

CIVIL SERVICES MONTHLY

APRIL 2021

World's highest railway bridge

MTP Amendment Bill

AIM-PRIME

Global Gender Gap Report 2021

'madhukranti portal' & 'Honey Corners'

Ingenuity Mars Helicopter

World press freedom index 2021

SCRI(Supply Chain Resilience Initiative)

No country for women

Police Reforms

BIMSTEC needs to reinvent itself

Forest Fires

Net Zero and climate injustice

Antimicrobial resistance: the silent threat

A post-COVID fiscal framework



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PRELIMS

WORLD'S HIGHEST RAILWAY BRIDGE

CHENAB BRIDGE

- a. The construction of the arch of the world's highest railway bridge that soars 359 metres above the bed of the Chenab river from Bakkal to Kauri in the reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir was completed today, with the Northern Railways zone of Indian Railways terming the achievement a milestone.
- b. The 1.3-kilometre-long bridge aims to boost connectivity to the Kashmir Valley and it is being constructed at a cost of ₹1,486 crore **as part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project.**
- c. The bridge, which is 35-metre higher than the Eiffel Tower in Paris, is expected to be completed within a year, officials said.
- d. **Salient features of the arch of the Chenab Bridge:**
 - i. Indian Railways is constructing the iconic Arch Bridge on River Chenab as a part of the USBRL project to connect the Kashmir valley to the rest of the nation.
 - ii. This bridge is 1315m long.
 - iii. This is the highest Railway Bridge in the world being 359m above the river bed level.
 - iv. It will be 35 meters higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris (France)
 - v. Arch consists of steel boxes. Concrete will be filled in boxes of the Arch to improve stability.
- e. **Unique Features of the Bridge:**
 - i. Bridge designed to withstand high wind speed up to 266 Km/Hour.
 - ii. It designed for blast load in consultation with DRDO for the first time in India.
 - iii. It will remain operational at restricted speed of 30 Km/Hour even after removal of one pier/trestle.
 - iv. Bridge designed to bear earthquake forces of highest intensity zone-V in India.

MTP AMENDMENT BILL

Context:

- Recently Rajya Sabha passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill 2020 despite much opposition.

Features of MTP Amendment Bill:

- It increased upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women.
- Under the bill, abortion will not be allowed at request of a pregnant women but is conditional on authorization by the doctor.
- It also allows abortions without any upper gestation limit only for "foetuses with abnormalities".
- It also calls for mandatory setting up of Medical Boards in every State & UTs that rely on inconsistent criteria for approval of abortion.
- Identity details has of pregnancy aborted women shall not be revealed to a authorized person as per law.

Issues with MTP Bill:

- Lack of effective consultation with stakeholders.
- Lack of inclusion of transgender people within the MTP framework.
- Bill goes against the Supreme Court jurisprudence on reproductive autonomy & bodily integrity.

- Constitution of medical boards would violate privacy of women & also cause inordinate delay.
- Bill has ignored concerns of disabled persons & rural public because of its regressive & impractical provisions.
- Still, state continues to control women's reproductive & sexual rights.
- The bill while allowing co-option of women's rights it continues to criminalise abortion & perpetuate harmful stereotypes and stigma around reproduction & sexuality.

Conclusion:

India largest democratic nation has to breakdown the hetero-patriarchal regulatory orientation in women's reproductive autonomy. Even though the bill lays foundation for safe & legal abortions but it is need of the hour that bill needs to be accommodative of all stakeholders concerns and enlarge the horizon of states understanding of women issues that aids policy formation to be gender sensitive.

PAKISTAN ALLOWS KEY IMPORTS FROM INDIA AND AGAIN MAKE U TURN

Context:

- Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) allowed the private sector to import five lakh tonnes of white sugar from India.
- Pakistan has decided to lift its nearly two year ban on imports of cotton & sugar from India.

When trade normalcy is a norm between both:

- Before trade ban i.e August 2019, trade between both India & Pakistan is not too great because of the tumultuous relation between both.
 - But India over the years maintained trade surplus.
- Aftermath of Uri terror attack & India's surgical strike, India's exports fell from \$2.17 billion (2015-16) to \$ 1.82 billion (2016-17).
- In spite of tensions between both, trade between both rose marginally
 - India's export raised on 6% avg.
 - Pakistan's exports raised on avg 3%.
- **Major Products of trade:**
 - In 2018-19, Cotton & organic chemicals are accounted for half of Pakistan's imports and other imports are plastics, tanning extracts and industrial equipment's.(fig)
 - Except pharma products, all above 5 imports drastically fell due to trade ban while cotton imports stopped altogether.
 - India's major imports from Pakistan are mineral fuels & oils, edible fruits & nuts among others. However, India imported above imports substantially from other nations ranging from West Asia to South American nations.

What led to Trade Ban?

- In August 2019, Pakistan resorted to suspension of bilateral trade ties with India due to
 - Backdrop of Constitutional changes in Jammu & Kashmir.
 - But underlying reason was imposing of 200% tariff & revoking of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status against Pakistan by India.
- But the trade ban affected Pakistan more since it depended on India heavily for raw materials for pharma & textiles.
- Trade ban resulted in dropping of India's exports & imports by 60% & 97% respectively.

INDIA'S TRADE WITH PAKISTAN (IN \$)

Year	Exports	Imports	Trade Balance
2018-19	2.07 billion	494.87 million	1.57 billion
2019-20	816.62 million	13.97 million	802.65 million
2020-21*	240.99 million	2.15 million	238.84 million

*April to January, Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

MAJOR PRODUCTS TRADED BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN (IN \$)

India's Top Exports to Pakistan	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*
Cotton	550.33 mn	64.25 mn	0
Organic chemicals	457.75 mn	273.97 mn	115.92 mn
Plastic and articles thereof	131.19 mn	42.62 mn	1.43 mn
Tanning or dyeing extracts, etc.	114.48 mn	39.47 mn	0.92 mn
Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, etc	94.88 mn	42.42 mn	1.28 mn
India's Top Imports from Pakistan	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*
Mineral fuels and oils and products of their distillation, etc	131.29 mn	0.01 mn	N/A
Edible fruit and nuts, peel or citrus fruit or melons	103.27 mn	0.92 mn	0.85 mn
Salt, sulphur, earths and stone, plastering materials, lime and cement	92.84 mn	1.31 mn	0.20 mn
Ores, slag and ash	17.18 mn	0.03 mn	N/A
Raw hides and skin (other than fur skins) and leather	16.27 mn	N/A	N/A

*April to January, Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Rationale behind Revoke Trade Ban:

- Major reason to lift trade ban on cotton imports is shortage of raw cotton material that resulted in heavy losses to Pakistan's textile sector.
 - Since in Pakistan cotton yields are very low & imports from west are costlier and time taking.
- Due to high domestic prices of sugar, its imports from India is allowed due to low price levels in India.

However, later Pakistan's cabinet led by PM, overruled the decision and made double U-turn on resuming trade with India highlights the internal differences within Ministries, between business and political communities, and the emphasis on politics over economy and trade. It also signifies Pakistan cabinet's grandstanding, linking normalization of ties with India to Jammu and Kashmir.

BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK FIRE

- A WILDFIRE that had spread across several zones in Bandhavgarh National Park has been brought under control, two days after it broke out.
- Officials refused to divulge the areas affected but the fire is said to have spread across six ranges, including Panpatha, Khitoli, Tala and Manpur.
- The central Tala zone, which is known for tigers, is also said to be affected.

d. ABOUT BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

Bandhavgarh national park is located in the Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh., with core area of 716 square kilometres. It is famous for white tiger, Nilgai, Chausingha, Chital, Chinkara, Wild Boar etc.

- In **1968**, it was notified as a national park and in 1993 was declared a tiger reserve- under the

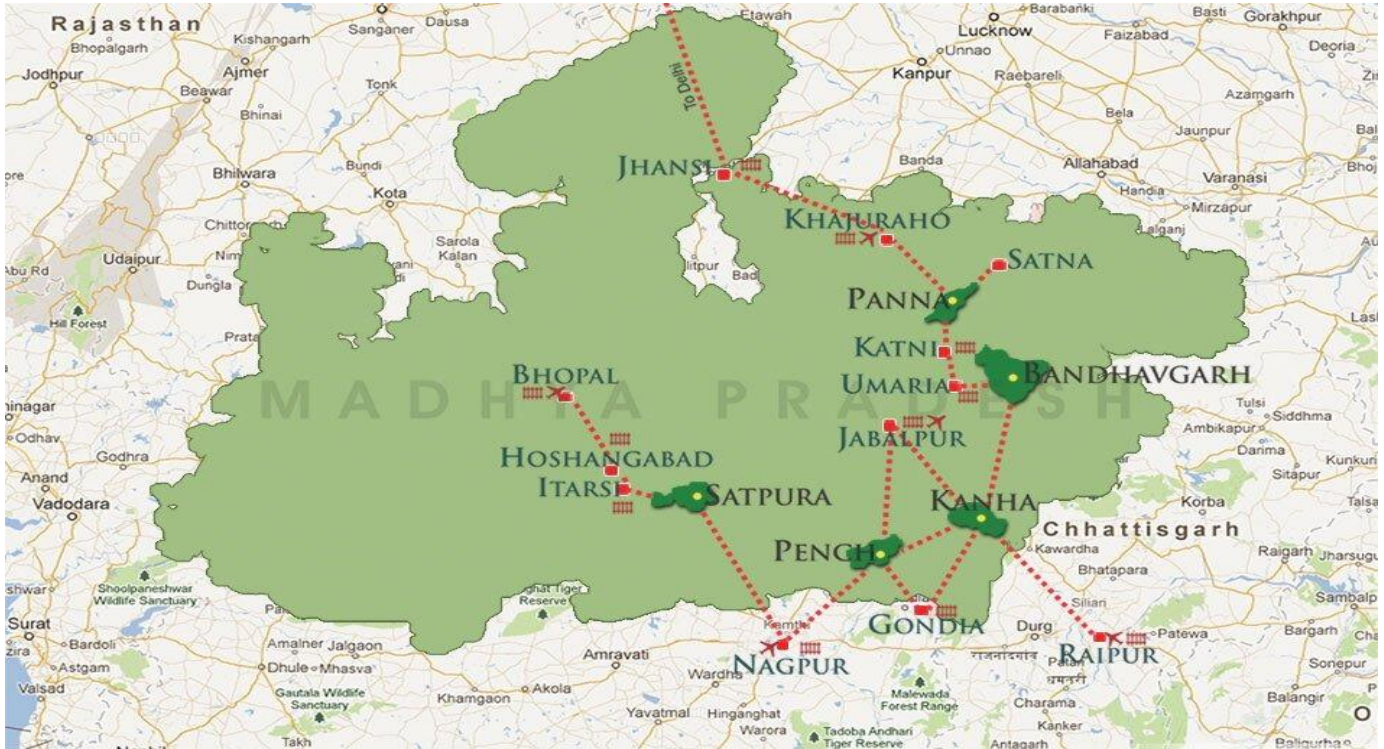
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Project Tiger Network at the neighbouring Panpatha Sanctuary.

ii. Historical Significance: Its mention can be found in the ancient books of the 'Narad Pancharatra' and the 'Shiv Purana' that this place is being associated with Ramayana.

iii. The Bandhavgarh Fort is known as **a great masterpiece of "Treta Yuga"** (one of the ages of mankind in Hinduism).



AIM-PRIME

Atal Innovation Mission launches 'AIM-PRIME', in partnership with BMGF & Venture Center

a. AIM-PRIME: Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog launched AIM-PRIME (Program for Researchers on Innovations, Market-Readiness & Entrepreneurship)

b. AIM: an initiative to promote and support science-based deep-tech startups & ventures across India. In this regard, AIM has joined hands with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to launch this nationwide program which will be implemented by Venture Center - a non-profit technology business incubator.

c. BENEFITS:

- i. Addressing specific issues through training and guidance over a period of 12 months.
- ii. Candidates selected for the program will get access to in-depth learning via a comprehensive lecture series, live team projects, exercises, and project-specific mentoring.
- iii. They will also have access to a deep tech startup playbook, curated video library, and plenty of peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

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DISQUIET OVER POLICY FOR RARE DISEASES

a. The National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021: The document specifies increasing the government support for treating patients with a 'rare disease' from ₹15 lakh to ₹20 lakh. It divides diseases into three groups:

i. Group 1: Disorders amenable to one-time curative treatment:

ii. Group 2: Diseases requiring long term / lifelong treatment having relatively lower cost of treatment and benefit has been documented in literature and annual or more frequent surveillance is required.

iii. Group 3: Diseases for which definitive treatment is available but challenges are to make optimal patient selection for benefit, very high cost and lifelong therapy.

b. Problem:

i. GROUP 3 PATIENTS: The new policy has absolutely no consideration for Group 3 patients, who require lifelong treatment support

ii. It **offers no support to patients awaiting treatment since the earlier National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases 2017** was kept in abeyance. Looking at the number of rare disease patients diagnosed and considered eligible for treatment by the respective State technical committees, the immediate requirement of funds to support the immediate treatment needs of the diagnosed patients shouldn't have exceeded ₹80 crore to ₹100 crore annually.

c. SOLUTION:

i. The Centre's contribution would work out to ₹40 to ₹50 crore , if it is able to convince the States for a load-sharing model,

ii. Examples: A few States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have already indicated

d. ABOUT RARE DISEASE:

i. There is no universal or standard definition of rare disease. A disease that occurs infrequently is generally considered a rare disease.

ii. It has been defined by different countries in terms of prevalence – either in absolute terms or in terms of prevalence per 10,000 population.

iii. A country defines a rare disease most appropriate in the context of its own population, health care system and resources.

e. Challenges:

i. Research and development: A fundamental challenge in research and development for the majority of rare diseases is that there is relatively little known about the pathophysiology or the natural history of these diseases

ii. Unavailability of treatment: Availability and access to medicines are important to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with rare diseases. Despite progress in recent years, effective or safe treatment is not available for most of the rare diseases. Hence, even when a correct diagnosis is made, there may not be an available therapy to treat the rare disease.

GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2021

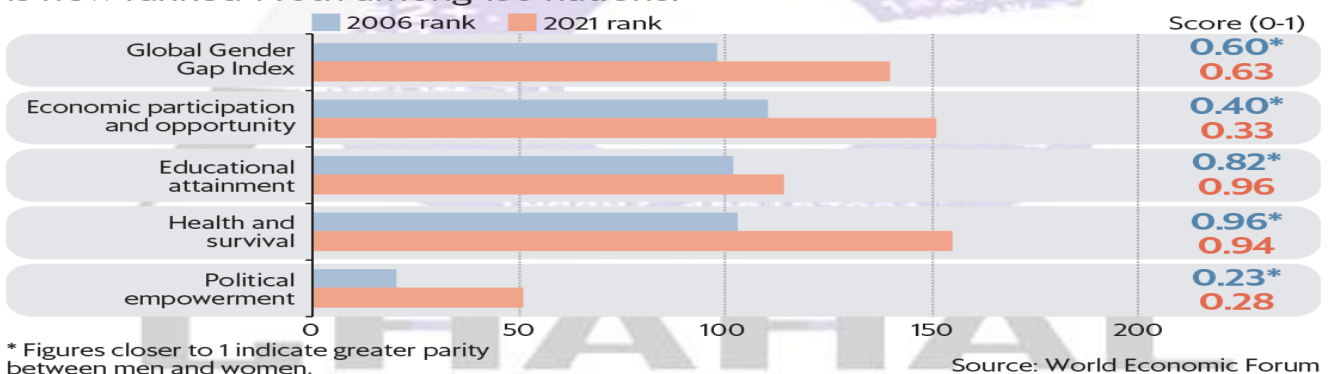
India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, becoming the third-worst performer in South Asia with Pakistan and Afghanistan trailing. The gender gap in India has widened to 62.5%, largely due to women's inadequate representation in politics, technical and leadership roles, decrease in women's labour force participation rate, poor healthcare, lagging female to male literacy ratio, income inequality.

The report is a measure of gender gap on four parameters: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The gap is the widest on the political empowerment dimension with economic participation and opportunity being next in line. However, the gap on educational attainment and health and survival has been practically bridged.

Among India's neighbours, Bangladesh ranked 65, Nepal 106, Pakistan 153, Afghanistan 156, Bhutan 130 and Sri Lanka 116.

Mind the gap

India has slipped 28 places in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, and is now one of the worst performers in South Asia. It is now ranked 140th among 156 nations.



- The World Economic Forum in its Global Gender Gap report, 2021 has not just highlighted the sad state of unequal progress of women among the two major genders, but also found evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic affected women more than men.
- India remains a country with a higher gender gap (GG) This puts India in the same category as West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Scandinavian and American countries have bridged the GG the most. But what is more concerning is that India's position has deteriorated on the index from 0.668 in the 2020 report.

About WEF= The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation. The Forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas. **It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.** It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests. The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance. **The WEF hosts an annual meeting at the end of January in Davos.**

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RIFT WIDENS**Highlights of report**

- ▶ According to WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India has closed 62.5% of its gender gap till date
- ▶ India's gender gap on economic participation and opportunity sub-index widened by 3% this year
- ▶ Highest decline on political empowerment sub-index, where India regressed 13.5 percentage points
- ▶ Women's labour force participation rate fell from 24.8% to 22.3%
- ▶ Estimated earned income of women is only one-fifth

of men's, which puts India among the bottom 10

- ▶ India ranks among bottom five in discrimination against women in health and survival sub-index
- ▶ As Covid-19 impact continues to be felt, global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 to 135.6 years
- ▶ Iceland is the most gender-equal nation for the 12th time in 15 years
- ▶ Top 10 gender-equal countries include Finland, Norway, New Zealand, Rwanda, Sweden, Ireland and Switzerland

CVC MODIFIED THE GUIDELINES

CVC has modified the guidelines pertaining to the transfer and posting of officials in the vigilance units of government organisations, restricting their tenure to three years at one place.

a. **CONTEXT:** In order to emphasis on the importance of the issue and to ensure transparency, objectivity and uniformity in approach, the Commission has decided to modify its earlier guidelines of CVC.

b. **TENURE TERM:**

- i. The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has modified the guidelines pertaining to the transfer and posting of officials restricting their tenure to three years at one place.
- ii. Undue long stay of an official in a vigilance department had the potential of developing vested interests, apart from giving rise to unnecessary complaints or allegations.
- iii. Personnel can have two continuous postings in vigilance units, at different places of posting, each running into a maximum of three years. Personnel who have worked for over three years at one place should be transferred in phases, with priority given to those who have served for the maximum period, the order said.
- iv. Those having completed over five years at one place should be shifted on top priority basis, it added.

c. **PHASES**

- i. **The first phase:** at least 10% of such personnel should be shifted in a sequential order without any exception. In case someone has served at one place for over three years, his tenure at the next place would be curtailed to ensure that the combined tenure was limited to six years.
- ii. The order said after transfer from the vigilance unit, there would be **a compulsory cooling off**

period of three years before anyone could be considered again for posting in the unit.

iii. A personnel, having completed three years in the vigilance unit of an organisation, could be considered for transfer on deputation basis in the unit of another organisation, subject to the laid down rules.

MADHUKRANTI PORTAL & HONEY CORNER

Union Agriculture Minister launches 'madhukranti portal' & 'Honey Corners'. The portal enables consumers to know the source of honey and assure quality of the products

- a. Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shri Narendra Singh Tomar launched this portal of NAFED today in New Delhi.
- b. It is an initiative of National Bee Board (NBB), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare under National Beekeeping & Honey Mission (NBHM).
- c. This portal is being developed for online registration to achieve traceability source of Honey and other beehive products on a digital platform. The technical and banking partner for development of this digital platform is Indian Bank. An MoU between NBB and Indian Bank was signed for this project.
- d. SIGNIFICANCE: Honey Mission will lead to increase in income of farmers, employment generation and increase in exports. Sweet Revolution should spread all over the country and Indian honey should meet global standards
- e. Necessary functionalities are being developed on the Portal to create a database of all stakeholders involved in Honey and other hive products' production, sales and marketing chain.

SAUDI ARABIA RAISED OIL SHIPPING COSTS TO ASIA

Why Saudi Arabia has raised oil shipping costs to Asia in response to India cutting imports

- a. **SAUD ARAMCO:** Saudi Arabia's national oil company Saud Aramco has raised the price of oil shipments to Asia by between 20-50 cents per barrel, raising the total cost of Arab light crude for key Asian importers such as India to \$1.8 over the benchmark price.
- b. **LIMITED TO INDIA ONLY:** Saudi Aramco hasn't raised shipping prices for northwestern European customers however and has even cut shipping prices for US customers.
- c. **RAISE SHIPPING PRICE FOR ASIA:** Hike may be a signal to India, which has been looking to diversify supplies away from Saudi Arabia, that there are concerns besides the simple price of crude that can affect the landed price of crude for an importer.
- d. **STATE OWNED OMCs ARE CUTTING SUPPLY FROM SAUDI ARABIA:** OPEC+, a group of 23 major oil-producing countries that had cut crude oil production levels during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic as the price of Brent crude fell to below \$20 per barrel, had decided to maintain lower production levels through April despite crude oil prices recovering to pre-pandemic levels.
- e. A consistent rise in crude oil prices has contributed to auto fuel prices reaching record highs in India as it imports over 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements.
 - i. Saudi Arabia alone had extended a 1 million barrel per day production cut through April, contributing to elevated crude oil prices.
- f. **IMPACT on INDIA:**
 - i. A consistent rise in crude oil prices has led to the prices of petrol and diesel reaching a record high level across India, with the price of petrol crossing Rs 100 per litre in some parts of the country.
 - ii. Rising crude oil prices have also magnified the impact of central and state taxes on auto fuels which were hiked significantly in 2020 to boost revenues amid lower economic activity.

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LOK ADALAT

Lok Adalats: Justice delayed is justice denied.

- a. Access to justice for the poor is a constitutional mandate to ensure fair treatment under our legal system. Hence, Lok Adalats (literally, 'People's Court') were established to make justice accessible and affordable to all. It was a forum to address the problems of crowded case dockets outside the formal adjudicatory system.
- b. **Lok Adalat:** Indian way of "Alternate Dispute resolution": It is an arbitration mechanism(both parties agree to go for arbitration of their case in the Lok Adalat). It can be approached even when the matter is in litigation in regular court or in pre-litigation phase. It is important that both parties agree.
- c. **History:**
 - i. Lok Adalats had existed even before the concept received statutory recognition.
 - ii. In 1949, Harivallabh Parikh, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, popularised them in Rangpur, Gujarat.
 - iii. The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, inserted Article 39A to ensure "equal justice and free legal aid". To this end, the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, was enacted by Parliament and it came into force in 1995 "to provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections of the society" and to "organise Lok Adalats to secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity".
- d. This is a **non-adversarial system**, whereby mock courts (Lok Adalats) are held by:
 - i. the State Authority,
 - ii. District Authority,
 3. Supreme Court Legal Services Committee,
 4. High Court Legal Services Committee, or
 5. **Taluk** Legal Services Committee,
 - i. periodically for exercising such jurisdiction as they thinks fit.
- e. Members:
 - i. Usually presided by **retired judge officer** as the chairman,
 - ii. **Two** other members: usually a **lawyer** and a **social worker** or members of legal profession.
- f. Features and Issues:
 - i. It does not have jurisdiction on matters related to non-compoundable offences.
 - ii. There is **no court fee** and **no rigid procedural** requirement (i.e. no need to follow process given by CrPC or Indian Evidence Act), which makes the process very fast.
 - iii. Parties can directly interact with the judge, which is not possible in regular courts.
 - iv. Cases that are pending in regular courts can be transferred to a Lok Adalat if both the parties agree.
 1. A case can also be transferred to a Lok Adalat if **one party** applies to the court and the court sees some **chance of settlement** after giving an opportunity of being heard to the other party.
 - v. **Focus on Compromise:**
 1. When no compromise is reached, the matter goes back to the court.
 2. If a compromise is reached, an award is made and is binding on the parties. It is enforced as a decree of a civil court. An important aspect is that the **award is final and cannot be appealed, not even under Article 226** of the Constitution of India [which empowers the litigants to file Writ Petition before High Courts] because it is a judgement by consent. No appeal lies against the order of the Lok Adalat.
 - vi. Every Lok Adalat is deemed to be a **Civil Court** & its proceedings are deemed as **judicial proceedings**.

COPYRIGHT (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2021

- a. The Government of India has notified Copyright (Amendment) Rules, 2021
- b. **Context:** In India, the copyright regime is governed by the Copyright Act, 1957 and the Copyright Rules, 2013. The Copyright Rules, 2013 were last amended in the year 2016.
- c. Objective and provision of Amendment:
 1. smooth and flawless compliance in the light of the technological advancement in digital era by adopting electronic means as primary mode of communication and working in the Copyright Office.
 2. A new provision regarding publication of a copyrights journal has been incorporated, thereby eliminating the requirement of publication in the Official Gazette. The said journal would be available at the website of the Copyright Office.
 3. To reinforce transparency in working of copyright societies a new rule has been introduced, whereby the copyright societies will be required to draw up and make public an Annual Transparency Report for each financial year.
 4. The time limit for the Central Government to respond to an application made before it for registration as a copyright society is extended to one hundred and eighty days, so that the application can be more comprehensively examined.
 5. In order to encourage accountability and transparency, new provisions have been introduced, to deal with the undistributed royalty amounts and use of electronic and traceable payment methods while collection and distribution of royalties.
 6. The compliance requirements for registration of software works have been largely reduced, as now the applicant has the liberty to file the first 10 and last 10 pages of source code, or the entire source code if less than 20 pages, with no blocked out or redacted portions.

USS JOHN PAUL JONES ENTERS INSIDE INDIA'S EEZ

The US Navy **announced on April 7** that the USS John Paul Jones from its 7th Fleet had "asserted navigational rights and freedoms approximately 130 nautical miles west of Lakshadweep Islands, inside India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), without requesting India's prior consent, consistent with international law".

- a. **US's view:** It said "India's requirement of prior consent for military exercises or manoeuvres in its EEZ or continental shelf, a claim inconsistent with international law", and the "**freedom of navigation operation ("FONOP")** upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging India's excessive maritime claims".
- b. **Indian response:** MEA responded that the government's stated position on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) "is that the Convention does not authorise other States to carry out in the EEZ and on the continental shelf, military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those involving the use of weapons or explosives, without the consent of the coastal state".
- c. **7TH FLEET:** It is the largest of the US Navy's forward deployed fleets. According to its website, "at any given time there are roughly 50-70 ships and submarines, 150 aircraft, and approximately 20,000 Sailors in Seventh Fleet", which is commanded by a 3-star Navy officer.
- d. **EEZ:** According to UNCLOS, the EEZ "is an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, subject to the specific legal regime" under which "the rights and jurisdiction of the coastal State and the rights and freedoms of other States are governed by the relevant provisions of this Convention".
- e. **Indian Laws on EEZ:**
 - i. India's Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976, the EEZ of India "is an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial waters, and the limit of such zone is two hundred nautical miles from the baseline".

- ii. India's "limit of the territorial waters is the line every point of which is at a distance of twelve nautical miles from the nearest point of the appropriate baseline".
- iii. Under the 1976 law, "all foreign ships (other than warships including sub-marines and other underwater vehicles) shall enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial waters", innocent passage being one that is "not prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of India".

TReDS (TRADE RECEIVABLES DISCOUNTING SYSTEM)

News: TReDS can be a lifeline for small businesses

a. Provisions:

1. Since 2017, TReDS has enabled over 20,000 MSMEs to receive over Rs 30,000 crore in payments on time.
2. Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) are mandated by the government to procure at least 25 per cent of their purchases from MSMEs and to register on TReDS.
3. Since the government and its CPSEs are the single largest institutions that procure from MSMEs, their potential to promote its use and grow the transaction volumes on TReDS is immense. In the current economic climate, CPSEs can act as saviours that have the potential to provide liquidity to MSMEs by ensuring payment of their dues on time.

b. Problems:

1. However, 20000 MSMEs represents only a fraction of the overall amount public enterprises spent on procurement from MSMEs.
2. 156 CPSEs that have registered, only 32 have undertaken any transactions. And of this number, only eight have disbursed more than Rs 10 crore worth of payments, as of September 30, 2020.

- c. **Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs):** These are vital elements towards building a \$5 trillion economy. The pandemic saw many MSMEs face a massive liquidity crunch, and this makes TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) a key platform to revive the economy by providing financing to small businesses.

INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS:

- a. India is the world's third largest crude oil importer and imports 84% of its oil requirements. India's oil import bill in FY20 and FY19 was \$101.4 billion and \$111.9 billion, respectively.
- b. In February 2021,:
 1. Iraq remained the top oil supplier to India
 2. Followed by the US as refiners increased purchase of cheaper US crude by 48% (14% of overall imports)
 3. Thereby relegating Saudi Arabia to being the fourth largest supplier, and offsetting Opec+ supply cuts strategy. Traditionally, Opec+ and Saudi Arabia have been India's mainstay suppliers, accounting for 86% of Indian oil imports.
 4. Nigeria was the third largest oil supplier.
- c. Opec+, which controls 40% of the world's crude oil, aims to unify petroleum pricing of its members. Indian retailers purchase two-thirds of their oil requirement on fixed annual contracts. Opec+ assures supplies of the contracted quantity for the buyer, while price and other terms are balanced in favour of the supplier.
 1. As per the terms of the contract, suppliers can reduce supplies when Opec+ nations decide to lower production levels to hike crude prices, thereby, refusing to adhere to the contractual price (when price goes up due to production cut).
 2. In January 2021, Saudi Arabia pledged additional output cuts of 1 million barrels per day, causing oil prices to spike to \$61.22 in February 2021.

SHANTIR OGROSENA**MULTINATIONAL MILITARY EXERCISE SHANTIR OGROSENA CULMINATES IN BANGLADESH**

- a. **Exercise SHANTIR OGROSENA-2021:** a 10 day long multinational military exercise, which started on 04 April 2021, culminated today i.e.12 April 2021 at Bangabandhu Senanibas (BBS), Bangladesh.
- b. The exercise culminated with a validation phase and closing ceremony organised on the theme of Robust Peace Keeping Operations jointly undertaken by contingents of Indian Army, Royal Bhutanese Army, Sri Lankan Army and Bangladesh Army, preceded by an Army Chiefs Conclave.
- c. Observers from USA, UK, Russia, Turkey, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore attended.
- d. **Aim of the exercise:** To strengthen defence ties and enhance interoperability amongst neighbourhood countries to ensure effective peace keeping operations. The Armies of all participating nations shared their wide experiences and enhanced their situational awareness through robust information exchange platforms.

E-SANTA**Shri Piyush Goyal inaugurates e-SANTA, an electronic marketplace providing a platform to connect aqua farmers and the buyers.**

- a. **e-SANTA: Electronic Solution for Augmenting NaCSA farmers' Trade in Aquaculture.** **National Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture (NaCSA)** is an extension arm of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Govt. of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- b. An electronic marketplace providing a platform to connect aqua farmers and the buyers.
- c. It will enable the farmers to get a better price and the exporters to directly purchase quality products from the farmers enhancing traceability, a key factor in international trade. an extension arm of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Govt. of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- d. e-SANTA will RAISE the lives & income of farmers by:
 - i. Reducing Risk
 - ii. Awareness of Products & Markets
 - iii. Increase in Income
 - iv. Shielding Against Wrong Practice
 - v. Ease of Processes

AAHAAR KRANTI**Dr Harsh Vardhan announces launch of 'Aahaar Kranti'**

- a. **Aahaar Kranti:** Vijnana Bharati (Vibha), 'Global Indian Scientists and Technocrats' Forum (GIST), Vigyan Prasar, and Pravasi Bharatiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (PRABHASS) have come together to launch the mission with the motto of 'Uttam Aahaar- Uttam Vichaar' or 'Good Diet-Good Cognition'.
- b. **AIM:**
 - i. It is designed to address the peculiar problem being faced by India and the world- 'hunger and diseases in abundance'. Studies estimate that India produces as much as two times the amount of calories it consumes. However, many in the country are still malnourished. The root cause of this strange phenomenon is a lack of nutritional awareness.
 - ii. It address the problem by working to rouse the people to the values and richness of India's traditional diet, to the healing powers of local fruits and vegetables, and to the miracles of a

balanced diet. It will renew the focus on nutritionally balanced diets replete in locally sourced fruits and vegetables.

US TROOPS WITHDRAW FROM AFGHANISTHAN

The announcement by President Joe Biden that the US will withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, has sent tremors through the region's fault-lines.

a. **Context:** There are about 2,500-3,500 US troops in Afghanistan at present, plus a NATO force of under 8,000. A coordinated withdrawal is expected to begin soon.

b. IMPACTS:

i. **Advantage Taliban:** Biden's announcement has removed all incentives for the Taliban to agree for a dialogue with the Afghan government.

ii. **Pakistan:** This is a moment of both vindication and concern in Islamabad.

1) The Taliban are a creation of the Pakistani security establishment.

2) For the Pakistani Army, which has always seen Afghanistan in terms of "strategic depth" in its forever hostility with India, a Taliban capture of Afghanistan would finally bring a friendly force in power in Kabul after 20 years.

iii. **India:** time to be wary:

1) India was on the outer edges of the Trump drive to exit Afghanistan that culminated in the Doha Accord, and was a reluctant supporter of the "intra-Afghan talks" between the Taliban and Afghan government.

2) Another concern would be **India-focused militants** such as **Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed**, which the Indian security establishment already believes to have relocated in large numbers to Afghanistan.

iv. **China:** It would have much to lose from instability in Afghanistan as this could have an impact on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

v. **Russia:** The US exit is for Russia a full circle after its own defeat at the hands of US-backed Mujahideen and exit from Afghanistan three decades ago. Russia's growing links with Pakistan could translate into a post-US role for Moscow in Afghanistan.

vi. **Iran:** As a country that shares borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran perceives active security threats from both. And a Taliban regime in Kabul would only increase this threat perception. Despite the mutual hostility and the theological divide between the two, Iran opened channels to the Taliban a few years ago, and recently, even hosted a Taliban delegation at Tehran.

EAT-SMART CITIES CHALLENGE AND TRANSPORT 4 ALL CHALLENGE

News: Housing and Urban Affairs launched the Eat Smart Cities Challenge and Transport 4 All Challenge at an online event

b. Transport4all Challenge: It aims to make Public Transport Safe, Affordable, Comfortable, and Reliable

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c. Eat Smart Cities Challenge: This movement will nudge the urban populace to make the right food choices and help build a healthier and happier nation.

d. AIM: to motivate Smart Cities to develop a plan that supports a healthy, safe and sustainable food environment supported by institutional, physical, social, and economic infrastructure along with the application of 'smart' solutions to combat food related issues.

IMD PREDICTS NORMAL MONSOON

IMD predicts third straight year of normal monsoon

- a. First stage Long Range Forecast (LRF) Report:** The IMD has said that the monsoon will be normal this year, the said in its first stage Long Range Forecast (LRF) . The IMD releases its LRF twice every year, in April and June.
 - i. The four-month southwest monsoon season brings India about 70% of its annual rainfall.
 - ii. Quantitative rainfall during June to September would be 98% of the Long Period Average (LPA), which is in the 'normal rainfall' category.
 - iii. Neutral **ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation)** conditions are currently prevailing over the Pacific Ocean, the LRF said. During the 2021 monsoon season, we foresee no development of El Niño conditions
- b. About ENSO:** It is one of many large scale features that influence the Indian summer monsoon.
 - i. El Niño refers to the abnormal warming of surface waters of the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean. It has been observed that southwest monsoon rainfall remains subdued in India in El Niño years.
 - ii. It is a condition opposite to El Niño is La Niña, which sees unusually cold ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific, and has been seen to favour the Indian summer monsoon.
 - iii. **The Indian Ocean Dipole:** which is similar to the ENSO condition that creates the El Niño and La Niña events in the Pacific. Sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean get both warmer and cooler than normal, and this deviation influences regional atmospheric and weather patterns, including the Indian monsoon.
- c. Impact on India's agriculture:** It being primarily rain-fed, the southwest monsoon is one of the key drivers of India's economy.
- d.** The four-month period is when reservoirs are replenished, and except for some areas in the far north and parts of Tamil Nadu, the monsoon is the main source of drinking water in the country.

About IMD =The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India. It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology. IMD is headquartered in Delhi and operates hundreds of observation stations across India and Antarctica. Regional offices are at Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur, Guwahati and New Delhi.

INDIAN RAILWAY STEPS UP PORT CONNECTIVITY

The Indian Railways is stepping up efforts on port connectivity projects.

- a. AIM:** The aim is to increase this share to 32-35 per cent of 925 million tonnes (mt) by 2026, and to 40-45 per cent of 1,200 mt by 2030.
- i. Projects **under Vision 2024** are part of the **first phase** of this exercise. The Two **dedicated freight corridors (DFCs)** will be commissioned before 2026 to allow traffic to grow to 32-35% of total freight share, from the current 27%.
- ii. In the **second phase**, the railways aims to develop three new DFCs before 2030 to cater to 45% of

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the total freight share.

b. The 'national transporter'(Railways) has been throwing its weight behind connecting major ports (such as Kandla, Mundra, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Visakhapatnam, among others) to the rail network.

i. "The western ports of Gujrat and JNPT in Maharashtra will get connected to the northern hinterland of Rewari in Haryana, as well as Punjab (Ludhiana) through the Western DFC, along with feeder routes. The connectivity of Kolkata and Haldia ports to the Eastern DFC will be established through the Sonnar-Dankuni leg of the eastern corridor".

MAJOR PORT CONNECTIVITY PROJECTS TO BE COMPLETED BY 2024

Project	Line	Connecting port(s)
Doubling	▶ Kanaknadi – Panambur	New Mangaluru
	▶ Raipur – Titlagarh	Visakhapatnam
	▶ Madurai – Thoothukudi	Thoothukudi
	▶ Titlagarh – Sambalpur	Paradip
	▶ Banspani – Daitri – Jakhapur	Paradip
	▶ Sambalpur – Talcher	Paradip
	▶ Hospet – Tenaighat – Vasco	Marmagao
3rd line	▶ Bhadrak – Vizianagram – Vizag – Vijayawada	All major ports on East Coast
3rd and 4th line	▶ Budhapank – Salegaon	Paradip
4th line	▶ Chennai Beach – Attipattu	Kamarajar

Source: Rail ministry

THREE COUNTRIES ACCOUNT FOR OVER 50 PERCENT OF FPI INFLOWS

1. Three countries account for over 50 per cent of FPI inflows

- Three countries, The US, Mauritius and Luxembourg** accounted for more than 50 per cent of the total foreign portfolio investment (FPI) that India received so far.
- Out of Rs 44.62 lakh crore investment, US investors accounted for Rs 15.38 lakh crore, Mauritius Rs 5.29 lakh crore and Luxembourg Rs 3.74 lakh crore, according to data from National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL).**
- The liberal policies followed by the US Fed have facilitated such flow of funds to the emerging markets with India also benefiting.
- It is widely held that there is a strong correlation between FPI flows and movements in the stock indices.

National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) is an Indian central securities depository under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Finance, Government of India based in Mumbai. It was established in August 1996 as the first electronic securities depository in India with national coverage. It was established based on a suggestion by a national institution responsible for the economic development of India.

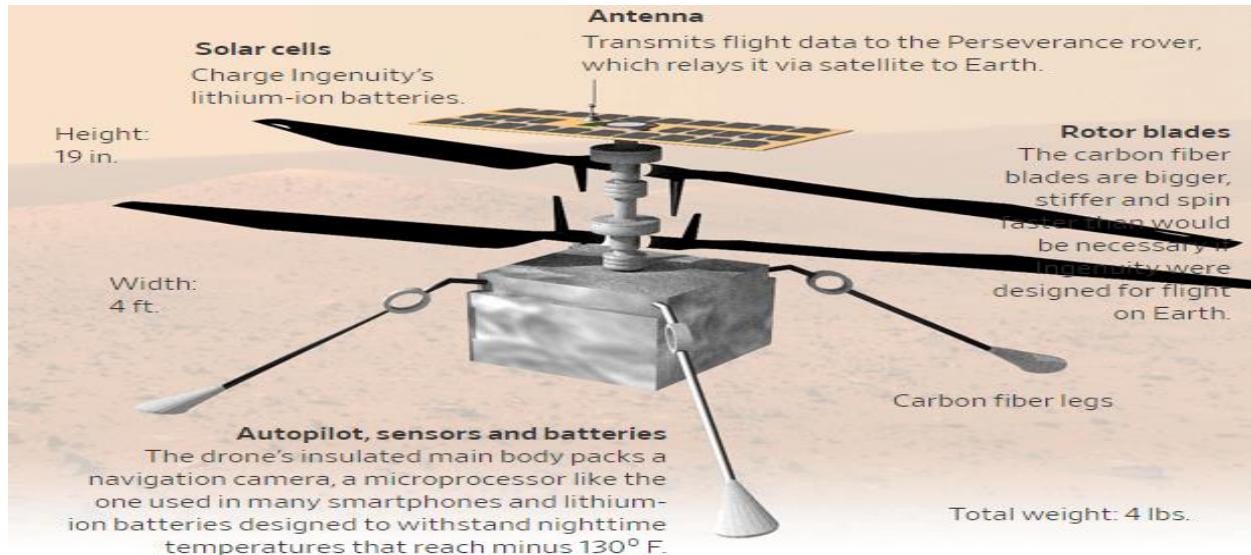
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INGENUITY MARS HELICOPTER

NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter's maiden flight:

1. NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter became the first aircraft in history to make a powered, controlled flight on another planet.
2. The Ingenuity team at the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California confirmed the flight succeeded after receiving data from the helicopter via **NASA's Perseverance Mars rover**.



3. Highlights:

- A. The Ingenuity is a **2-kg drone**. It flew for 40 seconds at a height of 3 metres above the Martian surface.
 - B. In order to fly, lift is generated to counter gravity. Lift depends on aircraft design, on gravitational force, and on atmospheric density.
 - C. It is a solar powered Helicopter.
 - D. Ingenuity's initial flight demonstration was autonomous – piloted by onboard guidance, navigation, and control systems running algorithms developed by the team at JPL.
 - E. **Lag:** Because data must be sent to and returned from the Red Planet over hundreds of millions of miles using orbiting satellites and NASA's Deep Space Network, Ingenuity cannot be flown with a joystick, and its flight was not observable from Earth in real time.
4. "The X-15 was a pathfinder for the space shuttle. Mars Pathfinder and its Sojourner rover did the same for three generations of Mars rovers.

The successful test flight of the Ingenuity helicopter on Mars ushers in a new era for space exploration. Planets like Mars can be explored much quicker by air than by ground vehicles like rovers. This could also result in significant advances in high-altitude helicopter connectivity on Earth itself.

CHINA REFUSES TO VACATE PP15 & PP17A

Context:

- During the 11th round of discussions between the senior military commanders of India & China to resolve the over 11-month long standoff in eastern Ladakh, China had refused to vacate two of the four original friction points.

The 11-month Standoff:

- In May 2020, China had diverted its troops that had come for annual exercise to the Tibetan plateau region, towards the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh, creating a standoff with India at PP15 & PP17A points.
- Chinese troops also crossed the LAC at PP14 in Galwan Valley & the north bank of Pangong Tso & positioned themselves across.
- The maximum ingress was on the north bank of Pangong Tso, where Chinese troops were at Finger 4, which is 8km west of Finger 8 where India LAC lies.

What are PP15 & PP17A?

- China Study Group established in 1976 is the apex decision-making body on China that had given certain point locations along LAC to the Indian Army for patrolling under its control, these points are known as Patrolling-Points or PPs.
- Barring certain areas like Dapsang Plains, these patrolling points are on the LAC, & troops access these points to assert their control over the territory.
- It is an important exercise since the boundary between India & China is not yet officially demarcated.
- Both PP15 & 17A are two of the 65 patrolling points, close to Chang Chenmo River in the Glawan sub-sector of the LAC in eastern Ladakh.
 - PP15 is located in an area known as the Hot Springs.
 - PP17A is near an area called the Gogra post.
- The area is north of the Karakoram Range of mountains, which lies north of the Pangong Tso Lake, and the southeast of Galwan Valley that became a major flashpoint & a violent faceoff in June 2020.



Importance of the region:

- According to India, the international boundary lies significantly east, as it includes the entire Aksai chin area. But China's claim is that area close to Kongka Pass marks the boundary between India & China.
- In 1960, during official negotiations on the boundary between India & China, China state that the Western Sector of the boundary is divided into two portions with Kongka Pass as the dividing point,
 - The portion "north of Kongka Pass" is the boundary between Xinjiang & Ladakh.
 - The portion south of it is that between Tibet & Ladakh.

- Thus Hot Springs & Gogra Post are close to the boundary between two of the most historically disturbed provinces of China.

Military Significance of the Region:

- Both PP15 & PP17A are in alignment with the LAC, which comes southeast from Galwan Valley, turns down at Kongka La & moves towards Ann Pass before reaching the north bank of Pangong Tso.
- China has its Army post a few km east of Kongka La, While India's posts lie southwest of it.
- According to the history of the 1962 Sino-India war, the region is not identified as a major Launchpad used for offensive action by both sides.
- During that time, the Chinese had succeeded in eliminating possible launch pads for any offensive against the Aksai Chin highway by eliminating DBO, Chushul & Demchok positions.
- During the 1962 conflict, there was company strength at the Galwan Post, while other posts – Hot springs, Nala Junction & Patrol Base had strengths of a platoon.
- During that period Hot Springs was an important post & served as the Company headquarters. Though the Chinese wanted to go behind Hot Spring, but it was resisted at the Nala Junction.

Current Situation:

- Both sides had agreed to disengage from PP14, PP15 & PP17A following Galwan Valley clashes.
- However, though China pulled back its troops from PP14, it did not complete the disengagement from PP15 & PP17.
- After the disengagement in the Pansong Tso region, when both India & China had pulled back their troops & armored columns.
- However no fresh ground could be broken in the talks & China has refused to pull back from other friction points.

NEW REGULATORY REGIME FOR 8 MEDICAL ITEMS

New Regulatory Regime for 8 Medical Items under Drugs and Cosmetics Act

- Importers/manufacturers are now required to take import/manufacturing licence from Central Licencing Authority or State Licencing Authority.
- Eight regulated medical devices: Adopting a proactive and sensitive approach to address the needs of the Indian Industry, the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has taken a significant decision for ensuring continued access of eight regulated medical devices today.
 - All Implantable Medical Devices;
 - CT scan equipment;
 - MRI equipment;
 - Defibrillators;
 - PET Equipment;
 - Dialysis Machine;
 - X-Ray Machine; and
 - Bone marrow cell separator.

Transition time of 6 months allowed for ensuring supply chain continuity and access while implementing their regulatory order under Medical Devices Rules (2017).

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2021

- WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2021- It is published by the international journalism not-for profit body **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**

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b. It continues to be counted among the countries classified "bad" for journalism and is termed as India is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists

c. The latest index:

i. It ranks **180 countries**, topped, yet again, by **Norway** followed by Finland and Denmark, while Eritrea is at the bottom. **China is ranked 177**, and is only above North Korea at 179 and Turkmenistan at 178.

ii. **India is ranked 142**, same as last year, after it had consistently slid down from 133 in 2016.

iii. It said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi "tightens his grip on media". With "four journalists killed in connection with their work in 2020, India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their job properly".

iv. In **the South Asian neighbourhood, Nepal is at 106, Sri Lanka at 127, Myanmar (before the coup) at 140, Pakistan at 145 and Bangladesh at 152.**

STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE 2020 REPORT

State of Global Climate 2020 Report: Cyclone Amphan, which made landfall in May last year near the India-Bangladesh border, was the costliest tropical cyclone on record for the North Indian Ocean.

a. **Report:** The reported **economic losses in India of approximately USD 14 billion, in the case of Cyclone Amphan.**

b. The State of the Global Climate 2020 report

- Extreme weather combined with **COVID-19 dealt a double blow for millions of people in 2020.**
- The year **2020** was one of the three **warmest years on record**, despite a cooling La Nia event.
- The global average temperature was about **1.2 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level.**
- It also highlights impacts on socioeconomic development, migration and displacement, food security and land and marine ecosystems.
- **The report compiled by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).**

About WMO= The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is an intergovernmental organization with a membership of 193 Member States and Territories. It originated from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), the roots of which were planted at the 1873 Vienna International Meteorological Congress. Established by the ratification of the WMO Convention on 23 March 1950, WMO became **the specialised agency of the United Nations for meteorology** (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences a year later. The Secretariat, headquartered in Geneva, is headed by the Secretary-General. Its supreme body is the World Meteorological Congress.

CIVIL SERVICE DAY-21 APRIL

The Government of India celebrates April 21 every year as 'Civil Services day' as an occasion for the civil servants to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizen and renew their commitments to public service and excellence in work. This date is chosen to commemorate the day when first Home Minister of Independent India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the probationers of Administrative Services Officers in 1947 at Metcalf House, Delhi, he referred to civil servants as the 'steel frame of India'. The first such function was held in Vigyan Bhawan, New delhi 21 April 2006.

As part of Civil Servant Day, Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration are presented to Districts/Implementing Units for implementation of Priority programme and innovation categories. With participation from a large number of Districts across the country in the Awards scheme, the scale of entire process is very large. These awards on the Civil Services day each year bring together civil servants to connect with each other and learn the good practices being implemented across the nation in the field of public grievance. This annual affair is eagerly awaited by all public administrators to celebrate outcomes of work done in the entire year.

VACCINE INEQUALITY IN WORLD

Context: US President Joe Biden has set a goal of administering 100 million vaccine doses within his first 100 days in office and asked officials to use the Defence Production Act (DPA) to direct private firms to prioritize orders from the federal government.

2. Thus vaccine production in India, which banks on raw materials from countries like the US, takes a hit. Serum Institute of India's (SII's) appealed to Biden "to lift the embargo of raw material exports" so that his firm could boost production. SII manufactures Oxford-AstraZeneca developed Covishield and Covovax developed by a US firm Novavax.

3. India has taken up the matter with the US on an urgent basis bilaterally. Foreign minister S. Jaishankar was in touch with the US to keep supply chains open as US firms say they need government permission to export because of the DPA.

4. Countries overbooking covid-19 vaccines

i. Organizations, including Oxfam and Amnesty International, have accused Western countries of buying up more vaccines than needed to inoculate their people.

ii. According to news reports, the UK, Canada, and the European Union are among those who have overbooked vaccines, more than required by their populations.

5. **Vaccines can be made affordable:** Rich nations such as the UK, Japan, Canada, and Switzerland are against a waiver of Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provisions for vaccines.

i. A waiver would mean a vaccine developed by firms such as Pfizer or Moderna will be available for manufacturing by countries with capacity without paying licence fees.

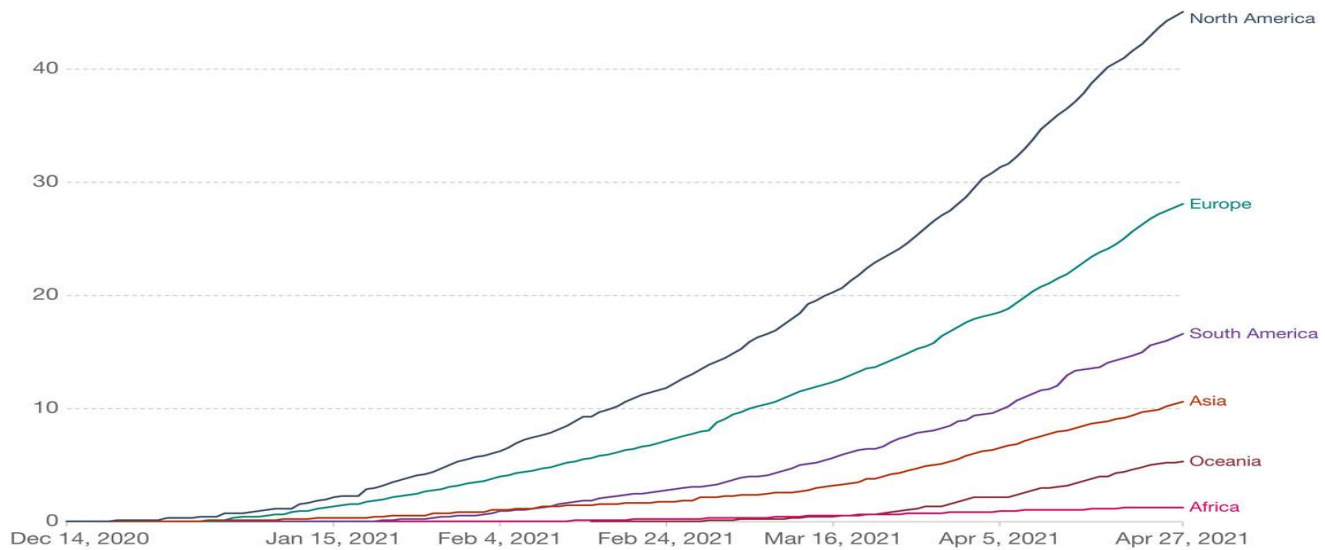
ii. This would mean doses are accessible and affordable to low- and middle-income nations. But, the

supporters of TRIPS say that IPR and patent protection boosts innovation.

COVID-19 vaccine doses administered per 100 people

Total number of vaccination doses administered per 100 people in the total population. This is counted as a single dose, and may not equal the total number of people vaccinated, depending on the specific dose regime (e.g. people receive multiple doses).

Our World in Data



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

CC BY

INDIA SHOULD BE IN CPC LIST: USCIRF

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF): an independent bi-partisan US federal government commission, has recommended for the second year in the row that the State Department put India on a list for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.

1. USCIRF recommendations are non-binding and the Trump administration had rejected the USCIRF recommendation to designate India a **CPC ('Country of Particular Concern')** last year.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

i. The USCISRF recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for 'severe violations of religious freedom'.

ii. A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums "such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral [the Quad]."

iii. Another recommendation – to the U.S. Congress – was to raise issues in the U.S. – India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.

iv. CPC list in the Commission's 2021 were Russia, Syria and Vietnam.

1) Countries already on the CPCs list and recommended by USCIRF for re-designation were Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

2) Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Turkey and Uzbekistan were recommended for a 'Special Watch List', along with Cuba and Nicaragua, both of which were already on the list for 2019.

NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY -24 APRIL

- a. 24th April, 1993 marks a defining moment in the history of decentralization of power to the grassroots, with the institutionalization of Panchayati Raj, through the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 which came into force with effect from that day.
- b. Ministry of Panchayati Raj commemorates 24th April of every year as the National Panchayati Raj Day (NPRD), as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into force on this date. This occasion provides an opportunity for direct dialogue with Panchayat representatives from all over the country as well as recognizing their achievements to empower and motivate them further.
- c. **Awards:** Every year, on this occasion, Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been awarding the best performing Panchayats/States/UTs across the country under the Incentivization of Panchayats in recognition of their good work for improving delivery of services and public goods.
- d. Awards are given under various categories namely:
 - i. Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP),
 - ii. Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP),
 - iii. Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA),
 - iv. Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award and
 - v. e-Panchayat Puraskar (*given to States/UTs only*).

E-PROPERTY CARD UNDER SVAMITVA SCHEME

Prime Minister electronically distribute Property Cards/ Title deeds (Sampatti Patrak) under the SVAMITVA Scheme to nearly 409945 property holders of 5002 villages

a. (SVAMITVA)"Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas: It was launched by the Prime Minister on 24th April 2020.

b. The pilot phase of the Scheme was implemented during 2020-2021 in States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh and few border villages of Punjab & Rajasthan.

c. Objectives: Socio-economic empowerment of the rural mass and making them self-reliant rural India. The Scheme has the potential to transform rural India using modern technical tools of mapping and surveying. It paves the way for using the property as a financial asset by villagers for availing loans and other financial benefits. The Scheme will cover around 6.62 Lakh villages of the entire country during 2021-2025.

d. Aim: To provide the 'record of rights' to village household owners in rural abadi areas and issuance of digital Property cards.

Nearly in 40,000 thousand villages in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and few border villages of Punjab & Rajasthan drone flying have been completed, along with establishment of Continuous Operating System (CORS) stations' network across Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab & Rajasthan in the Pilot phase during 2020-21. SVAMITVA scheme for implementation across the country in phased manner during 2020-2025 covering approx 6.62 villages of entire country. In addition to 9 pilot phase States, most of the other States are in final stage of signing MoU with Survey of India for drone survey of rural abadi area and implementation of scheme. These States have also initiated the process for finalisation of Digital

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property card/Title Deed format, requisite amendments in their act for the provisioning of Property Cards/title deeds and survey of abadi areas. The Scheme has the potential to transform rural India. It will pave the way for using property as a financial asset by villagers for taking loans and other financial benefits, as in the case in towns and cities. Further, this is the first time ever that such a large-scale exercise involving most modern technology is being carried out to benefit millions of rural property owners.

NBFCs ARE KEY TO REACH UNDERSERVED SEGMENTS

NBFCs are key to reaching underserved segments

a. SIGNIFICANCE OF NBFC: CREDIT GROWTH: Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) are a significant contributor to credit growth, having captured over 20 per cent of the credit pie.

i. Given their reach in the underserved and under banked sectors, they play a pivotal role in achieving the objective of financial inclusion.

ii. The recently amended regulation under the co-lending model in the priority sector is one such measure which would help in achieving greater financial inclusion, with the twin benefits of lower cost and better reach arising from the partnerships between banks and NBFCs.

b. ABOUT NBFC:

i. NBFCs are defined in Section 45-I of RBI Act, 1934 and registered under **Section 45-IA**,

ii. **Definition under Sec 45-I(f):** non-banking financial company(NBFC)" means:

(a) a financial institution which is a company;

(b) ...a company which has as its principal business the receiving of deposits, under any scheme or arrangement or in any other manner, or lending in any manner;

(c) such other non-banking institution or class of such institutions, as RBI may, with the previous approval of the Central Government and by notification in the Official Gazette, specify.

iii. Features of NBFC:

1) Are authorised to accept deposits; or

2) have customer interface, with assets size of one billion rupees(100Cr) or above, as on the date of the audited balance sheet of the previous financial year, or of any such asset size as the RBI may prescribe, are covered under the Scheme.

iv. Over last some years, RBI has carved out some specialized NBFCs like:

1) Core Investment Companies (CICs): It holds not less than 90% of its net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies; Ex: Mutual fund.

2) NBFC- Infrastructure Finance Companies (IFCs),

3) Infrastructure Debt Fund- NBFCs; Ex: IL&FS.

4) NBFC-MFIs: Micro Finance Institutes.

5) NBFC-Factors: whose financial assets in the factoring business constitute at least 75% of its total

assets and income derived from factoring business (paying on behalf of a party for the purchase of raw material).

c. WAY FORWARD: Electronic know-your-customer (e-KYC) authentication should be allowed for NBFCs, as is permitted for banks, to enable faster and seamless processing of credit. Most small borrowers don't have other standard KYC documents and hence Aadhaar authentication becomes critical.

EXERCISE VARUNA – 2021

a. 'VARUNA-2021': • The 19th edition of the **Indian and French Navy bilateral exercise** is scheduled to be conducted in the Arabian Sea from 25th to 27th April 2021.

b. From the Indian Navy's side, guided missile stealth destroyer INS Kolkata, guided missile frigates INS Tarkash and INS Talwar, Fleet Support Ship INS Deepak, with Seaking 42B and Chetak integral helicopters, a Kalvari class submarine and P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft, will participate in the exercise.

c. The three day exercise will see high tempo-naval operations at sea, including advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises, intense fixed and rotary wing flying operations, tactical maneuvers.

INDIA THIRD HIGHEST MILITARY SPENDER IN 2020-SIPRI

India third highest military spender in 2020, states data published by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- India was the third largest military spender in the world in 2020, behind only the US and China according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute which tracks military expenditure and arms trade globally
- The US accounted for 39 per cent of the money spent on military globally, China accounted for 13 per cent, and India accounted for 3.7 per cent of the globe's share.
- The US spent a total of \$778 billion in 2020, China spent \$252 billion and India's military expenditure was \$72.9 billion. All three countries saw their military spending go up compared to 2019, even during a pandemic year.
- About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute(SIPRI)
 - i. This think tank is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
 - ii. It was established in 1966 at Stockholm (Sweden).
 - iii. It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

SCRI (SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE INITIATIVE)

SCRI(Supply Chain Resilience Initiative):

- **Trade ministers of India, Japan and Australia** formally launched a move to counter China's dominance of supply chain in the Indo-Pacific region
- **AIM: to create a virtuous cycle of enhancing supply chain resilience with a view to eventually attaining strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region.**
- The meeting held by videoconference was attended by India's trade minister Piyush Goyal, Australia's minister for trade, tourism and investment Dan Tehan and Japan's minister of economy, trade and industry Kajiya Hiroshi.
- The Ministers noted the importance of risk management and continuity plans in order to avoid supply chain disruptions and affirmed their commitment to strengthen resilient supply chains.

Possible policy measures may include: (i) supporting the enhanced utilization of digital technology; and (ii) supporting trade and investment diversification.

- The Ministers instructed their officials to implement the following as initial projects of SCRI and further develop the Initiative: (i) sharing of best practices on supply chain resilience; and (ii) holding investment promotion events and buyer-seller matching events to provide opportunities for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains.

INDIA'S EXPORT OF ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS ROSE BY 51%

India's export of Organic food products rose by 51% in terms of value (USD Million), to USD 1040 million (Rs 7078 crores) during financial year 2020-21 compared to the previous fiscal (2019-20).

- Oil cake meal has been a major commodity of the organic product exports from the country followed by oil seeds, fruit pulps and purees, cereals & millets, spices & condiments, tea, medicinal plant products, dry fruits, sugar, pulses, coffee, essential Oil etc.
- India's organic products have been exported to 58 countries including USA, European Union, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Switzerland, Israel, South Korea .
- Organic products are currently exported from India only if they are produced, processed, packed and labelled as per the requirements of the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP).
- About NPOP certification:**
 - The NPOP has been implemented by APEDA since its inception in 2001 as notified under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulations) Act, 1992.
 - The NPOP certification has been recognised by the European Union and Switzerland which enables India to export unprocessed plant products to these countries without the requirement of additional certification.
 - NPOP has also been recognized by the Food Safety Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) for trade of organic products in the domestic market. Organic products covered under the bilateral agreement with NPOP need not to be recertified for import in India.

OXYGEN CONCENTRATOR

An **oxygen concentrator** is a device that concentrates the oxygen from a gas supply (typically ambient air) by selectively removing nitrogen to supply an oxygen-enriched product gas stream. Two methods in common use are pressure swing adsorption and membrane gas separation.

About Oxygen concentrator

- It's a medical device that draws in ambient air, passes it through a molecular sieve to concentrate room oxygen to therapeutic levels and deliver it to a patient.
- The core of an oxygen concentrator is a sieve bed. This separates the oxygen from the air and passes it on to the patient at 95% purity
- Capacity and purity come into play**
 - The two most common models of oxygen concentrators available in the Indian market currently offer an output of 5 litres and 10 litres per minute. Some of the brands in the market also offer 8 litres per minute
 - More than the capacity or purity, it is important to understand how much oxygen a patient is able to extract by using such a device. How much oxygen is getting into the blood is what matters
Cylinders can only store a fixed amount of oxygen, but concentrators capture and filter the air around you.
- Helpful for covid-19 patients**

- i. Oxygen concentrators were designed to help people suffering from chronic respiratory illness, not acute situations like covid-19.
- ii. "Oxygen concentrators can be a temporary measure, provided the patients' oxygen requirement is not very high," he added.
- iii. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO's) technical specifications on oxygen concentrators, pulse oximeters should be used in conjunction with a concentrator to identify and monitor hypoxaemic (low levels of oxygen in the blood) patients.

TIANHE

China launches key module of space station planned for 2022

- a. **Tianhe ("Harmony of the Heavens")** : China launched an unmanned module containing what will become living quarters for three crew on a permanent space station that it plans to complete by the end of 2022
 - i. Tianhe is one of three main components of what would be China's first self-developed space station, rivalling the only other station in service - the International Space Station (ISS).
 - ii. The ISS is backed by the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada. China was barred from participating by the United States.
 - iii. China has prioritised space exploration in recent years, with the aim of becoming a major space power by 2030. By 2045, it hopes to establish a programme operating thousands of space flights a year and carrying tens of thousands of tonnes of cargo and passengers.
- b. **About International Space Station (ISS)**:
 - i. It is a space station, or a habitable artificial satellite, in low Earth orbit.
 - ii. Its first component launched into orbit in 1998, and the ISS is now the largest human-made body in low Earth orbit.
 - iii. The ISS serves as a microgravity and space environment research laboratory in which crew members conduct experiments in biology, human biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, and other fields.

THE CENTRE KEPT INFLATION TARGET UNCHANGED AT 2-6% FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

The Centre kept the inflation target of the monetary policy framework unchanged at 2-6% for the next five years, until the fiscal year 2025-26

- a. **The 4% anchor point target for inflation** -- with an upper tolerance limit of 6 per cent and a lower limit of 2 per cent, measured in terms of consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation -- was set by the government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 2016
- b. **SIGNIFICANCE**: The decision to maintain the flexible inflation targeting framework in its entirety is good news as it will help provide stability and allow the monetary policy committee (MPC) to continue in its endeavor of pushing inflation expectations down toward the 4 per cent headline CPI target in the years ahead

c. ABOUT MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE

- i. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee constituted by the Reserve Bank of India and led by the Governor of RBI. The committee comprises six members - three officials of the Reserve Bank of India and three external members nominated by the Government of India.
- ii. Monetary Policy Committee was formed with the mission of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to restrain inflation within the particular target level. The meetings of the Monetary Policy Committee are held at least 4 times a year (specifically, at least once BIMONTHLY) and it publishes its

decisions after each such meeting.

iii. The RBI governor controls the monetary policy decisions with the support and advice of the internal team and the technical advisory committee.

INDIAN STATEMENT AGAINST MILITARY JUNTA IN MYANMAR

Indian statement that goes against Military Junta in Myanmar:

a. "We **condemn any use of violence**. We believe that the rule of law should prevail. We stand for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. We have urged the release of political prisoners and supported any attempts at resolving the current situation, including through the efforts of ASEAN," said Arindam Bagchi, Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs.

b. This is prompted by large-scale civilian casualties in the on-going military crackdown.

c. India's response till now:

i. **India was among the first countries to express concern** after the February 1 military takeover which deposed the democratically elected leadership of Myanmar.

ii. However, India's subsequent behaviour indicated that it preferred **to maintain communication links with the military junta**.

iii. On March 27, an **Indian official attended the Myanmar Armed Forces Day parade** at capital Naypyitaw even as the day turned out to be the bloodiest with the military killing around 100 protesters.

d. Significance Of Condemnation:

i. **India's position as defender of human rights** is restored.

ii. **Public opinion in Myanmar:** is going against China, condemnation of military regime would develop right attitude

NEW AMENDMENT IN IBC FOR MSMEs

a. **Context:** The government has amended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) through an Ordinance, enabling prepackaged resolution schemes for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and allowing corporate debtors to propose a resolution plan for the stressed company.

b. **The pre-pack scheme:** is an arrangement wherein the corporate debtor proposes a resolution plan to the secured creditors before the initiation of corporate insolvency resolution procedure (CIRP). During this process, the company will continue to be controlled by the existing management rather than coming under the control of the resolution professional — considered to be a less disruptive process. The resolution plan can then be taken for approval by the secured creditors to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), provided it is approved by 66% of them.

c. Importance:

i. First, this option will **help ease the resolution process of MSMEs**, as, considering that there aren't enough buyers for stressed assets in the economy in the first place, not allowing existing promoters the option of participating in the resolution process would lead to capital destruction.

ii. Second, the scheme will not only **bring down the costs associated** with the resolution process,

but may also lead to **faster resolution of cases**, as the frivolous litigation brought by defaulting promoters, in hopes of clinging on to their firms, will be reduced.

IRV 2020

NEWS: Target of attaining a population of 3,000 rhinos almost achieved but the animal could be reintroduced in only one of the four protected areas planned

- a. **Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV2020):** IRV2020 is believed to have achieved its target of attaining a population of 3,000 rhinos in Assam.
- b. Recently it release of two rhinos an adult male and a female in Assam's Manas National Park transported from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary about 185 km to the east.
- c. **Savior of Manas**
 - i. Assam had at least five rhino-bearing areas till the 1980s. Better conservation efforts helped maintain the population of the one-horned herbivore in Kaziranga, Orang and Pobitora, but encroachment and poaching wiped the animal out of Manas and Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.
 - ii. Manas, in focus for the near-extinction of the pygmy hog, lost the World Heritage Site tag it received in 1985 along with Kaziranga from the UNESCO.

About IRV 2020= Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020) programme launched by the Assam Forest Department in partnership with WWF-India, the International Rhino Foundation and US Fish & Wildlife Service in 2005. The programme aims at increasing the number and range of rhinos in Assam through wild-to-wild translocations from Kaziranga National Park and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary to potential Protected Areas including Manas National Park, Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary, Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. The vision was to attain a population of 3000 wild rhinos in Assam, distributed over seven of its Protected Areas by 2020.

NGT DIRECTED TO CONSTITUTE 8 MEMBERS NATIONAL TASK FORCE

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the constitution of an eight-member national task force to oversee air quality monitoring of 124 non-attainment cities (NACs) in the country.

- a. **MEMBERS:** The task force will have members from ministries of housing and urban development, road transport, petroleum, power, agriculture, health, and chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board.
- b. **FUNCTION:** The task force will monitor remedial steps to improve air qualities in the NACs — places where air quality has generally remained poor and breached pollution parameters for five years — consistent with action plans already prepared, and also oversee compliance of noise control norms
- c. **CONCERN:** That 124 major cities in the country are continuously non-compliant with the prescribed standards of air quality for more than five years is a matter of serious national concern
- d. The Tribunal has also asked the environment ministry and the Central Pollution Control Board to set up and periodically update a National Environment Data Grid, linked to state and district environment data grids and to online air quality portals, to facilitate research, analysis and planning on the subject.

ABOUT NGT= The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection

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and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues. The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, **but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.**

The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts. **The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.**

EUROPEAN COUNCIL APPROVES INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY OF EU

European Council approves conclusions on EU's Indo-Pacific strategy

1. **CONTEXT:** The Council of the European Union approved conclusions on a European Union strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to "reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions" in this region with the aim to contribute to "regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development," at a time of "rising challenges and tensions in the region."
2. **AT CURRENT:**
 - i. Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific have given rise to intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas. Human rights are also being challenged.
 - ii. These developments increasingly threaten the stability and security of the region and beyond, directly impacting on the EU's interests
 - iii. The renewed EU commitment to the Indo-Pacific will have a long-term focus and will be based on "upholding democracy, human rights, the rule of law and respect for international law
 - iv. The EU will aim to promote effective rules-based multilateralism, reiterating its support for ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) centrality, a point also stressed by India.
3. **COVID-19 effects**
 - i. The EU will work together in order to mitigate the economic and human effects of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - ii. An open and fair environment for trade and investment, reciprocity, the strengthening of resilience, tackling climate change and supporting connectivity with the EU.
 - iii. On trade partnerships, the EU will aim to conclude free trade agreements with Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand and take further steps towards the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China.
 - iv. The EU will continue to explore deepening economic relations with India
4. **Security cooperation**
 - i. The EU will continue to develop partnerships in the areas of security and defence, including to address maritime security, malicious cyber activities, disinformation, emerging technologies, terrorism, and organised crime
 - ii. **CRIMARIO:** On security cooperation, the Council said building on its experience of protecting critical maritime routes in the Indian Ocean through maritime domain awareness, the EU has taken the decision to extend the geographic scope of its CRIMARIO (Critical Maritime Routes) II activities from the Indian Ocean into South and Southeast Asia with a view to contribute to safer sea lanes of communication with the EU.

ABOUT EU- The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe. EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people,

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goods, services and capital within the internal market. The EU and European citizenship were established when the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993.

ABOUT EUROPEAN COUNCIL-The European Council (informally **EUCO**) is a collegiate body that defines the overall political directions and priorities of the European Union. It comprises the heads of state or government of the EU member states, along with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission. Established as an informal summit in 1975, the European Council was formalised as an institution in 2009 upon the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Its current president is Charles Michel, former Prime Minister of Belgium.

JUSTICE N V RAMANA SWORN AS CJI

Justice Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana was sworn in as the 48th Chief Justice of India by President Ram Nath Kovind. Justice Ramana was appointed as a permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh high court in June 2000. He also served as the acting Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh high court for a brief period between March and May 2013. He was appointed as the Chief Justice of Delhi high court in September the same year, before being appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court in February 2014. He dealt with several-high profile cases in the apex court related to the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir, restoration of internet in the Valley, the restoration of the Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh and the Right to Information Act.

GENERAL STUDIES -1

INSTITUTIONS, CASTE AND THE VITAL COG OF TRUST

The findings based on the IHDS on castes and their trust in State governments, the judiciary and the police are revealing

GS 1: **Society**

Context

- Trust impacts income and growth through markets and public institutions.
- There is a positive relationship between trust and the development of financial markets.
- Operation of these markets is contingent on trustworthiness of debtors, as legal methods of recovery of dues are fraught with delays and heavy expenses.
- Turning to labor markets, higher trust manifests in 'higher levels of cooperative relations between labor and management and higher levels of unionization.
- In fact, firms that have unions representing their employees are better able to adapt to new management methods, and show better productivity.
- Evidence suggests a strong positive correlation between trust and the quality of the legal system.
- There is a similar correlation between trust and the quality of governance'.
- Here, our focus is on whether trust in institutions such as state government, judiciary and police varies by caste.

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India Human Development Survey–The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) was organized by the University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)

Key term is confidence

- A unique feature of the 2005 and 2012 rounds of the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) is that they ask a question on trust.
 - Trust in public institutions is measured in terms of levels of confidence: a great deal of confidence, only some confidence and hardly any confidence.
- Caste hierarchy reflects socio-economic status.
- A vast majority of households surveyed lacked confidence in State governments in 2012.
- The most trusted was the judiciary, followed by State governments and then police.
- To avoid circularity, trust in institutions is for 2012 and the caste hierarchy is for 2005.
 - In the composite caste category, General, the highest proportion (under half) had only some confidence, under 30% had a great deal of confidence while about a quarter had hardly any confidence.
 - A high proportion of OBCs also reported a great deal of confidence, a much higher proportion displayed a great deal of confidence and a much lower proportion had hardly any confidence.
 - In sharp contrast, among SCs, the highest proportion (under 45%) displayed a great deal of confidence, a smaller proportion had only some confidence, and a much smaller proportion with hardly any confidence.
 - STs, however, display a pattern not dissimilar to OBCs.

Quota as a reason

- SCs confidence in State governments:
 - One reason is quotas.
 - Another is a conjecture.
 - While those higher-up in the socio-economic hierarchy are likely to have other options (stemming from relative affluence), SCs are largely reliant on state munificence.
 - STs, in contrast, while also dependent on quotas, are so isolated that they have limited experience of social safety nets.
- Trust in the judiciary is highly pervasive with a slight variation across castes.
 - For each caste, a large majority displayed a great deal of confidence, with nearly three-fourths of STs reporting a great deal of confidence.
 - The proportion of those with hardly any confidence was extremely low, ranging between 5% and 7%.
 - These findings are indeed surprising given the judicial overload of cases and prolonged delays.
 - Yet another striking contrast emerged for the police as a law enforcement agency.
 - A great deal of confidence varied within a narrow range of 13%-18%, with the lowest among STs.
 - Over 30% displayed hardly any confidence, with the highest among SCs and STs.
 - This is not surprising given rampant corruption and discrimination against lower castes.

Need for inclusion

- One component of trust is shaped by beliefs inherited from earlier generations, and another by a contemporaneous environment.
- Trust in these institutions rose between 2005 and 2012.
- However, recent accounts indicate a sharp erosion of trust, presumably because of
 - State government policies that are far from inclusive,
 - Judicial verdicts that do not conform to high standards of autonomy and fairness, and
 - Police actions that violate rights of citizens, and are often brutal.
- While inculcation of initial beliefs is bound to be slow, transition to a policy environment that is inclusive and transparent is daunting too but growing awareness among the citizens is likely to facilitate it.

THE AMBEDKAR WE DON'T KNOW

He was an institution builder, a champion of workers' rights

GS1: Important Personalities (Dr.B.R.Ambedkar).

Context:

- Nation is celebrating the 130th birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar in this month.

Role of Ambedkar in Nation Building:

- Ambedkar was a pioneer as an institution builder.
- From his guidelines laid out in 'The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin & Its Solution', Hilton Young Recommended establishing RBI.
- As a labour member in Viceroy's Executive Council (1942-46), he evolved numerous policies in the water, power labour welfare sectors.
 - His farsightedness helped in establishing the Central Water Commission, Central Technical Power Board & Integrated water resources management.
 - The Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956 & the River Board Act 1956 emanates from his vision.
- Ambedkar was the voice of the Depressed Classes on every platform.
 - In Round Table Conference, he championed the cause of labour & improving the peasant's conditions.
 - In 1937, he introduced a Bill to abolish the Khoti system of land tenure in Konkan.
 - In 1938, His historic Bombay Council Hall peasant march made him popular among peasants & workers.
 - He was the first in the country to introduce a Bill for abolishing serfdom in agriculture.
 - He proposed industrialisation as the answer to India's agricultural problem.
- In Bombay Assembly, He opposed the introduction of the Industrial Disputes Bill, 1937 as it removed workers 'right to strike'.
- He advocated for "fair condition of life of labour" instead of securing "fair condition of labour" & laid out the basic structure of the government's labour policy.
- He contributed following for workers welfare
 - Reducing working hours to 48 hrs/week
 - Lifting the ban on the employment of women in coal mines
 - Provisions of overtime paid leave & minimum wage.
 - Also helped to establish the principle of "equal pay for equal work".
- He outrightly opposed the communist labour movements & their approach of controlling all means of production.
- As Drafting Committee Chairman, Ambedkar took meticulous measures to build a just society through liberty, equality & fraternity.

- His advocacy for universal adult franchise ensured that women had the right to vote immediately after independence.
- His advocacy of the Hindu Code Bill was a revolutionary measure towards ameliorating women's plight by conferring on them the right to adopt & inherit.
- Ambedkar also contributed to developing federal finance.

Conclusion: Ambedkar wore many hats- a distinguished economist, active politician, eminent lawyer, labour leader, great parliamentarian & a fine scholar. It is imperative to reflect on Ambedkar in all his facets to grasp the gravity of his ideas, his role as a nation-builder and actions taken to strengthen the social fabric and build a just society & stronger nation.

TEMPLES ARE NOT FIEFDOMS OF THE STATE

What is being asserted by the community is the right of representation in the affairs of the management of temples

GS 1: Indian Culture

Context:

- Uttarakhand CM Tirath Singh Rawat, revoked the Trivendra Singh Rawat govt's 'Uttarakhand Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act', freeing 51 temples

What is the Uttarakhand Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act?

- In 2019, the Trivendra Singh Rawat government had passed the Uttarakhand Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act in the Assembly taking over control of major Hindu religious institutions.
- The Act allowed the government to nominate MPs, MLAs, and representatives as the chairman and members to the temple's boards for its management.
- The Act was heavily criticised by the Opposition and aggrieved priests who reportedly claim that they were 'kept in the dark' regarding the law.
- BJP's Subramanian Swamy had filed a PIL challenging the constitutional validity claiming that it violates Articles 31 A(1) (b), Article 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

A myth

- A myth is trotted out to justify sovereign control of temples: that Hindu temples were supervised and managed by kings, who "habitually employed ministries to supervise temples and charitable bodies".
- Like many myths the colonials perpetuated, this too must be disabused: there is not a shred of historical source to support this claim.
- On the contrary there are inscriptions, cast in stone, that attest that temples were managed wholly and entirely by local communities.

State in religion

- The state has assumed the role of religious functionaries to determine who will be heads of Mutts and the authority to conduct poojas.
 - For example, The Shri Jagannath Temple Act, 1954 entrusted the committee appointed by the state with the task of ensuring the performance of seva pooja.
 - When the Act was questioned by the Raja of Puri before the Supreme Court, in Raja Birakishore vs The State Of Orissa, the Court made a revelation: the performance of a puja is in fact a secular act and, therefore, the state is justified in its regulation.

- The exercise of state regulation of secular aspects of religion was taken to extreme lengths when the Court ruled that the state, by appointing temple priests, was exercising a secular function (Seshammal & Ors, Etc. Etc vs State Of Tamil Nadu).
- Whatever style of secularism we subscribe to, surely the Indian state is not to tell the believer how he/she is to offer worship to the deity nor is it to tell the custodian of the deity how she will be appointed.

Distinct aspects

- Constituent Assembly framed the religious liberty clauses keeping in mind the historical prohibition of entry to certain classes and sections of Hindu society.
- Article 25(2) grants power to the State to enact law on two distinct aspects.
 - Article 25(2)(a) empowers the state to regulate "economic, financial, political or other secular activities which may be associated with religious practice".
 - Article 25(2)(b) enables the state to enact law to prohibit the exclusion of 'classes and sections' of Hindu society to enter into Hindu temples of a public character and also make law for social welfare and reform.
- Thus, the control of secular aspects associated with religion and the power to throw open Hindu temples to all classes and sections of society are distinct.
- The control of secular aspects is not a measure of any social reform.
- Viewed from this standpoint, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department is not a "tribune for social justice" as argued in the article nor has it ever guaranteed equal access to worship.
- Nowhere does the text of the Constitution permit the state to assume ownership of properties belonging to religious institutions and treat them as state largesse to be siphoned off.
- The only vestige of authority under the Constitution empowering the state to take over property of religious institutions is under Article 31A (b).
- The history of legislative practice of endowment laws reveals the state prerogative in ensuring regulation of only secular activities.
- As a matter of fact, the Shirur Mutt case, while upholding certain provisions of the 1951 Act, struck down a major portion of the Act characterising the provisions as a "disastrous invasion" of religious liberty.
- In 1959, the Legislature 'cured' the defects pointed out by the Supreme Court, by inserting verbatim the very provisions that the Supreme Court had struck down in 1954.

Applicable to charities

- The Waqf Act justification for the legitimacy of control of Hindu religious endowments is misleading.
- A reading of the Act reveals that it applies to charities and specifically excludes places of worship such as mosques.
- In fact the scheme of the Waqf Act supports the argument that the government should not regulate places of worship.
- The most fundamental criticism against the release of Hindu temples from government control to the society is two-fold.
 - First, it is asked to whom will the temples be handed over to?
 - Second, once restored to the community, will it not perpetuate class hierarchies?

- What is being asserted by the community is the right of representation in the affairs of the management of temples.
 - This right of representation can be effectuated by the creation of boards representative of religious heads, priests and responsible members from the dharmik sampradaya.
 - The logic is simple. Members who profess a particular dharmik sampradaya will have its due interest in mind.

British legacy

- When the British government realised that a secular government should take no part in the management of religious institutions, it enacted the Religious Endowments Act (Act XX of 1863) repealing the pre-existing Bengal and Madras Regulations.
- Interestingly, in handing over the religious institutions to the society, it created committees in every district to exercise control over temples.
- Section 8 of the Act provided that the members of the committee to be appointed from persons professing the religion, for purposes of which the religious establishment was founded or maintained and in accordance with the general wishes of those who are interested in the maintenance of the institution.
- For this purpose the local government caused an election.
- In the spirit of equality of all religions, this scheme should be applicable to all religious institutions which would guarantee adequate community representation in the management of their places of worship.

NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN

The pandemic could be an inflection point for gender norms in India

GS1: Issues related to Women Empowerment.

Context:

In the recent WEF Global Gender Gap report, India has been placed in 17th position from the bottom.

About World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report:

- It was first published in 2006 by the WEF & benchmarks 156 countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions:
 - Economic Participation and Opportunity,
 - Educational Attainment,
 - Health and Survival and
 - Political Empowerment.
- Over the Index, the highest possible score is 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score is 0 (inequality).
- The objective is to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy, and politics.
- Through this annual yardstick, the stakeholders within each country can set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.
- India is now one of the worst performers in South Asia with a 28 ranks drop, attained 140th rank among 156 nations.

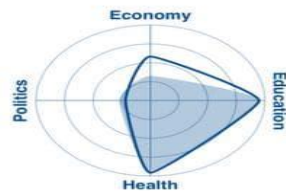
Looking India through WEF Gender Report Numbers:



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Not Secure — www3.weforum.org

29% battery icon



Global Gender Gap Index

Economic participation and opportunity
Educational attainment
Health and survival
Political empowerment

	2006 score	2021 score
Economic participation and opportunity	98 0.601	140 0.625
Educational attainment	110 0.397	151 0.326
Health and survival	102 0.819	114 0.962
Political empowerment	103 0.962	155 0.937
	20 0.227	51 0.276

COUNTRY SCORE CARD

	rank	score	avg	female	male	f/m	distance to parity
Economic participation and opportunity	151	0.326	0.583				
Labour force participation rate, %	148	0.280	0.655	22.3	79.6	0.28	
Wage equality for similar work, 1-7 (best)	135	0.482	0.628	—	—	3.38	
Estimated earned income, int'l \$ 1,000	148	0.207	0.494	2.2	10.8	0.21	
Legislators, senior officials and managers, %	140	0.171	0.349	14.6	85.4	0.17	
Professional and technical workers, %	136	0.411	0.755	29.2	70.9	0.41	
Educational attainment	114	0.962	0.950				
Literacy rate, %	129	0.799	0.897	65.8	82.4	0.80	
Enrolment in primary education, %	1	1.000	0.755	93.0	91.6	1.02	
Enrolment in secondary education, %	1	1.000	0.950	62.4	60.9	1.02	
Enrolment in tertiary education, %	1	1.000	0.927	29.1	27.2	1.07	
Health and survival	155	0.937	0.957				
Sex ratio at birth, %	152	0.909	0.925	—	—	0.91	
Healthy life expectancy, years	145	1.002	1.029	60.4	60.3	1.00	
Political empowerment	51	0.276	0.218				
Women in parliament, %	128	0.168	0.312	14.4	85.6	0.17	
Women in ministerial positions, %	132	0.100	0.235	9.1	90.9	0.10	
Years with female/male head of state (last 50)	7	0.450	0.144	15.5	34.5	0.45	

Global Gender Gap Report 2021

Reason for India's 28 rank drop in Gender Gap Report:

- The share of women ministers has declined sharply from 23 to 9%.
- Indian women's labour force participation has plummeted in the last decade to a mere 21%.
 - Before the pandemic, even as the #MeToo movement exposed sexual harassment in the workplace, Indian boardrooms had only 15% of women.
 - Now it has fewer numbers than Saudi Arabia.
 - The absence of crèche facility at workplaces, MNREGA sites & Anganwadis decreased women's participation.

RIFT WIDENS**Highlights of report**

- ▶ According to WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India has closed 62.5% of its gender gap till date
- ▶ India's gender gap on economic participation and opportunity sub-index widened by 3% this year
- ▶ Highest decline on political empowerment sub-index, where India regressed 13.5 percentage points
- ▶ Women's labour force participation rate fell from 24.8% to 22.3%
- ▶ Estimated earned income of women is only one-fifth

of men's, which puts India among the bottom 10

- ▶ India ranks among bottom five in discrimination against women in health and survival sub-index
- ▶ As Covid-19 impact continues to be felt, global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 to 135.6 years
- ▶ Iceland is the most gender-equal nation for the 12th time in 15 years
- ▶ Top 10 gender-equal countries include Finland, Norway, New Zealand, Rwanda, Sweden, Ireland and Switzerland

In Comparison with Other Nations:

- Within South Asia, post-conflict 83% of Nepali women work outside the home.
 - Also reports good women representation in from local govt to parliament.
- Bangladesh is the only country with women serving longer than men as head of the state.
- Rwanda is one of the few developing countries that has surprisingly closed the gender gaps on several fronts.
 - Where women now dominate 2/3rd of parliamentary seats.

Discrimination faced by Women in Indian Society:

- Indian women's discrimination starts in the embryo stage with the misuse of technology for sex-selective abortion.
- As per UNFPA data, each year India reports more than 46 million "missing women".
- The patriarchal mindset of the society creates obstacles for women's empowerment & growth at every stage of life.
- As per NSSO 2019 time-use survey, Indian women's daily work is almost 10 times more than men on unpaid chores.
- According to National Family Health Survey 2019-20, even before the pandemic child marriages have marginally increased since the previous survey.
 - Though education is inclusive with 3/4th of women literates, only 37% complete 10th class.
 - Lack of employment opportunities for women.
- Compounded with the lack of independence, more than 1/4th of married women reported spousal violence.
- According to NCRB, In 2019 alone nearly 88 rapes daily are reported with Dalit women (mainly in Rajasthan & UP) the most vulnerable.

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Some positive developments for women in India:

- At present, three out of five women now operate their bank accounts.
- More than 2/3rd of young women use menstrual hygiene products.
- More than half of married women use modern contraceptives & have mobile phones.

Way-Ahead:

India when a new generation of dynamic women taking up leadership & fighting against all forms of discriminations. Taking a cue from the East Asian growth miracle associated with large increases in working women, it is high time for govt & Indian society at large that has been sleeping in the patriarchal hangover to take up the responsibility & reform every institution for building a equal society.

GENERAL STUDIES-2**STILL NO RECOGNITION OF THE THIRD TIER**

In the FC-15 proposals, the goal of fiscally empowering local governments to deliver territorial equity is still far away

GS 2: Conditional grants to incentivise the states for reforms**CONTEXT:**

Unlike the previous Commissions, the Fifteenth Finance Commission was in the background of the COVID-19 pandemic which reinforced the significance of local governments, *gram sabha* and other participatory institutions in containing the crisis and delivering social protection in India.

15th Finance Commission

- The 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the President of India in November 2017, under the chairmanship of NK Singh. Its recommendations will cover a period of five years from April 2020 to March 2025
- The primary task of the Union Finance Commission is to rectify the vertical and horizontal imbalances in resources and expenditure responsibilities between Union and States, which after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments includes the third tier of local governments.
- This Commission is the fifth after the incorporation of Part IX and Part IX-A to the Constitution which mandate the Union Finance Commission to supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities on the basis of the recommendations of the State Finance Commission (another institution created by the Amendments)

Recommendations of 15th Finance Commission

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission's report for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26 outlines some crucial recommendations for state governments.
- These recommendations cover tax devolution, grants from the Centre, and the guidelines for the borrowings that they are permitted to incur over the medium-term.
- The commission has recommended that 41 per cent of the government's divisible pool of taxes be transferred to state governments.

Higher vertical devolution

- Compared with the 14th Finance Commission there is a 52% increase in the vertical share.

- 15th Finance Commission has raised this share to 60% and linked them to drinking water, rainwater harvesting, sanitation and other national priorities in the spirit of cooperative federalism.
- It reduced the performance-based grant to just ₹8,000 crore — and that too for building new cities, leaving out the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) altogether.



Entry-level criterion

An important recommendation of the Fifteenth Finance Commission is the entry-level criterion to avail the union local grant (except health grant) by local governments (strictly speaking, it is performance-linked).

- For panchayats, the condition is online submission of annual accounts for the previous year and audited accounts for the year before
- For urban local governments, two more conditions are specified
 - After 2021-22, fixation of minimum floor for property tax rates by the relevant State
 - Consistent improvement in the collection of property taxes in tandem with the State's own Gross State Domestic Product

Gram panchayats (especially the affluent and semi-urban categories) are left out from this.

Issue in Fiscal Data

- 11th Finance Commission published the fiscal data of all tiers of panchayats and municipalities in its report. But the data proved defective.
- 12th Finance Commission did not publish any local fiscal data.
- 13th Finance Commission published data online and some researchers did use them.
- 14th Finance Commission conducted a sample survey covering 15% *gram* panchayats, 30% block panchayats and all district panchayats besides 30% municipalities, presumably to ensure quality in canvassing data. The results too were not published.
- Interestingly, neither the Fifteenth Finance Commission nor the earlier counterparts took pains to examine how and where the financial reporting system has failed.

Without reliable data can you ensure good governance?

Equalisation principle

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission claims that it seeks to achieve the "desirable objective of evenly balancing the union and the states"

- Fifteenth Finance Commission outlines nine guiding principles as the basis of its recommendation to local governments, there is no integrated approach

Conclusion-Equity is the foundational rationale of a federation. Abandoning tax effort criterion incentivises dependency, inefficiency and non-accountability. In sum, if decentralisation is meant to empower local people, the primary task is to fiscally empower local governments to deliver territorial equity. We are far from this goal.

A STEP THAT ENHANCES COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

The amendment to the GNCTD Act defines, without doubt, who represents the 'Government' in unique case of Delhi.

GS 2: Co-operative Federalism.

Features of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2021:

- The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill mainly aims to amend four clauses of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 (GNCTD Act 1991). They are,
- **Section 21** – This section deals with the restrictions on laws passed by the Legislative Assembly concerning certain matters.
- The Bill provides that the term "government" referred to in any law made by the Legislative Assembly will imply Lieutenant Governor (L-G).
- **Section 24** – This section deals with assent to Bills passed by the Legislative Assembly. The L-G will reserve the bills for the consideration of the President in a few matters. It includes bills that diminish the powers of the High Court of Delhi, the President directed the L-G to reserve a bill, etc.
- The NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill requires the L-G **to reserve bills** for the President that **incidentally covers any of the matters outside the purview** of the powers of the Legislative Assembly.
- **Section 33**- It mentions that the Legislative Assembly will make rules to regulate the procedure and conduct of business in the Assembly.
- The 2021 NCT bill states that such rules must be consistent with the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha.
- **Section 44** – **It deals with the conduct of business.** Accordingly, all executive decisions taken by the elected government should be under the L-G's name.
- The 2021 bill empowers the L-G to specify his suggestions on certain matters. His opinion has to be taken before making any executive action on decisions of the Minister/ Council of Ministers.

Background:

- In 2015, Legislative assembly of Delhi had passed Delhi Netaji Subash University of Technology Bill and sent it to President assent and defined the term 'Government' as the 'Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi'.
- In 2017, LG of Delhi returned Delhi Netaji Subash University of Technology Bill 2015 to Legislative assembly of Delhi due to inconsistent definition of the term 'Government'.
- Delhi Assembly sent a modified version of the Bill for President's assent where the definition of 'Government' was described as "Lieutenant Governor of NCT Delhi appointed by the President".

Formalises the Definition

- Aim of amendments were to clear ambiguities in the roles of various stakeholders and provide a constructive rule based framework for stakeholders within the government of Delhi to work in tandem with the Union Government.

Partners not adversaries

- Union Government by this transformation provides platforms and frameworks to work together.
- The creation of NITI Aayog, GST Council and accepting the 15th FC recommendations are clear examples of Union Government viewing states as equal partners.

Delhi's Status

1. Delhi's current status as a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the **69th Amendment Act**. The act introduced Articles 239AA and 239BB in the Constitution.
 - They have created the Union Territory of Delhi with a legislative assembly.
 - Further, the administrator appointed under article 239 gets designated as the Lieutenant Governor. There shall be a council of ministers to aid and advise LG.
 - Lastly, provisions of public order, police and land are not under the jurisdiction of the Delhi government. The Centre will maintain these provisions.
2. **Article 239AA(4)** mandates that in case of a **difference of opinion** between the L-G and the Council of Ministers, the L-G has to refer the issue to the President.
 - Until the decision is pending before the President, the L-G can use his discretion to take immediate action if urgency requires him/her to take an action.
3. The **GNCTD Act 1991** got passed to supplement the constitutional provisions relating to the Assembly and the Council of Ministers in the national capital. The act outlines few important provisions such as:
 - the powers of the Assembly
 - the discretionary powers enjoyed by the L-G
 - duties of the Chief Minister with respect to the need to furnish information to the L-G

Importance of Delhi

- The National capital has
 - Country's legislature
 - Seat of union Government
 - Judiciary
 - Diplomatic Mission
 - And other institutions of national importance

It deserves smooth functioning and cannot be subject to misadventures arising from the ambiguities in the roles and responsibilities of its stakeholders.

Conclusion-Making Delhi Assembly rules consistent with the rules of the Lok sabha or ensuring that the opinion of the LG is taken can only ensure clarity and foster an environment of co-operation.

POLICE REFORMS

CONTEXT:

- Recent chain of scandalous events in Maharashtra, again questions the credibility of Police system.
- While disposing Mumbai former commissioner's plea, SC revisited its own judgment in Prakash Singh case.

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Supreme Court Directives in Prakash Singh Case:

In 2006, Supreme Court issued directions regarding a 1996 petition, for implementation of expert committee's recommendations to prevent police abuse & misuse of police powers & the directions for Centre & State famously known as "The Prakash Singh Guidelines".

- **State Security Commission:**
 - Every state should constitute commission that lay down policy for police functioning, police performance evaluation & mainly to curb political unwarranted influence on police.
- **Police Establishment Board:**
 - Every state shall constitute police board that decides postings, transfers & promotions for officers below DSP rank.
- **Police Complaints Authority:**
 - State & District level complaints authority needed to constitute for inquiring into allegations of serious misconduct & power abuse by police personnel.
- **Security of Tenure:**
 - In order to protect against arbitrary transfers & postings, there is need to provide a minimum tenure of 2 years for DGP at state & Chiefs of central forces.
- **DGP Appointment:**
 - DGP appointment shall be taken on the basis of service length, good record & experience, chosen among 3 senior most officers empanelled for promotion by UPSC.
- **National Security Commission:**
 - For shortlisting of candidates for appointment as Chiefs of central armed police forces, National Security Commission is required.
- **Separation Of investigation and Law & Order:**
 - To ensure speedier investigation, better expertise & friendly police, there is need to separate investigation wing from law & order wing.

Rationale behind the directives:

- To reduce political interference in police functioning & rationalize the police performance evaluation system.
- To reduce politics & corruption and increase transparency in police appointments, promotions & transfers.
- Replacing the existing internal inquiries system & instilling public confidence in police.
- To enable key police officials to withstand against undue political interference
- To reduce uncertainty of office & tenure for the DGPs by reducing arbitrariness & personal considerations of ruling class in appointments.
- For encouraging specialization in police force & upgrading the overall performance.
- Increasing transparency & streamlining policing by speedier & scientific investigation.

Conclusion: It is high time that the unholy nexus between the criminals, politicians, bureaucrats & police needs to be broken. While taking steps in the directions of decriminalization of politics, parallelly govt needs to restructure police system in order to build robust criminal justice system based on justice Malimath committee recommendations.

A WALK-BACK: H-1B VISA ISSUE

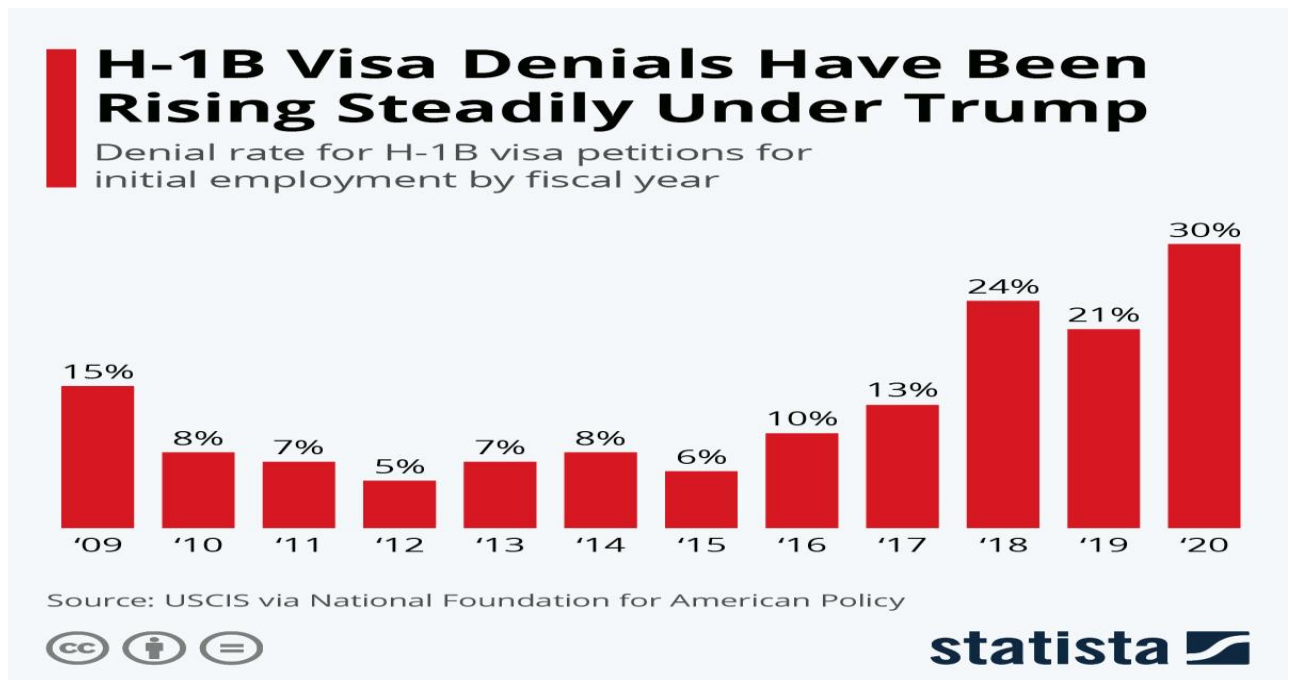
Biden shows intent on reworking immigration rules by not extending H-1B visa ban

GS 2: International Relation

CONTEXT: President Joe Biden allowed a ban on issuance of H-1B visas for skilled workers to lapse at the end of March 2021

Background:**President Trump's Immigration Policy (America First Ideology):**

- President Donald Trump in June 2020, **blocked the issuance of non-immigrant work visas of several types, including the skilled worker visa, or H-1B** following the **tightening immigration policy**-aim of the policy was to stop foreign workers from decreasing American jobs.
- Protecting U.S. jobs for Americans, in the context of the economic distress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, was a major immigration reform for President Trump.
- By some estimates, H-1B visa applications of up to 219,000 workers were likely blocked.

**Impact on India:**

- Mr. Biden's action will have a significant and favourable impact for Indian nationals seeking employment with U.S. tech firms, as they garnered approximately 70% of the 65,000 H-1B visas annually made available to private sector applicants other than students
- Yet, this raised genuine questions about whether such rules would set back the U.S.-India relationship by impacting Indian IT services exported to the U.S.
 - These totalled approximately \$29.7 billion in 2019, 3.0% (\$864 million) more than 2018, and 143% greater than 2009 levels.
- Not only did the CEOs of Silicon Valley tech titans protest the clampdown on a key source of skilled labour driving their core operations, but some universities also filed lawsuits challenging a subsequent student visa ban last year, leading to a partial walk-back on the rules for the latter.
- Google CEO Sundar Pichai had lashed out at the policy, noting that Immigration had contributed immensely to America's economic success, making it a global leader in tech.
- SpaceX founder and Tesla CEO Elon Musk and Apple CEO Tim Cook have also expressed similar anguish against the policy.

Dreams Disrupted

About **70%** of H-1B visas are issued to Indians, mainly workers of US tech firms

About **68%** of the **275,000** H-1B applications for FY2021 were for Indian nationals

During Feb-April 2020, over **20 million** US workers lost jobs in industries which would hire H-1B and L-1 workers

Suspension to hit H-1B and L-1 workers and their dependents



Conclusion:

- In allowing the H-1B visa ban to expire, Mr. Biden is walking a fine line between restoring the inflow of skilled workers into the U.S., a source of productivity-increase for its labour force, and not being seen as overly aggressive in unwinding Trump-era immigration policies.
- Biden administration should continue to push gradual reforms that nudge the U.S. economy and global strategic position back toward an ethos of multilateral cooperation and bilateral progress with countries such as India, while however retaining a sharp emphasis on policies that further U.S. national interest in a dramatically transformed post-COVID world

FREE AND UNHINDERED JUSTICE

Access to the Supreme Court has been made easier with virtual hearings, but more needs to be done

GS 2: Social Justice, Indian Judiciary

CONTEXT:

- SC e-Committee Proposes Live-Streaming And Sharing Of Digital Transcript of Court Proceedings Immediately With The Order.
- While the lockdown limited people's movements, it opened new vistas for litigants and lawyers across India to approach, through technology, the country's highest court with relative ease.

Background:

- Last Year, in the wake of Coronavirus Pandemic, the Supreme Court (SC) has passed directions for all courts across the country to extensively use video-conferencing for judicial proceedings.
- The Supreme Court exercised its plenary power under Article 142 to direct all high courts to frame a mechanism for use of technology during the pandemic.

e-Courts Project

- The e-Courts project was conceptualized by e-Committee, Supreme Court of India with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts on the basis of the "National Policy

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and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary – 2005” submitted.

- The e-Courts Mission Mode Project, is a pan-India Project, monitored and funded by the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, for the District Courts across the country.
- **Objectives of the Project**
- To provide efficient & time-bound citizen-centric services delivery as detailed in e-Court Project Litigant's Charter.
- To develop, install & implement decision support systems in courts.
- To automate the processes to provide transparency and accessibility of information to its stakeholders.
- To enhance judicial productivity, both qualitatively & quantitatively, to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable and transparent.



Increasing reach

- Even at the time the Constitution was being debated by the Constituent Assembly, geographical access to the Supreme Court was flagged as a concern.
 - The B.R. Ambedkar-led Drafting Committee was nevertheless of the view that the Court must have a specified place of sitting and that litigants should “know where to go and whom to approach”.
 - Accordingly, in recognition of the same, the Constitution empowered the Chief Justice to hold sittings of the Supreme Court through Circuit Benches in places other than Delhi as well.
 - However, despite an increasing caseload and repeated pleas by litigants and governments, successive Chief Justices have refused to invoke this constitutional power for reasons best known to them.
- In India, given the unified, single-pyramidal structure of the judicial system, all types of cases can potentially make their way to the Supreme Court, irrespective of the place or forum of the original institution.

- It is the effective exercise of that right, however, that is curtailed by the court assembling exclusively in Delhi.
- According to a report by the Centre for Policy Research, a disproportionately high number of cases filed in the Supreme Court originated in High Courts closer to Delhi.
 - For instance, cases from States like West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, which collectively account for around a fifth of India's total population, contribute to less than 10% of the court's docket.
 - On the other hand, almost 18% of all cases in the Supreme Court originate from Punjab and Haryana, with less than 5% of the total population share.
- Geographical constraints have also meant that appearing before the Supreme Court has inescapably become the domain of a select few lawyers in and around Delhi.

A Court for everyone

- Thus, the pandemic, although for different reasons, has compelled the Supreme Court to attempt to overcome physical constraints in an effort to increase access, albeit virtually.
- Over the past year, with virtual hearings, what was seen as the exclusive domain of a limited number of lawyers in Delhi has opened up to advocates from all over India, most of whom could only ever have dreamt of addressing the Supreme Court in their lifetimes.
- Litigants now have the option to engage a local lawyer of their own choice and convenience, including the same lawyer who argued their case before the lower court.

Conclusion

- Indeed, virtual hearings may not be the perfect alternative, but such imperfections must be preferred over a denial of the right to access justice itself.
- It is only when each person in India is provided unhindered access to its corridors can the Supreme Court be said to have fulfilled its constitutional promise.
- More than one Law Commission and Parliamentary Committee have recommended Circuit Benches of the Supreme Court to be set up around the country.
- Nonetheless, till the judiciary acts on such proposals, virtual hearings should be allowed to continue, if not as a matter of right, then at least as a matter of just and equitable policy.

UNREASONABLE RESTRICTIONS: RE-EXAMINE THE RTE

It is time to re-examine the Right to Education Act's bias against private non-minority institutions.

GS 2: Fundamental rights & Issues related to education.

CONTEXT:

- Since the unveiling of new National Education Policy 2020, debates around reforms in the education sphere cropping up.
- In this regard, there has been voice echoing to re-examine the RTE bias against private non-minority institutions.

What is right to education?

- To give effect for Article 21A that provided free & compulsory education as a fundamental right, Right to Education Act enacted in 2009.
- The main aim of RTE is to ensure that every child gets quality elementary education.

Evolution of Right to Education:

- Originally, Article 45 of the Constitution mentioned right to education has Directive principle that indicated "State should provide free & compulsory education to children upto age of 14".
- In 1992, SC in Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka held that right to education is a part of Right to Life under Article 21.
- In 1993, Court in Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh held that state was duty bound to provide primary education within its economic capacity & indicated need for private institutions to play role along with govt in this regard.
- TMA Pai Foundation & P A Inamdar landmark judgments laid ground for insertion of Article 21A (Right to Education) as a Fundamental right by the 86th Constitutional Amendment.
- In 2009, to enforce Article 21A in spirit Right to Education Act was enacted.

Some Features of Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009:

- It aims to provide primary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years.
- It mandates 25% reservation in the education institutions for the socially backward sections of the society.
- It focuses on making education system free of fear, trauma & anxiety through child centered & friendly methods.
- It provides for the appointment of teachers with eligible academic qualification.

Issue of Unreasonable Differentiation of Minority & Non-Minority Institutions:

- Even when in Inamdar case, court held that there shall be no reservation in private institutions and that minority & non-minority are not treated differently.
- But 93rd Constitutional amendment inserted Clause(5) in Article 15, that provides reservation in education institutions for backward classes & also excluded minority institutions from this ambit.
- RTE Act 2009, doesn't directly discriminate between minority & non-minority students.
- But, in Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan case, court upheld that unaided minority schools are exempted from purview.
- Even though Article 21A doesn't discriminate but the arbitrary RTE Act discriminates between minority & non-minority institutions.
- The above differentiation is unreasonable that violates Article 14 & uneconomical to private institutions.
- The differentiation not only unreasonable but also lacks rational nexus between objective of universal education & exclusion of minority schools from RTE purview.
- Even judiciary that follows the doctrine of harmonious construction of fundamental rights has upheld the exemption of minority institutions despite many RTE provisions would not interfere with their administrative rights.
- In 2016, Sobha George case, Kerala high court held that Sect 16 of RTE that prohibits non-promotion till the completion of elementary education will also be applicable to minority schools.
- Despite functioning of minority institutions are not subjected to RTE but they are subjected to Fundamental rights such as Article 14, 21 of the constitution.

Conclusion: Right to Education that ushered 2nd phase of rights revolutions in India, needs to relook at some of the discriminatory provisions of the act. To attain the goal of universal quality education that is accessible & affordable, India needs to create a harmonious balance between affirmative & discriminative provisions.

AN OPAQUE BOND: ELECTORAL BOND

SC missed another opportunity to enforce transparency in election funding should worry us all

GS2: Election Reforms & Funding (Electoral Bond).

Context:

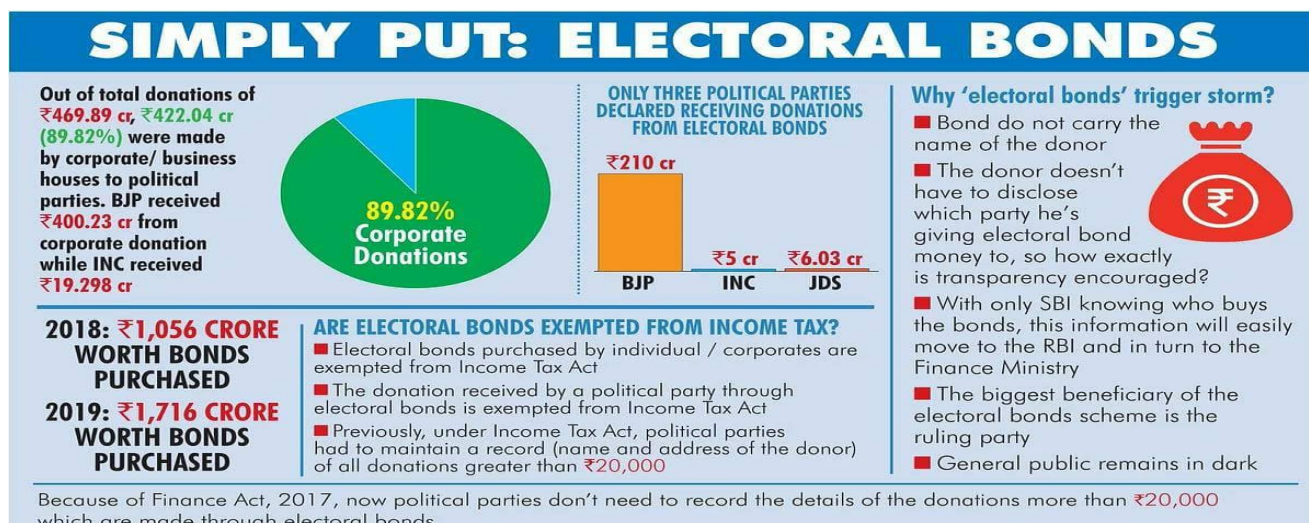
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- SC refused to stay filed by ADR against the sale of electoral bonds announced by the finance ministry last week.

What are Electoral Bonds?

- Announced in the 2017 budget, electoral bonds are interest-free bearer instruments used to donate money anonymously by individuals, companies, NGOs, and trusts to political parties.
- They sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh & 1 crore and SBI is the only bank authorized to sell them.
- 1 Political parties are needed to encash the bonds within 15 days, failed to do so, will result in the transfer of bonds to the PM Relief Fund.
- There is no limit on the number of bonds an individual/company can purchase.



The pending challenge of ADR plea:

- In 2017, ADR & Common Cause also filed a plea challenging the constitutionality of the electoral bonds scheme and asked the court to declare all political parties as public offices under the ambit of the RTI Act and also compel political parties to disclose their income & expenditure. But the plea is under sub-judice.

Issues with Electoral Bonds:

- The main issue is with the anonymity of electoral bonds donor that has been brought by an amendment in 2017 exempting political parties disclosing donors details.
- According to transparency activists, the change infringes the citizen's "Right to Know" & makes the political class even more unaccountable.
- Though citizens can't get access to the details of the bond but govt of the day can always access the donor details which amounts to abuse of power.
- It also pointed out that printing of electoral bonds & SBI commission for sale & purchase is paid from taxpayer's money by union govt.
- SC flagged the possibility of misuse of money received by political parties for activities like terror or violent protest funding.
- Issue of dubious expenditure in buying MLAs/MPs after the elections to overturn the public mandate.
- EC in past has warned that electoral bonds, combined with the preceding legislative amendments, would encourage large sums of illegal donations.

- That in turn leads to mushrooming of shell companies to funnel black money into the political system through these bonds.
- The most serious concerns are related to following changes that undermine the electoral process
 - Amended section 182 of the companies act 2013 that removed the provision of donating 7.5% profit limit.
 - Now with 100% profits donations will make a way for legitimizing & legalizing crony capitalism.
 - Amending Section 29B of RPA 1951 & Section 3 of the FCRA 2010, together removed the prohibition on candidate's & parties from receiving foreign donations.
 - This will affect the country's sovereignty due to foreign interference in the democratic electoral system.

Way Forward:

- There is a need to ensure transparency on both the source of income & its expenditure.
- The best way is not to abolish electoral bonds but to disclose the donor and the recipient.
- A law has to be passed to make political parties liable to get their accounts by an auditor as per EC/CAG suggestion.
- An alternate way is of doing away with private fund collection & replacing it with the public funding of political parties.
- A feasible solution in the future is to establish a National Election Fund to which all donations are directed & will be distributed to parties based on their electoral performance.

Electoral bonds are means to stop black money-funded elections. As EC rightly said, "Transparency in political funding is to ensure free & fair elections which are very essential for a democracy like India". The need is to bring more transparency in the electoral bonds mechanism by accommodating the concerns of all the stakeholders.

The current period provides a stable environment to bring longstanding reform demands in elections, Govt should start reforms by bringing more transparency & accountability in electoral bonds.

INDIA HAVE A REFUGEE PROBLEM

It needs to clinically address the issue of refugee protection and introduce appropriate legal and institutional measures

GS 2: International Relation

Context

- In any case, refugee flows to India are unlikely to end any time soon given the geopolitical, economic, ethnic and religious contexts of the region.
- There is, therefore, an urgent need today to clinically address the issue of refugee protection in India and put in place appropriate legal and institutional measures.

Background

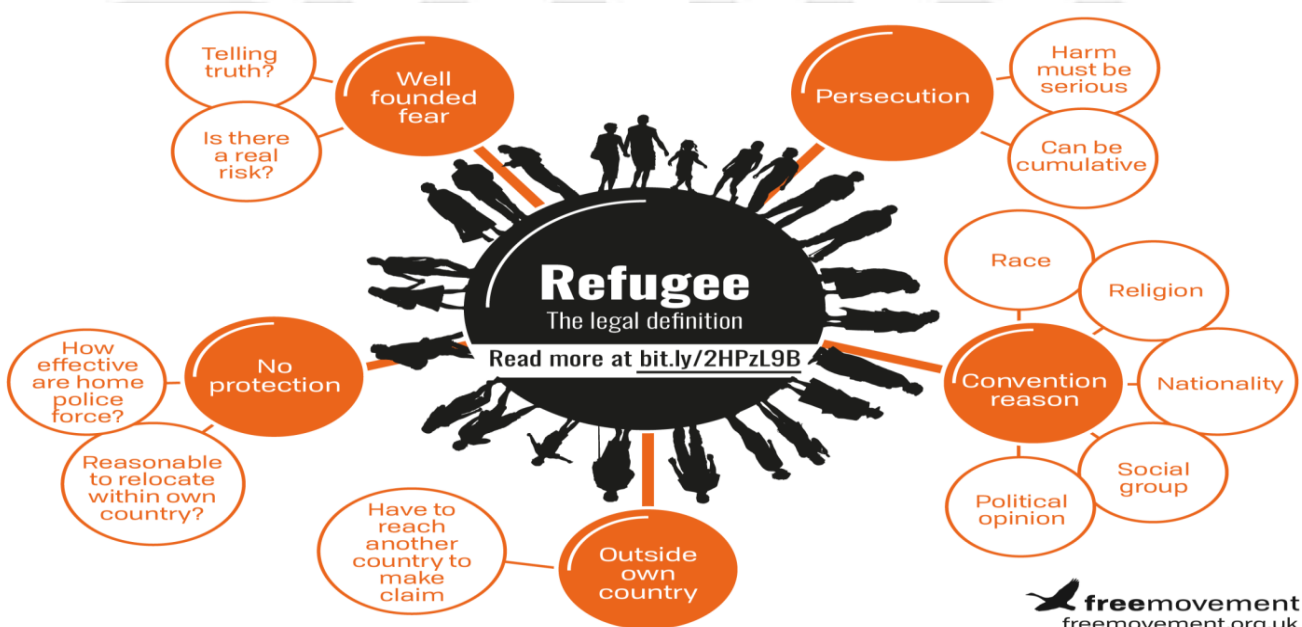
- The current plight of the Myanmar people has been preceded by that of another group of Myanmar people, the Rohingya.
- The debate was dominated by the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and its impact on those seeking refuge in India, even though new refugees would not be benefited by the law since the cut-off year of the CAA is 2014.

Refugees versus immigrants

- Illegal immigration is a threat to the socio-political fabric of any country, including India, with potential security implications.
- Much of the debate in the country is about the illegal immigrants, not refugees; the two categories tend to get bunched together.
- And because we have jumbled up the two issues over time, our policies and remedies to deal with these issues suffer from a lack of clarity as well as policy utility.

Ambiguity in the framework

- The main reason why our policies towards illegal immigrants and refugees is confused is because as per Indian law, both categories of people are viewed as one and the same and are covered under the Foreigners Act, 1946 which offers a simple definition of a foreigner — “foreigner” means “a person who is not a citizen of India”.
 - Needless to say that there are fundamental differences between illegal immigrants and refugees, but India is legally ill-equipped to deal with them separately due to a lack of legal provisions.
- Recall that India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection.
- The absence of such a legal framework also leads to policy ambiguity whereby India’s refugee policy is guided primarily by ad hocism which, of course, often has its own ‘political utility’.
- Ad hoc measures enable the government in office to pick and choose ‘what kind’ of refugees it wants to admit for whatever political or geopolitical reasons, and what kind of refugees it wants to avoid giving shelter, for similar reasons.
- At the same time, the absence of a legal framework increases the possibility of the domestic politicization of refugee protection and complicates its geopolitical fault-lines.
- The absence of a clearly laid down refugee protection law also opens the door for geopolitical considerations while deciding to admit refugees or not.



Legal, moral complexities

- New Delhi has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world in spite of not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.
- For one, as is often discussed in India, the definition of refugees in the 1951 convention only pertains to the violation of civil and political rights, but not economic rights, of individuals, for instance.
 - Put differently, a person, under the definition of the convention, could be considered if he/she is deprived of political rights, but not if he/she is deprived of economic rights.
 - If the violation of economic rights were to be included in the definition of a refugee, it would clearly pose a major burden on the developed world.
- On the other hand, however, this argument, if used in the South Asian context, could be a problematic proposition for India too.
 - And yet, this lop-sidedness is something New Delhi has traditionally highlighted, and justifiably so, as a reason for its non-accession to the treaty.
 - The West's lopsided obsession with civil and political rights at the cost of economic rights is a convenient excuse with little moral backing.
- Second, as scholar B.S. Chimni has argued, "India should not accede to the 1951 convention at a time when the North is violating it in both letter and spirit... India should argue that their accession is conditional on the Western States rolling back the non-entrée (no entry) regime they have established over the past two decades.
- The non-entrée regime is constituted by a range of legal and administrative measures that include visa restrictions, carrier sanctions, interdictions, third safe-country rule, restrictive interpretations of the definition of 'refugee', withdrawal of social welfare benefits to asylum seekers, and widespread practices of detention."
- In other words, India must use its exemplary, though less than perfect, history of refugee protection to begin a global conversation on the issue.

New domestic law needed

- The answer perhaps lies in a new domestic law aimed at refugees.
 - The CAA, however, is not the answer to this problem primarily because of its deeply discriminatory nature:
 - It is morally untenable to have a discriminatory law to address the concerns of refugees who are fleeing their home country due to such discrimination in the first place. More fundamentally, perhaps, the CAA is an act in refugee avoidance, not refugee protection.
- What is perhaps equally important is that such a domestic refugee law should allow for temporary shelter and work permit for refugees.
- This is crucial because in the absence of proper legal measures, refugee documentation, and work permit, refugees may end up becoming illegal immigrants using illicit means.
- Put differently, the absence of a refugee law incentivizes illegal immigration into the country.
- New Delhi must also make a distinction between temporary migrant workers, illegal immigrants and refugees and deal with each of them differently through proper legal and institutional mechanisms.
- Our traditional practice of managing these issues with ambiguity and political expediency has become deeply counterproductive: It neither protects the refugees nor helps stop illegal immigration into the country.

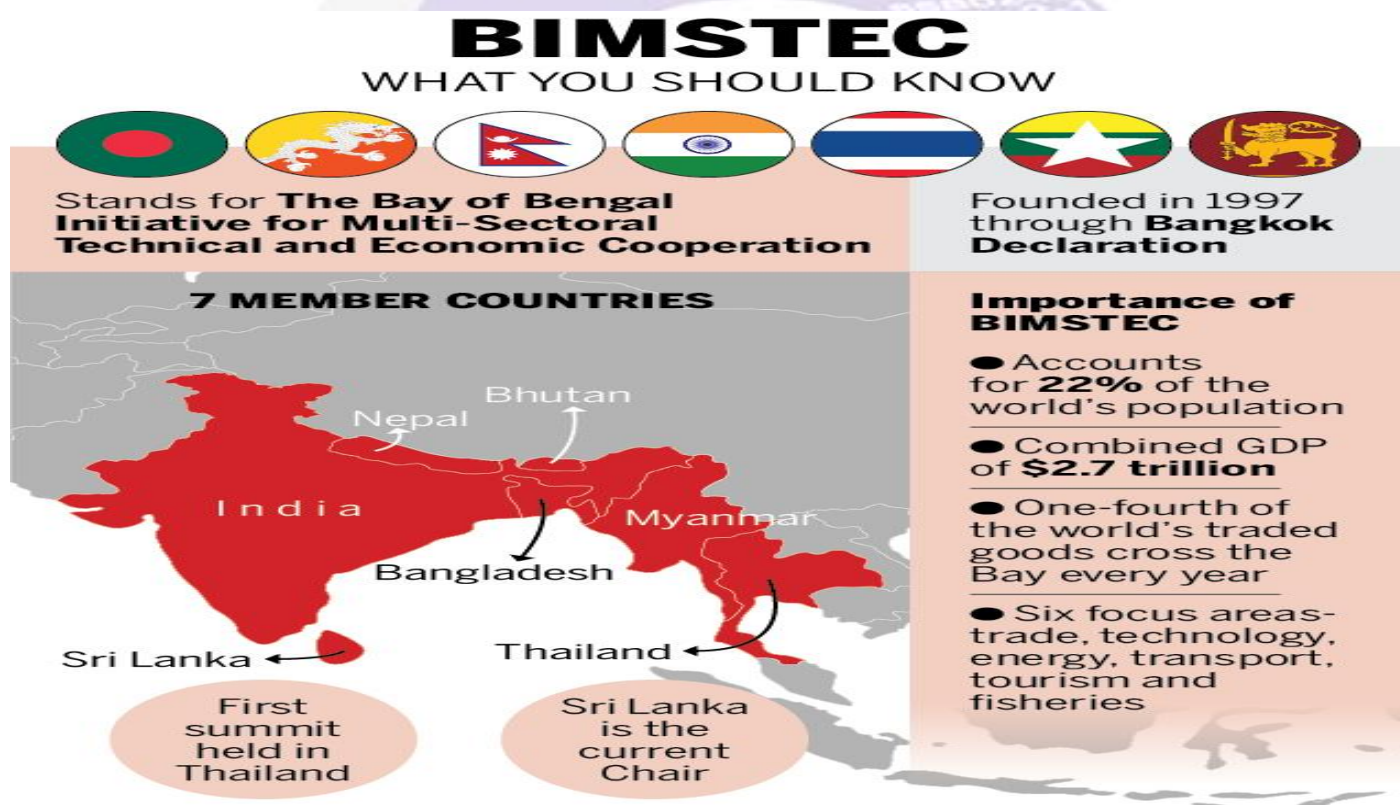
BIMSTEC NEEDS TO REINVENT ITSELF

The grouping, a work in progress, has several obstacles to overcome

GS 2: International Relation

Context

- The foreign ministers of BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) met virtually on April 1 for their 17th meeting.
- They advanced the agenda, which had been arrested by the pandemic, since the last ministerial meeting held in August 2018.
- Their major task was to pave the way for the next summit, the grouping's fifth, due to be held in Sri Lanka in the "next few months".
- While most multilateral groupings from G20 to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) held their deliberations at the highest political level in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, BIMSTEC leaders failed to do so.
- In contrast to a meeting of even SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) leaders held at India's initiative a year ago, BIMSTEC could not arrange its ministerial meeting until April 2021.



Unfolding rejuvenation

- Established as a grouping of four nations — India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — through the Bangkok Declaration of 1997 to promote rapid economic development, BIMSTEC was expanded later to include three more countries — Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.

- It moved at a leisurely pace during its first 20 years with only three summits held and a record of modest achievements.
- But it suddenly received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation over a faltering SAARC.
- The BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, followed by their Outreach Summit with the BRICS leaders in Goa in October 2016, drew considerable international limelight to the low-profile regional grouping.
- The fourth leaders' summit, held in Kathmandu in August 2018, devised an ambitious plan for institutional reform and renewal that would encompass economic and security cooperation.
- It took the important decision to craft a charter to provide BIMSTEC with a more formal and stronger foundation.
- The shared goal now is to head towards "a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region".
- At the second swearing-in of the Modi government in May 2019, the leaders of BIMSTEC, not SAARC, were invited as honored guests.
- Soon thereafter, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar observed that India saw a mix of "energy, mindset and possibility" in BIMSTEC.

Recent decisions

- The foreign ministers cleared the draft for the BIMSTEC charter, recommending its early adoption.
- They endorsed the rationalization of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest.
- The ministers also conveyed their support for the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which will be adopted at the next summit.
- Preparations have been completed for the signing of three agreements relating to
 - Mutual legal assistance in criminal matters,
 - Cooperation between diplomatic academies, and
 - The establishment of a technology transfer facility in Colombo.
- What has been missing from recent deliberations is a reference to the lack of progress on the trade and economic dossier.
- A January 2018 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement to be a real game changer.
 - Ideally it should cover trade in goods, services and investment; promote regulatory harmonization; adopt policies that develop regional value chains; and eliminate non-tariff barriers. Also lacking was an effort to enthuse and engage the vibrant business communities of these seven countries, and expand their dialogue, interactions and transactions.
- On this score, BIMSTEC remains a work in progress. Over 20 rounds of negotiations to operationalise the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, signed in 2004, are yet to bear fruit.
- In contrast, much has been achieved in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, including counterterrorism, cyber security, and coastal security cooperation.
- India has led through constant focus and follow-up — to the extent that some member-states have complained about the 'over-securitization' of BIMSTEC.

- Similarly, while national business chambers are yet to be optimally engaged with the BIMSTEC project, the academic and strategic community has shown ample enthusiasm through the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks and other forum.

Hurdles

- The goal now should be to overcome the obstacles leading to BIMSTEC's success.
- First, a strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states.
- Second, uncertainties over SAARC hovers, complicating matters.
 - Both Kathmandu and Colombo want the SAARC summit revived, even as they cooperate within BIMSTEC, with diluted zeal.
- Third, China's decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space has cast dark shadows.
- Finally, the military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse has produced a new set of challenges.

Conclusion:

- As BIMSTEC readies itself to celebrate the silver jubilee of its formation next year, it faces a serious challenge:
 - To effect "a paradigm-shift in raising the level of our cooperation and regional integration", as Mr. Jaishankar said on April 1.
- The grouping needs to reinvent itself, possibly even rename itself as 'The Bay of Bengal Community'.
- It should consider holding regular annual summits.
- Only then will its leaders convince the region about their strong commitment to the new vision they have for this unique platform linking South Asia and Southeast Asia.

INDIA AND THE GREAT POWER TRIANGLE

India and the great power triangle

GS2: India & its Bilateral, Regional relations.

Context:

- Recent visit of the Russian foreign minister to Delhi & Islamabad & the dramatic rise of China & Beijing's new assertiveness indicates India's changing relations with great powers.

Why Change matters to Delhi?

- Change is the only permanent feature of the world & India needs to brace it.
 - Delhi's growing strategic partnerships with the US & Europe will end India's prolonged alienation from the West.
 - India's relative weight in the international system continues to increase & give greater space to its foreign policy.

A glimpse of The Great Relations:

Sino-Russian relations:

- **1950's:**
 - A formal treaty of alliance in 1950 by Stalin & Mao Zedong gave birth to ideological soulmates.
 - This union was aggressively supported by expansive economic & security cooperation.
 - Where Russia not only invested massively in the economic modernization of china but also helped China technologically to become a nuclear weapon state.

- China was refused to extend the 1950 security treaty with Russia that expired in 1980.
- **1960's:**
 - Dispelling the illusions that communist states don't fight with each other, but Sino-Soviet armies fought in 1969 & its consequences are way beyond their bilateral relations.
- **1980's & afterward:**
 - Under intense American pressure on Russia, it sought to normalize ties with Beijing.
 - At the same time after the collapse of Soviet Union, failure to be part of the political west led Russia to build a stronger partnership with China.

Indo-Russia Relations:

- Sino-Russia split opened space for Delhi against Beijing after the 1962 war.
- In the 1960-70s, China strongly objected to Delhi's partnership with Moscow.
- Although the Indo-Russian strategic liaison endured but Delhi has to cope up with the share of problems.
- Delhi was always supported by Russia in the Kashmir issue by passing repeated veto in UNSC against Anglo-American interventions.
- India was anxious about the dangers of a potential US-Russian global condominium.
- Delhi was concerned about the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty made by US-Russia in 1960s that constrained India's all atomic options.
- Many Russian interventions regionally & globally such as Hungary, Afghanistan created political difficulties for India.
- India never relished Russia's ideas on "Asian Collective Security".

US-Russia Relations:

- Though today, Russia resents India's growing strategic warmth with the US, it has a long history of collaboration with the US.
- Russia & US were allies in WW2 & in constructing the Yalta system which is the basis for the current world order.
- By the late 1940s, Alliance between Russia & US degenerated into a Cold War.
- But by 1960s, Russia's willingness for peaceful coexistence with America led both to laid foundations for nuclear arms control & sought to develop a new framework for shared global leadership.

Sino-US:

- In early 1950s, China fought a very costly Korean war with the US.
- But to counter the perceived Russian threat in 1971, China reached out the US for an alliance.
- In the 1970s China was even more visceral in its denunciation of the US-Soviet détente but leaning more towards the US.
- China's focus on building a solid economic partnership with the US & the West helped accelerate China's rise as a great power.

Current & Future trend:

- Today China's economy is 9 times larger than Russia which reminds us that power balances will inevitably change over time.
- Although both China & Russia, which raised their disagreements on India joining an "Asian Nato", are always trying to seek special bilateral relationships with the US.
- The twists & turns in the triangular dynamic between the US, Russia & China remind us that neither they are going to be best friends nor will their ties remain permanently frozen.
- In the last few years, India finally over its historic hesitation for the US partnership & also intensified its efforts to woo European powers like France & UK.
- India also expanding its ties with Asian powers like Japan, Korea & Australia.
- The only trouble for India's upswing in bilateral ties is with China.

Conclusion:

Delhi has successfully managed the changing dynamics between great powers and is now even better positioned to deal with potential changes among the great powers because of India's economic size i.e 6th in the world & a more broad-based foreign policy.

THE ORDINANCE ROUTE IS BAD, RE-PROMULGATION WORSE

Governments, Centre and State, are resorting to the practice which is a usurpation of legislative power by the executive

GS 2: Polity & Governance**Context:**

- The central government has re-promulgated the ordinance that establishes a commission for air quality management in the National Capital Region, or the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020.
- This raises questions about the practice of issuing ordinances to make law, and that of re-issuing ordinances without getting them ratified by Parliament.

Ordinance in Indian Constitution:

- Article 123 deals with the ordinance making power of the President. President has many legislative powers and this power is one of them.
- The Constitution permits the central and State governments to make laws when Parliament (or the State Legislature) is not in session for urgent requirements with an automatic expiry date of 6 weeks from next meet.
- In the Constituent Assembly, while there was a discussion on how long the ordinance could remain valid (with some members asking for it to lapse within four weeks of promulgation as that would be sufficient time to call an urgent session of Parliament), no one raised the possibility of an ordinance to be re-promulgated. Perhaps such an eventuality was beyond their imagination.

What the data show

- Whereas an ordinance was originally conceived as an emergency provision, it was used fairly regularly.
 - In the 1950s, central ordinances were issued at an average of 7.1 per year.
 - The number peaked in the 1990s at 19.6 per year, and declined to 7.9 per year in the 2010s.
 - The last couple of years has seen a spike, 16 in 2019, 15 in 2020, and four till now this year.
- State governments also used this provision very often. The issue was brought up in the Supreme Court through a writ petition by D.C. Wadhwa, a professor of economics, who discovered this fact when he was researching land tenures.
 - He found out that Bihar had issued 256 ordinances between 1967 and 1981, of which 69 were repromulgated several times, including 11 which were kept alive for more than 10 years.
- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in 1986, ruled that repromulgation of ordinances was contrary to the Constitutional scheme.

- It would enable the Executive to transgress its constitutional limitation in the matter of law making in an emergent situation and to covertly and indirectly arrogate to itself the law making function of the Legislature.
- **Interestingly, the Court pointed out that there was not a single instance of the President (i.e., the central government) repromulgating an ordinance.**
- The judgment did not stop the practice. Instead, the Centre also started to follow the lead of Bihar.
 - For example, in 2013 and 2014, the Securities Laws (Amendment) ordinance was promulgated three times.
 - Similarly, an ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act was issued in December 2014, and repromulgated twice – in April and May 2015.

An unconstitutional practice

- The matter came up again in the Supreme Court, and in January 2017, a seven-judge Constitution Bench declared this practice to be unconstitutional.
 - The judgment concluded that, "Re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the Constitution and a subversion of democratic legislative processes."
- Even this judgment has been ignored.
 - The Indian Medical Council Amendment Ordinance was issued in September 2018, and reissued in January 2019, as it was passed by only one House of Parliament in the intervening session.
 - The current case of the Commission for Air Quality Management is even more egregious. While the ordinance of October 2020 was laid in Parliament on the first day of the recent Budget Session, a Bill to replace it was not introduced.
- States have also been using the ordinance route to enact laws.
 - For example, in 2020, Kerala issued 81 ordinances, while Karnataka issued 24 and Maharashtra 21.
 - Kerala has also repromulgated ordinances: one ordinance to set up a Kerala University of Digital Sciences, Innovation and Technology has been promulgated five times between January 2020 and February 2021.

Onus on legislatures, courts

- The legal position is clear, and has been elucidated by constitution Benches of the Supreme Court.
- Repromulgation is not permitted as that would be a usurpation of legislative power by the executive.
- As governments, both at the Centre and States, are violating this principle, the legislatures and the courts should check the practice.
- That is what separation of powers and the concept of checks and balances means.
- By not checking this practice, the other two organs are also abdicating their responsibility to the Constitution

A PATENTLY WRONG REGIME

Over the last few decades, intellectual property rules have served as a lethal barrier to the right to access healthcare

GS 2: Government Policies & Interventions

Context:

- Even an unprecedented pandemic can do little, it appears, to upset the existing global regime governing monopoly rights over the production and distribution of life-saving drugs.
- Intellectual property rules that have served as a lethal barrier to the right to access healthcare over the last few decades.
- The neo-liberal order, under which these laws exist, is so intractable today that a matter as seemingly simple as a request for a waiver on patent protections is seen as a claim unworthy of exception.

Request for waiver

- On October 2 last year, India and South Africa submitted a joint petition to the World Trade Organization (WTO), requesting a temporary suspension of rules under the 1995 Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- A waiver was sought to the extent that the protections offered by TRIPS impinged on the containment and treatment of COVID-19.
- The request for waiver has, since, found support from more than 100 nations.
- But a small group of states — the U.S., the European Union, the U.K. and Canada among them — continues to block the move.
- Their reluctance comes despite these countries having already secured the majority of available vaccines, with the stocks that they hold far exceeding the amounts necessary to inoculate the whole of their populations.
- Reports suggest that for most poor countries it would take until at least 2024 before widespread vaccination is achieved.
- A patent is a conferral by the state of an exclusive right to make, use and sell an inventive product or process.
- Patent laws are usually justified on three distinct grounds:
 - On the idea that people have something of a natural and moral right to claim control over their inventions;
 - On the utilitarian premise that exclusive licenses promote invention and therefore benefit society as a whole; and
 - On the belief that individuals must be allowed to benefit from the fruits of their labour and merit, that when a person toils to produce an object, the toil and the object become inseparable.
- Each of these justifications has long been a matter of contest, especially in the application of claims of monopoly over pharmaceutical drugs and technologies.

A new world order

- In India, the question of marrying the idea of promoting invention and offering exclusive rights over medicines on the one hand with the state's obligation of ensuring that every person has equal access to basic healthcare on the other has been a source of constant tension.
- The colonial-era laws that the country inherited expressly allowed for pharmaceutical patents.
- But in 1959, a committee chaired by Justice N. Rajagopala Ayyangar objected to this on ethical grounds.

- The committee found that foreign corporations used patents, and injunctions secured from courts, to suppress competition from Indian entities, and thus, medicines were priced at exorbitant rates.
- To counter this trend, the committee suggested, and Parliament put this into law through the Patents Act, 1970, that monopolies over pharmaceutical drugs be altogether removed, with protections offered only over claims to processes.
- This change in rule allowed generic manufacturers in India to grow.
- As a result, life-saving drugs were made available to people at more affordable prices.
- The ink had barely dried on the new law, though, when negotiations had begun to create a WTO that would write into its constitution a binding set of rules governing intellectual property.
- It was believed that a threat of sanctions, to be enforced through a dispute resolution mechanism, would dissuade states from reneging on their promises and with the advent in 1995 of the TRIPS agreement this belief proved true.
- It was only when Indian companies began to manufacture generic versions of these medicines, which was made possible because obligations under TRIPS hadn't yet kicked in against India, that the prices came down.

Refuting objections

- Instead, two common arguments are made in response to objections against the prevailing patent regime.
 - One, that unless corporations are rewarded for their inventions, they would be unable to recoup amounts invested by them in research and development.
 - Two, that without the right to monopolise production there will be no incentive to innovate.
- Both of these claims have been refuted time and again.
- Most recently, it has been reported that the technology involved in producing the Moderna vaccine in the U.S. emanated out of basic research conducted by the National Institutes of Health, a federal government agency, and other publicly funded universities and organisations.
- Similarly, public money accounted for more than 97% of the funding towards the development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
- It's also been clear for some time now that its research is usually driven towards diseases that afflict people in the developed world.
- Therefore, the claim that a removal of patents would somehow invade on a company's ability to recoup costs is simply untrue.
- The second objection — the idea that patents are the only means available to promote innovation — has become something of a dogma.
- The economist Joseph Stiglitz is one of many who has proposed a prize fund for medical research in place of patents.
 - A system that replaces patents with prizes will be "more efficient and more equitable", in that incentives for research will flow from public funds while ensuring that the biases associated with monopolies are removed.

Conclusion

- The unequal vaccine policy put in place by the Indian state is indefensible.
- But at the same time, we cannot overlook the need for global collective action.

- If nation states are to act as a force of good, they must each attend to the demands of global justice.
- The pandemic has demonstrated to us just how iniquitous the existing world order is.
- We cannot continue to persist with rules granting monopolies which place the right to access basic healthcare in a position of constant peril

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

COVID is an opportunity to make structural changes to our largest health insurance & pension schemes

GS2: Issues related to Health sector & Public Policy

Context:

- COVID-19 reminded the world that a modern state is a welfare state, where it witnessed 1500+ new social protection programmes in 2020 & also reinforced the importance of resources.

Editorial Insights:

- For India, the sustainability of social security lies in raising its per-capita GDP ranking from 138.
 - The need is to reform India's two biggest health insurance & pension schemes.
 - Both Employee State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) & Employee Provident Fund (EPF) have hostages rather than clients with no option of opting out or choosing an alternative.
 - Since the 1950s, though touted as employee welfare schemes, both had failed in serving their clients in times of crisis.

About ESIS & EPF:

Employee State Insurance Scheme:

- It is India's richest & biggest health insurance scheme with 13 crore people covered & Rs.80000 crore in cash.
- Employers with more than 10 employees make a mandatory 4% payroll deduction for employees earning up to Rs.21000/month.
 - Despite that its coverage is limited to only 10% of India's population,

Employee Provident Fund:

- It is India's biggest pension scheme with a Rs.12 lakh crore corpus & 6.5 crore contributors.
- Employers with more than 20 employees make mandatory 24 % payroll deductions for employees earning up to Rs 15000/month.
 - Despite that it covers 10% of India's labour force.

Need for Reforms:

- The coverage ratio of ESIS is only 10% of India's population & coverage ratio of EPF is only 10% of the total labour force.
 - Among them 60% of accounts & 50 % of registered employers are inactive.
- ESIC's unspent reserves are larger than India's healthcare budgetary allocation.
- EPF's 1991 creation of a defined benefit component can now only be made solvent with an unfair benefit cut Or taxpayer haircut.
- Despite EPF administrative costs make it the world's most expensive govt securities mutual fund still, its services are poor & use outdated technology.
- There is a need for updating the risk-sharing framework in societies because current structures are breaking up
 - Due to changing roles of women
 - Longer careers
 - Disruptive technologies.

- Hyper-Globalisation.
- There is a need for nuanced social security redistribution across time, incomes & financial burden-bearing.
- The need is to have the political will in fixing the problems of EPF & ESIS but not to go behind unaffordable universal basic income proposals.

Issues with Current System:

- Poor coverage ratios.
- High costs including administrative costs.
- Unsatisfied customers.
- Metrics confused with goals.
- Jail provisions.
- Excessive corruption & low expertise
- Rude & Unaccountable staff.
- Lack of competition in the market.

The above problems can't be solved by using technical solutions but can be solved by adaptive solutions such as The Three Reforms.

The Three Reforms:

- **Structure:**
 - The combined roles of policymaker, regulator & service providers have been hampering the delivery potential of both EPF & ESIS.
 - Splitting roles is a precondition for performance because goals strategy & skills are different.
 - An independent policymaker would strive for more than a 10% coverage ratio.
 - An independent regulator would ensure the balancing of the claims ratio.
 - An independent service provider would invest heavily in technology & skill development.
 - It would lead to completion from NPS for EPF.
 - Ending VIP opt-out by merging CGHS with ESIS.
 - Raising enforceability by making EPF contribution voluntary.
 - Improving portability by de-linking accounts from employers.
 - Targeting Universalisation by simultaneously ending minimum employer head-count & introducing absolute contribution caps.
- **Governance:**
 - The large governing boards of ESIS & EPFO have hampered meaningful discussions, making decisions & exercising oversight.
 - The need is to fill this governance deficit by
 - Smaller boards with less than 15 members.
 - Age limits of 70 years.
 - Term limits of 10 years.
 - Domain Expertise.
 - Active sub-committees.
 - Providing Real powers.
- **Leadership:**
 - The present leadership of generalist bureaucrats has to be changed with professional chief executives because health & pensions need skills that developed over time

Conclusion:

Equality is democracy's fundamental premise. India's democracy has been better at the complex trade-offs that create equality, though the gap remains. Social security can blunt structural & COVID inequality

when combined with complementary policies like formalisation, financialisation & better governance. The non-fiscal reforms of EPFO & ESIS are a great place to start for structural changes that ensures equality as well as equity.

COVID-19 & MIGRANT LABOURERS

Livelihoods can save lives

Existing government programmes cannot provide gainful employment opportunities to migrants at their native places. Government must think out-of-the-box for a special package

GS2: Issues related to Vulnerable & Public Policy.

Context:

- With COVID-19 hitting India like a tsunami, and the health infrastructure caving on, the country is once again staring at the issue of lives & livelihoods

Editorial Insights:

Migrant Labourers in India:

- They contribute significantly to India's GDP.
- In India, 90% of the labour force is employed in the informal sector, where 75% are migrants.
 - They manage most of the essential services such as construction etc.
- As of 2020, India has nearly 600 million internal migrants.

Migrant crisis due to COVID-19:

- Before the 2nd COVID wave, Though India is gradually returning to the "new normal", it cannot forget the distressing images of hungry migrant workers walking back to hometowns.
- During lockdown & shutdowns of factories & workplaces,
 - Millions of migrant workers lost their jobs
 - Forcing them & their family to go hungry.
 - Many migrants were arrested for breaking the lockdown rules.
 - Many on their walk back, died from dehydration & accidents.
- Since partition, it was the second-largest population displacement in India.
 - It displaced nearly 200 million migrants.
- The Vulnerable circular migrants were the worst-hit class.
 - Because of their weak position in the market & their seasonal movements between urban-rural.
 - They work in construction sites & as rickshaw pullers.
- Migrants due to their informal nature are often denied adequate healthcare, nutrition, housing & sanitation facilities.
- The majority of them have no savings & resides in slums & dormitories.

Livelihood status of migrants at Native place:

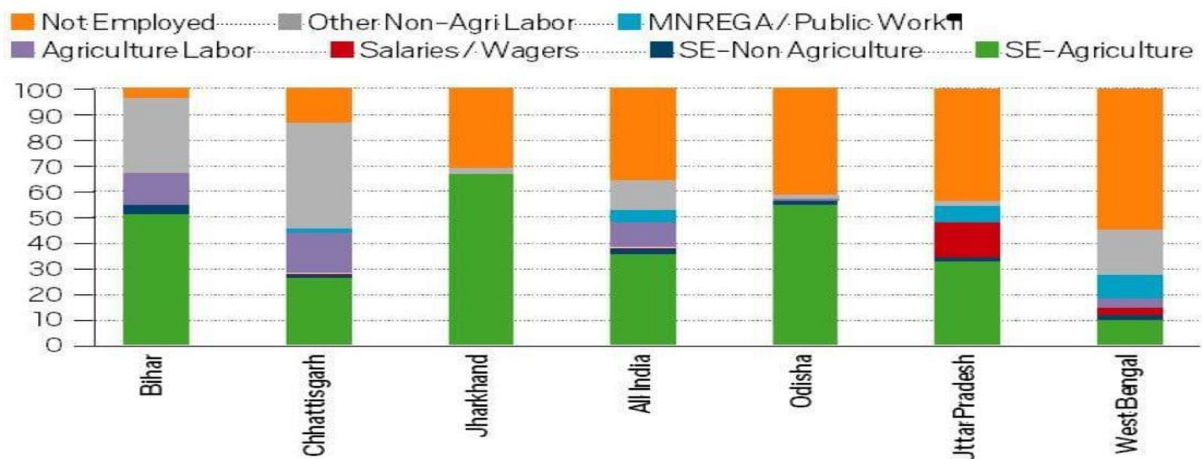
During the COVID crisis in 2020, the ISS&RF in collaboration with ICRIER surveyed the employment status of migrants at their native places from 6 states- UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha & Bengal.

The survey revealed following:

- These 6 states covered 2/3rd of migrant workers at an all-India level.
- Among the Migrants who left cities & industrial towns for their native villages & small towns
 - 35.4% had unemployed.
 - 35.8% involved in agriculture as self-employed labour.
 - 9.7% worked as agri-labour
 - 4.6% in MNREGA & other public works.

- 12.2% as casual workers.
- The employment pattern at native places across these states are also varied
 - Bihar migrants had the least unemployment (3.6%), whereas Bengal migrants had the highest (54%)
 - In self-employed agriculture, Jharkhand employed 67%, While Bengal as employed very low about 10%.
- As the result of this migration, Change in nature of employment-unemployment led to a Massive fall in average family income of about 86%.
- This prompted the return of 63% of migrants back to cities after the end of lockdown.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MIGRANTS AT NATIVE PLACE AFTER REVERSE MIGRATION RESULTING FROM 1ST WAVE OF COVID-19



Government Steps in this regard:

- Indian govt came out with many schemes for its migrant population.
 - It announced a Rs 1.7 lakh crore spending plan for the poor that consisted of cash transfers & other food security measures.
 - Under MGNREGA, the average daily wages were increased from Rs 182 to Rs 202.
 - Nearly, Rs 1000 crore from the PM CARES Fund has been allocated for migrant's welfare.
 - Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, govt provided free food grains to 80 million migrant workers.
- Govts with SC directions provided stranded migrant workers with free food, shelter, & transport.
- Center issued an order instructing landlords not to demand rent during the lockdown period.

Shortfalls in Govt efforts:

- The intended govt efforts such as food security schemes have not reached the large chunk of migrant workers.
 - Because of the inaccessibility of fair-price stores during the lockdown.
- SC also admitted that the migrant's issues had not been addressed & there had been "inadequacies & certain lapses" on govt's part.
- The transportation of stranded migrants met with issues of poor conditions in buses & higher fares charged.
- At the same time, SC denied a plea requiring payment of the minimum wages to labourers.

What survey reveals of Govt efforts:

- The survey indicates that existing govt programmes failed to provide employment opportunities to the migrants at their native places.
- MGNREGA as a strategy failed to provide employment, only 7.7% of migrants are employed, because
 - It has not reached some rural places.
 - Uninterested among migrants in MGNREGA.
- It also revealed that only 1.75% of migrants had Jan Dhan accounts & 28% other bank accounts.
- Migrants benefitting from any of the govt loan schemes were abysmally low at 1% & skill development was at 2%.

What govt should now?

- **Short-term:**
 - Scaling up its "one nation, one ration card" scheme & make subsidized grains available at places of work in cities.
 - The overflowing grain stocks in the govt godowns may be useful to distribute a part of this to benefit migrants rather than incurring high costs of maintaining these stocks.
 - Financial assistance under the Garib Kalyan Yojana can also be extended to migrants & putting them under some group medical insurance protects them against the COVID onslaught.
 - India needs to have a robust database of migrants.
- **Long-term:**
 - A special package for Eastern India, based on infrastructure & industrial development.
 - Engaging returning migrants in building new agri-value chains have the potential to create productive employment & protect livelihoods.

Conclusion:

Without adequate support, migrants cannot able to survive this crisis. India's failure to provide basic needs for the migrants has marginalized them & created deep mistrust in government efforts. It is high time govt should come with an out-of-the-box plan to protect the livelihoods and lives of the migrants.

GENERAL STUDIES-3

FOREST FIRES

Why forest fires break out in the spring, and why they have been so frequent this year

GS 3: Disaster & Disaster Management (Forest Fires)

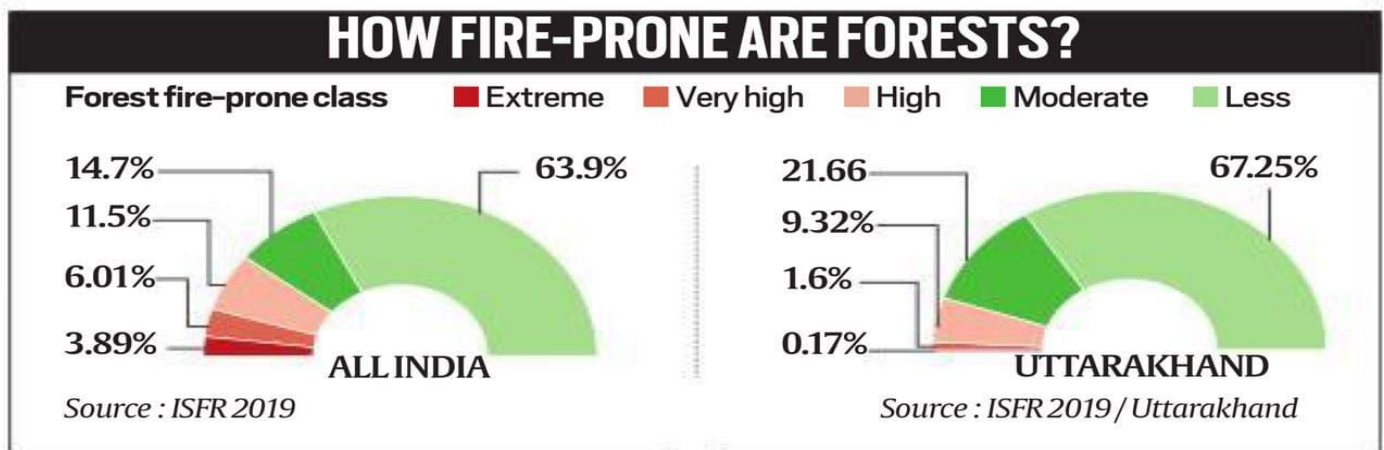
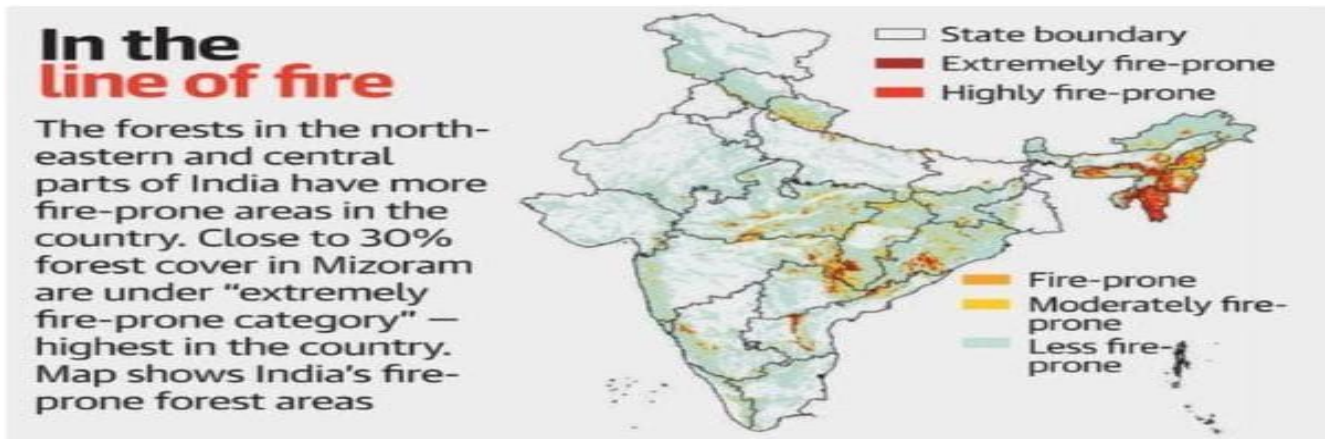
CONTEXT:

- In the past(April 4th), Uttarakhand witnessed over 45 forest fires & reached out for Centre for help.
- Recently forest fires broke out in Simlipal Nation park(Odisha), Bandhavgarh forest reserve (MP).

India & Forest fires:

- As per Forest Report 2019, India has total forest & tree cover of 24.56% of total geographical area.
- The report indicates that many of the India states are highly prone to forest fires ranging from extremely prone(North Eastern states) to very highly prone(Central & Southern Indian states).
- The area under forest fire prone is 26.2% of total forest cover.
- Himalayan states such as Uttarakhand & Himachal Pradesh are most affected with frequent forest fires annually.

- Among others, Uttarakhand that has forest cover of over 45% of the geographical area has been witnessed over 1000 forest fire incidents over last 6 months.



Causes of Forest Fires:

Forest fires are caused by both Natural & Anthropogenic causes.

- Natural causes:**
 - In areas like Uttarakhand, lack of soil moisture coupled with deficient rainfall than avg seen as key factor.
 - Lightning is another factor that sets fire in deciduous forests.
 - High temperatures with low humidity offer favourable conditions for forest fires.
 - Climate change can be seen as cause & effect of forest fires across globally
 - Higher frequency, Highly inflammable nature, increasing intensity of long duration forest fires are all linked to climate change.
 - Also India witness major forest fires in March & April when forests are full with dry dead woods, leaves & grass which act as easy trigger to initiate fire.
- Anthropogenic causes:**
 - Many major fires in India are triggered by human activities such as
 - Discarded matchstick, cigarette butt, electric spark or any source of ignition that is due to deliberate or carelessness will also cause forest fire.

- In recent simlipal forest fire, locals in order to collect mahua flowers set fire to dry leaves that led to massive forest fire.
- Since ages even though Indian forests are affected by forest fires, but the problem has been aggravated with
 - Rising human & cattle population led to increasing demand for grazing, forest products & shifting cultivation.

Challenges in controlling forest fires:

- Terrain & topographical barrier to carry out large operations.
- Lack of adequate fire staff at highly prone regions.
- Huge gaps in timely mobilization of forest staff & equipment through thick forests.
- Infrastructural bottlenecks in using heavy water vehicles.
- High wind speed & wind direction creates major hurdles in controlling forest fires.

Consequences of Forest Fires:

- Forests major role in mitigation & adaption in climate change will be adversely affected by forest fires.
- It leads to degradation of forest ecosystem causing wide range of adverse impacts
 - India, where 1.7 lakh villages livelihood depended on forests for timber, fodder etc will be highly affected.
 - Heat generated during fires destroys animals habitats & may led to their extinction.
 - Soil quality decrease due to changing soil moisture & fertility, in totality they impacts soil productivity.
 - It also decreases carbon sink resources & increase CO₂ in the atmosphere.
 - Thereby changing microclimate of the area & also depleting ozone layer.

Steps taken to control forest fires:

- In 2004, FSI developed forest fire alert system to monitor forest fires in real time.
- In 2019, the above system is upgraded & now uses Satellite information.
- Using MODIS sensors, FSI gathers real time information of the identified fire hotspots.
- **National Action Plan on Forest Fires, 2018**
 - To revamp forest fires management in the country.
 - With an aim to Inform, Enable & Empower forest fringe communities and incentivizing them to work in collaboration with forest departments.
- **Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme:**
 - Centrally funded initiative to assist states in tackling forest fires.

Way Forward:

Even though forest fires mainly happen in dry seasons but to prevent its adverse impacts, adequate precautions has to be taken.

- Increasing the fire staff numbers.
- Upgrading fire fighters gear & equipment in effectively tackling forest fires.
- Taking stringent actions against violation of norms around forest regions.
- Increasing disaster management funds mainly for forest fires that will help states to carry effective mitigate & adaptive actions.
- Systems of early warning need to be developed by integrating ground based detection with satellite based alert systems.
- A holistic and comprehensive national policy is needed to consolidate existing guidelines that aligns with climate change policies.

- Awareness generation & sensitisation of local communities needed to be done in order to ensure community's actions will not damage forest health & ecosystem.

GST ON FUEL: A PRICE VS REVENUE TRADE-OFF

GS 3: Indian Economy & Resource Mobilisation (GST)

Context:

- In the backdrop of rapid rising fuel prices, the Author (BJP MP) opines that merely bringing petrol and diesel to the ambit of GST will not lower fuel prices unless Union and State governments take revenue cuts.

Background:

- **About GST**
 - GST is a destination based indirect tax introduced by the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act.
- **Tax subsumed under GST at State level :**
 - State VAT
 - Entertainment tax
 - Octroi and Entry tax
 - Luxury tax
 - Taxes on lottery, betting and gambling
- **Tax subsumed under GST at Central level**
 - Central Excise duty
 - Additional Excise duty
 - Service tax
 - Additional Customs duty
- **Taxes not subsumed under GST**
 - Property tax and Stamp duty
 - Electricity duty
 - Excise duty on Alcohol
 - Basic custom duty
 - Taxes on Petroleum crude, Diesel and Natural Gas

Current Position in India

- In the current fiscal year, Centre and states are expected to earn around 5.5 lakh crore by way of revenue from Petrol and diesel.
- Out of the Central levy on Petrol and Diesel, the following two components forms part of divisible pool of taxes between centre and states:
 - Basic excise duty
 - Special additional excise duty.
- The following levies imposed on petrol and Diesel are completely retained by the centre and exclusively used for the purpose behind the cess.
 - Road and infrastructure cess
 - Agriculture Infrastructure and development cess.

International scenario

- In **European Union**, these products are subjected to plethora of levies like VAT, storage levies, environmental taxes and such taxes range from 45 to 60 percent.
- In **Canada**, petroleum products are charged around 15 percent GST in addition to the 25 to 30 percent levied per liter

Problems being faced in bringing petrol and Diesel under ambit of GST

- Due to the imposition of multiple levies on Petrol and diesel, bringing it under 28 percent levy of GST would result in significant loss of revenue to states and Centre.
- Fixing the slab rate is an issue once brought under ambit of GST, since States are reluctant to lose any revenue.
- Absence of Compensation mechanism in case of fall of revenue of states by way of including petrol and Diesel under GST

Way Forward:

- Rather than indirect taxes, steps are to be taken to increase the direct tax base by way of reforms like
 - Electronic tax filling system.
 - Reducing the threshold for cash transactions
 - A suitable compensation mechanism is to be worked out by states in case of short fall of revenue due to the inclusion of Petrol and Diesel in GST.

LWE & DEVELOPING A COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

Any strategy to counter left-wing extremism would need to have the dual objective of defeating the insurgents militarily and fully quelling insurgent impulses.

GS3: Linkages between Development and Spread of Left Wing Extremism.

Context:

- In the backdrop of recent killing of 22 security personnel by Maoists, Author discusses about counterinsurgency framework that is to be adopted.

Background:

- Left wing extremism is a form of armed insurgency against the state motivated by leftist ideologies.
- They reject parliamentary democracy and aim at waging a war against the government.
- Maoists, one of the extremist groups derive their ideology from Maoism, a form of communism backed by Mao Zedong of China.

Editorial Analysis

- In the past few years, Maoist violence is decreasing owing to the factors like increase in arrests and surrenders.
- However, the drop in violence can be attributed to tactical withdrawal by Maoists and the recent attack stands as a wakeup call.
- Maoists key strength include
 - Efficient intelligence network
 - Devolution of authority to local commanders

- Support of local tribes
- Domination of local landscape

Nature of the strategy to be adopted

- One school of thought believes that people centric approach is to be adopted by winning the hearts and minds thus avoiding coercive action.
- Another school of thought believes that enemy centric approach need to be adopted and the success of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh can be attributed to the enemy-centric approach.
- States need to rise tactical forces like Greyhounds to counter the attacks being made by the maoists.
- States must also coordinate with each other since better coordination acts as a deterrent for the Maoists to move from one state to another during attacks.

GOVT STRATEGY

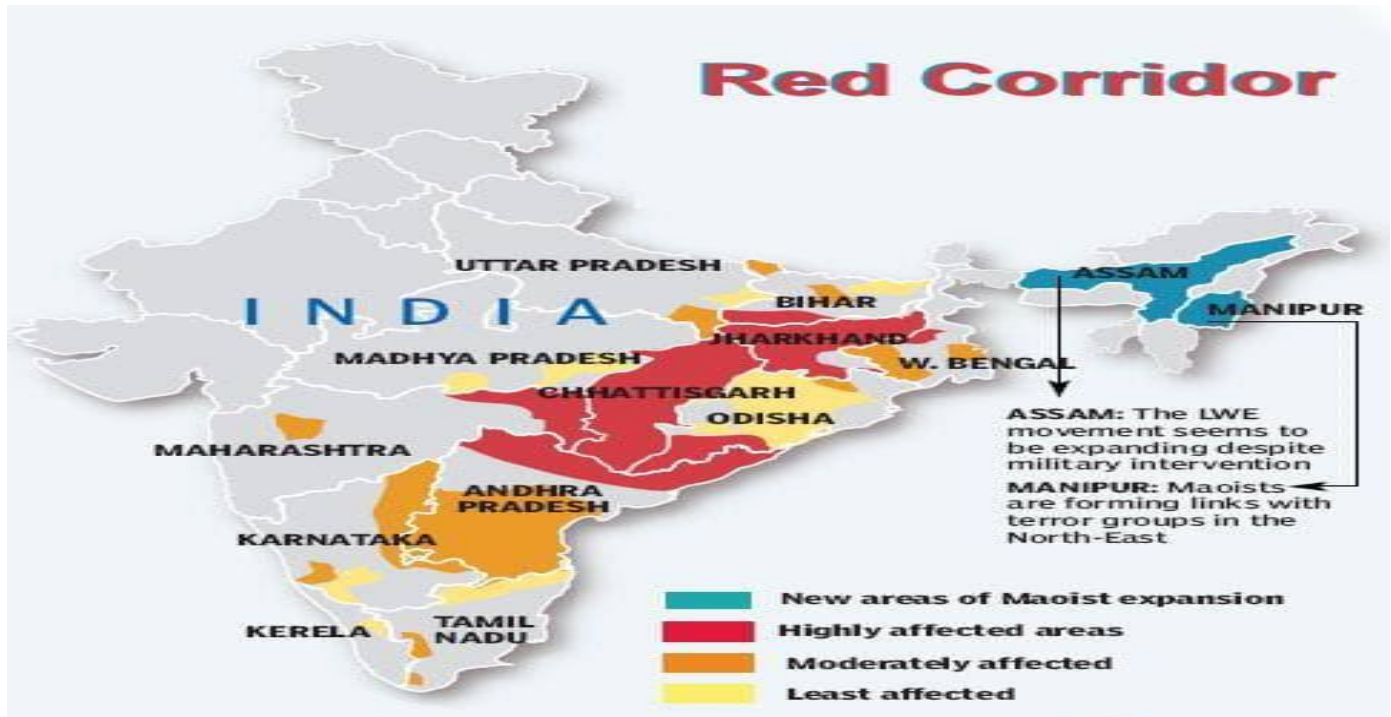
- **SAMADHAN doctrine** comprises of the short-term policy to long-term policy formulated at different levels to tackle Left Wing Extremism.
- **SAMADHAN** stands for-
 - **S**- Smart Leadership,
 - **A**- Aggressive Strategy,
 - **M**- Motivation and Training,
 - **A**- Actionable Intelligence,
 - **D**- Dashboard Based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)
 - **H**- Harnessing Technology,
 - **A**- Action plan for each Theatre,
 - **N**- No access to Financing.
- Other steps taken
 - Special Central Assistance for improving the public infrastructure.
 - Road Connectivity Project for better access to town centers and improving livelihood opportunities.
 - Educational initiatives like Eklavya model school for the development of tribal areas.

Way forward

- Institutional overhaul is needed to for defeating the insurgents militarily and quelling the insurgent impulses.
- States should rationalise the surrender policy in order to bring innocent individuals caught in the trap of Left wing extremism to mainstream.

Value Additional Matter:

- Left-wing extremisms also known by Naxalism in India that originated in Naxal Bari village of West Bengal, now spread across 11 states infamously known as "Red Corridor"
- After the consolidation in 2004 of all fringe groups associated with left wing, a single all-India wide outfit known as Communist Party of India(Maoist) emerged.
 - It is the major, left wing outfit that is responsible for majority of violent incidents involving killing of civilians & security forces.
 - The objective is to wage an armed revolution and overthrow existing democratic state structure with violence as their main weapon inorder to usher formation of their own government.



Current state of Left Wing Extremism in India:

- According to Min of Home Affairs, in India 90 districts across 11 states are affected by LWE.
 - But the geographical spread of LWE violence has also shrunk considerably to 60 dist in 2018
 - At same time, arc of violence has been restricted to just 30 districts accounting for 89% LWE violence.
 - Where majority of incidents are hovering around Gadchiroli, Dantewada, Bastar, Sukma & Bijapur dists.
 - In the last decades number of persons that has been killed more than 1500 but there has been a gradual decrease in intensity of deaths.

Causes of LWE:

- Economic development under five plan led to the formation of the growth poles restricted only to some urban areas that led to unequal development.
- Alienation of Forest Land because failure of land reforms and harassment of govt servants.
- Agrarian development policies focused on improving output without reducing economic and social disparity.
- Industrial developments policies helped the capitalists to exploit tribal of their rights & resources.
- Lack of basic infrastructure required for the developments to connect these remote areas with dist headquarters, helped extremists to thrive.
- The skilled human resource deficit such as doctors, teachers etc led to further deprivation of these areas.
- Inaccessibility of government schemes & presence of parallel governments in the remote region hindered state led development

Steps taken:

• Security Led Measures:

- Specialised anti-naxal forces like Black panther, Greyhounds etc have been established with multi-disciplinary groups of officers from various agencies.

- Central govt under Security Related Expenditure(SRE) scheme, reimburses security related expenditure relating to various state requirements.
- To LWE affected states center is providing CAPFs, UAVs, funds for modernization of state police forces, intelligence sharing etc
- **Development Related Measures:**
 - Implementation of Infrastructural Development schemes such a Road Connectivity Project, Universal Service Obligation Fund(USOF) to provide connectivity & mobile services in LWE affected areas.
 - Skill development measures such as ROSHINI under DDU Grameen Kaushal Yojana for training & placement of rural poor youth.
 - Increasing thrust for financial inclusion & opening up of Livelihood centers in the region
- **Confidence Building Measures:**
 - Since 2011 to bridge gaps between security forces & local people Civil Action Programme has been implemented.
 - Surrender & rehabilitation policies such as imparting vocational training to eligible surrenderees.

Way forward:

- Consensus based approach needed to pursue against the extremists.
- A permanent institutional mechanism in the form of a coordination center can be established to even out the differences between center & state.
- Augmenting the capacities of the police force against Maoist violence will be key to neutralize.
- Govt need to focus on development tools that redistributes the resources without disparity.
- Development must operate in tandem with the security forces. Such as resumption of administrative activity should immediately follow the clearing of an area by the forces.
- Holding elections for institutions of local self-government in the affected areas followed by the strengthening of these institutions with additional financial and decision-making powers is a necessity.
- Success of security force operations need to be based on the concept of just war that strives to do the maximum to avoid collateral damage.
- Government needs to stay away from propagandist claims about winning the war in quick time.

Conclusion:

To prevent spread of Naxalism, the best strategic response would be to work with civil society actors to counter the Naxal narrative & ideology, which requires re-conceptualization of the counter strategy. Consensus based approach needs to be arrived that can serve as force-multiplier for the security forces. With the effective implementation of SAMADHAN approach left wing extremism will be contended.

NET ZERO AND CLIMATE INJUSTICE

The emissions target delays climate action by developed countries and is being used to transfer burdens to developing countries.

GS 3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution & Degradation

CONTEXT:

- Recent push of developed nations for net zero emissions by 2050 as panacea for the climate change evils started debates surrounding it.

What is Climate Justice?

- It is to ensure fair & equitable distribution of resources to all sections of society & to pass on planet in a sustainable condition to future generations.

Need for Climate Justice:

- The historical differences in contribution to climate change.
- Variations in the Technological, Economical & Societal capabilities.
- Uneven distribution & utilization of resources across nations.
- Inorder to ensure balanced growth opportunities for late runners.

Climate Actions & UNFCCC:

- The principles of equity & common but differentiated responsibilities & respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) based on historical responsibilities have been bedrock of climate actions of UNFCCC since 1992.
- The 1997 Kyoto protocol was a historic turning point with legally binding targets for industrialised countries to reduce overall GHG emissions.
- Paris Agreement was a forward march for global communities in climate justice sphere where
 - Developed countries pledged to take not only mitigation actions but also deliver & facilitate higher financial commitments & technological regime by 2025.
 - While developing countries agreed to take legal obligated domestic mitigation measures & reporting their National Determined Contributions (NDC).
- But the idea of net zero emissions as panacea for climate change evils undermines the basic tenets of UNFCCC & Climate Actions achievements.

India & Climate Justice:

- At the Paris COP, with India's articulation Climate Justice was inscribed in the preamble of the Paris agreement.
- India has been forerunner in introducing Climate sensitivity in domestic policies such as Energy & housing for all, Health & Crop insurances etc that ensure climate justice to the vulnerable worst affected by climate change.
- India became part of climate justice discourse due to its efforts to balance sustainable living & safety nets for poor.

The three aspects of Climate Justice:

- **Distributive Justice:** Resources distribution based on Principles of Equality, Equity & Merit.
 - Global Carbon Space is an important resource of the climate change.
 - Despite responsible for large part build up in greenhouse gases by industrialization, Developed nations still continue to corner out larger carbon space for their luxurious consumption.
 - While historically, developing countries suffering disproportionately and now under obligation to cut down emissions emitting from basic needs.
 - According to Climate action tracker, climate actions undertaken by developed nations are incompatible with Paris Agreement goals, therefore they should focus on ensuring ambitious climate actions to ensure distributive justice.
- **Commutative Justice:** Truly honouring past climate action commitments.
 - Even though second phase Kyoto protocol targets were inadequate & unambitious to meet UNFCCC objectives, but most developed nations backtracked & refused to take targets.
 - They even failed to meet their climate finance goal of mobilizing \$100 billion by 2020 to support climate actions.
 - Fulfillments of the past commitments are critical precursor for enhancement of climate ambitions.
- **Corrective Justice:** pertains to righting of wrongs.
 - Developed nations need to repay their climate debt by taking up greater mitigation responsibilities & providing finance & technology for safeguarding developing countries vulnerable & poor population.

Conclusion:

Though developed nations believe that net zero emissions by 2050 is a positive breakthrough in the climate regime, but on the other front it is a step to evade historical responsibilities of developed & transfer burdens on developing. It is high time for developing nations, that fought for enshrining principles of equity & CBDR-RC in Paris agreement, rising to the occasion & forcing developed nations to act responsibly.

WHY THE PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION BILL MATTERS

The proposed regime under the Bill seeks to be different from the existing regime which does not adequately protect users' data

GS 3- Cyber Security

Context:

- The pandemic has forced more people to participate in the digital economy.
- The recent alleged data breach at MobiKwik could stand to be India's biggest breach with the data of 9.9 crore users at risk.
- Robust data protection regimes are necessary to prevent such events and protect users' interests.

Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 or "Privacy Bill", inspired from a previous draft version prepared by a committee headed by retired Justice B N Srikrishna, now under scrutiny by a Joint Parliamentary Committee, could play a big role in providing robust protections to users and their personal data.

Decoding the data protection bill



WHAT IT MEANS FOR CONSUMERS

- **DATA** can be processed or shared by any entity only after consent.
- **SAFEGUARDS**, including penalties, introduced to prevent misuse of personal data.
- **ALL** data to be categorized under three heads—general, sensitive and critical.



THE GOVERNMENT & REGULATORY ROLE

- **GOVT** will have the power to obtain any user's non-personal data from companies.
- **THE** bill mandates that all financial and critical data has to be stored in India.
- **SENSITIVE** data has to be stored in India but can be processed outside with consent.



WHAT COMPANIES HAVE TO DO

- **SOCIAL** media firms to formulate a voluntary verification process for users.
- **SHARING** data without consent will entail a fine of ₹15 crore or 4% of global turnover.
- **DATA** breach or inaction will entail a fine of ₹5 crore or 2% of global turnover.

Source: Mint research

- The need for more robust data protection legislation came to the fore in 2017 post the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India that established the right to privacy as a fundamental right.

- It tries to protect individual rights by regulating the collection, movement, and processing of data that is personal, or which can identify the individual.
- The Bill gives the government powers to authorize the transfer of certain types of personal data overseas and has given exceptions allowing government agencies to collect personal data of citizens.
- The Bill divides the data into three categories:
 - Personal Data: Data from which an individual can be identified like name, address, etc.
 - Sensitive Personal Data: Some types of personal data like financial, health-related, sexual orientation, biometric, genetic, transgender status, caste, religious belief, and more.
 - It needs to be stored only in India and can be processed abroad only under certain conditions including approval of the Data Protection Agency (DPA).
 - Critical Personal Data: Anything that the government at any time can deem critical, such as military or national security data.
 - It must be stored and processed in India only.
- The bill removes the requirement of data mirroring (in case of personal data). Only individual consent for data transfer abroad is required.
 - Data mirroring is the act of copying data from one location to a storage device in real-time.

No effective protection

- Personal data in India is mainly governed by the Information Technology Act, 2000, and various other sectoral regulations.
- However, this data protection regime falls short of providing effective protection to users and their personal data.
- For instance, entities could override the protections in the regime by taking users' consent to processing personal data under broad terms and conditions.
 - This is problematic given that users might not understand the terms and conditions or the implications of giving consent.
- Further, the frameworks emphasize data security but do not place enough emphasis on data privacy.
- The data protection provisions under the IT Act also do not apply to government agencies. This creates a large vacuum for data protection when governments are collecting and processing large amounts of personal data.
- Finally, the regime seems to have become antiquated and inadequate in addressing risks emerging from new developments in data processing technology.

The upcoming regime

The proposed regime under the Bill seeks to be different from the existing regime in some prominent ways.

- First, the Bill seeks to apply the data protection regime to both government and private entities across all sectors.
- Second, the Bill seeks to emphasize data security and data privacy.
 - While entities will have to maintain security safeguards to protect personal data, they will also have to fulfill a set of data protection obligations and transparency and accountability

measures that govern how entities can process personal data to uphold users' privacy and interests.

- Third, the Bill seeks to give users a set of rights over their personal data and means to exercise those rights.
- Fourth, the Bill seeks to create an independent and powerful regulator known as the Data Protection Authority (DPA).
 - The DPA will monitor and regulate data processing activities to ensure their compliance with the regime.
 - More importantly, the DPA will give users a channel to seek redress when entities do not comply with their obligations under the regime.

Concerns over the Bill:

- For instance, under clause 35, the Central government can exempt any government agency from complying with the Bill.
- Government agencies will then be able to process personal data without following any safeguard under the Bill. This could create severe privacy risks for users.
- Similarly, users could find it difficult to enforce various user protection safeguards (such as rights and remedies) in the Bill.
 - For instance, the Bill threatens legal consequences for users who withdraw their consent for a data processing activity.
 - In practice, this could discourage users from withdrawing consent for processing activities they want to opt out of.
- Additional concerns also emerge for the DPA as an independent effective regulator that can uphold users' interests.

The way forward

- The time is ripe for India to have a robust data protection regime.
- The Joint Parliamentary Committee that is scrutinizing the Bill has proposed 86 amendments and one new clause to the Bill – although the exact changes are not in the public domain.
- The Committee is expected to submit its final report in the Monsoon Session of Parliament in 2021.
- Taking this time to make some changes in the Bill targeted towards addressing various concerns in it could make a stronger and more effective data protection regime.

AN OBITUARY FOR THE IPAB

Its tenure was a missed opportunity to develop the home-grown jurisprudence on patent law

GS 3: Intellectual Property Rights

Context:

- On April 4, the President of India signed the Tribunal Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021, shutting down the IPAB by amending the Copyright Act, 1957, the Patents Act, 1970 the Trade Marks Act, 1999, Geographical Indication of Goods Act, 2000, and the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001.

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- The demise of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB), India's specialist tribunal for determining disputes relating to intellectual property (IP) rights, is symbolic of its tenuous life.

Background:

- It was constituted on September 15, 2003 by the Indian Government to hear and resolve the appeals against the decisions of the registrar under the Indian Trademarks Act, 1999 and the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.
- Most of the significant amendments to the Patents Act since 1970 came through, not by way of an Act passed by Parliament, but through an ordinance.

Troubled life

- Ever since its creation, the IPAB has been treated like an unwanted child.
- Historically, appeals from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), rectification and revocation applications were heard by the various High Courts.
- However, the Patents (Amendment) Act of 2002 divested these powers from the High Courts and extended it to the IPAB.
- Though the patents side of the IPAB existed in theory since 2002, the Central government notified its functioning only in April 2007 after a rebuke from the Madras High Court.
- Even though the IPAB has not been performing its adjudicatory function on the patent side regularly due to administrative reasons, it certainly has been the subject matter of judicial review before the various High Courts.
 - These cases include a challenge to the constitutionality of the IPAB, petitions seeking filling up of vacancies before the High Court in Delhi and Chennai, and even a petition to the Supreme Court for extension of the term of the chairperson.
- After remaining headless for almost two years, in January 2018, the IPAB was given a head.
 - The then chairperson of the Appellate Tribunal for Forfeited Property was given additional charge.
 - However, there was a substantial delay in the start of hearing of patent cases due to a technical reason.
 - The appointment of the technical member for patents, with whom the chairperson sits while deciding cases on patents, who brings the much-needed technical expertise that patent cases usually demand, was delayed.
- The appointment of the technical member finally came last year after the government was sued by the Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association.
- IPAB's end was foreseen by the leaders who ran it.
 - Not only was the IPAB understaffed, with its administrative staff often being on deputation, it was also underpowered, at times quite literally.
 - The tribunal had to bear the brunt of the summer power cuts in Chennai.
 - Imagine the highest authority on protecting technology and innovation working through the scorching Chennai summer during power cuts without any viable backup.
- The IPAB's jurisdiction of cases was split between trademarks, patents, copyright, and geographical indication, where the predominant business pertained to trademarks.
- Not only did the IPAB juggle its time with the different forms of IP, but it also had sittings in five different cities, with just one chairperson who had to fly between them at times.

- The chairperson had to summon parties and papers to all these cities, which came at a substantial cost to the public.
- In any case, the disposal rate for patents at the IPAB did not justify its continuance.
- Patent disputes owing to their technological complexity were the IPAB's predominant time-consuming business after trademarks.
- Nearly 70% of the patent cases filed were either pending at some stage or yet to be taken up for hearing.
- After the IPAB was set up, not more than 15 cases were transferred from all the High Courts to the IPAB.
- Going by this disposal rate, it would have taken another decade to dispose of the pending applications, leave alone the new ones.
- The irony was that tribunals were established with the primary aim of speedy disposal of cases by specialized experts.
- Every patent granted by the Patent Office is a potential subject matter in appeal before the IPAB.



Missed opportunity

- Be it the retraction of product patents for pharmaceuticals and chemicals between 1970 and 2005, the anti-evergreening provisions or the robust compulsory licensing regime, it has offered the world a host of TRIPS-compliant flexibilities in its statute.
- But when it came to developing jurisprudence around these provisions – case laws from the highest courts on how these provisions will be worked – it has failed.
- Barring a few bright spots, there has been a reluctance to extend the flexibilities in the Patents Act through judicial interpretation that expands the law.
- The tenure of the IPAB will be remembered as a missed opportunity to develop the home-grown jurisprudence on patent law that is much lacking in India.

ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE: THE SILENT THREAT

Tackling the problem would mean engaging the health, agricultural, trade and environment sectors

GS 3: Pharma Sector & Health Science

Context:

- As serious as the current health and economic crisis is, COVID-19 may just be the harbinger of future crises.

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- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the phenomenon by which bacteria and fungi evolve and become resistant to presently available medical treatment, is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.
- World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in July 2020, "AMR is a slow tsunami that threatens to undo a century of medical progress".
- AMR is already responsible for up to 7,00,000 deaths a year.
- Unless urgent measures are taken to address this threat, we could soon face an unprecedented health and economic crisis of 10 million annual deaths and costs of up to \$100 trillion by 2050.

Diverse challenges

- AMR represents an existential threat to modern medicine.
- Without functional antimicrobials to treat bacterial and fungal infections, even the most common surgical procedures, as well as cancer chemotherapy will become fraught with risk from untreatable infections.
- Neonatal and maternal mortality will increase.
- All these effects will be felt globally, but the scenario in the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) of Asia and Africa is even more serious.
 - LMICs have significantly driven down mortality using cheap and easily available antimicrobials.
- Drug resistance in microbes emerges for several reasons. These include
 - The misuse of antimicrobials in medicine,
 - Inappropriate use in agriculture, and
 - Contamination around pharmaceutical manufacturing sites where untreated waste releases large amounts of active antimicrobials into the environment.
- This is compounded by the serious challenge that no new classes of antibiotics have made it to the market in the last three decades, largely on account of inadequate incentives for their development and production.
- A recent report from the non-profit PEW Trusts found that over 95% of antibiotics in development today are from small companies, 75% of which have no products currently in the market.
- Tackling these diverse challenges requires action in a range of areas – in addition to developing new anti-microbials, infection-control measures can reduce antibiotic use.
- Further, to track the spread of resistance in microbes, surveillance measures to identify these organisms need to expand beyond hospitals and encompass livestock, wastewater and farm run-offs.
- Finally, since microbes will inevitably continue to evolve and become resistant even to new antimicrobials, we need sustained investments and global coordination to detect and combat new resistant strains on an ongoing basis.

The way forward

- A multi-sectoral \$1 billion AMR Action Fund was launched in 2020 to support the development of new antibiotics, and the U.K. is trialling a subscription-based model for paying for new antimicrobials towards ensuring their commercial viability.
- Other initiatives focused on the appropriate use of antibiotics include Peru's efforts on patient education to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions.

- Australian regulatory reforms to influence prescriber behaviour, and initiatives to increase the use of point-of-care diagnostics, such as the EU-supported VALUE-Dx programme.
- Beyond human use, Denmark's reforms to prevent the use of antibiotics in livestock have not only led to a significant reduction in the prevalence of resistant microbes in animals, but also improved the efficiency of farming.
- Finally, given the critical role of manufacturing and environmental contamination in spreading AMR through pharmaceutical waste, there is a need to look into laws such as those recently proposed by India, one of the largest manufacturers of pharmaceuticals, to curb the amount of active antibiotics released in pharmaceutical waste.
- While the range of initiatives that seek to control the emergence and spread of AMR is welcome, there is a need to recognise the limitations of a siloed approach.
- Current initiatives largely target individual issues related to AMR (such as the absence of new antibiotics, inappropriate prescription and environmental contamination) and consequently, narrowly defined groups of stakeholders (providers, patients and pharmaceutical companies).
- Regulating clinician prescription of antimicrobials alone would do little in settings where patient demand is high and antimicrobials are freely available over-the-counter in practice, as is the case in many LMICs.
- Efforts to control prescription through provider incentives should be accompanied
 - By efforts to educate consumers to reduce inappropriate demand,
 - Issue standard treatment guidelines that would empower providers to stand up to such demands,
 - As well as provide point-of-care diagnostics to aid clinical decision-making.
- Policy alignment is also needed much beyond the health system.
- Solutions in clinical medicine must be integrated with improved surveillance of AMR in agriculture, animal health and the environment.
- International alignment and coordination are paramount in both policymaking and its implementation.
- Indeed, recent papers have proposed using the Paris Agreement as a blueprint for developing a similar global approach to tackling AMR.

A POST-COVID FISCAL FRAMEWORK

Government should plan to gradually improve its primary balance. This would protect against the risk of the growth-interest differential turning unfavourable

GS3: Government Budgeting (FRBM).

Context:

- COVID crisis has upended already soaring India's fiscal position. In this context, there have been suggestions to revamp the FRBM act.

What is FRBM Act?

- Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management(FRBM) Act was enacted in 2003 to ensure inter-generational equity in fiscal management, Macroeconomic stability, better coordination between fiscal & monetary policy& mandated central govt to ensure greater transparency in its fiscal operations.
- The main purpose was to eliminate the Revenue deficit of the country & to bring the Fiscal deficit to a manageable 3%.

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- FRBM Act has been amended from time to time and govt appointed NK Singh on the FRBM Act Review recommended following
 - Combine debt-to-GDP ratio of centre & state should be brought down to 60% by 2023(40% Centre & 20% States.)
 - Centre should reduce its fiscal deficit from 3.5% (2017) to 2.5%(2023)
 - Centre should reduce its revenue deficit steadily by 0.25% of GDP each year, to reach 0.8% by 2023
 - Recommended an Escape Clause to accommodate countercyclical fluctuations in case of any natural calamities.

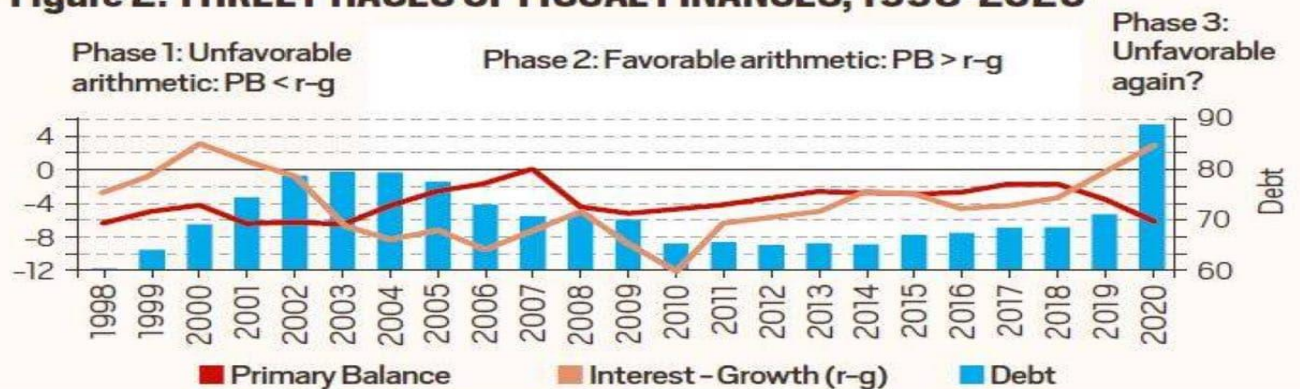
Figure 1: GENERAL GOVERNMENT DEBT, 1951-2021 (PERCENT OF GDP)



Issues with Current FRBM:

- It sets targets for the overall deficit, revenue deficit & debt, this proliferation of targets creates conflict & thereby impedes debt sustainability.
- Fixating specific targets lack proper economic grounding & will encourage governments to use off-budget expenditures & revenues.
- As long as pressure remains in achieving a specific target, transparency in transactions could not be possible.
- FRBM in the initial period of growth booming helped in reaching deficit targets but later this framework failed to prevent breaching of deficit targets.

Figure 2: THREE PHASES OF FISCAL FINANCES, 1998-2020



Problems of Indian fiscal position:

- India's government debt reached all-time high of 90% of GDP.
- Even with current contending policies, debt likely to exceed 80% of GDP in future.

- On the questions of India Debt Sustainability, this depends on two factors.
 - Primary Balance(PB) which is revenue less non-interest expenditures.
 - $r-g$, that is difference between the cost of borrowing & the nominal growth rate.
- Based on the above factors India since 1998 undergone 3 Phases.
 - Phase 1(early 2000s)
 - During this period, India ran into high debt due to unfavourable interest-growth differential.
 - Where interest rates are higher than growth that led to holding of greater amounts of debt.
 - Phase 2: (Past decade)
 - When primary balance is greater than interest-growth differential($r-g$) debt doesn't explode.
 - Even though India has been running negative in primary balance, it was counterbalanced by favourable $r-g$ (interest rates are lower than growth)
 - Phase 3 (from 2019)
 - The above equilibrium now has been broken due to a sudden increase in debt due to unfavourable $r-g$ (whereby interest rates are higher than growth)
 - To overcome the above unsustainable debt, govt needs to maintain a primary balance surplus.

Remaking of FRBM: An Alternative

- Govt should define a clear objective based on sound first principles to ensure debt sustainability.
- Govt could use the following principles-strategy in remaking FRBM.
 - India should abandon multiple fiscal criteria for guiding policy.
 - The future framework should be not be fixated on specific numbers & targets.
 - Government should focus on targeting primary balance as a measure for guiding fiscal policy.
 - Keeping primary balance surplus helps in guarding the fiscal sustainability against the growth-interest differential turning unfavourable in the future.
 - Finally, Centre should focus on improving primary balance gradually, as %of GDP per year on average, which makes it feasible & easy to adapt & adjust.
- **Advantages of this approach:**
 - It is simple & easy to adapt.
 - It is gradual & feasible, together makes it credible.
 - Improving credibility creates a virtuous cycle of improving growth-interest differentials which in turn reduce debt and finally improves the debt sustainability prospects.

Conclusion:

Though COVID has upended India's fiscal position. But from the learning's of past we need to adapt & reinvent new strategies. The new strategy that represents a substantial departure from the current objective of focusing on specific debt ratio to achieving debt sustainability will make the Indian economy in tackling future shocks & create a virtuous cycle.

A LOW-CARBON FUTURE THROUGH SECTOR-LED CHANGE

In India, a sector-led, action-based approach could provide the framework to drive low-carbon transformation

GS 3: Climate Change

Context:

- In the build-up to the 'Leaders' Climate Summit' organised by the United States this week (April 22-23), there has been a flurry of articles about whether India should announce a 'net-zero' emissions target, and by when.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1.5°C report called for global carbon emissions to reach net-zero by 2050, call for all countries to announce 2050 as the net-zero target year.
- Since a disproportionate share of the carbon space has been used up by developed countries, it is important that they act boldly at home, to match the vigour of their diplomatic efforts.
- Nonetheless, as a climate-vulnerable country, India must also up its game to contribute to limiting global temperature rise, ideally below 1.5°C.
- While doing so, it should not lose sight of the history of global climate negotiations and its own developmental needs.
- Though a large country and economy, we are still a very poor country with a significant development deficit — for example, our per-capita carbon emissions are less than half the world average.

What India must do

- Yet, announcing an Indian 2050 net-zero commitment risks taking on a much heavier burden of de-carbonization than many wealthier countries, and could seriously compromise India's development needs.
- We suggest a third path, focused on concrete, near-term sectoral transformations through aggressive adoption of technologies that are within our reach, and an earnest effort to avoid high carbon lock-ins.
 - This is best accomplished by focusing on sectoral low-carbon development pathways that combine competitiveness, job-creation, distributional justice and low pollution in key areas where India is already changing rapidly.
- This approach is directionally consistent with India moving towards net-zero, which should be our long-term objective.

De-carbonise power sector

- To achieve net-zero emissions, a key piece of the puzzle is to decarbonise the electricity sector, which is the single largest source (about 40%) of India's greenhouse gas emissions.
- De-carbonised electricity would also allow India to undertake transformational changes in urbanisation and industrial development, for example by expanding the use of electricity for transport, and by integrating electric systems into urban planning.
- So far, our efforts in the electricity sector have focused on expanding renewable electricity capacity, with targets growing by leaps and bounds from 20GW of solar to 175GW of renewable capacity by 2022, further growing to 450GW of renewable capacity by 2030.
- While useful as a direction of travel, India now needs to shift gears to a comprehensive re-imagination of electricity and its role in our economy and society.
 - One way to do this is to go beyond expanding renewables to limiting the expansion of coal-based electricity capacity.
 - This will not be easy: coal provides firm, dispatchable power and accounts for roughly 75% of electricity today; supports the economy of key regions; and is tied to sectors such as banking and railways.

Ceiling for coal power

- A first, bold, step would be to pledge that India will not grow its coal-fired power capacity beyond what is already announced, and reach peak coal electricity capacity by 2030, while striving to make coal-based generation cleaner and more efficient.
- There is a strong rationale for this:
 - Coal is increasingly uneconomic and phasing it out over time will bring local gains, such as reduced air pollution, aside from climate mitigation.
 - Such a pledge would give full scope for development of renewable energy and storage, and send a strong signal to investors.
- A second, necessary step is to create a multi-stakeholder Just Transition Commission representing all levels of government and the affected communities to ensure decent livelihood opportunities beyond coal in India's coal belt.
 - This is necessary because the transition costs of a brighter low-carbon future should not fall on the backs of India's poor.
- Third, a low-carbon electricity future will not be realised without addressing existing problems of the sector such as the poor finances and management of distribution companies, which requires deep changes and overcoming entrenched interests.
- Finally, India will need to work hard to become a leader in technologies of the future such as electricity storage, smart grids, and technologies that enable the electrification of other sectors such as transportation.
- Through careful partnership with the private sector, including tools such as production-linked incentives, India should use the electricity transition to aim for job creation and global competitiveness in these key areas.

Improve energy services

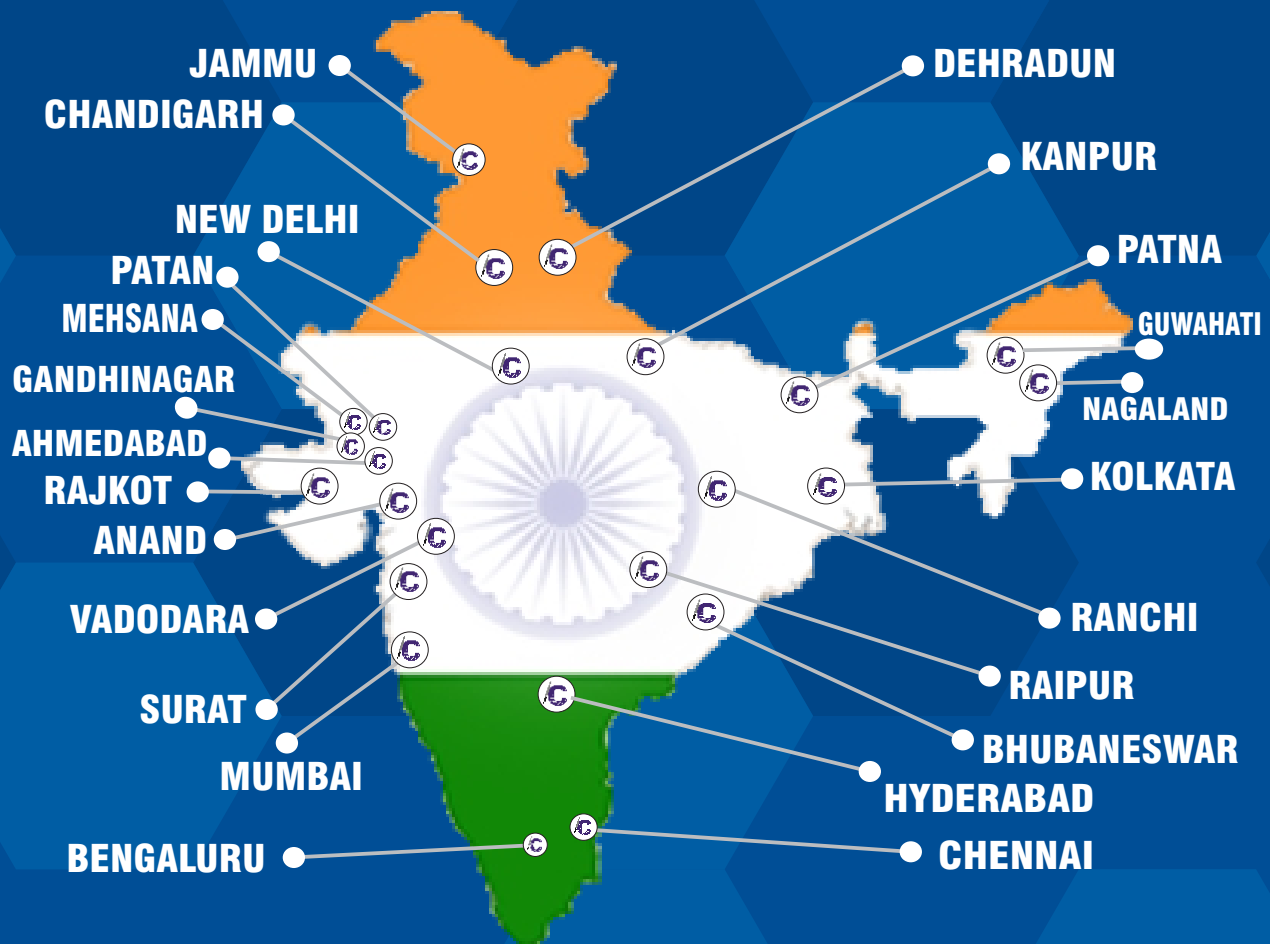
- Growing urbanisation and uptake of electricity services offer a good opportunity to shape energy consumption within buildings through proactive measures.
 - Cooling needs are expected to increase rapidly with rising incomes and temperatures.
 - Air conditioners, fans and refrigerators together consume about 60% of the electricity in households.
 - Today, the average fan sold in the market consumes more than twice what an efficient fan does and an average refrigerator about 35% more.
 - India could set aggressive targets of, say, 80% of air conditioner sales, and 50% of fan and refrigerator sales in 2030, being in the most efficient bracket.
- In addition to reducing green house gas emissions, this would have the benefit of lowering consumer electricity bills.
- India can leverage this transition too as an opportunity to become a global leader in production of clean appliances.

Forming timelines

- Going further, India may even consider committing to submit plausible pathways and timelines to achieving net-zero emissions as part of its future pledges.
- India can also use this period to develop a strategic road map to enhance its own technology and manufacturing competence as part of the global clean energy supply chain, to gain benefits of employment and export revenues.

- Such an integrated approach, which is ambitious, credible and rooted in our developmental needs — including climate mitigation needs — will represent an ambitious, forward-looking and results-oriented India.





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