



# **MONTHLY**

# **CURRENT**

# **AFFAIRS**

# **MAGAZINE**

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# SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

## 1. INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

Recent Anti-conversion laws enacted by the state governments like Karnataka raised debate over legality of Interfaith marriages and the existing issues with Special Marriage Act, 1954.

### ABOUT INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

- Interfaith marriage is a marriage between spouses professing different religions. In India interfaith couple generally solemnize their marriage through the Special Marriage act, 1954 (SMA)
- SMA is a civil law enacted in 1954 that allows the solemnisation of marriages between any two individuals without religious customs, rituals, or ceremonial requirements.
- SMA creates provisions for the marriage of interfaith couples without religious conversions — a requirement for marriages under personal laws such as the Hindu or the Muslim marriage acts.
- Being a secular Act, it plays a key role in liberating individuals from the traditional coercive requirements of marriage. However, many of its provisions are inconsistent with its objectives.

### ISSUE WITH SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT (SMA)

- The conditions such as the 30-day notice period, the requirement for an extra witness, and the need to inform families breach the right to privacy of the parties and exposes the couple to fear of hate crimes like honour killing and religious persecution as well as to social ostracization.
- Similar conditions are not applicable to intra-faith marriages held outside purview of SMA doesn't justify these conditions for interfaith marriages.
- These conditions violate against the right to equality given under Article 14. Currently, Supreme Court is considering a plea challenging certain provisions of Special Marriage Act, 1954.

### IMPACT OF ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS ON INTER-FAITH MARRIAGES

Recently Karnataka Legislative Assembly passed ***The Karnataka Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021***, commonly referred to as the '**Anti-Conversion Act**'. Similar laws were also passed by UP, MP, Gujarat legislative assemblies etc.

These laws included "**conversion by marriage**" as one of the illegal forms of conversion and **criminalised interfaith marriages by treating them as a means to convert one of the parties from one religion to another.**

These laws **violate the values of secularism and liberty** enshrined in the constitution. They are also in contravention with the Supreme Court judgement in ***Shafin Jahan Vs Ashok KM (2018)***, which has upheld the right to marry a person of one's choice as a part of Article 21.



### **LAW COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Process of registration of marriage should be expedited by removing the time gap between marriage notice and registration.
- A legal framework should be established that could address the issue of interference of caste assemblies, councils, religious groups or any kind of group of assembly that threatens the couples or interferes with their right to marry.
- Acts such as social boycott, discrimination, or anything that endangers the liberty of the couple because of their decision of getting married under SMA, shall be addressed by certain penal action and prescribed punishment.
- There shall be a provision on preventive action and the same powers shall be granted to SDM or DM to protect the couple from any such unlawful assembly
- The offence shall be made cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable to have strict action against people involved

## **2. GENDER NEUTRAL LAWS**

*At a recent consultation organised by **National Commission for Women** on amendment to criminal laws, the need for **gender neutral** rape laws came into focus. Rape is defined under section 375 of the IPC. Following the December 2012 gang-rape in Delhi, after consultation with the Justice Verma Commission (JVC), Parliament expanded the meaning of rape. Yet, the rape laws in India have remained far from being gender neutral.*

### **ABOUT GENDER NEUTRALITY**

The idea behind is that policies, language and other social institutions should avoid distinguishing roles according to people's sex or gender. This is to avoid discrimination arising from the impression that there are social roles for which one gender is more suited than another.

### **NEED FOR GENDER NEUTRAL RAPE LAWS**

- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2013 recognises that both boys as well as girls can be victims of sexual assault. But there is no such provision for adult male.
- Though the Supreme Court decriminalise consensual sexual acts between men (section 377), but for nonconsensual acts of sexual violence between two men, the section continues to apply. However, unlike rape laws, the burden of proof lies with the complainant.
- The existing rape laws are inadequate to do justice to the LGBTQ sections since they are not Gender neutral.

- Gender biased laws reinforces the existing gender stereotypes and helps in sustaining patriarchy.
- There are certain laws that have been framed in India which accord more protection to women as compared to men. These laws have been framed as women were often considered the weaker gender and thus need protection by the state. However, these laws have also been often misused by females for their vested interest. This has demand for gender neutral laws.
- However, some sections of civil society were vocal against these gender-neutral provisions, highlighting the high probability of double victimisation of women wherein complaints of rape, sexual harassment and assault could be met by counter complaints to build pressure to withdraw their cases. They thus advocate for special provisions in favour of women.

### 3. EDUCATION EMERGENCY

*The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education and learning as much as any other sector of the economy and civic life. As per UNESCO in April 2020, over 1.5 billion students worldwide were affected by school closures – with over half of those students facing economic and technical barriers to access education via other means. In India, over 250 million students faced the prospect of learning recession due to school closures across the country. This created a situation of “Education emergency” and calls for efficient adoption of Digital education in India.*

#### **NEED FOR ENHANCING DIGITAL EDUCATION**

- Improving learning outcomes: Multiple ASER reports have shown that basic learning outcomes are very poor in Indian primary education sector. Blending online learning with face-to-face teaching generally produces better outcomes than traditional classrooms.
- Imparting 21st century skills: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends leveraging digital in education to improve learning outcomes and imparting 21st century skills to students. These 21st century skills include- Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Curiosity, Communication.
- Impact of COVID-19 pandemic: COVID induced school closures resulted in learning loss to many students who couldn't attend classes.

#### **CHALLENGES WITH DIGITAL EDUCATION**

- **Digital access divide:**

- ✓ Device access: Urban areas and higher socioeconomic groups have adequate access to devices, whereas public schools and rural communities lack access to basic ICT infrastructure such as projectors. Also, the access to smartphones, electricity which are pre-requisite for digital learning are very low in poor households.
- ✓ Internet penetration: Low internet access in rural areas, with only 32% of people aged 12+ having access to internet versus 54% in urban areas, hampers the ability to adopt digital in education.
- Access to the content in vernacular languages: Most of the digital content is not available in vernacular languages.
- Shortage of trained teachers: A major obstacle in the use of digital education in rural area is the lack of knowledge and skills among teachers. There is a shortage of teachers, formally trained on digital technology. Lack of digitally trained teachers accentuates the skewed learning outcomes.
- Poor maintenance and upgradation of digital equipment is a challenge in rural areas. Digital education projects in rural schools are not self-sustainable. At initial stage various projects have been launched by government for development of digital education, but later, they have not been taken due care & maintenance of digital equipment which is affecting digital education development in rural areas.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

1. Increasing expenditure by government on making digital infrastructure such as computers, internet connectivity available in particularly in government schools.
2. Inviting Corporate Social Responsibility participation in digital education.
3. Partnership with innovating ed-tech firms to make digital learning available to vast majority of students.
4. Nation-wide teacher training in digital education.
5. Regulation of EdTech firms to comply with rules of government and make digital education widespread.

#### **Initiatives to boost Digital Education**

- **National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR):** In the Union Budget 2021-22, the Indian government established the National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR) to strengthen digital infrastructure and support activities related to education planning. The NDEAR aims to offer distinct education ecosystem architecture for advancement of digital infrastructure in the country and guarantee autonomy of stakeholders, especially states and UTs.
- **PM eVIDYA Programme:** The government introduced the PM eVIDYA programme in 2020 to make e-learning more accessible for Indian students and teachers and promote & strengthen digital education in India. The programme aims to converge all activities related to online/digital education and is expected to benefit ~25 crore school students. Under this, top 100 universities were permitted to begin online courses, provide better learning

prospects to 3.7 crore higher education students and enhance elearning by relaxing regulatory framework for distance/open/online education.

- **DIKSHA:** In 2017, the government introduced DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), a national portal for school education, to offer school curriculum-based engaging learning materials to students, teachers, and parents. The portal supports >18 Indian languages and has been implemented by 35 states/UTs.
- **SWAYAM:** In 2017, government launched Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) to offer an integrated platform for online courses at affordable costs to all citizens, especially underprivileged section. The portal hosts **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** to offer quality education on various subjects for students (from Class 9-12 to Under Graduates and Postgraduates).
- **NISHTHA:** In FY21, the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) - Phase II was launched at the secondary level to tailor modules for online education. As per the Union Budget 2021-22, ~5.6 million teachers will be trained under the NISHTHA training programme in FY22

#### 4 . PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

*National Food Security Act promised to give lactating mothers a provision of Rs 6,000 to take of their health and nutritional needs. After much delay, the union government enacted the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) which promises Rs 5000 as cash support to women and only for the first child. Experts have advised for reforming the scheme for better health outcomes of mothers and reducing IMR and MMR.*

##### **CONTEXT FOR THE SCHEME**

- As per the Sample Registration System (SRS) report by Registrar General of India (RGI), Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of India is 113 per 100,000 live births and IMR is 30 per 1000 live births. According to UNICEF, India accounts for 1/5th of world's annual child births.
- As per NFHS-IV, 2015–16 report, over half (53%) of Indian women of reproductive age and 58.6% of children were estimated to be anaemic.
- Owing to economic and social distress many women continue to work to earn a living right up to the last days of their pregnancy. Furthermore, they resume working soon after childbirth, even though their bodies might not permit it, thus preventing their bodies from fully recovering on one hand and impeding their ability to exclusively

breastfeed their young infant in the first six months. This impacts nutritional health of Mothers and infants. To address these challenges, PMMVY is being implemented.

#### **OBJECTIVE OF PMMVY**

- To provide **partial compensation for the wage loss** in terms of cash incentives so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child.
- To improve **health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant and Lactating Mothers.**

#### **BENEFITS UNDER THE SCHEME**

- All eligible Pregnant & Lactating Mothers would receive a Cash incentive of Rs 5000 in three instalments for first childbirth.
- Conditions attached to these instalments are
  - ✓ Early registration of pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC).
  - ✓ Receiving at least one ante-natal check-up (ANC).
  - ✓ Registration of childbirth and vaccination of first cycle vaccines (BCG, OPV, DPT and Hepatitis-B).
- In addition, a pregnant woman also receives the cash incentive of INR 1,000 when she opts for an institutional delivery, under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY).

#### **ISSUES WITH PMMVY**

- **Inadequate coverage of intended beneficiaries:** While the estimated eligible population of pregnant and lactating mothers in India was 128.7 lakh for 2017-18, the target set by the Government was 51.70 lakh beneficiaries which is only 40% of the eligible population.
- **Restricted to first birth:** Of the total live births in India, 49.5% comprises first-order births and 29.9% are second-order births, as per SRS 2018. It is imperative to include second live birth under the maternity benefit cover particularly for women in the unorganised sector who are more vulnerable to economic shocks and nutrition loss for all child births.
- **Insufficient compensation:** The cash entitlement is insufficient to compensate the wage loss of pregnant and lactating women. The current entitlement of Rs 5,000 provided over 1-year amounts to merely one month's wage loss, as per the MGNREGA wage rate.
- **Implementational challenges:** Lack of awareness within the intended beneficiaries about the scheme and cumbersome process to get the benefits made its implementation a challenging task.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

- **Increase the amount of cash transfer** to at least 12 weeks of wage compensation, amounting to about INR 15,000. This is especially important in the current context, as the lockdown has led to income loss not just for women, but for others in the household as well. Also, 95% of the female workforce in India is employed in the

informal sector, and does not have access to maternity benefits like paid maternity leave.

- **Expand the benefits to women giving birth to second child as well.**
- **Simplify the process to receive the benefit** as the current requirements for submission of multiple documents like mother child protection card (MPC), husband's Aadhar card, bank passbook, registration form etc. act as barriers to access the benefits.

## 5. REGULATION OF EDTECH

*UGC and All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have warned their recognised varsities and institutions against offering courses in distance learning and online mode in association with Ed-tech companies, saying no "franchise" agreement is permissible as per norms.*

### **STATUS OF EdTECH**

EdTech is a shorthand for Educational Technology. It is combined use of computer hardware, software and educational theory to facilitate learning. EdTech industry particularly boomed in India during the COVID-19 pandemic as physical classrooms were shut. Many large firms such as BYJU'S, UNACADEMY have come in this space. Many traditional educational institutions also used technologies such as Zoom etc for education. Indian EdTech industry was valued at US\$ 750 million in 2020 and is expected to reach US \$4 billion by 2025. This growth is due to growing internet penetration in India. As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020, smartphone ownership among government school student families increased from 30% in 2018 to 56% in 2020, whereas smartphone ownership among private school student families rose from 50% to 74%. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in India's education sector.

### **SELF-REGULATION**

The EdTech companies have formed a collective — India EdTech Consortium — under the aegis of the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). This consortium has adopted a code of conduct for their businesses. However, the Government has already hinted at formulating a policy to regulate the EdTech sector.

### **NEED FOR REGULATING OF EdTECH**

- **Monopoly:** Being heavily venture capital funded, EdTech platforms can offer their services at low or no charges (predatory pricing) and heading towards forming monopolies.
- **Exploitation of students:** There are reports that some education technology companies are exploiting students with loans for fee-based courses.
- **Data safety concerns:** EdTech companies aggregate data to get a 360° view not only of the child's academic context but also of the psycho-social-economic behaviour of households to make personalised products to the customers. But the safety of this immense data is a huge concern. Example: In May 2020, firewalls of one of the biggest EdTech companies of

India was breached by cyber threat groups and put up personally identifiable information of the users for sale on the dark web.

- **Algorithmic bias:** As most of these platforms run on AI based tools, there are chances of Algorithmic biases which will have long-term consequences for a child's academic career. **Example:** Recently, students in the United Kingdom (UK) were graded by an algorithm. This caused an uproar when students from disadvantaged backgrounds received lower scores than White students, reflecting the implicit bias in the process. In Indian context, reliance on AI tools can create a situation where students from traditionally marginalised castes are driven towards vocational training, as the data will suggest that they are better off here, while their upper caste/class peers are directed towards professional courses.
- **Lack of emphasis on social skills:** EdTech platforms can't replace traditional school system. Beyond classroom instruction, school environment serves a variety of developmental functions for young individual like important life skills, such as ability to collaborate, play, deliberate, and disagree.

**WAY FORWARD** Data about students and teachers and their learning transactions must belong to the school and the parent community, although these may be hosted by data platforms. As per the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, the data fiduciary (EdTech company) shall, before processing any personal data of a student, verify their age and obtain the consent of their parent or guardian.

- Regular auditing of Artificial intelligence tools that are used by these platforms to avoid any bias.
- Platform businesses must have no say in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
- Setting up a separate institution to look into grievances of victims.
- Expansion of free educational services via existing platform like Swayam MOOC.

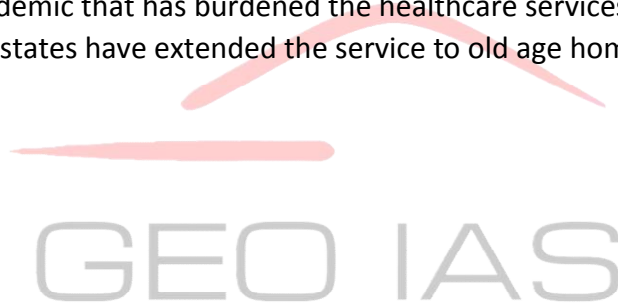
## 6. NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR TECHNOLOGY

- Ministry of Education had announced a National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) as a Public-Private partnership model between the Government (through its implementing agency AICTE) and the Education Technology companies of India.
- Through an open invitation and screening, companies are invited to showcase their products on a National Portal developed for the learners, who may procure them based on their requirements.
- The scheme includes free seats for existing students of higher education from weaker sections of society. The distribution of free seats would be done through the NEAT portal, based on student information shared by Educational Institutions



## 7. E-SANJIVINI

- eSanjeevani, the national Telemedicine Service of Government of India, is a technological intervention conceptualized by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- It has been deployed in two modes:
  - ✓ **eSanjeevani AB-HWC:** A Doctor-to-Doctor telemedicine system under Ayushman Bharat Scheme at Health & Wellness Centres, to provision specialised health services in rural areas and isolated communities.
  - ✓ **eSanjeevani OPD:** A Patient-to-Doctor telemedicine system to enable people to get outpatient services in the confines of their homes.
- It has led to improvement in access to specialised health services, particularly in rural areas. This service has come in handy for the patients in urban areas as well, especially during the pandemic that has burdened the healthcare services delivery system in the country. Some states have extended the service to old age homes, orphanages and for jail inmates





# ECONOMY

## 1. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF SEZs- CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

India has established SEZs under the SEZ Act, 2005 to boost exports, attract foreign investment, generate employment and thus promote economic development. However, unlike their counterparts in China, SEZs in India have failed to deliver expected results. In this regard, the Union Budget 2022-23 is expected to come out with new announcements to give new lease of life for the SEZs.

### **SALIENT FEATURES OF SEZ SCHEME: (PRELIMS POINTERS)**

What are SEZs? Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a geographically delineated duty-free enclave and deemed to be a foreign territory for the purposes of trade operations and duties and tariffs. All the territory outside the SEZ is the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA). SEZs can be set up by the Centre, State or a private entity.

**Objectives of SEZs:** Generation of additional economic activity, promotion of exports, promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources, creation of employment opportunities along with the development of infrastructure facilities.

#### **Incentives for SEZ Units:**

- ◇ Duty free import/domestic procurement of goods for development, operation and maintenance of SEZ units
- ◇ Tax incentives: 100% Income Tax exemption on export income for SEZ units for first 5 years, 50% for next 5 years thereafter and 50% of the ploughed back export profit for next 5 years.
- ◇ Exemption from Central Sales Tax, Exemption from Service Tax and Exemption from State sales tax. These have now subsumed into GST and supplies to SEZs are zero rated under IGST Act, 2017.
- ◇ **Lower Compliance burden:** Greater ease of doing business by through single window mechanism, no routine examination by customs authorities of export/import cargo; liberal economic laws etc.

**Supply of Goods and services** by SEZ units to DTA are treated as imports into India.

#### **Minimum Land area requirement**

- ◇ SEZs for IT or IT enabled services, biotech or health: No minimum land requirement.

- ◇ Other SEZs: Contiguous land area of 50 hectares or more. (In certain states such as Goa, Sikkim etc., the area will be 25 hectares or more)

#### **KEY ENTITIES IN THE SEZ SCHEME**

- ◇ **Department of Commerce (DOC):** Formulation and review of the policy including regulatory framework for SEZs. The highest decision-making body for SEZs i.e., the Board of Approval (BOA) is also administered by the DOC.
- ◇ **Office of Development Commissioner:** The office of the Development Commissioner (DC) administers the regulatory framework of SEZs.

#### **EVOLUTION OF SEZS IN INDIA**

**Export Processing Zones (EPZs):** The first export processing zone was set up in Kandla in 1965. It was followed by Santacruz export processing zone in 1973.

**EXIM Policy, 2000:** EPZs at Kandla, Santa Cruz, Cochin and Surat were converted into SEZs.

**SEZ Act 2005:** Legal framework to provide for a stable economic environment for the promotion of Export of goods in a quick, efficient and hassle-free manner

#### **PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF SEZs**

India has notified around 377 SEZs which have been able to create around 2.5 million jobs and account for 26%

#### **CHALLENGES WITH SEZs**

**Tax related problems:** The tax changes have increased the tax obligation on SEZ units and brought them almost on par with units in Domestic Tariff area (DTA).

- ◇ **Introduction of Minimum alternate Tax (MAT):** MAT was introduced in 1987 to bring Zero-tax companies under the tax bracket. Initially, developers and Units in SEZs were not required to pay MAT. However, in 2011, the Government decided to extend MAT even to SEZs.
- ◇ **Introduction of Sunset clause on tax benefits (2017):** SEZ Units enjoy phased tax holiday for 15 years. However, this benefit is available to only those units that start operations before Jun 30, 2020.
- ◇ Decrease in Corporate tax rate to 15% for new domestic companies in the Domestic Tariff area (DTA)
- ◇ **Sale of goods in DTA by SEZ units** attract customs Duty

**Issues with Indian approach to SEZs:** The success of SEZs in China has been attributed to- Emphasis on Manufacturing- based SEZs, favorable location along the coasts and focus on limited numbers of large-sized SEZs to have agglomeration effects. In contrast, the SEZs in India are more Service sector-based, located away from exports from India. However, as highlighted by Baba Kalyani Committee, unlike their counterparts in China, SEZs in India have failed to become engines of economic growth. coasts and focus has been on a large number of small-sized SEZs.

**Regulatory problems** such as absence of single window approvals, Lack of Dedicated Courts to handle disputes, Non-Optimal Utilization of Land etc.

**External Challenges**

- Foreign companies exiting China are getting attracted to other countries (Vietnam, Bangladesh etc.) due to higher tax benefits in their SEZs.
- Signing of FTAs has enabled DTA units to import goods at zero customs duty.

**WAY FORWARD (BABA KALYANI COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS)**

**Need for strategic shift from islands of exports to catalysts of economic and employment growth.**

Framework shift from export growth to broad-based Employment and Economic Growth (Employment and Economic Enclaves-3Es):

- ◇ SEZs to be renamed as 3 E's- '**Employment and Economic Enclaves**'
- ◇ Quantum of Incentives to SEZ Units be based on multiple parameters such as Investment, Job Creation, Value addition, Technology adoption etc

**Shift from supply driven to demand driven approach**

- ◇ Focus on few but large zones as future zones of excellence (Similar to Institutes of eminence in Education sector).
- ◇ Develop SEZs close to ports.
- ◇ Focus on developing SEZs in key manufacturing hubs such as Industrial Corridors etc.

**Shift from trade competitiveness to manufacturing competitiveness** through high speed multi modal connectivity.

**Ease of Doing Business (EoDB)**: Integrated online portal for new investments, easier operational requirements and exits related matters.

**Infrastructure status** to improve access to finance and enable long term borrowing.

**Promote MSME participation in 3Es** and enable manufacturing enabling service players to locate in 3E.

**Dispute resolution** through arbitration and commercial courts.

**Formulation of separate rules and procedures** for manufacturing and service SEZs.

## **2. BANKING ON ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN INDIA: NITI AAYOG'S REPORT**

Recently, NITI Aayog has published a new report titled "Banking on Electric Vehicles in India". In this report, NITI Aayog has highlighted about the poor status of Bank financing for Electric Vehicles and has accordingly argued in favor of Priority sector lending for Electric Mobility. This report comes against the backdrop of recent announcement of "First-loss risk sharing Instrument " worth \$ 300 million by NITI Aayog and World Bank.

### **NEED FOR ELECTRIC MOBILITY**

NITI Aayog has highlighted that Electric Mobility can cut energy demand by 64% and carbon emissions by 37%. This roughly translates into savings of Rs 3.9 lakh crores by 2030.

**Climatic change:** India has committed to cutting its GHG emissions intensity by 33% to 35% percent below 2005 levels by 2030

**Advances in battery technology:** Lower cost of clean, low-carbon energy with higher energy densities, faster charging and long-lasting batteries.

**Rapid urbanization:** According to a recent study by WHO, India is home to 14 out of 20 most polluted cities in the world. Electric vehicles (EVs) can improve that scenario by reducing local concentrations of pollutants in cities.

**Energy security:** EV's will facilitate lower reliance on fossil fuel imports and at the same time reduce India's Current account Deficit (CAD).

**Lower Maintenance of Electric Vehicles** due to less number of moving parts.

### **INITIATIVES TAKEN FOR ELECTRIC MOBILITY**

The Indian Government has committed to **EV30@30 initiative** i.e., to reach a 30 percent sales share for EVs by 2030.

**1. National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020:** Aims to have 6-7 Million Electric Vehicles by the end of 2020. Implemented by Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

**2. National Council for Electric Mobility:** InterMinisterial team headed by Minister of Heavy Industries to approve Electric Mobility Plans.

**3. National Board for Electric Mobility:** InterSecretarial team headed by Secretary, Department of Heavy Industries to recommend Policies for adoption of Electric Vehicles.

**4. FAME Scheme (Phase II):** The Department of Heavy Industries is implementing phase 2 of the FAME Scheme (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles) for a period of 3 years starting from 1st April 2019.

- **Objective:** Target to achieve 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles year on year from 2020 onwards.
- **Mandate:** Demand Incentive and Charging Infrastructure. The Demand incentive is available for consumers (buyers/end users) in the form of an upfront reduced purchase price of hybrid and electric vehicles
- **Applicability:** Applicable for all electric vehicles (TwoWheelers, Three-Wheelers, Four-Wheelers, Buses etc). The demand incentive for electric two wheelers is given to vehicles used even for private transportation. However, the demand incentive for electric 3W, 4W and Buses is applicable only for vehicles used for public transportation or registered for commercial purposes.
- **Quantum of Demand Incentive:** Higher the battery capacity, higher would be the demand incentive.

**5. Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI)** for advanced chemistry cell (ACC) battery manufacturing and automotive manufacturing focusing on EVs and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles

**6. E-commerce, fleet operators/ aggregator:** Companies including Amazon, Capgemini, Dalmia Cement, JSW Cement, and Zomato made new commitments to 100 percent electrification of their fleets in India between 2030 and 2040

**7. EV start-ups:** Start-ups including Hero Electric, Magenta, and Ola Electric have focused on increasing production of electric vehicles.

**8. State Governments:** State EV policies of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal notified. These policies offer number of incentives such as demand incentives, exemption from road tax etc.

**9. First-loss risk-sharing instrument:** The first loss guarantee is a mechanism whereby a third party compensates the Banks if the borrower defaults. As the third party pays for the losses, it gives lenders confidence to give out loans. So, basically, it is an insurance against a loss. NITI Aayog and World Bank have recently announced First-loss risk-sharing instrument worth \$300 million. Under this program, both NITI Aayog and World Bank would guarantee repayment of loans taken by the customers for buying electric vehicles. So, if the customer defaults, NITI Aayog and World Bank would compensate the loss for the banks.

#### **NITI AAYOG'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FINANCING ELECTRIC VEHICLES**

India needs an investment of around Rs 20 lakh crores between 2020 to 2030 to achieve the vision of **EV30@30 initiative** i.e., to reach a 30 percent sales share for EVs by 2030.

**Present status of Financing by Banks:** More than 85% of the vehicles sold in India are financed by Banks. However, most of the Banks have been reluctant to lend loans to the customers for buying electric vehicles. This is on account of multiple reasons such as uncertainty of resale value, concerns over product value etc. This has led to following implications:

- Higher Interest rates of 20% or more (almost 2 times of petrol/diesel vehicles)
- Low loan to value ratio as down payments is much higher between 25% to 50%
- Short duration loans leading to higher EMIs

**Need for Priority Sector Lending for Electric Vehicles:** Despite Government's incentives, the upfront cost of electric vehicles is higher than conventional vehicles. Some of the Banks such as SBI (Green Car Loan) and Union Bank of India (Green Miles) have already launched loans for electric vehicles. Priority sector lending for electric vehicles would incentivise other banks to venture into financing of Electric Vehicles.

#### **OTHER IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **PSL Sub-target for clean energy:** Presently, loans given to Renewable energy are categorised as Priority sector loans. However, there is no separate sub-target for renewable energy. For example, RBI has specified sub-targets for other sectors Agriculture (18%), Microenterprises (7.5%) etc. Having explicit sub-targets for lending to renewable and electric vehicles would incentivise banks to finance clean energy in India.
2. **EVs to be included as an infrastructure sub-sector:** The Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure Subsectors, compiled by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, provides financing and taxation benefits to the sector categorised as Infrastructure sector. Inclusion of electric mobility as an infrastructure subsector would create an enabling environment for large investments in the sector.
3. **Loan guarantee programs:** Priority sector lending helps improve supply of credit but does not directly address challenges such as interest rates and equated monthly instalments. In the short term, interest rate subventions can play this part, as the Delhi EV Policy has demonstrated through its proposed subvention scheme

### **3. NPCI GUIDELINES ON AePS**

*National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has recently introduced new guidelines to standardize the transactions made through Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS)*

#### **ABOUT AADHAAR ENABLED PAYMENT SYSTEM (AePS)**

- AePS is a bank led model which allows transactions at PoS (Micro ATM) through the Business correspondent of any bank using the Aadhaar authentication.
- It empowers a bank customer to use Aadhaar as identity to access Aadhaar enabled bank account and perform basic banking transactions like cash deposit, cash withdrawal, Intrabank or interbank fund transfer, balance enquiry and obtain a mini statement through a Business Correspondent.
- Only inputs required for a customer to do a transaction under this scenario are: -
  - a. Bank Name
  - b. Aadhaar Number
  - c. Fingerprint captured during enrolment.

#### **BENEFITS OF AEPS**

- Facilitate disbursements of Government entitlements like NREGA, Social Security pension, Handicapped Old Age Pension etc. of any Central or State Government bodies, using Aadhaar and authentication thereof as supported by UIDAI.
- To facilitate inter-operability across banks in a safe and secured manner.
- To build the foundation for a full range of Aadhaar enabled Banking services.
- Developed by NPCI.

#### **NEW GUIDELINES**

- Standardised limit of a minimum of five approved cash withdrawal transactions per month for every customer.
- Standardised limit of a minimum of five ministatement transactions per month for every customer.

### **4. RBI'S FINANCIAL STABILITY REPORT**

*RBI has recently released its biannual "Financial stability Report (FSR)." This report highlights the present financial position of the Scheduled Commercial Banks in India.*

#### **BASIC TERMS TO UNDERSTAND**

**Non-Performing Asset (NPA):** A loan is categorized as NPA if it is due for a period of more than 90 days. Depending upon the due period, the NPAs are categorized as under:

- Sub-Standard Assets > 90 days and less than 1 year
- Doubtful Assets: Greater than 1 year
- Lost Assets: Loss has been identified by the bank or RBI but the amount has not been written off wholly.

**Special Mention Accounts (SMA):** Special Mention Account (SMA) Category has been introduced by the RBI in order to identify the incipient stress in the assets of the banks and NBFCs. These are the accounts that have not-yet turned NPAs (default on the loan for more than 90 days), but rather these accounts can potentially become NPAs in future if no suitable action is action. The SMA has the various sub-categories as shown below:

- SMA-0: Principal or interest payment overdue between 1-30 days
- SMA-1: Principal or interest payment overdue between 31-60 days
- SMA-2: Principal or interest payment overdue between 61-90 days
- Note: If the Principal or interest payment is overdue for more than 90 days, then the loan is categorized as NPA .

### **PROVISIONING COVERAGE RATIO (PCR)**

Under the RBI's provisioning norms, the banks are required to set aside certain percentage of their profits in order to cover risk arising from NPAs. It is referred to as "Provisioning Coverage ratio" (PCR). It is defined in terms of percentage of loan amount and depends upon the asset quality. As the asset quality deteriorates, the PCR increases. The PCR for different categories of assets is as shown below:

- Standard Assets (No Default): 0.40%
- Sub-standard Assets (> 90 days and less than 1 year): 15%
- Doubtful Assets (greater than 1 year): 25%-40%
- Loss Assets (Identified by Bank or RBI): 100%

**Gross and Net NPA:** Gross NPA refers to the total NPAs of the banks. The Net NPA is calculated as Gross NPA - Provisioning Amount.



**Written off Assets:** If the lost assets continue to remain on the balance sheet, the Banks would be required to set aside 100% of its profits to cover the losses. Hence, usually, such lost are written-off from the balance sheets of the Banks.

**Capital Adequacy ratio (CAR):** The CAR has been laid down by the BASEL committee on banking supervision under Bank of International Settlement located in Basel, Switzerland.

It has been laid down to ensure financial stability and to prevent failure of banks. So far, 3 BASEL Norms have been laid down: Basel I (1998), Basel II (2004), Basel III (2009).

CAR is the ratio of a bank's capital to its risk. It is also known as the **Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio (CRAR)**

**CAR= (Tier-1 Capital + Tier-2 Capital)/ RWAs \* 100** The Banks in India are required to maintain CAR of 9% (Tier-1 capital: 7% + Tier-2 Capital: 2%) along with Capital Conservation buffer (CCB) of 2.5%. Hence, unlike the BASEL III norms, which stipulate capital adequacy of 10.5% (8%-CAR + 2.5% CCB), the RBI has mandated to maintain capital adequacy of 11.5% (9%- CAR + 2.5%-CCB)

#### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT**

**Decrease in GNPA and NNPA:** The gross nonperforming assets (GNPA) stands at 6.9% in Sep 2021. While net NPA (NNPA) stands at 2.3% in Sep 2021. The decline in the NPAs, particularly when the economy was hit by COVID-19 could be attributed to two factors (a) Banks have written-off NPAs worth Rs 2 lakh crores from their Balance sheets (b) Relief in the form of moratorium on loan repayment provided by the RBI.

**Deterioration in Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR):** The provision coverage ratio (PCR) of all Banks taken together deteriorated across all bank groups from 72% in Sep 2020 to 69% in March 2021.

#### **BANKING STABILITY INDICATOR**

RBI defines Banking Stability Index (BSI) as “the expected number of banks that could become distressed given that at least one bank has become distressed.” Hence, as the BSI increases, it means that more banks are expected to become distressed if one bank in the system is distressed. The BSI considers the following parameters:

- Efficiency of the Banks
- Profitability
- Soundness
- Liquidity
- Asset Quality

**Updates on BSI:** By September 2021, the banking stability indicator (BSI) has showed improvement showed improvement in soundness, asset quality, liquidity and profitability.

## 5. RBI'S FRAMEWORK FOR OFFLINE DIGITAL PAYMENTS

*RBI has come out with the framework for facilitating small value digital payments in offline mode in order to promote digital payments in semi-urban and rural areas.*

**Background:** At present, digital payment modes like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) require internet connectivity and a smartphone. Earlier, in 2016, the NPCI had launched the **National Unified USSD platform (NUUP) which enables banking related transactions on feature phones without internet connection.** Feature phone users can avail various services by dialling \*99#. However, NUUP has not been very successful.

### **NEW ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Aug 2020:** RBI had announced a scheme to conduct pilot tests of innovative technology that enables retail digital payments even in situations where internet connectivity is low / not available (offline mode).

**Jan 2022:** RBI has proposed to introduce a framework for carrying out retail digital payments in offline mode across the country. This would enable customers to use digital payment modes even without internet connectivity. The new framework would provide fillip to new technologies such as E-RUPI, Near Field Communication (NFC) payments, interactive voice response-based payments systems etc.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF NEW FRAMEWORK**

- An offline payment means a transaction which does not require internet or telecom connectivity.
- Offline payments may be made using any channel or instrument like cards, wallets, mobile devices, etc.
- Offline payments shall be made in proximity (face to face) mode only.
- Offline payment transactions may be offered without Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) such as OTP.
- Transactions are subject to a limit of Rs 200 per transaction and an overall limit of Rs 2,000 for all transactions until the balance in the account is replenished. Balance replenishment can only occur in an online mode

## 6. DOMESTIC SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT BANKS

*Reserve Bank of India has stated that State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank will continue to be identified as Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs).*

## **BACKGROUND**

It was observed during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis that failure of large and highly interconnected financial institutions would negatively impact the economy. In the event of failure of such financial institutions, the government would be required to bail-out these institutions. Hence, such institutions may be considered as "Too big to fail".

## **SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT BANKS (SIBs)**

The SIBs are perceived as banks that are 'Too Big to Fail (TBTF)'. There is a need for stronger regulatory environment for the SIBs. In this regard, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) came out with a framework in 2011 for identifying the Global Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs). Similarly, the RBI has been mandated to identify the Domestic systemically Important banks (D-SIBs) and lay down suitable regulatory requirements to prevent their failure.

## **Number of Banks CRITERIA FOR DOMESTIC- SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT BANKS (D-SIBS)**

**Qualifying Criteria:** To identify the D-SIBs, the RBI considers only those banks whose size is equal to or more than 2% of GDP.

### **Criteria used for Identification of D-SIBs:**

- Size: Failure of Bank with higher Balance sheet can cause greater damage to Economy.
- Interconnectedness: Extent of linkages with other Banks and financial institutions. Failure of Bank with higher interconnectedness can cause greater damage to Economy.
- Substitutability: Lack of readily available substitutes. Failure of a large bank would inflict greater damage if certain critical services provided by the bank cannot be easily substituted by other banks.
- Complexity: The more complex a bank is, the greater are the costs and time needed to resolve its problems.

**Computation of Score:** The systemic importance of a bank is computed as weighted average scores of all 4 indicators. Thus, the systemic importance score of a bank would represent its relative importance with respect to the other banks. Banks that have scores above a threshold score are classified as D-SIBs.

**Note:** Presently, the SBI, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank have been identified as Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs).

## **HIGHER CAPITAL REQUIREMENT FOR D-SIBs**

D-SIBs are placed under different buckets (categories) depending upon their importance. According to the bucket in which they are placed, the bank would be required to maintain higher Tier-I capital under the

### **BASEL Norms as shown below:**

Bucket	Banks	Additional Common Equity Tier 1 requirement as a percentage of Risk Weighted Assets (RWAs)
5	-	1%
4	-	0.80%
3	State Bank of India	0.60%
2	-	0.40%
1	ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank	0.20%

#### **ABOUT FINANCIAL STABILITY BOARD (FSB)**

Financial Stability Board (FSB) is a global organization that regulates and makes recommendations regarding the global financial system. It is hosted and funded by Bank for International Settlements (BIS) and is located in Basel, Switzerland.

#### **Membership:**

- 24 member countries (G20 + 4 Key Financial Centres Hongkong, Singapore, Spain and Switzerland)
- International organisations (such as IMF, World Bank, Bank for International Settlements, OECD etc)
- Standard Setting Bodies such as Basel Committee on Banking Supervision.

**Role:** The FSB is not a treaty-based organisation. Policies agreed by the FSB are not legally binding. Instead, the FSB acts as a coordinating body to strengthen financial stability of member countries.

**Relationship with G-20:** The FSB regularly reports to the G20 which supports implementation of agreed international standards. However, FSB is not run by G20.

**Relationship with India:** India is one of the members of FSB. India is represented in the FSB by (a) Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance (b) Chairman of SEBI (c) Dy. Governor of RBI.

## **7. PMJDY ACHIEVES A NEW MILESTONE**

*Deposits in bank accounts opened under the Jan Dhan scheme have crossed the Rs 1.5 lakh crore mark.*

### **ABOUT PRADHAN MANTRI JAN DHAN YOJANA (PMJDY)**

- Launched under National Mission for Financial Inclusion initially for a period of 4 years (in two phases) in 2014.
- Envisages universal access to banking facilities with at least one basic banking account for every household, financial literacy, access to credit, insurance and pension. It comes under the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance.
- It has provided a platform for the three social security schemes i.e. Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY) and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY).
- Government has decided to extend the PMJDY program beyond 2018 with the change in focus on opening accounts from “every household” to “every adult”, with following modification:
  1. Existing Overdraft (OD) limit of Rs. 5,000 revised to Rs. 10,000.
  2. No conditions attached for active PMJDY accounts availing OD up to Rs. 2,000.
  3. Age limit for availing OD facility revised from 18-60 years to 18-65 years.
  4. Accidental insurance cover for new RuPay card holders raised from existing Rs.1 lakh to Rs. 2 lakhs to new PMJDY accounts opened after 2018

### **BENEFITS UNDER PMJDY**

- One basic savings bank account (BSBA) is opened for unbanked person.
- There is no requirement to maintain any minimum balance in PMJDY accounts.
- Interest is earned on the deposit in PMJDY accounts.
- Rupay Debit card is provided to PMJDY account holder.
- Accident Insurance Cover of Rs.1 lakh (enhanced to Rs. 2 lakhs to new PMJDY accounts opened after 2018)
- Life Insurance Cover of Rs. 30,000 to eligible PMJDY account holders who opened their account for the first time between 15th August 2014 and 31st January 2015.
- An overdraft (OD) facility up to Rs. 10,000 to eligible account holders is available.

- PMJDY accounts are eligible for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Bank (MUDRA) scheme.

#### **ABOUT BASIC SAVINGS BANK DEPOSIT ACCOUNT (BSBDA)**

- BSBDA Account is designed as a savings account which would offer certain minimum facilities, free of charge, to the holders of such accounts. These accounts were earlier known as "No-frills account".
- BSBDA can be opened by any individual and is not restricted to only poor and weaker sections.
- An individual is eligible to have only one Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account in one bank.
- Further, following conditions are applicable to **BSBDA Small Accounts**, which are opened on the basis of simplified KYC norms:
  - ✓ Total credits in such accounts should not exceed one lakh rupees in a year.
  - ✓ Maximum balance in the account should not exceed fifty thousand rupees at any time
  - ✓ The total debits by cash withdrawals and transfers in a month cannot exceed Rs 10,000.

#### **NEW CHANGES/ MODIFICATIONS IN 2019**

- No limit on number and value of deposits that can be made in a month
- Minimum of four withdrawals in a month, including ATM withdrawals
- ATM Card or ATM-cum-Debit Card.
- Banks are free to provide additional value-added services, including issue of cheque book, beyond the above minimum facilities, which may/may not be prized.

#### **ARE PMJDY ACCOUNTS SAME AS BSBDA ACCOUNT?**

PMJDY accounts are BSBDA accounts in nature with additional facility of RuPay Debit card with accident insurance coverage and overdraft facility

## **8. DRONE USE IN AGRICULTURE**

*To promote precision farming in India, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has issued guidelines to make drone technology affordable in the Indian agriculture.*

#### **SUB-MISSION ON AGRICULTURAL MECHANIZATION**

**Year of launch:** 2014-15

**Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' welfare

**Objectives:** Increasing the reach of farm mechanization to small and marginal farmers and to the regions & difficult area where farm power availability is low.

**Strategy:**

- Promote 'Custom Hiring Centres' and 'Hi-tech Hubs of High-Value Machines' to enable small and marginal farmers to hire agricultural machineries on rental basis.
- Creating awareness among stakeholders through demonstration and capacity building activities
- Performance testing and certification of agricultural machines at designated testing centres

#### **NEW GUIDELINES UNDER SUB-MISSION ON AGRICULTURAL MECHANIZATION**

- Grants up to 100% of the cost of agriculture drone or Rs. 10 lakhs, whichever is less for purchase of drones by the Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institutes, ICAR institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras and State Agriculture Universities for taking up large scale demonstrations of this technology on the farmers' fields.
- Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) would be eligible to receive grant up to 75% of the cost of agriculture drone for its demonstrations on the farmers' fields.

#### **BENEFITS OF DRONES IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE**

The use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) commonly known as drones have great potential to revolutionize Indian agriculture and ensure country's food security.

**Field and Soil Assessment:** Before the start of season, data collected by drones regarding soil analysis can help in planning which crop species to be grown, pattern of planting, time of irrigation and nutrient application. Hence, it facilitates site specific management practices i.e., precision farming.

**Plant establishment:** Drones can simplify planting of crops on a large scale with utmost accuracy and simultaneously reduce labour costs.

**Precision crop spraying:** Drones can scan the crops on a real time basis and spray precise quantity of insecticides and pesticides as per the need. Thus, it saves time and input costs for the farmers and reduce pesticide pollution.

**Crop Monitoring:** Massive scale surveillance of crops can provide details about development of a crop and highlight production inefficiencies, enabling better crop management and higher productivity.

**Irrigation management:** Drones equipped with thermal sensing cameras can provide details ranging from moisture stressed condition to waterlogged conditions. Thus, it enables the farmers to take decisions on irrigation depending upon the present water status.

**Livestock monitoring:** Animals tagged with Radio Frequency Identification tags (RFID) can be better monitored with drones.

**Productivity:** Drones can significantly alleviate labor pressure, while enhancing the crop coverage area per day. This will provide significant ease of farming for farmers, who can use the time saved to conduct other activities.

## **9 . PURPLE REVOLUTION IN J&K**

*Union Minister for Science and Technology has recently highlighted about the "Purple Revolution" in Jammu and Kashmir. In a brief span of time, many farmers in J&K have shifted from Maize to Lavender Cultivation due to Mission Aroma.*

### **ABOUT MISSION AROMA**

**Year of Launch:** 2017

**Objective:** Promote cultivation of economically important aromatic crops such as Lavender, mint, lemon grass, rosemary, wild marigold, damask rose, Indian valerian and lemongrass

**Nodal Agency:** CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CSIR-CIMAP), Lucknow

#### **Nature of Intervention:**

- Free Distribution of Aromatic plants to encourage cultivation
- Oil Distillation facilities to extract essential oils from aromatic plants
- Integration of bee keeping with cultivation of aromatic crops for enhancement of livelihood and additional income for the farmers
- Value addition of Aromatic crops
- Providing support in form of awareness, training and capacity building, entrepreneurship development

#### **Expected Benefits:**

- **Increase in Area:** Bring about 5500 ha of additional area under cultivation.
- **Higher Income of farmers:** Income of the farmers expected to increase by Rs. 30,000 to 60,000/ha/year.



- **Additional Employment opportunities:** More than 25,000 farming families would be directly benefitted, and additional employment opportunities would be created in rural India.
- **Higher Profits:** Farmers get higher profits for the cultivation of aromatic plants in comparison to cereal crops. For example, Lavender oil sells for at least Rs 10,000 per litre.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

**Increase in area under cultivation:** The area under wild marigold, damask rose, Indian valerian and lemongrass has increased to 538 ha in 10 states and 2 union territories.

**Purple Revolution in J&K:** Lavender has become vastly popular among small and marginal farmers of the temperate regions of the Jammu division, particularly in Doda District. Many farmers have shifted from maize to lavender cultivation in recent years. Farmers have produced more than 800 litres of lavender oil worth Rs. 80 lakhs between years 2018-2020. lakh.

**Marigold Cultivation:** Himachal Pradesh has become largest producer of wild marigold oil in the country (6.49 tonnes); a step towards self-reliant India

## **10. SAMARTH INITIATIVE**

*Recently, the Union Power Secretary chaired the second meeting of Steering Committee for SAMARTH i.e., National Mission on Use of Biomass in coal based thermal Power Plants. In this meeting, status of bio-mass co-firing and progress of the actions being taken to promote the co-firing in the thermal power plants was undertaken.*

### **BIO-MASS CO-FIRING- MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE**

**Meaning of Co-firing:** It refers to the combustion of two (or more) different types of fuels at the same time to generate electricity. For example, Biomass can be used along with the Coal in the existing thermal power plants to generate electricity. In biomass cofiring, biomass can substitute for up to 20% of the coal used in the boiler. Biomass Co-firing is a well proven technology and large number of thermal power plants in US and Europe have adopted this technology.

**How is it done?** The existing thermal power plants cannot directly use raw agricultural residue as fuel. The agricultural residue needs to be processed into dense bio-mass pellets. The densification of biomass into pellets also reduces its transportation costs.

### **Benefits of Bio-mass Co-firing:**

- **Reduce Coal consumption** by 20-50% and hence it has the potential to address coal shortages in India.
- **Reduce Emissions of Carbon Dioxide:** UNFCCC has recognised biomass co-firing as a carbon neutral technology for mitigation of carbon emission from thermal power plants

- **Efficient utilisation of agricultural residue:** Around 30-40 MT of paddy straw which gets burnt every year in north-west India leading to air pollution. This residue can potentially generate about 6000-8000 MW on an annual basis.
- **Improve the air quality** while creating additional income for the farmers.
- **Entrepreneurship and job opportunities** through processing of agricultural residue into biomass pellets.

#### **STATUS OF BIOMASS CO-FIRING IN INDIA**

NTPC has successfully demonstrated the co firing of 7% blend of biomass pellets with coal in its Dadri power plant. This can be replicated in other power plants as well.

#### **NATIONAL MISSION ON USE OF BIOMASS IN COAL BASED PLANTS**

##### **Objective**

- To increase the level of co-firing from present 5% to higher levels to have a larger share of carbon neutral power generation from the thermal power plants.
- To take up R&D activity in boiler design to handle the higher amount of silica, alkalis in the biomass pellets.
- To facilitate overcoming the constraints in supply chain of biomass pellets and agro-residue and its transport up to the power plants.

**Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Power

**Implementation:** Steering Committee headed by Secretary (Power) comprising of all stakeholders including representatives from Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG), Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) etc.

**Recent Changes in Policy:** All thermal plants to use 5% blend of biomass pellets with Coal. To be increased to 7% after a period of 1 year

GEO IAS

## **11. STATS ON AGRI TRADE**

*India has emerged as the largest exporter of gherkins in the world. Gherkin is a fruit that is similar in appearance and nutritional value to a cucumber. It is a smaller variety and is traditionally used for making pickles.*

#### **IMPORTANT STATS ON AGRICULTURAL TRADE**

**Share in global trade:** As per available WTO's Trade Statistics (2018), the share of India's agricultural exports and imports in the world agriculture trade were 2.15% and 1.54%, respectively.

**Share of agricultural exports in India's total merchandise exports** has increased from 10.9% in 2019-20 to 14.4% in 2020-21.

**Major destinations of exports** are the USA, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia.

**Major sources of import** are Indonesia, Ukraine, the United States of America, Argentina

**Top 3 agricultural export commodities (in terms of value):** Marine products, Basmati Rice, Spices.

**Top 3 agricultural import commodities (in terms of value):** Vegetable oils, Fresh fruits and Pulses.

#### **DETAILS ABOUT EXPORTS OF GHERKINS**

- India has crossed the \$ 200 mn of export of pickling cucumber, which is globally referred as gherkins or cornichons, in the last financial year.
- Nearly 15% production of the world's gherkin requirement is grown in India and mainly includes the states of Karnataka, TN, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

## **12. "INEQUALITY KILLS" REPORT**

*Oxfam International has recently released a report titled "Inequality Kills". It highlights that both the current wealth of extremely rich people and the rate at which they are accumulating wealth are unprecedented in human history. The growing global inequality is not only killing people, but it is also negatively impacting human progress.*

#### **GROWING INEQUALITIES**

The report highlights that huge amount of public money, poured into our economies, have inflated stock prices dramatically and in turn boosted the bank accounts of billionaires more than ever before.

- A new billionaire has been created every 26 hours since the pandemic began.
- The world's 10 richest men have doubled their fortunes, while over 160 million people are projected to have been pushed into poverty.
- If the 10 richest men spent a million dollars each a day, it would take them 414 years to spend their combined wealth.
- Since 1995, top 1% have captured nearly 20 times more of global wealth than the bottom 50% of humanity.

#### **WHY INEQUALITY KILLS?**

The report highlights that Inequality contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds.

**Economic Violence:** Extreme inequality is a form of "economic violence"—where structural and systemic policy and political choices that are skewed in favour of the richest and most powerful people result in direct harm to the vast majority of ordinary people worldwide.

**Vaccine Apartheid:** A number of poor and developing countries could not get access to vaccines leading to higher deaths. So, one hand, MNC pharma companies continued to make windfall profits, development of vaccines did not benefit poor countries.

**Lack of access to healthcare:** Healthcare of good quality is a human right, but too often treated as a luxury for rich people. An estimated 5.6 million people die every year for lack of access to healthcare in poor countries.

**Gender based violence:** 143 million women are missing worldwide due to a combination of excess female mortality and sex-selective abortions (son preference).

**Hunger and Malnutrition:** Hunger kills over 2.1 million people each year at a minimum.

**Climate Crisis:** Climate change is due to higher emissions by richest people. However, brunt of climate change is faced by poor and developing countries. One study estimates that the greenhouse gases emitted by 273 Americans in 2020 will kill one person during the rest of this century through heat waves alone.

### **WAY FORWARD**

**1. Higher tax on the billionaires:** All governments should immediately tax the gains made by super-rich during this pandemic period. This must evolve into implementing permanent progressive taxes on capital and wealth to fundamentally and radically reduce wealth inequality.

**2. Redirect wealth to save lives and invest in future:**

- Provide for universal healthcare coverage to improve health outcomes
- Provide for universal social protection to provide income security for all
- Rich governments must fully finance climate adaptation

**3. Change rules and shift power in the economy and society:**

- Adequate protection to workers in form of wages, social security, right to form trade unions etc.
- Addressing monopolies and limiting market concentration.
- Women still make up only 25.5% of parliamentarians globally and hence need to tackle the barriers to representation for women
- Provide for IPR waiver on the vaccines and drugs to deal with covid-19 pandemic

## **13. FIRST ADVANCE GDP ESTIMATES**

*National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has recently released the first advance estimates of Gross Domestic Product for the financial year 2021-22.*

### **DETAILS OF FIRST ADVANCE ESTIMATES**

- First Advance Estimates is usually published at the end of first week of January every year. It is the "first" official estimate of how the GDP is expected to grow in a financial year. It is "advance" estimates since it is published even before the end of the financial year (Mar 31st).
- Significance of First Advance Estimates lies in the fact that these GDP estimates are used by the finance minister in the Union Budget.

### **NOMINAL GDP VS REAL GDP**

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) refers to the market value of all final goods and services produced within an economy. It can be calculated into two ways:

**Nominal GDP:** It refers to the GDP at the current market prices i.e., the GDP is calculated as per the market prices for the year for which the GDP is calculated.

**Real GDP:** It refers to GDP at base year prices i.e., the GDP is calculated as per the market prices in the base year. Real GDP negates the inflation in goods and services.

*In case of high rate of inflation, the nominal GDP would be higher than the real GDP. However, in case of deflation, the real GDP would be higher than the nominal GDP.*

### **ESTIMATES OF NATIONAL INCOME FOR FIRST QUARTER (APRIL-JUNE) Q1 OF 2021-22**

**Real GDP:** Real GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the 2021-22 is estimated to be at Rs 147 lakh crores in comparison to Rs 135 lakh crores in 2020-21. The GDP growth rate is estimated to be 9.2% in comparison to contraction of 7.3% in 2020-21.

**Nominal GDP:** GDP at Current Prices in 2021-22 is estimated to be at Rs 232 lakh crores in comparison to Rs 197 lakh crores in 2020-21.

**Breaking down the data:** According to Expenditure method, GDP is calculated as  $C+G+I+(X-M)$  where C denotes Private final consumption expenditure (PFCE), G denotes Government Final consumption Expenditure (GFCE), I denotes Investment, X denotes Exports and M denotes Imports. As shown in the figure below, the PFCE accounts for the highest contribution followed by Investment.

# Polity And Governance

## 1 . LIMIT ON ELECTION EXPENSE ENHANCED

*Union Ministry of Law and Justice has approved raising the election expenditure ceiling by a candidate as proposed by Election Commission.*

### **ENHANCING ELECTION EXPENDITURE LIMIT FOR INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES**

- Considering the factor of COVID-19, the Ministry of Law & Justice in 2020 had earlier notified an amendment in Rule 90 of Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 enhancing the existing expenditure limit by 10%.

### **ELECTORAL LAWS**

- **Section 77 of Representation of People Act, 1951**

mandates every candidate or his election agent to maintain an account of all expense incurred for the election authorized by him or by his election agent between the date on which he has been nominated and the date of declaration of the result thereof, both dates inclusive.

- The total of the said expenditure shall not exceed such amount as may be prescribed under Rule 90 of Conduct of Election Rules.
- **Rule 90 – Conduct of Election Rules** – provides for a maximum limit on election expense as mandated under Section 77 of RPA 1951. The maximum limit is different for Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies.

### **COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED BY EC IN 2020**

- Election Commission had also constituted a committee comprising Sh. Harish Kumar, Ex. IRS and DG (Investigation), Sh. Umesh Sinha, Secretary General and DG (Expenditure) to examine the issues concerning expenditure limit for a candidate in view of increase in number of electors and rise in Cost Inflation Index and other factors.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE**

- ◇ **Grounds considered by the Committee**

- ✓ Increase in number of electors - from 2014 to 2021 from 834 million to 936 million - up by 12.23 %
- ✓ Increase in Cost Inflation Index since 2014-15 to 2021-22 from 240 to 317 - up by 32.08.
- ✓ Changing modes of election campaign - which is gradually shifting to virtual campaign.

- ◇ The Election Commission has accepted the recommendations of the Committee and has decided to enhance the existing election expenditure limit for candidates.

**Accordingly, revised limits have now been notified by Ministry of Law, Justice and Legislative Department, which are as under:**

- ◇ For the upcoming Assembly elections, the enhanced amount of Rs. 40 lakhs would apply in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab and Rs. 28 lakhs in Goa and Manipur.

## **2 . MEDIATION BILL, 2021**

*Parliament has introduced the Mediation Bill 2021 which aims to promote and facilitate mediation, especially institutional mediation for resolution of commercial or other disputes, enforce mediated settlement agreements, provide for a body for registration of mediators, to encourage community mediation and to make online mediation as acceptable and cost-effective process. The standalone law on mediation contemplates the international practice of using the*

*terms 'conciliation' and 'mediation' interchangeably as India is a signatory to the Singapore Convention on Mediation.*

<b>For Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs)</b>	
<b>Earlier expenditure limit (2014)</b>	<b>Enhanced expenditure limit now</b>
Rs. 70 Lakhs	Rs. 95 Lakhs
Rs. 54 Lakhs	Rs. 75 Lakhs
<b>For Assembly Constituencies (ACs)</b>	
<b>Earlier expenditure limit (2014)</b>	<b>Enhanced expenditure limit now</b>
Rs. 28 Lakhs	Rs. 40 Lakhs
Rs. 20 Lakhs	Rs. 28 Lakhs

### **Difference between Arbitration, Mediation & Conciliation**

◇ Arbitration, mediation and conciliation are the main Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism which is generally adopted to resolve disputes in an informal manner.

◇

he primary difference between arbitration, conciliation and Mediation is based on the role played by the third party who is selected by the parties seeking a settlement, in consensus.

- ◇ **Arbitration** is the process by which parties select an independent person, who renders a decision regarding the case.
- ◇ **Conciliation** attempts to make parties come to an agreement about the problem at hand.
- ◇ **In Mediation**, the mediator acts as a facilitator who helps the parties in agreeing.

### **BENEFITS OF MEDIATION**

- Mediation results in amicable resolution of disputes in civil, commercial, family and matrimonial matters and fosters collaborative approach, reduces the burden on the courts, and preserves relationships amongst disputants.
- Therefore, bringing a comprehensive mediation law and providing for online mediation may serve the interests of all the stakeholders as effective alternative mechanism for resolving disputes. 3. The Bill covering the various aspects of mediation.
- **Mediation Bill, 2021 aims to:**
  - ✓ Promote, encourage and facilitate mediation especially institutional mediation for resolution of commercial disputes.
  - ✓ Enforce domestic and international mediation settlement agreements.
  - ✓ Provide for a body for registration of mediators
  - ✓ Encourage community mediation
  - ✓ Make online mediation as an acceptable and cost-effective process.

### **IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF MEDIATION BILL**

- **Definition of Mediation** - Mediation shall be a process, whether referred to by the expression mediation, pre-litigation mediation, online mediation, community mediation, conciliation or an expression of similar import, whereby party or parties, request a third person referred to as mediator or mediation service provider to assist them in their attempt to reach an amicable settlement of a dispute.
- **Mediator** is a person who is appointed to be a mediator to undertake mediation, and includes a person registered as mediator with the Council.
- **Conflict of Interest of Mediator must be disclosed** - A mediator is supposed to be neutral and free from bias to ensure impartial conduct during mediation process. Thus, the Bill makes it mandatory for mediator to disclose in writing any conflict of interest which may question or doubt mediator's impartiality.
- **"Institutional Mediation"** means mediation conducted under the aegis of a mediation service provider.
- **Mediation Service Provider** means a body or organisation that provides for the conduct of mediation under this Act and rules and regulations made thereunder and are recognised by the Council.



- **Court Annexed Mediation** means mediation including pre-litigation mediation conducted at the mediation centers established by any court or tribunal.
- **Pre-Litigation Mediation** – Irrespective of any mediation agreement, any party before filing any suit or proceedings of civil or commercial nature in any court shall try to settle the disputes by pre-litigation mediation.
- **International Mediation** means mediation undertaken under this Act and relates to a commercial dispute arising out of a legal relationship, contractual or otherwise, under any law for the time being in force in India, and where at least one of the parties, is:
  - (i) an individual who is a national of, or habitually resides in, any country other than India.
  - (ii) a body corporate including a Limited Liability Partnership of any nature, with its place of business outside India.
  - (iii) an association or body of individuals whose place of business is outside India.
  - (iv) the Government of a foreign country.
- **Enforcement** - A mediated settlement agreement resulting from mediation signed by the parties and authenticated by the mediator shall be final and binding on the parties. The mediated settlement agreement shall be enforced in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, in the same manner as if it were a judgment or decree passed by a court.
- **Mediation Council of India** - The Central Government shall establish a Council to be known as the Mediation Council of India to regulate Mediation activities in India. The Council shall comprise of a Chairperson, two full time members, three Members ex-officio and a Part time Member.
- **Disputes or matters not fit for mediation** – A mediation under this Act shall not be conducted for resolution of any dispute or matter contained in the indicative list under the First Schedule. However, a Court may refer any dispute to mediation relating to compoundable offences or matrimonial offences connected with or arising out of civil proceedings between the parties.
- **Interim relief by court or tribunal** – In cases of exceptional circumstances, party to the mediation can approach Court or Tribunal to seek interim relief in cases of emergency.

#### **CERTAIN PROVISIONS IN THE BILL MAY IMPROVE LAW & ORDER SITUATION**

**Compoundable Offences** are those which can be compromised, i.e., the complainant can agree to take back the charges levied against the accused, whereas, non - compoundable offences are the more serious offences in which the parties cannot compromise.

- **Matrimonial Disputes** - Section 7 of the Bill says that courts will be competent to refer any dispute to mediation relating to compoundable offences or matrimonial offences connected with or arising out of civil proceedings between the parties.
- **Community Mediation** - Section 44 of the Bill provides for 'any dispute likely to affect peace, harmony and tranquility amongst the residents or families of any area or locality', to be settled

through community mediation. Any settlement so arrived at, however, shall not be enforceable as a judgment or decree of a civil court.

- **Provide Relief to law enforcement agencies** – Though the proposed law primarily intends to resolve civil and commercial disputes through mediation, it has ample scope to relieve some of the pressure on law enforcement agencies.
- **Promotes community peace, harmony & friendliness** - Thus, the policy of the law is to promote friendliness between the parties so that peace between them is restored. A case may be compounded any time before the sentence is pronounced.

**Conclusion:** Apart from providing out of court relief as a form of alternate dispute resolution mechanism, Mediation Bill will also ease out the duties of police specially in compoundable offences

### **3 . PLEA TO EXTEND DATES FOR STATE ELECTIONS**

*Amid rising cases of omicron, concerns have been raised by Allahabad High Court on the conduct of election in states and it had urged the Prime Minister and Election Commission to immediately ban rallies and public meetings of political parties and consider postponing the Assembly election as according to the Court, it is more important to save lives. However, taking note of the judgment of Allahabad High Court, Election Commission has stated that all parties in Uttar Pradesh want the Assembly elections to be held as per schedule and the fact that constitution does not allow for extension of state legislative assembly or even Parliament beyond a period of five years.*

#### **VIEWS EXPRESSED BY ELECTION COMMISSION**

- ◇ Chief Election Commissioner said that all political parties wants elections to be conducted on time while following Covid protocol.
- ◇ However, some political parties during the meeting expressed concern over flouting of Covid rules at election rallies and sought curbs on them.
- ◇ On the issue of postponing of elections, EC said that it will execute the responsibility assigned to it as per the Constitution and necessary steps will be considered (limiting presence in rallies) based on rising Covid cases in the state.
- ◇ On political rallies becoming instances of super spreader, EC stated that its responsibility kicks in once Model Code of Conduct comes into effect on the announcement of election dates.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS**

- ◇ **Article 83 - Duration of Houses of Parliament** – The House of the People, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer and the expiration of the said period of five years shall operate as a dissolution of the House.
- ◇ Provided that the said period may, while a Proclamation of Emergency is in operation, be extended by Parliament by law for a period not exceeding one year at a time and not extending in any case beyond a period of six months after the Proclamation has ceased to operate.
- ◇ **Article 172 - Duration of State Legislature:** Every Legislative Assembly of every State, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer and the expiration of the said period of five years shall operate as a dissolution of the Assembly.
- ◇ Provided that the said period may, while a Proclamation of Emergency is in operation, be extended by Parliament by law for a period not exceeding one year at a time and not extending in any case beyond a period of six months after the Proclamation has ceased to operate.

## **UNDERSTANDING CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS**

### **Illustration**

- ◇ Union Cabinet approved the Resolution advising the President to dissolve the Sixteenth Lok Sabha, which was constituted on 18th May 2014.
- ◇ First meeting of Sixteenth Lok Sabha was held on June 4, 2014, when members were administered oath and affirmation. Hence, life of 16th Lok Sabha expired on June 3, 2019, unless the President dissolved it earlier.

## **UNDERSTANDING ARTICLE 83(2) & ARTICLE 172(1)**

- ◇ Thus, constitutionally speaking, there is no provision to extend the duration of Lok Sabha or State Assembly unless proclamation of emergency under Article 352 is in operation.
- ◇ This is because completion of 5 years for both Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies operates as dissolution of the House.
- ◇ This also means that Election Commission by the operation of Article 324 must conduct elections so that a new government is elected on completion of the period of 5 years.

## 4. UTTRAKHAND VIOLATED POLL CODE

*Congress party in the state of Uttarakhand has alleged violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by the government as it issued orders for back-dated appointments by tampering official records and asked to register a First Information Report (FIR). Congress cited the constitution of the Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) as one example of making back-dated appointments.*

### **MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (MCC)**

- Model Code of Conduct (MCC) provide a level playing field for all political parties, keep the campaign fair and healthy, avoid clashes and conflicts between parties, and ensure peace and order
- Election Commission ensures observance of MCC by political parties in power to ensure electoral process is not misused by the ruling party.

### **SALIENT FEATURES**

- MCC has evolved with the consensus of political parties who have consented to abide by the set of guidelines embodied in the code.
- Salient features of the Model Code of Conduct lay down how political parties, contesting candidates and party(s) in power should conduct themselves during the process of elections i.e., on their general conduct during electioneering, holding meetings and processions, poll day activities and functioning of the party in power etc.
- In the case of **Union of India v Harbans Singh Jalal**, Supreme Court ruled that MCC would come into force the moment the Election Commission issues the press release, which precedes the notification of elections.
- MCC does not have a statutory backing and hence cannot be enforced legally.
- However, certain provisions of the MCC may be enforced through invoking corresponding provisions in other laws such as IPC, Cr. PC, Election laws – RPA, 1951 etc.

Part of MCC	Subject for guidance of political candidates & candidates
Part 1	General Conduct
Part 2	Meetings

Part 3	Procession
Part 4	Polling Day
Part 5	Polling Booth
Part 6	Observers
Part 7	Party in Power
Part 8	Guidelines on Election Manifestos

### **IMPLICATIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT**

- **Combining Election & Official Work:** Any Minister shall not combine their official visit with electioneering work and shall not also make use of official machinery or personnel during the electioneering work. However, the Commission has exempted the Prime Minister from the operation of the model code of conduct provision pertaining to the combining of official visit with electioneering visit.
- **Transport:** Government transport including official aircrafts, vehicles etc. shall not be used for furtherance of the interest of any party or a candidate.
- **Transfers & Postings:** There shall be a total ban on the transfer and posting of all officers/officials directly or indirectly connected with the conduct of the election. If any transfer or posting of an officer is considered necessary, prior approval of the Commission shall be obtained.
- **Transfer prior to MCC Announcement** - Even if an officer related to election work has been transferred by the government before enforcement of model code of conduct and has not taken over charge at new place, then such officer cannot take charge of his new office after MCC has been announced.
- **Minister cannot Summon Officer in their Constituency** - Any Union or State Minister cannot summon any election related officer of the constituency or the State for any official discussion during the period of elections. Only exception will be when a Minister, in his capacity as in charge of the department concerned, or a Chief Minister undertakes an official visit to a constituency, in connection with failure of law and order or a natural calamity or any such emergency which requires personal presence of such Ministers/Chief Ministers for the specific purpose of supervising review/salvage/relief and such like purpose.
- **Chief Minister/Minister/Speaker can attend a "State Day" function of a State** – provided they do not make any political speech on the occasion and the function is to be conducted only by Govt. officials. No advertisement depicting the photograph of Chief Minister/Minister/Speaker shall be released.

### **CHALLENGES – MCC**

- It cannot be legally enforced, and this increases its non-compliance
- Regulating Fake News and Hate Speech at election rallies

- Mere warnings by EC do provide deterrent effect to continue corrupt practice as defined under RPA, 1951.
- Regulating political advertisements on digital and social media by political proxies.

## **5. RURBAN MISSION**

*Telangana stood first in the implementation of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) that was launched four years ago to stimulate local economic development, enhance basic services and create well-planned clusters. Sangareddy and Kamareddy districts stood in the first two positions among the 300 clusters across the country where the program was being implemented.*

### **IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS – RURBAN MISSION**

#### **1. Implementation**

- The Mission is implemented by the States with facilitation from the Central Government. The institutional framework includes crucial involvement of Gram Panchayats in planning and implementation of Cluster Initiatives.
- Cluster level interventions reflect an integrated approach of development across the economic, social and infrastructure dimensions.

#### **2. Objectives**

- The objective of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) is to stimulate local economic development, enhance basic services, and create well planned Rurban clusters.

#### **3. Cluster Approach**

- A 'Rurban cluster', would be a cluster of geographically contiguous villages with a population of about 25000 to 50000 in plain and coastal areas and a population of 5000 to 15000 in desert, hilly or tribal areas. As far as practicable, clusters of villages would follow administrative convergence units of Gram Panchayats and shall be within a single block/tehsil for administrative convenience.
- Rurban clusters would be developed by provisioning of training linked to economic activities, developing skills & local entrepreneurship and by providing necessary

infrastructure amenities. The Mission recommends fourteen desirable components for an ideal Rurban cluster.

- The Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) follows the vision of development of a cluster of villages that preserve and nurture the essence of rural community life with focus on equity and inclusiveness without compromising with the facilities perceived to be essentially urban in nature, thus creating a cluster of "Rurban Villages."
- Large parts of rural areas in the country are not standalone settlements but part of a cluster of settlements, which are relatively proximate to each other. These clusters typically illustrate potential for growth, have economic drivers and derive locational and competitive advantages.
- These clusters once developed can then be classified as 'Rurban'. Hence taking cognizance of this, the Government of India has proposed the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM), aimed at developing such rural areas by provisioning of economic, social and physical infrastructure facilities.

#### **4. Identification of Clusters**

- Undertaken by the Union Ministry of Rural Development, the SPMRM focuses on cluster-based integrated development through Spatial Planning.
- Rurban clusters are identified across the country's rural areas showing increasing signs of urbanization  
o increase in population density
  - o high levels of non-farm employment
  - o presence of growing economic activities and
  - o other socioeconomic parameters

#### **5. Mission's Outcome**

- The larger outcomes envisaged under this Mission are:
  - i. Bridging the rural-urban divide-viz: economic, technological and those related to facilities and services.
  - ii. Stimulating local economic development with emphasis on reduction of poverty and unemployment in rural areas.
  - iii. Spreading development in the region.
  - iv. Attracting investment in rural areas.

#### **6. Infrastructure planned in these clusters includes (Cluster Components)**

1. Sanitation
2. Piped Water Supply
3. Solid and Liquid Waste Management
4. Village Street Lights and Electrification

5. Access to Village Streets with Drains
6. Inter Village Roads Connectivity
7. Public Transport
8. Skill Development Training Linked to Economic Activities
9. Agri-Services Processing and Allied Activities
10. Health
11. Education
12. Digital Literacy
13. Citizens Service Centers
14. LPG Gas Connection
15. Environment
16. Employment Generation and SHG Formation
17. Tourism Promotion
18. Sports Infrastructure
19. Social Infrastructure
20. Rural Housing
21. Social Welfare

- Economic amenities in a cluster comprise various thematic areas in the sectors of
  - Agri Services and Processing,
  - Tourism, and
  - Skill Development to promote Small and Medium Scale Enterprises.

#### **Funding for Rurban Mission**

- ◇ SPMRM is a Core Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- ◇ The Mission has two fund streams:
  1. Convergence through various Central sector schemes, centrally sponsored schemes, State sector/ sponsored schemes/ programs, CSR funds – (70%)
  2. Critical Gap Funds (CGF) – (30%)
- ◇ It provides for CGF up to Rs. 30 crore per cluster for non-tribal clusters, and up to Rs. 15 crore per cluster for Tribal and Hilly State clusters.
- ◇ **Institutional Framework** – The implementation framework has been designed keeping States as the anchors and facilitation support at National Level. The involvement and engagement of Gram Panchayats for planning and implementation is considered key to the success of the Mission.



### **PROGRESS OF THE MISSION SO FAR**

- ◇ Under the Mission, presently there are 109 tribal clusters and 191 non-tribal clusters under different stages of development across states and UTs.
- ◇ To achieve the objective of having 'sustainable planned development of rural habitat on spatial perspective, a spatial planning platform has been developed in collaboration with Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics and Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- ◇ NITI Aayog, while evaluating the implementation of SPMRM, found that “SPMRM growth clusters are playing a role reducing urban migration by ensuring that basic infrastructure, utilities are provided, and industrialization is promoted.

### **CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED BY NITI AAYOG**

- ◇ **Ambiguities in Cluster Formation** - While progress has been made on laying out spatial planning guidelines, there are ambiguities in the cluster identification and planning process as the States follow the clauses of Panchayati Raj Act, which is still evolving.
- ◇ **Convergence of funds** - While the implementation framework proposes 70% funding through convergence of various schemes of the Government, there is a significant challenge in mobilizing funds, and inconsistency in interpretation of schemes thereby preventing utilization of schemes to their full potential.
- ◇ **Implementation Framework** - In the implementation design, the evaluation has highlighted that there is a need for better bottom-up institutional capacity building, cluster level governance and social inclusion. There are insufficient institutional mechanisms for participation of PRIs, and engagement of the community at large. There are knowledge gaps among the grass-root implementers that pose a risk to the sustainability of scheme outcomes. With regards to the Operations and Maintenance, the implementers at block and district level are not equipped with the knowledge to ensure future quality of the assets, thereby limiting the impact of infrastructural investments and amenities created under SPMRM.

### **SUGGESTIONS FROM NITI AAYOG**

- ◇ Rural areas are experiencing transformative forces of globalization, demographic shifts and technological innovations, which is leading to diversity in their economic profiles. To adapt to these transformative forces, NITI Aayog proposes a new perspective to define clusters: a perspective of appreciation (as opposed to deficit) which will primarily seek answer to what exists as opposed to what lacks. With this, the programmatic interventions could be designed to build on resources and opportunities that exist in the rural areas.
- ◇ To build a Mission that is truly embedding the gender empowerment and responsive approaches, as well as built around inclusion of all stakeholders, especially the weaker and vulnerable sections
- ◇ Innovative solutions to social and environmental change, including green technology, circular economy etc. are duly incorporated in all the plans.

- ◇ The enforcement and governance of these plans is embedded within the ambit of the Panchayati Raj Acts and strengthening of local power devolution.
- ◇ Useful nodes for convergence are regularly identified and partnerships so developed with various Ministries are duly implemented in the Clusters.
- ◇ The Rurban Cluster development's key themes and components are aligned with the SDGs, larger national goals as well as the 29 subjects devolved to the Panchayati Raj Institutions under the 11th Schedule of the Constitution.
- ◇ There is collaborative integration and synergy with the GPDPs falling within the Rurban Clusters as well as the larger Block, District plans and the nearby Urban Areas Master Plans.
- ◇ Tracking of the investments being made in the region by various public resources and schemes are duly tracked by integrating all the concerned databases - through live and dynamic reporting.
- ◇ Rurban Mission also becomes a platform for collaborative innovation and research with various universities and other institutions.
- ◇ Productive and proactive participation of private sector is leveraged for the Rurban clusters.



## **6 . CONCERNS RAISED ON DATA PROTECTION BILL**

*Doubts have been raised over the Report of Joint Parliamentary Committee on Data Protection Bill as it has overlooked key concerns on various provisions of the Personal Data Protection Bill.*

### **KEY TERMS USED IN THE DATA PROTECTION BILL**

- **Data Principal** means the natural person to whom the personal data relates.
- **Data Processor** means any person, including the State, a company, any juristic entity or any individual, who processes personal data on behalf of a data fiduciary.
- **Personal Data** means data about or relating to a natural person who is directly or indirectly identifiable, having regard to any characteristic, trait, attribute or any other feature of the identity of such natural person, whether online or offline, or any combination of such features with any other information, and shall include any inference drawn from such data for the purpose of profiling.
- **Non-Personal Data** means the data other than personal data.
- **Harm includes**— (i) bodily or mental injury; (ii) loss, distortion or theft of identity; (iii) financial loss or loss of property; (iv) loss of reputation or humiliation; (v) loss of employment; (vi) any discriminatory treatment; (vii) any subjection to blackmail or extortion; (viii) any denial or

withdrawal of a service, benefit or good resulting from an evaluative decision about the data principal; (ix) any restriction placed or suffered directly or indirectly on speech, movement or any other action arising out of a fear of being observed or surveilled; or (x) any observation or surveillance that is not reasonably expected by the data principal.

## **CONCERNS RAISED IN THE PROVISIONS OF THE DATA PROTECTION BILL**

### **1. Clause 12**

- Clause 12 of the Bill which mentions about the grounds for processing of personal data without consent in certain cases.
- The personal data may be processed if such processing is necessary –
  - (a) for the performance of any function of the State authorised by law for –
    - (i) the provision of any service or benefit to the data principal from the State
    - (ii) the issuance of any certification, license or permit for any action or activity of the data principal by the State.
  - (b) under any law for the time being in force made by the Parliament or any State Legislature.
  - (c) for compliance with any order or judgment of any Court or Tribunal in India.
  - (d) to respond to any medical emergency involving a threat to the life or a severe threat to the health of the data principal or any other individual.
  - (e) to undertake any measure to provide medical treatment or health services to any individual during an epidemic, outbreak of disease or any other threat to public health; or
  - (f) to undertake any measure to ensure safety of, or aid or services to, any individual during any disaster or any breakdown of public order.

### **Concerns Raised**

- Clause 12 is an umbrella clause that does not specify which ministries or departments will be covered.
- The government can use these provisions as a means of control and surveillance.

### **2. Clause 35 of PDP 2019**

- *Where the Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient*
  - (i) *in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order; or*
  - (ii) *for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order it may, by order, for reasons to be recorded in writing, direct that all or any of the provisions of this Act shall not apply to any agency of the Government in respect of*

*processing of such personal data, as may be specified in the order subject to such procedure, safeguards and oversight mechanism to be followed by the agency, as may be prescribed.*

### **Concerns Raised**

- It exempts agencies of Union Government from the application of the law for processing of personal data on grounds of “public order”, “sovereignty”, “friendly relations with foreign states” and “security of the state”. However, such exemption must be in writing for the purpose of official records.
- **Bill creates two Parallel Universes** - one for the private sector where it would apply with full rigor and one for the Government providing exemption, carve outs and escape clauses.

### **3. Clause 86 – DPA bound by directions of Central Government**

*The Central Government may, from time to time, issue to the Authority such directions as it may think necessary in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order.*

### **Concerns Raised**

- Clause 86 makes DPA duty-bound to follow the orders of the government. This weakens its independence and gives the government excessive control.
- Appointment by the executive which goes against the Bill proposed by Justice B.N. Sri Krishna which proposed a judicial overlook.
- Appointment of DPA violates the principle of federalism as there must be State Data Protection Authority as regarding data flow from states to Centre, States are key stakeholders in the process. Even if the proposed central authority issues directions to allow processing of data on the grounds of ‘public order’, it is important to note that ‘public order’ is an entry in the State List.
- If the pith and substance of the legislation are related to the State, then it must be monitored by the State Data Protection Authority.

### **4. Explanation to Clause 91**

- Non-Personal Data means the data other than personal data.

### **Concerns Raised**

- By including non-personal data within the ambit of the Bill, the Joint Committee has put a huge compliance burden on the economy.
- This will hit the MSME sector and small businesses harder as technical processes involving data-sharing are very expensive.
- The government-constituted panel headed by S. Gopalkrishna also opposed the idea of including nonpersonal data in the Bill. Mandatory data localisation, it is estimated, will squeeze the economy by 0.7-1.7%.

- This may also invite similar measures by other sovereign countries which will hamper smooth crossborder flow of data.

## **7 . DECLINE IN PRODUCTIVITY OF STATE LEGISLATURES**

*In the last two years we have already witnessed decline in Parliament's productivity due to less number of sittings conducted. However, after a low of 33 days in 2020, Parliament saw only a small improvement in 2021 by functioning for 58 days. The situation is not very different for state assemblies as per a survey conducted for nine legislative assemblies. Restrictions due to Covid have been used as an excuse to shorten the legislative sessions. All the data of 2020 was sourced from PRS Legislative Research's report "Annual Review of State Laws 2020".*

### **Article 85 - Sessions of Parliament, prorogation and dissolution**

*The President shall from time to time summon each House of Parliament to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session.*

**Note\*** - Constitution of India does not mention about three sessions of Parliament.

### **Article 174 - Sessions of the State Legislature, prorogation and dissolution**

*The Governor shall from time to time summon the House or each House of the Legislature of the State to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session.*

IAS

## Fewer work days

The table shows the number of days nine State Assemblies sat in 2021 and 2020. While Punjab had the lowest tally of 11, Odisha fared better with 43 sittings

State	2021	2020
Odisha	43	
H.P.	32	25
Rajasthan	26	29
Gujarat	25	23
West Bengal	19	14
Haryana	18	13
U.P.	17	13
Maharashtra	15	18
Punjab	11	15

Data for sitting days of Odisha Assembly in 2020 were not available



## MEANING OF DISRUPTION OF PARLIAMENTARY OR ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS

- Disruptions encompass an undesired statement, action and gesture that not only delay the transaction of business in Parliament, but also violate the behavioral protocol that every MP is required to observe.
- Disruption also includes showing of placards, shouting of slogans, entering the well of the House, and repeated call for adjournment motions.
- However, walk-outs from the House do not fall within the scope of disruptions, but rather constitute a legitimate form of protests.

## REASONS FOR FREQUENT DISRUPTIONS

- **Discussion on matters of controversy and public importance** -E.g.: Demand for discussion on Pegasus Snooping and Farm Laws.
- **Opposition members coming together as a group to block key Bills in Rajya Sabha.**
- **Application of Anti-Defection** - Application of Whip by Political Parties to vote in a certain way stifles individual opinion of members and place political party's privilege and desires over individual.
- **Disruptions also help the Ruling Party to evade responsibility on key aspects of governance and policy measures** - Governments may in some instances schedule the transaction of business of each Session in such manner to pave the way for greater disruptions in Parliament. Such disruptions make it impossible for the Speaker/Chairman to conduct the Question Hour/Zero Hour and allow governments to avoid answering questions posed to them.

- Lack of dedicated time for unlisted discussion - increase in the number of parties in the House has led to a proportionate reduction in the amount of time available to each party for discussion.
- Rare resort to disciplinary powers by Speaker/Chairman - As a result, most members engaging in disorderly conduct are neither deterred nor restrained from engaging in such conduct.

#### **IMPACT OF DISRUPTION**

- Decline in overall productivity of the assembly and Parliament.
- Bills are passed hurriedly and without much debate or scrutiny.
- Less number of Bills is referred to Parliamentary or State Legislative Committees.
- Passing of Budgets by states and Parliament without much debate and discussion.
- Declining functioning of Parliament and State Assemblies reflects disregard for parliamentary practices and democratic norms.

#### **IMPLICATION OF PARLIAMENTARY DISRUPTIONS**

- Break in Parliamentary Proceedings and that of State Assemblies impacts their productivity which is unhealthy for Indian democracy.
- Increasing unparliamentary behavior during the session shows lack of respect for democratic norms and decorum.
- Disregarding the Speaker/Chairman leads to disciplinary actions against erring Members including their suspension from discussion.

#### **PAST OBSERVATIONS ON FUNCTIONING OF PARLIAMENT & STATE LEGISLATURES**

Increased disruptions of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies (SLA) has impacted legislature's core functioning of law making through discussions. Bills Sent to Parliamentary Committees have seen a decline:

Lok Sabha	Percentage of Bills sent to Committees
15th Lok Sabha	71%
16th Lok Sabha	27%
17th Lok Sabha (Present)	12% so far

#### **WHY ARE DECLINING WORKING HOURS OF PARLIAMENT & STATE ASSEMBLIES A CONCERN?**

- Lack of debates on key issues impacts governance.
- Lack of discussion in turn affects lives of citizens in multiple ways.
- Shows lack of concern by elected members and their performance deficit goes unaccounted
- Results in passing of budget of various departments without any discussion. This leads to disproportionate and unbalanced allocation of resources
- Budget passed without discussion shows lack of coordination with opposition members
- Increasing use of Ordinance route to pass legislation by Centre and states.



## **BROAD FRAMEWORK OF PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS TO IMPROVE LEGISLATURE'S FUNCTIONING & PRODUCTIVITY**

- **Compulsory presence of Prime Minister during Question Hour and Zero Hour (like Britain)** will lead to constructive debates and an assurance to the opposition that the Executive is responsible to the Parliament.
- **Both pre and post Legislative Impact Assessment** to be ensured for quality and informed law making for creating wider awareness about the targeted outcomes by bringing out social, economic, environmental and administrative impacts besides the involvement of all stakeholders in law making.
- **Ensuring effective functioning of the Department Related Standing Committees of Parliament** through longer tenures and promoting specialisation based on academic backgrounds.
- **Women Reservation** - The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 which sought reserving one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies needs to be re-introduced.
- **Enforceable Code of Conduct** - Law makers should abide by the Rules of the House and political parties to take responsibility in this regard by evolving and enforcing a code of conduct.
- **Rules on Interruptions of Proceedings** – Making rules that automatically take effect against erring Members in case of interruptions and disruptions.
- **Roster System** - Political parties to evolve roster system for ensuring attendance of at least 50% of their members in the legislatures all through the proceedings of the House every day to address the issue of lack of quorum.
- **Publication of Reports** - Secretariats of legislatures to publish regular reports on the attendance of members inside during the proceedings and the extent of their participation in the form of questions raised, debates participated in etc.
- **Opportunities for New Entrants** - Political parties to ensure that the new entrants and back benchers are given adequate opportunities to participate in the debates instead of seniors.
- **Prevent Criminalisation of Politics** – Political Parties must abide by SC Judgment whereby it has refrained political parties from distributing tickets to candidates facing serious or other criminal charges.
- **Review Whip System & Anti-Defection Law** – to ensure freedom of speech of individual MPs and MLAs without adversely affecting stability of the Government. Also, to transfer power to Speaker to decide anti-defection cases under Tenth Schedule either to a Tribunal having retired SC Judges or Election Commission.
- **Tribunals for MPs** - Setting up special courts/tribunals for time bound adjudication on criminal complaints against legislators and election related matters.
- **Action against Non-Ethical Conduct** - Timely and effective action against legislators for non ethical conduct.
- **Governments to be responsive to the views and concerns of the Opposition** - and the Opposition to be responsible and constructive in holding the government accountable.
- **Simultaneous Elections** – to ensure governance is not adversely impacted on account of staggered and continuous polls. These reforms will improve functioning of Parliament and State Assemblies, quality of law making thereby increasing trust of citizens in parliamentary democracy.



## **8. CONFRONTATION OF GOVERNOR WITH ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

*Confrontation of centrally appointed Governors with the elected state governments has increased especially in states having non-BJP governments such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. This suggests increasing interference of the central government through the governor in different states. Instances have been refusal to fix a date for election of Speaker of State Assembly by the Governor in Maharashtra or instances of appointing Vice Chancellors of Universities as generally the Governors of States are the ex-officio Chancellors of State Universities as per the respective State Universities Act. In this backdrop, let us go through the different kind of confrontations taking place in different states and then explore the constitutional duties which the Governor is mandated to perform.*

### **IN MAHARASHTRA**

Governor refused to accept the date of election of the Speaker recommended by the State government. Whereas in the other states mentioned above, there is a constant tussle on Governors acting as ex-officio Chancellors of State Universities.

- **Article 178** - Every Legislative Assembly of a State shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the Assembly to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof and, so often as the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the Assembly shall choose another member to be Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be.

### **IN KERALA**

The Governor has publicly stated that he was under pressure from the Kerala Government to reappoint the Vice Chancellor of Kannur University. The Governor also said that it was wrong on his behalf to yield to government's pressure.

- **Under the procedure followed in all Assemblies**, the government fixes the date and conveys it to the Secretary of the Assembly who forwards it to the office of the Governor for his signature. After the date is formally approved by the Governor (which he is duty bound to do) the members are informed about it.
- **Gopalakrishnan vs Chancellor, University of Kerala** - Kerala High Court has stated that the Governor of Kerala needs to apply his mind independently to the case of reappointment, evaluate the performance of the Vice Chancellor and fully satisfy himself about the merit of the appointee before signing the appointment order.

### **IN TAMIL NADU**

- State Assembly adopted a Bill to scrap the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test as the sole guiding factor for admission to undergraduate medical courses.

- However, the Bill was reserved by the Governor for President's consideration under Article 201 has not been forwarded to the President even after three months.
- In this backdrop, the Chief Minister of TN has announced that he is exploring options to empower itself to make the appointment of vice chancellors of universities, taking the powers away from the Governor-Chancellor.
- Even Maharashtra legislature has adopted a Bill curtailing the powers of the Governor in the appointment of vice chancellors in State universities.
- Even West Bengal government is considering a proposal to make the Chief Minister Chancellor of all State universities.

### **IN RAJASTHAN**

- Non-acceptance of the advice of the Council of Ministers was witnessed regarding summoning of State Assembly under Article 174.
- Rajasthan Governor returned Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's proposal to convene an Assembly session in July 2020 but convened it later in August 2020.
- So, the question which arose was - whether Governor has discretionary power to summon the house as per Article 174 of the Indian Constitution.

### **GOVERNOR'S DISCRETIONARY POWERS & NEED FOR NEUTRALITY**

**Article 163** of the Indian Constitution empowers the council of minister to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions along with certain discretionary powers. This acts as mechanism of checks and balance against any unconstitutional decisions taken by the state government.

**Governor functions both as head of the state and as an agent of the centre and accordingly has been bestowed with the following discretionary powers:**

- Reserve any Bill for the consideration of the President - Article 201.
- Appoint Chief Minister of State - Article 164(1), inviting leader of the single largest party in to prove majority in case of hung assembly.
- Dismiss the ministry as the CM and his ministers holds office during the pleasure of the Governor – Article 164(1)
- Sending report to the President under Article 356 - failure of Constitutional machinery in States.
- Governor's responsibility for administration of Tribal Areas and responsibilities placed on the Governor under Article 371A (Nagaland), 371C (Manipur), 371H (Arunachal Pradesh)

### **Nabam Felix judgment**

- Supreme Court decided that Governor can summon, prorogue and dissolve the House, only on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister as the head and not at his own.
- The Court gave its decision based on discussion in Constituent Assembly debates whereby it was finalised not to give discretionary power to Governor under Article 174.

### Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974)

- Supreme Court said: "The Governor has no right to refuse to act on the advice of the Council of Ministries. Such a position is antithetical to the concept of 'responsible government'."

### B.P. Singhal v. Union of India (2010)

- Five Judge Bench of Supreme on removal of governors mentioned about the dual role of governor: 1. Agent of the Centre & 2. Head of the state.
- SC also held that there may be instances of conflict between Centre and states where the **governor must act neutrally. Need for Politically Neutral Governor – Sarkaria Commission's Recommendation**
- **Sarkaria Commission** on Centre-State Relations, the **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution and Punchhi Commission** has reiterated the need for politically neutral governor.
- Neutrality of governor is best displayed when he uses his **discretionary powers** as per the constitution. However, the use of discretionary power by the Governor also leaves certain **space for its misutilisation.**
- **Sarkaria Commission** has recommended the following criteria which must be considered while appointing Governors of state:
  - ✓ He should be eminent in some walk of life.
  - ✓ He should be a person from outside the State.
  - ✓ He should be a detached figure and not too intimately connected with the local politics of the State; and
  - ✓ He should be a person who has not taken too great a part in politics generally and particularly in the recent past.
  - ✓ In selecting a Governor in accordance with the above criteria, persons belonging to the minority groups should continue to be given a chance.

### S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994)

- SC held explicitly that in situations where there is a hung assembly (where no political party has obtained a clear majority of seats), the final decision rests not with the various feuding parties but with the concerned legislature through a "floor" test.
- This case allows the Supreme Court to investigate the reasons which forms the basis of a Governor's report.

### **DISCRETION OF GOVERNOR BASED ON CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS**

Discretion given to governor is based on **constitutional limitations** and the Governor must follow certain rules as specified by **Sarkaria Commission** which suggested that in choosing a Chief Minister, the Governor should be guided by the following principles:

- The party or combination of parties that command the widest support in the Legislative Assembly should be called to form the government.

- The Governor's task is to see that a government is formed — and not to try to form a government that will pursue policies that he approves.
- If no party has a majority, the Governor must invite:
  - a) a pre-poll alliance,
  - b) the largest single party that can gain majority support,
  - c) a post-election coalition that has the required members,
  - d) a post-election coalition in which partners are willing to extend outside support.
- The Commission recommended that whoever is appointed as the Chief Minister, must seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly on the floor of the House within 30 days of taking over.
- The Governor should not resort to mechanisms where determining of majority of the government is done outside the assembly.

#### **POWER OF GOVERNOR UNDER ARTICLE 174 TO SUMMON THE HOUSE**

##### **Article 174 - Sessions of the State Legislature, prorogation and dissolution**

**A 174 (1):** The Governor shall from time to time summon the House or each House of the Legislature of the State to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session.

**A 174 (2):** Governor may from time to time— (a) prorogue the House or either House; (b) dissolve the Legislative Assembly.

The problem with Article 174 arises with the phrase “....as he thinks fit....” Now this phrase can be seen in the context of Article 163 which provides for discretionary power of the Governor.

##### **Article 163 – Council of Ministers to aid and advise Governor**

**A 163 (1):** There shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except in so far as he is by or under this Constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion.

##### **Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix vs Deputy Speaker, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly – July 2016**

- It is settled law that the Governor cannot refuse the request of the Cabinet to call for a sitting of the House for legislative purposes or for the chief minister to prove his majority. In fact, on numerous occasions, including in the 2016 Uttarakhand case, the court has clarified that when the majority of the ruling party is in question, a floor test must be conducted at the earliest available opportunity.
- In 2016, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix vs Deputy Speaker, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly case, expressly said that the power to summon the House is not solely vested in the Governor.

##### **Supreme Court's Observation in Bamang Felix Case – Referred Constituent Assembly Debates**

- Referring to discussions in the Constituent Assembly, the court noted that the framers of the Constitution expressly and consciously left out vesting powers to summon or dissolve the House solely with the Governor.
- SC discussed that draft Article 153 (*which later became Article 174 in the present constitution*), which dealt with the powers of the Governor, was substantially altered to indicate that the constitution framers did not want to give Governors the discretion.
- Draft Article 153 (3) provided that the functions of the Governor with reference to the power to summon and dissolve the House or Houses of the State Legislature “... shall be exercised by him in his discretion,”
- So, as per the original draft Article 153 – it was clear that Governor did enjoy discretionary power to summon or dissolve the House or Houses of the State Legislature, without any aid or advice of his Council of Minister.
- However, when Draft Article 153 was renumbered as Article 174, sub-article (3) contained in original draft of Article 153 was omitted which dealt with discretionary power of Governor to summon or dissolve the House or Houses of the State Legislature, without any aid or advice of his Council of Minister.
- After debating the intention of the framers, the court concluded that “the only legitimate and rightful inference, that can be drawn in the final analysis is, that the framers of the Constitution altered their original contemplation, and *consciously decided not to vest discretion with the Governor, in the matter of summoning and dissolving the House, or Houses of the State Legislature*, by omitting sub-article (3) of draft Article 153, which authorized the Governor to summon or dissolve, the House or Houses of Legislature at his own discretion.
- Thus, the Supreme Court in Nabam Felix judgment decided that Governor can summon, prorogue and dissolve the House, *only on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister as the head. And not at his own.*

#### **IDEA OF DETACHMENT FOR THE GOVERNOR**

- The Governor is a high constitutional authority. He needs to function within the four walls of the Constitution and be a friend, philosopher and guide to his government.
- The Constitution does not allow him to be a parallel government, nor does it make him personally responsible for his actions as Governor.
- That such confrontations take place only in Opposition-ruled States shows that political expediency has overtaken constitutional propriety.
- Wading through the Constituent Assembly debates, one comes across these wise words of Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, a conscientious member of the Assembly: *“Governor will be a man above party, and he will look at the minister and government from a detached standpoint”*

## 9. CHANGES IN IAS CADRE RULES

*In the backdrop of decreasing number of IAS officers opting for central deputation (309 in 2011 to 223 in 2021) despite increase in their overall strength (621 in 2014 to 1130 in 2021), central government has proposed amendment in IAS Cadre Rules, 1954. Central government's concern is that most states are not meeting the Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) requirement and hence minimum number of officers is not available to the Centre from All India Services for deputation. However, this change has been opposed by number of states as it according to them it not only hampers India's federal polity but also state's autonomy. The IAS cadre rules were framed in 1954 under the All-India Services Act, 1951.*

### **LETTERS SENT TO STATES FOR THEIR OPINION**

- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) sent a communication to all States in January seeking their opinion on the proposal to amend Rule 6 (deputation of cadre officers) of the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954.
- Similar letters were also sent proposing changes in cadre rules of the other two All India Services (AIS) namely the Indian Police Service (IPS) and the Indian Forest Service (IFoS).
- Through the amendments, the Union government plans to acquire powers to depute IAS/IPS and IFoS officers to the Central Government and Ministries without necessarily taking the State government's consent.

### **FOUR AMENDMENTS INCLUDING TWO NEW INSERTIONS ARE PROPOSED**

1. States should make available the names of such officers, part of a central deputation reserve (CDR), who can be deputed to the Centre. The actual number of officers to be deputed to the Central government shall be decided by the Central government in consultation with the State government concerned. According to existing norms, States must depute AIS officers to the Union government offices.
2. In case of any disagreement between the Centre and the State, the matter shall be decided by the Central government and the State shall give effect to the decision of the Centre "within a specified time." The aspect of specified time frame is a new addition.
3. If the State government delays posting a State cadre officer to the Centre and does not give effect to the Central government's decision within the specified time, the officer shall stand relieved from cadre from the date as may be specified by the Central government. Presently, officers must get a noobjection clearance from the State government.
4. In certain specific situations where services of cadre officers are required by the Central government in "public interest" the State shall give effect to its decisions, within a specified time. Now, the term "public interest" can be used in wide range of cases.

### **HOW WAS CENTRAL DEPUTATION DONE EARLIER?**

- All India Service (AIS) officers are made available for central deputation through a consultative process involving the Centre, the States and the officers concerned.

- The level of confrontation which exists now was not present earlier between Centre and states on matters of central deputation of AIS Officers.
- No officer was sent to central deputation without their will and their willingness along with state government's consent was generally the rule.
- Every year, the States prepare an "offer list" of officers who had opted for central deputation without arbitrarily withholding any names.
- The Centre would choose officers only from among those "on offer" from the States. The States would then relieve the officers picked up by the Centre at the earliest.

#### **POLITICS BETWEEN CENTRE AND STATES HAVE OFTEN DISTURBED THE HEALTHY PRACTICE**

- In July 2001, the Centre unilaterally "placed at its disposal" the services of three IPS officers of Tamil Nadu cadre.
- In December 2020, the Centre did the same in respect of three IPS officers of West Bengal cadre.
- In May 2021, the Centre unilaterally issued orders for the central deputation of the Chief Secretary of West Bengal just before his last day in service. In all these cases, the States concerned refused to relieve the officers.
- Politics was also involved in the appointment of Mr. Rakesh Asthana (IPS) as Delhi Police Commissioner and holds additional charge of Narcotics Control Bureau.

#### **STATES HAVE OPPOSED IT ON THE FOLLOWING GROUNDS**

- Impacts State's Autonomy: Proposed amendment is against the ideal of federal polity of India and against state's autonomy. Many States' Chief Ministers' have highlighted this.
- Misuse by Centre: The provision of releasing AIS officers by states in "specific situations" and in public interests may be misused for political considerations. Example: Centre can unilaterally depute Chief Secretaries or Principal Secretaries of States either to Centre or to other states especially prior to state elections.
- No Consultation with States: The Amendment unilaterally mandates the State government to make such several officers available for deputation as prescribed under Central Deputation Reserve.
- Confrontational Federalism: Taking unilateral decisions might impact the healthy atmosphere which promotes cooperative federalism and increasing friction between Centre and States (ruled by opposition parties), and this may further fuel confrontational federalism.
- Dampen the morale of AIS Officers: Contemplated changes have grave implications for the independence, security and morale of IAS officers.
- Deputation to Centre Against the Officer's Wish: Instances of the past confirms that IAS Officers can be deputed to Centre as punishment postings as the officers themselves may not wish to go on central deputation due to poor working conditions in junior level posts and opaque and arbitrary system of empanelment for senior-level posts, and lack of security of tenure at all levels.



- State's may decrease intake of IAS Officers: Reduce the number of IAS cadre posts and their annual intake of IAS officers. Further states prefer officers of the State Civil Services to handle as many posts as possible. Thus, increasing political slugfest with AIS Officers may impact their morale and in future bright students may not want to become part of Indian bureaucracy.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

Speaking to the Constituent Assembly on October 10, 1949, Sardar Patel said, "The Union will go, you will not have a united India if you have not a good All India Service which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has a sense of security." Thus, the Centre must heed the advice of India's first Home Minister and ensure that the spirit of cooperative federalism is not disturbed through the proposed changes in IAS Cadre Rules of 1954.

## **10 . OBC RESERVATION IN LOCAL BODIES**

Supreme Court in its latest judgment in [Rahul Ramesh Wagh v. State of Maharashtra & Others](#) have held that it is mandatory to follow the five-judge constitution bench in judgment [K. Krishnamurthy \(Dr.\) v. Union of India of 2010](#) whereby it laid down certain principles for providing reservation to OBCs in local bodies across India.

#### **Constitutional provisions – Reservation for OBC in Local Bodies**

- **Article 243 D (6):** Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Panchayat or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at any level in favor of backward class of citizens.
- **Article 243 T (6):** Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Municipality or offices of Chairpersons in the Municipalities in favor of backward class of citizens.

#### **K. KRISHNAMURTHY (DR.) JUDGEMENT**

##### **Petitioner Arguments**

- The petitioner challenged Articles 243D (6), 243 D (4), 243 T (6) and 243 D (4) of the Constitution on the ground that reservation provided under the provisions is discriminatory in nature based on caste and gender.
- The petitioner also challenged the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 which provided reservation to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Women and Backward classes of about 15%, 3%, 33% and 33% respectively.

#### **SC Judgment in K Krishnamurthy Case**



- **Linking of Reservation not Possible:** Supreme Court held that the reservation policy as under Article 243-D and 243-T is distinct from that of reservation policies under article 15 (4) and 16(4) and hence both kinds of reservations cannot be linked.
- **Socio-Economic Backwardness different from Political Backwardness:** SC held that backwardness in the socio and economic sense does not imply political backwardness. For reservation under Article 15(4) and 16(4), due regard is given to merit, but the same criteria cannot be applied for reservation in local bodies. This is because the voters are not influenced by merit but rather by a candidate's ability to canvass support, ideologies, affiliation to any group and past records of achievements. Thus, backwardness in the social and economic parameter can act as a barrier for the backward people to have effective political participation.
- **Reservation in the Local Self-Government beneficial for Society:** As reservation is a more effective tool to achieve empowerment of the weaker section of the society. The democratic decentralization not only brings governance closer but also make governance more participatory, accountable and inclusive to the weaker section. Hence such reservation would benefit the society as a whole and not only any community.
- **Creamy Layer cannot be Excluded:** The exclusion of the creamy layer concept in the reservation policy of Local Self-Government may not be feasible like that of Article 15(4) 16(4). As at the level of Panchayat and Municipality, the objective of representation is only to put forward the interest of weaker sections and hence it would be counter-intuitive to exclude better off reserved category people from the representation.
- **Horizontal Reservation to be Excluded:** While deciding the ceiling of 50% of the reservation, the horizontal reservation shall not be included while aggregating the total reservation. The upper ceiling of 50% vertical reservations in favour of SC/ST/OBCs should not be breached in the context of local self-government. Exceptions can only be made to safeguard the interests of Scheduled Tribes in the matter of their representation in panchayats located in the Scheduled Areas.
- **Article 243-D (6) and Article 243-T (6) are Constitutionally Valid:** Since they are in the nature of provisions which merely enable State Legislatures to reserve seats and chairperson posts in favour of backward classes. Concerns about disproportionate reservations should be raised by way of specific challenges against the State Legislations.
- **Quantum of Reservation to be determined by respective state based on empirical findings** - under respective State Legislations, the onus is on the executive to conduct a rigorous investigation into the patterns of backwardness that act as barriers to political participation which are indeed quite different from the patterns of disadvantages in the matter of access to education and employment.
- **Article 243-D (4) and Article 243-T (4) are Constitutionally Valid** - The reservation of chairperson posts in the manner contemplated by Article 243-D (4) and 243-T (4) is

constitutionally valid. These chairperson posts cannot be equated with solitary posts in the context of public employment.

➤ **Determination of Reservation to OBC in local bodies based on three following conditions:**

- 1) To set up a dedicated Commission to conduct empirical inquiry into the nature of the backwardness in local bodies.
- 2) To specify the proportion of reservation required to be provisioned local body-wise
- 3) Such reservation shall not exceed aggregate of 50% of the total seats reserved for SCs/STs/OBCs taken together.

**SUPREME COURT'S DECISION IN RAHUL RAMESH WAGH V. STATE OF MAHARASHTRA**

- Maharashtra had constituted a Commission to ascertain the backwardness of OBCs in June 2021. But without waiting for an empirical report, an ordinance was promulgated to amend the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads Act, Panchayat Samitis Act and the Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act to conduct local body elections with OBC reservation.
- The Ordinance was challenged before the Bombay High Court. Despite this, the election process was not stalled. This led the petitioner to file an appeal in the Supreme Court.
- Supreme Court struck down the ordinance and stalled the election process to local bodies in Maharashtra.
- The OBC reservation and notification for the local body election in Madhya Pradesh was also found to be done against Supreme Court's guidelines.
- The Supreme Court directed the re-notification of the reserved seats as belonging to general category in both the States (Maharashtra & Madhya Pradesh) based on which the election process may proceed.

**CONCLUSION**

- Thus, reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in local body elections without empirical base can no more be sustainable in law.
- Supreme Court's latest order in Rahul Ramesh Wagh v. State of Maharashtra & Others makes it mandatory that the principles laid down by the Supreme Court in Krishnamurthy (Dr.) v. Union of India for providing reservation to OBCs in local bodies shall be scrupulously followed across the country.

## **11. INDEPENDENCE OF ELECTION COMMISSION**

*The attendance of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his Election Commissioner (EC) colleagues at an “informal” meeting with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister has brought renewed focus on the independence and impartiality of the Election Commission of India (ECI).*

#### **CONCERNS RAISED BY ELECTION COMMISSION**

- ECI has been ensuring democratic transfer of political power from one set of representatives to another since independence. However, in recent times, the body has criticized for issues & controversies such as *EVM malfunctioning, announcement of election dates to benefit ruling government, money, and muscle role in elections* etc.
- Article 324 of the Indian Constitution empowers the Election Commission with superintendence, direction, and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls along with conduct elections to Parliament, State Legislatures and for the office of President and Vice-President.
- However, the Election Commission in its 2004 Report expressly opined that the current wording of Article 324(5) was “inadequate” and required an amendment to bring the removal procedures of Election Commissioners on par with the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). This will provide Election Commissioners (EC) with the “same protection and safeguards” as the CEC and will strengthen EC.

#### **Important Role of Election Commission in India**

- Supervisory Powers to Conduct Elections
- Preparations of Electoral Rolls
- Notifying the elections – this initiates the electoral process
- Appointment of Chief Electoral Officer, Returning Officers, Observers and other electoral officers to ensure smooth conduct of elections
- Registration of political parties
- Appointing dates for nomination of candidates
- Scrutiny of candidate’s documents filed for nomination
- Adjournment of poll in emergencies by Returning Officer or the Presiding Officer
- Ensuring security of EVMs & VVPAT
- Counting of votes and Declaration of results
- Conduct of bye-elections
- Declarations of assets and liabilities
- Ensuring compliance of Model Code of Conduct
- Providing limit on election expenses under Conduct of Elections (Amendment) Rules, 2014
- Allotting Symbols to independent candidates

#### **CEC & EC EQUAL ON MATTERS OF SALARY & CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

- In 1991, the Parliament enacted *The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Conditions of Service) Act 1991* – fixed retirement age of:
  - ✓ CEC at 65 years – equivalent to SC Judge

- ✓ Other EC at 62 years - equivalent to HC Judge
- The 1991 legislation was amended in 1993 and the CEC and other EC were placed on par on matters of retirement age, salaries and other benefits. So, now post Amendment
  - ✓ Both CEC & EC's salary is equal to the salary of a Judge of the Supreme Court.
  - ✓ Both CEC & EC to hold office for 6 years or up to the age of 65 years.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF 255TH LAW COMMISSION AND GOSWAMI COMMITTEE FOR AUTONOMY OF ELECTION COMMISSION**

- **Collegium Based Appointment:** Presently, ECs along with CEC is appointed by the President under Article 324 based on the recommendation of the Central Government. The appointment of all the Election Commissioners, including the CEC, should be made by the President in consultation with a **three-member collegium or selection committee**, consisting of the Prime Minister; the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha in terms of numerical strength) and the Chief Justice of India. This will reduce executive's complete control in the appointment of Election Commissioners including CEC.
- **Need for Parity:** Currently, only the CEC can be removed on the same grounds of Judge of Supreme Court whereas the other two Election Commissioners can be removed as per CEC's recommendations by the government. Thus, there needs to be parity even in the removal process for other Election Commissioners.
- **Lack of legal enactment envisaged under Article 324(2):** The provision mentions that *"the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President."* However, so far, no law has been made by Parliament which leaves a "gap" and leaves the appointment of such a crucial post solely to the executives.
- **Plugging Gaps in the Constitution:**
  - ✓ **Constitution has not prescribed the qualifications** (legal, educational, administrative, or judicial) of the members of the election commission.
  - ✓ The constitution has **not debarred the retiring Election commissioner from any further appointment** by the government.
  - ✓ **There is no clarity regarding the power division** between the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners.
- **EC's Expense to be charged on Consolidated Fund of India:** This will ensure financial autonomy. As per the current practice, EC's expense is voted and approved by Parliament thereby giving financial discretion to the Parliament.
- **Separate and Independent Secretariat:** having powers to appoint, transfer and promote its staffs and officers. This will insulate personnel from executive and political interference. Independent Secretariat would insulate EC from Executive's interference on the issues of appointments, promotions etc.
- **Elevation of an Election Commissioner should be based on seniority:** Unless the three-member collegium/committee, for reasons to be recorded in writing, finds such Commissioner unfit.

- **Common Electoral Roll for Parliament, Assembly and Local Elections:** This will avoid duplicity of effort and resources by EC and SEC.
- **Filing of false affidavits to be made corrupt practice:** Increase punishment from 6 months to 2 years imprisonment without fine.
- **As per EC, filing false affidavit**
  - ✓ Be classified as *corrupt practice* under RPA, 1951
  - ✓ must be a *ground to challenge elections*
- **In case of Bribery:** Postpone or declare elections void.
- **Candidate must contest only from 1 constituency**
- **Debar Persons charged with Cognisable Offences** at the stage of framing charges by Court if punishment of offence is 5 years or more case filed 6 months prior to the election
- **Misusing Religious Sentiments during elections to be made punishable offence**
- **Bribery during Election to be made cognizable offence** and enhance punishment up to two years.
- **EC must have power to de-register political parties** – suggested by Law Commission in its 255th Report on Electoral Reforms.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

Thus, implementing the above recommendations will ensure independence and autonomy of the Election Commission which will further strengthen our democratic process through the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections.

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## **12 . FINANCES OF LOCAL INSTITUTION STRAINED**

*Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the report titled “State Finances, Study of Budgets of 2021-22”, an annual publication that provides information, analysis and an assessment of the finances of State governments for 2021-22 including the local institutions. The theme of this year’s Report is “Coping with the Pandemic: A Third-Tier Dimension” in which the RBI has highlighted about the frontline role played by third-tier government to combat COVID pandemic by implementing containment strategies, healthcare, quarantining and testing facilities, organising vaccination camps and maintaining the supply of essential goods and services. However, in the process, local institutions’ finances were severely strained forcing them to cut down expenditures and mobilise funding from various sources.*

#### **REASONS FOR FINANCIAL LOSS FOR LOCAL INSTITUTIONS**

- Finances of the third-tier governments were impacted severely during the pandemic which inflicted a heavy toll on their finances.

- Reasons include:
  - ✓ Restrictions on movement of people
  - ✓ Provisions for goods and services
  - ✓ ramping up of health infrastructure
  - ✓ measures taken to protect livelihood and efforts taken to inoculate the citizens in a short span of time.

**In economics, this is known as Scissor Effect:**

**‘Scissor effect’** – an increase in expenditure due to a sharp rise in demand for public healthcare services with a simultaneous decrease in revenue resulting from the slowdown in economic activity.

**Above factors resulted in**

- Increase in expenditure.
- Decline in revenue collection.
- Lack (or delayed release) of funds from the State governments during the second wave of the pandemic.

**FISCAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THIRD-TIER GOVERNMENT**

- In line with the global experience, the pandemic has worsened the finances of local governments in India substantially in 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- It is estimated that local authorities would lose around 15-25 per cent of their revenues in 2021, which may make the maintenance of the current level of service delivery difficult to sustain.
- In rural India, village panchayats struggled for funds during the pandemic and similar challenges were encountered by the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

**SURVEY OF RBI HIGHLIGHTS VARIOUS FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (MCS)**

- increase in expenditure
- decline in revenue collection and
- lack (or delayed release) of funds from the State governments during the second wave of the pandemic.
- 70 per cent of MCs reported a decline in revenue while 71 per cent reported an increase in expenditure.
- Several MCs had to cut down expenditure on other areas to make available funds for the COVID response.

**IMPACT ON REVENUE OF MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS**

- Revenue receipts account for around 70 per cent of total receipts of MCs in India whereas capital receipts account for about 30 per cent.

Revenue Receipt	Capital Receipt
<p>MCs' revenue receipts largely comprise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ own tax revenue</li> <li>➤ non-tax revenue</li> <li>➤ and transfers from the Central and the State governments.</li> <li>➤ Property tax is the dominant component of own tax revenue, whereas fees and user charges constitute the largest sub-component of non tax revenue.</li> <li>➤ The share of transfers, predominantly State government transfers, in revenue receipts is significant.</li> </ul>	<p>The capital receipts of MCs mainly comprise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grants</li> <li>➤ contributions and subsidies from central and State governments and</li> <li>➤ transfers from funds maintained by municipal bodies.</li> </ul>

#### **STEPS TAKEN BY MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS TO FILL THE RESOURCE GAPS**

- Reduction of non-essential expenditure
- Mobilised additional funding from multiple sources such as borrowing, grants from the States and the Centre,
- Drawing from reserve funds - reserves are linked to either the infrastructure sector or committed liabilities such as provident and pension funds.
- Municipal funds
- Deposits in State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF)
- Issuances of COVID bonds
- Donations and contributions
- Creating Special Reserve Funds to cope with future pandemics by MCs

#### **THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM IS LACK OF DEVOLUTION OF FUNDS TO THE LOCAL LEVEL**

- Despite the constitutional empowerment, the local bodies face problems of inadequate finance to carry out various activities assigned to them.
- Transfers made through the State Finance Commissions are also meager in most States.
- In most of the states, most of the Gram Panchayats are found reluctant to raise their own source of revenue (OSR).
- Only a few GPs can generate OSR in the form of tax or non-tax revenue by renting shops, house tax and clean water fee.

#### **STEPS SUGGESTED BY RBI TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS**



- Increasing the financial and functional autonomy of civic bodies
- Strengthening their governance structures and • Financially empowering them via higher resource availability
- Focusing on improving “Own Resource Generation” capacity of local institutions which are critical for their effective intervention at the grassroot level.
- During the pandemic, inter-governmental transfers were among the least affected sources of revenue. Thus, strengthening and streamlining transfers from upper tiers of government through institutionally sound mechanisms can help fortify the financial stability of MCs.
- **There are several facets of municipal finances that merit reforms:**
  - ✓ Greater fiscal transparency
  - ✓ Revitalising the municipal bond market
  - ✓ Boosting developmental/infrastructure finance and green finance
  - ✓ Exploiting land-based financing opportunities and
  - ✓ Developing partnerships with impact finance in the private space would strengthen the third tier and make it viable and effective, especially in managing and mitigating future crises.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

- The RBI has recommended that the functional autonomy of civic bodies must increase and their governance structure strengthened.
- This could happen by ‘empowering them financially through higher resource availability’. Genuine fiscal federalism i.e., fiscal autonomy accompanied by fiscal accountability can provide a long-term solution.
- The 2nd ARC had recommended that there should be a clear-cut demarcation of functions of each tier of the government.
- Thus, empowerment of the third-tier government presents an opportunity that can result in better and more effective pandemic crusaders in the future.

### **13. SUSPENSION OF MLAS**

*In July 2021, Maharashtra Assembly had passed a resolution suspending 12 MLAs of BJP for one year over misbehavior. However, the Supreme Court in its recent judgment has quashed the decision of the Maharashtra Assembly terming the suspension beyond a session as unconstitutional, substantively illegal and irrational. Maharashtra Legislative Assembly does*



*not have a Speaker since February 2021 and the Chair was presided over by one of the four Presiding Officer named by Acting Speaker.*

#### **BACKGROUND TO SUSPENSION OF MLAs**

- During the monsoon session of Maharashtra Assembly, a state minister tried to table a resolution demanding release of data on Other Backward Classes (OBCs) so that seats could be reserved for them in local bodies in Maharashtra.
- This move was opposed by Leader of Opposition and several BJP leaders entered the well in protest snatched the mace, and uprooted mike.
- The MLA who was in the chair, adjourned the House for ten minutes, following which some BJP MLAs allegedly entered his chamber and threatened, abused, and misbehaved with him.
- Maharashtra Parliamentary Affairs Minister subsequently moved a resolution to suspend 12 BJP MLAs for 1 year.

#### **GROUND ON WHICH PETITION FILED IN SUPREME COURT BY SUSPENDED MLAs**

- The 12 MLAs stated that they were not given adequate opportunity to present their case and that the suspension violated their fundamental right to equality before law under Article 14 of the Constitution.
- The MLAs have also contended that under Rule 53 of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rules, the power to suspend can only be exercised by the Speaker, and it cannot be put to vote in a resolution as was done in this case.

#### **Rule 53 - Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rules**

- The Speaker may direct any member:
  - ✓ Who refuses to obey his decision, or
  - ✓ Whose conduct is in the opinion of Speaker grossly disorderly, to withdraw immediately from the Assembly.
- And any member who is ordered to withdraw, shall absent himself during the remainder of the day's meeting.
- If any member is ordered to withdraw a second time in the same Session - the Speaker may direct the member to absent himself from the meetings of the Assembly for any period not longer than the remainder of the Session and the member so directed shall absent himself accordingly.
- The member so directed to be absent shall, during the period of such absence, be deemed to be absent with the permission of the Assembly within the meaning of clause (4) of Article 190 of the Constitution.

#### **Article 190(4) – Constitution of India**

- If for a period of 60 days a member of a House of the Legislature of a State is without permission of the House absent from all meetings thereof, the House may declare his seat vacant:

- Provided that in computing the said period of 60 days no account shall be taken of any period during which the House is prorogued or is adjourned for more than four consecutive days.

### Article 212 - Constitution of India

#### Courts not to inquire into proceedings of the Legislature

- 1) The validity of any proceedings in the Legislature of a State shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.
- 2) No officer or member of the Legislature of a State in whom powers are vested by or under this Constitution for regulating procedure or the conduct of business, or for maintaining order, in the Legislature shall be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the exercise by him of those powers.

### Section 151A – Representation of People Act, 1951

- It mandates the Election Commission to fill the casual vacancies in the Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures through bye elections within six months from the date of occurrence of the vacancy, provided that the remainder of the term of a member in relation to a vacancy is one year or more.

### SUPREME COURT'S JUDGMENT

- **One Year Suspension Unconstitutional:** The Supreme Court held that the one-year suspension was prima facie unconstitutional as it went beyond the sixmonth limit and amounted to “not punishing the member but punishing the constituency as a whole”.
- **Importance of Article 190(4):** Article 190(4) fixes a threshold of absence of member of state assembly at 60 days beyond which a bye-election can be held on the said seat under Section 151 (A) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951. Based on this understanding, Supreme Court declared suspension of 12 BJP MLAs for one year as an “irrational” act that would impact the democratic set-up, leave constituencies unrepresented and help “thin majority” governments manipulate numbers.
- **Unrepresented Constituency:** A suspension beyond the remainder period of the ongoing session would not only be grossly irrational measure, but also violative of the basic democratic values owing to unessential deprivation of the member concerned, and more importantly, the constituency would remain unrepresented in the Assembly.
- **Impact Democratic Set-up:** It would also impact the democratic set-up by permitting the thin majority government of the day to manipulate the numbers of the Opposition party in the House in an undemocratic manner.
- **Decline in Quality of Debates** - Fear of suspension would impact the quality of debate and instill terror in the minds of opposition members as they will be subjected to whims of majority.
- **Rule 53 to ensure smooth conduct of House** – The law required the Speaker to adopt a “graded approach”, based on objective and rational standards to ensure that the

House can be carried on in an orderly manner and without any disruption owing to misconduct of one or more members.

- **Against Article 14 & 21** - Suspension for one year is violative of procedure established by law and manifestly arbitrary, grossly irrational and illegal and violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.
- **Judgment Not Against Article 212** – Maharashtra Government argued that under Article 212, Courts do not have jurisdiction to inquire into the proceedings of the legislature. On this the Court held that though noncompliance of or deviation from the procedure may be non-justiciable, it would still be “open to judicial review on the touchstone of being unconstitutional, grossly illegal and irrational or arbitrary”.

#### **LOK SABHA RULES ABOUT SUSPENSION OF MPs**

Rules 373, 374, and 374A of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provide for the withdrawal of a member whose conduct is “grossly disorderly”, and suspension of one who abuses the rules of the House or will fully obstructs its business.

#### **POWER OF SPEAKER - RULES OF PROCEDURE AND CONDUCT OF BUSINESS IN LOK SABHA**

- **Maintaining Orderly Business** - Speaker of Lok Sabha maintains order in the House to ensure its smooth functioning. In the process Speaker is empowered either to withdraw or suspend the member from the House.
- **Withdrawal of Member** – Regarding disorderly conduct in the House by any member, Speaker may direct such member to **withdraw from the House** immediately for the entire day and such member shall not sit in the House for the remaining proceedings of the day.
- **Suspension of Member** - The Speaker may name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and willfully obstructing the business of the House.
- **A motion shall be presented in the House for the named person's suspension.** A motion on being passed by the House results in suspension of the member for the remainder of the Session of the House.
- **The suspension of such member can be terminated** on presenting of another motion in the House.
- **Regarding Expulsion of Members**, Speaker appoints a committee to investigate the conduct and activities of MP, whether it is derogatory to the dignity of the House and inconsistent with the Code of Conduct.
- **Committee on Ethics** can also be asked to give its recommendations. Consequent to the findings of committee a motion for expulsion is adopted by the house.

#### **POWER OF CHAIRMAN - RULES OF PROCEDURE AND CONDUCT OF BUSINESS IN THE COUNCIL OF STATES**

The Rules of Procedure of Rajya Sabha also provides for the **withdrawal & suspension** of Members of Rajya Sabha. It is slightly different from Lok Sabha.

- Withdrawal of Member regarding disorderly conduct in the House.
- Suspension of Member - shall take place after Rajya Sabha adopts a motion for suspension for remaining session.
- The Council can terminate the suspension by passing another motion.
- So, unlike Lok Sabha, the motion for suspension of member of Rajya Sabha is not moved by the Chairman but is adopted by the Council.

## **14. EC CHANGES DATES FOR PUNJAB POLLS**

*Punjab Chief Minister wrote a letter to Election Commission and urged them to postpone the February 14 Assembly polls by six days as lakhs of devotees will be visiting Varanasi to celebrate Sri Guru Ravidas Jayanti on February 16 and therefore will not be able to cast their vote.*

### **GROUND ON WHICH ECI SHIFTED DATES OF ELECTION**

- In his letter to the Chief Election Commissioner, Chief Minister said it was brought to his notice by representatives of the Scheduled Castes community, which is around 32 per cent of the State's population that the birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas falls on February 16.
- In such a situation, many people from this community would not be able to cast their votes for the State Assembly, which is otherwise their constitutional right.
- Based on these understandings and after taking inputs from the State Government and Chief Electoral Officer, the Election Commission has rescheduled the General Elections to Legislative Assembly of Punjab under ***Section 153 of the Representation of the People Act.***

### **SECTION 153 – REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE ACT, 1951**

- **Section 153 states** - *It shall be competent for the Election Commission for reasons which it considers sufficient, to extend the time for the completion of any election by making necessary amendments in the notification issued by it.*
- Thus, Section 153 of the Representation of the People Act allows the poll panel to extend the time for completing an election, but such extension should not go beyond the date of the normal dissolution of the Lok Sabha, or the Assembly as mandated under Article 83 and 172 respectively.
- In 1991, the Commission, under this provision read with Article 324 of the Constitution, postponed parliamentary elections for three weeks following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during his campaign in Tamil Nadu.
- **Under Article 172** - *Every Legislative Assembly of every State, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer and the expiration of the said period of five years*

## **15. SC UPHOLDS RESERVATION IN AIQS**

*Government of India had extended the All-India Quota (AIQ) Scheme to state run medical/dental colleges where it also allowed for providing 27% reservation for OBCs and 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Section (EWS) under AIQ Scheme for admissions to medical colleges through NEET. Supreme Court while upholding the validity of reservations in All India Quota Scheme has recognized the idea of 'substantive equality', which sees affirmative action not as an exception to the equality rule, but as a facet of the equality norm.*

### **ALL INDIA QUOTA (AIQ) SCHEME**

- All-India Quota (AIQ) Scheme was introduced in 1986 under the directions of Supreme Court to provide for domicile-free merit-based opportunities to students from any State to aspire to study in a good medical college located in another State.
- All India Quota consists of 15% of total available UG seats and 50% of total available PG seats in government medical colleges.
- The other 85% UG seats and 50% PG seats in these colleges are set aside for the applicants from respective states.

### **RESERVATION POLICY PURSUED SO FAR**

- Until 2007, no reservation was implemented within the All-India Quota for medical admission.
- *Abhay Nath v University of Delhi and Others* (Jan 2007) - Supreme Court directed that reservation of 15% for Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes be introduced in the AIQ.
- The same year, the government passed THE CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (RESERVATION IN ADMISSION) ACT, 2007.
- Section 3 of the Act provides for Reservation of seats in Central Educational Institutions in the following manner:

Categories	Percentage of Reservation
Scheduled Caste	15%
Scheduled Tribe	7.5%
Other Backward Classes	27%

### **Benefits of EWS was not extended to AIQ Scheme**

- THE CONSTITUTION (ONE HUNDRED AND THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019 enabled the provision

of 10% reservation in educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State for EWS category.

- Accordingly, seats in medical/dental colleges were increased over two years in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to accommodate this additional 10% EWS reservation so that the total number of seats available for unreserved category does not reduce.
- In the AIQ seats, however, the benefit of EWS under Article 15(6) was not extended

### **BENEFITS FOR THE STUDENTS**

- The OBC students from across the country shall now be able to take benefit of this reservation in AIQ Scheme to compete for seats in any State.
- Around 1500 OBC students in MBBS and 2500 in postgraduation will be benefitted through this reservation.
- Reserved category students need not only depend on reservation provided by state in medical colleges.
- Now, along with the 27% reservation for OBCs, 10% reservation for EWS is also being extended in AIQ seats for all the undergraduate/postgraduate medical/dental courses from the current academic year 2021-22.
- This will benefit every year around more than 550 EWS students for MBBS and around 1000 EWS students for PG medical courses.

### **SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT – IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Binary of Merit versus Reservation superfluous:** While ruling in favour of extending reservation to OBCs in the all-India quota (AIQ) of seats in admission to under-graduate and post-graduate medical and dental courses, the Court has concluded that the binary has become superfluous.
- **Substantive Equality Not an Exception:** The courts have now come to recognize the idea of 'substantive equality', which sees affirmative action not as an exception to the equality rule, but as a facet of the equality norm.
- **Formal Equality Inadequate:** Formal equality or the principle that everyone competes on an equal footing, is inadequate to address social inequalities and the inherent disadvantages of the less advanced sections, necessitating provisions that help them compete with the advanced classes.
- **Reservation ensures Distributive Justice:** The Court held that reservation is not at odds with merit but furthers its distributive consequences. Merit should be socially contextualized and reconceptualized as an instrument that advances social goods like equality.
- **Open Competitive Examination does not reflect Social, Economic & Cultural Disadvantage:** The competitive examination may be necessary for distribution of educational opportunities, but it does not enable equal opportunity for those competing without the aid of social and cultural capital, inherited skills, and early access to quality

schooling. Merit cannot be reduced to narrow definitions of performance in an open competitive examination which only provides formal equality of opportunity.

- **High scores in an examination are not a proxy for merit:** Good performance in an examination does reflect hard work but does not always reflect “merit” solely of one’s own making. The rhetoric surrounding merit obscures the way in which family, schooling, fortune, and gift of talents that the society currently values aids in one’s advancement.
- **Reservation Needed for Post-graduate Courses:** Court has rejected the argument that there was no need for reservation in post-graduate medical education. According to SC, impact of backwardness does not simply disappear because a candidate has a graduate qualification and does not create parity between advanced classes and backward classes.

## 16. ELECTORAL BONDS

*Opaqueness in election funding not only distorts the level playing field among political parties but also snatches from the voters their right to knowledge or information on electoral funding. Electoral Bonds brought as an alternative for cash donations and prevent flow of black money in elections has on the contrary made the fundings opaquer and more corporate friendly as donations to electoral bonds are anonymous and limitless. For this reason, it has been alleged that electoral bonds are deeply destructive of democracy, compromise fair and democratic elections and violate core principles of the Indian Constitution.*

### **ABOUT ELECTORAL BONDS**

- Electoral Bonds are bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note and are an interest free banking instrument.
- Electoral Bond shall be issued for any value, in multiples of Rs 1000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 crore from the Specified Branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).
- The purchaser would be allowed to buy Electoral Bonds only on due fulfillment of all the extant KYC norms and by making payment from a bank account. It will not carry the name of payee.
- The Electoral Bonds would have a life of only 15 days during which it can be used for making donation only to political parties which has secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last general election to the House of the People or to Legislative Assembly.
- Every political party in its returns will have to disclose the amount of donations it has received through electoral bonds to the Election Commission.

### **OPAQUENESS OF ELECTORAL FUNDING IMPACTS DEMOCRACY**



- In a Parliamentary democracy, citizens have the right vote and send their representatives to Parliament on sound knowledge and complete information about the representative and his political party.
- Political funding specially during elections is one of the most crucial information which a voter must know. Money is the most effective way of buying policy, of engaging in regulatory capture, and of skewing the playing field in one's own favor.
- This is enabled to a far greater degree when citizens are in the dark about the source of money. Supreme Court has long held that the "right to know", especially in the context of elections, is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression under the Indian Constitution.
- By keeping this knowledge from citizens and voters, the electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy.
- It is equally important that if a democracy is to thrive, the role of money in influencing politics ought to be limited.

#### **OTHER DEMERITS OF ELECTORAL BONDS**

- **Identity of Donor Unknown:** The electoral bonds will likely be bearer bonds, but the identity of the donor will not be known to the receiver. Thus, through the disguised process of electoral bonds, the identity of the person will never be known. While the identity of the donor is captured, it is not revealed to the party or public. So, transparency regarding electoral funding is not enhanced for the voter.
- **No Upper Limit for Donation** - Any individual or company can make any amount of donations as there is no upper limit on donations. This will increase corruption as any money can be raised anonymously even by registering a fictitious or through shell companies.
- **Strengthen Corrupt Nexus** - This process of redeeming money through bonds without disclosure of name will penetrate and strengthen the nexus between corporate houses and political parties. Political parties may also start taking care of the highest bidder in such scenario and may grant them unreasonable favors which may affect our economy and business environment in the long run.
- **Aid Corruption & Red Tapism** - Business houses will expect favorable policies from the future government and the political party shall be obliged to obey when it comes to power. This nexus shall further increase corruption and red-tapism in the society.
- **Frivolous Donations** - There are loopholes to electoral bonds too. If identity of persons donating cash to political parties is not revealed, then it may lead to frivolous donations from unaccounted source.
- **Formation of Shell Companies to route funds** - Persons also includes companies and organizations. Hence shell companies can be formed just to route funds to buy electoral bonds without revealing the identity of such companies. Companies are also included as person as per Income Tax Act, 1961.
- **Restrictions on Company Removed** - Similarly, earlier only those companies which were in existence for at least 3 years were allowed to make contributions. Such a restriction was



basically laid down to prevent the shell companies from influencing the political parties. Even this restriction has now been removed and hence concerns have been raised that the shell companies would end up influencing the policies of the Government.

- **Corporate Funding of Elections:** Earlier, the companies were prohibited from donating more than 7.5% of their average net profit over the previous 3 years to the Political parties. However, this restriction has now been removed. Going forward, even the lossmaking companies could also make contributions through the Electoral Bonds.
- **Against Equality & Rule of Law** - uncapping political donations and introducing a structural bias into the form of the donations violate both the guarantee of equality before law, as well as being manifestly arbitrary.
- **Lack of Transparency:** In a democratic country, voters need to be aware of how the political parties are funded to ensure greater transparency in the elections. However, by keeping the political donations anonymous, the electoral bonds violate the right of the citizens to know the information related to political funding.
- **Foreign Influence:** The Election Commission cannot monitor the funding through Electoral Bonds as there is secrecy of donor, therefore it becomes difficult to know what is coming in is black money or not. Electoral Bonds can be misused for routing foreign money and thereby increase ability of other countries to influence Indian elections.
- **FCRA Amendment:** Further, the amended Foreign Contribution Regulation (FCRA) rules enable the political parties to accept donations from foreign companies. This leaves a scope for the foreign companies in influencing Indian Politics.
- **Only Government can trace the donor:** as the donations are routed through the State Bank of India. So, it is possible for the Government to find out who is donating to which party, but this advantage is taken away from the opposition.

#### **PETITION FILED AGAINST CONSTITUTIONALITY OF ELECTORAL BOND STILL PENDING**

- Courts must be particularly sensitive to and cognizant of laws and rules that seek to skew the democratic process and the level playing field, and that seek to entrench one-party rule over multi-party democracy.
- In this regard, taking up the matter to settle the constitutionality of Electoral Bond by the Supreme Court before the next general elections will ensure parity in electoral funding for all political parties.
- This will also ensure level playing field where democratic norms and practices will not be distorted in favor of only those in power.

## **17. STATES MUST DECIDE ON SC/ST QUOTA IN PROMOTIONS**

*A Three Judge Bench of Supreme Court has held that states are obligated to collect data on the inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and refused to provide any criteria or yardstick to be followed by states. Centre and States had filed an appeal asking the Court to clarify as they could not proceed with many promotions due to ambiguities in applying reservation norms.*

#### **IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF JUDGMENT**

- **M. Nagraj & Jarnail Singh** - The Court recognised the principles laid down in Jarnail Singh and M. Nagraj judgments where questions of adequate representation of SC/ST in promotions were left to the states.
- **Refused to lay down any Yardstick** - Based on the above judgments, the Court held that it cannot lay down any yardstick for determining the inadequacy of representation as laying down of criteria for determining the inadequacy of representation would result in curtailing the discretion given to the State Governments. Further, such yardstick might not consider the prevailing local conditions in any given state regarding availability of seats in a specific cadre.
- **Cadre as Unit** - The Court held 'cadre' (grade/category) as the unit for purpose of collection of quantifiable data for giving promotion quotas and not and not class, group or the entire service. If cadre is considered as a group, then the entire exercise of reservation in promotions would be rendered meaningless if data pertaining to the representation of SCs and STs was done with reference to the entire service.
- **B.K. Pavitra Judgment set aside** - While recognising 'cadre' as the unit for collection of quantifiable data, the court set aside its earlier judgment in the B.K. Pavitra v Union of India.
- **States obligated to collect data** - Regarding unit of collection of quantifiable data, the court held that the State was "obligated to collect quantifiable data on the inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes."
- **Need for Review on Data by States** - The Court held that a review needs to be conducted regarding the data for the purpose of determining the inadequacy of representation in promotions by the states and the Centre can fix a reasonable time for states to conduct the review.

#### **M. NAGRAJ V UNION OF INDIA**

- The government further felt that representation of the SCs and STs in the services in the state had not reached the required level.
- Hence to continue to provide reservation in promotion, legislature passed the **Constitution 77<sup>th</sup> amendment act of 1995** and added **Article 16(4A)** to the constitution.
- As per **Article 16(4A)** - State can make any provision for **reservation in matters of promotion** if *SC/STs are not adequately represented in the services* in the state.
- In **M. Nagraj case**, the constitutional validity of 77<sup>th</sup> Amendment was challenged which provided for **reservation in promotion** along with other amendments on **backlog vacancies** in reservation.

- The Supreme Court **upheld the constitutional validity of 77th Amendment** and said these were mere enabling provisions.
- If a state government wishes to make provisions for reservation to SC/STs in promotion, **the state must collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of the class and inadequacy of representation of that class and maintenance of efficiency.**
- **The Court allowed reservations in promotion for members of SC/ST subject to proving three conditions:**
  - ✓ *Backwardness of class – so there is a need for quantifiable data to prove backwardness*
  - ✓ *Inadequacy of representation*
  - ✓ *Administrative Efficiency – Article 335*

#### JARNAIL SINGH V LACHHMI NARAIN GUPTA

- The controversy in this case arose due to the interpretation of Article 16 (4A) which was added by Constitution 77th Amendment.
- **Article 16 (4A)** mentions that state can make provisions for **reservation in matters of promotion**, with consequential seniority, to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favor of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes which, in the opinion of the State, are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- So, the Court confined their entire judgment based on two grounds:
  - 1) Whether the state must collect quantifiable data to show backwardness of members of SC and ST?
  - 2) Can the concept of creamy layer be applied to the members of SC and ST as it will amount to subclassification within the members of SC and ST. (because it was declared in Indra Sawhney that further sub-classification within Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is not permissible.)

#### The Judgment

- There is no need to revisit the judgment of **M. Nagaraj** by a 7-judge Constitutional Bench.
- States no longer need to collect **quantifiable data** on the backwardness of SCs and STs in granting quota in promotions.
- However, the states will have to back it with data to show their **inadequate representation in the cadre.**
- The Court said that the principle of creamy layer can be extended to members of SC/ST for promotions in government jobs.

#### SC on the issue of Creamy Layer

- The whole object of reservation is to see that backward classes of citizens move forward so that they may march hand in hand with other citizens of India on an equal basis.
- This will not be possible if only the creamy layer within that class bag all the coveted jobs in the public sector and perpetuate themselves, leaving the rest of the class as backward as they always were.

- When a Court applies the creamy layer principle to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, it does not in any manner tinker with the **Presidential List under Articles 341 (Scheduled Castes) or 342 (Scheduled Tribes)** of the Constitution of India.
- The Court **excluded the creamy layer** from such groups or sub-groups (including members of SC/ST) when applying the principles of equality under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution of India.



# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## 1. UKRAINE CRISIS

*Russian military buildup near Ukrainian border has raised fears of Russian invasion in the coming days. Russia considers Ukraine becoming more integrated with NATO as a threat to its national security. Earlier, Russia had warned NATO against its eastward expansion. Russia also iterated that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people”, part of the “Russian civilisation”. In this backdrop let us try and understand the issue in detail and its impact on global geopolitics.*



### ROOTS OF THIS CONFLICT

- Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union until its 1991 collapse.
- In 2004, **Orange Revolution** began after reports of widespread vote-rigging in presidential election nominally won by pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich.
- In 2014, Revolution of Dignity began in Ukraine, which saw months-long protests which toppled pro-Moscow Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich.
- Russia used the power vacuum to annex Crimea Crimean Peninsula.
- Conflict broke out between the Ukrainian government and Russian-backed separatists who declared two regions in **eastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, known as the Donbas, self-proclaimed republics.**

### COUNTRIES FORMED BY DISINTEGRATION OF ERSTWHILE USSR STRATEGIC



### **CALCULATIONS OF RUSSIA**

- Russia, the world's largest country by land mass, **lacks natural borders except the Arctic Ocean in the north and the Pacific in the far east.**
- **Geopolitics of Russia's insecurity:** Russia's heartland runs from St. Petersburg through Moscow to the Volga region lies on plains and is vulnerable to attacks. Also, there is lack of natural boundaries between Russia and Eastern Europe. The experience of Napoleon's invasion, WWI and WWII when Russia got attacked is always heavy on Russia's strategic calculations. But the disintegration of the Soviet Union 1990s, threw its security calculations into disarray, deepening its **historical** insecurity.
- This makes Russia to claim strategic influence in its Eastern European neighbours as a guarantee of its security.

### **RESPONSE TO NATO'S EXPANSION**

- **Russia's view on NATO:** Russia claims that the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the USSR led to the end of animosities between the Western Europe and Russia. Thus, there was no security threat for Europe and thus, no need for NATO that is a vestige of the cold war. The continued expansion of NATO wherein smaller countries part of Eastern Europe joining Russia enhances the insecurity of Russia. Russia, thus is, uncomfortable with this situation and demands stopping of eastward expansion of the NATO alliance.
- **Continued Expansion of NATO:** The West had promised that NATO would not expand in the east. But despite the Promises the expansion has continued. In 1999 the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (all were members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact) joined NATO. Five years later, seven more countries — including the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, all of which share borders with Russia. Further out of the countries that surround Black Sea - Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania are NATO members.
- **Russia's insecurity on Ukraine joining NATO:** Russia does not want Ukraine to fall into the hands of NATO, which would threaten its heartland. If Ukraine and Georgia join NATO, Russia's gateway to Mediterranean Sea would be narrowed. Thus, Russia annexed Crimean Peninsula to secure its access to the Black Sea.

### **RUSSIA'S FOCUS ON RIMLAND COUNTRIES**

- South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the self-proclaimed republics that broke away from Georgia, are controlled by Russia-backed forces.
- In Ukraine, the eastern Donbas region is in the hands of pro-Russian rebels.

- Russia has supported the President of Belarus against the protests that erupted in 2020.
- Russia sent thousands of “peacekeepers” to end the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, reestablishing its strategic dominance.
- Belarus with Russian support had manufactured a migrant crisis on the Polish border of the European Union.

#### **LOCATIONS OF IMPORTANCE IN THE BLACK SEA**

- Countries surrounding Black Sea are: **Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.**
- Important rivers falling in the Black Sea: **Danube, Dneiper, Don.**
- **Bosporus strait in the South of Black Sea to Sea of Marmara which through the Dardanelles strait connects to the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.**
- **In the north of Black Sea, Kerch strait connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov.**

## **2. UN – CHALLENGES AND REFORM**

*Global community adopted the Multilateralism post WWII, in the form of UNO. UN recently celebrated 75th anniversary in 2020. However, presently the multilateral world order is facing challenges because of changing nature of the geopolitics and the ineffectiveness of the UN to address the issues concerning the global community.*

#### **ABOUT MULTILATERALISM**

In international relations, multilateralism refers to an alliance of multiple countries pursuing a common goal. Multilateralism leads to collective effort on part of nations over their narrow national interest to tackle global issues.

#### **Benefits of Multilateralism:**

- Binds powerful nations – To avoid possibility of future conflict.
- Discourages unilateralism.
- Gives small powers a voice.
- Encourages consensus on the emerging global issues such as terrorism, climate change and other challenging global issues.
- **Examples of Multilateral bodies:** UN System, WTO, UNFCCC, EU etc.

#### **CHALLENGES TO MULTILATERALISM**

- **Rise of Nationalistic politics:** Seen in global as well emerging powers. Example: BREXIT or withdrawal of UK from the EU marks a dent to the spirit of multilateralism.
- The powerful nations are challenging the multilateral world order.

- **Rise in conflicts** such as in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan. This reflects lack of effort on the important players across the globe to collaborate and address critical issues.
- **Changing Geopolitics**: The rise of China, Concretization of Russia China axis. SCO etc. has made the West conscious of preserving its hegemony. The west sees China as a challenger to the US led world order and does not seem to cooperate with China and Russia. At the same time, China and Russia try to counter the west. This competition has led to erosion of spirit of cooperation and collaboration, hurting multilateralism.
- **Lack of consensus on Global issues**: Most challenges are cross-national and cross-domain in character requiring multilateral approach. poverty and hunger, climate change, inequality, fake news, terrorism. Thus, a lack of common, collaborative global approach to these multi-dimensional problems and a zero-sum attitude leads to sub-optimal outcomes for everyone.

#### **CHALLENGES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF UN AND OTHER MULTILATERAL BODIES**

- **Issues with UNSC**: Rift between the permanent members of the Security Council – Veto power of P5. UNSC permanent members are not representative of the current world order. Despite efforts the expansion of UNSC has not been materialised. Failure of UN on emerging conflicts such as Myanmar, Afghanistan etc.
- **UNGA has no substantive powers**: UN General Assembly which is a more representative body of global voice plays second fiddle to the super-powers led UNSC.
- **World Health Organization** failed to provide early warnings during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **World Trade Organisation** has failed to conclude the negotiations of the Doha Agenda started in 2001, as bilateralism and protectionism are resurging worldwide, and its dispute settlement system has stalled.
- **Lack of accountability**: Countries that violate international law have not been held accountable.
- **Pursuit of narrow geo – political interest** by member nations for their allies and against the enemies. Ex – UNESCO – stopping funding of UNESCO in 2019.
- **Higher leadership of World Bank and IMF** are taken by USA and EU alternatively. While the poor and developing countries where these institutions mostly work do not get to decide their agenda.

#### **ISSUES IN FINANCING OF UN**

- Around 40 UN political missions and peacekeeping operations engage 95,000 troops, police, and civil personnel. But the UN peacekeeping budget, is just a little over \$8 billion. Also, countries providing most troops for the peacekeeping efforts are rarely made party to decide the mandate of the peacekeeping missions, which is often dominated by UNSC P5 members.
- **Lack of contribution by the member nations**: There was an outstanding \$711 million in the assessed contribution for the general budget.



- **Voluntary contributions dominate:** Most of the humanitarian assistance, developmental work, and budgets of the specialised agencies are based on voluntary contributions.
- **Climate change financing:** Developed nations despite repeated promises have failed to meet their promise to provide \$100 bn of climate finance for developing countries despite being responsible for historical emissions which are the prominent reason for present climate change, which is hurting the developing nations hardest.

### **OUR COMMON AGENDA**

- To mark the 75th Anniversary of UN, Member States came together to recognise that our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through stronger international cooperation and reinvigorated multilateralism with the United Nations at the Centre of our efforts.
- Global leaders pledged to strengthen global governance for the sake of present and coming generations and asked the Secretary General to prepare a report with recommendations to advance our common agenda and respond to current and future challenges.
- UN Secretary General prepared a comprehensive report titled outlining 12 comprehensive action areas named '**Our Common Agenda**'.
- The important proposals in the report are given below. The Secretary General proposed a **Summit of the Future** to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like and what we can do to secure it.

### **KEY PROPOSALS ACROSS THE 12 COMMITMENTS FROM**

#### **the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations**

All proposed actions are in line with and designed to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.





## 1. Leave no one behind

- Renewed social contract anchored in human rights
- New era for universal social protection, including health care and basic income security, reaching the 4 billion unprotected
- Reinforce adequate housing, education and lifelong learning and decent work
- Digital inclusivity
- World Social Summit in 2025
- Identify complementary measures to GDP



## 2. Protect our planet

- Leaders meeting ahead of the global stocktaking in 2023
- Commit to the 1.5-degree Celsius goal and net zero emissions by 2050 or sooner
- Declarations of climate emergency and right to a healthy environment
- Package of support to developing countries
- Measures for adaptation and resilience
- No new coal after 2021 and phasing out fossil fuel subsidies
- Account for the environment in economic models, carbon pricing mechanisms and credible commitments by financial actors
- Post-2020 biodiversity framework
- Transforming food systems for sustainability, nutrition and fairness
- Action by the General Assembly on territorial threats of climate change and to prevent, protect and resolve situations of environmental displacement



## 3. Promote peace and prevent conflicts

- New agenda for peace to:
  - Reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons)
  - Strengthen international foresight
  - Reshape responses to all forms of violence
  - Invest in prevention and peacebuilding, including Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission
  - Support regional prevention
  - Put women and girls at the centre of security policy
- Peaceful, secure and sustainable use of outer space, including through a multi-stakeholder dialogue on outer space



## 4. Abide by international law and ensure justice

- Human rights as a problem-solving measure, including by comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and promoting participation
- Application of human rights online and to frontier issues and new technologies
- Universal access to the Internet as a human right
- Human rights mechanisms on a more sustainable financial footing
- Legal identity for all, end to statelessness and protection of internally displaced persons, refugees and migrants
- New vision for the rule of law
- Global road map for the development and effective implementation of international law



## 5. Place women and girls at the centre

- Repeal of gender-discriminatory laws
- Promote gender parity, including through quotas and special measures
- Facilitate women's economic inclusion, including investment in the care economy and support for women entrepreneurs
- Include voices of younger women
- Eradication of violence against women and girls, including through an emergency response plan



## 6. Build trust

- Global code of conduct that promotes integrity in public information
- Improve people's experiences with public institutions and basic services
- Inclusive national listening and "envisioning the future" exercises
- Action to tackle corruption in line with the United Nations Convention against Corruption
- Reformed international tax system
- Joint structure on financial integrity and tackling illicit financial flows



## 7. Improve digital cooperation

- **Global Digital Compact** to:
  - Connect all people to the Internet, including all schools
  - Avoid Internet fragmentation
  - Protect data
  - Apply human rights online
  - Introduce accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content
  - Promote regulation of artificial intelligence
  - Digital commons as a global public good



## 8. Upgrade the United Nations

- **High-level Advisory Board** led by former Heads of State and Government on improved governance of global public goods
- System-wide policy that **puts people at the centre**, taking into account age, gender and diversity
- More listening, participation and consultation (including digitally), building on the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration and Our Common Agenda
- **Gender parity** within the United Nations system by 2028
- Re-establish the Secretary-General's **Scientific Advisory Board**
- **"Quintet of change"** for United Nations 2.0, including innovation, data, strategic foresight, results orientation and behavioural science



## 9. Ensure sustainable financing

- **Biennial Summit between the Group of 20, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General and the heads of international financial institutions** for a sustainable, inclusive and resilient global economy including to:
  - Support a **Sustainable Development Goal investment boost**, including through a **last-mile alliance** to reach those furthest behind
  - Provide more flexible research and development incentives
  - Resolve **weaknesses in the debt architecture**
- Fairer and more resilient multilateral **trading system**, including a reinvigorated WTO
- New business models
- Improve the **United Nations budget process**



## 10. Boost partnerships

- Annual meetings between the United Nations and all heads of **regional organizations**
- **Stronger** engagement between the United Nations system, international financial institutions and regional development banks
- More systematic engagement with **parliaments, subnational authorities and the private sector**
- **Civil society focal points** in all United Nations entities
- United Nations Office for Partnerships to **consolidate access and inclusion**, including accessibility online



## 11. Listen to and work with youth

### Youth

- **Remove barriers to political participation** and measure progress through a **"youth in politics" index**
- **United Nations Youth Office**
- Transforming Education Summit in 2022
- **Recovery barometer** to track career paths and labour market outcomes for youth
- **High-ambition coalition** to promote green and digital-economy job creation

### Future generations

- Summit of the Future in 2023
- **Ensure long-term thinking**, including through a United Nations **Futures Lab**
- **Represent succeeding generations**, including through a **repurposed Trusteeship Council**, a **Declaration on Future Generations**, and a **United Nations Special Envoy for Future Generations**



## 12. Be prepared

- **Emergency Platform** to be convened in response to complex global crises
- **Strategic Foresight and Global Risk Report** by the United Nations every five years
- **On global public health:**
  - **Global vaccination plan**
  - Empowered WHO
  - Stronger global health security and preparedness
  - Accelerate product development and access to health technologies in low- and middle-income countries
  - **Universal health coverage** and addressing determinants of health



### **3. CHINA'S BORDER LAW**

*China has recently passed a border law. It aims at securing the Chinese borders with its neighbours. However, concerns have been raised about the intent of the Chinese government in the wake of its recent expansionist tendencies.*

#### **ABOUT CHINA'S BORDER LAW**

- China has a 22,457-kilometer land border with 14 nations, including India, which is the third longest after Mongolia and Russia.
- Under the law, China is required by law to install boundary markers on all of its land borders in order to clearly designate the border.
- The law also states that the state must take steps to strengthen border defence, support economic and social development of border areas, open up border areas, and improve public services and infrastructure encourage and support people's lives and work, and promote coordination between border defence and social and economic development.

#### **BACKDROP OF BORDER DISPUTE**

- India has unmarked border with China in the Ladakh sector. China stakes its claims on parts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The border which remained peaceful since the 1962 war has been a source of conflict recently, particularly in the Ladakh region specially in the Galwan valley. A recent clash between Indian Army and People Liberation Army in the Ladakh region saw about 20 deaths from Indian side and reportedly 38 deaths from the Chinese side.
- Further, China has been settling population the border villages along the border with Arunachal Pradesh. It has also renamed villages in the Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh.

#### **CONCERNS FOR INDIA**

- This legislation may become **a problem because it prevents permanent infrastructure along the border without China's authorisation.**
- The law's mandate for **unilateral installation of boundary markers** along the disputed India-China boundary will increase tensions. As China's perception of the boundary different from that of India's.
- Both India and China have increased their building activity in recent years, with roads, bridges, and military housing units being built at breakneck speed on both sides of the border.

- **China's new map includes the whole state of Arunachal Pradesh, the Barhoti Plains in Uttarakhand, and regions in Ladakh up to the 1959 Claim Line.** According to the new rules, these places are now deemed Chinese sovereign territory.
- In addition, the new law declares that China will have complete authority over its internal rivers, regardless of neighbouring states' interests.
- Experts view the new law, as merely a tool for the Chinese government to use if it so desires, as the government's actions have been aggressive even before the law was enacted.

#### 4. TRINCOMALEE

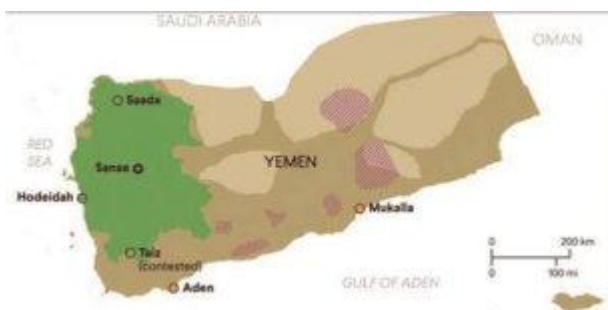
*Sri Lankan cabinet has given approval to jointly develop with India 61 tanks out of the 99 tanks in the Trincomalee oil tank farm.*

##### **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

- Trincomalee is a Natural harbor in North-East of Sri Lanka.
- Location is strategically important for India.
- India has talked about developing Trincomalee is a regional petroleum Hub.
- The Presence of Indian Oil subsidiary has seen opposition in Sri Lanka.
- The opposition is led by the Sinhala nationalists



## 5. YEMEN LOCATIONS



*Houthi rebels of Yemen attacked UAE through Drone in which two Indians and a Pakistani national were killed.*

## 6. KAZAKHSTAN



Kazakhstan witnessed widespread Protest on New Year. The rise in fuel prices was seen as the immediate trigger for the protests and brought to the fore grievances over structural problems like corruption and socio-economic inequality

## **7. COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANISATION (CSTO)**

*To deal with the Protests Kazakh president called the CSTO for Help.*

### **POINTERS**

- The CSTO is a Russia-dominated security alliance which was established after the USSR's fall when some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States signed a mutual defence treaty named the Collective Security Treaty.
- The CSTO has six members today: **Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.**

### **PANGONG TSO LAKE**

A bridge being built by China across the Pangong lake in an area claimed by India is expected to be completed in a few months and will give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) an edge in speedily moving troops between several locations.



# SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

## 1. 4TH QUAD FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

- The **4th Quad Foreign Ministers'** meeting was held in Melbourne. It was hosted by Australia.
- This was the third in-person meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers. Ministers last met virtually in February 2021.

### **Key Highlights Of The Joint Statement**

- Support for **international law, peace, and security in the maritime domain**.
- **Veiled reference to China's actions:** Reaffirmed the commitment of free and open Indo-Pacific.
- **Emphasized ASEAN unity and centrality** and the ASEAN-led architecture in Indo Pacific region. For this, leaders expressed their support for ASEAN partners to advance the practical implementation of ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.
- **COVID-19 pandemic** - Together, the Quad members have *pledged to donate more than 1.3 billion vaccine doses* globally. The delivery of first batch of Quad-supported vaccines is expected in first half of this year.
  - ✓ Quad expressed their satisfaction with the Quad Vaccine Partnership's rapid progress in expanding vaccine production at the Biological E Ltd facility in India. It aims to deliver at least 1 billion vaccines by the end of 2022.
- **Counter All Forms Of Terrorism And Violent Extremism:** It called on all countries to ensure that territory under their control is not used to launch terror attacks and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks. Quad reiterated its condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks.
- **Ensure Resilient Cyber Security**
  - ✓ Quad decided to assist partners across Indo-Pacific to address the growing threat of ransomware. It will do so by strengthening capacity building to ensure resilient cyber security and to counter cybercrime.
  - ✓ It will also build the capacity of regional countries to implement UN Voluntary Framework for Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace.
- **5G Technology:** QUAD is pursuing work on 5G technology and vendor diversification to maintain a diverse, open and interoperable telecommunication ecosystem through collaboration with like-minded partners
- **Indo-Pacific Clean Energy Supply Chain Forum** - Australia has proposed to host an Indo-Pacific Clean Energy Supply Chain Forum in mid-2022. This reflects the Quad leaders'



commitment to cooperate to establish responsible and resilient clean-energy supply chains.

- **Increasing People-To-People Ties** - Quad is exploring a track 1.5 dialogue between its respective strategic thinkers.
- **On Myanmar**- Quad expressed grave concern about the crisis in Myanmar. It extended its support for ASEAN efforts to seek a solution in Myanmar and called on the military regime to urgently implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus.



## **2. NEW CHAIR OF UN COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE**

India will host the **2023 International Olympic Committee's (IOC) session in Mumbai** after successfully bidding for it at the 139th IOC session. This will be the first time India will host the session after **1983**.

### **Significance**

- India received a historic **99% of the votes in favour of its bid** from the delegates participating in the process. 75 members endorsed India's candidature in the session held in Beijing. This also reflects India's growing stature in international arena.
- Acceptance of India's candidature reflects a significant development for India's Olympic aspirations. This will herald the start of a new era for Indian sport.
- Getting to host the session also means India is already front-runners to host the 2030 Youth Olympics and from here on, the effort to pitch for a Summer Olympic possibly 2036 – will get a boost.
- The allotment of the Olympic session will once again make India a crucial and an exciting destination to nurture and grow the Olympic movement.

#### **About International Olympic Committee (IOC)**

- In 1892, Pierre de Coubertin of France declared his intention to spearhead a movement to revive the ancient Greek Olympics.
- His efforts led to the establishment of IOC in June 1894 as a not-for-profit independent international organisation. It is **based in Lausanne, Switzerland, the Olympic Capital**.
- The IOC is the guardian of Olympic Games and the leader of Olympic Movement.
- The vision of the International Olympic Committee is to Build a Better World through Sport.

#### **Roles & Responsibilities**

- IOC is the authority responsible for organising the modern (Summer, Winter, and Youth) Olympic Games.
- It is the governing body of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs)

#### **IOC Session**

- An IOC session is the annual meeting of the members of the IOC. It comprises 101 voting members and 45 honorary members. **All IOC Session decisions are final.**
- It discusses and decides on the key activities of the global Olympics movement including:
  - 1) **adoption or amendment of Olympic Charter**
  - 2) **election of IOC members & office bearers**
  - 3) **election of host city of the**
  - 4) **Olympics**

#### Other Addition powers of the Session are:

- To elect the President, vice-presidents and all other members of IOC Executive Board.
- To elect the city in which an ordinary Session is held, the President having the authority to determine the city in which an extraordinary Session is held
- To approve the annual report and financial statements of the IOC
- To appoint the independent auditor of the IOC
- To decide on the awarding or withdrawal by the IOC of full recognition to or from NOCs, associations of NOCs, International Sports Federations (Ifs), associations of IFs and other organisations
- To expel IOC members and to withdraw the status of Honorary President, honorary members and honour members
- To adopt or amend the Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration upon recommendation of the Athletes' Commission and to promote respect for this Declaration within the Olympic Movement
- To resolve and decide upon all other matters assigned to it by law or by the Olympic Charter.

### 3. 2ND ASEAN DIGITAL MINISTERS MEETING

- The 2nd ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN) meeting with India was held on a virtual platform.
- The meeting discussed and deliberated various matters relevant to strengthening regional digital cooperation in the spirit of digital inclusion and integration.
- The Ministers meeting **approved the India-ASEAN Digital Work Plan 2022**. The workplan includes system for combating the use of stolen and counterfeit mobile handsets, WiFi Access network interface for nationwide public internet, the capacity building and knowledge sharing in emerging areas in the field of ICT (5G, IoT, advanced satellite communication, cyber forensics).
- The ADGMIN is an annual meeting of Telecom Ministers of **10 ASEAN countries and dialogue partner countries** - Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia, UK and US.

### 4. PREPARATIONS FOR INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

- The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of a G20 Secretariat and its reporting structures.
- This Secretariat will be responsible for implementation of overall policy decisions and arrangements needed for steering India's upcoming G20 Presidency.
- As per practice, a G20 Secretariat is being established to handle work relating to substantive / knowledge / content, technical, media, security and logistical aspects of India's G20 Presidency.
- It will be manned by officers and staff from the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and other relevant line Ministries / Departments and domain knowledge experts.
- The Secretariat will be functional till February 2024
- India will hold the Presidency of G20 from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023, culminating with the G20 Summit in India in 2023.
- India in December 2021 joined the **G20 Troika** which consists of Indonesia, Italy, and India - the current, previous and incoming G20 Presidencies, respectively.



# DEFENSE AND SECURITY

## 1. CENTRE EXTENDS POLICE MODERNISATION SCHEME

- The Union government, in 2017, had approved implementation of **umbrella scheme** of Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF). Initially, it was launched for three years' period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- Now, the government has approved extension of umbrella scheme of MPF for next five years (up to 2025- 26) with a financial outlay of Rs 26,275 crore.
- 'Police' and 'law and order' fall within the domain of State as per **Entry 2 of List II of the VIIth Schedule**. However, States have not been able to fully modernize and equip their police forces up to the desired level due to financial constraints.
- In this context, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been supplementing the efforts and resources of the States, from time to time, by implementing the MPF Scheme since **1969-70**.

### Objectives Of The Scheme

- To meet the identified deficiencies in various aspects of police administration.
- To reduce the dependence of State Governments on Army and Central Armed Police Forces to control internal security and law and order situation by way of equipping the state police forces adequately and imparting the required training.

### Key Highlights

- The scheme includes security-related expenditure in J&K, northeastern states and Maoist-affected areas for raising **new battalions**, developing **high-tech forensic laboratories** and other **investigation tools**. In other words, it has all relevant sub schemes that contribute to the modernisation and improvement.
- Provision has been made under the scheme for internal security, law and order, and adoption of modern technology by the police.
- Assistance will be given to states for narcotics control and strengthening the criminal justice system by developing a robust forensic set-up in the country.



### **National Policy and Action Plan**

- In order to holistically address the “**LWE problem**” in an effective manner, Government, in 2015, formulated National Policy and Action Plan.
- Under this plan, govt adopted **multi-pronged strategy** in the areas of security, development, ensuring rights & entitlement of local communities etc.
- The multi-pronged strategy primarily includes development and security aspects of affected districts.

### **Projects related to development**

- Include infrastructure, roads, cell-phone connectivity, bridges and schools.

### **Security-related measures**

- Include assistance to LWE affected States by providing CAPF Battalions, helicopters, UAVs, funds for modernisation of State Police forces, training assistance, sharing of intelligence etc.

GEO IAS

## **2. RAISING DAY OF INDIAN COAST GUARD**

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) celebrated its 46th Raising Day on February 1.

#### About Indian Coast Guard (ICG)

- ICG is a government organisation formally established by the Coast Guard Act, 1978.
- It operates under the Ministry of Defence.
- The operation of Indian Coast Guard is limited to Indian coastal waters.
  - After Indian Navy, which protects India's interest in high seas, ICG provides a second layer of maritime security by protecting Indian coastal waters.



#### Background

- ICG came into existence after Committee under KF Rustamji submitted its report on the Indian government's shortcomings in combating smuggling and other illegal maritime activities.
- The report strongly recommended the setting up of a 'Coast Guard' for securing India's EEZ and marine resources.
- In 1977, the Indian Coast Guard came into existence on 1 February, after the Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the force.

#### Duties

- The mission of the ICG is offshore security, marine safety and coastal security. It has also been given the task of securing India's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**.
- For this, it has been entrusted with following duties:
  - ✓ Safety and protection of **artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations**.
  - ✓ Protection and assistance to **fishermen and mariners** at sea.
  - ✓ Preservation & protection of **marine ecology & environment**, including pollution control
  - ✓ Assistance to Department of Customs and other authorities in **anti-smuggling operations**.
  - ✓ Law enforcement in **territorial as well as international waters (outside territorial seas)**.
  - ✓ **Scientific data collection** and support.
  - ✓ National defence during hostilities (under the operational control of the Indian Navy).

#### Achievements of Coast Guard

- From a modest beginning with just seven surface platforms in 1978, the ICG has grown into a formidable force with 158 ships and 70 aircraft in its inventory.
- It is likely to achieve targeted force levels of **200 surface platforms and 80 aircraft by 2025**.



- The ICG is the **4th largest coast guard in the world.**

### **Performance Of Duties**

#### **Saving lives**

- It has saved over 1200 lives at sea in the last year and more than 11000 since its inception.
- It has also rescued approximately 13000 personnel to date during various 'Aid to Civil Authority' operations such as assistance provided to civil authorities during floods, cyclones and other natural calamities.

#### **Prevention of smuggling through maritime routes**

- In the last one year, it has seized drugs and contraband worth nearly Rs 4,000 crore. Around Rs 12,000 crore of drugs and contraband have been seized by the ICG since its operation.
- ICG has, so far, apprehended more than 13000 crew and over 1,500 boats involved in illegal activities in EEZ

#### **Combating transnational maritime crimes**

- It is also collaborating with the littoral countries to combat transnational maritime crimes and enhance maritime safety in its area of responsibility.

#### **Ocean Peacekeeping**

- In line with PM Modi's vision of 'SAGAR' – Security and Growth for all in the Region, ICG has nurtured professional relationship across oceans and established ties with countries in Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

#### **First Responder**

- ICG has successfully averted major ecological disasters and emerged as the 'First Responder' in the region by undertaking major fire-fighting and Pollution response operations off the Sri Lanka coast.
- The most recent being 'Sagar Aaraksha-II' onboard carrier MV X-Press Pearl.

#### **Establishing robust coastal security**

- ICG also conducted **National Maritime Search & Rescue Board** meeting to harmonise the maritime and civil aviation search & rescue mechanism.
- It is also working in close coordination with Central and State agencies to put in place a robust coastal security mechanism.
- The ICG's reach was demonstrated during the flag hoisting on 100 inhabited and uninhabited far-flung islands, as part of the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebration on August 15, 2021

## **3. EXERCISES**



<b>Eastern Bridge VI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recently, Indian Air Force and Royal Air Force of <b>Oman</b> conducted bilateral exercise at the Jodhpur air force station.</li> <li>➤ The exercise named <b>Eastern Bridge VI</b> is in its sixth edition.</li> <li>➤ Exercise Eastern Bridge V was held in October 2019 at the Air Force Base Masirah, Oman.</li> </ul>
<b>Milan 2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Indian Navy launched its massive multilateral naval exercise, MILAN. The naval exercise will see the participation of 42 nations including Russia.</li> <li>➤ Theme of MILAN 2022 exercise is '<b><i>Camaraderie Cohesion Collaboration</i></b>'</li> <li>➤ The exercise and its participation of several South-East Asian navies along with those of the QUAD members is a significant event in the Indo-Pacific amid rising aggression from China.</li> <li>➤ The MILAN exercise is a <b>biennial event</b> that had <b>been first started in 1995</b> with the participation of <b>just four other nations</b> - Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Today it is one of the largest naval exercises in the world.</li> </ul>
<b>Dharma Guardian 2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>India and Japan</b> conducted the annual joint military exercise "Dharma Guardian 2022" in Belgaum, Karnataka.</li> <li>➤ This exercise with Japan is crucial and significant in terms of security challenges faced by both nations in the backdrop of current global situation.</li> <li>➤ The annual exercise has been taking place since 2018.</li> </ul>

# GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

## 1. INTEGRATED FARMING

*A sustainable natural farming system adopted in southern Rajasthan's Banswara district, which has created new livelihood sources and brought food security to indigenous tribal communities, has impressed the Chief Minister's Economic Transformation Advisory Council. The model is being considered for replication elsewhere in the State.*

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRICULTURE**

Sustainable growth or sustainability of agriculture sector has been of interest. Indian agriculture has, however, been considered sustainable before chemicalization of agriculture and farmers produced organic food. The agriculture system was based on integration of soil and related ecological systems. *An agricultural system that can overcome stress, defined as a discontinuity in the situation to which it is subject, can be referred to as sustainable.* In context of Rajasthan failure of rains can be cited as an example. The FAO referred to sustainable agriculture as successful management of resources for agriculture to satisfy changing human needs while maintaining or enhancing the quality of environment and conserving natural resources. As per Dr. Swaminathan food security is "Livelihood security at the level of each household and all members within and involves insuring both physical and economic access to balanced diet, safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, primary education and basic health care".

#### **STATE OF FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA**

- **Global Food Security (GFS) Index (2021):** India is ranked at 71st position in 2021 of 113 countries.
- **Global Hunger Index (2021):** India was ranked 101<sup>st</sup> position in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2021.
- **State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020 report** states that prevalence of undernourishment in total population in India declined from 21.7 % in 2004-06 to 14 % in 2017-19.

#### **NEED TO FOCUS ON NUTRITIONAL SECURITY**

- The goal of attaining social equity and inclusive growth can't be achieved without providing livelihood and nutritional security to the most vulnerable sections of the Indian population which consist of mostly scheduled tribes and scheduled caste.
- Ensuring equity, good quality of life and its sustainability and economic empowerment of the weaker section is an important policy goal of our development plans.

- About 8.2 % of the country's population is constituted of tribals which makes India the second largest concentration of tribal communities in the world.
- Southern Rajasthan region is one of the tribal dominated having more than 70% tribal population. The socio-economic condition of the tribal farmers does not allow them to adopt any new production technology there by poor livelihood. Most of the tribal farmers are marginal and small farmers.

#### **ABOUT INTEGRATED FARMING SYSTEM**

Integrated Farming System (IFS) is a *biologically integrated farming system that integrates natural resources and regulatory mechanisms into farming activities to achieve maximum replacement of off-farm inputs, secures sustainable production of high-quality food and other products through ecologically preferred technologies, maintains farm income, eliminates, or reduces sources of current agricultural pollution, and sustains the multiple facets of agriculture.*

#### **OBJECTIVES OF INTEGRATED FARMING SYSTEM**

1. Efficient recycling of farm and animal wastes
2. Minimizing the nutrient losses
3. Maximizing nutrient use efficiency
4. Complementary combination of farm enterprises.

#### **ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATED FARMING SYSTEM**

1. **Productivity**: Integration of crop and allied enterprises helps to increase economic yield per unit area per unit time. Intensification of cropping and allied enterprises in space and time dimension found to increase productivity.
2. **Profitability**: Produce/waste material of one enterprise can be used for other enterprise at least for crop, thus reducing the cost of production and increasing profitability per rupee investment.
3. **Sustainability**: Huge quantity of inorganic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides are required to meet the food requirement of increasing population. Abundant use of such material causes soil degradation and pollution. The productivity of soil gets drastically reduced in due course of time. IFS provides an opportunity to sustain production through organic supplementation and effective utilization of byproduct of linked components.
4. **Balanced food**: IFS links varied nature of enterprises to provide nutritious food viz., vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, fat, minerals etc. from the same area. This solves the malnutrition problem of poor peoples.
5. **Environmental Safety**: Abundant use of inorganic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides make the soil, water and environment polluted. Similarly, residues of some crops, waste material also pollute the environment after decomposition. However, in IFS waste material, by-products of one composite are effectively recycled using for other component and by-product of that component as organic manure to enrich the soil. Use of bioagent or crop protection also minimizes the pesticides.

6. **Recycling of waste:** By-product of the crop & animal husbandry can be effectively recycled for preparation of compost. Some of the by-product can be used as feed. This reduces the cost of production of one enterprise at the cost of other. Thus, net income of farmers increases.
7. **Saving energy:** Energy crises can be served to same extent by utilizing organic waste to generate biogas which can be used for cooking, lighting etc.
8. **Adoption of new technology:** Big farmers are fully aware of new technologies because of using improved varieties and innovative practices. But small and marginal farmers are not able to adopt technology for want of money. In IFS, linking of cropping with dairy, mushroom, sericulture, floriculture there is a flow of money throughout the year.
9. **Money round the year:** In conventional farming, income is expected once at the end of cropping season. However, IFS provides flow of money round the year by way of disposing eggs, milk, edible mushroom, honey, cocoons of silkworm etc.
10. **Availability of fodder, fuel and timber:** IFS utilizes every part of land. Growing of fodder trees on border will not only provide fodder but also enrich the soil by fixing atmospheric nitrogen. Multistorey cropping includes of fodder component like cowpea as second or third tier also meet the fodder crises. The current production of fuel wood is about 20 million ton which needs to be increased to eighteen folds.
11. **Employment round the year:** Crop-livestock integration increase labour requirement through the year, other activities like mushroom cultivation, sericulture, apiculture also needs labour. Hence, IFS provides employment to family members as well as outside labour throughout the year.
12. **Agro industries:** Linking of various components in IFS, the production increased to commercial level. Surplus production leads to development of agro based side industry.
13. **Increase input efficiency:** IFS provides better scope to use available inputs more efficiently. This leads to increase cost benefit ratio.
14. **Standard of living:** IFS leads to produce milk, eggs, fruits, honey, edible mushroom and generate bioenergy for farmers family and commercial purpose. There is regular flow of money at frequent interval throughout the year.
15. **Avoid degradation of forest:** There is a vast gap between demand and production of fuelwood and timber. Users encroaches/destroy the forest area to bridge the gap. Forest lands get degraded and eroded due to denudation of forest. IFS linked with afforestation and provided safety against degradation of lands, besides supplementation of fuel, timber and fodder.

## **CONCLUSION**

With 16.8% of the world's population but less than 2.4% of the world's arable land, India is confronted with several challenges in agricultural development. The achievements in increasing food grain production have been realized with high costs to natural resources and environment. Within the sustainable agriculture framework, integrated farming system (IFS) is one approach

towards transforming the idea of sustainable development from concept to reality. Execution of a series of reform measures is needed to solve these problems of sustainable agriculture. The development and implementation of integrated farming systems are of special importance for a healthy management of farm resources to enhance farm productivity and reduce environmental degradation, improve quality of life of resource poor farmers and maintain sustainability. Integrated farming system can ensure the highest standard of food production with the minimum environmental impact and improve the quality of life of farmers. More importantly, IFS help to maintain sustainability in farm production and productivity even under highly vulnerable climatic conditions with the available resources accessible to farmer. IFS has revolutionized conventional farming of livestock, aquaculture, horticulture, agro-industry and allied activities in some countries, including India.

## **2. STATE OF THE FOREST REPORT 2021**

*The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the biennial India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021.*

### **INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT (ISFR)**

Forests, and by extension trees, are an essential resource for the survival of life on Earth. Evaluating the nature of forests and keeping track of their state is critical for national wealth and development, as well as the foundations of a knowledge economy. Forest Survey of India (FSI), an organization of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India has been monitoring India's forest and tree resources through periodic assessments and presenting the findings in its biennial publication 'India State of Forest Report' (ISFR). The first State of Forest report was brought out in the year 1987. The current report, ISFR 2021 is 17th in the series. Over these years, successive reports present a continuous, comprehensive and comparative picture of India's forest and tree resources over time. The information being presented in the latest ISFR 2021 has been derived by way of complete wall to-wall mapping of the country's forest cover using remote sensing techniques, sample plot based national forest inventory and special studies carried out at national level.

Three categories of forests are surveyed – Very Dense Forests (canopy density over 70%), Moderately Dense Forests (40-70%) and Open Forests (10-40%). Scrubs (canopy density less than 10%) are also surveyed but not categorised as forests.

### **NEW IN ISFR 2021**

- It has assessed forest cover in tiger reserves, tiger corridors, and the Gir forest, which is home to the Asiatic lion, for the first time.

### **KEY TERMS:**

- **Tree cover:** It is defined as all tree patches of size less than one hectare occurring outside the recorded forest area. This covers trees in all formations including scattered trees.
- **Forest area:** It denotes the legal status of the land as per the government records, whereas the term 'forest cover' indicates presence of trees over any land.
- **Forest carbon stock:** It is the amount of carbon that has been sequestered from the atmosphere and is now stored within the forest ecosystem, mainly within living biomass and soil, and to a lesser extent also in dead wood and litter.
- **National Forest Inventory:** Knowledge of Growing Stock, or the volume of all living trees is essential to understand dynamics of forest stands, their productive capacity and their sustainable management. Such information is also important in the determination of the quantum of biomass existing in the forests and for further calculation of emission factors, carbon stock assessments and related information.

### **FINDINGS OF THE REPORT**

- **Forest cover changes:**
  - The country's forest and tree cover has increased by 1,540 square kilometres in the last two years.
  - India's forest cover has increased to 7,13,789 square kilometres, accounting for 21.71 percent of the country's land area, up from 21.67 percent in 2019.
  - Tree cover has increased by 721 sq km.
- **Performance of states:**
  - **Biggest increases:** Telangana (3.07 percent), Andhra Pradesh (2.22 percent), and Odisha (3.07 percent) have the biggest increases in forest cover (1.04 %).
  - **Deterioration:** Five states in the Northeast – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland.
  - **States with Highest Forest Area/Cover:**
    - ✓ **Area-wise:** Madhya Pradesh > Arunachal Pradesh > Chhattisgarh > Odisha > Maharashtra.
    - ✓ **Forest cover as percentage of total geographical area:** Mizoram > Arunachal Pradesh > Meghalaya > Manipur > Nagaland
- **Carbon Stocks:** The total carbon stock in the country's forests is estimated at 7,204 million tonnes, an increase of 79.4 million tonnes since 2019.
- **Mangroves:** Mangroves have shown an increase of 17 sq km. India's total mangrove cover is now 4,992 sq km.
- **Forest Prone to Fires:**

- 35.46% of the forest cover is prone to forest fires. Out of this, 2.81% is extremely prone, 7.85% is very highly prone and 11.51% is highly prone.
  - By 2030, 45-64% of forests in India will experience the effects of climate change and rising temperatures.
  - Forests in all states (except Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland) will be highly vulnerable climate hot spots. Ladakh (forest cover 0.1-0.2%) is likely to be the most affected.
- **Bamboo Forests:** Bamboo forests have grown from 13,882 million culms (stems) in 2019 to 53,336 million culms in 2021.
- **Forest cover in Tiger reserves:**
- The forest cover in tiger corridors has increased by 37.15 sq km (0.32%) between 2011-2021 but decreased by 22.6 sq km (0.04%) in tiger reserves.
  - Forest cover has increased in 20 tiger reserves in these 10 years and decreased in 32.
  - Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh has the highest forest cover, at nearly 97%.

#### **CONCERNS FROM THE REPORT**

- The area of moderately dense woods, sometimes known as "natural forests," has shrunk by 1,582 square kilometres.
- This reduction is at the time when there is a rise of 2,621 sq km in open forest areas which indicates that the country's forests are deteriorating.
- Also, scrub area has increased by 5,320 sq km – indicating the complete degradation of forests in these areas.
- The forest cover in the region has decreased by 1,020 square kilometres overall. Although the Northeast states represent just 7.98 percent of total land area, they cover 23.75 percent of total forest cover. The decline can be linked to following factors
- **Natural:** Disasters (landslides and heavy rains)
  - **Anthropogenic activities:** shifting agriculture, pressure of developmental activities and felling of trees.

### **3. T.S.R SUBRAMANIAN REPORT ON ENVIRONMENT**

*Supreme Court responding to a petition argued that environmental issues need specialised knowledge. Despite its aversion to interfering in the government's administrative affairs, the Supreme Court questioned the Centre how it plans to establish such a system. T.S.R. Subramanian*



*committee was set up in August 2014 to review the country's green laws and the procedures followed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It suggested several amendments to align with the then Government's economic development agenda. But a Parliamentary Standing Committee rejected the report on the grounds that it diluted key aspects of environmental legislation.*

#### **TSR SUBRAMANIAN COMMITTEE REPORT ON ENVIRONMENT**

- In August 2014, the Subramanian committee was formed to examine the country's green legislation and the procedures followed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- It recommended changes to practically all green legislation, including those dealing to the environment, forest, wildlife, and coastal zone clearances, to fit with the government's economic growth plan. It also suggested for another committee to review environmental laws.

#### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF TSR SUBRAMANIAN COMMITTEE**

**1. Creation of Indian Environment Service (IES):** To recruit qualified and skilled human resource in the environment sector.

**2. Establishment of Environment Management Authorities:** The finding suggests a "Environmental Laws (Management) Act" (ELMA), which called for full-time expert bodies to be established at both the federal and state levels:

- National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA)
- State Environmental Management Authority (SEMA)

**3. Project clearances**

- These agencies examine project approval in a timebound manner (using technology and experience), allowing for single-window clearance.
- It proposed a "fast track" system for "linear" projects (roads, railroads, and transmission lines), as well as "nationally significant" power and mining projects.
- It also proposed an appeals procedure for project approval decisions made by NEMA/SEMA or the MoEF&CC, with a three-month timetable to resolve appeals.

**4. Widening Environment Protection Act**

- The Air Act and the Water Act is to be subsumed within the EP Act.
- The current Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Boards, which monitor and regulate the environmental conditions imposed on enterprises, should be included into NEMA and SEMA.

**5. Evaluating Environmental Reconstruction Cost (ERC)**

- The study also suggests that a "ERC" be calculated for each project based on the environmental harm it does, and that this figure be factored into the project's cost.
- This cost must be recovered as a cess or duty from the project proponent during the life of the project.



## **6. Research and Development**

- A National Environment Research Institute "on the lines of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education" has been recommended.
- It would bring in the application of high-end technology in environment governance.

### **IMPACT OF THE REPORT**

The Centre never formally accepted this report and neither constituted a new committee as recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee. However, many of these recommendations are implicitly making their way into the process of environmental regulation. The Government has proposed rewrites to the Forest Conservation laws, set timelines to the pace at which expert committees that appraise the suitability of infrastructure projects must proceed, as well as sought to make existing laws consonant with court judgements.

## **4. ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

*Environmentalists have slammed a plan by the MOEFCC to "rank" and "incentivize" States based on how soon they can issue environmental permits to proposed infrastructure projects, claiming it violates basic environmental principles. According to centre the ranking criteria was not intended to accelerate the speed with which clearances were accorded but to encourage the SEIAA to take quicker decisions on approving or rejecting a project and adhere to timelines already specified by the provisions of the Act.*

### **ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- It is a *planning tool to integrate the environmental concerns into developmental process right at the initial stage of planning* and suggest necessary mitigation measures.
- EIA essentially refers to the assessment of environmental impacts likely to arise from a project.
- *Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (EPA)* gives power to the Central Government to take all measures that it deems necessary or expedient for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of the environment and preventing and controlling abating environmental pollution. Mandate for EIA has been under this section.

### **STAGES OF EIA**



#### **ISSUES WITH EIA PROCESS**

- **Conflict of Interest:** EIA is funded by the same agency which is implementing the project and hence the primary concern of that agency is to obtain clearance.
- **Discretion in the hands of state government:** The problem is that categorising the projects is in the hands of state level committees and these committees are formed by the state governments.
- **EIA reports are plagiarised and often spread misinformation:**
  - Many a times EIA reports are plagiarised. EIA reports of one project is copied and pasted into other defeating the whole purpose. There is also a lack of scientific approach in the way report is prepared.
  - Moreover, since there is no process for punishing the agencies tabling such dishonest EIA reports, there is no deterrence for such acts.

- **Poor quality of EIA professionals:** The individuals involved in the process lack knowledge in the field of environment and ecology.
- **Issues related to public hearing:**
  - Lack of awareness among local people about the process of EIA.
  - Notification issues due to publication of the EIA process in the local newspaper and not in every panchayat. Most of the times local people are unaware of the Public hearing meetings.
  - Unavailability of EIA in local languages affects the capacity of the majority of the rural people to participate in the process.
  - The issues raised by people in public hearings remains unanswered and they do not know what happens to the issues, nor do they know if the issues raised are reflected in public hearing reports that is presented to Ministry of Environment and forests
- **Lack of larger outlook while conducting EIA:** The EIA remains focused on very small aspect of the projects and do not assess the overall impact on ecology.

#### **CRITICISM OF EIA RATING SYSTEM**

- It could lead to negligence on behalf of State EIA authorities.
- The system will guarantee that the SEIAA's goal is to complete projects in the quickest period feasible overlooking environmental concerns.
- Because seasonal variations have an influence on a given area's biodiversity profile, penalising SEIAAs for obtaining extra information more than once may lead to them awarding clearances with insufficient data.
- It also generates artificial rivalry between states, which might lead to firms moving in areas that provide speedier environmental clearance.
- The pressures of speed, efficiency, and incentivizing environmental governance may tilt it in favour of business.

#### **DRAFT ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT RULE 2020**

MoEF&CC has published the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020, with the intention of replacing the existing EIA Notification, 2006.

#### **ISSUES PERTAINING TO DRAFT EIA NOTIFICATION 2020**

1. **Post-Facto Approval:** It means that the clearances for projects can be awarded even if they have started construction or have been running phase without securing environmental clearances.
  - This also means that any environmental damage caused by the project is likely to be waived off as the violations get legitimised. As the only remedy would be to impose a fine or punishment; but that would not reverse the detrimental consequences on the environment.
  - Post facto approval is the derogation of the fundamental principles of environmental jurisprudence and violation of the “precautionary principle,” which is a principle of environmental sustainability.

- In 2017, post-facto clearance given to projects in Tamil Nadu was struck down by the Madras high court.

**2. Public Consultation Process:** The draft notification provides for a reduction of the time period from 30 days to 20 days for the public to submit their responses during a public hearing for any application seeking environmental clearance.

- The danger is that if adequate time is not given for the preparation of views, comments and suggestions to those who would be affected by the project, then such public hearings would not be meaningful.
- Unless a public hearing is meaningful, the whole EIA process would lack transparency and credibility.
- Further, the reduction of time would particularly pose a problem in those areas where information is not easily accessible or areas in which people are not that well aware of the process itself.

**3. Compliance Report Issue:** The 2006 notification required that the project proponent submit a report every six months, showing that they are carrying out their activities as per the terms on which permission has been given.

- However, the new draft requires the promoter to submit a report only once every year.
- During this period, certain irreversible environmental, social or health consequences of the project could go unnoticed because of the extended reporting time.
- For example, if a mining project is being carried out at someplace which can be potentially hazardous to the nearby population and can contaminate the air, and water nearby, a half-yearly compliance report would better help in addressing these concerns.

**4. Bypassing EIA Process:** Through the draft notification, the central government gets the power to categorise projects as “strategic.”

- Once a project is considered as strategic, the draft notification states that no information related to such projects shall be placed in the public domain.
- Violations can only be reported suo-motu by the project proponent, or by a government authority, appraisal committee, or regulatory authority. This is against the principles of natural justice.
- Further, the draft notification states that the new construction projects up to 1,50,000 square meters (instead of the existing 20,000 square meters) do not need “detailed scrutiny” by the Expert Committee, nor do they need EIA studies and public consultation.

## **WAY FORWARD**

### **1. Independent EIA Authority**

- Which will be responsible for conducting/regulating EIAs.
- There is a need for Sector wide EIAs.
- It is vital that the EIA be prepared without the involvement of the project proponent.

### **2. Applicability:**

- Without exception, all projects that are expected to have a substantial impact on ecosystems must go through the environmental clearance process.
- No industrial developmental activity should be permitted in ecologically sensitive areas.

### **3. Public hearing:**

- All previously exempt categories of projects with environmental consequences should be subject to public hearings.
- The focus of EIA should change from natural resource consumption and exploitation to natural resource conservation.

**4. Grant of clearance:** The notification should state explicitly that the provision for site clearance does not mean that the effect Assessment agency will provide full environmental clearance.

**5. Composition of expert committees:** The present executive committees should be replaced by expert people from various stakeholder groups, who are reputed in environmental and other relevant fields.

### **6. Monitoring, compliance and institutional arrangements:**

- The EIA notification should include an automatic withdrawal of clearance if the requirements of clearance are not met, as well as more severe penalties for noncompliance. Currently, EIA notification is limited to the point at which environmental clearance is granted.
- The composition of the NGT needs to be changed to include more judicial persons from the field of environment.
- Citizen should be able to access the authority for redressal of all violation of the EIA notification as well as issues relating to non-compliance.

### **7. Capacity building:**

- NGOs, civil society groups and local communities need to build their capacities to use the EIA notification towards better decision making on projects.
- Dissemination of all information related to projects from notification to clearance to local communities and the general public.

## **5. TIGER CONSERVATION IN INDIA**

*Tiger census will commence at Bandipur and Nagarhole as part of the All-India Tiger and Mega Herbivore Estimation. This is part of the nation-wide enumeration that is held once in four years and is the fifth such exercise being taken up — the earlier ones being held in 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018.*

### **BANDIPUR NATIONAL PARK**

- It is in Chamarajanagar, Karnataka. The park is flanked by the Kabini River in the north and the Moyar River in the south. The Nugu river runs through the park.
- It shares its boundary with 3 other national parks namely Nagarahole National Park (Karnataka), Wayanad National Park (Kerala) and Mudumalai National Park (Tamil Nadu).
- It is a part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It along with Nagarahole, Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam & Wayanad constitutes the single largest Wild population of Tigers in the world.
- It harbours Indian elephant, gaur, Bengal tiger, sloth bear, mugger crocodile, Indian rock python, fourhorned antelope, golden jackal and dhole.

#### **NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK**

- It is in Kodagu and Mysore District of Karnataka. Bandipur, Mudumalai & Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary are adjacent to NNP.
- Nagarahole River flows through the park and gradually joins the Kabini River which also is a boundary between Nagarahole and Bandipur
- It lies in the Western Ghats and is a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The vegetation consists mainly of moist deciduous forests with predominating trees of teak and rosewood. Asian elephants, chital (spotted deer), Indian mouse deer, gaur, stripe-necked and ruddy mongooses, grey langur, bonnet macaque, Asian wild dog, leopard, tiger, sloth bear among others.

#### **ABOUT NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

##### **(NTCA)**

- A statutory body constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for tiger conservation.
- It is headed by the minister of MOEFCC.

##### **Objectives of NTCA:**

- Providing statutory authority to Project Tiger so that compliance of its directives becomes legal.
- Fostering accountability of Centre-State in management of Tiger Reserves, by providing a basis for MoU with States within our federal structure.
- Providing for an oversight by Parliament.
- Addressing livelihood interests of local people in areas surrounding Tiger Reserves.
- **Functions:** Its functions are to assist in population assessment of tigers, law enforcement, wildlife forensics, infrastructural development and mitigation, smart patrolling and advisory role in policy formulation.

#### **PROJECT TIGER**

- The Project Tiger launched in 1973 is a 100% centrally sponsored scheme.
- It gives fund help to the 'tiger range States', for in-situ conservation of tigers in the chosen tiger reserves.

- It has put the endangered tiger on a guaranteed path of revival by protecting it from extinction.
- The Project Tiger aims to promote an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas of tiger reserves, with inclusive people participation.

#### **Objectives of Project Tiger**

- To guarantee a viable population of tigers for financial, scientific, aesthetic, social and ecological values.
- Limit the elements which lead to the reduction of tiger habitat and to tone them down by suitable strategy.
- Site-particular eco-development to decrease the dependency of local individuals and indigenous people on tiger reserve.

#### **CONSERVATION ASSURED TIGER STANDARDS (CA|TS)**

- Launched in 2013
- Conservation Assured (CA) is a new conservation tool to set best practice standards for effective management of target species.
- CA fulfils the requirement for protected area management effectiveness in international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Programme of Work on Protected Areas and will help national governments, and their partners in conservation, to meet the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.
- CA is also linked to and partnered in the development of IUCN's Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas.
- Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards (CA|TS) scheme provides an incentive to those responsible for tiger conservation areas in the 13 tiger range countries to improve the effectiveness of management.

## **6. VOLCANIC ACTIVITY HUNGA-TONGA-HUNGAHA'APAI**

*Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcano has erupted regularly over the past few decades. During events in 2009 and 2014/15 hot jets of magma and steam exploded through the waves. A violent eruption of an underwater volcano on January 15 in Tonga kingdom has spread shock waves, quite literally, around half the world.*

#### **LOCATION OF HUNGA TONGA**



- Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha‘apai is a volcanic island in Tonga, located about 30 km south of the submarine volcano of Fonuafo‘ou and 65 km north of Tongatapu, the country's main island.
- The volcano is part of the highly active Tonga–Kermadec Islands volcanic arc, a subduction zone extending from New Zealand north-northeast to Fiji.
- It lies about 100 km above a very active seismic zone.
- The island arc is formed at the convergent boundary where the Pacific Plate subducts under the IndoAustralian Plate.

#### **REASONS FOR VIOLENT NATURE OF VOLCANOES**

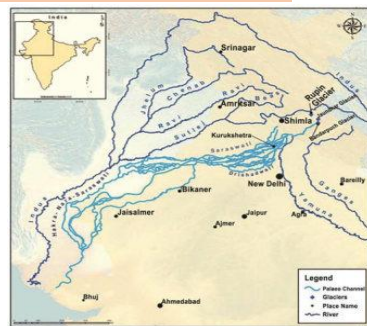
- If magma rises into sea water slowly, even at temperatures of about 1200 degrees Celsius, a thin film of steam forms between the magma and water. This provides a layer of insulation to allow the outer surface of the magma to cool.
- But this process doesn't work when magma is blasted out of the ground full of volcanic gas. When magma enters the water rapidly, any steam layers are quickly disrupted, bringing hot magma in direct contact with cold water.
- Volcano researchers call this 'fuel-coolant interaction' and it is akin to weapons-grade chemical explosions.
- Extremely violent blasts tear the magma apart. A chain reaction begins, with new magma fragments exposing fresh hot interior surfaces to water, and the explosions repeat, ultimately jetting out volcanic particles and causing blasts with supersonic speeds.
- Caldera is a crater-like depression around 5km across. Small eruptions occur mainly at the edge of the caldera, but very big ones come from the caldera itself. These big eruptions are so large the top of the erupting magma collapses inward, deepening the caldera.
- The latest eruption has stepped up the scale in terms of violence. The ash plume is already about 20km high. Most remarkably, it spread out almost concentrically over about 130km from the volcano, creating a plume with a 260km diameter, before it was distorted by the wind.
- This demonstrates a huge explosive power, one that cannot be explained by magma-water interaction alone. It shows instead that large amounts of fresh, gas-charged magma have erupted from the caldera.
- The eruption also produced a tsunami throughout Tonga and neighbouring Fiji and Samoa. Shock waves traversed many thousands of kilometres, were seen from space, and recorded in New Zealand some 2000km away. Soon after the eruption started, the sky was blocked out on Tongatapu, with ash beginning to fall.
- All these signs suggest the large Hunga caldera has awoken. Tsunamis are generated by coupled atmospheric and ocean shock waves during an explosion, but they are also readily caused by submarine landslides and caldera collapses.



## 7. SARASWATI RIVER

- Mentioned in the Rig Veda (1500 BC) and described as a "great and holy river in north-western India.
- Played important role in Vedic religion.
- Later Vedic texts such as the Tandya Brahmana and the Jaiminiya Brahmana and the Mahabharata mention that the Sarasvati dried up in a desert.
- ISRO observed that major Indus Valley Civilization urban sites at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Banawali and Rakhigarhi (Haryana), Dholavira and Lothal (Gujarat) lay along this course Gagghar-Hakra is not the real evidence of Past Saraswati River.

### **PROPOSED MAP OF SARASWATI**



**FIGURE 1** Map of the Indian subcontinent showing the modern day significant drainage channels and the palaeo-Saraswati River system which originated in the higher Himalayan terrain and was probably fed by the Rupin, the Jaundhar, and the Bandarpunch glacier complex. The Drishadvati River was a vedic time tributary of this river system. The palaeochannels of this river system show a gradual westward migration due to terrain slope modification on account of continuous northward movement of the Indian plate and subsurface tectonism

## 8. LIVING ROOT BRIDGES

*The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has underlined some green rules for the living root bridges of Meghalaya to get the UNESCO World Heritage Site tag.*

### **ABOUT LIVING ROOT BRIDGE**

- It is like a suspension bridge formed by guiding the pliable roots of the rubber fig tree (*Ficus elastica*) across a stream or river and allowing the roots to grow and strengthen over time.
- Living root bridges locally called jingkieng jri.
- They are common in the southern part of the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya.
- They are built by the local Jaintia and Khasi people

## **9. GHARIALS TO RETURN TO ORANG NATIONAL PARK**

*Recently, the government has issued notification to make Orang National Park more than thrice its existing size for Conserving Gharials.*

### **GHARIAL**

- It is a crocodilian in the family Gavialidae and among the longest of all living crocodilians.
- The gharial once thrived in all the major river systems of the northern Indian subcontinent, from the Indus River in Pakistan, the Ganges in India, the Brahmaputra River in north-eastern India and Bangladesh to the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar.
- It has been listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List since 2007.
- Adult males have a distinct boss at the end of the snout, which resembles an earthenware pot known as a ghara, hence the name "gharial"

### **ORANG NATIONAL PARK**

- It is located on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River in the Darrang and Sonitpur districts of Assam. Pachnoi river, Belsiri river and Dhanshiri River border the park and join the Brahmaputra River.
- It is also known as the mini Kaziranga National Park (IUCN site) since the two parks have a similar landscape made up of marshes, streams, and grasslands.
- It is an important habitat for the Indian One-horned Rhinoceros and Tigers.

## **10. HOGENAKKAL WATER PROJECT**

*Tamil Nadu is planning to execute the second phase of the Hogenakkal combined drinking water project.*

### **HOGENAKKAL WATER PROJECT**

- It is situated at the borders of Karnataka at 46 kms from Dharmapuri.

- At Hogenakkal, the Cauvery River enters Tamil Nadu as a big river with gushing water presentably as a natural fall.
- The river when falls on the rock below, the gushing force of water resembles like smoke emanating from the rocks.
- It is sometimes referred to as the "Niagara Falls of India".
- Tamil Nadu decision of this dam should be seen in Tamil Nadu's opposition to Mokedatu Dam project of Karnataka on the upstream of Cauvery River.



GEO IAS

## **11. ELEPHANT CORRIDORS TO BE RESTORED IN WEST BENGAL**

*The fragmented and patchy forests of south Bengal have emerged as one of the hotspots of human-elephant conflict in the country, resulting in loss of lives of both humans and pachyderms.*

### **CAUSES OF HUMAN ELEPHANT CONFLICT**

- Loss of natural habitat
- Availability of food and water bodies
- Fragmentation
- Encroachment of forest land for agriculture and related activities

### **ABOUT ELEPHANTS**

The Indian Elephant is one of the recognised sub-species of the Asian Elephant. There are three subspecies of Asian elephant which are the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan.

### **Protection Status:**

- IUCN Red List: Endangered.

- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES): Appendix I
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

## **12. SUNDARBANS IS CYCLONE CAPITAL OF INDIA: IMD REPORT**

*West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, within which the larger share of the Sundarbans is located, is impacted by cyclones the most frequently among Indian districts, found a recent study.*

### **CYCLONES IN SUNDARBANS**

- The return period of cyclonic storms in the district was 1.67 years on a scale of 1.5 to 60 years, according to the analysis by India Meteorological Department (IMD). Shorter return periods indicate more frequent cyclones.
- For severe storms, the return period was 2.61 years, the report climate hazards and vulnerability atlas of India showed.
- Purba Medinipur in West Bengal had the highest cyclone vulnerability in the country for cyclones of all intensities. Baleshwar in Orissa topped the list in terms of vulnerability to severe cyclonic storms.
- South 24 Parganas was the second-most vulnerable to all cyclones and ranked third in terms of severe cyclonic storms.

### **ABOUT SUNDARBANS**

- It is a vast tract of forest and saltwater swamp.
- It is a part of the world's largest delta, formed by the mighty rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna. Situated on the lower end of Gangetic West Bengal.
- It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the 27<sup>th</sup> Ramsar Site in India (Largest Ramsar Site in India).
- It was designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2001.
- It is the largest single block of tidal, halophytic mangrove forests in the world.
- It is about 10,000 sq. km across India and Bangladesh, of which 40% lies in India, and is home to many rare and globally threatened wildlife species such as the estuarine crocodile, Royal Bengal tiger, Water monitor lizard, Gangetic dolphin and Olive ridley turtle.
- It is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers.
- Name of Sundarbans is due to the Sundari Tree which are dominant in the Sundarbans delta. It is a species of Mangrove.

### **13. SPECIES IN NEWS**

#### **KOALA**

- The Australian government declared it as Endangered.
- The koala has suffered greatly in recent years due to habitat loss, disease and most of all, bushfires and hunting for their fur.



- 
- They are an arboreal herbivorous marsupial native to Australia.
- They are listed as Vulnerable in IUCN Red List Status

#### **INDIAN GAUR**

- Indian gaur also known as Indian bison is one of the largest extant bovines, native to South and Southeast Asia.



- They are found in evergreen forests or semi-evergreen and deciduous forests.
- Listed as Vulnerable in IUCN red list and in Schedule I of Wild Life Protection Act, 1972.
- It is the State Animal of Goa and Bihar

### **CRIMSON ROSE BUTTERFLY**

- It is a large butterfly with a mix of black, white and crimson colours on its wings and body.



- It is known to migrate along the coast, inland and crosses the sea often.
- This species found in India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.
- It is listed as the Least Concern in IUCN Red List and in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

### **CYRTODACTYLUS EXERCITUS**

- Researchers have discovered a new species of gecko belonging to the family of Cyrtodactylus exercitus from Meghalaya.



- The name was given to honour the Indian army for its service to the nation, (in Latin, exercitus means army).
- The English name of the species was given as Indian army's bent-toed gecko.
- New gecko species is strictly nocturnal species.
- India is now home to 40 species of the bent-toed gecko with the northeast accounting for 16 of them.

### **COLORADO BLUE COLUMBINES**

- It is a species of flowering plant, native to the Rocky Mountains, USA.
- It is a herbaceous perennial plant often found at elevations of 2,100 to 3,700 m.



- It is used as an ornamental plant in gardens.

### **SCOMBEROIDES PELAGICUS**

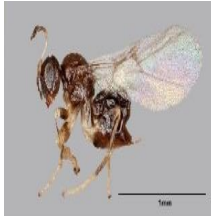
- A new carangid (Vatta) species identified from the Indian coast.
- It belongs to the 'queen fish' group and is named scomberoides pelagicus. Locally known as pola vatta.



- There are over 60 species of carangids (family of ray-finned fish) in the Indian seas.
- The newly-described one is the fifth queen fish from the Indian waters

### **NEUROTERUS VALHALLA**





- Researchers have discovered a wasp species called *Neuroterus Valhalla*.
- The scientists are yet to find the male member of the species.
- The species are spread in the US and Mexico.
- The wasp is about a millimeter long and does not sting.

### **NEW GENUS OF A PARASITIC FLOWERING PLANT**



- It has been discovered from the Nicobar group of islands.
- The genus *Septemeranthus* grows on the plant species *Horsfieldia glabra* (Blume) Warb.
- It has a distinct vegetative morphology, inflorescence architecture and floral characters.
- It is endemic only to the Nicobar group of islands.
- They play an important role as they provide food for frugivorous birds.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1 . SOLID STATE LITHIUM METAL BATTERY (SSLMB)

Volkswagen (in partnership with QuantumScape) is aiming for production of solid-state batteries by 2025.

### ISSUES WITH LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES

- Energy density of lithium-ion cell is nearly four-times higher than that of older-generation nickel-cadmium batteries.
- Lithium-ion batteries use aqueous electrolyte solutions, where ions transfer to and from between the anode (negative electrode generally made of graphite) and cathode (positive electrode made of lithium), triggering the recharge and discharge of electrons.
- While lithium-ion batteries are seen as sufficiently efficient for phones and laptops, they still lack the range that would make EVs a viable alternative to internal combustion engine.
- Thus, current lithium-ion batteries continue to suffer with long charging times and weak energy density, for heavy battery applications.
- **Safety Issues:** Lithium metal is extremely reactive. The main form of lithium corrosion are dendrites, which are branched lithium structures that grow on from the electrode and can potentially pierce through the separator on to the other end, short-circuiting the cell. In current lithium-ion batteries, the electrolyte is flammable liquid, dendrite formation can trigger a fire.

### ABOUT SOLID-STATE LITHIUM METAL BATTERIES

- **Solid-state separator:** Quantscape has developed a solid-state lithium metal battery with solid electrolyte separating the two electrodes. A solid-state battery replaces polymer separator used in conventional lithium-ion batteries with a solid-state separator.
- **Lithium Anode:** The replacement of the separator enables the use of a lithium-metal anode in place of traditional carbon/graphite anode. The lithium metal anode is more energy dense than conventional anodes, which allows the battery to store more energy in the same volume.

### ADVANTAGES OF SOLID-STATE LITHIUM METAL BATTERY

- **Higher cell energy density** by eliminating the carbon anode.
- **Lower charging time** by eliminating the need to have lithium diffuse into the carbon particles in conventional lithium-ion cells.
- Ability to undertake more charging cycles and thereby a longer life.
- Improved safety.

- These batteries are safer, cheaper alternative to traditional lithium-ion batteries. (Quantscape claims that its battery is 15-20% cheaper than lithium-ion batteries).
- Lower cost of batteries is essential for the proliferation of Electric Vehicle revolution as battery costs account for 30% of total vehicle cost.

#### **ABOUT IRON-AIR BATTERY**

- American company Form Energy has announced plans for developing a rechargeable iron-air battery capable of delivery electricity for 100 hours.
- This battery has at a claimed cost competitive with conventional power plants.
- Cost of this battery at less than the cost of lithium-ion.
- It is a utility scale or grid scale battery that can be connected to a distribution or transmission network or power generation assets directly.
- This battery can be used continuously to ensure round the clock operations of a renewable electricity grid.
- Reversible Rusting: The battery is based on the principle of 'reversible rusting'. It uses oxygen from air and converts iron metal to rust while discharging and while charging, the application of an electrical current transforms the rust back to iron and the battery releases oxygen back into air.
- However, each unit of this battery is on the size of refrigerator, which makes its application impractical in EVs.

#### **TESLA'S TABLESS LITHIUM-ION BATTERY**

- Electric Vehicle automobile maker Tesla has announced plans to develop a new 'Tabless' LithiumIon battery that could improve an EV's range and power.
- A tab is the part of the battery that forms a connection between the cell and what it is powering.
- Tesla claims that its tabless batteries will have 5 times more energy capacity, make them 6 times more powerful and enable a 16% increase in the range of the vehicle.

#### **INDIA'S EFFORTS IN BATTERY TECHNOLOGY**

- Centre is planning to install 4,000 MWh of grid-scale battery storage system at the regional load dispatch centres than control the India's power grid, primarily to balance the vagaries of renewable generation.
- Proposal for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery storage manufacturing.
- Reliance Industries plans to set up an Energy Storage Giga factory.

## **2. Dark Genome**

*Dr. S Somanath, the ISRO's new chairman, has hinted at the launch of indigenous new launch rockets known as the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).*

#### **ABOUT SMALL SATELLITE LAUNCH VEHICLE (SSLV)**

- SSLV is a small-lift launch vehicle having a payload capacity of 500 kg to Low Earth Orbit (500 km) or 300 kg to Sun-synchronous Orbit (500 km).
- It is being developed by ISRO.
- It would aid in the launch of tiny satellites and would be capable of numerous orbital drop-offs.
- A specialised launchpad dubbed the Small Satellite Launch Complex (SSLC) will be built at Srihari Kota in the future. SSLV launches will be handled after a new spaceport in Kulasekharapatnam in Tamil Nadu is completed.
- The vehicle's manufacture and launch operations will be handled by a consortium of Indian companies, including New Space India Limited, once it enters the operational phase (NSIL).
- **Propulsion:** The vehicle will launch in four stages. The first three stages will employ solid propellant based on hydroxyl-terminated polybutadiene (HTPB), with a Velocity-Trimming Module as the fourth stage (VTM).

#### **SSLV VS PSLV**

- The SSLV was created with the goal of commercially launching small satellites at a far lower cost and with a much greater launch rate than the PSLV.
- The expected high launch rate is based on a mostly automated launch operation and simplified logistics in general.
- A PSLV launch, for example, requires 600 personnel, but the SSLV launch would be controlled by a tiny team of roughly six individuals.
- Instead of months, the SSLV's launch readiness is predicted to be less than a week.
- The SSLV can launch satellites weighing up to 500 kilogrammes into low earth orbit, whereas the PSLV can launch spacecraft weighing up to 1000 kg.
- The whole project would be completed in a short amount of time, at a cost of roughly Rs 30 crore for SSLV.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF SSLV**

- SSLV is ideal for simultaneously launching several microsatellites and allowing for multiple orbital dropoffs.
- The SSLV's development and production are anticipated to foster increased collaboration between the space industry and private Indian enterprises, which is a primary goal of the space ministry.

### **3. MAGNETAR**

*An international group of researchers has succeeded in measuring for the first time the characteristics of a flare on a distant magnetar.*

#### **ABOUT RECENT STUDY**

- The studied magnetar is about 13 million light years away, in the direction of the NGC 253, a prominent galaxy in the Sculptor group of galaxies. Its flare spewed within a few tenths of a second as much energy as the Sun would shed in 100,000 years.
- It was captured accidentally in 2020, by the Atmosphere-Space Interactions Monitor instrument (ASIM) of the International Space Station.
- This is the first study to characterize such a flare from so distant a magnetar.

#### **ABOUT MAGNETARS**

- A magnetar is a rare compact type of neutron star with extremely high energy and magnetism. It is many times more massive than the Sun.
- It is characterised by extremely high magnetic field powers and emission of highly energetic X-rays and gamma rays.
- The magnetic field of such a star is very powerful about thousand times stronger than a typical neutron stars.
- They are formed when the core of a massive star undergoes gravitational collapse when it reaches the end of its life. This results in the matter being so tightly packed that even a sugar-cube sized amount of material taken from such a star weighs more than 1 billion tons, which is about the same as the weight of Mount Everest.
- As stars are so large the crushing forces created can be phenomenal. These pressures can squash the core of the star together and because of this, a neutron star – and hence a magnetar – is made of some of the densest material in the known universe.
- Magnetars are differentiated from other neutron stars by having even stronger magnetic fields, and rotating comparatively slowly, with most magnetars completing a rotation once every one to ten seconds, compared to less than one second for a typical neutron star
- Magnetars occasionally release flares with more energy in a fraction of a second than the Sun can emit in tens of thousands of years.
- The active life of a magnetar is short. Their strong magnetic fields decay after about 10,000 years, after which activity and strong X-ray emission ceases.
- They are relatively rare objects, with only about thirty having been spotted within the Milky Way so far.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF MAGNETARS**

- **Violent flare:** The observed giant flare lasted approximately 160 milliseconds and during this time 1039 joules of energy was released. The flare spewed as much energy in a tenth of a second that our Sun will radiate in 100,000 years.
- **Starquake:** Eruptions in magnetars are believed to be due to instabilities in their magnetosphere, or “starquakes” produced in their crust – a rigid, elastic layer about one

kilometre thick. This causes waves in the magnetosphere, and interaction between these waves causes dissipation of energy.

- **Collapsing of Stars:** When a massive star runs out of fuel, it cools off. This causes the pressure to drop. Gravity wins out, and the star collapses.
- **Neutron Stars** are formed when a massive star runs out of fuel and collapses. The very central region of the star – the core – collapses, crushing together every proton and electron into a neutron.
- **Magnetars** are a type of neutron star, an incredibly dense object mainly made up of tightly packed neutron, which forms from the collapsed core of a massive star during a supernova. Magnetar's magnetic field is 1000 times stronger than a typical neutron star.
- **Very Strong Magnetic Field:** What sets magnetars apart from other neutron stars is that they also have the most powerful known magnetic fields in the universe. Example, the strength of our planet's magnetic field has a value of about one Gauss, while Magnetars have magnetic fields of about a million billion Gauss.

#### 4. CHINA'S CHANG'E 5 LUNAR PROBE

*Presence of water had been confirmed by remote observation, but the lander has now detected signs of water in rocks and soil.*

##### **FINDING BY CHANG'E 5 LUNAR PROBE**

- It revealed that the moon had turned drier, owing probably to the degassing of its mantle reservoir.
- Earlier, India's Chandrayaan-1 (2008) data showed evidence for water in the exosphere of Moon, on the surface of Moon and sub-surface.
- Also, Chandrayaan-2 (2019) confirmed the presence of water ice in the permanently shadowed region on the moon.
- In the coming years, several countries, including India, are planning to launch their lunar missions.
- Reasons for renewed interest:
  - **Economic: Helium-3 (an isotope of the element helium) is abundant on the Moon,** but rare on Earth. It is a potential fuel for nuclear fusion.
  - **Base for future space exploration:** It is the best place to test how life reacts to harsh conditions of space.
  - **To study Earth:** Moon and Earth share a common past, studying it will reveal how earth's early past.

- **Some future lunar missions:** Artemis (NASA), Volatiles Investigating Polar Exploration Rover (NASA), Korea Pathfinder Lunar Orbiter (South Korea), Chandrayaan-3 (India).

#### **ABOUT CHANG'E 5**

- CHANG'E 5 is China's first lunar sample return mission.
- It had 4 components: Lander, Ascender, Orbiter and Returner.
- It was launched in November 2020, landed on Moon in December 2020, collected lunar samples from a core and returned to Earth later in December 2020.
- It was the first lunar sample return mission after USSR's Luna 24 in 1976. The mission made China the third country to return samples from the Moon after the US and USSR.

## **5. XENOTRANSPLANTATION**

*The University of Maryland School of Medicine recently stated that a genetically modified pig heart has been successfully transplanted into a patient with serious diseases.*

#### **ABOUT XENOTRANSPLANATION**

- In the 1980s, xenotransplantation, or the transplantation of organs from various species, was first attempted in humans.
- After the famous case of the American Baby Fae, who was born with a congenital cardiac abnormality and got a baboon heart in 1984, the project was abandoned.
- Pig heart valves, on the other hand, have been used to replace defective valves in humans for over 50 years. Harvesting organs from genetically modified pigs is now viewed as a potential option for meeting organ shortages.

#### **NEED FOR XENOTRANSPLANTATION**

- Transplanting desperately needed organs such as kidneys, hearts, and livers into humans from large animals such as pigs could save thousands of lives.
- Kidney dialysis treatment costs millions per year per patient. Treating these patients' with xenotransplants will lead to permanent and less costly solution.
- There are not enough living and deceased donors to supply growing need for transplantable organs.

#### **REJECTION OF XENOTRANSPLANT ORGANS**

- Human immune system responds immediately and violently to organs from non-primate animals, destroying them within minutes.
- For ex. Pig organs have chemical markers that human immune system immediately flags as foreign and starts to attack.



- Using gene therapy techniques, researchers have developed pigs that human immune system does not consider alien. That makes them resistant to attack from the human immune system.
- Researchers have also inserted human genes into pig genome. These 'transgene' pigs produce blood clotting factors in the pig organ, overcoming another cause of rejection.

### **'GALSAFE' PIGS**

- The genes responsible for the quick rejection of foreign organs by the human body were inactivated or knocked out in the donor pig using ten genetic changes.
- Six human genes were inserted to replace four pig genes.
- Pigs that have been edited to knock out a gene that codes for Alpha-gal (a sugar molecule) were utilised as "GalSafe" pigs.
- In humans, alpha-gal may cause a severe immunological reaction.
- GalSafe pigs have been thoroughly researched and are authorised for use in pharmacology by the US FDA.

### **A CRUCIAL CASE IN INDIA**

- Harvesting organs from genetically modified pigs is being considered as a feasible option for meeting the organ shortage.
- According to the health ministry, over 0.18 million individuals in India suffer from renal insufficiency each year, but only about 6,000 kidney transplants are performed each year.
- In India, between 25,000 and 30,000 liver transplants are required each year, but only approximately 1,500 are done.
- In the instance of the heart, 50,000 patients need a heart transplant due to heart failure.
- In India, however, barely 10-15 heart transplants are performed each year.

### **ISSUES WITH XENOTRANSPLANTATION**

- **Animal rights:** Many people, including animal rights organisations, are against murdering animals for the purpose of harvesting their organs for human consumption. (Ethical issue).
- **Reduced life expectancy:** In the 1960s, several organs from chimps were transplanted into individuals who were terminally sick, and as a result, they did not live much longer.
- **Religious infractions:** In Islam and many other faiths, some animals, such as pork, are absolutely banned.
- **Informed consent:** When contemplating the future applications of xenotransplantation, autonomy and informed consent are critical.
- **Threats posed by zoonoses:** The protection of public health is an important aspect to consider. We're already dealing with the most serious zoonotic disease danger.

### **CONCLUSION**

We should move in the direction of xenotransplantation of genetically modified organs very cautiously. At the same time, we should promote citizens to come forward and donate their organs

## 6. NEOCOV CORONAVIRUS

*Scientists warn that the NeoCov coronavirus identified in bats might pose a hazard to people in the future.*

### **ABOUT CORONAVIRUS**

- Coronaviruses are a big viral family that may infect both animals and humans.
- Alpha, beta, gamma, and delta are the four genera in which they are classified.
- In general, alpha and beta coronaviruses infect mammals such as bats and humans, but Gamma and Delta coronaviruses mostly infect birds.

### **INFECTING HUMANS: THROUGH 'ZOO NOTIC SPILLOVER'**

- While mammals, including bats, are typically thought to be coronavirus reservoirs, occasional spillover occurrences may occur.
- Viruses that infect animals have the potential to spread to people, a process known as zoonotic spillover.
- Spillover is assumed to be the cause of several important infectious disorders, including COVID-19.

### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

- SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic, is a member of the beta coronavirus genus.
- It is the seventh kind of coronavirus to infect people and cause serious sickness.

### **How does it affect humans?**

- The receptor-binding domain of a coronavirus determines how the virus hooks onto particular receptors on host cells.
- The distinctions in coronavirus receptor-binding domains define the kind of host receptor the virus will utilise, and hence the host that it will be able to infect.
- There are now four well-known coronavirus receptors, including ACE2, which is utilised by SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, and DPP4, which is used by MERS-CoV.

### **ABOUT NeoCoV**

- NeoCoV is a bat coronavirus that was discovered for the first time in 2011.
- It was discovered in a bat species called Neoromicia, from whence the term NeoCoV was derived.
- This species, sometimes known as aloe bats, is found in the Afro-Malagasy area.
- NeoCoV has an 85% genome sequence similarity to MERS-CoV, making it the closest known cousin of MERS-CoV.

### **NeoCoV & HUMANS**

- It's worth noting that NeoCoV can't connect with human receptors by nature, meaning that the virus can't infect people in its present form.
- NeoCoV has not yet infected people and so has not resulted in any fatalities.

#### **LATEST FINDINGS**

- Despite their similarities, MERS-CoV and NeoCoV employ distinct receptors to infect cells.
- NeoCoV, a bat coronavirus, was discovered to exploit bat ACE2 receptors to rapidly penetrate cells.
- NeoCoV's interaction with bat ACE2 receptors differs from that of other coronaviruses that engage the receptor.
- Specific modifications in NeoCoV's receptor-binding region, however, may improve the virus's ability to engage with human ACE2 receptors.
- These alterations have yet to be discovered in NeoCoV isolates collected from natural environments.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

- To avoid future outbreaks, it will be critical to keep an eye on this virus family for signs of zoonosis while continuing study into the complicated receptor utilisation of distinct coronaviruses.
- As a result, genomic monitoring of human and animal viruses is critical for understanding the viral spectrum and may offer early warning of possible spill over occurrences

## **7. NEGATIVE ION TECHNOLOGY**

*The Netherlands' Authority for Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection (ANVS) has released a statement naming several negative ion wearable goods that contain more radioactivity than is legally allowed.*

#### **ABOUT NEGATIVE ION TECHNOLOGY**

- Negative ion technology is a kind of technology that combines negative ions into personal products and is currently being pushed to improve health, energy balance, and general well-being.
- This technique is used in silicone wristbands, quantum or scalar-energy pendants, and kinesiobiology tape.
- Negative ions are formed when sunlight, radiation, air, or water breakdown oxygen.
- Radioactive elements such as uranium and thorium are often found in minerals that produce negative ions.
- Negative ions are thought to improve mood by eliciting positive emotions. They provide several mental and physical health benefits, including stress reduction, better sleeping, and

breathing, among others. However, these ions may negatively charge contaminants, leading them to collect on surfaces.

#### **CONCERNS WITH NEGATIVE ION TECHNOLOGY**

- Some of these goods had levels of radiation that were greater than the background level, and in some circumstances, required licencing.
- The radioactivity of the minerals used in goods varies, making it difficult for the user to determine how radioactive these things are.
- The spontaneous emission of radiation is referred to as radioactivity.
- The items were discovered to contain radioactive ingredients, which produce ionising radiation on a constant basis, exposing the user.
- Ionizing radiation exposure may have negative health consequences and using the items for long periods of time can cause tissue and DNA damage.
- Skin burns, acute radiation illness with cancer and hair loss, temporary decrease in white blood cells, possible chromosomal damage, and reduced resistance to infection are all possible side effects of exposure.
- Researchers from the International Atomic Energy Agency discovered that the underwear sector in Malaysia and elsewhere claimed that its "negative ion underwear" included tourmaline, monazite, and zircon, all of which are known to contain uranium and thorium.

#### **EFFORTS TO REGULATE**

- In "Radiation Protection and Safety of Radiation Sources: International Basic Safety Standards," the IAEA deems the frivolous use of radiation or radioactive substances in toys and personal jewellery or adornments, which results in an increase in activity, to be unjustified.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a "Radiation Safety for Consumer Products" special safety advice.
- In India, the Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Restrictions of 2004 include rules that are identical to the IAEA's

## **8. 'LCA MK-1A TO TAKE FLIGHT IN JUNE'**

*Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) expects to deliver all Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas in the Final Operational Clearance (FOC) variant to the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2022 while the LCA MK-1A, with specific enhancements, will take flight by middle of this year.*

#### **ABOUT LIGHT COMBAT AIRCRAFT (LCA)**

- It is an Indian 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
- In 2003, the LCA was officially named "Tejas".
- It is the smallest and lightest in its class of contemporary supersonic combat aircraft.
- Primary user: Indian Air force.

#### **VARIANTS OF LCA TEJAS**

- The Tejas currently has three production models – Tejas Mark 1, Mark 1A and trainer variant.
- The IAF currently placed an order for 40 Tejas Mark 1 and 83 Tejas Mark 1A, including Tejas trainer aircraft.
  - The IAF plans to procure 324 aircraft in all variants, including the Tejas Mark 2 currently being developed by the HAL.
- **Tejas Mark 2** is expected to be ready for series production by 2026–27.
- **Tejas Mark 2** - or Medium Weight Fighter, is an enhanced Tejas Mark 1 design which is expected to have a more powerful engine and an increased payload carrying capacity. The Tejas Mark 2 will feature a AESA radar, an on-board oxygen generation system and a built-in electronic warfare suite among other improvements to avionics.

## **9. DARK MATTER SHAPES GALAXIES**

*Scientists studying how the form of dark matter impacts the velocity of stars in the centre of certain galaxies (stellar bars) have discovered that out-of-plane bending in barred galaxies may be described by dark matter halos.*

#### **ABOUT DARK MATTER**

- Even though it has never been found, dark matter is assumed to exist throughout the universe.
- Dark matter is theorised to come from primordial black holes, which were formed in the early phases of the universe.
- Dark matter is a hypothetical form of matter, which accounts for approx. 85% of the matter in universe.
- Various astrophysical observations – including gravitational effects that accepted theories of gravity could not explain unless more matter is present that can be seen – imply dark matter's presence.
- It is called 'dark' because it does not appear to interact with electromagnetic field, which means it does not absorb, reflect or emit electromagnetic radiation. Thus, it is difficult to detect.

- So far, attempts to identify dark matter particles via underground tests or accelerator experiments, such as the world's largest accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), have failed.

#### **DARK MATTER PRESENCE IN THE UNIVERSE**

- According to gravitational laws, stars closer to the core of galaxies should rotate faster than stars on the periphery.
- In most galaxies, however, stars in the centre and stars at the outside require almost the same amount of time to complete one revolution.
- This means that something unseen and encircling the galaxies was giving the outer stars a boost, causing them to accelerate.
- Since the 1930s, this creature has remained one of cosmology's unsolved mysteries. 'Dark Matter' was the moniker given to it.
- The substance is classified as 'matter' because it exhibits gravitational pull, and it is classified as 'dark' because it does not seem to interact with light (or any part of the electromagnetic spectrum).

#### **DARK MATTER & DARK ENERGY**

- Dark matter attracts and binds galaxies together, but dark energy repels and causes our universe to expand.
- Even though both components are invisible, we know a lot more about dark matter.

#### **ABOUT DARK ENERGY**

- Nearly 15 billion years ago, the Big Bang happened and then expanded.
- Previously, scientists assumed that the Universe's expansion would slow down and collapse because of gravity.
- Data from the Hubble Telescope, on the other hand, showed that the Universe's expansion is speeding up.
- According to the researchers, the rapid expansion rate is caused by a mystery dark force or energy pushing galaxies apart.
- The phrase 'dark' is used to describe anything that is unknown.
- Since the universe's creation 15 billion years ago, the pace of expansion has changed as seen in the figure below.

# CULTURE

## 1. KARAKATTAM

- Kerala Nattukala Kshema Sabha (KNKS), an outfit that works for the promotion of local art forms in the state, has demanded that Karakattam (also known as Kumbakkali) be recognised as the agricultural art form of Kerala.
- Karakattam is a form of folk dance performed at festivals, conferences, roadshows and primarily at Mariamman festivals.
- Karakattam performances are characterised by a lot of swaying movements. Three tiers of flower arrangements of different colours sit on top of a container filled with either water, rice, or soil. All of this is balanced on the head of a Karakattam dancer while he or she dances.
- Other highlights include *blowing fire, inserting needles into eyes, and keeping balance while holding a bottle parallel to the ground on the performer's back.*
- It is one of the many creative traditions that owe their existence to Mariamman, the rain goddess.
- Although it has links with the rain goddess, the form is about more than just worship—it is also about reversing the caste dominance.
- Even though Karakattam is mostly famous in Tamil Nadu, it's performed in different parts of Kerala as well. While the dance form is not dying, it has undergone radical change and adaptation in recent years.

## 2. SANT RAVIDAS

- Sant Ravidas Jayanti is observed on **Magh Purnima**. This year marks the 645th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas.
- Born in **1377 C.E. in Varanasi**, UP, Guru Ravidas was an Indian mystic, poet, social reformer and spiritual guru.
- Also known by Raidas, Rohidas and Ruhidas - his devotional songs and verses created a lasting impact upon the **Bhakti Movement**.
- He was among the first people to oppose the Indian caste system through his poems and teachings based on spirituality and spread the message of equality.



- Around 41 poems accredited to Ravidas were included in **Adi Granth** (sacred scripture of Sikhism).
- Guru Ravidas is considered the founder of the Ravidasia religion. He was also known as the spiritual guide of Meera Bai, who is an eminent personality in the sphere of Hindu spiritualism.

### 3. RAMANUJACHARYA

- Prime Minister recently inaugurated the **Statue of Equality**, a gigantic statue of Ramanujacharya, on the outskirts of Hyderabad.
- Born in 1017 in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu, Ramanujacharya is respected as a Vedic philosopher and social reformer.
- Ramanuja revived the **Bhakti movement** and his preachings inspired other Bhakti schools of thought. He is considered to be the inspiration for poets like Annamacharya, Bhakt Ramdas, Thyagaraja, Kabir, and Meerabai.
- He went on to write 9 scriptures known as the **navaratnas**, and composed numerous commentaries on Vedic scriptures.
- Ramanuja is also credited with establishing the correct procedures for rituals performed in temples throughout India, the most famous being Tirumala and Srirangam.

#### Reasons for calling it the Statue of Equality

- He travelled across India for several decades, propagating his ideas of social equality and universal brotherhood. From the time he was a young philosopher, Ramanuja appealed for the protection of nature and its resources like air, water, and soil.
- He encouraged temples to allow everyone irrespective of caste or position in society at a time when people of many castes were not allowed to enter into temples.
- He embraced the socially marginalised and asked royal courts to treat them as equals.
- He took education to those who were deprived of it. His greatest contribution is the propagation of the concept of **vasudhaiva kutumbakam**, which translates as “All the universe is one family”.
- He spoke of universal salvation through devotion to God, compassion, humility, equality, and mutual respect, which is known as **Sri Vaishnavam Sampradaya**.
- Ramanujacharya liberated millions from social, cultural, gender, educational, and economic discrimination with the foundational conviction that every human is equal regardless of nationality, gender, race, caste, or creed.

### 4. DEVAYATNAM

- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) of Ministry of Culture recently organised a two-day international conference '**Devayatanam** – An odyssey of Indian temple architecture'.
- Devayatanam, the house of god is not only a place to worship and perform rituals but also a centre for education, fine arts, music, science & technology, rituals & traditions or every activity shaping the society.
- The conference aims to deliberate upon the philosophical, religious, social, economic, technical, scientific, art and architectural aspects of temple.
- It also intends to start a dialogue on the evolution and development of the various styles of temple architecture.
- In India, there are **3 main kinds of temple architecture**: Nagara or the Northern Style, Dravida or the Southern style, and Vesara or the Mixed styles.
- These architectures highlight India's rich history, culture, and heritage and are an integral part of Indian life and its ecosystem.
- Construction of temples started with beginning of human settlements & evolved through ages.
- Temple construction was practiced as a pious act not only in the subcontinent but the idea also travelled to the nearest neighbourhood such as south-east and east Asia.
- Approximately 10 of India's 40 UNESCO World Heritage Inscriptions are Hindu temples in different architectural styles, patterns and symmetry.

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## Miscellaneous

### 1. PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA (PMMVY)

- The government has recently announced that for the **revamped PMMVY** under Mission Shakti, the maternity benefit amounting to ₹5000 is also to be provided for **second child only if it is a girl**. This is to discourage pre-birth sex selection and promote the girl child.
- However, this has met with sharp criticism from activists who have demanded that it be universalized.

**About PMMVY:** It is a maternity benefit programme that was rolled out by Government of India in 2017.

#### Objective

- To provide partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of **cash incentives** so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the **first living child**.

#### Beneficiaries

- All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), **excluding**
  - ✓ PW&LM who are in **regular employment** with Central or State Governments or PSUs.
  - ✓ Those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.
- A beneficiary is eligible to receive benefits under the scheme **only once**.
- In case of miscarriage or still birth, the beneficiary would be eligible to claim the remaining installment(s) in event of any future pregnancy.

#### Features

- Cash incentive of Rs **5000 in three instalments**
- **1st transfer** (at pregnancy trimester) of ₹1,000 requires the mother to:
  - ✓ Register pregnancy at Anganwadi Centre (AWC) whenever she comes to know about her conception.
  - ✓ Attend at least one prenatal care session and taking **Iron-folic acid** tablets and TT1 (tetanus toxoid injection).
  - ✓ Attend at least one counselling session at the AWC or healthcare centre.
- **2nd transfer** (six months of conception) of ₹2,000 requires the mother to:
  - ✓ Attend at least one prenatal care session and TT2
- **3rd transfer** (three and a half months after delivery) of ₹2,000 requires the mother to:
  - ✓ Register the birth

- ✓ Immunize the child with OPV and BCG at birth, at six weeks and at 10 weeks.
- ✓ Attend at least two growth monitoring sessions within three months of delivery.
- Additionally, the scheme requires the mother to:
  - ✓ Exclusively breastfeed for six months and introduce complementary feeding as certified by the mother.
  - ✓ Immunize the child with OPV and DPT.

#### **Additional Cash incentive**

- The eligible beneficiaries would receive the incentive (Rs 1000) given under the **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for Institutional delivery**. So, on an average a woman gets Rs 6000

#### **Implementing authority**

- Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal implementing authority. The scheme is implemented using the platform of **Anganwadi Services scheme** of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

#### **Issues With The Revamped Provision**

- To provide maternity benefit only to the mother of the girl child is **illegal** as the **National Food Security Act, 2013** lays down that every pregnant woman and lactating mother are entitled to it.
- For second child as girl, it is to promote the birth of a girl child is nothing but posturing since it penalizes the mother for not giving birth to a girl child.
- Subsequent adding of more conditions to the scheme will prove to be a bureaucratic nightmare, which can be overcome if the scheme is universalized.
- Women will be able to access the scheme only after delivery, which will not have any impact on their nutritional uptake during the course of their pregnancy

#### **Evaluation**

- Performance- Since its inception in 2017, PMMVY has covered 2.01 crore women nationally, disbursing a total amount of Rs. 8,722 crore. But the annual estimate of the targeted beneficiaries by the Government has remained the same over the years.
- Target- While the estimated eligible population of pregnant and lactating mothers in India was 128.7 lakh for 2017-18, the target set by the Government was 51.70 lakh beneficiaries, which is only 40% of eligible population. This means that we have an exclusion error of at least 60% since 2017.
- Enrolment and Disbursement- It has witnessed a downward fall in the last two years as per the data of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. In 2020-21, more than 50% of registered beneficiaries did not receive all three instalments and there was a 9% drop in enrolment.
- Budgetary allocation- The overall budget for women and child development was reduced by 20% for 2021- 22. Additionally, Budget allocation for the PMMVY has also been reduced as it has been clubbed under SAMARTHYA along with multiple other schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila Shakti Kendra and Gender Budgeting/Research/Training. The overall budget of SAMARTHYA is ₹2,522 crore, which is nearly equivalent to the budget of PMMVY alone in the previous financial years.

- Most women continue to work during & post-pregnancy since they cannot afford to lose wages. Additionally, they also spend on out-of-pocket expenses during pregnancy.

#### **What Steps Must Be Taken For PMMVY?**

- Expansion Of Scheme: Of the total live births in India, 49.5% comprises first-order births and 29.9% are second-order births, as per Sample Registration Survey 2019. The maternity benefit under the PMMVY has to be extended to the second live birth similar to the predecessor scheme, the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana.
- Increase Maternity Benefit Amount: The current entitlement of Rs. 5,000 provided over one year amounts to one month's wage loss (as per Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act wage rate of Rs. 202). There must be an increase in the maternity benefit amount since the primary objective of the PMMVY is to provide partial wage compensation.
- To Be In Line With Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 which mandates 12 weeks of maternity leave for women with two or more children, pregnant and lactating mothers should receive 12 weeks of wage compensation amounting to Rs. 15,000 As per Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017- Women who have completed 80 days in the 12 months immediately preceding the date of her expected delivery is entitled to maternity leaves for a maximum of 26 weeks of which not more than 8 weeks shall be preceding the expected date of her delivery.
- Simplification Of Process: The reduced coverage can be attributed to the lack of awareness within targeted beneficiaries, process level challenges, requirement of a mother and child protection (MPC) card, bank passbook and registration form for each of three instalments, etc.
- Revisit The Design: There is a need to revisit the design & implementation of this scheme, drawing lessons from States like Odisha which is successfully prioritising maternal health nutrition in a pragmatic manner.

## **2. ANAEMIA MUKT BHARAT (AMB)**

- Union Minister of State for **Health and Family Welfare** provided information on Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) strategy.
- According to WHO, women in the reproductive age group and having **haemoglobin levels** lower than **12 grams per decilitre (g/dL)**, children under five with lower than **11.0 g/dL**, and men with less than **13 g/dl** are considered anaemic.

#### **Reasons For High Prevalence In India**

- **Iron-deficiency and vitamin B12-deficiency** anaemia are the two common types of anaemia in India. Among women, iron deficiency prevalence is higher than men due to menstrual iron losses and the high iron demands of a growing foetus during pregnancies.
- **Lack of millets** in the diet due to overdependence on rice and wheat, insufficient consumption of green and leafy vegetables, and dominance of packaged and processed foods which are low in nutrition could be the reasons behind high prevalence of anaemia in India.

#### **About AMB Strategy**

AMB strategy was launched in 2018 with the target to reduce anaemia in vulnerable age groups such as women, children and adolescents in **life cycle approach** by providing preventive and curative mechanisms through **6X6X6 strategy** including six target beneficiaries, six interventions and six institutional mechanisms for all stakeholders to implement the strategy.

Under AMB strategy, the interventions for tackling the problem of anaemia in all the States and UTs include:

- i) **Prophylactic Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation** in all six target age groups.
- ii) Intensified year-round **Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) Campaign** for:
- iii) Ensuring **testing and treatment of anaemia**, using *digital methods* and point of care treatment, with special focus on pregnant women and school-going adolescents.
  - ❖ **compliance to Iron Folic Acid supplementation and deworming**
  - ❖ **appropriate infant and young child feeding practices**
  - ❖ **intake of iron-rich food through diet diversity/quantity/frequency and/or fortified foods**
  - ❖ **delayed cord clamping after delivery (by 3 minutes) in health facilities**

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iv) Addressing **non-nutritional causes of anaemia** in endemic pockets with special focus on malaria, hemoglobinopathies and fluorosis.

v) Management of severe anaemia in pregnant women by administration of **IV Iron Sucrose/Blood transfusion**.

vi) Providing **incentives to ANM for identification** and follow-up of pregnant women with severe anaemia in high priority districts (HPDs)

vii) **Training** of Medical Officers and front line-workers on newer Maternal Health and Anaemia Mukh Bharat guidelines

viii) **Field level awareness** by ASHAs through community mobilization, IEC and BCC activities.

### **Evaluation**

Under Phase I, 22 states and UTs were surveyed and in a majority of these states and UTs, more than half the children and women were found to be anaemic.

### **Measures Taken By Government To Make AMB Programme More Effective**

i) Working with other line departments and ministries for strengthening implementation.

ii) Engaging National Centre of Excellence and Advanced Research on Anaemia Control (NCEAR-A) at AIIMS, Delhi in capacity building of health care providers



- iii) Strengthening supply chain and logistics.
- iv) Development of **AMB Training Toolkit** for capacity building of health care providers & recent launch of Anaemia Mukh Bharat **e-Training Modules** to facilitate training of the health care providers through virtual platform.
- v) **Health Management Information System & Mother Child Tracking System** being implemented for reporting and tracking the cases of anaemic and severely anaemic pregnant women.
- vi) **Universal Screening of Pregnant Women for Anaemia**: It is a part of Ante-Natal Care (ANC) and all pregnant women are provided **iron and folic acid tablets** during their ante-natal visits.
- vii) **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**: It has been launched to focus on conducting special ANC check up on **9th of every month** with the help of Medical officers to detect and treat cases of anaemia.
- viii) **Operationalization of Blood Bank** in District Hospitals and Blood Storage Unit in sub district facilities .
- Health is a State subject and the primary responsibility for strengthening health care services including implementation of national programs lies with the respective State/UT government. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provides financial and technical support to States/UTs under National Health Mission (NHM) as proposed during annual Programme Implementation Plan. Covid-19 pandemic has also hampered AMB programme implementation contributing to anaemia prevalence among all the age groups.

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### **3. SUPREME COURT ON DEATH PENALTY**

Supreme Court (SC) commuted the Death sentence of a man, convicted of rape and murder of a seven year old girl to life imprisonment. It may become noteworthy example to the anti-death penalty cause.

#### **Key Point Of The Judgement**

- SC has said that he shall not be entitled to premature release or remission before undergoing actual imprisonment for a period of 30 years.
- It was mentioned that it is unsafe to treat this case as rarest of rare category.
- The Court advised trial judges to consider the mitigation factors in favour of life imprisonment.

- SC referred to the evolution of the principles of penology. It further explained that penology had grown to accommodate the philosophy of safeguarding of human life.

**Penology:** It is study of punishment of crime and prison management. It is division of criminology that is connected to philosophy and practice of society in its effort to repress criminal activities.

Previous Supreme Court Judgement

#### **Jagmohan Singh v State of UP 1973**

- SC has said that deprivation of life is constitutionally permissible if that is done according to the **procedure established by law**

#### **Bachan Singh v the State of Punjab 1980**

- SC advocated the **rarest of rare doctrine**.
- According to this death penalty is not to be awarded except in rarest of rare case

#### **Macchi Singh v State of Punjab 1983**

- SC laid down certain **considerations for determining** whether a case falls under the category of rarest of rare cases or not.

#### **Shankar Kisan Rao Khade vs State of MH 2013**

- Capital punishment can be awarded only if there are **“zero mitigating circumstances”** favouring the convict. The award of death penalty should be “society-centric” and the litmus test is whether society will approve the awarding of death sentence or not.

#### **Status of Death Penalty in Indian**

- Prior to the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act (Cr PC) of 1955, the death penalty was the rule and life imprisonment an exception in India. The courts were bound to give an explanation for awarding a lighter penalty than death for capital offences.
- After the amendment of 1955, courts were at liberty to grant either death or life imprisonment.
- As per Section 354 (3) of the Cr PC, 1973 the courts are required to state reasons in writing for awarding the maximum penalty. The situation has been reversed and a life sentence is the rule and death penalty an exception in capital offences.
- As per official statistics, 720 executions have taken place in India after it became independent, which is a minuscule fraction of the people who were awarded death penalty by the trial courts.

#### **Some Laws That Provide Death Penalty As A Form Of Punishment**

- Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987: Direct or indirect abetment of sati.
- SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989: Giving false evidence leading to the execution of an innocent member belonging to SC/ ST.
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012: Rape of a minor below 12 years of age.
- Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985: Financing, producing, manufacturing as well as the sale of certain drugs for repeat offenders.
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967

- Army, Navy and Air Force Acts: For certain specified offences committed by members of the armed forces.

#### **Arguments Supporting Death Penalty**

- **Controlling Law And Order:** In 1991, Supreme Court cited its use in defending law and order as the reason for its continuance.
- **Problem of Terrorism & Neighbourhood:** India's neighbourhood is not peaceful, unlike Scandinavia. On the contrary, vested interests attempt to destabilize the very idea of our nation from across every border it shares. Moreover, cases of violent terror are constant reminders of the need to protect national stability by ensuring appropriate responses to such actions and the death penalty forms part of the national response.
- **Moral Support For Death Penalty:** A punishment cannot be judged by its impact on criminals but by its impact on those who are still innocent.
- **Retributive/Deterrence Effect:** Those who defend the death penalty often do it on the basis of retributive justice. Moreover, its alleged usefulness extends from being a potential deterrent to serving as a primordial need for retribution.
- **Rarest of rare cases:** The death penalty is imposed only in rarest of rare cases that shock the conscience of society. This is reflective in the fact that in the *last 13 years*, only four people have been executed.

#### **Arguments Against Death Penalty**

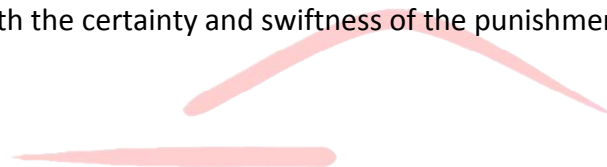
- Study has found that it has *not acted as a deterrent* against crime, which is being cited for retaining it. Infact, in US, the death penalty States have far worse homicide rates than abolitionist States. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the *certainty and swiftness of the punishment*. The death penalty has not deterred terrorism, murder or even theft.
- The death penalty is not only barbaric and immoral, it also contradicts the criminal justice system's core objectives- to *reform and rehabilitate offenders* while ensuring that the accorded punishment deters others from committing crime. With a death sentence, the cause of redistributive justice appears to be served, but what of reformatory justice?
- **Nothing is infallible.** Errors of judgement can't be avoided in court's decision. The strongest, practical argument against capital punishment is its irrevocability. The dangers are most evident from the Supreme Court's judgment in 2009 in **Santosh Kr. Bariar v. State of Maharashtra**. Here, a bench comprising Justices S.B. Sinha and Cyriac Joseph ruled that previous judgments of the Court, in which 13 death sentences were validated, were rendered *per incuriam*, or in other words were rendered in ignorance of the law laid down in Bachan Singh's case.

In 2012, 14 eminent retired judges wrote to the President pointing out that the SC has erroneously given death penalty to 15 people since 1996, of which 2 were hanged. This is the gravest known miscarriage of justice in the history of crime in independent India.

- **Problems in Implementation:** The recent *Death Penalty India Report* by the National Law University, Delhi indicates that structural flaws in our criminal procedure and criminal justice system are most pronounced in death penalty cases.
- **Arbitrary Application:** There has been an arbitrary manner/application in which death penalty is awarded by different judges (*judge-centric variations*) and the way public discourse influences such decisions.
- **Pressure Of Public Opinion On Judiciary:** In individual cases, the decision on death penalty depends on the nature of the crime, its gravity, cruelty and the number of fatalities. But in recent times, public outrage, the need for deterrence, and the clamour for a befitting punishment to render substantial justice have dominated the discourse.
- **International resolution:** In 2007, the *UN General Assembly* passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on the administration of the death penalty. Two-thirds of countries in the world has abolished it. India certainly does not need it as it serves no purpose. The evidence is all to the contrary.

#### **Way Forward**

Morality of death penalty is a debatable. It is important to understand deeply how to tackle dreadful crimes. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the certainty and swiftness of the punishment.



## **4 . HIJAB ROW AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION PRACTICES**

### **Context**

- The Karnataka High Court is hearing a clutch of petitions challenging **the government order** banning the hijab in Government Educational Institutions.
- On February 5, the Karnataka government passed an order exercising its powers under **Section 133(2) of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983**. The provision grants powers to the state to issue directives for government educational institutions to follow. In 2013, under this provision, the state had issued a directive making uniforms compulsory for education institutions.
- Referring to the 2013 directive, the latest directive specifies that **a headscarf is not part of the uniform**.

### **Grounds On Which Karnataka Government Order Is Being Challenged**

- The recent judgement is against **Article 25 (1)** which grants every person “freedom of conscience and the right to freely **profess, practice and propagate** religion”. It is the duty of state that there is no interference or obstacle to exercise this freedom. However, State can restrict the right on grounds of public order, decency, morality, health and other state interests.
- The petitioners have argued that wearing a hijab is an **expression protected under Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression. Constitutionally, a right under Article 19(1)(a) can only be limited on the “reasonable restrictions” mentioned in Article 19(2). This includes sovereignty and integrity of India, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of courts, defamation or incitement to an offence. The petitioners have argued that a student silently wearing a hijab/headscarf and attending class cannot in any manner be said to be a practice that disturbs “public order” and is only a profession of their faith.
- The petitioners have also argued that the ban on headscarves violates the **fundamental right to equality under Article 14** since other religious markers, such as a *turban worn by a Sikh*, are not explicitly prohibited.
- Hindus, Sikhs and Christians have their religious symbols. Various religious groups have used turbans, caps, strolls, vermilion marks, talismans, mangalsutra etc to signify their clan, caste, ethnicity, marital status and theological identity. Thus, Plurality and diversity exists in our society. Then why has the hijab only been chosen for this hostile discrimination? **Article 15** says the state should not discriminate against citizens on the basis of their religion, race, caste, sex and birthplace.
- Students come from different religions, castes and nations. They speak different mother tongues, eat different kinds of food and wear different kinds of clothes and ornaments. In many ways, the classroom of a government educational institution is truly representative of the society within which it is instituted, since it provides democratic access to students from all sections of society. Thus, **homogeneity must not be imposed on students in garb of dress code and** educational institutions must remain spaces of diversity and inclusivity.

#### **Views Supporting The Ban**

- SC in **Hindu Religious Endowment Madras Vs Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar** of Sri Shishur Mutt (1954) case states that term “religion” will cover **all rituals and practices integral to a religion**. It also said that “**essentiality test**” will determine the definition of core religious practices entitled to protection by freedom of religion under the Constitution. The essentiality test was followed many times by honourable Court.
  - In a 2004 ruling, SC held that the Ananda Marga sect had no fundamental right to perform Tandava dance in public streets, since it did not constitute an essential religious practice of the sect
  - While these issues are largely understood to be community-based, there are instances in which the court has applied the test to individual freedoms as well. For example, in 2016, the SC upheld the discharge of a Muslim airman from the Indian Air Force for keeping a beard.

- Armed Force Regulations, 1964, prohibits the growth of hair by Armed Forces personnel, except for “personnel whose religion prohibits cutting of hair or shaving of face”. The court essentially held that keeping a beard was not an essential part of Islamic practices.
- The Karnataka Govt states that wearing a headscarf is ***not an essential religious practice*** for Muslims that can be protected under Article 25 of the Constitution. The order *takes refuge in the cases* decided by different High Courts to hold that banning the headscarf is not violative of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of religion.
  - In **Fathima Tasneem vs State of Kerala 2018**, another Bench of HC ruled differently and held that collective rights of an institution would be given primacy over individual rights of the petitioner.
  - In **Fathema Hussain Sayed v Bharat Education Society 2003**, the Bombay High Court ruled against allowing hijab, despite the argument that wearing a headscarf is an essential religious practice which must be protected under the Constitution. The High Court referred to relevant verses from the Quran and held that the *book did not prescribe wearing of a headscarf before other women*.
- Kerala’s Muslim Educational Society (MES), which controls 150 educational institutions, has banned “any dress that covers the face” for girls on all the campuses it runs. An official circular says “The MES will not encourage any type of veil on its campus. Managers of each MES institution will have to ensure that girl students do not come to the campus with their faces covered.” If a Muslim institution has itself ban hijab, why there is so much polarisation against Karnataka government decision.
- Dozens of countries, from China to liberal democracies such as Switzerland, France and Belgium too have banned the hijab in public places in the last few years. Nearer home, the hijab is compulsory in Afghanistan and Iran, optional in Pakistan and banned in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. It is now the duty of judiciary to rise to the occasion and deliver an authoritative ruling that can guide the executive as well as citizens of the Country.

## 5 . MONEY LAUNDERING

- Supreme Court is currently examining the issues related to **misuse of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** by the government and the Enforcement Directorate (ED).
- It is also examining the constitutional validity of various provisions of PMLA for allegedly being violative of basic principles of natural justice and criminal jurisprudence.

### Allegations

- Being Used for **Ordinary Crimes**
- Lack of **Transparency and Clarity** about ED's selection of cases to investigate. Even the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) - an equivalent of the FIR – is considered an “internal document” and not given to the accused.

### Money Laundering

- Money laundering is the illegal process of converting money earned from illegal activities (such as drug trafficking) into “clean” money.
- The money from the illegal activity is considered dirty, and the process of money laundering, “launders” (cleans) it to make it look clean.
- Clean money is money that can be freely used in legitimate business operations and does not have to be hidden from the authorities.
- Hawala, bulk cash smuggling, fictional loans, shell companies and trusts, real estate, gambling, and fake invoicing are some of the common methods of money laundering.

### Process of Money Laundering

#### 1st stage

It is when the money derived through illegal activities is introduced into the formal financial system called **placement**.

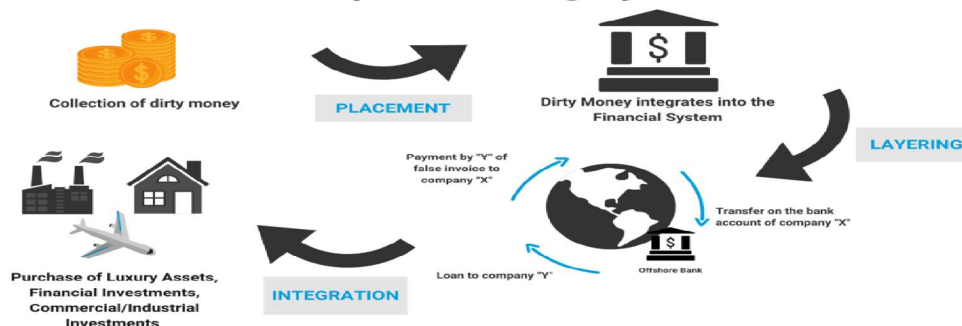
#### 2nd stage

Called **layering** involves continuous transfer of money through multiple transactions, forms, investments, or enterprises, to make it virtually impossible to trace the money back to its illegal origin.

#### 3rd final stage

Called **Integration** where the money is freely used legally without the necessity to hide it any further.

### Money Laundering Cycle



### Consequences Of Money Laundering

#### Economic Distortions

- Money laundering hurts the development of legitimate private sector through the supply of products **priced below production cost**, making it difficult for legitimate activities to compete.



- Criminals may turn enterprises (which were initially productive) into **dormant entities** to launder their funds leading to a decrease in the overall productivity of the economy.
- Furthermore, it can also cause unpredictable changes in money demand as well as high volatility in international capital flows and exchange rates.

#### **Erosion Of Financial Sector**

- Flows of large sums of laundered funds in or out of financial institutions can undermine the stability of financial markets.
- In addition, it may damage the reputation of financial institutions involved, resulting in a loss of trust and goodwill with stakeholders. In worst case scenarios, it may also result in bank failures and financial crises.

#### **Reduction In Government Revenue**

It also reduces tax revenue as it becomes difficult for the government to collect revenue from related transactions which frequently take place in the underground economy.

#### **Socio-economic Cost**

- The socio-economic effects of money laundering are many as the laundered money can be used to expand existing criminal operations and finance new ones.
- This may lead to the transfer of economic power from the market, the government and the citizens to criminals, leading to more corruption and crimes like drug trafficking and terrorism.

#### **Efforts To Combat Money Laundering**

- Large-scale money laundering schemes invariably contain cross-border elements. Since it is an international problem, international co-operation is necessary in the fight against it.
- International organisations, such as United Nations or Bank for International Settlements, took some initial steps at the end of the 1980s to address the problem.
- In 1989, **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** was established by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit, to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- Following the creation of FATF, **regional groupings** – European Union, Council of Europe, Organisation of American States, established anti-money laundering standards for their member countries
- The Caribbean, Asia, Europe and Southern Africa have also created regional antimoney laundering task force-like organisations.
- United Nations **Global Programme against Money Laundering (GPML)** was established in 1997 in response to the mandate given by the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.
- The broad objective of GPML, as a unit within United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), is to strengthen the ability of UN Member States to implement measures in anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism.

#### **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002**

- In India, PMLA 2002 was enacted to fight the criminal offence of legalizing the income/profits from an illegal source.

- The Act puts the responsibility on banking companies, financial institutions and intermediaries to verify identity of clients, maintain records and share information in prescribed form to Financial Intelligence Unit - India (FIU-IND).
- The **Enforcement Directorate** in the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, is responsible for investigating offences of money laundering under PMLA.

#### **Objectives of PMLA**

- 1) **Prevent money-laundering**
- 2) **Confiscate and seize the property obtained from money laundering**
- 3) **Prevent channelising of money into illegal activities and economic crimes**
- 4) **Deal with any other issue connected with money laundering**

#### **Offences Under PMLA**

- Various offences mentioned under Indian Penal Code, Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances(NDPS) Act, Prevention of Corruption Act, Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, Copyright Act, Trademark Act, Wildlife Protection Act, and Information Technology Act are covered under PMLA.
- The Act also ***covers trans-border crimes*** and reflects the dedication to tackle money laundering across global boundaries.
- Any person found guilty of money-laundering shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment from ***three years to seven years***.

#### **PMLA (Amendment) Act, 2012**

- The amendment seeks to treat money laundering as a **stand-alone crime**. Earlier Money Laundering was not an independent crime; rather depended on another crime, known as the '*predicate offence*' or '*scheduled offence*'
- The most crucial amendments are deletion of provisions in sub-sections (1) of **Section 17** (Search and Seizure) and **Section 18** (Search of Persons). These provisions required the pre-requisite of an **FIR or charge sheet** by other agencies that are authorised to probe the offences listed in the PMLA schedule
- An explanation is added to Section 45 that clarifies that all PMLA offences will be **cognisable and non-bailable**.
- Adds the concept of '**reporting entity**' which would include a banking company, financial institution, intermediary etc.
- It has provided for provisional attachment and confiscation/ freezing of property of any person involved in such activities

#### Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND)

- It is an independent body reporting directly to the Economic Intelligence Council (EIC) headed by Finance Minister of India.
- It was established in 2004 as the **central national agency responsible for receiving, processing and analyzing information relating to suspect financial transactions.**
- It is responsible for coordinating & strengthening efforts of national & international intelligence.
- It also undertakes investigations for pursuing the global efforts against money laundering and related crimes.

#### Enforcement Directorate

- It is a **law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.**
- It is part of Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
- The **prime objective of the ED is the enforcement of two key Acts namely, Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA) and Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002.**



## 6 . CHINA AND PAKISTAN INK NEW CPEC AGREEMENT

- China and Pakistan signed a new **agreement on industrial cooperation** as part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) plan.
- Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, was on a four-day visit to attend the opening ceremony of the 2020 Beijing Winter Olympics.
- The new industrial cooperation agreement, signed during this visit, is a key part of what is being called as Phase II of CPEC.

#### Different Phases of CPEC.

##### 1<sup>st</sup> Phase

- Various agreements such as **energy, infrastructure, port development and the railway line** construction have been signed

- In total, the economic corridor project aims to add some 17,000 megawatts of **electricity generation** at a cost of around \$34 billion. The rest of the money will be spent on **transport infrastructure**, including upgrading the railway line between the port megacity of Karachi and the northwest city of Peshawar.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Phase**

- This agreement is aimed at boosting Chinese investment in Pakistan as well as transferring Chinese industrial capacity.
- In other words, 2nd phase primarily revolves **around Special Economic Zones development and industrialisation**.

## **About China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**

- During April 2015 visit to Islamabad, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif unveiled the \$46 billion CPEC.
- CPEC quickly ballooned to \$62 billion in pledges—one-fifth of Pakistan's GDP—covering dozens of envisioned high-profile projects.
- The **corridor of 3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects links Xinjiang with Gwadar**, and also passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) where China is investing in a number of projects.
- Often described as a flagship project of **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, the stated goal of CPEC is:
  - To transform Pakistan's economy by modernizing its road, rail, air, and energy transportation systems; and
  - To connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to China's Xinjiang province and beyond by overland routes.

The BRI, launched in 2013, aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.



#### **Opaque Funding of CPEC**

- A substantial chunk of Chinese **development financing under the CPEC** consists of loans that are at or near commercial rates as opposed to grants.
- Pakistan received about half of all Chinese development finance in the form of **export buyer's credit**.
  - ✓ I.e., money lent by Chinese institutions to Pakistan in order to facilitate the purchase of **equipment and goods to be bought by Chinese implementation partners**, besides awarding contracts to Chinese.
- There was no competitive international bidding in this process.
- As much as 40% of China's lending to Pakistan does not appear on the government's books. This is because of the fact that 40% of the loans have been disbursed in a way that blurs the distinction between private and public debt, doing away with the need for its disclosure as public debt.
- Thus, the nature of Chinese financing calls for a greater transparency.
- Pakistan has given an explicit or implicit **government liability protection to Chinese investors** in the form of sovereign guarantees or guaranteed returns on equity.

## India and CPEC

### CPEC and Sovereignty of India

- This corridor is not only passing through India's territory but also posing a threat to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of India.
- It passes through Gilgit-Baltistan area of Kashmir which is occupied by Pakistan. The corridor enters into Gilgit-Baltistan through Khujerab Pass.
- This area is a part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and claimed by India.

### CPEC and Security threat to India

- Ever since the construction of the corridor is started, the Chinese military presence in the area is also embarked.
- In 2017, Chinese troops marched in the parade of Pakistan's day in Islamabad. This was the first time when Chinese military took part in any parade outside its country.
- Apart from the naval vessels deployed in Pakistan, eight submarines are also delivered to it by China. China is planning to build its 2nd naval base in Gwadar port after Djibouti in 2017.
- These activities of China are a serious security threat to India since China is encircling India into the Indian Ocean.

## India's Response

- India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK).
- As per India, the initiatives of the connectivity must be based on the universally accepted and the other recognized international norms, transparency and equality, rule of law and must respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity.

## 7. RUSSIA - CHINA TIES

Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted Russia's Vladimir Putin on the opening day of Beijing Winter Olympics. This was their first face-to-face meeting in more than two years. A Joint statement was issued after the meeting of these two leaders.

### Key Highlights Of The Joint Statement

#### A. Close Strategic Relationship Between Beijing and Moscow

- Both the countries proclaimed a deep strategic partnership to balance the malign global influence of US.
- They affirmed that their new relationship is superior to any political or military alliance of the Cold War era.

#### B. Cooperation In Technology Arena

- Both are ready to strengthen cooperation on artificial intelligence and information security.
- They announced an agreement to cooperate on building complementarity between their two global satellite navigation systems, GLONASS and BeiDou.

### **C. Gas And Oil Supply Deals**

- Russian state energy giants Gazprom and Rosneft agreed new gas and oil supply deals with Beijing worth tens of billions of dollars.
- The deals capitalise on Russia's drive to diversify its energy exports away from the West, which started in 2001 by signing of the **Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation**, paving the way for expanding economic and trade ties, including sales of defence equipment and energy by Russia to China, and Russia's backing for China's position on Taiwan.

**D. Promotion of Trade In National Currencies** because of unpredictability surrounding the use of the dollar.

### **E. Build A New International Order**

The agreements signed during the visit marked the most detailed and assertive statement of Russian and Chinese resolve to work together to build a new international order based on their own interpretations of human rights and democracy.

### **F. Promotion of Multilateralism**

The joint statement said both sides would deepen cooperation with India through *Russia-India-China (RIC) framework* and also work to boost the BRICS grouping.

## **Analysis**

### **1) Both Sides Backed Each Other Over Several Controversial Issues**

- In order to antagonise US and its allies, each side went significantly further than before in explicitly backing the other over key contentious issues.
- Russia voiced its support for China's stance that **Taiwan** is an inalienable part of China.
- Moscow and Beijing also voiced their opposition to **AUKUS alliance** between Australia, Britain and US. Both sides said it increased the danger of an arms race in the region.
- China joined Russia in calling for an end to **NATO enlargement** and supported its demand for security guarantees from the West.

### **2) Challenged The Hegemony of US**

- Without naming Washington, they criticised attempts by certain states to establish global hegemony, fan confrontation and impose their own standards of democracy.
- They also expressed concern about the advancement of US plans to develop global missile defence and deploy its elements in various regions of the world.
- They hit out at the United States, accused NATO of expansionism in Europe, and blamed US' Indo-Pacific strategy for fomenting regional tensions.



### **Drivers Behind Improved China-Russia Ties**

- Both countries want to maintain ***peace along their 4,200-kilometer border***, and do not want to go back to the years of costly and risky confrontation. By 2006, the territorial dispute was fully resolved, removing major irritant in bilateral ties.
- The ***two economies naturally complement each other***. Russia has a huge endowment of *natural resources*, but needs *technology and capital*. On the other hand, China has the potential to explore these synergies.
  - Trade between two neighbours has grown from \$10.7 billion in 2001 to nearly \$140 billion in 2021.
  - Beijing wants to ensure access to commodities transported over secure land routes from a friendly state, while Moscow wants to decrease its dependency on European markets and monetize Russia's natural resources.
  - Russia opened its doors wide for Chinese investments, and struck a USD 400 billion deal for Gazprom, the Russian state monopoly gas exporter, to supply 38 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually to China for 30 years from 2025.
- Despite significant differences between their domestic political setups, both China and Russia are ultimately **authoritarian regimes**. Issues like the imprisonment of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Russia or Beijing's human rights record in Xinjiang and Hong Kong never poison the exchanges between the two governments.
- **Parallel confrontation with United States and America's adventurism in Indo Pacific** is driving Beijing and Moscow even closer together.

### **Limitations**

- Both countries are extremely **sensitive about their strategic autonomy**, and therefore will seek to avoid entering into legally binding security guarantees like NATO.
- The two countries also have **different global security interests**.
  - For example, China is not incentivized to support Russia's annexation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine, or Moscow's military operations in Syria and Africa.
  - By the same token, Moscow has few reasons to support China on Taiwan beyond paying lip service to One China policy, or on the nine-dash line in the South China Sea.
- China and Russia are also **engaged in espionage** against each other. In 2020 and 2021, evidence mounted over the level of Chinese spies' aggression in Russia, including hacking attempts aimed at stealing designs for latest weapons systems.
- There are also **obstacles to expanding economic ties** between China and Russia.
  - The Russian investment climate is becoming increasingly hostile for foreigners.
  - *U.S. economic sanctions* against both China and Russia complicate their cooperation even further.

## **8 . US ANNOUNCES INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY**

- US President Joe Biden's administration has released its Indo-Pacific strategy. The strategy outlines Biden's vision to more firmly anchor United States in the Indo-Pacific and strengthen the region in the process.
- Its central focus is **sustained & creative collaboration** with allies, partners, and institutions, within the region and beyond it.

### **Key Highlights Of The Strategy: Goals Pursued By USA In Indo-Pacific Region**

#### **A. Advance a Free and Open Indo-Pacific by –**

- Investing in **democratic institutions, a free press, and a vibrant civil society**.
- Improving **fiscal transparency** in Indo-Pacific to expose corruption and drive reform.
- Ensuring that the **region's seas and skies** are governed and used according to international law.
- Advancing common approaches to **critical and emerging technologies**, the internet and cyber space.

#### **B. Build Connections Within And Beyond The Region**

A free and open Indo-Pacific can only be achieved if **collective capacity** is built for a new age. This will be done by:

- Deepening US **five regional treaty alliances** with Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), Philippines, and Thailand.
- Strengthening relationships with **leading regional partners**, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia etc.
- Contributing to an empowered and unified **ASEAN**.
- Strengthening the **Quad** and delivering on its commitments.
- Forging connections between the **Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic**
- Expanding U.S. diplomatic presence in Indo-Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia & Pacific Islands

#### **C. Driving Regional Prosperity by:**

- Proposing an **Indo-Pacific economic framework**, through which US will:
  - Develop new approaches to trade that meet **high labour and environmental standards**
  - Govern digital economies and cross-border data flows according to open principles, including through a new digital economy framework
  - Advance resilient and secure supply chains that are diverse, open, and predictable

- Make shared investments in **decarbonization and clean energy**
- Promoting free, fair, and open trade and investment through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (**APEC**),
- Closing the region's infrastructure gap through **Build Back Better World** with **G7 partners**.

#### **D. US Will Bolster Indo-Pacific Security By:**

- Advancing integrated deterrence.
- Deepening cooperation and enhancing interoperability with allies.
- Maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.
- Innovating to operate in rapidly evolving threat environments, including space, cyberspace, and emerging technology areas.
- Continuing to deliver on AUKUS.
- Expanding U.S. Coast Guard presence and cooperation against other transnational threats.
- Working with Congress to fund the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and the Maritime Security Initiative.

#### **E. Build Regional Resilience To Transnational Threats**

The Indo-Pacific faces major transnational challenges. These are:

- Climate change - Pacific Islands battle existential rises in sea levels.
- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Natural disasters, resource scarcity, internal conflict & governance challenges

The strategy talks about building regional resilience to 21st-century transnational threats by:

- Working with allies and partners to develop **2030 and 2050 targets and policies** consistent with limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius
- Reducing regional vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation
- Ending the COVID-19 pandemic and bolstering global health security

#### **Indo-Pacific Action Plan**

To implement this strategy, US will pursue **ten core lines of effort** in the next 12-24 months. These are:

- i) Drive new resources to the Indo-Pacific
- ii) Lead an Indo-Pacific economic framework
- iii) Reinforce deterrence
- iv) Strengthen an empowered and unified ASEAN
- v) Support India's continued rise and regional leadership
- vi) Deliver on the Quad
- vii) Expand US-Japan-RoK (Republic of Korea) cooperation
- viii) Partner to build resilience in the Pacific Islands

- ix) Support good governance and accountability
- x) Support open, resilient, secure and trustworthy technologies

#### **India Specific Observation In The Document**

- The strategy emphasised that US will continue to support India's rise and regional leadership, working with India bilaterally and through groups on a range of issues.
- The strategy plan said that US would steadily advance its **Major Defence Partnership** with India and support India's role as a net security provider. India was given the Major Defence Partner designation in 2016.
- US refers to India as a like-minded partner and **driving force in Quad**.
- It also mentions the fact that China's coercion and aggression is acute along Line of Actual Control with India.

#### **Analysis**

- The strategy leans heavily on **alliances, military deterrence and a stronger presence in Southeast Asia** to counter China's growing regional and global footprint.
- Many of the strategy's provisions appeared to be aimed at **countering China's economic clout, military power, and Belt and Road Initiative**. These are larger role for European allies in the Taiwan Strait and beyond; stronger regional trade; economic and infrastructure linkages and an empowered India.
- In a bid to support **US' outlined pivot to Asia**, the plan pledges to: open new US embassies and consulates throughout the region; expand Peace Corps; launch an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework; and expand the role of US Coast Guard.
- The strategy is **not trying to alter Beijing's thinking**. Rather, it wants to shape the strategic environment in which it operates.
- The strategy is focused on building a **balance of influence in the world that is maximally favourable to the USA and its allies**.

## **9 . DIPLOMATIC BOYCOTT OF BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS**

- **India announced a diplomatic boycott** of Beijing Winter Olympics which started on February 4.
- By doing so, India joined a growing list of countries that did not send government delegations to the Chinese capital for Winter Olympics. The other countries are US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Netherlands.
- Although India has diplomatically boycotted the Beijing games, it will continue to be represented by just one athlete, alpine skier Arif Khan.
- Doordarshan decided not to telecast live the opening & closing ceremonies of Winter Games.

#### **Important Delegations Visiting**

- **Russian President, Pakistan Prime Minister and five Presidents from Central Asia** reached for the opening of the Winter Olympics.
- The Russian President will discuss the ongoing crisis with Ukraine with the Chinese President.
- The Pakistan Prime Minister is expected to discuss investments from China and speed up the 2nd phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China also sought to discuss developing **communications satellites** for Pakistan and construction of Pakistan Space Centre.

#### **What Does Diplomatic Boycott Mean?**

- Diplomatic boycott means **a country will not send official government delegations** to Beijing during the Games.
- Given the scale of Olympics, high-ranking officials from a country's government often travel to the Olympics. These officials are often labelled as the VIP visitors.
- However, a diplomatic boycott is a ***token protest that has no impact on the sporting spectacle***. Thus, diplomatic boycott does not affect athletes' participation.
- Although many countries have boycotted, so far, no athlete has withdrawn from the Beijing games. E.g., the US even said it will fully support its athletes even as they diplomatically boycott the Winter Olympics.

#### **Reasons For Boycotting Beijing Games**

##### **China antagonised India**

- In India's case, the boycott was announced after a Chinese soldier involved in the Galwan incident was made an **Olympic torchbearer**.

##### **Diplomatic snub by western countries**

- The Western countries, led by US, made the diplomatic snub over China's alleged treatment of the Uyghur Muslims and human rights issues.

##### **Pandemic related risks**

- Some countries like Austria, New Zealand, Slovenia, Sweden and Netherlands have cited pandemic-related risks for not sending government officials.

### **Peng Shuai issue**

- Peng Shuai had accused a high-ranking communist party member, Zhang Gaoli, of sexually assaulting her. However, moments after Peng Shuai made her allegations, the posts were taken down and she disappeared from public view for days, sparking concerns about her safety.
- Many countries, including US, Australia and Germany, have cited this as one of the reasons.



#### Winter Olympics

- It is the premier competition for sports that are played on ice or snow.
- It is held every 4 years and features participants from across the world.
- Ice skating, ice hockey, skiing and figure skating are some of the popular sports that are played

#### History

- The first Winter Olympics were held in 1924 in Chamonix, France.
- Winter sports were initially played at the Summer Olympics, with the 1908 London Olympics hosting four figure skating events and Antwerp 1920 having figure skating as well as ice hockey.
- However, in 1924, a separate event was created for winter sports, called the International **Winter Sports Week**. It was held in Chamonix, France – the host country for the 1924 Summer Olympics.
- Two years later, the International Winter Sports Week in Chamonix was officially recognised as the first Winter Olympic Games.

#### India participation in the Winter Olympics

- India has been participating at the Winter Olympics since 1964.
- Jeremy Bujakowski was the first Indian to qualify for the Winter Olympics when he competed at the 1964 Games in Austria in the men's downhill alpine skiing event.
- For Beijing 2022, alpine skier Mohammad Arif Khan has won quotas in two events – slalom and giant slalom.
- He is the only Indian to have secured a place at the upcoming Games till now.

### **Current Boycott Is Different From Earlier Boycotts**

- During **1980 Moscow Olympics** and **1984 Los Angeles Games**, thousands of athletes did not participate due to the prevailing political situation at that time. However, athletes and officials from all countries will continue to take part in the Winter Olympics in Beijing unhindered.
- One of the key differences between then and now is the **commercial angle**. The Olympics are now are a billion-dollar enterprise and a complete boycott could cost athletes, broadcasters and the organisers a fortune.

### **Impact Of Current Boycott On Future Olympics**

- There are fears that the move led by the US could provoke China to do the same. The US and Australia are the hosts of the Summer Olympics in 2028 (Los Angeles) and 2032 (Brisbane), respectively.
- The US is reportedly looking to stage the Winter Olympics as well in the near future. With many key Olympic sponsors being Chinese, it could get tricky for the US bid.



## 10 . 30 YEARS OF INDIA-ISRAEL TIES

- On January 30, India and Israel marked 30 years of full diplomatic relations and launched a commemorative logo.
- The logo features the Star of David and the Ashoka Chakra- the two symbols that adorn the national flags of both countries- and forms the numeral 30 depicting the 30th anniversary of bilateral relations. (See figure beside)

### India-Israel Bilateral Relation





Both countries gained their independence from the UK within months of each other.

However, they headed in different directions for nearly four decades:

- India as a leader in **NAM** maintained close relations to **Arab world and Soviet Union**;
- Israel established close ties with the **US and Western Europe**.

The two famous foreign policy decisions of India in relation to Israel at the time of Independence included:

- India's participation in the **UN Special Committee on Palestine** and
- Its decision on Israel recognition as a State.
  - India had recognised Israel on September 17, 1950.
  - Full-fledged diplomatic relations between the countries were **established on January 29, 1992**.

### Political Relations

- President Pranab Mukherji was the first Indian President to visit Israeli in 2015.
- PM Modi undertook an historic first ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel in July 2017. During this visit, the relationship was upgraded to **a strategic level**.
- ✓ The 2017 visit was significant as it formally acknowledged the relationship at the highest levels **leaving behind hesitations of history**.
- ✓ It also reflected **India's willingness to de-hyphenate its relationship with Israel and Palestine**.
- The then PM of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu made a return visit to India in January 2018.

### Economic and Commercial Relations

- From US\$ 200 million in 1992 (comprising primarily of diamonds), merchandise trade diversified and reached US\$ 4.14 billion (excluding defence) during the period April 2020 – February 2021.
- The balance of trade is in India's favour. Also, India is Israel's **third-largest trade partner in Asia** and **seventh largest globally**.
- Though bilateral trade is dominated mainly by diamonds and chemicals, recent years has witnessed an increase in trade in areas such as electronic machinery and high-tech products; communications systems; medical equipment etc.
- **India continues to be a 'focus' country** for Israeli Government's increased trade efforts.
- Israel is also joining the India-led International Solar Alliance (ISA), to scale up the cooperation in renewable energy and partner in clean energy.

### Agriculture

- Agricultural cooperation between the two sides is formalized through **three-year action plans**.
- The two sides are currently implementing the **fifth phase of the joint action plan** (2021-23). The Fourth Action Plan (2018-2020) aimed at increasing farmers' productivity and optimization of water use efficiency.
- Twenty- nine Centers of Excellence for Horticulture are fully active in twelve Indian states.

### **Water Technology**

- Ongoing cooperation in this sector was formalized through an MOU on Water Resources Management and Development Cooperation signed in November 2016.
- Israeli company IDE has built several **desalination plants** in India. A 100 MLD per day desalination plant set up by IDE at Nemelli in Tamilnadu was commissioned in 2013.
- **Israeli drip irrigation technologies** and products are now widely used in India.

### **Defence & Security**

- There are regular exchanges between the armed forces.
- Israel has been among the top four arms suppliers (along with US, Russia and France) to India with military sales worth around \$1 billion every year. Indian armed forces have inducted a wide array of Israeli weapon systems. E.g.,
  - Phalcon AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) and Heron
  - Searcher-II and Harop drones
  - Barak anti-missile defence systems & Spyder quick reaction anti-aircraft missile system
  - India is now finalising "Project Cheetah" to arm Heron drones with laser-guided bombs

### **Cooperation in S&T and Space**

- It is overseen by the Joint Committee on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.
- During the visit of PM Modi in July 2017, an MoU for establishing **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F)** was signed.
- This MoU, with a contribution of US\$ 20 million from each side over 5 years, is playing an important role in jointly undertaking R&D projects.

### **Culture and Education**

- The relations between the two peoples go back to more than two millennia. India has welcomed Jews for several centuries and their contribution has enriched Indian culture.
- India and Israel signed a **Cultural Exchange Programme** (for the period of 2020-23) in August 2020 to facilitate bilateral cultural exchanges.

- There are approximately 1200 Indian students in Israel, mostly at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels.

#### **What Makes Israel A Good Arms Supplier To India?**

- India suffers from many constraints in defence production and acquisition including lack of technical expertise, complex bureaucracy, lack of manufacturing infrastructure etc. Israel fills these shortcomings by **supplying ready-to-use critical technologies**, even on short notices.
- Israel has always been a '**no-questions-asked supplier**', i.e., it transfers even its most advanced technology without placing limits to its use.
- The Israeli imports are instrumental for India in patrolling and surveillance purposes in peacetime and eases the operational ability of armed forces in wartime.
- The export-oriented Israeli defence industry and its openness to establishing joint ventures **complement both 'Make in India' and 'Make with India' in defence.**

