authority of the courts to declare the regulations unconstitutional and void if they breach or if the legislation is incompatible with one or more of the constitutional clauses.

Judicial Activism Vs Judicial Overreach

There is a narrow demarcation between activism and overreach. Sometimes in the process of judicial activism, the judiciary intervenes too much and reflects its personal beliefs in the course of providing justice. The interpretation of law which is the primary function of judiciary but the courts rather than interpreting the law start making the law, issue guidelines and directions which is to be done by the legislature. Due to judicial overreach, conflict takes place between the legislative and judiciary

- 12.** The researchers at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, have come up with a way to **generate clean fuel hydrogen from water at a low-cost**

In the study that was funded by the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Energy Centre (OEC), India, the researchers have successfully split water by a process known as **Sulphur-Iodine (SI) thermochemical hydrogen cycle** to generate low-cost, clean hydrogen fuel for industrial consumption.

Hydrogen as fuel

Hydrogen is the simplest element. An atom of hydrogen consists of only one proton and one electron. It's also the most plentiful element in the universe. Despite its simplicity and abundance, hydrogen doesn't occur naturally as a gas on the Earth – it's always combined with other elements. Water, for example, is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen (H₂O).

A Hydrogen fuel cell combines hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity, heat, and water.

Advantages of using Hydrogen as fuel

1. Hydrogen is a clean energy source - On burning hydrogen produces water as a byproduct
2. Hydrogen energy is not toxic and does not cause damage to human health unlike nuclear energy or natural gas.
3. Hydrogen energy is highly efficient - It is 3 times more powerful than most fossil based fuel sources

Limitations of Using Hydrogen as a fuel

1. Hydrogen is a highly flammable and volatile substance which makes it a risky fuel to work with, this is due to its high energy content, hydrogen gas.
2. Further there is also no smell to hydrogen so sensors are required to detect leaks to prevent any catastrophes.
3. Hydrogen energy is difficult to store - To be able to store it we need to compress it into a liquid and store it at a low temperature. The high amounts of pressure needed to store hydrogen makes it a difficult fuel to transport in large quantities.

13. Ukraine is looking **to procure some military hardware from India** in addition to efforts to deepen its presence in the Indian defence market

Ukraine has signed four **agreements worth \$70 million** which includes sale of new weapons as well as maintenance and upgrades of existing ones in service with the Indian armed forces.

Other ties with Ukraine

- Ukraine is currently upgrading the **AN-32 transport fleet of the Indian Air Force (IAF)** under a deal finalised in 2009. Of the over 100 aircraft, 40 were upgraded in Ukraine and the remaining are to be done by the IAF Base Repair Depot in Kanpur, with upgrade kits supplied by Antonov. Ukraine has in the past pitched its **AN-132 transport aircraft** as a replacement for the IAF's AN-32 fleet.
- Ukraine also manufactures the **R-27 air-to-air missiles** which are in use by the IAF on its SU-30MKI fighters.
- The Ukraine team also held discussions with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and looked at **possible collaborations in research and development.**

Ukraine

Ukraine is a country located in eastern Europe. It is the **second largest country on the continent after Russia**. The capital is Kyiv (Kiev), located on the Dnieper River in north-central Ukraine.

Ukraine gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is bordered by **Russia** to the east and north-east; **Belarus** to the north; **Poland, Slovakia and Hungary** to the west; and **Romania, Moldova, Crimea**, and the **Black Sea** to the south.

14. Recently, the Union Minister of Science & Technology addressed the Mission Innovation (MI) to mark the beginning of phase-2 of the mission or Mission Innovation 2.0.

Mission Innovation (MI) is a global **initiative of 24 countries and the European Union** to accelerate **global clean energy innovation** dramatically. It was announced on 30th November 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious measures to combat climate changes.

The first phase has shown that work done under Innovation Challenges (ICs) have mobilized in a relatively short period, relying on members' leadership and voluntary efforts to advance IC objectives. These resources have dramatically accelerated the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix which is clean, affordable, and reliable.

The Objectives of MI are to:

- Enhance the public sector investment to a substantial level.
- Increased private sector engagement and investment.
- Increase international collaboration.
- Raising awareness of the transformational potential of innovation.

There are **8 innovation challenges** under the mission innovation: IC1 – **smart grids**, IC2 – **Off-grid access to electricity**, IC3 – **Carbon capture**, IC4 – **Sustainable biofuels**, IC5 – **Converting sunlight**, IC6 – **Clean energy materials**, IC7 – **Affordable cooling and heating of buildings**, IC8 – **Renewable and clean hydrogen**.

15. Scientists have found the first geological evidence of an earthquake on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, which dates back to 1697.

Scientists from **Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG)**, a research institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, carried out a mega trench excavation at Himebasti village, Arunachal Pradesh, India, where the most recent event records the imprints of the 1697 Sadiya earthquake and analysed it with modern geological techniques.

They found the first geological surface rupture signatures in the form of exposed deposits associated with rivers and streams deformed by a thrust fault along a Northeast dipping fault zone. In order to constrain the causative faulting event at this site, the team dated twenty-one radiocarbon samples from the trench exposure.

Significance of this finding:

Studying the past earthquakes help to **determine the seismic potential** of the region. This helps in mapping the earthquake hazard of the region and enables syncing the development activities accordingly.

Further, since Arunachal Pradesh, which at the **Indo-China Border**, is sometimes centre of dispute making it strategically important.

Seismic Zone Map of India:

The entire Indian landmass, susceptible to different levels of earthquake hazard, has broadly been classified into four distinct seismic Zones, referred to as Zones II to IV as per the Seismic Zoning Map of India.

According to latest seismic zoning map brought out by the **Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS)**, over 65 percent of the country is prone to earthquake of intensity **Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale (MSK) VII or more**.

16. Over a lakh **migratory water birds** arrived at the **Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary** in Himachal Pradesh this winter. However, thousands of migratory birds died at the lake due to an outbreak of bird flu in late December

The bird census found 1,08,578 birds of 96 species at the wetland, including 1,01,431 migratory water birds of 51 species and 6,433 resident water birds of 29 species.

A total of 716 birds of 16 other species were also recorded.

Some of the most important species that were recorded include: the Bar Headed Geese (40,570), Eurasian Coot (24,163), Northern Pintail (12,702), Common Teal (8,444), Little Cormorant (3,649), Great Cormorant (3,410), Grey Lag Goose (2,297), Northern Shoveler (2,275) and Common Pochard (2,138).

The species which find noticeable mention are Red Necked Grebe, Great Bittern, Lesser White-Fronted Goose, Red Crested Pochard, Ferruginous Pochard, Pied Avocet, Northern Lapwing, Peregrine Falcon etc. During the counting exercise, one Bar-headed Goose and one Grey Lag Goose with collars was also spotted.

Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary

Pong Dam Lake was created in 1975, by building the highest earthfill dam in India on the **Beas River** in the wetland zone of the **Siwalik Hills** in the Kangra district of the state of Himachal Pradesh. The reservoir or the lake is a well-known wildlife sanctuary and one of the 27 international wetland sites declared in India by the Ramsar Convention

Wetlands and Birds

Wetlands are extremely rich in biodiversity. Birds such as herons, egrets, swans, ducks and geese, and waders use wetlands during the majority of their lifetime. At least 12% of all Globally Threatened Birds, (146 species) depend on wetlands. The most important types of wetlands for these birds are lakes and pools, rivers and streams, bogs, marshes and swamps, and coastal lagoons. Wetlands make up a high percentage of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) mainly due to their importance for large congregations of water birds.

Bird Flu

Bird flu, also called **avian influenza**, a viral respiratory disease mainly of poultry and certain other bird species, including migratory waterbirds

Waterfowl such as wild ducks are thought to be primary hosts for all bird flu subtypes. Though normally resistant to the viruses, the birds carry them in their intestines and distribute them through faeces into the environment, where they infect susceptible domestic birds. Sick birds pass the viruses to healthy birds through saliva, nasal secretions, and faeces. Within a single region, bird flu is transmitted readily from farm to farm by airborne feces-contaminated dust and soil, by contaminated clothing, feed, and equipment, or by wild animals carrying the virus on their bodies. The disease is spread from region to region by migratory birds and through international trade in live poultry.

17. In the News: **Sedition Law**

The **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** defines sedition (**Section 124A**) as an offence committed when "any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India".

Disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity. However, comments without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.

The law finds its origin in the Colonial Era. The law was originally drafted in 1837 by **Thomas Macaulay**, the British historian-politician, but was inexplicably omitted when the IPC was enacted in 1860.

Later Section 124A was **inserted in 1870** by an amendment introduced by Sir James Stephen when it felt the need for a specific section to deal with the offence. It was one of the many draconian laws enacted to stifle any voices of dissent at that time.

Punishment for the offence of sedition

- Sedition is a non-bailable offence. Punishment under the Section 124A ranges from imprisonment up to three years to a life term, to which fine may be added.
- A person charged under this law is barred from a government job. They have to live without their passport and must produce themselves in the court at all times as and when required.

Arguments in support of Section 124A:

- Section 124A of the IPC has its utility in combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements
- It protects the elected government from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the stability of the State
- If contempt of court invites penal action, contempt of government should also attract punishment
- Many districts in different states face a Maoist insurgency and rebel groups virtually run a parallel administration. These groups openly advocate the overthrow of the state government by revolution
- Against this backdrop, the abolition of Section 124A would be ill-advised merely because it has been wrongly invoked in some highly publicized cases

Arguments against Section 124A:

- Section 124A is a relic of colonial legacy and unsuited in a democracy. It is a constraint on the legitimate exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression.
- Dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of robust public debate in a vibrant democracy. They should not be constructed as sedition. Right to question, criticize and change rulers is very fundamental to the idea of democracy.
- The British, who introduced sedition to oppress Indians, have themselves abolished the law in their country. There is no reason, why should not India abolish this section.
- The terms used under Section 124A like 'disaffection' are vague and subject to different interpretation to the whims and fancies of the investigating officers.

The view of the Law Commission of India

- In August 2018, the Law Commission of India published a consultation paper recommending that it is time to re-think or repeal the Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code that deals with sedition.
- In its 39th Report (1968), the Law Commission had rejected the idea of repealing the section.

- In its 42nd Report (1971), the panel wanted the scope of the section to be expanded to cover the Constitution, the legislature and the judiciary, in addition to the government to be established by law, as institutions against which 'disaffection' should not be tolerated.
- In the recent consultation paper on the sedition, the Law Commission has suggested invoking 124A to only criminalize acts committed with the intention to disrupt public order or to overthrow the Government with violence and illegal means.

The view of the Supreme Court of India

The constitutionality of sedition was challenged in the Supreme Court in Kedar Nath Vs State of Bihar (1962). The Court upheld the law on the basis that this power was required by the state to protect itself. However, it had added a vital caveat that "a person could be prosecuted for sedition only if his acts caused incitement to violence or intention or tendency to create public disorder or cause disturbance of public peace".

The court held that "a citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the Government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence against the Government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder".

In September 2016, the Supreme Court had reiterated these necessary safeguards and held that they should be followed by all authorities.

18. In the News: Glacial burst, and India's preparedness against Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

Background: A glacier break is suspected to have caused the **flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli** recently.

Last October, the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** had issued detailed guidelines on how to reduce and deal with disasters caused by what is scientifically called **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**.

A GLOF refers to the flooding that occurs when the water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released suddenly.

According to NDMA, glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the Hindu Kush Himalaya has given rise to the formation of numerous new glacial lakes, which are the major cause of GLOFs. Since glaciers in the Himalayas are in a retreating phase, glacial lakes are growing and pose a potentially large risk to downstream infrastructure and life.

How can the risk be reduced?

The NDMA guidelines say that risk reduction has to begin with identifying and mapping such lakes, taking structural measures to prevent their sudden breach, and establishing mechanism to save lives and property in times of a breach.

Other recommendations in the guidelines area as follows:

- NDMA has recommended use of Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations, during the monsoon months. It has said methods and protocols could also be developed to allow remote monitoring of lake bodies from space.
- To manage lakes structurally, the NDMA recommends reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.

- The guidelines say construction of any habitation should be prohibited in the high hazard zone. Further it states that the existing buildings are to be relocated to a safer nearby region and all the resources for the relocation have to be managed by Central/State governments. New infrastructures in the medium hazard zone have to be accompanied by specific protection measures.
- The guidelines emphasize the importance of land use planning: most importantly there should be monitoring systems prior to, during, and after construction of infrastructure and settlements in the downstream area.

An **Inventory and Monitoring of Glacial Lakes / Water Bodies in the Himalayan Region of Indian River Basins**, sponsored by Climate Change Directorate, Central Water Commission, and done by National Remote Sensing Centre during 2011-15, found that there are 352, 283 and 1,393 glacial lakes and water bodies in the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra basins respectively.

19. Two new initiatives of Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) — **SAKSHAM** (Shramik Shakti Manch) and a **Seaweed Mission** were launched recently

SAKSHAM (Shramik Shakti Manch) is a **dynamic portal for jobs/ mapping the skills of Shramiks** based on the requirements of MSMEs and other industries all across the country. The portal with the demand and supply data uses algorithm and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, **for geo spatial information on demand and availability of Shramiks, and also provide analysis on skill training programmes of Shramiks**. The pilot portal originally initiated with two districts is now being launched as an all India portal.

The portal is expected help both Shramiks and MSMEs to take advantage of technology in this era of economic revival. This would empower Shramiks by projecting their candidature directly to the MSMEs & other employers and would also address aspects related to their skill proficiency levels. This would also eliminate the dependence of industry on the middlemen / labour contractor for their manpower requirements.

The MSME industries have been enlisted from Tamilnadu, Bihar, Maharashtra etc. The list is growing.

Key Features of SAKSHAM:

- A dynamic job portal - opportunity for Shramiks and MSMEs
- Facilitate creation of 10 lakh blue collar jobs
- Direct connect between Shramiks and MSMEs, no middleman in between
- Minimise migration of Shramiks – job opportunity in proximate MSMEs

SEAWEEDS

Out of the global seaweed production of ~ 32 million tons fresh weight valued around 12 billion US dollars. China produces ~57 %, Indonesia ~28% followed by South Korea, whereas India is having a mere share of ~0.01-0.02%. Despite several advantages, commercial seaweeds cultivation has not been taken place in the country at an appropriate scale, as being practiced in South-East Asian countries.

By an estimate, if cultivation is done in ~10 million hectares or 5% of the EEZ area of India, it can provide employment to ~ 50 million people; set up new seaweed industry; contribute to national GDP; ocean productivity; abates algal blooms, sequesters millions of tons CO₂; Healthier ocean; bio-ethanol of 6.6 billion litres

The **Seaweed Mission** focuses on commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing for value addition towards boosting national economy.

The Mission envisages the following activities:

- Establishing model demonstration farms over one hectare for cultivation of economically important seaweeds in nearshore and onshore along the Indian coast
- Proposed Demonstration Sites: Gujarat / Tamil Nadu / Andhara Pradesh / Odisha / Karnataka
- Establishment of seaweed nurseries for supplying seed material for large scale farming of economically important seaweeds in the country
- Onshore cultivation for (i) Seedling supply facility (ii) Seaweed cultivation for processing
- Establishment and demonstration of processing technologies/recipes for edible seaweeds in line with consumer acceptability or cultural food habits
- Dried flakes, Dried powder, Dried sheets or processed dried sheets with additional flavour meeting the acceptance/perceptions of people
- Seaweed-based proteins as an alternate to meet- Food supplements; Feed supplements
- Setting up of processing plant for integrated production of plant growth stimulants (sap) along with industrially important cell wall polysaccharides (phycocolloids) such as agar, agarose, carrageenan and alginates from fresh seaweeds
- Specific Zones Identified: East & West Coast
- An activity on seaweed cluster development including value chain development, supply chain development, collection of data on environmental, economic and social impacts of seaweed projects in the country.

20. Researchers have discovered **three fossils of the earliest known living animal** — the 550-million-year-old '**Dickinsonia**' — on the roof of the **Bhimbetka Rock Shelters**, about 40 km from Bhopal.

Dickinsonia is an **extinct genus** of a basal animal that lived during the late **Ediacaran period**. The fossils are known only in the form of imprints and casts in sandstone beds. Geological Survey of India stated that they were the only such fossils available in the country, and were similar to those seen in south Australia.

Dickinsonia fossils found in other parts of the world exceeded 4 feet in length. But the one found in Bhimbetka is 17 inches long,

Bhimbetka Rock Shelters

Bhimbetka rock shelters are a series of natural rock shelters in the foothills of the Vindhya Range, in Madhya Pradesh in central India.

Discovered in 1957, the complex consists of some 700 shelters and is one of the largest repositories of prehistoric art in India. The shelters were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003. The complex is surrounded by the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary.

The caves provide a rare glimpse at a sequence of cultural development from early nomadic hunter-gatherers to settled cultivators to expressions of spirituality. It has been observed that the present-day cultural traditions of agrarian peoples inhabiting the villages surrounding Bhimbetka resemble those represented in the paintings.

21. The first-ever **voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition** meant to end hunger and malnutrition were endorsed by members of the **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**

CFS is an international and intergovernmental platform for stakeholders to work towards ensuring food security and nutrition for all. It is hosted and co-funded by the **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**.

The guidelines have been developed to support countries in their efforts to eradicate all forms of hunger and malnutrition by utilising a comprehensive food systems approach, according to the document released on the occasion

They are structured around seven focus areas:

1. Transparent, democratic and accountable governance
2. Sustainable food supply chains to achieve healthy diets in the context of economic, social and environmental sustainability and climate change
3. Equal and equitable access to healthy diets through sustainable food systems
4. Food safety across sustainable food systems
5. People-centred nutrition knowledge, education and information
6. Gender equality and women's empowerment across food systems
7. Resilient food systems in humanitarian contexts

The guidelines are intended to build upon and complement the work and mandate of other international bodies, for example the **UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)**.

They call for realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security for all, particularly for the most vulnerable and affected groups.

They focus on policy planning and governance so that food systems can be made more resilient and responsive and are in accordance with needs of consumers and producers too, especially small and marginal farmers.

Governments have been asked to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, while implementing the guidelines.

Some of the Initiatives taken by India are as follows:

- POSHAN Abhiyaan
- Antyodaya Anna Yojana
- Integrated Child Development Scheme
- Midday meal scheme

22. The government has stated that the **Soil Health Card Scheme** has helped India achieve **surplus capacity in foodgrain production**

Soil Health Card (SHC) is a Government of India's scheme promoted by the **Department of Agriculture** under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. It is being implemented through the Department of Agriculture of all the State and Union Territory Governments. A SHC is meant to give each farmer soil nutrient status of his/her holding and advice him/her on the dosage of fertilizers and also the needed soil amendments, that s/he should apply to maintain soil health in the long run.

The card contains the status of the soil with respect to **12 parameters**, namely N,P,K (Macro-nutrients); S (Secondary- nutrient); Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micro - nutrients); and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters). Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

Benefits of the Soil Health Card Scheme

- The scheme will monitor the soil of the farmers and will give them a report so as to enable them to decide which crops they should cultivate and which ones they should skip.
- It will also give them a picture on which fertilizers they would need. So, ultimately, the crop yield will see a rise.
- The authorities will monitor the soil on a regular basis. One in every 3 years, they will provide a report to farmers. So, farmers need not worry if the nature of the soil changes. Also, they will always have updated data about their soil.
- Moreover, Experts will be employed to help farmers in carrying out the corrective measures.

23. In the News: Privatization of Public Sector Banks

Historical Background: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was also Finance Minister, decided to **nationalise the 14 largest private banks in 1969**. The idea was to align the banking sector with the socialistic approach of the then government. State Bank of India had been nationalised in 1955 itself, and the insurance sector in 1956.

There is widespread perception that the private sector then was not sufficiently aware of its larger social responsibilities and was more concerned with profit, which made private banks unwilling to diversify their loan portfolios as this would raise transaction costs and reduce profits.

Various governments in the years were for and against privatisation of PSU banks. Many committees had proposed bringing down the government stake in public banks below 51% — the Narasimham Committee proposed 33% and the P J Nayak Committee suggested below 50%. An RBI Working Group recently suggested the entry of business houses into the banking sector. The NDA government, in its second term, has been pushing for privatisation and reducing the number of PSU banks to five or six.

Why Privatize banks?

- Years of capital injections and governance reforms have not been able to improve the financial position of in public sector banks significantly.
- Many of them have higher levels of stressed assets than private banks, and also lag the latter on profitability, market capitalisation and dividend payment record. The government front-loaded Rs 70,000 crore into government-run banks in September 2019, Rs 80,000 crore in in FY18, and Rs 1.06 lakh crore in FY19 through recapitalisation bonds. In 2019, the government merged ten PSU banks into four.

On the other hand

- **Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36%** in 2020 from 21.26% in 2015, while **public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% from 74.28%**.
- Competition heated up after the RBI allowed more private banks since the 1990s. They have expanded the market share through new products, technology, and better services, and also attracted better valuations in stock markets — HDFC Bank (set up in 1994) has a market capitalisation of Rs 8.80 lakh crore while SBI commands just Rs 3.50 lakh crore. India has 22 private banks and 10 small finance banks.

After a series of mergers and equity injections by the government, the performance of public sector banks has shown improvement over the last couple of years. However, compared

with private banks, they continue to have high non-performing assets (NPAs) and stressed assets although this has started declining.

After the Covid-related regulatory relaxations are lifted, banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses. As per the RBI's recent Financial Stability Report, gross NPA ratio of all commercial banks may increase from 7.5% in September 2020 to 13.5% by September 2021 under the baseline scenario (from 9.7% to 16.2% for public sector banks; from 4.6% to 7.9% for private banks).

This would mean the government would again need to inject equity into weak public sector banks. The government is trying to strengthen the strong banks and also minimise their numbers through privatisation to reduce its burden of support.

Will more PSU banks be privatised in the coming years?

Currently, there are ten nationalised banks in addition to IDBI Bank and SBI. While the government is unlikely to touch the top three including SBI, smaller and middle-level banks are likely to be privatised. The Finance Minister did not disclose which two banks will be privatised this fiscal.

The initial plan of the government was to privatise four. Depending on the success with the first two, the government is likely to go for divestment in another two or three banks in the next financial year. PSU banks are under dual control, with the RBI supervising the banking operations and the Finance Ministry handling ownership issues.

24.A Parliamentary Panel thinks India may miss the 5G bus

The **standing committee on Information Technology** has said the inadequate availability of spectrum, high spectrum prices, poor development of use cases and low status of fiberisation among others could be the reason India will miss the 5G bus.

Some of the observations made by the committee are as follows:

- The committee noted that despite the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) having submitted a report on the steps to make India 5G ready as early as August 2018, there was very little progress on the ground.
- The committee said the first serious issue was the lack of various approvals around spectrum such as uncertainty around auctions, high reserve price of spectrum, inadequate and poor development of test cases, low reach of optical fibre across India, and deficient back-haul capacity.
- The committee noted that the reserve price for auction of 5G was one of the highest in the world. It needed to be rationalised, taking into account the per capita income of the country and also by comparing it with reserve price mandated by other countries.
- Comparing it to the deployment of other older technologies such as 2G, on which it was late by four years, 3G on which India was as much as a decade late, and 4G on which India missed by the bus by 7 years, the committee concluded that "sufficient preparatory work had not been undertaken for launching of 5G services in India."

As per the findings and observations of the parliamentary standing committee, **the country must expedite its approvals process and sort out issues such as spectrum auction, back-haul capacity, price and user test cases** to catch up with other countries which have taken a lead in 5G network deployment.

Apart from this, the parliamentary committee also hoped that the DoT would reach an understanding with the Department of Space and Ministry of Defence at the earliest to earmark the allocation of spectrum waves.

25. The United States announced that it plans to **reengage with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** that it withdrew from in 2018.

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 States responsible for the **promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe**.

It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland

The UNHRC was established by the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006 to replace the **UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)** that had been strongly criticised for allowing countries with poor human rights records to be members. The UNHRC works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and engages the UN's *special procedures*.

Membership and Structure

The members of the General Assembly elect the members who occupy the UNHRC's 47 seats.

The term of each seat is three years, and no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms. The seats are distributed among the UN's regional groups as follows: 13 for Africa, 13 for Asia, six for Eastern Europe, eight for Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), and seven for the Western European and Others Group (WEOG)

The General Assembly can suspend the rights and privileges of any Council member that it decides has persistently committed gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term of membership

India was elected to the UNHRC, with the term starting on 1st January 2019, getting 188 votes in the Asia-Pacific category for a three year period.

The US decided to leave the UNHRC in 2018. its objections centred on the argument that the design of the Council did not do enough to address problems of politicisation, bias and the membership eligibility of well-known rights violators. Many countries and NGOs have criticised the council's bias against Israel, and the presence of grave human rights abusers (such as Burundi) as members of the body.

Other critics have opined that the Council is also used by some states to promote agendas that directly undermine human rights. Countries such as Cuba, Pakistan and Russia have been at the forefront of efforts to protect "the family" or "religious freedom" in order to justify state-sponsored violence and discrimination against ethnic, religious and sexual orientation minorities.

26. A team of scientists have reported some of the properties of element called "Einsteinium"

Element 99 in the periodic table called "**Einsteinium**", named after Albert Einstein, was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the **first hydrogen bomb** (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called "Ivy Mike" in the Pacific Ocean). Since its discovery, scientists have not been able to perform a lot of experiments with it because **it is difficult to create and is highly radioactive**. Therefore, very little is known about this element.

Some of the highlights of the research are as follows:

- The scientists worked with less than 250 nanograms of the artificial element, which was manufactured at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory's High Flux Isotope Reactor.

- Specifically, the team worked with einsteinium-254, one of the more stable isotopes of the element that has a half-life of 276 days. The **most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.**
- Because of its high radioactivity and short half-life of all einsteinium isotopes, even if the element was present on Earth during its formation, it has most certainly decayed. This is the reason that it cannot be found in nature and needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.
- For the recent research, using a precise X-ray produced by a particle accelerator, the scientists were able to examine this element to find out how it bonds with atoms. By studying this atomic arrangement, scientists can find out interesting chemical properties of other elements and isotopes that may be useful for nuclear power production and radiopharmaceuticals,

27. Kerala Chief Minister has sought the intervention of the Prime Minister to allay the apprehension of the people in Wayanad over the recent draft notification that envisages a **buffer zone around the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.**

Background: On January 28, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change published a draft notification to declare an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) — a buffer or transition zone around highly-protected areas — around the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary in Kerala.

As per the draft notification, the Ministry has proposed an Eco-Sensitive Zone, measuring from zero to 3.4 kilometres, around the boundary of Wayanad wildlife sanctuary. The proposed zone will cover an area of 118.59 square kilometres, of which 99.5 square kilometres is outside the sanctuary, which could include human-inhabited areas.

Significance of Buffer Zone

According to experts, the existence of a buffer zone between the core protected area and the mainland is integral to the sustenance of the protected areas. Its aim is to reduce the impact of human intervention in the core protected area.

As per the Environment Protection Act, 2002, there should be an eco-sensitive zone of 10 kilometres around wildlife sanctuaries.

Opposition to the Move

According to the Wayanad District Panchayat officials, many human settlements, including tribal colonies and agricultural lands, come within the proposed Buffer Zone.

Critics have argued that the draft notification **would cripple both agriculture and business sectors** and will deal a blow to the district as the notification imposes curbs on vehicular traffic.

28. To ensure timely settlements of claims under **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)**, the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** has approved the proposal of the department of agriculture for **flying drones over 100 districts** growing rice and wheat

As a part of the pilot study

- About 13 agencies were engaged for conducting pilot studies to develop technology-driven approaches for direct yield estimation at gram panchayat level for Kharif 2019 and Rabi 2019-20.
- The agencies had conducted studies in 64 districts of 15 states for 9 crops for Kharif 2019 with the help of satellite, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), biophysical models,

smart sampling and other advanced statistics technologies for crop yield estimation

- Apart from drone-based images, high spatial resolution satellite data, biophysical models, smart sampling, artificial intelligence among others are also being used in the large scale pilot study

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) is the government sponsored crop insurance scheme that integrates multiple stakeholders on a single platform.

Objectives of the scheme are :-

- To provide insurance coverage and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crop as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases. -
- To stabilise the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming. -
- To encourage farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices. -
- To ensure flow of credit to the agriculture sector.

Highlights of the scheme

- There will be a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all Rabi crops. In case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be only 5%. The premium rates to be paid by farmers are very low and balance premium will be paid by the Government to provide full insured amount to the farmers against crop loss on account of natural calamities.
- There is no upper limit on Government subsidy. Even if balance premium is 90%, it will be borne by the Government.
- Earlier, there was a provision of capping the premium rate which resulted in low claims being paid to farmers. This capping was done to limit Government outgo on the premium subsidy. This capping has now been removed and farmers will get claim against full sum insured without any reduction.
- The use of technology will be encouraged to a great extent. Smart phones will be used to capture and upload data of crop cutting to reduce the delays in claim payment to farmers. Remote sensing will be used to reduce the number of crop cutting experiments.
- PMFBY is a replacement scheme of NAIS / MNAIS, there will be exemption from Service Tax liability of all the services involved in the implementation of the scheme. It is estimated that the new scheme will ensure about 75-80 per cent of subsidy for the farmers in insurance premium.

29. A study found that the panel of doctors to decide on termination of pregnancy beyond 24 weeks as proposed in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020, is “unfeasible”

Background: The MTP Bill was passed in Lok Sabha in March 2020, and is likely to be brought before Rajya Sabha during the ongoing Budget Session.

The Bill proposes several amendments,

- including the constitution of a Medical Board in every State and UT, which will decide on **pregnancies beyond 24 weeks in cases of foetal abnormalities**.
- Each board will have **one gynaecologist, one radiologist or sonologist, one paediatrician**, and other members prescribed by the State/UT government

A new study has found this “unfeasible”. The study was based on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare’s Rural Health Survey, which provides details of vacancies filled at secondary healthcare centres. The report analysed district-wise availability of specialists,

including surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, physicians and paediatricians. It found that for each of the years between 2015-2019, the shortfall in these posts hovered between 71% to 81.8%. For the year 2019, for a total of 21,296 vacancies in the country, only 3,880 were filled, that is, there was a shortfall of 81.8%.

The shortfall was starker in the northeast where Sikkim, Mizoram and Manipur had a total absence of obstetricians and gynaecologists, and a near total absence of paediatricians. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya had a 100% shortage of paediatricians.

30. Ministry of Education, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), and World Bank have signed an agreement for the financial support worth Rs 5718 crore towards the implementation of the **Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS)** project.

The project aims at improving the overall monitoring and measurement activities in the Indian school education system through interventions in selected states. STARS will draw on the existing structure under Samagra Shiksha.

Some of the highlights of the project are as follows

- At the state level, the project will be implemented through the integrated state Implementation Society (SIS) for Samagra Shiksha.
- The proposed World Bank support under STARS is primarily in the form of a results-based financing instrument called Program for Results (PforR). This will ensure major reforms at the state-level through a set of disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs).
- A State Incentive Grant (SIG) will be used to encourage states to meet desired project outcomes. The SIG matrix has been aligned with the intermediate outcome indicators as per the requirement of the PforR instrument. An independent verification agency (IVA) will verify each result before disbursement of funds.

The ministry stated that the STARS project will be instrumental in the implementation of various recommendations of National Education Policy 2020 that is strengthening early childhood education and foundational learning, improving learning assessment system, ICT-enabled approaches in education, teachers development and vocational education etc

31. India's rank has slipped six places to **86th among 180 countries** in a **corruption perception index (CPI)** in 2020.

Transparency International (TI)'s corruption perception index was released on Thursday. The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their **perceived levels of public sector corruption** according to experts and business people, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

India's rank is 86 out of 180 nations with a score of 40. India was ranked at **80th position** out of 180 countries **in 2019**. But the CPI score for India is constant this year as well as the previous year.

This year, **New Zealand and Denmark** were ranked at first position with scores of 88. Somalia and South Sudan were ranked lowest at 179th position with scores of 12.

32. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and MapmyIndia have partnered to build an **indigenous mapping portal**.

The collaboration will enable them to jointly identify and build a holistic geospatial portal utilising earth observation datasets, '**NavIC**', Web Services and APIs (application programming interface) available in MapmyIndia. The geospatial portals will be called '**Bhuvan**', '**VEDAS**' and '**MOSDAC**'.

- **Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System** also known as **NavIC** (Navigation with Indian Constellation), is an indigenous navigation system, developed by ISRO.
- **Bhuvan** is the national geo-portal developed and hosted by ISRO comprising geospatial data, services, and tools for analysis.
- **VEDAS** (Visualisation of Earth observation Data and Archival System) is an online geoprocessing platform that uses optical, microwave, thermal, and hyperspectral EO data covering applications particularly meant for academia, research and problem solving, ISRO said.
- **MOSDAC** (Meteorological and Oceanographic Satellite Data Archival Centre) is a data repository for all the meteorological missions of ISRO and deals with weather-related information, oceanography, and tropical water cycles.

Significance:

- Being an Indian platform, it is well aligned with the government's **Atma Nirbhar Bharat Programme**.
- Its services will **reflect the true borders of the country** as per the information available from Government of India.
- Experts note that foreign search engines and companies claim to offer 'free' maps, but in reality, they make money by targeting the same users with advertising, by **invading the user's privacy and auctioning private location and movement data**. However there is no such provision of advertisement in MapmyIndia.

33. The central government will set up a **digital intelligence unit (DIU)** as a nodal agency to deal with complaints of **unsolicited commercial communication (UCC)** and **cases of financial fraud**, especially in the digital payments space.

Background: Recently, the Delhi High Court (HC) ordered the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** to ensure "complete and strict" implementation of the regulation issued by it in 2018 for curbing **Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC)**.

Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU):

- The **main function** of DIU will be to coordinate with various LEAs (law enforcement agencies), financial institutions and telecom service providers in investigating any fraudulent activity involving telecom resources
- At License Service Area level, Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFMCP) system will also be created.
- In case of any violation, it was proposed to impose financial penalty against the tele-marketers including disconnection of resources in case of repetitive violations.
- It also adding that a web and mobile application as well as a SMS-based system shall be developed for effective redressal of complaints.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was established in the year 1997 in pursuance of TRAI (Ordinance) 1997, which was later replaced by an Act of Parliament, to regulate the telecommunication services. Currently it is a **statutory body**

Functions of TRAI are to make recommendations

- on the need and timing for introduction of new service provider,
- on the terms and conditions of license to a service provider,
- ensure compliance of terms and conditions of license,
- effective management of spectrum,
- lay down the standards of quality of service to be provided by the service providers and
- ensure the quality of service and conduct the periodical survey of such service provided by the service providers so as to protect interest of the consumers of telecommunication service,
- ensure effective compliance of Universal Service Obligations,
- notify the rates at which telecommunication services within India and outside India shall be provided under this Act etc.

34. Recently, the Prime Minister handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army

The Arjun Main Battle Tank project was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.

The **objective** was to create a “state-of-the-art tank with superior fire power, high mobility, and excellent protection”. During the development, the CVRDE achieved breakthroughs in the engine, transmission, hydropneumatic suspension, hull and turret as well as the gun control system. Mass production began in 1996 at the **Indian Ordnance Factory’s production facility in Avadi, Tamil Nadu.**

Features of the Arjun Tank:

- The Arjun tanks stand out for their ‘Fin Stabilised Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS)’ ammunition and 120-mm calibre rifled gun.
- It also has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions.
- The secondary weapons include a co-axial 7.62-mm machine gun for anti-personnel and a 12.7-mm machine gun for anti-aircraft and ground targets.

The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version. It is also supposed to have missile firing capability as per the design, but this feature will be added later as final testing of the capability is still on. However, the biggest achievement with the latest version is 54.3 per cent indigenous content against the 41 per cent in the earlier model.

35. Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed as the Director-General of the **World Trade Organization by representatives of the 164 member countries**

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. It was created in 1995. by superseding the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) created in the wake of World War II.

The WTO is based on agreements signed by the majority of the world's trading nations. The main function of the organization is to help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers protect and manage their businesses. As of 2021, the WTO has **164 member countries**, with Liberia and Afghanistan the most recent members, having joined in July 2016, and 23 "observer" countries.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

The history of international trade has been a battle between **protectionism** and **free trade**, and the WTO has fueled globalization with both positive and adverse effects. The organization's efforts have increased global trade expansion, but a side effect has been a negative impact on local communities and human rights.

- Proponents of the WTO, particularly multinational corporations (MNCs), believe that the **organization is beneficial to business, seeing the stimulation of free trade and a decline in trade disputes as beneficial to the global economy.**
- Skeptics believe that the **WTO undermines the principles of organic democracy and widens the international wealth gap.** They point to the decline in domestic industries and increasing foreign influence as negative impacts on the world economy.

The WTO is run by its member governments. All major decisions are made by the membership as a whole, either by ministers (who usually meet at least once every two years) or by their ambassadors or delegates (who meet regularly in Geneva).

Recent Challenges faced by WTO

The operations of the **WTO's Appellate Body have effectively been suspended** since December 2019, as USA is blocking of appointments, which has left the body without a quorum of adjudicators needed to hear appeals.

36. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has sent 'chadar' through Afghan embassy in India, for the shrine of renowned Sufi saint **Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer.**

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti also known as **Gharib Nawaz** (benefactor of the poor) was one of the **most significant saints of the Indian subcontinent.**

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti lived and preaching in Ajmer. His instructive discourses, full of spiritual insights, drew the local populace as well as kings and nobles and peasants and the poor from far and wide. He introduced and established **the Chisti order** in South Asia and significantly contributed to the spreading of Islamic Sufi mystic order.

The shrine has been visited by Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Sher Shah Suri, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Dara Shukoh, Jahanara Begum and Aurangzeb, among many others and even today an important pilgrimage site.

Sufism

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, a school of practice that emphasizes the inward search for God and shuns materialism. In Sufism, **self-discipline** is considered an essential condition to gain knowledge of God by sense of perception. Sufis believe **service to humanity** is tantamount to service to God.

Major Sufi Orders

Apart from the **Chisti order**, there are **three other main Sufi orders - Qadiriyya, Suhrawardiyya and Naqshbandi** that are followed in India

- **Qadriya Order:** This ascetic order of Sufism was instituted by saint Saiyid Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani. The sufis of this order migrated into India from the Persio-Arab land. Muhibullah Shah, Miyan Meer and Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shahjahan, were the representative sufis of this order.
- The **suharwardi order** was founded in the name of Sheikh Shahabuddin Suharwardi Maqtul. Unlike the Chishtis, the suharwardi saints did not believe in leading a life of Poverty. They accepted the service of the state and held important posts mainly under Delhi Sultanate ruler Iltutmish.
- After Chishtis **Naqsh bandya** order became quite popular in India. The order was founded by Khwaja Baha-ul-din Naqsh band. Naqsh Bandya order was introduced in India with the invasion of Babar.

37. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has released its **India Energy Outlook 2021** report

The report explores the opportunities and challenges ahead for India as it seeks to ensure reliable, affordable and sustainable energy for a growing population.

The highlights of the report are as follows

- India accounts for nearly one-quarter of global energy demand growth from 2019-40 — the largest for any country. Its share in the growth in renewable energy is the second-largest in the world, after China,
- A five-fold increase in per capita car ownership will result in India leading the oil demand growth in the world. Also, it will become the fastest-growing market for natural gas, with demand more than tripling by 2040.
- India's continued industrialisation becomes a major driving force for the global energy economy. Over the last three decades, India accounted for about 10 per cent of world growth in industrial value-added (in PPP terms)
- By 2040, India is set to account for almost 20 per cent of global growth in industrial value-added, and to lead global growth in industrial final energy consumption, especially in steelmaking. The nation accounts for nearly one-third of global industrial energy demand growth to 2040.
- Prior to the global pandemic, India's energy demand was projected to increase by almost 50 per cent between 2019 and 2030, but growth over this period is now closer to 35 per cent.

International Energy Agency

The **International Energy Agency** is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organisation established in the framework of the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. The IEA was initially dedicated to responding to physical disruptions in the supply of oil, as well as serving as an information source on statistics about the international oil market and other energy sectors.

In the decades since, its role has expanded to cover the entire global energy system, encompassing traditional energy sources such as oil, gas, and coal as well as cleaner and faster growing ones such as solar PV, wind power and biofuels.

It is best known for the publication of its annual **World Energy Outlook**

38. The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has released the **Draft Blue Economy policy for India**

The draft blue economy policy document outlines the vision and strategy that can be adopted by the Government of India to utilize the plethora of oceanic resources available in the country.

What is Blue Economy?

India's blue economy is understood as a subset of the national economy comprising an entire **ocean resources system** and human-made economic infrastructure in **marine, maritime, and onshore coastal zones** within the country's legal jurisdiction. It aids the production of goods and services that have clear linkages with economic growth, environmental sustainability, and national security. The blue economy is a vast socio-economic opportunity for coastal nations like India to utilize ocean resources for societal benefit responsibly.

Potential for India's Blue Economy

With a coastline of nearly 7.5 thousand kilometers, India has a unique maritime position. Nine of its 29 states are coastal, and the nation's geography includes 1,382 islands. There are nearly 199 ports, including 12 major ports that handle approximately 1,400 million tons of cargo each year. Moreover, India's Exclusive Economic Zone of over 2 million square kilometers has a bounty of living and non-living resources with significant recoverable resources such as crude oil and natural gas. Also, the coastal economy sustains over 4 million fisherfolk and coastal communities. With these vast maritime interests, the blue economy occupies a vital potential position in India's economic growth. It could well be the next multiplier of GDP and well-being, provided sustainability and socio-economic welfare are kept center-stage. Therefore, India's draft blue economy policy is envisaged as a crucial framework towards unlocking country's potential for economic growth and welfare.

Highlights of the Draft Policy

The MoES prepared the draft blue economy policy framework in line with the Government of **India's Vision of New India by 2030**. It highlighted blue economy as one of the ten core dimensions for national growth. The draft policy framework emphasizes policies across several key sectors to achieve holistic growth of India's economy. The document recognizes the following **seven thematic areas**.

1. National accounting framework for the blue economy and ocean governance.
2. Coastal marine spatial planning and tourism.
3. Marine fisheries, aquaculture, and fish processing.
4. Manufacturing, emerging industries, trade, technology, services, and skill development.
5. Logistics, infrastructure and shipping, including trans-shipments.
6. Coastal and deep-sea mining and offshore energy.
7. Security, strategic dimensions, and international engagement.

Importance of Blue Economy around the globe

The United Nations Member States, including India, adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, in 2015 as a universal call to take action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. SDG 14 seeks to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Several countries have undertaken initiatives to harness their blue economy. For instance, Australia, Brazil, United Kingdom, United States, Russia, and

Norway have developed dedicated national ocean policies with measurable outcomes and budgetary provisions. Canada and Australia have enacted legislation and established hierarchical institutions at federal and state levels to ensure progress and monitoring of their blue economy targets. With a draft blue economy policy framework of its own, India is now all set to harness the vast potential of its ocean resources.

39. Recently a rare endangered Gangetic dolphin was beaten to death

The Ganges river dolphin was officially discovered in 1801. Ganges river dolphins once lived in the **Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems** of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. But the species is extinct from most of its early distribution ranges.

The distribution range of the Ganges river dolphins in India covers **seven states namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal**. The upper Ganga River (in Uttar Pradesh), Chambal River (Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), Ghaghra and Gandak Rivers (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), Ganga River, from Varanasi to Patna (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), Son and Kosi rivers (Bihar), Brahmaputra from Sadia (foothills of Arunachal Pradesh) upto Dhubri (on the Bangladesh border) and Kulsi River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River, form ideal habitats for the Ganges river dolphin.

This species has been included in

- Schedule I of the **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**,
- Appendix I of the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)**,
- Appendix II of the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)** and
- categorized as **Endangered** on the **International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List**.

40. The world's smallest adult reptile species has been discovered in the island country of Madagascar

The **Male Brookesia Nana**, or **Nano-Chameleon**, has a body of just 13.5 mm. Its length from top to tail is 22 mm. The female is far bigger at around 29 mm.

Previously, the chameleon species **Brookesia micra** was thought to be the smallest. The average length of adults of this species is **16 mm (29 mm with tail)**, while the **smallest adult male** has been recorded at **15.3 mm**.

Scientists recommended that the chameleon be listed as Critically endangered in the **International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species** to help protect it and its habitat.

Madagascar

Madagascar is an **island country** lying off the **south eastern coast of Africa**. Madagascar is the **fourth largest island in the world**, after Greenland, New Guinea, and Borneo.

The animal life and vegetation of the island are anomalous, differing greatly from that of nearby Africa and being in many respects unique.

Because of the island's isolation, many zoologically primitive primates have survived and evolved into unique forms. About 40 species of lemurs are indigenous to Madagascar. Several unique hedgehoglike insectivores, such as the tenrec, have evolved there, and there are also many kinds of chameleons of varying size.

41. The RBI has issued directives to housing finance companies (HFCs) on maintenance of liquidity coverage ratio, risk management, asset classification and loan-to-value ratio.

Housing Finance Company

A housing finance company (**HFC**) is a form of a non-banking financial company (**NBFC**) which primarily is engaged in the business of providing finance for housing which fulfils the following conditions

- Its financial assets (in the business of providing finance for housing) constitute not less than 60% of its total assets; and
- Out of the total assets (netted off by intangible assets), not less than 50% should be by way of housing financing for individuals.

The provisions for the regulation of HFCs are provided under the **National Housing Bank Act, 1987 (NHB Act)** with the **National Housing Bank (NHB)** being the regulatory authority for HFCs. However, In 2019, the NHB Act was amended and certain powers for regulation of HFCs were conferred with the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**)

Liquidity Coverage Ratio

Liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) refers to the proportion of highly liquid assets held by financial institutions, to ensure their ongoing ability to meet short-term obligations.

This ratio is calculated by dividing a bank's high-quality liquid assets by its total net cash flows, over a 30-day stress period.

LCR was part of the 'Basel III: International framework for liquidity risk measurement, standards and monitoring' which is an international banking regulation issued in December 2010

Liquidity Risk Management

It is the process by which the Bank identifies, measures, monitors and controls its risk exposure in order to ensure that risks are within the tolerance level set by the Bank and are clearly understood at relevant levels across the Bank.

Loan to value ratio(LTV)

LTV ratio is the proportion of the property value that a lender can finance through a loan. This ratio is used by financial institutions (banks, housing finance companies, non-banking finance companies) to assess their risk in lending a home loan to you as a borrower.

The core purpose of using LTV ratio for a lender is to calculate that they do not lend higher amount than actual price of the property. For a lender, if LTV increases the perceived risk of borrower default increases.

According to RBI guidelines which is fixed for financial institutions,

- LTV ratio in case of home loans of Rs.30 lakh or less can go up to 90 percent of the property value. A 90 percent LTV means that the borrower will have to shell out at least 10 percent of the property value out of his own pocket while the rest can be financed through loans.
- For loans between Rs 30 lakh and Rs 75 lakh, LTV ratio can go up to 80 percent while for loans above Rs 75 lakh, the required LTV ratio is 75 percent.

- 42.** The Prime Minister has suggested that neighbouring countries should consider creating a **special visa scheme for doctors and nurses**, so that they could travel quickly within the region during health emergencies, on the request of the receiving country.

Context: The Prime Minister was addressing a **workshop on 'COVID-19 Management: Experience, Good Practices and Way Forward'** with nine neighbouring nations, including Pakistan.

The eight members of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** and **Mauritius and Seychelles** participated in the workshop.

Measures Proposed are as follows:

- Creating a **special visa scheme** for doctors and nurses.
- The **civil aviation ministries** should coordinate on a **regional air ambulance agreement** for medical contingencies.
- Creating a **regional platform** for collating, compiling and studying data about the **effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines** among populations.
- A **regional network** for promoting technology assisted epidemiology **for preventing future pandemics**.
- **Sharing of successful public health policies** and schemes such as **Ayushman Bharat** and **Jan Arogya schemes from India**

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and political organization of eight countries in South Asia. It was established in 1985 when the Heads of State of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka formally adopted the charter. Afghanistan joined as the 8th member of SAARC in 2007.

It is headquartered In Kathmandu, Nepal. The meetings of the heads of the states are usually scheduled annually while the meetings of foreign secretaries, twice a year.

Mauritius and Seychelles

Mauritius is an island country that lies about 800 km east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The island of Mauritius is volcanic in origin and is almost entirely surrounded by coral reefs.

Seychelles is an island republic in the western Indian Ocean, comprising about 115 islands, with lush tropical vegetation, beautiful beaches, and a wide variety of marine life. The major islands of Seychelles are located about 1,100 km northeast of Madagascar. The capital, Victoria, is situated on the island of Mahé.

43. Hyderabad city has been chosen as one among the '**Tree Cities of the World**' by the **Arbor Day Foundation** jointly with the **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** of the United Nations Organisation.

Significance: Hyderabad is the **only city in the country** to have been selected for this recognition in response to its commitment to growing and maintaining urban forestry. The recognition stands Hyderabad alongside 120 cities from 23 countries, including developed nations such as USA, UK, Canada, Australia and others.

Official have attributed the success to the Haritha Haram Programme - a **flagship programme** of the Telangana government to increase the **green cover** of the State **to 33%** of the total geographical area.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The FAO is the **oldest permanent specialized agency** of the United Nations, established in October 1945 with the objective of eliminating hunger and improving nutrition and standards of living by increasing agricultural productivity. It is headquartered in Rome, Italy.

The FAO coordinates the efforts of governments and technical agencies in programs for developing agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and land and water resources. It also carries out research; provides technical assistance on projects in individual countries; operates

educational programs through seminars and training centres; maintains information and support services, including keeping statistics on world production, trade, and consumption of agricultural commodities; and publishes a number of periodicals, yearbooks, and research bulletins.

The **Arbor Day Foundation** is a nonprofit conservation and education organization founded in 1972 in United States

44. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, announced twenty-five(25) shortlisted cities for the 'Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge'

The Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge is a **3-year initiative** aimed at supporting **early childhood-friendly neighbourhoods** under the government's **Smart Cities Mission**.

The first stage of the Challenge involved an open call for applications from city agencies. 63 cities from across India submitted applications proposing neighbourhood-level pilot projects in public space, mobility, and access to services to enhance the physical and psychological health of young children and their caregivers. From the list of applicant cities, the evaluation committee chose 25 cities based on the strength of their applications.

Cities proposed a diverse array of pilot projects, including creating toddler-friendly walking corridors in residential neighbourhoods; safer commutes to early childhood services for vulnerable young children and caregivers living in urban slums; increasing opportunities for nature play and sensory stimulation; and adapting underused open spaces within government school grounds into public play areas after school hours. Besides streets and open spaces, other proposed pilots aim to address the need for early childhood amenities in government office premises, bus shelters and transit hubs; developing Anganwadis with nutrigardens and age-appropriate play equipment; and transforming outdoor waiting areas for PHCs with shade, seating, and lactation cubicles.

Smart Cities Mission

The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative by the Government of India to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local development and harnessing technology as a means to create smart outcomes for citizens.

A 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. The mission is operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)

45. Trials of DRDO-developed Anti-Tank Guided Missile Systems 'Helina' and 'Dhruvastra' were successfully conducted in desert region

Joint User Trials for **Helina (Army Version)** and **Dhruvastra (Air Force Version)** Missile Systems have been carried out from Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) platform in desert ranges. The missile systems have been designed and developed indigenously by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Some of the features of the missile:

- The Helina and Dhruvastra are third generation, **Lock on Before Launch (LOBL) fire and forget Anti-Tank Guided Missiles**
- It can engage targets both in direct hit mode as well as top attack mode.
- The system has all-weather day and night capability and
- It can defeat battle tanks with conventional armour as well as with explosive reactive armour.
- It is one of the most-advanced anti-tank weapons in the world.

46. The government has launched Intensified **Mission Indradhanush 3.0 (IMI 30.)**

IMI 3.0 will have two rounds starting from February 22 and March 22 and will be conducted in 250 pre-identified districts and urban areas across 29 states and Union territories.

Focus of IMI 3.0 will be the children and pregnant women who have missed their vaccine doses during the COVID-19 pandemic. They will be identified and vaccinated during the two rounds of IMI 3.0. Each round will be for 15 days. Beneficiaries from migration areas and hard-to-reach areas will be targeted as they may have missed their vaccine doses during COVID-19

Mission Indradhanush

Mission Indradhanush was launched in 2014 to provide affordable and accessible healthcare to all citizens of the country

The ultimate goal of Mission Indradhanush is to ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women. The Government has identified 201 high focus districts across 28 states in the country that have the highest number of partially immunized and unimmunized children.

Earlier the increase in full immunization coverage was 1% per year which has increased to 6.7% per year through the first two phases of Mission Indradhanush. Four phases of Mission Indradhanush have been conducted till August 2017 and more than 2.53 crore children and 68 lakh pregnant women have been vaccinated.

Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)

To further intensify the immunization programme, the government launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) on October 8, 2017. Through this programme, Government of India aims to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme/UIP. The focus of special drive was to improve immunisation coverage in select districts and cities to ensure full immunisation to more than 90% by December 2018.

Under IMI, four consecutive immunization rounds were conducted for 7 days in 173 districts (121 districts and 17 cities in 16 states and 52 districts in 8 northeastern states) every month between October 2017 and January 2018. Intensified Mission Indradhanush has covered low performing areas in the selected districts (high priority districts) and urban areas. Special attention was given to unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums with migratory population. The focus was also on the urban settlements and cities identified under National Urban Health Mission (NUHM).

Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 2.0

To boost the routine immunization coverage in the country, Government of India has introduced Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0 to ensure reaching the unreached with all available vaccines and accelerate the coverage of children and pregnant women in the identified districts and blocks from December 2019-March 2020.

The IMI 2.0 aims to achieve targets of full immunization coverage in 272 districts in 27 States and at block level (652 blocks) in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar among hard-to-reach and tribal populations.

47. NITI Aayog, along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, has prepared a draft **National Migrant Labour Policy**.

Background: The nationwide lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic brought to fore the plight of an invisible workforce that contributes in no small measure to the nation's economy. About 26 lakh migrant workers who provide cheap labour to India's industry and services were abruptly left with nowhere to go and no one to help. Their plight was made worse by employers not paying salaries or using the police to prevent them from leaving their workplaces.

In response to the migrant workers' concerns, NITI Aayog, the Central government's policy think tank, has drawn up a draft national policy on migrant labour. It lays down institutional mechanisms to coordinate between Central Ministries, State governments and local departments to implement programmes for migrants.

Some of the highlights of the draft policy are as follows:

- The draft policy initiates discussions on the creation of a **database of workers**, particularly those in the informal economy, **an increase in minimum wages**, and **employment creation in the rural belt** in order to stem migration.
- The draft describes **two approaches to policy design**: one focussed on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations; the other which "enhances the agency and capability of the community and thereby remove aspects that come in the way of an individual's own natural ability to thrive".
- The most relevant feature of the draft policy is the **requirement of several Ministries to work in tandem**. The Ministry of Labour and Employment is proposed to be the nodal Ministry for implementation of policies. It would manage migration resource centres in high-migration zones, a national labour helpline, link worker households to government schemes, and create inter-State migration management bodies.
- The policy suggests that the Ministries of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Housing and Urban Affairs, and Tribal Affairs use migration data to help set up the **migration resource centres**. Additionally, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship should focus on **skill building at these centres**.
- The draft's recommendations include asking source States (such as Bihar and Odisha) to **raise minimum wages** in order to bring major shifts in the livelihood of tribal people which "may result in stemming migration to some extent".
- Another proposal is to build a **central database** to help employers **fill the gap between demand and supply** and ensure maximum benefit of social welfare schemes.
- Additionally, the draft policy asks the Ministries concerned with labour and the Census office to be consistent with the definitions of sub-populations, capture seasonal and circular migrant data, and incorporate migrant-specific variables in existing surveys.

48. **Chandigarh** has become the first state or Union Territory in India to launch **Carbon Watch**, a mobile application **to assess the carbon footprint of an individual**.

The app focuses on four areas— Water, Energy, Waste Generation and Transport (Vehicular movement). The Application user is asked to fill in the details about the consumption of these four areas within their family.

With the mentioned information, the mobile application will automatically calculate the carbon footprint of the individual. The application will also provide information such as the

national and world average of the emission, and the individual's level of emission generation. The **motive behind designing this application** is to Make people Climate-Smart Citizens while making them capable of accessing their carbon footprint, along with providing them with steps to reduce it. The app does this by **suggesting remedial actions** and **sensitises people** about their lifestyle emissions, their impact and possible countermeasures to mitigate the same.

Chandigarh's stand in the view of emission generation

Although Chandigarh is one of the green cities, which has achieved the surplus 45 per cent green cover instead of the set target of 33 per cent. It still stands among 112 Indian cities identified as Non-Attainment Cities, for not meeting the prescribed standards of air quality.

49. The **'Making Peace with Nature'** report released by United Nations ahead of its fifth Environment Assembly.

The assembly will be held February 22-23, 2021 on the theme **'Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals'**. It calls for strengthened action to protect and restore nature and nature-based solutions to achieve the sustainable development goals in its three social, economic and environmental dimensions.

'Making Peace with Nature' presents a strong case for **innovation and investment to tackle climate, biodiversity and pollution** —the three environmental emergencies within the framework of sustainable development goals. The report warned that the three self-inflicted planetary crises are closely interconnected and put the well-being of current and future generations at unacceptable risk.

The report delves into the **'triple crisis'** by drawing on global assessments, including those from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services**. It also refers to UNEP's **Global Environment Outlook report**, the UNEP International Resource Panel and new findings on the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as the novel coronavirus diseases (COVID-19).

Some of the other highlights of the report are as follows

- The report stated that the three sustainable development goals — **poverty alleviation, food and water security and good health for all** — will also be reached by addressing environmental crisis.
- It advocates for **advancements in science and bold policymaking** for a **carbon neutral world by 2050**, while bending the curve on biodiversity loss and curbing pollution and waste.
- In context of this, the report cautions how **ecosystem degradation heightens the risk of pathogens** making the jump from animals to human. It has strongly advocated for importance of a 'one health' approach that considers human, animal and planetary health together.
- The report stated that a sustainable economy driven by renewable energy and nature-based solutions will create new jobs, cleaner infrastructure and a resilient future. Further it noted that it is the bedrock of hope in the post-COVID-19 world.

50. Bengaluru-based scientists have developed a new material that can help in **tapping waste heat** produced by all kinds of domestic and industrial appliances, and use it **to accomplish other useful work**.

A compound of Silver, Copper and Tellurium, called **Silver Copper Telluride** has showed this property.

The material has been found to have an efficiency of 14 per cent, though a prototype device has so far been able to achieve 10 per cent efficiency. But that already is more than any other known material and can turn out to be extremely useful in utilising at least some of the energy that goes entirely waste.

Potential Applications:

- It has shown several potential applications right from tapping heat from the laptop to charge a mobile phone.
- Scientists are also looking into the possibility of tapping the heat from **traditional cooking chulhas** to run some electrical appliances in rural households
- Further, Tata Steel has already shown interest in the material and is collaborating with the team to develop this material for deployment in its **steel manufacturing** units where a huge amount of waste heat is generated.

51. The government has launched the **“Go Electric” Campaign** to spread awareness on the benefits of e-mobility and EV Charging Infrastructure as well as electric cooking in India.

Go Electric Campaign is an important initiative that would help in **reducing the import dependence of our country** in the coming years and would be an important step towards a cleaner and greener future. Currently, fossil fuels which have an import bill of Rs. 8 lakh Crore.

The campaign is aimed at creating awareness at PAN-India level and is expected to boost the confidence of Electric Vehicle manufacturers.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the aegis of the Ministry of Power has been mandated to undertake an awareness drive for promoting Public Charging, e-mobility & its ecosystem. To implement the ‘Go Electric’ campaign at National and State level, BEE will extend technical support to the State Designated Agencies (SDAs). As a Central Nodal Agency, BEE will provide content and details to State Designated Agencies and other partners to ensure uniformity of information.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)

The Bureau of Energy Efficiency is an agency of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Power created in March 2002 under the provisions of the nation's 2001 Energy Conservation Act. The agency's function is **to develop programs which will increase the conservation and efficient use of energy in India**.

52. The Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, launched the operational guidelines for **Integration of NAFLD (Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease) with NPCDCS (National Programme for Prevention & Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke)**

Background: Epidemiological studies suggest the prevalence of NAFLD is around 9% to 32% of the general population in India with a higher prevalence in those with overweight or obesity and those with diabetes or prediabetes. Researchers have found NAFLD in 40% to 80 % of people who have type 2 diabetes and in 30% to 90 % of people who are obese.

Studies also suggest that people with NAFLD have a **greater chance of developing cardiovascular disease**. Cardiovascular disease is the most common cause of death in NAFLD. Once the disease develops, there is no specific cure available, and health promotion and prevention aspects targeting weight reduction, healthy lifestyle, and control of aforementioned risk factors are the mainstays to disease progression and prevent the mortality and morbidity due to NAFLD.

NAFLD and NPCDCS

NAFLD is an independent predictor of future risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and other metabolic syndromes like hypertension, abdominal obesity, dyslipidaemia, glucose intolerance. The Government of India is of the view that existing NPCDCS programme strategies can easily be aligned to prevent NAFLD through lifestyle changes, early diagnosis, and management of associated non-communicable diseases as well as NAFLD. Accordingly, doable actions have been identified with main focus on health promotion and prevention of common NCDs which would also specifically cater to the identified needs of NAFLD

Significance: India is becoming the first country in the world to identify the need for action for NAFLD. He said, "The Government of India has realized that the existing NCD programme's strategies can now be aligned to achieve the objectives to prevent and control NAFLD with:

- i. behavior and lifestyle changes,
- ii. early diagnosis and management of NAFLD,
- iii. building of capacity at various levels of healthcare for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of NAFLD.

53. The Union Cabinet approved a proposal by the Home Ministry to dissolve the Puducherry Assembly and impose **President's rule** in the Union Territory.

President's Rule refers to the suspension of a state government and the imposition of direct rule of the Centre. The central government takes direct control of the state in question and the Governor becomes its constitutional head. The Vidhan Sabha is either dissolved or prorogued. Such a situation forces the Election Commission to conduct a re-election within six months.

Article 356 of the Constitution of India gives the President of India the power to impose this rule on a state on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers. There are some conditions that the President has to consider before imposing the rule:

- a. If the President is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.
- b. The state government is unable to elect a leader as chief minister within a time prescribed by the Governor of that state.
- c. There's a breakdown of a coalition leading to the chief minister having a minority support in the House, and the CM fails to prove majority in the given period of time.
- d. Loss of majority in the Assembly due to a vote of no-confidence in the House.
- e. Elections postponed on account of situations like natural disasters, war or epidemic.

Proclamation of President's Rule under Article 356 of the Constitution stands for **six months**. This timeframe **can be extended up to three years**, in phases. President's Rule can be revoked at any time by the President and this does not require Parliament's approval.

However, according to the **44th Amendment Act of 1978**, President's rule can only be extended over a year every 6 months under the following conditions:

- The Election Commission certifies that elections cannot be conducted in the state concerned.
- There is already a national emergency throughout India or in the whole or any part of the state.

54. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has decided to retain Pakistan on the “**greylist**” till the next review of its performance on its recommendations during the June Plenary session.

Background: FATF had placed Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019 but the deadline was extended later on due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body decision-making body. It was established in 1989 during the G7 Summit in Paris to develop policies against money laundering. It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in money laundering. It has also started dealing with virtual currencies. The FATF Secretariat is located in Paris.

FATF sets standards and promotes effective implementation of:

- a. legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering.
- b. The FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

FATF has 2 types of lists:

- **Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.
- **Grey List:** Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

Consequences of being in the FATF grey list: Considered in the grey list may face

- 1. Economic sanctions from IMF, World Bank, ADB
- 2. Problem in getting loans from IMF, World Bank, ADB and other countries
- 3. Reduction in international trade
- 4. International boycott

India became an Observer at FATF in 2006 and on June 25, 2010 India was taken in as the 34th country member of FATF.

55. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) to undertake **bathymetric’ study** of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep

The INCOIS is planning to take the help of the **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** to conduct **study**.

NRSC has already done a similar high resolution topographic Airborne Laser Terrain Mapping (ALTM) for entire coastal areas of the country

Importance of this study: Such a study has become imperative in view of the recent tsunamis of the Indonesian coasts where more than the quake related high waves, damage

was due to landslides that had under the sea beds causing sudden wave surge leading to much damage without giving sufficient time to alert people.

Bathymetry is the study of the "beds" or "floors" of water bodies, including the ocean, rivers, streams, and lakes. The term "bathymetry" originally referred to the ocean's depth relative to sea level, although it has come to mean "submarine topography," or the depths and shapes of underwater terrain.

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services

INCOIS was established as an **autonomous body** in 1999 under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** and is a unit of the **Earth System Science Organization (ESSO)**. ESSO-INCOIS is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focussed research.

56. The President has appointed Vijay Sampla as chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC).

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes is an Indian constitutional body established with a view to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes and Anglo Indian communities to promote and protect their social, educational, economic and cultural interests, special provisions were made in the Constitution. **Article 338** of the Indian constitution deals with National Commission for Scheduled Castes.

The duties of the Commission as laid down in the Article 338(5) of the Constitution are:

- a) to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes under the Constitution or under any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards;
- b) to inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Castes;
- c) to participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State;
- d) to present to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards;
- e) to make in such report recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or any State for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes; and
- f) to discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Castes as the President may, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, by rule specify.

Membership: Members of the commission includes a chairman, a vice chairman and four other members, who are appointed by the President of India

57. The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has unearthed a Buddhist monastery, believed to be at least 900 years old, in a hilly area of Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand.

Discoveries:

- Four statues of **deity Tara** in Varad Mudra [gesture of hand showing dispensing of boons] and
- Six statues of the **Buddha in Bhumisparsha Mudra** [gesture of hand showing five fingers of right hand towards the earth symbolising the Buddha's enlightenment].

The ASI has not yet done scientific dating of the structures, but preliminary analysis shows that the findings represents **Pala period** based on earlier findings.

Further, finding as deity Tara's statues means this was an important centre of **Vajrayana sect of Buddhism**

Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana is a form of **Tantric Buddhism**, which flourished in India from **6th to 11th century**. This school advocates the belief illustrated by the phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* ("thou art that") that one already is a Bodhisattva, one only has to realize it. One need not, therefore, give up unhealthy attachments at the start of one's walk but, rather, just proceed along the path and those attachments will become less and less alluring.

Pala dynasty and Buddhism

The Pala rule was established by Gopala. They ruled over eastern parts of India from 8th Century to 12th Century. The Pala rulers were great supporters and admirers of Buddhism. Palas are great patrons of Buddhism. In this regard:

- **Dharmapala**, the second Pala ruler, founded the renowned **Vikramshila University** near Bhagalpur in Bihar attracting students from all-over India and Tibet.
- **Devapala**, the Pala king of Bengal, granted five villages for the maintenance of a **monastery at Nalanda**.
- Many of the sculptures in the niches in the **Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya** are dated to the 8th century Pala Period.
- **Nalanda and Vikramshila** were great centres of Buddhist learning, showcased art and several manuscripts with Buddhist themes and images of Vajrayana Buddhist deities on palm leaves. Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita is a good example of a Pala Buddhist palm-leaf manuscript.

58. Tribals living in villages located in the core areas of Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve are demanding that their Community Forest Resource rights be recognised.

Forest Rights Act: The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** gives right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which the tribals have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use. For recognition of Community Forest Resource rights, traditional boundary of a tribal village is recognised, empowering the gram sabha of the village to take decisions on protection, regeneration, conservation and management of the forest and its produce.

Sitanadi-Udanti Tiger Reserve, which is located in the **Gariaband district, Chhattisgarh** came into existence in the year 2008-09 after two separate reserves (Udanti & Sitanadi Wildlife Sanctuaries) combined together.

The name originates from the two rivers Sitandi and Utandi which flow through the region.

The area is ecologically diverse and holds **several endangered species** apart from the **Tiger** such as the **Indian Wolf, Leopard, Sloth Bear the Mouse Deer. Asiatic Wild buffalo** is the key endangered species that is found in the core area.

59. The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, in the Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for the year 2020-21, has stated that the current **inflation target** of 4 % with a ± 2 % tolerance band is appropriate for the next five years.

What is inflating Targeting?

Inflation targeting is a **monetary policy strategy** used by central banks **for maintaining inflation at a certain level or within a specific range**. In general, central banks normally follow a policy of keeping inflation sufficiently low. However, in inflation targeting, there is a preset, publicly declared target. Using methods such as interest rate changes, the central bank and other monetary authorities are expected to guide inflation to a targeted level or range. Such a policy makes the central bank focus on a single variable and imposes a penalty if the target is not adhered to. This policy was initially adopted by New Zealand in 1990, although other countries, most notably Germany, had evolved something close to inflation targeting considerably earlier. Thereafter, many countries have adopted inflation targeting as a part of monetary policy during the 1990s.

Inflation Targeting in India

In India, the Reserve Bank of India undertook inflation targeting in August 2016. The decision was taken after India had $\sim 10\%$ inflation rate for around five years.

The amendment to Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, effective in June 2016, made way for a **Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework** in India by defining the primary objective of monetary policy as maintaining price stability together with the objective of growth. This was based on the recommendations of the **Urjit Patel Committee**. The committee had also recommended that the apex bank should adopt the new **CPI (consumer price index)** as the measure of the nominal anchor for policy communication. It had also recommended that the monetary policy decision-making should be vested with a **monetary policy committee (MPC)**.

To operationalise this command, the Government of India notified a medium-term inflation target of 4%, with a band of $\pm 2\%$ between August 2016 and March 2021. The inflation target is fixed in terms of all-India CPI-Combined issued by the **Central Statistics Office (CSO)**.

60. The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021** have been framed superseding of the earlier Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011.

Background: Proliferation of social media, on one hand empowers the citizens then on the other hand gives rise to some serious concerns and consequences which have grown manifold in recent years. These concerns have been raised from time to time in various forums including in the Parliament and its committees, judicial orders and in civil society deliberations in different parts of country. Such concerns are also raised all over the world and it is becoming an international issue. Some of these issues are:

- Persistent spread of fake news has compelled many media platforms to create fact-check mechanisms

- Rampant abuse of social media to share morphed images of women and contents related to revenge porn have often threatened the dignity of women.
- Misuse of social media for settling corporate rivalries in blatantly unethical manner has become a major concern for businesses.
- Instances of use of abusive language, defamatory and obscene contents and blatant disrespect to religious sentiments through platforms are growing.

Further, lack of transparency and absence of robust grievance redressal mechanism have left the users totally dependent on the whims and fancies of social media platforms. Often it has been seen that a user who has spent his time, energy and money in developing a social media profile is left with no remedies in case that profile is restricted or removed by the platform without giving any opportunity to be heard.

Highlights of the new guidelines

- The guidelines aims to regulate social media, digital media and OTT Platforms (Over The Top).
- The new rule empowers the Information & Broadcasting Secretary to directly block the content for public access for specific content in case of an emergency.
- As a part of rules and regulations for its users, an entire list of DO's and DON'T's have been prescribed for the online platforms.
- As per the rules, the platform will also have to consider India's diverse racial and religious nature and take **proper precautions while streaming acts of any religious or racial groups**
- The guidelines propose a **three tier Grievance Redressal Mechanism**
- Also, both the OTT Platform and the online news media will have to inform the ministry and publish a monthly report which will mention all the details

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