

OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 21 | 18th October to 24th October, 2020

COVERAGE.

The Hindu

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AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY
THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



News @ a glance

POLITY..... 3	4) Feluda Tests.....17
1) Allegations of misconduct against judges ... 3	5) Smart Fence17
2) Cap on election expenditure 4	6) Cyberattack.....17
3) Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 5	DEFENCE19
ENVIRONMENT..... 6	1) Nag Anti Tank Missile19
1) Skinks of India..... 6	ART & CULTURE20
2) Kaleshwaram eco-clearance violates law: NGT..... 6	1) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.....20
ECONOMY..... 8	2) Sabarimala pilgrimage.....20
1) Co-operative banks..... 8	3) Life in Miniature project.....20
2) Essential Commodities Act 9	PIB ANALYSIS22
3) CPI-IW10	1) BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile.....22
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.....12	2) Exercise SLINEX-2022
1) UN Human Rights Council.....12	3) Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise.....23
2) 'One China' policy12	4) Kisan Credit Card.....23
2) International Labour Organisation13	5) Sustainable Processing of Municipal Solid Waste.....24
3) India and Nepal Border disputes13	6) Snow leopard habitat conservation24
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY15	7) CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System).....25
1) Childhood stress and mental illness15	8) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana25
2) The enigma of Covid 19.....15	
3) India and HIV.....16	

News in Depth

AIR NEWS.....27

- 1) Anaemia Mukht Bharat.....27
- 2) Ayushman Sahakar27

THE HINDU EDITORIALS.....29

- 1) Still awaiting police reforms29
- 2) India's low rank on nutritional index.....30
- 3) Offset dilution in defence, a flawed policy
turn.....31
- 4) Innovation ecosystem in India.....32
- 5) At 75, UN needs a rebirth33

INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED35

- 1) Why Delhi air pollution rises in Oct.....35
- 2) What is asteroid Benu, and why is NASA
studying it?.....36
- 3) Why the 200-year Ramnagar ki Ramlila
has an important place in India's art
history37

RSTV BIG PICTURE.....38

- 1) Improving Higher Education38

News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Allegations of misconduct against judges

What's in the news?

- Andhra Pradesh government released a letter written by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy to Chief Justice of India SA Bobde that made serious allegations against the second senior-most judge of the Supreme Court NV Ramana.

How are allegations of misconduct against judges dealt with?

- The Constitution protects the independence of judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court by making them **removable only through a long process of impeachment**.
- However, not all forms of misconduct will warrant impeachment. There could be other kinds of impropriety too. There are times when serious complaints of this sort are received, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is called upon to examine them.
- Since 1997, judges have adopted an **'in-house procedure'** for inquiring into such charges.

When was the procedure adopted?

- After Justice J.S. Verma took over as Chief Justice of India (CJI) in 1997, he circulated among judges a document called **'Restatement of Values of Judicial life'**. This was a set of principles containing the essential elements of ideal behaviour for judges.
- The Full Court passed a resolution that an 'in-house procedure' would be adopted for action against judges for acts of commission or omission that go against these values. A five-judge committee was constituted to come up with a procedure. Its report was adopted on December 15, 1999. It was made public in 2014.

How does the in-house procedure work?

- When a complaint is received against a High Court judge, the CJI should decide if

it is considered frivolous or if it is "directly related to the merits of a substantive decision in a judicial matter", or it does not involve any serious misconduct or impropriety.

- If it is serious, the CJI should get the judge's response. He may close the matter if he is satisfied with the response. If a deeper probe is considered necessary, both the complaint and the judge's response, along with the Chief Justice's comments, are recorded for further action.
- After considering the High Court's Chief Justice, the judge involved and the complaint, the CJI, if deemed necessary, forms a **three-member committee**. The committee should have two Chief Justices from other High Courts and one High Court judge.
- The inquiry it holds is of the nature of a fact-finding mission and is not a formal judicial inquiry involving examination of witnesses. The judge concerned is entitled to appear before it.
- If the case is against a High Court's Chief Justice, the same procedure is followed, but the probe committee comprises a Supreme Court judge and two Chief Justices.
- If a Supreme Court judge faces such a charge, the in-house panel will comprise three Supreme Court judges. The in-house procedure does not give any separate provision to deal with complaints against the Chief Justice of India. But in practice, a panel of three other Supreme Court justices is formed.

What happens after the probe is done?

- If the committee finds substance in the charges, it can give **two kinds of recommendations**. One, that the misconduct is serious enough to require removal from office, or that it is not serious enough to warrant removal.

- In the former case, the judge concerned will be urged to resign or seek voluntary retirement. If the judge is unwilling to quit, the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned would be asked to withdraw judicial work from him.
- The President and the Prime Minister will be informed of the situation. This is expected to clear the way for Parliament to begin the process of impeachment. If the misconduct does not warrant removal, the judge would be advised accordingly.

2) Cap on election expenditure

Why are there caps on election expenditure?

- Limits on campaign expenditure are meant to provide a level-playing field for everyone contesting elections. It ensures that a candidate can't win only because she is rich.
- The **255th Report of the Law Commission on electoral reforms** argued that unregulated or under-regulated election financing could lead to "lobbying and capture, where a sort of quid pro quo transpires between big donors and political parties/candidates".

Expenditure limits

- The Election Commission (EC) imposes limits on campaign expenditure incurred by a candidate, **not political parties**.
- Candidates must **mandatorily file a true account of election expenses** with the EC.
- An incorrect account, or expenditure beyond the ceiling can attract **disqualification for up to three years** under **Section 10A of The Representation of the People Act, 1951**.

Effectiveness of cap

- It has often been argued that these limits are unrealistic as the actual expenditure incurred by the candidate is much higher.
- However, due to the EC's stipulated cap it is not reflected in the expenditure statements submitted to it and is instead disguised in various ways or driven through illegal mechanisms.
- An analysis of expenses for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections by the **nonprofit Association for Democratic Reforms**

(ADR) found that even though candidates complained that the EC's limits were too low and unrealistic, as many as 176 MPs (33%) had declared election expenses that were less than 50% of the limit in their constituency — indicating that candidates may not be providing true accounts of their poll expenses to the EC.

EC's view on party spends

- The EC had previously asked the government to **amend the Representation of the People Act and Rule 90 of The Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961**, to introduce a ceiling on campaign expenditure by **political parties** in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

Why in News?

- The Law Ministry has increased the ceiling on poll expenditure for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections by 10% by issuing a notification amending the **Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961**.
- The move was based on a recommendation of the Election Commission which suggested a 10% increase in expenditure for all elections to be held during the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping in mind the problems that candidates may face while campaigning under the various COVID protocol laid down by the poll panel.

Revised limits

- The ceiling on poll expenditure **varies across States**, with candidates in Assembly elections in bigger States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu now allowed to spend up to ₹30.8 lakhs as against ₹28 lakhs earlier.
- For a candidate contesting a Lok Sabha poll in these States, the revised ceiling on poll expenditure is now ₹77 lakhs instead of the earlier amount of ₹70 lakhs.
- Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and a few Union Territories, based on the size of their constituencies and population, have a lower ceiling on poll expenditure. Here while the enhanced ceiling for a Lok Sabha candidate is now ₹59.4 lakhs those contesting an Assembly can spend up to ₹22 lakhs.
- The last time the expenditure ceiling was enhanced was in **2014** just ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

- The notification, however, does not mention that the limit has been increased in the wake of the pandemic or if it is only for the COVID-19 period.

3) Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

How is citizenship acquired in India?

- In India, citizenship is regulated by the **Citizenship Act, 1955**.
- The Act specifies that citizenship may be acquired in India through **five methods** – by birth in India, by descent, through registration, by naturalisation (extended residence in India), and by incorporation of territory into India.

Can illegal migrants acquire citizenship?

- An illegal migrant is prohibited from acquiring Indian citizenship.
- An illegal migrant is a foreigner who: (i) enters the country without valid travel documents, like a passport and visa, or (ii) enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period.
- Illegal migrants may be imprisoned or deported under the **Foreigners Act, 1946** and the **Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920**.

How does the 2019 Act seek to change the criteria for determining citizenship?

- The Act makes it clear that immigrants belonging to **Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi communities** from the Muslim-majority nations (**Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan**) will not be treated as illegal.
- They will also be eligible to get naturalised citizenship.
- One of the requirements for citizenship by **naturalization** under the 1955 Act is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, and for 11 of the previous 14 years.
- The amendment act **relaxes this 11-year requirement to five years** for persons belonging to these six religions from these three countries.
- They will also no longer be deported or jailed under the Foreigners Act of 1946

and the Passport (Entry into India) Act of 1920.

- The cut-off date for citizenship is **December 31, 2014** which means the applicant should have entered India on or before that date.

Rationale of the Law

- The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the amendment Act (SoR) states that India has had historic migration of people from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and these countries have a state religion, which has resulted in **religious persecution** of minority groups.

Are the provisions of the Act applicable across the country?

- The Act clarifies that the amendments will not apply to certain areas. These are:
 - the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the **Sixth Schedule to the Constitution**. These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.
 - the **states regulated by the “Inner Line” permit** under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873.

How does the Act change the regulations for Overseas Citizens of India?

- The Act also amends the provisions on registration of Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- OCI cardholders are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin.
- At present, the government may cancel a person’s OCI registration on various grounds specified in the 1955 Act.
- The 2019 amendment **adds another ground for cancelling OCI registration** — violation of any law notified by the central government.

Why in News?

- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president J.P. Nadda recently said that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be implemented and the process of framing rules is on.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Skinks of India



What are skinks?

- Skink, (family Scincidae), are a group of lizards, mostly secretive ground dwellers or burrowers, that are represented throughout most of the world but are especially diverse in Southeast Asia and its associated islands, the deserts of Australia, and the temperate regions of North America.
- Their body is typically cylindrical in cross-section, and most species have cone-shaped heads and long, tapering tails. They may have either shrunken limbs or no limbs. Their bodies have scales.
- They are highly alert, agile and fast-moving and actively forage for a variety of insects and small invertebrates.
- Some species lay eggs, while others give birth to fully developed young.
- Being void of legs or shorter legs, these are confused with snakes and are killed predicting to be venomous. They are not venomous creatures.

Why in the News?

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has released a report called 'Skinks in India'. It is the first monograph released on this group of lizards.
- The report makes an attempt to 're-describe' all the 62 species with their taxonomic identification keys, distributional maps, habits, habitat and breeding biology etc.

What does the report say?

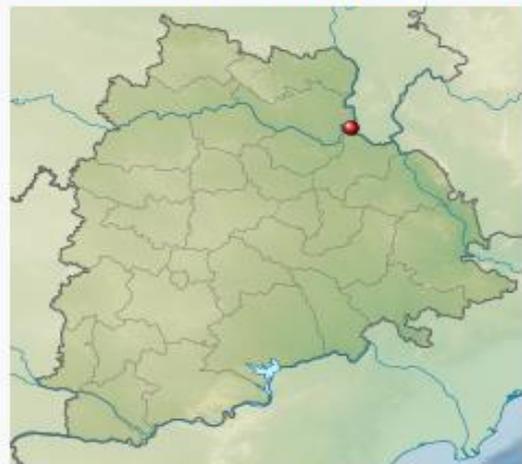
- The report reveals that India is home to 62 species of skinks and says about **57% of all the skinks** found in India (33 species) are **endemic** (found in only that habitat or place).

2) Kaleshwaram eco-clearance violates law: NGT

What is the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project?

- The KLIP is very complex, with **nearly 11 stages** transporting water through canals, tunnels and storing water in massive water tanks. The overall objective of the entire KLIP is to pump 2 TMC of water every day from **Godavari** to irrigate 18 lakh ac, and provide water to industry and urban areas.
- Presently it is conceived to be the **world's largest multi-stage, multi-purpose lift** irrigation project.
- The estimated cost of the project is around Rs.100,000 crores.
- This project was inaugurated in June 2020.

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project



Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project

Facts about Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP)

- Built across **Godavari river**, KLIP will lift the water to a height of half-a-kilometer.
- It is designed to irrigate 45 lakh acres for two crops in a year, meet the drinking water requirement of 70 percent of the state and also cater to the needs of the industry.
- Claimed to be an engineering marvel, the project comprises 1,832 km water supply route, 1,531 km gravity canal, 203 km tunnel routes, 20 lifts, 19 pump houses and 19 reservoirs with a storage capacity of 141 thousand million cubic feet (TMC).

- It provides 40 TMC drinking water to **Hyderabad** & several towns and villages in the State. 16 TMC water is also provisioned for industrial needs besides irrigation
- It not only caters to the needs of irrigation in drought-prone Telangana but also enhances the socio-economic profile of Telangana including fisheries development, inland waterways, tourism, and biodiversity.

National Green Tribunal



- The National Green Tribunal has been established under the **National Green Tribunal Act 2010** for effective and expeditious disposal of **cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources**.
- It can also take up cases like enforcement of any legal right relating to the environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- It is a **specialized body** equipped with the necessary expertise to handle

environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.

- It is **not bound by** the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be **guided by principles of natural justice**.
- It tries to provide **speedy environmental justice** and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts. The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally **within 6 months** of filing of the same.
- **New Delhi** is the Principal Place of Sitting of the Tribunal and Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai shall be the other four places of sitting of the Tribunal.

Why in the news?

- The NGT has found faults in the environmental clearance (EC) given to Kaleshwaram project.
- It was found that EC was given to the project by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change (MoEF&CC) **ex-post facto**, after completion of substantial work.
- To fix the accountability and take some remedial steps, NGT has directed the MoEF&CC to constitute a **seven-member expert committee** preferably out of expert appraisal committee (EAC) members with relevant sectoral expertise to look into the matter.

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ECONOMY

1) Co-operative banks

About Co-operative banks

- Co-operative banks are financial entities established on a co-operative basis and belonging to their members. This means that the customers of a co-operative bank are also its owners.
- These banks provide a wide range of regular banking and financial services.

Structure of co-operative banks in India

- Broadly, co-operative banks in India are divided into two categories - **urban and rural**.
- Rural cooperative credit institutions could either be short-term or long-term in nature. Further, **short-term** cooperative credit institutions are further sub-divided into State Co-operative Banks, District Central Co-operative Banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies.
- Meanwhile, the **long-term** institutions are either State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs)

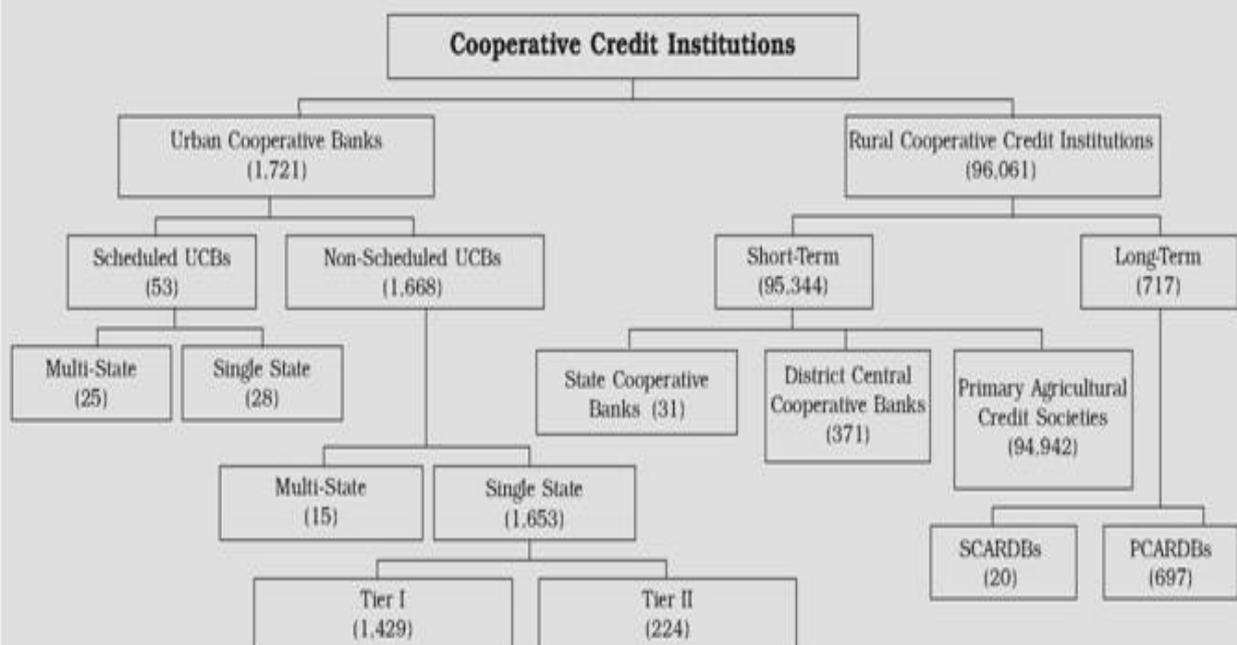
or Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).

- On the other hand, Urban Co-operative Banks (UBBs) are either **scheduled or non-scheduled**. Scheduled and non-scheduled UCBs are again of two kinds- **multi-state** and those operating in a **single state**.

Who oversees these banks?

- In India, co-operative banks are registered under the **States Cooperative Societies Act**.
- Cooperative banks are currently under the **dual control** of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and RBI.
- While the role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation, RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such as maintaining cash reserve and capital adequacy, among others.

Chart V.1: Structure of Cooperative Credit Institutions in India



SCARDBs: State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks.

PCARDBs: Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks.

- Note:** 1. Figures in parentheses indicate the number of institutions at end-March 2009 for UCBs and at end-March 2008 for rural cooperative credit institutions.
2. For rural cooperatives, the number of banks refers to reporting banks.

Direct RBI supervision

- Recently, the Parliament passed a law to bring **all urban and multi-State cooperative banks** under the **direct supervision of the RBI**.
- Previously, these banks came under dual regulation of the RBI and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies.
- The move is aimed at strengthening lenders' oversight, boosting depositors' confidence, and preventing instances of fraud and financial irregularities.

Why in News?

- In an affidavit filed in the Madras High Court, the Reserve Bank of India has said that there is no violation of any law in bringing the cooperative banks under its supervisory control.
- It submitted that the RBI is empowered to regulate any banking activity including those by the cooperative bodies.
- The RBI further mentioned that 430 urban cooperative banks in the country have lost their banking licenses due to very poor financial positions.
- Earlier, two cooperative banks in Tamil Nadu filed petitions against the Central Government ordinance bringing them under the RBI control. The ordinance has since been replaced by a law.

2) Essential Commodities Act

About ECA

- The Essential Commodities Act (ECA) was enacted by the Central Government in 1955 to control and regulate trade and prices of commodities declared essential under the Act.
- Though there is **no specific definition for 'essential commodities'**, Section 2(A) of this Act states that an essential commodity means a commodity specified in the "Schedule" of this Act.
- The Act empowers the **Central and state governments** concurrently to control production, supply and distribution of certain commodities in view of rising prices and to prevent Black marketing.
- The measures that can be taken under the provisions of the Act include licensing, distribution and imposing stock limits. The governments also have the power to fix price limits, and selling the particular

commodities above the limit will attract penalties.

- Most of the powers under the Act have been delegated by the Central Government to the State Governments with the direction that they shall exercise these powers.
- Some of the major commodities that are covered under the act:
 - 1) Petroleum and its products
 - 2) Food stuff, including seeds, vanaspati
 - 3) Drugs- prices of essential drugs
 - 4) Fertilisers
 - 5) Raw jute and jute textiles
 - 6) Cattle fodder
 - 7) Face masks and sanitisers.

Background

- Recently, the central government **deregulated the sale of six types of agricultural produce**, including cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes, by amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Stock limits on these commodities may be **regulated only under extraordinary circumstances** which may include **(i) war, (ii) famine, (iii) extraordinary price rise and (iv) natural calamity of grave nature**.
- The amendment requires that imposition of any stock limit on agricultural produce must be based on price rise. A stock limit may be imposed only if there is: (i) a 100% increase in retail price of horticultural produce; and (ii) a 50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable agricultural food items.
- However, such limits will not be imposed at all on **food processors or value chain participants**, which/who will be allowed to store as much as allowed by their installed capacity. **Exporters** will also be exempted.

Were the amendments necessary?

- The government claims that while India has become **surplus in most agri-commodities**, farmers have been unable to get better prices due to lack of investment in cold storage, warehouses, processing and export. It says the Essential Commodities Act was handy in the 1960s and 1970s when India was still a net importer of food.

- According to the **Economic Survey 2019-20**, frequent and unpredictable imposition of blanket stock limits on commodities under Essential Commodities Act neither brings down prices nor reduces price volatility. However, such intervention does enable opportunities for rent-seeking (unproductive income) and harassment.
- The reduction in government regulation by the amendment is expected to encourage traders and investors to build warehousing and supply chain infrastructure without worrying about being raided on suspicions of hoarding. The Centre had also promised that farmers' income would rise through the move.

Why in News?

- With onion prices crossing ₹100 per kg in several cities, the Centre imposed stock limits on wholesalers and retailers until the end of the year to prevent hoarding.
- This is the first time stock limits have been imposed on any commodity after the Essential Commodities Act was amended last month to reduce such interventions.

Why have onion prices been rising?

- Prices are always high at this time of year as stocks from the last rabi crop dwindle before the fresh kharif crop begins to arrive.
- However, excess rainfall and flooding in the key producer States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh this year has resulted in significant damage to the standing kharif crop, and the expectation of short supplies has led to soaring prices.

3) CPI-IW

About CPI

- Consumer Price Index is an index which measures the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services such as transportation, food and medical care.
- It is calculated by measuring price changes for each item in the **predetermined basket of goods and services** and averaging them.

How does the Consumer Price Index help?

- The Reserve Bank of India and other statistical agencies study CPI so as to understand the price change of various commodities and keep a tab on inflation.
- CPI is also a helpful pointer in understanding the real value of wages, salaries and pensions, the purchasing power of a country's currency; and regulating prices.

Who maintains the Consumer Price Index in India?

- In India, different types of consumer price index numbers are released by the government which includes:
 - 1) CPI for Industrial Workers (IW)
 - 2) CPI for Agricultural Labourers (AL)
 - 3) CPI for Rural Labourers (RL)
- The **Ministry of Labour & Employment** collects the data for CPI (IW), CPI (AL) and CPI (RL) and compiles it.
- In addition to these, the **National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** is releasing
 - 1) CPI for Rural
 - 2) CPI for Urban and
 - 3) CPI Combined (computed by combining CPI Rural and CPI Urban)

What is the base year of an Index?

- The CPI is calculated with **reference to a base year**, which is used as a benchmark. The price change pertains to that year.
- In India, the base years of the current series of CPI (IW) is 2001. The base year of CPI (AL) and CPI (RL) is 1986-87.
- For CPI Rural, Urban and Combined, the base year is 2011-12.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment has **revised the base year** of the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) from **2001 to 2016** to reflect the changing consumption pattern, giving more weightage to spending on health, education, recreation and other miscellaneous expenses, while reducing the weight of food and beverages.
- Under the new series, the weightage for the food group has gone down to 39.17 per cent from 46.2 per cent in the 2001 series, while weight of miscellaneous items, like education and health has risen to 30.31 per cent from 23.26 per cent. The weight of housing and clothing and

footwear have changed to 16.87 per cent from 15.27 per cent and to 6.08 per cent from 6.57 per cent.

- The CPI-IW is used as a benchmark for **calculating dearness allowance (DA)** for government employees, **dearness**

relief for pensioners and **wages** for industrial workers in some sectors.

- The government announced that in the future, it would work towards revising the index every five years.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) UN Human Rights Council

About the council

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system.
- The Council's mandate is to promote "universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all" and "address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon."
- It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
- The Council was created by the **United Nations General Assembly in 2006**.
- It **replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights**.
- The UNHRC, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, has two key functions — the council passes **non-binding resolutions** on human rights issues through a periodic review of all 193 UN member states called the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, besides **overseeing expert investigation of violations** in specific countries (Special Procedures).

Membership

- The Council is made of **47 Member States**, which are elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly of the United Nations through **direct and secret ballot**.
- The Council's Membership is based on **equitable geographical distribution**.
- Members of the Council serve for a period of **three years** and are **not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms**.

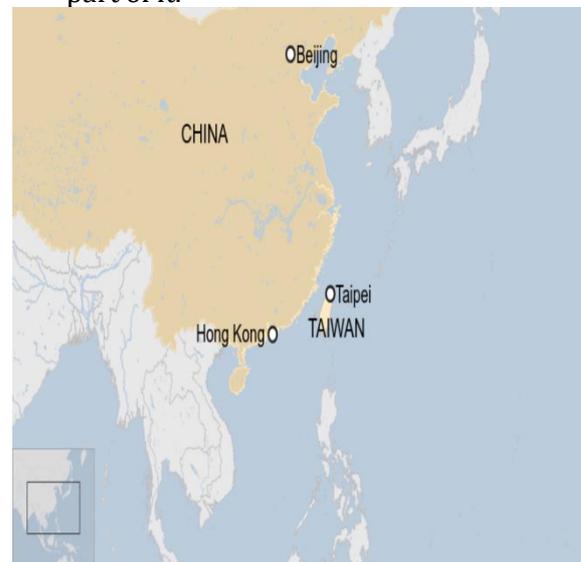
Why in News?

- Recently, elections were held for several member nations who will serve for the next three years (2021-23) in the UN Human Rights Council.
- Four countries — Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Nepal and China — have been elected for membership from the Asia-Pacific region.

2) 'One China' policy

China-Taiwan Relations

- Taiwan, officially known as the **Republic of China (ROC)**, is an island off the southern coast of China that has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949.
- China and Taiwan sharply disagree on the island's status. While Taiwan's government claims it is an independent country, the **People's Republic of China (PRC)** asserts that there is only "**one China**" and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of it.



Background

- The China-Taiwan Relations can be traced back to 1949 and the end of the Chinese civil war.
- The defeated Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang, retreated to Taiwan and made it their seat of government while the victorious Communists began ruling the mainland as the People's Republic of China.
- The island has since been run as a separate entity from mainland China, though Beijing never gave up its claim over Taiwan.

'One China' policy

- It is the diplomatic acknowledgement of China's position that there is **only one Chinese government**. It acknowledges Taiwan being part of China and the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China.

- Any country that wants diplomatic relations with mainland China **must break official ties with Taiwan**. This has resulted in Taiwan's diplomatic isolation from the international community.
- Taiwan now only has diplomatic relations with 15 countries, almost all small and developing nations like Nauru, Belize and Honduras.

Why in News?

- China has asked India to approach ties with Taiwan prudently and properly in line with the 'One-China principle' and said it would firmly oppose any official exchanges between New Delhi and Taipei.
- The statement came in response to reports that India and Taiwan were considering going forward with talks on a trade deal.
- India and Taiwan in 2018 already signed a bilateral investment agreement. India-Taiwan trade ties have expanded since and Taiwanese firms are prominent investors in India, although **India and Taiwan do not maintain formal diplomatic relations**.

2) International Labour Organisation

About ILO

- ILO was created in 1919, as part of the **Treaty of Versailles** that ended World War I.
- It became the **first specialized agency of the UN** in 1946.
- ILO is the **only tripartite U.N. agency** which brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- India is a **founder member** of the ILO.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

Governing body of ILO

- The governing body is the apex executive body of the ILO. It meets thrice a year, in March, June and November.
- It takes decisions on ILO policy, decides the agenda of the International Labour Conference, adopts the draft programme and budget of the organisation for

submission to the conference, and elects the Director-General.

- **Why in News?**
- India has assumed the chairmanship of the governing body of the International Labour Organisation after a gap of 35 years.
- Labour secretary Apurva Chandra has been elected as the chairperson of the governing body of the organisation for the period October 2020- June 2021.
- The Chairperson of the Governing Body of ILO is a position of international repute.

3) India and Nepal Border disputes

Background

- India and Nepal share a 1,800km (1,118-mile) open border.
- Nepal has long claimed the areas of **Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipulekh** under the **1816 Sugauli treaty** with the British East India Company, although these areas have remained under the control of Indian troops since India fought a war with China in 1962.
- Under the Treaty of Sugauli, **Kali river** was agreed as the demarcation line for the boundary between India and Nepal.
- However, what is meant by "Kali River" in the upper reaches is unclear, which created the scope for different interpretations by the two neighbours.



- The latest border dispute between the countries began over India's inauguration of a Himalayan link road cutting through the Lipulekh Himalayan pass, which will

serve as the shortest route between capital New Delhi and Kailash-Mansarovar, a revered Hindu pilgrimage site in the Tibetan plateau.

Nepal's new map

- In June 2020, Nepal's Parliament cleared a Constitution Amendment Bill that endorses the country's new map that includes the areas of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura as part of its territory.

- India, which controls the region has rejected the map, said it is not based on historical facts or evidence.

Why in News?

- Recently, the Nepal government said that it has not diluted its claim to the Kalapani region which has been at the centre of a territorial dispute.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Childhood stress and mental illness

What's in the news?

- A study using mice led by scientists from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, finds that **stimulating a particular pathway in the brain** in early life can **cause anxiety, depression and even schizophrenia-like symptoms later** in life.

Findings of this study

- Using **genetic engineering** the researchers modulated a specific pathway in the brains of mice which is known to **stimulate the excitatory neurons** in the forebrain region. The **neuron** is the **basic working unit of the brain**, a specialized cell designed to transmit information to other nerve cells, muscle, or gland cells.
- When they carried out prolonged stimulation in two-week old mice and observed them when they grew into adults, the researchers found that the adult mice exhibited signs of increased anxiety, depression-like behaviour and even symptoms of schizophrenia-like behaviour.
- Such behaviour was not observed in mice that had been subjected to the stimulation as adolescents or adults.
- The study hopes to find answer to the following question- "If we can mimic the effects of early stress using these chemogenetic strategies, can we also reverse the effects of early stress?"

Importance of this study

- In India, the **National Mental Health Survey 2015-16** reveals that **nearly 15% Indian adults need active intervention for one or more mental health issues and one in 20 Indians suffers from depression**. It is estimated that in 2012, India had over 258,000 suicides, with the age-group of 15-49 years being most affected.
- The Indian government's commitment is reflected in the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), which encompasses life skills training and counselling in educational institutions, workplace stress

management and suicide prevention services, among others.

- India's 1st National Mental Health Helpline '**Kiran**' was also unveiled recently.

2) The enigma of Covid 19

Why is Covid different from other diseases?

- The disease is a complex interplay of infection, immunity and reinfection.
- **Reinfections being reported** across the world and declining seroprevalence of antibodies in repeat sampling surveys done in both Mumbai and Delhi.
- The latter suggests a possible "**decay**" of **antibodies** with time.
- Nasal and throat swabs for SARS-CoV-2 can remain positive due to dead viral RNA for over 2 months, but such re-positivity does not imply reinfection. A true reinfection is one in which the viral genome in the second infection differs from that of the first.
- Proving this necessitates the whole genome sequencing of both viral strains, a research tool that is not accessible routinely to healthcare providers. Clues to a possible reinfection include more severe disease (both clinically and on laboratory investigations) and a lower cycling threshold value (which may reflect an increased quantum of virus) on the **RT-PCR test** done during the second episode.
- A negative swab between the two episodes helps further distinguish re-positives from reinfections. Instead of RT-PCR for viral RNA, which detects live and dead virus, subgenomic messenger RNA, a product of actively replicating virus, can be used to detect viable virus.

Types of Immunity

- **Two forms of immunity** defend the body from reinfection: **antibody-mediated (through immunoglobulins**, which recognise parts of the virus and neutralise it), and **cell-mediated** (through cells such as T-cells which can induce death of virus-infected cells).
- **Antibodies could either be binding antibodies** (which bind to the virus and

sensitise the immune system) or **neutralising antibodies** (which directly bind to the virus and interfere with its function). Unlike antibodies induced by SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV (the causative viruses of the 2003 and 2012 outbreaks, respectively) that lasted a minimum of 1-2 years, studies have demonstrated the **rapid waning of antibodies** after infection from SARS-CoV-2

The role of citizens here

- **An individual** who has recovered from an episode of COVID-19 needs to be cognisant of the fact that recovery does not ensure immunity, and keep up the precautions of masking, physical distancing and hand sanitising need to continue unabated.
- From a **healthcare provider's perspective**, we now know that the constellation of symptoms and signs that make us suspect the possibility of COVID-19 disease needs to be investigated, irrespective of whether the patient has already had the disease.
- From a **community perspective**, we need to rethink the constructs of immunity passports, herd immunity and vaccination strategies, taking into account the possibility that with the passage of time, immunity, whether induced by infection or vaccination, may wane, and reinfections/vaccine failures may become more common.

Why in News?

- Covid reinfections being reported across the world.

3) India and HIV

Why in News?

- There is a **reduction in new HIV infections** among **children** and in AIDS-related deaths in India

What the latest numbers say?

- 2019 HIV estimates by the **National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)**/Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the technical support of UNAIDS tell us that there has been a **66.1% reduction in new HIV infections** among children and a **65.3% reduction in AIDS-related deaths in India** over a nine-year period.

- The number of pregnant women living with HIV has reduced from 31,000 in 2010 to 20,000 in 2019.
- Overall, antenatal coverage has expanded, and HIV testing has increased over time and within target range. Treatment coverage has also expanded.
- 'Fast-Tracking of **EMTCT** (elimination of mother-to-child transmission) strategy-cum-action plan' was outlined by June 2019, in the run-up towards December 2020: the deadline to achieve EMTCT.
- From 2010 to 2019, India made important progress in reducing the HIV impact on children through prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.
- This was done through **education and communication programmes; increased access to HIV services with innovative delivery mechanisms for HIV testing (community-based testing, partner testing or index testing); counselling and care; and treatment and follow-ups.**
- India made **HIV testing for all pregnant women free** and HIV treatment is offered the same way nationwide without cost to pregnant mothers living with HIV through the national 'treat all' policy.

Way Forward

- There remains a need for increased treatment saturation coverage and for early HIV testing and treatment initiation to become the normal.

Additional Details

HIV

- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a **virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.**
- It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during **unprotected sex** (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through **sharing injection drug equipment.**
- If left untreated, **HIV can lead to the disease AIDS** (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
- However, by taking HIV medicine (called **antiretroviral therapy or ART**), people with HIV can live long and healthy lives

and prevent transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.

- In 2014, the Joint **United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)** and partners launched the **90-90-90 targets**; the aim was to diagnose 90% of all HIV-positive persons, provide antiretroviral therapy (ART) for 90% of those diagnosed, and achieve viral suppression for 90% of those treated by 2020.
- This is estimated to result in 73% of people with HIV achieving viral suppression, a crucial step in ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

4) Feluda Tests

What's in the news?

- The **Feluda test**, a **coronavirus detection test** developed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to be commercially soon.

Why are Feluda Tests better?

- The test, which **still requires a nasal swab** to be collected and sent to a lab, promises to be **quicker compared to testing methods currently employed in the country**.
- A **smaller, cheaper more portable machine called a thermocycler**, which costs around ₹25,000, is employed and once the viral RNA is extracted, it takes anywhere from **45 minutes to an hour** to confirm presence of the virus.
- **FELUDA**, that stands for FNCAS9 Editor-Limited Uniform Detection Assay, is also unlike antigen tests in that it **uses a CRISPR-cas9** based system and therefore more accurate in detecting the virus.
- **CRISPR-cas9 is a genome-editing tool** whose discovery won the Nobel Prize for chemistry this year.
- Compared to the RT-PCR test, it's **reportedly cheaper** — about ₹500 per test compared to ₹1,200-₹1,600 for RT-PCR.

5) Smart Fence

What's in the news?

- Hybrid model of 'smart' fence is being tested along the Line of Control (LoC).

About Hybrid Fencing

- The fence will be integrated with **LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging)** sensors,

infrared sensors and cameras among others.

- The existing fence is called the **Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS)**. The double row fence consisting of concertina has a high rate of degradation every year due to snow.

How is a complete Smart Fencing different?

- **Smart fencing** uses a number of devices for surveillance, communication and data storage.
- Sensors like **thermal imager, underground sensors, fiber optical sensors, radar and sonar** will be mounted on different platforms like aerostat, tower and poles as part of the smart fence.

Need for hybrid/smart fencing

- It will **enable surveillance** during **difficult weather** conditions and **reduce** the need for **physical patrolling** of the borders. It will rely on thermal imaging, infra-red and laser-based intruder alarms to stop infiltration.
- **A total of 2,026 km border is vulnerable**. Digital fencing will make it virtually impossible for terrorists to infiltrate.
- Can **counter smuggling and illegal immigration**.
- For these purposes Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) was put forward and the smart fencing was suggested by **Madhukar Gupta Committee**.

6) Cyberattack

What is a cyber attack?

- A cyber attack is an assault launched by **cybercriminals** using one or more computers against a single or multiple computers or networks. A cyber attack can **maliciously disable computers, steal data, or use a breached computer as a launch point** for other attacks.
- Ex: Data Theft At Zomato, **Wannacry** Ransomware, **PETYA** Ransomware etc.

Cybersecurity in India

- The **Internet Crime Report for 2019**, released by the USA's Federal Bureau of Investigation, has revealed that **India** stands **third** in the world among top 20

countries that are victims of internet crimes.

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), **cyber crimes in India almost doubled** in 2017 from the previous year. In 2016, there were 12,317 cases reported, which spiked to 21,796 cases in 2017. In 2018, the number further rose to 27,248 cases.
- The digital economy today comprises 14-15% of India's total economy, and is targeted to reach 20% by 2024.

Initiatives taken

- The **National Cyber Security Policy, 2013** was developed to build a secure and resilient cyberspace for India's citizens and businesses. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the policy aims to protect information and the information infrastructure in cyberspace, build capabilities to prevent and respond to cyber threats, reduce vulnerabilities and minimise damage from cyber incidents through a combination of institutional structures, people, processes, technology and cooperation.
- **The National Technical Research Organisation** is the main agency designed to protect national critical infrastructure and to handle all the cybersecurity incidents in critical sectors of the country.
- Additionally, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (**CERT-In**) is responsible for incident responses including analysis, forecasts and alerts on cybersecurity issues and breaches.

- The Ministry of Home Affairs is implementing the '**Cyber-Crime Prevention against Women & Children' Scheme** with the intent to prevent and reduce cyber crimes against women and children.
- **Cyber Surakshit Bharat** - Aiming at strengthening the cybersecurity ecosystem in India — in line with the government's vision for a 'Digital India', The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has launched Cyber Surakshit Bharat initiative. This program was in association with the National e-Governance Division (NeGD).

Way Forward

- Increase in **manpower** and invest in research and training
- Create an Indian specific system on the grounds of EU's General Data Protection Regulation (**GDPR**) or USA's Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data (**CLOUD**) Act.
- Indigenisation of hardware and software of cyber security tools.
- National Cyber Coordination Centre (**NCCC**), National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (**NCIIPC**) and the Computer Emergency Response Team (**CERT**) need to be strengthened.

Why in News?

- Dr. Reddy's Laboratories has temporarily shut down some of its production facilities in the wake of a cyber attack.

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DEFENCE

1) Nag Anti Tank Missile

About Nag Missile

- It is a **third-generation, fire-and-forget, anti-tank guided missile**. Nag can be launched from **land and air-based platforms**.
- Indigenously developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
- The missile has top attack capabilities which can defeat all Main Battle Tanks (MBT) equipped with composite and reactive armour. The helicopter-launched NAG (HELINA), can be fired from Dhruv advanced light helicopter (ALH) and HAL Rudra (ALH WSI) attack helicopter.
- It can be used in **all weather conditions** with day and night capabilities and with a **minimum range of 500m and maximum range of 4 km**.

Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme

- The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) is an Indian Ministry of Defence programme for

the research and **development of the comprehensive range of missiles**.

- The project started in 1982–83 under the **leadership of former President Dr. Abdul Kalam** who oversaw its ending in 2008 after these strategic missiles were successfully developed.
- The 5 missiles developed under this program are:
 - 1) **Prithvi**: Short range surface to surface ballistic missile.
 - 2) **Akash**: Medium range surface to air missile.
 - 3) **Nag**: 3rd generation anti-tank missile.
 - 4) **Trishul**: Short range low level surface to air missile.
 - 5) **Agni**: Ballistic missiles with different ranges- Agni (1,2,3,4,5)

Why in News?

- DRDO recently executed the final user trial of Nag anti-tank missile.

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ART & CULTURE

1) Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

About Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

- Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) was born in Delhi. He was a widely read person and studied books on **mathematics, medicine, Persian, Arabic, Urdu**, etc.
- Wrote '**Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind**' (Reasons for the Indian Revolt of 1857) which cited British ignorance and aggressive expansion policies as the main cause of the revolt.
- Stressed on the importance of **modern scientific education for Muslims**.
- **Advocated inter-faith** understanding. He wrote a book, '**Commentary on the Holy Bible**'.
- In 1869, he received the "**Order of the Star**" of India from the British government. He set up the **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875**. This later became the Aligarh Muslim University. He became the leading light of the wider **Aligarh Movement**.
- He founded the **Scientific Society of Aligarh** modelling it on the Royal Society of England.
- He was nominated to the Viceroy's Legislative Council in 1878. He supported Dadabhai Naoroji and Surendranath Banerjee in obtaining representation for Indians in the government.
- He advocated Muslims to have loyalty to the British. He is regarded as one of the founders of the **Two-Nation Theory**.

Why in News?

- Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik recently praised Sir Syed's vision of India which includes all its inhabitants without distinctions on the basis of religion, caste or race.

2) Sabarimala pilgrimage

About Sabarimala

- Located in the forests of the **Western Ghats** in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district.
- It is said that its deity, Lord Ayyappa, is in the form of a "**Naisthik Brahmachari**" (the one who observes staunch celibacy).

- The Sabarimala temple prohibits women aged between 10 and 50 years from entering the shrine.
- In 2018, the **Supreme court** ruled that the ban is ultra-vires the Constitution, Section 3 of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965 as well as Section 4 of the 1965 Act which says that the regulations/rules made under this act shall not discriminate, in any manner whatsoever, against any Hindu on the ground that he/she belongs to a particular section or class.
- The Supreme Court condemned the prohibition as "**hegemonic patriarchy**" as it takes away women's right against discrimination guaranteed under **Article 15(1)** of the Constitution and also curtails the religious freedom assured by **Article 25(1)**.

Why in News?

- Kerala High Court has recently given several directions to assure safety of pilgrims visiting Sabarimala.

3) Life in Miniature project

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Culture has launched the "Life in Miniature" project recently.
- The project is a collaboration between the **National Museum, Delhi, and Google Arts & Culture**.

About the project

- "Life in Miniature" project uses technologies such as machine learning, augmented reality and digitisation with high-definition robotic cameras, to showcase miniature paintings from the National Museum's collections.
- These miniature paintings can now be seen through the **Google Arts & Culture app**.
- On the Google Arts & Culture app, online viewers can experience the first augmented reality-powered art gallery designed with traditional Indian architecture, and explore a life-size virtual space where one can walk up to a selection of miniature paintings.

- Among the collections included are Ramayana, Royal Saga and Pahari-style paintings.

Additional Details

Miniature Paintings

- **Miniature paintings** originated in India around **750 A.D when the Palas** ruled over the eastern part of India. Since religious teachings of the **Buddha**, accompanied by his images, were written on palm leaves, these paintings became popular.
- As these paintings were done on palm leaves, they had to be miniature in nature because of space constraint. Around 960 A.D, similar paintings were introduced in the western parts of India by the rulers of the **Chalukya** Dynasty.
- During this period, miniature paintings often portrayed religious themes. With the rise of the **Mughal** Empire, miniature paintings started growing on a level unknown before. The tradition of

miniature paintings was further taken forward by the artists of various **Rajasthani** schools of painting, including the Kishangarh, Bundi Jaipur, Mewar and Marwar.

Pahari Painting

- **Pahari** painting is a term used for a form of Indian painting, done mostly in miniature forms, originating from **Himalayan hill kingdoms of North India**. Pahari paintings of India can be categorized into two groups based on their geographical variety.
 - a. **Basohli and Kulu** Style is influenced by Chaurpanchasika style
 - b. **Guler and Kangra** Style based on calm colors and modification

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile

About :

- BrahMos is a cruise missile, meaning it can be guided towards a predetermined 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.

Why in News?

- BrahMos, the supersonic cruise missile was successfully test fired from Indian Navy's indigenously-built stealth destroyer INS Chennai, hitting a target in the Arabian Sea.
- The missile hit the target successfully with pin-point accuracy after performing high-level and extremely complex manoeuvres.

2) Exercise SLINEX-20

About:

- SLINEX series of exercises exemplifies the deep engagement between **India and Sri Lanka** which has strengthened mutual cooperation in the maritime domain.
- SLINEX-20 aims to **enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding** and exchange best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations between both navies.
- In addition, the exercise will also showcase capabilities of our indigenously constructed naval ships and aircraft.

- Surface and anti-air exercises including weapon firing, seamanship evolutions, manoeuvres and cross deck flying operations are planned during the exercise, which will further enhance the high degree of inter-operability already established between the two friendly navies.
- Interaction between the SLN and IN has also grown significantly in recent years, in consonance with **India's policy of 'Neighbourhood First' and the vision of 'Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR)'**.

About the SAGAR Programme (Security and Growth for All in the Region):

- SAGAR is a term coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 during his Mauritius visit with a focus on the blue economy.
- It is a maritime initiative which gives priority to the Indian Ocean region (IOR) for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of India in the Indian Ocean region.
- It is in line with the principles of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- Through SAGAR, India seeks to deepen economic and security cooperation with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities.



Why in News?

- The Eighth Edition of annual Indian Navy (IN) – Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) bilateral

maritime exercise SLINEX-20 is scheduled off Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

3) Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise

About:

- Malabar Exercise is an **annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA** which is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- It began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the USA in 1992 and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Defence recently announced that **Australia** will join the Malabar 2020 naval exercise.

Significance of Malabar 2020

- This year, the exercise had been planned on a **'non-contact - at sea' format**.
- As India seeks to increase cooperation with other countries in the maritime security domain and in the light of increased defence cooperation with Australia, Malabar 2020 will see the **participation of the Australian Navy**.
- The decision to add Australia will make the upcoming iteration of Malabar the first exercise to include all **four Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad**.
- It will bolster the ability of India, Australia, Japan and the United States to work together to uphold peace and stability across our region.
- It showcases the "deep trust" between four major Indo-Pacific democracies and their "shared will" to work together on common security interests.

4) Kisan Credit Card

About the Scheme

- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was launched in 1998 with the aim of providing **short-term formal credit to farmers**.
- The beneficiaries under the scheme will be issued with a **Smart card/ Debit card**.
- Under the KCC Scheme, a **flexible limit of Rs.10,000 to Rs.50,000** is being provided to marginal farmers (as Flexi

KCC) based on the land holding and crops grown.

Objective / Purpose

- The Kisan Credit Card scheme aims at **providing adequate and timely credit support from the banking system under a single window** with flexible and simplified procedure to the farmers for their cultivation and other needs as indicated below:
 - To meet the short term credit requirements for cultivation of crops;
 - Post-harvest expenses;
 - Produce marketing loan;
 - Consumption requirements of farmer household;
 - Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture;
 - Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities.

Eligibility:

- Farmers - individual/joint borrowers who are owner cultivators;
- Tenant farmers, oral lessees & sharecroppers;**
- Self Help Groups (SHGs) or Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) of farmers including tenant farmers, sharecroppers etc.
- KCC has also been extended to farmers who are involved in **activities related to animal husbandry and fisheries**.

Interest Subvention Scheme

- With a view to ensuring availability of agriculture credit including loans taken against Kisan Credit Card (KCC) at a reasonable cost/at a reduced rate of 7% per annum to farmers, the Government of India, is implementing an **interest subvention scheme of 2% for short term crop loans up to Rs. 3 lakh**.
- Currently, besides 2% interest subvention, the farmers, on prompt repayment of crop loans on or before the due date, are also provided 3% additional interest subvention.
- Thus, in case of **prompt payee farmers the short term crop loans are provided at an effective interest rate of 4% per annum**.
- The benefit of interest subvention is extended for a period of up to six months (post-harvest) to small and marginal farmers having KCC on loan against

negotiable warehouse receipts with the purpose of preventing distress sale of produce.

Why in News?

- As part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Package, the Government has announced to cover 2.5 crore farmers under the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme with a credit boost of Rs. 2 lakh crore through a special saturation drive.
- As a result of concerted and sustained efforts by the banks and other stakeholders a major milestone target of covering more than 1.5 crore farmers under KCC, with sanctioned credit limit of Rs.1.35 lakh crore has been achieved.

5) Sustainable Processing of Municipal Solid Waste

What is the need?

- With an ever increasing population and rapid pace of urbanization, the country is facing a huge challenge of waste management.
- The volume of waste is projected to rise from the present 62 million tonnes to about 150 million tonnes by 2030.
- Indiscriminate dumping of garbage at the current rate without appropriate scientific treatment, would impose a huge requirement of landfill area per year.
- This necessitates the importance of scientific solid waste management in today's context.

Different methods/technologies used for Waste Management

- **Plasma arc gasification process:**
- It is an option for eco-friendly solid waste management in which large volume **reduction of waste up to 95%** is possible.
- The plasma gasification process uses electricity to generate a high temperature plasma arc (above 3000°C) inside the plasma reactor which converts the waste into syngas.
- The produced syngas when passed through a series of gas purification systems can be used in gas engines for generation of electricity.

- *Syngas (Synthesis Gas) is currently made from a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide, and is used to produce a range of commodities, such as fuels, pharmaceuticals, plastics and fertilisers.*
- The residual ash can be mixed with cement for preparation of recycled bricks for usage in construction. Thus, it helps in the creation of 'Wealth from Waste'.

Biomass Waste Disposal

- Biomass waste such as dry leaves, dead branches, dry grass etc. are disposed of by first shredding it to suitable size followed by mixing with the slurry of the biogas digester.
- This mixture is feedstock for briquette, which is utilized as fuel for cooking.
- These briquettes are also being utilized in gasifier for production of syngas which can be utilized in gas engine for generation of electricity.
- The ash produced from burning briquettes is mixed with cement and water in an appropriate proportion for production of bricks which is used for construction work.

Polymer Waste Disposal

- The polymer waste consisting of plastics, sanitary waste etc. is being disposed of through two main processes i.e. **pyrolysis** and **plasma gasification**.
- In the pyrolysis process, the polymer waste is heated to a temperature of 400 – 600°C in an anaerobic environment in presence of suitable catalyst.

Sanitary Waste Disposal

- The sanitary items including masks, sanitary napkins, diapers etc. are disposed-off utilizing high temperature plasma.

6) Snow leopard habitat conservation

About:

- Snow leopards are highly adapted to the cold high mountains. Their thick fur patterned with dark rosettes and spots (a pattern that is unique to each individual snow leopard) is the perfect camouflage for their rocky habitat, allowing them to stalk their prey.
- The snow leopard is found in 12 countries — **India, Nepal, Bhutan, China,**

Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

- The snow leopard is found along the upper reaches of the Himalayan range and, in India, it is found in Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- IUCN status is **vulnerable**.

Conservation efforts of Snow leopard

- The Government of India has identified the snow leopard as a **flagship species** for the high-altitude Himalayas.
- **Project Snow Leopard (PSL):** It was launched in 2009. It aims to protect the snow leopard and its habitat in the major Himalayan rivers that support the teeming millions downstream. It also ensures that the ecological balance is maintained in these fragile ecosystems.
- **First National Protocol** was also launched last year on Snow Leopard Population Assessment which has been very useful for monitoring populations. The project also encourages the States and UTs to adopt innovative strategies to resolve issues related to multi-stakeholder landscape management, human-wildlife conflicts, wildlife crime and trade in wildlife parts and products, capacity building, climate-smart energy solutions etc.
- India is also a party to the **Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP)** Programme since 2013. The government also hosted the 4th Steering Committee of the GSLEP program in October 2019 in New Delhi. This meeting resulted in the **“New Delhi Statement”** of strengthening the resolve of the snow leopard range countries towards conservation of the mountain ecosystems of Central and South Asia.

Why in News?

- The Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change has said that the Government of India has been conserving the snow leopard and its habitat through the Project Snow Leopard (PSL).

7) CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System)

About Centralized Public Grievance Redress And Monitoring System

- It is a government of India portal aimed at providing the citizens with a platform for redress of their grievances, developed by **National Informatics Centre (Ministry of Electronics & IT [MeitY]), in association with Directorate of Public Grievances (DPG) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).**
- It has been developed with an objective of speedy redress and effective monitoring of grievances by Ministries/Departments/Organizations of Government of India.
- The CPGRAMS provides the facility to lodge a grievance online from any geographical location.
- It enables the citizen to track online the grievance being followed up with Departments concerned and also enables DARPG to monitor the grievance.

Why in News?

- The Jammu & Kashmir- Integrated Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (JK-IGRAMS) has been integrated with the offices of district level in the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir and also with the central CPGRAMS portal.
- With this, Jammu and Kashmir has become the first union territory to integrate district portal with state and thereof with the national portal and this mechanism can be emulated in other states and union territories.

8) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana

About the scheme

- The vision of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) is to ensure access to some means of protective irrigation to all agricultural farms in the country, to produce **‘per drop more crop’**, thus bringing much desired rural prosperity.
- PMKSY has been conceived amalgamating ongoing schemes viz. Accelerated

Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR,RD&GR), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) of Department of Land Resources (DoLR) and the On Farm Water Management (OFWM) of Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC).

- The scheme is implemented by the **Ministries of Agriculture, Jal Shakti and Rural Development.**
- The Ministry of Rural Development is to mainly undertake rain water conservation, construction of farm ponds, water harvesting structures, small check dams and contour bunding etc.
- PMKSY will be to adopt a **'decentralized State level planning and projectized**

execution' structure that will allow States to draw up their own irrigation development plans based on District Irrigation Plan (DIP) and State Irrigation Plan (SIP).

- It will be operative as a convergence platform for all water sector activities including drinking water & sanitation, MGNREGA, application of science & technology etc. through comprehensive plan.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti launched a Mobile application for **Geo tagging** of the components of projects under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Anaemia Mukht Bharat

About the programme

- The Anemia Mukht Bharat is an initiative of the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** and **UNICEF** to **reduce the prevalence of Anemia all over India**.
- It follows a **6X6X6 strategy** (six target beneficiary groups, through six interventions and six institutional mechanisms) to reduce prevalence of anemia by 3 percentage points per year.



Approximately 450 million beneficiaries – nearly 50% of the country's population – will be reached

- The **six population groups** under AMB strategy are:
 - 1) Children (6-59 months)
 - 2) Children (5-9 years)
 - 3) Adolescents girls and boys (10-19 years)
 - 4) Pregnant women
 - 5) Lactating women
 - 6) Women of Reproductive Age (WRA) group (15-49 years)
- The **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare** has launched Ayushman Sahakar to **assist cooperatives play an important role in creation of healthcare infrastructure** in the country.
- The scheme was formulated by the **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)**.

Why in News?

- In the recently released Anemia Mukht Bharat (AMB) Index by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, **Haryana** secured the top position among 29 states in the country with an AMB Index of 46.7.

2) Ayushman Sahakar

What's in the news?

About the scheme

- There are about 52 hospitals across the country run by cooperatives. Under the scheme, NCDC would extend **term loans to prospective cooperatives to the tune of Rs.10,000 Crore** in the coming years.
- The NCDC fund would give a boost to provision of healthcare services by cooperatives.

- Ayushman Sahakar scheme fund would also assist cooperative hospitals to take up **medical/Ayush education**.
- By virtue of their strong presence in rural areas, cooperatives utilizing the scheme would bring revolution in comprehensive health care services.
- Any Cooperative Society with suitable provision in its byelaws to undertake healthcare related activities would be able to access the NCDC fund.
- The scheme provides **interest subvention of one percent to women majority cooperatives**.

About NCDC

- National Cooperative Development Corporation is an autonomous development finance institution under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.
- NCDC was set up under an Act of Parliament in 1963 for promotion and development of cooperatives.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Still awaiting police reforms

Context

- Police brutality in recent months occurs very frequently.
- The thrashing of a **Dalit Ahirwar couple** by the police in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh, the brutal torture of **J. Benicks and his father P. Jayaraj** in Sattankulam town in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu resulting in their death and several other incidents happened recently show that we need immediate remedial measures.

Measures to be taken

- The **recommendations of various commissions** and committees that demands for police reforms should be **implemented**.
- The first serious attempt to overhaul the policing machinery was made when the **National Police Commission (NPC)** was set up in 1977. The NPC submitted eight reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs between 1979 and 1981. Most of the reports were kept in cold storage until **Prakash Singh**, a retired IPS officer, filed a PIL in the apex court in 1996 demanding the implementation of the NPC's recommendations.
- In **2006, the Supreme Court issued a slew of directives** on police reform but the States and the Centre did not pay any serious attention to them.

- In the **Prakash Singh Case of 2006**, the Supreme Court gave **7 directives** with a view to bring in **police reforms**.
- In passing these directives the Court put on record the deep rooted problems of politicization, lack of accountability mechanisms and systemic weaknesses that have resulted in poor all round performance and fomented present public dissatisfaction with policing. The directives are:-
- Constitute a **State Security Commission (SSC)** to:
 - Ensure that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the police,

- Lay down broad policy guideline and
- Evaluate the performance of the state police.
- Ensure that the **DGP is appointed through a merit based** transparent process and secure a minimum tenure of **two years**.
- Ensure that other police officers on operational duties (including Superintendents of Police in-charge of a district and Station House Officers in-charge of a police station) are also provided a minimum tenure of two years.
- Separate the investigation and law & order functions of the police.
- Set up a **Police Establishment Board (PEB)** to decide transfers, postings, promotions and other service related matters of police officers of and below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police and make recommendations on postings and transfers above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.
- Set up a **Police Complaints Authority (PCA)** at state level to inquire into public complaints against police officers of and above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police in cases of serious misconduct, including custodial death, grievous hurt, or rape in police custody and at district levels to inquire into public complaints against the police personnel below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police in cases of serious misconduct.
- Set up a **National Security Commission (NSC)** at the union level to prepare a panel for selection and placement of Chiefs of the Central Police Organisations (CPO) with a minimum tenure of two years.

What is the issue?

- Of the States that constituted a State Security Commission, only Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have made SSC recommendations binding on the State government, according to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.
- Only six States provided a minimum tenure of two years to the Director General of Police (DGP).

- Many States have not implemented a single directive of the Supreme Court.

Way forward

- Judiciary should step in and enforce the directions** it had passed. The Court has to come down heavily on the States and the Centre to ensure that its directives are not dismissed lightly.

2) India's low rank on nutritional index

About global hunger index

- The Global Hunger Index is an **annual** score ranking countries of the world on **hunger levels**.
- It is prepared by **NGO Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide**.
- It is based on 4 indicators:
 - Undernourishment**- Share of the population with insufficient caloric intake.
 - Child wasting** - The share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition
 - Child stunting** - children under the age of five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition
 - Child mortality** - the mortality rate of children under the age of five.
- Based on the values of the four indicators, the GHI determines hunger on a **100-**

point scale where 0 is the best possible score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst.

Highlights of Global Hunger Index 2020

- India has been ranked at **94 among 107 countries** in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020. India secured 102nd rank out of 117 countries in the 2019 index.
- The country's score of **27.2** in the latest index is the worst among BRICS countries, and **inferior to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal**.
- India has the **highest prevalence of wasted children** under five years in the world, which reflects acute undernutrition.
- Child stunting** has actually **improved** significantly, from 54% in 2000 to less than 35% now.
- Child wasting**, on the other hand, has **not improved** in the last two decades, and is rather worse than it was decades ago.
- India has **improved in both child mortality rates and undernourishment**, with about 14% of the total population which gets an insufficient caloric intake.
- In the region of south, east and south-eastern Asia, the only countries which fare worse than India are **Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and North Korea**.

Where India stands

The Global Hunger Index score is computed using four indicators — undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting and child mortality. A country's GHI score is classified by severity — low (green), moderate (yellow) and serious (orange)



RANK	COUNTRY	2020 SCORE
1-17*	China	<5
64	Sri Lanka	16.3
73	Nepal	19.5
75	Bangladesh	20.4
78	Myanmar	20.9
88	Pakistan	24.6
94	India	27.2
99	Afghanistan	30.3

*17 countries have scores of less than 5 and are collectively ranked 1-17

Current scenario

- According to the **International Food Policy Research Institute** three out of four rural Indians cannot afford a balanced, nutritious diet.

- Globally, nearly **690 million people are undernourished** which warns that the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected the progress made on reducing hunger and poverty.

- The **world is not on track** to achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal - known as Zero Hunger for short - by 2030.

Way forward

- National policy should call for a **radical transformation** in the delivery of adequate nutrition especially to women and children, and pay adequate attention to achieving **diet diversity through the PDS**.
- **Strengthening the PDS**, with a focus on women's health, would lead to healthier pregnancies, and stronger **supplemental nutrition under the ICDS scheme** would give children a better chance at all-round development.
- Necessary measures to be taken to bring the **true benefits of the National Food Security Act** to the unreached, not merely as hunger mitigation through cereals, but as nourishment through a **diverse diet** that includes fat, protein and micronutrients.
- The right to food would be meaningless if it leaves a large section of Indians hungry, stunted and wasted.

3) Offset dilution in defence, a flawed policy turn

Context

- Recently, the government diluted the "offset" policy in defence procurement, reportedly in response to a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India's report.
- Many experts contend that the move is a setback for augmenting domestic capabilities or for realising the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

What is an offset policy?

- The offset is an obligation by an international player to **boost India's domestic defence industry** if India is buying defence equipment from it.
- Since defence contracts are costly, the government wants part of that money either to benefit the Indian industry, or to allow the country to gain in terms of technology.

Objectives of offset

- The key objective of the Defence Offset Policy is to **leverage capital acquisitions to develop Indian defence industry** by
 - (i) fostering development of internationally competitive enterprises,
 - (ii) augmenting capacity for Research, Design and Development related to defence products and services and
 - (iii) encouraging development of synergistic sectors like civil aerospace, and internal security.

Need for offset policy

- Developing country buyers often **lack an industrial base** and research and development (R&D) facilities.
- Apart from securing the lowest prices, large buyers also try to acquire the technology to **upgrade domestic production** and **build R&D capabilities** through the offset policy.

Changes over time

- Initiated in 2005, the offset clause has a requirement of
 - a. **sourcing 30%** of the value of the contract domestically.
 - b. indigenisation of production in a **strict time frame**, and
 - c. training Indian professionals in high-tech skills, for **promoting domestic R&D**.
- However, the policy has been tweaked many times since.

Issues with the current policy

- According to the recent CAG report, between 2007 and 2018, the government reportedly signed **46 offset contracts worth ₹66,427 crore** of investments. However, the realised investments were merely **8%**, or worth ₹5,457 crore.
- Also **technology transfer** agreements in the offsets were not implemented, failing to accomplish the stated policy objective.
- Following CAG's report, the government has **diluted this policy** further. Henceforth, the offset clause will **not be applicable to bilateral deals and deals with a single seller**.
 - Most defence deals being bilateral or a single supplier deal,
 - (i) The dilution means practically giving up the offset clause.
 - (ii) This impacts India's prospects for boosting defence production and technological self-reliance.

- Due to the CAG's latest report, the government has virtually **scrapped the defence offset policy**. Thus, India has voluntarily **given up a powerful instrument of bargaining** to acquire scarce advanced technology.

Offset short lived in aerospace

- According to the offset policy in 2005 for **contracts valued at ₹300 crore** or more, 30% of it will result in offsets, implemented through Indian offset partners.
- By 2014, **exports increased** to \$6.7 billion from \$62.5 million in 2005, according to the United Nations Comtrade Database.
- The 2005 policy helped promote a **vibrant aerospace cluster**, mostly **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** around Bengaluru.
- The offset clause enabled India to join the **league of the world's top 10 aerospace exporters**; the only country without a major domestic aerospace firm.
- The success was short-lived, however.
- Exports decreased rapidly after the offset clause was relaxed, primarily when the threshold for the policy was raised from the hitherto ₹300 crore to ₹2000 crore, in 2016.
- The offset exports fell to \$1.5 billion by 2019.

Aiding self-reliance

- India needs to **re-conceive or re-imagine the offset clause in defence contracts** with stricter enforcement of the deals, in national interest, and in order to aim for '**Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan**', or a self-reliant India.
- There are successful examples to draw lessons from, as the aerospace industry episode demonstrates.

4) Innovation ecosystem in India

- Innovation in India is being structured around the **triad of collaboration, facilitation and responsible regulation**. It is advanced by cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Innovation potential of India

- India is a fertile ground to be a **technology-led innovation garage**.

- It is the **fastest growing country in terms of Internet usage**, with over 700 million users and the number projected to rise to 974 million by 2025.
- The **JAM trinity** (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) trinity has 404 million Jan Dhan bank accounts with 1.2 billion Aadhaar and 1.2 billion mobile subscribers.
- There is a potential to add over \$957 billion to India's GDP by 2035 with **artificial intelligence (AI)**, according to a recent report by Accenture.

Recent events

VAIBHAV summit

- Vaishvik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit is a collaborative initiative by S&T and Academic Organisations of India to enable deliberations on thought process, practices and R&D culture with a problem solving approach for well defined objectives.
- The VAIBHAV initiative aims to bring out the comprehensive roadmap **to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researchers** for solving emerging challenges.
- More than 3,000 overseas Indian-origin academicians and scientists from 55 countries, and about 10,000 Indians participated to ideate on innovative solutions to our challenges.
- The goal is to create an **ecosystem of Knowledge and Innovation** in the country through global outreach.

RAISE summit

- RAISE 2020 is **India's first Artificial Intelligence summit** organized by the Government in partnership with Industry & Academia.
- The RAISE 2020 summit (**Responsible AI for Social Empowerment**) has brought issues around artificial intelligence (AI) to the centre of policy discussions.
- The summit is a global meeting of minds to exchange ideas to use AI for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation in key areas like Healthcare, Agriculture, Education and Smart Mobility amongst other sectors.
- It is being organised by the **Ministry of Electronics & IT**.

Government initiatives to encourage innovation

- The government has been building a comprehensive framework by providing **capital in terms of resources** and **psychological security** for researchers. It is incentivising research and development with several schemes such as
 - 1) Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (**INSPIRE**) scholarships
 - 2) The Ramanujan Fellowship
 - 3) The Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (**KIRAN**) scheme
 - 4) Smart India Hackathons (**SIH**)
 - 5) Atal Innovation Mission (**AIM**)
 - 6) The Biotechnology Ignition Grant (**BIG**) scheme
 - 7) Setting up of the Future Skills **PRIME** (Programme for Reskilling/Upskilling of IT Manpower for Employability) capacity building platform and
 - 8) Also the triad of Scheme for Transformational and Advanced Research in Sciences (**STARS**), Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (**SPARC**) and Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (**IMPRESS**).
 - 9) National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems
 - The government has been actively facilitating collaborative and light touch regulatory practices to promote innovation and incentivise risk-taking.

A better life

- Innovation has the potential to build a future where
- **AI** will transform education and health care, machine learning and
- **Blockchain** will make commerce robust and resilient,
- **Clean energy** will drive our economy,
- **Gene-editing** would help us bring back extinct species and reinvigorate depleted ecosystems,
- **Quantum computing** will raise our processing capability to resolve challenges which seem insurmountable and augmented, and
- **Virtual reality** will optimistically change the way we interact with the physical world.

5) At 75, UN needs a rebirth

Context:

- October 24,2020 marks the **diamond jubilee of the United Nations**.

Objective of UN

- UN represents hopes of a **peaceful and just world order** through multilateral cooperation, abidance by international law, and uplift of the downtrodden.

Concerns

- The UNSC's permanent, veto-carrying members, chosen by virtue of being "winners" of World War II -the U.S., the U.K., France, Russia and later China — can **hardly claim adequate representation** of the world's leadership today.
- The UNSC does not include a permanent member from the African, Australian and South American continents, and the pillars of the multilateral order, such as the G-4 group of Brazil, India, Germany and Japan, have been **ignored for long**.
- The institution has been designed to privilege the most powerful states of the post-World War II dispensation.
- The undemocratic instruments of veto power and permanent seats in the Security Council (UNSC) for the P5 nations give them **extraordinary power over international politics**.

Consequences

- UN was pushed to the verge of irrelevance by the Cold War because the two powers US and Soviet Union often vetoes each other's moves, which left the UN **little room to implement noble visions** of peace, development and human rights
- **Competitive vetoing** by P-5 countries has prevented the UNSC from fulfilling its collective security mandate.

Current global scenario

- The phrase '**new Cold War**' is in vogue to depict the clash between China and the U.S. Tensions involving other players like Russia, Turkey, Iran and Israel in West Asia, as well as between China and its neighbours in Asia, are at an all-time high.
- UN Secretary-General has labelled the present peaking of geopolitical tensions as a "**great fracture**" as the member countries fail to cooperate against the immediate global threat of the pandemic.

Obstacles to reforms

- **Frequent divisions within the UNSC P-5** end up blocking key decisions and **deep polarisation within the UN's membership** remains as an obstacle to major reforms proposed in the UN.
- **Proposed reforms**
- It includes **expanding the permanent membership of the UNSC** reflecting the changed global scenario.
- There are also proposals to **do away with the veto powers** of the permanent members.
- **Redistributing the Security Council-General Assembly power balance.**

Way forward:

- If a **simple majority voting** method could replace the P-5 consensus method,

the obstacles to UNSC reforms would reduce.

- **Upgrading the United Nations** with a commitment to instil new life in the discussions on the reform of the Security Council can only be realised if the UNSC's permanent members **recognise the deep peril the UN faces** and support the reform process, an act that will require looking beyond their own interests for the greater good of the world and its peace-building architecture.
- **Restoring balance between 'power' and 'principle'** can ensure a renaissance of the UN.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Why Delhi air pollution rises in Oct

Why in the news?

- Every year in October the weather of Delhi starts to deteriorate. This starts a blame game between the centre and state government of Delhi.
- Let us analyse what conditions make Delhi vulnerable to pollution.

What are the factors?

- Air pollution of the delhi is a complex phenomenon which is determined by 3 major factors:

- (i) The weather
- (ii) Inputs of pollutants
- (iii) Local conditions

What happens in October?

- In October North India faces the withdrawal of the monsoons.
- Once monsoon withdraws, the predominant direction of winds changes to **north westerly** which used to be easterly during the monsoon.
- Any kind of storm or cyclone in the near northwest region of pakistan or middle east brings changes in the Delhi weather. For example in 2017, a storm that originated in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait led to a drastic dip in Delhi's air quality in a couple of days.
- Secondly, in October the temperature starts to dip. When the temperatures drop the **inversion height** — **which is the layer beyond which pollutants cannot disperse into the upper layer of the atmosphere** — is **lowered**. The concentration of pollutants in the air increases when this happens.
- In the winters even wind speed decreases compared to in summers. The **low wind speeds minimise the dispersion of the pollutants**.
- Hence pollutants remain in the air for a longer time. The concentration of pollutants increases if there are farm fires and dust storms.

What is the role of stubble burning or farm fires?

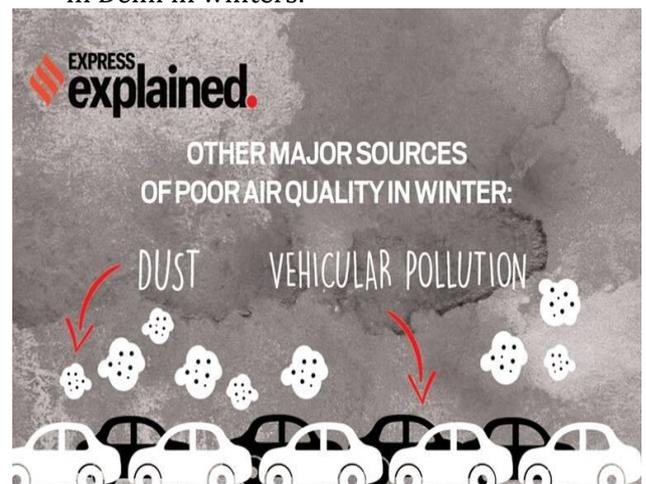
- In a study conducted by IIT Kharagpur it is found that stubble burning/farm fires

contribute up to 17-26% of all the particulate matter in Delhi winters.

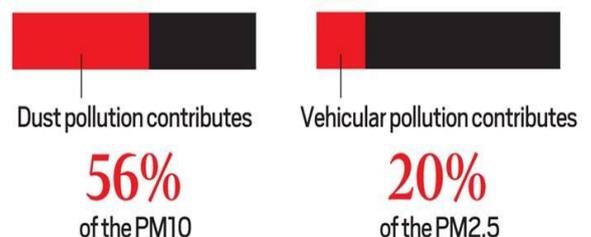
- Stubble burning has been the cheapest and quickest way to handle the straw left over after the harvest.
- Since 2009, the stubble burning has increased because of the changes in the law made by the Punjab and Haryana government which asks the farmers to sow early. This law was modified to conserve the groundwater.
- The paddy straw and stalks have high silica content and are not used to feed livestock. The easiest, but the least productive, way to get rid of it is to set it on fire.

What are other sources of the pollution?

- **Dust and vehicular pollution** are the two biggest causes of dipping air quality in Delhi in winters.



Cold, dry weather means dust is prevalent in the entire region



Steps taken so far

- The introduction of **BS VI (cleaner) fuel**,
- Push for electric vehicles,
- **Odd-Even vehicle movement** as an emergency measure,

- Construction of the Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways.
- **Happy seeder machine** which helps mulch the residue.

2) What is asteroid Bennu, and why is NASA studying it?

What is an asteroid?

- Asteroids are small, rocky objects that orbit the Sun. Although asteroids orbit the Sun like planets, they are much smaller than planets. They are also called minor planets.

There are 3 types of Asteroids:

- First are the kind which are found in the main asteroid belt between **Mars and Jupiter**, which is estimated to contain somewhere between 1.1-1.9 million asteroids.
- Second are called the **trojans**, which are asteroids that **share an orbit with a larger planet**. NASA reports the presence of Jupiter, Neptune and Mars trojans. In 2011, they reported an Earth trojan as well.
- Third are **Near-Earth Asteroids (NEA)**, which **have orbits that pass close by the Earth**. Those that cross the Earth's orbit are called Earth-crossers. **More than 10,000 such asteroids are known, out of which over 1,400 are classified as potentially hazardous asteroids (PHAs).**

About Bennu Asteroid



- It was discovered in 1999 by NASA and has been named after an Egyptian deity.
- It is about 200 million miles away from the Earth.

- This asteroid is a **B-type asteroid**, implying that it contains **significant amounts of carbon** and various other minerals. It reflects only 4% of light which falls on it.

About Osiris-Rex



- This is NASA's first mission to extract material from the Bennu asteroid.
- The mission is essentially a **seven-year-long voyage** and will conclude when at least 60 grams of samples are delivered back to the Earth.
- The spacecraft contains five instruments meant to explore Bennu including cameras, a spectrometer and a laser altimeter.
- The mission was launched in 2016, it reached its target in 2018 and since then, the spacecraft has been trying to match the velocity of the asteroid using small rocket thrusters to get itself attached to the asteroid.
- It also analysed the places where it can take out the samples.
- On October 20th 2020, the spacecraft made contact with the Bennu asteroid. It used Touch-And-Go Sample Acquisition Mechanism (TAGSAM) to tag with the asteroid.
- The spacecraft will detach with the asteroid in 2021 and will return back to the earth in 2023.

Why do scientists want to study the Bennu asteroid?

- The study will give information about the formation and history of planets and the sun since asteroids were formed at the same time.
- Bennu asteroid hasn't undergone drastic changes since its formation over billions of years ago and therefore it contains

chemicals and rocks dating back to the birth of the solar system.

- Tracking these asteroids may also be useful as it can be hazardous in the future. There is a slight possibility that Bennu, which is classified as a Near Earth Object (NEO), might **strike the Earth in the next century**, between the years 2175 and 2199

3) Why the 200-year Ramnagar ki Ramlila has an important place in India's art history

Why in the news?

- Ramanagar's Ramlila has come to stall in the COVID 19 pandemic.

What is Ramlila of Ramnagar?

- Ramlila, literally "**Rama's play**", is a performance of the Ramayana epic in a series of scenes that include song, narration, recital and dialogue.
- It is performed across northern India during the festival of Dussehra, held each year according to the ritual calendar in autumn. The most representative Ramlilas are those of Ayodhya, Ramnagar and Benares, Vrindavan, Almora, Sattna and Madhubani.

- Ramnagar, a boat ride from the ghats of Varanasi. Its Ramlila is organised by the royal family and is **the grandest in the country** and practically unchanged from the time the first performance was held in 1830.
- It is the largest moving theatre performance in India, with a **UNESCO Intangible Heritage tag given in 2004**, it attracts lakhs of audiences from villages as well as scholars and stage professionals from across the country.
- It is played for 31 days and is based on Tulasidas' **Ramcharitmanas**.
- The Ramlila is performed by **men only**, with the "pure" young boys playing the "swaroops"— the roles of Ram, his brothers and Sita — being selected from Brahmin families after an extensive audition attended by the **king and palace officials**. The boys are carried on the shoulders of the Ramlila workers and their feet do not touch the floor. People crowd around for their "darshan" every evening of the performance and touch their feet for blessings.

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RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Improving Higher Education

- Continuous efforts are being made to make India a global hub for higher education.
- Over the last 6 years, many structural efforts have been made towards higher education.

Current status of Higher Education

- In today's era, higher education has been the focus with our increased efforts to establish more number of IIT's and other research institutions.
- There is **increased interest among students** to take up higher education particularly in the field of research.
- The government's approaches towards the education sector are in par with **Atma Nirbhar Bharat**.
- Inclusion of **women** in higher education is increasing because of access and quality.
- The current **National Education Policy (NEP)** has emphasized the creation of a **National Research Foundation** to improve the research ecosystem as well as towards **multidisciplinary and holistic education**.
- Thus, the Indian education system is **plural as well as diverse**.

Pillars for strengthening Higher Education

- **Infrastructure-** for quality education
- **Human resource-** for nurturing the talent
- **Governance-** for building leadership qualities
- **Maintenance and financing** of institutions
- **Autonomy** for institutions

What needs to be done to create a research ecosystem ?

- For moving from service to product economy, **research is an essential component**.
- The NEP focusses on strengthening school education for building innovative skills for the future which needs to be replicated.
- **Public - Private Partnership** is essential for building the research culture.
- The **socially relevant, locally need based and nationally important**

research needs to be identified and carried forward.

- **Funding of institutions** with research excellence can also be a way to provide research-based education.

Challenges

- The first and foremost challenge is to overcome **infrastructural limitations**.
- Introduction of **quality towards excellence** in terms of research.
- The **behavioural limitation** of the people towards digital education.
- **State Universities have a lot of restrictions** for research , funding , curriculum etc.

Way Forward

- The **vocational training** needs to be considered as primary.
- **Research funding** should be **performance based or outcome based**.
- **Public Private Partnership** is needed for providing digital education.
- **Skill based curriculum** can be made for the school level.
- Introduction of **accountability and healthy competition** among higher education institutions.

Conclusion

- The interest needs to be **multi dimensional** and increased access to quality education can be ensured by **reinventing the universities** from time to time.

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