

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

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At a Glance & In Depth.

Polity and Social Issues
Economy
International Relations
Environment
Science and Tech
Culture..

CURRENT AFFAIRS
WEEKLY

THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT
YOUR FINGER TIPS.



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) MGNREGA

About MGNREGA

- MGNREGA, which is the **largest work guarantee programme in the world**, was enacted in 2005 with the **primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households**.
- The MGNREGA provides a **legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage**.
- The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

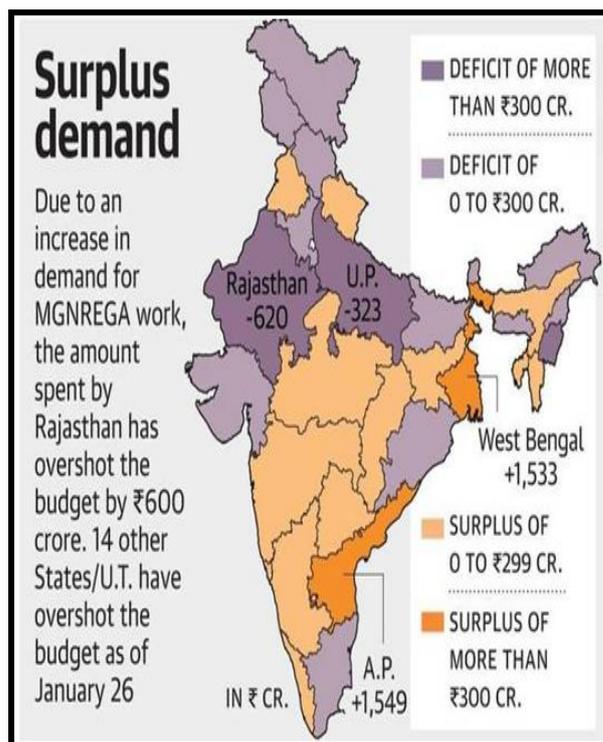
Key facts about MNREGA

- MGNREGA focuses on the **economic and social empowerment of women**.
- The MGNREG Act actually gives rural households the **right to work** — making it obligatory for the State to give them work on demand.
- Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, wage employment will be provided to the applicant.
- Right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- **Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory**, which lends to accountability and transparency.
- MGNREGA works address the climate change vulnerability and protect the farmers from such risks and conserve natural resources.
- The **Gram Sabha** is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands. It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the

shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

Why in News?

- The Centre is on the verge of running out of funds for the crucial Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.
- More than 96% of the allocated money has already been spent or is needed to pay pending dues, with less than ₹2,500 crore left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.



News in Detail:

- January, February and March are months with little agricultural activity and rural workers move towards other employment opportunities but the **scheme doesn't have financial resources** to pay them.
- According to the scheme's financial statement, **Rajasthan has the highest negative net balance** of ₹620 crores, followed by ₹323 crores in Uttar Pradesh.

- In Rajasthan, **worker's wages have not been paid from past several months** as the centre has not released the funds which violate the spirit of the Act and principles of right based implementation of the scheme.
- The **Central Employment Guarantee Council which is responsible for a central monitoring and evaluation system** for the scheme has **not met in the last two years** despite it being mandatory to hold a meeting every six months.
- The budget allocation for 2019 for MGNREGA scheme was ₹60,000 crores which is **lower than** the amount spent in 2018.

2) Legislative Councils

What are the Legislative Councils?

- India has a **bicameral system** i.e., two Houses of Parliament. At the state level, the equivalent of the Lok Sabha is the Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly; that of the Rajya Sabha is the Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council. .
- Under Article 168, states can have either one or two Houses of legislature(Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council).

Composition:

- As per **Article 171** of the Indian Constitution the total number of Members in the Legislative council of a State **shall not exceed one third of the total number of Members** in the Legislative Assembly.
- Of the total number of Members of the Legislative Council, 1/3 of Members are elected by electorates consisting of the Members of Local Authorities, 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of graduates residing in the State, 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of persons engaged in teaching, 1/3 are elected by the Members of Legislative Assembly and the remaining are nominated by the Governor.

Why are they important?

- A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons: one, to act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House (legislative Assembly) and, two, to ensure that individuals who might not be cut out for the rough-and-tumble of direct elections too are able to contribute to the legislative process.

How many legislative councils are there in India?

- The states with bicameral legislature include **Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh**. These states have both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly.

Why in News?

- The Andhra Pradesh assembly passed a statutory resolution seeking to abolish the state legislative council.

Abolition of legislative councils

- **Article 169(1)** of the Constitution allows Parliament to either create or abolish a Council in a state "if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect.
- The resolution must be by a majority of the **total membership of the Assembly** and **by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting**.

Why is it being abolished in Andhra Pradesh?

- With just nine members, the ruling YSRCP is in the minority in the 58-member legislative council. The opposition TDP has an upper hand with 28 members. Jagan can get a majority in the house only in 2021, when a number of opposition members will retire at the end of their six-year term.

3) Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

What is meant by adoption?

- Adoption means the process through which the adopted child becomes the lawful child of his adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that are attached to a biological child.

About Central Adoption Resource Authority:

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a **statutory body of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India**.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in

accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993, ratified by the Government of India in 2003.

- CARA primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognized adoption agencies.

Why in News?

- The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has begun a nationwide capacity building programme for social workers who help assess the suitability of the adoptive family and prepare a child for a new home.

4) Anticipatory Bail

What is Anticipatory Bail?

The back story of advance bail

- The old Cr.PC of 1898 did not contain any specific provision corresponding to the present Section 438. There was a difference of opinion among various HCs whether court had an inherent power to grant pre-arrest bail
- The Law Commission of India on September 24, 1969, highlighted the need for introducing a provision in the Code enabling courts to grant "anticipatory bail" as an antidote to detention in false cases

- Clause 447 of the Draft Bill of 1970 was enacted with some modifications and became Section 438 of the Cr.PC, 1973



A five-judge Supreme Court Bench in the 1980 case of Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia vs. State of Punjab interpreted that the power to grant anticipatory bail is "cast in wide terms and should not be hedged in through narrow judicial interpretation". It held that courts could impose conditions which were appropriate

- In anticipatory bail, a person is **directed to be released on bail even before arrest made** unlike to ordinary the bail, which is granted to a person who is under arrest
- The provision of anticipatory bail under **Section 438** was introduced when CrPC was amended in 1973.
- Section 438 is a procedural provision concerned with personal liberty of each individual, who is entitled to the benefit of the presumption of innocence.

Conditions while granting anticipatory bail

- While granting anticipatory bail, the Sessions Court or High Court can impose the conditions laid down in sub-section (2).
 - a condition that the person shall make himself available for interrogation by a police officer as and when required;
- 1) a condition that the person shall not, directly or indirectly, make any inducement, threat or promise to any person acquainted with the facts of the case so as to dissuade him from disclosing such facts to the Court or to any police officer;
 - 2) a condition that the person shall not leave India without the previous permission of the Court;
 - 3) such other conditions as may be imposed under sub-section (3) of section 437, as if the bail were granted under that section."

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court ruled that no time limit could be fixed while granting anticipatory bail, and that it could continue till the end of trial.

CITIZENS' RIGHTS ARE FUNDAMENTAL, NOT RESTRICTIONS, SAYS TOP COURT

“The spectre of **arbitrary and heavy-handed arrests, too often to harass and humiliate citizens**, and often times at the interest of powerful individuals (and not to further any meaningful investigation into offences) led to the enactment of Section 438 (anticipatory bail)

As denial of bail amounts to deprivation of personal liberty, the **court should lean against the imposition of unnecessary restrictions** on the scope of Section 438, especially when not imposed by the legislature

It would be useful to remind oneself that the rights which the citizens cherish deeply, are fundamental, it is not the restrictions that are fundamental

— SUPREME COURT

News in Detail:

- A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra said the court could extend pre-arrest bail, with suitable conditions, under Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).
- The bench was hearing a matter regarding whether anticipatory bail should be limited to a particular period.

- According to court, the protection of anticipatory or pre-arrest bail cannot be limited to any time frame or “fixed period”

as denial of bail amounts to deprivation of the fundamental right to personal liberty.

ENVIRONMENT

1) 10 more wetlands from India get the Ramsar site tag

What are Wetlands?

- According to Convention on Wetlands, Wetland is defined as “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide **does not exceed six metres**”
- The definition is further enlarged to include “may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands” This may also include human made wetlands.
- Five major wetland types are generally recognized:
 1. marine (coastal wetlands including coastal lagoons, rocky shores, and coral reefs);
 2. Estuarine (including deltas, tidal marshes, and mangrove swamps);
 3. Lacustrine (wetlands associated with lakes);
 4. Riverine (wetlands along rivers and streams);
 5. Palustrine (meaning “marshy” - marshes, swamps and bogs).

Convention on Wetlands

- The Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- The Convention was adopted in the **Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971** and came into force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world’s geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”.
- The wetlands recognised under this convention are called Ramsar sites.
- Ramsar Convention has adopted a Ramsar Classification of Wetland Type which includes 42 types, grouped into three categories: Marine and Coastal Wetlands, Inland Wetlands, and Human-made Wetlands.

- The aim of the Ramsar list is to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits. Wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are protected under strict guidelines of the convention.

Why in news?

- 10 more Indian wetlands are added in Ramsar List.
- Maharashtra gets its first Ramsar site i.e., Nandur Madhameshwar.
- Punjab which already had 3 Ramsar sites adds 3 more i.e., Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve & Nangal
- UP with 1 Ramsar site has added 6 more i.e., Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and SarsaiNawar.
- With this, the numbers of Ramsar sites in India **are now 37** and the surface area covered by these sites is now 1,067,939 hectares.

2) African Cheetah in India

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court on Tuesday lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
- In May 2012, the apex court had stalled the plan of bringing foreign cheetah into the **Palpur Kino sanctuary** in Madhya Pradesh fearing they may come into conflict with a parallel and a much-delayed project to **reintroduce lions** into the same sanctuary.
- The court was also concerned about the number of prey available in the sanctuary.
- The Bench made sure that the right precautions are taken. It **set up a three-member committee**, comprising former director Wildlife Institute of India Ranjit Singh, DG of Wildlife Institute of India Dhananjay Mohan, and DIG, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests to

'guide' the NTCA for reintroduction of cheetah.

- The Supreme Court made it clear that a **proper survey should be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs**. Every effort should be taken to ensure that they adapt to the Indian conditions.
- The court has asked to NTCA to look after the issues such as Man-animal conflict, introduction of alien species, coexistence of lions and cheetahs etc.

Asiatic Cheetah

- The Asiatic cheetah is one of the **world's most critically endangered big cats**. Tan color, speckled with characteristic black spots and weighing up to 143 pounds.
- Asiatic cheetahs are almost identical in appearance to their better known African cousins. However, there are subtle differences.
- Asiatic Cheetah were not spotted after 1952 in India. In 1952 cheetah was declared extinct from India.
- Asiatic cheetahs are **slightly more slender and have slightly longer legs**. Moreover, because of the nature of these physical differences some have speculated that Asiatic cheetahs might actually be faster than their African cousins.

- Preferring Savannah like open plains and semi-desert regions, **Asiatic cheetahs are presently found mainly in eastern Iran** around areas such as Dasht-e Kavir, with most housed in protected national park habitats such as Kavir and Touran National Parks.

African Cheetah



- The map shows the distribution of African Cheetahs. They are **Vulnerable**, and are bigger compared to Asiatic Cheetah. Their population is around 6500 in the wild



- African cheetah

3) Yellow rust disease Why in news?

Asiatic cheetah

- The detection of yellow rust disease in the **wheat crop** in sub-mountainous parts of

Punjab and Haryana has raised anxiety among farmers.

- They fear a drop in the crop's yield even as respective agriculture departments are leaving nothing to chance to ensure the spread of the disease doesn't go beyond control.
- The recent rains in the region coupled with slight increase in the temperature and humid conditions became favourable for yellow rust.



About the disease

- It is a FUNGAL DISEASE.
- It turns the crop's leaves into a yellowish colour and **stops photosynthesis activity**, which eventually could result in a drop of wheat crop productivity.
- It can spread quickly and can cause severe losses in crop yield if not checked in time
- More than \$5 billion is lost to cereal rusts (leaf rust, stem rust and stripe rust) worldwide each year.

4) E-commerce giants need to set up system for collecting plastic waste: CPCB to NGT

The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 aim to:

- Increase minimum thickness of plastic carry bags from 40 to 50 microns and stipulate minimum thickness of 50 micron for plastic sheets also to facilitate collection and recycle of plastic waste
- Expand the jurisdiction of applicability from the municipal area to rural areas, because plastic has reached rural areas also

- To bring in the responsibilities of producers and generators, both in plastic waste management system and to introduce collect back system of plastic waste by the producers/brand owners, as per extended producers responsibility
- To introduce collection of plastic waste management fee through pre-registration of the producers, importers of plastic carry bags/multilayered packaging and vendors selling the same for establishing the waste management system
- To promote use of plastic waste for road construction as per Indian Road Congress guidelines or energy recovery, or waste to oil etc. for gainful utilization of waste and also address the waste disposal issue; to entrust more responsibility on waste generators, namely payment of user charge as prescribed by local authority, collection and handing over of waste by the institutional generator, event organizers.
- An eco-friendly product, which is a complete substitute of the plastic in all uses, has not been found till date. In the absence of a suitable alternative, it is impractical and undesirable to impose a blanket ban on the use of plastic all over the country. The real challenge is to improve plastic waste management systems.

Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2018

- The amended Rules lay down that the phasing out of Multilayered Plastic (MLP) is now applicable to MLP, which are "non-recyclable, or non-energy recoverable, or with no alternate use."

Why in news?

- The Central Pollution Control Board told the National Green Tribunal that E-commerce giants **Amazon and Flipkart** need to fulfil their extended producer responsibility under the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 and need to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to the packaging of their products.

ECONOMY

1) RBI launches 'MANI' app

Why in News?

- RBI launched a mobile application called "**Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI)**" for **aiding visually impaired persons to identify the denomination of Indian Banknotes.**

More in News

- Indian banknotes contain several features which enable the visually impaired (colour blind, partially sighted and blind people) to identify them, viz., **intaglio printing** and **tactile mark**, variable banknote size, large numerals, variable colour, **monochromatic hues and patterns.**
- Technological progress has opened up new opportunities for making Indian banknotes more accessible for the visually impaired, thereby facilitating their day to day transactions.

Intaglio Printing

- The portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, the Reserve Bank seal, guarantee and promise clause, Ashoka Pillar Emblem on the left, RBI Governor's signature are printed in intaglio i.e. in **raised prints**, which can be felt by touch, in Rs.20, Rs.50, Rs.100, Rs.500 and Rs.2000 notes.

Watermark

- The Mahatma Gandhi Series of banknotes contain the Mahatma Gandhi watermark with a light and shade effect and multi-directional lines in the watermark window.

Variable colour

- The numeral 2000 and 500 on the obverse of Rs.2000 and Rs.500 notes respectively is printed in optically variable ink viz., a **colour-shifting ink.**

Features of MANI

- Capable of identifying the denominations of Mahatma Gandhi Series and Mahatma Gandhi (New) series banknote by checking front or reverse side/part of the note including half folded notes at various holding angles and broad range of light conditions (normal light/day light/low light/ etc.).

- Ability to identify the denomination through **audio notification** in Hindi/English and **non-sonic mode such as vibration** (suitable for those with vision and hearing impairment).
- It does not require internet and works in offline mode.
- Ability to **navigate** the mobile application **via voice controls** for accessing the application features wherever the underlying device & operating system combination supports voice enabled controls.
- The application is free and can be downloaded from the Android Play Store and iOS App Store without any charges/payment.
- This mobile application **does not authenticate a note as being either genuine or counterfeit.**

2) Govt goes for 100% stake sale of Air India

Why in News?

- The Union government invited bids for **100% stake sale of Air India (AI) and transfer of management control.**

News in Detail

- The deal is along with its **complete share in two subsidiaries-low-cost international carrier Air IndiaExpress Limited (AIXL) and all of the government's 50% stake in AI-SATS**, which is a **joint venture with Singapore-based ground handling company SATS Limited.**
- The government has also offered to write off liabilities worth nearly Rs 40,000 crore.
- The new buyer will get a total of 146 aircraft, 56% of which are owned by the airline group, while the remaining are on lease.
- It will also benefit from as much as 50% of international market share held by Indian airlines as well as the airline's 4,400 airport slots at airports in the country and 3,300 slots in 42 countries, which will be available at least for six months after the sale is complete.
- As many as 9,617 permanent employees, including pilots and cabin crew with deep

technical and operational expertise, will be up for grabs along with the airline's brand as well as the famous "Maharaja" and "Flying swan" logos.

FDI norm

- The bid document also states that the **existing FDI** (foreign direct investment) policy, which allows a foreign airline to buy

up to **49%** in Air India, will continue to apply.

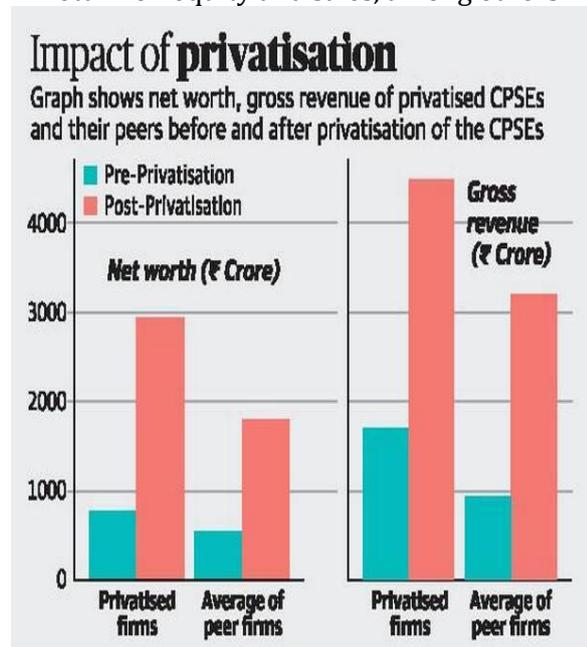
- The substantial ownership and control will also have to rest with an Indian national.

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2019-2020

1) Divestment in public sector undertakings

Details

- The Economic Survey has aggressively pitched for divestment in public sector undertakings (PSUs) by proposing a **separate corporate entity** wherein the government's stake can be transferred and divested over a period of time.
- Further, the survey has said **privatised entities have performed better than their peers** in terms of net worth, profit, return on equity and sales, among others.



SOURCE: SURVEY CALCULATIONS BASED ON DATA FROM CMIE PROWESS

- "Aggressive disinvestment, preferably through the route of strategic sale, should be utilised to bring in higher profitability, promote efficiency, and increase competitiveness and to promote professionalism in management in CPSEs," stated the Survey.

2) Food inflation higher in urban areas

Details

- There has been a sudden change in trend so far as food inflation is concerned, in the current financial year, for urban and rural areas, the Economic Survey said, highlighting **higher food inflation in urban areas**.

- Divergence in rural-urban food inflation in 2019-20 was **mainly led by cereals, eggs, fruits, vegetables etc.**
- Headline inflation (Consumer Price Index) has been consistently higher for urban areas since July 2018, which is in contrast to the earlier experience, and the divergence has been mainly due to differential rates of food inflation between rural and urban areas.

▪ **Headline inflation** is a measure of the total inflation within an economy, including commodities such as food and energy prices (e.g., oil and gas), which tend to be much more volatile and prone to **inflationary** spikes.

- The report further noted that the divergence in rural-urban inflation was not just observed in the food component, but also in other components like clothing and footwear.
- "The decline in rural inflation in items like clothing and footwear, fuel and light could be due to **fall in growth of real rural wages**, while rise in rural price index for items like education, health, personal care, etc., also raises the question of affordability of these items to the rural segment."

3) India has low rates of formal entrepreneurship

Details

- The Economic Survey said that India currently **ranks third globally in the number of new firms created** with about 1.24 lakh new entities coming up in 2018.
- However, **India has lower rates of formal entrepreneurship** on a per-capita basis compared to other countries.
- *Between the 10-year period from 2006 to 2016, the mean number of new firms registered per year per 1,000 workers was 0.10. In contrast, the mean entrepreneurial intensity for the U.K. and the U.S. was 12.22 and 12.12, respectively.*
- The data showed that new firm creation in services sector (at around 85,000) was significantly higher than that in manufacturing (a little less than 15,000), infrastructure (about 5,000) or agriculture (less than 5,000).

- Further, the Survey added that **entrepreneurship at the bottom of the administrative pyramid — a district — had a significant impact on wealth creation at the grassroots level.** “... a 10% increase in registration of new firms in a district yields a 1.8% increase in GDDP (gross district domestic product).”
- It added that enhancing ease of doing business and implementing flexible labour laws in job-creating sectors, such as manufacturing, can create the maximum number of jobs in districts and thereby, in the States.
- Literacy, education and physical infrastructure are the other policy levers that district and State administrations must focus upon to foster entrepreneurship and thereby, job creation and wealth creation, the Survey said.

4) Essential Commodities Act is outdated, must go

About Essential Commodities Act (ECA) 1955

- It has been used by the Government to **regulate the production, supply and distribution** of a whole host of commodities it declares ‘essential’ in order to **make them available to consumers at fair prices.**
- The list of items under the Act include **drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, and petroleum and petroleum products.**
- The **Centre can include** new commodities as and when the need arises, **and take them off the list** once the situation improves.

How does it work?

- If the Centre finds that a certain commodity is in short supply and its price is spiking, it **can notify stock-holding limits** on it for a specified period.
- The **States act on this notification** to specify limits and take steps to ensure that these are adhered to.
- Anybody trading or dealing in a commodity, be it wholesalers, retailers or even importers are prevented from stockpiling it beyond a certain quantity.
- Traders have to immediately sell into the market any stocks held beyond the mandated quantity.

- This improves supplies and brings down prices.
- As not all shopkeepers and traders comply, State agencies conduct raids to get everyone to toe the line and the errant are punished.
- The excess stocks are auctioned or sold through fair price shops.

Why is it important?

- The ECA gives consumers **protection against irrational spikes in prices** of essential commodities.
- It cracks down on hoarders and black-marketers of such commodities.

Another side to the story

- Given that almost all crops are seasonal, ensuring round-the-clock supply requires adequate build-up of stocks during the season.
- So, it may not always be possible to differentiate between genuine stock build-up and speculative hoarding.
- Also, there can be genuine shortages triggered by weather-related disruptions in which case prices will move up.
- So, if prices are always monitored, farmers may have no incentive to farm.
- With too-frequent stock limits, traders also may have no reason to invest in better storage infrastructure.
- Also, food processing industries need to maintain large stocks to run their operations smoothly. Stock limits curtail their operations.
- In such a situation, large scale private investments are unlikely to flow into food processing and cold storage facilities.

Survey findings

- In July 2019, the NITI Aayog set up a panel of Chief Ministers to suggest agriculture reforms, whose mandate included possible amendments to the ECA.
- However, just a few months later, in September 2019, the Centre invoked the Act’s provisions to impose stock limits on onions after heavy rains wiped out a quarter of the kharif crop and led to a sustained spike in prices.
- Although the restrictions on both retail and wholesale traders were meant to prevent hoarding and enhance supply in the market, the Survey showed that there was actually an **increase in price volatility**

and a widening wedge between wholesale and retail prices.

- The Survey argued that if the government had not intervened, traders would have stored part of their produce to ensure smooth availability of the commodity at stable prices throughout the year.
- *In the long term, the Act **disincentivises development of storage infrastructure**, thereby leading to increased volatility in prices following production/ consumption shocks — the opposite of what it is intended for.*
- The Survey also offered similar examples of stock limits on sugar and pulses which had little impact.
- It added that despite 76,000 raids conducted under the ECA in 2019, the conviction rate was abysmally low.
- *The ECA only seems to enable rent-seeking and harassment. The Survey provides clear evidence that the case for jettisoning this anachronistic legislation is strong.*

Drug price control

- The Survey argued that the **Drug Price Control Order** issued under the ECA also distorted the market and **actually made medicines less affordable**.
- Estimates showed that the prices of drugs that came under DPCO, 2013, increased Rs. 71 per mg of the active ingredient, in comparison to just Rs. 13 per mg for drugs unaffected by the order.
- The increase in prices is greater for more expensive formulations than for cheaper ones and for those sold in hospitals rather than retail shops, said the Survey.

No to loan waiver and direct procurement

- With regard to the farm sector, the Survey argued that the beneficiaries of farm loan waivers **consume less, save less, invest less and are less productive**.
- It added that the **government procurement of foodgrains led to an increasing food subsidy burden** and inefficiencies in the markets, arguing for a **shift to cash transfers** instead.

5) India can chart China-like export trajectory

Details

- The Economic Survey says India has an unprecedented opportunity to chart a China-like, labour-intensive, export

trajectory by integrating “**Assemble in India for the world**” into Make-in-India policy and thus can raise its export market share to 3.5 % by 2025 and 6% by 2030.

- It said such a strategy could help to create four crore well-paid jobs by 2025 and 8 crore by 2030.
- The Survey said India must focus on a group of industries, referred to as “**network products**”, where **production processes are globally fragmented** and controlled by leading Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) within their “producer-driven” global production networks.
- The Survey has suggested a strategy similar to one used by China to grab this opportunity, which is specialisation on a large scale in labour-intensive sectors, especially network products.

6) Thalonomics: the calculation behind one square meal

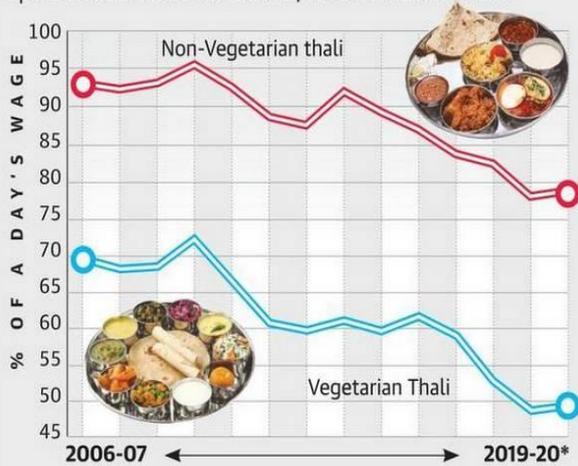
Details

- The final part in the Economic Survey for 2019-20 reveals a **new way of measuring household income**.
- “**Thalonomics: the economics of a plate of food in India**” is an attempt to figure out how much a meal costs in India, the survey said.
- The price of a meal, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, is modelled for 25 States/UTs, taking into account the price of cereals, vegetables, pulses and the cost of fuel.
- Analysing this data, the survey found that since 2015-16, there was a change in the dynamics of ‘thali’ prices.
- It claims that the reforms undertaken a year ago to enhance agricultural productivity as well as efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural markets for better and more transparent price discovery led to the change in prices of thali.
- Using the annual earnings of an average industrial worker, the survey found that the **affordability of vegetarian ‘thali’ improved 29% from 2006-07 to 2019-20**, while that of **non-vegetarian thali improved by 18%**.
- Affordability of ‘thali’ in relation to a worker’s daily pay has improved over time,

indicating **improved welfare of the common person**, the survey concluded.

What's in your plate?

The graph shows the % share of day's wage, a worker has to spend to afford two thali meals, for a household of five



SOURCE: SURVEY CALCULATIONS

NOTE: *: CALCULATIONS FOR 2019-20 BASED ON PRICES FOR THE PERIOD APRIL-OCTOBER, 2019

- However, accelerating food inflation over the last few months has broken that trend, with workers now forced to use an increasing share of their wages on food, the data compiled in the Survey shows.
- The thali prices include the costs of raw cereals, vegetables and protein, as well as the spices, condiments, cooking oil and fuel needed to prepare the meal.

7) Bigger banks needed for \$5 trillion economy

Details

- The country will need much bigger banks to become a \$5 trillion economy, the Economic Survey 2019-20 said.
- In particular, at least eight banks are needed which are large enough to belong to the top 100 banks globally, the Survey said noting there is now only one bank in the country, the **State Bank of India**, with **55th** rank, in the world's top 100 banks.
- *The state of the banking sector in India, therefore, needs urgent attention.*

Lag in performance

- Observing that even though public sector banks are the dominant players in the

banking sector, they lag considerably in performance metrics when compared to their peers, the Survey said, pointing out that these entities have destroyed capital deployed by the government over the years.

- *In 2019, every rupee of taxpayer money invested in public sector banks, on average, lost 23 paise.*
- *In contrast, every rupee of investor money invested in 'New Private Banks' (NPBs) — banks licensed after India's 1991 liberalization — on average gained 9.6 paise.*
- The report highlighted that while a large economy needs an efficient banking sector to support its growth, **credit growth among PSBs has declined significantly since 2013** and has also been anaemic since 2016.
- Credit growth for the new private banks, however, remained healthy.
- Commenting that anaemic credit growth has impacted economic growth, the Survey called for enhancing the efficiency of public sector banks as they operate in the same market as the new private sector banks.

Less operating freedom

- The report says the decline in PSB market share has been largely absorbed by new private banks.
- The report also pointed out that the PSBs enjoy **less strategic and operating freedom** as compared to private banks.
- It says the majority ownership by the government also subjects public sector bank officers to **scrutiny of their decisions by the Central Vigilance Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General.**
- *With no real restrictions on what can be investigated and under what circumstances, officers of state-run banks are wary of taking risks in lending or in renegotiating bad debt, due to fears of harassment under the veil of vigilance investigations.*

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) India and Brazil

Why in News?

- Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro was in India as the Chief Guest of the 71st Republic Day 2020.



Action Plan

- India and Brazil concluded an **Action Plan to deepen the strategic partnership**.
- The Strategic Partnership Action Plan will serve as an “umbrella agreement”, for plans between the two countries to increase defence cooperation, technology sharing and a logistics agreement.
- Under the Action Plan, existing mechanisms, as well as the goals of the Action Plan, have been grouped in six major thematic areas: political and strategic coordination; trade and commerce, investments, agriculture, civil aviation and energy mechanisms; science, technology and innovation; space cooperation; environment and technical cooperation; health mechanisms; defence and security; culture and education; consular issues, social security and legal cooperation mechanism.

- The **India-Brazil Joint Commission** for political, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation will be the main forum for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan and will convene every two years.

More in News

- The two countries also concluded 15 agreements and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the visit.
- These include agreements on bioenergy and cyber security.
- Bilateral relations were elevated to a **Strategic Partnership in 2006** and 2023 will mark 75 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations.
- Brazil and India also exchanged a **Social Security Agreement (SSA)**, first signed in March 2017, to allow investments in each other’s pension funds, to help business processes and encourage the flow of investment.
- The other agreements exchanged are cooperation in oil and natural gas; women and child development; investment protection; field of health and medicine; early childhood; traditional systems of medicine and homeopathy; cultural exchange programme between 2020-24; scientific and technological cooperation; geology and mineral resources; animal husbandry and dairying.

Agreement on Criminal Cooperation

- The Agreement aims to enhance the effectiveness of both the countries in investigation and prosecution of crime through cooperation and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.
- It is also expected to bolster counter-terror cooperation between the two countries.

Energy cooperation

- The MoU in the energy sector will allow for **joint exploration** in the petroleum and natural gas segment.
- Under the MoU, both sides will work towards establishing cooperation in the E&P (Exploration and Production) initiatives in Brazil and India, research & development in this sector, explore

collaboration in Liquefied Natural Gas projects in Brazil, India and third countries.

Investment cooperation and facilitation treaty

- The Bilateral Investment treaty is one of the first India signed since 2015, when it decided to scrap all existing treaties with 83 countries, and brought in a new “Model BIT”.
- Since then India has been able to sign BITs with **Belarus** and **Kyrgyzstan**, has concluded an agreement with Cambodia, and is negotiating treaties with about a dozen other countries.

Issues

- Brazil’s **complaint at the World Trade Organization** against India’s subsidies to sugarcane farmers.
- Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of sugar, and claims Indian subsidies are inconsistent with global trade rules.
- Brazil is being non-cooperative climate change talks and decided not to host the COP-25 UN climate talks.

2) West Asia peace plan

Israel-Palestine conflict

- The **roots** of the conflict go back to **Biblical times**, but from a modern historical perspective, the late 1800s and early 1900s were central to the situation that exists now.
- Between 1882 and 1948 a series of **Aliyahs** took place (large-scale movements of Jews from around the world to an area, which from 1917, officially became known as Palestine).
- In **1917**, shortly before **Britain** became the colonial power in Palestine, it issued the **Balfour Declaration** which declared that the British were in favour of establishment in Palestine of a **national home for the Jewish people**.

Wars over the issue

- In **1947**, the United Nations voted to split the contested territory into three parts; one for Jews, one for Arabs, and an international trusteeship regime in Jerusalem.
- The Arabs did not accept the deal and war broke out.
- After the **1948 Arab-Israeli war**, the Holy Land was divided into three parts: the State

of Israel, the West Bank (of the **Jordan River**), and the Gaza Strip.

- The West Bank and Gaza Strip fell under **Jordanian and Egyptian rule**, respectively.
- There was another major war in **1967 (Six Day War)**, in which Israel defeated Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces in a conflict that lasted just six days and resulted in Israel taking the **West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan**.
- The area is considered by the UN, the Palestinian territories, and many other countries to be “occupied” land, while Israel considers it to be “disputed” territory and wants its status to be resolved in the peace negotiations.



Intifada - violent uprising

- Once the wars over territory were over, a surge in violence and uprisings among the Palestinians began.
- The **first intifada**, in **1987**, was an uprising comprising hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- The **1993 Oslo Accords** mediated the conflict.
- In **2000**, inspired by continuing Palestinian grievances, the **second intifada** began and was much bloodier than the first.

About Oslo Accords

- The Oslo Accords were a landmark moment in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.
- Actually a set of two separate agreements signed by the **government of Israel** and the leadership of the **Palestine Liberation**

Organization (PLO), the Oslo Accords were ratified in **Washington, D.C., in 1993 (Oslo I)** and in **Taba, Egypt, in 1995 (Oslo II)**.

- While provisions drafted during the talks remain in effect today, the relationship between the two sides continues to be marred by conflict.
- Oslo Accords were noteworthy in that the PLO agreed to formally recognize the state of Israel and that Israel, in turn, allowed the Palestinians some form of limited self-governance (**Palestinian Authority**) in **Gaza** and the **West Bank** (the so-called Occupied Territories).
- They were originally seen only as a stepping-stone toward the ratification of a formal peace treaty between the two sides that would end decades of conflict.
- However, the Oslo Accords **have yet to result in any lasting peace.**

Oslo II

- The **Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement**, signed in **1995**, sought to put into practice the first Oslo peace deal.
- Sometimes called **Oslo II**, the interim agreement set out the scope of **Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza.**
- The interim pact was only supposed to last five years while a permanent agreement was finalized but it has tacitly been rolled over for more than two decades.

Issue of Jerusalem

- The Palestinians see **East Jerusalem** as the capital of their future state.
- But the **US** recognized undivided **Jerusalem as the capital of Israel** in 2017.
- Palestinians believe the US move buries the two-state solution that has been for decades the cornerstone of international Middle East diplomacy.
- World powers have long agreed that Jerusalem's fate should be settled through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

What is two-state solution?

- The two-state solution would establish an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel — **two states for two peoples.**
- In theory, this would win Israel security and allow it to retain a Jewish demographic majority (letting the country remain Jewish and democratic) while granting the Palestinians a state.

- Most governments and world bodies have set achievement of the two-state solution as official policy, including the United States, the United Nations, the Palestinian Authority and Israel.
- This goal has been the basis of peace talks for decades.

India's stand

- India has traditionally **supported statehood for the Palestinian** side and maintained that the two-state solution is the best guarantee for solution of the crisis.

Why in News?

- U.S. President Donald Trump announced a new plan for resolving the Israel-Palestine crisis, which has been rejected by the Palestinian side.

About the Plan - key points

- The U.S. will recognise Israeli settlements on the occupied West Bank.
- In exchange, Israel would agree to accept a four-year freeze on new settlement activity while Palestinian statehood is negotiated.
- The Palestinian refugees, who were forced out from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, would not be allowed to return.
- Jerusalem would be “the undivided capital” of Israel, with Palestine gaining its capital in the east of the city — beyond the security border Israel has already built.

3) Indian Navy launches 'Operation Vanilla' to help cyclone-hit Madagascar

Madagascar- location



- Madagascar, an island in the **Indian Ocean** off the southeastern coast of Africa, is the **fourth-largest island** (after Greenland, New Guinea, and Borneo) in the world.
- The **Tropic of Capricorn** passes through the southern part.
- It is separated from the African coast by the 400-km wide **Mozambique Channel**.

Biodiversity

- Many of the species of animals found in Madagascar **cannot be found anywhere else** in the world.
- Examples of these include lemurs, fossas, aye-ayes, tomato frogs, and the Madagascar long-eared owl.

Madagascar Animals



Why in News?

- **Indian Navy** on January 28 launched **'Operation Vanilla'** in support of the national disaster in **flood-hit** Madagascar and diverted a **large amphibious ship (INS Airavat)**.

4) The Dalai Lama

Who is the Dalai Lama?

- The Dalai Lamas are believed by **Tibetan Buddhists** to be **manifestations of Avalokiteshvara** or Chenrezig, the **Bodhisattva of Compassion** and the **patron saint of Tibet**.
- Bodhisattvas are realized beings, inspired by the wish to attain complete enlightenment, who have vowed to be reborn in the world to help all living beings.

How is the Dalai Lama chosen?

- The position of Dalai Lama dates back to the **14th century** and the person is **found rather than chosen**.
- He is believed to have the power to choose the body into which he is reincarnated, meaning that the current Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of the last.
- The search for the reborn Dalai Lama is the responsibility of the **High Lamas** of the **Gelgupa tradition** and the Tibetan government.
- It took four years to find the current Dalai Lama, the 14th incarnation, **Tensin Gyatso**.
- The search is generally limited to Tibet, although the current Dalai Lama has said

that there is a chance that he will not be reborn, and that if he is, it will not be in a country under Chinese rule.

China's interference

- China, which took control of Tibet in 1950, brands him a dangerous separatist and has said its leaders have the right to approve his successor, as a legacy from China's emperors.
- But many Tibetans suspect any Chinese role as a ploy to exert influence on the community.
- Gyatso has also warned that any successor named by China would not be respected.

China and Tibet

- Tibet, the remote and mainly-Buddhist territory known as the "roof of the world", is governed as an autonomous region of China.



- Following a brief military conflict between China and Tibet at the start of the 20th century, Tibet declared itself as an independent nation in 1912.
- It functioned as an autonomous region until 1950.
- China sent in thousands of troops to enforce its claim on the region in 1950.
- Some areas became the Tibetan Autonomous Region and others were incorporated into neighboring Chinese provinces.
- In 1959, after a failed anti-Chinese uprising, the **14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet** and set up a **government in exile in India**.
- Most of Tibet's monasteries were destroyed in the 1960s and 1970s during **China's Cultural Revolution**.
- Thousands of Tibetans are believed to have been killed during periods of repression and martial law.

Why in News?

- The US House of Representatives has passed a bill that authorises financial and travel sanctions against Chinese officials who interfere in the process of selecting the successor to the Dalai Lama.

5) WHO declares coronavirus outbreak a global emergency

About WHO Global Health Emergency

- Some serious public health events that endanger international public health may be determined under the Regulations to be public health emergencies of international concern (**PHEIC**).
- The term **Public Health Emergency of International Concern** is defined in the **IHR (2005)** as "an extraordinary event which is determined, as provided in these Regulations:
 - to constitute a public **health risk to other States** through the international spread of disease; and
 - to potentially **require a coordinated international response**".
- This definition implies a situation that: is serious, unusual or unexpected; carries implications for public health beyond the affected State's national border; and may require immediate international action.
- The responsibility of determining whether an event is within this category lies with the **WHO Director-General** and requires the convening of a committee of experts – the **IHR Emergency Committee**.
- This committee advises the Director General on the recommended measures to be promulgated on an emergency basis, known as temporary recommendations.
- Temporary recommendations include health measures to be implemented by the State Party experiencing the PHEIC, or by other States Parties, to prevent or reduce the international spread of disease and avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic.

About IHR

- The **International Health Regulations, or IHR (2005)**, represent an agreement between **196 countries** including **all WHO Member States** to work together for global health security.
- Through IHR, countries have agreed to build their capacities to detect, assess and report public health events.

- WHO plays the coordinating role in IHR and, together with its partners, helps countries to build capacities.
- IHR also includes specific measures at ports, airports and ground crossings to limit the spread of health risks to neighboring countries, and to prevent unwarranted travel and trade restrictions

so that traffic and trade disruption is kept to a minimum.

Why in News?

- The death toll in China from the new coronavirus (nCoV) reached 213, with overall cases worldwide rising rapidly in an outbreak that the **World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency.**

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Swalekhan App for visually impaired students

Why in News?

- An **Android-based** application (App), Swalekhan, built on the basis of a technology innovation promises to **academically empower visually impaired students** by freeing them of their dependence on scribes while writing exams.

About Swalekhan

- The Swalekhan (**self-writing**) app is a tech offering conceptualised by the Pune-based **Niwant Andh Mukta Vikasalaya**, an **NGO** that works for the betterment of the visually impaired individuals.
- The Android **text-to-speech app (typing tutor)** is aimed at helping visually impaired students reduce their reliance on scribes.
- From helping master the keys by using an **innovative braille paper overlay**, to aiding students in listening and grasping 78 innovative and interactive lessons, Swalekhan uses a combination of human voices as well as Text-to-Speech guided assistance.
- It has been embraced by more than 20 schools across Maharashtra since its launch in mid-2019.

2) Mission Shakthi - ASAT

About Mission Shakthi

- On **March 27, 2019** India conducted Mission Shakthi, an **anti-satellite missile test**, from the **Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam Island** launch complex.
- This was a **technological mission** carried out by **DRDO**.
- The satellite used in the mission was one of India's existing satellites operating in **Low Earth Orbit (LEO) of 300 km**.
- The test was fully successful and achieved all parameters as per plans.
- The test required an extremely high degree of precision (10-cm accuracy) and technical capability.
- The significance of the test is that India has tested and successfully demonstrated its capability to interdict and intercept a satellite in outer space based on **complete indigenous technology**.

- With this test, India joins an exclusive group of space faring nations consisting of USA, Russia and China.
- The DRDO's **Ballistic Missile Defence interceptor** was used, which is part of the ongoing ballistic missile defence programme.
- The test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that there is no space debris.
- Whatever debris that is generated will decay and fall back onto the earth within weeks.

Need for ASAT

- India's space programme is a critical backbone of India's security, economic and social infrastructure.
- The capability achieved through the Anti-Satellite missile test provides **credible deterrence** against threats to our growing space-based assets from long range missiles, and proliferation in the types and numbers of missiles.

Is India entering into an arms race in outer space?

- India has no intention of entering into an arms race in outer space and has always maintained that space must be used **only for peaceful purposes**.
- India is **against the weaponization of Outer Space** and supports international efforts to reinforce the safety and security of space based assets.
- India is a party to all the major international treaties relating to Outer Space.
- India already implements a number of Transparency and Confidence Building Measures(TCBMs) – including registering space objects with the UN register, prelaunch notifications, measures in harmony with the **UN Space Mitigation Guidelines**, participation in **Inter Agency Space Debris Coordination (IADC)** activities with regard to space debris management, undertaking **SOPA (Space Object Proximity Awareness and COLA (Collision Avoidance))**.
- India has been participating in all sessions of the **UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space**.

- India supported **UNGA resolution 69/32 on No First Placement of Weapons on Outer Space**.
- India supports the substantive consideration of the issue of **Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) in the Conference on Disarmament** where it has been on the agenda since 1982.

What is the international law on weapons in outer space?

- The principal international Treaty on space is the **1967 Outer Space Treaty**.
- India is a **signatory** to this treaty, and ratified it in **1982**.
- The Outer Space Treaty **prohibits only weapons of mass destruction in outer space**, not ordinary weapons.
- India is **not in violation of any international law or Treaty** to which it is a Party or any national obligation.

Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR)

- DRDO's ADTCR is used for volumetric surveillance, detection, tracking and friend/foe identification of aerial targets of different types, and transmission of prioritised target data to multiple command posts/ weapon systems.
- The radar is capable of detecting very small targets and low flying targets.

Why in News?

- The DRDO marching contingent displayed the **ASAT missile** along with a second equipment, the **Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR)** during the 71st Republic Day parade.

3) Cyber security vulnerabilities

What is Buffer Overflow?

- A buffer overflow occurs when a program or process **attempts to write more data to a fixed length block of memory**, or buffer, than the buffer is allocated to hold.
- Since buffers are created to contain a defined amount of data, the extra data can **overwrite data values** in memory addresses adjacent to the destination buffer unless the program includes sufficient bounds checking to flag or discard data when too much is sent to a memory buffer.

Buffer Overflow vulnerabilities

- Buffer overflows allow attackers to read or write data outside of the defined memory boundaries of a particular programme.
- Though mitigative measures exist, buffer overflow vulnerabilities in general are complex, and are considered to be harder to detect and exploit than other, **more frequently occurring security flaws**.
- In some cases, buffer overflow vulnerabilities can be leveraged for executing malicious code on the target machine.

How does it affect WhatsApp?

- A buffer overflow vulnerability in an application such as WhatsApp would allow an attacker to take advantage of the context under which the application is running on the system.
- The protections offered by end-to-end encryption on the platform would be rendered ineffective — since with a buffer overflow, an attacker would be able to get access to the buffer where data (including received messages) is stored.
- By exploiting such a flaw, permissions that have been granted to the app, which may include permission to access the device's microphone, camera, location, gallery and more — also stand to be exploited, though protections baked into mobile operating systems may make this harder to achieve.

Sandbox - safeguards on devices

- Modern computing devices, including smartphones, implement a number of security measures to effectively contain the extent of a program's ability to interact with machine it is running on.
- One such measure is known as a **"sandbox"**, which **limits the ability a program or process has to interact with operating system code**.
- However, it is possible to bypass such protections, too.
- It is possible to "chain" a vulnerability in software such as WhatsApp — with a vulnerability in the device's operating system — escaping the sandbox within which it is run, to ultimately gain **"root" privileges** on the affected system.
- Exploitation of sandbox and kernel vulnerabilities is also what allows **"jailbreaking"** to be performed on devices.

- Root access on a device grants the attacker with the **highest level of privilege** that can be held on the system.
- This would allow the attacker to circumvent most (if not all) software restrictions imposed on the device.

- A **sandbox** is a type of software testing environment that enables the **isolated execution of software** or programs for independent evaluation, monitoring or testing.
- **Root privilege** - The **highest authority or privilege given to a user** working with an operating system or other control program.

A person with root level access is called an **"administrator," "root user" or "superuser."**

- A **jailbreak** essentially 'unlocks' a device to give it capabilities beyond those permitted by the manufacturer that made it.

Why in News?

- Recently, The Guardian published a report on the alleged hacking of the personal phone of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos (in 2018).

PIB ANALYSIS

1) Child Sexual Abuse

Why in News?

- The Adhoc Committee of the Rajya instituted by Chairman Venkaiah Naidu has made 40 recommendations to prevent sexual abuse of children and to contain access to and transmission of child pornography content on the social media.

Key Recommendations:

- A clause to be inserted in the POCSO Act, 2012 under which advocating or counselling sexual activities with a person under the age of 18 years is made an offence under the Act.
- National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal shall be designated as the national portal under reporting requirements in POCSO Act in case of electronic material;
- A new section be included in the IT Act 2000, providing for punitive measures for those providing pornographic access to children and also those who access, produce or transmit Child Sexual Abuse Material(CSAM);
- Apps that help in monitoring children's access to pornographic content shall be made mandatory on all devices sold in India.
- On-streaming platforms like Netflix and social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook etc. should have separate adult section where under- aged children could be disallowed;
- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) should be designated as the nodal agency to deal with the issue of child pornography.
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shall mandatorily record and report annually cases of child pornography of all kinds.

2) Government eMarketplace (GeM)

Why in News?

- Government eMarketplace (GeM), under the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Government of Uttar Pradesh, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a GeM Organizational Transformation Team

(GOTT) Project Management Unit (PMU) in the State.

About GeM

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a one stop portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement. It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- The purchases through GeM by Government users have been authorized and made mandatory by the Ministry of Finance by adding a new Rule No. 149 in the General Financial Rules, 2017.

News in Detail:

- The PMU to be setup under the MoU will make it easier for MSMEs of U.P. to onboard and transact on GeM. GOTT will assist the buyer agency to redesign the procurement processes and enhance competencies to derive maximum benefit from the online marketplace.
- The Government of Uttar Pradesh is the second State after Punjab to establish a GOTT-PMU for efficient and transparent procurement.
- Among the CPSEs, SAIL has already signed MoU for setting up a PMU.

3) Complete phase out of Hydro chlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b

What are Hydro chlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b?

- Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b, is a chemical used by foam manufacturing enterprises and one of the most potent ozone depleting chemical after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- (HCFC)-141 b is used mainly as a blowing agent in the production of rigid polyurethane (PU) foams.

About Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs):

- These are gases used worldwide in refrigeration, air-conditioning and foam applications, but they are being phased out

under the Montreal Protocol since deplete the ozone layer.

- HCFCs are both ODS and powerful greenhouse gases: the most commonly used HCFC is nearly 2,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of its global warming potential (GWP).

Why in News?

- India has successfully achieved the complete phase out of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b.

News in Detail:

- India is one of the few countries that are pioneer in the use of non-Ozone Depleting technologies and have a low Global Warming Potential (GWP).
- The Ministry of Environment has brought out a Gazette notification through which import of HCFC-141b is prohibited from 1st January, 2020 under Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019 issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The complete phase out of HCFC 141 b from the country in foam sector is among the first at this scale in Article 5 parties (developing countries) under the **Montreal Protocol**.

About Montreal Protocol

- It seeks to cut the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances (ODS) in order to protect the earth's fragile ozone layer. It also **aims to phase out HCFCs by 2030**.
- It came into force in 1989 and has been ratified by 197 parties making it universally ratified protocol in UN history.

4) Bharat Parv 2020

About Bharat Parv:

- The objective of Bharat Parv is to encourage people to visit different tourism places of the country and to inculcate the spirit of 'Dekho Apna Desh'.
- Bharat Parv has many attractions for public including display of Tableaux of the Republic Day parade, performance by armed forces bands and cultural Performances from different regions of the country.
- The theme of this year's Bharat Parv is 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and 'Celebrating 150 Years of Mahatma Gandhi'.

Why in News?

- Bharat Parv 2020, a festival to celebrate the spirit of India has begun at Red Fort ground in New Delhi. It will continue till 31st of January.

5) National Commission For Indian System Of Medicine Bill, 2019

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for proposal of Official Amendments in the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2019 (NCIM) which is pending in the Rajya Sabha.

Key Highlights of the Bill:

- The Bill seeks to **repeal the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970**.
- The Bill provides for the establishment of the **National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM)**. The NCISM will consist of 29 members, appointed by the central government.
- **Functions of the NCISM include:** (i) framing policies for regulating medical institutions and medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine and (ii) ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.
- The Bill sets up following **autonomous boards** under the supervision of the NCISM:
 1. the Board of Ayurveda and the Board of Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa,
 2. the Medical Assessment and Rating Board for Indian System of Medicine and
 3. the Ethics and Medical Registration Board:
- The central government will constitute an **Advisory Council for Indian System of Medicine**, which will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories can put forth their views and concerns before the NCISM.
- There will be a uniform **National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test** for admission to under-graduate education in each of the disciplines of the Indian System of Medicine in all medical institutions regulated by the Bill.

News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) National Commission For Homoeopathy Bill, 2019

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the amendments in the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019 for amending the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973. Presently, the Bill is pending in Rajya Sabha.

Key Highlights of the Bill:

- The Bill sets up the **National Commission for Homoeopathy (NCH)**. The NCH will consist of 20 members, appointed by the central government.
- **Functions of the NCH include:** (i) framing policies for regulating medical institutions and homoeopathic medical professionals, (ii) assessing the requirements of healthcare related human resources and infrastructure, (iii) ensuring compliance by the State Medical Councils of Homoeopathy of the regulations made under the Bill, and (iv) ensuring coordination among the autonomous boards set up under the Bill.
- **The Bill sets up following autonomous boards under the supervision of the NCH:**
 - 1) the Homoeopathy Education Board,
 - 2) the Medical Assessment and Rating Board for Homoeopathy, and
 - 3) the Board of Ethics and Medical Registration for Homoeopathy
- **The central government will constitute an Advisory Council for Homoeopathy.** The Council will be the primary platform through which the states/union territories

can put forth their views and concerns before the NCH.

Significance of the amendment :

- 1) ensure necessary regulatory reforms in the field of Homoeopathy education.
- 2) enable transparency and accountability for protecting the interest of the general public. The Commission will promote availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country.

2) Surajkund International Crafts Mela

Why in News?

- The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the 34th Surajkund International Crafts Mela.

About:

- Surajkund is an ancient reservoir of the 10th century located on Southern Delhi Ridge of Aravalli range in Faridabad city of Haryana.
- Surajkund (literal meaning is 'Lake of the Sun') is an artificial Kund ('Kund' means "lake" or reservoir). It is said to have been built by the king Surajpal of Tomar dynasty in the 10th century.
- Surajkund is known for its annual fair "Surajkund International Craft Mela", which is being organized since 1987 to showcase the richness and diversity of handicrafts, handlooms and cultural heritage of India.
- The year, the partner country in the fair is Uzbekistan and Himachal Pradesh is the theme-state.

HINDU EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

1) “Crime and politics: on political candidates with criminal records”

- The Supreme Court has recently agreed to hear a plea from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to direct political parties not to field candidates with criminal antecedents.
- Supreme Court has passed successive series of landmark judgments to **bar criminal candidates from contesting** but the extent of the problem has not been eliminated entirely.
- A recent report stated that
 1. **46% of Members of Parliament have criminal records.**
 2. **Current cohort of Lok Sabha MPs has the highest (29%) proportion** of those with serious declared criminal cases.

What does this indicate?

- These unhealthy tendencies in the democratic system reflect a **poor image of the nature of India’s state institutions and the quality of its elected representatives.**
- This is a consequence of a **structural problem** in Indian democracy and the nature of the Indian state.

Landmark judgements by Supreme Court to curb criminalisation of politics:

- In 2013 **Lily Thomas vs. Union of India case**, supreme court removed the statutory protection of convicted legislators from immediate disqualification.
- In 2014, SC directed the completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year.
- In 2017, it asked the Centre to frame a scheme to appoint special courts to exclusively try cases against politicians.
- In **Public Interest Foundation vs Union Of India, 2018** supreme court asked the political parties to publicise pending criminal cases faced by their candidates.

Reasons for still prevailing criminalisation of Politics:

Lack of political will

- Representation of the People Act, 1951, deals with disqualification of candidates against whom charges have been framed in

court for serious offences. Therefore, in order to curb criminalisation of politics, Parliament needs to bring an amendment in the Act.

- The parliament is **yet to frame a law** that is deterrent to legislators with dubious credentials.

Money power:

- Candidates with serious records seem to do well largely due to their ability to finance their own elections and bring substantive resources to their respective parties.
- The report by the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)** and the National Election Watch (New) found that a candidate with a clean record has 12 per cent chance of winning the election whereas for a candidate with a criminal record, the chance of winning is 23 per cent.

Narrow prism view

- Some voters tend to view such candidates through a narrow prism of being able to represent their interests by any possible means.

Left out with no choice

- As all competing candidates have criminal records voters are left with no choices but to select any of them.

Way forward:

- While judicial pronouncements on making it difficult for criminal candidates to contest are necessary, only **enhanced awareness and increased democratic participation** could create the right conditions for the decriminalisation of politics.

2) Time to prioritise education and health

Context:

- The government’s macroeconomic policy has acquired a new salience in the context of reversing the current slowdown in recent months.
- The policy currently being pursued is intended primarily to incentivise potential investors by facilitating ease-of-doing-business and making large-scale concessions to the corporate sector but

investments to serve social objectives and help in indigenisation are being discarded.

Call for more liberalisation

What are the reforms needed?

- Reform such as **labour market liberalisation and removal of constraints** on acquisition of land for industrial purposes.
- Advocating **acceleration of investment in physical infrastructure and human infrastructure**(education and health)

Negative impact of such reforms:

- Likely to have an **impact on the incomes, living conditions and the economic security** of the workers and the agricultural class.
- The policy of **freedom of hiring and firing** of labour will be counterproductive as it would **squeeze demand** further in a situation of huge demand deficit.
- Investment in physical infrastructure is **not as labour-intensive** as that in other sectors
- Large-scale projects in physical infrastructure field have **long gestation periods**.

Positive impact of investing in social sector:

- **Creating demand** in the short run by way of opening avenues for **large-scale employment**.
- Imparts **competitiveness and sustainability on the Indian economy** on the medium and long run.
- Increased public expenditure in social sectors have short- and medium-term effect of enhancing employment, generating demand and **attracting investment**.
- **Lower gestation periods**.
- For example, in the RTE Act, a gestation period of only five years was envisaged for universalisation of elementary education.

Examples:

Impact of investment in school education

- The Right to Education Act (RTE) sets out the objective of **universalising elementary education in five years**.
- The National Education Policy, 2020 states that the Act “will be reviewed... to ensure that all students... shall have free and compulsory access to high quality and equitable schooling from early childhood

education (age three onwards) through higher education (i.e. until Grade 12)”.
▪ Council for Social Development, have calculated the magnitude of demand creation by meeting just one condition for realising this objective, i.e. **employment of teachers**.

- The recruitment of 5.7 million (figure arrived by considering pupil teacher ratio as 10:1) additional teachers over a period of five years, can **create huge scale demand** which is only one factor essential for universalising quality school education.
- There is also a **large gap between the requirement of infrastructure in the schools and that available** and built recently.
- According to government data, only 12.5% of the schools covered by the RTE Act were compliant with RTE norms, most of which are related to infrastructure.
- Thus meeting these norms has the potential of creating employment on a large scale.

Health and employability

- In the health field, there is a **vast number of vacant posts** for professionals at these levels and there is a huge deficit of paramedical workers, middle-level health workers, nurses and trained doctors.
- Health being one of the labour intensive sector investments in this sector is need of the hour.

Significance of Investments in education and health

- **Health and education are of instrumental value in driving growth, creating employment and improving people's well-being**.
- Education has a crucial role to play for an individual in gaining employment and **retaining employability**.
- If we compare 2011 and 2017 data released by the Labour Ministry, the gap in educational attainment emerges as the single most important factor for the **higher rate of growth** during this period.
- Health and education have been widely recognised as **public goods**.

Conclusion:

- It is therefore time for **reprioritising education and health in the scheme of development strategy and the allocation of budgetary resources**.

RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Economic Survey 2019-20



Why in News?

- The Economic Survey 2019-20 tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman projected growth for the next fiscal starting April 2020-21 at 6 per cent to 6.5 per cent.
- The pre-budget survey has also retained the growth numbers for the current fiscal at five per cent.
- The annual economic survey, prepared by a team headed by the Chief Economic Adviser Krishnamurthy Subramanian, also stressed on the need to relax fiscal deficit for the current fiscal to revive growth.
- It also called for more reforms for making it easier to do business in the country.

What are the major observations?

- The survey observed that there is an urgent need to remove red tape at ports to promote exports apart from eliminating other business hindrances such as registering property, paying taxes and enforcing contracts.

- While it mentioned that weak global growth has impacted India, it also acknowledged the fact that investment has slowed due to domestic financial sector issues.
- The Economic Survey also said that the government must deliver on reforms quickly as it is the only way to enable an economic recovery in the upcoming fiscal.
- Improving governance in public sector banks and the need for better disclosure of information other key steps recommended by the Economic Survey.

What are the highlights of wealth creation - the invisible hand supported by the hand of trust?

- Survey posits that India's aspiration to become a \$5 trillion economy depends critically on:
 - Strengthening the invisible hand of the market.
 - Supporting it with the hand of trust.

- Strengthening the invisible hand by promoting pro-business policies to:
- Provide equal opportunities for new entrants.
- Enable fair competition and ease doing business.
- Eliminate policies unnecessarily undermining markets through government intervention.
- Enable trade for job creation.
- Efficiently scale up the banking sector.
- Introducing the idea of *trust as a public good*, which gets enhanced with greater use.
- Survey suggests that policies must empower transparency and effective enforcement using data and technology.

What are the major observations of entrepreneurship and wealth creation at the grassroots?

- India ranks third in number of new firms created, as per the World Bank.
- New firm creation in India increased dramatically since 2014:
 1. 12.2 % cumulative annual growth rate of new firms in the formal sector during 2014-18, compared to 3.8 % during 2006-2014.
 2. About 1.24 lakh new firms created in 2018, an increase of about 80 % from about 70,000 in 2014.
- New firm creation in services is significantly higher than that in manufacturing, infrastructure or agriculture.
- Survey notes that grassroots entrepreneurship is not just driven by necessity.
- A 10 percent increase in registration of new firms in a district yields a 1.8 % increase in Gross Domestic District Product (GDDP).
- Entrepreneurship at district level has a significant impact on wealth creation at the grassroots.
- Birth of new firms in India is heterogeneous and dispersed across districts and sectors.
- Literacy and education in a district foster local entrepreneurship significantly:
 1. Impact is most pronounced when literacy is above 70 per cent.

2. New firm formation is the lowest in eastern India with lowest literacy rate (59.6 % as per 2011 Census).
 - Physical infrastructure quality in the district influences new firm creation significantly.
 - Ease of Doing Business and flexible labour regulation enable new firm creation, especially in the manufacturing sector.
 - Survey suggests enhancing ease of doing business and implementing flexible labour laws can create maximum jobs in districts and thereby in the states.

What are the highlights wrt pro-business versus pro-markets?

- Survey says that India's aspiration of becoming a \$5 trillion economy depends critically on:
 1. Promoting 'pro-business' policy that unleashes the power of competitive markets to generate wealth.
 2. Weaning away from 'pro-crony' policy that may favour specific private interests, especially powerful incumbents.
 - Viewed from the lens of the Stock market, creative destruction increased significantly post-liberalisation:
 1. Before liberalisation, a Sensex firm expected to stay in it for 60 years, which decreased to only 12 years after liberalisation.
 2. Every five years, one-third of Sensex firms are churned out, reflecting the continuous influx of new firms, products and technologies into the economy.
 - Despite impressive progress in enabling competitive markets, pro-crony policies destroyed value in the economy:
 1. An equity index of connected firms significantly outperformed market by 7 % a year from 2007 to 2010, reflecting abnormal profits extracted at common citizens' expense.
 2. In contrast, the index underperforms market by 7.5 % from 2011, reflecting inefficiency and value destruction inherent in such firms.
 - Pro-crony policies such as discretionary allocation of natural resources till 2011 led to rent-seeking by beneficiaries while competitive allocation of the same post 2014 ended such rent extraction.
 - Similarly crony lending that led to wilful default, wherein promoters collectively

siphoned off wealth from banks, led to losses that dwarf subsidies for rural development.

What are the major observations wrt job creation?

- Survey says India has unprecedented opportunity to chart a China-like, labour-intensive, export trajectory.
- By integrating “Assemble in India for the world” into Make in India, India can:
 1. Raise its export market share to about 3.5 % by 2025 and 6 % by 2030.
 2. Create 4 crore well-paid jobs by 2025 and 8 crore by 2030.
- Exports of network products can provide one-quarter of the increase in value added required for making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025.
- Survey suggests a strategy similar to one used by China to grab this opportunity:
 1. Specialization at large scale in labour-intensive sectors, especially network products.
 2. Laser-like focus on enabling assembling operations at mammoth scale in network products.
 3. Export primarily to markets in rich countries.
 4. Trade policy must be an enabler.
- **What are the targets for ease of doing business in India?**
- A jump of 79 positions to 63 in 2019 from 142 in 2014 in World Bank’s Doing Business rankings.
- India still trails in parameters such as Ease of Starting Business, Registering Property, Paying Taxes and Enforcing Contracts.

- Survey has numerous case studies:
 1. For merchandise exports, the logistics process flow for imports is more efficient than that for exports.
 2. Electronics exports and imports through Bengaluru airport illustrate how Indian logistical processes can be world class.
- The turnaround time of ships in India has almost halved to 2.48 days in 2018-19 from 4.67 days in 2010-11.
- India ranks third in number of new firms created, as per the World Bank.

What is the concept of Thalinomics?

- An attempt to quantify what a common person pays for a Thali across India.
- A shift in the dynamics of Thali prices since 2015-16.
- Absolute prices of a vegetarian Thali have decreased significantly since 2015-16 across India and the four regions; though the price has increased during 2019-20.
- Post 2015-16:
 1. Average household gained close to Rs. 11, 000 on average per year from the moderation in prices in the case of vegetarian Thali.
 2. Average household that consumes two non-vegetarian Thalīs gained close to Rs. 12, 000 on average per year during the same period.
- From 2006-07 to 2019-20:
 1. Affordability of vegetarian Thalīs improved 29 %.
 2. Affordability of non-vegetarian Thalīs improved by 18 %.

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