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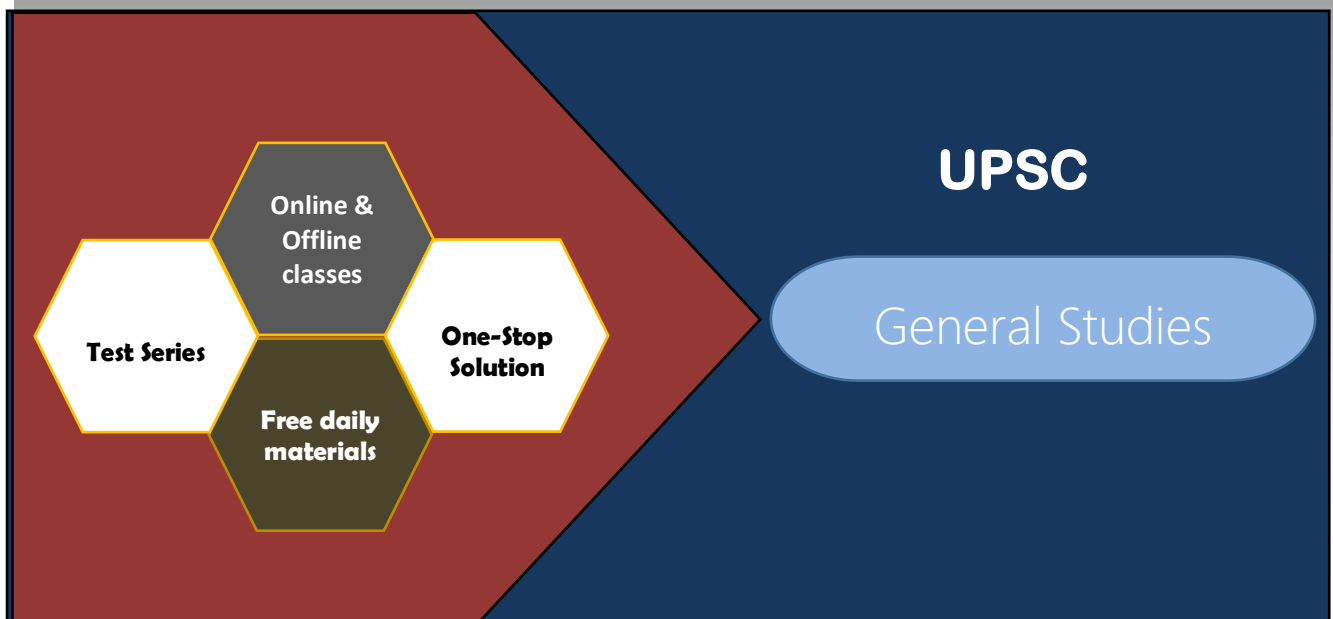
**Monthly current affairs magazine**

# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

A MAGAZINE FOR CIVIL SERVICES PREPARATION

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**Articles of the day  
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**



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## GS 1 : Heritage, culture , Geography of the World and Society

### 1. Process on to amend criminal laws

The process of comprehensive amendments to the criminal laws pertaining to marital rapes has been initiated and discussed in Parliament.

#### The issue in detail:

- The entire issue of marital rape in Indian society surrounds sensitive social values that are required to be examined under proper rationale at the policy-making level before introducing any legislative reforms.
- Bringing marital rape within the ambit of criminal law and recognising it as an offence under the IPC has invited a series of arguments.
- According to many legal experts, this issue has to be seen in the light of wider consultations that involve various stakeholders.

#### The petitioners' demand:

- There are a number of petitions that demand to strike down the exception to Section 375 of the IPC.
- **Section 375 of the IPC** – states that forcible sexual intercourse or sexual acts of a man on his wife, provided the wife is not below 18 years, is not rape.
- This provision is contradictory to section 3 of the Domestic Violence Act of 2005 according to which physical, sexual, verbal and emotional variants of abuse are perceived as domestic violence.
- Besides, the **National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)** reported that 7% of every married woman has suffered sexual violence. Moreover, 83% of married women aged 15-49, have experienced sexual violence and 9% reported former husbands as perpetrators.
- All these data mandates an effective legislation against the brutal practice of marital rape.
- Contrastingly, on the other side of the issue, there is a possibility of misuse of the criminal laws if marital rape is criminalised.
- Lack of evidence in matters of consent by the woman in developing a sexual relationship with her spouse acts as a major challenge to adjudicate the cases related to marital rapes.

## 2. President quotes Thirukkural while addressing Parliament

President Ram Nath Kovind quoted a couplet from Thirukkural while addressing the joint Houses of Parliament for Budget Session.

### What did the President quote?

- ‘**Karka Kasadara Karpavai Kattrapin Nirka Atharku Thaka**’ was the couplet chosen by him to reiterate the importance of the New Education Policy.
- The couplet insists on thorough and flawless learning and adhering to what one has learnt.

### What is Thirukkural?

- The Tirukkural (meaning ‘sacred verses’), or shortly the Kural, is a classic Tamil language text consisting of 1,330 short couplets, or kurals, of seven words each.
- The text is divided into three books with aphoristic teachings on virtue (aram), wealth (porul) and love (inbam), respectively.
- Considered one of the greatest works ever written on ethics and morality, it is known for its universality and secular nature.

### Three major parts of the book

1. **Aram** : Book of Virtue (Dharma), dealing with moral values of an individual and essentials of yoga philosophy
2. **Porul** : Book of Polity (Artha), dealing with socio-economic values, polity, society and administration
3. **Inbam**: Book of Love (Kama), dealing with psychological values and love

### Who authored it and when?

- Its authorship is traditionally attributed to Valluvar, also known in full as Thiruvalluvar.
- The text has been dated variously from 300 BCE to 5th century CE.
- The traditional accounts describe it as the last work of the third Sangam, but linguistic analysis suggests a later date of 450 to 500 CE and that it was composed after the Sangam period.

### Cultural significance of Thirukkural

- The Kural is traditionally praised with epithets and alternative titles, including “the Tamil Veda” and “the Divine Book.”

- Written on the foundations of ahimsa, it emphasizes non-violence and moral vegetarianism as virtues for an individual.
  - In addition, it highlights truthfulness, self-restraint, gratitude, hospitality, kindness, goodness, duty, giving, and so forth.
  - It covers a wide range of social and political topics such as king, ministers, taxes, justice, forts, war, greatness of army and soldier's honor.
  - It emphasizes death sentence for the wicked, agriculture, education, abstinence from alcohol and intoxicants.
  - It also includes chapters on friendship, love, sexual unions, and domestic life.
1. Nothing is impossible for those who act after wise counsel and careful thought.
  2. Real kindness seeks no return.
  3. The only gift is giving to the poor; All else is exchange.
  4. Friendship with the wise gets better with time, as a good book gets better with age.
  5. Worthless are those who injure others vengefully, while those who stoically endure are like stored gold.
  6. Among a man's many good possessions, A good command of speech has no equal. Prosperity and ruin issue from the power of the tongue. Therefore, guard yourself against thoughtless speech.
  7. A fortress is of no use to cowards.
  8. Even the ignorant may appear very worthy, If they keep silent before the learned.

### **3.Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas**

The Hoysala Temples of Belur, Halebid and Somnathapura in Karnataka have been finalized as India's nomination for consideration as World Heritage for the year 2022-2023.

#### **Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas**

- The sacred ensembles of the Hoysalas are extraordinary expressions of spiritual purpose and vehicles of spiritual practice and attainment.
- The sacred ensembles of the Hoysalas at Belur and Halebid are the finest, most exquisite, and most representative examples of the artistic genius and cultural accomplishments of the Hoysalas remaining today.

#### **[I] Belur: Chennakeshava Temple Complex**



- The Chennakeshava temple complex was at the center of the old walled town located on the banks of the Yagachi River.
- The complex itself was walled in a rectangular campus with four rectilinear streets around it for ritual circumambulation of the deity.
- Construction of the temple commenced in 1117 AD and took a 103 years to complete.
- The temple was devoted to Vishnu.
- The richly sculptured exterior of the temple narrate scenes from the life of Vishnu and his reincarnations and the epics, Ramayana, and Mahabharata.
- However, some of the representations of Shiva are also included.
- Consecrated on a sacred site, the temple has remained continuously worshipped since its establishment and remains until today as a site of pilgrimage for Vaishnavites.

## [II] Halebid: Hoysaleshwara Temple

### Hoysalesvara Temple

#### Halebidu



- At the zenith of the Hoysala empire, the capital was shifted from Belur to Halebidu that was then known as Dorasamudhira.
- The Hoysaleshwara temple at Halebidu is the most exemplary architectural ensemble of the Hoysalas extant today.
- Built in 1121CE during the reign of the Hoysala King, Vishnuvardhana Hoysaleshwara.
- The temple, dedicated to Shiva, was sponsored and built by wealthy citizens and merchants of Dorasamudra.



- The temple is most well-known for the more than 240 wall sculptures that run all along the outer wall.
- Halebid has a walled complex containing of three Jaina basadi (temples) of the Hoysala period as well as a stepped well.

### [III] Somnathpur: Kesava Temple

## Kesav Temple

### Somanathpur



- The Keshava temple at Somanathapura is another magnificent Hoysala monument, perhaps the last.
- This is a breathtakingly beautiful Trikuta Temple dedicated to Lord Krishna in three forms - Janardhana, Keshava and Venugopala.
- Unfortunately, the main Keshava idol is missing, and the Janardhana and Venugopala idols are damaged.
- Still this temple is worth a visit just to soak in the artistry and sheer talent of the sculptors who created this magnificent monument to the Divine.

### 4. Issues with Population Control Bill

The Rajya Sabha has discussed a Private Member's Bill on population regulation.

## The Population Control Bill

- First introduced in 2019, it is a private member bill proposed by Rakesh Sinha.
- The purpose of the bill was to control the population growth of India.
- The proposed bill then was signed by 125 Members of Parliament (MP) and is yet to become an act of law.

It seeks to amend Article 47 by inserting article 47A to the Constitution of India. It proposes that-

1. The State shall promote small family norms by offering incentives in taxes, employment, education etc. to its people who keep their family limited to two children
2. The state shall withdraw every concession from and deprive such incentives to those not adhering to small family norm, to keep the growing population under control.

### Key provisions

- **Penalties:** The 2019 bill talked about introducing penalties for couples not adhering to the two-child policy such as debarment from contesting in elections and ineligibility for government jobs.
- **Two-child policy:** The 2020 bill proposes to introduce a two-child policy per couple.
- **Incentivizing adoption:** It shall incentivize adoption through various measures such as educational benefits, taxation cuts, home loans, free healthcare, and better employment opportunities.
- **Birth spacings:** It also proposes to ensure healthy birth spacing through measures related to augmenting the availability, accessibility and affordability of quality reproductive health services.

### Issues with penal provisions

- **Alienation:** If a family was penalized for more than two children, then the third child would develop a feeling of alienation that he is an unwanted child.
- **Bar on Women:** The biggest victim of such would be women, irrespective of religion. They would be debarred in political participation.
- **Selective abortions:** In India, the preference for male children may lead to a greater anti-female child sex selection because parents will only have "two attempts" to have babies.
- **Violation of reproductive autonomy:** To control and regulate the number of children a family can have is a gross violation of human rights, the right to self-determination and an individual's reproductive autonomy.

- **Violation of Individual Privacy:** A right to procreation is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution but it comes under the ambit of Article 21, as discussed in *Jasvir Singh vs State of Punjab*.
- **Remarriage issues:** A divorced person who has two children with a prior partner cannot bear a child with their next spouse.

### Why need such policy?

- India had a land availability of only 1.2 hectare per person, while the resources that get regenerated automatically was 0.43 only.
- We are an ecological debtor. The ecological footprint which we use and the gap between their regeneration is 187%.
- If this continued for 30 years, then resources would be exhausted and people would not be able to lead a dignified life.
- Some people see demographic dividend in the growing population but it was being used as cheap labour globally.

### Way forward

- The population of India is seen as the biggest obstacle to its economic development.
- It is the fall guy for governments seeking to justify their incompetence.
- No legislation must be enacted unless its future impact and social effect are first completely realized.

## 5. Debate over Freedom of Religion and Attire

A row over whether educational institutions can impose a strict dress code that could interfere with the rights of students has spilled in the Udupi district of Karnataka.

### Religious Freedom in India

- Article 25(1) of the Constitution guarantees the “freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion”.
- It is a right that guarantees a negative liberty – which means that the state shall ensure that there is no interference or obstacle to exercise this freedom.

### Restrictions on religious freedom

- Like all fundamental rights, the state can restrict the right for grounds of **public order, decency, morality, health and other state interests**.

- Over the years, the Supreme Court has evolved a **practical test** of sorts to determine what religious practices can be constitutionally protected and what can be ignored.
- In 1954, the Supreme Court held in the Shirur Mutt case that the term “religion” will cover all rituals and practices “integral” to a religion.

The test to determine what is integral is termed the “**Essential Religious Practices**” test.

### What is the essential religious practices test?

- While these issues are largely understood to be community-based, there are instances in which the court has applied the test to individual freedoms as well.
- In a 2004 ruling, the Supreme Court held that the Ananda Marga sect had no fundamental right to **perform the Tandava dance in public** streets since it did not constitute an essential religious practice of the sect.
- For example, in 2016, the Supreme Court upheld the discharge of an airman from the Indian Air Force for **keeping a beard**.
- It distinguished the case of a Muslim airman from that of Sikhs who are allowed to keep a beard.
- In 2015, the Supreme Court restored the **Jain religious practice of Santhara/Sallekhana** (a ritualistic fast unto death) by staying an order of the Rajasthan HC.

### Issues with this Test

- In the first place, what constitutes the essential part of a religion is primarily to be ascertained with reference to the doctrines of that religion itself, the SC had held in the Shirur Mutt case.
- So the test, a judicial determination of religious practices, has often been criticized by legal experts as it pushes the court to delve into theological spaces.
- In criticism of the test, scholars agree that it is better for the court to prohibit religious practices for public order rather than determine what is so essential to a religion that it needs to be protected.
- In several instances, the court has applied the test to keep certain practices out.

### Precursors related to Hijab

- Two set of rulings of the Kerala High Court, particularly on the right of Muslim women hold dressing according to the tenets of Islam.

- In 2015, Kerala HC ruled the prescription of dress code for AIPMT exam which prescribed wearing light clothes with half sleeves not having big buttons, brooch/badge, flower, etc. with Salwar/Trouser and slippers and not shoes.
- In 2016, it examined the issue more closely. It held that the practice of wearing a hijab constitutes an essential religious practice but did not quash the CBSE rule.
- The court once again allowed for the “additional measures” and safeguards put in place the previous year.

## GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

### 6. The Supreme Court fails to decide key constitutional cases in time-bound manner

Unless the Court strives in every possible way to assure that the Constitution, the law, applies fairly to all citizens, the Court cannot be said to have fulfilled its custodial responsibility.

#### Landmark judgments

- In the last few years, the Indian Supreme Court has delivered some judgments of far-reaching consequence.
- It declared the **right to privacy a fundamental right; decriminalized consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex; recognized transgender persons as the third gender; and outlawed triple talaq.**
- These decisions shore up the belief in republican values like **liberty and equality** reified in our Constitution.

#### Important cases pending in the Supreme Court

- **Constitutionality of CAA:** Many petitions were filed before the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, that provides non-Muslim communities from **Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan** a fast-track route to Indian citizenship.
- More than two years later, the matter continues to languish in the apex court.
- **Dilution of Article 370:** Innumerable petitions have been filed challenging the Presidential Order of August 5, 2019, that effectually diluted Article 370 of the Constitution.



- To date, the court has done precious little to decide this vexed question of law.
- **Constitutionality of 103rd amendment:** Petitions challenging the constitutionality of the Constitution(One Hundred and Third Amendment)Act,2019 that provides reservations in public educational institutions and government jobs for economically weaker sections are also languishing in the Supreme Court.
- **Challenges to the electoral bond scheme:** The Supreme Court has failed to accord proper hearing in the last four years to the constitutional challenge to the electoral bonds scheme.

## Conclusion

Unless the Court strives in every possible way to assure that the Constitution, the law, applies fairly to all citizens, the Court cannot be said to have fulfilled its custodial responsibility”.

## 7.How India can adapt to global geoeconomic churn

As India returns to a high growth path after a slowdown in the last decade, its geopolitical salience in the world will continue to rise.

### India's growth story

- Today, **India's GDP is \$3.1 trillion** and could cross, according to some estimates, \$8 trillion by the end of this decade.
- India's total trade, which was about **\$38 billion in 1991-92**, is expected to touch **\$1.3 trillion this year**.
- This is about **40 percent of India's GDP** and underlines the fact that India is more deeply tied to the world than ever before.
- The world itself is in a geo-economic churn making the transition to \$8 trillion a challenging one.

## Geo-economic and geopolitical changes in the global order

### Geo-economic changes

- It was **Edward Luttwak**, the well-known American strategist, who triggered a **global discourse on the idea of geoeconomics** in a seminal article in 1990 amidst the end of the Cold War.
- **Using economic dominance for political gain:** The rapid economic rise of China in the last three decades and Beijing's success in **leveraging its growing economic clout for political gain** is widely seen as a **classic example of geoeconomics**.

- **Economic interdependence:** Luttwak's warning against illusions of **economic interdependence** and globalization have been borne out by major changes in **US-China relations** in recent years.
- The dramatic expansion of economic interdependence between China and America over the last four decades – what some called “**Chimerica**” – was the principal evidence for the thesis that **geopolitics and ideology** no longer mattered.
- Chimerica was held up as an efficient economic fusion that underscored the virtues of economic globalization.
- However, **economic nationalism** has re-emerged in both countries today.
- The US is also strengthening domestic research and industrial capabilities to compete more effectively with China.
- China too has adopted the economic strategy of “**dual circulation**” that focuses on strengthening domestic capabilities and reducing exposure to external factors.

### How geopolitical and geoeconomic changes are influencing India's free trade policies

- At the end of 2019, India has walked out from the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** suggesting that the costs of joining a China-centered regional economic order are unacceptable.
- **Deepening engagement with complementary economies:** India's move towards **free trade agreements** with countries like **Australia, Britain, UAE, and Israel**.
- **Domestic orientation:** Much like the US and China, India is now taking a number of initiatives to promote domestic manufacturing in a range of sectors under the banner of “**Atmanirbhar Bharat**”.

### Way forward for India

- Until now, India had the luxury of treating its **foreign, economic, and strategic policies as separate domains**.
- **An integrated approach to policies:** Adapting to the current global geo-economic churn demands that Delhi finds better ways to **integrate its financial, trade, technological, security, and foreign policies**.
- Above all India needs a strategy that can respond to the imperatives of building **domestic capabilities, developing geo-economic partnerships, and constructing geopolitical coalitions** with like-minded countries.

### Conclusion

India's selective trade arrangements and the policies to promote domestic manufacturing have drawn much criticism. While those arguments must continue,



they must be related more closely to the structural changes in the international economic order.

## 8. Missed opportunity to opportunity of employment-centred and inclusive growth

India continues to rank poorly in various global indices that reflect the quality of life, human capital or human development in the country. In this context, it was expected that the current Budget would see an expansion in government spending on the social sector.

### Need for greater spending on social sector

- In Human Development Index, India ranks 131 out of 189 countries and on the Global Hunger Index, it ranks 101 out of 116 countries.
- The pandemic over the last two years has had a severe impact on the health, education and food security of the poor and informal sector workers.
- The country has been experiencing increasing inequality over the last couple of decades.

### Marginal increase in allocation for school education

- In the budget, the government announced that it will expand its 'one class, one TV channel' scheme instead of announcing enhanced allocations for schools the government announced that it will expand its '**one class, one TV channel**' scheme instead of announcing enhanced allocations for schools so that they can reopen with vigour.
- The budget for school education at ₹63,449 crore is a slight improvement over last year's ₹54,873 crore (2021-22 budget estimates, BE) and a mere increase of 6% in nominal terms compared to 2020-21 BE of ₹59,845 crore.
- After rechristening the school mid-day meal scheme as **Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman**, simply called PM Poshan, the allocation for the scheme has reduced from **₹11,500 crore last year to ₹10,233 crore this year.**

### Low allocation for health

- Despite repeated statements about strengthening the public health system, the overall budget for the Department of Health and Family Welfare at **₹83,000 crore** has gone up by only 16% over the BE for 2021-22 and by **less than ₹1,000 crore compared to the RE for 2021-22, which is ₹82,921 crore.**
- However, by **including water and sanitation in the budget for health**, there is an increase being shown in health spending as a proportion of GDP.

- Also, even though the budget for the **Jal Jeevan Mission** has increased from **₹50,000 crore to ₹60,000 crore**, only 44% of the allocated funds to the Department of Water and Sanitation for 2021-22 has been spent as on end December 2021.

### **No indication of plan to extend the PMGKAY**

- 60% of the population are covered by ration cards currently under the National Food Security Act.
- Those who were eligible benefited from the additional free foodgrains that they have been given under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)**.
- However, the food subsidy (BE) for 2022-23 at **₹2.06 lakh crore** is only enough to cover the regular NFSA entitlements.
- The indication is that there is **no plan to extend the PMGKAY**.
- The food subsidy RE for 2021-22 is ₹2.86 lakh crore.

### **Other schemes**

- Budgets for important schemes such as Saksham Anganwadi, maternity entitlements and social security pensions **are around the same as the allocations for last year**.
- The allocation for MGNREGA at ₹73,000 crore also does not reflect the increased demand for work or the pending wages of ₹21,000 crore.

### **Continued negligence**

- The resources allocated for crucial government schemes in the fields of **health, education, nutrition, and social protection have remained stagnant** or show negligent increase.
- In fact, the budgets for these schemes **have been declining in real terms since 2015**.
- The **World Social Protection Report 2020-22**, brought out by the International Labour Organization, shows that the spending on social protection (excluding health) in India is 1.4% of the GDP, while the average for low-middle income countries is 2.5%.

### **Conclusion**

This continued negligence does not bode well for inclusive development in India.

## 9. J&K Delimitation Commission likely to get another extension

The Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission is likely to get a second extension which might result in the delay of assembly elections in the union territory.

### The Delimitation Commission:

- It is a three-membered commission headed by retired judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.
- The commission came into effect by an Act of Parliament and operates under Part V of the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019.
- It provides for the redrawing of boundaries of seven additional seats for the 83 member assembly.

### Highlights of the suggestions:

- The Delimitation Commission, in its first draft proposal, recommended an increase of six assembly segments in Jammu and one in Kashmir.
- It also suggested the reservation of seats for the scheduled castes (7 seats) and 9 seats to be reserved for the scheduled tribes.
- These suggestions have been considered gerrymandering and termed unacceptable by the political parties of Kashmir.

### What is Gerrymandering?

- Gerrymandering is an electoral exercise that involves the manipulation of the boundaries of an electoral constituency that works only in favour of a particular political party or class.
- This disturbs the entire system of free and fair elections thereby leading to electoral malpractice.

## 10. Ink India-Britain free trade, unlock new opportunity

Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson announced their common motto of transforming the India-United Kingdom partnership in the next decade. **Read more on India - UK relations in the link.**

### Background:

- As part of the transformation, the leaders declared their vision to double the bilateral trade by 2030, which was over £23 billion in 2019.

- The leaders have directed their governments to take rapid steps to reduce barriers to trade, and to complete the groundwork necessary to begin work on a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
- Both governments have taken measures in this regard.
  - **Example:**
    - Unlocking the export of British apples to India
    - Enabling a greater number of Indian fisheries to export shrimp to the U.K.
- Small but significant steps have been taken up, which have shown that concrete measures can be undertaken to stimulate growth.

### **Business relationship between India and UK**

- Investment by the UK in India
  - There are about 600 U.K. companies working in India which employ more than 3,20,000 people.
  - Barclays company has its biggest office outside of London in Pune.
  - JCB's products manufactured in India are exported to over 110 countries across the globe.
  - Hindustan Unilever headquartered in Mumbai also exports its consumer goods to the international market.
- **Investment by India in UK**
  - India is one of the big investors in the U.K. in dynamic sectors like fintech, electric vehicles and batteries.
  - In 2020-21, India was the U.K.'s second-largest source of investment in terms of the number of projects.
  - Recently, **Essar Group** and **Ola Electric** announced investments into the U.K.

### **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**

- FTA is an arrangement between two or more countries to reduce trade barriers in imports and exports among them.
- With FTA, goods and services can be exchanged across international borders with limited or no government tariffs, quotas, or subsidies.
- In the current world, free trade policy is often implemented by means of a formal and mutual agreement of the nations involved. However, a free-trade policy may simply be the absence of any trade restrictions.
- Based on the level of openness in the trade between the countries free trade policies can be categorized as,
  - Preferential trade agreement
  - Free trade agreement

- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
- Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
- Customs Union
- Common Market
- Economic Union

### **FTA between India and UK**

- Considering the size of the two economies the trade relationship, in particular, has underperformed. FTA is regarded as one of the solutions to better trade relationships.
- Having left the European Union's common trade bloc after 47 years, the UK thrives on FTAs.
- In this regard, FTA negotiations were launched in January 2022 in New Delhi.
- India's Commerce Minister and the U.K.'s International Trade Secretary announced their shared ambition to finish negotiations on a comprehensive and balanced FTA by the end of 2022.
- This is a big step in building a network of like-minded democracies committed to free trade.
- The Indian government is showing its determination to agree to a new set of trade deals.

### **Significance of FTA between India and the U.K.**

- India has an opportunity to transform its economy and society in the next 30 years.
  - Free trade with the U.K. will help through greater access to a highly open and competitive market, offering valuable opportunities for India's booming companies.
- A U.K.-India trade agreement will stimulate growth and employment in both countries.
- U.K. government reports suggest that, depending on the depth of the deal, an FTA would add around **£14.8 billion** to the GDP of India and the U.K. collectively by 2035.
- A trade deal helps diversify supply chains by making it easier and cheaper for more businesses to do business across borders.
- Reducing the trade barriers along with regulatory certainty will help small and medium-sized enterprises in the export of their goods and services.
- An agreement would help consumers from both countries see improvements in the variety and affordability of products.
- The two dynamic democracies such as India and the U.K. need to work closely together to promote open economies.

## Conclusion

Acknowledging the past of the two countries and with an intent to build for the future, an FTA would provide a framework within which the two countries can grow and flourish together, which helps in marking a new way of working between the U.K. and India.

## 11. Imperial excess

The Chief Minister of West Bengal has expressed outrage against the state's Governor and blocked him on a social media platform.

### Details

- Tired of the Governor's constant attack against her on Twitter, the West Bengal CM blocked him on the platform.
- The Chief Minister said the Governor was trying to treat the elected government as "bonded labour".
- The Governor then sent her a message for dialogue and harmony amongst constitutional functionaries.
- The recent events have once again brought back the limelight on the role of the Governor in relation to the elected government and legislature.

### West Bengal Case

- The governor has been summoning the Chief Secretary and the Director-General of Police on a regular basis, and taking to Twitter and often tagging the Chief Minister when they do not turn up.
- The governor also had an argument with the Assembly Speaker recently, in the State Assembly premises.
- He has withheld assent to the Howrah Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill 2021, delaying polls to the civic body.
- He has made allegations of misconduct in welfare schemes and questioned Government claims about investments in the State.
- He has often been criticized for taking stances that support the opposition in the Assembly.

### Maharashtra case

- The Governor has stalled the election of Speaker since the post fell vacant in February 2021.
  - He has taken exception to the amendments in the legislative rules for holding the Speaker's election through voice vote instead of secret ballot.



- The Governor's view that the State Assembly cannot decide its own rules is unacceptable to the ruling coalition, but is being cheered by the Opposition.
- The governor was criticised in the past for supporting opposition parties and their demands for a special session of the Assembly on women's safety and security.
- He had refused to accept the recommendation of the Council of Ministers on the nomination of 12 members to the Legislative Council, until the matter reached the High Court.

### Tamil Nadu's Case

- The governor has not acted upon the T.N. Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill, adopted by the Assembly in September 2021.
  - The Governor is required to either send it to the President of India for approval or return it for reconsideration by the Assembly, but the indefinite delay in taking a decision amounts to undermining the legislature, and is regarded unjustifiable.
  - The Bill relates to a question of State-Centre relations, as it proposes to dispense with the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical graduate admissions in the State. NEET has been criticised for curtailing State powers, and the Governor's delay in processing the Bill is aggravating the situation.

### Conclusion

The imperialistic attitude of the governor has huge implications on the constitutional scheme of functioning and requires the governor to act within the prescriptions of the Constitution and be a friend, philosopher and guide to his government.

### 12. The curious case of Meghalaya's COVID-19 relief package

This article examines the **Chief Minister's Relief Against Wage Loss scheme** of the Government of Meghalaya.

#### Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic in India has highlighted the insecurity of life and livelihood for India's vast numbers of unorganised workers, and the inadequate response of the state.
- According to the latest Oxfam report:
  - India's number of billionaires has grown significantly, while 84% have reduced income and 4.6 crore working people have plummeted into acute poverty.



- It indicates the poor response by the state in terms of relief and social sector expenditure during the period.
- The delivery systems of the inadequate amounts that have been allocated by the Centre and State governments.
- A public audit of an unjustified relief scheme in Meghalaya for unorganised workers provides important lessons about the importance of transparency, public participation, and monitoring those who have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

### The Chief Minister's Relief Against Wage Loss scheme

- The Government of Meghalaya announced relief for workers affected by the COVID-19 lockdown through the Chief Minister's Relief Against Wage Loss (CRAWL) scheme.
- The announcement was made without necessary details; there was no notification about the amount of financial support.
- There was no published scheme, or guidelines with minimum norms for identifying beneficiaries, and verifying their eligibility.
  - This led to a large number of people applying for assistance.
- People did not know whether their application for support had been successful or not.
- Although payments were deposited into the bank accounts of the applicants, there were confusions about the amount of support they were supposed to get.
- Some unions of the workers brought this to the attention of the government, but there was no response.
- In October 2020, a local civil group filed an RTI application asking for the list of workers to whom payments had been made.

### Inference from RTI application

- The response to the RTI was provided in December 2020 with details of around 1,60,000 people and transfers.
- The data also indicated that,
  - The scheme for financial assistance to **unorganised workers** facing a wage loss was **₹2,100**.
  - To **construction workers** registered under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) Act, it was **₹5,000**.

### Response by the unions

- The unions decided to disseminate this information widely over various platforms.

- The RTI response was converted into a searchable digital database with the help of **Graamvaani**, a social tech company, via a dedicated site called “in.”
- This enabled people to check whether and how much money they had been transferred as per the government’s records.
- It also had the option of filing a grievance with the Chief Minister’s Office if there was any disparity in the Government’s claim.
- Using IVRS, calls were also made to 1,35,617 people to inform them that as per the Government’s record, ₹2,100 or ₹5,000 had been transferred to their bank account.

### **Public Audit Report**

- The virtual “public audit” was planned and carried out by civil society groups and workers’ unions using digital technology during the COVID-19 restrictions which made physical verification impossible.
- **Key Findings**
  - Out of 11,509 people who responded to the IVRS calls, only 13% said that they received the full amount mentioned in the RTI response.
  - 47% received nothing, in spite of the Government records showing ₹2,100 having been transferred to each of them.
  - Nearly 8,000 people submitted individual grievances to the Chief Minister’s Office and the Labour Department.
  - Thousands of others searched through the RTI data and submitted their grievances.

### **Response by the Government**

- The process should have been carried out by the Government, which is better equipped. Instead, the Government became defensive and refused to accept the findings.
- With a deadlock between workers and the Government, the civil society unions organised a public hearing in Shillong on World Human Rights Day, to draw focus to the issue.

### **Public hearing**

- Chaired by Justice Madan B. Lokur, a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, the public hearing set an example of the democratic potential and social ethos of the people.
- Over 200 workers gave up the day’s wages, and came with their bank passbooks and labour cards to show that the money had not been credited in their bank accounts more than a year after it was due.

- Justice Lokur asked the civil society groups to approach the Legal Services Authority to pursue and enforce mechanisms of grievance redress since the Department of Labour boycotted the hearing.

### Implications of the proceedings

- The exercise has implications beyond Meghalaya. The Centre and various State governments have collected and spent thousands of crores, including the use of District Mineral Foundation Trust Funds, disaster relief funds, Compensatory Afforestation Management Funds Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds, etc. for “relief payments” with almost no information in the public domain.
- Expenditures made by governments under various funds for COVID-19 relief have not been subject to either statutory audits of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India or institutionalised social audits, and necessary grievance redress platforms are absent.
- The assertion of demanding transparency, and citizen-centric accountability cannot be seen as an isolated movement in a single State.
  - For example, Rajasthan has an ongoing campaign demanding an accountability law, which is drawing support.

### Conclusion

The demand for transparency and accountability by the marginalised groups need to be acknowledged and should be made part of all fund support and disbursement schemes in order to make democratic participation meaningful.

### **13. Weighing in on a health data retention plan**

The National Health Authority (NHA) – the body responsible for administering the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)** – has initiated a consultation process on the retention of health data by healthcare providers in India. The consultation paper asks for feedback on what data is to be retained, and for how long.

#### **Issues with the policy for healthcare data retention**

- **Risk of over-collection:** A simple **classification system**, as suggested in the consultation paper, exposes individuals to harms arising from **over-collection and retention of unnecessary data**.
- At the same time, this kind of one-size-fits-all system can also lead to the under-retention of data that is genuinely required for research or public policy needs.

- Instead, we should seek to **classify data based on its use**.

### Do we need a policy for the mandatory retention of health data?

- Currently, service providers can compete on **how they handle the data of individuals or health records**, in theory, each of us can choose a provider whose data policies we are comfortable with.
- Whether the state should mandate a **retention period** at all is an open question.
- Given the landscape of healthcare access in India, including through informal providers, **many patients may not think about this factor in practice**.
- Nonetheless, the decision to **take the choice out of the individual's hands** should not be taken lightly.

### Balancing the policy for public health data retention with the right to privacy

- **Four-part test for privacy:** The Supreme Court of India has clarified that privacy is a fundamental right, and any interference into the right must pass a four-part test: **legality; legitimate aim; proportionality, and appropriate safeguards**.
- Health data and privacy: **The mandatory retention of health data** is one such form of interference with the right to privacy.
- **1] Legality:** In this context, the question of legality becomes a question about the legal standing and authority of the NHA.
- Since the NHA is not a sector-wide regulator, it has no legal basis for formulating guidelines for healthcare providers in general.
- **2] Legitimate aim:** The aim of data retention is described in terms of benefits to the individual and the public at large.
- **Benefits to the individuals:** Individuals benefit through greater convenience and choice, created through **portability of health records**.
- The broader public benefits through **research and innovation**, driven by the **availability of more and better data to analyse**.
- **Risk involved:** Globally, legal systems consider **health data particularly sensitive**, and recognise that improper disclosure of this data can expose a person to a range of significant harms.
- **Benefits must be clearly defined:** As per Indian law, if an individual's rights are to be curtailed due to anticipated benefits, such benefits cannot be potential or speculative: they must be clearly defined and identifiable.
- **3] Proportionality:** This is the difference between saying that data on patients with heart conditions will help us better understand cardiac health – a vague explanation – and being able to identify a specific study that will include data from that patient.

- It would further mean demonstrating that the study requires personally identifiable information, rather than just an anonymous record – the latter flowing from the principle of proportionality, which requires choosing the **least intrusive option available**.
- **4] Safeguard: Standards for anonymisation are still developing.**
- We are not yet able to rule out the **possibility of anonymised data still being linked back to specific individuals**.
- In other words, even anonymisation may not be the least intrusive solution to safeguarding patients' rights in all scenarios.

### Way forward

- **Clear and specific case for retention:** The test for retaining data should be that a clear and specific case has been identified for such retention, following a rigorous process run by suitable authorities.
- **Anonymise data:** A second safeguard would be to anonymise data that is being retained for research purposes – again, unless a specific case is made for keeping personally identifiable information.
- If neither of these is true, **the data should be deleted**.
- **Express and informed consent:** An alternate basis for retaining data can be the **express and informed consent** of the individual in question.
- **User-based classification process:** Health-care service providers – and everyone else – will have to comply with the data protection law, once it is adopted by Parliament.
- The current Bill already requires **purpose limitation for collecting, processing, sharing, or retaining data**; a use-based classification process would thus bring the ABDM ecosystem actors in compliance with this law as well.

### Conclusion

A privacy-centric process is needed to determine what data to retain and for how long.

## 14. India- Central Asia Relations

The inaugural India-Central Asia Summit, the India-Central Asia Dialogue, and the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi – all held over the past four months – collectively indicate a renewed enthusiasm in New Delhi to engage the Central Asian region.



## Significance of Central Asia for India

- India has limited economic and other stakes in the region, primarily due to **lack of physical access**.
- And yet, the region appears to have gained a great deal of **significance in India's strategic thinking** over the years, particularly in the recent past.
- **New geopolitical realities:** India's mission Central Asia today reflects, and is responsive to, the **new geopolitical, if not the geo-economic, realities** in the region.

## Factors driving India's engagement

- One of the factors driving this engagement and shaping it is the **great power dynamics there**.
- **Withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan:** The decline of American presence and power in the broader region (due primarily to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan) has led to a **reassertion by China and Russia** seeking to fill the power vacuum.
- **India-Russia relations:** Moscow considers **India to be a useful partner in the region:** it helps it to not only win back New Delhi, which is moving towards the U.S., but also to subtly **checkmate the rising Chinese influence in its backyard**.
- For the U.S., while growing India-Russia relations is not a welcome development, it recognises the utility of Moscow-New Delhi relations in Central Asia to offset Beijing's ever-growing influence there.
- **India's dilemma:** In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, New Delhi faces a **major dilemma in the wider region**, not just in the pre-existing theatres like the **Line of Control and the Line of Actual Control**.
- **India's China challenge:** India in the region might get further hemmed in due to the combined efforts by China, Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan.
- If so, it must ensure that there is **no China-led strategic gang up with Pakistan and the Taliban against India** in the region, which, if it becomes a reality, would severely damage Indian interests.
- **Consolidation of Afghan policy:** India's engagement of Central Asia would also help it to consolidate its post-American Afghan policy.
- Now that the Taliban have returned to Kabul, New Delhi is forced to devise **new ways of engaging Afghanistan**.
- That's where the **Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Russia could be helpful**.
- The announcement of a **Joint Working Group on Afghanistan** during the summit between India and the CARs is surely indicative of such interest.

## Russia's prominence

- In India's current vision for a regional security architecture, Russia appears prominent
- **Countering China:** By courting Russia – its traditional partner, also close to China and getting closer to Pakistan – to help it re-establish its presence in the Central Asian region, **India is seeking to work with one of the region's strongest powers** and also potentially create a rift between China and Russia.
- **Joint defence production** by India and Russia has been on the rise and the CARs could play a key role in it.
- **India's non-critical stance on developments in Ukraine and Kazakhstan:** This growing India-Russia partnership also explains India's non-critical stance on the developments in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

## Challenges in India's engagement with Central Asia

- **China's dominance in the region:** China, which shares a land border with the region, is already a major investor there.
- Iran's role: An even bigger challenge for India may be **Iran**.
- India's best shot at reaching the CARs is by using a hybrid model – via **sea to Chabahar** and then by road/rail through Iran (and Afghanistan) to the CARs.
- So, for New Delhi, the ongoing re-negotiations on the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action** are of crucial importance.
- While Iran getting close to the West is not preferred by Russia (but preferred by India), if and when it becomes a reality, **India would be able to use it to its advantage** and join Russia in engaging the CARs.
- **Delivering on the commitment:** Most importantly, India will have to walk the talk on its commitments to Central Asia.
- Does it have the political will, material capability and diplomatic wherewithal to stay the course in the region?

## Conclusion

India's renewed engagement of Central Asia is in the right direction for the simple reason that while the gains from an engagement of Central Asia may be minimal, the disadvantages of non-engagement could be costly in the longer run.

## 15. India-Britain free trade agreement

In May last year, Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson announced their shared vision for a transformative decade for the India-United Kingdom partnership. These words have now been made real.



## Transforming India-UK partnership

- **Doubling bilateral trade:** The two leaders had declared their ambition to more than double bilateral trade by 2030, which **totalled over £23 billion in 2019.**
- **Reduce barriers to trade:** They directed their governments to take rapid steps to reduce barriers to trade.
- **FTA:** The groundwork necessary to begin work on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) had to be prepared by the end of 2021.
- Both governments **have already taken action;** for example, unlocking the export of British apples to India and enabling a greater number of Indian fisheries to export shrimp to the U.K.
- The big next step was the launch of FTA negotiations last month.

## Trade relations at present

- **Bilateral trade:** The bilateral trade between the two countries stood at 15.5 billion USD in 2019-20. India has engaged with the UK in sectors like pharma, textiles, leather, industrial machinery, furniture, and toys.
  - Britain is among the top investors in India and India is the second-biggest investor and a major job creator in Britain. Recently, the Serum Institute of India has announced setting up its research facilities in the UK.
- **Indian Diaspora:** Around 1.5 million people of Indian origin live in Britain. This includes 15 Members of Parliament, three members in Cabinet, and two in high office as Finance and Home Ministers.
- India is already a big investor in the U.K. – especially in dynamic sectors such as fintech, electric vehicles, and batteries.
- India has an extraordinary opportunity to transform its economy and society in the next 30 years, as it hits its demographic sweet spot, at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region where half the world's people live and 50% of global economic growth is produced.

## Benefits of FTA

- A U.K.-India trade agreement will **stimulate growth and employment in both countries.**
- Lower barriers coupled with greater regulatory certainty would incentivize new small and medium-sized enterprises **to export their goods and services.**
- An agreement also means Indian and British consumers see improvements in the variety and affordability of products.

- **Strategic reasons:** The British Government's Integrated Review of our overseas policy, describes the world we are in; messier, with the more **geostrategic competition**.
- It is one in which two dynamic democracies such as India and the U.K. need to work closely together **to promote open economies**.

## Conclusion

An FTA would mark a new way of working between the U.K. and India. It gives a new framework within which the two countries can grow and flourish together, putting the colonial economic relationship where it belongs – in the history books.

## 16. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

The government's recent announcement that the maternity benefits program which provides 5,000 for the first child will be extended to cover the second child only if it is a girl has met with sharp criticism from activists who have demanded that it be universalized.

### What is PMMVY?

- Launched in 2017, this scheme provides ₹5,000 for the birth of the first child to partially compensate a woman for the loss of wages.
- It also aims to improve the nutritional well-being of the mother and the child.
- The amount is given in three installments upon meeting certain conditions.
- It is combined with another scheme, Janani Suraksha Yojana, under which nearly ₹1,000 is given for an institutional birth so that a woman gets a total of ₹6,000.

### Eligibility Conditions

The first transfer (at pregnancy trimester) of ₹1,000 requires the mother to:

- Register pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) whenever she comes to know about her conception
- Attend at least one prenatal care session and take Iron-folic acid tablets and TT1 (tetanus toxoid injection)
- Attend at least one counseling session at the AWC or healthcare centre.

The second transfer (six months of conception) of ₹2,000 requires the mother to:

- Attend at least one prenatal care session and TT2

The third transfer (three and a half months after delivery) of ₹2,000 requires the mother to:

- Register the birth
- Immunize the child with OPV and BCG at birth, at six weeks, and at 10 weeks
- Attend at least two growth monitoring sessions within three months of delivery

Additionally, the scheme requires the mother to:

- Exclusively breastfeed for six months and introduce complementary feeding as certified by the mother
- Immunize the child with OPV and DPT
- Attend at least two counselling sessions on growth monitoring and infant and child nutrition and feeding between the third and sixth months after delivery

### Why in news?

- Under the revamped PMMVY under Mission Shakti, the maternity benefit amounting to ₹6000 is also to be provided for the second child.
- However, this is only in case the second is a girl child, to discourage pre-birth sex selection and promote the girl child.

### Issues with this provision

- To provide maternity benefit only to the mother of the firstborn is illegal as the **National Food Security Act, 2013** lays down that every pregnant woman and lactating mother are entitled to it.
- For second child as a girl, it is to promote the birth of a girl child is nothing but posturing since it penalizes the mother for not giving birth to a girl child.
- Subsequent adding of more conditions to the scheme will prove to be a bureaucratic nightmare, which can be overcome if the scheme is universalized.
- Women will be able to access the scheme only after the delivery, which will not have any impact on their nutritional uptake during the course of their pregnancy.

### 17. Paray Shikshalaya Initiative

The West Bengal government has launched 'Paray Shikshalaya' Initiative.

### Paray Shikshalaya

- It is an open-air classroom in the neighborhood programme – for students from class 1 to 7.
- The aim of this initiative is to encourage students who dropped out of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic to continue their education.

### Why was this initiative launched?

- In view of the rising demand for physical classes, the state government reopened schools.
- Classroom teaching could not be called on due to fear of spikes in covid cases.
- Hence, students are being called in batches.

### Where were these classes held?

- Schools which do not have open-air spaces conducted the classes in neighbourhood parks and grounds.
- Local councilors and MLAs helped set up infrastructure in such parks like putting up makeshift shades and chairs, besides making mid-day meal arrangements for the students.
- Schools which have open-air spaces held the classes there.
- Benches were set up for students and blackboards were placed to provide a real classroom experience.

### 18. Quad Ministers set to meet in Australia

- The Indian External Affairs Minister will be visiting Australia to attend a **meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Quad.**

### Quad:

- The Quad, officially the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**, is a group of four countries: the United States, Australia, India, and Japan.
- It is a **strategic security dialogue** between like-minded member countries, who share **common interests, principles, and values.**
  - It supports the **rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight**, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity through open dialogue and information sharing.
  - **Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region** remains a top priority for the Quad grouping. The member countries share the vision of a **free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.**

### Agenda of the upcoming meeting:

- The participating ministers are expected to review ongoing Quad cooperation and announce new measures to ensure increased **cooperation and collaboration to address contemporary challenges such as the COVID pandemic, supply chain vulnerability, climate change, etc.**
- The meeting is expected to discuss **cooperation on vaccines, technology and regional security issues of the Indo-Pacific.**
- On the regional security issue, the Quad is likely to **discuss the challenges that China poses to a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.** China has been displaying increasing assertiveness while dealing with other countries in the region and resorting to coercive measures to have its way.
- The Quad Foreign Ministers' meet is expected to lay the groundwork for the upcoming Quad leaders' summit.

### Initiatives undertaken under the Quad framework:

- During the Washington Leaders' Summit of September 2021, an ambitious agenda was laid down for the grouping, from cooperating on vaccines to regional infrastructure and critical technologies such as 5G.
  - Member countries have pledged to **donate more than 1.2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses globally.** They also aim to produce at least 1 billion doses by the end of 2022 to meet the global supply-demand gap for vaccines.
  - The four countries have set up a **new critical and emerging technologies group** focusing on 5G, technical standards and technology supply chains. A joint initiative to identify existing vulnerabilities in the supply chains and bolster supply-chain security for semiconductors is also under consideration by the Quad member countries.

## **19. Anger in diplomacy**

Multinational companies faced backlash in India over their posts on social media that supported "Kashmir Solidarity Day".

### Kashmir Solidarity Day

- February 5th is observed as Kashmir Solidarity Day or Kashmir Day in Pakistan.
- The day is observed to show Pakistan's support towards the people residing in the Indian administered part of Jammu and Kashmir and the efforts of separatists of Kashmir.

### Details

- The posts by the companies appeared to be part of a coordinated exercise sponsored by the Pakistani establishment, as they contained offensive messages calling for “Kashmiri liberation”.
- Given that the companies, like Hyundai, Toyota, KFC, Pizza Hut, and Schwabe, also have flourishing businesses in India, it is questioned as to why the private MNCs would post politically charged messages.

### India’s Response

- The government summoned the respected country’s Ambassadors and ensured that Indian embassies take up the issue with other governments.
- The External Affairs Minister raised the matter with his Korean counterpart, who apologised to the Indian people.
- The Commerce Minister added that the apology by Hyundai India was not adequately “forceful or unequivocal”.
- The social media consumers in India threatened to boycott products made by the companies concerned.

### Way forward

- The government must consider the bigger picture of its actions and consequences, especially while confronting the powerful global players.
- Holding the foreign governments in democratic countries to account for the actions of the local distributors of their private companies could have unforeseen repercussions.
- India’s claims over Jammu and Kashmir are strong, widely acknowledged, and not so fragile that a few social media posts, that appeared only in Pakistan, can dent in any way.
- The Foreign Ministry’s resources are to be spent in furthering India’s interests rather than on short-lived controversies.

## **20. Local job laws that raise constitutional questions**

The Supreme Court will be hearing a petition to remove the stay on the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act.

### Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act

- The Act reserves 75% of jobs in the private sector in the State for local residents.
- The Act applies to jobs that pay up to ₹30,000 per month, and employers have to register all such employees on a designated portal.
- The Government may exempt a few industries and has exempted new start-ups and new Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) companies,



along with farm labour, domestic work, and promotions and transfers within the State.

### Similar acts in other states

- **The Jharkhand State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2021**
  - Every employer shall fill up 75% of the total existing vacancies by local candidates to such posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are less than ₹40,000.
- **A.P. Employment of Local Candidates in Industries/Factories Act**
  - The Andhra Pradesh law, passed by the Assembly in July 2019, reserved 75% of jobs for locals in industries and factories, including any joint venture and project taken up under the public-private partnership (PPP) mode.

### Constitutional questions arising from these Acts.

- **Against Article 19(1)(g)**
  - Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution guarantees freedom to carry out any occupation, trade or business.
  - Reasonable restrictions include public interest, and in particular related to specifying any professional or technical qualifications, or to reserve a sector for government monopoly.
  - These Acts, by imposing private businesses to reserve 75% of lower-end jobs for locals, encroach their right to carry out any occupation.
- **The provision of reservation based on domicile or residence is unconstitutional**
  - **Article 16** of the Constitution provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in public employment. It prohibits discrimination on several grounds including place of birth and residence.
  - However, it permits Parliament to make a law that requires residence within a State for appointment to a public office.
  - This provision is for public employment and not for private-sector jobs and the law needs to be made by Parliament, and not by a State legislature.
- **The questions on 75% reservation**
  - In the **Indra Sawhney case** in 1992, the Supreme Court capped reservations in public services at 50%. However, it said that there may be extraordinary situations that may need relaxation in this rule.
  - Telangana, Rajasthan and Maharashtra have passed Acts that breach the 50% limit.
  - Recently a Maharashtra Act was struck down by the Supreme Court on grounds of breaching the 50% limit which said “to fulfill the objective



of equality”, and that to breach the limit “is to have a society which is not founded on equality but on caste rule”.

### Important judgements by the Court

- **M.A. Pai Foundation case, 2002** – The Supreme Court stated that private educational institutions have autonomy in their administration and management.
- **P.A. Inamdar case, 2005** – S.C. said that reservation cannot be mandated on educational institutions that do not receive financial aid from the state, as that would affect the freedom of occupation.
- **The Supreme Court, in 2002** – Said that preference given to applicants from a particular region of Rajasthan for appointment as government teachers was unconstitutional. Further added that reservations can be made for backward classes but this cannot be solely on account of residence or domicile.
- **In 1995, Rules in Andhra Pradesh** that gave preference to candidates who had studied in the Telugu medium were struck down on grounds that it was discriminatory against meritorious candidates.

### Against Equality

- The Haryana Act is against the notion of equality of all citizens of India.
- The Haryana Act is about private sector employment and is questioned that any reservation requirement imposed on the private sector should not be higher than the limits on the public sector.
- The Constitution conceptualises India as one nation with all citizens having equal rights to live, travel and work anywhere in the country. These State laws go against this vision by restricting the right of out-of-State citizens to find employment in the State.
- The restrictions also affect the right to reside across India as finding employment becomes difficult.

### Conclusion

The act is against the ideal enshrined in the Constitution and will have social as well as adverse economic implications on society. The courts along with looking at the fundamental rights perspective, should also look at whether these Acts breach the basic structure of the Constitution that views India as one nation which is a union of States.

## 21. Wrong signal

The Kerala High Court judgment in the Malayalam news channel MediaOne case.

### Background

- The transmission of a Malayalam-language news channel, Mediaone TV, was barred by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry citing “security reasons”.
- The I&B Ministry did not renew the channel’s permission to uplink and downlink signals after the Union Home Ministry declined security clearance.
- The channel along with its employees challenged the action.
- The Kerala High Court upheld the Government’s order of revoking the broadcasting permission given to the channel.

### Concerns

- Questions have been raised about the court’s stand that is in line with the Government’s stand that it was a national security issue and, hence, there is no need to abide by the principles of natural justice.
- The Government has not disclosed the reasons for its stand. And the court has accepted the submission of documents in a sealed cover and has agreed with the authorities that there were intelligence inputs that warranted the denial of security clearance, without the petitioners being shown the contents.
- The court’s ruling is against the clause that any restriction on fundamental rights must not only be reasonable, but also pass the test of proportionality.
  - In this case, broadcasting involves the rights concerning media freedom, freedom to disseminate information and the freedom to consume information.
  - These fall under the framework of freedom of speech and expression.
  - The court seems to have accepted the restriction without examining its reasonableness.
- The ban on the channel not only violates the channel’s right to broadcast but also its viewers’ right to know.

### Court’s Ruling in Pegasus Case

- The Court said that national security cannot be used as an excuse to avoid judicial review of restrictions imposed by the state.
- Raising the issue of national security did not give a free pass to the Government, the court had noted.

### Criticism against the latest judgement

- It is seen that the recent ruling is against the Pegasus judgement.
- The court is criticised for its claim that the case involved the broad aspect of 'right to privacy' that is not relevant in the MediaOne case.
- Further, the critics say it is unacceptable that the form of 'sealed cover' justice is being used as an aid to adjudication.
- If the practice of using confidential intelligence information to revoke the permission given to a channel is encouraged, freedom of the media will be in great peril.

### Conclusion

The Court needs to play a more proactive role in the circumsppection against the misuse of national security that is being used to deny or curtail fundamental rights.

### **22. Quad meet focuses on Indo-Pacific ties**

The Quad held their fourth Quad Ministerial meeting in Melbourne.

#### About the Fourth Quad Ministerial meeting:

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is a partnership of Australia, India, Japan and the US.
- Australia hosted India, Japan and the United States for the fourth Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Melbourne.
- This is the first time Quad Foreign Ministers are meeting since the two Quad Summits.

#### Highlights of fourth Quad Ministerial meeting:

- Quad reiterated condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including the 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks.
- Quad resolved to speed up the delivery of more than a billion COVID-19 vaccines to be manufactured in India.
- The Quad reaffirmed a commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which states strive to protect the interests of their people, free from coercion.
- Quad aims to hold a special meeting on climate change in 2022 and to step up efforts to ensure maritime security in the region.

#### **What is the Significance of the 4th Quad Ministerial meeting for India?**

- **Technology:**
  - India will be benefited from Quad's work on 5G and Vendor Diversification to maintain a diverse, open and interoperable telecommunication ecosystem.

- **Climate Change:**
  - The Quad WG on Climate Change is working on strengthening climate actions through mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology, capacity-building, and climate finance. This will help India on three pillars-
    - Climate Ambition;
    - Clean Energy Innovation and Deployment;
    - Adaptation, Resilience and Preparedness
  - One of the most promising areas Quad is working on is the Quad Green Shipping Network. It will be significant in greening and decarbonizing the shipping value chain.
  - Quad is also looking at establishing two to three Quad low-emission or zero-emission shipping corridors by 2030.
- **Infrastructure:**
  - Quad partners have provided more than USD 48 billion in official finance for infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region.
  - The Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group (QICG) announced by the Leaders is meeting regularly to share assessments of regional infrastructure.
- **Space:**
  - The Quad Space Working Group is discussing the exchange of Earth observation satellite data and analysis to help Indo-Pacific countries for the sustainable use of outer space.
- **Cyber Security:**
  - The Quad Senior Cyber Officials group is exchanging best practices that will benefit India to secure critical cyber infrastructure and build resilience against cyber threats.
- **Disaster Management:**
  - With the High availability disaster recovery (HADR), Quad countries have responded to many natural disasters in the region.
  - India has proposed strengthening cooperation in this area to deliver timely and effective relief and assistance during disasters such as the recent volcano in Tonga and the COVID pandemic.
- **Education:**
  - India has proposed Quad cooperation in the field of higher education to discuss opportunities for student exchanges, joint research.
  - The Quad STEM Fellowships provide 25 graduate/doctoral students from STEM fields from each Quad country with scholarships to study in leading US universities.

### Concerns with Quad:

- Quad countries are divided in their stand on global developments such as Russia-NATO tensions over Ukraine and sanctions against Myanmar's military.
- India is concerned with respect to the policy of national sanctions.
- India is "troubled" by the situation in Myanmar post-coup which is guided by cross-border concerns.

### **23. Do not spread things to a larger level, SC observes on hijab row**

In the context of the hijab ban in Karnataka classrooms, the Supreme Court said it will protect the constitutional rights of petitioners and intervene at an "appropriate time".

#### **Background:**

- The Karnataka High Court uploaded the interim order passed in the petitions challenging the Hijab ban in colleges in the state.
- In a related development, some of the petitioners before the High Court have approached the Supreme Court challenging the interim order. They contend that it amounts to an effective suspension of their fundamental right to practice religion.
- The CJI said that the Supreme Court will consider the matter at the "appropriate time" as the High Court is already seized of the case.

### **24. Dhami's push for uniform code stirs debate**

Uttarakhand Chief Minister announced to form a committee to prepare a draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the State, if voted to power.

#### **What is the Issue?**

- Uttarakhand CM announced that if the party is re-elected to power, the new government will constitute a committee to prepare a draft Uniform Civil Code (UCC).
- This has sensed a major defeat over whether an individual State can bring its own family law code.

#### **Common family law and State: -**

- **Goa's Portuguese Civil Code of 1867** is an example of a common family law prevalent in a State.

- The promulgation of the UCC emerges as a positive obligation and not a duty of the State under **Article 44** of the Constitution in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP).
  - It says “**the State shall endeavor to secure a UCC for the citizens throughout the territory of India**”.

### Does “State” in Article 44 mean the Union or the States?

- **Article 12** of the Constitution defines the “State” to include the Union and State governments, Parliament and State Legislatures, and even local authorities.
- Besides, **entry five of the Concurrent List** in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution empowers both the Union and States to make laws on marriage, divorce, infants, minors, adoption, wills, intestacy and succession.
- However, the Supreme Court argued that promulgation of a UCC by an individual State may clash with Central statutes governing marriage and succession.

### Supreme Court judgment on State Right UCC: -

#### 1. Jose Paulo Coutinho judgment of the court in 2019

- The Jose Paulo Coutinho judgment of the court in 2019 found Goa a “shining example of an Indian State which has a UCC”.
- But it has also questioned the wisdom of enacting a uniform law in a pluralist society in “one go”.

#### 2. Pannalal Bansilal Pitti judgment: -

- The Supreme Court had observed in the Pannalal Bansilal Pitti judgment that a uniform law may be counterproductive to unity and integrity of the nation.
- Making law or amendment to a law is a slow process and the legislature attempts to remedy where the need is felt most acute.

### Conclusion: -

Uniform Civil Code will be an impactful step towards Article 44 that provides for UCC for all citizens. This UCC will be for equal laws on subjects like marriage, divorce, land, property and inheritance for people of all religions. But at the same time such a move by the state government should not be counterproductive to the unity and integrity of the nation.



## 25. Amidst a wave of coups and a pandemic

Concerns are rising over the increasing frequency of military coups in the African continent.

### What do you mean by a coup?

Coup can be simply defined as an illegal and overt attempt by the military to unseat sitting leaders.

### Recent Military Coups in Africa: -

- A study by US researchers has identified over 200 such attempts in Africa since the 1950s.
- In 2020, armed forces staged a mutiny and captured power from the President in Mali.
- In 2021, the Guinean coup d'état occurred when forces led by the military captured the President and announced the dissolution of the government and the Constitution.
- In 2022, the military takeover took place due to protests demanding the resignation of the President in Burkina Faso.

## Countries in Africa with the highest number of coups since 1952



Source: Jonathan Powell, Uni of Central Florida and Clayton Thyne, Uni of Kentucky

BBC

Source: BBC

### Reasons for increased Military coups: -

- **Local Circumstances** in the particular country harbor the ground for a military coup. Such as
  - In Mali, it stemmed from frustration at the former president's weak leadership and resentment over his corruption and manipulation of parliamentary election results.
- **Significant discontent has arisen amongst the people** due to different ways of deciphering and implementing democracy according to the wishes of politicians and the ruling elite.
- **The proliferation of insurgents and extremist violence** coupled with weak democracies have provided fertile grounds for military intervention in civilian and political matters across Africa.

- In addition, the decadence of the **socio-political and economic environment** is the justification for coups in many cases.
- **Poorly-funded and under-resourced militaries** are another reason why coups have been a recurring event in Africa, especially in the Sahelian region.

### Concerns Associated with Increasing Military Coups in Africa: -

- **Failure of regional bodies:**
  - All attempts by regional bodies like ECOWAS and the African Union were focused on punishing the militaries rather than attempting to help fix the underlying causes that led to civilian populations supporting their actions.
  - The influence of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been hampered by eroding credibility and increasing sanctions.
- **Failure of Democratic Institutions:**
  - The masses' lack of faith in the state of democratic politics in their countries has significant consequences not only for Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, but the wider region.
- **No long-Lasting Penalties:**
  - The punitive measures against military coups usually are lifted quickly.
  - This leniency has enabled coup leaders to make minimal concessions while preparing for longer stays in power.
- **Widespread civilian support for military coups:**
  - Citizens appear to believe that the military may be a credible alternative to the band of corrupt and unrepentant political elites that have betrayed their confidence.
  - This led to the legitimisation of attempts to reintegrate militaries into politics across the continent.
- **Continued Military Support from other countries:**
  - Other countries, including France and European allies, have maintained a military presence in the region, and partner local armed forces to fight radical groups.
- **Futile Sanctions:**
  - Sanctions have not been able to create the necessary political outcomes that the AU and ECOWAS desire.
  - The sanctions on Mali and Guinea in 2021 have backfired and have driven popular support towards military leadership.

### Implications on India: -

- The rise in military coups in the African continent is a cause of concern for India and Africa who have common positions and interests in global platforms.
- It will also hamper several areas of cooperation such as
  - techno-economic capacity building.
  - Skill development featured prominently in all the India-Africa Forum Summits.
- India's model of development cooperation in Africa lacks a clear strategy and the consequences of military coup will worsen the developmental efforts.
- Besides, it will also erode the progress of 'Ten Guiding Principles for India-Africa Engagement' which have defined India-Africa engagement.
- The military takeovers in Africa will reduce the pace of synchronization between different development instruments.
- India must chart out a roadmap for its development cooperation programme in Africa that outlines a long-term strategy and delineates how it will deploy state capacity to pursue common development goals.

#### **Recommendations: -**

- Bolstering the roles and capacities of regional bodies such as ECOWAS. Peer influence among any group of neighboring nations will always be vital.
- Focus more support on strengthening civil society and democracy in each country.
- Be consistent by offering the incentives of partnership to governments and civil societies in strengthening democratic governance.
- Support broad national dialogues to address the root causes of each country's instability.
- Strategic Measures must include groups that historically have been marginalized, such as ethnic minorities, women, youth and grassroots groups.

#### **26. India non-committal on funding curbs on U.K. NGOs**

U.K. officials requested India to reconsider its decision to deny Oxfam India's registration renewal application under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

#### **Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (Amendment), Act, 2020: -**

- Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (Amendment), Act, 2020 has amended the FCRA 2010, which regulates the use and acceptance of foreign contribution by individuals and organizations.

- The Act prohibits foreign contribution for any activities that pose a danger to national interest.
- Know more about **FCRA Act, 2020**

### **Arguments Against the FCRA Amendment Act 2020: -**

- The FCRA 2020 amendments have placed steep obstacles for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to receive foreign funding.
- It has been argued that these restrictions will hamper the functioning of NGOs and add difficulties in receiving foreign funds.
- The Amendment was challenged under Articles 14, 19 and 21 as the blanket requirement to open an account at one specific SBI branch serves no rational purpose, violating the right to equality.
- Further, they argue that the Amendment lacks a legitimate objective and has a disproportionate impact on NGOs.
- FCRA 2020 amendments will overload the NGOs with new bureaucratic tasks, and open the floodgates for arbitrary, vindictive action by the authorities.

### **27. NHA to integrate caste census databases**

The National Health Authority (NHA) said that it has undertaken an exercise to integrate beneficiary databases under different schemes to upgrade its own database.

#### **What is the Issue?**

- The Union Health Ministry said the National Health Authority (NHA) is working to integrate the database of Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 beneficiaries with the National Food Security Act (NFSA) portal.
- This is being done so that beneficiaries can seek information regarding their entitlements under the AB PM-JAY using their ration card number.
- The NHA is mandated with the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri-Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY).
  - The scheme provides health assurance of up to ₹5 lakh for a family a year, for secondary and tertiary care-related hospitalisations.
- The NHA is also working on a proposal to use fair price shops or ration shops for providing information related to the scheme and entitlement under the scheme to eligible beneficiaries.

## 28. India has 'positive secularism', petitioners tell Karnataka HC

The argument was made on India's positive secularism by a senior advocate appearing for the two students who have questioned the restriction on wearing hijab in classrooms.

### Positive Vs. Negative Secularism:

- **Positive Secularism:**
  - A nation performs positive secularism when the constitution of that country has more power than religion.
  - Positive secularism is where the state plays an enabler role in the exercise of fundamental rights and the religious freedoms of all communities.
- **Negative Secularism:**
  - Under 'negative secularism', the state says that nobody can display their religious identity in public and the ban on hijab in public places was upheld by the constitutional courts.
  - Turkey observes negative secularism.

### Positive Secularism in India:

- The Indian Constitution offers 'positive secularism' which recognises all religions as true.
- The Indian interpretation of secularism stems from the Vedic precept of Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava.
- The SC has observed that 'Indian secularism' is susceptible to a positive meaning, that is developing an understanding and respect towards different religions.

## 29. India slams 'communal mindset' of OIC over remarks on hijab row

India hit out at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), saying it was "hijacked by vested interests".

### What is the issue?

- The OIC commented on the hijab controversy in Karnataka.
- The OIC called upon the UN and the Human Rights Council to take "necessary measures" following reports of Muslim students being prevented from wearing hijab in Karnataka.
- Pakistan, a leading member of the OIC, had criticized the developments in Karnataka.



- Know more about Karnataka Hijab row in CNA dated Feb 7, 2022.

### What is India's Response?

- OIC has commented on the hijab controversy in Karnataka and requested the Human Rights Council to intervene.
- India criticized this action of OIC as communal and argued that this response is not at all appreciated by India.
- According to India, OIC continues to be hijacked by vested interests to further their nefarious propaganda against India.

### 30. The fate of the Afghan reserves in the United States

U.S. President Joe Biden signed an executive order declaring that \$7 billion of the frozen Afghan reserves will be used for the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people.

### What is the source of the Afghan funds in the U.S.?

- At the time of the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021, at least \$9 billion belonging to Afghanistan was parked abroad in various countries.
- The USA held around \$7 billion and others like Switzerland, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and two other countries held the rest.
- The money belonged to Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB).

### What is the domestic situation of Afghanistan?

- The economic situation in Afghanistan crashed immediately in the aftermath of the takeover by the Taliban.
  - Supply lines were disrupted and inflation shot up prices across the country.
  - An unusual drought came as an additional burden.
- As the revenue system inside the country collapsed, the Taliban administration found itself incapable of proceeding along the lines of the Doha agreement.
  - The Taliban-U.S. agreement had envisaged that an Afghan Islamic Government as determined by intra-Afghan dialogue would be formed when the Taliban joined the mainstream Government.
- In view of the military takeover by the Taliban and in the absence of any "intra-Afghan dialogue", the agreement's financial sections were not activated.
- However, the Taliban has been demanding that the \$9 billion belong to the Afghan people and the U.S. should return the money.

### What is the U.S. argument on taking control of the reserve?

- The U.S. does not agree that the reserve belongs to the Afghan people.
- White House argues that a part of that amount came from international donors.
- The U.S. has declared that it will access around \$3.5 billion for supporting the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people.
- This contribution is expected to be channelled through international aid and relief agencies like the World Food Programme that are involved in providing food support to Afghanistan.

### What has been the Taliban's response?

- Taliban spokespersons have described the US's announcement as "unilateral".
- The "Permanent Representative-designate for the United Nations" of the Taliban has assured that the reserve of the Da Afghanistan Bank does not belong to "governments or factions" and is a "property" of the Afghan people.
- It is meant for implementation of "monetary policy, facilitation of trade and boosting of the financial system of the country."
- The Taliban described the U.S. move as an act of "injustice" against the Afghan people.

## 31. The Pathology of School Closure in India

The article intends to provide the root causes of school closure in India to guide the intervening policies of the future.

### The background:

- In the wake of the pandemic, the impact of school closures on learning losses has been immense.
- According to the United Nations, it has been reported that school closure in India is continuing for 82 weeks with some intermittent classes in between.
- The reopening of schools is backed by scientific evidence pertaining to its benefits. However, it is necessary to analyse the root causes of school closure in India.

### The Misinformation: Probable Causes

- Widespread misinformation has been a major reason for the continuation of school closure.

- There is information all across the country regarding the third wave of the pandemic that was anticipated as detrimental to children. As a result, the parents are eager to wait for the kids to get vaccinated prior to the resumption of schools.
- Such information is without any substantial ground and is propagated through social media.
- A significant wave of fear was promoted among parents as the news channels highlighted cases of children going to hospitals in different parts of the world boosting their target rating point (TRP).
- This has contributed to the sensitivity of the entire issue of school closure driven by the pandemic and incorrect fears associated with it.
- Various surveys and reports indicated that poor and middle-class parents were willing to send their children to schools. Contrastingly, the privileged parents were unwilling to support the reopening of schools.
- In the midst of such a mismatch of opinions, the issue became complicated and rumours gathered more importance than epidemiological and scientific evidence.
- An essential inference has been highlighted that reveals the considerable preference given to the parents of privileged sections neglecting the holistic opinion of every section of the society.
- This has furthered the widening of educational inequities.
- The indifference of the government on the entire issue along with the silence of the stakeholders of education has assisted misinformation to grow further bringing huge losses in terms of learning and receiving quality education.
- There has been a consistent lack of planning and discussion on the need to reopen the schools.
- Moreover, the delay in the resumption of schools is accompanied by several social aspects.

### **Impacts: The Social Aspects:**

- School closure has a major impact on the children from the disadvantaged section resulting in significant learning losses and difficulties.
- The voices of the poor parents regarding the opening of schools were unheard and representation was mostly by the association of parents from the privileged section.

### **The One Class, One TV Channel Initiative:**

- The Union Budget 2022-23 acknowledged the learning losses due to the pandemic.

- In order to overcome the losses, the government announced to expand the One Class, One TV channel programme of the PM eVidya scheme to 12 TV channels with a sum total of 200 channels offering supplementary teaching.

### Challenges:

- Equating learning with syllabus completion stands as the major challenge in this programme and other learning programmes across the country.
- The School Children Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey in India has determined the ineffectiveness of TV-based education programmes.

### Ways Suggested:

- It is suggested that certain measures can be adopted to ensure the safety of every child before the schools reopen. **P-E-R-I (Prepare, Engage, Reimagine and Innovate)** is a structured approach that has been recommended.
- This method envisages the following:
  - **Prepare** for the continuity of school education with proper planning and preventive measures.
  - **Engage** with the stakeholders that include parents, community members, schools, public health experts and local governments to counter all misinformation and spread awareness on the importance of quality education.
  - **Reimagine** every facet of school functioning, for example, improved ventilation and blended learning methods.
  - **Innovate** for compensating for learning losses and make schools place for holistic development of the child.
- There is an urgent need for effective government policy to promote innovative thinking with sustainable solutions for better learning outcomes.
- Establishing a favourable ambience for quality and equitable education will exemplify the essence of a responsible society that advocates inclusive growth.

## 32. NATO, U.S. sceptical of Russian troop pull-out

Russia's announcement of pulling back some of the troops from Ukraine's borders.

### Background

- Russia has maintained that it has no plans to invade Ukraine, but the massive troop mobilisation on the three flanks of Ukraine, with combat aircraft, warships and S400 missile defence systems, had raised fears of war.

- The Russian move was aimed at building military pressure around Ukraine to gain diplomatic leverage in talks with the West.
- Recently, European leaders from Hungary, France and Germany visited Moscow. Their talks with Russia opened a diplomatic path towards de-escalation.

### **De-escalation**

- Russia said that more of its forces surrounding Ukraine were withdrawing, but NATO with the U.S. said that they are not convinced about the pull-out.
- The Russian Defence Ministry published a video that showed tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery units leaving the Crimean peninsula.
- But the U.S. said more than 1,50,000 Russian troops are still stationed near Ukraine's borders and their analysts indicate that they remain in a threatening position.
- Russian President Putin said the West was ignoring Russia's main concerns but Moscow is ready to continue dialogue on security issues.

### **Russia's concerns**

- It does not want its neighbours Georgia and Ukraine to be members of NATO.
- It wants NATO to roll back its military presence and drills from Eastern Europe and the Black Sea.
- It wants the Ukraine crisis (the civil conflict between Kiev and the Russia-backed separatists in Donbas) to be resolved through the Minsk process.

### **NATO's Open door policy**

- NATO's founding treaty commits to an "open door" policy for European countries that want to join, and a mutual defence clause guarantees that all members will come to the defence of an ally under threat.
- Ukraine, though, is not a member, but NATO considers it a partner and hence supports it.
- Russia poses no direct security threat to any NATO country, but the alliance is concerned about a surge of people fleeing fighting across European borders, possible cyber and disinformation attacks in case of conflict in Ukraine.
- Some of NATO's member countries, like the U.S., U.K. and Canada are helping Ukraine.

### **NATO bolster its defences**

- At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Defence Ministers of various countries discussed dispatching troops and equipment to countries near Russia and the Black Sea region in case of an invasion of Ukraine.
- The U.S. has initiated to deploy 5,000 troops to Poland and Romania.
- The U.K. is mobilizing hundreds of soldiers to Poland and offering warships and planes.
- Germany, Netherlands and Norway are sending additional troops to Lithuania.
- Denmark and Spain are providing jets for air policing.

### **India's response**

- India is said to support the basic principles of European security, and if there is an aggressive act, India is prepared to respond.
- It is also said that India has prepared a package of measures and any actions it takes will be a united action that will be severe and commensurate.
- In view of the rising tension, India has set up control rooms and emergency phone numbers for students and professionals based in Ukraine.
- Negotiations are also underway to increase the number of flights to help in evacuating the Indian citizens.

### **33. A Case for a more Federal Judiciary**

The article examines the federal structure of the Indian Judiciary and discusses the necessity to strengthen it.

#### **A Brief Perspective:**

- The doctrine of federalism has been upheld by the Supreme Court as a part and parcel of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.
- It becomes extremely significant to embolden the federal feature of the India Judiciary.
- In order to retain the federal nature of the judiciary, the role of High Courts and their jurisdiction must be recognised and empowered.

#### **The federal characteristics of Judiciary:**

- A robust federal judicial system forms the integral requirement of a federal state.
- This system of judiciary includes the Supreme Court and High Court that are entrusted to adjudicate the rights of the federal and central units and between the citizens and these units.



- The integrated judicial system functions as a single entity providing remedies in all the cases originating under constitutional law, civil law and criminal law.
- The Supreme Court is superior to the High Court only in the appellate sense. This was reiterated by the Supreme Court on many occasions.

### **The emerging imbalances:**

- Despite the fact that the high courts are not subordinate to the Supreme Court, there have been multiple events that reflected considerable inclination towards the central court. This imbalance started increasing after 1990.
- A prominent rise in centralisation has been observed in the judicial set-up with the gradual progress of time.
- A greater degree of centralization of the judiciary will pave the consequences of weakened federalism in the country.

### **Scenarios in other countries:**

- According to a legal researcher in the United States, the judicial review by the centralised judiciary tends towards unitarism. It is observed in the US that the Supreme Court is far more likely to strike down a state statute as unconstitutional.
- In Nigeria which is also a federal country, it is seen that the Supreme Court supports the central government over the state units. Such centralising tendency has been exemplified through the recent event wherein there were litigations over mineral rights and subsoil rights where the Supreme Court favoured the central government.

### **The Concluding Remark:**

- The central units have a tendency to aggrandise power to themselves from the state units believing that this would ensure better discharge of duties. This notion has been weakening the entire body of the state which will ultimately lead to an irreversible decay of federalism.
- Therefore, there is an urgent need to empower the High Courts with significant acknowledgement towards its effective role in the judiciary.
- The Supreme Court, as the custodian of the Constitution, is expected to play an active role to enliven the spirit of federalism.

### 34. SC lifts stay on Haryana quota for private jobs

The Supreme Court squashed a Punjab and Haryana High Court order staying **Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act**.

#### Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act

- Is a controversial State Act which provides 75% reservation for locals in private sector jobs paying less than ₹30,000 a month.
- An employer faces a fine of ₹10,000 to ₹2 lakh for violation of the Act.

#### Industries' concerns

- It is said that the Act would impact 48,000 registered companies.
- Reservation in the private sector has not been mentioned in the Constitution.
- The law impacts employment as well as livelihood for many as there were no empirical studies that justify the act.
- The implementation of the law would have implications not only in Haryana but across India as States might be encouraged to draft similar laws.

#### Supreme Court's view

- The Supreme Court Bench set aside the stay order of the High Court on the ground that it did not give "sufficient reasons".
- The Bench observed that every law passed by the legislature was presumed to be legal.
- An order of stay on the implementation by a court of law should be reasoned.
- The SC requested the High Court to decide on the writ petition filed by industrialists within four weeks.
- The Supreme Court ordered the State government not to take any "coercive steps" against employers violating the Act.

### 35. India, UAE sign major trade pact

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a bilateral "comprehensive" trade pact.

#### India-UAE Trade Pact: -

- India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- The trade deal is set to benefit almost 90 per cent of trade – both exports and imports– between the two countries.

- The India-UAE CEPA would have strong anti-dumping measures.
- The trade deal has also provided a permanent safeguard mechanism to safeguard exporters and businesses from any unwarranted surge in volumes of any particular product.
- India has given duty concessions on gold exported from the UAE, while Indian exporters will attract zero percent duty on jewelry.

### India-UAE Trade

- **Indian Exports:** India's major exports to the UAE include petroleum products, precious metals, stones, gems and jewellery, minerals, food items such as cereals, sugar, fruits and vegetables, tea, meat, and seafood, textiles, engineering and machinery products, and chemicals.
- **Indian Imports:** India's top imports from the UAE include petroleum and petroleum products, precious metals, stones, gems and jewellery, minerals, chemicals and wood and wood products.
- **UAE investments in India:** UAE's investments in India are concentrated mainly in five sectors: Services Sector (15.78%), Sea Transport (8.80%), Power (8.34%), Construction (Infrastructure) Activities (7.15%) and Construction Development: (7.08%). UAE is also investing in a post-Article 370 Jammu and Kashmir, thereby helping to strengthen India's position on Kashmir.

### Why is this deal significant for India?

- **Boost to other FTAs:** The signing of the pact with the UAE would also help to step up India's proposed free trade agreements with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.
- **Benefits to gems and jewellery sector:** The deal will push jewellery exports to UAE to the level of \$10 billion by 2023.
- **Greater Market for Indian Goods:** India hopes to gain greater market access in the UAE for items such as textiles & apparels, agriculture and processed food, electronics, gems & jewellery, chemicals & pharmaceuticals and engineering goods.
- **Reduced import duties:** The biggest advantage is that import duties will be brought down on all items exchanged between the two nations.
- **Duty free exports:** At least 80 percent of India's exports into the UAE will be duty free due to the free trade agreement.
- **Employment generation:** The agreement will also create 5 lakh jobs in India gems and jewelry, textiles, engineering, pharma and auto sectors, among others. In the UAE, the pact is expected to create over 1 lakh jobs in the next few years.
- **Wide coverage of Sectors:** CEPA is also likely to include areas such as digital trade, intellectual property rights, government procurement etc. The two

sides are also strengthening their cooperation in new areas of renewable energy, start-ups, fintech, etc.

- **Strengthened Air bubble:** The Air Bubble agreed in August 2020 has helped several Indians to return back for employment and business. This deal will further strengthen this cooperation.

### 36. Row over summoning West Bengal Assembly

The West Bengal Governor returned the recommendation of the Chief Minister to summon the Assembly.

#### What is the Issue?

- The West Bengal CM recommended the governor to summon the Assembly.
- The governor returned the recommendation arguing that it has to be done for constitutional compliance.

#### What is the Summoning of Assembly?

- Summoning is the process of calling all members of the State Assembly to meet.
- The power to summon each house of the State Assembly from time to time is given to the Governor of the state.

#### Constitutional Provisions on Governor's Power to Summon the House

- The two Articles – 174 and 163 – are read together to outline the governor's powers in summoning the House.
- **Article 174** states that "The Governor shall from time to time summon the House or each House of the Legislature of the State to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit, but six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session."
- **Article 163** says "There shall be a council of Ministers with the chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except in so far as he is by or under this constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion."

#### Role of governor in summoning an assembly

- The Governor summons the assembly on the recommendation made by the Cabinet after due compliance with Rules of Business under article 166(3) of the constitution.
- There are a few instances where the Governor can summon the House despite the refusal of the Chief Minister who heads the Cabinet.
- The Governor can decide on his or her own on summoning the House;
  - When the Chief Minister appears to have lost the majority
  - the legislative members of the House propose a no-confidence motion against the Chief Minister.
- But the actions of the Governor, when using his discretionary powers, can be challenged in court.

### **Discretionary Power of the Governor:**

- **Article 163 states that** “If any question arises whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Governor is by or under this Constitution required to act in his discretion, the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final, and the validity of anything done by the Governor shall not be called in question on the ground that he ought or ought not to have acted in his discretion.”
- Article 163(1) essentially limits any discretionary power of the Governor only to cases where the Constitution expressly specifies that the Governor must act on his own and apply an independent mind.

### **When can a Governor use his discretion?**

- The Governor’s discretionary powers are limited to specified areas like
  - giving assent or withholding/referring a Bill to the President
  - appointment of a Chief Minister or dismissal of a government which has lost confidence but refuses to quit, etc.
- Only in a situation where the government in power is seen to have lost the confidence of the majority, would it be open to the Governor to exercise the powers vested with him under Article 174 at his own discretion.

### **Supreme Court on Governor’s power to summon the House**

- **2016 Arunachal Pradesh Assembly case:** In this case, SC concluded that In ordinary circumstances during the period when the CM and his council of ministers enjoy the confidence of the majority of the House, the power vested with the Governor under Article 174 to summon, prorogue and dissolve the house(s) must be exercised in consonance with the aid and advice of the chief minister and his council of ministers.

- **Nabam Rebia versus Deputy Speaker 2016 verdict:** In this case the Supreme Court had expressly stated that a “governor can summon, prorogue and dissolve the House, only on the aid and advice of the council of ministers”.
- **Madras High Court judgment of 1973:** This judgment answered the question on the discretion of power over prorogation by reading Article 163 into Article 174 to hold that a governor was bound by the aid and advice of the council of ministers.

### **37. Eating right**

Eat Right India initiative of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

#### **Background**

- As a one-of-its-kind initiative, four police stations in New Delhi have been designated as ‘**Eat Right Campus**’ by the FSSAI for providing nutritious and wholesome meals to police personnel.
- The scheme has been implemented since 2017 in various government colleges and hostels.

#### **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**

- FSSAI is an autonomous statutory body set up under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- FSSAI works under the aegis of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare with an objective of maintaining food safety and standards in India.

#### **Eat Right India initiative**

- Eat Right India is a flagship mission of FSSAI.
- The mission aims to ensure the people of the country are provided with nutritious meals that help address the problem of various lifestyle-related diseases.
- The initiative works on the principles,
  - Ensure that the food being served to officers, jawans, visitors and staff is safe to consume and in compliance with the **Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006**.
  - It aims at promoting balanced meals and eliminating trans-fats or “bad fat” found in industrial food products.
  - It ensures a reduction in consumption of salt and sugar that increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases.
- The programme also aims at promoting local and seasonal vegetables and reducing the use of chemicals.



- Delhi government's Department of Food Safety is the implementing body of the initiative in the capital and has launched a programme called 'Sehatmand Delhi' under which places are designated as 'Eat Right Campus'.

### **The process for getting the 'Eat Right' tag**

- To get the 'Eat Right Campus' certificate, the programme directs an initial audit of the campus and identifies gaps in cooking and hygiene.
- Later, a final audit by a third party is conducted upon which a certificate with a validity of two years is handed over.
- Regular inspections will be carried out by the Food Safety Department to keep a check on the food quality.

### **Changes introduced at the police stations as apart of the initiative**

- Ban on the use of plastic or aluminum plates
- Cooking oil has been changed and better quality lentils are used for meals
- Cooks are directed to follow a dress code with gloves and caps
- The cooking process is recorded on CCTV cameras

### **Significance of the Scheme**

- The campaign holds significance as it aims at good food habits for the people of the country.
- It adopts a judicious mix of regulatory, capacity building, collaborative and empowerment approaches to ensure that all the parameters are followed.
- The Initiative adopts a holistic approach as it brings together food-related mandates of the agriculture, health, environment and other ministries.
- The key reason behind the initiative was the welfare of all personnel, especially Police personnel who face difficult tasks during their duties and fall sick due to unhygienic food.
- Specific diet charts have been prepared to ensure that all police staff and visitors are provided with nutritious meals who earlier used to eat outside. This has made it budget-friendly.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the benefits and significance of the initiative, it has to be implemented and extended to all the police stations and other government institutions across the country to promote healthy food habits.

### **38. Allow removal of Governors: Kerala govt.**

The Kerala government questioned the constitutional need for the Governor's office.

#### **What are the arguments made by the Kerala government?**

- The Kerala government has repeatedly demanded that national legislation should empower States to elect them via a representative electoral college.
- The Cabinet sought national legislation to introduce a resolution in the Assembly demanding the dismissal of an "erring" Governor from the post.
- The government suggested that the Center divest the Governor of statutory posts, including the chancellor.
- The Center should keep the State in the loop while appointing Governors.
- It should empower legislatures to impeach Governors if lawmakers find them wanting constitutionally.
- The Center should limit the discretionary powers of the Governor on legislative matters.

#### **Different Controversies Related To Governor**

- **Appointment:** The apparent politicization of the governor's appointment process has been extensively criticized. It is observed that ex-politicians with significant ties with the ruling party in the Center are generally appointed as the head of the states.
- **Tenure:** The Governor remains in office during the pleasure of the President who is bound to follow the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister. This effectively means that the tenure of Governor is at the mercy of the ruling party and can be removed if she refuses to act according to the wishes of the Center.
- **Discretionary Powers:** Article 163 of the Constitution of India recognises the discretionary powers of the Governor. This power has been widely misused by successive Union governments in India. The report of the Governor has been used to dismiss the popularly elected state governments in the states. Know more about the **Discretionary Powers of Governor**

#### **Supreme Court's Decisions Limiting Governor's Discretion**

- **P. Singhal v. Union of India 2010:**
  - In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the President can remove the Governor anytime she is pleased, without assigning any reason for the removal whatsoever.

- However, this power should not be used arbitrarily without having any compelling reasons for removal.
- **Nabam Rebia v. Dy. Speaker 2016:**
  - In this case, the SC ruled that the Governor can not summon the House at his discretion unless the CM has lost the majority.
  - It held that the Governor's power under Article 174 is subject to the aid and the advice of the Cabinet.
  - The court also observed that Article 163(2) does not confer absolute discretionary power upon the Governor and in no way gives her the right to turn her office into an "all-pervading super constitutional authority."

### 39. The crisis in Ukraine's Donbass region

This article examines the crisis in Ukraine's Donbass region and reasons for failure of the Minsk agreements.

#### How did the crisis in Ukraine's Donbass region start?

- The Donbass region comprises the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine.
- This region has been at the center of the conflict since March 2014 when Moscow invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula.
- Since then, pro-Russia rebels in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions began seizing territory in Eastern Ukraine and held a referendum to declare independence from Ukraine.
- Recently, Russian speaking regions within Ukraine have been witnessing shelling and skirmishes between the rebels and Ukrainian forces leading to the loss of lives and destruction of the local economy.

#### What are the Minsk Agreements?

- There are two Minsk agreements which are named after the Belarussian capital Minsk where the talks were held.
- **Minsk 1:**
  - Minsk 1 was written in 2014 by the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine, i.e. Ukraine, Russia, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).
  - It was mediated by France and Germany in the so-called Normandy Format.
  - Under Minsk 1, Ukraine and the Russia-backed rebels agreed on a 12-point ceasefire deal, which included prisoner exchanges, delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

- However, due to violations by both sides, the agreement did not last long.
- **Minsk 2:**
  - In 2015, representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk signed a 13-point agreement .
  - It is known as the Minsk 2 accord.
  - The new agreement had provisions for an immediate cease-fire,, dialogue on interim self-government for Donetsk and Luhansk, in accordance with Ukrainian law, with specific mention of Donetsk and Luhansk, elections in Donetsk and Luhansk, full Ukrainian Government control throughout the conflict zone and calls to Ukraine to restore control of state borders, etc.
  - However, these provisions have not been implemented because of what is popularly known as the ‘Minsk Conundrum’.
- **‘Minsk Conundrum’:** While Ukraine believes the accord supports its sovereignty fully, Russia believes it only gives Ukraine limited sovereignty.

### Can implementing the Minsk Agreement avert war?

- The immediate implementation of the Minsk 2 agreement is one of Russia’s main demands to the West.
- The accord could serve as a starting point for establishing a diplomatic solution to the current crisis.
- It could aid Ukraine in regaining control of its borders and putting an end to the threat of a Russian invasion for the time being.
- It could be a means for Russia to ensure that Ukraine never joins NATO and that Russian language and culture are safeguarded in a new federal Constitution in Ukraine.

### **40. West responds to Russia move with new sanctions**

Russia signed a decree to officially recognise the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk.

### What is the ‘Donbas’ region?

- Donetsk and Luhansk are two states located in eastern Ukraine, which share a border with Russia.

- Within these two states are two separatist territories known as the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), which are run by Russian and Russian-backed separatists.
- This entire region, which includes Donetsk, Luhansk and their respective separatist territories, is generally referred to as the 'Donbas' region.
- Donbas, located on the Russian border adjoining Russia, has a majority Russian-speaking population.



Source: Theprint

### What is the issue?

- After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2014, rebels in Donetsk and Luhansk held disputed referendums to join the Russian Federation.
- Its results paved the way for the separatist territories to be declared as LPR and DPR.
- The pro-Russian separatist regions in Donetsk and Luhansk had declared independence from Ukraine in 2014.
- No country had recognised the republics as sovereign states until now.
- Recently, Russia has recognised the territorial claims of the self-declared separatist republics in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

### What is the International Response?

- **Ukraine:** Ukraine argues that the resolution passed by Russia "undermines Minsk agreements and the peace process. The immediate priority for India is de-escalation of tensions taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries.
- **India:** India aims to secure long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond. India had chosen not to join Western calls for action against Russia.

- **UN:** The UN is greatly concerned by Russia's decision on the status of certain areas of the Donetsk & Luhansk regions of Ukraine.
- **NATO:** NATO joined in the international condemnation of the move, saying "this further undermines Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, erodes efforts towards a resolution of the conflict, and violates the Minsk Agreements
- **Other:** In contrast, the U.K., the U.S., European countries, and Kenya called Russia's decision an attack on Ukrainian sovereignty, and promised sanctions and other actions.

### Sanctions on Russia:

- **SWIFT ban:** The US and European officials are finalizing an "extensive package" of sanctions which could target major Russian banks and its energy sector, with the possibility of Russia being excluded from the SWIFT financial system.
  - **SWIFT system** stands for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication and is a secure platform for financial institutions to exchange information about global financial transactions such as money transfers.
- **Nord Stream 2:** The package of sanctions prepared by the European Union in case Russia invades Ukraine includes measures targeting the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.
  - **Nord Stream** is a gas pipeline that connects Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea.

### What does the recognition mean for the Ukraine crisis?

- Russia's decision to recognise the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk republics practically brought the Minsk peace process to an end.
- The Minsk 1 and II accords, reached in 2014 and 2015, had brought a tenuous ceasefire between the Russian-backed rebels in Ukraine's Donbas region.

### **41. Understanding the Draft India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022**

Recently the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) proposed a policy named "Draft India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022"

#### India Data Accessibility & Use Policy, 2022

- **Aim:** To radically transform India's ability to harness public sector data.
- The nature of the policy objectives suggested in the draft is mainly commercial.



- The Policy proposes permitting the licensing and sale of public data by the Government to the private sector.
- The policy will apply to all data and information created and collected by the Central Government. It also has provisions for the State governments.

### The key features of the Policy

- The policy proposes the establishment of an **India Data Office (IDO)** under the MEITY for overall management, with each government entity designating a **Chief Data Officer** to help achieve its objectives.
- An **India Data Council** will act as a consultative body.
- The policy strategy is to make Government data open by default and then maintain a negative list of datasets that cannot be shared. The declaration of sensitive data that has restricted access is left to the independent government ministries.
- The existing data sets will be enriched or processed to gain greater value and termed high-value datasets.
- As a measure of privacy protection, there is a recommendation for anonymisation and privacy preservation.

### The need for the policy

- The generation of citizen data is expected to increase at a rapid rate in the next decade and become a foundation of India's \$5 trillion-dollar digital economy.
- The policy aims to harness the economic value of the generated data.
- The National Economic Survey, 2019 noted that "The private sector may be granted access to select databases for commercial use, given that the private sector has the potential to reap massive dividends from this data"
- Currently, there are several bottlenecks in data sharing and use which includes,
  - The absence of a body for policy monitoring and enforcement of data sharing
  - Absence of technical tools and standards for data sharing
  - Identification of high value datasets and licensing and valuation frameworks.

### Issues associated with the policy

- **Privacy Issues** - India does not have a data protection law that can provide a remedy for privacy violations such as coercive and excessive data collection or data breaches. The inter-departmental data sharing poses concerns related

to privacy since the open government data portal may result in state-sponsored mass surveillance.

- **Lack of transparency** – The list of stakeholders who have been consulted, which according to MEITY include, “academia, industry, and Government” are not revealed along with their view on the policy.
- **Lack of scientific analysis** – The lack of analysis of scientific evidence and the availability of tools pose a challenge as the commercial value of the data increases with greater amounts of personal data to the private sector. It becomes a challenge to limit the usage of this data by private agencies.
- **The policy bypasses parliament** – The policy as it contemplates large scale data sharing and enrichment that will be borne from public funds.
- **The issue of federalism** – The constitution of offices and prescription of standards apply to the Central government as well as State governments and schemes administered by them.

## 42. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Russia has launched an all-out attack on Ukraine through land, air and sea.

### Details

- The attacks by Russia are considered as the biggest attack by one state against another in Europe since the Second World War.
- Russian missile attacks were reported in the Ukrainian cities, much to the shock of the international community.
- Ukraine reported the arrival of multiple troops across its borders in the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Luhansk regions, and by sea at the cities of Odessa and Mariupol.



Image source: The Hindu

### Russia's Stand

- Russia's President Mr. Putin declared that he has ordered "a special military operation" to protect people, including Russian citizens who had been subjected to "genocide" in Ukraine, "for this we will strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine".
- Russia's Defence Ministry said its military destroyed 83 Ukrainian land-based targets and achieved all its goals in Ukraine for the day.

### Violations of international laws by Russia

- **The UN Charter**
  - The **principle of non-intervention** is enshrined in article 2(4) of the UN Charter.
  - It demands the states to avoid using force or threat of using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.
  - The Russian attack on Ukraine is violative of the principle and amounts to aggression under international law.
- **The UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 (1974)**
  - The resolution defines aggression as the use of armed force by a state against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another state.
  - Also, allowing one's territory to be used by another state for aggression against a third state, would qualify as an act of aggression.
  - Hence, Belarus can also be held responsible for aggression as it has allowed its territory to be used by Russia for attacking Ukraine.
- Aggression is also considered an **international crime** under **customary international law** and the **Rome statute** establishing the **International Criminal Court**.

### Ukraine's Response

- Ukraine's President said that Russia aims to destroy his state.
- The Ukrainian Foreign Minister said "This is a war of aggression and Ukraine will defend itself and will win. He also asked for the world to come together and stop Russia".

### The principle of self-defence

- In wake of the use of force by Russia, Ukraine has the right to self-defence under international law.

- The **UN Charter** under article 51 authorises states to resort to individual or collective self-defence, until the Security Council takes steps to ensure international peace and security.
- As Russia is a permanent member and has veto powers, it looks impossible for the UNSC to arrive at a decision
- Hence, Ukraine has a right under international law to request assistance from other states in the form of military assistance, supply of weapons etc.

### Russia's claims of self-defence

- Russia has also claimed that it is acting in self-defence.
- Russia claims that Ukraine may acquire nuclear weapons with the help of western allies.
- However, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Legality of Threat of Nuclear Weapons case held that mere possession of nuclear weapons does not constitute a threat.
- Even if Ukraine has, or were to acquire nuclear weapons in the future, it does not become a ground for invoking self defence by Russia.
- Further, mere membership in a defence alliance such as NATO cannot necessarily be considered as a threat of aggression against Russia.
- Russia can also not invoke anticipatory self defence as such invocation according to the **Caroline test**.

### Response by UN

- The United Nations Secretary General at a Security Council meeting, asked Russia to stop the attack on Ukraine and to “give peace a chance.”

### Response by the West

- **The U.S.** – The President said that America and its allies would respond decisively and unitedly. He also said that the world will hold Russia accountable and will announce further consequences on Russia in the coming days.
- **France** – Said that the country strongly condemns the attacks and asked Russia to immediately put an end to its military operations.
- **The U.K.** – Said that Russia has chosen a path of bloodshed and destruction by launching the attack.
- **Sanctions** – the U.S. along with the NATO and European Commission leadership vowed to impose “severe sanctions” on Russia that will overlay prior economic penalties imposed on Russian entities.

- Sanctions are expected to include cutting off top Russian banks from the financial system, halting technology exports, and directly targeting the Russian President.

### Impact on India

- **Indian diaspora** – thousands of Indian students, especially medical students are stranded in Ukraine. The attack by Russia threatens their lives.
- **Economy** – following the attacks, India's benchmark S&P BSE Sensex dropped by about 2,700 points, the highest drop in two years.
- **Rise in oil prices** – Oil prices surged to over a seven-year high of \$103 a barrel. The Brent crude rose to \$103.78 a barrel, the highest since August 14, 2014. India relies on imports for 85% of its fuel requirements.
- **Indian tea exports** – Russia is a significant market for Indian tea. Russia imports about 40 million kg from India. Ukraine is also a major importer of Indian tea.
- **Wheat exports** – The Russia-Ukraine crisis might give India an opportunity to export more wheat in the global markets as about 25% of the world's wheat export comes from Russia and Ukraine.

### India's Response

- The Indian Prime Minister appealed for an immediate ceasefire and a return to dialogue in a telephonic conversation with the Russian President.
- The PMO said that the safe exit of Indian citizens from the region is India's highest priority.
- India's Foreign Minister met several European leaders who asked India to change its position (which has so far not criticised Russia's actions) and support the UNSC resolution to be brought by the NATO allies, affirming the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

### **43. Russia willing to talk with Ukraine**

The Russian President has expressed willingness to indulge in a high level negotiation with Ukraine. This was conveyed through a telephonic conversation with the Chinese President.

#### **A brief background:**



- Over the gradual progress of recent times, the Russia-Ukraine discontent has intensified to an alarming level with the emergence of new tensions in the entire landscape of geopolitics.
- The tension furthered with the onset of military action by Russia on the eastern borders of Ukraine.
- Besides, the Ukrainian army was called upon by Russia to uproot the existing government describing the leaders as neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazis are group of individuals who advocate the Nazi ideology that promotes racism, xenophobia, ultranationalism, anti-communism and other elements of the Nazi doctrine.
- Russia also accused Ukrainian nationalists of deploying weapons in the residential areas which was alleged to be an attempt to provoke the Russian military.
- The ongoing crisis and the onslaught on Ukraine has determined the weakness of NATO that resulted from a broken security architecture of Europe.

#### **China's Take:**

- China extended its support to Moscow by urging Europe to consider the legitimate security concerns of all the countries.
- It has been confirmed from the Chinese President that Russia has agreed to hold high level negotiations with Ukraine.
- China has condemned NATO and called it responsible for the continuity of the Cold War ideology which leans towards the geopolitical interests of America.
- China's intervention in the matter is a reflection of its two-pronged approach towards the Ukraine crisis.
- The two-pronged approach involves, calling for a dialogue and peaceful negotiations, at the same time, refraining from criticising Russia's action publicly.
- Overall, China's take on the entire situation is similar to that of India which is in favour of a diplomatic resolution instead of criticising Russia's invasion.

#### **Conclusion:**

The intentions of China to resolve the ongoing crisis between Russia and Ukraine is prominent and in future, China is likely to put efforts for a political settlement of the entire issue. However, the major question that arises is the possibility and feasibility of such negotiations between Russia and Ukraine especially after the tense developments.



#### **44. Additional sanctions on Russia by the US**

The US President has imposed additional sanctions on Russia in the wake of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

##### **Highlights of the issue:**

- The US termed the action of Russia on Ukraine as aggressive and as a result introduced strong additional sanctions with new limitations on what can be exported to Russia.
- These sanctions will have a long term impact on Russia and minimum impact on the US and its allies.

##### **About the Sanctions:**

- Several banks of Russia have been sanctioned along with restrictions on transactions of 13 major state owned enterprises in Russia.
- Several Russian elites and their family members have been sanctioned including many Belarusian individuals.
- There is a possibility that the sanctions will extend to Russia's import of sensitive technology concerning defence, aviation and the maritime sectors.
- This step of imposing additional sanctions on Russia has been taken by considering the agreement of 27 European countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan and many others according to the US.
- The EU eyed to freeze the assets linked to the Russian President and the Foreign Minister over their invasion of Ukraine. This is considered as a unique step in history towards a nuclear power by the international community.

##### **Consequences :**

- The ongoing Ukraine crisis has brought Europe and all the advocates of freedom in a dangerous juncture which poses threat not only to the security but also to the economic interests of the European countries.
- These sanctions on Russia will result in unprecedented diplomatic and economic challenges and isolate Russia from the global financial system and international community.
- However, there are experts who believe that these drastic sanctions on Russia and ignoring Russia's concerns will not be a sustainable approach to resolve the ongoing crisis and can bring bitter outcomes for Europe's security and trade interests.

- World's staple grain markets have been significantly hit by the shockwaves of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Grain exports from Russia have been stalled for the time being and the Ukrainian ports have been closed. This leads to the sufferings of countries that largely depend on imports of grains from the region raising concerns of global food inflation and hunger.

### **Conclusion:**

- The US and its allies are clear in their decision to ostracise Russia from the global financial system on the grounds of its unlawful invasion of Ukraine. This will impact the entire set up of international trade which will not be a sustainable approach to continue with.
- Therefore, many experts envisage a precise diplomatic negotiation that addresses Russia's concerns, as an effective method to resolve the ongoing crisis and as a better alternative to bolstering the norms of NATO.

### **45. India to face tough choices at UNGA**

India abstained from the UN Security Council Resolution 8979 condemning Russian action in Ukraine.

#### **UN Security Council Resolution 8979:**

- The 8979th meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was held to pass a resolution under Chapter VII of the UN charter.
- The draft resolution was called to vote to end Russia's military offensive against Ukraine.
- It also aimed to deplore Russia's decision to grant independence to Ukraine's breakaway regions Donetsk and Luhansk and reverse the decision, calling it violative of territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine.
- Out of the total fifteen members of the UNSC, eleven voted in favor, Russia vetoed the resolution and three countries abstained from the voting. Thus, the resolution was rejected by the UNSC.

#### **Response to the UNSC Resolution**

- The U.S. and European countries leading the diplomatic charge against Russia are hopeful of gaining a large majority in the 193-member UNGA.
- If a UNGA vote happens, India will have to choose where it stands in the much larger global arena: with us, or with countries like China, Syria and Venezuela on the issue.
- India has thus far refrained from supporting any resolution criticizing Russia but officials said India's growing concerns over the "humanitarian crisis".

- Russia has “highly appreciated India’s independent and balanced position at the voting in the UNSC”.

### What Does India’s Abstention From Voting Means?

- India abstained from voting on the draft resolution of UNSC for holding Russia accountable for Ukraine’s crisis.
- A UNSC resolution is of two kinds:
  - **One is obligatory:** An obligatory or binding resolution of the UNSC is passed under Article 39, Chapter VII of the UN charter.
  - **Other non-obligatory:** A non-binding resolution of the UNSC is one that is passed under Article 33, Chapter VI of the UN charter.
- During UNSC voting, abstention by non-P5 members merely means that temporary members do not wish to take sides in a resolution.
- Thus, India’s abstention along with China and the UAE could not have hampered the fate of the resolution.
- What restricted the resolution to get passed was the requirement of concurrence of P5 members on the resolution.
- Since Russia is a P5 member, Russia vetoed the resolution by not concurring with the rest of the P5 members.
  - **Veto:** The act of not concurring with the rest of the P5 members in this voting is called a veto.

### Why Did India Abstain From Voting?

- India appeared to have abstained from the voting for multiple reasons.
- By abstaining from voting, India could establish its neutrality in a matter involving Russia and the USA.
- India has been on a path of strategic partnership with the USA, in which the Indian government has invested a lot.
- At the same time, Russia is an all-weather friend of India. It is a matter of regret that the path of diplomacy was given up.
- Moreover, India’s vote was in any way inconsequential given Russia has the veto power to block the resolution from getting passed.
- Therefore, India had the luxury to be seen as neutral on a matter that it supports but not by going against an all-weather and tested ally.
- It must be highlighted that Ukraine has a chequered past with respect to India in international relations.
  - Ukraine has opposed the Indian action of removing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 in Parliament, and has also sold weapons to Pakistan.

### Conclusion:

- India is sympathetic to the cause of territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine but also shares the Russian security concern vis-à-vis Ukraine joining NATO.
- Ukraine's heavy-handed approach to the Russian-speaking ethnic minority of Donetsk and Luhansk regions that Russia just declared independent entities.
- Though India is in-principle in agreement with the rest of the world that the territorial integrity of Ukraine is non-negotiable, it did not want Russia to be penalized with onerous international sanctions.

## **GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment**

### **46. What is UNCITRAL Model for Cross-Border Insolvency?**

The Economic Survey 2021-22 has called for a standardized framework for cross-border insolvency as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) at present does not have an instrument to restructure firms involving cross-border jurisdictions.

#### **What is the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)?**

- The IBC, 2016 is the bankruptcy law of India that seeks to consolidate the existing framework by creating a single law for insolvency and bankruptcy.
- It is a one-stop solution for resolving insolvencies which previously was a long process that did not offer an economically viable arrangement.
- The code aims to protect the interests of small investors and make the process of doing business less cumbersome.

#### **Cross-border insolvency proceedings**

- Cross-border insolvency proceedings are relevant for the resolution of distressed companies with assets and liabilities across multiple jurisdictions.
- A framework for cross border insolvency proceedings allows for:
  1. Location of such a company's foreign assets
  2. Identification of creditors and their claims
  3. Establishing payment towards claims and
  4. Process for coordination between courts in different countries

#### **Current status of foreign stakeholders and courts in other jurisdictions under IBC**

- Foreign creditors can make claims against a domestic company.

- However, the IBC currently does not allow for automatic recognition of any insolvency proceedings in other countries.
- Current provisions do not allow Indian courts to address the issue of foreign assets of a company being subjected to parallel insolvency proceedings in other jurisdictions.

### What is the UNCITRAL Model?

- The UNCITRAL model is the most widely accepted legal framework to deal with cross-border insolvency issues.
- It has been adopted by 49 countries, including the UK, the US, South Africa, South Korea, and Singapore.
- It is designed to assist States in reforming and modernizing their laws on the arbitral procedure so as to take into account the particular features and needs of international commercial arbitration.

### Key provisions

This law works on four main principles: **access, recognition, cooperation and coordination**:

1. **Direct access to foreign insolvency professionals and foreign creditors** to participate in or commence domestic insolvency proceedings against a defaulting debtor.
2. **Recognition of foreign proceedings & provision of remedies.**
3. **Cooperation between domestic and foreign courts & domestic and foreign insolvency practitioners.**
4. **Coordination between two or more concurrent insolvency proceedings in different countries:** The main proceeding is determined by the concept of Centre of Main Interest (COMI).

### Implications for India

- The framework for cross-border insolvency adopted in India may like in the case of some other countries require reciprocity from any country which seeks to have its insolvency proceedings recognised by Indian courts.
- This would allow Indian proceedings for foreign corporate debtors to be recognised in foreign jurisdictions.

### How is IBC different from the model law?

- Many countries that adopt the UNCITRAL model law do make certain changes to suit their domestic requirements.

- The Indian cross-border insolvency framework excludes financial service providers from being subjected to cross-border insolvency proceedings.
- This is because many countries exempt businesses providing critical financial services, such as banks and insurance companies, from the provisions of cross-border insolvency frameworks.

#### 47. What is Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme?

India has invited applications from 100 domestic companies, startups, and small and medium enterprises to become a part of the design-linked incentive (DLI) scheme.

##### What is the DLI scheme?

- Aims to provide financial and infrastructural support to companies **setting up fabs or semiconductor making plants in India.**
- It aims to attract existing and global players as it will support their expenditures related to design software, IP rights, development, testing, and deployment.
- Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), a scientific society operating under MeitY, will serve as the nodal agency for the implementation of the DLI scheme.

##### Components of the scheme

It has three components which are

1. **Chip Design infrastructure support:** C-DAC will set up the India Chip Centre to host the state-of-the-art design infrastructure (viz. EDA Tools, IP Cores, and support for MPW (Multi Project Wafer fabrication) & post-silicon validation) and facilitate its access to supported companies.
2. **Product Design Linked Incentive:** Reimbursement of up to 50% of the eligible expenditure subject to a ceiling of Rs. 15 Crore per application will be provided as financial support to the approved applicants who are engaged in semiconductor design.
3. **Deployment Linked Incentive:** An incentive of 6% to 4% of net sales turnover over 5 years subject to a ceiling of Rs. 30 Crore per application will be provided to approved applicants whose semiconductor design for Integrated Circuits (ICs), Chipsets, System on Chips (SoCs), Systems & IP Cores and semiconductor linked design are deployed in electronic products.



## Why need such a scheme?

**Ans.** Growing semiconductor demand in India

- The semiconductor industry is growing fast and can reach \$1 trillion dollars in this decade. India can grow fast and reach \$64 billion by 2026 from \$27 billion today.
- Mobiles, wearables, IT, and industrial components are the leading segments in the Indian semiconductor industry contributing around 80% of the revenues in 2021.
- The mobile and wearables segment is valued at \$13.8 billion and is expected to reach \$31.5 billion in 2026.

## A boost to semiconductor manufacturing

- The sudden surge in demand for chips and semiconductor components has underpinned the need to establish a robust semiconductor ecosystem in India.
- Several sectors, including auto, telecom, and medical technology suffered due to the unexpected surge leading to the scarcity of chips manufactured by only a few countries.
- The inception of new companies will help in meeting the demand and supply and encourage innovation in India.

## What are other countries doing to be dominant in the race of chip-making?

- Currently, semiconductor manufacturing is dominated by companies in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Israel, and the Netherlands.
- They are also making efforts in solving the chip shortage problem.
- The US wants to bring manufacturing back to America and reduce the country's reliance on a small number of chipmakers based largely in Taiwan and South Korea.
- These chipmakers produce up to 70% of the world's semiconductors.

## Challenges in India

- **No incubation:** In India, more than 90% of global companies already have their R&D and design centers for semiconductors but never established their fabrication units.
- **Strategic sector:** Although India has semiconductor fabs in Mohali and Bangalore, they are purely strategic for defense and space applications only
- **Capital requirement:** Setting up fabs is capital intensive and needs investment in the range of \$5 billion to \$10 billion.

- **Lack of supportive policies:** Lack of investments and supportive government policies are some of the challenges to setting up fabs in India.
- **Geopolitical limitations:** A combination of capital and the geopolitical situation comes into play to build new fabs.

### Way forward

- **Further incentivization:** Schemes like the DLI are crucial to avoid high dependencies on a few countries or companies.
- **Raw material supply:** Several gases and minerals which are a part of the global semiconductor supply chain are produced in India.
- **Large talent pool:** Availability of highly-skilled engineers for semiconductor manufacturing.

### Conclusion

- The 21st century will be an era of Digital revolution signifying an increased use of mobile phones and computer devices. This enhanced usage can be met only with a robust availability of semiconductor chips that sustains their functioning. Therefore India needs to focus on the indigenous development of semiconductors in order to realize its digital potential and emerge as a strong power in the present era.

### 48.What is the Digital Rupee?

The Union Finance Minister has announced the launch of the Digital Rupee – a central bank digital currency (CBDC) – 2022-23 onwards.

#### Who will launch the CBDC?

- The Reserve Bank of India will launch the CBDC in the upcoming financial year.
- This follows the government's plans to launch the CBDC that will be backed by blockchain technology.

#### What is a CBDC?

- CBDC is a legal tender issued by a central bank in a digital form.
- It is similar to a fiat currency issued in paper and is interchangeable with any other fiat currency.
- One chief difference will be that a Digital Rupee transaction will be instantaneous as opposed to the current digital payment experience.

## Features of CBDC

- **High-security instrument:** CBDC is a high-security digital instrument; like paper banknotes, it is a means of payment, a unit of account, and a store of value.
- **Uniquely identifiable:** And like paper currency, each unit is uniquely identifiable to prevent counterfeit.
- **Liability of central bank:** It is a liability of the central bank just as physical currency is.
- **Transferability:** It's a digital bearer instrument that can be stored, transferred, and transmitted by all kinds of digital payment systems and services.

## What is the need for CBDC?

- **Online transactions:** India is a leader in digital payments, but cash remains dominant for small-value transactions.
- **High currency in circulation:** India has a fairly high currency-to-GDP ratio.
- **Cost of currency management:** An official digital currency would reduce the cost of currency management while enabling real-time payments without any inter-bank settlement.
- The growth of **cryptocurrencies** such as Bitcoin, Ethereum, etc has raised challenges to fiat currencies.

## Key benefits offered

- **Faster system:** CBDC can definitely increase the transmission of money from central banks to commercial banks and end customers much faster than the present system.
- **Financial inclusion:** Specific use cases, like financial inclusion, can also be covered by CBDC that can benefit millions of citizens who need money and are currently unbanked or banked with limited banking services
- **Monetary policy facilitation:** The move to bring out a CBDC could significantly improve monetary policy development in India.
- **Making of a regional currency:** In the cross-border payments domain, India can take a lead by leveraging digital Rupee especially in countries such as Bhutan, Saudia Arabia, and Singapore where NPCI has existing arrangements.

## Why is CBDC preferred over Cryptocurrency?

- **Sovereign guarantee:** Cryptocurrencies pose risks to consumers. They do not have any sovereign guarantee and hence are not legal tender.

- **Market volatility:** Their speculative nature also makes them highly volatile. For instance, the value of Bitcoin fell from USD 20,000 in December 2017 to USD 3,800 in November 2018.
- **Risk in security:** A user loses access to their cryptocurrency if they lose their private key (unlike traditional digital banking accounts, this password cannot be reset).
- **Malware threats:** In some cases, these private keys are stored by technical service providers (cryptocurrency exchanges or wallets), which are prone to malware or hacking.
- **Money laundering:** Cryptocurrencies are more vulnerable to criminal activity and money laundering. They provide greater anonymity than other payment methods since the public keys engaging in a transaction cannot be directly linked to an individual.
- **Regulatory bypass:** A central bank cannot regulate the supply of cryptocurrencies in the economy. This could pose a risk to the financial stability of the country if their use becomes widespread.
- **Power consumption:** Since validating transactions is energy-intensive, it may have adverse consequences for the country's energy security (the total electricity use of bitcoin mining, in 2018, was equivalent to that of mid-sized economies such as Switzerland).

### Way forward

- The launch of CBDCs may not be a smooth affair and still requires more clarity in India. There are still a lot of misconceptions about the concept of digital currency in the country.
- The effectiveness of CBDCs will depend on aspects such as **privacy design and programmability**.
- There is a huge opportunity for India to take a lead globally via a large-scale rollout and adoption of digital currencies.

### 49. Govt. proposes new SEZ Law

The government has proposed to replace the existing law governing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with new legislation to enable States to become partners in 'Development of Enterprise and Service Hubs'.

#### Why amend SEZ Act, 2005?

- Units in SEZs used to enjoy 100% income tax exemption on export income for the first five years, 50% for the next five years, and 50% of the ploughed back export profit for another five years.

- SEZs now have started losing their sheen after the imposition of minimum alternate tax and the introduction of a sunset clause for the removal of tax incentives.
- The new act will cover all large existing and new industrial enclaves to optimally utilize the available infrastructure and enhance the competitiveness of exports.
- The government will also undertake reforms in customs administration of SEZs with a view to promote ease of doing business.

### **What are SEZs?**

- A Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is an area in which the business and trade laws are different from the rest of the country.
- SEZs are located within a country's national borders, and their aims include increasing trade balance, employment, increased investment, job creation, and effective administration.
- To encourage businesses to set up in the zone, financial policies are introduced.
- These policies typically encompass investing, taxation, trading, quotas, customs, and labor regulations.
- Additionally, companies may be offered tax holidays, where upon establishing themselves in a zone, they are granted a period of lower taxation.

### **SEZs in India**

- The SEZ policy in India first came into inception on April 1, 2000.
- The prime objective was to enhance foreign investment and provide an internationally competitive and hassle-free environment for exports.
- The idea was to promote exports from the country and realize the need for a level playing field must be made available to the domestic enterprises and manufacturers to be competitive globally.
- Subsequently, the SEZ Act 2005, was enacted to provide the umbrella legal framework, covering all important legal and regulatory aspects of SEZ development as well as for units operating in SEZs.

### **Who can set up SEZs? Can foreign companies set up SEZs?**

- Any private/public/joint sector or state government or its agencies can set up an SEZ.
- Yes, a foreign agency can set up SEZs in India.

### **What is the role of state governments in establishing SEZs?**

- A representative of the state government, who is a member of the inter-ministerial committee on private SEZ, is consulted while considering the proposal.
- Before recommending any proposals to the ministry of commerce and industry (department of commerce), the states must satisfy themselves that they are in a position to supply basic inputs like water, electricity, etc.

### **Are SEZs controlled by the government?**

- In all SEZs, the statutory functions are controlled by the government.
- The government also controls the operation and maintenance function in the central government-controlled SEZs. The rest of the operations and maintenance are privatized.

### **Are SEZs exempt from labor laws?**

- Normal labor laws are applicable to SEZs, which are enforced by the respective state governments.
- The state governments have been requested to simplify the procedures/returns and for the introduction of a single-window clearance mechanism by delegating appropriate powers to development commissioners of SEZs.

### **Who monitors the functioning of the units in SEZ?**

- The performance of the SEZ units is monitored by a unit approval committee consisting of a development commissioner, custom, and representative of the state government on an annual basis.

### **What are the special features for business units that come to the zone?**

- Business units that set up establishments in an SEZ would be entitled to a package of incentives and a simplified operating environment.
- Besides, no license is required for imports, including second-hand machinery.

### **How do SEZs help a country's economy?**

- SEZs play a key role in the rapid economic development of a country.
- In the early 1990s, it helped China and there were hopes that the establishment in India of similar export-processing zones could offer similar benefits – provided, however, that the zones offered attractive enough concessions.



- Traditionally the biggest deterrents to foreign investment in India have been high tariffs and taxes, red-tapism, and strict labor laws.
- To date, these restrictions have ensured that India has been unable to compete with China's massively successful light-industrial export machine.

### **50. PM's Development Initiative for North East (PM-DevINE)**

Union Budget 2022-23 provided for a new scheme, Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East (PM-DevINE) will be implemented through the North-Eastern Council.

#### **PM-DevINE**

- It will fund infrastructure, in the spirit of PM GatiShakti, and social development projects based on felt needs of the northeast.
- This will enable livelihood activities for youth and women, filling the gaps in various sectors.
- While the Central Ministries may also pose their candidate projects, priority will be given to those posed by the States.

#### **Some of the projects to be implemented are:**

1. Dedicated Services for the Management of Paediatric and Adult Haemotolymphoid Cancers in North East India, Guwahati
2. Construction of Aizawl bypass on western side, gap funding for passenger ropeway system for Pelling to Sanga-Choeling in West Sikkim
3. Gap funding for eco-friendly Ropeway (Cable Car) from Dhapper to Bhaleydhunga in South Sikkim
4. Pilot project for the construction of Bamboo Link Road at different locations in various districts in Mizoram

### **51. ₹3,358 cr. in MGNREGA wages not paid**

**Context:** The MGNREGA workers are still waiting for pending wages that sum up to Rs 3,358 crore in the states of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

#### **About the Issue:**

- The Union Budget 2022-23 has reduced the fund allocation for the MGNREGA scheme by 25% in comparison to the revised estimates for the current year.

- This pendency of payment of wages to the workers, if extended till the next financial year, will result in further reduction of money available to pay the workers.
- This has resulted in huge criticism of the recently released budget as many workers benefited from the MGNREGA scheme.
- With the recent changes in the amount of resource allocation for the scheme, there are possibilities of reduction in employment opportunities.

## 52. The need to boost labour income and consumption expenditure

### Economic context of the recent budget:

- The **Annual budget 2022-2023** was placed in the midst of the following challenges.

### Sharp reduction in output growth rate following the pandemic:

- The Indian economy faced a record economic contraction in the first year of the pandemic (2020-21 fiscal year).
- Though **India's GDP is expected to grow by 9.2% in 2021-22 and 8% to 8.5% in 2022-23**, these estimates suggest a recovery above the pre-pandemic level of 2019-20 by a meagre 1.3% only.

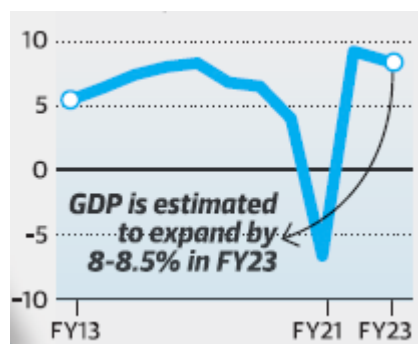


Image Source: The Hindu

### Concerns over the fiscal deficit numbers:

- The fiscal stimulus during the pandemic and the lower revenue realization resulted in the fiscal deficit numbers reaching as high as **9.2% in the 2020-21 fiscal year**.
- This marks a large deviation from the fiscal consolidation envisaged under the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act**.

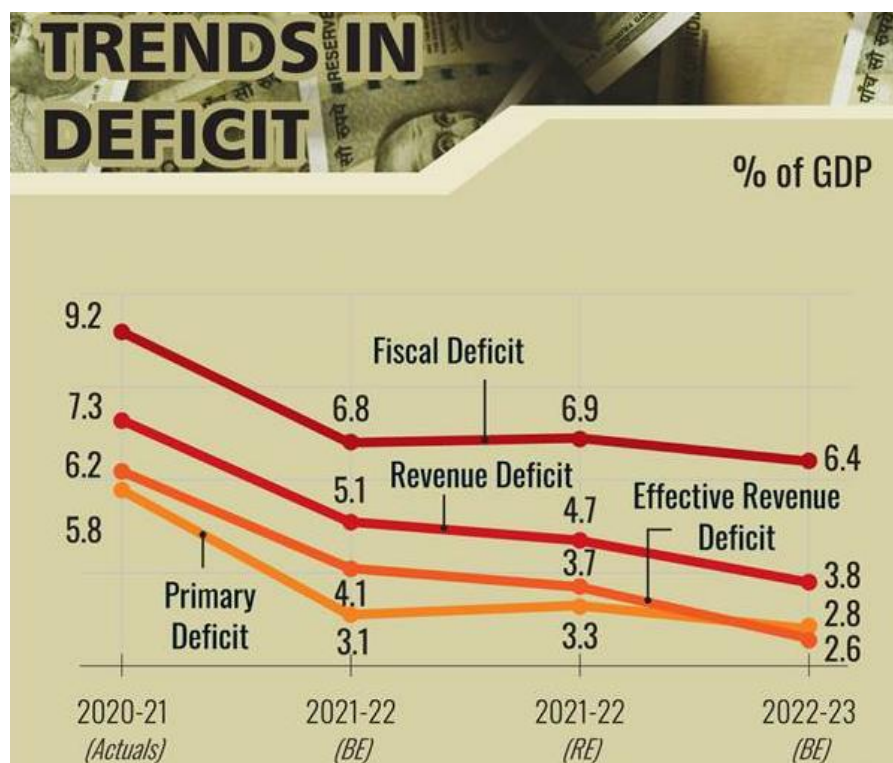


Image source: PIB

### Reduction in labour income and consumption expenditure:

- While every economic crisis involves a sharp reduction in output growth rate, a specific problem in India was the **sharp reduction in labour income even as industrial profits have increased**.
- The reduction in the income share of labour has resulted in a sharp **fall in both the absolute value of consumption expenditure as well as the consumption-GDP ratio**.
- Despite signs of economic recovery in India, the real consumption expenditure remains lower as compared to 2019-20.

### Structural challenges:

- Though the present challenges in the Indian economy can be mainly attributed to the disruption caused by the pandemic, notably however the pandemic in itself was preceded by perhaps the longest **episode of a growth slowdown in the Indian economy** since the liberalisation period.
- Several economists have attributed this to the **structural constraints of the Indian economy**.

### Fiscal Deficit projections in current Budget:

- The Union Budget for 2022-23 has projected a **fiscal deficit of 6.4% of nominal GDP**.
- This marks a decrease from the 6.9% assumed in the revised estimates for the current fiscal year (2021-22) ending on March 31.
- This move is **consistent with the broad path of fiscal consolidation** envisaged in the last budget which set out the target of reaching a **fiscal deficit level below 4.5% by 2025-26** while also considering the need to nurture growth, through public investment, to ensure sustainable economic recovery in the post-pandemic phase.

### Key shortcomings of the Budget:

### Impact on revenue expenditure:

- Given that the **share of revenue and non-debt receipts in GDP has remained more or less unchanged**, fiscal consolidation would then be possible only by reducing the expenditure-GDP ratio.
- The **brunt of this expenditure compression is likely to be mostly on revenue expenditure**.

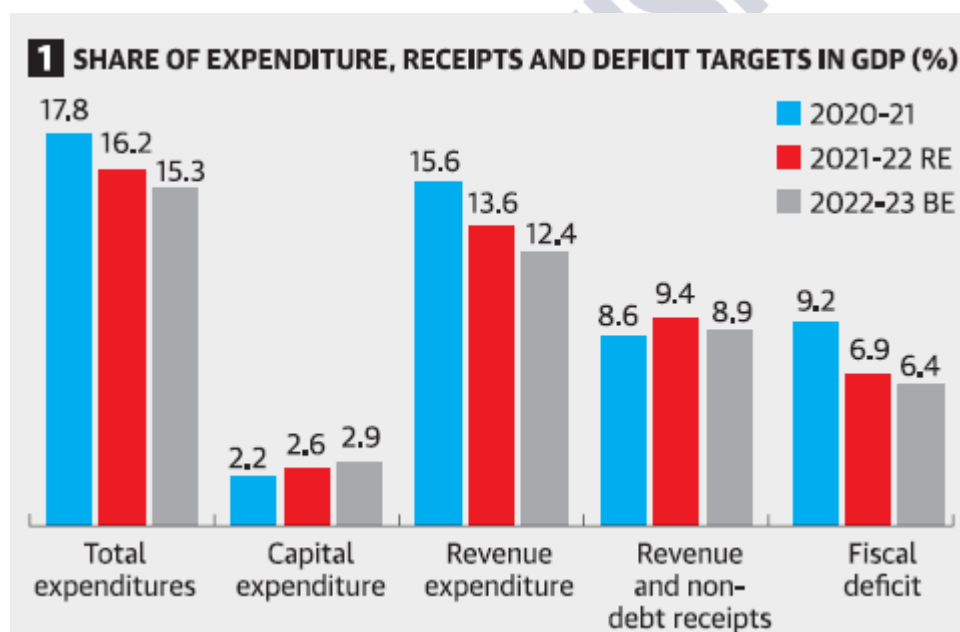


Image Source: The Hindu

### Implications for development spending:

- The **brunt of expenditure compression has fallen on development expenditure**. The fiscal consolidation strategy carried out in the last few years has led the development expenditure ratio to slide downward.

- Development expenditure is calculated as the sum of expenditures on social services and economic services.

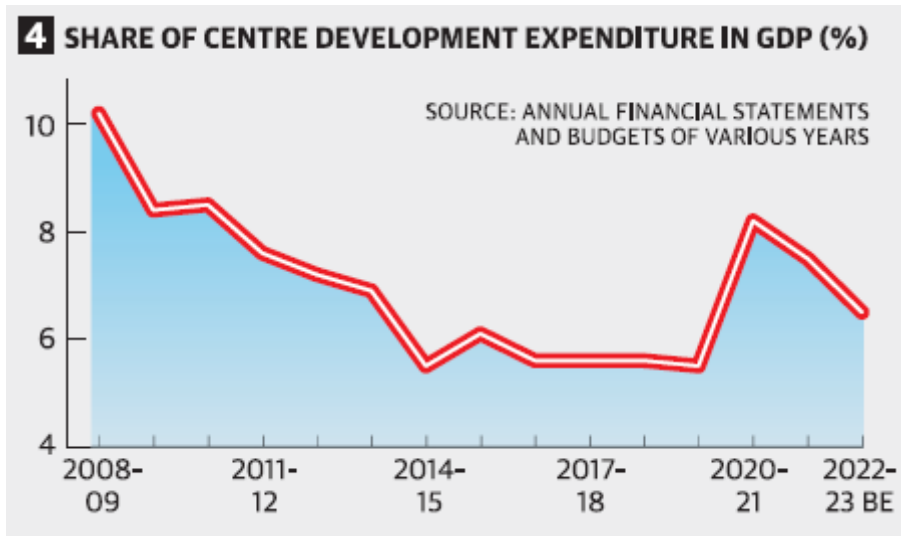


Image Source: The Hindu

**Impact on income and livelihood:**

- The reduction in the allocation for development expenditure ratio for 2022-23 reflects a reduction in the allocation for food subsidies, national rural employment guarantee program, expenditure in agriculture, rural development and social sector.

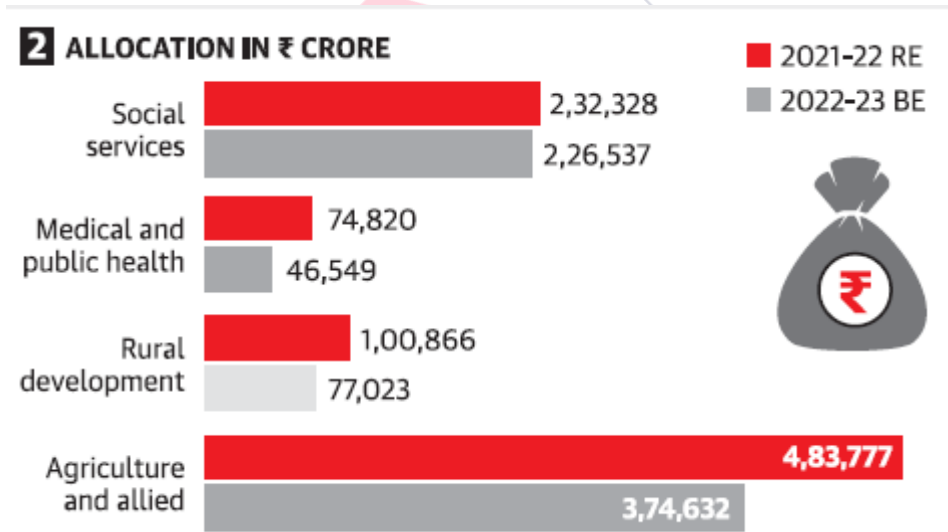


Image Source: The Hindu

- The **reduced expenditure in the rural employment programme and employment-intensive sectors like the agricultural sector** would have a marked **impact on the income levels of the general populace.**

- Expenditure compression has been often associated with the **overall fall in the allocation for total social sector expenditure**.
  - Example: The total nominal expenditure on medical and public health has registered a fall in 2022-23 as compared to 2021-22.
- Thus the reduction in the allocation for revenue expenditure would be associated with a fall in several key expenditures that **affect the income and livelihood of labour**.

#### Macro-economic perspective:

- The reduction in the allocation for development expenditure would have an adverse impact on labour income and consumption expenditure. This could **curtail the aggregate demand in the economy and depress the consumption expenditure** which is so very critical for the Indian economy especially for the recovery process.
- Thus the Budget's fiscal consolidation approach could be a cause of concern from the macro-economic perspective of India.

#### Heavy reliance on the external sector:

- The budget approach signifies a **heavy dependency on external demand for economic revival**.
- Despite the limited recovery in exports in the last few quarters, the possibility of sustained economic recovery relying exclusively on the export channel appears to be bleak at the present as different countries have already started pursuing fiscal consolidation.

#### Neglect of corporate tax as a revenue source:

- Despite a sharp increase in profits during the pandemic, **the corporate tax-GDP ratio has continued to remain below the 2018-19 level due to tax concessions**. This restricts revenue receipts.
- Despite the objective of fiscal consolidation, the corporate tax ratio continues to remain low.

### 53. A disjointed response

Introduction of a tax regime for virtual digital assets in the Union Budget 2022-23.

#### Tax on digital assets

- The Budget 2022-23 proposes the introduction of a taxation regime for virtual digital assets that include, evolving manifestations of cryptocurrencies, codes and non-fungible tokens.



- The Budget proposed to tax all profits from transactions from such assets at 30% along with the applicable surcharge and cess, and a 1% tax to be deducted by buyers while trading in any virtual digital asset beyond a threshold.
- The tax on profits will start from April 1, 2022, and the TDS provisions aimed at creating a transaction trail for the tax authorities will start from July 1.
- The trading profits will be taxed according to crypto industry players, no deductions will be allowed on account of setting off losses from such trading or from any other capital losses.
  - The only deduction permitted would be the cost of acquiring the asset.

### **Inclusion of digital assets in I-T Act**

- The term 'property' under the I-T Act is being expanded to include virtual digital assets such that the assets received as a gift shall be taxable except when received from kin.
- The taxation regime by itself does not grant legitimacy to the trade in these currently unregulated assets.
- A consultation process is underway, to determine the legal position of such assets.

### **Relief for investors**

- The move is expected to bring in relief for the growing number of crypto investors.
- Though the Government has not yet legitimised the assets, the tax regime indicates that the hard option of an outright ban on crypto is off the table.
- The proposed legislation of the crypto law that had suggested an outright ban on cryptocurrencies now seems to be dropped from the agenda.

### **Way forward**

- There is a need for the introduction of norms to control advertisements, that the government is worried about, luring India's youth by the Crypto players.
- There is a need for a regulatory watchdog for monitoring virtual digital assets.
- The government has to undertake speedy and proactive actions as the delay in decision making prevents the Indian start-ups and innovators from developing products and ideas that can be scaled up globally.
- In November 2021, the Government had indicated a forward-looking approach to the crypto market.
  - It is time to bring in a clear regulatory framework soon instead of ambiguous measures.

#### 54. Scientists set new record in fusion energy

- Scientists at the **Joint European Torus (JET) facility** near Oxford in England have achieved a new milestone in producing nuclear fusion energy.
  - The team **generated 59 megajoules of sustained energy during an experiment**, more than doubling the previous record.
  - The energy was produced in a machine called a tokamak.

#### Nuclear Fusion Energy:

- Fusion power is a form of power generation that would generate electricity by using heat from nuclear fusion reactions. In a fusion process, **two lighter atomic nuclei combine to form a heavier nucleus, while releasing energy.**
  - Ongoing studies on nuclear energy involve **using hydrogen as the fuel** for nuclear fusion. Deuterium and tritium, which are isotopes of hydrogen, are heated to high temperatures to create plasma. Plasma is confined to a place using superconducting electromagnets. Consequently, they fuse and release a tremendous amount of heat energy.

#### Tokamak:

- A tokamak is a machine that **confines a plasma using magnetic fields** in a donut shape that scientists call a **torus**.
- The tokamak is one of several types of **magnetic confinement devices** being developed to produce controlled thermonuclear fusion power. As of 2021, it is the leading candidate for a practical fusion reactor.
- In a tokamak, magnetic field coils confine plasma particles to allow the plasma to achieve the conditions necessary for fusion.

#### Significance of Nuclear Fusion:

- **Large source of power:** A kilogram of fusion fuel contains about 10 million times as much energy as a kilogram of coal, oil or gas.
- **Low carbon:** Given that it is not based on fossil fuels, the carbon emissions will be much lower.
- **Safety:** Nuclear fusion is much safer as compared to nuclear fission reactors.

#### Significance of the new finding:

- The breakthrough achieved at the JET facility will be a major boost for ITER.
  - The **ITER is a fusion research mega-project** supported by seven members – China, the European Union, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the U.S. – and based in the south of France. It seeks to

further demonstrate the **scientific and technological feasibility of fusion energy**.

## 55. It's time to take a relook at privatisation

### Background

- India's fiscal deficit for FY22 is said to be **6.8%** of the GDP or **₹15.06 lakh crore**. It accounts for about **12.7%** of the GDP if debts of the States are included.
- Privatisation is being put forward as an option to generate sufficient revenues for the government to close down the fiscal deficit. Also in the recent past, there has been a broad consensus that privatisation is the solution for the revival of the economy post-pandemic as the policymakers suggest that the private sector has more ability to grow faster.

### Privatisation

- Privatisation means the transfer of ownership, management, and control of the public sector enterprises to the private sector.
- **Objectives:**
  - To minimise the public sector's role and create new investment space for the private sector, and to infuse private capital, technology and management practices that will contribute to growth and new jobs.
  - The proceeds from the sale of the public firms would help finance various government-run social sector and developmental programmes.

### Privatisation in India

- The Disinvestment Commission, under the Ministry of Industries, was set up in 1996 to provide inputs on which firms to privatise over a five-10-year period.
- A separate Department of Disinvestment was set up under the Ministry of Finance and later upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry in 2001. It was downgraded back to a department in 2004.
- Despite strong institutional backing, privatisation as a policy has failed to raise significant funds. The actual receipts from disinvestment have fallen short of targets.
- In FY11, **₹22,846 crores** were raised against a target of **₹40,000 crores**.
- In FY20, **₹50,304 crores** were raised against a target of **₹1 lakh crores**.
- Between FY11 and FY21, about **₹5 lakh crores** were raised, which is about 33% of FY22's projected fiscal deficit.

### Evidence against privatisation

- Studies indicate that the gap in growth between public sector undertakings (PSUs) with autonomy and private firms is not very significant.
- A study highlighted that the famed British privatisation initiative of British Airways, British Gas, and the Railways led to no systemic difference in performance.
- Evidence on performance after privatisation is more mixed in developing countries.
- Growth post-privatisation is linked to factors like better funding by the private firms compared to the government budget and a better business model.
- Privatisation as a revenue source has also offered meagre returns.

### Challenges with privatisation

- **Valuation** - 65% of 300 national highway projects have been recording significant toll collection growth. Valuations of such assets should ensure to capture potential growth in toll revenue.
- **Employment** - PSUs have been significant generators of employment, with about 10.3 lakh employees in Central Public Sector Enterprises (in 2019). A push for privatisation is said to be a push for mass layoffs, in a period of low job creation.
- **Concentration of public assets in select private hands** - In India, about 70% of profits generated in the corporate sector in FY20 were from just 20 firms.
- **Concerns of Monopoly** -
  - Cigarettes are dominated by a single player, with a 77% market share in FY21
  - Paints has one entity with 40% in FY21
  - Telecom has just three players left
- **Loss of strategic control** - Privatization decreases the government control on strategic sectors.

### Conclusion

An alternative method of selective PSU reform could be considered which has been a success in other countries like:

- In China, growth has been led by corporatised PSUs that are held under a holding company, which promotes better governance, appoints leadership and executes mergers and acquisitions.
- In Singapore, the Ministry of Finance focuses on policymaking, while Temasek Holdings (a private firm) is focused on corporatising and expanding its PSUs.

A PSU with greater autonomy, with the government retaining control and subject to the right incentives, the Indian PSUs could aspire to be as large and efficient as that of China's.

### **56. Exclusion from SWIFT: what it entails**

The U.S., Europe and several other western nations are moving to exclude Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).

#### **What is SWIFT?**

- SWIFT stands for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication.
- SWIFT, first used in 1973, went live in 1977 with 518 institutions from 22 countries, its website states. SWIFT itself had replaced the much slower and far less dynamic Telex.
- SWIFT is a messaging network used by banks and financial institutions globally for quick and faultless exchange of information pertaining to financial transactions.
- Know more about **SWIFT**

#### **What happens if one is excluded from SWIFT?**

- If a country is excluded from the most participatory financial facilitating platform, its foreign funding would take a hit, making it entirely reliant on domestic investors.
- This is particularly troublesome when institutional investors are constantly seeking new markets in newer territories.
- An alternative system would be cumbersome to build and even more difficult to integrate with an already expansive system.

#### **How is the organization governed?**

- SWIFT claims to be neutral.
- Its shareholders elect the 25-member board, which is responsible for oversight and management of the company.
- It is regulated by G-10 central banks of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and Sweden, alongside the European Central Bank.
- Its lead overseer is the National Bank of Belgium.
- The SWIFT oversight forum was established in 2012.

### 57. A day to embody the true spirit of science

The Government is organising a Science Week called 'Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate'.

#### Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate

- A programme titled Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate is being held to celebrate the S & T achievements of India over the past 75 years as a prelude to National Science Day on February 28 that commemorates Sir C.V. Raman's discovery on light scattering.
- It is being held at 75 locations across the length and breadth of the country.
- The aim of the program is to inspire India's youth into building a progressive nation.

#### Freeman Dyson's views

- Freeman Dyson in his book, **The Scientist as Rebel**, argues about why dissent is the soul of science.
- He believes that science is universal, like music, dance or poetry.
- He considered evidence-based modern science as an intellectual rebellion or as a form of dissent against social constraints or the restrictions imposed by the locally prevailing culture.
- He also views that the Arabs, Indians, Japanese and Chinese have contributed highly to the development of modern science.

#### Indian context

- For Indian scientists in the past, science was a double rebellion,
  - One against English domination.
  - And another against the fatalistic ethos of religion.
- This rebellious spirit revived science in India in the pre-Independence era.
- Sir C.V. Raman's discovery should not be seen independent of the social reform movements of those days.
- With an ideological shift in recent times, academic freedom is now under greater pressure.
- For science to excel it needs to be promoted in a free spirit.
- As Dyson argues, "science is an inherently subversive act, a threat to establishment of all kinds, whether it upends a long-standing scientific idea, or it questions the received political wisdom or irrationality".

#### Need for transformation



- Cultural changes are difficult to achieve, especially in a society that is bound by traditions.
- A former Director-General of the CSIR, said that tradition-bound countries such as India need to free themselves from the cultural chains of the past to foster original thinking.
- It is the duty of scientists to promote a free and unrestricted intellectual environment by actively engaging in the transformation of values.
- A key challenge is to strengthen the social democratic norms within the institutes that represent Indian diversity.
- National Science Day should provide a platform where free discussions are organised, endorsing the true spirit of science, that help realise its huge transformative potential.

### 58. Tackling the plastic problem

The UN Environment Assembly meeting in February-March 2022.

#### Plastic waste in aquatic ecosystems

- A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report in 2021, estimated that emissions of plastic waste into the aquatic ecosystems would triple by 2040 if no actions are undertaken.
- The UN Environment Assembly meeting scheduled in 2022 may formulate a way forward for global cooperation in this regard.

#### Negative impacts of Plastic waste

- Plastic products like bags, bottles, etc. take a long time to decompose.
- The increase in the consumption worldwide and low interests in recycling programmes have led to more prevalence of plastic wastes.
- Plastic wastes result in a huge loss of marine life, especially Marine fisheries and wildlife.
- This also impacts the livelihoods and income of people in the coastal regions, who are dependent on marine ecosystems.

#### Consumption externality

- Plastics is an example of a **consumption externality** (which involves many people) rather than a **production externality** (which involves one or multiple firms)
- Consumption externality is a complex issue, as it is challenging to differentiate the behaviour of consumers.
- Since the number of consumers is more, the cost of controlling them will also be high.

## Key challenges

- Several regions across the world have banned plastic items, although this approach promotes a sustainable environment, and helps save marine and wildlife ecosystems, It causes:
  - Inconvenience for consumers
  - Increases substitution cost
  - Creates unemployment as it affects the production of plastics
  - Leads to less economic activity
  - Leads to less income generation
- The replacement of plastics that are low cost, have substitutes that result in a deadweight loss for the economy.
- If plastics are banned, the efficiency of imposing tax and the associated problems have to be considered.
- It is complex to identify and impose an exact tax regime as it depends on specific factors that vary across countries.

## Way forward

- The environment regulation for plastics should include a 'command and control' approach.
  - "Command-and-control" approach demands the polluters to meet emission-reduction targets and facilitates the installation and use of specific types of equipment to reduce emissions.
- The effectiveness of regulations depends on its framework, foundation, design and execution.
- Regulations should be credible, transparent and predictable.
- A tax rate should be carefully determined and in general, the rate of tax on plastics should be higher than the cost of compliance.
- Eco-taxes may be imposed in the various stages of production, consumption or disposal of plastics.
- The pollution-controlling authority should install meters for recording the emission or the effluent discharged in the process of production or consumption of plastics.

## Evaluating the social cost

- The social costs should be estimated differently in the local/regional and global contexts.
- Health and hygiene are the factors in the local context
- Climate change is the predominant factor in the global context.
- Eco-tax rates on plastics should be equal to the marginal social cost arising from the negative externality associated with production, consumption or

disposal of goods and services. This requires evaluation of damage to the environment based on scientific assessment of the adverse impacts on health, environment, etc.

## Conclusion

The comprehensive policy measures against plastics should involve,

- Removal of existing taxes and subsidies that have a negative environmental impact, taking into account the different types or grades of plastics, and restructuring existing taxes in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Inclusion of creative and effective policy solutions to reduce plastic consumption.
- Promoting multiple uses of plastics through better waste management, educating the public, incentivising R & D activities for substitute development, appropriate disposal mechanisms and waste management.

## 59. Frozen by uncertainty

The Monetary Policy Committee's decision to leave interest rates unchanged and retain its "accommodative" policy stance.

### Background

- The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in its recent meeting, kept the policy interest rates unchanged and by a 5-1 majority voted to continue the 'accommodative' stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward.
- The MPC noted there had been a loss in momentum of the economic activity as reflected in high-frequency indicators due to the spread of the Omicron variant.
- The MPC also noted that consumer price inflation has risen since its last meeting.
- Critics claim that this stance by the RBI indicates that the central bank has frozen into inaction by the immeasurable uncertainties surrounding the pandemic-hit economy.

### Current situation of the Economy

- Both the global and domestic economies have seen a loss of momentum in the wake of the Omicron wave and the prospects for the recovery have become riskier in the face of the uncertainties posed by the pandemic.
- In India, private consumption, which is crucial for domestic demand, has shown little signs of recovery.

- Further, the persistent increase in international commodity prices, a surge in volatility in international financial markets and global supply bottlenecks, and the risks to the outlook are heightened.
- The RBI's forecast of 7.8% growth is its forecast for GDP expansion in 2022-23 is lower compared to the 8.0%-8.5% projection made in the Economic Survey.
- With the contact-intensive components of the services sector and private investment also being still, the central bank expects growth in the next fiscal to sharply slow down from a 17.2% expansion in Q1 to 4.5% in Q4.
- Consumer Price Index-based inflation is seen rising in the current fiscal quarter and averaging 5.7% after 'moving close' to the upper tolerance threshold of 6% in January 2022.
- The RBI governor acknowledges that the hardening of global crude oil prices poses a major upside risk to the outlook for price gains.

### Analysis

- An expected softening in vegetable prices on account of winter arrivals, and the improving prospects for foodgrains production have prompted the authorities to propose that the "improving inflation outlook" gives them comfort to continue to keep policy 'growth supportive'.
- The monetary policy would continue to be guided by its primary mandate of price stability over the medium term, while also ensuring a strong and sustained economic recovery.
- With the MPC's forecast for inflation to average 4.5% over 2022-23 predicted based on a normal monsoon, the RBI's panel has risked its primary mandate of ensuring price stability and imparting monetary momentum to the economy.

### Conclusion

At a time when inflation is peaking, prompting major central banks including the Federal Reserve in the U.S. to start normalizing policy, there is a real danger of the RBI falling behind the curve.

### 60. Clearing the airways

The Government has allowed fully vaccinated passengers from 82 countries to skip the mandatory quarantine period.

### Impact of Pandemic on Indian Tourism:

- As per a report by the UN World Tourism Organization, India was 96 per cent below its pre-pandemic numbers till June 2021.

- In 2019-2020, the tourism sector is estimated to have directly contributed 2.7 per cent to the GDP and 6.7 per cent to the employment of the country.
- Currently, India has air bubble agreements with 35 countries.

### Ways for Restoring Confidence in Tourism:

- Leveraging technology and applications for more convenient travel will help in further scaling up this traction.
- Bringing in additional such ideas to action may restore traveller confidence considerably.
- Technologically superior technology players can enter the market and offer customized solutions to the people involved in the travel and tourism industry.
- Firms with resources can help create a unified platform for the travel requirements of agents, as well as end consumers.
- Authorities should invest in educating the stakeholders, training service providers, and cautioning all travellers about safe practices to be followed.

### 61. Sinking Sundarbans

This article examines the climate crisis of Sundarbans in India.

#### About Sundarbans:

- The Sunderban delta is named after a special type of mangrove tree called Sundari.
- These trees are very common in the mangrove forests of West Bengal.
- The Sundarban Delta is located from the Hooghly River in India's state of West Bengal to the Baleswar River in Bangladesh.
- The Sundarbans is a mangrove area in the delta formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers in the Bay of Bengal.

#### What are the reasons behind the climate crisis of Sundarbans?

- **Deforestation:** Trees are cut down rigorously from the mangrove forest for firewood. Thus, the green cover of the rich mangrove forest is vanishing.
- **Soil Erosion:** Another factor that has been posing a massive threat to the land is soil erosion.
- **Water Attacks:** There are not enough trees in Sundarbans to hold the soil during high tides and rain. It has become more susceptible to violent water attacks.

- **Rising Water levels:** Rising water levels have also degraded the cultivable land quality and reduced crop yield, leading to a food and drinking water crisis.
- **Other Disasters:** Devastating floods, intense storms, and torrential rain have become frequent. Cyclones such as Aila, Amphaan and Yaas have changed the geography of the land.

## 62. When will India's mRNA vaccine be out?

India's first indigenously developed mRNA vaccine is expected to be released by the Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals in order to broaden the scope of RNA therapy making its use much beyond COVID-19.

### About mRNA vaccine:

- mRNA (messenger Ribonucleic Acid) vaccines pave a new era in the realm of vaccine research and development.
- Traditionally, vaccines incorporate a part of a harmless pathogen in the body against which the antibodies are targeted.
- In case of mRNA vaccines, the mRNA molecules of the pathogen (SARS-CoV-2 mRNA in case of the COVID-19 virus) are used to activate the immune system to combat the virus and other infectious agents.
- This vaccine has been developed with an approach that ensures a significant immune response along with safety.
- The researchers emphasised on the fact that minimising the injection of a foreign body results in reduced possibility of adverse reactions.
- Therefore in mRNA vaccines, a piece of genetic code is introduced into the body of the individuals to trigger immune responses. The genetic code corresponds to the viral protein present on the outer membrane of the virus.



# How mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines Work

## Understanding the virus that causes COVID-19.

Coronaviruses, like the one that causes COVID-19, are named for the crown-like spikes on their surface, called **spike proteins**. These **spike proteins** are ideal targets for vaccines.

## What is mRNA?

Messenger RNA, or mRNA, is genetic material that tells your body how to make proteins.

## What is in the vaccine?

The vaccine is made of mRNA wrapped in a coating that makes delivery easy and keeps the body from damaging it.

## How does the vaccine work?

The mRNA in the vaccine teaches your cells how to make copies of the **spike protein**. If you are exposed to the real virus later, your body will recognize it and know how to fight it off.



## GETTING VACCINATED?

For information about COVID-19 vaccine, visit: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/vaccines](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus/vaccines)



Image Source: cdc.gov

## The Present Status of the Vaccine:

- The mRNA vaccine in India is currently in phase 2 and 3 trials to examine the immunogenicity, safety and tolerability.
- The study has been carried out across various sites in Phase-2 and 3 using Covishield for comparison as the placebo trials have been prohibited by the regulatory authorities.

- The results from the Phase-1 study are anticipated to be published soon.

### **Advantages:**

- Evidence reveals that mRNA Vaccine shows robust immune response in the trials and enhanced protection against infections.
- As it employs only the genetic code, it is easily updated in response to the emergence of variants.

### **Where lies the Challenge?**

- The major challenge with mRNA vaccines is with respect to its storage which mandates temperature spanning from -90 degree Celsius to -50 degree Celsius.
- Such stringent freezing conditions are expensive to be maintained.
- There is a wide gap between vaccine preparation and its supply due to challenges in scaling up production.

### **Hope for the future:**

The mRNA vaccines, with its entry into the market, will expand India's vaccination drive and offer resilience towards a pandemic-like situation in the upcoming days.

### **63. Center readies for LIC listing, to offload 5% stake in insurer**

The government is planning to sell 5 percent of its stake in Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), through an initial public offering (IPO).

### **What is the Issue?**

- LIC Initial public offer comprises the net offer, the employee reservation portion and the policyholder reservation portion.
- The IPO works out to five per cent of the total capital shares with the government retaining the remaining 95 per cent.
- The IPO is an 100% OFS [offer for sale] by the Government of India and entails no fresh issue of shares by LIC.

### **What does it mean for the government and LIC?**

- **Benefits For Government:**
  - The government will be entitled to the entire proceeds of the offer after deducting the offer expenses and relevant taxes thereon. LIC will not receive any proceeds from the offer.

- It will be a big boost to the government's revenues and aid in bringing down the deficit.
- **Benefits For LIC:**
  - The listing of the shares means higher visibility and profile. Investors will be able to actively trade in its shares on the stock exchanges.
  - It also means more transparency from the LIC side which was hitherto answerable only to the government.
  - LIC will be accountable to the investors and meet their expectations.
  - Investors are expected to demand a high level of corporate governance from the corporation.

### **LIC IPO: Impact on Economy**

- The LIC IPO is an "excellent development" not only for India's capital markets, but also for the country's economic growth.
- A good listing could help LIC raise as much as \$10 billion from the IPO, with a minimum dilution of 5 per cent.
- In such a scenario, it would be the third biggest IPO globally involving an insurer.
- It will help the government substantially reduce its disinvestment target deficit for the ongoing fiscal year.
- The massive listing could result in an expanded market capitalisation of the Indian market with greater liquidity.

### **What are the challenges to the issue?**

- Inflation has been a growing concern worldwide and the central banks around the world are looking to raise the interest rates.
- The equity markets are likely to remain under pressure in the near future.
- A rise in interest rates in the US and in other developed markets would mean that Foreign portfolio investment (FPIs) will pull out money from emerging markets especially from the equity markets and move them into US treasury bonds.
- It will put pressure on the secondary market but even reduce the liquidity availability for investments into primary market issuances.
- A decline in equity markets in the near term would also reduce the government's ability to command a higher premium for the issue.
- In order to help a large issue sail through, the government may have to settle down to a lower price in order to make it attractive for the investors.
- Investors will have to carefully look at the pricing of the issue and do their due diligence on valuation.

## 64. India's semiconductor dream

The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of the global supply chain of semiconductor manufacturing.

### Reasons for disruption in the supply of semiconductors

- Supply-side constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Overdependence of the world on East Asia for fab manufacturing (semiconductor fabrication plant is commonly called as “fab”)
- The rising prices of silicon
- The China-U.S. trade war

### Global initiatives to resolve semiconductor shortage

- Various countries are trying to safeguard their interests by introducing packages to attract more chip manufacturing.
- The U.S. has announced a \$50 billion package to create factories
- Intel is adding two more foundries to its Arizona campus and is also developing its own foundry business to compete with chip-makers such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC).
- TSMC, which controls 24% of the semiconductor supply chain, is setting up a \$12 billion facility in Arizona.
- Japan and Germany have got TSMC to start specialty technology fabs in their countries.

### Initiatives by India

- India has approved a \$10 billion package to incentivise the manufacturing of semiconductors in the country.
- The government has announced a list of incentives to attract leading international manufacturers to set up their manufacturing units in India.
- **Production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme** for semiconductor and display board production. The scheme has been allocated ₹76,000 crores.
- **Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme** – The Program aims to train 85,000 high-quality and qualified engineers in the area of Very-large-scale integration (VLSI) and Embedded System Design.
- **Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme** – The scheme aims to nurture at least 20 domestic companies involved in semiconductor design and facilitate them to achieve a turnover of more than ₹1500 crores in the next 5 years(2022-27).

## Way forward

- **Fab manufacturing**
  - India has the largest number of chip designers outside of the U.S.
    - **Example:** Karnataka has over 85 fabless chip design houses of various global companies.
  - To create the ecosystem for fab manufacturing, it is important to lock in the demand for semiconductors produced within the country.
  - The total demand for semiconductors stands at \$24 billion. This is expected to grow to \$80-90 billion by 2030.
  - It would be ideal to enter into an agreement with the consumers of such semiconductors to ensure that the production is consumed within the country.
- **Develop raw material supply capabilities**
  - The India Electronics and Semiconductor Association is exploring the opportunity to start supplying processed raw materials like minerals and gases to the fab industries.
  - This will help the Indian gas, materials, and mines industry and also expand opportunities for semiconductor equipment, spares, and service industry.
- **Fab clustering**
  - To ensure that semiconductor supply chains and related businesses are in one place to create linkages.
  - Such sites should be chosen based on the ability of the location to act as a force multiplier for the development of an ecosystem.
  - It needs to ensure high-quality infrastructure along with uninterrupted power availability and the availability of semiconductor grade Ultra Pure Water to the extent of 10 MLD per fab.
- Creating a conducive environment for women and night shifts with zero labour disputes.
- Focus on encouraging Indian manufacturers and start-ups to enter and master complex R&Ds
- Premier research institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science should be incentivised to work on R&D in chip designing and manufacturing.
- Further, the government must focus on emerging technologies like LiDAR and Phased Array in which incumbents do not have a disproportionate advantage and the entry barrier is low.



## 65. India lacks solar waste handling policy

### Details

- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimated that the global photovoltaic waste will touch **78 million tonnes** by 2050, with India being one of the top five generators of such waste.
- India currently considers solar waste a part of electronic waste and does not account for it separately.

### India's solar energy capacity

- India has set a target of producing 100 GW of solar energy by 2022.
- The cumulative capacity of grid-connected solar photovoltaic (PV) installations is around **40 GW** and of the current capacity,
  - About **35.6 GW** is generated from ground-mounted plants
  - About 4.4 GW from rooftop solar panels

### The need for a policy on managing solar waste

- Solar panels have an estimated life of 25 years, and given that most of the installed systems in India are early in their lifecycle, they are unlikely to generate a large quantity of solar waste.
  - However, according to the **Council for Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)**, end-of-life was only one of the possible waste streams for PV modules and there were several other stages where modules could get damaged.
- Modules could develop defects during the plant operations and be discarded even before their scheduled life span.
- According to CEEW, PV modules have generated a cumulative waste of nearly **2,85,000 tonnes**, as of FY21.

### Way forward

- **Circular economy** – Minister for New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) said that a committee had been constituted to propose an action plan to evolve a “circular economy” in solar panels, through the reuse/recycling of waste generated.
- **Recovery of raw materials** – There was no commercial raw material recovery facility for solar e-waste in India, but a facility for material recovery had been set up by a private company in Gummidipoondi (Tamil Nadu).



- **Ramp-up domestic manufacturing** – Much of India’s solar PV manufacturing uses imported components with parts imported from China.

## 66. A miracle cure against HIV

A U.S. patient has become the first woman and the third person to date to be cured of HIV after receiving a stem cell transplant from a donor.

### Background

- At a Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in the United States, researchers described the case of a 60-year-old woman who was diagnosed with an HIV infection in 2013. She was also later diagnosed with leukaemia in 2017.
- She received embryonic stem cells from a donor with a rare mutation that naturally blocks HIV from infecting cells. She was also given adult stem cells, from a relative.
- The adult stem cells boosted the immunity and possibly helped the embryonic stem cells fully integrate with the lady’s immune system.
- After 14 months, doctors report that the woman has no sign of HIV in her blood and also has no detectable antibodies to the virus.

### Prevalence of HIV/AIDS in India

- In 2019, HIV prevalence among adult males (15–49 years) was estimated at **0.24%** and among females at **0.20%** of the population.
- As of 2019, there were **23.48 lakh** Indians with HIV.
  - Maharashtra had the maximum at **3.96 lakh** followed by Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
- As per the India HIV Estimation 2019 report, the estimated adult HIV prevalence is on a downward trend and stabilizing in India since the epidemic’s peak in 2000.
- India’s National Aids Control Organisation says that anti-retroviral treatment (ART) therapy is “freely available” to all those who require it that could be availed at dedicated centres across the country.

### Anti-retroviral therapy (ART)

- The treatment for HIV is called anti-retroviral therapy (ART). ART involves taking a combination of HIV medicines every day.
- ART consists of tenofovir, emtricitabine and raltegravir.
- ART effectively suppresses replication, if taken at the right time and thus restores the immune system and halts the onset and progression of the disease as well as reduces chances of getting opportunistic infections.

- The main goal of HIV treatment is to reduce a patient's viral load to an undetectable level. An undetectable viral load means that the level of HIV in the blood is too low to be detected by a viral load test.

### Previous cases of HIV recovery

- Only two people have reportedly been cured of HIV.
- Till now both the recoveries have relied on bone marrow transplants from donors who carried **CCR5 delta 32** mutations, that naturally make one immune to an HIV infection.
- The previous transplants involved adult stem cells and these cells from the bone marrow replaced their immune system.
- The body's natural tendency is to reject foreign stem cells and hence both donors suffered side effects called **graft-versus-host disease** and developed severe illnesses throughout their HIV remission.

### Concerns with the new stem-cell therapy

- The woman was discharged from the hospital within 17 days of the transplant and did not develop graft-versus-host disease. However, it remains to be studied if the lady will further develop any side effects.
- Stem cell therapy is a complex exercise and is not accessible to most HIV patients.
- This therapy requires stem cells from a rare group of individuals with beneficial mutations.

### Way forward

- Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) has been successful in ensuring that proper treatment has resulted in better life spans comparable to those without HIV. Hence it needs to be made accessible across the world.
- A vaccine for HIV or a permanent drug that eliminates the virus is yet to be made available and would be the long-sought 'cure' for HIV.

## 67. I&B Ministry warns officials on data security

Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has given directives in order to protect data security of crucial information.

### What is Data Security?

- Data security refers to the process of protecting data from unauthorized access and data corruption throughout its lifecycle.

- It includes data encryption, hashing, tokenization, and key management practices that protect data across all applications and platforms.

### Orders given by the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry

- The Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has prohibited the sharing of top secret or secret documents by its officials over the Internet.
- The Ministry has raised concern over violation of the Departmental Security instructions and the **National Information Security Policy Guidelines (NISPG)**.
  - NISPG has been prepared by MHA in the wake of expanding information security threat scenarios.
  - It aims at improving information security posture of organizations possessing any information.
  - It does not restrict organizations from adopting additional stringent practices over and above these guidelines.
- The order said that confidential and restricted information could be shared on the Internet via networks having a commercial **Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) 256-bit mechanism**.
  - AES-256 supports the largest bit size and is practically unbreakable by brute force based on current computing power, making it the strongest encryption standard.
- The Ministry has directed that top secret and secret documents be shared only in a closed network with the leased line connectivity where the **Scientific Analysis Group (SAG)** grade encryption mechanism is deployed.
  - Scientific Analysis Group (SAG) is working in the area of cryptology and information security.
  - The SAG functions under the Defense Research & Development Organization.
- The Ministry has recommended the use of government email facilities or government instant messaging platforms.
  - The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing's **Samvad** and the National Informatics Centre's **Sandesh** for communicating such information can be used.

### 68. Narendra Modi flags off 100 'kisan drones'

The Prime Minister flagged off 100 "kisan drones" in different parts of the country for spraying pesticides and other farm materials.

### Use of Drones in Indian Agriculture

#### Significance of Drone Technology

- Drone technology helps to enhance productivity and efficiency in the sector to reach the highest potential.
- Agriculture drones efficiently study external factors like weather, soil conditions, and temperature and empowers the farmer to make mindful choices accordingly.
- The gained data helps regulate crop health, crop treatment, crop scouting, irrigation, and carry out field soil analysis and crop damage assessments.
- The drone survey helps boost crop yields and minimize time and expenses.

### Applications of Drone in Agriculture

- **Locusts Attacks:** The drones can be used for spraying of insecticides in the areas affected by locusts. Recently, the Maharashtra government decided to use drones to spray insecticides on swarms of locusts.
- **Mapping/Surveying:** The process of using a drone to map or survey crops is a relatively efficient way to gather exact information in a precise manner.
- **Crop Dusting/Spraying:** Use of drones in spraying and dusting crops helps reduce costs and potential pesticide exposure to workers who would have needed to spray those crops manually.
- **Irrigation Monitoring:** Drone survey helps improve water efficiency and disclose potential pooling/leaks in irrigation by providing Irrigation monitoring yields.
- **Crop Health Monitoring and Surveillance:** Agriculture drones can see which plants reflect different amounts of green light and Near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) light. This data helps produce multispectral images to track crop health.
- **Field Soil Analysis:** The drone survey allows seizing soil data, field soil analysis, irrigation, and nitrogen-level management which permits farmers to analyze their soil conditions thoroughly.

### Challenges:

- **Knowledge and Skill:** An average farmer cannot analyze drone functioning as it requires specialized skills and knowledge to translate it to any useful information.
- **Flight Time and Range:** Due to relatively higher payloads, the flight duration of drones used in agriculture is short which results in limited coverage of land.
- **High Cost:** Mostly, agricultural drones are costlier as it includes the cost of imaging sensors, software, hardware and tools.
- **National Laws:** Multiple laws governing drone use in India creates ambiguity besides affecting the production and use of drones.

- The requirement of obtaining an unmanned aircraft operator's permit (UAOP) for piloting drones, Permission for each flight through Online Digital Sky platform for No Permission No Take off (NPNT) compliance limits use of drones in agriculture.
- **Connectivity:** Farmers intending to use drones have to invest in connectivity or buy a drone with local data storing capability in a format that can be transferred and processed later.
- **Weather Dependent:** Drones are weather dependent. Under windy or rainy conditions, flying drones is not easy, unlike traditional aircrafts.
- **Misuse:** There is a chance of misuse to infringe the privacy of people and illegal transfer of information.

### Recommendations

- Encourage Start-ups to establish local drone manufacturing/assembling units for agriculture use.
- Develop a comprehensive legal and policy framework in the form of Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR 3.0) to encourage applications of drones in agriculture.
- Expedite Digital sky platform with its revision for pragmatic and practical implementation for enhanced drone usage.
- Capacity development for flying drones is required as it is a skill-based operation.
- Develop an enabling ecosystem with a single-window concept for entrepreneurs.
- Encourage Research in drone applications to study various operating parameters in agriculture.

### 69. Centre moots policy on synthetic biology

The Center is working on a national policy on synthetic biology

#### What is synthetic biology?

- Synthetic biology is an emerging science that deals with engineering life forms for a wide range of applications from making designer medicines to foods.
- Some examples of what scientists are producing with synthetic biology are:
  - Microorganisms harnessed for bioremediation to clean pollutants from our water, soil and air.
  - Modified rice to produce beta-carotene, a nutrient usually associated with carrots, that prevents vitamin
  - Yeast engineered to produce rose oil



### Applications of synthetic biology:

- The potential benefits from synthetic biotechnology are seen in biofuels, bioremediation, biosensors, food and health.
- Use of gene editing systems such as CRISPR that allow defective genes in animals, plants and even people to be silenced, or changed, and control biological outcomes.

### Government's Response so Far:

- As part of the 12th Five-Year Plan, India had set up a task force on systems biology and synthetic biology research in 2011.
  - It made a strong case for a push for the technology and highlighted that India could be a world leader as a protector and supporter of “open source biological platforms”.
- Parliament is yet to clear the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India Bill, 2013, that had mooted the creation of an independent regulator to adjudicate research around genetic engineering that could have also encompassed synthetic biology.
- There's also a ban on commercial genetically modified brinjal and many States have restrictions on field trials on GM food crops.

### What are the Challenges?

- **Regulatory Challenges:** The regulatory challenge is how to leverage its anticipated benefits while guarding against its potential risks. The laws and regulations governing traditional tools most often fail to fully adapt to the evolving possibilities of synthetic biology.
- **Security Challenges:** Biosafety and biosecurity issues emerging from research in synthetic biology.
- **Lack of Research:** India is lagging behind in this field of research and an urgent need arises to expand the research base if India wishes to accelerate the field of synthetic biology.

### 70. CBI examines NSE's former MD Ravi Narain in 'co-location' case

This article examines the NSE co-location case and order issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

### What is the National Stock Exchange (NSE) co-location case?

- The NSE is facing allegations that some brokers got preferential access through the co-location facility at the stock exchange, early login, and 'dark



fiber', which can allow a trader a split-second faster access to the data feed of an exchange.

- Even this infinitesimally sooner access is considered to result in huge gains for a trader.

### **What was the SEBI's order?**

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) penalized the former MD chief and chief executive officer of the NSE and a few others for allegedly violating securities contract rules in the appointment of Subramanian as group operating officer.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), in its order on governance lapses at the exchange, said an unknown 'spiritual force' in 2015 had advised her to reach out to top officials in the country to make "noises" on self-listing.

### **What are the Concerns raised?**

- The SEBI order spotlights the regulator's tardiness in adjudicating a sensitive matter involving the manner of appointment of a top-level NSE official.
- It also points out possible regulatory violations by the then CEO and MD in sharing confidential internal information with an unknown person.
- The top management and some key directors clearly failed to discharge their duties, largely because they trusted people at an institution that serves as a frontline regulator for the Indian capital market.
- Issues also encompass much-bigger concerns such as lapses at various levels, including the board, the regulator and the government, including those relating to the controversial co-location facilities and high-frequency trades.
- Such concerns are also being cast on the "fat finger trade" fiasco of 2012 were allegations that the crash was triggered by something else as a deliberate manipulation.
  - "Fat-finger trade" is a term used for punching error or wrong pressing of orders on the trading terminals.

### **What does the latest SEBI adjudication order mean for NSE?**

- The latest SEBI order will bring NSE closer to closure of the case which has been ongoing since 2016.
- The closure of this controversial case may help NSE bring out its Rs 10,000 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) that has been delayed because of the co-location probe.

## 71. Govt. bets big on animation, gaming

The Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) sector in the country could become the content creation factory of the world.

### Potential of Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) sector in India:

- According to a recent analysis by Sequoia India and BCG, India's gaming business generates \$1.5 billion in sales and is anticipated to triple to more than \$5 billion by 2025.
- By 2030, the Indian media and entertainment industry is predicted to grow at a rate of nine to eleven percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

### What is the Significance of AVGC sector in India?

- Young professionals will have a lot of opportunities in the AVGC sector, and new job prospects will be created for them.
- The AVGC industry will transform India into a worldwide player in the interactive entertainment arena, resulting in a high talent pool of developers and creative artists.
- The rise of the startup sector, together with the promotion of AVGC, will have a multiplier effect on the economy, resulting in an overall increase in GDP.
- Newer industry developments, such as metaverse and education digitization, could aid the AVGC sector's growth in India and prepare it to lead global change.

### Government Measures:

- **AVGC Center of Excellence (CoE):** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in 2020 announced that it will establish AVGC Center of Excellence (CoE) on the back of the belief that gamification and animation.
- Recently, the Karnataka government launched an AVGC Center of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru consisting of a high technology digital media hub.
- **AVGC Task Force:** Union Budget 2022 announced the creation of a new task force for AVGC industry with the help of all stakeholders to look at various ways in which domestic capacity is built and serve the global demand in the sector.

### Conclusion:

Gaming as an industry has been gaining popularity in the country in recent years, especially with the digital push. AVGC is best for job development since it focuses on creative content creation, which requires a lot of human capital and cannot be automated. An expansion of the credit line guarantee scheme will bring much-needed relief to the sectors impacted due to the pandemic.

## 72. Questions on MGNREGA budget estimation

The budget allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been disappointing. The article discusses various issues associated with the act and also talks about the adequate measures to address the issues.

### Background:

- The allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in the budget 2022-23 created a buzz. The concerns have been raised by the organizations such as All India Kisan Sabha and NREGA Sangharsh Morcha (NSM) regarding the inadequate amount of budget allocation.
- Despite the demands for higher budgetary allocations by activists and academics, the actual budget allocations are very low and inadequate to meet the needs of the beneficiaries.
- In the last two fiscal years, the budget allocations for the MGNREGA were just half of the amount recommended by the groups such as People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) and NSM.

### Consequences of low budgetary allocations:

The inadequate budget allocations for the MGNREGA have led to the following consequences:

- Deficits for state governments,
- Long delays in wage payment,
- The decline in the work provided in the last two quarters of the Fiscal Year 2021-22,
- Funds got exhausted at the end of September 2021-22 and many states were running a negative balance, and
- Significant pending dues at the end of the Fiscal Year 2021-22.

### Budget allocations for the MGNREGA at a glance:

There are two important variables that determine the budget calculation for the MGNREGA:

- The Projected Persondays in the coming year, and
- Wage rate

### **Budget calculation:**

- The projected person-days are the total days of work anticipated for the year. This is calculated by the District Program Coordinator and then submitted to the state. It is then collated with the entire state's projected demand and submitted to the center for approval.
- The MGNREGA MIS report R.2.2.2 contains the monthly projections approved by the center and the projected person-days as well.
- If we look at the data of FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21, then certain discrepancies can be found.
- In FYs 2019-20 and 2020-21, the person-days generated were about 18.4% higher in Q4 when compared to Q3. However, the projected person-days for Q4 in FY 2021-22 appeared to be strangely and significantly lower than that in Q3.
- FY 2020-21 was the year the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns that led to the increase in the demand for the MGNREGA work. It implies that the rural population was still relying on the MGNREGA for livelihood.
- In the FY 2021-22, for the first three quarters, person-days generated were only 7% lower than the person-days generated in the same three-quarters of FY 2020-21.
- It is not clear how these projections are arrived at and it seems that the government has not revised the projections for the Q4 of FY 2021-22 because in the Q4 the MGNREGA work demand increased significantly due to harvest season.

### **Curbing work demand:**

- There have been cases of curbing the work demand based on the availability of funds.
- For example, a report of the Business Standard asserted that the states were communicated by the Rural Development Ministry to cut down on the MGNREGA work because there was a lack of funds.
- Budget allocations for the MGNREGA are based on the projected person-days. Hence, any discrepancy in the calculation of the projected person-days will lead to inadequate budget allocation.
- The low projections for the person-days in the FY 2021-22 led to the supplementary allocation of only Rs. 25,000 crore when the activists have been demanding Rs, 50,000 crores.
- It is believed that the low budget allocations for FY 2022-23 are also because of the underestimated projected person-days.

### **Wage Rate:**

- It is clearly mandated in the MGNREGA act that wages paid to the workers cannot be less than the minimum wage in each state. But, the wages always remain lower than the minimum wage rate.
- An expert committee under the chairmanship of Anoop Satpathy has recommended a minimum wage of Rs. 375 per day as of July 2018.
- The PAEG used a conservative estimate of Rs. 269 per day in its recent report. But, according to the report of the NREGA, wages paid to the workers stood at Rs. 209 a day and by looking at the budget allocations, it is expected that the wage rate will not increase in the upcoming years.

### **Expenditure of the Central Government:**

- Even if the government pays Rs. 209 a day to a worker, then it is expected that the dues of the government will be around Rs. 20,000 crores at the end of the FY 2022-23.
- The projected expenditure of the Central Government for the FY 2022-23 is Rs. 1.02 lakh crore even if the wage bill, material costs, administrative cost increase in a linear manner.
- The dues of the previous FYs will add up to over Rs. 17,000 crores. If we add the above-mentioned figures then the total expenditure of the government will be Rs. 1.19 lakh crores for the FY 2022-23.
- The total budget allocations are Rs. 73,000 crores (for FY 2022-23) and Rs. 25,000 crores (Supplementary grants) and after clearing out the pending dues of Rs. 17,000 crore, the funds left for the FY will be Rs. 53,000 crores only.

### **Way Forward:**

- Employment Guarantee is treated as a legal right under the MGNREGA. that means any rural household can demand to work up to 100 days in a year and the government has to provide it.
- Hence, treating budget allocation as a ceiling to the work erodes the main aim of the scheme.
- The PAEG recommended a minimum budget allocation of Rs. 2.64 lakh crores considering the active households in the year only. However, even this number is lower than the number of households that are registered under the scheme.
- An initial budget allocation has to be made and apart from that, the government has to make the supplementary grants on the basis of the actual work demand in each state.

### 73. NASA's plan to decommission the International Space Station

NASA plans to decommission the International Space Station (ISS) by 2031.

#### International Space Station (ISS)

- The ISS was launched in 1998 by five space agencies, namely, **NASA** (USA), **Roscosmos** (Russia), **European Space Agency** (ESA-Europe), **JAXA** (Japan) and the **Canadian Space Agency** (CSA-Canada).
- The ISS operates in low-earth orbit and is at an altitude between about 200 km and 400 km and weighs more than 400,000 kg.
- The ISS orbits the earth at about 5 miles per second and makes 15.5 orbits per day. It takes about 93 minutes to make one revolution around the earth.
- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has announced plans to retire and decommission the International Space Station (ISS) by 2031.

#### The Reasons for Decommissioning the ISS

- The ISS was initially built to operate for 15 years. The space station has surpassed the timeline and plans to serve till 2030.
- The ISS goes through 16 rotations of the earth per day, experiencing extreme temperature changes, causing intense expansion and contraction of the material.
  - The side facing the sun gets heated up to 121°C.
  - The temperature on the opposite, darker side falls upto -157°C.
- The orbital thermal cycling, along with dynamic loading, affects the longevity of the structure of the ISS.
- The technical lifetime of the space station is also limited, with parts like radiators, modules and truss structures tend to degrade over time.

#### Challenges with the decommissioning

- The ISS is a huge structure and it was not designed to be disassembled in space.
  - The process of dismantling in space has posed huge logistical and financial challenges.
- The ISS cannot be decommissioned by boosting to a higher orbit because of its large mass and low operational altitude.
  - The station also has a mass of over 4,30,000 kg.
  - Existing propulsion systems cannot raise the station's altitude to a high target and escape low-earth orbit.



- The random re-entry method was discarded since it carries a huge risk for the human population on the ground.

### The process of decommissioning

- NASA plans to remove the ISS from its orbit around the earth and eventually plunge it into the ocean at a point farthest from human settlements.
- NASA will use the dual method of **natural orbit decay** and a **re-entry manoeuvre** to decommission the ISS.
- The earth's atmospheric drag will be used to lower the altitude of the ISS while setting up the de-orbit.
- The space station operators provide the final push to lower the structure to the maximum possible height and ensure safe re-entry into the earth's atmosphere, leading it to **Point Nemo** over the **South Pacific Oceanic Uninhabited Area (SPOUA)**.
- The exterior of the module is expected to melt when it re-enters the earth's atmosphere.
- The internal hardware is also expected to burn during the process.
- It is believed that denser components will survive the re-entry and fall into the SPOUA.
- NASA claims that the process will not cause any substantial long-term impact on the environment.

### Future space stations

- China announced that its space station will be ready for operations in 2022.
- Blue Origin, an aerospace company, has also announced its plans to build **Orbital Reef**, a commercially developed, owned, and operated space station in low-earth orbit.

## 74. Ploughing a new channel for India's food systems

The transformation of food systems in India would require interfaces between the areas of science, society and policy that intend to focus on sustainability, resource efficiency and circularity.

### A blend of Science and Policy:

- A tripartite association between science, society and policy is necessary for transforming the food systems in the country addressing the issues of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.
- The instance of Green Revolution in the 1960s, can set a suitable example of the collaboration between science and technology with policy measures of the

government. This involved extensive agricultural research and technology transfer at the national, regional, state and local levels.

- The Training and Visit system that was developed with assistance from the World Bank acted as a key to the science and society interface through which a cadre of agricultural specialists was provided at the local level.

### **Food security in India: The Present scenario**

- In a large scale measurement, India is now self-sufficient in the production of food grains. However, it harbours a considerable number of people who have poor or no access to food security.
- In order to ensure food security for all, a caloric target has been set by ICMR (Indian Council for Medical Research) which is 2400 Kcal in rural areas and 2100 Kcal in the urban areas.
- It becomes essential to establish a food system which is inclusive in nature to achieve the caloric target for the growing population of the country.
- As time progressed, the nutrition indicators have shown marginal improvement with policy interventions like the POSHAN Abhiyan.
- The macro and micronutrient malnutrition have increased to 18.7% in women and 16.2% in men. This reflects an alarming fact that a considerable group of the population cannot access sufficient food to meet the nutritional demands.
- The fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS) revealed that 32% of children below five years are underweight.
- India ranked 101 out of 116 countries in the Global Hunger Index(GHI), 2021 which provides a comprehensive index to measure and track hunger at global, regional and national levels.
- All these estimates raise significant concerns about growing poverty and malnutrition.
- The present hour determines a dual challenge for the country of achieving nutrition security as well as addressing declining land productivity and land degradation.

### **Ways Suggested for a sustainable future:**

- There is a need for transition from the isolated approach of agriculture meeting the food security demands to sustainable food systems for better nutrition, enhanced food production, aggregation, processing, distribution and consumption with a firm engagement with the socio-economic and physical context.
- Scientific interventions, in order to give effect to social outcomes, have to be planned and executed within the theory of change. This was perhaps the important takeaway from the Green Revolution.

- Adoption of new seeds and practices which were introduced by the Training and Visit system enabled science to drive the process of change. The intensification of economic, environmental and climate change issues can be tackled by a transition that includes spatial, social and scientific dimensions along with policy incentives and mechanisms for achieving a sustainable, resilient and food secure agriculture.
- Review of the agro-climatic zones at regular intervals can open up avenues of profit for smallholders farming with increased agricultural efficiency, socio-economic development and sustainability.
- The policies pertaining to the food systems of the country must prioritise strengthening and shortening of food supply chains, reinforcing the regional food systems, food processing, agricultural resilience along with enormous emphasis on research and investments.
- A suitable ecosystem for infrastructural development is expected to boost agri-preuners and agri micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) accompanied by institutional support. This will play a central role in ensuring an inclusive and sustainable network of food security in the country.

### **75. Surprise enemy with Indian weapons**

The Prime Minister of India emphasised on the significance of customisation and uniqueness towards the establishment of vibrant defence systems.

#### **Strengthening the defence systems:**

- Incorporation of innovation and new technologies in the defence sector will be a potential weapon in fighting our adversaries.
- In order to boost self reliance in defence manufacturing and production, the Union Budget 2022-23 has provided considerable assistance.
- The budget intended to provide a level playing field for private players and start-ups to flourish that would cater the demands of the defence industry.
- The government has decided to set up an independent nodal umbrella body to meet the wide range of requirements and bring in a more transparent, time bound and pragmatic approach in trial, testing and certification of defence equipment.
- Multiple avenues will be opening up for research and development in defence by bridging the gap between academia and industries. A 25% of defence R & D budget has been allocated for the purpose of bringing together industry, start-ups and academia.
- To further the development of defence start-ups with active participation of private players, a Special Purpose Vehicle model has been developed.
- This will engage the private industry not just as a vendor or supplier but a partner.

- The defence procurement list has conveyed positivity in terms of indigenisation.
- Government has been taking active steps to encourage self reliance in defence by improving the quality assurance process, building Defence Industrial Corridors and so on and so forth.
- Over 350 new industrial licences have been issued for defence manufacturing in the last seven years.
- Efforts have been made to incorporate information technology in defence to tackle the issue of cyber security which is also a form of threat to national security.

### **Towards a vibrant defence industry:**

- Indigenisation of technology and its promotion in the defence sector is indispensable for fighting the adversaries with efficiency and confidence.
- The several policy interventions by the government exemplifies India's attentiveness towards establishing a self-reliant ecosystem for defence which is in line with the futuristic vision of Make in India.

### **76. Exclusion from SWIFT: what it entails**

The U.S., Europe and several other western nations are moving to exclude Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).

#### **What is SWIFT?**

- SWIFT stands for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication.
- SWIFT, first used in 1973, went live in 1977 with 518 institutions from 22 countries, its website states. SWIFT itself had replaced the much slower and far less dynamic Telex.
- SWIFT is a messaging network used by banks and financial institutions globally for quick and faultless exchange of information pertaining to financial transactions.
- Know more about **SWIFT**

#### **What happens if one is excluded from SWIFT?**

- If a country is excluded from the most participatory financial facilitating platform, its foreign funding would take a hit, making it entirely reliant on domestic investors.
- This is particularly troublesome when institutional investors are constantly seeking new markets in newer territories.

- An alternative system would be cumbersome to build and even more difficult to integrate with an already expansive system.

### How is the organization governed?

- SWIFT claims to be neutral.
- Its shareholders elect the 25-member board, which is responsible for oversight and management of the company.
- It is regulated by G-10 central banks of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and Sweden, alongside the European Central Bank.
- Its lead overseer is the National Bank of Belgium.
- The SWIFT oversight forum was established in 2012.

### 77. A day to embody the true spirit of science

The Government is organising a Science Week called 'Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate'.

#### Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate

- A programme titled Vigyan Sarvatra Pujyate is being held to celebrate the S & T achievements of India over the past 75 years as a prelude to National Science Day on February 28 that commemorates Sir C.V. Raman's discovery on light scattering.
- It is being held at 75 locations across the length and breadth of the country.
- The aim of the program is to inspire India's youth into building a progressive nation.

#### Freeman Dyson's views

- Freeman Dyson in his book, **The Scientist as Rebel**, argues about why dissent is the soul of science.
- He believes that science is universal, like music, dance or poetry.
- He considered evidence-based modern science as an intellectual rebellion or as a form of dissent against social constraints or the restrictions imposed by the locally prevailing culture.
- He also views that the Arabs, Indians, Japanese and Chinese have contributed highly to the development of modern science.

#### Indian context

- For Indian scientists in the past, science was a double rebellion,
  - One against English domination.
  - And another against the fatalistic ethos of religion.

- This rebellious spirit revived science in India in the pre-Independence era.
- Sir C.V. Raman's discovery should not be seen independent of the social reform movements of those days.
- With an ideological shift in recent times, academic freedom is now under greater pressure.
- For science to excel it needs to be promoted in a free spirit.
- As Dyson argues, "science is an inherently subversive act, a threat to establishment of all kinds, whether it upends a long-standing scientific idea, or it questions the received political wisdom or irrationality".

### **Need for transformation**

- Cultural changes are difficult to achieve, especially in a society that is bound by traditions.
- A former Director-General of the CSIR, said that tradition-bound countries such as India need to free themselves from the cultural chains of the past to foster original thinking.
- It is the duty of scientists to promote a free and unrestricted intellectual environment by actively engaging in the transformation of values.
- A key challenge is to strengthen the social democratic norms within the institutes that represent Indian diversity.
- National Science Day should provide a platform where free discussions are organised, endorsing the true spirit of science, that help realise its huge transformative potential.

### **78. Tackling the plastic problem**

The UN Environment Assembly meeting in February-March 2022.

#### **Plastic waste in aquatic ecosystems**

- A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report in 2021, estimated that emissions of plastic waste into the aquatic ecosystems would triple by 2040 if no actions are undertaken.
- The UN Environment Assembly meeting scheduled in 2022 may formulate a way forward for global cooperation in this regard.

#### **Negative impacts of Plastic waste**

- Plastic products like bags, bottles, etc. take a long time to decompose.
- The increase in the consumption worldwide and low interests in recycling programmes have led to more prevalence of plastic wastes.
- Plastic wastes result in a huge loss of marine life, especially Marine fisheries and wildlife.



- This also impacts the livelihoods and income of people in the coastal regions, who are dependent on marine ecosystems.

### Consumption externality

- Plastics is an example of a **consumption externality** (which involves many people) rather than a **production externality** (which involves one or multiple firms)
- Consumption externality is a complex issue, as it is challenging to differentiate the behaviour of consumers.
- Since the number of consumers is more, the cost of controlling them will also be high.

### Key challenges

- Several regions across the world have banned plastic items, although this approach promotes a sustainable environment, and helps save marine and wildlife ecosystems, It causes:
  - Inconvenience for consumers
  - Increases substitution cost
  - Creates unemployment as it affects the production of plastics
  - Leads to less economic activity
  - Leads to less income generation
- The replacement of plastics that are low cost, have substitutes that result in a deadweight loss for the economy.
- If plastics are banned, the efficiency of imposing tax and the associated problems have to be considered.
- It is complex to identify and impose an exact tax regime as it depends on specific factors that vary across countries.

### Way forward

- The environment regulation for plastics should include a 'command and control' approach.
  - "Command-and-control" approach demands the polluters to meet emission-reduction targets and facilitates the installation and use of specific types of equipment to reduce emissions.
- The effectiveness of regulations depends on its framework, foundation, design and execution.
- Regulations should be credible, transparent and predictable.
- A tax rate should be carefully determined and in general, the rate of tax on plastics should be higher than the cost of compliance.

- Eco-taxes may be imposed in the various stages of production, consumption or disposal of plastics.
- The pollution-controlling authority should install meters for recording the emission or the effluent discharged in the process of production or consumption of plastics.

### **Evaluating the social cost**

- The social costs should be estimated differently in the local/regional and global contexts.
- Health and hygiene are the factors in the local context
- Climate change is the predominant factor in the global context.
- Eco-tax rates on plastics should be equal to the marginal social cost arising from the negative externality associated with production, consumption or disposal of goods and services. This requires evaluation of damage to the environment based on scientific assessment of the adverse impacts on health, environment, etc.

### **Conclusion**

The comprehensive policy measures against plastics should involve,

- Removal of existing taxes and subsidies that have a negative environmental impact, taking into account the different types or grades of plastics, and restructuring existing taxes in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Inclusion of creative and effective policy solutions to reduce plastic consumption.
- Promoting multiple uses of plastics through better waste management, educating the public, incentivising R & D activities for substitute development, appropriate disposal mechanisms and waste management.

### **79. DRDO, Safran to develop engine for aircraft**

- India and France are concluding a deal for the joint development of a 125KN engine for the indigenous fifth generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

### **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA):**

- The Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) is envisioned as a replacement for the British SEPECAT Jaguar and Mirage 2000 the IAF flies.

- AMCA is an Indian programme to develop fifth generation fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy.
- The collaboration is between the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and French engine maker Safran.
- The initial design of the AMCA started way back in 2009 and is envisaged as a twin engine stealth aircraft with an internal weapons bay.

## 80. Radiation spike in Chernobyl

A rise in the levels of radiation was observed in the Chernobyl exclusion zone and a warning has been given for the seizure of the nuclear plant by the invading Russian troops to evade disastrous consequences.

### Overview of the issue:

- The Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant is considered as the most radioactive place on earth. It has been suggested to seize the nuclear plant on the grounds of disaster management and environmental sustainability.
- If the situation is not controlled, there is a possibility of harmful radioactive emissions of Plutonium-239 that can become a nuclear bomb threatening numerous lives and the environment.