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Schemes

1) One District One Product Scheme

About the scheme

- One District One Product One District One Product (ODOP) scheme was launched by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- The objective is to **convert each District of the country into an Export Hub** by
 1. Identifying products with export potential in the District,
 2. Addressing bottlenecks for exporting these products,
 3. Supporting local exporters/manufacturers to scale up manufacturing, and
 4. Find potential buyers outside India with the aim of promoting exports,
 5. Promoting the manufacturing & services industry in the District and generating employment in the District.
- The programme aims to **promote local indigenous specialised products and the crafts of each district** through various development initiatives, including providing loans to local production units, artisans, and farmers; establishing common facility centres; helping market these products at a global level; etc.
- Under the initial phase of the ODOP programme, **106 Products have been identified from 103 districts across 27 States**.
- There may be **more than one cluster of ODOP products in one district**. There may be a **cluster of ODOP products consisting of more than one adjacent district in a State**.

Significance of the initiative

- ODOP is seen as a transformational step forward towards realizing the true potential of a district, fuel economic growth and generate

employment and rural entrepreneurship, taking us to the goal of AtmaNirbhar Bharat.

- It will increase income and local employment at the bottom of the value chain and can empower the craftsmen, artisans, and farmers to improve their product quality and attain newer skills to produce better products.

Why in the news?

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

2) Swadhar Greh Scheme

About the scheme

- The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** is implementing the Swadhar Greh Scheme which targets the **women victims of difficult circumstances** who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity.
- Swadhar Greh targets the following categories of women in difficult circumstances without economic and social support:
 - Deserted women;
 - Women rendered homeless due to natural calamities;
 - Women ex-prisoners;
 - Trafficked women/girls rescued or runaway from brothels;
 - HIV/AIDS affected women;
 - Women victims of domestic violence, family tension or discord driven out from their homes and facing marital litigations;
 - Women victims of terrorist violence

Objectives

- Under the Scheme, Swadhar Greh will be set up in **every district**. Swadhar Greh provides **temporary residential**

accommodation with the following objectives:

- ✓ To cater to the **primary need** of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support.
 - ✓ To enable them to regain their **emotional strength** that gets hampered due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances.
 - ✓ To provide them with **legal aid and guidance** to enable them to take steps for their readjustment in family/society.
 - ✓ To **rehabilitate** them economically and emotionally.
 - ✓ To act as a **support system** that understands and meets various requirements of women in distress.
 - ✓ To enable them to start their life afresh with dignity and conviction.
 - For big cities and other districts having **more than 40 lakh population** or those districts where there is a need for additional support to the women, **more than one Swadhar Greh could be established.**
 - The Swadhar Greh Scheme initially introduced as a central sector scheme has been revised in 2016 as a sub-scheme of the **Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme “Protection and Empowerment of Women”.**
 - Funds are released through the States, with a cost sharing ratio of **60:40** between the Centre and the States excepting for the North Eastern and Himalayan States where it shall be **90:10** and for UTs it is **100%.**
- Why in the news?**
- This information was given by the Union Minister of Women and Child Development in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha recently.
- 3) Janani Suraksha Yojana**
About the Yojana
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a **safe motherhood intervention** under the **National Health Mission** launched by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** in 2005.
 - It is being implemented with the objective of **reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery** among pregnant women especially with weak socio-economic status i.e. women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and BPL households..
 - JSY **integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care.**
 - The scheme is under implementation in **all states and Union Territories (UTs)**, with a special focus on Low Performing States (LPS).
 - **Cash assistance:** Under the JSY, eligible pregnant women are entitled for cash assistance **irrespective of the age of mother and number of children** for giving birth in a government or accredited private health facility.
 - **BPL pregnant women, who prefer to deliver at home,** are entitled to a cash assistance of **Rs 500 per delivery** regardless of age of women and the number of children. The rationale is that the beneficiary would be able to use the cash assistance for her care during delivery or to meet incidental expenses of delivery.
 - **Focus:** The scheme focuses on the poor pregnant woman with **special dispensation for States having low institutional delivery rates** namely the States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Rajasthan, Orissa and Jammu and Kashmir. While these States have been named as Low Performing States (LPS), the remaining States have been named as High performing States (HPS).

- The Yojana enables the States/UTs to hire the services of a **private specialist** to conduct **Caesarean Section** or for the management of Obstetric complications, in the Public Health facilities, where Government specialists are not in place.
- States are encouraged to **accredit private health facilities** for increasing the choice of delivery care institutions.

Category	Rural area (Rs.)	Urban area (Rs.)	Eligibility
Financial Assistance for Institutional Delivery			
Low Performing States(LPS)	1400	1000	Available to all women regardless of age and number of children for delivery in government /private accredited health facilities.
High Performing States(HPS)	700	600	Available only to BPL/SC/ST women regardless of age and number of children for delivery in government /private accredited health facilities.
Financial Assistance for Home Delivery			
Low Performing States(LPS)	500	500	Available only to BPL women who prefer to deliver at home regardless of age and number of children.
HighPerforming States(HPS)	500	500	

Why in the news?

- Institutional deliveries reported by the States/UTs under Janani Suraksha Yojana during the period from April to December, 2019 is 1.54 Crore in comparison to 1.33 Crore for the corresponding period for the current year i.e. from April to December, 2020 as reported in Health Management Information System (HMIS).

4) Kisan Credit Card scheme

About the Scheme

- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was introduced in **1998** with the aim of providing **adequate and timely credit support** from the banking system under a single window with flexible and simplified procedure to the farmers for their cultivation and other needs as indicated below:
 - To meet the short term credit requirements for cultivation of crops;
 - Post-harvest expenses;
 - Produce marketing loan;
 - Consumption requirements of farmer household;

- Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture;
- Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities.

- Note:** The aggregate of components 'a' to 'e' above will form the **short term credit limit portion** and the aggregate of components under 'f' will form the **long term credit limit portion**.
- Under the KCC Scheme, a flexible limit of Rs.10,000 to Rs.50,000 has been provided to marginal farmers (as Flexi KCC) based on the land holding and crops grown.
- The beneficiaries under the scheme will be issued with a **Smart card/ Debit card**.
- It enables farmers to purchase agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. and draw cash to satisfy their agricultural and consumption needs.
- The Scheme is implemented by **Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks and Cooperatives**.

Eligibility

- Farmers - individual/joint borrowers who are owner cultivators;

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

Why in News?

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

5) Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)

About the Campaign

- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, to which **India is a signatory**, casts an obligation on all the signatory governments to take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- The Accessible India Campaign was launched in **2015** by the **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment**, with a view to fulfilling the obligations under the UNCRPD.
- It is a nation-wide Campaign for **achieving universal accessibility** for

Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It aims at providing equal opportunity to PwDs to participate in all the aspects of life and live independently.

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

Objectives

- The campaign is based on the principles of the **Social Model of Disability**, that disability is caused by the way society is organised, and not the person's limitations and impairments.
- The **physical, social, structural and attitudinal barriers** prevent People with Disabilities from participating equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities. A barrier-free environment facilitates equal participation in all the activities and promotes an independent and dignified way of life.
- The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the

growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

Why in News?

- According to data from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, less than 7% of public buses in the country were fully accessible to wheelchair users as

of December 2020, with the target of 25% of buses being accessible by June 2022 under the Accessible India Campaign getting close.

- When the Accessible India Campaign was launched in 2015, the deadline for making at least 25% of public buses fully accessible was March 2018. However, the deadline had been pushed back to June 2022.

Initiatives

1) KAPILA for patent awareness

About

- 'KAPILA: Kalam Program for Intellectual Property (IP) Literacy and Awareness' was launched by the **Ministry of Education** in 2020.
- It is proposed to create appropriate **awareness regarding the need of IP filing, mechanism and methodology involved in filing IP in India and globally**, especially amongst students and faculty of higher education institutions (HEIs).
- KAPILA will help in establishing the much required IP filing ecosystem in a large number of education institutions and thus create a culture of systematically protecting new ideas, research and innovation having national and global relevance.

The objective of KAPILA is to

1. Recognise, facilitate and felicitate the Intellectual Property, innovations and best practices in Higher Education Institutions,
2. Enabling of IP protection of inventions originating from faculty and students of HEIs,
3. Development of Credit Course on Intellectual property rights (IPRs),
4. Training program on IPR for faculty and students of HEIs and sensitization and
5. Development of vibrant IP filing system.

Why in News?

- The Union Ministry of Education conducted a nationwide review of the KAPILA programme.

2) NaiRoshni

About the programme

- "NaiRoshni", a scheme for **Leadership Development of Minority Women**, is being implemented across India by the **Ministry of Minority Affairs**.

Aim

- The aim of the scheme is to **empower and instill confidence in women** by providing knowledge, tools and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks and other institutions at all levels.
- This includes empowerment of the trainee women so that they become independent and confident members of the society.

Objective

- The overall objective of the scheme is to **embolden the minority women** to move out of the confines of their homes and community and assume leadership roles in society.
- The scheme provides for a **six days training programme** followed by handholding for a period of one year.
- The training is provided on various pre-designed Training modules covering issues relating to women viz.
 - Leadership of Women through participation in decision making
 - Educational Programmes for women, Health and Hygiene
 - Legal rights of women
 - Financial Literacy
 - Digital Literacy
 - Swachh Bharat
 - Life Skills
 - Advocacy for Social and Behavioural change.
- The Scheme is being **implemented through Non-Governmental Organisations** empanelled under the NaiRoshni Scheme as per scheme guidelines in force.

Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister for Minority Affairs in the Lok Sabha recently.

3) INSPIRE Programme

About the Programme

- Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) is an

innovative programme sponsored and managed by the **Department of Science & Technology (DST)** for **attraction of talent to Science**.

- The basic objective of INSPIRE is to
 - ✓ Communicate to the youth of the country the excitements of creative pursuit of science,
 - ✓ Attract talent to the study of science at an early age and thus build the required critical human resource pool for strengthening and expanding the science & technology system and r&d base.
 - ✓ A striking feature of the programme is that it **does not believe in conducting competitive exams** for identification of talent at any level.
 - ✓ It believes in and relies on the efficacy of the **existing educational structure for identification of talent**.
- INSPIRE has three components:
 1. **Scheme for Early Attraction of Talent (SEATS)**
 2. **Scholarship for Higher Education (SHE)**
 3. **Assured Opportunity for Research Careers (AORC)**

INSPIRE Award MANAK

- The **INSPIRE Awards - MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge)**, being executed by DST with **National Innovation Foundation-India**, aims to motivate **students in the age group of 10-15 years** and studying in **classes 6 to 10**.
- The objective of the scheme is to target one million original ideas/innovations rooted in science and societal applications to foster a culture of creativity and innovative thinking among school children.
 - *Refer Pulse January 2021 edition for details on National Innovation Foundation-India.*

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Science & Technology has announced that during the last three years, close to 1,23,024 young students of class 6-10 from recognized schools across the country, received the INSPIRE Award MANAK.

4) Strategic Crude Oil Reserves

What are SPRs?

- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) are **huge stockpiles of crude oil** stored in the **underground rock caverns** (considered safest for storage of Hydrocarbons) to tackle emergency situations and allow a country to tide over short-term supply disruptions.
- They represent a **defence against any event of downfall in future oil production**, including physical or economic actions which disrupt any part of the production process from exploration and development through refining.

Status in India

- In India, Strategic Petroleum Reserves are maintained by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited**, a Special Purpose Vehicle - wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.
- Strategic crude oil storages are situated at **Mangalore (Karnataka), Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) and Padur (Karnataka)** as per Phase I of India's SPR programme. They have fuel storage of a total 5.33 MMT (Million Metric Tonnes). As per the consumption pattern of 2019-20, the total capacity is estimated to provide for about **9.5 days of crude oil requirement**.
- In addition, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) in the country have storage facilities for crude oil and petroleum products for **64.5 days**, thus the current total national capacity for storage of crude oil and petroleum products currently is **74 days**.

- The government of India has given 'in principle' approval to set up two more such caverns at **Chandikhol (Odisha) and Padur** as per phase II through Public-Private Partnership. This will give an **additional 6.5 MMT** of the oil reserves. As per the consumption pattern of 2019-20, 6.5 MMT SPR capacity is estimated to provide for about **additional 12 days** of India's crude oil requirement.



- The **global practice** is to maintain strategic reserves of **at least 90 days of oil imports**.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas reviewed the status of SPRs in India recently.

5) FSSAI slashes limit for trans fat levels in foods

Natural fats

- All natural fats and oils are a combination of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids (TFA).
- Our body needs the **first two categories of 'healthy' fats** as apart from being a major source of energy, they help absorb some vitamins and minerals and build cell membranes and the sheaths surrounding nerves.

- These fats are **free-flowing**, unlike saturated fatty acids or trans fats, which are considered harmful as they **clog arteries** and result in hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular issues.

What are trans fats? and why are they harmful?

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

Elimination of TFAs

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

Recent changes

- In December 2020, **FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) capped the amount of trans fatty acids in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022** from the current permissible limit of 5%

through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.

- The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.

Why in News?

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

About FSSAI

- FSSAI is an **autonomous statutory body** established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare is the administrative Ministry** of FSSAI.
- FSSAI is responsible for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.

6) New guidelines to regulate digital content

What's in the news?

- Citing instructions from the Supreme Court and the concerns raised in Parliament about social media abuse, the government has framed the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021** in exercise of powers under section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The new rules aim to regulate **social media, digital news media, and over-the-top (OTT) content providers**.
- In addition, the government said that it wanted to create a level playing field in terms of rules to be followed by online news and media platforms vis-à-vis traditional media outlets.

What are the key proposals that the guidelines make for social media?

- **Section 79 of the Information Technology Act 2000** provides a “safe harbour” to intermediaries that host user-generated content, and **exempts them from liability for the actions of users** if they adhere to government-prescribed guidelines.
- The new guidelines notified recently prescribe an **element of due diligence to be followed by the intermediary**, failing which the safe harbour provisions would cease to apply to these platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp.
- They also prescribe a **grievance redressal mechanism** by mandating that the intermediaries, including social media platforms, should establish a mechanism for receiving and resolving complaints from users.
- These platforms will need to appoint a **grievance officer** to deal with such complaints, who must acknowledge the complaint within 24 hours, and resolve it within 15 days of receipt.
- Intermediaries which provide messaging as a primary service must enable the **identification of the first**

originator of the information on its platform and it must be **disclosed if required by an order from the Court or the government**. Such order will be passed for specified purposes including investigation of offences related to sovereignty and security of the state, public order, or sexual violence.

Do the guidelines lay the rules for removal of content from social media?

- In essence, the rules lay down **10 categories of content that the social media platform should not host**.
- These include content that “threatens the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of India, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or causes incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or prevents investigation of any offence or is insulting any foreign States”; “is defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another’s privacy, including bodily privacy; insulting or harassing on the basis of gender; libellous, racially or ethnically objectionable; relating or encouraging money laundering or gambling, or otherwise inconsistent with or contrary to the laws of India”, etc.
- The rules stipulate that upon receipt of information about the platform hosting prohibited content from a court or the appropriate government agency, it **should remove the said content within 36 hours**.

What does the due diligence entail for social media companies?

- In addition to appointing a grievance officer, social media platforms will now be required to appoint a **chief compliance officer resident in India**, who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the rules.
- They will be required also to appoint a **nodal contact person** for 24×7

coordination with law enforcement agencies.

- Further, the platforms will need to publish a **monthly compliance report** mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints, as well as details of contents removed proactively by the significant social media intermediary.
- While the rules have been notified and will take effect immediately, the due diligence requirements will come into effect after three months.

What are the penalties for companies violating these guidelines?

- In case an intermediary fails to observe the rules, it will be liable for punishment “under any law for the time being in force including the provisions of the IT Act and the Indian Penal Code”.
- While the offences under the IT Act range from tampering with documents, hacking into computer systems, online misrepresentation, confidentiality, privacy and publication of content for fraudulent purposes, among others, the penal provisions vary from **imprisonment for three years to a maximum of seven years, with fines starting from Rs 2 lakh**.

Rules for Digital news media & OTT platforms

- The rules establish a **Code of Ethics** and a **three-tier grievance redressal framework** for news publishers and OTT platforms on the digital media.
- The first tier of the regulatory mechanism is grievance redressal by the **company itself**; the second level involves a **Press Council of India-like regulatory body** that will be headed by a retired judge of a high court or the Supreme Court. The third-tier will comprise an **inter-ministerial committee** and will be headed by a joint secretary-level officer from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

- For OTT service providers such as YouTube, Netflix, etc., the government has prescribed **self-classification of content into five categories based on age suitability**.
- Online curated content that is suitable for children and for people of all ages shall be classified as “U”, and content that is suitable for persons aged 7 years and older, and which can be viewed by a person under the age of 7 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 7+” rating.
- Content that is suitable for persons aged 13 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 13 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 13+” rating; content which is suitable for persons aged 16 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 16 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 16+” rating.
- Online curated content which is restricted to adults shall be classified as “A” rating. Platforms would be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content that is classified as “A”.
- The programme also implements **source sustainability measures** as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through greywater management, water conservation and rainwater harvesting.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is based on a **community approach** to water and will include **extensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC)** as a key component of the mission.
- JJM looks to create a **Jan Andolan** (People's Movement) for water, thereby making it everyone's priority.
- The fund sharing pattern is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States; 50:50 for other States and 100% for UTs.

Why in News?

- Union Finance Minister, in the latest budget, announced that Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) will be launched to provide **universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns** in accordance with **SDG Goal-6** (“clean water and sanitation for all”).
- Sewerage/septage management in **500 AMRUT cities** (*Refer Pulse October 2020 edition*) with the objective of making them water secure are the major focus areas under JJM(U).

Key Highlights

- The project will focus on **rejuvenation of water bodies** to augment sustainable fresh water supply and creating **green spaces and sponge cities** to reduce floods and **enhance amenity value** through an Urban Aquifer Management plan.
- JJM(U) will promote **circular economy of water** through development of a city water balance plan for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation. **20% of water demand** to be met by reused water

7) Jal Jeevan Mission

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- Launched in 2019, the chief objective of the Mission is to provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024** and thereby ensuring potable water supply in adequate quantity i.e. **@ 55 lpcd** (Litres per capita per day) of prescribed quality on a long-term and regular basis.
- This Mission is under the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- It focuses on **integrated demand and supply-side management** of water at the local level.

with development of institutional mechanisms.

- **Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign** is proposed to spread awareness among masses about conservation of water.
- In order to promote **Public private partnership**, it has been mandated for cities having million plus population to take up PPP projects worth minimum of 10 percent of their total project fund allocation.
- Funding Pattern :
 - For Union Territories, there will be 100% central funding.
 - For North Eastern and Hill States, central funding for projects will be 90%.
 - Central funding will be 50% for cities with less than 1 lakh population, one third for cities with 1 lakh to 10 lakh population and 25% for cities with million plus population.
- Mission will be monitored through a **technology-based platform** on which beneficiary response will be monitored along with progress and output-outcome.

8) Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0

Background

- The Immunization Programme in India was introduced in **1978** as the '**Expanded Programme of Immunization**' (EPI) by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- In 1985, the programme was modified as '**Universal Immunization Programme**' (UIP) to be implemented in a phased manner to cover all districts in the country.
- Under UIP, immunization is providing free of cost against 12 vaccine preventable diseases:
 - Nationally against 9 diseases - **Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Measles, Rubella, severe**

form of Childhood Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and Meningitis & Pneumonia caused by Hemophilus Influenza type B

- Sub-nationally against 3 diseases - **Rotavirus, Pneumococcal Pneumonia and Japanese Encephalitis**; of which Rotavirus vaccine and Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine are in process of expansion while JE vaccine is provided only in endemic districts.
- A child is said to be fully immunized if the child receives all due vaccines as per national immunization schedule within the 1st year age of child.
- Every year the Universal Immunization Programme caters to the vaccination needs of 2.65 crore children and 2.9 crore pregnant women against these 12 Vaccine Preventable Diseases. Despite these efforts by all the States and UTs, some children and pregnant women get missed out from this network.
- **Mission Indradhanush** was launched by the government to **reach out to every dropped out and left out child and pregnant woman**.

Mission Indradhanush

- To strengthen and re-energize the Universal Immunization Programme and **achieve full immunization coverage** for all children and pregnant women at a rapid pace, the Government of India launched "Mission Indradhanush" in 2014.

Goal of Mission Indradhanush

- The ultimate goal of Mission Indradhanush is to ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for **children up to two years of age and pregnant women**.
- The Government has identified 201 high focus districts across 28 states in the country that have the highest number of partially immunized and unimmunized children.

- Earlier the increase in **full immunization coverage** was 1% per year which has **increased to 6.7% per year** through the first two phases of Mission Indradhanush.
- Four phases of Mission Indradhanush have been conducted till 2017 and more than 2.53 crore children and 68 lakh pregnant women have been vaccinated.

Intensified Mission Indradhanush

- To further **intensify the immunization programme**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) in 2017.
- Through this programme, Government of India aims to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been **left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme/UIP**.
- Special attention was given to unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums with migratory populations.

IMI 2.0

- It was launched in 2019 to ensure reaching the unreached with all available vaccines and accelerate the coverage of children and pregnant women in the identified districts and blocks.

Why in News?

- Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0 recently.

About IMI 3.0

- The Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0 will be conducted in **pre-identified 250 districts/urban areas** across 29 States/UTs in the country.
- IMI 3.0 will build on the gains of previous phases of the campaign and make lasting gains towards Universal Immunization. It will target achieving **90% Full Immunization Coverage (FIC) in all districts** of the country.

- Focus of the IMI 3.0 will be the **children and pregnant women who have missed their vaccine doses during the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- Beneficiaries from **migration areas and hard to reach areas** will be targeted as they may have missed their vaccine doses during COVID19.

9) Conclusive Land Titling

Background

- The Centre wants to reform the country's land markets through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded.
- In 2020, the government's think tank, **NITI Aayog**, took steps to initiate land reforms. A **Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling** was sent to States and Union Territories last June seeking their comments.
- In September, after many States failed to send in their feedback, the Centre warned that their agreement would be presumed.

How does the current system work?

- India currently follows a **system of presumptive land titling**. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is **determined through details of past transactions**.
- Ownership, then, is established on the basis of current possession. Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.
- **Holding registration papers does not actually involve the government or the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land.**

What will change in the new system?

- On the other hand, under a **conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership**.
- The title is granted by the **government**, which takes the

responsibility for accuracy. Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government, not the title holder.

- Further, under conclusive land titling, the **government may provide compensation** to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership.

Why is conclusive land titling needed?

- The main advantage is that a conclusive system will **drastically lower litigation related to land.**
- According to a 2007 **World Bank study** on 'Land Policies for growth and poverty reduction', land-related disputes accounted for **two-thirds of all pending court cases** in India.
- A **NITI Aayog** study on strengthening arbitration estimated that **disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.**
- Right now, because land titles are based on transactions, people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership.

Other Benefits

- Once conclusive titling is in place, **investors** who want to purchase land for business activities will be able to do so **without facing the constant risk that their ownership may be questioned** and their entire investment may go to waste.
- The idea of conclusive titling is to **promote an active land market.**
- Land disputes and unclear titling also create **hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction**, leading to costly delays and inefficiency. In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available.
- Ambiguity in ownership also results in a **black market for land**

transactions, which deprives the government of taxes.

- In **rural areas**, the **need is even more acute. Access to agricultural credit** is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral. Without being able to prove their ownership of land and access formal credit from banks, small and marginal farmers are often left at the mercy of unscrupulous moneylenders, entrenching themselves in a mountain of debt.

What does the model Bill propose?

- The Bill circulated by the NITI Aayog in 2020 calls for **Land Authorities** to be set up by each State government, which will appoint a **Title Registration Officer (TRO)** to prepare and publish a draft list of land titles based on existing records and documents.
- This will be considered a valid notice to all potential claimants interested in the property, who will have to file their claims or objections within a set period of time.
- If disputing claims are received, the TRO will verify all the relevant documents and refer the case to a **Land Dispute Resolution Officer (LDRO)** for resolution. However, disputes which are already pending in courts cannot be resolved in this way.
- Having considered and resolved all the disputed claims, the **Land Authority will publish a Record of Titles.** Over a three-year period, these titles and the decisions of the TRO and the LDRO can be challenged before Land Titling Appellate Tribunals, which will be set up under the law.
- After a three-year period, entries in the Record of Titles will be considered conclusive proof of ownership. Further appeals can only be taken up in **High Courts.**

What are the difficulties?

- The biggest challenge is that land records have **not been updated for**

decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

- Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance. Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.
- **Comprehensive village-level surveys with community involvement** are a necessary precursor to the land titling process. Relying on current records or even satellite imagery will not provide the same accuracy as actual, on-the-ground, local surveys. However, **local governments have not been provided with the resources or manpower** to conduct such surveys.
- If surveys are not conducted, the onus falls on village claimants, many of whom have no access to documentation, to proactively challenge the titling during the three-year period.

10) Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project

Background

- India ranks third globally with 5334 large dams in operation and about 411 are under construction. In addition, there are several thousand smaller dams.
- These dams are vital for ensuring the water security of the Country; and these also constitute a major responsibility in terms of asset management and safety.
- In 2012, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (now “**Ministry of Jal Shakti**”) with an objective to improve safety and operational performance of selected dams, along with institutional strengthening with system wide management approach, embarked upon the **six year Dam Rehabilitation**

and Improvement Project (DRIP) with World Bank assistance.

- The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of 223 dam projects in four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu. Later the number of dams in the DRIP portfolio increased to 257.
- The Government of India, in 2018, approved the two years extension with revised scheduled closure June 2020.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project Phase II & Phase III under the **Ministry of Jalshakti** with the **financial assistance of the World Bank (WB), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).**

About the Project

- The aim of the project is to **improve the safety and operational performance of selected dams** across the whole country, along with institutional strengthening with a system wide management approach.
- The Scheme envisages comprehensive rehabilitation of **736 existing dams located across 19 states of the country.**
- The project, worth ₹10,211 crore, will be implemented from **April 2021-March 2031.**
- DRIP Phase II & Phase III envisages the following **objectives:-**
 - ✓ To **improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams** and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner.
 - ✓ To **strengthen the dam safety institutional setup** in participating states as well as at central level, and
 - ✓ To explore the alternative incidental means at few of selected dams to **generate the incidental**

- **revenue** for sustainable operation and maintenance of dams
- To achieve the above objectives, DRIP Phase II & Phase III has following **components**
 - Rehabilitation and improvement of dams and associated appurtenances,
 - Dam safety institutional strengthening in participating States and Central agencies,
 - Exploration of alternative incidental means at few of selected dams to generate the incidental revenue for sustainable operation and maintenance of dams, and
 - Project management.

11) APEDA & NSIC

About APEDA

- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) was established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act, 1985.
- The Authority replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPCC).
- It functions under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- The Authority has its headquarters in **New Delhi**.

Functions of APEDA

- **Development of industries** relating to the scheduled products for export by way of providing financial assistance or otherwise for undertaking surveys and feasibility studies, participation in enquiry capital through joint ventures and other reliefs and subsidy schemes;
- **Registration of persons as exporters** of the scheduled products on payment of such fees as may be prescribed;

- **Fixing of standards and specifications** for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports;
- **Carrying out inspection** of meat and meat products in slaughterhouses, processing plants, storage premises, conveyances or other places where such products are kept or handled for the purpose of ensuring the quality of such products;
- **Improving of packaging** of the Scheduled products;
- **Improving of marketing** of the Scheduled products outside India;
- **Promotion of export oriented production and development** of the Scheduled products;

Products monitored

- APEDA is mandated with the responsibility of **export promotion and development** of the following scheduled products:
 - Fruits, Vegetables and their Products.
 - Meat and Meat Products.
 - Poultry and Poultry Products.
 - Dairy Products.
 - Confectionery, Biscuits and Bakery Products.
 - Honey, Jaggery and Sugar Products.
 - Cocoa and its products, chocolates of all kinds.
 - Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages.
 - Cereal and Cereal Products.
 - Groundnuts, Peanuts and Walnuts.
 - Pickles, Papads and Chutneys.
 - Guar Gum.
 - Floriculture and Floriculture Products.
 - Herbal and Medicinal Plants.
- In addition to this, APEDA has been entrusted with the responsibility to monitor **import of sugar**.

Why in News?

- To support and empower agri entrepreneurs, APEDA and National Small Industries Corporation Ltd

(NSIC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to ensure cooperation in range of areas focussing on harnessing exports potential of agricultural and processed food products manufactured by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

- The collaborations will also support promotion of green and sustainable manufacturing technology for the MSME clusters so as to enable units to switch to sustainable and green production processes and products.

About NSIC

- The National Small Industries Corporation is a Government of India Enterprise under the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**.
- Established in **1955**, NSIC has been working to promote, aid and foster the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises in the country.
- NSIC operates through a countrywide network of offices and Technical Centres in the Country. In addition, NSIC has set up Training cum Incubation Centres managed by professional manpower.

Environment

1) World Sustainable Development Summit 2021

About the summit

- It is the annual flagship event of **The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)**.
- Started in **2001**, the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) aims to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of the global community by assembling the various stakeholders on a single platform and initiating a step in the direction of achieving constructive action in combating issues pertinent to the future of humanity.
- It provides a platform for global leaders and practitioners to discuss and deliberate over climatic issues of universal importance.
- Previously WSDS was called as the **Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS)**.

Why in the news?

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

Related Information

The Energy and Resources Institute

- TERI is a **not-for-profit, policy research organization** that conducts research work in the fields of energy, environment and sustainable development.
- It was established in 1974 as **Tata Energy Research Institute** and was renamed The Energy and Resources Institute in 2003.
- It aims to focus on formulating local and national level strategies for shaping global solutions to critical issues.
- Its key focus lies in promoting clean energy, water management, pollution

management, sustainable agriculture and climate resilience.

2) Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

About the Reserve

Location

- The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a protected area in **Uttar Pradesh**. It shares the north-eastern **boundary with Nepal**, which is defined to a large extent by the **Mohana River**.
- It comprises the **Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary**. The three Protected Areas, being the last viable home of the **Royal Bengal Tiger** in the state, have been jointly constituted into Dudhwa Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger.

Vegetation

- **Moist Deciduous** type, containing some of the finest examples of Sal forests in India, as well the most extensive tracts of **moist grasslands** that remain in this region.

Rivers flowing through

- The **Sharda River** flows by the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, the **Geruwa River** flows through the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary and the **Suheli and Mohana** streams flow in the Dudhwa National Park, all of which are tributaries of the mighty **Ghagra River**.

Wildlife

- Tiger, Rhinoceros, Elephant, Swamp deer, Sambar, Cheetal, Hog deer, Kakar, Wild pig, Blue bull, Rhesus monkey, Langur, Sloth bear, Porcupine, Otter, Monitor lizard, Turtles, Python, Mugger, Gharial, etc.
- Of the nearly 1300 birds found in the Indian subcontinent, over 450 species can be seen in the Reserve. These include Hornbill, Red Jungle Fowl, Peafowl, Bengal Florican, Fishing eagle, Serpent eagle, Osprey, Woodpeckers,

Shama, Indian Pitta, Paradise flycatcher, Orioles, Emerald dove etc.

Why in the news?

- Women weavers residing around Dudhwa Tiger Reserve have largely benefited from technological interventions for their looms by associating themselves with the **Tharu Hath Karga Gharelu Udyog** – a Self Help Group (SHG).
- These technological interventions were realized with **funding support under the TARA Scheme** of Science for Equity, Empowerment & Development (SEED) Division, Department of Science & Technology (DST).

About TARA Scheme

- Technological Advancement for Rural Areas (TARA) scheme under SEED Division is essentially to provide long term Core Support to Science and Technology (S&T) based NGOs to promote and nurture them as “S&T Incubators” / “Active Field Laboratories” in rural and other disadvantaged areas.
- It also strives to provide technological solutions and effective delivery of technologies for livelihood generation & societal benefits.
- It is an initiative under the **Ministry of Science and Technology**.

3) Carbon Watch

What's in the news?

- **Chandigarh** became the first Union Territory or state in the country to launch ‘Carbon Watch’ mobile application to assess the carbon footprint of an individual.
- The app has been rolled out by the **Department of Environment and Forest of Chandigarh**.

What is Carbon footprint?

- Carbon footprint is the amount of greenhouse gases-especially carbon dioxide-released into the atmosphere by a particular human activity.

- It is usually measured as **tons of CO₂ emitted per year**, a number that can be supplemented by tons of CO₂-equivalent gases, including methane, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gases.

How does the app work?

- It is primarily for Chandigarh residents but can be downloaded by all.
- Anyone who downloads the application, they will need to fill details in four parts — Water, Energy, Waste Generation and Transport (Vehicular movement).
 - **Water:** The person will be required to inform about the consumption of water.
 - **Energy:** The details regarding the electricity units consumed every month at the house and usage of solar energy will have to be furnished.
 - **Waste:** The individual will need to inform about the waste generation on their part and their family.
 - **Transport:** Need to furnish the type of vehicle one possesses.
- The mobile application will automatically calculate the carbon footprint of the individual with the above information.
- The application will also provide information such as the **national and world average of the emission**, and the individual's level of emission generation.

Benefits of the application

- The mobile application will **suggest methods to reduce the carbon footprints**. The application will suggest ways as per the information furnished by the individuals.
- It also suggests remedial actions and sensitises people about their lifestyle emissions, their impact and possible countermeasures to mitigate the same.

4) Glaciers and Glacial lakes

What's in the news?

- A portion of the Nanda Devi glacier recently broke off in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, triggering an avalanche and a deluge in the **Alaknanda river system** that washed away hydroelectric stations and caused damages in several villages in Uttarakhand.
 - *The Alaknanda River flowing in Uttarakhand is one of the two head-streams of River Ganga. The source of Alaknanda River is the confluence of Satopanth Glacier and Bhagirathi Kharak Glacier.*

How glaciers and glacial lakes form?

- A glacier is a large, perennial accumulation of crystalline ice, snow, rock, sediment, and often liquid water that originates on land and **moves down slope under the influence of its own weight and gravity**. Glaciers are **found on every continent except Australia** and some are hundreds of thousands of years old. A large cluster of glaciers are in the **Himalayas**.
- Glaciers are made of layers of compressed snow that move or "flow" due to gravity and the softness of ice relative to rock.
- A glacier's "**tongue**" can extend hundreds of kilometers from its high-altitude origins, and the end, or "**snout**," can advance or retreat based on snow accumulating or melting.
- Ice may flow down mountain valleys, fan out across plains, or in some locations, spread out onto the sea.
- **Proglacial lakes**, formed after glaciers retreat, are often bound by sediment and boulder formations. Additional water or pressure, or structural weakness, can cause both natural and manmade dams to burst, sending a mass of floodwater surging down the rivers and streams fed by the glacier.

- There has been a **rapid increase in the number of glacial lakes due to a retreat in the glaciers caused by global warming**.

Types of Glacial Lakes

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

Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

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

Why do glaciers burst?

- It is not yet known what caused part of the Nanda Devi glacier to snap off, sending flood water surging downstream towards power plants and villages in India's northern state of Uttarakhand.
- **Seismic activity and a buildup of water pressure** can cause glaciers to burst, but one particular concern is **climate change**.
- **High temperatures coupled with less snowfall** can accelerate melting, which causes water to rise to potentially dangerous levels.
- Most mountain glaciers around the world were much larger in the past and have been **melting and shrinking dramatically** due to **climate change and global warming**.
- According to **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**, glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the **Hindu Kush Himalayas** has given rise to the formation of **numerous new glacial lakes**, which is a major cause.

Prediction of these disasters

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

NDMA's role

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

What are the guidelines?

- **Identifying Potentially Dangerous Lakes:** Through field observations, records of past events, geomorphologic and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/dam and surroundings, and other physical conditions.
- **Use of Technology:** Promoting use of **Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery** (a form of radar that is used to create two-dimensional images) to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations, during the monsoon months. Methods and protocols could also be developed to allow remote monitoring of lake bodies from space.
- **Channeling Potential Floods:** NDMA recommends reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.
- **Uniform Codes for Construction Activity:** Developing a broad framework for infrastructure development, construction and excavation in vulnerable zones. There is a need to accept procedures for land use planning in the GLOF prone areas.
- **Enhancing Early Warning Systems (EWS):** The number of implemented and operational GLOF EWS is very small, even at the global scale. In the Himalayan region, there are at three reported instances (two in Nepal and one in China) of implementation of sensor- and monitoring-based technical systems for GLOF early warning.
- **Training Local Manpower:** Apart from the National Disaster Response Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Army, NDMA has emphasised the need for trained local manpower. The local teams could also assist in planning and setting up emergency shelters, distributing relief packages, identifying missing people, etc.
- **Comprehensive Alarm Systems:** Besides classical alarming infrastructure consisting of acoustic alarms by sirens, modern communication technology using cell and smartphones can complement or even replace traditional alarming infrastructure.

Flora & Fauna

1) Red-eared Turtle

About the Turtle

- Also known as **Red eared slider**, the red-eared turtle originally belongs to Mississippi valley, **North America**. They are one of the most dangerous **invasive species**.



- It is the latest favourite of pet lovers, especially children, because of its small size and colour. But it grows quickly and once of bigger size it is left in nearby water bodies.
- Red-eared sliders are well-poised to be effective invaders. They reach sexual maturity at a young age and have **high fecundity** (the ability to produce an abundance of offspring).
- Red-eared sliders, being omnivorous, **compete with native turtle species for food, habitat, and other resources**.
- These turtles can get quite large (10-12”) and are notoriously aggressive, and can bully native turtles out of basking sites, a critical resource for these reptiles. Reduced access to these sites can slow growth and increase mortality of native turtles.
- **IUCN status: Least Concern.**

Why in the news?

- Recently, a red-eared slider has been found in Thrissur, Kerala.
- Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) has been working with the locals to remove this invasive species as it may become harmful to local turtle populations. It is also working on discouraging pet shops from selling the

species and instructing pet owners not to release them to the wild.

Related Information

What are invasive species?

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

2) World Pangolin Day

About Pangolin



- It is a small toothless, sticky-tongued creature which thrives on ants and termites, and lives in hollow trees and burrows.

- When threatened, the pangolin curls up into a tight ball, exposing its scales to prevent attack by predators. But these scales have been the reason why pangolins have reached endangered status.
- It's a belief that these scales have medicinal properties; hence, these pangolins are picked from the forest and are boiled to death, to extract scales.
- **8 species of pangolins** (including **Indian pangolin**) can be found across Asia and Africa. All of these have shown decline in their population.
- Asian pangolins:
 1. Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) – Critically Endangered
 2. Sunda pangolin (*Manis javanica*) – Critically Endangered
 3. Philippine pangolin (*Manis culionensis*) – Critically Endangered
 4. Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) – Endangered
- African pangolins:
 1. White-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) – Endangered
 2. Giant pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*) – Endangered
 3. Ground pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*) – Vulnerable
 4. Black-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tetradactyla*) – Vulnerable
- The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)** recently voted to end international commercial trade in all pangolins through **listing the eight species in Appendix I** of the Convention.
- **World Pangolin Day** is celebrated every 3rd Saturday of February each year.

Why in the news?

- **Eastern Ghats Wildlife Society (EGWS)**, a non-profit organisation, has initiated an immediate conservation status survey of Indian Pangolins to

acquire vital data on the presence/absence of them and specific human-induced threats.

- One of the challenges in conservation of this species is lack of appropriate data. Little is known about the conservation status and activity pattern of the Indian pangolin throughout its range.

3) Caracal



About Caracal

- The caracal is a medium-sized wildcat found in parts of **Rajasthan and Gujarat**. The iconic ears are what give the animal its name. In India, it is called **siya gosh**, a Persian name that translates as 'black Ear'.
- Though found across **Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia**, its numbers in Asia are declining.
- Its fossil evidence has been found in the **Indus valley civilization** and it was used for hunting during the medieval period by rulers such as Firoz Shah Tughlaq and Akbar. They were traditionally valued for their litheness and extraordinary ability to catch birds in flight.

What is present status?

- Since the caracal is an elusive and nocturnal animal their sightings are not common.
- There is **no proper data regarding their population** due to lack of sightings.
- Experts estimate that there are **only 50 or odd individuals left in India**.

- Historically, it lived in 13 states but now since 2001 it was sighted only in 3 states (Rajasthan, Gujarat, and parts of MP).

What might be reasons for the decline of the caracal population?

- In recent years, cases have been detected of the animal being **captured to be sold as exotic pets**.
- Loss of habitat and increasing urbanisation** is another cause. It affects the animal's prey which includes small ungulates and rodents.
- Areas like Chambal ravines where caracal is found, are tagged as **wastelands**. Land and environment policies are not geared towards the preservation of such wasteland ecology, rather they seek to 'reclaim' these areas to make them arable.

Why in the news?

- The National Board for Wildlife and Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change included the **caracal under the recovery programme for critically endangered species**.
- Besides India, the caracal is found in several dozen countries across **Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia**. While it flourishes in parts of Africa, its numbers in Asia are declining.
- The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** lists caracals as a species of '**least concern**', mainly due to their large numbers in Africa.

Recovery programme for critically endangered species

- The programme is a component of the centrally funded scheme, **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)**.
 - Started in 2008-09, IDWH is meant for providing support to protected areas (national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, conservation reserves and community reserves except tiger*

reserves), protection of wildlife outside protected areas and recovery programmes for saving critically endangered species and habitats.

- With the addition of caracal, the recovery programme now includes **22 wildlife species**.
- It includes Snow Leopard, Bustard (including Floricans), Dolphin, Hangul, Nilgiri Tahr, Marine Turtles, Dugongs, Edible Nest Swiftlet, Asian Wild Buffalo, Nicobar Megapode, Manipur Brow-antlered Deer, Vultures, Malabar Civet, Indian Rhinoceros, Asiatic Lion, Swamp Deer, Jerdon's Courser, the Northern River Terrapin, Clouded Leopard, Arabian Sea Humpback Whale and Red Panda.

What are the benefits of critically endangered status?

- It is expected to bring central funding to conservation efforts.
- It will ensure that the animal is studied comprehensively for the first time, including its home range, population, prey, etc.
- Such study will also throw light on the much neglected "wastelands" in the country.

4) Sloth Bear

About



- The sloth bear inhabits the **tropical lowland forests of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh**.
- They have a number of unique adaptations to support their primarily **insectivorous lifestyle**.

- **Protection Status:** IUCN Red List: **Vulnerable**; CITES: **Appendix I**; Wildlife Protection Act (1972): **Schedule I**.
- Many human activities threaten the sloth bears' survival. Poaching for the bears' gallbladder, which is used in traditional medicine, is a rampant problem. Habitat loss and fragmentation in the Indian subcontinent are also severe threats, as bears become displaced from their forest homes.
- Another conservation issue is that the bears are captured by the **Kalandar community** (a nomadic community) who tame bears and perform street side-entertainment routines. The bears are chained and mentally and physically tormented.

Why in the news?

- **Wildlife SOS**, a not-for-profit organisation, has been in the process of rescuing and rehabilitating sloth bears and elephants which are used for entertainment.
- More than 628 Sloth bears used by the Kalandar community have been rescued and in the due process, the NGO has helped the Kalandar community to switch to alternative occupations than dancing bear trade.
- Today, over 4,000 Kalandar families, with education and women empowerment, are no longer dependent on illegal wildlife crime. In fact almost 40% of the Wildlife SOS staff comprises members of this community.

5) Leatherback sea turtles

About leatherback sea turtles

- Leatherback turtles are named for their shell, which is leather-like rather than hard, like other turtles.
- They are the **largest of the seven species of sea turtles** on the planet and also **one of the most migratory**,

crossing both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



- Leatherbacks are **found in all oceans except the Arctic and the Antarctic**.
- Within the Indian Ocean, they nest only in **Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.
- Leatherback turtles are among the deepest-diving marine animals and have been recorded diving to depths of over 1000 metres. They are also the fastest moving reptiles and can swim at speeds of up to 35 km per hour.
- **Protection Status:** IUCN Red List: **Vulnerable**; CITES: **Appendix I**; Wildlife Protection Act (1972): **Schedule I**.

Why in the news?

- Environmentalists are criticizing several mega projects in Andaman and Nicobar islands to promote tourism and infrastructure, as they will be affecting nesting grounds of Giant leatherback turtles.

6) Fishing Cat Conservation Alliance

About Fishing Cat

- About twice the size of a typical house cat, the fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) is a highly elusive wild cat species found primarily in **wetland and mangrove habitats**, even been recorded in highly urbanised landscapes and montane forests.
- This unique species of wild cat is found distributed in patches across **South and Southeast Asia**. Confirmed

records show fishing cat populations to be present in Sri Lanka, **India**, Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.



- In India, fishing cats have a patchy distribution along the Eastern Ghats, Sundarbans in West Bengal, Chilika lagoon and surrounding wetlands in Odisha, Coringa and Krishna mangroves in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Protection Status:** IUCN Red List: **Vulnerable**; CITES: **Appendix II**;

Wildlife Protection Act (1972): **Schedule I.**

- Unlike most felines, fishing cats love water and are known for their expert hunting skills in aquatic habitats.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation, conflict with humans over poultry and livestock, as well as the demand for bushmeat and trade for captive wildlife are causing fishing cat populations to decline.

Why in the news?

- The Fishing Cat Conservation Alliance (FCCA) has started a worldwide month-long campaign in February to raise awareness and garner support across the globe towards conservation of fishing cats.
 - *FCCA is a team of conservationists, researchers and fishing cat enthusiasts working on conserving floodplains and coastal ecosystems that would ensure the survival of the fishing cat and all species with which it shares a home.*

Agriculture

1) Formation and Promotion of FPOs

What is a Farmer Producer Organization?

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

Why in News?

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

About the Scheme

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

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

Benefits

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

2) Soil Health Card

About the scheme

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

Constituents of a Soil Health Card

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

 <p>Department of Agriculture & Cooperation Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Government of India</p> <p>Directorate of Agriculture Government of Goa</p> <p>SOIL HEALTH CARD</p> <p>Soil Health, Real Peace</p> <p>Soil Health Card No. : _____</p> <p>Name of Farmer : _____</p> <p>Validity : From _____ To _____</p>	SOIL HEALTH CARD				Name of Laboratory				
	Farmer's Details								
	Name				SOIL TEST RESULTS				
	Address				S. No.	Parameter	Test Value	Unit	Rating
	Village				1	pH			
	Sub-District				2	EC			
	District				3	Organic Carbon (OC)			
	PIN				4	Available Nitrogen (N)			
	Aadhaar Number				5	Available Phosphorus (P)			
	Mobile Number				6	Available Potassium (K)			
	Soil Sample Details				7	Available Sulphur (S)			
	Soil Sample Number				8	Available Zinc (Zn)			
Sample Collected on				9	Available Boron (B)				
Survey No.				10	Available Iron (Fe)				
Khasra No. / Dag No.				11	Available Manganese (Mn)				
Farm Size				12	Available Copper (Cu)				
Geo Position (GPS)	Latitude:								
Irrigated / Rainfed									

Secondary & Micro Nutrients Recommendations		
Sl. No.	Parameter	Recommendations for Soil Applications
1	Sulphur (S)	
2	Zinc (Zn)	
3	Boron (B)	
4	Iron (Fe)	
5	Manganese (Mn)	
6	Copper (Cu)	
General Recommendations		
1	Organic Manure	
2	Biofertiliser	
3	Lime / Gypsum	
International Year of Soils		Healthy Soils for a Healthy Life
2015		

Fertilizer Recommendations for Reference Yield (with Organic Manure)				
Sl. No.	Crop & Variety	Reference Yield	Fertilizer Combination-1 for N P K	Fertilizer Combination-2 for N P K
1	Paddy (Dhaan)			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

- SHC will be made available once in a **cycle of 3 years**, which will indicate the status of soil health of a farmer's holding for that particular period.
- The SHC will also **indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.**

Benefits of Soil Health Card

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

Why in the news?

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

Related Information About NPC

- National Productivity Council of India, established in 1958, is an **autonomous organization under Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**

- Besides undertaking research in the area of productivity, NPC has been providing consultancy and training services in areas of Industrial Engineering, Agri-Business, Economic Services, Quality Management, Human Resources Management, etc., to the Government and Public & Private sector organizations.
- NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based **Asian Productivity Organisation (APO)**, an Inter-Governmental Body of which the Government of India is a founding member.

Economy

1) Can a 'bad bank' solve the growing NPA crisis?

Background

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech revived the idea of a 'bad bank' by stating that the Centre proposes to set up an **asset reconstruction company** to acquire bad loans from banks.

What is a 'bad bank'?

- A bad bank is a financial entity **set up to buy non-performing assets (NPAs), or bad loans, from banks.**
 - NPA is a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of 90 days.*
- The aim of setting up a bad bank is to help **ease the burden on banks** by taking bad loans off their balance sheets and get them to lend again to customers without constraints.
- After the purchase of a bad loan from a bank, the bad bank may later try to restructure and sell the NPA to investors who might be interested in purchasing it.
- A bad bank makes a profit in its operations if it manages to sell the loan at a price higher than what it paid to acquire the loan from a commercial bank. However, **generating profits is usually not the primary purpose** of a bad bank — the objective is to ease the burden on banks, holding a large pile of stressed assets, and to get them to lend more actively.

What is the extent of the crisis faced by banks?

- According to the latest figures released by the RBI, the **total size of bad loans** in the balance sheets of Indian banks at a gross level was just **around ₹9 lakh crore** as of March 31, 2020, down significantly from over ₹10 lakh crore two years ago.

- While the size of total bad loans held by banks has decreased over the last few years, analysts point out that it is mostly the **result of larger write-offs** rather than due to improved recovery of bad loans or a slowdown in the accumulation of fresh bad loans.
- The size of bad loan write-offs by banks has steadily increased since the RBI launched its **asset quality review procedure** in 2015, from around ₹70,000 crore in 2015-16 to nearly ₹2.4 lakh crore in 2019-20, while the size of fresh bad loans accumulated by banks increased last year to over ₹2 lakh crore from about ₹1.3 lakh crore in the previous year.
- Further, due to the lockdown imposed last year, the **proportion of banks' gross non-performing assets** is expected to rise sharply from 7.5% of gross advances in September 2020 to **at least 13.5% of gross advances in September 2021.**

Pros of setting up a bad bank

- A supposed advantage in setting up a bad bank is that it can help **consolidate all bad loans of banks under a single exclusive entity.** The idea of a bad bank has been tried out in countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan and others in the past.
- The **troubled asset relief program**, also known as **TARP**, implemented by the U.S. Treasury in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, was modelled around the idea of a bad bank. It is estimated that the Treasury through its operations earned nominal profits.

Cons

- Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan** has been one of the critics, arguing that a bad bank backed by the government will **merely shift bad assets from the hands of public sector banks, which are owned by the government, to the hands of a**

bad bank, which is again owned by the government.

- There is little reason to believe that a mere transfer of assets from one pocket of the government to another will lead to a successful resolution of these bad debts, when the set of incentives facing these entities is essentially the same.
- Other analysts believe that unlike a bad bank set up by the private sector, a bad bank backed by the government is **likely to pay too much for stressed assets**. While this may be good news for public sector banks, which have been reluctant to incur losses by selling off their bad loans at cheap prices, it is bad news for taxpayers, who will once again have to foot the bill for bailing out troubled banks.

Will a 'bad bank' help ease the bad loan crisis?

- A key reason behind the bad loan crisis in public sector banks is the **nature of their ownership**. Unlike private banks, which are owned by individuals who have strong financial incentives to manage them well, public sector banks are managed by bureaucrats who may often not have the same commitment to ensuring these lenders' profitability.
- To that extent, bailing out banks through a bad bank does not really address the root problem of the bad loan crisis.
- Further, there is a **huge risk of moral hazard**. Commercial banks that are bailed out by a bad bank are likely to have little reason to mend their ways. After all, the safety net provided by a bad bank gives these banks more reason to lend recklessly, and thus, further exacerbate the bad loan crisis.

Will it help revive credit flow in the economy?

- Some experts believe that by taking bad loans off the books of troubled banks, a bad bank can help **free capital of over ₹5 lakh crore** that is **locked in by banks as provisions against these bad loans**. This will give banks the freedom to use the freed-up capital to extend more loans to their customers.
 - *Provision Coverage Ratio in most of the banks is over 80 per cent, which means that the lender has made a provision of 80 per cent against NPAs.*
- This gives the impression that banks have unused funds lying in their balance sheets that they could use if only they could get rid of their bad loans. It is, however, important not to mistake banks' reserve requirements for their capital position.
- This is because what may be stopping banks from lending more aggressively may not be the lack of sufficient reserves, which banks need to maintain against their loans.
- Instead, it may simply be the precarious capital position that many public sector banks find themselves in at the moment. In fact, **many public sector banks may be considered to be technically insolvent** as an accurate recognition of the true scale of their bad loans would show their liabilities as far exceeding their assets.
- So, a bad bank, in reality, could help improve bank lending not by shoring up bank reserves, but by improving banks' capital buffers.
- To the extent that a new bad bank set up by the government can improve banks' capital buffers by freeing up capital, it could help banks feel more confident to start lending again.

Organisations

1) United Nations Peacekeeping Forces

About UN Peacekeeping Forces

- The United Nations Peacekeeping Forces are employed by the UN to maintain or re-establish peace in an area of armed conflict.
- The UN may engage in conflicts between states as well as in struggles within states. The UN acts as an impartial third party in order to prepare the ground for a settlement of the issues that have provoked armed conflict.
- The UN Peacekeeping Forces may **only be employed when both parties to a conflict accept their presence**.
- The Peacekeeping Forces are subordinate to the leadership of the United Nations. They are normally deployed as a consequence of a **UN Security Council** decision. However, on occasion, the initiative has been taken by the **General Assembly**.
- Operational control belongs to the **Secretary-General and his secretariat**.

Two kinds

- There are two kinds of peacekeeping operations – **unarmed observer groups** and **lightly-armed military forces**. The latter are only allowed to employ their weapons for self-defence.
- The observer groups are concerned with gathering information for the UN about actual conditions prevailing in an area.
- The military forces are entrusted with more extended tasks, such as keeping the parties to a conflict apart and maintaining order in an area.
- The first UN peacekeeping mission was a team of observers deployed to the Middle East in 1948, during the **1948 Arab-Israeli War**.

Why in News?

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced that India would gift 2,00,000 doses of vaccine to the U.N. Peacekeeping Forces.
- The Minister said India had already sent vaccines to 25 countries under its **Vaccine Maitri programme** and that 49 more countries would be supplied in the coming days.

Contribution of India

- India has consistently been **among the top troop contributing nations to the U.N.**
- In 2007, India became the first country to deploy an **all-women contingent** to a UN peacekeeping mission.
- The country has so far participated in 51 of the 71 missions and contributed over 2 lakh personnel.

2) World Health Organization

About WHO

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is a **specialized agency** of the United Nations established in **1948** to further international cooperation for improved public health conditions.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Working with 194 Member States (including **India**), its stated goal is to ensure "**the highest attainable level of health for all people**".

Where does WHO get its funding from?

- It is funded by a large number of countries, philanthropic organisations, United Nations organisations etc.
- **Voluntary donations** from member states contribute 35.41%, **assessed contributions** (dues countries pay in order to be a member of WHO) are 15.66%, **philanthropic organisations** account for 9.33%, **UN organisations** contribute about 8.1%; the rest comes from myriad sources.
- **Countries decide how much they pay and may also choose not to.**

- **The US** contributes almost 15% of the WHO's total funding and almost 31% of the member states' donations. **India** contributes 1% of member states' donations.

Why in News?

- The U.S. has announced that it would pay the World Health Organization \$200 million towards fulfilling its financial obligations as a WHO member.
- The U.S. is the **largest funder of the WHO**.
- The announcement is significant as former U.S. President Donald Trump had begun the process of withdrawing the U.S. from the WHO, a process stopped by his successor, President Joe Biden.

3) World Trade Organization

About WTO

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an intergovernmental organization that is concerned with the regulation of international trade between nations.
- The WTO officially commenced on **1 January 1995** under the **Marrakesh Agreement**, replacing the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, which commenced in 1948.
- It is the largest international economic organization in the world.
- The WTO deals with **regulation of trade in goods, services and intellectual property** between participating countries by providing a framework for negotiating trade agreements and a dispute resolution process aimed at enforcing participants' adherence to WTO agreements, which are signed by representatives of member governments ratified by their parliaments.

Objectives

- The primary purpose of the WTO is to **open trade for the benefit of all**.
- The WTO is essentially an **alternative dispute or mediation entity** that upholds the international rules of trade among nations. The organization provides a platform that allows member governments to negotiate and resolve trade issues with other members.
- The WTO **prohibits discrimination between trading partners**, but provides exceptions for environmental protection, national security, and other important goals.
- At present, the WTO has over 160 members representing 98 per cent of world trade.
- **India** has been a WTO member since 1 January 1995 and a member of GATT since 8 July 1948.

WTO Structure

Ministerial Conference

- The topmost decision-making body of the WTO is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets **every two years**.
- It brings together all members of the WTO, all of which are countries or customs unions.
- The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters under any of the multilateral trade agreements.

General Council

- The General Council comprises the representatives of all member countries and acts as the representative of the Ministerial Conference when it comes to daily operations. Its job is to carry out the implementation and monitoring function of the WTO.

Dispute Settlement Body

- The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) is a **part of the General Council** and is responsible for settling trade disputes between member states.
- According to the procedure established by the WTO, the first step to resolve a

trade dispute is engaging in the **consultation process**.

- If two trading partners having a dispute could not resolve at that level, one of them can ask for a settlement of **DSB** for hearing. The General Council of the WTO convenes as the DSB.
- The DSB's ruling can be challenged at the **appellate body**, the highest court for global trade disputes.

Appellate Body

- The Appellate Body is a standing committee of **seven members** that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.

- Members of the Appellate Body have **four-year terms**. In the selection process, WTO members follow the **consensus principle**, which means that the nomination of the Appellate Body members can only proceed smoothly with the agreement of all the members of WTO.
- The Appellate Body **must have at least three sitting members** to hear an appeal.

Why in News?

- Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala became the first woman and first African to be appointed as the head of the World Trade Organization.

Science and Technology

1) Deep Ocean Mission

What is it?

- It is an initiative spearheaded by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** in collaboration with ISRO, DRDO, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Indian Navy.
- The Indian government wants to understand the oceans better, both as a resource and for the conservation of marine biodiversity.
- One of the main aspects of the mission will be **design, development and demonstration of human submersibles** (in the image below).



- Another aspect is **exploring the possibility of deep sea mining and developing necessary technologies.**
- Under the mission, studies are planned at depths close to 6,000 metres under six major components —
 1. Mineral exploration on the sea-bed;
 2. Study and mapping of biodiversity;
 3. Study of climate change;
 4. Exploration of marine biology and developing allied courses,
 5. Training; development and demonstration of ocean exploration
 6. Off-shore technologies for future.

Significance of the mission

- The mission forms a part of the **Blue Economy** envisioned to be developed by 2030, which will place India among select countries — US, France, Japan, Russia and China — to have special missions dedicated for ocean studies.
- It is a **strategic and geo-political move** in order to further strengthen India's position in the Indian Ocean region.
- Globally, **only 11 percent of marine species have been identified.** The deep ocean species are even less explored. Hence it will be helpful in identifying the species and know more about **climate change.**

Economic Potential

- It will enable India to develop capabilities to **exploit resources in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB).**
- CIOB reserves contain deposits of metals like iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt. It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years.
- India has also been allotted 75,000 square kilometres in the CIOB by the **UN International Sea Bed Authority (ISA)** for exploration of **poly-metallic nodules.**
 - *The ISA is an institution set up under the Convention on Law of the Sea (Refer Pulse August 2020 edition) to which India is a Party.*
- Polymetallic nodules are potato-shaped, largely porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea. These are also known as **manganese nodules.**

Why in the news?

- The budget of 2021-22 outlays more than Rs 4,000 crores, over the next five years for Deep Ocean Mission.

2) Opening up the Geo-spatial sector

What is the Geospatial data?

- Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) essentially **collect and pool data** on everything on the planet — be it objects or events — and **tag them geographically** using geospatial metadata (such as latitude and longitude coordinates, altitude, trajectory, etc.) so that they can be **identified based on their exact locations**.
- Managing the apps on your smart-phone, traffic lights, air travel, weather forecasting and the raging pandemic all depend on GIS for accuracy.
- The past decade has seen an increase in the use of geo-spatial data in daily life with various apps such as food delivery apps like Swiggy or Zomato, e-commerce like Amazon or even weather apps.
- Till now this data was **highly regulated by the government in the name of security**. It gave space for **red tape bureaucracy and delayed developmental projects**.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Science and Technology has deregulated the Geo-spatial sector in India and liberalised the sector, allowing private companies to conduct surveying and mapping **without prior government approvals** and sharing the data for various everyday applications, from logistics and transport to road safety and e-commerce.

Highlights of the policy

- Under the new policy, **geospatial data from government agencies** such as the Survey of India and the Indian Space Research Organisation **will also be made available to public and private companies**.
- The new policy **restricts the terrestrial mapping and surveying to only Indian entities**—both public

and private. The data generated also needs to be **owned and stored in India**, with foreign entities being allowed to license it.

- **High resolution data**—finer than 1m horizontally and 3m vertically—**will still remain restricted**.
- Due to security concerns, data like Street View were earlier banned, and now the new policy will allow companies to capture such data.
- The government estimates that the new guidelines will boost the geospatial data sector to a value of ₹1 lakh crore by 2030, create jobs for 2.2 million people, and have a multifold impact on the economy.

What are the benefits of deregulation of this sector?

- The deregulation **eliminates the requirement of permissions as well as scrutiny**, even for security concerns.
- **Indian companies now can self-attest**, conforming to government guidelines without actually having to be monitored by a government agency. It will **enhance trust between government and businesses**.
- The mapping of the entire country, that too with high accuracy, by the Indian government alone could take decades. The government therefore felt an urgent need to incentivise the geo-spatial sector for Indian companies and **increased investment from private players in the sector**.
- The government will ensure more players in the field, competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market, and **more accurate data available** to both the government to formulate plans and administer, but also for individual Indians.
- Startups and businesses can now also use this data in **setting up their concerns, especially in the sector of e-commerce or geo-spatial based**

- apps** – which in turn will increase employment in these sectors.
- The government also expects an **increase in investment in the geospatial sector** by companies, and also an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn **will boost the economy**.
 - If the new geospatial policy can tap this potential, it will be an excellent roadmap for India to ensure data sovereignty across civilian and defence domains.

Reports and Indices

1) State of Environment Report, 2021

What's in the news?

- The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has released its **State of Environment Report, 2021**.
 - *Centre for Science and Environment is a public interest research and advocacy organisation based in New Delhi. It is one of India's leading environmental non-governmental organizations.*

Highlights of the Report

Potential zoonotic viruses

- The world is going to face a pandemic like the current one more frequently. We know just 0.1 per cent of potential zoonoses. In other words, the world remains ignorant of 99.9 per cent of potential zoonotic viruses.

'Pandemic generation'

- The country is all set to usher in a **'pandemic generation'**, with **375 million children** (from newborns to 14-year-olds) **likely to suffer long-lasting impacts**, ranging from being underweight, stunting and increased child mortality, to losses in education and work productivity,
- The pandemic also has its hidden victims — **over 500 million children forced out of school globally and India accounted for more than half of them.**
- Covid-19 has made the world's poor poorer. 115 million additional people might get pushed into extreme poverty by the pandemic – and most of them live in South Asia.

Lagging behind

- On the **sustainable development goals (SDGs)**, the report said that **India ranks 117 among 192 countries** and is behind all South Asian countries, except Pakistan.
- The **five best performing states** on SDGs are Kerala, Himachal Pradesh,

Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, the report said, adding that the **five worst states** were Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh.

Pollution unabated

- India's air, water and land have become more polluted between 2009 and 2018.
- Sixty-seven million Indians died due to **air pollution** in 2019. The **economic cost** was over \$36,000 million, equivalent to **1.36 per cent of the country's GDP.**
- Contrary to popular belief, India's rivers did not see any significant improvement in their water quality during the lockdown. Of India's 19 major rivers, five – including Ganga – ran dirtier in the Covid-19 period.
- The report also noted that 34 per cent of **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** funds since 2014-15 were used for water-related works, leading to the creation of almost 11 million water assets in half a million India villages.

Forestland diversion

- Forestland diversion continued unabated in the country. Over 11,000 hectares were diverted in 22 States in 2019.
- On India's forest cover, the report questions whether it has grown by 5,188 sq km since 2017. The report notes that the **Forest Survey of India mistakes "trees for forests"**—it counts orchards, plantations and even trees along highways as parts of forest and tree cover.

Sixth Mass Extinction

- Taking note of the Sixth Mass Extinction (**Holocene extinction**), the report says, "Before an extinction phase sets in, there are two signs: **Loss in population and shrinking distribution areas.** These two signs

are evident among all species currently.

2) Association for Democratic Reforms Report

Unrecognised political parties

- Either newly registered parties or those which have not secured enough percentage of votes in Assembly or General Elections to become a State party or those which have never contested in elections since being registered are considered **unrecognised parties**. Such parties don't enjoy all the benefits extended to the recognised parties.
- There are 2,360 political parties registered with the Election Commission of India and 2,301 or 97.50% of them are unrecognised.

Provisions for recognised party status

- A recognised political party shall either be a **National party or a State party** if it meets certain laid down conditions.
- The **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**, lays down the criteria for declaring any registered political party as a national party or a state party.

National Party

- As per the Election symbols order, a registered political party needs to **fulfil at least one of the following three conditions** to be recognised as a national party:
 1. It needs to win a minimum **two percent** of seats in the Lok Sabha (11 seats) from at least three different states.
 2. It needs to get **at least six percent of votes in four states** in Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, in addition to **winning four Lok Sabha seats**.
 3. It needs to get **recognised as a state party in four or more states**.

State Party

- In order to be recognised as a state party, a political party needs to **fulfil at least one of the four criteria** laid down by the Election Commission of India.
- A political party will be recognised as a state party:
 1. If it wins **three percent of the total seats** in the Legislative Assembly of the state (subject to a minimum of three seats).
 2. If it wins one Lok Sabha seat for every 25 Lok Sabha seats allotted for the state.
 3. If it gets **at least six percent of votes** in a state during a Lok Sabha or Assembly election. In addition, it also needs to win **at least one Lok Sabha or two Legislative Assembly seats**.
 4. If it wins **at least eight percent votes** in a state during the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly elections.

Benefits of being a recognised state party or national party

- If a party is recognised as a 'State Party', it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its **reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State of States in which it is so recognised**, and if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its **reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India**.
- The registered unrecognised political parties do not have the privilege of contesting elections on affixed symbol of their own. They have to choose from a list of '**free symbols**' issued by the Commission.
- However, the candidates set up by a political party registered with the Election Commission of India will get **preference in the matter of allotment of free symbols** vis-à-vis purely independent candidates.

- Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties **need only one proposer** for filing the nomination and are also entitled for **two sets of electoral rolls** free of cost and **broadcast/telecast facilities** over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- It is to be noted that the **Election Commission cannot deregister a party**. However, it uses **Article 324 of the Constitution to "unlist" dormant political parties**.

Why in News?

- The **Association For Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, an Indian non-governmental organization which works in the area of electoral and political reforms, has released its latest report related to funding of political parties.

Highlights of the Report

- The **number of registered unrecognised political parties increased two-fold in the last 10 years**, from 1,112 in 2010 to 2,301 in 2019.
- The number of such parties increases disproportionately during the year of Parliamentary elections especially.
- The **contribution reports of only 78 (3.39%)** of the total 2,301 registered

unrecognised political parties are **available in the public domain** for 2018-19, while the **reports of only 82 such parties (3.56%)** for 2017-18 are **uploaded on the respective State Chief Electoral Officers' (CEO) websites**.

ECI guidelines

- The Election Commission of India issued guidelines on 'Transparency and Accountability in party funds and election expenditure – submission of reports by unrecognised political parties' which were applicable to all political parties w.e.f October 1, 2014.
- As per these guidelines, **all unrecognised parties are required to submit their requisite reports in the office of the respective state CEOs**.
- On receipt of the reports from the state level unrecognised political parties, scanned copies of annual audited accounts, contribution reports and statements of election expenditure shall be uploaded on the websites of CEOs of the respective states, within three days of receipt of the same for viewing by the public.

Polity

1) Privilege Motion

What are Parliamentary privileges?

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

Legal provisions

- The **powers, privileges and immunities** of either House of the Indian Parliament and of its Members and committees are laid down in **Article 105** of the Constitution.
- **Article 194** deals with the powers, privileges and immunities of the State Legislatures, their Members and their committees.
- Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.
- In addition to the above mentioned privileges and immunities each House also enjoys certain **Privileges based on Rules of Procedure and precedents** such as:
 - The Chairman has a right to receive immediate information of the arrest, detention, conviction, imprisonment and release of a member on a criminal charge or for a criminal offence.

- Members or officers of the House cannot be compelled to give evidence or to produce documents in courts of law, relating to the proceedings of the House without the permission of the House.
- The Parliamentary houses also have **consequential powers** necessary for the protection of its privileges and immunities. These powers are:
 - To commit persons, whether they are members or not, for breach of privilege or contempt of the House;
 - To compel the attendance of witnesses and to send for persons, papers and records;
 - To regulate its procedure and the conduct of its business;
 - To prohibit the publication of its debates and proceedings and
 - To exclude strangers.

What constitutes a breach of this privilege?

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

House for or relating to his character or conduct as a legislator.

Procedure to be followed

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

Punishment

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

Why in News?

- A privilege notice against a Member of Parliament was moved recently in Lok Sabha.

2) RTI & Lokpal

About RTI Act, 2005

- Under the RTI Act, 2005, **Public Authorities** are required to make

disclosures on various aspects of their structure and functioning.

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

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

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

How is the right to information enforced under the Act?

- The Act has established a **three tier structure** for enforcing the right to information guaranteed under the Act.

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

Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019

- The Act amended Sections 13 and 16 of the RTI Act, 2005.
- Section 13 of the original Act sets the term of the central Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners at **five years** (or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier). The amendment changed that the appointment will be for such term as may be **prescribed by the Central Government**.
- According to the amendment act, the salaries, allowances and other terms of service of the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners **shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government**. Previously it was equivalent to that of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners respectively.
- The government said that the amendment was required because the election commission is a Constitutional body while the information commission, formed under the Right to Information Act, is a statutory one.

Why in News?

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

About Lokpal

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

Members

- Lokpal is a multi-member body, that consists of **one chairperson and a maximum of 8 members**.
- **Chairperson** of the Lokpal should be either the former Chief Justice of India or the former Judge of Supreme Court or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
- Out of the maximum eight members, **half will be judicial members and minimum 50% of the Members will be from SC/ ST/ OBC/ Minorities and women**.
- The judicial member of the Lokpal shall either be a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.
- The term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is **5 years or till the age of 70 years**.
- The members are appointed by the **President** on the recommendation of a **Selection Committee**.

- The five-member Lokpal selection committee includes the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Chief Justice of India, along with the Leader of Opposition and an eminent jurist selected by other members.

Jurisdiction

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

How can a complaint be made and what happens next?

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

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

3) Sedition lies in the effect, not in content

CONTEXT

- Recent charges of sedition against individuals have brought back focus to a law on sedition, introduced in the Indian Penal Code in 1870.

LAW ON SEDITION (Section 124A)

- **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**, deals with sedition. It was drafted by **Thomas Babington Macaulay** and included in the IPC in **1870**.
- It states that 'Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into **hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law**, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to **three years**, to which fine may be added.'
- Sedition is a **non-bailable offence**. Punishment under the law varies from imprisonment up to three years to a life term and fine.

PREVIOUS JUDGEMENTS ON SECTION 124A

- **In Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (1962)**, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of sedition and noted it as being a **reasonable**

restriction on free speech as provided in **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution.

- It made clear that a **citizen has the right to say or write whatever she likes about the government**, or its measures, by way of criticism or comments, **as long as she does not incite people to violence** against the government established by law or with the **intention of creating public disorder**.
- Following the Kedar Nath case, the **Bombay High Court**, in the **case of cartoonist Aseem Trivedi (2012)**, issued **guidelines** which the police must follow prior to invoking the provisions of sedition.
- These include an **objective evaluation of the material** to form an opinion on whether the words and actions cause disaffection, enmity and disloyalty to the government as they must be of the magnitude that they **incite violence or tend to create public disorder**.
- The Court also directed obtaining a **legal opinion in writing from a law officer of the district** who must give reasons on how the pre-conditions are met.
- This needs to be followed by a **second opinion from the State's public prosecutor**.

WHY THE LAW NEEDS RELOOK?

- The sedition law has been in debate ever since it was brought into force by the colonial British rulers in 1860s. Several top freedom movement leaders including **Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were booked under the sedition law**.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** described it as the "prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen."
- Despite being cautioned by courts on numerous occasions, law enforcement agencies continue to misuse the provisions on sedition and ignore

court directions. The problem therefore lies in the **poor implementation of the law and guidelines**.

- Based on data from the **National Crime Records Bureau**, between 2016 and 2019, the number of cases of sedition under Section 124A increased by 160%, while the rate of conviction dropped to 3.3% in 2019 from 33.3% in 2016.
- Notably, out of these cases, **many charges fell outside the ambit of sedition**. Consequently, the staggering numbers have got people saying that "the aim is not to punish or convict anyone but to incarcerate them... the process itself is the punishment."
- This data and the gross misuse of the legal provisions compel one to state that even though a Constitution Bench upheld the vires of the law of sedition, the **circumstances now require a complete relook at the provision**.
- When the situation changes, the statute calls for a change as law cannot afford to remain static.
- **The U.K.** has repealed the offence of sedition in 2010 and India is holding onto a relic of the British Empire.
- In its consultative paper on sedition, the **Law Commission of India** said **dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of a robust public debate in a vibrant democracy**.
- The Commission, headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice B.S. Chauhan, suggested **it was time to rethink or even repeal Section 124A**.

WAY FORWARD

- The outcome of the question is unknown, but the discussion needs to be rekindled.
- Till the law on sedition continues to remain on our statute book, courts must adopt an **effect-based test** followed in the west. The test **examines the effects of the seditious**

text rather than a content-based test which reviews the text alone.

- It is not the alleged seditious acts that are creating fragments in our society; it is in fact the persecution of individuals and labelling them that are really creating cracks in our socio-political ecosystem.
- In the words of **Martin Luther King, Jr. "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."**

4) Special Category Status

What is it?

- A Special Category Status (SCS) is a classification given by the Centre to **assist in the development of those states that face geographical and socio-economic disadvantages** like hilly terrains, strategic international borders, economic and infrastructural backwardness, and non-viable state finances.

Historical background

- The **Constitution does not have any provision** for categorisation of any state as a Special Category Status State.
- The concept of a special category status was first introduced in **1969** when the **fifth Finance Commission** sought to provide certain disadvantaged states with preferential treatment in the form of central assistance and tax breaks, establishing special development boards, reservation in local government jobs, educational institutions, etc.
- This formula was named after the then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, **Dr Gadgil Mukherjee** and is related to the transfer of assistance to the states by centre under various schemes.

When was the first Special Category status bestowed?

- Initially, three states; Assam, Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir were granted special status but from 1974-1979, five

more states were added under the special category. These include Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura.

- In 1990, with the addition of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, the states increased to 10. The state of Uttarakhand was given special category status in 2001.

Who grants special status to states?

- Special category status for plan assistance has been granted in the past by the **National Development Council (NDC)**, composed of the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers and members of the planning commission, who guide and review the work of the commission.
- Some of the features required for special status are:
 1. Hilly and difficult terrain
 2. Low population density or sizeable share of tribal population
 3. Strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries
 4. Economic and infrastructural backwardness
 5. Non-viable nature of state finances

Benefits states confer with special category status

- States which are granted special category status enjoy several benefits which includes
 - The **Centre pays 90 per cent of the funds** required in a centrally-sponsored scheme to special category status category states as against 60 per cent in case of normal category states, while the remaining funds are provided by the state governments.
 - Preferential treatment in getting central funds.
 - Concession on excise duty to attract industries to the state.

Discontinuation of the Gadgil formula-based grants

- The **14th Finance Commission** stated that there is no distinction between special and general category States in determining norms and recommendations.
- The Centre said that the **concept of Special Category Status has been effectively discontinued since 2015** when the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission were accepted.

Why in News?

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reiterated that the Central government was obliged to grant Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh as per the commitment given in Parliament as a precondition to bifurcation.

Why does Andhra Pradesh want to get Special Category Status?

- When Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014, it sought Special Category Status on the grounds that it was at a disadvantage, since it would lose a significant amount of revenue as a result of Hyderabad going to Telangana, the new state that came into existence on June 2, 2014.
- Andhra Pradesh was **promised Special Category Status by the Congress government**, which was at the Centre during the state bifurcation.
- **Manmohan Singh**, who was then Prime Minister, said in the Rajya Sabha

that special category status would be extended to Andhra Pradesh for five years to help put the state on a firmer footing. This oral submission by the then PM has been the basis for Andhra Pradesh's claim to the status.

Ongoing tussle

- However, the **14th Finance Commission did away with the distinction** between general and special category states since it had taken into account the level of backwardness of states in the proposed transfer of funds to states.
- The idea was that adequate resources would be allocated through tax devolution and grants to address interstate inequalities.
- It was also decided that a **revenue deficit grant** would be provided for certain states for which devolution alone would be insufficient. **Andhra Pradesh** was one of the states that were to be given a revenue deficit grant.
- The Centre had said it was willing to provide the **"monetary equivalent" of a special category state** to Andhra Pradesh but would not be able to grant the "special status".
- The demand for the special category status for the southern state has been a constant issue ever since the inception of Telangana in 2014.

International Relations

1) India-Mauritius CECPA

What's in the news?

- India and Mauritius have signed a **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)** that provides an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- CECPA is the **first trade agreement signed by India with a country in Africa.**
- The agreement was signed during the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to the island nation.

About CECPA

- Under CECPA, India will have preferential access to the Mauritius market for 310 products, while Mauritius will get access for 615 products.
- New Delhi will also have access to about 115 sub-sectors across 11 broad services sectors, including software, financial services and telecommunications.
- This can spur Indian investment in the services sector in Mauritius, especially in the ICT sector. The service sector forms 76% of Mauritius GDP.
- The agreement also has provisions for the **unrestricted movement of skilled professionals.**

Other key agreements

- Other than CECPA, both countries increased defence engagement with India extending a **defence line of credit (LOC) of \$100 million** to the Indian Ocean Island country.
- An agreement has also been signed on providing for a **Dornier aircraft and an Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv** on lease to Mauritius on a gratis basis for 2 years. This will help in the country's capabilities to patrol and monitor its vast maritime domain more effectively.

Significance of CECPA

- India and Mauritius enjoy excellent bilateral relations, sustained by historic cultural affinities, frequent high-level political interactions, development cooperation, defence and maritime partnership, and people to people linkages.
- Mauritius is an important development partner of India. India had extended a **'Special Economic Package'** of USD 353 million to Mauritius in 2016.
- The new Supreme Court building project is one of the five projects being implemented under this package and was jointly inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth in July 2020.
- Since 2005, **India has been among the largest trading partners of Mauritius**, and has been **one of the largest exporters of goods and services to Mauritius.**
- The bilateral trade between India and Mauritius has registered a growth of 233% from USD 206.76 million in the Financial Year (FY) 2005-06 to USD 690.02 million in FY 2019-20.
- The India-Mauritius CECPA will further cement the already deep and special relations between the two countries.

2) U.K. opens special visa route for Hong Kong residents

Hong Kong and China relationship

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

- But that autonomy, guaranteed under a mini-constitution known as the **Basic Law**, expires in 2047. The joint signed declaration does not state what will

happen in 2047 after that agreement officially ends.

Location



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

Controversial law

- Last year, China's Parliament passed a new legislation for Hong Kong that will for the first time empower China to **draft national security laws** for the Special Administrative Region.
- Many sections in Hong Kong are protesting against the law who fear that it could be the biggest blow to the territory's autonomy and personal freedoms since 1997 when it came under Chinese rule.

Why in News?

- The United Kingdom has launched a new visa programme which offers residents of Hong Kong an opportunity to become British citizens. It provides

a lifeline for those wanting to escape China's crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous city.

- Anyone with a **British National Overseas (BNO) passport and their dependents** can apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the UK. After five years, they can then apply for citizenship.
- The visa scheme is a response to Beijing's decision to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong, a former British colony, to contain huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests.
- The UK said the law – which punishes subversion, collusion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces – breaches the terms of agreements under which Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997. London has argued it has a moral duty to the people of Hong Kong.

About BNO passports

- The UK introduced BNO passports in the 1980s for people who were a “British dependent territories citizen by connection with Hong Kong”.
- Many residents of the city at the time wanted the UK to grant them full citizenship but China was opposed to the move. The BNO was a compromise,

allowing Hong Kong people born before 1997 the right to stay in the UK for six months at a time, but with no working or settling rights.

- Now, it has become one of the few ways out for Hong Kong people hoping to start a new life overseas as authorities conduct mass arrests against democracy supporters.

Art and Culture

1) Tholpavakoothu

About Tholpavakkoothu



- Tholpavakoothu is a **traditional temple art form of shadow puppetry** in Kerala having its roots in Palakkad and neighbouring regions.
- It is believed to have originated in the **ninth century AD** and uses **Kamba Ramayana as its basic text**.
- Tholppava (Thol means leather, Pava means puppet) are moved with the help of strings, and their shadows are depicted on a screen with the help of a row of oil lamps in the background.
- Tholppavas are made of the skin of deer and the puppet forms are made by making small holes in the leather that are then attached vertically to a bamboo stick.
- Accompanying instruments include **Ezhupara, Chenda and Maddalam**. The puppetry is staged on a special structure in temple premises called **Koothumadam**.
- It used to be performed in the **Bhadrakali temples** of Palakkad, telling tales from the Ramayana. It is **also known as Nizhalkkoothu and Olakkoothu**.
- The performance language uses **Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam words**.
- According to legend, Tholpavakoothu was performed at the **request of the goddess Bhadrakali** who could not witness Ravana's killing as she was fighting the demon Darika.

- Refer Pulse August 2020 edition for more details on Shadow puppet traditions in India.

Why in News?

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

2) Fossils of Dickinsonia at Bhimbetka

What is Dickinsonia?

- Dickinsonia was an **early form of multicellular life** that is thought to have given rise to some of the modern forms of life on Earth. It lived during the **late Ediacaran period** (around 550 million years ago).
- It was a flattened, ribbed oval creature that grew over four feet across and sported a distinct ridge down its centre.
- The fossils are known only in the form of imprints and casts in **sandstone beds**. It is the **earliest known living animal**.



- The Ediacaran period was the **precursor to the Cambrian era** (about 541 million to 485.4 million years ago), when there was an **explosion of life forms on Earth**.

Why in the news?

- Recently, a group of archaeologists has found the earliest fossils of *Dickinsonia*

in the Auditorium Cave in **Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, Madhya Pradesh.**

- If the discovery is confirmed, it **will make India home to one of the oldest animal fossils in the world-** dating back 570 million years.
- Furthermore, Dickinsonia fossils from India that were found by the scientists turned out to be identical to the **Rawnsley Quartzite in South Australia**, providing evidence of their age, and the proximity of the two land masses in **Gondwanaland** in that era.
- The discovery puts India firmly on the map for studies related to the Ediacaran era, along with Australia and Russia.

About Bhimbetka

- It is a place in **Madhya Pradesh** with enormous amounts of **cave paintings** dating back to approximately 30,000 years.
- Located in the foothills of the **Vindhya Mountains**, it is one of the **UNESCO cultural heritage sites**.
- The paintings, which display great vitality and narrative skill, are categorized into different prehistoric periods. The oldest are dated to the **Late Paleolithic Period** and consist of large linear representations of rhinoceroses and bears. Paintings from **Mesolithic** times are smaller and portray, in addition to animals, human activities. Drawings from the **Chalcolithic Period** showcase the early humans' conceptions of agriculture. Finally, the **decorative paintings** dating to early historical times depict religious motifs, including tree gods and magical sky chariots.
- The paintings found in the rock shelters here have a striking resemblance to the ones discovered in **Kakadu National Park in Australia**; to the **cave paintings of Bushmen in Kalahari Desert** and **Upper Palaeolithic Lascaux cave paintings in France**.
- **Archeologist V S Wakankar** discovered the Bhimbetka rock caves in 1957.
- The complex is surrounded by the **Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary**.

Budget 2021-22

1) Union Budget 2021-22

Summary

- Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman presented the **first ever digital Union Budget** for 2021-22.
- The key highlights of the Union Budget 2021-22 are as follows:

6 pillars of the Union Budget 2021-22:

1. Health and Wellbeing
2. Physical & Financial Capital, and Infrastructure
3. Inclusive Development for Aspirational India
4. Reinvigorating Human Capital
5. Innovation and R&D
6. Minimum Government and Maximum Governance

1. Health and Wellbeing

- The Finance Minister said the government is expected to spend ₹2,23,846 crore in the coming year on health and well-being which is a **137% increase** compared to the budgeted spending in 2020-21.
- This includes a ₹60,030 crore outlay on **drinking water and sanitation**, a ₹2,700 crore outlay on **nutrition** — both of these are handled by separate ministries — nearly ₹49,000 crore as **Finance Commission grants** and ₹35,000 crore toward **vaccination**.
- The budget also records a new centrally sponsored scheme called **Pradhan Mantri Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana**, in addition to the National Health Mission, with an outlay of about Rs 64,180 crore over six years.
 - It is aimed at developing capacity at the primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare levels, strengthening existing institutions and creating new ones, specifically to detect and cure emerging diseases.
 - This scheme aims to support 17,788 rural and 11,024 urban Health and Wellness Centers, establish integrated public health labs in all districts, strengthen the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and 20 metropolitan health surveillance units, establish nine Bio-Safety Level III laboratories and four regional National Institutes of Virology.
- The **Made-in-India Pneumococcal Vaccine** is to be rolled out across the country, from present 5 states – to avert 50,000 child deaths annually.
 - The Pneumococcal vaccine targets the **pneumococcal bacterium**, which causes pneumonia and other serious life-threatening diseases such as meningitis and sepsis, and is estimated to cause nearly four lakh deaths in children under five years of age each year worldwide.
- The supplementary nutrition programme and the **Poshan Abhiyaan** (*Refer Pulse September 2020 edition*) under the Women and Child Development Ministry have been merged to launch **Mission Poshan 2.0** to strengthen nutritional content, delivery, outreach, and outcome.
 - Mission Poshan 2.0, prioritizing 112 aspirational districts, will focus on overall health-wellbeing of the beneficiary and integrated approach in the delivery of nutrition services will reinforce the fight against malnutrition.
 - Poshan 2.0 scheme is an **umbrella scheme** covering the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyaan, Scheme For Adolescent Girls and National Creche Scheme.
 - Healthcare experts and NGOs have welcomed the launch of Poshan Mission 2.0, saying it will help tackle the complex issue of

malnutrition which is dependent upon various factors.

- The Finance Minister also announced the **Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban)** (*Refer initiatives section*) to bring safe water to 2.86 crore households through tap connection by 2024. This in line with the Centre's rural water supply project- Jal Jeevan Mission (Rural)-launched in 2019.
- Unveiling **Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0**, Finance Minister stressed on further strengthening of the 'swachhata' (cleanliness) campaign of urban India and allocated the budget of Rs. 1.41 lakh crore, which will be implemented over five years from 2021.
 - The government intends to focus on complete faecal sludge management and wastewater treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in single-use plastic, reduction in air pollution, especially waste from construction and demolition, and bio-remediation of dumpsites.
- Ms Sitharaman also announced the **voluntary vehicle scrapping policy** to phase out old and polluting vehicles.
 - The new policy will allow owners to scrap their **20-year old vehicles** and avail incentives on the purchase of new **personal vehicles**. For **commercial vehicles**, the scrappage policy will be applicable for **15-year old** commercial vehicles without a fitness certificate.
 - The policy would cover an estimated 51 lakh light motor vehicles (LMVs) that are above 20 years of age, while another 34 lakh LMVs are above 15 years. It would also cover 17 lakh medium and heavy motor vehicles, which are above 15 years, and currently without valid fitness certificates. These vehicles are estimated to

cause 10-12 times more pollution than the latest vehicles.

- It would lead to recycling of waste metal, improved safety, reduction in air pollution, lower oil imports due to greater fuel efficiency of current vehicles, and stimulate investment.

2. Physical and Financial Capital and Infrastructure

- The Budget has imposed an **agriculture infrastructure and development cess (AIDC)** on specified goods including alcoholic beverages, gold, silver, cotton, peas, apple, petrol, and diesel.
 - The proceeds from the cess shall be used to finance the **improvement of agriculture infrastructure and other development expenditure**.
 - The AIDC is least (1.5%) for coal and most (100%) for imported liquor. The customs duty for the goods covered under AIDC have been rationalised to ensure the consumer doesn't bear the additional burden on most of these items.
 - This has been done to make sure that there is a dedicated amount coming out to the Budget to improve agricultural infrastructure.
- The government has proposed to **link 1,000 more mandis into the e-NAM system** in view of the transparency and competitiveness the electronic marketing system has brought into agriculture trade.
 - At present there are about 7,000 mandis in the country with about 5,000 of them being small and medium ones. The rest are either large or medium ones.
 - Around 1,000 APMCs are currently on the eNAM platform.
- The government announced that the **Production Linked Incentive scheme (PLI)** implemented to boost manufacturing within India, will now

- cover a total of 13 sectors with an outlay of ₹1.97 lakh crore over five years, starting financial year 2021-22.
- This will be an addition to the ₹40,951 crore announced for the PLI for electronic manufacturing schemes. This will be a major step ahead in making India a hub for manufacturing and exports.
 - Under the scheme, eligible players will receive **incentives ranging from 4 per cent to 6 per cent of production value for five years**, after they achieve their investment and production value target for each year.
 - India will set up **seven Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (MITRA) parks** over three years to position India as a fully integrated, globally competitive manufacturing and exporting hub.
 - The parks to be setup over 1,000 acres of land with world class infrastructure, and plug-and-play facilities, will be in addition to the PLI scheme for technical textiles and manmade fibre.
 - It aims to double the industry size to \$300 billion by 2025-26. The parks are targeted to have uninterrupted water and power supply, common utilities and research and development labs.
 - Similar parks already exist in China, Vietnam and Ethiopia where the entire textiles value chain is covered.
 - India has already sanctioned 59 textile parks under the **Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks (SITP)**, of which 22 have been completed. However, their slow progress due to delays in obtaining land and other statutory clearances from state governments and tardy fund mobilisation, have prompted the government to develop MITRA parks.
 - The **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)**, which was launched with 6,835 projects, has now expanded to 7,400 projects in an effort to shore up economic growth as the nation recovers from the pandemic-induced recession.
 - The programme will require an increase in funding from the government as well as the financial sector. For this, the government is proposing to take three concrete steps:
 - Creating institutional structure
 - Big thrust on monetisation of assets
 - Enhancing share of capital expenditure in central and state budget
 - Building new roads, rail links and other social and economic infrastructure is key for attracting investments and making **India a \$5-trillion economy**.
 - NIP, launched in 2019, envisages an investment of Rs 111 lakh crore on infrastructure projects by the year 2024-25. So far, around 217 projects worth Rs 1.10 lakh crore under some key infrastructure ministries have been completed.
 - The NIP—jointly funded by the **central government (39%), state government (40%)** and the **private sector (21%)**—aims to invest in projects spanning across sectors such as energy, social and commercial infrastructure, communication, water and sanitation.
 - The Finance Minister announced setting up of a **Development Finance Institution (DFI)** with a view to mobilise Rs 111 lakh crore required for funding of the ambitious national infrastructure pipeline.
 - Infrastructure needs long-term debt financing. A professionally managed development financial institution is necessary to act as

- provider, enabler and catalyst for infrastructure financing.
- Ms Sitharaman also announced a '**National Monetisation Pipeline**' of potential brownfield infrastructure assets to raise finances for upcoming projects. For instance, railways will monetise **Dedicated Freight Corridor assets** for operations and maintenance, after commissioning. The next lot of **airports** will be monetised for operations and management concession.
 - She also announced the launch of a new scheme to **support augmentation of public bus transport services**, at a cost of Rs 18,000 crore. The scheme will facilitate deployment of innovative PPP models to enable private sector players to finance, acquire, operate and maintain over 20,000 buses.
 - Besides, two new technologies — '**MetroLite**' and '**MetroNeo**' — will be deployed to provide metro rail systems at much lower cost with the same experience, convenience and safety in Tier-2 cities and peripheral areas of Tier-1 cities.
 - The Finance Minister announced that the **National Hydrogen Energy Mission** will be launched in 2021-22 for generating hydrogen from green power sources.
 - The Hydrogen Mission is not only essential to decarbonise heavy industries like steel and cement, it also holds the key to clean electric mobility that doesn't depend on rare-earth element-based batteries as energy storage.
 - **Seven major ports** worth ₹2,000 crore will see their operations **privatised** in the year 2021-2022.
 - India has **12 major ports** -- Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai, JNPT, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Kamarajar (earlier Ennore), V O Chidambaranar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia) under the control of the Centre.
 - These major ports handle about 60% of the country's total cargo traffic.
 - The Budget also envisages boosting the recycling of ships at **Alang** in Gujarat, the world's biggest shipyard. The Minister said the **capacity of recycling shipyards would be doubled** from 4.5 million light displacement tonne by 2024, which will generate 1.5 lakh jobs.
 - India has enacted **Recycling of Ships Act, 2019** and acceded to the **Hong Kong International Convention (HKC)**. Post-enactment of the law, around 90 ship recycling yards at Alang in Gujarat have already achieved HKC-compliant certificates.
 - India aspires to grab at least 50 per cent of the global ship recycling business. The country's share in the ship recycling business is around 30% at present.
 - **Ujjwala Scheme** under which 8 crore poor households were provided free cooking gas connection, will be extended to cover 1 crore more beneficiaries.
 - Launched in 2016, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana is a scheme of the **Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas** which aims to safeguard the health of women & children by providing them with a clean cooking fuel – LPG.
 - The scheme provides **free LPG connections to economically weaker families**. The connections are issued in the **name of women** of the households.
 - Under the scheme, **cash assistance of Rs. 1600** is given to the beneficiaries to get a deposit-free new connection. Further, interest

- free loans are provided to purchase a stove and refill by Oil Marketing Companies.
- Initially, the beneficiaries under PMUY were identified either from the SECC list or from seven other identified categories. In 2018, the Government **extended the benefit to all left out poor families** not having LPG connections and not covered under the existing beneficiary categories.
 - Also, 100 more districts will be added in the next 3 years to the **City Gas Distribution network**.
 - The Budget proposed to amend the Insurance Act, 1938 to **increase the permissible FDI limit from 49 per cent to 74 per cent in insurance companies** and allow foreign ownership and control with safeguards.
 - A liberal FDI policy will attract higher amounts of foreign capital, which will aid in increasing insurance penetration in India.
 - Life insurance penetration in the country is 3.6 per cent of the GDP, way below the global average of 7.13 per cent, and in case of general insurance, it is even worse at 0.94 per cent of GDP, as against the world average of 2.88 per cent.
 - The government has earlier allowed **100 per cent foreign direct investment in insurance intermediaries**.
 - Intermediary services include insurance brokers, reinsurance brokers, insurance consultants, corporate agents, third party administrators, surveyors and loss assessors.
 - The Finance Minister proposed setting up an **asset reconstruction company** to clean up non-performing assets in the banking sector.
 - *Refer Economy section.*
 - Budget 2021 has proposed to amend the **Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, 1961 (DICGC Act)**, to allow depositors to get funds if a bank is unable to fulfil its obligations.
 - Keeping the interest of depositors in mind, the government had increased the deposit insurance cover from **₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh** last year. However, the claim could be made only in dire situations—if a bank's licence was cancelled and its liquidation proceedings were started.
 - With the amendments to the DICGC Act, it should be possible for depositors to withdraw funds of up to ₹5 lakh even if the bank is under stress.
 - To improve credit discipline while continuing to protect the interest of small borrowers, the Budget proposed to reduce the minimum loan size eligible for debt recovery under the **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002** from **Rs. 50 lakh to Rs. 20 lakh** for NBFCs with minimum asset size of Rs. 100 crore.
 - The SARFAESI Act was passed in 2002 to lay down processes to help Indian lenders recover their dues quickly. The Act essentially empowers banks and other financial institutions to directly auction residential or commercial properties that have been pledged with them to recover loans from borrowers.
 - Before this Act took effect, financial institutions had to take recourse to civil suits in the courts to recover their dues, which is a lengthy and time-consuming process.
 - The Budget incentivizes the incorporation of **One Person Companies (OPCs)** by amending the

Companies (Incorporation) Rules to allow OPCs to grow without any restrictions on paid-up capital and turnover, allowing their conversion into any other type of company at any time, reducing the residency limit for an Indian citizen to set up an OPC from 182 days to 120 days and also allow Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to incorporate OPCs in India.

- These measures will help a number of overseas Indians establish businesses in India and benefit Startups and Innovators in the country.
- The **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)** will launch data analytics-driven **MCA 21 Version 3.0** during fiscal 2021-22 with additional modules for e-Adjudication, e-Consultation, and Compliance Management.
 - Aligned with global best practices and aided by emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, data analytics and machine learning, MCA 21 3.0 is envisioned to transform the corporate regulatory environment in India.
 - MCA-21 is an initiative under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs storing all registered companies that file accounts online with MCA. It enables an easy and secure access of the MCA services to the corporate entities, professionals and citizens of India.
- The government budgeted a **disinvestment target of ₹1.75 lakh crore** for the next fiscal year beginning April 1.
 - The amount is lower than the record ₹2.10 lakh crore which was budgeted to be raised from CPSE disinvestment in the current fiscal year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the government's CPSE stake sale programme, and the target has been lowered to ₹32,000 crore in the Revised Estimates.
 - For fiscal year 2021-22, out of the total ₹1.75 lakh crore, ₹1 lakh crore is to come from selling government stake in public sector banks and financial institutions, including 2 PSU banks and one insurance company. About ₹75,000 crore would come as CPSE disinvestment receipts.
 - The Finance Minister Nirmala said **four sectors** — Atomic energy, Space and Defence; Transport and Telecommunications; Power, Petroleum, Coal and other minerals; and Banking, Insurance and financial services — would be **strategic sectors**.
 - In strategic sectors, there will be **bare minimum presence of the public sector enterprises**. The remaining CPSEs in the strategic sectors will be privatised or merged or subsidiarised with other CPSEs or closed. In non-strategic sectors, CPSEs will be privatised, otherwise shall be closed.
 - Strategic disinvestment of BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, IDBI Bank, BEML, Pawan Hans, Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd, among others would be completed in 2021-22.
 - Also the legislative amendments required for launching the **Initial Public Offering (IPO) of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)** would be brought in the ongoing session of Parliament.
 - To fast-track the disinvestment policy, **NITI Aayog** would work out on the next list of central public sector companies that would be taken up for strategic disinvestment.

- To monetise lands owned by CPSEs, a **special purpose vehicle (SPV)** would be developed.
- Besides, to ensure timely completion of closure of sick or loss making CPSEs, a **revised mechanism** would be brought in.

3. Inclusive Development for Aspirational India

- The **SWAMITVA Scheme** is to be extended to all States/UTs.
 - SVAMITVA (Survey of villages and mapping with improvised technology in village areas) scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.
 - It aims to provide rural people with the **right to document their residential properties** so that they can use their property for economic purposes. The scheme is for surveying the land parcels in rural inhabited areas using Drone technology.
 - 1.80 lakh property-owners in 1,241 villages have already been provided cards.
- The Budget envisages expanding '**Operation Green Scheme**', currently applicable for Tomato, Onion and Potato value chains, to **22 more perishable products** to encourage value addition in agriculture and allied products.
 - Announced for the first time in 2018-19 budget with an outlay of ₹500 crore, the Operation Greens scheme, on the lines of Operation Flood, was aimed at stabilizing the supply of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) crops and to ensure availability of TOP crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.
 - It aimed at promoting farmer producer organisation,

strengthening agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.

- Also, to protect the farmers from cheaper imports, Ms Sitaraman has announced the **increase in customs duty on products such as cotton, raw silk and silk yarn**. Cotton will attract customs duty of 10 per cent, while the levy on raw silk and silk yarn has been increased from 10 to 15 per cent.
- Further, to strengthen the post-harvest facilities, the Finance Minister announced that the **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund**, announced in the aftermath of the COVID Pandemic lockdown last year, would be made available for the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee mandis to augment their infrastructure.
- **Five major fishing harbours** — Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Petuaghat — will be developed as **hubs of economic activity**. They will see substantial investments for modernisation and development.
- To promote seaweed cultivation, the Budget proposed a **Multipurpose Seaweed Park** to be established in Tamil Nadu. Seaweed farming is an emerging sector with potential to transform the lives of coastal communities. It will provide large scale employment and additional incomes.
- The government said **social security benefits will be extended to platform and gig workers**. The government also proposed setting up a **portal** to collect information on gig-workers, building and construction workers, among others, to provide them benefits like health, credit (easy financing), food and others.
 - The gig and platform workers are those who are engaged by various e-commerce businesses like UBER, OLA, SWIGGY and Zomato. These

workers are not paid salaries and hence deprived of social security benefits like provident fund, group insurance and pension.

- India has a total workforce of over 50 crore including 40 crore unorganised sector which include farm and rural workers.

4. Reinvigorating Human Capital

- **More than 15,000 schools will be qualitatively strengthened** to include all components of the **National Education Policy (NEP)**. They shall emerge as exemplar schools in their regions, handholding and mentoring other schools to achieve the ideals of the policy.
- A total of **100 new Sainik Schools** will be set up in partnership with NGOs, private schools and states.
 - There are 30 Sainik Schools in India at present, established and managed by Sainik Schools Society under the **Ministry of Defence**. These schools are supported by the Central and State government and act as feeder institutions to the National Defence Academy (NDA).
- A total of **750 Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs)** will be established in tribal areas.
 - The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has been setting up EMRSs since 1998-99 for imparting quality education to tribal children in their own environment. The objective of EMRSs is to provide quality middle and high level education to **Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in remote areas**.
 - As per the budget 2018-19, **every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons**, will have an Eklavya Model Residential School by the year 2022.
- Standards will be developed for all school teachers in the form of **National Professional Standards for Teachers**

(NPST). This will enhance the capabilities of teachers and will be followed by all 92 lakh teachers of public and private school system in the country.

- During the year, despite COVID-19 pandemic, the government trained more than 30 lakh elementary school teachers digitally, covering the whole gamut of education. Taking this further, in 2021-22, the government will enable the training of 56 lakh school teachers through the **National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers for Holistic Advancement (NISTHA)**.
 - NISTHA is a national initiative for school heads and teachers' holistic advancement. It was launched in 2019 by the **Ministry of Education**.
 - The aim of this training is to motivate and equip teachers to encourage and foster critical thinking in students, handle diverse situations and act as first level counsellors.
- Rs. 3000 crore has been allocated for realignment of existing **National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS)** towards post-education apprenticeship, training of graduates and diploma holders in Engineering.

5. Innovation and R&D

- Modalities are being worked out for a **National Research Foundation** for which Rs 50,000 crore has been earmarked over five years to strengthen the overall research ecosystem with focus on national-priority thrust areas.
- **National Language Translation Mission (NLTM)** — a new initiative is being introduced to make policy and government documents available in major Indian languages.
 - The Mission will work towards creating a “voice-based internet” using artificial intelligence,

machine learning and speech recognition technologies which will be accessible in popular Indian languages and not be dominated by Hindi or English.

- This is in line with the **National Education Policy 2020**, which emphasises creating content and delivery of content in regional languages.
- Finance Minister announced an allocation of over Rs 4,000 crore over the next five years for the **Deep Ocean Mission** (*Refer Science and Technology section*) aimed at improving understanding about oceans, its biodiversity and impact of climate change, along with development and demonstration of technology to undertake future ocean explorations.

6. Minimum Government, Maximum Governance

- In the spirit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance", a number of steps were taken to bring reforms in **Central Administrative Tribunals (CATs)** in the last few years for speedy delivery of justice and the budget proposes to take further measures to **rationalise the functioning of tribunals**.
- The Budget proposes to set up a **conciliation mechanism** and mandate its use for quick resolution of contractual disputes with CPSEs to instil confidence in private investors and contractors.

Fiscal Position

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has pegged **fiscal deficit for the coming year 2021-22 at 6.8% of GDP and aims to bring it back below the 4.5% mark by 2025-26**.
- The original fiscal deficit target for 2020-21 was 3.5%. However, in reality, the deficit shot up to a high of **9.5% of GDP** due to the double impact of the COVID-19 pandemic —

low revenue flows due to the lockdown and negative economic growth clubbed with high government spending to provide essential relief to vulnerable sections of society, as well as a stimulus package aimed at reviving domestic demand.

- The Centre proposes to make **amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003**, to reflect these changes to the fiscal consolidation roadmap.
- She added that the Centre hopes to return to the path of fiscal consolidation by **higher tax buoyancy** through improved compliance on the one hand, and increased monetisation of its assets, including Public Sector Enterprises and land, on the other hand.
- This year's fiscal deficit has been funded through government borrowings, multilateral borrowings, Small Saving Funds and short term borrowings.
- In 2021-22, the **government proposes to spend a total of ₹34.83 lakh crore**, higher than the budget estimate of ₹30.42 lakh crore in the previous year, as well as the actual expenditure of ₹34.5 lakh crore.
 - The coming year's spending plan includes **₹5.54 lakh crore as capital expenditure**, an increase of 34.5% over the current year's budget estimates.
- Finance Minister also proposed to **augment the Contingency Fund of India from ₹500 crore to ₹30,000 crore**.

Finance Commission recommendations

- The government has accepted the Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendation to maintain the **States' share in the divisible pool of taxes to 41%** for the five-year period starting 2021-22, and given an 'in-principle' nod to the panel's

- suggestion to set up a **separate non-lapsable fund for defence and internal security modernisation**.
- The Fourteenth Finance Commission had raised States' share to 42% of divisible revenues, but the Fifteenth Finance panel, headed by N.K. Singh had reduced the share to 41% in its interim report for 2020-21, citing the conversion of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh into Union Territories.
- The Commission's report, which was submitted to the President in November but tabled in Parliament recently with the government's action taken report on its suggestions, has recommended **additional revenue deficit grants of ₹2.94 lakh crore** for 17 States over the next five years.

States borrowing ceiling

- **States are being allowed a net borrowing ceiling of 4% of GSDP in 2021-22**, and will be expected to consolidate their fiscal deficits to 3% of GSDP by 2023-24, as recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission.
- An **additional borrowing ceiling of 0.5% of GSDP** will also be provided based on meeting specified reforms in the power sector.
- The Commission has sought to assuage the fears of southern States about losing some share in tax transfers due to the **reliance on the 2011 Census data** instead of the 1971 census, which could penalise States that did better on managing demographics. It has done so by giving a **12.5% weightage for demographic performance** in its tax-transfer calculations.