

# OFFICERS' Pulse

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## Coverage.

The Hindu  
PIB  
Yojana  
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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) Delimitation in J&K, 4 N-E states

#### What is Delimitation?

- Delimitation literally means the act or process of **fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies** in a country or a province having a legislative body.
- The job of delimitation is assigned to a high power body. Such a body is known as Delimitation Commission or a Boundary Commission.
- The Delimitation Commission in India is a high power body whose **orders have the force of law and cannot be called in question before any court.**

#### Constitutional Provisions:

- Under **Article 82** of the Constitution, the Parliament by law enacts a **Delimitation Act** after every census.
- Under **Article 170**, States also get divided into territorial constituencies as per Delimitation Act after every Census.
- After coming into force at the commencement of the Act, the Central Government constitutes a Delimitation Commission.
- This Delimitation Commission demarcates the boundaries of the Parliamentary Constituencies as per provisions of the Delimitation Act.
- The present delimitation of constituencies has been done **on the basis of 2001 census** figures under the provisions of Delimitation Act, 2002.
- Notwithstanding the above, the Constitution of India was specifically amended in 2002 not to have delimitation of constituencies till the first census after 2026.
- Thus, the present Constituencies carved out on the basis of 2001 census shall continue to be in operation till the first census after 2026.

#### Background:

- The delimitation exercise to readjust the division of each of the States and the Union Territories (UTs) into territorial constituencies for elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies based on the 2001 Census figures was last completed in **2008**.
- However, this delimitation exercise was **postponed in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland on the apprehension of threat to peace and public order.**
- Recently, the President had cancelled the order of the Union government that had deferred the delimitation exercise based on the fact that the President was satisfied that the circumstances leading to the deferment had ceased to exist, given that there had been significant improvement in the security situation, reduction in insurgency and improvement in the law and order situation in these States.

#### Why in News?

- The government constituted a Delimitation Commission, to be headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, to redraw Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies of the Union Territory Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland.
- The Commission will delimit the constituencies in accordance with the provisions of the Delimitation Act, 2002

### 2) Workplace safety still an issue: survey

#### Why in News?

- A survey report released by the **Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) and Gender at Work** recorded over 70% of respondents who had approached an internal committee to report sexual

harassment at the workplace were not completely satisfied with the outcome.

- The survey had 456 participants, including journalists, journalism educators, trainers and researchers. Most respondents were based in metropolitan centres such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Pune.
- The survey findings were compiled in the report titled 'creating safe workplaces: prevention and redressal of sexual harassment in media houses in India'.

#### Key Findings of the survey:

- The report notes that around **36% of the respondents have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace.**
- Of the respondents who experienced such harassment at work, 53% did not report it for lack of awareness of the existing mechanism or fear of reprisal.
- Worryingly, over 70% of respondents who had approached the **Internal Complaint Committee (ICC)** to report sexual harassment at the workplace were not completely satisfied with the outcome.
- A higher level of sexual harassment about 47% was reported from organizations which did not have a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment.
- This points towards the fact that ICC though has its flaws, has a deterring effect.
- The report also found that a large percentage of respondents had never attended a training workshop on sexual harassment, as required by **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, of 2013.**

#### About Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, of 2013

- In 2013, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed **broadening the Vishaka guidelines.**
- The Act mandates that **every organisation with 10 or more employees set up an internal complaints committee of ICC** at each office or branch.
- It lays down procedures and defines various aspects of sexual harassment, including aggrieved victim — a woman “of any age whether employed or not”, who “alleges to have been subjected to any act of

sexual harassment”, which means the rights of all women working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity, are protected under the Act.

#### What were the Vishaka guidelines?

- These were laid down by the Supreme Court in a judgment in 1997. This was a case filed by women’s rights groups, one of which was Vishaka. They had filed a public interest litigation over the alleged gang-rape of Bhanwari Devi, a social worker from Rajasthan. In 1992, she had prevented the marriage of a one-year-old girl, leading to the alleged gang-rape in an act of revenge.

#### What do these guidelines say?

- Legally binding, these defined sexual harassment and imposed three key obligations on institutions — **prohibition, prevention, redressal.** The Supreme Court directed that they establish a Complaints Committee, which would look into matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

#### Definition of Sexual Harassment:

- Sexual harassment includes “any one or more” of the following “unwelcome acts or behaviour” committed directly or by implication:
  1. Physical contact and advances
  2. A demand or request for sexual favours
  3. Sexually coloured remarks
  4. Showing pornography
  5. Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.
- The Act states the complaint of sexual harassment has to be made “**within three months from the date of the incident**”. For a series of incidents; it has to be made within three months from the date of the last incident. However, this is not rigid. The ICC can “extend the time limit” if “it is satisfied that the circumstances were such which prevented the woman from filing a complaint within the said period”.
- If the allegations are proved, the ICC recommends that the employer take action for sexual harassment for misconduct “in accordance with the provisions of the service rules” of the company. These will obviously vary from company to company. It also recommends that the company deduct from the salary of the person found

guilty, “as it may consider appropriate”. Compensation is determined based on five aspects: suffering and emotional distress caused to the woman; loss in career opportunity; her medical expenses; income and financial status of the respondent; and the feasibility of such payment. After the recommendations, the aggrieved woman or the respondent can appeal in court within 90 days

### **3) Government can't deny foreign funds to NGOs: Supreme Court**

#### **Why in News?**

- The Supreme Court ruled that the Centre cannot deprive NGOs of their right to receive foreign money by declaring them as political organisations if they use legitimate means of dissent to support public causes.

#### **Background:**

- The verdict came on a petition filed by Indian Social Action Forum challenging certain provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules of 2011.
- Both of these confer the Centre with “unguided and uncanalised power” to brand organisations ‘political’ and shut down their access to foreign funds.
- The FCRA 2010 prohibited acceptance and utilization of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest.

#### **News in Detail:**

- The Central government cannot brand an organisation ‘political’ and deprive it of its right to receive foreign funds for using “legitimate forms of dissent” like bandh, hartal, road roko or jail ‘bharo’ to aid a public cause, held the Supreme Court .
- “Any organisation which supports the cause of a group of citizens agitating for their rights without a political goal or objective cannot be penalised by being declared as an organisation of a political nature,”.
- But the foreign funding pipeline could be cut if an organisation took recourse to these forms of protest to score a political goal.
- It struck a similar balance in the cases of organisations of farmers, workers,

students, youth based on caste, community, religion, language, etc.

- It said their foreign funding could continue as long as these organisations worked for the “social and political welfare of society” and not to further “political interests”.

#### **About FCRA**

- The Government of India enacted the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) in the year 1976 with an objective of regulating the acceptance and utilization of foreign contribution.
- The act was majorly modified in 2010 with several amendments because many NGOs were found using illegal use of foreign funding.
- It is a consolidating act whose scope is to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations or companies.
- It aims to prohibit funding for any activities detrimental to the national interest and for matters connected therewith.
- In 2016 licenses of about 20,000 NGOs were cancelled after reviewing their work.

### **4) Masks, sanitizers now essential commodities**

#### **Why in News?**

- Masks and hand sanitizers have been declared as essential commodities by the central government.

#### **News in Detail:**

- There have been reports of shortage in Masks and hand sanitizers, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Central government has notified the order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to declare 2 ply and 3 ply surgical masks, N95 masks, and hand sanitizers as essential commodities till June 30, 2020.
- The decision would empower the States and the Central government to regulate the production, quality, distribution, and sale of these items, and carry out operations against those involved in speculation, overpricing and black marketing.
- An offender under the Essential Commodities Act can be punished with imprisonment up to seven years, or a fine, or both.

#### **What is the Essential Commodities Act?**

- The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 was enacted by Parliament to ensure the delivery of certain commodities or products, the supply of which may be obstructed due to hoarding or black marketing.
- The Act has been used by the Government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a whole host of commodities which is declared essential.
- The list of items under the Act includes 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.

- The Central government has also issued an advisory under the Legal Metrology Act, mandating the States to ensure that Masks and hand sanitizer are not sold for more than the Maximum Retail Price (MRP).

#### **Why is it important?**

- The ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities. The Government has invoked the Act umpteen times to ensure adequate supplies. It cracks down on hoarders and black-marketers of such commodities.

# ENVIRONMENT

## 1) Red Panda

### About:



- The only living member of the genus Ailurus, the Red Panda is listed as ‘**endangered**’ on the IUCN Red List of threatened species.
- The animal has been hunted for meat and fur, besides illegal capture for the pet trade.
- An estimated 14,500 animals are left in the wild across Nepal, Bhutan, India, China and Myanmar.

### TRAFFIC

- TRAFFIC is a leading **non-governmental organisation** working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.
- Founded in 1979, TRAFFIC's headquarters are located in Cambridge, United Kingdom,

### Why in the news?

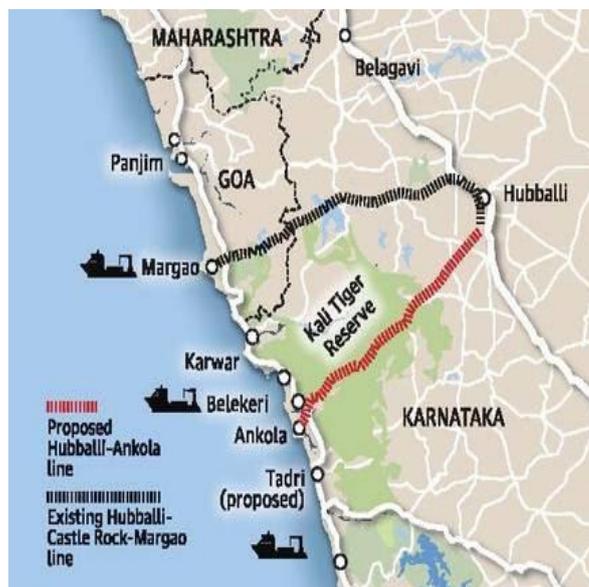
- A report titled “Assessment of illegal trade-related threats to Red Panda in India and selected neighbouring range countries” has been released recently by TRAFFIC.
- The report says that neither India nor Bhutan had reported any incidences of poaching or illegal trade in Red Pandas in the study period.
- This brings to a generalisation that Red Panda products’ demand has reduced.

## 2) Hubballi-Ankola rail line

### Why in the news?

- The wildlife board of Karnataka state has opposed laying of Hubballi-Ankola railway line. Chief Minister is the head of

### About railway line



- The proposed railway line is expected to be made after felling 2.2 lakh fully grown trees.
- The 164.44-km railway line passes through pristine forests **between** two major protected areas — **Kali Tiger Reserve and Bedthi Conservation Reserve**.
- A 75-km stretch between Hubballi and Yellapur comprises plain land, while a 56-km stretch between Yellapur and Sunksal is a ghat section where the track alignment cuts through the Western Ghats.
- **More than 80% the line has to pass through the dense forest lands** of the Western Ghats, and this entails the diversion of 727 hectares of prime forests.

### Kali Tiger Reserve

- Kali Tiger Reserve, earlier known as Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve, is located in the central portion of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka state.
- The Tiger Reserve comprises two important protected areas of the region viz., Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary (475.018 Km<sup>2</sup>) and Anshi National Park (339.866 Km<sup>2</sup>).
- These two protected areas are contiguous to each other and form a single tract of protected area located in the biologically sensitive Western Ghats.

- These two protected areas were administratively unified under Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve (DATR) in the year 2007. The tiger reserve is headed by a Conservator of Forests.
- Forests of the Tiger Reserve are primarily moist deciduous and semi-evergreen, with excellent patches of evergreen forests in the western most parts as well as in deep valleys.
- Animals found in the Tiger Reserve include Tiger, Leopard, Elephant, Bison, Wild dog, Sambar, Spotted deer, Sloth bear, Wild boar, Hanuman langur, Bonnet macaque, varieties of reptiles and birds, etc.

### 3) New variety of Paddy

#### What is Blast disease?

- Rice blast caused by fungus *Magnaporthe oryzae*, is generally considered the most important disease of rice worldwide because of its extensive distribution and destructiveness under favourable conditions.

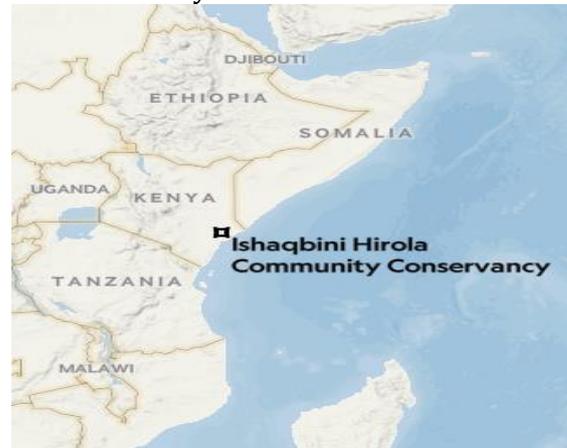
#### Why in the news?

- University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences(UAHS), Shivamogga, has developed '**Sahyadri Megha**', a new red variety of paddy that is resistant to blast disease and rich in nutrients.
- Sahyadri Megha is developed under the hybridization breeding method by cross-breeding the best among the 'Jyothi' varieties with that of 'Akkalu', a native disease-resistant and protein-rich paddy variety.
- Another objective of developing the new variety was to cater to the strong **demand for red rice**, rich in fibre and protein, by health-savvy consumers in urban areas.

### 4) White Giraffe

#### Why in the news?

- Kenya has three rare all-white giraffes. Two of them have been killed by poachers at Ishaqbini Hirola Community Conservancy.



#### What are White giraffes?



- White or otherwise, all reticulated giraffes (*Giraffa reticulata*, the species found in the conservancy and throughout northern Kenya) are considered **endangered** by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- The giraffes likely had a genetic condition called **leucism**, which inhibits skin cells from producing pigment but allows other organs, like eyes, to be dark-colored.
- This differs slightly from albinism, which inhibits the body from producing pigment in all organs. Despite their inability to produce colourful pigments, giraffes and other animals with leucism don't face genetic disadvantages to their survival.

# ECONOMY

## 1) RoDTEP scheme

### About the scheme

- The government introduced the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme with a view to give a boost to the country's outbound shipments.
- The government announced that whatever taxes, or duties or local levies imposed by the Centre, State or local governments that are not getting refunded through any other scheme, will be done through RoDTEP in a way that is **compliant with the WTO norms**.
- The reimbursement of taxes such as duty on power charges and VAT on fuel in transportation and farm sector captive power generation would make **Indian products competitive in global markets**.
- It is proposed to **digitally refund to exporters**, duties and taxes levied at the Centre, State and local levels.
- The RoDTEP scheme will **replace the current Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS)** in a phased manner.

### Need for a new scheme

- The MEIS scheme was introduced under the Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) to make Indian products competitive at the Global market.
- In 2019, a WTO dispute resolution panel ruled that MEIS was not in compliance with the global trade norms. India had filed a complaint against the order at the WTO appellate body.
- Additionally, many exporters have persistently complained that the MEIS scheme doesn't offset all the taxes.
- The new scheme aims to bridge this gap and make exports 'zero-rated', in line with the global best practices.

### Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the RoDTEP scheme.

## 2) Dollar sell-buy swap window

### India's exchange rate policy

- India's exchange rate policy has evolved over time in line with the gradual opening up of the economy as part of the broader strategy of macroeconomic reforms and liberalization since the early 1990s.

- At present, India has been operating on a **managed floating exchange rate regime**.
- Under this system, the exchange rate is basically determined in the foreign exchange market through the operation of market forces.
- But during extreme fluctuations, the RBI intervenes in the foreign exchange market to minimise the fluctuation in the exchange rate of the rupee.

### Why in News?

- Recently, Indian banks witnessed huge outflows of dollars as foreign institutional investors (FIIs) sell their shares.
- As a result, the rupee hit a record low of 74.50 a dollar.

### RBI's measure

- In order to stabilize the rupee exchange rate, the RBI has announced that it would open a **six-month dollar sell-buy swap window**.
- Under this window, RBI will provide \$2 billion to the banks that need it through a swap. The central bank will give dollars and the buyer will give rupees and the transaction will be reversed 6 months later.
- This window will pump in liquidity in the foreign exchange market and reduces exchange rate volatility.

## 3) Long Term Repo Operations

### What's in the news?

- RBI has announced a new liquidity facility known as Long Term Repo Operations (LTRO) to inject liquidity in the banking system and boost credit growth.
- Under this facility, the RBI will give out Rs.100000 crores as loans to banks through auctions at the repo rate of 5.15%. These loans will have long term maturity periods of 1 year and 3 years.

### Rationale of the move

- The repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends to the commercial banks for a day (overnight lending rate).
- Loans with a longer-term maturity (say 1 year) usually have higher interest rates. But, under LTRO, the RBI will give out loans of long term maturity at the repo rate.

- Thus, **LTROs will enable banks to borrow longer-term loans at a cheaper rate.** This would reduce the cost of funds for banks and boost lending in the economy.

#### 4) Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill

##### Highlights of the Bill

- The Direct Tax 'Vivad Se Vishwas' (dispute to trust) Bill intends to provide a **one-time opportunity to end disputes related to personal income tax and corporate tax.**
- It aims to resolve more than 483,000 legacy disputes stuck in various tribunals involving direct taxes amounting to Rs 9.32 lakh crore.
- The bill waives off interest and penalty on pending tax if paid by March 31. For payments made after March 31 and till June 30, a 10% penalty would be charged.
- The bill, however, **excludes litigations above Rs 5 crore** to check large cases of evasion.

##### Why in News?

- The Parliament has passed the Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020.

#### 5) CPI & IIP

##### About CPI

- Consumer Price Index (CPI) is an index which measures the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer **goods and services** such as transportation, food and medical care.
- It is calculated by measuring price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods & services and averaging them.
- It is released by the **Central Statistical Organisation (CSO)** under the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.
- The base year used to calculate CPI in India is **2011-2012.**

##### About IIP

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index which details out the growth of various sectors in an economy such as mineral mining, electricity and manufacturing.
- It is compiled and published every month by the **Central Statistics Office (CSO)** of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The current base year is **2011-2012.**
- The **Eight Core Industries** (Electricity, steel, refinery products, crude oil, coal,

cement, natural gas and fertilizers) comprise 40.27 per cent of the weight of items included in the IIP.

##### Why in News?

- According to the latest official data, retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index hit 6.58% in February, 2020.
- Under the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework, RBI aims to contain CPI **within 4 percent with a band of (+/-) 2 percent.**
- The industrial production growth as measured in the Index of Industrial Production accelerated to 2% in January, 2020.

#### 6) Why oil prices are crashing

##### What's in the news?

- Prices of Brent crude crashed by almost 50% this year, from \$66 a barrel on December 31, 2019 to the current levels, which is hovering around \$33 a barrel.
- This price crash is mainly due to a price war initiated between Saudi Arabia and Russia, two of the world's largest oil producers.

##### OPEC-Plus alliance

- The 2014 oil crisis, which was accentuated by oversupply of crude, brought down prices below \$30 a barrel. It forced Saudi Arabia and Russia to come together to cut output and steady prices.
- Known as the **"OPEC Plus" arrangement** (Russia is not a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC), this alliance kept production lower and pumped up the prices.

##### What is the issue now?

- The OPEC-Plus cooperation collapsed recently after Russia rejected a Saudi request to affect more cuts in output given the fall in demand owing to the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.
- Saudi Arabia responded by slashing its export prices to start a price war with Russia. That brought the price per barrel down by about \$11 to \$35 a barrel — the biggest one-day drop since 1991.
- In addition to this, the existing output reduction deal **expires at the end of March, 2020.** The Russian and Saudi sides have said they are no longer constrained by the deal and are free to ramp up production.

### What does Saudi Arabia want?

- The plan is to flood the markets with Saudi oil and depress the prices, which would hurt all oil exporters. This will help Saudi Arabia to exert pressure on Russia and make it come back to the negotiation table.
- If not, the plan is to capture market share from Russia with discounts.

## 7) RBI invites applications for Deputy Governor's post

### Central Board of Directors

- The RBI's affairs are governed by a central board of directors.
- Section 8(1)(a) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, provides that **there shall be one Governor and not more than four Deputy Governors** to be appointed by the central government on the central board of RBI.

### Appointments

- The RBI governor is appointed by the **Prime Minister's office** on the

recommendation of the Union Finance Minister.

- Deputy Governors are appointed on the basis of the **Appointment Committee of Cabinet (ACC)**-approved guidelines, which stipulate that the search committee constituted for the purpose will recommend the person to be appointed as a Deputy Governor.
- The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee (FSRASC), headed by the **Cabinet Secretary**, was constituted with the approval of ACC for this purpose.

- The Appointment Committee of Cabinet is **chaired by the Prime Minister**. It decides all higher level appointments in the Central Secretariat, Public Enterprises, Banks and Financial Institutions.

### Why in News?

- The RBI has invited applications to fill up a Deputy Governor's post.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1) Sir Creek dispute

### What is Sir Creek?

- Sir Creek is a 96-km strip of water disputed between India and Pakistan in the **Rann of Kutch marshlands**.
- The Creek opens up in the Arabian Sea and roughly divides the Kutch region of Gujarat from the Sindh Province of Pakistan.

### What's the dispute?

- The dispute lies in the interpretation of the maritime boundary line between Kutch and Sindh.
- The dispute goes back to 1908 between the ruler of Kutch and the British authorities in Sindh.

- In 1914, the government of Bombay province took up the resolution of the dispute and gave an award where on the map attached they indicated that the boundary lay along the eastern bank of the creek, called the **Green Line**, now claimed by Pakistan.
- But the actual text of the decision seemed to suggest that the boundary was through the middle of the creek, as per the international law's '**Thalweg principle**'.
- *(The Thalweg principle defines the border between two states separated by a watercourse or flowing body of water as lying along the thalweg, which is the line of greatest depth of the channel or watercourse)*



### War in 1965 and tribunal

- After Pakistan's and India's independence in 1947, the creek was physically noted as the border between India and Pakistan but no formal resolution of the 1914 map's ambiguity was determined.
- The war of 1965 between India and Pakistan over various territorial differences also involved the Kutch region. Subsequently, both countries agreed to take the matter to the **International Court**

**of Justice**, which issued a ruling in 1968 favoring 90 percent of India's claim to the salt marsh (i.e., the Rann of Kutch) but excluded a mention of Sir Creek itself, thus leading to an uncertain outcome regarding its status.

- Since 1969, 12 rounds of talks have been held over the issue of Sir Creek, but both sides have denied reaching any solution.

### What's the importance of Sir Creek?

- Apart from strategic location, Sir Creek's core importance is **fishing resources**. Sir Creek is considered to be among the largest fishing grounds in Asia.
- Significance is the possible presence of great oil and gas concentration under the sea.

#### Why in News?

- Recently, a former Pakistan Foreign Minister mentioned the Sir Creek dispute in a summit hosted by an International news channel.

## 2) Military Cooperation Group dialogue

#### About MCG

- The India-U.S. Military Cooperation Group (MCG) is a forum to review the progress of defence cooperation between **India's Integrated Defence Staff and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)** at the strategic and operational levels.
- MCG acts as the senior-most military dialogue to plan forward-looking cooperative activities.
- The Integrated Defence Staff was responsible for coordination among the

armed forces before the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff.

#### Why in News?

- The India-U.S. Military Cooperation Group dialogue, scheduled for later this month, has been cancelled in view of the COVID-9 outbreak.

## 3) SAARC emergency fund

#### About SAARC

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985 with 7 founding members.
- SAARC now comprises **eight Member States**: Afghanistan (joined in 2007), Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- There are nine observer countries namely Australia, China, European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea, and the United States.
- The Secretariat of the Association is located in **Kathmandu, Nepal**.

#### Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited members of the SAARC to create a fund to fight the threat of COVID-19.
- Mr. Modi extended \$10 million as India's contribution to the fund.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1) Cars can be hacked

### About key-fob



- The **key-fob, or immobiliser**, enables the user of a vehicle to lock or unlock their car with the touch of a button.
- The system was invented to try and control car thefts, which are traditionally executed by bringing together certain wires in the ignition, known as “**hot-wiring**” a car, which starts the ignition without a key.

### Why in News?

- A recent research conducted by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven) in Belgium and the University of Birmingham in the U.K. has revealed that even cars are not safe from cyber attacks.

### News in Detail

- The research paper describes how electronic key-fobs, which are used to lock and unlock cars, can be hacked by cyber criminals with surprising ease, and millions of cars are at risk.
- The research paper points out vulnerabilities in the immobilisers of several models of Hyundai, Toyota and Kia.
- According to the report, all a hacker has to do is to use a radio frequency identification (RFID) device within close range of a key-fob, which exploits the vulnerability in the immobiliser system and downloads its secret code to the hacker’s device.

- Using this information, the hackers can clone the target’s key-fob, use it to unlock the car and drive away without raising any alarm.

### DoS attack

- Apart from car thefts, the other possibility pointed out in the report is that of a **denial of service (DoS) attack**, where hackers can take over a large number of key-fobs and simply **not let users unlock their vehicles**.
- On a large enough scale, such an attack could be chaotic.
- Performing this type of DoS attack can be automated by building a device which repeatedly broadcasts the required commands.
- While there might be little incentive for someone to do this type of attack, it could lead to bad publicity for the affected car manufacturers and increased revenue for local garage owners.

## 2) Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) or monkey fever

### About KFD

- Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) is a **zoonotic** disease associated with sudden onset of high grade fever, prostration, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and occasionally neurological & haemorrhagic manifestations.
- It derives its name from the forest range where the virus was first isolated.
- It is also known as “**monkey disease/monkey fever**” because of its association with monkey deaths.
- The disease was first reported in **1957** from **Shimoga** district, Karnataka, which is a part of the **Western Ghats** of India.

### Mode of transmission

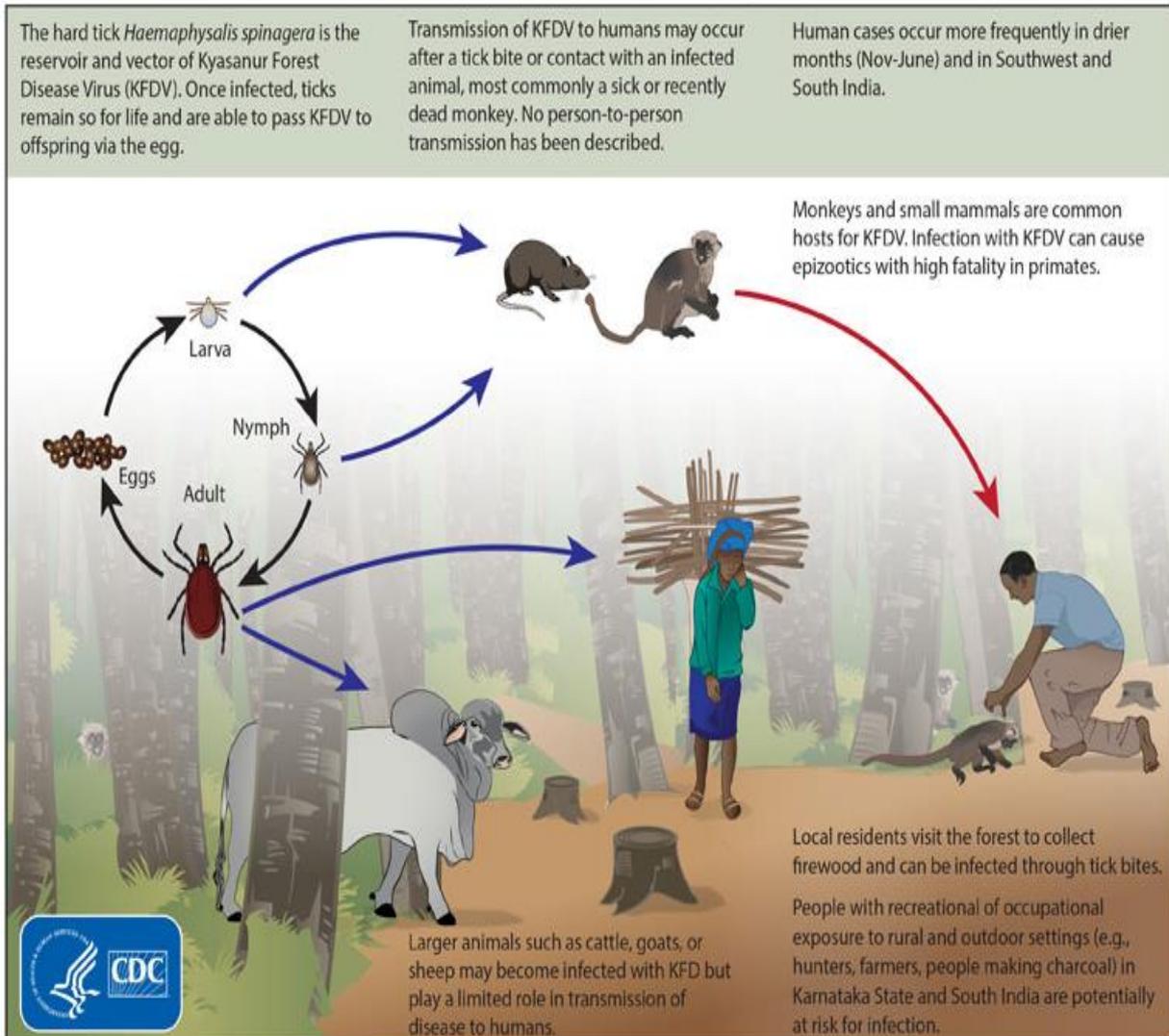
- KFDV is transmitted by an **infected tick**, especially **nymphal stage** ticks.
- The wild monkeys, **Semnopithecus entellus** and **Macaca radiata**, get the disease through the bites of infected ticks.
- When infected monkeys die, the ticks drop from their body, thereby generating “hot spots” of infectious ticks that further spread the disease.

- Humans can get the disease from an infected tick bite or by contact with an infected animal, such as a sick or recently dead monkey.
- Available epidemiological data does not suggest any human-to-human transmission. However, human cases have

been reported in the past while working on this virus in the laboratory.

- The epidemic period, coinciding with the activity of nymphs, usually begins in October or November and peaks from January to April, then declines by May and June.

## Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) Virus Ecology



### Symptoms

- Incubation period: Estimated to be between **3 - 8 days** after the bite of an **infective tick**.
- KFD usually presents with sudden onset of high-grade fever with chills, intense frontal headache, severe myalgia and body aches.
- Muscle tenderness, photophobia, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea are usually seen.
- **Respiratory** symptoms like persistent cough may be present in some cases.

- Temperature may be as high as 104° F/40° C, and last for 5 - 12 days and there is intense prostration.
- Case **fatality is 2 - 10%**. Fatality is higher in the elderly and in patients with comorbid conditions like - liver diseases (alcoholic) etc.

### Treatment

- **No specific treatment** for KFD is available.
- However, prompt symptomatic and supportive therapy including maintenance of hydration, hemodynamic stability and

management of neurological symptoms decreases morbidity and mortality.

#### Vaccine

- The vaccine for KFD consists of an **inactivated KFD virus** that is produced in tissue-culture and preserved in formalin.
- The vaccine has a **62% effectiveness rate** for individuals who receive two doses.
- For individuals who receive an additional dose, the effectiveness increases to almost 83%.

#### Why in News?

- A 48-year-old woman from **Wayanad** died of monkey fever in Kerala. 14 KFD cases reported in the district this year (until March 10).
- Karnataka government has agreed to set up KFD research centre at Sagar, Shivamogga District

#### News in Detail

- 97 cases of monkey fever have been reported in the state of Karnataka.
- The worst affected region is **Thirthahalli** Taluk in Shivamogga district, infamous for its repeated outbreaks of KFD, year after year.

#### Issues in dealing with KFD

- Vaccination is the only possible remedy to keep the disease at bay.
- Yet there was **hesitation** among the local population to get vaccinated.
- Karnataka health workers said they are finding it hard to contain the spread of the disease, without support from the local population.

### 3) Bird Flu

#### What is bird flu?

- Bird flu, also called **avian influenza**, is a **viral** infection that can infect not only birds, but also humans and other animals.
- **H5N1** is the most common form of bird flu.
- It's deadly to birds and can easily affect humans and other animals that come in contact with a carrier.
- According to the World Health Organization, H5N1 was first discovered in humans in **1997** and has killed nearly 60 percent of those infected.
- Currently, the virus **isn't known to spread via human-to-human contact**.
- Still, some experts' worry that H5N1 may pose a risk of becoming a pandemic threat to humans.

#### Why in News?

- Two new cases of bird flu have been reported from two farms in West Kodiyathur and Vengeri in Kozhikode district of Kerala.

### 4) ISRO's Young Scientist Programme 2020

#### About YUva Vigyani KAryakram (YUVIKA) 2020

- **Indian Space Research Organisation** has launched a special programme for **School Children** called "Young Scientist Programme" "YUva Vigyani KAryakram" from the year **2019**.
- The **second session** of the programme is scheduled to be held during the month of May 2020.
- The Program is primarily aimed at **imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology**, Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones with the intent of arousing their interest in the emerging areas of Space activities.
- The program is thus aimed at creating awareness amongst the youngsters who are the future building blocks of our Nation.
- ISRO has chalked out this programme to "**Catch them young**".
- The programme will be of two weeks duration during summer holidays (May 11-22, 2020) and the schedule will include invited talks, experience sharing by the eminent scientists, facility and lab visits, exclusive sessions for discussions with experts, practical and feedback sessions.
- **3 students from each State/ Union Territory** will be selected to participate in this programme covering CBSE, ICSE and State syllabus.
- **5 additional seats are reserved for OCI candidates** across the country.

#### Eligibility

- The selection will be done through online registration and submission of completed applications.
- Those who have finished 8th standard and currently studying in 9th standard (in the academic year 2019-20) will be eligible for the programme.
- Students who are studying in India including OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) are eligible for the programme.

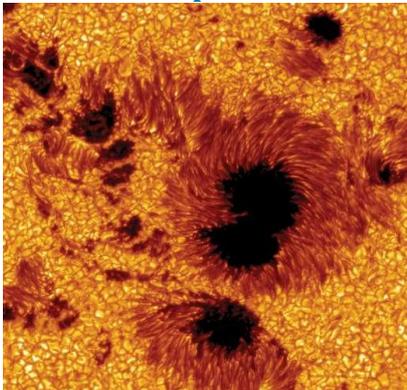
- The selection is based on the 8th Standard academic performance and extracurricular activities.
- Students belonging to the **rural area have been given special weightage** in the selection criteria.
- It is proposed to conduct the residential programme at 4 centres of ISRO located at **Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Shillong and Thiruvananthapuram.**

#### Why in News?

- The ISRO has shortlisted 358 high school students from across the country to be part of its second annual 'catch them young' programme, YuViKa.

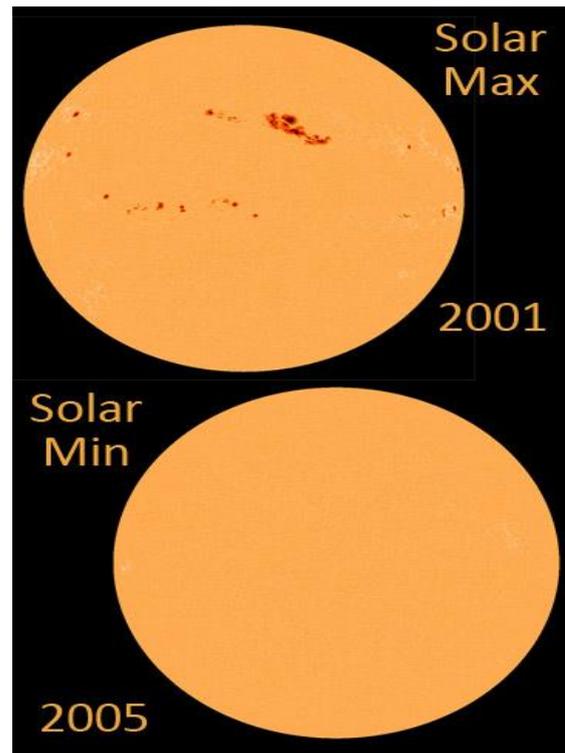
### 5) The Sun brings out a fresh batch of sunspots

#### What are sunspots?

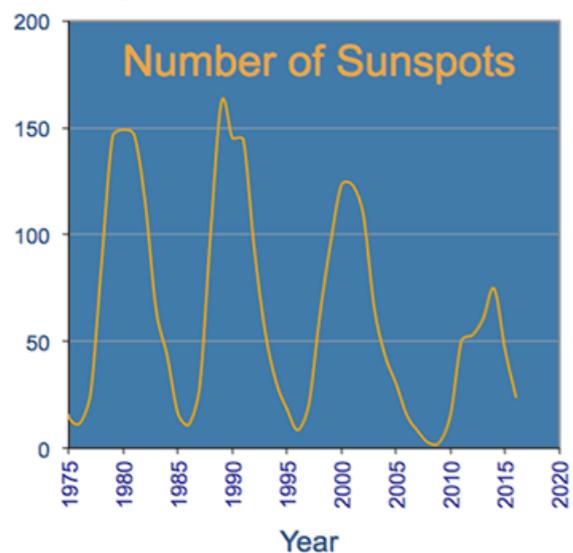


- From our safe distance of about 148 million km, the Sun appears to be sedate and constant.
- However, huge solar flares and coronal mass ejections spew material from its surface into outer space.
- They originate from sunspots, an important phenomenon that people have been following for hundreds of years.
- Sunspots are **relatively cooler spots** on the Sun's surface.
- Their number waxes and wanes in cycles that last 11 years approximately.
- We are currently at the minimum of one such cycle.

#### Solar cycle



- Sunspots **occur in pairs**, with a leader and a follower.
- They originate deep within the Sun and become visible when they pop out.
- Their number is not constant but **shows a minimum and then rises up to a maximum** and then falls again in what is called the **solar cycle**.
- So far, astronomers have documented **24 such cycles**, the last one ended in 2019.



#### Why in News?

- Amidst claims that the Sun would "go silent" and not give out sunspots for an extended period, a group from **IISER**

**Kolkata** has shown that the next sunspot cycle has begun.

- Their results were published in Research Notes of the American Astronomical Society.

#### Start of cycle 25

- Following a weakening trend in activity over the last few cycles, there were predictions that the Sun would go silent into a grand minimum in activity, with the disappearance of cycles.
- Some groups have claimed that this would give rise to a mini ice age and cooling of global climate.
- However, a team from IISER Kolkata has shown that there are **signs that cycle 25 has just begun**.
- They used the data from the instrument **Helioseismic and Magnetic Imager** aboard **NASA's** space-based **Solar Dynamics Observatory** for their calculations.

- **The Solar Dynamics Observatory**
- It is the first mission to be launched for **NASA's Living With a Star (LWS) Program**, a program designed to understand the causes of solar variability and its impacts on Earth.
- SDO is designed to help us understand the **Sun's influence on Earth and Near-Earth space** by studying the solar atmosphere on small scales of space and time and in many wavelengths simultaneously.

#### Maunder minimum

- Though the sunspots look small and are hardly even visible to us, sunspot activity may be **correlated with climate on earth**.
- In the period between 1645 and 1715, sun spot activity had come to a halt on the Sun – a phenomenon referred to as the Maunder minimum.
- This coincided with extremely cold weather globally.
- Solar activity affects space weather, which can have an impact on space-based satellites, GPS, power grids and so on.

#### Solar dynamo

- Given the high temperatures in the Sun, matter exists there in the form of **plasma**, where the electrons are stripped away from the nuclei.
- The Sun is made of hot ionised plasma whose motions generate magnetic fields in

the solar interior by harnessing the energy of the plasma flows.

- This mechanism is known as the **solar dynamo mechanism** (or magnetohydrodynamic dynamo mechanism).
- The process generates the magnetised sunspots, giving rise to the solar cycle.
- Because of the nature of the solar dynamo, the part of its magnetic field that gives rise to sunspots reverses direction when it moves from one solar cycle to another.
- This can be inferred by observing when the relative orientation of the sunspot pairs flips.
- Studying such pairs of magnetic regions, the researchers concluded that the Sunspot cycle 25 is brewing within the solar interior.
- Small magnetic regions and a few full grown sunspots with the magnetic polarity orientation that is expected of sunspot cycle 25 have already started appearing on the solar surface.
- This means that we have either already seen the start of sunspot cycle 25 or it is just about to start.

## 6) India shares two SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences

### What is Genome sequencing?

- Genome sequencing is figuring out the **order of DNA nucleotides, or bases**, in a genome—the order of As, Cs, Gs, and Ts that make up an organism's DNA.
- The human genome is made up of over 3 billion of these genetic letters.

### Why in News?

- India has shared two whole genome sequence data of the novel coronavirus (**SARS-CoV-2**) with the **Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID)**.
- The two sequences were shared by the **Pune-based National Institute of Virology**.

### Why study genomes?

- Studying viral genome sequences immensely helps in **epidemiological investigations**.
- Sequencing the genome of novel coronavirus will help us to know where the virus came from and how the virus has spread.

- For instance, by sequencing the genome of the virus isolated from an Indian patient, it will become possible to know if the virus had come from China or any other country.
- So far, 26 countries, including India, have shared 178 SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences with the GISAID.
- At 70, China has shared the highest number of sequences.

## 7) C-17 Globemaster

### About



- The C-17 Globemaster III is a premier transport aircraft, manufactured by the American aerospace major **Boeing**.
- The massive, sturdy, long-haul aircraft can carry large combat equipment, troops and humanitarian aid across long distances in all weather conditions.
- The C-17 fleet has been a vital part of the **Indian Air Force's strategic and combat airlift capability**.
- The IAF C-17s have performed a wide range of operations in military missions, and provided peacekeeping support, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in India and internationally, since induction to the Sky Lords squadron in 2013.
- Recently (August, 2019), IAF received its 11th C-17 Globemaster III.

### Why in News?

- The IAF C-17 Globemaster aircraft with Indians evacuated from Coronavirus-hit Iran landed at Hindan Air Force Station.

# PIB ANALYSIS

## 1) Malnutrition among Women

### Why in News?

- Union Minister of Women and Child Development informed about Malnutrition among Women.

### News in Detail:

- As per the recent report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 4 conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2015-16, 22.9% women (15-49 years of age) are underweight (BMI less than 18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>).
- The five States/UTs having highest percentage of malnutrition among women are Jharkhand (31.5%), Bihar (30.4%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (28.7%), Madhya Pradesh (28.4%), Gujarat (27.2%) and Rajasthan (27%).
- Schemes like Anganwadi Services, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY) and POSHAN Abhiyaan are being implemented to address the problem of malnutrition among women.
- **The Anganwadi Services Scheme** aims to improve the nutritional and health status of pregnant women & lactating mothers and reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity and malnutrition. Under the Scheme, pregnant women and lactating mothers are provided supplementary nutrition, nutrition and health education, immunization, health check-up and referral services.
- **Scheme for Adolescent Girls** is implemented for out-of-school adolescent girls in the age group of 11-14 years for self-development and empowerment of adolescent girls; improvement of nutritional and health status; to promote awareness about health, hygiene & nutrition; support to out-of-school Adolescent Girls for successful transition back to formal schooling or bridge learning/skill training; upgrade their home-based skills and life skills.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** is implemented with an aim to provide cash incentive to improve health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant

Women & Lactating Mothers (PW&LM) and to compensate partially the wage loss in terms of cash incentive so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first child.

## 2) Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP)

### Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, has given its approval for introducing the Scheme for Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP).

### Salient features of the scheme:

- At present, GST taxes and import/customs duties for inputs required to manufacture exported products are either exempted or refunded.
- However, certain taxes/duties/levies are outside GST, and are not refunded for exports, such as, VAT on fuel used in transportation, Mandi tax, Duty on electricity used during manufacturing etc. These would be covered for reimbursement under the RoDTEP Scheme.
- The rebate would be claimed as a percentage of the Freight On Board (FOB) value of exports.

### News in Detail :

- Under the scheme, a mechanism would be created for reimbursement of taxes/duties/levies, at the central, state and local level, which are currently not being refunded under any other mechanism, but which are incurred in the process of manufacture and distribution of exported products.
- This scheme is going to give a boost to the domestic industry and Indian exports providing a level playing field for Indian producers in the International market so that domestic taxes/duties are not exported.
- Under the Scheme an inter-ministerial Committee will determine the rates and items for which the reimbursement of taxes and duties would be provided. In line with “Digital India”, refund under the Scheme, in the form of transferable duty

credit/electronic scrip will be issued to the exporters, which will be maintained in an electronic ledger. The Scheme will be implemented with end to end digitization.

- The refunds under the RoDTEP scheme would be a step towards “zero-rating” of exports, along with refunds such as Drawback and IGST.
- This would lead to the cost competitiveness of exported products in international markets and better employment opportunities in export-oriented manufacturing industries.

### 3) Wings India 2020

#### Why in News?

- Wings India 2020 was launched in Hyderabad. The theme of Wings India 2020 is ‘Flying For all’.

#### About:

- Wings India is a biennial civil aviation and aerospace event.
- The event is being organised by the Ministry of Civil Aviation along with **Airports Authority of India and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI)**.
- International Exhibition and Conference on Civil Aviation sector, providing a congenial forum catering to the rapidly changing dynamics of the sector, focusing on new business acquisition, investments, policy formation and regional connectivity.
- It will provide a much desired fillip to the aviation and restructured focused forums shall be instrumental in attaining the objective of connecting the Buyers, Sellers, Investors and other stakeholders at a common vantage forum ‘WINGS INDIA 2020’

### 4) Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram

#### About the scheme:

- Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK) has been launched with the objective to eliminate out of pocket expenses for both pregnant women and sick infants accessing public health institution for treatment.
- Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK) entitles all pregnant women delivering in public health institutions, to absolutely free delivery including Caesarean section, post-natal care and treatment of sick infants till one year of age.

- The initiative was estimated to benefit more than 1 crore pregnant women access public health institutions every year in both urban and rural areas.

#### Key features of the scheme:

- The initiative entitles all pregnant women delivering in public health institutions to absolutely free and no expense delivery, including caesarean section.
- The entitlements include free drugs and consumables, free diet up to 3 days during normal delivery and up to 7 days for C-section, free diagnostics, and free blood wherever required.
- This initiative also provides for free transport from home to institution, between facilities in case of a referral and drop back home.
- Similar entitlements have been put in place for all sick newborns accessing public health institutions for treatment till 30 days after birth. This has now been expanded to cover sick infants.

### 5) Bhoomi Rashi portal

#### About:

- In order to overcome the issues of delays and avoid parking of public funds with the Competent Authority for Land Acquisition (CALA), the Ministry developed a web based Utility –Bhoomi Rashi to fully digitize and automate the entire process of land acquisition.
- The portal has been integrated with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) for depositing the compensation in the account of affected/ interested persons on real-time basis. This integration has resulted in avoiding the parking of huge public funds in the account of the Competent Authority for Land Acquisition.
- The Bhoomi Rashi portal model is replicable and can be used by state governments as well as by Ministries which directly acquire land under their relevant legal provisions.

#### Features of Bhoomi Rashi

- Bilingual application with Hindi and English for easy usability
- Preparation of interface for adding project basic details including LA sanction details.
- Preparation of interface for Land Acquisition locations i.e. villages

- Interface for generation of 3a, 3A & 3D notification: organizational email IDS for all those involved in the process flow to ensure smooth e-office management

#### Why in News?

- Bhoomi Rashi portal of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has significantly expedited error free and transparent land acquisition for National Highways.

### 6) National Crèche Scheme

#### About:

- National Creche Scheme (earlier named as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme) is being implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme through States/UTs to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.
- The **salient features** of the National Crèche Scheme are as follows:
  1. Daycare Facilities including Sleeping Facilities
  2. Early Stimulation for children below 3 years and pre-school Education for 3 to 6 years old children.
  3. Supplementary Nutrition ( to be locally sourced)
  4. Growth Monitoring
  5. Health Check-up and Immunization

#### Significance:

- This scheme facility enables the parents to leave their children while they are at work and where the children are provided with a stimulating environment for their holistic development.
- This scheme ensures to improve the health and nutrition status of the children.
- It promotes physical, social, cognitive and emotional/holistic development of the children.
- It also educates and empowers parents/caretakers for better childcare.
- The scheme is being structurally revised with the enhanced financial norms, stringent monitoring and sharing pattern between the Government of India and the implementing agencies and NGOs.

### 7) Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal.

#### About:

- The MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a 'first-of-its-kind' platform for 'real time monitoring' of prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP) and for simultaneously generating alerts for intervention under the terms of the Operation Greens(OG) scheme.
- The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as Prices and Arrivals, Area, Yield and Production, Imports and Exports, Crop Calendars, Crop Agronomy, etc in an easy to use visual format.

#### The salient features of the MIEWS portal include:

- A dashboard that would indicate low price and high price alerts as well as price forecasts for 3 month forward
- Prices and arrivals of TOP crops across the country including interactive charts and comparisons with previous seasons
  - Area, Yield and Production of TOP crops
  - Crop Agronomy and Trade Profile of each of the TOP crops
- Regular and special reports on the market situation of the TOP crops. The portal will have public and private sections into which the aforementioned features would be divided. Sections like Prices and arrivals, Area, yield and production, Crop Agronomy, and Trade Profile would be accessible to the public while the regular and special market intelligence reports and price forecasts would be accessible only to the policy makers.

#### About Operation Greens Scheme:

- The objectives of Operation Greens scheme are:
  - Enhancing value realisation of TOP farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs, and linking/connecting them with the market.
  - Price stabilisation for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters and introduction of dual use varieties.
  - Reduction in post-harvest losses by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics, and creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres.

- Increase in food processing capacities and value addition in TOP value chain with firm linkages with production clusters.
- Setting up of a market intelligence network to collect and collate real time data on

demand and supply and prices of TOP crops.

# News in Depth

## AIR NEWS

### 1) Self Help Group

#### What are Self Help Groups?

- Self Help Groups (SHGs) are small groups of poor people. The members of an SHG face similar problems. They help each other, to solve their problems. SHGs promote small savings among their members. The savings are kept with the bank. This is the common fund in the name of the SHG. The SHG gives small loans to its members from its common fund.

#### Size of the SHG

- The ideal size of an SHG is 10 to 20 members. (Advantage: In a bigger group, members cannot actively participate. Also, legally it is required that an informal group should not be of more than 20 people.)
- The group need not be registered.
- **Deen dayal Antyodaya Yojana** – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), under Ministry of Rural Development, across the country in a mission mode with the **objective of organizing the rural poor women into Self Help Groups (SHGs)** and continuously nurturing and supporting them to take economic activities till they attain appreciable increase in income over a period of time to improve their quality of life and come out of abject poverty. The programme aims to ensure that at least one woman member from each rural poor household (about 9 crore) is brought into the fold of women SHGs and their federations within a definite time frame.

#### Why in News?

- On the occasion of International Women's Day, Union Rural Development Minister announced that the government is planning to create a total of 75 lakh Self Help Groups by 2022 to enable more women to get a livelihood.

### 2) Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020

#### About:

- The POCSO Act was enacted in 2012 to provide a robust legal framework for the protection of children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography while safeguarding the interests of children at every stage of the judicial process.

#### Salient Features:

- Some of the significant additions in the new rules include provision of mandatory police verification of staff in schools and care homes, procedures to report sexual abuse material (pornography), imparting age-appropriate child rights education among others.
- For crackdown on child pornography, any person who has received any pornographic material involving a child or any information regarding such pornographic material shall report the contents to the Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) or police, or the cybercrime portal.
- Under the rules, the State Governments have been asked to formulate a child protection policy.
- The Central Government and every State Government shall provide periodic training including orientation programmes, sensitization workshops and refresher courses to all persons coming in contact with the children, to sensitize them about child safety and protection.
- Any institution housing children or coming in regular contact with children, including schools, crèches, sports academies or any other facility for children must ensure a police verification and background check on a periodic basis of every staff.
- The new POCSO rules became effective from 9th of March.

### Why in News?

- The Centre has notified the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020 which enables implementation of recent

amendments to the Act under which provisions of punishment for child abuse has been made more stringent.

# THE HINDU EDITORIALS

## 1) Cryptocurrency: Looking ahead



### Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court struck down a circular of the Reserve Bank of India recently banning financial institutions from enabling deals in digital or cryptocurrencies.
- The ban crippled the Indian cryptocurrency industry after it came into force in April 2018.

### What is the Background?

- The Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMA) challenged this ban in the Supreme Court with a plea that dealing and trading in Cryptocurrency was a legitimate business activity.
- It also argued that the RBI did not have jurisdiction over it as these assets could be classified as commodities rather than currency.

### What is Cryptocurrency?

- Cryptocurrencies are intended to function as a means of payment unlike fiat currencies and they lack a sovereign guarantee and their source of value is not quite clear.
- They are more like investment instruments like shares in the equity market and that's why they can be better-called Crypto-Assets.

### What is the hold of the judgement?

- The Supreme Court held that an outright ban on virtual currencies would be a disproportionate measure by the government since many less intrusive measures are available.
- It is worth remembering that virtual currency transactions do not operate in a complete regulatory vacuum.

### Why has it been banned?

- Cryptocurrencies are a poor unit of account demonstrated by their frequent and high fluctuation in value
- anti-money laundering and terrorism financing concerns
- striking paucity of information on their design
- use and operation and indications of market manipulation
- business models of commercial banks may be seriously disrupted

### What are the impacts of the judgements?

- helps in incorporation of block chain technology
- creates electronic ledgers where every transaction is recorded
- It is open to verification by many persons while maintaining confidentiality
- It quickly detects fakes and disallows duplicate transactions
- It is also estimated that blockchain will generate \$3.1 trillion in new business value by 2030
- It forms a crucial part of Industrial revolution 4.0
- Cryptocurrencies act as alternative investments

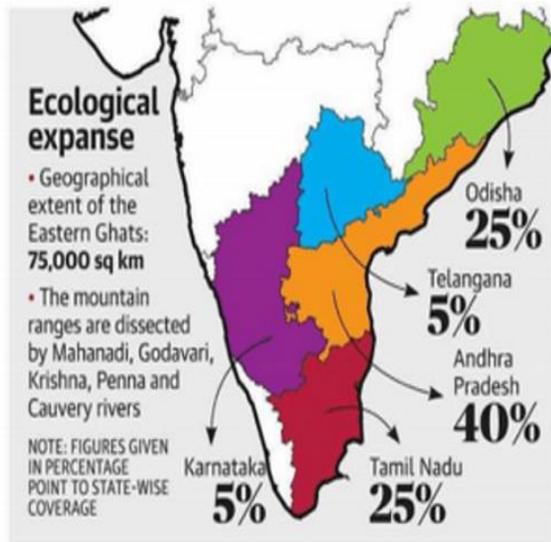
### What is the way forward?

- It would be more pragmatic to institute awareness campaigns to alert investors to specific risks
- RBI should formulate a detailed regulatory framework to license virtual currency intermediaries like exchanges
- KYC norms should be adhered at local Cryptocurrency exchanges
- Virtual currency trade can be carried on in a safe and responsible manner with self-imposed safeguards, such as adequate customer due diligence

### Conclusion

- India's financial sector could add value and a vibrant cryptocurrency segment in the face of growing technological innovation in the financial sector as it is critical to strengthen the supporting regulatory frameworks of India that operate regardless of the nature of an instrument.

## 2) A browning east: on climate change and the Eastern Ghats



### Why in the news?

- Eastern Ghats play an important dual role in fostering biodiversity and storing energy in trees.
- They are spread across some 75,000 sq. km. from Odisha to southern Tamil Nadu.

### What is the Background?

- With its range from south to north along the east coast of India the Eastern Ghats consist of different eco-regions i.e, Eastern Highlands moist deciduous forests, East Deccan dry evergreen forests, Deccan thorn scrub forests, shrublands, and South Deccan Plateau dry deciduous forests.
- It is home to endemic flora and fauna which includes tigers and elephants, and some 400 bird species.
- The broken hill-ranges of the Eastern Ghats spread across Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, are home to unique ecosystems and are considered to be a part of India's natural heritage.
- The Eastern Ghats area has shrunk by 16% over the past century, and just one region, Papikonda National Park, lost about 650 sq. km. over the last twenty years and faces a serious threat from climate change.

### What are the associated concerns?

- Diminished rainfall can negatively affect the forests ability to store carbon and provide subsistence material.
- This will also affect local forest communities as they are always dependent

on forest produce and other forest resources for sustaining their livelihoods.

- With rise in seasonal temperature it causes reduced plant species diversity and provides a dominant role for herbs over trees.
- It will add tremendous stress with degradation and damage due to human greed leading to unsustainable development.
- Haphazard mining, logging, poaching, forest fires, unsustainable harvest of forest produce, pilferage of rare species, smuggling and export of rare flora and fauna, encroachments of forest land and infrastructure development industrialization are also concerns due to springing up of habitations with an intention to colonize and devour the forest.

### What is the way forward?

- Promotion of sustainable use of forest resources should be done in order to counter overexploitation.
- Incentivising settled agriculture by the Government in order to counter the impact of shifting agriculture because the practice of shifting agriculture will directly contribute to deforestation.
- Multiple benefits can be conferred by improving tree cover resulting in modulation of the monsoon, improved air quality and wider spaces for biodiversity to persist.
- The usage of indigenous plants and trees for restoring and strengthening the peripheral areas of the forest of Eastern Ghats by tapping into the International Climate Fund available through Government financing.

### Conclusion

- Measures should be taken to protect endemism, rarity, endangered species; species which are or may become threatened with extinction and centres of the evolution of domesticated species, are critical for maintaining the range and pace of evolution and speciation and there is a need for concerted and macro-level conservation movement by the involvement of all stakeholders especially the public.

## 3) Fail-safe exit for America, but a worry for India



### Why in the news?

- The US and Taliban have negotiated a peace deal recently to bring an end to a near twenty years of war in Afghanistan.
- Within 24 hours of the much-hyped deal major disagreements and violence erupted in Afghanistan.
- The manner in which the deal was negotiated indicated that the deal was more about providing an honourable exit route for the US' military campaign in Afghanistan rather than about ending the violence in the country.

### What is the Background?

- The US withdrawal may perhaps put Afghanistan on the verge of yet another long-drawn battle.
- These events may prove geopolitically disadvantageous for India and may have serious implications for our national security.

### How will it lead to power reversal?

- Majority of global and regional players were against the Taliban between 1996-2001.
- After 20 years the Taliban has become an important stakeholder as most of the regional powers are backing it.
- The Taliban has become an important stakeholder as most of the regional powers are backing it as these countries consider the U.S. is the bigger challenge than the Taliban.
- The US president wants to fulfil his electoral promise of withdrawing the US military from the conflict zone.
- Just like Syria sees Afghanistan as another theatre to outplay the US, Russia too joins the game.
- Pakistan military may consider the Taliban as a strategic asset once it returns to power, which can be used against India to fuel terrorism.
- Pakistan's closeness with the Taliban and given the strong strategic relationship

between Pakistan and China, it may extend the influence of its Belt and Road initiative over Afghanistan.

### What is the impact on India?

- It is expected to take a hit between India and Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of the US-Taliban deal.
- It may get into headwinds on India's economic investments.
- China now may try to deepen involvement in the geopolitics and geo-economics of Afghanistan.
- US sanctions on Iran can act as an irritant in the bilateral relations.

### Conclusion

- The return of the Taliban can be projected as a signal of a victory of religious fundamentalism in the region and it might have serious implications for the region as a whole. The U.S.-Taliban deal will require Pakistan's assistance towards ensuring its success. Pakistan is leveraging this to involve the US in India-Pakistan equation related to Kashmir.

## 4) Having an war to Adivasi ground



### Why in the news?

- The Adivasis of Jhargram, West Bengal were overtaken by an event while preparing for the Bandhna festival; seven adults of the Kharia Savar community died within a span of just two weeks in November 2018.
- Their lifespan is approximately 26 years less than the average Indian's life expectancy as their lives are full of uncertainties, and death is considered the most normal of happenings.

### What is the Background?

- The cause of the deaths could not be medically verified as the dead were

cremated without any autopsy being performed.

- The villagers were of the view that those who had passed away were suffering from tuberculosis.
- It was not the case of undernourishment but they died of tuberculosis and excessive drinking as opined by the State authorities.
- Surveillance by the administrative authorities over the population in all other matters of their lives had failed to detect anything about the catastrophe until a few surviving inhabitants of the village made a plea to rescue them from hunger and diseases.

#### **What are the lessons to be learnt?**

- The entire outlook on the Adivasi question is reversed.
- The entire country can benefit a great deal by considering them as co-citizens.
- Sharing their historically constructed cultural values which often manifest the best forms of democracy and uphold the notions of higher levels of justice, fairness, and equality.

- The country can in fact guarantee itself a flourishing democracy by ensuring their right to live their own lives.

#### **What is the way forward?**

- It is important to go beyond the administrative convention of bracketing Adivasis into a single category.
- Policy framing requires mandatory recognition of their wide diversity so as to address the different problems faced by different groups — by community as well as by region.
- The possibility of fair implementation of public programmes, however, is contingent on an agentic involvement of the communities concerned.

#### **Conclusion**

- Instead of being considered to be mere passive recipients, Adivasis must be respected as active agents of change and involved in all spheres of policy, from planning to implementation. Adivasis are relatively more disadvantaged in terms of economic development, social inclusion and health issues.

# RSTV BIG PICTURE

## 1) Yes Bank crisis

### YES BANK JOURNEY: FROM PEAK TO PLUNGE

**1999** | Rana Kapoor, brother-in-law Ashok Kapur & Harkirat Singh partner with Dutch Rabobank to set up Rabo India Finance

**2002** | The trio gets in-principle approval to set up a bank with support from Rabobank

**2003** | Harkirat Singh is sidelined. Rana Kapoor, Ashok Kapur and Rabo promote Yes Bk

**2005** | Yes Bank hits the stock market with a Rs 300-crore IPO

**2017** | Yes Bank reports **divergence of Rs 6,355 crore in bad loans** – disclosed and identified by RBI

**2018** | The bank's shares tank nearly 30% in Sept after RBI cuts Rana Kapoor's tenure to 3 months

**2019** | The lender reports fresh divergence in FY19. New CEO Ravneet Gill announces **plans for \$2-billion capital-raising**

**2019** | Lenders sell Rana Kapoor's entire stake in the bank by invoking pledged shares. Kapoor had pledged the shares to finance family businesses

**2019** | Yes Bank balance sheet hit by a **spate of bad loans** – IL&FS, Anil Ambani Group, CG Power, Cox & Kings, Altico, CCD, Essel Group, Essar Power, Vardaraj Cement, Radius Developers, Mantri Group

**2020** | The lender's shares tank after bank reveals little-known NRIs as potential investors

**Feb '20** | Yes Bank **delays financial results** for Q3

**Mar 5, '20** | RBI places Yes Bank under moratorium over severe deterioration in financial condition

#### Why in the news?

- Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das said that the Yes Bank resolution will be done very swiftly and that 30 days is an outer limit.
- Late evening, the central bank put Yes Bank under moratorium and capped withdrawals at Rs 50,000 per account till further orders.

#### What is the Background?

- The central bank had taken over the Mumbai-based bank's board for 30 days amid a serious deterioration in India's fifth-largest private sector lender's financial position.

- The governor said that the decision was at a "larger level" and not at individual entity level.
- The move is aimed at ensuring safety of the financial system.
- Das has assured a swift action from the central bank's end so as to put in place a scheme to revive the Bank.
- Yes Bank has been facing difficulties ever since new chief executive Ravneet Gill took charge last March and revealed massive stress in the loan book.
- Significantly, public sector lender SBI along with some other financial institutions has come forward to bail out the bank, according to media reports.
- PTI also reported that LIC has been asked to team up with the public sector bank for a stake buy.

#### What is the history of YES Bank?

- It started in 2004 as one of the new generation private banks that were allowed to start banking operations by the Reserve Bank of India in the post-liberalisation era.
- Rana Kapoor and Ashok Kapur were the founders of the bank.
- The bank's engagements were in high risk lending and providing loans to those who could not raise funds elsewhere.
- Until 2017, when the problem of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) came into the highlight the assets books of Yes bank showed promising growth.
- Currently YES bank is India's fifth-largest private sector lender.

#### What were the reasons behind?

- The crisis at YES Bank started when the huge NPA issue at YES Bank became public.
- The founder Rana Kapoor had personal connections with most of the high-level industrialists who sought his help for loans, which went not repaid like IL&FS, Anil Ambani group, CG Power, Cox & Kings, Café Coffee Day, Essel group, Essar Power, Vardaraj Cement, Radius Developers, and Mantri Group.
- Rs.17000 crore is the estimated amount of Bad loans of Yes Bank.

- The NPA of Yes Bank may have increased to 10-11% of the total loans given as per the latest estimates by financial agencies.
- YES Bank had under-reported NPAs which was later found out by RBI which led to the end of the tenure of the founder Rana Kapoor as the CEO (2018).
- Adding fuel to the fire, Rumours spread through social media about the possible collapse of Yes Bank when it was capable of managing its balance sheet.
- Many false news and rumours resulted in shrinking of the deposit base of YES bank.

#### What is the way forward?

- To recover the loans and return the depositors money, SBI should take over the loan book of YES Bank.
- The new draft scheme proposes full repayment of all deposits, dilution of equity, and write-off of Rs 10,800 crore of additional tier one (AT-1) bonds.
- Since SBI has 51% government's share which is taxpayers money has raised concerns in wasting taxpayers' money to bail out failing private entities.
- Without any alternatives left, this bailout should be seen as an exception rather than the rule.

#### Conclusion

- Until 2017, Yes Bank was one of the highest-rated new generation private banks before the bank started to face serious bad loan issues. Yes Bank Ltd. Reconstruction Scheme, 2020 was introduced by the Reserve Bank of India to stabilise the bank and had also imposed temporary restrictions regarding the withdrawal of deposits. To protect Yes Bank's depositors and maintain trust in the entire banking system the bank needs to be resolved effectively.

## 2) NGOs Foreign Funding and Risks

### Foreign funding

- FCRA licences of 20,674 NGOs were cancelled from 2012 onward
- 10,002 registrations were cancelled in 2015 alone
- Before 2011, the number of FCRA registrations stood at 40,376



#### Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court ruled that the Centre cannot deprive NGOs of their right to receive foreign money by declaring them as political organisations if they use legitimate means of dissent to support public causes.
- Section 5 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 gives the Union government "unchecked and unbridled powers" to declare an organisation as being one of political nature and deny it access to funds from sources abroad.

#### What is the Background?

- The Apex Court observed - "It is clear from the provision itself that bandhs, hartals, rasta rokos, etc. are treated as common methods of political action."
- Any organisation that supports the cause of a group of citizens agitating for their rights without a political goal or objective cannot be penalised by being declared an organisation of political nature," the court observed.
- The court also made it clear that organisations used for channelling foreign funds by political parties cannot escape the rigour of FCRA.

#### How are NGOs registered in India?

- Societies, Trusts and Charitable Companies are the three segments of Indian NGOs.
- Societies have to register under The societies Registration Act, 1860.
- Private trusts are registered under the central government's Indian Trusts Act, 1882, and public ones are registered under the state legislation concerned.
- Charitable companies are set up according to section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.

#### What are the salient features of FCRA (Amendment Act) 2010?

- It bars organizations of 'political nature' from accepting foreign contributions.
- It mandates the organizations receiving foreign funds should renew their licenses every five years.
- The amendment to FCRA 2010 in 2016 mandated that contribution from foreign companies to not-for-profit, political parties and candidates contesting elections, newspapers, government employees etc. does not come under the definition of foreign source.

#### What is the role of NGOs?

- They act as service contractors, able to work more efficiently and more effectively than government agencies thereby playing an important role in the socio-economic transformation.
- It brings in accountability and transparency to governance.
- It acts as a human rights watchdog in the society.
- They act as channels for donors to provide international development funds to low-income countries or developing countries.

#### What are the issues associated?

- Many NGOs don't have sophisticated finance and legal teams, nor do they have the funds to conduct audits due to Misappropriation of funds.
- It is often said that foreign-funded NGOs try to propagate the foreign propaganda to stall developmental projects.
- CBI records filed in the Supreme Court show that only 10% of the total registered NGOs under the Societies Registration Act file annual financial statements.
- Corrupt or unscrupulous NGOs that receive foreign funds may serve as conduits for money laundering.

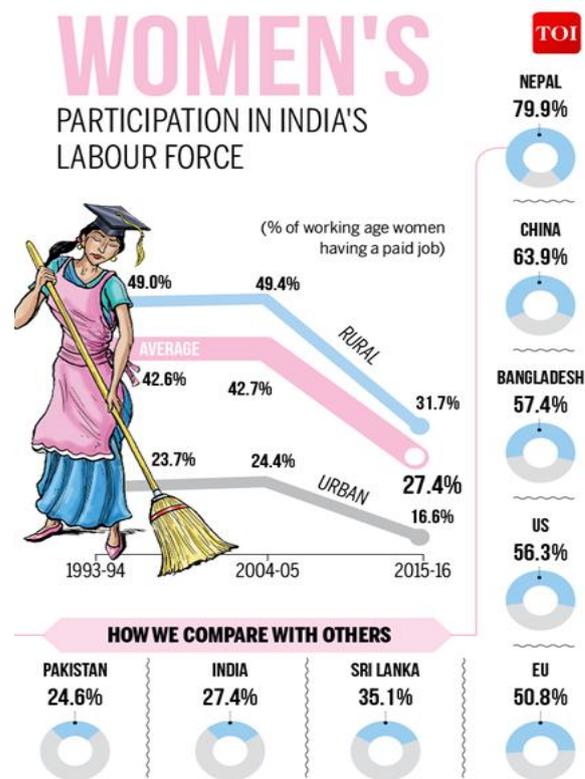
#### Conclusion

- There is a need for a regulatory mechanism to keep a watch on the financial activities of NGOs and voluntary organizations. Also the government should frame guidelines for their accreditation, the manner in which these organizations should maintain their accounts and the procedure for recovery in case they fail to submit their balance sheets.

### 3) Women in workforce

#### Why in the news?

- Women workforce in the country fell to 18 per cent in 2019 from 37 per cent in 2006, non-government organisation Azad Foundation said on International Women's Day.
- The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report this year ranks India at 149th position out of 153 countries on economic participation and opportunity.



#### What is the Background?

- According to the Foundation, the Global Gender Gap Report estimates that raising women's participation in the labour force can increase India's GDP significantly.
- The declining women's labour force participation, gender pay gap, high rates of informal work with lack of social security are seen as impediments to the goal of gender equality and empowerment of women in India.
- Over the last few years more women have taken up Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics courses and are aspiring to enter the workforce.
- However dropout rates among women is also high, particularly around marriage, maternity and motherhood.
- There are options like working from home, creches and so on, yet a lot more needs to be done.

#### What are the key findings of the Global Gender Gap report?

- The average (population-weighted) distance completed to gender parity is at 68.6% globally.
- To achieve full parity between men and women at the current rate of change it takes 99.5 years.

- The largest gender disparity is in political empowerment.
- Only 25% of the 35,127 seats in parliaments around the world are occupied by women.
- Only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women.
- For 11 years in a row, Iceland has been the frontrunner on the Global Gender Gap Index.
- Yemen is ranked the worst (153rd), while Iraq is 152nd and Pakistan 151st.

#### **What are the findings wrt India?**

- India has slipped to the 112th spot from its 108th position in the last edition.
- India has been ranked below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th).
- India has improved to 18th place on political empowerment but it has slipped to 150th on health and survival, to 149th in terms of economic participation and opportunity and to 112th place for educational attainment.
- India is the only country where the economic gender gap (0.354) is larger than the political gender gap (0.411) among the 153 countries studied.
- India is among the countries with very low women representation on company boards (13.8%), while it was even worse in China (9.7%).

#### **What are the reasons behind?**

- lack of employment opportunities
- rising education levels and household incomes
- problems in measurement such as under-reporting of women's work
- lack of suitable job opportunities is acute for women in rural India
- fall in the availability of farm jobs
- lack of economic opportunities in non-farm employment
- Mechanization of farm and non-farm activities
- rural societies are segregated rigidly on gender basis dictated by patriarchal norms
- reduction in family sizes and distress migration of rural males
- burden of unpaid work on women has been increasing disproportionately
- burden of domestic work and unpaid care

#### **Conclusion**

- Women not only suffer from demand-side constraints and inadequate state-level interventions but also women's low work participation and disproportionate burden of unpaid care work results in structural rigidities that reinforce prevalent socio-cultural practices.

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