

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

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AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

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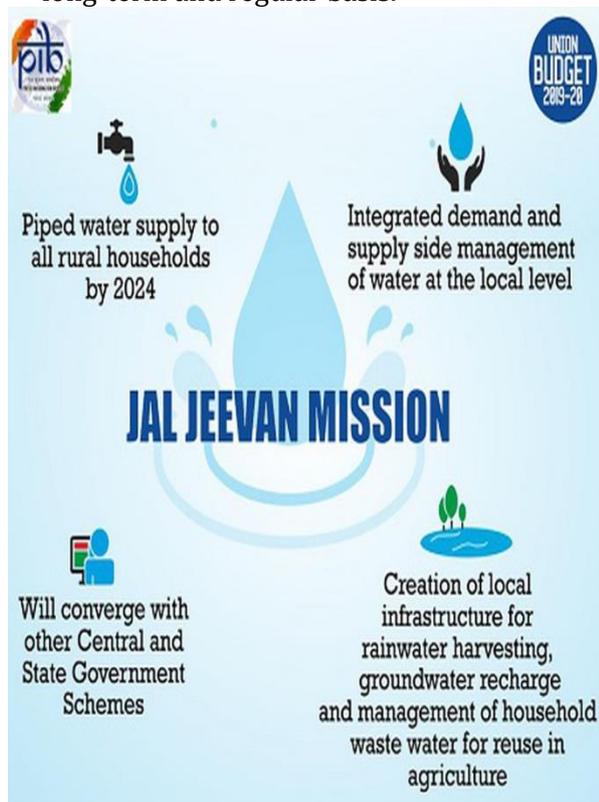
News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Jal Jeevan Mission

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- Launched in 2019, the chief objective of the Mission is to provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024** and thereby ensuring potable water supply in adequate quantity i.e. **@ 55 lpcd** (Litres per capita per day) of prescribed quality on a long-term and regular basis.



- This Mission is under the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- The programme also implements **source sustainability measures** as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through greywater management, water conservation and rainwater harvesting.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is based on a **community approach** to water and will include **extensive Information, Education**

and Communication (IEC) as a key component of the mission.

- JJM looks to create a **Jan Andolan** (People's Movement) **for water**, thereby making it everyone's priority.
- The fund sharing pattern is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States; 50:50 for other States and 100% for UTs.

Why in News?

- Since its launch in August 2019, the Centre's ambitious flagship scheme Jal Jeevan Mission, which in partnership with the States seeks to ensure that every rural household of the country gets assured drinking water supply by 2024, has **achieved 32.3% coverage** (6.15 crore households) **of tap connections in rural India**.
- Almost 1 lakh new connections are getting added on a daily basis.

2) GAVI Alliance

About GAVI Alliance

- Created in 2010, the GAVI Alliance (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation) is a global health partnership of public and private sector organizations dedicated towards creating **equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries**.
- GAVI's strategy supports its mission to save children's lives and protect people's health by increasing access to immunisation in poor countries.
- Its partners provide funding for vaccines and intellectual resources for care advancement. They contribute to strengthening the capacity of the health system to deliver immunisation and other health services in a sustainable manner.

Why in News?

- Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has been nominated by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation as a member of the GAVI Board.

- Dr. Vardhan will be representing the South East Area Regional Office (SEARO)/ Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) constituency on the GAVI Board. The seat is currently held by Myint Htwe of Myanmar. Dr. Vardhan will be representing India from January 1, 2021 till December 31, 2023.

3) Inner Line Permit

What is it?

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document that allows Indian citizens to stay in an area under the ILP system.
- The document is currently required by visitors to **Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram**.
- The ILP is issued by the **concerned state government**. The permits issued are mostly of different kinds, provided separately for tourists, tenants and for other purposes.
- The main objective of the ILP system is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the notified states in order to **protect the indigenous population**. It also offers protection for the locals with regards to lands, jobs and other facilities.

History of ILP

- Under the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873**, the British framed regulations restricting the entry and regulating the stay of outsiders in designated areas.
- This was to protect the Crown's own commercial interests by preventing "British subjects" (Indians) from trading within these regions.
- In 1950, the Indian government replaced "British subjects" with "Citizen of India". This was to address local concerns about protecting the interests of the indigenous people from outsiders belonging to other Indian states.

Why in News?

- Union home minister Amit Shah recently said the implementation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) was the biggest gift given by the Centre to Manipur since its creation as a state.
- ILP was a long-standing demand of the indigenous people of Manipur.
- In December last year, the Central government included Manipur within the ambit of ILP system.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) New species of Sun rose found in the eastern ghats

Portulaca Laljii



- It is a new flower species found in Prakasam of Andhra Pradesh.
- This new species flowers from June to February because of its succulent (thick and water storing) tuberous roots which makes plants survive on rocky crevices.
- It is said to have rich horticultural value.
- It is named after **Lal Singh Ji**, an eminent Botanist of Botanical Survey of India.

2) Assessing Tiger-Human Interactions through Radio-Telemetry

Why in the news?

- The West Bengal Forest Department and WWF-India funded by ICICI foundation have started this project to **radio-collar Sundarban Tigers to study Human-Tiger Interaction**.

How will radio-collaring a tiger help?

- The radio-collared tiger will provide crucial information on
 1. Tiger behaviour,
 2. Their habitat use within the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve
 3. The extent of negative human-tiger interaction around human settlements.
 4. The data obtained will influence the development of effective management plans and strategies to reduce negative human-tiger interactions in the landscape.

About Sundarbans

- The Sundarbans, the **world's largest mangrove forest**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Ramsar site**, is home to a uniquely adapted tiger population that occupies mangrove forests, with individuals swimming across creeks to maintain territories and hunt their prey.
- In the last survey, the tiger population in the Sundarbans was around **96 individuals**.
- The Sundarbans is a unique but challenging landscape for tiger conservation given that large portions of it are subject to inundation under seawater with tidal fluctuations, and many portions of the habitat are quite inaccessible.
- About **1.5 million people** live in proximity to these forests and are dependent on natural resources. Local people engaged in traditional fishing and wild honey collection are often at risk of attacks from tigers.
- More humans have lost their lives to tigers in the forests of Sundarbans than any other area of the tiger's range. While such tragic events sometimes occur in and around settlements when tigers 'stray' into those areas, the majority occur within the mangrove forests, which local people access for resource extraction.

3) Two new species of ginger found from northeast

Why in the news?

- Two species of ginger have been found in Arunachal Pradesh by Malabar Botanical Garden and Institute of Plant Sciences researchers.

Hedychium mechukanum



- It is a close relative of white ginger lily which is mentioned in Mahabharata.

- It was found in **Mechuka valley** of Arunachal Pradesh, at an altitude of **1,400 m**.
- This plant grows in open areas of evergreen forests. Flowering is from mid-June to September and fruiting from September to November.
- The species gives out large white flowers having pleasant fragrance.
- According to IUCN, it has **DATA DEFICIENT** status.
- Road widening in its habitat is the greatest threat to this species.

Amomum arunachalense



- It is distinguished from its relative species mainly by a white rhizome with a pale brown centre.
- It was found in Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.
- Deforestation and extraction of shoots for medicinal purposes are major threats to this species.

4) Indian Skimmer sighted at creek on Kakinada coast

About Indian Skimmers



- Indian Skimmers are water bird species which fly low over the water bodies with beak open. They are found along large rivers like the Chambal river, near the sand-bars.
- Indian skimmers are mainly found along large rivers in **India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal**.
- Its population is declining due to degradation of wetlands and rivers. Sand Mining and construction of dams devoids them suitable places for nesting.
- In mid-2020, IUCN degraded its status from vulnerable to **ENDANGERED**.

Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary

- It has the largest surviving patch of Mangrove forests in **Andhra Pradesh** with more than 65 Mangrove tree species.
- Home for the rare, endangered **Smooth Indian Otter, Fishing Cat, Estuarine Crocodile**.
- The Sanctuary in the estuary of **River Godavari** supports rich mangrove vegetation with species like Rhizophora, Avicennia, Sonneratia, Aegiceros.

Why in the news?

- There is a request by environmentalists to declare Kumbhabhishekam mudflat of Kakinada coast as a part of Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary as Indian Skimmer birds in large numbers have been sighted in this region.
- This mudflat is present at just 3.2 kms away from the Coringa Sanctuary and supports migratory birds in large numbers.
- Since it is present very near to the deep sea port there is greater threat to this region if not recognised and protected.

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ECONOMY

1) Inflation Targeting

What is it?

- The RBI's explicit mandate is to **conduct monetary policy**. The primary objective of monetary policy is to **maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth**. Price stability is a necessary precondition to sustainable growth.
- In **2016**, the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**, was amended to provide a statutory basis for the implementation of a **flexible inflation-targeting framework**, where the Centre and the RBI would review and agree upon a specific inflation target every five years.
- Under this, **4% was set as the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation target** for the period from August 5, 2016, to March 31, 2021, with the **upper tolerance limit of 6% and the lower tolerance limit of 2%**.
- In a bid to keep inflation under specified level, the government in 2016 had decided to set up the **Monetary Policy Committee** headed by the RBI Governor entrusted with the task of fixing the benchmark policy rate (repo rate).
- The six-member panel, which had its first meeting in October 2016, was given the mandate to maintain annual inflation at 4 per cent until March 31, 2021, with an upper tolerance of 6 per cent and lower tolerance of 2 per cent.

Why in News?

- A RBI working paper has recommended that **maintaining 4 per cent inflation is appropriate for India** as targeting a lower rate could impart deflationary bias to the monetary policy.
- The paper, authored by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra and another official Harendra Kumar Behera, has found a **steady decline in trend inflation to 4.1-4.3 per cent since 2014**.
- The inflation target has to be reviewed by end-March 2021.

2) Ethanol interest subvention scheme

What's in the news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the expansion of interest subvention scheme to also include **grain-based distilleries** besides molasses-based distilleries for the production of ethanol.
- The government would bear interest subvention for five years including one year moratorium against the loan availed by project proponents from banks @ 6% per annum or 50% of the rate of interest charged by banks whichever is lower.
- The scheme would be available to only those distilleries which will supply at least 75% of ethanol produced from the added distillation capacity to oil companies.
- The blending percentage of ethanol with petrol is expected to go up from 1.53% in 2013-14 to 8.5% in 2020-21. The **National Biofuel Policy 2018** envisages an indicative target of **20% blending of ethanol in petrol and 5% blending of biodiesel in diesel by 2030**.

Significance

- The government has procured 173 crore litres of ethanol in 2019-20. India needs 1000 crore litres of ethanol to achieve the 20% blending target by 2030. For that we need to enhance production capacity and availability of raw material. It cannot be achieved through sugarcane only. So, the government has approved use of cereals for ethanol production.
- The decision would encourage ethanol production from grains like **barley, maize, corn and rice**. The scheme would boost production and distillation capacity to 1,000 crore litres and help in meeting the goal of 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2030.
- The proposed intervention would **enhance production of ethanol** from various feedstocks. It would promote ethanol as a fuel which is **indigenous, non-polluting and virtually inexhaustible**.
- It would **improve the environment and the eco-system** and result in **savings on the Oil Import Bill**. It will also ensure timely payment of dues to farmers.

Related Information

- Biofuel are liquid or gaseous fuels produced from biomass that are generally high in sugar (such as sugarcane, sugar beet, sweet sorghum), starch (such as corn and cassava) or oils (such as soybeans, rapeseed, coconut, sunflowers, and palms). The two most commonly used biofuels are ethanol and biodiesel.
- **Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana:** It provides Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to Second Generation bio-ethanol manufacturing projects to increase availability of ethanol for ethanol blending programme.
- **Categories of Biofuels:**
- **First generation Biofuels** are mainly produced from **food crop feedstock**, such as oil, sugar and starch crops, thus competing for agricultural areas used for food production.
- **Second generation Biofuels** differ in feedstock which, in this case, comes from **nonfood plants** such as agricultural crops, residues and wood (so-called lignocellulosic biomass).
- **Third generation Biofuels** are produced from **micro-organisms** like algae. Its production is supposed to be low cost and high-yielding – giving up to nearly 30 times the energy per unit area as can be realized from current, conventional ‘first-generation’ biofuel feedstocks.
- **Fourth generation Biofuels** use **genetically modified (GM) algae** to enhance biofuel production. Key to the process is the capture and sequestration of CO₂, a process that renders fourth-generation biofuels a **carbon negative source of fuel**.

3) Digital Payments Index

What's in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India released a Digital Payments Index to **measure the growth in cashless transactions in India**. It aims to reflect accurately the penetration and deepening of various digital payment modes.
- The index comprises **five broad parameters** with varying weights to measure the penetration of digital payments.
- The five key parameters include:
 1. **Payment enablers (25%).**

2. **Payment infrastructure—demand-side factors (10%).**
3. **Payment infrastructure—supply-side factors (15%).**
4. **Payment performance (45%).**
5. **Consumer centricity (5%).**
 - These factors include multiple sub-parameters that would help the regulator conduct its study into the digital payment ecosystem.

Parameters

- **Payment enablers** comprise multiple channels through which digital payments can be accessed. This includes the internet, mobile, Aadhaar, bank accounts, merchants, and participants. The sub-parameters for **payment infrastructure** include credit cards, debit cards, prepaid payment instruments, point of sale terminals, automated teller machines, quick response codes, among others.
- Under **payment performance**, which carries the highest weight in the index, the regulator would measure factors such as the volume and value of digital payments, unique users, paper clearing, currency in circulation and cash withdrawals. For **customer centricity**, the RBI would consider customer education and awareness, frauds, complaints, declines and system downtime.

Highlights of the Index

- At a base of 100 for March 2018, the RBI has measured that the **index rose to 153.47 and 207.84 in March 2019 and 2020**, respectively. Going forward, the index shall be published on RBI's website on a semi-annual basis from March 2021 with a lag of four months.
- Digital payments in India have seen a rapid rise in adoption and development in the last four years. The decision to outlaw old Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes in November 2016 forced customers to switch to digital payments.
- The **Unified Payment Interface (UPI)** was also launched in the same year and it soon became one of the most popular payment platforms.
- In December, UPI reported 223 crores transactions worth Rs 4.16 lakh crores compared with 221 crores transactions worth Rs 3.9 lakh crores in November.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

What is the CPEC project?

- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) refers to a clutch of major infrastructure works currently under way in Pakistan, intended to **link Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province to Gwadar deep sea port** close to Pakistan's border with Iran.
- Several other road, rail and power projects are associated with the corridor, and the project seeks to expand and upgrade infrastructure across the length and breadth of Pakistan, and to widen and deepen economic ties with China.
- CPEC is **part of the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
- CPEC was launched in 2015 when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and it now envisages investment of over USD 60 billion in different projects of development in Pakistan.



Significance

- The goal of CPEC is both to transform Pakistan's economy—by modernizing its road, rail, air, and energy transportation systems—and to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to China's Xinjiang province and beyond by overland routes.
- This would reduce the time and cost of transporting goods and energy such as

natural gas to China by circumventing the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea.

- The CPEC project is also strategically important for China. Currently, eighty percent of China's oil has to pass through the **Strait of Malacca**, a narrow stretch of water between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. In the event of a conflict, the Malacca Strait could easily be blocked by a rival nation, cutting off China from crucial energy resources. CPEC allows China to circumvent the Strait of Malacca and reduce its dependency on the strait.

India's position on CPEC

- India has been opposing the project as it **passes through Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**, which New Delhi considers its own territory.
- India claims that the CPEC project encroaches on sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

Why in News?

- Following reports in the Pakistani press last week that China is seeking additional guarantees from Pakistan before sanctioning a loan for a key project under CPEC, the Chinese Foreign Ministry denied the reports as baseless.

2) United Nations Security Council

About UNSC

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

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members.

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

Vote and Majority Required

- Each member of the Security Council shall have **one vote**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **procedural matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **all other matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including

the concurring votes of the permanent members.

- However, any member, whether permanent or non-permanent, must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

Why in News?

- India officially began its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council along with Norway, Mexico, Ireland and Kenya.
- On 17 June, 2020, India was elected to the UN Security Council with 184 of the total 192 votes.
- A member country needs a **two-third majority of votes** in the General Assembly to become a non-permanent member. This is the **eighth time** India has been elected as a non-permanent member.
- India will be the **UNSC President** in August 2021 and will preside over the Council again for a month in 2022. The presidency of the Council is held by each of the members in turn for one month, following the English alphabetical order of the member states' names.

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DEFENCE

1) Helicopter Deal

About Ka-226T

- The **Kamov 226T** is a light weight, **twin-engine multi-role chopper** that offers services for both **military and civilian** purposes.
- The military version is capable of **working** in extreme and **difficult weather conditions** such as hot climate, marine areas and high mountains.

Why in News?

- As the deal for Ka-226T utility helicopters with Russia was not concluded even after five years it was announced, Indian Army is set to approach the Defence Ministry for a waiver to take the deal forward.

About the deal

- In 2015, India and Russia had concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for at least 200 Ka-226T twin engine utility helicopters estimated to cost over \$1 billion with 60 helicopters to be directly imported and the remaining 140 manufactured locally. They are to replace the ageing and obsolete Cheetah and Chetak fleet of the Army and the Air Force.
- About 75% of the Army's **fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters is over 30 years old**. Some of them are about 50 years old.
- The operational capability has already been **impacted due to deficiencies and non-availability of replacement**.

2) Akash Missile

Akash Missile System

- AKASH is a **Surface to Air Missile** with a range of 25 Kms. The missile was inducted in 2014 in IAF and in 2015 in Indian Army.

- The **indigenously developed** (over 96 percent indigenisation) **and manufactured** Akash has a **range of 25 km and can simultaneously engage multiple targets** in all weather conditions.
- It has a large operational envelope from a low altitude of 30 metres to a maximum of up to 20 km.
- The Akash missile having a **multi target, multi directional, all weather air-defence system consisting of surveillance and tracking radars**, could take off at a speed of around **2.5 Mach** and reach a high altitude of 18 kms and as low as 30 meters.
- *Mach is used as a unit of measurement in stating the speed of a moving object in relation to the speed of sound. For example, if an aircraft is travelling at Mach 1, it is travelling at exactly the speed of sound.*

Why in News?

- As part of efforts to boost defence exports, the Union Cabinet has approved the export of the Akash short-range Surface to Air Missile (SAM) system.

About the defence exports

- To **achieve** the target of **\$5 bn defence exports** and improve strategic relations with friendly foreign countries, the government intended to focus on exporting high value defence platforms.
- So far, Indian defence exports included parts and components but the export of big platforms was minimal.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Nanomicelles

Why in News?

- A multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional team has created a nanomicelle that can be used to deliver a drug named docetaxel, which is commonly used to treat various cancers including breast, colon and lung cancer.

What are nanomicelles?

- Similar to nanoshells and nanovesicles, **nanomicelles are extremely small structures** and have been noted as an emerging platform in targeted therapy. Nanomicelles are globe-like structures with a hydrophilic outer shell and a hydrophobic interior. This dual property makes them a perfect carrier for delivering drug molecules.
- Once injected intravenously these nanomicelles **can easily escape the circulation and enter the solid tumours where the blood vessels** are found to be leaky. These leaky blood vessels are absent in the healthy organs.
- The ideal goal for cancer therapy is destroying the cancer cells without harming healthy cells of the body, and chemotherapeutics approved for treatment of cancer are highly toxic. The currently used docetaxel is a highly hydrophobic drug, and is dissolved in a chemical mixture. This aggravates its toxic effects on liver, blood cells, and lungs.

Cancer

- Cancer is a term used for diseases in which **abnormal cells divide without control and are able to invade other tissues**. Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems. **All cancers begin in cells**, the body's basic unit of life.
- The body is made up of many types of cells. These cells grow and divide in a controlled way to produce more cells as they are needed to keep the body healthy. When cells become old or damaged, they die and are replaced with new cells.

Cancer Initiatives by the Government

- National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular

Diseases and Stroke (**NPCDCS**) is being implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM). It aims at awareness generation for cancer prevention, screening, early detection and referral to an appropriate institution for treatment.

- **'Tertiary Care for Cancer'** scheme was launched with the primary purpose to set up individual units in every state. As per the plan state cancer institutes (SCI) and tertiary care cancer centres (TCCC) in different parts of the country are to be set up.
- **National Tobacco Control Programme** is launched to create awareness about the dangerous effects of tobacco consumption, reduce the demand and supply of tobacco products.

2) Digital Ocean

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Science and Technology has launched the 'Digital Ocean' platform of Indian National Centre for Oceanic Information Services (**INCOIS**) as a one stop-solution for all data related needs of a wide range of users, including research institutions, operational agencies, strategic users, academic community, maritime industry, and the public.

About the initiative

- Digital Ocean (www.do.incois.gov.in) is expected to bring a sea-change in how the **oceanographic data** is served for a better understanding of oceans surrounding us.
- It will play a central role in sustainable management of our oceans and expanding our **'Blue Economy' initiatives**.
- It will facilitate an online interactive web-based environment for **data integration, 3D and 4D data visualization, data analysis** to assess the evolution of oceanographic features obtained from multiple sources like on site monitoring devices, remote sensing and model data.
- INCOIS provides ocean information and advisory services to various stakeholders in the country, including **Potential Fishing Zone (PFZ) advisories, Ocean State Forecast (OSF), high wave alerts, tsunami early warnings, storm surge**

and **oil-spill advisories**, among others, using state-of-the-art technologies and tools to get real time information on oceanographic and marine meteorological data.

Significance of this Initiative

- India will transform into a **digitally empowered society and knowledge economy**.
- Will **provide data** to research institutions, academic communities, policy makers and the public etc.
- Sustainable management of the oceans and **Blue Economy** initiatives.
- **Capacity building** on Ocean Data Management for Indian Ocean Rim countries.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Additional Information

Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services

- It was established as an autonomous body in 1999 under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** and is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO).
- It is mandated to provide the **best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community** through sustained ocean observations and constant improvement through systematic and focused research.
- It has adopted and developed various state-of-the-art technologies and tools that includes **Potential Fishing Zone (PFZ) advisories, Ocean State Forecast (OSF)-Spill advisories**, etc.
- Provides **round-the-clock monitoring and warning services** for the coastal population on tsunamis, storm surges, high waves, etc. through the in-house **Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)**.
- It has been serving as the National Argo Data Centre and Regional Argo Data Centre of the International Argo Programme.

Other initiatives related to Ocean exploration

Deep Ocean Mission- started in 2018

- Aim- To explore the deep ocean for **deep-sea mining, ocean climate change advisory services, underwater vehicles and underwater robotics** related technologies.

- Two key projects planned in the Mission are:

1. A **desalination plant** powered by tidal energy.
2. A submersible vehicle that can **explore depths** of at least 6,000 metres.

Blue Economy

- India has a long coastline of 7,517 km- with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.02 mn. sq.km.
- **Marine services sector** could serve as the backbone of its blue economy and help India a **5 Trillion Dollar Economy**
- **Indian Ocean is a major conduit** of trade with as much as 80% of global oil trade happening through it.
- The objective of the Blue Economy is to **promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and employment opportunities** within the Indian Ocean region's maritime economic activities.
- The **Blue Economy** is determined to initiate appropriate programs for: the sustainable harnessing of ocean resources; research and development; developing relevant sectors of oceanography; stock assessment of marine resources; introducing marine aquaculture, deep sea/long line fishing and biotechnology; and human resource development; among others.
- The idea encompasses **Renewable Energy, Fisheries, Maritime Transport, Tourism, Mitigating Climate Change (oceans as a carbon sink), Waste Management (reducing burden on oceans)**.

3) Bird Flu

About Bird Flu

- Bird flu, also called avian influenza, is a **viral infection** that spreads from bird to bird. These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.
- Currently, a particularly deadly strain of bird flu -- **H5N1** -- continues to spread among poultry in Egypt and in certain parts of Asia. The H5N1 virus can cause severe flu with a high mortality rate.
- Avian influenza viruses **do not normally infect humans**. However, there have been **instances of certain highly pathogenic**

strains causing severe respiratory disease in humans.

- In most cases, the people infected had been in close contact with infected poultry or with objects contaminated by their faeces. When **people** do become infected, the **mortality rate is about 60%**.

Why in News?

- Prohibitory orders were imposed and a one-km radius area was declared a “zero mobility zone” in Rajasthan’s Jhalawar as 50 crows were found dead because of avian influenza.
- H5N1 infection in humans can cause severe disease and has a **high mortality rate**.
- If the H5N1 virus were to change and become easily transmissible from person to person while retaining its capacity to cause severe disease, the consequences for public health could be very serious.
- In most cases, avian influenza in humans develops into a serious disease that should be treated promptly in the hospital and may require intensive care, where available.
- **The antiviral medicine oseltamivir** can reduce the severity of illness and prevent death, and should be used in all cases.

4) Covishield

About DCGI

- Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) is the head of department of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization of the Government of India **responsible for**

approval of licences of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines, and sera in India.

- Drugs Controller General of India comes under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**.
- DCGI also sets **standards for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution** of drugs in India.
- DCGI lays down the **standard and quality of manufacturing, selling, import and distribution of drugs** in India.
- **Other Functions**
- Acting as **appellate authority** in case of any dispute regarding the quality of drugs.
- Preparation and maintenance of **national reference standards**.
- To bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- **Training** of Drug Analysts deputed by State Drug Control Laboratories and other Institutions
- **Analysis of Cosmetics** received as survey samples from CDSCO.

Why in News:

- Covishield, the vaccine candidate from Pune-based Serum Institute of India, was approved by a Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of the Drug Controller General of India.

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ART & CULTURE

1) Khelo India Youth games

About Khelo India programme

- The Khelo India programme has been introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
- Under this programme, talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by the High-Powered Committee will be provided annual **financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.**
- It is under the **Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports.**

About Khelo India Youth Games

- Introduced by the Ministry of Sports and Youth affairs, Khelo India Youth Games is a part of the Khelo India programme.

Why in News?

- The Sports Ministry has approved the inclusion of four indigenous sports, including **Gatka, Kalaripayattu, Thang-Ta and Mallakhamba**, in the Khelo India Youth Games 2021.

Gatka

- Gatka is the name of an Indian martial art associated with the **Sikhs of the Punjab** who practice an early variant of the martial art.
- It is a **style of stick-fighting**, with wooden sticks.
- It is believed to have originated when sixth Sikh guru Hargobind adopted 'Kirpan' for self defense during Mughal era and tenth Guru Gobind Singh made it compulsory for everyone to use the weapons for self defence.

Kalaripayattu

- Indian martial art and fighting style that **originated in Kerala.**
- Considered to be among the **oldest martial arts** still in existence, with its origin dating back to at least the 3rd century BC.
- Kalaripayattu includes strikes, kicks, grappling, preset forms, weaponry and healing methods. Practitioners of Kalaripayattu also possess intricate knowledge of pressure points on the human body and healing techniques that incorporate the knowledge of Ayurveda and Yoga.
- Unlike other parts of India, **warriors in Kerala belonged to all castes.**
- **Women also underwent training in Kalaripayattu**, and still do so to this day.

Thang-Ta

- Indian martial art from **Manipur.**
- It is dedicated to fighting skill and worship.

Mallakhamba

- Mallakhamb is a traditional sport in which a gymnast performs aerial yoga or gymnastic postures and wrestling grips in concert with a vertical stationary or hanging wooden pole, cane, or rope.
- **Madhya Pradesh (state sport) and Maharashtra** have been the hotspots of this sport.
- The name **Mallakhamb** derives from the terms malla, meaning wrestler, and khamb, which means a pole.

Need for martial arts in India

- Increases confidence and **improves physical and mental health**
- **Safety of women**
- Can use Indian martial arts to **enhance India's Soft Power**, the same way China promotes Kung-Fu.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan Project

About:

- Launched in 2017, it is an initiative of the **Ministry of Tourism** in close collaboration with the **Ministry of Culture, Archeological Survey of India (ASI), State/ UT Governments and the Private/ Public sector companies/ Trusts/ NGOs/ Individuals.**
- This is to make the facilities tourist-friendly and increase the site's tourism potential by enhancing the tourist experience in a planned and phased manner.
- It aims at ensuring quality & inclusive provision of amenities and facilities across heritage, natural, & tourist sites through active participation of private and public sector organizations and individuals. These organizations would be known as "**Monument Mitras**" for their collaboration initiative.

Monument Mitra

- Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage, natural, tourist sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be signed between Monument Mitra, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Survey of India and any other concerned stakeholder as applicable for the site.

The objectives of the project are :

- Developing basic tourism infrastructure in and around heritage sites, monuments, natural sites and tourist sites.
- Develop facilities and amenities to improve the tourist experience at heritage sites, monuments, natural sites and tourist sites.
- Promote cultural and heritage value of the country and develop avenues to create awareness about the heritage/natural/tourist sites in the country

- Develop and promote sustainable tourism infrastructure and ensure proper Operations and Maintenance therein.
- Develop employment opportunities and support livelihoods of local communities at the heritage, natural and tourist sites.

Why in News?

- The Minister of State for Tourism and Culture took a review meeting of the "Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan" project.

2) RoDTEP scheme

Merchandise export from India scheme

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) was introduced under **Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20)**, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- The scheme provides **incentive in the form of duty credit scrip** to the exporter to compensate for his loss on payment of duties. The scrips can be transferred or used for payment of a number of duties including the basic customs duty.

What is the issue?

- In 2019, a **World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute resolution panel** ruled that MEIS was **not in compliance with the global trade norms.**
- Additionally, many exporters had persistently complained that the MEIS scheme doesn't offset all the taxes.

RoDTEP scheme

- To address these issues, the government introduced the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme** with a view to give a boost to the country's outbound shipments.
- The government announced that whatever taxes, or duties or local levies imposed by the Centre, State or local governments that are not getting refunded through any other scheme, will be done through RoDTEP in a way that is **compliant with the WTO norms.**
- It is proposed to **digitally refund to exporters**, duties and taxes levied at the Centre, State and local levels.
- The RoDTEP scheme will **replace the current Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS)** in a phased manner.

Comparison between MEIS and RoDTEP

Aspect	MEIS	RoDTEP
Schema of Incentive	Additional Incentive on Exports of goods apart from other refunds and drawbacks available on undertaking the said exports.	Refund of Indirect taxes on Inputs used in the manufacture of exported product which is not being currently reimbursed by any other existing schemes.
WTO compliance	Non-Compliant with WTO trade norms	Compliant with WTO trade norms

Significance

- By adopting the RoDTEP scheme, Indian exporters will be able to meet the international standards for exports as affordable testing and certification will be made available to exporters within the country instead of relying on international organizations.
- Also under it, tax assessment is set to become fully automatic for exporters. Businesses will get access to their refunds for GST via an automatic refund-route.
- This would increase the economy for the country and working capital for the enterprise.

Why in News?

- Government has decided to **extend the benefit of the scheme for RoDTEP to all export goods** to boost exports.
- The scheme will refund to exporters the embedded Central, State and local taxes that were so far not being given rebate or refunded. The refund will be credited in the exporter's ledger account with Customs and used to pay Basic Customs duty on imported goods. The credits can also be transferred to other importers.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) AFSPA

About AFSPA

- Passed in 1958 for the North-East and in 1990 for Jammu & Kashmir, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) gives armed forces special powers to control “**disturbed areas**”, which are designated by the government when it is of the opinion that a region is in such a disturbed or dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary.
- An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The **Central Government**, or the **Governor of the State** or **administrator of the Union Territory** can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area.
- Under its provisions, the armed forces have been **empowered to open fire, enter and search without warrant, and arrest any person** who has committed a cognisable offence, all while having immunity from being prosecuted.
- The law has been repealed where insurgencies have subsided, and when governments have gained confidence in managing the region using the police force.
- Critics both in India and abroad have criticised government agencies for acting with impunity under AFSPA. **Manipuri activist Irom Sharmila** had been on a 16-year hunger strike in protest against AFSPA. The **Jeevan Reddy Committee** formed in 2004 has recommended a complete repeal of the law.

Why in News?

- The entire state of Nagaland has been declared a “disturbed area” under the AFSPA for six more months. The Armed

Forces (Special Powers) Act has been in force in Nagaland for several decades.

2) Blue Flag Certification

What is it?

- The Blue Flag certification is given to environmental- friendly, clean beaches, marinas which are equipped with amenities of international standards for tourists.
- There are **33 environment and tourism-related conditions** for Blue Flag Certification. Few of them include, having proper waste disposal systems, availability of clean water for tourists, disabled friendly etc.
- The Blue Flag Programme for beaches and marinas is run by **FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education)** – a Copenhagen based international, non governmental, non-profit organisation.
- Indian beaches are being developed by the **Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)** according to the Blue Flag certification standards.

Why in News?

- Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar virtually hoisted the international blue flags in eight beaches across the country.
- These beaches are Kappad (Kerala), Shivrajpur (Gujarat), Ghoghla (Diu), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Odisha) and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).
- India secured the International Blue Flag Certification for these beaches on 6 October 2020.
- The Environment Minister further informed that hundred more such beaches will be made Blue Flag in the coming 3-4 years and highlighted that cleaning beaches needs to be made a “**Jan Andolan**”

(People's Movement) not only for its aesthetic value and tourism prospects but more importantly towards reducing the menace of marine litter and making coastal environment sustainable.

- Japan, South Korea and the UAE are the only other Asian nations who have been

conferred with a couple of Blue Flag beaches.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Towards an effective vaccination distribution policy

GS 2 - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

NEWS

- India plans to vaccinate 300 million people against COVID-19 over the next 6-7 months. The government plans to give priority to healthcare workers and other frontline workers, followed by everyone who is above 50 years of age. This means roughly 20% of the population will be vaccinated by July or August 2021.

CHALLENGES IN VACCINATION PROCESS

- Since all the vaccines that are currently in the spotlight require two doses, the government will have to acquire 600 million doses. Fortunately, Pune's Serum Institute of India is the world's largest producer of vaccines. There are reports that the government has already struck a deal with it to acquire 500 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- Principle underlying the triage scheme adopted by the government for setting up the priorities for vaccine distribution needs improvement.
- Inclusion of private players in the vaccination process is another contentious issue.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE AIM OF ANY VACCINATION DRIVE?

- Provide protection to those vaccinated.
- Minimise or at least slow down the speed and spread of the viral transmission.

BASIS FOR GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITY LIST

- The government's strategy of giving priority to front-line workers and elderly people is in line with the practice being followed in the U.K. and the U.S. drive.
- The rationale for this is to protect those who are most likely to be infected in the future as well as those who are most vulnerable to the health consequences of the infection.
- The priority given to healthcare professionals satisfies both the conditions i.e. these are individuals who have high

levels of exposure and they also act as active disease vectors since they interact with large numbers of people.

DRAWBACKS IN THE PRIORITY RATIONALE

- The priority given to older people may not actually minimise the total social and economic cost inflicted by the virus in the long run. As elderly are less mobile, have a lower level of social interaction, and are hence less likely to spread the virus.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

- Instead, younger people who interact with a larger number of people are both more likely to be infected and subsequently infect others should receive more attention, for instance, the Dharavi slum — should receive far more attention than they are likely to get under the current strategy.

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

PROCUREMENT

- It seems to depend entirely on domestic sources.
- It also plans to rely entirely on public resources for distribution without involving private hospitals.
- Also, the government plans to bear the entire cost of vaccination.

WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- In order to help the poor who cannot afford the vaccine, the government should continue to procure all available domestically produced vaccines and supply them through its own distribution channel.
- Government has to ensure that there is no reduction in the availability of the vaccine for the poor.
- Allowing private players in the process may lead to an increase in supply and hence less waiting time for the less affluent since some of the richer individuals in the target group will opt out of the government distribution system and prefer to get vaccinated at some private outlet.
- India with a huge market for vaccines, needs to exploit the bargaining power and grab the cost effective deal. This will ensure crucial health facilities accessible to all its citizens.

2) Dealing with India's two-front challenge - China+Pakistan

GS 2 - International Relations

CONTEXT

- A politically-guided doctrine and comprehensive military capability are needed to deal with the China-Pakistan threat.

OPINIONS TILL RECENT

- **INDIAN MILITARY-** India's military was firmly of the view that a collusive China-Pakistan military threat was a real possibility, and we must develop capabilities to counter this challenge.
- **POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC COMMUNITY-** Political class in general and the mainstay of the country's strategic community felt that a two front threat was being overhyped by the military to press for additional resources and funds. Also historically, China has never intervened militarily in any India-Pakistan conflict.
- As a result, Indian strategic thinking was overwhelmingly focused on Pakistan and the security considerations emanating from there.

RECENT INTRUSIONS CHANGE THINGS

- The Chinese intrusions in Ladakh in May, the violence that resulted from clashes between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army, and the deadlock in negotiations have now made the Chinese military threat more apparent and real.
- This comes at a time when the situation along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan has been steadily deteriorating. As a result the worrisome two front situation has arisen for India.

CHINA-PAKISTAN MILITARY LINKS

- The Sino-Pakistan relationship is nothing new, but it has far serious implications today than perhaps ever before.
- Over the years, the ties between the two countries have strengthened and there is a great deal of alignment in their strategic thinking.
- Military cooperation is growing with China accounting for 73% of the total arms imports of Pakistan between 2015-2019.
- Hence, there is a need for India to be ready for a two front threat. In preparing for this, the Indian military needs to realistically analyse how this threat could manifest itself and the type of capabilities that should be built up to counter it.

DILEMMAS FOR INDIA

- A two front conflict presents the Indian military with two dilemmas — of resources and strategy.
- It is estimated that about 60 combat squadrons are needed to deal with a serious two front threat. This is double the number of squadrons currently with the Indian Air Force (IAF).
- Regarding the strategy to be deployed against Pakistan- if defensive, it may encourage Pakistan to continue with its actions in J&K; being offensive could draw limited resources into a wider conflict.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- It is certain that the threat cannot be ignored. Therefore there is a need to develop both the doctrine and the capability to deal with this contingency.
- Developing a doctrine will require close interaction with the political leadership, while capability building requires a serious debate.
- Currently, too much focus is being given on major platforms such as aircraft, ships, and tanks, and not enough on future technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber, electronic warfare, etc. Hence, India needs to work towards upgrading its existing technologies.
- The right balance will have to be struck based on a detailed assessment of China and Pakistan's warfighting strategies.

ROLE THAT DIPLOMACY CAN PLAY

- Diplomacy has a crucial role to play in meeting the two front challenges.
- New Delhi needs to improve the relations with its neighbours, thus avoiding being caught in an unfriendly neighbourhood.
- The government's current engagement of the key powers in West Asia, including Iran, should be further strengthened in order to ensure energy security, increase maritime cooperation and enhance goodwill in the extended neighbourhood.
- India's needs to strengthen its maritime strategy, as it can help to ease the Sino-Pakistan pressure in the continental sphere.

OUTREACH TO KASHMIR

- The stark military reality of a two front challenge must serve as a wakeup call for the political leadership in New Delhi, and encourage it to look for ways to ease the pressure from either front.

- Easing pressure on the western front requires political will more than anything else.
- From a Longview perspective, political outreach to Kashmir aimed at pacifying the aggrieved citizens is the possible step towards this end.
- This could also lead to a potential rapprochement with Pakistan, which can be persuaded to put an end to terrorist infiltration into Kashmir.
- China, a rising and aggressive, superpower next door, is the bigger strategic threat for India, with Pakistan being a second order accessory to Beijing's 'contain India Strategy'. New Delhi would, therefore, do well to do what it can politically to reduce the effect of a collusive Sino-Pakistan containment strategy aimed at India.

3) Resilient supply chains as a pandemic lesson

GS- 3 Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

CONTEXT

- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of creating resilient supply chains that can withstand disruptions and ensure reliability for the global economy.
- Disruptions in supply chains can be natural or man-made.

NATURAL DISRUPTIONS

- **Japan:** The Great Tōhoku Earthquake of 2011, followed by the Tsunami, led to a nuclear disaster (Fukushima Daiichi). It led to a sharp drop in Japanese automobile exports to the United States.
- **Global:** When the novel coronavirus pandemic broke out, it had an immediate effect on supply chains emanating from China.
- In India, several companies felt the disruption in the automotive, electronics and white goods sectors.
- Though India excels in the pharmaceuticals sector, the overreliance on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) from China still creates vulnerabilities in the value chain.

MAN-MADE DISRUPTIONS

- **Saudi Arabia:** Terrorist drone attacks on Aramco's oil refineries in Saudi Arabia in

September 2019 resulted in a drop of 5.7 million barrels of oil per day. This resulted in a steep plunge in Saudi Arabia's stock market and a sharp spike in global oil prices.

- **China:** China has long practiced "supply chain politics". In 2010, when Japan detained a Chinese fishing trawler captain near the disputed Senkaku Islands, in response to this action, the Chinese government cut off exports of rare earths to Japan.
- **USA:** Tensions with China led the United States government to impose restrictions on export of microchips to China's biggest semiconductor manufacturer.

WHAT IS SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE?

- In the context of international trade, supply chain resilience is an approach that helps a country to ensure that it has diversified its supply risk across a clutch of supplying nations instead of being dependent on just one or a few.
- **Significance-** In the times of unanticipated events, whether natural, such as volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes or even a pandemic; or manmade, such as an armed conflict in a region — that disrupt supplies from a particular country or even intentional halts to trade, could adversely impact economic activity in the destination country.

INITIATIVE AGAINST OVER DEPENDENCE ON CHINA

Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

- Geopolitics and geoeconomics can never be truly separated. Also with the increasing trend of weaponization of trade and technology, supply chains disruption is a persistent threat. It is in this context that **India, Japan and Australia** initiated **SCRI** in September this year.
- SCRI may be strengthened by the future involvement of **France, United Kingdom**.
- The **objectives of SCRI** are-
 1. To attract foreign direct investment to turn the Indo-Pacific into an "economic powerhouse".
 2. To build a mutually complementary relationship among partner countries.
 3. To work out a plan to build on the existential supply chain network.

"China plus one" strategy

- For many Japanese companies, global performance and profits are linked to manufacturing facilities and supply chains in China.
- Yet, early capacity for risk mitigation through the “China Plus One” business strategy is being pursued by Japan.
- The strategy aims at diversification of investments to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), India and Bangladesh.
- Under it, Japan announced a \$ 2.2 billion Relocation Package.

INDIA'S VULNERABILITY TO SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS

- India can ill-afford the shocks of disruption in supply chains. For instance, the pandemic caused a breakdown in global supply chains in the automotive sector. For India, which imports 27% of its requirement of automotive parts from China, this quandary was a wake-up call.
- Despite being the fourth largest market in Asia for medical devices, India has an import dependency of 80%. This is clearly not sustainable.
- Given the renewed thrust in the health-care sector, this is the right time to fill gaps through local manufacturing.

INDIA'S INCREASING PRESENCE IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Electronic industry:

- India's electronics industry was worth \$120 billion in 2018-2019 and is forecast to grow to \$400 billion by 2025.
- India is enhancing its presence in the global supply chains by attracting investments in the semiconductor components and packaging industry.
- Indian electronics sector is gradually shifting away from completely knocked down (CKD) assembly to high-value addition.

Defence sector:

- Defence is among the key pillars of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' policy.
- The government is providing a big boost to defence manufacturing under the 'Make in India' programme.
- It has identified a negative import list of 101 items.
- There is a tremendous opportunity for foreign companies to enter into tie-ups with reputed Indian defence manufacturers

to tap into the growing defence market in India.

- **India has the capacity and the potential to become one of the world's largest destinations for investments, and one of the world's largest manufacturing hubs, in the aftermath of the pandemic. Hence, India needs to hit the iron when it is hot.**

4) Separating the wheat from the Agri policy chaff

GS 3 Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

CONTEXT

- Amid the ongoing debates around the three new pieces of agricultural legislation and the farmers' demand for continuation of MSP, the question that is being raised is- Whether the government should be using the taxpayers' money to provide subsidies to the farming community in this country? But, logically this question must be followed by the other two-
- Why have successive governments used the exchequer to provide farm subsidies?
- How large is India's spending on farm subsidies as compared to those of other countries having substantial interests in agriculture?

AGRICULTURE LIVING BEYOND IT MEANS

- In 1950-51, agriculture's share in the country's GDP was 45%, the share of the workforce dependent on the sector was close to 70%.
- Seven decades later, agriculture's share in GDP is below 16%, but almost 50% of the country's workforce depends on this sector.
- The squeeze on the agricultural sector is more evident from its terms of trade vis-à-vis the nonagricultural sectors.
- Agriculture has been facing adverse terms of trade over extended periods with no distinct upward trend.
- This erosion of farm incomes was triggered by growing inefficiencies, which, in turn, was caused by a lack of meaningful investment in agriculture.

SITUATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL YIELDS

- A comparison of the yields of the major crops in India with those of other countries confirms the dismal state of agriculture in the country.

- If India ranked in terms of its yields in wheat and rice — India's two major crops — the country's ranks were 45 and 59, respectively, in 2019.
- The major portion of this yield comes from few states like Punjab, Haryana. This implies that, for farmers in most regions of the country, it is an uphill battle for survival amid low yields.
- Further, markets have been farmers' biggest adversary, making it impossible for them to realise remunerative prices for their produce.
- The existing marketing system dominated by the Agricultural Produce Market Committees Works against the interests of the small farmers.

INDIA'S Vs OTHERS AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

- India needs an agricultural policy that addresses the challenges facing this sector in a comprehensive manner. The magnitude of this failure can be better understood if one considers the fact that-
- the United States, with less than 2% of its workforce engaged in agriculture, has been enacting farm legislations every four years since the Agricultural Adjustment Act was enacted in 1933.
- In a similar vein, members of the European Common Market adopted their Common Agricultural Policy in 1962.
- These policies comprehensively address the needs of the farm sector through proactive support from the respective governments.

ISSUES OF FARM SUBSIDIES IN INDIA

- Farm Subsidies are the price that the government pays for the failure of the policy makers to comprehensively address the problems of the farm sector.
- Thus, instead of engaging with the farming communities for putting in place a comprehensive set of policies (which also

provides for the setting up of farmer friendly institutions in order to improve the economic viability of the sector), successive governments have chosen to give subsidies in order to ensure domestic food security and protecting rural livelihoods.

- Also, the wanton distribution of subsidies without a proper policy framework has distorted the structure of production and, consequently, undesirable outcomes in terms of excessive food stockpiling.

WAY FORWARD

- Subsidising the cost of inputs is not going to end the problems of the marginal farmers of India, rather rationalizing of subsidies is the need of hour, for e.g. subsidies should be linked to the size of the farm-holding, rather than offering them to every other farmer.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer** should be used to give subsidy so as to plug leakages.
- The government should **withdraw subsidies gradually** and possibly **convert them to capital investments** in the sector.
- There is the need for long-term policies on export trade, for the government departments to engage with exporters on a regular basis. This can help keep farmers aligned with the global demand/supply and price situations.
- **Building up an agri-market intelligence system** can help in putting out price and demand forecasts for various major foodgrains and price-sensitive horticulture crops in advance.
- The government needs to look at ways of **aggregating the small land-holdings** and help farmers draw benefit from **farm mechanization**.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Who was freedom fighter Udham Singh?

Why in the news?

- December 26 is the birth anniversary of freedom fighter Udham Singh, known for avenging the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. He killed **Michael O'Dwyer**, the colonial official considered responsible for **Jallianwala Bagh**, where over 1,000 men, women and children lost their lives, and more than 1,200 were wounded.
- There is a continued demand to establish his statue in the Parliament.



About Udham Singh

- Born in Punjab, he was 19 during the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and was severely injured during the massacre. It is believed that he took vow there to take revenge.
- Then he became a political activist of the **Ghadar Party** in the US. Ghadar Party is a multi-ethnic party believed to have communist tendencies and was founded by **Sohan Singh Bhakna** in 1913. Headquartered in **California**, the party was committed to the ouster of the British from India.
- In 1934, he went to London to assassinate **Michael O'Dwyer**, who in 1919 had been the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab and, unsurprisingly, Singh considered O'Dwyer to be responsible for the massacre.
- Instead of **General Dyer**, who instructed his men to open fire at the crowd gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, O'Dwyer is considered to be the actual perpetrator, since Dyer

could not have executed it without his permission.

- In 1940, Udham Singh shot O'Dwyer at a meeting of the East India Association and the Royal Central Asian Society at Caxton Hill. He was sentenced to death in England and was hanged on July 31, 1940. His remains were sent to India in 1974 to his village in Punjab for cremation.

About Jallianwala Bagh massacre

- After passing the **Rowlatt Act**, the Punjab Government set out to suppress all opposition.
- On **April 13, 1919**, the public had gathered to celebrate **Baisakhi**. However, the British point of view, as seen from the documents present in the National Archives of India, indicates that it was a political gathering.
- In Spite of General Dyer's orders prohibiting unlawful assembly, people gathered at Jallianwala Bagh, where two resolutions were to be discussed, one condemning the firing on April 10 and the other requesting the authorities to release their leaders (**Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew**).
- When the news reached him Brigadier-General Dyer, headed to the Bagh with his troops.
- He entered the Bagh, deployed his troops and ordered them to open fire without giving any warning. People rushed to the exits but Dyer directed his soldiers to fire at the exit.
- The firing continued for 10-15 minutes. 1650 rounds were fired. The firing ceased only after the ammunition had run out. The total estimated figure of the dead as given by General Dyer was 291. However, other reports including that of a committee headed by Madan Mohan Malviya put the figure of dead at over 500.

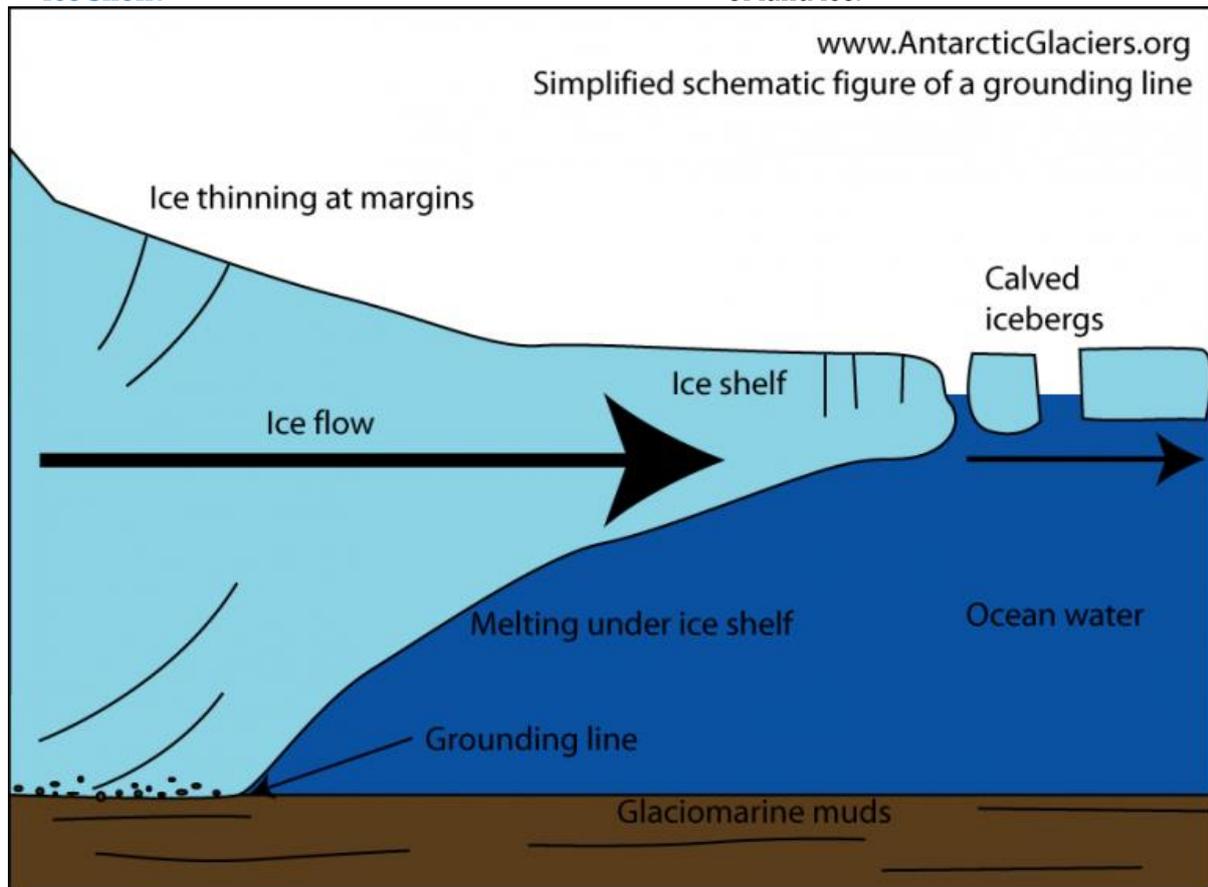
2) Where is the giant Antarctic iceberg A68a heading and why is it a cause for concern?

Why in the news?

- An iceberg named A68A which calved from Larsen C Ice shelf, Antarctica in 2017, is about to collide South Georgia Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean.

What is the difference between Iceberg and Ice shelf?

- Ice Shelf: An ice shelf is a floating extension of land ice.



- Ice Berg: Icebergs form when chunks of ice calve, or break off, from glaciers, ice shelves, or a larger iceberg. Icebergs travel with ocean currents, sometimes smashing

up against the shore or getting caught in shallow waters.

About South Georgia Islands



- South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands is a **British Overseas Territory** in the southern Atlantic Ocean.
- It is home to several wildlife like **penguins, albatrosses, seals, whales and petrels.**

How are icebergs named?

- Naming of iceberg is done by the **US National Ice Center (USNIC)**. Icebergs are named according to the Antarctic quadrant in which they are spotted.

How has the Iceberg reached South Georgia?

- Ice berg A68A was detached from Larsen C ice shelf in July 2017. It was around 6000 sq km in area when it was carved out.
- Over the years it was drifted north by water currents and it broke into several smaller icebergs but the parent iceberg i.e. A68A is still about the size of as much as twice the GOA state.
- Now it is just 50km away from South Georgia islands.

What is the issue with Ice berg A68A reaching South Georgia?

- Once the ice-berg collides with the South Georgia with a size it is now, it will take at least 10 years for the ice-berg to melt.
- South Georgia is home for a large penguin and Seal population, with ice-berg near them, it will take a longer period for the parent penguin population to fetch food. It is predicted that with Ice-berg near the island, the **penguin population may be reduced 10% annually**.
- It is also believed that the **fresh water from the iceberg will affect the fragile ecosystem** of the island and in turn the **food chain will be destabilized**. With this, it will affect the local fishing population.
- There are some positive effects like Iceberg will bring a **lot of dust which fertilises ocean plankton**, which draws up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere but it is a long term process.
- It is an inevitable event which humans can't stop, but it will be an opportunity for the human race to study this event and know what climate change is doing to the earth and take measures appropriately.

3) Why are more than half of India's kids, women anaemic?

Why in the news?

- According to the latest **National Family Health Survey 2019-20**, it was found that Indian women and children are overwhelmingly anaemic and anemia is most prevalent in Himalayan cold deserts.
- Let us understand what anemia is and what facts the recent survey shows.

About Anemia

- Anemia occurs when the **number of red blood cells circulating in the body decreases**.
- A diet which does not contain enough **iron, folic acid or vitamin B12** is a common

cause of anaemia. Some other conditions that may lead to anaemia include **pregnancy, heavy periods, blood disorders or cancer, inherited disorders and infectious diseases**.

- The most common symptom of anemia is fatigue. Other common symptoms include pale skin, a fast or irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches and light-headedness.

How did the NFHS measure anemia among the people?

- Blood samples were collected from children, men and women and were declared anemic according to following:
 - If a child gets a haemoglobin of less than 11 grams per decilitre (g/dl) indicated anaemia.
 - For non-pregnant and pregnant women, it was less than 12 g/dl and 11g/dl respectively
 - For men, it was less than 13 g/dl.
 - Altitude and smoking factors were adjusted.

What does the survey say on anemia?

- In 15 of the 22 states and UTs surveyed, **more than half the children are anaemic**. Similarly, **more than 50 per cent women are anaemic** in 14 of these states and UTs.
- Anaemia among men was less than 30 per cent in a majority of these states and UTs.
- It was **higher** in the states/UTs of Ladakh, Gujarat, J&K, and West Bengal, and **lower** in the areas of Lakshadweep, Kerala, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Why is our country vulnerable to anemia?

- **Iron-deficiency and vitamin B12-deficiency** anaemia are the two common types of anaemia in India. **Among women iron deficiency prevalence is higher** than men due to menstrual iron losses and the high iron demands of a growing foetus during pregnancies.
- **Lack of millets** in the diet due to overdependence on rice and wheat, **insufficient consumption of green and leafy vegetables**, and dominance of packaged and processed foods which are low in nutrition could be the reasons behind the high prevalence of anaemia in India.

Some issues regarding the standards

- The current standards are according to western population, in India, the normal standards could be different.
- There is a need to study the local population to determine standards according to the local environment and genetic factors.
- There is a need for greater research in this area.

Why Himalayan population more vulnerable to anemia?

- According to the survey, in Ladakh a whopping 92.5 per cent children, 92.8 per cent women and around 76 percent men are anaemic in the given age groups.
- High prevalence of anaemia in the cold desert region could be due to **short supply of fresh vegetables and fruits** during the long winter each year.
- However, there could be other factors as well and the causes of anaemia here are **yet to be scientifically ascertained**.

4) India and the world in 2021: A year to engage and assert

- As 2020 ends, a lot in the international scenario has changed. Let us understand top events which happened in 2020 and also analyse what opportunities and challenges India has to become a global leader.

2020 events

China as competitor to the top

- China under the leadership of Xi Jinping is battling for the top in the International arena.
- China has feuded with almost all the countries in the India-Pacific region starting with Australia with trade curbs, harassed a Malaysian oil drilling operation, etc.
- It saw an opportunity in the world distracted by pandemic and clenched its fist with its neighbourhood especially with India.
- India-China relations touched the lower strata as Chinese troops since May 2020 altered the status quo along the border with India, claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers, and violated every agreement to maintain peace.

America and Trump

- Post the November elections, President Donald Trump lost the race to the

upcoming president Joe Biden but the Trump administration has done a lot damage to the International institutions as well as American Stand.

- Trump's decision to pull out from the Iran Deal, WHO, Paris Agreement etc has weakened the global order. His decisions gave space for China to occupy the top position.

Acceptance of Taliban

- America fought with the Taliban for almost 19 years but in 2020 it decided to bring the Taliban on the table to negotiate its exit.
- India has obliged this move by participating in a virtual meeting held in Doha. India has invested over \$ 3 billion in Afghanistan for the last 2 decades, now India is accepting the fact that Taliban will be a political party though it has links with Pakistan militaria.

Changing Middle-East

- Many countries have eased their relations with Israel in the Middle-east. With the US as mediator, Morocco, UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan have acknowledged Israel and are building their ties with it. While Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran are fighting for the power in the region, there are calls to normalise relations with Israel.
- India has tried to stay connected with all these countries but situations within India like CAA-NRC, are impacting these relations.

Russia-China Bonding

- With India moving towards American squad forming QUAD, transactions of more defence equipment, etc, Russia which stood ally to India all these years is becoming more pro-china in its approach.
- Russia had more cordial relations with China when China was facing **trade war** with the US.
- India has strong ties with Russia, and Moscow was the venue for all the India-China official and ministerial conversations over the border standoff. But, it has taken note of Moscow's position on the Quad and Indo-Pacific, a near-echo of Beijing's stance.

India and Neighbourhood

- Many neighbours had their routes criss-crossed with India in 2020. Nepal claimed territory and issued a new map. Bangladesh was upset due to CAA-NRC law.

- Right now India has eased their tensions on these issues but greater issues are yet to be addressed.
- India is also watching closely the interference of China, US and Japan in Maldives and Sri-Lanka.

Aspirational Leader

- India forwarded an **isolationist look** when it pulled out of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Decisions like this have made India an **aspirational power** rather than a global leader.

What opportunities and challenges in 2021 does India have?

Countering China

- India has stood against China and is ready to counter it by all means.
- It has to gather support from countries like US, Japan, Australia, besides Europe leaders such as France, Germany and the UK to counter effectively.

India at UN

- As India has become a non-permanent member at the UN for the eighth time, it is time for India to take calculative stands on global issues such as Saudi-Iran conflict, Refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, Tibet and Taiwan issue etc.
- **Cross-border terrorism** is one of top concerns for India to tackle Pakistan at the UN but it should not become sole agenda of its talk.

Friendship with the US

- New Delhi will build on its deepening strategic and defence ties with the US, and would want to resolve trade and visa issues. It will also watch the upcoming administration's stand on US-China relations and Indo-pacific region.

Europe and India

- The UK has made an exit from European Union and India is trying to strike a trade deal with the UK. India is also eagerly waiting to sign a long-pending deal with the EU. In May 2021, there is a possibility of an India-EU summit.
- France and Germany have come up with their Indo-Pacific strategy, and a potential European strategy is a possibility.

Engaging with Neighbours

- As the world emerges from the pandemic, New Delhi has a lot to gain from what could be "**vaccine diplomacy**" with neighbours in 2021 — supplying vaccines either free or at affordable costs.
- Since most of the countries in the neighbourhood (except Nepal) had their elections, 2021 is said to be stable.
- India's only ambition lies in stopping China's economic footprint in the subcontinent.

Aiming to be global than aspirational

- In 2021, New Delhi will host the **BRICS summit**, and start its preparations for the **G-20 summit** in 2023.
- The **India-Africa Forum summit**, which could not be held in 2020, could be held in 2021 or later.
- New Delhi has opportunities to articulate and be vocal on issues that matter to the world, and be proactive to further its interests.

Wayforward

- With the above opportunities in mind, India must build diplomacy to conquer as a global leader in the post COVID era.

For doubts and queries email us at: doubts@officerspulse.com

RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Dealing with Single Use Plastic

- Recently, the Vice President of India has highlighted the fact that Single use plastic is a major cause of concern for the world today.

A Glance at the Magnitude of the issue:

- In today's Era, around **300 million metric tonnes** of plastic is being produced every year out of which **India alone produces around 80.7mmt of plastic and 50% of this production is Single use plastic.**
- There is an increase of around **8.7% every year** in the production of plastic which can be harmful for human health.
- Eg: Packaging plastics, micro plastics etc.
- The magnitude of **irregular disposal of plastic** is very high due to which earth will be facing harmful effects like blide in the landscape, unhygienic conditions and mainly it reduces the soil fertility due to which there is water seepage in the soil which is also a major cause of floods.
- The use of plastics is increasing day by day and is turning out to be a **serious problem** which may cause severe repercussions in the near future.

Challenges ahead

- The major challenges in dealing with single use plastic can be classified into 3 categories:
- Building Awareness-** The awareness level regarding harmful effects of single use plastic is very poor and the majority of the population has become addicted to the use of plastics in everyday life.
- Stimulating innovation-** Generally, the startups prove to be the best starting point for stimulating innovation where investment becomes a major issue for introducing new technology in dealing with the plastic.
- Re-engineering solutions-** Finding out sustainable alternative solutions for dealing with disposal systems, alternatives to plastics and replacing especially the packaging plastics as being low value plastic it is very difficult to recycle such plastic and meeting the demands can be a major concern.

Some of the steps taken by Government

- Atal Innovation mission** has empowered the new startups for "Responsible production and responsible consumption" of single use plastics.
- The **Atal tinkering labs** are used for spreading awareness regarding the harmful effects of single use plastics from top to the bottom level.
- Innovation is being stimulated at the university level.**
- Challenges like New India, ARISE** are being introduced for bringing up **new solutions** and encouraging the concept of **Circular economy.**

Way Forward

- The foremost importance has to be given to **waste collection systems** where low value waste collection systems can be given **incentives** to reduce the magnitude of the problem.
- A serious **audit** about the life span of the plastics needs to be done from a scientific and environment perspective.
- Upscaling of the plastics** without undermining the range utility plastics can be a solution.
- The technique like **pyrolysis** can be used at a managing level along with **R&D, public awareness and enhancing innovation.**
- The **3R's** which is "**reduce, refuse and reuse**" can be an alternative in the form of providing affordable plastic as well as employment to the people.
- The major focus should lie in **enhancing "research in recycling"** which may change the production and consumption levels.

2) Technology and Urban Transformation

- Recently, the Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of Light House Projects (LHP) under Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India) across six States.

Significance of Technology in Urban Transformation

- As of now, Urbanisation in India is **around 31% whereas Global urbanisation rate is around 80-90%.**
- Urbanisation can be defined as "**high density of population in urban areas**

along with least dependence on agriculture”.

- Urban areas are **products of technology** and can be equipped with better technological facilities and should accept more and more people because urban areas have **better capacity to pay which eventually leads to creation of wealth and can result in urban transformation.**
- The pandemic has created a situation where the majority of the population goes for **remote work** that is work from home and in this scenario; the **role of technology can be a game changer in terms of urban transformation.**
- Technology can further **enhance the optimality of construction, management and futuristic plans.**

Major areas of Technology Application in Urban areas

- In terms of **construction area**, the planning aspect is undergoing a big technological revolution and construction techniques like **prefabricated sandwich panel system, monolithic concrete construction technology, 3D printing** etc. are being used.
- Technology can be used to **analyse the nature of land in order to develop farmer efficient cities.**
- Identifying **production levels** of buildings.
- Use of digital technology for **designing** aspects.
- For **planned organisation and smart governance** of cities.
- For **training** purposes especially in terms of skill development.
- For efficient **data management.**

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