

OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 06 | 4th July to 10th July, 2021



**DON'T
QUIT**

**AT A GLANCE
& IN DEPTH.**

COVERAGE.

The Hindu
The Indian Express
PIB
Rajya Sabha TV
All India Radio

Polity and Social Issues
Economy
International Relations
Environment
Science and Tech
Culture

CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY
THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



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News @ a glance

POLITY

Clarification:

Dear Students,

- In Pulse Issue no: 1, under the topic “**Andaman-Nicobar theatre command**” topic, it is given as “Officers and personnel from all three services (Navy, Air Force, and Army) serve under the command of an officer from the Navy”. However, as per **Indian Navy’s** website, “The defence of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands is a joint responsibility of all the three services and is coordinated by the Headquarters, Andaman & Nicobar Command, located at Port Blair. This is the only Tri-Services Command in the Indian Armed Forces and is headed by a Commander-in-Chief, as **appointed in rotation from the three Services**”.
- In Pulse Issue no: 2, “RAMP Program” topic, it is given that ‘MSME sector is the backbone of India’s economy, contributing 30% of India’s GDP and 4% of exports’. It is a typographical error. **The MSME sector contributes more than 40% of India’s exports.**
- We Regret the Error.
-

1) Scrapped 6 yrs ago, 66A still in use

Section 66A of IT Act

- Section 66A of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, was titled “**punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service**” and included information shared via a “computer resource or a communication device” known to be “false, but for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will”.
- It prescribed the punishment for sending messages through a computer or any other communication device like a mobile phone

or a tablet, and a **conviction could fetch a maximum of three years in jail.**

- In 2015, the Supreme Court in the landmark **Shreya Singhal judgment** that expanded the contours of free speech to the Internet, concluded that the provision was **vague and worded arbitrarily**. The judgment had found that Section 66A was **contrary to both Articles 19 (free speech) and 21 (right to life) of the Constitution**. The entire provision was struck down by the court.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court expressed dismay over police continuing to file cases under Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, even six years after it struck down the provision as unconstitutional and a violation of free speech.
- A petition said Section 66A has continued to be in use “not only within police stations but also in cases before trial courts across India”.
- In 2019, the Supreme Court directed that the **copies of the Shreya Singhal judgment be made available by every High Court to all district courts**. The Union Government was also directed to make available copies to chief secretaries of all state governments and Union Territories and the chief secretaries were, in turn, **directed to sensitise the police departments**.

2) Legislative Councils

Legislative Councils and their Composition

- Under **Article 168** of the constitution, states can have either one or two Houses of legislature.
- As per **Article 171**, the total number of Members in the Legislative council of a State **shall not exceed one third of the total number of Members** in the

Legislative Assembly, and **not less than 40 members**.

- Legislative Councils are **permanent Houses**, and like Rajya Sabha, **one-third of their members retire every two years**. The tenure of the members of the council is **six years**.
 - The members of the Council are **either nominated by the Governor of the state or are indirectly elected**.
1. 1/3 of Members are elected by local bodies like a municipality or other local authorities,
 2. 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of graduates residing in the State,
 3. 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of persons engaged in teaching,
 4. 1/3 are elected by the Members of Legislative Assembly and
 5. The remaining 1/6 are nominated by the Governor.

Powers of legislative councils

- The constitution gives Councils **limited legislative powers**.
- Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack the constitutional mandate to do so. **Legislative Assemblies have the power to override suggestions/amendments made to a legislation by the Council**.
- As for money bills, **Article 198** allows the legislative council to make its recommendations for amendments within 14 days of receiving the bill. However, the **legislative assembly could accept or reject these recommendations**.
- The **State Council of Ministers is responsible to the Legislative Assembly alone and not to the Legislative Council**. The members of the Legislative Council exercise some control over the State ministry by asking questions and supplementary questions to the ministers.

Why are they important?

- A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons:
 1. To act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House (legislative Assembly) and,
 2. It can ensure individuals who might not be cut out for the elections are able to contribute to the legislative process.

Creation/Abolition of legislative councils

- **Article 169(1)** of the Constitution allows **Parliament** to either create or abolish a Council in a state if the **Legislative Assembly of the State** passes a **resolution** to that effect.
- The resolution must be by a majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than **two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting**.

Criticisms on legislative councils

- The Legislative Councils have been criticised for being **unnecessary and unrepresentative of the people**.
- They are considered a **burden on the state budget and cause delays in passing legislation**.

Why in News?

- The West Bengal Assembly has passed a resolution to set up Legislative Council with a two-thirds majority.
- The Legislative Council existed in the state till 1969 till a resolution was passed in the Assembly for its dissolution.
- Presently, **six states** have a Legislative Council, and they are- **Maharashtra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar**.

3) NIPUN Bharat Mission

What's in the news?

- The **Ministry of Education** has launched the **National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN)**.
- The objective of NIPUN Bharat Mission is to **create an enabling environment to ensure universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy**, so that every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy by the end of Grade 3, by **2026-27**.

News in detail

- NIPUN Bharat will be implemented by the **Department of School Education and Literacy** and a **five-tier implementation mechanism** will be set up at the National-State- District- Block- School level in all States and UTs, **under the aegis of the centrally sponsored scheme of Samagra Shiksha**.

- Although the **National Education Policy 2020** had included a **2025 deadline** to achieve the goal of foundational literacy and numeracy, the Centre has **pushed back the target date to 2026-27**, given that COVID-19 has already disrupted two academic years.
- No additional funding is being allocated for the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Instead, money is being allocated from the **Samagra Shiksha scheme**.
- NIPUN Bharat is likely to emphasise goal setting and accountability for State governments, and provide guidelines for

teacher training, assessment and the creation of printed resources.

Related Information **Samagra Shiksha scheme**

- 'Samagra Shiksha' programme was introduced in the Union Budget 2018-19.
- It subsumes three existing schemes: **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)** and **Teacher Education (TE)**.
- The aim of the scheme is to **treat school education holistically, from pre-school to Class XII**.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) New plant recorded in India is invasive weed elsewhere

What is an invasive species?

- An alien species is a species introduced outside its natural past or present distribution; if this species becomes problematic, it is termed an invasive alien species (IAS).
- **Not all non-native species are invasive.** For example, most of the food crops grown in India, including onion, potato and tomatoes are not native to the region.
- To be invasive,
- **a species must adapt to the new area easily**
- **it must reproduce quickly**
- **it must harm the economy, or the native plants and animals of the region**
- Some of the most serious invasive species in India are *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, *Cassia uniflora*, *Chromolaena odorata*, *Eichhornia crassipes*, *Lantana camara*, *Parthenium hysterophorus* and *Prosopis juliflora*, etc.

Ways to deter them

- The movement of people and goods around the world increases the opportunity for introduction of IAS. The most effective way to stop the negative impacts of IAS is through **prevention of spread by regulating the trade or movement of a species.**
- Once an IAS has arrived, **early detection, monitoring and eradication** can stop the species spreading.

Why in the news?



- Scientists from Nagaland University have found *Strobilanthes reptans* in hills of Arunachal Pradesh for the first time in India.

Features of the plant

- Growing up to 20 cm tall on grassy hill slopes
- Prefers at 150 metres above mean sea level.
- Gives Pale violet flowers with darker veins from June to September, and yields fruit from July to December.
- But it is **an invasive species** all over South Asia and Indo-Pacific Islands.
- The plant has not had any adverse effect on indigenous flora as it is restricted to a single locality measuring less than 1 sq. km. But scientists have fears about its spread and have called for tracing its cultivation in India.

2) Researchers at IISER Bhopal to study atmospheric CO emissions

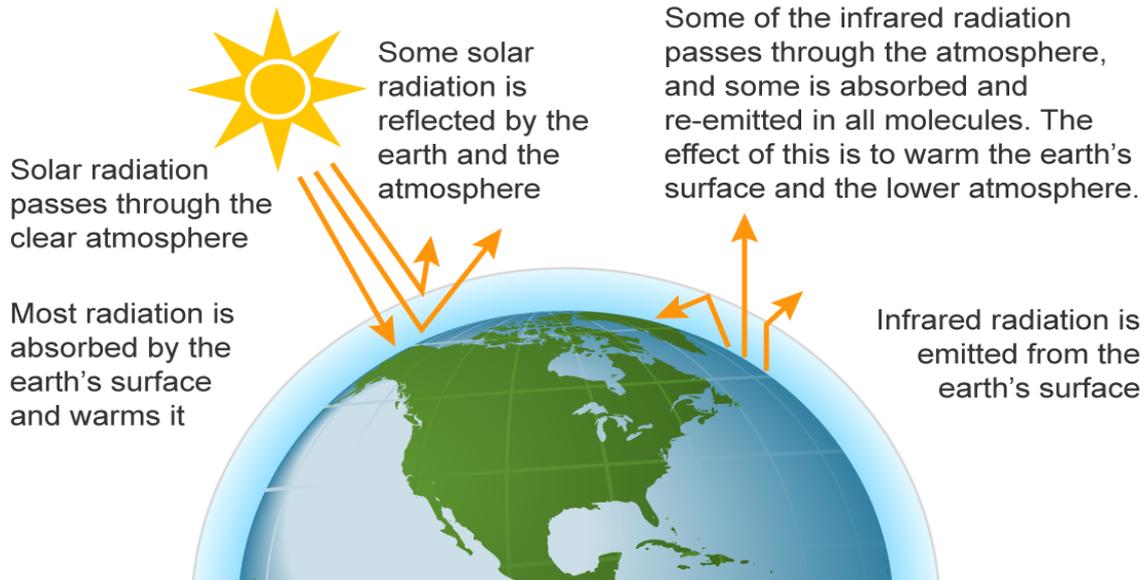
About IISER

- The Government of India has established Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) at Berhampur, Bhopal, Kolkata, Mohali, Pune, Thiruvananthapuram and Tirupati to integrate and promote interdisciplinary science education and research.
- They are autonomous Institutions under the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India.

About Greenhouse Gases

- Greenhouse gases are those gases in the atmosphere that have an influence on the earth's energy balance. They cause the so-called greenhouse effect.
- The best known greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane and nitrous oxide, can be found naturally in low concentrations in the atmosphere.
- However, the proportion has increased significantly since the beginning of the last century due to various man-made sources.

The greenhouse effect



About Carbon Monoxide

- Carbon monoxide (CO) is an **odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that is slightly lighter than air**. It is sometimes called carbonic oxide, exhaust gas or flue gas.
- Carbon monoxide is produced by the **incomplete combustion of any fuel that contains carbon**. This includes petrol, natural gas, oil and propane, as well as coal and wood products.
- It can also kill within minutes in high concentrations. When inhaled, it bonds with the hemoglobin in the blood, which is responsible for carrying oxygen throughout the body.
- The carbon monoxide replaces the oxygen molecules in hemoglobin and deprives the heart, brain and body of the oxygen it needs to function. High concentrations can displace enough oxygen in your body to cause oxygen starvation.
- Carbon monoxide (CO) is **not considered a direct greenhouse gas**, mostly because it does not absorb terrestrial thermal IR energy strongly enough. However, CO is able to modulate the production of **methane and tropospheric ozone**.

COVID-19 and greenhouse gases

- Due to COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdowns, globally there is reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
- We have seen a drop in the world's carbon footprint by 2.6 gigatonnes (Gt) - which is

almost equal to India's annual emissions (~3 Gt).

Why in the news?

- Researchers from IISER Bhopal have developed an Innovative data model fusion technique which consists of high-resolution atmospheric CO (carbon monoxide) modelling technique.
- It uses data from **Sentinel-5 Precursor satellite** (It is an European Space Agency Satellite).
- It is capable of devising strategies to address air quality issues faced by both agricultural sectors and in megacities across India, particularly with respect to Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.
- This is to assess and provide insights to India on improving air quality.
- As already COVID lockdowns have reduced the emissions this model helps India to keep low emissions further.

3) National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC)

Gangetic Dolphin

- It is the **National Aquatic animal of India** (declared in 2009). According to IUCN, it is listed as an **Endangered** species. It is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.



- Ganges river dolphins once lived in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. But the species is extinct from most of its early distribution ranges.
- The distribution range of the Ganges river dolphins in India covers **seven states** namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- The Ganges river dolphin can only live in freshwater and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to “see” an image in their mind (**echolocation**).
- October 5th is celebrated as National Ganga River Dolphin Day.

Project Dolphin

- Project Dolphin is a 10-year project in the similar lines of Project Tiger and Project elephant launched in 2020. The idea is to increase the population of Gangetic Dolphins across the Ganga and other rivers.
- The project is aimed at saving both river and marine dolphins.

Why in the news?

- The National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC) is coming up at **Patna** University, Bihar by 2022. It will be constructed on the banks of River Ganga.
- It will come up under Project Dolphin executed by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- NDRC would boost conservation efforts of dolphins and would provide an opportunity for in-depth research on dolphins including its changing behaviour, survival skills, food habits, cause of death and other aspects.

Why Bihar?

- Because Bihar accounts for 50% of the world’s river dolphin population. Bihar is home to around half of the estimated 3,000 Gangetic dolphins in India.

4) New plant species in Antarctica

What is a moss?

- Mosses are **non-flowering plants** which produce spores and have stems and leaves, but don't have true roots.



- Instead of roots they have **rhizoids**, which are small hairlike structures. Their main function is anchoring the plant to rock, bark or soil.
- Mosses, and their cousins liverworts and hornworts, are classified as Bryophyta (bryophytes) in the plant kingdom.
- Composed of 15,000 – 25,000 species, they occur on every continent and in every ecosystem habitable by plants that use sunlight for energy.
- They help to soak up rainfall, maintain moisture in the soil below and keep conditions around them humid. This enables other plants around them to thrive, such as in habitats like marshes and woodland.

Indian Antarctic Program

- The Indian Antarctic expeditions began in 1981. The first trip consisted of a team of 21 scientists and support staff led by Dr SZ Qasim. (40th Anniversary in 2021)
- After a humble beginning, the Indian Antarctic programme has now been credited to have built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named **Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri, and Bharati**.
- As of today, India has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri and Bharati.

- **The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa**, manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.
- The Antarctic region provides an excellent opportunity for conducting scientific research for the benefit of all mankind. It happens to be one of the most pristine laboratories of world-wide significance.
- Antarctic Regions hold an important place while answering the key questions about global climate change such as contribution towards global sea – level, the background aerosol properties, variability in the sea ice cover and phenomena like Antarctic haze and Ozone concentrations. Attempts to address some of these issues has helped mitigating on some important problems concerning human life and well-being.

Bharati Station



- It is India's 2nd operational research station in Antarctica after Maitri.
- It was started in 2012 to facilitate year-round scientific research activity by the Indian Antarctic program.

Why in the news?

- Scientists at Bharati Station have discovered a new moss species.
- The scientists have named the species '**Bryum Bharatiensis**' as a tribute to goddess Saraswati, who is also known as 'Bharati'. It was found near Bharati Station.
- This moss mainly grew in areas where penguins breed in large numbers.
- Penguin poop has nitrogen and plants need nitrogen along with potassium, phosphorus, sunlight and water to survive.
- The discovery is significant for the Indian Antarctic Mission as it is the **first and only plant species** that the mission discovered since 1981.

5) Himalayan yaks to be insured

Himalayan Yak

- The Yak, a long-haired bovine, is found throughout the Himalayan region of India.
- The massively-built animal with a drooping head are among the largest bovinds with males standing about 6 feet tall at the shoulder.
- The shaggy beast is among the most useful animals of Himalayan. Besides meat, fiber, milk, and hide, yaks are used as beasts of burden.
- Yak is one of the local inhabitants of the cold desert.

Yak and Temperature

- Yak is accustomed to very cold temperatures and can **survive up to -40 degrees but finds it difficult when the temperature crosses 13 degrees**.
- Yak can efficiently conserve its body heat during cold weather conditions and has minimal body mechanism to dissipate heat by way of sweating. This makes yak more susceptible to heat stress.
- The animal finds it difficult to tolerate the conditions below 7,000 feet above sea level.



Yak rearing in India

- The yak-rearing states of India are Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.
- The total yak population in India is about 58,000. The Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir have some 26,000, followed by 24,000 in Arunachal Pradesh, 5,000 in Sikkim, 2,000 in Himachal Pradesh and about 1,000 in West Bengal and Uttarakhand.

National Research Centre for Yak

- ICAR-National Research Centre on Yak is a premier research institute exclusively engaged in research and development of yak in India.
- The institute was established in 1989 by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research at

Dirang, West Kameng district of **Arunachal Pradesh**.

Why in the news?

- The National Research Centre on Yak (NRCY) has tied up with **the National Insurance Company Ltd.** for insuring Himalyan Yak livestock.
- The countrywide population trend shows that the yak population has been **decreasing at an alarming rate**. Further, climate change and inexplicable changes in the weather pattern have been reported from the yak rearing areas throughout the country.
- The insurance policy will shield the yak owners against the risks posed by weather calamities, diseases, in-transit mishaps, surgical operations and strikes or riots.

6) World Zoonoses Day

Why in the news?

- July 6th every year is celebrated as World Zoonoses Day.
- It is the anniversary of **Louis Pasteur** administering the first rabies vaccine to a human in 1885.
- The day is also marked to raise awareness about the risk of zoonotic diseases like Ebola, Avian influenza and West Nile virus.

What are Zoonoses?

- Zoonosis (plural zoonoses) is an **infectious disease that is transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans**.
- It is caused by a **pathogen**, such as a bacterium, virus or parasite, that an animal carries and which jumps to a human.
- The infected human then unknowingly transmits the infectious agent to another human and then from there it spreads to others until it becomes a pandemic.
- Seven human-mediated factors have been identified as most likely driving the emergence of zoonotic diseases:
 1. Increasing human demand for animal protein;
 2. Unsustainable agricultural intensification;
 3. Increased use and exploitation of wildlife;
 4. Unsustainable utilization of natural resources accelerated by urbanization, land use change and extractive industries;
 5. Increased travel and transportation;
 6. Changes in food supply; and
 7. Climate change.

7) Social structure differs in Asian and African Elephants, find researchers

Difference between Asian and African Elephant



Asian Elephants	African Elephants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smaller than African Elephants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bulkier than Asian Elephants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ear: Smaller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ear: Large fan-shaped ears
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only some male Asian elephants have tusks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both male and female African elephants grow tusks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only one species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two distinct elephant species on the African continent—the savanna elephant and the forest elephant, with a number of characteristics that differentiate them both as well.

Why in the news?

- Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, has conducted research regarding social structures of the Asian and African

savannah elephants due to differing habitats.

Findings

- Male Asian elephants spent only about 12% of their time in all-male groups as compared to 30-60% of the time in African savannah elephants. This may be because of the differences in resource availability.
- In an African savannah elephant population, young males seemed to prefer old males possibly due to opportunities for social learning.

Asian Elephants

- Young males spent a greater proportion of time associating with females (in mixed-sex groups) than with other males (in all-male groups). For old males, these two proportions were similar. While males met at random in the presence of females, the behaviour differed in their absence.

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ECONOMY

1) Agriculture Infrastructure Fund

About AIF

- The Government of India launched the **Central Sector Scheme of financing facility under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) in 2020.**
- AIF is a **medium - long term debt financing facility for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets** through interest subvention and credit guarantee.
- AIF aims at bringing farmers & agribusinesses together with newer partnership models emerging for the creation of distributed infra near farm-gate in a hub & spoke model. These assets will enable farmers to get greater value for their produce as they will be able to store and sell at higher prices, reduce wastage, and increase processing and value addition.
- The duration of the scheme is from **FY2020 to FY2029 (10 years).**
- Under the scheme, **Rs. 1 Lakh Crore** will be provided by banks and financial institutions as loans with **interest subvention of 3% per annum** and **credit guarantee coverage under Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) for loans up to Rs. 2 Crores.**
- *Launched in 2000, CGTMSE makes available collateral-free credit to the micro and small enterprise sector. The corpus of CGTMSE is being contributed by the Government of India and SIDBI in the ratio of 4:1 respectively.*
- **Eligible beneficiaries:** Farmers, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS), Marketing Cooperative Societies, Self Help Groups (SHGs), Joint Liability Groups (JLG), Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, Agri-entrepreneurs, Start-ups, and Central/State agency or Local Body sponsored Public-Private Partnership Projects.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved modifications in the guidelines of the Rs 1-lakh-crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund.

- **Eligibility to avail loans from AIF has now been extended** to state agencies/Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), national and state federations of cooperatives, federations of farmers producers organisations (FPOs) and federations of self-help groups (SHGs).
- If an eligible entity takes up projects in different locations, all such efforts will be eligible for 'interest subvention' for loans up to Rs. 2 crore. However, there will be a **maximum limit of 25 such projects for a private sector unit.**
- The **overall period of the scheme has been extended from 10 years to 13 years up to 2032-33.**
- So far, the government has sanctioned projects worth Rs 4,300 crore from AIF.

2) Purchasing Managers' Index

What is PMI?

- Purchasing Managers' Index is an economic indicator which indicates the business activity & economic health of both the **manufacturing and service sectors.**
- PMI of India is published by Japanese firm **Nikkei** but compiled and constructed by **IHS Markit**, a London-based global information provider.
- PMI is an **investor sentiment tracking index** and is more dynamic in nature. They are derived from monthly surveys of about 400 private companies.
- Variables used for calculating the PMI are: Output, New Orders, Employment, Input Costs, Output Prices, Backlogs of Work, Export Orders, Quantity of Purchases, Suppliers' Delivery Times, Stocks of Purchases and Stocks of Finished Goods.
- PMI, which is usually released at the **start of the month**, serves as a leading indicator of economic activity. It comes before the official data on industrial output, core sector manufacturing and GDP growth.

How to read PMI?

- While PMI >50 implies an expansion of business and economic activity, PMI <50 means contraction.

Why in News?

- According to the latest Purchasing Managers' Index, **India's services sector shrank the most last month since July 2020.**
- The PMI for services dropped at **41.2**, reflecting a second successive monthly contraction in new business and increased job shedding by firms.
- International demand for Indian services deteriorated further with new export orders falling for the sixteenth straight month. A reading above 50 denotes expansion and one below it signifies a contraction in business activity.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

About OIC

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the **second largest inter-governmental organization** after the United Nations with a membership of **57 states**.
- The majority of its member states are Muslim-majority countries, while others have significant Muslim populations, including several African and South American countries.
- **India is neither a member nor an observer of the OIC.**
- The organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world to ensure and safeguard their interest on economic socio and political areas.
- Under its charter, the OIC aims at promoting **Islamic solidarity and co-operation** among its Member and Observer States in the political, economic, social, cultural, humanitarian, scientific and related spheres.
- The OIC has **observer status at the United Nations**, on a reciprocal basis, and it co-operates with the United Nations in all areas of concern, including support to the Governments of Member States in their efforts to promote the economic and social development of their countries and peoples.
- Its Headquarters is in **Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**.

Why in News?

- India called on the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to not allow vested interests like Pakistan to "subvert" the grouping's platform for anti-India propaganda through biased and one-sided resolutions.
- The strong comments by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) came in response to the OIC secretary-general proposing to send a delegation to Jammu and Kashmir in line with relevant resolutions by the grouping's council of foreign ministers.
- In the past, the OIC has criticised India over the Kashmir issue.

- On its part, New Delhi has always been asserting that **Jammu and Kashmir is an integral and inalienable part of the country and that the OIC has no locus standi in matters internal to India.**

2) European Union

About EU

- The European Union (EU) is a unique **economic and political union** between 27 European countries.
- The **United Kingdom**, which had been a founding member of the EU, left the organization in 2020.
- The EU was created by the **Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, 1993. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the euro), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs.
- Additionally, the **Treaty of Lisbon**, enacted in 2009, gave the EU more broad powers that included being authorized to sign international treaties, increase border patrol, and other security and enforcement provisions.
- EU's headquarters is currently located in Brussels, Belgium.
- Currently, **the euro is the official currency of 19 out of 27 EU member countries which together constitute the Eurozone, officially called the euro area.**

Why in News?

- The European Union has projected that the eurozone economy will grow by 4.8% this year, much faster than the 4.3% expansion it had forecast in May, despite emerging concerns the fast-spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus could lead to new restrictions.
- The large upward revision is largely due to the reopening of the bloc's national economies in the second quarter which benefited the services sector and is expected to boost tourism within the EU.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Open Source Software

About Co-WIN

- Co-WIN is a **cloud-based IT platform**, to **handle** the finer points of India's Covid-19 immunisation programme, such as **registering beneficiaries, allocating vaccination centres, sending text messages to beneficiaries with the name of their vaccinator, and live monitoring of vials in cold storage.**
- The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare owns the Co-WIN platform**, which was previously used to run Pulse Polio and other critical immunisation programmes across the country.
- The same platform has been expanded for the distribution of Covid-19 vaccinations, with the **Ministry of Electronics and IT and the National Informatics Centre** in charge of the **backend and technical infrastructure.**

Features of CoWIN

- This app allows for **real-time monitoring of the immunisation drive and tracking of the vaccine recipients.** As a result, it aids in the **prevention of proxy vaccines.**
- It also allows **beneficiaries to be identified efficiently** via the **Aadhaar platform.**
- CoWIN Platform has been integrated in Aarogya Setu and UMANG Apps.

Why in News?

- At the recently held CoWIN global conclave, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the CoWin platform is being made **open source** and it will be available to any and all countries.
- The PM also opined that guided by the approach of 'One Earth, One Health', humanity will certainly overcome this pandemic.

What is open source software?

- **Open source software** is software with **source code that anyone can inspect, modify, and enhance.**
- "Source code" is the part of software that most computer users don't ever see; it's the code computer programmers can manipulate to change how a piece of software—a "program" or "application"—works.

- **Programmers** who have access to a computer program's source code **can improve** that program by **adding features to it or fixing parts** that don't always work correctly.

Uses of digital approach in vaccination

- Digital approach helps in **tracking the usage of vaccination** and **minimizes the wastage**
- Vaccinated people do not need to carry around fragile pieces of paper to prove anything. It is all available in **digital format**
- **Customizability** to the software as per the **local requirements** of the interested countries.

About CoWIN Global Conclave

- It is a **collaborative project of the Union ministries of health, external affairs, and the National Health Authority(NHA).**
- Health and technology **professionals from around the world** will be in attendance, representing countries from all over the world.
- The purpose of the conclave is to **share India's experience** with universal immunisation in order to combat COVID-19 through Co-WIN.

2) Pegasus spread

Why in News?

- An online database about the use of the spyware Pegasus was recently launched by the organisations including Forensic Architecture, Amnesty International and the Citizen Lab to document attacks against human rights defenders.

What is spyware?

- **Spyware** is defined as **malicious software** designed to **enter your computer device, gather data** about you, and **forward** it to a third-party without your consent.
- Spyware can also refer to legitimate software that monitors your data for commercial purposes like advertising.

Why is Pegasus dangerous?

- It is a **spyware** developed by the **Israeli cyber arms firm NSO Group Technologies.**

- It mainly **uses exploit links**, clicking on which installs Pegasus on the target's phone.
- **Pegasus** had been used for digital attacks on human rights activists in the world.
- The spyware enabled an **attacker to get complete access** to a person's phone, including contacts, calls, camera and messages.

3) Vande Bharat Express

Why in News?

- The Railway Ministry has decided to deploy Shatabdi Express rakes to run as Vande Bharat Express in the event of the latter suffering a breakdown or unusual late running.

What is Vande Bharat Express?

- It is **India's first indigenously built engineless semi-high speed train**.
- Earlier, it was **known by the name Train 18**. It is rolled out by the **Integral Coach Factory in Chennai**.
- It has been provided with passenger amenities like **On-board wifi** entertainment, **GPS** based passenger information system, **CCTVs**, **bio-vacuum toilets**, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards.
- It also has provision of **Divyang-friendly** facilities (differently-abled friendly facilities).
- Further, it has an intelligent **braking system** with **power regeneration** for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.

High Speed Rail

- **High-speed rail (HSR)** is a type of rail transport that runs **significantly faster** than traditional rail traffic.
- While there is no single standard that applies worldwide, new lines in excess of 250 kilometres per hour (160 mph) and existing lines in excess of 200 kilometres per hour (120 mph) are widely considered to be high-speed.

Bio-Vacuum Toilet

- Scientifically, in the bio-vacuum toilet, **human waste is discharged into a biodegradable tank** system and **converted into organic matter** through composting, which **reduces** the bad **odour** as well as the consumption of **water**.

- This step enhances the passenger experience during long hours of travel.

4) Gravitational waves

Why in news?

- Scientists have for the **first time detected gravitational waves produced by the collision of a neutron star and a black hole**.
- Previous gravitational wave detections have spotted black holes colliding, and neutron stars merging but not one of each.
- Such astrophysical systems **can help answer many big questions about the universe, from star formation and stellar evolution, to the expansion fate of our Universe**.
- Since the first ever direct detection of gravitational waves in 2015, astronomers have predicted that this type of system – a black hole and neutron star merger – could exist, but without any compelling observational evidence.
- Now that scientists have finally witnessed the existence of this new type of system, they said their detection will bring important new clues about how black holes and neutron stars form.

What are gravitational waves?

- Gravitational waves are '**ripples**' in **space-time** caused by some of the most violent and energetic processes in the Universe.
- **Albert Einstein predicted** the existence of gravitational waves in 1916 in his general theory of relativity. Einstein's mathematics showed that massive accelerating objects (such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other) would disrupt space-time in such a way that 'waves' of undulating space-time would propagate in all directions away from the source.
- These cosmic ripples **would travel at the speed of light**, carrying with them information about their origins, as well as clues to the nature of gravity itself.
- The strongest gravitational waves are **produced by** cataclysmic events such as **colliding black holes**, **supernovae** (massive stars exploding at the end of their lifetimes), and **colliding neutron stars**.
- Other waves are predicted to be caused by the rotation of neutron stars that are not perfect spheres, and possibly even the

remnants of gravitational radiation created by the Big Bang.

What is a neutron star?

- **Neutron stars** are stellar objects with a **mass about 1.4 times that of the sun**. Neutron stars are **formed when a massive star runs out of fuel and collapses**.
- **When stars four to eight times as massive as the sun explode** in a violent supernova, their outer layers can blow off in an often-spectacular display, leaving behind a small, dense core that continues to collapse.
- Gravity presses the material in on itself so tightly that protons and electrons combine to make neutrons, yielding the name "**neutron star**."

Blackhole

- A black hole is a place in **space where gravity pulls** so much that even light can not get out. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a star is dying.
- Because no light can get out, people can't see black holes.
- Stellar black holes are made **when the center of a very big star falls in upon itself, or collapses**. When this happens, it causes a supernova. A supernova is an exploding star that blasts part of the star into space.

LIGO

- The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) was designed to open the **field of gravitational-wave astrophysics** through the direct detection of gravitational waves predicted by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.
- LIGO's multi-kilometer-scale gravitational wave detectors **use laser interferometry to measure the minute ripples in space-time** caused by passing gravitational waves from cataclysmic cosmic events such as colliding neutron stars or black holes, or by supernovae.
- LIGO is funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation and operated by the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

5) Malaria

Why in News?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that China is "malaria-free".

What is malaria?

- Malaria is a life-threatening disease **caused by parasites** that are **transmitted** to people through the **bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes**. It is preventable and curable.
- **Mosquirix** is the **world's first licensed malaria vaccine** and also the **first vaccine licensed for use against a human parasitic disease** of any kind.
- **Malaria is caused by Plasmodium parasites**. The parasites are spread to people through the bites of infected **female Anopheles** mosquitoes, called "**malaria vectors**."
- After entering the human body, parasites initially **multiply within the liver cells** and then **attack** the Red Blood Cells (RBCs) resulting in their rupture.
- There are 5 parasite species that cause malaria in humans, and 2 of these species – *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax* – pose the greatest threat.
- In **2019**, there were an estimated **229 million cases** of malaria **worldwide**.

Symptoms

- The first symptoms – **fever, headache, and chills** – may be mild and difficult to recognize as malaria.
- If not treated within 24 hours, malaria **can progress to severe illness, often leading to death**.

Prevention

- **Vector control** is the main way to prevent and reduce malaria transmission.
- **Insecticide-treated mosquito nets**- Sleeping under an insecticide-treated net (ITN) can reduce contact between mosquitoes and humans by providing both a physical barrier and an insecticidal effect.
- **Antimalarial drugs**- Antimalarial medicines can also be used to prevent malaria.

The latest numbers

- The **WHO's World Malaria report 2020** said the majority of cases were reported in Africa, while India and Southeast Asia recorded a significant drop.
- **Cases in India** fell from approximately **20 million to 6 million**, according to the 2020 report.

How did China achieve this?

- In the 1980s, China began **using insecticide-treated nets** widely, distributing 2.4 million nets by 1988.
- WHO credited **China's public health system** offering **free of charge diagnosis** and treatment of malaria in bringing down cases to zero, as well as a **"1-3-7 strategy"** referring to a **one-day deadline to report a malaria diagnosis, confirming a case and determining the spread by the third day, and measures taken to stop the spread by the seventh day**, along with **continued surveillance** in high-risk areas.

Initiatives by WHO

- In 2016, WHO identified a group of 21 countries spanning five regions to scale up efforts to achieve malaria elimination by 2020. Known as the **E-2020 initiative**, it aimed at achieving zero indigenous cases of malaria within the 2020 timeline.
- WHO launched the **E-2025 initiative** to halt the transmission of malaria in 25 identified countries by 2025. It is built on the foundation of the E-2020 initiative.
- **India is not a part of E-2020 and E-2025**

India and malaria

- India is the **only highly endemic country** which has **reported a decline of 17.6%** in 2019 as compared to 2018.
- The **Annual Parasite Incidence** (API, the number of new infections per year per 1000 population) reduced by 18.4% in 2019 as compared to 2018.
- The **percentage drop in the malaria cases** was 71.8% and deaths were 73.9% between 2000 to 2019.
- Malaria **deaths** in India **declined** from about 29,500 in 2000 to about 7,700 in 2019.
- **India, however, still accounted for 88 per cent of malaria cases and 86 percent of**

malaria deaths in the WHO South-East Asia Region in 2019.

- India achieved a **reduction of 83.34% in malaria morbidity and 92% in malaria mortality** between the year 2000 and 2019, thereby achieving Goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals.

India's Strategy

- **In 2016, the National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) was initiated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.** NFME is in line with WHO's Global Technical Strategy for Malaria, 2016-2030, which guides the WHO Global Malaria Programme (GMP), responsible for coordinating WHO's global efforts to control and eliminate malaria.
- **In 2017, the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) was released, outlining strategies for the next five years.** It gives year-by-year elimination targets in various sections of the country, based on malaria endemicity.
- In 2019, four states (West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh) began implementing the **High Burden to High Impact (HBHI) initiative.** The distribution of **Long-Lasting Insecticidal Nets (LLINs)** to high-burden areas has resulted in a decrease in endemicity in these normally highly endemic areas.
- The **Malaria Elimination Research Alliance-India (MERA-India)** was founded by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which is a consortium of malaria control partners.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Jal Jeevan Mission and Acute Encephalitis Syndrome

▪ **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.

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 a million plus population to take up PPP projects worth a 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.

Why in the news?

- In a short span of 22 months, Jal Jeevan Mission has provided tap water supply to more than 97 lakh households in 61 Japanese Encephalitis-Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (JE-AES) affected priority districts.

News in detail

- Jal Jeevan Mission has significantly **strengthened the preventive measures to reduce spread of JE-AES** by providing

clean tap water supply to economically poor households in the affected districts of Assam, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

- 1.05 Crore (35%) households have assured tap water supply in JE-AES affected districts at present.
- This **32% increase** in household tap water connections in **JE-AES priority districts** is about **12% higher than the national average** increase of 23.43% in tap water supply across the country during the same period.
- Specific funds for JE-AES affected priority districts are allocated on the basis of drinking water sources and the extent of water contamination.
- The **0.5% budget under the Jal Jeevan Mission** is allocated to carry out activities for providing potable drinking water in every rural household of JE-AES affected priority districts.

About AES

- AES affects the **central nervous system**, mostly in children and young adults. It starts with a high fever, then hampers neurological functions causing mental disorientation, seizure, confusion, delirium, coma.

What causes AES?

- Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) including Japanese Encephalitis (JE) is a group of clinically similar **neurologic manifestations** caused by several different viruses, bacteria, fungus, parasites, spirochetes, chemical/ toxins etc.
- Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus is the most common cause of AES in India, with union health ministry estimate attributing 5-35 per cent cases due to JE.
- But the syndrome is also caused by scrub typhus, dengue, mumps, measles, even Nipah or Zika virus. In several cases though the cause of AES remains clinically unidentified.

Who is affected?

- It predominantly affects the population **below 15 years**.
- There is **seasonal and geographical variation** in the causative organism.
- JEV has its endemic zones running along the Gangetic plain including states of UP (east), Bihar, West Bengal and Assam, and parts of Tamil Nadu.

Prevention

- Increase access to **safe drinking water** and proper sanitation facilities
- Improve **nutritional status** of children at risk of JE/AES
- **Vector control** (Reducing mosquito density)
- **Vaccination** - 2 doses of JE vaccine has been approved to be included in UIP to be given one along with measles at the age of 9 months and the second with DPT booster at the age of 16-24 months.

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Japanese Encephalitis/Acute Encephalitis Syndrome

- Several government initiatives have been undertaken to educate and improve the hygiene of people living in the JE endemic zones.
- Government and non-government organizations have been instrumental in providing proper nutrition to the AES-affected population as most of the affected people belong to the lower economic strata of the society.

2) Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought (BOLD) Project

What is in the news?

- **“Bamboo Oasis on Lands in Drought” (BOLD)** is the first of its kind unique scientific exercise serving the combined national objectives of reducing desertification and providing livelihood and multi-disciplinary rural industry support has been initiated by **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** recently.
- It was launched from the village **NichlaMandwa in Udaipur, Rajasthan**.

About the project:

- Under the project, 5000 saplings of special bamboo species – **BambusaTulda and BambusaPolymorpha** specially brought from Assam – have been planted over 25 bigha (16 acres approx) of vacant arid Gram Panchayat land.
- KVIC has thus created a world record of planting the highest number of bamboo saplings on a single day at one location.
- The initiative has been launched as part of KVIC’s **“Khadi Bamboo Festival”** to celebrate 75 years of independence **“Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav”**.

Significance of the project

- It seeks to **create bamboo-based green patches** in arid and semi-arid land zones.
- It aligned with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's call for **reducing land degradation and preventing desertification** in the country.
- It will be a haven of sustainable development and **food security**.
- It will boost **self-employment** in the region.
- It will benefit a large number of women and unemployed youths in the region by connecting them to **skill development programs**.

Why did KVIC choose bamboo?

- KVIC has judiciously chosen bamboo for developing green patches. Because,
 1. Bamboos **grow very fast** and in about three years' time, they could be harvested.
 2. Bamboos are also known for **conserving water and reducing evaporation** of water from the land surface, which is an important feature in arid and drought-prone regions.

Extension

- KVIC is set to replicate the Project at Village Dholera in Ahmedabad district in Gujarat and Leh-Ladakh region by August this year. Total 15,000 bamboo saplings will be planted before August 21.

3) Fly Ash

About

- Fly ash is a fine powder that is a **byproduct of burning pulverized coal** in electric generation power plants.
- Fly ash is a pozzolan, a substance containing aluminous and siliceous material that forms cement in the presence of water. When mixed with lime and water, fly ash forms a compound similar to Portland cement.
- Depending upon the source and composition of the coal being burned, the components of fly ash vary considerably, but all fly ash includes substantial amounts of **silicon dioxide (SiO₂), aluminium oxide (Al₂O₃) and calcium oxide (CaO)**, the main mineral compounds in coal-bearing rock strata.
- **Minor constituents include:** arsenic, beryllium, boron, cadmium, chromium, hexavalent chromium, cobalt, **lead**, manganese, **mercury**, molybdenum,

selenium, strontium, thallium, and vanadium, along with very small concentrations of **dioxins and PAH compounds**. It also **has unburnt carbon**.

Issues with Fly ash

- Fly ash is a **highly toxic** substance known for causing health and environmental problems. It can contain lead, arsenic, mercury, cadmium, and uranium.
- When fly ash is deposited in water bodies they **contaminate aquaculture** and may leach into landmasses, leading to toxicity of agricultural land and drinking water.
- Fly ash **cannot be disposed-off in the open field** because it pollutes the air, soil and groundwater.
- Long inhalation of fly ash causes serious **respiratory problems**.
- Fly ash also causes **siltation** problems.

Uses of fly ash

- Fly ash can be used as prime material in many cement-based products, such as poured concrete, concrete block, and brick.
- One of the most common uses of fly ash is in **Portland cement** concrete pavement or PCC pavement.
- **Road construction projects** using PCC can use a great deal of concrete, and substituting fly ash provides significant economic benefits.
- Fly ash has also been used as an **embankment** and mine fill.

Regulations in India

- Over the years, India's dependence on coal has gone up and so has the production of fly ash. India has the **world's fourth-largest coal reserve** and the **second-largest producer of coal**, with more than 50% of its demand for electricity being met by coal-based thermal power plants.
- Indian regulations stipulate that coal plants should ensure the fly ash they generate is made available, free of cost, to the cement and concrete industries, so that it's recycled instead of polluting the environment.
- The cost of transportation of fly ash is to be borne collectively by the power plant and the industry concerned.
- However, the disposal of fly ash is a serious issue as more than **20 percent** of fly ash generated in the country remains **unutilised**, according to data from the Central Electricity Authority.

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) issued a draft notification in December 2020 for utilisation of fly ash by coal- and lignite-based power plants. It introduces a **penalty regime for non-compliance for the first time.**

Why in the news?

- NTPC Ltd, a Maharatna CPSU under Ministry of Power and India's largest integrated power producer, in its endeavour towards 100% utilization of fly ash has invited Expression of Interest (EOI) for sale of fly ash from the designated ports of the Middle East and other regions.

4) Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority

About APEDA

- The **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)** is a **statutory body** established by the Government of India under the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act, 1985.**
- The Authority replaced the Processed Food Export Promotion Council (PFEPCC).
- It functions under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**

Functions of APEDA

- **Development of industries** relating to the scheduled products for export by way of providing financial assistance or otherwise for undertaking surveys and feasibility studies, participation in enquiry capital through joint ventures and other reliefs and subsidy schemes;
- **Registration of persons as exporters** of the scheduled products on payment of such fees as may be prescribed;
- **Fixing of standards and specifications** for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports;
- **Carrying out inspection** of meat and meat products in slaughterhouses, processing plants, storage premises, conveyances or other places where such products are kept or handled for the purpose of ensuring the quality of such products;
- **Improving of packaging** of the Scheduled products;

- **Improving of marketing** of the Scheduled products outside India;
- **Promotion of export oriented production** and development of the Scheduled products;

Products monitored

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

Why in the news?

- To promote agricultural crops exports and adherence to global practices, APEDA in collaboration with Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), traders, exporters, agricultural scientists, Uttar Pradesh government & other institutions organized a meet at Varanasi.

5) Matsya Setu app

What's in the news?

- The **Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying** has recently launched the Online Course Mobile App "Matsya Setu".

About the app:

- The app was developed by the **ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA)**, Bhubaneswar, with the funding support of the **National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB)**, Hyderabad.
- The online course app aims to **disseminate the latest freshwater aquaculture**

technologies to the aqua farmers of the country.

- Matsya Setu app has species-wise/ subject-wise self-learning online course modules, where renowned aquaculture experts explain the basic concepts and practical demonstrations on breeding, seed production and grow-out culture of commercially important fishes like carp, catfish, scampi, murrel, ornamental fish, pearl farming etc. Better Management
- Practices to be followed in maintaining the soil & water quality, feeding and health management in aquaculture operations were also provided in the course platform.
- Upon successful completion of each course module, an **e-Certificate** can be auto-generated.

6) Enforcing Contracts Portal

What is in the news?

- The **Department of Justice** under the Ministry of Law and Justice has launched the “**Enforcing Contracts Portal**”.

Background

- The **Doing Business Report** of **World Bank** Group **benchmarks business regulations** across **191 economies** of the world.
- Within this, the Ease of Doing Business (**EoDB**) index is a ranking system which is an indication of an economy’s position relative to that of other economies across **11 areas of business regulation namely**
 1. Starting a Business, Dealing with Construction Permits, Getting Electricity, Registering Property, Getting Credit, Protecting Minority Investors, Paying Taxes, Trading across Borders, Enforcing Contracts, and Resolving Insolvency.
- The “Enforcing Contracts” indicator is one such essential area that measures time and cost to resolve a standardized commercial dispute as well as a series of good practices in the judiciary.
- Currently, only the cities of **Delhi and Mumbai** are under the purview of the Ease of Doing Business survey by World Bank.

- Kolkata and Bengaluru are likely to be included in the Doing Business Reporting future.
- **Department of Justice**, Ministry of Law and Justice, as the **nodal department** has been monitoring an array of legislative and policy reforms to strengthen the “Enforcing Contracts” regime for Ease of Doing Business in India in coordination with e-Committee, Supreme Court of India and the High Courts of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Karnataka.

About the portal

- The portal aims to promote ease of doing business and improve the ‘Contract Enforcement Regime’ in the country.

Features of the portal

- The portal is envisioned to be a **comprehensive source of information** pertaining to the **legislative and policy reforms** being undertaken on the “Enforcing Contracts” parameters.
- It includes the **latest data** related to the functioning and disposal of **commercial cases in the Dedicated Commercial Court** Of Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata. These Dedicated Commercial Courts have been established for **speedy resolution of commercial disputes** and boast of dedicated infrastructure and exclusive judicial human power.
- The new portal also hosts **online reporting by all High Courts** regarding the Mediation and Arbitration centres annexed to the Commercial Courts.

Need for the Portal

- In the Enforcing Contracts indicator, India achieved **163rd position** in the Ease of Doing Business Report 2020, an **improvement of 23 positions from the 186th rank** in the 2015 Report.
- However, to ensure that India’s ranking in this indicator comes within **TOP 50** this portal was launched.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

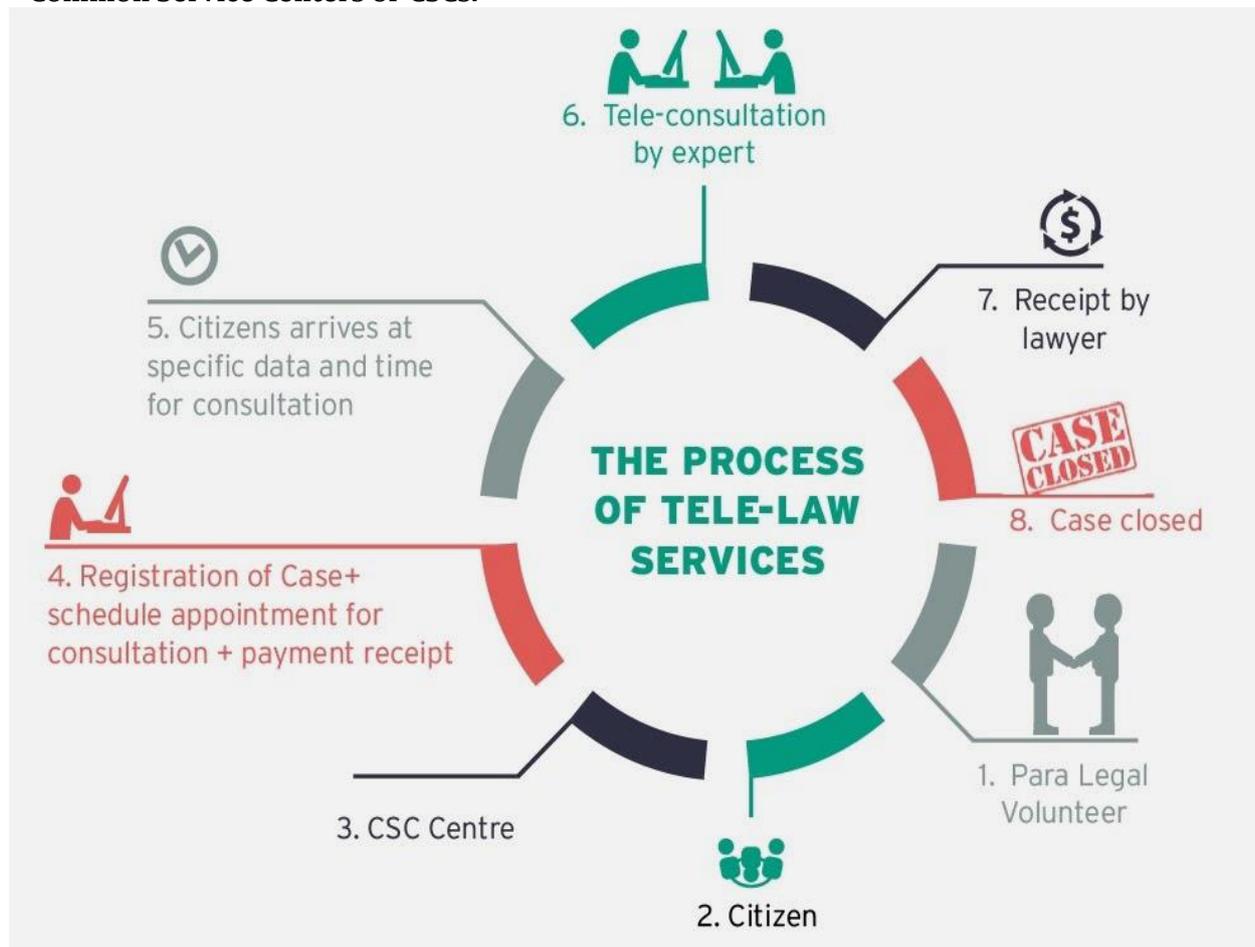
1) Tele-law services

What is Tele-law service?

- Tele-law is a service that uses video conferencing facilities and telephone services to connect lawyers to litigants who need legal advice.
- This service aims to reach out to the needy, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged.
- The project connects citizens with lawyers through communications and information technology with the help of **Para-Legal Volunteers** stationed at identified **Common Service Centers or CSCs**.

Role of Para Legal Volunteer

- Para Legal Volunteer (PLV) is the **first point of contact between rural citizens and lawyers** providing legal aid through CSC.
- They are **not lawyers, but have basic understanding of the legal process**. They hear the grievances of citizens and offer appropriate support/suggestions for legal aid. They also help the citizens understand legal issues and advice given by lawyers.
- A trained PLV is available in a CSC for minimum ten days in a month under the Scheme.



Benefits

- Tele Law service enables anyone to seek legal advice without wasting precious time and money.
- Legal advice is made available to everyone under Tele-Law service Advice is **free of Cost to those who are eligible for free legal aid under Section 12 of Legal Services Authority Act, 1987:**
 1. Women
 2. Children
 3. Persons belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe
 4. Victims of Trafficking
 5. Mentally ill and differently abled people
 6. Victims of natural disaster/ethnic violence
 7. Workers in unorganized /industrial workers
 8. Under trials
 9. People of low income group
 - For all **others a nominal fee of Rs INR 30/- charged for each consultation.**
 - The Tele-law website can be accessed at <http://tele-law.in> and is available in 22 official languages.

Availability

- Presently, tele-law programme is operational in 633 districts (including 115 aspirational districts) across all the States and Union Territories using a network of 50,000 CSCs.

Jurisdiction

- Legal matters in which advice can be taken through Tele-Law service :-
 1. Dowry, family dispute, divorce, protection from domestic violence.
 2. Sexual harassment, sexual abuse, eve teasing at the workplace.
 3. Maintenance of women, children and senior citizens.
 4. Rights regarding property and land.
 5. Equal wages for males and females.
 6. Maternity benefits and prevention of foeticide.
 7. Prohibition of child marriage, protection of children from sexual assault, prevention of child labour and implementing right to education.
 8. Arrest – (F.I.R)/ process of registering the First Information Report.
 9. Atrocities against scheduled castes/ scheduled tribes and their rehabilitation.

Why in News?

- Former Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad recently said that offering legal assistance

to needy people over telephone and video conference by lawyers and para-legal volunteers has given “voice of justice to the voiceless”.

- He was addressing an event to mark the **coverage of more than nine lakh beneficiaries** of the government’s tele-law scheme, using common service centres to provide justice across the country.
- Mr. Prasad said the facility has also been “**a source of gender justice and empowerment**”.
- Tele-law saw a **369% jump in the number of beneficiaries seeking legal advice during the last one year.**
- A third party evaluation conducted by the **National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER)** in January 2020 described tele-law as “**a successful legal empowerment model for the poor and vulnerable**” and **recommended increasing its footprint.**

Related Information

What is a CSC?

- Common Service Centres (CSCs) are shops/Kiosks that deliver various government services online like public utility services, social welfare schemes, healthcare, financial, education and agriculture services, apart from a host of B2C services to citizens in rural and remote areas of the country.
- CSC is one of the mission mode projects **under the Digital India Programme** run by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). There are approximately 3.19 lakh CSCs in India. CSCs are located in Gram Panchayats.

Objectives

- CSCs have also been trying to **bridge the gaps in digital literacy and skills of rural citizens** through a range of literacy initiatives focused on digital, financial and legal literacy and e-learning and skill development courses.
- Under the **CSC 2.0 scheme** initiated by the Ministry of Electronics & IT in 2015, **at least one CSC is to be rolled out in each and every 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country.**

Village Level Entrepreneur

- The CSC operator, also known as Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE), is the key stakeholder.

- The essence of the CSC scheme is that it is managed and operated by a local person whose acceptability is higher within the community she/he serves.
- The success of the Scheme depends largely on his ability, zeal and passion for setting up a sustainable social enterprise within the existing constraints of rural India.

Implementation

- **CSC e-Governance Services India Limited** is a Special Purpose Vehicle set up by the Ministry of Electronics & IT to oversee implementation of the CSC scheme.

2) Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

About PMGSY

- The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), was launched in 2000 as **centrally sponsored scheme** to provide connectivity to unconnected habitations of **designated population size** (500+ in plain areas and 250+ in North-East, hill, tribal and desert areas as per Census, 2001) as part of a poverty reduction strategy.
- The **Ministry of Rural Development** along with state governments is responsible for the implementation of PMGSY.
- **Phase III** of PMGSY was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2019. It involves the consolidation of Through Routes and Major Rural Links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.

Guiding Principles of PMGSY

- The spirit and the objective of the scheme is to provide good all-weather road connectivity to unconnected Habitations. A habitation which was earlier provided all-

weather connectivity would not be eligible even if the present condition of the road is bad.

- The unit for this Programme is a **Habitation** and not a Revenue village or a Panchayat. A Habitation is a cluster of population, living in an area, the location of which does not change over time.
- The PMGSY shall cover **only the rural areas**. Urban roads are excluded from the purview of this Programme.

Funding pattern

- The Union Government bears **90% of the project cost** in respect of projects sanctioned under the scheme in North-Eastern and Himalayan States, whereas for other states the Union Government bears **60% of the cost**.

Initiatives related to PMGSY

- **Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism affected Areas (RCPLWEA)**: It was launched in 2016 as a separate vertical under PMGSY to provide all-weather road connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 districts (35 are worst LWE affected districts and 09 are adjoining districts), which are critical from security and communication point of view.
- **Meri Sadak mobile app**: It was launched to enable citizens to register complaints regarding the quality and pace of construction of PMGSY roads.

Why in News?

- The **Ministry of Rural Development** conducted a nationwide review of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Rural power solutions even other States can emulate

GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions;
GS-3 Energy

NEWS

- As a recent ruling by Rajasthan's power regulator implies, enabling energy access must go beyond powering rural homes.

BACKGROUND

- Over the past decade, India has made great strides in expanding energy access in rural areas.
- As per the credible estimates, there was a **near doubling of electrified rural households, from 55% in 2010 to 96% in 2020.**

ISSUES

- The increase in the credible estimates are based on the measure of access to power supply, which takes into account the number of households that have been connected to the electricity grid.
- But this **method of measure discounts large areas of essential and productive human activities** such as public schools and primary health centres.
- Also despite greater electrification, **power supply is often unreliable in rural areas.**

RECENT RULING

- Recently **Rajasthan's power regulator** gave the ruling which points towards this yawning gap.
- The regulating authority also suggested solutions that other States could emulate. **The Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC)** has ordered:
 - The State's power distribution companies, or discoms to **solarise unelectrified public schools.**
 - This has the potential to electrify about 1,500 government-run schools in the remote parts of the State with roof-top solar panels and generate about 15 megawatts (MW) of power.
 - It has also suggested **installation of batteries to ensure storage of power.**
 - The RERC order also directs Rajasthan's cash-strapped discoms to **seek corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for the solarising drive** and **allows schools**

ownership of the power systems in a phased manner.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RULING

- Apart from **enabling education**, this ruling would benefit several **other crucial aspects of rural life.**

- Other than imparting education government **schools serve as public spaces in rural areas:**

1. In the past they have housed villagers from extreme weather such as storms and floods, and have been turned into polling centres during election season.

2. Also they have played a crucial role during COVID pandemic by acting as a COVID-19 care centre.

- Battery storage of power will ensure that schools will **cater to children's after-school activities.**

- Also, schools could also **extend power supply to mid-day meal kitchens, toilets, and motorised water pumps** and not limit it to powering fans and lights in classrooms.

- Another ruling of the RERC to use the CSR funding **will remove the burden of infrastructure development expenses on discoms**, while also ensuring clean energy for the schools.

- The power that is generated could also be counted towards the discoms **Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO).**

- RPO** is the proportion of power that distribution companies must procure from renewable sources. This ratio is a gradual annual progression to encourage greater use of renewable energy and to provide for a phased manner to reduce dependence on climate warming fossil fuels.

BENEFITS OF THE RULING FOR RAJASTHAN

Achieving the targets:

- In 2019, Rajasthan set itself an ambitious target of producing **30 GW of solar energy by 2025.**

- It currently has an installed capacity of about 5 GW, most of which are from large-scale utility plants, or solar parks with ground-mounted panels.

- The State must install at least 7 GW every year for the next four years to achieve this

target. Hence, the ruling will help the state to take the steps in this direction.

Climate resilience:

- While Rajasthan is India's largest State in terms of land mass with vast, sparsely populated tracts available to install solar parks, **bulk infrastructure of this scale is susceptible to extreme weather events.**
- With climate change increasing the possibility of such events, a decentralised model of power generation would prove to be more climate resilient.

Encourage solar power usages:

- Taking a cue from the RERC ruling, a **greater number of public buildings could be used to install roof-top solar panels.**
- Buildings such as primary health centres, panchayat offices, railway stations and bus stops could easily be transitioned to utilising clean energy.
- With battery storage, **the susceptibility of grid infrastructure to extreme weather events could be mitigated.** This is called **climate proofing.**

Boosting rural electrification:

- Large-scale projects are generally financed by companies that wish to profit from economies of scale, making investments in rural electricity less lucrative.
- Hence, **large-grid based projects** add to the supply of power in urban areas, and therefore, **only marginally further greater energy access goals.**
- As solar installations become inexpensive and with rapidly advancing battery storage technologies, decentralised solar power generation has become a reality.
- And a State such as Rajasthan, which is most exposed to solar irradiation, could set an example by making its urban and rural centres, power generators, consumers, and suppliers in the same breath.

Aligned with national goal:

- The government has an **ambitious plan to catapult the State into being a power "exporter".**
- The recent ruling will help in achievement of this national goal **without destroying the environment.**

WAY FORWARD

- One of the hurdles to holistic, climate resilient, clean energy access is the **lack of convergence between government departments.**

- Rajasthan, for instance, the **discoms could work with the State's Education Department** to determine the schools that require electrification, and their expected demand and infrastructure expenses.
- They could then **liaise with the CSR arms of companies to generate funding,** and with **industry to produce cost-effective solar photovoltaic panels and batteries.**
- **Sustaining these new power systems would require some unlearning and relearning, but it is not unimaginable.**

2) Will a national judiciary work?

GS-2 Judiciary

NEWS

- In the current context, the feasibility of the All India Judicial Service requires to be studied.

BACKGROUND

- The idea for an 'All India Judicial Service (AIJS)' was first proposed by the 14th Report of the Law Commission of India in 1958, aimed at creating a centralised cadre of District Judges.
- Later the **First National Judicial Pay Commission** found that it would be in the interest and the health of the judiciary to form an AIJS. The report supported and **reiterated the recommendations of the 14th Law Commission.**
- In 2019, the central government initiated a consultative process for the creation of the All India Judicial Service (AIJS).
- Initially, only four States and two High Courts supported the proposal, but eight States rejected it, five suggested changes, and 11 are yet to respond.

RECENT STEPS TAKEN BY CENTRE

- The Union government appears to be steadfast in its resolve to implement reforms in recruitment and appointment to the subordinate judicial services.
- Taking steps in this direction, **the Centre recently took the ordinance route to effect changes in the appointment of members to various tribunals.**
- Hence, in a single stroke, the centre abolished several tribunals.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF AIJS

- AIJS envisages to **bridge the underlying gap in judicial vacancies,** by streamlining

the appointment process of the lower judiciary.

- According to the Government, the AIJS is an ideal **solution for equal representation of the marginalised and deprived sections of society.**
- Also it believes that implementation of AIJS, would help **create a pool of talented people** who could later become a part of the higher judiciary.
- The bottom-up approach involved in AIJS in the recruitment would also **address issues like corruption and nepotism in the lower judiciary.**
- This will in turn improve the **quality of justice dispensation in the lower levels of society.**

CONSTITUTIONAL DICHOTOMY

- **Article 233(1)** of the Constitution lays down that **“appointments of persons to be, and the posting and promotion of, district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State”.**
- The **42nd Constitutional amendment in 1976 amended Article 312 (1)** empowering **Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services**, including an AIJS, common to the Union and the States.
 1. However, **Clause 3 of Article 312 places a restriction** that such a service shall not include a post inferior to that of a district judge.
 2. The amendment also brought about a **significant change in the Seventh Schedule** — Entry 3 of List II in its entirety was placed as Entry 11A in List III.
 3. This paved the way for Parliament to enact laws with regard to ‘Administration of Justice; constitution and organisation of all courts, except the Supreme Court and the High Courts’.
- Post-Emergency, amendment to Article 312 (1) has escaped parliamentary scrutiny, thus there exists a dichotomy **with regard to Articles 233 and 312.**

CONCERNS RELATED TO AIJS

- The AIJS would lead to a situation where the fundamental power of the States to make rules and govern the appointment of district judges is taken away in favour of the centre.

- Thus, it may be **against the principle of federalism** and the **basic structure doctrine.**
- The operationalization of the AIJS could **severely curtail the promotional avenues of the subordinate judiciary.**
- Currently, fifty per cent of the posts of district judges are to be filled by promotion from the subordinate judicial service. This will decrease with direct recruitment under the proposed AIJS.
- Another fundamental concern would be the **language barrier.**
 1. The cases in the lower courts are argued in local languages, but Judges recruited through a centralized process may not know the local languages of the States in which they are posted.
 2. Hence, this lack of understanding of the local language and customs could affect the quality of judgments.

CONCLUSION

- Any groundbreaking reform is bound to receive criticism.
- Hence, **the feasibility of the AIJS in the current context requires to be studied**, especially when reliance is placed upon archaic reports of the Law Commission.
- It is for the Union to eliminate the doubts and at the same time give wings to the aspirations of all stakeholders when implementing the proposal.

3) Challenging negative social norms

GS-1 Population and its related issues

CONTEXT

- **India has entered a demographic sweet spot that will continue for another two to three decades.**
- **Half of India’s population is under 29 years of age**, which means that in this period, a greater proportion of young people will drive India’s economic growth and social progress.
- Hence, this young population must not only be healthy, knowledgeable and skilled but must also be provided with the rights and choices to develop to their fullest potential, including, and especially, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

WHAT IS SRHR?

- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights** is the concept of human rights applied to sexuality and reproduction.
- It encompasses efforts:
 1. to **eliminate** preventable maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity,
 2. to **ensure** quality sexual and reproductive health services
 3. to **address** sexually transmitted infections (STI) and cervical cancer, violence against women and girls, and sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents.
- Hence, SRHR is a **critical aspect of human well being**, such that it greatly impacts the psychological, emotional and social well-being of individuals.

INDIA'S PROGRESS

- In the last two decades, India has made substantial gains with SRH indicators.

Maternal health:

- As per **Sample Registration System (SRS)** data, progressive policies for maternal health have resulted in:

1. **Improved rates of institutional delivery**
2. **Decline in maternal mortality ratio (mmr)** from 327 in 1999-2001 to 113 per 100,000 live births in 2016-18.

Family planning:

- There have also been significant shifts in family planning in the past decade,
- **Data from the National Health Family Survey 5** for the year 2019-20 (NFHS-5) shows **improved usage of contraceptives in most States**.

Population stabilization:

- Also India's population growth is now stabilising. There has been a **decline in the overall fertility rate**.
- The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), presently at 2.2 children, will soon reach replacement level (2.1).

POOR INDICATORS

Inadequate information and access to SRH services for girls:

- Several reports point to inadequate information and access to SRH services for **girls in the (15-19) year age group**.
- According to **Guttmacher Institute (2021)**, two million adolescent girls (15-19 years) each year had a **pregnancy**, and of these, nearly 63% were unwanted or unintended.

- According to **NFHS-4**, among girls aged 15-19 years, 22.2% had an **unmet need for contraception**.

Girls are still marrying too young:

- **26.8% of women aged 20-24 years** are married before they turn 18, often having their first child within the first year of marriage.
- Far too many girls and women face **gender-based violence and harmful practices** that are socially sanctioned.
- All of these practices are rooted in social norms, beliefs and **practices that deny women their bodily autonomy**.

Declining performance in bridging gender gap:

- India has **slipped 28 places to rank 140th** among 156 countries, becoming **the third-worst performer in South Asia in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report (2021)**.

CHALLENGES

- Success is hard-earned and never assured. There are many challenges on the path to 2030, the goalpost for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Population growth:

- Despite the decline in overall fertility rate, **the population will continue to grow because of the effect of 'population momentum'**.

Uneven progress:

- With little formal education and in the lowest income quintile, **TFR among the rural women remains higher than the national average of 2.2 children**.

Social norms:

- **Social norms** such as **early marriage, gender-based violence and harmful practices** faced by girls and women, are the major challenges that India needs to address.

Weak healthcare system:

- Further, the **COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in healthcare systems**.
- It has led to serious gaps and **challenges in the provision of information and services** on sexual and reproductive health (SRH).
- Even before the pandemic, universal access to SRHR was hindered by:
 1. Pervasive negative social norms,
 2. Health system barriers

3. Gender inequality

Need for immediate actions:

- On World Population Day this year, the **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India** recognised the provision of SRHR cannot wait. **Any further delays will curtail the health and well-being of women and girls**, the consequences of which can last a lifetime.

WAY FORWARD

Careful approach:

- Time to achieve the ambitious targets of the SDGs is running out. Hence, India must choose its priorities carefully.

Youth centric policies:

- There is a need to **place youth, women and girls at the centre of policy making** and services, which could trigger a positive ripple effect.
- India will be on a clear path to achieve its goals, if it secures its young people, adolescent girls in particular:

1. **Access to education,**
2. **Relevant skills,**
3. **Information and services** to make healthy choices, including related to srh,
4. Are empowered to **exercise their rights,**
5. Have access to opportunities for **employment.**

Empower women:

- India's population stabilisation strategy must be adjusted keeping in mind the rights of women and girls.
- Instead of using prescriptive or coercive methods (such as one- or two-child norms), **women must have a greater say in choosing their family size.**
- The current government, with programmes such as **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)**, has made some efforts to challenge existing social norms.
- Further all sections of society must embrace this call for positive change.
- Research and practical experience show that when **women can make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, and when they have access to services to support their choices, societies are healthier and more productive.**
- **A woman who has control over her body gains not only in terms of autonomy but also through advances in health, education, income and safety. She is**

more likely to thrive, and so is her family.

4) Troubling prospects in Afghanistan

GS-2 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT

- The withdrawal of the USA from Afghanistan is a reality now. **Handing over of Bagram airbase to the Afghan authorities** marks the symbolic end to United states symbolic end to its military presence in Afghanistan.
- U.S. forces have completed their **withdrawal well ahead of the September 11 deadline.** Withdrawal of the US forces have resulted in the uncertainty over the future of Kabul. The future will depend on Taliban-Kabul dynamics and Pakistan's role.

20 YEARS OF THE WAR ON USA IN AFGHANISTAN

- The war has been a costly misadventure for the US. It has been **20 years since the war started** in October 2001. Intervention in Afghanistan by the US has been unsuccessful and the US is forced to **negotiate with the same Taliban** which it went in to punish.
- Data shows that the war has been a costly lesson. The war effort has **cost \$980 billion, over 2,400 U.S. soldiers (plus 1,144 allied troops) and 388 private military contractors** have lost their lives. The USA has also spent **\$143 billion on reconstruction, \$90 billion on Afghan army, police and other security forces, \$36 billion for governance** and economic development activities.
- The war has been even more costly for Afghanistan. This resulted in the **death of 50,000 Afghan civilians and nearly 70,000 Afghan security forces, added to that loss of 60,000 Afghan Taliban.**
- However, war has positive effects too. There has been **significant improvement in the literacy rate (from 12% in 2002 to 35%), and life expectancy (40 to 63 years).** There has been an increase in other factors like **connectivity and decline in the infant mortality rate.**

ISSUES WITH PRESENT WITHDRAWAL

- There has been change in the goal post of the objective of the US in Afghanistan.

Initially the goal of the US as said by **President Bush was to build a stable, strong, effectively governed Afghanistan that won't degenerate into chaos.** During President Barack Obama, this **goal was diluted and objective became preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for global terrorism.**

- Taliban has got legitimacy due to negotiation by the US. Direct negotiation with Afghanistan started during President Donald Trump's time. The US agreed for **Intra-Afghan peace** talks with the terrorist group and withdrawal of all foreign military forces from Afghanistan. During the negotiation, Taliban managed to get the U.S. to push the Kabul government to release over 5,000 Taliban cadres in custody. These ended up legitimising the Taliban at the expense of the government in Kabul.
- The Taliban has gained considerably since the negotiation started. The **locals manning the security posts and checkpoints have just surrendered.** From villages and towns, there is already a move towards the cities. This has resulted in the Taliban being reluctant for talks with the government.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

- Given the present development there are concern regarding future of Afghanistan regarding:
- Whether the path of Civil war is certain in Afghanistan due to absence of intra-Afghanistan talks?
- What will be the future of the security and unity of Afghanistan?
- Whether the withdrawal of US troops was done in haste?

WAY FORWARD

- Withdrawal of the US is certain. The event that folds afterwards depends on factors like change in the **ideological color of Taliban, presence of United front in Kabul regime.** If opportunistic leaders are tempted to strike their own deals with the Taliban, it will only hasten the collapse, and even western funding will dry up.
- The last factor which will decide the **future of Afghanistan will be the Pakistan factor.** Pakistan may still seek strategic depth in Afghanistan or might have realised **that a Taliban-dominated Kabul will be a**

magnet for its own home-grown extremists as well as those from the neighbourhood.

5) In defence of India's noisy democracy

GS-2 International relations

NEWS

- In the current moment, it is important to be clear why comparisons with China are not only deceptive but also dangerous.

COMPARING DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS CHINA

- **China's developmental pathway over the last century has been spectacular.**

1. No country in history has ever grown faster and more dynamically.
2. Not only have hundreds of millions been lifted out of poverty, but social indicators have improved dramatically.

INDIA

- **India's developmental record has been much more mixed.**
- Since the 1990s, the **Indian economy has grown impressively, but it remains far behind China in its global competitiveness.**
- Poverty has come down, but employment prospects for the majority remain limited to low-wage informal sector jobs.
- India has actually fallen behind Bangladesh and Pakistan in improving basic social development indicators.

ALLEGED REASON FOR INDIA'S LOW DEVELOPMENTAL GROWTH

- Few sections of the society claim that **India's problem is that it is just too democratic.**
- Unlike China, making and implementing key decisions about public investment and various reforms is impossible in the din of multiple and contradictory democratic voices.
- Hence, there has been a demand for firmer and more independent forms of decision-making that are insulated from this cacophony.

AGAINST SUCH CLAIMS

- The claim that less democracy is good for development **does not stand up to comparative, theoretical and ethical scrutiny.**

- Contrary to those who believe economic management cannot be left to the whims of democratic forces, the comparative evidence clearly shows that **democratic regimes have on balance performed better than non-democratic regimes.**
- **Understanding using examples:**
- While China, with a history of state-building going back two millennia, and an exceptionally well-organised, disciplined and brutal form of authoritarianism, has done especially well in transforming its economy.
- Africa and West Asia, where authoritarian governments of every stripe have dominated, remain world economic laggards.
- The Latin American military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s had a terrible economic and social record.
- Later it was only with the return of democracy and the “pink wave” of Left populist parties that prosperity and social progress were ushered in.
- At first, the economic take-offs of Taiwan and South Korea happened under military regimes and relied on labour repression.
- But their transitions to democracy saw their economies move up to the next level and become much more inclusive.

Examples from India:

- Most pointedly though, one only has to look within India itself can help in understanding how development and democracy can thrive together.
1. **Kerala and Tamil Nadu** have done more to improve the lives of all their citizens across castes and classes than any other States in India
 2. It is no coincidence that both have also had the longest and most sustained popular democratic movements and intense party competition in the country.
- **In contrast, in Gujarat**, where single party rule has been in place for nearly a quarter century, growth has been solid but accompanied by increased social exclusion and stagnation in educational achievement and poverty reduction.
 - Hence, the comparative record proves that democracies are better at promoting inclusive growth.

- The theory behind the authoritarian fantasy also does not hold up, as it is based on presumption:

1. That those in command will serve the general interest rather than catering to the powerful.
 2. that they enjoy such autonomy and they actually know what to do with it.
- But based on practical evidence these presumptions are flawed.
 - On the contrary, democracies are in fact more likely to meet the necessary conditions for successful decision making via elected representatives.

IN FAVOUR OF DEMOCRACY

- The conflicts and noise that democracy generates may complicate things, but in the end, it **allows us to respond to a broad spectrum of interests and identities.**
- Democracy not only protects against catastrophic decisions, but also allows for forms of negotiation and compromise that can bridge across interests and even balance otherwise conflicting imperatives for growth, justice, sustainability and social inclusion.
- Thus, the common good cannot and should not be determined by science, profits, technocrats or autocratic fiat. What it is and how we get there can only emerge out of sustained societal deliberation.

CONCLUSION

- India's tryst with democracy was born not only of its liberation movement but also it is **ethically unique**- it promotes equality by endowing all citizens with the same civic, political and social rights even as it protects and nurtures individuality and difference.
1. Also, India's democracy has opened social and political spaces for subordinate groups and has built a **sense of shared identity and belonging** in the world's largest and most diverse society.
 2. It has **preserved individual liberties, group identities, and religious and thought freedoms.**
- On the other hand China's developmental success includes the human cost due to:
 1. Famine that took some 35 million lives,
 2. A cultural revolution that made enemies out of neighbours,
 3. A one child policy that devastated families and erased a generation,

4. The violent, systematic repression of the uyghur muslim and tibetan minorities.
 - Thus, the China-India comparison is so problematic, indeed unconscionable.

**For doubts and queries email us at
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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) UAE's Hope orbiter

Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Hope orbiter of the United Arab Emirates** found out about the **presence of auroras in the Mars atmosphere**.
- Unlike auroras on Earth, which are seen only near the north and south poles, discrete auroras on Mars are seen all around the planet at night time.

What is the Hope orbiter studying?

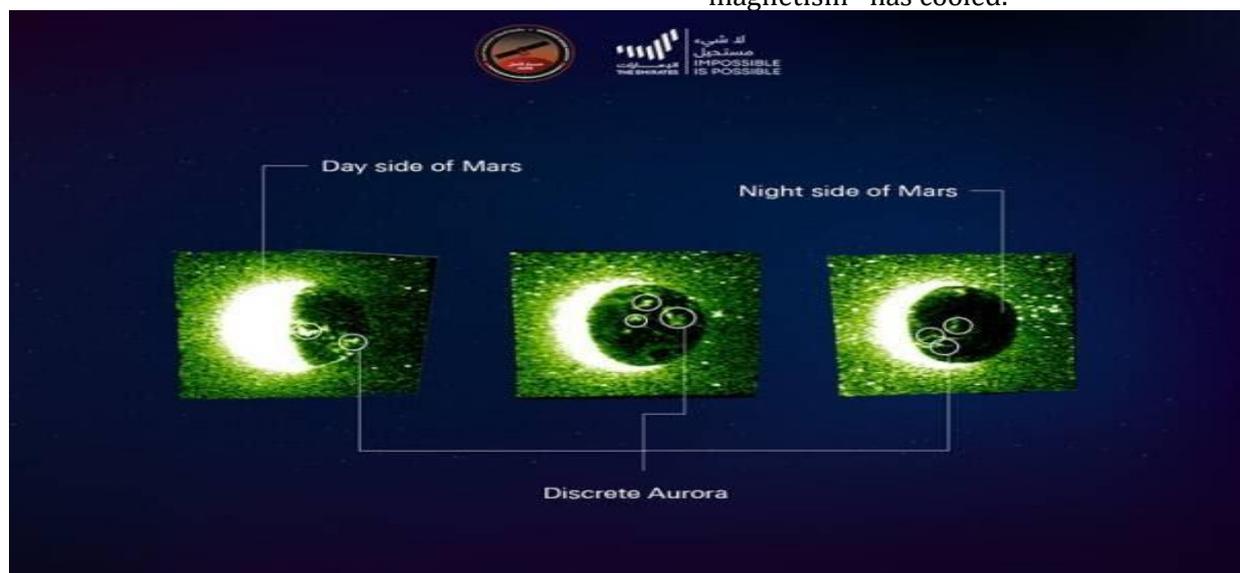
- The Hope Probe, the **Arab world's first mission to Mars**, took off from Earth in July 2020, and has been orbiting the Red Planet since 2021.
- The primary objective of the mission is to study **Martian weather dynamics**. By correlating the lower atmosphere and upper atmosphere conditions, the probe will look into how weather changes the escape of hydrogen and oxygen into space.
- By measuring how much hydrogen and oxygen is spilling into space, scientists will be able to look into why Mars lost so much of its early atmosphere and liquid water.
- It is **expected to create the first complete portrait of the planet's atmosphere**.
- With the information gathered during the mission, scientists will have a better understanding of the climate dynamics of different layers of Mars' atmosphere.

What causes an aurora on Earth?

- Auroras are caused when **charged particles ejected from the Sun's surface**- called the solar wind- enter the Earth's atmosphere.
- These particles are **harmful**, and our planet is protected by the **geomagnetic field**, which preserves life by shielding us from the solar wind.
- However, at the north and south poles, some of these solar wind particles are able to continuously stream down, and interact with different gases in the atmosphere to cause a display of light in the night sky.
- This display, known as an aurora, is **seen from the Earth's high latitude regions (called the auroral oval), and is active all year round**.
- In the northern part of our globe, the polar lights are called **aurora borealis or Northern Lights**, and are seen from the US (Alaska), Canada, Iceland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.
- In the south, they are called **aurora australis or southern lights**, and are visible from high latitudes in Antarctica, Chile, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia.

How are Martian auroras different?

- Unlike Earth, which has a strong magnetic field, the Martian magnetic field has largely died out. This is because the molten iron at the interior of the planet- which produces magnetism- has cooled.



- However, the Martian crust, which hardened billions of years ago when the magnetic field still existed, retains some magnetism.
- So, in contrast with Earth, which acts like one single bar magnet, **magnetism on Mars is unevenly distributed**, with fields strewn across the planet and differing in direction and strength.
- These disjointed fields channel the solar wind to different parts of the Martian atmosphere, creating “discrete” auroras over the entire surface of the planet as charged particles interact with atoms and molecules in the sky– as they do on Earth.

Importance of Aurora Study

- Studying Martian auroras is important for scientists, for it can offer clues as to why the Red Planet lost its magnetic field and thick atmosphere– among the essential requirements for sustaining life.

2) Why a Cooperation Ministry?

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Union Government announced the formation of a separate **Union Ministry of Cooperation**, a subject that till date was looked after by the Ministry of Agriculture.

What will be the new Ministry's objectives?

- The official release said the Ministry of Cooperation will provide a **separate administrative legal and policy framework for strengthening the cooperative movement in the country**.
- It will **help deepen Co-operatives as a true people based movement reaching upto the grassroots**. In our country, a Co-operative based economic development model is very relevant where each member works with a spirit of responsibility.
- The Ministry will work to streamline processes for **'Ease of doing business' for co-operatives and enable development of Multi-State Co-operatives (MSCS)**.
- In the Budget speech, the Finance Minister too had mentioned the need to strengthen cooperatives.

What is the cooperative movement?

- By definition, cooperatives are organisations **formed at the grassroots level by people to harness the power of collective bargaining towards a common goal**.

- In agriculture, cooperative dairies, sugar mills, spinning mills etc are formed with the pooled resources of farmers who wish to process their produce.
- Cooperative sugar mills account for 35% of the sugar produced in the country.
- In banking and finance, cooperative institutions are spread across rural and urban areas. Village-level primary agricultural credit societies (PACs) formed by farmer associations are the best example of grassroots-level credit flow.
- These societies anticipate the credit demand of a village and make the demand to the district central cooperative banks (DCCBs).
- **State cooperative banks** sit at the apex of the rural cooperative lending structure. Given that PACs are a collective of farmers, they have much more bargaining powers than an individual farmer pleading his case at a commercial bank.
- There are also cooperative marketing societies in rural areas and cooperative housing societies in urban areas.

How much finances do these institutions control?

- NABARD's annual report of 2019-20 counts 95,238 Primary agricultural credit societies (PACs), 363 DCCBs (District central cooperative banks) and 33 state cooperative banks in the country.
- The DCCBs, whose main role is disbursement of short-term loans to the farming sector (crop loan), distributed Rs 3,00,034 crore in loans.
- The state cooperative banks, which mainly finance agri-processing industries such as sugar mills or spinning mills, disbursed Rs 1,48,625 crore in loans. (Annual Report, NABARD, 2019-20)
- In urban areas, urban cooperative banks (UCBs) and cooperative credit societies extend banking services to many sectors that would otherwise have found it difficult to get into the institutional credit structure.

What laws govern cooperative societies?

- Agriculture and cooperation are in the state list, which means state governments can govern them.
- A majority of the cooperative societies are governed by laws in their respective states, with a Cooperation Commissioner and the

Registrar of Societies as their governing office.

- In 2002, the Centre passed a MultiState Cooperative Societies Act that allowed for registration of societies with operations in more than one state.
- These are mostly banks, dairies and sugar mills whose area of operation spreads across states. The Central Registrar of Societies is their controlling authority, but on the ground the State Registrar takes actions on his behalf.

Why was the new Ministry necessary?

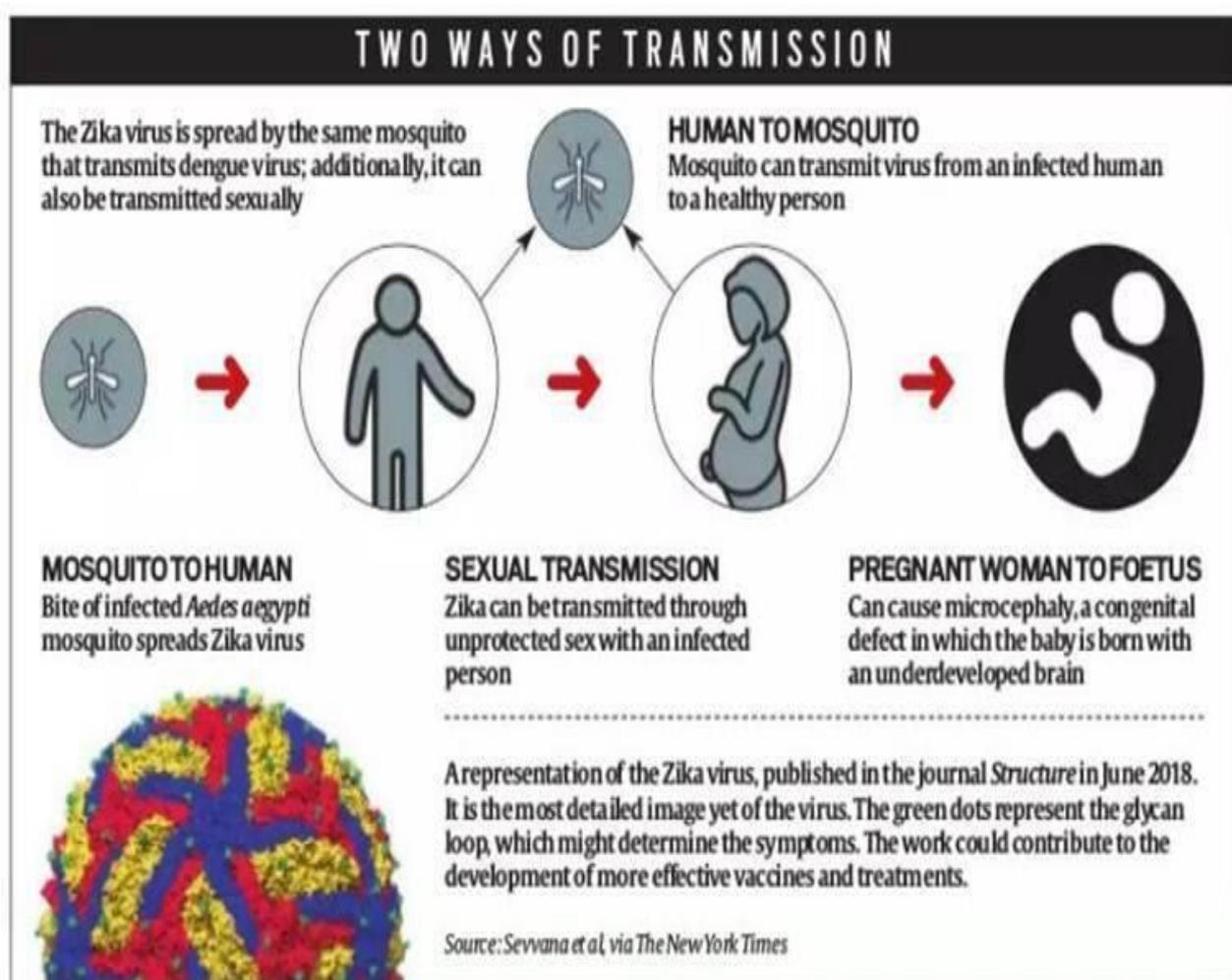
- It was necessary to restore the importance of the cooperative structure in the country.
- Various studies have shown the cooperative structure has managed to flourish and leave its mark only in a handful of states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka etc.
- Under the new Ministry, the cooperative movement would get the required financial and legal power needed to penetrate into other states also.

- Over the years, the cooperative sector has witnessed drying out of funding. Under the new Ministry, the cooperative structure would be able to get a new lease of life.

3) Zika Virus and its Importance

What is Zika virus?

- Zika is a **viral infection, spread by mosquitoes.**
- The **vector is the Aedes aegypti mosquito**, which also spreads dengue and chikungunya. Additionally, **infected people can transmit Zika sexually.**
- First identified in **Uganda** in 1947 in monkeys, Zika was detected in humans five years later.
- In 2015, a major outbreak in Brazil led to the revelation that Zika can be associated with microcephaly, a condition in which **babies are born with small and underdeveloped brains.**



What are the symptoms of Zika virus?

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- Most people infected with the virus do not develop symptoms.
- When they are manifested, the symptoms are similar to those of flu, including fever, bodyache, headache etc.
- If the symptoms worsen, people should seek medical advice. Additional symptoms can include the occasional rash like in dengue, while some patients also have conjunctivitis.
- The incubation period (the time from exposure to symptoms) of Zika virus disease is estimated to be 3-14 days.

How do you treat Zika virus?

- Zika has **no treatment or vaccine**. The symptoms of Zika virus are mild and usually require rest, consumption of plenty of

fluids, and common pain and fever medicines, the WHO says.

Control Measures

- Governments take mosquito control measures such as **spraying of pesticides**, use of repellents etc. Because of the possibility of congenital abnormalities and sexual transmission, there is also focus on **contraceptives**.
- The WHO requires countries to counsel sexually active men and women on the matter to minimise chances of conception at the time of an outbreak.

Why in the news?

- Recently, 15 cases of the Zika virus have been detected in Kerala.

For doubts and queries email us at doubts@officerspulse.com

INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) Government E-Marketplace

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ABOUT GEM



Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Launched in 2016, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a 100 percent government-owned company setup under the aegis of the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

It is a completely paperless, cashless and system driven e-market place that enables procurement of common use goods and services with minimal human interface.



GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.

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GeM was developed with the technical support of the **National eGovernance Division** (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology).

In 2017, the government made it **mandatory** for all the departments and ministries to source goods and services from the GeM.

MANDATORY

GeM



Vision

To affect an evolution in public procurement promoting a **transparent, efficient and inclusive marketplace.**



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Mission

Institute a unified procurement policy to encourage behavioral change and drive reform.



Establish a lean, dynamic organization capable of continuous innovation and market driven decision making.

Build an easy to use, fully automated platform to ensure transparency and efficiency in procurement



Demonstrate commitment to delivering value by ensuring right quality at right price

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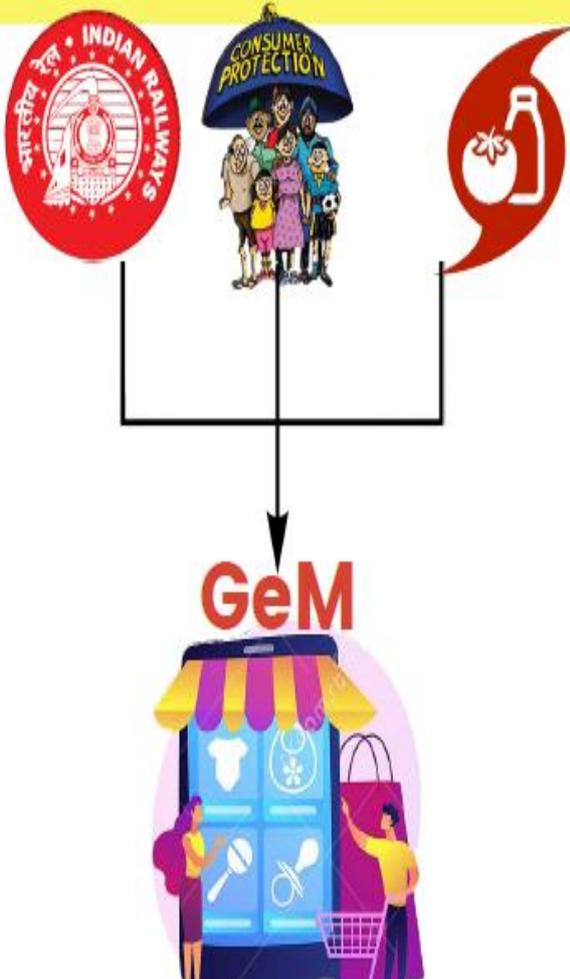
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Create a sustainable ecosystem covering all stakeholders and driving inclusive development in India



Why in the news?



Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs and Food & Public Distribution Piyush Goyal recently called upon **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** to **expand its scope** and include more participants in GeM portal for public procurement of both **Products & Services**.

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It was stressed that **integration of GeM with the Railway e-procurement system** towards the Unified Procurement System for buyers should be done expeditiously.



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