9pm Compilation

July, 2021 (First Week)

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General Studies Paper - 1

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General Studies - 1

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1. <u>The power of an apology</u>

Synopsis: Apologies from governments for past mistakes can help individuals reconcile with the past and enhance bilateral relations.

Introduction

In May, Germany apologised to Namibia for the slaughter of the Herero and Nama people in1904-1908, for the first time calling it a genocide. Around the same day, in Rwanda, French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged his country's part in the Rwandan genocide and expressed hope for forgiveness.

What are the effects of these gestures?

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of these gestures. They have a variety of beneficial effects. Apart from improving relations between the countries involved, leaders' apologies assist people in reconciling with the past, and countries and communities in learning from history and avoiding similar catastrophes.

The conclusion

In today's geopolitics, a feeling of humility is arguably a rare occurrence. From Nicaragua to Myanmar, we are seeing a resurgence of political leaders who are willing to go to any length to maintain power. In this climate, apologetic voices become even more valuable, as they aid us in reconciling with unfortunate occurrences in the past and removing historical stains.

- To be a pillar of the multipolar world in this sense, one must be more than a military power, an industrial and/or financial powerhouse, and/or a global investor. Countries that aspire to global leadership should also be capable of moral leadership. This comprises critical self-reflection, humility, compassion, and caring not only for themselves, but also for the world's most vulnerable groups.

Terms to Know:
Herero and Nama People
Komagata Maru Incident

2. <u>Envisioning the post-pandemic smart city</u>

Synopsis:

The pandemic has come as a remarkable opportunity to review the pathway for 'smart cities', and also other towns not on the map. Further, cities should avoid expensive technological solutions and frame their plans in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

Background:

- The government started a journey of urban development in 2015. It was based on the belief that **a select set of cities across the country could be 'transformed' and made smart**.
- After this, 100 smart cities were chosen through a competition among the States. The Centre would **support the chosen projects and others would learn from them.**

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About the smart city:
- Globally, there is no uniform definition of smart cities, and the most common features of such urban spaces are derived from concepts in the global north.
- **They generally have a technocentric vision**, with sensors everywhere, smart homes, and high levels of connectivity.
- There is massive and ubiquitous data collection by various agencies and a continuous flow of useful information to citizens.

Performance of Cities during the Pandemic:
- The pandemic interrupted the lives of cities – confining people indoors for long periods. It disrupted economic processes and paralyzed vibrant urban life.
- As the pandemic peaked, thousands had to desperately look for emergency medical care in scarce health facilities. At the same time, the flashy smart developments built for leisure and shopping remained shuttered.
- The **Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs)** functioned as "war rooms" for COVID-19. They helped cities in fighting the pandemic through information dissemination, improving communication, predictive analysis, and supporting effective management.
  - However, people still struggled for information and access to medical care in several states and the national capital during the second wave of the pandemic. This shows the poor efficiency of these centers.

Building a post-pandemic smart city:
- It should **not solely focus on developing urban infrastructure**. Over the years, Smart Cities Mission projects converged with other infrastructure programmes such as AMRUT and the PM Awas Yojana (Urban).
  - The latest official count shows that 5,924 Mission projects worth Rs. 1,78,500 crore have been tendered but still, robust resilience has not been developed.
- It should be developed in **consonance with the ecology and environment**. This would mean a freeze on the diversion of wetlands and commons for infrastructure development.
  - It would also involve the creation of new urban gardens and water bodies, and doing a climate change audit for every piece of infrastructure planned.
- Cities should **apportion the available road space for bicycles**, which exemplifies safe travel. It would also complement expanded public transport when commuters return in big numbers to bus and urban rail.
  - Further, focusing on Pedestrianization, biking, and building harmonious opportunities for street vending will address the criticism that smart city planning ignores the informality that marks India's urban spaces.
- There should be **democratic planning** to ensure every section of society has a voice in the process and not merely those who have digital access.
- Cities should invest in **essential modernization**. This includes deployment of multiple sensors to gauge air, noise, and water pollution, provision of electronic delivery of citizen services, intelligent public transport, etc.
  - For citizens, real-time control rooms can be meaningful only if they can have a good public dashboard of information.
  - In COVID-19 times, this means access to health alerts, vaccinations, hospital beds, and topical advice, rounded off with data on pollution, rainfall, congestion, and so on.

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Terms to Know:
- Smart city Mission,
- Smart City Awards

3. Why a grassroots mass movement is necessary to fight dowry

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 1 – Indian Society

Relevance: Dowry practice is still prevalent in Indian Society, despite taking different measures.

Synopsis:

Country needs a multipronged approach to tackle the inhuman practice of dowry. Mere enactment of a legislative framework or enhancement of literacy levels is not enough to control this problem.

Background:
- Last week, a young woman named Vismaya Nair was found dead in her house. It is alleged that excessive demand for dowry by her husband resulted in the death of the woman.
- Vismaya is just one more in the endless statistics of horrifying dowry deaths in India. They are so common that if a young woman dies with burns or other injuries within seven years of marriage, it is deemed to be a dowry death.

Challenges in Tackling Dowry:
- **First**, the **system of patriarchy is deeply entrenched** in our homes. The bride is looked upon as a commodity and handed over as a package. She is bundled up with gold, a car, and other luxury items.
- **Second**, the **legislative framework i.e the Dowry Prohibition Act hasn't been able to place an effective barrier** on the practice of dowry.
- **Third**, giving a **sufficient degree of education is also not enough to control this menace.** For instance, Kerala has near-total literacy and yet weddings continue to be lavish, with brides' parents often taking loans and nearly bankrupting themselves.
- **Fourth**, the larger context for the practice of dowry is the **poor presence of women in the workforce**, and their consequent lack of financial independence.

Multipronged Approach to tackle dowry:
- **Accepting dowry should be made a social stigma.** Superstars should be encouraged to endorse this along with their soap and soft drink endorsements.
  - Women should flatly refuse to give dowry as part of marriage and men should refuse to take it in any form. People should go for simple, inexpensive, dowry-less marriages rather than Bollywood-style extravaganzas.
- Women should be **supported to take up jobs and have independent incomes**. This means we should expand childcare and safe public transport, reduce discrimination in hiring, and create affirming workplace environments. At home, men should share domestic work and care responsibilities.
- States should look at **gender-disaggregated data across the life cycle** – birth, early childhood, education, nutrition, livelihood, access to healthcare, etc. This will help in addressing gender inequality.
  - Further boys and girls should be systematically sensitized on the core value of gender equality by their teachers and mentors.

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- As a larger initiative, **laws, and regulations should be screened to remove gender bias**, replacing words like "manpower" with gender-neutral equivalents.
- Further, there should be **zero tolerance towards domestic violence**. Families should store evidence and report at once, instead of sending battered women back fearing "what society will say".
  - Support systems must be expanded to help victims with shelter, counseling, legal follow up, and livelihood support when required.

Way Ahead:
- To become a mass movement, this approach must start at the grassroots level.
- The **power of marriage registration should be decentralised to panchayat secretaries** as we know that marriage registration protects women's rights.
- Further **women's self-help groups** should be systematically oriented about violence against women and the existence of local support systems.
  - By actively spreading awareness and displaying solidarity, women's self-help groups can play a powerful role in building a more equal society.

Terms To Know:
Dowry Prohibition Act

4. Is digitisation opening up a can of worms?

Source: Livemint
Syllabus: Salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times
Relevance: Digitalizing heritage assets is an important topic in art and culture.
Synopsis: Digitalizing heritage assets need a careful assessment.

In recent years, cultural institutions across the country have advocated for digitisation and the pandemic has only accelerated this. For instance,

- **The National Mission for Manuscripts' project**: The pilot was set up in 2006. It aims to create a digital resource that spans themes, aesthetics, scripts, and illustrations.
- **Advantages of Digitalizing heritage assets** :
- Many heritage custodians see digitisation projects as a fantastic **means to organise data, enable accessibility** and also meaningfully **build a repository** that provides accountability and security.
- Digital technology, will open up incredible frontiers of sharing and collaboration. For example, collaboration with Indian and Foreign historians without coming together physically.

Challenges in digitalizing heritage assets:
- **The records might create an accessibility barrier**: For instance, in the National Mission for Manuscripts project, the **catalogues are mostly available in English and Hindi**, creating an accessibility barrier. Some state archives have digitised thousands of portfolios and now rely on hard drives. That makes them **inaccessible without meaningful interfaces.**
- Digitisation throws up **ethical, legal, and copyright complexities** all institutions must think about as they continue to fulfill their mandate. For example, **Indigenous communities sometimes have no say** in how the digital material originating from their material culture is used. For instance,
  - In 2018 Sarr-Savoy report commissioned by the French President highlighted this. The report recommends the complete digitisation of material that belongs to African ethnic communities and suggests making it available as part of an open-access digital initiative.

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- o But the decision should perhaps come from the communities themselves since many artefacts might be sacred or sensitive.
  - o Additionally, each time an artefact is digitised, a new digital asset is created. This will create a violation of copyrights.
- Digitisation is also **high-cost**, and, typically, **digitisation priorities are decided by funders and their interests or biases**. So **many marginalised histories don't find space in digital archives**. For instance,

Suggestions to improve Digitalizing heritage assets:
- **To protect copyrights**: Copyright laws in all countries are territorial, so custodians must consider that these "digital" assets are imbued with the copyright and intellectual property rights applicable in the country of digitisation.
- A slow-digitisation option with moderated debates will benefit individuals, institutions and nations alike.
- It might be best to **proceed with balanced moral and ethical interests** when digitising heritage. Such as **adopting an inclusive and participatory approach** that at the very least attempts to protect and inform all stakeholders.

5. Ecological urbanism – Key to sustainable urbanization
Source: TOI
Syllabus: GS1 – urbanization, GS3 – Environment
Relevance: Importance of urban ecology to sustainable urbanization
Synopsis: Achieving a sustainable model for urbanization needs to factor-in the urban ecology. Some new insights into the issue.
Introduction
Ecology and urbanism are two conflicting subjects because usually we see urbanization to be in conflict with urban ecology. It is precisely this dichotomy that ecological urbanism tends to eliminate. We often separate the environmental from the social and the mental or subjective side of things. This is a mistake as we need a more holistic approach.

What is ecological urbanism?
Ecological urbanism is an approach to urban planning which puts nature at the centre of the design process in order to create better places and provide solutions to the multiple social, economic and environmental challenges facing the 21st Century city.
How is urban ecology linked to a city's sustainability?
Many of the problems associated with increased temperatures and extreme weather events now are the result of not following an ecological approach. By using concepts like ecological urbanism, we can hopefully address problems cities are facing today.

Link between nature and the urban ecology
Yes, multiple studies show green spaces are essential for our physical and emotional well-being.
In the pandemic, we've all felt how important it is to go for walks, smell the flowers, breathe fresh air and listen to birds. This is why it is so important to **integrate more open spaces in our cities.** But it isn't always possible to do so in dense urban areas, so **we need creative ways** to bring nature in with window boxes, green walls and more smells, colors and textures around us.
Global examples
There are cities which have designed urban ecology well in recent times. India too can learn from these cities and incorporate the ecological urbanism to design ecologically sustainable urban environments.

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- **Brazil's Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro**, the largest favela or slum in Brazil. Landscape architecture is a good example. For them, this meant gardens for the elite. So, they engage in small ecological micro-interventions, like taking care of a lemon tree.
- **Sacred groves in Nigeria, West Africa,** especially the Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo, one of the last left in Yorubaland. Formerly, every settlement there had a sacred grove but most were lost to urban development. Sacred groves support wildlife and human communities and are home to orishas, deities or energies of nature in West African traditional religion. Today, the Osun Sacred Grove is protected as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site.** We need to learn more about such spaces, which were designed landscapes holding important environmental logic — and nature's joy of life.

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General

Studies

Paper - 2

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General Studies - 2

1. <u>**On the margins with full equality still out of reach**</u>
Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States
Tags: LGBTQ+, Navtej Singh Johar case, Naz Foundation case, GS paper 2
Relevance: The LGBTQ+ community is one of the most vulnerable sections in India and mainstreaming them is a great challenge.
Synopsis: The global LGBTQ+ community marched ahead after the 1970s. But in India, it was not the case. Despite the Constitution focus on liberation, the marginalised segments such as LGBTQ+ did not receive enough attention so far.

What is section 377?
• Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalized homosexuality. This Section was introduced in 1861 during the British rule in India, modeled on the Buggery Act of 1533.
• **Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. vs Union of India (2018) case**: The Supreme Court ruled that the criminalization of consensual homosexual sex, under Section 377 between adults was **unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible, and manifestly arbitrary.**
• However, Section 377 remains in force for sex with minors, non-consensual sexual acts, and bestiality.

Other significant judgements on Section 377:
• **Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi [2009]** is a landmark Indian case of the Delhi High Court. It held that treating consensual homosexual sex between adults as a crime is a violation of fundamental rights.
• As a result of the ruling, homosexual acts between consenting adults are no longer illegal in India.
• The court also held that **Section 377 offended the guarantee of equality enshrined in Article 14** of the Constitution, because it creates an unreasonable classification and targets homosexuals as a class
• **Suresh Kumar Koushal vs. Naz Foundation [2013]:** In this case, the SC overturned the previous judgment by Delhi HC 2009 and reinstated Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.
• **Outcomes after these Judgement:**
• These judgments have provided a launch pad for the LGBTQ+ jurisprudence and queer liberation movement in India.
• Despite the judgments of the Supreme Court, full equality is still not provided to the LGBTQ+ community.
• The Union of India has recently **opposed any move to accord legal sanction to same-sex marriages**. The government states that, **decriminalisation** of Section 377 **does not automatically translate into a fundamental right** for same sex couples to marry.

Why India needs to allow Same Sex marriages?
As of 2021, same-sex marriage is legally performed and recognised in 29 countries. Indian society and the state should synchronise themselves with changing trends. For example, the United Kingdom passed the "<u>Alan Turing law</u>" in 2017 to outlaw homosexual acts.

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Suggestions:

- Eliminating the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ community through the mass media and the official channels. Further, School and university students too should be sensitised about the diversity of sexuality.
- **Amending Article 15**: Article 15 secures the citizens from every sort of discrimination by the state, on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them. India should amend the article to include **discrimination based on sexual orientation**.
- In May 1996, South Africa became the first country to constitutionally prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Read more:

- Marriage Rights of the LGBTQIA+ community
- Madras High Court guidelines for mainstreaming LGBTIQA+ community
- Need to ban the Conversion therapy of the LGBTQIA+ community

2. Another Shade of Grey
Source – The Hindu
Syllabus: GS2- International Institutions
Tags: FATF, Pakistan, grey list, blacklist, terror financing, money laundering
Relevance: Significance of FATF's latest action for India
Synopsis: Pakistan has been retained on Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list.
Pakistan will stay on the FATF grey list for now. Pakistan missed the mark by one crucial action point out of 27 – being judged deficient in prosecuting the senior leadership of UN-proscribed terror groups.
Read more – Pakistan to remain on FATF greylist -ForumIAS Blog

FATF and Pakistan
Many in the Pakistan are protesting this decision. They are of the view that their reforms to terror financing laws have enabled the prosecution of more than 30 UN-proscribed leaders and their associates, for terror financing.
However, it is unclear that how many leaders are serving jail time, the convictions and prison terms. It has previously happened that Pakistani authorities arrest leaders on charges under international pressure, and subsequently release them.
Thus, FATF has cleared that Pakistan must complete the prosecution of all proscribed leaders of groups including the LeT, JeM, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban.
Furthermore, FATF has included six more items to the list.

What does it mean for India?
Pakistan's continuance on this list is a news of relief for India. It is because India is still awaiting true justice delivered to leaders of groups such as the LeT and JeM for attacks, including Mumbai 26/11, Parliament (2001) Pathankot and Pulwama, and not just terror financing.
However, the processes of FATF must be checked for overreach also. It is because India's Mutual Evaluation Report is also pending due to the pandemic.
FATF has announced a new focus on "extreme right-wing terrorism (ERW)". With this factor along with Pakistan's lobby will result in technical scrutiny of India's political aspects.

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Terms to Know:
- FATF
- UNSC 1267 Committee
- Ethnically or Racially Motivated Terrorism Financing

3. Police reforms are not enough
Source: TOI, Livemint
Syllabus: GS2 – Governance
Tags: police reform, police violence, human rights, justice, custodial deaths, custodial violence
Relevance: Police reforms in India are pending for a long time.
Synopsis: Police reforms are much needed in India. In this respect, India can learn a lot from the George Floyd trial.
- Killing of George Floyd was in news a few months back. In the USA it sparked mass protests culminating in the conviction of the police officer involved in the case.

Why an erosion of public trust in the police is not unusual?
As per The Status of Policing in India Report for 2018, police personnel has inherent biases.
- **Bias against minorities**: Police personnel has an inherent bias against minorities and marginalized sections of the society in the sense that it is believed that these sections are prone to violence. More so than other sections of the society.
- **Bias towards violent justice**: A section of police personnel felt that it was better to put dangerous criminals to death than on trial.
  Thus, an erosion of trust in the police is, thus, highly probable in the country.

What can India learn from the George Floyd trial?
- **Demanding accountability**: The first must be in demanding accountability. Police brutality in India isn't rare. An analysis of NCRB data reveals that about 7 in 10 custodial deaths in the past decade were attributed to illness or suicide, which underscores the possibility of custodial torture
- **Eradicating systemic biases**: Second, we need to acknowledge and eradicate systemic bias within the police force. In India, acknowledgments of racial bias have never been forthcoming. NCRB data on incarcerated populations in India shows that minorities are disproportionately jailed, indicating the existence of bias against these communities within the criminal justice system
- **Realistic cinematic portrayal of cops**: The role played by popular cinema in glamourizing the no-nonsense, tough-on-crime cop has certainly played a role in normalizing police violence. it encourages lynch-mob vigilantism as justice.
- **Improving judicial sensitivity**: Judicial response to custodial violence has also been erratic, and despite the Supreme Court's guidelines in **DK Basu's case**, the rate of conviction in custodial violence or death claims continues to be low.
- **Parliamentary discussions and debates**: Law-making organ of the state needs to have a consistent and meaningful discussion on the issue of police atrocities within civil society.
- **Public outrage**: Equally important is the public outrage over police brutality or deaths which has been largely missing from India. It is in sharp contrast with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Citizen's participation can galvanize different societal elements coming together to correct injustices.
- **Police Complaint authorities**: Supreme Court, in the ***Prakash Singh & Ors versus Union of India & Ors case***, had directed each State and Union Territory

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to constitute Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs) at the State and district levels with immediate effect. This needs to be followed in letter and spirit. Many states have yet to establish these bodies while those that have been established are without any penal powers.

4. Fear, myths, and lack of awareness leads to Vaccine hesitancy

Source- The Business Standard

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues related to health.

Tags: vaccine hesitancy, vaccine access, vaccination

Relevance: elimination of vaccine hesitancy is critical for COVID vaccination success in India

Synopsis – What is the cause of vaccine hesitancy in India and what needs to be done to address this issue.

Introduction-

According to community survey across 299 Indian districts, 17-18 % of eligible people are reluctant to take the vaccine. Furthermore, 11% are concerned about the effectiveness of currently existing vaccines.

Causes of vaccine hesitancy

- **Lack of credible information about vaccines and their after effects**-Many people are afraid to take vaccines due to concerns over safety, efficacy, and possible side effects of the vaccine. People are not aware of common and temporary side effect of the vaccine-like fever and body ache after the injection.
- **Religious propaganda** that the vaccine may contain animal-derived, microbes, chemicals, and products, which is forbidden by religious laws.
- **Lack of access to vaccine** – long gap between the doses also injects vaccine hesitancy, while some forgetting to get the second shot.
- **Inconvenience factor** – people hesitate to participate in the vaccination drive due to the difficulties that they must face in accessing the vaccine.
- **Disinformation, especially on social media** – Social-media has seen a rising number of self-proclaimed experts who have been making unsubstantiated claims.
- **For example-** Some social media posts advise people to avoid alcohol for 60 days following vaccination, which adds to their reluctance.

What needs to be done to address vaccine hesitancy?

- **Make public aware-** Government need to run awareness workshops for community leaders and social mobilisers at the block levels to dispel any doubts about vaccine.
- Use **Social Media Platforms** to counter any disinformation regarding vaccines and spread awareness.
- Social media platform should make sure that users only get to see the credible, science-based information about the vaccines.
- There is **need to identify vaccine hesitant areas/group/community** based on prior experience of vaccine programmes like polio.
- **Engage local influencers to persuade people**– The influential person or celebrities should come forward to dispel doubts leading to Vaccine hesitancy.
- **Ensure credible information-** Vaccine producers must provide scientific and trustworthy information in addition to declaring figures related to efficacy, which only fey understand.
- **Make vaccination a compulsory** condition to join office.

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Way forward-

In the fight against the pandemic, complete vaccination is one of the most important weapons in the arsenal. Therefore, the issue of vaccine hesitancy must be addressed immediately. The Government must take aggressive steps to address the cause behind vaccine hesitancy.

5. The law of sedition is unconstitutional

Source: The Hindu

GS2: Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Relevance: Sedition is important to protect the national interest. On the other hand, misuse of this provision will hamper the Fundamental Rights of individuals.

Synopsis: There is an urgent need to **review the Kedar Nath judgment on sedition law**.

Background:

- In Vinod Dua's case (2021), the Supreme Court has reaffirmed the law of sedition upheld in Kedar Nath Singh (1962).
- The Kedar Nath judgment upheld the constitutional validity of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code.
- The court held that only writings or speeches which incite people to violence against the Government will come within the ambit of sedition.

Why Kedarnath judgment needs a review?

- Firstly, the Supreme Court's view in Kedar Nath is **consistently** being **ignored**.
  - o Citizens of all ages have been charged with sedition for criticizing government authorities.
  - o For instance, the recent **Lakshadweep case.**
- Secondly, section 124A of the IPC clearly **violates Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution. Further Kedarnath judgment opens the **door for misuse** by making it **conditional**.
  - o It says that 'only when the words written or spoken etc. which have the pernicious tendency or intention of creating public disorder' the law steps in.
  - o So, if a policeman thinks that a cartoon has the pernicious tendency to create public disorder, he will arrest that cartoonist.
  - o It is the **policeman and law enforcement machinery** who would decide whether a person's behaviour was seditious.
- Thirdly, section 124 A is **not a reasonable restriction.**
  - o Accused under this section does not get protection under Article 19(2) on the ground of reasonable restriction.
  - o **Sedition as a reasonable restriction** was included in the draft constitution but was deleted during the adoption of the Constitution.
- Fourth, this law was **enacted by the British colonial government** with the sole objective of **suppressing all voices** of Indians.
  - o In the Bangobasi case in 1891, **Bal Gangadhar Tilak's case** in 1897 and 1908, and **Mahatma Gandhi's case** in 1922, it was held that a **mere comment** has the potential to cause disaffection towards the government.
  - o Justice Arthur Strachey in Tilak's case had made it absolutely clear that even attempts to cause disaffection would attract the provision.
  - o These arguments **do not stand valid after the adoption of the constitution**.
  - o However, SC adopted the reasoning given by the **Federal Court in Niharendu Dutta Majumdar vs Emperor in 1942.** In which it was held that

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the gist of the offense of sedition is a public disorder or a reasonable apprehension of public disorder.

- Lastly, this law should be removed for being unconstitutional, but the SC judgment has softened it.

o The Supreme Court emphasized the **words 'public order' used in Article 19(2)** and this made the offense of sedition constitutionally valid.

People have the right to criticize the government, which is part and parcel of democracy. Hence, the law of sedition which penalizes people for criticizing the government should be declared unconstitutional.

Terms to know

What is sedition?

6. Keeping alive conversations about AIDS

Source: The Hindu

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

Relevance: India needs to look for each and every way to control the pandemic. Among that, lessons from chronic diseases might provide some valuable suggestions.

Synopsis: To handle the COVID-19 pandemic, we can learn from the lessons of chronic diseases like HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a rare fungal infection of the lungs in five persons on June 5, 1981. The world learned for the first time about the Human Immunodeficiency Virus(HIV) infection in patients with a weakened immune system.

- India became one of the most successful countries in the world in combating the HIV/AIDS disease between 1997 and 2010. In 2012, the Centre hailed the achievement of "managing AIDS" as a minor step forward in the long process of combating the disease.
- However, now India is lagging behind the targets. For example;
  o The WHO aimed that 90 percent of persons living with HIV/AIDS will be on antiretroviral medication, by 2020. Now, at least five years have been added to the deadline.
- Former Union Health Secretary and Director of the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), J.V.R. Prasada Rao, is concerned that the country's hard-won successes may be jeopardised.

Why India is lagging behind in controlling HIV/AIDS?

The HIV **infection diagnosis rate dropped from 60% in 2010 to 23% in 2019.** the mortality rate doubled, and new cases spiked five times more during the period.

This happened because the campaign to educate and empower the vulnerable communities, like MSM (men who have sex with men), IDUs (Injecting Drug Users), migrant and sex workers, and truck drivers, is not happening.

Suggestions

- **Firstly,** strong political leadership, financial support, advocacy, and activism are crucial in the successful handling of the movement. **A long-term view of AIDS beyond the health sector and the socio-economic impacts of the epidemic should be considered.**
- **Secondly,** To contain AIDS, a **multi-sectoral and multi-pronged strategy** is required.

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- o **Supporting science-driven approaches**, good quality data, and empirical evidence; and consolidating guidelines are necessary to combat any medical crises.
  - o **The nationalised AIDS treatment plan** is a perfect example of how early detection, diagnosis, and treatment saved many lives.
- **Thirdly, the NACP's experience in dealing with HIV needs to be tapped into**. The existing workforce in 21,000 Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTC) is well-equipped. They can help in the early detection of infections, reduce vulnerability, and link people with care and treatment services.
- **Fourthly, the government needs to change its priorities and re-energise the ICTCs** to uphold the right to treatment and the dignity of individuals affected by diseases. Using the available tools in the healthcare system is the best way to mainstream health crises.

Terms To Know:
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus(HIV)
- Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTC)

7. What India can learn from China's foreign Policy
Source: Indian Express
Gs2: India and its Neighborhood- Relations
Relevance: China always aligns its national ambitions with its foreign policy for better results. So, aligning India's national ambition will improve India's foreign relations.
Synopsis: China's foreign policy was always directed towards its national ambitions

Background
- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be celebrating its 100th anniversary this week.
- The CCP has been commendable in making China the world's second-largest economy, and a technological powerhouse.
- Though India had much in common with China a hundred years ago, it is not the same now.
- China's GDP is five times larger than that of India, and Beijing spends three times more than Delhi on defense.
- In this regard, India can learn from China on building flexible global coalitions, adapting quickly to changing internal needs and external circumstances.

China's foreign policy was always in line with its national ambitions
1st phase: China was against Japanese occupation more than Imperialism
- China's world view was different from India's. India wanted to build a "spiritual Asia", different from the "material West". Whereas the young communists demanded rapid modernisation.
- Also, a divergence of opinion emerged between India and China towards defeating Imperialism.
- The two sides issued a joint declaration underlining their shared interest in defeating imperialism and jointly building post-colonial order in Asia and the world.
- However, during the second world war, the two national movements could not find common ground. For China, fighting Japanese occupation was the priority and for India, it was about ousting British colonialism from India.

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2nd Phase: China departed from Russia to pursue its national ambitions

- India wanted to befriend China and oppose US efforts to isolate Beijing. But the bilateral disputes over territory and Tibet drove them to war.
- On the geopolitical front, communist China moved away from communist Russia and moved closer to the US. To restore regional balance, India moved closer to Russia.

3rd phase: China focused on rebuilding the Chinese economy by committing to peace

- Instead of pursuing revolutionary goals abroad, Deng Xiaoping pursued peace to facilitate domestic development.
- This had helped in establishing peace on the Sino-Indian border, normalising political relations, and expanding economic cooperation.
- But the situation began to change in the late 2000s, especially after the 2008 financial crisis. Also, China's increasing economic power got steadily translated into military power and diplomatic influence was steadily rising.

4th Phase: China is determined to rewrite the regional order under Xi Jinping

- The fourth phase in Chinese international policies, marked by assertiveness on territorial disputes with neighbours.
- China under Xi Jinping is ready to offer an alternative to the US-led global order. It wants to deliver a superior form of capitalism, better ways of domestic political governance, and a new model of international relations centred around Chinese power.
- Currently, India finds itself squeezed by Chinese power on multiple fronts i.e., Territorial, maritime, and from regional to international institutions.
- The Chinese face-off at eastern Ladakh reflects the more difficult phase in India-China relations.

What India can learn?

China did not let its internationalism come in the way of its national ambition. For example,

- Mao broke from the Russian-led Comintern to initiate the Chinese revolution.
- Similarly, Deng broke from the communist ideology to accelerate Chinese economic transformation in partnership with the US and the West.

For any nation, large or small, internationalism can't be an end in itself. It is a critical instrument in strengthening national unity, security, and prosperity.

8. False notions of gender roles should be corrected early

Source: click here

Syllabus: GS2, Women Empowerment

Relevance: Dowry is one of the biggest hurdles to women's empowerment.

Synopsis: In order to encourage gender equality-related transformation in society, it is necessary to intervene at the school level.

Introduction

Recently a 24-year-old woman who was believed of being harassed for dowry, died tragically recently. It reveals a lot about the situation of women's empowerment in our culture.

- **7,115 deaths were recorded in dowry-related cases in 2019. It** is nearly 20 women every day, according to the records of India's National Crime Records Bureau.
- **In 2019, the Indian Penal Code recorded over 340,000 cases of crime against women.**

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What are the gender norms that women have to deal with?

- **Problems faced by women**: Women's education does not provide them much influence over their life choices. **Women's decision-making capacity is limited** by their lack of access to economic resources. Education and riches do not guarantee a sense of self-worth.
  - o Social conventions around marital customs and gender roles can only be challenged by the change from inside society.
- **Age for marriage**: In India, marriage by a specific age is regarded as a universal requirement. According to the 2018-19 National Sample Survey, one in two females (and one in three men) in urban India and three in four girls (and two in four men) in **rural India married before the age of 25.**
- **Dowry:** A research project found that married **women workers with school-aged daughters were saving in gold for their daughters' marriages.** While yet-to-be-married women workers were saving for their own dowry.
- **Domestic violence: Spousal violence was experienced by 27% of women in paid labor** and 20% of women who did not work.
- **Divorce rates:** In India, one out of every four married women is subjected to marital abuse, while the proportion of divorced or **separated women among ever-married women was less than 1% in 2018-19.** Divorce is frowned upon and considered a betrayal of family honour.

How can social norms be changed?

- **Firstly, promoting successful women CEOs and sportswomen as role models could change people's perceptions.** It would also be beneficial if **male role models openly challenged gender stereotypes.**
- **Secondly,** "To instil a culture of gender equality, Kerala's school **textbooks will be rewritten and inspected to screen out terms and phrases demeaning women**," tweeted Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.
  - o **Steps should be taken to transform our schools and institutions** into places where gender equality and equal rights are valued.
- **Thirdly, early-stage action to modify gender views among boys and girls** would be the single most important policy undertaking. This is a strategy that should be implemented in all Indian states as soon as possible.

9. Apt judicial reminder in era of over-criminalisation
Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: GS 2 – Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions
Relevance: Delhi High Court judgment has highlighted the scope of UAPA.
Synopsis:
The criminal justice system needs to take note of the Delhi High Court's recent judgment on 'defining terrorism'. The judgment can help in preventing the misuse of anti-terrorism laws like UAPA.

Background:

- The Delhi High Court granted bail to Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Tanha on 15th June 2021. They were imprisoned for over a year in connection with the riots in North-east Delhi and the anti-CAA-NRC protests under the UAPA act.
- The 133-page bail order brings into limelight another instance of misuse of anti-terrorism laws like Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

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Misuse of Laws:
- In the period 2015-2019, as many as 7,840 persons were arrested under the Draconian UAPA but only 155 were convicted by the trial courts.

Factors behind misuse:
- **First**, the prosecution had unjustifiably invoked provisions of TADA 'with **an oblique motive of depriving** the accused persons from getting bail.
- **Second**, there is **no universal definition of the term 'terrorism'** either in India or at the international level.
  - **Section 15 of UAPA merely defines a terrorist act** in extremely wide and vague words. It states that any act with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security, or sovereignty of India or with intent to strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people is a terrorist act.
- **Third**, there is vagueness in many provisions of UAPA that gives a scope for misuse.
  - For instance, UAPA states that a terrorist act can be committed by using bombs, dynamite or other explosive substances or inflammable substances or by **any other means** of whatever nature to cause or likely to cause death or injuries. Here the meaning of any other means is not clear.

About the Delhi High Court's recent judgement:
- The court held that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests cannot be covered by the expression 'any other means' under UAPA.
  - A general word used in any statute after specific words should be interpreted in the context of specific words.
- In **Yaqoob Abdul Razzak Memon (2013)**, the Supreme Court said that terrorist acts can range from threats to actual assassinations, kidnappings, airline hijacking, car bombs, explosions, use of chemical, biological, nuclear weapons etc.
  - Since the three student activists did not do any of these things, the Delhi HC could not be convinced of their involvement in any terrorist act.
- Through an authoritative and enlightened bail order entirely based on the apex court judgments, the court reminded the Delhi police of the true meaning of a terrorist act.

Way Ahead:
- One can hope that our police will be far more cautious in charging people under black laws such as UAPA, the NSA, etc. after the recent Delhi HC judgement.
- Further, we must understand that no anti-terror law can really end the problem of terrorism. Our focus should be on creating a truly just, egalitarian and non-oppressive society. This would be far more effective in combating terrorism.

10. The trouble with rankings
Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to education
Relevance: The article highlights the issues in the ranking system of universities
Synopsis:
Today the universities are judged based on different ranking lists, however, there are certain flaws in them. The rankings are biased against the small institutions and place excessive focus on quantity rather than quality. Hence, there is a need to redefine the idea of a university within the framework of an ever-changing social perspective.

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Background:
- The concept of university has evolved since the ancient times of Nalanda and Taxila. Earlier they were considered as a place for the communication and circulation of thought by means of personal intercourse.
- This notion was altered with the Humboldtian principle of Germany. It called for a fusion of teaching and research in the work of the individual scholar.
    - As per this, the objective was to advance knowledge by original and critical investigation, not just to transmit the legacy of the past or to teach skills.
    - The 'Humboldtian' university became a model for Europe, and subsequently for the research universities of the U.S.

Evolution of Universities in India:
- In India, the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857 with an aim to promote Advancement of Learning.
- However the immediate interest was to produce graduates to fill up the salaried positions emerging in the wake of colonial rule.
- Today the universities are judged based on different ranking lists such as Times Higher Education and Quacquarelli Symonds. The rank is derived based on weighted averages of scores for several performance-related criteria.

Issues with Ranking:
- **First**, there is **no uniformity in assignment of weightage** to a particular criteria. The criteria and their weights differ from one ranking organisation to another. Change in weights may produce a different list of rankings.
- **Second**, the criteria **are biased against the small institutions**. The criteria constitute research income from industry; ratio of international to domestic staff and students; research papers, citations; etc. Small institutions automatically trail on such issues.
- **Third**, it gives **very high weightage to academic peer review**, where opinions of academics get importance. This means too much emphasis on perception rather than tangible outcomes.
- Last year, seven leading IITs boycotted one such ranking, saying they are not satisfied with the transparency of the process.
- **Fourth**, greater focus is placed on **quantity of research rather than quality** of research. Academics are expected to keep churning out papers.

Way Ahead:
- The concept of a university should not be the same everywhere. Universities at Chicago, Harvard and Oxford might make the achievements of their students or professors as the yardstick of excellence.
    - However, there are many universities which cater to the local people as the only spectacles of higher education and the prism of enlightenment.
    - Their importance is no less than the 'elite' universities. Hence, a university should be judged within its social perspective.
- Thus, there is a need to redefine the idea of a university within the framework of an ever-changing social perspective and need.

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11. The future of learning in India is ed-tech

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Relevance: How technology can help India achieve its long-term policy objective of access to education?

Synopsis: Pandemic has shown us that traditional model of education delivery is not sufficient. Integration of technology with education offers a resilient alternative.

Why India is well positioned to integrate technology with education?

India is well-poised to take this leap forward because of the following factors:

- increasing access to tech-based infrastructure and electricity
- affordable internet connectivity
- Digital India and the Ministry of Education's initiatives, including the Digital Infrastructure for School Education (DIKSHA), open-source learning platform and UDISE+ — one of the largest education management information systems in the world.

Designing an ed-tech policy architecture

A comprehensive ed-tech policy architecture must focus on four key elements —

- **Access**: providing access to learning, especially to disadvantaged groups
- **Enabling processes of teaching**, learning, and evaluation
- **Teaching**: facilitating teacher training and continuous professional development
- **Governance**: Improving governance systems including planning, management, and monitoring processes.

Problems with using technology in education

- First, technology is a tool, and **not a panacea**.
- Second, **technology must be in service of the learning model**. There is a danger in providing digital infrastructure without a plan on how it's to be deployed or what teaching-learning approaches it would support.
- Third, **technology cannot substitute schools or replace teachers**. It's not "teachers versus technology"; the solution is in "teachers and technology". In fact, tech solutions are impactful only when embraced and effectively leveraged by teachers.
- Fourthly, **digital divide is a big problem** esp. for students living in slums and remote villages, with poorly-educated parents further strained by the lockdown.
- Several examples of grassroots innovation
- The **Hamara Vidhyalaya** in Namsai district, **Arunachal Pradesh**, is fostering tech-based performance assessments
- **Assam's online career guidance portal** is strengthening school-to-work and higher-education transition for students in grades 9 to 12
- **Samarth in Gujarat** is facilitating the online professional development of lakhs of teachers in collaboration with IIM-Ahmedabad
- **Jharkhand's DigiSATH** is spearheading behaviour change by establishing stronger parent-teacher-student linkages
- **Himachal Pradesh's HarGhar Pathshala** is providing digital education for children with special needs; Uttarakhand's community radio is promoting early reading through byte-size broadcasts

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- **Madhya Pradesh's DigiLEP** is delivering content for learning enhancement through a well-structured mechanism with over 50,000 WhatsApp groups covering all clusters and secondary schools
- **Kerala's Aksharavriksham initiative** is focusing on digital "edutainment" to support learning and skill development via games and activities.
- Suggestion/Measures
- Action needs to be taken on multiple fronts.
- **In the immediate term:** There must be a mechanism to thoroughly map the ed-tech landscape, especially their scale, reach, and impact. The focus should be on access, equity, infrastructure, governance, and quality-related outcomes and challenges for teachers and students.
- **In the short to medium-term:** The policy formulation and planning process must strive to enable convergence across schemes (education, skills, digital governance, and finance), foster integration of solutions through public-private partnerships, factor in voices of all stakeholders, and bolster cooperative federalism across all levels of government. Lessons can be learnt from the Aspirational Districts Programme on tech-enabled monitoring and implementation
- **In the long term:** A repository of the best-in-class technology solutions, good practices and lessons from successful implementation must be curated. The NITI Aayog's India Knowledge Hub and the Ministry of Education's DIKSHA and ShaGun platforms can facilitate and amplify such learning.
- **Addressing digital divide**: Special attention must be paid to address the digital divide at two levels — **access** and **skills to effectively use technology**.
- India's new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is responsive to the need of integrating technolgy with education. It envisions the establishment of an autonomous body, the **National Education Technology Forum (NETF)**, to spearhead efforts towards deployment and use of technology. This needs to be implemented in letter and spirit.

Conclusion

Integrating ed-tech with India's education sector has a transformative potential for India as it will not only maximize student learning but also help India in realizing a universal access to education.

12. How much can a four-year-old really learn from a smartphone?
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Relevance: Addressing issues arising out of COVID's impact on primary education
Synopsis: Alleviating the impact of COVID on India's primary education sector involves bringing back the dropouts, addressing the learning deficit and an increased requirement of manpower.
How can India resolve COVID-induced problems in primary education?

- **Bringing back the dropouts**: Whenever schools reopen, to bring back the dropouts. The Uttar Pradesh government proposes to track all students disappearing between Classes VIII and IX. The exercise needs extending to all classes in all states, especially the very young, who might otherwise be consigned to illiteracy for life.
    - Among migrant workers' children, 46.2% were out of school by July 2020. The Education Ministry has a three-page guideline for their rehabilitation that calls for a database of children who have left the state. Such guidelines

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are impractical without detailed planning, transfer of funds and active coordination with the states.

- **Addressing the learning deficit**: The second task is to plug the huge learning deficit. It calls for detailed yet open-ended planning, adjustable to the evolving COVID scenario. That planning needs to start right now.
- **Requirement of manpower**: These measures, current and future, demand much more manpower than the regular corps of teachers can provide. Given the scale and urgency of the need, it might be undertaken in mission mode.
- **Increased spending under the SAKSHAM scheme** is desperately needed to arrest the decline in nutrition and child growth evident for years and grossly aggravated by the pandemic.

Also read: **Blended model of learning – Explained in detail**

How have states adapted their offline instruction model?

The states, have adopted two major strategies for offline instruction.

- **Teaching material is distributed and worksheets collected for review**. Parents might play a part, but success depends on the teacher's monitoring.
- **Lockdown schools**: Here small groups of children meet their teacher at a place other than their school. Karnataka has formalized the arrangement. Such endeavors work best in villages, which have more open spaces and better community support; but they reach only a minority of children.

13. Mendez principle to replace torture and coercive interrogation

Source: The Hindu

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance

Relevance: Mendez anti-torture principles can be used to reduce the use of torture in obtaining evidence.

Synopsis: Without addressing the structural constraints that encourage the persistence of torture, Institutionalising Mendez anti-torture principles in India will be difficult.

Background

- Instilling fear through torture, either physical or psychological to obtain the truth, is still seen as an effective interrogation technique by security forces. However, such techniques violate moral and legal standards.
- In the Indian context, too, enough evidence indicates that the belief in the utility of torture is embedded in institutional culture and accommodated by law.
- In spite of the prohibition of and safeguards against "third-degree methods", they are normalised in police practice.
    - For instance, the **National Human Rights Commission** has said that "custodial violence and torture is so rampant in this country that it has become almost routine".
    - Even, a 2019 survey of about 12,000 police personnel across India, published by Common Cause and Lokniti confirmed the same. For instance, Three out of four personnel felt that it is justified for the police to be violent towards "criminals".
- However, there needs to be a fundamental shift in police thinking.

Why coercive interrogations still exist?

- One, Structural constraints encourage the persistence of torture, since it is seen to be effective.
- Two, investigating officers have little scope to develop specialisation in investigative work.

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- Three, inadequate resources, political pressure, and an overburdened legal system compelled them to take matters into their own hands.
- Four, Popular films, and political and public support to illegal police killings as in the Hyderabad 'Disha' case 2019, further legitimise such actions.
- Five, Indian law still allows evidence obtained through torture or coercive methods as admissible.
  - For example, Section 27 of the Indian Evidence Act permits the admissibility of statements before the police if they relate to the recovery of material objects, often called 'recovery evidence'.

Why coercive interrogations are counterproductive?
- **Méndez's Principles** that are based on scientific empirical studies across disciplines (Psychology, criminology, sociology, neuroscience) had established that coercive interrogation is counterproductive.

What are Mendez's principles?
- The 'Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering' is also known as the **'Méndez Principles'**. It reinforces the empirical evidence that torture does not work.
- It was initiated by Mr. Méndez, a former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.
- The principles seek to prevent coercive techniques and torture by introducing a paradigm shift away from "confession" based on information gathering.
- It aims to replace torture and coercive interrogation with "rapport-based" interviews, that would be in line with legal and procedural safeguards.
- It offers practical guidance for non-coercive interrogations; addresses vulnerabilities in custody and provides specific guidance on training, accountability, and implementation.
- 'Méndez Principles' were developed through a comprehensive, expert-driven consultative process.
- It applies to all authorities who have the power to detain and question people, including the police, military, and intelligence.

What is the way forward?
- Need to use scientific techniques of interrogation, such as lie detectors and narco-analysis, to end physical torture.
- However, Jinee Lokaneeta's analysis in The Truth Machines (2020) revealed that the introduction of these techniques, without addressing the existing conditions, has resulted in psychological forms of torture.

Structural constraints, popular culture, and political approval have institutionalised violence and coercion techniques to obtain the truth. Without urgent introspection, Méndez's anti-torture vision will remain distant for India.

14. What CCI has to do with economic opportunity?
Source: LiveMint
Syllabus: GS 2
Synopsis: The CCI wants to monitor monopolistic, restrictive, exploitative, and exclusionary trade practices. It ordered a probe into huge digital corporations like Google, Amazon, and WhatsApp's new privacy policy, as well as sectors like cars.

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What is CCI? Why was it introduced?

India's antitrust regulator, the CCI, was established in 2003. It is governed by the 2002 Competition Act, which aims to provide a stable competitive environment. The competition law safeguards trade from the whims of unjust commercial activities like price-fixing and ensures that fair competition prevails.

- This Act, which focuses on increasing competition and business freedom, **replaced the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act of 1969,** which was aimed at preventing monopolies and restricting enterprises with assets of over 100 crores from expanding. It is similar to antitrust legislation in nations such as the United States.
- **The CCI Act was created with the goal of stimulating market competition**, preserving consumer interests, and ensuring trade freedom while keeping the country's economic progress in mind. The prior system of regulating firms with assets worth more than 25 crores (relaxed to 100 crore in1985) was unscientific before the MRTP Act of 1969.

What is the role of CCI in promoting equitable opportunity across the economy?

- **The Competition Act aims** to prevent huge businesses from entering into anti-competitive agreements and abusing their dominating position. It governs mergers and acquisitions that may have an anti-competitive effect. It prohibits price-fixing, market allocation, predatory pricing, and tied selling, as well as other horizontal and vertical constraints.
- **The economy can reduce its deadweight loss**, which is a cost caused by market inefficiencies, by boosting competition and supporting free trade.
- **It aims to defend customers' interests** in terms of price, quality, and availability of a diverse range of products by limiting the scope for monopoly advantage exploitation.
- **This will also contribute to India's tale of being a desirable investment destination** for both global and domestic investors by fostering a competitive and efficient market system. CCI is known to have intervened in situations of cement and steel cartelization.

Conclusion

- Google, Amazon, and Flipkart have been accused of abusing their dominating positions in the
- smart TV industry and of evading foreign investment e-commerce restrictions. In the information technology sector, 11 and five companies were issued notices for breaking regulations in 2018-19 and 2019-20, respectively.
- **The scope of anti-competitive agreements should not be restricted** to horizontal and vertical limitations, according to a government-appointed commission in 2019. It also stated that high-value deals involving technological corporations may go unnoticed, necessitating a re-examination.

15. Election no guarantee against tyranny, says CJI

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express
Syllabus: GS2 – Polity
Relevance: Points can be used in an essay.
Synopsis: Elections are not a guarantee that the government will not turn tyrannical. A vibrant public discourse, criticism, and protests prove much more effective.

- Chief Justice of India (CJI)'s views on what constitutes a robust and resilient democracy and other equally important issues, like rule of law.

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- Key points:

<u>On the issue of independence of the judiciary</u>

The judiciary cannot be controlled, directly or indirectly, by the legislature or the executive, or else the rule of law would cease to exist.

- At the same time, judges **should not be influenced by public opinion** either, which usually gets amplified through social media platforms. Media trials, therefore, cannot be a guiding factor in deciding cases.
- However, this doesn't mean that judges and the judiciary need to completely disassociate from what is going on because at the end of the day they have to decide questions that pertain to social issues.

<u>On rule of law</u>

CJI elucidated four principles of the rule of law.

Clear and accessible laws: The **first principle** of rule of law states that **laws must be clear and accessible**. When laws are expected to be obeyed, the people at least ought to know what the laws are. There cannot, therefore, be secretive laws, as laws are for society.

Equality before law: The **second principle** relates to the idea of "equality before the law". Laws are to be applied on an equal basis in a non-arbitrary fashion. An important aspect of "equality before the law" is having equal "**access to justice**".

Right to participate in the creation and refinement of laws: Members of the society have the right to participate in the creation and refinement of laws that regulate their behaviors. The very essence of a democracy is that its citizenry has a role to play, whether directly or indirectly, in the laws that govern them. In India, it is done through elections.

Strong and independent judiciary: The last principle of rule of law enshrines the principle that the judiciary is the primary organ that is tasked with ensuring that the laws which are enacted are in line with the Constitution. This is one of the main functions of the judiciary, that of judicial review of laws. The Supreme Court has held this function to be a part of the basic structure of the Constitution

- In the end, CJI quoted, Maha Kavi Gurajada Appa Rao, a great poet, and reformist of the 19th / 20th Century. He said: "Desamamte Matti Kadoi, Desamamte Manushuloi". Gurajada gave a universal definition to the concept of nation.
  - He said, "a nation is not merely a territory. A nation is essentially its people. Only when its people progress, the Nation progresses".
- <u>On a strong democracy</u>
- The mere right to change the ruler, once every few years, by itself need not be a guarantee against tyranny.
- Elections, day-to-day political discourses, criticisms, and voicing of protests are **integral to the democratic process.**

Also Read: Does India have a rule of law?

16. <u>Small doses</u>

Source: <u>The Hindu</u>

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

Relevance: The government relief package focus on reviving the Indian Economy.

Synopsis: The first relief package for the second COVID-19 wave falls short of expectations

Few major highlights of relief package:

Rs 1.1 lakh crore loan guarantee scheme for COVID affected sectors

Additional fund for <u>Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme</u>

Extension of <u>Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana</u> (PMGKAY) – Free food grains from May to November 2021 and Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana till 31st March 2022

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Financial support to more than 11,000 Registered Tourists/ Guides/ Travel and Tourism Stakeholders and Free one-month Tourist Visa to first 5 lakh tourists

Advantages of relief measures:
Health projects in the hinterland: Additional spending to ramp up paediatric healthcare, with guarantees for ₹50,000 crore low-interest loans for health projects, will improve health care facilities in the hinterland. It is also critical to cope with future pandemic waves.
Challenges with the relief measures:
- **Free visas**: Free visas are a good idea, but are unlikely to gain results till India has a firmer grip on the pandemic by providing vaccines for all, including for those under 18.
- Weak demand is a bigger concern for the industry this year as high inflation. But the direct stimulus to demand is not enough for industries in the government relief measures.
- High fuel prices are not taken care of. If the government lowered the fuel process, then this would dampen inflation, empower RBI to lend greater support to grow, and leave a little more money in people's hands to spend.

Read more:
- Govt. unveils Rs 6.28 lakh cr stimulus post-second COVID wave
- Analysis of government relief package- Explained, pointwise

17. Significance of India and France's successive presidencies at UN Security Council
Source: Click Here
Relevance: India and France can achieve their goals by cooperating in UN Security Council.
Syllabus: GS 2 – Important International Institutions, agencies and fora – their Structure, Mandate
Synopsis:
The India-France bilateral strategic partnership would act as a multilateral force for good in the UN security council. Their successive presidencies in July and August will help in reforming and expanding the council.

Background:
- France and India will be at the forefront of UN endeavors as they chair the Security Council in July and August respectively.
    - The council bears the primary responsibility for international peace and security.
- The trust between the two countries and result-oriented diplomatic practice will help forge consensus and deliver concrete outcomes at the Security Council.

Significance of Successive presidencies:
- **First**, it would promote **reformed multilateralism** across the world. Defending the rules-based, multilateral system against the many crises of the 21st century is our common priority of both countries.
    - The crisis includes terrorism, climate change, pandemics, etc.
- **Second**, it would help in the expansion of the security council thereby making it **more representative**.
    - France favours the expansion of the council in both categories of membership, permanent and non-permanent. It supports the candidatures

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of India and the three **other G4 members** (Germany, Japan, Brazil) for permanent seats.

- o Further, it also desires an enhanced presence of **Africa** among the permanent members as well as the non-permanent members. Thus, an expanded council could have up to 25 members.

- **Third**, it can also help in **passing a resolution on responsible use of the veto** by the permanent members.
    - o France had earlier proposed a collective and voluntary agreement among the current permanent members of the Security Council.
    - o It states that members would refrain from using the veto in case of mass atrocities, such as crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes on a large scale. Currently, 105 countries (excluding India) support the resolution.

- **Fourth**, it offers a **welcome opportunity to work proactively over key issues on the Security Council agenda**. This includes:
    - o Deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in conflict areas,
    - o Rigorous implementation of arms embargoes,
    - o Strengthening of the humanitarian space as well as the modernization of peacekeeping missions.

18. Location no bar

Source – The Indian Express

Relevance: One Nation One Ration Card system would reduce the vulnerability of migrants.

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

Synopsis – The Supreme Court order government to ensure quick and effective rollout of One Nation One Ration Card system.

Introduction –

The Supreme Court set a July 31 deadline for states to adopt the One Nation One Ration Card system and the Centre government to build a nationwide database of unorganized workers. The court also chastised the Centre for taking so long to build such a database, calling it unpardonable. The court's verdict came in a suo motu case filed on May 26 of last year, which concerned the welfare of migrant workers affected by the Covid-19

One Nation One ration Card System [ONORC]-

Under the scheme, the beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act can access the subsidized food grains from any of the fair price shops across the country, not necessarily where the ration card is registered. To date, 32 states and union territories have joined the ONORC, bringing the total number of NFSA beneficiaries to 69 million.

However, appropriate implementation will only occur once the following considerations have been taken into account.

- **Migrant portal –** Setting up a portal to register migrant and unorganized workers, as they will get the benefit of the welfare programs only once they have been registered.
- **Stock management**– Food grain allocations across states will need to be more flexible in order to account for seasonal fluctuation in migration numbers.
    - o To achieve successful inventory and stock management, the information technology infrastructure must be strong.

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- **Regular updation and a dynamic database system are needed** so that migrant workers should be able to avail their entitlement irrespective of where they reside in the country.
- **Use of ePOS [Electronic Point of Sale] at all the fair price shops** as ONORC system identifies a beneficiary through biometric authentication on ePos devices at fair price shops.
- It is necessary to give facilities for linking ration cards with Aadhar cards throughout India in order to tackle the issue of ration card updation of household member data.

Way forward-
The government should implement ONORC as soon as possible and create a dynamic database for real-time information on migration across the country so that so that poor citizens and migrant workers get ration at the place of their work or where their ration cards are not registered.

19. How police can serve citizens better
Source: Indian Express
Relevance: Modernisation of police is a long pending demand and also a need of the hour.
GS2: Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.
Synopsis: There is a need to enhance the efficiency of Police using technology.
Introduction:
- Even though the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) earmarked about Rs 20,000 crore for the modernisation of police (2017-2020), for schemes such as crime and criminal tracing networks and systems (CCTNS), police wireless and e-prisons, there is a **lack of prioritization of technology.**
- Also, Supreme Court-mandated police reforms of 2006 are not implemented fully in all states.

Implications of inefficient Police:
- Firstly, delays in settlement of criminal, labour and civil disputes.
  - The economic cost is reflected in the **reluctance of foreign companies** to set up manufacturing and commercial ventures in India.
- Secondly, the **social implications** can be seen from the report, "Crime in India 2019", published by the National Crime Records Bureau.
  - As per the report, 25,023 cases of assault on women, 11,966 rape cases and 4,197 "dowry deaths" have been pending trial for five to 10 years.
- **Other issues:**
  - Police leaders do not understand the difficulties that citizens face at the police station level.
  - Citizens fail to hold police accountable for the non-use of technology.

Why is there a need for technology to enhance the efficiency of police?
- **Overburdened police:** Along with prevention and detection of crime and maintenance of law and order, police stations in India undertake numerous daily tasks.
  - for example, providing verifications and no objection certificates of different kinds to citizens. They supply crucial documents too.
  - The Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) had identified 45 such tasks in 2017.

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- **Ease of business**: the procedures are non-transparent and timelines are often blurred which encourages corrupt practices.
  - o For instance, in Maharashtra, where a former home minister and top police officers, including former Mumbai's former commissioner, are facing allegations of extortion.
- **Time-bound delivery of services:** The India Justice Report (IJR) 2020 has studied the e-portals of various state police organisations that provide citizen-centric services.
  - o Punjab, Himachal, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh seem to be doing well.
  - o But, despite the push for digitisation, no state offers complete services.
  - o Users face numerous problems of accessibility to these services.
- **Ease of use:** the language of e-portals needs attention.
  - o IPJ 2020 found that "most sites were available in English or Hindi, but not necessarily in the state language".

Way forward:
- **E-governance**: it can reduce the burden of police officers.
  - o User-friendly citizens portals for obtaining passports and driving licences have been game-changers.
- **Improvement in investigation and prosecution**: all criminal trials must be completed within a year.
- **More Investment:** The IJR 2020 audit confirms that states need to invest more resources to upgrade their e-portals for providing basic services to the citizens.
- **States can take up a crucial service delivery mechanisms**.
  - o a large number of young technology enthusiastic police officers can lead cost-effective initiatives.
  - o for instance, in Pune Police Commissionerate, an additional commissioner, an engineer from BITS Pilani, initiated **"technology for citizens"**

To transform India maximum information and services through portals have to be provided within specified timelines. An efficient and well-oiled criminal justice system not only helps citizens but helps a country politically, socially and economically.

20. What pushing delimitation does to talks on peace and statehood in J&K

Source: Indian Express
Relevance: Present developments will be helpful in achieving peace in Jammu and Kashmir.
GS2: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure
Synopsis: The Centre is making serious efforts to restore democracy in J&K but there is no clarity over statehood for J & K.

Background:
The Gupkar alliance is in news since 2020, Home Minister tweeted, the Congress and the Gupkar Gang want to take J&K back to the era of terror and turmoil. Also, he stated that the Gupkar Gang is going global. They want foreign forces to intervene in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
However, now this alliance is part of a dialogue. Gupkar alliance is an electoral alliance between the several regional political parties in Jammu and Kashmir. On the other hand, Congress has insisted that statehood must first be restored and elections to the assembly held thereafter.

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Why Gupkar alliance is part of the peace process now?
- Firstly, many experts say that the government has been nudged into reaching out since guns are silent along the Indo-Pak border.
- Secondly, the **government's back-channel diplomacy** is part of a larger game plan.
  - To bringing back democracy in J&K.
  - To send a message to the world that the abrogation of Article 370 was not intended to throttle democracy but to ensure peace in a region.
- Thirdly, the government is trying to send a message that it is **willing to have a dialogue** even with those who were outcasted since the abrogation of Article 370.

What could be the possible suggestion by for J & K?
- First, **Delhi model of an assembly** with almost absolute powers in the hands of a lieutenant-governor.
  - However, it is unlikely that the leaders of the Gupkar Alliance would want to be subjected to the near-absolute will of the lieutenant governor.
  - And, when elections are held and all parties in the Gupkar Alliance participate in that process, the outcome will be an uneasy relationship between the lieutenant governor and the assembly.
- Second, **to delimit constituencies and hold elections** to the assembly.
  - Based on the **census of 2011**, this exercise will re-determine not just the boundaries of the constituencies but also the number of seats in the assembly, which are likely to increase pursuant to delimitation.
  - This exercise will generate some hostility.
  - While the rest of India will wait till 2026 for delimitation, this exercise in J&K will be regarded as an exception.

What are the key challenges that lie ahead?
- **Delimitation can sour the dialogue process:** If the delimitation process takes place in a non-transparent manner to ensure that the ruling party's political presence has greater chances of success, the **confidence sought to be built will be eroded**.
- **No clarity on statehood:** The Prime Minister's statement that the issue of statehood will be considered later without any timeline is an indication of the pitfalls.
  - Successful election and participation of Gupkar alliance will legitimize the restoration of democratic processes in J&K.
- However, it is highly unlikely that statehood will be restored any time soon.
  That is why the road for statehood is not easy. Since the people of India were largely in favour of the abrogation of Article 370. Hence, The Supreme Court too is not likely to set aside the abrogation.

21. Explained: 'Union' or 'central' government?
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 2
Relevance: Understanding of subtle differences between often used terms is what will make your preparation meaningful and worthy. You can use this knowledge in essay and in your GS answers too.
Synopsis: In Tamil Nadu, a controversy erupted recently over the new DMK government referring to the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the 'union government' (*ondriya arasu*) instead of 'central government'(*madhiya arasu*).

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Rationale given by Tamil Nadu govt

As per the Tamil Nadu govt, the word *ondriyam* (union) stands for the principles of federalism.

- The word signifies federal principles underlined in the Constitution which describes India as a "union of states".

Also Read: **Union govt has a unifying effect**

Centre vs Union – Does it matter?

The question in the 'Union or Centre' debate is about the **nature of the Indian state.** While it often said what's in a name but usage of the word 'Union' does have a kind of unifying effect, while the word 'Centre' does have centralistic overtones. Also we need to consider the following ground realities:

- **Nature of Indian state is federal with a unitary bias**: In the Government of India Act, 1935, provinces had more power and the Viceroy had only the minimum. But the Indian constitution changed this equation, and the federal government was made more powerful. Presently, the actual power is vested with the Union of India in all respects. So, the debate over using Centre or Union is of no consequence.
- **Language issue**: There's a language issue too. More than 70 years after Independence, there is no authorized Tamil translation of the Constitution of India. Hence, Tamil Nadu has seen consistent efforts to present words in a better form of Tamil, especially after the DMK came to power in the mid-1960s.
- What is the constitutional position on the issue?
- Under Article 1 of our, Constitution India is clearly described as a Union of States. Article 1 mentions that India, that is Bharat, shall be a **Union of States.**
- While submitting the draft Constitution in 1948, Dr B R Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee, had said that the committee had used the world 'Union' because **(a)** the Indian federation was not the result of an agreement by the units, and **(b)** the component units had no freedom to secede from the federation.

22. Two big gaps in our vaccination programme that need attention

Source: Live Mint

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

Synopsis: India's Capacity to vaccinate has been constrained by many factors. India needs to address those factors to improve its fight against the Pandemic.

Background

India's vaccination programme has been hampered by a short supply of vaccines and this has dominated the public discourse.

However, there are two other equally important matters that have been given insufficient attention

- First, the capacity of our health system to vaccinate people.
- Second, public demand for vaccination, including the issue of vaccine hesitancy.

Issues in increasing Vaccination capacity

One, given the vaccine shortage, state governments responsible for vaccination have been preoccupied with procuring doses rather than focusing on their capacity to vaccinate on-demand

Two, the matter of capacity is currently plagued by oversimplification and lack of nuance.

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Issues that determine our effective capacity.

- **First, the capacity of India's Subcentres.**
- The public health system's facility closest to villages is called a 'subcentre'. It is an extension of a PHC, or primary health centre.
- Each subcentre is supposed to serve a population of 5,000. India has over 150,000 subcentres.
- Though PHC is the first point of in-patient care and access to a doctor for most people, subcentres hold the key to any vaccination programme. Because
- One, they are closest to habitations and designed to be staffed with people trained to give intramuscular injections, among other things.
- Two, the capacity can only be determined by details at the sub-centre level. That is the actual presence of trained personnel, refrigeration facilities at the PHC and sufficiency of ice boxes for distribution to subcentres, etc.,
- **Second,** the data entry requirements for Covid are a very much needed task. However, poor internet connectivity across the country increases the cycle time for data entry. They deprive health personnel of significant time, reducing capacity.
- **Third,** Problems with the basic operating model in many places. India follows a 'people-to-vaccine model'. where people are expected to come to Subcentres. An alternate model, a 'vaccine-to-people model', where the subcentre staff go to villages or mohallas and hold vaccination camps can increase capacity.
- **Fourth**, Public demand for vaccination needs to be increased by nudging people to give up 'Vaccine hesitancy'.

23. Delhi's lame duck Assembly

Source: The Hindu>
Syllabus: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure
Relevance: The GNCTD Act impact the functions of the Delhi Legislative Assembly and Federalism.
The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD)(Amendment) Act, 2021 is criticised as a retrograde law. The bulk of criticism has been focused on the reduced autonomy of the elected government and the consequent vesting of several crucial powers in the unelected Lieutenant Governor.
However, what deserves equal condemnation is the Act's assault on the functioning of Delhi's Legislative Assembly. It also has been sought to be reduced to a lame duck.

About the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act:
The GNCTD Act was enacted in 1992, the Legislative Assembly was given the power to regulate its own procedure, as well as the conduct of its business. The Act provided a unique constitutional position to Delhi. It is neither a full state nor a centrally governed Union Territory.

Challenges with the recent amendment:
- **No more functional independence**: The amendment made the standards of procedure and conduct of the business of Delhi Assembly firmly tethered to that of the Lok Sabha. Thus, **depriving Delhi's elected MLAs of** power to conduct effective business in Assembly.
- The Amendment **prohibits the Assembly from making any rule.** It enables either itself or its committees to consider any issue concerned with "**the day-to-day administration of the capital**" or "**conduct inquiries in relation to administrative decisions**".

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- o The most insidious impact of this shall be the exercise of free speech in the Assembly and its committees.
- o It prohibits the elected Assembly by law from discussing matters concerning the day-to-day administration of its own territory.
- **Impact on committees:**
  - o In general, the committees perform away from the glare of cameras, **conduct Inquiries, examine documents and evidence**, report relevant issues. The deliberations and inputs of committees often pave the way for intelligent legislative action.
  - o The Amendment made it impossible for committees to perform their functions. As the **Act hamper the power to conduct inquiries in relation to the administrative decisions**.
  - o So, the **critical legislative functions** that have rendered the Delhi Assembly a 'legislature' will now remain in name only.

Read more:
- "The GNCTD Amendment Act" does not alter the functions of Delhi Assembly – Centre
- The NCT of Delhi Act, 2021 Enhances Cooperative Federalism
- GNCT of Delhi Amendment Bill 2021 and Supreme Court's Verdict

24. All WHO-approved jabs must be recognised for travel: UN

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: GS – 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests
Relevance: Vaccination is essential for global economic recovery.

The World Health Organization recently said that **any COVID-19 vaccine it has authorised for emergency use** should be recognised by countries as they open up their borders to inoculated travelers.

The move could force Western countries to broaden their acceptance of two apparently less effective Chinese vaccines. These vaccines are licensed by the UN health agency, but most European and North American countries have not.

About the European Union decision:
- The European Union aims to restore travel across Europe. So, the EU earlier said that it would only recognise people as vaccinated if they had received shots licensed by the **European Medicines Agency**.
  - o Although it is up to individual countries to let in travellers who have received other vaccines, including Russia's Sputnik V.
  - o The EU drug regulator is currently considering licensing China's Sinovac vaccine, but there is no timeline on a decision.

What was the reason behind the recent WHO announcement?
The WHO has issued this statement due to the following problems in the decision of North America and the EU.
- The decision by North America and the EU will **undermine the confidence in life-saving vaccines** that have already been shown to be safe and effective.
  - o In addition to vaccines by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna Inc., AstraZeneca, and Johnson & Johnson, the WHO has approved the two Chinese jabs, made by Sinovac and Sinopharm.

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- **Create a two-tier system**: The decision of the EU will only protect a section of people. Further, it will **widen the global vaccine divide and exacerbate the inequities** in vaccine distribution.
- It would **negatively impact the growth of economies** that are already suffering the most due to COVID-19.

Few general differences between the Chinese and Western vaccines:
- The two Chinese shots are "inactivated" vaccines, made with killed coronavirus. Many developing countries have used Chinese-made vaccines.
- The Western-made shots are made with newer technologies that instead target the "spike" protein that coats the surface of the coronavirus. Western countries have largely relied on vaccines made in the U.S. and Europe, such as Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca

Read more:
- **Challenges in Vaccine Procurement in India – Explained, Pointwise**

Terms to know:
- **mRNA vaccines:** It is a new type of vaccine to protect against infectious diseases. It does not use the conventional model to produce an immune response. mRNA vaccine carries the molecular instructions to make the protein in the body through a synthetic RNA of the virus. The host body uses this to produce the viral protein that is recognized and thereby making the body mount an immune response against the disease.
- **Adeno Virus vaccines:** In this type, a modified version of adenovirus is used. The virus can enter human cells but not replicate inside. A gene for the coronavirus vaccine was added into the adenovirus DNA, allowing the vaccine to target the spike proteins that SARS-CoV-2 uses to enter human cells.
- **Inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine:** In this type, an inactivated live virus is used to create an immune response against the disease.

25. Compassion & caution
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS-2 – Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure
Relevance: Recently, SC directed the government to release compensation for victims of Covid-19.
Synopsis: Why the Supreme Courts' directive to provide **Exgratia compensation to** the families of those who have lost their lives during the Pandemic is not a rational idea.

Background
- Recently, the Supreme Court directed the National Disaster Management Authority to frame guidelines for compensation to the next of kin of families of those who died during the Pandemic.

Why the Supreme Courts' directive is not a rational one?
- One, The SC's directive of ex-gratia payment, though in sync with the Act, does not do justice to its own reading of the pandemic's peculiarities.
  - The 2005 law's definition of a disaster as "a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes" indicates that it was not framed to cater to the demands of a countrywide public health crisis.

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- Two, a Pandemic is not a one-time event, unlike other Disasters. The Pandemic is set to stay for a longer time. Learning to live with Covid-19 using vaccination and precaution is the key.
- Three, the use of the disaster management law is an ill-advised move because it could set a precedent in a country beset with several other health crises in addition to Covid-19.
- Fourth, such relief measures are best organized by local governments. For instance, some states have announced steps for those who have lost their sole breadwinner or children who have been orphaned. A one-check solution as directed by the court cannot be the most equitable one.

26. Rule of Law vs Rule by Law
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS2 – Indian Polity
Relevance: Points can be used in the essay paper and in your answers for GS Mains.
Synopsis: Chief Justice of India (CJI)'s views on what is meant by the term 'law' and how safeguarding constitutionalism is a shared responsibility.

What is meant by 'law'?
- Law, in most general sense, is a **tool of social control** that is backed by the sovereign. But such a definition of law makes it a **double-edged sword**. It can be used not only to render justice but it can also be used to justify oppression.
- A law cannot really be classified as a "law" unless it imbibes within itself the ideals of **justice** and **equity**.
- An "unjust law" might not have the same moral legitimacy as a "just law". But it might still command the obedience of some sections of the society to the detriment of others.

Rule by law vs Rule of law
The British colonial power used the law as a tool of political repression, enforcing it unequally on the parties, with a different set of rules for the British and for the Indians. It was famous for "Rule by Law", rather than "Rule of Law", as it aimed at controlling the Indian subjects.
- Thus, rule by law indicates that decisions are forced upon a citizenry while rule of law means a just application of the law for everybody, keeping in mind that the law doesn't go against basic precepts of humanity.

Also Read: **What is meant by Rule of law? – CJI's views**

Safeguarding constitutionalism – a shared burden
The importance of the judiciary shouldn't blind us to the fact that the responsibility of safeguarding constitutionalism lies not just with the courts. All the three organs of the state, i.e., the executive, legislature, and the judiciary, are equal repositories of constitutional trust.
- The role of the judiciary and scope of judicial action is limited, as it only pertains to facts placed before it.
- This limitation calls for other organs to assume the responsibilities of upholding constitutional values and ensuring justice in the first place, with the judiciary acting as an important check.

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What is Constitutionalism?
- It is an idea that calls for **limitations or restraints** on the powers available to the government.
- Constitutionalism recognizes the **need for a government with powers** but at the same time insists that **limitations** (checks and balances) be placed on those powers because unlimited power may lead to an **authoritarian, oppressive,** government i.e., arbitrary rule, which jeopardizes the freedoms of the people.
- Only when the Constitution of a country seeks to **decentralize power** instead of concentrating it at one point, and also imposes other restraints and limitations thereon, does a country have not the only constitution but also constitutionalism.

27. The country needs a framework for a universal social security net
Source: Live Mint
Syllabus: Gs2 – Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.
Relevance: Social protection schemes protect the vulnerable sections of society. Exclusion from them increases the vulnerability.
Synopsis: Despite multiple laws and numerous judicial orders, a majority of unorganized-sector workers are excluded from schemes meant to protect them.

Background
- Recently, India's Supreme Court passed several orders on a suo moto writ petition on the misery of migrant labourers.
- The Court ordered the time-bound implementation of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONOR) scheme by 31 July 2021.
- The court had also ordered an update of the list of beneficiaries under the NFSA Act.
- Further, it has highlighted in detail that the problem is not the absence of legislation, but the way our schemes are being implemented.

What are the challenges in the implementation of social protection schemes?
- **First, ONOR the flagship scheme of the government is faced with operationalization problems**. For example, the failure of biometric identification, the absence of e-Point of Sale machines, and the ambiguity in entitlement across states.
  - o This has resulted in the exclusion of beneficiaries and hardship for those exercising their entitlement under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
- **Second, exclusion errors under NFSA.**
  - o Currently, the beneficiaries are decided based on population estimates of 2011 and need to take into account India's increase in population.
  - o Based on Census 2011, the total number of eligible beneficiaries should be 813.5 million.
  - o However, actual beneficiaries stood at 805.5 million in May 2017, hat is 20 million less than the eligible count even by the Census 2011 estimates.
  - o Further, using population projections for 2021 suggests that around 100 million beneficiaries have been excluded.
- **Three, large number of people being denied NFSA rations as there's no mechanism to identify beneficiaries.**
  - o The existing list has largely been derived from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) survey conducted during 2011-12.
  - o While this survey is a better source than the earlier Below Poverty Line (BPL) census of 2002, its quality varies across regions.

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o It is generally more robust in rural areas, but unreliable in urban areas.
o For instance, its methodology of beneficiary identification in urban areas is ambiguous and has large errors of exclusion.
- **Fourth, exclusion errors due to the absence of updated survey data.**
    o NFSA's original design required the SECC to be updated at regular intervals with full-scale surveys every five years.
    o But given the government's track record on statistical data and surveys, there is little likelihood of this happening.

Way forward: Universalize NFSA benefits for the next year.
- The manner in which various legislated provisions and schemes are implemented tends to exclude a significant section of India's population.
- Hence, there is a need for laws on social protection that are universal and accessible to every worker, irrespective of place of residence or work.
- Such a framework for universal social protection should not just comprise a set of legislations, but also have the requisite flexibility and political will to be of aid to every citizen of the country at all times.

28. Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate framework deal
Source: TOI, The HinduBusinessline
Syllabus: Economy

What is the news?
In a historic agreement, announced in Paris under the aegis of OECD, 130 countries (out of the 139 involved in talks), including India, have endorsed the **OECD/G20 Inclusive**

Framework Tax Deal.
- Once implemented, it is expected to prevent globally operating companies from shifting to low tax regions to secure extended profits.
- The G7 had already agreed on a **minimum tax rate** of at least 15%, in June 2021. The present deal has both elements of the agreement forged by the G7 in June. However, there are some special rules for certain sectors and companies added to it.

Countries which didn't sign the deal
A total of 130 countries have endorsed the deal. All major economies have signed up including many noted tax havens such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands.
- The nine countries that did not sign were the low-tax EU members Ireland, Estonia and Hungary as well as Peru, Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Kenya.

Key elements of the tax Deal
The proposed solution consists of two components:
- Pillar one, which is about **reallocation of an additional share of profit** to the market jurisdictions
- Pillar two consisting of **minimum tax** and subject to tax rules.
- What are the new tax rules?
- The new **minimum tax rate of at least 15%** would apply to companies with turnover above a 750-million-euro ($889-million) threshold, with only the **shipping industry** exempted.

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- Companies considered in scope would be multinationals with global turnover **above 20 billion euros** and a **pre-tax profit margin above 10%**, with the turnover threshold possibly coming down to 10 billion euros after seven years following a review.
- The minimum corporate tax does not require countries to set their rates at the agreed floor, but gives other countries the right to apply a **top-up levy** to the minimum on companies' income coming from a country that has a lower rate.
  - o **Illustration**: Country A has a corporate tax rate (CTR) of **20%**, Country B has a CTR of **11%** and Global minimum corporate tax (GMCT) rate is **15%**. There is a Company X that is headquartered in Country A, but reports its income in Country B in order to save tax. Now with GMCT in place, country A can legally impose an additional top-up levy of **4%** on Company X.
- Extractive industries and regulated financial services are to be excluded from the rules on where multinationals are taxed
- The deal resolves another issue by ensuring that **Amazon.com Inc.** will be subject to tax in local jurisdictions,

Impact
- **Curb tax avoidance**: Deal, after implementation, would curtail tax avoidance by making multinational companies pay an effective rate of "at least 15%" and give smaller countries more tax revenue from foreign firms.
- **Discourage profit shifting**: With a global minimum tax in place, multinational corporations will no longer be able to avoid paying their fair share by hiding profits in lower-tax jurisdictions.
- **Prevent countries from becoming tax havens**: This would also discourage countries from lowering tax rates to very low levels, in order to attract business. Now, they would have to compete on other factors like ease of doing business, regulatory system, etc.

What happens now?
The final deal is expected to be reached by October when the G20 leaders meet in Rome next week. Implementation of the deal is expected to start in 2023.
Also Read: **Global Minimum Corporate Tax Rate – Explained**

What is India's position?
India is in favor of a solution based on a consensus. Also, the solution should be simple to implement and simple to comply with. At the same time, the solution should result in the allocation of meaningful and sustainable revenue to market jurisdictions, particularly for developing and emerging economies.

Terms to know:
OECD

29. In centenary backdrop, this is no hand of peace
Source: The Hindu
GS2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests
Relevance: There were many reasons behind China's unprovoked misadventure in Galwan valley.
Synopsis: China is celebrating the **100th anniversary of the foundation of the Communist Party of China (CPC),** but an atmosphere of unpredictability still prevails.

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Background:
- Memories of the bloodiest clash in recent decades that occurred in the **Galwan** are still vivid in India's memory.
- After some progress in talks over troop disengagement in the vicinity of Pangong Tso Lake and the Kailash ranges, matters have since reached a stalemate.
- Meanwhile, China is reportedly raising new militia units comprising local Tibetan youth, to be deployed in Eastern Ladakh.
- China's misadventure in Ladakh exposed certain shortfalls with regard to the mechanization of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

However, blame for such miscalculations is being attributed to Mr. Xi as he has concentrated power in his hands.

Why could be the possible reason for the rise in misadventure from China's side?
- Firstly, in past also China acted in a similar erratic manner.
  - In the late 1950s and 1960s China faced the worst famines due to the misadventure of the **Great Leap Forward Movement.** It put **Mao** Tse Tung/Mao Zedong in a difficult situation.
  - Rather than accepting his mistake, he embarked on his campaign to attack India.
  - Mao's actions were intended to divert attention and to counter those who were critical of Mao's autocratic attitude within CPC.
  - Another instance of this kind **is Deng Xiaoping's** behaviour following the Tiananmen Square movement in the 1980s.
- Secondly, China's recent behaviour is due to **growing inner-party criticism** of Mr. Xi's policies and actions.
  - For instance, The Ladakh adventure was a misguided attempt by Mr. Xi to demonstrate to his opponents within the CPC that he is well and truly in command.
  - The **CPC is a monolith entity,** however, deep fissures exist within the party.
- Thirdly, the **accumulation of problems does produce in closed societies** (such as China) a 'pressure cooker' syndrome, where the safety valve is often in the hands of the leadership.
  - However, the extent of inner-party tensions is little known to the world outside, given the opacity of Chinese society.
- Fourth, the Chinese president is a **leader in a hurry.**
  - He is seen as Mao's clone; he seeks to achieve the same kind of dominance over the CPC as the latter.
  - He has attempted to accelerate the pace at which China expects to overtake the U.S. as the world's number one superpower, which, however, seems to be stalling for a variety of reasons.
  - Also, the Chinese leadership is concerned as the world is seemingly tilting towards India at this juncture, regarding it as more sophisticated, diplomatically, and more flexible compared to China.
- Lastly, apart from this, several of Mr. Xi's other ideas have run into difficulties.
  - His plans to remake the **global order** on terms favourable to the CPC seem to have gone awry.
  - The Chinese economy is showing signs of slowing down.
  - Xi had been betting on technological prowess and economic heft to achieve the kind of geo-political transformation, but this is clearly not happening at present.

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Hence, India should expect, and prepare for more clashes with many more provocations coming from China. Also, before any reset in relations, an answer needs to be found out as why without any provocation China attacked Indian soldiers.

30. Unjust green
Source: The Hindu
Gs2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.
Relevance: After Vaccination, countries are opening up their economies. Countries will adopt policies which may impact India's interest.
Synopsis: The vaccine passport issue has been in news recently due to Discrimination against vaccines of few countries.

Background
- Recently the European Union have decided to enforce a "Green Pass" to allow travel within the EU.
- Under Green Pass regulation, only people who have taken vaccines acknowledged by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) guidelines are allowed to travel in EU countries.
- The vaccines included under the European Medicines Agency (EMA) guidelines are Comirnaty, Vaccine Janssen, Spikevax and Vaxzevria.
- Neither of India's vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin, as well as Russia's and China's, would be eligible for the EU Digital COVID Certificate (Green Pass).
- Consequently, India and other African countries are protesting against such irrational Exclusionary principles.

What are the issues associated with this regulation?
- One, India has argued that the entire idea of "vaccine passports" would leave developing nations and the global south at a disadvantage, as they have restricted vaccine access.
- Two, it has been criticised that there is a hint of racism in the action as the EMA list only includes vaccines already used by Europe and North America.
- Three, Covishield the "backbone" of the COVAX alliance's programme. it is made under licensing and certification from AstraZeneca, and cleared by WHO.

Way forward
- As more nations complete their vaccine programmes, they will seek to tighten their border controls. They will use measures like "vaccine passports" and longer quarantines in order to curtail the spread of new variants.
- While it is necessary to battle discriminatory practices, the real imperative remains to vaccinate as many Indians as possible.
- Given that only 4.4% of those eligible have been fully vaccinated, India needs to increase its vaccine capacity

31. Net Loss
Source: The Hindu
Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
Relevance:

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Synopsis:
The UDISE+ shows that many schools have fallen through the net, and they need urgent help to get connected. In this regard, the Centre must take proactive steps to provide internet facilities as an essential service in every school of our country.

Background:
- The 2019-20 data of the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) portal shows a stark digital divide in the country.
- The latest data confirm that **a mere 22% of schools** across the country on average had Internet access, while **government institutions fared much worse at 11%**.
- On the second metric of functional computer access, the national average was 37% and for government schools, 28.5%.
- Beyond the averages, the **range of deficits reflects deep asymmetries**. For instance, 87.84% of Kerala schools and 85.69% in Delhi had an Internet facility, compared to 6.46% in Odisha, 10% in West Bengal, and 8.5% in Bihar.

Need of curbing the digital divide:
- The advent of **hybrid learning** has made it imperative to have computers and a robust internet connection for making the learning process more engaging.
- During 2020-21 (the pandemic year), it became painfully evident that most students had to rely on remote learning.
  - Many students faced the double jeopardy of not possessing their own computing devices at home. Their schools remain in the dark without such facilities.
  - In remote areas, particularly in the Northeast, many had to travel closer to mobile phone towers to access the Internet on shared phones to get their lessons.

Way Ahead:
- COVID-19 has compelled all countries to evaluate their hybrid education models. Schools are encouraged to deliver some lessons virtually and rest in offline mode when the virus threat abates.
- In such a multi-layered process, bringing computers and the Internet to all schools cannot be delayed any longer.
  - The Centre must explore all options, such as the National Broadband Mission, the BSNL network, and other service providers to connect the schools.
  - The upcoming 5G standard with the benefit of high wireless bandwidth may also be able to help bridge the gap quickly.
  - Communities, corporates, and hardware makers can use recycling and donation options for improving connectivity.

Also read:
Blended model of learning – Explained in detail
How much can a four-year-old really learn from a smartphone?

Terms to Know:
- **UDISE+**

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32. India should stand with developing countries

Source: Indian Express

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Relevance: Policies of Western countries are becoming redundant. India should tilt its policies in favor of the global south.

Synopsis:

India should adopt an independent foreign policy and champion the concerns of the global south instead of assimilating in the agenda of the US and other Western powers.

Background:

- India is **constantly improving its closeness and bonding with the US and other western powers**.
- In the recent G7 outreach summit, India agreed on a plan to "Build Back a Better World" (B3W). The plan aims to curtail Chinese influence and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- Further, Indian PM has not been attending Non-Aligned Summit at regular intervals.
    - He attended only a virtual meeting of the NAM Contact Group in 2020. As the government was criticised for human rights violations, abolition of Article 370, use of sedition laws, and so on.

Reason behind growing western tilt:

- There has been a Global structural crisis of capitalism. Since the 1970s, monopoly capital has only produced nominal returns to the advanced economies, and this has been the central concern of the rich and their enabling ecosystems such as the IMF.
- In search of higher returns, investment of capital in the developing world has increased.

Issues associated with growing western tilt:

- Privatisation and exploitation have picked up the pace, and lives and livelihoods have become even more insecure. The crisis is leading to **unemployment, poor wages and working conditions, lack of social security etc**.
    - There has been a push for privatisation of PSUs, sale of national assets, weakening of financial cushions like the RBI and LIC in India. This has curtailed access to public health, education, housing, employment etc.
- The neoliberal model of western countries **has increased economic inequalities** in the last five decades, as quantified by economist Thomas Piketty.
    - Alarming levels of wealth concentration at the top and increasing destitution at the bottom are the hallmarks of neoliberalism.
- Further, such inclination is **straining our relations with neighbours like China and time-tested allies like Russia**.

Way Ahead:

- The closing of the economic gap between China and the US has made the Western world uneasy. It marks the first serious challenge to Western dominance since the disintegration of the USSR. Provocations and trade wars are taking the globe closer to a new Cold War.
- In this backdrop, India should adopt an independent foreign policy and champion the concerns of the global south instead of succumbing to the agenda of US and other Western powers.

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33. Court correction

Source: Indian Express

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

Relevance: Weaponisation of UAPA and similar laws, is a big issue.

Synopsis: The NIA special court order on Akhil Gogoi should serve as a warning against weaponising sedition, anti-terror laws.

Background

- Earlier, Akhil Gogoi, a prominent leader of the anti-CAA movement in Assam, was booked under sedition and UAPA charges
- Akhil Gogoi was also accused of having association with Maoist groups, terrorism, etc.,
- He was held in prison for 19 months and contested the Assam assembly elections from jail.
- The NIA opposed his bail at the Gauhati High Court and the Supreme Court on the ground that he was held under UAPA.
- Recently, The NIA special court that took up the hearing, dismissed each of the charges made against Akhil Gogoi and three others.

Why the charges were dismissed?

- The court said there were no "prima facie materials to frame charges against the accused persons" and found the "conduct and approach of the investigating agency, in this case, to be discouraging.
- For instance, analysing the NIA evidence against Gogoi for incitement to violence, the judge found that "he is exhorting people not to indulge in violence and seems to be doing so fervently".
- Similarly, it found no prima facie materials to frame charges against Gogoi for any offence of conspiracy, abetment, advocacy of terrorism, or threatening the integrity of the country.

Misuse of UAPA and Sedition laws

- Clearly, the UAPA and various other criminal provisions had been weaponised by the NIA to silence a political activist, protesting a government policy and mobilising people to support his stand.
- Gogoi's case is not an exception, many times anti-terror and sedition laws are abused by state agencies to crack down on legitimate forms of dissent and protests by civil society groups.

Way forward

- Since UAPA has stringent bail conditions, the accused, in most cases, end up spending a long time in prison awaiting trial.
- In this context, the NIA court observed that "if the criminal justice system, for some reason, is unable to give bail to an accused, his trial should preferably be completed within a year.
- This is to ensure that his constitutional and human rights of presumption of innocence and speedy trial are not violated.
- Court's directives need to be widely deliberated. Such moves can help to safeguard innocent citizen's rights.

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34. Why ex-bureaucrats speak up

Source: The Indian Express
Syllabus: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability
Relevance: The new government rules restrict free speech and impact the transparency and accountability of the government.

Synopsis:
The new government rules restrict the free speech of retired bureaucrats.

About the new rules:
1. The central government recently prohibits officers who retired from 25 critical organisations not to publish anything without taking prior clearance from the government.
2. Further, the order also bans discussions on "the domain of the organisation".
3. The order also put restrictions is on **revealing any "expertise or knowledge gained** by virtue of working in that organisation".
4. The notification also **amends the central pension rules**, enabling the government to withhold the pension of those who defy.

Challenges with the government restrictions:
- The rules are **ambiguous**. For example, "expertise or knowledge gained" is prone to conflicting interpretations among individuals.
- **Pension is not a reward but a binding obligation**. The rules insist on "future good conduct" as a "condition of every grant of pension and its continuance." But, the government cannot withhold the pension as the rule itself mention pension as a "claimed as a right".
  - The Courts also historically ruled in favour of the pensioner. For instance, In **Dr Hira Lal v. State of Bihar case**, the court mentioned "that the right to pension cannot be taken away by a mere executive fiat or administrative instruction. An employee earns these benefits by virtue of his long, continuous, faithful and unblemished service".
- **Not a national security threat, instead, an act of <u>Sedition</u>**: The government has to act maturely and distinguish between genuine protests and sedition. If a question arises, then it has to be decided by the courts. These orders were meant for colonial times or even for the late 20th century. For example, One need not reveal information, with current advancements in technology, the enemy's satellite can see not only moving trucks but also their number plates as well.
- The government **cannot force a code of conduct for such large numbers of retired officials** to speak out against its policies. Such as secretaries, ambassadors, the Directors-General of police and others. Further, the rules make the retired officials **speak in the government's favour**.

35. How a PPP can overhaul India's health infrastructure

Source: Times of India
Syllabus: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health
Relevance: Public and private sectors can work together to modernise the Indian healthcare system.

Synopsis:
The coronavirus pandemic has exposed many weaknesses in India's healthcare system. But it has also presented an opportunity to change the healthcare landscape.

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Present needs for the Indian healthcare system:
- India can get ICU beds, ventilators and machines. But a large, **well-trained healthcare workforce** is critical to run them.
- Further, India also needs **affordable medical education**.
- Healthcare is **highly capital intensive and labour-intensive**. So, the government has to figure out schemes whereby **out-of-pocket expenses can be reduced**, whether it is through Ayushman Bharat, community health schemes or CSR funding.

Why we need the PPP model in the health care system?
- The private sector accounts for more than 70% of India's healthcare market. So, the PPP model can **expand access to healthcare**.
- **Human capital, financial capital and management** are scarce in the government sector, the Private can complement that.
- Expanding India's healthcare infrastructure also presents an **opportunity for the private sector**. Further, a lot of private healthcare is provided by smaller setups – 10-20 beds run by individual doctors. So there is a huge opportunity for private healthcare players.

Suggestions to improve healthcare in India:
- Medical debt forces 66 lakh families below the poverty line every year. Now insurance schemes like Ayushman Bharat are in place, **digitising the scheme** is the next step. This will make **healthcare interoperable** across India.
- India **needs to reduce its import dependence**. About 30-35% of our hospital project cost is medical equipment and technology. For a long time, India has relied on international brands for equipment such as MRIs, CTs and ultrasounds. So, India needs to **build up its own manufacturing capacity** for equipment and Vaccines.
    - Eventually, it will make India the manufacturing hub of the world for medical devices rather than importing them
- The government aimed to provide drinking water to every rural household by 2024. India can have a programme like this for a massive upswing over the next few years in health infrastructure.

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General
Studies
Paper - 3

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General Studies - 3

1. India's debt-to-GDP ratio at a 14-year high
Source: Livemint – Article 1, Article 2, Article 3
Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy
Tags: Fiscal Deficit, Debt-to-GDP ratio, Debt burden, Credit rating, Debt repayment, NSSF
Relevance: Present situation of India's economy, dealing with a high debt burden and an increased Fiscal Deficit.
Synopsis: High Fiscal Deficit, a very high Debt-to-GDP ratio and a high amount of external debt have raised concerns over debt sustainability.
- Few concerns and possible solutions.

Rise in Fiscal Deficit & Debt-to-GDP ratio
- **Fiscal Deficit =** 9.3% of GDP from 4.6% (2020)
- **Debt-to-GDP ratio** = Risen to 58.73% from 51.6%

Why Fiscal Deficit (FD) is high?
This was mainly due to the following reasons:
- **Shortfall in revenue collection**: Firstly, there has been a shortfall in revenue collection due to disruption in economic activities caused by the first wave of the pandemic.
- **Accounting FCI's borrowing in calculation of FD**: Secondly, government has made a slight change in its accounting practices. It is now including full borrowings of Food Corporation of India (FCI) in calculation of Fiscal Deficit.

Food subsidy to FCI
Earlier situation: Till last year, FCI's massive loans *(to finance distribution of subsidized ration)* were sourced from the **National Small Savings Fund (NSSF)**. These borrowings were part of "extra budgetary resources", literally outside the budget. Hence, they did not reflect in the fiscal deficit.
- This extra-budgetary borrowing was slammed by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in 2019. Hence, government
- Extra Budgetary resources refers to allocations made from money outside of revenue or borrowings, through means such as the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF), and recapitalization bonds etc.

Why FCI requires food subsidy?
The difference between the cost of procurement of food-grains and the cost of providing them to fair price shops is what FCI demands from the government as a subsidy.
- **Subsidy Arrears**: When the budget allocation for a financial year is not sufficient to clear all the dues of the food subsidies bill raised by FCI, the dues of such subsidies are carried over to the next financial year. Hence, to cover these arrears FCI used various methods like bonds, unsecured short-term loans and NSSF loans etc.
- **Present situation:** Now, government will make budgetary provisions for the repayment of entire FCI loans. Hence, these repayments shall be counted to calculate FD.
- **Impact of the change**: Although, in both cases ultimately the burden of repayment shall lie with the government, but this change in accounting indicates transparency.

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Why Debt-to-GDP ratio is at an all-time high?

The Union government's debt has risen from 51.6% to **58.8%** of the gross domestic product in the fiscal year due to the following reasons:

- **High amount of borrowing**: Economic contraction forced the government to borrow a record amount to meet a revenue shortfall.

Why India's external debt increased?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in debt not only for India but for most countries around the world.

- Most of the emerging economies have government debt that is around 40% to 50% of their GDP. Compared to that India's debt is around 75% to 80% of our GDP
- Advanced countries like the US and Japan may have even higher debt levels. But India should not compare itself to these economies because their repayment capacity is also much higher than India.
- **Constituents of external debt (in decreasing order)**: Commercial borrowings (37%), Non-Resident Deposits (25%), Government borrowings (19%)

What is the problem with a large Fiscal Deficit, a high Debt-to-GDP ratio and a high external debt?

It means the government is saddled with a higher debt burden. This has the following impact:

- **Credit rating**: This influences **sovereign creditworthiness ratings** assigned by global rating agencies which tend to increase the government's borrowing costs.
- **Repayment issues under unforeseen circumstances**: Borrowing more money means that you'll have to pay it back at some point in time. COVID has already led to a **high fiscal uncertainty** as per the 15th Finance Commission. Future unforeseen circumstances like another pandemic or a war in the near term, can lead to subdued growth, and then this debt will become a problem.

What are the targets for FD and Debt-to-GDP ratio as per FRBM Act?

The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, as amended in 2008, mandated the following:

- **Fiscal Deficit target**: Centre needs to limit the fiscal deficit to 3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) by March 31, 2021. **Note**: FRBM Act includes has an option of an **escape clause** in situations of calamity and national security. In such situations, the government can deviate from its annual fiscal deficit target.
- In light of COVID-induced uncertainty, government is now eyeing a Fiscal Deficit target of **6.8%** in 2021-22 and a gradual reduction to **4.6%** in 2025-26.
- **Debt-to-GDP ratio:** Bringing down the debt-to-GDP ratio of the **Centre** to **40%** and that of **states to 20%** by **2024-25**.

Note: Fifteenth Finance Commission (FFC) has recommended setting up an **FRBM review panel** to draft a new fiscal consolidation framework because the current challenges have made the **earlier targets impossible** to achieve.

Is there a way out of this entire situation? /How can India tackle this problem of rising debt burden?

- The FFC has recommended a **slow and gradual decline** in central government and general government debt to 56.6% and 85.7% (of GDP), respectively, by FY26.
- **Improved tax revenue** via increased compliance
- Increased receipts from monetization of assets, including public sector enterprises and land.
- Increase in capital expenditure via private investments

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- Higher fiscal stimulus to revive businesses, increase in employment etc

Terms to know:
- Fiscal Deficit
- Debt to GDP Ratio
- What does the Union Government debt include?

2. Explained: Will food become costlier?
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS3 – Issues of Buffer Stocks and Food Security.
Tags: agricultural commodities, food inflation, food prices in India, international food prices.
Relevance: Global prices of major agricultural commodities in India and the reason behind the divergence in prices, way forward
Synopsis: Factors affecting food inflation in India.

Background
- Brent Crude prices ($76.18) had reached the highest since October 2018.
- Since the increase in international oil prices is being fully passed on to Indian consumers, there is a concern that prices of Food will also increase.

India's Scenario is different from Global Scenario
1. Global prices of major agricultural commodities have increased compared to their levels a year ago.
2. Similarly, The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) world food price index (FPI) touched 127.1 points, which is the highest value since September 2011.
3. Whereas in India the increase in global food prices is not getting reflected in what consumers in India are paying. For instance,
4. Annual consumer food price index (CFPI) inflation in India, at 5% in May, is way lower than the 39.7% year-on-year rise in the FAO-FPI for the same month.
5. Interestingly, Global food inflation crashed after March 2020 after the impact of the Pandemic. Whereas in India, Retail food inflation was around double-digits till November.

Reasons for the divergence
Understanding the drivers of both global and domestic inflation will help us understand the reason for the divergence
1. The drivers of Global food inflation are mainly due to,
   o Increase in demand due to unlocking of economies.
   o Chinese stockpiling for building strategic reserves, as well as in anticipation of fresh corona outbreaks.
   o Production shortfalls in Brazil, Argentina, Ukraine, Thailand and even the US.
2. In India, by contrast, the reduction in food inflation is mainly due to two reasons.
   o One, good monsoons in 2019 and 2020 that led to bumper kharif crop harvest.
   o Two, the collapse of demand from successive Covid-triggered lockdowns.
3. India's food index has seen a rise in edible oils and pulses mainly. These are the Agri-commodities that India significantly imports.

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- **Edible oil import**: India imports 13-15 million tonnes every year and produces just 7.5-8.5 mt.
- **Pulses Import**: India produces 22-23 Mt and imports h 2.5-3 Mt.

- **In the future, what are the possible factors that can impact Food Inflation in India?**
- Food inflation in India in the coming months is likely to be influenced by four determinants.
1. The first one is **international prices**, which matters for edible oil and pulses as discussed above.
2. The second, determinant is the **monsoon's progress**. With 18% above-average precipitation during the southwest monsoon the Production is set to increase. This will help in controlling Food inflation at permitted levels.
3. The third determinant is the **extent of fuel cost increases being pass-through to consumers**. In the event of an increase in fuel prices, there is a likelihood that processors, transporters, and even farmers may pass the increase in fuel costs to consumers.
4. The final determinant is **political**. Governments' decision on minimum support policy, procurement of buffer stocks of wheat and paddy, regulation of Sugar price will all impact Food inflation.

3. Let's step back from the NPA Scare
Source: Business Standard
Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy- Banking and associated issues
Tags: – NPA, NPA Scare, Banking, Indian Economy, GS Paper 3
Relevance: NPA crisis is a critical problem for Indian economy. But, are we worried a bit too much?
Synopsis: Lenders must be less afraid of regulators and agencies so that they can aggressively restructure debts.
Introduction
In India, there is a "NPA Scare": An inflated fear of NPAs and lender losses. Failure of a business and credit losses are unavoidable in lending. We will hinder economic growth if we avoid all NPAs or demonise default. The emphasis on human interest tales and failed transactions tends to hide the large amount of successful lending that occurs.

- **The three things that are wrong with the Indian credit market**: Banking regulation, the lack of a capable bond market, and bankruptcy reform.
- **Default-free lending**: buy AAA-rated 90-day government bonds from the United States or Germany. These produce a yield of about 0%. Purchasing an Indian government bond demonstrates a willingness to take risks.
- If policymakers or board members seek exceptionally low nonperforming assets (NPAs), sensible financial plans and loan access are hampered. It's similar to selling life insurance and expecting clients to not die. **Business failure is a part of life, so credit defaults will always happen.**
- **Currently, financial authorities and agencies are vigilant in preventing future defaults** and pursuing past defaulters. As a result of the NPA scare, businesses are reducing their borrowing. They are using more equity capital and are investing less, which is hurting GDP growth.
- Deaths faced by life insurance companies surge in a pandemic. **Business failures rise when growth declines**. When Indian growth slowed in the last decade, defaults increased. This is the normal working of the market economy.

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- **A huge volume of debt transactions goes through successfully all the time.** As financial economist Harsh Vardhan told that about 12 trillion of new credit takes place every year. But a few big defaults are highlighted which fuels the NPA Scare.

What are the problems in the Indian credit market that require solving?

There are three problems in the Indian credit market that require solving: Banking regulation, bond market, and bankruptcy process.

- **Firstly, the weaknesses of banking regulation**. In India, banks have provided loans, had defaults, and then gone bankrupt after the defaults were paid. The NPA scare should not be fuelled by bank fragility; rather, it should serve as a catalyst for improvements in banking regulation that would fix the problem.
- **Secondly, non-implementation of market-based accounting.** The job of banking regulation is to force market-based accounting upon lenders, this has not been implemented. Banks have overvalued their portfolios and regulators have supported this. Regulators must force banks to assess the market value of loans and mark their portfolios to market every quarter.
- **Thirdly, the problem is the bond market.** Banks have short-dated deposits and are structurally unable to do long-term lending. There are structural failures in financial regulation which have held back the emergence of the bond market.
- The losses should not add to the NPA Fear; instead, they should prompt the necessary bond market changes. This is a work programme that was started in the 2015 Finance Bill but was cancelled.
- **Fourthly, the bankruptcy code** is about reducing the losses suffered by lenders when default takes place. **The bankruptcy process must begin, with the committee of creditors** taking over and finding a value-maximizing agreement for lenders. The bankruptcy code should make it more difficult for promoters to hide their theft, resulting in retaliatory actions.

The way forward

- **Regulators and agencies need to instil less fear in lenders**, so that they are able to restructure debts when faced with early signs of distress. A small loss in restructuring is generally better than a large loss in bankruptcy.
- The Indian bankruptcy reform has been in play since 2016, but the elements described here have not fallen into place through the combination of regulators, courts, departments, and agencies.
- **The problems of the bankruptcy process should not fuel the NPA Scare**; they should generate the energy to come back into the bankruptcy reform with fresh energy and intellectual capacity.

4. Inadequate planning on PLI Schemes

Source: Livemint

Syllabus: GS Paper 3- Industries and associated issues, GS2 – Govt Schemes

Tags: PLI scheme, General Studies 2, Export, industry schemes.

Relevance: Important points regarding PLI Scheme of the government

Synopsis: Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes are gathering momentum.

Introduction

25 companies, including Nokia and Dixon Technologies, have registered for the telecom hardware PLI scheme. It is worth over Rs 12,000 crore.

PLI schemes for telecom hardware, steel sector, advanced chemistry cell batteries etc. Have been notified. However, sufficient thought or a strategic planning is missing in this expansion of PLI schemes.

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What are the issues with PLI Schemes?
- It is just like an old-style industrial policy. Incentives will be provided to uncompetitive units in order to ramp up production for the domestic market.
- It will create institutional links between industrialists and the bureaucracy. These links will be very difficult to manage in the long run.
- Implementing the scheme across multiple sectors is useless. It will not be able to overcome the existing barriers to exports and will put additional burden on taxpayers.
- These schemes will only be useful for sector, where a foreign and domestic market exists and hurdles like the cost of purchasing intellectual property and other start-up costs exists. lithium-ion batteries sector is one such sector.

Suggestions
- "Institutional mechanism" to manage obstacles in PLI scheme implementation.
- Providing "hand-holding" support for firms.
- PLI scheme should be a sector or industry specific scheme. For example,
- if it aims at generating factory jobs, it should be concentrated in labor-intensive sectors.
- If it aims to reduce strategic independence on China, then it should focus on diversifying specific China-focused supply chains alongside a China-focused trade policy.

5. Shaping India's green future
Syllabus: GS3 – Environment
Tags: Global warming, pandemic, zero emission, climate change.
Relevance: Achieving net zero emissions to achieve carbon neutrality
Synopsis: Pandemic and global warming are giving clear warning that India must move to a more sustainable and greener future.

Background:
- Frequency of extreme weather events, heat waves, and deadly droughts have increased.
  - Recent Cyclones Tauktae and Yaas have caused death and destruction on India's western and eastern coasts.
- The zoonotic (such as SARS, MERS, and AIDS) viruses are spreading because of destruction of natural habitats.
- As per Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, global carbon emission must reach net-zero by 2050 to keep warming within 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2100.
  - However, world with current emissions will warm up the planet by 3 degrees.
  - India being one of the largest emitters has immense pressure to bring carbon emission down to net-zero by mid-century.
- Climate change is a **slow-motion global disaster.**
  - It destroys planet's temperate climate and diminishes the lives of children.

Benefits of net Zero emission approach:
- Firstly, net-zero technologies, such as solar power and electric vehicles, are likely to be much **more efficient.**
  - it will drive **economic growth and create high-quality jobs.**
  - It will also end the **trade-off between development and emission reductions**.

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- Secondly, the rest of the world might **impose high carbon taxes** on exports from carbon-emitting countries.
    - Therefore, India may **be disadvantaged relative to our peer economies** and face significant export challenges.
    - A legally binding net-zero target will be beneficial diplomatically and lead to much more **supportive technology transfer** and global trade agreements.
- Thirdly, it will help in building the necessary state capacity.
    - it will promote a stable government framework and policy predictability.
    - India can promote entrepreneurship and build a more competitive, sustainable future.
- Lastly, the net-zero target would force the Central and state governments to quickly **build the necessary state capacity** for monitoring and compliance.
    - It could lead to **massive investments in green technologies** and equipment.
    - India requires at least $100 billion per year in green investments to reach a net-zero target by mid-century.

Challenges in path of carbon neutrality:
- Firstly, India need to **transform** electricity generation, transportation, construction, real estate, agriculture, cement, steel, and many other industries.
- Secondly, due to financial constraints faced by Central and state governments it requires involvement of **private sector capital.**
- Thirdly, India will need competitive, advanced technologies and business models. For long-term, sustainable prosperity.

Benefits of low carbon approach:
Net zero approach is impractical for India considering high transition cost.
- Firstly, India is not obliged to follow net zero approach under **Common but differentiated responsibility.**
- Secondly, India can adopt longer phase out period such as by 2080 or even later.
- Thirdly, clear sectoral targets are needed for both private and public sector. such as the current 450-Gw target for solar energy.
    - It would also provide a clear sectoral road map for the private sector for its investment plans.
    - it would allow slow decommission and investment requirements would be reduced.
    - It will help in moving people out of high-carbon industries.
- India needs coordinated policies and actions to ensure rapid peaking in carbon emission and a steeper decline thereafter.
Source: Business Standard

6. Reopen the files, reconsider privatisation
Source: **The Hindu**
Syllabus: GS 3 – Effects of Liberalization on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth
Relevance: Privatisation has the potential to alter the functioning of the Indian economy.
Synopsis: In the backdrop of an economic contraction, it is important to revisit the aggressive privatization of public enterprises. Focus should be on adopting different strategies for sick and profitable units.

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Background:
- Privatization of the public sector, including banks, has been part of economic reforms since 1991. This was at the core of the '**Washington Consensus'** which believes that the private sector is inherently more efficient.
- The socio-political realities of India prevented outright privatisation. However, progressive disinvestment of the shares of public sector undertakings has been taking place over the years.
- Privatisation is now happening, with great vigor and dedicated targets. However, India is right now going through its worst economic crisis.
    - Unemployment has risen, incomes are falling, and the fiscal deficit is rising. In this situation, outright privatisation may not be justified.

Concerns associated with Outright privatisation:
- **First**, the number of **Indian private firms which can buy out public sector firms is limited**. Their limited financial and managerial resources can be better utilised;
    - In taking over numerous private firms up for sale through the bankruptcy process.
    - In investing in various brownfield and greenfield projects
- **Second**, the Sale at fair or lower than fair valuations to foreign entities has adverse implications from the perspective of being '**Atma Nirbhar'**.
- **Third**, PSU enterprises provide for **reservations** in recruitment. With privatisation, this would end and unnecessarily generate social unrest.
- **Fourth**, the Government has been able to use its ownership to get banks and public enterprises to do **so many things on an immediate basis during the pandemic**. This would not have been possible with private ownership.

Types of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs):
- **First Category**: Enterprises which have been sick for a long time. Their technology, plants and machinery are obsolete while managerial and human resources have become inefficient.
- **Second Category**: Enterprises which have been financially sick but can be turned around. Their difficulties can be traced to ministerial micromanagement, especially in enterprises with a direct consumer interface. For example, Air India and the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) hotels.
- **Third Category**: Enterprises that are generating decent profits.

Cautious approach towards PSUs:
- **First Category**: Government should close these in a time-bound manner with a generous handshake for labour.
    - These enterprises may be taken away from their parent line Ministries and brought under one holding company. The company should have the sole mandate of speedy liquidation and asset sale.
- **Second Category**: **Private management through induction of a strategic partner** is the best way to restore the value of these enterprises.
    - They should ideally be made debt-free and new management should be given freedom in personnel management to get investor interest.
    - Once debt-free, management control with a 26% stake may be given. As valuation rises, the Government could reduce its stake further and get more money.

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- **Third Category**: The Government can continue to reduce its shareholding by offloading shares. It can even reduce its stake to less than 51% while **remaining the promoter and being in control**.

This would help in producing Global Champions, as done by China. The country has **91 state-owned enterprises in the Fortune 500 list**.

7. Rattling foreign investors

Source: The Hindu
GS- 3: International Trade, Investment Models
Relevance: Attracting more FDI is crucial for India's economic recovery after the pandemic.
Synopsis: Regulatory risks and uncertainty in following the rule of law will discourage FDI in India.

Background
- The Commerce Ministry recently reported that India attracted the highest ever FDI of $81.72 billion in 2020-21.
- However, several economists argue that the surge in FDI inflows is driven by short-term portfolio investment inflows and a few major acquisition deals involving select corporations.
- Further, Government's disputes with big companies like Vodafone and Cairn Energy, on retrospective taxation, will shake the confidence of foreign investors.

Barriers to FDI in India: Regulatory risk
- Honoring contracts and enforcing awards are vital to attracting the confidence of FDI investors. However, a lack of confidence in the host state's credibility towards the **rule of law** hampers FDI investments. Following are some such examples.
- For instance, last year India had lost two high-profile bilateral investment treaty (BIT) disputes with **Vodafone and Cairn Energy** on retrospective taxation.
- Further, Cairn has launched legal proceedings in the U.S. to enforce the arbitral award of $1.2 billion by seizing the assets of Air India.
- Apart from this, the other set of high-profile BIT disputes comes from the cancellation of an agreement between **Antrix, and Devas Multimedia**. The agreement was arbitrarily annulled on the grounds of national security.
- This annulment led to a commercial arbitration between Antrix and Devas Multimedia at the International Chambers of Commerce (ICC),
- However, India lost the case. The **ICC arbitration** tribunal ordered Antrix to pay $1.2 billion to Devas after a U.S. court confirmed the award earlier this year.
- **India's willful noncompliance attitude towards adverse judicial rulings**.
- What is more worrisome is that whenever India loses a case to a foreign investor, immediate compliance rarely happens. Instead, efforts are made to delay the compliance as much as possible.
- For instance, After the ICC award, Indian agencies started investigating Devas accusing it of corruption and fraud.
- Last month, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) ordered the liquidation of Devas on the ground that the affairs of the company were being carried on fraudulently.
- Further, the NCLT directed the official liquidator to prevent Devas from perpetuating its fraudulent activities and abusing the process of law in enforcing the ICC award.
- This has led to, Devas issuing a notice of intention to initiate a new BIT arbitration against India.

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- The non-compliant behaviour on India's part shows a willful disobedient attitude towards adverse judicial rulings.
- This will not help India in attracting global corporations to its shores to 'make for the world'

8. The drone challenge before India

Source: <u>Indian Express</u>, <u>TOI</u>, <u>Business-Standard, India Today</u>
Syllabus: GS3 – Security
Tags: drones, Heron, Predator, Sea Guardian, border surveillance, drone tech.
Relevance: Strengthening India's surveillance capabilities to deal with constantly evolving terror threats in the border areas esp. J&K
Synopsis: The recent drone attack on Air Force Station Jammu has raised some doubts about the robustness of India's intelligence and surveillance capabilities in the sensitive border regions. Drones have been a threat for a while but received little serious consideration. This will change now.

Why are drones so dangerous?

- First, they are **cheap** and can be bought online by anyone. Checking who's buying drones for what purpose is virtually impossible currently.
- Second, **anonymity** is afforded to the user due to drones' uncontrolled proliferation.
- Third, drones **do not require much technical expertise** to use.
- Fourth, use of drones by terrorists causes a **disproportionate psychological effect** on people as well as on security personnel.
- Fifth, terrorist drones **can be deployed anywhere** in the country, not just security/military installations. The state's expensive weapons system or massive deployment of troops are of little use.

Also read: **UAVs and threats posed by them – Explained in detail**

Challenges

- **Detecting drones is difficult**: They are battery-powered, and hence **relatively quiet.** They can be manually controlled or programmed to **fly low** giving the defender **very little warning time**. Also, **detection** by normal civil and military radars **is difficult** as their radar cross-section is very small; their small size makes **visual acquisition problematic** too.
- **Neutralization of drones is tough**: When a drone makes an approach at night or drones are used in a swarm to saturate defenses, quick response can be difficult.
- **India's underdeveloped drone capabilities**: India's own capabilities to detect drones/UAVs have not yet developed successfully. The Indian security forces have been testing anti-drone jammer technology along the border. But it now turns out that communications between domestic security agencies get jammed when this system is deployed.

Suggestions/Measures

- **Intensify observation**: There is a need for intensifying observation 24×7 to track likely places from where drones are launched.
- **Developing indigenous drone tech**: India is certainly lagging behind in UAV and drone technology although we keep hearing of the DRDO having come up with a new design etc. They need to work seriously in operationalizing their range of UAVs and drones.

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- **Supplementing indigenous tech with imports**: Since R&D and manufacture of anti-drone systems are at a nascent stage in India, some numbers should be sourced through imports for certain vital areas.
- **Formation of a task force**: A task force should be formed. This task force should be skilled at taking time-bound anti-drone measures.
- **Improving detection & engaging capabilities**: Helicopters can be used to detect and engage UAVs. Tracking drones via optical or infra-red means or multi-sensors including sound can be done.
  - o Efforts need to be accelerated to ensure detection and finding innovative ways to engage them.
  - o **Laser-based Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs)** is a possible defense system against drone attacks. In India, DRDO has developed two anti-drone DEW systems. They can use powerful lasers to engage aerial targets at a distance of 2 km. However, mass production of these systems is yet to take place.
- **Anti-drone protocol:** A standing operating procedure based on an anti-drone protocol should be developed.
- **Need to broaden the guidelines**: Government needs to avoid the knee-jerk response of restricting drones in the domestic arena, most of which is involved in such critical civilian work as mapping land to establish ownership records, or weather drones that survey crop output, floods, and droughts.
- **Maintain a graded list**: Since it is impossible to address every vital installation, a graded list be made of those to be protected including personages too as the world has been witness to assassinations through unmanned systems, including drones.
- **Involving private players**: Private industry should be involved. We have plenty of young and enthusiastic IT entrepreneurs whose startups need to be supported with finance for R&D.
  - o The government's **iDEX initiative** must enable multiple players as there are many sub-parts in an anti-drone architecture. Expecting one or two companies to produce the system as a whole will only delay the end-product.
- **Monitoring the proliferation of drones**: A mechanism to monitor the proliferation of drones and anti-drone technology needs to be instituted quickly. The policy needs to legitimize legal players and prevent the technology from landing up in wrong hands.

Also read: **Anti-drone guidelines by Indian government**

Conclusion
Drone strike signals a major shift in the nature of cross-border terrorism along the Line of Control and the government urgently needs to develop and deploy countermeasures to ensure that it does not escalate into a bigger tragedy in this turbulent region.
Terms to know:
What are drones?
India's drone arsenal

9. In India, forest rights means forest conservation
Source: **Indian express**
Syllabus: GS 3 – Environment and biodiversity Conservation
Relevance: Community Forests Resource (CFR) Rights is essential for forest conservation in India.
Synopsis: The multifarious benefits of Community Forests Resource (CFR) Rights present compelling evidence for India to recognize and support CFR rights. Community forests with

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legally recognized rights are healthier and associated with lower deforestation rates, higher carbon storage and biodiversity compared to other forests.

Background:
- On June 14, Prime Minister addressed the UN High-Level Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought.
- He reiterated that India was on track to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030. He cited the example of the Banni grassland in Gujarat.

Case Study of Banni Grassland:
- Banni is home to great biological diversity and is the lifeline of its pastoralist communities. However, climate change and the invasion by Prosopis Juliflora have severely impacted its unique ecology.
- Banni's pastoralist communities (Maldharis) are applying their deep knowledge of the local ecology to conserve the grassland.
  - They uproot Prosopis in the pre-monsoon period and when it rains, the native grass species' regenerate from their rootstock.

Legal Mandate of Community Forest Resource Rights (CFR) in India:
- Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, bestows adivasis and other traditional forest-dwelling communities, including pastoralists with CFR rights.
- They are empowered to decide on the management and restoration of their community forest resources. Further they can stop any activity that adversely impacts biodiversity or the local ecology.

Compelling reasons for India to recognize and support CFR rights:
- **First**, our **forests are grappling with degradation**, an important contributor to GHG emissions. More than 40 per cent of the forest cover is open, often degraded.
- **Second**, it will help in **meeting international commitments**. India has committed to restore 26 million hectares of degraded forests and lands by 2030 under the **Bonn pledge**.
  - It has also targeted creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons by 2030 under the Paris Agreement through additional forest and tree cover.
- **Third, India's** potential to remove carbon through forest restoration is **among the highest in the Global South** as per a 2020 study published in Nature, Ecology and Evolution.
  - At 123.3 million, India also has the greatest number of people living near areas with forest restoration opportunities (within 8km).
- **Fourth**, numerous **past initiatives were severely criticized for poor focus** on CFR that resulted in sub optimal outcomes.
  - Social forestry in the 1970s, the National Afforestation Program and Green India Mission have found them to have limited restoration benefits.
  - These initiatives have drawn criticism for
    - paying little attention to the land and forest tenure of local communities,
    - failing to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge, and
    - not assisting communities to receive the opportunities they desire from restoration.
- **Fifth**, the **recognition of CPR rights has happened at an extremely slow pace** in the country. Less than 5 per cent of the total potential area has been brought under CFR. In

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Banni too, title deeds formally recognizing the CFR rights of the pastoralists are yet to be issued. Further, Institutional support for CFR remains minimal.

Terms to know
- Banni grassland
- Community Forest

10. India must be wary of monopolistic e-retailers
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus: GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors
Tags: e-retailers, monopoly, GS2, ecommerce companies, ecommerce
Relevance: Impact of monopolistic companies and ways to combat such monopolies
Synopsis: The technological superiority and huge capital have enabled the e-retailers to capture a significant share of the Indian retail market. They may convert themselves into monopolistic entities in the near future which may pose numerous problems for the nation.

Background:
- The big e-retail firms like Jio Mart, Amazon, Tata Group etc. enjoy a large share of the Indian retail market.
- Experts believe that the market would value at $2 trillion dollar by 2030 and would be dominated by few big e-retail companies.

How would they dominate the market?
- Big e-retail companies, by **being procurers of goods in large volumes**, dictate bottom of the pit prices and impose stifling terms on manufacturers.
- Along with investment in Artificial Intelligence and process systems, their delivery prices to consumers will eventually be less than the procurement price of kirana stores.
- E-retail companies would become **super distributors to kirana stores** and will use them as pick-up points for ordered merchandise. Simultaneously, kirana stores will be nudged and compelled to increase the minimum order size, driving up inventory costs and losses for such stores.
- This would be a temporary arrangement and over the next 10-20 years, a majority of kirana stores will close.
  - Along with them, interdependent businesses of supply chain intermediaries and hundreds of thousands of medium and small enterprises that supply to these stores will slowly cease to exist.
- Inevitably, as stores dwindle in numbers, consumers will find single suppliers and face a **monopoly**.
- They may also **take support of the political class** to promote their products. For instance, Paytm flourished as a home grown (swadeshi) brand with active support from politicians during the demonetization. While in reality it has investors from various countries including Alibaba from China.
  - Furthermore, now politicians have stopped opposing FDI in retail, a deviation from their earlier stance.

Problems associated with monopolistic e-retailers:
- **First**, there **would be lost of employment.** Many among the 20 million small establishments (the kirana stores) would be closed. Further, the 40 million families spread across every street of the country dependent on the informal and formal retail chain would also lose their jobs.

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- **Second**, it would **deplete the independent entrepreneurial streak** that is essential for a nation's progress. Monopolies reduce competition, strangle innovation and disincentivize smaller businesses that actually create jobs and economic dynamism.
- **Third**, it would **impact public sector banks** and make them lose the lucrative retail segment.
  - This would happen as E-retail firms have the ability to source and provide cheaper credit to consumers.
  - They will dictate the terms to credit card companies and e-payment platforms to retain part of the fees collected when customers make a purchase.
- **Fourth**, it would **reduce the independence of media outlets** by taking a larger share of advertising revenue.
  - Due to their huge presence, brands will be obliged to spend heavily on advertisements to gain visibility for their products.
  - When Google was founded in 1998, print media collected over 50 per cent of the advertisement revenue. Today, it's down to about 10 per cent.
- **Fifth**, the massive control over data would enable them to become arbitrators of opinion and decide the fate of elections. This would **undermine free and fair elections** in our democracy

Way Ahead:
- Europe is considering legislation to address the monopolistic behavior of big tech companies and to make data anonymous. India can learn from this for improving regulation, enforcement and anti-trust legislation in the country.
- Further, focus should be placed on augmenting people's activism that can hold off the oligarchs from having a stranglehold over the nation

11. A kind of relief
Source: Livemint, Indian Express, Livemint
Syllabus: GS Paper 2, Indian Economy, issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development
Relevance: Indian Economy is facing a slowdown. A fiscal stimulus package was much needed to give it a boost.
Synopsis: India's finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently announced a long-awaited stimulus package. Now, critics and experts are analyzing the nature, targets, and potential of the package.
Read facts about Stimulus Package

Analysis of stimulus package
- The package consists largely of credit guarantees to boost liquidity flows towards the more vulnerable parts of the economy. It includes micro, small and medium enterprises, small household borrowers, tourism, and health sectors.
- Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) would help MSMEs in accessing much-needed funds to commence operations.
- The scheme announced for the tourism sector likely to have less impact because a majority of the sector operates in the informal economy.
- One of the Scheme announced for the health sector focus specifically on paediatric care. Further, other measures would address the gaps in the public health infrastructure exposed by the pandemic.

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What would be the impact on the budget?
1. Firstly, the actual fiscal outgo on account of these relief measures is likely to be minimal. The credit guarantee route will have actual fiscal outgo of around 0.6 percent of GDP.
   o This approach is similar to the one adopted during the first wave. Direct demand-side support from the central government has been limited.
2. Secondly, most of the Centre's commitments are contingent liabilities that may not arise at all.

Nature of Fiscal stimulus package
- This package reaffirms the rejection of the Keynesian method of demand stimulation, which includes measures like Cash giveaways.
- Direct spending has been reserved only for absolute vulnerable sectors and sections such as food hand-outs, healthcare infrastructure, and rural internet connectivity.
- Thus, the nature of government policy is fiscal conservatism. Last year's Atmanirbhar rescue plan also depicted this policy, where state expenditure was very less compared to the package announced.

How desirable is fiscal conservatism?
- India's policy of fiscal conservatism is a step in the right direction if we look from the future perspective. It would save the economy from the risk of future instability and a heavier tax burden.
- However, still, India would need some moderate measure for revival in overall demand. Which is not possible by easing loans.

12. An appropriate way to judge the famed economic reforms of 1991
Source: Livemint
Syllabus: GS 3 – Effects of Liberalization on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.
Relevance: Economic reforms of 1991 revolutionized the Indian economy. It is important to analyze their success and failures.
Synopsis:
Four big structural constraints have eased after 1991: savings, food, foreign exchange, and a small home market. However, there are newer structural constraints on the horizon that needs to be tackled.

Background:
- The Indian economy had begun to gather pace around the 1980s with tentative changes in fiscal, monetary, trade, tax, exchange rate, and industrial policies.
- However, the policy reforms of that decade were within the boundaries of the earlier system of economic management.
- In July 1991, a web of interconnected reforms were launched to address the problems surrounding the Indian economy.
- **Problems**:
- Due to the severe balance of payments crisis, the country was on the verge of defaulting
- Macroeconomic imbalances, low productivity of public sector investments, loopholes in the tax system, etc.
- Further indiscriminate protection to domestic players had weakened the incentive to export.

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- The country also had a weak financial system that was not allocating capital efficiently.

What was the objective of the 1991 reforms?
- The objective was to evolve a pattern of production which is labor-intensive and generates larger employment opportunities in productive sectors.
- It aimed to reduce the disparities in income and wealth between rural and urban areas.
- The implicit goal of the 1991 economic reforms was to create a new economy that had learned the right lessons from the success stories of East Asia.

Impact of reforms:
Success:
- Economic growth since 1991 has been **far more stable**. One simple indication of this is the external account.
  - Independent India had a severe balance of payments crisis almost once every decade: 1957, 1966, 1981, 1990. There has been no comparable crisis over the past 30 years, despite a scare in 2013.
- **All four macroeconomic constraints** (domestic savings, foreign exchange, food, and aggregate demand) have eased after 1991.
  - The domestic savings rate to fund domestic investments has undoubtedly come down since the peak it hit in 2008. But it is still almost eight percentage points higher than the average of the 1980s.
  - The availability of foreign exchange is no longer a major worry. The occasional balance of payments surpluses in recent years show that India receives more international savings than it can absorb.
  - The food constraint had already begun to ease after the Green Revolution. India now has excess food stocks as a buffer against sudden shocks to farm production.
  - The aggregate demand constraint meant that there was not enough domestic demand for industrial goods because of high poverty levels. Rising incomes, as well as exports, have eased this as well.

Failure:
- The reforms failed to generate enough jobs in formal enterprises. This led to the proliferation of informal employment in the country.
- Further, enhanced political pressure was created to use fiscal resources for subsidies or income support rather than on the creation of public goods.

Way Ahead:
- The 1991 reforms played a big part in loosening the four traditional structural constraints that had dominated Indian economic thinking for many decades.
- The focus should be now placed on newer structural constraints:
  - The health and education crises during the pandemic have underlined inadequate investments in human capital.
  - India still does not have adequate state capacity and regulatory capacity for a $3 trillion economy.
  - Ecological stress, as well as climate change, will create new forms of constraints on sustainable economic growth.

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13. Does India need more coal power?

Synopsis: Critical analysis on the future of coal plants in India.

Arguments in favour of doing away with additional coal-based capacity

Several reasons are being cited in support of this argument. They are,

- First, need to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting temperature rise to only 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2100 when compared to pre-industrial levels.
- Second, coal-fired plants in India are already operating at a very low plant load factor (PLF). It is possible to generate additional power at a relatively low marginal cost.
- Third, India has envisioned a massive programme of having 450 GW of renewable capacity by 2030 and it is growing at the rate of about 25 per cent annually in the last few years.
- Fourth, with the cost of batteries declining progressively, storage has become a viable option, which will help in attaining grid stability.
- Fifth, green hydrogen may become a viable option by 2030 and will be able to provide long-term storage solutions.
- Sixth, coal-based developers will find it increasingly difficult to find lenders for their projects due to increasing divested from coal.
- However, India needs to look into the following issues in detail before coming to a conclusion.

- First, India needs to estimate the demand for electricity for the future in 2030. Various estimates suggest India needs 2,200 billion units (BUs) to 2,800 BUs depending upon the assumptions made.
- Second, need to estimate the shape of our load curve in 2030. Need to understand whether the load curve will be the same as it is today where the peak demand will be at around 8pm or will it shift to sometime during the daylight hours.
- Third, need to have a realistic estimate about the feasibility of achieving a renewable capacity of 450 GW by 2030.
- Fourth, though battery costs may have come down by 80 percent approximately in the last decade, there is apprehension that further decrease in costs may no longer be so dramatic. Even at today's battery prices, it is economically viable to have storage of approximately four hours only.
- Fifth, low PLF does not necessarily mean that India does not need any further fresh capacity. PLF is only the average use of the capacity of the generating station over the year. There could be certain hours of the 24-hour dispatch period where the plant may have to operate at more than 80 percent of the load, for a short period of time.
- In conclusion, it would be a significant achievement for India if it can do away with more coal-based plants other than the ones under construction. However, this can only happen after a thorough study clearly establishes that we can meet the demand for electricity without new coal-based plants.

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14. A question of compliance

Source: <u>Business Standard</u>

GS2: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development.

Relevance: Inflation Targeting is the main tool of fighting inflation.

Synopsis: More transparency and clarity are required over RBI's way of managing inflation.

Introduction:

- RBI has recently released minutes of the RBI Monetary Policy Committee's meeting.
- It decided to **retain the prevailing repo rate at 4 per cent** and continue with the **accommodative stance** to revive growth and continue to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy.
- RBI has prioritized growth over inflation.

Why such a move of RBI is the cause of concern?

- Firstly, there is **no clarity over what happens if these inflation projections go wrong**.
  - o The June retail inflation number will have to decline to around 5 per cent to be in line with the projections, which is difficult.
  - o Also, Localised lockdown in different parts of the country is not fully reflected in retail inflation.
- Secondly, it raises **question over Committee's compliance of inflation targeting regime.**
  - o As per compliance provision, average inflation above 6 per cent for any three consecutive quarters means a failure to achieve the inflation target.
  - o **RBI must submit a report to the Union government** stating the reasons for failure, remedial actions, and an estimate of the time within which the inflation target should be achieved.
- Thirdly, when retail inflation exceeded the upper tolerance band from March 2020 to December 2020, there was no such report from the RBI.
  - o Monetary Policy Committee had noted that data for April and May 2020 were collected under the limitations of the lockdown.
  - o The government had clarified that it was due to **short-run supply gaps** and **instability** in agriculture production.
- Lastly, the break in the CPI series is questionable.
  - o The tolerance band is expected to **allow the MPC to recognize the short-run trade-offs between inflation and growth** and enable it to pursue the inflation target in the long run.
  - o It implies that the tolerance band was not able to handle data limitations.
- It shows the Committee had taken the easy way out by not explaining to the government what its perspective was on inflation. Also, the government failed to secure from the RBI a report on inflation.

Way forward:

- Compliance report should be presented as it brings attention back to the need for reining in inflation.
- It helps to generate a **public debate** on the vital issue affecting the people.
- It also helps the government explore policy options to limit the impact of higher prices on its citizens.

Hence, RBI should soon return to its primary mandate of adhering to the inflation target of 4 per cent with a permissible upper tolerance level.

15. What to check when building by the sea

Source- The Indian Express
Syllabus- GS 3 – Disaster and disaster management.
Relevance: Florida building collapse highlights the need for caution in building structures in coastal areas.

Synopsis – Some factors should be considered while building construction close to coastal areas, as well as a possible way to avoid sudden building collapses.
Introduction-

- The sudden collapse of a building in surfside, Florida, coastal area underlines the vulnerability of structures near the sea.
- According to some reports, the collapsed building was in need of substantial repairs. There has been a lack of adequate waterproofing and abundant cracking of varying degrees.
- Sea level rise, corrosion might be possible causes of Florida building collapse.

Key consideration with coastal construction-

1. **Soil and foundation type-** In general, the bearing capacity of the soil around the coastal areas, is not good enough. Thus the deep foundation is to be adopted for multi-storey buildings in which the superimposed loads are transferred to firm strata.
   - **Type of deep foundation in the coastal area-**
   - **Pile foundation**
   - **Pier foundation**
2. **Consider Corrosion –** saltwater seeping into concrete is a major issue in a coastal area, causing support beams to corrode and weaken over time, eventually leading to collapse. Therefore, engineers should consider the following things during construction in such conditions
   - Should use non-corrosive steel.
   - Concrete Carbonation should be considered. Anti-carbonation coatings can be applied to the cleaned surface of the concrete reinforcement.
3. **Choosing the right building material** – The use of the right material that withstands the hostile saline environment is very important for coastal area construction.
   - Use of **chemical additives** to improve the performance of concrete.
   - **Cement type –** Sulphate-resistant cement.
4. **Proper and timely structure audit –** To avoid buildings in coastal areas from collapsing unexpectedly, proper maintenance and regular structure audits are required. The following audits can be done –
   - Buildings that are 30 years or older can undergo **Non-Destructive Testing**.
   - Basic check related to columns, beams, pillars, iron bars and plaster, sewage discharge systems, and water pipelines.
5. **Rising sea levels and overdevelopment** are two significant causes that contribute to the abrupt collapse of coastal structures.

16. V2G – Vehicle to grid technology and its future

Source- Live Mint
Syllabus- GS 3 – Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Synopsis – V2G solutions could be the future of decentralized power in India. EVs could be used as a buffer against the inconsistency of renewable energy.

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What is V2G?

V2G stands for vehicle-to-grid and is a technology that enables energy to be pushed back to the power grid from the battery of an electric car to balance variations in energy production and consumption.

- The V2G technology requires a bidirectional charging infrastructure so that surplus energy can be transfer.

Advantages of V2G technology-

- **Reduce power storage building cost –** building energy storage facilities that operate as a buffer are more expensive to supply and require significant investments to establish. As the number of EVs is continuously rising, electric cars provide a storage option with no extra costs.
- **V2G will be reliable as conventional energy** – Solar and wind energy are weather dependent, while the V2G is not.
- **Environment friendly-** Vehicle-to-grid helps mitigate climate change by allowing energy system to balance more and more renewable energy.
  - o V2G will help to reduce carbon emissions by contributing clean, green energy.
  - o The EV batteries can act as a buffer against patchy power supply from renewable energy sources.
- **Extra income for EV owners** by selling surplus energy of batteries back to grid.
- **Scope of V2G in India-**
- **There are some positive steps taken in this directions-**
- India has set itself an ambitious target of achieving 100% EV sales by 2030.
- **Manufacturing EVs batteries in India-** To meet EV demand, the government plans to develop Tesla style giga factories in India.

What need to be done?

Need of technical and regulatory frameworks – The framework that allows EVs, producers of renewable energy and the electricity grid to seamlessly interact with one another. So EV can be dynamically utilized by the grid.

- The deciding factor for V2G adoption would be the development of V2G enabling infrastructure, and its integration in flexibility markets in the future.

Way forward-

- V2G technology is one of the few potential flexibility assets that could support the grids, help avoid peak power plants usage and at the same time benefit the EV users financially.
- EVs are simply the smartest way to help with the renewable energy production, as EVs will be part of people's life in the future.

17. Govt charts course for usage of new-age fuel

Source: Livemint

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

Relevance: Green Hydrogen has the potential to become a major source of energy. It will be helpful in dealing with climate change.

Synopsis:

The government plans to implement the Green Hydrogen Consumption Obligation (GHCO) in fertilizer production and petroleum refining. This would reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels for producing hydrogen and enable a smooth transition towards green hydrogen.

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Background:
- A draft note prepared for the Union cabinet said that fertilizer plants and oil refineries may have to mandatorily use green hydrogen in their operations.
- The aim is to cut the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and promote the generation of clean energy.
  - Currently, Around 54% or 3.6 mmt of India's annual hydrogen consumption of 6.7 mmt is utilized in petroleum refining and the rest in fertilizer production.
  - This is, however, **'grey' hydrogen produced from fossil fuels** such as natural gas or naphtha.
  - India's total hydrogen demand is expected to touch 11.7 million metric tonnes (mmt) by 2029-30 from the current 6.7 mmt.

About Green Hydrogen:
- Green hydrogen is **produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using an electrolyzer** that may be powered by electricity from renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.
- Hydrogen can be used for both fuel cell and internal combustion engines. It is also being leveraged for applications in sectors such as chemicals, iron, steel, transport, heating and power.

What does the draft cabinet note say?
- The government plans to implement the Green Hydrogen Consumption Obligation (GHCO) in fertilizer production and petroleum refining. This would be similar to what was done with renewable purchase obligations (RPO).
  - RPOs require electricity distribution companies to buy a fixed amount of renewable energy to cut reliance on fossil fuels.
- GHCO is proposed to be raised from 0.15% in 2023-24 to 0.25% in 2024-25 and 0.5% in 2025-26.
- Subsequently, it may be raised to 1.5%, 3.5% and 6.5% in 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29, respectively, with the **10% mark targeted for 2029-30.**
- The proposal involves leveraging the country's large landmass and low solar and wind tariffs to produce low-cost green hydrogen.

Way Ahead:
- The mandatory adoption would help in reducing the current cost of green hydrogen produced by electrolysis. It would reduce the cost to Rs. 160 per kg by 2029-30 while its current price is Rs. 350/kg.
- The government is also aiming to **extend the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing electrolyzers** to produce green hydrogen.
- Indian companies, including Reliance Industries Ltd, have been gearing up to leverage opportunities presented by the transition to cleaner energy.
  - RIL has announced plans to build an electrolyzer giga factory and a fuel cell giga factory as part of its pivot towards clean energy.

18. GST at four: A dive into the milestones and the unfinished agenda
Source: Business Standard
Syllabus: GS paper 3- Mobilization of resources
Relevance: GST has completed 4 years, since its implementation.
Goods and Services Tax (GST) marked a new chapter in India's taxation. It has completed four years. Following are the major highlights of its journey, till now.

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Revenue collection: Before April, the monthly collection of GST was ₹ 95,000 crore on average. However, the collection has crossed ₹ 1.4 trillion in April.

GST Council: It is a working model of cooperative federalism between the Centre and states on the matters of GST. It has 2 central government members, 28 members representing states, and 3 members representing union territories with (proposed) legislature.

However, it's 2 central government members command 33 percent of the total vote. All states together account for 67 percent of the vote. 75 percent of votes are needed to pass a resolution. Thus, the GST council has become a new ground of political tussle.

Rate rationalisation: GST was originally aimed as a simplified tax structure with a lesser number of tax slabs. However, this aim has not been achieved properly.

The 15th Finance Commission recommended merging the 12 percent and 18 percent slabs and rationalising GST into a three-rate structure, complemented by the 5 percent merit rate and 28- 30 percent de-merit rate.

The weighted average rate of GST in India has gradually reduced, from 14.4 percent during the beginning of GST implementation (May 2017) to as low as 11.6 percent in September 2019. These decisions are taken for the political benefit, not a rational basis.

19. Patent waiver talks falter on developed nations' hurdles
Source: Times of India
Syllabus: GS-3: Issues relating to intellectual property rights.
Relevance: One of the hindrances to the wide-scale production of vaccines is Intellectual property rights and the TRIPS agreement.
Synopsis:
After showing some promise, the patent waiver talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO) have hit a hurdle due to a split between the developed and developing countries.

What developing countries want, and what is the EU proposing?
India and South Africa have suggested that their proposal for Covid drugs, vaccines and aids should be the basis for **"line by line negotiations"**. This is backed by 60 developing and poor countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the African group.

But the European Union has rejected several arguments put forward by the developing countries. Instead, the EU wants its proposal to be taken up **on an equal footing.**
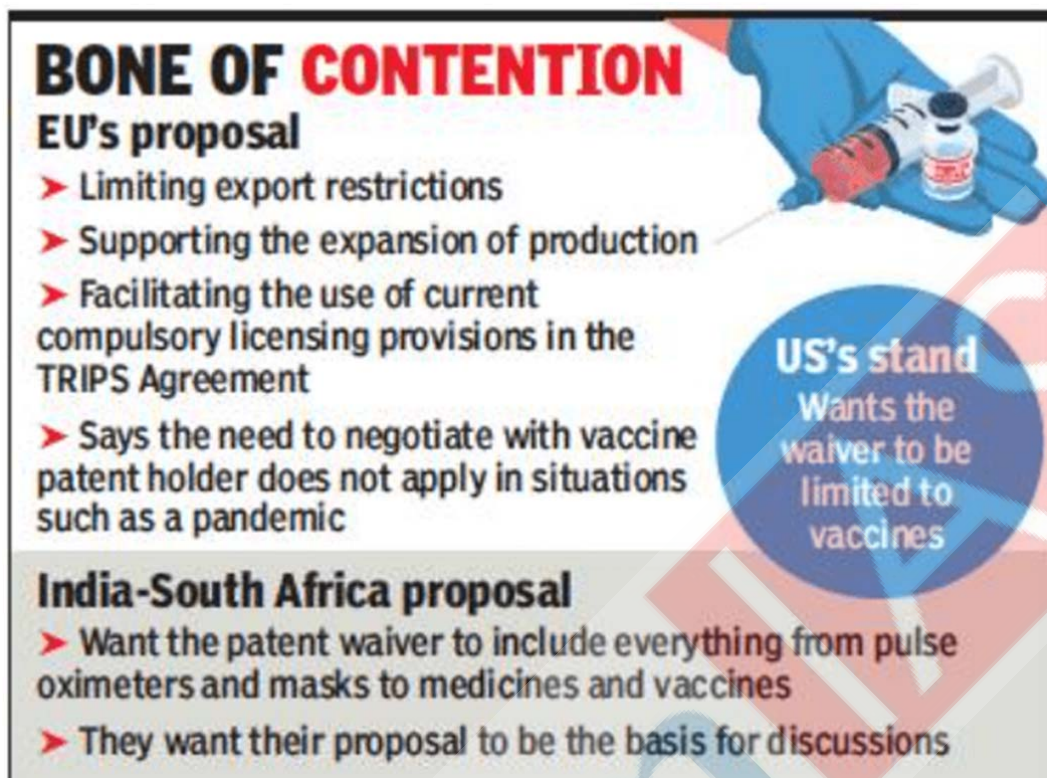
About EU's proposal:
The EU's proposal calls for the following things.
- Limiting export restrictions on vaccines,
- Supporting the expansion of production of vaccines,
- Facilitating the use of current compulsory licensing provisions in the TRIPS Agreement,
- The EU also wants to clarify that the requirement to negotiate with the right holder of the vaccine patent does not apply in urgent situations such as a pandemic.

Other contentions regarding waiver:
- The US has agreed to negotiations on the waiver, wants the **waiver to be limited to vaccines**. On the other hand, India and South Africa want it to **include everything from pulse oximeters and masks to medicines and vaccines**.
- Apart from the US and EU, **Switzerland, the UK & Japan along with Brazil, Mexico & Colombia also have concerns** about the India-South Africa proposal.

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BONE OF CONTENTION

EU's proposal

➤ Limiting export restrictions

➤ Supporting the expansion of production

➤ Facilitating the use of current compulsory licensing provisions in the TRIPS Agreement

➤ Says the need to negotiate with vaccine patent holder does not apply in situations such as a pandemic

US's stand
Wants the waiver to be limited to vaccines

India-South Africa proposal

➤ Want the patent waiver to include everything from pulse oximeters and masks to medicines and vaccines

➤ They want their proposal to be the basis for discussions

Source: TOI

Why India and South Africa demanding such proposals?

- The WHO resolution includes medicines, vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics, assistance products, cell and gene-based therapies, health products and technologies, which are critical for the prevention, treatment and containment of Covid-19. So, including vaccines alone is not enough to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Early conclusion of talks is essential for the poor countries to get quick access to drugs and vaccines and can combat coronavirus before it mutates further.

Read more:

- Intellectual Property Rights(IPR) and Universal Vaccination – Explained, Pointwise

20. Order & stability in power supply
Source: Business Standard
Syllabus: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc
Relevance: Solar energy is essential for achieving energy security in India.
Synopsis:
India's solar energy price reduction needs other reforms from the government to enhance India's solar capacity.

About Japanese investment in solar energy:
In 2015, Japan's SoftBank Group announced the intention to invest $20 billion in India in solar projects through SB Energy (SBE). It seemed ideal for India. With abundant sunshine and a big potential market, the logic for large solar projects was always compelling.
Further, India had about 4 GW of rural and rooftop projects. But this rooftop electricity is priced 50 per cent higher than power from coal.

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Solar power cost trajectory in India:
The Indian government has raised the solar target for 2022 from 20 GW to 100 GW. Prices fell since 2015. This is due to cheap solar modules from China, and increasing competition. All this led to the cost of Solar power became half that of coal. This means **solar energy is a slower-payback infrastructure.**

Challenges in solar energy:
- The preponderance of coal will continue because the current annual tendering capacity is 6-8 GW. This means higher costs and carbon footprint until the government is able to accommodate larger-scale investor interest.
- India's markets in electricity are roiled by **low and unstable prices and uneven service quality**. To bring out order and stability to electricity markets, India needs investors with significant capital willing to invest.

How to improve India's solar energy?
- India needs investors like SoftBank, with the capacity and willingness to invest in slower-payback infrastructure. So, India needs to **nurture serious investors** willing to invest in electricity and other infrastructure.
- India has to develop **integrated, stable services** at reasonable prices. That might not necessarily be the least cost in the interests of efficacy. This is what India need to drive the economy in a sustained manner, to provide its foundation and fuel with its growth.
- Government **policies and regulations** need to be **configured towards overarching objectives** that are aligned or at least not contradictory.
    - Various streams **within and across sectors must be integrated** to converge towards objectives. Such as fuel sources and electricity generation
    - But, this will require **Central and state governments to evolve integrated plans** and **develop interdepartmental coordination** processes to steer the energy sector.
- A prerequisite to energy security is **resolving the financial problems of state distribution companies**, including payment discipline.

21. A widening current account deficit is both good news and bad
Syllabus: GS 3 – issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment
Source: Live Mint
Relevance: Some signs like CAD signifies economic recovery
Synopsis: current account deficit (CAD) of India is widening. It is a piece of mixed news for India.
India's current account deficit (CAD) has widened. As per the latest data, it is around 1% of gross domestic product (GDP). It is a relief for the Indian economy because 19% growth in imports is the main factor behind that.

Why increasing CAD is mixed news for the economy?
Positives: CAD has increased mainly due to an increase in imports, especially non-oil and non-gold. It indicates that economic recovery is picking up the pace. As per experts, faster vaccination would increase the growth rate that would reflect in the CAD by an increase in imports.
Negatives: However, this increase in imports is also accompanied by a surge in key global commodity prices. From crude oil to steel, prices of most commodities have galloped in the past few months.

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It would result in an increase in domestic inflationary pressures. It would complicate the work of RBI because retail inflation surged to over 6% in April.

A faster rise in the consumer price index (CPI) inflation momentum compared to the wholesale price index (WPI) shows that producers have begun to pass on their costs to consumers.

Terms to Know:
- Current Account Deficit
- Consumer Price Index

22. What is a heat dome? – Explained

Source: Indian Express, Hindustantimes, Livemint

Syllabus: GS3 – Environment

Relevance: Important weather phenomenon impacting the climate and the people.

Synopsis: Parts of Canada and USA are reeling under severe heatwave caused due to a heat dome. Possible causes and likely impact are discussed.

Why in news?

High temperatures are being reported from the Pacific northwest (in USA) and some parts of Canada. This is a part of **a "historic" heat wave** that lasted over a week, a result of a phenomenon referred to as a **"heat dome".**

- On June 29, temperatures in Portland (USA) advanced to 46.7°C. For three consecutive days, the city saw record temperatures. Before this, the highest temperatures were in August 1981 and July 1965.
- Canada too saw its highest temperature ever recorded in the country's west. In Lytton in British Columbia, temperatures soared to **over 46°C** last week.

What is a heat dome?

According to The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a heat dome occurs when the **atmosphere traps hot ocean air** like a lid or cap.

- Heat dome is **more likely to form during La Niña years** like 2021, when waters are cool in the eastern Pacific and warm in the western Pacific.
- The phenomenon begins when there is a strong change (or difference) in ocean temperatures. In the process known as **convection**, the temp difference causes more warm air, heated by the ocean surface, to rise over the ocean surface.
- That **temperature difference** creates winds that blow dense, tropical, western air eastward. Eventually that warm air gets trapped in the jet stream—a current of air spinning counterclockwise around the globe—and ends up on the U.S. West Coast, resulting in heatwaves.
  - A **heat wave** is a period of unusually hot weather that lasts for more than two days. Heat waves can occur with or without high humidity and have the potential to cover a large area exposing a high number of people to **hazardous heat.**
  - **Impact of heat wave**: So as long as the body is producing sweat, which is then able to evaporate quickly, the body will be able to remain cool even under high temperatures. But, there is a limit to this *(a limit called the **wet-bulb temperature)* beyond which humans cannot tolerate high temperatures.** Some heat-related illnesses include heat stroke, heat exhaustion, sunburn and heat rashes. Sometimes, heat-related illnesses can prove fatal.
  - **Wet Bulb temperature**: is the lowest possible temperature that a surface can reach by evaporative cooling (i.e. that a wetted surface can reach with air passing over it) in a given spot.
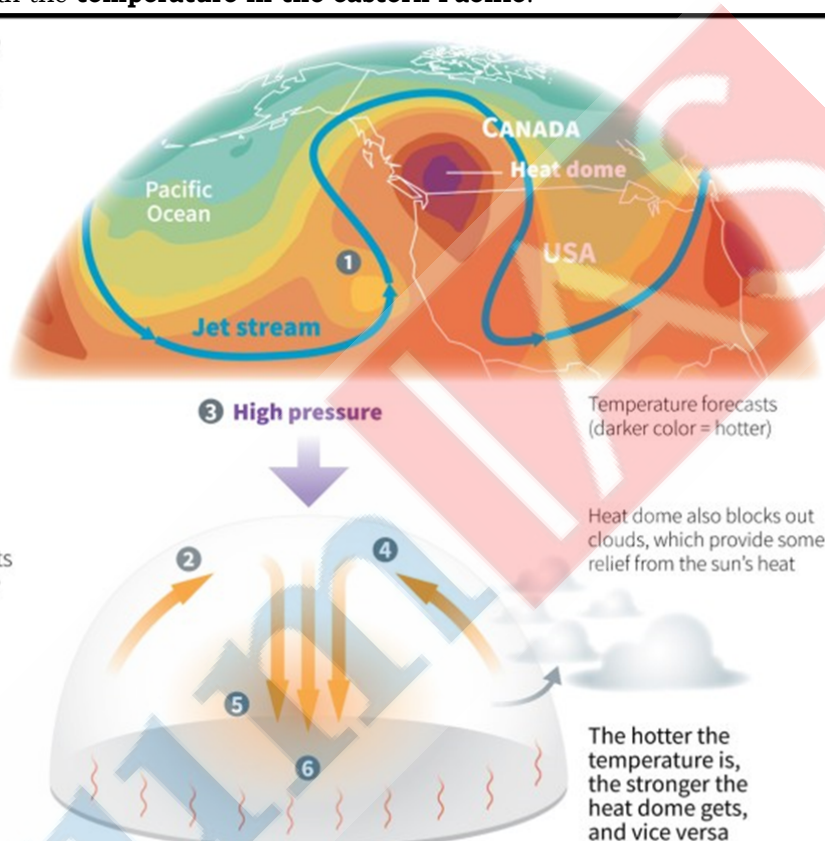
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- **Example**: To understand what causes a heat dome, one should liken the Pacific ocean to a large swimming pool in which the heater is turned on. Once the heater is on, the portions of the pool close to the heat source will warm up faster and therefore, the temperature in that area will be higher. In the same way, the **western Pacific ocean's temperatures have increased** in the past few decades and are relatively more than the **temperature in the eastern Pacific**.

The 'heat dome'

Occurs when the atmosphere traps hot ocean air like a lid or cap

1. In summer, the **jet stream** (which moves the air) shifts northward

2. **Hot** and stagnant **air expands** upwards

3. Strong and **high-pressure** atmospheric conditions combine with influences from La Nina act like a dome or cap

4. In a process known as **convection,** hot air attempts to escape but high pressure pushes it back down

5. Under the dome, the air sinks and **compresses,** releasing more heat

6. As winds move the hot air east, the jet stream traps the air where it sinks, resulting in **heat waves**

Source: NOAA/US/Canada medias, experts

③ High pressure

Temperature forecasts (darker color = hotter)

Heat dome also blocks out clouds, which provide some relief from the sun's heat

The hotter the temperature is, the stronger the heat dome gets, and vice versa

AFP

Impact of a heat dome

- **Loss of life**: Heat domes can lead to a sudden rise in fatalities due to extreme heat like those which are being reported in Canada and parts of the US. These fatalities happen especially amongst those living without an air conditioner.
- **Damage to crops**: The trapping of heat can also damage crops, dry out vegetation and result in droughts.
- **Rise in energy consumption**: The heat wave will also lead to rise in energy demand, especially electricity, leading to pushing up rates.
- **Increase in wildfires**: The heat domes can also act as fuel to wildfires, which destroys a lot of land area in the US every year.
- Heat dome also **prevents clouds from forming**, allowing for more radiation from the sun to hit the ground.
- Are heat domes linked to climate change?
- It's challenging to link any one specific weather event with climate change, but over time the trend is showing longer-lasting, more intense heat.
- Climate change certainly influences hot weather: It is making heat more extreme and such extreme heat will occur more frequently.

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- In Russia, cities as far north as the Arctic circle broke heat records this month.

Also Read: **What are marine heatwaves?**

23. 'GNPA ratio may rise up to 11.2% in FY22'
Sources: The Hindu, The Business Standard (Article 1, Article 2)
Syllabus: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.
Relevance: The problem of NPA is still impacting the Indian economy and the recent Financial Stability Report also highlights it.
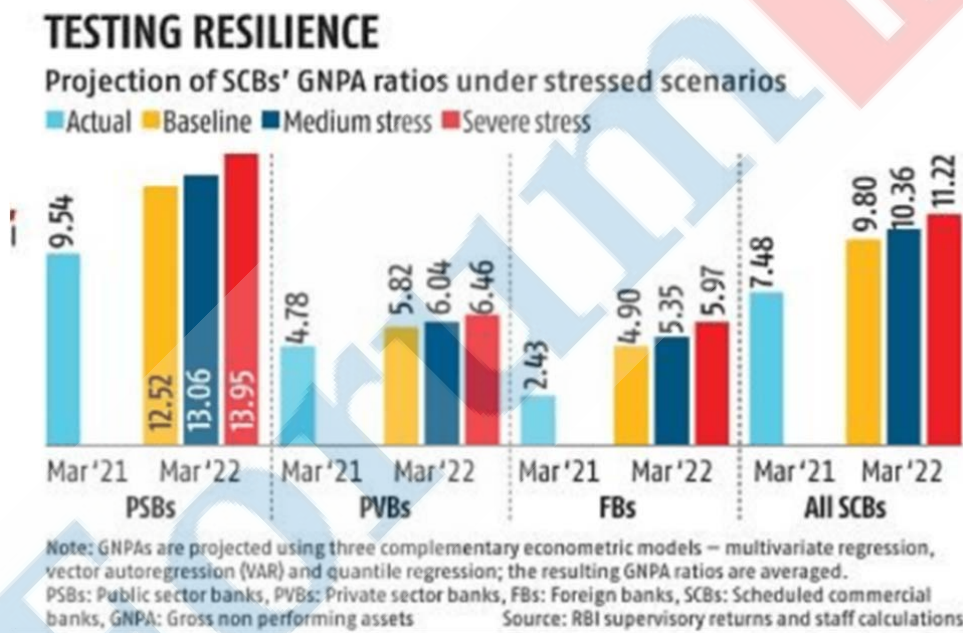**About the news:**
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently launched its half-yearly Financial Stability Report. The report highlighted that the gross non-performing asset ratio (GNPA) of India's scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) may climb by the end of the current fiscal year to as much as 11.2% under a severe stress scenario, from 7.48% in March 2021.
About the Financial Stability Report:
The half-yearly FSR report is a collective assessment of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) sub-committee. It assesses the economy on risks to financial stability and the resilience of the financial system. All regulators take part in making the report, and it is released by the RBI.
Key highlights of the Financial Stability Report:

TESTING RESILIENCE
Projection of SCBs' GNPA ratios under stressed scenarios
■Actual ■Baseline ■Medium stress ■Severe stress

Note: GNPAs are projected using three complementary econometric models — multivariate regression, vector autoregression (VAR) and quantile regression; the resulting GNPA ratios are averaged.
PSBs: Public sector banks, PVBs: Private sector banks, FBs: Foreign banks, SCBs: Scheduled commercial banks, GNPA: Gross non performing assets   Source: RBI supervisory returns and staff calculations

Source: Business Standard
- The report mentions the "GNPA ratio of SCBs may increase by March 2022". The report mentions that the banks have sufficient capital to take care of NPAs.
- The capital to risk-weighted assets ratio of SCBs increased to 16.03%, and the provisioning coverage ratio stood at 68.86% in March 2021.
- Policy support has helped in shoring up the financial positions of banks, containing non-performing loans, and maintaining solvency and liquidity globally.
- **On the domestic front**, the ferocity of the second wave of COVID-19 has dented economic activity. But the monetary, regulatory, and fiscal policy measures have helped curtail the solvency risk of financial entities, stabilize markets. Further, these measures also help the financial entities to maintain their financial stability.

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- **Large borrowers** make up the **lion's share of a bank's bad debt** even now. The share of large borrowers in the aggregate loan portfolio of banks stood at 52.7 per cent in March 2021. But they accounted for 77.9 per cent of the total gross non-performing assets (NPA).
- The pandemic has hit consumers and smaller businesses the hardest. Demand for consumer credit across banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) has dampened.
  - Public sector banks grew their credit book by only 3.2 percent. On the other hand, private counterparts expanded their credit book by 9.9 per cent year on year.
- **Precautionary savings** resulted in a deposit increase of 11.9 per cent.
- The report mentions new risks such as
  - Future waves of the pandemic;
  - **Expansion of government market borrowing**: The report has pointed out that banks are holding a high amount of government bonds. This is the highest since March 2010. This makes them sensitive to valuation changes.
  - International commodity prices and inflationary pressures;
  - Global spillovers amid high uncertainty;
  - Rising incidence of data breaches and cyberattacks
- **Improvement in health of banking sector**: The RBI was expecting NPAs to climb to 12.5 per cent of advances under its baseline scenario a year ago. But under current projection's it is what projected in a severe stress scenario also.

Suggestions mentioned in the report:
1. The SCBs will need to **reinforce their capital and liquidity positions** to fortify themselves against potential balance sheet stress.
2. The RBI also mentioned that the **sustained policy support, benign financial conditions, and the gathering momentum of vaccinations** were **nurturing an uneven global recovery**.

Terms to know:
Financial Stability Report

24. Explained: Facing up to the drone challenge
Source: Indian Express1 Indian Express1
Syllabus: GS3 – S&T, Security
Relevance: How is India placed in drone technology and offensive measures to counter-drone attacks in the future?
Synopsis: Recent attacks on air force base in Jammu should force the Indian security establishment to speed up its drone and anti-drone tech development. Challenges involved, and the current scenario.

Background
Last week, two drones dropped an IED each packed with high grade-explosives on an Indian Air Force base in Jammu. It was the **first-ever attack in India** where suspected terrorists had used drones.

Also read: **What is a drone?**

Usage of drones in India
In India, the most commonly known drones are quad- and hexacopters used for civil and commercial purposes, and **Heron drones** used for military surveillance

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What has been the Indian experience?

In the last few years, India and its enemies have frequently used drone surveillance against each other. There have been an estimated 100-150 sightings of suspected drones near India's western border annually. Most of these are suspected to be surveillance drones.

Also Read: **Drone challenge for India**

How to tackle drones?

Drones have control and delivery mechanisms, and to counter them either you can counter the **control mechanism** by jamming, or can control the **delivery mechanism**. It depends on what kind of radar is being used, which is critical for the size of the UAV that needs to be detected.

Any kind of counter-strategy should give enough warning to positively identify that it is not a bird. Also, if you are firing, you don't know what it is carrying. I

- Currently, **border forces in India largely use eyesight** to spot drones and then shoot them down. It is easier said than done, as most rogue drones are very small and operate at heights difficult to target.
- India has been exploring technologies to detect and disable drones using **electromagnetic charges or shoot them down using laser guns.** Technology to disable their navigation, interfere with their radio frequency, or just fry their circuits using high energy beams have also been tested. None of these has, however, proven foolproof.

Challenges in tackling small drones

Conventional radar systems are not meant for detecting small flying objects, and, even if they are calibrated that way, they might confuse a bird for a drone and the system may get overwhelmed.

Global anti-drone systems

- **Drone Dome:** Rafael, the defence company behind Israel's famed **Iron Dome missile system**, has also developed something called the **Drone Dome**. Like the Iron Dome, which identifies and intercepts incoming missiles, Drone Dome detects and intercepts drones. Beside offering a **360-degree coverage**", the Drone Dome is also capable of jamming the commands being sent to a hostile drone and **blocking visuals,** if any, that are being transmitted back to the drone operator. Its highlight, however, is the precision with which it can shoot **high-powered laser beams** to bring down targets.
- **DroneHunter**: US-based Fortem Technologies uses an interceptor drone called the 'DroneHunter' — to pursue and capture hostile drones. The DroneHunter fires from its '**NetGun**' a spider web-shaped **net** to capture targets midair and tow them.
- **DroneGun**: Besides the regular detection and surveillance, DroneShield, an Australian publicly listed company, also offers a portable solution in the form of a drone gun that can be used to point and 'shoot'. The company's **DroneGun Tactical and DroneGun MKIII** engage in **radio frequency disruption** that will disrupt the hostile drone's video feed and force it to land on the spot or return to the operator.
- Does India have an anti-drone technology?
- Yes. The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has developed a **detect-and-destroy technology** for drones, but it is **not yet into mass production**.
- The DRDO's **Counter-Drone System was deployed for VVIP protection** at the Republic Day parades in 2020 and 2021, the Prime Minister's Independence Day

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speech last year, and former US President Donald Trump's visit to Motera Stadium, Ahmedabad in 2020.

- The DRDO system, developed in 2019, has **capabilities for hardkill** (destroying a drone with lasers) and **softkill** (jamming a drone's signals). Its softkill range is 3 km and hardkill range between 150 m and 1 km.
- It has a **360° radar** that can detect **micro drones** up to 4 km, and other sensors to do so within 2 km.

Although challenges related to technology's strategic deployment and the money the government is ready to spend, still remain.

What are India's plans to use drones in warfare?

The armed forces have been slowly inducting capacity. In 2020, Navy got two unarmed **Sea Guardian Predator drones** on lease from the US. The three forces want 30 of these UAVs between them.

- The military has been working towards using small drones for offensive capabilities as well. On January 15, during the Army Day parade, the Army showcased its swarm technology, with 75 drones swarming together to destroy simulated targets.

25. Military should fund its own modernisation

Source: Business Standard

Syllabus: GS 3 – Security Challenges and Their Management in Border Areas

Relevance: The issue justifies a case of modernization of the military by itself.

Synopsis:

The threat of a two-front war creates an urgent situation to modernize the military which requires enhancement of the defence budget. The additional revenue can be generated by levying a military modernization cess, leasing military lands, or disinvesting some ordnance factories.

Background:

- The intrusion of Chinese soldiers across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 2020 brought the Indian military inched closer to its worst-case security contingency. It was on the verge of a **two-front confrontation with both China and Pakistan.**
- There is a situation of peace after the renewal of the ceasefire agreement on the India-Pakistan Line of Control. Further, the PLA is also quiet after largely achieving its operational objectives in Ladakh.
- Nonetheless, the threat of a two-front war is still looming, which creates an urgency to modernize the military. However, this can be done only with an enhanced defense budget.

Pattern in the allocation of defense budget:

- There is a **dire shortfall of funds for capital purchases**. The government has been allocating fewer resources for capital expenditure than demanded by the military since 1992.
- Each year, the military calculates its Capex requirements for the coming year and projects its requirement to the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- The MoD projects this onwards to the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Then, without assigning reasons, the MoF slashes the military's requirement and allocates a smaller capital budget instead.
  - The current defence budget was presented in the backdrop of an ongoing conflict between Indian troops and the PLA in Ladakh.

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o The MoF still slashed the military's Capex projection of Rs 199,553 crore by a whopping 38 percent (Rs 76,553 crore), allocating just Rs 123,000 crore.

Why is there a cut on defence expenditure every year?
- **First,** governments have operated on **the assumption that a full-scale war was highly unlikely** and, therefore, equipment modernization was wasteful.
- **Second**, **Border conflicts,** such as the 1999 Kargil war, the 2017 Doklam confrontation, and the ongoing Ladakh intrusions **are not serious enough to make equipment modernization an imperative**.
    o If things go wrong, such as in Kargil where the army was caught without 155-millimeter artillery ammunition for its Bofors guns, **we rely on friends like Israel to bail us out.**
- **Third,** the **political-electoral calculus favors** the spending of thousands of crores on vanity projects such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's statue in Gujarat and the redevelopment of the Central Vista in New Delhi.

Need to increase defense expenditure:
- **First**, the revenue heads, which include salaries, pensions, and the forces' operating expenses, are already catered for before allocating money to the capital budget head.
    o Therefore, **any increase in the defence budget would be an increase in the capital budget**.
- **Second**, making a capital purchase usually requires only 10-15 percent of the total cost to be paid up-front. The remaining amount is disbursed over a five to seven-year period, as the product is manufactured and delivered.
    o Therefore, the army, navy, and air force can fill critical deficiencies of fighter aircraft, artillery guns, and submarines with just 1/10th of the total amount.

Ways to generate revenue for incurring greater expenditure:
- **First**, Goods and services tax (GST) could be increased by 1 percent in all slabs as a **military modernization cess**.
    o Further, much of the education cess on income tax remains unutilised. It can be reduced by a percentage point and a 2 percent cess for military modernization could be levied.
- **Second**, if increasing taxation is unacceptable, the defence services could **monetise** some of its 17 lakh acres (2,833 square kilometres) of **defence land**.
    o However, real estate has created a chequered history of controversies involving senior generals. Such as scandal in Sukhna in 2008 and the Adarsh Housing Society scam in Mumbai in 2011.
- **Lastly,** MoD can do **disinvestment in the 41 factories** of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB). The factories produce arms, ammunition, and equipment for the military worth about Rs 12,000 crore annually.
    o **In the UK, selective privatisation has transformed** a moribund public defence sector into vibrant and productive private entities. London has conveyed its willingness to share its experience and expertise with India.

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26. THE FORMULA FOR PLANT-BASED 'MEATS'

Source: Livemint

Syllabus: Awareness in the field of biotechnology and Food processing and related industries

Relevance: The achievement of food processing industries(FPIs) to create plant-based meat is an important topic for biotechnology and FPIs.

Synopsis: Plant-based meat is gaining popularity globally. But, what are the associated issues and why we need such products?

Issues with large-scale meat consumption:

- **Large-scale animal husbandry is unsustainable**. For example, plants convert 10% of the sun's energy into calories. Further, animals eat plants and only give us 10% of those calories in the form of meat. But the generation of greenhouse gases is much higher in the process.
- Either we all learn to eat less meat and pay a premium price for it, or we won't have much of a planet left to enjoy a filet mignon in the near future.

Technological solutions:

Now, Technology has a potential solution to the problem, just like it first enabled large-scale factory farms.

1. **Growing meat in a laboratory setting**: In simple terms, it means growing animal muscle tissue from its DNA to produce low-carbon-footprint meat. But this is a complex solution. Further, This meat does not have the same texture and flavour as a walking, breathing animal.

2. **Converting plants into meat like or Mock meat:** This method involves taking protein from plants like wheat, peas and soybean, use flavour additives and binding chemistry to synthesise something that tastes exactly like meat. The main challenge in this method is **plants don't have muscle tissue** (elastic and flexible). Instead, they have rigid structures. However, this tech isn't new.
   - Mock meat made from soy has been catering to Buddhist monks in East Asia for ages.
   - Some food-tech firms in the US have made breakthroughs in the looks, flavour and texture department.
     - i. Beetroot extract, pomegranate powder and soy leghemoglobin are used to mimic the colour(**Look**) of red meat.
     - ii. For **flavour**, plant-based meat uses plant-based saturated fats to mimic the intra-muscular fat in animal tissue.
     - iii. To get the **texture**, the plant protein also has to be laid out in a layered fibrous structure that mimics muscle tissue. For this, scientists use a process of high-moisture extrusion, a combination of heating, compression and cooling that can be sequenced precisely.
     - iv. The tech has reached a point where even **foodies can't tell the taste difference** between beef and plant-based meat.

Concerns with plant-based meat:

There are few questions associated with plant-based meat. Such as,

- Questions regarding the healthiness of ultra-processed, preservative and stabiliser-laden products.
- Uses of preservatives in plant-based meat, etc.

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