

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

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AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Amnesty International

About Amnesty International

- Amnesty International (AI) is a **non-governmental organization** that works for the **upliftment of human rights** and has a supporter list of close to 7 million around the world.
- AI throws light on **human rights violations by governments, armed political groups, companies, etc.**
- It aims to publicize violations by governments and other entities of rights recognized in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**, especially freedom of speech and of conscience and the right against torture.

About Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- The declaration sets out, for the first time, **fundamental human rights to be universally protected.**
- It states that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'
- It entitles **everyone to all the rights and freedoms and prohibits slavery and slave trade in all forms.**
- In 1977, AI was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace.**
- The major areas that are covered by the Amnesty International include –
 - 1) Women's, children's, minorities' and indigenous rights
 - 2) Ending torture
 - 3) Abolition of the death penalty
 - 4) Rights of refugees
 - 5) Rights of prisoners of conscience
 - 6) Protection of human dignity.

Why in News?

- Amnesty International India has decided to shut its operations in the country. The decision came after the recent move by

the government to freeze the organisation's accounts for circumventing the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) regulations.

2) One Nation One Ration Card

What is a ration card?

- A ration card is issued to the head of the family, depending on the number of members in a family and the financial status of the applicant.
- It is used by households to get essential food grains at subsidised prices from designated ration shops (also called fair price shops) under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- The responsibility of identifying eligible families and issuing ration cards to them rests with the state/UT government.

Background:

- PDS was started in India in 1947 to distribute food items to the poor at subsidised rates. Later in 2013, it was revamped and strengthened with the enactment of the **National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013.**

- The **National Food Security Act, 2013** was launched with the objective to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.
- The Act provides for coverage of upto **75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**, thus covering about two-thirds of the population. The eligible persons will be entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse

grains.

- Under NFSA, the government is obliged to give subsidised food grains every month to the beneficiaries identified by each state government on the basis of the **economic status of households**.
- Implemented in **all states and Union Territories**, PDS is currently covering about 81.35 crore persons identified by each state government via more than 5 Lakh ration shops across the country, as per the estimates of the Department of Food and Public Distribution.

What is the one 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system?

- In the present system, a ration cardholder can buy food grains only from an FPS that has been assigned to her in the locality in which she lives.
- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.
- However, the migration of the poor from rural areas to urban locations is more commonplace.
- Thus, geographical location being one of the hindrances that migrant workers face in order to claim their quota of grains and subsequently get denied their right to food.
- To address the state of food security in the country and combat the problem of hunger, the government has started the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' facility.

How will the system of ration card portability work?

- Ration card portability is aimed at providing **intra-state as well as inter-state portability** of ration cards.
- The new system, based on a technological solution, will identify a beneficiary through **biometric authentication** on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs, and enable that person to purchase the quantity of foodgrains to which she is entitled under the NFSA.
- While the **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) portal** (<http://www.impds.nic.in/>) provides the technological platform for the inter-state portability of ration cards, enabling a migrant worker to buy

foodgrains from any FPS across the country, the other portal (**annavitran.nic.in**) hosts the data of distribution of foodgrains through E-PoS devices within a state.

- Once the 'one nation one ration card' system takes effect in a given state, the beneficiary family **can purchase food grains from different locations**. For example, a migrant worker staying in a different state can buy his or her share of the subsidized food grains from any FPS in the state where they work while the remaining family members will be able to buy their quota of the supplies back at home.

Since when has the One Nation, One Ration Card System been in the works?

- Work on this ambitious project started about two years back when the government launched a scheme called Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) in April 2018 to reform the public distribution system in the country.
- The PDS system was marred with inefficiency leading to leakages in the system. To plug the leakages and make the system better, the government started the reform process.
- For this purpose, it used a technological solution involving the **use of Aadhaar to identify beneficiaries**. Under the scheme, the **seeding of ration cards with Aadhaar** is being done.
- Simultaneously, **PoS machines** are being installed at all FPSs across the country. Once 100 per cent of Aadhaar seeding and 100 per cent installation of PoS devices is achieved, the national portability of ration cards will become a reality.

Benefits of One Nation, One Ration Card

- The scheme has been launched keeping in mind the **internal migration of our country**, since people keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living.
- As per Census 2011, 4.1 crore people were inter-state migrants and 1.4 crore people migrated (inter and intra-state) for employment.

Why in News?

- The Tamil Nadu government launched the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme on October 1. The scheme will allow ration cardholders to receive their monthly entitlements from any public distribution system (PDS) shop in the State.

3) National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

About:

- NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a **repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.**
- It was based on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee, National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task force (1985).

- Subsequently, NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for **monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project** in the year 2009.
- The project has connected 15000+ police stations and 6000 higher offices of police in the country.
- CCTNS digitises data related to FIR registration, investigation and charge sheets in all police stations leading to the development of a national database of crimes and criminals.
- NCRB brings out the annual comprehensive statistics of crime across the country ('**Crime in India**' report).

Why in News?

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has released its annual Crime in India 2019 report.



Key Highlights :

- Crime against SCs have **increased by over 7% and crimes against STs have increased by 26% in year 2019** compared to 2018.
- Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number of crimes against SCs in 2019, followed by Rajasthan and Bihar.
- Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest number of cases against STs, followed by Rajasthan, and Odisha.

- In the number of cases of **rape of women belonging to SCs, Rajasthan topped the list** with 554 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh at 537 and Madhya Pradesh at 510 cases.
- **Cybercrimes increased by 63.5% in 2019.**
- The data on seizures of counterfeit notes from all the States and Union Territories also shows there is a surge in seizure of fake Indian currency notes in 2019 compared to 2018.
- Crime against women showed **an increase of 7.3% in 2019 from 2018.**
- 88 cases of crimes against women were recorded per day.
- Majority of cases under crime against women under IPC were registered under cruelty by husband or his relatives (30.9%), followed by assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty, kidnapping & abduction of women and rape .

4) Swachh Bharat Mission

About Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:

- Swachh Bharat Mission launched on 2nd October 2014 is a massive mass movement that seeks to create a Clean India by 2019.
- It has 2 components - urban and rural.
- SBM Urban aims for the elimination of open defecation, conversion of unsanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradication of manual scavenging, municipal solid waste management and bringing about a behavioural change in people regarding healthy sanitation practices.
- SBM Rural aims to make India an open defecation free country.
- It seeks to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.
- The **urban component of the mission is implemented by the Ministry of Urban Development**, and the **rural component by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.**

Objectives

- To Elimination of open defecation, Eradication of Manual Scavenging, Modern and Scientific Municipal Solid Waste Management, To effect behavioural change regarding healthy sanitation practices,
- To Generate awareness about sanitation and its linkage with public health, Capacity Augmentation for ULB's and Creating an enabling environment for private sector participation.

Components -

- 1) Household toilets, including conversion of insanitary latrines into pour-flush latrines;
- 2) Community toilets
- 3) Public toilets
- 4) Solid waste management
- 5) Public Awareness and IEC (Information, Education and Communication).

Implementation -

- **Behaviour change** is the primary focus and fundamental tool for achievement of ODF outcomes.
- This is carried out through the Ministry's focused Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programme.

SBM ODF Plus and ODF Plus Plus Protocol

- To make ODF achievements sustainable and address the issue of holistic sanitation, there is a need to address the entire sanitation value chain.

Definition of Open Defecation

- Free city / ward A city / ward can be notified/declared as ODF city/ ODF ward if, at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating in the open.
- SBM ODF Plus (ODF+) & ODF Plus Plus (ODF ++) are geared towards achieving this objective.
- The SBM ODF Plus (ODF+) protocol focuses on sustaining community/ public toilet usage by ensuring their functionality, cleanliness and maintenance.
- The SBM ODF plus Plus (ODF ++) will focus on achieving sanitation sustainability by addressing complete sanitation value chain, including safe containment, processing and disposal of fecal sludge and septage.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) celebrated the **sixth anniversary of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U)** by organizing a webinar titled 'Swachhata Ke 6 Saal, Bemisaal' on 2nd October 2020.

5) Postal Ballots

What is postal voting?

- In this facility, a voter can cast her vote remotely by recording her preference on the ballot paper and sending it back to the election officer before counting. A restricted set of voters can exercise postal voting.

Who can avail this facility?

- **Members of the armed forces** like the Army, Navy and Air Force, members of the armed police force of a state (serving outside the state), government employees posted outside India and their spouses are entitled to vote only by post.
- **Voters under preventive detention** can also vote only by post.
- **Special voters** such as the President of India, Vice President, Governors, Union Cabinet ministers, Speaker of the House and **government officers on poll duty** also have the option to vote by post.
- **Absentee voters:** These are voters employed in essential services and unable to cast their vote due to their service conditions. Currently, these officials of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Northern

Railway (Passenger and Freight) Services and media persons .

How are votes recorded by post?

- Postal ballot papers for members of the Armed Forces are sent through their record offices.
- For members of the armed police force of a state (serving outside the state), government employees posted outside India and their spouses, the ballot paper can be sent through post or electronically.
- For remaining categories ballot papers can be delivered personally or through the post.
- The Returning Officer is supposed to print ballot papers within 24 hours of the last date of nomination withdrawal and dispatch them within a day.
- This is done so that the ballot papers reach the concerned voter well before the polling date and she has enough time to send it back before the counting day.

Why in News?

- COVID-19 patients and those quarantined in Kerala can exercise their franchise through postal votes in the forthcoming elections to local bodies.
- The decision was based on the proposal of the State Election Commission to the government to allow postal ballots for COVID-19 patients and those in quarantine.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD)

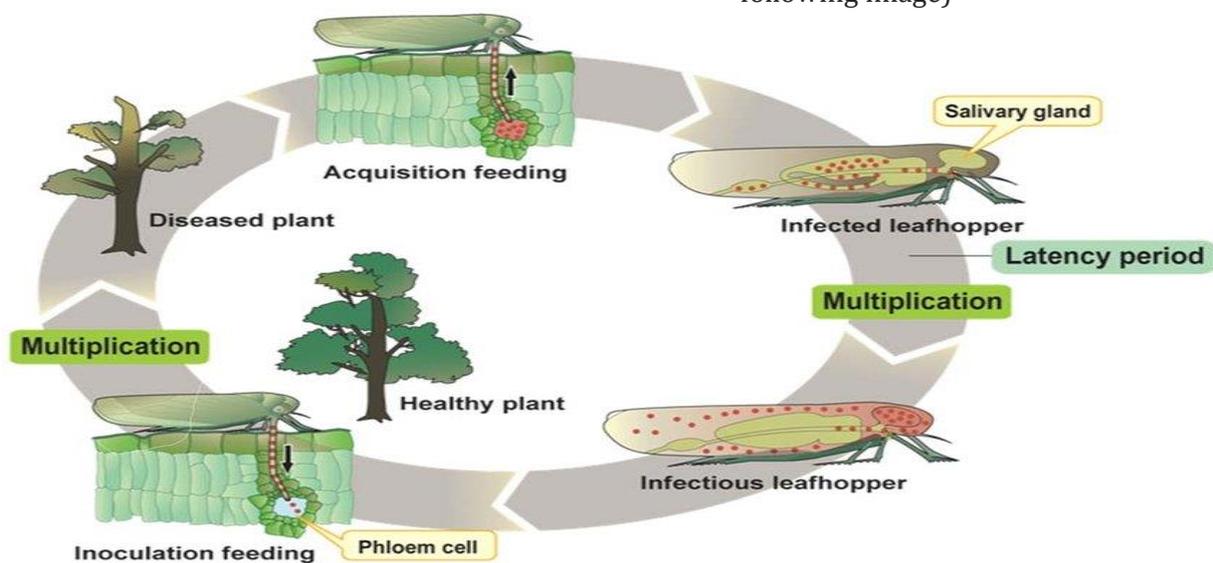
Indian Sandalwood

- *Santalum album*, commonly known as Indian Sandalwood, is a dry deciduous forest species native to **China, India, Indonesia, Australia, and the Philippines**.
- Because it is strong and durable, *S. album* is mostly harvested for its timber. Close-grained sandalwood heartwood is used for fine furniture and carving.
- The heartwood and roots also contain 'sandal oil' which is valued for use in perfumes, incense, cosmetics, soaps, and medicines. The bark contains tannin, which is used for dye.
- Because of its economic value, it is prone to illicit felling and overexploitation. Hence, IUCN has accorded it **vulnerable** status.



Why in the news?

- The sandalwood trees of Karnataka and Kerala are destructively hit by the **sandalwood spike disease (SSD)**.
- It is caused by a **phytoplasma** (bacterial parasites of plant tissues), which are transmitted by insect vectors. (The spread of the disease has been explained in the following image)



- SSD is very less studied and has no cure. The infected tree has to be cut to reduce the spread of the disease. Yearly 1-5% of the sandalwood is lost due to this disease. But due to the increase in the spread of the disease, it is feared that it may spread to sandalwood cultivations.
- This disease has the potential to wipe out the whole population of sandalwood. Hence, scientists of Bengaluru-based **Institute of Wood Science & Technology (IWST)** will join hands with the Pune-based **National Centre for Cell Sciences** for a three-year study to combat the disease, initiated by the **Union**

Ministry of Ayush with a financial allocation of ₹50 lakh.

2) Mission Lantana

Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary



- It is a sanctuary located near Udaipur, **Rajasthan**. The sanctuary is located on the **Bansdara Peak** of the Aravalli Range at an elevation of 944 m above the sea level.
- Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary is a salient part of Sajjangarh Palace built-in 1884. The Palace derived its name from **Maharana Sajjan Singh**, one of the rulers of the Mewar dynasty.
- The sanctuary contains **Jiyan Lake** which supports the sanctuary.

Lantana shrub



- Lantana (*Lantana camara*) is one of the world's most **invasive weeds**.

- It is native to **American and African continents** but it has spread across the Indian and Australian continent due its high adaptability rate. In India it was introduced during the 1800s.
- The leaves of the Lantana are poisonous to the herbivorous, hence its occupancy and invasion in the forest areas is harmful to the grass-eating animals.
- It can outcompete native species, leading to a reduction in biodiversity.
- It can also cause problems if it invades agricultural areas as a result of its toxicity to livestock, as well as its ability to form **dense thickets** (group of bushes) which, if left unchecked, can greatly reduce the productivity of farmland.

Why in the news?

- After noticing the spread of Lantana in the Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary, forest officials took up **MISSION LANTANA** to remove the weed across the sanctuary and plant native species.
- The lantana was responsible for the reduction of grass in the sanctuary which inturn resulted in the decrease of herbivorous animals such as deer.
- The drive involved collective efforts and 'shram daan' (voluntary physical work) by the forest officials, police personnel, wildlife lovers, representatives of voluntary groups and local villagers.
- Due to the mission undertaken now the natural grass has started growing in the Sajjangarh sanctuary and the spotted deer and other herbivores can be seen foraging on the vegetation.

3) Five amphibians to Madhya Pradesh's fauna list

Panna Tiger Reserve

- It is a prime tiger-land located in **Vindhyan Hills in northern Madhya Pradesh**. It consists of dynamic dry deciduous forest.
- The tiger reserve is run by the **Ken river**, and it is the northernmost boundary of natural distribution to **teak** (*Tectona grandis*).
- Apart from the **tiger**, it is home to other animals like the **leopard, nilgai, chinkara, chousinga, chital, rusty spotted cat, porcupine, and sambhar. Gharials** (long snouted crocodiles) and

muggars (marsh crocodiles) can be found

in River Ken.



Why in the news?

- The researchers from Wildlife Institute of India did a study on amphibians in the central Indian Panna Tiger Reserve and has come up with a list of **five species hitherto undocumented in this region.**
- Five species that the group has added to the faunal list of Madhya Pradesh are:
- **The dwarf toad found in peninsular India**
- **Odisha paddy frog, an inhabitant of eastern India**
- **Wrinkled cricket frog, earlier observed in Karnataka**
- **Pierre's cricket frog, seen in Nepal, Bhutan and Assam**
- **Western burrowing frog, earlier seen in western India**
- For the first time calls of western burrowing frogs have been recorded.
- With climate change, the amphibians like frogs and toads are vulnerable to extinction. The scientists have pushed for detailed field information so that we get an idea of the behaviour and ecology of amphibian species from forested areas.

4) Pusa Decomposer

What is Pusa Decomposer?

- There are capsules consisting of 5 strains of fungi which are used along jaggery and besan, to make a solution which helps in **speedy decomposition of organic matter.**
- These capsules were invented by Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) to tackle the situation of **stubble burning.**
- The Pusa Decomposer can rapidly degrade **paddy straws** in the field and convert them into compost, which then does not pose any issues for the sowing of wheat crops.

Stubble burning

- It is one of the major causes of severe pollution which occurs in Delhi and nearby cities during winters.
- Stubble burning is burning of residue of paddy cultivation. Since farmers find it easy to burn it and get rid of it, they do it, but its effect on the environment and air are hazardous.
- The farmers of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are being frequently requested

and educated by the government to stop stubble burning, but appropriate technology was not present till where this waste can be used or modified to the needs of the farmers

Why in the News?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has asked states of Punjab, UP, Haryana and Delhi to conduct field trials of Pusa Decomposer.

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ECONOMY

1) Marginal Standing Facility

About MSF

- Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) is the rate at which the banks are able to borrow overnight funds from RBI against the approved government securities.
- MSF is a very **short term borrowing** scheme for banks. Banks may borrow funds through MSF during severe cash shortage or acute shortage of liquidity.
- The scheme was introduced by RBI with the main aim of **reducing volatility in the overnight lending rates** in the inter-bank market and to enable **smooth monetary transmission** in the financial system.
- In March 2020, the RBI increased the cap for liquidity available under the marginal standing facility, **from 2 per cent to 3 per cent of their Net Demand and Time Liabilities (NDTL) — or deposits.**
- MSF rate is also known as the **penal rate** and it is **always fixed above the repo rate.**
- The marginal standing facility rate currently stands at 4.25 per cent.

Why in News?

- Amid the ongoing economic woes created by the coronavirus pandemic, the RBI has decided to extend by six months the enhanced borrowing facility provided to banks under Marginal Standing Facility till March 31, 2021.
- The facility, which was initially available up to June 30, 2020 was later extended up to September 30, 2020 in view of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2) Purchasing Managers' Index

What is PMI?

- Purchasing Managers' Index is an economic indicator which indicates the business activity & economic health of both the **manufacturing and service sectors.**
- PMI of India is published by Japanese firm **Nikkei** but compiled and constructed by **IHS Markit**, a London-based global information provider.

- Unlike the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which indicates the changes in production volume or output, the PMI is an **investor sentiment tracking index** and is more dynamic in nature. They are derived from monthly surveys of about 400 private companies.
- Variables used for calculating the PMI are: Output, New Orders, Employment, Input Costs, Output Prices, Backlogs of Work, Export Orders, Quantity of Purchases, Suppliers' Delivery Times, Stocks of Purchases and Stocks of Finished Goods.

How to read PMI?

- While PMI >50 implies an expansion of business and economic activity, PMI <50 means contraction.

Why in News?

- According to the latest PMI data, India's manufacturing sector activity improved for the second straight month in September and touched an over eight-and-a-half-year high supported by accelerated increases in new orders and production.
- The Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index increased from 52.0 in August to 56.8 in September — highest since January 2012.

3) Priority Sector lending norms

What is Priority Sector Lending?

- Priority Sector means those sectors which the Government of India and Reserve Bank of India consider as important for the development of the basic needs of the country and are to be given priority over other sectors. The banks are mandated to encourage the growth of such sectors with adequate and timely credit.
- Priority Sector includes the following categories:
 - a. **Agriculture**
 - b. **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**
 - c. **Export Credit**
 - d. **Education**
 - e. **Housing**
 - f. **Social Infrastructure**
 - g. **Renewable Energy**
 - h. **Others**

Targets Under the Priority Sector Lending

- **Domestic scheduled commercial banks** (excluding Regional Rural Banks and Small Finance Banks) and **Foreign banks with 20 branches and above**: 40 per cent of Adjusted Net Bank Credit or Credit Equivalent Amount of Off-Balance Sheet Exposure, whichever is higher.
- **Regional Rural Banks & Small finance banks**: 75 per cent of Adjusted Net Bank Credit or Credit Equivalent Amount of Off-Balance Sheet Exposure, whichever is higher.
- **Foreign banks with less than 20 branches**: 40 per cent of Adjusted Net Bank Credit or Credit Equivalent Amount of Off-Balance Sheet Exposure, whichever is higher, to be achieved in a phased manner by 2020.
- **Sub-targets** are specified for certain sectors like 18% to agriculture with 8% to small and marginal farmers, 7.5% to micro units etc.

Recent changes

- Recently the RBI released revised priority sector lending guidelines to augment funding to segments including start-ups and agriculture.
 - According to the revised guidelines,
 - a. **Bank finance of up to ₹50 crore to start-ups,**
 - b. **loans to farmers both for installation of solar power plants for solarisation of grid-connected agriculture pumps, and for setting up compressed biogas (CBG) plants** have been included as fresh categories eligible for finance under the priority sector.
 - The revised PSL guidelines have been framed to **address regional disparities** in the flow of priority sector credit. Higher weightage has been assigned to incremental priority sector credit in **'identified districts'** where priority sector credit flow is comparatively low.
 - The targets prescribed for **'small and marginal farmers'** and **'weaker sections'** are being increased in a phased manner and higher credit limit has been specified for **farmer producer organisations (FPOs)/farmers producers companies (FPCs)** undertaking farming with assured marketing of their produce at a pre-determined price.
- While the **loan limits for renewable energy have been doubled** now, the **credit limit for health infrastructure**, including those under 'Ayushman Bharat', has also been **doubled** to improve the country's health infrastructure.
 - Commercial banks have been instructed to adhere to the revised guidelines.

Why in News?

- Despite many efforts by the government to boost credit supply by offering many schemes to priority sectors, the loan demand from the priority sector plunged to a low 1.9 per cent in the June 2020 quarter from 10.2 per cent a year ago.

4) Cess

What is a cess?

- The Union government is empowered to raise revenue through a gamut of levies, including taxes (both direct and indirect), surcharges, fees and cess.
- While **direct taxes and indirect taxes** are taxes where the revenue received can be spent by the government for **any public purpose** in any manner it deems appropriate for the nation's good, a cess is an earmarked tax that is collected for a **specific purpose** and ought to be spent only for that.
- Every cess is collected after **Parliament has authorised its creation through an enabling legislation** that specifies the purpose for which the funds are being raised.
- **Article 270** of the Constitution allows cess to be **excluded from the purview of the divisible pool** of taxes that the Union government must share with the States.

How many cesses does the government levy?

- A report titled **Cesses and Surcharges: Concept, Practice and Reforms since 1944**, prepared by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in 2018 and submitted to the Fifteenth Finance Commission listed 42 cesses that have been levied at various points in time since 1944.
- Given that cess does not need to be a part of the divisible pool of resources, this increasing share of cess in the Union government's tax receipts has a **direct impact on fiscal devolution**.

Present status

- The introduction of the GST in 2017 led to most cesses being done away with and as of August 2018, there were only **seven cesses** that continued to be levied.
- These were Cess on Exports, Cess on Crude Oil, Health and Education Cess, Road and Infrastructure Cess, Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess, National Calamity Contingent Duty on Tobacco and Tobacco Products and the GST Compensation Cess.
- And in February, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced a new cess — a **Health Cess** of 5% on imported medical devices — in the Finance Bill for 2020-2021.

Why is the issue in the news currently?

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, in its latest audit report of government accounts, has observed that the Union government withheld in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) more than ₹1.1 lakh crore out of the almost ₹2.75 lakh crore collected through various cesses in 2018-19.
- The CAG found this objectionable since cess collections are supposed to be transferred to **specified Reserve Funds** that Parliament has approved for each of these levies.

5) Trade surplus

What is Balance of Payments?

- Balance of Payments (BoP) statistics systematically summaries the economic transactions of an economy with the rest of the World for a specific period.
- BoP broadly comprises **current account, capital account and changes in foreign exchange reserves.**

Current account

- Current account of the BoP includes **merchandise** (exports and imports) and **invisibles.**

- Invisible transactions are further classified into three categories, namely
 - a. Services-travel, transportation, insurance, Government not included elsewhere (GNIE) and miscellaneous (such as, communication, construction, financial, software, news agency, royalties, management and business services);
 - b. Income; and
 - c. Transfers (grants, gifts, remittances, etc.) which do not have any quid pro quo.

Capital account

- The main components of the capital account include **foreign investment, loans and banking capital.**
- Foreign investment, comprising Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Portfolio Investment consisting of Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) investment, American Depository Receipts/Global Depository Receipts (ADRs/GDRs) represents **non-debt liabilities**, while loans (external assistance, external commercial borrowings and trade credit) and banking capital, including non-resident Indian (NRI) deposits are **debt liabilities.**

Why in News?

- According to the latest RBI data, India recorded a **surplus of \$19.8 billion (3.9% of GDP) in its current account balance** in the first quarter of FY21.
- India registered a surplus of \$0.6 billion (0.1% of GDP) in the preceding quarter. A deficit of \$15 billion (2.1% of GDP) was recorded a year earlier.
- The surplus in the current account in the first quarter of 2020-21 was on account of a **sharp contraction in trade deficit** to \$10 billion due to a steeper decline in merchandise imports relative to exports on a year-on-year basis.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute

What is it?

- The landlocked mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh is the subject of an unresolved dispute between **Azerbaijan**, in which it lies, and its ethnic **Armenian**

majority, backed by neighbouring Armenia.

- In 1988, towards the end of Soviet rule, Azerbaijani troops and Armenian secessionists began a bloody war which left the de facto independent state in the hands of ethnic Armenians when a truce was signed in 1994.



- Negotiations have so far failed to produce a permanent peace agreement, and the dispute remains one of post-Soviet Europe's "**frozen conflicts**."

Why in News?

- Clashes erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan recently over the volatile Nagorno-Karabakh region.
- The recent clashes reignited concern about instability in the **South Caucasus**, a corridor for pipelines transporting oil and gas to world markets.

2) JIMEX-20

- **What's in the news?**
- The 4th edition of the **biennial India and Japan naval exercise JIMEX-20** was conducted recently in the North Arabian Sea.

- JIMEX series of exercises commenced in January 2012 with a special focus on maritime security cooperation. The last edition of JIMEX was conducted in October 2018 off Visakhapatnam, India.
- Maritime cooperation has significantly increased between the two sides with focus on information sharing and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific.
- The drills come after **Indian and Australian navies** conducted a passage exercise in the eastern Indian Ocean Region (IOR) from September 23-24.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Herd Immunity and Covid

What does herd immunity mean?

- Herd immunity refers to preventing an infectious disease from spreading by immunising a certain percentage of the population.
- While the concept is most commonly used in the context of **vaccination**, herd immunity can also be achieved **after enough people have become immune after being infected**.
- The premise is that if a certain percentage of the population is immune, members of that group can no longer infect another person. This breaks the chain of infection through the community ("herd"), and prevents it from reaching those who are the most vulnerable.

When do we know that a population has achieved herd immunity?

- It depends on multiple factors: how effective the vaccine for a given disease is, how long-lasting immunity is from both vaccination and infection, and which populations form critical links in transmission of the disease.
- Mathematically, it is defined on the basis of a number called "**herd immunity threshold**", which is the number of immune individuals above which a disease may no longer circulate.
- Polio has a threshold of 80% to 85%, while measles has 95%.
- For the SARS-CoV-2, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's chief scientist, thinks that at least 60-70% of the population should have immunity to really break the chain of transmission.

Are vaccines the solution?

- A recent research paper argues that vaccines are particularly suited for creating herd immunity because their allocation can be specifically targeted to highly exposed populations, such as healthcare workers or individuals with frequent contact with customers.
- They may have a significantly greater impact on reducing viral circulation than naturally-acquired immunity, especially if it turns out that naturally-acquired

protective immunity requires boosts through re-infections.

- With a vaccine one can achieve immunity and herd immunity safely. Through natural infection also we can achieve it at some point, but it would be at great human cost.

Why in News?

- Since a vaccine is not available for COVID-19 yet, some people advocated that the infection be allowed to spread in the community until herd immunity is achieved.

2) 'Ideal' weight of Indian men and women

What's in the news?

- The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), the Hyderabad-based premier research body of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has **released a new set of guidelines, updating norms on recommended dietary allowances (RDA)**.
- RDA are daily dietary nutrient intake levels which would be sufficient to meet the nutrient requirements of nearly all healthy individuals while EARs are the average daily nutrient intake levels of the population.
- The guidelines specify the amount of carbohydrates, minerals, dietary fibre, fats and oils, protein, and even water that a person must ideally consume.

New guidelines

- NIN has also **redefined the ideal or reference Indian adult man and woman** with regard to age to **19-39 years instead of 20-39 years**.
- **The body weight has been put at 65 kg for males and 55 kg for females** while earlier, it was 60 kg and 50 kg respectively, which are a decade old.

How do Indians compare internationally?

- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that **194.4 million people in India (about 14.5% of the total population) are undernourished**. **India ranks 102 out of 117 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2019**.

- Malnutrition in India includes **calorific deficiency, protein hunger and micronutrient deficiency.**

Schemes that fight malnutrition

- **Calorific Deficiency-Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme-** The scheme (under the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**) provides specific interventions targeted towards the vulnerable groups that include children below 6 years and women. It is focussed on **supplementary nutrition, pre-school non-formal education, nutrition & health education, immunization, health check-up and referral services.**
- **National Health Mission (NHM-** by **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**) and it subsumed the National Rural Health Mission and the National Urban Health Mission. It aims at **health system strengthening in rural and urban areas for - Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A), and Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases.**
- **Protein Deficiency- Mid Day Meal Scheme & National Food Security Mission.** Also- **Pusa Arhar 16**, a dwarf pigeon pea created by scientists at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) which can be used to tackle India's pulses shortage.
- **National Nutritional policy (1993)** by the Ministry of Women and Child Development- It has a multi-sectoral strategy for eradicating malnutrition and achieving optimum nutrition for all.

- **National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan)** - "malnutrition free India" by 2022- POSHAN Abhiyaan is India's flagship program, hoping on **improving nutritional outcomes for children, adolescents, pregnant women and lactating mothers.**
- **Micronutrient Deficiency-** The National Horticulture Mission & National Millet Mission.

3) Sutures with nanofiber yarns

Why in News?

- A team of researchers at **IIT Madras** has developed a prototype of suture thread made of **nanofiber yarns** that is **bio-absorbable** and can **deliver** a higher load of **antibiotics** and/or therapeutics at the site itself.

About the new sutures

- Each strand has a **good tensile strength**, besides degrading rapidly and **mimics the collagen fibrils** of body tissues.
- The suture material uses nanofibers woven as yarn using certain specific techniques, and the **strength can be varied depending on the target tissue** (skin, muscle, cartilage).
- **Nanofiber** yarns are **thread-like structures** formed by twisting together hundreds of nanofibers.
- Several innovations globally in suture material have advanced infection control and achieved in some cases, better recovery among patients, even as other options such as staples, glues and strips have become available.
- **For doubts and queries email us at: doubts@officerspulse.com**

DEFENCE

1) Offset requirements for IGAs

New Defence Acquisition Procedure Features:

For making the process faster

- **Project Management Unit-** To streamline the acquisition process and for contract management
- There will be **no offset clause in government-to-government, single vendor and Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA).**
- Under the new policy offset guidelines have been revised, wherein **preference will be given to manufacture of complete defence products** over components and various multipliers have been added to give incentivisation in discharge of offsets
- **Multiplier value** refers to a factor applied to the actual value of an offset transaction to calculate the offset credit value earned. Buyers use multipliers to provide sellers with incentives to offer offsets in targeted areas of their choice. The standard multiplier value is 1.
- **Scope of trials will be restricted to physical evaluation** of core operational parameters, other parameters may be evaluated based on vendor certification, certification by accredited laboratories, computer simulations of parameters

For making India a manufacturing hub

- A **new category - 'Buy (Global-Manufacture in India)'** to encourage foreign OEMs to set up "manufacturing or maintenance entities through its subsidiary in India". The new guidelines encourage the manufacturing of the entire equipment rather than just components and spares.
- This will bring FDI and will create more jobs

For helping Indian businesses

- **Category- Buy (Indian Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured -IDDM)-** this is exclusively for Indian sellers.
- **Indigenisation of Imported Spares**
- Notified items will be banned for import

What's in the news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Defence released a new **Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020.**
- Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 replaces the previous Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2016.
- One of the major changes in the new procedure is the Ministry has removed the offset clause requirement in Inter-Governmental Agreements (IGA).

What is an offset clause?

- Under defence offset, a **foreign supplier** of equipment **agrees to manufacture a given percent of his product** (in terms of value) **in the buying country.** **Sometimes** this may take place with **technology transfer.**
- To develop the Indian defence industry and bring in high technologies, the offset policy was adopted by India in 2005 for all capital defence purchases above Rs 300 crore made through imports. The foreign vendor, or Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), was required to invest **at least 30 per cent** of the value of the purchase in India's defence or aerospace sectors.

Other Defence Initiatives

Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy 2020 (DPEPP 2020)

- to provide a **focused, structured and significant thrust** to defence production capabilities of the country for self-reliance and exports.
- to achieve a turnover of Rs. 1 lakh 75 thousand Crore including an export of Rs. 35 thousand Crore in the Aerospace and Defence goods and services by the year 2025.
- Developing a dynamic, robust and competitive Defence industry, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding industry to cater to the needs of Armed forces with quality products has also been clearly laid out in the new draft policy.
- Efforts will be made to create an environment that **encourages Research and Development, rewards innovation, creates Indian IP ownership** and

promotes a robust and self-reliant defence industry.

- The Ministry has also laid emphasis on **reducing dependence on imports** and taking forward the Make in India initiatives through domestic designs.

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) Initiative

- iDEX aims at creation of an ecosystem to **foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D institutes & academia.** And provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has

good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.

- iDEX will be funded and managed by a 'Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)' which has been formed as a 'not for profit' company as per Section 8 of the Companies Act 2013 for this purpose

Artificial Intelligence in Defence-

- **N Chadrasekharan Task Force** was set up in 2018 to study the use of **AI in national security.**

Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti

- **Aimed to boost the IPR culture** in the sector of indigenous defence.

ART & CULTURE

1) National School of Drama

About:

- An **autonomous organization** under the **ministry of Culture**.
- **Bharat Rang Mahotsav**, or the 'National Theatre Festival', established in 1999, is the annual theatre festival of National School of Drama (NSD).
- It is acknowledged as the **largest theatre festival of Asia**, dedicated solely to theatre.
- It is one of the major organisations **involved in preservation and propagation of the 13 Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements from India** that have been inscribed till date on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Why in News?

- The National School of Drama is preparing for its first production since the pandemic shut down all public spaces in March.

Additional Details

- From India, the Intangible Cultural Heritages added into the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity are:
 - 1) Tradition of Vedic chanting
 - 2) Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana
 - 3) Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre
 - 4) Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas.
 - 5) Mudiyetu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala
 - 6) Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
 - 7) Chhau dance

- 8) Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir.
- 9) Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur
- 10) Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab
- 11) Yoga
- 12) Nawrouz
- 13) Kumbh Mela

2) Vallam Kali of Kerala

What is it?

- Vallam Kali is a **traditional boat race in Kerala**.
- It is a form of **canoe racing**, and uses paddled war canoes. It is mainly conducted **during** the season of the **harvest festival Onam**.
- The race of **chundan vallam ('snake boat')** is the major event. Hence Vallam Kali is also known as the snake boat race.
- The **Nehru Trophy Boat Race** is a popular vallam kali event held in the **Punnamada Lake** near Alappuzha, Kerala.
- **Vanchipattu ('boatsong')** is the form of poetry in Malayalam language commonly used during vallam kali and related festivals.

Why in News?

- Locals join hands to preserve a legendary snake boat that won the first Nehru trophy.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) UMANG App

About UMANG

- UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) is developed by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** and **National e-Governance Division (NeGD)** to drive Mobile Governance in India.
- UMANG provides a **single platform for all Indian Citizens to access pan India e-Gov services** ranging from Central to Local Government bodies and other citizen centric services.
- Launched in 2017, at present, about 660 services from 127 departments & 25 states and about 180 utility bill payment services are live and more are in pipeline. UMANG user base has crossed 2.1 Crore including Android, iOS, Web and KaiOS.

Key features

- **Unified Platform:** It brings together all government departments and their services on a single platform to provide better and easier services to citizens.
- **Mobile-First Strategy:** It aligns all government services with the mobile-first strategy to leverage mobile adoption trends.
- **Integration with Digital India Services:** It provides seamless integration with other Digital India Services like Aadhaar, DigiLocker, and PayGov. Any new such service will automatically be integrated with the platform.
- **Uniform Experience:** It is designed to enable citizens to discover, download, access, and use all government services easily.
- **Secure and Scalable:** It supports Aadhaar-based and other authentication mechanisms for service access. The sensitive profile data is saved in an encrypted format and no one can view this information.

Services provided by the app

- It is a unified application that can be used to avail a number of pan India e-government services such as: Filing income tax, Employees Provident Fund

Organization (EPFO) services, Aadhar, Pension, ePathshala, e- Land Records, Crop Insurance, etc.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has started a facility on the UMANG App which enables members of the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995 to apply online for **Scheme Certificates**. *(EPS is a social security scheme that was launched in 1995 and is provided by EPFO).*
- It makes provisions for pensions for the employees in the organised sector after the retirement at the age of 58 years.

What is a Scheme certificate?

- Scheme certificate is issued to members who withdraw their EPF contribution but wish to retain their membership with EPFO, to avail pension benefits on attainment of retirement age.
- A member becomes eligible for pension only if he has been, cumulatively, a member of the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 for at least 10 years.
- Upon joining a new job, Scheme Certificate ensures that previous pensionable service is added to pensionable service rendered with the new employer thereby, increasing the amount of pension benefits.
- Further, Scheme Certificate is also useful for family members to avail family pension, in case of untimely death of the eligible member.

2) Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission (ASIIM)

What's in the news?

- The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has launched the "Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission (ASIIM) under Venture Capital Fund for SCs" to promote innovation and enterprise among SC students studying in higher educational institutions.

What is ASIIM ?

- Under Ambedkar Social Innovation Incubation Mission initiative, **one thousand scheduled caste (SC) youth** will be identified in the coming four years with start-up ideas through the Technology Business Incubators in various higher educational institutions.
- They will be **funded 30 lakh rupees** in three years as equity funding to translate their start-up ideas into commercial ventures.
- Successful ventures would further qualify for venture funding of **up to five Crore rupees from the Venture Capital Fund for SCs (VCF-SC)**.

Objectives

- The main objectives of ASIIM are:
- To promote entrepreneurship among the SC Youth with special preference to Divyangs.
- To support (1,000) innovative ideas till 2024 through a synergetic work with the Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) set up by the Department of Science and Technology.
- To support, promote, hand-hold the start-up ideas till they reach commercial stage by providing liberal equity support.
- To incentivise students with an innovative mindset to take to entrepreneurship with confidence.

Eligibility:

- Youth who have been identified by the TBIs.
- Students who have been awarded under the Smart India Hackathon or Smart India Hardware Hackathon being conducted by the Ministry of Education.
- Innovative ideas focusing on the socio-economic development of the society identified in the TBIs.
- Start-ups nominated and supported by corporates through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds.

Significance:

- ASIIM under VCF-SC will promote innovation in the SC youth and would help them to become job-givers from job-seekers.
- It would further give fillip to the 'Stand Up India' initiative of the Prime Minister.

3) BrahMos missile with indigenous booster successfully test-fired

About :

- BrahMos is a cruise missile, meaning it can be guided towards a pre-determined land- or sea-based target.
- With a capability to attain speeds **2.8 times that of sound (Mach 2.8)**, BrahMos is classified as a **supersonic cruise missile**.
- A newer version under development is aimed at flying at speeds greater than Mach 5. These are called hypersonic cruise missiles.
- Besides decreasing the reaction time of the enemy, higher speeds also substantially reduce the chances of the missile getting intercepted.
- An amalgam of the names of the **rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva**, BrahMos is being produced by **BrahMos Aerospace**, a joint venture company set up by DRDO and Mashinostroyeniya of Russia in 1998.

Benefits:

- BrahMos has been deployed in Ladakh as well as the Eastern Sector in Arunachal Pradesh to tackle any threats in the ongoing standoff with China.
- Enhanced use of indigenous technologies will give a boost to India's AtmaNirbhar Bharat and Make in India Initiatives.

Why in News?

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently successfully test-fired the BrahMos surface-to-surface cruise missile with an indigenous booster .
- The supersonic missile is one of the prime precision-strike missiles used by all three forces, the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

4) Exercise BONGOSAGAR

What's in the news?

- The second edition of the bilateral naval exercise Bongosagar between **India and Bangladesh** was held recently in the Northern Bay of Bengal.
- Ships from both navies participated in surface warfare drills, seamanship evolutions and helicopter operations.
- Bongosagar will be followed by the third edition of **India Bangladesh**

Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) on 4-5 October.

- This edition of Exercise Bongosagar assumes greater significance since it is being conducted during Mujib Barsho, the **100th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** (*served as Bangladesh's first president and later as its prime minister*).

5) National Digital Health Mission

About:

- The National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) **aims to develop the backbone necessary to support the integrated digital health infrastructure of the country.**
- It will **bridge the existing gap** amongst different stakeholders of the Healthcare ecosystem through digital highways.
- NDHM shall create a seamless online platform “through the provision of a wide-range of data, information and infrastructure services, duly leveraging open, interoperable, standards-based digital systems” while ensuring the security, confidentiality and privacy of health-related personal information.

Objectives:

- To establish registries at appropriate level **to create single source of truth in respect of clinical establishments, healthcare professionals, health workers, drugs and pharmacies;**
- To **create a system of personal health records**, based on international standards, easily accessible to individuals and healthcare professionals and services providers, based on individual's informed consent;
- To **promote development of enterprise-class health application systems** with a special focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for health;
- To **adopt the best principles of cooperative federalism** while working with the States and Union Territories for the realization of the vision;
- To **ensure that the healthcare institutions and professionals** in the private sector participate actively with

public health authorities in the building of the NDHM, through a combination of prescription and promotion;

- To **ensure national portability in the provision of health services;**

Benefits:

- The implementation of NDHM is expected to significantly **improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of health service delivery overall.**
- NDHM will **provide choice to individuals to access both public and private health services**, facilitate compliance with laid down guidelines and protocols, and ensure transparency in pricing of services and accountability for the health services being rendered.
- Better quality of macro and micro-level data **will enable advanced analytics, usage of health-biomarkers and better preventive healthcare.**
- It will also **enable geography and demography-based monitoring and appropriate decision** making to inform design and strengthen implementation of health programmes and policies.

Why in News?

- The operational integration of **Ayush Grid**, the emerging IT backbone for AYUSH Sector with the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), was endorsed at a high level meeting chaired by Secretary, Ministry of AYUSH recently.

- AYUSH Grid, initiated by the **Ministry of AYUSH**, aims to bring onboard all AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) facilities including hospitals and laboratories and to promote traditional systems of healthcare.
- The components of Ayush Grid initiative will cover all the verticals of the Ayush Sector, like Health Services, Education, Ayush Research, Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes, Training Programmes, Citizen Centric Services, Drug Licencing Portal, and Media Outreach.
- The Ayush Grid is steadily developing through its constituent projects.
- It is expected to emerge as a comprehensive IT backbone serving 8 lakh Ayush physicians and nearly 50

crore citizens within three years.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Jal Jeevan Mission

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- The chief objective of the Mission is to provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024** and thereby ensuring potable water supply in adequate quantity i.e. **@ 55 lpcd** (Litres per capita per day) of prescribed quality on a long-term and regular basis.
- This Mission is under the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.**

- The mission will focus on integrated demand and supply side management of water at the local level, including creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse in agriculture.
- The fund sharing pattern is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States; 50:50 for other States and 100% for UTs.



Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said about 1 lakh families are being connected to pure drinking water facilities every day under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

2) NABARD

About NABARD

- NABARD was established in 1982 under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Act, 1981.

- NABARD is an **apex refinancing agency** for the institutions providing investment and production credit for promoting the various developmental activities in rural areas.
- It is responsible for the development of the small industries, cottage industries, and any other such village or rural projects.
- NABARD also provides **direct term loans** at affordable rates of interest to certain activities like Designated Food Parks

(DFPs) and food processing units in the DFPS.

- NABARD is **wholly owned** by the Government of India.

Why in News?

- NABARD has announced a special refinance facility of ₹800 crore for FY21 to support the Government of India's **Water, Sanitisation and Hygiene (WASH) programme**.
- NABARD will provide concessional refinance to all eligible financial institutions including commercial banks, regional rural banks and cooperative banks with a repayment period of up to 36 months.

WASH programme

- WASH is the collective term for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Due to their interdependent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector. While each a separate field of work, each is dependent on the presence of the other.
- For example, without toilets, water sources become contaminated; without clean water, basic hygiene practices are not possible.

3) Namami Gange Program

- '**Namami Gange Programme**', is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in 2014 with a budget outlay of Rs 20,000 Crore to accomplish

the **twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga**.

Main pillars of the Namami Gange Programme

1. Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure
2. River-Surface Cleaning
3. Afforestation
4. Industrial Effluent Monitoring
5. River Front development
6. Biodiversity
7. Public awareness
8. Ganga gram
 - Marking a major shift in implementation, the Government is focusing on **involving people living on the banks of the river** to attain sustainable results.
 - The programme also focuses on involving the States and grassroots level institutions such as **Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions** in implementation.
 - The program is implemented by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)**, and its State counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).

Why in News ?

- Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated 6 major projects in Uttarakhand under the Namami Gange program.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) The benefits of a carbon tax

Context

- The largest carbon dioxide emitter **China** has recently announced that it would balance out its **carbon emissions** with measures to **offset them before 2060** and hence the spotlight is now on the U.S. and India, the countries that rank second and third in emissions.

Need to cut carbon effluents

Vulnerability of India's Climate risk

- India ranks **fifth in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020** released by German Watch.
- Also according to a United Nations report, between 1998 and 2017, disaster-hit countries reported \$2.9 trillion in direct economic losses, with 77% resulting from climate change of which the **highest losses** were incurred by the **U.S. followed by China, Japan, and India.**

To reduce the impact of global warming

- Record **heat waves** in Delhi, **floods** in southwest China, and **catastrophic forest fires** in California this year are indicative of the existential danger from global warming for which the main cause can be attributed to carbon dioxide.

To fulfill targets

- India has committed to **40% of electricity capacity** being from non-fossil fuels by 2030.
- It also committed to lower the **ratio of emissions to GDP by one-third** from 2005 levels.
- It is in the country's interest to take stronger action before 2030, leading to no net carbon increase by 2050.

How to cut effluents?

Carbon Pricing

- **Pricing the carbon content** of domestic production and imports, be it energy or transport can be one way to cut effluents while earning revenues.

Emission trading

- Carbon pricing can be done through emission trading, i.e., setting a **maximum amount of allowable effluents** from industries, and permitting those with low emissions to sell their extra space.

Introduce a carbon tax

- A carbon tax is a **fee imposed on the burning of carbon-based fuels** (coal, oil, gas).
- By putting a carbon tax on economic activities can help reduce effluents.
- A carbon tax at \$35 per tonne of CO₂ emissions in India is estimated to be capable of generating some 2% of GDP through 2030.
- Example: **Canada** imposed a carbon tax at \$20 per tonne of CO₂ emissions in 2019, eventually rising to \$50 per tonne. This is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas pollution by between 80 and 90 million tonnes by 2022.

Imposing a carbon tariff

- Big economies like India should also use their **global monopsony**, or the power of a large buyer in international trade, to impose a **carbon tariff** as envisaged by the EU.
- Focusing on trade is vital because reducing the domestic carbon content of production alone would not avert the harm if imports remain carbon-intensive.
- Therefore, leading emitters should use their monopsony, diplomacy and financial capabilities to forge a **climate coalition with partners.**

Conclusion

- A market-oriented approach to tax and trade carbon domestically and to induce similar action by others through international trade and diplomacy offers a way forward.

2) Cess non transfer and its economic impact

What are cess and surcharge?

- A **cess** is a tax that is levied by the government to raise **funds for a specific purpose.** Collections from the Education Cess and Secondary and Higher Education Cess, for instance, are supposed to be used for funding primary and higher and secondary education respectively.
- **Surcharge** is an **additional charge** or tax. For example: A surcharge of 10% on a

tax rate of 30% effectively raises the combined tax burden to 33%.

- The main difference between surcharge and cess is that surcharge can be spent like any other taxes, the cess should be spent only for a specific purpose for which it is created.
- The Union government **does not have to share cesses** and surcharges with the states as they are not part of the divisible pool that needs to be shared with states.

Source from constitution

- **Article 270** of the Constitution requires the Union government to distribute the proceeds from all Central taxes listed in the Union List based on the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- However, **Article 271** excludes the distribution of the revenue from any surcharge or cess levied by the Union government for any specified purpose.

Where does the cess money go?

- **Cesses** are earmarked taxes and the proceeds should be used for the purposes for which they are levied.
- A number of **reserve funds or development boards** have been created for these specified purposes and the collections from the cesses are supposed to be transferred to these funds placed in **public accounts** for defraying expenditures on the specified purposes.
- They are **not a part of the Consolidated Fund of India** and cannot be used for defraying regular expenses.
- The transactions in **public accounts** are supposed to be done by the government as a trustee or a banker, and are **not subject to vote by Parliament**.

Why in the news?

- The **Financial Audit Report of the Government of India by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG)** for 2018-19 placed in Parliament recently has pointed out that in 2018-19, the collections from **35 Cesses** amounted to nearly ₹2.75-lakh crore of which only ₹1.64-lakh crore was transferred to various reserve funds and boards designated for the purpose in Public Accounts.

Impact of short transfer to Public account of India

- In addition to off budget borrowings, short transfer of cess revenue to public accounts is a method used to **obfuscate the Budget to show lower revenue and fiscal deficits**.

Should the government of India raise revenues through so many cesses?

- The cesses and surcharges constituted just about 3% of Central gross tax revenue in 2000-01; but in 2015-16, it was **16.5%** and it could be as much as **20% in 2020-21**.
- Cesses are earmarked taxes and to ensure a minimum allocation to important and priority programmes, this method of financing could be used.
- Large numbers of cesses make it difficult to see all of them as **priority areas** requiring protection of funding which may result in the possibility of limiting the funding of important and priority areas to the amount of cess collected even when they require much larger amounts.
- Too many cesses also **complicate the tax system** and add to administrative and compliance costs.
- The operation of the cesses involving collections and transfer to designated funds in the Public Accounts makes the **entire process opaque** as the operation of these funds too needs to be monitored and audited.

Conclusion

- The issues raised by the CAG relate merely to short transfer of funds, but the **implications are much larger** which should be considered by the government and make necessary arrangements to credit the short transfer of money to the Public Account of India and also not to deny states its share of taxes in the divisible pool.

3) Pathways to diversity: On UN biodiversity summit

Context

- The **UN Summit on Biodiversity** convened recently in the midst of a global crisis caused by the novel coronavirus.
- **Highlights of the summit**
- The member-nations of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** took note of the link between biodiversity loss and

the spread of animal pathogens, calling for an **end to destructive industrial and commercial practices**.

- There is consensus that **Aichi biodiversity targets** to be achieved by 2020, have spectacularly failed which is evident from the latest **UN Global Biodiversity Outlook 5** report saying that none of the 20 targets has been fully met.

Convention on Biological Diversity and Aichi targets

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a **legally binding treaty** to conserve biodiversity has been in force since 1993 and **ratified by 196 nations**.
- It has 3 main objectives:
 1. The **conservation of biological diversity**.
 2. The **sustainable use of the components of biological diversity**.
 3. The **fair and equitable sharing of the benefits** arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.
- The CBD Secretariat is based in **Montreal, Canada** and it operates under the **United Nations Environment Programme**.
- The Parties (Countries) under Convention of Biodiversity (CBD), meet at regular intervals and these meetings are called **Conference of Parties (COP)**.
- COP-10 has adopted a **ten-year framework** for action by all countries to save biodiversity, officially known as **“Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020”**, provide a set of 20 ambitious yet achievable targets collectively known as the **Aichi Targets for biodiversity**.
- The Aichi Biodiversity Targets divided under five sections are:
 1. **Strategic Goal A:** Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society
 2. **Strategic Goal B:** Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.
 3. **Strategic Goal C:** To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity
 4. **Strategic Goal D:** Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services
 5. **Strategic Goal E:** Enhance implementation

through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building.

- India enacted **Biological Diversity Act in 2002** for giving effect to the provisions of the CBD.
- The United Nations General Assembly had declared the period 2011-2020 to be the **“United Nations Decade on Biodiversity”**.

Progress in achieving Aichi biodiversity targets

- Among the Aichi targets that fell by the wayside are those on
 - reform or phasing out of subsidies that erode biodiversity,
 - steps for resource use within safe ecological limits,
 - preventing industrial fisheries from destroying threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems,
 - an end to pollution, including growing plastic waste.
- Partial progress was made on
 - protecting surface and subsurface water, inland, coastal and marine areas.

Current issue

- Many countries have chosen to ignore the connection between biodiversity and well-being, and depleted ecological capital in pursuit of financial prosperity.
- There is little concern for indigenous communities that have fostered biodiversity, and no effort to make them strong partners in improving the health of forests and buffer zones.

Way forward

- Fast-eroding ecosystem health mandates the 196 CBD member-countries to **chart a greener course, aligning it with the Paris Agreement**, which has a significant impact on the health of flora and fauna.
- Since CBD members are set to draw up fresh conservation targets to be finalised next year, India too has the opportunity to **plan a trajectory of green growth** after COVID-19, around clean energy, ecological agriculture, a freeze on expansion of mining and dam-building,

resource recovery from waste, and
regeneration of arid lands.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Kanaklata Barua



- **What is in the news?**
- The Indian Coast Guard Ship ICGS Kanaklata Barua was commissioned recently.
- This ship is a FPV (Fast Patrol Vessel) which are upgraded versions of inshore patrol vessels. These vessels are used for patrolling, maritime surveillance, anti-smuggling, and anti-poaching activities.
- They can reach upto speed of 34 knots (1 knot = 1.852 kmph).

Who is Kanaklata Barua?

- She is one of the youngest martyrs of the **Quit India Movement**. She hails from **Assam**.

- She was shot by police when she led a group of freedom fighters to hoist the tricolour flag in Sept 1942. She was just 17.
- Though she was shot she didn't let the flag touch the ground until one of her co-protester held the flag.
- She was a member of **Mrityu Bahini** (a kind of suicide squad).
- Her valourous act inspired the generations of her time and led to greater participation of women in the freedom struggle.



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RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) VAIBHAV Summit

- Vaishvik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit is a **global virtual summit of overseas and resident Indian Researchers and Academicians being organized from 2nd October to 31st October 2020.**
- The aim of the summit is to **bring Indian origin luminaries in academic institutes and R&D organizations across the world and resident counterparts on a single platform** to debate upon collaboration mechanisms to strengthen academic and S&T base in India for global development.
- The goal is to create an **ecosystem of Knowledge and Innovation in the country through global outreach.**
- It is a **joint effort of all S&T and Academic organisations.**
- It also aims to give an **impetus to the objectives of Atal Innovation Mission** by leveraging the collaborative experience and deep expertise of International and Indian subject experts.
- Vaibhav summit seeks **active support and ideation from Indian Diaspora for developing skills of Indian aspirants in alignment with the New Educational Policy**

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