

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

The Hindu

The Indian Express

PIB

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AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

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



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) FSSAI slashes limit for trans-fat levels in foods

About FSSAI

- FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) is an **autonomous statutory body** established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is the administrative Ministry** of FSSAI.
- FSSAI is responsible for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.

Why in News?

- FSSAI has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.
- The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.

What is Trans-fat?

- Trans fats, or trans-fatty acids, are a **form of unsaturated fat**. They come in both **natural and artificial forms**.
- Natural, or ruminant, trans fats **occur in the meat and dairy** from ruminant animals, such as cattle, sheep, and goats. They form naturally when bacteria in these animals' stomachs digest grass.
- **Artificial trans-fat is created during hydrogenation**, which converts liquid vegetable oils into semi-solid partially hydrogenated oil.

Significance

- Trans fats are associated with **increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease**. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO),

approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids.

- The WHO has also called for **global elimination of trans fats by 2023**.
- It was in 2011 that India first passed a regulation that set a TFA limit of 10% in oils and fats, which was further reduced to 5% in 2015.

Additional Information:

- As part of the FSSAI-led 'Eat Right India' movement, the target is to **reduce the industrially produced trans fatty acids on food supply to less than 2% by 2022**.

2) One Nation One Ration Card

PDS in India

- Under the **National Food Security Act, 2013**, about 81 crore persons are entitled to buy subsidized foodgrain — rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg, and coarse grains at Re 1/kg — from their designated Fair Price Shops (FPS) of the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**.
- PDS is operated under the **joint responsibility** of the Central and the State Governments.
- The Central Government, through **Food Corporation of India (FCI)**, has assumed the responsibility for procurement, storage, transportation and bulk allocation of food grains to the State Governments.
- The **operational responsibilities** including allocation within the State, identification of eligible families, issue of Ration Cards and supervision of the functioning of Fair Price Shops (FPSs) etc., rests with the State Governments.

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

- Earlier, a ration cardholder can buy food grains only from an FPS that has been assigned to her in the locality in which she lives.

- However, under the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system, the beneficiary will be able to buy subsidised foodgrains from **any FPS across the country**.
- The biggest beneficiaries will be **migrant workers** who move to other states to seek better job opportunities.

How will the system of ration card portability work?

- Ration card portability is aimed at providing **intra-state as well as inter-state portability** of ration cards.
- The new system, based on a technological solution, will identify a beneficiary through **biometric authentication** on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices installed at the FPSs, and enable that person to purchase the quantity of foodgrains to which she is entitled under the NFSA.
- While the **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) portal** (<http://www.impds.nic.in/>) provides the technological platform for the inter-state portability of ration cards, enabling a migrant worker to buy foodgrains from any FPS across the country, the other portal (**annavitran.nic.in**) hosts the data of distribution of foodgrains through E-PoS devices within a state.
- Once the 'one nation one ration card' system takes effect in a given state, the beneficiary family **can purchase food grains from different locations**. For example, a migrant worker staying in a different state can buy his or her share of the subsidized food grains from any FPS in the state where they work while the remaining family members will be able to buy their quota of the supplies back at home.

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

- Work on this ambitious project started about two years back when the government launched a scheme called **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)** in April 2018 to reform the public distribution system in the country.
- The PDS system was marred with inefficiency leading to leakages in the system. To plug the leakages and make the

system better, the government started the reform process.

- For this purpose, it used a technological solution involving the **use of Aadhaar to identify beneficiaries**. Under the scheme, the **seeding of ration cards with Aadhaar** is being done.
- Simultaneously, **PoS machines** are being installed at all FPSs across the country. Once 100 per cent of Aadhaar seeding and 100 per cent installation of PoS devices is achieved, the national portability of ration cards will become a reality.

Why in News?

- The progress of implementation of the One Nation One Ration Card initiative was reviewed recently.
- Presently, this initiative is seamlessly enabled in a single cluster of 32 States and UTs covering about 69 crore beneficiaries.

3) "Transparent Taxation-Honouring the Honest" platform

Background

- In August 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the "**Transparent Taxation -- Honouring the Honest**" platform aimed at easing compliance and expediting refunds, benefiting honest taxpayers.
- Three main features of the platform are **faceless assessment, faceless appeal and taxpayers' charter**.

Objectives

- The faceless assessment system seeks to eliminate corrupt practices by doing away with the territorial jurisdiction of income-tax offices. With the help of technology, the cases of scrutiny will now be **allocated randomly to any official in any part of the country**. The document identification numbers will be issued from the central database.
- Review of orders will also be done by another team at some other place, chosen randomly using data analytics and artificial intelligence.
- The platform would instil a **sense of fairness and fearlessness in the taxpayers**.

Taxpayers' charter

- The taxpayers' charter outlines the **rights and duties of an honest taxpayer**.

- It also defines the commitment of the tax department and the expectations from the taxpayers.
- Mr. Modi said taxpayers' charter was also a vital step in the country's development, in terms of bringing about a balance between the responsibilities and the taxpayers' duties and also fixing the government's responsibilities.
- He appealed to those not paying taxes despite the capability to come forward and commit themselves to the cause of making the country self-reliant.
- Although the taxpayer base had expanded by 2.5 crore in the past six-seven years, it was a matter of grave concern that **only about 1.5 crore people were paying**

income-tax in a country of over 130-crore population.

Why in News?

- The government's faceless tax assessment scheme, an attempt to remove individual tax officials' discretion and potential harassment for income tax payers, has managed to deliver about 24,000 final orders since its introduction in August 2020.
- As many as 800 cases have also concluded the faceless appeals process since it was implemented on September 25, 2020.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Asian waterbird census

What is it?

- Every January, thousands of volunteers across Asia and Australasia visit wetlands in their country and count waterbirds. This citizen science programme is the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC).
- It is an annual exercise conducted since 1987.
- The AWC is an integral part of the global waterbird monitoring programme, the **International Waterbird Census (IWC)**, coordinated by **Wetlands International**.
- In India, the Forest Department and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) support the exercise.
- The census, thus covers the entire East Asian – Australasian Flyway and a large part of the Central Asian Flyway.

The census has the following objectives:

- to obtain information on an annual basis of waterbird populations at wetlands in the region during the non-breeding period of most species (January), as a basis for evaluation of sites and monitoring of populations
- to monitor on an annual basis the status and condition of wetlands
- to encourage greater interest in waterbirds and wetlands amongst citizens

Why in the news?

- The Asian Waterbird Census is being conducted in Andhra Pradesh's Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and nearby wetlands.

2) No impact assessments, no mitigation: Wildlife clearances in Goa's Mollem forests

About Mollem National Park

- Mollem's forest cover is part of a near-contiguous stretch of Western Ghats. It is part of the core area of **Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary**.
- Spread over 240 sq km, Mollem National Park is located in Sanguem taluka in Goa close to the border with Karnataka.
- Mollem currently supports more than 70 types of mammal, 235 bird species, 219 butterfly species, 45 reptile species, 44 fish species and 27 amphibian species. It is

home to key species such as tigers, leopards and Gaur.

- The forest also comes as an essential revenue source for nature-based tourism. Along with **Dudhsagar**, hundreds of river-feeders originate in the woods and act as a lifeline for Goa's water supply.

The National Board for Wildlife

- The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is constituted by the Central Government under Section 5 A of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA)**.
- The NBWL is **chaired by the Prime Minister** according to the WLPA. The NBWL has 47 members including the chairperson. Among these, 19 members are ex-officio members. Every new government constitutes a new board, based on the provisions of the WLPA, with the new PM as the chair.
- The National Board may, at its discretion, constitute a Standing Committee under sub-section (1) of Section 5B.
- The Standing Committee shall consist of the **Vice-Chairperson** (Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) the Member Secretary and not more than ten members to be nominated by the Vice-Chairperson from amongst the members of the National Board.

Environment Impact Assessment

- EIA can be defined as the study to predict the effect of a proposed activity/project on the environment. A decision making tool, EIA compares various alternatives for a project and seeks to identify the one which represents the best combination of economic and environmental costs and benefits.
- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, under the **Environmental (Protection) Act 1986**, has made Environmental Clearance (EC) mandatory for expansion or modernisation of any activity or for setting up new projects such as mining, thermal power plants, river valley, infrastructure (road, highway, ports, harbours and airports) and industries

including very small electroplating or foundry units.

- Certain activities permissible under the **Coastal Regulation Zone Act, 1991** also require similar clearance.
- The eight steps of the EIA process are presented in brief below:
 1. **Screening:** First stage of EIA, which determines whether the proposed project, requires an EIA and if it does, then the level of assessment required.
 2. **Scoping:** This stage identifies the key issues and impacts that should be further investigated. This stage also defines the boundary and time limit of the study.
 3. **Impact analysis:** This stage of EIA identifies and predicts the likely environmental and social impact of the proposed project and evaluates the significance.
 4. **Mitigation:** This step in EIA recommends the actions to reduce and avoid the potential adverse environmental consequences of development activities.
 5. **Reporting:** This stage presents the result of EIA in a form of a report to the decision-making body and other interested parties.
 6. **Review of EIA:** It examines the adequacy and effectiveness of the EIA report and provides the information necessary for decision-making.
 7. **Decision-making:** It decides whether the project is rejected, approved or needs further change.
 8. **Post monitoring:** This stage comes into play once the project is commissioned. It checks to ensure that the impacts of the project do not exceed the legal standards and implementation of the mitigation measures are in the manner as described in the EIA report.

Why in the news?

- Goa is seeing one of its greatest environmental protests. The **SAVE MOLLEM campaign** is drawing attention from all the people including celebrities and politicians. Let us know what is the history behind the campaign.
- During the lockdown period in April 2020, the standing committee of the **National Board for Wildlife** had cleared 3 projects on Mollem forests. They are:
 - 400 kv Goa Tamnar Power transmission Project lining from Goa to Karnataka

- Four-laning proposal for **National Highway 4A**
- The double-tracking of the South Western Railway line through the Ghats.
- All these projects have not done their environment impact assessment and all these were cleared without any mitigation measures.
- The transmission line laying itself may involve the felling of 5000 trees and further it is estimated that if all these 3 projects are initiated could mean the felling of over 30,000 trees, irreversibly impacting this rich ecosystem.
- Several agencies — ranging from the State forest departments, to the National Board for Wildlife — have powers under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to assess projects coming up in wildlife-rich areas and **impose legally binding mitigation measures**. But these powers have not been exercised for the projects coming up near Mollem.
- The people of Goa have come together against these clearances and are protesting to save Mollem forests.
- All three projects are still awaiting final forest clearance by the Environment Ministry.
- There is a hope as the **Supreme Court** has intervened and formed a **Central Empowered Committee** that would carry out site inspections in Goa for all three projects after it received a number of complaints on the manner in which the projects were green-flagged with no assessment to the threats to wildlife.

3) Experts suggest ways to reduce hazards posed by birds to flights

Salim Ali Centre For Ornithology and Natural History

- The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) is one of the **centres of excellence** of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It is named after famous Indian ornithologist (bird scientists) Salim Ali.
- SACON's mission is "To help conserve India's biodiversity and its sustainable use through research, education and peoples'

participation with birds at the centre stage".

- SACON is located at Anaikatty, 24km northwest of **Coimbatore city, Tamil Nadu**.

Why in the news?

- Salim Ali Centre For Ornithology and Natural History has come out with a publication "**Best Practices for Mitigation of the Hazards Posed by Birds to Aircraft**" which tries to give mitigation strategies to reduce hazards posed by birds to aircraft.
- At least two planes are struck every day in India by airborne birds or animals on runways, accidents that pose a serious risk to human lives and the aviation industry.
- According to latest data obtained through the RTI law from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), more than 4,000 aircraft suffered wildlife strikes — hit by birds or animals — in about 80 airports over the past five years.
- Hence the publication tries to resolve this through following suggestions.

What are the suggestions given?

- A systematic study of birdlife at an airfield and understanding the bird community structure and its changes are essential for mitigating the dangers posed by birds to flights.
- Hence, it suggests creating a **database of all bird species in the 10 km radius of airports**.
- Feeding of birds by people close to airports (within a radius of 2 km) should be discouraged and stopped. It provides species specific suggestions.
- The study suggests discouraging slaughterhouses and dumping of waste very close to airports to avoid carnivorous birds such as kites.
- To discourage lapwing (a kind of bird) activity, appropriate short grass cover should be developed and maintained preferably at less than 15 cm height inside the airfield.
- Water stagnation should be cleared to keep away pigeons. Crows can be discouraged by relocating food dumping areas.

- It recommends ornithological training for the Air Traffic Control (ATC) staff focussing on problematic birds would help them make appropriate decisions.
- The study also suggests awareness creation and public participation in reducing the hazards posed by birds to aircraft.

4) Gangetic dolphin

About Gangetic Dolphin



- The Gangetic Dolphin is one of the last three surviving river dolphin species and India has declared it as **National Aquatic Animal**. Its conservation is crucial to the welfare of the Ganga river ecosystem, the presence of the Dolphin in a river system **signals its good health and biodiversity**.
- Once present in tens of thousands of numbers, the Ganges river dolphin has dwindled abysmally to less than 2000 during the last century owing to direct killing, habitat fragmentation by dams and barrages and indiscriminate fishing.
- At present, the **distribution range** of the Ganges river dolphins in India covers seven states namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- The Ganges river dolphin can **only live in freshwater** and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to "see" an image in their mind (**echolocation**).
- This species has been given **ENDANGERED** status by IUCN. It is also protected under **Schedule 1** of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

Why in the news?

- Three men filmed beating a Gangetic dolphin to death was arrested in Uttar Pradesh.

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ECONOMY

1) India's GDP to contract 7.7% in current fiscal

What's in the news?

- According to the first advance estimates released by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, India's gross domestic product (GDP) will contract 7.7 per cent in the current financial year as against a growth of 4.2 per cent in the previous fiscal. It is mainly due to the sharp contraction in the services, manufacturing and mining sectors.
- The projected contraction reflects a loss of Rs 11.3 lakh crore of GDP in real absolute terms from last year.

Expenditure side

- Out of a total eight sectors, **agriculture and electricity generation** are the only two that are projected to be in positive territory, with an estimated growth rate of 3.4 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively.
- On the expenditure side, except for **government final consumption expenditure**, which has been estimated to increase 5.8 per cent in FY21, other drivers of demand are down sharply: **private consumption expenditure** is expected to contract 9.5 per cent, and **gross fixed capital formation** — an indicator for private investment — is expected to contract 14.5 per cent.

NSO

- The National Statistical Office is the Statistics Wing of the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.
- In 2019, the central government merged the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) into the National Statistical Organisation.
- NSO is mandated with the following responsibilities:-
 1. acts as the nodal agency for planned development of the statistical system in the country
 2. compiles and releases the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** every month and conducts the **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**;

3. organizes and conducts periodic **all-India Economic Censuses**
4. prepares national accounts as well as publishes annual estimates of national product, government and private consumption expenditure, capital formation, savings, etc. as also the state level gross capital formation of supra-regional sectors and prepares comparable estimates of State Domestic Product (SDP) at current prices;

2) National Infrastructure Pipeline

About National Infrastructure Pipeline

- To achieve the GDP of \$5 trillion by 2024-25, India needs to spend about **\$1.4 trillion (100 lakh crore)** over these years on infrastructure. To implement an infrastructure program of this scale, the government has envisaged the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP).
- In April 2020, the Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline chaired by **economic affairs secretary Atanu Chakraborty** submitted its Final Report on NIP for FY 2019-25.
- **Highlights of the Report**
- The final report projects a total infrastructure investment worth **Rs 111 lakh crore** during the financial period **2020-25**.
- Sectors such as energy (24%), roads (18%), urban (17%) and railways (12%) amount to around 71% of the projected infrastructure investments.
- The **Central Government (39 per cent)** and **State Governments (40 per cent)** are expected to have almost equal share in funding of the projects followed by the **Private Sector (21 per cent)**.
- The Task Force has recommended that three Committees be setup:
 1. a Committee to monitor NIP progress and eliminate delays;
 2. a Steering Committee in each Infrastructure ministry level for following up implementation; and
 3. a Steering Committee in the Department of Economic Affairs for raising financial resources for the NIP.

Why in News?

- Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reviewed the progress of the National Infrastructure Pipeline as the government seeks to accelerate infrastructure spending in the economy.
- The NIP has been expanded from 6,385 projects at the time of its introduction a year ago, to more than 7,300 projects, and is making progress despite the pandemic.

3) Purchasing Managers' Index

What is PMI?

- Purchasing Managers' Index is an economic indicator which indicates the business activity & economic health of both the **manufacturing and service sectors**.
- PMI of India is published by Japanese firm **Nikkei** but compiled and constructed by **IHS Markit**, a London-based global information provider.
- Unlike the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which indicates the changes in production volume or output, the PMI is an **investor sentiment tracking index** and is more dynamic in nature. They are derived from monthly surveys of about 400 private companies.
- Variables used for calculating the PMI are: Output, New Orders, Employment, Input Costs, Output Prices, Backlogs of Work, Export Orders, Quantity of Purchases,

Suppliers' Delivery Times, Stocks of Purchases and Stocks of Finished Goods.

How to read PMI?

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

Why in News?

- According to the latest PMI data, India's services sector activity expanded at a slower pace in December.
- Service PMI stood 52.3 in December, from 53.7 in November.

4) EXIM Bank

About EXIM Bank

- Export-Import Bank of India is a specialized financial institution, **wholly owned by Government of India**, set up in 1982, for financing, facilitating and promoting foreign trade of India.
- EXIM Bank provides **financial assistance to exporters and importers**.
- It functions as the principal financial institution for coordination the work of institutions engaged in financing export and import of goods and services with a view to promoting the country's international trade.

Why in News?

- The Exim Bank has raised \$1 billion through a dollar-bond sale to international investors.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) 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 nonpermanent, must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

India's quest for permanent seat in UNSC

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

Expansion of Membership

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

Veto power

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

Regional Representation

- On the question of regional representation, India has argued for an **equitable geographical representation** and the urgent need for mitigating the non-representation and under-representation

of some regions in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories.

- The UN has three of the five permanent members from one region alone while the regions of Africa, Latin America, three-fourths of Asia including the Arab states, the entire Central and Eastern Europe, the Caribbean states and the Small Island developing states remain excluded from the functioning of the Security Council.
- The Security Council, for India, needs to reflect contemporary realities and provide adequate representation to all regions of the world.

Relationship Between Security Council and General Assembly

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

What is the issue?

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

Why in News?

- India has called for introspection within the UN Security Council over the lack of representation of African countries among its permanent members.
- Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said, even though more than half of the issues on the agenda of the Security Council are related to Africa, the African continent does not even have a single voice amongst the permanent membership to defend its own interests.
- He said, the world body needs to correct this historical anomaly, and collectively support the **Ezulwini consensus**.

Ezulwini consensus

- The Ezulwini Consensus is a position on international relations and reform of the United Nations, agreed by the **African Union**.
- It calls for a more representative and democratic Security council, in which Africa, like all other world regions, is represented.
- The Ezulwini consensus was based on the **idea of regional representation**, while the current UN system focused on representation of countries on the basis of their individual merit.

2) An Indian gift helps Sri Lanka's COVID-19 fight

What's in the news?

- Less than five years after its launch, an India-funded free ambulance service ('1990 Suwa Seriya' Emergency Ambulance service) is playing a vital role in Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response.

'1990 Suwa Seriya' Emergency Ambulance service

- On Sri Lanka's request, India provided a **grant of \$7.56 million** for the Suwa Seriya [vehicle or journey for good health] service, launched first in 2016, in Sri Lanka's Western and Southern Provinces, with 88 ambulances.
- In the next couple of years, the '1990' service was expanded to cover all nine provinces in the island, with a fleet of 297 ambulances — Sri Lanka purchased them from Tata Motors — with an additional Indian grant of \$15.09 million.
- It is **India's second largest grant project in the island**, after the **housing project of**

- more than 60,000 houses**, with a nearly \$400 million grant.
- So far, all the 709 technicians, who work round the clock in the '1990' ambulances, have been **trained in India**.
 - After the initial partnership in training and operations, India exited the scene, even as Sri Lanka's health sector began owning it.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Flood Management

Why in News?

- To understand if a coastal city is more prone to floods caused by tidal events or extreme rainfall, a team from the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, devised a **new metric** or measure called the **Tide-Rainfall Flood Quotient**.

How does it work?

- **Using the past rainfall data, tidal data, and topography** of the region one can apply the Tide-Rainfall Flood Quotient framework to pinpoint the major factor at play.
- This metric can **help disaster management experts** in framing better flood risk management systems directed towards long term planning.

Where can we apply this?

- For **storm-tide dominated regions**, severe flood hazard can be alleviated by **building coastal defence structures such as closure dams, tide breakers, and storm-surge barriers at appropriate locations**. The tide and surge forecasting systems in these regions should be equipped with state-of-the-art ocean circulation models.
- For **pluvial dominated regions**, structural measures such as **rainwater storage structures, lakes, and detention basins** should be prioritised in the flood management plans.

Significance

- The **C40 Cities report of 2018** notes that by 2050, over 570 low-lying coastal cities will face projected sea level rise by at least 0.5 meters, putting over 800 million people at risk from the impacts of rising seas and storm surges.
- While the **inland areas** can be **flooded** due to the **heavy rainfall**, the **coasts** are **threatened** by the **impact of tidal surges**.

2) Uranium Enrichment

Why in News?

- Iran has started enriching uranium up to 20% at an underground facility and seized a South Korean-flagged oil tanker in the crucial Strait of Hormuz, further escalating

tensions in West Asia between Tehran and the West.

What is enrichment of uranium?

- **Natural uranium** consists of two different isotopes - **nearly 99% U-238 and only around 0.7% of U-235**.
- U-235 is a fissile material that can sustain a chain reaction in a nuclear reactor.
- **Enrichment process increases the proportion of U-235 through the process of isotope separation** (U-238 is separated from U-235).
- **For nuclear weapons, enrichment is required upto 90% or more** which is known as **Highly Enriched Uranium/weapons-grade uranium**.
- **For nuclear reactors, enrichment is required upto 3-4%** which is known as **Low Enriched Uranium/reactor-grade uranium**.

Additional Information

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

- **The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**, more commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, was reached between Iran and six world powers known as the **P5+1** (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) in July 2015.

What did Iran have to do to meet the requirements of the deal?

- According to this framework, Iran would **redesign, convert, and reduce its nuclear facilities** in order to lift all nuclear-related economic sanctions.
- The deal also allowed for the tracking of nuclear activities with robust transparency and inspections by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.

U.S. withdrawal from JCPOA

- The US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, claiming it did not address Iran's ballistic missile programme or its roles in Middle Eastern conflicts.
- The US also re-imposed tough economic sanctions against Iran.

- Reacting to the US' withdrawal, Iran announced that it will breach its limits set on its nuclear activity by the 2015 deal.

3) Privacy Policy

Why in News?

- WhatsApp updated its privacy policy and terms of service, expanding how the messaging platform will share user data with other Facebook-owned and third-party apps.

Why the worry?

- The update comes with a condition that if the user refuses to share data with Facebook, they will have to quit WhatsApp.
- Status, group names and icons, **frequency and duration of activities**, and whether a user is online information will all continue to be held by WhatsApp.
- Beyond this, the platform will collect data from the new payment feature, including processing method, transactions and shipment data. It will also collect and share **location, device model, operating system, battery level and browser details**.
- The updated WhatsApp terms will help Facebook and connected third-party apps to **exploit user data for commercial gain**, including personal data, breaching user's privacy
- The personal data could also result in the **micro-targeting of propaganda and hate messages through Facebook**.
- The **privacy policy lacks clarity** and fails to shed light on how data from Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram is being combined, and who it is being made available to.

Issues with social media

- Concepts in technology such as data mining, technology addiction, machine learning, artificial intelligence, and **surveillance capitalism** can be misused and can pose serious threats to privacy.
- Social media has many beneficial qualities; it includes the facilitation of interpersonal connection across long distances, acquiring knowledge, and even finding organ donors.
- But, user data can be used to build models to **predict user actions** and how

companies keep user attention to maximize the profit from advertisements.

- **Manipulation techniques** are used by social media companies to addict their users and the psychology that is leveraged to achieve this end. This often leads to increased depression and increased suicide rates among teens and young adults.
- User actions on online platforms are watched, tracked, measured, monitored, and recorded. Companies then mine this **human-generated capital to increase engagement**, growth, and advertising revenue.
- "**Disinformation-for-profit business model**" companies make more money by allowing unregulated messages to reach anyone for the best price. Ex: flow of fake news regarding COVID-19 and propaganda that can be used to influence political campaigns.

Real world implications of Social Media

- Increase in hospitalizations for teenagers due to self-harm, beginning in 2010-2011. This spike is due to the great amount of time spent on social media because people have the tendency to check social media as often as they can and the psychological effects it has on the brain. If a user is feeling **distressed**, the media can release **dopamine** into the brain, and they eventually find themselves dependent upon it. The release of dopamine makes technology work similar to addictive drugs, such as alcohol or nicotine.
- There is a phenomenon of patients wanting to receive plastic surgery in order to look more similar to a picture with a filter on it due to '**Snapchat Dysmorphia**'. This can lead to a body dysmorphic disorder and the lowering of one's self-esteem.
- The practice of **using positive intermittent reinforcement** in media development to keep users' attention for longer periods of time.
- People are highly likely to believe false information on the Internet, such as conspiracy theories, affecting off-screen behaviour and lives. **False information on Twitter spreads six times faster than true information**, according to a study,

because people have a greater emotional reaction towards fake news.

- 64% of the people in extremist groups on Facebook, joined these groups because their **algorithms** lead them there. Algorithms push content that ignites outrage, hate, and amplifies biases within the data that is shown to them.

India and laws on Privacy

- The draft law on data protection proposed by the **Srikrishna Committee** takes into account three aspects in terms of **data - the citizens, the state and the industry**.
- The draft bill notes that "the **right to privacy is a fundamental right**".

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ART & CULTURE

1) Anubhava Mantapa

About Basaveshwara (Basavanna)

- Basavanna was an Indian 12th-century **statesman, philosopher, poet, Lingayat saint in the Shiva-focussed Bhakti movement, and Hindu Shaivite social reformer** during the reign of the Kalyani Chalukya/Kalachuri dynasty.
- Basavanna was active during the rule of both dynasties but reached his peak of influence during the rule of King Bijjala II in Karnataka.
- Basavanna **spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas**. Basavanna **rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals** but introduced Ishtalinga necklace, with an image of the Shiva Linga, to every person regardless of his or her birth, to be a constant reminder of one's bhakti (devotion) to Shiva.
- As the chief minister of his kingdom, he introduced new public institutions such as the **Anubhava Mantapa** ("hall of spiritual experience"), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
- Basava **championed devotional worship** that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins, and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga.
- Basaveshwara is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms.
- Basavanna literary works include the **Vachana Sahitya in Kannada Language**.
- He is also known as **Bhaktibhandari** (the treasurer of devotion), Basavanna or Basaveswara.

Sharana Movement (Vachana Movement)

- The Sharana movement Basaveshwara presided over attracted **people from all castes, and like most strands of the Bhakti movement**.

- The **egalitarianism** of Basavanna's Sharana movement was too radical for its times.
- Sharanas **challenged the caste order**: they organised a wedding where the bridegroom was from a lower caste, and the bride a Brahmin.

Why in News?

- Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa laid the foundation stone for the 'New Anubhava Mantapa' in Basavakalyan, the place where 12th century poet-philosopher Basaveshwara lived for most of his life.

About the New Anubhava Mantapa

- The New Anubhava Mantapa, as envisaged now, will represent various principles of Basaveshwara's philosophy.
- It **will showcase the 12th Century Anubhava Mantapa** (often referred to as the "first Parliament of the world") established by him in Basavakalyan where philosophers and social reformers held debates.
- The building **will adopt the Kalyana Chalukya style of architecture**.
- The grand structure supported by 770 pillars will have an auditorium with a seating capacity of 770 people. It is believed that 770 Sharanas (followers of Basaveshwara) led the Vachana reformist movement in the 12th Century.

Kalyani Chalukya architecture

- **Western Chalukya architecture also known as Kalyani Chalukya or Later Chalukya architecture**, is the distinctive style of ornamented architecture that evolved during the rule of the **Western Chalukya Empire** in the Tungabhadra region of modern central Karnataka during the 11th and 12th centuries.
- Most notable of the many buildings dating from this period are the Mahadeva Temple, the Kasivisvesvara Temple, the Mallikarjuna Temple at Kuruvatti and the Kallesvara Temple (all are located in Karnataka).

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Sagarmala Seaplane Services

About:

- The project aims at initiating the process of commencing operations of the Seaplane services, on the select routes, under a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) framework through prospective airline operators.
- The project execution and implementation would be through **Sagarmala Development Company Ltd (SDCL)**.
- The SDCL is under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Shipping**.

- The proposed Origin-Destination pairs under Hub and Spoke model include:
 - Islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep,
 - Guwahati Riverfront & Umranso Reservoir in Assam,
 - Yamuna Riverfront / Delhi (as Hub) to Ayodhya, Tehri, Srinagar (Uttarakhand), Chandigarh and many other tourist places of Punjab & HP;
 - Mumbai (as Hub) to Shirdi, Lonavala, Ganpatipule;
 - Surat (as Hub) to Dwarka, Mandvi & Kandla, Khindsi Dam, Nagpur & Erai Dam and Chandrapur (in Maharashtra)



Significance of Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS)

- SDCL is exploring plans to leverage the potential of the vast coastline and numerous water bodies/rivers across

India by commencing seaplane operations to provide connectivity and easier accessibility to remote locations.

- The Sea Plane will utilize the nearby water bodies for take-off and landing and thus

connect those places in a much economical way as conventional airport infrastructure.

- The seaplanes services will be a game-changer providing a supplementary means of faster and comfortable transportation across the nation.
- It will boost tourism for domestic and international holidaymakers.
- It will save travel time and stimulate localized short distance travelling especially in the hilly regions or across the rivers/lakes etc.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is starting the ambitious Project of Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS) with potential airline operators.

2) UJALA and SLNP

About Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All

- It was launched in 2015 with a **target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs** and to nullify the high-cost of LEDs that acted as a barrier previously in the adoption of energy-efficient systems.
- The scheme was implemented to set up a phase-wise LED distribution.
- The objective is to promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment that will reduce electricity bills and preserve the environment.
- It is the world's largest domestic lighting project.

About SLNP

- Street Light National Programme is an initiative of the Government to **promote energy efficiency in the country**.

Objectives

- Mitigate climate change by implementing energy efficient LED based street lighting
- Reduce energy consumption in lighting which helps DISCOMs to manage peak demand
- Provide a sustainable service model that obviates the need for upfront capital investment as well as additional revenue expenditure to pay for procurement of LED lights
- Enhance municipal services at no upfront capital cost of municipalities

Both schemes have been spearheaded and implemented by **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)**, a joint venture of PSUs under the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

Why in News?

- Govt of India's UJALA and SLNP completes six years of Illuminating India efficiently.

Achievements

- UJALA project brought the market transformation in the energy efficiency sector. Prices of LED bulbs being distributed under UJALA programme have fallen to one-tenth of their rates in 2015 from INR 310 to INR 38 in 2018.
- The switch from inefficient incandescent bulbs to LEDs is helping families reduce their electricity bills while also enabling them to access better brightness in homes.
- Through the UJALA initiative, over 36.13 crores LED bulbs have been distributed across India. This has resulted in estimated energy savings of **46.92 billion kWh per year**, avoided peak demand of 9,394 MW, and an estimated **GHG emission reduction of 38 million tonnes CO2** annually.
- **Under the SLNP programme**, over 1.03 crore smart LED streetlights have been installed till date, enabling an estimated energy savings of 6.97 billion kWh per year and an estimated greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction of 4.80 million tCO2 annually.
- LED streetlights have been installed in various states across the country, helping **generate approximately 13,000 jobs to support the Government of India Make in India initiative**.
- This has enabled citizens to increase productivity at night and made roads safer for pedestrians and motorists due to enhanced brightness and reduced dark spots.

3) Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

About

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated **once in every two years** to **strengthen** the engagement of the **overseas Indian**

community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.

- The 16th PBD Convention was held Virtually on 9 January, 2021 in New Delhi.
- The theme of 16th PBD Convention 2021 was "**Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat**".
- The day commemorates the **return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to India** on 9 January 1915.
- During the Convention, selected overseas Indians are also honoured with the prestigious **Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award** to recognize their contributions to various fields both in India and abroad.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award

- The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award is the **highest honour conferred on a Non-Resident Indian, Person of Indian Origin; or an organisation or institution** established and run by Non-Resident Indians or Persons of Indian Origin, who have made **significant contribution in better understanding of India abroad**, support India's causes and concerns in a tangible way, community work abroad, welfare of local Indian community, philanthropic and charitable work, etc.

Why in News?

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), the flagship event of the **Ministry of External Affairs** was held on 9 January, 2021.
- PBD provides an important platform to engage and connect with overseas Indians.
- Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, the Convention held in virtual format.

4) Jal Jeevan Mission

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission is envisioned to provide **safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.**

- The goal of JJM is to provide functional household tap connection to every household with service level at the rate of **55 litres per capita per day (lpcd).**

- The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management,

water conservation, rain water harvesting. The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water .

Key Objectives of the Mission are:

- To provide **Functional Tap Connection (FHTC)** to every rural household.
- To prioritize provision of FHTCs in quality affected areas, villages in drought prone and desert areas, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) villages, etc.
- To provide functional tap connection to Schools, Anganwadi centres, GP buildings, Health centres, wellness centres and community buildings.
- To monitor functionality of tap connections.
- To promote and ensure voluntary ownership among the local community by way of contribution in cash, kind and/ or labour and voluntary labour (shramdaan).
- To bring awareness on various aspects and significance of safe drinking water .

The institutional mechanism under JJM:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| National level | National Jal Jeevan Mission |
| State level | State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) |
| District level | District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) |
| Gram Panchayat level | Paani Samiti/ Village Water & Sanitation Committee (VWSC)/ User group |

Funding Pattern under JJM:

- The fund sharing pattern between Centre and State is **90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 100 percent for UTs and 50:50 for rest of the States.**

Positive Outcomes of JJM:

- JJM would ensure functional household tap connection to every rural household where there is a demand and people aspire for household piped water supply.
- It will significantly **improve quality of life**, particularly of women and children.
- It will assist in ODF-sustainability as water is important to sustain Swachh Bharat Mission's gains.
- In the rural areas, for developing in-village water supply infrastructure, water resource management, source

strengthening/ augmentation, distribution network, treatment plants, etc., unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled human resources will be required.

- Further there will be procurement of various materials for water supply systems. This will **generate employment and boost the economy.**

Why in News?

- 3.04 Crore New Connections provided under National Jal Jeevan Mission.
- **Goa** is the first state to provide 100% piped connection. States of Telangana, Gujarat, Haryana, UT of Puducherry are close to achieving 100% coverage.

5) Perform, Achieve and Trade scheme

About:

- **Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme** is a flagship programme of **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** under the **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE)**.
- The scheme is a **market based compliance mechanism to accelerate improvements in energy efficiency** in energy intensive industries.
- The energy savings achieved by notified industries is converted into tradable

instruments called **Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts)**.

- The ESCerts after issuance by Bureau of Energy Efficiency are traded at Power Exchanges like Indian Energy Exchange and Power Exchange India.
- **About BEE**
- BEE is a statutory body under the **Ministry of Power, Government of India.**
- It assists in **developing policies and strategies on energy conservation and efficiency** with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.
- BEE coordinates with designated consumers, designated agencies of the states, and other related organizations to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Power in consultation with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency has notified the price of per metric tonne of oil for Designated Consumers of a specified cycle of PAT scheme.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) New Development Bank

About NDB

- The New Development Bank (NDB) created by the **BRICS countries** formally came into existence at the Ufa Summit (Russia) in 2015.
- It was established with the objective of financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions toward global growth and development.
- In 2018, the NDB received **observer status** in the UN General Assembly.
- The five member nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – have an **equal shareholding in the NDB**.
- Voting power of each member is equal to the number of its subscribed shares in capital stock.

- All members of the United Nations could be members of the bank, however the share of the BRICS nations can never be less than **55% of voting power**.

Why in News?

- India has signed two loan agreements of USD 646 million with New Development Bank for upgrading State Highway Network and District Road Network in Andhra Pradesh.
- The two projects are expected to improve mobility and connectivity to the socioeconomic centres, enhance transport efficiency, improve road safety and riding quality, and provide all-weather accessibility for the State's road users.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Boosting India with Maritime domain Awareness

GS-2: India and its neighbourhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Why in the news?

- There has been an increase in Chinese presence in Indian ocean. India is countering Chinese presence through enhancing military strength and synergy with other Indian ocean nations. In the light of the adversary with China, a proper way to counter Chinese presence becomes important.

Why strategy needed?

- War in the modern time has become a more complex phenomenon. Adversary is not only conventional threats like enemy nations but a number of players like terrorists, pirates, criminals and sea robbers etc. These new players are invisible and they lurk behind regular actors like fisherman and port workers. Hence a need to be more vigilant through high-grade sensors and communication networks arises.

Steps taken by India to enhance Maritime domain awareness

- The Indian Navy is setting up **radar stations** in the Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Seychelles to form a wider coastal radar network to monitor Chinese presence in Eastern Indian ocean.
- Use of **P-8I aircraft and Indian naval ships** near Andaman seas and eastern checkpoints to deter any maritime adventurism by Beijing.
- Cooperation with Indian ocean countries** and Australia, Japan, UK, USA to send **Liaison officers at Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean region**, Gurugram. France already has an Officer there. This will result in the centre becoming the most important hub in the Eastern Indian Ocean.
- Engagement in the Western Indian Ocean** by positioning a **Liaison officer at Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre** in Madagascar established under

auspices of **Indian Ocean Commission** where India is an observer member.

- Posting officer at European Maritime Awareness in **Strait of Hormuz** in Abu Dhabi to assist in monitoring maritime activity in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.
- Deepening cooperation with French**, a key Indian ocean player and critical partner.

Way Forward

- These steps are a good way to ensure maritime security of India. However, in light of China working on a new generation of quieter submarines who are capable of beating adversary surveillance, there is a need to **extend underwater detection capabilities to the Eastern Chokepoints**.
- Underwater sensors can be installed with help of its partner Japan near Andaman Island to help detect Chinese submarines. Also, **surveillance through Sea Guardian drones (from USA), P-8I aircraft** should be used to enhance surveillance footprint.
- India's moves in Indian ocean should not only be limited to countering China but should also involve **dealing with transnational crime and increasing bonding with partner countries**. In this case, White Shipping agreements, real time maritime information sharing through India's military satellite (GSAT-7A), Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) can come handy.
- India must ensure seamless information flow generating operational synergy with its partner.

2) Grading India's counter-coercive strategy

GS-2 India and its neighbourhood-relations; International relations.

Why in the news?

- Global order is changing in the backdrop of the Covid Pandemic. The two heavyweights of Global order, USA and China are jabbing at each other without anyone of them being able to deliver any decisive knockout. Long term engagement between two superpowers provides an

opportunity to middle powers like India to redefine their place in the world.

Why India should redefine its response

- India is an immediate neighbour of China, a revisionist power who is engaging with India through coercive diplomacy. The People's Liberation Army of China got engaged in unprovoked transgression in May 2020, which sought to alter the existing status quo in eastern Ladakh.
- India's own goal of becoming a prominent player in Global world order.

Evaluation of India's response to Chinese provocation

- India-China's standoff at eastern Ladakh can be analysed through pioneer American political scientist **Alexander L. George's four variants of coercive diplomacy** namely – a gradual turning of screw, a try-and-see, a tacit ultimatum or a full-fledged ultimatum.
- Chinese approach in Ladakh was in a progressive manner. It was similar to graduated turning of screws and then waiting to see India's response.
- India correctly did not subscribe to quid-pro-quo and instead decided to adopt the try-and-see approach. It engaged in mild forms of coercion like building up forces on ground, displaying Indian Air Forces to achieve parity on ground. This strengthened India's defensive posture.
- After strengthening its defensive posture, India's focused on coercion through diplomatic and economic posture. At political level, the political establishment did not push the panic button in May, 2020 and synergised politico-diplomatic-military response. This helped India to avoid limited escalation or tactical wars.
- In the eastern Ladakh, the People's Liberation Army used speed and stealth to unroll its tactical plans. However, mobilisation of strength by Indian Air Force and control over high altitude caught Chinese unprepared.

Way Forward

- India is a status quo power and hence when faced with adversaries who are either irrational or revisionist, it is bound to be rocked on backfoot during the initial crisis that involves application or show of force.

- During the present India-China crisis, India did exceptionally well at the military and diplomatic level. At present however, it is difficult to predict the trajectory once ice snows melt in the Himalayas.
- However, given the asymmetry that exists between two powers, it will be fair to argue that India has done well in countering Chinese coercion in Ladakh with its own brand of counter coercion.

3) Beyond the Central Vista verdict, key questions

GS-2 Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions; GS-3 Infrastructure

Why in the news?

- The Supreme court in its recent judgement has given go to Central Vista projects and the new Parliament of India. Limiting itself strictly to **“the procedures sanctioned by law”**, the majority judgement concluded that the government had followed all the processes as stipulated by regulations.
- This judgement though may have put an end to litigation but is being seen as a missed opportunity to ensure accountability in civic projects and procurements of professionals' services by central and state government.

Why miss the opportunity?

- There was hope that the Judiciary would go beyond “procedure sanctioned by law”. Such steps were needed as laws governing prudence in civic procurement and procurement of professional's services are few. Hence overarching guidelines were needed.
- The problem of prudence is widespread beyond the Central Vista project. **Prudence in civils projects is being abandoned for political reasons.**
- The imprudent planning and reckless abandonment of Amravati, the proposed capital for Andhra Pradesh is another such example. In this project, after acquiring vast land and months of planning, the project was abandoned when the projects moved towards construction. This left farmers and others agitated and in difficulty.

What needs to be done to ensure accountability?

- **“Vertical accountability”** and **“Horizontal accountability”** are two pillars that ensure accountability. “Horizontal accountability” is about creating interrelated state organisations such as heritage committees and environmental regulators to keep check.
 - Vertical regulations concern citizen oversight which currently is limited to elections. Though the government argues that there is sufficient Vertical accountability, experience has shown that processes like stakeholder consultations are vague. As a result, Citizens are at mercy of official or judges’ interpretations where different judges can have their different yardsticks. Thus, there is a need to ensure Vertical accountability through better citizen oversight.
 - Need for clear regulations which unambiguously state what objective evaluation is needed for a particular project.
 - Regulatory changes are needed while choosing designers for public projects as design is a complex service which requires creativity and hence significant bearing on cost of public assets. There is a need to improve the process of procuring design services. Weightage placed on design value should be clear and fixed.
 - **Alternative method of closed procurement**, where select architects who meet a set of prerequisite criteria are invited and choices are made from their design, needs to be given up in favour of open competition. **Balance needs to be made between quality and cost.** In the cases where Open public procurement is not possible focus should be on reducing entry barriers.
 - **Removing steep turnover requirements** from public projects and **introducing quality as criteria** is important because the assumption that more turnover means better expertise is not always true. Creative function is not an outcome of a firm's scale. Steep entry requirements **eliminate medium and small size firms** and enable only a handful of large firms to qualify. This reduces the pool of choice available for public procurement.
 - **Recommendation of the Architect’s council of Europe** can come handy in this regard which advocates for dropping turnover requirement and puts emphasis on qualitative selection criteria.
- Way forward**
- As a considerable portion of India’s taxpayer’s money goes to public procurement there is a need for prudence in the process. Also, regulatory frameworks need to be changed to benefit medium and small size procurement firms, new architects below the age of 35years. This will enhance the pool of options available and hence quality in public procurement.
 - Low state capacity should not be an excuse for not adopting better practices in public procurements. Higher standards of the mature economy need to be implemented in Civic procurements.
 - Responses during the novel coronavirus pandemic of India and the United States has shown that the state capacity is not directly connected with the wealth rather than the will of the nation.
- #### 4) Quality gigs, a solution to urban employment
- ##### GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation, GS-3 Indian Economy and related issues.
- Why in the news?**
- Covid epidemic has resulted in restriction movement of people through which resulted in an adverse impact on the economy with the economy even having periods of negative growth of 23.9% in the April-June quarter of 2020. Now when India is aiming at “V shaped recovery”, many economic commentators believe that the focus on quality gig employment opportunities in the urban area can be a solution to urban employment.
- Why Quality gigs in urban areas?**
- Quality gigs is a solution to deal with the question of unemployment in the cities. While labor flocking to rural India have employment support through **MGNREGA scheme which has witnessed a 243% increase in person day**, there is **no such**

equivalent to deal with the issue of unemployment in urban areas.

- In many of the Indian cities shuttered businesses have forced millions of workers to leave or take up new jobs. Gigs economy as a result has become their only source of employment.
- Recently, an annual review was released by “**Fair work Foundation**” which has evaluated the wellbeing of gig workers on 11 digital platforms and does so by evaluating them on five metrics of Fair pay, Fair conditions, Fair management, Fair contracts and Fair representation.
- According to review only two India firms (Urban company and Flipkart) have scored greater than five while seven score only 2 or less, bottom of the rankings being held by four platforms giants namely Uber, Ola, Swiggy and Zomato. Hence this report demands an immediate attention to the issue of quality of gigs.
- Although some workers use a platform of gigs for “side hustle”, for many it is the primary source of employment.

Steps needed to ensure Quality Gigs

- **Better government regulation** through broad guidelines is required to ensure welfare of gigs workers. There is always sensitivity associated with the government regulations in the market, but considering that the gig economy is in its initial stage, such steps can be taken.
- There is a **need to move beyond one-size-fits-all-regulatory strategy** as regulation of the Gigs sector for those who see it as the primary source of employment, may hurt the market for highly skilled and highly paid freelancers.
- Government can form **conditional government partnerships** with platforms under some of its flagship schemes. Successful pilot programs examples include **Swiggy’s Street Vendors** programme under the **PM SVANidhi** or **PM Street vendor’s Atma Nirbhar Nidhi Scheme**. Such partnership between the state and platform can ensure simultaneous creation of jobs along with voluntary adoption of quality standards by street vendors.
- Labor platforms which provide urban employment can be required to **comply with disclosure norms and workers**

compensation standards. Collaboration with the platforms to employ workers will not only bring down the costs significantly for both the state and partners but it also creates an environment where firms would be more likely to cooperate with the state.

Way Forward

- As India moves on the path of recovery, India must look to step outside the box to tackle the challenge of urban unemployment. Given the limited fiscal space and a growing need to fuel consumption base, the government must push to build symbiotic relationships with new partners.
- As pandemic forces India to define its own understanding of the future of work, India must collaborate and regulate Industry 4.0 platforms to absorb an increasing number of urban workforces. These steps will not only ensure quantity but also quality of livelihood in urban areas.

5) Hasty Approval, no transparency

Why in the news?

- Recently two Covid-19 vaccines namely-Covishield and Covaxin – tested and manufactured by the Pune-based-Serum Institute and Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech respectively were approved by Indian regulators to end the pandemic in the country. The introduction of vaccines for the Covid-19 is a cause for celebration but the way in which the regulator showed haste and lack of transparency in approving vaccines does not inspire confidence.

Why concern over vaccines?

- Regulator while approving the vaccine did not wait for sufficient safety and efficacy data to be collected and did not share information about the clinical trials before granting approval. Thus, **transparency was missing from the approval process.** Transparency is vital for gaining people's trust so that they did not hesitate to take vaccines. The opaque nature of the vaccine’s approval has done little to eliminate the mistrust and misinformation about the epidemic.

- Behavior of the Indian regulator is in contrast with the transparency norms being followed in the developed world. USA Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had a live telecast of the advisory committee's examination of Pfizer's and Moderna's vaccines data before granting emergency use authorization. Similarly, UK regulators also made the assessment of Pfizer and AstraZeneca publicly available.
- During phase- 2/3 trial of Covishield safety and immunogenicity was tested but **not the efficacy of the vaccine**. Approving Covishield based on safety and immunogenicity data from India and efficacy data from the UK might be sufficient for emergency use but Serum Institute must collect efficacy data from the Indian trials before seeking full approval.
- UK regulators have found that efficacy improves when the AstraZeneca vaccine is delayed. By showing haste, Serum institute has wasted an opportunity to test the protection offered by the first dose and determine the efficacy of the second dose and time to administer the second dose. Now the decision regarding timing for the second dose has been left to the government.
- Approval for the "restricted use" granted to the Covaxin has not been granted based on efficacy data. Hence the level of protection offered by the vaccine against severe disease and preventions of infection and transmission is unknown.
- Assertions that the new vaccine will protect against the new variant of the virus is not backed by evidence. No efficacy data against any SARS-CoV-2 virus strain are currently available.
- There are concerns regarding informed consent as it will be very difficult to obtain informed consent in light of opaqueness and lack of transparency.

Way Forward

- By giving approval to Covaxin without data on its efficacy, the Indian regulator has joined the ranks of China and Russia. In India where the number of daily fresh cases and deaths are steadily dropping since mid-September, Companies and regulators should have taken the advantage of the situations so as to ensure

that emergency use authorization (EUA) is backed by data.

- Recent approval may set a stage to potentially reverse decades of hard work in building vaccine confidence. If there is **vaccine hesitancy** among the four high risk groups which will get the vaccine on priority, the companies and regulators should blame themselves.

6) "Shock treatment will not work in Agriculture"

GS - 2 Government policies and interventions; GS-3 marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints, Effects of liberalization on the economy

Why in the news?

- To deal with the crisis in the agriculture sector, the government recently passed three Acts to transform the agriculture sector and raise the farmers sector. These acts have introduced the concept of parallel private markets and contract farming in the agriculture sector. These changes have not gone well with the farming community and there has been protest specially in western part of countries. In midst of ongoing changes, there is debate about whether the APMC have outlived their utility and whether the new changes brought by the three acts are desirable or not.

Changes introduced by new Acts

- Governments have brought the concept of the output market with the aim that market forces will improve efficiency and create more value for farmers and the economy. Farmers are now **free to sell all their products anywhere and to anyone beyond the physical premise of APMC markets**.
- The three acts **promote contract farming through establishing partnership between the farmers and food processing companies**.
- The act also **promotes unlimited hoarding of food except in special circumstances**.

Issues with the changes brought

- No doubt APMC mandi's were known as demons. However, in mandis malpractices are known and local leaders are often

brought in to vent farmers' anger or arbitrate in difficult situations. New markets on other hand will be an **unknown ghost with no control over them by anyone.**

- Malpractices in the new system are neither forecastable nor is there any authority to report to.
- Despite government assurances there is **concern of duration to which MSP will continue once APMC mandis are gone.**
- As alternative traders offer better prices, farmers will go there and not to mandis. Sooner or later regulated mandis will become weaker and will shut down due to lack of business. This will be detrimental to farmers' interest in the long run.
- Even in the new market system **maximum price realization is not guaranteed.** Traders could reduce the prices on more than one pretext like finding faults with the products, declining to buy on pretext of glut, defaulting on payments and so on. As traders are few they may even form cartels. It becomes impractical and costly for the farmers to return from the market with loads of several quintals of produce on hired tractors when they are not able to realize a suitable price for their produce due any of these reasons.
- Most of the farmers, especially small farmers who form around 90-plus % of those who sell at the mandis, have immediate cash requirements and hence are prone to exploitation.
- Contract farming might be a noble idea but there is a problem when the contract is unequal. Small farmers are always at disadvantage due to big pockets, access to lawyers available to corporates and traders. Also, fine prints in contract, the pocket and language of contract are incomprehensible to small farmers.

What are farmers' demands?

- Prices for their produce should be cost of production plus a reasonable mark-up.
- Fluctuations in prices of the produce should be minimal.
- There should be little or no interface with legal or administrative officials. They are not comfortable in dealing with the Sahibs and police.

Way forward

- Farmers protest should not be ignored thinking that they are coming from specific areas. Farmers protest against the problem that affects them and present protest should not be seen as region specific.
- Even earlier there have been protests like Indigo farmers of eastern India in 1860, Mappilas in 1921, Warli Adivasi in 1945, by farmers of Maharashtra in between 1970s-2010s under Sharad Joshi or by farmers of Tamil Nadu against Cauvery water.
- The problem of stagnation and high agriculture input prices in agriculture needs a systematic approach proposed in **the M.S. Swaminathan Commission and/or the Ashok Dalwai committee.** Shock treatments don't work neither in agriculture nor in economy.

7) The dark step of writing hate into law

GS-1 Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India, GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation, GS-4 Ethics and Human Interface

Why in the news?

- A series of anti-interfaith marriage law has been enacted in the states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh on the pretext of checking religious conversion, love Jihad and for protecting Hindu women from marrying Muslim men. These laws, ordinances, schemes are seen by many as affecting the fabric of society and fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

Why new laws are problematic

- These laws are fundamentally wrong. The **Constitution treats individual citizens as having rights and obligations** where these **new laws treat religious communities instead of individual citizens as basic entities** and hence distorts the fundamental framework of our republic. By seeing the world as split between "Hindus" and "Muslims", a fundamental modern characteristic of

guaranteeing autonomy to all Indians as individuals is broken.

- State inference in civil union which is a solemnization of a relationship between two individuals **breaches the Right to privacy** which is a **part of the basic structure of the constitution**.
- Provision of these laws **impedes the exercise of an individual's right to choose her faith without seeking state sanction**. In matters of change of profession, nationalities, electoral choice and even political parties there is no such sanction or interference. The Constitution guarantees the **right to freedom of religion under article 25** and every person has the right to profess his own religion and to act according to it.
- **Basis of the new law is patriarchal**. Charges of "Hindu Betis" being taken away like cattle and the myth of love Jihad sees women as property. It limits women to exercise her choices. Famous Hadiya case, a 25-year-old health professional from Kerala is an example of such mindset.

Thus, the new laws are bad not only for muslim men but also for Hindu women.

Way forward

- Right to religious freedom is a fundamental right. Inter-religious marriages may be **less than 2.5% of all marriages** but the **promise they hold goes beyond numbers**. They reaffirm the fundamental constitutional premise that all citizens are equal, besides promoting the ideals of freedom and fraternity.
- Enacting Laws to check "Love Jihad" is diabolical as the government has itself confirmed in the Parliament that there was no evidence of it. Enacting such laws seeds mistrust, and changes fundamental and basic ground rules that all plural democracy upholds.
- There is always price for a country when it puts hate into laws as can be seen in Nazi Germany. Hence the need of the hour is that the court should Suo motu strike these laws down if it wants to preserve the basic structure of the constitution.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

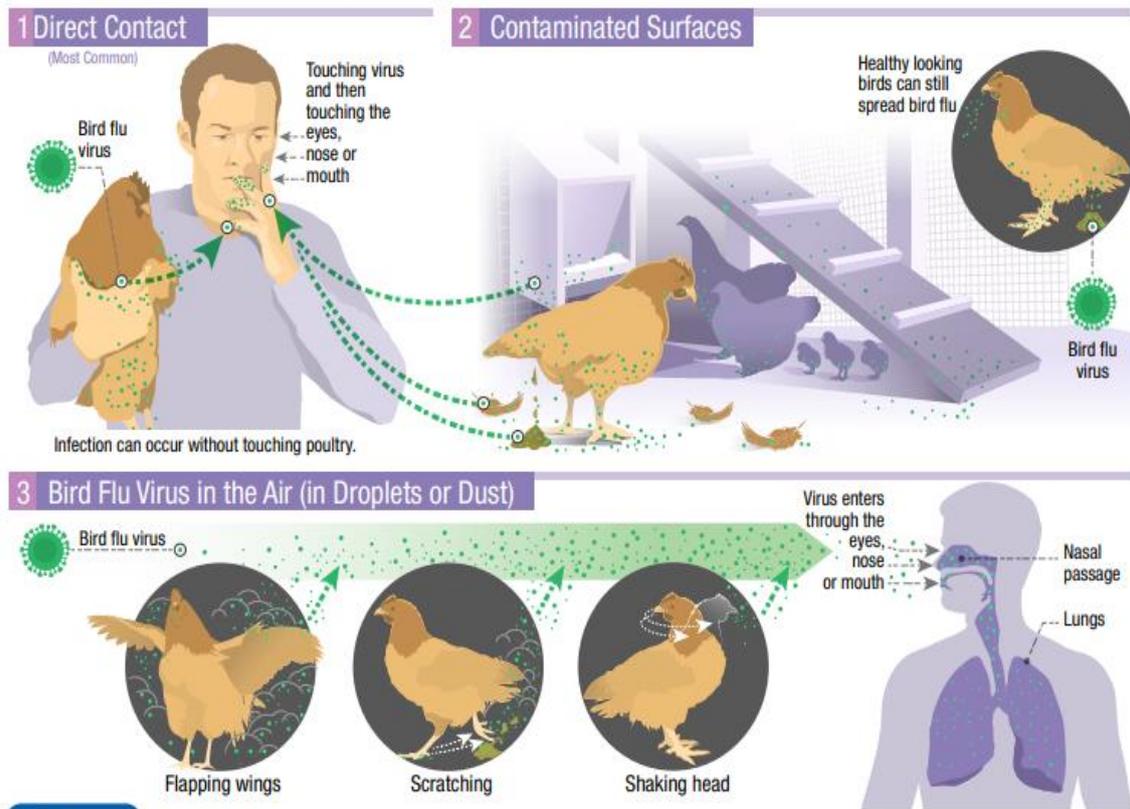
1) What is bird flu and how severe is the latest outbreak in India?

Why in the news?

- Bird flu is affecting domestic and wild birds all over India. Wild geese in Himachal Pradesh, crows in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, ducks in Kerala and poultry birds in Haryana are victims of bird flu.

How Infected Backyard Poultry Could Spread Bird Flu to People

Human Infections with Bird Flu Viruses Rare But Possible



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-in-humans.htm

What is bird flu?

- Bird flu, also called avian influenza, is a **viral infection** that can infect not only birds, but also humans and other animals. **Most forms of the virus are restricted to birds.**
- **H5N1** is the most common form of bird flu. There are many strains of the virus – some of them are mild and may merely cause a low egg production or other mild symptoms among chickens, while others are severe and lethal.
- It's deadly to birds and can affect humans and other animals that come in contact with a carrier.

What is the source of the flu?

- Wild water birds (like ducks and geese) can be infected with bird flu viruses, but usually do not get sick. Infected birds have viruses in their saliva, mucous and droppings.
- From water birds, many of whom migrate and travel long distances, the viruses are thus further spread to poultry and terrestrial birds. Sometimes, the virus jumps over to mammals such as pigs, horses, cats and dogs.
- Movement of infected poultry and migratory birds, and an illegal bird trade are believed to be the causes of the spread of bird flu. Since birds excrete even while flying, they provide a nice aerosol of

influenza virus, shedding it all over the world.

- Bird flu viruses spread easily between birds. Some of these viruses can cause serious illness and death in domestic poultry (like chickens, ducks and turkeys).

Measures taken to stop bird flu

- Generally poultry birds are vaccinated against the disease. But if found in large numbers, **culling of birds** is done to stop the spread.

Bird Flu and Humans

- According to the World Health Organization, H5N1 was first discovered in humans in 1997 and has killed nearly 60 percent of those infected.
- Unlike in birds, where it generally infects the gut, the **avian influenza attacks the respiratory tract of humans** and may cause severe respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia or Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). Its early symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, and sometimes abdominal pain and diarrhoea.
- According to WHO, the disease **does not spread among humans**. There is also no evidence that the disease spread from poultry food. Virus is sensitive to heat and dies in cooking temperatures.

Way Forward

- Flu viruses are more prone to mutation because they have a **segmented genome** (there are several fragments of genetic material that make a complete virus genome). All known strains of flu – including the seasonal flu and the pandemic flu – have jumped from birds to humans.
- If the virus **mutates** and becomes **easily transmissible from person to person**, say by altering its shape to grab human cells much more effectively, it can potentially cause a **pandemic**.
- Among poultry birds, vaccination strategies advised by the World Organisation for Animal Health can be used to prevent the flu, and the Organisation recommends eradicating the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) at its source to decrease the disease in avian species and further human infections.

2) How horizontal, vertical quotas work; what Supreme Court said

Why in the news?

- A two-judge supreme court bench gave clarity on classes in reservation in **Saurav Yadav versus State of Uttar Pradesh case** while solving the issue of in the selection process to fill posts of constables in the state.

What are types of reservations?

- **Vertical Reservation:** The reservations in favour of **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes [(under Article 16(4))]** are referred as vertical reservations.

a) SC, b) ST and c) OBC

- The Total percentage of Reservation for the above three categories **should not exceed 50%** at any point of time.
- **Horizontal reservation:** The Reservation in favour of women, Ex-servicemen, Person with Disability, Sportsmen, Minorities, etc. are generally referred to as Horizontal reservation.

Interlocking of reservation

- The horizontal quota is applied separately to each vertical category, and not across the board.
- For example, if women have 50% horizontal quota, then half of the selected candidates will have to necessarily be women in each vertical quota category — i.e., half of all selected SC candidates will have to be women, half of the unreserved or general category will have to be women, and so on.
- Even after providing for these horizontal reservations, the percentage of reservations in SC /ST and OBC should remain the same. It should not exceed the limit prescribed for these categories.

What was Saurav Yadav versus the State of Uttar Pradesh case?

- The litigants Sonam Tomar and Rita Rani had secured 276 and 233 marks respectively in UP police constable exam. They applied under the categories of OBC-Female and SC-Female respectively. OBC and SC are vertical reservation categories, while Female is a horizontal reservation category.

- The two candidates **did not qualify in their categories**. However, in the General-Female (unreserved-female) category, the last qualifying candidate had secured 274.8298 marks, a score that was lower than Tomar's.
- The question before the court was that if the underlying criterion for making selections is "merit", should Tomar be selected under General-Female quota instead of the OBC-Female category for having secured a higher score?

What was the UP government's argument?

- The government's policy was to restrict and contain reserved category candidates to their categories, even when they had secured higher grades.

What was the decision of the court?

- The Supreme Court has observed that the **candidates belonging to reserved category, are eligible to fill general/open category vacancies also**.
- Therefore, the court held that all candidates coming from 'OBC Female Category' who had secured more marks than the marks secured by the last

candidate appointed in 'General Category-Female' must be offered employment as Constables in Uttar Pradesh Police.

- The court concluded by saying that reservations, both vertical and horizontal, are a method of ensuring representation in public services.
- These are **not to be seen as rigid "slots"**, where a candidate's merit, which otherwise entitles candidates to be shown in the open general category, is foreclosed, as the consequence would be, if the state's argument is accepted.
- Doing so, would result in a communal reservation, where each social category is confined within the extent of their reservation, thus negating merit. **The open category is open to all**, and the only condition for a candidate to be shown in it is merit, regardless of whether reservation benefit of either type is available to her or him.

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RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) One Nation, One Gas Grid

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the 450-km natural gas pipeline between Kochi in Kerala to Mangaluru in Karnataka.

Objectives

- To double the share of cleaner natural gas in the consumption basket
- Diversify sources of energy
- Connecting the nation with one gas pipeline grid and bringing affordable fuel to people and industry.

Natural gas grid

- The gas-based economy is crucial for Atmanirbhar Bharat as it will not only help **improve clean energy access, but also aid in the development of city gas projects.**
- By connecting sources to consumers with the natural gas grid, the share of natural gas mix in the energy basket can be **increased to 15% from the current 6.3% while the global energy share average is around 24%.**
- It may also help in **improving regional imbalances** as currently natural gas is located in different pockets of the country.
- The natural gas being on priority list can also further strengthen the upstream wing like ONGC, midstream wing like GAIL India and downstream wing like Oil India Ltd. which will further lead to increase in exploration as well as production and may help in reducing the imports of Natural gas which is currently around 53%.

Challenges

- **Infrastructure hiccups** especially in terms of allocation of land for developing the grid.
- Maintaining the **stability of the policy regime** for attracting investments.
- **Pricing mechanism** eg: Administered pricing mechanism.
- **Maintenance of land records**
- **Public awareness** about the natural gas economy.

Way Forward

- **E-bidding process for petroleum products** in terms of diversifying the energy basket.
- **Tariff rationalisation**

- Increase **investment in natural gas exploration** which will further result in cleaner environment, employment generation and improving the health of people as well as per capita energy consumption.
- **Removing energy poverty and ensuring energy security** by building platforms especially for MSME in exploration as well as production.
- Building terminals along with pipelines and overseeing the **un-utilised gas pipelines.**

Conclusion

- At the end, every single household, manufacturing unit and power plants need to get connected to the natural gas grid and it needs to be in a much faster way for fulfilling the government's energy roadmap.

2) Role of Indian Diaspora in making India Self Reliant

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 16th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas convention and mentioned that the lessons learnt by India during the pandemic have become an inspiration for the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, and this movement for self-reliance is meant to help others as "Made in India" products and solutions will benefit the world.

Role of Indian Diaspora

- The pandemic has created a need for becoming self-reliant in terms of **Health, Habitat and hunger** and Indian diaspora plays a very critical role in crossing the threshold and deciding the future of the economy.
- Indian diaspora is around **3.2 crore and India is top receiver of remittances** which contributes to around 3% of GDP and results in co-creation and co-development.
- It can be an **aiding vehicle for Industrial revolution 4.0 and can act as a living bridge in terms of Technology and Finance.**
- India is being a business and investor friendly country in terms of allowing Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) and Person

of Indian Origin (PIO) card holders for investing in various sectors and as result India is being **leveraged as an offshore facility for investments.**

- A **cluster based investment approach** where Indian diaspora can play a permanent role in various sectors like **green and brown field manufacturing, financial sector, industrial sector, technology and especially in the Health sector** need to be encouraged.
- There is a need for more efforts in terms of **negotiations** and India needs to be a **facilitator** for encouraging the Indian diaspora and better global integration.

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