



MONTHLY

CURRENT

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AFFAIRS

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SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



1. NFHS-5

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare released the National Report of the fifth round of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). The report comprises of detailed information on key domains of population, health and family welfare and associated domains like characteristics of the population; fertility; family planning; infant and child mortality; maternal and child health; nutrition and anaemia; morbidity and healthcare; women's empowerment etc. The national report also provides data by socio-economic and other background characteristics useful for policy formulation and effective programme implementation.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT	POSSIBLE REASONS	MEASURES NEEDED
POPULATION CONTROL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Fertility Rates (TFR) has declined from 2.2 to 2.0 at national level between NFHS-4 & 5. • There are still five States in India, which are above replacement level of fertility of 2.1. They are Bihar (2.98), Meghalaya (2.91), Uttar Pradesh (2.35), Jharkhand (2.26), Manipur (2.17). • Note: Total Fertility Rate is defined as the number of children a female will have in her entire reproductive life. A TFR of 2.1 is replacement level that means population will remain stable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing availability of contraceptives • Increasing institutional deliveries • Increasing female literacy • Strong preference for nuclear families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States with high TFR like UP and Bihar are coincidentally low in literacy levels. So, increasing coverage of female literacy through "New India literacy programme" is necessary.
CHILD	• Wide	• Supply of

NUTRITION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of stunting among children under 5 years has marginally declined from 38 to 36 percent for India from NFHS-4 to 5. • The prevalence of obesity increased to 23% from 20% in the last round. 	coverage of NFSA, National nutrition mission, mid-day meal scheme helped improving the nutritional status of children, but micronutrient deficiency remained an issue due to lack of diversification in diet.	fortified food through PDS and PM POSHAN <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply of Nutricereals and pulses through PDS under NFSA. • Diversification of agriculture
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional births have increased substantially from 79 percent to 89% in India. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance based incentives to ASHA workers for promoting institutional delivery under Janani Suraksha Yojana helped in this aspect. • Working women having babies at a later age, increase in in-vitro fertility and sedentary lifestyle of mothers are some of the reasons for increasing C-section deliveries. • Public hospitals see a rise in C sections because of poor doctor patient ratio and concentration of high-risk pregnancies at places with less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C-section audits must be strictly enforced in public hospitals, whereas in private sector there is a need to check widespread
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in Births delivered by caesarean section from 17% to 21%. 		commercialisation by regulating medical practices and costs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In those states with an unmet need for C-sections where they are needed to prevent maternal deaths and poor foetal outcomes, it is necessary to improve the quality of labour rooms through schemes like LaQshya.

	doctors and less caregivers.	
SEX RATIO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex ratio of the total population (females per 1,000 males) increased to 1020 • Sex ratio at birth has improved from 919 in NFHS-4 to 929 in NFHS-5. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase in the overall sex ratio is a combination of increased life expectancy of women and improvement at sex ratio at birth. • Improvement in sex ratio at birth is a result of initiatives like "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" and implementation of "PCPNDT act". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early registration of pregnancy should be mandated to all eligible couples, so that all abortions are audited and illegal abortions are prevented.

2. WELFARE SCHEMES

Recently PM stressed on the need for efficient delivery of welfare schemes and underlined that there should be no discrimination in distribution of welfare measures to the deserving beneficiaries irrespective of their caste, religion or other affiliations. Being a welfare state, Indian government plays a key role in promoting economic and social wellbeing of its citizens in general and vulnerable sections in particular.

LIMITATIONS OF WELFARE SCHEMES

- **Identification of beneficiaries:** (1) Welfare schemes often fail to target the intended beneficiaries due to several inclusion and exclusion error. Ex. in PDS, there are prevalence of ghost BPL cards. Some States have issued more ration cards than the number of households, while some others have the problem of unidentified households. (2) Status of beneficiary is dynamic. The aim of social protection is to ensure that person comes out of below poverty at some point of time. But absence of continuous evaluation of schemes and their beneficiaries results in providing benefits to unintended beneficiaries.
- **Corruption and leakages:** Corruption and leakages lead to inefficiency in scheme implementation and make it difficult for the intended beneficiaries to gain.

- **Emphasis on outputs rather than outcomes:** Output refers to direct and measurable product of program activities, often expressed in physical terms or units. Whereas Outcomes are the collective results or qualitative improvements brought about in the delivery of these services. Ex. Construction of a school is the 'output', while increase in the literacy rate is the 'final outcome' or 'impact'.

- **Lack of awareness and participation of beneficiaries:** Demand driven and rights-based welfare schemes like PDS under NFSA or MGNREGA, can't be implemented efficiently without the awareness and participation of beneficiaries. This lack of awareness reduces the vulnerable sections to mere beneficiaries rather than partners in the development process.

- **Doesn't address the structural issues:** Some welfare schemes are supposed to be temporary in nature till the structural issues are resolved. But often populist welfare schemes become an end in themselves. Example: MGNREGA was introduced to arrest distress migration of rural people by assuring livelihood to them. However, MGNREGA scheme provides majorly unskilled manual work, it would neither result in Skill development of rural labour nor provide sustainable employment opportunity to them.

- **Hinders capacity building:** Unlimited welfare schemes may disincentivise the beneficiaries to improve their capabilities and make them reliant upon government benefits perpetually.

- **Issues with scheme design:** (1) There are too many small-small schemes which fail to make a tangible impact on a large country like India. (2) Federal competition and politicisation often paralyses schemes, for example despite its great potential Ayushman Bharat Scheme is not being implemented by some states. (3) There is limited number of schemes in urban areas and for people who often migrate in search of livelihood.

STEPS TAKEN TO OVERCOME THESE LIMITATIONS

- **Better targeting of beneficiaries:**
 - Socio-economic Caste Census (SECC) was conducted to replace the old below-poverty-line (BPL) lists to identify the potential beneficiaries of government schemes better on clear objective poverty criterion.
 - Aadhaar provided unique identity and useful in targeting the intended beneficiaries.

- **Direct beneficiary transfers (DBT):** DBTs are introduced to ensure correct funds are transferred to correct beneficiaries, reducing corruption & leakages in system. Example: JAM trinity is used to provide LPG subsidy
- **Use of technology in the implementation of welfare programmes.** Example: GeoMGNREGA uses space technology to develop a database of assets created under MGNREGS using technological interventions like mobile based photo geo-tagging and a GIS based information system for online recording and monitoring. The entire data is in public domain and ensures transparency and public disclosure.
- **Social audit:** Social auditing has been mandated for implementation of schemes like MGNREGA to increase transparency and people's participation. Meghalaya has passed a state level act for mandating Social Audit.
- **Involving Self Help Groups (SHGs):** SHGs are roped in to implement and monitor schemes like NRLM to increase transparency and awareness of the beneficiaries about their entitlements.
- **Introduction of Outcome-based budgeting:** Outcomebased budgeting (OBB) is a method of budgeting that measures the progress of each department and ministry and what they have done with its allocated budget. Outcome budgeting makes government programmes more result oriented, instead of outlay oriented.

3. MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY

*A debate on abortion rights of women arised when reports emerged indicating that Supreme Court of USA is in favour of overturning abortion rights of women granted in **Roe vs Wade judgement in 1973**. In this context let us analyse the existing legal framework for abortion in India.*

ABORTION LAWS IN INDIA

- Under **Indian Penal Code**, voluntarily causing a woman with child to miscarry is an offence attracting a jail term of up to three years or fine or both, unless it was done in good faith where the purpose was to save the life of the pregnant woman. Since this provision was highly restricting the reproductive rights of women, a law was passed to give exemptions from the above criminal provision.

MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY, ACT (1971)

This act allowed voluntary termination of pregnancy under following conditions:

- Continuation of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or cause grave injury to her physical or mental health.
- Substantial risk that the child, if born, would be seriously handicapped due to physical or mental abnormalities.
- Pregnancy is caused by rape.
- Pregnancy is due to failure of contraceptive in a **married woman**.
- Maximum time limit to terminate pregnancy – 20 weeks Though the law granted abortion rights to some extent, there were some issues with it and there was need for an amendment

NEED FOR AMENDMENT OF MTP ACT, 1971

- **Unsafe abortions:** Rigid conditions and time-limit for termination of pregnancy legally forced many to resort to illegal unsafe abortions. Example: According to a study published in Lancet Global Health, 15.6 million abortions occurred in India in 2015 of which 78% of these were outside health facilities.
- **Time delay at judiciary:** Those who wish to terminate pregnancy beyond the legal time limit had to seek court's permission. This often leads to judiciary delay and prevent women from terminating their pregnancy at the right time.
- **Technological advancements:** Most of the foetal anomalies that are detected late and MTP Act, 1971, had not kept pace with the changing times, needs and advancements in medical science. With the advancement of medical technology, there is a scope to increase the upper limit for terminating pregnancies especially for vulnerable women, and in cases of severe foetal abnormality.
- **Discriminatory to unmarried women:** Lack of choice for abortions to unmarried women due to failure of contraception.
- Keeping in view of these challenges, an amendment was made to the act in 2021

MTP AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

- **Increased legal time limit:** Increases the time for abortion from 12 weeks to 20 weeks with the advice of one registered medical practitioner (RMP) and allows abortion beyond 20 weeks for rape survivors and beyond 24 weeks in case of substantial foetal

abnormalities thereby preventing illegal abortions beyond 20 weeks through quacks involving risk to maternal health.

- **Equal rights to unmarried women:** Replaces “any married woman” with “any woman” undergoing termination of pregnancies resulting from contraception failures, thus destigmatising pregnancies outside marriage and accepting modern day relationships.
- **Reduces delay by setting up of medical boards:** The amendment **sets up state level Medical Boards to decide if a pregnancy** may be terminated after 24 weeks in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities.
- **Confidentiality:** Medical practitioners are barred from revealing the identity of women who wants to terminate pregnancies thus ensuring their right to Privacy. However, there is still a long way to ensure full reproductive rights to pregnant women.

LIMITATIONS OF MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2021

- **Section 19 of the POCSO Act** requires any person aware of a minor engaging in sex to report the matter to the local police even if it was a consensual act as the law pegs the age of consent at 18 years. Often, they are denied safe and legal termination of pregnancy due to dear of police harassment.
- It **does not cover victims of marital rape** under the category of rape survivors thereby limiting the right of women to terminate pregnancies.
- There is **no change in the process for terminating pregnancies** due to rape that have crossed the 24-week limit and the only recourse left is to get permission from SC/HC through writ petition.
- Lack of government healthcare clinics or medical professionals in remote areas leads to the prevalence of illegal abortion facilities thereby defeating the purpose of the MTP Act.

4 . NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT SURVEY (NAS) 2021

- The report assesses the health of school education system in the country by conducting comprehensive evaluation survey of children’s learning competencies at **classes III, V, VIII and X with a cycle period of three years**. The last NAS was held in 2017.
- The **National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)** has developed the Assessment Framework for gauging the competencies attained by the student’s vis-a-vis learning outcomes.
- This **national level survey would be conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)** as Assessment Administrator for Grade 3, 5, 8 and 10 students at **State Govt. schools, Govt. Aided schools, Private Unaided recognized schools and Central Government schools**.
- The report has registered a dip in performances across subjects and grades at the national level as compared to the last achievement survey conducted in 2017. This shows that the pandemic had affected teaching and learning.

5. INDIA HYPERTENSION CONTROL INITIATIVE

- Recognising that hypertension is a serious, and growing, health issue in India, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Indian Council of Medical Research, State Governments, and WHO-India began a five-year initiative to monitor and treat hypertension.
- India has committed to a “25 by 25” goal, which aims to reduce premature mortality due to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by 25% by 2025. One of the targets includes reducing the prevalence of high blood pressure by 25% by 2025.

ECONOMY

1. NATIONAL LAND MONETIZATION CORPORATION (NLMC)

In her Budget speech 2021-22, the finance minister announced setting up of an agency to carry out the monetization of the land and other non-core assets of the Government agencies and public sector undertakings (PSUs). In pursuance of the Budget announcement, National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC) has been recently set up.

UNDERSTANDING ASSET MONETISATION

- The Government agencies and PSUs own both core and non-core assets. The Core assets are the assets which are integral to the functioning of the PSUs. While the non-core assets include land and buildings.
- For example, NHAI's core assets would include the National Highways which it has built. While non-core assets would include surplus land and buildings owned by it.
- Some of these core and non-core assets may be under-utilised or unused. Selling or leasing these assets would help us unlock their value, raise capital and undertake investment for creation of new infrastructure projects.
- The monetisation of core assets is undertaken under the National Monetisation Pipeline. On the other hand, monetisation of non-core assets (sale/lease of land and buildings) would be undertaken by the National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC)

UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL MONETISATION PIPELINE (NMP)

- Government agencies and PSUs own **core infrastructure assets** which may be underutilised or unused. Some of these assets include roads, ports, airports, telecom, railways, warehousing, energy pipelines, power generation, power transmission, hospitality and sports stadiums.
- Under NMP, these core assets are leased to the private sector for longer period (say, 15 to 20 years). NMP does not involve sale of core assets. It only involves lease of core assets.
- Hence, **NMP is not privatisation** since the ownership of the assets would continue to remain with the Government. The assets would be only transferred to the private sector for limited duration of time based upon the contract.
- NMP is steered by NITI Aayog.

NATIONAL LAND MONETISATION CORPORATION

Need:

- At present, CPSEs hold considerable surplus, unused and under used non-core assets in land and buildings.

Lead Article

- Desired skill set to take on the responsibility of management and monetization of non-core assets in Government is limited

Establishment: Set up as a wholly owned Government of India company with an initial authorized share capital of Rs 5000 crore and paid-up share capital of Rs 150 crore.

Mandate:

- The surplus land and building assets of PSUs would be transferred to the NLMC. The NLMC would then undertake monetization of surplus land and building assets. As part of such an exercise, NLMC would either sell or lease the surplus land and buildings to the private sector.
- NLMC will also act as an advisory body and support other government entities and CPSEs in identifying their surplus non-core assets and monetising them in an efficient and professional manner.
- Act as a repository of best practices in land monetization.

Working Mechanism:

- Board of Directors of NLMC will comprise senior Central Government officers and eminent experts to enable professional operations and management of the company.
- The board of directors would have specialized skills and expertise required for asset monetization such as real estate market research, legal due diligence, valuation, master planning, investment banking, land management etc.

Nodal Ministry: While the National Monetisation pipeline is steered by NITI Aayog, the NLMC functions under the Department of Public Enterprises under the Ministry of Finance.

CASE STUDY

In Canada, surplus land in possession of the government is sold to the Canada Lands Company at a reasonable market value. The Canada Lands company then develops, manages, or sells the property. The company is highly profitable and pays dividends to the Canada Government every year.

BENEFITS

Unlock value of Underutilised Non-Core assets:

Various Government agencies hold land more than 5 lakh hectares. For example, the Railways and Defence

Ministries have the largest amount of government land, some of which can be monetised.

Administrative Efficiency: Monetisation of land by individual PSUs would be time-consuming exercise. However, when unutilised lands of different agencies are pooled in together by NLMC, it would be able to bring in higher economies of scale, better technical expertise and higher revenue realisation.

Raise Finances: Monetisation of land is one of the most viable options for government to raise additional finances for the creation of new infrastructure.

Efficient Utilisation of Land: Monetisation of land would lead to the efficient utilisation of unutilised land and boost urban infrastructure and economic development.

The Vijay Kelkar Committee (2014) had recommended monetising government's under-utilised land to finance infrastructure projects in urban areas.

Cascading Effects: The commercial development of unutilised land accelerates the development of real estate sector leading to planned urbanisation, boost to Tourism sector and creation of employment opportunities.

Fast track strategic disinvestment: NLMC would also facilitate monetisation of assets belonging to PSUs that have ceased operations or are in line for a strategic disinvestment. For instance, at the time of Strategic Disinvestment of Air India, it owned land and buildings worth Rs 14,000 crores. It was transferred to government's Air India Assets Holding Limited (AIAHL). Now, NLMC will undertake monetisation of such assets.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Lack of Reliable Land Inventory: Presently, there is no Centralised, updated and consistent inventory of all unutilised lands owned by Government departments and PSUs. This could complicate the process of Land monetisation.

Reluctance of Government Agencies and PSUs to demarcate land parcels as "surplus". Hence, Government agencies must be required to identify the surplus land and provide justification for holding on to surplus lands.

Realistic Valuation of land: There is a need for realistic valuation of land before undertaking its monetisation. Normally, state Governments provide for official valuation of Land. However, such valuation is usually lower than the existing market price. If land is monetised as per the official records, then

Government's revenue realisation would be lower. On the other hand, independent valuation may lead to higher unrealistic valuation and hence may discourage private sector from buying/leasing-in land.

2. TRANSFER OF DIVIDEND FROM RBI TO GOVERNMENT

Recently, the RBI has recently decided to transfer Rs 30,000 crores as dividend to the Government for the accounting year 2021-22. This is the lowest transfer of dividend from the RBI to the Government in the last 10 years.

WHY DOES THE RBI PAY THE DIVIDEND?

The RBI is a statutory body under the RBI Act, 1934. The Section 47 of the RBI Act states that profits made by the RBI from its operations must be transferred to the Centre in the form of dividends.

HOW DOES THE RBI EARN PROFITS?

The following are main sources of Income for the RBI:

- Interest on the foreign currency assets such as bonds and treasury bills of other central banks.
- Appreciation in the value of Gold held in its custody
- Interest on its holdings of G-Secs
- Interest on the loans given to the banks.
- Management commission on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government.

Note: Net profit is calculated by subtracting the operation expenditures and other expenses as stipulated in section 47 of the RBI Act.

TUSSLE BETWEEN RBI AND GOVERNMENT IN 2019

- The total asset of the RBI in 2017-18 was Rs 36 lakh crores and it comprises of the Gold, Foreign Currency Assets (FCA), Government Securities, Loans to Central and State Governments, Loans to Banks etc.
- From these assets, the RBI earns profits. Certain percentage of the profits is used to meet its own Banking and Finance expenses and later the remaining amount is transferred to its Reserves. The total reserve with the RBI in 2018-19 was around 10 lakh crores which was around 28.92% of the total assets.
- In 2019, there was tussle between RBI and Government over the transfer of its surplus Reserves.

Government wanted RBI to transfer at least 1/3 of its Reserves, but it was rejected by RBI on the grounds that it would affect its functioning as a Central bank.

- Finally, to sort out this issue, RBI had appointed **Bimal Jalan Committee to decide on the Economic Capital framework (2019)** i.e., how much Reserves should RBI maintain and how should be transferred to Government.

IDEAL SIZE OF RBI'S RESERVES

Usha Thorat committee (2004) had examined the question of what the ideal size of RBI's reserves should be and concluded that reserves should be around 18% (as against 28.92%). Subsequently, **Malegam committee (2013-14)** recommended that since the Reserves were more than the buffers needed, there was no need to make any more transfers to these funds. The entire surplus should be transferred to the Central government. Accordingly, since 2014, the RBI has been transferring the entire profits to the Centre without adding any profits to its Reserves.

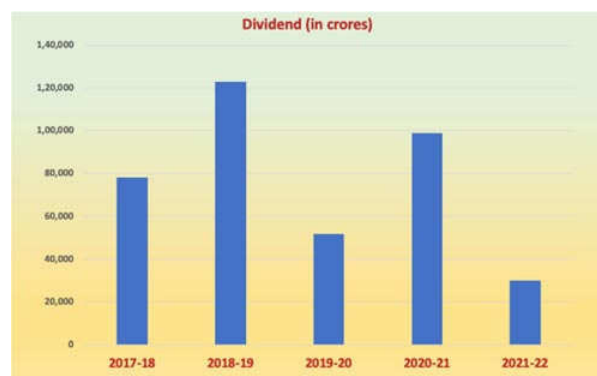
RECOMMENDATIONS OF BIMAL JALAN COMMITTEE

Composition of Economic Capital: The committee has defined Economic capital as a combination of realized equity and revaluation reserves. The realized equity is the total realized profits of the RBI while the revaluation reserves is the unrealized and notional profits of the RBI which may arise from changes in the valuation of Gold, Foreign Currency or foreign securities.

Adequacy of Economic Capital: Realized equity should be maintained at within a range of 6.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent of the RBI's balance sheet.

Transfer Policy: Committee has stated that the surplus distribution policy must take into the account the total realized equity. **Only if realized equity is above its requirement (6.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent), the entire net income should be transferable to the Government. If it is below the lower bound of requirement, risk provisioning will be made to the extent necessary and only the residual net income should be transferred to the Government.**

TREND IN TRANSFER OF DIVIDENDS TO GOVERNMENT



REASONS FOR LOWER TRANSFER OF PROFITS IN

21-22 In the year 2021-22, RBI sucked out excess liquidity from the economy through Reverse Repo window. When the RBI sucks out money through the Reverse Repo, RBI is required to pay interest to Banks. Hence, it would lead to increase in RBI's expenditure and decrease in its profits. Hence, lower surplus transfer is due to RBI's absorption of huge liquidity from Banks due to Reverse Repo window.

3 . INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT TRUSTS (InvITs)

As part of National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), Government is planning to set up Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) for railways and ports. Such a move comes after the success of InvITs set up by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and PowerGrid.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT TRUSTS (InvITs)

- A mutual fund company pools in money from the retail investors and invests that money in the financial market in the form of shares, bonds, debentures etc. Profit earned from such investments is in turn distributed among the investors.
- An Infrastructure investment trust (InvIT)/Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) is like Mutual fund. However, it invests pooled money of investors in infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, airports etc.
- Profit earned from such investments is distributed among the investors in the form of dividend. Both REITs & InvITs are regulated by SEBI and accordingly, SEBI has notified SEBI (Infrastructure

Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 to regulate their working.

WORKING MECHANISM OF INVITS

Step 1: Assets created by Government which are operational i.e., Brownfield assets are transferred to the REITs/InvITs. For example, NHAI would set up its own InvIT. Certain identified National Highways which are built by NHAI and have toll collection potential are transferred to NHAI InvIT.

Step 2: REITs/InvITs raise money from Retail investors, Institutional investors and foreign investors. In this case, the NHAI InvIT would raise money from the investors. Certain amount of money would be transferred to NHAI, which can then use the money for creation of new infrastructure assets i.e., new National Highways.

Step 3: NHAI InvIT would manage the National Highways transferred to it. Toll revenue collected from such National highways is distributed among the investors. Apart from that, certain amount of money is also invested in (a) new National Highway projects (b) Buy shares of infrastructure companies (c) Invest in G-Secs.

Step 4: Profits earned by InvITs are distributed among the investors.

SEBI GUIDELINES ON InvITs

- Earlier, the minimum amount to invest in the REIT was Rs 50,000, and Rs 1 lakh in the case of InvIT. However, recently, SEBI has lowered the minimum amount to Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000.
- Minimum 80% of the pooled money of InvITs should be invested in completed revenue generating infrastructure projects while the balance 20% can be invested in under construction projects, equity shares of infrastructure companies, G-Secs etc.
- 90% of profits generated by InvITs should be distributed among investors in the form of dividend.

ADVANTAGES OF InvITs

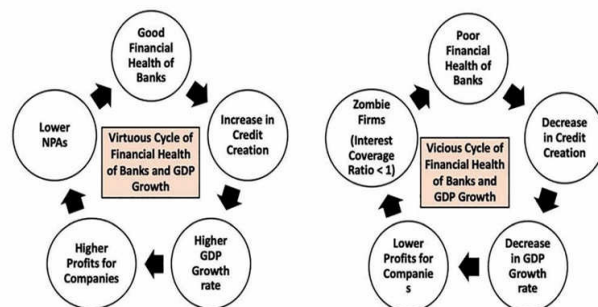
Raise capital for Asset Creation: InvITs would provide the much-needed long term financing for the infrastructure sector projects in India. This would reduce the present burden on the banks and NBFCs and help them address the problem of Asset-Liability Mismatch (ALM).

Benefits to retail investors: Small retail investors would be able to invest in long term infrastructure projects and earn dividend without any hassles. The investors are allowed to trade their investments on the stock exchanges facilitating easier entry and exit.

4 . CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IBC

According to the latest data provided by Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the financial creditors recovered only around 10% of their total claims during the January-March 2022. This is the lowest realization under the IBC in a single quarter.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINANCIAL HEALTH OF BANKS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



EVOLUTION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO DEAL WITH NON-PERFORMING ASSETS (NPAs)



Rationale: The IBC Code was introduced to consolidate all the existing laws related to Insolvency and Bankruptcy in India and to simplify the process of insolvency resolution.

Coverage: The IBC code is applicable to Companies, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), Partnership firms and Individuals. However, it is not applicable to Banks. That means if a Bank is under financial crisis and not able to pay money to depositors, then in that case depositors cannot drag banks under IBC.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

Insolvency Professionals to administer the resolution process, manage assets of debtor, and provide information for creditors to assist them in decision making.

Insolvency Professional Agencies to conduct examinations to certify the insolvency professionals.

Information Utilities to report financial information of the debt owed to them by the debtor.

Adjudicating authorities: National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT) for companies; and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) for individuals.

Committee of Creditors (CoC) may either decide to restructure the debtor's debt by preparing a resolution plan or liquidate the debtor's assets. However, such a decision must be approved by at least 66% of the votes. (Earlier threshold- 75%).

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board to regulate insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities set up under the Code.

PROCEDURE

Insolvency Resolution Process (IRP): When a default occurs, the resolution process may be initiated either by the debtor or creditor before the adjudicating authority. The NCLT appoints an insolvency professional to administer the IRP. The Resolution Professional identifies the financial creditors and constitutes a Committee of Creditors (CoC). The CoC would prepare the resolution plan for the restructuring the loans of the defaulted borrower. However, such a resolution plan must be approved by at least 66% of the votes in the committee of creditors.

Liquidation (Sale of Assets) would take place if the Committee of Creditors fail to produce a resolution plan within the time limit of 330 days.

HITS AND MISSES OF IBC, 2016

HITS	MISSES
1. Higher Recovery rate of 45% in comparison to recovery rate of 26% in the earlier regime. 2. Time taken to close the cases: Around 1 year in comparison to 3-4 years earlier. 3. Improvement in Ease of Doing Business 4. Addresses the Chakravyuha challenge of Indian Economy: • 1991 LPG Reforms has enabled easier entry of private sector but made the exit difficult. • Old Inefficient firms continue to operate with highly efficient firms leading to misallocation of factors of production • IBC has enabled faster exit of old inefficient firms 5. Behavioral Change 1. Fear of losing control of the company forces the promoters to operate at highest level of efficiency. 2. Encourages the borrowers to settle dues at	1. Case Closure: Only 60% of the cases closed. 2. Mode of Case Closure: Majority of cases closed through liquidation; Few cases closed due to Resolution. 3. Recovery rates: Exclusion of large recovery cases such as Bhushan Steel, Essar Steel etc. would lead to recovery rate of around 35-36%. 4. Delay in admission of Applications and Approval of Resolution plans 5. Infrastructural issues: Less number of NCLTs; Delay in appointments; Higher vacancies etc.

the earliest.

5. BAN ON WHEAT EXPORTS

*The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has recently issued notification to ban the export of wheat to control **External Sector** inflation and ensure food security. While the Government's move is expected to increase domestic availability of wheat, some of the economists have highlighted that it would adversely affect agricultural exports and hurt farmers.*

TRENDS IN WHEAT PRODUCTION

Top Global Producers: China, India and Russia. These 3 countries alone account for 40% of global wheat production. Top Exporters: Russia (20%), USA and Canada.

DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Area under Wheat: Wheat accounts for second largest percentage of area under cultivation (16%) after Rice. Stagnation in percentage of area under Wheat in the last decade.

Production: Fluctuating trend in the last decade i.e., increased in some years while it decreased in others. But overall, there was increase in production from 86 MT (2010-11) to 108 MT (2019-20). Top Wheat producing States: UP, MP and Punjab.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR BAN ON EXPORTS

Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:

- Empowers Centre to regulate Foreign Trade
- Enables Centre to announce Foreign Trade Policy
- Prohibit or restrict Imports and Exports
- Empowers Centre to appoint Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) to exercise powers on behalf of the Centre. Hence, the DGFT issues notification for ban on export of Goods from India.

WHY EXPORT OF WHEAT HAS BEEN BANNED?

The Government has banned export of wheat to increase its domestic availability, control rising inflation and ensure food security. Lower Domestic Production: Unprecedented heatwaves across the north, west and central parts of the country, have caused substantial loss to the yield this year. The overall production of wheat is estimated to reduce by 3% for the first time since 2015-16. Impact of Russia-Ukraine War: Russia and Ukraine account for around 25% of the global wheat exports. The Russia-Ukraine

war has led to supply chain disruptions leading to increase in global wheat prices. The Indian exporters took advantage of higher global wheat prices leading to increase in wheat exports from India. Lower Procurement of wheat by Food Corporation of India (FCI): Wheat procurement by FCI has reduced to 15-year low in the current marketing season. The lower procurement of wheat may make it difficult for us to meet our wheat requirements under Public Distribution System (PDS), mid-day meals and other welfare measures.

PROBLEMS WITH BAN ON WHEAT EXPORTS

Lost Opportunity: Wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine went to countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Nigeria, Italy and Bangladesh. The prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict was an opportunity for India to tap this market to boost agricultural exports from India. **Adequate Wheat Stock:** Presently, India has 190 lakh tonnes of wheat stocks against a buffer norm of 75 lakh tonnes. After meeting the requirement of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and welfare schemes, India would have stocks of 80 lakh tonnes of wheat in April 2023, well above the minimum requirement of 75 lakh tonnes as buffer stock. **Adverse impact on farmers:** The increase in wheat exports from India could have benefitted the Indian farmers in terms of higher prices. **Adverse Impact on Agricultural Exports:** The sudden ban on wheat exports has dented India's global image as a reliable exporter of agricultural commodities.

WAY FORWARD

Rather than outright ban, a regulated wheat export policy could have been more appropriate. To ensure adequate wheat supply in the domestic market, the Government should have declared bonus over and above the Minimum support price (MSP). This would have ensured adequate procurement accompanied by higher prices for the farmers.

6. DECLINE IN INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

India's Foreign exchange Reserves has dropped to below \$ 600 bn due to rise in global crude oil prices and FPI outflows.

COMPONENTS OF FOREX RESERVES

Forex reserves in India comprise of **Foreign Exchange assets (FEAs)**, **Gold**, **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)** and **Reserve Position in the IMF**.

Foreign Exchange assets (FEAs): Consists of major global currencies + Investments in US Treasury bonds, bonds of other selected governments, deposits with foreign central and commercial banks. Even though, Foreign Exchange assets (FEAs) is maintained in major currencies, the foreign exchange reserves are denominated and expressed in US dollar terms.

Reserve Position in the IMF: Subscription of quota consists of two components: (i) foreign exchange component and (ii) domestic currency component. Under the foreign exchange component, a member is required to pay 25 per cent of its quota in SDRs or in foreign currencies. This is termed as "reserve position in the IMF or reserve tranche" and is part of the member country's reserve assets.

Different components of Forex Reserves (in decreasing order): Foreign Exchange assets (FEAs) account for the highest share followed by Gold, SDR and Reserve Position in IMF.

UNDERSTANDING ADEQUACY OF FOREX RESERVES

Import Cover: Number of months of imports that could be paid for by Forex reserves. **Greenspan-Guidotti rule:** Forex Reserves should be sufficient to pay the short-term External Debt. **Reasons for decrease in the Forex Reserves:** The rise in global crude oil prices and FPI outflows has led to Rupee Depreciation. The Rupee value has hit all time low of 77 against US dollar in May 2022.

To check Rupee depreciation, the RBI has been selling dollars from the forex reserves. Hence, RBI's intervention in the forex market for managing the volatility in the exchange rate has led to decrease in Forex Reserves.

7. IMF INCREASES WEIGHT OF DOLLAR & YUAN IN SDR BASKET

Recently, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed the quinquennial review of the method of valuation of the basket of currencies that make up the Special Drawing Right (SDR). Based upon the review, the IMF decided to increase the weightage of dollar and Yuan in the SDR basket.

SPECIAL DRAWING RIGHTS (SDRs):

The SDRs was created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as an international reserve asset in the year 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves.

The SDR is a basket of 5 currencies- Dollar, Euro, Pound, Yen and Yuan. The SDRs are allocated to member countries in proportion to their IMF quotas. The value of SDR is set daily by the IMF based on exchange rates between the currencies included in SDR. The value of SDR is denominated in terms of dollars.

Uses of SDRs:

- SDRs can be held as part of Forex Reserves.
- SDRs can be exchanged into other freely usable currencies among themselves. This signifies that SDR is neither claim nor currency of IMF Rather; it is potential claim on freely usable currencies of IMF members.
- IMF members can also use SDRs in their transactions with IMF such as repayment of loans, payment of interest, payment for increasing their IMF quota and so on.
- Members can sell a part or all their SDR allocations.

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION OF CURRENCY IN SDR BASKET

- **Export Criterion:** Member of IMF and one of the Top 5 world exporters.
- **Freely usable:** Currency must be widely used to make payments for international transactions

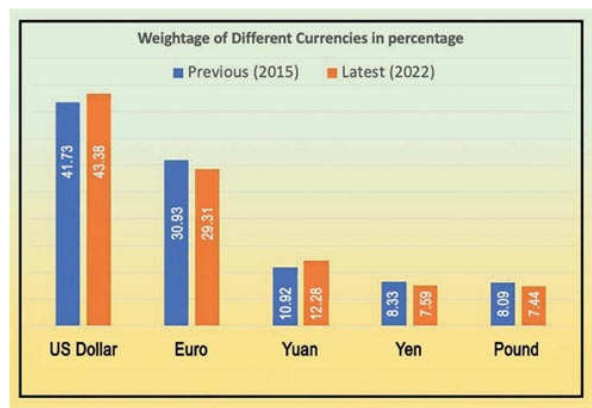
WEIGHTAGE OF DIFFERENT CURRENCIES IN SDR BASKET

The different currencies which are part of SDR are given a weightage based upon 4 criteria:

- Volume of exports in that currency
- Forex reserve holdings denominated in that currency
- Foreign exchange turnover of that currency
- Sum of international banking liabilities and debt securities denominated in that currency.

REVIEW OF SDR BASKET

The SDR currency basket is reviewed every five years i.e., on the quinquennial basis by the Executive Board of the IMF. In the last review conducted in 2015, the IMF had decided to include Yuan in the SDR currency basket. In the recent review, the IMF has decided to increase the weightage of Dollars and Yuan in the SDR basket.



8 . EXPORT OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FROM INDIA

Exports from India have crossed \$ 400 bn for the first time in 2021-22. One of the reasons for the increase in exports is due to increase in export of Petroleum products from India.

GLOBAL PRODUCTION OF CRUDE OIL

Countries with highest Crude oil Reserves: Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran

Top Producers of Crude oil: USA, Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Top Consumers of Crude Oil: US, China and India
Top Exporters of Crude oil: Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iraq

DOMESTIC PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

The Crude oil imported into India is in turn processed into petroleum products such as Petrol, Diesel, Aviation Turbine fuel, Kerosene, Fuel oil, Naphtha, Paints, Lubricants etc. Almost 80% of the petroleum products is used domestically and remaining 20% is exported.

Import of Crude oil into India: India is the third largest importer and consumer of crude oil. India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirements. Crude oil imports accounted for 26% of the total imports into India.

Top Suppliers of Crude oil to India: Iraq, USA, and Saudi Arabia.

Export of Petroleum products from India:

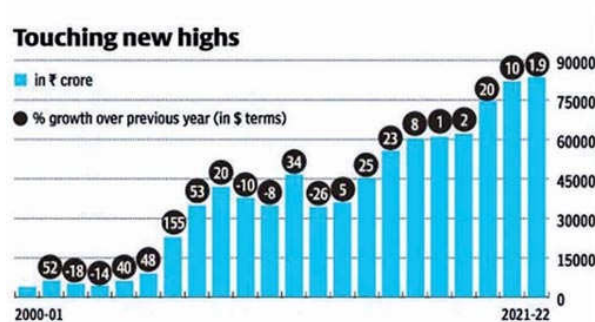
- The Petroleum products account for the second

largest share in India's exports after Engineering Goods.

- India is the third largest exporter of Petroleum products accounting for 15% of total exports.
- Top Export destinations are Singapore, UAE and USA

9. RECORD FDI INFLOWS IN 2021-22

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India has recorded highest ever annual FDI inflow of USD 83.57 billion in the Financial Year 2021-22.



DETAILS ABOUT FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI)

Foreign direct investment (FDI): Major source of nondebt financial resource for the economic development.

Nodal Department: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry makes policy pronouncements on FDI through Consolidated FDI Policy Circular/Press Notes/Press Releases which are notified by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance.

Definition: Investment through capital instruments by a person resident outside India (a) in an unlisted Indian company; or (b) in 10 percent or more of the post issue paid-up equity capital in a listed Company.

ELIGIBLE CAPITAL INSTRUMENTS

- Shares
- Convertible debentures
- Global Depository Receipts/ American Depository Receipts
- Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds (FCCBs)

ROUTES

- **Government Route:** Application in Foreign Investment Facilitation Portal to Concerned Administrative Ministry/Department. Proposals of more than Rs 5000 crores to be approved by CCEA.
- **Automatic Route:** No Prior Approval of the Government.

Prohibited Sectors: Lottery Business; Gambling and betting including casinos; Chit funds and Nidhi company; Trading in Transferable Development Rights (TDRs); Real Estate Business or Construction of Farmhouses; Manufacturing of Cigars; Activities / sectors not open to private sector investment viz., (i) Atomic energy and (ii) Railway operations

IMPORTANT POINTERS FOR PRELIMS

- **Countries attracting highest FDI in 2021:** USA (\$ 250 bn); China; Hong Kong, Singapore, and India. India is placed at 5th Position.
- **Trends:** India received its highest ever FDI inflows of around \$ 83 bn in 2021-22.
- **Top FDI Sources for FDI (2021-22):** Singapore, USA, and Mauritius
- **Sectors attracting highest FDI (2021-22):** Computer Software & Hardware, Services and Automobile.
- **States attracting highest FDI Inflows (2021-22):** Karnataka, Delhi and Maharashtra.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS OF GST COUNCIL NOT BINDING: SC

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court has recently ruled that the recommendations of the GST council are not binding on the Parliament and State legislatures. On one hand, the SC judgement was welcomed by the opposition ruled states, while the Centre has ruled out any change in the functioning of the GST. The Centre has argued that the SC judgement has merely reiterated the constitutional and legal provisions related to the functioning of the GST council and hence would not affect its functioning.

ABOUT GST COUNCIL

The GST Council is a constitutional body under Article 279A for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to Goods and Service Tax.

Mandate: Make recommendations to the Union and States on the following:

- Recommend Taxes, surcharge, and Cess to be

subsumed into GST.

- Model GST laws
- Recommend GST Rates.
- Recommend the date on which the GST be levied on petroleum crude, high speed diesel, petrol, natural gas and aviation turbine fuel.
- Recommend threshold limit of turnover below which GST may be exempted.
- Any other matter related to GST, as the council may decide.

Composition: Chaired by the Union Finance Minister and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance of all the States.

Decision Making: Voting Weightage- Centre (1/3) and all States (2/3). Decision shall be taken by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present and voting.

Thus, Central Government has an effective veto on all decisions of the GST Council.

Quorum: Half of the total members

ARGUMENTS OF CENTRE ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF GST COUNCIL

Certain provisions of IGST Act, CGST Act and SGST Acts explicitly provide that Government shall take decisions based on the recommendations of the GST Council. For example, if the GST council makes recommendations related to changes in GST rates or the inclusion of petroleum products in the GST, then accordingly, the Central and State Government would issue notification to give effect to the recommendations of the GST council. Similarly, the power of the Central Government to exempt goods or services from levy of tax shall be exercised on the recommendations of the GST Council.

If the recommendations of the GST council are not binding, then different states could impose different tax rates on goods and services which would defeat the purpose of Nation, One Tax.

SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT ON GST COUNCIL

Recommendations of GST Council are not binding on the Union and States for the following reasons:

- Article 279A provides that GST council shall make recommendations to the Union and States. There is no explicit provision in Article 279A for the recommendations to be binding.
- Article 246A provides that both Union and States are empowered to make laws related to GST. There is no explicit provision in Article 246A for the recommendations of the GST council to be binding on

the Parliament or state legislatures.

- The 'recommendations' of the GST Council are the product of a collaborative dialogue involving the Union and States. To regard them as binding edicts would disrupt fiscal federalism, where both the Union and the States are conferred equal power to legislate on GST.

- Government while exercising its rule-making power under the provisions of the CGST Act and IGST Act is bound by the recommendations of the GST Council. However, that does not mean that all the recommendations of the GST Council are binding on the legislature.

ANALYSIS OF THE SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT

GST council may make two types of recommendations:

- (a) which would require Government to issue notification
- (b) which require legislatures to make laws related to GST.

For example, under CGST, Central Government issues notification based upon recommendations of GST council related to changes in the GST rates or inclusion of petroleum products in the GST. Once central Government issues the notifications, such notifications must be compulsorily placed before the Parliament. So, here the Parliament has delegated some of its powers to the Central Government. Such recommendations of GST council should be binding on Central Government and State Governments. This would help realise the framework of "One Nation One Tax". On the other hand, GST council may make recommendations on any other matter related to GST, as the council may decide. So, here, Government cannot issue notification based on recommendations of the GST council. To give effect to recommendations of GST council, the Parliament and State Legislatures may have to formulate separate law. According to Supreme Court, in such cases, recommendations of GST council would not be binding on the Parliament and State Legislatures.

WAY FORWARD

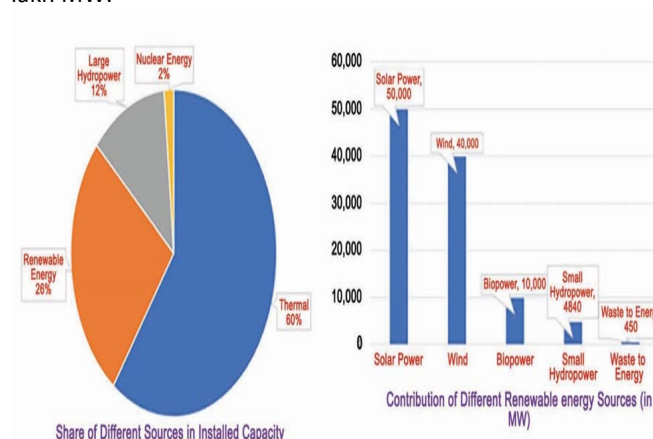
So far, the GST council has functioned in the spirit of cooperative federalism. This is evident in the fact that no state has exercised its power to reject council recommendations in the past five years.

11. PUSH FOR RENEWABLE PURCHASE OBLIGATION (RPO)

Union government is planning to amend the Electricity Act and the National Tariff Policy to make it mandatory for DISCOMs to meet their renewable purchase obligations (RPOs) to provide fillip to the Renewable energy sector.

SHARE OF DIFFERENT SOURCES IN INSTALLED CAPACITY

The total Installed power capacity in India is around 3.9 lakh MW.



ACHIEVEMENTS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR

- Globally, today India stands 4th in RE power capacity, 4th in Wind power, and 5th in Solar Power capacity.
- Total Installed Capacity of Renewable energy (including large hydropower above 25 MW): 150 GW
- Share of Renewable energy (including large hydropower above 25 MW) in total installed capacity: 38%
- Share of Non-fossil energy sources (Renewable energy and Nuclear): 40%. India has achieved the National Determined contribution (NDC) target of having at least 40% installed capacity from non-fossil

energy sources by end of 2030.

Top 3 States in Installed Wind Power (as on 31st Dec 2020): Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra

Top 3 States in Installed Solar Power (as on 31st Dec 2020): Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu

ABOUT RENEWABLE PURCHASE OBLIGATION (RPO)

What is it?

DISCOMs required to purchase certain percentage of electricity from various renewable energy sources.

Framework for RPOs?

Infrastructure Laid down under Electricity Act, 2003 and National Tariff Policy 2016

Types of RPOs: Solar RPO and Non-Solar RPO. In 2020, Government declared that procurement of power from

large Hydropower Projects (more than 25 MW) and Ocean Energy would be considered as Non-Solar RPO.

Who lays down the Targets for RPOs?

Annual Targets laid down by State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs). Long term targets laid down by Ministry of Power.

Present Targets: Long Term target to be met by 2022. Total RPO: 21% (Solar RPO: 10.5% + Non-Solar RPO: 10.5%)

Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs): DISCOMs that exceed their RPO obligations can sell RECs to other DISCOMs that fail to meet RPO target. 1 REC is equal to 1 Mwh.

PRESENT STATUS OF RPO

Compliance of DISCOMs with respect to meeting RPO targets has been consistently poor. For example, the RPO target for the financial year 2019-20 was set at 17.5 per cent but the achievement on pan-India basis was merely 12.73 per cent. The compliance is less than 55 per cent of the target for about 20 states.

Polity And Governance

1 . RELEASE OF A.G. PERARIVALAN BY SC

A.G. Perarivalan, one of the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, case has been released by the Supreme Court by exercising its power under Article 142.

Three Judge Bench also disapproved Governor's decision to send recommendations of state cabinet (remit remaining part of sentence) for President's consideration. Clemency powers of Governor and President are provided under Article 161 and 72.

MERCY PETITION

- Appeal beyond SC: If Supreme Court turns down appeal against capital punishment, a condemned prisoner can submit a mercy petition to President of India and Governor of the State under Article 72 and Article 161 respectively.
- Powers of President & Governors under Articles 72 and 161: "to grant pardons, reprieves, respites, or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence."
- Pardon: It affects both the punishment prescribed for the offence and guilt of the offender. A full pardon may completely erase the guilt.
- Reprieve: A temporary suspension of the punishment awarded by a court of law. For example: Putting a stay order on death sentence of a convict for certain temporary period.
- Respite: Postponement of the sentence of punishment or reducing the sentence due to certain special circumstances such as disability, pregnancy etc.
- Commutation: Changing the punishment from one category to another, such as changing of death sentence to life imprisonment.
- Remission: Reduction of the amount of a sentence without changing its character. Example: A person is imprisoned for 14 years in solitary confinement. In Remission, his sentence might reduce to 10 years but the nature i.e., solitary confinement will not change.
- Decision Based on Aid & Advice of Council of Ministers: Power of clemency to be exercised under Article 72 & 161 respectively by President and Governors need to be exercised in conformity with the aid and advice of Council of Ministers under Articles 74 and 163.
- Decision not constrained by time: Clemency powers of President and Governor, under Article 72 and 161 respectively, can be exercised before, during or after the trial.
- Final Opportunity for the Convict: Allows both

executive and judiciary to investigate the matter with compassionate ground.

- Comparison with other countries: Indian President's power of pardon is almost like that in America or Britain. American President has power to grant reprieves and pardons for offences committed against United States except in cases of impeachment. In Britain, the Crown enjoys a prerogative to grant pardon to any criminal, but the prerogative is exercised on ministerial advice.

SUPREME COURT ON VALIDATING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

- Article 21 has been legally construed to mean if there is a procedure, which is just, fair, reasonable, and valid, then the state by framing a law can deprive a person of his life.
- In *Jagmohan Singh vs Uttar Pradesh (1973)*, *Rajendra Prasad vs Uttar Pradesh (1979)*, and finally in *Bachan Singh vs Punjab (1980)*, Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional validity of the death penalty.
- SC held that *if capital punishment is provided in the law and the procedure is a fair, just and reasonable one, the death sentence can be awarded to a convict (In rarest of rare cases).*

PRESIDENT VS GOVERNOR – DISPOSING MERCY PETITION

- President has power to pardon in cases where punishment has been provided through Court Martial which governor lacks.
- Governor cannot pardon death sentence. However, the governor can suspend, remit, or commute a death sentence. Whereas pardoning power of President extend even to cases of death penalty.

Kehar Singh v Union of India

- The power to pardon is part of constitutional scheme. It has been reposed by the people through the Constitution in the head of the state and enjoys high status. It is a constitutional responsibility of great significance, to be exercised when occasion arises.
- In most civilized societies, deprivation of personal liberty and threat of deprivation of life by the action of the state is regarded seriously and therefore recourse is provided against the judicial decisions.
- This is because there always remains the possibility of 'fallibility of human judgment' even in 'the most trained mind' and it has been considered appropriate in matters of life and personal liberty, 'the protection should be extended by entrusting the power to some high authority to scrutinize the validity of the threatened denial of life.'

LAW COMMISSION'S VIEW ON PREROGATIVE OF MERCY IN THE EXECUTIVE

- When giving punishment, there are many matters which may not have been considered by the Courts. The hands of the Courts are tied down by the evidence placed before it.
- A death sentence passed by the Court after consideration of all materials placed before it may yet require reconsideration because:
 - (i) Facts not placed before the Court.
 - (ii) Facts placed before the Court but not in the proper manner.
 - (iii) Facts discovered after passing of the death sentence.
 - (iv) Events which may have developed after passing of death sentence.
 - (v) Other unknown developments related to the sentence.

JUDICIAL REVIEW OF CLEMENCY POWERS

- In *Epuru Sudhakar vs Andhra Pradesh*, Supreme Court laid down that judicial review under Articles 72 and 161 is available on the following grounds:
 - a) That the order has been passed without application of mind.
 - b) That the order is mala fide.
 - c) That the order has been passed on extraneous or wholly irrelevant considerations.
 - d) That the order suffers from arbitrariness.
- The Court also held that pardon obtained based on manifest mistake or fraud can also be rescinded or cancelled.
- If power under Article 72 is exercised on irrational, irrelevant, discriminatory grounds or in bad faith, then in such cases Court can examine the case and intervene if necessary.

DISCRETION WHILE GRANTING PARDON?

- Power to pardon vested in the President *under Article 72 shall not be exercised independently without the aid and advice of Home Minister.*
- In *Maru Ram v. Union of India*, Supreme Court held that under Article 72, *President cannot take an independent decision or direct release or refuse release on his own choice.*
- This has been done to avoid any decision made on arbitrary grounds or on some partial grounds of religion, caste, colour or political loyalty.

POWER OF REMISSION UNDER CR. PC DIFFERENT FROM CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF PARDON

- Suspend or Remit: Cr. PC empowers central and state government to suspend or remit a sentence, in whole or in part, with or without conditions.
- Commutation: Cr. PC empowers central and state

governments to commute death sentence, imprisonment for life and rigorous imprisonment to a lesser degree.

- State Government to Consult the Centre: Cr. PC states that powers of state government to suspend, remit or commute a sentence must be done in consultation with the central government if
 - o *The case was investigated by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or*
 - o *The case was investigated by any other agency empowered to make investigation into an offence under any Central Act.*
 - o *The offence involved misappropriation or destruction of, or damage to, any property belonging to the Central Government, or*
 - o *The offence was committed by a person in the service of the Central Government while acting in the discharge of his official duty.*

- Section 433A adds a restriction on powers of remission or commutation in certain cases.
 - o It states that where a sentence of imprisonment for life is imposed on conviction of a person for an offence for which death is one of the punishments provided by law, or
 - o Where a sentence of death imposed on a person has been commuted under section 433 into one of imprisonment for life,
such person shall not be released from prison unless he has served at least 14 years of imprisonment.

- Article 161 overrides Section 433A of Cr. PC: Supreme Court has held that powers of Governor under Article 161 to pardon override the restrictions imposed under Section 433-A of the Criminal Procedure Code even if the prisoner has not undergone 14 years or more of actual imprisonment.
- Section 433-A of Cr. PC does not in any way affect the constitutional power conferred on President/Governor to grant pardon under Articles 72 or 161 of the Constitution.

- If the prisoner has not undergone 14 years or more of actual imprisonment, the Governor has a power to grant pardon. Such power is in exercise of the power of the sovereign, even though the Governor is bound to act on the aid and advice of the State Government.

RAJIV GANDHI ASSASSINATION CASE

- 1999: Seven persons were convicted by Supreme Court in 1999 final verdict in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Of these, four - Sriharan alias Murugan, Nalini, Perarivalan and Santhan - were given the death penalty. The other three - Robert Payas, Jayakumar, and Ravichandran - were sentenced to life terms.

- 2000: Governor commuted the death sentence of Nalini to one of life, based on a recommendation by the Cabinet. The remaining three remained on death row and their mercy petitions were pending with the President.
- 2014: Supreme Court commuted the sentences of Sriharan, Perarivalan and Santhan to life terms. Immediately, the then Chief Minister Jayalalithaa decided to remit their sentences. The State government sought Centre's opinion within three days as the matter was investigated by CBI.
- However, Centre challenged State Government's decision in Supreme Court and obtained a stay. Constitution Bench settled the controversy by stating that State government could not release the prisoners without Centre's concurrence as Union government's opinion had primacy in the matter.
- 2018: Union Home Ministry formally rejected the plea for remission. Later, Tamil Nadu government decided to invoke Governor's Power under Article 161 and advised Governor to remit the life term of the seven convict so that they could be released.
- Matter was sent for President's Consideration: Article 161 does not specify any time frame for the Governor to act on the advice of the State Cabinet. So, the matter was sent for President's consideration and the matter kept pending.

SUPREME COURT'S FINAL VERDICT TO RELEASE THE PRISONERS

- Governor sending state government's recommendation on remission: Supreme Court held that there is no constitutional provision for Governor to refer a recommendation made by the State Cabinet to the President of India.
- On Centre's Plea on "appropriate government": SC rejected Centre's argument which stated that "appropriate government" to decide on remission of sentence in matters to which the executive power of the Union extends is the Union Government.
- Union taking precedence over State where both state and Centre had power to make laws, Union Government's power will take precedence only if "executive power had been expressly conferred on the Union under the Constitution or the law made by Parliament, failing which the executive power of State remained intact".
- Governor's power under Article 161 not immune from Judicial Review: The judgment pointed out that Governor's power under Article 161 to grant pardons, reprieves, respites, or remissions of punishment, is subject to judicial review. SC also stated that nonexercise of power under Article 161 is

not immune from judicial review.

- Not fit to remand the matter back to Governor for consideration considering appellant's prolonged period of incarceration, his satisfactory conduct in jail as well as during parole, chronic ailments from his medical records, his educational qualifications acquired during incarceration and the pendency of his petition under Article 161 for 2.5 years after recommendation of the State Cabinet.

2 . SUPREME COURT VERDICTS ON RESERVATION

Supreme Court while upholding the validity of reservations in All India Quota Scheme not only recognised the idea of 'substantive equality' but also held that the binary of merit versus reservation is superfluous. Supreme Court in number of other judgments has held that Article 16(1) can exist parallelly along with Article 16(4) and 16(4A) without violating the principles of equality enshrined under Article 14 of Indian Constitution. Let us go through such landmark Supreme Court Judgments along with Mandal Commission Report to understand how the jurisprudence of reservation has evolved over a period of years.

RESERVATION IN PROMOTION NOT A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

Reservation in promotion in public posts cannot be claimed as a fundamental right as per the recent Supreme Court judgment under Article 16(4) and Article 16(4A).

Issues considered by the Supreme Court were:

1. Whether the State Government is bound to make reservations in public posts?
2. Whether decision of the state to provide or not provide reservation shall be based only on quantifiable data relating to adequacy of representation of persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?
 - i. Can the state refuse to collect quantifiable data regarding the adequacy or inadequacy of

representation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in public services?

JUDGMENT OF SUPREME COURT

Article 16 (4) & 16 (4A) empowers State to make reservation in matters of appointment and promotion in favour of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 'if in the opinion of the State they are not adequately represented in the services of the State'.

1. Article 16 (4) and 16 (4A) are enabling provisions and accordingly State has discretion either to provide reservation in public services under Article 16(4) or reservation in promotions under Article 16(4A) or not to provide such reservations.

2. If the states wish to provide reservation in promotion then the State must collect quantifiable data showing inadequacy of representation of that class in public services.

3. Even if under-representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in public services is brought to the notice of the Court, the State cannot be directed to provide such reservations under writ of Mandamus. Supreme Court effectively held that State Government is not bound to make reservations and citizens cannot claim reservation in public services under Article 16(4) and reservation in promotion under Article 16(4A) as Fundamental Right.

KELKAR COMMISSION – FIRST BACKWARD CLASS COMMISSION

- The Commission was set up as a Presidential Order under Article 340 to investigate the conditions of backward classes.
- It prepared a comprehensive list of backward caste or communities and out of 2399 such castes, 837 were classified as 'Most Backward'.
- The commission submitted its report in 1955 but was not implemented. (PM – Jawahar Lal Nehru)

MANDAL COMMISSION – SECOND BACKWARD CLASS COMMISSION

- It was set up to investigate the extent of social and educational backwardness among various sections of Indian society and recommend ways of identifying these 'backward classes'.
- It advised backward castes had a very low presence

in both educational institutions and in employment in public services. It therefore recommended **reserving 27% of seats in educational institutions and government jobs** for these groups.

- The government accepted the recommendations and along with it, issued another order by which,
 - o **within the 27% of vacancies,**
 - o **Preference** was to be given to candidates belonging to the **poorer sections of the Socially and Economically Backward Classes;** and
 - o **10% vacancies** were to be reserved for **Other Economically Backward Sections** who were not covered by any of the existing schemes of reservation.

Second Backward Class Commission (Mandal Commission)	
Announced by	PM Morarji Desai in December 1978
Submission of Report	In 1980 to President N.S. Reddy. PM – Indira Gandhi
Implemented by	In 1990 - Prime Minister V.P. Singh

2015 - RECOMMENDATIONS OF NCBC - CHAIRMAN - JUSTICE V. ESWARAIAH

It discussed sub-categorization of OBCs at length and proposed that Other Backward Classes/castes/communities/ synonyms be divided into the following three categories:

1. **Extremely Backward Classes (Group 'A')**: This would include Aboriginal Tribes, Vimukta Jatis, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, wandering classes etc., whose traditional occupation is/was begging and pig-rearing, snake-charming, bird catching, game-sneakers, religious mendicants, drum beaters, bamboo workers, hunters and labourers, making mats from date leaves, basket making, agricultural labourers, earth workers, boatmen etc.
2. **More Backward Classes (Group 'B')**: This would include vocational groups whose traditional occupation is/was making of brushes for weaving looms and dyers, painting and doll making, weavers, toddy tappers, cotton ginning, oil pressing, silk weavers, potters, sheep-rearing and combing

weaving, earth workers, jute weaving and gunny bag making, butchers, tailoring, fishing, gardening, dancers and singers, barbers, petty traders in kumkum and bangles, dyeing, petty dealers in beads, needles etc., scheduled castes converted into Christianity and their progeny, washermen etc.

3. **Backward Classes (Group 'C')**: This would include land owning, cultivating castes, agriculturists, business and trading castes and comparatively advanced castes/communities.

INDRA SAWHNEY JUDGMENT

- The case decided by **Nine Judge Constitution Bench**. The bone of contention in this landmark judgment was the **Mandal Commission Report of 1980**, which was laid before Parliament on two occasions – once in 1982, and again in 1983.
- However, no action was taken based on this Report until late 1990, when an Office Memorandum stated that after considering the said Report, **27% of the vacancies in civil posts and services under the Government of India shall be reserved for the Socially and Economically Backward Classes**.
- This was followed by an Office Memorandum in 1991, by which, **within the 27% of vacancies**,
 - o Preference was to be given to candidates belonging to the **poorer sections of the Socially and Economically Backward Classes**; and
 - o **10% vacancies** were to be reserved for **Other Economically Backward Sections** who were not covered by any of the existing schemes of reservation. The majority judgments upheld the reservation of 27% in favour of backward classes, and the further subdivision of more backward within the backward classes who were to be given preference but struck down the reservation of 10% in favour of Other Economically Backward categories.
- The Court contrasted **Article 16(4) with Article 15(4)** and stated that Article 16(4) refers to any backward class of citizens where it refers primarily to **social backwardness**.
Article 16 (4) - any backward class of citizens
Article 15 (4) - any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes
- The Court held that the **test or requirement of social and educational backwardness cannot be applied to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, who indubitably fall within the expression "**backward class of citizens**". Thus, they do not have to prove their backwardness.

- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the most backward** among backward classes and it is, therefore, presumed that once they are contained in the **Presidential List under Articles 341 and Article 342** of the Constitution of India, there is no question of showing backwardness of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes all over again.
- The advanced sections among OBCs (the creamy layer) should be **excluded** from the list of beneficiaries of reservation.
- **Creamy layer principle is only confined to Other Backward Classes** and has no relevance in the case of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes.
- There shall be **no reservation in promotions** and **reservation should be confined to initial appointments only**.
- The reasoning was that reservations exist to create a level-playing field, to remedy unequal starting positions, thereby removing the justification for reservation in promotion.

M. NAGRAJ V. UNION OF INDIA

- The government further felt that representation of the SCs and STs in the services in state had not reached the required level.
- Hence to continue to provide reservation in promotion, legislature passed the **Constitution 77th 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 77th Amendment was challenged which provided for **reservation in promotion** along with other amendments on **backlog vacancies** in reservation.
- Supreme Court **upheld 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, **state must collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of class and inadequacy of representation of that class and maintenance of efficiency**.
- Court allowed reservations in promotion for members of SC/ST subject to proving three conditions:
 - o Backwardness of class – so there is a need for quantifiable data to prove backwardness
 - o Inadequacy of representation
 - o 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 favour 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, states will have to back it with data to show their **inadequate representation in the cadre**.
- SC said that principle of creamy layer can be extended to members of SC/ST for promotions in government jobs.

SC ON 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 creamy layer within that class bag all the coveted jobs in public sector and perpetuate themselves, leaving the rest of class as backward as they always were.
- When a Court applies creamy layer principle to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, it does not in any manner tinker with **Presidential List under Articles 341 (Scheduled Castes) or 342 (Scheduled Tribes)** of Constitution of India.
- Court **excluded creamy layer** from such groups or subgroups (including members of SC/ST) when applying the principles of equality under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution of India.

MARATHA QUOTA JUDGMENT

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of Supreme Court held that reservations more than the 50% ceiling limit are unconstitutional. **Accordingly, Supreme Court struck down Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018** which extended reservation to Maratha community in public education and employment more than ceiling limit of 50% fixed by SC earlier.
- SC held that exceeding ceiling limit of reservation beyond 50% without exceptional circumstances violates Article 14.
- The bench further noted that the **M.G. Gaikwad Commission did not articulate any exceptional circumstances to justify the excess quota**. The commission's report found that Marathas are socially, educationally and economically backward and eligible to be included as a backward class.
- Based on Gaikwad Commission report, the state legislature passed a Bill giving 16% reservation in government jobs and education to Marathas over and above ceiling limit fixed by SC in Indra Sawhney.
- SC further held that after the insertion of **Article 342A** in Constitution, Centre alone is empowered to identify Socially and Economically Backward Class (SEBC).
- **By introduction of Articles 366 (26C) & 342A through the 102nd Constitution Amendment**, President alone, to exclusion of all other authorities, is empowered to identify SEBCs and include them in a list to be published under Article 342A (1), which shall be deemed to include SEBCs in relation to each state and union territory for the purposes of the Constitution.
- **SC held that Constitution 102nd Amendment Act, 2018 does not violate any basic feature of Constitution** and declared it constitutionally valid.
- However, this judgment led to enactment of Constitution 105th Amendment Act which empowered State Government to make their own list of Socially and Educationally Backward List which is different from the Central List.

CONSTITUTION 105TH AMENDMENT ACT

- Constitution (One Hundred and Fifth Amendment) Act, 2021 by amending **Article 338B, 342A and 366(26C)** allows states and UTs to prepare their own list of socially and educationally backward classes.
- **Constitution (One Hundred and Second Amendment) Act, 2018** inserted three new **Articles 342A, 366(26C) and 338B** in the Constitution.

- o **Article 338B** constituted **National Commission for Backward Classes**
- o **Article 342A** dealt with Central List of socially and educationally backward classes (commonly known as the Other Backward Classes).
- o **Article 366 (26C)** defined socially and educationally backward classes.
 - Constitution 105th Amendment enables states and UT to **prepare their own list of socially and educationally backward classes**. This list must be made by law and may differ from the central list.
 - Article 338B of Constitution mandates central and state governments to **consult NCBC on all major policy** matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.
 - The amendment exempts states and UTs from this requirement for matters related to preparation of their list of socially and educationally backward classes

3 . LIFETIME CABINET MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGED

Government of Goa has accorded "lifetime cabinet status" to former Goa Chief Minister Pratap Singh Rane for completing 50 years as legislature. This has led to filing of petition in Bombay High Court for violation of Constitution 91st Amendment.

CONSTITUTION 91ST AMENDMENT

- It limits the size of Ministers in state to 15% of total number of members of State Legislative Assembly. However, number of Ministers, including Chief Minister in a State shall not be less than 12.
- Constitution 91st Amendment added Article 75(1A) and 164(1A) which limited size of council of Ministers.
- **Article 75(1A)**: Total number of Ministers, including Prime Minister, in Council of Ministers shall not exceed 15 per cent of total number of members of House of People.
- **Article 164(1A)**: Total number of Ministers, including Chief Minister, in Council of Ministers in a State shall not exceed 15 per cent of total number of members of Legislative Assembly of that State: Provided that number of Ministers, including Chief Minister in a State shall not be less than 12.

CONTENTION RAISED IN HIGH COURT

- The petitioner has urged High Court to quash state government's notification according Pratap Singh Rane lifetime cabinet status as it exceeds the limit of

12ministers provided under Article 164(1A).

- Adding another minister in the Council will drain public exchequer as Cabinet ranked minister will have to be provided with number of staffs and Officers on Duty, accommodation, vehicle etc. for his lifetime which will cost the exchequer Rs. 90 lakhs per annum.

4 . AADHAAR DETAILS CANNOT BE SHARED: UIDAI TO HC

Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has told Delhi High Court in a bank robbery case that it cannot share biometric information with investigating agencies to match prints and photograph details from crime scene.

REASON FOR NOT SHARING AADHAAR DETAILS

- UIDAI prohibits sharing information: UIDAI stated that purpose and objective of Aadhaar Act is to provide unique identity to residents and sharing of biometric information other than to generate Aadhaar Number and authentication is not permissible under Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 [referred as Aadhaar Act].
- Sharing information technologically not feasible: UIDAI stated that it does not collect biometric information suitable for forensic use and matching of biometric details of the accused may not be technologically feasible.
- Aadhaar Act prohibits sharing or using core biometrics of any resident under section 29 of Aadhaar Act. As per Aadhaar Act, "core biometric information" means fingerprint, Iris scan, or such other biological attribute of an individual as may be specified by regulations.
- Authentication has been described as a process by which Aadhaar number along with demographic information or biometric information of an individual is submitted to the Central Identities Data Repository for its verification and such Repository verifies the correctness, or the lack thereof, based on information available with it.

SECTION 29 - RESTRICTION ON SHARING INFORMATION

- No core biometric information, collected or created under this Act, shall be (a) shared with anyone for any reason whatsoever; or (b) used for any purpose

other than generation of Aadhaar numbers and authentication under this Act.

- Aadhaar Number [demographic information or photograph] of a resident shall not be published, displayed, or posted publicly, except for the purposes as may be specified by regulations.

WHEN CAN AADHAAR INFORMATION BE SHARED?

According to Section 33 of Aadhaar Act, Aadhaar details of a resident can be disclosed

- On orders of High Court
- In the interest of national security, orders must be given by an officer not below the rank of Secretary to Government of India.
- Every direction to disclose Aadhaar details given by Secretary shall be reviewed by an Oversight Committee consisting of the Cabinet Secretary and Secretaries to Government of India in Department of Legal Affairs and Department of Electronics and Information Technology before it takes effect.
- Any direction issued to disclose Aadhaar details through the Oversight Committee shall be valid for a period of 3 months from the date of its issue, which may be extended for a further period of 3 months after the review by the Oversight Committee.

MASKED AADHAAR CARD

- Masked Aadhaar number implies replacing of first 8 digits of Aadhaar number with some characters like "xxxx-xxxx" while only last 4 digits of the Aadhaar Number are visible. While downloading Aadhaar Card, one can select the option of Masked Aadhaar.

UPDATION OF AADHAAR DETAILS

- On attaining 5 or 15 years: Where an Aadhaar number holder has attained the age of 5 or 15 years, first update in his/her Aadhaar must be necessarily accompanied by a biometric information update.
- Aadhaar Deactivated if Not Updated: Where an Aadhaar number holder who has attained the age of 5 or 15 years fails to update his/her biometric information within 2 years of attaining such age, his/her Aadhaar number shall be deactivated.
- Can Update Aadhaar within 2 years: The facility of biometric information update shall be available free of cost to the Aadhaar number holder till attaining the age of 7 or 17 years, respectively. Thereafter, the Aadhaar number holder can activate his/her Aadhaar number by updating his/her biometric information.
- Aadhaar number shall not be omitted even if the Aadhaar number holder does not update biometric information, and the Aadhaar number shall remain in deactivated state.

WHO CAN HAVE AADHAAR CARD IN INDIA?

- Every resident shall be entitled to obtain an Aadhaar number by submitting demographic and biometric information by undergoing the process of enrolment.
- Resident means an individual who has resided in India for a period or periods amounting in all to 182 days or more in the 12 months immediately preceding the date of application for enrolment.
- Biometric Information means photograph, fingerprint, Iris scan, or such other biological attributes of an individual as may be specified by regulations.
- Demographic Information includes information relating to the name, date of birth, address and other relevant information of an individual, as may be specified by regulations for the purpose of issuing an Aadhaar number, but shall not include race, religion, caste, tribe, ethnicity, language, records of entitlement, income or medical history.
- Enrolment means the process to collect demographic and biometric information from individuals by the enrolling agencies for the purpose of issuing Aadhaar numbers to such individuals under the Aadhaar Act.

POWERS & FUNCTIONS OF UIDAI

- Specifying demographic information and biometric information required for enrolment and processes for collection and verification thereof.
- Collecting demographic information and biometric information from any individual seeking an Aadhaar number in such manner as may be specified by regulations.
- Appointing of one or more entities to operate the Central Identities Data Repository.
- Generating and assigning Aadhaar numbers to individuals.
- Performing authentication of Aadhaar numbers.
- Maintaining and updating information of individuals in Central Identities Data Repository.
- Omitting and deactivating of an Aadhaar number and information relating thereto in such manner as may be specified by regulations.
- Specifying the manner of use of Aadhaar numbers for providing or availing of various subsidies, benefits, services and other purposes for which Aadhaar numbers may be used.

- Specifying terms and conditions for appointment of Registrars, enrolling agencies and service providers and revocation of appointments thereof.
- Establishing, operating and maintaining of Central Identities Data Repository.
- Sharing information of Aadhaar number holders, subject to the provisions of this Act.
- Calling for information and records, conducting inspections, inquiries and audit of operations of the Central Identities Data Repository, Registrars, enrolling agencies and other agencies appointed under this Act.
- Specifying various processes relating to data management, security protocols and other technology safeguards under this Act.
- Specifying conditions and procedures for issuance of new Aadhaar number to existing Aadhaar number holder.
- Levying and collecting fees or authorizing Registrars, enrolling agencies or other service providers to collect such fees for the services provided by them under this Act in such manner as may be specified by regulations.

CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED BY CAG IN THE FUNCTIONING OF UIDAI

- Data Mismatch: Comptroller and Auditor General has highlighted issues of data-matching, errors in authentication, and shortfall in archiving which is a primary function of UIDAI. As per CAG, data of Aadhaar Card holders have not been matched with their Aadhaar number even after 10 years in some cases.
- No analysis of Authentication Errors: CAG has criticized the absence of a system to analyze factors leading to authentication errors. This is happening due to lack of data archiving policy of UIDAI which is considered a vital storage management best practice. Data Archiving Policy for storing of certain data for certain period.
- Deprived Government of Revenue: UIDAI provided Authentication services to banks, mobile operators and other agencies free of charge till 2019, contrary to provisions of their own Regulations, depriving revenue to Government.
- Putting privacy of residents at risk: UIDAI has not ensured that applications or devices used by agencies or companies for authentication were not capable of storing the personal information of the residents, which put the privacy of residents at risk.
- UIDAI had not ensured security and safety of data in

Aadhaar vaults: They had not independently conducted any verification of compliance to the process involved.

- No specific proof for residence: UIDAI has not prescribed any specific proof, document, or process to confirm whether a person who is applying for Aadhaar has resided in India for the period specified by the Rules. Therefore, "there is no assurance that all the Aadhaar holders in the country are 'Residents' as defined in the Aadhaar Act".
- Multiplicity of Aadhaar cards: UIDAI generated Aadhaar numbers with incomplete information, which, along with the lack of proper documentation or poor quality biometrics, have resulted in multiple or duplicate Aadhaar cards being issued to the same person.
- Lack of Arrangement with Postal department: UIDAI does not have adequate arrangements with the postal department, due to which many Aadhaar cards were returned to government after they could not be delivered to their intended recipients.
- Onus of updating Aadhaar on citizens: Aadhaar numbers with poor quality biometrics induces authentication errors. UIDAI takes no responsibility for it and transfers the onus of updating biometrics to the resident and charges fees for it.
- Way Forward: UIDAI should go beyond self-declaration, and "prescribe a procedure and required documentation other than self-declaration, to confirm and authenticate residence status of applicants

5. CONSIDER USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE IN COURTS: PM

Speaking at the inauguration of 11th Joint Conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts, Prime Minister Modi appealed for the use of local languages in Courts since a large section of the population find it difficult to understand Court rulings and judicial process.

POINTS HIGHLIGHTED BY PRIME MINISTER

- Prime Minister emphasized that use of common language in High Courts will not only help common man relate to judiciary but will also make common man more aware about legal developments.
- Ensure that the common man has faith in the judiciary and can feel part of the system.
- Even the Chief Justice of India highlighted the need for local languages in the Courts but also mentioned

that there are number of bottlenecks which needs to be cleared.

- Stressing on the importance of access to justice, PM highlighted that government is trying to simplify laws for the common man to understand.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS - LANGUAGES IN HIGH COURT

- **Article 348 of Constitution** states that all proceedings in Supreme Court and in every High Court shall be in English language.
- However, Governor of a State may, with previous consent of President, authorize use of Hindi language, or any other language used for any official purposes of State, in proceedings in High Court having its principal seat in that State.
- **Official Languages Act, 1963** allows optional use of Hindi or other Official language in judgments etc. of High Courts.
- Provisions of Official Language Act highlights that from the appointed day (26th January 1965) Governor of a State may, with previous consent of President,
 - o Authorise use of Hindi or official language of State, in addition to English language.
 - o For purposes of any judgment, decree or order passed or made by High Court for that State.
 - o Where any judgment, decree or order is passed or made in any such language (other than English language), it shall be accompanied by a translation of same in English language issued under the authority of High Court.

6 . RAJIV KUMAR APPOINTED AS NEW CEC

Rajiv Kumar has assumed charge as 25th Chief Election Commissioner of India in pursuance of Ministry of Law & Justice's Gazette Notification in May 2022.

CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

Election Commission shall be responsible for Superintendence, Direction and Control of the preparation of the Electoral Rolls for and the conduct of all elections to:

- Parliament
 - Legislature of every State
 - Offices of President and Vice-President
- The President may also appoint after consultation with the Election Commission such Regional

Commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the Election Commission in the performance of its functions.

CONSTITUTION

- **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of other Election Commissioners**, as the President may from time-to-time fix. The CEC shall act as the Chairman of the Election Commission.

REMOVAL

- The CEC shall be removed from his office in like manner and on the like grounds as a **Judge of the Supreme Court**.
- Any other **Election Commissioner or a Regional Commissioner** shall not be removed from office except on the **recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner**. Thus, the process of removal of CEC and other Election or Regional Commissioners is different.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

Parliament may by law make provision with respect to matters relating to elections to either **House of Parliament or to the House or either House of State Legislature** including the preparation of

- Electoral rolls,
- The delimitation of constituencies and
- All other matters necessary for securing the due constitution of such House or Houses

Thus, the Parliament of India has legislated **Representation of People Act, 1950 and Representation of People Act, 1951**. State Legislature can make provisions (if any has not been made by the Parliament) in connection with election to the House or either House of State.

IMPORTANCE OF CONDUCTING ELECTIONS FOR A DEMOCRATIC NATION

- In any country practicing democratic norms, conduct of regular elections can be said to be the most visible symbol of the democratic process.
- In India, Article 324 of Constitution empowers 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.
- Even the Supreme Court has held that democracy is one of the inalienable basic features of the Constitution of India and forms part of its basic structure.

- It is here where the role of Election Commission becomes very significant to conduct a free, fair and transparent election in India as it enhances electoral trust among people which further improves the quality of democracy in India through greater voter participation.

IMPORTANT ROLE OF ELECTION COMMISSION

- 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

STATE ELECTION COMMISSION – SEC

- SEC has been constituted under **Article 243K and Article 243ZA** and has been entrusted with function of conducting free, fair and impartial elections to the local bodies in the state.
- **Article 243K & 243ZA** provide that superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls for, and Conduct of all elections to Panchayats and Municipalities shall vest in State Election Commission consisting of State Election Commissioner.
- **Article 243K ensures independence of State Election Commissioner:**
 1. Appointed by Governor
 2. **Removal Procedure:** Same as that of Judge of High Court – removed by President
 3. Salary and Status and allowance of a Judge of a High Court.
 4. Conditions of service cannot be varied to his/her disadvantage after appointment.
- **Mandate & functions of SECs are vested with powers of superintendence, direction and control for:**

- o Preparation of electoral rolls
- o Conducting elections for Panchayats & Municipalities
- o Conducting mid-term or bye-elections for local bodies.
- o Delimiting constituencies for local election.
- o Determine seats to be reserved for SC, ST, Tribals and Women.
- o **Safeguards to Election Commissioners under Constitution:** Article 243K (2) ensures independent functioning of State Election Commissioner as he cannot be removed at will by the state government before his tenure.
- o He can only be removed as judge of High Court is removed through a motion passed in both the houses of parliament.
- o Conditions of service cannot be varied to his disadvantage after appointment.

ELECTION COMMISSION SEEKS MORE AUTONOMY

Election Commission in its 2004 Report opined that current wording of Article 324(5) was “inadequate” and required an amendment to bring the removal procedures of Election Commissioners on par with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). This will provide Election Commissioners (EC) with “same protection and safeguards” as CEC and will strengthen EC.

Concerns Raised by Election Commission

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

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

- In 1991, Parliament enacted **Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Conditions of Service) Act 1991** – fixed retirement age of:

- o CEC at 65 years – Equivalent to SC Judge.

- o Other EC at 62 years - Equivalent to HC Judge.

- **The 1991 legislation was amended in 1993** and CEC and other EC were placed on par on matters of **retirement age, salaries and other benefits. So, now post Amendment**

- o Both CEC & EC's salary is equal to the salary of a Judge of the Supreme Court.

- o Both CEC & EC to hold office for 6 years or up to the age of 65 years.

AUTONOMY OF ELECTION COMMISSION AND ITS MEMBERS CAN BE ENSURED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING: (RECOMMENDATIONS OF 255TH LAW COMMISSION AND GOSWAMI COMMITTEE)

- **Collegium Based Appointment:** Presently, ECs along with CEC is appointed by President under Article 324 based on recommendation of Central Government. The appointment of all Election Commissioners, including the CEC, should be made by President in consultation with a **three-member collegium or selection committee, consisting of Prime Minister; Leader of the Opposition of Lok Sabha** (or leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha in terms of numerical strength) and **Chief Justice of India**. This will reduce executive's complete control in appointment of Election Commissioners including CEC.

- **Need for Parity:** Currently, only CEC can be removed on same grounds of Judge of Supreme Court whereas the other two Election Commissioners can be removed as per CEC's recommendations by government. Thus, there needs to be parity even in removal process for other Election Commissioners.

- **Lack of legal enactment envisaged under Article 324(2):**

Provision mentions that “.... **appointment of Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, subject to provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by President.**” no law has been made by Parliament which leaves a “gap” and leaves appointment of such a crucial post solely to the executives.

- **Plugging Other Flaws in the Constitution:**

- o **Constitution has not prescribed qualifications** (legal, educational, administrative, or judicial) of members of election commission.

- o The constitution has **not debarred retiring Election**

commissioner from any further appointment by the government.

- o **There is no clarity regarding the power division** between 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 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**

- o Be classified as **corrupt practice** under RPA, 1951
- o 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 cognizable offences**

- o At the stage of framing charges by Court

- o If punishment of offence is 5 years or more

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

7. NHRC SOUGHT REPORT ON MUNDKA FIRE

National Human Rights Commission has issued a notice to the Delhi Chief Secretary, seeking a report on the Mundka fire incident within two weeks, and has decided to send its own team to investigate the site. The NHRC asked the Chief Secretary to inform it about the action taken against the officials responsible. The Commission also asked its Director General to immediately send a team for an on-the-spot investigation.

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

- Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 was enacted to provide for the constitution of

- o National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
- o Respective State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) & o Human Rights Courts

- Paris Principles: NHRC has been established in conformity with the Paris Principles, adopted at the first international workshop on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights held in Paris in 1991, and endorsed by UN General Assembly in 1993.

- As per Resolution of UN General Assembly: A national institution shall be vested with competence to promote and protect human rights.

- NHRC is an embodiment of India's concern for the promotion and protection of human rights. Section 2(1)(d) of the PHRA defines Human Rights as the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India.

- Post 2019 Amendment, NHRC shall consist of
 - o A chairperson who has been a Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the Supreme Court.
 - o One Member who is, or has been, a Judge of the Supreme Court.

- o One Member who is, or has been, the Chief Justice of a High Court,
- o Three Members out of which at least one shall be a woman, to be appointed from amongst persons having knowledge of, or practical experience in, matters relating to human rights.

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF NHRC

- Chairperson and the Members shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
- Appointment Committee: Appointment of the Chairperson & Members shall be made after obtaining the recommendations of a Committee consisting of

Prime Minister	Chairperson
Speaker of the House of the People	Member
Minister in-charge of the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Government of India	Member
Leader of the Opposition in the House of the People	Member
Leader of the Opposition in the Council of States	Member
Deputy Chairman of the Council of States	Member

- No sitting Judge of the Supreme Court or sitting Chief Justice of a High Court shall be appointed except after consultation with the Chief Justice of India.

REMOVAL & RESIGNATION - NHRC

- Chairperson or any Member may, by notice in writing under his hand addressed to the President of India, resign his office.
- Chairperson or any Member shall only be removed from his office by order of the President of India on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity after the Supreme Court has on inquiry held in accordance with the procedure prescribed in that behalf by the Supreme Court, reported that the Chairperson or the Member ought on any such ground to be removed.

TERM OF OFFICE – NHRC

- Chairperson shall hold office for a term of 3 years from the date on which he enters upon his office or until he attains the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier and shall be eligible for re-appointment.
- Member shall hold office for a term of 3 years from the date on which he/she enters upon office and shall be eligible for re-appointment.
- On ceasing to hold office: Chairperson or a Member shall be ineligible for further employment under the Government of India or under the Government of any State.

COMPOSITION – SHRC

- State Commission shall consist of:
 - o A Chairperson who has been a Chief Justice or a Judge of a High Court.
 - o One Member who is, or has been, a Judge of a High Court or District Judge in the State with a minimum of seven years' experience as District Judge.
 - o One Member to be appointed from among persons having knowledge of or practical experience in matters relating to human rights.
- Chief Executive Officer: There shall be a Secretary who shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the State Commission and shall, subject to control of the Chairperson, exercise all administrative and financial powers of the State Commission.
- Two or more State Governments may, with the consent of a chairperson or Member of a State Commission, appoint such Chairperson or such Member of another State Commission simultaneously if such Chairperson or Member consents to such appointment. Such appointments must be made after obtaining the recommendations of the Appointment Committee.

APPOINTMENT – SHRC

- Chairperson and Members shall be appointed by the Governor by warrant under his hand and seal.
- Appointment of Chairperson & Members shall be made after obtaining the recommendation of a Committee consisting of:

Chief Minister	Chairperson
Speaker of the Legislative	Member

Assembly	
Minister in-charge of the Department of Home in that State	Member
Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly	Member
For states having Legislative Council - Chairman and Leader of the Opposition in that Council	Members

- Sitting Judge of a High Court or a sitting district judge shall not be appointed except after consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court of the concerned State.

RESIGNATION & REMOVAL – SHRC

- Resignation: The Chairperson or a Member of a State Commission may, by notice in writing under his hand addressed to the Governor, resign his office.
- Removal: Chairperson or any Member of the State Commission shall only be removed from his office by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference being made to it by the President, has, on inquiry held in accordance with the procedure prescribed in that behalf by the Supreme Court, reported that the Chairperson or such Member ought on any such ground to be removed.

TERM OF OFFICE – SHRC

- Chairperson shall hold office for a term of 3 years from the date on which he enters upon his office or until he attains the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier and shall be eligible for re-appointment.
- Member shall hold office for a term of 3 years from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall be eligible for re-appointment.
- No Member shall hold office after he has attained the age of seventy years.
- On ceasing to hold office: Chairperson or a Member shall be ineligible for further employment under the Government of a State or under the Government of India.

AMENDMENTS UNDER PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019

- The amendments address the concerns raised at certain global platforms and by respective State Governments as they faced difficulties in finding

suitable candidates to the post of Chairperson of the respective State Commissions owing to the earlier eligibility criteria for the post.

- Amendment made NHRC more compliant with Paris Principles: The amendments has enabled both the National as well as the State Human Rights Commissions to be more compliant with the Paris Principles regarding NHRC's autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions to effectively protect and promote human rights.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019, PROVIDES FOR THE FOLLOWING CHANGES

- Retired Judge of SC can be appointed as Chairperson: A person who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the Commission in addition to the person who has been the Chief Justice of India.
- 3 Members to be appointed (instead of 2) from amongst persons having knowledge of, or practical experience in, matters relating to human rights. Out of these 3, 1 member shall be a Woman.
- Deemed Members of NHRC: To include Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes, Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as deemed Members of the Commission as members of NHRC.
- Reduction in Tenure: To reduce the term of the Chairperson and Members of the Commission and the State Commissions from 5 to 3 years and the fact that they shall be eligible for re-appointment.
- Eligibility for Chairperson of SHRC: A person who has been a Judge of a High Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the State Commission in addition to the person who has been the Chief Justice of the High Court.
- SHRC for certain UTs: The Central Government may confer upon State Commission the functions relating to human rights being discharged by the Union territories, other than the Union territory of Delhi, J&K and Ladakh.
- NHRC for UTs of Delhi, J&K and Ladakh: Functions relating to human rights in case of Union territory of Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh shall be dealt by NHRC.

THE COMMISSION SHALL, PERFORM ALL OR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS, NAMELY

- (a) Inquire, on its own initiative or on a petition presented to it by a victim or any person on his

behalf, into complaint of

- (i) violation of human rights or abetment or
- (ii) negligence in the prevention of such violation, by a public servant.
- (b) Intervene in any proceeding involving any allegation of violation of human rights pending before a court with the approval of such court.
- (c) Visit, under intimation to the State Government, any jail or any other institution under the control of the State Government, where persons are detained or lodged for purposes of treatment, reformation or protection to study the living condition of the inmates and make recommendations thereon.
- (d) Review the safeguards by or under the Constitution or any law for the protection of human rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation.
- (e) Review the factors, including acts of terrorism that inhibit the enjoyment of human rights and recommend appropriate remedial measures.
- (f) Study treaties and other international instruments on human rights and make recommendations for their effective implementation.
- (g) Undertake and promote research in the field of human rights.
- (h) Spread human rights literacy among various sections of society and promote awareness of the safeguards available for the protection of these rights through publications, the media, seminars and other available means.
- (i) Encourage the efforts of non – Governmental organizations and institutions working in the field of human rights.
- (j) Any other functions as it may consider necessary for the promotion of human rights.

ISSUES CONCERNING NHRC

- Non-filling of vacancies: Most human rights commissions are functioning with less than the prescribed Members. This limits the capacity of commissions to deal promptly with complaints, especially as all are facing successive increases in the number of complaints.
- Non-proportionate use of limited Resources: Large chunks of the budget of commissions go in office expenses, leaving disproportionately small amounts for other crucial areas such as research and rights awareness programs.
- Limited Manpower to address increasing complaints.
 - o Powers are only advisory in nature.
 - o Members lack any experience in dealing with

Human rights issues.

o Not empowered to investigate matter post one year of its occurring.

Hence, needs exist to be adequately empower NHRC by enhancing its financial and human resource base, making its decision immediately enforceable etc. These steps shall go a long way in ensuring their success in promoting and protecting human rights.

SUGGESTIONS

- Decisions of NHRC must be made binding from merely being an advisory body.
- Proceedings to be made Quasi-Judicial in the Nature, since NHRC already has the powers of a civil court, and its proceedings are already deemed to be judicial proceedings.
- Status should be enhanced to that of a constitutional body to ensure compliance of its decisions.
- Change in the composition through introduction of civil society members. Hence, a complete revamping of NHRC is required to make it more effective and truly a watchdog of human rights violations in the country.

8 . SEDITION PUT ON HOLD BY SUPREME COURT

Supreme Court has suspended pending criminal trials and court proceedings under Section 124A (Sedition) of Indian Penal Code, while allowing Union of India to reconsider the British-era law. However, adjudication with respect to other sections of law, if any, would proceed if the court concerned was "of the opinion that no prejudice would be caused to the accused". The court also made it clear that it "hopes and expects" the Centre and States to restrain from registering FIRs, continuing investigations or take coercive measures under Section 124A while the "reconsideration" of the colonial provision was on. So, if new case of sedition is registered, then the accused is at liberty to approach the Court and Court will dispose the case.

In *Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (1962)*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of sedition and noted it as being a reasonable restriction on free speech as provided in Article 19(2) of the Constitution. It made clear that a citizen has the right to say or write whatever she likes about the government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comments, if she does not incite people to violence against the government established by law or with the intention of creating public disorder. So, the question remains as to why sedition is used by the government as a coercive law to invoke fear in the minds of citizens of India.

SEDITION & FREE SPEECH WORKS AT OPPOSITE ENDS

• **Sedition and Free Speech operates at two ends of the spectrum**, but sedition can cross the path of free speech occasionally. Once, threshold of the reasonable restrictions is crossed by an individual, he/she enters the unknown domain or territory of sedition.

• **This world of sedition is mostly one sided** as the government holds most of the strings of one's life and personal liberty. So, it is important to know the grey areas where the world of sedition begins and often, it begins with the idea of freedom of speech and expression which is also one of the fundamental rights under Article 19(1)(a).

• **Free speech is one of the most significant principles of democracy**: The purpose of this freedom is to allow an individual to attain self-fulfilment, assist in discovery of truth, strengthen the capacity of a person to take decisions and facilitate a balance between stability and social change. The freedom of speech and expression is the first and foremost human right, the first condition of liberty as it makes the life meaningful. This freedom is termed as an essence of free society.

IMPORTANCE OF FREE SPEECH

• **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948**, in its Preamble and Article 19 declared freedom of speech as a fundamental right.

• **John Stuart Mill** advocated for the free flow of the ideas and expressions in a society. He argued that for the stability of a society one must not suppress the voice of the citizens, how so ever contrary it might be. To reach a point of conclusion and that too a right conclusion, in certain cases, open public discussions and debates are inevitable.

• According to Mill, this could be achieved through the right to freedom of speech. The right not only makes it possible to highlight the popular opinion of a society but also provides a platform to the suppressed and unheard people who wish to voice against any celebrated culture.

• Mill further points out that a good government is the one where the intelligence of the people is promoted.

RESTRICTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

• Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India guarantees freedom of speech and expression to all citizens.

• However, this freedom is subjected to certain restrictions under Article 19(2) namely, **interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.**

• Sedition is used for restriction on free speech.

SEDITION AS DEFINED IN INDIAN PENAL CODE UNDER SECTION 124A

Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring **into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend**

to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.

Explanations

- The expression “disaffection” includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
- Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, *without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection*, do not constitute an offence under this section.
- Comments expressing disapprobation of the administrative or other action of the Government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.

History of Sedition

• Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England, when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy. This sentiment and law were borrowed and inserted into the IPC in 1870.

• **Section 113 of Macaulay’s Draft Penal Code** corresponds to the present section 124A of IPC on sedition. The punishment proposed was life imprisonment. **The offence of sedition is provided under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC).**

• The law was **first used to prosecute Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897**. That case led to Section 124A of the IPC being amended, to add the words “hatred” and “contempt” to “disaffection”, which was defined to include disloyalty and feelings of enmity. **Even Mahatma Gandhi was later tried for sedition** for his articles in Young India.

• Even in Constituent Assembly, an attempt was made to incorporate sedition to restrict free speech which was opposed by Jawaharlal Nehru.

SUPREME COURT JUDGMENTS ON SEDITION

• **Romesh Thapar v State of Madras**: Supreme Court in declared that unless the freedom of speech and expression threaten the security of or tend to overthrow the State, any law imposing restriction upon the same would not fall within the purview of Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

• **Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar, 1962**: Constitution Bench had ruled in favour of the constitutional validity of Section 124A (sedition) in the IPC. The Court held that a person can be prosecuted for sedition only - *if his acts caused “incitement to violence or intention or tendency to create public disorder or cause disturbance of public peace”*. Unless an act of a person does not incite violence or disturb public order cannot be booked under the dangerous section of sedition.

• **Balwant Singh v State of Punjab, 1995**: Supreme Court, in, acquitted persons from charges of sedition for shouting slogans such as “Khalistan Zindabaad” and “Raj Karega Khalsa” outside a cinema after Indira Gandhi’s assassination. Instead of looking at the “tendency” of the words to cause public disorder, the

Court held that **mere sloganeering which evoked no public response did not amount to sedition, for which a more overt act was required**. The accused did not intend to “incite people to create disorder” and no “law and order problem” occurred. The court has been categorical in expressing that **every criticism does not amount to sedition and the real intent of the speech must be considered before imputing seditious intent to an act**. It was reasoned that raising of some lonesome slogans, a couple of times by two individuals, without anything more, did not constitute any threat to the Government of India as by law established nor could the same give rise to feelings of enmity or hatred among different communities or religious or other groups.

• **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India**: Section 66A of the Information and Technology Act, 2000, was declared unconstitutional on the ground **that it was in direct conflict with the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression**. The Supreme Court held that under the Constitutional scheme, for the democracy to thrive, the liberty of speech and expression is a cardinal value and of paramount importance. There are three concepts which are fundamental in understanding the reach of freedom of speech and expression. **The first is discussion, the second is advocacy, and the third is incitement**. Mere discussion or even advocacy of a particular cause howsoever unpopular is at the heart of Article 19(1) (a). It is only when such discussion or advocacy reaches the level of incitement that Article 19(2) kicks in. It is at this stage that a law may be made curtailing the speech or expression that leads inexorably to or tends to cause public disorder or tends to cause or tends to affect the sovereignty & integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, etc.

• Freedom of speech does not only help in the balance and stability of a democratic society, but also gives a sense of self-attainment. In the case of Indian Express Newspaper (Bombay) v. Union of India, following four important purposes of the free speech and expression were set out:

- (i) Helps an individual to attain self-fulfilment.
- (ii) Assists in the discovery of truth.
- (iii) Strengthens the capacity of an individual in participating in decision-making.
- (iv) Provides a mechanism by which it would be possible to establish a reasonable balance between stability and social change.

• **S. P Gupta v. Union of India**: Supreme Court held that the right to know is inherent in the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1) (a).

• **Javed Habib v State of Delhi**: It was held that holding an opinion against the Prime Minister or his actions or criticism of the actions of government or drawing inference from the speeches and actions of the leader of the government that the leader was against a particular community and was in league with certain other political leaders, cannot be considered as sedition under Section 124A of the IPC.

• **Criticism of government is the hallmark of democracy**:

The democratic system which necessarily involves an advocacy of the replacement of one government by another, gives the right to the people to criticize the government.

• **Higher standards of proof needed for conviction under Sedition:** This is necessary to protect fair and reasonable criticisms and dissenting opinions from unwarranted State suppression. Legitimate speech must be protected, and care must be taken that the grounds of limitation are reasonable and just.

• **Section 124A IPC must be read in consonance with Article 19(2) of the Constitution** and the reasonableness of the restriction must be scrutinized based on facts and circumstances of the case. On the other hand, there have also been instances where people have been charged with sedition for making statements that in no manner undermine the security of the nation.

LAW COMMISSION VIEWS ON SEDITION

• Law Commission of India was asked to consider section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 which deals with sedition. Sedition attracts imprisonment from three years to life.

• **Dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of a robust public debate in a vibrant democracy.** Thus, if the country is not open to positive criticism, there lies little difference between the pre and post-Independence eras.

• **Right to criticise one's own history and the right to offend are rights protected under free speech under Article 19 of the Constitution.** While it is essential to protect national integrity, it should not be misused as a tool to curb free speech.

• **Every restriction on free speech and expression must be carefully scrutinised** to avoid unwarranted restrictions.

• In a democracy, singing from the same songbook is not a benchmark of patriotism. **People should be at liberty to show their affection towards their country** in their own way.

• **An expression of frustration over the situation cannot be treated as sedition.** For merely expressing a thought which is not in consonance with the policy of the government of the day, a person should not be charged under the provision of sedition.

• The Commission also asked whether it would be worthwhile to rename **Section 124A** and find a suitable substitute for the term – sedition.

Arguments in Favour of Sedition	Arguments Against Sedition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Really a draconian law • Used only in specific circumstances • Application of sedition is a part of reasonable restriction. • Does not curb freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against democratic norms • Grossly misused by state machinery to quell dissent • Used against writers, journalists, students who raise voice against policies of government. • Draconian in nature

of speech until it incites violence

- Used against anti national elements or actors such as Naxals, terrorists etc.
- Mere misuse of sedition law by one government cannot be grounds for repeal of the law.

- It is used to gag press and freedom of speech and expression.

9 . DON'T REMOVE ARMY FROM RTI ACT

Indian Ex-Services League, an association of ex-servicemen, family pensioners and next-of-kin of the armed forces personnel who laid down their lives for the country and were recognised by governments, has written to PM against any consideration by the government to remove the armed forces from the purview of the Right to Information Act. The letter said defence services are not to be placed in its Schedule 2.

NEED FOR ARMY UNDER RTI

- Helps to maintain transparency in the functioning of the Indian Army.

- Acts as a powerful tool for family members of serving officials and veterans to seek information from the government or to seek documents or service records of army officials.

- Helps to address myriad grievances of army personnel and their family members regarding service issues or pension matters.

- Seeking information through RTI has reduced litigation in Court.

- Section 8 and 9 of RTI Act provides adequate protection for sensitive information which the Army do not want to disclose.

SECTION 24 OF RTI ACT – EXEMPTS CERTAIN CENTRAL INVESTIGATIVE AGENCIES

- The provisions of RTI Act shall not apply to the intelligence and security organisations specified in the Second Schedule of the Act.

- However, information pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violations shall not be excluded of such central investigative agencies.

- Information about allegations of violation of human rights shall only be provided after the approval of the Central Information Commission.

- Such information shall be provided within 45 days from the date of the receipt of request.

Central Government by amendment may add or omit

any intelligence or security organisation from the Second Schedule. Such amendment shall be laid before each House of Parliament.

THE SECOND SCHEDULE (See section 24)
INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY ORGANISATION
ESTABLISHED BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

1. Intelligence Bureau.
- 1[2. Research and Analysis Wing including its technical wing namely, the Aviation Research Centre of the Cabinet Secretariat.]
3. Directorate of Revenue Intelligence.
4. Central Economic Intelligence Bureau.
5. Directorate of Enforcement.
6. Narcotics Control Bureau.
7. 2***
8. Special 3[Frontier] Force of the Cabinet Secretariat.
9. Border Security Force.
10. Central Reserve Police Force.
11. Indo-Tibetan Border Police.
12. Central Industrial Security Force.
13. National Security Guards.
14. Assam Rifles.
- 4[15. Sashtra Seema Bal.]
- 5[16. Directorate General of Income-tax (Investigation).]
- 5[17. National Technical Research Organisation.]
- 5[18. Financial Intelligence Unit, India.]
- 6[19. Special Protection Group.
20. Defence Research and Development Organisation.
21. Border Road Development Board.
- 7 *****]
- 8[22. National Security Council Secretariat.]
- 9 [23. Central Bureau of Investigation.
24. National Investigation Agency.
25. National Intelligence Grid.]
- 10[26. Strategic Forces Command.]

10 . CENTRE RECONSTITUTES INTER-STATE COUNCIL

Inter-State Council, a body mentioned under Article 263, as a measure to ensure cooperative federalism has been reconstituted with Prime Minister as chairman and chief ministers of all states and six Union ministers as members. Ten union ministers will be the permanent

invitees to the Inter-State Council, according to an official notification. The government has also reconstituted the standing committee of the Inter-State Council with Union Home Minister Amit Shah as chairman.

INTER-STATE COUNCIL – ARTICLE 263

- Under Article 263 of the Constitution, there is a provision for the formation of an inter-State Council. Although this Council has several functions, it is also competent to tender advice regarding the resolution of inter-State disputes including boundary disputes.
- The functions to be discharged by the Council are:
 - (a) inquiring into and advising upon disputes which may have arisen between States.
 - (b) investigating and discussing subjects in which state/s and Union have common interest; or
 - (c) make recommendations for better co-ordination of policy and action among states.

GOVERNMENT ACCEPTED SARKARIA COMMISSION REPORT

- The Commission on Centre-State Relations under the **Chairmanship of Justice R. S. Sarkaria** in its report in January 1988 recommended that:
 - o A **Permanent Inter-State Council called the InterGovernmental Council (IGC)** should be set up under Article 263.
 - o **The IGC should be charged with the duties set out in clauses (b) and (c) of Article 263, other than socio-economic planning and development.**
- Government of India accepted the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission to set-up an Inter-State Council and notified the establishment of the InterState Council through Presidential Order in 1990.
- Government also established Inter-State Council Secretariat in 1991 headed by a Secretary to the Government of India.

COMPOSITION OF THE INTER-STATE COUNCIL

- The Council consists of **Prime Minister as Chairman**, Chief Ministers of all States and UTs, Administrators of UTs, 6 Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers.

FUNCTIONS OF THE INTER-STATE COUNCIL

- **Making recommendations** upon such subject and for better coordination of policy and action regarding any issue or subject matter.
- **Investigating and discussing subjects** in which some or all the States, or the Union and one or more of the States have a common interest.
- **Deliberating upon other matters of general interest** to the states as may be referred by the Chairman.

FUNCTIONS OF STANDING COMMITTEE – CHAIRMAN – UNION HOME MINISTER

- Have continuous consultation and process matters for consideration of the Council.
- Process all matters pertaining to Centre-State Relations before they are taken up for consideration in the Inter-State Council.
- Monitor implementation of decisions taken on the recommendations of the Council
- Consider any other matter related to disputes of centre-states.
- The Standing Committee also takes suggestions from constitutional, geological, environmental, and other experts on different matters of disputes.

11. SC ALLOWS MP TO IMPLEMENT OBC RESERVATION IN LOCAL BODIES

The Supreme Court by modifying its earlier order has allowed the implementation of reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the local body elections in Madhya Pradesh. The court had earlier rejected state government's decision and asked State Election Commission to notify local polls without OBC reservation.

WHAT MADE SUPREME COURT CHANGED ITS VERDICT?

- The Supreme Court gave the go-ahead for local body polls in Madhya Pradesh with OBC reservation, based on revised recommendations in a second report of a State Backward Class Commission.
- The Court gave its approval based on the following considerations:
 - (i) Submission of revised recommendations of the State Backward Commission
 - (ii) Completion of delimitation exercise in the state and its notification thereof.
 - (iii) Maximum limit of 50% reservation was not breached.
- The empirical report was part of the **triple test formula** to provide reservation in local polls.

TRIPLE TEST FORMULA

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

- To set up a dedicated Commission to conduct empirical inquiry into the nature of the backwardness in local bodies.
- To specify the proportion of reservation required to be provisioned local body-wise.
- Such reservation shall not exceed aggregate of 50%

of the total seats reserved for SCs/STs/OBCs taken together.

SC JUDGMENT (K. KRISHNAMURTHY V. UNION OF INDIA)

Petitioner Arguments

- The petitioner challenged Articles 243D (6), 243-D (4), 243T (6) and 243D (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.

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 favour 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 favour of backward class of citizens.

SC Judgment

- **Linking of Reservation not Possible:** The 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:** The Court further 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 decentralisation 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 particular 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 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

12 . GYANWAPI MOSQUE & PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT

Supreme Court in the ongoing Gyanwapi dispute has transferred the case from Civil Judge, senior division, to District Judge of Varanasi for trial. After the claims of a Shivling being discovered inside the mosque, Hindu organisations have claimed worshipping rights inside the mosque. Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which manages the mosque in its petition, has sought protection under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions Act).

SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT – A BALANCING ACT

- The Court directed District Magistrate of Varanasi to protect the SHIVLING found in the mosque premises.
- The Court at the same time also allowed Muslims to offer Namaz till the District Judge pronounce its verdict.

ABOUT THE PLACES OF WORSHIP (SPECIAL PROVISIONS) ACT, 1991

- The law was passed in 1991 by the P V Narasimha Rao led Congress government.
- The law was brought in at the peak of the Ram Mandir movement, exactly a year before the demolition of the Babri Masjid to curb communal tension in those times.
- The law seeks to maintain the “religious character” of places of worship as it was in 1947 — except in the case of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Justice Ranjan Gogoi while pronouncing the Five Judge Constitution Bench in Ram Janmabhoomi dispute stated that the Court was making an exception in Ayodhya case as it was an ongoing episode.

INDIAN SECULARISM & PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT (AYODHYA VERDICT OF SC)

- The Constitution Bench in Ayodhya dispute had said that “history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future.”
- **Non-retrogression** is a foundational feature of the fundamental constitutional principles of which secularism is a core component.
- **The Places of Worship Act** is, thus, a legislative intervention which preserves **non-retrogression as an essential feature of our secular values.**

IMPORTANT PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

- **Prohibits Conversion:** The Act prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th of August 1947.
- **Froze religious character of place of worship as on 15th August 1947** and prohibited conversion of religious denomination or places of worship.
- **Pending Cases ceases to exist (abate):** All suits, appeals or other proceedings regarding conversion of places of worship that were pending on 15th August 1947 shall stand abated and no fresh proceedings could be filed.

Abatement of suit means that the suit ceases to exist, and no proceeding can be conducted.

- **Cases after 15th August 1947:** However, legal proceedings can be initiated with respect to the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship after the commencement of the Act if the

change of status took place after the cut-off date of August 15, 1947.

1991 LEGISLATION DOES NOT APPLY TO (EXCEPTIONS)

- **Ancient or Historical Monument:** Any place of worship which is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site or remains covered by **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.**
- **Court's Decisions:** Any Court proceedings finally decided, settled, or disposed of by a Court, Tribunal or other authority before the commencement of this Act. (1991)
- **Amicable Settlement of Dispute:** Any dispute with respect to any such matter settled by the parties amongst themselves before such commencement.
- **Acceptance without Protest:** Conversion of any such place effected before such commencement by acquiescence (acceptance without protest).



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

1. SIGNIFICANCE OF PM'S VISIT TO EUROPE

PM Modi visited three European countries – Germany, France and Denmark and participated in 2nd India – Nordic. At this visit, he met with 7 heads of government including the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, newly reelected French President, Prime Minister of Norway, Prime Minister of Sweden, Prime Minister of Iceland, Prime Minister of Finland, and Prime Minister of Denmark. The visit assumes importance because it was the first visit of the PM after COVID Pandemic, and it was the first visit after the war in Ukraine broke out which has considerably changed the geo-politics and geo-economics of the world. Because of the important interactions, major geo-political events and importance that India accords to these countries, let us try and understand the key outcomes of this visit along with India's relations with some of these countries.

IMPORTANT AGREEMENTS SIGNED/AGREED DURING THE VISIT

Country	Agreement	Key highlights
India – Germany	Partnership for Green and Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany has committed to providing additional development assistance of €10 billion till 2030 to support India's green growth plans. Agreed to a 7-point agenda on renewable energy and sustainable growth cooperation.

India – Nordic countries	Environmental Cooperation, Space, Cyber security, invest in India's defence industry	Boosting cooperation in wind and solar energy, pollution control and urban renewal projects and other green projects. India and Denmark have already signed a Green Strategic Partnership. India reiterated its commitments made at COP26 in Glasgow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 500 gigawatts of non fossil fuel by 2030, 50% of energy capacity to come from renewable energy by 2030. Reduction of 1 billion tonnes in projected carbon emissions by 2030. Carbon intensity of India's economy to reduce by 45% by 2030 and net zero by 2070.
India – France	Green investments in India.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India called for French investment in making India a green hydrogen hub. Both countries

		<p>agreed to an integrated approach on supply chains for solar energy production in Europe and Asia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two sides set up a strategic dialogue on Space issues, strengthen a cyber dialogue and find more ways for France to invest in building India's defence industry
India – Germany	Equipment and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to step up high tech transfer collaborations and signed a joint declaration of intent for an agreement on exchange of classified information.
India – Nordic	Technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This visit did not have a security component but focused on new technologies.

AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT

- **Disagreement over Ukraine issue:** India has stayed away from taking any stand against Russia owing to its own interests, while European countries want India to call out Russian aggression against Ukraine.
- **Energy From Russia:** EU has very lately started to impose ban on Russian oil with exceptions of Hungary and other landlocked countries. Further Gas has been kept out of the ban. However, India's import of the Russian Oil has increased manifold.
- **India EU-FTA:** European Union is India's 3 largest

trading partner, after China and US, and its 2 largest export destination, but its potential is far more. In such a scenario, a FTA can give further boost to economic relations. However, talks for a Free trade agreement have been pending since 2013 when talks were suspended.

2 . INDIA-FRANCE

India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations. In 1998, the two countries entered Strategic Partnership which is emblematic of their convergence of views on a range of international issues apart from a close and growing bilateral relationship. India-France partnership is one that is rooted on mutual trust, commitment to international law, vision for a "multipolar world shaped reformed and effective multilateralism." In the context of the recent visit of the Prime Minister to France, Let us glance through important aspects of IndiaFrance relation.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

- The areas of defence cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation constitute the three principal pillars of our Strategic Partnership.
- Apart from these traditional fields of cooperation, India and France are increasingly engaged in new areas of cooperation like climate change, sustainable growth and development, the International Solar Alliance etc.
- **India and France support a multi-polar world order.**
- **France supports India's claim for permanent membership of UN Security Council and reforms of United Nations.**
- **France has provided consistent support to India's candidature for the membership of all the four Multilateral Export Control regimes, viz. Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and the Australia Group (AG). France's support was vital in India's accession to MTCR, WA and AG while France continues to support India's bid for accession to the NSG.**
- **India and France have consistently condemned terrorism and have resolved to work together for adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) in the UN.**
- **Both have signed provision of reciprocal logistics**

support between respective Armed Forces.

- Both have declared Joint Statement a "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region" and the "India-France Joint Vision for Space Cooperation".

- France has emerged as a major source of FDI for India with more than 1,000 French establishments already present in India with a total turnover of US \$20 billion and employing around 300,000 persons.

- France is the 9th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of USD 6.59 billion from April 2000 to December 2018. There are more than 150 Indian companies operating in France (including subsidiaries), employing more than 7,000 persons.

INDIA FRANCE RELATIONS IN THE EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Indo-Pacific:** Both believe in a shared vision of a free, open and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, with a commitment to international law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, freedom of navigation and a region free from coercion, tensions and conflicts.

- **Ukraine Conflict:** Both are divergent on the issue of taking a stand against Russia, wherein India has stayed away from condemning Russia owing to its privileged partnership with Russia while France has been critical of Russian aggression. However, both believe in the need to respect UN Charter, international law and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

- **Defence and Security:** France support's India's "Make in India" initiative and wants further to transfer of technology to India. INS Vagsheer the sixth Scorpene submarines developed at Mazagoan dock under a deal with France is a testimony to high level of defence cooperation. Timely delivery of the Rafale despite COVID pandemic has increased optimism about defence ties between the two.

- **Post AUKUS opportunity for collaboration:** France resented the cancellation of Nuclear Submarine development program with Australia, after the formation AUKUS, under which US will transfer the submarine technology to Australia. France which was looking towards security partnership with Australia before the AUKUS, is now finding itself turning to India to rework its Indo-Pacific strategy.

- **Maritime security:** India has growing maritime security concerns in the Indian Ocean given the

increasing Chinese footprint in the region and its intrusions into India's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Andamans. Given this backdrop, it is likely that India will pursue France to step up bilateral engagements but also strengthen its naval wherewithal in the region as a deterrent measure.

- **Space Cooperation:** Both the countries decided to cooperate on ways to secure outer space from several growing space security challenges including counterspace challenges. India is considering a **space security dialogue mechanism with France**. India has similar security dialogues with only two other countries – United States and Japan. China's growing space and counterspace capabilities have pushed many Indo-Pacific powers to develop their own appropriate deterrent measures to protect their assets.

- **Cyber security:** Both agree to develop a common understanding of cyber security challenges and "promoting cyber norms and principles" so as to effectively counter cyber threats and enable a "peaceful, secure and open cyberspace".

- **Terrorism:** Both countries want to further their counterterrorism agenda by addressing several areas including financing of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism, as well as misuse of the internet for terrorism and violent extremism.

WAY FORWARD

Given the long-standing and trusted partnership between India and France and the intensifying geopolitical trends in the Indo-Pacific region, both are likely to build an even closer partnership that will focus on building India's military wherewithal. Even as the bilateral relationship is strong, India and France must forge more multilaterals in the Indo-Pacific, getting more countries to endorse the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy. Beyond diplomatic support and arms, France's actual material capacity to help counter China in the Indo-Pacific remains to be seen.

3. UKRAINE WAR'S GEOPOLITICAL IMPACT ON INDIA

When the war between Ukraine and Russia broke out, India's position on the war was being closely watched by the global community. However, after the initial

balancing act of India, it has been argued that India's strategic options are now shrinking in the broader regional geo-politics largely due to decrease in Russian influence and increase in Chinese influence because of the war. So let us understand some of the challenges in front of India which have emerged because of Ukraine war.

FACTORS THAT LIMIT GEO-POLITICAL OPTIONS OF INDIA

1. Russia as a key strategic partner is no longer available to India for balancing purposes because Russia is more dependent upon India's support than the other way round.
2. Russian focus on Ukraine issue has decreased its influence on Asia, while the Chinese influence has increased.
3. US and west Europe's focus has shifted away from China because of the Ukrainian issue.

CHALLENGES THAT INDIA NEEDS TO HANDLE

A) Increasing influence of China

- Chinese influence has increased considerably in the Past decade owing to its economic prowess (Belt Road initiative, Cheque book diplomacy) and assertiveness witnessed under the present Chinese regime. Ex. South China Sea issue, Galwan valley attack.
- Ukraine war has reduced the focus of US and its partners on South Asia, thereby increasing the influence of China.
- Additionally, with jolt to Russian global image and its reduced global influence and USA's reduced focus on South Asia, their support in helping India in its pursuit of favorable geo-political outcome in the South Asia is decreasing.

B) Managing Russia China ties

- Due to adverse impacts of the war on Russian Economy, Russia's dependence of China is increasing.
- In such a scenario, in case of a skirmish along the LAC, India will have to look towards support from West, which is going to impact Russia's intent of seeking the Indian support during Ukrainian war. Thus, Russia would not want China to start a skirmish along the LAC with India. However, in return the China would want India to reduce its focus on the Indo – Pacific.

C) Calm in Kashmir and India's policy towards Afghanistan and Central Asian republics.

- As consequence of the war, India's policy towards Afghanistan and Central Asian republics will also be impacted.

- India kept itself disengaged from Afghanistan after the takeover of Taliban. Disengagement is being seen as a quid pro quo for peace along LOC by Pakistan.
- However, such a policy will further reduce the strategic interest of India in the region. Only recently, India sent a team Joint secretary to take stock of the humanitarian assistance that India sent to Afghanistan.
- The situation is further getting complicated because of the increasing Chinese influence on the Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan in the backdrop of lack of attention by Russia.

INDIA'S APPROACH TO COUNTER THE CHALLENGES

- India is also taking various measures to counter the Chinese assertion and manage the impact of Ukraine war and international pressure on India's long term strategic partner Russia.
- Some of these measures include:
 - o Outreach to the Central Asian Republics via India – Central Asia Summit.
 - o Recently, Quad meeting in Japan and announcement of Indo-Pacific Economic forum.
 - o The recent visit of Indian Prime Minister to Europe was seen as India assuring its relations with Europe, since both have taken divergent views on issue of calling out Russian aggression in Ukraine.
 - o India has been reaching out to countries in South Asia troubled by political and economic crisis like Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Afghanistan and Myanmar.

WAY FORWARD

Despite such steps the combined geopolitical impact of the ill-timed U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's Ukraine war, and rapid expansion of Chinese influence goes to show how India's geopolitical choices face challenges due to Ukraine war

4. CRISIS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD

India's neighboring countries are witnessing political and economic turmoil. These include Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Myanmar. Such political and economic upheavals pose a challenge for India to balance its ties with these countries, since it has been accused of acting as big brother and of interference in the internal affairs of its neighborhood.

However, it has been argued that India has learnt its lessons from the past and has displayed a careful approach towards the neighboring crises. In this context, let us understand the lessons learnt by India and what more needs to be done.

STRONG ARM POLICY APPROACH

- India has been accused of acting like 'Big-Brother' by its smaller neighbours in the region. India being the most powerful and resourceful country in the region likes to see the South Asian region as its backyard and is the regional hegemon in the region.
- In the recent past, India has been accused of following strong arm tactics under the popularly known approach of **muscular foreign policy**.
- For instance, Government had put Pakistan on notice for terror attacks, and cancelled Foreign Secretary level talks; in Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa government, that had been seen to be close to China was voted out, with some reports that Indian intelligence played a role in facilitating opposition talks; and in Nepal, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's coalition government had fallen apart, with a similar nudge reported from New Delhi.
- These measures have primarily been to counter the Chinese influence in its neighbourhood. But such an approach did not have support our neighbours and was resented.

TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE APPROACH TOWARDS NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Myanmar (Military coup), Nepal, Afghanistan (Taliban replaced Ashraf Ghani led govt.), Pakistan (PM Imran Khan lost the confidence Vote) and Sri Lanka (Political change owing to economic crisis) all have witnessed change in the ruling regime.
- In contrast to the earlier accusations of being a Big brother, **has not been held responsible in any of its neighbouring countries for attempting to interfere in their political processes**. Thus, India has displayed a **more neutral approach**.
- India has **abandoned "one size fits all" approach** to the region.
 - ✓ In Myanmar, India has strengthened ties with the Military Junta.
 - ✓ India has been supportive of the change in ruling party in Nepal and Sri Lanka.
 - ✓ India has almost ignored the change of ruling party in Pakistan.
- India now is **focused more on people in the neighbourhood** rather than just those in power.
 - ✓ Diplomatic manoeuvring with the Afghan and Pak diplomats, despite strained ties with both nations, to send 50,000 MT wheat to

support Afghan population facing humanitarian crisis.

- ✓ In Sri Lanka, India said, India would "always be guided by the best interests of the people of Sri Lanka expressed through democratic processes".
- ✓ Toning down of rhetoric on domestic issues in the neighbourhood.

LESSONS INDIA NEEDS TO LEARN

- Neutral position in neighbourhood is far more challenging than the neutrality shown by India in case of Ukraine war or China's moves on Hong Kong. This is because the fallout of crisis in neighbourhood has direct impact on India unlike the other cases.
- Since in the neighbourhood, India needs to prepare itself for the need for aid and loans or a possible influx of refugees, as movements that develop in one neighbouring country are often mirrored in another.
- Populist policies shown by the ruling parties in the neighbourhood have not worked. Some prominent examples being Sinhala Nationalism in Sri Lanka, Anti – India sentiment in Nepal.
- Economy matters in bringing political stability. All the neighbouring countries were under severe economic strain.
- India must also assess the impact of economic and political vulnerabilities on smaller neighbouring countries that could be exploited by global powers as they seek a more direct influence in the region.
- India must find newer ways to energise regional groupings such as **Bay of Bengal Initiative for MultiSectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** and **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative**, and even to reconsider SAARC.

5. INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

At a time when the world politics is focused on the Ukrainian crisis and when it was being felt that the US and the big powers have moved their focus away from the theatre IndoPacific, US announced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

Initiative that seeks to increase economic collaboration in the Indo-Pacific. In this context, let us try understanding the key aspects of this initiative which was announced at the Quad Summit recently held in Japan.

CONTEXT OF FORMATION

- In the backdrop of US withdrawal from the **TransPacific Partnership** under Donald Trump, there has been concern over the **absence of a credible US economic and trade strategy to counter China's economic influence in the region**.
- China is already an influential member of RCEP in the

region and has applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which is the child of TPP after the US declined to join it. As such the US is projecting IPEF as the new US vehicle for economic re-engagement with East Asia and Southeast Asia.

- The US President first talked about it at the at the October 2021 East Asia Summit. It has been launched at present Quad summit 2022.

Aspects of IPEF	Highlights
Four Pillars	(i) Trade (ii) Supply chain resilience (iii) Clean energy and decarbonisation
Objective	To “advance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness” in these economies.
Members	Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Together, these countries account for 40 per cent of the global GDP.
How a country becomes a member?	Countries are free to join (or not join) initiatives under any of the stipulated pillars but are expected to adhere to all commitments once they enrol.
How the Framework Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) will be spearheading the trade pillar, • Supply chain resilience, clean energy and decarbonisation, and taxes and anti-corruption measures will fall under the purview of the U.S. Department of Commerce.
Key areas of Cooperation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trade Pillar: To establish “high standard, inclusive, free, and fair trade commitments” to fuel economic activity and investments benefitting both workers and consumers. 2. Digital Trade Pillar: Incorporates not just the purchase and sale of goods online but also data flows that enable the operation of global value chains and services, like smart manufacturing, platforms and applications 3. Supply chain resilience Pillar: The framework aspires to

	<p>secure access to key raw and processed materials, semiconductors, critical minerals and clean energy, tech, particularly for crisis response measures and ensuring business continuity</p> <p>4. Clean energy, decarbonisation and infrastructure Pillar: In line with the Paris Agreement, provide technical assistance and help mobilize finance, including concessional finance, to improve competitiveness and enhance connectivity by supporting countries in the development of sustainable and durable infrastructure for adopting renewable energy.</p> <p>5. Tax and anti-corruption Pillar: Aimed at promoting fair competition by enforcing robust tax, anti-money laundering and anti-bribery regimes in line with existing multilateral obligations, standards and agreements to curb tax evasion and corruption in the region.</p>
Pros	<p>digital trade and creating a framework for the digital economy, was born out of the common interest of Chile, New Zealand and Singapore) of which US and India are not a party.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would help U.S. companies that are looking to move away from manufacturing in China. • It is significant that 7 of 10 ASEAN countries and 11 out of 15 of the countries that form Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) took part in the launch. • It signifies the first multilateral attempt to boost supply chain resilience to ease global inflationary pressures and mitigate effects of future disruptions, particularly key raw materials, critical minerals, and semiconductors.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPEF is not a traditional trade agreement. • It would include different modules covering “fair and resilient trade, supply chain

	<p>resilience, infrastructure and decarbonization, and tax and anticorruption”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries would have to sign up to all the components within a module, but do not have to participate in all modules. • The “fair and resilient trade” module will be led by the US Trade Representative and include digital, labour, and environment issues, with some binding commitments. • IPEF will not include market access commitments such as lowering tariff barriers, as the agreement is “more of an administrative arrangement”, and Congressional approval, which is a must for trade agreements, is not mandatory for this. • Critics suggest it would be security, and not economics, that will drive U.S. trade engagement in the region. • Exclusion of U.S. ally Taiwan from the arrangement, despite its willingness to join, exhibits USA’s geopolitical caution to call out China. • Despite Taiwan being eligible on economic merit.
Concerns for India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US’ preference to allow free and open data flows under digital economy pillar will constrict India’s ability to regulate data for domestic purposes. • India might be reluctant to sync its tax policies with the push for a global tax standard amongst US partners to mitigate tax avoidance and evasion. • Labour Standards and non-Tariff barriers will remain a bone of contention for India

6. INDO-PACIFIC MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS INITIATIVE

Quad members floated this initiative at the Tokyo summit, which will collate satellite imagery from Centres in India, Singapore, Vanuatu and Solomon

Islands to offer near-realtime, integrated, and cost-effective maritime mapping and track dark shipping, piracy and provide disaster relief in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and Pacific Ocean. Let us understand the important aspects of this initiative.

INDO-PACIFIC MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS INITIATIVE (IPMDA)

- Quad members India, Japan, Australia, and US signed IPMDA, a maritime security initiative meant **to monitor and tackle illicit fishing activities, dark shipping, and other tactical activities in the Indo-Pacific region**.
- Will allow member countries to monitor illegal fishing, track “dark shipping” and other tactical-level activities.
- Dark ships are **vessels with their Automatic Identification System (AIS), a transponder system, switched off so as not to be detectable**.
- This crucial maritime pact between Quad member countries will enhance security apparatus of IndoPacific region.
- This initiative will transform the ability of partners in the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region to fully monitor the waters on their shores and, in turn, to uphold a free and open IndoPacific.
- It aims to combat China in its expansionist ambitions in the South and East China Sea where the country’s fishing practices have long been called out for being “opaque, vast and at times, illegal.
- In addition to the IFC-IOR, other existing regional fusion centres that will be integrated are the IFC based in Singapore; the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency based in the Solomon Islands, and the Pacific Fusion Center based in Vanuatu, both of which receive support from Australia.

CONSTRAINTS THAT HINDER INDIA’S MARITIME ROLE

- **Infrastructure:** Despite requests from various countries to post **international liaison officers (ILO) at the Indian Navy’s Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**, India has not been able to do that because of the infrastructure constraints. A proposal for expansion has been pending with the Defence Ministry for two years.
- ILOs bring to the table one’s local expertise which Indian authorities are not aware of and help in building linkages with various agencies in their home countries.
- The **initiative will lose steam if not acted upon immediately** as countries will lose interest.
- It is not just important to have ILOs in India, but

also equally important that Indian Navy officers be posted at similar centres in other countries.

- Proposals to post Indian naval liaison officers (LO) at Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), Madagascar, and Regional Coordination Operations Centre, Seychelles, have been pending for more than two years.
- India joined **Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as an observer in 2020** and proposal to send an LO to RMIFC has been pending since.
- Another proposal to post an LO at European-led mission in Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi has also not been approved so far.

Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)

- Set up in 2018, is located within the premises of Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram and currently has 12 ILOs posted there.
- India has signed white shipping exchange agreements with 22 countries and one multi-national grouping.
- As opposed to dark shipping, White shipping information refers to exchange of relevant advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

1. 12TH MINISTERIAL MEETING OF WTO

- The 12th Ministerial Meeting (MC12) of World Trade Organization (WTO) members concluded with first major deal in nearly 9 years.
- In 2013, at the Bali Ministerial Meet, members had signed WTO's first trade deal on a **peace clause on public stockholding for food security purposes and trade facilitation agreement**.

OUTCOME OF 12TH MINISTERIAL MEETING OF WTO

Limited Patent Waiver For Covid-19 Vaccines

- The members agreed on a **waiver of certain procedural obligations under the TRIPS Agreement**.
- This will allow for swift manufacture and export of COVID-19 vaccines without the consent of patent owner.
- The demand to include **diagnostics and**

therapeutics in the agreement was not agreed upon this time. WTO members will decide on the same after six months.

An Agreement To Discipline Fisheries Subsidy

- The agreement on harmful fisheries subsidies was achieved. It includes a strong prohibition of subsidies contributing to **illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU)** fishing with unprecedented transparency provisions.
- It also includes an **absolute prohibition of subsidies** for fishing on the unregulated high seas.
- Also, there is provision on overfished stocks. It will bring sustainability rules for subsidies regarding most vulnerable stocks in the first phase of the agreement.

✓ For the agreement regarding subsidies on overcapacity and overfishing to enter into force, negotiations on UN SDG 14.6 need to be concluded.

Food Security and Agriculture

- SDG 14.6: By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation.
- In a joint Declaration on Food Security, WTO members committed to avoiding unjustified export restrictions on food. They also agreed to improve transparency on any export restrictions.
- Moreover, a decision was taken to completely exempt humanitarian purchases for the World Food Programme from export restrictions. However, internal food security concerns will take precedence and a country will be free to decide according to this priority.
- On Agriculture, members were not able to overcome their differences on a work programme for agriculture.

Extended A Moratorium On Applying Duties To Electronic Transmissions

- The meeting had reached an agreement to extend a moratorium on applying duties to electronic transmissions until the next ministerial meeting.
- Extension of moratorium was backed by major players like the US, the UK and the EU.
- They argued that letting it expire would undermine a global recovery already threatened by spiralling prices. Limited Patent Waiver For Covid-19 Vaccines
- An Agreement To Discipline Fisheries Subsidy
- Food Security and Agriculture Extended A Moratorium On Applying Duties To Electronic Transmissions
- The agreement specified that the moratorium would expire in March 2024, should the next conference be postponed.

INDIA'S RESPONSE

India listed several gains from the meet and sought to position itself as a key proponent of many of the moves.

On Fisheries Deal	Patent waiver	Moratorium on Customs duty on e-commerce
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		transactions
o The agreement on fisheries subsidies is a compromise deal.	o India had called for a TRIPS waiver for vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics to fight Covid-19 and future pandemics.	o India was officially opposed to extending the moratorium, citing loss of revenue to developing countries.
o It dropped several contentious provisions that were not acceptable to several countries.	o In October 2020, India, South Africa, and 63 co-sponsors had made the TRIPS waiver proposal.	o India agreed to an 18-month extension of the moratorium in exchange of protection of its right to extend subsidies to its fishermen.
o Many countries, including India, did not want their ability to provide subsidies curtailed in any manner.	▪ This proposal was to help middle- and low income nations get access to Covid-19 vaccines and drugs.	▪ Contentious clauses on fisheries were removed from the text at the last minute.
o On the other hand, now, over-fishing by China will face discipline	o However, the discussions reached a deadlock in the TRIPS Council, the body responsible for monitoring the operation of the agreement.	
	o Current agreement validates India's position to some extent.	
	▪ The current deal did not include therapeutics and diagnostics.	

INDIA: A MORE ACTIVE PLAYER AT MC 12

- India put forth aggressive draft texts in all pillars of WTO negotiations rather than being reactive, as in the past.

- India brought the members together to a unanimous agreement on fisheries, health, the future of WTO reforms, digital technology, food, and environment.
- The voice of the poor and the vulnerable got strengthened globally by India's principled stand at the WTO.

2. SPECIAL ASEAN-INDIA FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

- India hosted ASEAN Foreign Ministers and Secretary General for a Special ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting (SAIFMM) to **commemorate 30 years of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations**.
- In recognition of this milestone, year 2022 is being celebrated as ASEAN-India Friendship Year.
- The Ministers reviewed the status of ASEAN-India Partnership and set out the path for the coming decade.
- The leaders also addressed the Ministerial Session of 12th edition of Delhi Dialogue (DDXII) which focuses on 30 years of ASEAN-India relations with the theme '**Building Bridges in the Indo-Pacific**'.
- ✓ Launched in 2009, Delhi Dialogue is India's premier annual Track 1.5 Dialogue.
- ✓ Track 1.5 dialogues are conversations that include a mix of government officials (who participate in an unofficial capacity) and non-governmental experts
- ✓ It aims to strengthen ASEAN-India relations in the context of contemporary global and regional scenario.

3. WORLD OF WORK SUMMIT IN GENEVA

- Union Minister For Labour & Employment participated in High Level Panel discussion in Geneva.
- The discussion was organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) under the World of Work summit.
- ✓ The summit was organized by the International Labour Conference (ILC).
- ✓ ILC is the ILO's highest decision-making body. It is often called the International Parliament of Labour.

- Theme of Discussion: "**Tackling multiple global crises: promoting human centered recovery and resilience**".

ABOUT ILO

- Established in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles, ILO is a specialized agency of United Nations to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- It is the only tripartite U.N. agency which brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States.
- Headquarter - Geneva, Switzerland
- Parent organization: Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
- It is also a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDP), a coalition of UN organization aimed at helping meet the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Members - The ILO has 187 member states (186 Countries + The Cook Islands)
- Key Reports Published by ILO - World Employment and Social Outlook; Global Wage Report

4. MAJOR ECONOMIES FORUM ON ENERGY AND CLIMATE (MEF)

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change represented India at the virtual meeting of the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF).
- Hosted by U.S. President, the meeting aimed at galvanising actions that are to strengthen energy security and tackle the climate crisis thereby building momentum for COP27.
- The Indian Minister called upon the members of MEF to launch a global movement on LIFE i.e. Lifestyle for Environment.
- ✚ While addressing the world leaders at CoP 26 in Glasgow (November 2021), PM Modi appealed to world leaders to make lifestyle change a global movement by shunning mindless consumption and adopting mindful utilisation of resources.
- ✚ In this regard, he coined the term LIFE i.e., Lifestyle For Environment.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY

1. CHINA BLOCKS INDIA-US BID TO LIST PAK-BASED LET DY CHIEF AS GLOBAL TERRORIST

- China blocked a joint India-US proposal to list Pakistan-based top LeT militant Abdul Rehman Makki as a **'global terrorist' under a UNSC sanctions committee**.
- China blocked the move by **placing a "technical hold" on the proposal**.

- ✓ Placing a technical hold effectively blocks the proposal to designate Makki as a terrorist until it is withdrawn.
- ✓ This measure (Technical hold) can last for up to six months at a time under the Security Council's procedures.

PAST INSTANCES WHEN CHINA BLOCKED SUCH PROPOSALS

- In the past, China blocked proposals to designate JeM chief Masood Azhar at the UN sanctions committee at least four times by using technical holds.
- At the time, Beijing had contended that this was done as more information was required about Azhar's activities.
- China finally relented in Azhar's case by lifting the technical hold in May, 2019. Beijing caved in because of mounting international pressure. Also, it wanted to

improve its ties with New Delhi in the wake of the 2017 border standoff at Doklam.

APPLICATION OF SANCTIONS BY UN SECURITY COUNCIL

- Under **Chapter VII** of the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council can take action to maintain or restore international peace and security. The **application of sanctions** is one of the possibilities the Council has in this respect.
- Sanctions measures, under Article 41 of the UN Charter, encompass a broad range of enforcement options that do not involve the use of armed force.
- The measures can range from economic and trade embargoes to more targeted measures against specific individuals, companies or entities, such as the freezing of funds and travel bans.

SANCTIONS REGIMES

- Currently, the UNSC has 14 active sanctions regimes which focus on supporting political processes in armed conflicts, nuclear non-proliferation and counter-terrorism.
- Sanctions regimes are enacted via a UN Security Council resolution.

SANCTIONS COMMITTEE

- Each sanctions regime is administered by a sanctions committee that consists of all **15 members** (5 permanent member and 10 non-permanent members) of the Security Council. This requirement effectively gives a veto to all 15 members of the committee.

- These sanctions committees ensure the implementation of the sanctions and can decide by consensus to adopt targeted sanctions against specific individuals, enterprises or entities.
- UNSC Al-Qaeda and ISIL Sanctions Committee or 1267 sanctions committee is one of them.

2. EXERCISES/ OPERATIONS

OPERATION SANKALP

- It was launched by Indian Navy in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman as a measure to assure the safety and security of the Indian vessels.
- After the attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf of Oman in June 2019, Indian Navy had commenced this operation.
- Indian Navy's stealth Frigate, INS Talwar is presently deployed for Operation Sankalp commemorating the 3rd continuous year of Indian Navy's presence in the Gulf for protection of India's Maritime Interests.

EX KHAAN QUEST – 2022

- A Multinational Peacekeeping exercise "Ex Khaan Quest 2022" featuring participation from military contingents from 16 countries was held in Mongolia.
- The exercise was designed to improve peacekeeping capabilities, enhance the core UN doctrine of peace keeping competencies.
- It also provided a platform to strengthen military to-military relationships.

EX SAMPRITI-X

- As part of ongoing India Bangladesh bilateral defence cooperation, a joint military training exercise Ex SAMPRITI-X was conducted at Jashore Military Station in Bangladesh.
- The aim of the exercise was to strengthen interoperability between the two armies and to

understand each other's tactical drills and operational techniques.

JOINT BORDER OPERATION FRIENDSHIP BORDER 2022

- The 8th meeting of the heads of border services of the member states of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held in New Delhi under chairmanship of India.
- The Plan for the preparation and conduct of the Joint Border Operation Friendship Border 2022 was reviewed and approved.
 - ✓ It is an initiative by China to conduct a "joint border operation" in 2023 of all member countries of SCO.
 - ✓ The border operation is called "Solidarity-2023" and will be organised by China.

RIMPAC

- Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) is one of the largest biennial multilateral Naval Exercises, which is led by US.
- The RIMPAC started in 1971 as an annual exercise by the US, Australia, and Canada, but from 1974, maritime exercise became a biennial event.
- India first participated in RIMPAC in 2014.
- 27 countries participated in RIMPAC 2022

GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

1. LANDSLIDES

The monsoons bring destruction to Assam like a clockwork almost every year. However, this year, while the monsoons are yet to arrive, the state has already been beset by floods and landslides that have left 15 people dead and more than 7 lakhs affected. The hill district of Dima Hasao has been ravaged by flash floods and landslides, with connectivity to the rest of the state snapped.

ABOUT LANDSLIDES

Landslide is rapid movement of rock, soil and vegetation down the slope under the influence of gravity. These materials may move downwards by falling, toppling, sliding, spreading or flowing. Such movements may occur gradually, but sudden sliding can also occur **without** warning. They often take place in conjunction with earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions. The extent and intensity of landslide depends upon number of factors: Steepness of the slope, amount of vegetation cover, tectonic activity, bedding plane of the rocks etc.

TYPES OF LANDSLIDES

- **Falls:** Abrupt movements of materials that become detached from steep slopes or cliffs, moving by freefall, bouncing, and rolling.
- **Creep:** Slow, steady downslope movement of soil or rock.
- **Debris flow:** Rapid mass movement in which loose soils, rocks, and organic matter combine with water to form slurry that then flows down slope. Usually associated with steep gullies.
- **Mudflow:** Rapidly flowing mass of wet material that contains at least 50 percent sand-, silt-, and clay-sized particles
- **Flows:** General term including many types of mass movement, such as creep, debris flow, mudflow etc.

CAUSES OF LANDSLIDES

- **Geological Causes:** Weak, sensitive and weathered material, sensitive material, presence of joints and fissures, variation in physical properties such as permeability.
- **Morphological Causes:** Tectonic or volcanic uplift,

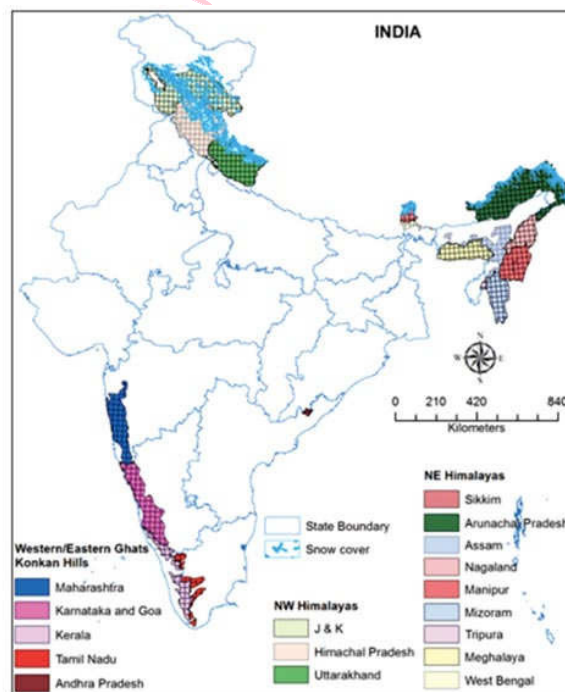
erosion due to wind and water, higher deposition of load on the slope or its crest, removal of vegetation.

- **Physical Causes:** Intense rainfall, earthquake/volcanic eruption, rapid snow melt/freeze.
- **Human Causes:** Excavation of the slope or its toe, deposition of load on the slope, drawdown of reservoir, deforestation, mining, irrigation and artificial vibration.

LANDSLIDE PRONE AREAS IN INDIA

As per Geological Survey of India (GSI), about 0.42 million sq.km covering nearly 12.6% of land area of our country is prone to landslide hazards. The major landslide prone areas in India include

1. **Western Ghats and Konkan Hills** (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra)
2. Eastern Ghats (Araku region in Andhra Pradesh)
3. **North-East Himalayas** (Darjeeling and Sikkim)
4. **North-West Himalayas** (Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).



Himalayan Mountain ranges and hilly tracts of the NorthEastern region are highly susceptible to slope

instability due to the immature and rugged topography, fragile rock conditions, high seismicity resulting from proximity to the plate margins and high rainfall. Extensive anthropogenic interference, as part of developmental activities, is another significant factor. Similarly, Western Ghats, though located in a relatively stable domain, experiences landslides due to number of factors- steep hill slopes, high intensity rainfall and anthropogenic activities. The Nilgiris hills located at the convergence zone of the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats experiences several landslides due to high intensity and protracted rainfall.

IMPACT OF LANDSLIDES

- **Short run:**
 - o Loss and damage to property, loss of lives, destruction to agricultural crops, damages to vegetation, obstruction of vehicular movement leading to traffic jam, temporary loss of livelihood for the poor people etc.
- **Long-run:**
 - o Increase in the sediment load of the river which can lead to floods.
 - o Reduce the effective life of hydroelectric and multipurpose projects by adding an enormous amount of silt load to the reservoirs.
 - o Loss of cultivable land.
 - o Environmental impact in terms of erosion and soil loss.
 - o Demographic Impact in terms of relocation of Population towards other areas.
 - o Frequent disruption of transportation networks leads to geographical isolation and hence perpetuates under-development.

NDMA GUIDELINES FOR LANDSLIDE DISASTER MANAGEMENT

- **Landslide Hazard, Vulnerability and Risk Assessment:**

This includes delineating areas susceptible to landslide hazards in different areas and to assess the resources at risk.
- **Early Warning Systems for Landslides:** This includes the continuous monitoring of movements, development of stresses and the transmission of this data at regular time intervals.

- **Investigations for Landslide Risk Assessment:** Multidisciplinary investigations of landslide risk assessment leading to formulation of Standards to mitigate impact of landslides.
- **Landslide Risk Mitigation and Remediation:**
 - o Restricting development in landslide prone areas through land use planning.
 - o Laying down standards to be followed for excavation and construction.
 - o Protecting existing developments through restraining walls and rock anchors.
 - o **Slope Stabilisation measures:** Generally, include works involving modification of the natural landslide conditions such as topography, geology, ground water, and other conditions that indirectly control portions of the entire landslide movement. These include drainage improvement works, soil/debris removal works etc.
- **Landslide Insurance and Compensation for Losses**
- **Regulation and Enforcement:** The state governments/SDMAs will adopt the model technolegal framework for ensuring compliance with land use zoning and landslide safety issues in all development activities and plans.
- **Awareness and Preparedness:** Comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting different groups of people living in landslide prone areas should be carried out systematically
- **Capacity Development** (Including Education, Training and Documentation):
 - o Introduction of curriculum related to Disaster Management, including Landslides in the Schools
 - o Training of the Administrators to plan, respond and mitigate the impact of Landslides
 - o Technical institutes located in vulnerable areas should develop adequate technical expertise on the various subjects related to landslide management.
- **Immediate Response:** Put in place **Standard Operating Procedure (SoP)** which should ensure coordinated and sustained action from various agencies in the aftermath of landslides
- **Research and Development:** Government should encourage, promote, and support R&D activities to address current challenges, offer solutions, and develop new investigation techniques, with the application of the latest developments in remote sensing, communications, and instrumentation technologies.

2. INDIA'S ETHANOL BLENDING POLICY

Union Cabinet has approved amendments to the National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, **to advance the date by which fuel companies must increase the percentage of ethanol in petrol to 20%, from 2030 to 2025.** The policy of introducing 20% ethanol is expected to take effect from April 1, 2023.

National Policy on Biofuels was notified by Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in 2018 in supersession of National Policy on Biofuels, promulgated through the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy, in 2009.

AMENDMENTS APPROVED TO THE NATIONAL POLICY ON BIOFUELS

- i. To allow more feedstocks for production of biofuels.
- ii. To advance the ethanol blending target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol to ESY 2025-26 from 2030.
- iii. To promote the production of biofuels in the country, under the Make in India program, by units located in Special Economic Zones (SEZ)/ Export Oriented Units (EoUs),
- iv. To add new members to the NBCC.
- v. To grant permission for export of biofuels in specific cases, and
- vi. To delete/amend certain phrases in the Policy in line with decisions taken during the meetings of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

This proposal will also attract and foster developments of indigenous technologies which will pave the way for Make in India drive and thereby generate more employment. The amendment proposal will pave the way for Make in India drive thereby leading to reduction in import of petroleum products by generation of more and more biofuels. Since many more feedstocks are being allowed for production of biofuels, this will promote the Atmanirbhar Bharat and give an impetus to the vision of India becoming 'energy independent' by 2047. Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels. Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill

Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation. Biofuels programme in India has been largely impacted due to the sustained and quantum nonavailability of domestic feedstock for biofuel production which needs to be addressed.

India has been working for two decades to create an ecosystem that will allow more ethanol to be blended into gasoline for use in automobiles, notably two and four wheelers. According to government statistics, two-wheelers make up 75% of India's 220 million vehicles, while four-wheelers make up 12%. Ethanol, often known as ethyl alcohol, is a hydrocarbon that can generate heat and power engines when burned.

SALIENT FEATURES OF NATIONAL POLICY ON BIOFUELS

1. The Policy categorises biofuels as **"Basic Biofuels"** viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and **"Advanced Biofuels"** - Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
2. The Policy **expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production** by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.
3. Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
4. With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a **viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries** of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.
5. The Policy encourages **setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production** from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.
6. Roles and responsibilities of all the concerned

Ministries/Departments with respect to biofuels has been captured in the Policy document to synergise efforts.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Reduce Import Dependency:** One crore litre of E10 saves Rs.28 crore of forex at current rates. The ethanol supply year 2017-18 is likely to see a supply of around 150 crore litres of ethanol which will result in savings of over Rs.4000 crore of forex.
- **Cleaner Environment:** One crore litre of E-10 saves around 20,000 ton of CO₂ emissions. For the ethanol supply year 2017-18, there will be lesser emissions of CO₂ to the tune of 30 lakh ton. By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.
- **Health benefits:** Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.
- **MSW Management:** It is estimated that, annually 62 MMT of Municipal Solid Waste gets generated in India. There are technologies available which can convert waste/plastic, MSW to drop in fuels. One ton of such waste has the potential to provide around 20% of drop in fuels.
- **Infrastructural Investment in Rural Areas:** It is estimated that, one 100klpd bio refinery will require around Rs.800 crore capital investment. At present Oil Marketing Companies are in the process of setting up twelve 2G bio refineries with an investment of around Rs.10,000 crore. Further addition of 2G bio refineries across the Country will spur infrastructural investment in the rural areas.
- **Employment Generation:** One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.
- **Additional Income to Farmers:** By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for this waste if a market is developed for the same. Also, farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Thus,

conversion of surplus grains and agricultural biomass can help in price stabilization.

FLEXIBLE-FUEL VEHICLE

A flexible-fuel vehicle (FFV) or dual-fuel vehicle (colloquially called a flex-fuel vehicle) is an alternative fuel vehicle with an internal combustion engine designed to run on more than one fuel, usually gasoline blended with either ethanol or methanol fuel, and both fuels are stored in the same common tank. Modern flex-fuel engines can burn any proportion of the resulting blend in the combustion chamber as fuel injection and spark timing are adjusted automatically according to the actual blend detected by a fuel composition sensor.

Flex-fuel vehicles are distinguished from bi-fuel vehicles, where two fuels are stored in separate tanks and the engine runs on one fuel at a time, for example, compressed natural gas (CNG), liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), or hydrogen.

ISSUES WITH ETHANOL BLENDING

- It takes **much more ethanol to power a vehicle's engine than petrol.**
- **Leaves residual by-products that can corrode and damage the vehicle,** which is why, while vehicles can be run on ethanol, they need to be tuned accordingly so that they don't compromise on efficiency and usability.
- **Use of E20 will require Modification of vehicles** hence the Cost of E20 compatible vehicles is expected to be higher above the cost of conventional vehicles.
- **Water Footprint:** Sugarcane, a water intensive crop, continues to be the most lucrative food crop for ethanol.
- **Lack of Ethanol production facilities** and capacity to fulfil target.
- **Prices of ethanol produced in India are higher in comparison to global players** since cost of raw materials like sugarcane and food grains are fixed by the government to support the farming community.
- **Restrictions on inter-state movement of ethanol** due to non-implementation of the amended provisions of Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951 by all the States.
- **Non-Availability of ethanol across the country:** Ethanol is not produced or available in some states for blending and about 50% of total pump nozzles in India are supplying only E0. For ex. **Blending has not been taken up in North-East states** due to non-

availability of feedstock or industries.

- Transport of ethanol to different places for blending will **increase the cost of logistics and transport related emissions**.

On the other hand, the gains are potentially significant as ethanol can be sourced from sugarcane, molasses, maize, which given India's agricultural base, can substantially reduce India's dependence on petroleum. The blending percentage of ethanol with petrol has gone up from 1.53% in 2013-14 to 8.5% in 2020-21.

WAY FORWARD

- To make greater ethanol blends more acceptable in the country, the retail price of such fuels should be lower than regular gasoline to compensate for the lower calorific value.
- To fulfil the targets, it is necessary to investigate the potential of using other grains to augment sugar in ethanol production.
- Globally, vehicles compliant with higher ethanol blends are provided with tax benefits.
- Technology for production of ethanol from non-food feedstock should be promoted to tap abundantly available resource without causing any trade-off with the food production system.
- OMCs need to set up ethanol distillation facilities and need to provide timelines for making blended fuel available across the country.
- Experts point out that many sugar mills which are best placed to produce bioethanol do not have the financial stability to invest in biofuel plants.

3. WMO STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE REPORT 2021

Four key climate change indicators – greenhouse gas concentrations, sea-level rise, ocean heat and ocean acidification – set new records in 2021. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), this is yet another clear sign that human activities are causing planetary-scale changes in the land, ocean, and the atmosphere, with harmful and long-lasting ramifications for sustainable development and ecosystems.

Extreme weather – the day-to-day “face” of climate change – led to hundreds of billions of dollars in economic losses, wreaked a heavy toll on human lives and well-being, and triggered shocks for food and

water security and displacement that have accentuated in 2022.

The WMO State of the Global Climate in 2021 report confirmed that the past seven years have been the warmest seven years on record. 2021 was “only” one of the seven warmest because of a La Niña event at the start and end of the year. This had a temporary cooling effect but did not reverse the overall trend of rising temperatures. The average global temperature in 2021 was about 1.11 (± 0.13) °C above the pre-industrial level. State of Global Climate Report of WMO is prepared by collating data from the 6 large data sets on the health of planet.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Greenhouse gas concentrations** reached a new global high in 2020 when the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) reached 413.2 parts per million (ppm) globally or 149% of the pre-industrial level. Data from specific locations indicate that they continued to increase in 2021 and early 2022, with monthly average CO₂ at Mona Loa in Hawaii reaching 416.45 ppm in April 2020, 419.05 ppm in April 2021, and 420.23 ppm in April 2022.
- **Global annual mean temperature** in 2021 was around 1.11 ± 0.13 °C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average, less warm than some recent years owing to cooling La Niña conditions at the start and end of the year. The most recent seven years, 2015 to 2021, are the seven warmest years on record.
- **Ocean heat** was a record high. The upper 2000m depth of the ocean continued to warm in 2021, and it is expected that it will continue to warm in the future – a change which is irreversible on centennial to millennial time scales. All data sets agree that ocean warming rates show a particularly strong increase in the past two decades. The warmth is penetrating to ever deeper levels. Much of the ocean experienced at least one ‘strong’ marine heatwave in 2021.
- **Ocean acidification**: Ocean absorbs around 23% of the annual emissions of anthropogenic CO₂ to the atmosphere. This reacts with seawater and leads to ocean acidification, which threatens organisms and ecosystem services, food security, tourism and coastal protection. As the pH of the ocean decreases, its capacity to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere also declines. The IPCC concluded that “there is very high confidence that open ocean surface pH is now the lowest it has been for at least 26,000 years and current rates of pH change are unprecedented since at least that time.
- **Global mean sea level** reached a new record high in 2021 after increasing at an average of 4.5 mm per

year from 2013 to 2021. This is more than double the rate between 1993 and 2002 and is mainly due to the accelerated loss of ice mass from the ice sheets. This has significant implications for hundreds of millions of coastal dwellers and increases vulnerability to tropical cyclones.

- **Cryosphere:** Although the glaciological year 2020-2021 saw less melting than in recent years, there is a clear trend towards an acceleration of mass loss on multidecadal timescales. On average, the world's reference glaciers have thinned by 33.5 meters (ice-equivalent) since 1950, with 76% of this thinning since 1980. 2021 was a particularly punishing year for glaciers in Canada and the US Northwest, with record ice mass loss due to heatwaves and fires in June and July. Greenland experienced an exceptional mid-August melt event and the first-ever recorded rainfall at Summit Station, the highest point on the ice sheet at an altitude of 3 216 m.

- **Exceptional heatwaves** broke records across western North America and the Mediterranean. Death Valley, California, reached 54.4 °C on 9 July, equalling a similar 2020 value as the highest recorded in the world since at least the 1930s, and Syracuse in Sicily reached 48.8 °C. The Canadian province of British Columbia reached 49.6°C on 29 June, which contributed to more than 500 reported heat-related deaths and fuelled devastating wildfires, which, in turn, worsened the impacts of flooding in November.

- **Flooding** induced economic losses of US\$17.7 billion in Henan province of China, and Western Europe experienced some of its most severe flooding on record in mid-July, associated with economic losses in Germany exceeding US\$20 billion. There was a heavy loss of life.

- **Drought** affected many parts of the world, including the Horn of Africa, Canada, the western United States, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. Drought caused significant agricultural losses in subtropical South America and disrupted energy production and river transport. The drought in the Horn of Africa has intensified so far in 2022. Eastern Africa is facing the genuine prospect that the rains will fail for a fourth consecutive season, placing Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalis into a drought of a length not experienced in the last 40 years. Humanitarian agencies are warning of devastating impacts on people and livelihoods in the region.

- **Hurricane Ida** was the most significant of the North Atlantic season, making landfall in Louisiana on 29 August, with economic losses in the United States

estimated at US\$75 billion.

- **Ozone hole** over the Antarctic was unusually large and deep, reaching its maximum area of 24.8 million km² (the size of Africa) due to a strong and stable polar vortex and colder than average conditions in the lower stratosphere.

- **Food security:** The compounded effects of conflict, extreme weather events and economic shocks, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, undermined decades of progress towards improving food security globally. Worsening humanitarian crises in 2021 have also led to a growing number of countries at risk of famine. Of the total number of undernourished people in 2020, more than half live in Asia (418 million) and a third in Africa (282 million).

- **Displacement:** Hydrometeorological hazards continued to contribute to internal displacement. The countries with the highest numbers of displacements recorded as of October 2021 were China (more than 1.4 million), the Philippines (more than 386 000) and Viet Nam (more than 664 000).

- **Ecosystems** Including terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems – and the services they provide are affected by the changing climate, and some are more vulnerable than others. Some ecosystems are degrading at an unprecedented rate. For example, mountain ecosystems – the world's water towers – are profoundly affected. Rising temperatures heighten the risk of irreversible loss of marine and coastal ecosystems, including seagrass meadows and kelp forests. Coral reefs are especially vulnerable to climate change. They are projected to lose between 70 and 90% of their former coverage area at 1.5 °C of warming and over 99% at 2°C. Between 20 and 90% of current coastal wetlands are at risk of being lost by the end of this century, depending on how fast sea levels rise. This will further compromise food provision, tourism, and coastal protection, among other ecosystem services.

ABOUT WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, WMO is dedicated to international cooperation and coordination on the state and behaviour of the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the land and oceans, the weather and climate it produces, and the resulting distribution of water resources. National Meteorological and Hydrological Services work around the clock to monitor Earth Systems and provide vital weather and

climate information worldwide. Their early and reliable warnings of severe weather and fluctuations in air quality as well as of climate variability and change allow decision-makers, communities and individuals to be better prepared for weather and climate events. Their warnings help save life and property, protect resources and the environment and support socio-economic growth. WMO supports National Meteorological and Hydrological Services with this work and in meeting their international commitments in the areas of disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable development.

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- Establishment and maintenance of data management centres and telecommunication systems for the provision and rapid exchange of weather, climate and water-related data.
- Creation of standards for observation and monitoring to ensure adequate uniformity in the practices and procedures employed worldwide and, thereby, ascertain the homogeneity of data and statistics.
- Provision of weather, climate and water-related services through the application of science and technology in operational meteorology and hydrology to reduce disaster risks and contribute to climate change adaptation, as well as for sectors such as transport (aviation, maritime and land-based), water resource management, agriculture, health, energy and other areas.
- Activities in operational hydrology as well as closer cooperation between National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in states and territories where they are separate.
- Coordination of research and training in meteorology and related fields

4. COP15 OF THE UNCCD

Four key climate change indicators – greenhouse gas concentrations, sea-level rise, ocean heat and ocean acidification – set new records in 2021. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), this is yet another clear sign that human activities are

causing planetary-scale changes in the land, ocean, and the atmosphere, with harmful and long-lasting ramifications for sustainable development and ecosystems.

Extreme weather – the day-to-day “face” of climate change – led to hundreds of billions of dollars in economic losses, wreaked a heavy toll on human lives and well-being, and triggered shocks for food and water security and displacement that have accentuated in 2022.

The WMO State of the Global Climate in 2021 report confirmed that the past seven years have been the warmest seven years on record. 2021 was “only” one of the seven warmest because of a La Niña event at the start and end of the year. This had a temporary cooling effect but did not reverse the overall trend of rising temperatures. The average global temperature in 2021 was about 1.11 (± 0.13) °C above the pre-industrial level. State of Global Climate Report of WMO is prepared by collating data from the 6 large data sets on the health of planet.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Greenhouse gas concentrations** reached a new global high in 2020 when the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) reached 413.2 parts per million (ppm) globally or 149% of the pre-industrial level. Data from specific locations indicate that they continued to increase in 2021 and early 2022, with monthly average CO₂ at Mona Loa in Hawaii reaching 416.45 ppm in April 2020, 419.05 ppm in April 2021, and 420.23 ppm in April 2022.
- **Global annual mean temperature** in 2021 was around 1.11 ± 0.13 °C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average, less warm than some recent years owing to cooling La Niña conditions at the start and end of the year. The most recent seven years, 2015 to 2021, are the seven warmest years on record.
- **Ocean heat** was a record high. The upper 2000m depth of the ocean continued to warm in 2021, and it is expected that it will continue to warm in the future – a change which is irreversible on centennial to millennial time scales. All data sets agree that ocean warming rates show a particularly strong increase in the past two decades. The warmth is penetrating to ever deeper levels. Much of the ocean experienced at least one ‘strong’ marine heatwave in 2021.
- **Ocean acidification:** Ocean absorbs around 23% of the annual emissions of anthropogenic CO₂ to the

atmosphere. This reacts with seawater and leads to ocean acidification, which threatens organisms and ecosystem services, food security, tourism and coastal protection. As the pH of the ocean decreases, its capacity to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere also declines. The IPCC concluded that “there is very high confidence that open ocean surface pH is now the lowest it has been for at least 26,000 years and current rates of pH change are unprecedented since at least that time.

- **Global mean sea level** reached a new record high in 2021 after increasing at an average of 4.5 mm per year from 2013 to 2021. This is more than double the rate between 1993 and 2002 and is mainly due to the accelerated loss of ice mass from the ice sheets. This has significant implications for hundreds of millions of coastal dwellers and increases vulnerability to tropical cyclones.

- **Cryosphere:** Although the glaciological year 2020-2021 saw less melting than in recent years, there is a clear trend towards an acceleration of mass loss on multidecadal timescales. On average, the world's reference glaciers have thinned by 33.5 meters (ice-equivalent) since 1950, with 76% of this thinning since 1980. 2021 was a particularly punishing year for glaciers in Canada and the US Northwest, with record ice mass loss due to heatwaves and fires in June and July. Greenland experienced an exceptional mid-August melt event and the first-ever recorded rainfall at Summit Station, the highest point on the ice sheet at an altitude of 3 216 m.

- **Exceptional heatwaves** broke records across western North America and the Mediterranean. Death Valley, California, reached 54.4 °C on 9 July, equalling a similar 2020 value as the highest recorded in the world since at least the 1930s, and Syracuse in Sicily reached 48.8 °C. The Canadian province of British Columbia reached 49.6°C on 29 June, which contributed to more than 500 reported heat-related deaths and fuelled devastating wildfires, which, in turn, worsened the impacts of flooding in November.

- **Flooding** induced economic losses of US\$17.7 billion in Henan province of China, and Western Europe experienced some of its most severe flooding on record in mid-July, associated with economic losses in Germany exceeding US\$20 billion. There was a heavy loss of life.

- **Drought** affected many parts of the world, including the Horn of Africa, Canada, the western United States, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. Drought caused significant agricultural losses in subtropical South America and disrupted energy production and river transport. The drought in the Horn of Africa has intensified so far in 2022. Eastern Africa is facing the genuine prospect that the rains will fail for a fourth consecutive season, placing Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalis into a drought of a length not experienced in the last 40 years. Humanitarian agencies are warning of devastating impacts on people and livelihoods in the region.

- **Hurricane Ida** was the most significant of the North Atlantic season, making landfall in Louisiana on 29 August, with economic losses in the United States estimated at US\$75 billion.

- **Ozone hole** over the Antarctic was unusually large and deep, reaching its maximum area of 24.8 million km² (the size of Africa) due to a strong and stable polar vortex and colder than average conditions in the lower stratosphere.

- **Food security:** The compounded effects of conflict, extreme weather events and economic shocks, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, undermined decades of progress towards improving food security globally. Worsening humanitarian crises in 2021 have also led to a growing number of countries at risk of famine. Of the total number of undernourished people in 2020, more than half live in Asia (418 million) and a third in Africa (282 million).

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vulnerable to climate change. They are projected to lose between 70 and 90% of their former coverage area at 1.5 °C of warming and over 99% at 2°C. Between 20 and 90% of current coastal wetlands are at risk of being lost by the end of this century, depending on how fast sea levels rise. This will further compromise food provision, tourism, and coastal protection, among other ecosystem services.

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climate change adaptation, as well as for sectors such as transport (aviation, maritime and land-based), water resource management, agriculture, health, energy and other areas.

- Activities in operational hydrology as well as closer cooperation between National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in states and territories where they are separate.
- Coordination of research and training in meteorology and related fields.

5. COP15 OF THE UNCCD

The 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), concluded in May 2022 in Abidjan with a global pledge to boost drought resilience and invest in land restoration for future prosperity.

ABOUT COP 15 OF UNCCD

- The COP15 theme, 'Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity', is a call to action to ensure land, the lifeline on this planet, continues to benefit present and future generations.
- COP15 will bring together leaders from governments, the private sector, civil society and other key stakeholders from around the world to drive progress in the future sustainable management of one of our most precious commodities: land.
- Land is the bedrock of a healthy, productive society, and COP15 will explore links between land and other key sustainability issues.
- COP 15 is a key moment in the fight against desertification, land degradation and drought. It will build on the findings of the second edition of the **Global Land Outlook** and offer a concrete response to the interconnected challenges of land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss as we step into the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
- Through its decisions adopted by UNCCD's 197 Parties, COP15 is expected to galvanize sustainable solutions for land restoration and drought resilience, with a strong focus on future-proofing land use.

LAND DEGRADATION

- Land degradation is a process in which the value of the biophysical environment is affected by a combination of human-induced processes acting upon the land.
- It is viewed as any change or disturbance to the land perceived to be deleterious or undesirable.
- Natural hazards are excluded as a cause; however human activities can indirectly affect phenomena such as floods and bush fires.
- Land degradation has severe consequences for agricultural productivity, the environment, and its effects on food security.
- It is estimated that up to 40% of the world's agricultural land is seriously degraded.

IMPACT OF LAND DEGRADATION:

- **A temporary or permanent decline in the productive capacity of the land:** This can be seen through a loss of biomass, a loss of actual productivity or in potential productivity, or a loss or change in vegetative cover and soil nutrients.
- **Loss of biodiversity:** A loss of range of species or ecosystem complexity as a decline in the environmental quality.
- **Shifting ecological risk:** increased vulnerability of the environment or people to destruction or crisis. This is measured through a base line in the form of preexisting risk of crisis or destruction.

CAUSES OF LAND DEGRADATION

Land clearance, such as clearcutting and deforestation	Agricultural depletion of soil nutrients through poor farming practices
Livestock including overgrazing and over drafting	Urban sprawl and commercial development Vehicle off-roading
Invasive Species	Quarrying of stone, sand, ore and minerals
Soil degradation, Soil contamination, Soil acidification, Soil erosion	Exposure of naked soil after harvesting by heavy equipment
Significant land degradation from	Increase in field size due to economies of scale,

seawater inundation, particularly in river deltas and on low-lying islands, is a potential hazard that was identified in a 2007 IPCC report	reducing shelter for wildlife.
	Loss of soil carbon
Dumping of non biodegradable trash, such as plastics	Monoculture, destabilizing the local ecosystem

SENSITIVITY AND RESILIENCE

- Sensitivity and resilience are measures of the vulnerability of a landscape to degradation. These two factors combine to explain the degree of vulnerability.
- Sensitivity is the degree to which a land system undergoes change due to natural forces, human intervention or a combination of both. Resilience is the ability of a landscape to absorb change, without significantly altering the relationship between the relative importance and numbers of individuals and species that compose the community. It also refers to the ability of the region to return to its original state after being changed in some way.
- Resilience of a landscape can be increased or decreased through human interaction based upon different methods of land-use management. Land that is degraded becomes less resilient than undegraded land, which can lead to even further degradation through shocks to the landscape.

ABOUT UNCCD

- Established in 1994, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
- The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semiarid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.
- The Convention's 197 parties work together to improve the living conditions for people in drylands, to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought.
- UNCCD is particularly committed to a bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local

people in combating desertification and land degradation.

- UNCCD secretariat facilitates cooperation between developed and developing countries, particularly around knowledge and technology transfer for sustainable land management.
- As the dynamics of land, climate and biodiversity are intimately connected, the UNCCD collaborates closely with the other two Rio Conventions; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to meet these complex challenges with an integrated approach and the best possible use of natural resources.

LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY (LDN) FUND

- LDN fund is a first-of-its-kind investment vehicle leveraging public money to raise private capital for sustainable land management and landscape restoration activities worldwide.
- Land Degradation Neutrality Fund (LDN Fund) was launched at the 13th Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Ordos, China.
- It will be independent from the UN and will be managed by a private sector investment management firm.
- It will invest in bankable projects on land rehabilitation and sustainable land management worldwide, including
 - o Sustainable agriculture, sustainable livestock management,
 - o Agro-forestry, sustainable forestry,
 - o Renewable energy, infrastructure development, and eco-tourism.

ABOUT LDN

It is a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions, services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems.

6. DROUGHT IN NUMBERS REPORT

More than a billion people around the world were affected by drought in 2000-19, making it the second-worst disaster after flooding. Findings on impact of

droughts was released in the report Drought in Numbers, 2022 presented at UNCCD.

SALIENT FINDINGS

- A United Nations report has revealed that many parts of India fall under the list of regions that are vulnerable to drought globally. The report also stated that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reduced by 2 to 5 per cent between 1998 and 2017 due to severe droughts in the country. Globally, droughts in the same period caused economic losses of approximately \$124 billion.
- The Drought in Numbers report is a collection of data on the effects of droughts on our ecosystem and how they can be mitigated through efficient planning for the future. The report also helps inform negotiations surrounding key decisions by the UNCCD's 197 member parties at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15), currently underway in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.
- The number and duration of droughts around the world has increased by an alarming 29% since 2000.

HUMAN IMPACT

- More than a billion people around the world were affected by drought in 2000-19, making it the secondworst disaster after flooding.
- World Health Organisation has noted that approximately 55 million people globally are directly affected by droughts annually, making it the most serious hazards to livestock and crops in almost every part of the world.
- Africa was the worst hit, with 134 droughts, of which 70 occurred in East Africa.
- Impact of drought is not uniform across genders. Research shows that women and girls in emerging and developing countries suffer more in terms of education levels, nutrition, health, sanitation, and safety because of droughts. Burden of water collection also disproportionately falls on women (72 per cent) and girls (9 per cent). The report notes that they may spend up to 40 per cent of their caloric intake fetching water.
- In 2022, over 2.3 billion people are facing water stress. Almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

- If predictions are correct and global warming reaches 3° C by 2100, drought losses could be five times higher than today's levels. The largest increase

in drought losses is projected in Mediterranean and Atlantic regions of Europe.

- Australia's megadrought in 2019-2020 contributed to "megafires" resulting in one of the most extensive losses of habitat for threatened species. About three billion animals were killed or displaced in the Australian wildfires. On a related note, 84 per cent of all terrestrial ecosystems are threatened by changing and intensifying wildfires.
- According to a 2017 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the percentage of plants affected by drought has more than doubled in the last 40 years. Around 12 million hectares of land are lost each year due to drought and desertification.



- It is also known as the Painted Leopard Gecko.
- It is strictly nocturnal, actively foraging along trails in the forest after dusk.
- This new species appears to be common in forests of Andhra Pradesh & Odisha.
- Based on IUCN conservation prioritization criteria, the researchers suggested it to list as Near Threatened.

7. SPECIES IN NEWS

THIOMARGARITA MAGNIFICA

- It is a bacterium that is big enough to be seen through the naked eye. It is said to be the size of a fly.
- This huge string-like bacterium is native to Caribbean mangroves.



EUBLEPHARIS PICTUS

FISHING CAT

- Recently the world's first population estimation of the fishing cat has been conducted outside the protected area network.
- Fishing cats are about twice the size of a typical domestic cat.
- The fishing cat is nocturnal (active at night) and apart from fish also preys on frogs, crustaceans, snakes, birds, and scavenges on carcasses of larger animals. The species breed all year round.
- They spend most of their lives in areas of dense vegetation close to water bodies and are excellent swimmers.
- In India, fishing cats are mainly found in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, Chilika lagoon, on the foothills of the Himalayas along the Ganga and Brahmaputra river valleys and in the Western Ghats.
- It is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List and in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.



SARAS CRANE

- It is a **large non-migratory crane** found in parts of the **Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and Australia.**
- It is the **tallest flying bird in world** standing 152-156 cm tall with a wingspan of 240cm.



- It is easily distinguished from other cranes in the region by its overall grey colour and the contrasting red head and upper neck.
- It is listed as **Vulnerable on IUCN Red List** and in **Schedule IV of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.**

PLATYGOMPHUS BENRITARUM

- It is a **new species of dragonfly** discovered in Assam.
- It has turquoise blue eyes and dark brown face covered with hair on the sides.



- It has been **named in honour of two women**, Monisha Ben Behal and Rita Banerji.

BLUE DUKE

- The Chief Minister of Sikkim declared **Blue Duke** as **"State Butterfly of Sikkim"**



- It is a **native butterfly species of Sikkim.**
- It is also called *Bassarona durga*. It was first discovered in Sikkim in 1858.
- It is **listed in Schedule 2 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.**

CHEETAH

- It is the world's fastest land mammal.
- It is **native to Africa and central Iran.**
- The **Asiatic cheetah**, which is now found only Iran, is classified as **critically endangered** in IUCN Red List; while the **African cheetah** is classified as **vulnerable** in the IUCN red list.



- In India, cheetah was **declared extinct in 1952.**

CHELONOIDIS PHANTASTICUS

- A giant tortoise species, believed to be extinct 100 years ago, is rediscovered recently.



- It is commonly called Fernandina Island, Galapagos Giant Tortoise.

- Its habitat is largely dry brush land at lower elevations, but much of that habitat has been destroyed.
- It is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red list.

HAPLOPTYCHIUS SAHYADRIENSIS

- A new species of snail has been found in northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra.
- The species is endemic to Vishalgad Conservation Reserve in Kolhapur.
- It has been named after the type locality of the species in the northern part of the Western Ghats, which is Sahyadri in Sanskrit.
- India has nearly 1,450 snails and slugs with the highest diversity in northeastern India followed by the Western Ghats.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. STANDARD MODEL OF PARTICLE PHYSICS GETS A JOLT

In CDF (Collider Detector at Fermilab) experiment, Physicists have found that an elementary particle called the W boson appears to be 0.1% too heavy — a tiny discrepancy that could foreshadow a huge shift in fundamental physics. If the W's excess weight relative to the standard theoretical prediction can be independently confirmed, the finding would imply the existence of undiscovered particles or forces and would bring about the first major rewriting of the laws of quantum physics in half a century, Standard Model of particle physics, the long-reigning set of equations capturing all known particles and forces. But while theorists had various reasons to expect the top quark and the Higgs to exist, and to be connected to the W boson through the equations of the Standard Model, today the theory has no obviously missing pieces. Any remaining discrepancy in the W boson's mass would point toward the unknown. Standard Model is known to be incomplete, leaving various grand mysteries unsolved, such as the nature of dark matter.

STANDARD MODEL OF PARTICLE PHYSICS

- Standard Model of particle physics is the theory describing **three of the four known fundamental forces (Electromagnetic, weak and strong interactions while omitting gravity)** in the universe and classifying all known elementary particles.
- It **does not fully explain theory of gravitation** as described by general relativity, or account for the universe's accelerating expansion as possibly described by dark energy.
- The model does not contain any viable dark matter particle that possesses all the required properties deduced from observational cosmology.
- It also **does** not incorporate neutrino oscillations and their non-zero masses.
- According to the standard model, elementary particles in nature are **Quarks, Leptons and Bosons**.

QUARKS

- They join to form hadrons, such as protons and neutrons, which are components of nuclei of atoms.

- The antiparticle of a quark is the antiquark.
- There are 6 principal quarks and, hence, 6 anti-quarks.
- Quarks and antiquarks are the only two fundamental particles that interact through all four fundamental forces of physics: gravitation, electromagnetism, and the strong interaction and weak interactions.
- A quark exhibits confinement, which means that quarks are not observed independently but always in combination with other quarks.

LEPTONS

- Like quarks, leptons too are of 6 types.
- The six types of leptons are: electron, muon, tau and 3 types of neutrinos.
- However, they do not have any fractional charge.

BOSON

- Boson is a collective name given to particles that carry forces.
- Named after Indian scientist Satyendra Nath Bose.
- Gravity as a force of nature is yet not accepted by the Standard Model due to the failure to discover its Boson.
- Some elementary bosons (for example, gluons) act as force carriers, which give rise to forces between other particles, while one (Higgs boson) gives rise to the phenomenon of mass. Other bosons, such as mesons, are composite particles made up of smaller constituents.
- Bosons are thought to be particles which are responsible for all physical forces. Other known bosons are photon, W and Z bosons, and gluon.

WEAK BOSONS

- W bosons, together with Z bosons, mediate the weak force, one of the universe's four fundamental forces. Unlike gravity, electromagnetism and the strong force, the weak force doesn't push or pull so much as it transforms heavier particles into lighter ones.
- A muon spontaneously decays into a W boson and a neutrino, for instance, and the W then becomes an electron and another neutrino. Related subatomic shape-shifting causes radioactivity and helps keep the sun shining.

MUON

- Muon, a heavier cousin of electron, is expected to have a value of 2 for its magnetic moment (g).
- It occurs naturally in cosmic ray showers and has been produced copiously in Fermilab experiments.
- Like electron, muon has a magnetic moment because of which, when it is placed in a magnetic field, it spins.

As muon spins, it also interacts with the surrounding environment, which consists of short-lived particles popping in and out of a vacuum. So, its g value (magnetic moment) is altered by its interactions with these short-lived excitations.

'MUON G-2' EXPERIMENT RESULT

- Fermilab has announced that measured 'g' deviated from the amount predicted by the Standard Model.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULT

- The implications of this difference in the muon's magnetic moment can be significant.
- Standard Model is supposed to contain the effects of all known particles and forces at the particle level, if the measured g factor differs from the value calculated by the Standard Model, it could signify that there are new particles in the environment that the SM does not account for.
- So, a contradiction of the Standard Model would imply that there exist new particles, and their interactions with known particles would enlarge the canvas of particle physics.
- These new particles could be dark matter particles which people have been looking out for, in a long time.
- This observation together with the recently observed anomaly in B decays at CERN indicates that the effects of new yet unobserved particles and forces is being seen as quantum effects.

DARK MATTER

- It was in 1930s when Fritz Zwicky observed that many galaxies were moving faster than theoretical calculations. This implied that there was some mysterious gravitational pull towards the centre of those galaxies. The quantity of matter needed to exert such a pull far exceed the observed matter. This extra matter which invisible and undetected has been termed as Dark Matter.
- It has not yet been observed yet directly. It doesn't interact with matter and is completely invisible to light and other forms of electromagnetic radiation making it impossible to detect.

- Scientists are confident it exists because of the gravitational effects it has on galaxies and galaxy clusters.
- The light from distant galaxies gets distorted and magnified by massive, invisible clouds of dark matter in the phenomenon known as **Gravitational Lensing**.

NOTE OF CAUTION

- There have also been calculations made by a group of scientists which appeared in Nature that use the Standard Model itself to explain this difference. But these so-called Lattice Models could have large errors and need to be substantiated further.

2 . MOZAMBIQUE CONFIRMS FIRST WILD POLIOVIRUS CASE IN 30 YEARS

Mozambique. Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), led by national governments and World Health Organisation (WHO), has been monitoring the disease situation globally. As per the WHO, since 1980, the cases of wild poliovirus have decreased by over 99.9% because of vaccination efforts made around the world.

- For a country to be declared polio-free, wild transmission of all three kinds of Polioviruses must be stopped.
- For eradication, cases of both wild and vaccine-derived polio infection must be reduced to zero.
- Eradication of a disease refers to the complete and permanent worldwide reduction to zero new cases through deliberate efforts. If a disease has been eradicated, no further control measures are required.
- However, elimination of a disease refers to reduction to zero or a very low defined target rate of new cases in a defined geographical area. It requires continued measures to prevent re-establishment of disease transmission.
- India received polio-free certification by the WHO in 2014, after three years of zero cases.
- Afghanistan and Pakistan are the two countries that are the last stronghold of the wild poliovirus.

ABOUT POLIO VIRUS

- Positive-sense **single-stranded RNA viruses**. There are three serotypes of wild poliovirus type 1, type 2, and type 3 each with a slightly different **capsid protein**. Immunity to one serotype does not give confer immunity to the other two.

- Type 2 wild poliovirus was declared eradicated in 2015, with last virus detected in India in 1999. Type 3 wild poliovirus was declared eradicated in 2019. It was last detected in 2012. Only type 1 wild poliovirus remains.
- Virus may infect central nervous system, which may cause paralysis; parts outside central nervous system, which causes a minor illness with mild symptoms. Less than 1% of poliovirus infections result in paralysis.
- Virus is most often spread by the **faecal-oral route**. Infected individuals shed poliovirus into environment for several weeks, where it can spread rapidly through a community, especially in areas of poor sanitation.
- It largely affects children under 5 years of age.
- There is no cure, but it can be prevented through immunisation.
- Poliovirus enters through the mouth and multiplies in the intestine.

CIRCULATING VACCINE-DERIVED POLIOVIRUS (cVDPV)

- While cVDPVs are rare, they have been increasing in recent years due to low immunization rates within communities.
- Since African Region was declared to have interrupted transmission of wild poliovirus in 2020, cVDPV are now the only form of the poliovirus that affects the African Region.
- Oral polio vaccine (OPV) that has brought wild poliovirus to the brink of eradication has many benefits: live attenuated (weakened) vaccine virus provides better immunity in the gut, which is where polio replicates. Vaccine virus is also excreted in the stool, and in communities with low-quality sanitation, this means that it can be spread from person to person and help protect the community.
- However, in communities with low immunization rates, as the virus is spread from one unvaccinated child to another over a long period of time (often over the course of about 12-18 months), it can mutate and take on a form that can cause paralysis just like the wild poliovirus. This mutated poliovirus can then spread in communities, leading to cVDPVs.
- The cause of cVDPV is low immunization rates. So, best way to prevent them and stop them when there is an outbreak is to vaccinate children. Polio vaccine protects children whether the kind of polio is wild poliovirus or vaccine-derived poliovirus. Outbreaks (whether WPV or cVDPV) are usually rapidly stopped

with 2–3 rounds of high-quality supplementary immunization activities (immunization campaigns).

ORAL POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- It is the predominant vaccine used in the fight to eradicate polio.
- There are different types of oral poliovirus vaccine, which may contain one, a combination of two, or all three different serotypes of attenuated vaccine.
- **Attenuated poliovirus(es)** contained in OPV can replicate effectively in the intestine, but around 10,000 times less able to enter the central nervous system than wild virus. This enables individuals to mount an immune response against the virus. Virtually all countries which have eradicated polio used OPV to interrupt person to person transmission of the virus.

ADVANTAGES OF ORAL POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- Relatively cheap.
- Safe and effective and offer long lasting protection against serotype(s) which they target.
- They stimulate good mucosal immunity, hence effective at interrupting transmission of the virus.
- They are administered orally and do not require health professionals or sterile needle syringes. As such, OPVs are easy to administer in mass vaccination campaigns.
- **Passive Immunisation:** For several weeks after vaccination the vaccine virus replicates in the intestine, is excreted and can be spread to others in close contact. This means that in areas with poor hygiene and sanitation, immunization with OPV can result in 'passive' immunization of people who have not been vaccinated.

DISADVANTAGES OF ORAL POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- In extremely rare cases (at a rate of approximately 2 to 4 events per 1 million births) live attenuated vaccine-virus in OPV can cause paralysis.
- In some cases, it is believed that this may be triggered by an immunodeficiency.
- The extremely low risk of **vaccine-associated paralytic poliomyelitis (VAPP)** is well accepted by most public health programmes.
- Very rarely, when there is insufficient coverage in a community the vaccine-virus may be able to circulate, mutate and, over the course of 12 to 18 months, reacquire neurovirulence. This is known as a **circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus**.

INACTIVATED POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- IPV consists of inactivated (killed) poliovirus strains of all three poliovirus types.
- Given by intramuscular or intradermal injection and needs to be administered by a trained health worker.
- IPV produces antibodies in the blood to all three types of polioviruses. In the event of infection, these antibodies prevent the spread of the virus to the central nervous system and protect against paralysis.

ADVANTAGES OF INACTIVATED POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- As IPV is not a 'live' vaccine, it carries no risk of VAPP.
- IPV triggers an excellent protective immune response in most people.
- IPV is one of the safest vaccines in use.
- No serious systemic adverse reactions have been shown to follow vaccination.
- IPV is highly effective in preventing paralytic disease caused by all three types of polioviruses.

DISADVANTAGES OF INACTIVATED POLIOVIRUS VACCINE

- IPV induces very low levels of immunity in the intestine. As a result, when a person immunized with IPV is infected with wild poliovirus, the virus can still multiply inside the intestines and be shed in the faeces, risking continued circulation.
- IPV is over five times more expensive than OPV.
- Administering the vaccine requires trained health workers, as well as sterile injection equipment and procedures. An increasing number of industrialized, polio-free countries are using IPV as the vaccine of choice. This is because the risk of paralytic polio associated with continued routine use of OPV is deemed greater than the risk of imported wild virus. However, as IPV does not stop transmission of the virus, OPV is used wherever a polio outbreak needs to be contained, even in countries which rely exclusively on IPV for their routine immunization programme. Once polio has been eradicated, use of all OPV will need to be stopped to prevent re-establishment of transmission due to VDPVs

3. PRIVATE PLAYERS IN SPACE SECTOR

Recently, Minister of State for Department of Space (DOS) informed Lok Sabha that government was looking at opening space sector to Foreign Direct Investment.

INDIA'S PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVE IN SPACE SECTOR

- Bengaluru-based **Pixxel India** has planned a vast constellation of earth-imaging satellites that would continuously monitor every part of the globe and beam high-resolution imagery and other data that can be used for a variety of applications related to climate change, agriculture, and urban planning.
- The **first satellite Anand** from a start-up called Pixxel India was going to be launched.
- Till now Indian industry's role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems to ISRO. Indian industries do not have the resources or technology to undertake independent space projects of the kind that US companies such as SpaceX have been doing or provide space-based services.
- Demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India, and ISRO is unable to cater to this. The need for satellite data, imageries and space technology now cuts across sectors, from weather to agriculture to transport to urban development, and more.
- The private players in the space communication sector will also enable India to keep pace with the growing demand for satellite-based broadcasting, network connectivity, and global mobile personal communication.

INDIA'S FIRST PRIVATE UPPER STAGE ROCKET ENGINE

- Aerospace start-up Skyroot Aerospace has successfully test fired an upper-stage rocket engine, becoming the first Indian private company to demonstrate the capability to build an indigenous rocket engine.
- The 3-D printed rocket engine – Raman, named after Nobel laureate CV Raman – has fewer moving parts and weighs less than half of conventional rocket engines with a similar capacity.
- It is India's first 100% 3D-printed bi-propellant liquid rocket engine injector. Compared to traditional manufacturing, this reduced the overall mass by 50%, reduced the total number of components and lead time by 80%.

NEED FOR PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION IN SPACE

- Demand for space-based applications and services is growing and ISRO is unable to cater to this due to lack of bandwidth and resources, private players can participate in setting up of ground stations for space crafts which constitute 48% of the space sector

budget and in application of space technology which result in 45% of space economy.

- **ISRO is overburdened by its regular operations** such as launch of satellites, construction of launching vehicles etc. Privatization will allow private players to take up these regular functions.
- **Involvement of private sector in these areas will free up ISRO resources** for research and development activities, new technologies, exploration missions and human spaceflight programme.
- **End ISRO monopoly** over making launch vehicles and satellites and boost competitiveness in space sector.

REFORMS THAT OPENED PRIVATE SECTOR IN SPACE SECTOR

- Government is of the view that space sector can play a major catalytic role in technological advancement and expansion of India's industrial base. The proposed reforms will enhance the socio-economic use of space assets and activities, including through improved access to space assets, data and facilities.
- **IN-SPACe**: Act as a **single-point interface** between Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and everyone who wants to participate in space-related activities or use India's space resources. It will also handhold, promote and guide the private industries in space activities through encouraging policies and a friendly regulatory environment.
- **Indian National Space Promotion Board**: Set up to strengthen Department of Space and for promotion of the private space entrepreneurs or non-government space entrepreneurs.
- **Role of ISRO**: Overall idea is to let ISRO concentrate on essential activities like research and development, planetary exploration, and strategic use of space, while freeing itself from ancillary or routine work which could easily be done by private industry.
- **Public Sector Enterprise 'New Space India Limited (NSIL)'** to re-orient space activities from a 'supply driven' model to a 'demand driven' model, thereby ensuring optimum utilization of our space assets.
- **Demand Driven Model**: By support of **New Space India Limited (NSIL)**, it would endeavour to reorient space activities from a 'supply driven' model to a 'demand driven', thereby ensuring optimum utilisation of the nation's space assets.

o The main objective of NSIL is to scale up industry participation in Indian space programmes in comparison to IN-SPACe

which gives emphasis on the participation of the private sector.

- **ISRO released the draft of a new Spacecom Policy 2020**: The policy will regulate the commercial use of satellites, orbital slots, and ground stations for communication needs. The policy also details how private players can get authorization for setting up new communication satellites and ground stations.

4. 5G LEAP IN INDIA

5G is the next generation cellular technology that will provide faster and more reliable communication with ultralow latency. With 5G the peak network data speeds are expected to be in the range of 2-20 Gigabit per second (Gbps). It shapes the Fourth Industrial Revolution, or Industrial 4.0, quality of service delivery, innovation, etc. by facilitating smarter and developing societies. The technology that 5G uses will improve data transfer speed at unexpected higher levels — almost 100 times more — and reduce latency times helping mission-critical services. Thus, 5G is essential but India needs to look if it is ready for the deployment of the technology.

BENEFITS OF 5G

When enhanced with artificial intelligence, 5G provides a new dimension to connected and autonomous systems.

- Its use is a chance to transform existing cities into smart and innovative cities.
- There is great potential for India to move to an advanced digital revolution.
- With 5G technology, consumers will be able to download data heavy content such as 8K movies and games with better graphics in just a few seconds.
- 5G is expected to form the backbone of emerging technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT) and machine to machine communications.
- It would be supporting a much larger range of applications and services, including driverless vehicles, tele-surgery and real time data analytics.

STATUS OF 5G IN INDIA

- **Late 5G Auctions**: Countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including India, Bangladesh and Indonesia are late in adopting 5G technology, hence, will get insignificant revenue from the service. Auction of spectrum for 5G has not happened in India.
- **High reserve prices** set by the governments for

spectrum auctions amid ongoing fiscal deficits and low expected government subsidies will further drag the development and expansion of the technology.

- **Inadequate availability of spectrum:** 3300-3600 MHz (300 MHz) frequency band was envisaged for the 5G services. However, as per the recent spectrum allocation document, government is allocating just 175 MHz (3425 -3600 MHz) for 5G after ISRO and Department of Space (DoS) raised concern in allowing 3400-3425 MHz portion for 5G since they need this for IRNSS application.
- **Low status of fiberisation:** 5G is very much dependent on fiberisation because the backhaul requirement will be too much, and one can't do it on a traditional microwave.
- **Low Quality of Service of 4G networks:** The consumers are still grappling with basic network issues like call drops and interrupted data services. There are still areas where 4G networks have not stabilised causing frequent disruptions in internet services. It is important to meet the quality-of-service parameters of existing 4G networks before embarking on a new 5G platform.
- **Costly for consumers:** For transition from 4G to 5G technology, one must upgrade to the latest cellular technology, thereby creating financial liability on consumers. Consumers will have to buy 5G ready devices.

WAY FORWARD

- Immediate priority for India will be in identifying end users and population to be covered, analysis of existing network and operators, identification of cities for 5G roll out, working out an investment model and minimisation of digital risk and pricing based on externalities and usage of various sectors.
- As deployment of 5G network is expensive, both Central and State governments may need to consider measures which stimulate fibre investment, attract investment through public private partnerships (PPPs) and facilitate investment funds on a nominal interest basis.
- **Allowing 100% foreign direct investment in telecom sector under automatic route** along with other policy reforms augurs well for the sector to attract investment. Implementation of 5G requires huge investment and the relief package is a welcome step.
- Deployment of 5G technology will also need the **right of access to government infrastructure** such as traffic lights, lamp posts, etc. where wireless operators can deploy electronic small cell apparatus.
- **Removing the tax burden for deploying fibre**

networks reduces associated costs, thereby promoting investment as was done by Singapore government, could help in the smooth deployment of fibre in India.

- It is important to **strengthen its domestic telecommunication manufacturing market** so that it is not only the users of 5G in India, but also the manufacturers and providers of these technologies who will be able to make a mark in the global arena.
- 5G needs to become financially viable otherwise rural integration will remain a pipe dream.

5. FOOD FORTIFICATION

According to a report prepared jointly by Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA-Kisan Swaraj) and Right to Food Campaign, Jharkhand, where fortified rice is being distributed under Central government-funded schemes such as PDS, PM-POSHAN, ICDS, consent is not being obtained from beneficiaries. The report also flags risk of fortified rice for tribals of Jharkhand.

ABOUT FOOD FORTIFICATION

Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.

These nutrients may or may not have been originally present in the food before processing. Ex: Double fortified salt (DFS), a form of table salt manufactured with added iron and iodine.

NEED FOR FOOD FORTIFICATION

- Micronutrients are necessary for all normal growth and body functioning. Vitamins and minerals are vital chemical compounds that the body can't produce itself and must take in small doses from external sources. Micronutrient deficiency (Hidden hunger) is a serious health risk.
- National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) revealed that India has the highest burden of anaemia worldwide. The prevalence of anaemia was 58.6 % in children, 53.2 % in non-pregnant women and 50.4 % in pregnant women in 2016.

- According to Comprehensive National Nutritional Survey (CNNS), zinc deficiency was observed in 32 % of adolescents, whereas vitamin A deficiency was observed in around 20% of school going children.

ADVANTAGES OF FOOD FORTIFICATION

- **Does not alter the characteristics of the food**, fortification does not cause any change in the taste, aroma, texture, or appearance of the food. Ex. The fortified rice is blended into regular rice in the ratio 1:100. These look, cook and taste like regular rice kernels.
- **Cost-effective intervention**: Fortification is a cheap and effective way to address micronutrient malnutrition. Ex. Centre launched a scheme in 2019 for three years to introduce fortified rice through PDS in 15 districts, with a financial commitment of \$23.43 million. The additional cost per kg is no more than ₹0.60-0.80.
- **Socio-culturally acceptable**: It does not require any changes in food habits and patterns of people. It is a socio-culturally acceptable way to deliver nutrients to people.
- Results in nutritional gains in a **relatively short period of time and execution is easier**.
- Since the nutrients are added to staple foods that are widely consumed and doesn't require purchasing more food products, it **doesn't add any burden on the low-income groups**.

LIMITATIONS OF FOOD FORTIFICATION

- **Health effects**: Excess dosages of vitamins and minerals in some cases can have harmful effects. Fortified foods as a public health measure should be promoted after analysing the efficacies and micronutrient status of the population. Ex: Thalassemia, sickle cell anaemia and malaria are conditions where there is already excess iron in the body, whereas TB patients are unable to absorb iron. Consumption of iron-fortified foods among patients of these diseases can reduce immunity and functionality of organs.
- **Might not benefit infants and children**: Infants and young children, who consume relatively small amounts of food, are less likely to fulfil their recommended micronutrients from universally fortified staples alone.
- **Not a long-term sustainable strategy to address Malnutrition**: Fortification is a 'complementary strategy' rather than a 'replacement of balanced, diversified diets' to address malnutrition. Fortification only bridges the gap between the need

and actual consumption of required micronutrients through food.

CONCLUSION

Taking into the account of the limitations of food fortification strategy to address malnutrition, it is advised to take long term measures like **Promoting crop diversification; Employment generation strategies to increase the purchasing power of the people to consume micronutrients; Provision of Nutri-cereals under PDS; Provision of diversified diet in Mid-day-meal scheme etc.**

6. PHOTOGRAPH OF BLACK HOLE AT THE CENTRE OF MILKY WAY

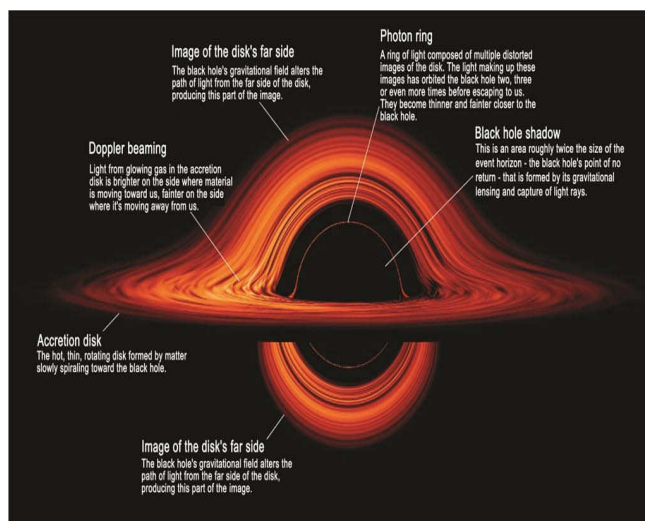
Event Horizon Telescope network has captured the second ever direct image of a super massive black hole called Sagittarius A, at the centre of our Milky Way. To image it, scientists created the powerful Event Horizon Telescope, which linked together 8 existing radio observatories across the planet to form a single 'Earth-sized' virtual telescope.*

BLACKHOLES

- A black hole is a region of **spacetime exhibiting such strong gravitational effects** that nothing—not even particles and electromagnetic radiation such as light—**can escape from inside it**. In many ways a black hole acts like **an ideal black body, as it reflects no light**.
- **Theory of general relativity** predicts that a sufficiently compact mass can deform spacetime to form a black hole.
- The boundary of the region from which no escape is possible is called the **event horizon**.
- Black holes **form at the end of some stars' lives**. **However, not all stars end up becoming blackholes.**
- The energy that held the star together disappears and it collapses in on itself producing a magnificent explosion. All that material left over from the explosion, many times the mass of our Sun, falls into an infinitely small point.
- Black holes can form in many ways though, and large black holes can have tens to millions of times the mass of our sun trapped in a point smaller than

the tip of a pin! Some black holes trap more and more material as their mass increases.

- The point where all that mass is trapped is **called a singularity**.
- It may be infinitely small, but its influence is enormous.
- Blackholes can form in many ways and have a range of masses. **Stellar blackholes** have as much matter as a bunch of our suns. **Supermassive blackholes**, on the other hand, have the mass of 1,000 million suns. All trapped within a tiny singularity.
- Imagine a circle with a singularity in the middle. The gravity on the inside of the circle is so strong that nothing can escape—it sucks in everything, even light. That's why it's black!



DIFFICULTY IN DETECTING BLACKHOLES

- Light enters Event Horizon but cannot escape from it. Hence, no light is emitted and that is why it is difficult to detect.
- It cannot be observed directly through telescopes on ground.
- Its presence is observed through the interaction of bodies with the blackholes.

7. ISRO TESTS BOOSTER FOR GAGANYAAN

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully carried out the static test of **HS200 solid rocket booster**, taking the space agency one more step closer to the keenly awaited Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission. The test was held at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.

ABOUT HS200 SOLID BOOSTER ROCKET

- Designed and developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram for over two years, the HS200 booster is the 'human-rated' version of the S200 rocket boosters used on the geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle Mk-III (GSLV Mk-III), also called the LVM3.
- GSLV Mk-III rockets, which will be used for Gaganyaan mission, will have two HS200 boosters that will supply the thrust for lift-off.
- HS200 is a 20-metre-long booster with a diameter of 3.2 metres and is the world's second largest operational booster using solid propellants.
- Of the three propulsion stages of GSLV Mk-III, second stage uses liquid propellant while the third is a cryogenic stage.

PURPOSE & OBJECTIVE

- Gaganyaan Program envisages undertaking the demonstration of human spaceflight to **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** in the short-term and will lay foundation for a sustained Indian human space exploration programme in the long run.
- Objective of Gaganyaan program is to demonstrate **indigenous capability to undertake human space flight mission to LEO**.

BENEFITS OF GAGANYAAN

- Progress towards a sustained and affordable human and robotic program to explore the solar system and beyond.
- Advanced technology capability for undertaking human space exploration, sample return missions and scientific exploration.
- Future capability to actively collaborate in global space station development & to carry out scientific experiments of interest to the nation.
- Create a broad framework for wider Academia-Industry Partnership in taking up development activities for national development.
- Ample scope for employment generation and human resource development in advanced science and R&D activities.
- Unique opportunity to inspire and excite Indian youth and steer many students toward careers in science and technology towards challenging jobs that encourage knowledge, innovation and creativity.
- The program will strengthen international partnerships and global security through the sharing of challenging and peaceful goals.
- Having a vibrant human spaceflight programme can be leveraged as a potent foreign policy tool.

MAJOR COLLABORATING PARTNERS - GAGANYAAN

- Indian Armed Forces
- Defence Research Development organisation
- Indian maritime agencies - Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Shipping corporation of India, National institute of Oceanography, National Institute of Ocean Technology.
- Indian Meteorological Department
- CSIR Labs
- Academic institutes
- Industry partners

8. MONKEY POX

- Monkeypox is a viral zoonosis (a virus transmitted to humans from animals) with symptoms like those seen in the past in smallpox patients, although it is clinically less severe.
- It has emerged as the **most important orthopoxvirus after the eradication of smallpox** in 1980 and subsequent cessation of smallpox vaccination.
- **Genus Orthopoxvirus contains four species that infect humans: variola (smallpox), monkeypox, vaccinia (includes buffalopox), and cowpox.**
- The first human case was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a period of intensified effort to eliminate smallpox. It occurs primarily in tropical rainforest areas of Central and West Africa and is occasionally exported to other regions.
- Monkeypox virus infection has been detected in squirrels, Gambian poached rats, dormice, and some species of monkeys.
- Monkey Pox infection was first discovered in 1958 following two outbreaks of a pox-like disease in colonies of monkeys kept for research — which led to the name 'monkeypox'.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever, Rash and Swollen Lymph Nodes.
- It causes the lymph nodes to swell (lymphadenopathy), which smallpox does not.

TRANSMISSION

- Monkeypox virus is mostly transmitted to people from wild animals such as rodents and primates, but human-to-human transmission also occurs.
- Monkeypox virus is transmitted from one person to another by contact with lesions, body fluids, respiratory droplets and contaminated materials such as bedding.
- The clinical presentation of monkeypox resembles that of smallpox, a related orthopoxvirus infection which was declared eradicated worldwide in 1980.

VACCINATION

- Vaccine used during the smallpox eradication programme was also protective against monkeypox.
- A new third generation vaccinia vaccine has now been approved for prevention of smallpox and monkeypox. Antiviral agents are also being developed.

9. PROJECT 75

It is a program by the Indian Navy that entails building six **Scorpene class attack submarines**.

- Scorpene is one of the most sophisticated submarines, capable of undertaking multifarious missions including anti-surface ship warfare, antisubmarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and area surveillance.
- The submarines in the Project-75 Scorpene Class are powered by **diesel-electric propulsion systems**.
- The design of Kalvari class of submarines is based on the French Scorpene class of submarines. It is given support by the Department of Defence Production (Ministry of Defence) and Indian Navy throughout its various phases of construction.
- Mazagon Dock limited (MDL) is manufacturing six Scorpene submarines with technology assistance from Naval Group of France under a deal signed in October 2005.
- INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj and INS Vela have been commissioned. Sea trials are on for Vagir.

CULTURE

1 . BUDDHA'S RELICS TAKEN TO MONGOLIA

- Four Holy Relics of Lord Buddha were recently taken to Mongolia for an 11-day exposition to coincide with Mongolian Buddha Purnima celebrations.
- The relics were displayed at the Batsagaan Temple in Gandan Monastery complex in Ulaanbaatar.
- In 2015, the Holy Relics were placed under the 'AA' category of *Antiquities and Art Treasures* which should not be ordinarily taken out of the country for exhibition, considering their delicate nature.
- However, upon the request of Mongolian government, the government has made a special exception. The relics will be accorded the status of a 'state guest' in Mongolia and will be taken again at the National Museum, India.

RELICS

- Relics are the physical remains of saints or holy people or, more generally, objects that have been in contact with holy individuals.
- Examples of relics include teeth, bones, hairs, and fragments of objects such as fabrics or wood.
- In religion relics are believed to have special powers to heal or grant favours.

BUDDHA'S RELICS

- The four relics come from among 22 Buddha relics, currently housed at Delhi's National Museum.
- Together, they are known as the 'Kapilvastu Relics' since they are from a site in Bihar believed to be the ancient city of Kapilvastu. The site was discovered in

1898.

- At the age of 80, according to Buddhist beliefs, Buddha attained salvation in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district. The Mallas of Kushinagar cremated his body with ceremonies befitting a universal king.
- His relics from the funeral pyre were collected and divided into eight shares to be distributed among:
- The purpose was erecting stupas over the sacred relics. Two more stupas came up — one over the urn in which the relics had been collected and the other over the embers.
- o Stupas erected over the bodily relics of Buddha (Saririka stupas) are the earliest surviving Buddhist shrines.
- o It is said that Ashoka (272–232 BC), opened up seven of these eight stupas, and collected major portion of the relics for enshrinement within 84,000 stupas built by him to popularise Buddhism as well as the cult of the stupas.

KAPILAVASTU RELICS

- The discovery of an inscribed casket in 1898 at the stupa site in Piprahwa (near Siddharthnagar in Uttar Pradesh) helped identify the place with ancient Kapilavastu.
- The inscription on the lid of the casket referred to the relics of Buddha and his community, the Sakya.
- This discovery was followed by several explorations. An Archaeological Survey of India excavation of the stupa in 1971-77 revealed two more stoneware relic caskets containing 22 sacred bone relics, now under the care of the National Museum.

2. Sant Tukaram

- The Prime Minister recently inaugurated the Sant Tukaram Shila (rock) Mandir in the temple town of Dehu in Pune district.
- Sant Tukaram was a 17th century Marathi poet and saint of Warkari sect (Marathi Vaishnav tradition). The Warkari sect worships Lord Vitthal, considered a form of Lord Vishnu.
- Tukaram is best known for his devotional poetry called Abhanga and community-oriented worship with spiritual songs known as kirtans.
- Abhanga is a devotional poetry sung in praise of Lord Vitthal, also known as Vithoba. The word abhangacomes from a for non and bhang for ending, in other words, a flawless, continuous poem.
- He preached about a society without caste and denied rituals, which led to a social movement.
- His poetry refers to earlier Bhakti saints Namdev, Dnyaneshwar, Kabir, and Eknath, who influenced his spiritual growth.
- He is credited with starting the Wari pilgrimage, where devotees of Lord Vitthal, walk 250 kilometres from Dehu to Vitthal temple in Pandharpur over 21 days.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SHILA (ROCK)

- The saint had immersed all his work in the Indrayani river. Later when the authenticity of his abhangs was questioned, he sat on a rock for 13 days.
- After 13 days, his work mysteriously reappeared and since then rock that he sat on is considered sacred by the Warkari sect.
- The Shila is placed on the Dehu Sansthan temple premise.

3. ZAFAR MAHAL

- Recently, Zafar Mahal in Mehrauli (Delhi) was in news for being in a bad and neglected condition.
- According to ASI, a restoration plan had been put on hold by Covid-19. The funds are ready, and plans to restore it are moving forward now.
- Earlier known as **Lal mahal or Rang Mahal**, Zafar Mahal is considered as the last monumental structure built as a summer palace during the fading years of the Mughal era.
- The building has two components namely, the

Mahal or the palace, which was built first by **Akbar Shah II** in the 18th century.

- And the entrance gate known as **Hathi Gate**, built by **Bahadur Shah Zafar** as an extension to the existing palace.
- It got its name because of the fact that an elephant can pass through it with the 'houdah' (seat, where people sit on elephant) mounted over it.

PHOOL WALON KI SAIR FESTIVAL

- Zafar Mahal, was used in the festival of **Phoolwalon ki Sair** (procession of the florists).
- The festival was stopped by the British during Quit India movement in 1942. However, it was restarted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962.
- Even today the festival is celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims alike.

4. GULABI MINAKARI

- During the G7 meet in Germany, the Indian Prime Minister gifted a Gulabi Minakari brooch to US President Joe Biden.
- Gulabi Minakari is a GI-tagged art form of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh that involves colouring the surface of metals by fusing different colours.
- It is originally from Persia and was brought to Varanasi by Persian enamellists during the Mughal era around the early 17th century.
- The word 'mina' is the feminine form of the Persian word 'Minoo' and means 'heaven'. It refers to the azure colour of heaven.
- In Varanasi, it is practiced on jewellery and home decor items. Thus, products with minakari work on them like jewellery boxes, idols, sculptures, key chains, dining sets, trays, cupboards etc. are available in Varanasi.
- Minakari can be found popularly in three forms:
 - ✓ **Ek Rang Khula Meena** :Only gold outlines are exposed and a single transparent colour is used
 - ✓ **Panch Rangi Meena** :Five colours of red, white, green, light blue and dark blue are used
 - ✓ **Gulabi Meena** :In which pink is the dominant colour

Miscellaneous

1. PLFS SURVEY

According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which also captured data on migration for the first time, nearly 88% of migrants moved within the same state in 2020-21, while 11.8% moved to another state during the same period.

➤ PLFS is released by **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI)**.

OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION IN INDIA

- Migration is the **movement of people away from their usual place of residence**, across either **internal (within country)** or **international** (across countries) borders.
- **Article 19(1)(e)** of the Indian Constitution guarantees all Indian citizens the right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India, subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of general public or protection of any scheduled tribe.
- As per 2011 Census, India had **45.6 crore migrants in 2011** (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population).
- Between 2001 and 2011, while the population grew by 18%, **the number of migrants increased by 45%.**
- In 2011, **99% of total migration was internal** and immigrants (international migrants) comprised 1%.

FINDINGS OF PLFS

- **Unemployment Rate:** It fell to 4.2% in 2020-21, compared with 4.8% in 2019-20. The rural areas recorded an unemployment rate of 3.3% and urban areas recorded an unemployment rate of 6.7%.
- **LFPR:** The percentage of persons in the labour force (that is, working or seeking work or available for work) in the population increased to 41.6%

during 2020-21 from 40.1% in the previous year.

- **Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** It increased to 39.8% from 38.2% of the previous year.

- The massive migration triggered by the lockdown in the aftermath of the pandemic had prompted calls for better data on the issue to devise policies to combat a surge in such movement.

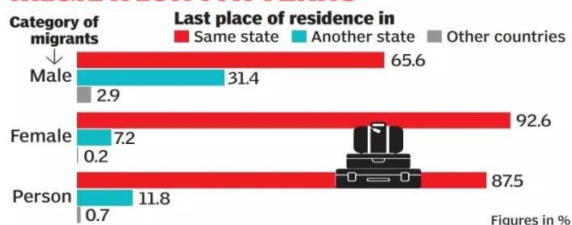
- The **migration rate** (percentage of migrants belonging to male or female category of persons) across the country was at 28.9% during the July 2020-21 period.

- The survey looked at distribution of internal migrants by four types of migration streams, which includes rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural and urban-to-urban.

PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

- One kind of classification is - **rural-rural** (54% of classifiable internal migration), **rural-urban, urban-rural (7% or 3 crore)** and **urban-urban**. Rural-urban and urban-urban movement accounted for around 8 crore migrants each.

MIGRATION PATTERNS



- Another way to classify migration is - **intra-state and inter-state.**

✓ In 2011, intra-state movement accounted for almost 88% of all internal migration (39.6 crore persons).

✓ According to 2011 Census, there were 5.4 crore inter-state migrants. As of 2011, **Uttar Pradesh** (83 lakh) and **Bihar** were the largest source of inter-state migrants while **Maharashtra** (60 lakh) and **Delhi** were the largest receiver states.

REASONS FOR INTERNAL MIGRATION

• Reasons For Intra-State Migration

✓ As of 2011, the majority (70%) of **intra-state** migration was due to reasons of **marriage and family** with variation between male and female migrants.

✓ While 83% of females moved for marriage and family, the corresponding figure for males was 39%.

✓ Overall, 8% of people moved within a state for work (21% of male migrants and 2% of female migrants).

• Reasons For Inter-State Migration

✓ Movement for **work** was higher among **inter-state migrants** (50% of male and 5% of female interstate migrants).

✓ Size Of Migrant Labour Force: As per the Census, there were **4.5 crore migrant workers** in 2011.

✓ The Economic Survey (2016-17) estimated **6 crore inter-state labour migrants** between 2001-2011.

ISSUES FACED BY MIGRANT LABOUR

• Lack of access to **affordable housing and basic amenities** in urban areas.

• Lack of **social security and health benefits** and poor implementation of minimum safety standards law.

• Lack of **portability of state-provided benefits**, especially food provided through the PDS is not effectively implemented. This has been partially remedied by one nation one ration card scheme.

• Poor implementation of protections under the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 (ISMW Act)**, which provides certain protections for inter-state migrant workers.

• **Impact of Covid-19:** The lockdown has severely impacted migrants, several of whom lost their jobs due to shutting of industries and were stranded outside their native places.

FACTORS SLOWING THE "MIGRATION POLICY" MOMENTUM

• **Politicisation of Migration:** 'Destination States' experience a tension between economic needs (of migrant labour) and political needs (which promote nativist policies of imposing domicile restrictions on employment and social security).

✓ Thus, the response to internal migration follows from State-specific calculations on what political

dividends might be reaped

• **Inaccurate Identification of Migrants:** Migrants are located inside two larger categories that have long troubled policymakers: the **unorganised worker** and the **urban poor**.

✓ Slum development continues as the primary medium for alleviating migrant concerns, while in reality, most migrants live on worksites that are out of the policy gaze

✓ Even the e-Shram portal has been unable to accurately distinguish and target migrants.

• **Failure of Official Datasets for Migration** to capture the actual scale and the frequency of internal migration in India.

2. CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY

*The Central Advisory Board on Disability, which is mandated to meet every **six months** under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, has not been re-constituted since the previous board's three-year term ended in November 2020.*

CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY

• **Section 60** of the Act empowers the Central Government to constitute a body to be known as **Central Advisory Board on Disability**

• In pursuance of this power, the Central Government had constituted the Central Advisory Board on Disability with **Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment** as the ex-officio chairperson.

• The panel is meant to "facilitate the continuous evolution of a comprehensive policy for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and the full enjoyment of rights"

• The board is mandated to meet every six months under the Act.

DISABILITIES IN INDIA

• According to an estimate by the WHO, globally, 15% of the population live with some form of disability, while over 80% of that share living in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.

• In India, **over 2.2%** of the total population endures some form of severe mental or physical disability.

• Conceptually, since the condition of disability is rather transient than static, there is no one universal definition of what comprises a disability.

• In India, the list of criteria that categorizes people as disabled was revamped in 2016 and came into effect with the Rights of People with Disabilities Act.

CHALLENGES FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

• **Attitudinal Barriers:** Attitudinal barriers, which result in **stigmatisation and discrimination**, deny people with disabilities their dignity and potential and are one of the greatest obstacles to achieving equality of opportunity and social integration.

• **Environmental Barriers:**

✓Physical barriers in the natural or built environment 'prevent access and affect opportunities for participation and inclusion'.

✓Lack of services or problems with service delivery also restrict participation of people with disabilities.

• **Institutional Barriers:** These include many laws, policies, strategies or practices that discriminate against people with disabilities.

• **Institutionalised Barriers:** Sometimes internalised barriers relating to people with disabilities results in their exclusion from societal interactions, which in turn can result in their '**lack of pro-active behaviour**' in expressing their opinions and claiming their rights', leading to further exclusion.

GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs) ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD) has launched Accessible India Campaign (**Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan**) as a nation-wide Campaign for achieving universal accessibility for PwDs in 2015. It has three components:

- Build Environment accessibility
- Build Transportation system accessibility
- Build Information & Communication system accessibility

DISHA This is an early intervention and school readiness scheme for children up to 10 years with the disabilities covered under the National Trust Act

VIKAAS A day care scheme for persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disabilities, above 10 years for enhancing interpersonal and vocational skills.

SAMARTH A scheme to provide respite home for orphans, families in crisis, PwD from BPL, LIG families with at least one of the four disabilities covered under the National Trust Act.

SAHYOGI A scheme to set up Caregiver Cells (CGCs) for training and creating skilled workforce of caregivers to care for PwD and their families.

WAY FORWARD

- Kerala became first state to conduct a census of its own called **Kerala Disability Census** for 2014-15.

Other states must follow example. The scale of disability in India needs to be better understood by improving the measurement of disability.

- **Increase public awareness and understanding of disability** through social marketing and campaigns.

- **Accessibility and support services** for persons with disability must be increased.

- **End Institutional Exclusion:** Not only the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, but every other ministries along with different departments will have to take blame for poor disability environment in India.

- Newer thinking and better coordination of programs is required. Most importantly, persons with disabilities should themselves be made **active participants in the development process**.

- There is need for **deepened preventive health programs and all children screened at a young age**.

- Strengthen and support **research on disability**.

CONCLUSION

- India has a **growing disability rights movement** and one of the **more progressive policy frameworks** in the developing world. But, a lot more needs to be done in implementation and "**getting the basics right**".

- By providing them aids to overcome their disability and enabling them to earn a dignified livelihood, we can actually transform **them from being disabled to being differently-abled**.

EXTRA MILE

The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has invited public feedback on the new draft national policy on persons with disabilities (PwD). The draft policy proposes interventions in disability prevention, education, healthcare, social security and accessibility.

National Policy for PwD, 2006

The existing National Policy for PwD was adopted in 2006. The policy seeks to --

- recognize that PwDs are valuable human resource for the country
- create an environment that provides them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society.

Focus Areas Of 2006 Policy

- **Prevention of Disabilities:** The policy calls for programme for **prevention of diseases**, which result in disability and the creation of awareness regarding measures to be taken for prevention of disabilities.

- **Rehabilitation Measures:** Physical, educational and economic rehabilitation.

- **Women with disabilities:** Special programmes will be developed for education, employment and providing of other rehabilitation services to women with disabilities

- **Children with Disabilities:** These are the most vulnerable group and need special attention. The Government would strive to:

- ✓Ensure right to care, protection and security for children with disabilities;

- ✓Ensure the right to development with dignity and equality creating an enabling environment where children can exercise their rights.

- ✓Ensure inclusion and effective access to education, health, vocational training.

- **Barrier-free environment:** That supports the independent functioning of individuals.

- **Issue of Disability Certificates:** The Government will ensure that the persons with disabilities obtain the disability certificates without any difficulty in the shortest possible time.

- **Implementing Agency:** Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is the nodal agency to coordinate all matters relating to the implementation of the Policy.

Need For Revision Of 2006 Policy

- The new policy has been drawn in keeping with the provisions of the RPwD Act 2016 and the vision of the **National Education Policy 2020**.

- Also, a revision was required as the existing policy was drafted in 2006, after which India signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007.

Major Proposals In New Policy

- **Focus On Diversified Causes Of Disability**

- ✓The draft said the current national programme on prevention of disabilities focused on traditional causes.

- ✓However, there were other causes of disability, such as malnourishment, medical negligence, socio-cultural factors and impairment caused by disasters.

- **Cross Disability Early Intervention Centres:**

- ✓Research findings show that one-third of disabilities in children are preventable if detected early. Hence, the new draft Policy calls for developing a network of '**Cross Disability Early Intervention Centres**' (CDEICs) in every district of the country.

- ✓The policy lays out broad roadmap for developing CDEICs to provide facilities like screening and identification and referral for rehabilitative services.

- **Educational Institutions:**

- ✓The States and UTs should add a provision on

compliance with the RPwD Act 2016 when granting permission or recognition to educational institutions.

- ✓A module on disability should be included in MBBS and other medical courses.

- **More Accessible Vehicles**

- ✓The draft policy said that the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will issue necessary guidelines for making modification in the personal vehicles being used by persons with disabilities as per requirement. This is to make vehicles more accessible.

3. RATION CARD NOW USABLE PAN-INDIA

Assam has become the last and the 36th State/UT to implement One Nation One Ration Card (**ONORC**) scheme. With this, the scheme now covers all the states and UTs, making distribution of subsidised and free foodgrain security portable throughout the country.

HOW DOES ONORC WORK?

- ONORC is based on technology that involves details of beneficiaries' ration card, Aadhaar number, and electronic Points of Sale (ePoS).

- The system identifies a beneficiary through biometric authentication on ePoS devices at FPS.

- The system runs with the support of two portals which host all the relevant data.

BENEFITS

- **Hassle Free Ration To Migrants:** Previously, with ration card, a beneficiary could only purchase subsidised food grains from PDS which was assigned to them in their locality. Due to this, there have been many issues faced by the migrants who shift to other cities for work.

- **Empowerment Of Beneficiaries:** Now the beneficiaries have the opportunity to choose their own dealer. With many cases of misallocation, the beneficiary can switch to another FPS shop instantly, if there is any case of foul play.

- **Step Towards Fulfilment Of SDG:** It will also help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030. It also aims to address the poor state of hunger in India.

- **Improved Efficiency:** Use of technology improved the efficiency of PDS network.

- **Nutritional Security:** With cheap food grain available to migrants, there are chances of more

expenditure towards fruits and vegetables

- **Help In Understanding Migration Pattern:** The centralised FRP shop data may be used to formulate policies on intra- and inter-state migration.

- **Prevent Duplication and Double Benefits:** It will help in reducing the number of dual ration cardholders. It will be in sync with the motto of Minimum Government Maximum Governance.

PERFORMANCE SO FAR

- **All States/UTs covered:** With inclusion of Assam, the scheme now covers all states/UTs.

- **Significant Portable Transactions**

- ✓ Since 2019, about 71 crore portable transactions have taken place delivering food-grains equivalent to about Rs 40,000 crore in food subsidy through portability.

- ✓ At present, a monthly average of about 3 crore portable transactions are being recorded.

- **During Covid-19:** From April 2020 till date, about 64 crore portable transactions have been recorded. It delivered foodgrains equivalent to about Rs 36,000 crore in food subsidy through portability.

- **AMERA RATION mobile application:** The government has also rolled out the 'AMERA RATION' mobile application to take maximum advantage of the ONORC plan. The mobile app is providing a host of useful real-time information to the beneficiaries and is available in 13 languages.

CHALLENGES

- 100% of ration cards are **yet to be linked to Aadhaar**;

- There is a **lack of clarity on operating procedures and beneficiary entitlements** with regard to prices and food habits in different states;

- There are presently 5.46 lakh FPS across the country, but **only 4.75 lakh ePoS devices have been installed**. Each FPS must mandatorily have an ePoS device;

- Critics have flagged a need for increase in inclusivity in the PDS. More people require subsidies than are presently enlisted in the available system;

- **Operational Challenges:**

- ✓ Internet penetration is still less in India for the smooth functioning of ONORC.

- ✓ Changes in Fingerprints have also been reported both due to genetics and due to constant work-related

wear and tear especially in case of labourers.

- ✓ Logistics Issue: There is a quota allocated to every state for the purchase of food grains from FCI. Constant migration may disturb that procurement

pattern.

- ✓ At places of emigration, food grain may get wasted. While the places where immigration is dominant may face a PDS food crunch.

- An analysis by PRS Legislative research indicates a leakage of 40.4% of all food grains under the PDS network.

EXTRA MILE

Recently, the Union Minister for Labour & Employment said that the ***e-Shram portal is being integrated with One Nation One Ration Card scheme.***

Benefits

- The aim of e-Shram portal is to boost the last-mile delivery of the welfare schemes for over 38 crore unorganised workers in the country.

- Each registered worker will be issued an **identity card** (with a **12-digit unique number**), which can be used across the country to avail any benefits announced by the Government.

- The data on portal will be used for optimum realization of workers' employability and extend the benefits of social security schemes to them.

- The Union Govt has already announced **linking accidental insurance with registration** on the e-Shram portal.

- ✓ If a registered worker meets with an accident, he/she will be eligible for Rs 2 lakh on death or permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh on partial disability.

- ✓ The benefits include those offered during natural calamities.

- As announced in Budget 2022-2023, work is also **underway to link four portals** - the National Career Service, eShram, UDYAM (for individuals interested in beginning MSMEs) and ASEEM (Atmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping).

Informal Economy In India

- The latest data of informal sector workers registered on the e-Shram portal shows that a majority of them are living under extreme poverty.

- **27.69 crore** informal sector workers are registered on the e-Shram portal.

- **94.11%** of the workers registered on the portal have a **monthly income of Rs 10,000 or below**, while 4.36% have a monthly income between Rs 10,001 and Rs 15,000.

- **The social category analysis** of the data shows that 74.44% of registered workers are socially backward classes, including 45.32% OBC, 20.95% SC and 8.17% ST. General Category workers form the remaining

25.56%.

- **Occupation wise**, agriculture is at the top with 52.11% of enrolments done by those related to the farm sector followed by domestic and household workers at 9.93% and constructions workers at 9.13%.

- **Top-5 states** in terms of registrations are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha.

Age and Gender Distribution

- 61.72% of the registered workers are of the age from 18 years to 40 years, while 22.12% are of the age from 40 years to 50 years.
- Workers aged above 50 years are 13.23%, while 2.93% of workers are aged between 16 and 18 years.
- 52.81% of registered workers are female and 47.19% are male. Almost all targeted informal sector workers will be registered on e-Shram portal during this calendar year. This will serve as a big opportunity to draft an evidence-based policy for the large section of deprived classes in the country.

4. ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

- The CBI is in the process of sending requests to several countries seeking information under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs).
- MLAT is a legal agreement between two or more countries for the purpose of ***gathering/exchanging information*** in an effort to enforce public or criminal laws.
- The information sought is about those involved in the online sexual abuse of minors and circulation of child pornographic material on social media platforms.

ENFORCING MLATS IN INDIA

- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the nodal Ministry and the Central authority for seeking and providing mutual legal assistance in criminal law matters.
- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) may be involved in this process when such requests are routed through diplomatic channels by these Ministries.
- Section 105 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) speaks of reciprocal arrangements to be made by the Centre with the Foreign Governments.

BACKGROUND

- Two dozen cases related to the online sexual abuse of minors and circulation of child pornographic material on social media platforms were registered in November 2021.

- CBI probe in these cases has resulted in identification of more than 80 Indian accused persons.

- The agency has gathered inputs related to over 50 groups with more than 5,000 offenders, involving the nationals of about 100 countries.

ISSUE OF ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

- Online child sexual abuse and online child sexual exploitation involve the use of ICT as a means to sexually abuse/ exploit children.

- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) defines child sexual abuse as:

- ✓ Contacts or an interaction between a child and an older or more knowledgeable child or adult when the child is being used as an object for the older child's or adult's sexual needs.

- ✓ These contacts or interactions are carried out against the child using force, trickery, bribes, threats or pressure.

- The increase in young people (including children and infants) accessing the internet has seen a corresponding upward trend in cases of online child sexual exploitation, especially during Covid-19.

INDIAN LAWS/INITIATIVES

- Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act)
- Section 67B of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 specifically provides stringent punishment for publishing, browsing or transmitting child pornography in electronic form.
- Sections 354A and 354D of IPC provide punishment for cyber bullying and cyber stalking against women.
- Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) under which an online Cyber Crime reporting portal has been launched.
- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs) are also mandated to monitor the implementation of the POCSO Act, 2012.

CHALLENGES

- Gaps in legislative frameworks and generally limited law enforcement capacity.
- Overall weak child protection systems.

- Significantly understaffed social welfare workforce, lacking professional recognition.
- Limited awareness of, and sense of urgency to address the issue among all professional cadres
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the limited and highly volatile, capacity of social welfare and child protection systems across the world.

WAY FORWARD

- Move towards a comprehensive and integrated approach to tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse. Focusing on the digital dimensions alone will not yield the result.
- Move from project-based support to system-strengthening through statutory bodies.
- Strengthen multi-sectoral, national collaboration.
- Facilitate cross-border, regional and international collaboration.
- Promote child participation and children's agency.

5 . COOPERATIVES ON GEM

- The Union Cabinet, recently gave its approval for expanding the mandate of Government e Marketplace (GeM) to allow procurement by Cooperatives as buyers on GeM.
- Cooperatives are people-centered enterprises owned, controlled and run by their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations.
- There are currently **8.54 lakh registered cooperatives**, with **27 crore members**.
- Cooperatives play an important role in addressing the developmental needs of underprivileged classes, especially in agricultural, banking and housing sectors.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

- GeM will offer a dedicated onboarding process for **cooperatives**, technical infrastructure to support additional users on existing portals and other assistance to them.
 - At the same time, to protect the sellers' interests and ensure timely payments, the modalities of payment systems will be decided by GeM in consultation with the cooperation ministry.
 - To cover for these incremental costs, GeM may charge an appropriate transaction fee from cooperatives.
- This will be planned to ensure self-sustainability of

operations for GeM, and hence no major financial implication is expected for government.

BENEFITS

- The current move will help cooperatives in getting competitive prices through an open and transparent process.
- Moreover, since the societies have more than 27 Crore members, procurement through GeM would not only economically benefit the common man, but it would also enhance the credibility of the cooperatives.
- It is also expected to enhance overall **ease of doing Business** for cooperatives, while providing a larger buyer base to the GeM registered sellers

EXTRA MILE

Significance of GeM

- GeM is transparent, efficient, has the economy of scale and is speedy in procurement.
- The Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) on GeM has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 84.5% from FY 2018-19 to FY 2021-22.
- ✓ GMV is the total amount of sales a company makes over a specified period of time, typically measured quarterly or yearly.
- GeM has delivered 178% growth in GMV in the FY 2021-22 and has crossed Rs 1 lakh crore in FY 2021-22 alone, which is higher than the cumulative GMV till FY 2020-21.
- Different independent studies, including those by the World Bank and National Economic Survey 2021, have highlighted substantial savings due to GeM's ability to pool in more participation and provide cost effective options.

Challenges With GeM

- **Multiple Portals:** There are multiple portals in Central government departments, such as the defense procurement portal, Indian Railways e-Procurement System, which could limit GeM's effort to achieve its mandate as the National Public Procurement Portal.
- **Lack of Compliance:** It also faces a bit of a challenge in getting all Central organizations to comply with Rule 149 of the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2017, which mandates that all common-use goods and services that are available on the GeM portal should necessarily be procured on the platform.
- **Use of Vernacular Language:** The user interface for public purchase portals should be in local language to tackle the issue of a particular language dominance.

6. NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE SERVICE DELIVERY ASSESSMENT 2021

Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has released the **second edition** of the National eGovernance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) 2021.

ABOUT NESDA

- Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) had constituted NeSDA in 2019. This drive was part of DARPG's mandate to boost the e-government endeavours and drive digital government excellence.

- It is a biennial study which assesses States, UTs, and focus Central Ministries on the effectiveness of eGovernance service delivery.
- NeSDA helps the respective governments improve their delivery of citizen centric services and shares best practices across the country.

NESDA 2021

- NeSDA 2021 covers services across **seven sectors** - Finance, Labour & Employment, Education, Local Governance & Utility Services, Social Welfare, Environment and Tourism sectors.
- The portals assessed were classified into one of two categories.

✓ **1st category:** The designated portal of the respective government that provides a **single window access** to information and service links. These portals were assessed on four parameters, viz., **Accessibility, Content Availability, Ease of Use, and Information Security & Privacy.**

✓ **2nd category:** It comprises of the **Services Portals** which focus on the digital delivery of services and provide service-related information. The Services Portals were assessed on an additional three parameters: **End-service Delivery, Integrated Service Delivery, and Status & Request Tracking.**

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT REPORT

1. Progress for e-Governance services across the country

- ✓ NeSDA 2021 has shown clear progress for e-Governance services across the country.
- ✓ Improvement in the country's e-Governance landscape may be summarized in the following key takeaways:
 - o Increase in e-Service Delivery

- o Rise in use of Integrated / Centralized Portals for delivery of e-Services
- o Improvement across assessment parameter scores.

2. Ranking of State / UT Portals is as follows:

Rank	North-East and Hill States	Remaining States - Group A	Remaining States - Group B	Union Territories
1	Nagaland	Kerala	Odisha	Jammu & Kashmir
2	Meghalaya	Tamil Nadu	Uttar Pradesh	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
3	Assam	Punjab	Bihar	Puducherry

3. Ranking of State / UT Services Portals:

Rank	North-East and Hill States	Remaining States - Group A	Remaining States - Group B	Union Territories
1	Meghalaya	Punjab	Rajasthan	Jammu & Kashmir
2	Tripura	Tamil Nadu	Uttar Pradesh	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
3	Assam	Haryana	Madhya Pradesh	Delhi

4. Satisfaction With e-Services Provided by States/UTs

- ✓ The e-Services of Finance and Local Governance & Utility Services sectors were the most widely used by citizens.
- ✓ The rising trend of e-Services delivery shifting from single silo departmental portals to **integrated / centralized portals** has resulted in higher citizen satisfaction & greater number of e-Services being offered.
- ✓ An overall improvement has been seen in scores across all parameters and at all levels. **Information Security & Privacy** is the most improved parameter across all portals.

5. Ranking of Central Ministries

Rank	Ministry Portal	Ministry Services Portal
1	Home Affairs	Finance - Central Public Procurement Portal (CPPP)
2	Rural Development	Home Affairs - Digital Police
3	Education	Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions - Bharatya Portal

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- In Maharashtra Government has issued a resolution allowing citizens to inspect records at district level and local bodies under RTI for two hours every

Monday. It will bring transparency.

- **Mission Karmayogi:** The capacity building programme will be delivered through an Integrated Government Online Training or iGOT-Karmayogi digital platform, with content drawn from global best practices rooted in Indian national ethos.

- **E- Kranti-** Electronic delivery of services- transforming e-gov by delivering all government services electronically to the citizens through integrated and interoperable systems.

- **Aspirational Districts Programme:** It is aimed at transforming 115 most backward districts with focused interventions in the field of health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water management, financial inclusion and skill development.

- **Government e- marketplace (GEM)** was launched in 2016 for single window online procurement.

- **National Data Sharing And Accessibility Policy (NDSAP)** to promote data sharing and enable access to Government of India owned data for national planning and development.

- **National E-Governance plan 2006** for improving service delivery and ensuring efficiency, transparency and reliability.

✓ Programs launched under e-Governance: Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI), Digital India Program, MCA21 (to improve the speed and certainty in the delivery of the services of Ministry of Corporate Affairs), Passport Seva Kendra (PSK), online Income tax return, etc.

- **Sevottam Model** was developed in 2006 that access the quality of internal process and their impact on quality-of-service delivery.

- **Right to Information:** RTI Act, 2005 gives greater access of the citizen to the information which in turn improves the responsiveness of the government to community needs

- Government of India commenced the exercise to formulate **Citizen's charters** in 1996 for all states and UTs.

- **Police Reforms:** Modernizing police forces and implementing the Model Police Act of 2015. Reform of FIR lodging mechanism, including introducing filing e-FIRs for minor offences.

- **Legal Reforms:** The Central Government has scrapped nearly 1,500 obsolete rules and laws with an aim to bring about transparency and improve efficiency. For the nation to achieve progress faster on all fronts, every section of society should be part of the growth story. Effective functioning of governance

can be achieved by reformulating our national strategy to Gandhian principle of Antyodaya and to develop probity in governance.

EXTRA MILE

Prime Minister has announced that his government's aim is to take welfare schemes to the level of saturation with a "**people- centric**" approach rather than the "government centric" approach.

Importance of Good Governance

- Good governance is directly linked to country's economic prosperity. E.g., Finland is ranked 1st on Chandler Good governance index.

✓ India is positioned exactly at midpoint – 52nd position out of 104 countries

- It protects vulnerable and low socio-economic population.

- Democracy derives its legitimacy from the people of state. In the absence of good governance, legitimacy is eroded.

- It is linked to the satisfaction of citizen thus health of political situation in the country.

Resistance In Way Of Good Governance

- **Lack of Accountability:** Due to tedious disciplinary process and hand in glove with political structure, there is lack of accountability.

- **Red-tapism:** It leads to misusing rules for benefits.

- **Digitally Handicapped:** There is lack of capacity within government specially with the use of technology.

- **Attitudinal Problems in Civil Service:** They are seen as to be inflexible, self-serving and inward looking. E.g., Recent incidence of shutting down the stadium during the practice time of athletes and serving their selfinterest.

- **Lack of Awareness:** There is extremely low level of awareness of rights and duties among citizens.

- **Structural Problems:** Issues like political nexus, lack of social audit, corruption, communication gap between ministries and departments, hierarchies etc. creates **delay in work** thus creating barrier in quality and timely service.

- **Criminalization of Politics:** According to the Association of Democratic Reforms, 43% of Members of Parliaments of Lok Sabha 2019 are facing criminal charges. It is a 26% increase as compared to 2014.

- **Gender Disparity:** To ensure good governance it is essential to ensure the empowerment of women.

- **Centralisation:** Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs),

currently suffer from inadequate devolution of funds as well as functionaries to carry out the functions despite 14th Finance Commission increased the tax devolution of the divisible pool to states from 32% to 42% for years 2015 to 2020.

7. INDIA, ISRAEL TO ENHANCE DEFENCE TIES

- With the intention to further strengthen the existing framework of the Indo-Israeli defence cooperation architecture, both the sides adopted the India-Israel Vision on Defence Cooperation.
- This document was signed at a meeting between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his visiting Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz.
- Cooperation between the countries would be in line with PM Modi's Make in India vision.

COMPREHENSIVE 10-YEAR ROADMAP

- In October 2021, India and Israel had agreed to form a **task force** to formulate a comprehensive 10-year roadmap. This was formulated to identify new areas of cooperation as part of efforts to further advance the bilateral defence cooperation.
- This roadmap was agreed at the 15th India-Israel Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting on bilateral defence cooperation held in October 2021.
- ✓ The JWG is the apex body between the Defence Ministries of the two countries to comprehensively review and guide all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation.

INDIA-ISRAEL BILATERAL RELATION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 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 the NAM maintained close relations to the Arab world and the Soviet Union and 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 in September, 1950. Full-fledged diplomatic relations between the countries were established in January, 1992.

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 in India's favour.
- India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally.
- ✓ India continues to be a 'focus' country for Israeli Government's increased trade efforts.
- ✓ During April 2000 – March 2021, Israel's direct FDI into India was reported at US\$ 224.76 million.

AGRICULTURE

- Agricultural cooperation between the two sides is formalized through three-year action plans.
- The two sides are currently implementing the fifth phase of joint action plan (2021-23). The Fourth Action Plan (2018-2020) was aimed at increasing farmers' productivity and optimization of **water use efficiency**.
- The focus during the new work programme (2021-23) will be to convert the villages surrounding the Centres of Excellence (COEs) into Villages of Excellence (VOEs) through massive outreach programmes.
- 29 Centers of Excellence for Horticulture are fully active in 12 Indian states.

WATER TECHNOLOGIES

- Ongoing cooperation in this sector was formalized through an MOU on Water Resources Management and Development Cooperation signed in November 2016.
- During the visit of PM Modi to Israel in July 2017, both the sides signed MoUs on National Campaign for Water Conservation in India.
- Israeli company IDE has built several desalination plants in India. A 100 MLD (Million Litre per day) desalination plant set up by IDE at Nemelli in Tamil Nadu 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 -
 - ✓ Phalcon AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) and Heron,
 - ✓ Searcher-II and Harop drones,
 - ✓ Barak anti-missile defence systems and Spyder quick reaction anti-craft missile system.
 - ✓ India is now finalising “Project Cheetah” to arm the Heron drones with laser-guided bombs with Israel’s help.

WHAT MAKES ISRAEL A GOOD ARMS SUPPLIER TO INDIA?

- 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 export-oriented Israeli defence industry and its openness to establishing joint ventures complement both ‘Make in India’ and ‘Make with India’ in defence.
- 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.

COOPERATION IN S&T

- India-Israel cooperation in S&T 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, a 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.
- In December 2020, India and Israel signed an Agreement on cooperation in the fields of health and medicine.

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.
- India offers Indian Council of Cultural Affairs (ICCR) scholarships to Israeli students every year for various courses in Indian institutions.

IRRITANTS IN INDIA-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

A. Palestinian Issue

- India does continue to walk a tightrope between its historical ties with Palestine and its newfound love for Israel.
- Last year, India’s statement in the UNSC on the Israel-Palestine violence virtually held Israel responsible for the violence.
- India expressed its strong support to just Palestinian cause and unwavering support for two-state solution.

B. Iran Issue: Israel considers Iran an existential threat. India, on the other, has a historical relationship with Iran. It finds the cooperation useful for energy supplies, and an alternative route through Chabahar port to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

C. India, Israel And The Arab World Triangle

- While Israel has inherent differences with Arab countries, India has significant stakes there.
- However, the signing of Abraham Accord (peace deal between Israel and countries of Arab world such as UAE, Bahrain) provides the much-needed space for India to strengthen the relation with Israel as well as with the countries of Arab World.

D. Bilateral Trade And Investment Still Below

Potential: Bilateral trade has not diversified much—diamonds and chemicals still make up for the large chunk of the pie.

E. Voting Pattern of India at UN

- India abstained on a UNHRC resolution in 2015, and criticized Israel for aerial Bombing on Gaza.
- In September 2020, the Economic and Social Council of UN has rebuked Israel for allegedly violating women’s rights. India voted against Israel on this matter.

CONCLUSION

- Cooperation in various areas ranging from technology to defence has led to the opening up of a new potential partnership between the **two-tech savvy democracies**: India and Israel.
- The agreement on enhancing partnership in

futuristic defence technologies is an effort in the right direction.

- What is needed now is the identification of mutually beneficial technologies, followed by a formal collaboration between Israel's Directorate of Defence Research & Development and India's DRDO along with greater engagement between their respective innovation ecosystems.

8 . INDIA & VIETNAM INK PACT TO BOOST DEFENCE TIES

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

A. Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership Towards 2030

- This document will significantly enhance the scope and scale of existing defence cooperation.

B. \$500 million Defence Line of Credit Extended to Vietnam

- The two ministers also agreed on *early finalisation of \$500 million Defence Line of Credit extended to Vietnam.*
- The implementation of the projects shall add substantially to Vietnam's Defence capabilities. It will also push the govt's vision of make in India, make for the world.

C. India and Vietnam Inked MoU on Mutual Logistics Support

- It is the **first such major agreement which Vietnam has signed with any country.**
- India, in turn, has such reciprocal logistics pact with several countries like **US, Australia, Japan, France, South Korea and Singapore.**
- This pact will allow their militaries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies.

D. India's Help Towards Setting Up Of Language and IT Lab

- Indian Defence Minister also announced that India will gift two simulators and a monetary grant.
- It will be used towards setting up of Language and

IT Lab at the Air Force Officers Training School for capacity building of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

INDIA – VIETNAM RELATIONS

Background

- India and Vietnam, with a long history of cultural and civilizational links and common roots in the struggle against colonial rule, share traditionally cordial bilateral relations.
- India was the Chairman of the International Commission for Supervision and Control formed, pursuant to the Geneva Accord of 1954, to facilitate the peace process in Vietnam.

Relationship Elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

- India initially maintained Consulate-level relations with the then North and South Vietnams.
- It later established full diplomatic relations with unified Vietnam in January 1972. In 2022, India and Vietnam are celebrating the **50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.**
- Relations between the two countries were elevated to the level of 'Strategic Partnership' in July 2007.
- In 2016, bilateral relations were further elevated to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership".

Trade and Economic Cooperation

- For FY 2021-22, bilateral trade posted a growth of 27% and reached US\$ 14.14 billion.
- ✓ Indian exports to Vietnam reached US\$ 6.70 billion while Indian imports from Vietnam amounted to US\$ 7.44 billion.
- In FY 2021-22, for India, Vietnam was the 23rd largest trading partner globally and the 4th largest within ASEAN, following Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- India's investments in Vietnam are estimated at around US\$ 1.9 billion including investments routed through third countries.
- ✓ As of December 2021, India has 313 valid projects with total invested capital of US\$ 910.4 million in Vietnam, ranking 25th among countries and territories investing in Vietnam.
- ✓ As of 2021, Vietnam has six investment projects in India with total estimated investment of US\$ 28.55

million, primarily in the areas of pharmaceuticals, IT, chemicals and building materials.

Development Partnership

A. Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)

- Under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) framework, India has been taking up QIPs, each valued at US\$50,000, in different provinces of Vietnam for development of community infrastructure.
- So far, since 2017, 27 QIPs have been completed in 23 provinces of Vietnam, while 10 new projects are under implementation in 10 provinces.

B. Capacity Building Cooperation, Training Programmes and Scholarships

As part of capacity building support under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, India has offered short-term courses in Indian institutions to nearly 3000 Vietnamese participants over the years.

C. Cultural Conservation Projects in Vietnam

- India is providing technical assistance worth US\$ 2.25 million for conservation and restoration of ancient **Cham monuments**.
- It is being carried out at the World heritage Site of **My Son in Quang Nam Province** of Vietnam.

D. Humanitarian Assistance

Indian Naval Ship **INS Kiltan** undertook a visit to Ho Chi Minh City in 2020 to deliver flood relief materials for the people of Central Vietnam (**Mission Sagar III**). Mission Sagar-III is part of India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) assistance to friendly foreign countries during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Defence Partnership

- MoU on Defence Cooperation signed in 2009 and the Joint Vision on Defence Cooperation signed in 2015 provide the broad institutional framework.
- The recently signed Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030 and MoU on Mutual Logistics Support further strengthens the relationship.
- The well-established bilateral annual exchange framework includes Defence Policy Dialogue at the Deputy Ministerial level, Services Staff talks and High-level Meetings between the Coast Guards.
- Vietnam is interested in India's Akash (surface-to-air) systems, Dhruv advanced light helicopters and

Brahmos missiles.

- India also participated in the **PASSEX Exercise** with the Vietnam People's Navy.

CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP

- **Creating A Balance With China** - Similar to other South East Asian countries, Vietnam also faces the challenge of creating a balance between India and China. Chinese actions in the South China Sea have pushed together Hanoi and New Delhi in a partnership. However, Vietnam remains concerned about provoking China.
- **Hurdles To Increased Military Ties** - The Indian military was currently on a war-footing for a possible twofront conflict with China and Pakistan, its ability to provide real-time military help to Vietnam was limited.
- **Challenges In Commercial Cooperation** - India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's international arm ONGC Videsh has for several years operated in waters claimed by both Vietnam and China.
 - ✓ India's greater role in exploring for oil and gas off the Vietnamese coast has Hanoi's blessing but opposition from Beijing.
 - ✓ Any future India-Vietnam cooperation would be complicated by commercial considerations such as financial viability and the risk of Chinese harassment of any oil operations in disputed waters.

CONCLUSION

- India-Vietnamese ties are deep, including in the defence sector. Though there may be strong strategic rationale pushing the two countries together, there are also potentially clear limits to the relationship.
- As much as Hanoi needs greater support, it also has to worry about potential negative Chinese reactions.
- Hence, New Delhi needs to be careful not to push Vietnam too far, especially considering its own reluctance in being seen as ganging up against China.

9 . 25TH FOUNDING DAY OF BIMSTEC

The 25th Founding Day of BIMSTEC was celebrated in Dhaka on June 6.

BIMSTEC

- It is an economic bloc with Permanent Secretariat at Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- **Aim:** To counter the onslaught of globalisation by

accelerating regional growth through mutual cooperation by utilising regional resources and geographical advantages.

- It is sector-driven cooperative organisation in which 6 sectors have been included (see the figure beside).
- Under these 6 sectors, 14 priority areas have been identified. Climate change was added as the 14th priority area of cooperation in 2008.
- Among these priority areas, a member country chooses which of the 14 priority areas it is willing to take lead.
- India is lead country for -- Transport & Communication, Tourism, Environment & Disaster Management, Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime.

Significance of BIMSTEC for India	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge-builder between the SAARC and the ASEAN – Myanmar and Thailand are members of ASEAN while other member nations belong to SAARC. • Neighbourhood First Policy - BIMSTEC is an integral part of India's ongoing efforts to increase geo-economic cooperation among countries in the region which it sees as part of its extended neighbourhood. • Potential game-changer for the landlocked northeastern states. • Strategic Significance - China has diverted its attention to the Bay of Bengal with greater assertion. The Bay of Bengal acts like a funnel to the Malacca Strait, a major trade route for China. • Economic Significance – 7 nations had robust annual economic growth in recent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India and Bangladesh have Teesta water sharing dispute and refugee's issue. • Bangladesh and Myanmar have problems in regard to the Rohingya Muslims as refugees. • India and Sri Lanka continue to have friction on the fishermen issue. • Chinese Interference in the backyard ✓ Growing Nepal – China economic and security cooperation ✓ Growing friendship

times and one-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year.

- Resource rich region - The Bay of Bengal has huge untapped resources especially - massive reserve of natural gas.
- In counterterrorism: Close cooperation between India and BIMSTEC countries can strengthen the fight against terrorism and illicit drug trafficking.
- Attractive alternative to SAARC - BIMSTEC more naturally lends itself to regional integration (physical connectivity as well as economic cooperation) than SAARC.

between Sri Lanka and China
✓ Increased Chinese activities in Bangladesh
• Initiated by India, MILEX 2018 was the first field training military exercise as part of the BIMSTEC. Nepal and Thailand only sent observers and did not participate.
• BIMSTEC seriously lags behind ASEAN and other regional organisations in terms of people-to-people contacts.

5TH BIMSTEC SUMMIT

- In March 2022, the 5th BIMSTEC Summit was hosted in virtual mode by Sri Lanka, the current chair of BIMSTEC.
- The Summit's theme was "Towards a Resilient Region, Prosperous Economies, Healthy People".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF SUMMIT

A. Main Outcome-Adoption and Signing of BIMSTEC Charter

- The Charter formalizes the grouping into an organization made up of member states that are littoral to, and dependent upon, Bay of Bengal.
- The charter would provide rules, a framework, and long-term goals.
- This, in turn, will streamline the operations of BIMSTEC and allow the organisation to finally deliver on its potential.

B. BIMSTEC Master Plan For Transport Connectivity

- It is a vision for implementing multimodal connectivity projects for greater regional integration.

- It will seek to combine shipping routes with road transport for the movement of people and cargo.

C. Other BIMSTEC Agreements Signed

- BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters;
- BIMSTEC MoU on Mutual Cooperation in the field of Diplomatic Training and
- Memorandum of Association on Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility.

INDIA'S STAND AT THE SUMMIT

Prioritise Regional Security And Cooperation

- PM Modi called for prioritising regional security and cooperation. He said developments in Europe have raised questions about the stability of the global order.

Highlighted Importance of Myanmar

- India stressed that the ASEAN nation is important for successful cooperation among the member-states.
- As per India, Myanmar is an important constituent member of BIMSTEC & has a very important geography.

India to Lead Security Pillar of BIMSTEC

- The leaders of BIMSTEC member countries also approved a complete reorganisation of the grouping's cooperation activities.
- Henceforth, the BIMSTEC cooperation activities will take place in seven pillars and each of the member countries will lead one pillar. India will lead the security pillar of the BIMSTEC.

Pushes for BIMSTEC Trade Pact, Vows \$1m Aid

- Indian PM pushed for early progress on the proposal of BIMSTEC free trade agreement (FTA) to enhance mutual trade among member states.
- He also announced that India will provide \$1 million in financial aid to augment the operational budget of the BIMSTEC secretariat.

CONCLUSION

- In its 25 years of existence, BIMSTEC has proved to be a bridge of friendship connecting the people of South and South East Asia.
- With the adoption of three legal instruments and the connectivity master plan at Colombo, BIMSTEC is now ready to perform and deliver.

10. 48TH G7 SUMMIT

48th G7 Summit was held at Elmau, Germany from 26-28 June 2022. Besides the member countries, the summit was joined by the Leaders of Argentina, India, Indonesia, Senegal and South Africa, as well as Ukraine.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMIT

Theme & Major Goals

- This year's theme was - Progress Towards An Equitable World.
- The summit had 5 major goals -- Strong alliances for a sustainable planet; Setting the course for economic stability and transformation; Enhanced preparedness for healthy lives; Sustainable investments in better future; Stronger together.

Partnership for Global Infrastructure & Investment (PGII)

- At the 2021 Summit (47th Summit), G7 leaders had announced their intent to develop a values-driven, high-impact, and transparent infrastructure partnership.
- This was formally launched in the form of PGII at the recently concluded summit through which they aim to mobilise USD 600 billion over the next 5 years to narrow global investment gap..
- Four Priority Pillars of PGII –

- The US has already announced investment worth \$30 million for a fund promoting food security in India under the PGII.

2022 Resilient Democracies Statement

- India, along with G7 countries and four invited countries, signed the G7 joint statement on 'Resilient Democracies'.

- Through this statement, the participating countries expressed their commitment to:

- ✓ Guard the freedom, independence and diversity of civil society actors
- ✓ Protect the freedom of expression and opinion online and offline

On Russia's War Of Aggression Against Ukraine

- G7 leaders resolved to stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes, providing the needed financial, humanitarian, military, and diplomatic support.
- They endorsed the ambitious and untried concept that seeks price caps on Russian oil.
 - ✓ Actually, higher crude oil and fuel prices allowed Russian revenues to climb in May despite its export volumes slipping due to sanctions.
 - ✓ Hence, the United States is pushing for a mechanism that would cap the price other countries pay for Russian oil. It seeks to leverage the West's financial and shipping influence over Russian oil exports.
 - ✓ The idea is to tie financial services, insurance and shipping of oil cargoes to cap on Russian oil price. So, if a shipper or importer wanted these services, they would have to commit to the Russian oil being sold for a set maximum price.
- G7 Leaders also agreed on a ban on imports of Russian gold.

Food Security Around The Globe

- The participating leaders pledged to spend \$4.5 billion this year to help ensure food security around the globe.
- To protect people from hunger and malnutrition, and in response to Russia's weaponisation of grain, G7 leaders decided to increase global food and nutrition security through the Global Alliance on Food Security.

INDIA AT 48TH G7 SUMMIT

1. Participation:

- India was represented by PM Modi at the summit. Although, India is not a member of G7, but it was called as a guest to attend the summit.

- At the G-7 summit in Germany, PM Modi participated in two sessions

2. No Direct Reference on Ukraine

- Indian PM in his speech made no direct reference on Ukraine and he did not criticise Russia for its invasion.
- He said that G7 meeting is being held amid the atmosphere of global tension and urged to use the path of dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the crisis.

3. Urged G7 to Use Indian Agricultural Talent In Its Member Countries

- India has immense agricultural manpower compared to the countries of the G7.
- Indian agricultural skills have helped give new life to traditional agricultural products like cheese and olive in some of the countries of G7.
- With the help of traditional talent of India's farmers, food security will be ensured to G7 countries.

4. Stops Short Of Endorsing Partnership For Global Infrastructure And Investment (PGII)

- India stopped short of endorsing another initiative by the US and its allies, the PGII.
- India endorsed only two outcome documents pertaining to the G7 and the outreach countries together.
These are:

- ✓ Resilient democracy (statement)
- ✓ The chair's summary on the Just Energy Transition Partnership

5. Gift Diplomacy

- Continuing with his efforts to highlight India's soft power on the global stage, PM Modi gifted a variety of products to heads of governments at the G7 meet.
- Distinct artistic products identified with different UP regions featured heavily in the PM's gift choices.
 - ✓ E.g., a gulabi meenakari brooch and cufflink set to US President Joe Biden
 - o Gulabi Meenakari is a GI-tagged art form of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.
 - o A piece of pure silver is moulded into a base form, and the chosen design is embossed in the metal.
 - ✓ Pieces of black pottery from Nizamabad were gifted to Japanese PM.

✓To celebrate the shared Ramayana links between India and Indonesia, the PM gifted a lacquerware Ram Darbar to Indonesian President.
o The GI-tagged lacquerware art-form has its roots in the temple town of Varanasi in UP.

SIGNIFICANCE OF G7

A. Economic Significance: G7 nations account for close to 64% of global net wealth (\$317 trillion), 31 % of global GDP, and 10% of the world's population.

B. Political Significance

- Political heavyweights are capable of shaping the response of multilateral challenges.
- In 1999, it created the Financial Stability Forum in order to manage the international monetary system

C. G7 & COVID-19 Pandemic

- 47th G7 summit (held in June 2021) focused on the recovery from ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- It promised to distribute 1 billion vaccines to poorer countries.

D. Developmental Significance

- G-7 provided \$300 million in 1997 to help build the containment of the reactor meltdown at Chernobyl.
- G7 played crucial role in setting up a global fund to fight malaria and Aids in 2002.
- In October 2020, G7 finance ministers backed an extension of a G20 bilateral debt relief initiative for the world's poorest countries.

✓It is also known as Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI).

✓It means that bilateral official creditors are, during a limited period, suspending debt service payments from the poorest countries that request the suspension.