

# OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 42 | 14th March to 20th March, 2021

## COVERAGE.

The Hindu

The Indian Express

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**AT A GLANCE  
& IN DEPTH.**

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

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Environment

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# News @ a glance

## POLITY

### 1) Global Hunger index

#### What is it?

- The Global Hunger Index is an annual score ranking countries of the world on hunger levels.
- The Index is a peer-reviewed report released annually by **Concern Worldwide** (a humanitarian agency) and **NGO Welthungerhilfe**.
- It is based on 4 indicators:
  1. **Undernourishment**
  2. **Child wasting** - the share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition
  3. **Child stunting** - children under the age of five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition
  4. **Child mortality** - the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

#### Background

- Last year, the Global Hunger Index 2020 was released by Concern Worldwide and NGO Welthungerhilfe.

#### Highlights of the Report

- Overall, **India ranks 94 out of 107 countries** in the Index, lower than neighbours such as Bangladesh (75) and Pakistan (88). 2020 scores reflect data from 2015-19.
- According to the report, with a score of 27.2, India has a level of hunger that is “serious”. India’s rank was 102 out of 117 countries last year.
- India has the **highest prevalence of wasted children under five years in the world**, which reflects acute undernutrition.
- The situation has worsened in the **2015-19 period**, when the prevalence of child wasting was **17.3%**, in comparison to 2010-14, when it was 15.1%.
- Although it is still in the poorest category, however, **child stunting** has actually

**improved significantly, from 54% in 2000 to less than 35% now.**

- Child wasting, on the other hand, has not improved in the last two decades, and is rather worse than it was decades ago.
- India has **improved in both child mortality rates**, which are now at 3.7%, and in terms of **undernourishment**, with about 14% of the total population which gets an insufficient caloric intake.
- In the region of south, east and south-eastern Asia, the only countries which fare worse than India are Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and North Korea.
- **South Asia** has the highest child wasting rate for any region, and **India** is the worst performer.

#### Pandemic effect

- Globally, nearly 690 million people are undernourished, according to the report, which warns that the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected the progress made on reducing hunger and poverty.
- The report noted that the world is not on track to achieve the **Goal 2 of Sustainable Development Goal (to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030)**.

#### Why in News?

- Union Minister of State for Agriculture Parshottam Rupala, in a recent Rajya Sabha proceedings questioned the methodology and data accuracy of the Global Hunger Index report 2020, which has placed India at 94th out of 107 countries.
- Mr. Rupala claimed that children considered healthy were also counted to determine the ranking.
- The Minister said that the government had written to NGO Welthungerhilfe, which compiles the report, expressing concerns about their methodology, data accuracy and sample size and was yet to hear from them.
- In a written reply, the Ministry stated that according to the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4**, the percentage of

wasted, stunted and malnourished children in 2015-16 stood at 21, 38.4 and 35.7, respectively.

- It said that compared to NFHS-4 data, the **Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS)** compiled in 2017-18 showed an **improvement of 4%, 3.7% and 2.3%** in wasted, stunted and malnourished children respectively.

#### About CNNS

- The first-ever CNNS was commissioned by the government in 2016 and was conducted from 2016-18, led by the **Union Health Ministry, in collaboration with UNICEF**.
- The findings were published in 2019. CNNS includes only nutrition data, whereas NFHS encompasses overall health indicators.

## 2) Electoral bonds

### What are Electoral Bonds?

- An electoral bond is designed to be a **interest-free bearer instrument** like a **Promissory Note** — in effect, it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand.
- It can be purchased by **any citizen** of India or a **body incorporated in India**.
- The electoral bonds were introduced with the **Finance Bill (2017)**.
- The bonds will be issued in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India.
- They can be bought by the donor with a **KYC-compliant account**.

### Features

- The bonds will be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the beginning of every quarter, i.e. in January, April, July and October as specified by the Central Government.
- The donor will remain **anonymous**. The electoral bonds will **not bear the name of the donor**. The intention is to ensure that all the donations made to a party will be accounted for in the balance sheets without exposing the donor details to the public.
- Political parties are allotted a verified account by the Election Commission and all the electoral bond transactions are done through this account only.

- Only political parties **registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951** and have **secured no less than one per cent votes** in the last Lok Sabha or State elections are eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- A donor will get **tax deduction** and the recipient, or the political party, will get **tax exemption**, provided returns are filed by the political party.
- The information furnished by the buyer shall be treated confidential by the authorised bank and shall not be disclosed to any authority for any purposes, except when demanded **by a competent court or upon registration of criminal case by any law enforcement agency**.

### Why in News?

- Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde agreed to urgently hear a plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms to stay the sale of a new set of electoral bonds on April 1, before Assembly elections in crucial States such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

### Arguments of the Critics

- The key critique is that, for something meant to bring transparency to the system, electoral bonds actually make political funding **more opaque – but only for the public**. Companies don't have to say who they are donating money to and parties don't need to say from whom they're getting the cash.
- Prior to 2017, Companies Act, 2013, stipulated that a company can donate **only up to 7.5%** of its average profit of the last three years. Now, through the electoral bonds, there is **no limit** to the amount companies can donate, and the requirement for such firms to have existed for the last three years on a profit-making basis has also been deleted.
- The implication is that even **loss-making companies or shell companies** can be used to purchase electoral bonds.
- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Election Commission** had both said the sale of electoral bonds had become an avenue for shell corporations and entities to park illicit money and even proceeds of bribes with political parties.
- The Election Commission of India criticised electoral bonds saying it would **wreck transparency** in political funding and

allow for **unchecked foreign funding** of Indian political parties.

- However, the government defended the scheme, saying it allowed anonymity to political donors to protect them from “political victimisation”.

### 3) MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020

#### About MTP Act, 1971

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 provides for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered Medical Practitioners. It is possible to get an abortion under the Act if pregnancy is **under 20 weeks**.
- However, it is **subject to several conditions** and conducting an abortion without fulfilling the conditions is considered a crime.

#### What are the conditions?

- Under the MTP Act, the doctor can perform an abortion in the following situations:
- If the pregnancy would be harmful to life or physical or mental health of the pregnant woman;
- If there is a good chance that the child would suffer from physical or mental abnormalities which would leave him or her seriously handicapped.

#### Issues with the current law

- Legal and medical experts feel that a revision of the legal limit for abortion is long overdue.
- Foetal abnormalities show up only by **18 weeks**, so just a two-week window after that is too small for the would-be parents to take the difficult call on whether to keep their baby and for the medical practitioner to exhaust all possible options before advising the patient to take the extreme step.
- Since lack of legal approval does not prevent abortions from being carried out beyond 20 weeks, women are put under risk since the abortions then are often conducted in unhygienic conditions by untrained, unqualified persons. It is

estimated that about **8% of maternal deaths happen due to unsafe abortions**.

#### What's in the news?

- The Rajya Sabha has passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 that increases the time period within which an abortion may be carried out.
- The Bill was passed in Lok Sabha in March 2020.

#### About the Bill

- The Bill **allows abortion up to 24 weeks of gestational age** for vulnerable categories of women and there is no limit of gestational age in case of pregnancies with substantial foetal abnormalities, diagnosed by a medical board.
- The Bill proposes **constitution of a Medical Board** in every State and UT, which will decide on pregnancies beyond 24 weeks in cases of foetal abnormalities.
- Each board will have **one gynaecologist, one radiologist or sonologist, one paediatrician, and other members prescribed by the State/UT government**.
- Currently, abortion requires the **opinion of one doctor** if it is done within 12 weeks of conception, and **two doctors** if it is done between 12 and 20 weeks.
- The Bill allows abortion to be done on the **advice of one doctor up to 20 weeks, and two doctors** in the case of certain categories of women between **20 and 24 weeks**.
- For a pregnancy to be terminated **after 24 weeks** in case of substantial foetal abnormalities, the **opinion of the State-level medical board is essential**.

#### Criticisms

- Opposition MPs pointed out that the Bill **still does not give women the freedom to decide**, since she will need a nod from a medical board in the case of pregnancies beyond 24 weeks.
- The Opposition's demand to send the Bill to a **Parliamentary Select Committee** for detailed scrutiny was defeated by a voice vote.

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# ENVIRONMENT

## 1) Lights Out Philly initiative

### Why in the news?

- **Bird Safe Philly partnership** has announced the Lights Out Philly initiative, a voluntary program in which as many external and internal lights in buildings of Philadelphia (largest city in the U.S. state of Pennsylvania) are turned off or dimmed at night during the spring and fall.
- Property managers and tenants are asked to voluntarily switch off lights between midnight and 6 a.m.
- The program runs from April 1 through May 31 and from August 15 to November 15.

### Why this initiative?

- This initiative is done to prevent millions of migrating birds that pass through twice a year from slamming into skyscrapers and crashing to the sidewalk.
- Birds navigate during migration using celestial cues and when they cannot see stars on a cloudy night they get confused by bright city lights. Windows pose a problem because birds might see a reflection of trees or the sky.
- Scientists estimate between **365 million and one billion birds** are killed by collisions with buildings or other outdoor structures in **the U.S. every year** and those crashes are taking a toll on some species.

### How will it be useful?

- Among the hundreds of birds dying, there are some of the bird species which are on the verge of extinction like the ovenbird and the black-throated blue warbler . Hence, this initiative will help them to protect these species.
- It has the added benefit of reducing energy consumption, potentially slowing climate change.

## 2) Great Indian Bustard

### About

- Great Indian Bustard (GIB) is one of the heaviest flying birds endemic to the Indian subcontinent.

- IUCN Status : **Critically Endangered.** Listed in **Schedule I** of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and in **Appendix I** of CITES.
- The majority of the surviving birds live in fragmented grasslands of **Rajasthan and Gujarat**, along with a few individuals in **Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.**
- GIB is nearing extinction due to collision with high voltage power lines that criss - cross their flying path, according to a report by the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**, a statutory body under the MoEFCC.
- It is the state bird of Rajasthan state and it was also mascot for **13th COP of Convention for Migratory Species** held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat in 2020.
- The only opportunity to potentially recover this species remains in the **Thar landscape of Rajasthan**, where the birds are now limited to two extant populations – one inside Desert (National Park) Sanctuary near Jaisalmer, and the second population located in the grasslands and agricultural lands of Pokhran and Ramdeora.

### Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court is hearing a case regarding collision of GIB birds falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.
- When the Supreme Court asked about transforming the overhead power lines to underground lines, the Ministry of Power said that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.
- To know more about flight diverters visit (<https://officerspulse.com/pokhrans-firefly-bird-diverters-shine-to-save-the-great-indian-bustard/>)
- The alternative mechanism is to install **flight diverters**, but the Supreme Court has noticed that installation of flight diverters too are expensive to install,
- Finally the SC has stated that wherever there are high voltage power lines, they can use flight bird diverters even if the recurring costs are high. Wherever there

are overhead low voltage lines, these lines can be placed underground.

### 3) Indian common crow butterflies

#### About



- The Indian Common Crow Butterfly is a common butterfly found from South Asia to Australia.
- It is one of the most common migrating butterfly species. Males and females in equal proportions have been seen to migrate.
- This species can be found in a wide variety of lowland habitats including tropical rainforest, dry woodland, Acacia scrub, beach hinterlands, parks and gardens.
- IUCN Status: **Least Concern**

#### Why in the news?

- Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh has observed **swarms (many butterflies/insects travelling at a time)** of Indian Common Crow Butterflies across the city.
- Butterflies usually migrate before the onset of South West monsoons from Western Ghats to the forests of Eastern Ghats plains to avoid torrential rains. They travel back before the onset of North East monsoons.
- But monsoon is far and butterfly swarms are seen in the month of March.
- Local Scientists say that this phenomenon may be due to population outburst of the butterflies or may be an indication of climate change.

### 4) Genetic profiling of swamp deer in Dudhwa planned

#### About Swamp Deer or Barasingha



- It is the **state animal of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh**.
- The swamp deer differs from all other Indian deer species in that the antlers carry more than three tines (spikes).
- Because of this distinctive character it is designated "**bārah-singgā**", meaning "twelve-horned".
- Swamp deer are already extinct in Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is now found only in **south- western Nepal and central and northeastern India**.
- There are **three subspecies** of swamp deer found in the Indian Subcontinent.
  - Western swamp deer (Rucervus duvaucelii) found in Nepal,
  - Southern swamp deer (Rucervus duvaucelii branderi) found in central and north India and
  - Eastern swamp deer (Rucervus duvaucelii ranjitsinhi) found in the Kaziranga and Dudhwa National Parks.
- With their numbers estimated at over 3,000, **Dudhwa National Park** has the largest number of barasingha in the country. They are also found in significant numbers in **Kanha National Park** in Madhya Pradesh.
- IUCN Status: **Vulnerable**, Protected Under WPA 1972 - **Schedule I** and CITES **Appendix I**.
- The swamp deer populations outside protected areas and seasonally migrating populations are threatened by poaching for antlers and meat, which are sold in local markets.
- Swamp deer lost most of its former range because wetlands were converted and used for agriculture so that suitable habitat was reduced to small and isolated fragments

#### Dudhwa National Park



- Dudhwa National Park or the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve lie adjacent to the **Indo-Nepal border** in **Uttar Pradesh**.
- It comprises **Kishanpur and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuaries** which represent the excellent natural forests and greenery along the **Terai region**.
- The area of the park is composed of a vast alluvial plain along the tributaries of **Mohana and Suheli**, interspersed with numerous rivulets, lakes and pools.
- The park has some of the **best forests of 'Sal' trees** in the world.
- It is also famous for its Swamp deers and Tiger population.

#### What is Genetic Profiling?

- DNA/Genetic profiling is the process where a specific DNA pattern, called a profile, is obtained from a person or sample of bodily tissue.

#### Why in the news?

- Genetic profiling of swamp deer in Dudhwa National Park is being done.
- Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is studying the swamp deers in Gangetic Rivers and of **Kali River Basin** (River Between Indo-Nepalese Border, it is also called **Sharda river**).

- Barasingha found in the Gangetic and Sharda basins would be compared to find out the genetic differences between them.
- It will also try to find out about the genetic health of Barasinghas.

### 5) India's blue revolution needs more marine protected areas, says new research

#### What is the Marine Protected Area?

- A marine protected area (MPA) is essentially a space in the ocean where **human activities are more strictly regulated than the surrounding waters** - similar to national parks we have on land.
- These places are given special protections for natural or historic marine resources by local, state, territorial, native, regional, or national authorities.

#### What is an Exclusive Economic Zone?

- An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a concept adopted at the **Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (1982)**, whereby a coastal State assumes jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of marine resources in its adjacent section of the continental shelf,

taken to be a **band extending 200 miles (upto 321 kms) from the shore.**

#### “30 by 30” target

- 30X30 is a call to action to **safeguard at least 30% of the world’s ocean by 2030** through a network of highly protected marine areas where no destructive or extractive activities like Fishing or mining can take place.

#### Why in the news?

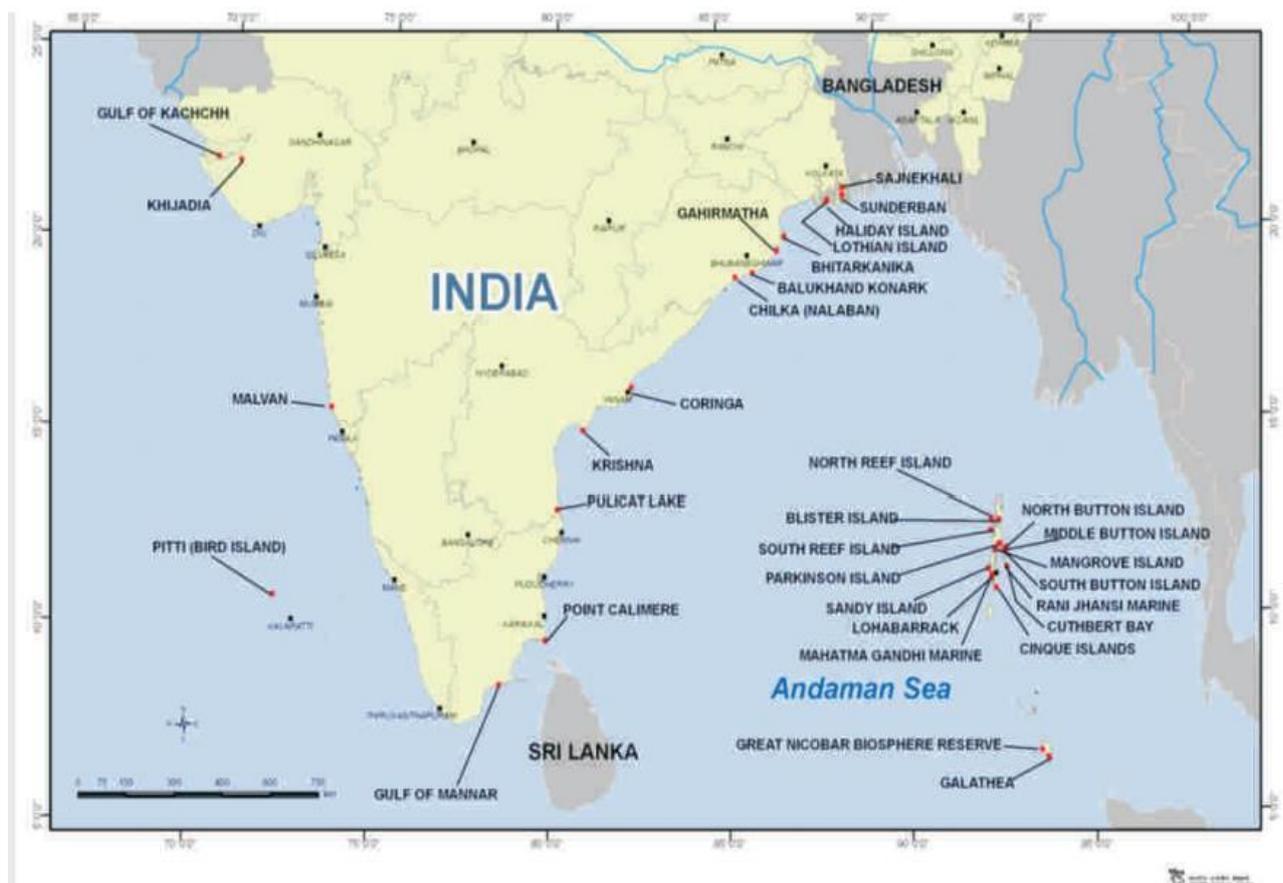
- A group of scientists have published a paper in journal *Nature*, stating that declaring parts of Exclusive Economic zones as Marine Protected Areas **can boost fisheries yield, protect the ocean’s capacity to capture carbon and boost biodiversity.**
- It is one of the important documents which is to serve as a reference point for the adoption of the 30x30 target in the

upcoming UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China, later this year.

- They stress the need for greater international cooperation to extend the boundaries of protection through MPAs.
- Although 7% of the world’s oceans are designated as MPAs currently, in practice, only 2.7% of MPAs are enjoying full or high levels of protection.

#### MPAs and food extraction

- Usually countries lower the standards of MPAs by reducing the protection with a thought that protected areas prevent extraction of food and materials.
- But scientists have found that expanding MPAs would actually produce overflow effects in other parts, which would raise the yield of food.
- If we strategically protect some of the oceanic area, we can boost our food stock upto 5.2 million metric tonnes.



#### How will MPAs help in protection of biodiversity?

- If we declare 43% of EEZs and 6% of the high seas of the world as MPAs, we can raise the protection of the endangered and

critically endangered marine species upto 82% and 87% respectively.

- Among the seas recommended for enhanced protection are Antarctica, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the Mascarene Plateau,

the Nazca Ridge and the Southwest Indian Ridge.

### MPAs and Carbon capture

- Currently **deep sea trawling and dredging** are the most frequent ways of fishing in the world.
- But the above activities destabilise the sediments containing organic carbon and leading to remineralisation of the sedimentary carbon into CO<sub>2</sub> and thereby **lead to acidification of the ocean**.
- The carbon released by above activities is equivalent to 15–20% of the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> absorbed by the ocean each year. This affects the absorption of carbon by the ocean and ultimately adds to global warming.
- The areas with the highest priority are found where carbon stocks and present threats from human activity are the highest.
- Creating MPAs would stop large-scale dredging up of the carbon-laden sediments, with potential to reduce emissions.

### India's case

- India ranks relatively low among Asiatic nations in terms of the fraction of EEZ in the top 10% of priority areas.
- That means that India would benefit relatively more than others for reaching global conservation objectives.
- India's bottom trawling for fisheries is thought to be responsible for annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the order of 28,83,128 tonnes. For comparison, it is 4,77,26,031 tonnes for Britain, and 76,92,94,185 tonnes for China.
- India is one of the top countries that will benefit greatly from fisheries reform and MPAs definitely can help improve fisheries in India. (figure denotes important MPAs of India)

## 6) Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees)

### KVIC

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programs for the development of Khadi and other village industries in the rural areas in coordination

with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.

- It is a **statutory body** which comes under the **Ministry of MSMEs**.



### Why in the news?

- To mitigate **human-elephant conflict** authorities of Kodagu district in Karnataka are using **Bee fences**.
- The bee boxes are set up in the passageways of human-elephant conflict zones to block the entrance of elephants to human habitations.
- The bee boxes are tied with strings and whenever the elephants attempt to pass through, a tug causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds and prevent them from progressing further.
- Presently the pilot project has been installed at the periphery of the forest and the villages with a belief that elephants are afraid of bees. These spots are located on the periphery of **Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve**, known conflict zones.
- This initiative has been led by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) under **Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees)**.

- Project RE-HAB is a sub-mission of KVIC's **National Honey Mission**.

- While the Honey Mission is a programme to increase the bee population, honey production and beekeepers' income by setting up apiaries, Project RE-HAB uses bee boxes as a fence to prevent the attack of elephants.

- The assessment of the pilot project will be done to take the project at a larger scale.

### What are the benefits?

- It dissuades elephants without causing any harm to them.
- It is extremely **cost-effective** as compared to various other measures such as digging trenches or erecting fences.

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# ECONOMY

## 1) No proposal to bring petrol, diesel, ATF, gas under GST

### What's in the news?

- Amid record-high fuel prices, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said there is no proposal as of now to bring crude oil, petrol, diesel, jet fuel (ATF) and natural gas under the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

### Rising prices

- When the GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, amalgamating over a dozen central and state levies, **five commodities - crude oil, natural gas, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF)** - were kept out of its purview given the revenue dependence of the central and state governments on this sector.
- This meant that the central government continued to levy **excise duty** on them while state governments charged **Value-added tax (VAT)**. These taxes have been raised periodically.
- While the taxes haven't come down, a spike in global oil prices on demand recovery has pushed petrol and diesel to an all-time high, leading to demand for them coming under the GST.

## 2) NPAs likely to rise in first half of 2021

### What is NPA?

- A non performing asset (NPA) is a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of **90 days**.
  - Banks classify NPAs further into Substandard, Doubtful and Loss assets.
- Substandard assets:** Assets which have remained NPA for a period less than or equal to 12 months.
  - Doubtful assets:** An asset would be classified as doubtful if it has remained in the substandard category for a period of 12 months.
  - Loss assets:** Loss asset is considered uncollectible and of such little value that its continuance as a bankable asset is not

warranted, although there may be some salvage or recovery value.

- With respect to agriculture, a loan granted for short duration crops will be treated as NPA, if the instalment of principal or interest thereon remains overdue for **two crop seasons**.
- A loan granted for long duration crops will be treated as NPA, if the instalment of principal or interest thereon remains overdue for **one crop season**.

### Why in News?

- A latest survey has shown that asset quality of banks, which saw some improvement in the second half of 2020, is likely to worsen during the first six months of 2021.
- The findings are part of the 12th round of bankers' survey carried out by FICCI-IBA between July and December 2020. The survey was conducted on 20 banks, including public sector, private sector and foreign banks.
- In the current round of the survey, **half of the respondent banks reported a decline in NPAs** during the second half of 2020. About 78% of participating state-run banks cited a reduction in NPA levels.
- However, in terms of outlook, **nearly 68% of respondent bankers expect the NPA levels to be above 10% in the first half of 2021**.

## 3) Development Financial Institution

### What's in the news?

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the introduction of a bill to set up a Development Financial Institution (DFI) to **finance long-term funds to infrastructure projects as well as for development needs** of the country.
- The government had announced the setting up of the DFI in the latest Union Budget and it hopes to introduce the bill during the current session of Parliament.

### About DFI

- The DFI will be set up with an **initial paid-up capital of Rs 20,000 crore**. Besides, the

government will give **Rs 5,000 crore as grant** to the institution.

- Through this, the government expects to raise up to Rs 3 lakh crore in the next few years.
- The government intends to use the **tax benefits** to enable the financial institution to raise funds from investors.

#### **DFI Board**

- The DFI will be **fully government-owned initially** and it will be **brought down to 26 per cent** in the next few years. At all times, the government will continue to hold 26 per cent in the entity.

- DFI would have a professional board with at least **50% non-official members**.

#### **Significance**

- As of December 2019, there were over 6,000 brownfield and greenfield projects requiring funding.
- Once the DFI comes into existence, the country will have an institution and institutional arrangement which will help in raising long-term funds.

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# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1) China's new election law

### Hong Kong and China relationship

- Hong Kong, a **former British colony**, was returned to the People's Republic of China in 1997 under a policy known as “**one country, two systems**,” which promised the territory a high degree of autonomy.
- As a **Special Administrative Region (SAR)**, Hong Kong allows freedoms not enjoyed in mainland China, including freedom to protest and an independent judiciary.
- Under the **Basic Law** — the Constitution that has governed Hong Kong since 1997 —

the SAR is a part of China but enjoys “**a high degree of autonomy**” and “executive, legislative and independent judicial power”, except in foreign policy and defence.

- It also says “the socialist system and policies shall not be practised” in Hong Kong for 50 years.
- But that autonomy, guaranteed under the Basic Law, **expires in 2047**. The Sino-British Joint Declaration does not state what will happen in 2047 after that agreement officially ends.

### Location



- Located on the southeast coast of China, Hong Kong's strategic location on the **Pearl River Delta** and **South China Sea** has made it one of the world's most thriving and cosmopolitan cities.

#### Why in News?

- The National People's Congress (NPC) of China, the ceremonial legislature in Beijing, has recently approved a decision to amend the Basic law, and the electoral system to ensure that people opposed to the Chinese Communist party and its rule over Hong Kong are **ineligible to sit in the city's parliament**.
- It will dilute the proportion of democratically elected lawmakers in Hong Kong.

#### Mounting Pressure

- Hong Kong's pro-democracy opposition groups have seen the change as another move that diminishes the space for dissent and erodes freedoms guaranteed previously under the terms of the 1997 handover.
- In recent times new laws and regulations in Hong Kong, including a draconian **national**

**security law** and a concerted campaign of protest-related prosecutions, have resulted in almost every significant voice of opposition being in jail, on trial or in exile overseas.

#### U.K.'s Response

- Responding to the sweeping changes in Hong Kong's electoral system, the U.K. said that **China is no longer compliant with Hong Kong's Joint Declaration**.
- The Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed before Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997 and was designed to allay fears about its future under Beijing's rule.
- Britain has been a strong critic of China's crackdown on pro-democracy campaigners in Hong Kong, and angered Beijing by announcing a visa scheme offering millions of its residents a pathway to U.K.'s citizenship.

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# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1) Martian Blueberries

### What are they?

- In 2004, NASA's Mars exploration rover 'Opportunity' found several small spheres on Mars, informally named **Martian blueberries**.
- Opportunity's mini spectrometers studied the mineralogy and noted they were made of **iron oxide** compounds called **haematites**. The presence of haematites suggests that there was **water present on Mars**.
- A **spectrometer** measures the wavelength and frequency of light, and allows us to identify and analyse the atoms in a sample we place within it.
- Haematite is known to form in oxidising environments, and based on experience on Earth, scientists infer that water must have also played a crucial role in the formation of grey haematite on Mars
- **Similar haematite concretions** have been found in **Kutch**, Gujarat. These have been called the **Jhuran formation**.
- Researchers have been studying the Jhuran formation in Gujarat which is between 145 and 201 million years old. Detailed geochemistry and spectroscopic investigations of the haematite concretions in this area revealed that they **resemble the ones on Mars**.

### How to use the arid region of Kutch for science?

- Several researches have shown that the **Kutch** area is a **potential Martian analogue** locality. It has been also argued that the transformation from the wet and humid to dry and arid environment on Mars is mimicked by the history of Kutch.
- There may be several localities in Kutch that share a geologic history of the surface to near-surface processes that appear to be similar to ancient Mars.
- The concretions in the Jhuran Formation of Kutch represent another data point that reinforces the need to use the Kutch area **for further analogue studies** of the Martian surface.

- The **Kutch** area could also be a **potential testing site** for carrying out future Mars exploration studies on Earth.

### Why in News?

- The results of the studies on the Jhuran formations were published in Planetary and Space Science.

## 2) Power transmission cables

### Why in News:

- Researchers at IIT Madras have demonstrated that by using Raman thermometry on fibre optic cables, they can achieve monitoring of power transmission cables.

### Raman Thermometry

- **India's first** and so far **only Nobel laureate in physics, C.V. Raman** won the prize for his discovery of **Raman effect**.
- In the Raman effect, **when light is scattered** off an object, **two bands** are observed, with **higher and lower frequency** than the original light, called the **Stokes and anti-Stokes bands**, respectively.
- By **studying the relative intensity** of the two bands, it is **possible to estimate the temperature of the object** that scattered the light.

### What the researchers found?

- They achieve this by **using the optical fibres** that are already embedded in the power cables for establishing optical communication.
- **Optical fibres** are traditionally incorporated in cables and **buried underground**. This could cost up to 80% of the total expense in setting up the communication system.
- One or two of the **unused fibres** could be used – owing to their proximity to the power cables – **to keep tabs on the health** of the power cables. This is **based on** the principle that **any current flowing** through a **conductor** would **cause a temperature rise** due to the **Joule heating effect**.

- *Joule heating is the physical effect by which the pass of current through an electrical conductor produces thermal energy.*

#### How they do it

- **Temperature measurement** is performed in not just one location, but in a distributed manner using an optical fibre.
- To achieve this, a **pulse of light is launched** into the optical fibre and the **backscattered radiation is observed**. The **time of flight** of the backscattered radiation provides an **estimate of the distance** from which the light is backscattered. This constitutes a distributed measurement as the pulse propagates all along the length of fibre.
- This technique is married to **Raman thermometry** to get the results for actual measurements over tens of kilometres.
- The method devised by the team is both **economical and provides real-time information**.

### 3) Primordial Lightning

#### Why in News?

- A recent study has revealed that lightning strikes during the first billion years after the planet's formation roughly 4.5 billion years ago may have **freed up phosphorus** required for the formation of biomolecules essential to life and the emergence of the Earth's first living organisms billions of years ago may have been facilitated by them.

#### What the researchers found?

- The study may offer insight into the origins of **Earth's earliest microbial life** - and potential extraterrestrial life on similar rocky planets. Among the ingredients considered necessary for life are water, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, sulfur and phosphorus, along with an energy source.
- **Phosphorus** makes up the **phosphate**, the **backbone of DNA and RNA**, hereditary material in living organisms, and represents an important component of cell membranes.
- On **early Earth**, this **chemical element** was **locked** inside **insoluble minerals**. Until now, it was **widely thought** that **meteorites** that bombarded early Earth

were primarily **responsible** for the presence of **bioavailable phosphorus**. Some **meteorites** contain the phosphorus mineral called **schreibersite**, which is soluble in water, where life is thought to have formed.

- **When** a bolt of **lightning strikes** the ground, it can **create** glassy rocks called **fulgurites** by **superheating** and sometimes vaporizing **surface rock**, **freeing phosphorus** locked inside. As a result, these fulgurites can contain schreibersite.

### 4) Blackholes

#### Why in News?

- Astronomers have spotted a supermassive black hole (SMBH) moving on its own.

#### What is a blackhole?

- **Albert Einstein** first predicted the **existence** of black holes in 1916, with his general **theory of relativity**. The term "black hole" was coined many years later in 1967 by American astronomer John Wheeler.
- A **black hole** is a place in space where **gravity pulls so much** that even light can not get out. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a **star is dying**.
- Because no light can get out, people can't see black holes. They are invisible. Space telescopes with special tools can help find black holes.
- A **supermassive black hole** is the largest type of black hole, with mass on the order of **millions to billions** of times the **mass of the Sun**.

#### What have astronomers found recently?

- The **SMBH** is **moving** with a **velocity** different from that of its surrounding galaxy.
- This is surprising because **supermassive black holes usually are not expected to move** with respect to the galaxies in whose centres they reside, according to what is known about them so far. Supermassive black holes have masses millions of times the solar mass and inhabit the centres of galaxies. The one at the centre of the Milky Way is named **Sagittarius A\***.

- Located at the centre of a galaxy named J0437+2456, **this supermassive black hole**, with a mass about three million times that of our Sun, is **moving** at a high speed.
- One of the possibilities is that this SMBH has just been created from the collision of two SMBHs, because in such cases the newborn black hole suffers a **recoil**, which might be what is being observed here. The other possibility is that this black hole may be a part of a **binary black hole system** – which has not been observed so far.

#### Will the sun become a blackhole?

- The **Sun** would **need** to be about **20 times more massive** to end its life as a black hole. In some 6 billion years **it will end up as a white dwarf** — a small, dense remnant of a star that glows from leftover heat. The process will start about 5 billion years from now when the Sun begins to run out of fuel.
- Sun will start to run out of hydrogen in its core to fuse, and it will begin to collapse. This will let the Sun start to fuse heavier elements in the core, along with fusing hydrogen in a shell wrapped around the core. When this happens, the Sun's temperature will increase, and the outer layers of the Sun's atmosphere will expand so far out into space that they'll engulf Earth.
- **Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar**, an eminent Indian scientist **proved** that there was an **upper limit** to the mass of a **white dwarf**. This limit, known as the **Chandra limit**, showed that stars more massive than the Sun would explode or form black holes as they died.

- In 1983, Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar was awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physics** for his work on the physical processes involved in the structure and evolution of stars.

## 5) Embryos

### What are embryos?

- An **embryo** is the **early stage** of development of a **multicellular organism**.
- In general, in organisms that reproduce **sexually, embryonic development** is the part of the **life cycle** that **begins** just after fertilization and continues through the formation of body structures, such as tissues and organs.

### Why in News?

- For the first time, scientists have used human cells to make structures that mimic the earliest stages of development, which they say will pave the way for more research without running afoul of restrictions on using real embryos.

### About the research

- Scientists used embryonic stem cells and reprogrammed skin cells to produce balls of cells that resemble one of the earliest stages of human development.
- These balls, called **blastocysts**, form a few days after an egg has been fertilised but before the cells attach to the uterus to become an embryo.
- Scientists previously generated similar structures of mouse cells in a lab, but this is the first time they have been made from human cells.

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## ART & CULTURE

### 1) Sankalp Art Village (SAV)

#### What is SAV?

- Located in Andhra Pradesh, Sankalp Art Village is a production centre of **handloom**, naturally **dyed yarns**, **wooden toys** and **utility products**, the village is a self-sustainable unit that supports villagers.
- The founders of the art village, have been managing the units and encouraging the **concept of eco-friendly lifestyles**.
- The game-changer in the **sustainable products segment** has been the increasing preference for schools supporting alternative learning methodologies like **Montessori and Waldorf** which stresses on wooden toys.

#### Why is the concept of SAV needed?

- **Mahatma Gandhi** believed in a **self-sufficient village economy**. He wanted villages to develop their economies to meet the basic requirements of the villagers and

whatever things cannot be produced should be obtained in exchange of surplus products produced in villages.

- **DPSP- Article 43-** Promote cottage industries on an individual or co-operation basis in rural areas.
- Natural products are **better for the environment**
- It will help in **improving the village economy** and produce more **employment opportunities**. It will also improve the Indian economy through **import substitution**.
- Keeps the **artistic** and **cultural** aspects **alive**.

#### Why in News?

- Sankalp Art Village creates a platform for artisans to improve their designs and cater to modern needs.

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## *PIB ANALYSIS*

### 1) Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana

#### About the scheme

- The Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) was **launched in 2015** by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.
- It is an **extended component of Soil Health Management (SHM) under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)**.
- PKVY aims at **supporting and promoting organic farming**, in turn resulting in improvement of soil health.

#### Objective

- The objective is to **produce agricultural products free from chemicals and pesticides** residues by adopting eco-friendly, low- cost technologies.
- Key Thrust areas of PKVY in promoting organic farming include the following:
  1. Promote organic farming among rural youth/ farmers/ consumers/ traders
  2. Disseminate latest technologies in organic farming
  3. Utilize the services of experts from public agricultural research system in India
  4. Organize a minimum of one cluster demonstration in a village

#### Programme implementation

- Under PKVY, farmers are provided **financial assistance of Rs 50,000 per hectare/ 3 years** is given, out of which Rs. 31,000 (61%) is provided directly through DBT for inputs bio fertilisers, bio-pesticides, organic manure, compost, vermi-compost, botanical extracts etc.
- Organic farming will be promoted by using traditional resources and the organic products will be linked with the market.
- It will **increase domestic production** and certification of organic produce by involving farmers.

#### Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in Lok Sabha recently.

### 2) Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD-NER)

#### About the scheme

- **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD-NER)** is a Central Sector Scheme, a sub-mission under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), launched by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.
- It is implemented in the states of **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura**.
- The scheme aims to develop **certified organic production in a value chain mode** to link growers with consumers and to support the development of the entire value chain starting from inputs, seeds, certification, to the creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing and brand building initiative.
- Farmers are given assistance of **Rs 25000/ha/3 years** for organic inputs including organic manure and bio-fertilizers etc. for NE States under the scheme.

#### Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in Lok Sabha recently.

### 3) Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, of 2013

#### About the Act

- In 2013, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed **broadening the Vishaka guidelines**.
- The Act mandates that **every organisation with 10 or more employees set up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** at each office or branch.

- Similarly, the Appropriate Government is authorized to constitute **Local Committee (LC)** in every district to receive complaints from organizations having less than ten workers or if the complaint is against the employer himself.
- It lays down procedures and defines various aspects of sexual harassment, including aggrieved victim — a woman “of any age whether employed or not”, who “alleges to have been subjected to any act of sexual harassment”, which means the **rights of all women working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity, are protected under the Act.**

#### What were the Vishaka guidelines?

- These were laid down by the **Supreme Court in a judgment in 1997**. This was a case filed by women’s rights groups, one of which was Vishaka. They had filed a public interest litigation over the alleged gang-rape of Bhanwari Devi, a social worker from Rajasthan. In 1992, she had prevented the marriage of a one-year-old girl, leading to the alleged gang-rape in an act of revenge.

#### What do these guidelines say?

- Legally binding, these defined sexual harassment and imposed three key obligations on institutions — **prohibition, prevention, redressal**. The Supreme Court directed that they establish a Complaints Committee, which would look into matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

#### Definition of Sexual Harrasment:

- According to the Act, Sexual harassment includes “any one or more” of the following “unwelcome acts or behaviour” committed directly or by implication:
  1. Physical contact and advances
  2. A demand or request for sexual favours
  3. Sexually coloured remarks
  4. Showing pornography
  5. Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

#### Definition of Workplace

- The Act defines the workplace as “any place visited by the employee arising out of or during the course of employment, including transportation provided by the employer for undertaking such a journey.”

- As per this definition, a workplace covers **both the organised and unorganised sectors**.
- It also includes all workplaces whether owned by Indian or foreign companies having a place of work in India.

#### Women covered under the Act

- The Act recognizes the **right of every woman to a safe and secure workplace** environment irrespective of her age or employment/work status. Hence, the right of all women working or visiting any workplace whether in the capacity of regular, temporary, adhoc, or daily wages basis is protected under the Act.
- It includes all women whether engaged directly or through an agent including a contractor, with or without the knowledge of the principal employer. They may be working for remuneration, on a voluntary basis or otherwise.
- Their terms of employment can be express or implied.
- Further, she could be a co-worker, a contract worker, probationer, trainee, apprentice, or called by any other such name.
- The **Act also covers a woman, who is working in a dwelling place or house.**
- **Is there a time-frame within which the complaint has to be made?**
- The Act states the complaint of sexual harassment has to be made “**within three months from the date of the incident**”.
- For a series of incidents, it has to be made within three months from the date of the last incident. However, **this is not rigid**.
- The ICC can “extend the time limit” if it is satisfied that the circumstances were such which prevented the woman from filing a complaint within the said period.

#### Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development Smriti Zubin Irani, in the Rajya Sabha recently.

## 4) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan-Dhan Yojana

#### About the Scheme

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana is a **pension scheme** which offers a

**guaranteed income to farmers in their old age.**

- Launched in 2019, it is a **Central Sector Scheme** under the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.
- It is voluntary and contributory in nature and it entitles beneficiary a **monthly pension of Rs 3,000 on attaining the age of 60 years**.
- **Eligibility:** The scheme is open to small and marginal farmers **owning less than two ha land in the age group of 18-40 years**.
- Farmers will have to make a monthly contribution between **Rs 55 and Rs 200**, depending on the age of entry. The Centre will contribute the same amount that the farmer pays.
- The pension fund will be managed by the **Life Insurance Corporation of India**.
- Farmers, who are beneficiaries of the **PM-Kisan Scheme**, will have the option to allow their contribution be debited from the benefit of that Scheme directly.
- **Note:** While PM KISAN scheme, which provides an income support of Rs.6000/- per year, is open to all farmers irrespective of land holdings, PM Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana is for farmers owning less than **two** ha land.

#### Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar in Lok Sabha recently.

## 5) Deep ocean mission

### About Deep Ocean Mission

- The Deep Ocean Mission is proposed as a **multi-ministerial multi-disciplinary programme** with emphasis on development of deep sea technology, exploration of deep sea mineral resources and biodiversity, acquisition of a research vessel for exploration, deep sea observations, and capacity building.
- The **Ministry of Earth Sciences** is the **nodal agency** for implementing the programme.
- The Deep Ocean Mission is proposed to be a **Central Sector Scheme** and no separate allocation for States is envisaged.

- Deep Ocean Mission aims to boost **India's Sea Exploration Capabilities**.

### Objectives of the mission

1. The major objectives proposed under Deep Ocean Mission are as follows:
2. Development of technologies for deep sea mining, underwater vehicles and underwater robotics;
3. Development of ocean climate change advisory services;
4. Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep sea biodiversity;
5. Deep ocean survey and exploration;
6. Proof of concept studies on energy and freshwater from the ocean; and
7. Establishing advanced marine station for ocean biology

### Significance of the Mission:

- The 'Deep Ocean Mission' plan will enable India to develop capabilities to exploit resources in the **Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB)**.
- India has been allotted 75,000 square kilometres in the CIOB by the **UN International SeaBed Authority** for exploration of poly-metallic nodules. CIOB reserves contain deposits of metals like iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt. It is envisaged that 10 % of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years.
- **Poly-metallic nodules** are potato-shaped, largely porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea. These are also known as manganese nodules.

### UN International SeaBed Authority

- International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an international organization established in 1994 to regulate mining and related activities in the international seabed beyond national jurisdiction, an area that includes most of the world's oceans.
- The ISA came into existence upon the entry into force of the **1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, which codified international law regarding territorial waters, sea-lanes, and ocean resources.
- It has more than 150 member states including **India**.

## 6) DigiLocker

### About Digilocker

- DigiLocker is a key initiative under **Digital India**, the Indian Government's flagship program aimed at transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.
- DigiLocker ties into Digital India's vision of providing citizens a **shareable private space on a public cloud and making all documents / certificates available on this cloud**.
- **The platform has the following benefits:**
- Citizens can access their digital documents anytime, anywhere and share it online. This is convenient and time saving.
- It reduces the administrative overhead of Government departments by minimizing the use of paper.
- Digital Locker makes it easier to validate the authenticity of documents as they are issued directly by the registered issuers.
- Self-uploaded documents can be digitally signed using the eSign facility (which is similar to the process of self-attestation).

### Why in the news?

- Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' announced that in order to ensure hassle free access to verified **Online Teacher Pupil Registration Management System (OTPRMS) Certificates**, the Ministry of Education has decided to link the certificates with **DigiLocker**.
- The issued certificates will automatically be transferred to DigiLocker and the same may be traced at the website of National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).

## 7) Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

### About CDRI

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), at the **Climate Action Summit 2019 in New York**.
- The CDRI is an international partnership that will support countries- developed and developing- **to build climate and disaster resilient infrastructure**.

- The Coalition's secretariat is supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and will be based in **Delhi**.
- CDRI will provide member countries technical support and capacity development, research and knowledge management, and advocacy and partnerships to facilitate and encourage investment in disaster resilient infrastructure systems.

### Significance of CDRI

- The CDRI will serve as a platform where knowledge is generated and exchanged on different aspects of disaster and climate resilience of infrastructure.
- It will bring together technical expertise from a multitude of stakeholders that will create a mechanism to assist countries to upgrade their capacities and practices, with regard to infrastructure development in accordance with their risk context and economic needs.
- Economically weaker sections of society, women and children, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and hence, will be benefited from the improvement of knowledge and practice in creating disaster resilient infrastructure.

### Why in the news?

- The third edition of the annual conference of the Coalition for Disaster resilient Infrastructure or CDRI has taken place recently.

## 8) Nirbhaya Fund

### About Nirbhaya Fund Framework

- Nirbhaya Fund is a dedicated fund set up by the government of India in 2013 which can be utilized for projects specifically designed to improve the safety and security of women.
- It is a **non-lapsable corpus fund** administered by the **Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF)** of the Government of India.
- It provides for an Empowered Committee (EC) of officers chaired by the Secretary, **Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD) to appraise and recommend proposals** to be funded under this framework.

- It also provides for the concerned Ministry/ Department to seek approval of the designated competent financial authority, as well as of the DEA for funding of such proposals under the Nirbhaya Framework.
- As per this framework, the **MoF through DEA is the nodal Ministry** for any accretion into and withdrawal from the corpus, and the **MWCD is responsible to review and monitor** the progress of sanctioned projects/ schemes in conjunction with the concerned Central Ministries/ Departments.
- Budget allocations against approved projects are made in the budget of the respective Ministries/ Departments

through **Demands or Supplementary Demands for Grants.**

- The **salient features of Nirbhaya Fund** like project contours, procedure for submitting proposals, procedure for processing proposals, funding pattern etc. is indicated in the framework.
- **Funding to Non-Governmental Organisations is not envisaged under the framework.**

#### **Why in the news?**

- The Minister of Women and Child Development Smriti Zubin Irani, in the Lok Sabha recently, gave this information.

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# News in Depth

## AIR NEWS

### 1) Milan Anti-Tank Guided Missile

#### About the Missile



- The Milan-2T is a Tandem Warhead Anti-Tank Guided Missile with a **range of one thousand 850 metres**.
- These missiles can be fired from **ground as well as vehicle-based launchers**.
- They can be deployed in Anti-Tank Role for both offensive and defensive tasks.

- It is produced by **Bharat Dynamics Limited** under license from MBDA Missile Systems, France.

#### Why in News?

- The Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with Bharat Dynamics Limited for supply of four thousand 960 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles to Indian Army.
- The Defence Public Sector Undertaking will supply the missiles at a cost of one thousand 188 crore rupees.
- The induction is planned to be completed in three years which will enhance the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces.
- This project will further boost the '**Make in India**' initiative of the Government.

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## THE HINDU EDITORIALS

### 1) Forestalling a cyber Pearl Harbour

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

#### NEWS

- Since early 2020, there has been an observation of a large increase in suspected targeted intrusion activity against Indian organisations from Chinese state-sponsored groups' concentrating on infrastructure targets, including the power sector and ports, then India needs to be on its guard.

#### BACKGROUND

- According to the revelations by the U.S.-based cyber security firm, Recorded Future, in the lead up to the India-China border clashes there was an **increase in malware attacks targeting the Indian government, defence organisations and the public sector.**
- Coinciding with Chinese incursions in Eastern Ladakh, certain **Indian power facilities** had been targets of a cyber attack.
- Also, there is evidence of ongoing intrusions, though the intensity of the activity appeared to have ceased by mid-February 2021.

#### BLACKOUT IN MUMBAI

- In the wake of these disclosures, a controversy has erupted: Whether the October 2020 blackout in Mumbai was directly linked to this cyber attack?
- The State authorities in Maharashtra attributed the blackout to the attack by the Chinese cyber group, but the authorities in Delhi blamed it on human error.

#### WAKE UP CALL

- The reported events are a wake-up call for India, and it would be a **grievous error if India were to underestimate the extent of the cyber threat posed to it by China.**
- China's intention evidently is to keep India in thrall, while outwardly demonstrating a conciliatory posture, such as vacating some

of the areas in Eastern Ladakh that it had occupied post April 2020.

- The real concern is that key infrastructure facilities, such as the power sector, are now in the crosshairs of a hostile China, which appeared intent on deploying cyber weapons to target India.
- At least 10 Indian distinct power sector organisations are said to have been targeted, in addition to two Indian ports, employing the malware known as **ShadowPad.**

#### SHADOWPAD

- ShadowPad is a network intrusion malware affiliated to both the Chinese Ministry of State Security and the People's Liberation Army.
- ShadowPad is depicted as a **back-door 'Trojan' malware** which creates a secret path from a targeted system to a command and control server to extract information.

#### CHINESE CYBER ESPIONAGE SETS NO LIMITS

- Across the world, Beijing does appear to be engaged in a major cyber offensive, directed not only against countries like India but against many advanced nations as well.
- In attempting this, China is exploiting many vulnerabilities that software companies (essentially those in the West) have deliberately left open (for offensive purposes at an opportune time).
- Chinese cyber espionage sets no limitations on targets, including targeting of vaccine research, gaining future access to corporate networks, and seeking sensitive information relating to COVID-19 vaccine distribution.
- Very recently in 2021, several thousands of U.S. organisations were hacked by the Chinese group, Hafnium in an unusually aggressive espionage campaign. Till the breach was discovered, thousands of Microsoft servers were compromised.

#### CYBER WARFARE BY OTHERS

- Other than China, many other countries, including the U.S. and Russia, do engage in the same kind of cyber warfare.

- However, western countries are also engaged in cyber espionage but **little is publicized**.
- The U.S. has extensively published Russia's cyber antics from time to time. Best known are-
  1. Russia's cyber interference in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016.
  2. Russia is currently the prime suspect in one of the greatest data breaches concerning the U.S. Federal government, involving the Departments of Defence, Energy, State, Homeland Security, Treasury, etc.

#### SHARPENING ATTACKS

- In present, we are witnessing only the tip of the iceberg at present and most nations are truly **unaware of the extent to which breaches are taking place**.
- This was well demonstrated way back in 2016, when a major attack on Ukraine's power grid took place and set an ominous precedent in this respect. Skilled cyber security professionals, who had planned their assaults over many months, conducting a very sophisticated operation, carried out the attacks.
- The Ukraine example should be a wake-up call for India and the world, as in the intervening five years, the sophistication of cyber attacks and the kind of malware available have become more advanced.

#### WAY FORWARD

- There are no readymade solutions to counter the cyber offensive emanating from different quarters. **No nation can hope, or can claim, to be insulated from such attacks.**
- Nations should beware and be warned about how cyber attacks can bring a nation to its knees.
- The U.S. seemed to fully wake up to the cyber threat only in 2017 when U.S. security tools were hacked, having preferred for long to indulge in a kind of 'active defence' by seeking to hack enemy networks.
- U.S. President Joe Biden is now understood to have included a sum of over \$10 billion for cyber security in his COVID-19 Relief Bill, which is clearly intended to improve U.S. 'readiness and resilience in cyber space'.
- Drawing up a comprehensive cyber strategy, one that fully acknowledges the

extent of the cyber threat is an imperative and immediate necessity.

#### PART OF BEIJING'S WORLD VIEW

- From an Indian perspective, the **Chinese cyber threat could prove to be truly daunting**. The reasons for this are many.
- China's analysis of the state of current relations between China and India is that they remain antagonistic towards India growing proximity to the U.S.
- China has forged a firm nexus between authoritarianism, global ambitions and technology, and is determined to transform the global order to advance its interests.
- 'Cyber' could well be one of China's main threat vectors employed against countries that do not fall in line with China's world view.
- China's 2021 Defence Budget (amounting to \$209 billion) gives special weightage to the **Strategic Support Force (SSF)**, which embraces cyber warfare.
- **If indeed the future is digital, and if China has indeed embarked on an all-out offensive of this nature, India needs to adopt comprehensive measures to forestall a potential 'Cyber Pearl Harbour', as far as India is concerned.**

## 2) The job crunch and the growing fires of nativism

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

#### CONTEXT

- The Haryana government has recently passed legislation that mandates companies in Haryana to provide jobs to local Haryanvis first, before hiring people from outside the State.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT STATUS OF HARYANA

- As per data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, or CMIE- the **unemployment rate in Haryana is the highest of all States in India.**
- A whopping 80% of women in Haryana who want to work cannot find a job.
- More than half of all graduates in Haryana are jobless.
- The jobs situation in Haryana is staggeringly dismal.

### PROBABLE REASON BEHIND SUCH LAW

- Politically, **11 out of the 18 million voters of Haryana do not have a regular job.**
- World history warns us that when such a vast majority of adults are jobless, it inevitably leads to **social revolutions and political upheavals.**
- Therefore, the democratically elected Haryana government panicked and chose to reserve the few available jobs for its own voters.
- Haryana is not alone in this quandary. The cabinet of the government of Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu have announced a similar proposal to reserve jobs for locals.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE BY STATES?

- **States need to 'Focus on creating more jobs, not on reserving the few available ones'.**
- When a company decides to expand its Indian operations, then the State governments can compete to lure it to their State and help create new jobs.
- It should provide the company abundant high quality skilled and unskilled labour, land at affordable prices, uninterrupted supply of electricity, water and other such 'ease of business' facilities for its expansion.
- Further, any tax advantages that a particular State can provide vis-à-vis others will increase its attractiveness for the company.
- Beyond all these, states need to provide the most critical factor in the choice of a location for a large business is the '**agglomeration effect**' — the ecosystem of supply chain, talent, good living conditions and so on.

### CHALLENGES

- In reality, in India a **poorer State can hardly compete against a richer State** to attract the interested company in its state. While in countries like America, States compete against each other vigorously using **tax concessions and land offers** to bring new jobs to their States.
- The availability of skilled local labour is a function of many decades of social progress of the State and cannot be retooled immediately.
- After the introduction of the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**, State governments in India have **lost their fiscal autonomy** and

have no powers to provide any tax concessions to businesses.

- A State with an already well-established network of suppliers, people, schools, etc. are at a greater advantage to attract even more businesses than the States that are left behind. This leads to a cycle of the more prosperous States growing even faster at the expense of the lagging States.

### IMPLICATIONS

#### The '333' danger:

- This phenomenon is evident in **India's increasing economic divergence among its States.**
- The '3-3-3' effect refers to — the three richest large States (Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) are three times richer than the three poorest large States (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), in per-capita income, compared to 1.4 times in 1970.
- This **gap between the richer and poorer States** in India is only **widening rapidly** and not narrowing, due to the agglomeration impact of modern economic development paradigms.

#### Subnationalism:

- In the absence of a level playing field and with no fiscal autonomy, it is **enormously difficult** for developing States in India to attract new investments and create new jobs.
- The potent combination of widening inter-State inequality, a '**rich States get richer**' **economic development model**, an impending demographic disaster and shrinking fiscal autonomy for elected State governments in a politically and culturally diverse democracy propagates nativistic sub-nationalism among the various States of India.
- **Until the economic playing fields for the various States are levelled and much greater fiscal freedom provided to the States, "don't protect but create jobs" will only remain a topic of a hollow lecture and moral sermons.**

## 3) A giant leap forward for the Quad

### GS - 2 Bilateral Groupings & Agreements CONTEXT

- The maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue summit of the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. on March 12 was a defining moment in Asian geopolitics.

#### WHAT IS QUAD?

- Quad is “a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated to advancing a common vision and to ensuring peace and prosperity”. It includes four countries namely – India, U.S.A, Australia and Japan.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEETING

- It was a meeting at the highest political level, occasioned a productive dialogue, and concluded with a substantive joint statement is indicative of its immediate significance.
- The summit showed that the “Quad has come of age”, as underlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- If the group successfully leads to tangible action and visible cooperation, it will impact the whole region.

#### JOURNEY OF CHANGE

- The Quad is no longer a loose coalition.
- The **Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004** triggered cooperation among the navies and governments of the Quad powers.
- Later they sought to forge diplomatic cooperation on regional issues in 2006-08, but gave up mainly because **China** objected to it and the hostility to China was not yet a potent enough glue.
- This began to change in **2017** when Beijing’s behaviour turned hostile, climaxing in multiple challenges in 2020, including its adventurism in eastern Ladakh.
- As a result the Foreign Ministers of the Quad met thrice between September 2019 and February 2021.

#### FIVE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MEETING

- This meet highlights a more sophisticated approach, with enhanced emphasis by the U.S. on carrying its allies and strategic partners together. This is evident from following five reasons:
- Unlike the past debates over differing visions of the Indo-Pacific, the joint statement struck a neat compromise. It refers to a “**free and open**” Indo-Pacific, which have been elaborated as – “**free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion**”.

- The summit leaders have secured an adequate alignment of their approaches towards China, even without mentioning the ‘C’ word in the document by reinforcing phrases like “**security challenges**” and “**the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas**” in the joint statement. Thus, the Quad members have preferred a **smart blend of competition, cooperation and confrontation**.
- The Quad has placed a premium on winning the battle for the hearts and minds of people in the Indo-Pacific region. The aim is to convince the nations of Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Indian Ocean region that the Quad is a benign grouping, committed to solutions for their development and well-being.
- The establishment of **three working groups on vaccine partnership; climate change; and critical and emerging technologies (such as telecom and biotechnology)** and their new standards, innovation and supply chains is a welcome step. The careful choice of themes reflects a deep understanding of the long-term challenge posed by China and has global implications.
- The leaders have agreed to meet in-person later this year, possibly at an international event within the region. Foreign ministers will gather at least once a year; other relevant officials, more often. Thus, will grow the habits of the Quad working together for a common vision and with agreed modalities for cooperation.

#### OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS

- The summit has been watched closely by the ASEAN capitals. A few of them may express cautious welcome.
- The Chinese see this meet in negative terms, targeting New Delhi in particular, such that a Chinese government mouthpiece has claimed India as “a negative asset of BRICS and SCO”.
- Among other issues discussed, the commitment to the “complete denuclearization” of North Korea as per the United Nations Security Council resolutions was reiterated – a reference to the importance of South Korea as a partner of the Quad.
- In Myanmar, Washington heed wise counsel from Asia. The call “to restore

democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience". It may help ASEAN in carrying forward its diplomatic initiative to promote reconciliation in Myanmar.

- **The summit and 'The Spirit of the Quad' have represented a giant leap forward. Now is the time to back political commitment with a strong mix of resolve, energy, stamina and the fresh ideas of stakeholders and experts outside of government to fulfil the promise of the Quad.**

#### 4) The limits of POCSO

##### GS - 2 Issues Related to Children; Government Policies & Interventions

###### NEWS

- A recent judgment by Madras High Court highlights the need to reconsider POCSO's absolutist approach to adolescent sexuality needs.

###### BACKGROUND

- Recently, a single bench of the Madras High Court allowed a petition seeking to quash a case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor.

###### PROVISIONS UNDER POCSO ACT

- Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape.
- A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs **within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others.**
- Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. **This means that any sex with a minor is rape.**

###### SEXUAL TENDENCIES OF ADOLESCENTS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY THE COURT

- The recent judgment echoes the arguments that child rights activists have been making for years: by ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, **POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution**

###### of young people in consenting sexual relations.

- The court reasoned that **adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum** because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during this time.
- The implication is that people within **this age group may be clubbed together notwithstanding the legal line drawn at 18.**
- Therefore the court observed the relationship of the minor 'victim' with the accused respondent as being a loving, rather than an abusive, one.
- The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was **purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest.**
- In making this observation, the court relied on the Statement of Objects and Reasons of POCSO, which states that the law was enacted pursuant to Article 15 of the Constitution, which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.

###### JUDGEMENT IGNORED ESTABLISHED PRECEDENT

- The judgement ignored the established precedent against quashing cases of rape, a heinous and serious offence, held by the Supreme Court to be a public concern, and not a private matter.

###### CONTRADICTORY VIEWS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

- The **Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha)** which considered the POCSO Bill, 2011 had, **criticised the clause providing for the possibility of consent** in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18.
- It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would **focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence**, instead of putting victims on trial as is often the case when the consent of the victim is in question.
- This would indicate that adolescent sexuality was not meant to be an exception to POCSO's bright-line approach.

### COMPLEXITY INVOLVED IN CONSENSUAL CASES

- The five State studies on the functioning of Special Courts under the POCSO Act, conducted by the Centre for Child and the Law, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, have demonstrated that these **de facto consensual cases are complicated**.
- While adolescents can and do choose to have sex, but it is a fact that they are still children, and their **nascent sexual autonomy is susceptible to abuse**.
- This contradiction created by the very nature of adolescence has led to inconsistent and unprincipled adjudication.
- The **absolute age line of POCSO has not prevented the insensitive assessment of minors' consent**.
- Instead, it has forced courts to choose between applying the law and doing justice, especially in cases where the minor victim has willingly eloped with, married the accused, or is carrying his child, for imprisoning him would only do her harm.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VERDICT

- Though the judgement was not in line with precedent, it was intuitively just.
- It highlighted the urgent need for a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people.
- Courts need to be able to strike a balance between the limited but developing capacity of adolescents to consent to sexual interaction and their vulnerability to being groomed, abused, and exploited.
- **The legislature must provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address, so that valid conclusions may be drawn about what is the intent of the law, and what is clearly outside its purpose.**

## 5) Responsible AI — the need for ethical guard rails

GS-3 Science and Technology-developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

### NEWS

- Without adequate safeguards, AI can widen social and economic schisms, leading to discriminatory outcomes.

### AI'S EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

- AI is embedded in the recommendations we get on our favourite streaming or shopping site; in GPS mapping technology; in the predictive text that completes our sentences when we try to send an email or complete a web search etc.
- The more we use AI, the more data we generate, the smarter it gets.
- In just the one decade, it has evolved with unprecedented velocity.
- Automation, big data and algorithms will continue to sweep into new corners of our lives.
- Just as electricity allowed us to tame time, enabling us to radically alter virtually every aspect of existence, **AI can leapfrog us toward eradicating hunger, poverty and disease**.
- It is capable of opening us to unimaginable pathways for climate change mitigation, education and scientific discovery.

### POSITIVE TRANSFORMATIONS BY AI

- Already, AI has helped **increase crop yields, raised business productivity, improved access to credit and made cancer detection faster and more precise**.
- It could contribute more than **\$15 trillion to the world economy by 2030, adding 14% to global GDP**.
- **Google** has identified over 2,600 use cases of "AI for good" worldwide.
- A study reviewing the impact of AI on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finds that **AI may act as an enabler on 79% of all SDG targets**.

### RELATED CONCERNS

- The study also finds that **AI can actively hinder 35% of SDG targets**.
- AI requires massive computational capacity, which means more power-hungry data centres resulting in a **big carbon footprint**.
- Also, AI could compound **digital exclusion**.
- Robotics and AI companies are building intelligent machines that **replace low-income workers**, such as self-service kiosks to replace cashiers, fruit-picking robots to replace field workers, etc. Possibly in coming days many desk jobs

will also be edged out by AI, such as accountants, financial traders and middle managers.

- Therefore, without clear policies on **reskilling workers**, the promise of new opportunities can **create serious new inequalities**.
- Investment is likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established, widening gaps among and within countries.

#### AI- DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

- Though AI has the potential to improve billions of lives, it can also replicate and exacerbate existing problems, and create new ones.
- For example, **AI facial recognition and surveillance technology discriminating against people of colour and minorities**. Or an AI-enhanced recruitment engine, based on existing workforce profiles, taught itself that **male candidates were preferable to female**.

#### PRIVACY CONCERNS

- AI also presents serious data **privacy concerns**.
- The algorithm's never-ending quest for data has led to our digital footprints being harvested and sold without our knowledge or informed consent.
- Today, it is no exaggeration to say that with all the discrete bytes of information floating about us online, the algorithms know us better than we know ourselves.
- They **can nudge our behaviour without our noticing**.
- Our level of addiction to our devices, the inability to resist looking at our phones, and the chilling case of **Cambridge Analytica** — in which such algorithms and big data were used to alter voting decisions — should serve as a potent warning of the individual and societal concerns resulting from current AI business models.

#### WAYFORWARD

- Without ethical guard rails, AI will widen social and economic schisms, amplifying any innate biases at an irreversible scale and rate and lead to discriminatory outcomes.
- It is neither enough nor is it fair to expect AI tech companies to solve all these challenges through self-regulation. As they

are not alone in developing and deploying AI; governments also do so.

- Only a **“whole of society” approach** to AI governance will enable us to develop broad-based ethical principles, cultures and codes of conduct, to flourish and bring about the extraordinary breakthroughs it promises.
- Given the global reach of AI, such a “whole of society” approach must rest on a **“whole of world” approach**.

#### GLOBAL INITIATIVES IN THIS DIRECTION

- **The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation** lays out the need for multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation so AI is used in a manner that is **“trustworthy, human rights-based, safe and sustainable, and promotes peace”**.
- **UNESCO** has developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting **draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to Member States for deliberation and adoption**.
- Many countries, including India, are cognisant of the opportunities and the risks, and are striving to strike the right balance between AI promotion and AI governance.
- **INDIA - NITI Aayog's Responsible AI for All strategy**, recognises that our digital future cannot be optimised for good without multi-stakeholder governance structures that ensure the dividends are fair, inclusive, and just.

#### CONCLUSION

- Agreeing on common guiding principles and implementing them in reality is a difficult task to do. Therefore, we must be prepared for deep, difficult, multi-stakeholder ethical reflection, analyses and resolve. Only then will AI provide humanity its full promise.

## 6) A robust economic relationship

### GS-2 Bilateral relations

#### NEWS

- Under the new U.S. administration, the economic relationship with India can be expected to be on the radar as India has enjoyed bipartisan support in the U.S.

- A closer economic partnership would bring gains to both sides in terms of GDP, employment, and productivity, given the complementary natures of their economies.

#### **FROM INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE**

- From this perspective, a robust collaborative agenda would rest on a comprehensive set of actions which can take **bilateral trade in goods and services to the desired goal of \$500 billion.**

#### **AREAS OF COLLABORATION**

##### **Boosting business partnership:**

- A collaborative response to the pandemic would contribute to global containment of the virus. Business partnerships are already taking place in the supply chain.
- As India becomes the hub of global vaccine distribution, building confidence in the Indian IPR regime, reviving the U.S.-India Health Dialogue, and mutually recognising standards and approvals will help drive healthcare exchanges.

##### **Market access:**

- The macro trade architecture can be strengthened with a broad trade agreement focusing on resolving the issues such as market access.
- There is potential for flexibility from both sides for restoring the Generalised System of Preferences, which would help lower duties for certain Indian products.
- The two countries should consider initiating discussions on a free trade agreement.

##### **Mobility of professional labour to aid trade in services:**

- Recent regulations in the U.S. have impacted labour mobility which can be addressed through immigration reforms for employment-based visa backlogs and smooth and timely processes.
- The MoU on labour cooperation signed in 2011 could be updated in line with India's recent labour regulatory changes.
- This may also be a good time to reconsider a totalisation agreement pertaining to social security, given that both have already entered into such agreements with many of the same partner countries.

##### **Defence industry ties:**

- Defence ties can be stepped up in coordination with industry, as both sides

benefit from U.S. technology and Indian manufacturing in this sector.

- A defence dialogue including the private sectors of both sides could help in co-production and co-development in the defence and aerospace sectors.

##### **Engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can be stepped up:**

- Smaller U.S. companies can find significant new opportunities for investments in India and sourcing from India.
- A U.S.-India SME CEOs Forum can be set up to catalyse such partnerships.

##### **Clean energy and climate change:**

- The U.S.-India Strategic Energy Partnership should be geared towards joint investments in industrial decarbonisation, carbon dioxide removal and green hydrogen.
- The programmes of Partnership to Advance Clean Energy Research, Partnership to Advance Clean Energy Deployment and Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy must be relaunched.

##### **A digital economy partnership:**

- India has proved its mettle in this space with new opportunities opening up in robotics, space, AI and electric vehicles.
- It is also important to disseminate information on India's IPR regime improvements and work towards taking India off the U.S. Trade Representative IPR priority watch list.

##### **Other opportunities:**

- There are immense opportunities in field of education, innovation and R&D, and agricultural trade and technology for both the countries.

## **7) Looking beyond privatisation**

### **GS-3 Government budgeting; Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment**

#### **CONTEXT**

- In the recent Budget session, the Union government announced its intent to privatise Public Sector Banks (PSBs), citing improving efficiency as the reason for this move.

- But there is no clarity, whether privatisation brings efficiency or reduces associated risks.

#### FALSE NOTIONS ATTACHED

- Failure of innumerable private banks around the world, challenges the notion that only private banks are efficient.
- Similarly, if private enterprises are the epitome of efficiency, why do private corporate entities have such large volumes of NPAs?

#### REVOLUTION THROUGH BANKS NATIONALISATION

- Bank nationalisation ushered in a revolution for India's banking sector.
- Before nationalisation, barring the State Bank of India, **most banks were privately owned and they largely benefited the rich and the powerful.**
- The nationalisation of 14 private banks in 1969, followed by six more in 1980, transformed the banking sector, **created jobs, extended credit to the agriculture sector and benefited the poor.**
- Areas that had so far been neglected, including agriculture, employment-generating productive activities, poverty alleviation plans, rural development, health, education, exports, infrastructure, women's empowerment, small scale and medium industry, and small and micro industries, became priority sectors for these banks.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF BANK NATIONALISATION

- The move also helped in **promoting more equitable regional growth** which is evident from RBI data.
- It **increased banking services** and also **reduced the dependence on moneylenders in rural regions.** Nationalised banking **improved the working conditions of employees** in the banking sector, as the state ensured higher wages, security of services, and other fringe benefits.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF PSBs

- As an institution, PSBs are vehicles of the Indian economy's growth and development, and they have become the trustees of people's savings and confidence.
- They have played a **huge role in making the country self-sufficient by supporting the green, blue, and dairy revolutions.**

- Also, they have contributed significantly to **infrastructural development** of the country.

#### CONCERNS REGARDING PRIVATISATION OF BANKS

- Public sector banks in India are currently earning considerable operating profits. Therefore, placing such a huge network of bank branches and the infrastructure and assets in the hands of private enterprises may turn out to be an irrational move.
- It could lead to denial of convenient and economical banking services to the common man.
- The risks of monopoly and cartelisation may only complicate the issue.

#### PSBs CANNOT BE BLAMED ALONE

- In the context of privatisation and efficiency, it is **unfair to blame PSBs alone for the alarming rise of NPAs.**
- Even, the government has not exhibited a firm willingness to implement the stringent measures to recover the losses.
- Wilful default by large corporate borrowers and subsequent recovery haircuts, imposed through the ill-conceived Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, has resulted in a heap of write-offs, stressing the balance sheets of PSBs.
- This has not only affected the profitability of the banks, but has also become an excuse to allege inefficiency.

#### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- **Stringent measures are required to recover large corporate stressed assets,** which is a key concern for the entire banking sector.
- There is an urgent need to bring in a **suitable statutory framework to consider wilful defaults on bank loans a "criminal offence".**
- Further, a **system to examine top executives of PSBs** across the country will also help in **improving accountability.**
- The government needs to strengthen PSBs, instead of starving them of the required capital and human resources through disinvestment and the proposed privatisation.
- **Privatisation of PSBs is not a definitive panacea for the problems of the banking sector in India.**

## 8) Aligning a missile deal with destination Manila

**GS-2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India or affecting India's interests; GS-3 Security challenges and their management in border areas.**

### CONTEXT

- Recently, India and the Philippines signed the “**Implementing Arrangement**” for “**procurement of defence material and equipment procurement**”.
- This agreement lays the groundwork for sales of defence systems such as the highly anticipated export of the BrahMos cruise missile, through the government-to-government route.
- This deal will be of great significance for multiple reasons, and even though the procurement process is progressing steadfastly, there are many challenges that lie ahead.

### ABOUT BRAHMOS

- Research and development of the BrahMos cruise missile systems began in the late 1990s.
- It is manufactured by **BrahMos Aerospace Limited**, a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the joint stock company Military Industrial Consortium NPO Mashinostroyeniya (earlier known as the Federal State Unitary Enterprise NPOM of Russia).

### SIGNIFICANCE

- This is the first supersonic cruise missile to enter service and is capable of attaining a **speed of Mach 2.8** (almost three times the speed of sound)
- It has a range of **at least 290 km** (a new version can reach up to 400km).
- Travelling with such velocity makes interception difficult for air defence systems utilising surface-to-air missiles, while making it easier for BrahMos to target and neutralise advanced fighter jets.
- Efforts to increase the speed and range of the missile in its next iterations are under way, with a goal of achieving hypersonic speeds (at or above Mach 5) and a maximum range of 1,500 km.
- The missile has already been **inducted into all three services of Indian defence.**

### EXPORT AS A GOAL

- Exporting the system has been on the agenda for more than a decade.
- Doing so would boost the credibility of India as a defence exporter and will help it meet the **target of \$5 billion in defence exports by 2025.**
- It will also help Indian to elevate their stature as a **regional superpower.**
- Countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa have so far shown an interest in acquiring the systems.

### GEO- POLITICAL IMPACT

- The implications of the Philippines becoming the first country to import the BrahMos would be wide-ranging and consequential in the Indo-Pacific.
- It would caution China, with whom the Philippines has been engaged in a territorial conflict in the South China Sea, and will act as a **deterrent to Beijing's aggressive posturing.**
- Further, taking lessons from the Philippines, other nations threatened by Chinese belligerence may come forward to induct the BrahMos into their arsenal.
- This will boost India's economic, soft, and hard power profile in the region, providing the Indo-Pacific with a strong and dependable anchor with which they can protect their sovereignty and territory.

### POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

- There exists two major roadblocks in the Manila deal.
- **First is the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**, which aims to sanction individuals and entities who engage in a “significant transaction” with a listed entity.
- NPO Mashinostroyeniya is one of the listed Russian entities, and since 65% of the components, including the ramjet engine and radar seeker used in the BrahMos, are reportedly provided by NPO Mashinostroyeniya, the export of the missile systems may attract sanctions.
- Also, hesitant of being sanctioned themselves, **countries may shy away from purchasing the BrahMos.**
- However, there is an excellent case for India to receive a waiver from CAATSA,

especially vis-à-vis the BrahMos that can help contain a confrontational China.

- **The second issue pertains to financing.** A regiment of the BrahMos, including a mobile command post, four missile-launcher vehicles, several missile carriers, and 90 missiles, reportedly costs around \$275.77 million (₹2,000 crore).
- Ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries which are interested in the BrahMos would find it difficult to purchase it.
- **With India determined to develop itself as a hub of defence manufacturing, how it handles the sale of the BrahMos would be an important factor in its potential emergence as a net provider of regional security in the Indo-Pacific.**

## 9) Aadhaar as a hurdle: On authentication failures and welfare delivery

**GS-2 Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures**

### NEWS

- Inefficiencies in the Aadhaar project should not come in the way of welfare delivery.

### CONTEXT

- The Supreme Court recently termed the cancellation of the three crore ration cards as “a serious issue”.
- The cancellation of these ration cards were done for not being linked with the Aadhaar database and was connected to reported starvation deaths in some States.

### AADHAAR

- Aadhaar is a unique 12- digit identification number that can be obtained voluntarily by residents or passport holders of India, based on their **biometric and demographic data**.
- The unique identification scheme has been in existence for more than a decade and recent data has estimated that **nearly 90% of India's projected population has been assigned the Aadhaar number**.

### SUPREME COURT 'S VERDICT ON AADHAR

- In 2018, the **Supreme Court (SC) upheld** the Aadhaar programme as a **reasonable restriction on individual privacy** to fulfil welfare requirements and dignity
- Also in January 2021, a 4-1 majority Bench had rejected a review petition which put the questions about the scheme's validity for public purposes to rest.

### CONCERNS

- Despite the upholding of aadhar's validity by the SC, the **concerns about the failures in the use of the identity verification project** have not been allayed. These include:
  - Inefficiencies in biometric authentication and updating.
  - Errors in the use of **Aadhaar payment bridge**.
  - Aadhaar Payment Bridge (APB) System, is one of the unique payment systems implemented by National Payments Corporation of India, that uses Aadhaar number as a central key for electronically channelizing the Government benefits and subsidies in the Aadhaar Enabled Bank Accounts (AEBA) of the intended beneficiaries.
  - Errors in linking Aadhaar with bank accounts.
  - The technological system based on iris identification, thumbprints but in the case of non-possession of Aadhaar or non-functioning of the internet in rural and remote areas, it leads to denial of Aadhar linked services.
  - Those engaged in manual and hard labour, are more susceptible to fingerprint changes over time, hence are more vulnerable to authentication failure.
  - In practice, beneficiaries have tended to use Aadhaar cards as identity markers but there have been instances of people losing cards and being denied benefits.

### IMPLICATIONS OF AUTHENTICATION FAILURE

- As the benefits under the PDS, the NREGA and LPG subsidy, among other essentials, requires individuals to have the Aadhaar number, inefficiencies and failures in its authentication have led to **inconvenience and suffering for the poor**.
- There are reports that show failures in authentication having led to delays in the disbursement of benefits and, in many cases, in

their denial due to cancellation of legitimate beneficiary names. For eg. reports from States such as Jharkhand from 2017, suggest that there have been **starvation deaths** because of the denial of benefits and subsidies.

#### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- The government had promised that **exemption mechanisms** that would allow for overriding such failures will help beneficiaries still avail subsidies and benefits despite system failures.
- **Given the scale of the problem, the central and State governments need to allow an alternative identification so that genuine beneficiaries are not denied due subsidies, thus making the process more inclusive.**

### 10) A booster shot for India's vaccination plan

**GS-2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector, Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.**

#### CONTEXT

- COVID-19 has affected countries across the world and India is not an exception. To deal with COVID, India is relying on the **vaccination along with other measures like social distancing**. More than a third of all vaccinations done in the world each day are done in India. However, many experts feel that these steps are baby steps and **more effective vaccination measures are needed to deal with the second wave of COVID in the country.**

#### WHAT CONCERNS THE VACCINATION PROGRAM?

- So far, India has vaccinated **only 3.2% of the adult population**. Although the country covered 2.6 million doses per day on March 15, the seven day rolling average hovers only around 0.11 per 100 people. This slow pace does not constitute an appropriate response when compared to India's true potential in scaling up vaccination.

#### STEPS NEEDED TO SCALE UP VACCINATION PROGRAM

- India has identified a **target of 300 million vulnerable populations**. To vaccinate its

population over two three months it must vaccinate around 10 million people per day. This requires speeding up the pace by five times. India has 300,000 trained vaccinators who are trained in vaccinating millions of children routinely. They can be effectively utilized to meet this enhanced target.

- There is also a need to **expand participation with private health facilities** to cover more than seven to 10 million doses per day. Regulated sales in the private market should be used as a careful option to accelerate the vaccination campaign.
- India will also need to have a **reasonable stockpile and production line of vaccines**. Several other vaccines are available internationally with established efficacy and safety, and can be approved under **emergency use authorization (EUA)**.
- The government may proactively seek supplies of **alternative vaccines** from other manufacturers while rapid studies can assess safety and immunogenicity in the Indian context. The ongoing arrangement with Russia for the local production of **Sputnik** while the vaccine is already undergoing clinical trials in India is an excellent template of using Indian companies to roll out other vaccines.
- India needs to **balance compassion** to supply vaccines to other countries with the compulsion to save the lives of millions of Indians, who are at risk of death as serial waves hitting different parts of the country.
- **Process of getting vaccinated needs to be simplified**. Any person who is 18 years should be permitted to get any vaccine approved by India, at any designated place, and at a fixed price regulated by the government.
- **Inequities in the health system**, which systematically neglect the poor and the marginalized, should also be taken into consideration. This social responsibility can be fulfilled by the government acting as the sole provider of free vaccines and care for all Indians below the poverty line or who cannot afford to buy Covid vaccines.
- **Public health programmes should be as simple as possible to ensure scalability**. Simple age based criteria should be used to

expand vaccination without restrictive criteria such as insisting on a medical certification of comorbidities. Simple, offline, walking vaccination should be done with the help of **CoWIN (Covid Vaccine Intelligence Work) portal**.

- This opportunity can also be used to **identify people with comorbidities** through screening using simple digital measuring devices for blood pressure and blood glucose.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

- India needs to focus on the **'3M' road map**. First step is **Micro planning**. Microplanning is a process that is followed in India's vaccination programmes, that captures the population details by identifying and mapping them. The central government can work with the States in

strengthening micro plans so that the vaccination pace picks up and is sustained.

- Second step is **mobilization**. Mobilizing identified persons can be done by the accredited social health activists (ASHAs) in rural areas and other volunteers in urban areas for effective mobilization. The strategy for mobilization in urban areas can include innovative technological solutions.
- **Monitoring and mentoring** of each step is also required. The activities that need structured support include preparing micro plans, ensuring that all the necessary inter sectoral coordination is done, and that the necessary logistical and transport supplies are provided.

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## INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

### 1) Jharkhand's SAAMAR campaign to fight malnutrition in the state

#### Why in News?

- Recently, the Jharkhand government announced the launch of **SAAMAR** (Strategic Action for Alleviation of Malnutrition and Anemia Reduction) campaign to tackle malnutrition in the state.
- The campaign aims to **identify anemic women and malnourished children** and converge various departments to effectively deal with the malnutrition problem in the state.

#### What are the existing schemes to tackle malnutrition in Jharkhand?

- In Jharkhand, almost 50% of the children are stunted and underweight and 33% of them are affected by stunting and 10% is affected from severe wasting and around 70% children are anemic, as per **National Family Health Survey-4 data**.
- The state government runs various schemes under Child Development Schemes, National Nutrition Mission among others to deal with the situation, but it is not enough.
- Dealing with malnutrition in the state monitoring has been an important concern due to **lack of doctors or health care workers**.

#### What was the need of bringing in the SAMAAR campaign?

- According to an internal note of the Women and Child Development Department, although existing schemes are there, seeing the current situation, intervention was required with a 'different approach' to reduce malnutrition.
- SAAMAR has been launched with a **1000 days target**, under which **annual surveys** will be conducted to track the progress.
- It talks of **convergence of various departments** such as Rural Development Department and Food and Civil Supplies and engagement with school management committees, gram sabhas among others

and making them aware of nutritional behaviour.

- Most importantly, the campaign also tries to **target Primarily Vulnerable Tribal Groups. (PVTGs)**.

#### How does the SAMAAR campaign work?

- To tackle severe acute malnutrition children, every **Anganwadi Centres** will be engaged to identify these children and subsequently will be treated at the Malnutrition Treatment Centres.
- All those anemic adolescent girls and women will be **educated on nutritional behaviour**, and all will be given a **health and nutrition card** to monitor their nutritional status.

#### How will the campaign measure the outcome?

- It will start with every panchayat which will be treated as a unit and there will be 8-10 parameters to tackle the nutritional issue.
- Nutrition Sabhas** will be conducted and the Mukhiyas will work along with every villages' Anganwadi Sevika, Sahayika, Poshan Sakhi, School Management Committee President, Jal Sahiya among others.
- The Panchayat Secretariat will carry **colour coded boards** of every village's nutritional condition. Later a **social audit** will be conducted after which a panchayat will be given the **tag of Malnutrition Free Panchayat**.

### 2) Anti-defection law

#### Why in News?

- Recently, nominated MP Swapan Dasgupta resigned from Rajya Sabha, a year before completion of his term.
- Earlier, opposition parties had raised the issue of his disqualification from Rajya Sabha under the anti-defection law.

#### Nominated members

- In order to accommodate the opinions of experts, the constitution under **Article 80(3)** has provided the provision of nominating **12 members** from different walks of life to the Rajya Sabha.

- The broad criterion for their nomination is that they should have distinguished themselves in fields like **literature, science, art, and social service**.
- The **President nominates such individuals as recommended by the Centre**. Nominated members have the same rights and privileges as elected members, with one notable difference — **they cannot vote in the election of the President**.

#### **Important Provisions of the Anti-defection law**

- The **Anti-defection Constitution Amendment was introduced in 1985** to bring stability to governments by deterring MPs and MLAs from changing their political parties on whose ticket they were elected.
- The penalty for shifting political loyalties is **the loss of parliamentary membership and a bar on becoming a minister**.
- The law covers **three types of scenarios** with respect to an MP switching party.
  1. The first is when a member elected on the ticket of a political party **“voluntarily gives up”** membership of such a party or votes in the House contrary to the wishes of the party.
  2. The second possibility is when an MP who has won his or her seat as an **independent candidate** after the **election joins a political party**. In both these instances, the MP loses the seat in the House on changing (or joining) a party.

3. The third scenario relates to **nominated MPs**. In their case, the law specifies that **within six months** of being nominated to the House, they can choose to join a political party. The time is given so that if a nominated MP is not a member of a political party, they can decide to join one if they want.
4. **But if they don't join a political party during the first six months of their tenure, and join a party thereafter, then they lose their seat in Parliament.**

#### **History so far**

- Over the years, courts have decided that changing a party or joining another **does not have to be a formal act**. It can also be interpreted through an MP's actions, on a case-by-case basis.
- In the past, actions like campaigning for another political party, joining a delegation of elected representatives from another political party to give a representation to the Governor, appearing in political rallies or fighting an election on the symbol of a political party have been held to **constitute defection**.
- The anti-defection law **applies equally to both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs**, even though the Upper House has no role in deciding the government's fate.

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## RSTV BIG PICTURE

### 1) Vehicle Scrappage Policy

- Recently, the Union Transport Minister announced the much awaited vehicle scrappage policy.

#### Aim

- The new policy is aimed at **boosting the auto industry**, which was facing a slump even before the pandemic
- Vehicle owners and potential buyers** will also be impacted by the policy by keeping the old polluting vehicles from plying on roads.

#### Need for a Vehicle Scrappage Policy

- As of now, there are around **51 lakh vehicles in India which are older than 20 years, 34 lakh vehicles which are more than 15 years old and around 17 lakh vehicles older than 15 years, but do not have vehicle fitness certificates.**
- The **old vehicles pollute air 10-12 times** more compared to vehicles that are fit, and also pose a risk for road safety.
- There is a greater need for shift to new vehicles as it will lead to **lower fuel consumption which may result in lower maintenance cost** which is a major expenditure for the vehicle owners.
- The **low cost materials** obtained from the scrap can be used for various other industries like steel and other rare earth materials and may further bring the **informal scrapping sector into the formal scrapping sector.**
- The new vehicle scrappage policy will be a win-win proposal for the **auto industry** as scrapping old vehicles will lead to increased demands for newer vehicles, which will boost the auto sector and will result in **increased GST collection** for both centre and states.
- The policy will give a boost to **new technologies** with better mileage of vehicles besides promoting green fuel and electricity and cut on India's huge **₹10 lakh crore crude import bills.**
- India could emerge as a **hub for automobile manufacturing** as key raw material available from scrapping like steel, aluminium and plastic are bound to be

recycled, bringing down automobile prices by 20-30 per cent.

#### Key Provisions of the Policy

- Under the voluntary vehicle scrapping policy, **personal vehicles would undergo fitness tests after 20 years while commercial vehicles would require it after completion of 15 years.**
- Buyers of new vehicles** after opting for scrapping of their old and polluting vehicles will be offered **incentives and rebates** under the new policy to phase out old and polluting vehicles.
- There are provisions of **green taxes**, other levies and such vehicles will have to **undergo strict fitness tests** in automated facilities.
- Automated fitness tests will be set up under PPP mode** while for scrapping centres also private partners and state governments will be assisted.
- Driving such vehicles that fail to pass automated tests will attract **huge penalties and also be impounded.**

#### Conclusion

- The policy will lead to **new investments of around ₹10,000 crore and create as many as 50,000 jobs** and the automobile industry will turn into one such sector that will offer maximum employment.

### 2) Mines & Minerals Amendment Bill

- The Lok Sabha has recently cleared The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021.

#### Aim

- The Bill is aimed at bringing more transparency in the auction process and to boost employment in the sector and may generate 55-lakh direct and indirect employment through reforms.

#### Key Provisions

- The Bill **amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.** which regulates the mining sector in India.
- Removal of restriction on end-use of minerals:** The original Act empowers the

central government to reserve any mine (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) to be leased through an auction for a **particular end-use** (such as iron ore mine for a steel plant). Such mines are known as **captive mines**.

- **Amendment-** The Bill provides that **no mine will be reserved for particular end-use**.
- **Sale of minerals by captive mines:** The Bill provides that **captive mines (other than atomic minerals) may sell up to 50% of their annual mineral production in the open market** after meeting their own needs. The central government may increase this threshold through a notification. The lessee will have to pay additional charges for minerals sold in the open market.
- **Auction by the central government in certain cases:** Under the 1957 Act, **states conduct the auction of mineral concessions** (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals). Mineral concessions include mining lease and prospecting license-cum-mining lease.
- **Amendment-** The Bill **empowers the central government** to specify a time period for completion of the auction process in consultation with the state government. If the state government is unable to complete the auction process within this period, the **auctions may be conducted by the central government**.
- **Transfer of statutory clearances:** Upon expiry of a mining lease (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals), mines are leased to new persons through auction. The statutory clearances issued to the previous lessee are transferred to the new lessee for a period of two years. The new lessee is required to obtain fresh clearances within these two years.
- **Amendment-** The Bill replaces this provision and instead provides that **transferred statutory clearances will be valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee**.
- **Allocation of mines with expired leases:** The Bill adds that **mines (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals), whose lease has expired, may be allocated to a government company in certain cases**. This will be applicable if the auction

process for granting a new lease has not been completed, or the new lease has been terminated within a year of the auction. The state government may grant a lease for such a mine to a government company for a period of up to 10 years or until the selection of a new lessee, whichever is earlier.

- **Extension of leases to government companies:** The Act provides that the period of mining leases granted to government companies will be prescribed by the **central government**.
- **Amendment-** The Bill provides that the **period of mining leases of government companies (other than leases granted through auction) may be extended** on payment of additional amounts prescribed in the Bill.
- **Conditions for lapse of mining lease:** The parent Act provides that a mining lease will lapse if the lessee:
  1. Is not able to start mining operations within two years of the grant of a lease, or
  2. Has discontinued mining operations for a period of two years.
  3. However, the lease will not lapse at the end of this period if a concession is provided by the state government upon an application by the lessee.
- **Amendment-** The Bill adds that the **threshold period for lapse of the lease may be extended by the state government only once and up to one year**.
- **Non-exclusive reconnaissance permit:** The Act provides for a non-exclusive reconnaissance permit (for minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals). Reconnaissance means preliminary prospecting of a mineral through certain surveys.
- **Amendment-** The Bill **removes the provision** for this permit.

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