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# ESE-2021

## (Preliminary Examination)

### Current Issues

(March 2021)

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# Current Issues

## (March 2021)

1. China's new Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) calls for the **first dams to be built on the lower reaches of Yarlung Zangbo river**, as the Brahmaputra is known in Tibet before it flows into India.

### **Brahmaputra River:**

The Brahmaputra (called Yarlung Tsangpo in China) is one of the longest rivers in the world. Starting in the Himalayas in Tibet, it enters India in Arunachal Pradesh, then passes through Assam, Bangladesh, and empties into the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra, a perennial river, is the lifeline for communities living along its banks. They use it for irrigation, fisheries and inland water transport. In its lower course, the river is both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, it deposits huge quantities of fertile alluvial soil suitable for agriculture, but on the other, due to geographical and climatic conditions, it causes periodical, disastrous floods in Assam and Bangladesh.

### **China's Dam Project on the River**

The dam is to be built on the river in Medog county, where it drops by 2,000 metres, making it an ideal place to harness hydropower. This region is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, governed by China.

The hydroelectric project is part of the country's renewable energy generation initiatives and that it will help **China achieve carbon neutrality by 2060** and also pave way for development in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The new dam could help generate up to **60 gigawatts of power**, three times that of central China's Three Gorges Dam, which has the largest installed hydropower capacity in the world now.

### **Impact of the Dam's on India**

**Agriculture:** Such a huge dam could hold back massive amount of silt carried by the river. (Silty soil is more fertile than other types of soil and it is good for growing crops.) This could affect farming in the areas downstream.

**Water resources:** The construction of dams upstream will have a significant effect on areas downstream. China has claimed that it is building a run-of-the river hydropower project, which do not involve storage or diversion of the waters of the Brahmaputra. (Run-of-the-river hydroelectric systems are hydroelectric systems that harvest the energy from flowing water to generate electricity). However, experts say it could still reduce water flow downstream, especially during the dry season. India is also worried about the release of water during the monsoons, when north-eastern states such as Assam experience floods. If China released water from the dam, it could be disastrous for an already inundated Assam.

**Water as a weapon:** Being an upstream area, China has a clear advantage in building dams and other infrastructure to store or divert the flow of the river system. There is the potential to significantly change the flow rate during times of standstill between the countries. India has agreements with China that require the latter to share hydrological data of the river during monsoon season between May and October. The data is mainly of the water level of the river to alert downstream areas in the event of floods. However, during the 2017 Doklam border standstill between India and China, China stopped

communication of water flow levels from its dams. Though data sharing resumed in 2018, India has reasons to believe that China may withhold data.

- **Seismological impact:** The Himalayan region is vulnerable to earthquakes and other seismic activities. The sheer size of the infrastructure projects undertaken there poses a significant threat to the populations living downstream.
- **Ecological impact:** Several species of flora and fauna are endemic to this part of the world and some of them are critically endangered. The ecosystem in the Himalayan region is already on the decline. The glaciers have been retreating due to climate change. Deforestation, soil erosion and landslides are some of the other issues here. The combined dam plans of China and India (See next question) could have disastrous consequences in this ecologically sensitive zone.

#### India's Response

India has urged China to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activity in upstream areas. Meanwhile, India is considering building a 10 gigawatts (GW) hydropower project in the Dibang valley in Arunachal Pradesh, to mitigate the adverse impact of the Chinese dam.

### 2. The NITI Aayog has recommended **reducing the coverage of population served under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013**

**Background:** Under the Act—which presently **covers 67 percent** of the country's total population—approximately 70.35 crore persons from priority households or those who hold ration cards, are entitled to five kilos of food grains per person per month, and each **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** household, covering approximately 9.01 crore persons, is entitled to 35 kilos of food grains per month.

The Planning Commission, which was replaced by the NITI Aayog in 2014, had determined the state-wise coverage ratio of the NFSA based on the rural and urban coverage ratio of 75:50. This was done using the **National Sample Survey Household Consumption Expenditure** coverage under food security law survey data for 2011-12. The coverage ratio has not been revised since the law came into effect on July 5th, 2013.

#### Recommendations of the NITI Aayog:

The NITI Aayog discussion paper estimates that if the rural-urban coverage ratio remains the same at 75:50, then updating the population numbers from Census 2011 to the present level (projected population in 2020) will expand the total number of people covered in the NFSA from the existing 81.35 crore to 89.52 crore.

On the other hand, if it is reduced to the recommended ratio of 60:40, the number of persons served will come down to 71.62 crore. Therefore, apart from reducing the coverage, the think tank has also recommended updating the population level which is currently based on Census 2011.

The paper suggests using the savings from the reduction in food subsidy for “other important areas of concern such as health and education, especially in the present pandemic time”.

### 3. In the News: European Union's 'Right to Repair' Law

The European Union has enacted, a “right to repair” law under which companies will be required to ensure that spare parts are available for their products for at least 10 years.

**Background: e-waste or Electronic waste** refers to various forms of electric and electronic equipment that have ceased to be of value to their users or no longer satisfy their original purpose.

The **Global E-Waste Monitor** is a collaboration of the **Global E-waste Statistics Partnership** (GESP), formed by **United Nation University** (UNU), the **International Telecommunication Union** (ITU), and the **International Solid Waste Association** (ISWA), in close collaboration with the **United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

The **2020 report** of the **Global E-Waste Monitor** notes the following about e-waste

- Europe produces more than **16 kilograms** (kg) of electrical waste per person every year, while in Asia and Africa were much lower: **5.6 and 2.5 kg** respectively
- About half of that junk is due to broken household appliances, and the **EU recycles only about 40% of it**, leaving behind huge amounts of potentially hazardous material.

A major **advantage** of the new law is that it will enable the move towards a **circular economy** by improving the life span, maintenance, re-use, upgrade, recyclability and waste handling of appliances. Further, the law will not only **help consumers save money** but will also **reduce the amount of e-waste pile up**.

However, the right to repair does have its **limitations**. With technology changing fast, there is an effort from consumers also to upgrade their devices. Thus, companies and governments need to work in tandem to invest in **recycling technologies** and focus on **research that can make more parts recyclable**. For instance, while countries are fast moving towards electric vehicles, most do not possess the wherewithal to recycle batteries, which have a life-cycle of just 8-10 years.

#### **E-waste in India**

According to the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**, India generated more than **10 lakh tonnes of e-waste in 2019-20**, an increase from 7 lakh tonnes in 2017-18. Initiatives have been taken to address the problem of e waste such as the **E-Waste Management Rules, 2016**: The rules aim to enable the **recovery and/or reuse of useful material from e-waste**, thereby reducing the hazardous wastes destined for disposal and to ensure the environmentally sound management of all types of waste of electrical and electronic equipment.

Further **E-Waste Clinics** have been established, which are aimed at segregating, processing and disposal of waste.

4. The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has issued **notices to the Chief Secretaries of Odisha and Chhattisgarh** over the action taken to alleviate the sufferings of people displaced by the construction of the **Hirakud dam over the Mahanadi river** about six decades ago.

**Background:**

- When the dam was built, a total of 73,923 hectares (182,590 acres) of land was submerged. This included 49,920 ha (123,303 acres) of agricultural land and 24,003 ha (59,287 acres) of government land, including forest land.
- A total of 111 villages were fully submerged, out of which 108 were in Odisha. Apart from the fully submerged villages, 174 villages were partially submerged (141 in Odisha and 33 in Chhattisgarh). According to sources in the government, approximately 18,000 families were displaced.

**National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**

The Rights Commission (NHRC) of India is an autonomous public body responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as "rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants". It was constituted on 12 October 1993 under the **Protection of Human Rights Ordinance** of 28 September 1993. It was given a **statutory** basis by the **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 (TPHRA)**.

**Hirakud dam**

The **Hirakud Dam** is built across the Mahanadi River. It is the **longest major earthen dam in India**, measuring 25.8 km including dykes, and stands across the river span. It also forms the **one of the biggest artificial lake** in India, with a reservoir holding 743 km<sup>2</sup>.

5. Recently the Union Education Minister chaired a review meeting on **Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)**

The Minister has asked the officials to draw plans on educating additional 3.5 crore students to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio. The centre has allocated Rs 3,000 crore under the RUSA this year in the General Budget 2021

**Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)**

Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)** launched in 2013, aims at providing **strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions**.

The salient objectives of RUSA are to;

- Improve the overall quality of state institutions by ensuring conformity to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Usher transformative reforms in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level, promoting autonomy in State Universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure reforms in the affiliation, academic and examination systems.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.



- Create an enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations.
- Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions, in order to achieve enrolment targets.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by setting up institutions in unserved & underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently abled persons.

**6. The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India under its “Waste to Wealth” Mission launched the “Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship”**

The aim of “**Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship**” to recognize students, community workers/self-help groups, and municipal/sanitary workers who are engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably. The Waste to Wealth Mission is one of the nine national missions of the **Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC)**.

The fellowship is an initiative to empower young innovators who are engaged in community work of waste management/awareness campaigns/waste surveys/studies, etc. as Swachhta Saarthis and implement actions to reduce waste for a greener planet.

The role of young students from schools and colleges, and citizens working in the community through Self Help Groups (SHGs), or in independent capacity, is key in sensitizing the communities towards waste management and offer innovative solutions for conversion of waste to value. This fellowship is aimed to empower interested students and citizens to continuously engage in their attempts to reduce waste in cities and rural areas. The three categories of awards under the fellowships are as below:

- 1. Category-A** – Open to School students from 9th to 12th standards engaged in waste management community work
- 2. Category-B** – Open to College students (UG, PG, Research students) engaged in waste management community work
- 3. Category-C** – Open to Citizens working in the community and through SHGs, municipal or sanitary workers working beyond specifications of their job requirement/descriptions

**Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).** The PM-STIAC is an overarching Council that facilitates the Principal Scientific Adviser’s Office to assess the status in specific science and technology domains, comprehend challenges in hand, formulate specific interventions, develop a futuristic roadmap and advise the Prime Minister accordingly. The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Government of India coordinates to facilitate and ensure the implementation of significant interventions by concerned government departments, agencies, and ministries.

7. **India** was the **biggest ‘overperformer’** in **frontier technologies** according to a recent country-readiness index released by the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**.

**Frontier technologies** include artificial intelligence, the internet of things, big data, blockchain, fifth-generation mobile telephony, three-dimensional printing, robotics, drones (remotely controlled flights), gene-editing, nanotechnology and solar power — the ones that take advantage of digitalisation and connectivity.

The index analysed progress of countries in using frontier technologies, considering their national capacities related to physical investment, human capital and technological effort.

The report noted the following:

- Not only India, but several developing countries showed stronger capabilities to use and adapt frontier technologies above their GDPs, the report highlighted. And yet, most of the 158 countries assessed were lagging behind.
- India’s actual index ranking was 43, while the estimated one based on per capita income was 108. This meant that India overperformed other countries by 65 ranking positions. It was followed by the Philippines, which overperformed by 57 ranking positions.
- China was at position 25; both India and China performed well in research and development. This was reflective of their abundant supplies of qualified and highly skilled human resources available at a comparatively low cost.
- The Philippines has a high ranking for industry—because of high levels of foreign direct investment in high-technology manufacturing, especially electronics.

**United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).**

UNCTAD is a permanent intergovernmental body established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964. The **main goals of UNCTAD** are to expand the capabilities of developing countries in the sphere of trade, investment and development, to assist them in overcoming the difficulties arisen as a result of globalization and to integrate on an equal footing into the world economy. UNCTAD achieves these goals by conducting researches and policy analyses, intergovernmental debates, with the help of technical cooperation, cooperation with civil society and business world.

8. Supreme Court has suggested the centre to **enact a law for additional courts** to deal with **pendency of dishonoured cheques**.

**Background:** Dishonoured Cheque cases form **30% to 40% of the backlog** in trial courts and a sizeable chunk of the pile-up in High Courts. The court had found that **over 35 lakh cheque bounce** cases were pending in various courts across the country.

The court reminded the government of its obligation under **Article 247** of the Constitution to establish additional courts for the “**better administration of the laws of Parliament**” under the provisions of the **Negotiable Instruments Act**.

**Powers of the Parliament**

**Article 247** of the Constitution gives power to Parliament to establish certain additional courts for the better administration of laws made by it or of any existing laws with respect to a matter enumerated in the **Union List**.

**Negotiable Instruments:**

A negotiable instrument is a document that guarantees payment of a specific amount of money to a specified person (the payee). It requires payment either upon demand or at a set time and is structured like a contract. **Promissory notes, bills of exchange, and cheques** are categorised as the negotiable instruments.

**Dishonored Cheques:**

A cheque is said to be **honoured**, if the banks give the amount to the payee. While, if the bank refuses to pay the amount to the payee, the cheque is said to be **dishonoured**. Cheques are dishonoured by the bank if there are insufficient funds, a signature mismatch, overwriting or a stale date.

**Pendency of Cases in the Judiciary**

According to the **Economic Survey 2018-19** there are about **3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system**, especially in **district and subordinate courts**. Some statistics provided in the survey are as follows

- About **87.54%** of the total pendency of cases is in the **district and subordinate courts**.
- More than **64%** of all cases are **pending for more than 1 year**.
- The **average disposal time** for civil and criminal cases in Indian District & Subordinate courts in 2018 was 4.4 fold and 6 fold higher respectively when compared with the average of Council of Europe members (2016).

9. A writ petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking the **appointment of a regular CBI Director** through the high-power selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of the Opposition.

The petition stated that

- The government has failed to appoint the Director of the CBI as per Section 4A of the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act of 1946** on the expiry of the term of the last incumbent, Rishi Kumar Shukla, on February 2, 2021
- Further it stated that an interim appointment through an **executive order is not envisaged in the 1946 Act**.

**Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)**

The CBI is the premier investigating police agency in India. It traces its origins to the Special Police Establishment, a Central Government Police force, which was set up in 1941 by the Government of India to investigate bribery and corruption in transactions with the War and Supply Department of India. After the end of the war, there was a continued need for a central governmental agency to investigate bribery and corruption by central-government employees. The department was transferred to the Home Department by the 1946 **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act**.

Appointment of the Director of CBI

The CBI Director is appointed by the Central Government on the recommendations of a selection committee comprising –

- The Prime Minister (Chairperson),
- The Chief Justice of India or any Judge of Supreme Court nominated by him and



- The Leader of Opposition. (The DSPE Act was further amended in 2014 to include the Leader of the single largest Opposition party in the selection committee when there is no recognised Leader of Opposition.)

#### 10. The DRDO successfully conducted flight test of **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet**

##### **Significance:**

Successful demonstration of Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will **enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles**. At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world.

##### **What is Ramjet?**

A ramjet is a form of **air-breathing jet engine** that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor. Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites. A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an **assisted take-off** like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.

Ramjets work **most efficiently at supersonic speeds** around Mach 3 (three times the speed of sound) and can operate up to speeds of Mach 6. However, the ramjet efficiency starts to drop when the vehicle reaches hypersonic speeds.

A **scramjet engine** is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently operates at hypersonic speeds and allows supersonic combustion. Thus it is known as Supersonic Combustion Ramjet, or Scramjet.

#### 11. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has released the **Ease of Living Index** and the **Municipal Performance Index**

The **Ease of Living Index**, is an assessment tool that **evaluates the quality of life and impact of various initiatives for urban development**.

It examines the outcomes that lead to existing living conditions through pillars of Quality of Life, Economic Ability, Sustainability, spanning across 13 categories of -Education, Health, Housing and Shelter, WASH and SWM, Mobility, Safety and Security, Recreation, Level of Economic Development, Economic Opportunities, Environment, Green Spaces, and Buildings, Energy Consumption, and City Resilience, that account for 70% of the overall outcome.

More than 32 lakh people across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey', holding a weightage of 30 per cent.

Some of the highlights of the report are as follows:

- Of the 49 cities ranked on liveability index in the million-plus population category, **Bengaluru** emerged as the top performer followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodara, Indore, and Greater Mumbai.
- In the **Less than Million category**, **Shimla** was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneswar, Silvassa, Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurugram, Davangere, and Tiruchirappalli.

The **Municipal Performance Index (MPI)** was launched as an accompaniment to the Ease of Living Index. It seeks to examine **local government practice in municipalities** across areas of services, finance, policy, technology and governance. It seeks to simplify and

evaluate the complexities in local governance practice and promote the ethos of transparency and accountability.

The framework covers 20 varied sectors viz. Education, Health, Water & Wastewater, SWM & Sanitation, Registration & Permits, Infrastructure, Revenue Management, Expenditure Management, Fiscal Responsibility, Fiscal Decentralisation, Digital Governance, Digital Access, Digital Literacy, Plan Preparation, Plan Implementation, Plan Enforcement, Transparency & Accountability, Human Resource, Participation and Effectiveness.

Some of the highlights of the report are as follows

- Indore topped the index, followed by Surat, Bhopal, Pimpri Chinchwad and Pune. The last five were Aurangabad, North Delhi, Srinagar, Kota and Guwahati.
- No city from the north with over a million people figured in the top 10 of the Municipal Performance Index, involving 51 municipal corporations.

#### **Significance of the Indices**

Learnings gathered from these indices can help the government identify gaps, tap into potential opportunities, and increase efficiency in local governance to improve lives of citizens and fulfil broader development outcomes. The framework for these assessments were prepared by MoHUA with the Institute for Competitiveness as the knowledge partner.

12. India wants **Chabahar port** to be included in the 13-nation **International North South Transport Corridor** and expand INSTC membership by including Afghanistan and Uzbekistan

#### **International North South Transport Corridor:**

The INSTC project was originally decided between **India, Iran and Russia in 2000** in St Petersburg, and subsequently included **10 other central Asian and west Asian countries:** Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus, Oman, Syria and Bulgaria as an observer. It envisions a **7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail and road route** for transporting freight, aimed at reducing the carriage cost between India and Russia by about 30% and bringing down the transit time from 40 days by more than half.

#### **Significance of India's proposal:**

This trade corridor could expand India's trade ties with the Central Asian Republics (CARs), which currently stands at a meager \$1.5 billion, accounting for just 0.11 percent of India's overall trade. Once Chabahar is linked to the multimodal International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), India hopes it will become a **gateway for its trade with Eurasia** as well. It is estimated that with the operationalization of Chabahar port and INSTC, India's trade with Eurasia could touch \$170 billion (\$60.6 billion in exports and \$107.4 billion in import).

#### **Importance of Chabahar Port to India:**

Operating Chabahar port will provide India with a foothold at the mouth of the strategic Straits of Hormuz, through which a third of all the world's sea-borne oil passes. China's presence in this region has grown rapidly in recent years, especially with Pakistan handing over Gwadar port, which is the gateway to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), to China on a 40-year lease.

India's participation in the Chabahar port project would enable it to keep an eye on Chinese activity at Gwadar, which is just 72 kilometers away.

India's investment, development, and operation of Chabahar port will strengthen its relationship with Iran, its third largest oil supplier. The port is a gateway to an overland trade corridor through Iran to Afghanistan. It will enable India to play a larger role in Afghan reconstruction, which has been restricted hitherto by Pakistan's refusal to allow India overland access through its territory to Afghanistan.

- 13.** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources** has stated that only half of government schools and anganwadis have **tap water supply**, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the **Jal Shakti Ministry** in October 2020

**Background:** The campaign to provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for hand washing and in toilets in every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school was launched on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti. The 100-day period should have ended on January 10, 2021. However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply.

Seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab — achieved 100% coverage. A number of other States also made significant progress in that time, and 1.82 lakh grey water management structures and 1.42 lakh rainwater harvesting structures were also constructed in schools and anganwadi centres. However, some States/ UTs have indicated that they need more time to complete the task and sustain the efforts. Therefore, the campaign has been extended till March 31, 2021

**What did the committee say?**

- The committee noted that “children are more susceptible to water borne diseases, more so, when there is also a need for repeated washing of hands as a precautionary measure during the pandemic”.
- Considering the health hazards in the children on account of lack of potable drinking water, the Committee urges the Department to take up the matter with those States which are lagging in providing drinking water and toilet facilities in their schools and anganwadi centres.
- Further it also added that the Centre should also take measures to set up water purification or reverse osmosis (RO) plants on an urgent basis so that children do not suffer due to contamination of drinking water.

In a broader comment on the flagship Jal Jeevan Mission, which aims to provide tap water to every rural household by 2024, the Standing Committee noted that

- mere provision of tap connection without ensuring assured availability of water in the pipeline would not serve the purpose and will defeat the very objective of JJM.
- It called for real-time monitoring of water supply at the district level. The Committee observed that there were several instances where wherein taps are being fitted but water supply is not there.

**Jal Jeevan Mission**

Jal Jeevan Mission, is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India. The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements,

such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting.

The following components are supported under JJM

- Development of in-village piped water supply infrastructure to provide tap water connection to every rural household
- Development of reliable drinking water sources and/ or augmentation of existing sources to provide long-term sustainability of water supply system
- Wherever necessary, bulk water transfer, treatment plants and distribution network to cater to every rural household
- Technological interventions for removal of contaminants where water quality is an issue
- Retrofitting of completed and ongoing schemes to provide FHTCs at minimum service level of 55 lpcd;
- Greywater management
- Support activities, i.e. IEC, HRD, training, development of utilities, water quality laboratories, water quality testing & surveillance, R&D, knowledge centre, capacity building of communities, etc.
- Any other unforeseen challenges/ issues emerging due to natural disasters/ calamities which affect the goal of FHTC to every household by 2024, as per guidelines of Ministry of Finance on Flexi Funds.

**14. Jan Aushadhi Diwas 2021 week** was celebrated across the country through more than 7400 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras.

The main aim of the **Jan Aushadhi Divas** or **Generic Medicine Day** is to **create awareness about the use of generic medicines** among the people. The day was first celebrated in the year 2019 making it the third-celebration this year.

**Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) scheme was launched by the government in 2015. Under the scheme **Jan Aushadhi Kendras** have been set up by the government to make generic medicines available to the people. To make the medicines affordable, the government also reduced the prices of high-quality medicines below the market price under this scheme.

Benefits of the scheme

- **Easy accessibility:** Generic medicines can be easily availed from more than 7,400 stores covering all the districts of the country under the scheme.
- **Cost reduction:** The medicines are made available at less cost that is below the market price under this scheme.
- **Savings:** According to the data available, sales in the financial year 2020-21 (up to 4th March 2021) led to total savings of approximately Rs 3,600 Crore for common citizens as the medicines are cheaper by 50 percent to 90 percent than the market rates.
- **Employment:** With permanent and regular earning through PMBJP the source of self-employment is also increasing.



**What is a generic medicine?**

A generic drug is a pharmaceutical drug that contains the same chemical substance as a drug that was originally protected by chemical patents. Generic drugs are allowed for sale after the patents on the original drugs expire.

Generic drugs have same efficacy and therapeutic value as that of branded medicines.

**15. DRDO has achieved an important milestone in the development of Air Independent Propulsion (AIP)**

The system, being developed by **Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL)** of DRDO, relies on the innovative **Phosphoric Acid Fuel Cell technology**.

This technology is different from the more popular **Fuel Cell Technology based AIP system**. Fuel cell technology-based AIP generates power through the **reverse electrolysis of oxygen and hydrogen**. In this process, the two elements chemically combine, thereby generating electricity to charge the submarine's batteries. This process does not need air, but requires storage of highly inflammable hydrogen on board. This is not true of the DRDO's AIP system, which relies on the innovative Phosphoric Acid Fuel Cell technology. The AIP of NMRL is unique as the hydrogen is generated onboard.

**Significance:**

Indian Navy has both conventional and nuclear submarines in its arsenal. The fleet of conventional submarines use diesel-electric engines, which require them to surface almost daily to get atmospheric oxygen for fuel combustion. With the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system on board, these submarines will be required to surface much less frequently, thus increasing their lethality and stealth multifold.

When they surface, diesel-electric submarines become vulnerable to detection by enemy radar, which easily detects submarine masts or snorkels protruding out of the water. This vulnerability is reduced by powering a submarine with an AIP system

**Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL)**

Naval Materials Research Laboratory is an Indian defence laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation. Located at Ambernath, in Thane district, Maharashtra. It develops materials and alloys for Naval use, and is a single-window agency for all materials requirement of the Indian Navy.

**16. The World Bank has released a report, "Connecting to Thrive: Challenges and Opportunities of Transport Integration in Eastern South Asia," - which discusses the potential for Trade between India and Bangladesh**

The report highlighted the following

- Seamless movement of vehicles between the two neighbouring countries for trade could raise **India's national income by eight per cent** and Bangladesh's by 17 per cent; provide faster and cheaper access to products from Northeast and boost real income in states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra,
- The report further stated that the **"broad trust deficit throughout the region"** was a major reason behind lack of seamless transport between the two countries, the report found that it is about 15-20 per cent less expensive for a company in India to trade with a company in Brazil or Germany, than with a company in Bangladesh, despite the two neighbours being party to an **international motor vehicles agreement**.

**Background:**

In 2015, both India and Bangladesh signed the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement**. The agreement seeks to facilitate the unrestricted cross-border movement of cargo, passenger, and personal vehicles between BBIN countries. Under the agreement, trucks carrying export-import or transit cargo can move inside the territories of other countries without transshipping to local trucks at border land ports. Implementation of the MVA has been delayed as the countries work to clarify some of the provisions that are supposed to be elaborated in protocols.

**Currently Situation:**

Despite the agreement, trucks from one country are not allowed to enter the other. The cargo is transloaded, adding to transport and trade costs. On average, crossing the India-Bangladesh border at Petrapole–Benapole, the most important border post between the two countries, takes 138 hours, including 28 hours spent transloading cargo. In contrast, the time to cross borders handling similar volumes of traffic in other regions of the world, including East Africa, is less than six hours.

The report noted that the transit restriction leads to long and costly routes between northeast India and the rest of India and the world. Goods from Agartala, for example, travel 1,600 kilometers through the **Siliguri corridor(also known as the "Chicken's neck")** to reach Kolkata Port instead of 450 kilometers through Bangladesh. If the border were open to Indian trucks, goods from Agartala would have to travel just 200 kilometers to the Chattogram Port in Bangladesh, and the transport costs to the port would be 80 percent lower.

17. The Union Cabinet approved a **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** for domestic manufacturing of telecom and networking products.

The core component of this scheme is to offset the huge import of telecom equipment worth more than Rs 50,000 crore and reinforce it with 'Made in India' products, both for domestic markets and exports.

With the inclusion of telecom equipment manufacturing under the ambit of PLI schemes, the total number of sectors under such programmes stands at 13. All the sectors included under the various PLI schemes are mostly labour intensive and aim to attract global manufacturing giants into the Indian manufacturing space.

**What is Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme?**

Production-Linked Incentive aims to give companies **incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units**. The scheme invites foreign companies to set up units in India, however, it also aims to encourage local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units and also to generate more employment and cut down the country's reliance on imports from other countries.

**Potential Roadblocks for the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme**

Subsidies granted by the Indian Government have been a matter of international disputes and are therefore to be examined closely. For instance, in 2019, India lost a case before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) where several incentive schemes such as MEIS, EPCG, and SEZ were challenged on the ground that such export linked schemes violate

international trade agreements between member countries. While India's appeal is pending, it is imperative to note that while the schemes challenged before the WTO were export linked, the present scheme is investment and production linked.

### 18. The Central Government has amended **insurance ombudsman rules**

Under the Amended rules the following changes were made:

- The amended rules have enlarged the scope of complaints to ombudsmen from only disputes earlier to deficiencies in service on the part of insurers, agents, brokers and other intermediaries.
- Under the amended rules, the timeliness and cost-effectiveness of the mechanism has been substantially strengthened.
- Policyholders will now be enabled for making complaints electronically to the ombudsman and a complaints management system will be created to enable policyholders to track the status of their complaints online. Further, the ombudsman may use videoconferencing for hearings.
- The ombudsman mechanism was administered by the Executive Council of Insurers, which has been renamed as the Council for Insurance Ombudsmen.

**Ombudsman:** An ombudsman is an official, usually appointed by the government, who investigates complaints (usually lodged by private citizens) against businesses, financial institutions, universities, government departments, or other public entities, and attempts to resolve the conflicts or concerns raised, either by mediation or by making recommendations.

#### **Insurance Ombudsman Scheme**

The Insurance Ombudsman scheme was created by the Government of India for individual policyholders to have their complaints settled out of the courts system in a cost-effective, efficient and impartial way.

There are at present 17 Insurance Ombudsman in different locations and any person who has a grievance against an insurer, may himself or through his legal heirs, nominee or assignee, make a complaint in writing to the Insurance ombudsman within whose territorial jurisdiction the branch or office of the insurer complained against or the residential address or place of residence of the complainant is located.

### 19. The Union Cabinet has approved the **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN)**, a single non-lapsable reserve fund for health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.

The Major benefit of PMSSN will be the **enhanced access to universal and affordable health care** through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of the financial year.

**Background:** In the 2018 Budget, the Central Government while announcing **Ayushman Bharat** Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3% Education Cess by **4% Health and Education Cess**. Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN and **accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Health Ministry** — Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), emergency

and disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies and any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.

### What is a cess?

Cess is a form of tax charged/levied over and above the base tax liability of a taxpayer. A cess is usually imposed additionally when the state or the central government looks to raise funds for specific purposes. For example, the government levies an education cess to generate additional revenue for funding primary, secondary, and higher education. Cess is not a permanent source of revenue for the government, and it is discontinued when the purpose levying it is fulfilled. It can be levied on both indirect and direct taxes.

Types of cess in India in the past

- Education Cess: Education cess was introduced to finance and provide standard quality education to the poor.
- Health and education cess: Proposed in Budget 2018 to meet the education and health needs of rural and rural and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.
- Swachh Bharat Cess: Introduced in 2015, a 0.5% Swachh Bharat cess was imposed to fund national campaign for clearing the roads, streets and the infrastructure of India.
- Krishi Kalyan Cess: This cess was aimed at developing the agricultural economy, and was collected at the rate of 0.5%.
- Infrastructure Cess: Announced in Union Budget 2016, this cess was charged on the production of vehicles.

**20. The country's biggest floating solar power plant**, by generation capacity, till date being developed by **NTPC** in the **reservoir of its thermal plant at Ramagundam in Peddapalli district of Telangana**

**Floating Solar Plants** refers to the **deployment of photovoltaic panels on the surface of water bodies**. They are a **viable alternative to land-based solar arrays** that hold significant advantages especially in a country like India. Some of them are as follows:

- **Cost of Land Acquisition and Real Estate Costs:** One of the biggest advantages of floating solar on water technology is that it does not use up expensive land which is highly precious in certain geographies. Floating Solar Panels free up land in countries which have densely populated cities and limited agricultural land.
- **Water Conservation** – Floating solar on water technology is supportive of the environment as it reduces evaporation. It is estimated that one square metre of water surface covered by floating solar panels could save more than 1,000 litres of water annually.
- **Cooling Effect:** The bodies of water exert a cooling effect, which **improves the performance of solar photovoltaic panels** by 5-10%. Over time, this translates into significant cost savings.

However, floating solar power plants have several challenges. Some of them are discussed below

- **Higher Expenditure** – Floating solar technology requires specialized installation and equipment which raises the overall cost of installation.



- **Safety Issues:** Since floating solar involves water and electricity, more consideration must be given to cable management and insulation testing than on land, especially when cables are in contact with water.
- **Degradation and Corrosion:** A floating solar plant has moving parts that are subject to constant friction and mechanical stress. Further, constant exposure to moisture can lead to corrosion especially in coastal environments.

**21. National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) to undertake a project for **genome mapping of microorganisms in the Indian Ocean.****

The research team will collect samples from various stretches of the ocean at an average depth of about 5 km. it will cover the Indian Ocean from India's east coast, all the way to Australia, then onward towards Port Louis in Mauritius and up to the border of Pakistan, off India's west coast, gathering samples for genome mapping of microorganisms in the Indian Ocean.

**Importance of the project**

Just like gene mapping is carried out on blood samples collected from humans, the scientists will map these in the bacteria, microbes found in the ocean. The mapping of the Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and Ribonucleic acid (RNA) will show the nutrients present in them, and also those lacking in different parts of the ocean. The NIO's project is expected to generate new information about trace metals from underexplored regions of the Indian Ocean, the third largest water body in the world, covering about 20 per cent of the Earth's water surface. This data can be used by scientists in the following ways

- It will help scientists understand the internal working of the ecosystem of the Indian Ocean.
- The research will enable scientists to identify the factors controlling the changes in RNA, DNA in the oceans, and various stressors impacting them.
- The ocean has several micronutrients like nitrates, sulphates and silicates, minerals like iron ore and zinc, and trace metals like cadmium or copper. The genome mapping will show the presence of which these microbes have adapted to, in addition to their reaction to atmospheric carbon dioxide. This will help in identifying which part of the ocean has a greater concentration of which mineral or element.
- Trace metals like cadmium or copper are supplied to oceans via continental run-offs, atmospheric deposition, hydrothermal activities and continental shelf interaction.
- Apart from their reactions on marine life, isotopic forms of trace metals can be utilised to track the movement of water masses responsible for ocean circulation and as tools to study the biological, geochemical and ecosystem processes and food web analyses.

Scientists will then use these as tracers to tackle the causative factors for excess or lack of a certain mineral or element and suggest possible solutions for their mitigation. In addition, the large pool of RNA, DNA library of the oceans will be utilised for using the Indian Ocean to human benefit in the future.

**22. The Supreme Court ruled that serving bureaucrats must not be appointed as election commissioners to ensure that the independence of the office of the election commissioner is not compromised.**

### **Election Commission**

The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India. Under the provisions of **Article 324** of the constitution the body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.

### **System of Appointment of the Election Commissioner**

There is no prescribed procedure for appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners as per the constitution. Under the Transaction of Business rules, the **President shall appoint the CEC and EC based on the recommendations made by the Prime Minister. Hence considered as Executive power of the President.**

However, according to **Article 324(5)**, the Parliament has the power to regulate the **terms of conditions of service and tenure** of ECs. It is under this article that the Parliament has made laws till date, and not under **Art. 324(2)** in which the Parliament can establish a selection committee for regulating the appointments made by the President.

### **Reforms Suggestions**

**The Second Administrative Reforms Commission(2nd ARC) had recommended the following**

- The State Election Commissioner (SEC) **should be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of a collegium**, comprising the Chief Minister, the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly.
- **An institutional mechanism should be created** to bring the Election Commission of India and the SECs on a common platform for coordination, learning from each other's experiences and sharing of resources.

**The Law Commission 255<sup>th</sup> Report on Electoral Reforms made the following note:**

- It **recommended, to add a new sub-clause to Article 324** of the Constitution to provide for **a separate independent and permanent Secretariat for the Election Commission of India (ECI)** along the lines of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Secretariats under Article 98 of the Constitution.
- Similar provisions can also be made for the State Election Commissions to ensure autonomy, and free and fair local body election.

### 23. The Centre has issued a **framework for scrap recycling of non-ferrous metals**.

The framework envisages bringing both product and processing stewardship to enhance non-ferrous metal recycling

#### **Need for a Scrap Recycling Policy**

- The demand for aluminum has increased at compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.77 per cent. The production has also increased from 3.3 million tonnes (MT) in 2015 to approximately 5 MT in 2019 with a CAGR of 11.19 per cent. Considering the growing demand for aluminium in future, there will be heavy dependence on domestic production and imports.
- Copper demand in India is expected to grow at 6-7 per cent due to increased thrust of Centre towards 'Make in India' and 'Smart City' programmes, development of industrial corridors, housing for all Indians by 2022, National Highway development project, rail project and defence production policy to encourage indigenous manufacture.
- In addition to this, there is plan for green energy corridor for transmission of renewable energy. The market for electric vehicles (EV) is also expected to witness growth in coming years. Copper is essential to EV technology and its supporting infrastructure, and the increase in the electric vehicles in the market will have a substantial impact on copper demand

#### **Advantages of recycling**

The advantages of recycling compared to producing metals from metal ore include:

- **More economic** as less energy is needed to produce a metal
- **Less damage to the environment:** fewer quarries and mines, less noise and less heavy traffic
- **Saves valuable raw materials** - reserves of metal ores will last longer

#### **Limitations of recycling arise from the recycling process itself:**

- Aluminum, steel and other metals need to be manually separated from other recyclable material. the collection and transport of used items needs organisation, workers, vehicles and fuel. Further, it can be difficult to sort different materials from one another
- Metals, especially aluminum, tend to degrade after each reuse cycle, so products using recycled metals can vary in quality, but most metals never reach a point where they are no longer recyclable.

### 24. Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) to end in March

The Centre is preparing its own **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education (MERITE)** project with some similar objectives to improve technical education.

**Background:** The TEQIP is a **World Bank funded Project** that **aims to take graduates from elite institutions to rural and remote engineering colleges in poorer States**.

Three phases of the Rs. 3,600-crore TEQIP project have been completed since it was launched in December 2002. The third phase focused on improving quality and equity in engineering institutions in seven low-income, eight north-eastern and three hilly States. Among the initiatives was a bid to recruit more than 1,500 faculty from top institutions and send them to colleges that could never have afforded them. They were paid salaries in accordance with the Seventh Pay Commission.

**25.** The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) sought applications for "**Lateral Entry**" into the government

**Background:** NITI Aayog, in its three-year Action Agenda, and the Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance in its report submitted in February 2017, recommended the **induction of personnel at middle and senior management levels** in the central government. These 'lateral entrants' would be part of the central secretariat which in the normal course has only career bureaucrats from the All India Services/ Central Civil Services.

The first ARC had pointed out the need for specialization as far back as in 1965. The Surinder Nath Committee and the Hota Committee followed suit in 2003 and 2004, respectively, as did the second Administrative Reforms Commission (2nd ARC).

The government in this regard has stated that Lateral recruitment is aimed at achieving the **twin objectives** of bringing in **fresh talent** as well as **augment the availability of manpower**

**Pros of lateral entry:**

1. Lateral Entry addresses the **lack of specialisation** across the top tier of Indian bureaucracy, which is a concern that has remained unaddressed until now.
2. Experts also state that the IAS was designed for a time when the State was all-powerful. That reality somewhat changed with liberalisation in 1991, where the state was compelled to cede more space to markets. Therefore, it becomes more critical for the government to ascertain the impact its policy decisions have on various stakeholders such as the private sector, non-profits, and general public, i.e. those who have experienced government from the outside.
3. It has also been noted that career promotions in the IAS move along seamlessly with few impediments along the way. Attempts to introduce 'meritocracy' hasn't quite worked out. Bringing in experts from the professional sphere is expected to shake the IAS out of their comfort zone.
4. Lateral entries have been tested before as well, though mostly on a contract basis. Manmohan Singh was one of the earliest lateral entrants to join the government. Singh was an economic advisor and later went on to hold the role of finance secretary. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Vijay Kelkar, Rakesh Mohan, and R V Shahi are other examples of officers who came from outside to hold posts of secretaries to the government.

**Criticism on Lateral Entry:**

Many experts say that a distinguishing feature separating the IAS officers from the rest is the field experience. Lateral entrants might score on domain knowledge but could fall short on field experience. The Opposition also claims that this move could mean the government filling up senior positions with those who would favour them or a particular ideology.

Further, groups representing SCs, STs and OBCs have protested the fact that there is no reservation in these appointments.



- 26.** The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) may be entrusted with the job of selecting MDs and DMDs of a proposed Rs. 1 Lakh Crore development financial institution (DFI) being set up to accelerate infrastructure financing.

#### **Banks Board Bureau (BBB)**

Banks Board Bureau (BBB) is an autonomous advisory body created by the government to enhance the governance of the Public Sector Banks and state-owned financial institutions.

The BBB was created after the recommendations of the Committee to Review Governance of Boards of Banks in India (Chairman - P.J. Nayak Committee - 2014). It started functioning in 2016.

The main functions of the BBB are as follows:

1. Responsible for the selection and appointment of Board of Directors in PSBs and FIs (Whole-time Directors and Non-Executive Chairman);
2. Advise the Government on matters relating to appointments, confirmation or extension of tenure and termination of services of the Board of Directors of the above-mentioned levels.
3. To advise the Government on the desired structure at the Board level, and, for senior management personnel, for each PSB and Financial Institution (FI).
4. To help banks to develop a robust leadership succession plan for critical positions that would arise in future through appropriate HR processes including performance management systems.
5. To build a data bank containing data relating to the performance of PSBs/FIs and its officers.
6. To advise the Government on the formulation and enforcement of a code of conduct and ethics for managerial personnel in PSBs/Financial Institutions.
7. To advise the Government on evolving suitable training and development programmes for management personnel in PSBs/FIs; and
8. To help banks in terms of developing business strategies and capital raising plan etc.

#### **Development Finance Institutions**

A development finance institution is an agency that finances infrastructure projects that are of national importance but may or may not conform to commercial return standards. In most cases, these agencies are government owned and their borrowings enjoy the comfort of government guarantees, which help bring down the cost of funding. DFIs can be categorised as follows:

- **National Development Banks** such as IDBI, SIDBI, ICICI, IFCI, IRBI, and IDFC.
- **Sector-specific financial institutions** such as TFCI, EXIM Bank, NABARD, HDFC, and NHB.
- **Investment Institutions** such as LIC, GIC and UTI.
- **State-level institutions** such as State Finance Corporations and SIDCs.

The role of the Development Finance Institution (DFI) is **to take cognizance of the gaps in institutions and markets in the country's financial sector and to act as a gap filler.**

**27.** A total of **1770 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs)** have so far been sanctioned in 22 States & one Union Territory

#### **Van Dhan Scheme**

The Van Dhan Scheme is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED. It was launched in 2018 and seeks **to improve tribal incomes** through **value addition of tribal products**.

The scheme is being implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level. Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.

#### **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs)**

Under Van Dhan, 10 Self Help Groups (SHG) of 30 Tribal gatherers is constituted. The establishment of "Van Dhan Vikas Kendra" is for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility. They are then trained and provided with working capital to add value to the products, which they collect from the jungle. Working under the leadership of Collector these groups can then market their products not only within the States but also outside the States. Training and technical support is provided by TRIFED. It is proposed to develop 3,000 such centres in the country.

**28.** Scientists spot a 'space hurricane' for the first time

#### **What is a Space Hurricane?**

A 'space hurricane' is a swirling mass of plasma. Unlike other hurricanes, a space hurricane **rains electrons into the ionosphere**, causing a stunning effect: a huge, cyclone-shaped glowing green aurora below the hurricane.

**The discovery:** Scientists said the **hurricane detected over the North Pole consisted of plasma with multiple spiral arms**. It was spinning in an anticlockwise direction and lasted almost 8 hours before gradually breaking down

#### **Importance of this study:**

The study of space hurricane will help in understanding important space weather effects such as satellite drag, disturbances in high frequency (HF) radio communications, and errors in over-the-horizon radar location, satellite navigation and communication systems better.

**29.** The Reserve Bank of India today said that it has taken IDBI Bank Ltd out of its **prompt corrective action(PCA)** list

Background: IDBI Bank was placed under the PCA framework in 2017 over its high bad loans and negative return on assets

#### **Prompt Corrective Action**

Prompt Corrective Action is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI. The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip below certain norms on three parameters — capital ratios, asset quality and profitability.

It has three risk threshold levels (1 being the lowest and 3 the highest) based on where

a bank stands on these ratios.

- Banks with a capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) of less than 10.25 per cent but more than 7.75 per cent fall under threshold 1.
- Those with CRAR of more than 6.25 per cent but less than 7.75 per cent fall in the second threshold.
- In case a bank's common equity Tier 1 (the bare minimum capital under CRAR) falls below 3.625 per cent, it gets categorised under the third threshold level.

Banks that have a net NPA of 6 per cent or more but less than 9 per cent fall under threshold 1, and those with 12 per cent or more fall under the third threshold level.

On profitability, banks with negative return on assets for two, three and four consecutive years fall under threshold 1, threshold 2 and threshold 3, respectively.

#### **Why is it important?**

As most bank activities are funded by deposits which need to be repaid, it is imperative that a bank carries a sufficient amount of capital to continue its activities. PCA is intended to help alert the regulator as well as investors and depositors if a bank is heading for trouble. The idea is to head off problems before they attain crisis proportions. Essentially PCA helps RBI monitor key performance indicators of banks, and taking corrective measures, to restore the financial health of a bank.

On breach of any of the risk thresholds mentioned above, the RBI can invoke a corrective action plan. Depending on the threshold levels, the RBI can place restrictions on dividend distribution, branch expansion, and management compensation. Only in an extreme situation, breach of the third threshold, would identify a bank as a likely candidate for resolution through amalgamation, reconstruction or winding up.

- 30. The central government's Commission on Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region and its Adjoining Areas** has been shut down due to lapsing of the ordinance.

**Background:** The commission's mandate is to monitor the status of air pollution, the enforcement of laws after monitoring and research, and provide for innovative solutions to curb air pollution. In case of any conflict in the orders or directions of the Commission and any state government, the direction of the Commission shall prevail. Civil courts shall not have the authority to take up any matter arising due to any order or direction passed by it. This ordinance was necessitated because **Delhi, Faridabad and Gurugram are amongst the world's most polluted cities in the world.**

#### **What is an Ordinance?**

Under the Constitution, the power to make laws rests with the legislature. However, in cases when Parliament is not in session, and 'immediate action' is needed, the President can issue an ordinance under the provisions of **Article 123**. An ordinance is a law, and could introduce legislative changes. The Supreme Court has clarified that the legislative power to issue ordinances is 'in the nature of an emergency power' given to the executive only 'to meet an emergent situation'

After the ordinance is notified it is to be laid before Parliament within 6 weeks of its first sitting. Parliament could either choose to pass the ordinance, disapprove it or it

may lapse within the 6 week time frame. It is important to note that it is compulsory for a session of Parliament to be held **within six months** (as per **Article 85**). Therefore, **the maximum validity of an ordinance is 6 months and 6 weeks**.

In addition, the President may choose to withdraw the ordinance. Once the ordinance is laid in Parliament, the government introduces a Bill addressing the same issue. This Bill is supposed to highlight the reasons that necessitated the issue of the Ordinance.

**31. A pilot project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees) has been launched by KVIC in Karnataka**

Project RE-HAB is a sub-mission of **Khadi and Village Industries Commission's (KVIC) National Honey Mission**.

The Project entails installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages with the belief that the elephants will not venture anywhere close to the bees and thus avoid transgressing into human landscape. This idea stems from the elephants' proven fear of the bees.

Further, the boxes are connected with a string so that when elephants attempt to pass through, a tug causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds and dissuade them from progressing further.

**National Honey Mission**

Under the Honey Mission, KVIC provides training and 10 bee boxes with live colonies to beneficiaries including farmers, beekeepers and unemployed youth. The mission aims to generate livelihood for the beneficiaries and increase honey production in the country.

**Khadi and Village Industries Commission(KVIC)**

The KVIC is a **statutory body** formed in April 1957 (During 2nd Five Year plan) by the Government of India, under the '**Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956**'. It is an apex organisation under the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**, with regard to khadi and village industries within India, which seeks to - 'plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.

**32. A team of researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi has developed a new method for efficient removal of heavy metals from water**

The team developed a **fibrous membrane filter** using a **biopolymer-based material** that helps to separate out the heavy metals from water samples.

These membranes contain **adsorbents** — materials that attract and hold the metals.

The membranes could be reused at least eight times before there was considerable reduction in the efficiency of metal adsorption.

**Importance**

Heavy metal pollution of water is a serious concern. Major hazardous metals of concern for India in terms of their environmental load and health effects are **lead, mercury(Minamata Disease), chromium, cadmium(Itai-Itai Disease), copper, and**



**aluminium**, that are released into the water through anthropogenic activities such as mining, manufacturing, electroplating, electronics, and fertilizer production, among others.

**33. Union Minister for North Eastern Region said that **Connectivity is an important element of Act East Policy.****

In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha today, the minister stated the following efforts in this direction include

- Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link between India and Bangladesh,
- Intermodal transport linkages and inland waterways through Bangladesh,
- Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and
- the Trilateral Highway Project connecting the North East with Myanmar and Thailand.

Under India-Japan Act East Forum, projects such as Road and Bridges and modernization of Hydro-electric power project have been undertaken. Among other initiatives assistance has been extended in the form of medicines/medical supplies to ASEAN countries during the pandemic. Scholarships with offer of 1000 PhD fellowships have been offered at IITs for ASEAN countries participants. India is also implementing Quick Impact Projects in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to provide development assistance to grass-root level communities in the fields of education, water resources, health etc.

**Act East Policy**

The 'Act East Policy' announced in November, 2014 is the upgrade of the "**Look East Policy**" which was promulgated in 1992. It aims at promoting economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop a strategic relationship with countries in Indo-pacific region with a proactive and pragmatic approach and thereby improving the economic development of North Eastern Region (NER) which is a gateway to South East Asia Region.

The policy has been continuously evolving since early 1990s and involves intensive and continuous engagement with South East Asian countries in the field of connectivity, trade, culture, defence and people-to-people-contact at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.

**34. The **National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, 2021** was passed by Parliament**

The Bill establishes the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) as the **principal development financial institution (DFIs) for infrastructure financing**.

NaBFID will be set up as a corporate body with authorised share capital of one lakh crore rupees. Shares of NaBFID may be held by: (i) central government, (ii) multilateral institutions, (iii) sovereign wealth funds, (iv) pension funds, (v) insurers, (vi) financial institutions, (vii) banks, and (viii) any other institution prescribed by the central government.

Initially, the central government will own 100% shares of the institution which may subsequently be reduced up to 26%.

**Functions of NaBFID:** NaBFID will have both financial as well as developmental objectives.

- Financial objectives will be to directly or indirectly lend, invest, or attract investments for infrastructure projects located entirely or partly in India. Central government will prescribe the sectors to be covered under the infrastructure domain.

- Developmental objectives include facilitating the development of the market for bonds, loans, and derivatives for infrastructure financing

The Bill also provides for any person to set up a DFI by applying to Reserve Bank of India (RBI). RBI may grant a licence for DFI in consultation with the central government. RBI will also prescribe regulations for these DFIs.

#### **development financial institution (DFIs)**

DFIs are set up for providing long-term finance for such segments of the economy where the risks involved are beyond the acceptable limits of commercial banks and other ordinary financial institutions.

Unlike banks, **DFIs do not accept deposits from the public**. They source funds from the market, government, as well as multi-lateral institutions, and are often supported through government guarantees. Key features of the Bill include:

- 35. The National Tiger Conservation Authority** has constituted a committee to ascertain the disappearance of tigers from the **Ranthambore tiger sanctuary**.

**Background:** Six tigers — four adults and two sub-adults — have been unaccounted for since March 2020 in the Ranthambore tiger sanctuary, Rajasthan.

#### **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**

The NTCA is a **statutory body** under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. It was established in December 2005 following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force, constituted by the Prime Minister of India for reorganised management of Project Tiger and the many Tiger Reserves in India

#### **Ranthambore tiger sanctuary**

The Ranthambore National Park is located in the Sawai Madhopur district of southeastern Rajasthan, which is about 130 km from Jaipur.

The Ranthambore forest reserve consists of highly fragmented forest patches, ravines, river streams, and agricultural land. The Ranthambore Tiger Reserve is connected to the Kuno-Palpur landscape in Madhya Pradesh through parts of the Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary, the ravine habitats of Chambal and the forest patches of Sheopur. Tributaries of river Chambal provide easy passage for tigers to move towards the Kuno National Park.

#### **Tigers in India**

India has 2,967 tigers, a third more than in 2014, according to results of a census made public on July 29 last year. Ranthambore, according to this exercise, had 55 tigers.

Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442). Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in tiger population and all other States saw an increase.

- 36. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020** was passed by Parliament

The Bill amends the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 which provides for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered medical practitioners. The Bill makes the following changes. The bill adds the **definition of termination of pregnancy** to mean a procedure undertaken to terminate a pregnancy by using medical or surgical methods. The Act states the following

- Under the Act, a pregnancy may be **terminated within 12 weeks**, if a registered medical practitioner is of the opinion that:
  - a. continuation of the pregnancy may risk the life of the mother, or cause grave injury to her health, or
  - b. there is a substantial risk that the child, if born, would suffer physical or mental abnormalities.
- For termination of a pregnancy between **12 to 20 weeks**, opinion of a registered medical practitioner is required earlier, two medical practitioners are required to give their opinion.
- Further, the bill states that approval of two registered medical practitioners will be required for termination of pregnancies between **20 to 24 weeks**. The termination of pregnancies up to 24 weeks will only apply to specific categories of women, as may be prescribed by the central government. The central government will notify norms for medical practitioners whose opinion is required for terminating the pregnancy.

#### **Medical Board:**

Under the Bill, every state government is required to constitute a Medical Board. It states that the upper limit of termination of pregnancy will not apply in cases where such termination is necessary due to the diagnosis of substantial foetal abnormalities. These abnormalities will be diagnosed by a Medical Board. Medical Boards will consist of the following members: (i) a gynaecologist, (ii) a paediatrician, (iii) a radiologist or sonologist, and (iv) any other number of members, as may be notified by the state government. The central government will notify the powers and functions of these Medical Boards.

### **37. Rajasthan has urged the Central government to give **national project status** for the **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)**.**

**Background:** According to the state Water Resources Department, Rajasthan is the largest state of India with a geographical area of 342.52 lakh hectares which amount to 10.4 per cent of the entire country, however, holds only 1.16 per cent of India's surface water and 1.72 per cent of groundwater.

The **Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project** aims to harvest surplus water available during the rainy season in rivers in southern Rajasthan such as **Chambal and its tributaries** including **Kunnu, Parvati, Kalisindh** and **use this water in south-eastern districts of the state where there is a scarcity of water for drinking and irrigation**.

However, among the state's water bodies, only the Chambal river basin has surplus water but this water cannot be tapped directly because the area around the Kota barrage is designated as a **crocodile sanctuary**.

Through the help of diversion structures, intra-basin water transfers, linking channels and construction of pumping main feeder channels, the ERCP aims to create a network of water channels which will cover 23.67 per cent area of Rajasthan along with 41.13 per cent population of the state.

#### **Estimated benefits of the project**

- According to the Rajasthan Water Resources Department, ERCP is estimated to create an **additional command area** of 2 lakh hectares and an area of 4.31 lakh hectare will get irrigation facilities because of this project.
- The ERCP also intends to **improve the groundwater table** in rural areas of the state, positively influencing the socio-economic conditions of people from these areas.

- It also adds special emphasis on the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), hoping that **sustainable water sources will enhance and help industries grow** in these areas resulting in investment and revenue.  
There are multiple sub-projects under the ERCP with budgets allocated for each phase.

### 38. The Department of Biotechnology has released the **National Biotechnology Development Strategy 2021-25**

The strategy is aimed at **making India globally competitive in biotechnology research, innovation, and industry**. The strategy document noted that the growth of the biotechnology industry in India is primarily driven by vaccines, and drugs produced by using genetic engineering (altering the genetic makeup of an organism). The size of the biotechnology industry of India is estimated to be USD 63 billion in 2019. The strategy is aimed at increasing it to USD 150 billion by 2025.

The strategy identifies the following as key focus areas:

- research academic partnership,
- venture capital for high-risk science,
- expenditure on research and development by industry,
- link between research and commercialisation, and
- quality assurance as per international standards.

The strategy proposes Setting up: 10 strategically located **technology clusters**, 5 **bio-manufacturing zones** in the vicinity of special economic zones, 100 **bio-incubators**, 100 **rural bio-resource technology clusters**, **biodesign centres** in IITs, NITs, and IIITs, etc, biotech **angel networks** for catalysing early-stage investments, **international incubators** in areas such as agriculture and clean energy, new **biotech parks** with the active participation of state governments, and a **focused biotechnology mission** on national priorities including climate change, climate-resistant crops, and nutrition

The strategy also suggested the following

- Ensuring import substitution as well as enhancement of export for key products,
- Developing regulatory guidelines for emerging technologies such as gene editing, defining policy on sharing biological data,
- Developing a National Biosafety and Biosecurity Network for epidemic,
- Promoting skill development in the area of biotechnology and enhancing employability.

### 39. Cargo ship blocking the Suez Canal severely impacts world trade.

#### **Suez Canal**

Suez Canal is a sea-level waterway running north-south across the **Isthmus of Suez in Egypt** to connect **the Mediterranean and the Red seas**. The canal separates the African continent from Asia, and it provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans. It is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes. The canal extends 193 km (120 miles) between Port Said in the north and Suez in the south, with dredged approach channels north of Port Said, into the Mediterranean, and south of Suez.



### Importance of Suez Canal

About 10% of all global trade flows through the 193-kilometer-long canal, which allows tankers and container ships to avoid a long trip around the southern tip of Africa.

The iconic shipping journal Lloyd's List estimates that goods worth \$9.6 billion pass through the canal every day. Lloyd's says about \$5.1 billion of that traffic is westbound and \$4.5 billion is eastbound.

About one-fourth of that traffic is on container ships — like the one that is currently burrowed into one side wall of the canal. Lloyd's says more than 50 ships traverse the canal on an average day, carrying 1.2 billion tons of cargo.

### Impact on Supply Chain

The Suez situation could compound issues for a supply chain already under pressure from the pandemic and a surge in buying.

Virus-related restrictions have trapped crews on merchant ships. Congested ports have led to container ships anchoring off the California coast, unable to dock and unload their goods. Shortages of semiconductors and rare-earth elements have plagued manufacturers of cars and other consumer products.

About 1.9 million barrels of oil a day go through the canal, according to Lloyd's. That's about 7% of all seaborne oil. The closure could affect shipments of oil and natural gas from the Mideast to Europe. S&P Global Platts Analytics said about 1 million barrels of crude and 1.4 million barrels of gasoline and other refined products flow from the Middle East and Asia north through the canal to Europe on the average day.

## 40. The **Public Accounts Committee** submitted its report titled '**Preparedness for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**'

Background: In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 SDGs as targets to be achieved by 2030. These include: (i) no poverty, (ii) zero hunger, and (iii) quality education. The Committee report is based on a **2019 audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)** on NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI).

Key observations and recommendations include:

- **Integration of framework for health targets:** The MoHFW is responsible for fulfilling the SDG of 'Good Health and Well Being'. The Committee observed that a working group set up by the MoHFW to ensure coordination with state governments had not had any meetings. It recommended undertaking efforts to ensure coordination between ministries, and between central and state governments.
- **Public health expenditure:** The Committee observed that allocation towards public health in India is lesser than the 2.5% of the GDP recommended by the National Health Mission. It recommended increasing spending on public health ensure that SDGs linked to health are fulfilled.
- **Public healthcare facilities:** The Committee observed that India has a low number of public health centres. It noted that the government plans to transform 1.5 lakh sub, primary and urban primary health centres and wellness centres by 2022 under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. It recommended posting at least one allopathic doctor with paramedical staff in each wellness centre to enhance healthcare services in remote areas.

### Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee consists of fifteen members elected by Lok Sabha every year from amongst its members according to the principle of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote. Seven members of Rajya Sabha elected by that House in like manner are associated with the Committee.

The Public Accounts Committee examines the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the expenditure of the Government of India, the Annual Finance Accounts of the Government of India and such other accounts laid before the House as the Committee may think fit. Apart from the Reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Appropriation Accounts of the Union Government, the Committee also examines the various Audit Reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General on revenue receipts, expenditure by various Ministries/ Departments of Government and accounts of autonomous bodies. The Committee, however, does not examine the accounts relating to such public undertakings as are allotted to the Committee on public undertakings.

41. A team of researchers has found that **Diphtheria** has started to become **resistant to several classes of antibiotics** and in future, it may even **become immune to vaccination**

**Background:** The researchers were drawn from the Department of Biotechnology's Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad, Maharishi Valmiki Infectious Diseases Hospital, Delhi, Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, World Health Organization, New Delhi, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, Cambridge Institute of Therapeutic Immunology & Infectious Disease, University of Cambridge, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK, Gabrichevsky Research Institute for Epidemiology and Microbiology, Moscow, Russia, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

The highlights of the report are as follows:

- The number of diphtheria cases reported globally has been **increasing gradually**. In 2018, there were 16,651 reported cases, more than double the yearly average for 1996-2017 (8,105 cases).
- The team looked for genes that might confer **some degree of resistance to antimicrobials** and they found that the average number of antimicrobial resistance genes per genome was **increasing each decade**.
- Genomes of bacteria isolated from infections from the most recent decade (2010-19) showed the highest average number of AMR genes per genome, almost four times as many on average than in the next highest decade, which was the 1990s.
- the team has also suggested that there was a possibility of the disease once more becoming a major threat across the globe because of the impact of COVID-19 on vaccination schedules in different parts of the world, coupled with a rise in the number of infections.

### Diphtheria

Diphtheria is primarily caused by the **bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae***. It is a **highly contagious** infection that primarily infects the throat and upper airways, and produces a toxin affecting other organs.

The illness has an acute onset and the main characteristics are sore throat, low fever and swollen glands in the neck, and the toxin may, in severe cases, cause myocarditis or peripheral neuropathy. The diphtheria toxin causes a membrane of dead tissue to build up over the throat and tonsils, making breathing and swallowing difficult. The disease is spread through direct physical contact or from breathing in the aerosolized secretions from coughs or sneezes of infected individuals.

**Antibiotic resistance:** Antibiotics are medicines used to prevent and treat bacterial infections. Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in response to the use of these medicines.

Bacteria, not humans or animals, become antibiotic-resistant. These bacteria may infect humans and animals, and the infections they cause are harder to treat than those caused by non-resistant bacteria.

Antibiotic resistance leads to higher medical costs, prolonged hospital stays, and increased mortality.

### 42. Power and new and renewable energy ministry has launched the **Gram Ujala scheme**

The highlights of the scheme are as follows:

- The scheme offers the **world's cheapest LED bulbs** in rural areas at Rs. 10.
- Gram Ujala programme is financed entirely through **carbon credits**. Under the **United Nations' Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)**, the scheme will claim carbon credits. Also, under the new scheme, the rural consumer's incandescent and CFL (compact fluorescent lamp) bulbs will be taken back.
- The first phase of the scheme, which comes with no government support or subsidy, was **launched from Arrah in Bihar**. In the first phase 15 million LED bulbs will be distributed across villages of Arrah (Bihar), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Vijaywada (Andhra Pradesh), Nagpur (Maharashtra), and western Gujarat.
- The bulbs are offered by state-run **Energy Efficiency Services Ltd's** subsidiary Convergence Energy Services Ltd (CESL) by leveraging scale.
- Under phase 1 of GRAM UJALA programme 1.5 crore LED bulbs will be distributed which will have a significant impact on India's climate change action energy savings of 2025 million kWh/year and CO<sub>2</sub> reductions of 1.65 million T CO<sub>2</sub>/year. The programme will enable better illumination, at an affordable price of INR 10/bulb. This will usher in a better standard of life, financial savings, more economic activity, and better safety for rural citizens

According to EESL, **India is currently the second-largest LED market in the world by value**. The government's previous **Ujala (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All)** scheme had cut LED bulb prices to Rs.70 apiece from around Rs.310 in 2014. Under Gram Ujala, the new scheme, the revenue earned from carbon credits will contribute Rs. 60 per LED bulb piece, with the balance Rs. 10 to be paid by the rural consumer.

**43.** Recently, **US India Artificial Intelligence (USIAI)** initiative has been launched to scale up the science and technology relationship between India and the United States

The program is a part of the **Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF)**. The U.S.-India AI Initiative will provide an opportunity for key stakeholder groups to share experiences, identify new R&D areas and opportunities that would benefit from synergistic activities, discuss the emerging AI landscape, and address the challenges of developing an AI workforce.

Over the next year, the IUSSTF will conduct a series of **roundtables and workshops** to gather input from different stakeholder communities and prepare White Papers that identify technical, research, infrastructure, and workforce opportunities and challenges, and domain-specific opportunities for R&D in healthcare, smart cities, materials, agriculture, energy, and manufacturing.

**Importance:** USIAI Initiative focuses on AI cooperation in critical areas that are priorities for both countries. USIAI will serve as a platform to discuss opportunities, challenges, and barriers for bilateral AI R&D collaboration, enable AI innovation, help share ideas for developing an AI workforce, and recommend modes and mechanisms for catalyzing partnerships.

**44.** The Lok Sabha has passed **supplementary demand for grants** for the second batch (2020-2021).

The additional grant required to meet the required expenditure of the government is called Supplementary Grants.

**Explanation:** When grants, authorised by the Parliament, fall short of the required expenditure, an estimate is presented before the Parliament for Supplementary or Additional grants. These grants are presented and passed by the Parliament before the end of the financial year.

When actual expenditure incurred exceeds the approved grants of the Parliament, the **Ministry of Finance presents a Demand for Excess Grant**. The **Comptroller and Auditor General of India bring such excesses to the notice of the Parliament**.

The **Public Accounts Committee examines** these excesses and gives recommendations to the Parliament. The Demand for Excess Grants is made after the actual expenditure is incurred and is presented to the Parliament after the end of the financial year in which the expenses were made.

**45.** Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh sign an agreement to implement the **Ken-Betwa Link Project**

The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers**. Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.

The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases.

- Under Phase-I, one of the components — Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses — will be completed.
- While in the Phase-II, three components — Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage — will be constructed.



### Advantages of the project

- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide **annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people** and also **generate 103 MW of hydropower**.
- The project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Potential negative impacts of the project

- According to a written reply given by Minister of State for Jal Shakti Rattan Lal Kataria, out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under **submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project**, 4,206 ha of area lies within **the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve**.
- According to the Comprehensive Detailed Project Report, **the cost of Ken-Betwa Link Project** is estimated at **Rs 35,111.24 crore at 2017-18 prices**. **Several Clearance** are required for the project. These are:
  - Techno-economic (given by the Central Water Commission);
  - Forest Clearance and Environmental clearance (Ministry of Environment & Forests);
  - Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plan of Tribal Population (Ministry of Tribal Affairs) and
  - Wildlife clearance (Central Empowered Committee).

**46. IUCN declares African forest elephants and savanna elephants as ‘critically endangered’ and ‘endangered’ based on latest population estimates**

**Background:** The population of African forest elephants dropped by 86 per cent in the last 31 years while that of the savanna elephants dropped by 60 per cent in the last 50 years, according to the IUCN.

### African forest elephants and savanna elephants

Forest elephants occur in the tropical forests of Central Africa and in a range of habitats in West Africa. They rarely overlap with the range of the savanna elephant, which prefers open country and is found in a variety of habitats in sub-Saharan Africa including grasslands and deserts.

The forest elephant, which has a more restricted natural distribution, is thought to occupy only a quarter of its historic range today, with the largest remaining populations found in Gabon and the Republic of the Congo.

### International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

IUCN, formerly called **World Conservation Union**, is a network of environmental organizations founded as the International Union for the Protection of Nature in October 1948 in Fontainebleau, France, to promote nature conservation and the ecologically sustainable use of natural resources. It changed its name to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 1956 and was also known as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) from 1990 to 2008. The IUCN is the world's oldest global environmental organization. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switz.

The IUCN maintains the **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**, a comprehensive assessment of the current risk of extinction of thousands of plant and animal species.

The IUCN has been granted observer status at the United Nations General Assembly. The IUCN's membership includes more than 1,000 governmental and nongovernmental organizations from more than 140 countries. It is governed by a democratically elected council, which is chosen by member organizations at each World Conservation Congress. The IUCN's funding comes from a number of governments, agencies, foundations, member organizations, and corporations.

**47. The Prime Minister addressed the opening ceremony of International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (ICDRI)**

The Prime Minister stated that COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-hundred-year disaster. It has taught us that in an interdependent and interconnected world, country-rich or poor, in the east or west, north or south- is immune to the effect of global disasters.

Further, the Prime Minister elaborated on key priority areas:

- He called for the ICDRI to embody the central promise of the **Sustainable Development Goals**, that is, "leave no one behind".
- He suggested that we **take stock of the performance of some of the key infrastructure sectors** - particularly health infrastructure and the digital infrastructure, that played a central role during the pandemic.
- The PM stressed that in our quest for resilience, no technological system should be considered too basic or too advanced. The ICDRI must maximize the demonstration effect of the application of technology.

**International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (ICDRI)**

The ICDRI is an annual international conference and platform to continue building an engaged global community for disaster and climate resilient infrastructure. It is a partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and knowledge institutions that aims to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development.

Members include Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Bhutan, Chile, Fiji, France, Germany, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, Peru, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America along with Six Organisations as supporting partners - World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), The Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies (ARISE) and Coalition for Climate Resilient Investment (CCRI).

**48. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021 was passed by Parliament.**

The Bill amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, an Act that regulates the mining sector in India.

The new act has the following prominent provisions

- The Act empowers the central government to reserve any mine (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) to be leased through an auction for a particular end-use (such as iron ore mine for a steel plant). Such mines are known as captive mines. The Bill provides

that no mine will be reserved for particular end-use.

- The Act provides that captive mines (other than atomic minerals) may sell up to 50% of their annual mineral production in the open market after meeting their own needs. The central government may increase this threshold through a notification. The lessee will have to pay additional charges for mineral sold in the open market.
- Under the Act, states conduct the auction of mineral concessions (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals). Mineral concessions include mining lease and prospecting license-cum-mining lease.
- The Bill empowers the central government to specify a time period for completion of the auction process in consultation with the state government. If the state government is unable to complete the auction process within this period, the auctions may be conducted by the central government
- Upon expiry of a mining lease (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals), mines are leased to new persons through auction. The statutory clearances issued to the previous lessee are transferred to the new lessee for a period of two years. The new lessee is required to obtain fresh clearances within these two years. The Bill replaces this provision and instead provides that transferred statutory clearances will be valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee.

**49.** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that presently, there is **no proposal to implement Panchayat system in Sixth Schedule areas of Assam.**

#### **Sixth Schedule**

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution has provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the border states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. It provides autonomy to the communities through creation of autonomous development councils that can frame laws on land, public health, agriculture and others. Under the Sixth Schedule, autonomous districts and councils have a varying degree of autonomy to frame laws to protect the interests of the tribal.

As of now, 10 autonomous councils exist in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said the specified tribal areas are the North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and the Bodoland Territorial Area in Assam, Khasi Hills, Jaintiya Hills and Garo Hills in Meghalaya, Tribal Areas in Tripura, Chakma, Mara and Lai districts in Mizoram.

**50.** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up a five-member committee, headed by former RBI Deputy Governor Shyamala Gopinath, for evaluating applications for **universal banks and small finance banks**

#### **Universal Bank**

A universal bank is a bank that offers retail, wholesale and investment banking services under one roof.

According to the guidelines released by the central bank in August 2016, eligible entities seeking universal bank licences must be individuals/entities with at least 10 years of experience in banking and finance at a senior level or private companies or groups with at least 10 years of successful track record. Groups or companies applying for such licences must have assets of Rs 5,000 crore or above and the non-financial businesses don't

account for 40% or more of these assets.

### **Small Finance Bank**

Small Finance Bank is a specific segment of banking created by RBI under the guidance of Government of India with an objective of furthering financial inclusion by primarily undertaking basic banking activities to un-served and underserved sections including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganized entities. Like other commercial banks, these banks can undertake all basic banking activities including lending and taking deposits.

To be eligible to apply for a small finance bank licence, individuals must have at least 10 years of experience in the banking and finance sector at senior levels. Groups, companies, existing payments banks, non-banking finance companies, microfinance companies, local area banks and cooperative banks applying for these licenses must have at least five years of successful track record.

## **51. In the News: Emerging crisis of obtaining helium in India**

**Context:** The United States is the most important exporter of helium across the world. But it is now planning to switch off export of helium from 2021. While Qatar is another possible exporter, acute political and diplomatic wrangles have made the country unreliable. This has created a crisis of obtaining helium in India.

### **Helium**

Helium is an element that exists in gas form. Its atomic symbol is "He," and its atomic number is 2 on the periodic table. Helium's melting point is the lowest of all the elements. The element helium is second only to hydrogen in its abundance in the universe.

### **Importance of Helium**

Helium has become extremely important because it has a large number of applications .

- Helium is used for medicine, scientific research, arc welding, refrigeration, gas for aircraft, coolant for nuclear reactors, cryogenic research and detecting gas leaks.
- It is used for its cooling properties because of its boiling point being close to absolute zero. This makes it attractive for use in superconductors.
- Helium is also used for pressurizing rockets and other spacecraft. It is also used as a heat-transfer agent.
- In medicine, sometimes helium is used to aid patients with lung issues like obstructed airways, asthma and COPD. Helium enables better gas penetration to the distal alveoli in the lungs, so it is used for lung ventilation when medically necessary.
- Helium is also used for pulmonary function testing. Helium is also used in some laparoscopic surgeries instead of carbon monoxide. Helium is sometimes used as a label for imaging. Sometimes helium is used for open-heart surgery, mixed with oxygen and used as a mist for the lungs.
- Helium is also used to cool the superconducting magnets in MRI scanners. Radiation monitors also use helium.

### **Helium Sources in India**

Helium is said to be found in large quantities in an area called Rajmahal volcanic basin around Bakreswar in Jharkhand, where floating on an ocean of helium.

India consumes about 70 million cubic metres per year.



**52.** The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all **Right to Information (RTI) requests** in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report.

**Background:** Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons. Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.

#### **Right to Information**

The Right to Information Act, 2005 has been enacted by the Parliament and has come into force from 15 June, 2005. This Act provides for right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority

According to the RTI act any Indian citizen can request any information (which is supposed to be public knowledge) from the offices and departments of the state or central governments. The act mandates that the said offices and departments must process such requests in a timely manner. Moreover, it states that the authority is under liability to respond to such a request within a period of 30 days from the date of receiving such an application.

#### **Rejecting RTI**

The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information which would endanger life and safety to that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign governments, copyrights, or sovereignty, security and intelligence matters. Public authorities are expected to cite the relevant clause of the Act to invoke the exemption.

**53.** **NASA and ISRO** are collaborating on developing a **satellite called NISAR**, which will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court

**NISAR** stands for **NASA-ISRO-SAR**. SAR here refers to the **synthetic aperture radar**

NISAR is an SUV-sized satellite that is being jointly developed by the space agencies of the US and India. The partnership agreement was signed between NASA and ISRO in September 2014, according to which

- NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.
- ISRO, on the other hand, will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.

Significantly, NISAR will be equipped with the largest reflector antenna ever launched by NASA

**Goal of the Mission:** Primary goals include tracking subtle changes in the Earth's surface, spotting warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions, helping to monitor groundwater supplies and tracking the rate at which ice sheets are melting.

**Importance:** The data will allow for better understanding of the causes and consequences of land surface changes, increasing our ability to manage resources and prepare for and cope with global change

#### 54. In the News: **Tiger Relocation Project**

**Context:** A tigress shifted as part of India's first inter-state translocation project in 2018 from Madhya Pradesh to Odisha — returned home.

##### **Tiger Relocation Project**

The tiger relocation project was initiated in 2018 wherein two big cats, a male (Mahavir) from Kanha Tiger Reserve and a female (Sundari) from Bandhavgarh from Madhya Pradesh were relocated to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha, to shore up the tiger population in the state.

The relocation was meant to serve two purposes —

- reducing tiger population in areas with excess tigers to majorly reduce territorial disputes,
- second, to reintroduce tigers in areas where the population has considerably reduced due to various reasons.

Both the big cats were selected for the translocation project as per the NTCA guidelines and in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India and the Government of India. Two key factors were considered for choosing the animal — first, a dispersing young animal which is to find a new and second, an adult transient which was yet to establish any territory.

##### **Outcome of the project**

The project ran into trouble within weeks of initiation. The arrival of the tigers was followed by severe **protests by villagers** living on the fringes of the reserve. Forest department officials were attacked and their offices burnt down by irate villagers. This reaction was the **outcome of displacing tribals from Raigoda in the core area to Saruali** on the outskirts of the reserve. The villagers feared the big cats would endanger their livelihoods, lives and livestock. They also **alleged that they were not consulted or informed prior to the translocation.**

Within months of the translocation, Mahavir was found dead due to **poaching**. And two people were allegedly killed by Sundari. Subsequently, the project was suspended by NTCA.

##### **factors contributed to the likely failure of the project?**

As per wildlife conservation activists and former forest officials from the state, the major reason which contributed to the failure of the project was

1. the lack of confidence and trust building between the forest department and the villagers.
2. the already existing female tigress in the core area did not allow the presence of another tigress and chased her away. Sundari's proximity to human habitations which are in abundance even close to the core area in Satkosia could have led to the human-animal conflict.

**55.** The Government of **National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021** was passed by Parliament

**Background:** Between 2015 and 2019 there was a tussle between the elected government of NCT and the L-G of the state on various issues. Several orders issued by the Delhi government were either declared void or reversed by the L-G citing procedural lacunae ranging from lack of approval from his office to not being constitutionally empowered to take such decisions.

The Supreme Court in a series of decisions in 2018 and 2019 stated that there was no room either for anarchy or absolutism in a democracy, held that

- The real authority to take decisions lies in the elected government.
- The NCT's government needed only to inform the LG of its "well-deliberated" decisions instead of obtaining his "concurrence" in every issue of daily governance.
- While the L-G was free to form an opinion on any matter however, the L-G should not intervene routinely but only in matters fundamental to Delhi.
- It also held that the L-G should not hold on to files but honour the wisdom of Delhi's Cabinet of Ministers.

#### **National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

The Bill amends the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991. The Act provides a framework for the functioning of the Legislative Assembly and the government of the NCT of Delhi. The Bill amends certain powers and responsibilities of the Legislative Assembly and the Lieutenant Governor.

Some of the highlights of the Act are as follows:

- The Act provides that the term "government" referred to in any law made by the Legislative Assembly will imply Lieutenant Governor (LG).
- The Act prohibits the Legislative Assembly from making any rule to enable itself or its Committees to: (i) consider the matters of day-to-day administration of the NCT of Delhi and (ii) conduct any inquiry in relation to administrative decisions. Further, the Bill provides that all such rules made before its enactment will be void.
- The Act specifies that all executive action by the government, whether taken on the advice of the Ministers or otherwise, must be taken in the name of the LG. The Bill adds that on certain matters, as specified by the LG, his opinion must be obtained before taking any executive action on the decisions of the Minister/ Council of Ministers.

#### **Impact of the Bill**

The immediate impact of the Bill will be to render void several committees created in the Delhi Legislative Assembly on administrative issues over the last six years allowing direct communication between MLAs and bureaucrats.

#### **Arguments against the Bill**

Some experts believe the amendments will turn the administrative clock of the Capital back by several decades and take it back to the era of the Delhi Metropolitan Council, mainly considered a municipal body, and "snatch" the democratic and Constitutional right of the city's citizens to vote those they deem fit to administer them.

#### **Arguments in favour of the Bill**

Other experts argue that the elected government of Delhi had always been a local administrative body to be headed by the L-G as an administrator.

**56.** Supreme Court dismissed petitions seeking to stay the sale of fresh **electoral bonds** ahead of Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry.

### **Electoral Bonds**

Electoral bonds are **interest-free bearer instruments** used to donate money anonymously to political parties. A bearer instrument does not carry any information about the buyer or payee, and the holder of the instrument (which is the political party) is presumed to be its owner. They were announced in the 2017 Union Budget.

- The bonds are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore, and State Bank of India is the only bank authorised to sell them.
- Donors can buy and subsequently donate bonds to a political party, which can encash the bonds through its verified account within 15 days.
- There is no limit on the number of bonds an individual or company can purchase. If a party hasn't encashed any bonds within 15 days, SBI deposits these into the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. A total of 12,924 electoral bonds worth Rs 6534.78 crore have been sold in 15 phases between March 2018 and January 2021.

### **Why have they been challenged?**

Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the **Centre has exempted parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds** i.e., they need not disclose these details in their mandatory contribution reports to the Election Commission every year.

This means voters will not know which individual, company, or organisation has funded which party, and to what extent. Before the introduction of electoral bonds, parties had to disclose details of all donors who have contributed more than Rs 20,000.

Experts state that the change **infringes the citizen's 'Right to Know'** and makes **the political class even more unaccountable**.

"Moreover, while electoral bonds provide no details to the citizens, the said anonymity does not apply to the government of the day, which can always access the donor details by demanding the data from the State Bank of India (SBI). This implies that the only people in dark about the source of these donations are the taxpayers. It may also be noted that the printing of these bonds & SBI commission for facilitating the sale and purchase of the bonds is paid from the taxpayers' money by the central government

### **Election Commission's stand**

In its submission to the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in May 2017, the **EC had objected to amendments in the Representation of the People Act that exempt political parties from disclosing donations through this route.**

Further, it had state that in a situation where the contribution received through electoral bonds are not reported it cannot be ascertained whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provision under Section 29(b) of the RP Act which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources."



**57.** The corporate affairs ministry has announced companies will have to **disclose any holding or dealings in cryptocurrencies or virtual currencies** in their financial statements filed with the Registrar of Companies.

Experts have noted the corporate affairs ministry may just be seeking disclosures from companies to get a record of the usage of cryptocurrencies after reports that some startups were paying some employees part of their salaries in cryptocurrencies.

Notably, the government has also amended disclosure requirements to require companies to require disclosures of the relationships that companies have with any companies that have been struck off by the RoC, and any proceedings against companies for Benami transactions. The regulations also require that companies disclose if they have ever been declared a wilful defaulter by a bank or financial institution as a part of an effort to gather more information on the conduct of companies.

#### **Government's stance on Crypto Currencies**

The government's new bill – Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 — aims to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies while setting the stage to roll out the legal framework for an “official digital currency”. However, Union Finance Minister has said the Centre will take a calibrated approach to cryptocurrencies and will not close the window on experimentation with cryptocurrencies.

#### **CryptoCurrency**

A cryptocurrency is in a broad sense a **virtual or digital money**. A virtual currency is a digital representation of value that can be digitally traded and functions as (a) a medium of exchange, and/ or (b) a unit of account, and/or (c) a store of value, but, unlike fiat currency like the rupee, it is not legal tender and does not have the backing of a government. A cryptocurrency is a subset of virtual currencies, and is decentralised, and protected by cryptography.

#### **Concerns regarding private cryptocurrencies**

While it is true that the technology used in virtual currencies has immense potential, without a central regulating authority, they can have numerous downsides.

- Non-official virtual currencies can be used to defraud consumers, particularly unsophisticated consumers or investors.
- if private cryptocurrencies are allowed to function as legal tender, Central Banks such as the the RBI would lose control over the monetary policy and financial stability, as it would not be able to keep a tab on the money supply in the economy.
- The anonymity of private digital currencies make them vulnerable to money laundering and use in terrorist financing activities while making law enforcement difficult.

**58.** The Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) scheme has been launched in 10 States

This scheme plan has been laid out in a parliamentary standing committee report submitted to the Lok Sabha, as part of **the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP)** which began in 2008 and has been expanded several times.

The Unique ID can be described it as **“the Aadhaar for land”** — a number that would uniquely identify every surveyed parcel of land and prevent land fraud, especially in rural India, where land records are outdated and disputed. The identification will be based on the longitude and latitude of the land parcel, and is dependent on detailed surveys and geo-referenced cadastral maps, according to a presentation by the Department in September 2020.

Under the scheme, a 14-digit identification number will be issued to every plot of land in the country.

**59.** The Chief Justice of India (CJI) lauded Goa's **Uniform Civil Code**

**Uniform Civil Code**

A Uniform Civil Code is one that would provide for **one law for the entire country**, applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc. **Article 44** of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for the citizens throughout the territory of India.

Article 44 is one of the **Directive Principles of State Policy**. These, as defined in Article 37, are **not justiciable** (not enforceable by any court) but the principles laid down therein are **fundamental in governance**.

**60.** In the News: **Model Code of Conduct**

**Context:** Elections for selecting Members of Legislative Assembly will be held in five states between March 27 and April 29. These states are under the Model Code of Conduct and will remain under it till the completion of the election process.

**Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**

The MCC is a consensus document. In other words, political parties have themselves agreed to keep their conduct during elections in check, and to work within the Code. The philosophy behind the MCC is that parties and candidates should show respect for their opponents, criticise their policies and programmes constructively, and not resort to mudslinging and personal attacks. The MCC is intended to help the poll campaign maintain high standards of public morality and provide a level playing field for all parties and candidates.

**History of MCC:** Kerala was the first state to adopt a code of conduct for elections in 1960. The experiment was successful, and the Election Commission decided to emulate Kerala's example and circulate the draft among all recognised parties and state governments for the Lok Sabha elections of 1962. However, it was only in 1974, just before the mid-term general elections, that the EC released a formal Model Code of Conduct. This Code was also circulated during parliamentary elections of 1977.

**Criticism of the MCC**

Although the MCC has been around for almost four decades, its observance is left to parties and candidates. It is not a legally enforceable document, and the Commission usually uses moral sanction to get political parties and candidates to fall in line.

Governments have in the past attempted to amend The Representation of the People Act, 1951, to make some violations of the MCC illegal and punishable. Although the EC's stand in the mid-1980s was that Part VII of the MCC (dealing with the party in power) should have statutory backing, it changed its position after the conduct of Lok Sabha elections in the 1990s. The EC is now of the opinion that making the Code legally enforceable would be self-defeating because any violation must be responded to quickly — and this will not be possible if the matter goes to court.

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