

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

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**AT A GLANCE
& IN DEPTH.**

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

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Culture

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



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Plea bargaining

Gs Paper 2 - Indian Constitution , Judicial Review , Law Commission

What is Plea bargaining?

- Plea bargaining refers to a person charged with a criminal offence **negotiating with the prosecution for a lesser punishment** than what is provided in law by pleading guilty to a less serious offence.
- It primarily involves pre-trial negotiations between the accused and the prosecutor. It may involve bargaining on the charge or in the quantum of sentence.

Background:

- In India, the concept was not part of law until 2006. There has always been a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure for an accused to plead 'guilty' instead of claiming the right to a full trial, but it is not the same as plea bargaining.
- The Law Commission of India, in its 142nd Report, mooted the idea of "**concessional treatment**" of those who plead guilty on their own volition, but was careful to underscore that it would not involve any plea bargaining or "haggling" with the prosecution.

About Law Commission

- Law Commission of India is a **non-statutory body**, established by an order of the Government of India.
- The Commission was originally constituted in 1955 and is reconstituted **every three years**. Its major function is to work for legal reforms.
- It works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Functions of Law Commissions include:

- **Review/Repeal of obsolete laws:** Identification of laws which are no longer relevant and recommending for the repeal of obsolete and unnecessary

enactments.

- **Law and Poverty:** Examines the Laws which affect the poor and carries out post-audit for socio-economic legislations.
- **Judicial Administration:** Considering and conveying to the Government its views on any subject relating to law and judicial administration that may be specifically referred to it by the Government through the Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs).
- **Examine the existing laws** in the light of Directive Principles of State Policy and to suggest ways of improvement and reform and also to suggest such legislations as might be necessary to implement the Directive Principles and to attain the objectives set out in the Preamble to the Constitution.
- **Examine the impact of globalization** on food security, unemployment and recommend measures for the protection of the interests of the marginalized.
- **Revise the Central Acts of general importance** so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities;

- Plea bargaining was **introduced in 2006 as part of a set of amendments to the CrPC** as Chapter XXI-A, containing Sections 265A to 265L .

When is it allowed?

- In India Plea bargaining can be initiated only by the accused and that to someone who has been charged sheeted for an offence that does not attract the death sentence, life sentence or a prison term above seven years can make use of the scheme.
- It is also applicable to private complaints of which a criminal court has taken cognisance.

- The categories of cases that **cannot be disposed** of through plea bargaining are those that involve **offences affecting the “socio-economic conditions” of the country, or committed against a woman or a child below the age of 14.**

Rationale of Plea Bargaining:

- The **Justice Malimath Committee on reforms of the criminal justice system** endorsed the various recommendations of the Law Commission with regard to plea bargaining. Some of the advantages are that
 - The practice would ensure speedy trial, end uncertainty over the outcome of criminal cases,
 - Save litigation costs and relieve the parties of anxiety.
 - It would also have a dramatic impact on conviction rates.
 - It may help offenders make a fresh start in life.
 - Reduction of pendency of cases and decongesting prisons can also be achieved by plea bargaining.

Why in News?

- Many members of the Tablighi Jamaat belonging to different countries have obtained release from court cases in recent days by means of plea bargaining.
- Accused of violating visa conditions by attending a religious congregation in Delhi, these foreign nationals have walked free after pleading guilty to minor offences and paying the fines imposed by the court.
- These cases have brought the focus on plea bargaining as a practice by which time consuming trials can be avoided.

2) NRC and NPR

Gs Paper 2- Population and associated issues

What is the National Population Register?

- The National Population Register (NPR) is a **Register of usual residents of the country.**
- It is being prepared at the local (Village/sub-Town), sub-District, District, State and National level under provisions of the **Citizenship Act 1955** and the **Citizenship Rules, 2003.**
- It is **mandatory** for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.

- A usual resident is defined for the purposes of NPR as a person who has resided in a local area for the **past 6 months or more** or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next 6 months or more.
- NPR cannot be seen as a citizenship registration drive since it would include, for instance, any **foreigner** residing in a given locality for over six months.

Present Status

- The data for the NPR is generated through house-to-house enumeration during the “house-listing” phase of the census, which is held once in 10 years.
- It was collected in **2010** alongwith the houselisting phase of Census of India 2011. The update of this data was done during **2015** by conducting a door to door survey.
- Now it has been decided to update the NPR along with the Houselisting phase of Census 2021 during April to September 2020 in **all the States/UTs except Assam.**
- Assam has been excluded because the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** exercise has already been conducted in the state.
- The entire NPR exercise will be conducted by the **Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI)** under the Union Home Ministry. It will be done before the 2021 census.

What kind of data will NPR collect?

- NPR will collect **both demographic data and biometric data.** For biometric data it will depend on Aadhaar, for which it will seek Aadhaar details of the residents.

Why does the government want so much data?

- The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country. It will help the government formulate its policies better and also aid national security.
- It will streamline data of residents across various platforms and ease the life of those residing in India by cutting red tape.

How NPR differs from population census?

- The **decennial** census is the largest single source of a variety of statistical information on different characteristics of

all persons in the country. The process began for the first time in **1872** when India was still under colonial rule.

- The Census is carried out under the **Census Act, 1948.**
- The responsibility of conducting the Census rests with the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India** under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- As opposed to this, the exercise of creating and maintaining a NPR began in the year **2010** to create a registry of **usual residents** of the country. NPR is conducted under the **Citizenship Act 1955** and the **Citizenship Rules, 2003.**
- The Census data **does not aim to collect information about individuals** but to give an overall picture of the status or condition of residents of India and the overall population trends.
- The purpose of collecting and analyzing Census data is that it informs planning and policy, and helps in assessing the impact of existing government policies.
- While the Census Act makes it compulsory for the government to keep the data collected during census **confidential and anonymous**, there is no such requirement of confidentiality for NPR data under the citizenship rules. The NPR is a register that will be in the public domain with data of individuals.

Are foreigners included?

- **Both the NPR and Census include foreigners staying in India** — in NPR's case, those staying for more than six months while in the case of Census, those who are expected to stay within the geographical limits of this country throughout the enumeration period are included.

National Register of Citizens

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the register containing names of Indian citizens.
- NRC was prepared first in 1951 after the conduct of the Census of 1951.
- It is being updated and that too **only in Assam.**
- Now, it is not linked to census but one has to link oneself to a family member whose name had appeared either in the **NRC of 1951**, or to any of the **state's electoral**

rolls prepared till midnight of 24th march 1971.

- If the applicant's name is not on any of these lists, he can produce any of the **12 other documents dated up to March 24, 1971.**

Why 1971?

The Assam Accord:

- Popular movements between 1979 and 1985 against undocumented immigrants in Assam led to the Assam Accord.
- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The Accord agreed that all those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.
- Those who had done so **after 1971 were to be deported**; the entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.
- However, the provisions in the Assam accord were not implemented for a long time.
- Finally the Supreme Court, which is supervising the entire process, has set a hard deadline of July 31 for the final NRC. Deadline was extended to August 31^a later.

Current status:

- The final draft of NRC was released in August 2019 which excluded 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam.
- Each excluded person can file an appeal in **Foreigners Tribunals.**
- The appellant then has the option of approaching the **High Court and Supreme Court.**

Foreigners Tribunal:

- The foreigners tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies, unique to Assam, to determine if a person staying illegally is a "foreigner" or not.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964**, and has empowered **district magistrates** in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals to

decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.

- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.

Why in News?

- The West Bengal Chief Minister spoke about the National Register of Citizens and National Population Register recently.

3) High Court for Puducherry

Gs Paper 2 - Judiciary

Background:

- Puducherry was merged with India in 1962 and the **jurisdiction of the Madras High Court** was extended to it.
- In 2017, the Puducherry legislature unanimously resolved to have its own High Court; subsequently it also passed a resolution seeking establishment of the High Court.
- As per **Article 241** of the Constitution, **Parliament** has the power to constitute a High Court for a Union territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a High Court.

What is the Need for a High Court at Puducherry?

- The Puducherry government spends exorbitant sums of money towards expenses of the large High Court. As its population is small, this amount can be reduced to less than a quarter of the amount spent with a much smaller High Court.

Constitutional provisions:

- The Constitution of India provides for a high court for each state, but the **Seventh Amendment Act of 1956** authorised the Parliament to establish a common high court for two or more states or for two or more states and a union territory.
- When a common High Court is established for more than one State, **administrative expenses** have to be paid only from the consolidated fund of the 'State' in which the principal seat of the High Court is situated.
- However, this provision is not followed with respect to Puducherry which shares the disproportionately exorbitant expenses with Tamil Nadu.
- Also, administrative expenses of a High Court at the Union Territory shall be

drawn from the 'Consolidated Fund of India' under the Constitution.

- A Puducherry High Court with four to five judges can ensure **quick action on pendency of matters**.

Increasing the number of judges:

- In the *All India Judges Association And Others vs Union Of India (Uoi) And Ors* judgement, the Supreme Court observed that the time has now come for protecting one of the pillars of the Constitution, namely, the judicial system, by directing increase, in the first instance, in the Judge strength from the **existing ratio of 10.5 or 13 per 10 lakhs people to 50 Judges for 10 lakh people**.
- It was also discussed in the Law Commission of India Report titled *Arrears and Backlog: Creating Additional Judicial (wo)manpower*, in 2014.
- However, as of 2016, the ratio is **only 12 judges for one million population**.
- This ratio at Puducherry can be increased if a separate High Court with four to five judges is established.

A data comparison:

- Size of population and territory is irrelevant: The number of cases filed and disposed of at Puducherry in 2010 is four times higher than the numbers at Sikkim, Manipur and Goa (with High Courts) put together.
- Bigger States have more judges and staff whereas smaller States have lesser numbers of these.
- Also the number of cases disposed of from Puducherry (28,631 cases) is three times more than the number of cases (9,031 cases) disposed by four High Courts (Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya and Sikkim) put together in 2016.

Aiding Statehood demand :

- A High Court for Puducherry will also strengthen voices seeking Statehood.
- The Constitution enabled the establishment of a legislature and Council of Ministers for certain Union Territories with the intent of providing them Statehood gradually.
- Consequently, out of the seven Union Territories originally placed under Article 239A, all except Puducherry were granted Statehood by 1989.

- However, most Union Territories under 239A at least had Benches of High Courts when they attained Statehood.

Way Forward:

- In March 2016, the Government of India had suggested that the establishment of a High Court will be taken up if the Puducherry government proposes the idea. However, the decision of the Puducherry legislature has still not been conveyed to the Central government.
- The Puducherry government should now form a committee to prepare a comprehensive report and a draft Bill backing its proposal and forward it to the Central government.

4) Contempt of Court

Gs Paper 2 - Judiciary

What is Contempt of Court?

- Contempt of court is an act of disrespect or disobedience towards a judge or court's officers or interference with its orderly process.

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 129:** Grants **Supreme Court** the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- **Article 142(2):** Enables the Supreme Court to investigate and punish any person for its contempt.
- **Article 215:** Grants every **High Court** the power to punish for contempt of itself.

- According to the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, contempt of court can **either be civil contempt or criminal contempt.**

Civil contempt

- It means **wilful disobedience** to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court.

Criminal contempt

- It means the publication (whether by words, spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representations, or otherwise) of any matter or the doing of any other act whatsoever which
- scandalises or tends to scandalise, or lowers or tends to lower the authority of, any court; or
- prejudices, or interferes or tends to interfere with, the due course of any judicial proceeding; or

- Interferes or tends to interfere with, or obstructs or tends to obstruct, the administration of justice in any other manner.

Punishments for Contempt of Court :

- A contempt of court may be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or
- With fine which may extend to two thousand rupees, or with both, provided that the accused may be discharged or the punishment awarded may be remitted on apology being made to the satisfaction of the court.
- The Supreme Court in 1991, ruled that it has the **power to punish for contempt not only of itself but also of high courts, subordinate courts and tribunals functioning in the entire country.**
- The **High Courts** have been given special powers to punish contempt of subordinate courts, as per Section 10 of The Contempt of Courts Act of 1971.
- However, innocent publication and distribution of some matter, fair and reasonable criticism of judicial acts and comment on the administrative side of the judiciary do not amount to contempt of court.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court initiated a contempt of court case against public rights activist and lawyer Prashnat Bhushan.

5) Women Army officers eligible for permanent commission

Gs Paper 2 - Government Policies and Interventions, Gender, Issues related to Women

Background:

- The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992. Recruits under the **Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES)** had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.
- In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.
- In the February 2019 policy statement, the Government endorsed the Permanent

Commission (PC) for SSC women officers in 10 streams of the 'Combat Support Arms' and 'Services' sections.

- However, it was said that the women officers would not be offered any **command appointments**, and would serve only in staff posts.
- In February 2020, the Supreme Court held that there is a need for an administrative will and 'change of mindset' and directed the government to grant Permanent Commission and command postings in all services other than combat to women Army officers.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has issued the formal Government Sanction Letter for grant of Permanent Commission to women officers in the Army.
- The order specifies the grant of PC to SSC women officers in all the 10 streams of the Army in which they presently serve — the Army Air Defence (AAD), Signals, Engineers, Army Aviation, Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Army Service Corps (ASC), Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), and Intelligence Corps in addition to the existing streams of Judge and Advocate General (JAG) and the Army Educational Corps (AEC).

Women in command

It's an order

Here are some of the salient features of the order:

- Accepts government policy to grant PC to short service commission (SSC) women officers in 10 streams of the Combat Support Arms and Services wings
- SSC women officers are eligible for command assignments and not just staff appointments
- SSC women officers granted PC will be entitled to all consequential benefits, including promotion and financial gains

For the women in uniform, career progression is now becoming a reality with the Supreme Court directing the Centre to grant permanent commission (PC) within three months. Here is a snapshot of the long years of the fight women officers have conducted against discrimination:

1992: Centre notifies women eligible for appointment as officers for five years in the Army Postal Service, Judge Advocate General Department, Army Education Corps, Signal Corps, Intelligence Corps, Corps of Engineers, Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and Regiment of Artillery, among other Corps

Dec. 1996: Ministry of Defence deletes the five-year clause for enrollment

Nov. 2005: The initial process of induction of women officers under the WSES was replaced by SSCs with an

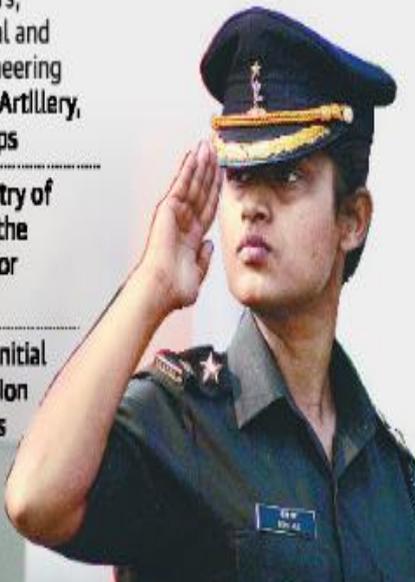
outer period of 14 years. The first batch of women officers under the new scheme entered the Army in 2008

2003 and 2006: Writ petitions filed in the Delhi High Court by advocate

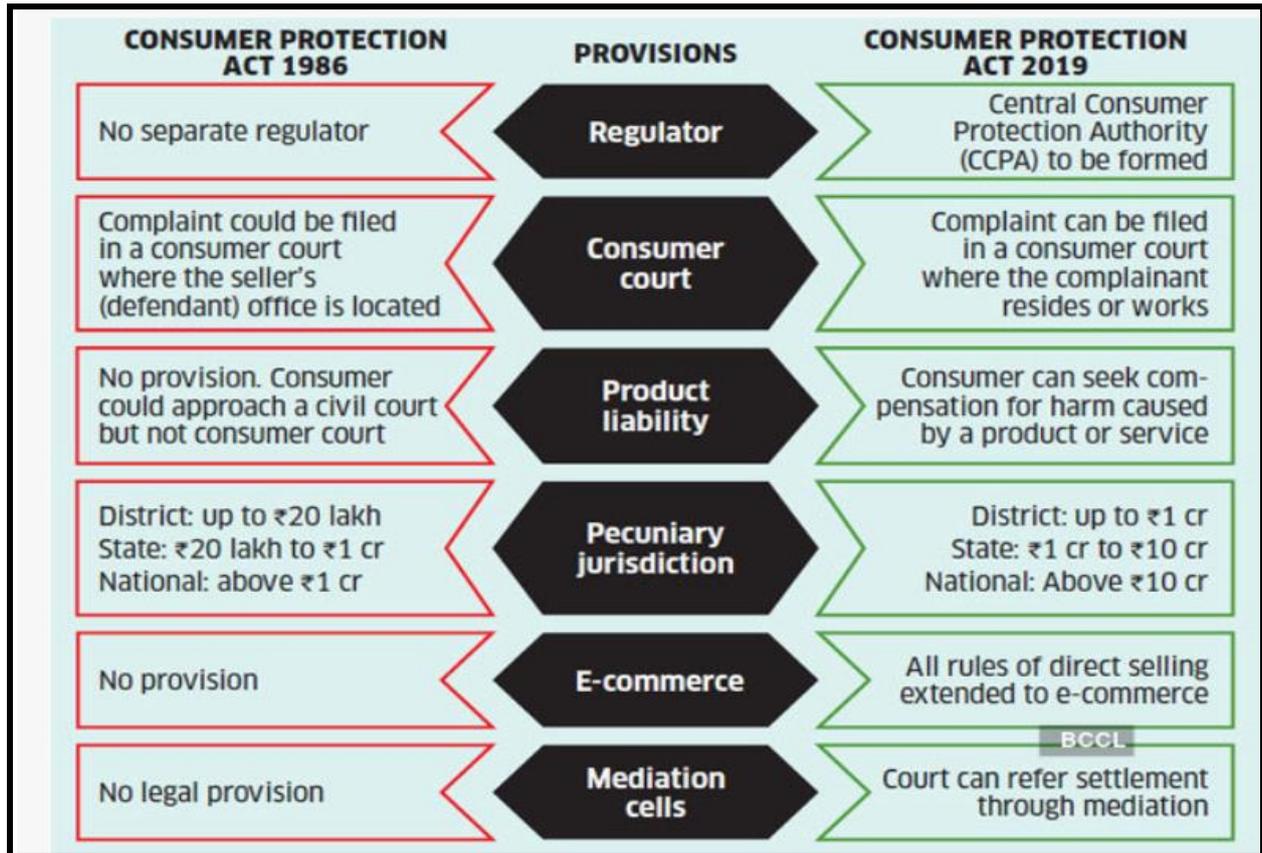
Babita Puniya and several SSC women Army officers for permanent commission and equality of opportunity in the Army

March 2010: Delhi HC holds that women SSC officers of the Air Force and Army who had opted for PC, but not granted that status would be entitled to PC at par with male SSC officers with all consequential benefits. Contempt proceedings were then initiated by the women officers against the Union of India for non-compliance with the HC judgment. Contempt was later stayed

September 2, 2011: The case reaches the Supreme Court in appeal



6) Consumer Protection Act, 2019



Gs Paper 2 - Government Policies and Interventions

Key features of the Act :

Definition of consumer:

- A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration.
- It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose.
- It covers transactions through all modes including **offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.**

Rights of consumers:

- The following consumer rights have been defined in the Act, including the right to:
- be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property;
- be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services;
- be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and
- Seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.

Central Consumer Protection Authority:

- The central government will set up a CCPA to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.
- It will **regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements.**
- The CCPA will have an investigation wing, headed by a Director-General, which may conduct inquiry or investigation into such violations.

Functions of CCPA:

- Inquiring into violations of consumer rights, investigating and launching prosecution at the appropriate forum;
- Passing orders to recall goods or withdraw services that are hazardous, reimbursement of the price paid, and discontinuation of the unfair trade practices, as defined in the Bill;
- Issuing directions to the concerned trader/ manufacturer/ endorser/ advertiser/ publisher to either discontinue a false or misleading advertisement, or modify it;
- Imposing penalties, and;
- Issuing safety notices to consumers against unsafe goods and services.

Penalties for misleading advertisement:

- The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement.
- In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years.

Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission:

- Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (CDRCs) will be set up at the district, state, and national levels. A consumer can file a complaint with CDRCs in relation to:
 - 1) Unfair or restrictive trade practices;
 - 2) Defective goods or services;
 - 3) Overcharging or deceptive charging; and
 - 4) The offering of goods or services for sale which may be hazardous to life and safety.
- Complaints against an unfair contract can be filed only at the State and National levels.
- Appeals from a District CDRC will be heard by the State CDRC. Appeals from the State CDRC will be heard by the National CDRC.

- Final appeal will lie before the **Supreme Court**.

Jurisdiction of CDRCs:

- The District CDRC will entertain complaints where value of goods and services does not exceed Rs one crore.
- The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10 crore.
- Complaints with value of goods and services over Rs 10 crore will be entertained by the National CDRC.

Product liability:

- The Act introduces the product liability clause which means a manufacturer or a service provider has to compensate a consumer if their goods/services cause injury or loss to the consumer due to manufacturing defect or poor service.
- The most significant impact of this provision will be on **e-commerce** platforms as it also includes service providers under its ambit.

Why in News?

- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 which replaces the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, comes into force from 20 July.

ENVIRONMENT

1) EIA 2020

About

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process or study which predicts the effect of a proposed industrial/infrastructural project on the environment.
- It prevents any project from being approved which has a harsh effect on the environment and tries to give oversight to have solutions to the upcoming issues if the project is implemented.
- This process falls under **Environmental Protection Act 1986**.

- EIA covers projects such as mining of coal or other minerals, infrastructure development, thermal, nuclear and hydropower projects, real estate and other industrial projects.
- The projects are assessed based on their potential impact on the environment. Based on the assessments, they are granted or denied environmental clearance by a panel of experts.

Steps in EIA process

- EIS here means Environmental Impact Statement.

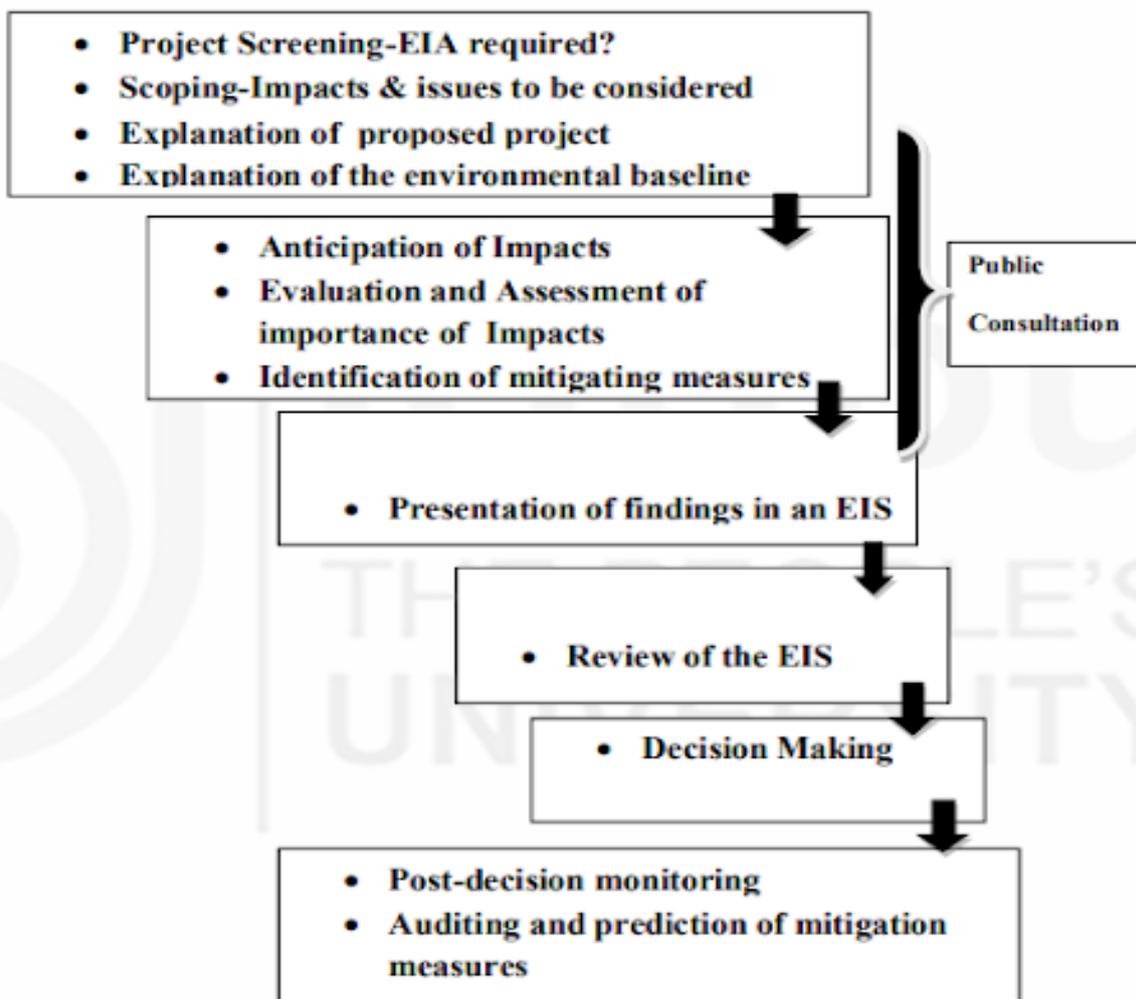


Fig. 1 : Steps in EIA Process

Image Credit: IGNOU

- It was in 1994 when the first norms of the EIA were notified under the Environment

(Protection) Act, 1986. This notification was replaced by another one in 2006.

- The EIA Notification, 2006, broadly divides all projects into two categories— **Category A and Category B**—based on potential impacts over an area and on human health and natural and man-made resources.
- According to the notification, all Category A projects (with potentially significant impacts) are required to carry out an EIA and undertake a public hearing before an environmental clearance may be granted by the Union environment ministry.
- Category B projects (with potentially less significant impacts) are evaluated and given a clearance by state level authorities, the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and State Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC).
- Moreover, projects under **Category B1** also require an EIA and public consultation, but those falling under **B2** are exempted from requirements of both EIA and public consultation.

EIA 2020

- The Government of India has put up new draft EIA rules and has asked for public opinion on this.
- The new draft rules are facing opposition from different sectors and environmentalists.
- The following are some of the changes prescribed in the new draft rules:
- The EIA new draft 2020 allows **post-facto clearance**. This means that a project can get environmental clearance after it has started the project.
- There is a list of the selected projects in the new draft that have been proposed to be **exempted from public participation**. Modernisation projects, irrigation projects, all building constructions and area development projects, expansion or widening of national highways, all projects concerning national defence and security, are part of the list.
- The time allotted for **public hearings** has been reduced to expedite the process.
- It has called for all those projects which have not got environmental clearance to apply and get clearance. This gives space to illegal projects to get sanctioned and approved.
- Authorities earlier were asked to check the compliance of the projects every 6 months, but now this period has been extended to **1 year**.
- Any drastic changes in EIA will have a direct impact on the living and working conditions of people like adivasis, fishing communities and the ecology.

Why in the news?

- The website *fridaysforfuture.in* was being used to build up protest against the proposed EIA rules 2020.
- The Cyber crime unit of Delhi police has shut down the website *fridaysforfuture* after receiving complaint from the Environment ministry.
- *Fridaysforfuture* is an initiative started by Environmental activist **Greta Thunberg** in Sweden to push for environmental reforms.

ECONOMY

1) National Financial Reporting Authority

About NFRA

- National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) was constituted in 2018 under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- NFRA is an **independent regulator overseeing the auditing profession** and is a part of the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)**.
- It has taken over all the powers of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) regarding regulation of auditors.

Functions and powers of NFRA

- Recommend **accounting and auditing policies and standards** to be adopted by companies;
- Monitor and enforce compliance with accounting standards and auditing standards. NFRA has also been given powers to **investigate professional misconduct** committed by members of the ICAI for prescribed class of body corporate or persons.
- NFRA is empowered to oversee the quality of audit service and undertake investigation of companies whose securities are listed on any stock exchange in India or abroad.
- Also, it can probe unlisted public companies having paid-up capital of no less than Rs 500 crore or annual turnover of no less than Rs 1,000 crore.

Why in News?

- Audit regulator NFRA has constituted a technical advisory committee (TAC) under the chairmanship of R. Narayanaswamy, Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore.
- This TAC, which comprises seven members including the chairman, would among other things aid and advise the executive body of the NFRA on issues relating to drafts of accounting standards and auditing standards.
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2) Financial Stability Report

Indian Economy

What is NPA?

- A non performing asset (NPA) is a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of **90 days**.
- Banks classify NPAs further into Substandard, Doubtful and Loss assets.
 - 1) **Substandard assets:** Assets which have remained NPA for a period less than or equal to 12 months.
 - 2) **Doubtful assets:** An asset would be classified as doubtful if it has remained in the substandard category for a period of 12 months.
 - 3) **Loss assets:** Loss asset is considered uncollectible and of such little value that its continuance as a bankable asset is not warranted, although there may be some salvage or recovery value.
- With respect to agriculture, a loan granted for short duration crops will be treated as NPA, if the instalment of principal or interest thereon remains overdue for **two crop seasons**.
- A loan granted for long duration crops will be treated as NPA, if the instalment of principal or interest thereon remains overdue for **one crop season**.

Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)

- CRAR, also known as **Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR)**, is the capital needed for a bank measured in terms of the assets or loans disbursed by the banks. It measures capital adequacy in terms of riskiness of the assets or loans given.
 - $CAR = \frac{\text{Tier I} + \text{Tier II} + \text{Tier III (Capital funds)}}{\text{Risk weighted assets}}$
- According to the RBI's capital adequacy norms, banks (including RRBs) are required to maintain CRAR at **9%**.

Why in News?

- The RBI has released its Financial Stability Report, July 2020.

Highlights of the report

- The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) could worsen to as high as 14.7% by the end of the current financial year, from 8.5% in March 2020, if the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was 'very severe'.

- Observing that the capital to risk-weighted assets ratio of SCBs edged down to 14.8% in March, from 15% in September 2019, the RBI projected that this ratio could slide to 13.3% in March 2021 under the baseline scenario and to 11.8% under the very severe stress scenario.
- Bank credit which had considerably weakened during the first half of 2019-20, slid down further to 5.9% by March 2020 and remained muted up to early June 2020.

3) New currency swap facility

Bilateral relations, Indian Economy

What are currency swap arrangements?

- In the swap arrangement, a country provides dollars to a foreign central bank, which, at the same time, provides the equivalent funds in its currency to the former, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which could be the next day or even two years later, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.

Why in News?

- The RBI has signed an agreement for extending a **\$400-million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka** to boost the foreign reserves and ensure financial stability of the country, which is badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The currency swap arrangement will remain available till November 2022.

- While Sri Lanka's forex reserves were at \$ 6.7 billion in June 2020, India's forex reserves were at a record high of \$ **517.63 billion** as on July 17.

Similar arrangements

- The RBI also offers similar swap lines to central banks in the **SAARC region** within a total corpus of \$2 billion.
- This facility originally came into operation in 2012 to provide a backstop line of funding for short-term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or balance of payment crises until longer term arrangements were made.
- India also has a \$75 billion bilateral currency swap line with **Japan**, which has the second highest dollar reserves after China.

Advantages of such arrangements

- These swap operations carry **no exchange rate or other market risks**, as transaction terms are set in advance. The absence of an exchange rate risk is the major benefit of such a facility.
- This facility provides the country, which is getting the dollars, with the flexibility to use these reserves at any time in order to maintain an appropriate level of balance of payments or short-term liquidity.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) European Union rescue package

Important International institutions

About European Union

- The European Union (EU) is a unique **economic and political union** between 27 EU countries.
- The **United Kingdom**, which had been a founding member of the EU, left the organization in 2020.
- The EU was created by the **Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, 1993. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the euro), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs.
- Additionally, the **Treaty of Lisbon**, enacted in 2009, gave the EU more broad powers that included being authorized to sign international treaties, increase border patrol, and other security and enforcement provisions



- EU's headquarters is currently located in Brussels, Belgium.

- Currently, the euro is the official currency of 19 out of 27 EU member countries which together constitute the **Eurozone**, officially called the **euro area**.

Why in News?

- European Union leaders have agreed on a rescue package of €750 billion (\$858 billion) to try and pull their bloc out of a deep recession.
- The package will send tens of billions of euros to countries hit hardest by the virus, most notably heavily indebted Spain and Italy.

2) Forms of Economic integration

Bilateral relations, Indian Economy, Effects of liberalization on the economy

What are they?

- Economic integration takes the form of the Preferential Trade Area, Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union.
- A **preferential trade area (PTA)** is a trading bloc that gives preferential access to certain products from the participating countries. This is done by reducing tariffs but not by abolishing them completely. A PTA can be established through a trade pact. It is the first stage of economic integration.
- A **free trade area** is the region encompassing a trade bloc whose member countries have signed a free-trade agreement (FTA). Such agreements involve cooperation between at least two countries to reduce/abolish trade barriers. e.g. South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).
- A **customs union** is defined as a type of trade block which is composed of a free trade area with no tariffs among members and a common external tariff. e.g. BENELUX (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg).
- A **common market** has the same features as a customs union, but, in addition, factors of production (labour, capital and technology) are mobile among members. Restrictions on immigration and cross-border investment are abolished. e.g. European Common Market (ECM).

- An **economic union** is the last step in an economic integration process. In addition to free movement of goods, services and production factors, it also requires integration of economic policies, both monetary and fiscal. Under economic union members harmonized monetary policies, taxation and government spending. (e.g. European Economic Union)

Why in News?

- Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently said that India and the U.S. have almost finalised a limited trade deal.
- Mr. Goyal also reiterated that the longer term plan is to work towards a comprehensive trade deal. As an intermediate step between the imminent limited deal and the comprehensive deal, Mr. Goyal proposed a **preferential trade agreement** with the United States that would cover 50 to 100 goods and services, rather than waiting for the gains of a free trade agreement, which may take several years to conclude.

What are the issues?

- India and the U.S. were apparently close to finalising a limited trade deal several times over the past year, including when both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump were in New York last year for the United Nations General Assembly session.
- Again, in February this year the two sides scrambled — unsuccessfully — to finalise a mini deal that was to be announced during Mr. Trump's India visit.
- India wanted the U.S. to restore its access to the U.S. preferential trading system, the **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**, an end to Mr. Trump's steel and aluminium tariffs, increased market access for some categories of Indian agricultural products and so forth.
- U.S. concerns during the negotiations have included market access for American dairy and agricultural products, medical devices and a cut in information and communication technology (ICT) import tariffs. The U.S. has also had concerns with India's digital trade policies (for instance FDI in commerce, data localisation).

About GSP

- The Generalised System of Preferences is one of the oldest trade preference programmes in the world, under which developed countries offer **preferential treatment** (such as zero or low duties on imports) to products originating in developing countries.
- GSP is presently extended by 29 developed countries.
- India, as a developing country, enjoyed special trade benefits from the **GSP programme of U.S** which allowed duty-free entry of Indian goods worth \$5.6 billion into the U.S.
- In June 2019, the U.S. decided to **terminate** India's eligibility for the GSP based on complaints from US' dairy and medical device industries alleging that India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that are affecting the US exports in those sectors.

3) Malabar exercise

Important International institutions, Bilateral relations

About the exercise

- Malabar began as a bilateral naval exercise between **India** and the **U.S.** in 1992, and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of **Japan** in 2015.
- **Australia** has been requesting for observer status in the Malabar exercise.
- However, India did not include Australia in the exercises in 2018 and 2019, while the bilateral **AUSINDEX naval exercise** expanded in scope and complexity.

Why in News?

- Recently, a key meeting of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) discussed the issue of inviting Australia for the trilateral Malabar naval exercise. However, a final decision has not been taken yet.
- The decision, if taken, could bring all **Quad countries** together as part of the annual war games.
- The inclusion of Australia in the Malabar exercises would mark a major shift for India's Indo-Pacific plans. The bilateral cooperation has gone up significantly over the years.
- Last month, the two countries signed the long-pending **Mutual Logistics Support**

(MLSA), elevated their partnership to **Comprehensive Strategic partnership** and also announced a joint declaration on a **shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**.

Quad grouping

- The grouping of four democracies– **India, Australia, US and Japan** –known as the **quadrilateral security dialogue or quad**, was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. Quad was revived in 2017.
- Quad is projected as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- With growing concerns in all four quad countries about **Chinese foreign policy**

and regional influence, the group has found renewed relevance.

4) G20 Digital Economy Ministerial' Summit

Important International institutions

About G20

- Founded in 1999, the Group of Twenty (G20) is the premier forum for its members’ international economic cooperation and decision-making.
- The G20 comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, European Union, France, Germany, **India**, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK and USA.

G20 members



Note: The European Union is also a member

BBC

- The G20 Countries together represent around 90% of global GDP, 80% of global trade, and two thirds of the world’s population.

The objectives of the G20 are:

1. Policy coordination between its members in order to achieve global economic stability, sustainable growth;
2. To promote financial regulations that reduce risks and prevent future financial crises; and

3. To create a new international financial architecture.

Why in News?

- The Digital Ministers of G20 Members conducted a virtual summit known as G20 Digital Economy Ministerial' Summit.
- India was represented by Ravi Shankar Prasad, Union minister for Law and Justice, communications and electronics and IT.
- During the summit, Mr. Prasad said all digital platforms need to be accountable

and sensitive towards concerns related to defence and data privacy of citizens of sovereign countries.

- The comments follow the Indian government's move to ban 59 Chinese applications, including TikTok, Shareit, Mi Video Call, Club Factory and Cam Scanner, citing a threat to national security and sovereignty.

5) Restrictions on bidders from nations sharing land borders

GS 3: Effects of liberalization on the economy, Changes in industrial policy, Indian Economy

What's in the news?

- In a move that will mainly affect entities from China, the government has amended the General Financial Rules, 2017, imposing **restrictions on public procurement** from bidders of **countries that share a land border with India**, citing grounds of defence and national security.
- Bidders from these countries will be eligible only if they are registered with the **Registration Committee** constituted by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT). They will also be required to take mandatory **political and security clearance** from the ministries of External Affairs and Home.
- The central government has also directed state governments to implement this order for all public procurement.
- Relaxation will be provided for procurement of COVID medical supplies till December 31. Also, the order for prior registration will not apply for countries to which the government extends lines of credit or provides development assistance, even if they share a land border with India.
- India shares its land border with **China, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar**.

Background

- The move will effectively put in place more filters for entities from China.
- The restrictions follow a series of steps taken in recent months to **prevent the influx of Chinese products and investments into India**.

- On June 23, the government made it mandatory for sellers on the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal** to clarify the country of origin of goods when registering new products.
- The GeM portal now allows buyers to reserve a bid for Class I local suppliers, or suppliers of those goods with more than 50 per cent local content. For bids below Rs 200 crore, only Class I and Class II (those with more than 20 per cent local content) are eligible.
- The decision came in the backdrop of the government's push for **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, and following the clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in **Galwan Valley** on June 15, which prompted several government departments to launch an offensive against imports from China.

More filters in place

- At \$70.32 billion in 2018-19 and \$62.38 billion between April 2019 and February 2020, **China accounts for the highest proportion of goods imported into India** — around 14 per cent in 2019-2020 so far.
- In April, the government amended **FDI rules** mandating prior approval for investment by entities in countries that share land borders with India.
- The government stated that prior approval was compulsory for foreign investments from all countries sharing borders with India to **prevent "opportunistic takeovers" of domestic firms** following the pandemic.

Related information

- The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a 100 percent government-owned company setup under the aegis of the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**. GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- In 2017, the government made it **mandatory** for all the departments and ministries to source goods and services from the GeM.

6) United Nations Security Council

Important International institutions, Effect of policies on India's interests

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1946 as one of the six principal organs of the UN. It is generally viewed as the apex of the UN system.
- It is responsible for the **maintenance of international peace and security**.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue **binding resolutions** to member states.

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members.
- The council has **five permanent members** (P-5) United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France.
- These permanent members can **veto** any substantive Security Council resolutions, including those on the admission of new member states.
- The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a **regional basis** as follows:
 1. five for African and Asian States;
 2. one for Eastern European States;
 3. two for the Latin American and Caribbean States; and
 4. two for Western European and other States.
- Each year the 193-member UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term.
- The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Vote and Majority Required

- Each member of the Security Council shall have **one vote**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **procedural matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **all other matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.
- However, any member, whether permanent or non-permanent, must

abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

India's quest for permanent seat in UNSC

- For decades, India has sought a comprehensive reform of the UNSC and permanent membership at the Council.
- The arguments put forward India centred on four aspects for making the Council more representative: **Expansion of Membership, Veto power, Regional Representation & Relationship between Security Council and General Assembly**.

Expansion of Membership

- In India's eyes, no reform of the UN is complete without the composition of the Security Council changing to reflect contemporary realities of the twenty-first century.
- This requires expansion in the membership of the Security Council in both the permanent and non – permanent categories.
- India has also highlighted the need of **Africa** to be represented in both categories.

Veto power

- On the question of veto, Indian position is fully aligned with **G4, L.69** and Africa who have called for the abolition of veto.
- *The G4 nations comprise Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan which support each other's bids for permanent seats on the UNSC.*
- *L.69 is a group of developing countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. They form a major bloc that is united by the common cause of achieving the lasting and comprehensive reform of the UNSC.*

Regional Representation

- On the question of regional representation, India has argued for an **equitable geographical representation** and the urgent need for mitigating the non-representation and under-representation of some regions in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories.
- The UN has three of the five permanent members from one region alone while the regions of Africa, Latin America, three-fourths of Asia including the Arab states,

the entire Central and Eastern Europe, the Caribbean states and the Small Island developing states remain excluded from the functioning of the Security Council.

- The Security Council, for India, needs to reflect contemporary realities and provide adequate representation to all regions of the world.

Relationship Between Security Council and General Assembly

- On the issue of the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, in India's view, it should not be competitive or adversarial, but "one of synergy and complementarity" which benefits the UN objectives of the promotion of international peace and security.
- A relationship with the General Assembly based on transparency, mutual trust and frequent interaction with all Member States will increase the credibility of the Council that includes increase in dialogue between the Council and the Assembly.
- India thus has called for a greater transparency and consistency to improve the relationship between the two.

What is the issue?

- India's attempt to find a permanent place at the UNSC has always been opposed by Pakistan and China.
- China, which has veto power in the UNSC being one of its five permanent members, has been stonewalling India's efforts to become permanent member of the UNSC, pointing out lack of consensus even though the other four -- US, UK, France and Russia -- have backed New Delhi's membership.
- An informal "**coffee club**", comprising 40-odd member states (including Italy, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Argentina and Pakistan) has been instrumental in holding back reforms to the UNSC. Most members of the club are middle-sized states who oppose bigger regional powers grabbing permanent seats in the UN Security Council.

Why in News?

- Despite India's repeated demands for reform of the U.N. Security Council, the process of the expansion of the membership is expected to slow down

this year with the final draft of the Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the U.N. favouring a softer approach to the issue.

- Recently, India became a non-permanent member of the Security Council for a single year term of 2021-22. This move was seen as a boost for its demand for the actual reform and expansion of the UNSC.

7) PASSEX

Security challenges & Management in border areas, bilateral relations

What's in the news?

- Indian naval ships recently conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the United States Navy's *USS Nimitz* carrier strike group near the **Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) islands**.

Significance

- The *USS Nimitz* is the world's largest warship and the exercise between the two navies assumed significance as it took place in the midst of China's renewed military assertiveness in eastern Ladakh as well as in the South China Sea.
- With regular large-scale exercises deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the India Navy has recently undertaken several PASSEXs, which officials described as an opportunity to improve interoperability on the high seas.
- The Navy is keeping a close watch on the movement in the IOR of Chinese naval ships, whose presence has gone up considerably over the years in the name of anti-piracy patrols. In 2017, China opened its first overseas military base in **Djibouti** in the Horn of Africa.

Strategic location

- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are more than 1,200 km from mainland India. A significant volume of China's oil imports passes through the **Malacca Strait**, which is south-east of these islands.
- Given their strategic location, India is also undertaking major infrastructure expansion plans on the A&N island chain.
- Indian warships are deployed from as far as the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait and northern Bay of Bengal to the southeast coast of Africa.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Solar Orbiter (Solo) Mission

GS 3: Awareness in the fields of Science and Technology

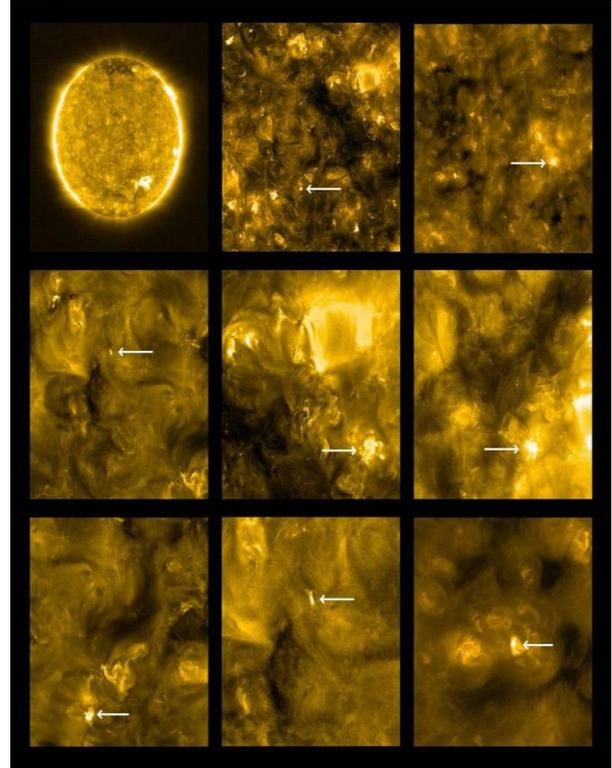
About

- Solar Orbiter is an international collaboration between the **European Space Agency (ESA)** and **NASA**, to study the **Sun**.
- Solar Orbiter was launched to space aboard the **US Atlas V 411** rocket from NASA's spaceport in Cape Canaveral, Florida on 10 February 2020.



- Solar Orbiter carries a set of ten instruments for **imaging the surface of the Sun** and studying the environment in its vicinity.
- The spacecraft will also capture the **first images of the sun's Polar Regions**.
- The spacecraft will travel around the Sun on an elliptical orbit that will take it as close as 42 million km away from the Sun's surface, about a quarter of the distance between the Sun and Earth.
- The orbit will allow the Solar Orbiter to see some of the never-before-imaged regions of the Sun, including the **poles**, and shed new light on what gives rise to solar wind, which can affect infrastructure on Earth.

Why in News?



- The first images from ESA/NASA's Solar Orbiter are now available to the public, including the **closest pictures ever taken of the Sun**.
- Among the novel insights from the images are views of **mini-flares dubbed "campfires"**.

What are 'campfires'?

- The campfires are the miniature versions of **solar flares**, at least a million times smaller.
- It's possible they are mini-explosions known as **nanoflares** – tiny but **ubiquitous sparks** theorized to help heat the Sun's outer atmosphere, or corona, to its temperature 300 times hotter than the solar surface.

2) Fast Track Procurement and recent concerns

GS 3: Security forces and agencies

About Fast Track Procurement

- The fast track procedure (FTP) for buying weapon systems was introduced three years after the Kargil war in **2001** and it has been revised under **Defence Procurement Procedure 2016**.
- Fast Track Procedure is envisaged for **meeting urgent operational requirements**.
- The objective of this procedure is to ensure expeditious procurement for urgent operational requirements foreseen as imminent or for a situation in which a crisis emerges without prior warning.
- Fast Track Procedures may also be applied for cases where **undue/unforeseen delay**, due to reasons beyond the control of the acquisition set up, is seen to be adversely impacting the capacity and preparedness of the regular and Special Forces.
- The FTP will cover acquisitions undertaken by the Ministry of Defence and Defence Services under '**Buy category**' or outright purchase.
- Such acquisitions are applicable for **both indigenous sources and exclusive import**.
- Procurement proposals in which user trials are envisaged will not be under the purview of FTP.
- The acquisition under FTP can be categorised as under:
 - Procurement of equipment already inducted into Service.
 - Procurement of new equipment

Why in News?

- With the Army taking a decision to order assault rifles from foreign vendors, domestic small arms manufacturers have expressed concern over continuing imports.

Concerns raised

- There are Indian companies which can make small arms with over 50% indigenous content and can reportedly match the price and timelines.

- In the last few years, several Indian companies have invested in the small arms segment, given the large requirement and efforts by the government to open up ammunition to the private sector and have started production as well.
- These firms are requesting to give domestic companies the same level playing field as foreign companies and support Make in India.
- However, without any major order from the armed forces, many companies are looking for smaller orders from police and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF).
- If the industry is not given a chance, it will only undermine the Make in India initiative.

Background

- The Army has been attempting to **replace the indigenous INSAS (Indian National Small Arms System) rifles** with a modern rifle.
- Under a ₹700 crore deal in February 2019 with **Sig Sauer** of the U.S., the Defence Ministry procured 72,400 **SIG-716 assault rifles** through FTP, most of which were for the Army.
- The remaining demand of over 7 lakh rifles was to be met through the licensed manufacture of **Russian AK-203 rifles** in India through a **joint venture** with the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB).
- However, the final deal has been stuck over the issue of pricing.

3) Rafale fighter jets

GS 3: Science and Technology, Security forces and agencies

About Rafale



- The Rafale is a **twin-jet fighter** aircraft able to operate from both an aircraft carrier and a shore base.
- Equipped with a wide range of weapons, the Rafale is designed to carry out air dominance, aerial reconnaissance, ground support, in-depth strike, anti-ship strike and nuclear deterrence missions.
- The jets are referred to as an “**omnirole**” **combat aircraft** by **Dassault Aviation**, the manufacturer.
- The Rafale entered service with the French Navy in 2004.
- The Rafale jets intended for India are expected to come with certain bespoke (made for a particular customer or user) modifications for the IAF and have been awaited as a crucial enhancement to India’s **Medium Multi-role Combat Aircraft (MMCA)** fleet.
- The biggest advantage of Rafale is that it is **capable of delivering nuclear weapons**.

Weapons on board

Meteor



- The game-changing missile on-board the Rafale is the Meteor.
- Manufactured by European firm **MBDA**, the Meteor is a **very long-range** rocket and **ram-jet** powered **air-to-air** missile.
- Its integration into the Rafale weapon system brings about a paradigm shift in air-to-air affairs since it has a range of over **120 km**.
- It means an Indian Rafale jet will be able to shoot down an enemy aircraft over 100 km away without even crossing the Indian air space.
- According to MBDA, Meteor has a no-escape zone many times greater than any other air-to-air missile.

Scalp



- Another key missile that is on-board the Rafale is the Scalp **long-range air-to-ground stand-off cruise missile**.
- Weighing 1,300 kg, the 5.1 metre-long Scalp can be carried in either one missile or two missiles configuration on the Rafale.
- The missile has a **600-km range** and is known for its precision. The Rafale will not have to cross the Indian airspace to hit a target that is about 600 km in enemy territory.
- It is a strategic weapon that can be used in penetration, impact or airburst modes.
- The Rafale will also be equipped with the **Mica air-to-air** missiles.



- The IAF plans to further integrate the **BrahMos NG** (‘NG’ - Next Generation – lighter and sleeker version of BrahMos – max. speed of 3.5 mach) missiles with the Rafale when it is finally made by the Indo-Russian joint venture.

The deal

- In September 2016, India and France signed a **€7.87 billion Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** for **36 Rafale** multi-role fighter jets in **fly-away condition**.
- The deal has a **50% offset clause** as part of which French companies in the deal are setting up facilities in India and tying up

with local companies to execute the obligations.

- **Dassault Reliance JV (DRAL)** production facility in **Nagpur** has started functioning while **Thales** already has a presence in Nagpur.
- Engine maker **Safran** is set to inaugurate its facility in **Hyderabad**.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh formally received the first Rafale fighter jet built for the Indian Air Force (IAF) in France on 8 October, 2019.

Rafale squadron in India

- The IAF recently resurrected the **17 Squadron 'Golden arrows'** at Air Force station **Ambala** which will operate the first squadron of Rafale fighter jets once they arrive in India.
- The second Rafale squadron would be based at the **Hasimara** base in West Bengal.

Why in News?

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) is scheduled to induct the first batch of five Rafale fighter jets from France at the Air Force Station, Ambala, on July 29, subject to weather conditions.

4) 'Hope' - Mission to Mars by UAE

GS 3: Awareness in the fields of Science and Technology

About



- Hope mission of the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, is the **Arab region's first attempt to go interplanetary**.
- This mission is sending **only the orbiter**.
- The spacecraft will spend seven months trekking through deep space before slipping into orbit around **Mars**.

- From that point, Hope will spend a full Martian year, or nearly two Earth years, **orbiting Mars** and studying its atmosphere.
- It aims to provide a **complete picture of the Martian atmosphere for the first time**, studying daily and seasonal changes.
- To develop and build the Hope Probe, Emiratis and Dubai's **Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC)** worked with U.S. educational institutions.

Why in News?

- The Hope Probe blasted off from **Japan's Tanegashima Space Center** atop a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries H-IIA rocket to **Mars**.

UAE's space venture

- The UAE strives to develop its scientific and technology capabilities and move away from its reliance on oil.
- The UAE first announced plans for the mission in 2014 and launched a National Space Programme in 2017 to develop local expertise.
- It has an ambitious plan for a Mars settlement by 2117.
- Hazza al-Mansouri became the first Emirati in space last September (2019) when he flew to the International Space Station.

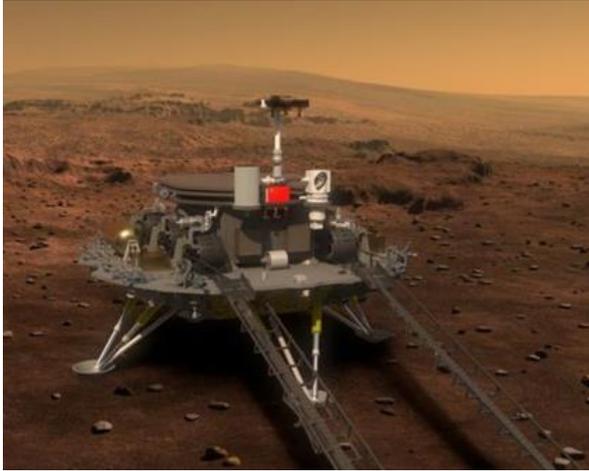
5) 'Tianwen-1' - Mission to Mars by China

GS 3: Awareness in the fields of Science and Technology

Why in News?

- China successfully launched its first Mars probe- Tianwen-1- recently atop the **Long March-5** rocket from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the coast of southern China's island province of Hainan.

About China's first Mars mission



- Tianwen-1 or **Quest for Heavenly Truth 1** is China's **first fully homegrown Mars mission**.

- China's previous attempt to send an exploratory probe to Mars called **Yinghuo-1**, in a Russian spacecraft in 2011 failed as shortly after the launch it was declared lost and later burnt during re-entry.
- Tianwen-1 consists of an **orbiter** and a **lander/rover duo**, a combination of craft that had never before launched together toward the Red Planet.
- The orbiter will remain in the orbit for scientific operations and to relay signals while the lander-rover combination

makes an autonomous descent and landing.

- The lander/rover pair will touch down on the Martian surface somewhere within **Utopia Planitia**, a large plain in the planet's Northern Hemisphere.
- The mission will conduct scientific investigations into the planet's soil, geological structure, environment, atmosphere and water.

More in the News

- The **US, Russia, India** and **the EU** have succeeded in sending missions to Mars regarded as the **most complex space mission**.
- **India** became the first Asian country to have successfully launched its Mars orbiter mission Mangalyaan which entered the orbit of the red planet in 2014.
- **India** also became the **first country** to have **entered the Martian orbit in its first attempt**.
- China in recent years has emerged as a major space power with manned space missions (**Shenzhou**) and landing a rover in the dark side of the moon (**Chang'e-4**).
- It is currently building a space station of its own, named **Tiangong**.

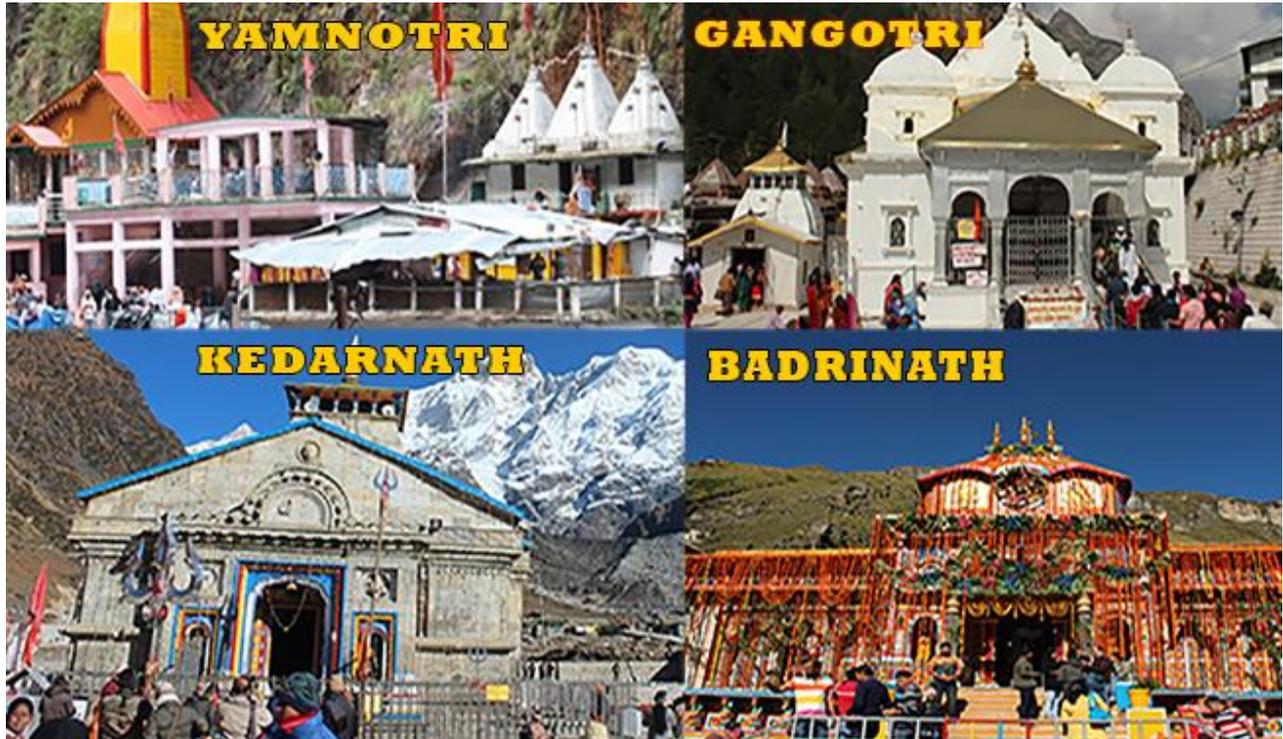
ART & CULTURE

1) Char Dhaam Yatra

GS 1: Indian culture

What is Char Dhaam Yatra?

- Char Dhams are the famous four holy places of Hindu Pilgrimages, which are nestled among the lofty peaks of Himalayas in **Uttarakhand**.
- This hindu pilgrimage Char Dham circuit consists of four sites located in **Garhwal**



- These four ancient temples also mark the spiritual source of four sacred rivers as well: **River Yamuna (Yamunotri)**, **River Ganga or Ganges (Gangotri)**, **River Mandakini (Kedarnath)** and **River Alaknanda (Badrinath)**.
- Each of these four sites is devoted to a specific deity.
- Yamunotri is dedicated to the **Goddess Yamuna**.
- Gangotri is dedicated to the **Goddess Ganga**.
- The shrine overlooks the **River Bhagirathi** which is geographically considered as the **headstream of Ganga**.

region: **Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath**.

- These pilgrimage centers draw the maximum numbers of pilgrims each year, thus becoming the most important hubs of religious travel in the whole of Northern India.

About Char Dhaam Yatra

- **Kedarnath** is dedicated to **Lord Shiva** and is also a part of the Panch Kedar. It is the northernmost Jyotirlinga.
- **Badrinath** is dedicated to **Lord Vishnu**.

Why in News?

- Due to Covid-19 pandemic, July is turning out to be a dry month for those involved in the pilgrimage and sacred tourism industry in Uttarakhand.
- **Uttarakhand** is known as **Dev Bhoomi** (Land of Gods), as it is the land of great pilgrimages, sacred temples and places, which attracts millions of pilgrims and spiritual seekers to get enlightenment.

HEALTH

1) Transmission of viruses

- In general, transmission of viruses can occur through two pathways: horizontal and vertical transmission.

Horizontal transmission

- Horizontal transmission is **transmission by direct contact** between infected and susceptible individuals or between disease vectors and susceptible individuals usually through contact with bodily excretions or fluids, such as sputum or blood that contain the agent.
- In horizontal transmission, viruses are transmitted **among individuals of the same generation.**

Vertical transmission

- A vertically transmitted infection is an infection caused by pathogens (such as bacteria and viruses) that use **mother-to-child transmission**, that is, transmission directly from the mother to an embryo, foetus, or baby during pregnancy or childbirth.

Why in the news?

- A study has found evidence that **confirms vertical transmission of SARS-CoV-2 virus** from the mother to the foetus. The route of infection is through the womb (in utero) well before the onset of labour and delivery of the baby.

How does the virus reach the foetus?

- According to the study
1. The virus first occurs in the mother's blood and later causes placental infection and inflammation.
 2. The virus then gets into the blood of the neonate following placental infection.
 3. The neonate also seems to show clinical manifestation of COVID-19 in terms of neurological signs and symptoms.

2) Psoriasis drug for COVID-19 therapy

Why in the news?

- **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** gave approval to market **Itolizumab** for treatment of cytokine release syndrome (CRS) in moderate to severe acute respiratory distress syndrome patients due to COVID-19.
- **About Itolizumab:**

- Itolizumab is a **monoclonal antibody** which is used to treat acute psoriasis.
- It is an approved drug for **acute psoriasis** since 2013 and has passed safety and efficacy trials for that disease in over 500 patients.
- However, independent experts have pointed out that the efficacy of the drug in treating COVID-caused Acute Respiratory Disease Syndrome has **not been conclusively demonstrated** because it has, as part of a clinical trial, only been tested on 30 patients.
- However, the drug has been **approved by the DCGI for emergency use** in the treatment of moderate to severely-ill patients as per the discretion of physicians.
- **What are monoclonal antibodies?**
- Monoclonal antibodies are **proteins cloned in the lab to mimic antibodies produced by the immune system** to counter an infection.
- They have their origin in serum, the colourless constituent of blood that contains antibodies.
- These proteins bind to an antigen, the fragment of an infectious virus in the case of SARS-CoV-2, and either destroy it or block its action.
- **Plasma therapy vs monoclonal antibodies**
- Convalescent plasma is a constituent of blood and recovered from those who have successfully fought the disease. This blood contains antibodies produced within a week or two of being infected.
- While plasma therapy involves **injecting this entire antibody extract** into another sick patient, a monoclonal antibody can be made by **isolating specific antibodies** and multiplying them via various techniques.
- **Advantages of monoclonal antibodies over plasma therapy**
- Isolating plasma and serum is laborious and time-consuming when it must be administered to every patient but in monoclonal antibodies therapy, **antibodies once isolated can be easily replicated.**

- **How useful are they in treating COVID-19 patients?**
- While eight in 10 of those infected by the disease recover with little more than a few days of cough and fever, about one in 10 can manifest severe systems of the disease irrespective of their age and medical history. Many have died because of the **cytokine storm**.

- **About Cytokine storm**
- An **immune reaction** triggered by the body to fight an infection is known as a cytokine storm when it **turns severe**.
- The body releases too many **cytokines**, proteins that are involved in immunomodulation, into the blood too quickly. While normally they regulate immune responses, in this case they cause harm and can even cause death.
- These cytokines dilate blood vessels, increase the temperature and heartbeat, besides throwing blood clots in the system, and suppressing oxygen

utilisation.

- If the cytokine flow is high and continues without cessation, the body's own immune response will lead to **hypoxia** i.e. insufficient oxygen to the body, multi-organ failure and death.
- Cytokine storms can be prevented by **use of antibodies** that can **block a particular protein, called CD6** which is found on the surface of T-cells, a class of cells that are a central prong in the body's defence system.
- If this CD-6 is suppressed, it will **prevent the T-cells from releasing a cytokine cascade** and thus better regulate the immune system.
- <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/the-hindu-explains-why-is-a-psoriasis-drug-being-used-to-treat-covid-19-patients/article32126359.ece>

PIB ANALYSIS

1) National Disaster Response Fund

Gs Paper 3 - Disaster Management

About National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF):

- National Disaster Response Fund is defined in Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act) as a fund managed by the Central Government for meeting the **expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation due to any threatening disaster situation or disaster.**
- It is constituted to **supplement the funds of the State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF)** of the states to facilitate immediate relief in case of calamities of a severe nature.

Definition of a disaster:

- The DM Act defines "disaster" to mean a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.

Financing of the fund

- The NDRF is **entirely funded by the Centre** through the imposition of **National Calamity Contingency Duty (NCCD)** on specified goods such as Cigarettes and Crude Petroleum. NDRF is maintained by the Central Government under the **Public Account of India.**
- The requirement for funds beyond what is available under the NDRF is met through general budgetary resources.
- Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit the accounts of NDRF.

Funding pattern

- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim,

Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

- The Government of India approves the annual allocation to SDRF based on the recommendations of successive Finance Commission.

Utilisation of funds

- NDRF amount can be spent only towards meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation.
- For projects exclusively for the purpose of mitigation, i.e, measures aimed at reducing the risk, impact or effect of a disaster or threatening disaster situation a separate fund called **National Disaster Mitigation Fund** has to be constituted.

Why in News?

- The Central Government has allowed contributions from any person or institution to the National Disaster Response Fund.

2) RAISE Initiative

Gs Paper 3 - Energy Conservation

What's in the news?

- "Retrofit of Air-conditioning to improve Indoor Air Quality for Safety and Efficiency" (RAISE) national programme has been launched to **potentially alleviate the issue of bad air quality in workspaces** across the nation and pioneer ways to make them healthier and greener.
- The RAISE initiative focuses on improving indoor air quality, energy efficiency and thermal comfort in the office air conditioning.

Background:

- **US Agency for International Development (USAID) MAITREE programme and EESL** has launched the "Healthy and Energy Efficient Buildings" initiative.
- The initiative is to address the **challenges of air conditioning systems** so that they are healthy and energy efficient.
- The RAISE initiative has been launched under this programme. It is to be extended to government offices after examining its success.

- **About EESL:** Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under the administration of the **Ministry of Power** is working towards mainstreaming energy efficiency and is implementing the world's largest energy efficiency portfolio in the country.
- Driven by the mission of Enabling More – more transparency, more transformation, and more innovation, EESL aims to create market access for efficient and future-ready transformative solutions that create a win-win situation for every stakeholder.
- **About USAID:** USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results.
- **About MAITREE (Market Integration and Transformation Program for Energy Efficiency) program:**
- It is a part of the US-India bilateral Partnership between the **Ministry of Power and USAID** and is aimed at accelerating the adoption of cost-effective energy efficiency as a standard practice within buildings, and specifically focuses on cooling.

3) YuWaah

Gs Paper 2 - Government Policies and Interventions

About YuWaah Initiative:

- Generation Unlimited, also called YuWaah in India, is a multi-stakeholder alliance of **UNICEF** which aims to **facilitate youth to gain relevant skills for productive lives and the future of work.**
- The target age group of YuWaah includes **adolescent girls and boys.**
- Its key mission is to **promote access to foundational, transferable and 21st century skills for youth inside and outside formal education systems,** which includes defining foundational skills, life skills and flexible learning and identifying and scaling impactful delivery models.
- YuWaah intends to create platforms to guide youth to market opportunities (career guidance, mentorship, internships, apprenticeships) and facilitate integration of career guidance in school education.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports signed a Statement of Intent with **YuWaah** to work in partnership to **promote volunteerism among the youth of India** as well as to help them transition from education and learning to productive work, skilling and being active citizens.

News in Detail:

- The main aim is to realise the vision of **mobilising 1 crore youth volunteers in India** and **help reap the demographic dividend** with YuWaah's support.
- India currently has approximately **50% of its population under 25 years** which calls for robust focus in education and skill development.

Benefits:

- This will include collaboration on supporting young people in entrepreneurship, up skilling young people, creating linkages with aspirational socio-economic opportunities.
- It will help in promoting change making and civic participation among young people, providing career guidance support to young people.
- It will also help in Supporting direct dialogue and the establishment of a feedback mechanism between young people and policy stakeholders, and
- Building the capacity of the National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) cadre and volunteer force on sustainable development goals.

4) Manodarpan initiative

Gs Paper 2 - Government Policies and Interventions

About:

- Manodarpan initiative provides psycho-social support and counselling to students for their mental health and wellbeing.
- Under the initiative, the Minister of Human Resource Development launched a toll-free national helpline number (8448440632), a website of Manodarpan and a handbook on 21st century life skills, for the students of school, college and universities.

Significance

- Covid 19 lockdown had led to extended vacation for students and forced close down of schools and colleges. This has created panic among children.
- The initiative would act as an element of strengthening human capital and increasing productivity for the education sector in the wake of covid-19.

Why in News?

- The **Minister of Human Resource Development** has launched the Manodarpan initiative to provide psychosocial support to students for their Mental Health and Well-being during the COVID outbreak and beyond.

5) Study in India programme

GS Paper 2 - Education

About :

- The Study in India programme, a flagship project under the **Ministry of Human Resource Development**, was launched in 2018.
- This program has been put together to facilitate and encourage the global student community to study in India, which offers a plethora of courses with its top-ranked institutes.
- The programme focuses on attracting International students from select 30 plus countries across South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa.
- The programme envisages participation of select reputed Indian institutes/universities by way of offering seats for the International students at affordable rates, along with fee waivers to meritorious foreign students ranging from 100% to 25%.

Objectives:

- To make India a preferred education destination/hub for foreign students;
- To improve the soft power of India with focus on the neighbouring countries
- Use it as a tool in diplomacy;
- To rapidly increase the inflow of inbound International Students in India through systematic brand-building,
- Marketing, social media and digital marketing campaigns;
- To increase India's market share of global education exports;

- Improvement in overall quality of higher education;
- To reduce the export-import imbalance in the number of international students;
- Growth in India's global market share of International students;
- Increase in global ranking of India etc.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development conducted the first ever Indian Scholastic Assessment (Ind-SAT) Test 2020 under its 'Study in India' programme.

6) Radio-Frequency Identification

Gs Paper 3 - Technology

What is RFID?

- Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) is the use of **radio waves** to read and capture information stored on a tag attached to an object. A tag can be read from up to several feet away and **does not need to be within the direct line-of-sight** of the reader to be tracked.
- RFID tags can store a range of information from one serial number to several pages of data.

Applications of RFID

- **Product Tracking** – RFID tags are increasingly used as a cost-effective way to track inventory and as a substitute for barcodes.
- **Toll Road Payments** – Highway toll payment systems use RFID technology to electronically collect tolls from passing cars. Instead of stopping at the toll booth, cars pass directly through the Pass lane and the toll is automatically deducted from a pre-paid card.
- **Passports** – A number of countries, including Japan, the United States, Norway, and Spain incorporate RFID tags into passports to store information (such as a photograph) about the passport holder and to track visitors entering and exiting the country.
- **Libraries** – Libraries use RFID tags in books and other materials to track circulation and inventory, store product information (such as titles and authors), and to provide security from theft.
- **Shipping** – Large shipments of materials, such as retail goods, often utilize RFID

tags to identify location, contents, and movement of goods.

- **Health care** – In health care and hospital settings, RFID technologies include the following applications: Inventory control, Equipment tracking, Out-of-bed detection and fall detection, Ensuring that patients receive the correct medications and medical devices, Preventing the distribution of counterfeit drugs and medical devices, Monitoring patients, Providing data for electronic medical records systems, etc.

Why in News?

- Indian Railways is on a mission to RFID Tag all wagons by December 2022.

Benefits of RFID

- Using RFID devices will be easier for the railways to know the exact position of all the wagons, locomotives and coaches.
- While the RFID tag will be fitted in the rolling stock, trackside readers will be installed at stations and key points along the tracks to read the tag from a distance of about two meters and transmit the wagon identity over a network to a central computer.
- In this way, each moving wagon can be identified and its movement tracked.
- With the introduction of RFID, the issue of shortage of wagons, locomotives and coaches is expected to be addressed in a more transparent and expeditious manner.

News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) BRICS

Important International institutions, Regional and global groupings and agreements

About BRICS

- BRICS brings together five major emerging economies- China, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa. It comprises 43% of the world population, having 30% of the world GDP and a 17% share in world trade.
- The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of **BRIC** (Brazil, Russia, India and China) Foreign Ministers on the margins of the UNGA in New York in September 2006.
- South Africa was added to the grouping in 2011 creating "BRICS".
- BRICS cooperation is aimed at complementing and strengthening existing bilateral and multilateral relations among member countries.
- The **Chairship of the forum is rotated annually** among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- Cooperation among members is predicated on three levels or "tracks" of interaction, namely:
 - **Track I:** Formal diplomatic engagement between the national governments
 - **Track II:** Engagement through government-affiliated institutions, e.g. state-owned enterprises and business councils
 - **Track III:** Civil society and "people-to-people" engagement.

Significant developments of BRICS:

New Development Bank (NDB)

- The NDB created by the BRICS countries formally came into existence at the Ufa Summit (Russia) in 2015.
- It was established with the objective of financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other

emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions toward global growth and development.

- In 2018, the NDB received **observer status** in the UN General Assembly.
- The five member nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – have an **equal shareholding in the NDB**.
- Voting power of each member is equal to the number of its subscribed shares in capital stock.
- All members of the United Nations could be members of the bank, however the share of the BRICS nations can never be less than **55% of voting power**.

Contingency Reserve

- The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is a framework for the provision of support through liquidity and precautionary instruments in response to actual or potential short-term balance of payments pressures.

Why in News?

- The 10th BRICS Trade Ministers virtual Meeting was conducted recently.
- Representing India, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal called for all nations to enhance transparency in their trade and build trust to prevent losing their role as a preeminent trade partner.

2) Central Pollution Control Board

About CPCB

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) is a **statutory organisation** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It was constituted in 1974 under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**.

- Further, CPCB was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. It also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The mandate of the CPCB is to set environmental standards in India, lay down ambient standards and coordinate the activities of State Pollution Control Boards.

Why in News?

- The Central Pollution Control Board has issued fresh guidelines on disposal of COVID-19 waste.
- It has directed that masks and gloves used by everyone, whether infected or not, should be cut and kept in paper bags for a minimum 72 hours before disposing off them.
- The CPCB also directed commercial establishments, shopping malls, institutions and offices to follow the same procedure with discarded protective personal equipment (PPE) from the general public.

3) India-US strategic Energy Partnership

About

- The US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is very vital in the times of COVID pandemic. These are very important times for growth of bilateral relationships and the energy sector is a promising one.
- India is an energy deficit country and the US is an energy superpower which has great reserves of oil and natural gas. The US has technology providers and independent companies which make it have a global footprint in the energy sector.
- India almost **imports 86% of its petroleum requirement and 50% of natural gas requirement.**

Why do we have a strategic partnership with the US?

- The US-India energy partnership started in 2014 as a strategic partnership because
- India can trust the US.

- The US understands the energy requirements of India.
- India receives support from the US in all angles i.e., petroleum, technology, capital etc.

Why is India thinking to establish strategic reserves in India?

- India has a very vulnerable and volatile neighbourhood. The Middle East is always volatile; China is always ambitious, Pakistan being war-hungry etc. We must always be prepared such that we must have sufficient oil to fulfil the basic necessities.
- Presently we have oil reserves which can last for **11 days** in severe conditions. India needs **roughly 5 million barrels of oil** every day for normal functioning. India is working to store reserves for at least 40-45 days
- Taking steps in this direction, India has entered in agreement with the US to buy oil from the US and store in the local storages by paying certain rent. This oil stored in the US, can be used in the time of war or any other similar situation.
- We can even bring the oil physically to India by US protection or can sell the oil, get money and buy oil in nearby markets.

What is the roadmap further in the US-India energy partnership?

- India is still dependent on fossil fuels and coal energy and slowly moving towards electricity. This means that we are going to use electricity for everything from manufacturing, transport to other services.
- Hence, India and US are entering into partnership in nuclear energy where both countries are engaging in building new-generation nuclear reactors to up mark the supply of electricity in India.
- India and the USA are also venturing into **hydrogen technology.**

Gender diversity in energy sector

- The conventional energy which comprises coal, oil and gas, has greater male workers density.
- But renewable and nuclear energy sectors which are more technology driven see greater woman participation and leadership.
- Women are also participating in hydrogen R&D and its business.

What are ways to modernise the power sector?

- India has become a role model to other countries to have ambitious renewable energy targets. We are also leading the world in **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
- We are also increasing the electricity generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure and adapting to modern technologies.

- We are also enhancing the production of equipment like solar panels; solar cells etc under Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
- The USA is helping India with technology, capital and helping in boosting indigenous capacity.

Conclusion

- This strategic partnership is seen with lot of hopes which will bring synergy and growth in energy sector of India to become self-reliant and self-sufficient.

THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Making the right call on Malabar going quad

GS Paper 2- Regional and global groupings and agreements

Context:

- There is speculation in the media that New Delhi could soon invite Australia to join the Malabar naval exercises to be held later this year. This article explains that India's plan for naval coalition building alone will not credibly deter China's military power in the Indian Ocean.

News in detail

- A key meeting of India's Ministry of Defence discussed the issue of adding Australia to the trilateral Malabar naval exercise with Japan and the United States in the Bay of Bengal later this year.
- It appears a green signal to Australia could soon be given, making it the first time that all members of Quad will participate in a joint military drill.
- Refer International Relations section for details on Malabar exercise & Quad.*

Chinese view about including Australia

- Chinese have long opposed a coalition of democracies in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Chinese leadership sees the maritime Quadrilateral as an Asian-NATO that seeks only to contain China's rise.
- At a time of strained bilateral ties with China, India's intention to involve Australia in the Malabar drill could only be considered as a move directed against China.
- India was risking harsh consequences by putting more pressure on China and moving to expand its sphere of influence into the entire Indian Ocean and the South Pacific.

Arguments in favour:

- Many Indian analysts believe the time is right for India to shed its traditional defensiveness in the maritime domain following the stand-off in Ladakh.
- An alliance with the U.S., Japan and Australia can counter Chinese moves in the Indian Ocean.
- U.S. and Japanese navies have little spare capacity for sustained surveillance and

deterrence operations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) while Australia is the only one ready and able to partner India in securing the Eastern Indian Ocean.

Strategic rationale of the military-Quad

- India's priority is to acquire strategic capabilities to counter a Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Arguments against

- India's invitation to Australia to participate in the Malabar exercise sends contrary signals to China at a time when India and China are negotiating a truce on the border in Eastern Ladakh.
- If China responded through aggressive posturing in the Eastern Indian Ocean, it could needlessly open up a new front in the India-China conflict.
- With the strategic contest between the U.S. and China in East Asia and Southeast Asia hotting up, there is every possibility that the military-Quad will be used to draw India into the security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific.

China has been cautious

- Despite a growing presence in the Indian Ocean, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is yet to physically threaten Indian interests at sea.
- Chinese warships have not challenged Indian sovereignty in its territorial waters, or ventured close to Indian islands with malign intent.
- PLAN assets have not impeded the passage of Indian merchantmen in the regional sea lanes and choke points.
- Though Chinese research and intelligence ship presence close to the Andaman Islands has relatively expanded, Chinese maritime agencies ensure that operations do not cross the threshold of conflict with India.
- Chinese Navy has avoided any entanglement with Indian naval ships in the sub-continental littorals.
- This means that the onus of the first move to precipitate a crisis in the Eastern Indian Ocean lies with the Indian Navy.

Need for careful thought

- Naval coalition building alone will not credibly deter Chinese naval power in the Indian Ocean.
- Upgrading the trilateral Malabar to a quadrilateral, without acquiring the requisite combat and deterrence capability, could yield gains for India in the short term, but would prove ineffective in the long run.
- Thus New Delhi should not sign up to quadrilateral engagement without a cost-benefit exercise and proportionate gains in the strategic-operational realm.

2) Why a separate anti torture law?

GS 2- Governance, transparency and accountability, Effect of policies on India's interests

Context:

- The alleged torture of a father-son in Sattankulam town in Tamil Nadu has once again given rise to the **demand for a separate law against torture**. This article essentially examines **whether the existing law is inadequate** to deter incidents of custodial torture.

Arguments to state that the existing law is sufficient

What constitutes torture?

- **Torture is not defined in the Indian Penal Code**, but the definitions of 'hurt' and 'grievous hurt' are clearly laid down.
- Though the definition of 'hurt' does not include mental torture, Indian courts have included psychic torture, environmental coercion, tiring interrogative prolixity, and overbearing and intimidatory methods, among others, in the ambit of torture.
- Voluntarily causing hurt and grievous hurt to extort confession are also provided in the Code with enhanced punishment.

Specific guidelines for autopsy

- The **National Human Rights Commission** has laid down **specific guidelines** for conducting autopsy under the eyes of the camera.
- **Supreme Court rulings on custodial torture**
- **DK Basu v. State of West Bengal**: It is considered as a turning point in the

evolving jurisprudence on custodial torture.

- **Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa**: The state could no longer escape liability in public law and had to be compelled to **pay compensation**.
- Similarly, the Court has held in many cases that policemen found guilty of custodial death should be given the **death penalty**.
- Therefore, there is **neither a dearth of precedents nor any deficiency** in the existing law.
- In 2017, the Central government admitted in the Supreme Court that it was seriously considering the **273rd Report of the Law Commission** that recommended ratification of the **U.N. Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment (CAT)**.
- CAT was signed by India, but is **yet to be ratified**.
- However, except for minor discrepancies, **the prevalent law in India is adequate** and well in tune with the provisions of CAT.
- *For information about UNCAT and law commission recommendation refer pulse 5 editorial section.*

Criticism of draft Prevention of Torture Bill, 2017

- A fresh draft of the Prevention of Torture Bill was released in 2017 for seeking suggestions from various stakeholders.
- The Bill was not only **vague** but also very **harsh for the police** to discharge its responsibilities without fear of prosecution and persecution.
- It was **inconsistent** with the existing provisions of law.
- It included 'severe or prolonged pain or suffering' as a form of torture but that was left **undefined**.
- Though the **262nd Law Commission Report** recommended that the **death penalty** be abolished except in cases of 'terrorism-related offences', the Bill provided for the death penalty for custodial deaths.
- In the Bill, the proposed registration of every complaint of torture as an FIR and blanket **denial of anticipatory bail** to an

accused public servant was not reasonable.

- Thus the proposed Bill was **vague, harsh and retributive in nature** and not a reformatory one.

So what is needed?

- **Implementation** of the existing laws
- Ensuring **fair investigations** and prosecutions
- Police need to be **trained better**

Conclusion:

- Thus, the need of the hour is to **strike at the root cause of the problem** and implement recommendations of various commissions to bring in necessary reforms.

3) Big reform on the wrong track- On privatising Indian railways

GS Paper 2-Government policies and interventions for development

GS Paper 3- Changes in industrial policy, Investment Models

Context:

- In this article the author highlights the **pros and cons of Privatising railways** and the need to weigh both carefully.

What does Privatisation mean?

- The **transfer of ownership, property or business from the government to the private sector** is termed privatization.

Proposed model

- In India, the selection of private parties using the tendering process for privatisation of Railways proposes a two-stage **competitive bidding**.
- While short listing will be based on financial capacity (with sharing of gross revenue), the selected parties can **fix fares by themselves**.
- These parties have to pay fixed haulage charges (*charge for commercial transport of goods*), energy charges based on actual consumption, and a share in gross revenue through the bidding process.
- The main criterion is procurement of coaches by the concessionaire and form them into rakes of 16 coaches each, with maintenance at 10 major stations from where the trains will operate to their destinations.
- For maintenance, existing depots and yard facilities at different stations will be made use of.

- The project entails a total investment of **₹30,000 crore by private enterprises**. The cost of investment at each of those stations varies from ₹2,300 crore to ₹3,500 crore.

Arguments in favour of railways privatisation

- Introduce modern technology rolling stock with reduced maintenance
- Reduce transit time
- Boost job creation
- Provide enhanced safety
- Provide world class travel experience to passengers
- Reduce demand supply deficit in the passenger transportation sector.

Arguments against railways privatisation

- Leads to dual control and split responsibility
- Results in higher fares
- Repercussions in terms of maintenance and operations.

Global Precedents

- The **United Kingdom and Japan** have privatised their rail systems completely but most countries have retained their rail networks for public convenience.

Challenges ahead

Fixing responsibility

- According to the proposed model, **railway crew will work the trains** (151 trains in 109 routes) which will be maintained by the private investor. It will lead to **dual control and split responsibility**.
- The responsibility of the private investor ends with investment in the procurement and maintenance of coaches while train operation, safety and dealing with everyday problems rests with the Railways.

Speed and changes

- While raising the maximum running speed to 160 kmph is a welcome measure, accomplishing this in the **timeframe given** will be difficult.

Purpose defeated

- In the proposal the Railways or government have **no role in fixing passenger fares** while full liberty is being given to the concessionaire to unilaterally fix fares for these proposed trains that are on a par with air and air conditioned bus

fares which will be **beyond the common man's reach**.

- The very objective of commissioning the Railways as a public welfare transport organisation is defeated.

Deprive employment opportunities

- The private investor is **not bound to follow reservation regulations** in employment, in turn depriving employment opportunities for those who are on the margins of society.

Way forward:

An ideal PPP model

- The government can consider well an alternative model instead of the proposed one.
- For example, **metro railway services** (Hyderabad, for example) are **ideal PPP (Public Private Partnership) projects**. The concessionaire is solely responsible for daily maintenance, operation, and passenger amenities and staff issues. The State government steps in when it comes to land, power, permissions, law and order, etc. Fare determination is in consultation with the government.

Technology transfer

- Indian Railways should go in for **state-of-the-art coach designs using 'transfer of technology' (ToT)** with world leaders to make coaches in India of international standard.

Improved Infrastructure to meet target

- To raise the existing speed limit of 110kmph to 160 kmph, as proposed, there has to be **track strengthening, elimination of curves** and level crossing gates and strengthening of bridges.
- It also calls for **track fencing** especially in densely populated areas.

Think IRCTC

- Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, a government undertaking which has gained experience in running the Tejas Express trains can be entrusted so that there will be **'unity of command'** in maintenance, operation and passenger services **under the single administration of the Railways** and its undertaking.

Conclusion:

- The Indian Railways is a strategic resource for the nation and provides a **vital public good**. With its vast network

across the length and breadth of India, it is not just a mere transporter of passengers and goods but also a **social welfare organisation**.

- Hence, it should **not be judged solely on its profit-generating capability** or market-based return on investment.

4) More than a crisis a chance to rebuild health care

GS Paper 2- Issues relating to social sector Government policies and interventions for development

Context:

- **Innovations in managing the COVID-19 pandemic** can help India revolutionise care delivery and related outcomes.

Dharavi's success strategy:

- Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru are among India's major metropolitan agglomerations and are also the current foci of the pandemic within the country which points to the speed and the scale of the epidemic moving within densely populated areas.
- However, **sustained municipal efforts and community participation** can together blunt the spread of the virus for which the case of Dharavi, Mumbai's densely populated area is an example.

Current scenario

- 49 districts out of the 733 in India accounted for 80% of the nearly eight lakh cases, with eight States accounting for 90% of all the incident cases.
- India is now third in global case standings.

Opportunity to act

- Taking the given numbers there are on average 250 cases per district in about 700 districts.
- Many of these districts may be closer to having no cases, while others may be at a significantly higher incidence.
- The **low numbers in a large number of districts** present officials the opportunity of stemming the epidemic and preventing morbidity, mortality and economic distress in a significant way.

Key steps at ground level

Ensure district level tracking

- Instead of the COVID-19 tracking mechanisms and the national level tables

and graphs, there should be **733 district-level versions**, where each one is updated and reported on a daily basis, at the district level.

- State and national summaries are important but are not as critical as ensuring the **accuracy and timeliness** of district-level tracking.

Encourage district magistrate to exercise power

- Encouraging District Magistrates to use the **full range of social support schemes** available in support of the District Health Officer helps prevent anyone from facing situations of hunger or economic distress by providing **better household nutrition and income outcomes**.

Scale up testing capacity

- The testing capacity in the district can be scaled up dramatically by **co-opting the science departments of every college and university**.
- Thus, chemistry and zoology-allied departments such as microbiology and biochemistry can lend their laboratory services to carry out basic polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based tests.

Look out for innovations

- Complexity of current testing protocols, and difficulty in co-opting college-level infrastructure and staff, can be overcome by **rapid innovations** in testing.
- For example, using **saliva as the start point for testing** rather than using a nasopharyngeal swab for sampling.

Chance for biotech

- Besides providing opportunities in the health-care and biotechnological spheres for young minds, the emphasis should also be to **encourage innovators and entrepreneurs to bring out and scale up their products** without making compromises on the standards.

Administrative leaps

- Ensure every positive diagnosis report is delivered along with a **pulse oximeter** and phone number to call and report status on and there should be enough **oxygen-equipped beds** in every nook and corner of the country.

Support healthcare workers

- There is a need to ensure that our doctors, nurses, laboratory personnel and floor

workers in hospitals are **protected with everything they deserve**-personal protective equipment to safety at home, and salaries on time.

Critical engagement

- Critical engagement from Indian biopharmaceutical and biotech companies should be encouraged to produce validated and **affordable antiviral drugs and monoclonal antibodies**.

Conclusion

- COVID-19 is both a **crisis and an opportunity** for health-care reform as well as understanding the interplay of health outcomes with social and economic support interventions.

5) Why are repurposed medicines expensive?

GS Paper 3- Indian Economy

Issues relating to intellectual property rights

About TRIPS

- The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an international legal agreement between all the member nations of the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.
- The Agreement, which came into effect on 1 January 1995, is a comprehensive multilateral agreement on intellectual property.
- The TRIPS Agreement is often described as **one of the three “pillars” of the WTO**, the other two being trade in goods and trade in services.
- To facilitate the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement, the Council for TRIPS concluded with WIPO an **agreement on cooperation between WIPO and the WTO**, which came into force on 1 January 1996.

What is voluntary licensing?

- A voluntary license is an arrangement whereby a **patent holder may allow others** to manufacture, import, and/or distribute its patented drug.

What is compulsory licensing?

- **Compulsory licenses** are **authorizations given to a third-party** to make, use or sell a particular product or use a particular process which has been

patented, **without the need of the permission of the patent owner.**

- This concept is recognised at both national as well as international levels, with express mention in both **(Indian) Patent Act, 1970** and **TRIPS Agreement**. There are certain pre-requisite conditions which need to be fulfilled if a compulsory license is to be granted in favour of someone.
- Section 92 of the Indian Patent Act enables grant of compulsory licensing in circumstances of national emergency or extreme urgency.

Did India ever use compulsory licencing?

- India has used compulsory licensing only **once in 2012 for Sorafenib**, an anticancer drug.
- **Is this the same as tearing up the patent?**
- The patent owner still has **rights over the patent**, including a right to be paid compensation for copies of the products made under the compulsory licence.

Does there have to be an emergency?

- The TRIPS Agreement does not specifically list the reasons that might be used to justify compulsory licensing. However, the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health confirms that **countries are free to determine the grounds for granting compulsory licences**, and to determine what constitutes a national emergency.

Prerequisites for issuing Compulsory license under TRIPS agreement

- Normally the person or company applying for a license has to have tried, within a reasonable period of time, to **negotiate a voluntary license** with the patent holder on reasonable commercial terms. Only if that fails can a compulsory license be issued, and - even when a compulsory license has been issued, the patent owner has to receive adequate remuneration taking into account the economic value of the authorization.
- Compulsory licensing must meet certain additional requirements: the **scope and duration of the license** must be limited to the purpose for which it was granted, it cannot be given exclusively to licensees (e.g. the patent-holder can continue to

produce), and it should be subject to legal review.

- Only when there is a national emergency or other circumstances of extreme urgency the first step of negotiating a voluntary license can be bypassed in order to save time.
- **Who can use the option to grant a compulsory license?**
- The option is available to **all members** for the purpose of local manufacturing or import.
- **Amended TRIPS agreement**
- TRIPS Agreement has been amended to provide for an additional type of compulsory licensing. This change follows a decision at the 2001 Doha Ministerial Conference when Ministers recognized that countries unable to manufacture pharmaceuticals should be able to obtain cheaper copies produced under compulsory licenses elsewhere if necessary.
- The idea is that if such a country needs to turn to the option of compulsory licensing to produce needed affordable pharmaceuticals, producers overseas can step up and supply that need, even if a compulsory license is needed in that country.
- It's therefore a **compulsory license especially for production in one country**, for export, to **meet the public health needs of one or more other countries.**
- **Which products are covered by this mechanism?**
- According to the amended TRIPS Agreement, the mechanism **covers pharmaceutical products**, including medicines, vaccines and diagnostics, needed to fight an epidemic.

Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** issued approval to Glenmark Pharma to manufacture and market Favipiravir tablets for 'restricted emergency use'.
- It also issued approvals to Hetero and Cipla to manufacture and market injectable formulations of Remdesivir, and to Biocon Limited to market injectable formulations of Itolizumab.

News in detail:

- Gilead who originally developed Remdesivir to fight ebola virus infection has entered into **royalty-free voluntary licensing agreement** with companies including Hetero and Cipla to provide technology transfer to manufacture Remdesivir for distribution in 127 countries.
- The free royalty period is valid until the World Health Organization (WHO) declares the end of the pandemic or until another medicine or vaccine is approved to treat or prevent COVID-19.
- Glenmark claims to have developed the active pharmaceutical ingredient and formulation of Favipiravir through its in-house research team.
- These pharma companies **price drugs on their own** which raises a question if this high cost of repurposed drugs would benefit the majority of the people.

What are repurposed medicines?

- Drug repurposing, also known as **drug repositioning**, is a **drug development strategy** predicated on the reuse of existing licensed drugs for new medical indications.
- For example, Remdesivir, an antiviral originally developed to treat the Ebola virus infection is now being used to treat COVID-19.

Legislations that regulate high pricing during crisis

- Flexibilities in the **TRIPS agreement** as mentioned above.
- **Indian patent laws** are armed with sufficient powers to ensure reasonable pricing for pharmaceutical products.
- Likewise, some countries are resorting to enabling legislation and procedural modifications of existing regulations to address affordability of anti-COVID-19 medicines.

What else can do away with high pricing?

- **Agreeing upon voluntary licences** with generic companies can cause substantial reduction of medicine prices.
- This is evident from the case of Sofosbuvir, the \$1,000 anti-hepatitis C medicine whose price went down to approximately \$10 per tablet in India, subsequent to the innovator's voluntary licenses with Indian generic companies in 2014.

Way forward:

- Back seating profit maximization, Pharma companies should support the government to bear the burden of global pandemic.
- It is high time to **reconfigure the pricing strategies of the re-purposed medicines** for COVID-19 treatment.

6) Towards a robust data regulation

GS Paper 2 - Government policies and interventions for development

Effect of policies on India's interests

Context:

- A **government committee** headed by Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan has suggested that **non-personal data generated in the country be allowed to be harnessed by various domestic companies and entities**.
- The nine-member committee, while releasing the **draft report**, has kept time till August 13 for the public to send suggestions.
- It has also suggested setting up of a **new authority** which would be empowered to monitor the use and mining of such non-personal data.

What is non-personal data?

- In its most basic form, non-personal data is any set of data which **does not contain personally identifiable information**. This in essence means that no individual or living person can be identified by looking at such data.
- For example, while order details collected by a food delivery service will have the name, age, gender, and other contact information of an individual, it will become non-personal data if the identifiers such as name and contact information are taken out.

What are public, community, and private non-personal data sets?

- Depending on the source of the data and whether it is anonymised in a way that no individual can be re-identified from the data set, the three categories have been divided.

Public non-personal data

- All the **data collected by government and its agencies** such as census, data

collected by municipal corporations on the total tax receipts in a particular period or any information collected during execution of all publicly funded works has been kept under the umbrella of public non-personal data.

Community non-personal data

- Any **data identifiers about a set of people** who have either the same geographic location, religion, job, or other common social interests will form the community non-personal data. For example, the metadata collected by ride-hailing apps, telecom companies, electricity distribution companies among others have been put under the community non-personal data category by the committee.

Private non-personal data

- Private non-personal data can be defined as those which are **produced by individuals** which can be derived from application of proprietary software or knowledge.

How sensitive can non-personal data be?

- Unlike personal data, which contains explicit information about a person's name, age, gender, sexual orientation, biometrics and other genetic details, non-personal data is more likely to be in an **anonymised form**.
- However, in certain categories such as data related to national security or strategic interests such as locations of government laboratories or research facilities, even if provided in anonymised form can be dangerous.
- Similarly, even if the data is about the health of a community or a group of communities, though it may be in anonymised form, it can still be dangerous.

Sensitive non-personal data

- Possibilities of harm are obviously much higher if the original personal data is of a sensitive nature. Therefore, the **non-personal data arising from such sensitive personal data** may be considered as sensitive non-personal data.

Global standards on non-personal data

- In May 2019, the **European Union** came out with a regulation framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the

European Union, in which it suggested that member states of the union would cooperate with each other when it came to data sharing.

- The regulation, however, had not defined what non-personal data constituted of, and had simply said all data which is not personal would be under the non-personal data category.
- In **several other countries** across the world, there are **no nationwide data protection laws**, whether for personal or non-personal data.

Key stakeholders in the regulation of non-personal data

- To enable a robust regulation of NPD, the report defines key stakeholders for the ecosystem.
 - **Data principals**, who/ which can be individuals, companies or communities.
 - **Data custodians**, who undertake collection, storage, processing, and use of data in a manner that is in the best interest of the data principal.

What areas does India's non-personal data draft miss?

Unclear aspects of community non personal data

- Though the non-personal data draft is a pioneer in identifying the power, role, and usage of anonymised data, there are certain aspects such as community non-personal data, where the draft could have been clearer.

Communities as data principals

- The idea of communities as data principals is introduced ambiguously by the report.
- While it provides examples of what might constitute a community, e.g. citizen groups in neighborhoods, there is **little clarity on the rights and functions of the community**.

No specificity on data custodian

- It is not specified if the data custodian can be the government or just private companies.
- It is also **not clear how communities engage with the custodian**.

Conflict of interest

- Further suggestion that data custodians can potentially **monetise the data** they hold is especially problematic as this

presents a conflict of interest with those of the data principal communities.

Unclear relationship

- The report talks about data trustees who can be governments, citizen groups, or universities as a way for communities to exercise data rights.
- However, the **relationship between the data principal communities and the trustees is not clear.**
- *(Trustees, by definition, are bound by a duty of care and loyalty towards the principal and thus work in their best interests, negotiating on behalf of their data rights with technology companies and regulators)*

Inadequate information about data trusts

- The report explains data trusts comprising specific rules and protocols for containing and sharing a given set of data.
- Trusts can hold data from multiple custodians and will be managed by public authority.
- The **power, composition and functions** of the trust are not established.

Way forward

- The committee should organise **broader consultations** to ensure that the **objective of unlocking data in public interest** and through collective consent does not end up creating structures that exacerbate the problems of the data economy.

7) The COVID-19 fiscal response and India's standing

GS Paper 2- Government policies and interventions for development

How does India compare in the quantity and quality of its COVID-19 response to other developing countries?

- Before the announcement of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package, India lagged significantly behind comparable developing countries that are similar in GDP per capita, state capacity, and structure of the labour force. As of early July, the gap seems to have narrowed.

Relief measures by India

- Atmanirbhar package
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana
- Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan

- The extent of relief measures does not seem to be commensurate with the economic disruption and dislocation caused by the severity of the lockdown.

Lessons for India

On cash transfers

- Cash transfers constitute the largest category of support.
- The World Bank reports that, on average, **cash transfers amount to 30% of monthly GDP per capita**, reaching 46% for lower-middle-income countries, for an average of three months.
- Countries have also significantly expanded coverage of their cash transfer programmes from pre-COVID-19 levels
 - For example, **Bangladesh and Indonesia** have increased the number of beneficiaries by 163% and 111%, respectively.
- India could take these actions into account in decisions about **expanding existing transfer programmes** or even creating new ones.

Enhance NREGA

- Of the World Bank's list of 621 measures across 173 countries only **2% related to public works**, a clear indication of the popularity of cash transfers over public works for income support.
- **Mexico**, announced an enlargement of its rural permanent employment scheme to 200,000 farmers and beneficiaries.
- **Indonesia** has allocated more than \$1 billion (more than ₹7,000 crore) to fund public works schemes that will benefit at least 600,000 workers.
- India has been a leader in employment guarantee policies with its flagship **MGNREGA programme**. This is the right time to **expand entitlements** in this programme as well as introduce an **urban version** of the programme.

Steps in the developing world

- Developing countries are resorting to drastic means to finance COVID-19 responses which includes

- The amendment of **legal budget limits** and the **enhanced issuance of bonds** — including a ‘pandemic bond’ by Indonesia.
- Central banks in many emerging economies are experimenting with purchases of public and private bonds in the secondary market (**quantitative easing**) or directly purchasing government bonds on the primary market (**monetising the deficit**).
- **Indonesia and Brazil** have both amended laws to allow their central banks to buy government bonds, which the Indonesian central bank is doing in the primary and secondary markets.
- Although the Reserve Bank of India has been buying sovereign bonds on the secondary market in India, the debate continues over whether the Indian government should invoke the “**escape cause**” in the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act**, to enable the central bank to directly finance the deficit.

Why subdued fiscal response?

- In India, one reason for the subdued fiscal response and the resort to monetary measures is likely a concern with the debt-to-GDP ratio.

Conclusion

- Additional **fiscal outlay** in the form of cash and in-kind transfers and **expanded public works schemes** would save lives and jobs today and might **prevent a protracted slowdown**.

8) Calibrated balance- On India and Non alignment

GS paper 2- Effect of policies on India's interests

About Non-Aligned Movement

- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed during the Cold War as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral.
- NAM was officially founded in 1961, at the Belgrade Summit, drawing on the principles (also known as **Bandung Principles**) agreed at the Afro-Asian

Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955.

- Such principles were adopted later as the main goals and objectives of the policy of non-alignment. The fulfillment of those principles became the essential criterion for Non-Aligned Movement membership.
- The ten principles of Bandung are followings:

1. Respect of fundamental human rights and of the objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
 2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
 3. Recognition of the equality among all races and of the equality among all nations, both large and small.
 4. Non-intervention or non-interference into the internal affairs of another -country.
 5. Respect the right of every nation to defend itself, either individually or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
 6. Non-use of collective defense pacts to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers.
 7. Refraining from carrying out or threatening to carry out aggression, or from using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
 8. Peaceful solution of all international conflicts in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
 9. Promotion of mutual interests and of cooperation.
 10. Respect of justice and of international obligations.
- **India** is one of the founding members of the NAM.
 - The following are considered to be the founding fathers and historic leaders of the Movement: Joseph Broz Tito (President of Yugoslavia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (President of Egypt), Jawaharlal Nehru (Prime Minister of India), Sukarno (President of Indonesia), and Kwame Nkrumah (President of Ghana).

Why in the news?

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that non-alignment as a concept belonged to a **bygone era**.

News in detail:

- **Multi-polarity** in the world necessitated that India would have to take a **definite stand** and even take “risks” on issues such as connectivity, maritime security, terrorism and climate change. However, the Minister made clear that India does **not reject non-alignment in its entirety**, and that it would not compromise on its independence.

Instances that indicate India still remains Non-Aligned:

- While non-alignment worked for India during the Cold War era between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the fact that India and China share a land boundary would always be a factor in a “new cold war” between the U.S. and China.
- **Despite multiple references** by the U.S. Secretary of State to the India-China clashes and his call for India and the U.S. to jointly “counter” China, the government has rightly chosen **not to raise its tensions with China** in any forum other than bilateral talks with Beijing.

Significance

- The assertion of **India’s strategic independence and resistance to joining any alliance** comes as a timely reminder amid speculation that tensions with China will push India into a stronger relationship with Washington.

Conclusion

- At a time of a double crisis for India battling the novel coronavirus pandemic in the country and Chinese aggression at the border the message from New Delhi is one of a **carefully calibrated balance**.

9) Deepening India South Korea ties

GS paper 2- Bilateral Relations

Context:

- India-South Korea relations are **yet to reach their full potential** despite making significant strides

About India- South Korea relations:

- India and South Korea have the **shared values of open society, democracy and liberal international economic order** and their mutual engagement is at a historically unprecedented level.

Areas of cooperation:

- India and South Korea have signed **numerous bilateral agreements** with the aim of taking their ties to the next level.
- With the convergence of **India’s Act East Policy (AEP)** and **South Korea’s New Southern Policy (NSP)**, there has been an acceleration of economic and strategic relations between the two countries.

Science and Technology

- Significant strides have been made in several areas of science and technology.
- The **Indo-Korea Science and Technology Centre**, established in Bengaluru in 2010 as collaboration between the Indian Institute of Science and the Korea Institute of Science and Technology, is a shining example in this regard.

Defence

- The emerging balance of power in the region has also started influencing the trajectory of defence ties.
- **Co-production of the K9 Thunder howitzer** is a prime example of the ongoing defence collaboration.
- With **technology transfer from South Korea**, India’s Larsen and Toubro plans to achieve over **50% localisation by manufacturing** the key components of these weapon systems domestically as part of ‘Make in India’.
- And more recently India South Korea has signed a **logistics pact** which extends **logistical support to each other’s Navies**. Through this India will be able to get assured logistic support when it operates in the Indo-Pacific in the ports of South Korea. This agreement extended the reach, presence and sustainability of Navy ships when deployed at great distances from home ports.

Trade

- Since India opened up its economy in the early 1990s, India-South Korea trade ties have grown from a few hundred million dollars to **\$22 billion at the end of 2018**.
- The major items that India exports to South Korea include mineral fuels, oil distillates (mainly naphtha), cereals and iron and steel.
- South Korea’s main exports to India include automobile parts and

telecommunication equipment, among others.

Education

- Both countries have regularised education exchanges.

Security

- There is **regular security dialogue** between India's National Security Adviser and the intelligence agencies of Korea.

Challenges ahead for India

Trade target likely to be missed

- Despite the robust ties, the **trade target of \$50 billion by 2030** is most likely to be missed due to lack of adequate efforts.

Defence partnership recedes

- Defence partnership appears to have receded from great all-round promise to the **mere sale and purchase of weapon systems**.

Commerce body not serving its purpose

- More than eight years into its existence, the Indian Chamber of Commerce in Korea (ICCK), is **struggling to find its due space** in promoting economic and business ties and spends most of its time organising social and cultural events.

Failure of Indian Cultural Centre

- The Indian Cultural Centre, established more than ten years ago, has **failed to reach out to common South Koreans**, who still fail to differentiate between India and Indonesia.
- While it teaches regional dance forms to children, the bigger picture of introducing India to the general South Korean population has been lost.

Discrimination continues

- **Social and economic discrimination** against Indians working and living in South Korea is still a regular occurrence.

Cultural prejudices

- Despite the best efforts of many well-intended leaders, Indians and South Koreans are failing to touch a mutually meaningful chord of empathy and move closer to each other as people which can be due to cultural prejudices on both sides.
- Indians are unable to distinguish between the cultural and social characteristics of South Koreans and people of other East Asian nations.

Way forward

- The **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement**, originally the core mechanism for economic ties, requires immediate upgrading.
- A new, **empowered commerce body** is the urgent need of the hour.
- **Mutual respect regarding cultural values** is the key to building a robust partnership between two countries. The means to achieving that respect is often **filling the information gap** that creates a chasm between two strong cultures.

Conclusion

- As the balance of power in the region continues to shift fast, India and South Korea may need each like never before, to protect their ways of life. However, both countries will be able to help each other only if they can fill the cultural gaps.

INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Kaziranga National Park and annual floods



G3: Biodiversity

About Kaziranga National Park

- The Kaziranga national park is located in **Assam** and was formed in 1908 on the recommendation of Mary Curzon (wife of Lord Curzon). The park is located on the edge of the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspots – Golaghat and Nagaon district.
- In the year 1985, the park was declared as a **World Heritage Site by UNESCO**.
- Kaziranga was declared as **Tiger Reserve** in 2006 and it is also recognised as an **Important Bird Area** by Birdlife International for conservation of avifaunal (birds) organisms.
- In the park one can see four types of vegetation like alluvial inundated grasslands, alluvial savanna woodlands, tropical moist mixed deciduous forests, and tropical semi-evergreen forests.
- The park is famous for its **One-horned Rhinoceros**; about 2200 rhinoceros exist in this park, which is half of the world's one-horned rhino population.
- **River Brahmaputra** flows adjacent to the park.

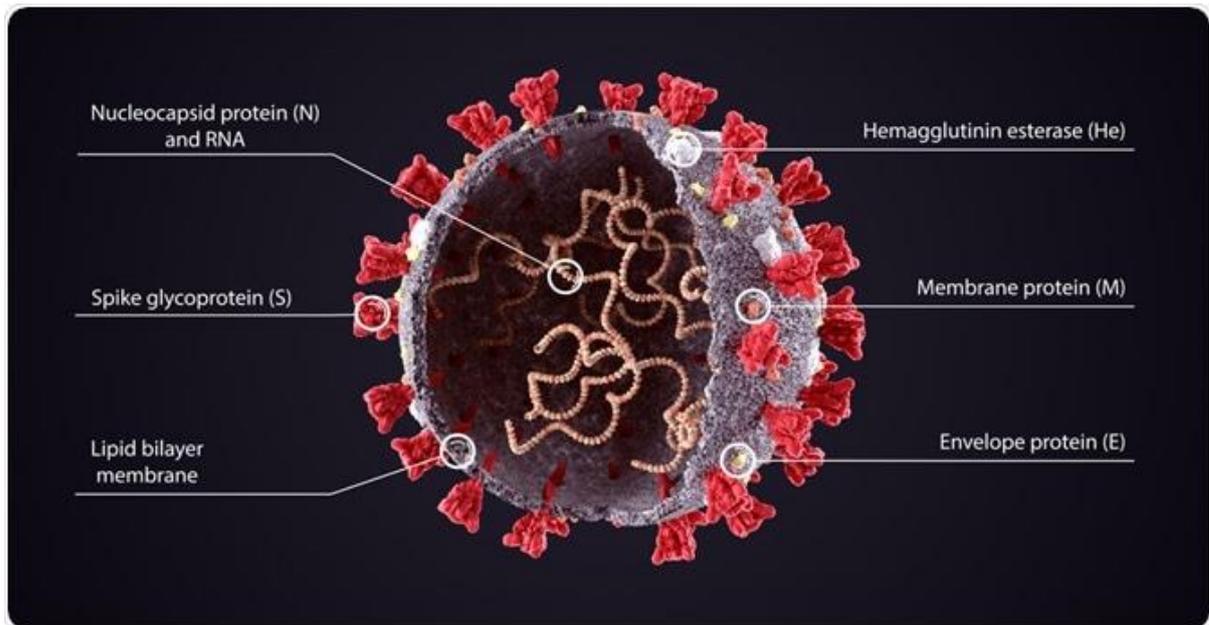
Why in the news?

- Kaziranga National Park has faced severe floods resulting in the death of more than 100 wild animals, which includes 8 one-horned rhinoceros.

- But floods in the park are an **annual necessity to maintain the ecosystem of the park**.
- In the following ways the floods help national park :
 - Since Kaziranga park itself is a **floodplain ecosystem** and water is essential to maintain its character.
 - Floodwaters also function as a **breeding ground for fish** and help in replenishing the Brahmaputra River's fish livestock.
 - Floods act as **natural selection** to eliminate the old and weak animals.
 - The floods intensity is increasing year by year, hence proper steps need to be taken to mitigate the effects.
 - The solution, as experts say, lies in securing animal corridors and ensuring safe passage to the Karbi hills which is a highland refuge for animals during floods.

2) Shape change of coronaVirus SARS-CoV-2

- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is the virus causing the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- It is the successor of SARS-CoV-1 which appeared in 2002.
- It was first named in February 2020. It has a spike protein layer surrounding the genetic material of the virus.



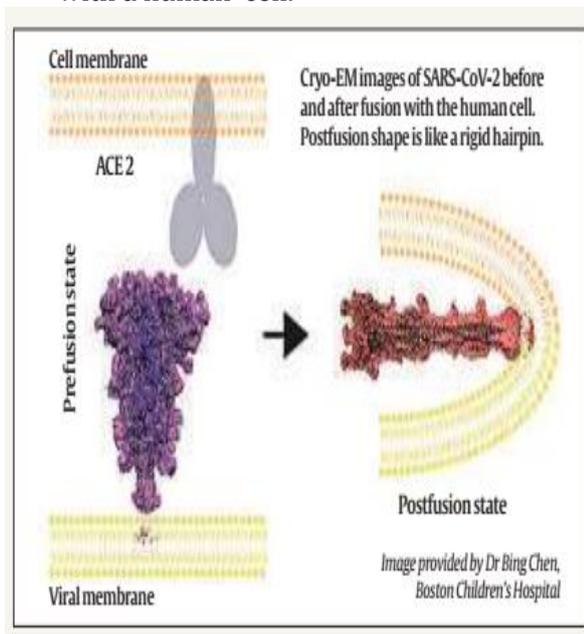
■ Multiplication of the virus:

- Once it enters the human body, the virus attaches itself with the human enzyme called ACE2 receptor, and then it enters the human cell and then makes multiple copies of it.

Why in the news?

- A study published in *SCIENCE* journal has shown that the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 changes its shape after the fusion with the human cell. It transforms into a **hair-pin like structure** after the fusion with a human cell.

- The changes in the shape of the virus **protects the virus from the human immune system** by distracting the antibodies, which are majorly activated against the postfusion state of the virus. Hence our antibodies cannot stop the prefusion state of the virus.
- This study will be important to develop vaccines and devise a route to channelize the antibodies against the virus.
- Scientists say that our vaccines should have calibre to fight with both the prefusion state of the virus and postfusion state of the virus so that we have better protective efficiency.



RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) India's Import Monitoring mechanism :

- Recently, there are media reports that the government is planning to raise **non-tariff barriers** on a number of products by putting in place product-specific monitoring systems or by allowing them only through licensing by adding them to the restricted list.
- There has been a great focus over the Atma Nirbhar Bharat which would mean reduction in import dependency and boost local manufacturing.

What is current Import regulating regime in India?

- According to Foreign Trade development and regulating Act of 1992, the **Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** under the Ministry of Commerce is the nodal authority to notify the regulatory regime for import and export.
- As per the last policy which is for 2015-2020, the **goods are classified into 8 digit codes out of which 6 codes are for the International goods and 2 codes are for Indian goods.**
- **The imports are free except for 3 categories which are as follows:**
 1. Restricted goods- Import licence is required for importing the goods
 2. Channelised goods- it is imported by the designated agency
 3. Prohibited goods
 - Eg: Tyres were in the free list before but recently it has been included in the restricted goods category.
- Every importer has to be **registered with DGFT** and the mechanism can vary according to different products depending upon the important aspects of the product.
- Dynamic reactions can be given in some sectors or areas according to the prevailing situation.

How do Non-tariff barriers help the Industries?

- The Import can be controlled by 2 ways:

- **Tariff barriers:** India has increased the tariff barriers for almost 3500 items out of 11,000 imported items.
- **Non-Tariff barriers:** Non-tariff barriers like **online monitoring, quality standard, restrictions, etc.** has also been increased.
- Imposing non-tariff barriers help domestic industries to become **self reliant** but there needs to be some policy intervention by the government.
- It may also **reduce our trade deficit with various countries and it can avoid the situation of dumping of goods which takes place via alternative routes instead of originating countries.**
- Hence, there might be short term loss but there is a way ahead for long term gain in future.

How non-tariff barriers will boost the Make-in-India initiative ?

- The major focus for **regulating the import lies on substituting product specific imports** by domestic production in order to ensure quality, public safety and implementation of other general laws and regulations.
- The decision to impose non-tariff barriers is not for the **discrimination purpose but for checking the poor quality goods, second hand waste** which is generally cheap and inturn results in destroying the domestic industry.

Will imposition of non-tariff barriers impact our bilateral ties ?

- This mechanism is not **meant for targeting the particular country** but certain decisions have to be taken by keeping in mind that India cannot cut-short the import completely because our import dependence is around 25% on other countries.
- There can be **separate laws, quality standards, etc. for different countries according to their respective mechanism in order to maintain a balance.**
- Imposing restrictions should be backed by **scientific evidences for the imported goods as far as public safety is concerned** so that there is no chance

for raising question upon placing the restrictions and the law of discrimination for goods can be avoided.

What are the areas of concern as far as Indian industries are concerned in producing domestic goods ?

- In order to include India in the competitive trend, there are various areas where we need to work upon and they are as follows :
 - The **logistic cost in India is very high** due to which small manufacturers are not enthused for producing goods, instead they are more leaning towards marketing the goods imported from various countries.
 - India's logistic cost is around 10-12% whereas the world standard for logistic cost is around 5-6%.
 - The **production cost as well as compliances are high** which makes India a less adoptable destination for various industries.
 - There is a huge problem for the **availability of land as well as the price is high.**
 - There is **less monitoring over the enforceability of the contracts.**
 - There is **no well defined quality standard for the finished goods** which needs to be looked upon particularly.
 - (vi)Overall, the cost of finance and doing business is very high in India which needs to be made **affordable for small manufacturers** as our country is largely composed of SMEs.
 - Thus, the **policy level changes in terms of land, electricity and credit availability** is the need of the hour.

Way forward

- The measures should be taken keeping in mind the country's needs and **which should not disrupt the domestic supply.**
- There is a need for **automation of licensing** which may improve the ease of doing business.
- The **cost of production should come down** from the current trend and **incentive based schemes for the electricity** sector should be increased.
- **Cluster based approach** can be adopted to resolve the issue of land availability.

- The laws and regulations need to be looked upon according to the prevailing trend especially in terms of **low-tech consumer goods.**
- It is a golden opportunity for India to become self-reliant as well as major export power globally.

Conclusion:

- If a level playing field is provided along with scientific decisions with the right kind of impetus and incentive, India can reach up to a new level especially towards the goal of becoming the manufacturing hub.

2) New Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020

Why in the news?

- The government is coming up with Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) 2020.
- This policy is in its consultative process and is about to be realised by the end of this year.
- The formulation process of this policy will be facilitated jointly by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- STIP 2020 by way of its **decentralized, bottom-up, and inclusive design** process aims to re-strategize priorities, sectoral focus, and methods of research and technology development for larger socio-economic welfare.

What is the need?

- To cater the needs of new challenges like Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Development, Antimicrobial resistance, water management etc, a strong and effective policy is needed to fulfil the demands.
- There is a need to create a knowledge ecosystem and also connect knowledge generators to knowledge consumers.
- It is important to develop Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

What are the recommendations suggested in the upcoming policy?

- This policy seeks to develop self sufficiency for S&T in India
- It will bring up rules to ease the technology transfers from other countries.

- It aims to develop R&D cess for Industries and also tries to bring up tax benefits for R&D.
- In a way it tries to build bridge academia, industries and government.

3) Indo-Bangladesh Connectivity and Economic Partnership :

- Recently, the first-ever container cargo from Kolkata via Bangladesh's Chattogram port has reached Agartala which has proved to be a "historic milestone" in the Indo-Bangladesh connectivity and economic partnership.
- India and Bangladesh have enhanced cooperation in shipping and inland water trade in the recent years.
- Under the **Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade**, in addition to the six existing Ports of Call, five more in each country have also been added.

A Glance at developments in Indo-Bangladesh relationship

- In the last 6-7 years, the Indo-Bangladesh relationship has been **dynamic as well as active cooperation is seen in resolving the various irritants** which were hindering points for both the countries relations.
- Eg: Land-boundary agreement, maritime boundary issue etc.
- The recent **transit and trade protocol is the milestone** for further strengthening the relations especially in terms of improving the **connectivity between India's North-eastern states and Bangladesh via ports which in turn will result in reducing the logistic cost.**
- Eg: Chittagong port, Mongla port etc.
- In 2019, various projects were implemented in Bangladesh like Dhaka-Agartala-Kolkata bus service, PAR project by Reliance, transfer of electricity to Dhaka via N-E grid etc.
- Thus, the relationship has enormously improved in the **corporate sector, trade and in terms people to people contact.**

How might this protocol be beneficial for both the countries?

- In terms of connectivity, India has been vulnerable as seen from various recent issues and at this point, such a move

might **help to generate confidence in other countries towards India.**

- India's North-eastern part and Bangladesh has geographic connectivity which in turn will help to achieve **regional growth as well as economic growth.**
- The **bureaucratic and leadership arrangements** in both the countries have **positive co-ordination** which may help to envision the future for Indo-Bangladesh relations.

How Indo-Bangladesh relations might have impetus for sub-regional cooperation?

- It will provide a great boost to the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative** as well as for the **BIMSTEC.**
- It may also **directly benefit Nepal and Bhutan** because there is a possibility that **Motor Vehicle agreement** may come into force from which Bhutan has withdrawn and both the countries may develop its relations in various other sectors other than power sector.
- The **environmental as well as regional impact will be tremendous** as the trade will take place via river route and there will be access to new markets.
- Thus, relations can be made **strong and sustainable by taking it to regional level** because Bangladesh imports power from Nepal and Bhutan via India.
- Further, if **Myanmar** comes into picture then it may bring a phenomenal change in the economy because there will be an **opportunity to access South-East Asia.**
- Hence, it may become more **stable when the benefits are reaching to the consumer or people of the countries.**

Way forward

- The political irritants should be kept on minor-footnote and both the nations should **focus on the developmental aspirations** to reach higher economies of scale.
- The **strategic engagement** should be kept at foresight.
- Both the countries should **expedite on ongoing projects.**
- **Promote Bangladesh for Indian Tourists.**

Conclusion

- The relations between both the countries are overall at a positive note and are improving day-by-day by underscoring the differences and going for further engagement which shows the way towards global economic prosperity.

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