

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

The Hindu

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AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019

About

- The DNA Technology Regulation Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in July 2019. The Bill was then referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology.

Objectives

- The Bill seeks to create a **regulatory framework for obtaining, storing and testing of DNA samples of human beings**, mainly for the purposes of criminal investigations, and with the objective of establishing the identity of a person.
- DNA testing is already being used for a variety of purposes, such as criminal investigations, establishment of parentage, and search for missing people.
- The proposed law seeks to bring in a **supervisory structure** to oversee these practices, and frame guidelines and rules so that the DNA technology is not misused.
- Nearly 60 countries have enacted similar legislation, with the U.S. bringing in law as far back as 1994.

Highlights of the Bill

Use of DNA Data

- Under the Bill, **DNA testing is allowed only in respect of matters listed in the Schedule** to the Bill. These include offences under the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and for civil matters such as paternity suits.
- Further, the Schedule includes DNA testing for matters related to establishment of individual identity.

Collection of DNA

- While preparing a DNA profile, bodily substances of persons may be collected by the investigating authorities. **Authorities**

are required to obtain consent for collection in certain situations.

- For arrested persons, authorities are required to obtain written consent if the offence carries a punishment of up to seven years. If the **offence carries more than seven years of imprisonment or death, consent is not required.**
- Further, if the person is a victim, or relative of a missing person, or a minor or disabled person, the authorities are required to obtain the written consent of such victim, or relative, or parent or guardian of the minor or disabled person. If consent is not given in these cases, the authorities can approach a **Magistrate** who may order the taking of bodily substances of such persons.

DNA Data Bank

- The Bill provides for the establishment of a **National DNA Data Bank and Regional DNA Data Banks**, for every state, or two or more states.
- DNA laboratories are required to share DNA data prepared by them with the National and Regional DNA Data Banks.
- Every Data Bank will be required to maintain indices for the following categories of data: (i) a crime scene index, (ii) a suspects' or undertrials' index, (iii) an offenders' index, (iv) a missing persons' index, and (v) an unknown deceased persons' index.

Removal of DNA profiles

- The Bill states that the criteria for entry, retention, or removal of the DNA profile will be specified by regulations.
- However, the Bill provides for removal of the DNA profiles of the following persons: (i) of a suspect if a police report is filed or court order given, (ii) of an undertrial if a court order is given, and (iii) on written request, for persons who are not a suspect, offender or undertrial, from the crime scene or missing persons' index.

DNA Regulatory Board

- The Bill provides for the establishment of a **DNA Regulatory Board, which will supervise the DNA Data Banks and DNA laboratories.**
- The **Secretary, Department of Biotechnology**, will be the ex officio Chairperson of the Board.
- The Board will comprise additional members including: (i) experts in the field of biological sciences, and (ii) Director General of the National Investigation Agency and the Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Functions of the Board

- The functions of the Board include: (i) advising governments on all issues related to establishing DNA laboratories or Data Banks, and (ii) granting accreditation to DNA laboratories.
- Further, the Board is required to ensure that all information relating to DNA profiles with the Data Banks, laboratories, and other persons are kept confidential.

DNA laboratories

- Any laboratory undertaking DNA testing is required to obtain **accreditation from the Board.**
- The Board may revoke the accreditation for reasons including failure to: (i) undertake DNA testing, or (ii) comply with the conditions attached to the accreditation.

Offences

- The Bill specifies penalties for various offences, including: (i) for disclosure of DNA information, or (ii) using DNA samples without authorization.
- For instance, disclosure of DNA information will be punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and fine of up to one lakh rupees.

Critique of the Bill

- The main debate over the proposed law has been around **three issues** —
 1. whether the DNA technology is foolproof,
 2. whether the provisions adequately address the possibility of abuse of DNA information, and
 3. whether the privacy of the individual is protected.
- DNA information can be **extremely revelatory**. It can not only establish a person's identity but also reveal a lot

about physical and biological attributes of the person like eye, hair or skin colour, susceptibility to diseases, possible medical history, and possible clues to biological relatives.

- Critics of the Bill have been claiming that collecting and storing such intrusive information **could lead to abuse**, besides being **violative of a person's privacy**.
- The government, on the other hand, has been arguing that since DNA tests are **already happening**, and frequently used as the most reliable tool to establish identity, it would be better to have regulatory safeguards so that it is carried out only in prescribed manner and by authorised personnel and institutions.
- The government has also claimed that very limited information is proposed to be stored in the indices — only 17 sets of numbers out of billions that DNA samples can reveal. These can tell nothing about the individual except to act as a **unique identifier**, it has said.

Why in News?

- AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen) president Asaddudin Owaisi and CPI leader Binoy Viswam have filed dissent notes to the Parliamentary Standing Committee's report on DNA Technology Bill, claiming that it does not take into account their concerns over privacy violations and targets Dalit, Muslims and Adivasis by way of DNA sample collection and indefinite storage as per the new legislation.
- The bill proposes DNA sampling and profiling of citizens accused of crime or reported missing and storing their unique genetic information for administrative purposes. The fear is that the law could be used for caste or community based profiling.

2) NCC Expansion

About NCC

- The National Cadet Corps (NCC) is a youth development movement.
- It is a **Tri-Services Organisation**, comprising the Army, Navy and Air Wing, providing opportunities to the youth of the country for their all-round development with a sense of Duty, Commitment,

Dedication, Discipline and Moral Values so that they become able leaders and useful citizens.

- The NCC provides exposure to the cadets in a wide range of activities., with a distinct emphasis on Social Services, Discipline and Adventure Training. The NCC is **open to all regular students of schools and colleges on a voluntary basis.**
- The NCC came into existence under the National Cadet Corps Act XXXI of 1948.
- The motto of NCC is:“ **UNITY AND DISCIPLINE**”.
- NCC is headed by the Director General (DG), an Army Officer of the rank of Lieutenant General.
- The NCC operates under the **Ministry of Defence.**

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that to strengthen the security network in the border and coastal areas, the participation of National Cadet Corps is being boosted and the government has made efforts to see that the role of NCC is further expanded.
- On August 15 last year, it was announced that NCC will be given **new responsibilities in around 175 districts in the coastal and border areas.** For this, around one lakh NCC cadets are being trained by Army, Navy and Air Force. Of these, **one-third are girl cadets.**
- Mr. Modi also commended the NCC cadets for helping the government amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and hailed their role in floods and other calamities.

3) e-EPICs

What's in the news?

- The Election Commission has launched the Electors Photo Identity Cards (e-EPICs) to enable voters to download the electronic version of EPICs on the National Voters Day (January 25).

About e-EPICs

- The e-EPIC will be a **non-editable PDF** of the Electors Photo Identity Cards that can be stored on the **DigiLocker app or printed from a computer.** The e-EPICs are in **addition to physical IDs being issued for fresh registration.**

- The digital version of EPICs would be available for download from the **Voter Helpline app, voterportal.eci.gov.in and nvsp.in.**
- All general voters who have valid EPIC numbers would be able to download the e-EPIC from February 1 and those who applied in November and December 2020 will be able to download their digital EPICs from January 25 till January 31.
- Themed **'Making Our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed'**, the National Voters Day this year will focus on the ECI's commitment towards conducting elections safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Related Details

About DigiLocker

- DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the **Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).** Linked to both Aadhaar card and cellphone numbers, DigiLocker eliminates the use of physical documents as part of the government's Digital India drive, since all data is stored in the cloud.
- One can upload scanned copies of their documents (PDF, JPEG or PNG format) and access it anywhere they want. One can also e-sign these uploaded documents, which works like self-attestation of physical documents.
- On the other hand, organisations like the CBSE, the Registrar Office or the Income Tax Department can also push electronic copies of documents and certificates directly into Citizens' e-lockers.
- The issued documents in DigiLocker system are **deemed to be at par with original physical documents** as per the Information Technology (Preservation and Retention of Information by Intermediaries providing Digital Locker facilities) Rules, 2016.
- DigiLocker is available both on **websites and mobile apps.**

Benefits of DigiLocker

- Benefits to Citizens
1. Important Documents Anytime, Anywhere.
 2. Authentic Documents, Legally at Par with Originals.
 3. Digital Document Exchange with the consent of the citizen.

4. Faster service Delivery- Government Benefits, Employment, Financial Inclusion, Education, Health.
 - Benefits to Agencies
1. **Reduced Administrative Overhead:** Aimed at the concept of paperless governance. It reduces the administrative overhead by minimizing the use of paper and curtailing the verification process.
2. **Digital Transformation:** Provides trusted issued documents. Issued Documents available via DigiLocker are fetched in real-time directly from the issuing agency.
3. **Secure Document Gateway:** Acts as a secure document exchange platform like payment gateway between trusted issuer and trusted Requester/Verifier with the consent of the citizen.
4. **Real Time Verification:** Provides a verification module enabling government agencies to verify data directly from issuers after obtaining user consent.

4) Inequality Virus Report

What's in the news?

- **Oxfam**, a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty, has released its 'Inequality Virus Report'.

Highlights of the Report

Deepening inequalities due to COVID-19

- Calling the coronavirus pandemic the world's worst public health crisis in a hundred years, the report said it triggered an economic crisis comparable in scale only with the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- However, Indian billionaires increased their wealth by 35% during the lockdown to ₹3 trillion, ranking India after U.S., China, Germany, Russia and France.
- Out of these, the **rise in fortunes for the top 100 billionaires** since the lockdown in March is **enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest Indian people a cheque for ₹94,045 each.**
- The wealth of just the top 11 billionaires during the pandemic could easily sustain the MGNREGS or the Health Ministry for the next 10 years, stated the report, which underscored the deepening inequalities due to COVID-19 where the wealthiest escaped the worst impact of the pandemic

while the poor faced joblessness, starvation and death.

Wealth Tax & Cess

- It recommended reintroducing the **wealth tax** and effecting a **one-time COVID-19 cess of 4%** on taxable income of over ₹10 lakh to help the economy recover from the lockdown.
- According to its estimate, wealth tax on the nation's 954 richest families could raise the equivalent of 1% of the GDP.

Different forms of inequities

- The report also delved deeper into different forms of inequities, including **educational, gender and health**, which meant that facilities to wash hands and maintain distance, essential to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, was **impossible for a majority of the population.**
- According to the report, **only 6% of the poorest 20% have access to non-shared sources of improved sanitation**, compared to 93.4% of the top 20%.
- **59.6% of India's population lived in a room or less**, which meant that protocols necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 cannot be followed.
- While the government took steps to make COVID-19 services affordable by including them under **Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY**, the scheme **only covered BPL (below poverty line) population** leaving out the uninsured poor and the middle class.

Education

- Till October, 32 crores students were hit by closure of schools, of whom 84% resided in rural areas and 70% attended government schools.
- Close to 40 % of teachers in government schools feared that the prolonged school closure might lead to a third of the students not returning once schools reopened.
- It was estimated that **out of school rates would double in a year. Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims** were likely to see a higher rate of dropout. **Girls** were also most vulnerable as they were at risk of early and forced marriage, violence and early pregnancies.

Gender

- **Unemployment of women rose by 15%** from a pre-lockdown level of 18 %, which

could result in a loss of India's GDP of about 8 % or ₹15 trillion.

- Women who were employed before the lockdown were also 23.5 percentage points less likely to be re-employed

compared to men in the post lockdown phase.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Lookalike snakes but with self-styled venoms

About kraits

- Kraits (genus Bungarus) are distributed throughout Asia from Pakistan to southern China and southward into Indonesia. The genus consists of 12 species.
- Krait venom contains β -bungarotoxin, a presynaptic blocker which **causes muscle paralysis**.
- They are terrestrial, feeding mainly on other snakes but also on frogs, lizards, and small mammals. Kraits are nocturnal hunters and are dangerous to humans only when stepped on or otherwise strongly provoked.
- Common kraits are most frequent and lethal. It is a nocturnal terrestrial snake living close to human dwellings and the bites happen mostly at night where people sleep on the floor in mud huts.



Why in the news?

- A recent study by Indian Institute of Science on kraits in southern and western India has found new species of kraits across the region of study.
- **Romulus Snake:** This species has been found in **Karnataka**. This species looks very similar to the common krait but **differs genetically**. It has been named snake man of India, Romulus Whittaker.
- **Wall's Sind krait:** This species is found across **Maharashtra, Rajasthan and western Pakistan**. It differs about 3% from **Sind krait** found in Pakistan.
- It is found that venom from the above kraits is very potent and **no antivenom in India has the ability to neutralize their venoms**.

- This is because these antivenoms are made to protect against the bites of the 'big four' Indian snakes – the spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*) and saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*).
- According to the researchers, about **58,000 people die in India every year** due to snake bites and three times this number suffer permanent disabilities, it is necessary to take cognisance of the difference between the venoms of the different species and their distribution across the country through more research.

2) Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle

About the Turtle



- It is a **freshwater turtle** and one of the rarest species in India. It is also called the Asian giant softshell turtle.
- Cantor's giant softshell is found across **Southeast Asia**, including India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.
- The species is listed as **Endangered** by the IUCN Red List, however, this assessment is long out-of-date and in urgent need of updating.
- It is listed under **Schedule I** of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act and designated on **CITES Appendix II**.
- Cantor's giant softshell is under threat from harvesting by local people for meat, accidental killing and persecution from fishermen when caught in fishing gear, and

the destruction of its freshwater and coastal habitats.

Why in the news?

- Ayushi Jain, a conservationist, is trying to conserve Cantor's Giant Softshell turtles in Kerala along with people's support.

3) Sunderbans is home to 428 species of birds

About Indian Sunderbans

- The Sunderbans forest is about 10,000 sq km across India and Bangladesh, of which 40% lies in India.
- The forest of the Sunderbans is located in the **world's largest delta**, which is formed by three rivers named **Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna**.
- The forest in India is divided into the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve and 24 Parganas (South) Forest Division, and together with the forest in Bangladesh is the **only mangrove forest in the world where tigers are found**.
- The Indian Sunderbans, which covers 4,200 sq km, comprises the Sunderban Tiger Reserve of 2,585 sq km — home to about 96 Royal Bengal Tigers (as per last census in 2020) — is also a world heritage site and a **Ramsar Site**.

Why in the news?

- Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has published a book on the birds of sunderbans - "Birds of the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve".
- It not only recorded 428 species of birds, along with this it published photographs of male and female of each species as well as their distribution and locality data. This is to encourage bird watching in the region.



- The report found that the area is home to nine out of 12 species of kingfishers found in the country as well rare species such as the **Goliath heron (image 1)** and **Spoon-billed Sandpiper (image2)**.
- **Masked Finfoot (image3)** and **Buffy fish owl (image 4)**, are recorded **only** from the Sunderbans.
- The mudflats and wetlands of Sunderbans act as a stopover site for migratory flight south (south wards) and back.

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ECONOMY

1) Green Tax

What's in the news?

- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has approved a proposal to **levy a 'green tax' on old vehicles** in a bid to protect the environment and curb pollution.

News in Detail

- Personal vehicles will be **charged a tax at the time of renewal of Registration Certification after 15 years**. The levy may differ depending on fuel (petrol/diesel) and type of vehicle.
- Vehicles like strong hybrids, electric vehicles and those running on alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol and LPG will be **exempted** while the revenue collected through the green tax will be **utilised for tackling pollution**.
- Vehicles used in **farming**, such as tractor, harvester and tiller will also be exempted from the tax.
- The proposal will now go to the States for consultation before it is formally notified. The proposal includes **10-25% of road tax on transport vehicles older than eight years** at the time of renewal of fitness certificate.
- The proposal on green tax also includes a **steeper penalty of up to 50% of road tax for older vehicles registered in some of the highly polluted cities** in the country.

Scrapping of vehicles policy

- The Minister also approved the policy of deregistration and scrapping of vehicles owned by government departments and PSUs, which are **above 15 years in age**.
- It is to be notified, and will come into effect from 1st April, 2022.

2) Minimum Support Price

About MSP

- Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a form of **market intervention** by the Government to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices.
- The minimum support prices are announced by the Government at the **beginning of the sowing season** for

certain crops on the basis of the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.

About CACP

- The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices is an attached office of the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**. It came into existence in 1965.
- It is mandated to recommend MSPs to incentivize the cultivators to adopt modern technology and raise productivity and overall grain production in line with the emerging demand patterns in the country.
- As of now, CACP recommends MSPs of **23 commodities**, which comprise **7 cereals** (paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, pearl millet, barley and ragi), **5 pulses** (gram, tur, moong, urad, lentil), **7 oilseeds** (groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, soyabean, seasmum, sunflower, safflower, niger seed), and **4 commercial crops** (copra, sugarcane, cotton and raw jute).
- CACP submits its recommendations to the government. The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)** takes a **final decision** on the level of MSPs and other recommendations made by CACP.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the Minimum Support Price of copra at Rs 10,335 per quintal for 2021 season.

3) Index of Eight Core Industries

About ICI

- The monthly Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) is a **production volume index**.
- The objective of the ICI is to provide an advance indication on production performance of industries of 'core' nature before the release of Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- These industries are likely to impact on general economic activities as well as industrial activities.
- The Eight Core Industries- **Electricity, steel, refinery products, crude oil, coal, cement, natural gas and fertilizers-**

comprise 40.27 per cent of the weight of items included in the IIP.

▪ **Industry Weight (In percentage)**

1. Petroleum & Refinery production - 28.04
 2. Electricity generation - 19.85
 3. Steel production - 17.92
 4. Coal production - 10.33
 5. Crude Oil production - 8.98
 6. Natural Gas production - 6.88
 7. Cement production - 5.37
 8. Fertilizers production - 2.63
- ICI is released by the **Office of Economic Advisor**, under the Ministry of Commerce

and Industries. The base year of the ICI is **2011-12**.

Why in News?

- According to the latest official data, output from India's eight core sectors **contracted 1.3% in December 2020**, with electricity and coal the only two sectors recording positive growth.
- This is the **third month in a row that core sectors' output declined**.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) New START

About the treaty

- The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was signed in 2010 by **Russia and the United States** and entered into force in 2011.
- New START replaced the 1991 START I treaty, which expired in 2009, and superseded the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT).
- New START **caps the deployed strategic nuclear warheads and bombs** of the United States at Russia at 1,550 each. The Treaty includes limits on missiles, bombers, and land-based launchers for nuclear weapons.
- The Treaty also allows for verification inspections and information-sharing.
- The New Start Treaty is **due to expire this February**.

Why in News?

- Russian lawmakers have approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear Russia-U.S. arms control treaty, a fast-track action that comes just days before it's due to expire.
- Both houses of Parliament voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years, a day after a phone call between U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia said they agreed to complete the necessary extension procedures in the next few days.

2) Davos Summit

About the Summit

- Davos is the informal name of the annual four-day conference held by The **World Economic Forum** in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland.
- The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation. The Forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.
- Each year, at the Davos summit, business leaders and heads of state give lectures and speak on panels about topics ranging

from gender equality and venture capital to mental health and climate change.

- Countries use the event as a chance to network and hash out their differences out of the public eye. North and South Korean officials held their first ever ministerial-level meetings at Davos in 1989, while Greece and Macedonia settled their nearly three-decade-long conflict over Macedonia's name at the event in 2018.

Why in News?

- Addressing the World Economic Forum's virtual Davos summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that more '**Made in India**' **COVID-19 vaccines** are on the way to help speed up the world's vaccination efforts, and India's economy would help global growth recover from the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Inviting investors to consider opportunities in the country, Mr. Modi said: "India is full of possibilities and self-confidence. During the crisis, we have undertaken several structural reforms and they are being supported by production-linked incentives. Now, from the tax regime to FDI norms, we have a predictable and friendly environment."
- Arguing that India had all the ingredients required for adopting Industry 4.0, with its robust digital infrastructure and skills, the Prime Minister said that it was important that the fourth industrial revolution should not be for robots, but for the **benefit of human beings**.

3) Iran nuclear deal

Background

- **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

- Former 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.
- He 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.

Why in News?

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that if Iran were to become compliant with the terms of the now defunct Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the U.S. would re-enter it too.

4) India-China Relations

Background

- India and China are in the midst of their most serious conflict at the border, with the two militaries at a stand-off at multiple points in eastern Ladakh since May 2020.
- India has accused China of triggering the current conflict by increasing troop levels at the frontline and entering into Indian territory beyond the previous patrol patterns at the LAC.

Why in News?

- Asserting that difficulties in India-China relations could undermine the so-called Asian century, India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar proposed "**three mutuals**" and "**eight broad propositions**" as a way forward for the relationship. He said **mutual respect,**

mutual sensitivities and **mutual interests** were the determining factors.

- According to Mr. Jaishankar, the **eight broad propositions** are:

1. First and foremost, **agreements already reached must be adhered to in their entirety**, both in letter and spirit.
2. Second, where the handling of the border areas are concerned, the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) must be strictly observed and respected**; any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo is completely unacceptable.
3. Third, **peace and tranquility** in the border areas is the basis for development of relations in other domains. If they are disturbed, so inevitably will the rest of the relationship.
4. Fourth, while both nations are committed to a multi-polar world, there should be a recognition that a **multi-polar Asia is one of its essential constituents**.
5. Fifth, obviously each state will have its own interests, concerns and priorities; but sensitivity to them cannot be one-sided. At the end of the day, **relationships between major states are reciprocal in nature**.
6. Sixth, as rising powers, each will have their **own set of aspirations and their pursuit too cannot be ignored**.
7. "eventh, there will always be divergences and differences but their **management is essential to our ties**."
8. And eighth, **civilisational states like India and China must always take the long view**.
 - He added that respecting the three mutuals and observing the eight principles will surely help us make the right decisions.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Flash Droughts

Why in News?

- A new study has pointed out that India could experience more flash droughts by the end of this century.

What are Flash Droughts?

- **Flash droughts** are those that **occur very quickly, with soil moisture depleting rapidly**. Normally, developing drought conditions take months, but **these happen within a week or in two weeks' time**.
- Several **factors** including **atmospheric anomalies, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions** play an important role.

About the study

- The team analysed the major flash droughts that occurred from 1951 to 2016 in India. They simulated the soil moisture using the meteorological data obtained from the India meteorological department.
- Duration, intensity, and area of the flash droughts were studied and an overall severity score was given. The top five flash droughts based on the overall severity score occurred in 1979 followed by 2009, 1951, 1986 and 2005.
- To predict the future flash droughts the team used a **Community Earth System Model** which simulates the **summer monsoon precipitation, sea surface temperature, role of El Nino Southern Oscillation, and air temperature over India**.
- The analysis showed a considerable rise in the frequency of extremely dry and hot years in the coming three decades. They also examined the role of greenhouse gas emissions, industrial aerosols, and land-use/land-cover change.
- The frequency of **concurrent hot and dry extremes** is **projected to rise by about five-fold**, causing an approximately seven-fold increase in flash droughts like 1979 by the end of the 21st century.
- The study concluded that this increased frequency of flash droughts can have deleterious **implications for crop production, irrigation demands and groundwater abstraction in India**.

Why is it happening?

- The ongoing **climate change** has caused a significant increase in global temperature and this can lead to more and more flash droughts in the coming years.

How to tackle this problem?

- If we can meet the **'Paris Agreement' goals** and limit global warming to well below 2 degree C, the numbers and frequency of the projected flash droughts may go down.

2) Supercomputers

What is a supercomputer?

- A supercomputer is a **computer with a high level of performance compared to a general-purpose computer**. Performance of a supercomputer is measured in **floating-point operations per second (FLOPS)** instead of million instructions per second (MIPS).
- Supercomputers contain tens of thousands of processors and can perform billions and trillions of calculations or computations per second.
- Some supercomputers can perform up to a hundred quadrillion FLOPS. Since information moves quickly between processors in a supercomputer (compared to distributed computing systems) they are ideal for real-time applications.

Why in News?

- A new supercomputer in Wyoming, U.S., will rank among the world's fastest and help study phenomena including climate change, severe weather, wildfires and solar flares.

About the new Supercomputer

- The **HPE-Cray EX supercomputer** will theoretically be able to perform almost **20 quadrillion calculations per second** — 3.5 times faster than the existing machine at the NCAR-Wyoming Supercomputing Center.
- The new machine's maximum speed per second will be roughly equivalent to each person on Earth completing a math equation every second for an entire month.

Uses of Supercomputers

- Common applications for supercomputers include **testing mathematical models for complex physical phenomena** or designs, such as climate and weather, evolution of the cosmos, nuclear weapons and reactors, new chemical compounds (especially for pharmaceutical purposes), and cryptology.
- That power will enable some of the most sophisticated simulations yet of large-scale natural and human-influenced events.
- **Academic research:** For **observing and simulating the phenomena which are too big, too small, too fast, or too slow** to observe in laboratories. For example, astrophysicists use supercomputers as “time machines” to explore the past and the future of our universe. Another important area is quantum mechanics.
- **Weather and climate modeling** to forecast with better accuracy by analyzing multiple factors and their interrelationships.

Medicine discovery

- **Monsoon Forecasting** using dynamic Models.
- **Big data mining** to strengthen and better mobilization of digital India mission.
- Oil and gas exploration
- **Aerodynamics** research and development
- **Simulation** of nuclear fission and fusion processes, therefore giving better nuclear infrastructure models
- **Molecular dynamics**- supercomputer simulations allow scientists to dock two molecules together to study their interaction which may lead to the development of innovative materials
- Predicting future comet collision with the earth.

India and Supercomputers

- India's **first supercomputer was PARAM 8000**. It was developed by the Centre for Advanced Computing (C-DAC) in 1991, with a speed of 1 Gigaflop.
- **Param Siddhi** is a High Performance Computing-Artificial Intelligence (HPC-AI) supercomputer **developed by Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) under National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)** at Centre for Development of

Advanced Computing. Param Siddhi is ranked 63rd among top 500 most powerful non-distributed computer systems in the world.

- **PARAM-Siddhi is the second Indian supercomputer** to be entered in the **top 100** on the Top500 list. **Pratyush**, a supercomputer used for weather forecasting at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology is **also in the top 100 list**.
- Another Indian supercomputer, **Mihir** (146th on the list), clubs with Pratyush to generate enough computing power to match PARAM-Siddhi.

National Supercomputing Mission

- Envisages empowering our national academic and Research and Development (R&D) institutions spread over the country by installing a **vast supercomputing grid**
- These supercomputers will also be networked on the National Supercomputing grid over the **National Knowledge Network (NKN)**.
- The NKN is another programme of the government which **connects academic institutions and R&D labs** over a high speed network.
- The Mission is implemented and steered **jointly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)**.
- The C-DAC has recently launched the second phase of this project wherein more institutions will be supported by supercomputing facilities.

Objectives of NSM

- To **make India one of the world leaders in Supercomputing** and to enhance India's capability in solving grand challenge problems of national and global relevance
- To **empower our scientists and researchers** with state-of-the-art supercomputing facilities and enable them to carry out cutting-edge research in their respective domains

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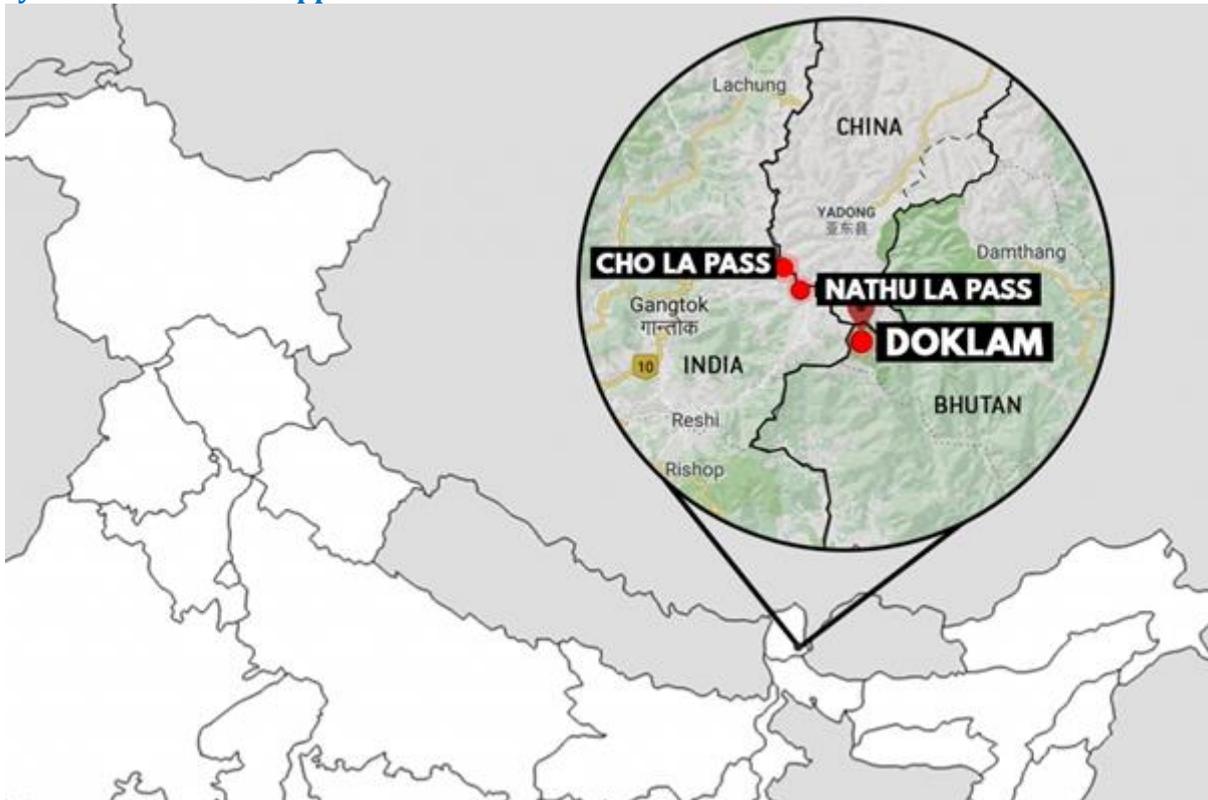
DEFENCE

1) Military Standoff

Why in News?

- Recently, troops from India and China were involved in a clash in **Naku La** in Sikkim.

Why do the standoffs happen?



- But as of now the **border has not actually been demarcated on the ground**. As it is, there have been issues in the so-called Finger Area to the east of Naku La. The Chinese have been contesting the boundary in the north-eastern arc of Sikkim, because this is in an area where terrain allows India to deploy armoured units that can threaten the roads connecting Tibet to the Chumbi Valley.
 - The **1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** states: "When necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of the (LAC) where they have different views as to its alignment".
- China has been developing two air defence positions that will cover the 2017 Doklam stand-off area and also Naku La in Sikkim.
 - It is also **close to Siliguri Corridor** (Chicken's Neck Corridor) that connects mainland India with North East India. By taking advantage of this geographically important position, China can get **more influence over Arunachal Pradesh**, which China claims as its territory.
 - This could also be a **pressure tactic by China** to force India on its objection to the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**.
 - Modus operandi of China**
 - China's** history of territorial conquests falls in the '**fait accompli**' category. Sparsely populated/unpopulated and undefended territories have been the prime targets. Chinese moves in East Asia,

South China Sea and Sino-Indian border provide ample evidence.

- The current situation in Ladakh and Sikkim seems to suggest that China is playing its favourite game of **seizing disputed territory** that is not populated and is not permanently occupied by the border guarding forces. The confrontation in **Galwan River valley, Pangong Tso, and Naku La in north Sikkim** are examples.

- Once incursions are made by China, **military assets, including the creation of permanent roads and military structures** are created, along with **building of township** for a civilian population
- China is trying to **influence India's decision-making** in the context of the **US-China geopolitical competition**.

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ART & CULTURE

1) Keeladi excavation

Why in News?

- Encouraged by the archaeological findings in **Keeladi, Tamil Nadu**, that testified to the existence of an ancient urban Tamil civilisation, the Department of Archaeology has decided to launch excavations at seven more sites and field studies in two places.

About Keeladi excavation

- Excavations in Keeladi proved that an urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu in the **Sangam era** on the banks of the **river Vaigai**.
- Researchers found that the cultural deposits unearthed during the fourth excavation at Keeladi in Sivaganga district could be safely dated to a period between **6th century BCE and 1st century CE**.
- The Keeladi findings have led academics to describe the site as **part of the Vaigai Valley Civilisation**. The findings have also invited **comparisons** with **the Indus Valley Civilisation**.
- There are **similarities** in urban planning between the Indus Valley and Keeladi.
- Some of the **symbols** found in **pot sherds of Keeladi** bear a **close resemblance to Indus Valley signs**. Graffiti marks are found in earthenware, caves and rocks in or near the excavation sites of Tamil Nadu.
- The **Tamil Brahmi script**, found engraved on the outer surface or the shoulder of black and red earthenware in Keeladi, carries personal names.
- When the **carbon dating** test was performed, it confirmed the date of the Tamil-Brahmi script is dated to the **year 580 BC**.
- **Radiocarbon dating** (also referred to as *carbon dating* or **carbon-14 dating**) is a method for determining the age of an object containing organic material by using the properties of radiocarbon, a **radioactive isotope of carbon**.
- The results suggest that the second urbanization (the first is the IVC) happened in Tamil Nadu during the 6th century BC.
- Skeletal fragments of Cow/Ox & Buffalo, Sheep & Goat, Nilgai & Blackbuck, Wild boar, and Peacock suggest that the society in Keeladi had **used animals** predominantly for **agricultural** purposes.
- The discovery of spindle whorls, pinpointed bone tip tools, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres, copper needle, and earthen vessels to hold liquid, outlines the various stages of **weaving industry** from spinning, yarning, looming, weaving and dyeing.
- **Pottery** specimens from Keeladi confirmed that they were shaped out of locally available raw materials.

Sangam Age

- The word sangam is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word Sangha which **means a group of persons** or an association.
- The Tamil Sangam was an academy of poets and bards who flourished in three different periods and in different places under the patronage of the **Pandyan kings**.
- It deals with **secular matters** relating to public and social activity like **government, war, charity, trade, worship, agriculture etc.**
- Sangam literature consists of the earliest Tamil works (such as the **Tolkappiyam**), the ten poems (**Pattupattu**), the eight anthologies (**Ettutogai**) and the eighteen minor works (**Padinenkilkanakku**), and the three epics (**Silappadikaram, Manimekalai** and **Sivaga Sindamani**).
- It is believed that the **first Sangam** was attended by gods and legendary sages, and its **seat was Ten Madurai**. **All the works** of the first Sangam have **perished**.
- The **seat of the second Sangam** was **Kapatpuram**, another capital of the Pandyas. It was attended by several poets and produced a large mass of literature, but only **Tolkappiyam has survived**. Tolkappiyam is the **oldest extant Tamil grammar** written by **Tokkappiyar** (one of the 12 disciples of Saint Agastya).
- The **seat of the third Sangam** was the present **Madurai**. It has also produced vast literature, but only a fraction of it has

survived. It is this fraction which constitutes the extant body of Sangam literature.

- The Age of the Sangam is the age to which the Sangam literature belonged. The Sangam literature constitutes a mine of information on conditions of life around the beginning of the Christian era.
- **Tamil-Brahmi Script**
- Tamil-Brahmi is the **earliest script** used to write **Old Tamil**.

- Tamil language has since then been written in a wide range of continuum of scripts. Tamil-Brahmi is in principle an **adaptation of the Brahmi script** with several additional features being added.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Election Commission of India

About ECI :

- The Election Commission of India is an **autonomous constitutional authority** responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
- The body administers elections to the **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India**, and the **offices of the President and Vice President** in the country. The Election Commission was established in accordance with the Constitution on **25th January 1950**.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Part XV of the Indian constitution deals with elections and establishes a commission for these matters.
- Article 324 to 329 of the constitution deals with powers, function, tenure, eligibility, etc of the commission and the member.

Articles related to Election Commission	
324	Superintendence, direction, and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.
325	No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.
326	Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.
327	Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.
328	Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.

329	Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.
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Structure of the Commission

- Originally the commission had only one election commissioner but after the Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989, it has been made a **multi-member body**.
- The commission consists of one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
- The secretariat of the commission is located in New Delhi.
- At the state level, the election commission is helped by the **Chief Electoral Officer** who is an IAS rank Officer.
- The **President** appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- They have a **fixed tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.
- The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through a process of removal similar to that of a Supreme Court judge by Parliament.

Functions

- Election Commission of India superintendents, direct and control the entire process of conducting elections to Parliament and Legislature of every State and to the offices of President and Vice-President of India.
- The most important function of the commission is to decide the election schedules for the conduct of periodic and timely elections, whether general or bye-elections.
- It prepares electoral roll, issues an Electronic Photo Identity Card (EPIC).
- It decides on the location of polling stations, assignment of voters to the polling stations, location of counting centers, arrangements to be made in and around polling stations and counting centers and all allied matters.

- It grants recognition to political parties & allots election symbols to them along with settling disputes related to it.
- The Commission also has advisory jurisdiction in the matter of post-election disqualification of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures.
- It issues the Model Code of Conduct in the election for political parties and candidates so that no one indulges in unfair practice or there is no arbitrary abuse of powers by those in power.
- It sets limits of campaign expenditure per candidate to all the political parties and also monitors the same.

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister has appreciated the Election Commission on National Voters Day (January 25). National Voters Day is an occasion to appreciate the remarkable contribution of the EC to strengthen our democratic fabric and ensure smooth conduct of elections.

2) AYU SAMVAD Campaign

About:

- **“AYU SAMVAD” (My Health My Responsibility)** is one of the largest public awareness campaign programs on AYURVEDA and COVID 19 pandemic. It is organized by All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, as envisioned & supported by the Ministry of AYUSH.

Objective of the Campaign:

- The main objective of the campaign is to create awareness through lecture series to make common people aware about the theme “Ayurveda for COVID 19 Pandemic”.
- This campaign ensures the uniformity of information through a structured PPT delivered to approximately 1 crore target audience across India through 5 Lakh lectures.

Benefits

- This campaign will be immensely beneficial in understanding the importance of Ayurveda & in the fight against COVID 19 & also for Post Covid Management.
- This campaign will specifically focus on the Role of Preventive, Promotive, Curative and Rehabilitation in

Management of COVID 19 through Ayurveda.

Why in News?

- As part of AYU SAMVAD Campaign, All India Institute of Ayurveda organized an online Training of Trainers program.

3) Fit India Movement

About Fit India Movement

- The Fit India Movement is a movement to take the nation on a path of fitness and wellness.
- It provides a unique and exciting opportunity to work towards a healthier India.
- It aims at **behavioural changes** – from sedentary lifestyle to physically active way of day-to-day living.
- As part of the movement, individuals and organisations can undertake various efforts for their own health and well-being as well as for the health and well-being of fellow Indians.
- A committee, headed by Sports Minister and comprising government officials, members of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), national sports federations, private bodies and fitness promoters, has been formed to take the movement forward.

Why in News?

- The Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports concluded the second edition of "Fit India School Week" program.

Significance

- School is the first place where habits are formed. School children should be encouraged to indulge in active field time during school hours involving fitness and sports activities.
- This will instil in students the understanding for regular physical activity and higher levels of fitness, thus enhancing self-esteem and confidence in them.
- Keeping these objectives in mind, Fit India School Week program was launched in 2019.

4) Khadi and Village Industries Commission

About KVIC:

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a **statutory body** established by an Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.
- It plans, promotes, organizes and implements programs for the development of Khadi and other village industries in rural areas nationwide.
- KVIC also helps in building up reserves of raw materials for supply to producers. The commission focuses on creation of common service facilities for processing of raw materials, such as semi-finished goods.
- KVIC has also helped in creation of employment in the Khadi industry.

Objectives:

- The social objective of providing employment.
- The economic objective of producing saleable articles.
- The wider objective of creating self-reliance amongst the poor and building up of a strong rural community spirit.

Functions of KVIC:

- Building up of a reserve of raw materials and implementation for supply to producers.
- Formation of common service facilities for processing of raw materials that include semi-finished goods.
- Promoting the sale and marketing of Khadi and Village Industries products, as well as handicrafts.
- Promoting research in the village industries sector related production techniques and equipment.
- Providing financial assistance to individuals and institutions for the development and operation of Khadi and Village industries.

Why in News?

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) rolled out a massive employment drive benefiting 2250 artisan families in Malda district of West Bengal. West Bengal is known for producing some of the finest cotton and silk fabric.
- The state is widely acclaimed for its Muga, Mulberry and Tussar Silk that was a major artisanal activity for generations.
- The state is also popular for its world famous **Muslin cotton**. KVIC has, for the

first time, provided an online sale platform to Muslin fabric through its e-portal, which has given a big boost to Bengal's Khadi Institutions.

5) NCAVES India Forum 2021

About:

- Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) India Forum-2021 is being organised by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**.
- India is one of the five countries taking part in this project – the other countries being Brazil, China, South Africa and Mexico.

About NCAVES Project

- The NCAVES project seeks to **advance the theory and practice of environmental and ecosystem accounting** in Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.
- The project has been jointly implemented by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).
- It aims to assist the five participating partner countries, to advance the knowledge agenda on environmental-economic accounting, in particular ecosystem accounting.
- The project will have a duration until the end of 2021.
- The project is funded by the **European Union**.

Objectives:

- The objectives of the National Forum would be:
 1. To present India's achievements in the domain of Natural Capital Accounting (NCA);
 2. To prioritize the emerging opportunities for NCA in India;
 3. To familiarize stakeholders with the work undertaken by the different international agencies in the area of NCA; and
 4. To provide a platform to selected Research Institutions to present their research conducted in the valuation of ecosystem services.

About NCAVES India Forum 2021

- In India, the NCAVES project is being implemented by the MoSPI with collaboration of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC). The Forum aims to build a stronger awareness about the different perspective to Environment and to show a way forward towards realizing the contribution of the natural capital to achieve a “better environment, better tomorrow”.

Why in News?

- The NCAVES India Forum 2021, organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) in a virtual format, with live sessions on January 14, 21 and 28, 2021, concluded on January 28, 2021. The event covered a wide range of topics pertaining to the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA).

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Programme

What's in the news?

- The **Indian government and the World Bank** signed a \$500 million Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Programme (STARS) to **improve the quality and governance of school education in six states -- Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan.**
- The project will be implemented through the **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, the flagship central scheme, in partnership with these six states.

About the Programme

- The STARS project is aimed at improving the overall monitoring and measurement activities in the school education system through interventions in selected states.
- The total cost of this project is over five thousand crore rupees and the World Bank will provide the financial support of three thousand 700 crore rupees.
- This project will be instrumental in the implementation of **National Education Policy 2020** by strengthening early childhood education and foundational learning, ICT enabled approaches and promoting teachers development and vocational education.
- **Objectives**
- The objectives of the STARS programme are:
 1. strengthening early childhood education and foundational learning;
 2. facilitating school to work transition through vocational education;
 3. improving learning assessment mechanisms; and
 4. supporting teacher development.

- STARS will support India's renewed focus on addressing the **'learning outcome' challenge** and help students better prepare for the jobs of the future -- through a series of reform initiatives.
- In line with the **Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4)**, the program will help produce better data on learning levels by improving the National Achievement Survey (NAS).
- Around 250 million students (between the age of 6 and 17) in 1.5 million schools and over 10 million teachers will benefit from the programme.

India-World Bank Partnership

- The STARS programme builds on the long partnership between India and the World Bank (**since 1994**), for strengthening public school education and to support the country's goal of providing **'Education for All'**.
- Prior to STARS, the bank had provided a total assistance of more than \$3 billion towards this goal.

2) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

About the Scheme

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme is a **tri-ministerial initiative** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource which focuses on awareness and advocacy campaign for changing mind-sets, multi-sectoral action, enabling girls' education and effective enforcement of Pre-Conception & Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC & PNDT) Act.
- It was launched by the Prime Minister on 22nd January, 2015 at Panipat, Haryana.
- **BBBP addresses the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of women empowerment over a life-cycle continuum.**

- The objectives of the Scheme are as under:
- 1. To prevent gender biased sex selective elimination
- 2. To ensure survival and protection of the girl child
- 3. To ensure education and participation of the girl child

First Phase

- The 100 districts have been identified on the basis of low Child Sex Ratio as per Census 2011 covering all States/UTs as a pilot with at least one district in each state.

Second Phase

- The scheme has further been expanded to 61 additional districts selected from 11 States/UT having CSR below 918.

Pan India Expansion of BBBP

- The Pan India Expansion of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao covering all 640 districts (as per census 2011) of the country was launched on 8th March 2018.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development is conducting a nationwide review of the BBBP programme.

Other initiatives by the Government towards Women Empowerment

- In addition to BBBP, **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs)** have been sanctioned in Educationally Backward Blocks in the country to reduce gender gaps at all levels of school education and

provide quality education to girls from disadvantaged groups.

- Under **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, over 5 thousand 700 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas have been sanctioned in the country with enrollment of over 6 lakh girls.
- Centre has also aided **Vocationalisation of Secondary Education** which provides for choice of courses for the girl students in a manner that discourages gender stereotyping.
- Various other interventions pushed by the Centre including opening of schools in the neighbourhood, provision of gender segregated toilets in schools, provision for self-defence training for the girls and free text-books to girls up to Class 8 have started bearing positive results.
- Even in the historic reforms brought about by the **National Education Policy of 2020**, a proposal to constitute a **Gender Inclusion Fund targeting** the development of girl child has been made.
- The fund will focus on ensuring 100% enrollment of girls in schooling and will boost their participation rate in higher education.

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family.” - **Mahatma Gandhi.**

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) A new framework around caste and the census

GS-1 Population and Associated Issues; GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions

WHAT IS CENSUS?

- A census is the procedure of systematically enumerating, and acquiring and recording information about the members of a given population. It helps in describing and understanding the population of a society and what people have access to, and what they are excluded from, is important not only for social scientists but also for policy practitioners and the government.
- In this regard, Census of India, one of the largest exercises of its kind, enumerates and collects demographic and socio economic information on the Indian population.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CENSUS

- According to '**Rig Veda**', population count was maintained during 800-600 BC.
- Further **Kautilya's Arthashastra** (written around 321-296 BC) states Census taking as a measure of State policy for the purpose of taxation.
- During the regime of **Mughal king Akbar**, the administrative report '**Ain-e-Akbari**' included comprehensive data on population, industry, wealth and many other characteristics.
- In India, the **first Census was conducted in 1872** (non-synchronously in different parts) during the reign of **Governor-General Lord Mayo**. While the **first complete synchronous Census** was conducted in **1881**.
- In present times this exercise is conducted every 10 years. The Census-2021 is the 16th such exercise since inception and 8th since independence.

CENSUS Vs SOCIO-ECONOMIC CASTE CENSUS (SECC)

- Following debate over the full-scale caste census, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was conducted in 2011.
- The SECC, which collected the **first figures on caste in Census operations since 1931**, is the largest exercise of the enumeration of caste.

- This was a distinct exercise from the Census of 2011.

DIFFERENCE IN THEIR PURPOSES

- Since the Census falls under the **Census Act of 1948**, all data are considered **confidential**, whereas the SECC data is **open for use by Government departments** to grant and/or restrict benefits to households.
- Thus, the Census provides a **portrait of the Indian population**, while the SECC is a **tool to identify beneficiaries of state support**.

IMPORTANCE OF CENSUS

- It gathers **knowledge about the demographic dividend** of the nation which is vital for many purposes. Various surveys like health survey, education survey, agriculture survey, etc. are based on this comprehensive data.
- Data collected through census is significant for a **country's evidence-based decision making**.
- It boosts **coherence policy-making and scientific planning**, resulting in optimisation of resources.
- It helps in **effective targeting and better delivery of government programmes** to the most downtrodden sections of the society.
- Census data is also used as a **delimitation exercise**.
- The **Finance Commission** gives grants to the states on the basis of population figures available from the Census data.

CRITICISM OF CENSUS

- Despite being a technique of governance, it is criticised for not being useful enough for a detailed and comprehensive understanding of a complex society.
- There is a **lack of depth in Census** where some issues are concern for eg. The discussion around caste and its enumeration have been controversial.
- Census have the issue related to the **time lag** between each Census, and the delay in the release of data.
- There is a growing demand for a **full-scale caste census** to capture contemporary

Indian society and to understand and remedy inequalities.

- While others believe that this large administrative exercise of capturing caste and its complexities is not only **difficult**, but also **socially untenable**.
- There have been concerns that counting caste may help **solidify or harden identities**, or that caste may be context-specific, and thus difficult to measure.
- The other concern is whether an institution such as caste can even be captured completely by the Census.

WAY FORWARD

- What is needed is a **discussion on the caste data that already exists**, how it has been used and understood by the government.
- **Linking and syncing aggregated Census data to other large datasets** such as the National Sample Surveys or the National Family Health Surveys that cover issues that the Census exercises do not, such as maternal health, would be significant for a more comprehensive analysis.
- This linking of the Census with the National Sample Survey data has been suggested in the past by scholars such as Mamta Murthi and colleagues.
- Census operations across the world are going through significant changes, employing methods that are precise, faster and cost effective, involving coordination between different data sources.
- However, care must be taken to ensure that digital alternatives and linking of data sources involving Census operations are **inclusive and non-discriminatory**, especially given the sensitive nature of the data being collected.
- Delay in the release of data needs to be reduced.
- Need for closer and continuous engagement between functionaries of the Census and SECC, along with academics and other stakeholders concerned.

2) The shipping sector is at sea

GS- 3: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways Etc.

CONTEXT

- Major economies of the world have always realised the potential of shipping as a

contributor to economic growth. Today, for instance, control of the seas is a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is trying to take control of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean Region.

INDIA Vs CHINA SHIPPING GROWTH

- Prior to the 16th century, **both India and China were equal competitors on GDP**. Historical records prove that **India had maritime supremacy in the world**. But over the past 70 years, India has lost its global eminence in shipping due to poor legislation and politics.
- Even though, geographically, China is not as blessed as India. It has a coast only in the east; yet, seven of the top 10 container ports in the world are in China, according to the World Shipping Council.

WHAT AIDED CHINA'S GROWTH

- Chinese shipping port was aided by a **strong merchant marine and infrastructure** to carry and handle merchandise all over the world.

WHY INDIA LAGS BEHIND?

- In independent India, helping foreign shipping liners starting from the establishment of new ports to the establishment of the present day Chabahar Port in Iran, all of India's actions on the shipping front have been counter effective. This is due to a visionless administration.
- All the shipping infrastructure in peninsular India only helps foreign shipping liners.
- India has concentrated only on short term solutions.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SHORT TERM APPROACH

- Foreign carriers and their agents continue to dominate export-import (EXIM) trade with enormous hidden charges in the logistics cycle.
- Much of foreign currency is drained as transshipment and handling cost every day.
- Given this state of affairs, members of our maritime business community have also preferred to be agents for foreign ship owners or container liners rather than becoming ship owners or container liners themselves.
- This is a historical mistake and a major economic failure of the country. As a result, there is a wide gap between

carrying capacity and multi folded cargo growth in the country.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

- In the past, colonial traders had strong merchant marine, but they also developed optimum shorebased infrastructure with road and rail connectivity to facilitate their trade.
- There was balanced infrastructure onshore and at sea. Shorebased infrastructure was developed to cater to the carrying capacity. This needs to be understood with a clear economic sense.
- At present, **foreign ship owners carry our inbound and outbound cargo**. This is the case in **container shipping** too. As a country, we have still not optimised our carrying capacity.

HURDLES BY BUREAUCRACY

- In the port sector, instead of creating regional cargo specific ports in peninsular India, the bureaucracy has repeatedly allowed similar infrastructural developments in multiple cargo handling ports. As a result, **Indian ports compete for the same cargo**.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **Sagarmala**, a government programme to enhance the performance of the country's logistics sector. It aims at portland industrialisation, development of world class logistics institutions, and coastal community development. It will also give a boost to domestic carrying capacity.
- As of now, shipbuilding, repair and ownership are not preferred businesses in peninsular India. Hence, tries to change the mindset of the authorities and the maritime business community through the flagship programme of **Make in India**.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- Make our major ports cargo specific, develop infrastructure on a par with global standards.
- Connect ports with the hinterlands as well as international sea routes.
- Concentrate on developing the contributing ports to serve the regional transshipment hubs for which improving small ship coastal operations is mandatory.
- Short sea and river voyages should be encouraged.

- The ship owning spirit of the Indian merchant marine entrepreneur has to be restored. Shipbuilding and owning should be encouraged by the Ministry.
- The **National Shipping Board** is an independent advisory body for the Ministry of Shipping, where the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) is a member. The NSB should be able to question the functioning of the DGS, which is responsible for promoting carrying capacity in the country.
- **Sagarmala** should include coastal communities and consider evolving schemes to harness the century old ship owning spirit and sailing skills of peninsular India.
- **Coastal communities should be made ship owners**. This will initiate carriage of cargo by shallow drafted small ships through coast and inland waterways.
- Old sailing vessel owners should be encouraged to become small ship owners.
- In the coastal region, the **strength of youth** has not been tapped yet. Sagarmala should concentrate on consolidating the strength of the coastal youth and make them contribute to the nation's economy with pride.
- It is our long cherished dream to be competent and cost effective in international supply chain logistics. We need quality products to be available in global markets at a competitive price. This will happen only if we develop balanced infrastructure onshore as well as at sea.

3) Global antitrust and the challenge of Big Tech

GS-1: Effects of globalization on Indian society.

GS-3: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security,

GS-4: ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions; laws, rules, regulations and conscience as sources of ethical guidance; accountability and ethical governance.

NEWS

- Worldwide including in the European Union and the United States, the antitrust investigations are going on the abuse of monopolistic power by the Big Tech firms, especially Facebook and Google.

CONTEXT

- These investigations are being compared with the earlier antitrust investigations in the U.S. on the telecom industry and the breakup of the AT&T dictated by the Department of Justice in its Modified Final Judgment in 1982.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

- **Nature:** The information good that is being provided by the Internet firms of today, is largely **non-rival**. The consumption of information by one does not alter the value for the others. However, in **telecom**, due to limited network capacity, the consumption by one has an effect of decreasing value for the others and, hence, is **rival in nature**.
- **Regulation:** Telecom services are within the jurisdictional boundaries of regulators and, hence, the regulators have the power to lay down rules of the orderly behaviour of the licensed telecom operators. On the other hand, the Internet firms operate globally. Therefore, it is often **difficult to lay down international rules of obligation by the different country regulators**.
- **Non-excludability:** While it is debatable whether the goods and services provided by the Internet firms are excludable, telecom is certainly excludable due to the need for consumers to obtain connections from the respective telcos and pay the subscription charges for the same. On the contrary the Internet firms provide search, navigation, and social connectivity with no charge to the consumers, and, consequently, making these services non-excludable.

WHAT CAUSES THE PROBLEM?

- The **commercialisation of the Internet** has created the **new avatar of non-excludability** that includes subtle trade offs of personal information for availing services of the Internet firms.
- Hence, as the nonexcludable and nonrival goods, also known as **public goods**, are

provided by governments, in a peculiar way, the information goods as described above are being provided by private firms. This arrangement poses several problems.

HOW DOES THIS MONETISATION MODEL WORKS?

- While the governments can cover the expense of providing public goods (such as police protection, parks and street lights) through **tax payers' money**, private firms need to have **monetisation models to cover the costs of providing their services**.
- Hence, the Internet firms have resorted to personalised advertisements and third party sharing of the personal information of their users for monetisation purposes.
- The strong network effects present in these Internet platforms warrant increasing the subscriber base and garnering as much market share as possible. This results in near monopoly of some firms in their defined markets.
- In order to retain their pole position, these firms may **resort to anticompetitive behaviour** including acquiring rivals to vertically integrate; erecting entry barriers by refusing to interconnect and interoperate with competing firms, and leveraging their capital base, thereby engaging in predatory pricing, and driving out competitors.

INDISPENSABLE APPLICATIONS

- In present times, even without our knowledge, these Internet firms have become an **indispensable part of our lives**.
- For example- We cannot do without Google Maps for our day-to-day commute to various destinations; Google Searches are indispensable in our quest for information and news; Google Scholar is a necessary tool for academicians to explore relevant research artefacts.
- There are **positive externalities** as well. For example, Google Maps Application Program Interface (APIs) is being used by almost all logistic and transport companies; Facebook APIs are used for advertisement by almost all firms across the industry.
- Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, recently announced that its Search is being expanded to provide **accurate and timely**

information on vaccine distribution to enable quick recovery from the COVID19 pandemic.

CHALLENGES BEFORE THE POLICYMAKERS

- The question before policymakers is **how to regulate these Internet firms from abusing their monopoly power while at the same time encouraging the positive externalities and consumer surplus they create.**
- This is a tough task to do, as it is often very difficult to prove that the firms engage in the abuse of their monopoly power.
- Also, due to strong network effects, it is not possible to ban or curtail these services. For example- Even if other options are available (such as Signal and Telegram for messaging), the network effects bind customers to their often used platform (WhatsApp), even if it is not their favourite.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Government can **subsidise the good that creates positive externalities** or it can **resort to mandate sharing of Non-Personal Data (NPD)** owned by these firms for societal and economic well being as pointed out in the expert committee on NPD.
- We can take an example from the **Australian government** which has pointed in its media legislation that Google and Facebook must negotiate a fair payment with news organisations for using their content in Facebook's newsfeed and Google's Search.

- **Controlled expansion of products and services without hurting the interests of consumers and smaller competing firms** shall be the mantra used by these firms to minimise litigation, lawsuits and, eventually, wastage of taxpayers' money.
- The other way to control any abusive behaviour of the Internet firms is to **use the power of public voice.** The million mails that were sent to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in March 2015, effectively put an end to the Free Basics programme of Facebook in India, thereby prohibiting any violation of Net Neutrality principles.
- Similarly, the huge public outcry and subsequent government actions have delayed the recent changes to privacy policy relating to the sharing of personal information between WhatsApp and its parent firm, Facebook.
- Internet firms should adhere to core ethical principles in conducting their businesses taking lessons from the Enron scandal, and collusions between large banks and financial institutions during the 2008 financial crisis, indicate that firms that aim at super monopoly profits and are greedy to become powerhouses of the world, often end up in the ditch.

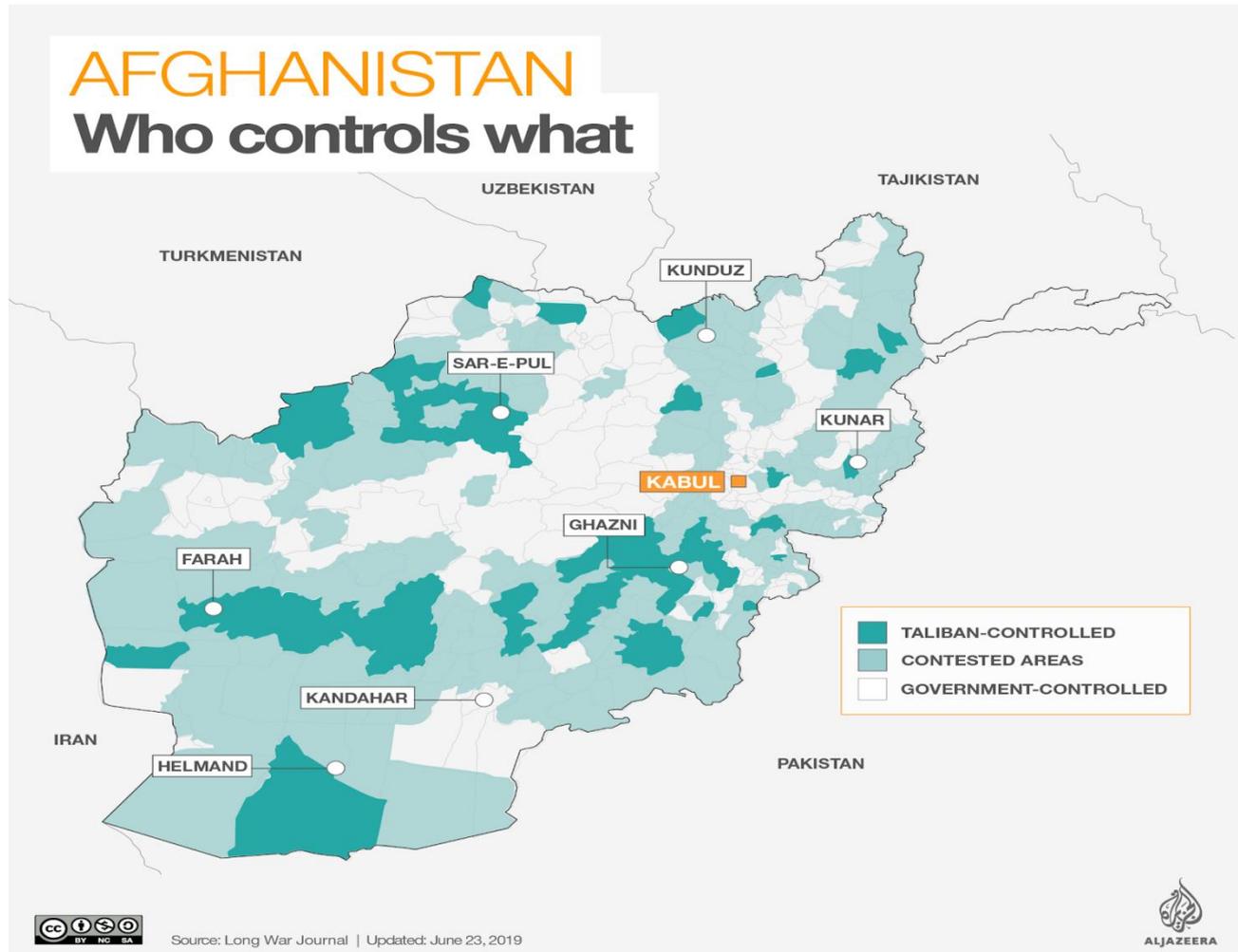
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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) What is the US-Taliban deal that the Joe Biden administration is expected to review

Why in the news?

- The new Biden administration in America is thinking to review the US-Taliban deal signed in Feb 2020.



What is the US-Taliban peace deal?

- This pact was done in Feb, 2020 between the United States and Taliban in Doha.
- The pact said that there will be a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire between Taliban and Afghan Government which will be resolved with a round of talks and Afghan political map will be prepared.
- This peace deal is essential as withdrawal of US troops along with bringing down NATO or coalition troop numbers from Afghanistan is taking place.
- The US and NATO forces withdrawal will be completed within 14 months after signing this agreement.

- Taliban has also promised in this deal that it will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
- Taliban has asked for removal of sanctions and releasing prisoners held by both sides and ceasefire.
- Apart from this, a joint agreement between the US, Taliban and Afghanistan government has been signed as a symbolic commitment.

What is the significance of this deal?

- This gave the Taliban significant international identity.

- This has also strengthened Pakistan, the Taliban's benefactor, and the Pakistan Army and the ISI's influence appears to be on the rise.

Issues with the deal

- The Afghan government was completely sidelined during the talks between the US and the Taliban. Therefore, the future for the people of Afghanistan is uncertain and will depend on how the Taliban honours its commitments.
- Taliban has been following anti-democratic views, people of Afghanistan fear as what Taliban want out of a political settlement is unclear.

2) Why govt borrows off-budget, and how

Why in the news?

- To control the fiscal deficit on record, the government uses **off-budget borrowing techniques**.
1. **Fiscal Deficit** is the difference between the government's total expenditure and its total receipts excluding borrowing. In other words, it is the level of borrowings by the Union government.
 2. Fiscal Deficit is one of the indicators of the financial health of the government and is keenly watched by insiders and outsiders of the economy. Hence it is kept to an optimal number.
- Let us understand what off-budget borrowings are.

Off-budget borrowing

- Off-budget borrowings are loans that are taken not by the Centre directly, **but by another public institution** which borrows on the directions of the central government. Such borrowings are **used to fulfil the government's expenditure needs**.
- Since the liability of the loan is not formally on the Centre, the **loan is not included in the national fiscal deficit**. This helps keep the country's fiscal deficit within acceptable limits.
- **How are off-budget borrowings raised?**
- The government can ask an implementing agency to raise the required funds from the market through **loans or by issuing bonds**.

- For example, food subsidy is one of the major expenditures of the Centre. In the Budget presentation for 2020-21, the government paid only half the amount budgeted for the food subsidy bill to the Food Corporation of India. The shortfall was met through a loan from the National Small Savings Fund. This allowed the Centre to halve its food subsidy bill from Rs 1,51,000 crore to Rs 77,892 crore in 2020-21.
- Other public sector undertakings have also borrowed for the government. For instance, public sector oil marketing companies were asked to pay for subsidised gas cylinders for Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries in the past.

What is the issue?

- **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report of 2019** points out, this route of financing puts major sources of funds outside the control of Parliament.
- The various sources of off-budget borrowing makes the true debt difficult to calculate. For instance, it was widely reported that in July 2019, just three days after the presentation of the Budget, the CAG pegged the actual fiscal deficit for 2017-18 at 5.85% of GDP instead of the government version of 3.46%.
- The flaws in budgeting of fiscal deficit should be recognised timely so that we can stop the illogical management and representation of fiscal deficit.

3) History and Precedent of President's address in the Parliament

Why in the news?

- Recently, President of India Ram Nath Kovind addressed the Parliament to start the parliament session.
- Let us understand the history of the President's address.
- **History**
- The practice of the President addressing Parliament can be traced back to the **Government of India Act of 1919**.
- The above law gave the **Governor-General** the right of addressing the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State.

- The law did not have a provision for a **joint address** but the Governor-General did address the Assembly and the Council together on multiple occasions.
- After the Constitution came into force, President Rajendra Prasad addressed members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the first time on **January 31, 1950**.

Constitutional Provisions and Procedure

- **Article 87** provides **two special occasions** on which the President addresses a joint sitting.
- The first is to address the opening session of a new legislature **after a general election**.
- The second is to address the **first sitting of Parliament each year**. A session of a new or continuing legislature cannot begin without fulfilling this requirement.
- The address of the President follows a general structure in which it highlights the government's accomplishments from the previous year and sets the broad governance agenda for the coming year.
- Usually in December the PMO and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs asks other Ministries about any legislative proposals that need to be included in the President's address.
- Following the President's address, a **motion** is moved in the two Houses **thanking the President** for his address.
- This is an occasion for MPs in the two Houses to **have a broad debate** on governance in the country. The **Prime Minister replies to the motion of thanks** in both Houses, and responds to the issues raised by MPs.
- The motion is then put to vote and MPs can express their disagreement by moving amendments to the motion.

4) How CSR expenditure rules have changed for Indian companies

What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable—to itself, its stakeholders, and the public.
- By practicing corporate social responsibility, also called **corporate citizenship**, companies can be conscious

of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental.

- In 2014, India became the **first country** to legally mandate corporate social responsibility by introducing **Section 135** in the India's **Companies Act 2013**.
- All companies with a net worth of Rs 500 crore or more, a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or net profit of Rs 5 crore or more, are required to spend **2 percent** of their average profits of the previous three years on CSR activities every year.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs amended rules of CSR. 4 Major amendments were done:
- Corporates can now undertake **multi-year projects** under new CSR rules. Companies have been permitted to set off the excess amount spent under CSR up to three succeeding financial years.
- Non-compliance with CSR provisions has also been **decriminalised** by shifting such offences to the penalty regime. Also, companies having CSR obligation below Rs 50 lakhs have been **exempted from constituting a CSR Committee**.
- A large number of companies conduct CSR expenditure through **implementing agencies**, but the new amendment **restricts companies from authorising either a Section 8 company or a registered public charitable trust** to conduct CSR projects on their behalf.
- International organisations have been permitted to carry out designing, monitoring and evaluation of the CSR projects or programmes. However, **they cannot act as implementing agencies**.

▪ Section 8 Company is a company registered with the **purpose of promoting charitable causes**, applies profits to promoting its objectives and is prohibited from distributing dividends to shareholders.

- There will be an **impact assessment of CSR projects** that will help companies to plan and allocate resources in a better manner. Companies can use upto 5% of the CSR fund for impact assessment.

What is the impact of amended rules?

- There was ambiguity whether the rule would apply for expenditure undertaken prior to the amendment.
- Experts note that the change would impact CSR programmes of a number of large Indian companies that conduct projects

through private trusts. Private trusts would either have to be converted to registered public trusts, or stop acting as CSR implementing agencies.

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RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Economy-Marching Ahead

Context

- The **World Economic Outlook** released by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has projected an impressive **11.5 per cent growth rate for India in 2021**, making the country the only major economy of the world to register a double-digit growth this year amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

Highlights of the Report

- The IMF projections reflected a strong rebound in the economy, which is estimated to have contracted by 8% in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- India's economy is projected to **grow by 6.8 per cent in 2022** and that of China by 5.6 per cent.
- India regains the tag of the **fastest developing economy** of the world.
- **The parameters identified for measuring the progress of the economy post pandemic are as follows:**
 - How quickly the economy is marching ahead in Physical terms,
 - Increase in growth trajectory by reversing a decline caused during pandemic.
 - In order to revive the growth in other areas, there is a need for a **fiscal stimulus package** in the upcoming Budget.

Major Areas for Bridging Gap with China

- **The major challenge for India lies in bridging the gap with China in various areas like**
 - Increase Investment in the **infrastructure sector**
 - Upward linkage in terms of **Health and Education**
 - Institutions like **NBFCs, MSME's, etc. have to be given handholding** in terms of credit
 - The bureaucracy at the local level need to be **decentralised**
 - **Judicial reform, expansion of judiciary and capacity building**
 - Improve **Public Employment Ratio**

Which areas need to be focussed in the upcoming Budget for speedy revival of Growth?

- **Capitalisation of Banks and creation of bad banks** for stressed assets.
- **Development Financial institutions** should be allowed for providing long term credit for infrastructure.
- **Debt management** policies or measures.
- **Interest subvention scheme** for reviving consumer growth.
- Focus on **twin balance sheet** problems for revival of credit growth.
 - *Twin balance sheet problem refers to the stress on balance sheets of banks due to non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans on the one hand, and heavily indebted corporates on the other.*
- **Investment led growth instead of consumer driven growth.**

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