

9pm
Compilation
March, 2021

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Priya Ramani Case: Significance and Challenges

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS 1: Salient features of Indian Society – Social Empowerment**

Synopsis: Since 2018, women revealing their stories of sexual assault faced many hardships. The verdict in the Priya Ramani Vs MJ Akbar case is new hope for those women.

Background

- In 2018, Priya Ramani made allegations of harassment against MJ Akbar through Tweets and News article.
- In turn, a criminal defamation case was filed in Delhi High Court against the journalist by Union Minister.
- Recently Delhi court has acquitted Priya Ramani in the defamation case filed by a former Union minister.

What are the important observations made by the court in this case?

- **One**, the court accepts the fact that many women do not file complaints due to the social stigma in society.
- **Two**, the court said that the victim has a right to put her grievance even after years and decades.
- **Three**, the judgment also upholds that reputation cannot be protected at the cost of human dignity. The Right of a woman's reputation has been guaranteed under Article 21.

What is the significance of this verdict?

- The verdict upholds women's right to share their experiences of sexual harassment whenever they are comfortable. It also disregards claims to male respectability in a patriarchal society.
- It also approves any future moves by women in support of campaigns similar to #metoo movement.

What are the challenges faced by women while expressing their vulnerable conditions?

- Women who share their experiences of sexual harassment at the workplace are often met with harsh consequences. For example, employers, globally, are expressing an unwillingness to hire more women.
- It also challenges the Patriarchal society's values that a privileged man cannot be punished despite their disreputable actions.

Suggestions to solve the menace of sexual harassment?

- According to an American feminist scholar, Janet Halley, the struggle for affirmative consent shall be fought in the real world and not in the courtrooms.
- According to her, the struggle for sexual consent of women should have the following features,
 - One, promoting individual freedom to decide the course of one's own sexual engagements.
 - Two, affirmative consent has to be realized through legal actions by the engagement with the state.
- Questioning the male privilege and removing the gender inequality in society appears to be the best way forward for feminism in India.

2. Critical Evaluation of Draft Policy on Migrant workers

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 1

Synopsis: NITI Aayog has released a draft report on migrant workers. Though it is well-intentioned, it fails to address the policy misrepresentations which is at the root of migrant workers' issues.

Introduction

The suffering of migrant workers during the pandemic raised awareness about their scale, vulnerability, and role in the economy. It also led to several measures taken by the central and state governments.

Read more – [Draft policy on migrant workers](#)

- Niti Aayog prepared an umbrella policy document for migrant labourers, including informal sector workers.
- The draft policy provides a perspective on recognising the scale and role of migrant workers. It states that a complete policy must be viewed from a “human rights, property rights, economic, social development, and foreign policy lens”.

What are the features mentioned in the draft policy?

It states that a rights-based and labour rights perspective built around the core issue of dignity of labour must be the principle of policy. It should meet ILO commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. **Firstly, the document appreciates the magnitude of the migrants** and their role in the economy. It also finds that the present data fails to capture the growth in their numbers.
2. **Secondly, many sources of vulnerabilities** of migrant labourers have been described in the document. It includes:
 - Their invisibility and political and social exclusion to informal work arrangements.
 - Exploitation and denial of labour rights.
 - Lack of collective voice, exclusion from social protection arrangements.
 - Formal skills, health, education, and housing.
3. **Thirdly, it identifies the transferability of social protection**, voting rights, right to the city. It recognizes health, education and housing facilities as key issues to be dealt with.
4. **Lastly, it proposes a governance structure** with the Ministry of Labour. It will act as a focal point for inter-ministerial and Centre-state coordination. It also proposes mechanisms for coordinating the effort on inter-state migration.

What are the issues missed by the draft policy?

The draft misses recognising and addressing many critical issues.

1. **First, gaps in development and inequalities** have grown constantly in the last 3 decades. It requires corrections in the development strategy without which migration is bound to grow unchecked. The report did not acknowledge this.
2. **Second, the report fails to recognize the root cause** of the uneven urban development strategy. The urban strategy has marginalised the poor and the migrants.
3. **Third, the report has denied approaches that rely on cash transfers** and special allowances. The denial of the first approach has resulted in ignoring the migrants' and informal workers' right to social security.
4. **Fourth, the biggest weakness of the report is its approach towards labour rights** and labour policy. It puts grievance and legal redressal above regulation and enforcement.

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5. **Lastly, the labour codes which are promoting ease of business**, have shifted the balance firmly in favour of capital. This weakens the bargaining power of labour and further weakens an already drained enforcement system.

The way forward

- The draft policy identifies the problems but fails to address the policy distortions. However, if the draft will be opened up for further discussions and feedback, it will enrich and complete what is already a significant beginning.

3. Issue of Women rights in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS – 1: Issues linked to Women in India

Synopsis: March 8 is celebrated as International Women’s Day. While celebrating it, we also need to look back at how women’s rights upheld by the state in the last years.

Background:

- 8th march is being celebrated as International Women’s Day. It is celebrated to commemorate the struggles of women factory workers.
- It was first organised by socialist movements as “international women’s day” in the first decade of the 20th century.
- Later, from the 1920s, it began to be celebrated annually by communist parties, first in the Soviet Union and then in China.
- Much later, the United Nations “established” International Women’s Day in 1977 in the wake of the International Women’s Year in 1975.
- In India, the celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8 started in the 1980s.
- For the last few years, there are demands to celebrate the death of **Savitribai Phule** on March 10 as Women’s Day in India.

Contribution of Savitribai Phule

1. Savitribai Phule was colonial India’s first female teacher. She fought for the cause of “social justice” against women’s caste-differentiated enslavement. She was ousted from the family home for breaking caste codes.
2. Furthermore, she was instrumental in establishing the **Satyashodhak Samaj** in Maharashtra by her husband **Jyotirao Phule**.
 - It was a social reform society that focused on education and increased social rights and political access for underprivileged groups.
3. However, the legacy, of Savitribai Phule, long ignored in the history of women’s rights.

State’s response to the major women-centric movements in 2020

1. **First, Denial of right to protest.** For example, the Shaheen Bagh protest led by Muslim women against the discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act. This protest ended with the arrests of many young women and students, on the charges of having incited violence.
 - In the recent farmer protests against the three farm laws, many women participated even during freezing weather in Delhi. However, the state didn’t show apathy towards their concerns.
2. **Second, denial of rights to live a dignified life. For example,** Lockdown imposed hardship on women migrants. They were left without basic survival needs – food, shelter and care due to lack of **social security**.

3. **Three, denial of economic rights to women.** For example, the lockdown witnessed increased domestic violence against women. Also, the burden of Women's household care work increased due to the absence of paid domestic workers. Yet, there was no state response to recognize women's care work and housework.
4. **Fourth, ineffective towards deterring gender violence based on caste.** For example, **Hathras rape case.** The state response in tackling this kind of crime not proved effective to deter future caste-based violence.

4. Pew Research study on Poverty in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS:1 – poverty and developmental issues

Synopsis: A recent Pew research study report reveals increasing poverty in India. But the report also points out some serious flaws in government policy during pandemic times.

Introduction

A recent [Pew research study report](#) reveals increasing poverty in India and China in 2020. As per the report, the pandemic has pushed approximately 7.5 crore people into poverty levels (Earn less than \$2 a day). In contrast, the pandemic pushed only 10 lakh people into poverty in China.

Intensity of the Pew Research study on Poverty:

In India, the pandemic reversed the gains made in the preceding nine years in poverty reduction programmes. But in contrast, China pushed back only one year, matching the 2019 level.

Is the Pew research study reliable?

The Pew research study is based on the analysis of the World Bank's database. However, the research itself mentions that there are multiple assumptions in the report. This includes the assumption on-base years for income/consumption also. In India, the base year was 2011 and for China, the base year is 2016.

This might be the reason for the large difference between the poverty data in India and China. But still, there are few significant highlights of the report.

Highlights of the report:

1. **Widening inequality in India:** The pandemic increased the inequality level in India. As the lower-income populations have borne the job and income losses due to the multiple lockdowns.
2. **The fiscal policy response of India is uncertain.** India introduced many policy initiatives to revive the economy. Especially the pre-pandemic tax cuts provided to the corporates to revive private investment and revive growth. The Pew research report data reveals that the benefits of fiscal policy measures did not reach the desired persons. So the Fiscal policy has to be assessed.
3. The National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme's record level of demand is proof of increasing Poverty in India.

Suggestions:

With the COVID-19 cases increasing once again. If the data on the report is not assessed properly then India might face two critical challenges.

1. The economic recovery might not be feasible to the desired level
2. The poverty level in India might increase dramatically.

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So the government policy responses will test the government's policy on 'lives versus livelihoods'.

ForumIAS

General Studies Paper – 2

General Studies - 2

1. Why New IT Rules, 2021 for Social Media were necessary?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.**

Synopsis: Government has released [new IT rules](#) 2021 for Social media. This article talks about the need for these rules.

Background:

Recently, the Indian government has announced a number of rules to curb the misuse of social media.

Read More about New Rules: [New IT Rules for Social Media and OTT platforms – Explained Pointwise – ForumIAS Blog](#)

Why the Big Tech needs to be regulated?

- **First**, Big techs have grown out of proportion. They have access to billions of dollars as well as the power to control three important resources in modern times. Data, Attention and the popular narrative.
- **The following incidents will better explain the power** these big companies wield in modern times.
 - Twitter's noncompliance to obey orders from a sovereign country like India.
 - Donald Trump, de-platformed from Twitter and Facebook
- **Second**, Self-regulation measures taken by the Big Techs to control misinformation in the infodemic era have been ad hoc, inconsistent and reactive.
- **Third**, Offensive speech in social media has commercial gains for Big techs. Because this content goes viral è attracts more users more data è More advertising revenue.
- **Fourth, in democratic societies** states are the guardians of the public interest. So, curtailing speech or permitting it, is the role of states, not the Big techs.
 - Also, the tech industry is itself deeply flawed. There is a lack of sufficient choice of platforms and there are asymmetries in power between the companies and users. Big Tech is amassing data on the citizens and using this information for its own purposes.
- **Fifth, the** power of Big techs is more compared to states. It gives them better bargaining power to enforce their profit motives over national interests. For example, recently, Google and Facebook threatened to de-platform Australia.

What are the counterarguments from Big techs?

- **First**, the Big techs contend that they have developed better processes to regulate offensive speech content. So, they feel that the government's involvement is not necessary.
- **Second**, even democratically elected governments are far from perfect. So, they do not have the legitimacy to regulate free speech.
 - For instance, according to [The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index](#), both India (ranked 53rd) and the US (ranked 25th) are "**flawed democracies**".
 - Also, governments might enforce rules in their personal interest to cut-off dissents against the government.
 - This leads to the opinion that well-functioning markets are superior to flawed democracies in optimizing social welfare.

2. India-US relations under Biden administration

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**

Synopsis: India and US relations under the Biden administration may strengthen in certain areas. But there will be some challenges too.

Areas where India and the US are willing to cooperate?

India and the US are already engaging with each other on a majority of issues, including COVID-19, climate, health care, immigration and restoring America's global standing. For example,

1. Like previous leaderships, the Biden government also want to build closer ties with India. A major focus is on the push for the **Quadrilateral and Indo-Pacific policy**.
2. **Recently**, the US praised India's efforts towards renewable energy and controlling emissions.
3. Also, the US has revealed its plans to enhance health cooperation through a memorandum of understanding (MoU). It is likely to deal with COVID-19 testing, vaccination and critical drug supplies.
4. Biden's decision to lift restrictions and caps on a number of visas and green cards has relieved India.

Areas where US interest will affect India'?

The change in the Presidency in the US will have the following implications over India.

Factoring China:

1. During the Trump presidency, China's aggression at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in early 2020 brought India and the U.S. closer.
2. America provided "moral and material support" to India through greater military cooperation, intelligence sharing etc.,
3. Even, India gave up its hesitancy over holding the Quad. India participated in two Quad ministerial meetings in the past year.
4. However, at present, this cooperation is likely to change. It is because the Biden administration wants to take on China strategically.
5. The Biden administration sees China as a competitor in areas such as defence, trade and technology. However, it is also pushing for cooperation in certain areas such as climate change.
6. Thus, unlike Trump years, India won't have greater support from the US on the China issue.

Impact on India's Pharmaceutical Industry:

- Biden wants to secure America's supply chains. For Instance, he is insisting on localizing the production of pharmaceuticals. It will affect India, as it is a major exporter of pharma.
- This move will also hit the India-Japan-Australia trilateral **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative** (SCRI) to counter their dependence on Chinese goods. Now with the US localizing, the benefits of this initiative will be lesser.

Human rights issue between India and the US:

1. The US has stated that the "shared commitment to democratic values is the bedrock for the U.S.-India relationship".

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2. Thus, the US has been vocal against crackdowns on freedom of speech in India. For example, the Internet ban in Jammu and Kashmir, farmers' protests and the government's face-off with Twitter.
3. Also, India's actions to shut down international agencies Amnesty, Greenpeace, Compassion International will be dealt with strictly, by the U.S.
4. Further, the U.S. will want India's cooperation in ensuring human rights in South Asia. It is most likely given India's current term in the UN Security Council. However, ensuring cooperation on Human Rights will affect India's neighbourhood relation. For instance,
 - o If India takes a hard stance against the coup in Myanmar it will affect India's interests in the region.
 - o Similarly, Sri Lanka faces a resolution at the Human Rights Council for alleged wartime excesses in 2009 operations against the LTTE.
5. India's support for its neighbour would place it closer to China than to the U.S.

Impact on India's ties with Russia

- The Biden administration looks at CAATSA act as a powerful tool. It was made clear by him in countering Turkey's S-400 purchase and the Nord Stream2 pipeline project from Russia.
- The purchase of the S-400 missile systems will attract sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

Trade issues:

- Under Biden, India is hoping that the US will reverse its decision to cancel its GSP status for Indian exports.
- The mega Indian investment plan announced during the "Howdy Modi" visit has ended abruptly. (Petronet India's \$2.5 billion stake in U.S. company Tellurian's Driftwood LNG project)

Dealing with Afghanistan and Pakistan:

The US will not see India as part of the Afghan solution, and it will seek more support from Pakistan to facilitate its exit. This is because India firmly supports the Ashraf Ghani government and refusing to engage the Taliban.

3. Relevance of the JCPOA | Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action | Iran Nuclear Deal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Synopsis: Resolution of JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) is the foremost challenge for Biden administration. It is also very important for a peaceful world.

Introduction:

Former US president (Mr Trump) revoked the JCPOA or Iran nuclear deal in 2018. After that Iran also resumed its nuclear program. So the US under the current Biden presidency have to take a proactive step to revive the JCPOA.

What is JCPOA and developments around it so far?

1. After the prolonged talks from 2013 to 2015, the JCPOA, (the Iran nuclear deal) was reached. The negotiations involved Iran and P5+1 countries (Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union + Germany).
2. While signing the JCPOA, **Iran was estimated to be months away from producing a nuclear device** (it accumulated enough highly enriched uranium (HEU) to produce a nuclear device).

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Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU): This type of Uranium has at least a 20 percent concentration of Uranium-235. This is a higher concentration comparing to the natural uranium ore (0.7% of U235). This is essential to produce the simplest type of nuclear weapon.

3. According to the Iran nuclear deal, **Iran accepted to restrict its uranium enrichment program. It also agreed** to intense compliance with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards. In return, the sanctions on Iran were partially lifted.
4. The Iran nuclear deal was seen as the greatest diplomatic achievement by Former US President Barak Obama. But the **Iran nuclear deal was not ratified in the US Senate**. So, Mr Obama implemented the deal based on periodic executive orders.
5. Under the Trump administration, the Iran nuclear deal was seen as a one-sided deal. So, by May 2018 the US adopted a policy of **putting 'maximum pressure' to force Iran back to the negotiating table**. Accordingly, the US imposed sanctions on Iran again.

How the other P5+1 members reacted to the US decision on JCPOA?

1. Other parties to the JCPOA criticised the U.S. decision. They also supported Iran as it complied with its obligations and also certified by the IAEA.
2. The E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the EU promised Iran to find ways to mitigate the U.S. decision on JCPOA.
3. The E-3 countries also created a relief Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) with Iran in 2019. This is aimed to facilitate limited trade between Iran and the EU.

How Iran reacted to sanctions?

1. After the failure of talks and the INSTEX, Iran shifted to a **strategy of 'maximum resistance'** in 2019. Iran restarted its nuclear program with the following steps:
 - o Accumulating the low enriched Uranium and heavy water to develop HEU
 - o Stepping up the research and development on advanced centrifuges.
2. Already tense relationship between US and Iran worsened by many developments, like:
 - o Drone strike leading to the **death of IRGC commander** Gen. Qassem Soleimani.
 - o The U.S. had imposed nearly 80 rounds of sanctions on Iran.
 - o Iran experienced **unexplained fires and blasts in many sensitive places** like the one at the Natanz nuclear facility

Relevance of reviving JCPOA:

1. The Iranian Parliament also passed a bill seeking to enrich the Uranium above 20%. A recent IAEA report has also confirmed that **20% enrichment had begun**.
2. Moreover, **Iranian elections** are due in June. A fundamentalist regime is less likely to agree to any US demand. So, the negotiations might not yield results after the Iranian elections.
3. If there is a collapse of the JCPOA, then the situation in **Iran will be just like North Korea's situation**. It will have major repercussions in the region and beyond.

What can be done to revive the JCPOA?

1. Positive steps and multiple rounds of talks are necessary for creating a conducive atmosphere.
 - o To achieve that, Iran can release the European and American nationals currently in custody in Iran.

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- Similarly, the US can help to **clear Iran's applications to the International Monetary Fund**. This will help Iran to recover from COVID-19 and aid the supply of vaccines under the [international COVAX facility](#).
- 2. Similarly, the E-3/EU also needs to **fast track deals** worth a few million euros **stuck in the INSTEX pipeline**.
- 3. The US on the other hand can **remove sanctions on Iranian political leaders**, it will bring Iran closer to talks.

Conclusion

The revival of JCPOA is essential considering the current political situations in Iran and the new change in the US presidency. But it has to be fast, else Iran will go nuclear like North Korea.

4. Pakistan Remains on FATF's Grey list

Synopsis: Pakistan avoided the blacklist in the recent FATF meeting. However, it has to do more, to come out of the grey list of FATF.

Introduction:

The recent [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\)](#) meeting has once again decided to keep [Pakistan in their grey list of countries](#) under "increased monitoring".

Further, the FATF ruled out the option of placing Pakistan on blacklist like Iran and North Korea. It is because Pakistan made some progress on its commitments to FATF. Further, the FATF also provided a 3-month time limit to Pakistan for fulfilling its remaining commitments.

Pakistan's progress under FATF grey list:

1. Pakistan was removed from the Financial Action Task Force lists in 2015. But in 2018, it was again put on the list. Pakistan was provided with a **27-point action list** to fulfill, to come out of the FATF grey list.
2. **FATF President Marcus Pleyer** acknowledged **Pakistan's "significant progress"**. However, he further mentioned that Pakistan fulfilled 3 points on the list only partially. Notably, 3 of them in the area of curbing terror financing. The FATF mentions the few important areas of non-compliance such as,
 - **Demonstrating terror-funding prosecution is accurate, effective, and dissuasive**
 - **Implementing financial sanctions against all terrorists designated by the UN Security Council**. This includes LeT founder Hafiz Saeed, JeM chief Masood Azhar and those who belong to al-Qaeda.

India's relations with Pakistan

Since 2016, political, trade, cultural ties between Pakistan and India are minimal. But recently the recent decision of [Directors General of Military Operations \(DGMO's\)](#) to strictly observe the [ceasefire agreement](#), is a great first step.

The move indicates more dialogues are possible between both countries. But the success of dialogues also depends upon Pakistan's **compliance with other points in the 27 point action list**. Such as

- **Successfully prosecuting terrorists and terror financiers.**
- Addressing **cross-border terror** that emanates from Pakistan.

Conclusion

India Pakistan relations may progress by fulfilling Pakistan's commitment to the FATF action list. Because these actions also address India's main grievance with Pakistan on State-sponsored terrorism.

5. NEP 2020 and children's right to playgrounds

Synopsis: NEP 2020 (National Education Policy) has disregarded the children's right to playgrounds in the name of efficiency.

Background

- The **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE)** mandates that all school-going children between the ages of 6 and 14 should be guaranteed essential infrastructure including playgrounds.
- However, the New NEP 2020 is going against the RTE requirements of providing mandatory infrastructural facilities.
- This requirement is introduced with the intention to increase efficiency and optimization. It may also lead to an increase in total schools and decrease school fees.
- However, it will deprive children's access to playgrounds. It is also a denial of their right to play in safe and adequate spaces.

What are the changes brought by NEP 2020 with respect to playground provisions?

- **First**, the NEP directs a review of the "practicalities of playgrounds in urban areas", school-area, and room-size requirements. It aims to "ease" school operation by removing RTE playground requirements.
- **Second**, the NEP proposes that by 2025, state governments have to create school complexes. The school complex would be comprised of a mix of schools and anganwadis in a 5-10 kilometre radius. Schools will be encouraged to use shared resources such as playgrounds.

What are the issues involved in it?

1. **First**, according to NEP 2020, neither the government nor private schools need to provide playgrounds. After that, private schools may charge exorbitant fees without providing playgrounds.
2. **Second**, one school complex comprises a 5–10 KM radius, sharing playgrounds among large no. of schools and children of different ages will be difficult. Because children of different ages have different playground needs. For instance, Anganwadi learners have different spatial needs than middle school students.
3. **Third**, this is against the court's directive. In 2019, the Allahabad High Court ruled that playgrounds must be provided within a school's land area to ensure access for all children, including children with disabilities.
4. **Fourth**, there is a growing scarcity of playgrounds due to intensive urbanization. Children's playgrounds have increasingly been appropriated by governments and private parties for development.
 - For instance, in 2019, Gujarat amended its RTE rules to reduce the minimum playground area requirements for urban and rural schools.
5. **Fifth**, NEP provisions are contradictory in nature. Despite removing playground requirements, the NEP advocates sports-integrated education. It fails to explain how sports may be integrated without playgrounds.
6. **Sixth**, it is against the 1989 **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**. The **Convention** recognizes play as an indispensable right of the child as it allows for the free and true expression of one's personality.
7. **Seventh**, Sports is also a minuscule sub-category of the infinite varieties of children's play. It can accommodate only a few children based on "abilities".
 - Even if specific forms of sports infrastructure are provided in well-resourced schools, these cannot substitute for large, open playgrounds.

The NEP 2020 provision will bring down the minimum standards of quality education, instead of protecting and expanding it. This is also seen as a move to prioritize neoliberal interests that prioritize market demands over **societal good**.

6. Critical Analysis of IT Rules 2021

Source: [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu 2](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation

Synopsis: Government released new 'IT (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021'. There are many flaws in these rules that require urgent attention.

Background

- Recently the Centre introduced the '**Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**' to regulate all types of digital platforms.
- For framing the new rules, the government has referred to the **2018 Prajwala case**. Where the Supreme Court had observed that the Government of India may frame necessary guidelines to eliminate child pornography, rape and gangrape imageries, videos and sites in content hosting platforms and other applications.
- The new rules force digital news publishers and video streaming services to adhere to a **three-tier structure of regulation**. It will have a government committee at its apex.
- It is feared that the new rules will have implications for **freedom of expression** and the **right to information**.

What are the issues in the new IT rules 2021?

- **First**, the new rules have increased the **censorship of Internet content**. Moreover, it mandates compliance with government demands regarding user data collection and policing of online services in India.
 - Rules are framed in the **absence of open and public discussion** and without any **parliamentary study and scrutiny**.
- **Second**, the new rules issued under the Information Technology Act appears to be **unconstitutional**. Instead of taking a legislative route, it was done by expanding the purview of the IT Act, 2000.
- **Third**, the ability to frame **subordinate legislation** is by its nature a limited, constrained power. An executive cannot use its rule-making power to issue primary legislation by itself.
 - But, the government by enacting new **Information Technology rules 2021** has increased the scope of **subordinate legislation**.
- **Fourth**, the new rules will also regulate digital news media, it is a prime source of news. Any government involvement could have a chilling effect on their free speech and conversations.
- **Fifth**, according to the new rules, any person having a grievance regarding the content in relation to the **Code of Ethics** can file his grievance.
 - Literally, it will force a digital platform to take up any issue by anyone. This opens the floodgates for all kinds of interventions considering the fact that many digital news platforms are small entities.
- **Sixth**, the new rules have increased the compliance burden for social media platforms. For instance,
 - Big platforms such as WhatsApp will have to appoint **chief compliance officers**. He/she will ensure the rules and the laws are followed. A nodal officer

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will also need to be appointed, for coordinating with the law enforcement agencies.

- **Seventh**, the new rules mandate the **retention of user data** by intermediaries for use by government agencies.
 - The rules require messaging apps such as **WhatsApp and Signal** to trace the origin of the problematic messages based on a judicial order.
 - It raises uncertainty about adherence to such orders, as their messages are encrypted end-to-end.
- **Eighth**, the new rules provide for the registration of digital news sites with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Further, OTT platforms are required to agree to a government-supervised “self-regulatory system”.
 - However, under the IT Act, digital news service is not required to be registered. Similarly, streaming video content has not been included under the ambit of the **Cinematograph Act**.

What is the way forward?

- Given the new challenges in digital content, some strict policy measures are needed. However, the Centre’s decision to involve in the grievance redressal process as an apex body cannot solve these problems.
- Also, over-regulation will prove counterproductive in a country where the citizens still do not have a **data privacy law**.
- So, what is needed is the uniform application of laws to combat unlawful content that is already in place.

7. Regional stability in South-Asia depends on India, Pakistan and China

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: India and neighbourhood relations

Synopsis: If China, Pakistan and India can remain humble, then there is hope for better regional development and stability.

Introduction

Recently India and Pakistan have announced the [strict observance of all ceasefire agreements](#) along the Line of Control(LoC). On the other hand, India has also seen a [de-escalation along the Line of Actual Control](#) with China.

Lessons from these announcements:

1. India has shown that China’s military and economic domination can be resisted.
2. India showed that Pakistan’s **ceasefire violations cannot yield any result** on the ground.
3. On the other hand, Pakistan also learned a few significant things.
 - The **abrogation of Article 370 did not result in a cycle of violence** in the Kashmir Valley that Pakistan wanted to exploit.
 - Pakistan at present [remained on the FATF grey list](#). So, Pakistan’s state funding of terrorism has burdened Pakistan itself.

Challenges in regional stability:

1. There are a few things that can disrupt the de-escalation between India and China.
 - There is a possibility that some fringe group might try to disrupt the de-escalation.
 - **Chinese intentions behind de-escalation are still unknown**. There is also not enough trust between both the countries among each other.
2. Similarly, the **ceasefire declaration by Pakistan also cannot be trusted**, considering the past instability in Pakistan’s actions.

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3. The **Issue of Kashmir, now seen by the world as a trilateral dispute**. As the LAC with India-China and LoC with India-Pakistan was disputed. If it is true then India will need significant resources to deal with China and Pakistan at the same time.

Suggestions to improve the regional stability:

1. **India** has to realise that the **aggressive use of foreign policy** for domestic political gains has **serious effects on India's international stand**. For example, assuring that India will retake Pakistan occupied Kashmir for gaining votes in elections will harm bilateral relations and India's international credibility.
2. **Pakistan should open up to the South Asian region** instead of depending on China. As it will help Pakistan to realise its full economic potential. Further, it will provide access to the Central Asian region to the South Asian countries. Pakistan can get a large revenue as they are the transit of goods and services.
3. **China has to maintain stable relations in their deals**. China **has to avoid things** such as non-adherence to the principles, frequent violation in the region, etc.

Conclusion

- The pandemic offers an opportunity for greater economic cooperation between the three countries.
- Political establishments of India, Pakistan and China have to rethink their geostrategic interests. Also, they need to analyse what they can offer to their citizens from peaceful relations. Then only regional stability is feasible in South Asia.

8. NGT and associated challenges

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS-2:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Synopsis- The National Green Tribunal(NGT) instead of protecting the environment is facing trouble due to internal issues within the NGT.

Introduction

The National Green Tribunal(NGT) is a dedicated tribunal to deal with matters relating to the environment. The NGT website even mentions that the tribunal has cleared 90% of the cases. But a close look will reveal the tribunal's mandate to protect the environment is not yet fulfilled.

About the National Green Tribunal (NGT):

1. National Green Tribunal (NGT) is a quasi-judicial body established on October 18, 2010. It was established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 to handle environment-related disputes.
2. India is the third country following Australia and New Zealand to have such a system.
3. **The Mandate of NGT** is to dispose of the cases related to the environment in an effective and efficient manner. The NGT handles cases related to,
 - Environmental protection
 - Environmental clearances for projects by the government are covered under the jurisdiction of NGT.
 - Conservation of forests and other natural resources.
 - Enforcement of any legal right relating to the environment.
 - Relief and compensation for damages to persons and properties.

Challenges with the working of NGT

1. Since the inception of the NGT Act, the tribunal **never functioned in its full capacity**. According to the NGT Act, the tribunal should have 10 members in the Judicial and 10

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members in the Expert capacity. At present, the NGT is functioning with three judicial and three expert members only. This is much less than the official requirement under the NGT Act.

2. It has **failed to achieve the Right to a healthy environment** as a part of the Right to Life under Article 21.
3. NGT has invoked the deadline associated with the technical clause and dismissed 11 petitions last year alone. This shows the inability of NGT to solve the cases in a time-bound manner.
4. **Lack of expertise in the functioning of Tribunal.** This is evident by the fact that many decisions of NGT have been challenged and overruled in the Supreme Court. For instance
 - o The Supreme Court questioned the expertise of NGT in **the case of the Subansiri Hydropower Project in Arunachal Pradesh 2019**. Further, the court also overruled the ban imposed by NGT on that project.
5. The tribunal also failed to carry out the merits-based review and discharge of adjudicatory function. For example, **In Mopa Airport Case**, the apex court held that the NGT lacks merits-based review on its judgements.
6. **Limited Regional Benches:** The NGT is located only in big cities. But, environmental exploitation is majorly taking place in the tribal areas of dense forest. There is a limited opportunity for these people to come forward and file a case in NGT.

Way Forward

- The Government needs to reform the provisions of the NGT Act to include more number of judicial and expert officials.
- Apart from that, the government also needs to ensure the filling of Vacancies in a time-bound manner. This will ensure the proper functioning of NGT.

9. India-EU trade relations

Source- **The Hindu**

Syllabus- GS 2- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis – After Brexit, India can strengthen bilateral trade and investment relations with the EU by signing a Free Trade Agreement(FTA). This will mutually benefit both India and the EU.

Introduction

- The EU is India's largest trading partner. It accounts for 11 per cent of total Indian trade in 2019, making it more important than China.
- India has an export potential of \$39.9 billion to the EU and Western Europe. Apparel, gems and jewellery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and plastic have high export potential.
- So, making stronger ties with the EU will help India to achieve Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Further, the Generalized Scheme of Preferences in the EU also helps India to improve exports.

What is the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences?

The EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) helps developing countries by reducing the tariffs. This makes it easier for countries to export their products to the region.

Benefits EU's GSP for India:

- **Reduction in tariffs**– The scheme removes import tariffs from the products coming into the EU market.
- **Economic growth**- The lower tariffs will increase exports. This export revenue encourages growth in income, economic growth, and job creation for India.

What is the meaning of graduation under the EU's GSP?

- A developing country can export its products and gain an advantage from the GSP. But there is a limit provided for attaining maximum benefits. Once this limit is reached then that particular product will lose the benefits of GSP. That is called **Graduation**.
- **So, Graduation** means that imports of certain particular groups of products in a given GSP will lose the preferences of GSP.
- Graduation applies when the average imports from a country **exceed 17.5% of GSP imports** of the same products from all GSP beneficiary countries during three years (For textiles and clothing this limit is 14.5%).

Challenges for India in FTA:

1. Many products of India have already graduated or about to graduate under the EU's GSP.
 - **Graduated Indian products**- textiles products, inorganic and organic chemicals, gems and jewelry, iron, steel and their articles, base metals, and automotive.
 - **Products that about to graduate** – Apparel, rubber, electronic items, sports goods and toys.
2. **Lack of agreeing to the terms** in fields such as automotive, dairy, and marine goods by both the EU and India. So, the Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement [BTIA] commenced in 2007 is yet to take final shape.
3. After 2013, the Free Trade Agreement(FTA) negotiations were suspended between India and the EU. Both India and the EU were not ready to lose some privileges to gain more.
4. **Agreement on investment:** China has negotiated a comprehensive agreement on Investment with the EU. But India didn't. So, there is a huge possibility that the EU companies will start investing in China. The delaying of investment provisions will affect India.
5. **Non-tariff measures (NTMs):** India faces 414 cases against NTMs in the EU. This is covering a wide spectrum of industries. This will also hamper India and EU FTA.

Suggestions to fast pace India-EU FTA:

- India needs to negotiate with the EU on investment-related issues. Further India also has to negotiate the provisions to improve value chains, especially in technology-intensive sectors.
- FTAs often have several institutional arrangements for Non-Tariff Measures(NTMs). India should explore such arrangements to remove the NTMs. This will increase bilateral trade.

In the post-Covid recovery, India needs to increase its exports and increase its manufacturing capability. Signing an FTA with the EU will help India to achieve this objective.

10. NEP 2020 and language policy

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 2- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Synopsis- Since colonial times, efforts to introduce education policy based on mother tongue have failed. The NEP 2020 also fails to uphold a multilingual educational approach.

Introduction

1. Since colonial times, all committees and commissions recognized the importance of education in the mother tongue. Its proponents include Elphinstone's Minute of 1824, Macaulay's Minute of 1835, and Wood's Dispatch of 1854.
2. However, they laid the foundation of India's education system in the English language.
3. UNESCO declared in 1953 to use mother tongue for the conceptual clarity and cognitive growth of students
4. Even NEP 1986, plan of action 1992, NCF 2005, RTE 2009 also highlighted the importance of mother tongue in education. However, they did nothing to fill the quality gap between English-medium schools and non-English medium schools.
5. Now, NEP 2020 also recommends the medium of instruction to be in the home language/mother-tongue/local language or regional language in primary classes. But again words such as "preferably" or "wherever possible" are used, making implementation uncertain.

NEP 2020 sticks to the 'three-language formula' while emphasizing that no language would be imposed on anyone.

What is the issue with NEP 2020 on the language front?–

1. **Multiplicity of languages and dialects in India** – Students are better able to learn to read and write in the language that they are most familiar with. However, in a multilingual country like India, it comes across as a challenge with different states, regional and national languages.
 - Just 47 of the 270 mother tongues identified in the 2011 Census used as mediums of instruction in schools.
 - NEP 2020 speaks a lot about multilingualism. But it fails to recognize that children arrive in school not with "a language" but with a complex verbal repertoire.
2. The NEP 2020 three-language formula is theoretically unsound and has had a disastrous history. NEP, 2020 fails to understand that people only learn another language to integrate with others or when it is an instrument of benefit.
 - For example, people from South India learn Hindi for jobs and increments. People in North India learn Sanskrit because it ensures high marks without much work.

What needs to be done?

- The Government needs to ensure that every child's voice is heard in the classroom according to the child's own understanding.
- The Government needs to initiate an MLE model and identify the problems in implementation and the cost of change of the model. After then prepare an action plan which resolves all of such problems.

11. Judiciary's inconsistency in dealing with cases of Personal liberty

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Organization and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: The recent rulings of the judiciary have defended the personal liberty of citizens. However, there are many instances where the judiciary failed to uphold liberty.

What are the recent rulings?

The following rulings highlight the role of judiciary as the first line of defence against the deprivation of the liberty of citizens.

1. **First, in 'Priya Ramani case'** the Delhi high court acquitted her against the charges of **criminal defamation**. Above all, the court made the following significant directives.
 - o One, a woman's right to dignity supersedes the right to reputation.
 - o Two, survivors of sexual harassment are free to place their grievances at any point in time after the incident. They are free to choose any platform or time as per their comfort.
2. **Second, in Disha Ravi's' tool kit conspiracy case'** the high court has granted anticipatory bail to Disha Ravi. It further observed that in a democracy, the **right to dissent is a fundamental right**.
3. **Third**, the judiciary in many earlier judgments has acted against the arbitrary use of **Sedition laws**. It has stated that free speech can be criminalized only when it is resulting in Public disorder. For instance,
 - o **In Arnab Manoranjan Goswami vs State of Maharashtra**, the Court warned against the use of the criminal law as "a ruse for targeted harassment".

What are the views of critics of the Judiciary?

Despite the above rulings, there are many instances where the Judiciary failed to uphold the liberty of individuals.

1. **First, in Tandav case** the court has denied anticipatory bail to Ms. Purohit, (head of Amazon Prime Video's India Originals.)
 - o Further, the high court allowed the interrogation in custody. It was for running a show (Tandav) that was "bound to hurt the sentiments of the majority community".
 - o In doing so, the court upheld that religious beliefs are more important than free speech.
2. **Second**, the court has shown unequal attitude towards '**haves and have-nots**'. **For example**, in **Arnab Goswami case**, the court granted quick bail by stating that deprivation of liberty even for a single day is one day too many.
 - o However, it has done nothing to protect the life and dignity of thousands of **Under trial prisoners**. They continue to suffer in jail for many years. Some have even served half of their jail sentences without conviction.
3. **Third**, the supreme court the guardian of people's rights failed to quash unconstitutional laws. Rather, It allowed the continuance of these laws irrespective of their poor record in protecting personal liberty. **For example, Sedition, Defamation laws etc. (Justification for this statement given below)**
 - o **One, criminal defamation** has imposed a chilling effect on legitimate speech. Every democratic nation of the world has decriminalized defamation. But in India, it remains a tool to harass dissenters.
 - o **Two**, Sedition laws are colonial remnants. The offence of sedition continues to be weaponized to restrict dissent against government. **For example**, journalists involved in **Hathras rape case and Bhima Koregaon case** booked under sedition.
 - o **Three**, India's **blasphemy laws**, are also remnants of colonialism. Section 153A, deals with speech that seeks to promote enmity between different communities.

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Section 295A criminalizes speech that outrages religious feelings. Even these laws are used to enforce majoritarian views and very little for dealing genuine cases of hate speech. **For example, Tandav case.**

Judicial discretion will lead to arbitrary outcomes. When this uncertainty is coupled with the prevailing distrust in the values of personal liberty, of free thought and expression, it leads to denial of rule of law.

12. Indian Diaspora in US and its Impacts on India- US Relations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: The stature of the Indian diaspora in the US is growing. It will have a significant impact on India-US relations.

Significance of Indian Diaspora in the US

- Indian-Americans are the second-largest immigrant community in the US(4 million-plus).
- They are considered as one of the most influential groups in the US. and they have played a key role in transforming the relations. For example, the U.S. signing the civil nuclear deal.
- In addition, many American Indians have entered into the administration and the US congress.
- Yet, over the past years, there has been a divergence in the preference of the community especially the second generation of American Indians. They have become more Americanised.

How the attitude changes of Indian-Americans is affecting India-US relations?

1. **First**, the second generation of American Indians has their own assessment of developments in India. **For example**, Government steps on Farmers protest in India was criticized by many American- Indian citizens.
 2. **Second**, the India **caucus** (A caucus is a meeting of supporters or members of a specific political party) with the Indian Ambassador to the United States offers an insight into the changing attitude of the **Indian-American community**.
 - **For example**, the caucus with representatives from the **Indian-American community** urged the Government of India to make sure that the norms of democracy are maintained.
 - Also, they stated that protesters shall be allowed to protest peacefully with access to the Internet and journalists.
 3. **Third**, notably, the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar cancelled the engagement with the top leadership of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee congress in December 2019.
 - This was due to the presence of **Ms. Jayapal** (Democrat, **Indian-American**) who voiced against the Indian government clampdown in Kashmir.
- In addition to the above issues, **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)** might impact India-USA ties. Because India has proceeded to procure the Russian **S-400 missile defence** system which is against the CAATSA act.

Suggestion

India-U.S.-Parliamentary Exchange for formal and reciprocal visits by parliamentarians should be established. It was expressed in the **India-U.S. 2+2 meeting**, in October 2019, it will help to solve the above issues.

13. Appointment of Police officers for Prison Management

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Separation of Powers between various organs

Synopsis: The appointment of Police officers for Prison management is not right. It is against strengthening the criminal justice system.

Background

- Recently, the Uttarakhand government issued a notification to post IPS officers as superintendents of Prisons.
- A PIL has been filed against the government's decision before the Uttarakhand High Court.

What are the reasons for Posting police officers to monitor Prisons?

- **First**, it was done for strengthening security and to control corruption.
- **Second**, prison departments have limited strength at the officer level, leading to malpractices. So, the suggested solution is to bring fresh talent from outside, who would not have any long-term stake in the system.

Why appointing police officers to prison is criticised?

Though there are problems in Prison management, the process of appointing police officers is adhoc and short-sighted. Because of the following reasons,

- **First**, the skill requirement for police is different from a prison officer. For instance, police personnel recruited and trained to detect crime and maintain law and order. Whereas, prison officers are recruited and trained to reform and rehabilitate offenders.
- **Second, it is not legal and amounts to a violation of rules and procedures. For example,**
 - The decision contradicts the provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Jail (Group A and B) Service Rules, 1982.
 - Also, appointing police officers in prisons amounts to a violation of the **principle of separation of powers** enshrined in our Constitution.
- **Third**, it is against the philosophy of **correctional administration**. It goes against the Prison reform committee reports like the **Justice Mulla Committee on Prison Reforms Report** (1983), the **Justice Krishna Iyer Committee on Women Prisoners Report** (1987). They advocated;
 - Prisons should be houses of reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners and their families.
 - Creation of a specialised All India Prison Service along the lines of the IPS or IAS.
 - Currently, Bihar is the only state which continues to have an IAS officer heading the prison department.
- **Finally**, posting IPS officers as superintendents of Prisons amounts to police custody. It is because it gives the police direct access to prisoners during "judicial custody".

What is the way forward?

- **First**, we need to invest in the prison system in terms of resources and staff. It can be done in the following ways,

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- Appointing social workers and counselors in sufficient numbers.
- Conducting regular training in human rights and social reintegration for prison staff.
- Filling vacancies, which are as high as 30 to 40 percent as per the **India Justice Report 2020**.
- **Second**, institutionalize practices that will promote **upward mobility** for prison officers. For example, rewarding good work with promotions.
- **Third**, need to uniformize their career growth equally across states. It will motivate them for better work performance.
 - For example, in a few states, a prison officer who starts his career as a deputy superintendent of a central prison can end up as Additional IG or IG Prisons. Whereas in most states, one can only rise to the rank of DIG Prisons.

14. Rise of Lateral Surveillance in India

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The notification on the IT rules 2021 promotes lateral surveillance. It has given a new meaning to 'Citizen watch'.

Introduction:

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), launched the Cyber Crime Volunteers Program. It aims to allow citizens to register themselves as "Cyber Crime Volunteers" in the role of "Unlawful Content Flaggers".

- **The programme will help law enforcement agencies** in identifying, reporting and removal of illegal/unlawful online content.
- The programme will be launched all over the country. It is going to have its test run in Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura.

What is lateral surveillance?

- The surveillance in which citizens watch over one another is called lateral surveillance.
- **Main Features of lateral surveillance:**
 - It is different from typical surveillance. In the typical surveillance, there is a vertical relationship between those being watched (citizenry) and those who are watching (the state).
 - The lateral surveillance specifically ensures that the imbalance of power no longer exists.
 - It is a form of community policing.
- The United States had the neighbourhood watch scheme. It increased community policing in the 1970s. With the introduction of technology and **the development of applications such as Citizen and Next door**, monitoring of people and their behaviour has become easier.

What is the extent of lateral surveillance in India, and what are its impacts?

The state-sponsored lateral surveillance has been implemented in India earlier as well. For example, the C-Plan App in Uttar Pradesh launched for keeping a tab on anti-social elements. It is designed to receive inputs from certain identified individuals in villages across the State.

1. **Firstly, these individuals have been given the responsibility** to solve local problems such as providing information about boiling communal tensions or land disputes taking place in their own villages through the mobile application.
2. **Secondly, the scope of lateral surveillance expanded during the pandemic lockdown.** For instance, the Karnataka government released a PDF with the names

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and addresses of around 19,000 international passengers who were quarantined in Bengaluru.

3. **Thirdly, lateral surveillance may create a situation where privacy could get weakened** for the betterment of the community.
4. **Fourthly**, It can act as a tool for social exclusion. Lateral surveillance makes it easier to discriminate between those who do not conform to the social norms of the majority.
 - o For example, the LGBT community in South Korea faced harsh comments from the homophobic majority when coronavirus cases were reported from the area where they resided.
5. **Fifthly**, it is harmful because it **creates an environment of hate, fear and constant suspicion**. This method gives people a duty of keeping an eye out for their own safety which results in an increase in fear of crime in society.
6. **Sixthly, these threats will increase intolerance**, prejudice, racism and casteism in our society. It will also violate the fundamental right to privacy right of free speech.

What will be the outcome of the policy?

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 also promotes lateral surveillance.
 - o For example, there is a provision relating to the user-directed removal of non-consensual sexually explicit content. It will enable mediators to remove or disable access to the information within a short period of time of being notified by users.
- This may result in taking down content and sharing user data without sufficient due process safeguards, violating the fundamental right to privacy and freedom of expression.

15. Afghan Peace Process and India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The US is set to leave Afghan as per the mandates of the Afghan Peace process. India should step up to ensure a peaceful, stable, and democratic Afghan government

Background:

- The peace process in Afghanistan is witnessing a crucial moment in its history.
- In a recent development, Mr. Blinken's letter (U.S secretary of state) addressed Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani. It confirmed the US intention to fully withdraw all forces from Afghanistan as per the **Doha Agreement**.
- Moreover, The continuation of Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation indicated that the US wants to proceed to a final settlement based on the Doha agreement.
- The withdrawal of the US from the state will worsen the security situation, and it would help the Taliban to make rapid gains.

Dilemma faced by the US

- The U.S. maintains that its objective is to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations. It wants Afghanistan to remain united, sovereign, and democratic.
- But withdrawing troops from Afghanistan to cut its expenses is a contradiction to its above-stated objectives.
- Also, the major problem for the US is that it cannot withdraw from Afghan **without accepting Pakistan's terms**.

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- But acceding to Pakistan's terms will not be accepted by Afghan patriots who want freedom for Afghanistan to choose its political direction.
- Mr. Biden is of the view that Pakistan is strategically more important to the U.S. than Afghanistan.
- Thus, Instead of pressuring Pakistan, the US is seeking Afghan support for a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban. It would help to enable the exit of U.S. soldiers.

The current plan

- The U.S. Government is advocating 'a new, inclusive government' in Afghanistan. It supports an immediate 50% share for the Taliban in an interim government, as a quid pro quo for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.
- Ghani is now asked to work closely with a broad consultative group to build consensus for negotiations with the Taliban on power-sharing, governance, and essential supporting principles.

What are the implications for India?

- India remains fully committed to Afghanistan. The bilateral relations are growing irrespective of political instability in Afghan. For example, recent high-level exchanges between Indian and Afghan leaders.
- Invites to prominent elders and senior Afghan leaders by India helped it to reconnect with the political forces in Afghanistan.
- India's efforts in Afghanistan have attracted support from the Afghan people and government.
- The patriotic Afghan people have always supported their erstwhile leaders such as Ex-President Najibullah, who are committed to building the nation. And these leaders in turn look to India as a friend and expect solidarity.

What should be the way forwards for India?

- In the late 1990s when no country was willing to help the democratic forces in Afghanistan. India and Iran voiced their support. A similar situation is arising.
- India must step up to assist materially those who want to defend the Afghan republic.
- This will also mark the arrival of India as the super power and as an arbiter in settling international disputes.

16. The ill effects of Job reservation for locals

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States

Synopsis: Haryana has introduced a new law where it assures 75% Job reservation for locals. This could be a disastrous decision for the Indian Economy.

Introduction

The Governor of Haryana has approved a law that regulates job reservation in the private sector. This could possibly hamper India's investment climate and its socio-economic framework.

- The [Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act of 2020](#) seeks to **provide for a 75 per cent job reservation** for local people in private-sector jobs. The reservation is ensured on jobs having salaries **less than Rs. 50,000 a month**.
- Apart from Haryana, States such as Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh also tried to provide Job reservation for locals.

Few major provisions of Haryana's Law:

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1. Firms and companies need to **register** all of their employees receiving a gross salary of Rs 50,000 or less on a **government portal** and update it at regular intervals.
2. An **exemption** can be claimed by employers when there enough number of local candidates are not available with the desired skills, qualifications, and proficiency. However, an officer of the rank of deputy commissioner or higher will evaluate such a claim.

What are the issues with Job reservation for locals?

1. This law is not consistent with the provisions of the constitution. Especially Article 19(1)(g) and Article 16(2).
 - o Article 19 (1)(g): Right to freedom of profession or Right to carry on any occupation, trade or business
 - o Article 16(2): State cannot provide discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them. The law imposes difficult and argumentative responsibilities on key personnel of firms in the State.
2. The Law creates **barriers for businesses** by attaching severe monetary penalties for alleged non-compliance. The penalties can go up to Rs. 2,00,000 rupees.
3. Apart from that, the government will have the power to enter firms' premises for inspections. This could possibly **bring back the 'Inspector Raj' system**. This process **discourages employers from operating in the State**. Further, It will lead to decreasing local jobs and increasing the unemployment rate in the long run.
4. **Impact on the entire country:** The law will be an example for more such laws from State governments. This will lead to a mass departure of investors from India.
 - o For instance, a disturbance in the Gurgaon back-office operations of a global firm will damage India's reputation as a stable, trustworthy investment destination with a talented workforce.
5. The law is completely **against the Prime Minister's vision such as 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'** and **'One Nation One Market'**.

Way forward

- It is time the Centre discourages [job reservation for locals](#). Because these laws threaten to unleash a **'work visa' regime for Indians within the country** and also **damage crucial workplace diversity**.

17. Concerns associated with Local Reservation Laws

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States

Synopsis: Enactment of local reservation laws by states would have a negative impact on low-income internal migrants. Laws will also fail to go through the constitutionality test.

Background:

- There have been **numerous instances of subnational nativism** in the past:
 - o Mulki rules in Nizam-ruled Hyderabad in the late 19th century
 - o Anti-South Indian movements in Bombay in the 1960s
 - o Sons of the soil movement in Assam
- However rarely **we saw a formal law supporting local reservation** as:
 - o The politicians used subnational nativism just to woo voters
 - o Constitution prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of place of birth.
 - o The report of the **Working Group on Migration in January 2017** inferred the Supreme Court's decision in the **Charu Khurana v Union of India case, 2014**. As

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per which the restrictions based on residence for the purposes of employment are unconstitutional.

- Nonetheless, a rise in the enactment of local reservation laws is witnessed in India.

Recent Local Reservation Laws:

- Andhra Pradesh became the first state to pass such a law in 2019. It reserved 75% private jobs across all categories in industrial units, factories, joint ventures as well as Public-Private Projects.
- In March 2021, the Haryana government notified its Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020. It provides for a 75 % job quota for local people in private sector jobs which offer a salary of less than Rs. 50,000 a month.

Problems with Local Reservation Laws:

- **Constitutionality Test: Article 16(2)** provides that there cannot be any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them.
 - Further, it curtails the employer's choice of recruiting labour from anywhere in the country. It is against **Article 19(g)** that provides the freedom to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business.
- **Flawed Objective:** One of the aims is to control interstate migration but census 2011 shows that the majority of migration is intrastate.
- **Depriving state of cheap labour:** Migrants offer better services at cheap prices. Further, the natives are reluctant to engage in some jobs which are taken by migrants. This is evident from Surat's power loom industry which employs workers from Odisha.
- **Plight of Low-income migrants:** He/she already faces the challenge of the uncertain job and portable job security. Now another obstacle of native laws is placed in front of them.
- **Discriminatory Criteria:** The income cut-off in Haryana's law conveys that the rich can move anywhere in India. However, similar opportunities are denied to poorer inter-state migrant workers.
- **Parallel Markets:** There is a fear of development of fake local residence certificate markets in order to get jobs within a state.

Way Forward:

- The **law passed by the Andhra Pradesh assembly is already challenged in court.** The decision would make it clear whether states can give any local reservation in jobs or not.
- Further, the **states must realize that a rise in interstate migration will definitely happen.** It is evident from the development trajectory of any other country. This was also seen in China during the last 3 decades of its growth.
- The **states shouldn't indulge in hypocrisy.** For instance, the residents of Haryana and Andhra Pradesh have benefited from internal and international migration in the past. But now is restricting migration in their respective states.

Discouraging protectionism has been the traditional stance of India as evident from the criticism of the Trump administration for enhancing barriers on H1B migrants. The change of Biden administration has brought hope to Indians who want to live the American dream, but local reservation policies at home have certainly discouraged the internal migrants.

18. Why India Should limit its Involvement With QUAD?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The stand-off at Ladakh has shown the limits of India-U.S. security ties and India's involvement in the Quad. So, India should limit its involvement in QUAD and prioritize national security.

How India joined the QUAD?

China's encroachment & India's response

1. China was expanding its footprint in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region over the last few years.
2. Thus, India required an up-gradation of its naval capabilities and enhancement of ties with the Indian Ocean Region littoral states and other major powers in the region.
3. Later, due to the shared concerns relating to the rise of China, India-U.S. security ties deepened, For example,
 - o Focus on Interoperability of defence equipment and training based on defence purchases,
 - o Conducting frequent land and sea exercises,
 - o The signing of agreements to harmonize the two countries' military doctrines and operations.

India got dragged into the QUAD by the US

- The US wants to maintain its global hegemony and sees china's rise as a threat to the world order.
- The deepening relationship with the US gradually pulled India into the ambit of the **Indo-Pacific**. (Indo-Pacific is a concept that views the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as an integrated geopolitical space.)
- This India joined the QUAD to expand its maritime ties with other regional states such as Japan, Australia.

What is the consequence of India's involvement in QUAD?

- By joining with the U.S.-led maritime coalition, India ignored the principal areas of its security concerns.
- In the words of Shivashankar Menon, by joining QUAD India emphasized more focus on maritime borders. But had no clues on how to protect its borders on the mainland.
- The shifting of India's alignment with the U.S. and its allies made china respond strongly by engaging in direct confrontation at our territorial borders.
- This resulted in the border face-off in Ladakh, from April 2020. By doing so China has reminded t India that its security concerns lie in its northern borders, not the west Pacific.

Why India should limit its involvement with QUAD?

1. **First**, India is the only Quad member that is not in the west Pacific. It is also the only one that shares an undemarcated 3,500-km land border with China. So, any developments will have more impact on India-China relation. For example, **Ladakh standoff**.
2. **Second**, Quad neither shares a strategic vision nor is it animated by a shared agenda. Its members despite being anti-china continue to forge ties with China. For example,
 - o in 2020 China became India's number one trade partner
 - o American investors hold \$1 trillion of Chinese equity, and 75% of U.S. companies in China continue to invest there.

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3. **Third**, The Quad has a core structural problem. It revolves around the U.S. which is self-centred in defining and pursuing its interests and hardly serves the security interests of its members.

What are the suggestions?

1. **One**, India needs to dilute its focus on the Indo-Pacific and the Quad. It should prioritise spending of resources on issues concerning national security. (The border, the neighbours and the Indian Ocean.)
2. **Two**, the rebuilding of ties with China will have to be a priority concern. Recent disengagement at LAC (Pangong Tso) is a step in the right direction.
3. **Three, the need** to assure our commitment to democratic pluralism by building back our national ethos. Foreign policy should be made in line with domestic affairs.
4. **Finally**, India's foreign policy has often been ad hoc, reactive and short-term, reflecting the absence of broad strategic culture. So, with the rising ambition of India, we need to build a cohesive strategic vision to aid India's interest in the long term.

19. Flaws in New IT rules 2021

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Synopsis: The new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 suffers from numerous flaws. Due to this, experts have questioned their efficacy and legality.

Background:

- The online streaming industry has grown multifold in recent years and has made a unique space of itself vis-a-vis cinema and television.
- However, the intended government regulation under new rules deters the creative freedom of industry. It is a grave concern at a time when the industry is already facing multiple challenges.

Challenges prior to new regulation:

- **Multiple court petitions** have been filed against online streaming platforms due to inappropriate content. The concern generally pertains to religious sentiments or display of obscene sexual content. The result is restrictions on artistic expression and viewer choice.
- In some cases, **FIRs lodged directly** against the artists or company employees of platforms like Netflix and Amazon. This causes substantial harassment and undermines personal liberty of content creators.

Flaws in new IT rules:

- **Inconsistency with Parent Act (Section 69A of IT Act):** Powers under Section 69A can be exercised in the interest of “sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State etc. grounds.”
 - However, a **ground of decency and morality is not mentioned** under the section. But rules allow the government to regulate platforms on such ground.
 - Similarly, Section empowers the central government to direct “any agency of the Government or intermediary” to block access to online content. However, **online video streaming platforms do not fall** into either of these two categories but still are covered under the new rules.

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- The Section allows the government to block access of any information to the public generated or transmitted on a computer. Nonetheless, rules give **greater power** of demanding an apology or re-classifying the content that breeds subtle censorship.
- **Lack of Independent Regulation:** The proposed three-tier regulatory framework falls short of independent functioning.
 - For instance, the Inter -Departmental committee which makes the 3rd tier will be mainly formed by bureaucracy. Further there is no compulsory judicial/civil society representation at this level.
 - Similarly, the review committee constituted under Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951 for examining the government order, comprises only government officials.

Way Forward:

- Government should **release a white paper** stating the intended objectives to be achieved by regulating online streaming platforms. Prior to this, a meaningful public consultation involving all the concerned stakeholders should be done.
- Further if stringent regulation is desired, then it **must be done through the legislative branch**. As executive rule making power under Section 69A never contemplated the creation of such an elaborate regulatory framework.

20. Increasing Cases of Gestational Diabetes in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: India registers a high number of gestational diabetes cases, which are bound to increase in the future. This coupled with low awareness and poor testing potential calls for immediate action.

Background:

- Diabetes is a metabolic disease that causes high blood sugar. The hormone insulin moves sugar from the blood into your cells to be stored or used for energy.
- If a person is having diabetes, the body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't effectively use the insulin it makes.
- India has 7 crore cases of diabetes and almost 3.5 crore prediabetes cases.
- Further, Type 2 diabetes is most common, it is preventable with some lifestyle changes. However, very less focus is placed on Gestational diabetes.

About Gestational Diabetes:

- It is a transitory form of diabetes occurring in pregnant women.
- South Asian women are at higher risk of development as shown by data from the International Diabetes Federation. It estimates that 25% of south Asian women would develop it.
- In India, it is assumed to be more prevalent in urban areas (30%) than rural areas (10%). Further, assuming a 10% rate of development, the figure for gestational diabetes comes around 27-30 lakh women every year.

Impact of Gestational Diabetes:

1. **First**, it enhances complications during pregnancy. This includes preeclampsia (fits during pregnancy), prolonged and obstructed labor, need for assisted delivery, postpartum hemorrhage, etc.

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2. **Second**, the above complications can cause a spike in maternal and neonatal mortality rates.
3. **Third**, if not death, then the probability of developing other problems is quite high.
 - Type 2 diabetes gets developed in almost 50% of women.
 - Children also are at high risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Challenges in Managing Gestational Diabetes:

1. **First**, there is a lack of awareness regarding gestational diabetes due to which, it gets noticed after the complication has occurred.
2. **Second**, our health system also lacks the capacity for providing robust and timely testing.

Way Forward:

- There should be a prompt and adequate implementation of **national guidelines on the diagnosis and management of gestational diabetes**.
- The **single test procedure** suggested by Dr. V. Seshiah (a pioneer in the field of diabetes and pregnancy) and subsequently approved by the World Health Organisation should be adopted for better diagnosis.
- In order to spread awareness, the 10th march can be celebrated as **National Gestational Diabetes Awareness Day**.
 - The Diabetes Study Group of India recommended this step as it would be an act to recognize Dr. V. Seshiah's contribution towards the field of diabetes and pregnancy for more than 40 years.

21. Lack of Gender sensitivity in the Court Judgments

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: Lack of gender sensitivity by the judiciary is one of the fundamental reasons for the worsening security of Women in India. The judiciary in many cases enforced societal attitudes towards women.

Worsening state of Security of women in India:

- India rated as the **most dangerous country for women**, as per Thomson Reuters Foundation survey 2018.
- According to a National Crime Records Bureau report (2019) as many as 32,032 rapes were reported in 2019 (88 incidents of rape a day).
- Every hour, 39 instances of crime against women including four instances of rape are committed in India.

Judgments lacking gender sensitivity:

- **First**, instances where marital rape was not acknowledged as a crime.
- **One**, SC recently granted bail to a government servant who is accused of repeated rape and torture of a 16-year-old child.
- During this hearing, CJI questioned that “When two people are living as husband and wife, however brutal the husband is, can the act of intercourse between them be called rape?”
- **Two**, a few years ago, the supreme court orally asked a convict who had molested a girl 10 years ago to fall at her feet and that if she forgave him, the Court would limit his sentence of imprisonment to the period already undergone.

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- **Three**, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court also issued a similar order. It ordered that the sentence of the 'rape convict can be cut if he agrees to pay ₹1 lakh to the victim.
- Four, In Bhanwari Devi case (1995), the Rajasthan court acquitted the accused. The reasons given were not gender sensitive at all such as
 - Higher caste man cannot rape a lower caste woman for reasons of purity
 - Men who are 60-70 years old cannot commit rape
 - One relative cannot commit rape in front of another relative
- **Second**, instances when the court has upheld the superiority of society's attitude toward women against the rights of Women.
- **One**, in 2020 the Guwahati High Court said that refusal of applying sindoor (vermilion) and wearing conch shell bangles (shaka) as sufficient basis to grant a divorce to the husband.
- **Two**, the Madras High Court had earlier stated that divorcees too should maintain sexual purity to claim alimony.
- **Three, In Narendra vs K. Meena (2016)**, the SC said that under Hindu traditions, a wife after marriage is supposed to fully integrate herself with her husband's family.
 - Refusal of women to live with in-laws amounts to cruelty. Therefore, the husband would be entitled to divorce her under the Hindu Marriage Act.
- **Third**, instances when women protection laws are diluted without considering the sensitivity of the issue. For example,
 - **In Rajesh Sharma vs The State of Uttar Pradesh (2017)**, the complainant accused that her husband had harassed her for Dowry. And, the trauma faced by the victim has resulted in the termination of her pregnancy
 - It has to be noted that an offense under Section 498A is non-bailable and non-compoundable. Also, a police officer is legally allowed to make an arrest without a warrant from the court.
 - However, the court issued a number of directions in favor of the accused, Such as
 - there should be no automatic arrests on charges of cruelty.
 - Also, no arrest should be done till the newly constituted Family Welfare Committee submit its report.
- **Fourth**, instances when the court has intervened against the right of a woman to marry according to her will. For example, the infamous Hadiya (2017) case.
 - The woman's father accused that she was forcefully converted to Islam. Though, Hadiya had denied it repeatedly.
 - The court ordered an investigation by the National Investigation Agency for looking into the matter of marriage of two adults.

22. India's new policy of proactive diplomacy

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: India's new policy of proactive diplomacy and strong ground posturing is working well.

Introduction

Things are getting better for India in the neighborhood. China has withdrawn its troops in eastern Ladakh across the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Also, Pakistan has initiated a ceasefire across the Line of Control (LoC). The new U.S. administration has also been issuing positive statements.

How proactive diplomacy helped India?

1. **Under the new strategy of proactive diplomacy**, the Indian forces actively engage their enemy on the ground. Whereas military leadership actively engages in negotiations with their counterparts at the same time.
2. Due to it, China was forced to review its ground strategy for the second time. Mobilization of Indian forces led to the withdrawal of Chinese equipment and troops from Doklam also, in 2017.
3. **The DGMOs of India and Pakistan recently agreed to strictly implement the 2003 ceasefire agreement.** This decision must be a step towards peace after multiple ceasefire violations.
4. This decision of Pakistan came even after the announcement by Imran Khan of no engagement with India until the status quo was restored in Jammu and Kashmir.
5. **It is also because Pakistan is under pressure due to its dangerous economic condition** and a repayment crisis. **China looks unhappy** about the uncertainty over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Pakistan must be under pressure from India, the new U.S. administration as well as China.

However, India is well aware of Pakistan's tendency to spread terror and violence in India. That is why India has repeated that counter-terror operations will not be reduced.

Favourable approach of the US towards India

There are signals that the Biden administration will adopt a complex approach with China.

- China also wants to take a chance by cooperating with US, for its own economic and strategic interest. China would also want Pakistan to adopt the same approach.
- Contrary to earlier beliefs, the Biden administration seems to be largely siding with India in its South Asia policy.
- A US state department official recently said that they are concerned by China's pattern of ongoing attempts to threaten its neighbours. And also, they are going to stand by their friends and allies.
- In another statement, the U.S. State Department said it welcomes the steps taken to return Jammu and Kashmir to full economic and political normalcy consistent with India's democratic values. India should seize this opportune moment.

23. Addressing Systemic Issues in Higher Education

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education

Synopsis: There are systemic issues in higher education. They need to be addressed to strengthen our education system.

Background

- According to the recently released **QS World University Rankings**, India has 12 universities and institutions in the top-100 in particular subjects.
- Though it is a better achievement compared to the previous years. Still, there is room for improvement.
- We need to address the systemic issues to further strengthen our education system.

Why are the systemic issues impacting quality in higher education?

There are many systemic issues which needs to be addressed. For example,

- **First, lack of relevant career opportunities** diminishes the appeal of academic education among students. **For example**, if studying hard and critical thinking doesn't lead to career improvement, students tend to lose academic ambition.

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- **Second, the lack of relevance of the core syllabus** decreases students' interest in education. **For example, students** joining IIT's initially, work hard to secure admission, but then lose motivation owing to a lack of relevance in the actual syllabus.
- **Third, lack of High-quality jobs.** In India, only a few jobs exist after high-quality education. The Majority of jobs require lower skills and pay poorly. In such a system the Lower-ranked colleges don't find any motivation to improve themselves.
- **Fourth, prioritising top colleges and neglect of Low ranked colleges.** For example, top colleges in India enjoy much state-sponsored support. They attract the best faculty and students. This makes it further difficult for low ranked colleges to make any improvement.

What needs to be done?

For the mediocre college to improve, its students must first see value in a better education. It requires system-wide growth in opportunity. To achieve this the relevant stakeholders must do the following;

1. **First, policymakers**, they need to promote employment led -growth oriented policies to create enough jobs for 650 million Indian youths under age 25.
2. **Second, industry**, they should focus on developing indigenous technologies. It will help in improving our Higher Education standards.
3. **Third, teachers**, standard of teaching will improve standards of the institutions and create more competitive students.
4. **Fourth, Students**, they need to demand for better education. Only then institutions will respond to their needs.
5. **Finally**, students will demand better education only when the quality education is valued by society. And vice versa, it will be valued by society only when the imparted quality education is applied towards the benefits of the society.

We must teach students not only our subjects, but also how to think about both existing applications and future ones. Students must aim to relate their learning to society.

24. Working towards Climate Justice

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: New Delhi has to control its green commitment to guarantee carbon and policy space for its developmental goals. It will ensure Climate Justice.

Introduction

Joe Biden in the U.S. Presidential elections promised to lead a major diplomatic push to increase global climate ambition.

- The U.S. is moving back to Obama's achievement of the Paris Accord and to the Bush days. It is evident by the presidential call to resume the Major Economies Forum (MEF).
- The MEF was started in March 2009. It aimed to push for a way forward on climate change without attention to the differentiated responsibilities and historical responsibilities.

What actions have been taken to control greenhouse gas emissions?

All the countries are being told to commit to net-zero (Green House Gas emissions) by 2050. China committed to reaching the target by 2060, but they have been strictly told to be there a decade earlier.

- **Firstly**, the UN Secretary-General asked the countries to build a coalition for a carbon-neutral world by 2050. Countries representing around 65% of global CO2

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emissions have already agreed to this. The UN Secretary-General wants this figure to reach 90% within 2021.

- **Secondly, the implementation of these plans** will be subject to international reviews and verification. India can easily be the focus of this dialogue because of its huge population and one of the world's largest economies.
- **Thirdly, the EU might impose carbon border taxes** on those who do not take on high carbon cut-down targets. This could add to the challenges of this proposed global goal.
- **Fourthly**, the U.S. Administration appears uncertain on these border taxes, but this possibility cannot be ruled out. In such a situation, World Trade Organization rules that currently exclude the use of charges on **environmental grounds will surely get modified.**

What is the idea suggested by Raghuram Rajan?

The lack of money is a constant issue in the climate discourse. Raghuram Rajan has recently put forward a proposal for India to consider. It asks countries to pay into a global fund amounts based on their carbon emissions over and above the global per-capita average of five tons.

- **This step disincentive coal and incentivises renewables.** Countries above the global average would pay, while those below would receive the taxes. This method may be unacceptable to the developed countries.
- **This proposal may appear attractive to India** as today it has a per capita CO₂ emission of only 2 tons. India is a global record-setter in pushing renewables. However, it is unlikely that real politics would allow a major economy to benefit from such fund flows.
- **The long-term consequences of this proposal** require examination in detail. Alternatives such as emission trading should also be considered.

However, The proposal focuses on current and future emissions. Thus, it penalizes developing countries while giving developed countries a certain free pass. Because more than 75% of the carbon space available to keep global temperature rise to 1.5° C already been utilized by the developed world and China.

The way forward

- Climate negotiations are also about global governance and will hereafter be pursued with a drive. It requires India to carefully regulate its approach including on the economic and political fronts.
- Climate justice is very important for India. It needs to influence its green and pro-nature commitment to ensure carbon and policy space for its developmental and global aspirations. India's diplomatic and negotiating efforts must be quickly geared to that end.

25. Reasons Behind Participation of India in Desert Flag exercise

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: India and South Korea participated in the sixth edition of the Desert Flag exercise. It is an indication of Increasing Asian security interest in West Asia.

Background

- The Indian Air Force for the first time is about to participate in the sixth edition of Desert Flag. It is a multi-nation exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

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- Other than India and the UAE, Bahrain, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and the United States are also participating.
- Though the joint military exercise by Western countries and Arab countries is common, the involvement of India and South Korea showcases the growing interests of Asian economies.
- The sixth edition of Desert Flag is important considering the recent developments in the West Asian region.
 - Mounting tensions between Iran and the U.S.
 - The signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020 between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain.
 - Ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen.

How West Asia's stability is important for India and other Asian economies?

1. **First**, as net importers of crude oil, the Asian economies are heavily dependent on the West Asian states for their supplies. For example, in April 2020, Saudi Arabia was India's top supplier of oil followed by Iraq.
2. **Second**, for the **protection of vital sea lanes**, such as the **Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea**. For example, The Indian Navy has made multiple port calls from the UAE and Kuwait to Iran and Qatar in recent years.

Iran – US conflict and its impact on India and South Korea:

Both India and South Korea faced negative impacts of Iran sanctions. The West forced economic sanctions on Iran due to the issue of nuclear weapons.

- In 2013, an Indian oil tanker named **MT Desh Shanti** confiscated near the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian forces. It was seen as a pressure tactic by Tehran to make India pay for Oil Imports. India was unable to pay for oil imports owing to US sanctions.
- Similarly, in January 2021, Iran confiscated a South Korean tanker, **MT Hankuk Chemi**, also from near the Strait of Hormuz. At that time, Tehran and Seoul were also in the conflict over billions of dollars worth of oil payments. It was frozen due to sanctions against Iran over its nuclear Programme.

The changing security nature in West Asia:

- The US security support is eroding in the West Asian region. **For example**, January 2021 marked the first time since 1985 that the U.S. did not import oil from Riyadh
- Hence, Regional states will become more responsible for their own security, and Asian economies such as India are strong stakeholders.

26. The Issue of Programme Code for Media outlets

Source- **The Hindu**

Syllabus- GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Synopsis – Karnataka High Court directs media outlets to stick to Programme Code.

Introduction

1. Karnataka minister resigned after media aired footage that allegedly featured him and an unidentified woman.
2. There has been speculation about the prospect of more such CDs that could be aired.
3. Following that, PIL filed by Jarkiholi's lawyer. It seeks to take steps to safeguard the right to privacy of individuals and ensure that media do not breach the law by invading the privacy of individuals.

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4. Karnataka HC directs media houses to follow the **Programme code** defined under the **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act**. It restrained around 70 media organization from broadcasting or publishing contents of a CD. However, the order of restraining media might become a tool of harassment.

What are the concerns and provisions about the Programme Code?

Concerns-

- The code contains an elaborate list for a media organization. It says that no programme should be aired that contains
 - **Anything offensive for the sovereignty and integrity of India.**
 - **Criticism of friendly relations of India with any foreign state.**
 - **Obscene, defamatory, false, and suggests innuendos and half-truths.**
- DMs, SDMs and police commissioners are the authorized officers to ensure that the Programme Code is not breached.
- It contains defamation, half-truths and innuendo as the potential violations.

Penalties under the code-

If any media governed under the CTN Act violates the provisions and the Programme Code, the code prescribes;

- Imprisonment up to two years or fine up to ₹1,000 or both for the first offence or
- Imprisonment up to five years and with a fine of up to ₹5,000

What are the challenges in this case?

- **No complaint filed by the victim-** It is not possible to show any misconduct in the absence of a complaint from the victim, or even information about her.
- **Invasion of Privacy** – An invasion of someone's privacy or a disrespectful representation of women cannot be justified in the name of the public good.

27. Incentivising Women's Domestic Care and Associated Issues

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States

Synopsis: Addressing Women's challenges in an economy is more important than incentivising women's domestic care work.

Background

- In the 1991 census, women's groups undertook a campaign to ensure that women's home-based labour is getting recognised.
- Recently, in the poll-bound Tamilnadu state, various political parties announced remuneration for women's domestic and care.
- Over the years, Tamil Nadu has nurtured the growth of **competitive welfarism**. Because many believe that the success of such social security net has resulted in reducing poverty and ensuring inclusive growth.
- However, the recent proposal has been criticized. It is because Political parties resorted to **Populist measures** to win elections without paying real attention to the existing women issues

What are the issues of Women that need priority in Tamil Nadu?

- **First**, Women working as domestic workers and housekeeping staff are still not recognised as Workforce. The lack of recognition of domestic workers as a workforce forces them to accept poor remuneration, abuses etc.,

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- **Second**, increasing **female indebtedness**. The state has allowed and enabled the growth of microfinance in the state, which led to a high level of female indebtedness. Mostly, the loans are taken for a range of social and reproductive purposes such as Children's education, hospital expenses.
- **Third**, the vulnerable conditions of Women in employment have not been addressed by the state yet. For example, denial of equal pay for equal work, sexual harassment at the workplace, lack of social security net, etc.,
- **Fourth**, the state has been promoting liquor sales despite many demands from the Women groups to make liquor sales illegal. Spending on liquor drinking reduces the household's financial ability to spend on basic goods.

Rather than paying wages for women's domestic care work, the state should address core Women issues and challenges and empower them to become a contributor in development from being a welfare recipient.

28. Flaws in new IT Rules 2021

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: The [IT \(Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code\) Rules, 2021](#), will result in systematic incremental loss of the freedom of speech and expression.

Introduction

The final notification of the rules will depend on the decisions of the two petitions filed against it in Kerala and Delhi.

- **The main motive of this new set of rules is to put in place a grievance redressal** mechanism. It will involve the consumer of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms and digital news web portals.
- The smaller or medium-sized independent digital news portals will be most affected by this redress requirement. They are already struggling to survive.

What are the issues in this notification?

The worrying aspect of this move is to control the digital media which are more defiant than the mainstream media.

1. **Firstly**, the notification gives the government ad hoc **emergency powers to block any content**. It would include the content that the government considers problematic even without the symbolic procedure.
2. **Secondly, regulation by the government**. The rules have made a mockery of self-regulation by giving the power of regulation to a committee set up by the government. They can regulate the content on the basis of a real or imagined grievance.
3. **Thirdly, this measure poses a financial threat** as monetization opportunities become limited. Investors and brands get scared because of political considerations interrupting business interests and an unusual media policy regime in constant change.
4. **Fourthly, it is eroding pillars of democracy**. It is important to realize that the fourth pillar i.e. media is as important as the other three pillars, i.e. the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. A healthy tension among the four pillars keeps the democratic structure strong and vibrant.
5. **Fifthly, it affects free speech and expression**. The freedom of the press, although not prescribed as a fundamental right directly, is a derivative from Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g). These articles have given every citizen the right to free speech and expression.

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There is also a question that why the government is curbing press freedom when there are more stringent laws such as Sedition law and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, or UAPA.

Conclusion

This argumentative notification takes it an absurd step further. A deliberate measure of government regulation of the news media is required to be passed off as self-regulation by that same news media.

29. Why States are Planning for Reservation to Locals in Private Jobs?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Synopsis: Haryana already passed the proposal providing reservation to locals. Many other states are planning for the same. It is because the States in India are unable to create jobs for their local economy due to various issues.

Background

- Recently, the Haryana government has passed legislation for reservation of jobs to local Haryanvi's first.
- On similar lines, the cabinet of the government of Jharkhand approved legislation to reserve jobs for Jharkhand residents.
- Also, The DMK in Tamil Nadu announced a proposal to reserve jobs for Tamils in its manifesto.
- Many economists have criticised the above policies of the State as it is against the liberal idea of a free economy.

What are the reasons for providing reservation in jobs for locals?

- First, increasing unemployment rate: As per the data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate in Haryana is very high among all States in India.
- Second, fear of Demographic disaster: More than half of all graduates in Haryana are jobless. Increasing Unemployment of youths will inevitably lead to social revolutions and political disorder.
- Third, Interstate economic inequality is rising: For example, the '3-3-3' effect. The three richest large States (Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) are three times richer than the three poorest large States (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), in per-capita income.
- Also, inequality is only widening due to the agglomeration impact of modern economic development.
- Fourth, States have less autonomy to attract new jobs and investment. The lack of autonomy within states pushes them to resort to measures such as protecting jobs for locals through reservation etc.,

Why the states' ability to attract new industries is limited in India?

Attracting investments and industries is related to many critical factors. States have limited discretion to provide land at affordable prices, provisioning uninterrupted supply of electricity, water etc., But it does not have control over the following aspects that stimulate jobs in states.

- First, Industries are willing to invest only in Economies which is growing steadily and at a faster pace. But the growth of Indian economy cannot be controlled by single states alone.

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- Second, the requirement of abundant high quality skilled and unskilled labour. However, the availability of skilled local labour is a result of many decades of social progress of the State. States that have a very high unemployment rate cannot skill their population within a short period of time.
- Third, States have lost their fiscal autonomy after the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). They have no powers to provide any tax concessions to businesses. Whereas in America, States compete against each other vigorously using tax concessions.
- Fourth, the agglomeration effect drives new investments and industries in states that already are well established. For example, supply chain, talent, good living conditions etc., This leads to a cycle of the more prosperous States growing much faster at the expense of the lagging States.

The increasing interstate disparity among states will only encourage nativistic sub-nationalism ideas and policies in the future, which is a threat to national integration. Hence, the centre should work towards bridging the development gap between different states along with greater fiscal freedom.

30. Highlights of the Quad Summit

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

Synopsis: The maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) witnessed declaration of a joint statement by four leaders along with a common article in the Washington post. It is a step which is expected to yield positive outcomes in the Asian Geopolitics and the Indo Pacific region.

Background:

- The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 triggered cooperation among the navies and governments of the Quad powers namely India, U.S, Australia and Japan.
- The countries wanted to build a diplomatic alliance in 2006-08 but sidelined the idea as:
 - China opposed creation of such a group
 - Chinese Dominance at that time was not strong enough to unite QUAD members in comparison to the current scenario

However China's behaviour has turned hostile since 2017. The nation's constant adventures (including the 2020 Galwan Valley incident) induced QUAD members to concretise the vision of QUAD summit.

Thus the 1st virtual summit took place on 12th March 2021.

Highlights of the Summit:

- A joint statement titled 'The Spirit of the Quad' was released along with a common article in the Washington post. The leaders have visualised Quad as a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated towards advancement of a common vision which will ensure peace and prosperity.
- The diverging views on the Indo Pacific are over. The aim is to ensure a free, open, inclusive and healthy Indo Pacific. The region should be anchored by democratic values and unconstrained by coercion.
- The security challenges from China especially in the east and south china seas has been recognised without expressly using the word China. The countries have agreed to adopt a smart blend of competition, cooperation and confrontation for containing Chinese actions.

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- The summit has focused on winning people's hearts in the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, a special initiative to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines from the western Pacific to eastern Africa would be run.
- Three working groups on vaccine partnership; climate change; and critical and emerging technologies (such as telecom and biotechnology) would be established.
- Country leaders and foreign ministers have agreed to do periodic meetings in order to strengthen the habits of the Quad working together for a common vision.
- Complete denuclearization of North Korea as per the United Nations Security Council resolutions will be carried on by members. A statement made in South Korea's interest.
- The Quad members agreed to restore democracy in Myanmar along with strengthening democratic resilience across the region.

Way Ahead:

- The summit should get the four national establishments into serious policy coordination and action mode, creating new capacities.
- The new synergy in vaccine development is a real highlight that should result in the production of one billion vaccine doses in India by 2022.
 - In this regard, the U.S and Japan have volunteered for financial support, Australia performs well in logistics while manufacturing would be taken care of by India.

The call for democracy restoration can help ASEAN in carrying forward its diplomatic initiative to promote reconciliation in Myanmar.

Further, Beijing has already shown its discontent against Quad. It has cautioned India from becoming a negative asset in SCO and BRICS groupings.

- Greater clarity is expected to emerge post the scheduled March 18 discussions between the top officials of the U.S. and China.

It is believed that some of Asian Capitals may express a cautious welcome to QUAD as they are suspicious about the vision and objectives of QUAD.

31. Supreme Court's Judgment on State Election Commission

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels, and challenges therein.

Synopsis – The Supreme Court in its recent judgment ruled that government officials cannot be appointed as State Election Commissioner (SEC).

Introduction-

- 25 years have passed since local governance was introduced in India by the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments. However, there is very little and actual progress in this direction.
- There is inadequate devolution of powers to the third tier of governance.
- The SEC is responsible for holding unbiased elections for local bodies in the state. But local elections often suffer from abuse, charges of ward fixing, and ward reservation.

What is the case?

- The government notification on municipality elections in Goa was initially challenged in the Bombay HC. Allegedly, the reservation of wards for women, SCs, and STs was not in accordance with the law.
- The Bombay HC struck down the reservation notices of specific wards. It ruled that they caused constitutional infractions.

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- Then the Goa government approached the SC, challenging this order.
- However, the SC upheld the Bombay HC's ruling. SC said that the appointment of the law secretary as the poll body head is against the independence of the election.

The Supreme Court ruling

- Entrusting additional charge of State Election Commissioner to a government official is a mockery of the Constitution.
- Under Article 142 the SC directed all SECs who currently hold an additional charge, to step down immediately. It stated that a government employee or bureaucrat cannot be appointed as Election Commissioner.

Way forward-

- The SC ruling will help secure the independence of SECs in the future.
- The independence of the Election Commission cannot be compromised in a democracy.
- Centre should work on the devolution of powers to the local level of governance. It ensures that decisions are made closer to the local people, communities, and businesses.

32. Why Taxes on Fuel may increase in the future?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein.

Synopsis: Due to economic pressure, the centre and states may increase taxation on fuel.

Disparity between the taxation powers of the centre and states

- Taxation is an economic tool used by government to raise revenues. The Supreme Court of India described taxation as a "sovereign" power. Taxation powers of a state cannot be subjected to judicial scrutiny.
- Compared to States, the Centre has a lot of independence with respect to taxation powers. It has a wide scope in this regard. For example, in 2016, the Centre levied the equalisation levy to tax non-resident e-commerce service providers. The levy was neither an income tax nor a service tax. It was levied using provisions of the Income Tax Act and service tax laws.
- Whereas the subject matters over which states can raise revenue are very limited.
- In ITC Ltd. V. State of Karnataka 1985, Justice Sabyasachi Mukharji observed that "States must have the power to raise and mobilise resources in their exclusive fields".

Fiscal Independence of states further reduced after GST

- With the implementation of GST, states have lost their autonomy to raise finances.
- The Constitution's (101 Amendment) Act, 2016 deleted provisions empowering states to independently levy taxes.
- However, states retained their taxation powers in few items such as the sale of petrol, alcoholic liquor for human consumption, and Taxes on entertainments and amusements.

Why fuel tax will be increasing?

- First, the need for economic recovery after the pandemic will incur more public spending. High public spending means government needs more revenues. This is one main reason why the Centre's has kept the excise duties of fuel high.

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- Second, the central government's need for fiscal responsibility under the Fiscal Responsibility Budget Management Act has ensured that it maintains high taxes on fuel to raise resources.
- Third, the fiscal deficits of the states are also increasing at an all-time high. Provided with very less options to raise resources after the implementation of GST, even the states will try to tax fuel to raise more revenues.
- Fourth, while many states are in the run-up to election within a month, the tax on fuel would also be required to finance various promises made before the elections.

Impacts of rising in fuel prices:

- Inflation: Rising fuel prices will translate to higher cost of goods. However, RBI has noted that that inflation rates have been revised and risks have been balanced.
- Impact on the demand for fuel: The demand will not decrease. The lack of robust public transport system in India makes the demand for fuel inelastic. (no change in demand even after the price increases).

33. Issue of Consent in POCSO Act

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis: The Madras High Court quashed a case of aggravated sexual assault of a minor under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. The High Court also mentioned the need to amend the POCSO act.

The case and ruling

- Madras HC was hearing a case of aggravated penetrative sexual assault under POCSO act.
- This case was filed against an auto driver, in his early twenties, for marrying a minor girl in 2018.
- Recently the HC Quashed the case. In this case, the Court observed the consensual relationship between the accused and the minor girl.
- The court stated that the POCSO Act is not intended to bring the romantic relationships between adolescents or teenagers within its ambit. Thus, the act requires appropriate amendments.

About the POCSO Act:

1. POCSO was enacted as per Article 15 of the Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.
 - Article 15 allows the state to make special provisions for women and children. Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the POCSO Act, 2012 is equal to the provision for aggravated rape.
 - It means rape occurs within a relationship of trust, leads to pregnancy or any other aggravating circumstance.
- Further under POCSO, an individual will be punished if the victim is below 18 years. It does not consider the consent of minors as relevant. Thus, the accused can't plead consent as a defence.

Rationale behind the judgement:

- POCSO has become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relationships. The act completely ignores the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents and undermines their right.
- The court also said that this case was purely individual in nature. Thus, releasing the accused in this particular case will not undermine the public interest.
- Punishing consenting youngsters results in their persecution throughout life. This is more evident in cases where the minor victim has willingly eloped or married the accused or carrying his child.

Concerns associated with judgement:

- It goes against the established Supreme Court precedent of considering rape cases as a matter of public concern.
- The Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha) in 2011 prescribed a uniform age of 18. It would make sure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence. Thus, The Possibility of consent was not meant to be an exception under POCSO.
- The five State studies on the functioning of Special Courts under the POCSO Act shows the complicated nature of consensual cases.
 - As per the study, adolescents can and do choose to have sex. However, they are still children, and their growing sexual autonomy is prone to abuse. This issue resulted in inconsistent and unprincipled adjudication.

Way Ahead:

- The judgement has highlighted the urgent need of amending the rigid stance in POCSO Act.
- The courts should create a fine balance between sexual rights of adolescents and their gullibility of being exposed.
- Further this balance can be rightly created when the legislature is willing to provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address.

34. Why India should Invest More in Research and Innovation System?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-2

Synopsis: India could use its education policy to improve the research and innovation ecosystem in the country.

Introduction

The Government of India celebrates National Vaccination Day every year on March 16 to communicate the importance of vaccination to the people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of this day becomes even more important.

- India's indigenous COVID-19 vaccine will help India in emerging as a global leader in the post-COVID-19 era.

What steps were taken during the pandemic?

1. Most developed nations ramped up their efforts to vaccinate their respective population. However, the developing countries were far behind. It could have resulted in another year of humanitarian and economic crisis for them.
2. Developed countries engaged in vaccine nationalism during this time. However, India made vaccines widely available for other developing countries. India guaranteed a universal, unbiased, and affordable supply of vaccines for developing countries.

3. This firmly established India as the pharmacy of the world and sent out the message that medical products must be dealt with as global public goods.
4. The country has supplied vaccines to over 70 countries while ensuring that its domestic demand is met.

Why India should invest more in Research and Innovation?

The IITs came up with significant innovations like low-cost portable ventilators, affordable AI-powered COVID-19 test kits, drones for sanitization, and cheap and effective PPE kits and masks.

These innovations helped in providing healthcare facilities to Indian citizens. Moreover, the products were exported to different countries.

Thus, India should invest more money and energy in research and innovation to make India a long-term global leader.

Steps taken to strengthen research and Innovation

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a step forward in this direction.

1. Firstly, the NEP aims to improve the research and innovation landscape in India. It proposes that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should focus on research and innovation. This will be done by establishing start-up incubation centres, technology development centres, and interdisciplinary research.
2. Secondly, the NEP also recommends setting up Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities, which will be on the level of IITs and IIMs to achieve the highest global standards in education.
3. Thirdly, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be established under the Principal Scientific Adviser. Its aim is to transform India's research culture. An outlay of ₹50,000 crore for the next five years has been allocated for NRF in the Budget.

Conclusion

The world will remember India for initiating the largest education reforms and emerging from the pandemic as a global leader. The Prime Minister has given a solid boost to the vaccination drive and instilled confidence in the nation after taking the vaccine himself.

35. Measures to Strengthen India US economic partnership

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: Strengthening India-U. S economic partnership will help India to become a \$5 trillion economy.

Background

- India and the US have committed to the goal of increasing the bilateral trade in goods and services to \$500 billion. Currently, the bilateral trade stands at \$146 billion (2019).
- To achieve this, the Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) needs to be increased to 11.9%. The current CAGR is 7.7% per year.
- A closer economic partnership will benefit both sides in terms of GDP, employment, and productivity.
- Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) identifies the following key areas for collaboration to boost India-U. S bilateral trade.

What are the key areas of collaboration as suggested by CII?

1. First, the need to elevate partnership in Healthcare.
 - India has emerged as the hub of global vaccine distribution. This has led to the establishment of a robust health care supply chain with global countries including the US.
 - Along with this development, India needs to take the following steps:
 - build confidence in the Indian IPR regime,
 - revive the U.S.-India Health Dialogue, and
 - work on mutually recognizing standards and
 - approvals to further co-operation in healthcare.
- Second, the need to strengthen existing trade agreements. It can be done by;
 - Reviving the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum meetings along with a cross-sector track-2 group to look at convergence on issues such as market access.
 - Restoring the Generalised System of Preferences. It will help in increasing Indian exports as a result of lower duties for certain Indian products.
 - Working on Free trade agreement that mutually benefits both.
- Third, the need to address concerns related to the mobility of professional labour. It requires the following measures,
 - Strict US immigration rules have impacted labour mobility from India. India needs to push for reforming the US immigration system.
 - The MoU on labour cooperation signed in 2011 needs to be updated in line with India's recent labour regulatory changes.
 - Both countries should strive to finalise a totalization agreement on social security.
- Fourth, strengthening cooperation in defence.
 - Both countries complement each other in defence. India is dependent on the U.S. for technology whereas US can be benefitted from Indian manufacturing.
 - Initiating a defence dialogue along with the private sectors of both sides will help in co-production and co-development in the defence and aerospace sectors.
- Fifth, improving ties between SMEs.
 - A U.S.-India SME CEOs Forum to facilitate engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). It will help US SMEs to find new opportunities for investments and sourcing from India.
- Sixth, deepening collaboration in clean energy and climate change.
 - The U.S.-India Strategic Energy Partnership should be channelized to promote joint investments in clean energy. (industrial decarbonization, carbon dioxide removal and green hydrogen).
 - Further, initiatives such as, Advance Clean Energy Research, Advance Clean Energy Deployment and Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy needs to be relaunched.
- Seventh, Partnership in Digital economy.
 - India needs to take measures to strengthen its IPR regime. It will also enable India to come out of the U.S. Trade Representative IPR priority watchlist.
 - Strengthening IPR will allow India to gain from the US knowledge industry in the fields of robotics, space, AI and electric vehicles etc.

36. Neglect of Public Health in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Synopsis: India needs to prioritize public health along with Healthcare. It will be helpful to tackle both communicable and non-communicable diseases effectively.

What is the difference between public health vs Health care?

- Health care deals with individual patients, whereas Public health deals with the community at large.
- The goal of public health is disease prevention and control. Whereas healthcare is focused on treatment and disease cure (Therapy).
- Public health employs a deliberate, intervention-based mechanism to reduce the disease burden in a population.
- Though India ranks among the world's best in health-care capability, India's success in providing public health is very poor.

What are the issues in India's Public health management?

1. First, ineffective public health surveillance leading to a lack of reliable data collection on all diseases
 - Reliable data is required for real-time monitoring of disease burden and to know the trend of declining infection prevalence in a population. This is one of the important tasks of public health which is done through diagnosis.
 - For example, diagnosis of polio in the under-five population through acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and laboratory tests were crucial for the elimination of polio in India.
 - Through diagnosis, we could know about the disease burden of polio. When it reaches zero, we will consider that polio has been eradicated.
 - Yet, India's public health management does not have an effective plan for collecting data on all diseases and deaths through diagnosis.
 - Using alternatives such as the COVID-19 epidemic curve or serosurveys on random samples does not provide the real no. of disease burden.
 - Further, Post-vaccination surveillance is not conducted. It is considered vital for assessing vaccine efficacy and safety. This points towards the lack of an effective public health surveillance system.
2. Second, lack of authentic public health education
 - Timely public health education (Social Vaccine) is needed to nudge the population's behavior towards tackling any diseases. For example,
 - For preventing the spread of COVID-19, both non-pharmacological preventive interventions such as face masks, hand hygiene, physical distancing, and pharmacological prevention by vaccination were strategized.
 - However, the lack of Social vaccines from Public health management authorities delayed the control of COVID-19. Also, it has given rise to the issue of 'Vaccine Hesitancy'.
 - It has to be noted that, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, India's AIDS Task Force designed and successfully applied a 'social vaccine' to control the disease spread.
3. Third, Public health in India does not address both social and environmental determinants to control the disease. For example,
 - COVID-19 has strong social determinants of infection transmission. Such as overcrowding, urban-rural divide in health awareness and education.

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- Similarly, disease such as Typhoid, cholera, leptospirosis has environmental determinants.
 - Contrary to India, in countries where public health is given equal status, addresses both social and environmental determinants.
4. Many infectious diseases in India can be controlled if we adequately invest in Public health. Investment in public health will result in health, wealth, and prosperity.

37. Relevance of India-Philippines Brahmos Deal

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

Synopsis: India's Brahmos deal with the Philippines is very important. India's aspiration to become Atma Nirbhar in defense exports and emerge as a key regional security provider in Indo-Pacific will depend on it.

Background

- In March 2021, India and the Philippines signed the "Implementing Arrangement" for procurement of defense material and equipment procurement.
- The agreement lays the groundwork for sales of defence systems including the highly advanced Brahmos missile. The sale will be through a government-to-government route.

About Brahmos Missile:

- It is a cruise missile manufactured by BrahMos Aerospace limited. It is a joint venture of India's DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyenia.
- The research for the missile began in the 1990s. It became the first supersonic cruise missile to enter service.
- It has a speed of 2.8 mach (almost 3 times the speed of sound) and a range of 290 km. A new version has a range of 400 km.
 - The high speed makes its interception very difficult and allows it to easily target fighter jets like the Chinese J-20 fighter aircraft.

The naval and land variants of the BrahMos were inducted into service by the Indian Navy in 2005 and the Indian Army in 2007. Later, the air variant was tested in 2017 thereby giving the missile a dominating presence in all three domains. India is now trying to build a superior version having hypersonic speeds (at or above Mach 5) and a maximum range of 1,500 km.

Relevance of Deal for India

- It would boost the export potential of India.
- It would help in attaining the target of \$5 billion in defense exports by 2025. More orders are expected to come from countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, etc.
- Furthermore, It would elevate India's stature as a responsible regional superpower.
- This would also boost India's economic, soft, and hard power profile in the Indo-Pacific region.

Relevance of Deal for Philippines

- It would be helpful in protecting geopolitical and strategic interests, especially in the South China Sea. The sea has been a zone of frequent conflict between China and the Philippines.
- The deal would make the Philippines the first country to buy BrahMos. Thereby it will strengthen bilateral relations in the defence sphere.

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Geopolitical relevance:

- It would act as a deterrent to China's aggressive stance in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Further, other vulnerable countries of the region would come forward and induct Brahmos into their defense arsenal. This would protect their sovereignty and territory in the region.

Challenges in exporting Brahmos:

- It may attract sanctions from the US under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).
 - The act aims to sanction individuals and entities who engage in a "significant transaction" with a listed entity under CAATSA.
 - Russia's NPO Mashinostroyenia is one of the listed Russian entities. That is why a threat of sanctions looms over the Philippines and other countries. Further, the US has maintained ambiguity over the Brahmos deal.
 - Turkey and China have been penalized under CAATSA for purchasing the S-400 Triumph air defense systems from Russia.
- The cost of the Brahmos package comes around 2000 crores. This huge cost has discouraged purchase orders from many willing countries especially post the pandemic era.
- India has offered a \$100 million line of credit to the Philippines that has enabled it to purchase Brahmos with minimum components.

Way Ahead:

- India should engage in proactive talks with the US in order to obtain a waiver for the Brahmos deal. This seems possible as the deal would help contain China in the Indo-Pacific.
- India should offer a rational line of credit to potential buyers to give them flexibility in buying the missile.

38. Use of Non Violence in Myanmar Protests

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its neighbourhood- relations

Synopsis: The February 2021 coup in Myanmar removed the democratically elected government. Since then people have adopted the non-violent approach of Gandhi for pressuring the military junta.

Background:

- The democratically elected leaders in Myanmar were removed by the military on 1st February 2021 on allegations of election fraud.
- Subsequently, the military came to power and main leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi got house arrest. This induced the masses to start non-violent protests in Myanmar.

About Non Violence and its usage:

- It means positive action and not a state of passiveness. It involves working towards one's goal using non-violent means.
- Mahatma Gandhi used a spinning wheel as a symbol for his idea of non-violence. The spinning wheel presented two messages:
 - An instrument to protest against India's growing industrialism.
 - A symbol to show resistance to the British-made clothes that had replaced Indian handmade clothes.

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Martin Luther King turned to the symbol of the “American Dream” to portray his version of non-violence. The objective was to obtain social justice and equity for every member of American society.

Myanmar and tool of Non Violence:

1. The method was used in 1990 by Suu Kyi against the atrocities of the military government. Her efforts earned her a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.
2. The Buddhist Spirituality gave her moral strength that automatically took her towards Gandhian Non Violence. Later on the masses were also attracted towards the noble method.
3. The masses understood the Buddhist teachings under which each individual has the potential to change his circumstances. This was different from Despotic belief under which an individual is considered as faceless and helpless who can be manipulated at will.
4. The same enthusiasm is now being witnessed in the current protests wherein masses are adopting new symbols of non-violence. This includes the 3 finger salute adopted by activists in Thailand against the totalitarian regime.

Significance of Non-Violent Protests:

1. It is a laudable method to display the collective strength of the masses i.e. the power of the powerless.
2. It displays a belief in the method of non-violence that might not deliver immediate results but is definitely the ethical path.
3. Likewise, it is a peaceful way of questioning the legitimacy of military government and demanding democracy.
4. It further places a question on the democratic nature of countries that are criticizing the struggle for democracy in Myanmar.

Way Ahead:

- Greater number of people in Myanmar should engage in politics with ethical conduct. This would be in line with the Gandhian philosophy of associating politics with ethics that helps in delivering optimum outcomes.
- The future of Myanmar is not up to the military, it is up to those who follow the example of Gandhi in the streets of Yangon and Mandalay.

39. Ways to Strengthen India’s Democracy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Powers, Functions, and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

Synopsis: Increasing attacks on the press and the erosion of judicial autonomy are threatening India’s global image as a democracy. The government needs to take steps to strengthen India’s democratic values,

Background

- It has been said that Democracy is on retreat worldwide. Many democracies in the 21st century continue to disregard the principles of democracies.
- Principles such as the freedom of press, independence of the other public institutions of the state are often violated.
 - For instance, many world leaders such as Vladimir Putin (Russia), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), Trump (USA) had initiated a sustained, attack on these very institutions to sustain power.

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Recently, the western academic institutions, the Freedom House (US) and the Varieties of Democracy project (Sweden) downgraded India's democratic ratings.

However, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar dismissed these ratings as irrelevant.

Evolution of Democracy:

- The first-ever institutional check on sovereign power was provided through the Glorious Revolution in England. It led to the establishment of Parliament and England shifted from absolute monarchy to Constitutional monarchy.
- Later, the French Revolution and the American revolution assured inalienable rights to its citizens.
- However, in the era of colonialism, exclusion of women, as well as racial and religious minorities continued till the 1950s.
- After the 1950s, democracy got strengthened due to the following measures.
 - Institutionalization of universal suffrage elections
 - Constitutional check on the powers of the government
 - Independent judiciary empowered with judicial review
 - Empowered press to scrutinize government actions

Finally, after the end of the Cold War, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, many authoritarian countries were forced to conduct elections. This led to the establishment of liberal democracy rule in most of the world's countries.

Why India's democratic ratings were downgraded?

- Both Freedom House and V-Dem multi-dimensional framework give considerable weightage to the freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary.
- Concerns about the undermining of these institutional checks-and-balances led both institutions to reduce India's score on their index.
- Weakening democracy in India can negatively impact India's ambitions to become a full-fledged member of the Quad or the D-10. It will also undermine India's claim to become a Permanent Member of the UN security council.

What needs to be done?

- First, Government should hear criticism rather than rejecting it outrightly. Suggestions on eroding democratic values need a thoughtful, and respectful response.
- Second, the press and the judiciary which are considered as the pillars of democracy, require to be independent of any executive interference.
- Third, strong democracy requires strong opposition. Without an alternative choice, the very objective of election to provide a check on arbitrary power gets defeated.

Democratic Values and Principles are core to India's identity. We need to safeguard our democracy by strengthening its pillars- the Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, and the Media.

40. Issue of High Vacancies in Higher Educational Institutions

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Synopsis – According to the Education Ministry's committee, there is a high rate of Vacancies for faculty positions in Central institutions for higher education. State-sponsored preparatory programmes are essential to fill vacancies.

Introduction-

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- The government provides reservation for faculty positions to the weaker sections under the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.
- But, According to the data shared by the Education Ministry, more than half of the faculty **vacancies reserved for SCs, STs, and OBCs** in Central institutions of higher education are vacant.
- The situation is particularly **worse in the elite Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs)**. Here more than 60% of SC and OBC reserved positions are unfilled, while nearly 80% of ST reserved positions remain unfilled.
- If we include Central Universities, IISERs, IIT (non-faculty), IGNOU, and Sanskrit Central Universities then the vacancies are about 38% to 52%.

This data highlights a serious mismatch between the government's reservation goals and actual recruitment outcomes.

What are the recommendations made by an official committee?

- Exemption from a reservation in faculty hiring – The official committee suggested exempting IITs, IIMs from the reservation for SC, ST, OBC and Economically Weaker Sections.
- Vacancies to be de-reserve if no suitable candidates are found within a year– If vacancies for appropriate candidates from SC/ST/OBC/EWS applicants are not filled during a year, the vacancies may be de-reserved for the next year.

However, these recommendations are viewed as **undermining** the government's goal of social equity through the reservation. The government needs to understand the education system's shortcoming.

State-sponsored Preparatory programmes to fulfil various issues:

According to the Education Ministry's committee, the failure for filling the reserved positions is due to a lack of qualified applicants. The issue can be resolved by-

- State-sponsored Preparatory programmes(prepare faculties for their interviews) to meet the IITs and IIMs standards. These preparatory programmes have the following advantages,
 - The programme will increase the pool of aspiring candidates from the reserved sections.
 - Further, this will also create research faculties among the reserved sections.
 - These preparatory programmes could help to overcome the quality deficiencies in faculty preparation.
 - Make higher education institutions(HEIs) more socially responsive, thus achieving the objective of ending historical caste-based discrimination.

Way forward

- Apart from state-sponsored preparatory programmes, the government must increase the funding for education at all levels. This will support the vulnerable sections on their way towards equality.

41. Expectations from U.S-China Alaska meet

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS 2** – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Synopsis: The world leaders are looking at U.S-China Alaska meet as a starting point to restore normalcy between the two countries. Their relationship reached its lowest level since the Nixon era. It is primarily due to rising assertiveness and mistrust between the countries.

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Background:

- Recently, the US held meetings with South Korea and Japan, followed by the QUAD summit. The outcomes included a commitment for an American pushback to China and the maintenance of a free Indo-Pacific.
- The country is now focusing on improving its relationship with China by conducting a meeting of foreign ministers in Alaska, U.S.
- The relationship between the two had declined during the Trump era. This decline was the result of trade tariffs, tech espionage, Chinese maritime actions, U.S. sanctions on China, and other issues.

Expectations from Meeting:

- The US will discuss critical issues like:
 - China's crackdown in Xinjiang and Hong Kong
 - Chinese aggression against U.S. allies and partners including
 - Pressure on Australia over trade bans
 - Aggression against Japan in the Senkaku islands
 - Chinese intrusion in India along LAC
- China would be focusing on reversing trump era policies which include:
 - Removal of US trade sanctions and visa bans
 - Removal of restrictions on American firms manufacturing in China
 - Reopening of its consulate in Houston, U.S
- A future meeting of country heads can also be scheduled.

Significance of meeting:

- The expectation of any major breakthrough from the meeting is very low. However, the occurrence of the meeting itself showcases a will to resolve differences in the future.
- The cooperation could end the Cold War between the two which can help tackle global issues like Climate Change and COVID-19 pandemic.
- The U.S.-China tariff war could cost the world \$600 billion as per World Economic Forum's estimate. The collaboration can ensure a swift global economic recovery.

The meeting could help in resolving the Afghanistan puzzle by encouraging proactive communication among the Troika (U.S, China, Russia) in future.

42. Flaws in design of lateral entry policy

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Role of civil services in a democracy

Synopsis: The government has approved the policy of Lateral entry in civil services. However, it has some flaws over entry requirements, job assignments, number of personnel, and training. This calls for reforming the policy for lateral entrants.

Background:

- The government has often complained about the problems associated with the permanent structure of bureaucracy. Recently the PM talked about the overreach of the elite IAS cadre.
- Realising this, the government has been encouraging lateral entry at middle and senior positions.
 - Eight professionals were recruited for joint secretary-level positions in various ministries.
 - UPSC has also advertised some other positions at the joint secretary and director-level.

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However, the lateral entry policy lacks on multiple fronts that might reduce the efficacy of a lateral entrant.

Issues with Lateral Entry:

- Age Ceiling: The age of the lateral entrant is capped as per the seniority rule. For instance, an IAS officer becomes a joint secretary at 45 years of age, so a lateral entrant below 45 years is not allowed.
 - This discourages the attraction of the best talent. At this age, a person can reach top positions in the private sector (CEO, CFO, etc.) and would be unwilling to join the government sector.
- Portfolio Assignment: There is no provision to restrict lateral entrants to important portfolios. Providing an unimportant portfolio discourages the work potential and urges him/her to resign.
 - It is alleged that one lateral entrant amongst the eight appointed joint secretaries had resigned due to this. Control over decision-making: The small number of lateral entrants can't disregard the decision of permanent bureaucracy who easily outnumber them. This hinders their work.
- Training: The current policy doesn't provide sufficient training to lateral entrants for understanding and working with the "permanent" establishment. By the time networks are built, it is time to move on.

Way Forward:

- The government should appoint more lateral entrants at all levels in ministries to enhance their decision-making.
- Further sufficient tenure and training must be given to better assimilate with the permanent bureaucracy.
 - A recent lateral entrant like Parameswaran Iyer succeeded because he was a former IAS officer who understood the system well. The age ceiling for joint secretary-level can be relaxed to 35 years. Similar relaxation should be done at other levels for attracting the best talents.
 - This was seen in the case of Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Bimal Jalan, and Vijay Kelkar. They were joint secretaries in their mid-30s and secretaries by their late 40s or by 50.

The government can also reform the permanent system in order to reduce unwelcoming behavior of senior bureaucrats towards lateral entrants.

- The first step could be a reconsideration of the seniority principle that allows promotion solely on seniority

43. Flaws in New AICTE rules

Source: Indian Express

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: The new AICTE rules allow non-Physics and Non-Maths students to pursue engineering. It will impact students' prospects in education.

Background

- Recently, All India council for technical education (AICTE) brought changes to the entry-level qualification for undergraduate engineering programmes.
- According to the new changes, students who haven't studied either physics or mathematics (or both) in Classes 11 and 12, will be eligible for admission in undergraduate engineering programs.

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- Earlier, an engineering aspirant was required to pass high school with physics and mathematics as compulsory subjects.
- Under the new norms, a candidate is expected to have scored at least 45% in any three subjects out of a list of 14 subjects. It gives choice for students to pursue engineering without opting Physics, mathematics from the listed 14 subjects.

AICTE's rationale behind the move

- AICTE stated that the new changes are in line with the new National Education Policy's multidisciplinary approach.
- Further, they have decided to supplement the student's lack of knowledge in Physics and maths through a bridge course.
- This new decision by AICTE attracted criticism from Niti Aayog member and Scientific Advisor Scientist V K Saraswat.

What are the issues with the new AICTE rules?

- First, according to V K Saraswat, developing strong basics in mathematics and physics is easier during the school period. Most of the Engineering subjects require depth knowledge in physics and maths. It will be difficult for non-background students to develop these logics in a short period.
- Second, offering bridge courses to cope with Maths and physics concepts will reduce the student's ability to excel in graduation. For example, a non-background student needs at least 2 semesters to study physics and maths through a bridge course. It will be difficult for him to cope up with both graduation subject and bridge courses simultaneously.
- Third, worldwide there has been a renewed focus on STEM subjects. Nowadays, every subject even MMBS doctors are using mathematics. In this scenario, neglecting sciences and maths at the school level will limit students' opportunities.

Colleges need to complete bridge courses before starting formal classes so that students will be pre-equipped with knowledge of Science and maths.

44. Public trust is key to successful vaccination programmes

Source- The Hindu

Syllabus- GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis- Transparency and timely data sharing are needed to build public trust in the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Introduction-

- Major European countries, including Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, halted the use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine. This is followed by the warnings of harmful blood clots in some recipients.
- However, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Medicines Agency have ruled out any correlation between AstraZeneca's vaccine and blood clots.

Data on Blood Clot:

According to a study based on the U.S. population, about 1,000 to 2,000 blood clots occurs every single day in the human body.

In the recent AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine case, there are only 40 blood clot cases reported due to that.

But the people are reluctant to get vaccinated due to these type of events. Further, this type of events would have a negative effect on the vaccination push.

What are the reasons behind impediments to vaccination programmes?

1. No proper vaccine efficacy data available – There are uncertainty and suspicion about the side effects of the Covid-19 vaccine.
 - o The risks associated with COVID-19 vaccines has not been fully investigated as these vaccines were issued under Emergency Use Authorizations.
 - o The National Committee on Adverse Events Following Immunization has no proper details about the serious adverse events following immunization.Transparency and prompt data sharing: The lack of transparency and data sharing in vaccination programmes. This could lead to a lack of trust in the vaccine.

Suggestions to improve vaccination programmes

- Transparency, timely data sharing about the vaccine and open public health communication will win public trust and faith in vaccines.
- Like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, India also has to create data on adverse vaccine effects.
- Vaccine hesitancy is the main obstruction in the smooth vaccination drive, and it has to be resolved.

45. GNCT of Delhi Amendment Bill 2021 and Supreme Court's Verdict

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Synopsis: GNCT of Delhi Amendment Bill 2021 appears to go against the idea of representative government.

Introduction

The Centre's Bill is trying to amend the law which relates to the governance of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The bill claims that its aim is to implement the Supreme Court judgments on Delhi's governance structure. However, the proposed changes are the very opposite of what the Court has said.

What was the Supreme Court's 2018 verdict on the matter?

- The Constitution Bench verdict in 2018 stated that the LG (Lieutenant Governor) has not been trusted with any independent decision-making power.
- The LG either has to act on the aid and advice of council ministers or implement the decision of the President on the matters referred to him.
- The 'aid and advice' clause applies to the matters, on which the Delhi Assembly has powers under the State and Concurrent Lists. This comes with an exception of public order, police, and land.
- Wherever there are differences between the L-G and the elected government, the L-G should refer the question to the President.
- Further different judgments have clarified that the power to refer "any matter" to the President does not mean "every matter".
- This bill completely undermines the Court's efforts. The judgment strengthened the elected government in relation to Lieutenant Governor.

Read more – NCT Amendment Bill

What are the issues with the NCT amendment bill?

The Court wanted to clarify that the power to refer any matter to the President did not mean that every matter should be referred.

1. Firstly, the Bill states all references to the government in the bills and orders would mean the LG. It is irrational to declare LG as the government, in the UT with an elected House.

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- As per the guiding principle, an elected government should not be undermined by the unelected administrator.
2. Secondly, the provision to Article 239AA empowers L-G to refer the matter to the President, in case of difference of opinion. However, this does not mean that the administrator should come up with a different opinion on every government decision.
 - However, the bill provides the L-G with an opportunity to refer every matter to the President.
 3. Third, instead of Parliament identifying the matters on which the L-G's opinion should be required, the Bill proposes that the L-G himself would specify such matters.
- This bill amounts to a rollback of representative government. The Union Territory concept is one of the many ways in which India regulates relations between the Centre and its units. It should not be used to undermine the basis of electoral democracy.

46. Significance of QUAD leaders' summit for India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Synopsis: India's alignment with QUAD should be in line with India's principle of Strategic autonomy. In this article, we will analyse the Significance of QUAD leaders' summit for India.

Background

- Recently, the US and China met at a high-level summit in Alaska.
- This high-level summit was preceded by the first Leaders' Summit of the QUAD that was held on March 12.
- During the QUAD leaders' summit, a number of issues over china were raised by the QUAD members. Such as
 - China's coercion of Australia.
 - China's harassment around the Senkaku Islands.
 - Furthermore, China's aggression on the border with India.

The above concerns were directly passed on to the Chinese diplomats by the U.S. during the Alaska summit. Further, during the QUAD leaders' summit, all countries agreed to establish 3C's" working groups (on COVID-19 vaccines, Climate Change and Critical Technology). The outcomes of the QUAD leaders' summit i.e., the establishment of 3C's" working groups and offensive stand on China, are well in the interest of Japan and Australia. However, the outcomes are not supportive of India's interest.

Why the outcomes of the QUAD leaders' summit are not in India's interest?

1. First, the QUAD leaders failed to support India's plea in WTO during the QUAD leaders' summit.
 - i. India along with South Africa has made a proposal in WTO to waive certain provisions of the TRIPS agreement.
 - ii. A waiver will help India to increase its capacity and funding for vaccine production and manage covid crisis effectively.
 - iii. Further, it will aid global efforts to fight the Covid19 crisis. Because India is the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines.it has already exported 58 million doses to nearly 71 countries worldwide.
 - iv. However, QUAD member countries didn't show any interest in dropping their opposition to India's WTO proposal.
2. Second, the commitments made by the U. S to assist India in climate change are not yet implemented. For example,

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- i. In 2016, the US agreed to fund \$1.4 billion to finance solar technology. Yet, the funds have not reached India.
 - ii. Similarly, the US has not joined the International Solar Alliance, founded by India and France, which they committed to join in 2016.
 - iii. Against this backdrop, the establishment of a working group on climate change will be of the least interest to India.
3. Third, the working group set up to cooperate on critical technologies will benefit India in 2 cases. If it helps in reducing the dependence on Chinese telecom equipment and in finding new sources of rare-earth minerals.
 - i. But any move by QUAD partners for international rule-making on the digital economy, or data localization will not be accepted by India.
4. Fourth, QUAD's tough stand on China will have a major impact on India. For example, a year-long stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This is because;
 - i. India is the only Quad member not a part of the military alliance.
 - ii. India is the only Quad country with a land boundary with China.
 - iii. China has made deep inroads along the LAC.
5. Also, the violence at the LAC has also left three long-term impacts on Indian strategic planning.
 - i. Need to increase more resources, troops, infrastructure to the LAC to secure the LAC.
 - ii. The possibility of a two-front situation becoming a major territorial threat.
 - iii. Need to prioritize territorial security as against the QUAD's perception of strengthening Maritime security.

Way forward

- The posture of viewing QUAD as anti-china has been changed. This is a welcome development from India's side.
- Despite last week's Quad Summit, India's choices for its Quad strategy will be in line with India's principle of Strategic Autonomy. India will maintain cordial relations along with its territorial neighbours and close friendships with other democracies, the U.S., Japan and Australia.

47. Inefficiencies in the Aadhaar project

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Synopsis: There are many issues regarding the use of Aadhaar for the identification of beneficiaries. So, the central and state governments should allow for an alternative identification mechanism.

Background

- The use of Aadhaar for the identification of beneficiaries for several welfare schemes such as the PDS, the NREGA and LPG subsidy was made mandatory.
- This was challenged in 2018 as it was violating the individual's privacy. But the court upheld the Aadhaar Programme by stating that a reasonable restriction on individual privacy is not unconstitutional. Specifically, if it fulfils welfare requirements and dignity.
- Recently, a review petition regarding the validity of Aadhar for public purposes was again filed in the supreme court. But, a 4-1 majority Bench rejected the review petition in January 2021.

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- More recently, a petition was filed in the SC stating that 3 crore ration cards were cancelled for not being linked with the Aadhaar database. And these exclusions were connected to starvation deaths in some States.
- According to recent data, nearly 90% of India's population has been assigned the Aadhaar number

What are the issues in Aadhar based identification system?

1. Individuals to avail benefits under the PDS, the NREGA and LPG subsidy etc., need the aadhaar number. But many inefficiencies in the system have impacted the beneficiaries to access welfare schemes. For example,
 - Inefficiencies in biometric authentication and updating,
 - Inefficiencies in linking Aadhaar with bank accounts and the use of the Aadhaar payment bridge

According to some reports, failures in authentication has led to delays in the disbursement of benefits.

Also, in many cases, the cancellation of legitimate beneficiary names led to the denial of welfare services. For example,

According to reports, from 2017, there have been starvation deaths in Jharkhand because of the denial of benefits and subsidies.

Other challenges in using Aadhar based identification system

1. One, success rates of authentication and the generation of "false negatives" has always been an issue. For example, labourers and tribal people engaged in manual and hard labour, are susceptible to fingerprint changes over time.
2. Two, there are instances of people losing cards leading to a denial of benefits.
3. Three, exemption mechanisms that would help beneficiaries avail subsidies and benefits despite system failures are poorly implemented

Way forward

The elimination of ghost beneficiaries can also be addressed by the use of other verification cards and by decentralised disbursement of services at the panchayat level. So, the central and state governments should allow for an alternative identification mechanism.

48. Sachin Waze Case – The Issue of Right to Legal Counsel in Custody

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 2** – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions, and basic structure.

Synopsis – Sachin Waze was arrested recently by NIA in Antilia case. Waze has filed an application seeking permission to meet his lawyer. In this article, we will see the provisions regarding the right to legal counsel for those in police custody.

Introduction-

- In Feb. an SUV was found parked near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's multi-story residence Antilia, with gelatin sticks in it. Mumbai Policeman, Sachin Waze was arrested by the NIA for his alleged role in this case.
- The NIA recently claimed in Mumbai Court that Sachin Waze has not been cooperating in the interrogation. He has sought his lawyer's presence during questioning, while the NIA has argued that this insistence could hamper the investigation.

Is access to a lawyer, the right of an accused?

Around the world, arrestees are given various rights. It protects the accused from the use of forced methods like torture to make self-incriminating statements.

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In the US, under **Miranda warning**, a police officer needs to inform the following rights to the accused, before an arrest

- The right to remain silent.
- Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.
- The right to speak to an attorney.
- To have an attorney present during any questioning.

Different Constitutional and legal rights of an arrested person in India

1. **Cannot testify against himself-**

- **Article 20 (3):** No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

2. **Right to know the grounds of arrest**

- **Article- 22(1):** No police officer can arrest any individual without informing the accused of the reason/ ground of his detention/ arrest.

3. **Right to consult a Lawyer-**

- **Section- 41D of CrPC** allows the accused to be able to consult with their lawyers during their interrogation. But lawyers are not allowed to be with the accused throughout the interrogation.

Are lawyers allowed to remain present during the interrogation of an accused in custody?

Although the Supreme Court also noted the difficulty and ruled that a lawyer should not be present during interrogation. However, in certain cases, the court permits lawyers to be present during the interrogation:

- **In** the judgment of Senior Intelligence Officer vs Jugal Kishore Sharma (2011) case, the following facilities were allowed to accused-
 - The accused's lawyer was allowed to watch the proceedings from a visible distance which is outside hearing range.
 - The lawyer was not available to the respondent to consult during the questioning.

In the Sachin Waze case, the special court in Mumbai referred to the same judgment. **Waze's lawyer was permitted to stay in the NIA office during interrogation by the special court**, but not allowed to speak with his lawyer in private.

49. Refugees from Myanmar and India's internal Security challenge

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Synopsis:

Mizoram and the Indian government taking a different stand on [the current issue of refugees from Myanmar](#).

Introduction:

[After the coup in Myanmar](#), at least, 1,000 people from the adjoining Chin State of Myanmar crossed the Border and currently at Mizoram. Since the Chins are ethnically related to the Mizos, The Mizoram government favours providing refuge to the Chins.

But the (Ministry of Home Affairs) [MHA issued few directives](#) to the **States and UTs for taking measures against influx**. Further, The MHA directives advised Mizoram that India is not a signatory to the **UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol**.

Mizoram at present facing a dilemma between acting on Humanitarian grounds or India's refugee policy.

Challenges in India-Myanmar Border management:

1. **Most of the borders are without fence:** India Myanmar is not like India's border with Pakistan and Bangladesh. The majority of the Border areas are not fenced. The Assam Rifles at the India-Myanmar border is facing challenges in maintaining strict vigil.
2. **Close people to people ties:** There are more than 250 villages with almost 3,00,000 populations living within 10 km of the India-Myanmar border. In 2018, both Indian and Myanmar agreed to streamline the movement of people within 16 km of the border.

Previous such Refugee problem in Myanmar:

- Myanmar in the past faced also Extremism, counter-insurgency, and sectarian violence. All these act as a push-factor and made Myanmar people flee into India as refugees. For example, In 2017, More than 1,200 Buddhists and Christians from Myanmar's Arakan State fled as a refugee to Mizoram.
- Thousands of Chins are living in Mizoram for more than 40 years now as a refugee. Similarly, in Manipur, the villages of the Kuki-Zomi have often had people crossing Myanmar border and staying in India for some time.

Mizoram's stand on refugee:

- Mizoram's government issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) to Deputy Commissioners of border districts. In that, they mentioned facilitating the entry of refugees and migrants.
- Further, the Mizoram government mentioned giving medical care, relief and rehabilitation, and security to the refugees.

Indian government stand on Mizoram:

- The central government expressed displeasure to the Mizoram government. However, the Mizoram government revoked the SOPs later.
- The North East Division of the MHA issued a letter to chief secretaries of India-Myanmar border states and Director General of Assam Rifles. In that, the MHA directed few important suggestions like,
 1. Not to allow refugees from Myanmar and take appropriate action as per law.
 2. The state governments **have no powers to grant 'refugee' status** to any foreigner.

Mizoram's response to Central government:

The Mizoram government mentions that they share close ethnic ties with the people of Myanmar. Further, they also clarified a few important things to the central government. Such as they don't want to provide full-time citizenship or employment to the refugees. Instead, they want to provide refugee status until Myanmar returns to normalcy.

50. The Issue of Public trust on ECI or Election Commission

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS-2: Powers, Functions, and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

Synopsis: The public trust gained by the ECI (Election Commission of India) over the years is reducing. It is due to an increasing doubt over the fairness of the polls.

Background

- Recently, the **Citizens' Commission on Elections (CCE)**, released the second part of its report "An Inquiry into India's Election System.
- CCE is chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur.
- The report examines the critical aspects of conducting elections. Such as,
 - The integrity and inclusiveness of the electoral rolls.

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- Criminalisation in politics.
- The use of financial power.
- Compliance with the model code of conduct.
- The role of media in conducting elections etc.,

What are the important revelations made in the report?

- Since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, “grave doubts” have been raised around the fairness of the polls.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has failed to perform its duties. The report has stated reasons, such as
 - Exclusion of marginalized groups from voters’ lists.
 - The opacity of electoral bonds.
 - The power of big money in winning elections.
- It has warned that India is becoming an “**electoral autocracy**”

How India’s Election commission has built trust over the years?

Eminent bureaucrats such as Sukumar Sen, TN Seshan, and James Michael Lyngdoh worked for fair and accountable election machinery. Their work yielded citizen’s trust over the election process.

- **First, Sukumar Sen, India’s first Chief Election Commissioner.** He was remembered for successfully conducting the first general elections despite many barriers such as scope, scale, logistics, and social issues. **For example**, elections need to be conducted for 176 million citizens, nearly 85 per cent of whom were illiterate.
- **Second, TN Seshan the 10th Election Commissioner.** He was instrumental in implementing the model code of conduct to curb muscle and monetary power in elections. He enforced strict mechanisms to ensure fairness in the election process. For example,
 - Contestants were required to submit full accounts of their expenses for scrutiny. Those, who didn’t abide by polling rules, were arrested.
 - Also, officials who were biased towards candidates were promptly suspended.
 - He also prohibited election propaganda based on religion and caste-based hatred. **For example**, he canceled the Punjab elections in 1991.
- **Third, Lyngdoh** presided over the Election commission during 2001 to 2004, the period marked by the 2002 Gujarat riots. After the dissolution of Gujarat assembly after the Gujarat riots, there was immense pressure from the political parties to hold elections earlier than intended. However, Lyngdoh insisted that polls could not be held as the state had not yet recovered from the violence of the riots.

Why the public trust on Election commission is eroding now?

- **First**, ECI remains toothless against electoral offenses. For example,
 - During the 2019 elections, the Election commission gave “clean chits” to politicians, despite provocative political statements during campaigning.
 - The EC in a return reply to the supreme court stated that its powers to punish candidates for hate and religious speeches during the election campaign is limited.
- **Second**, lack of transparency and accountability. For example, the earlier CECs used to proactively engage with the Citizens’ Commission on Elections (CCE) to discuss its reports. But currently, there has been no response from the EC.

51. NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill is against the spirit of Federalism.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers.

Synopsis: [The Government of NCT of Delhi \(Amendment\) Bill, 2021](#) gives more powers to the Lieutenant governor(LG). Further, It is against the principle of **representative democracy**.

Evolution of The Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) act 1991

1. India follows **Parliamentary democracy** with a cabinet form of government. This is a basic structure of the Indian Constitution.
2. When the Constitution came into force, there were four kinds of States. (Parts A, B, C and D States)
3. The states under C and D were directly administered by centrally appointed Chief Commissioners and Lieutenant Governors. They don't have any elected Assemblies. Delhi came under Part C.
4. But in 1951, a Legislative Assembly was created with an elected Chief Minister for Delhi.
5. However, issues of jurisdictions and functional autonomy between the Chief Minister and chief commissioner of Delhi was always present. This led to the resignation of the 1st chief minister in 1955.
6. In 1956, following the **States Reorganisation Act**, only two categories(States and Union Territories) remained in the Indian Union.
7. Delhi became a Union Territory. Also, the Legislative Assembly of Delhi was abolished. Then, Delhi was administered by an Administrator appointed by the President.
8. In 1966, the **Delhi Administration Act 1966** provided a **limited representative Government** in Delhi. But there were repeated political demands that demanded a full statehood to Delhi.
9. To resolve this, the **Balakrishnan Committee** was set up in 1987. Consequently, the committee made the following recommendations
 - o **Delhi should continue to be a Union Territory.**
 - o But **there must be a Legislative Assembly and Council of Ministers** responsible with appropriate powers to ensure stability.
10. Based on this report, the **Constitution (69th) Amendment Act** and the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCT) Act**, 1991 were passed.
11. This act provided Delhi with a Legislative Assembly, a Council of Ministers and an elected Chief Minister.

Why Delhi is kept under the control of the Union Government?

1. **First**, our Constitutional makers feared that Delhi will acquire a predominant position compared to other States if Delhi had statehood. So they included Delhi under Part C.
2. **Second**, Delhi is the National capital. So Parliament decided to keep Delhi under Union Government on the basis of national interest.
3. **Third**, to **avoid federal disputes** and provide for smooth administration in Delhi. **For example**, If full statehood is provided to Delhi, then two different political parties at the centre and Delhi will result in higher conflicts than the present ones.

Salient provisions of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill:

The [NCT of Delhi \(Amendment\) Bill](#) has few significant provisions. They are,

1. The bill reduces the power of representative government. It provides enormous powers to the Lieutenant governor (directly appointed by the centre).
2. It makes the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor mandatory for taking any executive action.

Challenges with the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill:

1. The Bill is against **federalism** (basic structure of the constitution). It gives more powers to the centre.
2. The bill is against the provisions of **representative democracy**. It limits the power of the people. On the other hand, it gives more powers to the directly appointed administrators.
3. The Bill aims to hand over the accountability of Delhi to an unelected, centrally appointed government functionary.
4. The bill also violated the **directions given by the Supreme Court**. The SC provided a balanced approach. It mentions the LG has to '**aid and advice**' the matters on which the Delhi Assembly has powers under the State and Concurrent Lists.

The government must reconsider the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill as per the advice of the Supreme Court.

52. Speculation about the disengagement agreement is baseless

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: Gs-2 – India and its Neighbourhood- Relations.

Synopsis: The allegations against India's disengagement agreement at Pangong Tso is baseless. Rather, we need to appreciate the efforts of India's negotiators for ensuring a successful border disengagement

Introduction:

After the **India-China disengagement agreement** both agree to withdraw from the Pangong Lake area. The disengagement agreement ended the **nine-month-long military stand-off** between both countries. But, there are few speculations over the gain and loss for India.

What are the speculations against the disengagement agreement?

There are many speculations around the India-China disengagement agreement. They are,

1. Mutual withdrawal amounts to the **creation of a buffer zone on Indian territory**. It is perceived as a loss of Indian territory.
2. The **withdrawal amounts to the surrender** of Indian territory. Especially the Finger 4 Region in Pangong Tso.
3. Some questioned the **rationality of withdrawing** from the Kailash range on the South Bank of Pangong Tso. India had an advantageous position there while signing the disengagement agreement.
4. There was also **criticism over the inadequate budgetary allocation** for the defence sector.
5. There was also speculation about the **lack of priority towards national security**. The persons who support this mentions India's "two-front situation".

Why these allegations are baseless?

1. India has accorded top priority to national security by increasing Military modernization, indigenization and defence exports. **For example,**
 - Building of strategic **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) Road, Atal Rohtang Tunnel**, etc.
 - India implemented the defence reforms recommended by the **Naresh Chandra Committee**. The implementation includes,
 - The creation of the **Department of Military Affairs (DMA)**,
 - The appointment of the **Chief of Defence Staff**,
 - Ongoing efforts to build **integrated Theatre Commands**.
2. There is also a false assumption like patrolling by both sides will result in a buffer zone prevailing entirely in India. This is incorrect. India has neither accepted the unilateral

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definition of China's so-called Line of Actual Control (LAC) of 1959 nor its subsequent amendments.

- India still accepts the modified “**Colombo Conference Proposals**” mooted by six non-aligned countries after the 1962 war,
 - Further, India still conceives the whole of **Aksai Chin** as an integral part of India's territory.
3. The allegations that India has surrendered some parts of Indian territory is not correct. India has not surrendered any land in Galwan, Pangong Tso or Depsang since the border crisis broke out.
- More importantly, the disengagement agreement resulted in ceasing the Chinese patrolling areas between Fingers 4 and 8 for the first time in several decades.
 - Also, China agreed to relocate its forces to the east of Finger 8. Thus, it is pulling back from its claimed “customary boundary line”.
 - This is in line with India's consistent demand to restore the status quo ante. Further, It has provided an advantage to India on the South Bank.
4. Questioning the rationality of withdrawing from the Kailash range on the South Bank of Pangong is illogical. Because, if India's objective is to achieve status quo ante, India too would logically be required to revert to its pre-April 2020 status.

So the Disengagement agreement at Pangong Tso was a significant step. This agreement will act as a basis for resolving the remaining issues along the LAC.

Our military and External Affairs Ministry negotiators need to be appreciated for their efforts. Bilateral differences are best negotiated from a position of strength as has been done at Pangong.

53. Shortcomings of the ‘In House inquiry Procedure’

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary

Synopsis: The shortcomings of the ‘in house inquiry procedure’ of the Supreme Court has again come to the limelight. This time over the appointment of the future CJI itself. The upcoming CJI is facing serious allegations of misconduct, but there is no clarity of ‘In House inquiry Procedure’ in the concerned matter.

Background:

1. The upcoming CJI will assume office as the 48th CJI (Chief Justice of India) on 24th April 2021.
2. This would make him master of the roster and give him the power to constitute benches in every case of the Supreme court. This includes the creation of inquiry committees for the In House inquiry Procedure also.
3. Thus allowing him to constitute a bench in his own case as well. This will give rise to the development of bias and undermine judicial impartiality.

What are the allegations?

1. The current CM of Andhra Pradesh has accused the upcoming CJI and one other Judge of abusing their judicial position. The CM also wrote a letter to the present CJI in this regard in October 2020.
2. The allegation related to the creation of favourable benches to support the opposition party in Andhra Pradesh.
3. In 2017 as well, a senior Supreme Court judge had addressed the upcoming CJI in the same issue. He also wrote a letter to the then CJI.
4. Nonetheless, the issue has certainly highlighted the shortcomings of the In House inquiry procedure of the Supreme Court.

In House inquiry Procedure:

- It was formulated by the higher judiciary in 1997. It helps in determining whether a judge has acted against accepted values of judicial life or not.
- Under this, a complaint of misconduct may be filed by any person to CJI or the President of India.
- The CJI will then examine the complaint, he/she may constitute a 3 member committee for inquiry or dispose of the complaint as per his discretion.

Shortcomings of the 'In House inquiry Procedure':

1. There are **no timelines for the completion** of the inquiry. So the inquiry time is getting unnecessary delays.
2. The procedure **gives wide discretionary powers to CJI**. This can breed favouritism in Judiciary.
3. Further, the **procedure doesn't forbid the CJI from being part of his/her own complaint** of misconduct. Thereby **undermining the principle of natural justice**.
4. There is **no need to disclose the report of the inquiry into the public domain** or to the complainant. This is against transparency in the Judiciary.

Suggestions to improve the In House inquiry procedure:

1. As the issue revolves around high constitutional offices, the allegations deserve a **thorough, expeditious and transparent inquiry**.
2. Post inquiry a **remedial measure** should be taken like:
 - Inducing the concerned judges to resign if he is guilty of misconduct. Further initiation of removal proceedings can also be started if judges don't honour the resignation request.
3. **Citizens should be informed** regarding the inquiry committees outcomes. This would strengthen trust in the functioning of the judiciary.

The Bar Council of India has failed to demand greater transparency in the inquiry process. Now, the masses are the last hope to reform the self-serving and non-transparent judicial setup.

54. The Issue of Cross Border Electricity Trade in South Asia

Source; [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: India should plan a stable institutional model for governing electricity trade across borders. It should avoid imposing restrictive rules which is against the free market economy.

Background

- Currently, **Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity-2018** govern the trade of electricity across its borders.
- In 2014, India through the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework**, liberalized its electricity trade.
- **China entered the market** in the south Asian region to take advantage of it.
- India countered by **taking back** the free market advantages. Further, it imposed **strong restrictions** that prevented regional Private entities and joint ventures from participating.
- After long years of protest by Nepal and Bhutan, **new guidelines in 2018** (Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity-2018) were formulated.
- The new rules **allow private sector participation** but exclude Chinese investments. Through the new electricity rules, India attempts to balance China's growing influence in the region.

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- The new rules have clear limits on who can buy from and sell into India.
- However, it has the potential to disturb the electricity markets of Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

What are the important provisions?

- **First**, According to the new rules, Power plants owned by a company based in the country, not having a bilateral agreement with India on power sector cooperation, cannot participate.
- **Second**, the rules place the same security restrictions on tripartite trade.
- **Third**, the rules establish a surveillance procedure to detect changes in the ownership patterns of entities trading with India.

What are the issues involved?

- **First**, the institutional structure that governs the trade of electricity across its borders is India-centric.
 - India is in a Geographical advantage as it is placed in the middle of south Asian countries. Moreover, India at present is the fourth-largest global energy consumer. It puts India in a dominant position.
 - However, India's monopolistic tendency in power will attract displeasure from its neighbours as their economic growth will hurt.
 - Also, the prospect of an independent regional body governing electricity trade is unlikely in the near future.
- **Second**, lack of impartial institutions for planning, investments, and conflict resolution regarding electricity trade will impact india's vision of **One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG)**.
 - The OSOWOG aims to connect West Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa. An impartial institution is important for making it functional.
 - However, the South Asian lesson, contained in these latest rules tells us that political realities will hamper the vision of borderless trade.

India should plan for an attractive institutional model by setting standards that profit investors and utilities. India needs to create a rule-based regional institution that can counter Chinese offerings in other theatres. It will also set free South Asian power m

55. Significance of Supreme Court Guidelines on Gender Stereotypes

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS – 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis: The Supreme Court advocated certain important steps to avoid gender stereotypes while setting aside the Madhya Pradesh High Court order. Now it is time for us to work towards its implementation.

Introduction:

The Supreme Court set aside the controversial *rakhi-for-bail* order of Madhya Pradesh High Court. Further, the top court issued [a set of guidelines for dealing with sexual assault cases](#). The Courts in the country have to follow the guidelines in entertaining such cases. Further, the SC also mention a few important things about gender stereotypes in India. The Supreme Court mentioned the quote of a famous Norwegian play writer Henrik Ibsen to explain the gender stereotypes in India. (His playwright uses feisty women characters who break free of traditions of familial confines). The Court mentioned that the **Woman 'cannot be herself' in an 'exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men'**.

Avoidable gender stereotypes:

The SC listed a host of avoidable gender stereotypes. Such as,

1. Women are physically weak.
2. Men are the head of the household and must make all the decisions related to family
3. Women should be submissive and obedient.

Level of gender stereotypes in India:

The SC observed certain important observations about gender stereotypes in India. Such as,

1. Gender violence in India is often covered by the culture of silence.
2. The court also observed that there is an unequal power equation between men and women. This includes cultural and social norms, financial dependence, and poverty
3. The actual data of cases may not reflect the actual incidence of violence against women.

Other judicial interventions on gender equality:

The SC expressed gender equity through its judgments. Few important cases in this regard are,

1. **Secretary Ministry of Defence vs. Babita Puniya case:** In this case, the court held that men and women working in the Army are equal. The court held that they work as “equal citizens” in a common mission.
2. **Anuj Garg vs Hotel Association of India case:** In this case, the court mentioned that the “notion of romantic paternalism” is used to put women “in a cage”.

Note: Romantic Paternalism: It is a belief based on the “romantic” notion that women are the weaker sex than Men.

In conclusion, Women are battling societal prejudices. To achieve that, everyone must take responsibility, especially institutions and those in important positions.

56. MTP Bill 2021 is not progressive enough

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS-2: mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

Synopsis: The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2021(MTP Bill) aims to improve women’s reproductive rights. But it will restrict women’s bodily autonomy if implemented.

Introduction:

The Lok Sabha passed the [Medical Termination of Pregnancy \(Amendment\) Bill, 2021](#). Now the bill is in the Rajya Sabha. The Rajya Sabha has to maintain caution in passing the Bill as it enforces societal prejudices against women.

Important Provisions of the MTP Bill:

The bill is hailed as a much-needed departure from the existing MTP Act, 1971 for two reasons.

1. The MTP bill replaces “any married woman or her husband” with “any woman or her partner”. This step will facilitate the termination of pregnancy due to contraception failures and destigmatize the pregnancies outside marriage.
2. The MTP Bill increased the time limit. The Bill increase the pregnancy termination time from the current 20 weeks to 24 weeks. There are two categories for that.
 - o **Termination of Pregnancy from 12 weeks to 20 weeks:** Women can terminate the pregnancy after consulting one RMP (registered medical practitioner).
 - o **Termination of Pregnancy from 20 weeks to 24 weeks:** Women can terminate the pregnancy after consulting two RMPs.

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Challenges with the MTP Bill:

There are a few **significant challenges with the MTP bill**. They are,

1. **The problem with the upper limit:** The government increased the upper age to 24 weeks(Category 2). But, that does have certain conditions like
 - o the life of the pregnant woman or pregnancy can cause grave injury to her mental or physical health.
 - o If the child were born it would suffer from any serious physical or mental abnormality.But these limitations are not useful when the **opinion of the medical board is necessary**. So, the medical board can certify any pregnant woman as not having 'substantial foetal abnormalities' and **force her not to terminate the pregnancy**.
2. **Restricting the bodily autonomy of women:** The Bill still enforces the Patriarchal setup. As the woman alone cannot terminate her pregnancy. She always needs the opinion of one or two RMPs.
3. **The scientific necessity of the 24-week ceiling:** There might be abortions is essential after the 24 weeks also. For the reasons like,
 - o Development of foetal abnormalities after 24-week
 - o **A sudden change in circumstances** (due to separation from or death of a partner), etc.But the MTP Bill does not cover these points into consideration.
4. **Reduced access to termination facilities:** Pregnant women will also fail to approach termination facilities for having a fear of judgment from medical practitioners.
5. **Against the Supreme Court judgment:** The SC in KS Puttaswamy v Union of India case upheld the women's constitutional right to make reproductive choices. But the MTP Bill is a clear violation of women's Fundamental Right to make choices individually.

So, the government has to reconsider the MTP Bill in a holistic manner of women's development.

57. NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 is against the Principle of Federalism

Source: **The Hindu**

Gs2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers

Synopsis: Lok Sabha passed the Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021. It is against constitutional morality and needs to be declared unconstitutional.

Background

- **Article 239AA** of the Constitution of India granted Special Status to Delhi in 1991 through the **69th constitutional amendment (CAA)**.
- The 69th CAA provided Delhi with a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers (CoM). CoM was made responsible to the legislative Assembly and empowered to deal with matters of concern to the common man.
- The recently introduced Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 is against Article 239AA.

What are the changes made in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021?

- **First**, the Bill says the expression "Government" referred to in any law to be made by the Legislative Assembly in Delhi shall mean the "Lieutenant Governor".

READ MORE ABOUT THE GNCT OF DELHI BILL, 2021

What is the related court's ruling on this issue?

- **First, Govt. of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018) case:** The court stated that the Council of Ministers should keep the LG (Lieutenant Governor) informed of its decisions. The rationale of this decision was to resolve the difference of opinion between the LG and the Delhi government by referring it to the President.
 - Further, the court said the LG should be guided by the concept of **constitutional morality**. And the exercise of power to refer to the President should be an exception.
- **Second, in Samsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974)** the court warned against giving excessive powers to an individual like the Lieutenant Governor. The reasons stated by the court are,
 - **One**, elections will not have any meaningful value.
 - **Two**, the voice of the Citizens will go unrecognized. Because elected representatives chosen by the citizens are not given appropriate power to perform their functions
 - **Three**, it is against the concepts of **pragmatic federalism** and **collaborative federalism**.

Read more – NCT of Delhi Bill Critically Explained

What are the issues in the recent amendments?

- **First**, the Lieutenant Governor has been made synonymous with the Government. The government that is a collective voice of millions of citizens is replaced by one individual.
- **Second**, the bill provides the LG with enormous powers to refer all matters to the President.
- **Third**, it provides for a mandate to take the opinion of the lieutenant governor before taking executive actions.
- The above two provisions are against the Supreme Court ruling in **Govt. of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018) case and doctrine of Pith and substance**.
 - The doctrine of Pith and Substance states that within their respective spheres the state and the union legislatures are made supreme. They should not encroach upon the sphere demarcated for the other.

The bill is violative of the principles of **participative democracy, cooperative federalism, collective responsibility to the House and, constitutional morality**, and needs to be aborted

58. Assessment on India's counter to International criticism

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

Synopsis: India needs to address the international criticism of declining democratic values. It will strengthen the world's largest democracy further.

Background

Many countries are scrutinising the functioning of Indian democracy due to the alleged diminishing democratic space in India. For example,

- Recently, annual reports of the United States-based Freedom House and the Sweden-based V-Dem Institute **downgraded India from a free democracy to a "partially free democracy"**.

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- Similarly, issues of Farmer's safety and freedom of press have been debated in the British Parliament.
- Despite these criticisms, India has countered its critics strongly displaying hard **sovereignty**.
- By countering the critics India has missed out to address the fundamental point of the critics, that human dignity and freedoms are universal.

How India has responded to the criticism of eroding democratic values in India?

1. **First**, India has resorted to the new approach of Emphasizing **hard sovereignty**. It has repeatedly mentioned that the issues mentioned are internal to India.
2. **Second**, countering the criticisms aggressively.
3. **Third**, India's statements from high level offices are being fine-tuned to silence the critics.
4. **Consider the following examples**,
 - **One**, to counter U. K's criticism, India has taken up the issue of Racism in the UK, and it was discussed in Rajya Sabha. It pointed out Systemic racism in the UK.
 - **Two**, Similarly, India's External Affairs Minister highlighted the lack of public trust in the electoral process of western countries. Example the U.S
 - **Three**, The high-level statements are being fine-tuned to counter the allegations and to assert the autonomy of Indian institutions. For example, the statement from Indian High Commission in London mentioned India's 'well-established independent democratic institutions.
 - **Four**, India's response to the celebrity tweets was also aggressive. A Statement by the Ministry of External Affairs referred to international critics as 'fringe elements' and linked them to desecration of Gandhi statues.

How the global situation is aiding India to counter international criticism aggressively?

- **First**, the Pandemic has helped India to engage in 'vaccine diplomacy' and has positioned India in a central role in global politics. The goodwill generated by 'Vaccine Maitri' has been used to counter the criticisms. For example, India's has supplied critical health aid to 70 countries.
- **Second**, the crisis within western democracies has damaged their reputation, privilege, and their moral right to criticize other countries.
- **Third**, the growing significance of India for economic, environmental, and geopolitical reasons, gives India considerable space for an aggressive response.
- **Fourth**, India's conservative allies in western countries have also helped to undermine international criticism. For example, in October 2019, right-wing Members of the European Parliament visited Kashmir and gave a clean chit to the government against the allegation of human rights issues in J&K.

Evaluation of India's response to international criticism?

- India's response has been good with respect to limiting the cultural arrogance of west and their 'knowledge imperialism'.
- But India has failed to address the fundamental point of the critics. That, human dignity and freedoms are universal and an assault on them anywhere is an assault on them everywhere.

59. Lessons from the Bangladesh's Growth story

Source: Indian Express

Gs2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Synopsis: India and other South Asian countries can learn from the growth story of Bangladesh.

Background

- March 2021 marks 50 years of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and India and 50 years of Bangladesh independence.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit Dhaka as the guest of honour in Bangladesh's 50th Independence Day celebration.

Growth Story of Bangladesh

- Bangladesh's GDP growth in 2019 was 8.4% (2 times that of India). It was one of the few countries that maintained a positive growth rate during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Its GDP per capita is around \$2,000 which is almost equal to India.
- Further, in the next 5 years, Bangladesh will move from the least developed country status to developing country status.

The Vietnam Growth Model

- Economic reforms (**Doi moi**) in 1986, enabled Vietnam to achieve rapid economic growth and industrialisation.
- Growth story of Vietnam started with the manufacturing of textiles and garments and later diversified to mobiles and electronics. Also, it has largely benefitted from China's supply chain.
- It also remains the biggest beneficiary of the **China+1 strategy** leading to rising investment from Asian countries like Japan and Thailand.
- Further, the signing of smart trade agreements such as ASEAN FTA and free trade agreements with the US and with India, Japan, and China through ASEAN has immensely benefitted.
- It provided scope for Vietnam to skill-up its population for labor-intensive manufacturing at a large scale. Thereby, it brought down costs and increased exports.

What aided the success of Bangladesh?

1. **Focus on the intensive manufacturing sector:** Bangladesh has followed the same strategy as Vietnam. Its GDP growth is directly connected with the growth in the textiles and garments industry. It accounts for 80 percent of the country's exports.
2. **Signing of beneficial Free trade agreements:** It also got benefitted from **preferential trade treatments** with the European Union, Canada, Australia, and Japan with negligible or zero tax. With India too, Dhaka has a zero-export duty on key products like ready-made garments.
3. **Liberalised FDI regime:** it has helped to attract more investments. For example, Bangladesh allows 100 percent equity in local companies and no limits on repatriation of profits in most sectors.
4. **Innovative microfinance models:** For example, successful and pioneering microfinance organisations like Grameen and BRAC have aided small businesses in the country. It also helped in empowering women by supporting them with financial independence and encouraging them to work outside the home. Consequently, Bangladesh's workforce in its textiles sector is almost all women (95%).

5. **Effective public health schemes:** For example, government schemes like **Pushti Apas** (Nutrition Sisters) **and** community health clinics. It **has** helped Bangladesh to perform better in development indices such as infant mortality, sanitation, hunger, and gender equality better than India.

What India can learn from Bangladesh's successful development trajectory?

Some of the key lessons that could be learned from Bangladesh are,

- Increasing women in the workforce,
- Liberalising internal and external trade,
- Making micro lending accessible,
- Building special economic zones with adequate infrastructure, connectivity and environment friendly design.
- Supporting Domestic entrepreneurs

60. Need for an Integrated Digital System in Indian Justice System

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS

Synopsis: The implementation of an integrated digital system for the criminal justice system will help in speedy justice.

Background

43 years old Vishnu Tiwari, was recently found innocent by the Allahabad High Court. Vishnu was sentenced to life imprisonment for rape under the Indian Penal Code and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. He spent 20 years in prison before this decision.

- His appeal before the Allahabad High Court was pending for 16 years. The reasons behind that usually were missing documents or documents in the wrong format for listing the case. However, Vishnu's lawyer had no interest in pursuing the case. So, the appeal stayed defective.
- Shweta Singh Rana, a legal aid lawyer, was given the case in 2019, at the request of jail authorities to the High Court. The High Court pointed out in its verdict that the State government did not consider converting his life sentence after 14 years.
- A sincere lawyer and aware family members are essential to secure justice. However, these facilities have become luxuries that only prisoners with good economic conditions have access to.

How a poorly designed system is to be blamed in this case?

An effective justice system should be strong enough to ensure justice for everyone, irrespective of the economic condition of an individual.

1. **Firstly, there is an absence of an integrated digital platform** for the criminal justice system. Moreover, present systems are designed poorly.
2. **Secondly,** Digitisation has transformed the delivery of public services like passports. Whereas, the criminal justice system is still functioning with old procedures and paper-based processes.
 - The eCourts project has made significant progress in digitising the works of courts. Still, large gaps are present in the system.
3. **Thirdly,** criminal cases involve coordination and communication between various institutions such as the police, prosecutors, legal services authorities, and forensic labs. **These interactions are not smooth.**

How will an integrated digital system help?

It allows the interaction between various institutions through a digital platform. This system normalizes the format and content of data across all the systems. Thereby, it helps in smooth communication and avoiding duplication of data.

- **Firstly, this system will notify the registry about the defects** in a particular appeal, un-rectified for an extended period. The system would also inform the accused that his lawyer was not pursuing his case carefully.
- **Secondly, the legal service authority would be informed** of the case and the lawyer could be replaced. The quality of representation of the lawyer could be monitored by the system.
- **Thirdly**, after 14 years of imprisonment, the system would have notified the State government that **the prisoner was eligible for re-sentencing of his sentence.**

Conclusion

Priority must be given to speeding up the implementation of such a system. It will help in providing transparent, real-time access to criminal justice information to all stakeholders, including accused persons.

61. Why Electoral Bond Scheme should be declared unconstitutional?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability.

Synopsis: The electoral bonds scheme violates the core principles of the Indian Constitution. It must be declared unconstitutional by the courts.

Background

- The Electoral Bond Scheme was notified by the Government of India in 2018.
- For the last three years, electoral bonds have been the dominant method of political party funding in India.
- It allows for limitless and anonymous corporate donations to political parties.
- Anonymous electoral funding of elections without any limit is against the democratic electoral process. It violates core principles of the Indian Constitution.
- So, petitions were filed in the supreme court to scrap the unconstitutional Electoral Bond Scheme.

Why the Electoral Bond Scheme is unconstitutional?

The [electoral bond scheme](#) is unconstitutional because it,

- Violates the right to know of the citizens.
- Provides a way for uncapped political donations,
- Violate equality before the law.
- Against multi-party democracy.
- Provides a source for black money in elections.
- **First**, it violates the fundamental rights of citizens- the **Right to Know**. The Supreme Court has stated that the “right to know”, is an integral part of the **right to freedom of expression** under the Indian Constitution.
- **Second**, it will give rise to a **Corporate-political nexus**. It has been largely accepted that across democratic societies, money is the most effective way of buying a policy. Due to a lack of information on the source of funds, it is impossible to assess whether a government policy is designed to benefit its funders.
- **Third**, limitless and anonymous donations **increase** the role of money in politics. It will hamper the healthy functioning of Democracy.

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- **Fourth**, it creates unequal contests between the Opposition and the ruling party. Since the donations are channeled through the State Bank of India, it is possible for the government to find out the source of donations of opposition.
 - Government has the power to restrict donations to rival political parties. For example, in the last three years, the ruling party has received more donations compared to other parties.
- **Fifth**, it will result in increasing **institutional corruption**. The electoral bonds scheme allows even foreign donations to political parties. This is also against the defense of the government that states the purpose of the electoral bonds scheme is to prevent the flow of black money into elections.

What is the role of courts and how they have responded?

- In a functioning democracy, the role of an independent judiciary is to protect the fundamentals of the democratic process.
- The courts need to be cognizant of the laws and rules that violate the democratic process.
- Despite the Electoral Bond Scheme creating unequal competition, and seeking to enforce one-party rule over **multi-party democracy**, the judiciary has remained silent.
- The petition challenging the constitutional validity of the electoral bonds scheme was filed in 2018. But it has been left unheard for three years.

What is the way forward?

- **First**, to reduce the role of money in elections, public money should be used for funding elections. This will create a level playing field among the political parties contesting elections.
- **Second**, there needs to be caps or limits on financial contributions to political parties.
- **Third**, the judiciary should fast-track cases that are vital to the future health of Indian democracy.
- **Fourth**, the **Electoral Bond** Scheme that gives undue advantage to the ruling party needs to be declared unconstitutional.

The entire purpose of democracy, which as B.R. Ambedkar rightly pointed out, was not just to guarantee **one person, one vote**, but **one vote one value**.

62. Brief Analysis of India- Bangladesh Bilateral Relations

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Synopsis: An evaluation of India- Bangladesh bilateral relation from the past to the present.

Background

- India played an important role in Bangladesh's independence. India provided political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during **Bangladesh's Liberation War**.
- For example, India lost 3,900 Indian soldiers and provided accommodation to an estimated 10 million Bangladeshi refugees.
- Following Bangladesh's Independence, India- Bangladesh bilateral relation had many high and lows.
- For example, during President [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#) (1st Bangladesh President) India- Bangladesh relations were in full swing.
- However, after his assassination on August 15, 1975, the relation between India- Bangladesh hit a bottom. Between 1982-1991 a military-led government by General H.M. Ershad ruled the country.

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- But since the last decade India- Bangladesh relation has boosted up. Both countries have moved beyond historical and cultural ties. Cooperation is increasing in areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence.

What are the positive developments in India- Bangladesh relation?

- **First**, finding peaceful solutions to settle Land boundary issues. For example, Both countries ratified the historic **Land Boundary Agreement in 2015**.
- **Second**, the government of Bangladesh was cooperative in eradicating anti-India insurgency elements from its borders. This has allowed India to make a massive redeployment of resources in other contentious borders. (LAC, LoC)
- **Third**, increasing trade relations. **For example**, Bangladesh is India's biggest trading partner in **South Asia. (FY 2018-19- Export- \$9.21 billion, Import- \$1.04 billion)**. Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access to multiple Bangladeshi products.
- **Fourth**, deepening cooperation in developmental activities. **For example**, India has extended three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years (\$8 billion) for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
- **Fifth**, increasing cooperation in Medical tourism. **For example**, Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.
- **Sixth**, cooperation in connectivity has increased many folds. **For example**,
 - A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala running through Bangladesh.
 - Three passenger and freight railway services running between the two countries.
 - Recently, the **Maitri Setu bridge** was constructed. It connects Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
 - Improved Connectivity to landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura states. Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chittagong seaports carried by road, rail, and water ways to Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.

What are the issues in India- Bangla relations?

- **First**, water security is one of the major issue hampering India- Bangladesh relation. **For example**, the unresolved **Teesta water sharing issue**.
- **Second**, increasing border killings against illegal Bangladeshi cattle traders. **For example**, the year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force.
- **Third**, the implementation of the **National Register of Citizens** has offended the religious sentiments of Bangladeshis. Also, many of the illegal Muslim immigrants belong to Bangladesh.
- **Fourth**, India's neighbours are increasingly tilting towards China due to its attractiveness of massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments. Despite, India's '**Neighbourhood First Policy**' approach, India is losing its influence in the south Asian region. **For example**, Bhutan's withdrawal from the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) motor vehicles' agreement.
- **Fifth**, poor project implementation due to Red tapism in India is hampering developmental activities in Bangladesh. For example, only 51% of the first \$800 million lines of credit has been utilised. While the amount from the next two lines of credit worth \$6.5 billion has not been mobilised yet.

India and Bangladesh need to continue working on the three **Cs (cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation)** to materialise the recent gains.

63. Discrimination in taxing provident fund (PF)

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Synopsis: The Finance Minister has enhanced the Provident Fund(PF) limit up to 5 lakhs from the previously proposed 2.5 lakh. This is a discriminatory proposal for taxing PF should be reconsidered.

Background:

- The finance bill 2021 was passed with 127 amendments. This included a proposal to tax income on PF contributions over Rs. 2.5 lakh rupees a year.
 - The rationale behind this was to prevent abuse of the process as 93% of users fall below 2.5 lakh category.
- Recently, a contradictory provision of doubling the annual threshold to Rs. 5 lakh was also introduced. This enhanced limit was given to only those individuals whose employers do not remit any contribution to their retirement fund account.

Current Threshold limits for Provident Fund:

- Annual investments made into individual PPF accounts are capped at Rs. 1.5 lakh per year.
- EPF contributions beyond 1.5 lakh are not tax-deductible under Section 80C of the I-T Act. However, income on such contributions beyond 2.5 lakh will be taxable.
- Similarly, employer contributions into the EPF, NPS, or any superannuation pension fund can't exceed 7.5 lakh per year.
- Income on GPF(General Provident Fund) contributions would be tax-free up to 5 lakh per year.

Concerns with such a move

- It amounts to **discrimination with private employees** who have an EPF (Employees Provident Fund) account as:
 - Employer-employee relationship is an implicit requirement to open an EPF account.
 - Employees can contribute beyond the statutory wage limit of Rs. 15,000 but employers contribution can never reach zero.
- It **suggests a bias in favor of some government employees** as:
 - Only some senior government staff who joined service before 2004 and are not part of the NPS will benefit from this move.
 - They possess a unique profile that allows them to contribute to the GPF account and get a defined benefit pension separately.
- The move also **conflicts with other policy measures like Wage Code Bill**.
 - The calls for enhancing employers contribution in EPF accounts. This may make EPF contribution cross the 2.5 lakh limit thereby coming under the tax net.
- It shows a **disconnect between policymakers and the aspirations of the working class** to save for their retirement years. It appears that the government is willing to jeopardize the retirement benefits for augmenting tax collections.

Way Ahead:

- The government could offer the same cap of 5 lakh annual contribution to EPF account holders in order to bring equity. For capping the annual amount, employers' contributions can be counted as well.

- Until this is done, the government can put the new tax structure on hold and think through its implications.

India possesses a huge informal workforce that must be given equitable retirement benefits like the government sector employees.

64. India's stand on Human Rights violation in Sri Lanka

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and Neighbourhood relations

Synopsis: India maintained the balance between diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka and its support to Tamil minority people in Sri Lanka.

Introduction

The previous government in Sri Lanka made some **commitments to the UNHRC**. The commitments include constructive engagement with the international community on the Human Rights violation in Sri Lanka. Further, the government also committed to provide a consensual resolution to the problem of the Tamil people. But The **current government of Sri Lanka withdrew from the commitments**.

So, the 46th session of the [United Nations Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#) adopted a resolution titled “Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka”. But, India abstains from the [UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka](#). This is done to indicate the following things.

1. India attempted to preserve its diplomatic space. Further, India wants to contain persistent Chinese influence in Sri Lanka.
2. At the same time, India is also maintaining its support for the Tamil minority to achieve equality, justice, dignity and peace.

The Present Status of the Human Rights violation in Sri Lanka:

The UN High Commissioner's report has raised certain concerns on the following issues in Sri Lanka. They are,

1. Increasing militarization in Sri Lanka
2. Intensified surveillance against rights defenders and NGOs,
3. Interference with trials in certain symbolic cases from the past
4. The dangerous anti-minority rhetoric among other sections of people.

What has been India's stance on the Human Rights violation?

- India has never supported externally mandated investigative mechanisms. India voted in favour of a **credible investigation into human rights violation** in 2012. But India mentioned the importance of Sri Lanka's acceptance to solve the human rights dispute.
- **India has emphasised meaningful decentralization** to meet Tamil aspirations. Also, India demanded the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka.
- **India's concerns in Sri Lanka have been different** from the rest of the international community. India is well-informed by a sense of the long-term well-being of the Tamils. Hence, India **stresses devolution** rather than accountability.
- **India has its own limitations in expressing** disappointment over Sri Lanka's stand on Human Rights violation. Reasons such as the Chinese presence in the Sri Lankan region can be one of them.

Conclusion:

- India did not change its position on tactical neutrality on the Human rights violation in Sri Lanka. When practicality and principle needed an equal measure, the Centre has chosen non-participation as an easy way out. This is a welcome move.

65. Declining Role of Parliament in Ensuring Accountability of Executive

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.

Synopsis: Parliament needs to ensure scrutiny over the actions and bills passed by the government. Its role is declining in ensuring the accountability of the executive.

Background

- Parliament sessions are ending prematurely due to various reasons. **For example**, the recent budget session of the parliament ended two weeks ahead of the original plan.
- Partly, the impact of the pandemic led to the reduction of the Budget session of 2020 and the monsoon session of the parliament.
- However, during the Pandemic, the Parliament could have adopted remote working and technological solutions, similar to other countries.
- The result was, the fiscal year 2020-21 witnessed the lowest ever parliamentary sessions. The Lok Sabha (34 days), the Rajya Sabha (33 days).
- Unproductive parliament sessions resulted in a lack of public scrutiny over government functioning, financial expenditures, government bills.

What are the issues associated with the functioning of the parliament?

1. **First**, declining Parliament's responsibility to scrutinize important Bills passed by the parliament. **For example**, During the last session, 13 Bills were introduced, and none of them was referred to the parliamentary **committee** for examination. The important bills introduced are
 - **The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021:** It was aimed at shifting the governance from the legislature and the Chief Minister to the Lieutenant Governor.
 - **The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021:** it was aimed at removing end-use restrictions on mines and ease conditions for captive mines.
 - **The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021:** it aims to create a new government infrastructure finance institution and permit private ones in this sector.
 - **The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021:** it aims to increase the limit of foreign direct investment in insurance companies from 49% to 74%.
2. **Second**, the role played by Parliamentary committees was undermined. Parliamentary committees are instrumental in suggesting constructive changes to the bill to make the Code work better. **For example, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, Motor Vehicles Act.**
 - The percentage of Bills referred to committees declined from 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha to 27% in the 16th Lok Sabha and just 11% in the current one.
3. **Third**, diminishing the role of Rajya Sabha by classifying ordinary bills as money bills. For example,
 - Non-financial items such as **restructuring of tribunals**, the **introduction of electoral bonds**, and amendments to the foreign contribution act introduced as part of Finance bills.
4. **Fourth**, lack of debate, discussion over the demand for grants. For example,
 - In the last budget session, the Lok Sabha had only listed the budget of just five Ministries for detailed discussion and only three of these were discussed. The remaining 76% of the total budget was approved without any discussion.

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- Whereas, the Constitution requires the Lok Sabha to approve the expenditure Budget of each department and Ministry.
- 5. **Fifth**, delay in appointments of key constitutional functionaries in Lok Sabha also impacted parliamentary functioning. **For example**,
 - the current Lok Sabha did not appoint a Deputy Speaker which is a constitutional mandate.

What is the way forward?

The central role of the Parliament is to scrutinize the work of the government. In order to fulfill its constitutional mandate, the parliament has to

- Create an effective research support system to aid Members of Parliament.
- Provide sufficient time for MPs to examine issues.
- Parliamentary Committees should be made to examine the Bills and budgets.
- Finally, Public feedback should be taken before finalising the bill.

66. Lack of Transparency in the Supreme Court's In-house Inquiry Procedure

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Synopsis: In-house inquiry procedure needs to be made transparent

The issue:

- Recently, The Supreme Court dismissed the complaint from Andhra Pradesh CM against Justice N.V. Ramana, on the basis of in-house inquiry.
- But the court declined to disclose the findings of the in-house inquiry. This has raised issues of transparency in the court's process.
- According to a 2003 judgment of the supreme court, In-house inquiry is meant only for "the information and satisfaction" of the CJI, and not for the public.

Background

- CM of Andhra complained to CJI that Justice Ramana (the senior most judge of the Supreme Court) has been influencing the Andhra Pradesh High Court against his Government.
- He also accused that the family members of Justice Ramana were involved in Amaravati land scam. The prior knowledge that Amaravati was to be declared the State's capital was used for speculative buying of land in Amaravati.

Why the confidentiality procedure needs to be changed?

- **First**, it leads to opaqueness and arbitrariness in the court's functioning. **For example**, the evidence used to dismiss the complaint is unknown.
- **Second**, dismissal of the complaint means that a serving CM has levelled false charges against a senior Supreme Court judge. This will invite **contempt of the court** if the committee found no merit in the allegations. So, at least the complainant should get to know the fairness of the procedure.

SC must remove the confidentiality rule to demonstrate that justice was both done and was seen to be done.

General Studies Paper – 3

General Studies - 3

1. Indian legacy and developing Science and Technology in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-3 Science and Technology- developments and Achievements of Indians in science & technology

Synopsis: India is celebrating National Science Day. This day should be marked by commitments of promoting science, technology, and innovation in India.

Introduction:

National Science Day was celebrated on February 28 for the discovery of the **Raman effect by Indian physicist Sir C. V. Raman** on 28 February 1928. But the celebration has to move forward and Indians have the responsibility of taking forward our legacy of Science.

What is the Indians legacy in the field of Science?

1. Indians have a long tradition of illuminating the world of science. This is evident right from Aryabhata, Bhaskaracarya and Varahamihira to the great scientists of modern India.
2. The **role of women in the field of science** is also unforgettable. Women like Janaki Ammal (botanist), Bibha Chowdhuri (physicist), Asima Chatterjee (chemist), and Gagandeep Kang (medical scientist) have made India proud.
3. The contribution of **C.V Raman** in the field of Physics made him the most visible face of Indian science. He became the first Asian to win a noble price in Physics.
 - o Dr Rajinder Singh, a noted historian of science authored six books and 28 essays on Raman.
4. Apart from that, other major contributors like **Jagadish Chandra Bose** (C.V. Raman's senior), **Satyendra Nath Bose and Meghnad Saha**, (both were Raman's juniors) also made major contributions in science and being acclaimed globally.

How India is advancing in Science now?

After Independence, the application of science in fields such as space research, atomic energy, biotechnology, and agriculture has been impressive. Many scientists believe India has the potential to become a hub for world-class scientific and technological innovation.

The [draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020](#) (STIP 2020) and [National Education Policy 2020](#) (NEP) are the two recent developments to promote science and research in India.

Few important provisions of National Education Policy 2020:

1. The NEP underlines the **importance of mother languages for science teaching and popularisation**. S.N. Bose and others had also been advocating this from the 1940s.
2. Likewise, the setting up of the **National Research Foundation** to encourage and fund R&D (Research and Development) activities is also a step in the right direction.
3. Greater and intensive involvement of Indian universities in the R&D ecosystem will also improve science and technology among Indians.

Few important provisions of draft STIP 2020

1. Draft STIP focus on developing a **robust system for evidence and stakeholder-driven Science Technology and Innovation** planning and policy research.
2. The STIP draft also aims to **promote science and technology-enabled entrepreneurship** and mainstream [innovation at the grassroots level](#).
3. Further, the draft STIP also focuses on **traditional knowledge systems** (later it will be validated by modern scientific methods).

Conclusion:

The government has a key role to play in the development of science and technology. The government has to follow a liberal approach to promote science. The [government's recent restriction on online conferences](#) is not an encouraging one for science.

So, for creating a science-enabled and science-respecting nation the government and people have to be forward-looking. Then only the purpose of National Science Day will be fulfilled.

2. Issues in the Process of Decarbonization

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Synopsis- Grid failure in Texas and flash flood in Uttarakhand highlighted issues in the process of decarbonization.

Introduction

Almost every major country has agreed to a time-bound, “net-zero” carbon emissions target. They are also in agreement over the steps required for decarbonization. However, it is not sufficient to just set the targets. There are certain legacy hurdles in the way of decarbonisation, such as:

- Poorly designed planning systems.
- Poor regulatory mechanism for the energy ecosystem and lack of decision-making.
- Lack of investment in energy infrastructure.

2 recent incidents, such as the Nanda Devi flash flood and electricity grid system failure in Texas highlights these issues.

What is decarbonization?

Decarbonisation – It is the process of eliminating or reducing the carbon emissions sent into the atmosphere. Reducing the amount of CO₂ output is essential to meet global temperature standards set by the Paris Agreement [Net zero carbon emissions target by 2050]. The following are **some steps required for decarbonization**;

1. **Reduce**– Reduce greenhouse gases and use renewable energy sources like solar power and wind power.
2. **Use of Electric vehicles** instead of combustion engines.
3. **Energy conservation**- Energy demand should be conserved by reducing wastage and losses and using it more efficiently.

How incidents of grid failure in Texas and flash floods in Uttarakhand highlight the issues in the decarbonization process?

1. **First, lack of preparedness**- The planners had incorporated emergency response procedures for cold waves and floods. However, they didn't prepare for such extremes of weather conditions.
 - **For example– In Texas**- The authorities planned a worst-case scenario based on a 15GW drop in generating power. However, they lost 30GW, which resulted in a total blackout.
 - One reason for this is experts presume every scenario based on historical data. Thus
2. **Second, poor regulatory and institutional mechanism.** It is evident in both Grid Failure in Texas and Uttarakhand flash flood.
 - No umbrella authority was present to manage the disaster with responsibility for the entire system.
 - The recommendations made after the Kedarnath floods about land use and watershed management were not implemented.

3. **Third, lack of investment in energy infrastructure-**

- In Texas, the grid was not resilient enough to absorb the surge in the flow of intermittent renewable electrons.
- India's transmission system is also not capable of managing the energy transition. The Transmission issue slows down the adoption rate of solar power by failing to introduce green energy to the grid.

All of these factors have negative effects on the decarbonization process. They must be resolved in order to reach the Paris Agreement's global temperature goals.

Way forward-

To ensure the sustainability of the decarbonisation process the following steps are required-

- Policymakers need to create robust mechanisms. It will facilitate inter-ministerial and inter-state collaboration within the country and multilateral cooperation internationally.
- Poorly designed planning systems, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and a lack of investment are all challenges that policymakers must tackle.

3. Lessons from Operation Flood for Operation Green

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: A closer inspection of the Operation Green scheme shows that the scheme is nowhere near achieving its objectives.

Introduction

The Finance Minister during budget presentations announced the expansion of Operation Green (OG). It will be expanded beyond tomatoes, onions, and potatoes to 22 perishable commodities.

- Operation Green was launched in 2018 with three basic objectives:
 - **First, it should control the wide price instability** in the three largest vegetables of India (Tomatoes, Onions, and Potatoes).
 - **Second, it should build efficient value chains** so that a larger share of the consumers' money is received by the farmers.
 - **Third, it should reduce the post-harvest losses** by building modern warehouses and cold storage.

How is the operation green performing currently?

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has invited some program management agencies to see the implementation of OG.

- Rs 500 crore budget was outlined initially. **However, only Rs. 8.45 crore has been actually released.**
- A closer examination of the scheme reveals that **OG is progressing in slow motion** and is nowhere near achieving its objectives.
 - Research at ICRIER tells that **price instability remains high**. Farmers' share in consumers' money is very low with 26.6 percent for potatoes, 29.1 percent for onions, and 32.4 percent for tomatoes.
 - In cooperatives like AMUL, farmers get almost 75-80 percent of consumers' money.

What can Operation Green learn from the Operation Flood?

Operation Flood (OF) changed India's milk sector and made India the world's largest milk producer. There are some important lessons OG can learn from OF:

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1. **First, OG will not get any immediate results** and one has to be patient. There should be a separate board to strategize and implement the OG scheme, like the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) for milk.
2. **Second, a respectable leader with commitment and competence** is required to head this new board of OG. The person should be given at least a five-year term, sufficient resources, and should be made accountable for delivering results.
 - o The MoFPI can have its evaluation every six months.
3. **Third, at present, the criterion** for the selection of TOP commodity clusters is not transparent. This process should be transparent to keep the politics away.
4. **Fourth, the subsidy scheme will have to be made innovative** with new generation entrepreneurs, startups, and FPOs.
 - o For instance, the announcement to create an additional 10,000 FPOs along with the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund and the new farm laws are all promising but need to be implemented fast.

4. Ceasefire agreements between India and Pakistan and their significance

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-3: Security challenges and Their management in border areas

Synopsis: Recently India and Pakistan issued a joint statement to strictly [observe the ceasefire agreements](#) along the LoC and other sectors. This has significant implications for peaceful border management along LoC (J&K) and other sectors.

Background

- There were around 5130 [ceasefire violations](#) in 2020 registered on either side of the [Line of Control \(LoC\)](#) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
- In the backdrop of this hostile climate, the two **Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs)** from both India and Pakistan had issued a joint statement on February 24-25, to begin the ceasefire.
- This statement is viewed as a path-breaking initiative from a **conflict management** point of view. It can be attributed to the success of high-level contacts through **back-channel process**.
- It can be understood that both countries have realised that an unsettled border helps no one.

Ceasefire agreements between India and Pakistan:

There are several agreements signed between India and Pakistan to resolve the border dispute. They are,

1. The **Karachi agreement of 1949**
 - o This agreement ended the first war between newly formed India and Pakistan.
 - o It was the **first ceasefire agreement** between the two countries. It was supervised by the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan. This agreement created a boundary line in Kashmir called the **Ceasefire Line or CFL**.
 - o **Accordingly, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)** was mandated to monitor the ceasefire along the CFL.
2. **The Tashkent Agreement of 1965**
 - o The India-Pakistan war of 1965 also ended in a ceasefire. But, the CFL was unaltered in this agreement also. So similar to the Karachi agreement the status quo was maintained in border areas even after signing the Tashkent agreement.
3. **The Simla Agreement of 1972**
 - o This agreement was signed **after the Bangladesh liberation war** of 1971.
 - o **But unlike 1965, the status quo** was changed under the Simla Agreement.

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- The **Suchetgarh Agreement** of 1972 delineated the 'line of control' in Jammu and Kashmir. So the Simla Agreement **converted the ceasefire line into a Line of Control (LoC)**.
 - Further, under this agreement **both the countries agreed to resolve the disputes bilaterally**.
 - This was considered as a **smart move by India** because of two reasons,
 - It changed the nomenclature and the physical alignment of the India-Pakistan dividing line in Kashmir.
 - It also made the **UNMOGIP** presence in Kashmir irrelevant. As the UN was not even a party to the Simla Agreement.
4. **Ceasefire Agreement of 2003**
- This agreement came after four years of Kargil and two years after the Indian Parliament got attacked.
 - Pakistan PM announced the Ceasefire on LoC on November 26, 2003.
 - It is not a formalised document.

Recent developments:

1. The recent announcement by the DGMOs is also seen as the reiteration of the **ceasefire agreement of Simla**. As the 2003 agreement was not formalised.
2. **Further, the announcement is also considered as one of the most significant military measures by India and Pakistan in over 18 years. The reasons are,**
 - The recent announcement mentions a specific date to begin the ceasefire. (midnight of February 24-25).
 - It will help India to avoid a **two-front situation** i.e., Pakistan and China on both sides of Indian borders. Dealing with a **two-front situation** is neither easy nor practical for India for reasons like,
 - The Indian Army had to redeploy forces from the western border with Pakistan to the northern border with China to deal with the situation. It poses serious material challenges.
 - By agreeing to February 2021 ceasefire, India has defused the western challenge from Pakistan first. Now the army can focus more on the Northern borders with China.

Way forward:

1. The rules enshrined in the Simla Agreement has to be rewritten or both the countries have to formalise the 2003 ceasefire agreement. Experiences from conflict zones around the world show that an unwritten ceasefire tends to break down easily and trigger tensions.
2. To create stability in bilateral relations both countries need to progress in other domains also.

5. Knowledge-Economy in India

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS 3:** Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

Synopsis: India has lost its leadership in the production of a knowledge economy. But still India maintaining leaderships in few sectors like space, pharma and information technology.

India as Knowledge economy

Background

- The global success of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the pharmaceutical industry signifies the diplomatic potential of India's **Knowledge**

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Economy (production of goods and services is based mainly on **knowledge**-intensive activities).

- For instance, recently **ISRO launched Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite** and India **exported the COVID-19 vaccine to Brazil**, as part of its "**Vaccine Maitri**" diplomacy.
- However, India does not hold its leadership position in the production of **knowledge Economy** like in the 1950s.

What was the reason behind the success of these two sectors?

1. **Sustained state support:** India's current knowledge economy leadership in space and pharmaceuticals is due to 50 years of **sustained state support**.
 - It was Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi** who authorised the creation of ISRO in 1972.
 - Again, it was her decision to enact the **Indian Patents Act, 1970**. The Act **facilitated the growth of the domestic pharmaceuticals sector**.
 - Subsequent governments have all contributed to the development of both industries.
2. The **credit to Indian engineering, scientific and technological talent**. There is large scale development of educational institutions throughout India. This made Indian students pursuing world-class standards at a fraction of the cost compared to developed countries.
3. With these initiatives, India became the leader in the Knowledge Economy in the space and pharma sector. Further, India built the capacity to place satellites of several countries at globally competitive rates and also able to supply drugs and vaccines at affordable prices to developing countries.
4. Moreover, it has to be noted that these two sectors were successful even when the western countries created constraints for **indigenous technology development**. For instance,
 - **Unilateral sanctions** were imposed by the US to deny Indian industry access to technology and markets.
 - A multilateral regime for **intellectual property rights (IPRs)** protection was created, under the patronage of the World Trade Organisation.
 - Even today, many developed countries oppose India's Compulsory Licence of medicines.

Proof for India as a Knowledge Economy in the past:

There were many instances in the past that shows India's knowledge is in high demand. They are,

1. Students from across Asia and Africa sought admission to Indian universities for post-graduate courses.
2. Indian expertise was sought by global organisations such as the FAO, UNIDO, etc.
3. The government of South Korea even sent its economists to the Indian Planning Commission till the early 1960s. They got their training in long-term planning.
4. **Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES)**, had acquired a global profile with business in Africa and Asia.
5. The development of India's dairy and livestock economy also attracted global interest.

Why India lost its leadership in the Knowledge Economy?

Irrespective of the dominant position during the 1950s, India lost its leadership in the production of the knowledge economy. The reasons are,

1. **Flight of Indian talent to other developed countries**. It had accelerated since the 1970s and has sharply increased in recent years.

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2. **China has emerged as a major competitor** offering equally good S&T products and services at a lower cost.
3. The **appeal of higher education in India for overseas students has decreased**. This is the biggest setback for India trying to become the powerhouse of the knowledge economy. This is because of two reasons,
 - o The quality of education offered in most institutions is not up to date. The education institutes in India still teach old technologies instead of new ones.
 - o The social environment offered in India is no longer as cosmopolitan as it used to be. There is a significant growth in the narrow-minded ideologies in India.
4. **Lack of political and intellectual support** to the development of India's knowledge base and an inadequate commitment by the government. For example, **the Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) is discontinued** without an alternative programme hurts the quality of technical education in India.

The success of the ISRO and Pharma sector is a tribute to public policy, government support, private sector involvement and middle-class talent. This has to spread across the sector to regain India as the leader of the Knowledge Economy.

6. Issues associated with Government's Disinvestment proposal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources

Synopsis: Some experts are expressing concern over the government's disinvestment proposal. There is a need for adopting a cautious approach that augments rather than deteriorates public welfare.

Background:

- The government has set a target of 1.75 lakh crore rupees from the disinvestment of PSUs in the current financial year. Companies like Air India and BPCL will witness a strategic sale while an IPO (initial public offer) would be rolled out for LIC.
 - o **Disinvestment** of PSUs simply means withdrawal of government's investment in public sector undertakings.
 - o **Strategic Disinvestment** involves a sale of 50% or more in a PSU along with transfer of management control.
 - o **IPO** means the offering of a company's shares to the public which results in a change of ownership. Post-IPO a company gets listed on a stock exchange.
- The small industries and informal workers are already under severe stress post the demonization of 2016 and GST of 2017. The pandemic and rising oil prices have further worsened their position.

Why is the government disinvesting?

- **First**, it will help in the generation of additional revenue for the government.
- **Second**, it will enhance the efficiency of PSUs with more efficient private management taking the charge.
- **Third**, it will allow the government more time to do core and crucial tasks.
- **Fourth**, it will reduce the government's burden to consistently support and fund the sick units.

However, some experts are saying that the disinvestment might further increase the hardships of companies and the masses.

Issues with Disinvestment of PSUs:

- **First**, the **sale of profitable PSUs** is just like selling the family's silver to pay the grocer's bill. This would give short-term results but long-term losses. Eg – a privatised

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LIC might be reluctant to meet long-term financing needs for infrastructure projects with long gestation periods.

- **Second**, the government sometimes **undervalues the companies** to favor some industrialists. This was seen in the sale of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) and is criticised for strengthening crony capitalism.
- **Third**, the **government often fails to achieve huge disinvestment targets**. Last year it received merely 32000 crores out of target sales of 2.1 lakh crore.
- **Fourth**, the **spirit of disinvestment is undermined** when one PSU is purchased by another. The Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India bailed out the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI).
- **Fifth**, disinvestment **ignores social justice** as private players are not bound to give reservations to vulnerable sections. Further, they fire large numbers of workers and are reluctant to invest in backward regions, unlike PSUs.
- **Sixth**, the privatization of Public sector banks may not yield desired results. However, Private banks are driven by profit motives, and they are also suffering from corruption as seen in the recent Yes Bank case. Further, private players may shut down loss-making rural branches unlike public banks who also work for social welfare.
- **Lastly**, privatisation is not always good if the economic situation is uncertain. This is seen by the lack of tangible results post heavy relaxation in corporate tax cuts since 2019.

Way Forward:

- The government must put the formula of valuing PSUs in the public domain to augment transparency.
- The promise of exiting from all the sectors except the 4 strategic sectors can be changed to selling only the non-strategic and non-core sectors.
- The public banks can be clubbed and recapitalized instead of outrightly selling them.

In a nutshell, the process should be carried on in such a way that it generates resources for the government, sets the right incentives for PSUs management, and rewards the investing public.

7. Solving the issue of Retrospective Taxation

Source: [The hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Synopsis:

The two cases of retrospective taxation related to Vodafone and Cairn energy can be solved. It is possible if the government and companies collectively decide to do mutual bargains. Filing more and more cases in international tribunals might not deliver optimum results.

Background:

- Both the companies individually filed a case in the Permanent Court of Arbitration against its retrospective taxation of 2012.
 - Retrospective Taxation means the imposition of tax from a time behind the date on which the law is passed.
- The PCA has given the award in favour of both the companies in 2020. However, India has decided to challenge both of them.

About the Arbitration award:

- PCA in its September 2020 award ruled against the imposition of 27900 crore rupees retrospective tax on Vodafone. It said that taxation was against India-Netherlands BIT

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(Bilateral Investment Treaty). The court ordered India to pay 45000 crore rupees to Vodafone.

- Similarly, in December 2020, the court held India's action of imposing 10247 crore tax liability on Cairn is a violation of the India-United Kingdom BIT. The court ordered India to pay 90000 to the company.

Post-award Scenario:

- **Cairn has started enforcement proceedings** in the US, UK, Netherlands, Singapore and Canada. The company refrained from initiating any enforcement in India due to uncertainty over public policy and poor track record of courts in enforcing foreign awards.
- India **will now have to defend its position** in foreign jurisdictions of enforcement, primarily on the grounds of sovereign immunity and public policy.
- Parallely, the Indian Government has decided to challenge the award.

Problems in challenging the Cairn award:

- The government's action of retrospective taxation and subsequent inducement to pay is deemed as a wilful, unfair and inequitable measure. Such measures are not allowed under International Law.
- The act of government is also against the Bilateral Investment Treaties signed by it under International Law. The use of sovereign taxation powers to undermine BITs is not justified under international law.

Way Forward:

- India can definitely **use defence of international public policy** against tax avoidance. Similarly, the defence of **sovereignty of a state** can be used to determine what transactions can or cannot be taxable. This would help in challenging the awards.
- However, an **amicable solution** can be developed if both – companies and government are willing to do mutual bargains.
 - The government gave an offer to Cairn under the '**Vivad se Vishwas scheme**'. The company should pay 50% of the principal amount and remaining other things like interest and penalty would be waived off.
 - Re-computation of tax liability on a long term capital gains basis has also been offered.
 - Further the companies should understand the huge potential of the Indian market that should induce them towards dialogue. This is proved by the fact that India comes to the list of top 12 FDI destinations of the world.

An expeditious solution is desired in order to sustain the investor's trust. It will bring billions of investment in India and show respect towards bilateral commitments. Although the two awards have been challenged, the work on mutual settlement should be carried on in a parallel way.

8. An evaluation of India's actions against Climate Change

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: **GS 3: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation**

Synopsis: Events like Uttarakhand and Texas demand urgent climate action. However, the actions of India against climate change are not sufficient.

How Uttarakhand floods and extreme events in Texas are related to Global warming?

- Natural disasters such as Himalayan glacier flooding and extreme cold wave in Texas (USA) are the consequences of global warming.
- In 2013, **glacial flooding** caused over 6,000 deaths in Uttarakhand. Melting of the Himalayan glaciers due to increased global warming has caused floods and landslides in Uttarakhand.
- Further, the decrease in ice cover reduces the amount of light reflected back (Low Albedo) contributing to an additional rise in temperature.
- Similarly, the extreme cold weather in Texas and the double-digit negative temperatures in Germany this year, are consequences of global warming.
- The warming of the **Arctic-peninsula** at a rate almost twice the global average has damaged the **Polar vortex**. (The “vortex” refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air near the Poles).
- As a result, the cold winds that are restricted to the north poles were able to move south, causing extreme cold weather in **sub tropic countries**.

Why India’s response to Global warming is not satisfactory?

India has taken many steps to mitigate climate risks. However, the measures taken are not proportional to the risk posed by climate change, particularly to India.

1. India is the **3rd largest carbon emitter** after China and the United States. Also, India is particularly vulnerable to global warming. For instance,
 - HSBC ranks India at the top among 67 nations in climate vulnerability (2018)
 - Whereas, **Germanwatch** ranks India fifth among 181 nations in terms of climate risks (2020).
2. In spite of being highly vulnerable to climate risks, India hasn’t committed itself strongly to climate mitigation measures. For example, while China has announced **carbon neutrality** by 2060, India is yet to announce its target.
3. Also, public spending in India to mitigate climate risks does not reflect the urgency to shift towards cleaner and renewable power sources.
4. Further, instead of strengthening climate safeguards the governments both Center and State are diluting it. For example, unsustainable construction of hydroelectric and road projects in Uttarakhand.
5. Similarly, Kerala ignored the **Gadgil and Kasturirangan report on western ghats** which called for regulation of mining, quarrying, and dam construction in ecologically sensitive places. The neglect contributed to the massive floods and landslides in 2018 and 2019.

What needs to be done?

1. **First**, a significant step would be, including policies for climate mitigation explicitly in the government budget, along with energy, roads, health, and education. Moreover, specific growth targets including timelines for switching to cleaner energy will be required.
2. **Second**, the government needs to launch a major campaign to mobilize **climate finance**.
3. **Third**, India’s Central and State governments must increase allocations for risk reduction for building **climate-resilient infrastructure**. For example, agricultural innovations to resist droughts.

Sustainable growth depends on timely climate action. For that to happen, policymakers need to understand the connection between carbon emissions, atmospheric warming, melting glaciers, extreme floods, and storms.

9. History and significance of Mars Missions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: Gs3: Awareness in the fields of Space.

Synopsis: Questions related to Mars are still unanswered. However, the hope of finding life on the planet excites humanity for further exploration of Mars.

Background:

- Recently, as a part of Mars mission 2020, NASA launched orbiter **Perseverance** into Mars.
- **Mars 2020** is a Mars rover mission forming part of NASA's **Mars Exploration Program**. It includes the rover **Perseverance** and the small robotic helicopter **Ingenuity**.
- The rover Perseverance will explore **Jezero crater** and look for carbonate rocks that might hosts **Stromatolites**.
- Stromatolites are layered sedimentary formations that are created by photosynthetic **cyanobacteria**. They signify the possibility of life on Mars.
- The predecessor of the Perseverance orbiter is the **Curiosity rover**. It is surveying and testing the Martian surface since 2012.
- The launch of Mars 2020 was the third of three space missions sent toward Mars during July 2020. Other missions include the **Emirates Mars Mission** with the orbiter **Hope** and China's **Tianwen-1 mission**.

Why Mars missions are undertaken?

The possibility of life and water is high on Mars compared to other planets in the solar system. It can be inferred from the following findings:

- During the 19th century, astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli reported that he had seen water channels on the red planet.
- Later, another astronomer Percival Lowell talked about hundreds of canals on the equatorial region of Mars. He claimed that he was able to notice that through his telescope set up in the desert of Arizona.
- After that, high-resolution cameras confirmed the networks of channels that might have been created by running water.
- Also, in 2005, the **Mars Express satellite** found evidence of clays that may have formed after solid rocks were exposed to water.
- In addition to this, **the Curiosity rover** detected carbon-containing compounds in Martian rocks and shifting levels of methane molecules in the planet's atmosphere.
- Two papers published in the **journal Science in 2018** concluded that these findings support the possibility of the existence of microbial life.

Owing to these developments Humans want to explore Mars for two reasons,

- **One**, the curiosity of humans to look for alien life forms in the solar system.
- **Two**, historically, Mars has always been viewed as a backup site for humanity to migrate. For example, entrepreneurs like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk are proponents of this concept.

Yet, Mars has not delivered significant findings confirming the presence of life forms, and the quest for discovering potential life forms in Mars continues.

10. Consequences of Yemen Civil war

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

Synopsis- Joe Biden declared that the US will no longer back the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen. Yemen Civil war resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and a humanitarian crisis. A reconciliation is urgently required.

Background of Yemen civil war-

1. The civil war between the Yemeni government and Iran-backed Houthi rebels began in 2014. The Houthi rebels gradually took over the capital Sana'a.
2. In 2015, the war intensified. Saudi Arabia and 8 other Arab nations, supported by the US, the UK, and France, launched airstrikes against the Houthis. This attack was aimed to restore the Hadi government in Yemen.
3. The Saudi-led coalition imposed a blockade on Yemen, in the hope of weakening the Houthis.
4. Despite the blockade, the Houthis continued to amass weapons, including technologically sophisticated drones. They used these weapons to strike Saudi targets across the border.
5. The Saudi-led coalition failed to eject the Houthis as the rebel group still controls the city.

Consequences of Yemen-Saudi war

- The war has produced a humanitarian crisis. At least 8.4 million people are at risk of starvation and 22.2 million people (75% of the population) are in need of humanitarian assistance.
- The conflict has killed more than 100,000 Yemenis and displaced 8 million.
- Towns and cities have been destroyed. Poverty has spread and diseases like cholera have proven difficult to combat because of poor medical infrastructure.
- According to the UN, 50,000 Yemenis are starving to death and 16 million will go hungry this year.

What are the steps taken by the US?

- Joe Biden has announced an **end to US support for Saudi-led offensive operations** in Yemen.
- The Biden administration had put a temporary **halt on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE**. Moreover, **US-appointed a Special Envoy for Yemen**.
- **Other than that, the US also Removed the Shia Houthi rebels from the terrorist list.**
- The US is planning to increase the number of refugees accepted by the US from 15000 to 125000 for the fiscal year.

What needs to be done?

- The international community should focus on tackling the humanitarian situation in Yemen.
- The Biden administration should use its leverage to pressure Saudi to lift the blockade on Yemen.
- The Houthis and the Saudis must agree to a ceasefire. After that, the US and its regional allies can call a multilateral conference involving all stakeholders to consider Yemen's future.

11. Issues in the Process of Spectrum Auction

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS – 3, Mobilisation of Resources

Synopsis: The government should revisit spectrum auction formats, unrealistic pricing, regulatory norms.

Introduction

The telecommunications' spectrum auction successfully held in India recently. The winning bids in the auction collectively outdid the government's own low expectations for receipts from the sale of airwaves.

- The three largest telecom service providers bought only essential airwaves. They bought it either as renewal or for strengthening their network.
- Reliance Jio bought close to 60% of the spectrum. It contributed almost three-fourths of the ₹77,815 crores. Jio's contribution of ₹57,123 crores by itself surpassed the government's estimate of ₹45,000-₹50,000 crores from the auction.

However, the concerning fact is that only 37% of the airwaves on offer found buyers.

What are the issues in spectrum auctioning?

1. Like the auction of the 2016 spectrum, the auction of 700 MHz this time also is not successful. The high reserve price is a reason behind that. It prohibits buyers from auctioning with a motive of gaining from it.
2. The 700 MHz spectrum is a nationally valuable resource. The government's approach of keeping prices high is hard to understand.
3. The relatively low frequency **700 MHz is considered ideal for enhancing network availability** in large, densely built-up cities. Here, the issue of poor signal penetration inside buildings is an everlasting problem for users and providers.
4. Other than that, the government needs to take care of the following issues:
 - The auction format requires updation, it is evident after looking at the severely reduced number of participants.
 - Regulatory norms and tax practices will create monopolies in the sector.

What are the steps to be taken?

The country's telecom authorities shall reconsider the entire policy framework to tackle current persistent insecurity in the industry.

- **Firstly**, Grossly unrealistic pricing of the spectrum should be rationalized.
- **Secondly, the** government must ensure it does not end up hurting the telecom sector. This sector has become a key multiplier of economic empowerment and progress.

12. India's Space Sector: Initiatives and Issues

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS – 3

Synopsis: ISRO should take advantage of the market opportunities in the space sector.

Introduction

Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite was launched last week from Sriharikota. It was the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL). NSIL is a two-year-old commercial arm of the Department of Space.

Initiatives by India for promotion of Space sector

There is a potential explosion of market opportunities from space applications in the near future.

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1. **Firstly, the institutionalization of space commerce.** Regulatory agency the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe) and an independent tribunal are formed. It will be helpful in resolving disputes among private space entities. It also signifies the recognition of potential in space commerce by the government.
2. **Secondly, the private sector** plays an important role in developing launch and satellite infrastructure for ISRO. Many companies now offer numerous services. Many of these companies even aspire to launch their own satellites.
3. **Thirdly, NSIL has a broad ambit of functions.** It will collaborate on new launch programs and with overseas space industries. It is also expected to be a marketer of ISRO's technologies. Likewise, it has to find new business opportunities and expand the sector.

What are the issues?

1. **Firstly, the Commercialization experience of ISRO has not always been smooth.** The Government still owes nearly \$1.2 billion to Devas multimedia due to the Devas-Antrix deal controversy. Antrix was a commercial arm of the Department of Space.
2. **Secondly, the motivation behind NSIL may not be purely commercial.** NSIL is considered to be a move by India's space establishment to protect the space industry in India from **the consequences of the Devas-Antrix mess.**
3. **Third,** there is a scope of overlapping of roles between NSIL and ANTRIX. This is primarily because the difference in the responsibilities of NSIL and Antrix is quite confusing. It is yet to be properly delineated.

The way forward

NSIL must try to not be another Antrix but be continuously in start-up mode. It must think of ways to aid space start-ups to reach out to rural India and enable more recruits from India's young. It must see itself both as an Indian ambassador and disruptor in the space arena.

13. Cyber Attacks in India and Institutional arrangements for Cybersecurity

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Basics of Cyber Security

Synopsis: India's Critical Infrastructure is vulnerable to Cyberattacks from foreign countries. India needs to upgrade its Institutional arrangements for Cybersecurity.

Background

- Recently, The New York Times reported that China is threatening India through Cyber-attacks.
- It raised the possibility that the power outage in Mumbai (on October 13 2020) could have been an attack by a Chinese state-sponsored group.
- In the same direction, Maharashtra's Home Minister acknowledged a report by the Maharashtra Cyber Cell. The report showed that the grid failure was potentially the result of **"cyber sabotage"**.
- **However,** Power ministry contended that the grid failure was not linked to any cybersecurity incident.

Has India been affected by Chinese state-sponsored Cyber security attacks in the past?

India has been attacked by suspected Chinese state-sponsored groups multiple times in the past. **For example,**

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- **In 2009, GhostNet** (cyber espionage network) extensively targeted Indian entities. These entities included military establishments, news publications, and even the National Security Council Secretariat.
 - After the attack, **Shadow Network investigation** by researchers found clear evidence that confidential documents accessed by the attackers.
- **Suckfly** attack, targeted government and private entities including a firm that provided tech support to the National Stock Exchange.
- **Dtrack** attack in 2019, it first targeted Indian banks, and later the **Kudankulam nuclear power plant** (Tamil Nadu).
- India also faced attack from **Stuxnet**, which had hampered functioning of nuclear reactors in Iran.
- Apart from state-sponsored Cyber-attacks, there are enough evidence to show that the Chinese are also helping them to dismantle the infrastructure behind some of these attacks.
- More fearfully, WikiLeaks has shown that groups such as the **Central Intelligence Agency's UMBRAGE project** have advanced capabilities of **false flag attacks**. (ability to make other nations responsible for cybersecurity attacks with false proofs)

What are the Institutional arrangements in India related to cybersecurity?

Over the past two decades, India has made a significant effort for providing cyber security, some of them are

- **One**, Cyber security is given high priority by including cyber portfolios in PMO (Prime Minister's Office). For example, National Security Council, chaired by the National Security Adviser.
 - The NSA also chairs the National Information Board, the apex body for cross-ministry coordination on cybersecurity policymaking.
- **Two**, Establishment of **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre** under the **NTRO**. It protects critical information infrastructure,
- **Three**, in 2015, the Prime Minister established the **office of the National Cyber Security Coordinator**. It advises the Prime Minister on strategic cyber security issues.
- **Four**, the **Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)**, is the nodal agency. It responds to various cybersecurity threats to non-critical infrastructure.
- **Five**, The Ministry of Defence has recently upgraded the **Defence Information Assurance and Research Agency**.
 - It aims to establish the **Defence Cyber Agency**, a tri-service command of the Indian armed forces to coordinate and control joint cyber operations and craft **India's cyber doctrine**.
- **Six**, the Ministry of Home Affairs oversees "coordination centres". It focuses on law enforcement efforts to address cybercrime, espionage and terrorism.
- **Finally**, the Ministry of External Affairs coordinates India's **cyber diplomacy** with other countries and at international fora like the United Nations.

What are the issues in India's cybersecurity framework?

- **First, the institutional framework for cybersecurity has the following concerns.**
 - Lack of effective coordination.
 - Overlapping responsibilities
 - Lack of clear institutional boundaries and accountability.
- **Two**, India is yet to prepare a Cyber doctrine that defines the limits for offensive cyber operations, or the scope of countermeasures against cyber-attacks.

What is the way forward?

1. **First**, a clear-cut cyber doctrine similar to **Nuclear doctrine** is needed for protecting cyber spaces. For example, the '**No First Use**' nuclear posture was critical in preventing a nuclear war despite rising tensions.
 - o The absence of a credible cyber deterrence strategy allows states and non-state actors to conduct cyber attacks on critical information infrastructure.
2. **Second**, India should push for the debate on **global governance architecture** regarding **Cyber space** in international fora based on India's strategic interests and capabilities.
 - o It should also push for making binding rules that makes cyberspace-attacks on critical infrastructure illegitimate. (health-care systems, electricity grids, water supply, and financial systems)
3. **Third**, need for improved coordination between the government and the private sector at the national and State levels. It will effectively counter threats from both state actors and their proxies.
4. **Four**, need to publish cyber-attack information in Public domain for enabling meaningful public discussions on future Cyber policies.

14. Financial distress in Railways : Reasons and Way Forward

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

Synopsis: Despite several reforms, Railways is facing financial distress. This article highlights the issues and suggests solutions for financial distress in Railways.

Recent developments

- In 2016, the [Railway Budget was merged with the General Budget](#). Earlier, Railways had a separate Budget.
- The [Dedicated Freight Corridor](#) will be operational by 2022. It includes
 - o The **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor** (WDFC), from Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai
 - o The **Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor** (EDFC), Ludhiana in Punjab to Dankuni in West Bengal.
- Recently the union cabinet approved a proposal to create a single cadre for railways management. This was aimed to eliminate "**departmentalism**" in railways.

Why Railways is in financial distress?

- **First**, freight earnings are not improving despite improvement in freight load.
 - o According to the CEO and Chairman of the Railway Board, the freight loading in January 2021 was the highest ever.
 - o However, the freight earnings, according to the **Revised Estimates** for 2020-21 is ₹1,24,184.00 crore. It is lower than what was achieved in 2018-19 (₹1,27,432.72 crore).
- **Second**, the financial performance index i.e., **the Operating Ratio (OR)** (the ratio of working expenses to revenues) is not effective. (If the ratio is less than 100%, then Revenues are more than working expenses)
 - o Currently, the **Operating Ratio** is less than 100% due to the under-provisioning of the Pension Fund for 2020-21.
 - o However, the actual **Operating Ratio** works out to 114.19% and 131.49%, respectively, if the required provision is made for pension payments.
 - o More worryingly, this is the first time ever, the Indian Railways were unable to adequately provide for the Pension Fund.

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What are the future challenges that may increase the financial distress of railways?

1. **First**, traffic revenue is unable to keep pace with the increase in staff costs and pension payments. With the **(Eighth) Pay Commission**, to be scheduled in 2025-26 the working expenses of railways will further increase.
 - o **For example**, the passenger and freight revenues increased by 84.8 % from 2010-11 to 2019-20. While the staff and pension costs almost doubled, by 157%, in the same period.
 - o This is despite the fact that there is a reduction of about one lakh staff on the roll during this period.
 - o The increase in the staff and pension costs is mainly due to the implementation of the Central Pay Commission recommendations.
2. **Second**, freight traffic is over-dependent on one commodity, coal. Almost 50% of freight earnings are contributed by the transport of coal.
 - o With the increasing usage of renewable energy at competitive prices, dependence on coal will reduce. This will affect freight revenues.
3. **Third**, the other major challenge facing the Railways is the burgeoning staff costs including pension. In this scenario, the proposal to recruit an additional 1.5 lakh staff will further increase the financial distress.

Suggestions

1. **One**, increasing the revenues, particularly on the freight front, and a drastic reduction in the number of employees. In this context, the operationalization of two DFCs is significant.
2. **Two**, Railways need to think seriously about life after coal. Adoption of the **roll-on roll-off model** of transporting loaded trucks on the rail on the DFCs will reduce the overall carbon footprint.
3. **Three**, Corporatisation of the Railways' Production Units and outsourcing the medical services may reduce work expenses.
4. **Finally**, an annual report called **'Indian Railways Report'** on the lines of the annual Economic Survey should be placed in Parliament every year. It should detail the physical and financial performance of the Railways. It will make railways more accountable and transparent.

15. Why Criticisms of New IT Rules 2021 are illogical?

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Synopsis: The new IT rules 2021, is not a discretionary, arbitrary document released by the government. It is a document aimed towards creating a level playing field.

Introduction:

Recently, the government introduced the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The rules have the potential to [transform the online media platforms](#) to fit into the Indian ecosystem.

Few important provisions of new IT rules 2021:

The [major provisions of the new IT rules](#) are,

- **Self-Classification of Content:** The OTT(Over the top) platforms would self-classify the content into five age-based categories i.e. U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult).
- **Three-tier grievance redressal framework:** Both the digital news publishers and OTT platforms have to establish and follow the three-tier grievance redressal framework.

What are the general criticisms against new IT rules 2021?

The new IT rules are criticised by various private sectors. These private players mention the new IT rules as discretionary and against freedom of expression. They all point out criticisms like,

1. 5 Stage content classification on OTT platforms is arbitrary
2. Government influence in 3-tier Grievance redressal mechanism
3. The new IT rules were not consulted with OTT platforms
4. Government right to ban any content on OTT platforms
5. Furnishing basic information of a user violates privacy

Counter-arguments against the criticisms of new IT rules 2021:

All these steps are aimed to create a level playing field between offline and online media. But there are few criticisms against the new IT rules in 2021. But these criticisms are meaningless.

1. **5 Stage content classification on OTT platforms:** This is for the first time in independent India, the policy is shifted from pre-certification(censorship) to self-classification. This is a more transparent system compare to censorship. Even many countries are not following the same. For example,
 - o The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) of Singapore: All the service providers are required to obtain a license from IMDA for operation. Further, all content must be rated according to the Film Classification Guidelines there.
 - o Recently the UK Government released a **white paper on the threats posed by unregulated online content**. The paper proposed few important points such as,
 - o **Creating a new independent regulator** to ensure online safety,
 - o **Develop codes of practice,**
 - o Impose liabilities/fines on companies for the violation, etc. So the 5 stage content classification is much in line with the international practice.
2. **Government influence in 3-tier Grievance redressal mechanism:** This is completely a wrong criticism. Tier **1 and tier 2** of the **self-regulatory body** are to be **formed by the OTT platforms themselves**, not by the government.
3. **Lack of consultation with OTT platforms:** The government consulted the private sector on various occasions. Such as,
 - o Earlier, the I&B ministry organised consultations in Mumbai and in Chennai with the OTT platforms in November.
 - o The I&B minister himself met representatives of OTT platforms in March.
4. **Government right to ban the content:** This is not a new provision in India. Under the Information Technology Rules, 2009, the government uses the same provision to ban the content. Further, these provisions are aimed at National Security to protect its national interests in digital platforms.
5. **Furnishing basic information of a user violates privacy:** This is not a violation of privacy. Instead, it is transparency. The private players always advocating transparency from the government, but they themselves don't want to be transparent.

So, the new IT rules 2021 not provide discretionary powers to the government. Instead, the new IT rules are progressive and creating a level playing ground for digital entities.

16. Why India should Focus More on Climate Change Adaptation?

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Synopsis- Climate Change initiatives are not working as per their aims. India's climate policy should focus on Climate Change Adaptation measures instead of emission mitigation.

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Introduction

- The United Nations COP-26 summit is set to take place in Glasgow in November 2021. This conference was originally scheduled to be held last year but delayed due to COVID-19.
- The COP-26 will be the first time after the Paris Climate agreement concluded in 2015. Countries will be expected to raise their nationally determined commitments they made as part of that agreement.

Target announced by the major economies to reduce emissions

Countries globally are more focussed upon Climate Change Mitigation instead of adaptation, as depicted below:

- The EU and the UK have committed to net-zero GHGs by 2050.
- Japan, Korea, Canada, South Africa all have statements of intent for 2050 targets in either GHG or carbon terms.
- The US rejoined the Paris Agreement under the Biden administration and will achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050.
- China has announced a 2060 carbon neutrality target.

What are the Climate Change challenges in front of India?

1. **Present strategies are not effective in containing the Temperature rise-** The original commitments to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions might be enough to limit global warming to near 3° C by 2100, but it is still not enough to limit it to 1.5° C.
2. As depicted in the data above, the **Net Zero target strategy is not that effective**. Climate Change is already a reality and India's population is much more vulnerable. India needs to focus on Adaptation strategies rather than just focussing on mitigation.
3. **US-China collusion on climate policy framing** before COP- 26 same as Barack Obama and Xi Jinping before Paris climate summit.
 - Indian interests were neglected at that time despite China being part of the BASIC group. There is a full possibility that the interest of India will not be taken into account this time also.
4. **Financing** – By 2020, developed countries committed to mobilize \$100 billion in climate financing each year, including a mix of mitigation (carbon reduction) and adaptation projects. **According to the OECD, they delivered \$21 billion short at the end of 2018.**
 - As per estimates of the Indian finance ministry only a billion dollars in new and additional finance transferred to developing countries annually.

What should India's stance be at these meetings?

- **Both climate mitigation and Adaption strategies are required.** India should focus more on adaptation measures to climate changes. Adaptation and mitigation should be given equal weight if climate change action is discussed.
- **India should highlight the finance component** – Developed countries, must keep their pledge to channel \$100 billion annually.
- **India needs to implement a new climate change policy** to protect its interests and commit to a global climate regime that benefits rather than hinders India's growth prospects.
- **Delinking from China.** India must delink from China and make BASIC a consultative forum only. India needs to forge a coalition with like-minded developing countries on climate change.

India should focus more on Climate Change Adaptation rather than following the Net Zero targets like countries.

17. Prerequisites for Developing Digital Health Data

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Synopsis: National Digital Health Mission aims to build digital health infrastructure in India. But there are many hurdles in developing comprehensive digital health data.

Introduction:

Recently on Independence Day, our Prime Minister announced [National Digital Health Mission](#). The Mission aims to develop the backbone for integrated digital health infrastructure in India. Developing countries with significant health challenges like India critically need such an infrastructure.

The NDHM will help in developing the diagnostics and management of health services. Apart from that, the NDHM will also help in achieving broader public health monitoring, research, socio-economic studies, prioritizing resource allocation and policy interventions, etc.

Digitization can make healthcare more organized, effective, and efficient. But we must know that Digitization can't substitute the fundamentals like an investment in nutrition and welfare, primary healthcare services and healthcare professionals, etc.

What is the prerequisite to digital health infrastructure?

Before going completely digital, certain things are essential to achieve the desired social objectives. They are,

1. India needs to carefully develop **various ways to fulfil the “health needs of the public”**. India needs to carefully examine the following things and their improvement with digitization. Such as,
 - o Ways of facilitating better diagnosis and management,
 - o Understanding of the data structures for effective health services
 - o Alleviate health problems with digitization such as malnutrition and child stunting, etc.
2. **Challenges with Privacy:** It may also create tensions between a collection of digital health data and individual rights to privacy. For example, many countries like UK, Sweden, the US, etc. attempted to build digital health infrastructures they were not successful due to serious privacy-related controversies.
3. **Linking the digital health data to other sectors:** This data may be linked to other sectors such as banking and services with adequate access to data. This creates two types of challenges.
 - o **Not linking** the digital health data with other sectors will make the **potential uses of digital health data very limited**.
 - o **Complete interlinking** of digital health data will **create various problems** such as privacy violation, the vulnerability of data to profit-motivated pharma companies, etc.
4. **Design of Digital health data operations:** Access to digital data requires identifying and understanding the complexity in various data sources such as immunisation records, data in government and private hospitals, diagnostic centres, etc. The **design should also include** an understanding of data generation frequency, error models, sharing and other operational requirements, etc.
5. **Building an effective system** that can generate people's trust requires building a transparent process. That process should have openness and public consultations in all spheres of development. This includes avoiding “crony expertise”, rejecting poorly-conceived designs and ideas, etc.

So, developing a comprehensive digital health infrastructure not only depends on the health sector alone. Instead, it also depends on e-governance and the administration of digitisation in India.

18. The Advantages of Work from Anywhere

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

Synopsis: The new policy of **Work from anywhere** gained momentum during the pandemic. It has multiple benefits for all stakeholders.

Background

- Lack of clarity and flexibility in the US H-1B visa Programme remains major concerns for high-skilled Indian migrants, seeking to relocate to the U.S.
- This uncertainty was high during the Trump administration, with visa denial rates rising significantly.
- With the new administration in the US, reforms of the immigration system became a priority.
- However, bringing reforms will take more time owing to the lack of consensus among the political forces in the U.S.
- In this scenario, the new **Work from Anywhere** policy is gaining acceptance among corporates. It has the potential to mitigate the dependence on H-1B visas.

What are the reforms proposed by Mr. Biden to ease the immigration system?

Mr. Biden wants to ease the legal immigration for both family-based and employment-based migrants.

- **First**, for the high skilled population, he proposed the removal of country-specific quotas for employment-based visas. A green card for **STEM Ph.D. students** pursuing from a U.S. institution is also in the proposal.
- **Second**, the current H-4 visa holders (spouses and children of H-1B visa holders) will be made eligible for work permits.
- However, given the partisan divisions in the U.S. legislature, it is unlikely that the proposal in its current form will become a law.
- But for those skilled workers hoping to access U.S.-based opportunities have an alternative option of **Work from Anywhere**.

What are the benefits of the Work From Anywhere (WFA) policy?

1. **First, benefits for the workers:** It grants individuals the choice to live in their preferred locations without the need of commuting to an office. Whereas the traditional work-from-home (WFH) model allows workers WFH a few days every week.
 - WFA allows workers to relocate to their hometown, be closer to family and friends, manage dual career situations.
 - Workers can also benefit by moving to (or continuing to live in) a lower cost-of-living location.
2. **Second, benefits for the organisation:** **WFA** allows new companies to access a global pool of talent with relatively low investment in office space.
 - It can also help to reduce real estate costs of the organization as the workforce shifts to remote work.
 - Also, it helps to increase the efficiency of workers. For example, According to research, worker productivity under a work-from-anywhere policy increased 4.4% compared to the traditional work-from-home environments.

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3. **Third**, benefits for the society. Society, too, can benefit, as daily work commutes are a major source of carbon emissions.
 - o According to research shifting to remote work cut emissions by their employees by more than 44,000 tons.

TCS case study

1. Recently, **Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)** announced that its 400,000-plus employees will be 75% remote by 2025.
2. TCS has rolled out a **'25-25 remote-work model'**:
 - o 25% of the workforce will be in a physical office at any one time
 - o Also, workers will be expected to work from an office for only 25% of their working hours,
3. The Harvard Business School explored the changes being implemented by TCS and identified the following advantages.
 - o One, this model enables TCS clients to access the best talent within TCS, independent of the location of talent.
 - o Two, the model also offers TCS employees an opportunity to simultaneously work on multiple projects around the globe. It doesn't require relocation to the client site or worrying about immigration.

The TCS example shows how work-from-anywhere can help Indian companies and workers mitigate the challenges of immigration.

19. Revisiting the Reservation Laws in India

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions, and basic structure.

Synopsis:

The Supreme Court is examining the constitutional validity of the Maratha reservation policy. During the hearing, it mentioned that it will re-examine the landmark verdict in the **Indra Sawhney vs Union of India** case 1992.

What is the Indra Sawhney Case?

1. **The Mandal Commission-**
 - In 1979 the Second Backward Classes Commission was set up by the President.
 - The commission report concluded 52% of the population in India are "Socially and Economically Backward Classes (SEBCs)". Further, the commission recommended a 27% reservation for SEBCs. This reservation is provided in addition to the previously existing 22.5% reservation for SC/STs.
 - The government accepted the recommendation and provided the 27% reservation.
 - In 1991, the government enacted provisions for the reservation of 10% of jobs for economically weaker sections (EWS) among higher caste people.
2. **Indra Sawhney vs UOI case or The Mandal case:**
 - The Mandal Commission report and the government's decision to reserve 10 percent for the EWS was challenged in the Supreme Court.
 - A nine-judge Bench gave their verdict in 1992.
 - The important intervention of the case includes,
 - o **First**, the criterion for a group to qualify for reservation is social and educational backwardness only. So, the 10 percent reservation to the EWS becomes unconstitutional.
 - o **Second**, a 50% limit to vertical quotas will apply to ensure efficiency in administration **unless in exceptional circumstances**. The court in its earlier

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judgments like M R Balaji v/s State of Mysore (1963) and Devadasan v/s UOI (1964) also mentioned the 50 percent reservation limit.

Why is the Supreme Court revisiting the Mandal case?

- In 2018, the Maharashtra government enacted a law to provide 16 per cent reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions. This **violated the 50 per cent ceiling** mentioned by the Mandal case.
- But, the **Bombay High Court** upheld the validity of the quota. But the Court **reduced the Maratha reservation to 12-13%** (Instead of 16%). This per cent is also recommended by the State Backward Classes Commission. (Both are above 50 per cent)
- An **appeal was filed in the Supreme Court**. The Supreme Court during the case said that it will look into the capping of 50 per cent reservation in the Mandal case.

How does the Maratha reservation relate to the Indra Sawhney case?

The Maratha reservation law is related to the Indra Sawhney case in Many ways such as,

1. **The President power to notify backward classes–**
 - This power is provided by the **102nd Constitutional Amendment** provided powers to the President to notify the backward classes. The Court has to find out whether States have powers to notify the backward classes or not.
2. **Validity of 103rd Amendment, 2019**
 - This amendment provides for 10% reservation for the EWS in government jobs and educational institutions from the unreserved category.
 - Thus, the Marathas belong to EWS can attain benefits under the 103rd CAA. But the specific quotas to Marathas will turn into a bad example for communities asking for such reservations. For example, Patels in Gujarat, Jats in Haryana and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh.
3. **The Breach of 50% ceiling set by Indra Sawhney Verdict**
 - The Maharashtra law if enacted could make a reservation of up to 68%. Further, it can join states like Tamil Nadu, Haryana which already exceed the 50 percent ceiling.
 - **For Example–** the Tamil Nadu government reserves **69% of the seats in colleges and jobs** in the State government. Further, Tamil Nadu also placed its reservation law in Ninth Schedule

What is Ninth Schedule–

- It excludes the law from the jurisdiction of judicial review under Article 31 A of the Constitution.
- Laws placed in the Ninth Schedule cannot be challenged on the ground for violating any fundamental right.
- However, in **I R Coelho v/s Tamil Nadu (2007)** case the supreme court held that laws in the ninth schedule can be challenged on the ground of violation of the basic structure of the constitution.

20. Cyber attacks on critical Infrastructure

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 Security Issues and basics of cyber security

Synopsis: At present Critical infrastructure of India is vulnerable to cyberattacks. The government have to strengthen its cybersecurity initiatives.

Introduction:

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Recently Massachusetts-based firm Recorded Future released a study. It mentioned that Mumbai power outages can be a [cyber attack aimed at critical infrastructure](#). The report also mentioned few important things such as,

- The Cyberattack was carried out by the state-sponsored group Red Echo.
- The Red Echo has close ties to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and has also behind [many recent cyberattacks by China](#).
- So the cyberattacks probably carry a message from China.
- Chinese cyberattacks in the past focussed on stealing critical information and not on projecting their cyber potential. But their Cyberattack on India might be different.

What is the critical infrastructure?

These are the physical and cyber systems that are so vital to any country. Any attack on these infrastructures will weaken the economic security or public health or national security of a country.

In general 16 sectors are identified as a critical infrastructure of any country. This includes sectors such as the Defence sector, Energy sector, Emergency services, Nuclear reactors and their materials, etc.

What was India's response to the cyber attack on critical infrastructure?

1. The power minister denied the reports. Further, he mentioned cyberattack was not the reason behind power failure in Mumbai.
2. But, the power minister of Maharashtra on the same day mentioned that the Mumbai Cyber Police investigation had suggested a possible cyberattack on critical infrastructure. The cyberattack aimed with the intent to disrupt the power supply.
3. National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) has also reported cyberattacks by Red Echo to hack the critical grid network.

Government initiatives to protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks:

1. Indian government for the past few decades interested in critical information infrastructure protection (CIIP). So, In 2014 the government made NCIIPC as a national nodal agency for CIIP.
2. In 2019, the government also announced a National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS). The mission allotted a budget of Rs 3,660 crore for five years, to strengthen the Cyber-Physical Systems(CPS).
3. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) also launched the Industrial Cybersecurity Standards (IEC62443). This standard aimed to address and mitigate current and future cybersecurity challenges. Especially in industrial automation and control systems. But the government is yet to adopt the standards.

Vulnerability of Critical Infrastructures:

Critical infrastructure has become increasingly vulnerable to cyber-attacks. The power grid ecosystem is a major target of such cyber attacks.

Critical infrastructures always focused on productivity and reliability during their construction and planning. Further, many of these critical infrastructures were never designed to protect against cyberattacks. This is the main reason for their vulnerability to cyber attacks.

Suggestions to protect critical infrastructure:

The government has to **adopt the BIS Industrial Cybersecurity Standards**. This will strengthen cybersecurity.

Apart from that, Ministries and Departments need **better budgetary allocations** for cybersecurity. The government also **need a robust infrastructure**, processes and audit system to strengthen [cyber security](#).

To **strengthen the power sector India needs strong regulation**. India can take examples from the North American Electric Reliability Critical Infrastructure Protection (NERC) policy. The policy could serve as a guide to the power sector companies and help in securing their operational technology (OT) networks.

India so far has protected the critical networks like the sensitive Aadhaar ecosystem, the core banking systems etc. To strengthen it further, India can release a new cybersecurity policy addressing wider challenges.

21. Absence of Regular Chiefs in Central Security Forces

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-3: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

Synopsis: Many Security Forces are functioning without regular chiefs. This will impact their efficiency. So the government has to take the necessary steps to strengthen security forces.

Introduction:

At present in India, Many Security Forces are without regular heads. They play a pivotal role in maintaining the internal security of India. However, they are not given the due importance that not only affects the performance of Security Forces but also affects national security.

Few examples of Security Forces without regular Director-General:

1. **The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)**
 - With 3.5 lakh personnel, It is the largest Central force in the country.
 - But the CRPF is now headed by a temporary officer after its regular chief took superannuation.
2. **The Border Security Force(BSF)**
 - It is the second-largest force in the country after the CRPF.
 - The BSF tackles Pakistan Army and militants along the borders.
 - Apart from that, it even combats militants in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast.
 - But the Director-General of BSF is also burdened with an additional charge for Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).
3. The **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)**
 - The CBI has been **without a head since February 3** after its head retired.
 - The **additional Director is currently in charge of CBI** until the regular appointment of its head.
 - The regular CBI Director will be appointed through the high-power selection committee (HPC). The HPC consist of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of the Opposition.
 - An NGO Common Cause has also filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court seeking the appointment of CBI Director.
4. **The National Security Guard(NSG)**
 - It is an elite force comprising personnel from the Army and the Central Armed Police Forces
 - It comes into action during crisis times such as the Mumbai attacks of 2008.
 - Further, It is also entrusted with the responsibility of providing security to certain high-risk personalities.
 - But the NSG is **without a regular Director-General for nearly six months**.
5. **The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D)**
 - It is the only research and training organisation for the police forces in the country

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- But the BPR&D also at present **headed by an officer with an additional charge.**

Impact of having vacancies in Security Forces:

1. Officers holding provisional charges shy away from taking any major policy decisions.
2. Apart from that, Many regular chiefs do not get sufficient time for outcomes. When appointed they only have just a few months or a year of service. So, the head of these organizations cannot provide desired outcomes within short tenures.

These issues have an adverse impact on the efficiency of these Security Forces.

Suggestions:

1. The government should consider announcing the next chief of organisations at least three months in advance. Further, the government also consider appointing a chief with a minimum tenure of two years or till superannuation, whichever is later.
2. The government can form a panel of officers cleared by the Union Public Service Commission. The government should appoint panel members for future vacancies in top posts. This will speed up the decisions and enhance the efficiency of the Security Forces.

The government not only focus on posting the right kind of officers with adequate skill but also have to post them within a time limit. This will improve the efficiency of the Security Forces.

22. Need for Fire Safety training and technologies

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Disaster and disaster management.

Synopsis- Despite large fires in the past, building and fire safety standards continues to be ignored.

Introduction-

The current fire protection measures in all major cities do not account for all contemporary fire hazard issues. It makes fire safety a growing concern.

- The Fire accident at Eastern Railway Headquarter in Kolkata is a prime **example of poor attention to fire safety fundamentals, lack of preparedness plan, and the absence of robust fire mitigation technologies.**
- This accident also provides an opportunity to assess the status of the Model Bill of 2019. It Provides for the Maintenance of Fire and Emergency Services of a state.

Modern technology and preparedness are both important for safety against fire hazards, but both are undervalued in India.

What are the concerns related to fire safety in India?

- Lack of robust fire mitigation technologies.
- Most of the modern Buildings in major cities lack sufficient in-built fire safety services such as smoke alarms and sprinkler systems. These systems operate as early warning systems and fire control measures.

What should be done to reduce fire accidents?

1. Proper use of **fire safety norms prescribed under the National Building Code.**
2. **Fire Safety Audits [FSA]** should be made mandatory in India. Moreover, the auditing work should be delegated to third-party agencies with experience in the field.
3. **Regular fire safety drills** should be conducted so that people are aware of what to do in the event of such tragedy.
4. Enhancement of public awareness and proper use of technology and resources for the mitigation of fire hazards is needed.

5. Technology and resource advancement is needed.

23. Growing Food Subsidy Bill: Reasons and Suggestions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Public Distribution System – Objectives, Functioning, Limitations, Revamping; Issues of Buffer Stocks and Food Security;

Synopsis: The centre needs to find pragmatic solutions to limit the growing food subsidy bill.

Background

- The Economic Survey 2020-21, has pointed out the issue of a growing food subsidy bill.
- During 2016-17 to 2019-20, the total food subsidy bill was in the range of ₹1.65-lakh crore to ₹2.2-lakh crore. (Food subsidy + loans are taken by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) under the **National Small Savings Fund (NSSF)**)
- Whereas, the food subsidy bill for the financial year (2020-21) according to the revised estimate is ₹4.23-lakh crore. It excludes the **extra-budgetary resource allocation**. (Centre distributed extra food grains to the poor at free of cost during the Pandemic).
- Also, the survey has stated that it is difficult to reduce the economic cost of food management in view of rising commitment towards food security.

What are the Reasons for Increasing Food subsidy bill?

1. **One**, The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, increased the entitlements. It covers two-thirds of the country's population.
 - The law requires the authorities to provide to each beneficiary 5 kg of rice or wheat per month. This resulted in an increased States' demand for food grains in the States.
2. **Two**, recently the government has discontinued the **National Small Savings Fund** Loan to FCI for Food Subsidy. (i.e., extra-budgetary allocation has been discontinued) The Budget Provisions are provided accordingly. Consequently, budgetary allocation increased.

What was the suggestion given by the survey to address the growing food subsidy bill of the center?

- The survey suggested increasing the **Central Issue Price (CIP)**. It remains at ₹2 per kg for wheat and ₹3 per kg for rice for years.
- However, a mere increase in the CIPs of rice and wheat without a corresponding rise in the issue prices will not work. It would only increase the burden of States.
- Also, the State governments don't want to increase the state issue price. It is because food subsidies are internal to their political discourse. For example,
 - In States such as Karnataka and West Bengal the retail issue prices of rice and wheat Priority Households (PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration card holders are nil.
 - In Tamil Nadu, rice is given free of cost for all categories including non-PHH.
- This is the reason why retail prices of food grains at fair price shops are so low even after achieving substantial poverty reduction in the country.

What can be done?

1. **First**, the centre should find solutions to decrease the quantum of coverage under the NFSA law from the present 67% to around 40%. It can be done by
 - One, allowing a "give-up" option, as done in the case of cooking gas cylinders.

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- Two, the centre should nudge the state governments to objectively identify PHH cardholders, thereby reducing the number of **ghost beneficiaries**.
- 2. **Second**, the prices of the existing arrangement of flat rates should be replaced with a slab system.
 - Excluding the needy, other beneficiaries can be made to pay a little more for a higher quantum of food grains.
- 3. **Third**, other reforms to strengthen the PDS system includes,
 - End-to-end computerisation of operations,
 - Digitisation of data of ration cardholders,
 - Seeding of Aadhaar, and automation of fair price shops.

In India, the PDS system has shown to be more effective over Direct benefit transfer especially during time of emergencies. So, it is important to revamp the PDS based on the needs.

24. Importance of FPOs | Farmer Producer's Organisations)

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS3: Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints

Synopsis: FPOs (Farmer Producers' Organisations) could be a solution to the agrarian distress if they are helped to access credit and markets

What are the main reasons for farmer's distress?

- **First**, the declining average size of farm holdings is one of the reasons for agrarian distress.
 - The average farm size declined from 2.3 hectares (ha) in 1970-71 to 1.08 ha in 2015-16.
 - This resulted in a further increase in small and marginal farmers from 70 percent in 1980-81 to 86 percent in 2015-16.
- **Second**, getting access to inputs and marketing facilities is another main challenge faced by Small Farmers.

How FPOs can help small and marginal farmers?

Institutionalizing FPOs can help marginal and small farmers to overcome their challenges. FPOs will allow members to gain greater bargaining power in the purchase of inputs, obtaining credit, and selling the produce. For example,

1. **One**, FPOs in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan have shown positive outcomes. Farmers through FPOs were able to **realize higher returns** for their produce.
 - For example, tribal women in the Pali district of Rajasthan formed a producer company, and they are getting higher prices for custard apples.
2. **Two**, **The International Food Policy Research Institutes** comparative study of FPOs in Maharashtra and Bihar has revealed the following benefits of FPO's.
 - FPO's are doing better than non-FPO farmers. Also, within FPOs, organically evolved FPOs (**OFPOs**) are more beneficial than pushed or promoted FPOs (PFPOs). For example,
 - According to the survey, **OFPOs** resulted in an increase in gross income. While only 2 percent indicate a decline in the same.
 - For PFPOs, 64 percent report an increase in gross income while 27 percent report no change in income.
 - Whereas, only 32 percent of the non-members indicate an increase in gross income.

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Steps taken by the government in this regard?

- Since 2011, the center has intensively promoted FPOs under the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), NABARD, state governments, and NGOs.
- The FPO is supported through,
 - **Capital infusion:** up to Rs 10 lakh to registered FPOs
 - **Credit guarantee cover** to lending institutions: maximum guarantee covers 85 per cent of loans not exceeding Rs 100 lakh.
 - **Budgetary support:** Budget 2018-19 gave a five-year tax exemption for FPO's. Budget 2019-20 targetted to set up 10,000 more FPOs in the next five years.
 - **State support:** In Tamil Nadu, under collective farming, six lakh small and marginal farmers have been integrated into 6,000 farmer producer groups.

What are the Challenges for building sustainable FPO's?

Studies of NABARD shown the following challenges for building sustainable FPOs:

1. Lack of technical skills,
2. Inadequate professional management,
3. Weak financials, inadequate access to credit,
4. Lack of risk mitigation mechanism and
5. inadequate access to market and infrastructure

How to address the challenges faced by FPO's?

1. **First**, for a large country like India, more than one lakh FPOs are required. (currently 10,000 FPO's).
2. **Second**, to address issues such as working capital, marketing, infrastructure. For that
 - Banks must be facilitated to come with structured products for lending to FPO's.
 - Also, banks need to focus on capacity building to improve their professional management.
3. **Third**, FPO's have to be linked with input companies, technical service providers, marketing/processing companies, retailers etc. This will enable them to access data on markets and prices and other information and competency in information technology.
4. **Fourth**, FPOs need to look for land consolidation of their members where contiguous tracts of land are available. To some extent, Aggregation can overcome the constraint of small farm size. Women farmers also can be encouraged to group cultivate for getting better returns.

25. Why India Needs a Strong Regulatory Framework for Agriculture?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: There is a need of developing a strong regulatory framework to promote India's agricultural growth.

Introduction

The farmers in the country face various constraints such as accessing agricultural inputs, markets, finance, human resources, and information. All these factors are critical for increasing farmers' competitiveness.

The existing institutional structure controlling farm production fails to handle these issues. Thus, there is a need to develop a suitable regulatory system.

How did India perform in the World Bank publication, “enabling the business of agriculture”?

The World Bank recently published a report ‘Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA) 2019’. It measures the extent to which government regulatory systems make it easier for their farmers to operate agricultural activities. It covers 101 countries worldwide.

- **The 8 indicators of evaluation** are supplying seed, registering fertilizer, securing water, registering machinery, sustaining livestock, protecting plant health, trading food, and accessing finance.
- **India ranked 49 out of 101 on the EBA aggregate score.** Out of 20 emerging countries, India has the second least favorable regulatory environment for farming activities.
- **India has the weakest performance on five out of eight indicators** compared to China, Brazil, and Russia. Indicators are; registering fertilizer and machinery, securing water, sustaining livestock, and protecting plant health indicators.
- **The comparative score of India on supplying seed,** trading food, and accessing finance indicators is high.

Why India needs a strong regulatory framework for agriculture?

Governments need to develop a regulatory framework that enables farmers’ access to agricultural inputs, reduces the cost of production, improves farmers’ participation in agricultural markets and value chains. It is important due to the following reasons:

1. **Firstly, The regulatory system that runs irrigation management** is important for reducing the inconsistency of farm output, prices, and incomes, reducing vulnerability to natural shocks, and incentivizing the production of riskier and high returns crops.
2. **Secondly, India requires a sound regulatory framework on SPS.** For instance, with the active involvement of the SPS authority called as National Agrarian Health Service (SENASAPERU), Peru had become one of the world’s leading exporters of asparagus.
3. **Thirdly, a healthy seed supply system is required** for improving yield and adopting new crop varieties.
4. **Fourthly, a warehouse receipts system** helps the farmers to obtain the credit needed to invest in agriculture. Warehouse receipt operators accept deposits of crops and provide warehouse receipts to farmers as evidence of deposited crops. By using warehouse receipts as security, farmers can receive credit.
5. **Lastly, Insufficient access to quality agricultural inputs** such as fertilizers, water, and mechanical power can cause:
 - Productivity loss.
 - Higher cost of food production and uncertainty.
 - Lower capacity of farmers to produce surpluses.

Suggestions

The future of world agriculture and food production is expected to increasingly depend on middle-income countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia. India needs to put in place an agricultural regulatory system that would make it easier for its farmers to conduct agricultural activities. Thereby improving their productivity, competitiveness, and income.

26. India’s Rise as the new global manufacturing hub

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Synopsis: India’s recent achievements have positioned it as an alternative global manufacturing hub to China at the global level.

Background

- Democratic countries consider a rising China, with its authoritarian one-party system, as a challenge to the democratic order.
- This provided the strategic case for the formation of **Quadrilateral Security dialogue. It envisioned to develop a more sustainable model of governance.**
- But the QUAD formed in 2007 was not able to progress further. The dependence on China's factories kept the grouping of democracies from emerging.
- But two recent developments have completely changed the dynamic.
 - One, Australia returning to the **Malabar Naval exercises** in 2020, after 13 years.
 - Two, the **first summit-level meet of the Quad** is scheduled to take place in March.
- The rise in India's manufacturing ability as an alternative manufacturing destination to China has been one of the reasons for the above-mentioned developments.

What are the recent promising developments in India's manufacturing sector?

1. **First, the success in manufacturing PPE kits at a large scale.** Initially, after the pandemic, the world was dependent on china to secure supplies of PPE kits. But, India's ability to produce on a mass scale at a much cheaper price provided an alternative to the other countries. A similar case was with ventilators and other essential supplies, such as the drug HCQ.
 2. **Second, the success of 'Vaccine Maitri' diplomacy.** India exported millions of vaccines to other countries in need and all through domestically-manufactured vaccines. **For example,** Canada Pakistan, Caribbean Islands, Brazil and many more.
 3. **Third, the growing success of India's private industry. For example,** the manufacturing capacity of Hindustan Syringes & Medical Devices was almost 6,000 syringes a minute.
 4. **Fourth, India's success in precision high-end manufacturing.** India's **PLI scheme** was able to attract 22 top companies, including Apple and Samsung mobile phones in the electronics' manufacturing segment. It is expected that, over the next five years, a manufacturing capacity of over \$150 billion and exports of \$100 billion will be tied up through the **PLI scheme.**
 5. **Fifth,** the success of India's **fourth-generation fighter jet Programme.** The government has decided to procure 83 indigenously-developed **Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas** for the Indian Air Force. Very few countries have such ability to indigenously manufacture high-tech fighter planes.
 6. **Sixth,** simultaneously India's Economic policy reforms have made India an attractive manufacturing destination. For example,
 - India has the lowest tax rate anywhere in the world. (15 per cent for new manufacturing units).
 - FDI norms have been further relaxed to allow for automatic approval processes in some sectors even up to 100 per cent.
 - Privatisation of PSUs to bring more efficiency and managerial capacity.
 - Labour laws have been reformed to ease compliance burdens.
 - Abolition of Rent-seeking behaviour by making the taxation procedure faceless.
 7. Apart from this, effective bankruptcy laws, low-interest rates, strong digital infrastructure makes India a more attractive destination for manufacturing.
- All the benefits that China provided – quality, scale, speed, skilled manpower and a huge domestic market are now operative in India without the drawbacks of the Chinese model.

27. Need of Specific Law for National Security Screening of Inward FDI

Source- [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3**– Internal Security and related issues.

Synopsis – There is no clear law for national security screening of inward FDI in India. It is a major

Introduction-

1. As per some media reports, India may ease restrictions on FDI by Chinese companies. They will be allowed to invest up to 25 percent in a company through an automatic route.
2. Last year India tightened its FDI policy. It was aimed at preventing an opportunistic takeover of Indian firms, hit by COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown.
3. India made all Chinese FDIs subject to mandatory government screening.
4. Whereas, US, Australia, Canada, and Germany used specific laws to protect their companies against such takeover.

However, India does not have specific law which can block such attempts. Thus, India fails to differentiate between genuine National Security concerns and legitimate FDI.

How India regulates foreign investments?

India primarily uses FEMA to regulate Foreign Investments. RBI governs the **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA)**.

Objectives of FEMA

- Facilitating external trade and payments.
- Promoting the orderly development and maintenance of foreign exchange markets in India.

Shortcoming of FEMA

National security is unrelated to FEMA. Therefore, India needs a separate law for national security screening of inward FDI just like many other western countries.

What are the different types of legitimate threats from foreign acquisitions?

All countries face the difficulty of screening foreign investment in a way that separates genuine national security threats from bogus claims. In this regard, Theodore H. Moran identifies three types of legitimate threats from foreign acquisitions.

1. **Dependency on a foreign supplier** – The proposed acquisition would make the country dependent upon a foreign-controlled supplier of goods or services. These goods or services shall be crucial to the functioning of that economy.
2. **Transfer of technology** – The proposed acquisition allows the transfer of technology or other expertise to a foreign-controlled entity. There is a possibility that It might be deployed by the entity or its government in a manner harmful to the country's national interests.
3. **Infiltration and sabotage** – The proposed acquisition would allow some potential capability for infiltration, surveillance, or sabotage into the provision of goods or services, which are crucial to the functioning of that countries' economy.

Unlike FEMA, the new FDI control law would specifically state legal criteria for FDI in an Indian corporation. Also, it would be able to check the genuine national security danger.

What are the provisions required under the new FDI control law?

- Only the finance minister should have the right to reject strategic foreign acquisitions on national security grounds.
 - **For example-** the Australian Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act, 1975 empowers the treasurer to block certain foreign acquisitions on national security grounds.

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- Both the power and accountability mechanisms should be part of the law.

Way forward-

National security and capital control are separate and independent policy objectives. Separate legislation for national security screening of inward FDI will be prudent.

28. Aims and Objectives of “Quad Summit”

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-3

Synopsis: The Quad Summit held recently. This summit was important for all member countries due to various reasons.

Introduction

The virtual summit brought leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue together. The outcomes announced by Quad leaders include a vaccine initiative and joint working groups to cooperate on critical technology and climate change.

1. The vaccine initiative has a deadline. One billion vaccines will reach as many Indo-Pacific countries as possible by the end of 2022.
2. The vaccines will be made in India with U.S. technology, Japanese funding, and Australian distribution networks.
3. The four Quad countries will make sure emissions reduction based on the Paris accord.
4. They will cooperate on technology supply chains, 5G networks, and biotechnology.

Why are the QUAD members eager for further engagements?

The summit was hosted by Mr. Biden. The four leaders are committed to an open Indo-Pacific which is free from bullying. The leaders are expected to meet at the G-7 summit later this year.

1. Firstly, Biden is eager for the Quad engagement. It is a part of his promise that America will be back to the global leadership, endorsing regional pacts, and taking on the growing challenge from China.
2. Secondly, Australia and Japan are keen on taking the Quad partnership to deeper levels of cooperation. It is because of maritime tensions with China and trade-telecommunication issues.
3. Thirdly, India will get more strategic support after the new terms of the Quad. It will also boost its pharmaceutical skills, opportunities for technology partnerships.
 - Regional cooperation on development projects and financing infrastructure will also get a boost. In this domain, China leads usually.

Will Quad be a challenge for china?

However, this does not mean that the whole point of the Quad summit is to challenge china.

- Firstly, the new U.S. government is still exploring its own relationship with China. They will have an engagement with Beijing's top diplomats in Alaska.
- Secondly, China is the biggest trading partner for Japan and Australia. This relationship will only grow once the 15-nation RCEP gets into action.
- Thirdly, India has its own ties with China. It is having disengagement talks with china over LAC. India also has other multilateral commitments at the BRICS and SCO groupings. Hence, India kept the conversation at the summit focused on making the Quad a “force for global good” instead of pushing plans for a militaristic union.
 - The Quad's new “summit avatar” has given India yet another string to its bow, broadening India's interests on its geopolitical horizons even further.

29. KALIA scheme of Odisha and its lesson for India

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS3: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices

Synopsis: The Odisha government's KALIA scheme aims to provide Direct Income Support (DIS) to farmers. The design and implementation of the scheme offer some important lessons to the DIS schemes everywhere.

Introduction:

In India, the Agricultural reforms generally aim to find new solutions to the structural challenges facing farmers. The shift to direct income support (DIS) from the traditional non-targeted agriculture subsidies is the most important one among them.

Few important schemes in this regard are,

- Odisha's KALIA scheme – Under the KALIA scheme, Each farmer's family gets Rs. 5,000 separately in the Kharif and rabi seasons. It is irrespective of the amount of land.
- Telangana's Rythu Bandhu – In this scheme, the government provides Rs.4000 per acre per farmer per season to cover the input costs
- The Centre's [PM-KISAN scheme](#) – Under this scheme, an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred in three instalments of Rs.2000/- directly to the bank accounts of the landholding farmers' families.

But the Odisha government's KALIA scheme offers some important lessons for DIS schemes everywhere.

Some unique steps under KALIA Scheme:

Odisha used a three-step framework for KALIA Scheme. This is called the "Unification-Verification-Exclusion" framework. This framework is used to identify the beneficiaries of the scheme. The important point of the framework are,

1. Unification: This is the first step. It involves creating a unified database with "green forms". These green forms are essential for farmers who wanted to avail benefits under the KALIA Scheme. This has led to the creation of 1.2 crore applicants.
2. Verification: In this step, the unified data get verified. The databases like the Socio-Economic Caste Census, National Food Security Act and other databases are used in the verification process. Similarly, Aadhaar and bank account also got verified to avoid duplication.
3. Exclusion: In this step, the focus is on the exclusion of ineligible applicants. This includes applicants like government employees, taxpayers, large farmers, and those who voluntarily opted out.

Advantages of the KALIA Scheme's three-step framework:

1. Towards inclusive agricultural policy-making: The use of technology and non-farm databases under the KALIA scheme helped to include sharecroppers, tenant and landless farmers as beneficiaries. This facilitates inclusiveness in agricultural policy.
2. World Bank evaluation of the KALIA Scheme suggests that the beneficiaries are less likely to take out crop loans. Further, Those who take crop loans also take only a smaller amount of loans compared to non-beneficiaries.

Lessons from the KALIA scheme:

1. Better leverage of data: Any government targeted scheme can use the reliable data collected under the KALIA scheme for service delivery. So the other DIS schemes should aim towards forming such reliable data.

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2. Proof of Data Security: Odisha government obtained the consent for use of citizen data under the KALIA scheme. The data was also kept under a secure firewall. Further, access to data was only available to relevant officials on a need-to-know basis. Other GovTech platforms must use these “privacy by design” principles in data handling.
3. Effective grievance redressal: The KALIA scheme established an online grievance redressal mechanism (GRM). This online platform is accessible to farmers “offline” at the Common Service Centres closest to them. Using this, nearly 10 lakh grievances were received and resolved. The GovTech platforms should establish such an effective redressal mechanism.

The KALIA scheme has more lessons for the governments on the way of constructing a social welfare system for farmers.

30. Increasing cyber threat and need for Cyber strategy

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Internal Security Challenges, Basics of Cyber Security

Synopsis: As per the reports, China is increasing cyber-attacks. India needs to prepare a cyber strategy to tackle cyber warfare effectively.

Background

- Recently, the Recorded Future (a U.S.-based cybersecurity firm) revealed an increase in suspected targeted intrusions against India from Chinese state-sponsored groups.
- Also, according to State authorities in Maharashtra, the October 2020 blackout in Mumbai was directly linked to Chinese cyber-attack.
- Indian cyber agencies such as the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) and the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) may have information on China’s aggressive cyber campaign.
- Thus, India needs to adopt comprehensive measures to guard its critical infrastructure from the cyber threat posed by China.

What are the revelations made by the Recorded Future?

- One, at least 10 Indian power sector organisations have been targeted, in addition to two Indian ports.
- Two, they have also identified the network infrastructure viz., AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE used for this purpose. Servers of AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE are known to be used by Re Echo. It is a China-linked activity group, that targets India’s power sector, and facilitates the employment of a malware known as Shadowpad.
 - ShadowPad is a network intrusion malware that creates a secret path from a targeted system to a command-and-control server to extract information.
 - ShadowPad is affiliated with both the Chinese Ministry of State Security and the People’s Liberation Army

What are the recent infamous cyber espionages at the global level?

China:

- Chinese hackers are suspected for the development of a global ‘spearphishing campaign’. It targeted organizations responsible for vaccine storage and transportation. Its objectives are to;
 - target vaccine research
 - gain future access to corporate networks
 - collect sensitive information relating to COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

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Also, recently in 2021, several thousands of U.S. organizations were hacked in by Chinese espionage campaign. The Chinese group, Hafnium, was identified as responsible for this breach. They exploited a series of flaws in the Microsoft software, that enabled them to gain total remote control over affected systems.

Russia:

- Russia has been accused of cyber interference in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016.
- Also, Russia is currently the prime suspect in one of the greatest data breaches concerning the U.S. Federal government.
- Headlined SolarWinds, cyber-attack in 2020 is a prime example of the damage that can be caused by a cyber-attack.

How other countries are preparing to deter cyber warfare?

- First, the US, to improve its readiness and resilience in cyberspace, made a budgetary allocation of over \$10 billion for cybersecurity in his COVID-19 Relief Bill.
- Second, China's 2021 Defence Budget (\$209 billion) gives special weightage to the Strategic Support Force (SSF), which embraces cyber warfare.

The Ukraine example (cyber-attack on the Power grid in 2016) should be a wake-up call for India and the world. It reminds us of the availability of advanced malware to carry out sophisticated cyber-attacks. Hence, preparing a comprehensive cyber strategy, that fully acknowledges the extent of the cyber threat from China and other countries, should be recognised as an immediate necessity.

31. Why India Needs a Future force?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-3: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate

Synopsis: Like the US, India also needs to build a future force for future wars.

Introduction

War, at its core, is organized violence, waged for political purposes. The real purpose is domination. But the definition of wars changed rapidly. To tackle it, countries need to build a future force. India also needs to build such a future force.

Definition of War in older and modern times

Earlier wars were easy to define. One could know whether a country is at war or at peace. Further, people and security forces knew with whom they are fighting and at which front. However, war today is practically impossible to define, due to its unpredictability and contactless nature. Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz stated that war is practically limitless in variety (Military, cyber, etc).

So, making the armed forces of a state future-ready is important.

What is future force?

It is a branch force equipped with new manned and unmanned vehicles. This force is linked by a fast and flexible battlefield network for yielding better results in warfare.

Future Forces will radically use technologies such as nanotechnology powered armours etc.

Future force at US

In 2014, the US announced a Third Offset Strategy. This strategy consists of a certain important vision towards the future force. This includes steps such as,

1. Developing cutting-edge technology in defence such as robotics, big data analytics etc. These technologies are aimed towards providing autonomous learning systems,

collaborative decision-making between humans and machines, network-enabled autonomous weapons etc.

2. Exploration of new concepts for utilizing such technology.
3. Retaining the best human resources to achieve peace globally.

Why India need a Future force?

India at present recognize the war of older times and neglect the modern war. There are many anonymous threats bypassing Indian frontiers without challenging national sovereignty. For that India needs to build a future force.

Suggestions to build Future force in India:

India also has to build a future force. To achieve that India needs to take important steps. Such as,

1. Master force-on-force concept: In India, the Chief of the Defence Staff is preparing the future force. He admits that 'force on force' concepts are difficult, but it is prerequisite for the future force.

What is the force-on-force concept?

Force-on-force refers to the scenario-based training in which the participants work against live role-playing opponents. For example, If a battalion is going for force-on-force training, then the battalion is divided into 2 teams. One will operate as a protecting team. The other will operate as a terrorist team. This training is most realistic to the actual scenario.

2. India needs to master the 'hybridised effect' of warfare. It means the influence of mixing up security forces for getting better results in warfare. At present India is adopting the hybridised effect. This is evident by the establishment of the Chief of the Defence Staff.
3. India needs a confluence of all the technology and the government needs to drive new strategies and tactics.
4. India needs to break the civilian-military silos. This means building a more positive relationship between civilians and the military.

By fulfilling these steps, India can build a better future force.

32. Government should initiate steps to make Agriculture remunerative

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs3: Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints;

Synopsis: Government should avoid handing over India's agriculture to agribusiness companies. Instead, it should take steps to make agriculture remunerative.

Development of Agriculture during the green revolution period

- During the mid-1960s, the green revolution resulted in increased productivity in India and, especially, Punjab.
- Further, the growth in agriculture was aided by public investment in irrigation and market infrastructure. Also, the guaranteed minimum support price incentivized the cultivation of wheat and rice.
- Consequently, the area under paddy cultivation in Punjab jumped from 4.8 per cent of the total cropped area in 1960-61 to 39.19 per cent in 2018-19. Similarly, the wheat area shares too increased from 27 per cent to 45 per cent.

What are the reasons for India's deep agrarian crisis?

1. First, the adverse consequence of the Green revolution.
 - Monocropping: Though the production of wheat and rice increased, the cultivation of other crops started to decline. For example, Punjab had a total of 21 crops in 1960-61, which fell to nine in 1991.
 - Long-term economic and ecological effects: Wheat-rice cropping monoculture led to the depletion of groundwater levels. Excessive use of chemical pesticides reduced land productivity. For example, currently, the growth rate of yield has reduced to 2 percent per year due to water scarcity.Second, the absence of land reforms has increased inequalities among farmer communities. For example, According to the 10th agriculture census of 2015-16,
 - Small and marginal farmers (< 2 hectares of land): account for 86.2 per cent of all farmers in India. But own just 47.3 per cent of the crop area.
 - Whereas, semi-medium and medium land holding farmers (2-10 hectares of land) : account for 13.2 per cent of all farmers, but own 43.6 per cent of crop area.Third, widening rural-urban divide also contributed to the rural distress.
 - For example, according to the NSO household consumer expenditure survey for 2017-2018, Consumer expenditure by rural residents in 2017-18 decreased by 8.8 percent compared to 2012 statistics. Whereas, urban consumer expenditure for the same period increased by 2 percent.

Will the new farm laws address these problems?

The three contentious farm bills seek to deregulate and dismantle the APMC network. However, dismantling APMCs will not address the above-said issues. The Bihar experiment of scrapping APMC markets in 2006 can illustrate it better,

- The scrapping of APMC markets in Bihar (2006) did not improve its agricultural performance. According to the study by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER),
- Even after the scrapping of APMC markets, farm growth in the state averaged 2.04 percent, lower than the all-India average of 3.12 percent.
- Also, the scrapping of APMC markets has not led to any private investment in new marketplaces according to the study by National Institute of Agriculture Marketing (CCSNIAM).

What needs to be done?

1. First, since market accessibility is a major issue, the state should help the smallholder farmers to have access to the market.
 - The role of the private sector will be limited as evident from the Bihar example. Hence, Public investment in infrastructure and MSPs needs to increase.
 - Worryingly, the Public sector investment in agriculture is inadequate. As per the RBI, India has spent only 0.4 percent of the GDP between 2011-12 and 2017-18.Second, shifting towards agroecological farming that includes crop diversification, will ensure sustainability for Indian agriculture.
 - Agroecology emphasizes using locally available resources thereby minimizing external and artificial inputs.
 - Recently, in 2018, the Andhra Pradesh government announced to bring all 80 lakh hectares of its cultivable land under agroecological farming by 2024.
 - A study by Azim Premji University has shown that following sustainable agro-ecological principles has resulted in increased yields. For example, 79 percent increase in brinjal.

33. Significance and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence(AI)

Source: The Hindu

Syllabus: GS-3: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and issues

Synopsis: Artificial Intelligence(AI) has the potential to widen the social and economic divisions in society. That will lead to discriminatory outcomes at a global level.

Introduction

In the last ten years alone, AI has seen exponential growth. AI-based systems are now defeating human champions in games and decoding complex proteins in labs. But the exponential growth of AI has to pursue with caution.

What is Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial intelligence is intelligence demonstrated by machines. Unlike the natural intelligence present in living things, the AI will develop its intelligence based on the data. In simple terms, the more we use AI, the more data we generate, the smarter AI gets.

AI is everywhere in today's world. For example, using shopping sites, Using GPS mapping technology, predicting texts in messages and emails, etc.

AI is predicted to leapfrog human intervention in eradicating hunger, poverty, and disease. Further, AI is will help in climate change mitigation, education, and scientific discovery in the future.

Benefits of AI:

AI has helped mankind in many ways. For example,

1. In the field of Agriculture, AI has helped in increasing crop yields by analyzing farm data, tackling labour challenge, etc.
2. Similarly, the AI will act as an enabler in the economy. For instance, AI has raised business productivity, improved access to credit, etc.
3. In the field of Medicine, AI made cancer detection faster and more precise by spotting even a subtle challenge in the gene.
4. Robotics and AI companies are building intelligent machines. These AI-based robots perform tasks typically carried out by low-income workers like self-service kiosks (replace cashiers), fruit-picking robots (replaced field workers), etc.

Global studies on AI:

- A global study has predicted that AI can contribute more than \$15 trillion to the world economy by 2030. This is an addition of 14% to global GDP.
- A study published in *Nature* reviewed the impact of AI in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study found that the AI can act as an enabler on 134 SDGs. That is 79% of all the SDGs.
- Further, Google has identified over 2,600 use cases of "AI for good" worldwide.

The challenges with AI:

Despite having many advantages, AI also has an equal amount of challenges. For example, In 2016, it took less than a day for Microsoft's Twitter chatbot, "Tay" to start spreading racist content based on Twitter messages.

1. A proper AI-based system requires a massive computational capacity, which means more data centres have to be created.
2. AI will increase digital exclusion in all spheres including the exclusion of societies, nations. Further, global Investment also likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established.

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3. Apart from that, the AI will reduce desk jobs, such as accountants, financial traders, and middle managers.
4. The most important concern with AI is the concern of data privacy. The AI algorithm will improve only with access to more data. It will lead to the constant utilization of our digital footprints with or without our knowledge. In time a situation might arise where the algorithms know us better than we know ourselves. Scandals like Cambridge Analytica are an example of such a violation of privacy.

Suggestions to improve AI:

The fact is, just like AI has the potential to improve billions of lives, AI can also enlarge the existing problems and create new ones.

1. Countries have to develop broad-based ethical principles, cultures, and codes of conduct in utilizing AI-based systems. The principles not only include the “whole of society” approach but also include the “whole of world” approach. For example,
 - a. The UN Secretary-General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation. This focus on multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation.
 - b. Similarly, UNESCO also developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to the Member States.
2. In India, NITI Aayog’s Responsible AI for All strategy aims to strike the right balance between AI promotion and AI governance. The Indian government has to adopt the strategy.

Agreeing to the common principles globally is the first step towards regulating AI. The next step would be implementing the principles in reality. Only then AI will provide full benefits to humanity.

34. “Nominated members” and “Anti-defection Law” in India

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Synopsis: The important reason behind the inclusion of nominated members to Rajya Sabha and the provisions of Anti-defection Law.

Introduction:

Recently a nominated MP of Rajya Sabha has resigned due to the allegations under anti-defection law. The allegation raised after a political party nominated him as their election candidate.

Constituent Assembly debate on Nominated members:

During the making of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly felt that Rajya Sabha should have nominated members. They want to bring in the persons who might not win elections but willing to bring knowledge and expertise to discussions in the Upper House.

N Gopalswami Ayyangar said that nominating members to Rajya Sabha gives “an opportunity to the Upper House to bring outside talent in discussions and debate. Further, the nominated members will bring in the persons who do not ordinarily associate with the House of the People.

Nominated Members to the Rajya Sabha:

Due to the fore mentioned reasons, Rajya Sabha includes 12 nominated members from different walks of life. The criteria includes distinguished fields like literature, science, art, and social service, etc.

The President nominates such individuals as recommended by the Council of Ministers. Except the voting in the election of the President, Nominated members will have the same

rights and privileges as elected members. (Nominated members cannot vote in the election of the President).

What is the Anti-Defection Law?

After Independence, there were many times the state governments were toppled due to MLAs changed their political loyalties. This occurred to the Centre also in 1967. So, to reduce that, in 1985 the government amended the Constitution to include the Tenth Schedule. It is popularly known as the anti-defection law.

Salient features of Anti-defection Law:

The aim of the Anti-defection Law was to bring stability to governments by deterring MPs and MLAs from changing their political loyalties.

Even though the Upper House has no role in deciding the present government's dissolution. Anti-defection law applies equally to both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs. Similarly, the Anti-defection law applies to the State Legislative Assemblies.

The Anti-defection Law deprives the parliamentary/state legislative membership for the violations of the provisions. As per the Anti-defection Law, three scenarios are prescribed as a violation.

Three scenarios mentioned in the Anti-defection Law:

1. When an elected member "voluntarily gives up" the political party in which he/she got elected. Or when he/she votes in the House contrary to the wishes of the party.
2. When an independent MP/MLA joins a political party after the election.
3. When a nominated MP/MLA joins a political party after six month time.

Note: Nominated Members can join any party of their wish during their first six months.

Judicial intervention on Anti-defection Law:

The courts have interpreted the joining of the party many times. The courts held joining or changing a party not only include the formal ones but also include informal ones also.

The court in past mentioned such informal actions as defection. This includes campaigning for another political party, appearing in political rallies or fighting an election on the symbol of a political party, etc

35. Relevance of Inflation Targeting in India

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Synopsis: Inflation control will always be relevant. But there is no conclusive evidence that the policy of inflation targeting has worked in India.

Background

- The RBI was tasked with a mandate of the inflation target of 4 percent with a 2% deviation either way in June 2016. This agreement between the centre and the RBI is set to end by march-31-2020.
- It has been acknowledged that in these 5 years period (2016-2021) after inflation targeting was introduced,
 - Inflation rate has remained within the prescribed band of 2% to 6%.
 - Also, the RBI has been successful in anchoring inflationary expectations.

Against this backdrop, this article evaluates the success of inflation targeting as an effective monetary policy in India.

What is inflationary targeting?

- Inflation targeting prescribes the use of the interest rate to target inflation. Whereas other methods to control inflation targets money-supply (monetarist approach). For example, Open Market operations.
- Some suggest inflationary targeting is more effective than the monetarist approach, as the policy interest rate, is under the direct control of the central bank.

What are the issues in Inflation targeting?

First, inflation targeting is not statistically validated for Indian data.

- The model of Inflation targeting is based on the assumption that inflation means overheating the economy. i.e., increased output greater than natural level output.
- So, the Central bank will recommend raising the rate of interest (repo rate). This will eventually reduce the money supply in the economy and normalize economic activity, thereby achieving a reduction in inflation levels.
- However, it is impossible to observe the level of output in an economy. Hence, setting policy rates based on the assumption that the economy has overheated is unscientific.

Second, the belief that RBI can successfully control inflation using Inflation targeting is not completely true. Consider the following examples,

- First, RBI data on household expectations showed that inflation will remain well above 6% up to 2020.
- However, inflation had fallen steadily since 2011-12, halving by 2015-16. During this period inflation targeting was not introduced. So, this explains that there are other factors that control inflation.
- Second, during lockdown food inflation peaked even when the inflationary targeting mechanism was in force. It was mainly due to supply chain disruption during the lockdown.
- Also, the lockdown period witnessed a contraction in growth but coincided with inflation. This is against the core principle of inflation targeting that inflation denotes overheating economy.

Third, if the inflation in India has been controlled via inflation targeting in the past five years, it would have benefitted growth, exports, non-performing assets (NPAs) of commercial banks, and employment.

- However, the result has not been on the expected lines. Only, private investment has declined as higher interest rates contributed to a declining private investment rate.
- Other factors employment and exports are declining steadily.
- Also, NPA's are increasing since 2016. The cases of IL&FS, PMC Bank, PNB and YES Bank suggest that poor management and maladministration in the financial sector can escape RBI scrutiny as they tend to focus more on inflation targeting.

36. Single Use Plastic Pollution in India – A hidden pandemic

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: **GS 3:** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation

Synopsis: COVID-19 pandemic paused and reversed India's progress against single-use plastic pollution. Few necessary steps are essential to continue the progress.

Background

Single-use plastics were in use in great quantities during the COVID-19 pandemic to produce gloves, sanitary equipment etc. However, no attention has been paid to where the increased

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plastic waste will end up. India was progressing against plastic pollution before the pandemic began.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted to completely remove single-use plastics by 2022. The strategy calls for better arrangements to collect, store, and recycle single-use plastic.
- The UN Environment Programme along with the support of Norway and Japan took a multi-year assessment. They found out how plastic finds its way into rivers, and ultimately to the ocean. They achieved this through projects like CounterMEASURE.
- National Geographic's Sea to Source Ganges study tracked plastic sources in the Ganges river basin. This brought India and Bangladesh together to study plastic pollution.

Growth of Plastic pollution in pandemic times:

- The pandemic reversed many of the aforementioned progress. Single-use plastics became more abundant. Plastic was used for masks, sanitiser bottles, personal protective equipment, food packaging, and water bottles.
- This plastic will eventually disintegrate into tiny particles called microplastics. Only 9 percent of all plastic ever produced has been recycled. 79 per cent of all plastic produced is present in the world's landfills and in our air, water, soil, and other natural systems.

Suggestions to reduce Plastic Pollution

Plastic is important because of its central role in durable goods, medicine and food safety. There are quite a few steps we can take right now during the COVID-19:

1. The waste collection should operate at the same speed as the waste generation. Litter (paper, cans, and bottles lying in an open or public place) is a large part of plastic pollution. This generally ends up in Indian rivers. Improved planning and frequency of waste disposal operations can collect litter.
2. The wastes should be separated and used plastics have to be found early in the waste-to-value cycle. So that the plastic remains suitable for treatment and recycling. It will make recycling much easier and more economically feasible.
3. We need to encourage environmentally-friendly substitutes against single-use plastics. The government has to encourage business models that avoid plastic waste through alternative product delivery systems.
4. Plastic pollution should be considered as a truly society-wide problem. It is important for government, businesses, and civil society to coordinate to find solutions.
 - For example, UNEP and its partners are working with the Indian government towards these goals. They are working with researchers, enterprises, and community groups to address plastic pollution.
 - The data created in this process will be helpful in policy framing and decision-making processes at the national, regional and local level.

Way forward

- The government has to strengthen the existing plastic waste management framework in India. Further, India has to develop a National Action Plan for Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution in Rivers.
- Apart from that, India also requires an approach to reduce the manufacture of new fossil fuel-based plastics and developing and using alternatives.

37. Why Nationalisation of Banks was a Right Step?

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3

Synopsis: Privatisation of PSBs will not be a solution for India's banking sector distresses. The nationalization of Banks proved to be fruitful at the time of need, it requires reforms, not privatization.

Introduction

The Union government announced that they want to privatize Public Sector Banks (PSBs) in the recent budget. The government believes that this move will improve efficiency. However, it is not clear whether privatization brings efficiency or reduces associated risks.

The notion that only private banks are efficient is not correct. Many private banks failed around the world. Private corporate entities also have such large volumes of NPAs. Moreover, Bank nationalization helped in a revolution of India's banking sector.

How the nationalisation of banks helped in a revolution for india's banking sector?

The nationalization of 14 private banks in 1969, followed by six more in 1980, transformed the banking sector. It created jobs, extended credit to the agriculture sector, and benefitted the poor.

1. Firstly, nationalization of banks helped in promoting more equitable regional growth, which is quite evident from RBI data. In 1969, rural areas had only 1,833 bank branches. It increased to 33,004 by 1995 and continued to grow further in the next decades.
2. Secondly, this resulted in reduced dependence on moneylenders in rural regions. Nationalized banking also improved the working conditions of employees in the banking sector. This happened because the state ensured higher wages, the security of services, and other fringe benefits.
3. Thirdly, the Public Sector Banks played a huge role in making the country self-sufficient by supporting the green, blue, and dairy revolutions. They have also contributed considerably to infrastructural development.
4. Fourthly, public sector banks in India are presently earning significant operating profits. The profits were ₹1,74,390 crore in 2019-20 and ₹1,49,603 crore in 2018-19.

What should be done instead of privatising the public sector banks?

PSBs handled by the private sector could result in denial of convenient and economical banking services to the common man. The risks of monopoly will only complicate the issue.

1. Firstly, giving such a huge network of assets to private enterprises or corporates may turn out to be an irrational move. The government should strengthen the PSBs instead.
2. Secondly, it would be unfair to blame Public Sector Banks alone for the alarming rise of NPAs. Strict actions are required to recover large corporate stressed assets, which is a key concern for the entire banking sector.
3. Thirdly, the actions must include strong recovery laws and taking criminal action against wilful defaulters. The government has not shown a firm willingness to implement these measures till now.
4. Fourthly, there is an urgent and vital need to bring in a suitable statutory framework to consider wilful defaults on bank loans a criminal offense.
5. Lastly, a system to examine top executives of Public Sector Banks across the country will also help in improving accountability. But privatization of PSBs is not the ultimate remedy for the problems of the banking sector in India.

The conclusion

Defaults by large corporate borrowers, imposed through the impractical Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, have resulted in a pile of write-offs, putting a big dent on the balance sheets of PSBs. This has not only affected the profitability of the banks but has also become an excuse to declare inefficiency.

38. Impact of inflation targeting in India

Source: Indian Express

Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Synopsis: According to the Executive Director IMF, Surjit S Bhalla, Inflation targeting has been ineffective to control inflation. Moreover, it has also contributed to a decline in GDP growth because of high repo rates.

About inflation targeting

- The concept of 'Inflation targeting' was got acceptance in New Zealand first. Later it was adopted by 33 countries.
- In India, it was formally adopted in 2016, at the first meeting of the RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).
- The MPC considered a real repo rate of 1.25 percent as the neutral real policy rate for the Indian economy.
 - A neutral policy rate means the policy rate will be consistent with the growth potential of India.

The primary goal of inflation targeting is to contain inflation at around 4 percent, within the allowable range of 2 to 6 percent.

What are the impacts of inflation targeting in India?

The author, in his research paper, has evaluated the inflation target in a global context. It made the following conclusion based on the last 40 years for both the inflation targeting economies and the non-targeting economies.

AVERAGE MEDIAN INFLATION

| | India (average) | Emerging Markets | | Advanced Economies | |
|---------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | Inflation targeting | Not Inflation Targeting | Inflation targeting | Not Inflation Targeting |
| 1990-99 | 9.5 | 7.3 | 9.2 | 2.5 | 2.7 |
| 2000-04 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 3.8 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| 2005-09 | 7.1 | 4.3 | 6.0 | 2.5 | 1.9 |
| 2010-14 | 9.5 | 3.5 | 4.1 | 2.1 | 1.7 |
| 2015-19 | 5.2 | 3.4 | 2.4 | 1.5 | 0.9 |

Source: IMFWEO data

- First, countries that did not adopt inflation targeting were able to control inflation better than the countries that used inflation targeting. For example, India's inflation was around 5.2% (2015-19) for the same period it was 2.4% for economies that did not adopt inflation targeting.

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- Second, inflation depends on global variables, and it is not dependent upon one single factor. So, using an inflation targeting mechanism will not effectively control inflation. For example, 2000-04, has been the golden period of inflation all over the world even in India. During this time, inflation targeting was not in place in India, yet inflation was very low.
- Third, the belief that a high Fiscal deficit will contribute to high inflation is not true. For example, FRBM act was in place after 2003. However, Inflation in India increased from 3.9% (2000-04) to 7.1% (2005-09) despite the fiscal deficit were limited as per the FRBM act.
- Fourth, inflation targeting has negatively impacted GDP growth. High policy rates (repo) maintained to control inflation affected the cost of domestic capital. It led to a decline in investment rate thereby resulted in less GDP. For example, since 2016, (after inflation targeting was institutionalised), there has been a steady increase in repo rates, and a steady decline in GDP growth

39. Vehicle Scrappage Policy: Challenges and Suggestions

Source: [click here](#)

Syllabus: GS-3

Synopsis: Vehicle Scrappage policy will work if incentives are aimed at increasing fuel-efficiency..

Introduction

The Transport Ministry announced the Vehicle Scrappage policy, after the move for a green tax on ageing and polluting automobiles. This step promises economic benefits, a cleaner environment, and thousands of jobs.

- Vehicles belonging to the government and the public sector will be scrapped by April 1, 2022. It will require another year to identify junk heavy commercial vehicles through compulsory fitness checks and other vehicles by 2024.
- Vehicle scrappage and replacement are viewed internationally as **a path to revive COVID-19-affected economies** by favouring green technologies, notably electric vehicles (EVs). It is seen as an initiative to achieve net zero emissions by mid-century under Paris Agreement commitments.

What are the challenges in implementing the vehicle scrappage policy successfully?

Enforcement of this system will be important to get the vehicles scrapped once they are found unfit for use and to stop them from moving to smaller towns.

1. **Firstly, states must support this step by providing road tax** and registration discounts. The automobile industry is expected to offer genuine discounts on new vehicles.
2. **Secondly**, the centre has the difficult task of **making sure that the scrappage plan gets the state's support.**
3. **Thirdly, 1.7 million heavy commercial vehicles** do not have fitness certificates. This poses the biggest challenge. Many of these vehicles cannot be replaced quickly in the absence of financial arrangements for small operators.
4. **Fourth**, Fitness testing will be a difficult task. There is a requirement for a huge and reliable system of automated fitness checking infrastructure. It will measure the roadworthiness of commercial and private vehicles after 15 and 20 years.

Suggestions

- The automobile industry is important. Its share before COVID-19 was about 7.5% of GDP with significant downstream employment. **The Centre has to arrive at a balanced solution and incentivize** the manufacturers of fuel-efficient vehicles.

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- Implementation of very high standards and increased taxes on fuel consumers, without prioritizing fuel efficiency is not correct. It will only repeat the mistakes of vehicle exchange programmes abroad. They failed to realise full environmental benefits and taxpayers ended up subsidising inefficiency.
- Ecological scrapping, as a concept, must lead to high rates of materials recovery, reduce air pollution, mining and pressure on the environment.

40. Concerns with the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS-3: changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

Synopsis:

The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021 has few important concerns. But the move is a welcome step to the Insurance sector.

Introduction:

The Lok Sabha has passed the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021. The Bill had earlier been cleared by the Rajya Sabha also. Now it only requires the presidential assent to become a law.

About the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021:

1. The Bill amends the Insurance Act, 1938. The Bill seeks to increase the maximum foreign investment allowed in an Indian insurance company from 49% to 74%.
2. However, such foreign investment may be subject to additional conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government. The conditions include,
 - The majority of directors on the Board and key management persons in health and general insurance companies has to be resident Indians.
 - At least 50% of directors of the Insurance companies have to be independent directors.
3. The bill also removes restrictions on ownership and control.

[Click Here to Read more about the Insurance \(Amendment\) Bill](#)

Concerns with the Insurance (Amendment) Bill:

There are certain key concerns raised by the critics of the bill. These include,

1. The **present actual share of FDI** in the insurance sector is less than the current limit of 49%. Further, the present target was aimed to achieve within 5 years. But that **is not achieved** so far. Hence, there is no justification for increasing the limit to 74%.
2. **Infusion of market funds in the insurance sector is not viable.** The critics mention the time when financial institutions like DHFL, Yes Bank have collapsed, infusing market funds **might lead to the collapse of insurance institutions** also.
3. The Bill **does not have a provision to prevent financially weak foreign companies** from entering into the Indian insurance sector.
4. Many Indian insurance companies are already in Joint Venture with foreign companies. Hence, the Government's claim that foreign investment is needed for bringing newer technology to the country is not substantiated.

Government's response to the concerns:

1. The bill is aimed at solving some **long-term capital availability** issues in the insurance sector.
2. The banking and insurance industry fall under the strategic sectors according to the government's **strategic disinvestment policy**. The 74% cap is just a limit posed on the FDI. Hence, there should be no apprehension on privatization.

3. The bill will increase competition in the insurance sector. This will in turn **facilitate affordable schemes for middle-class** people.
4. Half of the market share of the Indian insurance sector is already held by private companies. The public sector insurance market share is merely 38.78%. On the other hand, the private sector enjoys 48.03% of the market share. So the increase in FDI is essential to improve the insurance penetration further.

The Insurance (Amendment) Bill might facilitate insurance penetration among middle-class Indians. But the adequate safety mechanisms have to put in place to check the insurance companies.

41. Bad Bank for strengthening the banking sector

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 3 – Issues related to banking sector

Synopsis: The Indian banks have started to recover post the pandemic phase. Further, strengthening will be witnessed after the creation of a bad bank as promised in the budget.

Background:

- During pandemic, NPA(Non-Performing Assets) was expected to rise. Thus, Indian banks written off their balance sheets.
 - A write-off is an accounting term, through which the book value of an asset is declared to be zero.
 - An NPA is a bank loan that is subject to late repayment or is unlikely to be repaid by the borrower in full.
- However, Later at the end of the year, a positive recovery was observed. Restructuring requests were reduced and Provision Coverage Ratios (PCR) improved.
 - PCR is the ratio of provisioning to Gross Non-Performing Assets.
 - It indicates the extent of funds a bank has kept aside to cover loan losses.
- In the recent budget 2021, the government announced a dedicated bad bank.

Reasons behind improvement in the banking system at the year-end

Before pandemic, banks held substantial capital and **built a sizable buffer** for dealing with NPAs. This prevented major degradation of their balance sheets during the pandemic. Further many other reasons were behind this performance.

1. Before the pandemic, the RBI instilled a **prudent degree of financial discipline** in the market. This included decreasing exposure in riskier assets and devising a system of ratings for the borrowers.
2. A **surge in disposable income** and spending capacity of middle-class people will be witnessed. This would cause the valuation of personal financial assets in Asia to reach \$69 trillion by 2025. Therefore, bringing more business to India as well.
3. Further, the **robust monetary management skills of RBI and budget announcements** created a sense of positivity in the sector.

Budget Announcements:

- A bad bank will be created under an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)-Asset Management Company (AMC) structure.
- National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARC) will acquire stressed assets in an aggregated manner from lenders. National Asset Management Company (NAMC) will act as a resolution manager for the acquired assets.

Benefits of Bad Bank:

- Banks will get the recovered value of the stressed asset and their balance sheet will not appear stressful. This will improve their valuations.
- Banks will get **more lending leverage** as:
 - Less provisioning is done for stressed assets if a robust bad bank exits
 - Bad Banks generally pay 85% in sovereign receipts and remaining in cash. This can be used for giving more loans.
- It will drive the consolidation of stressed assets and help in **faster decision-making**.
- Banks will get **more management space** as recovery work will be undertaken by bad banks. This would allow them to focus more on credit growth.
- As per some experts, transferring Rs. 400 assets to bad banks work out to around Rs 526 for the economy (a multiplier of around 1.3). **Further, benefits worth Rs 2.2 lakh** can be witnessed at just a **20% recovery rate**.

Way Ahead:

- The Banks have realized the growth potential of the sector. They are constantly developing new business models, rationalizing costs, and providing superior services to attract more customers.
- Along with this, the focus should on creating a favorable environment for the development of Bad banks that includes:
 - Keeping majority ownership in the private sector
 - Putting together a strong and independent board
 - Linking AMC compensation to their performance

42. India's potential as a Global investment hub

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Synopsis: India has the potential to become a Global Investment Hub. India's unique advantages attract global companies to invest in India.

Background

- In 2020, despite sharp economic contraction, India witnessed the fastest growth in **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** inflows among all the major economies. (>60 billion)
- Big firms like Google, Facebook, Walmart, Samsung, Foxconn, and Silver Lake made FDI contributions in India.
- However, India's latest FDI totals still lag behind other market economies such as China and Brazil.

Why India still lags behind China and Brazil in attracting FDI?

Even after three decades of liberalization (1991), India remains a complex and challenging place to do business because,

1. One, frequent shifts in the policy landscape. For example, **Retrospective taxation**. India lost the Vodafone case and Cairn energy case at the **Permanent Court of Arbitration**.
2. Two, Persistent market access barriers. For example, anti-dumping duty, negative list, mandatory localized procurement, etc.,
3. Three, Government's push towards "self-reliant" India also created distrust among the investors.

Then, why multinational companies are investing in India?

- **First**, India's huge market with growing purchasing power makes India an attractive destination for investments. **For example**, India has a market of 1.4 billion people and a rising middle class of 600 million.
- **Second**, shift in contemporary geopolitics due to rising U.S.-China competition. It has forced multinationals to reimagine their supply chain and production hubs. For example, Samsung has invested billions in the Indian market.
 - Additionally, manufacturers such as Cisco, Nokia, Ericsson, and Flex are planning to invest in India to take advantage of India's incentives in the manufacturing sector.
- **Third**, the rise of the 'next-gen netizens' is one of the key reasons why leading global tech companies are investing in India. For example, India has 700 million Internet users.
- **Fourth**, a showcase of India's resilience during adversities. For example, India has managed the pandemic better than many of its western peers and restored economic activity.

What is the way forward?

Increasing FDI investment should not result in a drain of wealth from India. MNC's should be made to demonstrate their commitment towards India. It can be done through,

- Placing shared value creation at the heart of their business strategy.
- Tying corporate success to India's growth and development.
- Increasing Investments in Indian talent.
- Aligning products with Indian tastes.
- Helping to tackle the problems faced by society at large.

Thus, to make India a Global Investment Hub, all the issues in the way of FDI shall be removed.

43. Water conservation is must for preventing another pandemic

Source: [Click here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Natural resources + Pollution and degradation

Synopsis: NITI Aayog has expressed concerns over the poor water quality in India. This gives a conducive environment for the spread of another pandemic through the water. Thus, it requires an effective mechanism for water conservation.

Background:

- NITI Aayog, Water Aid, and others have found that **over 70% of India's surface and groundwater is contaminated** by human and other waste.
- The contaminated water can be a breeding ground for numerous viruses causing another Pandemic.

How virus spreads through contaminated water?

Dangerous viruses can spread from animals to humans through the consumption of their meat. The closeness creates an artificial environment that can give birth to mutations in erstwhile dormant viruses.

- After infecting a human, the virus can easily proliferate in wastewater.
 - For instance, several wastewater samples were tested and were found to carry **traces of SARS-CoV-2 in England, Wales and Scotland**.
 - Traces of the virus have also been detected in raw sewage across Sydney.
- Astrovirus, hepatitis A and norovirus are some water-transmitted viral pathogens.

Need for water conservation in India

- The wastewater gets discharged into the river. Thus, it becomes a very **generous host for viruses** by carrying human waste, sewage, and toxic waste. This breeds more proliferation.
- Further, a huge population is **dependent on polluted water sources** for meeting their drinking requirements thereby enhancing the vulnerability. There is also a concern of growing demand in the future due to the **rising population**.
- The **success of schemes** like Nal se Jal demands the conservation of water.
 - The scheme aims to provide drinking water connections to every rural household by 2024.
- The **techniques used for water purification** like RO (reverse osmosis) are very costly and unaffordable for the majority population. Further, they extract the essential minerals from the water along with contaminants.
- **Destruction of natural resources** is happening at a rapid pace as our development model focuses on building artificial infrastructure. This involves the creation of highways, industrial plants, high-rise structures, etc. at the cost of natural infrastructure.

Is there any clean source of water left?

- There are two unpolluted freshwater sources left in the country –
 - Water lying below our forest
 - Aquifers below the river floodplain
- Both provide natural underground storage and are annually recharged by rain water.
- The **modest drinking requirement (2-3 litres)** can be met with water below our forests.
- Similarly, **river floodplains are a great source of water for cities**.
 - The Delhi Government is already using water from Yamuna floodplains to meet the requirement of million people.

Way Forward:

- We must focus on conservation techniques for solving the water problem like:
 - **Using only a fraction** of the annual recharge of water bodies and aquifers.
 - Declaring Forests and floodplains as **water sanctuaries**.

There is no technological substitute for living natural resources like pristine natural water and soil. The focus should be shifted from artificial infrastructure to natural infrastructure.

44. Similarities between Disinvestment and fiscal deficit

Source: [Click Here](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – mobilization of resources

Synopsis: Selling of Public assets (Disinvestment) has similar macroeconomic results to fiscal deficit. Both increase wealth inequalities in the society and hence should be avoided.

Background

- The government has set a target of 1.75 lakh crore rupees from the disinvestment of PSUs in the current financial year.
- The only rationale shown by the government behind such a move is to generate additional resources for spending.

Basic Terms:

- **Fiscal Deficit:** It is the difference between the total revenue of the government (excluding borrowings) and its total expenditure. A fiscal deficit situation occurs when the government's expenditure exceeds its income.
- **Disinvestment:** It simply means the withdrawal or reduction of investment.

Fiscal Strategy of selling Public Sector Undertakings:

- Under disinvestment, equity (shares) of PSUs is offered for sale to the private sector.
- However, the purchase of public assets crowds out private investment in other sectors.
 - This happens as the amount kept for investment in varied projects like road, rail, energy, etc. is used for the purchase of Public assets. It reduces the pool and hence crowding out takes place.

Moreover, there is not much difference between fiscal deficit and disinvestment.

Relationship between Disinvestment and Fiscal Deficit:

- In Fiscal Deficit, the government issues bonds to the private sector for raising money. While in case of disinvestment, ownership of public assets is offered.
- Both have similar macroeconomic consequences:
 - Enhancing private savings
 - Crowding out some private investments
 - Allowing the production of idle output and resources by increased government spending
 - Creating wealth inequalities
- The only difference is the nature of the paper handed over to the private party.

How does fiscal deficit increase wealth inequality?

Fiscal Deficit generates additional private savings. It enhances wealth inequality.

- The government expenditure financed by fiscal deficit generates additional demand in the economy.
- This further increases output and incomes until additional savings generated out of such incomes match the fiscal deficit.
- These savings are generally more in the case of the rich who have a higher propensity to save.
- These additional savings result in greater wealth creation for the rich and enhance wealth inequalities.

How selling of public assets increases wealth inequality?

- The process of disinvestment involves the transfer of ownership of public assets to the private sector.
- Wealth Inequality gets enhanced as:
 - **Additional savings are created** in the economy just like in the case of fiscal deficit, which enhances inequality.
 - Further, the transfer usually happens at prices well **below the capitalized value of earnings**. This makes new owners more wealthy in the future and enhances inequalities in society.
 - Capitalized value refers to the current value of an asset, based on the total income expected to be realized over its economic life span.

Alternative of disinvestment for increasing spending:

- The focus should be on **tax-financed government expenditure**. In this case, there would be no addition to private wealth, and hence no increase in wealth inequality.
- In the current scenario government can take the following steps:
 1. It can impose a **wealth tax** that would help it extract a bigger chunk of private profits and doesn't increase inequalities.
 - Elizabeth Warren had proposed the idea during her nomination for the American presidency and 18 billionaires supported this.
 2. **Increase the GST rate on luxury goods** with due consultation with states. This should be complemented with a proportional increase in government spending. The result would be an increase in employment and output in the economy without impacting post-tax profits in real terms.

Thus, the multiple benefits associated with PSUs like social empowerment (role in green revolution), protection against the dominance of multinational corporations, etc. cannot be ignored.

Even if we ignore these, the sale of public assets to finance government spending is undesirable and unnecessary on purely fiscal terms.

45. Cost and Benefits of Adani's Carmichael Coal Project in Australia

Source- [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus- **GS 3** – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc

Synopsis – Adani is making one of the world's largest new coal investments in the Carmichael coal mine project in Queensland. This article analyzes the Costs and Benefits of the Project.

Introduction-

New investment in coal will be a major factor if India is not able to meet its commitment against Climate Change.

Recently the Adani's \$16.5 billion dollar investment in the Carmichael coal mine project in Queensland has sparked debate. Being a primary buyer of this project, India would also face its environmental consequences.

Proposed benefits of Adani's Carmichael coal project-

- **Economic benefits** – It would be the largest coal mine in Australia and one of the largest in the world. It will produce 60 million tonnes of coal per year at full capacity. The mine is expected to produce 2.3 billion tonnes over the next 60 years.
- **It will create employment opportunities** and generate revenue for Australia's economy.
- **Australian government's subsidies-** Despite the G20 commitment to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, the Queensland and Australian governments have proposed various forms of assistance to the Carmichael coal project.

Issues

- **Financial viability-** With coal prices falling, the mine may not be able to produce enough income to cover its costs.
 - A number of major international banks ruled out financing the Carmichael Mine and Rail Project. It is due to its poor return on investment and environmental risks.
- **Environmental and climate impacts** – The project is likely to emit 4.7 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. This is more than 0.5% of the remaining global carbon budget for limiting warming to 2 degrees C.
 - Climate change is already affecting Australia. The frequency and intensity of droughts and extreme weather events such as heat-waves, storms and flooding, and bushfires are increasing.

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- **Health Impact-** Coal mining causes fine particle pollution, which contributes to heart diseases, lung diseases, and lung cancer.
 - In Australia, health damage due to CO₂ emission alone costs \$2.6 billion annually.
 - In India, coal is responsible for 100000 premature deaths each year.

Way forward-

India's carbon-neutrality would be hampered by the approval for Adani to mine and export coal to India.

To avoid dangerous climate change and increased risks to human health, it is required to keep the global temperature rise within 2°C. This means Australian and Indian coal reserves need to stay under the ground.

46. Why India should adopt Net-Zero Emission Target?

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Synopsis: India should adopt the net-zero emission target like others. It will lead to simultaneous attainment of net-zero emission and economic growth. Some temporary challenges may arise, but they can be tackled with robust policy measures.

Background:

- Recently 58 countries have made a commitment to attain net-zero emission by 2050. They currently emit more than 50% of Greenhouse gases (GHGs). So, being a responsible nation, India also needs to adopt a net-zero emission target.

What are Net-zero emissions?

It is a state in which GHGs emitted by a country is balanced by absorption of GHGs using advanced technologies or planting trees.

Why India Need to adopt net-zero emissions?

- IEA (International Energy Agency) findings indicate that the **majority of India's future emissions** are supposed to come from **things that are yet to be made**.
 - This includes transport infrastructure, buildings, industry, etc.
 - Therefore, adopting net-zero emissions will give the country an opportunity to build a cleaner economy.
- However, India did not adopt a net-zero emissions target due to its goals related to economic growth.

How Net-zero emissions can fuel economic growth?

Although, some experts believe that simultaneous attainment of net-zero emissions and economic growth is possible.

- Adoption of clean sources of energy will **reduce the water demand** by thermal power plants. It is expected to reduce from 2.5 billion cubic metres per year(bcm) to less than 1 bcm in 2050.
- Reduction in carbon emissions will result in **reducing pollution** thereby improving the health of the masses.
- It will also **generate 24 million jobs in 15 years** across multiple sectors.
 - For instance, promoting e-vehicles, clean energy, and hydrogen electrolysis can create jobs in the auto manufacturing, electricity, and construction sectors.
 - Electrolysis is the process of using electricity to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

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- Hydrogen gas released in this way can be used as hydrogen fuel.
- Switching to clean fuels will also **reduce the country's crude oil import bill**.

Challenges in adopting Net-zero emission targets:

- At present, nearly 25 % of government revenue comes from the energy sector (including the taxes on fuel). So, phasing out of Fossil fuels will **reduce the government's tax revenue**.
- A **job reduction** might arise in the vehicle maintenance and repair sector.
 - This will happen as e-vehicles contain fewer engine components than a traditional fossil fuel-based vehicle.
 - Similarly, learning new techniques to repair e-vehicles will also need significant time.
- There are **certain issues with new jobs created**. Such as,
 - The new job may not be created in the same place where job losses occurred. For example, A coal-based power plant worker working in coal collection will lose the job.
 - However, the alternative employment created by the adoption of new technologies may remain inaccessible to vulnerable sections (especially women).
 - For example; new jobs might arise in battery fabrication. Coal workers lack expertise in this field.

Way Ahead:

- The **focus should be on greater electrification**. Further, The government has to encourage using hydrogen as a fuel in industries like cement, iron and steel, and chemicals. Further the current coal plants can be **pre-retired** to improve energy efficiency.
- A **carbon tax** can be imposed on the industry to offset the tax revenue loss. The government has to start initially with the amount equivalent to the present Coal Cess. The amount can be increased gradually to Rs. 2500 for per ton emission by 2050.
 - The portion of carbon revenue can be **used for supporting poor households**. Especially for those who are badly hit by the emission reduction strategies.
- The government has to encourage all states and UTs **to make their respective carbon-neutral plan**.
 - The UT of Ladakh and Sikkim state are already planning such a carbon-neutral plan.
 - Further, at the local level cities like Bengaluru and Chennai, the Panchayat of Meenangadi in Wayanad, Kerala also planning such a carbon-neutral plan.
- Apart from strong climate policies, the government has to focus on **strong social policies and local institutions**. This will ensure that the clean energy transition is fair and just.

In conclusion, India needs to adopt net-zero emissions targets. Better policies, strong institutions, and finance will help India to declare freedom from polluting fossil fuels.

47. Recurring Fire accidents in India – Suggestions

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs3: Disaster and Disaster Management.

Synopsis: Recurrent fire accidents in India show the apathy of the government towards public safety.

Background

- Recently, the fire accident in Mumbai hospital (located inside Mumbai's Dreams Mall) resulted in the death of 10 people so far.
- An effective fire safety protocols could have prevented the devastating effect on lives and property.
- The tragedy points towards the failure of the government to make fire safety a systemic compulsory in public buildings.
- It has to be noted that, after a fire in Rajkot last November, the Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance of the incident. It issued directions, to task an officer with fire safety for each COVID-19 hospital.

What needs to be done?

1. **First**, strict measures need to be taken to implement The **National Disaster Management Guidelines of 2016** in Public buildings. For example, the requirement of open space to move patients in an emergency should be strictly implemented.
2. **Second**, the need for periodical assessment of public buildings on safety protocols. **For example**, the quality of infrastructure, specifically electrical installations, ensuring the retrofitting of structures with flame retardant materials, etc.,
3. **Third**, States must create scientifically designed public health facilities that meet the needs of populous cities.