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**APRIL 2022**

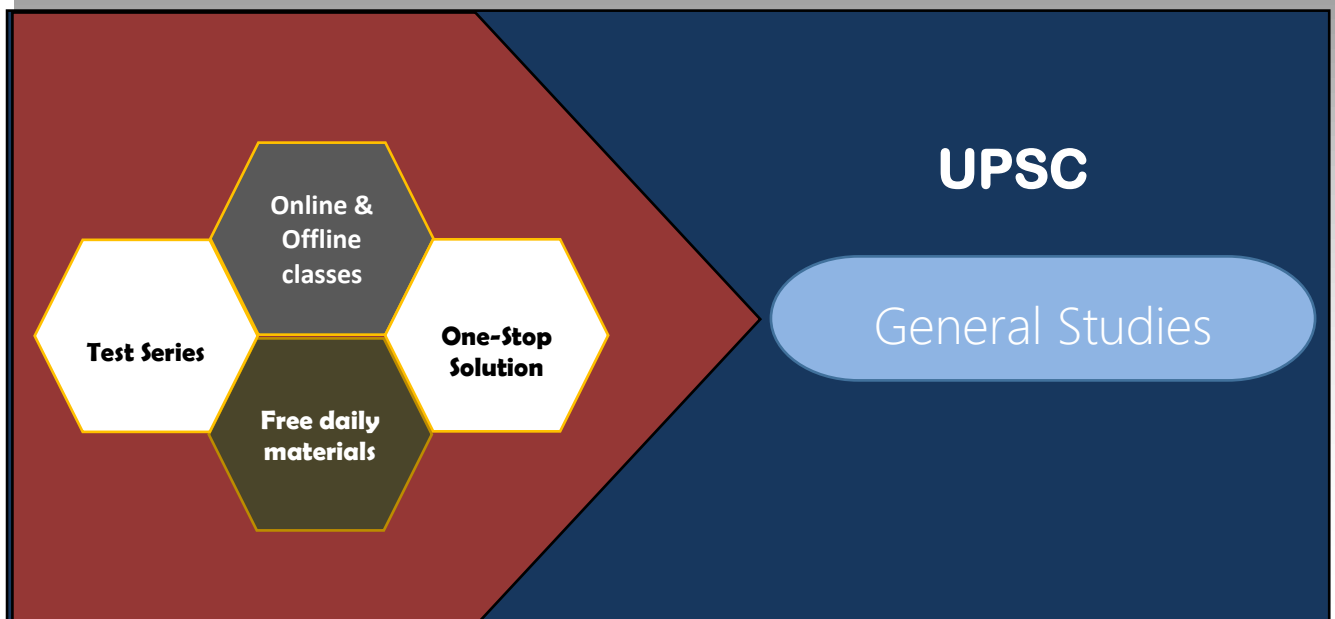
**Monthly current affairs magazine**

# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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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. Places in news: Jagannath Puri Temple**

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has asked the Odisha government to tweak its much-vaunted Shree Mandira Parikrama Project (SMPP) – a massive beautification project around the 12th-century Jagannath temple in Puri – which has already run into a controversy.

#### **What is the issue?**

- It is being alleged that neither does the State government have permission of the National Monuments Authority (NMA) nor does it have approval from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to plan.
- Execution of the project could potentially pose a threat to the centuries-old temple.

#### **What is the AMASR Act?**

- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (or AMASR Act) was passed in 1958.
- It is an act of the Parliament that provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance.
- It provides for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.
- The Archaeological Survey of India functions under the provisions of this act.
- The rules stipulate that area in the vicinity of the monument, within 100 metres is prohibited area.
- The area within 200 meters of the monument is regulated category.
- Any repair or modifications of buildings in this area requires prior permission

## 2. Who was Guru Nabha Dass?

Punjab government has announced gazetted holiday on the birth anniversary of Guru Nabha Dass, a 16th century saint, taking it out from list of restricted holidays.

### Who was Guru Nabha Dass?

- Guru Nabha Dass was born on April 8, 1537 at village Bhadrachalam on the bank of Godavari river in Khammam district, which falls in the present day Telangana.
- He belonged to Mahasha also known as doom or dumna community, which is one of the Schedule Caste communities.
- Since childhood, orphaned Guru Nabha Dass, whose original name was Narayan Dass, had an inclination towards spirituality.
- Two religious gurus – Agar Dass and Keel Dass – who were passing through his village took the orphan child to a temple at Ghalta Dham, which is now main pilgrimage of Nabhadassias, at Jaipur.
- People from this community are also known as Nabhadassias. They are known for making baskets and grain storage containers with bamboo.

### His legacy

- Guru Nabha Dass wrote 'Bhagatmal' in 1585.
- It has the life history of around 200 saints. He died in 1643.

### What is his connection with Punjab?

- Guru Nabha Dass used to visit village Pandori in Gurdaspur district where people of Doom community live.
- Some gurus of the community also used to live there.

### What made government announce gazetted holiday now?

- Political parties can't manage to ignore the sentiments of such a large community.
- The community had been requesting the government to declare April 8 as a gazetted holiday since long.

## 3. Artform in news: Yakshagana

Many students from Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Rajasthan are enrolling for training of Yakshagana theatre.

## What is Yakshagana?

- Yakshagana is a traditional theater, developed in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shimoga and western parts of Chikmagalur districts, in the state of **Karnataka** and in Kasaragod district in **Kerala**.
- It emerged in the Vijayanagara Empire and was performed by **Jakkula Varu**.
- **It combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form.**
- Towards the south from Dakshina Kannada to Kasaragod of Tulu Nadu region, the form of Yakshagana is called as '**Thenku thittu**' and towards north from Udupi up to Uttara Kannada it's called as '**Badaga Thittu**'.
- It is sometimes simply called "Aata" or āṭa (meaning "the play"). Yakshagana is traditionally presented from dusk to dawn.
- Its stories are drawn from **Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata** and other epics from both **Hindu** and **Jain** and other ancient Indic traditions.

## 4. Solving India's idol theft problem

### Context

Building an inventory of antiquities should be the first step in dealing with the problem.

### Measures taken by the worldwide organisations

- CAG in its 2013 Report stated that "131 antiquities were stolen from monuments/sites and 37 antiquities from Site Museums from 1981 to 2012"
- It added that in similar situations, worldwide, organisations took many more effective steps:
  - 1] Checking of catalogues of international auction house(s),
  - 2] Posting news of such theft on websites.
  - 3] Posting information about theft in the International Art Loss Registry.
  - 4] Sending photographs of stolen objects electronically to dealers and auction houses and intimate scholars in the field.
- **Lack of legal provisions:** The report also stated that the ASI had never participated or collected information on Indian antiquities put on sale at well-known international auction houses viz. Sotheby's, Christie's, etc. as there was no explicit provision in the **AAT (Antiquities and Art Treasures) Act, 1972 for doing so.**

## International conventions and treaties

- India is a signatory to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. (We ratified it in 1977).
- Perhaps we should also sign the **1995 UNIDROIT (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) Convention** on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects.

## Lessons from Italy

- Italy also suffers and several stolen antiquities have been returned by the US to Italy.
- That being the case, it shouldn't be surprising that many best practices originate in Italy.
- The following list is illustrative.
- (1) **A specific law** on protecting cultural heritage, with enhanced penalties;
- (2) **Centralised management** before granting authorisation for archaeological research;
- (3) **Specialisation** in cultural heritage for public prosecutors;
- (4) An inter-ministerial **committee for recovery and return** of cultural objects;
- (5) MOUs and bilateral agreements with other countries and international organisations to prevent illegal trafficking;
- (6) **Involvement of private organisations** and individuals in protection;
- (7) A **complete inventory** of moveable and immovable cultural heritage, with detailed catalogues;
- (8) Monitoring and inspection of cultural sites; and
- (9) Centralised granting of export requests.

## Way forward

- One could say the 2013 CAG Report did a bit of (8), but that was a one-off and isn't a permanent solution.
- This isn't a binary, nor is it possible to accomplish everything overnight. However, incrementally, one can move towards (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (8) and, especially, (7).
- We should **start with that inventory**.

## Conclusion

While fingers can rightly be pointed at Western museums and auction-houses (this isn't only about the colonial era), there is internal connivance.



## 5. Time Banking as a Crucial Tool to Empower Women

### Defining Work

- 'Work' was defined by Spanish economist Lourdes Beneria in 1999 as a paid economic activity linked to the market.
- Both paid and unpaid work, however, are constituents of our economic life.
- This leads to an ecosystem where unpaid and care work, performed for long hours, becomes invisible.

### Narrative of Unpaid Work

- Women perform 75 per cent of the world's unpaid care work, and unfortunately it is not accounted for in a nation's gross domestic product.
- The largest source of women's unpaid labour is domestic work.
- These include household chores like grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning as well as caregiving to the children, elderly and infirm.
- In the absence of this, survival is perceived as a challenge for both individuals and society as every economy is dependent on unpaid labour and care services.

### Time Poverty and unpaid work

- This share of labour has a cost not only in terms of the unrecognised monetary value but also time poverty.
- Time poverty is defined as "not having enough time" to pursue interests beyond unpaid domestic / care work.
- Time poverty has a direct bearing on the ability of women to contribute to or participate in the labour market and / or public or political life.
- Time poverty is also responsible for insufficient political participation of women globally.

### Issues with unpaid work

- Unpaid labour is not considered 'real work' and is often devalued by the men and society, who directly benefit from it.
- The situation leads to emotional strain and combined with the time poverty, the costs often outweigh the benefits.
- Often, women do not find enough time or motivation to participate in activities outside the household.
- Female labour force participation rate is on a declining trend in major economies.

## The conception of Time Banking

- Time banking comes forward as a social innovation for increased empowerment of women.
- Traditionally, household chores are expected to be performed by women. Women in general are more time poor than men.
- Empowerment of women is limited by time poverty. In this context the concept of time banking was introduced.
- Time banking can be viewed as an opportunity cost of an unpaid activity in terms of the time sacrificed.

## How does time bank function?

- In time banks, one hour equals one time credit, regardless of the service being performed or the level of each person's skill or gender.
- The time banks are time-sharing cooperative among women, with people helping each other meet their day-to-day needs and address challenges in their community.
- For each hour of a service exchanged, the service provider receives one, time credit and the beneficiary pays one, time credit.
- The time bank networks tap into unused resources of people in the community to fill unmet needs of each other.

## Significance of time banking for women

- Time-banking can benefit women, their families and their communities by alleviating time poverty through the system of exchange services through time credits.
- The system has the potential to improve the livelihoods of women and their families, thereby increasing overall economic activities.
- There were time banks operating in more than 30 countries in the Americas, Africa and Europe as well as in Russia and China.
- Most case studies showed that time banks have functioned most as community-building tools, economic drivers or within elder care.
- They can also be utilised to prioritise women's political participation.
- This has a direct impact on women empowerment and entails benefits to individual women, their families and communities.

Time bank networks can be utilised for increasing political participation of women in the following ways:

1. **Directly:** Through utilisation of time credits for campaigning for office

2. **Indirectly:** By educating themselves or others on local issues or understanding their rights, accessing government programs and mobilising others.

### Way forward

- Across the world, there are examples in our everyday life of intra- and inter-family examples of informal time-sharing.
- However, for tangible results on a community or economy scale, the concept needs scaling up and formalisation.
- Time banking, if made a formal arrangement, has the potential of community building, civic inclusiveness and increasing economic activity.
- Above all, it has the potential to act as the catalyst to women empowerment by formally recognising the economic value of unpaid labour and tapping the same across communities.

### 6. What is the 'Long Period Average', IMD's benchmark for monsoon prediction?

India is likely to receive a normal monsoon for the fourth consecutive year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its first Long Range Forecast (LRF) for this year.

#### What is Long Period Average (LPA)?

- The IMD predicts a “normal”, “below normal”, or “above normal” monsoon in relation to a benchmark “long period average” (LPA).
- The LPA of rainfall is the rainfall recorded over a particular region for a given interval (like month or season) average over a long period like 30 years, 50 years, etc.
- LPA refers to the average rainfall **recorded from June to September** for the entire country, the amount of rain that falls every year varies from region to region and from month to month.
- The IMD's prediction of a normal monsoon is based on the LPA of the 1971-2020 period, during which India received 87 cm of rain for the entire country on average.
- It has in the past calculated the LPA at 88 cm for the 1961-2010 period, and at 89 cm for the period 1951-2000.

#### Why LPA is needed?

- The IMD records rainfall data at more than 2,400 locations and 3,500 rain-gauge stations.

- Because annual rainfall can vary greatly not just from region to region and from month to month, but also from year to year within a particular region or month.
- An LPA is needed to smooth out trends so that a reasonably accurate prediction can be made.
- A 50-year LPA covers for large variations in either direction caused by freak years of unusually high or low rainfall, as well as for the periodic drought years.
- It also takes into account the increasingly common extreme weather events caused by climate change.

### Range of normal rainfall

The IMD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:

1. **Normal or near normal**, when the percentage departure of actual rainfall is +/-10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA;
2. **Below normal**, when departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA;
3. **Above normal**, when actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA;
4. **Deficient**, when departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA; and
5. **Excess**, when the departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA.

## GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

### 1. Privacy concerns in the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill 2022

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs introduced the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill 2022.

#### Purpose of the introduction of the Bill

- The Bill aims to replace the **Identification of Prisoners Act 1920** that has been in need of amendment for several decades.
- The criticism and the need for amendment was predominantly in respect of the limited **definition of 'measurements'** as under that Act.
- Back in the 1980s, the **Law Commission of India (in its 87th Report)** and the **Supreme Court of India** in a judgment titled *State of U.P. vs Ram Babu Misra* had nearly simultaneously suggested the need to amend the statute.

## What are the issues with the provisions in the Bill?

### 1] Definition of 'measurement' includes analysis of the data

- The definition of measurements is not restricted to taking measurements, but also their “analysis”.
- The definition now states “iris and retina scan, physical, biological samples and their analysis, behavio[u]ral attributes including signatures....”
- It goes beyond the scope of a law that is only designed for taking measurements and could result in **indirectly conferring legislative backing** for techniques that may involve the collection of data from other sources (For instance, using facial recognition).
- At present there are extensive facial recognition technology programmes for “smart policing” that are deployed all across the country.
- Such experimental technologies cause mass surveillance and are prone to bias, impacting the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable in India.

### 2] Power of the police and prison officials widened

- The existing law permits data capture by police and prison officers either from persons convicted or persons arrested for commission of offences punishable with a minimum of one year's imprisonment.
- Parallel powers are granted to judges, who can order any person to give measurements where it is in aid of investigation.
- While the judicial power is left undisturbed, it is the powers of the police and prison officials that are being widened.
- The law removes the existing – albeit minimal – limitation on persons whose measurements could be taken.
- It is poised to be expanded to all persons who are placed under arrest in a case.
- Here, the proposed Bill also contains muddled language stating that a person, “may not be obliged to allow taking of his biological samples”.

### 3] Storage and retention of data for a long period

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shall for a period of 75 years from the date of collection maintain a digital record, “in the interest of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of any offense”.
- The provision permits the NCRB to, “share and disseminate such records with any law enforcement agency, in such manner as may be prescribed”.
- The NCRB already operates a centralised database, namely the **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS)**, without any clear legislative framework.

- The existence of such legislative power with a technical framework **may permit multiple mirror copies and parallel databases of the “measurements”** being stored with law enforcement, beyond a State Police department which will be prosecuting the crime and the NCRB which will store all records centrally.
- For instance, in response to a Standing Committee of Parliament on police modernisation, Rajasthan has stated that it maintains a ‘RajCop Application’ that integrates with “analytics capabilities in real-time with multiple data sources (inter-department and intra-department)”.
- Similarly, Punjab has said that the “PAIS (Punjab Artificial Intelligence System) App uses machine learning, deep learning, visual search, and face recognition for the identification of criminals to assist police personnel.
- Hence, multiple copies of “measurements” will be used by State government policing departments for various purposes and with experimental technologies.
- This also takes away the benefit of deletion which occurs on acquittal and will suffer from weak enforcement due to the absence of a data protection law.
- The end result is a sprawling database in which innocent persons are treated as persons of interest for most of their natural lives.

## Conclusion

To protect individual autonomy and fulfil our constitutional promises, the Supreme Court of India pronounced the Justice K.S. Puttaswamy judgment, reaffirming its status as a fundamental right. The responsibility to protect it falls to each organ of the government, including the legislature and the union executive.

## 2. Dam Safety Act can end disputes, says Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has found in the Dam Safety Act of 2021 a panacea to end the “perennial” legal battle between Tamil Nadu and Kerala over the Mullaperiyar dam.

### What is the Dam Safety Act, 2021?

- The Act comprehensively postulates for surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of dams to prevent disasters.
  - Its key features are as follows:
1. **National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS):** It will be constituted and will be chaired by the chairperson, Central Water Commission. Its’ functions will

include formulating policies and regulations regarding dam safety standards and prevention of dam failures, analyzing the causes of major dam failures, and suggesting changes in dam safety practices.

2. **National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA):** It will be headed by an officer, not below the rank of an Additional Secretary, to be appointed by the central government. The main task of this authority includes implementing the policies formulated by the NCD, resolving issues between State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs), or between an SDSO and any dam owner in that state, specifying regulations for inspection and investigation of dams.
3. **State Dam Safety Organisation (SDSO):** Its functions will be to keep perpetual surveillance, inspection, monitoring the operation and maintenance of dams, keeping a database of all dams, and recommending safety measures to owners of dams.
4. **Dam Safety Unit:** The owners of the specified dams are required to provide a dam safety unit in each dam. This unit will inspect the dams before and after the monsoon session, and during and after any calamity or sign of distress.
5. **Emergency Action Plan:** Dam owners will be required to prepare an emergency action plan, and carry out risk assessment studies for each dam at specified regular intervals.
6. **Certain offences:** The act provides for two types of offences – obstructing a person in the discharge of his functions, and refusing to comply with directions issued under the proposed law.

### Why in news?

- Kerala and Tamil Nadu have been trading charges against each other over the safety, operation and maintenance of the Mullaperiyar dam.
- While Kerala claims the 126-year-old dam is unsafe, badly maintained and a threat to thousands of people living downstream, Tamil Nadu denies it.
- Kerala is pitching for a new dam in place of the existing one, while Tamil Nadu, which operates and maintains the reservoir, argues that the dam is well-preserved and so strong that the height water level could even be increased to 152 feet.

### What did the SC say?

- A few days ago, the Supreme Court was in search of an answer to the “perennial problem” between the two neighbours over the dam.
- It had mooted the idea of extending the powers of its own supervisory committee to take over charge of the safety and maintenance of the structure and its site.
- The Bench even wondered whether the supervisory committee should now continue as the 2021 Act has made it redundant.

- However, Kerala said the Centre was yet to appoint specialists to the NDSA.

### 3. India to set up Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) in Colombo

India and Sri Lanka have signed an MoU for the Indian public sector Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) to set up a state of the art Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) in Colombo.

#### What is MRCC?

- MRCCs are part of an international network under the UN's International Maritime Organisation.
- They aim to monitor the sea lanes with the objective of swift response to emergencies, such as vessels in distress, rescue and evacuation of people, and prevention of and containing environmental disasters such as oil spills.
- Each country is responsible for its own Search and Rescue Region (SRR).
- The work of MRCCs is co-ordinated by the Navy or Coast Guard in each country.
- In India, the Coast Guard is the co-ordinating agency. In Sri Lanka, it is the Navy.
- The MRCC will be established with a grant of \$6 million from India.

#### Benefits offered

- MRCC enhances co-operation on maritime security between the two countries in a part of the Indian Ocean region where the India-China rivalry has taken centre stage over the last decade.
- This engagement will augment interoperability and seamless maritime actions like carrying out anti-smuggling operations in the Indian Ocean Region.

#### Why such a move by India?

- Sri Lanka's SRR is a wide swathe of 1,778,062. 24 sq kms of the Indian Ocean, and nearly 200 ships pass through these waters every day.
- The MRCC agreement appears to be part of India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) initiative in the Indian Ocean.

#### Issues with MRCC

- The MRCC has been controversial in Sri Lanka who see every development by India suspicious.



- Sri Lanka's Defence Ministry issued a clarification on the MRCC, as well as on recent agreements with India for a naval floating dock and Dornier aircraft.
- The clarification has provided more details about the agreements than have been in the public domain so far.

#### 4. Old Pension Scheme vs New Pension Scheme

Many states are trying to restore Old Pension Scheme and discontinue the National Pension System (NPS).

##### What is the Defined Pension Benefit Scheme (old)?

- The scheme assures life-long income, post-retirement.
- Usually the assured amount is equivalent to 50% of the last drawn salary.
- The Government bears the expenditure incurred on the pension.
- The scheme was discontinued in 2004.

##### What is the National Pension System (NPS)?

- The Union government under PM Vajpayee took a decision in 2003 to discontinue the old pension scheme and introduced the NPS.
- The scheme is applicable to all new recruits joining the Central Government service (except armed forces) from April 1, 2004.
- On the introduction of NPS, the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972 was amended.

##### Features of NPS

- It is a scheme, where employees contribute to their pension corpus from their salaries, with matching contributions from the government.
- The funds are invested in earmarked investment schemes through Pension Fund Managers.
- At retirement, they can withdraw 60% of the corpus, which is tax-free and the remaining 40% is invested in annuities, which is taxed.
- It can have two components – Tier I and II.
- Tier-II is a voluntary savings account that offers flexibility in terms of withdrawal, and one can withdraw at any point of time, unlike Tier I account.
- Private individuals can opt for the scheme.

### What were the changes introduced in 2019?

- In 2019, the Finance Ministry said that Central government employees have the option of selecting the Pension Funds (PFs) and Investment Pattern in their Tier-I account.
- The default pension fund managers are the LIC Pension Fund Limited, SBI Pension Funds Pvt. Limited and UTI Retirement Solutions Limited in a predefined proportion.

### Who is the regulatory authority?

- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is the regulator for NPS.
- PFRDA was set up through the PFRDA Act in 2013 to promote old age income security by developing pension funds to protect the interest of subscribers to schemes of pension funds.

### What is the subscriber base?

- As on February 28, there were 22.74 lakh Central government employees and 55.44 lakh State government employees enrolled under the NPS.

### Why in news now?

- In Feb, Rajasthan CM announced restoration of the old pension scheme for the government employees, who joined the service on or after January 1, 2004.
- The announcement meant that the National Pension System (NPS) would be discontinued in the State.
- The center had maintained that restoration of the old system would cause an unnecessary financial burden on the government.

### Cons of NPS

- **Forfeiture of pension:** The NPS scheme was created by the Government of India, in order to stop all the defined pension related benefits that it gave to its employees.
- **Withdrawal restrictions:** NPS restricts all kinds of withdrawals, before the subscriber reaches the age of 60 years.
- **No tax benefits:** The NPS corpus, which the subscriber can use for buying annuity or for drawing pensions, is taxable, when the schemes matures.
- **Limit on investment:** The subscriber cannot invest more than 50% of his or her total investment in the NPS account, towards the equities.

- **No guarantee:** While NPS is a government scheme, the corpus is created according to the returns, which are generated under the corporate bonds, government securities, and equity.

## 5. FASTER digital platform for Judiciary

'FASTER', an abbreviation of 'Fast and Secured Transmission of Electronic Records', a digital platform was formally launched by Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana.

### What is FASTER?

- The FASTER system proposes transmission of e-authenticated copies of the interim orders, stay orders, bail orders and record of proceedings to the duty-holders for compliance and due execution, through a secured electronic communication channel.
- These orders may vary from stay of execution of a person to freeze on the demolition of a slum to bail orders for undertrial prisoners.
- The idea stemmed from a case reported about several prisoners in the Agra Jail forced to remain behind bars for three days after the hard copies of the order had not reached the prison officials.

### Benefits offered

- FASTER would aid the cause of quick and effortless justice.
- The timely delivery of the court's orders to the authorities would also prevent unnecessary arrests and custody of people who have already been granted anticipatory bail.
- For smooth transmission of court's orders and effective implementation of Article 21, Right to Life, such a system was the need of the hour.

## 6. BIMSTEC

The fifth summit of the regional grouping, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), held virtually in Colombo on March 30, has advanced the cause of regional cooperation and integration.

## Colombo package

- **Economic challenges:** Representing a fifth of the world's population that contributes only 4% of the global GDP, can this multilateral grouping trigger accelerated economic development?
- It was clear that BIMSTEC first needed to strengthen itself – by re-defining its purpose and rejuvenating its organs and institutions.
- The eventual result is now seen in the package of decisions and agreements announced at the latest summit.

## Achievement of Colombo Summit

- **1] Adoption of Charter:** Adopted formally, it presents BIMSTEC as “**an inter-governmental organization**” with “legal personality.”
- **BIMSTEC's purposes:** Defining BIMSTEC's purposes, it lists 11 items in the first article.
- Among them is **acceleration of “the economic growth and social progress in the Bay of Bengal region”,** and promotion of “**multidimensional connectivity**”.
- The grouping now views itself not as a sub-regional organisation but as a regional organisation whose destiny is linked with the area around the Bay of Bengal.
- **2] Reduction in the sectors of cooperation:** The second element is the decision to re-constitute and reduce the number of sectors of cooperation from the unwieldy 14 to a more manageable seven.
- Each member-state will **serve as a lead for a sector:** trade, investment and development (Bangladesh); environment and climate change (Bhutan); **security, including energy (India);** agriculture and food security (Myanmar); people-to-people contacts (Nepal); science, technology and innovation (Sri Lanka), and connectivity (Thailand).
- **3] Adoption of the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity:** the summit participants adopted the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity applicable for 2018-2028.
- It was devised and backed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
- It lists 264 projects entailing a total investment of \$126 billion.
- Projects worth \$55 billion are under implementation. BIMSTEC needs to generate additional funding and push for timely implementation of the projects.
- **4] Signing of three new agreements:** Finally, the package also includes three new agreements signed by member states, relating to mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic academies, and the establishment of a technology transfer facility in Colombo.

## Challenges

- The pillar of trade, economic and investment cooperation needs greater strengthening and at a faster pace.
- **Absence of FTA:** Despite signing a **framework agreement for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** in 2004, BIMSTEC stands far away from this goal.
- **Lack of legal instruments:** The need for expansion of connectivity was stressed by one and all, but when it comes to **finalising legal instruments** for coastal shipping, road transport and intra-regional energy grid connection, much work remains unfinished.
- There needs to be mention of the speedy success achieved in deepening cooperation in security matters and management of **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**.
- **Focus more on new areas:** BIMSTEC should focus more in the future on new areas such as the blue economy, the digital economy, and promotion of exchanges and links among start-ups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Step up the personal engagement of political leadership:** The personal engagement of the political leadership should be stepped up.
- The decision taken in Colombo to host a summit every two years is welcome if implemented.
- **Greater visibility:** BIMSTEC needs greater visibility.
- **India's turn to host the G20 leaders' summit in 2023** presents a golden opportunity, which can be leveraged optimally. Perhaps all its members should be invited to the G20 summit as the chair's special guests.
- **Simplify the groupings name:** The suggestion to simplify the grouping's name needs urgent attention.
- The present name running into 12 words should be changed to four words only – the Bay of Bengal Community (BOBC).
- It will help the institution immensely. Brevity reflects gravitas.

## Conclusion

BIMSTEC is no longer a mere initiative or programme. The question to address is whether it is now capable of tackling the challenges facing the region.

## 7. Building faith in India's investigative agencies

The image of the institution of police is regrettably tarnished by allegations of corruption, police excesses, lack of impartiality and close nexus with the political class.

## Police and investigation agencies need social legitimacy

- The police and investigative agencies may have **de-facto legitimacy**, but as institutions, they are yet to gain social legitimacy.
- Police should work impartially and focus on crime prevention. They should also work in cooperation with the public to ensure law and order.
- The CBI possessed immense trust of the public in its initial phase.
- But with the passage of time, like every other institution of repute, the CBI has also come under deep public scrutiny.
- The need of the hour is to reclaim social legitimacy and public trust.

## Issues affecting the system and causing delay in trial

- Lack of infrastructure, lack of sufficient manpower, inhuman conditions, especially at the lowest rung, lack of modern equipment, questionable methods of procuring evidence, officers failing to abide by the rule book and the lack of accountability of erring officers.
- Then there are certain issues that lead to delays in trials.
- They are: **Lack of public prosecutors** and standing counsels, seeking adjournments, arraying hundreds of witnesses and filing voluminous documents in pending trials, undue imprisonment of undertrials, change in priorities with the change in the political executive, cherry-picking of the evidence, and repeated transfers of officers leading to a change in the direction of the investigation.

## Way forward

- **Break the nexus with political executive:** The first step to reclaim social legitimacy and public trust is to break the nexus with the political executive.
- **Reform of the police system** is long overdue in our country.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs has itself recognised the glaring need for the same in the “**Status Note on Police Reforms in India**”.
- **Comprehensive law:** Our investigative agencies still do not have the benefit of being guided by a comprehensive law.
- **Independent and autonomous investigative agency:** The need of the hour is the creation of an independent and autonomous investigative agency.
- **Umbrella organisation:** There is an immediate requirement for the creation of an independent umbrella institution, so as to bring various agencies like the CBI, SFIO, and ED under one roof.
- This body is required to be created under a statute, clearly defining its powers, functions and jurisdictions.
- Such a law will also lead to much-needed legislative oversight.

- **Separation of prosecution and investigation:** One additional safeguard that needs to be built into the scheme, is to have separate and autonomous wings for prosecution and investigation, in order to ensure total independence.
- **Annual audit of performance:** A provision in the proposed law for an annual audit of the performance of the institution by the appointing committee will be a reasonable check and balance.
- **Strengthening state investigative agencies:** There is no reason why state investigative agencies, which handle most of the investigations, cannot enjoy the same level of credibility as that of the national agency.
- The proposed Central law for the umbrella investigative body **can be suitably replicated by the states.**
- **Ensure women's representation:** An issue that needs addressing at this stage is the representation of women in the criminal justice system.
- Often, women feel deterred in reporting certain offences due to a lack of representation.
- **Relations with community:** Relations between the community and police also need to be fixed.
- This is only possible if police training includes sensitisation workshops and interactions to inspire public confidence.

## Conclusion

It is imperative for the police and the public to work together to create a safe society. Ultimately the police must remember that their allegiance must be to the Constitution and the rule of law and not to any person.

## 8. Tripura's Darlong community in included in ST List

The Lok Sabha recently passed a bill to amend a constitutional order to include Darlong, a tribal clan in Tripura which was among the generic Halam community till now, in the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST).

### Who are Darlongs?

- Darlong is a tribal community of 11,000 people.
- Despite its small population, the community has a high prevalence of education, cultural activities and members of the community are serving in different high positions in the local administration.
- Darlongs, despite being Scheduled Tribes, were never given ST certificates.
- Since they were considered a generic tribe under the Kuki community, they were handed their tribal certificates as members of 'Kuki' community.

- The subsequent identity crisis among them, especially Darlong youths, who were equipped with modern education, culminated in the demand for a separate statutory identity of their own in 1995.
- The group is a small tribal clan but has produced a high number of educated people proportionate to its population in the state.
- People from the Darlong community, like many other tribal communities, are now serving in high positions in the state administration, academia, and public services.
- Tribal musicologist and Rosem (tribal instrument) maestro Thanga Darlong was conferred the prestigious Padma Shri award a few years back for his contribution to culture.

### Why is tribal identity a big issue in Tripura?

- Out of 37 lakh people of Tripura, nearly 30 per cent are tribals, who mostly live in areas under jurisdiction of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).
- They are spread in patches across all eight districts and covering 70 per cent of the state's geographical area.
- The state saw tribals become minority in their own state due to arrival of East Pakistani refugees who fled their country.
- Tribal identity is a major issue in Tripura, which is also one of the major subjects dominating the state politics now.
- There is rising demand of Greater Tipraland – a proposed separate state for Tiprasa or Tripuris (tribal and non-tribal) living in the state.

### 9. Marital rape

Justice M. Nagaprasanna of the Karnataka High Court on March 23, 2022, in the case of Hrishikesh Sahoo vs State of Karnataka, pronounced the end of the marital rape exception.

#### Background of the case

- This judgment was a result of a unique case where a woman had filed a criminal complaint of rape against her husband due to the repeated acts of sexual assault she had to face.
- **Marital rape exception to Section 375:** The police registered her complaint under **Section 376 notwithstanding the marital rape exception**, a charge sheet was filed and the Sessions Judge took cognisance and framed charges under Section 376.
- This led to the husband approaching the High Court seeking to quash the criminal proceedings.



- In a nuanced and far-reaching judgment, Justice Nagaprasanna refused to quash the charge of rape against the husband.

### Violation of rights of woman

- **Violation of the right to equality:** Justice Nagaprasanna held that if a man, being a husband is exempted for his acts of sexual assault, it would destroy women's right to equality, which is the very soul of the Constitution.
- **Discrimination:** He held that the Constitution recognises and grants equal status to women, but the exception to marital rape in the IPC amounts to discrimination because **a wife is treated as subordinate to the husband.**
- The Constitution considers **marriage as an association of equals** and does not in any sense depict women to be subordinate to men and guarantees women the fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 the right to live with dignity, personal liberty, bodily integrity, sexual autonomy, right to reproductive choices, right to privacy, right to freedom of speech and expression.
- In *Independent Thought vs Union of India* (2017), the Supreme Court of India diluted it and **removed the exception to marital rape to a wife not below 15 years** and made it 18 years.

### Historical roots of the principle of exception

- The exception to marital rape in common law was due to the dictum by Chief Justice Matthew Hale of Britain in 1736 where he argued that by marriage, a woman gave up her body to the husband and was accepted as an enduring principle of common law, due to which a husband could not be guilty of raping his wife.
- This was therefore translated into criminal codes, including the **Indian Penal Code which India adopted.**
- This principle has now been **completely abolished.**
- In the United Kingdom, in 1991, **the exception to marital rape was done away with** in the case of *R. vs R.* The House of Lords held that where the common law rule no longer represents what is the true position of a wife in present-day society.
- The court held that a husband's immunity as expounded by Chief Justice Matthew Hale no longer exists.

### Conclusion

The Karnataka High Court, by holding that the exception to marital rape in Section 375 is regressive and in violation of the constitutional guarantee of equality, has now truly pronounced the death knell of the marital rape exception.

## 10. India-Australia sign Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)

India and Australia signed an Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in the presence of PM Narendra Modi and his counterpart in Canberra Scott Morrison.

### India-Australia ECTA

- It is the first trade agreement of India with a developed country after more than a decade.
- The Agreement encompasses cooperation across the entire gamut of bilateral economic and commercial relations between the two friendly countries.
- It covers areas like Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons, Telecom, Customs Procedures, Pharmaceutical products, and Cooperation in other Areas.
- Eight subject specific side letters covering various aspects of bilateral economic cooperation were also included as part of the Agreement.

### Background of the ECTA

- The negotiations for India-Australia ECTA were formally re-launched on 30 September 2021 and concluded on a fast-track basis by the end of March 2022.
- India and Australia enjoy excellent bilateral relations that have undergone transformative evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a friendly partnership.
- Growing India-Australia economic and commercial relations contribute to the stability and strength of a
- Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner.

### Features of the agreement

- The ECTA between India and Australia **covers almost all the tariff lines** dealt in by India and Australia respectively.
- India will benefit from preferential **market access provided by Australia on 100% of its tariff lines.**
- This includes all the labour-intensive sectors of export interest to India such as Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear, furniture, food, and

agricultural products, engineering products, medical devices, and Automobiles.

- India will be offering preferential **access to Australia on over 70% of its tariff lines**, including lines of export interest to Australia which are primarily raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores and wines etc.
- As regards trade in services, Australia has offered wide ranging commitments in around 135 sub sectors and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) in 120 sub sectors which cover key areas of India's interest like IT, ITES, Business services, Health, Education, and Audio visual.
- Both sides have also agreed to a separate Annex on Pharmaceutical products under this agreement, which will enable fast track approval for patented, generic and biosimilar medicines.

### Way ahead

- The India-Australia ECTA will further cement the already deep, close and strategic relations between the two countries.
- It will significantly enhance bilateral trade in goods and services, create new employment opportunities, raise living standards, and improve the general welfare of the peoples of the two countries.

### 11. The 'Chandigarh Question'

The newly elected Punjab Legislative Assembly passed a resolution, moved by the Chief Minister himself, on April 1 in a special session seeking the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab.

With this, the 'Chandigarh question' has resurfaced, but this time it occupies the national spotlight.

### Establishment of Chandigarh

- Chandigarh is described as a 'planned city' emblematic of 'Nehruvian modernity'.
- It is a greenfield city, which was commissioned by the government in independent India to replace Lahore, which went to Pakistan after Partition, as the capital of Punjab.
- Designed by Le Corbusier in association with Pierre Jeanneret, it is located on the foothills of the Shivalik Himalayas on village land acquired from what was then the Kharar tehsil of Ambala district.
- It was the capital of undivided Punjab from its inauguration in 1953 till 1966.

## **Bifurcation of Punjab and Common Capital**

- Under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 following the Punjabi Suba movement, Haryana was carved out of the Hindi-speaking regions as a separate State.
- The hill regions of Punjab were merged with what was then the Union Territory (UT) of Himachal Pradesh.
- Chandigarh was made a UT and has remained the joint capital of Haryana and Punjab with State assets divided between Punjab and Haryana in a ratio of 60:40.

## **What is the Chandigarh issue?**

- Since 1966, the lack of full rights to its capital has remained a vexed issue in Punjab politics.
- All the governments and most political parties of Punjab have regularly raised the demand for Chandigarh.
- It has featured in all major developments, whether it is the 1973 Anandpur Sahib resolution, Dharam Yudh Morcha (then separatist movement) and the 1985 Rajiv-Longowal Accord.
- Since 1966, the Punjab Assembly has passed at least six such resolutions with the last being in 2014 under the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party (SAD-BJP) government.
- The Centres' opposition to the latest Assembly resolution is the first time a political party has taken a contrarian stand.

## **What is different this time?**

- The immediate provocation this time has been two recent decisions of the Central government: breaking allies with erstwhile govt and withdrawal of farm laws.
- The Centre also amended the rules governing the functioning of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), constituted under the 1966 Act.
- It changed the eligibility criteria for the two full-time members of the Board which have, though technically open to all Indian officials, by convention gone to officials from Punjab and Haryana.
- These moves are widely interpreted as a continuation of the Centre's contentious relationship with the other political parties.
- It gives an affront blow to Punjab's claim over Chandigarh.

### **What has been the position of the Union government on the city?**

- At the time of the 1966 Act, the Union government with Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister indicated that the UT status to Chandigarh was temporary and that it would be transferred to Punjab.
- This decision was formalised in 1970 with Mrs Gandhi promising Haryana funds for building its own capital.
- According to the 1985 Rajiv-Longowal Accord, Chandigarh was to be handed over to Punjab on January 26, 1986 but this never fructified after the assassination of Longowal and the long period of militancy.
- The recent developments could thus indicate a shift in the Central government's position.

### **What about Haryana?**

- As in Punjab, all parties in Haryana present a common position asserting its claim to the city.
- It has objected to any move which associates Chandigarh solely with Punjab.

### **Is there a distinctive Chandigarh position?**

- Employees and unions of the Chandigarh administration have mostly welcomed the change in service rules since the Central provisions carry more benefits and perks.
- After decades of existence as a UT, Chandigarh has developed a distinctive cultural character.
- Given its geographical location it has the presence of many educational institutions, medical establishments and the Army and Air Force.
- It has developed a unique cosmopolitanism and become a magnet for the youth across the north western region.
- They city residents thus favour the status quo.

### **Way forward**

- While this time the issue has attracted more attention than usual.
- Its Punjab mandate indicates massive expectations from the electorate including better service conditions from government employees but it has inherited a debt-ridden government.
- The new govt will have to balance these contending claims in deciding further action.

## 12. State of Emergency in Sri Lanka

A day after angry mob converged in front of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Colombo residence, demanding he step down immediately, he declared a state of Emergency in Sri Lanka.

### Sri Lankan Crisis: A backgrounder

- Sri Lanka's economic crisis can be traced to two key developments – the Easter Sunday bombings of 2019 that deterred tourists, and the pandemic since early 2020.
- These events stalled recovery and further drained the economy.
- As it grappled with an unprecedented challenge, the Rajapaksa regime made policy choices that are now proving to be costly.
- It cut the government's tax revenue substantially and rushed into an 'organic only' agricultural policy that will likely slash this year's harvest by half.
- The weak and debt-ridden economy with the lingering strain of the pandemic, and ill-advised policies accelerated the downward spiral.

### What were the economic indicators?

- COVID-19 hit Sri Lanka's key foreign revenue earning sectors hard.
- Earnings from tourism, exports, and worker remittances fell sharply in the last two years.
- But the country could not stop importing essentials, and its dollar account began dwindling.
- Fast draining foreign reserves, a glaring trade deficit, and a related Balance of Payments problem came as crucial signals.
- Colombo's huge foreign loan obligations and the drop in domestic production compounded the economic strain.

### When did things begin to worsen?

- The long-simmering crisis made its first big announcement during last August's food emergency, when supplies were badly affected.
- It was soon followed by fears of a sovereign default in late 2021, which Sri Lanka averted.
- But without enough dollars to pay for the country's high import bill, the island continued facing severe shortage of essentials – from fuel, cooking gas, and staple foodgrains to medicines.

### **How did the crisis manifest itself on the ground?**

- Consumers could not find the most basic things such as petrol, LPG cylinders, kerosene, or milk in the market.
- They spent hours waiting in long queues outside fuel stations or shops.
- Supermarket shelves were either empty or had products with high price tags that most could not afford.
- For instance, the price of one kg of milk powder, a staple item in dairy-deficient Sri Lanka, suddenly shot up to nearly LKR 2000 in March.
- Be it cooking gas, oils, rice, pulses, vegetables, fish, meat, consumers found themselves paying substantially more, or simply had to forego the item.
- The fuel shortage has led to long blackouts – up to 13 hours – across the island.

### **What is the situation now?**

- The value of the Sri Lankan rupee has dropped to 300 against a U.S. dollar (and even more than 400 in the black market), putting importers in a difficult spot.
- The government is unable to pay for its import shipments, forcing consignments to leave the Colombo port.
- For the average citizen contending with COVID-induced salary cuts and job losses, the soaring living costs have brought more agony.

### **How did India help mitigate the crisis?**

- India has extended \$2.4 billion this year.
- China, that is considering a fresh request from Colombo for \$2.5 billion assistance, in addition to the \$2.8 billion it has extended since the pandemic broke out.
- The government has decided to negotiate an International Monetary Fund programme, while seeking support from other multilateral and bilateral sources.
- But even with all this help, Sri Lanka can barely manage.

### **How has it affected the people?**

- Sri Lankans are seething with anger, going by public demonstrations and protests.
- They want the President to step down immediately and the ruling clan to leave the country's helm.
- They have been agitating in different parts of the country, including near the President's home.

- Former military man Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who came to power on a huge mandate in 2019, is Sri Lanka's most unpopular leader today.
- Following the protests near his home, Mr. Rajapaksa said "extremists" were plotting an 'Arab Spring' and hence he declared a state of Emergency.

### **13. No need for laws to enforce duties on citizens: AG**

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal said that there was no need to enact specific laws to "enforce" fundamental duties on citizens.

#### **What is the case?**

- The Supreme Court is entertaining a public interest litigation (PIL) petition to enforce the fundamental duties of citizens, including patriotism and unity of nation, through "comprehensive, well-defined laws".

#### **Precursor to AG's remark**

- The Supreme Court has directed in the Ranganath Mishra judgment of 2003 regarding the implementation of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee's report on the "operationalization of fundamental duties".
- The committee's work was a part of a report of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution.
- The report had urged the government to sensitise people to, and create general awareness of, their duties and the protection of minorities and freedom of religion.

#### **What are Fundamental Duties?**

- The fundamental duties of citizens were added to the constitution by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, upon the recommendations of the Swaran Singh Committee.
- It basically imply the moral obligations of all citizens of a country and today, there are 11 fundamental duties in India, which are written in Part IV-A of the Constitution, to promote patriotism and strengthen the unity of India.
- The FDs obligate all citizens to respect the national symbols of India, including the constitution, to cherish its heritage, preserve its composite culture and assist in its defence.
- They also obligate all Indians to promote the spirit of common brotherhood, protect the environment and public property, develop scientific temper, abjure violence, and strive towards excellence in all spheres of life.



## Judicial interpretation of FDs

- The Supreme Court has held that FDs are not enforceable in any Court of Law.
- It ruled that these fundamental duties can also help the court to decide the constitutionality of a law passed by the legislature.
- There is a reference to such duties in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 51A brings the Indian constitution into conformity with these treaties.

## Total FDs

- Originally ten in number, the fundamental duties were increased to eleven by the 86th Amendment in 2002.

The 10 fundamental duties are as follows:

1. To oblige with the Indian Constitution and respect the National Anthem and Flag
2. To cherish and follow the noble ideas that inspired the national struggle for freedom
3. To protect the integrity, sovereignty, and unity of India
4. To defend the country and perform national services if and when the country requires
5. To promote the spirit of harmony and brotherhood amongst all the people of India and renounce any practices that are derogatory to women
6. To cherish and preserve the rich national heritage of our composite culture
7. To protect and improve the natural environment including lakes, wildlife, rivers, forests, etc.
8. To develop scientific temper, humanism, and spirit of inquiry
9. To safeguard all public property
10. To strive towards excellence in all genres of individual and collective activities

The 11th fundamental duty which was added to this list is:

1. To provide opportunities for education to children between 6-14 years of age, and duty as parents to ensure that such opportunities are being awarded to their child. (86th Amendment, 2002)

## 14. 13 new districts created in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh has got a new map with the creation of 13 new districts, taking the number of total districts in the state to 26.

### What are Districts?

- India's districts are local administrative units inherited from the British Raj.
- They generally form the tier of local government immediately below that of India's subnational states and territories.
- A district is headed by a Deputy Commissioner/ Collector, who is responsible for the overall administration and the maintenance of law and order.
- The district collector may belong to IAS (Indian Administrative Service).
- Districts are most frequently further sub-divided into smaller administrative units, called either tehsils or talukas or mandals, depending on the region.

### How are new districts carved?

- The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State governments.
- This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly.
- Many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.

### How does it help?

- States argue that smaller districts lead to better administration and governance.
- For example, in 2016, the Assam government issued a notification to upgrade the Majuli sub-division to Majuli district for "administrative expediency".

### Does the Central government have a role to play here?

- The Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones. States are free to decide.
- The Home Ministry comes into the picture when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station.
- The State government's request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry seeking clearance.
- A no-objection certificate may be issued after examining their replies.

## 15. Delimitation of Constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir

Members of the Jammu & Kashmir Delimitation Commission faced protests in Jammu as they embarked on a two-day visit to hold consultations with citizens, civil society groups and political parties.

### What is Delimitation and why is it needed?

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.
- The objective is to redraw boundaries (based on the data of the last Census) in a way so that the population of all seats, as far as practicable, be the same throughout the State.
- Aside from changing the limits of a constituency, the process may result in a change in the number of seats in a state.

### Delimitation in J&K

- Assembly seats in J&K were delimited in 1963, 1973 and 1995.
- Prior to August 5, 2019, carving out of J&K's Assembly seats was carried out under the J&K Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- Until then, the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in J&K was governed by the Constitution of India.
- However, the delimitation of the state's Assembly was governed by the J&K Constitution and J&K Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- There was no census in the state in 1991 and hence no Delimitation Commission was set up by the state until 2001 census.

### Why is it in the news again?

- After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019, the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created UT would be as per the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- On March 6, 2020, the government set up the Delimitation Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, which was tasked with winding up delimitation in J&K in a year.
- As per the J&K Reorganization Bill, the number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.

### Factors considered during Delimitation

- The number of districts had increased from 12 to 20 and tehsils from 52 to 207 since the last delimitation.
- The population density ranged from 29 persons a square km in Kishtwar to 3,436 persons a square km in Srinagar.
- The remoteness of the place, inaccessibility etc are also considered during the exercise.

### Concerns raised over Delimitation

- **Jammu vs. Kashmir:** Concerns had been expressed over how the delimitation process may end up favoring the Jammu region over Kashmir in terms of the seats.
- **Under-representation of Ladakh:** Arguments have been made on how Ladakh has been underrepresented, with demands for statehood/sixth schedule.
- **Non-proportionate reservations:** It is argued that seats for STs should've been divided in both Jammu province & Kashmir province, as the ST population is almost equal.

## 16. Strengthen secularism

The High Court of Karnataka has not been able to settle the hijab issue. The petition has been filed in the apex court by a Muslim student against the high court judgement.

### Political and Constitutional dimensions of the issue

- The issue of the hijab is **political as well as constitutional**.
- The top court will examine the constitutional aspect and its judgment will hopefully settle the issue.
- But the political dimension of the hijab issue will continue to trouble Indian society for a long time.
- The Indian Constitution provides for **freedom of religion and conscience** on the one hand and secularism for the governance of the country on the other.

### Understanding the freedom of religion under Indian Constitution

- Under the Indian Constitution, there is a separation of religion from the state as in Europe.

- The essence of India's secularism is that the **state has no religion**.
- This is clear from Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution.
- **Article 27** says that no tax can be levied for promoting any particular religion.
- In other words, **no public revenue is permitted to be spent in favour of any particular religion**.
- **Article 28** says that no religious instruction shall be given in any educational institutions wholly maintained out of state funds.
- The same Article says that no educational institution recognised or aided by the state shall compel any person to attend religious classes or worship therein.
- Article 25(2)(a) empowers the state to **regulate secular activities** associated with religious practice.
- **Article 15** prohibits any kind of discrimination on the ground of religion.
- **Freedom of religion is subject to other fundamental rights:** Above all, freedom of religion is made subject to other fundamental rights, apart from the reasonable restrictions on the grounds of **public order, morality and health**.
- Thus, the freedom of religion under the Constitution **does not enjoy the same status as other secular rights** such as equality before law, non-discrimination, right to life and liberty, etc.

### Why India needs to be secular

- Theocracy will ensure the disintegration of the country.
- **1] India is a multi-religious country** where the largest minority is around 200 million.
- The Government of India had notified as many as **six minority religions in the country**.
- So, a theocratic state with the majority religion as the state religion is an unworkable proposition.
- **2] Complex structure:** Another crucial factor which makes a theocratic state impossible in India is the complex, inegalitarian, hierarchical and oppressive social structure of the majority religion.
- **3] There would be no equality:** Since a theocratic state based on the religious texts, in the Indian context, would mean a state which would **deny equality before law and equal protection of law** to the subaltern class and discriminate against them on the basis of caste, it will be inherently unstable.
- This may lead to perennial conflicts and the eventual disintegration of society.
- Therefore, we reach the inevitable conclusion that India, as a nation, can survive only as a secular state where the state has no religion and does not promote any religion.

## Conclusion

Secularism was chosen as the foundational principle of the republic to keep the nation united. Enlightened citizens should realise that if secularism is jettisoned, the hard-won national unity will be in peril. It is the patriotic duty of every citizen to strengthen secularism and thus save the republic.

## 17. Who are Denotified Tribes (DNTs)?

A standing committee of Parliament, tabled last week, has criticised the functioning of the development programme for de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes.

### Who are de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes?

- These are communities who are the most vulnerable and deprived.
- Denotified tribes (DNTs) are communities that were 'notified' as being 'born criminal' during the British regime under a series of laws starting with the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.
- They mostly belong to the medieval period Banjaras.
- Nomadic and semi-nomadic communities are defined as those who move from one place to another rather than living at one place all the time.

### What is the history of deprivation faced by these communities?

- This has a long history, first during colonial rule, and then in independent India.
- These communities are largely politically 'quiet' – they do not place their demands concretely before the government for they lack vocal leadership and also lack the patronage of a national leader.
- Many commissions and committees constituted since Independence have referred to the problems of these communities. These include the:
  1. Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee, 1947 constituted in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh)
  2. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar Committee in 1949 (it was based on the report of this committee the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed)
  3. Kaka Kalelkar Commission (also called first OBC Commission) constituted in 1953
  4. In 1965, an Advisory Committee constituted for revision of the SC and ST list under the chairmanship of B N Lokur referred to denotified tribes
  5. The B P Mandal Commission constituted in 1980 also made some recommendations on the issue

## Policy measures for DNTs

- A National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNT) was constituted in 2006 by the then government.
- It was headed by Balkrishna Sidram Renke and submitted its report in June 2008.
- It said that it is an irony that these tribes somehow escaped the attention of our Constitution makers and thus got deprived of the Constitutional support unlike SCs and STs.
- The Renke commission estimated their population at around 10.74 crore based on Census 2001.
- A new Commission constituted in February 2014 to prepare a state-wise list, which submitted its report on January 8, 2018, identified 1,262 communities as de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic.
- Much recently, the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi Nomadic Communities (SEED).

## Why in news now?

- While a number of these tribes are categorised under SC, ST and OBC, many are not.
- The standing committee report in Parliament has cited a statement by the Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, that 269 DNT communities are not covered under any reserved categories.
- These communities are frequently left out because they are less visible and difficult to reach.

## What is DWBDNC, and what is its role?

- The DWBDNC stands for the Scheme for welfare of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic communities (DWBDNC).
- The commission report submitted in 2018 had recommended the setting of up a permanent commission for these communities.
- But since most DNTs are covered under SC, ST or OBC, the government felt setting up a permanent commission, which would deal with redress of grievances.
- The government therefore set up the DWBDNCs under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

## The Idate Commission

- The DWBDNC was constituted on February 21, 2019 under the chairmanship of Bhiku Ramji Idate.
- Also, a committee has been set up by the NITI Aayog to complete the process of identification of the de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities (DNCs).
- Ethnographic studies of DNCs are being conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India, with a budget of Rs 2.26 crore sanctioned.
- On March 30, 2022 the DoPT issued an advertisement for the recruitment of consultants in the DWBDNC.

## 18. SC to hear plea against Electoral Bonds Scheme

The CJI N will soon take up a long-pending challenge against the government's electoral bonds scheme.

### What are Electoral Bonds?

- Electoral bonds are banking instruments that can be purchased by any citizen or company to make donations to political parties, without the donor's identity being disclosed.
- It is like a promissory note that can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India from select branches of State Bank of India.
- The citizen or corporate can then donate the same to any eligible political party of his/her choice.
- An individual or party will be allowed to purchase these bonds digitally or through cheque.

### About the scheme

- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India will be eligible to purchase the bond
- Such bonds can be purchased for any value in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore from any of the specified branches of the State Bank of India
- The purchaser will be allowed to buy electoral bonds only on due fulfillment of all the extant KYC norms and by making payment from a bank account
- The bonds will have a life of 15 days (15 days time has been prescribed for the bonds to ensure that they do not become a parallel currency).
- Donors who contribute less than ₹20,000 to political parties through purchase of electoral bonds need not provide their identity details, such as Permanent Account Number (PAN).



## Objective of the scheme

- **Transparency in political funding:** To ensure that the funds being collected by the political parties is accounted money or clean money.

## Who can redeem such bonds?

- The Electoral Bonds shall be encashed by an eligible Political Party only through a Bank account with the Authorized Bank.
- Only the **Political Parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951** (43 of 1951) and which secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the Lok Sabha or the State Legislative Assembly, shall be eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.

## Restrictions that are done away

- Earlier, no foreign company could donate to any political party under the Companies Act
- A firm could donate a maximum of 7.5 per cent of its average three year net profit as political donations according to Section 182 of the Companies Act.
- As per the same section of the Act, companies had to disclose details of their political donations in their annual statement of accounts.
- The government moved an amendment in the Finance Bill to ensure that this proviso would not be applicable to companies in case of electoral bonds.
- Thus, Indian, foreign and even shell companies can now donate to political parties without having to inform anyone of the contribution.

## Issues with the Scheme

- **Opaque funding:** While the identity of the donor is captured, it is not revealed to the party or public. So transparency is not enhanced for the voter.
- **No IT break:** Also income tax breaks may not be available for donations through electoral bonds. This pushes the donor to choose between remaining anonymous and saving on taxes.
- **No anonymity for donors:** The privacy of the donor is compromised as the bank will know their identity.
- **Differential benefits:** These bonds will help any party that is in power because the government can know who donated what money and to whom.
- **Unlimited donations:** The electoral bonds scheme and amendments in the Finance Act of 2017 allows for “unlimited donations from individuals and foreign companies to political parties without any record of the sources of funding”.

## Way ahead

- The worries over the electoral bond scheme, however, go beyond its patent unconstitutionality.
- The concern about the possibility of misuse of funds is very pertinent.
- The EC has been demanding that a law be passed to make political parties liable to get their accounts audited by an auditor from a panel suggested by the CAG or EC. This should get prominence.
- Another feasible option is to establish a National Election Fund to which all donations could be directed.
- This would take care of the imaginary fear of political reprisal of the donors.

## 19. India condemns atrocities in Bucha, Ukraine

India condemned the killing of civilians in Bucha, Ukraine, at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) calling for an independent UN inquiry. (However India abstained from blaming Russia for the civilian deaths.)

### Bucha massacre

- The grimmest discoveries have been made in a Kyiv suburb called Bucha, a town located about 25 km to the northwest of the capital.
- More than 300 bodies have been found in the town, some with their hands bound, flesh burned, and shot in the back of the head.
- Satellite images now available show streets strewn with corpses, and many of the bodies seen by journalists in the past couple of days appear to have lain in the open for weeks.
- The reports and pictures of corpses wearing civilian clothes, some clutching shopping bags, suggest that ordinary citizens were murdered without provocation, as they went about their daily business.

### A no lesser holocaust event

- The discoveries have drawn comparisons with the killings of civilians in this area during World War II.
- It reminds of the First Battle of Kyiv (part of Hitler's Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union that began in June 1941) and the Second Battle of Kyiv (November-December 1943).
- The Red (Soviet) Army started to push back the Germans from Ukraine, the area around the Ukrainian capital, including Bucha.
- It saw the "Holocaust by bullets" during which an estimated 1.5 million people, mostly Jews, were shot dead at close range.

## A genocide or war crimes?

- War crimes are defined as “grave breaches” of the Geneva Conventions, agreements signed after World War II that laid down international humanitarian laws during war time.
- Deliberately targeting civilians amounts to a war crime.
- The International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague has already opened an investigation into possible war crimes by Russia.
- The investigation could in theory target even Putin. But it will be difficult to bring Russian defendants to trial or to prove intent.
- Russia does not recognise the ICC and will likely not cooperate with the investigation.
- The crimes of genocide are defined by the United Nations Genocide Convention of December 1948.
- It includes acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. Genocide is seen as the gravest and most serious of all crimes against humanity.

## 20. CBI should have a strong leader with a distinct belief in the law and ethics

### Context

The Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice N.V. Ramana, while delivering the annual (and the 19th edition) D.P. Kohli Memorial Talk minced no words in condemning the utter subordination of agencies to the executive and its disastrous consequences for the cause of justice.

### Key takeaways

- **Resisting the pressure:** The CJI called upon investigators to stand up to unethical pressures in order not to betray the trust reposed in them by the public.
- **Strong court:** We need a strong Supreme Court and equally strong High Courts to keep our investigators on the straight and narrow path.
- **Fixed tenure:** Earlier, CBI Directors were changed at will.
- Mandatory tenure was meant to insulate the CBI Director from the caprice of the executive.
- This process has since been expanded to include the CJI in the selection panel.
- **Strong leadership:** The CBI now has some of the brightest Indian Police Service officers in its higher echelons.
- However, it is not enough if the middle-rung supervisors alone are straightforward.

## Should there be an umbrella organisation?

- The CJI had proposed an umbrella organisation that will oversee all investigating agencies.
- This idea was meant to avoid having multiple agencies looking into the same set of allegations.
- Apart from its **impracticality**, such a novel body could generate its own problems – of **turf wars and ego clashes**.

## Way forward

- There is a need to focus on weeding out the dishonest among officers and rewarding those who have shown and proven themselves to be honest and professionally innovative.

## Conclusion

There needs to be a strong and virtuous leader who will not only be honest but also stick his neck out to protect his deputies if and when confronted by an unscrupulous political heavyweight.

## 21. India-Nepal relationship

### Context

The Nepal Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, paid a long-awaited visit to India last week (April 1-3). Sworn in in July 2021, this was his first bilateral visit abroad, in keeping with tradition.

### Positive outcomes of the visit

- Among the highlights was the operationalisation of the 35 kilometre cross-border rail link from **Jayanagar (Bihar) to Kurtha (Nepal)**.
- The second project that was inaugurated was the 90 km long 132 kV double circuit transmission line connecting Tila (Solukhumbu) to Mirchaiya (Siraha) close to the Indian border.
- In addition, agreements providing technical cooperation in the railway sector, **Nepal's induction into the International Solar Alliance**, and between Indian Oil Corporation and Nepal Oil Corporation on ensuring regular supplies of petroleum products were also signed.
- **The Mahakali Treaty** covers the Sarada and Tanakpur barrages as well as the 6,700 MW (approximately) Pancheshwar Multipurpose project.
- Both sides have agreed to push for an early finalisation of the detailed project report.

- The **joint vision statement on power sector cooperation** recognises the opportunities for joint development power generation projects together with cross border transmission linkages and coordination between the national grids; it can provide the momentum.

### Issues in India-Nepal relations

- Over the years, a number of differences have emerged between India and Nepal that need attention.
- The relationship took a nosedive in 2015, with India first getting blamed for interfering in the Constitution drafting process and then for an “**unofficial blockade**” that generated widespread resentment against India.
- **Revision of Treaty of Peace and Friendship:** As one of the oldest bonds, the **1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship** was originally sought by the Nepali authorities in 1949 to continue the special links they had with British India.
- It provides for an open border and for Nepali nationals to have the right to work in India.
- But today, it is viewed as a **sign of an unequal relationship**, and an Indian imposition.
- The idea of revising and updating it has found mention in Joint Statements since the mid-1990s.
- **Demonetisation** is another irritant. In November 2016, India withdrew ₹15.44 trillion of high value (₹1,000 and ₹500) currency notes. Many Nepali nationals who were legally entitled to hold ₹25,000 of
- Indian currency (given that the Nepali rupee is pegged to the Indian rupee) were left high and dry.
- The Nepal Rashtra Bank, which is the central bank, holds ₹7 crore and **estimates of public holdings are ₹500 crore.**
- After more than five years, it should certainly be possible to resolve this to mutual satisfaction.
- **Kalapani boundary issue:** These boundaries had been fixed in 1816 by the British, and India inherited the areas over which the British had exercised territorial control in 1947.
- While 98% of the India-Nepal boundary **was demarcated, two areas, Susta and Kalapani remained in limbo.**
- In November 2019, India issued new maps following the division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.
- Though the new Indian map did not affect the India-Nepal boundary in any material way, a new map of Nepal was endorsed by the legislature through a constitutional amendment.
- While it did not alter the situation on the ground, it soured relations with India and added a new and emotive irritant.

## Way forward

- The political narrative has changed in both countries and these issues can no longer be swept under the carpet or subsumed by invoking a 'special relationship'.
- Part of the success of Mr. Deuba's visit was that none of the differences was allowed to dominate the visit.
- Yet, to build upon the positive mood, it is necessary these issues be discussed, behind closed doors and at **Track 2 and Track 1.5 channels**.

## Conclusion

The need today is to avoid rhetoric on territorial nationalism and lay the groundwork for quiet dialogue where both sides display sensitivity as they explore what is feasible. India needs to be a sensitive and generous partner for the "neighbourhood first" policy to take root.

## 22. Centre extends relief to Tibetan Committee by 5 years

The Union government has extended the scheme to provide ₹40 crore grants-in-aid to the Dalai Lama's Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC) for another five years, up to fiscal year 2025-26.

### What is CTRC?

- The Dalai Lama's Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC) was formed and registered as Charitable Society under Indian Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860.
- It effectively acts as the Relief and Development Wing of Home Department, Central Tibetan Administration.
- All the CTRC activities are carried out with consent and support from Board of Directors and approval from TPiE (Tibetan Parliament in Exile).

### Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPiE)

- The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPiE) has its headquarters in Dharamsala, in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.
- According to the Green Book of the Tibetan government-in-exile, over 1 lakh Tibetans are settled across India.
- The remaining are settled in United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Mongolia, Germany, United Kingdom, Switzerland and various other countries.

## Working of the TPiE

- The Speaker and a Deputy Speaker head the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile.
- It includes two members from each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the pre-Buddhist Bon religion.
- Other representatives are from the Tibetan Communities in North America and Europe; and from Australasia and Asia (excluding India, Nepal and Bhutan).
- Till 2006, it used to be called as Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPDs) with the chairman as its head and a vice-chairman.

## Tibetan Constitution

- The Central Tibetan Administration exists and functions on the basis of the Constitution of the Tibetan government called the 'The Charter of the Tibetans in Exile'.
- In 1991, The Constitution Redrafting Committee instituted by the Dalai Lama prepared the Charter for Tibetans in exile. The Dalai Lama approved it on June 28, 1991.
- In 2001, fundamental changes happened with the amendment of the Charter that facilitated the direct election of the Kalon Tripa by the Tibetans in exile.
- The Kalon Tripa is called Sikyong or president of the Central Tibetan Administration.

## The Kashag (Cabinet)

- The Kashag (Cabinet) is the Central Tibetan Administration's highest executive office and comprise seven members.
- It is headed by the Sikyong (political leader) who is directly elected by the exiled Tibetan population.
- Sikyong subsequently nominates his seven Kalons (ministers) and seeks the parliament's approval. The Kashag's term is for five years.

## A backgrounder: Democracy for Tibet

- The Dalai Lama began democratization soon after he came to India during the 1959 Tibetan National Uprising.
- He reportedly asked Tibetans in exile to choose their representatives through universal adult suffrage, following which polls were held for electing Tibetan Parliamentarians in 1960.
- Democracy for the Tibetans, thus, began in exile.
- The Dalai Lama, however, continued to remain the supreme political leader. On March 14, 2011, he relinquished his political responsibilities, ending a 369-year-old practice.

### Is TPiE officially recognized by any country?

- Not exactly, it is not recognised officially by any country, including India.
- But, a number of countries including the USA and European nations deal directly with the Sikyong and other Tibetan leaders through various forums.
- The TPiE claims its democratically-elected character helps it manage Tibetan affairs and raise the Tibetan issue across the world.
- The incumbent Sikyong, Lobsang Sangay, was among the guests who attended the oath-taking ceremony of our PM in 2014, probably a first.

### 23. Criminal Procedures (Identification) Bill violates right against self-incrimination

#### Context

The Bill proposes to collect “measurements” of convicted persons, those who are arrested (or detained under preventive detention laws) or those who have executed bonds promising good behaviour.

#### Dilution of right against self-incrimination

- The Constitution, **under Article 20(3)**, protects an accused from being compelled to give witness against himself.
- This fundamental right has been diluted over the years.
- In 2005, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) was amended to allow a magistrate **to order any person to give their handwriting samples** for the purpose of an investigation or proceeding.
- In 2019, the Supreme Court, in Ritesh Sinha v. State of UP, held that such **handwriting samples could include voice samples**.
- It relied upon its judgment in the **Kathi Kalu Oghad case (1962)** that held that giving palm impressions or footprints could not be called self-incriminatory because impressions were **unchangeable**, except in rare cases”.
- Instead, it held that the **Constitution bars the compulsory extraction of a statement** – oral or written – from the accused, “which makes the case against the accused person at least probable, considered by itself”.

#### Provisions in the Bill

- While the databasing of convicted persons is not new, the new piece of legislation allows for taking information, including finger-impressions, palm-print impressions, footprint impressions, photographs, **iris and retina scan, physical, biological samples and their analysis**, behavioural attributes



including signatures, handwriting or any other examination referred to in **Sections 53, 53A of the CrPC.**

- It also mandates the **National Crime Records Bureau to store, preserve and destroy the record of measurements** at the national level as well as process and share them with any law enforcement agency.
- 

### Issues with the Bill

- Right against self-incrimination is unlikely to apply to technologies in use today.
- **Wide scope of under new technologies:** The logic that was used in 1962 to interpret what would violate the right against self-incrimination is unlikely to apply to technologies in use today.
- **The Bill is vaguely worded** and the nature of the processing, sharing, and dissemination of data it entails will most certainly involve the use of new and **emerging technologies.**
- Their application to policing and the criminal justice system has new implications for the right against self-incrimination.
- The compulsory submission of such information could have chilling effects after being subjected to new technologies – in other words, the past of an accused person might be enough to incriminate him.
- **Possibility of coercive data collection:** The Bill proposes to collect **“measurements” of convicted persons**, those who are arrested (or detained under preventive detention laws) or those who have executed bonds promising good behaviour.
- Only **those arrested for petty offences** that are punishable with less than seven years may not be obliged to allow the recording of measurements.
- This rings a warning bell about coercive data collection, especially when seen in the light of the practices used to police oppressed communities.
- For instance, under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, many nomadic and semi-nomadic communities were labelled hereditary criminals.
- Despite the Act being repealed in 1952, these denotified tribal (“Vimukta”) communities continue to be treated as criminals by birth through the **“Habitual Offenders” provisions in state-level police regulations** that allow local police stations to keep records of such persons residing in their area.
- It condemns a section of the country’s population to several cycles of arrest, bail, and acquittal.
- The new piece of legislation could make the practice of history-sheeting, undertaken when a person is merely alleged of a crime, and not convicted, even more coercive.

- **Long storage period and no clear process for destroying information:** the “measurements” are to be stored at the national level for 75 years, with no clear procedure outlined for destroying the information.

## Conclusion

The right against self-incrimination is at the heart of protection against police excess and torture. Record-keeping as mandated by the Bill violates this right. Parliament must make laws that protect against such blatant attacks on fundamental rights and freedoms, rather than enable them.

## 24. What caused Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis?

### Context

Sri Lanka's ruling Rajapaksa family is facing mounting public anger, calls for resignations and political defections amidst the island's worst economic crisis in its post-independence history.

### Reasons for the crisis

- **1] Overnight switch to organic farming and import ban on fertiliser:** There was the decision to ban fertiliser imports and switch overnight to organic farming.
- The decision was reversed after sustained farmer protests but not before damage had already been done to crop yields.
- **2] Then, precious foreign exchange was wasted in propping up the rupee** while imposing controls on key imports that led to shortages and price rise.
- **3] For several months, as the crisis deepened with rolling power-cuts and shortages of essentials, the government refused to seek IMF assistance.**
- It has now relented on the IMF, but Sri Lanka's economic **distress has been prolonged and deepened by this indecision.**

### Contradictions in the Sri Lanka's politics

- While the immediate causes of popular anger are explicable, the crisis also reveals a more enduring contradiction at the foundation of Sri Lanka's politics.
- **Sinhala nationalist-inspired policies:** What this crisis shows is that Sinhala nationalist-inspired policies are no longer financially or politically viable.
- **Hardline approach toward Tamils:** The Rajapaksas first rode to power in September 2005 on the wave of **Sinhala nationalist antipathy** against the then-ongoing Norwegian-mediated peace process with the LTTE.

- Upon his election as president, Mahinda expanded the military and launched a full-frontal military offensive that ended with the LTTE's total defeat and destruction in May 2009.
- After the war, instead of seeking a political settlement with the Tamils, Mahinda Rajapaksa unrolled a de-facto militarised siege of the Tamil-speaking areas and population.
- **Assertive foreign policy:** The hardline approach to the Tamils and their demands was also linked to a new, more assertive foreign policy.
- The government turned away the long-established pattern of alignments with Western states and India.
- **Mistrust of India:** There is a long-standing mistrust of India amongst Sinhala Buddhist nationalists who see it as the source of historic Tamil invasions.
- The Rajapaksas translated this sentiment into policy, pushing back against **Indian attempts to forge closer economic ties and a constitutional settlement of the Tamil question.**
- **Ties with China:** In place of these ties, the Rajapaksas ostentatiously set out to forge new alliances, principally with China.
- The Rajapaksas also bet on a new geo-political optimism.
- They believed that with China's rise, **Sri Lanka's location on east-west trade lanes** would become a prized asset.
- They were confident that in the global competition for power triggered by China's rise, international actors would be compelled to seek Sri Lanka's favour for fear of "losing" it to the other side.
- With this geo-political calculus in mind, they assuredly rebuffed Western and Indian demands.
- None of the great powers who were supposed to be competing for Sri Lanka's favour have stepped up to offer a bailout, although the sums are quite small by global standards.
- The bid for total sovereign autonomy has crash-landed and yet the alternatives are also politically difficult.

### More leverage to international actors

- The irony of Sri Lanka's push for total sovereign autonomy is that it has given international actors more leverage than they had before.
- Going to the **IMF will require concessions on human rights and good governance** to secure preferential access to European markets.
- At the same time, Indian bilateral assistance has conditionalities on **clearing controversial investments.**

## Way forward

- **Push non-reversible changes:** International actors who really want to help Sri Lanka should use this leverage to push for tangible and non-reversible changes in the treatment of Tamils and Muslims whatever leadership emerges in Colombo.
- **Demilitarisation and normalisation of relations with the Tamils and Muslims:** The crisis can serve as a reality check for the Sinhala nationalist leadership and electorate. The model of economic and political governance they have pursued is unsustainable, and the alternatives must be faced.
- The most pressing of these is the demilitarisation and normalisation of relations with the Tamils and Muslims.
- Sinhala political attention can perhaps then be turned to the other pressing failures of governance that have brought Sri Lanka to this state.

## Conclusion

The Rajapaksas may be the principal protagonists of this crisis but the underlying script they have followed is a Sinhala Buddhist one and until Sri Lanka finds a new script it cannot find peace or stability.

## 25. No Fundamental or Absolute Right to receive Foreign Donations: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court upheld amendments introducing restrictions in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) while holding that no one has a fundamental or absolute right to receive foreign contributions.

### What is FCRA?

- The FCRA **regulates foreign donations** and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect internal security.
- **First enacted in 1976**, it was amended in 2010 when a slew of new measures was adopted to regulate foreign donations.
- The FCRA is applicable to all associations, groups and NGOs which intend to receive foreign donations.
- It is **mandatory** for all such NGOs to register themselves under the FCRA.
- The registration is initially valid for **five years** and it can be renewed subsequently if they comply with all norms.

### Why was FCRA enacted?

- The FCRA sought to consolidate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by individuals, associations or companies.
- It sought to prohibit such contributions from being used for activities detrimental to national interest.

### What was the recent Amendment?

- The FCRA was amended in September 2020 to introduce some new restrictions.
- The Government says it did so because it found that many recipients were wanting in compliance with provisions relating to filing of annual returns and maintenance of accounts.
- Many did not utilise the funds received for the intended objectives.
- It claimed that the annual inflow as foreign contributions almost doubled between 2010 and 2019.
- The FCRA registration of 19,000 organisations was cancelled and, in some cases, prosecution was also initiated.

### How has the law changed?

There are at least three major changes that NGOs find too restrictive.

- **Prohibition of fund transfer:** An amendment to Section 7 of the Act completely prohibits the transfer of foreign funds received by an organisation to any other individual or association.
- **Directed and single bank account:** Another amendment mandates that every person (or association) granted a certificate or prior permission to receive overseas funds must open an FCRA bank account in a designated branch of the SBI in New Delhi.
- **Utilization of funds:** Fund All foreign funds should be received only in this account and none other. However, the recipients are allowed to open another FCRA bank account in any scheduled bank for utilisation.
- **Shared information:** The designated bank will inform authorities about any foreign remittance with details about its source and the manner in which it was received.
- **Aadhaar mandate:** In addition, the Government is also authorised to take the Aadhaar numbers of all the key functionaries of any organisation that applies for FCRA registration or for prior approval for receiving foreign funds.
- **Cap on administrative expenditure:** Another change is that the portion of the receipts allowed as administrative expenditure has been reduced from 50% to 20%.

### What is the criticism against these changes?

- **Arbitrary restrictions:** NGOs questioning the law consider the prohibition on transfer arbitrary and too heavy a restriction.
- **Non-sharing of funds:** One of its consequences is that recipients cannot fund other organisations. When foreign help is received as material, it becomes impossible to share the aid.
- **Irrationality of designated bank accounts:** There is no rational link between designating a particular branch of a bank with the objective of preserving national interest.
- **Un-ease of operation:** Due to Delhi based bank account, it is also inconvenient as the NGOs might be operating elsewhere.
- **Illogical narrative:** 'National security' cannot be cited as a reason without adequate justification as observed by the Supreme Court in Pegasus Case.

### What does the Government say?

- **Zero tolerance against intervention:** The amendments were necessary to prevent foreign state and non-state actors from interfering with the country's polity and internal matters.
- **Diversion of foreign funds:** The changes are also needed to prevent malpractices by NGOs and diversion of foreign funds.
- **Fund flow monitoring:** The provision of having one designated bank for receiving foreign funds is aimed at making it easier to monitor the flow of funds.
- **Ease of operation:** The Government clarified that there was no need for anyone to come to Delhi to open the account as it can be done remotely.

### What did the Supreme Court observed now?

- The apex court reasoned that unbridled inflow of **foreign funds may destabilise the sovereignty of the nation.**
- The petitioners have argued that the amendments suffered from the "vice of ambiguity, over-breadth or over-governance" and violated their fundamental rights.
- But the court countered that the amendments only provide a **strict regulatory framework** to moderate the inflow of foreign funds into the country.
- Free and uncontrolled inflow of foreign funds has the potential to impact the socio-economic structure and polity of the country.
- No one can be heard to claim a vested right to accept foreign donations, much less an absolute right, said the verdict.

## Supreme Court's assessment of Foreign Funds

- Philosophically, foreign contribution (donation) is akin to gratifying intoxicant replete with medicinal properties and may work like a nectar.
- However, it serves as a medicine so long as it is consumed (utilised) moderately and discreetly, for serving the larger cause of humanity.
- Otherwise, this artifice has the capability of inflicting pain, suffering and turmoil as being caused by the toxic substance (poisonous tool) – across the nation.

## Way forward

- The court said **charity could be found at home**. NGOs could look within the country for donors.
- Fundamental rights have to give way in the larger public interest to the need to **insulate the democratic polity from the “adverse influence of foreign contributions”**.
- The third-world countries may welcome foreign donations, but it is open to a nation, which is **committed and enduring to be self-reliant**.
- An unregulated inflow of foreign donations would only indicate that the government was incapable of looking after its own affairs and needs of its citizens.

## 26. Care economy

### Context

The importance of care work is now widely acknowledged and covered in various international commitments such as the SDGs. However, the investment in the care economy has not matched the pace.

### Significance of care work

- Care work encompasses direct activities such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner, and indirect care activities such as cooking and cleaning’.
- Whether **paid or unpaid**, direct or indirect, care work is vital for human well-being and economies.
- Unpaid care work is linked to labour market inequalities, yet it has yet to receive adequate attention in policy formulation.
- Paid care workers, such as domestic workers and anganwadis in India, also struggle to access rights and entitlements as workers.
- Greater investment in care services can create an **additional 300 million jobs globally**, many of which will be for women.

- In turn this will help **increase female labour force participation** and advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.
- This year, to commemorate International Women's Day, the ILO brought out its new report titled, 'Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender-equal world of work'.
- The report highlights the **importance of maternity, paternity, and special care leave**, which help balance women's and men's work and family responsibilities throughout their lives.

### Gaps in the current policies

- Bridging the gaps in current policies and service provisions to nurture childcare and elderly care services will deliver the benefits of child development, aging in dignity and independent living as the population grows older and also generate more and better employment opportunities, especially for women.
- **Maternity leave:** Maternity leave is a universal human and labour right.
- Yet, it remains unfulfilled across countries, leaving millions of workers with family responsibilities without adequate protection and support. India fares better than its peers in offering **26 weeks of maternity leave**, against the ILO's standard mandate of 14 weeks that exists in 120 countries.
- However, this coverage extends to only a tiny proportion of women workers in formal employment in India, where 89% of employed women are in informal employment (as given by ILOSTAT, or the ILO's central portal to labour statistics).
- While **paternity leave** is recognised as an enabler for both mothers and fathers to better balance work and family responsibilities, it is not provided in many countries, including India.
- **Access to quality and affordable care** services such as childcare, elderly care and care for people with disabilities is a challenge workers with family responsibilities face globally.
- **Limited implementation:** While India has a long history of mandating the provision of crèches in factories and establishments, there is limited information on its actual implementation.
- Domestic workers, on whom Indian households are heavily reliant, also face challenges in accessing decent work.
- According to the Government's 2019 estimates, 26 lakh of the 39 lakh domestic workers in India are female.
- **Ensure decent work for domestic workers:** While important developments have extended formal coverage to domestic workers in India, such as the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act** and the **minimum wage schedule** in many States, more efforts are required to ensure decent work for them.



## Way forward

- **Increase spending:** India spends less than 1% of its GDP on the care economy; increasing this percentage would unfurl a plethora of benefits for workers and the overall economy.
- **Strategy:** In consultation with employers' and workers' organisations and the relevant stakeholders, the Government needs to conceptualise a strategy and action plan for improved care policies, care service provisions and decent working conditions for care workers.
- **5R Framework:** The ILO proposes a 5R framework for decent care work centred around achieving gender equality. The framework urges the **Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution** of unpaid care work, promotes **Rewarding** care workers with more and decent work, and enables their **Representation** in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

## Conclusion

A human-centred and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that benefits workers, employers, and the government, requires a more significant investment in and commitment to supporting the care economy, which cares for the society at large.

## 27. The wider impact of Pakistan's internal crisis

### Context

As Pakistan goes through a major political convulsion, India must resist the temptation to see the changes across our western frontiers through the narrow prism of bilateral relations.

### Why Pakistan matters

- Pakistan is an important regional piece in the power play between **the US, China and Russia**.
- Given its **location at the crossroads of the Subcontinent, Middle East, Eurasia, and China**, Pakistan has always been a vital piece of real estate that was actively sought by contending geopolitical blocs.
- The internal and external have always been tightly linked in Pakistan.
- Today, Pakistan's internal battles are tied to external geopolitical rivalry.

### Two important factors in the political trajectory of Pakistan

- Any Indian strategy in dealing with the new government in Islamabad would depend on an assessment of Pakistan's post-Imran political trajectory.

- Two important factors stand out.
- 1] First is the **changing nature of civil military relations** in Pakistan.
- It is part of a serious intra-elite struggle that transcends the well-known military dominance over Pakistan's polity.
- One of the more interesting questions to come out of the current episode is whether the army's famed internal coherence and unity of command might endure the crisis.
- 2] Second is the **growing fragility of Pakistan's polity** triggered by the deepening economic crisis and sharpening social contradictions.
- There is no guarantee that the army's ties with new civilian rulers will be smooth nor can we assume that the civilian coalition against Imran Khan will survive the many challenges ahead as it confronts difficult policy challenges on multiple fronts.

### Geopolitical challenges of Pakistan

- Engaging India is unlikely to be a high priority for the new government in Islamabad.
- Today, Pakistan has many other things to worry about – reviving its flagging economic fortunes, stabilising the Durand Line with Afghanistan, and rebalancing its ties with the major actors in the Middle East, including Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.
- Pakistan, which traditionally enjoyed good relations with the West as well as China, is **finding it hard to maintain a balance in its great power relations**.
- While the army and the new government are eager to restore ties with the US, Imran Khan has made it hard for them.
- Imran Khan's repeated praise for India's independent foreign policy was in essence a critique of the Pakistan army that has long steered Islamabad's international relations.

### Way forward

- Delhi should focus on the potential shifts in Pakistan's strategic orientation triggered by the current crisis.
- The good news from Pakistan is that India is not part of the argument between the political classes or between Imran Khan and the "deep state" represented by the army.

### Conclusion

An India that gets an accurate sense of Pakistan's changing geopolitics will be able to better deal with Islamabad.

## 28. Why central services cannot be exempted from reservation for disabled

### Context

In a case that the SC is currently hearing, the petitioner has challenged a notification issued by the Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities (Department).

### About the notification

- The impugned notification exempts all categories of posts in the Indian Police Service, the Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli Police Service, as well as the Indian Railway Protection Force Service from the mandated **4 per cent reservation for persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 [RPwD Act]**.

### Issues with the notification

#### 1] Against combat and non-combat classification

- On the same day as the issuing of the impugned notification, the Department also issued another notification exempting from the purview of reservation under the RPwD Act posts only of “combatant” nature in the paramilitary police.
- This classification between combat and non-combat posts was premised on a clear recognition of the fact that persons with disabilities are capable of occupying non-combat posts in the central forces.
- The Department has offered no justification as to why this classification would not hold good as regards the services covered in the impugned notification.

#### 2] Against the identification of posts suitable for reservation for the disabled

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had identified a range of ministerial/civilian posts as being suitable for reservation for the disabled.
- The impugned notification goes against this identification exercise, by virtue of its blanket character.
- Further, on November 22, 2021, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs released **Draft Accessibility Standards/Guidelines** for built infrastructure under its purview (police stations, prisons and disaster mitigation centres) and services associated with them.

- These Draft Standards state that the police staff on civil duty could be persons with disabilities.

### 3] Exercise of power

- As per the RPwD Act, the grant of any exemption has to be preceded by consultation with the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.
- However, the office of the chief commissioner has been lying vacant for many years, with the secretary in the Department officiating in that role.

### Conclusion

This case presents the SC with the opportunity to rule that the disabled are not a monolithic entity. Every disabled person is different, and it is unfair to paint all disabled people with the same broad brush, based on a stereotypical understanding of what they can do.

## 29. BRICS and the creation of a multipolar world

### Context

The current crisis in Ukraine will consolidate BRICS as the group will make further efforts to become a real alternative to the West to create a real multipolar world.

### BRICS' efforts to change world economic system

- The group was brought together by geopolitical rather than economic considerations and this can be seen in the strategic interests shared by Russia and China.
- **Inclusion of non-Western states in international financial institutions:** BRICS is actively involved in the efforts to change the world economic system by increasing the number of non-Western states in international financial institutes.
- The BRICS countries decided to create **the \$100 billion BRICS Development Bank** and a **reserve currency pool** worth over another \$100 billion to offer an alternative to countries in the non-Western world when it comes to choosing the sources of funding for development or coping with serious economic crises.

### Consequences of Ukraine crisis for BRICS

- It demonstrates that the West has not abandoned the idea of a unipolar world and will continue building it up by drawing into its foreign policy orbit issues it calls "international" or even "common to mankind."

- Many non-Western states look at this as a new wave of colonialism.
- This will increase the desire of non-Western countries to **enhance their coordination** and perhaps the current conflict is already showing signs in this respect.
- The BRICS states are different in many respects and their **disagreements with the West** are rooted in different historical and political circumstances.
- The current crisis in Ukraine **will consolidate BRICS** as the group will make further efforts to become a real alternative to the West to create a real multipolar world.
- RIC controls 22 per cent of the global GDP and 16 per cent of global exports of goods and services.
- The fallout from Russia's alienation from the G-8 group of nations, raises the prospect that – tactically at least – **Russia, India, and China** might be playing their own triangular integrationist card within BRICS at Moscow's initiative.
- **Eurasian integrationist core:** This will create a north Eurasian integrationist core within BRICS, whichever way Moscow's relations with the US and Europe play out.

### Implications for India

- Both the Asian giants – India and China – may stand to reap the “best of both worlds” as the Ukraine imbroglio plays out.
- **Investment:** This could mean **greater industrial and energy cross investments** between Russia and India as well as between Russia and China.
- Additionally, the proposed arrangement for **rupee-ruble cross currency pairing** could result in settlement of payments in non-dollar currencies with more countries looking at India's **sovereign Financial Messaging Systems (SFMS)**, while also remaining connected with a central system like SWIFT.
- **Dedicated payment mechanism:** This should also anchor India's quest to build a dedicated payment mechanism for energy-related payments and settlements as a long-haul measure.
- This could change the contours of the global payments landscape and **benefit the rupee immensely.**

### Spotlight on India

- As the war progresses, New Delhi has been receiving a stream of high-profile visitors from around the world.
- This has included delegations from the **US, Australia and Japan, India's partners in the Quad.**
- The foreign minister of Greece has also been to India and the Israeli prime minister is scheduled to visit soon.

- Even traditional rival China is making overtures to India at this time, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit.
- Another suitor is Russia, which is now also becoming a supplier of discounted crude oil to India as Moscow recoils from sanctions enforced by western consumers of its natural gas.

## Conclusion

New Delhi is basking in its well-deserved spotlight with well-crafted diplomacy. India could be looking at a new dawn.

## 30. Need for one common language

Last week, Home Minister Amit Shah suggested that states should communicate with each other in Hindi rather than English, while stressing that Hindi should not be an alternative to local languages.

This again sparked the debate of "Hindi imposition".

### How widely is Hindi spoken in India?

- The 2011 linguistic census accounts for 121 mother tongues, including 22 languages listed in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.
- Hindi is the most widely spoken, with 52.8 crore individuals, or 43.6% of the population, declaring it as their mother tongue.
- The next highest is Bengali, mother tongue for 97 lakh (8%) – less than one-fifth of Hindi's count (Chart 2).
- In terms of the number of people who know Hindi, the count crosses more than half the country.
- Nearly 13.9 crore (over 11%) reported Hindi as their second language, which makes it either the mother tongue or second language for nearly 55% of the population.

### Has it always been this widespread?

- Hindi has been India's predominant mother tongue over the decades, its share in the population rising in every succeeding census.
- In 1971, 37% Indians had reported Hindi as their mother tongue, a share that has grown over the next four censuses to 38.7%, 39.2%, 41% and 43.6% at last count (Chart 1).
- This begs the question as to which mother tongues have declined as Hindi's share has risen.

- A number of mother tongues other than Hindi have faced a decline in terms of share, although the dip has been marginal in many cases.
- For example, Bengali's share in the population declined by just 0.14 percentage points from 1971 (8.17%) to 2011 (8.03%).
- In comparison, Malayalam (1.12 percentage points) and Urdu (1.03 points) had higher declines among the mother tongues with at least 1 crore speakers in 2011.
- Punjabi's share, on the other hand, rose from 2.57% to 2.74%.
- At the other end of the scale (among the 22 languages listed in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution) were Malayalam, whose numbers rose by under 59% in four decades, and Assamese, rising just over 71% (Chart 3).

### **What explains Hindi's high numbers?**

- One obvious explanation is that Hindi is the predominant language in some of India's most populous states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.
- Another reason is that a number of languages are bracketed under Hindi by census enumerators.
- In 2011, there were 1,383 mother tongues reported by people, and hundreds were knocked out.
- These mother tongues were then grouped into languages.
- You will find that under Hindi, they have listed nearly 65 mother tongues.
- Among them is Bhojpuri, and 5 crore people have reported Bhojpuri as their mother tongue, but the census has decided that Bhojpuri is Hindi.
- If one were to knock out the other languages merged with Hindi, the total figure goes down to 38 crore.

### **And how widely is English spoken?**

- Although English, alongside Hindi, is one of the two official languages of the central government, it is not among the 22 languages in the 8th Schedule; it is one of the 99 non-scheduled languages.
- In terms of mother tongue, India had just 2.6 lakh English speakers in 2011 – a tiny fraction of the 121 crore people counted in that census.
- That does not reflect the extent to which English is spoken.
- It was the second language of 8.3 crore respondents in 2011, second only to Hindi's 13.9 crore.
- If third language is added, then English was spoken – as mother tongue, second language or third language – by over 10% of the population in 2011, behind only Hindi's 57%.
- It is still not a scheduled language in India, when it should be.

## Where is English most prevalent?

- As mother tongue, Maharashtra accounted for over 1 lakh of the 2.6 lakh English speakers.
- As second language, English is preferred over Hindi in parts of the Northeast.
- Among the 17.6 lakh with Manipuri (an 8th Schedule language) as their mother tongue in 2011, 4.8 lakh declared their second language as English, compared to 1.8 lakh for Hindi.
- Among the non-scheduled languages spoken in the Northeast, Khasi, predominant in Meghalaya, was the mother tongue of 14.3 lakh, of whom 2.4 lakh declared their second language as English, and 54,000 as Hindi.
- The trends were similar for Mizo, and for various languages spoken in Nagaland, including Ao, Angami and Rengma.
- Beyond the Northeastern languages, among 68 lakh with Kashmiri as their mother tongue, 2.8 lakh declared their second language as English, compared to 2.2 lakh who declared Hindi.

## 31. The impact of the CUET is likely to be harsher on disadvantaged sections

### Context

The introduction of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) can be seen as a step in the direction of aligning India with international standards.

### About CUET

- The UGC's rationale for introducing the test is to address the disparity in the allocation of marks by different examination boards, and provide a "level playing field" to students from different sections of society and diverse regions.
- The CUET has been envisaged as a corrective.
- Of the **48 central universities**, 45 seem to have the requirements to institute the test.
- The CUET is going to decide the fate of approximately 1.3 crore students for roughly 5.4 lakh undergraduate seats in 45 central universities.

### Issues with the CUET

- **Students to contend with two examinations:** The marks obtained in the board examination will remain vital for admission to state and private universities as well as job applications.
- The students will now have **to contend with two examinations.**



- **Impetus to coaching classes:** Many educationists argue that the new examination is likely to give an impetus to coaching classes.
- Coaching and private tuition will flourish without much concern for quality in the preparation of the study material.
- **Not all State Boards prescribe NCERT textbooks:** The CUET syllabus will be based on NCERT (under the Ministry of Education) textbooks even though not all state boards prescribe these books.
- The coaching industry stands to take advantage of this situation and students will have a hard time navigating two sets of textbooks.
- The impact is likely to be **harsher on disadvantaged sections of the society** for whom access to higher education is seen as the only route to upward mobility.

### Way forward

- The **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** is constantly increasing for higher secondary education (51.4 per cent according to UDISE, 2019-20) and higher education (27.1 per cent to AISHE, 2019-20).
- The figures indicate that higher education has acquired a mass base in the country.
- This has important implications for a knowledge-based economy and society.
- Maintaining the momentum of GER would require **more teachers, schools and higher education institutions of quality** and slow down the rush for a few but highly sought after universities and colleges.

### Conclusion

The new examination would put additional pressure on both students and teachers at a time when they are trying to overcome the exactions of the pandemic. It appears to diverge from the objective of the National Education Policy-2020 – equitable access to good quality higher education for all students.

## 32. Language sensitivity and provisions in Constitution

Language sensitivity has been a feature of selfhood in the case of every Indian language.

### Sensitivity to language

- From ancient times, a sensitivity to language difference has almost been the core of Dravidic self-hood.
- A similar sensitivity existed among the speakers of Prakrits in ancient times.

- It was in one of the Prakrits that Mahavir had presented his teachings in the sixth century BCE.
- Eighteen centuries later, **Acharya Hemachandra**, a major Jain scholar, poet, mathematician and philosopher, produced his Desinamamala, a treatise on the importance of Prakrit words used in Gujarat of his times as against those from Sanskrit.
- Mahatma Gandhi, who defined the idea of selfhood for India in Hind Swaraj (1909), chose to write this iconic book in Gujarati.

### Constitutional provision

- The official language used for communication between the States shall be the language that has been in use at the time of adoption of the Constitution.
- The move from English to Hindi can take place only if, **'two or more states agree'** for the shift.
- **Article 344 (4) provides for a 'Committee** consisting of thirty members', 'twenty' from the Parliament and 'ten' from State assemblies, for safeguarding language-related provisions.

### The distribution between two ministries

- The functions and the scope of the committee, as laid down by the Constitution, are further clarified by the practice of distribution of language as a subject between two Ministries, **the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry and the Home Ministry.**
- The scope of the HRD Ministry extends **to education and the promotion of cultural expression.**
- The Home Ministry's scope extends to safeguarding **relations of the States with the 'union'**, protecting the linguistic rights of language minorities and the promotion of Hindi.
- The last of these, the Constitution states, has to be 'without interference with other languages.

### Data on language decline

- In 2011, Hindi speakers accounted for 43.63% of the total population, with a total of 52.83 crore speakers.
- In 1971, the number was 20.27 crore, accounting for 36.99% of the total population.
- Between 2001 and 2011, the growth in proportion of the population was 2.6%.
- The next most spoken language, Bangla, **had negative growth.**
- It was spoken by 8.30% of Indians in 1991, 8.11% in 2001 and by 8.03% in 2011.

- Telugu, which slid from 7.87% in 1991, to 7.19% in 2001 and 6.70% in 2011, has a similar story to tell.
- Tamil recorded 6.32% of the total population in 1991, 5.91% in 2001 and 5.70% in 2011.
- The only major language to show decadal growth (though small) was Gujarati.
- And the only small yet scheduled language to show good growth was Sanskrit.

### Reasons for Hindi's growth

- The 52.83 crore speakers of Hindi (as recorded in 2011) included not just the speaker of 'Hindi' but also those of more than 50 other languages.
- Bhojpuri and most languages of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand have also been pushed into the Hindi package.
- Had the Census not included these other languages under Hindi, the strength of Hindi speakers would have gone down to about 39 crore, – just a little under 32% of the total population in 2011 – and would have looked not too different from those of other scheduled languages.
- The data for English speakers is far more truthful. Census 2011 reports a total of 3,88,793 Indians as English speakers (2,59,678 men and 1,29,115 women).

### Hindi in comparison to other languages in the Eighth schedule

- Among the languages included in the Eighth Schedule, Hindi falls within the younger lot of languages.
- On the other hand, Tamil, Kannada, Kashmiri, Marathi, Oriya, Sindhi, Nepali and Assamiya have a much longer/older history.
- As a language of knowledge too, Tamil, Kannada, Bangla and Marathi (with their abundance of encyclopaedias and historical literature), quite easily outshine Hindi.

### Conclusion

A language evolves slowly and cannot be forced to grow by issuing ordinances.

## 33. Widening data divide between state and citizens

### Context

While this year's Economic Survey focuses on improving the quality and quantity of data for better and quicker assessment of the state of the economy, it pays little

attention to access to the data by citizens, ignoring the criticality of data for a healthy and informed public discourse on issues of policy relevance.

### Strengthening data architecture

- The government has been proactively strengthening the data architecture for tackling corruption and better targeting of beneficiaries.
- Since 2014, the **scope of UIDAI has seen a huge expansion.**
- JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) has private details of citizens.
- The government is **sufficiently empowered to collect and use information** about its citizens touching all the spheres of their life.
- Along with traditional instruments such as the Census, **sample surveys and registers of various departments**, the government is now armed with real-time data.

### Erosion in citizens' right to access data and widening information gap

- **Delayed release of survey data:** The citizen's right to access relevant data for quality public discussion seems to be gradually eroding.
- In this process, the government has refused to hold itself accountable.
- This is evident from repeated events of **delayed release of various survey data.**
- For example, data from the consumption survey 2017-18 has not yet been released.
- Similarly, the first **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS 2017-18)** was released only after the 2019 general election.
- **Undermining of scientific data:** Further, instead of relying on the **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**, a systematically designed survey for estimation of industrial sector GDP, the government has started to depend on **self-reported, unverified data** submitted to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs since 2011.
- Now that ASI is nearly redundant for official estimation purposes, the future of this database is uncertain.
- Another example of undermining the scientific database is the **delay in the release of Water and Sanitation Survey data 2018.**
- **The information gaps** in the area of migration are well documented.
- **Information gap:** While the **JAM architecture** and pandemic induced tracking tools allow for the mapping of individuals, researchers and the civil society do not have access to that information, which is useful to ascertain the **level and prevalence of migration across regions within the country.**

## Conclusion

This data divide between the state and its citizens is a potential threat to the smooth functioning of a democracy. Without bridging this data gap, the scope of modern technology for tracking development cannot be realised.

### **34. No one can insist that judge disclose reason for recusal: Delhi HC**

The Delhi High Court has held that no litigant or third party has the right to intervene, comment or enquire about a judge's recusal from a case.

#### Recusal of a Judge

- Recusal is the withdrawal of oneself as a judge in a particular proceeding, because of a conflict of interest or having a prior or personal affiliation with the parties in the case.
- This practice of recusal derives its origin from the basic principles of "due process of law" which says that "nobody can be a judge in his/her own case".

#### Delhi High Court's views

- The Court, while dismissing a plea asking for an investigation against persons who had allegedly tried to influence the court of a Metropolitan Magistrate, held that an investigation on the cause or reason for recusal by a judge, especially by a litigant, would be an interference with the functioning of justice.
- The Court also said that the decision of recusal has to be respected, irrespective of whether a reason has been given in detail or not.
- Nobody can demand a reason from the judge for refraining from a case.
- The discretion of the judges regarding the disclosure of reasons for recusal is absolute.

### **35. Retirement spree in SC may affect efforts to scale down pendency**

A number of judges of the supreme court are about to retire in recent months amidst the high pendency of cases in the Supreme court.

#### Retirement of Supreme court Judges:

- Judges on the Supreme Court retire when they reach the age of 65.
- Retired Supreme Court or High Court judges can be appointed to sit on the Court and act as judges.
- A person who has served as a Supreme Court Judge is barred from practicing law in any court in India or before any other authority.

- Know more about **Supreme Court of India**

### **Concerns with Judges retirement in Supreme court:**

- The retirements come at a time when the court is attempting to regain its footing following particularly brutal pandemic waves.
- Even as the virus refuses to go away, the court continues to struggle with the issue of pendency.
- The Supreme Court is juggling Benches, with judges sitting on Special Benches in various combinations to expedite the hearing and disposition of pending matters, including death penalty cases.
- Seven impending retirements in seven months could stifle the recovery at a critical juncture. This is compounded by the fact that there are already two openings. The working judicial strength is 32 against the sanctioned strength of 34.
- If no new appointments are made till the retirement of Justice Lalit on November 8, the year may see nine vacancies in the court.

### **36. China, Solomon Islands sign landmark security agreement**

Foreign ministers of China and the Solomon Islands signed the framework agreement on security cooperation recently.

#### **China-Solomon Island Deal:**

- China has signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands, which could pave the way for more Chinese security agreements with other countries.
- Under the terms of the agreement, the two parties will cooperate in areas such as social order and humanitarian aid in order to assist the Solomon Islands in strengthening its capacity to protect its own security.

#### **Concerns with China-Solomon Island Deal:**

- The pact is being seen as a major shift in local geopolitics since it gives China direct access to the South Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand.
- Among the principal concerns are that China will build a military base in the Solomon Islands.
- United States' concerns are over the deployment of police, armed police, and military personnel on the Solomon Islands.
- The Solomon Islands has great strategic significance, as was evident during WWII when it served as a bulwark for Australia against the advancing Japanese.

- There are also fears it could fall into China's debt trap amid promises to funnel billions in mega infrastructure projects by Chinese firms.
- Finally, the Solomon Islands also sits on critical shipping routes, meaning China could potentially control maritime traffic in and around the region.

### **Impact of the China-Solomon Islands pact on India:**

- The islands are a significant distance from mainland India and even the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- However, China's advances in the region will be a cause for concern even for India as the agreement could give China a military foothold in the South Pacific.

### **37. The quarrel over Kuril Islands**

**Context:** The Kuril Islands situated between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean are under dispute as both Russia and Japan claim sovereignty over them.

#### **What are the Kuril Islands/Northern Territories?**

- These four islands are located between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean, near the northernmost prefecture of Japan, Hokkaido.
- Despite the fact that the islands have been under Russian control since the end of World War II, both Moscow and Tokyo claim sovereignty over them.
- The islands were seized by the Soviet Union at the end of WWII, and Japanese residents were expelled by 1949.
- Japan claims the disputed islands have been a part of the country since the early 1800s.

#### **What is the Kuril island dispute?**

- Several treaties confirm Japan's sovereignty over the islands. The Shimoda Treaty of 1855, the St. Petersburg Treaty of 1875 for the exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Islands, and the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, all signed after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.
- Russia, on the other hand, claims that the Yalta Agreement (1945) and the Potsdam Declaration (1945) establish its sovereignty, and that the San Francisco Treaty of 1951 establishes Japan's recognition of Russian sovereignty over the islands.
- Japan had "renounced all right, title, and claim to the Kuril Islands," according to Article 2 of the treaty.
- Japan claims that the San Francisco Treaty cannot be applied because the Soviet Union never signed it.

- In addition, Japan refuses to acknowledge that the four disputed islands were once part of the Kuril chain.

### **Attempts at resolution:**

- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the most recent attempt when he looked into the joint economic development of the disputed islands.
- In fact, based on the 1956 Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration, both countries agreed to hold bilateral talks.
- After the conclusion of a peace treaty, Russia was even willing to return two islands to Japan, the Shikotan Island and the Habomai islets, as stated in the 1956 declaration.
- Japan's efforts to improve relations with Russia were motivated by a desire to diversify its energy sources, while Russia sought to diversify its buyer base and attract foreign investment.
- However, nationalist sentiments on both sides prevented the dispute from being resolved.

### **Way Forward:**

- Japan has been one of the most adamant Western allies in condemning Russian aggression and imposing sanctions on it.
- The Kuril Islands are under Russia's "illegal occupation," according to Japan's recent Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022.
- Fears of a Russia-China alliance have likely fueled Japan's actions, as the country has territorial disputes and a tense history with China.
- Japan may have seen this as an opportunity to further isolate Russia by portraying it as a "repeat violator" of international law.
- Japan may have been prompted to take this stance because it believes the invasion of Ukraine proves that reclaiming the Kuril Islands is a futile effort.

## **38. A look at child and adolescent healthcare systems**

This article discusses the need for revamping the children and adolescent health care sector.

### **Background**

- Around 86 lakh deaths were recorded among children and adolescents (0-20 years) in the year 2019.
- With "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" being one of the key aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, it is expected that countries might fail to meet the targets.



- A new Lancet report urges for the complete revamp of the children and adolescent healthcare sector.

### The need for comprehensive care

- A significant number of deaths occurred between 28 weeks of gestation and 20 years of age which is considered to be the crucial period in the lifecycle that forms the foundation for building human capital.
- The significance of the impact of early life poverty on the growth and development of children.
  - As seen in the low and middle-income countries, early-life poverty has adverse effects on the survival, nutrition and cognitive development of children.
- Although progress has been made in improving the key aspects of healthcare, there are huge inequities as these interventions are not financially affordable to many children in low-income and middle-income countries.
- The COVID-19 pandemic also has highlighted the devastating effects that gaps in healthcare and education can have on children.★

### Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to improve the health and social systems for all children in low and middle-income countries and these systems must be better equipped to address the emerging needs of children and families.
- Scaling-up of evidence-based interventions for children which also includes aspects such as mental health, addressing unintentional injuries, non-communicable diseases, and neglected tropical diseases.
- A piecemeal approach, addressing the problems of only certain age groups is not the best method to handle the crises. Instead, a holistic care approach that includes nutrition, preventive health, education, and community is needed.
- The close involvement of family, especially lending help during pregnancy and continuing through the relevant years of growth of the child, is also recommended.

### 39. Revisiting death penalty jurisprudence

- Recently, a Bench of the Supreme Court of India, looking into the challenge of the **Irfan vs State of Madhya Pradesh case** has decided to critically examine the abrupt way in which trial judges impose the death penalty on convicts

#### Background:

#### **Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980):**

- Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980) is a well-known landmark judgment credited for developing the **jurisprudence pertaining to the death penalty**. It examined whether the death penalty was in consonance with the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- The main issue that was addressed in this case was whether the procedure prescribed under **Section 354(3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973** pertaining to sentencing the culprit is unconstitutional.
  - According to Section 354(3) in the Code of Criminal Procedure, while imposing capital punishment, the judge should specify “the special reasons” for doing so. By this provision, the courts are vested with unguided discretion and it is completely up to them to ascertain whether the death penalty should be imposed or not.
- The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal in accordance with the majority opinion. The Court dismissed the challenge to the constitutionality of Section 302 of the IPC in so far as it prescribes the death sentence, as well as, the constitutionality of Section 354(3) of the CrPC, 1973 was rejected.
- Though the Constitution Bench in the case refused to declare the death penalty as unconstitutional, it **suggested a humane and reformist framework in the matter of capital punishment**.
  - This case led to the establishment of the “**rarest of the rare**” doctrine applicable while determining whether the death penalty is to be awarded to the accused. According to this principle, the death sentence could be resorted to only in the rarest of rare cases, that too when “the alternate option (in the matter of punishment, such as life imprisonment) is unquestionably foreclosed”. Hence the bench sought to do away with the indiscriminate use of the penal provisions related to capital punishment.
  - The bench had emphasized that apart from examining the gravity of the offence, the courts will also have to consider other factors such as **the condition and the ‘reformability’ of the accused**. It recommended a person-centric approach while considering the **mitigative factors** which could include socio-economic backwardness, mental health, heredity, parenting, socialisation, education, etc. to avert the handing of capital punishment.

### Concerns with current jurisprudence:

#### Lack of concrete guidelines:

- Notably, the Bachan Singh judgment has not elaborated on the mitigative elements in the matter of sentencing or the method of invoking them to avert the death penalty. It also does not clearly explain the issues such as the burden of proof and standard of proof in detail.

- This lack of clarity is leading to cases being decided contrary to the principles set under the Bachan Singh case.

### **Breach of Bachan Singh case principle:**

- Notably, the Bachan Singh principle has been breached by the Supreme Court itself in several cases.
  - In **Ravji vs State of Rajasthan (1995)**, the Supreme Court had stated that it is the nature of the crime and not the criminal which is germane for deciding the punishment. This observation runs contrary to the observations made in the Bachan Singh case.
  - In **Machhi Singh vs State of Punjab (1983)**, the Supreme Court noted that the inadequacy of other punishments could justify the death penalty. This runs against the humanistic liberalism propounded in the Bachan Singh case.

### **Arguments against capital punishment:**

- Capital punishment is described by some as being violative of the right to life envisaged under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.
- As against the belief that the death penalty would act as a deterrent to heinous crimes, a number of surveys and statistical reports have suggested that the **death penalty does not act as a deterrent**.
- Across the world, 108 nations have abolished the death penalty in law for all the crimes and 144 countries (more than two-thirds of the total countries) have put an end to imposing the death penalty in law or practice, according to the **Amnesty Report of 2021**. India is one of the very few countries that are yet to abolish the death penalty.
- In India, as elsewhere, the **poor remain the most affected by capital punishment**. The numbers of the uneducated and the illiterate sentenced to death outweigh those who are educated and literate. This is indicative of the unequal impact on the marginalized sections which amounts to infringement of the constitutionally guaranteed rights. This could be attributed to the unsatisfactory legal assistance received by the poor which often leads to their conviction. And in the matter of sentencing too, the mitigating factors are either not placed before the trial court or not persuaded adequately to convince the trial judge to avoid the death penalty.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Filling gaps in the Bachan Singh case:**

- It is the dire need of the hour to lay down an **effective framework for awarding the death penalty**.

- The Court while looking into the instant case will have to revisit the issues related to **mitigating factors and individual-centred sentencing policy** and come up with concrete guidelines for such policy.
  - The Court should come up with a legal device for procurement of a comprehensive report dealing with the socio-economic and hereditary backgrounds of the accused from experts in the fields of social work, psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, etc.
  - There should be a comprehensive examination of the factors relating to the crime, the criminal, and the punishment.
  - The court should also lay down concrete propositions for assessment of mitigating factors, determination of standard of proof, the burden of proof, etc.
- This could ensure a convict-centric approach so that the imposition of capital punishment becomes **rarer, fairer, and principled**.

#### **Relook at the constitutional validity of the death penalty:**

- Given that evolving a just and judicious sentencing policy alone may not be able to accommodate for factors such as judgmental errors, poor quality of adjudication, incapacity or backwardness of the parties and their inadequacy of defence, the disparity in the practical application of the doctrine, etc, the Supreme Court should consider having a relook at the core question in 'Bachan Singh' – the constitutional validity of the death penalty.

#### **40. Plan for 4G upgrade in LWE areas**

- The Union Cabinet approved a Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) project for upgrading 2G mobile services to 4G at security sites in LWE (Left Wing Extremism) areas.
- The government has chosen BSNL for the project to promote the development of indigenous 4G telecom equipment to achieve self-reliance in the telecom sector.

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

### **1. Conservation of Sacred Grooves**

India's sacred groves are being gradually altered due to ever-expanding human populations, pollution and removal of biomass; effective conservation is the need of the hour to maintain their functional values

## What are Sacred Grooves?

- Sacred groves of India are forest fragments of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a significant religious connotation for the protecting community.
- It usually consists of a dense cover of vegetation including climbers, herbs, shrubs and trees, with the presence of a village deity and is mostly situated near a perennial water source.
- Sacred groves are considered to be symbols of the primitive practice of nature worship and support nature conservation to a great extent.
- The introduction of the protected area category community reserves under the **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002** has introduced legislation for providing government **protection to community-held lands**, which could include sacred groves.

## Historical references

- Indian sacred groves are often associated with temples, monasteries, shrines, pilgrimage sites, or with burial grounds.
- Historically, sacred groves find their mentions in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist texts, from sacred tree groves in Hinduism to sacred deer parks in Buddhism for example.
- Sacred groves may be loosely used to refer to natural habitat protected on religious grounds.
- Other historical references to sacred groves can be obtained in **Vrukshayurveda** an ancient treatise, ancient classics such as **Kalidasa's Vikramuurvashiiya**.
- There has been a growing interest in creating green patches such as **Nakshatravana**

## Regulation of activities in Sacred Grooves

- Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these patches.
- Other forms of forest usage like honey collection and deadwood collection are sometimes allowed on a sustainable basis.
- NGOs work with local villagers to protect such groves.
- Traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the grove.

## Threats to such grooves

- Threats to the groves include urbanization, and over-exploitation of resources.

- While many of the groves are looked upon as abode of Hindu deities, in the recent past a number of them have been partially cleared for construction of shrines and temples.

### **Total grooves in India**

- Around 14,000 sacred groves have been reported from all over India, which act as reservoirs of rare fauna, and more often rare flora, amid rural and even urban settings.
- Experts believe that the total number of sacred groves could be as high as 100,000.
- They are called by different names in different states:
  1. Sarna in Bihar
  2. Dev Van in Himachal Pradesh
  3. Devarakadu in Karnataka
  4. Kavu in Kerala
  5. Dev in Madhya Pradesh
  6. Devarahati or Devarai in Maharashtra
  7. Lai Umang in Maharashtra
  8. Law Kyntang or Asong Khosi in Meghalaya
  9. Oran in Rajasthan
  10. Kovil Kadu or Sarpa Kavu in Tamil Nadu

### **What lies ahead?**

- The groves have great research value in in situ conservation of rare, endangered and threatened plant species.
- It is high time that public awareness is created about the importance of these sacred groves, developmental activities are banned and the felling of trees or removal of any other vegetation is completely stopped.
- This is possible only by way of enacting a special law for the protection and management of sacred groves.
- As the management practices and other rituals vary from state to state, the concerned state governments may promulgate such an act as suitable for the state.
- The idea should be to protect certain rare, endangered and threatened plant species in the era of global warming and climate change.

## 2. Designation of Terrorists in India

The Union Home Ministry has designated Hafiz Talha Saeed, son of Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, chief of the Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), as a terrorist under the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA).

### About Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA)

- The UAPA is aimed at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Its main objective was to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India
- It is an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA, which was allowed to lapse in 1995 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was repealed in 2004.
- It was originally passed in 1967 under the then Congress government led by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- Till 2004, “unlawful” activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory. Following the 2004 amendment, “terrorist act” was added to the list of offences.

### Designation of Terrorists

- The Centre had amended UAPA, 1967, in August 2019 to include the provision of designating an individual as a terrorist.
- Before this amendment, only organisations could be designated as terrorist outfits.
- Section 15 of the UAPA defines a “terrorist act” as any act committed with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security, economic security, or sovereignty of India or with intent to strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or in any foreign country.
- The original Act dealt with “unlawful” acts related to secession; anti-terror provisions were introduced in 2004.

### Who makes such designation?

- The UAPA (after 2019 amendment) seeks to empower the central government to designate an individual a “terrorist” if they are found committing, preparing for, promoting, or involved in an act of terror.
- A similar provision already exists in Part 4 and 6 of the legislation for organizations that can be designated as a “terrorist organisations”.

### **How individuals are declared terrorists?**

- The central government may designate an individual as a terrorist through a notification in the official gazette, and add his name to the schedule supplemented to the UAPA Bill.
- The government is not required to give an individual an opportunity to be heard before such a designation.
- At present, in line with the legal presumption of an individual being innocent until proven guilty, an individual who is convicted in a terror case is legally referred to as a terrorist.
- While those suspected of being involved in terrorist activities are referred to as terror accused.

### **What happens when an individual is declared a terrorist?**

- The designation of an individual as a global terrorist by the United Nations is associated with sanctions including travel bans, freezing of assets and an embargo against procuring arms.
- The UAPA, however, does not provide any such detail.
- It also does not require the filing of cases or arresting individuals while designating them as terrorists.

### **Removing the terrorist tag**

- The UAPA gives the central government the power to remove a name from the schedule when an individual makes an application.
- The procedure for such an application and the process of decision-making will be decided by the central government.
- If an application filed by an individual declared a terrorist is rejected by the government, the UAPA gives him the right to seek a review within one month after the application is rejected.
- The central government will set up the review committee consisting of a chairperson (a retired or sitting judge of a High Court) and three other members.
- The review committee is empowered to order the government to delete the name of the individual from the schedule that lists “terrorists”, if it considers the order to be flawed.
- Apart from these two avenues, the individual can also move the courts challenging the government’s order.



### 3. Near Field Communication (NFC) technology for instant payments

Google Pay has recently launched a new feature in India, 'Tap to pay for UPI', in collaboration with Pine Labs. The feature makes use of Near Field Communication (NFC) technology.

#### What is Near Field Communication (NFC)?

- NFC is a short-range wireless connectivity technology that allows NFC-enabled devices to communicate with each other and transfer information quickly and easily with a single touch.
- It makes possible to pay bills, exchange business cards, download coupons, or share a document.

#### How does it work?

- NFC transmits data through electromagnetic radio fields, to enable communication between two devices. Both devices must contain NFC chips, as transactions take place within a very short distance.
- NFC-enabled devices must be either physically touching or within a few centimetres from each other for data transfer to occur.

#### When did NFC tech start?

- In 2004, consumer electronics companies, Nokia, Philips and Sony together formed the NFC Forum, which outlined the architecture for NFC technology to create powerful new consumer-driven products.
- Nokia released the first NFC-enabled phone in 2007.

#### How will this technology work with the recently launched feature, 'Tap to pay for UPI'?

- Google Pay has been the first among UPI apps to bring the Tap to Pay feature working on POS terminals.
- It will allow users with UPI accounts configured on Google Pay to make payments just by tapping their NFC-enabled Android smartphones on any Pine Labs Android POS terminal.
- Once users tap their phones on the POS terminal, it will automatically open the Google pay app with the payment amount pre-filled.
- Users can then verify the amount and merchant name and authenticate the payment, using their UPI PIN.

- The process is much faster compared to scanning a QR code or entering the UPI-linked mobile number which has been the conventional way till now.

### **What are the other applications of NFC technology?**

- NFC tech has a wide range of applications besides driving payment services.
- It is used in contactless banking cards to perform money transactions or to generate contact-less tickets for public transport.
- Contactless cards and readers use NFC in several applications from securing networks and buildings to monitoring inventory and sales, preventing auto theft, keeping tabs on library books,
- NFC is behind the cards that we wave over card readers in subway turnstiles and on buses to check tickets.
- It is present in speakers, household appliances, and other electronic devices that we monitor and control through our smartphones.
- With just a touch, NFC can also set up WiFi and Bluetooth devices in our homes, investopedia noted.
- It also has an application in healthcare, to monitor patient stats through NFC-enabled wristbands.
- NFC is used in wireless charging too.

### **How safe is this technology?**

- NFC technology is designed for an operation between devices within a few centimetres from each other.
- This makes it difficult for attackers to record the communication between the devices compared to other wireless technologies which have a working distance of several metres, according to the NFC forum, a non-profit industry association.
- The user of the NFC-enabled device determines by the touch gesture which entity the NFC communication should take place with, making it more difficult for the attacker to get connected.
- The security level of the NFC communication is by default higher compared to other wireless communication protocols.

### **Where does it stand in comparison to other wireless technologies?**

- There are other wireless technologies available which are replacing cable-based connections.
- The IrDa technology is a short range (a few metres) connection based on the exchange of data over infrared light where the two communication devices must be positioned within a line of sight.

- Today, this technology is mainly used for remote control devices. For larger data communication with computer devices this technology was replaced by Bluetooth or WiFi connections.
- However, for these technologies' receiver devices need their own power supply due to the larger working distance.
- Therefore, the receiving device cannot be powered by the radiofrequency (RF) field like in NFC, the NFC forum highlighted.
- Another consequence of the larger working distance is the need for the user to configure their device and to pair them together for communication.

#### 4. Tariff problem of renewable energy

##### Context

We need to shift to a two-part tariff for solar and wind to incentivise private investments.

##### Background of power generation tariff in India

- **The two-part tariff** has been in vogue since 1992.
- It applies to **thermal and hydro generation**.
- **1] Fixed component:** The **first part is a fixed component** – the cost that a generator incurs.
- This is not linked to the amount of power generated.
- **2] Variable component:** The second part varies with the **quantum of generation**.
- It **does not apply to renewable generation** – solar, wind, and also nuclear.
- Under the two-part formula, the variable cost is calculated on the basis prescribed by the regulatory commissions.
- This is based on the cost of fuel – coal or gas or lignite – as the case may be.
- The **fixed cost is also determined by regulatory commissions** and it has a graded payment system depending on the extent to which the plant would be in a position to generate.
- The point here is that when a generator is in a position to generate, it gets to recover the fixed cost (or some part of it), irrespective of whether it actually generates power.

## Single-part tariff for nuclear, wind and solar

- In contrast, solar and wind generation and also nuclear are still governed by a single-part tariff.
- The single-part tariff applies to nuclear power stations for various reasons including the fact that given the technology, a nuclear generator **does not usually increase/decrease the generation at a quick tempo**, but maintains a steady stream.
- In any case, nuclear power accounts for **only about two per cent** of the entire generation, so let's leave it aside.
- On the other hand, solar and wind generation account for about 10 per cent of the generation today and going by the statement delivered during COP26 in Glasgow, we want to ramp it up to 50 per cent by 2030.

## Issues with single-part tariff for wind

- **Must run status:** The renewable sector has been given a “must run” status.
- This means that any generation from renewables needs to be dispatched first.
- The problem is that “must run” runs counter to the basic economic theory that in order to minimise total cost, dispatch should commence from the source **offering the cheapest variable cost** and then move upwards.
- With a single-part tariff, whenever the renewable generator is asked to back down for maintaining grid balance, **it is paid nothing**.
- With a single part tariff for renewable generation, the entire cost is variable and at Rs 2.5 per unit for solar generation, **it is not the cheapest source**.
- There are several NTPC coal-fired pit head plants whose variable costs are far lower, for example, Simhadri (Rs 1.36), Korba (Rs 1.36), Sipat (Rs 1.43).
- For the older solar plants, the tariff could be well above Rs 3 per unit and for wind-based generation, it is even higher, averaging around Rs 4.5 per unit.
- Therefore, the SLDCs often **flout the principle of “must run”**, since the distribution companies **would save money** by asking the renewable generator to back down while keeping the tap on for a coal-based generation.

## Solution

- **Two-part tariff for solar:** The solution to this problem is to apply a two-part tariff for solar and wind generators as we do for hydro plants today.
- **Lowest variable cost:** The overriding principle is that the percentage allocated as variable cost should ensure that renewable generation has the **lowest variable cost** so that there is no violation of the “must-run” principle.
- At the same time, **the fixed cost component should not be kept so high that it hurts the consumers**.

- A fine balance between the proportion of the fixed and variable costs will have to be maintained.
- It would also ensure a certain minimum return to developers even if they are not generating during certain hours, as in the case of coal and hydro plants.
- **Proper environment:** If we are serious about having a renewable generating capacity of 450-500 GW by 2030, we need to create a proper environment and ensure adequate returns to invite fresh investments into renewable generation.

## Conclusion

The switch from a single to a two-part tariff structure for renewables has to be made right now as we are at the cusp of ramping up our renewable generation and it takes time for matters to get streamlined as we have seen in the past.

## 5. Crisis and sustainability in the face of climate change

### Context

The footprint of the Covid-19 pandemic across the sectors of the economy has instilled a new reckoning for resilience and sustainability on the economic, social and environmental (ESG) front.

### IPCC reports suggest adaption for resilience

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its latest report on climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptation last month.
- The report suggests that adaptation to climate impacts in the near to medium term can help communities and ecosystems become resilient against the threats from current and future levels of warming.
- **Ecosystem-based adaptation**, for instance, is recommended for taking care of communities and social well-being, while restoring forests, lands and marine ecosystems.
- The report details the variability in projected climate impacts and the vulnerabilities that can be expected across regions the world over due to differences in the range of warming, geographical location, demographics and the unique biophysical, social and cultural contexts.
- **Cost-effective adaptation:** It depends on a host of enablers on which global partnerships need to deliver.

- Enablers include **international cooperation**, inclusive technology, financial flows, knowledge sharing and capacity building, with institutions and innovations to support policy development and on-ground implementation.

### Gaps in the literature, acknowledge the uncertainties in climate science

- The IPCC has been consistently drawing attention to the lack of adequate science from and on developing countries.
- These countries have in turn been asking for the inclusion of what is broadly termed as “grey literature” or non-peer-reviewed literature in the IPCC process.
- Good science encompasses the formal and the informal, theory and empiricism, the traditional along with the modern.
- It relies on evolution through acknowledging the gaps and unknowns, the negatives and positives of past knowledge.
- The understanding of **adaptation finance, adaptation costing, and mapping of climate impacts** and adaptation needs of communities in geographically remote locations, for instance, could improve with suitable sourcing of information.

### Way forward

- Sustainable development, inclusive of climate resilience, **calls for an ensemble approach** – one that places contextually appropriate emphasis on tackling climate change impacts and development needs in a world with growing challenges.
- The pathway to be adopted is one of an **integrated risk assessment approach**, where solutions are interventions that impact the immediate, near and medium-term outcomes for developing economies.
- **Striking the right balance** is at any time a choice driven as much by enablers (capabilities, lifestyles and values, financial flows, technical know-how) as by constraints (warming levels, poverty, inequality, lack of health and education).

### Conclusion

The pandemic highlighted the need for balance in nature-people relationships, even as it tested the ability of the developing world.

## 6. Unlocking the potential of green hydrogen

The ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine have led to the prices of crude oil shooting to \$130/barrel. Green hydrogen is an emerging option that will help reduce India's vulnerability to such price shocks.

### Four deficiencies in Renewable Energy Technologies

- **1] Intermittent nature of RE:** RE can only be generated intermittently.
- Battery technology cannot store electricity at a grid scale.
- **2] Financial viability:** There are question marks on the financial viability of green power.
- In India, renewable electricity is a replacement for coal-based power, **the cheapest form of energy.**
- That's a big constraint on its viability.
- Moreover, the customers of this power – the state distribution companies – are collectively insolvent.
- A business cannot prosper if its primary customers are not financially viable.
- **3] Batteries are not suitable for heavy trucks:** While electric cars and two-wheelers get a lot of visibility, much of India's oil is burnt in heavy trucks.
- Lithium batteries are not viable for trucks.
- **4] Critical minerals:** Electric vehicles require large quantities of lithium and cobalt that India lacks.
- These minerals also have very concentrated supply chains that are vulnerable to disruptions.
- Large-scale investments in electric vehicles may create unsustainable dependencies for the country.

### Is green hydrogen a solution?

- Intermittent hydrogen in the energy mix can help circumvent some of these problems.
- Hydrogen is an important industrial gas and is used on a large scale in petroleum refining, steel, and fertiliser production.
- As of now, the hydrogen used in these industries is **grey hydrogen**, produced from natural gas.
- Green hydrogen produced using renewable energy can be blended with grey hydrogen.
- This will allow the creation of a substantial **green hydrogen production capacity**, without the risk that it may become a stranded asset.
- Creating this hydrogen capacity will provide experience in handling the gas at a large scale and the challenges involved.

- **Blending with CNG:** To widen the use of green hydrogen, it can be blended with compressed natural gas (CNG), widely used as a fuel for vehicles in Delhi, Mumbai and some other cities.
- This will partly offset the need for imported natural gas and also help flag off the challenges of creating and distributing hydrogen at a national level.
- By bringing down the price of green hydrogen sufficiently, India can help unlock some stranded assets.
- The country has close to 25,000 megawatts of gas-fired power generation capacity that operates at a very low-capacity utilisation level. The high price of natural gas reduces the viability of such electricity.
- These plants could use hydrogen blended with natural gas. Hydrogen should, however, be used to generate electricity after it has served its utility in other avenue.

### Way forward

- To catalyse a hydrogen economy, India needs some specialist players to execute projects as well as finance them.
- **Participation of private players:** Apart from government-backed players, the hydrogen economy will need private sector participation.
- India's start-up sector, with over 75 unicorns, is perhaps the most vibrant part of the country's economy currently.
- This ecosystem has been enabled by a mix of factors, including the presence of entrepreneurs with ideas and investors who are willing to back up these ideas
- **Creation of refueling network:** One challenge of using new transport fuels, whether CNG or electric vehicles, is the creation of large-scale refuelling networks.
- Bringing hydrogen vehicles on the road too soon will require the creation of yet another set of infrastructure.
- Building fleets of hydrogen-fueled vehicles for gated infrastructure can be a good starting point.
- Airports, ports and warehouses, for instance, use a large number of vehicles such as forklifts, cranes, trucks, tractors and passenger vehicles.

### Conclusion

The government's Green Hydrogen Policy sends the right signals about its intent. It now needs to ensure that investment can freely come into this space.



## 7. Areas under AFSPA regime reduced: Home Ministry

The Union Home Ministry has considerably reduced the “disturbed areas” under the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA) in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

### AFSPA: A Backgrounder

- The AFSPA, 1958 came into force in the context of insurgency in the North-eastern States decades ago.
- It provides “special power” to the Armed Forces applies to the Army, the Air Force and the Central Paramilitary forces etc.
- It has been long contested debate whether the “special powers” granted under AFSPA gives total immunity to the armed forces for any action taken by them.

### Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958

- Armed Forces Special Powers Act, to put it simply, gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas.”
- AFSPA gives armed forces the authority use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.
- The Act further provides that if “reasonable suspicion exists”, the armed forces can also arrest a person without warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.

### What are the Special Powers?

The ‘special powers’ which are spelt out under Section 4 provide that:

**(a) Power to use force, including opening fire, even to the extent of causing death** if prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons or carrying arms and weapons, etc are in force in the disturbed area;

**(b) Power to destroy structures** used as hide-outs, training camps, or as a place from which attacks are or likely to be launched, etc;

**(c) Power to arrest without warrant** and to use force for the purpose;

**(d) Power to enter and search premises** without a warrant to make arrest or recovery of hostages, arms and ammunition and stolen property etc.

## What are the Disturbed Areas?

- A disturbed area is one that is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA.
- As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

## Who can declare/notify such areas?

- The Central Government or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.
- A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette.

## Presently ‘Disturbed Areas’

- AFSPA is currently in force in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, 3 districts of Arunachal Pradesh, and areas falling within the jurisdiction of 8 police stations in Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam.
- In Jammu and Kashmir, a separate law Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990 has been in force.

## AFSPA: Is it a License to Kill?

While the operation of the Section has been controversial in itself, it has attracted much criticism when actions have resulted in the death of civilians.

- **Power to kill:** Section 4 of the Act granted officers the authority to “take any action” even to the extent to cause the death.
- **Protection against prosecution:** This power is further bolstered by Section 6 which provides that legal can be instituted against the officer, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government.

## Supreme Court’s Observations over AFSPA

- These extra-judicial killings became the attention of the Supreme Court in 2016.
- It clarified that the bar under Section 6 would not grant “total immunity” to the officers against any probe into their alleged excesses.
- The judgment noted that if any death was unjustified, there is no blanket immunity available to the perpetrator(s) of the offense.
- The Court further noted that if an offense is committed even by Army personnel, there is no concept of absolute immunity from trial by the criminal court constituted under the CrPC.

## Constitutionality of AFSPA

- Attempts have been made to examine the constitutionality of the Act on the grounds that it is contravention to the:
  1. **Right to Life and Personal Liberty** (Article 21) and
  2. **Federal structure** of the Constitution since law and order is a **State subject**

## Recommendations to repeal AFSPA

### (1) Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy Commission

- The 2004 Committee headed by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, the content of which has never officially been revealed by the Government, recommended that AFSPA be repealed.
- Additionally, it recommended that appropriate provisions be inserted in the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA) instead.
- It also recommended that the UAPA be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

### (2) ARC II

- The Administrative Reforms Commission in its 5th Report on 'Public Order' had also recommended that AFSPA be repealed.
- It recommended adding a new chapter to be added to the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.
- However, the recommendation was considered first and then rejected.

## Other issues with AFSPA

### (1) Sexual Misconduct by Armed Forces

- The issue of violation of human rights by actions of armed forces came under the consideration of the Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law (popularly known as Justice Verma Committee) set up in 2012.
- It observed that- in conflict zones, legal protection for women was neglected.

### (2) Autocracy

- The reality is that there is no evidence of any action being taken against any officer of the armed forces or paramilitary forces for their excesses.

## Caution given by the Supreme Court

A July 2016 judgment authored by Justice Madan B. Lokur in Extra Judicial Execution Victim Families Association quoted the “Ten Commandments” issued by the Chief of the Army Staff for operations in disturbed areas:

1. **Definite circumstances:** The “power to cause death is relatable to maintenance of public order in a disturbed area and is to be exercised under definite circumstances”.
2. **Declaration preconditions:** These preconditions include a declaration by a high-level authority that an area is “disturbed”.
3. **Due warning:** The officer concerned decides to use deadly force on the opinion that it is “necessary” to maintain public order. But he has to give “due warning” first.
4. **No arbitrary action:** The persons against whom the action was taken by the armed forces should have been “acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area”.
5. **Minimal use of force:** The armed forces must use only the “minimal force required for effective action against the person/persons acting in contravention of the prohibitory order.”
6. **Empathy with perpetrators:** The court said that: the people you are dealing with are your own countrymen. All your conduct must be dictated by this one significant consideration.
7. **People friendliness:** The court underscored how the Commandments insist that “operations must be people-friendly, using minimum force and avoiding collateral damage – restrain must be the key”.
8. **Good intelligence:** It added that “good intelligence is the key to success”.
9. **Compassion:** It exhorted personnel to “be compassionate, help the people and win their hearts and minds. Employ all resources under your command to improve their living conditions”.
10. **Upholding Dharma (Duty):** The judgment ended with the final Commandment to “uphold Dharma and take pride in your country and the Army”.

## Conclusion

- Despite demands by civil society groups and human rights activities, none of the recommendations have not been implemented to date.

## 8. Indian Antarctic Bill Introduced in Lok Sabha

The government has introduced the 'Antarctica Bill, 2022' in the Lok Sabha that envisages regulating visits and activities to Antarctica as well potential disputes that may arise among those present on the continent.

### Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022

#### Aims and objectives:

- To provide for national measures to protect the Antarctic environment and associated ecosystems and to give effect to the Antarctic Treaty
- To provide a harmonious policy framework for India's Antarctic activities through a well-established legal mechanism
- Facilitate activities of the Indian Antarctic programme, including management of Antarctic tourism and sustainable development of fisheries
- To prohibit Indian expedition to Antarctica or carrying of certain activities in Antarctica without a permit or the written authorisation of another party to the protocol
- To provide for inspection in India by an officer designated by the Central government as an Inspector and to constitute an inspection team to carry out inspections in Antarctica

#### Key feature: Committee on Antarctic governance

- It will empower the government to establish a committee on Antarctic governance and environmental protection to monitor, implement and ensure compliance with the relevant international laws, emissions standards and rules of protection.
- The panel is to be headed by the secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, as ex officio chairperson.
- Among other roles, he has also been the vice-president of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research of the International Science Council since 2018.
- The committee will have ten members from various ministries, departments and organizations of the Union government, plus two experts on the Antarctic environment or other relevant areas.

#### About Antarctica Treaty

- Antarctica has a geographical area of 14 million sq. km and has had no indigenous population (i.e. "Antarcticans" don't exist).
- However, a few thousand people reside there, in some 40 research stations spread across the continent, throughout the year.

- In 1959, 12 countries – Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the USSR, the UK and the US signed the ‘Antarctic Treaty’.
- Their aim was to prevent the continent from being militarised and to establish it as a centre of peaceful activities.
- Later, more countries, including India, have become party to the treaty, and today it counts more than 54 members.
- The treaty requires each party to take appropriate measures within its competence, including the adoption of laws and regulations, administrative actions and enforcement measures, to ensure compliance with the protocol.
- Countries also signed the ‘Protocol on Environmental Protection’ to the Antarctic Treaty in 1991, which designates Antarctica as a “natural reserve, devoted to peace and science”.

### **Need for the Antarctic Legislation**

- The growing presence of Indian scientists in Antarctica and the commitment to Antarctic research and protection prompted the government to adopt domestic legislation consistent with its obligations as a member of the Antarctic Treaty system.
- These laws will enable India’s courts to deal with disputes or crimes committed in parts of Antarctica, and help build credibility vis-à-vis India’s participation.

### **India at the Poles**

- India maintains two research stations on the continent: ‘Maitri’ (commissioned in 1989) at Schirmacher Hills and ‘Bharati’ (2012) at Larsemann Hills.
- It has also launched 41 scientific expeditions every year thus far.
- Together with the ‘Himadri’ station in Svalbard, above the Arctic circle, India is among an elite group of countries with multiple research in the polar regions.

## **9. The HDFC Ltd.-HDFC Bank Merger**

Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd. and India’s largest private sector bank HDFC Bank on Monday announced a mega-merger.

### **Impact of the move**

- Under the terms of the deal, which is one of the biggest in the Indian financial sector, HDFC Bank will be 100% owned by public shareholders.

- Existing shareholders of HDFC Ltd. will own 41% stake in HDFC Bank.
- Post-merger HDFC Ltd. will no longer be a separate mortgage lender, it will get folded into the bank.

### **What are the terms of the merger?**

- The merger has to go through a series of regulatory approvals.
- It has to get approval from the shareholders of both companies.
- At this moment what has been announced by the two entities is that its an all-share deal, so there's no cash transaction involved.
- The terms of the share swap are such that shareholders of HDFC Ltd. will receive 42 shares of HDFC Bank for every 25 shares they hold in HDFC Ltd.

### **What happens to existing customers and employees?**

- As far as customers are concerned, HDFC Ltd.'s customers will become the bank's customers as well.
- As for employees, HDFC Bank is planning to absorb and retain all the employees.
- Neither of the entities are very heavy on employee numbers and have been fairly conservative in their employee sizes.

### **What is the rationale behind this merger?**

- HDFC have largely had a fairly conservative lending culture, both reasonably customer-friendly, customer-centric, culturally, there wouldn't be a big challenge.
- The evolution of the regulatory framework for the NBFC (non-banking financial company) industry has been gradually moving closer, to harmonise with the banking sector's regulatory framework.
- Earlier, NBFCs had a fairly different and a far more loose sort of framework for lending and deposits.
- This led to issues in the industry with some NBFCs struggling and going under or being taken over by others.
- As Basel III norms for capital adequacy are in place, the NPA (non-performing asset) book is very closely monitored.

### **What is in it for HDFC Ltd. and HDFC Bank?**

- Post-merger, the mortgage lender, HDFC Ltd., gets access to HDFC Bank's CASA (current and savings accounts) deposits, which are lower cost funds.
- For the mortgage lending business, the capital cost will come down. As the capital cost comes down, automatically it will have the ability to lend at a finer rate.

- For HDFC Bank, every home loan customer can be tapped to become a bank customer.

### **Impacts of the deal**

- It's possible that we might see more NBFCs seeking to merge with banks.
- There is already talk of the number of banks coming down.
- So in some ways, this merger may be a precursor to what is going to happen in the state-run banking space, where the government has said it is going to reduce the number of public sector banks.

## **10. Indonesia's Palm Oil Crisis**

The world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil, Indonesia, is facing domestic shortages, leading to price controls and export curbs.

### **What is the news?**

- It's rare for any country that is the largest producer and exporter of a product to experience domestic shortages of the same product.
- Consumers are unable to access or paying through the nose for a commodity in which their country is the preeminent producer and exporter.

### **What is Oil Palm?**

- Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil derived from the mesocarp of the fruit of the oil palms.
- The oil is used in food manufacturing, in beauty products, and as biofuel.

### **Palm oil production in Indonesia**

- Its palm oil production for 2021-22 (October-September) at 45.5 million tonnes (mt).
- That's almost 60% of the total global output and way ahead of the next bigger producer: Malaysia (18.7 mt).
- It is also the world's No. 1 exporter of the commodity, at 29 mt, followed by Malaysia (16.22 mt).

### **Why in headlines?**

- Indonesia has seen domestic prices of branded cooking oil spiral, from around 14,000 Indonesian rupiah (IDR) to 22,000 IDR per litre between March 2021 and March 2022.



- Much recently, the government imposed a ceiling on retail prices at 14,000 IDR.
- This led to the product disappearing from supermarket shelves, amid reports of hoarding and consumers standing in long queues for hours to get a pack or two.

## Plausible factors

### (1) Ongoing War

- The possible reason has to do supply disruptions – manmade and natural – in other cooking oils, especially sunflower and soyabean.
- Ukraine and Russia together account for nearly 80% of the global trade in sunflower oil, quite comparable to the 90% share of Indonesia and Malaysia in palm.
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in port closures and exporters avoiding Black Sea shipping routes.
- Sanctions against Russia have further curtailed trade in sunflower oil, the world's third most exported vegetable oil after palm and soybean.

### (2) Diversion for Bio-Fuels

- Another factor is linked to petroleum, more specifically the use of palm oil as a bio-fuel.
- The Indonesian government has, since 2020, made 30% blending of diesel with palm oil mandatory as part of a plan to slash fossil fuel imports.
- Palm oil getting increasingly diverted for bio-diesel is leaving less quantity available, both for the domestic cooking oil and export market.

## Impact on India

- India is the world's biggest vegetable oils importer.
- Out of its annual imports of 14-15 mt, the lion's share is of palm oil (8-9 mt), followed by soyabean (3-3.5 mt) and sunflower (2.5).
- Indonesia has been India's top supplier of palm oil, though it was overtaken by Malaysia in 2021-22 (see above table).
- The restrictions on exports, even in the form of levy, take into cognizance Indonesia's higher population (27.5 crores, against Malaysia's 3.25 crore) as well as its ambitious biofuel program.
- To that extent, the world – more so, the bigger importer India – will have to get used to lower supplies from Indonesia.

## 11. RBI shift on monetary policy

### Context

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday gave a surprise, with a formal start to policy normalisation. This was contrary to the predominant market expectations of a hold.

### RBI on the path of policy normalisation

- **Focus on target of 4% +/- 2%:** While the MPC voted unanimously to remain accommodative, in a change of language, the focus would now be on “withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that (CPI) inflation remains within the **target (of 4 per cent +/- 2 per cent) going forward**”.
- Remember, the RBI had become a (flexible) inflation-targeting central bank since FY17, whose primary objective is price stability, that is, inflation management.
- The **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) corridor** was narrowed back to the conventional 0.25 percentage points from the earlier extraordinary pandemic widening in late March 2020.
- The cap of the erstwhile corridor was the repo rate and the floor was the reverse repo.
- Now, while the repo rate was held at 4.0 per cent and the latter at 3.35 per cent, the floor of the corridor was increased by 0.4 percentage points from 3.35 per cent.
- There was also a change in the monetary policy orientation, of which the stance is one component.
- The priority for monetary policy now is inflation, growth and financial stability, in that order.

### Reasons for unexpected tightening of policy

- **Inflation concerns:** Despite uncertainty over growth impulses and demand concentrated at the upper-income level households, inflation has increasingly emerged as a big concern.
- Given that inflation is likely to average 6.1 per cent in Q4 of FY22, this increases the risk of inflation remaining above the 6 per cent upper target for three consecutive quarters, necessitating **an explanation to the government by the MPC**.
- One comforting aspect of this scenario is that household inflation expectations remain anchored, with the median of three months to one year ahead expectations (as of March '22) rising by only 0.1 percentage points from the earlier January readings.

- **Stabilisation of demand:** On demand conditions, the RBI scaled-down the FY23 real GDP growth projection to 7.2 per cent (from 7.8 per cent), indicating that a combination of continuing supply dislocations, slowing global economy and trade, high prices and financial markets volatility are likely to take a toll.
- One possible reconciliation with modest GDP growth is continuing weakness in services, which is also borne out by channel checks.
- Certainly, continuing high inflation is likely to lead to some demand destruction, which will act as an automatic stabiliser.
- A **relatively loose fiscal policy** is likely to offset some of this reduced demand, particularly with continuing subsidies to lower-income households.
- **Financial stability:** This has multiple dimensions – interest and foreign exchange rates, market volatility, banking sector asset stress, and so on.
- An important objective for the RBI is the **management of money supply and system liquidity**.
- In a rising rate cycle, with a large borrowing programme of the Centre and state governments, interest rates on sovereign bonds are likely to increase without a measure of support from the RBI through **Open Market Operations (OMOs)**.
- This will entail injecting more liquidity into an already large surplus, which might add to inflationary pressures.
- The introduction of the overnight **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF)** was a significant measure in this context.
- Unlike the reverse repo facility, **the RBI will not need to give banks government bonds as collateral** against the funds they deposit.
- This is thus a **more flexible instrument** should a shortage of government bonds in RBI holdings actually transpire under some eventuality, say the need to absorb large capital inflows post a bond index inclusion.

### What are the implications?

- **Interest rates will begin to increase** but, for bank borrowers, this is likely to be a very gradual process.
- For corporates and other wholesale borrowers, who also borrow from bond markets, this increase is likely to be faster as the surplus system liquidity is gradually drained.
- How this is likely to affect demand for credit is uncertain, given the capex push of the government, some revival of private sector investment and likely continuing demand for housing.

## Conclusion

This cycle of policy tightening will present a particularly difficult mix of economic and financial trade-offs, but RBI has demonstrated the ability to innovatively use the multiple instruments at its disposal to ensure an orderly transition.

## 12. What is Standing Deposit Facility (SDF)?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced the Standing Deposit Facility (SDF), an additional tool for absorbing liquidity, at an interest rate of 3.75 per cent.

### What is SDF?

- In 2018, the amended Section 17 of the RBI Act empowered the Reserve Bank to introduce the SDF – an additional tool for absorbing liquidity without any collateral.
- By removing the binding collateral constraint on the RBI, the SDF strengthens the operating framework of monetary policy.
- The SDF is also a financial stability tool in addition to its role in liquidity management.
- The SDF will replace the fixed-rate reverse repo (FRRR) as the floor of the liquidity adjustment facility corridor.
- Both the standing facilities – the MSF (marginal standing facility) and the SDF will be available on all days of the week, throughout the year.

### How it will operate?

- The main purpose of SDF is to reduce the excess liquidity of Rs 8.5 lakh crore in the system, and control inflation.
- The SDF rate will be 25 bps below the policy rate (Repo rate), and it will be applicable to overnight deposits at this stage.
- It would, however, retain the flexibility to absorb liquidity of longer tenors as and when the need arises, with appropriate pricing.
- The RBI's plan is to restore the size of the liquidity surplus in the system to a level consistent with the prevailing stance of monetary policy.

## 13. GSLV-F10

The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) with improvements added to its cryogenic upper stage (CUS) is expected to be ready in the second half of this year.

## What is GSLV?

- GSLV is an expendable space launch vehicle designed, developed, and operated by the ISRO to launch satellites and other space objects into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits.
- GSLV is 49.13 m tall and tallest among all other vehicles of ISRO.
- It is a three-stage vehicle with a lift-off mass of 420 tonnes.
- ISRO first launched GSLV on April 18, 2001 and has made 13 launches since then.

## Stages in GSLV

- The first stage comprises S139 solid booster with 138-tonne propellant and four liquid strap-on motors, with 40-tonne propellant.
- The second stage is a liquid engine carrying 40-tonne of liquid propellant.
- The third stage is the indigenously built Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS) carrying 15-tonne of cryogenic propellants.

## Variants in GSLV

- GSLV rockets using the Russian Cryogenic Stage (CS) are designated as the GSLV Mk I while versions using the indigenous Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS) are designated the GSLV Mk II.
- All GSLV launches have been conducted from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

## Difference between PSLV and GSLV

- GSLV has the capability to put a heavier payload in the orbit than the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- PSLV can carry satellites up to a total weight of 2000 kg into space and reach up to an altitude of 600-900 km.
- GSLV can carry weight up to 5,000 kg and reach up to 36,000 km.
- PSLV is designed mainly to deliver earth observation or remote sensing satellites, whereas, GSLV has been designed for launching communication satellites.
- GSLV delivers satellites into a higher elliptical orbit, Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) and Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (GEO).

## 14. Microbots for Drug Delivery

An Indian researcher has found that it is possible to use light as a fuel to move microbots in real-body conditions with intelligent drug delivery that is selectively sensitive to cancer cells

### Microswimmers for drug delivery

- Made from the two-dimensional compound poly (heptazine imide) carbon nitride (aka PHI carbon nitride), these microbots are nothing like the miniaturised humans.
- They range from 1-10 micrometre (a micrometre is one-millionth of a metre) in size, and can self-propel when energised by shining light.
- While carbon nitride is an excellent photo-catalyst, the two-dimensional PHI has a sponge-like structure full of pores and voids and charge storage properties.
- The researchers found that the ions in the salty solution passed through the pores of PHI carbon nitride.
- Thus, there was little or no resistance from the salt ions.

### How do they swim across the blood?

- The PHI carbon nitride microparticles are photocatalytic.
- Like in a solar cell, the incident light is converted into electrons and holes.
- These charges drive reactions in the surrounding liquid. The charges react with the fluid surrounding them.
- This reaction, combined with the particle's electric field, makes the microbots (micro-swimmers) swim.
- As long as there is light, electrons and holes are produced on the surface of the swimmers, which in turn react to form ions and an electric field around the swimmer.
- These ions move around the particle and cause fluid to flow around the particle.
- So this fluid flow causes the micro-swimmers to move.

### How does the ion movement occur?

- The ions move from the bright surface of the micro-swimmer to the rear end.
- The diffusion of the swimming medium in one direction propels the micro-swimmer in the opposite direction.
- This is like a boat moving in the direction opposite to the oar strokes.
- The particles are nearly spherical, and the incident light illuminates one-half of the sphere, leaving the other dark.

- As photocatalysis is light-driven, it occurs only on the brightened hemisphere.
- As the ions move from the bright side to the dark side, micro-swimmers march in the direction of the light source.

## 15. Challenges in RBI's inflation management

### Context

The first bi-monthly meeting of the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) for the current financial year reaffirmed its focus on inflation management.

### Towards the normalisation of monetary policy

- The MPC voted to keep the policy rate unchanged at 4 per cent and retained its accommodative stance.
- However, the wording was changed to "remain accommodative while focusing on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth."
- This statement sets the stage for a **shift to a neutral stance** in the next meeting and policy rate hikes in subsequent meetings.
- RBI has announced the **withdrawal of some of the steps taken during the pandemic** to support the economy.
- These will foster the normalisation of monetary policy.

### Inflation challenge

- The central bank has acknowledged that the **disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine crisis** have upended their growth and inflation outlook.
- It has steeply revised its inflation projection from 4.5 per cent earlier to 5.7 per cent now for the current financial year.
- The projection is based on an average global crude oil price of \$100 per barrel.
- The Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO's) **Food Price Index**, a gauge of global food prices, posted a record growth of 12.6 per cent from February.

### Formalisation of Liquidity Adjustment Framework (LAF)

- The RBI has been managing liquidity infused into the system during the pandemic through the **Variable Rate Reverse Repo Auctions (VRRR)** to withdraw liquidity and **Variable Rate Repo auctions** to inject liquidity.
- RBI has now formalised the **Liquidity Adjustment Framework (LAF)**.
- The LAF is a **framework to absorb and inject liquidity** into the banking system.

- The LAF is now a **symmetric corridor** with a width of 50 basis points.
- The policy repo rate is **at the centre of the corridor**, with the MSF 25 basis points above the policy rate and the SDF 25 basis points below the policy rate.

### What is a Standing Deposit Facility

- The RBI has introduced the **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF)** as the **lower bound of the LAF** corridor to absorb liquidity.
- The idea of the SDF was first mooted by **the Urjit Patel Committee report** on the monetary policy framework.
- The RBI Act was amended through the Finance Act of 2018 to allow RBI to use this instrument.
- The SDF will be a **facility available to banks to park their funds**.
- The SDF will serve as the standing liquidity absorption facility at the **lower end of the LAF corridor**.
- At the upper end of the corridor is the **Marginal Standing Facility (MSF)** to inject liquidity.
- Through the SDF, the RBI can absorb liquidity **without placing government securities as collateral**, hence it will give greater flexibility to the central bank.
- The change also marks a **shift away from reverse repo** being the effective policy rate.

### Key takeaways

- While on the face of it, there are no rate hikes, the shift from the reverse repo rate to the SDF signals a **tightening of monetary policy**.
- There is a 40 basis points increase in the floor rate.
- In the medium run, the call money rate would move towards the new LAF corridor, thus bringing orderly conditions in the money market.
- As RBI begins to normalise liquidity in a calibrated manner, its ability to manage bond yields will likely be limited.
- Yields on bonds are likely to inch up and remain above the 7 per cent mark.
- Going forward, the trade-off between managing inflation and the borrowing programme of the government will become challenging.

### Conclusion

For now the RBI has rightly decided to place top priority on inflation management. This will help in maintaining the credibility of the inflation targeting framework.



## 16. Big Tech's privacy promise could be good news and also bad news

### Context

In February, Facebook stated that its revenue in 2022 is anticipated to reduce by \$10 billion due to steps undertaken by Apple to enhance user privacy on its mobile operating system.

### Move towards more privacy-preserving options

- Apple introduced **AppTrackingTransparency** feature that requires apps to **request permission from users** before tracking them across other apps and websites or sharing their information with and from third parties.
- Through this change, Apple effectively shut the door on “permissionless” internet tracking and has given consumers more control over how their data is used.
- Privacy experts have welcomed this move because it is predicted to **enhance awareness** and nudge other actors to move towards more privacy-preserving options, leading to a market for “**Privacy Enhancing Technologies**”.
- Google's **Privacy Sandbox project** is a case in point, though it remains to be seen whether it will be truly privacy-preserving.

### Big Tech dominance and issues related to it

- **Privacy and acquisitions:** One standout feature of the Big Tech dominance has been the non-price factors such as quality of service (QoS) in general and **privacy and acquisitions in particular**.
- **Acquisitions to kill competition:** Acquisitions by Big Tech are regular and eat up big bucks, not always to promote efficiency but **to eliminate potential competition**, described evocatively as “kill zone” by specialists.
- According to a report released by the Federal Trade Commission, between 2010 and 2019, **Big Tech made 616 acquisitions**.
- In the absence of a modern framework, competition law continues to rely on **Bork's theory of consumer welfare** which postulated that the sole **normative objective of antitrust** should be to maximise consumer welfare, best pursued through promoting economic efficiency.
- Market structure thus became irrelevant and **conduct became the sole criterion for judgement**.
- Conduct now predominantly revolves around QoS which, like much else surrounding digital platforms, is pushing competition authorities to fortify their existing regulatory toolkits.

## Privacy as a metric of quality

- Companies such as Apple and DuckDuckGo (with its slogan “the search engine that doesn’t track you”) are employing **enhanced user privacy as a competitive metric**.
- It has been shown that “websites which do not face strong competition are significantly more likely to ask for more personal information than other services provided for free”.
- In 2018, OECD accepted that **privacy is a relevant dimension of quality** despite the low quality that may be prevalent due to lack of market development.
- Regulators across the globe are recognising **privacy as a serious metric of quality**.
- For instance, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) in 2021 took suo moto cognisance of changes to WhatsApp’s “take-it” or “leave-it” privacy policy that made it mandatory for every user to share data with Facebook.
- In its prima facie order, the CCI inter alia observed that this **amounts to degradation of privacy and therefore quality**.

## Way forward

- Privacy and competition have overlapping boundaries.
- If privacy becomes a competitive constraint, then companies will have the incentive to create privacy-preserving and enhancing technologies.
- **Barriers for new entrants:** On the other hand, care must be taken so that Big Tech, aka the gatekeepers in the EU’s Digital Markets Act, do not misuse **privacy to create barriers for newer entrants**.
- Restricting **third-party tracking** is not novel and other browsers such as Mozilla Firefox and Microsoft’s Edge have already done so.
- But Google, **which owns 65 per cent of the global browser market**, is different.
- By disabling third parties from tracking but continuing to use that data in its own ad tech stack, Google harms competition.
- **The use of privacy as a tool for market development**, therefore, has to tread this tightrope between enabling and stifling competition.

## Conclusion

An approach that balances user autonomy, consumer protection, innovation, and market competition in digital markets is a real win-win and worth investing in.

## 17. Understanding Software Copyright and Licences

### Software licensing

- A copyright gives a creator the legal right to own, distribute and profit from his or her creative work.
- There are different kinds of software licences that allow free use of software:

#### (1) Proprietary License

- There is proprietary software which is to be purchased as a one-time transaction or as yearly licences.
- A popular example is Microsoft Windows which is purchased along with the computer or Microsoft Office which typically has a yearly licence that has to be renewed upon payment.

#### (2) Creative Commons licence (CC)

- There is the Creative Commons licence (CC) which is public domain: any software or work that is in CC can be used and distributed free of cost.
- For example, Wikipedia is under CC and hence its contents can be used freely with the condition that attribution is made to Wikipedia (this is called 'Creative Commons - Attribution-ShareAlike').

#### (3) Permissive Software licence

- Another form of free software licence is Permissive Software licence which is popular in the software developer community and in the commercial world.
- This licence allows free use and modification of software. There are further specific licences under this category, like the Apache licence and MIT licence.

#### (4) Apache licence

- The Apache licence is maintained by the Apache Software Foundation which is a non-profit entity.
- Many popular and powerful softwares like Spark (used in Big Data) have been developed under Apache licence.
- MIT licence is maintained by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and it covers hundreds of software packages including GitLab and Dot NET.

### What are Open Software?

- All free and permissive software licences are similar to Free and Open Source Software (FOSS).

- This is a set of rules and free software brought under one umbrella in the 1980s by Richard Stallman, a famous computer scientist and activist.
- FOSS maintains its own licence, called GNU GPL (Gnu's Not Unix General Public Licence) to govern and distribute free software but it comes with restrictions that its adoption and modification be for free use.
- In the software community, 'open source' means any of the above non-proprietary licences.

### Who maintains open source softwares?

- Open source software packages are developed and maintained by programmers from around the world.
- Until the mid-1990s, the idea of the general public collaborating to create software for free seemed to be unrealistic and confined to small, elite communities.
- However, with the success of a free operating system like Linux (which is under GNU GPL licence), many were convinced that open source could create sophisticated solutions because of access to top programmers around the world.

### Is the Internet free?

- To access and to create content on the internet, there are costs involved such as infrastructure costs like **network cost** and the **cost to host and maintain the content**.
- However, the core of the internet itself is free: it is free to use ideas like linking contents on the internet, transferring them with a network software protocol and adopting the associated standards like maintaining the website address (Uniform Resource Locator-URL).

### Are programming languages free of cost?

- Until the 1980s, popular programming languages had a price but with the advent of Java in the 1990s and thanks to the initiatives of Richard Stallman and his Free Software Foundation in the 1980s, many languages, especially modern ones like Go or popular ones like Python are free.
- Java is somewhere in the middle where there are free implementations of the language that most software developers use but there are also paid implementations provided by Oracle.
- In general, the realisation in the software community is that a free language has widespread adoption and leads to the availability of an expert pool of programmers.

- The last two decades have seen a proliferation of open source software and the future is even more exciting.

## **18. A profitable winter in Kashmir**

The tourism sector in Kashmir is witnessing a surge.

### **Background**

- Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the economy in Jammu and Kashmir but the sector has been going through a lean patch in recent years.
- Strict security measures were imposed and communication channels were suspended after the Union government decided to end Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status in August, 2019.
- The pandemic also severely impacted the tourism sector in Kashmir.
- However, Kashmir Valley has broken all the previous records of tourist arrivals in the first three months of 2022.
  - The valley witnessed about 3.5 lakh tourist arrivals in the months of January, February and March.
- Experts feel that the numbers will increase further and expect to break a decade-old record when 13 lakh tourists visited Kashmir in a year.

### **Surge in the number of tourists**

- For the first time in the history of the houseboats, they were occupied during all the months of the winter season.
  - Generally, houseboats are closed in Kashmir around November and are reopened in February or March. But this winter (2021-22), nearly 65% of the houseboats did not close due to the rush of tourists.
- There was a surge in the number of people at the Gondola which has Asia's highest ropeway located at a 13,000-feet altitude in north Kashmir's Gulmarg.
- Over 3 lakh tourists visited the seasonal Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden, the highest ever since the opening of the garden in 2007.
- On April 13th 2022, over 16,000 passengers on 100 flights landed at the Srinagar airport, compared to 30 flights a day two years ago.

### **Key reasons for the surge in the number of tourists**

- Post covid tourism (revenge tourism) has increased the number of tourists significantly.
- the higher and upper middle-class travellers who toured Europe are stranded due to the travel restrictions and have started exploring Kashmir which offers cheaper options.

### **Key challenges to the tourism sector in Kashmir**

- Security continues to be a major issue for the tourism industry.
  - Nearly 60 hotels are occupied by security forces.
- Guidelines issued by the countries, such as the European countries and the U.S. which suggest their citizens restrict their visits to Srinagar and designating the rest of the Valley as “unsafe”, are still in place.
- Surge in the prices due to increased demand.

### **Various initiatives by the government to support tourism sector in Kashmir**

- Newer routes and places for trekking have been identified to attract foreign travellers who prefer trekking over sightseeing.
- Residential places are converted into guest houses.
- The Jammu and Kashmir government offers a subsidy of up to 50% of the total cost to house owners for converting their homes into home stays, subjected to a ceiling of ₹5 lakh.
- The land ceiling was also relaxed by the government to encourage the locals toward tourism.

## **19. A north pole for science and technology**

### **Background:**

- Mankind’s evolution into modern civilisation has been propelled by rapid strides in the fields of science and technology. However, this rapid development has also thrown up some serious issues about the values, the purpose, the relevance, and the consequences of a blind-folded pursuit and application of science and technology.
- Hence it becomes extremely critical for setting the right goals and objectives for the use of science and technology and the values that should guide this process.
- In this direction, the article authored by Vice President Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, prescribes the following agenda while pursuing science and technology.

### **People centric:**

- Science and technology should adapt to the people. As against the import of technology and solutions, there is the need for domestic solutions given that they would be more effective. Western remedies may not solve India’s problems, which are different and context-specific.

- The new developments should be able to **meet the needs and concerns of the common people**. Science should be for society and technology should be driven by the needs of the people.
- The undesirable consequences of the application of the science and technological developments should be avoided and taken care of.

#### **Sustainable:**

- As against the values of 'materialism and consumerism' guiding the human society currently, Science and technology should enable development that is in harmony with nature and society.

#### **Dr. Y. Nayudamma:**

- The article reminisces the role played by **noted scientist and former Director-General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research Dr. Y. Nayudamma**.
- Nayudamma's work and contributions demonstrated how scientists and technologists could (and can) be effective agents of social change. His role in changing the nature of the tannery industry in India by infusing science and technology is laudable. This not only improved the quality of products but also improved the lives of the people involved in the job. Thus his contributions had both **economic as well as social impacts**.
- Nayudamma emphasized on **women empowerment, national self-reliance in science and technology and importance of education in national development**.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **Education:**

- Given the emergence of **knowledge economy**, empowering all with education and knowledge is the best path to growth and development of the nation.
- Education should release the inner potential of all to make everyone self-reliant and self-confident and also contribute to the development of the nation. There is the need to develop and adopt suitable education systems in the country.

##### **Sustainable development models:**

- The rapid resource depletion, and ecological imbalances and inequities should be taken care of. There is the need to have **alternative development models to ensure sustainable and harmonious development**.

### Community/ collective endeavour:

- Given the potential of community and collective efforts in realizing the true potential of every individual and the society and the role of nationalism in ensuring such an ecosystem, there is the need to promote nationalism in the mainstream agenda of the country.

## 20. Data, interrupted

India's official statistical machinery is gearing up to relaunch the All-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey from July 2022.

### What is Household Consumer Expenditure?

- Household Consumer Expenditure is the amount of money spent by households on the purchase of goods and services.
- The household sector includes people who live in communal settings such as retirement homes, boarding houses, and prisons, as well as those who live in traditional households.
- **Components used to measure Household Consumer Expenditure:**
  - Household spending on essential goods and services, such as food, clothing, rent, etc.
  - Household spending on products provided by the government, e.g. tickets to public museums, zoos.
  - Household spending for licenses and permits, e.g. fees for issuing passports
  - Household's consumption of outputs produced by them, e.g. consumption of milk and vegetables produced on a farm.
  - Income in kind earned by employees, e.g. free train tickets for railway employees

### All-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES):

- Every five years, the National Statistical Office (NSO) conducts the All-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey.
- The CES is a quinquennial survey that collects data on household consumption spending patterns in both urban and rural areas across the country.
- The information gathered in this exercise reveals average spending on goods (both food and non-food) and services.
- It also reveals estimates of household Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (MPCE) and the distribution of households and people across MPCE classes.



### **Significance of All-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES):**

- Estimates of monthly per capita consumption spending are critical in determining the economy's demand dynamics.
- It also aids in assessing living standards and growth trends across multiple strata, as well as understanding shifting priorities in terms of baskets of goods and services.
- It assists policymakers in identifying and addressing potential structural anomalies that could cause demand to shift in a specific socioeconomic or regional cohort of the population.
- The CES is a valuable analytical and forecasting tool in addition to providing pointers to producers of goods and providers of services.

### **Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) Survey (2017-18)**

- The most recent Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) was conducted in 2017-2018 and did not receive government approval.
- The government had thrown out the results of the previous survey, which took place in 2017-18, citing "data quality" issues.
- Due to the pandemic, the survey could not be launched in the previous two years.

### **21. 'Labour participation dips to 40% from 46% in six years'**

The Centre released data on Monitoring the Indian Economy.

#### **Labour force participation rate:**

- Labour force participation rate is defined as the section of the working population in the age group of 16-64 in the economy currently employed or seeking employment.
- The labour force participation rate is the measure to evaluate the working-age population in an economy.

#### **Data on labour force participation:**

- Only 40% of Indians of legal working age were employed or were looking for jobs in 2021-22.
- India's labour force has shrunk from about 445 million to 435 million in the six years.
- Labour force participation among women, which was already in low double digits, has declined further.

- Among men, the participation rate declined to 67%, from more than 74%. The dip in the participation rate was higher in the urban areas.
- The rate dropped in all the States, except in Rajasthan. The slide was more pronounced in two southern states Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

## 22. Indonesia's palm oil export ban

Indonesia, which is the world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil, decided to extend a ban on all exports of the commodity.

### Details

- The ban will be expanded to crude palm oil, RBD (Refined, Bleached & Deodorized) palm oil and used cooking oil.
- The ban is aimed at reducing the domestic shortages of cooking oil and reducing the skyrocketing costs of the commodity.

### Significance of palm oil in the global supply chain

- Palm oil is the **most extensively** used vegetable oil in the world.
- Palm oil accounts for about 40% of the global supply of edible oils.
  - Other edible oils include the likes of soybean, rapeseed (canola), and sunflower oil.
- The main reasons for the extensive use of palm oil for cooking purposes are;
  - Palm oil is **inexpensive**.
  - Oil palms **yield more oil in terms of area** than any other vegetable oil source.
- Although palm oil is mainly used as cooking oil it is also used in the manufacturing of cosmetics, processed food, biofuels, cleaning products, etc.

### Palm oil production in Indonesia

- Indonesia and Malaysia together produce about 90% of the global palm oil.
- Indonesia alone accounts for about 60% of the global supply of palm oil.

### Reasons for the surge in the prices of edible oils

- Increased demand for palm oil due to a **shortage of the supply of other vegetable oils**.
  - The production of soybean oil, the second most-produced oil, is affected due to a **poor soybean season in Argentina** which is a major producer.
  - The production of rapeseed oil has been impacted due to the **drought in Canada** in 2021.

- The supply of sunflower oil has been affected due to the **war in Ukraine** as Russia and Ukraine together account for about 80% of the oil globally.
- The **shortage of labour due to the COVID pandemic** also played its role in shooting up the prices of edible oils.

### Impact of palm oil export ban on India

- India is the biggest importer of palm oil.
- Palm oil accounts for about 40% of India's vegetable oil consumption.
- India imports nearly 50% of its annual palm oil imports from Indonesia.
  - India imports about 4 million tonnes of palm oil from Indonesia annually.
- The move to ban exports of palm oil by Indonesia will significantly increase the prices of edible oil in India.
- India also imports about 90% of soybean oil from Russia and Ukraine, which has almost stopped completely since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, further aggravating the prices.
- However, experts believe that though the latest move by Indonesia would create a short term price volatility in India, it would be favourable for the domestic edible oil refiners as it will boost the domestic crushing and refining of oil seeds.

### 23. Energy independence through hydrogen

- **India's Green Hydrogen Policy** was released in February 2022. It outlines various policies and initiatives to mainstream the use of Green Hydrogen in India to further boost India's energy transition.
  - Green hydrogen is hydrogen produced by splitting water by electrolysis. This produces hydrogen and oxygen. Electrolysis requires a constant supply of water and electricity.

#### Significance of hydrogen for India:

#### Energy independence for India:

- Though currently, India's per capita energy consumption is about one-third of the global average, the increasing economic growth rate and standard of living will surely increase India's demand for energy. That **India continues to remain dependent on energy imports** from other countries does not augur well for India's energy security.
- The **high volatility in prices and uncertainty in supply chains** remains a constant threat to India's energy security.

- Given that hydrogen can be manufactured in India, it will reduce India's dependency on other countries. Thus the new age fuel, hydrogen can be **India's gateway to energy independence**.
- Hydrogen fulfils the **three Es of India's energy – energy security, energy sustainability and energy access**.

#### **Export potential:**

- Hydrogen could help completely transform India's energy ecosystem by transforming India from an energy importer to a **dominant exporter** over the next few decades. India could export to projected future import centres like Japan, South Korea, etc.

#### **Decarbonization of the economy:**

- Hydrogen can play a major role in the **decarbonisation of India's transport sector**. The usage of hydrogen in fuel cell vehicles as against battery electric vehicles offers several advantages. These would have a faster fuelling and long-driving range. This would make them compatible with long-haul transportation vehicles which continues to remain a major constraint for Li-Ion batteries based electric vehicles.
- In the industrial segment, hydrogen can **de-carbonise 'hard-to-abate' sectors such as iron and steel, aluminium, copper, etc.**
- Thus with hydrogen, India would not only move closer towards realizing the target to achieve Net Zero by 2070 but also could lead the world in achieving Paris Agreement's goal to limit global warming to 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels. It can help lay the foundation of a new India which aims to be a **global climate leader**.

#### **Complement renewable energy:**

- As compared to electricity, **hydrogen can be stored on a large scale and for a longer duration**. This makes it a viable alternative to complement the ever-increasing supply of variable renewable energy. Hence Hydrogen holds immense potential and importance in realizing India's renewable energy target of 500 GW by 2030.

#### **Versatility of hydrogen:**

- Hydrogen has a huge prospect to **produce fuels such as methanol, synthetic kerosene and green ammonia**.
  - Ammonia, having high energy density could be promoted as a mode of transportation.

### Hydrogen usage in India:

- India's hydrogen consumption was around 7 Mt in 2020 and according to The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), it is anticipated to leapfrog to about 28 Mt in 2050.

### Challenges in mainstreaming green hydrogen:

- India needs to rapidly **build the capacity of electrolyzers** to produce green hydrogen. Currently, this capacity is very low. This would entail huge costs in itself for India.
- Additionally, India needs to **ensure an exponential increase in electricity supply** to meet the energy demands of electrolysis. This necessitates a rapid expansion in renewable energy.
- **Water scarcity** will prove to be another major challenge in realizing green hydrogen in India given that the production of 1 kg of hydrogen by electrolysis requires around nine litres of water.
- The above factors will lead to a **high cost of green hydrogen** which can affect the economic viability of the segment. This would pose challenges to the initial adoption of green hydrogen fuel. The lack of widespread demand may deter initial investments in the segment.

### Recommendations:

- The government should take appropriate measures to ensure the viability of green hydrogen at least in the initial phase of adoption after which the market forces can play their role. These measures could be understood from the demand and supply sides for better understanding.

### Demand side:

- Create an initial demand through policies which **mandate mature industries such as refining and fertilizers to adopt green hydrogen**. This could be supplemented with adequate incentives for adoption.
- Industries manufacturing low emission hydrogen-based products should be incentivized by government policies. This will create more demand for green hydrogen.
- **Blending hydrogen with natural gas** must be facilitated by framing blending mandates, and regulations.
- Concepts such as **carbon tariffs** need to be introduced to incentivize the demand for green hydrogen.

### Supply side:

- **Alternative sources of hydrogen production** such as biogas conversion into hydrogen should be explored to tackle the challenge of water scarcity in green hydrogen production.
- A **Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme** may be introduced for hydrogen-based projects to help commercialize and scale up nascent technologies. Affordable and easily accessible financing facilities should be ensured for related industries and sectors through measures such as **Priority Sector Lending (PSL)**.
- Schemes such as **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** should be expanded to the related sectors to ensure adequate production capacity of related products.
- An adequate number of Hydrogen fuel stations should be planned to ensure an unhindered supply of the fuel on demand.
- Given the criticality of the cost factor in mainstreaming green hydrogen, **investment in R&D** should be accelerated to bring its cost at par with fossils.

#### 24. The demand for a revenue share in privatised airports

The Tamil Nadu administration has claimed that state governments should get a share in the revenue whenever the Central government privatises an airport.

##### Privatisation of airports

- In India, the privatisation of airports started in 2003 after the government signed to upgrade Mumbai and Delhi airports in a public-private partnership (PPP) model.
- In 2019, airports in Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, and Guwahati were leased through the PPP model.
- In December 2021, the government planned to privatise 25 airports managed by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) over the next five years under the National Monetization Pipeline (NMP).

##### Tamil Nadu government's proposals

- According to the Tamil Nadu government, the state government acquires and transfers the land to the Centre-run AAI free of cost and if the AAI or the Centre transfers that land to a third party or a private player, the revenue realised thereby must be shared proportionately with the state governments.
- Further, the state's policy says that the value of land, at an appropriate stage, should be converted into equity of the State government in the airport's special purpose vehicle or an appropriate revenue sharing arrangement should be arrived at before the airport is transferred to a third party.

- The policy was drafted by the Tamil Nadu government as the Centre has proposed to privatise four airports in Tamil Nadu under the NMP which include Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Trichy.

### **Arguments for the proposals**

- States such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have supported the proposals of Tamil Nadu.
- A Chhattisgarh minister said that “in a joint venture, the Government of India would invest its capital in terms of infrastructure and the State government invests its capital in terms of its land and hence in every such venture, the value of the land should be given to the State government if it is sold to a third party”.
- The Jharkhand Finance Minister also voiced his support for the proposal by saying that “Land belongs to the State. When it is under the central government, the state has no issues to give land, water and other resources. But if the Centre is handing it over to private parties, revenue should be shared with the State government. A policy should be framed in this regard for all the States”.

### **Arguments against the proposals**

- Experts feel that the direct economic activity that takes place due to the development of airports benefits the entire state.
- In the region where the airport is being developed, there are catchment areas that reap benefits, which the state benefits from.
- Also, the land value gets enhanced and it translates into better collections of stamp duties for the states.
- The move will affect the attractiveness of the project to the private players if they are made to shell out extra money in addition to what they share with the AAI.

### **25. Are freebies affecting the economic growth of India?**

- Recently while delivering an address at the Delhi School of Economics, N.K. Singh, the chairperson of the 15th Finance Commission, criticised the practice of providing freebies by some state governments. This he warned could be a “quick path to fiscal disaster.”

### **Freebie politics:**

- Over the years the politics of freebies has become an integral part of the electoral politics in India.

- Political leaders offering freebies to lure voters is quite common during the election time in the country. Political parties promise to offer free electricity/water supply, monthly allowance to unemployed, daily wage workers and women as well as gadgets like laptops, smartphones, etc. to secure the vote of the people.

### Arguments against freebie politics:

#### Impact on fiscal stability:

- This freebie culture may be harmful to the long-term economic growth of the country. Given that some of the subsidies are wasteful, they do not lead to the creation of additional capacity but only lead to expenditure. Hence, they are not sustainable, and it could lead to deterioration of fiscal stability of the economy in the light of **mounting interest payments**.

#### Legal questions:

- Notably, those promising freebies obviously do not pay from their own pockets, but from the taxpayers' pockets. Hence **promising freebies from the state exchequer**, raises moral, ethical and serious legal issues, because the revenue is collected from taxpayers by the government, and set procedures exist for using this money for the welfare of the people.
- Freebies have become one of the **ways for political parties to entice and influence voters**. The Supreme Court in March 2022 agreed to consider listing for an urgent hearing of a plea, seeking direction to register FIRs against political parties for allegedly inducing voters by offering freebies. The petition pleaded that such inducement using freebies amounted to indulging in corrupt practices and bribery in terms of provisions of Section 123 (1)(b) of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**.

#### Undesirable impact of freebies:

- Non targeted **loan waivers** have undesired consequences such as destroying the credit culture.
- The **provision of free electricity** to the rural communities has led to disastrous consequences in terms of the declining water table, wastage of electricity and various other things.

#### Arguments in favour:

#### Poverty reduction:



- **Poverty, existing inequality and the distress caused by the pandemic** may necessitate some kind of relief to the population in the form of subsidies and freebies. Welfare measures such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the public distribution system, have contributed to poverty reduction.

### **Improve productive capacity of population:**

- **Freebies in the education and health** domain will help improve the productive capacity of the population and can be seen as an investment for the long term.
- Subsidies going into education, such as for laptops and other things would help increase productivity, knowledge, and skills.

### **Economic growth:**

- Also, some of these subsidies may actually be necessary for the economy to continue on its growth path.
- The economic slowdown brought out by the pandemic has led to a steep decline in demand in the economy. Welfare spending has been able to at least **prevent consumption demand from falling any further.**

### **Recommendations:**

- The priority for welfare spending should be for productive areas.
- Also, such **spending should be more targeted** to reduce the risks of leakage and to also increase the effectiveness of such spending.

## **26. What is Parboiled Rice, and why Centre wants to stop purchasing it?**

Last week, Telangana CM and members of his Cabinet staged a protest demanding a uniform paddy procurement policy. The protest came after the Centre said it was stopping the purchase of excess parboiled rice, of which Telangana is a major producer.

### **What is Parboiled Rice?**

- The dictionary meaning of 'parboil' is 'partly cooked by boiling'.
- Thus, the expression parboiled rice refers to rice that has been partially boiled at the paddy stage, before milling.
- Parboiling of rice is not a new practice, and has been followed in India since ancient times.

- However, **there is no specific definition of parboiled rice of the Food Corporation of India** or the Food Ministry.

### How is it prepared?

- There are several processes for parboiling rice.
- The Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysuru, uses a method in which the paddy is soaked in hot water for three hours, in contrast to the more common method in which paddy is soaked for 8 hours.
- The water is then drained and the paddy steamed for 20 minutes.
- Also, the paddy is dried in the shade in the method used by the CFTRI, but is sun-dried in the common method.
- The Paddy Processing Research Centre (PPRC), Thanjavur follows a method known as the chromate soaking process.
- It uses chromate, a family of salt in which the anion contains both chromium and oxygen, which removes the odour from the wet rice.
- All processes generally involve three stages – **soaking, steaming and drying**. After passing through these stages, the paddy goes for milling.

### Are all rice varieties suitable for parboiling?

- Generally, all varieties can be processed into parboiled rice, but it is ideal to use long slender varieties to prevent breakage during milling.
- However, aromatic varieties should not be parboiled because the process can make it can lose its aroma.

### What are the benefits?

- Parboiling makes rice tougher. This reduces the chances of the rice kernel breaking during milling.
- It also increases the nutrient value of the rice.
- It has a higher resistance to insects and fungi.

### Certain disadvantages

- The rice becomes darker and may smell unpleasant due to prolonged soaking.
- Besides, setting up a parboiling rice milling unit requires a higher investment than a raw rice milling unit.

### How much is the stock of parboiled rice in the country?

- According to the Food Ministry, the total stock of parboiled rice is 40.58 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) as on April 1, 2022.

- Out of this, the highest stock is in Telangana at 16.52 LMT, followed by Tamil Nadu (12.09 LMT) and Kerala (3 LMT).
- The stock was in the range 0.04–2.92 LMT in 10 other states – Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Karnataka, Bihar, Punjab and Haryana.
- From the other 10 rice-producing states, including Telangana, the Ministry has no plan to procure parboiled rice.
- In the coming days, the total parboiled rice stock will increase to 47.76 LMT.

### How high is the demand?

- The Food Ministry pegs the parboiled rice demand at 20 LMT per annum for distribution under the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- According to the Ministry, the demand for parboiled rice has come down in recent years.
- In the last few years, production in parboiled rice-consuming states such as Jharkhand, Kerala and Tamil Nadu has increased, resulting in less movement to the deficit states.
- Earlier, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) used to procure parboiled rice from states such as Telangana to supply to these states.
- But in recent years, parboiled rice production has increased in these states.
- The current stock is sufficient to meet the demand for the next two years.

## 27. Cryptos and a CBDC are not the same thing

### Context

Cryptocurrency will be discouraged via taxation and capital gains provisions. This was the message from the Finance Minister during the Budget discussion in Parliament.

### Growing worry about the cryptocurrencies

- The Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, in February, highlighted two things.
- First, “private cryptocurrencies are a big threat to our financial and macroeconomic stability”.
- Second, “these cryptocurrencies have **no underlying (asset)**.”
- Clearly, statements from the RBI indicate a growing worry since the proliferation of cryptos **threatens the RBI’s place in the economy’s financial system**.
- This threat emerges from the **decentralised character of cryptos** based on blockchain technology which central banks cannot regulate and which

enables enterprising private entities to float cryptos which can function as assets and money.

- The total valuation of cryptos recently was **upward of \$2 trillion** – more than the value of gold held globally.
- **Challenges in banning it:** Cryptos which operate via the net **can be banned only if all nations come together.**
- Even then, **tax havens may allow cryptos to function**, defying the global agreement.

### Crypto as currency

- A currency is a **token used in market transactions.**
- Historically, commodities (such as copper coins) have been used as tokens since they themselves are valuable.
- But paper currency is useless till the government declares it to be a fiat currency.
- Paper currency derives its value from state backing.
- Cryptos are a string of numbers in a computer programme. And, there is **no state backing.**
- Their acceptability to the well-off enables them to act as money.
- So, cryptos acquire value and **can be transacted via the net.**
- **This enables them to function as money.**
- **Solving the problem of double spending:** Fiat currency has the property that once spent, it cannot be spent again except through forgery, because it is no more with the spender.
- But, software on a computer can be used repeatedly.
- Blockchain and encryption have solved the problem by devising protocols such as **'proof of work' and 'proof of stake'.**

### Why CBDC is not a solution

- A Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) will not solve the RBI's problem since it can only be a **fiat currency and not a crypto.**
- Blockchain **enables decentralisation.** But, central banks would not want that.
- Further, central bank would want a fiat currency to be **exclusively issued and controlled by them.**
- But, theoretically everyone can **'mine' and create crypto.**
- So, for the CBDC to be in central control, solving the 'double spending' problem and being a crypto (not just a digital version of currency) seems impossible.
- **Validating transaction:** A centralised CBDC will require the RBI to validate each transaction – something it does not do presently.

- Once a currency note is issued, the RBI does not keep track of its use in transactions.
- Keeping track will be horrendously complex which could make a crypto such as the **CBDC unusable unless new secure protocols are designed.**

## Conclusion

CBDCs at present cannot be a substitute for cryptos that will soon begin to be used as money. This will impact the functioning of central banks and commercial banks.

## 28. RERA

The Supreme Court has asked the Chief Secretaries of the States to respond to queries raised by the Centre on the implementation of rules framed under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) (RERA) Act, 2016 in their respective jurisdictions.

### What is RERA, 2016?

- The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 seeks to protect home-buyers as well as help boost investments in the real estate industry.
- It establishes a Real Estate Regulatory Authority- **RERA in each state** for regulation of the real estate sector and also acts as an adjudicating body for speedy dispute resolution.
- It was enacted under Entry 6 and 7 (dealing with contracts and the transfer of property) of the Concurrent List.
- It is followed by the principle “**buyer is the king and builders will have to ensure compliances to avoid punishment**”.
- Its main objective is to reduce delay in the work or timely delivery of the project without compromising the quality.

### Objectives of this Act

It has the following objectives:

- To protect the interest of the allottees and ensure their responsibility
- To maintain transparency and reduce the chances of fraud
- To implement Pan-India standardization and bring about professionalism
- To enhance the flow of correct information between the home buyers and the sellers
- To impose greater responsibilities on both the builders and the investors

- To enhance the reliability of the sector and thereby increase confidence amongst the investors

### Key Provisions of RERA Act

- **Compulsory registration:** According to the central act, every real estate project (where the total area to be developed exceeds 500 sq mtrs or more than 8 apartments is proposed to be developed in any phase), must be registered with its respective state's RERA.
- **Establishment of state level regulatory authorities:** It provides for State governments to establish more than one regulatory authority such as RERA to:
  1. Register and maintain a database of real estate projects; publish it on its website for public viewing
  2. Protection of interest of promoters, buyers and real estate agents
  3. Development of sustainable and affordable housing
  4. Render advice to the government and ensuring compliance with its Regulations and the Act
- **Establishment of Real Estate Appellate Tribunal:** Decisions of RERAs can be appealed in these tribunals.
- **Mandatory Registration:** All projects with plot size of a minimum 500 sq.mt or eight apartments need to be registered with Regulatory Authorities.
- **Deposits:** Developers needs to keep 70% of the money collected from a buyer in a temporary pass through account held by a third party (escrow account) to meet the construction cost of the project.
- **Liability of the developer:** A developer's liability to repair structural defects would be for 5 years.
- **Cap on Advance Payments:** A promoter cannot accept more than 10% of the cost of the plot, apartment or building as an advance payment or an application fee from a person without first entering into an agreement for sale
- **Carpet Area over super built-up:** Clearly defines Carpet Area as net usable floor area of flat. Buyers will be charged for the carpet area and not super built-up area.
- **Punishment for non-compliance:** Imprisonment of up to three years for developers and up to one year in case of agents and buyers for violation of orders of Appellate Tribunals and Regulatory Authorities.

### Which projects can get RERA approval?

- Commercial and residential projects including plotted development.
- Projects measuring more than 500 sq mts or 8 units.

- Projects without Completion Certificate, before the commencement of the Act.
- The project is only for the purpose of renovation/repair / re-development which does not involve re-allotment and marketing, advertising, selling or new allotment of any apartments, plot or building in the real estate project, will not come under RERA.
- Each phase is to be treated as standalone real estate project requiring fresh registration.

## 29. WHO & Traditional Medicine

PM Modi, along with World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, will perform the groundbreaking ceremony for the first-of-its-kind WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

### What is Traditional Medicine?

- The WHO describes traditional medicine as the total sum of the “knowledge, skills and practices indigenous and different cultures have used over time to maintain health and prevent, diagnose and treat physical and mental illness”.
- Its reach encompasses ancient practices such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine and herbal mixtures as well as modern medicines.
- According to WHO estimates, 80% of the world’s population uses traditional medicine.

### Traditional medicine in India

- It is often defined as including practices and therapies – such as **Yoga, Ayurveda, Siddha** – that have been part of Indian tradition historically, as well as others – such as homeopathy – that became part of Indian tradition over the years.
- Ayurveda and yoga are practised widely across the country.
- The Siddha system is followed predominantly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- The **Sowa-Rigpa System** is practised mainly in Leh-Ladakh and Himalayan regions such as Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, Lahaul & Spiti.

### What will the GCTM be about?

- The GCTM will aim to focus on evidence-based research, innovation, and data analysis to optimise the contribution of traditional medicine to global health.
- Its main focus will to develop norms, standards and guidelines in technical areas relating to traditional medicine.

- It will seek to set policies and standards on traditional medicine products and help countries create a comprehensive, safe, and high-quality health system.
- The GCTM will support efforts to implement the WHO's Traditional Medicine Strategy (2014-23).
- It will serve as the hub, and focus on building a "solid evidence base" for policies and "help countries integrate it as appropriate into their health systems".

### Why has the WHO felt the need to advance knowledge of traditional medicine?

- Almost all WHO members have reported **widespread use of traditional medicine**.
- These member states have asked for its support in creating a body of **reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine** practices and products.
- The WHO has found that the **national health systems and strategies do not yet fully integrate traditional medicine workers**, accredited courses and health facilities.
- It has stressed the **need to conserve biodiversity and sustainability** as about 40% of approved pharmaceutical products today derive from natural substances.
- It has referred to **modernization of the ways traditional medicine** is being studied. Artificial intelligence is now used to map evidence and trends in traditional medicine.

### 30. India's Crude Oil Imports from OPEC

OPEC's share of India's oil imports for the FY22 financial year remained almost steady year-on-year, arresting sharp declines over the past six years, as refiners prefer crude from West Asia to counter rising global prices.

#### India's crude oil imports from OPEC

- OPEC oil accounted for about 88% of India's crude imports in FY08.
- Its share of India's overall imports could decline because refiners in Asia's third-largest economy are buying cheaper Russian oil.
- However, Russian oil continued to account for less than 1% of India's crude imports in FY22.

#### What is OPEC?

- OPEC stands for Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.



- It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.
- It aims to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil in the world market, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.
- OPEC membership is open to any country that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.
- Today OPEC is a cartel that includes 14 nations, predominantly from the middle east whose sole responsibility is to control prices and moderate supply.

### What is OPEC+?

- The non-OPEC countries which export crude oil along with the 14 OPECs are termed as OPEC plus countries.
- OPEC plus countries include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.
- Saudi and Russia, both have been at the heart of a three-year alliance of oil producers known as OPEC Plus – which now includes 11 OPEC members and 10 non-OPEC nations – that aims to shore up oil prices with production cuts.

### Why OPEC plus came into existence?

- When Russia concluded the Vienna Agreement in 2016, the Russian leadership believed that it would help prepare the country for the Russian presidential elections in March 2018.
- Higher oil prices ensured the Kremlin's financial capacity to lead a successful electoral campaign.
- This changed the regime's priorities – from satisfying the needs of the general population to ensuring the sustainability of the Kremlin's alliance with powerful tycoons, including that controlling oil production.
- For Saudi Arabia, turning what had been an ad hoc coalition into a formal group provides a hedge (protection) against future oil-market turbulence.
- For Russia, the formalization of the group helps expand Putin's influence in the Middle East
- However, both reportedly aimed at causing a drop in oil prices in order to hit US shale producers, who have continued to benefit from OPEC production cuts by expanding their market share.

### 31. How the Central and State governments procure Wheat?

Wheat procurement is now underway in various states of the country.

#### Wheat Procurement in India

- The main purpose of procuring for the central pool is ensuring the MSP as well as the country's food security by making food available to the weaker sections at affordable prices.
- The Centre procures wheat by paying the minimum support price (MSP) announced for the crop.
- The States do it under two systems:
  1. The centralised one, also called the non-decentralised procurement system (non-DCP) and
  2. The decentralised one, also called DCP

#### (1) Non-DCP

- Under this system, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) directly or through state government agencies procure wheat from the purchase centres established across the states based on various parameters like moisture, lustre, broken/shrivelled etc.
- In Punjab and Haryana, farmers sell their crop to the central agency or state agencies through Arhtiyas (commission agents).
- The wheat procured by the state agencies is handed over to the FCI for storage or for transportation to the consuming states.
- The FCI, which is the central nodal agency for wheat procurement, pays the cost of procured wheat to the state agencies.

#### (2) DCP

- The decentralised system was brought in the late 1990s to promote local procurement and save the transportation cost and time.
- The state government or its agencies procure, store and distribute wheat against the Centre's allocation for targeted PDS and other weaker sections etc. with the state.
- The excess stocks procured by the state and its agencies are handed over to the FCI for the central pool.
- The expenditure incurred by the state government on the procurement, storage and distribution of stocks under the decentralised system are reimbursed by the Centre.

## Role of Arhtiyas

- Apart from paying the MSP, the Centre also reimburses the arhtiyas' commission, administrative charges, mandi labour charges, transportation charges, custody and maintenance charges, interest charges, the gunny bag cost and statutory taxes.
- The cost of excess stocks handed over to the FCI is reimbursed to the state government or agencies as per the Centre's policies.
- Procurement agencies ensure that the stocks brought to mandis are purchased as per the specifications fixed by the government and farmers are not compelled to sell their crop below the MSP.
- But if a farmer gets a better price from private players, he can sell to them.

## From how many states is wheat procured for the central pool?

- There are 15 states on the procurement list for the central pool, but the contributions from seven of the states are negligible.
- Only Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are the main contributors to the central pool.
- Bihar also contributed to some extent in the last season.

## How much wheat is procured for the central pool by the FCI every year?

- According to the records of the FCI, from 2011 to 2021, procurement for the central pool was between 25-40 per cent of the total wheat production.
- The procurement has doubled in the past one decade as 22.5 million tonnes of wheat was procured in 2011 and 43.3 million in 2021.
- The current season of procurement is going on.

## What is the procurement scale against the total production of wheat in India?

- In 2011 the total production of wheat was 88 million tonnes while it was around 109 million tonnes in 2021.
- And the government's procurement was 26 per cent and around 40 per cent in 2011 and 2021 respectively.
- The procured grain is used for export purposes, the public distribution system and maintaining a particular stock for an emergency period.
- The remaining 60 per cent of the production goes to the bakery industry and other wheat-related businesses.
- Farmers also keep some of this wheat for their self-consumption.

### What is the share of wheat contribution of various states to the central pool?

- Barring 2020, Punjab has been the number one wheat contributor to the central pool.
- The state has increased its contribution from 102.09 lakh tonnes in 2011 to 132.22 lakh tonnes in 2021.
- Haryana has also increased its contribution from 63.47 lakh tonnes to around 84.93 lakh tonnes in the same period.
- Madhya Pradesh's contribution was 35.38 lakh tonnes in 2011, which jumped to the highest among all states – 129.42 lakh tonnes – in 2020 and was 128.16 lakh tonnes last year.
- Uttar Pradesh's contribution increased from 16.45 lakh tonnes to 56.41 lakh tonnes, and Rajasthan's contribution rose from 4.76 lakh tonnes to 23.40 lakh tonnes in the same period.

### 32. INS Vagsheer: Key features, capabilities

The sixth and last of the French Scorpene-class submarines, INS Vagsheer, was launched into water at the Mazagon Docks in Mumbai.

#### Launch of INS Vagsheer

- It was launched by Veena Ajay Kumar (wife of Union Defence Secretary), in keeping with the naval tradition of launch and naming by a woman.
  - The six submarines were being built under Project-75 by the Mazagon Docks under technology transfer from the Naval Group as part of a \$3.75-billion deal signed in October 2005:
1. INS Kalvari was commissioned in December 2017;
  2. INS Khanderi in September 2019;
  3. INS Vagir in November 2020;
  4. INS Karanj in March 2021; and
  5. INS Vela in November 2021.
- P 75 is one of two lines of submarines, the other being P75I, as part of a plan approved in 1999 for indigenous submarine construction with technology taken from overseas firms.

## Why 'Vagsheer'

- Vagsheer is named after the sand fish, a deep sea predator of the Indian Ocean.
- The first submarine Vagsheer, from Russia, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on December 26, 1974, and was decommissioned on April 30, 1997.
- The new Vagsheer will be officially named at the time of its commissioning.

## Specifications

- Vagsheer can take up to eight officers and 35 men.
- It is 67.5 metres long and 12.3 metres high, with a beam measuring 6.2 metres. Vagsheer can reach top speed of 20 knots when submerged and a top speed of 11 knots when it surfaces.
- It has four MTU 12V 396 SE84 diesel engines, 360 battery cells for power, and a silent Permanently Magnetised Propulsion Motor.
- The hull, fin and hydroplanes are designed for minimum underwater resistance and all equipment inside the pressure hull is mounted on shock-absorbing cradles for enhanced stealth.

## Features

- Vagsheer is a diesel attack submarine, designed to perform sea denial as well as access denial warfare against the adversary.
- It can do offensive operations across the spectrum of naval warfare including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and area surveillance.
- It is enabled with a C303 anti-torpedo counter measure system.
- It can carry up to 18 torpedoes or Exocet anti-ship missiles, or 30 mines in place of torpedoes.
- Its superior stealth features include advanced acoustic absorption techniques, low radiated noise levels, hydro-dynamically optimised shape.
- It has the ability to launch a crippling attack using precision guided weapons, underwater or on surface.

## Road ahead

- Vagsheer will be commissioned into the Indian Navy's Western Command after 12 to 18 months when sea trials end.
- It will be based with Western Naval Command, mostly in Mumbai.
- The submarine will undergo a very comprehensive and rigorous set of tests and trials, for more than a year, to ensure delivery of a fully combat worthy submarine.

### 33. ISRO develops Space Bricks from Martian Soil

Researchers from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have developed a way to make bricks from Martian soil with the help of bacteria and urea.

#### Space Bricks

- ISRO and IISc have collaborated to develop a novel scalable technique of manufacturing space bricks using Martian Simulant Soil (MSS).
- The team first made the slurry by mixing Martian soil with guar gum, a bacterium called **Sporosarcina pasteurii**, urea and nickel chloride ( $\text{NiCl}_2$ ).
- This slurry can be poured into moulds of any desired shape, and over a few days the bacteria convert the urea into crystals of calcium carbonate.
- These crystals, along with **biopolymers secreted by the microbes act as cement** holding the soil particles together.
- This method ensures that the bricks are less porous, which was a problem with other methods used to make Martian bricks.
- The bacteria seep deep into the pore spaces, using their own proteins to bind the particles together, decreasing porosity and leading to stronger bricks.

#### Their significance

- In the past, the team had made bricks out of lunar soil using a similar method.
- These 'space bricks' can be used to construct building-like structures on Mars that could facilitate human settlement on the red planet.

### 34. Special Purpose Acquisition Companies (SPACs)

The government is reportedly considering a regulatory framework for special purpose acquisition companies (SPACs) to lay the ground for the possible listing of Indian companies through this route in the future.

#### What are SPACs?

- An SPAC, or a blank-cheque company, is an entity specifically set up with the objective of acquiring a firm in a particular sector.
- They aim to raise money in an initial public offering (IPO) without any operations or revenues.

- The money that is raised from the public is kept in an escrow account, which can be accessed while making the acquisition.
- If the acquisition is not made within two years of the IPO, the SPAC is delisted and the money is returned to the investors.
- While SPACs are essentially shell companies, a key factor that makes them attractive to investors are the people who sponsor them.
- Globally, prominent celebrities have participated in SPACs.

### Why in news?

- According to reports, the Company Law Committee was set up in 2019 to make recommendations to boost ease of doing business in India.
- This committee has made this suggestion regarding SPACs in its report submitted to the government recently.
- The concept of SPAC has existed for nearly a decade now, and several investors and company promoters have used this route to take their investments public.
- The vehicle gained momentum in 2020, which was a record year for SPAC deals; this record was broken in 2021.

### Where does India stand?

- Early last year, renewable energy producer ReNew Power announced an agreement to merge with RMG Acquisition Corp II, a blank-cheque company.
- This became the first involving an Indian company during the latest boom in SPAC deals.
- As things stand now, the Indian regulatory framework does not allow the creation of blank cheque companies.
- The Companies Act, 2013 stipulates that the Registrar of Companies can strike off a company if it does not commence operations within a year of incorporation.

### Risk factors around SPACs

- The boom in investor firms going for SPACs and then looking for target companies have tilted the scales in favour of investee firms.
- This has the potential, theoretically, to limit returns for retail investors post-merger.
- SPACs are mandated to return money to their investors in the event no merger is made within two years.
- However the fineprint of several SPAC prospectuses shows that certain clauses could potentially prevent investors from getting their monies back.
- Historically, though, this has not happened yet.

### 35. New research about Jupiter's moon Europa

A team of researchers from Stanford University have said that on one of Jupiter's moons Europa, a prime candidate for life in the solar system might have abundance of water pockets beneath formations called double ridges.

#### About Europa

- Europa is slightly smaller than Earth's moon and its diameter is about one-quarter that of the Earth.
- Even though Europa has a very thin oxygen atmosphere, it is considered one of the most promising places in the solar system to find present-day environments that are suitable for life beyond the Earth.
- It is also believed that underneath Europa's icy surface the amount of water is twice that on Earth.
- NASA notes that scientists believe Europa's ice shell is 15-25 km thick and is floating on an ocean, which is estimated to be 60-150 km deep.
- Interestingly, while its diameter is less than the Earth's, Europa probably contains twice the amount of the water in all of the Earth's oceans.
- NASA is expected to launch its Europa Clipper in 2024.
- The module will orbit Jupiter and conduct multiple close flybys to Europa to gather data on the moon's atmosphere, surface and its interior.

#### What is the new finding?

- It is already known that Europa, whose surface is mostly solid water ice, contains water beneath it.
- The researchers are now saying that the double ridges – the formations which are most common on Europa's surface and are similar to those seen on Earth's Greenland ice sheet .
- They are formed over shallow pockets of water.

#### Significance of the recent findings

- The central implication is that the shallow water pockets beneath the double ridge increase the potential habitability of the moon.
- The ice shell, which is potentially miles thick, has been a difficult prospect for scientists to sample.
- But according to the new evidence, the ice shell is believed to be less of a barrier and more of a dynamic system.



- This means that the ice shell does not behave like an inert block of ice, but rather undergoes a variety of geological and hydrological processes.
- This suggests active volcanism and thus a possibility for life.

