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PRELIMS

Freshwater fish
CONTEXT:

1. Freshwater fish are those that spend some or all of their lives in fresh water, such as rivers and lakes, with a salinity of less than 1.05%.

2. Nearly a third of all freshwater fish are threatened with extinction, according to a recent report, World's Forgotten Fishes, published by 16 global conservation organisations.

3. Of more than 10,000 species whose conservation status has been assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 30% are considered at risk of extinction.

4. There are more than 18,075 species of freshwater fish, which account for half the world's fish species and a quarter of all vertebrate species.

IMPACT OF EMPLOYMENT:

1. The report stated that freshwater fish provide main source of protein to 200 million people across Asia, Africa and South America.

2. The industry provides jobs and livelihoods to 60 million people, more than half of whom are women.

3. In total, jobs in freshwater fisheries account for between 2.5 and 6 per cent of the global agricultural workforce.

CAUSES BEHIND EXTINCTION:

- Habitat degradation; Poorly planned dams; Releasing wastewater and draining wetlands; Overfishing; Pollution; Introduction of invasive species; Wildlife crime; Climate change

WAY AHEAD:

1. WWF has called on all governments to back the implementation of a global Emergency Recovery Plan for freshwater biodiversity. This would involve reducing pollution, allowing rivers to flow more naturally, controlling invasive species and ending overfishing, removing obsolete dams and unsustainable sand mining.

2. But the solution will require more than just government action. Implementing the new biodiversity agenda also needs to move beyond the realm of conservation.

3. Governments must incorporate specific new targets into the United Nations-mandated sustainable development goals for freshwater fishes, which are almost entirely absent from the current 169 SDG indicators despite their obvious links to poverty (SDG1), hunger (SDG2), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and life under water (SDG14) and on land (SDG 15).

4. Ensuring healthier freshwater ecosystems will only be achieved through collective action involving governments, businesses, investors, non-profits and communities, the report flagged.

Aerial mapping of ocean floor
ABOUT:

- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) is planning to take the help of the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) for aerial mapping of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep to get a better picture of the ocean floor, also called 'bathymetric' study.

FOR MITIGATING RISKS:

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

2. Now, it is in the process of integrating the data for a 3D multi-hazard mapping of both the east and west coastline for a more precise picture of the ocean floor.

3. Such a study has become imperative in view of the recent tsunamis of the Indonesian coasts where more than the quake related high waves; damage was due to landslides under the sea beds causing sudden wave surges leading to much damage without giving sufficient time to alert people.

4. The research institute, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, had also identified 'gaps' across the coast of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha for installing more tide gauges for better monitoring of the sea and more accurate prediction of impending disasters like cyclones.

5. These will be in addition to the 36 already in the Bay of Bengal.

6. INCOIS scientists with their counterparts in the Chennai-based National Institute of Ocean Technology and the United States independent scientific agency, Massachusetts-based Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, have been mining the data recorded by a unique 'Flux Buoy' retrieved from the Bay of Bengal off the Kolkota coast recently.

FATF 'greylist'

CONTEXT:

1. Global money laundering watchdog the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) decided to keep Pakistan on its terrorism financing "grey list".

ABOUT:

1. In its plenary held in October 2020, the FATF had kept Pakistan on the grey list citing its failure to fulfill six out of 27 obligations.

2. According to FATF, Islamabad had made progress but was yet to complete its action plan to overcome deficiencies in its combating of money laundering and terrorism financing.

3. Islamabad should demonstrate effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists.

4. Pakistan must demonstrate in taking action against UN-designated terrorists and their associates.

5. Pakistan courts must give effective, decisive and proportionate punishment to those involved in terrorism. It also said Pakistan must have an effective system to deal with terror financing.

6. Once Pakistan completes three unfulfilled tasks, the FATF will verify and take decision on Islamabad's present status in June 2021 plenary.

FATF

   a. Inter-governmental body set up in 1989 to combat money laundering, terror financing and other related threats to the international financial system.

   b. Currently, it has 39 members. Pakistan has been on the grey list since June 2018.

2. Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list.

Indradhanush 3.0

CONTEXT:

1. The States and Union Territories (UTs) have rolled out **the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0 scheme** to cover **children and pregnant women** who missed **routine immunisation during the COVID-19 pandemic**.

ROUTINE IMMUNISATION:

1. IMI 3.0 aimed to **accelerate the full immunisation of children and pregnant women** through a mission mode intervention.

2. The campaign is scheduled to have **two rounds of immunisation lasting 15 days** (excluding routine immunisation and holidays).

3. It is being conducted in 250 pre-identified districts/urban areas across 29 States/UTs.

REMOTE AREAS:

1. Beneficiaries from migration areas and remote areas would be targeted as they may have missed their vaccine doses during the pandemic.

2. As per the guidelines released for IMI 3.0, the districts have been classified to reflect 313 low risk, 152 medium risk and 250 high risk districts.

3. According to Health Ministry, **adherence to COVID-appropriate behaviour** (CAB) during immunisation activities has been strongly emphasised.

4. The States have been asked to **follow a "staggered approach"** to avoid crowding at the session sites and even plan break-up sessions if a staggered approach is not effective.

5. The sessions have also been planned in such a way that not more than 10 beneficiaries are present at the session site at one given point in time.

IMMUNIZATION IN INDIA:

1. It was introduced in 1978 as '**Expanded Programme of Immunization**' (EPI) by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

2. In 1985, the programme was modified as '**Universal Immunization Programme**' (UIP) to be implemented in phased manner to cover all districts in the country by 1989-90 with the one of largest health programme in the world.

3. Despite being operational for many years, UIP has been able to **fully immunize only 65%** children in the first year of their life.

4. Through UIP, **Government of India is providing vaccination free of cost** against vaccine preventable diseases include diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, measles, severe form of childhood tuberculosis, hepatitis B, meningitis and pneumonia (Hemophilus influenza type B infections), Japanese encephalitis (JE) in JE endemic districts with introduction **of newer vaccines** such as rotavirus vaccine, IPV, adult JE vaccine, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and measles-rubella (MR) vaccine in UIP/national immunization programme.

MISSION INDRADHANUSH:

1. **To strengthen and re-energize** the programme and achieve full immunization coverage for all children and pregnant women at a rapid pace, the Government of India launched "Mission Indradhanush" in December 2014.

2. Goal : to **ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women**.

IMI:

1. To **further intensify the immunization programme**, Prime Minister launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) on October 8, 2017.

2. Aim: to **reach each and every child up to two years of age** and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme/UIP.

3. Covered **low performing areas in the selected districts** (high priority districts) and urban areas.

4. Special attention was given to **unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums** with migratory population.

5. The focus was also on the urban settlements and cities identified under National Urban Health Mission (NUHM).

Facebook to end Australia news blackout

ABOUT:

1.   Facebook **would lift a contentious ban on Australian news and pay local media companies for content**, after a last-gasp deal on pending landmark legislation.

2.   Australia announced a **face-saving compromise that will see Google and Facebook plunge tens of millions of dollars** into the struggling local news sector.

3.   In return the U.S. digital firms will, for now, **avoid being subjected to mandatory payments** that could cost them vastly more and create what they see as an alarming global precedent.

4.   Facebook announced its first proposed deal with an Australian media company, Seven West, and was said to be **pursuing commercial deals with other local news organisations**.

5.   The company is expected to **use the content to launch a dedicated news product** in Australia later this year.

CORE ISSUE BETWEEN TECH GIANTS AND REGULATORS:

1.   While links to news may not be direct advertising money-spinners for Facebook or Google, **both see the presence of news as an important aspect** of audience engagement with their products.

2.   Google and Facebook are two of the largest and most profitable companies in history – and **each holds far more bargaining power than any news publisher**. The news media bargaining code sets out to undo this imbalance.

3.   The fight in Australia is in fact, centred on how much control these companies would be able to retain on their payout process — operational aspects such as deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithm.

DEBATE IN INDIA:

1.   According to a FICCI-EY report for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country — **making up approximately 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users** in India at the end of 2019.

2.   With 282 million unique visitors, **India is the second largest online news** consuming nation after China.

3.   In India, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% year-on-year to Rs 27,900 crore and are expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.

4.   A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to begin in any meaningful way.

Trade partner in 2020

ABOUT:

1.   **China topped India's list of trading partners in 2020** despite high tension between the countries, showed provisional data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

2.   Its position at the top is not just a result of **India's continued dependence on its electrical and nuclear machinery**, but a spurt in shipments of products like iron and steel as well.

CUTTING CHINESE PRESENCE:

1.   Despite a drop from the $85.47 billion traded between India and China from January to December 2019, **total trade between the countries stood at $77.67 billion during the same period in 2020** — a year that saw a deadly clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan Valley.

2.   The skirmish sparked various measures by the government to **cut Chinese presence in the country**, including a ban of popular apps, termination of major infrastructural contracts and the approval of production-linked incentive schemes to reduce dependence on critical goods from the neighbour.

3.   **Electrical machinery and equipment**, at $17.82 billion, and nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances, at $12.35 billion, continued to top the goods imported from China in 2020 — a sign of continued dependence as India works towards self-reliance in critical sectors.

4.   At the same time, **imports of these goods dropped by nearly 11 percent** in the calendar year.

5.   Meanwhile, **Indian iron and steel saw a 319.14 percent jump in exports to China**, with shipments touching $2.38 billion during January to December 2020. Iron and steel exports to China in 2019 were around $567 million.

WITH US:

1.   **India's trade with the US**, its top trading partner in 2019, took a hit during the pandemic.

2.   Total trade with the US in 2020, at $75.95 billion, lagged behind China.

3.   **India exported goods worth $49.06 billion to the US** between January and December 2020, down from $53.82 billion the year before.

4.   However, imports from the country took a bigger hit, dropping to $26.89 billion in 2020 from around $36.28 billion in 2019.

WHAT INDIA EXPORTS TO CHINA?

1.   Cotton yarn; Iron ore; Organic chemicals , Mineral fuels, Plastic items, Fish,Salts, Electrical machinery, Iron and steel, Gems & Jewellery;

ITEMS OF CHINESE EXPORTS TO INDIA:

1.   Electrical machinery and equipment, organic chemicals, nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, silk, mineral fuels, and oils.

2.   Value added items also dominate Chinese exports to India, like machinery, specially electrical machinery, which forms about 36% of Chinese exports to India.

Govt. to monitor OTT content

ABOUT:

- For the first time, the government, under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, has brought in detailed guidelines for digital content on both digital media and Over The Top (OTT) platforms, while giving itself overriding powers.

EMERGENCY POWERS:

1.   The new rules lay down a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism.

2.   However, over and above this framework, the government has equipped itself with "emergency" powers to block public access of any information.

3.   The rules state, "in case of emergency nature" the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, may "if he is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient and justifiable" give orders to block access.

4.   Such orders can be released "without giving an opportunity of hearing" to the publishing platform.

5. The first level of the grievance redressal system will be at the level of each OTT provider. Each complaint will have to be addressed within 15 days.

6. If the complaint is not satisfactorily addressed, then the complainant can scale it up to a self-regulatory body collectively established by the OTTs.

7. This body will be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, a High Court, or an independent eminent person from the field of media, broadcasting, entertainment, child rights, human rights or other relevant fields.

OVERSIGHT MECHANISM:

1. This self-regulatory body also has "censuring" powers in case of any incriminating content.

2. At the third tier, the government has equipped itself with overriding powers in the form of "oversight mechanism".

3. An inter-ministerial committee will perform this function and it will largely have the same powers as the collective self regulatory body of the OTTs.

4. Both Ministers also clarified that no new law has been framed. And the government already has power to step in, in case of an emergency under the existing law.

5. There have been widespread concerns about digital content, especially on OTT platforms, with 50 Parliament questions on the issues recently.

'Sedition law can't be used to quell disquiet: court

ABOUT:

1. Delhi Court observed that **Charges of sedition "**cannot be invoked to quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling the miscreants.

2. The youth was arrested for posting a fake video on Facebook about the Delhi police on the farmers' agitation. It granted bail to a 21-year-old labourer.

WHAT IS SEDITION?

Sedition, which falls under **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code**, is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring hatred or contempt towards the government of India and has been illegal in India since 1870.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SEDITION LAW:

1. Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy.

2. This sentiment (and law) was borrowed and inserted into the **Section 124A of IPC in 1870**, by the British.

3. British used Sedition law to convict and sentence freedom fighters. It was first used to prosecute **Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897.**

INVOCATION:

1. The Additional Sessions Judge remarked that in the absence of any exhortation, call, incitement or instigation to create disorder or disturbance of public peace by resort to violence, the sedition law cannot be invoked against anyone.

2. The law of sedition is a powerful tool in the hands of the State to maintain peace and order in society.

3. However, it cannot be invoked to quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling the miscreants.

Leopard population tracking gets new approach

ABOUT:

1. Wildlife specialists have for long faced challenges estimating the density of leopards in areas where some of the spotted cats are melanistic or black.

2. Experts from three organisations, one of them Assam-based **Aaranyak**, have come up with a system that helps in properly estimating the leopard population in areas sustaining a mix of rosette and **melanistic** individuals.

Leopard Status:

1. The Indian leopard is one of the big cats occurring on the Indian subcontinent, apart from the Asiatic lion, Bengal tiger, snow leopard and clouded leopard.
2. Listed on a par with Tigers under **Schedule 1** of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.
3. **Listed in Appendix I of CITES.**
4. Listed as **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List.

ROSETTES:
1. Rosettes are jagged black circular marks on the tawny coat of a leopard. Like the tiger's stripes, the rosettes of each leopard are unique in shape and size, making the species identifiable individually.

2. But **melanistic leopards —** commonly called black leopards or black panthers or ghongs (Assamese) — have been difficult to estimate as their rosettes are invisible.

3. The Spatial Mark-Resight (SMR) models applied by the scientists of **Aaranyak, Panthera** and World Wide Fund for Nature-India have provided a way of counting the melanistic leopards too. The new model has been written about in the Animal Conservation journal.

4. U.S.-based Panthera is the only organisation in the world devoted exclusively to the conservation of the world's 40 wild cat species and their ecosystems. **Melanism** has been documented in 14 of these species, including the leopard.

5. When a **population has only rosette leopard,** estimating their population size becomes easy because all the individuals can be identified.

6. Unlike rosette leopards, a black leopard can often not be reliably identified individually, although special cases exist.

7. Therefore it is **difficult to completely** estimate population sizes of leopards, a metric that is very critical for their conservation.

'ACUTE PROBLEM':

1. This problem is acute in the tropical and subtropical moist forests of South and Southeast Asia where the frequency of melanistic leopards is high and leopards also face the greatest threat.

2. No precise estimates of leopard population could thus be done in protected areas and non-protected areas in India except on some occasions.

3. Experts at the Aaranyak's tiger research and conservation division, said the team used three years of camera trapping data between 2017 and 2019 obtained from Manas National Park to establish the SMR approach.

4. The population density of **leopards in Manas** is 3.37 per 100 sq km. In the study, about 22.6% images of the leopards were of the melanistic kind.

'**MAJOR DEVELOPMENT**':

1. In the SMR models, they borrow the capture history of the rosette leopards and apply the information on the melanistic leopards to estimate the entire population size of leopards.

2. This is a significant analytical development that can help assess the population of leopards across a great part of the species range from where population estimates are scant.

3. The SMR method is expected to make it easier to assess the population status of leopards for informed conservation measures by applying the conventional camera trapping field method.

4. It can also be widely applied for other species that exhibit similar colour variation in nature.

Massive coal use in Mumbai's industrial clusters worsening city's air quality: CSE study

ABOUT:

1. Mumbai is gradually losing its coastal city trait of enjoying clean air through the year and the massive use of coal by its industries could be a major culprit, found a new study by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based non-profit.

2. The factories in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) burn two million tonnes coal every year, the report released recently said.

3. Out of the 13 industrial areas bordering Mumbai, CSE has done an in-depth assessment of four: Trans-Thane Creek (TTC), **Taloja, Ambernath and Dombivali.** They cover about 70 per cent of the industries operating in MMR.

4. The study has analysed and estimated the air pollution load from various industrial sectors.

5. An indicative ambient air quality monitoring for particulate matter was also conducted to calculate exposure of locals to the pollutants.

TTC a hotspot:

1. TTC was the most polluting, contributing about 44 per cent of the total load from the studied areas. It was followed by Taloja Industrial Area with a contribution of about 26 per cent.

2. CSE attributed the high pollution levels to rampant use of solid, dirty fuels like coal and agro-based fuels, and furnace oil.

3. TTC has the highest consumption of coal- and agro-based fuels, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the coal and 70 per cent of agro-residues consumed in the areas studied.

4. Mumbai is a coastal region and so is not expected to have very high levels of pollution. But with **rapid industrial and infrastructural development**, air quality of the region has started deteriorating.

5. The city needs to wake up and take corrective actions, to avoid turning into a pollution pressure-cooker like Delhi.

6. The chemical sector, which uses about 3.1 million tonnes of fuels every year, was found to be a major polluter. It contributed close to 72 per cent of the total load in the region, the study said.

7. **Medium and small enterprises (MSME)** were found to be bigger contributors to air pollution, observed the study.

8. **Dombivali** residents were the most exposed to pollution, as analysed by CSE's indicative monitoring of particulate matter (PM). Poor road infrastructure and high, uncontrolled pollution from surrounding industries could be the reasons for the high PM content.

9. **Patalganga** industrial area in Navi Mumbai (near Panvel) had the least exposure.

WAY AHEAD:

Against the backdrop of the challenges outlined for the industrial sector, CSE has developed a comprehensive action plan for the MMR.

1. The shift in industries from conventional polluting fuel (coal, furnace oil, etc) to cleaner and non-polluting fuel (PNG, electricity) should be expedited.

2. Policy to incentivise use of clean fuel introduced. Cleaner fuels like biomass and natural gas need to be less expensive. Removal of VAT on natural gas and inclusion of natural gas under GST would be positive steps

3. Volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the ambient air should be continuously monitored in areas where chemical industries are predominant

4. Air toxics emissions inventory and control plan should be developed Identify and monitor toxics and assess health risk through exposure modeling

5. Sector-specific pollution assessment study for chemical industries should be developed

6. A unique strategy of cross-regional inspection as already devised and implemented by the **Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) in Taloja** can be replicated in other regions. Inspection of industries should be done by MPCB officers drawn from other regions.

7. Mechanism for penalties for the MSME sector for not installing and using air pollution control devices should be created

8. Infrastructure should be well maintained and need assessments for development of roads and drainage lines conducted

9. Subsidies for purchase of air pollution control devices (APCD), particularly for small- and medium-scale units should be provided

10. The possibility of a common solvent recovery plant in chemical clusters and common steam generation units for industrial sectors cluster can be explored

11. **Non-attainment criteria for cities** within which industries are located should be modified

12. **Policy**-level intervention is needed for upcoming industrial areas to ensure the presence of adequate buffer zones along the periphery of the industrial areas, so as to clearly demarcate the boundaries of residential and industrial areas.

A puppet master with a chip in the brain

ABOUT:

1. A puppet with robotic movements may not sound very charming but in a melding of traditional art and cutting edge technology, a shadow leather puppet in Kerala's famous temple art **Tholpavakkoothu** is being animated by a robot.

FIRST ROBOTIC LEATHER PUPPET:

1. For the first time, the famous shadow leather puppets will tell stories of the epic Ramayana with the help of robots.

2. People from Harishree Kannan Tholpavakkoothu Kala Kendra, Koonathara, are set to animate their leather puppets using robotics with help from Inker Robotics.

3. The first robotic leather puppet was installed at the **Palakkad District Heritage Museum,** which was inaugurated by Minister for Museums Kadannappally Ramachandran recently.

4. Although there is a wide variety of art and cultural symbols showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Palakkad at the museum, the shadow leather puppets installed have been a big draw with visitors with their robotic movements.

5. The most difficult part of Tholpavakoothu is the limb movements of the puppets. These are now being controlled through robotics.

THOLPAVAKOOTHU:

1. Tholpavakoothu is a traditional temple art in **Kerala** having its roots in Palakkad and neighbouring regions.

2. It used to be performed in the Bhadrakali temples of Palakkad, telling tales from the Ramayana. It is also known as Nizhalkkoothu and Olakkoothu.

3. Tholpavakoothu or shadow puppetry is a temple art form which is prevalent in the Bhagavathy temples (mother Goddess) in Palakkad district and nearby regions in Kerala.

4. Tholppava (Thol means leather, **Pava** means puppet) are moved with the help of strings, and their shadows are depicted on a screen with the help of a row of oil lamps in the background.

5. The story of Tholpavakoothu performance is from the Indian epic, Ramayana.

6. In the olden days it was performed elaborately over a period of forty-one days. The narrative used for the performance is a mixture of prose and poetry called **Adalpattu**.

7. Tholppavas are made of the skin of deer and the puppet forms are made by making small holes in the leather that are then attached vertically to a bamboo stick.

8. Accompanying instruments include Ezhupara, Chenda and Maddalam. The artists have to undergo several years of rigorous training to master this art form. The puppetry is staged on a special structure in temple premises called Koothumadam.

'Governance and lawmaking should be left to legislature'

ABOUT:

1. The Law Minister recently told the Lok Sabha that just as independence of the judiciary is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the principle of separation of powers is also a part of that basic structure.

2. He asserted that governance and lawmaking should be left to the elected members of the legislature.

SEPARATION OF POWERS:

1. **Separation of powers** is the division of the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government.

2. It minimises the possibility of arbitrary excesses by the government, since the sanction of all three branches is required for the making, executing, and administering of laws.

3. The constitutional demarcation precludes the concentration of excessive power by any branch of the Government.

4. In India, a separation of functions rather than of powers is followed. Unlike in the US, in India, the concept of separation of powers is not adhered to strictly.

5. However, **a system of checks and balances** have been put in place in such a manner that the judiciary has the power to strike down any unconstitutional laws passed by the legislature.

6. Today, most of the constitutional systems do not have a strict separation of powers between the various organs in the classical sense because it is impractical.

The Separation of Powers

Executive Branch
Power of the President:
- Power to control the agencies that enforce the laws
- Powers to negotiate the treaties
- Power to nominate the judges
- Power to pardonbthe people convicted of crime

Legislative Branch
- Powers of Legislatures:
- Powers to pass legislation
- Power to declare war
- Power to over the Budget
- Power to establish courts

Judicial Branch
- Power to review laws passed
- Power to review action made by Government

Deadlock in collegium : CJI may retire without any appointment to SC

ABOUT:

1. With just over a month left in his 14-month tenure as Chief Justice of India, the Justice S A Bobde-led collegium is yet to make its first recommendation of a judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court since he took office in November 2019.

2. The last time a CJI **retired without a single** appointment to the SC was in 2015 during the tenure of CJI H L Dattu when there was an unprecedented stand-off between the judiciary and the government over the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC).

WHAT IS THE COLLEGIUM SYSTEM?

1. The **Collegium System is** a system under which appointments/elevation of judges/lawyers to Supreme Court and transfers of judges of High Courts and Apex Court are decided by a forum of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.'

2. There is no mention of the Collegium either in the original Constitution of India or in successive amendments.

3. The Collegiums **System of appointment of judges** was born through "three judges case" which interpreted constitutional articles on October 28, 1998.

4. The recommendations of the Collegium are binding on the Central Government; if the Collegium sends the names of the judges/lawyers to the government for the second time.

5. The collegium of the Supreme Court judges is comprises of 5 senior most judges of Supreme Court.

Special Marriage Act

ABOUT:

1. The Centre has objected to a petition seeking to discontinue with the provision of inviting objection from the public while applying for marriage registration under the Special Marriage Act (SMA).

2. In an affidavit filed before the Delhi High Court, the Ministry of Law and Justice said that the intention behind the provision in SMA was to "keep adequate safeguards to the interest of various parties involved".

SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT, 1954:

1. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 is an Act of the Parliament of India with provision for civil marriage (or "registered marriage") for people of India and all Indian nationals in foreign countries, irrespective of the religion or faith followed by either party.

2. The Act originated from a piece of legislation proposed during the late 19th century. Marriages solemnized under the Special Marriage Act are not governed by personal laws.

3. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 replaced the old Act III, 1872. The new enactment had three major objectives-

a. to provide a special form of marriage in certain cases,

b. to provide for registration of certain marriages and,

c. to provide for divorce.

GESTATION PERIOD:

1. All marriages done under the SMA require publication of the names of the couple for inviting objections from the public for 30 days.

2. Within this period, anyone can object to the marriage on the ground that it would contravene one or more of the conditions specified in section 4 of the SMA.

3. Some of the conditions include neither party has a spouse living; either of them is of unsound mind, incapable of giving a valid consent; and the man has completed twenty-one years and the woman eighteen years.

4. The provision was challenged by an interfaith couple on the ground that the 30 days gestation period was not warranted as the same objective can be mitigated on the basis of certificates issued by government hospitals and on the basis of undertaking by them.

STATEMENT FROM THE LAW MINISTRY:

1. If any person raises objection to the said marriage within a period of 30 days, the marriage officer shall not solemnise the marriage until he has enquired into the matter of objection.

2. It may not be possible to verify the credibility of such a person if at least a thirty days period is not given.

3. The procedure laid down in this Act for registration of marriage is fair and reasonable.

4. Advocate, who had appeared for the couple, argued that the question with regard to

whether either party has a living spouse can arise in other religious marriage also, but they are exempted from 30 days' notice period.

SMA SECTIONS:

1. The petition has sought to quash section 6 and 7 of SMA, which mandates publication of the public notice, on the ground that it is unreasonable and arbitrary.

2. The 30-day period offers an opportunity to kin of the couple to discourage an inter-caste or inter-religion marriage.

New marigold variety

ABOUT:

1. New varieties of marigold developed by the Hessarghatta-based Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) will fetch money even if they get spoiled as it can be used for extraction of crude carotene, which is mainly used in the pharmaceutical sector.

2. Generally, flowers lose their value if they get spoilt either due to rain or delay in harvest.

CAROTENE:

1. All marigolds have a carotene content of up to 1.4%.

2. However, the Arka Shubha variety of marigold has a carotene content of 2.8%, which is the highest content from a plant source.

3. These flowers can be sold for ornamental purposes too. Dr. Farmers consider this variety purely for extraction of carotene.

4. There is always a high demand for carotene in the pharma sector. Presently, India imports most of its carotene from China and other countries.

5. It is better to take up the carotene extraction venture through farmers' groups as a large

area is needed for marigold cultivation. This also provides scope for exports.

6. The Arka Shubha variety is of use in the poultry sector as well. Its petals could be used as feed to get quality yolk, she said. It is used as feed for sheep too.

Ports Bill despite opposition

ABOUT:

1. The Rajya Sabha passed the Major Ports Authority Bill, 2020.

2. Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways said the Bill aimed to make the ports world class and give the port authorities power to make their own decisions. He denied the Opposition's charge that it would lead to privatisation.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Decentralised decision making and infuse professionalism in governance of major ports.

2. Impart faster and transparent decision making benefiting the stakeholders and better project execution capability.

3. Reorient the governance model in central ports to landlord port model in line with the successful global practice.

FEATURES:

1. The bill seeks to provide for regulation, operation and planning of major ports in the country and provide greater autonomy to these ports.

2. It seeks to replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963. The legislation provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port.

3. These Boards will replace the existing Port Trusts.

High diversity of birds, many rarely seen in Delhi, in Mangar area: Study

ABOUT:

The Mangar landscape of the Aravallis in Faridabad has a "high diversity" of bird species, with 219 species in a 17.13 sq km area, reflecting its "high conservation value", reveals a study of the birds by the Centre for Ecology Development And Research (CEDAR).

DIVERSITY:

1. The study, which is the result of a year-long field survey and compilation of ebird data.

2. It covers the Mangar landscape, which includes Mangar Bani — a sacred grove in Faridabad with an area of 2.66 sq km — and its surrounding forests.

3. According to the study, the 219 species found in the Mangar landscape include 130 resident species, 53 winter migrants, 12 summer migrants, and 16 passage migrants.

4. Among the species found, several are "rare" in Delhi, including the common rosefinch, black breasted weaver, and red munia.

5. Five "nationally endangered raptor species", including king vulture and Egyptian vulture, as well as six bird species that have been showing a "national-level decline", including the yellow crowned woodpecker and short-toed Snake Eagle, were also found to be "thriving" in the Mangar landscape, states the study.

6. The biggest takeaway from the report is the species richness in the Mangar area. Another important takeaway is regarding the kind of species that were found.

7. There are several dry forest specialists. Most of these are not very frequently seen in other dry forests in NCR.

8. Based on the study, the researchers have concluded that "conservation of Mangar Bani, along with the surrounding forests, contributes immensely to NCR's avifaunal biodiversity".

PM hands over Arjun Mk-1A tank to Army

ABOUT:

1. The Prime Minister recently handed over the indigenous main battle tank Arjun Mk-1A to the Army.

2. Chief of the Army Staff General received the model of the tank, designed and developed by Chennai-based Combat Vehicles Research & Development Establishment (CVRDE), a unit of the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO).

AATMANIRBHAR:

1. A tank made in Tamil Nadu will be used in our northern borders to keep the nation safe. This showcases India's united spirit — Bharat's Ekta Darshan.

2. India will continue working to make our armed forces one of the most modern forces in the world.

3. The focus on making India aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) in the defence sector is moving with full speed.

4. One of the two defence corridors is in Tamil Nadu. The corridor has already received investment commitments of over ₹8,100 crore.

5. Setting up of Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor would catalyse indigenous production of defence and aerospace related items, thereby reducing our reliance on imports and promoting export of these items to other countries.

6. This will lead to generation of direct & indirect employment opportunities and growth of private domestic manufacturers including Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups.

7. Tamil Nadu is already the leading automobile manufacturing hub of India.

Arjun Mk-1A:

1. The Arjun Mk-1A has superior firepower, high mobility, excellent protection and crew comfort, with 14 major upgrades from Arjun Mk-1, according to the CVRDE.

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

3. The objective was to create a "state-of-the-art tank with superior fire power, high mobility, and excellent protection".

4. During the development, the CVRDE achieved breakthroughs in the engine, transmission, hydropneumatic suspension, hull and turret as well as the gun control system.

5. Mass production began in 1996 at the Indian Ordnance Factory's production facility in Avadi, Tamil Nadu.

6. The indent for 118 of these tanks would be placed shortly with the Heavy Vehicle Factory (HVF) at Avadi near Chennai.

7. The Army is expected to soon approach the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) for approval after which it would place the indent for 118 tanks at a cost of ₹8,956.59 crore.

8. Issues with Arjun Mk-1 ammunition, spares and repairs have also been resolved, and the DRDO has set up an Arjun hub in Jaisalmer for spares and support.

Assam uses combs for voter literacy.

ABOUT:

1. The Goalpara district administration has been distributing combs and other utilitarian items of daily use, such as sanitary pads, with SVEEP messages printed on them.

2. SVEEP expands to Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation, the flagship programme of the Election Commission of India for promoting voter literacy in the country.

SYSTEMATIC VOTERS' EDUCATION AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION:

1. Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program, better known as SVEEP, is the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India.

2. Since 2009, Election Commission has been working towards preparing India's electors and equipping them with basic knowledge related to the electoral process.

3. SVEEP's primary goal is to build a truly participative democracy in India by encouraging all eligible citizens to vote and make an informed decision during the elections.

4. The programme is based on multiple general as well as targeted interventions which are designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

'LOW VOTER TURNOUT':

1. The district election office is particularly ramping up SVEEP activities in areas with polling stations that have recorded low overall and low female voter turnout in the 2016 Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

2. The four Assembly constituencies in Goalpara — Dudhnai, Goalpara East, Goalpara West and Jaleswar — averaged a voter turnout of 90.83% in the 2016 State polls but the turnout at some polling booths was less than 10% of the average of a constituency.

Fossils of 'Dickinsonia' found at Bhimbetka

ABOUT:

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

NEW FINDING:

1. One can identify the fossils from the white leaf-like patches with a central vertebra (central midrib) and connecting veins. While one fossil is 17 inches long, the other two are much smaller.

2. The new discoveries, published in a journal, Gondwana Research, can be seen right at the beginning of the 'Auditorium Cave', the first of such caves at Bhimbetka, a UNESCO heritage site, located about 3.5 metres above the ground.

3. Geological Survey of India's Bhopal told that they were the only such fossils available in the country, and were similar to those seen in south Australia.

4. This is further proof of the similar paleoenvironments and confirms assembly of Gondwanaland by the 550 Ma (mega annum), but not reconstructions adjusted for true polar wander.

BHIMBETKA ROCK SHELTERS:

1. The Bhimbetka rock shelters are an archaeological site in central India that spans the prehistoric Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, as well as the historic period.
2. It exhibits the earliest traces of human life in India and evidence of Stone Age starting at the site in Acheulian times.
3. It is located in the Raisen District in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh about 45 kilometres (28 mi) south-east of Bhopal.
4. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that consists of seven hills and over 750 rock shelters distributed over 10 km (6.2 mi).
5. At least some of the shelters were inhabited more than 100,000 years ago. The rock shelters and caves provide evidence of a "rare glimpse" into human settlement and cultural evolution from hunter-gatherers, to agriculture, and expressions of prehistoric spirituality.
6. Some of the Bhimbetka rock shelters feature prehistoric cave paintings and the earliest are about 10,000 years old (c. 8,000 BCE), corresponding to the Indian Mesolithic.
7. These cave paintings show themes such as animals, early evidence of dance and hunting.
8. The Bhimbetka site has the oldest-known rock art in India, as well as is one of the largest prehistoric complexes.

Birds use massive magnetic maps to migrate — and some could cover the whole world

ABOUT:

1. Every year, billions of songbirds migrate thousands of miles between Europe and Africa — and then repeat that same journey again, year after year, to nest in exactly the same place that they chose on their first great journey.

2. The remarkable navigational precision displayed by these tiny birds — as they travel alone over stormy seas, across vast deserts, and through extremes in weather and temperature — has been one of the enduring mysteries of behavioural biology.

3. Birds buffeted by winds so much that they're significantly displaced from their migratory route are able to realign their course if they've already performed one migration.

4. This has suggested that birds' navigational abilities, some of which is built around a sense of compass direction, includes a mechanism for finding their way back home from parts of the world they've never before visited.

5. New study of Eurasian reed warblers has found that this remarkable ability involves a "magnetic map" that works like our human system of coordinates.

6. Surprisingly, the study found that these birds understand the magnetic field of places thousands of miles into territory they've never before visited — suggesting some birds could possess a "global GPS system" that can tell them how to get home from anywhere on Earth.

MIND MAPS:

1. It's long been known that adult birds develop some sort of navigational map to help them migrate.

2. How they do this has remained controversial. Several cues have been proposed as guides for migratory birds — including odours, infra-sound, and even variations in gravity.

3. However, a gathering body of evidence has indicated that the Earth's magnetic field is one of the likeliest solutions to this mystery.

4. It has been suggested that different parameters of the Earth's magnetic field could form a grid, which birds follow, of north-south and east-west lines.

5. That's because magnetic intensity (the strength of the magnetic field) and magnetic inclination (the angle formed between the

magnetic field lines and the surface of the Earth, also called the "dip" angle) both run approximately north to south.

6. Magnetic declination – the difference between the direction to the magnetic north pole and the geographical north pole — provides the east-west axis.

7. Despite largely agreeing that certain birds navigate via the Earth's magnetic field, scientists haven't worked out precisely what sensory apparatus they use to detect it – or whether multiple systems are used to detect different parameters of the field.

8. Other animals, like turtles, can also sense the magnetic field, but the same uncertainties apply.

9. Regardless, if birds have learned that magnetic intensity increases as they go north, they should be able to detect their position on the north-south axis wherever they happen to be.

10. Similarly, if they experience a declination value that is greater than anything they've previously experienced, they should know they're further east.

11. On this basis, the theory is that they can calculate their position on the grid and correct their orientation.

12. This would mean that birds essentially navigate using a system similar to our Cartesian coordinates – the basis of modern GPS navigation.

13. If this coordinate theory is accurate, it would mean that birds should be able to use their knowledge of magnetic field parameters to estimate their location anywhere on Earth – through the extrapolation or extension of their navigational rules.

14. To date, however, there has been no clear evidence that birds can use the magnetic field in this way.

Geospatial data policy liberalised

ABOUT:

1. In sweeping changes to the country's mapping policy, the government recently announced liberalisation of norms governing the acquisition and production of geospatial data.

2. This move is to help boost innovation in the sector and create a level playing field for public and private entities.

GEOSPATIAL DATA:

1. Spatial data, also known as geospatial data, is a term used to describe any data related to or containing information about a specific location on the Earth's surface.

2. Spatial data can exist in a variety of formats and contains more than just location specific information.

3. Geospatial data, also known as geodata, has locational information connected to a dataset such as address, city or ZIP code.

4. Geospatial data can also come from **Global Positioning System (GPS)** data, geospatial satellite imagery, telematics devices, IoT and geotagging.

LIBERALISATION:

1. Under the new guidelines, the sector will be deregulated and aspects such as prior approvals for surveying, mapping and building applications based on that have been done away with, Department of Science and Technology Secretary said.

2. For Indian entities, there will be complete deregulation with no prior approvals, security clearances and licences for the acquisition and production of geospatial data and geospatial data services, including maps.

3. Prime Minister said the liberalisation of policies governing the acquisition and production of geospatial data was a "massive step in the government's vision for an **Aatmanirbhar Bharat".**

4. The reform will benefit the country's farmers, start-ups, the private sector, the public sector, and research institutions to drive innovations and build scalable solutions.

GENERATE EMPLOYMENT:

1. Science and Technology Minister said the easing of norms will greatly **help** in several sectors that were suffering because of non-availability of high quality maps.

2. The move will unlock tremendous opportunities for the country's start-ups, private sector, public sector, and research institutions, to drive innovations and build scalable solutions. It will also generate employment and accelerate economic growth.

3. India's farmers will also be benefited by leveraging the potential of geospatial and remote sensing data.

New nodal agency to tackle fraud, pesky SMSes & calls

ABOUT:

1. An official release from the Ministry of Telecommunications said that the central government will set up a digital intelligence unit (DIU) as a nodal agency to deal with complaints of unsolicited commercial communication (UCC) and cases of financial fraud, especially in the digital payments space.

2. At a high level meeting presided by Telecom Minister, the Ministry decided that apart from the DIU at the nodal level, **a Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFCOP)** will also be set up at all the 22 license service area level.

FUNCTION OF DIU:

1. The main function of DIU will be to coordinate with various LEAs (law enforcement agencies), financial institutions and telecom service providers in investigating any fraudulent activity involving telecom resources.

2. The issue of UCC has been a major area of concern for the Telecom Ministry as well as the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai).

3. TRAI has from time to time fined telecom operators for not following its directives on stopping UCC.

NEED TOUGH MEASURES:

1. In November last year, the telecom sector regulator told the Delhi High Court that it had imposed fines of up to Rs 30 crore on telecom companies such as state-run **Bharat Sanchar Nigam** Limited, and private telecom companies such as Vodafone Idea and Reliance Jio Infocomm for not putting enough measures to control UCC, which occurred over their networks between April and June 2020.

2. All telecom service providers have been asked to ensure strict compliance of the directives issues with respect to UCC.

3. In case of any violation, it was proposed to impose financial penalty against the tele-marketers including disconnection of resources in case of repetitive violations.

4. A web and mobile application as well as a SMS-based system shall be developed for effective redressal of complaints.

RISE IN FRAUD CASES:

1. Apart from UCC, the rise in fraudulent digital transactions was also discussed in the meeting.

2. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had, in its annual report for 2018-19, said frauds related to misuse of credit and debit cards, cloning of identities, spam amounted to Rs 220 crore in the year, and was slated to rise unless proper mitigation measures were taken.

3. Special strategies, including blocking of telecom operations in regions, such as Jamtara and Mewat, which are infamous for running digital fraud transaction centres, shall also be taken, the Ministry said.

4. In August last year, Haryana's Faridabad police arrested five people from Jamtara for being involved in a racket involving e-SIM frauds.

5. Those arrested had then told the police that by swapping e-SIM of Apple's iPhones, funds were transferred into wallets provided by **PhonePe, OlaMoney, Paytm** Payments Bank and Airtel Payments Bank, which were then again routed into other bank accounts all over the country before being taken out.

RBI sets up panel for strengthening UCBs

ABOUT:

1. The Reserve Bank of India has set up of an eight-member expert committee on urban co-operative banks (UCBs) to examine their issues and provide a roadmap for strengthening the sector.

TAKING STOCK:

1. The panel will take stock of regulatory measures taken by the central bank and other authorities in respect of UCBs and assess their impact over last five years to identify key constraints and enablers, if any, in fulfilment of their socio-economic objective.

2. It will also review the current regulatory and supervisory approach and recommend suitable measures to strengthen the sector, taking into account recent amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

3. The panel will also suggest effective measures for faster rehabilitation or resolution of UCBs and assess potential for consolidation in the sector.

4. It will consider the **need for differential regulations and examine** prospects to allow more leeway in permissible activities for UCBs with a view to enhance their resilience.

5. It will draw up a vision document for a vibrant and resilient urban co-operative banking sector having regards to the Principles of Cooperation as well as depositors' interest and systemic issues.

Geological evidence of eastern Himalaya earthquake

CONTEXT

• Scientists have found the first geological evidence of an earthquake at Himebasti Village on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, documented by historians as Sadiya earthquake in history, which is recorded to have caused massive destruction in the region and almost destroyed the town in 1697 CE.

ABOUT:

• The study of the earthquake at Sadiya standing on a grassy plain, almost surrounded by forested Eastern Himalayas on the right bank of Lohit River, adds an important site to the seismic hazard assessment of the eastern Himalaya, which will benefit the inhabitants and help in providing better infrastructure across the Eastern Himalayan foothills which is one of the most densely populated regions in the world.

Democracy Index

Context:

- Recently, 2020 Democracy Index's report titled "**Democracy in sickness and in health?**" has been released by the **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)**.

INDIA RANKING:

- India slipped two places to 53rd position due to the "**democratic backsliding**" by **authorities and "crackdowns" on civil liberties has led to a further decline in the country's ranking**.
- With mounting pressure on India's democratic norms, **India's score fell from a peak of 7.92 in 2014 to 6.61 in 2020** (6.9 in 2019) and its **global ranking slipped from 27th (in 2014) to 53rd** . India was ranked 51st in the 2019 Democracy Index.
- It has been classified as a **'flawed democracy'**.

- Report alleged that the Central government had "introduced a religious element to the conceptualisation of Indian citizenship, a step that many critics see as undermining the secular basis of the Indian state".

- The authorities' handling of the coronavirus pandemic led to a further erosion of civil liberties in 2020.

NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

- **Sri Lanka**: 68th , flawed democracy

- **Bangladesh** (76), **Bhutan** (84) and **Pakistan** (105) : 'Hybrid regime' category

- **Afghanistan** : 139th , 'Authoritarian regime'

Top 5	Country	Score
1	Norway	9.81
2	Iceland	9.37
3	Sweden	9.26
4	New Zealand	9.25
5	Canada	9.24

Who are the Lingayats and why they want a minority status

CONTEXT:

- The community is demanding inclusion of a large Lingayat sub-sect in an OBC quota category that provides 15% reservation in government jobs and education in the state.

ABOUT:

- The Lingayats are a dominant community who make up nearly 17% of Karnataka's six crore population.
- The Lingayats, classified as a Hindu sub-caste called Veerashaiva Lingayats, are essentially followers of the 12th-century philosopher Saint Basavanna, who started a movement to help sections of society break away from the chains of caste.
- The Veerashaiva Lingayats are an amalgamation of the followers of Basavanna's teachings and Veerashaivas who follow more traditional Hindu practices. Current issue:

RESERVATION:

- Veerashaiva Lingayats have been provided 5% reservation under a special category called 3B.
- A sub-sect called the Panchamasali Lingayats — basically agriculturists who account for nearly 70% of Lingayats — have now risen in protest seeking reservations

under the category 2A, which currently provides 15% reservations to backward castes.
- The main stand of the Panchamasali Lingayats is that the community has been denied benefits, and that large sections dependent on agriculture are socially, economically, and educationally backward.

How the government plan to address the reservation demand?

- The chairman of the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission is directed to conduct a study and submit a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Panchamasali community to determine their inclusion under the 2A category.

Einsteinium
CONTEXT:
1. A team of scientists at the Berkeley Lab has reported some of the properties of element 99 in the periodic table called "Einsteinium", named after Albert Einstein.
2. With a new study published in the journal Nature recently, for the first time, researchers have been able to characterise some of the properties of the element.

ABOUT:
- Discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called "Ivy Mike" in the Pacific Ocean).
- Einsteinium-254: one of the more stable isotopes of the element that has a half-life of 276 days. The most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.
- High radioactivity and short half-life of all einsteinium isotopes, even if the element was present on Earth during its formation, it has most certainly decayed.
- It cannot be found in nature and needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.
- So far, the element has been produced in very small quantities and its usage is limited except for the purposes of scientific research.

- The element is also not visible to the naked eye and after it was discovered, it took over nine years to manufacture enough of it so that it could be seen with the naked eye.

"Economic impact" of various judgments
CONTEXT:
- Government think tank **NITI Aayog** has asked **Jaipur-headquartered research organisation Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International** to conduct a study on the **"economic impact" of various judgments delivered by Supreme Court, the high courts, and quasi-judicial bodies such as the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the "judicial activism" of such courts and tribunals**.

ABOUT:
- **Judicial decisions have far-reaching economic impacts** which are often not taken into account at the time of decision making.
- The absence of ex-ante analysis of the economic costs associated with a decision is further exacerbated when judicial activism by courts and tribunals is also in play.
- Study funding: NITI Aayog
- Objective of study: **"narrative building for sensitising the judiciary on the economic impact of their decisions"**
- Significance: the findings will be used as a **training input for judges of commercial courts, NGT, HCs, SC**.
- The study, initially supposed to start in February 2020 and get over by the end of this month, was delayed due to a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19.
- The study is to do an objective cost-benefit analysis of the economic impact of the decisions.
- The study is also a part of the larger umbrella project undertaken by NITI Aayog under which it wants to establish a judicial performance index, which would measure the performance of judges at district courts and subordinate levels.

Centre to amalgamate market laws into single code

ABOUT:

1. The Centre announced setting up of a Single Security Market Code by consolidating the provisions of SEBI Act, 1992, Depositories Act, 1996, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 and Government Securities Act, 2007.

2. This was announced by the Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, while presenting the Union Budget 2021-22 in Parliament.

ENHANCING EASE OF DOING BUSINESS:

1. According to analysts, this move will improve ease of doing business in the country's financial markets, cut down compliances, reduce cost and do away with friction between various stakeholders.

2. In order to instil confidence among participants in the corporate bond market during times of stress and to generally enhance secondary market liquidity, the Budget has proposed to create a permanent institutional framework.

3. The proposed body would purchase investment grade debt securities both in stressed and normal times and help in the development of the bond market.

4. It will clearly help to deepen the corporate bond market which continues to face liquidity challenges.

5. This will be fairly positive for debt mutual funds particularly credit funds which had witnessed significant outflows last year due to poor liquidity in certain corporate papers.

6. This will also help to reduce the volatility in secondary market yields of relatively lower rated bonds in the AA and A category.

Scrappage policy

ABOUT:

1. Leading players in the automotive sector have welcomed the Centre's announcement on the voluntary vehicle scrappage policy to phase out old and unfit vehicles.

2. While tabling the Union Budget for 2021-22, Finance Minister said the policy would help in encouraging fuel-efficient, environment-friendly vehicles, thereby reducing vehicular pollution and the oil import bill.

WHAT DOES THE POLICY AIM TO ACHIEVE?

1. The idea is to phase out cars and commercial vehicles which are older than 20 or 15 years, respectively.

2. This is being done in a bid to reduce urban pollution levels and galvanise automotive sales, which continue to suffer during India's post-COVID recovery phase.

3. This means that any private vehicle that's older than 20 years will have to undergo a fitness test.

4. A fitness test, according to the Finance Minister, will be conducted at automated fitness centres, which will determine whether the vehicle in question is qualified to run on roads, or headed for the scrap heap.

5. Vehicles would undergo fitness tests after 20 years in automated fitness centres in the case of personal vehicles (PV), and after 15 years in the case of commercial vehicles (CV).

ARE THERE ANY OTHER COSTS INVOLVED?

1. Yes. The government has proposed a Green Tax, which requires you to pay 10-25 percent of your road tax every time you renew your fitness certificate.

2. This means that, in addition to the fee you're required to shell out for the test, you have to pay a considerable sum, which differs from city to city, based on their pollution levels.

3. In the Delhi-NCR region, for example, the Green Tax, if implemented, would require the customer to pay 50 percent of the road tax, upon renewal of registration.

No Indian role in developing ECT in Colombo

ABOUT:

1. Reneging on a 2019 agreement with India and Japan, Sri Lanka has decided to develop the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port on its own.

2. The Sri Lankan government would instead offer the West Container Terminal to India for possible investments.

3. It comes amid mounting pressure from Port union workers against any foreign role or investment in the ECT project, where nearly 70% of the transhipment business is linked to India.

EAST CONTAINER TERMINAL:

1. In 2019, Sri Lanka, Japan and India signed an agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port.

2. The three countries will jointly build the East Container Terminal at the Port of Colombo.

3. As per the agreement the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) retains 100% ownership of the East Container Terminal (ECT), while the Terminal Operations Company is jointly owned, the SLPA

4. Sri Lanka will hold a 51% stake in the project and the joint venture partners will retain 49%.

5. Japan is likely to provide a 40-year soft loan with a 0.1% interest rate, details of India's contribution to the initiative are awaited

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT FOR INDIA:

1. Over 70% of the trans-shipment business at the strategically located ECT is linked to India

2. The involvement of India and Japan is the project is being seen as a big development aimed at neutralising the growing influence of China, which has poured money into the South Asian island nation under its mammoth Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure plan

INDIAN REACTION:

1. Asked about the development, a senior Indian source said: "We would hope that Sri Lanka does not unilaterally decide on this matter, as there is a tripartite agreement on it."

2. For New Delhi, the strategic ECT project in Colombo has been high on priority.

3. It has figured in talks at the highest levels, including when External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited in January.

ESIC, other social security safety nets to cover gig economy workers

ABOUT:

1. With the Covid-19 pandemic increasing the focus on gig economy and its workers, Finance Minister said that the law on minimum wages would now apply to workers of all categories including those associated with platforms.

2. Such workers would now be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

EMPLOYEES' STATE INSURANCE:

1. Employees' State Insurance (abbreviated as ESI) is a self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers.

2. The fund is managed by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) according to rules and regulations stipulated in the ESI Act 1948.

3. ESIC is a Statutory and an Autonomous Body under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.

MORE DETAILS:

1. Women will be allowed to work in all categories and also in the night-shifts with adequate protection.

2. At the same time, compliance burden on employers will be reduced with single registration and licensing, and online returns.

3. The Labour Ministry defines a gig worker as any person "who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship".

EASING COMPLIANCE BURDEN:

1. Apart from the workers, the budget for 2021-22 has also proposed measures aimed at easing the compliance burden for startups as well as larger companies.

2. Having decriminalised several procedural and technical compoundable offences under the Companies Act, the government now aims to do the same for the Limited Liability Partnership Act.

3. Companies which have paid up capital of up to Rs 2 crore and turnover of up to Rs 20 crore, up from Rs 50 lakh and Rs 2 crore, respectively, will be considered under the definition of small companies from the new fiscal, Sitharaman said.

4. The government has proposed to incentivise the setting up of one-person companies (OPC) by allowing them to grow without any restrictions on paid-up capital and turnover, with an option to convert into other companies at any other time.

5. The residency limit for an Indian citizen to set up an OPC has also been cut down to 120 days from 182 days, while also allowing non-resident Indians to start OPCs in India.

Allocation of Rs 24,435 crore Hike in WCD budget, Mission Poshan 2.0 launched

ABOUT:

1. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has received a 16 per cent increase in its budget allocation this year with a sum of Rs 24,435 crore.

2. Finance Minister further announced that supplementary nutrition schemes were being merged with the Poshan Abhiyan to launch Mission Poshan 2.0.

NATIONAL NUTRITION MISSION:

1. Government is implementing several schemes and programs under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services Scheme as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.

2. All these schemes address one or other aspects related to nutrition and have the potential to improve nutritional outcomes in the country.

3. POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India, which ensures convergence with various programmes i.e., Anganwadi Services, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) of MWCD Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), National Health Mission (NHM), Swachh-Bharat Mission, Public Distribution System (PDS), Department Food & Public Distribution, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation.

4. The goals of NNM are to achieve improvement in nutritional status of Children from 0-6 years, Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers in a time bound manner during the next three years beginning 2017-18.

MISSION POSHAN 2.0:

1. Out of the allocation for the ministry this year, the highest amount has been allocated to Mission Poshan 2.0 and Saksham Anganwadi scheme — Rs 20,105 crore.

2. Poshan 2.0 now combines the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Anganwadi services, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme For Adolescent Girls and National Creche Scheme.

3. The allocation for social services sector, which includes nutrition and social security and welfare, has been increased from Rs 2,411.80 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 3,575.96 crore.
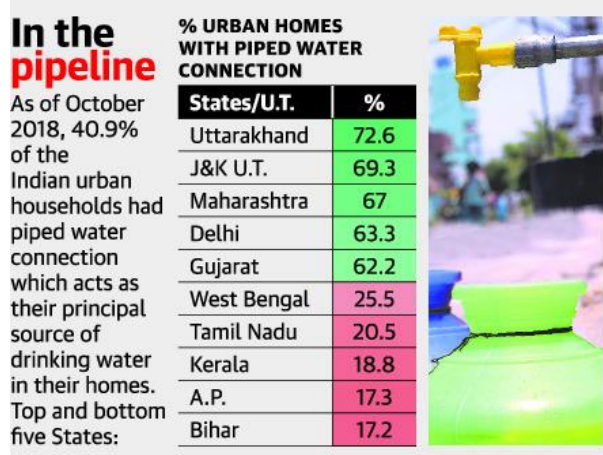
4. Schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, One Stop Centres, Swadhar Greh, Child Protection, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and Ujjawala have not been allocated anything in this budget.

5. The budget of the ministry's autonomous bodies — National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, Central Adoption Resource Agency, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, National Commission for Women and Central Social Welfare Board — have been increased.

Jal Jeevan Mission to help revive urban waterbodies

ABOUT:

1. The urban water supply mission announced in the Budget will include rejuvenation of waterbodies and 20% of supply from reused water, the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.

2. In a statement, the Ministry said there was an estimated gap of 2.68 crore urban household tap connections that the Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) (JJMU) would seek to bridge in all 4,378 statutory towns.

3. The Mission would also aim to bridge the gap of 2.64 crore sewer connections in the 500 cities under the existing Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation

In the pipeline

As of October 2018, 40.9% of the Indian urban households had piped water connection which acts as their principal source of drinking water in their homes. Top and bottom five States:

% URBAN HOMES WITH PIPED WATER CONNECTION	
States/U.T.	%
Uttarakhand	72.6
J&K U.T.	69.3
Maharashtra	67
Delhi	63.3
Gujarat	62.2
West Bengal	25.5
Tamil Nadu	20.5
Kerala	18.8
A.P.	17.3
Bihar	17.2

(AMRUT).

CHEAPER TECHNOLOGIES:

1. The Ministry said the MetroNeo and MetroLite technologies, which are cheaper than conventional Metros, mentioned in the Budget were already being considered by it.

2. Apart from the Budget announcements, the Ministry said there had been an increase in the funds to urban local bodies as per the 15th Finance Commission's report.

3. There had been a 78% increase, from ₹87,143 crore in the 14th Finance Commission period to ₹1,55,628 crore in the 15th Finance Commission's period.

4. It said the Finance Commission had allocated ₹8,000 crore for incubation of eight new cities and that the selection of the cities would be done through a competition for States, for which guidelines would be prepared by it.

JAL JEEVAN MISSION:

1. Jal Jeevan Mission, is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.

2. The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting.

3. The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water and will include extensive Information, Education and communication as a key component of the mission.

4. JJM looks to create a jan andolan for water, thereby making it everyone's priority.

5. The mission would include rejuvenation of water bodies to boost the sustainable freshwater supply and creation of green spaces.

6. JJM (U) will promote circular economy of water through development of city water balance plan for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation.

7. The Ministry said 20% of the water demand would be met with reused water. The total expenditure on the mission would be ₹2.87 lakh crore over five years.

ATAL MISSION FOR REJUVENATION AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION (AMRUT):

1. AMRUT was launched by PM in June 2015 with the focus to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for urban transformation by implementing urban revival projects.

2. Rajasthan was the first state in the country to submit State Annual Action Plan under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

3. The scheme Housing for All by 2022 and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) were launched on the same day.

4. The scheme is dependent with public–private partnership(PPP) model.

5. If required, various other schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission, Housing for All 2022, along with the local state schemes like that related to water supply and sewerage and other infrastructure related schemes can be linked to AMRUT.

1. 27% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday and 7% are married before the age of 15. 4% of boys were married off before their 18th birthday.

2. India has the highest absolute number of women married or in a union before the age of 18 in the world – 15,648,000.

3. Child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas and, in general, rates of child marriage are highest in the central and western parts of India.

4. For instance, child marriage rates in districts of Rajasthan and Bihar range from 47% to 51%.

Marriage age: SC to study plea to transfer HC cases to itself

ABOUT:

1. The Supreme Court decided to examine a plea to transfer to itself cases pending in the Delhi and Rajasthan High Courts to declare a "uniform minimum age" for marriage.

MORE DETAILS:

1. Various laws state that the minimum age to get married should be 18 for women and 21 for men.

2. "Petitioner is compelled to approach this court as more PILs may be filed seeking 'Uniform Minimum Age of Marriage for Men and Women'.

3. Therefore, to avoid multiplicity of the litigations, the Court may be pleased to transfer these PILs and decide them collectively.

4. It sought a direction to the Union government to remove the anomalies in the minimum age of marriage and make it 'gender-neutral, religion-neutral and uniform for all citizens'.

WHAT'S THE CHILD MARRIAGE RATE? HOW BIG OF AN ISSUE IS CHILD MARRIAGE?

ARE THERE COUNTRY-SPECIFIC DRIVERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN THIS COUNTRY?

Child marriage is driven by gender inequality and the belief that girls are somehow inferior to boys.

In India, child marriage is also driven by:

1. **Harmful traditional practices:** Patriarchal social norms consider that married women and girls belong to their husband's family and women are generally seen as an economic burden. Girls are expected to be adaptable, docile, hardworking and talented wives. Customary laws based on religion are a major barrier in ending child marriage in India.

2. **Control over girls' sexuality:** Until a daughter is married, her chastity is considered to be a marker of her father's honour. This motivates men to marry off their daughters early. Social pressure to marry at puberty can be enormous within certain castes. Some girls are promised in marriage before they are born in order to "secure" their future. Once they reach puberty, gauna or "send-off" ceremonies take place and they are sent to their husband's home to commence the married life.

3. **Poverty:** Child marriage is more common among poorer households, with many

families marrying off their daughters to reduce their perceived economic burden. Girls are often married off at a young age because less dowry is expected for younger brides.

4. **Level of education:** Women with no education are six times more likely to get married than those with ten years education or more. Many families consider girls to be paraya dhan (someone else's wealth). This means that a girl's productive capacities benefit her marital family, and educating daughters is therefore seen as less of a priority than educating sons, who are responsible for taking care of their biological parents in old age. Further, given a lack of jobs and employment opportunities, there is a low value for education especially in rural areas where distance and low quality of education are active barriers to girls' education beyond middle school.

5. **Household labour:** Girls are often married off at puberty when they are deemed most "productive" and can take care of children and conduct housework. The labour of young brides is central to some rural economies.

6. **Violence against girls:** Some girls are married off due to lack of safety and fear of violence against women and girls in public spaces, with many cases of being reported every day. However, a 2014 study found that child brides in India are at greater risk of sexual and physical violence within their marital home.

7. **Poor law enforcement:** There are persisting legal loopholes that fuel impunity for child marriage. There is also low awareness of the law and barriers to access justice for women and girls.

WHAT HAS THIS COUNTRY COMMITTED TO?

1. India has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The government did not provide an update on progress towards this target during its Voluntary National Review at the 2017 High Level Political Forum.

3. India acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, which sets a minimum age of marriage of 18, and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, which obligates states to ensure free and full consent to marriage.

4. During its 2017 Universal Periodic Review, India agreed to consider recommendations to improve enforcement of legal provisions against child marriage.

5. India is also a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), which adopted a regional action plan to end child marriage from 2015 – 2018.

6. Representatives of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), including India, asserted the Kathmandu Call to Action to End Child Marriage in Asia in 2014. As part of its commitment, India will ensure access to legal remedies for child brides and establish a uniform minimum legal age of marriage of 18. However as of 2020, the legal age for boys remains at 21 years.

7. In 2019, at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, India committed to address all forms of violence against all women and girls, but without mention of child marriage.

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING TO ADDRESS THIS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL?

1. A National Action Plan to prevent child marriages was drafted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2013, but it was shelved with the change of government in 2014. Key components included law enforcement, changing mind-sets and social norms, empowering adolescents, quality education and sharing knowledge.

2. India is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, a multi-donor, multi-stakeholder programme working across 12 countries over four years. In 2018, the Global Programme reached almost 2.3 million girls through adolescent groups, which enabled their participation in and access to health information and life skills training.

3. Due to its decentralised governance structure, in recent years there has been more initiatives at the state level with the development of action plans. Whilst some states have taken limited action, Rajasthan, one of the states with the highest prevalence of child marriage, launched a Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention of Child Marriage in March 2017 and a large-scale advocacy campaign.

4. In 2018, Jharkhand state developed a state action plan to end child marriage and Bihar state launched a Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention of Child Marriage. As part of it, 101 public servants were trained as Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, and task forces were set up to increase awareness and reporting of cases of child marriage.

5. West Bengal also has a state plan of action for children, which includes child marriage. Other states, including Gujarat and Odisha, consolidated child protection schemes in 2018.

6. Previous governmental schemes have included cash incentives (such as the Dhan Laxmi scheme and the Apni beti apna dhun programme), adolescents' empowerment programmes (Kishori Shakti Yojana) and awareness-raising to encourage behaviour change related to child marriage.

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM LEGAL FRAMEWORK AROUND MARRIAGE?

1. According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 the minimum legal age of marriage in India is 18 years for girls with no exceptions. For boys, the legal age of marriage is 21.

2. There have been a number of court cases in recent years where petitioners have argued that the provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act do not apply to Muslims as marriages between Muslims are governed by Muslim Personal Law under the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.

3. In 2017, the Supreme Court of India indicated that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 has priority over personal laws.

Granted Rs 8,000 crore, govt looks at 8 new cities

ABOUT:

The 15th Finance Commission has recommended a grant of Rs 8,000 crore to incubate eight new cities, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

OUTGROWTH TOWNS:

1. The Finance Commission has given a new window and new thinking. The way the nation is growing, unless we have planned cities, it will all be outgrowth cities. And outgrowth is an inefficient use of the city.

2. 2011 Census had categorised 31.2 per cent of India as urban, but only 26 per cent of that as statutory towns.

3. This gap of 5 per cent of urbanised India – populated by roughly 6 crore people – is living in either census towns or in outgrowth towns.

4. Census towns are towns of over 5,000 people, with a density of more than 400 per sq km, and more than 75 per cent of non-farm, male labourers.

5. These towns are still under the panchayat systems, and not municipalities. Outgrowth towns are in the periphery of big cities, also governed by panchayats.

Increased overall funding for ULBs:

1. For cities with more than a million people, roughly Rs 38,000 crore will be distributed based on performance of improvements in air quality, drinking water, sanitation, and solid waste management.

2. For cities with less than 1 million people, roughly Rs 83,000 crore will be distributed in a similar manner.

3. The Finance Commission has also allotted Rs 450 crore to a "shared municipal services" fund where the ministry will help smaller urban bodies with their back-end work such as database maintenance.

4. The ministry made 86 clusters of the smallest urban local bodies (ULBs) which they can help service from afar.

5. The Commission's overall funds for ULB saw a 78 per cent increase over last year – from Rs 87,000 crore to Rs 1.6 lakh crore. Of this, a little over Rs 1.2 lakh crore has been allocated directly to ULBs.

6. Cities will receive funding only when their annual accounts are put in public domain.

7. Also, if a state's GDP increases, then the city's property tax should increase by a similar proportion, Mishra said.

8. Even as a state's GDP is increasing, the urban local bodies are becoming that much weaker. So this condition has been added.

9. In the budget for MoHUA, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY), to provide housing for all, was allocated Rs 8,000 crore in 2020-21, but spent Rs 21,000 crore.

10. Continuing the same trend, the allocation in this year's Budget is Rs 8,000 crore, leading industry experts to deduce that the mission will again have to resort to extra-budgetary resources to finance the bulk of the mission.

NEW SCHEMES:

1. In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced a new bus scheme and emphasis on MetroLite and MetroNeo systems in cities.

2. The bus augmentation will focus on cities with population of over 5 lakh and the state capitals.

3. With a focus on Metros in Tier-II cities such as Gorakhpur, Jammu, Srinagar, Bhiwadi, and Darihera, the goal is to extend India's Metro lines to 1,000 km, from a current estimate of 700 km.

HAL gets contract for 83 LCAs in ₹48,000 cr. deal

ABOUT:

1. At the 13th edition of Aero India in Bengaluru, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) was awarded the contract to manufacture 83 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas for the Indian Air Force (IAF).

HAL Tejas:

1. The HAL Tejas is an Indian single-engine, fourth-generation, multirole light fighter designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) in collaboration with Aircraft Research and Design Centre (ARDC) of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy.

2. It came from the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme, which began in the 1980s to replace India's ageing MiG-21 fighters.

3. In 2003, the LCA was officially named "Tejas".

4. Tejas has a tail-less compound delta-wing configuration with a single vertical stabilizer. This provides better high-alpha performance characteristics than conventional wing designs.

5. It integrates technologies such as relaxed static stability, fly-by-wire flight control

system, multi-mode radar, integrated digital avionics system and composite material structures.

6. It is the smallest and lightest in its class of contemporary supersonic combat aircraft.

7. The Tejas is the second supersonic fighter developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) after the HAL HF-24 Marut.

8. Production of the Tejas Mark 1 for the Indian Air Force (IAF) began in 2016, at which time the naval version was undergoing flight tests for Indian Navy (IN).

9. The first Tejas IAF unit, No. 45 Squadron IAF Flying Daggers was formed on 1 July 2016 with two aircraft.

10. The Minister of State for Defence, Subhash Bhamre, reported to parliament that the indigenous content of the Tejas was 59.7% by value and 75.5% by number of line replaceable units in 2016.

INDIA MOTIVES:

1. India has long witnessed unfortunate attempts to employ force to change the status quo along our unresolved border and India is vigilant and prepared to counter and defeat any misadventure and defend people and territorial integrity at all costs. India's resolve towards this is shown by our growing defence capabilities"

2. India plans to spend $130 bn on military modernisation in the next 7-8 years.

3. India faced threats and challenges emanating from multiple fronts and it was a victim of state-sponsored terrorism, which was now a global threat.

DELIVERIES IN 8 YEARS:

1. This contract is the biggest Make in India defence contract till date.

2. The contract includes 73 LCA Tejas Mk-1A fighter aircraft and 10 LCA Tejas Mk-1 trainer aircraft at a cost of ₹45,696 crore along with design and development of infrastructure sanctions worth ₹1,202 crore.

3. The deliveries of all 83 aircraft shall be

completed in eight years from now.

4. Globally we are facing unprecedented levels of 'uncertainty, volatility and interconnected threats'. In this regard he pitched for greater regional coordination.

5. As part of efforts to boost defence exports, HAL displayed an 'Atmanirbhar formation' consisting of its platforms — LCA trainer, HTT-40 trainer, Intermediate Jet Trainer, Advanced Hawk Mk-132 and Civil Dornier Do-228.

U.S. extends New START nuclear treaty with Russia

ABOUT:

1. U.S. President Joe Biden's administration extended the New START nuclear treaty with Russia by five years, saying it hoped to prevent an arms race despite rising tensions with Moscow.

2. One day before the treaty was set to expire, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was extending New START by the maximum allowed time of five years.

DISARMAMENT:

1. President Biden pledged to keep the American people safe from nuclear threats by restoring U.S. leadership on arms control and nonproliferation.

2. The United States is committed to effective arms control that enhances stability, transparency and predictability while reducing the risks of costly, dangerous arms races."

3. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed off on legislation extending the accord, meaning that the treaty — signed by then-President Barack Obama in 2010 — will run until February 5, 2026.

4. The last remaining arms reduction pact between the former Cold War rivals, New START caps to 1,550 the number of nuclear warheads that can be deployed by Moscow

and Washington.

CHINA'S ARSENAL:

1. Former President Donald Trump's administration tore up previous agreements with Moscow and unsuccessfully sought to expand New START to cover China.

2. Mr. Blinken said the U.S. would use the coming five years to pursue diplomacy that addresses "all" of Russia's nuclear weapons and to "reduce the dangers from China's modern and growing nuclear arsenal".

Chauri Chaura Centenary Celebrations

CONTEXT:

● Prime Minister of India inaugurateD the **Chauri Chaura Centenary Celebrations at Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh**, on 4th February 2021.
● The day marks **100 years of the 'Chauri Chaura' incident**, a landmark event in the country's fight for independence.

ABOUT:

● DATE: 4 February 1922
● PLACE: Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of the United Province (modern Uttar Pradesh) in British India
● In this, a large group of protesters participating in the Non-cooperation movement, clashed with police who opened fire.
● In retaliation the demonstrators attacked and set fire to a police station, killing all of its occupants.

● The incident led to the death of three civilians and 22 policemen.
● Mahatma Gandhi, who was strictly against violence, halted the non-co-operation movement on the national level on 12 February 1922, as a direct result of this incident.

GOBARDHAN activities

CONTEXT:

● **Agriculture Ministry, Petroleum Ministry, Animal Husbandry Ministry, Jal Shakti Ministry and Ministry of State for Jal Shakti** jointly launched a unified web portal for monitoring the progress of **GOBARDHAN activities** across the nation.

ABOUT

● Gobardhan is an **important component of Swachh Bharat Mission Phase-2** for **organic solid waste management**.
● At the **rural level**, earlier there was no way of proper disposal of cattle dung waste, but after the introduction of Gobardhan programme, **people will be able to provide proper disposal of dung and achieve the goal of ODF Plus**.

● The Gobardhan **pilot project** will prove to be an important and useful step in cleanliness. Through this farmers will be able to **get wealth from waste in a true sense**.
● Apart from making the country ODF Plus, through the important scheme of Gobardhan, **India will get ethanol, bio-diesel and compressed bio-fuel in the coming years**.
● The launch of the unified **portal of Gobardhan will further strengthen the rural economy** through a **convergent approach for various Biogas projects** models and initiatives.

Maternal welfare scheme beneficiaries cross 1.75 crore

ABOUT:

1. The government's maternity benefit scheme, or Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, has crossed 1.75 crore eligible women till financial year 2020

2. A total sum of ₹5,931.95 crore was paid to 1.75 crore eligible beneficiaries between financial year 2018 and 2020.

3. Apart from that, ₹2,063.70 crore was disbursed in the current fiscal to 65.12 lakh women.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRI VANDANA YOJANA:

1. Maternity benefit program run by the government of India.

2. It was introduced in 2017 and is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

3. It is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for the first live birth.

4. It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.

5. In 2013, the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013 to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 (US$84) stated in the Act.

6. Presently, the scheme is implemented on a pilot basis in 53 selected districts and proposals are under consideration to scale it up to 200 additional 'high burden districts' in 2015–16.

7. The eligible beneficiaries would receive the incentive given under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for Institutional delivery and the incentive received under JSY would be accounted towards maternity benefits so that on an average a woman gets ₹6,000 (US$84).

8. The scheme, rechristened Maternity benefits programme is set to cover the entire nation.

9. Prime Minister, in his 2017 New Year's Eve speech, announced that the scheme will be scaled up to cover 650 districts of the country.

10. The announcement assumes significance as India accounts for 17% of all maternal deaths in the world.

11. The country's maternal mortality ratio is pegged at 113 per 100,000 live births, whereas infant mortality is estimated at 32 per 1,000 live births.

12. Among the primary causes of high maternal and infant mortality are poor nutrition and inadequate medical care during pregnancy and childbirth.

BENEFITS:

1. Disaggregated data on how many of these were unique beneficiaries, and how many were those receiving different instalments of the scheme was not provided.

2. According to the government's initial estimate, it aimed to reach 51.7 lakh women per year through the scheme.

3. Under PMMVY, pregnant women and lactating mothers receive ₹5,000 on the birth of their first child in three instalments, after fulfilling certain conditionalities.

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

Citing shortage of officers in J&K, Govt introduces Bill to merge its cadre with AGMUT

ABOUT:

1. THE GOVERNMENT introduced a Bill in the Rajya Sabha to merge the IAS, IPS and IFS cadre of Jammu and Kashmir with that of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre.

2. The cadres had been merged last month through an Ordinance.

3. The move has allowed officers posted in these states and union territories to work in Jammu and Kashmir and vice versa.

REASONS BEHIND THE CHANGE:

1. The government had to merge the two cadres in view of paucity of officers in the newly created union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

2. The J&K Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to amend the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 which had then made provision for retention of the J&K cadre for existing officers and stated that new officers posted there would henceforth come from the UT cadre.

3. There is a huge deficiency of officers of All India Services in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

4. The developmental schemes, centrally sponsored schemes and other allied activities suffer due to non-availability of All India Officers in the existing cadres of Jammu and Kashmir.

5. There is a requirement of merging Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram, union territories cadre so that the officers in this cadre can be posted in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir to meet out any deficiency to some extent.

6. It said the Bill is being brought "in order to provide uniformity in the governance of all the union territories and to further enhance efficiency in their administration.

7. Apart from paucity of officers, the reason for merging the cadres is also entrenched interests of officers of the J&K cadre and their "political links".

Retail investors to be able to buy G-Secs directly: RBI

ABOUT:

1. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would allow retail investors to open gilt accounts with the central bank to invest in government securities directly and without the help of intermediaries

WHAT ARE GOVERNMENT SECURITIES, OR G-SECS?

1. These are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.

2. The two key categories are treasury bills – short-term instruments which mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years.

BROADENING THE INVESTOR BASE:

1. This will broaden the investor base and provide retail investors with enhanced access to participate in the government securities market.

2. This is a major structural reform placing India among select few countries which have similar facilities.

3. This measure together with HTM [hold to maturity] relaxation, will facilitate smooth completion of the government borrowing programme in 2021-22.

4. The RBI will soon come out with modalities for opening of such accounts. The provision would not in any way hinder flow of investors' funds into mutual fund schemes and bank deposits.

5. Allowing retail participation in the G-Sec market is a bold step towards the financialisation of a vast pool of domestic savings and could be a game-changer.

Experts point to climate change impact:

Context:
1. A deluge that resulted from a glacial melt on Nanda Devi flooded Rishiganga river in Uttarakhand and washed away at least two

hydroelectric power projects — the 13.2 MW Rishiganga hydroelectric power project and the Tapovan project on Dhauliganga river, a tributary of the Alakananda.

ABOUT:

1. Environmental experts attributed the Nanda Devi glacial melt to global warming. Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of the mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes, according to the latest assessment reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

1. **Climate change** is a long-term **change** in the average weather patterns that have come to **define** Earth's local, regional and **global** climates. These **changes** have a broad range of observed effects that are synonymous with the term.

2. **Climate** change has driven erratic weather patterns like increased snowfall and rainfall, and warmer winters have led to the melting of a lot of snow.

3. The thermal profile of ice, it was increasing. Earlier the temperature of ice ranged from -6 to -20 degree Celsius; it is now -2 making it more susceptible to melting.

Difference between Climate variability and Climate change:

1. Climate variability includes all the variations in the climate that last longer than individual weather events, whereas the term climate change only refers to those variations that persist for a longer period of time, typically decades or more.

2. In the time since the industrial revolution, the climate has increasingly been affected by human activities that are causing global warming and climate change.

3. The largest driver of warming is the emission of greenhouse gases, of which

more than 90% are carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane.

4. Fossil fuel burning (coal, oil, and gas) for energy consumption is the main source of these emissions, with additional contributions from agriculture, deforestation, and industrial processes.

Human impacts of Climate Change:

1. Human impacts include under nutrition
2. hunger from reduced crop yields,
3. declining fish stocks,
4. increases in vector-borne diseases,
5. flooding, natural disaster
6. potentially severe economic impacts,
7. increased global economic inequality
8. more people living in uninhabitable climate zones
9. The increased migration.
10. Effects such as these have led the World Health.
11. The rising sea levels.
12. The rising ocean temperatures,
13. The Rising in ocean acidification

Mitigation of climate change:

1. The forestation and tree plantation.
2. The reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and removing them from the atmosphere;
3. The methods include the development and deployment of low-carbon energy sources.
4. Renewable Energy wind and solar,
5. a phase-out of coal, enhanced energy efficiency,

6. The reforestation and forest preservation.

7. Adaptation consists of adjusting to actual or expected climate,

8. The improved coastline protection, better disaster management,

9. The development of more resistant crops.

10. Adaptation alone cannot avert the risk of Climate change; it must be an effective implementation.

Conclusion:

1. the **Paris climate** change **agreement** signed in 2015, **India** has committed to cut GHG (GreenHouse Gas) emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35 per cent, increase non-fossil fuel power capacity to 40 per cent from 28 per cent in 2015, add carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonne CO_2 per annum by increasing the forest cover.

2. India achieved 21% of its emissions intensity reduction target as a proportion of its GDP in line with its pledge to a 33-35% reduction by 2030.

3. India was the only major G20 country that was on track towards keeping to its nationally determined commitments to halt runaway global warming.

Men access mental health helplines more

CONTEXT:

1. The 'Kiran' Helpline service was set up by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry.
2. Seventy per cent of callers to a mental health rehabilitation helpline launched, in September 2020 by the Social Justice and Empowerment (SJE) Ministry, were men according to an internal report of the Ministry accessed by about 32% of those who reached out were students.

3. The majority of callers (75.5%) were in the age group of 15 to 40 years, while 18.1% were older, in the 41 to 60 age group,
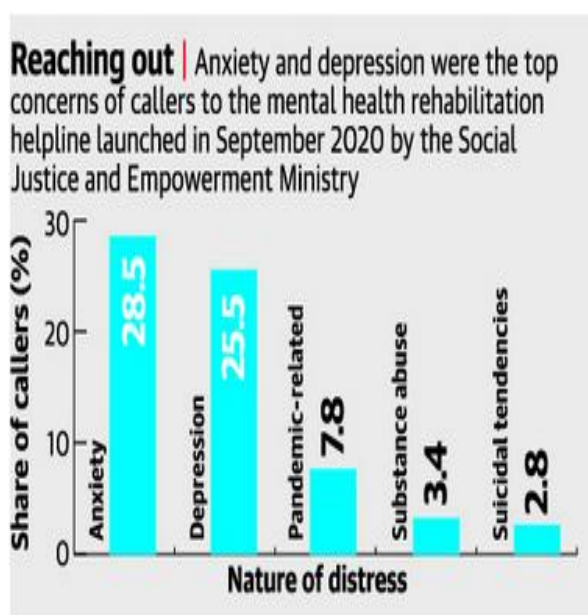
ABOUT:

1. The callers 65.9% had "milder nature of distress", while 26.5% were "moderately distressed" and 7.6% were "severely distressed". The report said 32.3% of the callers were students, 15.2% were self-employed, 27.1% were employed, 23.3% were unemployed, 1.4% were home-makers and 0.7% did not reveal the information.

2. While most of the callers (78.2%) sought help for themselves, others reached out for their parents, siblings, spouse and others.

3. Most of the calls were from the North zone (40.32%), followed by West (27.08%), South (16.99%), East (11.28%) and North East (4.33%).

4. The 24/7 helpline offers early screening, psychological first-aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well-being, psychological crisis management services and referrals to mental health experts and is operated by 81 front-line professionals, apart from volunteer psychiatrists, clinical and rehabilitation psychologists.

Issues:

1. **High Public Health Burden:** An estimated **150 million people** across India are in need of mental health care interventions, according to India's latest National Mental Health Survey 2015-16.
2. **Lack of Resources:**
   a. Low proportion of the mental health workforce in India (per 100,000 population) include psychiatrists (0.3), nurses (0.12), psychologists (0.07) and social workers (0.07).
   b. Low financial resource allocation of just over a percent of GDP on healthcare has created impediments in public access to affordable mental healthcare.
3. **Loss to Economy:** due to delayed or non treatment of mentally ill persons there is

loss in terms of human capital and an overall loss to the economy in the form of lost man-days, plus the poor is stressed as most of mental healthcare is in urban areas and are unavailable in primary healthcare centres in rural areas, this increases out of pocket expenditure.

4. **Demographic Dividend:** According to WHO, the burden of mental disorders is maximal in young adults, As most of the population is young (India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25) so it requires a special focus in mental health of youth by the government to reap the benefits arising out of the demographic dividend in India.

5. **Post-Treatment gap:** There is a need for proper rehabilitation of the mentally ill persons post his/her treatment which is currently not present.

6. **Poor awareness** about the symptoms of mental illness, **social stigma** and **abandonment** of mentally ill especially old and destitute leads to social isolation and reluctance on part of family members to seek treatment for the patient has resulted in a massive **treatment gap**, which further worsens the present mental illness of a person.

7. **Rise in Severity:** Mental health problems, tend to increase during economic downturns, therefore special attention is needed during times of economic distress.

8. **Prone to abuse:** Mentally ill patients are vulnerable to and usually suffer from

Reaching out | Anxiety and depression were the top concerns of callers to the mental health rehabilitation helpline launched in September 2020 by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry

physical abuse, sexual abuse, wrongful confinement, even at homes and mental healthcare facilities which is a cause of concern and a gross human right violation.

Constitutional Provision

1. The Supreme Court has held healthcare to be a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Mental health care Act 2017

1. **Right to make an Advance Directive:** Patient can state on how to be treated or not to be treated for the illness during a mental health situation.
2. **Right to appoint a Nominated Representative :** A person shall have the right to appoint a nominated representative to take on his/her behalf, all health related decisions
1. Right to access mental health care
2. Right to free & quality services
3. Right to get free medicines
4. Right to community living
5. Right to protection from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment
6. Right to live in an environment, safe and hygienic, having basic amenities
7. Right to legal aid

No Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) without anesthesia

1. **Attempt to commit suicide not an offence:** This act brought changes in Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code (which criminalized attempted suicide). Now, a person who attempts to commit suicide will be presumed to be **"suffering from severe stress"** and shall not be subjected to any investigation or prosecution.

2. The act envisages the establishment of **Central Mental Health Authority and State Mental Health Authority**.

India and mental Health:

1. In India, the prevalence estimates vary between 5.82 to 7.3%. In terms of absolute number suffering from mental illnesses, the prevalence estimate throws up a huge number of about 7 crore persons.

2. The median number of psychiatrists in India is only 0.2 per 100,000 population compared to a global median of 1.2 per 100,000 population.

3. The figures for psychologists, social workers and nurses working for mental health is 0.03, 0.03 and 0.05 per 100,000 population compared to a global median of 0.60, 0.40 and 2.00 per 100,000 population, respectively.

Treatment:

1. 70 MN Approximate numbers of people suffering from mental illnesses in India and 3000 Number of psychiatrists in India with 11500 estimated requirements of psychiatrists, 500: Number of clinical psychologists in India.

2. 17250: Estimated requirement of clinical psychologists with 400 Number of psychiatric social workers and 23000: Estimated requirement of psychiatric social workers in India.

Conclusion:

1. NMHP was launched in 1982 with very comprehensive objectives which stand true even today. National Health Policy 2002 recognised and incorporated the objectives and strategies of NMHP.

2. WHO Mental Health Atlas 2011 states that the government's expenditure on mental health was only 0.06% of the total health budget. The country has only 0.301 psychiatrists per 100,000 people. Treatment at the hospitals too leaves much to be desired.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Context:

1. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has allocated Rs 16000 crores for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) for the fiscal year 2021-22. This is a budgetary increase of around Rs 305 crore as against the previous fiscal year 2020-21,

2. The scheme extends coverage for the entire cropping cycle from pre-sowing to post-harvest including coverage for losses arising out of prevented sowing and mid-season adversities.

About PMFBY:

1. It was launched on 18 February 2016 by the Prime Minister and it is an insurance service for farmers for their yields.

2. It was formulated in line with One Nation–One Scheme theme by replacing earlier two schemes National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS) by incorporating their best features and removing their inherent drawbacks.

3. It aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claims for the full insured sum.

4. To provide a comprehensive insurance cover against failure of the crop thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers.

5. The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Crops Commercial/Horticultural for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

6. The scheme is implemented by empanelled general insurance companies. Selection of Implementing Agency (IA) is done by the concerned State Government through bidding.

7. The scheme is compulsory for loanee farmers availing Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops and voluntary for others. The scheme is being administered by the Ministry of Agriculture.

A bullet through an island's heart-

ABOUT:

1. A megacity plan for the sustainable and holistic development of the 680 sq km, fragile Little Andaman Island in the Andaman and Nicobar group.

2. The plan has raised the alarm among conservationists.

'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LITTLE ANDAMAN ISLAND - VISION DOCUMENT':

1. This is the NITI Aayog's proposal to leverage the strategic location and natural features of the island.

2. The document aims at building a new greenfield coastal city there, that will be developed as a free trade zone and will compete with Singapore and Hong Kong.

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

4. An international airport capable of handling all types of aircraft will be central to this development vision.

5. The only jetty on the island will be expanded and a marina will be developed next to the tourist entertainment district.

6. A 100 km greenfield ring road will be constructed parallel to the coastline from east to west and will be supplemented with a mass rapid transit network with stations at regular intervals.

7. The nature resort complex proposed at West Bay on the western coast is to have theme resorts, floating/underwater resorts, beach hotels, and high-end residential villas.

8. It is today a secluded and difficult to reach part, one of the most important nesting sites of the globally endangered Giant Leatherback sea turtle

9. Giant Leatherback sea turtle is being studied by the Dakshin Foundation, the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team and the island administration's Forest Department.

THREE ZONES:

The proposal is pivoted along three development anchors and zones.

Zone 1 — spread over 102 sq km along the east coast of Little Andaman — will be the financial district and medi city and will include an aerocity, and a tourism and hospital district.

Zone 2- Spread over 85 sq km of pristine forest- the leisure zone, will have a film city, a residential district and a tourism SEZ.

Zone 3 — on 52 sq km of pristine forest — will be a nature zone, further categorised into three districts: an exclusive forest resort, a nature healing district and a nature retreat, all on the western coast.

'BLOCKS' TO DEVELOPMENT:

Factors that could prevent Little Andaman from becoming the new Singapore and these include-

a. lack of good connectivity with Indian mainland and global cities,

b. a fragile biodiversity and natural ecosystems and;

c. the "presence of indigenous tribes and concerns for their welfare" and;

d. certain Supreme Court notifications that pose an impediment to development

e. 95% of Little Andaman is covered in forest, a large part of it the pristine evergreen type;

f. some 640 sq km of the island is Reserve Forest under the Indian Forest Act, and;

g. Nearly 450 sq km is protected as the Onge Tribal Reserve.

IRRITANTS IN THE DOCUMENT:

1. The vision needs 240 sq km (35%) of this land.

2. It is planning to de-reserve 32% of the reserved forest and de-notify 138 sq km or 31% of the tribal reserve.

3. And if the tribals become an impediment, the vision suggests that they "can be relocated to other parts of the island".

4. The document uses inappropriate photographs plagiarised from the Internet.

5. Vision talks of conservation of national park/wildlife sanctuary on Little Andaman when none exist here and it has no mention of the geological vulnerability of the place, which was amongst the worst-affected in the earthquake-tsunami combination in 2004.

6. The plan has no financial details, no budgeting, or inventorisation of forests and ecological wealth and no details of any impact assessment.

FOREST DEPT.'S CONCERNS:

1. Experts have raised serious concerns about this vision on grounds of-

   a. ecological fragility, indigenous rights and vulnerability to earthquakes and tsunamis.

   b. large diversion of forest land would cause obvious environmental loss leading to irreversible damage (more than 2 million trees

stand in the forest land sought for these projects).

   c. habitats of various wild animals including endangered sea turtles would be affected.

2. The impact could not even be assessed because there was no environment impact assessment report and neither were there any detailed site layout plans for the proposed diversion.

3. The vision that seeks to alter the nature of an ancient island bigger than Chennai and Mumbai in area.

4. A meeting will be held to initiate the denotification of the Onge tribal reserve on Little Andaman.

Centre likely to postpone Census to 2022-

ABOUT:

1. The Central government is on track to push the 2021 Census to 2022 on account of the country's continuing preoccupation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Measures taken to deal with the pandemic and now the massive vaccination programme underway across the country are the reasons behind the postponement.

NPR update:

1. The Census exercise was to be conducted in two phases —

2. HouseListing and Housing Census from April to September 2020 and;

3. Population Enumeration from February 9 to February 28, 2021.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE NPR:

1. Thousands of people had protested against the Centre's decision to update the NPR, which is considered the basis for the preparation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC) that could potentially exclude millions of people born in India.

2. The entire process of NPR had become controversial after Parliament approved the

Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December 2019 that sought to give citizenship to persecuted minorities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

3. However, the rules required for implementing the CAA have not been framed so far — more than a year after the passage of this key legislation.

4. Diplomatic sources believe that strong opposition from Bangladesh is one of the factors that led to the CAA remaining on hold.

'3-language policy is not applicable to Central govt. offices'

ABOUT:

1. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has said the three-language policy is not applicable to offices of the Union government.

WHAT IS THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA?

1. It was first incorporated in the National Education Policy 1968 by the Indira Gandhi government.

2. **In Hindi-speaking states:** English, Hindi, and a modern Indian language.

3. **Non-Hindi speaking states:** English, Hindi, and one Indian language.

4. The three-language formula sought to serve three functions namely, accommodating group identity, affirming national unity, and increasing administrative efficiency.

5. In 1968, the three-language formula was implemented across the country, barring Tamil Nadu that adopted a two-language policy.

Medical board on abortion 'unfeasible'

ABOUT:

1. A panel of doctors to decide on termination of pregnancy beyond 24 weeks as proposed in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020, is "unfeasible" as 82% of these posts are lying vacant in the country, finds a new study.

2. The data is based on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's Rural Health Survey, which provides details of vacancies filled at secondary healthcare centres. Similar data for urban areas were unavailable.

THE BILL:

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

2. The Bill proposes several amendments, including the constitution of a medical Board in every State and Union Territory.

3. The Board will decide on pregnancies beyond 24 weeks in cases of foetal abnormalities.

4. Each Board will have a gynaecologist, a radiologist or sonologist, a paediatrician, and other members prescribed by the governments.

REPORT ANALYSIS:

1. The report analysed district-wise availability of specialists, including surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, physicians and paediatricians.

2. It found that for each of the years between 2015 and 2019, the shortfall in these posts hovered between 71% and 81.8%.

3. For 2019, for a total of 21,296 vacancies in the country, only 3,880 were filled, that is, there was a shortfall of 81.8%.

4. The shortfall was starker in the northeast where Sikkim, Mizoram and Manipur had a total absence of obstetricians and

gynaecologists, and a near total absence of paediatricians.

5. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya had a 100% shortage of paediatricians.

HIKE:

1. Steel industry in general and the top few premium steel makers in India in particular have hiked the price of steel by at least 50 per cent in the past six months.

2. The move is expected to give a clear cost-advantage to the Centre's various road projects.

3. The decision will make thousands of suppliers of recycled steel and smaller players in the sector eligible to vie for the business so long as their steel meets the required technical standard set by the ministry for roads and bridges.

QUALITY CONTROL:

1. There will also be a requirement to set a stringent inspection regime for quality control at the ground level.

2. About 40 per cent of the expenditure in road projects goes into procuring steel and cement.

3. An estimated 10,000 suppliers in India will potentially be eligible to bid for contracts to supply steel after the move, introducing competition and also enhancing the size of the sector.

4. Over 60 per cent of the domestic steel demand is generated from construction sectors like real estate and roads.

5. The road sector the world over has been toying with a number of alternative technologies and materials that can replace steel.

6. Composite and reinforced fibre bars claim tensile strength five to six times that of steel.

Britain to apply to join Asia-Pacific free

trade bloc-

ABOUT:

1. Britain will apply to join a massive 11-nation free-trade bloc of Asia-Pacific countries.

2. Britain will formally request for Britain to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a market representing half a billion people and roughly 13.5% of the global economy.

3. British Prime Minister said the potential new partnership would "bring enormous economic benefits for the people of Britain".

4. Negotiations between the UK and the partnership -- which represents 11 Pacific Rim nations including Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Vietnam -- are expected to start this year.

'ENORMOUS OPPORTUNITIES' -

1. Britain said joining the CPTPP would offer "enormous opportunities".

2. Britain made agreements with members such as Japan and Canada in the wake of Brexit, with British media reporting that CPTPP nations accounted for around eight percent of UK exports in 2019.

3. The deal will mean lower tariffs for car manufacturers and whisky producers, as well as "delivering quality jobs and greater prosperity for people here at home".

4. Membership of the bloc has the potential to deliver new opportunities for UK business across different sectors.

COMPREHENSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE AGREEMENT FOR TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP:

1. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), also known as TPP11 is a trade agreement between Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico,

New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.

2. It evolved from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which never entered into force due to the withdrawal of the United States.

3. At the time of its signing, the eleven countries' combined economies represented 13.4 percent of the global gross domestic product (approximately US$13.5 trillion), making the CPTPP the third largest free-trade area in the world by GDP.

4. The CPTPP was launched in 2019 to remove trade barriers among the 11 nations representing nearly 500 million consumers in the Asia-Pacific region in a bid to counter China's growing economic influence.

5. The Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement was signed on 4 February 2016, but never entered into force, as Donald Trump withdrew the US from the agreement soon after being elected.

6. All original TPP signatories except the US agreed in May 2017 to revive it and reached agreement in January 2018 to conclude the CPTPP.

7. The formal signing ceremony was held on 8 March 2018 in Santiago, Chile.

8. The CPTPP incorporates most of the TPP provisions by reference, but suspended 22 provisions the US favored that other countries opposed, and lowered the threshold for enactment so the participation of the US is not required.

9. The agreement specifies that its provisions enter into effect 60 days after ratification by at least 50% of the signatories (six of the eleven participating countries).

10. The sixth nation to ratify the deal was Australia on 31 October, and the agreement came into force for the initial six ratifying countries on 30 December 2018.

MAINS

GS I

A verdict that has ended a long silence.

CONTEXT:

● A Delhi court acquitted / free former journalist Priya Ramani in a defamation case filed by former Union minister MJ Akbar against after she accused him of sexual harassment.

● The court said that a woman has the right to voice grievance several years after the alleged crime took place.

● Women speaking up against sexual harassment are often disbelieved, often asked, "what proof do you have?" Other questions women face includes: "Why did you not speak up immediately after it happened?" and "Why did you take to media or social media to tell your story, instead of filing a criminal case?" The Ramani judgment is worth celebration.

The Key takeaways from the verdict:

● Didn't "do'" anything: it drives the message home that you don't have to touch someone inappropriately to sexually harass them.

● The Victim had to prove her intention: that a woman who was sexually harassed had to prove her motives, that she was not guilty of defamation and was not making false allegations.

● The Women and the workplace: Now all workplaces have to have Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) complaint cells but women are still wary for this very reason.

● The Women have a right to complain even after decades: The court says women have a right to speak about their experiences on any platform, even decades later.

● Not a man of stellar reputation: Court says "A woman cannot be punished "for raising voice against sex abuse on the pretext of criminal complaint of defamation.

● The public goods: the imputation is made in good faith for the protection of the interests

of the person making it, or of any other person, or for the public good."

Defamation and the defence:

- Under the Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as whoever, by words either spoken or intended to be read, or by signs or by visible representations, makes or publishes any imputation concerning any person intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation.
- The law of criminal defamation is premised on a person's right to a reputation. Making or publishing "any imputation concerning any person, intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm, the reputation of such person", is criminal defamation.
- Mr. Akbar alleged that Ms. Ramani's allegations, "by their very tone and tenor, are ex facie defamatory and had not only damaged the complainant's goodwill and reputation in his social circles and on the political stage, which was established after years of hard work.
- Ms. Ramani premised her defence on the First Exception to Section 499 which postulates that "It is not defamation to impute anything which is true concerning any person, if it be for the public good that the imputation should be made or published.
- Ms. Ramani also relied upon the" Ninth Exception" which says that , "It is not defamation to make an imputation on the character of another provided that the imputation be made in good faith for the protection of the interests of the person making it, or of any other person, or for the public good."

For public good, witnesses:

- The Third Exception was also pressed into service saying: "It is not defamation to express in good faith any opinion whatever respecting the conduct of any person touching any public question, and respecting his character, so far as his character appears in that conduct".

- The court accepted the "defence of the accused that she disclosed the truth regarding the incident of sexual harassment against on ground public goods.
- The judgment has thus ruled that Ms. Ramani spoke the truth, and that Mr. Akbar had a pre-existing tarnished reputation which had been exposed for the public good.

The Construction and Law in IPC provision:

- Article 15(1) The Construction provides that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen of India on the ground of sex.
- Article 39(a) The Construction provides the state to secure for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Indian Constitution guarantees several rights such as the right to equality in Article 14, right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of Constitution to all its citizens irrespective of gender.
- Section 500 of IPC, which is on punishment for defamation, reads, "Whoever defames another shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both."
- Section 509 IPC provides that whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman.
- Section 506 in IPC, Punishment for criminal intimidation, Whoever commits, the offence of criminal intimidation shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both; If threat be to cause death or grievous hurt, etc.
- The objective of 504 IPC section is to prevent the intentional use of abusive language amounting to insult, giving rise to provocations causing the person against whom such words are used to commit breach of peace.
- The Section 67 of IT Act 2000, Punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form. Punishment for publishing or transmitting of material

containing sexually explicit act, etc, in electronic form.
- Cognizable are heinous crimes, whereas non-cognizable offences are not so serious. Cognizable encompasses murder, rape, theft, kidnapping, counterfeiting, etc. On the contrary, non-cognizable offences include offences like forgery, cheating, assault, defamation and so forth.

Other cases:

- In the Mathura rape case of 1978, the Supreme Court's acquittal of the policeman, Tukaram, earned it a stinging rebuke from legal scholars that "consent involves submission, but the converse is not necessarily true".
- In 1988, IAS officer Rupan Deol Bajaj case prosecuted Punjab's super-policeman K.P.S. Gill, for outraging her modesty. Mr. Gill's conviction was maintained right up to the Supreme Court but he was released on probation and suffered no imprisonment.
- In 1990, S.P.S. Rathore case , another senior policeman in the neighbouring State of Haryana, tried to force himself on a 14-year-old tennis player. When the girl and her family complained to the authorities, a targeted pattern of vengeance and harassment followed which lead to her death by suicide.
- The founder-editor of a magazine, Tarun Tejpal's trial case for an alleged digital rape, in 2013, of his subordinate in a hotel lift, is still pending trial in a court in Goa.

Effecting a social rise, starting a political experiment.
Context:

1. The Government of India tabled the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill 2021 that seeks to give effect to a long-standing political demand to group seven Scheduled Caste subsects in Tamil Nadu under the heritage name 'Devendrakula Velalar' (DKV).
2. The subsects include Devendrakulathan, Kadaiyan (excluding the coastal areas of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur,

Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts), Kalladi, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Vathiriyan.
3. These subsects have a predominant presence in south Tamil Nadu, which is a communally sensitive region. it is unique for a community to highlight the need for social advancement in order to be delisted.

The rationale demand:

1. The Caste-based political parties and organisations, spearheading the demand, feel that shedding individual Dalit caste tags would help in the social advancement of the community.

A political risk:

1. The twin demands "subsects under a common title" rise by many local leaders, of grouping and exclusion from the Scheduled Castes list.
2. Delisting and shuffling of castes from one reserved social class to another was fraught with political and administrative risks.
3. It could not only disturb the internal sharing of the communal reservation quota pool by existing castes, but also invite objections from other communities or spur political demands for similar reclassification.
4. As per Census 2011, the seven subsects constitute about 17.07% of the Scheduled Castes. In the southern districts, the concentration of their population in many constituencies would be far greater.

Steps to a review:

1. The committee headed by S. Sumathi, report, "Devendrakula Velalar – Cultural and Social Patterns of Seven Sub-Communities", was not made public, but it favoured a grouping of the subsects.
2. The second committee headed by Hans Raj Verma, IAS, to make recommendations on

the demand. Significantly, the government had eliminated the Vathiriyan caste from the purview of the panel as there was opposition from the community to being classified under DKV.

3. In the midst of electioneering in December 2020, he announced that he would write to the Centre to classify the seven subsects (including Vathiriyan) as DKV following the Verma panel recommendation.

Amendment of Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950:

1. In accordance with the provisions of clause (1) of article 341 of the Constitution, six Presidential Orders were issued specifying Scheduled Castes in respect of various States and Union territories.
2. The State Government of Tamil Nadu has proposed certain modifications in the list of Scheduled Castes, by way of grouping of seven castes, which presently exist therein as separate castes:
3. It is also proposed to consequentially omit the redundant entries from the said list in view of the aforementioned grouping.
4. The Registrar General of India has conveyed concurrence to the proposed.
5. In order to give effect to the above changes, it is necessary to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 in respect of the State of Tamil Nadu.

The Picking up the gauntlet:

1. The social advancement of the seven subsects including their demand to be delisted from the Scheduled Castes.
2. Claiming entitlement for the exclusive use of the 'Upper cast' title, they see the demand for use of the same title by the Dalit subsects

as "identity theft" and "cultural misappropriation".

3. They claim that the use of the 'Upper cast' (Vellalar) title by the subsects was a modern day inclusion by community leaders and not a historic practice.
4. Its traditional stronghold, due to their backing of the DKV classification demand, for political gain not for subsects empowerment.

The Dalit concerns:

1. Among the Dalits too, opinion is divided on the grouping of subsects under a common title.
2. There are apprehensions that over time, this could trigger arguments as to which of the larger groups is numerically stronger, thereby clouding the larger Dalit cause.
3. This section argues that Dalits as such cannot be treated as a homogeneous group considering the differences within in terms of social status and geographical identity.

GS II

The absurdity of the anti-defection law.

Context:

1. The Puducherry events (**Four Ruling MLAs have resigned**) highlight, yet the absurdity of the anti-defection law.

2. The several MLAs from **the treasury** benches resigned, lowering the numbers required for a no-confidence motion to succeed. This formula also use in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka.

3. The anti-defection law introduces (Tenth Schedule, 1985) to combat the "**evil of political defections**", and purpose was to preserve the stability of governments, time to review.

The Anti-Defection Law:

1. **The 52nd Constitutional** amendment act 1985, introduce anti-defection law.

'Defection' has been defined as, "To abandon a position or association, often to join an opposing group"

2. The decision on disqualification questions on the ground of defection is referred to the Speaker or the Chairman of the House, and his/her decision is final.

3. All proceedings in relation to disqualification under 10th Schedule are considered to be proceedings in Parliament or the Legislature of a state as is the case.

Range of the provision of anti-defection:

1. The provision was not limited to confidence motions or money bills, which are quasi-confidence motions. It applies to all votes in the House, on every Bill and every other issue.

2. It even applies to the Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils, which have no say in the stability of the government. Because an MP (or MLA) has absolutely no freedom to vote their judgement on any issue.

3. They have to blindly follow the direction of the party. This provision goes against the concept of representative democracy.

The roles MP/MLA in democracy and issues in anti-defection act:

1. **MP/MLA is** agents of the voters and is expected to vote according to the wishes and for the benefits of their constituents.

2. The duty to their constituents is to exercise their judgment on various issues towards the broader public interest. In this, they deliberate with other MPs and find a reasonable way through complex issue.

3. **The anti-defection law turns** the concept of a representative on its head. It

makes the MP neither a delegate of the constituency nor a national legislator but converts them to be just an agent of the party.

A broken chain in India:

1. In India, this chain of **accountability of MP/MLA has** been broken by making legislators accountable primarily to the party.
2. This means, anyone from the party has a majority in the legislature which is, by definition, the party forming the government is unable to hold the government to account.

3. **All legislators have** a ready explanation for their voting behaviour: they had to follow the party's direction. This negates the concept of them having to justify their positions on various issues to the people who elected them to the post.

The Eroding legislatures:

1. **The consequence of the anti-defection law is the hollowing out of our legislatures.**

2. If an MP has no freedom to take decisions on policy and legislative proposals, what would be the incentive to put in the effort to understand the different policy choices and their outcomes?
3. **The core role of an MP** to examine and decide on policy, Bills and budgets is side-lined. Instead, the MP becomes just another number to be tallied by the party on any vote that it supports or opposes.

Inducing instability:

1. **The anti-defection law** not even provide stability and political system has found ways to topple governments.

2. The **Constitution was** amended to ensure that any person disqualified for defecting cannot get a ministerial position unless they are re-elected; the way around this has been to resign rather than vote against the party.

3. The **Speaker usually from** the ruling party has delayed taking a decision on the disqualification, led to strange situations such as members who continue to be part of the main Opposition party becoming Ministers.

The Supreme Court Verdict on anti-defection act:

1. The **Supreme Court has** tried to plug this by ruling that the Speaker has to take the decision in three months, but it is not clear what would happen if a Speaker does not do so.

Onus is on parties:
1. **If stability of government** is an issue due to people defecting from their parties, the answer is for parties to strengthen their internal systems.

2. If they attract members on the basis of ideology, and they have systems for people to rise within the party hierarchy on their capabilities there would be a greater exit barrier.

3. **These characteristics** seem absent in many of the political parties, and we have seen a large number of defections despite the anti-defection law.

Way forward:

1. **The voters may decide to** reject the legislator for re-election and that is the core design element of representative democracy. The legislator is accountable to voters, and the government is accountable to legislators.

2. If voters believe that they have been betrayed by the defectors, they can vote them out in the next election. The premise that the anti-defection law is needed to punish legislators who betray the mandate given by the voters also seems to be flawed.

3. **The anti-defection law** has been detrimental to the functioning of our legislatures as

deliberative bodies which hold the executive to account on behalf of citizens.

4. It has turned them into fora to endorse the decision of the government on Bills and budgets. And it has not even done the job of preserving the stability of governments**. The Tenth Schedule to the Constitution must be repealed.**

The structural fragility of Union Territories.

Context:
1. Four Ruling MLAs have resigned from the Puducherry government led by CM Narayanasamy, throwing the government in the Union Territory in a fresh crisis.
2. The sudden and inexplicable resignations of ruling MLAs from the Puducherry Assembly have turned out to be an ingenious move to overbalance the government. It's as done like Karnataka in 2019.

The Constitutional crisis:

1. In both cases, the governments lost majority and went out of office. **Resignin**g from the membership of the House is every member's right.
2. But **according to Article 190** of the Constitution, the resignation should be voluntary or genuine. If the Speaker has information to the contrary, he or she is not obliged to accept the resignation.

Article 190 (3) of the Indian Constitution:
1. Article 190 (3)(a) If a member of a House of the Legislature of a State becomes subject to any of the disqualifications mentioned in clause (1), vacation or clause (2), member of the legislatures of two or more States of Article 191; or
2. **190 (3)(b) MLA resigns** his seat by writing under his hand addressed to the Speaker or the Chairman, as the case may be, and his resignation is accepted by the Speaker or the Chairman, as the case may be, his seat shall thereupon becomes vacant:

3. Provided that in the case of any resignation referred to in sub clause (b), if from information received or otherwise and after making **such inquiry as he thinks fit**, the Speaker or the Chairman, as the case may be, is **satisfied** that

such resignation is not **voluntary or genuine,** he shall not accept such resignation

An innovative method:

1. The resignations of MLA lead to the fall of the government and resignations take place only from the ruling parties in the States which are opposed to the ruling party at the Centre.

2. In most cases, the resignations are quite unanticipated and reduce the **party's majority** in the House abruptly.

3. Resignations are done with such precision that the exact number of MLAs required to reduce the majority resign, not more.

4. This mode of toppling a government has an odd attractiveness about it because of its sheer novelty.

5. The beauty of this scheme is that no MLA has to defect and face **disqualification** and get a bad name. It is a wonderful way to end defection and save the honour of the legislators.

Composition of the legislature:

1. The first question that arises in the context of these UTs is why the Constitution-makers/ Parliament thought it fit to provide a legislature and Council of Ministers to some of the UTs.

2. The ostensible reason is to fulfil the democratic aspirations of the people of these territories.

3. There was a realization that the administration of these territories directly by the President through the administrators **under Article 239** does not meet the democratic aspirations of the people.

4. Therefore, the creation of a legislature and a Council of Ministers is logical and in consonance with the policy of the state to promote democracy.

5. The Constitution reveals that this professed aim has often been sought to be defeated by the Union.

The Article 239 of the Indian Constitution:

1. **The every Union territory shall be** administered by the President acting, to such extent as he thinks fit, through an administrator to be appointed by him with such designation as he may specify under parliamentary made by laws.

2. The Article 239A was originally brought in, in 1962, to enable Parliament to create legislatures for the UTs.

The Constitutional composition of the legislature:

1. Legislature is a body that is elected, or partly elected and partly nominated. There can be a Council of Ministers without a legislature, or there can be a legislature as well as a Council of Ministers.

2. A legislature without a Council of Ministers or a Council of Ministers without a legislature is a conceptual absurdity.

3. A legislature is the law-making body and a legislative proposal is initiated by the government, which is responsible to the legislature.

4. **Neither can the legislature exist without** a Council of Ministers nor can the Council of Ministers exist without a legislature. Similarly, a legislature that is partly elected and partly nominated is another absurdity.

5. A simple amendment in the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 can create a legislature with more than 50% nominated members.

The Issue of nomination:

1. The Government of Union Territories Act provides for a 33-member House for Puducherry of whom three are to be nominated by the Central government.

2. The Union government nominated three BJP (Ruling party) members to the Assembly without consulting the government; it was challenged in the court.

The Supreme Court Verdict:

1. The Supreme Court (**K. Lakshminarayanan v. Union of India, 2019)** held that the Union **government is not required to consult** the State government

2. The nominated members have the **same right to vote as the elected members.**

3. **The Supreme Court took too** technical a view on the matter of nomination and did not go into the need to specify the fields from which those persons could be nominated and also lay down a fair procedure to be followed for nomination of members.

4. **The NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2019),** the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had said that the administrator should not misuse this power to frustrate the functioning of the elected government in the territory and use it after all methods have failed to reconcile the differences between him/her and the Council of Ministers, experience tells us a different story.

Purpose of nomination in Indian legislature:
1. There is provision for nomination of members to **the Rajya Sabha under Article 80 (i) (a).** But clause (3) of the Article specifies the fields from which they will be nominated.

2. The purpose of this nomination is to enable the House to draw on the expertise of those eminent members who are nominated and thus enrich the debate in the House.

3. But in the case of nomination to the Puducherry Assembly, no such qualification is laid down **either in Article 239A** or the Government of Union **Territories Act.**

4. If a different party runs the government in the UT, this provision will be used by the Union government with a vengeance, which is what happened in Puducherry.
Administrator's power:
1. The **power vested in the administrator, w**ho is known as the Lieutenant Governor in the UTs having a legislature, bear this out.

2. The administrator has the **right to disagree with the dec**isions of the Council of Ministers and then refer them to the President for a final decision.

3. The President decides on the advice of the Union government. So, in effect, it is the Union government which finally determines the disputed issue.

4. The **administrator can, in fact,** disagree with all crucial decisions taken by the State government when the territory is ruled by a different political party.

5. **Section 44 of the Government** of Union Territories Act and Article 239 AA(4) (proviso) of the Constitution vests the power in the administrator to express his or her disagreement and refer the matter to the President and then take all actions he or she deems fit in the matter in total disregard of the elected government.

Administration in Puducherry Vs NCR:
1. In **Puducherry**, the conflicts between the Lt. Governor and the Chief Minister were perennial. A frustrated Chief Minister at last had to knock on the door of Rashtrapati Bhavan seeking the removal of the Lt. Governor.

2. **Similarly**, in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, one often hears of complaints against the Lt. Governor from the ministers about the non-cooperative federalism being **practised** by him.

3. The conflicts between the administrator, who is the nominee of the President, and the elected government are inherent in the constitutional arrangement created for the UTs.

4. **No Union government really** likes the idea of a free and autonomous government in the UTs and therefore tries to control it through the administrator.

5. The weaponisation of the constitutional provision is done in full measure when the UT is ruled by a different political party.
Conclusion:
1. The **Puducherry development has tremendous** political significance. The structural fragility of Union Territories (UTs) as units of the Indian federation which perhaps makes it easier for powerful operators in the political system to de-stabilize them.

2. The redemption for the harried governments of these territories lies in the removal of the legal and constitutional provisions which enable the administrator to breathe down the neck of the elected government.

3. So far as the **conspiratorial resignation** by legislators to bring down their own government is concerned, the political class will have to rack its brains on how to get the better of the predatory instincts of political parties through constitutional or other means.

4. The UTs were never **given a fully democratic set-up** with necessary autonomy. The UTs having legislatures with ultimate control vested in the central administrator are not workable.

GS III

It's goodbye to fiscal orthodoxy.

CONTEXT:

1. The government's Budget for 2021-22 seems to signal with its fiscal deficit at 9.5% of GDP for FY21 and 6.8% in FY22 because government neoliberal fiscal policy. And not implementing The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003.

2. Budget 2021 is a also leaving from a set of ten economic policy prescriptions considered to constitute the reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries of the Washington Consensus on macroeconomic stability.

3. The large fiscal deficit can fuel a rise in inflation, and large inflation can boost a sluggish economy by giving more money to people who can then buy and invest more.

A mix initiative:

1. The government has increased duties on some imports in order to protect and foster domestic industry and fiscal deficit.

2. It has introduced performance-linked incentives for designated sectors, something that goes counter to market economics.

3. The government is, however, happy to adhere to other elements of market orthodoxy, such as

privatisation and a greater role for foreign direct investment (FDI).

4. The idea was to show that the economy was moving along a fiscal consolidation path, with a fiscal deficit of 3% of GDP as the eventual target. In this year's Budget, the yearly projections are missing.

5. All we have is a commitment to lower the fiscal deficit to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26. As the deficit targets set out in the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act (2003).

6. In this Budget, fiscal deficit goes out of the window. The Finance Minister has promised to introduce an amendment to the FRBM Act to formalize the new targets.

FRBM ACT 2003:

1. It aims of act 2003 to make the Central government responsible for ensuring inter-generational equity in fiscal management and long-term macro-economic stability.

2. The Act envisages the setting of limits on the Central government's debt and deficits; it limited the fiscal deficit to 3% of the GDP.

3. A Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) panel (headed by N.K Singh,) has recommended a debt-to-GDP ratio of 38.7% for the central government, 20% for the state governments together, a fiscal deficit target of 2.5% of the GDP, and a revenue deficit of 0.8%

Moving away from framework:

1. The Budget marks a departure from one of the key tenets of the Washington Consensus, the framework for market-oriented economics which has dominated policy making in most parts of the world.

2. "Macroeconomic stability" means that government budgets need to be broadly in balance so that borrowings to finance the deficit are kept to the minimum.

3. It has a quote from economist Olivier Blanchard, "If the interest rate paid by the government is less than the growth rate, then the intertemporal budget constraint facing the government no longer binds." The "intertemporal budget constraint" means that

any debt outstanding today must be offset by future primary surpluses. Blanchard was saying that this is not true if the Interest Rate-Growth Differential (IRGD), the difference between the interest rate and growth rate, becomes negative. In the advanced economies, as interest rates have turned negative, Blanchard's condition has been met. So governments there do not have to worry that deficits will render public debt unsustainable.

The Washington Consensus:

1. It is a set of ten economic policy prescriptions considered to constitute the reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington, D.C. based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and United States Department of the Treasury.

2. The term was first used in 1989 by English economist John Williamson. The prescriptions encompassed policies in such areas as macroeconomic stabilization, economic opening with respect to both trade and investment, and the expansion of market forces within the domestic economy.

Government need to spend more:

1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, both flag-bearers of the Washington Consensus, have been urging a departure from fiscal orthodoxy in the wake of the pandemic.

2. Both these institutions used to be wary of any increase in the public debt to GDP ratio beyond 100%.

3. Booth (IMF & WB) are urging the advanced economies to spend more by running up deficits even when the debt to GDP ratio is poised to rise to 125% by the end of 2021.

Key concerns:

1. A large fiscal deficit can fuel a rise in inflation. The change in the fiscal consolidation targets will require a change in the inflation target of 4% set for the Reserve Bank of India.

2. The Budget makes no mention of such a possibility. Perhaps the government did not want to administer too many surprises at one go.

3. The tax to GDP ratio not rising as expected, the sale of public assets has become crucial to reduction in fiscal deficits in the years ahead. This is a high-risk strategy.

4. For years now, revenues from disinvestment have fallen short of targets. The sale of Air India, which was begun in 2018, is still dragging on.

5. We face up to an important reality that a large-scale privatization is not easily accomplished in India.

6. Selling public assets cheap is politically contentious. There will be allegations of favoring certain industrial houses. Public sector unions are a vital political constituency.

7. Privatization of banks raises concerns about financial stability. Job losses from privatization are bound to evoke a backlash.

Privatization means FDI:

1. A Large-scale privatization almost always involves substantial FDI.

2. In South East Asia and Eastern Europe, privatization of banks meant a large rise in foreign presence in the domestic economies.

3. The Atmanirbhar Bharat connotes greater self-reliance and stronger Indian companies. The rise in FDI with Atmanirbhar Bharat is hard.

CONCLUSION:

1. In the current situation, expansionary fiscal policy will boost growth and cause debt to GDP ratios to be lower, not higher. Given India's growth potential, we do not have to worry about debt sustainability until 2030.

2. The fear that the rating agencies would downgrade India if total public debt crossed, if 10%-11% of GDP. That is a risk that cannot be wished away unless the rating agencies have decided to toe the IMF-World Bank line on fiscal deficits.

3. If the nation's political -economy came in the way to meet the FRBM targets, it is also likely to pose an obstacle to large-scale privatisation.

Infrastructure push now, fiscal consolidation later.

CONTEXT:

1. The fiscal year 2020-21 has been an extraordinary one were huge expectations from the Union Budget regarding stimulus to growth. But concerns remain about fiscal deficit.

2. The Budget has provided reasonable stimulus to growth through a change in the composition of expenditure and other measures to improve the climate for investment.

Transparency versus stimulus:

1. Proposed growth in central expenditure, both in 2020-21 Revised Estimates (RE) and in 2021-22 Budget Estimates (BE), indicates the extent of contemplated fiscal stimulus.

2. Since three quarters of 2020-21 have already passed, the expenditure push in 2020-21 RE over actual expenditure in 2019-20 has to be implemented in the last quarter.

3. The growth required in the last quarter of the current fiscal year over the corresponding period of the previous year would be 102.9% for total expenditure, 109.9% for revenue expenditure, and 60.3% for capital expenditure.

4. This involves transferring on to the Budget, the accumulated food subsidies amounting to ₹2,54,600 crore given to the Food Corporation of India through National Small Savings Fund (NSSF)

loans.

5. The balance of subsidies amounting to ₹1,68,018 crore would be the food subsidy pertaining to 2020-21 (RE).

6. This is a desirable change towards transparency. Taking revenue expenditure figures as budgeted, a contraction of 2.7% is seen in 2021-22 BE over 2020-21 (RE).

7. the NSSF-accumulated food subsidy amount, the growth in revenue expenditure in 2021-22 (BE) is 6.7%.

8. A good part of expenditure for the last quarter of 2020-21 may also pertain to clearing unpaid dues of various stakeholders including the private sector, autonomous bodies and government-aided institutions.

9. The main expenditure push comes through a budgeted growth of 26.2% in capital expenditure in 2021-22. Relative to GDP, capital expenditure is expected to increase from 1.6% in 2019-20 to 2.3% in 2020-21 RE and 2.5% in 2021-22 BE.

Receipts augmentation:

1. Budgeted increase in the Centre's gross tax revenues is dependent on nominal GDP growth of 14.4%, with a buoyancy of 1.6 for direct taxes and 0.8 for indirect taxes.

2. Significant increases are planned in non-tax revenues and non-debt capital receipts. Contraction of 35.6% in 2020-21 (RE), non-tax revenues are budgeted to grow by 15.4% in 2021-22.

3. In the case of non-debt capital receipts, mainly covering disinvestment, a budgeted growth of 304.3% in 2021-22 stands in contrast with the contraction of 32.2% in 2020-21 (RE).

4. An important initiative pertains to the launching of a National Monetisation Pipeline. This would be the first practical step towards asset monetisation. The pipeline may eventually start yielding revenues,

Infrastructure and initiatives:

1. The proposed Budget initiatives include setting up of a Development Finance Institution (DFI) with an initial capital of ₹20,000 crore, to serve as a catalyst for facilitating infrastructure investment.

2. In order to manage non-performing assets of public sector banks, there is a proposal to set up an Asset Reconstruction Company and an Asset Management Company. These institutional initiatives may prove to be effective.

3. The Union government has accepted the recommended vertical share of 41% for the States in the shareable pool of central taxes.

4. The government has accepted the Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendation for revenue deficit grants, local body grants and disaster-related grants.

5. The scope of revenue deficit grants has been extended to cover 17 States in the initial years. The determination of these grants is not based on equalisation principle although some norms have been used in the assessment exercise

6. The government has put on hold the consideration of State-specific and sector-specific grants including performance-based incentives.

7. States had shown a preference for the former mode and it is for this reason that the 14th Finance Commission had raised the States' share from 32% to 42%.

8. The reduction from 42% to 41% is only on account of the consideration of 28 States excluding Jammu and Kashmir because of its new status.

9. The increasing resorts to the imposition of cesses which are almost permanent have reduced the shareable pool. In fact, the States' share in the Centre's gross tax revenues is only 30% in 2021-22 (BE).

Physical and Financial capital and infrastructure:

1. With an aim to create jobs for youth, FM announced ₹ 1.97 lakh crore over 5 years starting this FY, for Production Linked Incentive Schemes to create manufacturing global champions for an Aatma Nirbhar Bharat.

2. FM also announced a sharp increase of 34.5% in capital expenditure as compared to previous budget estimates - resulting in allocation of ₹ 5.54 lakh crore.

3. The FM announced a record sum of ₹ 1,10,055 crore to be provided for Indian Railways. She also announced that definition of small companies under Companies Act 2013 to be revised so as to Companies with paid-up capital up to ₹ 2 crore & turnover up to ₹ 20 crore will fall under small companies.

4. The Scheme of Mega Investment Textile Parks to be launched and PLI scheme to be launched also 7 textile parks to be set up over 3 years boost textile industry .

5. The Development Financial Institution to be set up, to provide, enable & catalyze infra financing. ₹ 20,000 crore allocated to capitalize this institution

6. The National Monetization Pipeline of potential brownfield infrastructure assets to be launched. With National Monetization Pipeline a cost of Rs 3.3 lakh crore,

7. The Railways to monetize dedicated freight corridor assets for O& M and Western Dedicated Freight Corridor and Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor to be commissioned by June 2022 on ppp modal.

8. 100% electrification of rail broad gauge routes to be completed by December 2023and Scheme at a cost of ₹ 18,000 crore for augmentation of public bus transport services to be launched,

9. Meteorite and Metro New Technologies to be deployed to provide metro rail system for urban transport.

10. Comprehensive National Hydrogen Energy Mission to be launched and Seven port projects worth more than ₹ 2,000 crore to be offered by major ports in PPP Mode.

11. Scheme for promoting flagging of merchant ships in India to be launched and Ship Recycling Capacities of around "4.5 million Light Displacement Tonnage" to be doubled by 2024.

A road map:

1. The COVID-19 shock has fortified the sharp upsurge in fiscal deficits in 2020-21 and 2021-22. The Fifteenth Finance Commission has also proposed a revised fiscal consolidation road map for the Centre and States.

2. The Fifteenth Finance Commission has recommended the setting up of a High-Powered Intergovernmental Group to re-examine the fiscal responsibility legislations of the Centre and States.

3. The Centre has indicated taking the fiscal deficit to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26. The Finance Commission has also indicated a similar figure.

4. The issue of debt sustainability can be certainly re-examined by taking into account the evolving profiles of debt, interest payments, and primary deficits relative to GDP.

5. It should not be forgotten that in fiscal 2021-22, interest payments to total revenue receipts will be 45.3%, pre-empting a significant proportion of revenue receipts. We must be conscious of the burden of the rising stock of debt.

Conclusion:

1. The infrastructure expansion plan would depend on other stakeholders of the pipeline playing their due role. These include State governments and their public sector enterprises and the private sector , government should focus on effective implement to benefit all.

2. In the context of COVID-19, some economists have gone to the extent of advocating almost giving up the prudential norms. This will be a wrong

lesson to learn from the crisis.

3. Fiscal deficit must be related to household savings in financial assets and the interest payments to revenue receipts. Government must either increase revenue or decrease spending or go for PPP modal of investment.

Adding heft to diplomacy with some help from science

Context:

1.   India's ongoing 'Vaccine Maitri' campaign, which is aimed at provisioning COVID-19 vaccines to countries both near to and away from its immediate neighborhood, is one of the most important recent initiatives to leverage its science and technological advantages for the furtherance of its foreign policy objectives.

2.   The appreciation of leaders of Brazil and Canadian PM for securing vaccines manufactured in India has gained much attention, in global world.

3.   India efforts to address this health emergency were met with even more vocal appreciation by leaders from its partners from the Global South world.

Vaccine Maitri priority:

1.   India had announced a vaccine rollout for Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles which comes in line with its Neighbourhood First Policy.

2.   India to send 5 lakh Covid-19 vaccines to Sri Lanka as part of 'Vaccine Maitri, and all SAARC nations.

Number of Covid-19 vaccine doses delivered from India under "Vaccine Maitri" (Jan 2021):

Setting the template:

1.   India's global priorities in science and technology were clearly articulated by its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru during his

address to the country's Science Congress on January 21, 1959.

2. Nehru was aware of both the constructive and destructive power of science and made India's intention of seeking international scientific advances for the country's development and rise clear with added emphasis on averseness to inter-state rivalries.

3. This template would set the tone for India's international science and technology engagement for much of the 20th century, and met with mixed results as more powerful states such as the United States sought to curb its ambitions in critical spheres such as its nuclear and space programmers. The Assertion of interests:

1. Despite limitations, India still managed to assist its partners from the Global South in key areas of science and technology such as health across Asia and Africa.

2. The country's national confidence would also rise during the final decade of the last century as economic dynamism led to a more pro-active assertion of its interests.

3. India established the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India in November 1999.

4. By the early years of the 21st century, it sought to reduce its dependence on foreign countries to then emerge as a net provider of development assistance in the international system.

India strategic partnerships bearing substantial science and technology:

1. The 21st century international system was more conducive to the country's science and technology designs in spheres such as nuclear and space technology due to a thaw in ties between India and the United States given the rise of an aggressive China and other consequential challenges to the international system.

2. India would sign strategic partnerships bearing substantial science and technology components with advanced economies such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Israel, Germany, the European Union, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, South Korea and Australia even as it strengthened its traditional partnerships with countries such as France and Russia.

India's critical policy frameworks:

1. The country's Science and Technology Policy 2003 and Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2013 clearly related international science and technology cooperation with national interest.

2. Recently, Prime Minister has been categorical in placing science and technology at the forefront of the country's diplomatic engagement.

3. India's state instruments of diplomacy would also begin to show a more visible alignment to international science and technology cooperation.

4. India currently fields four Development Partnership Administrations under its Ministry of External Affairs consequential given that President Ram Nath Kovind, in Cuba in June 2018, declared that the country had "placed science and technology at the center of its development cooperation strategy".

The COVID-19 response:

1. India's science and technology prowess would be tested internationally by 2019 through an unprecedented global disruption originating from China in the shape of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. India was swift to address the global challenge by initially sending medicines such as hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol to over 150 countries, welcomed by its partners across the world.

3. India's pharmaceutical firms such as the Serum Institute of India competently partnered with the U.K.'s Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine project while others such as Bharat Biotech gave rise to indigenous vaccines in the shape of Covaxin.

4.   India's response came at a time where the developed world was pre-occupied in trying to address its own domestic issues and China's health diplomacy much like its other development assistance came with prohibitive costs.

The Areas for review:

1.   India's, Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative, attempts to secure maximum self-reliance through capacity building and creating an environment where science and technology can not only answer its own national needs and cross-border interests but also global challenges, there are issues that must be addressed.

2.   India's financial apportionment to science and technology related research must rise to enable the country's own rise as must participation of its states, universities and private sector in research and development efforts.

3.   The time is also right for India's young scientists and technologists to be made more aware of the country's foreign policy objectives, and to also enable all stakeholders in the policy establishment to learn more about science and technology to bridge the intellectual divide.

Conclusion:

1.   India's help by "The Ministry of External Affairs" has seen a restructuring with a Cyber Diplomacy Division, an E-Governance & Information Technology Division and a New Emerging & Strategic Technologies Division to manage science and technology issues in the nation's diplomatic matrix.

2.   As scientists developed vaccines to COVID-19 virus, it was India, an established leader in vaccine manufacturing that rose to the challenge of global provision. Beyond idealist invocations, India's COVID-19 response also came closely aligned with its Neighborhood First, Act East, Indo-Pacific and Look West policies.

3.   The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has presented the country a unique space to mainstream science and technology in its domestic and foreign policies. It is now up to India's decision-makers to conclusively convert this crisis into an opportunity.

GS IV

Human rights are everyone's business.

Context:

- The denial of democratic and human rights of the ongoing farmer protests drawn international attention getting strong statements of support from numerous international celebrities.
- The official response of Ministry of External Affairs was disproportionate to international community on the name of its matter of democracy and human rights, left unstated were India's 'internal affair'.
- Government must realise that democracy and human right cannot be reduced to only demanding praise from the rest of the world.

Is "Democratic and human right" volition is domestic issues?

- It is misdirected in a defense, "as country internal matter' like the one a wife-beating husband deploys with his neighbours that it is not their business.
- The arrest of the environmental activist, Disha Ravi, for amplifying the farmer protests internationally, unmasked the government's designs to criminalise those who speak for human rights.
- This attitude of government also visible in the Home Ministry's directions to social media companies to block accounts those speaking and expressing view contrary to that of the government.

The democracy not insures human rights in sense of security:

- It is Syrians on an Italian shore, the Rohingya in Myanmar, Hindus in Pakistan or stateless refugees on a border in Mexico etc, democracy does not ensure and secure universal rights for its citizen have different justification.
- No government has immunity because it violates human rights in its jurisdiction. India could not have been more misplaced, when government spoke 'Foreign Destructive Ideology' in Parliament.

The Nation and the idea of rights:

- India played a signature role in drawing the world together to oppose the apartheid government of South Africa, and it took till 1962 to override the sovereignty shield used by the government to continue oppressing the Black population.
- India stayed firm from the 1950s till a resolution was adopted and a United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid was set up by the United Nations.
- India's work, in consistently creating awareness and resistance against the demonization of Nelson Mandela via the Rivonia trial in 1963, checked the Apartheid regime from awarding him the death sentence.

The principle document signed in 20th century:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid down the terms for the post-war world; it enshrined the rights and the freedoms of all people, living everywhere
- India was a member of the first Human Rights Commission, which was to draft the 'international bills of rights.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted from January 1947 till December 10, 1948, when it was eventually adopted by the UN General Assembly.

The Indian freedom fighters and Human rights:

- The Charter of the United Nations signed in San Francisco in 1945, Indian freedom fighters did their best to influence it and make its brief wider and more effective.
- Mahatma Gandhi issued a press statement in April 1945 which was directed at participants of the San Francisco conference and he extensively quoted from the All India Congress Committee resolution of August 8, 1942.
- "The AICC the Committee is of opinion that the future peace, security and ordered progress of the world demand a world federation of free nations-Thus the demand for Indian independence is in no way selfishness"
- The Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit who becomes the first woman President of the UN General Assembly, powerfully advocated Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru's ideas and emphasized their universality and the indivisible nature of rights that all human beings must enjoy.
- The work of Indians like Hansa Mehta, Minoo Masani and Lakshmi Menon conveyed the message as being the same as that of the freedom movement of freedom from oppression for all human beings

The Rights are indivisible:

- The makers of the Indian Constitution did not invoke paranoia about respecting Indian tradition, customs or hiding perverse practices.
- Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan says on "the Objectives Resolution" that the endeavour was "a fundamental alteration in the structure of Indian society, to abolish every vestige of despotism, every heirloom of inorganic tradition."
- The triad of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' engraved in the Preamble, drew significantly from the slogan which had proved influential following the French Revolution.
- To quote B.R. Ambedkar who on the eve of the adoption of the Preamble explained how Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were connected and locked into each other firmly:

- "Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many.
- And "Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them."

India's recent moves:

- The refer to Atmanirbhar as a counter to international concerns about freedoms, equality and the right to dissent amounts to hiding behind the flimsy excuse of sovereignty to escape the bitter truth of the slithering slope of democratic rights India appears to be going down.
- The starkest case where India made human rights of citizens of other countries its business was in 2019 when the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, offered a home for certain persecuted citizens of three foreign countries.
- The case the Indian government is making is all the more specious as its own immediate concern expressed, officially by its External Affairs Minister visiting Sri Lanka, on the Sri Lankan government needing to do more to safeguard Tamil lives belies this principle.
- When it comes to universal human rights and international attention, the premier example is of the liberation of Bangladesh which India led and shepherded by invoking these principles.
- That India chose to and continues to host the Dalai Lama, who attracts visible support from high-profile global celebrities, is a testament to New Delhi's commitment to human rights.

The issue is a reality problem:

- The government has actively courted foreign approval. The foreign envoys were taken on a guided tour of Kashmir last week because getting a favourable opinion from foreigner's matters to the government.

- The craving for approval is natural for any publicity-seeking politician, but a democracy cannot be reduced to only demanding praise from the rest of the world and raising the bogey of 'internal matters' when international voices express solidarity with dissenters and raise serious concerns.

Conclusion:

- UDHR on human and civil rights, the Declaration consists of 30 articles detailing an individual's "basic rights and fundamental freedoms" and affirming their universal character as inherent, inalienable, and applicable to (Universal) all human beings.
- Global concerns about democratic rights in India cannot be dealt with by arresting messengers, bullying 'amplifiers' or shutting down social media accounts.
- India does not have an image problem; it has a reality problem. Changing the reality and adhering to best democratic practices inside is the only durable solution if the government wants its image 'fixed'.