

# OFFICERS' PULSE

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## COVERAGE.

The Hindu

The Indian Express

PIB

Rajya Sabha TV

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## AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

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# News @ a glance

## POLITY

### 1) World Press Freedom Index 2021

#### About the Index

- Published every year since 2002 by **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**, the World Press Freedom Index evaluates the press freedom situation in countries across the globe.
- *RSF is an international non-profit and non-governmental organization with the stated aim of safeguarding the right to freedom of information.*
- The Index ranks 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists.

#### Why in News?

- Reporters Without Borders has released its World Press Freedom Index 2021.

#### Highlights of the report

##### Global Scenario

- The 2021 report shows that journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organisation.
- Only 12 of the Index's 180 countries (7%) can claim to offer a favourable environment for journalism.
- **Norway** topped the latest index followed by **Finland and Denmark**, while Eritrea is at the bottom. **China** is ranked 177, and is only above North Korea at 179 and Turkmenistan at 178.
- In the South Asian neighbourhood, **Nepal** is at 106, **Sri Lanka** at 127, **Myanmar** (before the coup) at 140, **Pakistan** at 145 and **Bangladesh** at 152.

##### India's Performance

- The 2021 Index has again ranked **India at 142nd out of 180 countries**. This is despite the fact that for a year, on directions from Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, an **index monitoring cell** worked to improve the rankings.

- India is ranked 142, same as last year, after it had consistently slid down from 133 in 2016.
- The report stated that India shares the "**bad**" classification with Brazil, Mexico and Russia. According to the report, **India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists** trying to do their job properly. They are exposed to every kind of attack, even police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.
- In February last year, fearing such an adverse assessment, the cell was set up in **18 Ministries to find ways to improve the position on 32 international indices**.
- The **Information and Broadcasting Ministry** was delegated to look at the freedom of press index.

### 2) Gender bias and inclusion in advertising in India

#### What's in the news?

- **UNICEF and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDI)** recently conducted a study titled "Gender bias and inclusion in advertising in India".
- *GDI is a non-profit research organization that researches gender representation in media and advocates for equal representation of women.*
- The research measures over 1,000 television and YouTube advertisements aired across India in 2019. The ads analysed were those that received the most reach.

#### Results of the study

- The study finds that while Indian advertisements on television and YouTube are superior to global benchmarks insofar as **girls and women have parity of representation in terms of screen and speaking time, their portrayal is**

**problematic** as they **further gender stereotypes** — they are more likely than male characters to be shown as married, less likely to be shown in paid occupation, and more likely to be depicted as caretakers and parents.

- The study finds that **women characters dominate screen time (59.7%) and speaking time (56.3%)**, but one of the drivers of this is their depiction for selling cleaning supplies and food and beauty products to women consumers.
- For example, almost all the detergent and food commercials depicted a woman taking care of her family who speaks directly to women viewers about caring for their families.
- A greater percentage of female characters is **depicted as married than male characters** (11% compared with 8.8%). Female characters are three times more likely to be **depicted as parents than male characters** (18.7% compared with 5.9%).
- **Female characters are more likely to be shown doing the following activities than male characters** — shopping (4.1% compared with 2.3%); cleaning (4.8% as against 2.2%); and being involved in the purchase or preparation of meals (5.4% against 3.9%).
- For characters where intelligence is part of their character in the ad, **male characters are more likely to be shown as smart than female characters** (32.2% compared to 26.2%). Male characters are almost twice as likely to be shown as funny than female characters (19.1% compared to 11.9%).
- Two-thirds of female characters (66.9%) in Indian ads have **light or medium-light skin tones** — a higher percentage than male characters (52.1%).
- The research also found consistent **gender differences in sexualization**. Female characters are nine times more likely to be shown as **“stunning/very attractive”** than male characters (5.9% compared with 0.6%). Female characters are also **invariably thin**, but male characters appear with a variety of body sizes in Indian advertising.

### Impacts

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- **Misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes of women** in advertising have a significant impact on women — and young girls — and how they view themselves and their value to society.
- The study noted that while we do see female representation dominate in Indian ads, they are **still marginalised by colorism, hypersexualisation, and without careers or aspirations outside of the home**. The stark inequality must be addressed to ensure an equitable society.

### 3) Centre to provide 5 kg free food grains to 80 cr beneficiaries

#### What's in the news?

- The Union government has announced that 5kg of free wheat or rice per month will be provided to around 80 crore people for the next two months, May and June.
- This will be extended to beneficiaries under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)** and nearly 8 million tonnes of foodgrain will be distributed under this scheme.
- The scheme, with an additional expenditure of nearly Rs 26,000 crore, is expected to bring relief to NFSA beneficiaries as it **will be in addition to the regular entitlement of 5kg highly subsidised foodgrains to each beneficiary at Rs 3, 2 and 1 per kg of rice, wheat and coarse grains**.

#### Significance

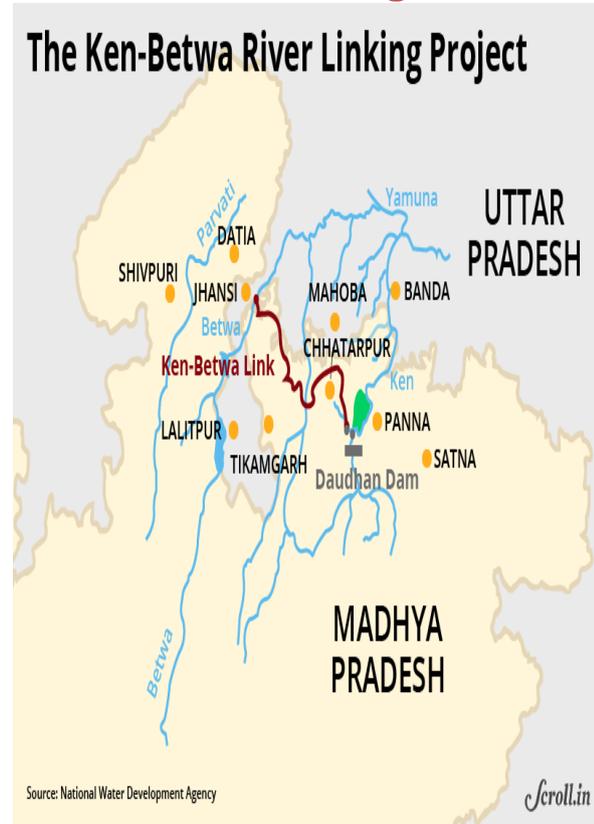
- The announcement came amid some states imposing lockdowns to beat the pandemic, which is likely to hit the poor and migrant workers who are returning home. It will be on the lines of the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)** launched during the first Covid wave last year.
- The Centre has a huge stock of foodgrains to meet the requirement. Currently, wheat and rice stock in the central pool is around 69 million tonnes – nearly three times more than the buffer requirement.
- Unlike the last PMGKAY, this time the Centre has not announced distribution of one kilogram of free pulses to nearly 20 crore beneficiary families per month as it doesn't have enough buffer stock of the key nutrient. Its stock is hovering around

1.5 million tones – lower than the buffer norm of 2 million tonnes.

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# ENVIRONMENT

## 1) The many missing links- Ken-Betwa River Linking



### Ken River

- The Ken River is **tributary of River Yamuna** and flows through Bundelkhand region.
- It flows between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- The river originates near the village of Ahirgawan on the **north-west slopes of Kaimur Range in the district of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.**
- Ken Gharial Sanctuary and Panna National Park is located on the banks of the river Ken.

### Betwa River

- Betwa is also a tributary of the Yamuna. The river originates in the **Vindhya Range** just north of Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh.
- Half of the river that is not traversable runs over the Malwa Plateau before breaking into the upland of Bundelkhand.
- **Orchha Wildlife Sanctuary** lies within the area through which Betwa River flows.

### What is Ken-Betwa Link Project?

- Ken-Betwa Link Project that proposed to link the Ken River that flows through Panna in Madhya Pradesh, and the Betwa River that runs through central Madhya Pradesh and southern Uttar Pradesh.
- The rationale was to augment water in the Betwa by linking it with the Ken, which, it was claimed, has surplus water. The proposal picked up momentum in the early 2000s, and was finally given environment clearance in 2017.
- In March 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the signing of a memorandum of agreement between the chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, which talks about the water distribution between the two States.

### What will be the benefits of this project?

- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected
- To provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares,
- Drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and
- Generate 103 MW of hydropower.

### What are its drawbacks?

- Ten villages near Daudhan dam are expected to be submerged, with over 10,000 people displaced
- The current cost of the Ken-Betwa project is ₹38,000 crore, and the contours of the ecological destruction that the project will wreak are clearer now:
- 9,000 ha of submergence, most of it in the Panna Tiger Reserve.
- 23 lakh trees with a girth of 20 cm or more are expected to be felled.
- The key wildlife species that will be affected include tigers, endangered vultures, mahseer fish, and gharials in the Ken Gharial Sanctuary.
- Most of the important geological sites are going to be affected either by submergence upstream of the proposed dam or would dry up when the full flow of the river is arrested by the proposed dam.

### Is River linking a feasible option?

#### Surplus-deficit claim

- Whole of India's river linking project lies in 'surplus-deficit' claim.

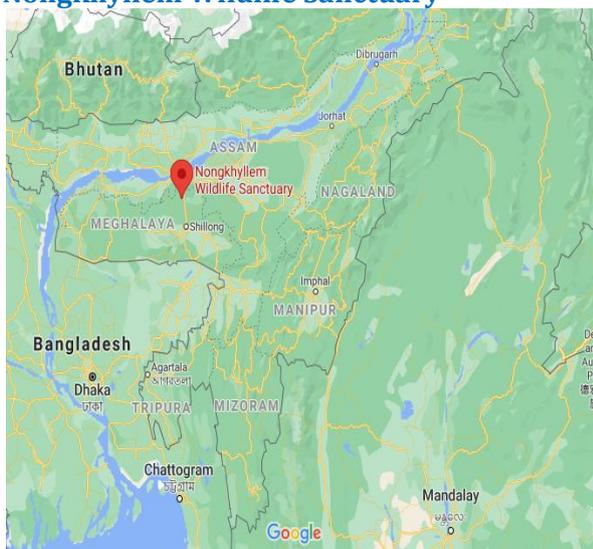
- But a scientific case for such a claim can be made only with an exhaustive assessment of all available options of water resource development in any basin or sub-basin, including rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed development, protecting wetlands, forests, soil moisture, optimising existing storage infrastructure, sustainable cropping patterns, demand-side management, reuse and recycling of sewage, and so on.
- No such assessment has been made for any basin or sub-basin in India.
- **The equating of floods with surplus and drought with deficit is also fundamentally flawed because these could be seasonal phenomena.**

#### What is a feasible option?

- Groundwater is and has been, at least for the last four decades, India's water lifeline.
- Our water resources policy, plans, projects and practices should be about nurturing the groundwater.
- It may include identifying and protecting existing groundwater recharge mechanisms, enhancing recharge where feasible, installing artificial recharge where possible and necessary, and also regulating groundwater use at aquifer level.

## 2) Bat with sticky discs found in Meghalaya

### Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary



- Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Ri Bhoi district of **Meghalaya**.
- The **Umtrew** is the main river of the area.

- The sanctuary supports different species of fauna such as Royal Bengal Tiger, Clouded Leopard, Indian Bison, and Himalayan Black Bear etc.
- Among the birds, the rare species which can be spotted here are Manipur Bush Quail, Rufous Necked Hornbill and Brown Hornbill.
- Nongkhylllem is an area where annual community hunting had been a tradition, but with sensible intervention of the forest department and conscientious support of the neighboring communities, it is now a pristine sanctuary.

### Eudiscopus denticulus/Disk-footed bat



- IUCN status: **Least Concern**
- It is widely found in Myanmar and Laos.
- It has a flattened skull and sticky pads which enables these bats to rest during night inside cramped spaces, clinging to smooth surfaces such as bamboo internodes.
- It has very high frequency echolocation calls which suits them for orientation in a cluttered environment such as inside bamboo groves.

#### Why in the news?

- The disc-footed bat (Eudiscopus denticulus) has been recorded in Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary in Meghalaya which is not its natural habitat.
- With its record, it has raised Meghalaya's bat count to 66, the **most for any State in India**.
- It has also helped add a genus and species to the bat fauna of India, the ZSI scientists

said, counting it to 130 bats species in India.

### 3) Only 3% of land areas unblemished by humans: study

#### Why in the news?

- In a study published in the journal **Frontiers in Forests and Global Change**, it was found that **only about 3% of land surfaces might be ecologically intact** — still home to their full range of native species and unblemished by human activity.
- This figure has been far lower than previous estimates based on satellite images, which suggested around 20% to 40% of land ecosystems were undamaged.
- This 3% lies majorly in the **less hospitable for humans**, including the Sahara Desert and chilly regions of Greenland and northern Canada.
- Some of the intact areas such Amazon forests of Latin America are said to be under severe stress from deforestation and development.
- The authors argue that these areas should be a priority for future conservation.
- Currently, **only 11% of these areas are under protection**.
- A 2019 U.N. report estimated as many as **1 million species are under threat of extinction due to human activity**.

#### What are some of the steps taken?

- The UN has started a **'30 by 30'** project aiming to protect 30% of the planet's land and waters by 2030.
- But some conservationists argue, however, that the world's conservation goal should be much higher than 30% in order to prevent mass die-offs of species.

### 4) Eastern India most vulnerable to climate change, says study

#### National Mission on Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem

- The National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE) is one of the eight missions under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.
- The Mission delivers better understanding of the coupling between the Himalayan ecosystem and the climate factors and provides inputs for Himalayan Sustainable

development while also addressing the protection of a fragile ecosystem.

#### National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

- The National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change is also a part of NAPCC.
- It seeks to build a vibrant and dynamic knowledge system that would inform and support national action for responding effectively to the objective of ecologically sustainable development.

#### Why in the news?

- Two IITs (Mandi and Guwahati) and IISc Bengaluru have released a report on **'Climate vulnerability assessment for adaptation planning in India using a common framework'** after conducting assessment across all the states.
- It was part of a capacity building programme under the **National Mission on Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem** and **National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change**.
- The study, funded by the Department of Science and Technology, has used the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5)** to define vulnerability and make state and district-wise assessments.
- The report Developed **Vulnerability Indices (VI)** based on several factors such as:
  1. Lack of forest area per 1,000 rural population,
  2. Lack of crop insurance,
  3. Marginal and small operational land holding,
  4. Low density of health workers,
  5. Low participation of women in the workforce,
  6. Yield variability of food grains,
  7. A high proportion of the population below the poverty line.

#### What were the findings?

- The **greenest part of India is the most vulnerable to climate change**. Along with Chhattisgarh in central India, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Odisha, Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, and West Bengal — all in the eastern part of the country — are the eight most vulnerable States that require prioritisation of adaptation interventions.

- Tamil Nadu and Kerala are among seven States that are the least vulnerable.
- **Jharkhand**, with the highest VI of 0.674, topped the list of States most vulnerable to climate change. Drivers of vulnerability: high incidence of vector-borne diseases, high yield variability of food grains, and low road and rail density.
- **Mizoram** was given second place because of less doctors availability.
- **Odisha**, came third due to its high prevalence of marginal land and small operational landholdings.
- One of the important factors for increased climate risks is **high levels of poverty** across the country.

#### Current trend of Vulnerability in India

- Vulnerability is a **function of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity**.
- According to **Germanwatch Global climate risk Index 2021**, India was ranked 7th out of 181 countries implying an extremely high exposure and vulnerability.
- In India, around **75% of the states are vulnerable to climate change out of which 89% of coastal areas are highly vulnerable as well as 40% of the states are showing swapping patterns**.
- With every 1 degree increase in temperature, there is a **reduction of around 20% in agricultural productivity**.

#### What needs to be done to reduce the degree of Climate risks ?

- **Identification of the risk and casualty factors** is the first step towards vulnerability assessment which can further help in adaptive measures.
- **Prioritisation of Climate proofing sectors** like Agriculture, Industries and Infrastructure can reduce the climate risk to a great extent.
- Developing **risk financing tools** and impact based **capacity building measures** need to be taken.

- **Onset and Chronic events need to be mapped together** for arriving at nature based solutions for adaptation and mitigation.
- Adaptation measures at the **local level** at the first step is the need of the hour.
- Creating a **climate risk atlas** by categorising the risks of a particular district and **reforms in Agriculture** need to go hand in hand.

#### Conclusion

- A **collaborative dynamic policy formulation by Government and private sector and community participation** can reduce the enhancing degree of climate risk as well as can be the basis for adaptive planning.

## 5) Earth Day 2021

#### About

- The idea for Earth Day was birthed by Gaylord Nelson, a US senator from Wisconsin.
- It was first celebrated on April 22, 1970, when around 20 million Americans took to the streets across the country for a healthy and sustainable environment.
- The **United Nations General Assembly** designated 22 April as International Mother Earth Day through a resolution adopted in 2009.

#### Why in the news?

- Earth Day was observed on April 22 to raise awareness for Earth's environment.
- The theme of Earth Day 2021 was "Restore Our Earth" which focuses on the natural processes, emerging green technologies, and innovative thinking that can restore the world's ecosystems.
- Earth Day events are now globally coordinated by **EARTHDAY.ORG**, a non profit organisation.

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## ECONOMY

### 1) RBI sets up panel to review working of ARCs

#### What is an ARC?

- An Asset Reconstruction Company is a specialized financial institution that buys the non-performing assets (NPA) or bad assets from banks and financial institutions so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets. Or in other words, ARCs are in the business of **buying bad loans from banks**.
- ARCs clean up the balance sheets of banks when the latter sells these to the ARCs. This helps banks to **concentrate in normal banking activities**. Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.

#### Objective of ARCs

- Rapid growth of bad debts/ non-performing assets was the chronic hurdle for healthy growth of Indian economy.
- According to **RBI's Financial Stability Report (FSR)**, banks non-performing assets may rise to as high as 14.8% in one year in case of a severe stress scenario, from 7.5% as of September 2020.
- ARCs acquire the bad debts/NPA accounts from Banks and Financial Institutions and try to resolve expeditiously by availing remedies under existing laws of India.

#### Legal Backing

- ARCs are incorporated under the Companies Act and registered with Reserve Bank of India under section 3 of **The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002**.
- ARCs function under the **supervision and control of the Reserve Bank of India**.

#### SARFAESI Act 2002– origin of ARCs

- The SARFAESI Act provides the legal basis for the setting up of ARCs in India.
- The Act helps reconstruction of bad assets **without the intervention of courts**. Since then, a large number of ARCs were formed and were registered with the RBI which has got the power to regulate the ARCs.

- After enactment of SARFAESI Act in 2002, regulatory guidelines for ARCs were issued in 2003 to enable development of this sector and to facilitate smooth functioning of ARCs.
- Since then, while ARCs have grown in number and size, their **potential for resolving stressed assets is yet to be realised fully**.

#### Why in News?

- The RBI has set up a six-member committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of asset reconstruction companies and recommend suitable measures for enabling them to meet the growing requirements.
- As per the terms of reference of the committee, the panel will review the existing legal and regulatory framework applicable to ARCs and recommend measures to improve efficacy of ARCs.
- Besides, it has also been asked to review business models of the ARCs.

### 2) Ways and Means Advances

#### About WMA

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** gives **temporary loans to the centre and state governments** as a banker to the government. This facility is called Ways and Means Advances (WMA). This facility was introduced in 1997.
- Thus, WMA is a temporary liquidity arrangement that helps **meet mismatches in receipts and payments of the government**.
- Under this scheme, Centre and states can avail themselves of immediate cash from the RBI. But it has to return the amount within **90 days**. Interest is charged at the existing **repo rate**.
- The limits for WMA are decided by the government and RBI mutually and revised periodically.

#### Why in News?

- The RBI has announced that the existing interim Ways and Means Advances (WMA) limit of Rs 51,560 crore for all states and Union Territories will continue up to

September 30, 2021, as the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is still prevalent.

- The Reserve Bank will review the WMA limit thereafter, depending on the course of the pandemic and its impact on the economy.

- The RBI said it has revised the WMA Scheme of States and Union Territories (UTs) based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on WMA to state governments.

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# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1) ASEAN

### About ASEAN



Image: ASEAN

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, is a regional & intergovernmental organisation of 10 countries of southeast Asia.
- ASEAN was established in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the **ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration)**.
- Its members are **Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam**.
- The organisation aims to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership. They work towards the progress of the southeast Asia region.

### Why in News?

- Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is set to attend an ASEAN summit in Indonesia on April 24, in what will be the coup leader's first official trip since the military deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Myanmar has been in upheaval since Min Aung Hlaing ousted an elected government led by democracy champion Aung San Suu

Kyi. Security forces have killed 728 people, according to an activist group, in an attempt to crush protests.

- Myanmar's neighbours have been trying to encourage talks between the junta and the ousted government, but the military has shown little willingness to engage.

## 2) U.S., China agree to cooperate on climate crisis

### What's in the news?

- **The United States and China, the world's two biggest carbon polluters**, have agreed to cooperate with other countries to curb climate change.
- The agreement was reached by U.S. special envoy for climate John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua recently.

### Significance

- China and the United States are the world's top carbon polluters, **pumping out nearly half of the fossil fuel fumes that are warming the planet's atmosphere**.
- Their cooperation is key to a success of global efforts to curb climate change, but frayed ties over human rights, trade and China's territorial claims to Taiwan and the South China Sea have been threatening to undermine such efforts.

### Climate summit

- U.S. President Joe Biden is set to host a virtual summit of world leaders to discuss issues related to climate change.
- Mr. Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, to the April 22-23 summit. The U.S. and other countries are expected to announce more ambitious national targets for cutting carbon emissions ahead of or at the meeting, along with pledging financial help for climate efforts by less wealthy nations.

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# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 1) Aditya-L1

### What is Aditya-L1?

- **ISRO** is gearing up for **Aditya-L1**, its **first** scientific **mission** to research the **Sun**.
- The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (**PSLV**) XL will be used to launch it.
- It will be put in the **L1 Lagrange point**.
- A satellite in halo orbit around the Sun-Earth system's **Lagrangian point 1 (L1)** has the main **advantage** of constantly observing the Sun without any occultation or eclipses.
- **Lagrange points** are **positions** in space where objects sent there tend to stay put. At Lagrange points, the **gravitational pull** of two large masses precisely **equals the centripetal force** required for a small object to move with them. These points in space can be **used by spacecraft** to **reduce fuel consumption** needed to remain in position. There are **five such points** in the Sun-Earth system and they are denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5.
- **Aditya L1** will investigate the **Sun's corona** (visible and near-infrared rays), photosphere (soft and hard X-rays), chromosphere (ultra violet), solar radiation, solar winds and flares, and Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs), as well as conduct round-the-clock imaging of the Sun.

### Need to study the sun

- Understanding **space weather**
- Studying **solar storms**
- To study the diagnostic parameters of **solar corona** and dynamics and origin of Coronal Mass Ejections
- To measure the magnitude and nature of the **Interplanetary Magnetic Field**

### Why in News?

- Ground support for Aditya-L1 will be played by the ARIES facility (Aryabhata Research Institute for observational Sciences) situated in **Nainital, Uttarakhand**.

### ARIES (Aryabhata Research Institute for observational Sciences)

- Specializes in Astronomy, Solar Physics, Astrophysics and Atmospheric Sciences.

- It is an **autonomous** body under the Department of Science and Technology (**DST**).

### Other Solar missions

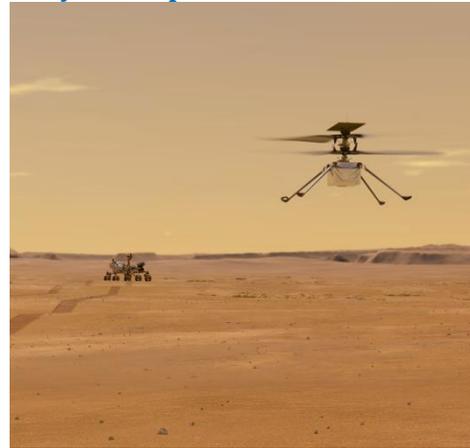
- NASA's Parker Solar Probe
- NASA's Living With a Star
- NASA's Helios 2

## 2) Ingenuity Helicopter

### Why in News?

- NASA's miniature robot helicopter Ingenuity performed a successful takeoff and landing on Mars

### Ingenuity Helicopter



- The Ingenuity Mars Helicopter is a technology demonstration, carried out by the **Perseverance rover**.
- The rover released the mini helicopter that **successfully** made the **first powered flight on another planet**.
- The flight will be challenging because Mars' thin atmosphere (which is 99% less dense than Earth's) makes it difficult to achieve enough lift.
- It has a wireless communication system, and is equipped with computers, navigation sensors, and two cameras.
- It is **solar-powered**, able to charge on its own.

### Importance of Ingenuity Mission:

- According to NASA, the helicopter was placed on the Martian surface to test for the first time ever-powered flight in the planet's thin air.
- Perform a supportive role as **robotic scouts**, surveying **terrain from above**, or

as full standalone science craft carrying instrument payloads.

- It will help **collect samples** from the surface from locations where the rover cannot reach.
- NASA will try and demonstrate rotorcraft flight in the extremely thin atmosphere of Mars with this helicopter, which is why the mission is so crucial.
- *To know about Perseverance Rover:* <https://officerspulse.com/perseverance-rover/>

### 3) Oxygen

#### Why in News?

- The Delhi High Court asked the Centre to immediately ban industrial use of oxygen due to the ongoing shortage of medical oxygen in hospitals.

#### Why the sudden need for medical oxygen?

- Most patients with Covid-19 have a **respiratory tract infection**, and in the most severe cases their symptoms can include **shortness of breath**. In a small proportion of such cases, this can progress to a more severe and systemic disease characterised by **Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)**.
- The **lungs** enable the body to **absorb oxygen** from the air and expel carbon dioxide. When a person inhales, the tiny air sacs in the lungs — **alveoli** — **expand** to capture this oxygen, which is then transferred to blood vessels and transported through the rest of the body.
- **Respiratory epithelial cells** line the respiratory tract. Their primary function is to protect the airway tract from pathogens and infections, and also facilitate gas exchange. And the **SARS-CoV-2** coronavirus can **infect** these epithelial cells.
- To fight such infection, the body's **immune system** releases cells that trigger **inflammation**. When this inflammatory immune response continues, it **impedes** the regular **transfer of oxygen** in the lungs. Simultaneously, fluids build up too. Both these factors combined make it **difficult to breathe**.

#### What is oxygen?

- Oxygen is the chemical element with the **symbol O** and atomic number 8

- At **standard temperature and pressure**, two atoms of the element bind to form dioxygen, a colorless and odorless diatomic gas with the formula **O<sub>2</sub>**.
- It is a **highly reactive nonmetal**, and an **oxidizing agent** that readily forms oxides with most elements as well as with other compounds.
- After hydrogen and helium, **oxygen** is the **third-most abundant element in the universe** by mass.
- **Oxygen** constitutes about **65% of the mass of the human body** and most of this is in the form of water.
- Oxygen also makes up about **30% of the Earth and 20% of the atmosphere**.
- Another form (allotrope) of oxygen, ozone (**O<sub>3</sub>**), strongly **absorbs ultraviolet** UVB radiation and the high-altitude ozone layer helps protect the biosphere from ultraviolet radiation. However, ozone present at the surface is a byproduct of smog and thus a pollutant.

#### Production of Oxygen

##### Naturally-

- **Plants:** During photosynthesis, plants use sunlight, water, carbon dioxide to create energy and oxygen gas is liberated as a by-product of this process.
- **Sunlight:** Some oxygen gas is produced when the sunlight reacts with water vapour in the atmosphere.

##### Artificially-

- Oxygen is produced in large quantities and at high purity as a gas or liquid by **cryogenic distillation**

#### Common Uses of Oxygen

- Breathing
- Decomposition
- Combustion
- Rusting

#### Industrial Uses

- Industrial uses of oxygen include production of steel, plastics and textiles, brazing, welding and cutting of steels and other metals, rocket propellant, oxygen therapy, and life support systems in aircraft, submarines, spaceflight and diving.
- **Smelting of iron ore into steel** consumes **55%** of commercially produced oxygen

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## DEFENCE

### 1) Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel

#### Why in News:

- The Indian Navy dispatched its Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) from Visakhapatnam to support the Indonesian Navy in search and rescue efforts for its submarine KRI Nanggala that went missing.

#### What is a DSRV?



- A deep-submergence rescue vehicle (DSRV) is a **type of deep-submergence vehicle** used for **rescue of downed submarines and clandestine missions**.
- **A Submarine Rescue Vessel, a Remote Operations Vehicle, Side Scan Sonar,** and other equipment make up the system.
- **Diver Decompression Chambers and hyperbaric** (a gas at a pressure higher than normal) medical devices are also available to **decompress submariners** who have been rescued from a sunken submarine.
- It can be quickly mobilised by air or road to aid submarine rescue operations even in remote areas.
- The **Indian Navy has inducted two such systems** that will provide submarine rescue protection on India's west and east coasts, respectively.

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# ART & CULTURE

## 1) Lingaraj Temple

### About the temple



- Lingaraja Temple is a **Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva** and is one of the oldest temples in **Bhubaneswar (Odisha)**.
- The temple speaks to the core of the **Kalinga Architecture** and is raised in **red sandstone**.
- The Lingaraja temple is said to have been **fabricated first** by the ruler **Yayati Kesari (Somavamsi dynasty)** and continued by kings from the Somavamsi dynasty, with **later** additions from the **Ganga rulers**.
- It is built in the **Deula style** that has four components namely, vimana (structure containing the sanctum), jagamohana (assembly hall), nata mandira (festival hall) and bhoga-mandapa (hall of offerings), each increasing in the height to its predecessor.
- In the sanctum sanctorum, the linga of Lord Shiva is regarded as '**Swayambhu**' (self-originated) and worshipped as both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.
- The amicability of the two factions is found in this temple where the god is adored as **Harihara**, a consolidated type of **Vishnu and Shiva**.
- The temple has images of Vishnu, possibly because of the rising prominence of **Jagannath sect** emanating from the Ganga rulers who built the Jagannath Temple in Puri in the 12th century.

### Kalinga School of Temple Architecture

- **Kalinga style** is identified as a **subclass** under the **Nagara** category.

- **Hindu temple architecture** is broadly categorized into three categories, **Nagara, Dravida and Vesara**. This classification is mainly based upon the geographical division, i.e. Nagara style is predominantly of northern India while Dravidian is confined to the southern part of India and Vesara in the middle region.
- There are **three kinds** of Kalinga temple styles i.e. **Rekha, Khakhara and Bhadra**.
- **Rekha-deul (temple)** is distinguished with its square plan topped with a curvilinear tower.
- A **Pidha-deul**, also referred as **Bhadra deul**, also has a square plan topped with a pyramidal tower composed of horizontal tiers arranged in a receding manner.
- A **Khakhara deul** is surmounted with a barrel-shaped (vault-shape) tower over a rectangular plan.
- **Silpaprakasha** is the most famous **text** describing the **Odishan temple architecture** which was authored by Ramachandra Kaulachara who belonged to the reign of king Viravarman.
- A typical Kalinga (Odishan) temple consists of two parts, a sanctuary where an idol or linga is placed and a hall where pilgrims can view the lord installed in the sanctuary.
- The **sanctuary** is **referred** to as **deul** while the **hall** is known as **jagamohana**. The other components under Kalinga style temple are:
  1. **Pitha** is the **platform** over which the entire structure of the temple stands.
  2. **Bada** is the **vertical wall** over which tower is supported.
  3. **Gandi** is the **lower part** of the tower while mastaka is the upper part of the tower.

### Why in News:

- The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation has restricted public entry into the 11th century Lingaraj Temple after priests tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

## 2) Thotlakonda Buddhist Monastery

### About Thotlakonda



- **Thotlakonda Buddhist Complex** is situated on a hill near Bheemunipatnam about 15 kilometres from **Visakhapatnam** in **Andhra Pradesh**.
- The excavations established the existence of a **Hinayana** Buddhist complex which flourished 2000 years ago.
- The excavations revealed **Satavahana dynasty coins and Roman silver coins** indicating foreign trade; terracotta tiles,

stucco decorative pieces, miniature stupa models in stone, and **Buddha footprints** were also found, inscribed **Chhatra** pieces, terracotta and glass beads, bangles, and stone sculptural remains at the site.

- The excavations also yielded twelve inscriptions in the **Brahmi script**. Thotlakonda's peak activity was between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE owing to brisk Roman trade and religious missions sent abroad.
- The site is also home to birds and raptors like the white-bellied sea eagle, Indian rock eagle, Indian spotted eagle, black-shouldered kite, and common kestrel.

#### Why in News?

- Historians and biologists are campaigning to protect the ancient Buddhist site of Thotlakonda in Visakhapatnam.

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## PIB ANALYSIS

### 1) Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)

#### Why in the news?

- Recently the Union government has launched the **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)**.

#### About the scheme

##### Aim

- To provide **financial assistance to startups** for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialization.

##### Features

- The scheme is expected to support an estimated **3,600 eligible startups** through 300 eligible incubators in 4 years with an outlay of Rs.945 crore.
- The SISFS will **Secure seed funding, Inspire innovation, Support transformative ideas, Facilitate implementation, and Start startup revolution.**
- The Scheme will create a robust startup ecosystem, particularly in **Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns of India**, which are often deprived of adequate funding.
- An **Experts Advisory Committee (EAC)** has been created by DPIIT to execute and monitor the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme.
- Grants of upto **Rs 5 Crores** shall be provided to the eligible incubators selected by the EAC.
- The selected incubators shall provide grants of up to **Rs 20 lakhs** for validation of Proof of Concept, or prototype development, or product trials to startups.
- Furthermore, investments of up to **Rs 50 lakhs** shall be provided to the startups for market entry, commercialization, or scaling up through convertible debentures or debt-linked instruments.

#### About Startups

- A startup is a young company founded by one or more entrepreneurs to develop a unique product or service and bring it to market.
- It is an entrepreneurial venture in search of enough financial backing to get off the ground.

- The first challenge for a startup is to prove the validity of the concept to potential lenders and investors.

#### About seed funding

- Seed Funding typically represents the first official money that a business venture or enterprise raises.
- It helps a company to finance its first steps, including things like market research and product development.
- There are many potential investors in a seed funding situation: founders, friends, family, incubators, venture capital companies and more.

### 2) Exercise Varuna

#### Why in the news?

- The 19th edition of the **Indian and French Navy bilateral exercise 'VARUNA-2021'** is scheduled to be conducted in the Arabian Sea from 25th to 27th April 2021.

#### News in detail

- The three day exercise will see high tempo-naval operations at sea, including
  - Advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises,
  - Intense fixed and rotary wing flying operations,
  - Tactical manoeuvres,
  - Surface and anti-air weapon firings,
  - Underway replenishment and other maritime security operations.
- Units of both navies will endeavour to enhance their war-fighting skills to demonstrate their ability as an integrated force to **promote peace, security and stability in the maritime domain.**

#### Significance

- VARUNA-21 highlights growing bonhomie and showcases **increased levels of synergy, coordination and interoperability** between the two friendly navies.
- These interactions further underscore the **shared values as partner navies**, in ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific and a rules-based international order.

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# News in Depth

## AIR NEWS

### 1) SVAMITVA

#### About the scheme

- 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**.
- Launched in 2020, it is a **central sector scheme** that 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**.

#### Objectives

- The outcome from the scheme would include updating the record of rights in the revenue/property registers and issuance of property cards to the property owners. This would facilitate **monetisation of rural residential assets** for credit and other financial services.
- It will also lead to creation of **accurate land records** for rural planning and determination of **property tax**.
- Through the SVAMITVA scheme, the government hopes that **property disputes and legal cases will be reduced**.
- Other gram panchayats and community assets like village roads, ponds, canals, open spaces, school, anganwadi, health sub-centres etc will also be surveyed and GIS maps will be created. These maps can be used to prepare better quality gram panchayat development plans.

#### Coverage

- There are about 6.62 lakh villages in the country which will be eventually covered in this scheme. The entire work is likely to

be spread over a period of four years (2020 -2024).

- Presently, the pilot phase is being approved for the year 2020-21. Pilot Phase will extend to **8 states** – Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan.
- The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)** is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of the scheme. **Survey of India** shall work as the technology partner for implementation.

#### Why in News?

- The government has announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the distribution of over four lakh e-property cards under the SWAMITVA scheme.

#### Related Information

##### About Survey of India

- The National Survey and Mapping Organization, also known as the Survey of India, is the oldest scientific department of the Government of India.
- Set up in 1767, it is under the **Department of Science & Technology**.
- As the nation's **Principal Mapping Agency**, Survey of India ensures that the country's domain is explored and mapped suitably, provides base maps for expeditious and integrated development and ensures that all resources contribute with their full measure to the progress, prosperity and security of the country.

### 2) 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.
- 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?

- The Karnataka government is planning to provide 25 lakh Tap Connections to rural households by March, 2022 under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

#### Related Information

##### Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban)

- 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** 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 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 :
  1. For Union Territories, there will be 100% central funding.
  2. For North Eastern and Hill States, central funding for projects will be 90%.
  3. 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.

### 3) 84% reduction in malaria cases

#### About Malaria

- Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by **Plasmodium parasites**.
- There are **5 parasite species** that cause malaria in humans, and 2 of these species – ***P. falciparum*** and ***P. vivax*** – pose the greatest threat.
- The parasites are spread to people through the bites of infected **female Anopheles mosquitoes**.
- Children aged under 5 years are the most vulnerable group affected by malaria.
- **Symptoms:** Fever, tiredness, vomiting, headaches, seizures, chills, etc.
- **Diagnosis:** Examination of blood films or by antigen-based rapid diagnostic tests (RDT).
- **Prevention:** Vector control is the main way to prevent and reduce malaria transmission. Two forms of vector control – insecticide-treated mosquito nets and

indoor residual spraying – are effective in a wide range of circumstances.

- **Treatment:** Antimalarial medications depending on the type of malaria.
- **Vaccine: RTS,S/AS01 (RTS,S)** (trade name **Mosquirix**) is the world's first malaria vaccine shown to provide partial protection against malaria in young children. The vaccine is being provided to young children through national immunization programs in parts of three sub-Saharan African countries as part of a pilot introduction that began in 2019.

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

- Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said that the country has witnessed 84 per cent reduction in malaria cases in 2020 as compared to 2015. Over 83 per cent reduction in deaths has also been reported in 2020.
- Every year, 25th April is observed as **World Malaria Day**. This year's theme for the day is **Reaching the Zero Malaria target**.

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# THE HINDU EDITORIALS

## 1) The roots of a decentred international order

### GS-2 International Relations

#### NEWS

- In the post-pandemic period, developing economies should rise to meet the U.S.-led liberal hegemonic world order.

#### CONTEXT

- According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the overall estimate of China's military budget at \$230 billion.
- This indicates the intentions for global supremacy, chiefly to outrun America.
- The primary geo-political rivals of U.S, i.e. Russia and China may possibly provide the strategic and tactical counterbalance to the hegemony of America.
- Moreover, the international order is under threat of the rising economic power of the BRICS nations, with China dominating in its economic and military capacity.

#### RISING POWERS AND AGENDA

- From the Renaissance period onwards, 14th-15th century Europe began its hegemonic ambitions through trade and commerce, taking almost 500 years to colonise and influence nations across the world.
- The decline of British Imperialism was followed by the ascendancy of America in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis (1956). Thus, Pax Britannica gave way to Pax Americana.
- Later the tectonic shifts in the postcolonial era saw the freedom struggles against western-centric perspectives inherently inadequate and biased for the understanding of the emerging new world order.
- It was the Bandung Conference of 1955, a meeting of Asian and African states, most of which were newly independent, that set the scheme for the rise of Asia, politically and economically.
- In present, though China is at a long distance from surpassing the United States in its military prowess, yet it is apparent that the future of global politics requires a significant programmatic agenda in the hands of the rising powers that are

aggressively building a parallel economic order envisaging new centres of hegemonic power.

- Hence, forebodes the final decline of American ascendancy.

#### DENTS TO AMERICAN SUPREMACY

- America will continue to play a prime role in international affairs though its image representing universal brotherhood has sharply declined under the Trump regime.
- This can be attributed particularly to his foreign policy of threatening withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate change.
- Furthermore, his bare-faced racist obsession and his handling of the marginalized immigrants have left the democratic world shocked.
- Also the rising tide of far-right ultra-nationalism experienced globally has set in motion the wearing down of liberal democracy.
- Other threats such as terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and the warning of annihilation owing to climate change necessarily demand joint international action where American "exceptionalism" is inconsistent with global.
- This indeed has chipped away at the American global supremacy.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH DENT

- As a result, the world will witness to a more decentred and pluralistic global order, a rather compelling vision of the empowerment of liberal forces standing up for an international order incentivized by long-term structural shifts in the global economy,
- Thus, indicating the evolving nature of power and status in international politics.

#### DIRECTION BY CHINA

- Despite, the current raging novel coronavirus pandemic has retarded economic development, China is spearheading Asian regionalism.
- China must strengthen the opposition to the West through the promotion of regional multilateral institutions.

- More than having individual partners or allies, China must embrace and give a push to multilateral affiliations in order to not further exacerbate regional tensions.

### CONCERNS REGARDING CHINA'S INTENTIONS

- China is self-enhancing economic and military greed reflecting its personal economic rise.
- Also, its self-centered promotion of building its own stature through Belt and Road Initiative and the Silk Road project has, indeed provoked an understandable clash with India and Japan.

### WHAT CHINA NEEDS TO DO?

- Though, China has risen in its global power by “adopting the idea of absolute sovereignty and following the nation-state model, but it cannot continue to rise by doing what it has been doing and it must eventually follow the liberal democratic models”.
- China must remember that its growing power has compelled the current U.S. Secretary of State, to encourage NATO members to join the U.S. in viewing China as an economic and security threat.

### CONCLUSION

- Thus, a kind of dualism persists in the world order with no clear hegemony that can be bestowed on one single nation.
- The emphasis, therefore, would be a move towards restructuring and advancement, as well as adopting an oppositional posture as a robust replacement of subservience to western hegemony.
- It is feared that there could be a possibility of a multipolar world turning disordered and unstable, but it is up to the rising nations to attempt to overcome territorial aspirations and strike a forceful note of faith on cultural mediation, worldwide legitimacy, and the appeal of each society in terms of its democratic values.
- Interestingly, the sun is now setting on the empire and the rising nations are gradually waking up to a new experience of freedom and self-confidence.

## 2) The ECI cannot be a super government

### GS-2 Constitutional Bodies

#### NEWS

- There is still some confusion about the extent and nature of the powers that are available to the Election Commission.

### CONTEXT

- The ongoing state assembly elections has brought the Election Commission of India (ECI) into sharp focus.

### ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

- ECI is a **constitutional body** that superintends, directs and controls the conduct of elections.
- It ensures that the elections held are free and fair.
- The body administers elections to the **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.**

### POWERS OF ECI COMES FROM?

- ECI derives its power from **article 324** of the constitution.
- It became rather easier to locate the powers of the ECI after the Supreme Court held in **Mohinder Singh Gill vs Chief Election Commissioner (AIR 1978 SC 851)**.
- In this case SC held that the Article 324 contains plenary powers to ensure free and fair elections and these are vested in the ECI which can take all necessary steps to achieve this constitutional object.
- All subsequent decisions of the Supreme Court reaffirmed Gill's decision and thus the ECI was fortified by these court decisions in taking tough measures.

### THE MODEL CODE CONDUCT

- The model code of conduct issued by the ECI is a set of guidelines meant for political parties, candidates and governments to adhere to during an election. The code has been **issued in exercise of its powers under Article 324.**
- This code is **based on consensus among political parties.**
- Its origin can be traced to a code of conduct for political parties prepared by the **Kerala government in 1960 for the Assembly elections.**
- It was adopted and refined and enlarged by the ECI in later years, and was enforced strictly from 1991 onwards.
- Besides the code, the ECI issues from time to time directions, instructions and

clarifications on a host of issues which crop up in the course of an election.

### CONCERNS

- There exists a considerable amount of confusion about the extent and nature of the powers which are available to the ECI in enforcing the code as well as its other decisions in relation to an election.
- Also, since the code of conduct is framed on the basis of a consensus among political parties, **it has not been given any legal backing.**
- **Although a committee of Parliament recommended that the code should be made a part of the Representation of the People Act 1951,** the ECI did not agree to it on the ground that once it becomes a part of law, all matters connected with the enforcement of the code will be taken to court, which would **delay elections.**

### UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS

- The position taken by the ECI is sound from a practical point of view. But then the **question about the enforceability of the code remains unresolved.**
- **Paragraph 16A of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968** says that the commission may suspend or withdraw recognition of a recognised political party if it refuses to observe the model code of conduct.
- But it is doubtful whether this provision is legally sustainable.
- The reason behind this doubt is that withdrawal of the recognition of a party recognised under these orders seriously affects the functioning of political parties.
- Also, when the code is legally not enforceable, how can the ECI resort to a punitive action such as withdrawal of recognition?

### ISSUES THAT NEEDS TO EXAMINED

- There are two crucial issues which need to be examined in the context of the model code and the exercise of powers by the ECI under Article 324.

#### Transfer of officials

- This issue relates to the **abrupt transfer of senior officials working under State governments by an order of the commission.**
- Such order is based on the report by the observers of the ECI and on the

assumption that the presence of those officials will adversely affect the free and fair election in that State.

- On the contrary, transfer of an official is within the exclusive jurisdiction of the government.
- Also, as the code does not say what the ECI can do; it contains only guidelines for the candidates, political parties and the governments. Further, Article 324 does not confer untrammelled powers on the ECI to do anything in connection with the elections.
- Hence, it is not clear whether the ECI can transfer a State government official in exercise of the general powers under Article 324 or under the model code.
- If transfer of officials is a power which the ECI can exercise without the concurrence of the State governments, the whole State administration could come to a grinding halt. The ECI may transfer even the Chief Secretary or the head of the police force in the State abruptly.

#### SUPREME COURT INTERPRETATION ON THIS ISSUE

- In **Mohinder Singh Gill's case**, the Court had made it abundantly clear that the ECI can draw power from Article 324 only when no law exists which governs a particular matter.
- Transfer of officials, etc is governed by rules made under Article 309 of the Constitution which cannot be bypassed by the ECI under the purported exercise of power conferred by Article 324.

#### Administrative moves

- Another issue relates to the **ECI's intervention in the administrative decisions of a State government or even the union government.**
- According to the model code, Ministers cannot announce any financial grants in any form, make any promise of construction of roads, provision of drinking water facilities, etc or make any ad hoc appointments in the government departments or public undertakings.
- But in reality, no government is allowed by the ECI to take any action, administrative or otherwise, if the ECI believes that such actions or decisions will affect free and fair elections.

- For eg. A recent decision of the ECI to stop the Government of Kerala from continuing to supply kits containing rice, pulses, cooking oil, etc is a case in point after the complaint from the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.
- The question is whether the ECI could have taken such a decision either under the model code or Article 324.
- The model code does not provide any clue. As regards the use of Article 324, the issue boils down to whether distribution of food items to those in need in a pandemic will affect free and fair elections.

#### **SUPREME COURT STANCE ON THIS**

- The Supreme Court had in **S. Subramaniam Balaji vs Govt. of T. Nadu & Ors (2013)** held that the distribution of colour TVs, computers, cycles, goats, cows, etc, done or promised by the government is in the nature of welfare measures and is in accordance with the directive principles of state policy, and therefore it is **permissible during an election**.
- Further, **Section 123 (2)(b) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951** says that declaration of a public policy or the exercise of a legal right will not be regarded as interfering with the free exercise of the electoral right.

#### **CONCLUSION**

- The ECI, through the conduct of free and fair elections in an extremely complex country, has restored the purity of the legislative bodies. However, no constitutional body is vested with unguided and absolute powers.
- Hence, the unlimited and arbitrary powers enjoyed by the ECI need to be addressed given the dangers associated with unbridled powers.

### **3) An obituary for the IP Appellate Board**

#### **GS-3 Intellectual Property Rights**

##### **CONTEXT**

- On April 4, the President of India signed the **Tribunal Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021**, which resulted in shutting down the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) and many other tribunals.

#### **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY APPELLATE BOARD (IPAB)**

- It was India's specialist tribunal for determining disputes relating to intellectual property (IP) rights.
- It was established under the Trade Marks Act of 1999, and later its jurisdiction was extended to hear patent cases after the Patents (Amendment) Act of 2002.
- Historically, appeals from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), rectification and revocation applications were heard by the various High Courts.
- However, the Patents (Amendment) Act of 2002 divested these powers from the High Courts and extended it to the IPAB.

#### **CHALLENGES FACED BY THE IPAB**

##### **Controversies:**

- Since its inception, the institution has been involved in controversies. It has been the subject matter of judicial review before the various High Courts.
- These cases include a challenge to the constitutionality of the IPAB, petitions seeking filling up of vacancies before the High Court in Delhi and Chennai, and even a petition to the Supreme Court for extension of the term of the chairperson.

##### **Understaffed:**

- Ever since its creation, IPAB has been **perennially understaffed**, its administrative staff often being on deputation.
- It remained headless for almost two years, in January 2018, the IPAB was given a head.
- The then chairperson of the Appellate Tribunal for Forfeited Property was given additional charge.
- The appointment of the technical member for patents, who brings the much-needed technical expertise that patent cases usually demand, was delayed.

##### **Underfunded:**

- The tribunal beside being understaffed was also underpowered which resulted in **poor infrastructural set up of the tribunal which further delayed the ongoing cases**.
- The IPAB's jurisdiction of cases was split between trademarks, patents, copyright, and geographical indication, where the predominant business pertained to trademarks. Thus, the workload of the

IPAB was typically split between trademarks and patents with the former consuming much of the time.

- Apart from its daily work load, it also had **sittings in five different cities, with just one chairperson who had to fly between them at times.**
- The chairperson had to summon parties and papers to all these cities, which came at a **substantial cost to the public.**

#### **Poor rate of case disposal:**

- According to a recent study, the first decade of operation of the patents bench, saw a **paltry disposal rate of about 20 patent cases a year.** Nearly 70% of the patent cases filed were either pending at some stage or yet to be taken up for hearing.
- After the IPAB was set up, not more than 15 cases were transferred from all the High Courts to the IPAB.
- It is to be noted that tribunals were established with the **primary aim of speedy disposal of cases by specialised experts.**

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF IPAB**

- The functioning of the IPAB was critical for the innovation ecosystem.
- Every patent granted by the Patent Office is a potential subject matter in appeal before the IPAB.
- An unjustified patent grant at the Patent Office, by error or oversight, can only be corrected in appeal.
- But now, with shutting down of IPAB, we will never know the number of unjustified patents that went unquestioned without an effective appellate mechanism.

#### **MISSED OPPORTUNITY**

- India stands as a shining example for its legislation in patent law.
- Some of these legislations are: **retraction of product patents for pharmaceuticals and chemicals between 1970 and 2005, the anti-evergreening provisions or the robust compulsory licensing regime.**
- Thus, it has offered the world a **host of TRIPS-compliant flexibilities in its statute.**
- But it has failed in developing a jurisprudence around these provisions.
- Therefore, the tenure of the IPAB will be remembered as a missed opportunity to

develop the home-grown jurisprudence on patent law that is much lacking in India.

## **4) Protecting children in the age of AI**

### **GS-3 Artificial Intelligence**

#### **CONTEXT**

- In present times we are now living among history's very first "AI" generation.
- The children and adolescents of today are born into a world increasingly powered by virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI).
- Thus, AI is not only changing what humans can do, it is shaping our behaviours, our preferences, our perceptions of the world and of ourselves.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF AI**

- In the field of education, AI can and is being used in fabulous ways to tailor learning materials and pedagogical approaches to the child's needs, such as-
  1. Intelligent tutoring systems,
  2. Tailored curriculum plans,
  3. Imaginative virtual reality instruction,
  4. Offering rich and engaging interactive learning experiences that can improve educational outcomes.

#### **CONCERNS**

##### **Digital divide:**

- Not everyone can tap into the opportunities offered by this transformation.
- According to UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), **as many as two-thirds of the world's children do not have access to the Internet at home.**

##### **Brand children:**

- The educational and performance data on children if not kept confidential and anonymous, it can inadvertently typecast or brand children, harming their future opportunities.
- For e.g. During the pandemic, when the usual tests were cancelled in the United Kingdom, the algorithms that served as a fallback, due to which thousands of students lost out on college admissions and scholarships.

##### **Unsupervised virtual world:**

- In the old-fashioned physical world, we evolved norms and standards to protect

children. But similar protections and standards are missing in the online world.

- The virtual world is full of unsupervised “vacations” and “playgrounds”.
- While video gaming and chat forums offer an online space for children to socialise with their friends, multiple reports identify such virtual playgrounds as “honeypots” for child predators.

#### **Digital addiction:**

- The AI systems driving many video games and social networks are designed to keep children hooked, both through algorithms and gimmicks like “streaks”, “likes”, infinite scroll, etc.
- An ancillary consequence of this business model is that— the children, from a tender age through adolescence, are becoming digitally addicted.

#### **Hinders children understanding of the world:**

- Right when children and youth are forming their initial views of the world, they are being sucked into virtual deep space, including the universe of fake news, conspiracy theories, hype, hubris, online bullying, hate speech and the likes.
- All this is thrown at children just when they are starting to try to make sense of who they are and the world they live in; right when it is so important to help them understand and appreciate different perspectives, preferences, beliefs and customs, to build bridges of understanding and empathy and goodwill.

#### **Harvesting, algorithmic bias:**

- Today, many AI toys come pre-programmed with their own personality and voice.
- Though, these toys can offer playful and creative opportunities for children, they also listen to and observe our children, soaking up their data, and with no framework to govern its use.
- Some of these AI toys even perform facial recognition of children and toddlers.
- **Germany banned Cayla, an Internet-connected doll**, because of concerns it could be hacked and used to spy on children. Yet, most countries do not yet have the legal framework in place to ban such toys.

#### **THE TASK AHEAD**

- This change in way of life with AI, leads to double imperatives of getting all children on-line and creating child-safe digital spaces.
- Hence, we need to balance the tremendous good AI can do for children, while mitigating inadvertent harm and misuse.
- The next phase of the fourth Industrial Revolution must include an overwhelming push to extend Internet access to all children.
- Governments, the private sector, civil society, parents and children must push hard for this now, before AI further deepens the pre-existing inequalities and creates its own disparities.
- To mitigate on-line harms, multi-pronged action plan is required, which includes:
  1. Legal and technological safeguards;
  2. Greater awareness among parents, guardians and children on how ai works behind the scenes;
  3. Tools, like trustworthy certification and rating systems, to enable sound choices on safe ai apps;
  4. Ban on anonymous accounts;
  5. Enforce ethical principles of non-discrimination and fairness embedded in the policy and design of ai systems.

#### **STEPS BEING TAKEN**

##### **Globally:**

- In February, in a landmark decision, **the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have adopted General Comment 25, on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and fulfilling all children’s rights in the digital environment.**
- This is an important first step on the long road ahead.

##### **India:**

- The Government of India has put in place strong policies to protect the rights and well-being of children, including a legislative framework that includes the Right to Education.
- Laws and policies to prevent a range of abuses and violence, such as the National Policy for Children (2013), can be extended for children in a digital space.

#### **CONCLUSION**

- We need safe online spaces for children, without algorithmic manipulation and

with restricted profiling and data collection.

- Also, there is a need of online tools (and an online culture) that helps prevent addiction, that promotes attention-building skills, that expands children's horizons, understanding and appreciation for diverse perspectives, and that builds their social emotional learning capabilities.
- Just as India proactively helped shape the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and gave the world the principle of Ahimsa, it could also galvanise the international community around, ensuring an ethical AI for Generation AI.

## 5) The ordinance route is bad, repromulgation worse

### Gs-2 Separation of powers

#### NEWS

- Governments, both Centre and State, are resorting to the practice of ordinance which is a **usurpation of legislative power by the executive**.

#### CONTEXT

- The central government has recently re-promulgated the ordinance that establishes a commission for air quality management in the National Capital Region, or the **Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020**.
- This raises questions about the practice of issuing ordinances to make law, and that of re-issuing ordinances without getting them ratified by Parliament.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR ORDINANCE

- The Constitution permits the central and State governments to make laws when Parliament (or the State Legislature) is **not in session**.
- As law making is a legislative function, this power is provided for **urgent requirements**, and the law thus made has an **automatic expiry date**.
- The Constitution states that the ordinance **will lapse at the end of six weeks from the time Parliament (or the State Legislature) next meets**.

- However, no provisions were placed in the constitution regarding the re-promulgation of the ordinance.

#### WHAT THE DATA SHOW

- While an ordinance was originally conceived as an emergency provision, it was used fairly regularly.
- **In the 1950s, central ordinances were issued at an average of 7.1 per year, while in the last couple of years it has seen a spike, 16 in 2019, 15 in 2020, and four till now this year.**
- State governments also used this provision very often.

#### AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

- The issue was brought up in the **Supreme Court** through a writ petition by D.C. Wadhwa, a professor of economics.
- As a result, the five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in **1986**, ruled that **re promulgation of ordinances was contrary to the Constitutional scheme**.
- It said that it would most certainly be a **colourable exercise of power for the Government to ignore the Legislature and to re-promulgate the Ordinance**.
- Such a scheme would be **against the constitutional spirit** as it would enable the Executive to transgress its constitutional limitation in the matter of law making in an emergent situation and to covertly and indirectly take to itself the law making function of the Legislature.
- But, the judgment did not stop the practice.
- The matter came up again in the Supreme Court, and in **January 2017**, a **seven-judge Constitution Bench declared this practice to be unconstitutional**.
- The judgment concluded that, **"Re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the Constitution and a subversion of democratic legislative processes."**
- However, even this judgment has been ignored.

#### RECENT EXAMPLES OF RE-PROMULGATION

##### Centre:

- The Indian Medical Council Amendment Ordinance was issued in September 2018, and reissued in January 2019, as it was passed by only one House of Parliament in the intervening session.
- The current case of the Commission for Air Quality Management is even more

shocking. While the ordinance of October 2020 was laid in Parliament on the first day of the recent Budget Session, a Bill to replace it was not introduced. Now, the ordinance has been re-promulgated.

#### States:

- In 2020, Kerala issued 81 ordinances, while Karnataka issued 24 and Maharashtra 21.
- Kerala has also re-promulgated ordinances: one ordinance to set up a Kerala University of Digital Sciences, Innovation and Technology has been promulgated five times between January 2020 and February 2021.

#### CONCLUSION

- Ordinances are to tackle exigencies when the legislature is not in session, and expire at the end of six weeks of the next meeting of the legislature.
- This time period is given for the **legislature to decide whether such a law is warranted.**
- Repromulgation should be considered as an alternative way of law making as that would be a usurpation of legislative power by the executive.
- As governments, both at the Centre and States, are violating this principle, the **legislatures and the courts should check the practice.** That is what separation of powers and the concept of checks and balances means.
- By not checking this practice, the other two organs are also abdicating their responsibility to the Constitution.

## 6) A low-carbon future through sector-led change

### GS-3 Climate Change

#### WHY IN NEWS?

- Leaders' Climate Summit will be organised by the United States from April 22-23. In the light of this coming summit there has been a flurry of articles about suggestions that India should announce a 'net-zero' emissions target.

#### WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

- The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1.5°C report** called for **global carbon emissions to reach net-zero by 2050.** Because of this report there have been calls for all

countries to announce 2050 as the net-zero target year. There is another strategy which suggests that since a disproportionate share of the carbon space has been used up by developed countries, **some countries should net-zero before 2050 in order for others to have some additional time.**

#### WHAT INDIA SHOULD DO?

- Being a climate vulnerable country India must contribute to limiting global temperature rise. India is still a very poor country with a significant development deficit. Announcing a net-zero commitment by 2050 **risks taking on a much heavier burden of decarbonisation than many wealthier countries, and could seriously compromise India's development.**
- Hence India needs a pathway which focuses on concrete, near-term sectoral transformations through aggressive adoption of technologies that are within our reach. It should avoid high carbon sectors which should be our long term objective. Some of the step which India take:
  - **Decarbonise power sector:** First step is to decarbonise the **electricity sector**, which is the **single largest source (about 40%) of India's greenhouse gas emissions.** Decarbonised electricity would allow India to undertake transformational changes in urbanisation and industrial development. While India's focus on expanding renewable electricity capacity is a welcome step, India now needs to shift gears to a **comprehensive re-imagination of electricity and its role in our economy and society.** This is to go beyond expanding renewables to limiting the expansion of coal-based electricity capacity. This will not be easy as coal provides firm, dispatchable power and accounts for roughly 75% of electricity, supports the economy of key regions; and is tied to sectors such as banking and railways.
  - **Ceiling for coal power:** Coal is **increasingly uneconomic.** Phasing out coal over time will bring local gains, such as **reduced air pollution, climate mitigation.** It will also give full scope for development of renewable energy and

storage. To reduce the transition costs of a brighter low-carbon future, there is a need to create a **multi-stakeholder Just Transition Commission** representing all levels of government and the affected communities to ensure decent livelihood opportunities beyond coal in India's coal belt.

- **Low-carbon electricity future:** To achieve this, there is a need to address existing problems of the sector such as **poor finances and management of distribution companies**. Electricity storage, smart grids, and technologies that enable the electrification of other sectors such as transportation should also need to be focused. There is a need for partnership with the private sector, including tools such as production-linked incentives so that India can use electricity transition for job creation and global competitiveness.
- **Improve energy services** Efficiency of electricity use can be used as an important complement to decarbonising electricity supply. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency will benefit in lowering consumer electricity bills.

#### WAY FORWARD

- India may consider committing to submit plausible pathways and timelines to achieve net-zero emissions as part of its future pledges. This would allow India adequate time to undertake an integrated approach for detailed assessments of its development needs and low-carbon opportunities and develop a strategic road map to enhance its own technology and manufacturing competence as part of the global clean energy supply chain, to gain benefits of employment and export revenues.

## 7) A fresh push for green hydrogen

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

**GS-3 Indian Economy and issues related**

#### CONTEXT

- India will soon join 15 other countries in the hydrogen club as it prepares to launch

the **National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM)**.

- The global target is to produce 1.45 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2023.

#### HYDROGEN

- Hydrogen does not occur freely in nature, but it can be made from natural gas or by passing electric current through water.
- When burned, it emits **only water vapour (no carbon dioxide is not produced)**.
- Although hydrogen is a clean molecule, the process of extracting it is **energy-intensive**.
- The sources and processes by which hydrogen is derived, are categorised as:
  - **Grey Hydrogen:** is produced from fossil fuels.
  - **Blue Hydrogen:** is generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options.
  - **Green Hydrogen:** is generated entirely from renewable power sources, which split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

#### HYDROGEN USAGE STATUS IN INDIA

- Currently, India consumes around 5.5 million tonnes of hydrogen, primarily produced from imported fossil fuels.
- According to an analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), by 2030 the demand for green hydrogen could be up to 1 million tonnes in India across application in sectors such as ammonia, steel, methanol, transport and energy storage.

#### CHALLENGES AND WAYFORWARD

- There exists several challenges in scaling up to commercial-scale operations:
  - Renewable energy resources can produce low-cost electricity. But currently, most renewable energy resources that can produce low-cost electricity are **situated far from potential demand centres**.
  - Hence, there is a need to **promote decentralised hydrogen production** through open access of renewable power to an electrolyser.
  - If hydrogen were to be shipped, it would significantly erode the economics of it.
  - A more viable option would be wheeling electricity directly from the solar plant, rather than shipping it.
  - We need mechanisms to **ensure access to round-the-clock renewable power for decentralised hydrogen production**.

- This can be done, as we scale up to the target of having 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030.
- Thus, aligning hydrogen production needs with broader electricity demand in the economy would be critical.
- We must take steps to blend green hydrogen in existing processes, especially the industrial sector.
- Improving the reliability of hydrogen supply by augmenting green hydrogen with conventionally produced hydrogen will significantly improve the economics of the fuel.
- This will also help build a technical understanding of the processes involved in handling hydrogen on a large scale.
- Policymakers must facilitate investments in early-stage piloting and the research and development needed to advance the technology for use in India.
- The growing interest in hydrogen is triggered by the anticipated steep decline in electrolyser costs.
- Hence, India should not be a mere witness to this. Public funding will have to lead the way, along the private sector, and secure the nation's energy future.
- India must learn from the experience of the National Solar Mission and focus on domestic manufacturing.
- Establishing an end-to-end electrolyser manufacturing facility would require measures like- secure supply of raw materials.
- Further, there is a need for a manufacturing strategy that can leverage the existing strengths and mitigate threats by integrating with the global value chain.
- **Hydrogen may be lighter than air, but it will take some heavy lifting to get the ecosystem in place.**

## 8) Strengthening the process of choosing the police chief

### GS-2 Transparency & Accountability

#### NEWS

- A balance needs to be struck between the government's legitimate role and the police chief's operational autonomy.

#### CONTEXT

- Recently, Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh was removed from the post by the government.
- This event has put the spotlight once again on long overdue reforms needed in the process of appointing and removing police chiefs.

#### CONCERNS

- There is no independent process to assess the suitability of qualified candidates.
- The government's exercise control over the State police through their unregulated power to decide who the chief will be. Their assessment remains opaque and is an exercise behind closed doors.
- The principles of democratic accountability necessitate the police chief to remain answerable to the elected government at all times.
- Hence, there is a need to ensure the right balance between the government's legitimate role in appointing or removing the police chief and the need to safeguard the chief's operational autonomy.

#### WAY FORWARD

- Two elements are vital to reforms in this area:
- **Have an oversight panel**
- **Need for transparency**

#### HAVE AN OVERSIGHT PANEL

- There is a need to shift the responsibility of appointment and removal from the government alone to a bipartisan, independent oversight body of which the government is one part.

#### Recommendations:

- **The National Police Commission (NPC)**, constituted in 1979, suggested to establish a state-level oversight body with a specified role in the appointment and removal of police chiefs.
- This was later reaffirmed by the **Supreme Court of India in its judgment in 2006, in the Prakash Singh case.**
- While the top court entrusted the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) with a role in shortlisting candidates from which the State government is to appoint the police chief, **the Model Police Bill, 2015** places the responsibility with a multiparty State Police Board, also referred to as the State Security Commission (SSCs).
- The SSC should constitute government officials, the Leader of the Opposition as

well as independent members from civil society.

- Thus the bill provided the additional safeguard of civilian oversight over the appointment process.

#### **Gaps in the SSCs-**

- Not a single state or UT adheres to the balanced composition suggested by the top court, instead either through new police acts or amendments or through executive orders.
- In essence, the commissions remain **dominated by the political executive.**
- Also there are concerns over non-functioning SSCs. As per the information secured in 2019, through the Right to Information Act indicates that **only four SSCs have held meetings since 2014.**
- Hence, there is a **need to redesign SSCs strength in order to drive meaningful reforms.**

#### **2.NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY**

- Much standard-setting work is needed on this as only basic safeguards have been defined in reform measures towards protecting the operational autonomy of the police chief.
- On appointments, the Court and the Model Police Act require the UPSC/SSC to shortlist candidates on the basis of length of service, service record, and range of experience and a performance appraisal of the candidates over the past 10 years.
- However, no further guidance has been developed on explaining these terms to guide the appointments.
- Questions such as- What qualifies as a “good” range of experience? How is the integrity of a candidate measured during appraisals? What is the process required to be followed by the SSC in reviewing the suitability of candidates? Should not interviews with the candidates be considered as a requirement, for instance?; remains unclear.
- Similarly, no scrutiny process has been prescribed to justify removals from tenure posts.
- The NPC had required State governments to seek the **approval of the State Security Commission before removing the police chief before the end of term.**
- But this important check was diluted under the Prakash Singh judgment that

only requires governments to **consult the SSC.**

#### **Supreme Court on such removal:**

- On the contrary, the Supreme Court in **T.P. Senkumar vs Union of India, 2017 case**, has rightly emphasised that “prima facie satisfaction of the government” alone is not a sufficient ground to justify removal from a tenure post in government, such as that of the police chief.
- The rule of law requires such decisions be for compelling reasons and based on verifiable material that can be objectively tested.

#### **EXAMPLE FROM UNITED KINGDOM**

- In improving transparency of the review process, the UK provides a useful example.
- The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, 2011, introduced **public confirmation hearings** as an additional layer of check for the appointment of the heads of their police forces known as Chief Constables (outside of London city).
- **Clear and specific benchmarks are required to be integrated into decision-making processes, both on appointments and removals, to prevent politically motivated adverse actions. Any further delay in implementing reforms in this area will continue to demoralise the police and cripple the rule of law.**

### **9) Judges pro tem**

#### **GS-2 Judiciary**

#### **CONTEXT**

- Recently the Supreme Court has decided to invoke a “dormant provision” in the Constitution to clear the way for appointment of retired judges as ad hoc judges to clear the mounting arrears in the various High Courts.

#### **PROVISION USED**

- The Court has chosen to activate **Article 224A of the Constitution, which provides for appointment of ad hoc judges in the High Courts based on their consent.**

#### **WHY THIS WAS STEP TAKEN?**

- The Supreme Court has made it clear that “the challenge of mounting arrears and

existing vacancies requires recourse to Article 224A”.

- The numbers both in respect of **pendency of cases and vacancies in the High Courts** are quite concerning — a **backlog of over 57 lakh cases, and a vacancy level of 40%**.

#### IS IT THE RIGHT STEP TO BE TAKEN?

- This step is an indictment of the extraordinary delay in filling up judicial vacancies.
- The unacceptable delay in the appointment process in recent times has caused huge vacancies in the High Courts.
- This delay can be attributed to the **ongoing tussle between the collegium system of judiciary and the delay on the part of the government to accept the recommendations of the collegium.**
- Official data suggest that there **need not be a correlation between the number of vacancies and the large backlog.**
- Therefore, it is **definitely not unwelcome that the Court has chosen to activate Article 224A of the Constitution.**

#### SUPREME COURTS GUIDELINES ON SUCH APPOINTMENTS

- The Court has directed that the trigger point for such an appointment will be:
  1. When the vacancies go beyond 20% of the sanctioned strength,
  2. Or when more than 10% of the backlog of pending cases are over five years old;
  3. Or when cases in a particular category are pending for over five years,
  4. Or when the rate of disposal is slower than the rate of institution of fresh cases.

#### MEMORANDUM OF PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED

- The Bench has ruled that the current Memorandum of Procedure to be followed for appointing ad hoc judges:
  - a process initiated by the Chief Justice of a High Court, with a suggested tenure of two to three years.
  - The Court has clarified that this is a **“transitory methodology”** and does not constrain the regular appointment process.

#### CONCLUSION

- The government, which did not oppose the proposal, but wanted the vacancies to be filled up first, would do well to expedite the regular appointment process from its

end, and give up its tendency to hold back some recommendations selectively.

- As for the judiciary, it should ensure that only retired judges with experience and expertise are offered the temporary positions, and there is no hint of favouritism.

## 10) India’s COVID crisis — when difficult became worse

### GS-3 Government Policies & Interventions; Health

#### WHY IN NEWS?

- India is suffering from the second wave of Coronavirus with more than 3 lakh daily cases. India is in its darkest days of the pandemic, but there may be still darker days to come. Its second wave is a result of poor political choices as political leaders have been slow and largely failed to take the outbreak seriously, bad communications, and neglect of public health principles. Lockdowns are being used as a tool to control the spread of viruses but given the catastrophic state of affairs, effective intervention will require much more rigorous and extensive action.

#### LACUNAE IN PRESENT COVID MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- **Data gap:** There has been a data gap as a result of which it is difficult to grasp the true scope of this crisis. We are **likely missing many infections and undocumented deaths** which may be too higher than official figures as supported by long queue at crematorium.
- **Premature celebration:** India did well during the first phase of Coronavirus when daily new infections dropped to less than 10,000 driven in part by successful efforts to enforce social distancing and other public health measures. There was also rolling of homegrown vaccines. However, the celebration started early. Lot of relaxation was given in a short period of time. Almost no steps to limit the risk posed by the Kumbh Mela festival, resumption of large, in-person political rallies and other large gatherings are part of the fuel that has caused COVID-19 to explode. This premature celebration has ushered in a nightmare. Kumbh Mela has resulted in thousands of positive tests,

including several sadhus and former King Gyanendra of Nepal, with many thousands of infections sure to go undetected as pilgrims return to their home communities.

- **Control strategies:** Viruses mutate constantly. However, only when they are allowed to spread unchecked through large populations, more deadly variants become established. This will change the dynamics of outbreaks. At the moment, India scientists and public health policymakers are drawing on extremely limited data, as far too few cases of infection are being analysed. India needs to rapidly scale up its genomic surveillance efforts to have the data needed to guide policy decisions.

#### STEPS TO BE TAKEN

- To bring the astronomical growth of the pandemic under control Short-term targeted lockdowns can be done as in Delhi and Bangalore. Lockdowns exact a terrible economic and social cost and hence should be a **strategy of last resort**. Lockdown needs to be removed once infection numbers are in control.
- Second strategy will be expanding access to vaccines which will take weeks before the benefit can be felt. Vaccine rollout without massive outreach and support for the complex, the challenging logistics of administering vaccines, and simply broadening eligibility requirements will do little to slow the virus. Whatever strategy India takes to administer vaccines the key is ensuring the country has enough vaccines. Government needs to work with manufacturers like the Serum Institute and should identify what is slowing them down, use the full clout of the Indian government to drive production higher.
- A **surge in testing is needed**. India has the capacity to do that many more tests but has not made it enough of a priority. India needs to increase its testing rates several times over, with the **goal of getting the positivity rate under 5%**.
- Universal masks wearing high quality masks must be made mandatory. All major indoor and outdoor events, including rallies, religious festivals, weddings, and so forth should be banned.

#### WAY FORWARD

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- India is now suffering the worst days of the pandemic as a result of poor political choices, poor communications, and neglect of public health principles. However the good news is that we know how to control Coronavirus. If we do things like focus on public health measures, improve vaccinations, universal masking, and effective coordination across public health efforts then hospitals can be stopped from being overwhelmed, and life can begin to go back to normal.

### 11) Arise and rejuvenate the third layer of governance

#### GS-2 Local Self Governance; Government Policies & Interventions; Constitutional Amendments

##### WHY IN NEWS?

- April 24 is celebrated as Panchayat Raj day. Famous quote of **Mahatma Gandhi** “**The voice of the people is the voice of god; The voice of the Panchayat is the voice of the people,**” shows the importance of Panchayati raj institutions.
- Panchayati raj ensures that the voices of the people are heard loud and clear. Strong local bodies are needed so that even the last man sitting in the remote corner of the last row should have access to the benefits of the plan. As there is neglect of Panchayati raj by state governments, Political acts depriving people of their rights must stop and there is need to strengthen Panchayati raj.

##### JOURNEY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA

- In India, **Cholas** are considered pioneers in the formation of local bodies as part of a well-organised hierarchy to oversee the implementation of progressive plans.
- In modern times, local bodies can be found during British colonial rule. The Madras Local Boards Act passed by British in 1884, formed unions in both small towns and big cities. Members were appointed to ensure better administration of these towns and cities. To a certain extent, introduction of local bodies brought about positive changes in basic parameters such as health and hygiene.
- Gram panchayat laws passed in 1920 gave voting rights to people over 25 years and

the right to choose their panchayat members.

- However, the idea of local bodies received **constitutional recognition only in 1992**. It was only after the 73rd Amendment in the 1990s, that the Panchayati raj law came into force.
- This amendment brought massive changes such as the initiation of grama sabha, a three-tier Panchayati raj methodology of governance, reservation for the downtrodden and women, consistency in economic development, local body elections once in five years, the formation of the State Election Commission, Finance Commission, and the power to draft the rules and responsibilities of the Panchayat.
- With subsequent amendments (74th amendment act) regions better equipped with basic facilities and more developed than the villages were brought under one coordinated body, namely, the municipality. The district capitals were further slotted into a combined parameter, namely, the corporation.

#### **BENEFITS OF AN IDEAL PANCHAYATI RAJ**

- Institution of Panchayati raj ensures that for seemingly trivial and easily resolvable issues, the villages did not have to seek the assistance of the State or the Central governments.
- **Mandatory grama** sabha meeting ensures that everyone is given equal rights to highlight the issues that disrupt life. Reading out of financial statements and balance sheets ensures transparency.

#### **REALITY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA**

- State governments do not make an attempt to seek the opinions and the consensus of the people on significant issues such as an eight-lane highway project and major hydrocarbon project as evident in the state of Tamil Nadu. State government of Tamil Nadu went ahead and conducted meetings, which were marked by poor

attendance and poor representation from the people. Even then, the government went ahead with the approval of projects which are impediments to normal life.

- **Women in Panchayati raj institutions** are not finding major administrative roles in the local bodies, though, on paper, women are shown to be a considerable force.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

- Taking learning from **Kerala model of Panchayati raj system** where state government have worked diligently toward ensuring the proper use of allotted funds, and ensuring the efficiency of administration and eligible member appointments, other state governments should take steps to enable the power of administration to Panchayats as mandated by Constitution.
- To ensure efficiency tools like holding online Panchayat meetings, decent remuneration to Panchayat chiefs and councillors and bestowing the grama sabha with the power to revoke appointed members and representatives can be considered.
- Steps should be taken to remove the conflict between State-appointed corporation commissioners of ruling parties and Mayor from the opposition party.
- Constitutional mandate of holding elections for local bodies once in five years should be followed in letter and spirit.
- Gandhi's belief was that the voices of people will resolve what violence can never be successful in resolving. It will come true only when we let the peoples' voices be heard.

**For doubts and queries email us at [doubts@officerspulse.com](mailto:doubts@officerspulse.com)**

## *RSTV BIG PICTURE*

### 1) India-UAE Cooperation

- Recently External affairs minister S Jaishankar visited the United Arab Emirates and talks were held on the entire gamut of bilateral relations especially on the economic recovery post Covid-19.

#### A Glance at India-UAE bilateral relations

- As of now, India and UAE share a **50 years old relationship** starting from 1972 which has transformed from just being an economic relationship to a **comprehensive strategic partnership**.
- UAE has around **3.3 million Indian diaspora which is one of the largest and India receives around 24% of remittances from the UAE**.
- India is considered as an **important strategic partner for UAE** and it holds the position of being the **2nd largest trading partner** while UAE is the **3rd largest trading partner for India**.
- There are around **5000 Indian companies operating across the**

**spectrum in UAE and India receives around 75 billion dollars of investment.**

- UAE has been a preferred partner for India in terms of **Energy security, food security** etc.
- Thus, India and UAE share a **trustworthy and in depth relationship** which can be a major factor for stabilizing India's position in the international domain.

#### Key Focus Areas for enhanced cooperation

- Considering the **Gulf and Indian ocean region as single maritime geography** for enhancing trade relations with the middle east.
- A joint collaborative effort for **ensuring the security of Indo-Pacific**.
- Ensuring the **Stability of Afghanistan** by stabilizing the Indo-Pak relations.
- **Technology cooperation** in fields of AI, nano technology etc.
- Cooperation in sectors like **Space, Nuclear, Covid pandemic** etc.

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