

OFFICERS' PULSE

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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Ayushman Bharat

About the scheme

- It is an umbrella of two major health initiatives, namely **Health and Wellness Centres** and **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)**.

Health and Wellness Centres

- Under this **1.5 lakh** existing Sub Health Centres (SHC), Primary Health Centres (PHC) and Urban Primary Health Centres (UPHC) to be transformed as **Health Wellness Centres (HWC)** by 2022.
- These centres will deliver **Comprehensive Primary Health Care** that is **universal and free** to users, with a focus on wellness and the delivery of an expanded range of services closer to the community.
- HWC are envisaged to deliver expanded range services that go beyond Maternal and child health care services to include care for non-communicable diseases, palliative and rehabilitative care, Oral, Eye and ENT care, mental health and first level care for emergencies and trauma, including free essential drugs and diagnostic services.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

- It is one significant step towards achievement of **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** and **Sustainable Development Goal - 3** (SDG3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages").
- AB-PMJAY will provide financial protection to 10.74 crore poor, deprived rural families and identified occupational categories of urban workers' families as per the latest **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data** (approx. 50 crore beneficiaries). It will offer a benefit cover of **Rs. 500,000 per family per year**.
- This cover will take care of **almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures**.

- To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be **no cap on family size and age** in the scheme.
- The benefit cover will also include **pre and post-hospitalisation expenses**.
- A defined **transport allowance** per hospitalization will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- Benefits of the scheme are **portable across the country** and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from **any public/private empanelled hospitals** across the country.

Implementation Strategy

- At the national level to manage, a **National Health Authority** has been set up. It will be chaired by the Minister of Health & Family Welfare which will enable the decision making at a faster pace, required for smooth implementation of the scheme.
- States/ UTs are advised to implement the scheme by a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA).

Why in News?

- The National Health Authority is carrying out the **"Aap Ke Dwar Ayushman" campaign** to create large-scale awareness about the AB PM-JAY health insurance scheme especially in rural and interior parts about cashless healthcare benefit of up to ₹5 lakh per family per year.
- The drive is being implemented in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana and J&K among other States.

2) National Food Security Act, 2013

About NFSA

- The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) provides for **food and nutritional security** in the human life cycle approach,

by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices for people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

- The Act is in line with **Goal Two of the Sustainable Development Goals** (which seeks sustainable solutions to end hunger in all its forms by 2030 and to achieve food security) set by the United Nations General Assembly.
- Schemes such as the **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM), the Public Distribution System (PDS), and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** are included under the Act.
- The implementation of the scheme comes under the ambit of the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.**

Key Features

- The Act legally entitled up to **75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population** to receive subsidized foodgrains under the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).**
- The eligible persons will be **entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains.** The existing **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households**, which constitute the poorest of the poor, will continue to receive 35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month.
- About two-thirds of the population, therefore, is covered under the Act to receive highly subsidized foodgrains.
- The Act also has a special focus on the nutritional support to women and children. **Pregnant women and lactating mothers** will be entitled to meals and **maternity benefits of not less than Rs 6000.** It is however restricted to two children only.
- **Children upto 14 years of age** will be entitled to nutritious meals as per the prescribed nutritional standards. In case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals, the beneficiaries will receive **food security allowance.**
- The Act also contains provisions for setting up of **grievance redressal mechanism** at the District and State levels

- The **eldest women of the household** of age 18 years or above will be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.

Implementation

- It is operated under the **joint responsibility of the Central and the State/Union Territory (UT) Governments.**
- The Central Government is responsible for procurement, allocation and transportation of food grains up to the designated depots of the Food Corporation of India.
- States/UTs hold the operational responsibilities for allocation and distribution of food grains.
- The NFSA currently covers **81 crore people** which was determined on the basis of the **2011 census**, and has not been revised since the law was passed in 2013.

Why in News?

- The Government has announced that once the new census data is available, the Centre may consider revising the number of people who get subsidised food grains under the National Food Security Act.
- The government has also launched the **'Mera Ration' mobile app** to help ration card holders identify their nearest ration shop, check details of their own entitlements, and track their recent transactions.

NITI Aayog proposal

- Government think tank **NITI Aayog** has recently circulated a discussion paper proposing a **reduction in the NFSA coverage**, to 60% of the rural population and 40% of the urban population, in a bid to curb the food subsidy budget.
- Right to Food activists and economists such as Jean Dreze, who was instrumental in formulating the NFSA, have argued that with an increased population, the NFSA's coverage should be expanded, not pruned.

3) Govt. staff should not be appointed as Election Commissioners

About ECI

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an **autonomous and permanent constitutional body** responsible for

organising free and fair elections in the Union and States of India.

- The Constitution grants the ECI with the power of direction, superintendence, and control of elections to **Parliament, state legislatures, the office of president of India and the office of vice-president of India.**
- The ECI does not deal with the elections to the urban bodies such as Municipalities and Panchayats in the states and hence, a separate **State Election Commission.**

Powers and responsibilities

- The Commission's functions and powers with respect to elections are divided into **three categories (Administrative, Advisory, and Quasi-judicial).** In detail, these powers include
 1. Determining the **Electoral Constituencies' territorial areas** throughout the country.
 2. Preparing and periodically **revising electoral rolls and registering all eligible voters.**
 3. Notifying the **schedules and dates of elections** and scrutinising nomination papers.
 4. **Granting recognition** to the various political parties and allocating them election symbols.
 5. The Commission also has **advisory jurisdiction** in the matter of post-election disqualification of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures.
 6. It issues the **Model Code of Conduct** in elections for political parties and candidates so that no one indulges in unfair practice or there is no arbitrary abuse of powers by those in power.

Composition of Election Commission

- Since its inception in 1950, the election commission had been a **one-member body** with only the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) as its sole member.
- Later, **two more election commissioners** were appointed to the body and the Election Commission became a multi-member body with 3 election commissioners.
- The **President** appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners.
- They have **tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.

- The chief and the two other election commissioners have the same powers and emoluments including salaries, which are the same as a **Supreme Court judge.**
- In case of a **difference of opinion** amongst the three members, the matter is decided by the Commission by a **majority.**

Article 324

- Article 324 of The Constitution of India mentions the provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of the Election Commission.
- The chief election commissioner is provided with **security of tenure.** He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- In other words, he can be removed by the President on the basis of a resolution passed to that effect by both the Houses of Parliament with a special majority, either on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.
- Any other election commissioner or a regional commissioner cannot be removed from office except on the **recommendation of the chief election commissioner.**

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court has ruled that any persons employed with the central or state governments could not be appointed as election commissioners across the length and breadth of the country.
- The Court held that election commissioners have to be "independent persons" and that nobody, who has been employed or holds an office of profit under the central or any state government, could be appointed as election commissioners.
- The ruling aims at **ensuring independence of the election commissions.**
- The judgment came as the top court censured the Goa government for appointing its law secretary as the state election commissioner for conducting municipal council elections in the state. The law secretary was given the additional charge as the state election commissioner.
- The Court issued the direction exercising its powers under **Articles 142 and 144 of the Constitution.**

Related Details

- Under **Article 142**, the apex court is empowered to issue directives to do “complete justice” whereas **Article 144** obligates all authorities to act in aid of the Supreme Court.

4) A Relook at the Mandal Judgment

Background

- A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in its landmark judgment in *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, 1992*, (popularly known as the **Mandal judgment**) imposed the **ceiling of 50%** on reservation in government jobs and educational institutions.
- The Court allowed deviation from the 50 per cent rule **only in extraordinary situations**.
- Further, the judgment **barred reservation solely on economic criterion**.

Why in News?

- Almost 30 years after the Supreme Court imposed the ceiling of 50% on total reservation, a five-judge bench agreed to examine whether the 1992 ruling should be reconsidered in the light of subsequent Constitutional amendments, judgments and changed social dynamics of society, etc.
- Considering the validity of the **reservation for the Maratha community** in Maharashtra, the five-judge bench issued notices to all states and sought their views on review of the mandate laid down in the Indra Sawhney case.
- If the five-judge bench accepts that the judgment in the Indra Sawhney case should be modified, the case will have to be referred to an 11-judge bench because **only a bench of larger composition can modify a previous judgment of the Supreme Court**.

Maharashtra Reservation law

- Based on a report by the Maharashtra State Backward Commission and using the window of “**extraordinary situations**” in the Indra Sawhney case, Maharashtra enacted the Socially Economically Backward Class Act 2018 to provide **16% reservation to the Maratha community in addition to the existing 50% quota**.

- In September 2020, the implementation of the Maratha quota was stayed by the Supreme Court through an interim order after highlighting that the Maharashtra government had breached the 50% ceiling on reservation by its new law.
- Over the years, several other States, including Tamil Nadu, have passed laws that allow reservation going beyond 50%.

Validity of 102nd Amendment

- The court also said that it will also consider another important question — whether the **102nd Amendment of the Constitution** deprives a state legislature of the power to enact a law determining socially and educationally backward classes and to confer reservation benefits on them, and thereby affects the federal policy/structure of the Constitution of India.

About 102nd Amendment

- The 102nd Amendment (2018), which gave **constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes**, also inserted **Article 342A in the Constitution**.
- Article 342A empowers the **President** to specify socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs) in various states and Union Territories in consultation with the Governor of the state.
- This virtually empowered the central government to identify SEBCs even in states and UTs.

5) Only NRI quota seats based on entrance exams for OCI cardholders

Overseas Citizen of India

- Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) are of Indian origin but they are foreign passport holders and are not citizens of India. They are registered under **section 7A of the Citizenship Act, 1955**.
- Following categories of foreign nationals are eligible for registration as OCI Cardholder:-
- who was a citizen of India at the time of, or at any time after the commencement of the Constitution i.e. 26.01.1950; or
- who was eligible to become a citizen of India on 26.01.1950; or

- who belonged to a territory that became part of India after 15.08.1947; or
- who is a child or a grandchild or great grandchild of such a citizen; or
- spouse of foreign origin of a citizen of India or spouse of foreign origin of an OCI Cardholder
- No person who or either of whose parents or grandparents or great grandparents is or had been a citizen of **Pakistan, Bangladesh or such other country** as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify, shall be eligible for registration as an OCI Cardholder.

What benefits an OCI cardholder is entitled to?

- **India does not allow dual citizenship** but provides certain benefits under **Section 7B(I) of the Citizenship Act, 1955** to the OCIs. It includes:
 - Multiple entry life-long visa for visiting India for any purpose.
 - **Parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)** in respect of all facilities available to them in economic, financial, and educational fields **except in matters relating to the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.**
 - Registered OCI Cardholder shall be treated at par with NRIs in the matter of inter-country adoption of Indian children.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has reiterated through a gazette notification that **OCI cardholders can lay claim to “only Non Resident Indian quota seats” in educational institutions** based on all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or other such all-India professional tests.
- The recent notification is in response to petitions filed by several OCI cardholder students claiming that they are eligible to get admission against general seats in medical, engineering and other government colleges if they clear the all-India tests.
- The notification also reproduced a part of the guidelines issued by the Ministry on November 15, 2019 regarding benefits to OCI cardholders, which said that **OCIs are not entitled to undertake any**

“missionary, mountaineering, journalism and tabligh activities” without prior permission of the Government of India.

Who is a Non Resident Indian?

- An Non Resident Indian is an Indian Citizen who resides in India for less than one hundred & eighty two days during the course of the preceding financial year, or
 1. Who has gone out of India or who stays outside India for the purpose of employment, or
 2. Who has gone out of India or who stays outside India for carrying on business or vocation outside India, or
 3. Who has gone out of India or who stays outside India for any other purpose indicating his intention to stay outside India for an uncertain period.

6) Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019

UAPA Act, 2019

- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 was passed by the Parliament in August 2019. It amended the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- The Act **empowers the central government to designate an individual a “terrorist”** if they are found committing, preparing for, promoting, or involved in an act of terror.
- The 1967 UAPA law required an investigating officer to take **prior permission** of the Director General of Police of a state for conducting raids, and seizing properties that are suspected to be linked to terrorist activities.
- The amendment act **removes this requirement** if the investigation is conducted by an officer of the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**. The investigating officer only requires sanction from the Director General of NIA.
- The 1967 law specifies that only officers of the rank of Deputy Superintendent or Assistant Commissioner of Police of the NIA shall have the power to investigate offences under the UAPA law. The new act allows **NIA officers of Inspector rank to carry out investigations.**

Why in News?

- According to the data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), there has been over **72% increase in the number of persons arrested under the anti-terror law UAPA (Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act)** in 2019 compared to 2015.
- As many as 1948 persons were arrested under the UAPA in 1226 cases registered across the country in 2019. Such cases registered in 2015-2018 stood at 897, 922, 901 and 1182 and the number of those arrested was 1128, 999, 1554 and 1421 respectively.
- Under the UAPA, **getting bail is rare** and the **investigating agency has up to 180 days to file a charge sheet.**
- Earlier, a reply by the government in the Lok Sabha shows that **only 2.2 % of cases registered under the UAPA between 2016-2019 ended in convictions** by court.

Related Information

About NIA

- The National Investigation Agency is a **statutory body** constituted under the **National Investigation Agency Act, 2008.**
- It is a central agency to investigate and prosecute offences:
 1. Affecting the sovereignty, security and integrity of India, security of State, friendly relations with foreign States.
 2. Against atomic and nuclear facilities.
 3. Smuggling in High-Quality Counterfeit Indian Currency.
- It implements international treaties, agreements, conventions and resolutions of the United Nations, its agencies and other international organisations.
- It acts as the Central Counter-Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Invasive species prove a tough challenge in the Nilgiris

What are invasive species?

- An invasive species can be any kind of living organism—an amphibian, plant, insect, fish, fungus, or bacteria—that is **not native to an ecosystem and causes harm**.
- **Not all non-native species are invasive.** For example, most of the food crops grown in India, including onion, potato and tomatoes are not native to the region.
- To be invasive,
 - a species must adapt to the new area easily
 - it must reproduce quickly
 - it must harm the economy, or the native plants and animals of the region
- Some of the most serious invasive species in India are *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, *Cassia uniflora*, *Chromolaena odorata*, *Eichhornia crassipes*, *Lantana camara*, *Parthenium hysterophorus* and *Prosopis juliflora*, etc.

Wattle Trees



- **Acacia mearnsii**, commonly known as black wattle, late black wattle or green wattle, is a species of flowering plant in the family Fabaceae and is **endemic to south-eastern Australia**.
- In some parts of the world, *A. mearnsii* is considered to be an **invasive species**. Its invasiveness is due to its production of large numbers of seeds each year and to its large crown that shades other species.

Shola forests

- The Shola forests of South India derive their name from the Tamil word *solai*, which means a 'tropical rainforest'.
- The Shola vegetation are **tropical montane forests found in the Western Ghats**.
- They are separated by rolling grasslands in high altitudes.
- It majorly consists of **stunted forest growths of diverse grass species**.
- These forests are found sheltered in valleys with sufficient moisture and proper drainage, at an altitude of more than 1,500 metres. The upper reaches are covered with grasslands, known as Shola grasslands. Shola grasslands consist of dwarf trees growing 25-30 feet.
- The comparison of the results of the 1849 and 1992 studies shows that cultivation of tea, wattle and eucalyptus has reduced the Shola forest-grassland ecosystem to a great extent. Between 1973-2014 Shola grasslands area had seen a 66.7% decline.
- The Sholas are found in the upper reaches of the **Nilgiris, Anamalais, Palni hills, Kalakadu, Mundanthurai and Kanyakumari** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**.

Why in the news?

- Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu is facing invasive species like **Wattle trees, Lantana camara, Cytisus scoparius (Scotch broom), Senna spectabilis, etc.**
- According to the High Court order, an expert committee for invasive species management in Nilgiris is focusing on areas to know how feasible it will be to re-establish Shola forests and grasslands by removing the wattle trees.
- They are facing multiple problems like:
 - Wherever the invasive species of wattle trees are being removed. Other invasive/exotic species of grass, such as *Vulpia myuros* have come up, which is **not palatable** for local wildlife.
 - A patch where invasive wattle has been removed needs to be maintained every year for a period of at least five to six years because it reemerges quickly and this will require persistence and substantial funding.

- The forest department is worried how to get rid of the exotic trees that have been removed.
- With the above challenges in hand the committee is finding that removing invasive flora will have a very limited impact on restoring native forests and grasslands in the Nilgiris.

2) Wenlock Downs and Adivasis

About Wenlock Downs

- The Wenlock Downs Reserve Forest is a crucial wildlife corridor located in **Ooty, Tamil Nadu**.
- It allows wildlife from the Sigur plateau to make their way up to the upper Nilgiris.

- **Reserve forest:** These are forests which are accorded a certain degree of protection. The **Indian Forest Act, 1927** in British India used this term for the first time. These are declared by the respective state governments.

- The landscape is also one of the last remaining patches of Shola and grasslands in the entire Nilgiris other than **Mukurthi National Park**.
- It is also home to some of the tribes of **Todas and Kotas**.
- Today Wenlock Downs reserve forest has changed dramatically from being a Shola-grassland mosaic to one populated primarily by woody, thorny and invasive species of flora.

Todas

- The Todas are a pastoral tribe inhabiting the higher elevations of the Nilgiri Hills of southern India.
- The Toda language belongs to the **Dravidian linguistic family** and is thought to have developed around the 3rd century BC.
- The Toda religion centers on the sanctity of the buffalo. Although the Todas have a pantheon of deities, of far greater importance are the buffalo dairies that, along with their contents, pasturage, and water supply, are viewed not only as sacred, but as divine.
- The opening up of the Nilgiris by the British during the 19th century, along with social and economic development during the present century, have brought about

profound changes in traditional Toda society.

Kotas

- The Kotas are one of several small communities thought to be indigenous to the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu in south India.
- They occupy seven villages distributed rather widely throughout the Nilgiris District.
- Kotas speak the Kota language or Ko-v Mant, a Dravidian language closely related to Toda and also having strong linguistic affiliations with very early Tamil and Malayalam.
- For the neighboring Communities the Kotas provided music, iron articles and silver ornaments, baskets, pottery, and a variety of other specialized goods and services.

Why in the news?

- According to the Forest Department, the last remaining areas of Wenlock Downs are being slowly eroded by encroachments adivasis like the Todas and Kotas.
- Before 2000, the Todas were given land pattas for cultivation on request. However, since the early 2000s, the adivasis have stopped applying for permissions and are cultivating without proper approvals.
- In the last 20-years, the Todas and the Kotas have started claiming that all these lands are ancestral lands, and that they have the right to cultivate crops here. They have put up fences and destroyed much of the grassland in the area, as their earlier pattern of land-usage, from pastoralists grazing the land, has changed and they have become settled agriculturalists.
- The adivasis encroach on a small portion of forest one year, and the next they lease it to outsiders and move on to another portion of the grassland or forest. This inevitably leads to more problematic human-animal interactions not just in Wenlock Downs but in other areas as well.
- Violations are being done by outsiders too by constructing illegal buildings and illegal tree-felling.

What needs to be done?

- Efforts should be taken to immediately **identify the non-tribals** who are cultivating in the area.

- **Promote eco-tourism** as an alternative to destructive agricultural practices.
- **Targeted restoration projects** could be conducted, while ensuring that cultivation does not spread further.
- **Cooperation between the Forest Department and the adivasis** needs to come up with a comprehensive landscape management plan.

3) Some sea slugs can shed and regenerate their whole body: study

What are sea slugs?



- The sea slugs are called “**butterflies of the ocean**” and they are beautiful, deadly, and strange.
- They are also called **nudibranchs** and can be found in marine environments all over the world.

- Like orchids, nudibranchs vary widely in color and arrangement.
- Some nudibranch species have evolved the plant-like ability to **photosynthesize**, or live off sunlight.

Why in the news?

- According to a paper published in the Journal Current Biology, it was found that some species of sea slugs can detach their whole body from their head to further regenerate the whole body.
- This behaviour of casting off body parts is observed in some animals like lizards and other other species is called autotomy. But the sea slugs represent extreme autotomy where even regeneration of heart and other important organs is possible.
- Scientists believe that this is possible by the sea slugs as they eat certain types of algae, they can photosynthesize their food from sunlight and oxygen, just like a plant, for about 10 days. Their head which is detached can provide essential nutrients for regeneration.

What further research can yield?

- Understanding the underlying molecular mechanisms involved in this type of regeneration could help us to understand how human cells and tissues can be used to repair damage.

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ECONOMY

1) Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi

What's in the news?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN).
- It is a **single non-lapsable reserve fund for health** in the **Public Account**. Proceeds of **Health and Education Cess** will be credited into PMSSN.

About PMSSN

- In the 2018 Budget, the Central Government while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3% Education Cess by **4% Health and Education Cess**.
- Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN and accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Health Ministry such as
 1. Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY),
 2. Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs),
 3. National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY),
 4. emergency and disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies and
 5. any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.
- Administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to the **Union Ministry of Health** and in any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the Ministry would be initially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).

Significance

- The government said the major benefits of PMSSN will be the **enhanced access to universal and affordable health care** through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of the financial year.

2) National Social Assistance Programme

About NSAP

- Launched in 1995, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a welfare programme being administered by the **Ministry of Rural Development**.
- This programme is being implemented in **rural areas as well as urban areas**.
- NSAP represents a significant step towards the fulfilment of **Article 41 of the Constitution of India** which directs the State to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its economic capacity and development.
- Presently NSAP comprises of five schemes, namely –
 1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS),
 2. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS),
 3. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS),
 4. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and
 5. Annapurna.

Eligibility and scale of assistance

- For getting benefits under NSAP the applicant must belong to a **Below Poverty Line (BPL)** family according to the criteria prescribed by the Govt. of India. The other eligibility criteria and the scale of central assistance under the sub - schemes of NSAP are as follows.
 - **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS):** A monthly pension of **Rs.200/-** to old age BPL persons in age group 60-79 years and **Rs.500/-** to old age BPL persons of age of 80 years and more.
 - **Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS):** A monthly pension of **Rs.300/-** to BPL widows aged 40-79 years and **Rs.500/-** upon attaining the age of 80 years.
 - **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS):** A monthly pension of **Rs.300/-** is given to disabled BPL persons aged 18-79 years and

Rs.500/- upon attaining the age of 80 years.

- **National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS):** A one-time assistance of **Rs.20,000/-** to the surviving members of a BPL family upon the death of the primary breadwinner.
- **Annapurna Scheme: 10 KG food grains (wheat or rice)** is given to those BPL elderly who remain uncovered under IGNOAPS.

Why in News?

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development in its report submitted to the Lok Sabha said that the Centre must increase the “meagre” pensions provided for poor senior citizens, widows and disabled people under the National Social Assistance Programme.

Issues with MGNREGA scheme

- The panel also criticised the Department of Rural Development for **delays and disparities in the payment of wages and unemployment allowances** under the flagship MGNREGA scheme.
- The panel noted “the callous approach of the State Governments in the proper implementation of the provision of unemployment allowance”, finding that the provision is not implemented in letter and spirit at the grass root level.
- Another issue with MGNREGA is the **disparity in wages in different States**, noting that the Constitution provides for equal pay for equal work.

Related Information

MGNREGA Scheme

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme is the largest social security scheme in the world — guaranteeing **100 days of work to any rural household** willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.
- The act makes it obligatory for the State to give rural households work on demand. In case such employment is not provided within 15 days of registration, the applicant becomes eligible for an **unemployment allowance**.
- The **Ministry of Rural Development (MRD)**, is monitoring the entire

implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

- **One-third** of the stipulated workforce must be women.
- The employment will be provided **within a radius of 5 km**: if it is above 5 km extra wage will be paid.
- The wages are revised according to the **Consumer Price Index-Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL)**.
- Work site facilities such as crèche, drinking water, shade have to be provided.
- **Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha.**

3) Consumer Price Index (CPI)

About CPI

- It is an index which measures the weighted average of prices of a basket of **consumer goods and services** such as transportation, food and medical care.
- It is calculated by measuring price changes for each item in the **predetermined basket of goods and services** and averaging them.
- It is released by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)** under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The base year used to calculate CPI in India is **2011-2012**.

WPI Vs CPI

- While the Wholesale Price Index keeps track of the wholesale price of goods, the CPI measures the average price that households pay for a basket of different goods and services.
- The CPI basket consists of **services like housing, education, medical care, recreation etc. which are not part of WPI basket**. A significant proportion of WPI item basket represents **manufacturing inputs and intermediate goods** like minerals, basic metals, machinery etc. whose prices are influenced by global factors but these are not directly consumed by the households and are **not part of the CPI item basket**.
- Even as the WPI is used as a key measure of inflation in some economies, the RBI **no longer uses it for policy purposes**. The central bank currently uses the **Consumer Price Index** as a key measure of inflation to set the monetary and credit policy.

- Under the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework, RBI aims to contain CPI based inflation **within 4 percent with a band of (+/-) 2 percent.**

Why in News?

- According to the data released by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Retail inflation,

measured by the Consumer Price Index, inched up to 5.03 per cent in February.

- The increase is mainly due to rise in food and fuel prices.
- The CPI based retail inflation was at 4.06 per cent in January which was lowest since October 2019.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Quad grouping

About

- The grouping of four democracies– **India, Australia, US and Japan** –known as the **quadrilateral security dialogue or quad**, was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. Quad was revived in 2017.
- Quad is projected as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- With growing concerns in all four quad countries about **Chinese foreign policy and regional influence**, the group has found renewed relevance.

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined the U.S. President Joseph Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga for the first ever leadership summit of the Quad grouping.
- Leaders of the four-nation Quad have reaffirmed that they are striving to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is accessible, dynamic and governed by international law and bedrock principles such as freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes, and free from coercion.
- **Significance**
- The virtual Quad summit took place as China and India are involved in a military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh since May last year.
- China is also engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. In the East China Sea, Japan has maritime disputes with China.

2) United Nations Security Council

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1946 as one of the six principal organs of the UN. It is generally viewed as the apex of the UN system.

- It is responsible for the **maintenance of international peace and security**.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue **binding resolutions** to member states.

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members.
- The council has **five permanent members** (P-5) United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France.
- These permanent members can **veto** any substantive Security Council resolutions, including those on the admission of new member states.
- The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a **regional basis** as follows:
 1. Five for African and Asian States;
 2. One for Eastern European States;
 3. Two for the Latin American and Caribbean States; and
 4. Two for Western European and other States.
- Each year the 193-member UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term.
- The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Vote and Majority Required

- Each member of the Security Council shall have **one vote**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **procedural matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **all other matters** shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.
- However, any member, whether permanent or nonpermanent, must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

Why in News?

- The U.N. Security Council has urged Somalia's government to organize elections without delay in a resolution that stressed the pressing threat to the country's security from armed opposition groups.
- The resolution, which was adopted unanimously, authorized the **African Union** to maintain its nearly 20,000-strong force in Somalia until the end of the year with a mandate to reduce the threat from the extremist groups to enable a stable, federal, sovereign and united Somalia.
- The resolution's adoption came amid growing pressure on Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed after

scheduled elections on 8th of last month failed to take place because of the lack of agreement on how the vote should be carried out.

About African Union

- The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the **Organisation of African Unity**.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Alzheimer's Disease

What is it?

- **Alzheimer's** disease is an **irreversible, progressive brain disorder** that slowly **destroys memory** and **thinking** skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest tasks.
- Alzheimer's disease is **thought** to be **caused** by the **abnormal build-up of proteins** in and around brain cells.
- One main feature of the disease is the **deposition of amyloid plaques** and neurofibrillary tangles in the brain.
- Alzheimer's is the **most common cause of dementia** among older adults.
- **Dementia** is a **group of brain disorders** that cause the loss of intellectual and social skills.
- The **World Alzheimer Report 2015** which was an analysis of the prevalence, incidence, cost and trends in Alzheimer's Disease documented the fact that **in 2015, over 46 million** people worldwide were living with dementia. The report estimated that this number would increase to more than **131.5 million by 2050**.

Why in News?

- Researchers from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, have developed a small molecule that helps disrupt and reduce formation of amyloid plaques in the brains of mice with Alzheimer's disease.

2) Neanderthals

Why in News?

- Neanderthal fossils from a cave in Belgium which is believed to belong to the last survivors of the species ever discovered in Europe are thousands of years older than what was assumed, according to a new study that appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Who are the Neanderthals?

- **Neanderthal** (Homo neanderthalensis, Homo sapiens neanderthalensis) are members of a group of archaic humans who emerged at least 200,000 years ago during the **Pleistocene Epoch** (about 2.6 million to 11,700 years ago) and were

replaced or assimilated by early modern human populations (Homo sapiens).

What does the discovery say?

- Previous radiocarbon dating of the remains from the Spy Cave in Belgium yielded ages as recent as approximately 24,000 years ago, but the new testing pushes the clock back to between **44,200 to 40,600 years ago**.

Radiocarbon Dating

- **Radiocarbon dating** is a method that provides objective **age estimates** for **carbon-based materials** that originated from living organisms. An age could be estimated by **measuring the amount of carbon-14** present in the sample and comparing this against an internationally used reference standard.
- **Carbon-14 is a weakly radioactive isotope of Carbon**; also known as radiocarbon, it is an isotopic chronometer. **C-14 dating is applicable to organic materials (not applicable to metals)**.
- All living things absorb carbon from the atmosphere and their food, including the radioactive form carbon-14, which decays over time.
- Since plants and animals stop absorbing carbon-14 when they die, the amount that remains when they are dated tells us how long ago they lived.
- When it comes to bones, scientists extract the part made up of collagen because it is organic.

Why is an accurate timeline important?

- Having a firm idea of when our closest human relatives disappeared is considered a key first step toward **understanding** more about the **nature and capabilities of the Neanderthals**, as well as **why they eventually went extinct** while our own ancestors prospered.
- Without a reliable framework of chronology we can't really be confident in **understanding the relationships between Neanderthals and Homo sapiens**.

3) Lunar space station

Why in News?

- Russia and China unveiled plans for a joint lunar space station.

About the joint initiative

- The Russian space agency **Roscomos** said in a statement that it had signed an agreement with China's National Space Administration (**CNSA**) to develop a complex of **experimental research facilities** created on the surface and/or in the orbit of the Moon.
- **2021** celebrates the **60th anniversary** of Russia's first-ever manned space flight — it sent **Yuri Gagarin** into **space** in April 1961, followed by the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova, two years later.

China's recent space initiatives

- In 2020, it launched its **Tianwen-1 probe to Mars** that is currently orbiting Mars.
- And in December 2020, it successfully brought rock and soil samples from the Moon back to Earth, the first mission of this type in over 40 years.

Other players

- The U.S. space agency NASA has now set its sights on Mars, with its **Perseverance rovers** conducting their first test drive on the planet. NASA eventually intends to conduct a possible human mission to the planet, even if planning is still at a very preliminary stage.
- Under the **Artemis programme** NASA plans **to land the first woman** and the next man **on the moon by 2024**.
- Elon Musk's **SpaceX** has become a key player in the modern space race and has announced plans to fly several members of the public to the Moon in 2023.

India's upcoming missions

- **Chandrayaan-3 2022-** Mission repeat of Chandrayaan-2 with **lander, rover** and a propulsion module to attempt **soft landing** of lunar surface.
- **Gaganyaan-2022-** is an Indian **crewed orbital spacecraft** intended to be the basis of the **Indian Human Spaceflight Programme**. The spacecraft is being designed to carry three people, and a planned upgraded version will be equipped with rendezvous and docking capability.

4) ISRO

Why in News?

- The India Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has said it would be in charge of projects linked to national security such as Chandrayaan 2, Gaganyaan, etc. and advanced technology.
- However, the bulk of commercial activities would increasingly be handled by the newly formed New Space India Limited.

How ISRO helps in national security and advanced technology

- India's space capabilities helped its armed forces **acquire actionable intelligence** on the terrorist launch pads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir that were destroyed during the recent surgical strikes.
- ISRO concentrated its resources on developing **fleets of communications and remote sensing satellites**, enabling telecommunications, weather forecasting, transportation, management and conservation of natural resources and natural disasters, urban planning, and more.
- The **guided missile development program** benefitted to an extent from the experience of satellite launch vehicle technology being developed at ISRO.
- The launch of Radar Imaging Satellite 2 (**RISAT-2**) in 2009 is perhaps India's first national security satellite . This satellite uses synthetic aperture radar for providing **radar images** with a resolution of one meter regardless of the time or weather conditions over an area of interest.
- In addition to these earth observation satellites, ISRO has also built **communications satellites** for strategic purposes like the **GSAT, CARTOSAT**. These satellites simply provide **sophisticated intelligence inputs** for the decision-makers on the ground for crafting military operations, while striving to prevent the adversaries from eavesdropping on these plans

The mandates of NSIL

- ISRO has formed the NewSpace India Limited (**NSIL**), a public sector undertaking (**PSU**) under the administrative control of the Department of Space.
- Mandate of the NSIL include:
 1. **Owning satellites** for earth observation and communication applications;

2. Providing **space-based earth observation** and communication service
3. **Building satellites** and **launching** them as per demand
4. **Building launching vehicles** through indian industry and launch as per requirements
5. Providing **launch services**
6. **Technology transfer** to indian industry. It would act as the aggregator of user requirements and obtain commitments.

How is it different from Antrix?

- **Antrix Ltd** is another **PSU** under the **Department of Space** that acts as a **commercial arm of ISRO** and markets the products and services of ISRO.
- Antrix handles ISRO's commercial deals for satellites and launch vehicles with foreign customers.
- **NSIL** deals with **capacity building of local industry** for space manufacturing.

What happened to Antrix?

- Several of the mandates of NSIL were being handled by the Antrix Corporation.
- However, it is involved in a **fractious dispute** with the U.S.-based Devas Multimedia, because of which the government of India owes nearly \$1.2 billion going by an order of a tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce and upheld by a U.S. federal court.
- The **NSIL**, is also a **move by India's space establishment** to **insulate** space-products marketing efforts and international business development prospects from any financial liability due to the Antrix-Devas issue.

5) Indo-Japan Space ties

Why in News?

- **Indian and Japanese space agencies** reviewed cooperation in earth observation, lunar cooperation and satellite navigation, and also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in space situational awareness and professional exchange programme.

Areas of Cooperation

- The areas of cooperation were decided on during a bilateral meeting between the Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (**JAXA**).

- Both agencies signed an **Implementing Arrangement for collaborative activities on rice crop area and air quality monitoring** using satellite data.
- India and Japan are already working on a **joint lunar polar exploration (LUPEX)** mission that aims to send a **lander and rover** to the **Moon's south pole around 2024**.

Other tie-ups

- In **2021**, **India and Italy** decided to explore opportunities in **earth observation, space science and robotic and human exploration**.
- In **2021**, **India and Australia** signed an amendment to the MoU which will build on the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**. Both countries are also in discussions for Australia to host **vital tracking infrastructure** to support the **Gaganyaan** manned space flight mission.

6) Benzene

What is it?

- **Benzene** is an **organic chemical compound** with the molecular formula **C₆H₆**. As it contains only carbon and hydrogen atoms, benzene is classed as a **hydrocarbon**.
- Benzene is a widely used **industrial chemical**. Benzene is found in crude oil and is a major part of gasoline. It's used to make plastics, resins, synthetic fibers, rubber lubricants, dyes, detergents, drugs and pesticides.

Why in News?

- A joint committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to study air pollution in Kerala has recommended the **installation of vapour recovery system at fuelling stations and retrofitting of diesel vehicles with particulate filters** to improve air quality and reduce benzene emissions.
- The report submitted pointed out that petrol refuelling stations were a major source of benzene emissions, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter 2.5 concentration.

What are they? Why the worry?

- **Benzene** emissions cause cancer in humans. Long-term exposure to high levels

of benzene in the air can cause leukemia, cancer of the blood-forming organs.

- Volatile organic compounds (**VOCs**) are **emitted as gases from certain solids or liquids**. VOCs include a **variety of chemicals**, some of which may have short- and long-term adverse health effects. **Fuels** are made up of organic chemicals. All of these **products can release organic compounds** while you are using them, and, to some degree, when they are stored.
- **Particulate matter** is the **sum of all solid and liquid particles** suspended in air many of which are hazardous. This complex mixture includes both organic and inorganic particles, such as dust, pollen, soot, smoke, and liquid droplets. These particles vary greatly in size, composition, and origin. Particulate matter is separated into three main groupings: coarse particles (**PM10**), fine dust (**PM2.5**), and ultrafine dust (**PM0.1**). These particle sizes, in general, differ in origin and health effects.
- The term fine particles, or particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5), refers to tiny particles or droplets in the air that are two and one half microns or less in width. **PM2.5** is a grouping of particles with an average diameter of 2.5 µm or less, capable of **penetrating deep** into our **lungs** and even entering our **bloodstream**.

Government schemes

- The Central Government has launched the National Clean Air Programme (**NCAP**) as a long-term, time-bound, national level strategy to tackle the air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
- It targets a **20 % to 30 % reduction in PM10 and PM2.5 concentrations by 2024** keeping 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.
- **122 non-attainment cities** mostly in Indo-Gangetic Plains have been identified based on ambient air quality data for the period 2011 – 2015 and WHO report 2014/2018.

7) Supercomputers

Why in News?

- The world's most powerful supercomputer **Fugaku** is now fully developed in **Japan**,

and the machine is available for research use.

What is a supercomputer?

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

8) Red Echo

Why in News?

- Maharashtra Power Minister announced that a State Cyber Cell probe had found 14 Trojan horses in the servers of the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company.

What is a Trojan Horse?

- A Trojan horse, or Trojan, is a type of malicious code or software that looks legitimate but can take control of your computer.
- A Trojan is designed to damage, disrupt, steal, or in general inflict some other harmful action on your data or network.

What the government found?

- The announcement came in the wake of a report from Recorded Future, a U.S.-based cybersecurity firm, stating that a group linked to the Chinese government, which it called 'Red Echo', had targeted 10 vital nodes in India's power distribution system and two seaports.
- Recorded Future claims the cyber intrusions from China began in May 2020 amid heightened tensions at the border. It also suggested that these malwares could be the cause of the massive power outage in Mumbai in October 2020.

- Recorded Future found a large number of IP addresses linked to critical Indian systems communicating for months with servers connected to Red Echo. These servers act as command-and-control centres for a malware known as ShadowPad.
- ShadowPad is a backdoor Trojan malware, which means it opens a secret path from its target system to its command-and-control servers. Information can be

extracted or more malicious code delivered via this path.

What could be the aim of these hackers?

- Potential pre-positioning of network access to support Chinese strategic objectives.
- Prepositioning in cyber warfare means to have malware assets in crucial places that can be called on when an actual attack is launched.

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ART & CULTURE

1) Independence Day

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the celebrations of the **75th year of Independence** would be based on public participation and revolve around **five themes — the freedom struggle and ideas, achievements, actions and resolve at 75.**

How did August 15 become India's Independence Day?

- At the **1929 Lahore session** of the Indian National Congress, the **Purna Swaraj declaration**, or "Declaration of the Independence of India" was promulgated, and **26 January 1930** was **declared as Independence Day** at that time.
- The Congress called on people to pledge themselves to civil disobedience and to carry out the Congress instructions issued

from time to time until India attained complete independence

- The **Congress** observed **26 January** as the **Independence Day between 1930 and 1946.**
- **Lord Mountbatten** had been given a mandate by the British parliament to **transfer the power** by June 30, 1948. **Mountbatten** thus **advanced the date to August 1947.**
- It provided for the **end of the British rule** in India, on **August 15, 1947**
- Following **actual independence on August 15th, 1947**, the **Constitution of India came into effect on** and from **26 January 1950**; since then 26 January is celebrated as **Republic Day.**

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal

About the portal

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** is a citizen-centric initiative under the **Ministry of Home Affairs** that enables citizens to report cyber crimes online. It was launched in 2019.
- It enables **filing of all cyber crimes** with specific focus on crimes against women, children, particularly child pornography, child sex abuse material, online content pertaining to rapes/gang rapes, etc.
- This portal also focuses on specific crimes like **financial crime and social media related crimes** like stalking, cyber bullying, etc.
- All the cyber crime related complaints will be accessed by the **concerned law enforcement agencies** in the States and Union Territories for taking action as per law.
- This portal improves coordination amongst the law enforcement agencies of different States, districts and police stations for dealing with cyber crimes in a coordinated and effective manner.

Why in the news?

- Details about the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal was stated by the Minister of State for Home Affairs in the Lok Sabha recently.

2) UNESCO World Heritage Site

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

- **UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN)** based in Paris, France. It was formed in 1946.
- Its declared purpose is to contribute to **promoting international collaboration** in education, science, and culture in order to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.

World Heritage Site

- A World Heritage Site is a **landmark or area**, selected by UNESCO for having

cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, which is legally protected by international treaties.

UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, 1972

- The Convention defines the kind of **natural or cultural sites** which can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage list.
- The Convention sets out the duties of **State Parties in identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and preserving them.**
- By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage.
- It explains how the **World Heritage Fund** is to be used and managed and under what conditions **international financial assistance** may be provided.

World Heritage Sites in India:

- There are 38 **UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India**. The sites are broken down into the following categories
 - **Cultural Sites (30)**
 1. Agra Fort (1983), Uttar Pradesh
 2. Ajanta Caves (1983), Maharashtra
 3. Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda, Bihar (2016)
 4. Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi (1989), Madhya Pradesh
 5. Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park (2004), Gujarat
 6. Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Maharashtra
 7. Churches and Convents of Goa (1986)
 8. Elephanta Caves (1987), Maharashtra
 9. Ellora Caves (1983), Maharashtra
 10. Fatehpur Sikri (1986), Uttar Pradesh
 11. Great Living Chola Temples (1987,2004), Tamilnadu
 12. Group of Monuments at Hampi (1986), Karnataka
 13. Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram (1984), Tamilnadu
 14. Group of Monuments at Pattadakal (1987), Karnataka
 15. Hill Forts of Rajasthan (2013)

16. Historic City of Ahmedabad (2017), Gujarat
17. Humayun's Tomb, Delhi (1993)
18. Jaipur City, Rajasthan (2019)
19. Khajuraho Group of Monuments (1986), Madhya Pradesh
20. Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya (2002), Bihar
21. Mountain Railways of India Darjeeling,(1999), Nilgiri (2005), Kalka-Shimla(2008)
22. Qutb Minar and its Monuments, Delhi (1993)
23. Rani-ki-Vav (the Queen's Stepwell) at Patan, Gujarat (2014)
24. Red Fort Complex (2007), Delhi
25. Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka (2003), Madhya Pradesh
26. Sun Temple, Konârak (1984), Odisha
27. Taj Mahal (1983), Uttar Pradesh
28. The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement (2016), Chandigarh
29. The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur (2010), Rajasthan
30. Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018), Maharashtra

Natural Sites (7)

1. Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (2014), Himachal Pradesh
2. Kaziranga National Park (1985), Assam
3. Keoladeo National Park (1985), Rajasthan
4. Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (1985), Assam
5. Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks (1988,2005), Uttarakhand
6. Sundarbans National Park (1987), West Bengal
7. Western Ghats (2012), Karnataka,Kerala,Tamilnadu, Maharashtra

Mixed Site (1)

- Khangchendzonga National Park (2016), Sikkim

Why in the news?

- The Central government has announced that, at present, India has **42 sites** listed under Tentative List which is a prerequisite condition for inscription as a World Heritage Site.

3) Gestational diabetes

What is gestational diabetes?

- Gestational diabetes is **high blood sugar that develops during pregnancy** and usually disappears after giving birth.
- It can occur at any stage of pregnancy, but is **more common in the second half**.
- It occurs if the mother's body cannot produce enough **insulin** – a hormone that helps control blood sugar levels – to meet the extra needs in pregnancy.
- Gestational diabetes can cause problems for the mother and the baby during and after birth. But the risk of these problems happening can be reduced if it's detected and well managed.

How can gestational diabetes affect pregnancy?

- **Baby growing larger than usual** – this may lead to difficulties during the delivery and increases the likelihood of needing induced labour or caesarean section.
- **Premature birth** – giving birth before the 37th week of pregnancy.
- **The baby developing low blood sugar or yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)** after he or she is born, which may require treatment in hospital
- **Still born babies.**

Steps taken by the government

- The Ministry of Health has developed national guidelines for testing, diagnosis and management of **hyperglycaemia** (*a condition in which an excessive amount of glucose circulates in the blood*) in pregnancy, and they recommend early testing during the first trimester.

Why in the news?

- National Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) Day was observed on March 10.

4) DUSTLIK-II

About the Exercise

- "DUSTLIK II" is a joint military exercise between **India – Uzbekistan**.
- This is the **Second Edition** of annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies.
- The first edition of the exercise was held in Uzbekistan in November 2019.
- Both sides will be **sharing their expertise and skills in the field of counter terrorist operations** in mountainous/rural/urban scenarios under UN mandate.

Significance

- This joint exercise will provide impetus to the ever growing **military and diplomatic ties** between the two nations and also reflects the strong resolve of both nations to counter terrorism.

Why in the news?

- DUSTLIK-II commenced recently in Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet (Uttarakhand).

5) Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana

About the scheme

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY)** under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** aims to **boost employment in the formal sector and incentivize creation of new employment opportunities** during the Covid recovery phase under Atmanirbhar Bharat Package 3.0.

Salient features

- The salient features of the Scheme are as under:
- The Government of India will provide **subsidy for two years in respect of new employees** engaged on or after 1st October, 2020 and upto 30th June, 2021.
- The Government of India will pay both **12% employees' contribution and 12% employers' contribution** i.e. 24% of wages towards Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) in respect of new employees in establishments employing upto 1000 employees for two years.
- The Government of India will pay only employees' share of EPF contribution i.e. **12% of wages in respect of new employees** in establishments employing more than 1000 employees for two years.

Eligibility

- An employee drawing **monthly wage of less than Rs. 15000/-** who was not working in any establishment registered with the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) before 1st October, 2020 and did not have a Universal Account Number or EPF Member account number prior to 1st October 2020 will be eligible for the benefit.
- Any EPF member possessing Universal Account Number (UAN) drawing monthly wage of less than Rs. 15000/- who made

exit from employment during Covid pandemic from 01.03.2020 to 30.09.2020 and did not join employment in any EPF covered establishment up to 30.09.2020 will also be eligible to avail benefit.

Purpose of the scheme

- The scheme is expected to encourage the employers and business establishments to **increase the number of workers hired**.
- The scheme will help a large number of **job seekers find employment** in EPFO-registered establishments.
- 99.1 percent of the establishments will be covered under this scheme and 65 percent of all employees in the formal sector are estimated to be covered, wherein EPF contributions will be given by the government by way of subsidy support.

Why in News?

- This information was given by Minister of State (I/C) for Labour & Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar in a written reply in Rajya Sabha.

6) Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

About the scheme

- The **Ministry of Labour & Employment** is implementing "**Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana**" (PMRPY) since 2016 with the objective to **incentivise employers for creation of new employment** and also aimed to **bring informal workers to the formal workforce**.
- Under the scheme, Government of India is paying **Employer's full contribution i.e. 12%** towards Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) both (as admissible from time to time) for a **period of three years** to the new employees through Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- The terminal date for registration of beneficiaries through establishment was **31st March 2019**.
- The beneficiaries registered upto 31st March, 2019 will continue to receive the benefits for 3 years from the date of registration under the scheme.

Eligibility criteria

- New employees should have joined in the establishment on or after 01.04.2016 and

should not have been a regular employee in any EPF registered establishment prior to this.

- Employers should ensure that the new employee has a **valid UAN which is Aadhaar linked**.
- The monthly wages of the new employee should be **less than Rs. 15,000**
- The EPS contribution for the new employee will be **available for 3 years**.

Significance of the scheme

- The employer is incentivised for increasing the employment base of workers in the establishment.
- A large number of workers will find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit is that these workers will have access to **social security benefits** of the organized sector.

Why in the news?

- The Minister of State (I/C) for Labour & Employment mentioned about PMRPY in Rajya Sabha recently.

7) SERB-PRISM

What's in the news?

- The **Science and Engineering Board (SERB)** has launched the portal called '**SERB - Project Information System & Management (SERB - PRISM)**'.
- **Developed by SERB**, this portal is designed to provide information regarding **projects sanctioned by SERB from 2011**

onwards, including funding details, status, research summary, and project output information such as publications and patents.

Significance

- SERB-PRISM provides a platform which makes project details, research outcomes, facilities created, and their achievements originating from SERB funding accessible.
- It also allows researchers to look at research trends, learn about cutting-edge science, locate critical equipment in their vicinity and help seek collaborations across disciplines.
- It also helps in the **democratisation of Research & Development funding trends**.

About SERB

- SERB is a **Statutory body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, Ministry of Science and Technology, established through an Act of Parliament in 2009. (SERB Act, 2008)
- **Supporting basic research in emerging areas of Science & Engineering** are the primary and distinctive mandate of the Board.
- It is the **premier agency** for planning, promoting, and funding of **internationally competitive research** in emerging areas.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Stand-Up India Scheme

About the Scheme

- The Stand-Up India Scheme aims to facilitate bank loans between **10 lakh and 100 lakh** to **at least one Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) borrower and at least one woman borrower per bank branch** for setting up a **greenfield enterprise**.
- This enterprise may be in **manufacturing, services or the trading sector**.

Eligibility

- SC/ST and/or woman entrepreneurs, above 18 years of age.
- Loans under the scheme are available for **only green field projects**. Green field signifies, in this context, the first time venture of the beneficiary in the manufacturing or services or trading sector.
- In case of non-individual enterprises, 51% of the shareholding and controlling stake should be held by either SC/ST and/or Women Entrepreneur.
- Borrowers should not be in default to any bank/financial institution.

Why in News?

- Government has said that more than 81 percent accounts under the Stand Up India Scheme belong to women entrepreneurs.

2) Status of tap water supply in schools

What's in the news?

- According to information provided to the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources**, **only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply**, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the Jal Shakti Ministry in October 2020.

About the Campaign

- The campaign to provide potable **pipled water supply** for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for hand washing and in toilets in **every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school** was launched on **October 2, Gandhi Jayanti** by the Jal Shakti Ministry.
- The 100-day period should have ended on January 10, 2021. However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply, the Ministry told the Parliamentary panel.

Basic need unmet

While seven States in the country have 100% tap water coverage in schools, three have abysmally low coverage of less than 15%

States with 100% tap-water coverage

State
Andhra Pradesh
Goa
Tamil Nadu
Haryana
Himachal Pradesh
Telangana
Punjab

Least coverage

State	% of schools with tap water supply
Uttar Pradesh	7.93
West Bengal	10.89
Jharkhand	12.99

- **Seven States** — Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab — **achieved 100% coverage**.
- A number of other States also made significant progress in that time, and 1.82 lakh grey water management structures and 1.42 lakh rainwater harvesting structures were also constructed in schools and anganwadi centres.

- However, less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it, while it is available in only 2-6% of anganwadis in Assam, Jharkhand, U.P., Chhattisgarh and Bengal.
- Some States/ UTs have indicated that they need more time to complete the task and sustain the efforts. Therefore, the Jal Shakti Ministry has extended the campaign till March 31, 2021.

Concerns

- The Standing Committee noted that **children are more susceptible to water borne diseases**, more so, when there is also a need for repeated washing of hands as a precautionary measure during the pandemic.
- At a time when schools and anganwadis are just starting to reopen after a yearlong shutdown, COVID-19 safety protocols require repeated handwashing by students and teachers.
- The Standing Committee **urged the Ministry to take up the matter with laggard States.**
- The panel added that the Centre should also take measures to set up **water purification or reverse osmosis (RO) plants** on an urgent basis so that children do not suffer due to contamination of drinking water.

Jal Jeevan Mission

- In a broader comment on the flagship **Jal Jeevan Mission**, the Standing Committee noted that “mere provision of tap connection without ensuring assured

availability of water in the pipeline would not serve the purpose and will defeat the very objective of JJM”.

- It called for **real-time monitoring of water supply at the district level.**

Related Information

About JJM

- Launched in 2019, the chief objective of the Mission is to provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024** and thereby **ensuring potable water supply in adequate quantity i.e. @ 55 lpcd (Litres per capita per day)** of prescribed quality on a long-term and regular basis.
- The programme also implements **source sustainability measures** as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through greywater management, water conservation and rainwater harvesting.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is based on a **community approach** to water and will include **extensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC)** as a key component of the mission. JJM looks to create a **jan andolan for water**, thereby making it everyone’s priority.
- **Note:** In the Union Budget 2021-22, the Union government announced the roll out of **Jal Jeevan Mission-Urban** which aims to create universal coverage of water supply in all 4,378 statutory towns as well as sewage management in 500 AMRUT cities.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Railways and a question of transparency

GS-2 Infrastructure

NEWS

- The Railways are in the midst of an unprecedented financial distress and are faced with fundamental organisational issues. This is no time for evasiveness and obfuscation but for clarity and transparency. It is also time to confront reality.

FALSE PICTURE PORTRAYED

- Recent public statements about the performance of the Railways on the freight front suggest that all is well with the Railways.
- In a recent interview, the CEO and Chairman of the Railway Board highlighted the fact that **freight loading in January 2021 was the highest ever.**
- A recent press report says that the **freight earnings in 2020-21 are likely to be more than in 2019-20** despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEED FOR A PROPER PERSPECTIVE TO ANALYSE THE PROBLEM

- The **freight earnings**, which during the entire year are projected to be ₹1,24,184.00 crore in the Revised Estimates for 2020-21 is lower than what was achieved in 2018-19 (₹1,27,432.72 crore). In fact, the passenger and freight earnings in 2019-20 were less than in 2018-19, indicating that a downslide had started even before the outbreak of COVID-19, probably due to the economic slowdown.
- The **Operating Ratio (OR)**, which is broadly the ratio of working expenses to revenues, has been artificially kept below 100% by making less than required provision for pension payments during 2019-20 and 2020-21. While the official figures of OR are 98.36% for 2019-20 and 96.96% for 2020-21, the actual OR works out to 114.19% and 131.49%, respectively, if the required provision is made for pension payments.
- Thus, it is clear that technically, the Indian Railways are well and truly in the red.

IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES

- **Increase in staff costs and pension payments:** while the passenger and freight revenues increased by 84.8 % from 2010-11 to 2019-20, the staff and pension costs raced ahead at almost double that rate, by 157%, in the same period.
- Further, while in 2010-11, the staff plus pension costs formed 55.7% of the traffic earnings, by 2019-20, they had shot up to 77.5% of the traffic earnings. This, despite the fact that there has been a reduction of about one lakh staff on roll during this period.
- The spike in the staff and pension costs is largely attributable to the implementation of the Central Pay Commission recommendations, a 10yearly feature.
- Further, being a Ministry of the Government of India, the Indian Railway's finances are bound to be subjected to another fatal body blow by the next (Eighth) Pay Commission around 2025-26.
- **Skewed product mix of freight:** A disturbing feature of freight traffic is the overwhelming dependence on one commodity- coal. Despite all the marketing efforts over the years, almost 50% of freight earnings are contributed by the transport of coal.
- But with the availability of alternative sources of renewable energy such as solar at competitive prices, the dependence on coal-based thermal power plants is bound to reduce to meet the incremental energy needs.
- Also, India's commitment under the 2015 Paris Agreement would result in India reducing its dependence on coal-based power plants. This does not augur well for the Railways and it will have to therefore think seriously of life after coal.

WAYFORWARD

- There is an **urgent need to achieve a quantum jump in revenues**, particularly on the freight front, with already undergoing drastic reduction in the number of employees, there being no way to reduce the number of pensioners in the short run.

- The **full commissioning of the two Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs)**, slated to be operational by 2022, can play a significant role in doing so.
- Further, **promoting the adoption of the rollon rolloff model of transporting loaded trucks** on rail on the DFCs. This model not only boosts revenues, but also adds the advantage of reducing the overall carbon footprint.
- Suggestions such as **corporatizing the Railways's Production Units and outsourcing the medical services** can help in reducing staff costs and pension payments.
- The government needs to firm up its policies on these crucial issues after discussions with all stakeholders.
- An annual report called '**Indian Railways Report**' on the lines of the annual Economic Survey should be placed in Parliament every year detailing the physical and financial performance of the Railways, identifying the challenges and plans for the future to meet the country's rail transport needs. This will ensure public scrutiny.

2) Health first, fiscal prudence later

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

NEWS

- Subsidised LPG prices have increased by a massive 50% in this financial year alone.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

- The scheme was launched in 2016 to distribute 50 million LPG connections to women of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.
- In 2018, the Government **extended the benefit to all left out poor families** not having LPG connections and not covered under the existing beneficiary categories.
- Since 2016, PMUY has provided LPG connections to 8 million poor households to reduce women's drudgery and indoor air pollution.
- **Providing an upfront connection subsidy of Rs 1,600**, PMUY helped expand

LPG coverage to more than 85% of households.

- In comparison, less than a third of Indian households used LPG as their main cooking fuel in 2011.

CONCERNS

- Multiple studies assessing PMUY have concluded that while **access has increased, many new beneficiaries are not consuming LPG in a sustained manner.**
- Large Scale primary surveys by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) suggest that, on average, recent **PMAY beneficiaries consumed only about half the LPG compared to long standing regular consumers.**
- Beyond causing indoor air pollution, biomass use for cooking contributes up to 30% to the ambient PM 2.5 at the national level, more than the contribution of transport, crop residue or coal burning.

REASONS FOR LIMITED UPTAKE OF LPG AMONG POOR

- The **effective price of LPG is not affordable for such households**, despite the subsidy.
- Many rural consumers have access to **freely available biomass**, making it difficult for LPG to displace it.
- The **recent increases in the subsidised LPG price** have made it more difficult for the poor to sustain LPG use.

CHANGING PRICES

- India determines domestic LPG prices **based on imported LPG price (we import more than 50% of our consumption).**
- As the pandemic set in, the LPG subsidised price began to rise, even when global LPG prices plummeted, contributing to the refiners' margins and government finances.
- At present, the LPG prices are rising globally and a 50% reduction in the LPG subsidy budget for FY22 (versus FY21) does not bode well.

BETTER TARGETING REQUIRED

- Currently, the government provides a **uniform subsidy per cylinder to all LPG consumers.** This allows many long-term LPG users, who are also middle- and higher-income households to use LPG even at a (higher) unsubsidized price.

- In contrast, **economically poor households need a greater subsidy** to make it affordable for them to use LPG as their main cooking fuel.
- One approach for such targeting is to **rely on the existing LPG consumption patterns of consumers**. Provide households exhibiting low consumption or a decline in LPG consumption over time with greater subsidy per cylinder to sustain health gains.
- The **subsidy levels could be dynamic with different slabs reflecting the previous year's consumption**.
- Alongside, the **deduplication efforts** to weed out households with multiple LPG connections must continue to avoid subsidy leakages.
- **In the post pandemic rebuilding, the continued support to the economically poor for sustaining LPG use is not merely a fiscal subsidy but also a social investment to free up women's productive time and reduce India's public health burden. This social investment will yield rich dividends in the years ahead through a healthier and productive population.**

3) An alarming diktat

GS-1 Social empowerment; GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

CONTEXT

- Haryana Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya has granted his assent to a law regulating private sector hiring.

LAW PASSED- Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act of 2020

- The law imposes **onerous and contentious responsibilities on key personnel of firms** in the State, including those with as few as 10 employees.
- They need to **register every employee earning ₹50,000** on an official portal and **employing 75% of locals in such jobs**.
- Non-compliance can attract severe monetary penalties.
- Exemptions to the law, such as hiring an outsider can be sought only when local

candidates for a desired skill are not available.

- Thus, this law presumably will **remove existing non-Haryanvi employees beyond the 25% limit**.

SONS OF SOIL – RECURRENT THEME NOW

- Andhra Pradesh (AP) had passed a similar law in 2019.
- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister has promised one to reserve 70% private sector jobs.

CONCERNS

- The law ostensibly acts against the spirit of the Constitution, especially-
- **Article 19 (1)(g)**: which enables an Indian citizen to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.
- **Article 16(2)**: which states that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.
- Also, it can have a dreadful impact on **India's investment climate and its socio economic framework**.
- The law encourages the system similar to that existed in **Inspector Raj**. It not only empowers officials to enter firms' premises for inspections, but also to decide if a firm can hire an outsider or should train local candidates instead, till they become proficient enough.
- This could possibly dissuade employers from operating in the State, thus defeating the idea of boosting local jobs when unemployment is running high.
- Further the law is capable of **damaging to India's already fragile reputation** as a stable, trustworthy investment destination with a talented workforce, as it can disrupt the Gurgaon back office operations of a global firm or the supplies of auto components.
- Thus this law runs counter to the Prime Minister's '**Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**' and '**One Nation One Market**' slogans.
- Rising unemployment could further spur more States to follow suit, and the logic could be extended to **internal capital flows** next.
- Bihar CM Nitish Kumar has already pointed out that Bihar's deposits into the

banking system are not matched by credit disbursements into the State.

WAY FORWARD

- The Centre needs to dissuade legislation which threatens to not only unleash a sort of 'work visa' regime for Indians within the country but also damage crucial workplace diversity.
- **Immobilising a much vaunted young workforce and rupturing the social fabric with this push for insularity would be the start of an unstoppable slide.**

4) Ensuring trust in the electoral process

GS-2 Governance, transparency and accountability

CONTEXT

- The political system in India has traditionally been hostile to the idea of transparency in electoral financing. Political parties have zealously opposed any examination of the linkages between their governments' policies and decisions, and the interests of their major donors.

ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME

- The government introduced amendments to laws, including the Income Tax Act of 1961, the Companies Act of 2013, and the Representation of the People Act of 1951 to give **effect to the electoral bond scheme.**
- Under this scheme, an electoral bond, issued in the **nature of a promissory note**, can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India. The scheme allows parties to receive these bonds.
- This new instrument of political party funding is aimed to **ensure greater transparency** by addressing the issue of anonymous financing. It sought to **eliminate black money from the system.**

RELATED CONCERNS

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

- The government used the **money bill route** to bypass the Rajya Sabha, to introduce electoral bonds which allow donors to anonymously donate unlimited amounts of funds to political parties.
- It allows **parties to receive these bonds without the public, the Election**

Commission or even the Income Tax Department knowing the identity of the donors.

- It has **legitimised opacity and opened the floodgates for anonymous donations** to parties, dealing a severe blow to voters' right to know.
- It undermines the People's ability to track donations by big businesses and expose quid pro quo.

VIEWES OF ELECTION COMMISSION

- Expressing its opposition to electoral bonds in the Supreme Court, the Election Commission has contended that they will have an **adverse impact on transparency in political party financing** and would make it impossible for the constitutional body to ascertain whether donations received were in compliance with the statutory framework governing political parties.

IN CONJUNCTION WITH AMENDMENTS TO FCRA ACT

- In 2016 and 2017, **amendments were made to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010**, with retrospective effect. Thus, **enabling the Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies to make donations to political parties** through electoral bonds.
- This allows **anonymous financing by foreign entities** opening Indian elections to the influence of foreign interests.

MONEY LAUNDERING

- One of the stated objectives of introducing electoral bonds was to address the problem of black money and large cash donation.
- Proponents of electoral bonds have argued that since bonds can only be purchased via cheques, demand drafts, direct debit or electronic clearing, they will **stem the flow of black money.**
- But, the problem lies with the provision of the Income Tax Act under which **political parties are exempted from disclosing sources of donations of less than Rs. 20,000.**
- Most parties claimed that a majority of their income was received in denominations smaller than Rs. 20,000 thus doing away with the requirement to disclose the source of donation.

- Even the amendments to the Income Tax Act in 2017 only **lowered the stipulated ceiling of anonymous contributions from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 2,000.**
- In fact, electoral bonds are likely to abet money laundering since the amendments to the Companies Act in 2017 **removed the cap of 7.5% on political contributions by a company as a percentage of its average net profits of the preceding three years.**
- This allows for black money to be easily routed through shell companies to purchase electoral bonds.

BIG MONEY IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

- The rationale given by the government for providing anonymity to donors of electoral bonds is to **allow donors to use legitimate funds to support political parties by protecting them against the wrath of rival parties,** especially the party in power.
- But as bonds are **issued only through the State Bank of India,** it is not difficult for the party in power to access information about the identity of purchasers and details of bonds sold to them, and match those to deposits in political party accounts.
- Bonds worth nearly ₹6,500 crore have been sold so far. Thus, the scheme has helped in consolidating the role of big money in electoral politics.
- As per the information obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act shows that bonds with the highest denomination value of Rs. 1 crore are the most preferred by donors and constitute 92% of the total value of bonds sold till October 2020.
- **Thus, Electoral bonds goes against every known principle of transparency and lend themselves to use by special interest groups, corporate lobbyists and foreign entities to acquire a stranglehold on the electoral process and governance at the expense of citizens**

WAY FORWARD

- To ensure public trust in the electoral process, it is critical that the Supreme Court immediately adjudicates on the matter.
- If bonds are to be retained as an instrument for contributing to political

parties, donations must be made transparent and parties should be obligated to file reports with the Election Commission and other oversight bodies disclosing the names of donors and amounts received.

- This information **must also be placed in the public domain.** These steps are necessary to safeguard democracy and ensure that elections do not become a mere formality.

5) Ploughing a new furrow in the agri-regulatory system

GS-3 Agriculture

CONTEXT

- In recent times, the intense debates around the three farm laws have brought to light the issue of developing a sound regulatory framework to promote India's agricultural growth and in keeping pace with the changing times.

CONSTRAINTS IN AGRICULTURE

- While the country is divided on the need for the three new farm laws, the fact remains that **farmers, mainly smallholders, across India continue to face various constraints** in carrying out farming activities.
- These include constraints in **accessing agricultural inputs, markets, finance, human resources, and information,** which are critical for increasing farmers' competitiveness.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

- The existing institutional set up that controls farm production often **fails to ease these constraints.**
- Hence, there is a **need to develop a suitable regulatory system that would enable farmers to overcome their constraints.**
- Governments can play a critical role in this regard by enacting laws and regulations that influence farmers' access to agricultural inputs, cost of production, farmers' participation in agricultural markets and value chains, the competitiveness of farmers, and private investment in the farming sector.

ENABLING THE BUSINESS OF AGRICULTURE

- A recent publication by the **World Bank** titled “**Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA) 2019**” based on eight indicators provides insight on India’s position compared to other countries.
- The EBA measures the extent to which government regulatory systems in 101 countries worldwide make it easier for their farmers to operate agricultural activities.
- The indicators are supplying seed, registering fertilizer, securing water, registering machinery, sustaining livestock, protecting plant health, trading food, and accessing finance.
- The EBA is **akin to the Doing Business project** of the World Bank, which ranks the ease of doing business in countries.

INDIA Vs OTHERS

- **Among 101 countries** covered, **India ranked 49** on the EBA.
- Among emerging groups of 20 (EG 20) countries, India has the second least favourable regulatory environment for farming activities after South Africa.
- India lags behind its close competitors in world agriculture, namely China, Brazil, and the Russian Federation.

WEAK INDICATORS

- India has the weakest performance on five out of eight indicators. They are registering fertilizer and machinery, securing water, sustaining livestock, and protecting plant health indicators.
- **Registering fertilizer and machinery** measures domestic laws and regulations that provide farmers access to fertilizer and agricultural machinery.
- **Securing water** measures the regulatory processes that help farmers make appropriate decisions regarding the level of investment in irrigation.
- **Sustaining livestock** captures the quality of regulations affecting farmers’ access to livestock farming inputs.
- **Protecting plant health indicator** captures the quality of legislation on phytosanitary standards (SPS).

NEED TO IMPROVE

- Inadequate access to quality agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, water, and mechanical power can cause-
- productivity loss,

- higher cost of food production and uncertainty,
- lower capacity of farmers to produce surpluses, adopt new plant varieties and accept new opportunities to improve their income.
- The **regulatory system that governs irrigation management** is essential for reducing the variability of farm output, prices, and incomes, minimising vulnerability to natural shocks, and incentivising the production of riskier and high returns crops.
- Gaining access to the global agricultural value chain requires a **sound regulatory framework on SPS**. For instance, thanks to active involvement by the SPS authority, namely National Agrarian Health Service (SENASA-Peru), Peru had become one of the world’s leading exporters of asparagus.

STRONG INDICATORS

- The comparative score of India on supplying seed, trading food, and accessing finance indicators is high.
- **Supplying seed** evaluates laws and regulations that ensure timely release of seed to farmers. A robust seed supply system is required for improving yield and adopting new crop varieties.
- **Trading food** assesses laws and regulations that facilitate exporting of farm products by farmers.
- **Accessing finance** assesses regulatory framework on the use of warehouse receipts. A robust warehouse receipts system enables the farmers to obtain the credit needed to invest in agriculture. Warehouse receipt operators accept deposits of crops and provide warehouse receipts to farmers as evidence of deposited crops. By using warehouse receipts as collateral, farmers can receive credit.

CONCLUSION

- The EBA project results reveal that, compared to its close competitors, the strength of India’s agricultural regulatory environment is weak on the whole and with respect to key performance indicators.
- The future of world agriculture and food production is expected to increasingly depend on middle-income countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia.

- Therefore, India needs to put in place an agricultural regulatory system that would make it easier for its farmers to conduct agricultural activities, thereby improving their productivity, competitiveness, and income.

6) In need of full-time heads

GS-3 Security forces and agencies

NEWS

- Many Central forces are functioning without regular chiefs, which could impact their efficiency.

CONTEXT

- The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), National Security Guard and other crucial organisations like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) are either **working without a regular head or being headed under additional charge**.

CONCERNS

- The fact that many Central Forces are functioning without regular chiefs, **could impact their efficiency and can have a detrimental impact on India's internal security**, as the concerned agencies play a pivotal role in maintaining internal security.
- The process of appointments is marked by **long delays**. Since most appointees to the top posts are at the fag end of their service, they are left with just a few months or a year or so to head these organisations. There is little they can do within their short tenures.
- There is a **lack of seriousness** in posting the right kind of officers with not only the required skill and experience but also the time which can have an adverse impact on the efficiency of these forces.
- Also, officers holding provisional charge shy away from taking major policy decisions and prefer to leave such matters to the next person in charge.

WAYFORWARD

- The government should consider providing a **minimum tenure of two years or till superannuation, whichever is later**. This

will help ensure sufficient tenure for the chief to implement some reforms.

- The government of the day should consider announcing the next chief of these organisations **at least three months in advance** with a minimum tenure of two years or till superannuation, whichever is later.
- Those being considered for such posts should be from **among the officers who have served in these organisations earlier**. This will help in better strategic planning of the organisation.
- A **panel of officers**, cleared by the Union Public Service Commission should be always kept ready and the officers for the top posts could be chosen from this panel. This will go a long way in speeding up decisions and enhancing the efficiency of these forces.

7) The new media rules are a tightening noose

GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions; IT & Computers

WHY IN NEWS?

- Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 were notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology at the end of February.
- The notified rules set out an elaborate **time bound three tier process** whereby each and every such grievance is first handled at the level of the portal itself by its **own grievance officer**, and if not satisfactorily settled, passes on to the **self-regulatory body** of the sector or industry, and if yet not resolved, moves further up to an **inter-ministerial oversight committee**. It is a scene of many pieces with the systematic incremental erosion of the freedom of speech and expression.

WHY CONCERNS REGARDING NEW LAW?

- Such moves are seen by the experts as a move by the executive to keep check on the media, particularly the standalone digital newsmedia, which have generally proved more defiant and inconvenient for the government than the mainstream press or television channels.
- The new rules on appearances seems to put in place a grievance redressal

mechanism for the end user or consumer of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms and the digital news web portals. But in the politically vitiated environment, the new rules provide scope for nature and scope of the bulk of grievances and hence are **prone to misuse for political reasons.**

- **Smaller or medium independent digital news and current affairs portals is one hardest hit** by this redress requirement as any criticism of the ruling party or government could trigger an orchestrated avalanche of grievances.
- The process of the regulation through these rules makes a **mockery of the concept of self-regulation**, where an inter ministerial committee of government officials in effect becomes an appellate authority over the self-regulatory exercise.
- The rules give **ad hoc emergency powers** to block any content even without such token procedure. Through real or imagined grievance, the government can in effect prescribe, oversee and overrule so-called self-regulation by the publishers.

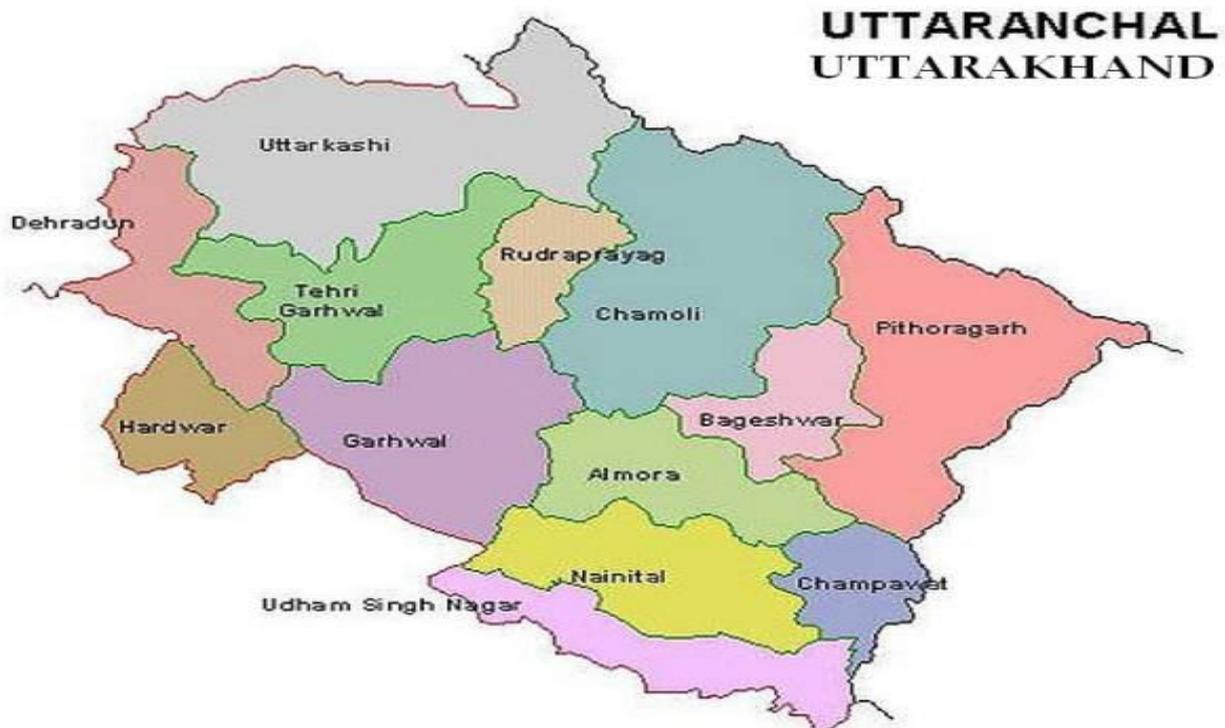
WAYFORWARD

- Such a rule jeopardizes the very sustenance of the already financially straitened and functionally beleaguered digital news media.
- It is seen by many concerted moves by the government to bring the more critical sections of the news media to heel.
- Hence a need for organic self-regulation by the news media as against an external authority or body is needed of the hour.
- **Media forms the fourth pillar of democracy** and needs to be given as importance as the other three pillars. Even **Article 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g)** implicitly provides for the freedom of press and hence organs of the state need to adhere to the same. The fourth pillar of democracy must be in a dynamic relationship of checks and balances vis-à-vis the other three pillars.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Why Uttarakhand wants the Centre to withdraw ILP from Niti and Nelong valley



Why in the news?

- The Uttarakhand government has sought withdrawal of “**inner-line permit**” (ILP) **system** in Niti Valley of Chamoli district and Nelang Valley of Uttarkashi district for better border management and expansion of tourism and other economic activities in villages located there.
- In Uttarakhand, tourists have to obtain ILP for locations near China border, at least in the three districts of **Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh and Chamoli**.
- Uttarakhand shares a 350-km border with China and a 275-km boundary with Nepal. Five of the state’s 13 districts are border districts.
- Chamoli and Uttarkashi share boundaries with China, whereas Udham Singh Nagar and Champawat have common boundaries with Nepal.
- Pithoragarh is strategically more sensitive as it shares boundaries with both China and Nepal.

What is the Inner Line permit system?

- An Inner Line Permit is a document that **allows an Indian citizen to visit or stay in a state that is protected under the ILP system**.
- The document is an effort by the government to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.
- This concept comes from the colonial area. Under the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873**, the British framed regulations restricting the entry and regulating the stay of outsiders in designated areas.
- This was done mainly to protect British commercial interests from Indians trading within these regions.
- In 1950, the Indian government replaced “British subjects” with “Citizen of India”. This was to address local concerns about protecting the interests of the indigenous people from outsiders belonging to other Indian states.

- Many Northeast states and international bordering states need this ILP.
- It is usually issued by the District Magistrate of the recognised nearby district.

▪ A similar document is needed for Foreigners to travel to such places, it is called **Protected Area Permit**.

What are the benefits of removing the ILP system?

- It will increase economic activities.
- Villages will be rehabilitated and locals could also act as 'eyes' and 'ears' at the border for surveillance.
- It will also stop outward migration. According to officials in these districts, most of the border villages see outward migration owing to lack of livelihood opportunities.

2) INS Karanj, the Scorpene-class submarine inducted into service

Why in the news?

- The Indian Navy inducted its third Scorpene-class **conventional diesel electric submarine**, INS Karanj, into service under **Project 75I**.
- The last two Scorpene class submarines inducted were INS Kalvari and INS Khanderi.
- A fourth submarine, **Vela**, was launched into the water in May 2019 and the fifth, **Vagir**, in November 2020, and both are undergoing sea trials. The sixth is in an advanced stage of outfitting.

What are Scorpene-class submarines?

- They are the **most advanced conventional submarines** with superior stealth features, such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels and ability to attack with precision-guided weapons on board.
- They were **designed by French naval shipbuilding firm DCNS** in partnership with Spanish shipbuilding firm Navantia.
- These are used in the missions such as area **surveillance, intelligence gathering, anti-submarine warfare,**

anti-surface warfare and minelaying operations.

- It can carry upto 6 torpedoes and 18 heavy weapons.
- With 350 meters diving depth, it can travel upto 20 knots speed (37.04 kmph) and submerged upto 21 days.

What is special about INS Karanj?

- It has the best sensors in the world and is fitted with an integrated platform management system to provide centralised propulsion and machinery control.
- It has powerful engines that quickly recharges the batteries which are crucial for stealthy response.
- Its design enables upgradation to **air independent propulsion** (which allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without access to atmospheric oxygen) in future.
- It is fitted with a **permanent magnetic synchronous motor**, making it one of the **quietest submarines in the world**.

About Project 75I

- **Indian Navy's** Project 75I (P75I) is development of Scorpene submarine development for **six** latest-generation attack submarines.
- It is expected to be completed by 2022.
- The project is taking shape at **Mazagon Dock in Mumbai**.

3) What was the significance of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March?

Context

- The Prime Minister of India launched **Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav** to celebrate the 75th year of Independence and also flagged off a march to commemorate the 91st anniversary of Dandi March.

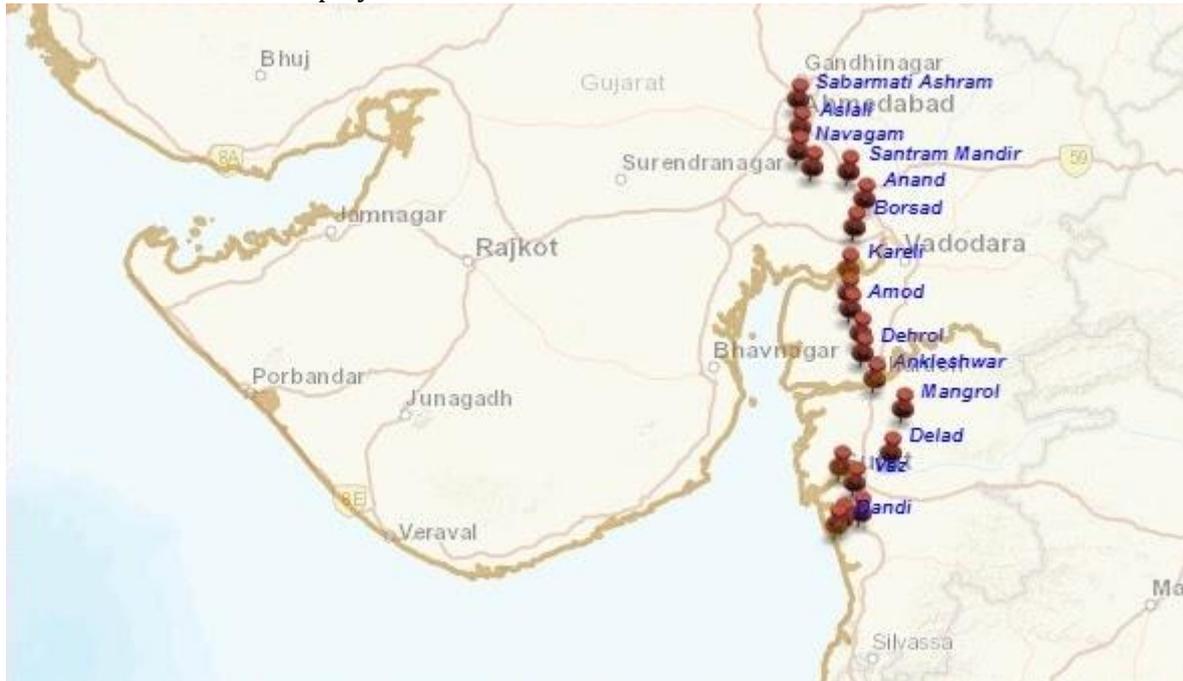
What is Dandi March?

- The **1882 Salt Act** gave the British a monopoly in the manufacture and sale of salt. Even though salt was freely available on the coasts of India, Indians were forced to buy it from the colonisers.
- After the halt of Non-cooperation movement in 1920's, Mahatma Gandhi decided that if there was any one product through which **civil disobedience movement** could be inaugurated, then it was salt. He said "**Next to air and water,**

salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life,”

- The British government, including the **Viceroy Lord Irwin** too did not take the prospect of a campaign against the salt tax too seriously.
- The 24-day march from March 12 to April 5, 1930 from **Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad to a coastal village called Dandi** was undertaken.
- It was a tax resistance campaign against the British salt monopoly over salt.

- **Women** did not participate in the march but Sarojini Naidu undertook the journey in the last stretch of the march.
- Mahatma Gandhi reached Dandi on April 5. The following day, early morning he proceeded along with the other marchers to the sea, where he picked up lumps of natural salt lying in a small pit and said **“With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.”**



What was the significance?

- The march shook up the British government. It responded by arresting 95000 people.
- Mahatma Gandhi was arrested and sent to Yerwada Central Jail.
- The Dandi march inspired many leaders across the country. Similar marches were undertaken by **Satish Chandra Dasgupta**

in Bengal, K.F Nariman in Bombay etc and prepared salt.

- What started as salt satyagraha soon grew into mass satyagraha. Forest laws were flouted in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Central Provinces. Peasants in Gujarat and Bengal refused to pay land and chowkidari taxes.

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