OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 43 | 21st March to 27th March, 2021

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POLITY

1) National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020

What's in the news?

- The Lok Sabha has cleared the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professionals Bill, 2021, which seeks to set up a commission to regulate the allied healthcare sector, standardise training and qualifications across the country.
- The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill on March 16.
- This legislation is expected to benefit an estimated 9 lakhs allied and healthcare-related professionals and thousands of other professionals joining the workforce annually.

Key features of the Bill

Allied health professional

- The Bill defines an 'allied health professional' as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment. Such a professional **should have obtained a diploma or degree** under this Bill.
- The **duration** of the degree /diploma should be **at least 2,000 hours (over a period of two to four years).**

Healthcare professional

- A 'healthcare professional' includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services.
- Such a professional **should have obtained a degree** under this Bill. The **duration** of the degree should be **at least 3,600 hours (over a period of three to six years).**

Allied and healthcare professions

- The Bill specifies certain categories of allied and healthcare professions as **recognised categories.** These are mentioned in the Schedule to the Bill and include life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals.
- The central government may amend this Schedule after consultation with the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Profession.
- **National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions**
- The Bill sets up the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions. The **Commission will consist of:**

(i) The Chairperson,

(ii) Vice-Chairperson,

(iii) Five members (at the level of Joint Secretary) representing various Departments/ Ministries of the central government,

(iv) One representative from the Directorate General of Health Services,

(v) Three Deputy Directors or Medical Superintendents appointed on a rotational basis from amongst medical institutions including the AIIMS, Delhi and AIIPMR, Mumbai, and

(vi) 12 part-time members representing State Councils, among others.

Functions of the Commission

- **The Commission will perform the following functions with regard to Allied and Healthcare professionals:** (i) framing policies and standards for regulating education and practice, (ii) creating and maintaining an online Central Register of all registered professionals, (iii) providing basic standards of education, courses, curriculum, staff qualifications, examination, training, maximum fee payable for various categories, and (iv) providing for a uniform entrance and exit examination, among others.

Professional Councils

- The Commission will constitute a **Professional Council for every recognised category of allied and healthcare professions**. The Professional Council will consist of a president and four to 24 members, representing each profession in the recognised category. The Commission may delegate any of its functions to this Council.

State Councils

- **Within six months** from the passage of the Bill, state governments will constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils.
- **The State Councils will consist of:** (i) the Chairperson (at least 25 years of experience in the field of allied and healthcare science), (ii) one member representing medical sciences in the state government, (iii) two members representing state medical colleges, (iv) two members representing charitable institutions, and (v) two members from each of the recognised categories of allied and healthcare professions, nominated by the state government, among others.
- **The State Councils will:** (i) enforce professional conduct and code of ethics to be observed by allied healthcare professionals, (ii) maintain respective State Registers, (iii) inspect allied and healthcare institutions, and (iv) ensure uniform entry and exit examinations.

Establishment of institutions

- **Prior permission of the State Council will be required to:** (i) establish a new institution, or (ii) open new courses, increase the admission capacity, or admit a new batch of students to existing institutions.
- If such permission is not sought, then any qualification granted to a student from such an institution will not be recognised under the Bill.

Offences and penalties

- No person is allowed to practice as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner other than those enrolled in a State Register or the National Register. Any person who contravenes this provision will be punished with a fine of Rs 50,000.

2) Right to Information Act

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About RTI Act, 2005

- Under the Right to Information Act, 2005, **Public Authorities** are required to make disclosures on various aspects of their structure and functioning.
- This includes: (i) disclosure on their organisation, functions, and structure, (ii) powers and duties of its officers and employees, and (iii) financial information.
- The intent of such *suo moto* disclosures is that the public should need minimum recourse through the Act to obtain such information. If such information is not made available, citizens have the right to request for it from the Authorities.
- This may include information in the **form of documents, files, or electronic records** under the control of the Public Authority. The intent behind the enactment of the Act is to **promote transparency and accountability** in the working of Public Authorities.

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

- The RTI Act defines "public authorities" in **Section 2(h).**
- A "public authority" means any authority or body or institution of self- government established or constituted
1. by or under the Constitution;
2. by any other law made by Parliament;
3. by any other law made by State Legislature;
4. by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any –
5. body owned, controlled or substantially financed;
6. Non-Government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

Section 8 of the RTI

- This provides for **exemption from disclosure of information** that are more valid in reasons
1. Which would affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State;
2. Which has been expressly forbidden to be published by any court of law or tribunal;
3. Which would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or the State Legislature;

4. Information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property;
5. Information received in confidence from foreign government;
6. Information which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person;
7. Information which would impede the process of investigation or apprehension or prosecution of offenders;
8. Cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, Secretaries and other officers: Provided that the decisions of Council of Ministers, the reasons thereof, and the material on the basis of which the decisions were taken shall be made public after the decision has been taken, and the matter is complete, or over;
9. Information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause an unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual.

Section 24
- Section 24 of the RTI Act **exempts certain security and intelligence organizations** from the purview of the Act.

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

Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019
- The Act amended Sections 13 and 16 of the RTI Act, 2005.

- Section 13 of the original Act sets the term of the central Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners at **five years** (or until the **age of 65**, whichever is earlier). The amendment changed that the appointment will be for such term as may be **prescribed by the Central Government**.
- According to the amendment act, the salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners **shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government.** Previously it was equivalent to that of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners respectively.
- The government said that the amendment was required because the election commission is a Constitutional body while the information commission, formed under the Right to Information Act, is a **statutory one.**

Why in News?
- According to the Central Information Commission's annual report, the Centre has **only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information requests in 2019-20**, the lowest ever rate.
- However, **almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason,** as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data. This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office.
- Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons. Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.
- The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information which would endanger life and safety to that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign governments, copyrights, or sovereignty, security and intelligence matters. **Public authorities are expected to cite the**

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relevant clause of the Act to invoke the exemption.

- In 38.7% of rejections in 2019-20, however, public authorities failed to cite these permissible exemption clauses, and were classified under the **'Others' category** in the CIC data. This is an increase from the 33% seen the previous year.

Highest use

- Of the permissible grounds for rejection, **Section 8(1)(j)** saw the highest use. It permits denial of access to personal information if disclosure has **no relationship to any public activity or public interest or is likely to cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual concerned.** One third of all permissible rejections invoked this clause.
- **Section 24** of the Act which exempts information related to security and intelligence organisations — except allegations of corruption and human rights violations — was also frequently used, with one in five permissible rejections coming under this category.

3) Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

Background

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to respond to a petition that challenges the constitutional validity of the **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.**
- The law was enacted to **freeze the status of all places of worship in the country as on August 15, 1947.**

What does the 1991 Act say?

- The Act says that **no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section**.
- It contains a declaration that a place of worship shall continue to be as it was on **August 15, 1947**.
- Significantly, it **prohibits any legal proceedings** from being instituted regarding the character of a place of worship, and declares that all suits and appeals pending before any court or authority on the cut-off date regarding the conversion of the character of a place of worship shall abate.

- In other words, all pending cases will come to an end, and no further proceedings can be filed. However, any suit or proceedings relating to any conversion of status that happened after the cut-off date can continue.

Exceptions

- The 1991 Act will not apply in some cases. It will not apply to **ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains** that are covered by the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.**
- It will also not apply to any suit that has been finally settled or disposed of, any dispute that has been settled by the parties before the 1991 Act came into force, or to the conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence.
- The Act specifically exempted from its purview the place of worship commonly referred to as **Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya**. It was done to allow the pending litigation to continue as well as to preserve the scope for a negotiated settlement.
- The dispute ended after the Supreme Court ruled that the land on which the Masjid stood should be handed over to the Hindu community for the construction of a Ram temple.
- Anyone contravening the prohibition on converting the status of a place of worship is liable to be **imprisoned for up to three years, and a fine**. Those abetting or participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit this offence will also get the same punishment.

What are the grounds of challenge?

- The petitioner argues that the Act takes away the rights of communities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains to reclaim the sites of their places of worship through legal proceedings. It amounts to taking away the right of the people to seek justice through the courts and obtain a judicial remedy. He also contends that the cut-off date of August 15, 1947, is arbitrary and irrational.
- It is also said the law violates the right to practise and propagate religion, as well as the right to manage and administer places of worship. Further, it goes against the principle of secularism and the state's duty

to preserve and protect religious and cultural heritage.

What has the SC said on the status freeze?

- In its final verdict on the Ayodhya dispute, the Supreme Court had observed that the Act "imposes a non-derogable obligation towards enforcing our commitment to secularism". The court went on to say: "Non-retrogression is a foundational feature of the fundamental constitutional principles, of which secularism is a core component."

- The court described the **law as one that preserved secularism** by not permitting the status of a place of worship to be altered after Independence. In words of caution against further attempts to change the character of a place of worship, the five-judge Bench said, "Historical wrongs cannot be remedied by the people taking the law in their own hands. In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future."

4) Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021

How is Delhi governed?

- Delhi's current status as a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the **69th Amendment Act** through which **Articles 239AA and 239BB** were introduced in the Constitution.

- The **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act** was passed simultaneously to supplement the constitutional provisions relating to the Assembly and the Council of Ministers in the national capital.

- For all practical purposes, the GNCTD Act outlines the powers of the Assembly, the discretionary powers enjoyed by the L-G, and the duties of the Chief Minister with respect to the need to furnish information to the L-G.

- The L-G does have the power to **refer any matter, over which there is a disagreement with the elected government, to the President** under **Article 239AA(4).**

Supreme Court judgement

- In its **2018 verdict**, the five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court had held that the **Lieutenant Governor's (L-G) concurrence is not required on issues other than police, public order and land**.

- It had added that **decisions of the Council of Ministers will, however, have to be communicated to the L-G.**

- The court held that requiring prior concurrence of the Lieutenant Governor would absolutely negate the ideals of representative governance and democracy conceived for the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi by **Article 239AA** of the Constitution. It also ruled that the **L-G was bound by the aid and advice of the council of ministers**.

Why in News?

- The Centre has introduced the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in Lok Sabha, reviving the dispute on the distribution of powers between the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor.

What does the Bill say?

- In the "statement of objects and reasons" section, the Centre claims that the amendment Bill seeks to **give effect to the Supreme Court's interpretation** and that it **"further defines" the responsibilities of the elected government and the Lt Governor** in line with the Constitutional scheme.

- Among the major proposed amendments, one makes it explicitly clear that the **term "government" in any law made by the Legislative Assembly shall mean the L-G.**

- The Bill adds that the **L-G's opinion shall be obtained** before the government takes any executive action based on decisions taken by the Cabinet or any individual minister.

What will change if the amendments are cleared by Parliament?

- Encouraged by the Supreme Court verdict, the elected government had stopped sending files on executive matters to the L-G before the implementation of any decision.

- But the amendment, if cleared, will force the elected government to take the L-G's advice before taking any action on any cabinet decision.

What are the state government's fears?

- For 2015 to 2018, the state government was engaged in a constant battle with the Centre over policy decisions and the powers of the L-G vis-à-vis the elected government. The Supreme Court judgment gave it a freer hand in terms of policy decisions.
- It was because of the judgment that the government was able to clear policy decisions like giving free power to those using under 200 units, free bus riders for women and doorstep delivery of ration.

- The amendments will have far-reaching implications. By making it mandatory for the elected government to route all its files through the L-G, the amendments will essentially **take away the government's autonomy and the dream for full statehood for the state**, which each political party has promised the electorate at various times.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Exotic Species in the Lakes

What are exotic species?

- They are opposite of native species.
- They are animals and plant species introduced from other countries and which are not otherwise found locally are termed exotic.
- These introduced or exotic species can adversely affect the ecosystem.

Alligator Gar

- Alligator gars are naturally found in freshwaters of **North America**. It can grow upto 10 feet.
- They are brought here in India for sale as **aquarium species.**
- Although they may look ferocious, alligator gars pose no threat to humans and there are no known attacks on people.
- Adult alligator gars primarily prey on fish, but they are opportunistic feeders who also eat blue crabs, small turtles, waterfowl or other birds, and small mammals.

Red eared Terrapin

- Read more about it at https://officerspulse.com/red-eared-turtle/

Neknampur Lake

- Neknampur Lake is a lake in **Hyderabad, Telangana**.
- Often in news for its pollution, it is one of the prominent lakes where the restoration of biodiversity and aquatic health is taking place.
- It is also famous for its **floating water treatment.**

Why in the news?

- Alligator gars and red eared terrapins have been found at the Neknampur lake.

- Alligator Gars are predatory in nature, and can wipe out the entire lake of its biodiversity.
- Red eared terrapins are aggressive in nature and kill other pond turtles such as pond terrapins and flapshell turtles.
- There is no control over which kind of fish are being brought from outside and where they are being left.

2) World Sparrow Day

About

- Every year 20th March is celebrated as World Sparrow Day.
- It is an international initiative by the **Nature Forever Society of India** (based in Nasik, Maharashtra) in collaboration with the Eco-Sys Action Foundation (France) and numerous other national and international organisations across the world.
- The first World Sparrow Day was celebrated in 2010 in different parts of the world.
- The rationale for celebrating World Sparrow Day is not only to commemorate the event for a day but to use it as a platform to underscore the need to **conserve sparrows as well as the urban biodiversity**.

About House Sparrow

- The house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is a bird of the sparrow family Passeridae, found in most parts of the world.
- According to IUCN it has been given **LEAST CONCERN** status.
- The house sparrow is strongly associated with human habitation, and can live in urban or rural settings. Though found in widely varied habitats and climates, it typically avoids extensive woodlands, grasslands, and deserts away from human development.
- It feeds mostly on the seeds of grains and weeds, but it is an opportunistic eater and commonly eats insects and many other foods.
- Its predators include domestic cats, hawks, and many other predatory birds and mammals.

- The house sparrow is believed to be declining for various reasons ranging from the destruction of its habitat to lack of insect food for the young and even the increasing microwave pollution from mobile phone towers

Why in the news?

- It is observed that the sparrow population in the urban areas is increasing.
- The campaign to save the sparrow has grown beyond organisations and become a citizen-based movement across cities.

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ECONOMY

1) State Development Loans

What are SDLs?

- State Development Loans (SDLs) are **market borrowings by state governments.**
- **The RBI** issues these securities on their behalf, through auctions.
- Purpose of issuing State Development Loans is to meet the budgetary needs of state governments. Each state is allowed to issue securities up to a certain limit each year.
- SDLs are eligible securities for Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) and Liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) purposes, and are bought by banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, provident funds and other institutional investors.
- Generally, the coupon rates on State Development Loans are higher than those of central government securities of the same maturity. This shows that the central government is considered more creditworthy than state governments.
- In 2015, the Government allowed **Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs)** to buy SDLs **up to 2% of outstanding SDLs** in the market.

Why in News?

- Fifteen states have recently raised a total of ₹17,783 crore at the auction of the State government securities or state development loans.

2) RoDTEP scheme

About Merchandise export from India scheme

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) was introduced under **Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20),** as a part of Exports from India Scheme.

- The scheme provides **incentive in the form of duty credit scrip** to exporters to compensate for their losses on payment of duties. The scrips can be transferred or used for payment of a number of duties including the basic customs duty.

What is the issue?

- In 2019, a WTO dispute resolution panel ruled that MEIS was **not in compliance with the global trade norms**.
- Additionally, many exporters had persistently complained that the MEIS scheme doesn't offset all the taxes.

RoDTEP scheme

- To address these issues, the government introduced the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme** with a view to give a boost to the country's outbound shipments.
- The government announced that whatever taxes, or duties or local levies imposed by the Centre, State or local governments that are not getting refunded through any other scheme, will be done through RoDTEP in a way that is **compliant with the WTO norms.**
- It is proposed to **digitally refund to exporters**, duties and taxes levied at the Centre, State and local levels.
- The RoDTEP scheme will **replace the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS)** in a phased manner.

Why in the News?

- The government has announced that the notification of benefit rates payable to exporters under the RODTEP scheme is expected to take more time.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

About SCO

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation established in 2001.
- It's a Eurasian **political, economic and military** organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, **Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan** were members of the **Shanghai Five.**
- Following the accession of **Uzbekistan** to the organisation in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- There are **eight member states** in the SCO at present. **India** and **Pakistan** became members in 2017.
- The **SCO Secretariat**, based in Beijing, is the main permanent executive body of the SCO.
- The organisation has **two permanent bodies** —
- The **SCO Secretariat** based in Beijing and
- The Executive Committee of the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** based in Tashkent. RATS serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Objectives of the SCO

- To strengthen mutual trust among the neighbouring member states.
- To promote effective cooperation in various fields like economy, trade, politics, culture and research and technology.
- To ensure peace, prosperity, security and stability in the region, and
- To establish a democratic, fair and rational international eco-political order.

Why in News?

- India recently participated in the Nowruz festivities at the SCO Secretariat in Beijing.

About Nowruz

- Nowruz is the **Persian New Year** and symbol of the onset of spring in the northern hemisphere.
- It's a celebration of new beginnings, wishing prosperity and welcoming the future.
- March 21 was officially recognized in 2010 as International Nowruz Day by the United Nations. This year, it falls on March 20.
- It is inscribed in the list of **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity from India.**
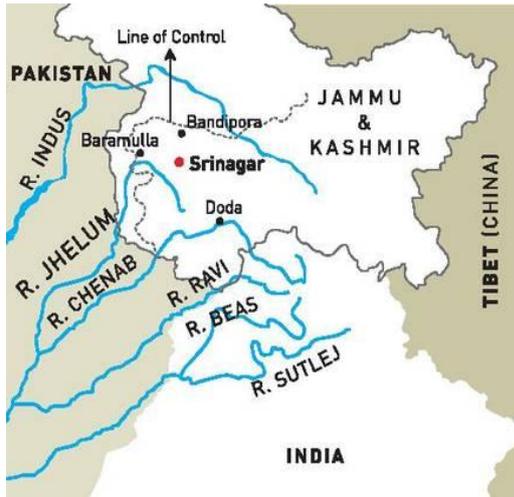
2) Indus Water Treaty

What is the Indus Water Treaty (IWT)?

- Signed in the year **1960** by **former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the then President of Pakistan, Ayub Khan,** the Indus Water Treaty is an agreement that was made to chalk out the control over the 6 rivers that run across India and then Pakistan into the Indus basin.
- This treaty was signed following the partition of the subcontinent.
- On an international level, the IWT has been seen as one of the most successful cases of conflict resolution. It is so because India and Pakistan, ever since IWT was signed, have engaged in 4 major wars but the treaty has stayed in place.

Which rivers belong to India and which ones to Pakistan?

- The Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960 after nine years of negotiations between India and Pakistan with the help of the **World Bank**, which is also a signatory.
- Precise details were laid out about how the water will be divided.
- While **Jhelum, Chenab and Indus** (3 western rivers) were allocated to Pakistan, India received the control of **Ravi, Beas and Sutlej** (3 eastern rivers).
- In effect, Pakistan got 80% of the water from the Indus river system and India 20%.
- If **disputes arose**, the two parties would try to solve them bilaterally first. Appointing a "Neutral Expert" and approaching the International Court of Arbitration are other options.

- The treaty also stated that aside from certain cases such as specified domestic, non-consumptive and agricultural use permitted to India, no storage and irrigation systems can be built by India on the western rivers.

Why in News?
- After a gap of more than two and half years Indian and Pakistani delegations have begun the 116th Meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission in New Delhi.
- The meeting is being viewed as part of the broader process of normalisation of bilateral ties between the two neighbours.
- The last meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission was held on August 29, 2018.

Key Issue
- Among the key points on the table was evolving a procedure to solve differences on technical aspects governing the construction of the **Ratle run-of-the-river (RoR) project** on the Chenab in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- According to the terms of the IWT, India has the **right to build RoR projects on the three 'western' rivers — the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus — provided it does so without substantially impeding water flow in Pakistan downstream.**
- Pakistan believes that the project's current design does pose a serious impediment and has told the World Bank that it wants a **Court of Arbitration (CoA)** set up to decide on the issue. India says this is only a technical issue and mutually solvable.
- Earlier, in 2016, Pakistan had approached the World Bank raising concerns of India's **Kishanganga hydroelectric power project** in Jammu & Kashmir.

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

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

Why in News?
- India has recently abstained from a crucial vote on Sri Lanka's rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.
- The resolution on **'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka'** was, however, adopted after 22 states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour.
- The resolution gives UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet the mandate to collect and preserve evidence of crimes related to Sri Lanka's civil war that ended in 2009 with the defeat of Tamil Tiger rebels.
- The resolution also contended the human rights situation has deteriorated under the Rajapaksa administration and that rights defenders and ethnic and religious minorities are facing problems.

Opposition

- Sri Lanka, which had earlier deemed the resolution "politically motivated", was quick to reject the UN move to collect and preserve evidence of war crimes in the country, committed by the armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- Sri Lanka is opposed to the process envisaged in the resolution to prosecute war criminals through an international evidence gathering and investigation mechanism.
- The Sri Lanka resolution was the first to be voted on using the extraordinary e-voting procedures established for the UNHRC 46th Session, which has been held virtually.

4) SAARC

About SAARC

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985 with 7 founding members.
- SAARC now comprises eight Member States: **Afghanistan** (joined in 2007), **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.**
- The Secretariat of the Association is located in **Kathmandu, Nepal**.
- The objectives of the Association include promotion of welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential.
- Decisions at all levels are to be taken on the **basis of unanimity**; and bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from the deliberations of the Association.

SAARC Development Fund

- SAARC Development Fund (SDF) was established by the heads of the eight SAARC Member States in **2010** with the aim to promote the welfare of the people of SAARC region, improve their quality of life, and accelerate economic growth, social progress and poverty alleviation in the region. SDF has **three funding windows** i.e. **Social, Economic and Infrastructure Window.**
- The Social Window focuses on funding projects on poverty alleviation, improving health and education, and so on. Economic Window funds non-infrastructural projects related to trade and industry development, agriculture and so on. Infrastructural Window funds projects in areas such as energy, power, transportation, etc.
- Currently, SDF is implementing 90 projects in all SAARC Member States under its Social, Economic and Infrastructure funding windows.

Why in the News?

- Grants from the SAARC Development Fund recently crossed $50 million for projects in the eight SAARC member States.

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DEFENCE

1) Arms Import

Why in News?

- **Arms imports decreased by 33%** between 2011–15 and 2016–20 while India continues to remain the second largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia, according to a report from Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

How did we achieve this?

- The overall drop in arms imports between 2011–15 and 2016–20 seems to be mainly due to its **complex and lengthy procurement processes**, combined with its attempts to **reduce its dependence on Russian arms** by diversifying its network of arms suppliers.

Who are the top suppliers to India?

- The report said **Russia was the largest arms supplier** in both years. However, Russia's deliveries dropped by 53% between the two periods and its share of Indian arms imports fell from 70 to 49%.
- The **U.S. was the second largest arms supplier** to India in **2011–15** but in 2016–20 India's arms imports from the U.S. were 46% lower than in the previous five-year period, making the **U.S. the fourth largest supplier in 2016–20.**
- **France and Israel** were the second and third largest arms suppliers in 2016–20.

India's arms imports from France increased by 709% while those from Israel rose by 82%.

What about indigenization?

- As part of efforts to boost defense imports and promote domestic manufacturing, the Defense Ministry had last year notified a list of 101 items on the **negative import list.**
- According to SIPRI, **India** accounted for **0.2% of the share of global arms exports** during 2016-20, making the country the **world's 24th largest exporter** of major arms. This represents an increase of 228% over India's export share of 0.1 % during the previous five-year period of 2011-15.
- **Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Mauritius** were the top recipients of Indian military hardware

Why is indigenization needed?

- **Reducing fiscal deficit** as **India** is the **second largest arms importer** in the world (first is Saudi Arabia)
- More **employment** generation
- Increase the **foreign exchange** through exports
- **National security** will be secured as foreign dependence will be less

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Helium

What is it?

- Helium (He) is a chemical element, inert gas of Group 18 (noble gases) of the periodic table. The second lightest element (only hydrogen is lighter), helium is a colourless, odourless, and tasteless gas.
- After hydrogen, helium is the **second most abundant element** in the universe. It is present in all stars.

Why in News?

- The U.S. is looking to cut off exports of helium from 2021.
- Helium was found in large quantities under the American Great Plains.
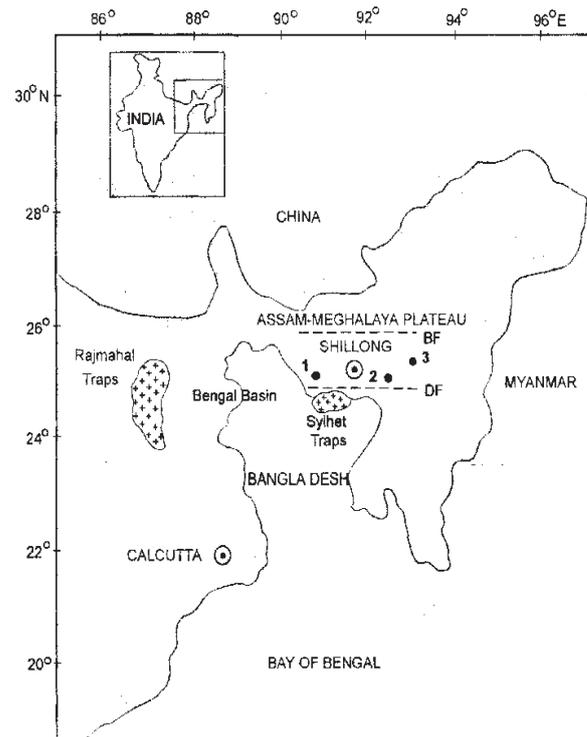- The U.S. became the most important exporter of helium across the world.

What are the uses of Helium?

- Helium is used as a **cooling medium for the Large Hadron Collider (LHC)**, and the **superconducting magnets** in **MRI scanners and NMR spectrometers**. It is also used to **keep satellite instruments cool** and was used to cool the liquid oxygen and hydrogen that powered the Apollo space vehicles.
- Because of its low density, helium is often used to **fill decorative balloons, weather balloons and airships.** Hydrogen was once used to fill balloons but it is dangerously reactive.
- Because it is very unreactive, helium is used to provide an **inert protective atmosphere** for making **fibre optics and semiconductors**, and for arc welding. Helium is also used to detect leaks, such as in car air-conditioning systems, and because it diffuses quickly it is used to inflate car airbags after impact.
- A mixture of 80% helium and 20% oxygen is used as an **artificial atmosphere** for deep-sea divers and others working under pressure conditions.
- Helium-neon gas lasers are used to **scan barcodes** in supermarket checkouts. A new use for helium is a helium-ion microscope that gives better image resolution than a scanning **electron microscope.**

Why the worry now?

- The **U.S.**, now, is **planning** to **switch off export of helium** from 2021. **Qatar** is a **possible exporter** but acute political and diplomatic wrangles have made Qatar unreliable.
- Every year, India imports **helium** worth Rs **55,000 crores** from the U.S. to meet its needs.

Where in India can we find Helium?

- There is a vast reservoir of helium in the **Rajmahal volcanic belt in Eastern India.**
- It is the store house of helium trapped for billions years
- India consumes about 70 million cubic metres per year. But the reserve of helium by far exceeds this.

2) Indian Monsoon

What is monsoon?

- Monsoon is a major wind system that **seasonally reverses its direction**—such as one that blows for approximately six months from the northeast and six months from the southwest.
- The **most prominent monsoons** occur in **South Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Pacific coast of Central America**. **Monsoonal tendencies also** are apparent

along the **Gulf Coast of the United States and in central Europe**; however, **true monsoons** do **not occur** in those regions.

- The **primary cause** of monsoons lies in **different warming trends over land and sea**, though other factors may be involved. Seasonal changes in temperature are large over land but small over ocean waters, and monsoons blow from atmospheric heat sinks (that is, cold regions with high atmospheric pressure) toward heat sources (warm regions characterized by low atmospheric pressure). Consequently, monsoon winds typically travel from sea to land in summer and from land to sea in winter.

Why in News?
- A new study has tried to map climatic variations using leaf fossils.

How did it happen?
- About **180 million years ago, India separated** from the ancient supercontinent **Gondwana** and took a long northward journey of about 9,000 km to join Eurasia. During this journey, the subcontinent moved from the southern hemisphere, crossed the Equator to reach its current position in the northern hemisphere.
- Due to these changing latitudes, it **experienced different climatic conditions**, and the new study has tried to map these climatic variations using leaf fossils.
- The evolution of the monsoonal climate in India is still debatable and not fully understood. Though recent data indicates that the monsoon system we experience now dates back to about 25 million years, it is still unclear how the climate was during its long voyage

What the researchers found?
- The team **analysed** the **morphological characters of fossil leaves** collected from Deccan Volcanic Province, East Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Gurha mine in Rajasthan and Makum Coalfield in Assam.
- The four fossil assemblages were found to be from four different geological ages and **helped** to study the **climate** during **65, 57, 54, and 25 million years ago** respectively.
- It has been observed from across the globe that plant leaf morphological characters such as apex, base and shape are ecologically tuned with the prevailing

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climatic conditions to adapt for all the seasons throughout the year.
- They **applied** this **model to characterise** the past monsoon from fossil leaves.
- The results indicated that the **fossil leaves from India** were **adapted** to an **Australian type of monsoon** and not the current Indian monsoon system during its voyage. The reconstructed temperature data show that the climate was warm (tropical to subtropical) at all the studied fossil sites with temperatures varying from 16.3–21.3 degrees C. All the fossil sites experienced high rainfall, which varied from 191.6 cm to 232 cm.

Why is this discovery important?
- **India** was the **only subcontinent** to have **crossed** from **the southern hemisphere to** the **northern** hemisphere, it is a **laboratory to study bio-geo changes** and **understand** how the **flora and fauna** changed accordingly.
- We can **understand** the **evolutionary history of Indian monsoon** and its role in the evolution of **biodiversity** hot spots in South and Southeast Asia. This will help in the **conservation of modern biodiversity hotspots.**
- **Understanding** the **past dynamics** of **Indian monsoon** will also help in **climate modelling** for future monsoon prediction

3) Humanoid Sophia
Why in News?
- A digital artwork done by Robot artist Sophia, world's first robot citizen has gone up for auction.

What is a humanoid robot?
- A **humanoid robot** is a robot with its **body shape** built to **resemble** the **human** body. The design may be for functional purposes, such as interacting with human tools and environments, for experimental purposes, such as the study of bipedal locomotion, or for other purposes.

Why is Sophia Famous?
- She is the **world's first robot citizen.**
- Sophia is a realistic **humanoid** robot capable of displaying humanlike expressions and interacting with people.
- In **2017**, **Sophia** became a **Saudi Arabian citizen**, the **first robot** to receive **citizenship of any country.**

- **Sophia** was named the **United Nations Development Programme's** first ever **Innovation Champion**, and is the **first non-human** to be given **any United Nation title.**

India's Humanoid Robot

- In 2020, Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) unveiled its **first half-humanoid astronaut**, named **Vyom Mitra** who will ride to space in the first test flight of the human space mission, **Gaganyaan**.
- Vyommitra is a **female-looking spacefaring half-humanoid robot**. Her body stops at the torso and has no legs.
- She can do **switch panel operations, ECLSS** [environment control and life support systems] functions, be a companion, **converse** with the astronauts, **recognise** them and also **respond** to their **queries**. She will **simulate the human functions** required for space before real astronauts take off.

4) Gaganyaan

What is Gaganyaan?

- It is an Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the formative spacecraft of the **Indian Human Spaceflight Programme.**
- The ₹10,000-crore ambitious project is expected to be launched in 2022, the year of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence, by the Indian Space Research Organisation **(ISRO).**
- It is designed to have 3-7 crew members spend 3-7 days in space in a 400-km orbit **(Low Earth Orbit or LEO).**
- **GSLV Mk III,** the three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle, will be used to launch Gaganyaan as it has the necessary payload capability.
- With this, **India** could **potentially** become the **fourth country** to send a man to space, after the erstwhile USSR, the US and China

Why in News?

- Four Indian **cosmonauts completed training** in **Russia** for Gaganyaan mission and the entire process of preparation and training included a number of elements necessary for future cosmonauts, such as medical and physical training, **studying** the Russian language, studying the design,

layout and systems of the **Soyuz transport** manned spacecraft.

4) Coronavirus variant

Why in News?

- A unique double mutant coronavirus variant with a combination of mutations not seen anywhere else in the world has been found in India.

What is mutation?

- **Mutation** is the property of a **virus** to **undergo changes** when it multiplies. As it replicates, it **may not produce exact replicas** of itself, resulting in the emergence of **new strains**, which may be more or at times less effective. Some strains die out, while the more effective ones, which spread efficiently, survive.
- Virus **mutations** create **genetic diversity,** which is subject to the opposing actions of selection and random genetic drift, both of which are directly affected by the size of the virus population.

About the new variant

- Genome sequencing of a section of virus samples by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), revealed the presence of **two mutations**, E484Q and L452R together.
- Mutations in the virus per se are not surprising but specific mutations that help the virus evolve to **thwart vaccines or the immune system,** or are linked to a spike in cases or in disease severity, are of interest.
- While the two mutations have been individually identified in other variants of SARS-CoV-2 globally, and have been associated with a **reduction in vaccine efficacy as well as infectivity**, their combined effect and biological implication has not yet been understood.

5) App update and Human rights

Why in News?

- ProtonVPN, a Swiss virtual private network service provider slammed Apple for stopping app updates and violating human rights.

What is a VPN?

- A virtual private network (**VPN**) gives you **online privacy and anonymity** by creating a **private network** from a public internet connection. VPNs **mask** your

internet protocol **(IP) address** so your **online action**s are virtually **untraceable**. Most important, VPN services establish **secure and encrypted connections**.

What is happening in Myanmar?

- The **military of Myanmar** has grabbed power in a **coup** (third time in the nation's history since its independence from British rule in 1948). A state of emergency has been imposed and democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained.

Why is India in a tough situation?

- Although India has expressed its concern over the recent developments, **India cannot alienate** itself from **Myanmar** as we have significant **economic and strategic interests** in Myanmar and its neighbourhood, especially with respect to its **Act East Policy** (Ex: **Sittwe port** in Myanmar's Rakhine state, **India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway** and the **Kaladan** Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project etc.)

How is stopping an app update violating human rights?

- **Apple blocked** Proton's security **updates** on the same day when the **UN recommended** the **Proton app to the people of Myanmar** to **report evidence** of crime by the military forces.
- These updates include security enhancements to safeguard against account takeover attempts.
- People of Myanmar turned to **ProtonVPN** to **bypass internet blocks** and **seek accurate news**, when the military forces imposed internet shutdown to prevent evidence of wrongdoings from getting out.

Has this happened before?

- Earlier, during the **Hong Kong protests Apple censored ProtonVPN** and removed the HKmap.live and Quartz apps, from its App Store after it received **pressure from China**.
- Hong Kong residents used the apps to stay informed about the protests.
- To know more about how private companies affect privacy: https://officerspulse.com/privacy-policy-whatsapp/

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ART & CULTURE

1) Ahom Kingdom

About the kingdom

- The Ahom kingdom (1228–1826) was a **medieval** kingdom in the **Brahmaputra Valley** in Assam. It is well known for maintaining its sovereignty for nearly 600 years and successfully **resisting Mughal expansion** in Northeast India
- The kingdom was established by **Chaolung Sukapha.**
- The kingdom became weaker with the rise of the **Moamoria rebellion**, and subsequently fell to repeated Burmese invasions of Assam. With the defeat of the Burmese after the First Anglo-Burmese War and the **Treaty of Yandabo in 1826**, control of the kingdom passed into East India Company hands.
- The Ahom state depended upon **forced labour.** Those forced to work for the state were called **paiks**. (Not to be confused with Paikas of Odisha)

Why is the Ahom Kingdom significant?

- Sukapha **successfully assimilated** different communities and tribes.
- He developed very **amiable relationships** with the tribal communities of Assam especially the Sutias, the Morans and the Kacharis.
- Though it came to be called the Ahom kingdom in the colonial and subsequent times, it was **largely multi-ethnic**, with the ethnic Tai-Ahom people constituting less than 10% of the population toward the end.
- The Ahom kingdom was actually a multi ethnic kingdom, and most people from **different** ethnic **groups** became a part of the Ahom population due to the process known as **Ahomisation**.

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister made a visit to Sivasagar's Jerenga Pothar in Assam, which is related to Ahom Kingdom.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain

Jal Shakti Abhiyan

- In 2019, the Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan in **256 water stressed districts** across the country. This Abhiyan is a **mass movement** to bring all the stakeholders under one ambit of water conservation drive.
- These districts fell under the critical or over-exploited groundwater category, where groundwater was being exploited faster than it could be replenished.
- Under JSA, **five target interventions** to promote water conservation and water resource management are implemented, viz.
1. Water conservation & rainwater harvesting,
2. Renovation of traditional & other water-bodies/tanks,
3. Reuse and recharge of bore-wells,
4. Watershed development and
5. Intensive afforestation etc.

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan:Catch the Rain' campaign on World Water Day i.e. on 22nd March 2021.

About 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan:Catch the Rain'

- The Campaign will be undertaken across the country, in both **rural and urban areas**, with the theme **"catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls".**
- It will be implemented from **22nd March 2021 to 30th November, 2021** - the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country.
- It will be launched as a **Jan Andolan (People's Movement)** to take water conservation at grass-root level through people's participation.
- It is intended to nudge all stakeholders to create rainwater harvesting structures suitable to the climatic conditions and subsoil strata, to ensure proper storage of rainwater.

2) Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan

About Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan

- It is a **Central Sector pension scheme** to ensure old age protection for **Unorganised Workers**.
- It was launched in March 2019.
- It is administered by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** and implemented through **Life Insurance Corporation of India** and **Common Service Centres (CSCs)**.
- LIC will be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.

Eligibility:

- The Unorganised workers whose **monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less** and belong to the entry **age group of 18-40 years** are eligible for the scheme.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- He/she **should not be an income tax payer.**

Salient Feature of PM-SYM:

- **Matching contribution by the Central Government:** PM-SYM is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme on a **50:50 basis** where prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government.
- **Minimum Assured Pension:** Each subscriber under the PM-SYM, shall receive a minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- **Family Pension:** During the receipt of pension, if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary as family pension. Family pension is applicable only to the spouse.

Why in the news?

- This information was given by Minister of State (I/C) for Labour & Employment Shri

Santosh Kumar Gangwar in Lok Sabha recently.

3) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

About PMFBY

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) launched in 2016, provides a comprehensive insurance cover against crop damage or loss arising out of unforeseen events thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers and encouraging them for adoption of innovative practices.
- The scheme is administered by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.**
- **Crops covered** : Oilseed crops; all food crops; Annual commercial/horticultural crops
- **Premium** : There will be a uniform premium of 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all Rabi crops. For annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be 5%.
- **Coverage** : It aims at covering the losses suffered by farmers such as pre-sowing losses, post-harvest losses due to cyclonic rains and losses due to unseasonal rainfall in India. It also covers losses due to localized calamities such as inundation, hailstorm and landslide risks.
- **Exclusions :** The losses arising out of war and nuclear risks, malicious damage and other preventable risks are not covered under this scheme.
- The scheme is implemented by **empanelled general insurance companies.** The funds for the scheme come from the **Krishi Kalyan Kosh**.
- Krishi Kalyan Kosh (farmers' welfare fund) is an emergency fund to support farmers when they incur losses due to low rates of produce, crop damage due to natural disasters, and to assist them when there is a delay in payment of minimum support price (MSP) by the Centre.

Major Changes

- Last year, the Union Cabinet approved the revamp of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana to enable quick and accurate yield estimation thus leading to faster claims settlement.
- The enrolment in the scheme has been made **voluntary for all farmers**, including those with existing crop loans.
- The **Centre has reduced its share of the premium subsidy** under PMFBY from 50% to 25% in irrigated areas and 30% for unirrigated areas from the kharif season of 2020. Districts having 50 per cent or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.
- Central share in premium subsidy is increased to **90 per cent** for north eastern states from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50.
- Technology solutions like **Smart Sampling Technique (SST)** to be adopted during assessment exercises.
- The Centre has given states/UTs the option to select any number of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses. Earlier, these risk covers were mandatory.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare conducted a nationwide review of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

4) Mission Karmayogi

About the programme

- Approved by the government in 2020, Mission Karmayogi is a nationwide programme to lay the foundation for capacity building of civil servants.
- It will help the officers to learn about the best practices across the world.
- Officially called the **"National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB)"**, the mission plans to transform human resource management in the country.
- The fundamental focus of the reform is the creation of a **'citizen centric civil service'** capable of creating and delivering services conducive to economic growth and public welfare.
- Mission Karmayogi shifts the focus from **"Rule based training to Role based training".**
- Greater thrust has been laid on behavioural change.

Unfolding of Mission Karmayogi

- Mission Karmayogi programme will be delivered by setting up a digital platform called **iGOTKarmayogi.**
- NPCSCB will be governed by the **Prime Minister's Human Resource Council**, which will also include state Chief Ministers, Union Cabinet ministers and experts. This council will approve and review civil service capacity building programmes.
- Besides this, there will be a **Cabinet Secretary Coordination Unit** comprising select secretaries and cadre controlling authorities.
- Also, there will be a **Capacity Building Commission**, which will include experts in related fields and global professionals. This commission will prepare and monitor annual capacity building plans and audit human resources available in the government.
- Also, there will be a **wholly-owned Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV),** which will govern the iGOT-Karmayogi platform.
- The SPV will create and operationalise the content, market place and manage key business services of iGOT-Karmayogi platform.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of State Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER) provided details about Mission Karmayogi in Rajya Sabha recently.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Atal Pension Yojana

About the Scheme

- Atal Pension Yojana (APY) addresses the **old age income security** of the working poor and the longevity risks among the workers in the **unorganised sector**.
- It encourages the workers in the **unorganised sector to voluntarily save for their retirement.** The Government had launched the scheme with effect from **1st June, 2015.**

Eligibility

- Any citizen of India can join the APY scheme. The age of the subscriber should be between **18-40 years.** The contribution levels would vary and would be low if a subscriber joins early and increases if she joins late.
- The benefits of the scheme will arise to the subscribers on attaining the **age of 60 years.**

Features of APY

- Fixed pension for the subscribers ranging between **Rs.1000 to Rs. 5000,** if s/he joins and contributes **between the age of 18 years and 40 years.**
- The same pension is payable to Spouse after death of Subscriber.
- Return of indicative pension wealth to nominees after death of spouse.
- Under the scheme, individuals who have registered before March 31, 2016, will get a co-contribution from the government, which will be 50 percent of the subscriber contribution up to a maximum of Rs. 1,000. The co-contribution will be for 5 years from 2015-16 to 2019-20.
- APY is administered by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority.**

Why in News?

- Government has said that more than 57 thousand lakh rupees have been disbursed under Atal Pension Yojana till February this year.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Recalibrating India-Taiwan ties

GS-2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

CONTEXT

- India and Taiwan are celebrating 25 years of their partnership. However, the growing relationship has been a low-key affair as India has been hesitant to acknowledge the improving ties in public.

TIME TO RECALIBRATE INDIA- TAIWAN RELATIONS

- Though mutual efforts between Delhi and Taipei have enabled a range of bilateral agreements covering agriculture, investment, customs cooperation, civil aviation, industrial cooperation and other areas, the time has come to **recalibrate India-Taiwan relations**. Creating a political framework is a prerequisite to doing this.

MUTUAL VALUES

- Both partners have increasingly deepened mutual respect underpinned by openness, with democracy and diversity as the key principles for collective growth.
- The shared faith in freedom, human rights, justice, and rule of law continues to embolden the partnership.

POTENTIAL TO COLLABORATE

HEALTH

- India has been in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. Likewise, Taiwan's handling of the pandemic and its support to many other countries underlines the need to deepen healthcare cooperation.
- India and Taiwan already collaborate in the **area of traditional medicine**. The time is ripe to **expand cooperation in the field of healthcare.**

BIO-TECHNOLOGY

- **Maintaining air quality** has become a mammoth challenge for the Indian government and **stubble burning** is an important reason for severe air pollution. Taiwan could be a valuable partner in dealing with this challenge through its bio-friendly technologies.

- Further, New Delhi and Taipei can also undertake **joint research and development initiatives in the field of organic farming.**

TOURISM

- India and Taiwan need to deepen **people-to-people connection. Cultural exchange** is the cornerstone of any civilisational exchange. It not only helps one appreciate another culture but also helps in overcoming prejudices and cultural misunderstanding.
- **Tourism** is the key tool in this exchange. However, Taiwanese tourists in India are a very small number.
- Therefore, India needs better connectivity and visibility of **Buddhist pilgrimage** tours in addition to showcasing India's diversity. This will accelerate the flow of Taiwanese tourists.
- With the Taiwan Tourism Bureau partnering with Mumbai Metro, Taiwan is already trying to raise awareness about the country and increase the inflow of Indian tourists.

DEEPENING ECONOMIC TIES

- Trade relations between the two nations have grown since the past.
- Taiwan's reputation as the world leader in **semiconductor and electronics complements** India's leadership in **ITES (Information Technology-Enabled Services).**
- Also India's huge market provides Taiwan with good investment opportunities. This convergence of interests will help create new opportunities for mutual growth.
- India's recent strides in the **ease of business ranking** not only provide Taiwan with lucrative business opportunities but also help it mitigate its over-dependence on one country for investment opportunities.
- Further, the signing of a **bilateral trade agreement in 2018** was an important milestone. As a result, there are around 200 Taiwanese companies in the field of electronics, construction, petrochemicals, machine, Information and Communications Technology and auto parts operating in India.

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CHALLENGES

- Despite the huge potential, **Taiwan investments have been paltry in India.** Taiwanese firms find the regulatory and labour regime daunting with stray incidents such as the incident in the Wistron plant last year creating confusion and mistrust.
- *The Wistron plant incident witnessed workers unrest following the non-redressal of payment and overtime issues at a new factory of Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing India Pvt Ltd (in Kolar district around 60 km from Bengaluru), that manufactures iPhones for Apple and other products. This unrest later resulted in a riot at the plant on December 12, 2020.*

WAY FORWARD

- Policymakers need to **coordinate better with the business community** to help them navigate the regulatory and cultural landscape for better ties.
- To make the relationship more meaningful, both sides can create a **group of empowered persons or a task force** to chart out a road map in a given time frame. Political will is the key.

2) Water, the looming frontier

GS-3 Environmental pollution; Conservation

NEWS

- While we are still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is airborne, we have forgotten that another such blight could well come from **contaminated water.**

CONTEXT

- NITI Ayog and WaterAid (an international non-governmental organisation), amongst others, have found that **over 70% of India's surface and groundwater is contaminated** by human and other waste and is likely to carry viruses.

INDISCRIMINATE HUMAN ACTIVITY

- **Indiscriminate human activity** is often the reason for environmental degradation and pandemics.
- The practice like keeping animals locked together for mass production of meat, produces an artificial environment that can birth mutations in erstwhile dormant viruses.

- Earlier, in the wild, animals were far away from human habitats, thus the viruses they harboured remained isolated. But human practices can spawn viruses that can easily transfer to the human population.

WATER AS A SOURCE OF SARS-CoV-2

- Once the virus has found its way into the human population, it is bound to proliferate in wastewater. For example, in England, Wales and Scotland, several wastewater samples were tested and were found to carry traces of SARS-CoV-2.
- Remnants of the virus have also been detected in raw sewage across Sydney.

ALARMING SITUATION FOR INDIA

- In India, **sewage water is often discharged into water bodies.**
- The river water or lake water, which carries human waste, sewage, and toxic waste, can be a very generous host for viruses of different kinds and we do not know where and how they can mutate and strike.
- Some **water-transmitted viral pathogens** are astrovirus, hepatitis A and norovirus.
- Unlike in the developed world, a huge section of the population in India **uses polluted water** from sources like rivers, lakes, or groundwater for drinking.

CHALLENGES

- Virus is still not understood completely, making it difficult to curtail.
- Decontamination of water bodies and groundwater could take several decades.
- Since most of the water sources are contaminated, the only way to purify water is through **reverse osmosis (RO).**
- But though RO removes contaminants, it also **takes out all the healthy minerals and nutrients** required by the human body.
- This is an unhealthy and exorbitantly priced proposition.
- To neutralise the virus, we would need at least an **ultraviolet aquaguard treatment,** but this **won't take out chemical contaminants,** and it is also **costly.**

SOLUTION

- There is **no technological substitute for living natural resources** like pristine natural water and soil. This means that we must **conserve and use our natural living resources.**

- The water beneath our forests is as good as natural spring water and we must safeguard it.
- It is to be noticed that developed countries have stable landscapes and populations whereas developing countries like India have a growing population, which means there will be growing consumption. Therefore, we need to work upon a **sustainable model of development.**
- There are **two unpolluted freshwater sources left in the country**. The first is the water lying below our forests; the second is the aquifers that lie below the floodplains of rivers.
- Both these sources provide natural underground storage and are renewable– the rains provide natural recharge year after year and it is this recharge which can be used to water our cities and towns. But we should use only a fraction of the annual recharge.
- **Forests and floodplains must be declared as water sanctuaries.**
- **It is important to remember that these evolutionary resources, once lost, will be lost forever. It is time we understood this is natural infrastructure bequeathed to us by nature. If we don't realise this, it will only be our loss.**

3) Tactical abstention
GS-2 International relations- India and its neighborhood- relations
CONTEXT
- By abstaining from the vote on the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka, India has signalled its unwillingness to upset its neighbour.

REASONS BEHIND THIS MOVE OF INDIA
- India seems to have utilised the opportunity to preserve its diplomatic space and to contain the pervasive influence of China over Sri Lanka even while maintaining its support for the Tamil minority to achieve equality, justice, dignity and peace.
- India has not been comfortable with externally mandated investigative mechanisms.
- Even when it voted in 2012 in favour of a credible investigation into human rights, India had got the resolution to incorporate

the need for Sri Lanka's 'concurrence' to any assistance that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights may offer in such a probe.
- In this session and just ahead of the vote, India stressed on both meaningful devolution to meet Tamil aspirations and the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka — aspects that it believes are not an 'either-or' choice.

WHY THIS RESOLUTION BY UNHRC?
- The resolution comes amidst disturbing signs that Sri Lanka is returning back into the days of democratic deficit seen prior to the 2015 elections.
- The present regime withdrew from the commitments made to the UNHRC by its predecessor on constructive engagement with the international community, and the consensual resolution on justice and accountability.
- The UN High Commissioner's report raises concern over increasing militarisation, heightened surveillance against rights defenders and NGOs, interference with the few prosecutions in emblematic cases from the past, and the dangerous anti-minority rhetoric.

INDIA'S CONCERN
- India's concerns in Sri Lanka have always been different from the rest of the international community.
- Informed by a sense of the long-term well-being of the Tamils, and that power-sharing does foster reconciliation, India emphasis on devolution rather than accountability.
- It is clear that India has its own limitations in expressing disappointment over the island nation's move away from reconciliation and devolution. It continues to be weighed down by the Chinese presence in the region.
- Even the need to be in accord with sentiment in Tamil Nadu in the midst of an election was not motivation enough for India to change its position from tactical neutrality to one of open support for the resolution. **When pragmatism and principle were needed in equal measure, the Centre seems to have chosen abstention as an easy way out.**

4) Here is why the electoral bonds scheme must go

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

NEWS

▪ Recently, after a brief hearing, the Supreme Court reserved orders on the question of staying of electoral bond.

CONCERNS REGARDING ELECTORAL BONDS

▪ Electoral bonds have become a dominant way of funding the political parties and many feel that these Electoral bonds allow for **limitless and anonymous corporate donations** to political parties. Hence there are various concerns about the electoral bonds:

▪ **Against democracy-** Electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy.

▪ This is because **money is the most effective way of buying policy, of engaging in regulatory capture, and of skewing the playing in one's own favour.**

▪ As Electoral bonds maintain secrecy around funding of the political parties, it **undermines the informed decision by the voters and citizens of India.**

▪ For democracy to thrive, the role of money in influencing elections should be limited. To ensure principles of parity between the ruling party and the opposition, the elections can be publicly funded or there should be a limit on the election expenditure as like in the advanced countries.

▪ But the electoral bonds scheme, by **removing limits on political donations allows political corporations to influence politicians**.

▪ This defeats the **entire purpose of democracy**, which as B.R. Ambedkar memorably pointed out, was **not just to guarantee one person, one vote, but one vote one value.**

▪ **Against "right to know"-** As held by the honourable Indian Supreme Court "right to know", especially in the context of elections, is an **integral part of the right to freedom of expression** under the Indian Constitution. Hence there are constitutional objections to electoral bonds.

▪ **Anonymity-** Electoral bonds allow limitless and anonymous donations to political parties in an asymmetrical manner and hence is **against healthy democracy**.

▪ Since the donations are routed through the **State Bank of India**, it is possible for the government to find who is denoting to which party. Hence it has a chilling effect on donations to rival political parties, while filling the coffers of the incumbent ruling party.

▪ The Donation patterns of the last three year shows this behaviour where **most of the donations have gone to the ruling party.**

▪ There have been reservations within the government as well as by the Election Commission of India about the electoral bonds scheme.

▪ With Electoral bonds, even **foreign donations** to political parties can often be made through shell companies, hence electoral bonds may result in **institutionalisation of corruption rather than elimination of black money.**

WAY FORWARD

▪ Governments derive their legitimacy from elections, and it is elections that grant governments the mandate to pursue their policy goals, without undue interference from courts.

▪ The electoral legitimacy of the government is questionable if the Electoral process becomes questionable.

▪ As the ruling government will never regulate something that is beneficial to them, hence it is need of the hour the honourable Supreme Court must be particularly sensitive to and cognisant of laws and rules that seek to skew the democratic process and the level playing fields and that seek to entrench one party rule over multiparty democracy. The Supreme Court's inaction in this case is not neutral. It directly benefits the ruling party.

▪ Since the electoral bonds scheme is guilty of both intent and in effect, the Electoral bond deserves to be struck down by the courts as unconstitutional without any delay.

5) Remove the wedges in India Bangladesh ties

GS-2 International relations /India and its neighborhood- relations

CONTEXT

- Bangladesh will celebrate its 50 years of Independence as on 26th March 2021.
- India- Bangladesh relationship has oscillated over the last fifty years during different regimes in Bangladesh. But in recent times, **relationships have been mostly cordial.**
- Despite that **some constraints** have been there in the relationship. Small but important steps can put an end to the longstanding issues in a relationship that is gradually coming of age.

NOW IT IS ABOUT COOPERATION

- Bangladesh and India have historical ties:
a) India's provided political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during **Bangladesh's Liberation War.**
b) Nearly 3,900 Indian soldiers gave up their lives and an estimated **10 million Bangladeshi refugees** took shelter in India during the war.
- Both countries in recent years solved their long pending border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic **Land Boundary Agreement in 2015**, where enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh has **uprooted anti India insurgency elements** from its borders. This has made the India Bangladesh border as one of the most peaceful borders of the region.
- Bangladesh today is **India's biggest trading partner in South Asia** with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at $9.21 billion and imports at $1.04 billion.
- On the development front, cooperation has deepend because of India extending **three lines of credit** to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to $8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
- **Bangladeshis are a large portion of tourists in India**, outnumbering all tourists arriving from western Europe in 2017, with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi.

- Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of **India's international medical patients** and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.
- **Direct buses** from Kolkata to Agartala have boosted connectivity. It has reduced the route distance to 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km if it ran through the Chicken's Neck. Recently, a 1.9 kilometre long bridge, the **Maitri Setu** has also been inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh to boost connectivity.
- Bangladesh ports of Chattogram and Mongla ports allow landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through road, rail, and waterways.

BONES OF CONTENTIONS

- Despite these areas of cooperation a lot of issues are pending between the two countries:
- Unresolved **Teesta water sharing issue.**
- **Border killings-** The year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force. The shots are fired at civilians, usually cattle traders, who are usually unarmed trying to illegally cross the borders.
- The Central government's proposal to implement the **National Register of Citizens** across the whole of India may reflect poorly on the India-Bangladesh relationship.
- **Red Tapism** from India's end, and **slow project implementation** on Bangladesh's end while implementation of the projects is another major issue.

CONCERNS

- **China** is influencing the politics of Southeast Asia in a big way even influencing traditional allies of India like Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives.
- In spite of its 'Neighbourhood First Policy', India is losing its influence in the region to China.

WAY FORWARD

- As Bangladesh is a key member in India's neighbour, onus is on India to be generous enough to let the water flow and ensure that people are not killed on the border for cattle even if it is illegal when there are appropriate means for justice.

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- These small but important steps can remove long standing snags in a relationship which otherwise is gradually coming of age in 50 years.
- To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the **three Cs — cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation.**

6) Dormant Parliament, fading business

GS-2 Parliament and State legislatures— structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

NEWS

- The gradual deterioration in Parliament's functioning has to be stopped if it is to fulfil its constitutional mandate.

CONTEXT

- The Budget session of the Parliament ended two weeks ahead of the original plan, as many political leaders are busy campaigning for the forthcoming State Assembly elections.
- Last year also sessions of the Parliament were hampered because of Covid-19 epidemics. The **fiscal year 2020-21 saw the Lok Sabha sitting for 34 days (and the Rajya Sabha for 33), the lowest ever.**
- Since, the Parliament is a crucial organ of the government responsible for scrutiny and responsibility, there is a **need for it to adopt remote working and technological solutions,** as several other countries have done.

CONCERNS

- Functioning of the Parliament for the shorter duration of the day is resulting in the following issues:
- It is resulting in **absence of careful scrutiny of Bills.**
- During the session, 13 Bills were introduced and **not even one of them was referred to a parliamentary committee for examination.**
- Many important bills like the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill**, 2021, for the change in governance of Delhi and **Mines, Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill 2021** to remove end use restrictions on mines and ease conditions

for captive mines, **National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021** — to create a new government infrastructure finance institution and permit private ones in this sector were passed within a few days. This quick work is a **sign of abdication by Parliament of its duty to scrutinise Bills** rather than as a sign of efficiency.

- There has been a **decline in the number of the bills sent to committees**. The percentage of Bills referred to committees have declined from 60% and 71% in the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-09) and the 15th Lok Sabha, respectively, to 27% in the 16th Lok Sabha and just 11% in the current one.
- In the last few years there has been **dubious practice of marking Bills as 'Money Bills'**. The Finance Bills, over the last few years, have contained several unconnected items such as restructuring of tribunals, introduction of electoral bonds, and amendments to the foreign contribution act. This **bypasses the Rajya Sabha** as over money bill Rajya Sabha cannot make any amendments, and has only recommendatory powers.
- In the present Budget session, Lok Sabha had listed the budget of just five Ministries for detailed discussion and discussed only three of these. **76% of the total Budget was approved without any discussion.**
- In the current Lok sabha **office the Deputy speaker, which is mandated by law is missing**.

WAY FORWARD

- Deterioration in Parliament's functioning is not a recent phenomenon. There has been manipulation of the rules even in the past to bypass Parliamentary accountability.
- However, some things have improved over the last few years. Most Bills being discussed in the House have had less disruptions.
- However, the scrutiny of Bills has suffered as they are not being referred to committees.
- In order to fulfill constitutional functions of the Parliament its functioning needs to be improved.
- This can be done through creating a **system of research support to Members of Parliament, providing sufficient time**

for MPs to examine issues and also **making the requirement that all Bills and budgets are examined by** **committees and public feedback is taken.**
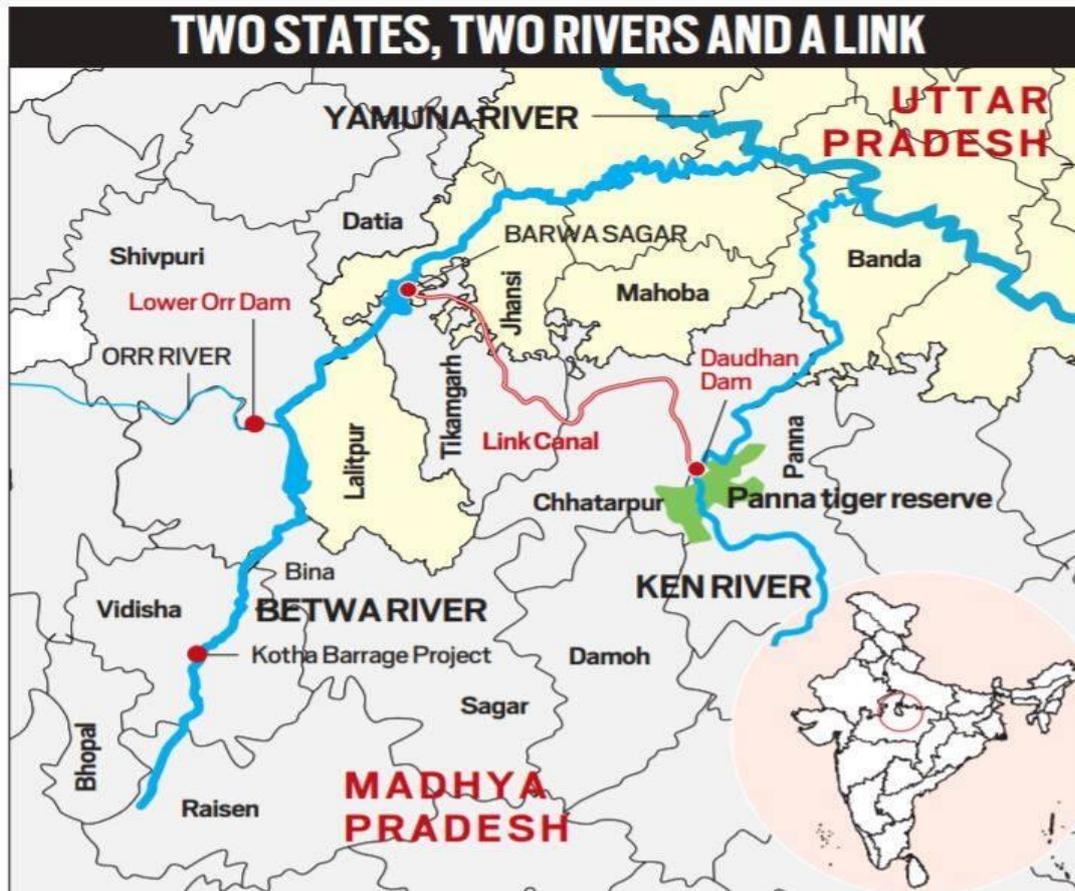
INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Ken-Betwa Link Project and its benefits

What is the Ken Betwa Link Project?

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers.** Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of **River Yamuna.**
- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

TWO STATES, TWO RIVERS AND A LINK

Which region will get the benefits of the Ken-Betwa Link Project?

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in **Bundelkhand**, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of **Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.**
- According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand.

Will the project affect the Panna tiger reserve?

- As per Minister of Jal Shakti Rattan report, out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project, 4,206 ha of area lies within the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve.
- The River Ken in the Madhya pradesh passes through the Panna Tiger Reserve.

Are there previous examples of river-linking in India?

- In the past, several river linking projects have been taken up. For instance, under the **Periyar Project**, transfer of water from Periyar basin to Vaigai basin was envisaged.
- Similarly, other projects such as **Parambikulam Aliyar, Kurnool Cuddapah Canal, Telugu Ganga Project, and Ravi-Beas-Sutlej** were undertaken.

Recent developments on interlinking of rivers in India

- In the 1970s, the idea of transferring surplus water from a river to water-deficit area was mooted by the then Union Irrigation Minister (earlier the Jal Shakti Ministry was known as Ministry of Irrigation) **Dr K L Rao.**
- However, the government did not pursue these two ideas further. The Ministry of Irrigation prepared a **National Perspective Plan (NNP)** for water resources development envisaging inter basin water transfer in the country.
- The NPP comprised two components: (i) Himalayan Rivers Development; and (ii) Peninsular Rivers Development.
- Based on the NPP, the **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** identified 30 river links—16 under Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component.
- **Ken Betwa Link Project is one of the 16 river linking projects under the Peninsular component.**

2) What is the electoral bond scheme, and why is it being opposed by transparency activists?

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has reserved its order on a plea seeking a stay on the sale of fresh electoral bonds ahead of state assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

What are electoral bonds?

- Announced in the **2017 Union Budget**, electoral bonds are **interest-free bearer instruments** used to donate money anonymously to political parties.
- A bearer instrument does not carry any information about the buyer or payee and the holder of the instrument (which is the political party) is presumed to be its owner.
- The bonds are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore, and the **State Bank of India (SBI) is the only bank authorised to sell them.**
- Donors can purchase and subsequently donate the bonds to their party of choice, which the party can then cash through its

verified account within 15 days. There is no limit on the number of bonds an individual or company can purchase.
- SBI deposits bonds that a political party has not encashed within 15 days into the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

Why are electoral bonds being so vehemently opposed by transparency activists?

- The **anonymity** provided to donors donating electoral bonds is the point of contention here. Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the Union government has exempted political parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds.
- This means the voters will not know which individual, company, or organisation has funded which party, and to what extent. Before the introduction of electoral bonds, political parties had to disclose details of all its donors, who have donated more than **Rs 20,000.**
- According to transparency activists, the change infringes the citizen's **'Right to Know'** and makes the political class even more unaccountable.
- Moreover, while electoral bonds provide no details to the citizens, the said anonymity does not apply to the government of the day, which can always access the donor details by demanding the data from the State Bank of India. This implies that the **only people in dark about the source of these donations are the taxpayers.**

How popular are electoral bonds as a route of donation?

- In less than three years of their introduction, by virtue of the anonymity they offer to donors, electoral bonds have become the most popular route of donation.
- More than half the total income of national parties and the regional parties analysed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) for the financial year 2018-19 came from electoral bonds donations.

What is the Election Commission's stand on electoral bonds?

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** had objected to the amendments in the Representation of the People (RP) Act, which exempt political parties from disclosing donations received through

electoral bonds. It described the move as a **"retrograde step"**.

- The ECI has asked the government to "reconsider" and "modify" the amendment.
- Due to its anonymous nature, ECI was unable to determine whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provision under Section 29(b) of the RP Act which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from **government companies and foreign sources.**

3) Why did the first inter-state tiger relocation project failed?

What was the Tiger Relocation Project?

- The tiger relocation project was initiated in 2018 wherein two big cats, a male (Mahavir) from **Kanha Tiger Reserve** and a female (Sundari) from **Bandhavgarh from Madhya Pradesh** were relocated to **Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha**, to shore up the tiger population in the state.
- The relocation was meant to serve **two purposes** — reducing tiger population in areas with excess tigers to majorly reduce territorial disputes, second, to reintroduce tigers in areas where the population has considerably reduced due to various reasons.

What is the Satkosia Tiger Reserve and why was it chosen?

- Encompassing an area of 963.87 sq km, the Satkosia Tiger Reserve spreads across four districts in Odisha and has as its core area 523 sq km, its population was significantly reduced in the last decade.
- The purpose of the relocation was to repopulate tigers in the reserve areas.

What was the outcome of the project?

- The project ran into trouble within weeks of initiation. The **villagers feared the big cats would endanger their livelihoods, lives and livestocks.**
- They also alleged that they were **not consulted or informed prior to the translocation.**
- Within months of the translocation, Mahavir was found dead due to **poaching**. Sundari was involved in **man-animal conflict** killing two persons in the tribal village.
- Subsequently, the project was **suspended** by the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

What factors contributed to the likely failure of the project?

- As per wildlife conservation activists and former forest officials from the state, the major reason which contributed to the failure of the project was the **lack of confidence and trust building between the forest department and the villagers.**
- While Mahavir had settled down after initial exploration of the forest area, Sundari was venturing into human habitation. This was also because the already existing female tigress in the core area did not allow the presence of another tigress and chased her away. **Sundari's proximity to human habitations** which are in abundance even close to the core area in Satkosia could have led to the human-animal conflict.
- **Capacity for tiger monitoring was poor**. The local communities were not taken into confidence nor conveyed the benefits from tourism that tigers could bring them.
- **Relocating villages** should be prioritised before tiger reintroduction is continued.

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RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Remote Voting Facility

Context

- Recently, the Chief Election Commissioner expressed hope that the concept of remote voting may see the light of day by the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.
- The poll panel started a research project for enabling remote voting, in consultation with IIT Madras and eminent technologists from IITs and other leading institutions.

What is Remote Voting?

- It is an electronic voting system that would **enable electors to cast their votes from any part of the country** irrespective of where they are registered to vote or even abroad.
- Eg: A Delhi-registered elector who happens to be in Hyderabad to cast his or her vote in elections in the Capital electronically.
- The facility will enable those who cannot be at their polling booths on the day of the election, due to various reasons, to exercise their franchise from a remote location.

Significance of developing a Remote Voting System

- As of now, the average **voter turnout ratio in India is around 50-60%** which needs to be increased to 80-90% for which the Election Commission (EC) has moved from ballot papers to Electronic voting machines (EVMs) but still there is very **less electoral participation.**
- The Remote voting facility may lead to a **greater inclusion of voters** and may also strengthen the social, demographic and ethical pillars of the country.
- With the introduction of EVMs, the voter turnout ratio has increased by a certain level which inturn proves that a technology enabled voting system may lead to **higher electoral participation** as it will be a more convenient environment or system for most of the population living outside the registered area or domicile.
- India being one of the largest democracy and super power in terms of technology should harness the opportunity as technology is considered as an enabler for conducting free and fair elections.

- A **Blockchain enabled voting system** will ensure reliability of results, secrecy of votes and protection of personal data.

What is Blockchain Technology ?

- **Blockchain** is a system of **recording information** in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to change, hack, or cheat the system. It is essentially a **digital ledger of transactions** that is duplicated and distributed across the entire network of computer systems **without a centralised authority.**
- Eg: Cryptocurrency

How will a Blockchain enabled voting system work ?

- Blockchain technology can used in developing voting system by dividing into 3 premises:
- **Voter Identification and authorisation** via multi-layered IT enabled system.
- **Generation of E-Ballot paper** for casting the vote
- A **Hashtag** will be generated and notification will be sent to all the people in a chain.
- The communication will be **secure and encrypted** and as a result privacy and secrecy of votes can be maintained and will provide layered levels of checks and balances.

Conclusion

- Blockchain Technology can increase **electoral participation** on one hand while on the other the Electoral process needs to be transparent for its efficient use.

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