

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) Privilege Motion

What are Parliamentary privileges?

- Parliamentary privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can "effectively discharge their functions". When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a **breach of privilege** and is punishable under law of Parliament.
- It should be noted that the parliamentary privileges **do not extend to the President** who is also an integral part of the Parliament

Constitutional provisions

- The **powers, privileges and immunities** of either House of the Indian Parliament and of its Members and committees are laid down in **Article 105** of the Constitution.
- **Article 194** deals with the powers, privileges and immunities of the State Legislatures, their Members and their committees.

What constitutes a breach of this privilege?

- While the Constitution has accorded special privileges and powers to parliamentarians and legislators to maintain the dignity and authority of the Houses, **these powers and privileges are not codified**.
- Thus, there are **no clear, notified rules to decide what constitutes a breach of privilege, and the punishment it attracts**.
- Any act that obstructs or impedes either House of the state legislature in performing its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results is treated as breach of privilege.

- It is a breach of privilege and contempt of the House to make **speeches or to print or publish false information** reflecting on the character or proceedings of the House, or its Committees, or on any member of the House for or relating to his character or conduct as a legislator.

Procedure to be followed

- The Legislative Assembly Speaker or Legislative Council Chairman constitutes a **Privileges Committee** consisting of 15 members in the Assembly and 10 members in the Council.
- The members to the committee are **ominated** based on the party strength in the Houses.
- The **Speaker or Chairman** first decides on the motions. If the privilege and contempt are found *prima facie*, then the Speaker or Chairman will forward it to the Privileges Committee by following the due procedure.
- The Committee, which has **quasi-judicial powers**, will seek an explanation from all the concerned, will conduct an inquiry and will make a recommendation based on the findings to the state legislature for its consideration.

Punishment

- If the Committee finds the offender guilty of breach of privilege and contempt, it can recommend the punishment. The punishment can include communicating the displeasure of the state legislature to the offender, summoning the offender before the House and giving a warning, and even sending the offender to jail.
- In the case of the media, press facilities of the state legislature may be withdrawn, and a public apology may be sought.

Why in News?

- The Bharatiya Janata Party has moved a privilege notice against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, days after her comments against a former chief justice of India in Lok Sabha.

2) FSSAI slashes limit for trans fat levels in foods

Natural fats

- All natural fats and oils are a combination of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids (TFA).
- Our body needs the **first two categories of 'healthy' fats** as apart from being a major source of energy, they help absorb some vitamins and minerals and build cell membranes and the sheaths surrounding nerves.
- These fats are **free-flowing**, unlike saturated fatty acids or trans fats, which are considered harmful as they **clog arteries** and result in hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular issues.

What are trans fats? and why are they harmful?

- There are **two broad types of trans fats** found in foods: naturally-occurring and artificial trans fats.
- Artificial trans fats, which are considered harmful, are created in an **industrial process that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils** (a method known as **hydrogenation**) to make them more solid, increase their shelf life, and for use as an **adulterant** as they are cheap. They are present in baked and fried foods as well as adulterated ghee, which becomes solid at room temperature.
- They are the **most harmful form of fats** as they clog arteries and cause hypertension, heart attacks and other cardiovascular diseases.
- The WHO estimates that over 5 lakh people with cardiovascular issues die globally every year due to the consumption of industrially produced TFAs. As per FSSAI, about 77,000 deaths take place annually in India due to TFAs.

Elimination of TFAs

- In 2018, the **WHO called for elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023**, and brought out a step-by step guide called '**REPLACE**' to help countries frame policies. This prompted accelerated action by member states and other stakeholders.

Recent changes

▪ In December 2020, FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) capped the amount of trans fatty acids 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.

Why in News?

- The FSSAI has restricted the permissible amount of industrial Trans Fatty Acid (TFA) in food products to 2 per cent from 2022, just weeks after it tightened the norms for oils and fats.
- The permissible limit for trans fats in food products in 2021 is 3 per cent, cut down from the previous limit of 5 per cent.
- Food products that incorporate edible oils and fats as ingredients, including edible refined oils, vanaspati/partially hydrogenated oils, margarine, vegetable fat spreads, mixed fat spreads, bakery shortenings, fall under the ambit of the newly issued Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2021.
- The 2% cap is considered to be a move towards **elimination of trans fatty acids**, which will be achieved by **2022**, a year sooner than the WHO deadline.

About FSSAI

- FSSAI 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.

3) KIRAN Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline

About

- Citing the prevalence of mental health issues and the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis, the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** launched a

- 24x7 Toll-Free Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline KIRAN (1800-599-0019).
- Launched in September 2020, the helpline is available in 13 languages to provide relief and support to persons with Mental Illness.
- This Toll Free Helpline is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week with the Technical Coordination of BSNL.
- It targets to resolve issues of people across the country experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, panic attack, adjustment disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, pandemic-induced psychological issues and mental health emergencies.

Why in News?

- According to an internal report of the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, seventy per cent of callers to the KIRAN helpline were men.
- September 16, 2020 to January 15, the helpline received 13,550 new calls, of which 70.5% were from males and 29.5% from females.
- The majority of callers (75.5%) were in the age group of 15 to 40 years, while 18.1% were older, in the 41 to 60 age group.
- Majorly the challenges faced by the callers were related to anxiety (28.5%) and depression (25.5%); while few others included pandemic-related challenges (7.8%), suicidal tendency (2.8%), substance abuse (3.4%) and others miscellaneous (32%).

4) RTI & Lokpal

About RTI Act, 2005

- Under the RTI Act, 2005, **Public Authorities** are required to make disclosures on various aspects of their structure and functioning.
- This includes: (i) disclosure on their organisation, functions, and structure, (ii) powers and duties of its officers and employees, and (iii) financial information.
- The intent of such *suo moto* disclosures is that the public should need minimum recourse through the Act to obtain such information. If such information is not made available, citizens have the right to request for it from the Authorities.

- This may include information in the **form of documents, files, or electronic records** under the control of the Public Authority. The intent behind the enactment of the Act is to **promote transparency and accountability** in the working of Public Authorities.

Who is included in the ambit of 'Public Authorities'?

- The RTI Act defines "public authorities" in Section 2(h).
- A "public authority" means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted

 1. By or under the Constitution;
 2. By any other law made by Parliament;
 3. By any other law made by State Legislature;
 4. By notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any –
 5. Body owned, controlled or substantially financed;
 6. Non-Government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

How is the right to information enforced under the Act?

- The Act has established a **three tier structure** for enforcing the right to information guaranteed under the Act.
- The first request for information goes to the **Central/State Assistant Public Information Officer** and **Central/State Public Information Officer**, designated by the Public Authorities. These Officers are required to provide information to an RTI applicant **within 30 days** of the request.
- Appeals from their decisions go to an **Appellate Authority**.
- Appeals against the order of the Appellate Authority go to the **State Information Commission or the Central Information Commission**. These Information Commissions consist of a **Chief Information Commissioner, and up to 10 Information Commissioners**.

Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019

- The Act amended Sections 13 and 16 of the RTI Act, 2005.
- Section 13 of the original Act sets the term of the central Chief Information

Commissioner and Information Commissioners at **five years** (or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier). The amendment changed that the appointment will be for such term as may be **prescribed by the Central Government**.

- According to the amendment act, the salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners **shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government**. Previously it was equivalent to that of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners respectively.
- The government said that the amendment was required because the election commission is a Constitutional body while the information commission, formed under the Right to Information Act, is a statutory one.

Why in News?

- Responding to a RTI request, the Centre has refused to disclose the minutes of the Lokpal selection committee's meetings, and its decision has now been upheld by the Central Information Commission (CIC).

About Lokpal

- The **Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013** provided for the establishment of **Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States**.
- These institutions are **statutory bodies** without any constitutional status. They perform the function of an "**ombudsman**" and inquire into **allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries** and for related matters.

Members

- Lokpal is a multi-member body, that consists of **one chairperson and a maximum of 8 members**.
- **Chairperson** of the Lokpal should be either the former Chief Justice of India or the former Judge of Supreme Court or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
- Out of the maximum eight members, **half will be judicial members and minimum**

50% of the Members will be from SC/ ST/ OBC/ Minorities and women.

- The judicial member of the Lokpal shall either be a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.
- The term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is **5 years or till the age of 70 years**.
- The members are appointed by the **President** on the recommendation of a **Selection Committee**.
- The five-member Lokpal selection committee includes the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Chief Justice of India, along with the Leader of Opposition and an eminent jurist selected by other members.

Jurisdiction

- The Lokpal has jurisdiction to inquire into allegations of corruption against anyone
 1. Who is or has been Prime Minister,
 2. A Minister in the Union government,
 3. A Member of Parliament,
 4. Officials of the Union government under Groups A, B, C and D,
 5. Chairpersons, members, officers and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust or autonomous body either established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly funded by the Centre,
 6. Any society or trust or body that receives foreign contribution above ₹10 lakh.
- It should be noted that the Lokpal **cannot inquire into any corruption charge against the Prime Minister if the allegations are related to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space, unless a full Bench of the Lokpal, consisting of its chair and all members, considers the initiation of a probe, and at least two-thirds of the members approve it.**
- Such a hearing should be held in camera, and if the complaint is dismissed, the records shall not be published or made available to anyone.

How can a complaint be made and what happens next?

- A complaint under the Lokpal Act should be in the prescribed form and must pertain to an offence under the **Prevention of Corruption Act** against a public servant.

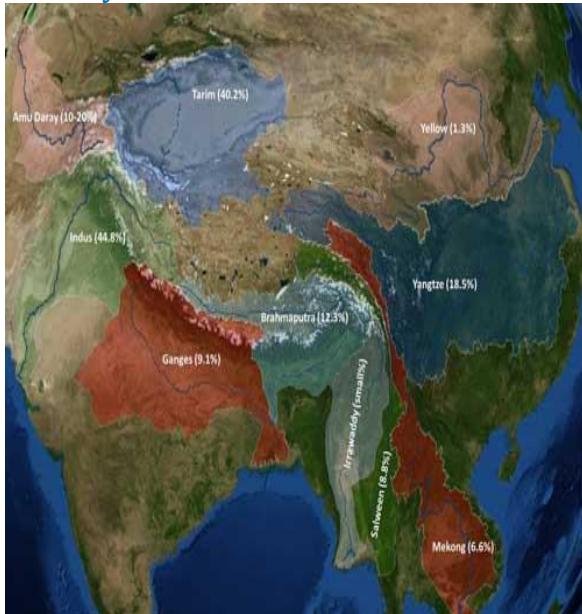
- When a complaint is received, the Lokpal may order a **preliminary inquiry** by its Inquiry Wing, or **refer it for investigation by any agency**, including the CBI, if there is a *prima facie* case.
- The Lokpal, with respect to Central government servants, may refer the complaints to the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)**.
- Lokpal has powers of confiscation of assets, proceeds, receipts and benefits arisen or procured by means of corruption in special circumstances.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Water scarcity likely in the Himalayan catchment if warming continues

Himalayan catchment



- A catchment is an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water flows over the landscape it finds its way into streams and down into the soil, eventually feeding the river. Some of this water stays underground and continues to slowly feed the river in times of low rainfall.
- The Himalayas are an important source of water for about a billion people who live in the basins of the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers.
- India, Nepal, Pakistan and China hugely depend on these Himalayan rivers for their daily needs and energy production.
- Snowpacks and glaciers act as storage houses of the freshwater, which melt to form rivers.

Why in the news?

- A new study called '**Components of Himalayan River Flows in a Changing Climate**' has tried to understand how rainfall-runoff, snow-melt and glacier-melt are affecting the Himalayan rivers.
- The study finds that if drier and warmer scenarios continue in the near future (2031–2050), we are more likely to face

water stress in the Himalayan catchment areas.

- The results show that the glacier-melt increases about 15% to 70% in a warmer environment with its present volume, but then decreases to 3%–38% substantially when the glacier volumes shrink.
- Snowpacks and glaciers are two important water storage units in the Himalaya. Though snow is lower density and will melt easily in a warming climate, the reduced snowfall will in turn reduce the amount of snow-melt.
- Though glacier melt will increase initially, they will shrink in size quickly and the amount of glacier melt will also decline in the latter end of the century.
- The research team emphasis on proper water-management and governance in the Himalayan catchment area. They also suggest further study of the effect of Indian Summer Monsoon and Western Disturbances on the Himalayan catchment area.

2) Brookesia nana

About the species



- Brookesia nana is a chameleon found in Madagascar.
- A group of German and Madagascar scientists found this chameleon in 2012. The adult male measures around 21.6 mm when the tail is included and the female is slightly longer at 28.9 mm.

- Till now only 2 adults of this species have been found. They are camouflaged and move slowly.
- **Why in the news?**
- There is debate going on now to declare *Brookesia nana* as the **smallest reptile**. But confirming *Brookesia nana* as the smallest reptile species will require finding more of them, which might take several years.
- Presently ***Brookesia micra*** has the title of smallest reptile.
- The *Brookesia nana* is under threat due to habitat degradation and deforestation. If proper measures are not adopted in time, the species may go extinct.

3) Punjab releases 23 captive-bred gharials in Beas reserve



About Gharial

- Gharials, sometimes called gavials, are a type of Asian crocodilian distinguished by their long, thin snouts.
- Gharials exhibit **sexual dimorphism** — or differences in characteristics between males and females of the same species — in both size and appearance which are absent in other crocodile species.
- Adult gharials primarily eat fish, while juveniles also feed on insects, crustaceans and frogs.
- Adult males develop a **bulbous growth** at the tip of their snout, called a "ghara" after the Indian pot it resembles. The ghara has several functions. It partially covers the crocodile's nostrils and acts as a vocal resonator, creating a loud, buzzing sound

when the gharial vocalizes. It is also a visual signal for females, helping males attract a mate.

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies the species as **critically endangered**. The biggest threats it faces are related to human activities.
- Gharial populations have declined as much as 98 percent since the 1940s due to human activities like **hunting for traditional medicine and dam-making**.
- Once found from Pakistan to Myanmar, the Gharial's range has shrunk to two countries: **India**, along the **Chambal, Girwa, and Son Rivers**; and **Nepal**, along the **Narayani River**.
- It is listed in **Schedule 1** of Wildlife Protection Act and covered under **Appendix I** of the CITES.

Beas Conservation Reserve

- The Beas Conservation Reserve is a 185-kilometre stretch of the Beas River located primarily in the north-west of the **State of Punjab**.
- The River meanders down from the Himalayan foothills to the Harike Headworks, where its course is diverted into a number of channels.
- The Reserve also hosts the only known population in India of the endangered **Indus river dolphin**.
- It is a Ramsar Site.

Why in the news?

- Punjab, under the Gharial reintroduction programme, has released 23 captive-bred juveniles in the Beas conservation reserve.
- These gharials were brought from Morena in Madhya Pradesh where their captive breeding was done.
- The ambitious scheme of the Punjab government aspires to establish a breeding population of these critically endangered gharials in the rivers of Punjab.

4) TN gets its fifth tiger reserve in Srivilliputhur - Megamalai

About Tiger Reserves

- Tiger reserves have been set under **Project Tiger** since 1973 to save the endangered species of tiger in the country.
- There are 51 Tiger Reserves covering approximately 71000 sq km.
- Project Tiger's main aims are to:

- Reduce factors that lead to the depletion of tiger habitats and to mitigate them by suitable management. The damages done to the habitat shall be rectified to facilitate the recovery of the ecosystem to the maximum possible extent.
- Ensure a viable tiger population for economic, scientific, cultural, aesthetic and ecological values.
- The various tiger reserves were created in the country based on the '**core-buffer' strategy:**
- **Core area:** the core areas are **free of all human activities**. It has the legal status of a national park or wildlife sanctuary. It is kept free of biotic disturbances and forestry operations like collection of minor forest produce, grazing, and other human disturbances are not allowed within.
- **Buffer areas:** the buffer areas are subjected to '**conservation-oriented land use**'. They comprise forest and non-forest land. It is a multi-purpose use area with twin objectives of providing habitat **supplement to spillover population** of wild animals from core conservation units and to provide **site specific co-developmental inputs** to surrounding villages for relieving their impact on core area.

Why in the news?

- The Centre has approved Srivilliputhur-Megamalai tiger reserve which will be the 5th Tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu.

Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve (SM tiger reserve) and its benefits

- The sanctioned SM tiger reserve will encompass the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary and the Megamalai Wildlife Sanctuary and **act as a buffer zone** between Periyar Tiger Reserve of Kerala and Anamalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu.
- With SM Tiger tiger reserve established, Tigers from these two reserves can find significant habitats and breeding and home ranges in the undisturbed terrains of Srivilliputhur and Megamalai hilly tracts.
- Conservationists say that with the declaration of this tiger reserve, **Vaigai river** which is in its brink of depletion, will flourish. Vaigai is the main source of water for farmers in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Other Tiger Reserves of Tamil Nadu



- Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam, Annamalai and Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserves are other tiger reserves in Tamil Nadu.

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ECONOMY

1) Over one crore MSMEs registered in country over period of 5 years

What's in the news?

- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Ministry has informed that more than one crore two lakh MSMEs were registered in the country within five years.

Significance of MSMEs

- In developing countries like India, where the majority of the population resides in the rural areas, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are crucial - socially and economically. Because these enterprises are **widely dispersed across rural areas**, they are extremely important for rural economic development and they have the **ability to absorb a significant number of workers**.
- Further, these enterprises play a key role as a **place for entrepreneurship and business skill development**, especially in rural areas due to their easy accessibility.
- The MSME sector contributes about **45% of India's manufacturing sector output and 40 % of the nation's exports**.
- In the emerging markets, most **formal jobs are generated by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**, which create **seven out of 10 jobs**.
- **New Definition of MSMEs**
- Last year, the government changed the basic definition of MSME and also **end the difference between the manufacturing and services sector**.
- Till now, MSMEs are categorised based only on the investment in machinery or equipment. The new classification has **raised the investment limit** and included **annual turnover** as an additional criteria.
- 1. Accordingly, units having investment less than Rs 1 crore and turnover less than Rs 5 crore will be called **Micro units**.
- 2. Investment between Rs 1 and Rs 10 crore and turnover of Rs 5 crore to Rs 50 crore will be categorised as **Small Enterprises**.
- 3. Units having investment between Rs 10 crore but up to Rs 50 crore and turnover between Rs 50 crore and Rs 250 crore will now be known as **Medium Enterprises**.

Rationale for the move

- It has been a long-standing demand from industry to hike the investment limits, as with inflation, units often cross the threshold that will bring them benefits. To prevent this, they either run their operations at a reduced level or incorporate multiple units so that turnover is distributed in a way that they remain within the threshold that will give them the benefits.
- With the revised definitions of MSMEs, they **will not have to worry about growing their size and can still avail benefits**.
- The new definition also **excluded exports from counting of turnover** which will encourage the MSMEs to export more and more without fearing to lose the benefits of a MSME unit.

Programmes for the growth and development of the MSME sector

Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme

- This is a credit-linked subsidy programme aimed at **generating self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector** by helping traditional artisans and unemployed youth.
- At the national level, the Scheme is being implemented by **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)**, a statutory organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of MSME.
- Under the scheme, loans are being provided by all Public Sector Banks, selected Private Sector Banks and Co-operative Banks with margin money subsidy being given by the Ministry of MSME through KVIC.
- **Scope**
- The scheme is applicable to all viable projects in **rural as well as urban areas**, under the Micro enterprises sector.
- The maximum cost of the project admissible under the manufacturing sector is **Rs.25 lakhs** and the business/services sector is **Rs.10 lakhs**.

- Only one person from a family is eligible for obtaining financial assistance under the scheme.
- Assistance under the Scheme is available **only for new projects.**

Eligible Entrepreneurs / Borrowers

- Any individual, above 18 years of age
- The beneficiaries should have passed at least VIII standard, for setting up of project costing above Rs.10 lacs in the Manufacturing Sector and above Rs. 5 lacs in the business /Service Sector,
- Self Help Groups
- Institutions registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860
- Production Co-operative Societies
- Charitable Trusts

Solar Charkha Mission

- Launched in 2018 by the **Ministry of MSME**, it aims to ensure inclusive growth by generation of employment, especially for women and youth, and sustainable development through **establishing solar charkha clusters in rural areas.**
- Each spinner will be given two charkhas of 10 spindles each. On an average, it is considered that such clusters will have about 1000 charkhas. A cluster with full capacity will provide direct employment to 2042 artisans.
- These solar charkhas are to be operated using **solar power** which will help in development of Green Economy and generate sustainable employment for the artisans.
- The scheme also aims to boost rural economy and help in **arresting migration** from rural to urban areas. It is envisaged to generate direct employment for nearly one lakh persons in the approved 50 clusters across the country.
- The **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** is implementing the programme.

CHAMPIONS portal

- The CHAMPIONS stands for Creation and Harmonious Application of Modern Processes for Increasing the Output and National Strength. The portal is basically for making the smaller units big by solving their grievances, encouraging, supporting, helping and handholding.
- As part of the system a network of control rooms is created in a **Hub & Spoke Model.**

The Hub is situated in New Delhi in the Secretary MSME's office. The spokes will be in the States in various offices and institutions of the Ministry.

- The system which utilises modern ICT tools including Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics and Machine Learning aims at **assisting Indian MSMEs march into the big league as National and Global Champions.**

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGMSE)

- Of all the problems faced by the MSMEs, non-availability of timely and adequate credit at a reasonable interest rate is one of the most important.
- CGMSE, launched in 2000, facilitates credit to the MSE units by covering **collateral-free credit facility** (term loan and/or working capital) extended by eligible lending institutions to new and existing micro and small enterprises.
- The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), established a Trust named **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)** to implement the scheme.

2) Currency swap facility

What are currency swap arrangements?

- In the swap arrangement, generally a country provides dollars to a foreign central bank, which, at the same time, provides the equivalent funds in its currency to the former, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which could be the next day or even two years later, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.

Why in News?

- The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) settled a \$ 400 million currency swap facility from the Reserve Bank (RBI) of India, meeting the terms that the two countries had agreed upon.
- The CBSL obtained the swap facility on July 31, 2020, for an initial period of three

months, to cope with the severe economic impact of the pandemic. Subsequently, the RBI provided a three-month rollover at CBSL's request, until February 1, 2021.

Similar arrangements

- The RBI also offers similar swap lines to central banks in the **SAARC region** within a total corpus of \$2 billion.
- This facility originally came into operation on November 15, 2012 to provide a backstop line of funding for short-term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or balance of payment crises until longer term arrangements were made.
- Under the facility, RBI offers swaps of varying sizes in US Dollars, Euro or Indian Rupee to each SAARC member country depending on their two months import requirement.

- India also has a \$75 billion bilateral currency swap line with **Japan**, which has the second highest dollar reserves after China.

Advantages of such arrangements

- These swap operations **usually carry no exchange rate risk**, as transaction terms are set in advance. The absence of an exchange rate risk is one of the major benefits of such a facility.
- This facility provides the country, which is getting the dollars, with the **flexibility to use these reserves at any time** in order to maintain an appropriate level of balance of payments or short-term liquidity.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) UN Human Rights Council

About the council

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system.
- The Council's mandate is to promote "universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all" and "address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon."
- It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year.
- The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly in **2006**. It replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- The headquarters of UNHRC is in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

Membership

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

immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

Why in News?

- The Biden administration is set to announce that it will reengage with the U.N. Human Rights Council that former President Donald Trump withdrew from almost three years ago.
- The decision reverses another Trump-era move away from multilateral organizations and agreements.
- Mr Trump pulled out of the human rights agency in 2018 due to its disproportionate focus on Israel, which has received by far the largest number of critical council resolutions against any country.
- In addition to the council's persistent focus on Israel, the Trump administration took issue with the body's membership, which currently includes China, Cuba, Eritrea, Russia and Venezuela, all of which have been accused of human rights abuses.
- The U.N. General Assembly makes the final choice in a vote that generally takes place in October every year to fill vacancies in three-year terms at the 47-member-state council.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Tumour Models

Tumour

- Tumours are groups of **abnormal cells** that form lumps or growths. They can start in any one of the trillions of cells in our bodies.
- Tumours grow and **behave differently**, depending on whether they are **cancerous (malignant), non-cancerous (benign) or precancerous**.

Why in News?

- Improving on techniques for testing cancer drugs, researchers from IIT Guwahati have come up with silk-protein-based tumour models.

How is the new model different?

- An **alternative** to testing cancer drugs using **patient-derived cell lines or animal models**, the silk protein based models involve fabrication of a bio-active composite of silk proteins from two species of silk moths and building a scaffolding that provides a **three-dimensional base for growing tumouroids**.
- Normally, cancer drugs are tested using **patient-derived primary cancer cells**, on tumours induced in animal models or on genetically modified organisms. However, these models are **insufficient to reproduce the three-dimensional morphology** and physiology of human tumours and hence show inaccuracies in drug screening.
- Though animal models are better at this, they can show a variation depending on the species used. Moreover, **animal models are expensive** to maintain and can **increase the cost of drug development**. In this context, the silk-protein-based tumour models developed by the group come as a useful intervention.

Advantage

- As an alternative to existing cancer models, this tissue-engineered 3D silk-based tumour model **imitates native tumour microenvironment**, complex **tumour physiology** and metastasis, thus improving **drug screening efficacy**.

2) Hope Probe

Why in News?

- The **interplanetary mission - HOPE** successfully reached Mars' orbit to unravel the secrets of weather on the Red Planet.

About the programme

- The unmanned probe — named "Al-Amal", Arabic for "Hope" — was launched by the **United Arab Emirates** in 2020 from Japan's Tanegashima Space Center.
- It is the **first interplanetary mission for the Arab World**.
- It carries three instruments: **an infrared spectrometer, an ultraviolet spectrometer and a camera**.
- The **spectrometer** is to **measure the lower atmosphere** and **analyse the temperature structure**.
- The high-resolution **imager** that will provide **information about ozone levels**.
- The **ultraviolet spectrometer** is to **measure oxygen and hydrogen levels** from a distance of up to 43,000 kilometres from the surface.
- Unlike the **other two Mars ventures**, the **Tianwen-1** from **China** and **Mars 2020 from the United States**, the UAE's probe will not land on the Red Planet.
- **Advantages of this programme**
- It will give planetary scientists their first **global view of Martian weather** at all times of day.
- Over its two-year mission, it will investigate **how dust storms** and other weather phenomena near the Martian surface speed or slow the loss of the planet's atmosphere into space.

3) Cloud solutions

Why in News?

- Microsoft has launched a new hybrid cloud solution in India for organisations to build and run cloud-native applications with seamless access to on-premise cloud services with existing tools, processes, and skill sets.

What is Cloud Solutions?

- A **cloud based solution** refers to on-demand **services**, computer networks, storage, applications or resources accessed **via the internet** and **through another**

provider's shared cloud computing infrastructure.

- The benefits of cloud based solutions to end users and businesses include increased **capacity, scalability, functionality, and reduced maintenance** and cost for computer infrastructure or in-house staff.
- Cloud Computing services are divided into 3 categories
 1. Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)
 2. Platform as a Service (PaaS)
 3. Software as a Service (SaaS)
- Cloud-based solutions can enable companies to focus on revenue driving initiatives rather than time-consuming, non-core business tasks.
- Cloud computer pricing models are categorized by servers in the cloud, sites/applications in the cloud, and storage in the cloud and the majority of cloud providers tend to offer "pay-as-you-go" subscription based models which enable companies to closely manage costs as well as scale up and down as needed.
- The role of hybrid cloud has transformed from being integrator of data centres with the public cloud to enabler of day-to-day business functions.
- It will enable organisations to be **adaptive, agile, efficient, and responsive across locations**, optimising operations and IT cost efficiency in an increasingly remote work environment today.

Advantages

- Less capital expenditure
- Improved disaster recovery
- Environmentally friendly

Disadvantages

- Internet connectivity
- Maintenance costs

Additional Information

Initiatives started by India

- In order to utilise and harness the benefits of **Cloud Computing**, the Government of India has embarked upon an ambitious initiative - "**GI Cloud**" which has been named as '**MeghRaj**'. The focus of this initiative is to accelerate delivery of e-services in the country while optimizing ICT spending of the Government.
- 1. This will ensure optimum utilization of the infrastructure and speed up the

development and deployment of **eGov applications**.

2. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**).
- **eGov App Store:** The eGov App store is a common platform to host and run applications (developed by govt agencies or private players) at Meghraj.
- **Digital MSME Scheme** – It provides cloud-based services for MSMEs to reduce their cost by avoiding the building of in-house IT infrastructure.
- **RailCloud** – The Indian railways has launched RailCloud, a cloud-based service that will enable faster connectivity at a minimal cost.
- **Nivaran-Grievance portal** – It is the first IT application on the **RailCloud**. It is a platform for resolution of service related grievances of both serving and former railway employees.
- **E-health vision** of the government aims at incorporating the Health Information Exchange (HIE) mechanism through a cloud platform. An electronic HIE enables stakeholders to correctly assess and securely share a patient's medical information electronically.
- **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has been working towards achieving 100% **financial inclusion** with the help of technology. The RBI has been utilising cloud-based solutions, especially for cooperative banks to extend the banking services across India via core banking solutions. **Indian Banking Community Cloud (IBCC)** is the first community cloud initiative for the banking sector in India.

4) Glaciers and Glacial lakes

Why in News?

- A break on a Himalayan glacier upstream has triggered floods which slammed two hydroelectric plants and caused damages in several villages in Uttarakhand.

How glaciers and glacial lakes form?

- A **glacier** is a large, perennial **accumulation of crystalline ice, snow, rock, sediment, and often liquid water** that originates on land and moves down slope under the influence of its own weight and gravity. Glaciers are found on every

- continent except Australia and some are hundreds of thousands of years old. A large cluster of glaciers are in the Himalayas.
- Glaciers are **made of layers of compressed snow** that move or “flow” due to gravity and the softness of ice relative to rock.
 - A glacier's “**tongue**” can extend hundreds of kilometers from its high-altitude origins, and the end, or “snout,” can advance or retreat based on snow accumulating or melting.
 - Ice may flow down mountain valleys, fan out across plains, or in some locations, spread out onto the sea.
 - **Proglacial** lakes, formed after glaciers retreat, are often bound by **sediment and boulder formations**. Additional water or pressure, or structural weakness, can cause both natural and manmade dams to burst, sending a mass of floodwater surging down the rivers and streams fed by the glacier.
 - There has been a **rapid increase in the number of glacial lakes** due to a retreat in the glaciers caused by global warming.

Types of Glacial Lakes

- Lakes form when meltwater ponds, and this can happen on the ice surface (**supraglacial** lakes), in front of the ice (**proglacial** lakes), or even underneath the ice (**subglacial** lakes).

Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

- It is the **flooding** that occurs when the **water dammed by a glacier or a moraine** (accumulations of dirt and rocks fallen onto the glacier surface) is released suddenly.
- When glaciers melt, the water in glacial lakes accumulates behind loose, natural “glacial/moraine dams” made of ice, sand, pebbles and ice residue.

Why do glaciers burst?

- **Seismic activity** and a buildup of water pressure can cause glaciers to burst, but one particular concern is climate change.
- **High temperatures coupled with less snowfall** can accelerate melting, which causes water to rise to potentially dangerous levels.
- Most mountain glaciers around the world were much larger in the past and have been **melting and shrinking**

dramatically due to climate change and global warming.

- According to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the **Hindu Kush Himalayas** has given rise to the formation of **numerous new glacial lakes**, which is a major cause.

Prediction of these disasters

- The remote locations of glaciers and a lack of monitoring means that currently we don't have a clear understanding of how often they occur and if they are increasing.
- There are **many glaciers and glacial dammed lakes** across the Himalayas, but most are **unmonitored**.
- Given the overall pattern of warming, glacier retreat, and increase in infrastructure projects, though, it seems natural to hypothesize that these events will occur more frequently and will become overall more destructive if measures are not taken to mitigate these risks.
- A 2010 information page published by the **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development** called for more glacier monitoring in the Hindu Kush Himalayas to better understand “the real degree of glacial lake instability.”

NDMA's role

- In October 2020, the National Disaster Management Authority issued **guidelines** on how to reduce and confront if such disasters happen.
- The guidelines suggest risk reduction by identifying and mapping potentially dangerous lakes, taking structural measures to prevent their sudden breach, and establishing mechanisms to save lives and property in times of a breach.

What are the guidelines?

- **Identifying Potentially Dangerous Lakes:** Through field observations, records of past events, geomorphologic and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/dam and surroundings, and other physical conditions.
- **Use of Technology:-** Promoting use of **Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery** (a form of radar that is used to create two-dimensional images) to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including

- new lake formations, during the monsoon months. Methods and protocols could also be developed to allow remote monitoring of lake bodies from space.
- **Channeling Potential Floods:** NDMA recommends reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.
 - **Uniform Codes for Construction Activity:** Developing a broad framework for infrastructure development, construction and excavation in vulnerable zones. There is a need to accept procedures for land use planning in the GLOF prone areas.
 - **Enhancing Early Warning Systems (EWS):** The number of implemented and operational GLOF EWS is very small, even at the global scale. In the Himalayan region, there are at three reported instances (two in Nepal and one in China) of implementation of sensor- and monitoring-based technical systems for GLOF early warning.
 - **Training Local Manpower:** Apart from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Army, NDMA has emphasised the need for trained local manpower. Over 80% of search and rescue is carried out by the local community before the intervention of the state machinery and specialised search and rescue teams. The local teams could also assist in planning and setting up emergency shelters, distributing relief packages, identifying missing people, and addressing the needs for food, healthcare, water supply etc.
 - **Comprehensive Alarm Systems:** Besides classical alarming infrastructure consisting of acoustic alarms by sirens, modern communication technology using cell and smartphones can complement or even replace traditional alarming infrastructure.

5) Alcohol and DNA

Why in News?

- Excessive alcohol consumption can cause irreversible changes to the DNA and changes may persist even when alcohol is no longer consumed, revealed a study by

researchers at National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS).

- **About the study**
- Alcohol (**ethanol**) is **rapidly metabolised** in the body, and its two carbon atoms (CH_3CH_2 or ethyl) are converted into single atoms (CH_3 or methyl), that can **react with** many other chemicals, including **DNA**.
- This change (methylation) **can modify the expression of many genes**, or even have toxic consequences.
- Researchers analysed the chemistry of the DNA of individuals who had been drinking heavily for 10 years, on an average of 10 drinks/day.
- The effects of alcohol were **more pronounced in those who had started drinking at an early age**. This suggests that starting to drink early may physically alter many genes, including those of the brain. This may have a significant effect on brain development and maturation, that may persist to later adult life.

Alcoholism in India

- Alcohol is the **most abused substance in India**.
- **11% of Indians** are binge drinkers according to WHO. This is against a global average of 16%.
- A major cause of concern is that more than half of alcohol consumed in the country is '**unrecorded alcohol**' according to WHO. 1/3rd of consumers drink cheap local brews- often adulterated and resulting in tragedies.
- **Highest percentage of children** who are addicted to alcohol are in **Punjab** followed by West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Acts/Initiatives involved**
- **Article 47 of the Directive Principle** in the Constitution of India states that "The state shall undertake rules to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health."
- Government launched its Action Plan for 2020-21 known as **Nasha Mukt Bharat** to combine efforts of Narcotics.
- India is a **signatory** to the UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the Convention on Illicit Traffic

in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

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DEFENCE

1) INS Viraat

[About INS Viraat](#)



- INS Viraat served in the **British Navy** as HMS Hermes for 25 years. It was commissioned into the Indian Navy in 1987 after refurbishment.
- An **aircraft carrier** is a warship with a full-length flight deck and facilities for carrying, arming, deploying, and recovering aircraft, that serves as a seagoing airbase.
- Viraat played a **major role in Operation Jupiter** in 1989 during the Sri Lankan Peacekeeping operation and also during **Operation Parakram in 2001-2002** after the terrorist attack on Parliament.
- The Ship also played a key role in **Operation Vijay** by creating blockade against Pakistan during Kargil War in 1999.
- The ship which was the centerpiece of the Navy, housed the fighters Sea Harriers of INAS 300, popularly called "White Tigers", Anti Submarine aircraft Sea king Mk 42B - also known as "Harpoons" - Sea King Mk 42 C and the SAR helicopter Chetak as an integral flight.
- INS Viraat holds the Guinness World Record for being the longest serving warship of the world.
- It was **decommissioned in March 2017** and is set to be scrapped at a ship breaking yard at Alang in Gujarat soon.
- Several attempts by the Navy to preserve the carrier, by converting it into a museum or by other means, failed.

[Why in News?](#)

- The Supreme Court ordered a status quo on the dismantling of the Navy's decommissioned aircraft carrier, INS Viraat.

2) Ka-226T utility chopper

[Why in News?](#)

- Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) said that the total indigenous content of the Ka-226T utility helicopters, to be jointly manufactured locally by **India and Russia** with Transfer of Technology (ToT), is between 27%-33%.

[About Ka-226T utility chopper](#)



- In 2015, India and Russia had concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement (**IGA**) for at least 200 **Ka-226T twin engine utility helicopters** estimated to cost over \$1 billion
- The Ka-226T is meant to replace the **ageing and obsolete Cheetah and Chetak** fleet of the Army and Air Force.
- It is a **light helicopter**, with a maximum take-off weight of over 3.5 tonnes and can carry a payload of up to 1 tonne.
- The Ka-226T uses **coaxial rotors**, that is, it has two sets of rotors mounted one on top of the other and typically no tail rotor. Coaxial rotors give a helicopter improvements in lift and **payload capacity** over conventional choppers. This is **advantageous in high-altitude environments**.

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ART & CULTURE

1) Red Fort

- **About Red Fort**



- The Red Fort Complex was built as the palace fort of **Shahjahanabad** – the new capital of the fifth Mughal Emperor of India, **Shah Jahan**.
- **Shah Jahan**, after ruling from Agra for eleven years, **decided to shift to Delhi** and laid the foundation stone of the Red Fort in 1618.
- For its inauguration in 1647, the main halls of the palace were draped in rich tapestry and covered with silk from China and velvet from Turkey.
- With a circumference of almost one and a half miles, the fort is an irregular octagon and has two entrances, the Lahore and Delhi Gates.
- Named for its massive enclosing walls of red sandstone, it is adjacent to an older fort, the **Salimgarh**, built by Islam Shah Suri in 1546, with which it forms the Red Fort Complex.
- The private apartments consist of a row of pavilions connected by a **continuous water channel**, known as the **Nahr-i-Behisht (Stream of Paradise)**.
- The **planning** of the **palace** is based on **Islamic prototypes**, but each pavilion reveals architectural elements typical of **Mughal building**, reflecting a fusion of Persian, Timurid and Hindu traditions.

Specific elements of the Red Fort

- The **Diwan-e-Aam** is the Red Fort's **hall of public audience**. The Mughal emperors would hold court here and meet **dignitaries and foreign emissaries**. In

the recess behind the platform are fine examples of Italian Pietra-Dura work.

- **Pietra-Dura** is a term for the inlay technique of using **cut and fitted, highly polished colored stones** to create images. It is considered a decorative art.
- The piece de resistance of the fort, the **Diwan-e-Khas** was the **hall of private audience**. The most highly ornamented of all Shah Jahan's buildings, Diwan-e-Khas is a pavilion of white marble supported by intricately carved pillars. So enamoured was the emperor by the beauty of this pavilion that he engraved on it the following words: "**If there is paradise on the face of this earth, it is this, it is this.**"
- Richly decorated with flowers of inlaid mosaic work of cornelian and other stones, the **Diwan-e-Khas** once housed the famous **Peacock Throne**, which when it was plundered by Nadir Shah in 1739.
- **Significance of the fort**
- It was from here that the **British deposed the last Mughal ruler**, Bahadur Shah Zafar, marking the end of the three century long Mughal rule.
- It was also from its ramparts that the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, announced to the nation that **India was free from colonial rule**.
- Every year on **India's Independence Day** (15 August), the **Prime Minister hoists the Indian tricolour flag** at the fort's main gate and delivers a nationally broadcast speech from its ramparts.

Why in News?

- Punjabi actor-activist Deep Sidhu, who was wanted in the Red Fort violence case, was arrested by the Delhi Police.

2) Padmanabhaswamy Temple

- **About the temple**



- **Sree PadmanabhaSwamy Temple**, is located inside the East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram, **Kerala**.
- The temple is built in an intricate **fusion** of the **Chera style and the Dravidian style** of architecture, featuring high walls, and a 16th-century gopura.
- The history of Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple dates back to the **8th century**.
- The principal deity Padmanabhaswamy (Vishnu) is enshrined in the “**Anantha Shayana**” posture, the eternal yogic sleep on the serpent Adi Shesha.
- It is **one of the 108 sacred Vishnu temples or Divya Desams** in India. Divya Desams are the holiest abodes of Lord Vishnu that are mentioned in the works of the Tamil **Azhwars**.
- Azhwars or Alvars are the **Vaishnavite poet saints** who lived between 5th and 10th Century CE . The azhwars are **twelve in number: 11 men and 1 woman**, and they belonged to various castes, by birth. They rendered great service to the **Bhakti Movement** writing, composing and singing the **Naalayira Divya Prabhandham** (4000 divine verses) in Tamil.
- **Marthanda Varma**, noted among Travancore kings, did a major renovation to the temple in the 18th century and it resulted in the present day structure of the temple.
- Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** upheld the right of the Travancore royal family to **manage** the property of deity at Sri PadmanabhaSwamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram. The Supreme Court (SC) reversed the **2011 Kerala High Court decision**. The High Court earlier ruled that the successor to the erstwhile royals could not claim to be in control of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple.

▪ The Supreme Court held that the erstwhile Travancore royal family is the “**human ministrant**” or the shebait (manager) of the properties belonging to Sri Padmanabha, chief deity of the temple.

▪ **Why in News?**

- The administrators of Kerala's Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple, one of the richest in India, informed the Supreme Court that the closure of the temple during the pandemic resulted in a financial crunch.

3) Tholpavakoothu

About Tholpavakkoottu



- Tholpavakoothu is a **traditional temple art form of shadow puppetry** in Kerala having its roots in Palakkad and neighbouring regions.
- It is believed to have **originated** in the **ninth century AD** and uses **Kamba Ramayana** as its basic text.
- It used to be **performed** in the **Bhadrakali temples** of Palakkad, telling tales from the Ramayana. It is **also known as Nizhalkoothu and Olakkoothu**.
- This art is confined largely to Pulavar families from Shoranur region of Palakkad district.
- The performance language uses **Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam words**.
- According to legend, Tholpavakoothu was performed at the **request of the goddess Bhadrakali** who could not witness Ravana's killing as she was fighting the demon Darika.

▪ **Why in News?**

- Kerala Minister for Museums Kadannappally Ramachandran inaugurated the first robotic leather

- puppet at the Palakkad District Heritage Museum.
- The robotic puppet will exhibit the famous Tholpavakkoothu and tell stories of the epic Ramayana with the help of robots.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Janani Suraksha Yojana

About the Yojana

- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a **safe motherhood intervention** under the National Health Mission launched by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** in 2005.
- **Objective:** It is being implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among poor pregnant women. JSY **integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care.**
- The scheme is under implementation in **all states and Union Territories (UTs)**, with a special focus on Low Performing States (LPS).
- **Cash assistance:** Under the JSY, eligible pregnant women are entitled for cash assistance **irrespective of the age of mother and number of children** for giving birth in a government or accredited private health facility. BPL pregnant women, who prefer to deliver at home, are entitled to a cash assistance of Rs 500 per delivery regardless of age of women and the number of children.
- **Focus:** The scheme focuses on the poor pregnant woman with **special dispensation for States having low institutional delivery rates** namely the States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Rajasthan, Orissa and Jammu and Kashmir. While these States have been named as Low Performing States (LPS), the remaining States have been named as High performing States (HPS).
- The Yojana enables the States/UTs to hire the services of a **private specialist** to conduct **Caesarean Section** or for the management of Obstetric complications, in the Public Health facilities, where Government specialists are not in place.
- States are encouraged to **accredit private health facilities** for increasing the choice of delivery care institutions.

Why in the news?

- Institutional deliveries reported by the States/UTs under Janani Suraksha Yojana

during the period from April to December, 2019 is 1.54 Crore in comparison to 1.33 Crore for the corresponding period for the current year i.e. from April to December, 2020 as reported in Health Management Information System (HMIS).

2) Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

What is a Farmer Producer Organization?

- A Producer Organisation (PO) is a **legal entity formed by primary producers**, viz. farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen.
- A PO can be a producer company, a cooperative society or any other legal form which provides for sharing of profits/benefits among the members.
- In some forms like producer companies, institutions of primary producers can also become members of PO.
- FPO is **one type of PO where the members are farmers**.
- **Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)** is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.

Why in News?

- Government of India has launched a new Central Sector Scheme titled "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)" with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of Rs 6865 crore.

About the Scheme

- Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) would be a **new Central Sector Scheme** under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs.
- Initially there will be **three implementing Agencies** to form and promote FPOs, namely Small Farmers Agri-business Consortium (SFAC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

- States may also, if so desire, nominate their Implementing Agency in consultation with Department of Agriculture, Co-operation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW).
- DAC&FW will allocate Cluster/States to Implementing Agencies which in turn will form the Cluster-Based Business Organization in the States.

Benefits

- Small and marginal farmers do not have the economic strength to apply production technology, services and marketing including value addition.
- Through the formation of FPOs, farmers will have better collective strength for better access to quality input, technology, credit and better marketing access through economies of scale for better realization of income.

3) Soil Health Card

About the scheme

- Launched in 2015, Soil Health Card (SHC) is a Government of India's scheme promoted by the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.
- It is being implemented through the Department of Agriculture of all the State and Union Territory Governments.
- The Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme provides information to farmers on **nutrient status of their soil** along with recommendations on appropriate dosage of nutrients to be applied for improving soil health and its fertility.

Constituents of a Soil Health Card

- SHC is a printed report that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings.
- It will contain the status of his soil with respect to **12 parameters**, namely N, P, K (Macronutrients); S (Secondary- nutrient); Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micronutrients); and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters).

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N - Nitrogen , P - Phosphorus, K - Potassium, S - Sulphur, Zn - Zinc, Fe - Iron, ▪ Cu - Copper, Mn - Manganese, Bo - Boron, EC- Electrical Conductivity, OC- Organic Carbon. |
|---|

- Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

Periodical Assessment

- It will be made available once in a **cycle of 3 years**, which will indicate the status of soil health of a farmer's holding for that particular period.
- The SHC given in the next cycle of 3 years will be able to record the changes in the soil health for that subsequent period.

Benefits of Soil Health Card Scheme:

- The scheme will monitor the soil of the farmers well and will give them a formatted report. So, they can **decide well which crops they should cultivate and which ones they should skip**.
- The authorities will **monitor the soil on a regular basis**. So, farmers need not worry if the nature of the soil changes due to certain factors and also they will always have updated data about their soil.
- Apart from listing down measures required to improve the quality of the soil, experts are also employed to help farmers in carrying out the corrective measures.

Why in the news?

- A study by **National Productivity Council (NPC)** on '**Soil Testing Infrastructure for Faster Delivery of Soil Health Card in India**' found that
- Application of fertilizer and micronutrients based on Soil Health Card (SHC) recommendations resulted in **8-10 % of savings**.
- Overall **increase in the yield of crops** to the tune of 5-6% reported by adopting the SHC recommendations.
- An impact study carried out on Soil Health Card scheme found that overall, paddy farmers reduced use of urea by 9% but increased use of Potassium by 20% which is a **healthy sign of moving towards balanced use of fertilizers**.

4) Special Economic Zones Act,2005

Background

- With a view to attract larger foreign investments in India, the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Policy was announced in 2000. The **Special Economic Zones Act**

was enacted in 2005 and the SEZ Rules came into effect in 2006.

Salient features of the SEZ Scheme

- SEZ is a specifically **delineated duty-free enclave and deemed to be foreign territory for the purposes of trade operations and duties and tariffs.**
- SEZs' economic laws are more liberal than a country's typical economic laws. In an SEZ,
- No licence required for import;
- Manufacturing or service activities allowed;
- No routine examination by customs authorities of export/import cargo;
- SEZ Developers /Co-Developers and Units enjoy tax benefits as prescribed in the SEZs Act, 2005;
- India's SEZ policy offers various fiscal and regulatory incentives to the developers within the zone like exemption from customs duties, central excise duties.
- The idea was to create a level playing field to the domestic enterprises and manufacturers to be competitive globally.
- **Domestic sales** from an SEZ is subject to full customs duty and import policy in force.

Objectives

The main objectives of the SEZ Act are:

- Generation of additional economic activity
- Promotion of exports of goods and services.
- To develop backward regions.
- Contribute towards exchange rate stability.
- Promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources
- Creation of employment opportunities
- Development of infrastructure facilities

Why in News?

- This information was given by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in a written reply in the Lok Sabha recently.

5) Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)

About AMRUT

- AMRUT was launched in 2015 as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.**

- It seeks to **lay a foundation to enable cities and towns to eventually grow into smart cities.**
- AMRUT adopts a **project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services** relating to water supply, sewerage, septage management, storm water drains, transport and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.

Coverage

- This Mission will be **implemented in 500 cities and towns** each with a population of one lakh and above, some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few capital cities and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.

Approach

- Implementation of this Mission will be **linked to promotion of urban reforms** such as
- e-governance,
- constitution of professional municipal cadre,
- devolving funds and functions to urban local bodies,
- review of Building bye-laws,
- improvement in assessment and collection of municipal taxes,
- credit rating of urban local bodies,
- energy and water audit and
- citizen-centric urban planning.

Funding

- Central assistance will be to the **extent of 50 percent of project cost** for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakh and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakh.
- Central assistance will be released in **three instalments in the ratio of 20:40:40** based on achievement of milestones indicated in State Annual Action Plans.

AMRUT and Cooperative Federalism

- Under AMRUT, work of selection, appraisal, approval and implementation of projects in cities have been **delegated to States/UTs and concerned Urban Local Bodies.**
- At Central level, only State Annual Action Plans (SAAPs) submitted by the States are considered for approval.
- AMRUT makes States equal partners in planning and implementation of projects,

- thus actualizing the **spirit of cooperative federalism**.
- **Random citizen survey and feedback** about the services is an integral part of the Mission.
- **Why in the news?**
- This information was given in a written reply by the Minister of State, Housing & Urban Affairs, in Lok Sabha recently.

6) SANKALP

About the programme

- The Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood (SANKALP) is an outcome-oriented **centrally sponsored programme** of the **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** financially supported by the **World Bank**.
- It focuses on the **overall skilling ecosystem** covering both Central & State agencies and also strengthens the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs). It focuses on **decentralised planning and quality improvement**.
- SANKALP aims to implement the mandate of the **National Skill Development Mission (NSDM)**.
- Under SANKALP four key result areas have been identified viz:
- Institutional Strengthening (at National, State & District level);
- Quality Assurance Quality Assurance of skill development programs;
- Inclusion of marginalised population in skill development; and
- Expanding Skills through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

Why in the news?

- The Union Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship recently reviewed the SANKALP initiative.

7) World Sustainable Development Summit 2021

About the summit

- It is the annual flagship event of **The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)**.
- It is the sole summit on global issues **taking place in the developing world**.

- Started in 2001, the Summit has become a focal point for leaders and stakeholders across the world to **bridge thought and action for sustainable development**.
- It provides a **platform for global leaders** and practitioners to **discuss and deliberate over climatic issues** of universal importance.
- Post the adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goals** and the signing of the **Paris Agreement**, the World Sustainable Development Summit aims to provide long-term solutions for the **benefit of the global community** by assembling the various stakeholders on a single platform and initiating a step in the direction of **achieving constructive action** in combating issues pertinent to the future of humanity
- It is continuing the **legacy of Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS)** which was initiated in 2001 with the aim of making 'sustainable development' a globally shared goal.

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021 via video conferencing.
- The theme of the 2021 Summit is '**Redefining our common future: Safe and secure environment for all**'.

About The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)

- TERI is a **leading think tank** that conducts **research work in the fields of energy, environment and sustainable development**
- Established in 1974 as **Tata Energy Research Institute** and was renamed The Energy and Resources Institute in 2003.
- It aims to **focus on formulating local and national level strategies** for shaping global solutions to critical issues.
- Its key focus lies in **promoting clean energy, water management, pollution management**, sustainable agriculture and climate resilience.
- **Objectives**
- Enhancing conservation, utilization of and access to water, including **watershed management**
- Enabling the planning and **governance of environmentally sustainable cities**

- through green buildings and through management of solid waste, sewage, sanitation, mobility and air quality
- **Building resilience to adverse impacts of climate change** due to cyclones and variations in hydrology and temperature
- Enhancing **ecosystem services** especially in forestry and biodiversity
- Enabling sustainable food production and **nutritional security** through quality planting material, **bio-based agricultural inputs** and crop diversification

8) FASTag

About FASTag

- **National Electronic Toll Collection (FASTag) programme**, is the flagship initiative of the **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRT&H)** and **National Highways Authority of India (NHAII)** launched in 2016.
- A FASTag is a **reloadable tag** that **automatically deducts toll charges** and allows a vehicle to pass through a toll gate without stopping for the payment.
- It uses **radio frequency identification (RFID) technology** to make cashless payments through a prepaid account linked to it.
- The tag is fixed to the **windscreen** of a vehicle and an RFID antenna in the canopy of the toll gate scans the QR code and the tag identification number, following which the boom barrier lifts to allow a vehicle to pass through.
- The tag, which is **valid for five years**, comes in **seven different colours** — violet, orange, yellow, green, pink, blue, black. Each colour is assigned to a particular category of vehicles.
- FASTag is **vehicle specific** and once it is affixed to a vehicle, it cannot be transferred to another vehicle. So it **avoids duplication**.
- It has been **implemented on pan India basis** in order to remove bottlenecks and ensure seamless movement of traffic and collection of user fee as per the notified rates.
- FASTag has been **made mandatory for all vehicles in the country**.

Benefits of FASTag

- FASTag uses **RFID technology** that provides users a **smooth and effortless cross-over** at Toll plazas without waiting/halting.
- The payment is made **digitally** through the FASTag linked to the bank wallet.
- As social distancing has become the new norm, commuters are increasingly looking at FASTag as a toll payment option as it **nullifies the chances of any human contact** between the drivers and the toll operators.
- Being an inclusive technological tool for toll collection on highways, FASTag is a **more practical and beneficial option**.
- Implementation of FASTag is one step in the direction of providing safe, smooth and seamless journeys to commuters on National Highways.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has made FASTags mandatory from February 15 midnight and any vehicle not fitted with it will be charged double at toll plazas across the country.
- The ministry has clarified that this has been done to further promote digital payments through digital mode, reduce waiting time and fuel consumption.

9) National Monsoon Mission

About the mission

- The National Monsoon Mission was launched by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** in 2012.
- **Aim:** It aims to develop a state-of-the-art, **dynamic monsoon prediction system** for short, medium, and long-range forecasts.
- **Objective:** The overall objective of NMM is to **improve the monsoon prediction over India** on all time scales and hence it is implemented for the whole country.
- The short range to medium range (1-10 days), extended range (10 days to 30 days) and seasonal (up to one season) models developed under the National Monsoon Mission (NMM) have shown very high skill in predicting important weather events on different time scales during the last 3 years.
- The targets of Monsoon Mission are as follows:
- Development of a **seamless prediction system** using monsoon mission model, on

different time scales, like Seasonal (for whole Monsoon season), Extended range (up-to 4 weeks), Short range prediction (up-to 5days).

- Initiate and **coordinate working partnership** between Indian and foreign institutes to develop a system for prediction of extremes and climate applications
- Develop and implement systems for **climate applications having social impacts** (such as agriculture, flood forecast, extreme events forecast, wind energy,etc.)
- Advanced **data assimilation system** for preparing high quality data for model predictions.

About ACROSS Scheme

- "**Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)**" is an umbrella scheme subsuming 9 sub-schemes launched by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- **Objective**
- The objective of the ACROSS scheme is to provide a **reliable weather and climate forecast** for betterment of society.
- To **conduct R & D for improving forecast** of weather, climate and other hazardous events in real-time for delivery of a reliable weather and climate service. This requires
- Augmentation of observations and their assimilation into weather and climate models
- Understanding the physical processes through field campaigns
- Developing and running of high resolution models for giving forecast in allscales
- Translating science to service and its delivery to society
- Improving and acquiring the required infrastructure

Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Minister of Science & Technology; Earth Science and Health & Family Welfare in the Rajya Sabha recently.

10) Swadhar Greh Scheme

About the scheme

- The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** is implementing the

Swadhar Greh Scheme which targets the **women victims of difficult circumstances** who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity.

- The scheme covers women who are **deserted** and without any social and economic support, women victims of domestic violence, family tension and natural disaster.

Objectives

- Under the Scheme , Swadhar Greh will be set up in **every district** with capacity of 30 women with the following objectives:
- To cater to the **primary need** of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support.
- To enable them to regain their **emotional strength** that gets hampered due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances.
- To provide them with **legal aid and guidance** to enable them to take steps for their readjustment in family/society.
- To rehabilitate them economically and emotionally
- To act as a **support system** that understands and meets various requirements of women in distress.
- To enable them to start their life afresh with dignity and conviction.
- For big cities and other districts having **more than 40 lakh population** or those districts where there is a need for additional support to the women, **more than one Swadhar Greh could be established**.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development also reviews the functioning of the Swadhar Greh at regular intervals with the State Governments/UT administrations.
- The Swadhar Greh Scheme initially introduced as a central sector scheme has been revised in 2016 as a sub-scheme of the **Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme "Protection and Empowerment of Women"**.
- Funds are released through the States, with a cost sharing ratio of **60:40** between the Centre and the States excepting for the North Eastern and Himalayan States where it shall be **90:10** and for UTs it is **100%**.

Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha recently.

11) CARINGS Portal

About the portal

- Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System (CARINGS), is an centralized Online Portal of Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) to facilitate adoption in the Country.
- It functions under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

About CARA

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** has been set up as an **autonomous and statutory body** of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It functions as a nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to **monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoption**.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the **Hague Conventions on Inter-Country Adoptions, 1993**, ratified by the Government of India in 2003.
- CARA interacts with State Governments and UT Administrations through regular training and orientation programmes as well as meetings, consultations and visits to the States/UTs.

About Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993

- The Hague Convention 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention) protects **children and their families against the risks of illegal,**

irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.

- It is an effort to protect those involved from the corruption, abuses, and exploitation which sometimes accompanies international adoption.
- Why in the news?**
- This information was given by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha recently.

12) Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav

About

- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is the flagship festival of the **Ministry of Culture** organized since 2015.
- It is organised with the active participation of **Seven Zonal Culture Centres** and has been playing a pivotal role to take the vibrant culture of India out to the masses.
- It has been instrumental in showcasing folk and tribal art, dance, music, cuisines & culture of one state in other states reinforcing the cherished goal of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat".
- It provides an effective platform to the artists and artisans to support their livelihood.
- The RSM will **reconnect the people**- especially the youth- with their indigenous culture, its multifaceted nature, magnificence, opulence and historical importance in the context of India as a Nation over the millennia.

Why in the news?

- The eleventh edition of Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is being held between 14th to 28th February, 2021 in West Bengal.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

About the Programme

- NCAP is a pollution control initiative that was launched by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** in 2019. This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target.
- It aims to reduce particulate matter (**PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀**) pollution by **20-30%** in **122 cities by 2024**, with 2017 as the base year for comparison.
- The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** will execute this nation-wide programme.

Implementation

- Under NCAP, **122 non-attainment cities** have been identified across the country based on the **Air Quality data from 2014-2018**.
- Apart from experts from the industry and academia, the programme is a collaboration between the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, NITI Aayog, and Central Pollution Control Board.
- **City specific action plans** have been prepared which include measures for strengthening the monitoring network, reducing vehicular/industrial emissions, increasing public awareness etc.
- Implementation of the city specific action plans are regularly monitored by Committees at Central and State level namely Steering Committee, Monitoring Committee and Implementation Committee.

- Air quality of cities is monitored by **State Pollution Control Boards** which publishes their results from time to time.

Why in News?

- Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar informed about the National Clean Air Programme in Rajya Sabha recently.

2) Kisan Credit Card scheme

About the Scheme

- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was introduced in **1998** with the aim of providing **adequate and timely credit support** from the banking system under a single window with flexible and simplified procedure to the farmers for their cultivation and other needs as indicated below:
 1. To meet the short term credit requirements for cultivation of crops;
 2. Post-harvest expenses;
 3. Produce marketing loan;
 4. Consumption requirements of farmer household;
 5. Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture;
 6. Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities.
- **Note:** The aggregate of components 'a' to 'e' above will form the **short term credit limit portion** and the aggregate of components under 'f' will form the **long term credit limit portion**.
- Under the KCC Scheme, a flexible limit of Rs.10,000 to Rs.50,000 has been provided to marginal farmers (as Flexi KCC) based on the land holding and crops grown.
- The beneficiaries under the scheme will be issued with a **Smart card/ Debit card**.
- It enables farmers to purchase agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides,

- etc. and draw cash to satisfy their agricultural and consumption needs.
- The Scheme is implemented by **Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks and Cooperatives.**

Eligibility

- Farmers - individual/joint borrowers who are owner cultivators;
- Tenant farmers, oral lessees & sharecroppers;
- Self Help Groups (SHGs) or Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) of farmers including tenant farmers, sharecroppers etc.
- In 2019, KCC was extended to **farmers who are involved in activities related to animal husbandry and fisheries.**

Why in News?

- More than 187 lakh Kisan Credit Cards with credit limit of one lakh 76 thousand crore rupees have been sanctioned to farmers across the country during the last one year.
- A special drive to cover farmers under the Kisan Credit Card is going on from February, 2020.

3) Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

About PMGSY

- The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), was launched in 2000 as **centrally sponsored scheme** to provide connectivity to unconnected habitations of **designated population size** (500+ in plain areas and 250+ in North-East, hill, tribal and desert areas as per Census, 2001) as part of a poverty reduction strategy.
- The **Ministry of Rural Development** along with state governments is responsible for the implementation of PMGSY.
- Phase III of PMGSY was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2019. It involves the consolidation of Through Routes and Major Rural Links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.

Guiding Principles of PMGSY

- The spirit and the objective of the scheme is to provide good all-weather road connectivity to unconnected Habitations. A habitation which was earlier provided all-

weather connectivity would not be eligible even if the present condition of the road is bad.

- The unit for this Programme is a **Habitation** and not a Revenue village or a Panchayat. A Habitation is a cluster of population, living in an area, the location of which does not change over time.
- The PMGSY shall cover **only the rural areas**. Urban roads are excluded from the purview of this Programme.

Funding pattern

- The Union Government bears **90% of the project cost** in respect of projects sanctioned under the scheme in North-Eastern and Himalayan States, whereas for other states the Union Government bears **60% of the cost.**

Initiatives related to PMGSY

- Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism affected Areas (RCPLWEA):** It was launched in 2016 as a separate vertical under PMGSY to provide all-weather road connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 districts (35 are worst LWE affected districts and 09 are adjoining districts), which are critical from security and communication point of view.
- Meri Sadak mobile app:** It was launched to enable citizens to register complaints regarding the quality and pace of construction of PMGSY roads.

Why in News?

- In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, District Development Commissioner Rajouri, Rajesh K Shavan has discussed the modalities for the formulation of Block and District Rural Road plans under PMGSY Phase-III in a meeting.

4) Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)

About the Campaign

- It was launched in **2015** by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) as a nation-wide Campaign for **achieving universal accessibility** for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It aims at providing equal opportunity to PwDs to participate in all the aspects of life and live independently.

- The Accessible India Campaign comprises of the following three components:
1. **Built Environment Accessibility:** It aims to provide an accessible physical environment for everyone. To achieve this, measures need to be undertaken to eliminate obstacles and barriers to indoor and outdoor facilities including schools, medical facilities, and workplaces.
 2. **Transportation System Accessibility:** It focuses on providing persons with disabilities an equal right to travel and use public and private transportation infrastructure with dignity and independence.
 3. **Information and Communication Ecosystem Accessibility:** Access to information refers to all information. This can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view webpages.

Objectives

- The campaign is based on the principles of the **Social Model of Disability**, that disability is caused by the way society is organised, and not the person's limitations and impairments.
- The physical, social, structural and attitudinal barriers prevent People with

Disabilities from participating equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities. A barrier-free environment facilitates equal participation in all the activities and promotes an independent and dignified way of life.

- The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

Why in News?

- According to data from the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry's Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD), less than 7% of public buses in the country were fully accessible to wheelchair users as of December 2020, with the target of 25% of buses being accessible by June 2022 under the Accessible India Campaign getting close.
- When the Accessible India Campaign was launched in 2015, the deadline for making at least 25% of public buses fully accessible was March 2018. However, the deadline had been pushed back to June 2022.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) The cost of Internet shutdowns

GS-2 CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

CONTEXT

- In recent times, movement led by farmers against the Central government's agricultural laws has become a part of our national and international discourse. Besides the contentious legislation, the manner in which the Centre introduced the Bills and its actions towards countering the movement also has raised plenty of concerns.

PRINCIPAL CONCERN

- Among all, the major concern has been the **recurrent shutdowns of Internet services** around many border areas of the National Capital Region (NCR) ordered by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- In recent years, India has witnessed internet blockages so frequently that it has topped the chart of number of shutdowns among all other democracies in the world. The past four years have seen over 400 such shutdowns.
- **Jammu and Kashmir** saw the longest Internet shutdown across the world since the abrogation of Article 370 in the erstwhile State.
- It was only after a long period of 223 days, when digital services were partially restored.

Concerns

- Many, including UN rights groups, have termed the internet shutdowns as a form of collective punishment for people and an **overreach of governments on citizens' rights and liberties**.
- Currently, **Indian laws have vague provisions for suspending telecommunication services**, including the Internet, during times of public emergencies, or, if required, for protecting the public interest.

IMPACT OF INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

- **During pandemic, the impact becomes more pronounced.** The ones with good connectivity and know-how of digital tools were able to carry on with their lives with relatively fewer disruptions, while others without digital literacy or connectivity

found themselves completely left out of all social and economic systems.

- Blanket bans on digital connectivity during the COVID-19 crisis may breed deep-rooted societal difficulties.
- The **most vulnerable among us may be cut off from health and welfare alerts**.
- There could be breaks in vital digital services, including those currently being used by hospitals to monitor the well-being of their patients at risk of infection, including the elderly, and pregnant women.
- **Students** may lose access to avenues of learning as classes shift online.
- **Journalists** may find it impossible to do ground-reporting from already volatile areas.
- The **economic activity in affected areas may freeze** and cause large-scale disruptions in economic output, today almost all whitecollar employment sectors, including IT, financial and consulting services, are encouraging their employees to work from home.
- India is estimated to have lost over ₹20,000 crore in 2020 because of Internet shutdowns.

SUPREME COURT VIEW ON SHUTDOWN

- In 2020, the Supreme Court had declared that the **Right to Access the Internet is one of our fundamental rights** alongside the freedom to carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of the Internet, under **Article 19** of the Constitution.

WAY FORWARD

- Despite the costs and inconveniences involved, the shutdowns, on very rare occasions, do become necessary evils. However, it is hard to classify the ones initiated by the Central government in recent years under those categories.
- As the pace of globalisation, digitisation and connectivity accelerate, balancing civil liberties with security concerns will become an increasingly difficult task. Governments must find a way other than digital curbs to balance civil liberties and security.

- Internet bans should be a last resort and must be enforced following well-formulated protocols.
- Emergency response and relief systems for the vulnerable have to then work in parallel.
- Upgrading cyber divisions of law enforcement agencies with new-age innovations may offer several alternatives.
- The use of some of these technologies, including mass surveillance systems and communication interceptors, also presents its own ethical dilemmas.
- Therefore, governments will have to create modern, independent institutions that have the authority and expertise to create frameworks that meet these challenges, without falling back on measures that result in state overreach.

2) The long and the short of India's Naypyitaw dilemma

GS-2 India and its neighborhood- relations.

CONTEXT

- After the February military coup, the future of Myanmar's democracy is uncertain, but the country, sandwiched between two powerful states competing for power and influence, is certain to be a key piece in the region's geopolitics.
- As the coup has undone the comfortable space New Delhi's Myanmar policy occupied for close to a decade, New Delhi would need to be nimble-footed and creative in its responses with well-thought-out strategic choices taking precedence over knee-jerk reactions.

COUP, POLITICS, GEOPOLITICS AND ROHINGYAS

- If Myanmar's democracy prior to the February 2021 coup was inadequate and intolerant towards minorities, its political future will be a lot more complicated, making the choices of outside powers far more constrained.
- Adding to it strong reactions and the **threat of sanctions from the United States and the West** in the wake of the recent coup could lead to unique political realignments in Myanmar.
- As a result, even though the democratic credentials of the former State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, remain deeply

diminished today, the international community may not have any alternatives when it comes to pursuing the restoration of democracy in the country.

- Consequently, those who are batting for Suu Kyi in the international community in order to build to rebuild the charisma of the fallen messiah, may have to condone her **government's past actions against the Rohingya** in order to highlight her suitability to be the saviour of democracy in Myanmar once again.
- Hence, there is the possibility that the case against Myanmar's conduct during her government's tenure at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will most likely be put on the backburner and the plight of the helpless Rohingya will take a backseat or be conveniently forgotten.
- Put differently, **increasing global support for Ms. Suu Kyi could potentially spell doom for the persecuted Rohingya.**

THE CHINA FACTOR

- This is a coup that seems to suit no one except the Tatmadaw, the armed forces of Myanmar.
- In the short run, the coup stands to hurt the interests of China, India and even the rest of the international community, all of whom were able to do business with Myanmar in their own unique ways.
- However, even though international sanctions are unlikely to have a major impact on the country's largely inward looking junta, it is likely that the **international community's sharp reactions will force the Tatmadaw to turn to China.**
- It is to be noted that the coup has complicated even China's larger regional economic plans in Myanmar, for the time being.
- Beijing has recently been cultivating Ms. Suu Kyi, who was keen on a strong relationship with China given the growing criticism she was facing from the West. But the junta's jailing her could complicate Beijing's plans for the country.
- While on the positive side for Beijing, decisive western sanctions will force the military to get closer to China.
- For Beijing, given that it does not come with the 'baggage' of democratic norms, it may simply be a matter of rejigging its

- schedule in Myanmar and getting used to the new scheme of things there.
- To that extent, **China will be its biggest beneficiary of the February coup by default.**
- NEW DELHI'S DILEMMA**
- While China's choices are straightforward, it is far more complicated for others, especially India. New Delhi faces the most challenging dilemma on how to respond to the military coup in Myanmar.
 - The dual power centres of the military and the civilian government that existed in Naypyitaw until recently, suited New Delhi quite well as it did not have to worry about hurting the international community's normative concerns or sacrificing its national interests while engaging them both.
 - The February coup has undone that comfortable space New Delhi's Myanmar policy occupied for close to a decade. While India's national interests, under the new circumstances, would clearly lie in dealing with whoever is in power in Myanmar, **India would find it difficult to openly support the junta given the strong western and American stance.**
 - On the other hand, it **can ill-afford to offend the junta by actively seeking a restoration of democracy.** Being a close neighbour with clear strategic interests in Myanmar, offending the junta would be counter-productive.
 - Although the Ministry of External Affairs statement — "We believe that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld. We are monitoring the situation closely" — is definitely in favour of restoring democracy, but its past support for the pro democracy movement in Myanmar is unlikely to return as the nature of the regional geopolitics has changed with the arrival of China on the scene.
 - New Delhi's new Myanmar policy will therefore be a function of interests rather than norms.
- OTHER CHALLENGES FOR INDIA**
- One, Myanmar's military played a **helpful role in helping New Delhi contain the North-eastern insurgencies** by allowing Indian military to pursue insurgents across the border into Myanmar.

- **Coordinated action and intelligence sharing** between the two forces have in the recent past been instrumental in beating back the insurgent groups in the northeast.
- Second, the **issue of providing succour to the Rohingya** in the wake of the military coup in Myanmar. Unless the military decides to engage in a peace process, the Rohingya question is likely to be pushed aside with the campaign against them continuing relentlessly, perhaps with even more ferocity.
- The inability of the states in the region to address the legitimate concerns of the Rohingya or increased violations of their rights could potentially lead to a rise of extremism within the community, which in the longer run would not be in India's interests.
- **New Delhi is currently left with very few clear policy options. It must continue to maintain relations with the government in power in Myanmar while discreetly pushing for political reconciliation in the country. In the meantime, the focus must be on improving trade, connectivity, and security links between the two sides.**

3) Troubled mountains

GS-3 Environment

NEWS

- The staggering collapse of part of a glacier in Uttarakhand's Nanda Devi mountain and the ensuing floods that have claimed many lives come as a deadly reminder that this fragile, geologically dynamic region can never be taken for granted.

BACKGROUND

- According to some satellite images, a significant slice of the glacier, dislodged by a landslide, produced roaring torrents in the Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers in Chamoli district.
- Number of people are still missing in the region, as the wave of water, silt and debris swamped the rivers and filled tunnels in the Tapovan power project.

CONCERNs

- The **increasing frailty of the state** in the face of environmental shocks, is the major cause of concern, which cannot be ignored.

- Despite the concerns raised by several environmentalists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Gaura Devi, the State's deep gorges and canyons have attracted **many hydroelectric projects and dams, with little concern for earthquake risk.**
- Red flags have been raised repeatedly, particularly after the moderate quake in 1991 in the region where the Tehri dam was built and the 2013 floods that devastated Kedarnath, pointing to the **threat from seismicity, dam-induced microseismicity, landslides and floods from a variety of causes**, including unstable glacial lakes and climate change.

FAULT LINES IN POLICY MAKING

- India is **heavily invested in dam development and growth of hydropower, largely in the Himalaya region** — especially to cut carbon emissions.
- By one estimate, if the national plan to construct dams in 28 river valleys in the hills is realised in a few decades, the Indian Himalayas will have one dam for every 32 km, among the world's highest densities.
- Researchers say that this can be the miscalculation for the reasons, including potential earthquake impacts, monsoonal aberrations that could repeat a Kedarnath-like flood, severe biodiversity loss and, importantly, extreme danger to communities downstream.
- Also there is evidence that the **life of dams is often exaggerated**, and siltation, which reduces it, is grossly underestimated: in the Bhakra dam in Himachal Pradesh, for instance, siltation was higher by 140% than calculated.

WAY FORWARD

- The need is to rigorously study the impact of policy on the Himalayas and confine hydro projects to those with the least impact, while relying more on low impact runoff the river power projects that need no destructive large dams and reservoirs.

4) A Budget not for the environment

GS- Environment, GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development

CONCERN HOVERING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY MAKING

- Steadily increasing levels of pollution, biodiversity loss, decline in forest health and destruction of wetlands are testimony to the dismal gap between governmental rhetoric and the environment, regardless of the party in power.
- It is argued that the governments have not put in the substantial new financial resources raised through rapid growth into environmental protection.
- Even when there are increased allocations, such as for cleaning up the Ganga, their usage is riddled with such design flaws, inefficiencies and corruption that the environment is no better off than before.

BUDGET 2021

- The 2021 Budget is no different, as the **budgetary allocations for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) have consistently fallen** as a percentage of total allocations.
- This includes MoEFCC crucial institutions such as the Wildlife Institute of India and the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education.

ANALYSING ALLOCATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT SECTOR

- The government could argue that while direct allocations to environment related institutions and schemes may not have risen significantly, there are substantial allocations to sectors that have a positive environmental impact.
- For instance, the 2021 Budget has allocated ₹3,500 crore for wind and solar energy, ₹4,000 crore for a 'Deep Ocean Mission', and ₹50,011 crore for urban drinking water. All of these have positive ecological potential, but let's examine them a bit more closely.
- **Renewable energy (RE):** There is no intention to phase out fossil fuels; on the contrary, coal mining and thermal power are being promoted under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package. And large hydropower is being promoted as RE, though its massive ecological and social impacts are well documented.
- Even much of the solar and wind energy is coming in the form of massive energy parks that take up huge areas of land, displacing people and wildlife.

- There is no indication in the Budget that the RE push would be predominantly decentralised, community managed, and with full environmental impact assessments (currently not required for RE projects).
- Nor does the Budget have anything on curtailing wasteful and luxury consumption of energy or other products and services by the rich.
- Without controlling demand, even a complete shift to RE will be unsustainable; after all, silica has to be mined somewhere.

Drinking Water:

- In principle any scheme for urban drinking water is positive. But with the continuation of a **highly centralised approach** to all such schemes, there is a 'one size fits all' approach, heavily focused on expensive infrastructure like big reservoirs and pipelines.
- Instead, a decentralised approach that uses a mix of local rooftop and backyard harvesting, restoration and conservation of urban wetlands, and regenerating groundwater could achieve much better results.
- And as in energy, there is no focus on incentivising responsible consumption, restraining luxury uses, and redistributing water more equitably, without which no amount of infrastructure will be enough.

Deep Ocean Mission:

- It is being projected as a programme for conservation of biodiversity in the depths of our marine areas, the serious neglect of our oceanic areas.
- The institutions that are given responsibility under this include the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the Indian Space Research Organisation, the Defence Research and Development Organisation, the Department of Atomic Energy, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Department of Biotechnology, and the Indian Navy. **None of these institutions have expertise in or even significant focus on marine conservation.** Instead, this could become a project for deep sea mining, for which already explorations are going on.
- **Public Transport:** Potentially, an allocation of ₹18,000 crore for public transport could have significant benefits

- for people and the environment if it helps to reduce private vehicle density in cities.
- But if much of this is allocated to the metro rather than to buses and other such earthy alternatives (including last mile connectivity, incentives for walking and cycling), the picture becomes murky.
- As the experience with the metro so far in India's cities is one of significant environmental impact, but also lacks affordability for the poor.

OTHER WORRYING ALLOCATIONS

- There is the worrying issue of allocations to non environmental sectors that have a negative impact on the environment.
- For instance, the Budget proposes 11,000 km more of national highway corridors, when in the last few years, massive road and dam construction has fragmented fragile ecosystems and disrupted local community life in the Himalaya, Western Ghats, northeast India and elsewhere.
- It is not only the road itself but what it brings with it that results in opening up previously intact ecosystems.

WAY FORWARD

- Leaving aside the fallacy of believing that all ecological damage can be compensated (a rainforest drowned under a dam can't be recreated, however much money you pour into it).
- It is time to think climbing into a green, nature-and-land based livelihoods recovery that could create tens of millions of jobs and also regenerate India's depleted environment.
- Need to come out of the logic of neoliberal 'development' planning, with a blind trust in growth as the panacea for all ills, to treat nature as a commodity for exploitation, or a 'sink' into which to dump waste.

5) Fine-tuning the State-of-the app technology

GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation;

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

CONTEXT

- Keener scrutiny of the technology platforms of India's States can lead to improved public services and user confidence.

TECHNOLOGICAL PLATFORMS AND COVID-19

- The issue of privacy is crucial for government technology platforms and services as governments typically have a monopoly in providing public services, unlike the private sector.
- For eg., since the announcement of the first lockdown, at least 35 mobile apps that specifically address COVID-19 were developed by 25 States and Union Territories of India.

CHALLENGES

- **Digital exclusion-** The development of COVID-19 mobile apps was well-received and perceived as a strong proactive initiative, especially by sections of the population that were digitally empowered. However, more than 40% of mobile phone subscribers in India **lack access to Internet services**, and this could be more than 50% for digitally excluded.
- **Lacks consistency-** An analysis shows that the various mobile apps on COVID-19 operated by the different State governments lack consistency in terms of the features, functionalities, and frequency of information updates they offer. Thus, leads to multiple sources of truth.
- **Privacy issues-** Most of these mobile apps differ significantly on the data privacy they provide, depending on the information or permissions they request from the user. It is observed that most of these apps request access to location services, device ID and call information, camera, contact information etc.
- **Risk of data breach-** Several mobile apps of the State governments employ a centralised approach. This approach has a higher risk of data leak as unlike multiple systems used in a decentralised database, the data in the centralised system resides in a common system, which is easier to breach.

WAY FORWARD

- There is the need for examination of government technological platforms to

create better awareness, as seen in the case of Aadhaar and Aarogya Setu.

- The governments should continue to set up **functional helplines, auto-diallers, SMS text messages, and other channels** to ensure that the digitally restricted have access to the same information as the digitally empowered, more so during crises such as the pandemic.
- The mobile applications developed must proactively follow established **principles of privacy** by design, such as minimal data collection and end-to-end data security.
- Data requests must always meet the two commonly accepted principles of data privacy — **necessity and proportionality**
- The adoption of an API-based micro services architecture and federated database structure with an appropriate governance framework could address issues such as inconsistency in data, risk of data breach. Also it will be capable of providing state-specific customised services or sub-applications such as information on hospital beds and grocery shops, among others.
- Given the presence of structured audits that continuously put the spotlight on Government of India-backed technologies, extending the same level of scrutiny to technology platforms developed by the States brings the opportunity of improved public services overall, and the public confidence needed to encourage wider adoption.

6) Denying women the right over their bodies

GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions; Issues Arising Out of Design & Implementation of Policies; Issues Related to Women

NEWS

- Argentina's Congress have legalized abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy.

CONTEXT

- The Indian Parliament too will consider an amendment to our abortion laws this Budget Session but unlike the Argentina law which is touted as being historic, the **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (MTP Bill)**, will

not translate into greater autonomy for women over their own bodies.

HISTORY OF THE LAW

- The MTP Act of 1971 was framed in the context of reducing the maternal mortality ratio due to unsafe abortions.
- It allows an unwanted pregnancy to be terminated **up to 20 weeks of pregnancy** and requires a second doctor's approval if the pregnancy is beyond 12 weeks.
- Further, it allows termination only when there is a grave risk to the physical or mental health of the woman or if the pregnancy results from a sex crime such as rape or intercourse with a mentally challenged woman.

DENIAL OF WOMEN'S RIGHT OVER HER OWN BODY

- It seems law is framed not to respect a woman's right over her own body but makes it easier for the state to stake its control over her body through legal and medical debates.
- For example, suppose a woman has had voluntary sex and she decides, for personal reasons, to end her pregnancy. If she is 24 weeks pregnant, then this would be a **criminal offence**. So, she moves the court under the condition that the pregnancy was affecting her mental health. However, here the court can refuse her despite the woman's choice to end it.
- In such circumstances, women usually resort to **unsafe methods of abortion**. Unsafe abortions are the **third largest cause of maternal deaths in India**.
- The amendment too continues this legacy of hetero-patriarchal population control, which **does not give women control over their own bodies**.

- The proposed amendment still requires one doctor to sign off on termination of pregnancies up to 20 weeks old, and two doctors for pregnancies between 20 and 24 weeks old.

PERSONAL BELIEFS

- The Bill also mandates the government to set up a **medical board in every State and UT**.
- Medical boards can rely on the facts of the case but personal beliefs could impact the medical board's opinion, which is one of the biggest challenges in having a **third-party opinion on a decision which is very personal**.
- While the current Bill provides that safe abortions can be performed at any stage of the pregnancy in case of foetal "abnormalities," it **fails to consider any other reason** such as personal choice, a sudden change in circumstances due to separation from or death of a partner, and domestic violence.
- Also, the proposed amendment uses the word "women" throughout, denying access to safe abortion to transgender, intersex and gender diverse persons.
- Abortion rights are central to a woman's autonomy to determine her life's course. Neither the state nor doctors have any right to deny a woman a safe abortion. Doing so means that women are not being treated properly as adults who are responsible for their own choices.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) In the oceans, the volume is rising like never before

Why in the news?

- In a report published in *Science* journal, it was found that Sound generated by Humans is affecting marine species.
- Noise from vessels, sonar, seismic surveys and construction is damaging marine animals' hearing, changing their behaviors and, in some cases, threatening their ability to survive.
- **How important is sound for marine life?**
- Sound is an important medium of communication in the oceans. The visibility disappears after 10-20 meters, chemical detection lasts for a few hundred yards but sound on the other hand can travel thousands of miles.
- Most of the marine species have evolved to **detect and emit sounds for survival**. For example, Whales sing and corals groan.

What is changing?

- Evidence shows that the noises from shipping traffic, fossil fuel exploration and weapon testing is harming marine animals.
- For example, CLOWN fish which rely on sounds to **guide them back to the coral reefs** where they were born, after drifting on the open ocean as larvae. But human-caused noise can now reduce the sound of cracking and snapping of coral, forcing some clownfish to drift forever without listening to corals.

What must be done?

- Scientists say that after climate change and plastic pollution, sound is a major issue, need to be addressed.
- Slowing down of shipping vessels, moving within the shipping lane, avoiding sensitive areas and changing propellers can help to reduce the noise pollution.
- Management of noise pollution is important to achieve the **14th SDG goal** which focuses on ocean life.

2) What is Einsteinium, the mysterious element named after Albert Einstein?

Why in the news?

- Scientists are conducting research to find some properties of element Einsteinium.

About Einsteinium

- Einsteinium is a chemical element, named after Albert Einstein, has the **atomic number 99**. That means an Einsteinium atom has 99 protons and 99 electrons. It is a **synthetic element**, so all isotopes are **radioactive** (property exhibited by certain types of matter of emitting energy and subatomic particles spontaneously).
- *Isotopes can be defined as the variants of chemical elements that possess the same number of protons and electrons, but a different number of neutrons.*
- Einsteinium-254 is one of the more stable isotopes of the element that has a half-life of 276 days. The most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.
- *Half-life is the interval of time required for one-half of the atomic nuclei of a radioactive sample to decay.*
- It was found for the first time in 1952 by Albert Ghiorso and his team of scientists in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion, and identified as an element at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Till now there has been no practical use discovered for this element.

Difficulty in managing with this element

- As it is **not found in nature**, scientists have to make this element.
- Because of its high radioactivity and short half-life of all einsteinium isotopes, the manufacturing process is very precise and intense. It is made in isotope reactors and produced in small quantities.
- The element is also **not visible to the naked eye** and after it was discovered, it took over nine years to manufacture enough of it so that it could be seen with the naked eye.

What are scientists set to study further?

- Scientists are set to examine how it bonds with atoms. By studying this atomic arrangement, scientists can find out interesting chemical properties of other elements and isotopes that may be **useful**.

for nuclear power production and radio-pharmaceuticals.

3) Move to privatise banks: Why the proposal? What are the concerns?

Why in the news?

- The government in the budget announced that it will be privatising 2 public sector banks.
- It also announced a strategic sale/disinvestment policy for four strategic sectors — including **banking, insurance and financial services** — in which the government will have a “bare minimum presence”.
- Let us understand issues around the privatisation of banks.

No. of public sector and private sector banks in India

- India has 12 state-owned banks and 22 private banks and 10 small finance banks.

Issues with Public-sector banks

- Compared with private banks, Public sector banks have **high non-performing assets (NPAs) and stressed assets**.
- In the RBI's recent **Financial Stability Report**, gross NPA ratio of all commercial banks may increase from 7.5% in September 2020 to 13.5% by September 2021 under the baseline scenario (from 9.7% to 16.2% for public sector banks; from 4.6% to 7.9% for private banks) due to COVID 19 pandemic.
- Government in the last 3 years has given 2.56 lakh crores to Public sector banks to keep them healthy but now due to pandemic the government wants to privatise them to shed their burden.
- The idea of government is to keep only 2 to 4 Public sector banks.

Are Private banks perfect in all hemispheres?

- The competition between private and public banks started in the 1990s when RBI allowed more private banks in India.
- Today **Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36% in 2020** from 21.26% in 2015, while public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% from 74.28%.
- They have expanded the market share through new products, technology, and better services, and also attracted better

valuations in stock markets — HDFC Bank (set up in 1994) has a market capitalisation of Rs 8.80 lakh crore while SBI commands just Rs 3.50 lakh crore.

- But there are many issues persisting within the private banks, **especially on governance issues**. For Example:
- ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar was sacked for allegedly **extending dubious loans**.
- Yes Bank CEO Rana Kapoor was not given extension by the RBI and now faces investigations by various agencies.
- Lakshmi Vilas Bank faced **operational issues** and was recently merged with DBS Bank of Singapore.
- RBI has found **under reporting of NPAs** among private banks.
- With these in mind, the government should take proper precautions before the privatisation of banks.

How will be privatisation of Public sector banks done?

- The two banks which are to be privatised, will be selected through a process in which **NITI Aayog** will make recommendations, which will be considered by a core group of secretaries on disinvestment and then the Alternative Mechanism (or Group of Ministers).

4) The Farakka 'lock' and hilsa, why there is both hope and apprehension

Why in the news?

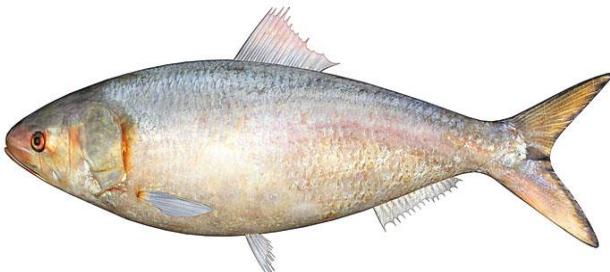
- The fish passes which were sanctioned at the Farakka barrage are set to open this year.
- Let us understand the phenomenon and about the project.

Farakka Barrage

- The Farakka Barrage was created by India in 1975 to divert water from the Ganges River to the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river system. The barrage diverts water from one of the most populated basins in the world, the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin.



Hilsa Fish and their journey



- The hilsa (*Tenuelosa ilisha*) is an **anadromous** fish. That is, it lives most of its life in the ocean, but during the rainy season, when it is time to spawn (or lay eggs), the hilsa moves towards the estuary, where the rivers of India and Bangladesh meet the Bay of Bengal.
- Earlier, hilsa used to move upstream into Ganga sailing till Agra and Delhi to lay eggs. But since the existence of Farakka Barrage, which has a navigation lock, they are not able to move breaching Farakka.

What are the steps taken?

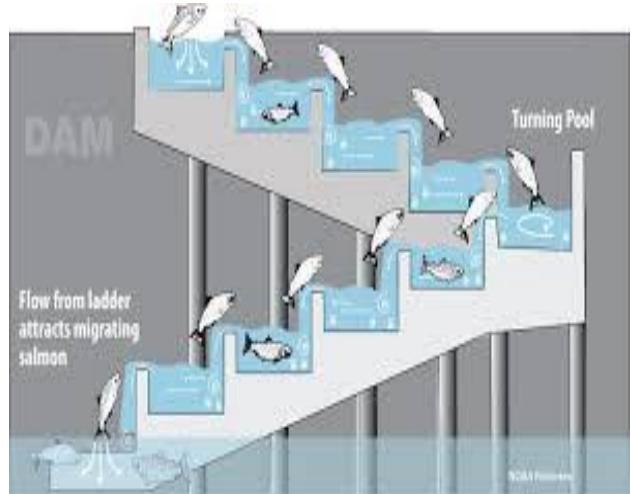
- On August 4, 2016, then Union Water Resources Minister Uma Bharti told Lok Sabha about plans to create “**fish ladders**” (also known as Fish passes) to help the

fish navigate the obstacle posed by the Farakka barrage.

- In 2019, navigation locks at farakka barrage were modified at a cost of Rs 360 crores to develop fish ladders for hisla.

What are fish passes?

- Fish passes — also known as fish ladders or fish ways — aim to assist fish in crossing obstacles presented by dams and barrages.
- They usually consist of small steps with a regulated flow of water, that allow the fish to climb over the obstacles and enable them to reach the open waters on the other side.



Are fish ladders effective?

- A 2013 study led by the American ecologist J Jed Brown noted that “state-of-the-art fish passage facilities have been unsuccessful. Some migratory species, such as sturgeons, do not pass through at all. But even the species that do make it through do so in numbers far less than stated targets”.
- The remodification at Farakka is to create just an 8 meter fish ladder. Many experts believe that it is just minuscule to the size of ganga, Hilsa may turn out in very less number.

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