

OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no.10 | 1st Aug to 7th Aug, 2021



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THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



News @ a glance

POLITY	3	1) GPS enabled clocks	16
1) Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021	3	2) Genome sequencing	16
2) Pardoning powers	4	3) Bacterial Motion	16
3) NALSA	5	4) Food fortification	17
ENVIRONMENT	7	5) EOS-03 Satellite	19
1) Hunger expected to rise: UN warning	7	DEFENCE	20
2) New Frog Species discovered in Western Ghats	7	1) Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC)	20
3) Air Quality Commission Bill for National Capital Region cleared	8	ART AND DEFENCE	21
4) Renegotiate Indus Water Treaty to address impact of Climate Change	9	1) Abanindranath Tagore	21
ECONOMY	11	2) Khel Ratna	21
1) Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code	11	PIB ANALYSIS	22
2) RBI holds rates	11	1) Deep Ocean Mission	22
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	13	2) Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana	22
1) India, Sri Lanka and Maldives to collaborate on security	13	3) SANKALP Scheme	23
2) United Nations Security Council	13	4) Nirbhaya Fund	24
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	16	5) Commercial coal mining	25
		7) Controller General of Accounts	25

News in Depth

AIR NEWS	27	7) South Asia's emerging digital transformation	36
1) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana	27	8) India's school children need their childhood back	37
2) FAME scheme.....	27	INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED	40
THE HINDU EDITORIALS	29	1) Why cloudbursts could become more frequent?	40
1) A disconcerting picture behind the headline numbers.....	29	2) Samagra Shiksha.....	40
2) Criminalising welfare issues	30	INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK	43
3) Providing horizontal quota: the Bihar way	31	1) Microplastic pollution in River Ganga.....	43
4) Getting back in business in the Indo-Pacific	33		
5) No fundamental right to strike	34		
6) India-Nepal flood management needs course correction.....	35		

News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021

What's in the news?

- The Parliament has passed the Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021.

Highlights of the Bill

- The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021 **allows the Central Government to prohibit strikes, lock-outs, and lay-offs in units engaged in essential defence services.**
- **The essential defence services include:**
 1. Any establishment or undertaking dealing with the production of goods or equipment required for defence-related purposes
 2. Any establishment of the armed forces or connected with them or defence. These also include services that, if ceased, would affect the safety of the establishment engaged in such services or its employees.
 3. In addition, the government may declare any service as an essential defence service if its cessation would affect the: (i) production of defence equipment or goods, (ii) operation or maintenance of industrial establishments or units engaged in such production, or (iii) repair or maintenance of products connected with defence.
- The government may issue such order if necessary in the interest of:
 1. Sovereignty and integrity of India
 2. Security of any state
 3. Public
 4. Public order
 5. Decency
 6. Morality
- The prohibition order will **remain in force for six months and may be extended by another six months.**
- Strikes and lock-outs that are declared after the issue of the prohibition order or those that had commenced before the prohibition order was issued **will be illegal.**

- The prohibition will not apply to lay-offs made due to power shortage or natural calamity, or lay-offs of temporary or casual workmen.
- Under the Bill, a **strike is defined as cessation of work by a body of persons acting together.** It includes the following under its purview:
 1. Mass casual leave
 2. Coordinated refusal of any number of persons to continue to work or accept employment
 3. Refusal to work overtime, where such work is necessary for the maintenance of essential defence services
 4. Any other conduct which results in, or is likely to result in, disruption of work in essential defence services.
- The new Bill also **amends the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 to include essential defence services under public utility services.** Under the Industrial Disputes Act, in the case of public utility services, a **six-week notice must be given before:**
 1. Persons employed in such services go on strike in breach of contract;
 2. Employers carrying on such services do lock-outs (lockout means temporary closing of employment or the suspension of work, or the refusal by an employer to continue to employ any number of persons employed by him).

What happens if there are strikes, lock-outs and lay-offs?

- Employers violating the prohibition order through **illegal lock-outs or lay-offs** will be punished with up to **one-year imprisonment or Rs 10,000 fine or both.**
- Persons initiating or participating in **illegal strikes** will be punished with up to **one-year imprisonment or Rs 10,000 fine or both.**
- Persons instigating, inciting, or taking actions to continue illegal strikes, or knowingly supplying money for such

purposes, will be punished with **up to two years imprisonment or Rs 15,000 fine, or both.**

- Such an employee will be liable to disciplinary action including dismissal as per the terms and conditions of his service. In such cases, the concerned authority is allowed to dismiss or remove the employee without any inquiry, if it is not reasonably practicable to hold such inquiry.
- **All offences punishable under the Bill will be cognisable and non-bailable.**

Who will the Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021 affect?

- The Bill has a direct bearing on around 70,000 employees of the 41 ordnance factories around the country, who are unhappy with the **corporatisation of Ordnance Factory Board**, fearing that it will impact their service and retirement conditions.
- In June 2021, the government announced the corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board which was otherwise directly under the Department of Defence Production and worked as an arm of the government.
- As per the new plan, 41 ordnance factories that make ammunition and other equipment for the armed forces will become **part of seven government-owned corporate entities**. The government has claimed that the move is aimed at improving the efficiency and accountability of these factories but the employees in these factories are unhappy with the development and have threatened indefinite strikes.

2) Pardoning powers

Articles 72 and 161

- **Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution empower the President of India and the governors of states to grant pardon or suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.**
1. **Pardon:** It removes both the sentence and the conviction and completely absolves the convict from all sentences, punishments and disqualifications.
 2. **Commutation:** It denotes the substitution of one form of punishment for a lighter form. For example, a death sentence may be commuted to rigorous imprisonment, which

in turn may be commuted to a simple imprisonment.

3. **Remission:** It implies reducing the period of sentence without changing its character. For example, a sentence of rigorous imprisonment for two years may be remitted to rigorous imprisonment for one year.
4. **Respite:** It denotes awarding a lesser sentence in place of one originally awarded due to some special fact, such as the physical disability of a convict or the pregnancy of a woman offender.
5. **Reprieve:** It implies a stay of the execution of a sentence (especially that of death) for a temporary period. Its purpose is to enable the convict to have time to seek pardon or commutation from the President.
 - Under Article 72, the President has the power to “grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence”.
 - He can do so in all cases where the punishment or sentence is handed down by a **court martial**, in cases where the punishment or a sentence is for an offence under **any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the Union extends, and in all cases where a death sentence is awarded**.
 - Article 161 grants the governor the power to “grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence”. The governor can do so for any person convicted of any offence against **any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends**.
 - The scope of the **pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider** than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161. The power differs in the following two ways:
 - The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a **Court Martial** but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
 - The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is the **sentence of death** but pardoning power of the Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court has held that the Governor of a State can pardon prisoners even before they have served a minimum 14 years of prison sentence.
- The court held that the Governor's power to pardon overrides a provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure — **Section 433A** — which mandates that a prisoner's sentence can be remitted only after 14 years of jail.
- The court clarified that the Governor could exercise his remission powers under Article 161 **only on the aid and advice of the council of ministers headed by the chief minister.**
- The court was considering the feasibility of remission policies in Haryana.

3) NALSA

About NALSA

- The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) is a **statutory body** constituted under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** to provide **free Legal Services** to the weaker sections of the society and to organize **Lok Adalats** for amicable settlement of disputes.
- *Lok Adalat (people's courts) is a body established by the government to settle disputes through conciliation and compromise.*
- NALSA came into force in 1995. It was enacted by the Parliament to give effect to **Article 39 A of the Constitution of India** which guarantees free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society to ensure that they are not denied access to justice by reason of economic or other disability.
- The NALSA is headed by the **Chief Justice of India as its Patron-in-Chief, the second senior most judge of the Supreme Court is the Executive Chairman.**

Regional Bodies

- In every State, the **State Legal Services Authority** has been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA and to give free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State.
- The State Legal Services Authority is headed by the **Chief Justice of the respective High Court** who is the Patron-in-Chief of the State Legal Services Authority.

- In every District, the **District Legal Services Authority** has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District. The District Legal Services Authority is situated in the District Courts Complex in every District and chaired by the **District Judge of the respective district.**

What are Legal Services?

- Legal Services includes providing **Free Legal Aid** to those weaker sections of the society who fall within the purview of **Section 12** of the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987.
- It also entails **creating legal awareness** by spreading legal literacy through legal awareness camps, print media, digital media and organizing **Lok Adalats** for the amicable settlement of disputes which are either pending or which are yet to be filed, by way of compromise.
- Legal services also encompasses **facilitating the beneficiaries to get their entitlements** under various government schemes, policies and legislations

Who is Entitled to Free Legal Services?

- The sections of the society as enlisted under Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act are entitled for free legal services, they are :
 1. A member of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe;
 2. A victim of trafficking in human beings or begar as referred to in Article 23 of the Constitution;
 3. A woman or a child;
 4. A mentally ill or otherwise disabled person;
 5. A person under circumstances of undeserved want such as being a victim of a mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste atrocity, flood, drought, earthquake or industrial disaster; or
 6. An industrial workman; or
 7. a person in receipt of annual income less than the amount prescribed by the State Government, if the case is before a Court other than the Supreme Court, and less than Rs 5 Lakh, if the case is before the Supreme Court.
 8. Senior citizens' eligibility for free legal aid depends on the Rules framed by the respective State Governments in this regard.

Why in News?

- Supreme Court judge Justice U.U. Lalit said every police station in the country must have display boards informing about the right to legal aid and the availability of free legal aid services.
- Justice Lalit is the Executive Chairman, National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
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ENVIRONMENT

1) Hunger expected to rise: UN warning

What is Hunger ?

- Hunger is an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by **insufficient consumption of dietary energy**.
- **Acute Hunger:** Acute hunger (famine) designates **undernourishment over a definable period**.
- **Chronic Hunger:** Chronic hunger designates a state of **long-term undernourishment**. The body absorbs less food than it needs.
- It usually arises in connection with **poverty**.
- **Hidden Hunger :** It is a form of chronic hunger. Due to an unbalanced diet, important **nutrients are lacking**, such as iron, iodine, zinc or vitamin A.
- At first glance, the consequences are not necessarily very visible, but over the long-term these nutrient deficiencies lead to serious diseases.

What is Food Insecurity ?

- A person is food insecure when they **lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food** for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.
- This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food.

Why in News?

- According to a report called "**Hunger Hotspots**" published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Program, acute food insecurity is likely to further deteriorate around the world.
- **Hunger is expected to rise in 23 global hotspots in the next three months** with the highest alerts for "catastrophic" situations in Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region, southern Madagascar, Yemen, South Sudan and northern Nigeria.
- The number of people facing starvation and death is expected to rise to 4,01,000, the highest number since the 2011 famine in Somalia.
- Acute hunger is increasing not only in scale but also severity and over 41 million people worldwide are now at risk of falling into

famine or famine-like conditions, unless they receive immediate life and livelihood-saving assistance.

Related Information

Food and Agricultural Organisation

- The Food and Agriculture Organization is a **specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger**.
- FAO's goal is to achieve **food security** for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.
- With over **194 member states, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide**.

World Food Program

- The World Food Programme is the **world's largest humanitarian organization, saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance** to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity for people recovering from conflict, disasters and the impact of climate change.

2) New Frog Species discovered in Western Ghats

Why in News ?

- Researchers from the University of Delhi have named a newly-discovered frog species after former vice chancellor and renowned plant geneticist Prof. Deepak Pental.
- The species was discovered from the **Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot**.
- The newly-discovered species, named **Minervarya Pentali**, is endemic to the southern Western Ghats.

Additional Details

Biodiversity Hotspots

- Biodiversity hotspots are regions with **high species richness** and a **high degree of endemism**.
- The concept of biodiversity hotspots was developed by **Norman Myers** in 1988.
- **To qualify as hotspot a region should contain**
 1. It must have **at least 1,500 vascular plants as endemics** — which is to say, it must have a high percentage of plant life found

nowhere else on the planet. A hotspot, in other words, is irreplaceable.

2. It must have **30% or less of its original natural vegetation**. In other words, it must be threatened.
 - **Conservation International (CI)**, an American based Non Governmental Organisation, founded in 1987 with the goal of protecting nature for the benefit of people.
 - In 1989, CI formally committed to the protection of biodiversity hotspots around the world. It identified **36 biodiversity hotspots** so far.
 - They represent just **2.4% of Earth's land surface**, but they support more than half of the world's plant species as endemics — i.e., species found no place else — and **nearly 43% of bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian** species as endemics.
 - India hosts 4 biodiversity hotspots: **the Himalayas, the Western Ghats and Srilanka, the Indo-Burma region and the Sundaland (Nicobar Islands and Others)**.

3) Air Quality Commission Bill for National Capital Region cleared

Context

- The **Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020** was promulgated on October 28, 2020.
- The Ordinance provides for the constitution of a Commission for better coordination, research, identification, and resolution of problems related to air quality in the national capital region (NCR) and adjoining areas.
- The Commission would be a '**permanent statutory body**' to address pollution in the National Capital Region Delhi and adjoining areas.

Applicability

- The Bill will apply to **NCR and the areas adjoining NCR**.
- Adjoining areas refers to areas in the states of **Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh** where any source of pollution may cause adverse impact on air quality in the NCR.

Composition

- **The Commission will consist of:**

1. a Chairperson
2. two Joint Secretaries from the central government,
3. three persons with knowledge and expertise related to air pollution as independent technical members, and
4. three members from non-government organisations.
 - **The Commission will also include ex-officio members:**
 1. From the central government and concerned state governments, and
 2. Technical members from **CPCB, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and NITI Aayog**.
 - Additionally, the Commission may appoint **representatives of certain ministries** as associate members.
 - The Chairperson and members of the Commission will have a **tenure of three years or till the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier**.

Need for the Bill

- It is observed that sources of air pollution, particularly in the National Capital Region, consist of a variety of factors which are **beyond the local limits** of the National Capital Region.
- Special focus is required on all sources of air pollution which are associated with different economic sectors, including **power, agriculture, transport, industry, residential and construction**.

Functions of the Commission

1. **Coordinating** actions taken under the Ordinance by concerned state governments (Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh),
2. **Planning and executing plans** to prevent and control air pollution in the region,
3. Providing a **framework for identification of air pollutants**,
4. Conducting **research and development** through networking with technical institutions,
5. **Training and creating a special work force** to deal with issues related to air pollution, and
6. Preparing various **action plans** such as increasing plantation and addressing stubble burning.

Powers of the Commission:

1. **Restricting activities** influencing air quality,
2. **Investigating and conducting research** related to environmental pollution impacting air quality,
3. Preparing **codes and guidelines** to prevent and control air pollution, and
4. Issuing directions which will be **binding** on the concerned person or authority.
5. The commission will be the sole authority with jurisdiction over matters defined in the ordinance (such as air quality management). In case of any conflict, the **orders or directions of the commission will prevail over the orders of the state governments** (of delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh), **the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), state PCBs, and state-level statutory bodies.**

Penalties:

- Any non-compliance or violation of the provisions of the Ordinance or orders and directions of the Commission is **punishable with imprisonment of up to five years or fine of up to one crore rupees or both.**
- All appeals against the Commission's orders will be heard by the National Green Tribunal.

Other Key Provisions of the Bill

- **Selection Committee:** The appointment of the Chairperson and members of the Commission will be done by the **central government on the recommendations of a Selection Committee.**
- The Committee will be headed by the **Minister in-charge of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as the Chairperson.**
- Further, the Committee will include the Cabinet Secretary and the Minister in-charge of: (i) Ministry of Commerce and Industry, (ii) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, and (iii) Ministry of Science and Technology.
- **Sub-Committees:** The Commission is required to form at least three sub-committees:
 1. sub-committee on monitoring and identification,
 2. sub-committee on safeguarding and enforcement, and
 3. sub-committee on research and development.

- **These sub-committees will be headed by:** (i) a member of the Commission, (ii) the Chairperson of the Commission, and (iii) a technical member of the Commission, respectively.

Why in News ?

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Bill to formalise the Commission for Air Quality Management For National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas replacing the Ordinance.

4) Renegotiate Indus Water Treaty to address impact of Climate Change

Indus Water Treaty 1960

- The Treaty was signed at **Karachi** by Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Indian Prime Minister and Mr. W.A.B. Iliff of the World Bank on **19th September, 1960.**
- The Indus system of rivers comprises of main stem of Indus river along with its five left bank tributaries, namely, the **Ravi, the Beas, the Sutlej , the Jhelum and the Chenab** and a right bank tributary, namely, the Kabul which does not flow through India.
- The **Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej are together called as Eastern Rivers** while the **Chenab, the Jhelum and the Indus main are called as Western Rivers.**
- The Treaty provides **India an absolute control of all the waters of Eastern Rivers** while **Pakistan is entitled for unrestricted use of all those waters of the Western Rivers.**
- **India is permitted to use the waters of Western rivers for :**

1. **Domestic use**
2. **Non consumptive use**
3. **Agricultural Use**

Generation of hydro-electric power

- The Treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers, known as the **Permanent Indus Commission**, which has a commissioner from each country.

Need to renegotiate the treaty

- The Treaty was framed on the basis of knowledge and technology existing at the

time of its agreement in the 1960s and the perspective of both the nations at that time was confined to river management and usage of water through construction of dams, barrages, canals and hydro-power generation and as a result present day issues such as **climate change, global warming and environmental impact assessment etc were not taken into account** by the treaty.

- There is a need to renegotiate the treaty so as to establish some kind of **institutional structure or legislative framework to address the impact of climate change** on water availability in the Indus basin and other challenges which are not covered under the treaty.

Additional Information

India - China Cooperation in Hydrological Front

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on Hydrological information of Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers

- In the year 2002, the Government of India had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China for **five years** upon provision of **Hydrological information on Yaluzangbu /Brahmaputra River during flood season** by China to India.
- In accordance with the provisions contained in the MoU, the Chinese side is

providing hydrological information on Water Level, Discharge and Rainfall to Indian authorities on a regular basis.

- In the year 2010, MoU was signed upon provision of **hydrological information of Sutlej/Langqen Zangbo River during flood season** by China to India.

Expert Level Mechanism (ELM)

- An Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) between both the nations is also in place for ensuring cooperation with regards to provision of **hydrological data by China during flood season, emergency management and other issues pertaining to trans-border rivers.**

Why in News ?

- A parliamentary panel has recommended renegotiating the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan to address the impact of climate change on water availability in the river basin, along with other challenges which are not covered under the agreement.
- The Standing Committee on Water Resources has also recommended that India should constantly **monitor the Chinese actions** to ensure that they do not pursue any major interventions on the Brahmaputra river which could adversely affect India's national interests.

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ECONOMY

1) Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

About IBC

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) creates a time-bound process for insolvency resolution of companies and individuals. These processes will be completed within **180 days** (unless extended by a one-time extendable period of **90 days**). If insolvency cannot be resolved, the assets of the borrower may be sold to repay creditors (known as *liquidation*).
- The resolution processes are conducted by licensed **insolvency professionals (IPs)**. These IPs are members of **insolvency professional agencies (IPAs)**.
- **Information utilities (IUs)** are established to collect, collate and disseminate financial information to facilitate insolvency resolution.
- The **National Company Law Tribunal** adjudicates insolvency resolution for companies and Limited Liability Partnerships. The **Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT)** adjudicates insolvency resolution for individuals and partnership firms.
- The **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)** regulates the functioning of IPs, IPAs and IUs.
- IBC was later amended with the provision to **bar promoters from bidding for their own companies**. It prevented defaulters from regaining control of their companies at a cheaper value
- The code was again amended in 2019 which mandated a deadline for the completion of the resolution process **within 330 days, including all litigation and judicial processes**.

Why in News?

- The Parliament's Standing Committee has sought a **review of the design and implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code as it has deviated from the original intent and questioned the low recovery rates, long delays in the resolution process and the high number of vacancies in the National Company Law Tribunals**.

- The panel stressed that the low recovery rates under the IBC with **haircuts** as much as 95% and the delay in resolution process with more than 71% cases pending with NCLT for more than 180 days, clearly point towards a deviation from the original objectives of the Code intended by Parliament.
- *In this context, haircuts refers to the reduction a bank makes in the original loan amount during a settlement.*
- In a report titled '**Implementation of IBC — pitfalls and solutions**', the Committee called for a thorough evaluation of the extent of fulfilment of the Code's original aims.
- Responding to the criticism that banks were taking steep haircuts in large IBC cases, **RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das** said **recoveries under the IBC process had been 'far greater' than via other debt resolution mechanisms**.
- He said the **total recovery under the IBC is 39-40%**. Till the onset of the pandemic, the recovery was 45%. It is only during the pandemic year that the recovery has slightly come down.
- However, he added that there was room to improve.

2) RBI holds rates

About MPC

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee of the RBI which is entrusted with the task of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to **contain inflation within the specified target level**.
- The 2016 amendment of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 provides for a statutory and institutionalised framework for the MPC.
- The MPC has **six members**.
- **RBI Governor (Chairperson)**, RBI Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, one official nominated by the RBI Board and remaining 3 members would represent the Government.
- The MPC makes decisions based on **majority vote**. In case of a tie, the **RBI**

governor will have a second or casting vote.

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee recently voted to keep the **repo rate unchanged at 4%** as part of the RBI's sustained effort to help the economy recover from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The committee also voted in favour of retaining the **accommodative stance** as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis.
- The central bank retained its **projection for real GDP growth in the current fiscal year at 9.5%**.

Related information

Repo Rate & Reverse Repo Rate

- Repo rate is the rate of interest which is applied by RBI to commercial banks when the latter borrows from RBI. Reverse Repo rate is the rate at which RBI borrows money from commercial banks by lending securities.

- Both the Repo rate and Reverse Repo rate are used to **control inflation and money supply in the economy.**
- In the event of rising inflation, the RBI increases the repo rate which will act as a disincentive for banks to borrow from the central bank.
- This ultimately reduces the money supply in the economy and thus helps in arresting inflation. Similarly, if it wants to make it cheaper for banks to borrow money, it reduces the repo rate.

Monetary policy stance

- The Central Banks use different terms to indicate its monetary policy stance on deciding policy rates like repo rate.
- **"Accommodative"** indicates that the central bank is telling the market to expect a rate cut anytime, **"neutral"** means that RBI could either increase or reduce repo rates as per liquidity conditions, **"calibrated tightening"** means that a cut in the repo rate is unlikely in the current rate cycle.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) India, Sri Lanka and Maldives to collaborate on security

What's in the news?

- In a recent National Security Adviser-level meeting, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have agreed to **work on “four pillars” of security cooperation**, covering areas of marine security, human trafficking, counter-terrorism, and cyber security.
- The discussion comes nine months after National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited Colombo for deliberations with top officials from Sri Lanka and Maldives, in which the three countries agreed to **expand the scope of intelligence sharing**.

Colombo Security Conclave

- The recent meeting marked the revival of NSA-level trilateral talks on maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region after a gap of six years.
- The **‘Colombo Security Conclave’** among the three neighbouring countries seeks to “further promote” maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region, and was **initiated by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2011**.
- The initiative, grounded in military and security collaboration, assumes significance in the region, in the wake of the current geostrategic dynamic that India shares with Sri Lanka and the Maldives.
- Earlier this year, India conveyed security concerns over China being awarded development projects in an island off Sri Lanka’s northern province, close to India’s southern border.

Engagement with Quad

- On the other hand, the Maldives’s engagement with members of the India-United States-Japan-Australia grouping, known as the **‘Quad’**, has been growing over the last year, especially in the area of defence cooperation.
- The Maldives government signed a **‘Framework for a Defence and Security Relationship’** agreement with the United States last year, an initiative that India welcomed.
- In November 2020, the Maldives received a Japanese grant of \$7.6 million for the

Maldivian Coast Guard and a Maritime Rescue and Coordination Center.

Related Information

Quad grouping

- The grouping of four democracies – **India, Australia, US and Japan** – known as the **quadrilateral security dialogue or quad**, was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. Quad was revived in 2017.
- The QUAD partners share a **commitment towards a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region** based on shared values and principles and respect for international law.
- There is a focus on practical cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development, and counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief, with the objective of promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity in an increasingly inter-connected Indo-Pacific region.
- With growing concerns in all four quad countries about **Chinese foreign policy and regional influence**, the group has found renewed relevance.

2) United Nations Security Council

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in **1946** as **one of the six principal organs of the UN**. It is generally viewed as the apex of the UN system.
- It is responsible for the **maintenance of international peace and security**.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue **binding resolutions** to member states.

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members.
- The council has **five permanent members** (P-5) United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France.

- These permanent members can **veto** any substantive Security Council resolutions, including those on the admission of new member states.
- The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a **regional basis** as follows:
 1. five for African and Asian States;
 2. one for Eastern European States;
 3. two for the Latin American and Caribbean States; and
 4. two for Western European and other States.
- Each year the 193-member UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects five non-permanent members for a **two-year term**.
- The body's **presidency rotates monthly among its members**.

Vote and Majority Required

- Each member of the Security Council shall have **one vote**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **procedural matters** shall be made by an **affirmative vote of nine members**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **all other matters** shall be made by an **affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members**.
- However, any member, whether permanent or nonpermanent, must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

Why in News?

- India is set to focus attention on three major areas—maritime security, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism, as it assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the month of August.
- India joined the UNSC in January 2021 for a two year term as one of the 10 rotating non permanent members.
- As part of its new role as president of the UNSC that all 15 members get in rotation, India will decide the agenda of the UN's highest decision making body whose resolutions and directives are binding on all member states. India will also coordinate important meetings on a range of issues during August.

India's quest for permanent seat in UNSC

- For decades, India has sought a comprehensive reform of the UNSC and permanent membership at the Council along with Germany, Japan and Brazil.

- In recent years, New Delhi has made the theme of **“reformed multilateralism”** central to its diplomacy—calling the UN structure that came into existence in the immediate aftermath of World War 2 **“anachronistic” and in need of urgent change**.

- The arguments put forward by India centered on four aspects for making the Council more representative: **Expansion of Membership, Veto power, Regional Representation & Relationship Between Security Council and General Assembly**.

Expansion of Membership

- In India's eyes, no reform of the UN is complete without the composition of the Security Council changing to reflect contemporary realities of the twenty-first century.
- This requires **expansion in the membership** of the Security Council in both the permanent and non – permanent categories.
- India has also highlighted the need of **Africa** to be represented in both categories.

Veto power

- On the question of veto, Indian position is fully aligned with **G4, L.69** and Africa who have called for the **abolition of veto**.
 1. *The G4 nations comprise Brazil, Germany, India and Japan which support each other's bids for permanent seats on the UNSC.*
 2. *L.69 is a group of developing countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. They form a major bloc that is united by the common cause of achieving the lasting and comprehensive reform of the UNSC.*

Regional Representation

- On the question of regional representation, India has argued for an **equitable geographical representation** and the urgent need for mitigating the non-representation and under-representation of some regions in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories.
- The UN has three of the five permanent members from one region alone while the regions of Africa, Latin America, three-fourths of Asia including the Arab states, the entire Central and Eastern Europe, the Caribbean states and the Small Island developing states remain excluded from the functioning of the Security Council.

- The Security Council, for India, needs to reflect contemporary realities and provide adequate representation to all regions of the world.

Relationship Between Security Council and General Assembly

- On the issue of the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, in India's view, it should not be competitive or adversarial, but "**one of synergy and complementarity**" which benefits the UN objectives of the promotion of international peace and security.
- A relationship with the General Assembly based on transparency, mutual trust and frequent interaction with all Member States will increase the credibility of the Council that includes increase in dialogue between the Council and the Assembly.
- India thus has called for a **greater transparency and consistency** to improve the relationship between the two.

What is the issue?

- While the US, France, Britain and Russia are not averse to India joining the UNSC as a permanent member, **China has been opposed to it.**
- There is also reportedly no unanimity among the permanent veto-wielding five – US, UK, France, Russia and China – to share its veto powers with any new members for fears of diluting the influence and authority they currently wield.
- An informal "**coffee club**", comprising 40-odd member states (including Italy, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Argentina and Pakistan) has been instrumental in holding back reforms to the UNSC. Most members of the club are middle-sized states who oppose bigger regional powers grabbing permanent seats in the UN Security Council.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) GPS enabled clocks

Why in News?

- The **Indian Railways** has announced that it will provide **Global Positioning System (GPS) clocks** for control offices.
- **GPS** is a **U.S.-owned utility** that provides users with positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) services.

About the upgrade

- The **enhanced safety measure** will **replace analog clocks** and train operations will soon be guided by satellite supported timers **known for precision and reliability**.
- The **accuracy in the synchronisation** of time in the clocks maintained by the control office, station masters, loco pilots, guards and others is **crucial in ensuring safety of train operations**.

2) Genome sequencing

Why in News?

- Scientists from the Telomere-to-Telomere (T2T) Consortium, an international collaboration of around 30 institutions, reported the most complete sequencing of the human genome until now.

What is a gene?

- The **gene is the basic physical unit of inheritance**.
- Genes are **passed from parents to offspring** and contain the information needed to specify traits. Genes are arranged, one after another, on structures called chromosomes.
- A chromosome contains a single, long DNA molecule, only a portion of which corresponds to a single gene. Humans have approximately 20,500 genes arranged on their chromosomes.

What is a genome?

- A **genome is the complete set of genetic information in an organism**. It provides all of the information the organism requires to function. In living organisms, the genome is stored in long molecules of DNA called chromosomes.

Significance of a complete sequence

- The **Human Genome Project that began in 1990** gave the first results of the

complete human genome sequence in 2003. For the first time, scientists were able to read the blueprint of human life.

- However, though it was announced as the complete human genome, **about 15% of it was incomplete**. Due to limitations of technology, scientists were not able to piece together some repetitive parts of the human genome.
- Solving some of the problems, an **updated version was released in 2013**, which **still missed out on 8% of the genome**.
- **Now, the researchers have nearly completed the job**, adding 200 million base pairs and 115 new protein-coding genes to the list.

Uses of a complete sequence

- One of the most important uses of this release will be that it **forms a standard** for comparison in future sequencing attempts
- *To read about uses of genome sequencing and Genome India Project-*
<https://officerspulse.com/genome-sequencing-lab/>

3) Bacterial Motion

Why in News?

- Indian **scientists** have found a **theoretical model** explaining a **unique kind of motion**, called **direction reversing** active motion, exhibited by some **bacteria**.

How does a bacteria move

- **Bacteria move by propelling themselves** with a velocity that changes direction randomly, which is called **active motion**.
- Besides bacteria, **this kind of motion** is found in living systems ranging from cells at the microscopic scale to the flocking of birds and fish schools at the macroscopic scale.
- It is **also seen in artificial systems**, including granular matter, self-catalytic swimmers, and nano-motors.
- **Some microorganisms**, such as predator bacteria *Myxococcus Xanthus* and saprotrophic bacteria *Pseudomonas putida*, **exhibit a unique kind of reversing active motion**, whereby, in addition to a diffusive change of direction, the motion also

completely reverses its direction intermittently.

The uses

- This analysis can help in building more efficient artificial micro- and nano-motors used in drug delivery and bio-imaging using the concept to incorporate a reverse gear.

4) Food fortification

What is food fortification?

- Food fortification is defined as the **practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient**, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and to provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
- It is a **cost-effective** strategy for improving diets and for the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies.
- It can be **carried out by food manufacturers, or by governments** as a public health policy which aims to reduce the number of people with dietary deficiencies within a population.
- In 2008 and 2012, the **Copenhagen Consensus** ranked **food fortification** as one of the **most cost-effective development priorities**.
- The Copenhagen Consensus Center provides information on which targets will do the most social good relative to their costs

Need for food fortification

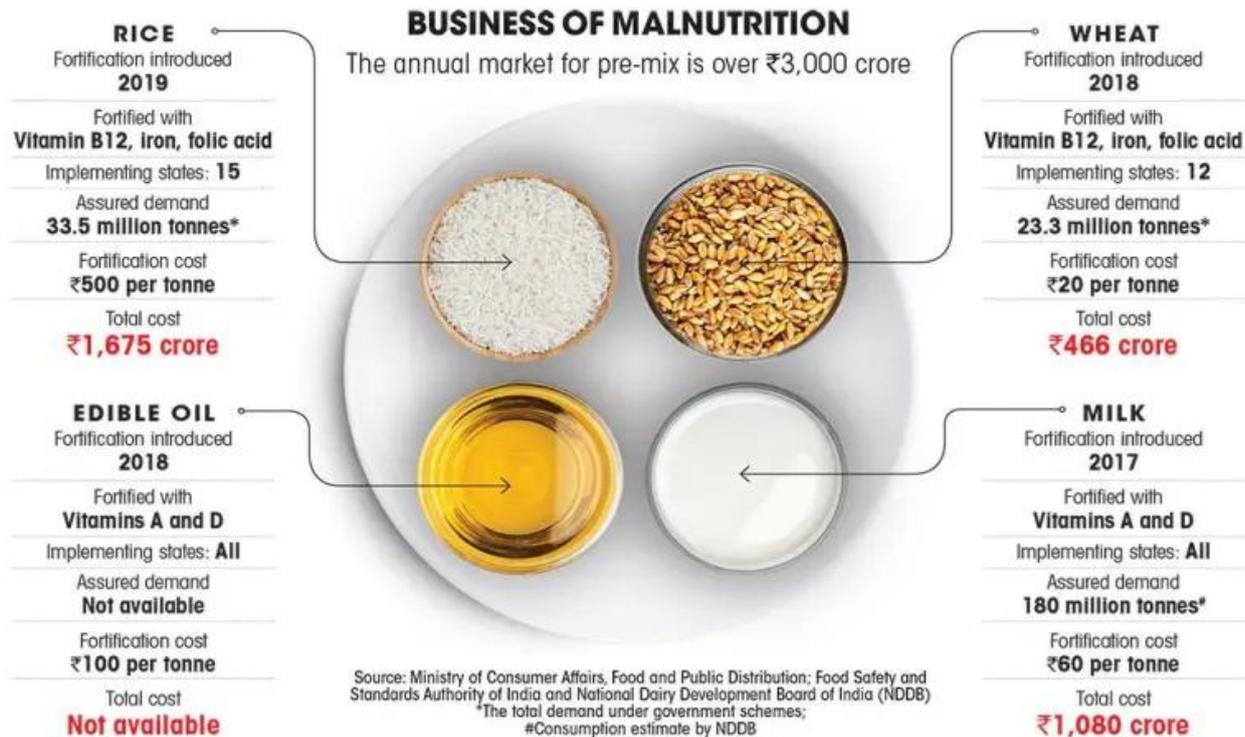
- **70% of people in India do not consume enough micronutrients** such as vitamins and minerals.
- About **70 percent of pre-school children suffer from anaemia** caused by Iron Deficiency and **57 percent of preschool children have sub-clinical Vitamin A deficiency**.
- **Neural Tube Defects (NTDs)** are the most common congenital malformation with an incidence that varies between 0.5-8/1000 births.
- It is **estimated that 50-70% of these birth defects are preventable**. One of the major causes is deficiency of Folic Acid.

- 58.4% of children (6-59 months) are anaemic
- 53.1% women in the reproductive age group are anaemic
- 35.7% of children under 5 are underweight
- **Deficiency of micronutrients** or micronutrient malnutrition, also known as **“hidden hunger”**, is a serious health risk.
- Unfortunately, those who are **economically disadvantaged do not have access to safe and nutritious food**. Others either do not consume a balanced diet or lack variety in the diet because of which they do not get adequate micronutrients.
- Often, there is **considerable loss of nutrients during the processing of food**. One of the strategies to address this problem is fortification of food.

Benefits of food fortification

- Since the nutrients are added to staple foods that are widely consumed, this is an **excellent method to improve the health of a large section of the population**, all at once.
- It **does not require any changes in food habits and patterns of people**. It is a **socio-culturally acceptable way** to deliver nutrients to people.
- It **does not alter the characteristics of the food**—the taste, the feel, the look.
- It can be implemented quickly as well as show results in **improvement of health in a relatively short period of time**.
- This **method is cost-effective** especially if advantage is taken of the existing technology and delivery platforms.
- The **Copenhagen Consensus** estimates that every **1 Rupee spent on fortification results in 9 Rupees in benefits to the economy**. It requires an initial investment to purchase both the equipment and the vitamin and mineral premix, but overall costs of fortification are extremely low. Even when all program costs are passed on to consumers, the price increase is approximately 1-2%, less than normal price variation. Thus it has a **high benefit-to-cost ratio**.

How government uses food fortification in various schemes



- Distribution of **fortified rice** through the **Integrated Child Development Services and Mid Day Meal Scheme**.
 - **The Milk Fortification Project** - a collaborative initiative of the World Bank, Tata Trusts and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to address **vitamin deficiencies** in the consumers.
 - **Poshan Maah** to ensure community mobilisation and bolster people's participation for addressing malnutrition amongst young children, and women and to ensure health and nutrition for everyone. It is Government of India's flagship programme to improve nutritional outcomes for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
 - To reduce the high burden of micronutrient malnutrition in India, the **Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016** were enacted to **fortify staples such as wheat flour and rice** (with iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid), **milk and edible oil** (with vitamins A and D), and **double fortified salt** (with iodine and iron).
 - The **National Nutritional Strategy of 2017** included **food fortification** as one of the measures to **address anaemia, vitamin A, and iodine deficits**.
- Why in News?**
- Group of scientists and activists have written to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), warning of the adverse impacts of food fortification on health and livelihoods.
- Concerns**
- Scientists have cited multiple studies to show that **dietary diversity and higher protein consumption are key to solving undernutrition in India, rather than adding a few synthetic micronutrients** which could harm the health of consumers.
 - Recent studies published in the medical journal Lancet and in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition showed that **both anaemia and Vitamin A deficiencies are overdiagnosed**, meaning that **mandatory fortification** could lead to **hypervitaminosis**.
 - It also notes that many of the **studies which FSSAI relies on** to promote fortification **are sponsored by food companies** who would benefit from it, leading to **conflicts of interest**.
 - One major problem with chemical fortification of foods is that **nutrients don't work in isolation** but need each other for optimal absorption. Undernourishment in India is caused by **monotonous cereal-based diets with low consumption of vegetables and animal protein**.

- **High expense-** The fortification cost the government Rs 3000 crores per year.

What could be alternatives to food fortification ?

- **Rice bran**, a rich source of numerous micronutrients, would reach people if less processed or unpolished rice was included in the public distribution system.
- **Kitchen gardens:** Organic kitchen gardens (growing of fruits and vegetables at the backyard of house by using kitchen waste water) produce fruits and vegetables that increase micronutrients.
- Increasing the **intake of animal-based foods and fruits**. A variety of natural diets is required to provide the normal population's micronutrient needs, according to the National Institute of Nutrition.
- **Farming practices like Amrut Krishi, Fukuoka's "Natural Farming"** -organic agricultural methods that would result in improved food nutrition.
 1. Amrut Krushi uses scientific methods (Natueco Farming Science) to figure out the maximum possible yield in a particular area with maximum nutrition
 2. "The Fukuoka Method" or "the natural way of farming" or "Do-Nothing Farming"-the system is based on the recognition of the complexity of living organisms that shape an ecosystem and deliberately exploiting it.
- **Breastfeeding** with correct latching practises. It has the potential to have a significant influence on nutrition insufficiency in the first 1,000 days.

5) EOS-03 Satellite

Why in News:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced that it will launch an **Earth Observation Satellite** from the

Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

About the satellite

- The satellite, **EOS-03**, will be carried on board the 14th flight of the **GSLV**, the **GSLV-F10**, and will place the satellite in a **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit**.
- A geosynchronous transfer orbit (**GTO**) is a type of geocentric orbit. Satellites which are destined for geosynchronous (GSO) or geostationary orbit (GEO) are put into a GTO as an intermediate step for reaching their final orbit.
- The satellite will reach the final **geostationary orbit** using its onboard propulsion system.
 1. A **geostationary orbit** is a circular geosynchronous orbit above Earth's equator following the **direction of Earth's rotation**.
 2. **Geostationary orbits of 36,000 km from the Earth's equator** are best known for the many satellites used for various forms of telecommunication, including television. Signals from these satellites can be sent all the way round the world.
- The EOS-03 is a state-of-the-art agile satellite that would enable real-time monitoring of **natural disasters** such as **floods and cyclones, monitoring of water bodies, crops, vegetation condition, forest cover changes** among others.

About earth observation satellites

- **Earth Observation (EO) satellites** help us to **monitor** and protect our **environment**, **manage** our **resources**, respond to global **humanitarian disasters** and enable **sustainable development**.
- They provide essential **information** on a vast number of areas, including; **ocean salinity, ice thickness, crop health, and air quality**.

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DEFENCE

1) Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC)

Why in News?

- Sea trials of India's maiden **indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1)**, built by the public sector Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL), began recently. The 40,000-tonne carrier is slated to join the Navy as **INS Vikrant** in 2022.

What is an Aircraft Carrier?

- A **vessel** that acts as a **seagoing airbase** with a **full-length flight deck and facilities for carrying, arming, deploying, and recovering aircraft** is known as an aircraft carrier.

The need for an IAC

- Its induction will give a **fillip to the sea control capabilities of the Navy in the Indian Ocean Region.**
 - While the Indian Navy **currently operates one aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya**, it is keen to add another to its fleet.
1. INS Viraat is another Aircraft Carrier – Bought from the UK- **officially decommissioned in 2017.**

2. **INS Vikrant**– The first indigenous aircraft carrier– to be commissioned in 2022

3. **INS Vishal**– proposed to be India's 2nd indigenous aircraft carrier, is awaiting defence ministry's clearance.

- **Like Vikramaditya**, IAC-1 has a **STOBAR** (short take off but arrested recovery) system of aircraft launch and recovery on the flight deck.

- STOBAR ("Short Take-Off But Arrested Recovery") is a system used for the launch and recovery of aircraft from the deck of an aircraft carrier, combining elements of "short take-off and vertical landing" (STOVL) with "catapult-assisted take-off but arrested recovery" (CATOBAR).

- *To read about India's other Aircraft Carriers:*

<https://officerspulse.com/indigenous-aircraft-carrier-iac/>

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ART AND DEFENCE

1) Abanindranath Tagore

Who is Abanindranath Tagore?

- He is the **nephew of Rabindranath Tagore**, helped shape modern Indian art and was the creator of the **iconic 'Bharat Mata' painting**.
- Abanindranath Tagore was arguably the first major exponent of an artistic idiom that sought to **modernise the Mughal and the Rajput styles** in order to counter the influence of Western models of art under the colonial regime
- His **unique interpretation of swadeshi themes** created a **new awakening and heralded a revival of Indian art**.
- **Mughal miniatures** influenced his ideas.
- Popular paintings by him are Bharat Mata, My Mother, Journey's End, The Passing of Shah Jahan , series of work on Krishna Lila, The Arabian Nights etc.
- Popular books Written by him are Khirer Putul, Nalak, etc.

Bengal School of Art

- The Bengal School of Art commonly referred as Bengal School, was an **art movement** and a style of Indian painting that **originated in Bengal, primarily Kolkata and Shantiniketan**, and flourished throughout the Indian subcontinent, during the British Raj in the early 20th century.
- **Also known as 'Indian style of painting'** in its early days, it was **associated with Indian nationalism (swadeshi)** and led by Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), but was also promoted and supported by British arts administrators like E. B. Havell.
- **During the British Raj**, the **traditional Indian approach** towards painting had **lost its identity**. Since the traditional painting styles didn't appeal to British tastes, they introduced a new form of painting in India in the late 1700s. Known as **'Company Paintings'**, specifically

catering to British collectors, they captured India's flora, fauna, ancient monuments, festivals, and 'exotic new people'.

- Done mostly in watercolours, they were more documental than imaginative, characterized in technique by the use of linear perspectives and shading.

Why in News?

- Year-long celebrations marking 150 years of Abanindranath Tagore is set to kick off with a host of online workshops and talks paying tributes to the leading light of the Bengal School of Art.

2) Khel Ratna

Why in News:

- The **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna** award has been **renamed** as the **"Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna"**.

Who is Major Dhyan Chand

- **Dhyan Chand**, a three-time Olympic gold medallist, is considered **one of the world's greatest hockey players**.
- His **birthday**, on **August 29**, marks the **National Sports Day**, when the National Sports Awards are presented each year.

Khel Ratna award

- The **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award** in Sports and Games is the **highest sporting honour** of India.
- It is **awarded annually by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**. The recipient(s) is/are selected by a committee constituted by the Ministry and is honoured for their "spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports over a period of four years" at international level.
- The Khel Ratna award was instituted in 1991-1992 and the **first recipient** was Chess legend **Viswanathan Anand**.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Deep Ocean Mission

What is it?

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



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

Significance of the mission

- The mission forms a part of the **Blue Economy** envisioned to be developed by 2030, which will place India among select countries — US, France, Japan, Russia and China — to have special missions dedicated for ocean studies.

- It is a **strategic and geo-political move** in order to further strengthen India's position in the Indian Ocean region.
- Globally, **only 11 percent of marine species have been identified**. The deep ocean species are even less explored. Hence it will be helpful in identifying the species and know more about **climate change**.

Economic Potential

- It will enable India to develop capabilities to **exploit resources in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB)**.
- CIOB reserves contain deposits of metals like iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt. It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years.
- India has also been allotted 75,000 square kilometres in the CIOB by the **UN International Sea Bed Authority (ISA)** for exploration of **poly-metallic nodules**.
 1. *The ISA is an institution set up under the Convention on Law of the Sea to which India is a Party.*
 2. *Polymetallic nodules are potato-shaped, largely porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea. These are also known as manganese nodules.*
 3. *Polymetallic nodules have economically valuable metals such as Copper, Cobalt, Nickel and Manganese in them and are viewed as potential resources to take care of the depleting land resources and increasing demand of these metals.*

Why in the news?

- Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of State of the Ministry of Science and Technology, said that the Government has approved the Deep Ocean Mission at a total budget of Rs. 4077 Cr for 5 years.

2) Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana

About PMBJP

- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) is a campaign launched by the **Department of Pharmaceuticals** to **provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses**.

- In September 2015, an existing 'Jan Aushadhi Scheme' was revamped as 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Yojana' and in November, 2016, to give further impetus to the scheme, it was again renamed as "Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana".
- PMBJP stores have been set up to provide **generic drugs**, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
- **Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI)** is the implementing agency for PMBJP.

Objectives of PMBJP

- Making quality medicines available at affordable prices for all, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, through exclusive outlets "**Jan Aushadhi Kendras**", to reduce out of pocket expenses in healthcare.
- Create awareness among the public regarding generic medicines.
- Create demand for generic medicines through medical practitioners.
- Create awareness through education and awareness programs that high price need not be synonymous with high quality.

Who can open a Jan Aushadhi Kendras?

- State Governments or any organization / reputed NGOs / Trusts / Private hospitals / Charitable institutions / Doctors / Unemployed pharmacists/ individual entrepreneurs are eligible to apply for new Jan Aushadhi stores.
- The applicants shall have to employ one B Pharma / D Pharma degree holder as Pharmacist in their proposed store.
- They can be set up at any suitable place within Government hospital or Private hospital premises or anywhere outside the premises.

Why in News?

- The Minister of Health & Family Welfare and Chemicals & Fertilizers, Mansukh Mandaviya in a written reply in Rajya Sabha said that under PMBJP, the Government has opened 8,001 Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras as on 02.08.2021 covering all the districts of the country.
- The government also aims to open about 10,500 Janaushadhi Kendras by March, 2025.
- The State Governments/UT Administrations have been requested from time to time to facilitate opening of

Janaushadhi Kendras in the premises of Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCs)/Community Health Centers (CHCs)/Hospitals, including super specialty hospitals, by providing rent-free space within their premises.

Related Information

What are generic drugs?

- When a company develops a new drug — often after years of research — it applies for a patent, which **prohibits anyone else from making the drug for a fixed period.**
- To recover the cost of research and development, companies usually price their brand- name drugs on the higher side.
- Once the patent expires, other manufacturers duplicate and market their own versions of the drug.

Cost-effectiveness of generic medicines

- Since the manufacture of these generic drugs do not involve a repeat of the extensive clinical trials to prove their safety and efficacy, it **costs less to develop them.** Generic drugs are, therefore, **cheaper.**
- However, because the compounds in the generic versions have the same molecular structure as the brand-name version, they provide the **same clinical benefits** as its brand-name version. The generic drug has the **same "active ingredient"** as the brand-name drug. This ingredient is the one that cures the patient; and other, "inert ingredients", which give the drug its colour, shape or taste, vary from the brand-name drug to the generics.
- In addition, multiple applications for generic drugs are often approved to market a single product; this creates competition in the marketplace, typically resulting in lower prices. **Typically results in prices about 85% less than the brand-name.**

About BPPI

- The Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India comprising all the Pharma CPSUs under the Department of Pharmaceuticals was established in 2008.
- It aims to bring about effective collaboration and cooperation in furthering the working and resources of these organizations.

3) SANKALP Scheme

About the Scheme

- Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) is a **supporting programme to skill training schemes** which focuses on improvement of quality, strengthening of institutions and inclusion of weaker sections in skill training.
- It is a **World Bank loan assisted programme of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** with **three key Result Areas (RA)**, namely
 1. Institutional Strengthening at Central, State, and District level;
 2. Quality Assurance of skill development programmes; and
 3. Inclusion of marginalized populations in skill development programmes.
- **The implementation period of SANKALP is till March, 2023.**

Outcomes

- SANKALP has undertaken several initiatives to contribute to improvement in employability, some of which are as under:
 1. **Strengthening of District Skill Committees** for improved access to and demand driven skill trainings for employment.
 2. **Emphasis on skill certification in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** at Gram Panchayat level for improving employment qualitatively.
 3. Funded development of an IT system namely **“Skill India Portal”** to capture the data for skilling related activities across the country.
 4. **Global Skill Gap study** was conducted to identify the global gaps in demand and supply of skilled manpower as well as overseas employment opportunities for skilled workers from India. The Report helped in identifying important countries of interest as destination and job roles of interest.
 5. A **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** has been prepared for promoting inclusion of women in Short term skilling and livelihood opportunities.

Why in News?

- This information was given by the Union Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Dharmendra Pradhan in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha recently.

4) Nirbhaya Fund

About Nirbhaya Fund Framework

- Nirbhaya Fund is a dedicated fund set up by the Government of India in **2013** which can be utilized for projects specifically designed to **improve the safety and security of women.**
- It is a **non-lapsable corpus fund** administered by the **Department of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance.**
- As per this framework, the **Ministry of Finance through the Department of Economic Affairs** is the nodal Ministry for any accretion into and withdrawal from the corpus, and the **Ministry of Women & Child Development (WCD)** is the nodal authority for appraisal of the schemes/proposals received under Nirbhaya Fund.
- **Funding to Non-Governmental Organisations is not envisaged under the framework.**
- The proposed projects under the Nirbhaya Fund should have the following features:
 1. Direct impact on safety and security concerns of women
 2. Optimum use of existing infrastructure
 3. Innovative use of technology
 4. No duplication of existing government schemes/programmes
 5. Provision for real time intervention as far as possible.

Initiatives under Nirbhaya fund

- The Nirbhaya fund is primarily meant to implement three initiatives through coordination between the WCD Ministry and the central government as well as state and union territory administrations: **One-Stop Centres (OSC), Universalisation of Women Helpline (WHL), and Mahila Police Volunteers (MPV).**
 1. The OSCs are meant to **help women who are victims of violence** by providing a range of services such as police, medical aid, legal aid and counselling, and psychological support under one roof.
 2. The WHL scheme oversees a **toll-free 24X7 helpline** — available at **181** — for women seeking immediate support and information in cases of violence.
 3. The MPV scheme, implemented by the WCD Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry

of Home Affairs, seeks to **identify volunteers who can act as a link between police and society** at large and help report incidents of violence against women.

Why in the news?

- This information was given by the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smriti Zubin Irani, in a written reply in the Lok Sabha recently.

5) Commercial coal mining

Background

- In 2020, as a part of the announcements made under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**, the Central government allowed commercial mining in the coal sector.

What is commercial mining?

- Commercial mining **allows the private sector** to mine coal commercially on a **revenue-sharing model without placing any end-use restrictions**.

- Removing end-use restrictions marks the **end of the captive mining regime**.

1. *Captive mining is the coal mined for a specific end-use by the mine owner, but not for open sale in the market.*

2. *A revenue sharing mechanism instead of the earlier fixed price per tonne will introduce competition, transparency and private sector participation in the market.*

- The private firms will have the option of either gasification of the coal or exporting it. They can also use it in their own end-use plants or **sell them in the markets**.

- Further, with **100 per cent foreign direct investment** allowed in the coal sector, global companies can also participate in the auctions.

- The complete freedom to decide on sale, pricing, and captive utilisation is expected to attract many private sector firms to participate in the auction process.

- The government expects these steps will generate employment and reduce India's import bill.

Was the private sector never allowed in mining?

- Private sector participation was permitted until the early 1970s. The Indira Gandhi government announced the **nationalisation of the coal blocks** in two phases **between 1971 and 1973**.

- The reforms announced in 2020 will effectively **end state-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL)'s monopoly** over mining and selling of coal.

Is this the first attempt by govt to open up the sector?

- After the Supreme Court cancelled the coal block allocations made to the private sector in 2014, the central government had brought in the Coal Mines (Special provisions) Act of 2015 to return these coal blocks to the private sector through **auctions**.

- But there had been **end-use restrictions** and the private sector was **not allowed to trade into the market** making it unattractive for the private sector.

- Further in 2018, private sector firms were allowed to **sell upto 25 per cent of the output** in the market, but this also saw a lukewarm response from the private sector.

Significance

- The government has also decided to spend Rs 50,000 crore on creating **infrastructure for coal extraction and transport**. This would also create job opportunities for locals closer to their homes.

- Despite India having the **world's fourth largest coal reserve** and being the **second largest producer**, the country was the **second largest coal importer**. The sector had been kept out of competition and devoid of transparency, hampering investment and efficiency.

- Fully opening up the sector would increase competition, capital, participation and technology. It would ensure new private players did not face the problem of finance.

Why in News?

- Minister of Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi gave details about commercial coal mining in India in a written reply in Rajya Sabha recently.

7) Controller General of Accounts

Who is a Controller General of Accounts (CGA)?

- A CGA is the **Principal Advisor on Accounting matters to the Union Government**.

- He is responsible for establishing and managing a **technically sound Management Accounting System**.
- He is responsible for preparation and submission of the accounts of the Union Government and also responsible for exchequer control and internal audits.
- CGA derives his mandate from **Article 150** of the Constitution.

Duties and responsibilities of CGA

- General principles of Government accounting relating to **Union or State Governments** and form of accounts, and framing or revision of rules and manuals relating thereto;
- Reconciliation of cash balance of Union Government with Reserve Bank in general and, in particular, of Reserve Deposits pertaining to Civil Ministries or Departments;
- Overseeing the maintenance of adequate standards of accounting by **Central Civil Accounts Offices**;
- Consolidation of monthly accounts, preparation of review of trends of revenue realization and significant features of expenditure etc and preparation of annual accounts (including Summary, Civil Appropriation Accounts) showing under the respective heads, the annual receipts and disbursements for the purpose of the Union Government;
- **Administration** of Central Treasury Rules and Central Government Account (Receipt and Payment Rules 1983);
- **Coordination and assistance** in the introduction of management accounting system in Civil Ministries or Departments;
- **Cadre management** of Group 'A' (Indian Civil Accounts Service) and Group 'B' Officers of the Central Civil Accounts Offices;
- **Matters relating to the Central Civil Accounts staff** belonging to Group 'C' and 'D';
- **Disbursement of Pension** through Public Sector Banks (PSBs) in respect of Central Civil Pensioners, Freedom Fighters, High Court Judges, Ex-M.P.s and Ex-Presidents.

Why in News?

- The Government appointed Mr. Deepak Das as the new Controller General of Accounts.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

About PMFBY

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

of minimum support price (MSP) by the Centre.

Major Changes

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

Why in News?

- The Union Government informed Lok Sabha that the **National Crop Insurance Portal (NCIP)**, www.pmfby.gov.in has been developed with the objective to digitize the entire activities of the implementation of PMFBY.

2) FAME scheme

About the Scheme

- The **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020** is a National Mission document providing the vision and the

roadmap for the faster adoption of electric vehicles and their manufacturing in the country.

- As part of the NEMMP 2020, the **Department of Heavy Industry** (under the Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises) formulated a Scheme viz. Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) Scheme in 2015.
- The objective of the FAME India scheme is to **promote manufacturing of electric and hybrid vehicle technology and to ensure sustainable growth of the same.**
- The scheme encourages adoption of Electric and hybrid vehicles by **offering upfront incentives** on purchase of Electric vehicles and establishing a necessary charging Infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- The scheme aims at **addressing the issue of environmental pollution and fuel security.**

Phase-I

- The Phase-I of this Scheme was initially launched for a period of 2 years, commencing from 1st April 2015, which was subsequently extended up to 31st March 2019.
- The 1st Phase of FAME India Scheme was implemented through four focus areas namely (i) Demand Creation, (ii)

Technology Platform, (iii) Pilot Project and (iv) Charging Infrastructure.

Phase-II

- Phase-II of FAME India Scheme is being implemented for a period of 3 years w.e.f. 01st April, 2019.
- This phase focuses on **supporting electrification of public & shared transportation** and aims to support, through subsidies, approximately 7000 e-Buses, 5 lakh e-3 Wheelers, 55000 e-4 Wheeler Passenger Cars and 10 lakh e-2 Wheelers.
- In addition, **creation of charging infrastructure** is also supported for electric vehicles.

Key Objectives

- Encourage faster adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles by way of offering **upfront Incentive on purchase of Electric vehicles.**
- Establishing necessary charging Infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- To address the issue of environmental pollution and fuel security.

Why in News?

- Government has allocated over 756 crore rupees under the FAME scheme.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) A disconcerting picture behind the headline numbers

GS-3 Employment

CONTEXT

- Recently the **third annual round of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data** conducted during July 2019-June 2020 has been released.
- It was expected that the data will provide official estimates of the labour market distress due to dwindling GDP growth and a lockdowns following the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- **The data, however, show a decline in the unemployment rate to 4.8% in 2019-20 — the lowest in three years.**
- While the headline numbers may seem pleasing, a detailed analysis paints a rather worrying picture.

PERIODIC LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

- PLFS is **India's first computer-based survey** launched by the **National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2017.**
- The two fold objective of the survey is to **estimate employment and unemployment indicators in both usual status and Current Weekly Status (CWS) in both rural and urban areas annually.**
- It captures **key indicators of the labour market** such as:
 1. The **labour force participation rate (LFPR)** — the proportion of population working or seeking work;
 2. The **worker-population ratio (WPR)** — the proportion of population that is working;
 3. The **unemployment rate (UR)** — the proportion of the population in the labour force that is seeking but unable to find work.
- It also provides data on the earnings of different segments of workers.

MEASURING UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

- The LFPR, WPR and UR are measured using two approaches — **usual status and current weekly status.**
- The **usual status** considers the activity of an individual over a relatively long period during the last 365 days, whereas the **current weekly status** is based on activity

performed during the reference period of the last seven days.

EXPECTED REASONS BEHIND THE FALLING UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

- The unemployment rate (measured by the usual status), has **fallen from 6.1% in 2017-18 to 4.8% in 2019-20.**
- This is because of the fact that while there was **an increase in the share of the population in the labour force** over the last three years, there was an even **higher increase in the share of those who were able to find work**, and hence unemployment fell.

ANSWER LIES WITH CHANGING WORKFORCE COMPOSITION

- The PLFS categorises the workforce into:
 1. **self-employed-** refers to the idea of opening a business and working for oneself rather than an employer. This includes own account workers, employers and unpaid helpers in family enterprises.
 2. **regular wage/salaried workers-** those who work for employers in the public or private sector and receive compensation in forms of salary, wage, commission or in kind etc.
 3. **casual labourers-** those who employed on a temporary, rather than a permanent or regular basis, for the performance of specific tasks.

Increase in the proportion if the unpaid family workers:

- Of all the worker categories, only the proportion of unpaid family workers has gone up significantly in the last three years.
 1. Between 2018 and 2019, while the workforce increased, the proportion of all other employment categories in the workforce declined, except unpaid family helpers.
 2. This entire rise in the workforce that cannot find remunerative employment elsewhere, is almost accommodated by agriculture.

Gendered dimension to the changing composition of the workforce:

- As the **category of unpaid family workers is dominated by women.**

1. Hence, the declining unemployment rate can largely be explained by understanding the gendered dimension linked to the changing composition of the workforce.
2. The movement of women from primarily being engaged in domestic work to agriculture and other petty production activities such as unpaid family helpers, can be possibly in the hope of increasing family income in the times of unprecedented distress and lack of alternative employment opportunities.

Underestimation of the open unemployment:

- The usual status is based on a loose definition of work that underestimates open unemployment.
- Open unemployment **is the situation when a person is willing to work, is educated but is unable to get a job and work.**
- **Using the current weekly status approach, the unemployment rate remained unchanged** during the last three years.
- Hence, there is the **need for an alternative measure of unemployment.**

ISSUES

Projection of disturbing picture:

- While the headline numbers projected by the PLFS data seem pleasing, a detailed analysis brings to light a disturbing picture.

Impact of lockdown:

- The PLFS survey for April-June 2020 has overlapped with the national lockdown.
- Numerous small-scale surveys have reported about the massive earnings loss during the lockdown. This indicates that the PLFS data may underestimate the loss of earnings and fall in consumption during the lockdown.
- Hence, this is a missed opportunity for the official survey to capture the labour market dynamics during the lockdown.

Gap in statistical data:

- There is no official data on poverty after 2011-12 or on farm income after 2013, and no recent data on migrant workers.
- While the consumer expenditure data for 2017-18 was buried, the data on situation assessment of agricultural households are not yet released, despite being conducted before the latest PLFS.

- Hence, there is an urgent need for strengthening of the statistical system.

WAYFORWARD

- **Minor tweaks in future PLFS surveys** can fill the data gaps.
 1. At present, PLFS captures incomes from agriculture and monthly consumer expenditure, but the questions on these aspects lack credibility.
 2. The predecessor to the PLFS, the National Sample Survey employment and unemployment surveys, collected data on consumer expenditure using a detailed schedule.
 3. PLFS must do the same.
 - **Adding questions on costs and returns from cultivation and related activities** can also capture more accurate data on agricultural incomes.
 - **Lengthening the questionnaire may result in additional costs— but the costs of the absence of reliable and timely data on important policy-relevant indicators are far higher.**

2) Criminalising welfare issues

GS-2 Issues Arising Out of Design & Implementation of Policies

CONTEXT

- The Supreme Court has recently issued notice on a writ petition on **the condition that the petition's prayer seeking a direction to "restrain beggars and vagabonds/homeless from begging on traffic junctions, markets and public places to avoid the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in all the States and Union Territories across India" be modified to focus on the rehabilitation of those forced to beg for a living.**

ANALYSING THE JUDGEMENT

- In issuing such notice the Supreme Court has rightly observed that **being compelled to beg was a socio-economic issue** that could not be remedied by directing begging restrictions.
- Such economic issues instead **require a welfare response from the state.**
- Thus, the order can be a **useful guide to making and implementing criminal law.**

WHAT SHOULD BE CRIMINALISED?

Considering welfare response:

- When decisions about criminalisation are being taken by the legislature, an important **point of consideration should be whether the issue sought to be addressed might be better suited to a welfare response.**
- There are several examples of welfare issues against which the coercive force of criminal law has inappropriately been deployed:
- **In Harsh Mander & Anr. v. Union of India (2018)**, the Supreme Court had noted that the criminalisation of beggary did not address the structural deprivations that drove people to beg.
- Similarly, **the criminalisation of triple talaq by the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019**, purportedly to 'protect' Muslim women, does nothing to address the structural gender inequality, social stigma, poor employment options, and lack of state support which actually cause the deprivations associated with divorce (and not just with triple talaq).

Creation of better employment venues:

- **Socio-economic marginalisation and poverty may frequently make people susceptible to exploitation**, whether through poorly paid/unpaid labour, trafficking and sex work, or indeed, begging.
- Hence, it is not only important to ensure that **criminal liability is imposed on the exploitators**, but also to **create alternative, well-paying and dignified employment.**
- This is essential not only to prevent exploitative practices, but also to rehabilitate those who have been rescued from such practices.
- Such employment can be made accessible by **imparting requisite education and skills, and by providing the social security nets.**
- **For example-** to 'rescue' a sex worker is meaningless unless they have a legitimate way out of such work, an option that is materially (not morally) better for them.

CONCERNS

- Focusing on the welfare aspect of exploitative practices sheds light on **structural forms of impoverishment**, and

on who is most likely to be exploited as a result.

- Such a focus also **exposes the liability of the state and society in creating the vulnerabilities of those prone to exploitation.**
- This recognition is reflected in the apt remarks of the High Court in **Suhail Rashid Bhat v. State of Jammu & Kashmir and Others (2019)**, "Begging is also in fact evidence of the failure of the Government as well as the society at large to protect its citizens from debilitating effects of extreme poverty and to ensure to them basics of food, clothing, shelter, health, education, essential concomitants of the right to life ensured under Article 21 of the Constitution of India."

WAY FORWARD

- When evaluating the necessity of a criminalisation response to something that is essentially or even partly a welfare issue, **it is crucial to question whose interests the law does, in fact, serve.**
- There is **need to address the questions such as:**
 1. Does it help the vulnerable and/or the exploited, or is it a tool of persecution?
 2. Does it cater to the morality and sensibilities of the powerful?
 3. Does it hide the failures of the state?
 4. Or is it a quick fix that allows the government to abdicate and divert attention away from its welfare responsibilities?
- It is only then we, as citizens, hope to hold the state accountable in its use of the power to criminalise conduct.

3) Providing horizontal quota: the Bihar way

GS-2 Reservation, Affirmative action, Women empowerment

NEWS

- Bihar government recently announced **33% horizontal reservation for women** in State engineering and medical colleges.

CONTEXT

- There are two types of reservations - Horizontal reservation and Vertical reservation.

- Reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) is referred to as vertical reservation.
- Bihar at present has 60% reservation in the State higher educational institutions along the six vertical categories (SCs, STs, EWS and so on).
- On the other hand, **horizontal reservation** refers to the equal opportunity provided to other categories of beneficiaries, such as **women, veterans, the transgender community, and individuals with disabilities, cutting through the vertical categories.**
- Horizontal reservation for women in Bihar will be distributed across all the vertical categories, including the **non-reserved 40% seats open to all.**
- The Vertical reservation for women is in line with **Article 15(3) of the Constitution** which allows governments to make special provisions for women and children.

BENEFIT OF VERTICAL RESERVATION FOR WOMEN

- Vertical reservation, if properly implemented, can become an **important driver for improving the FLFP (female labour force participation) rate.** FLFP is consistently declining and is worryingly low.
- World Bank data show that the FLFP **came down to 21% in 2019 from 31.79% in 2005.**
- **FLFP rate** is even problematic in Bihar. Only **6.4% and 3.9% women** were employed in the **urban and rural areas of Bihar** compared to the all-India figures of **20.4% and 24.6% respectively.**
- Patriarchal control of women and systemic gender discrimination cannot be defeated by government intervention alone; State welfare schemes can go a long way in challenging them.

STEP TAKEN IN BIHAR FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

- In the last three decades, Bihar has implemented **various initiatives to empower women** and improve their representation in various fields.
- In 1992, Bihar had announced **two consecutive days of menstrual leave** for women employees in government services.

- In 2006, Bihar became the **first State to reserve 50% seats for women in Panchayati Raj** institutions even though the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution which came into force in 1993, mandated only one-third seats for them.
- In 2013, the Bihar government made a **provision for 50% reservation for women in cooperative societies and reserved 35% seats** for them in police recruitment.
- Reservation in police recruitment for women led to a swift jump in the number of women officers in the police department **to 25.3% in 2020, more than double the national average of 10.3%, from 3.3% in 2015.**
- In 2016, the government extended the **35% reservation for women to all government jobs** in Bihar for which direct recruitment is made.
- In 2006, Bihar government launched **Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana** for Class 9 and 10 girl students which provided for a conditional **cash transfer programme** for secondary education of girls.
- The scheme helped in enhancing enrolment of girl students and encouraged girls to complete education and delay marriage.

WAY AHEAD

- Horizontal reservation for the women in Bihar is a laudable step. However, the government should also take steps to deal with low **female literacy rate and FLFP rate.**
- The government should also do away with **hiring workers on contract** and make all the **current contractual workers permanent.**
- **India Human Development Survey-II** found that women with **low levels of education and from rural areas are relatively more active in the labour market** compared to women with middle or high school education.
- Therefore, the Bihar government also needs to ensure that **women don't fall out of the labour market** as they become more educationally qualified.
- The Bihar government should also **extend the engineering and medical quota for women to all** institutions of higher

education, including private colleges and universities.

- Also quota allotted to Women can be increased to **40-45%, if not 50%**, and the category can be renamed as **'women and transgender persons'**.
- Other State governments and the Union government should follow the Bihar government's lead and **introduce horizontal quota for women (and in addition, for transgender persons)** in higher educational institutions as well as State employment as these measures will go a long way in reducing gender disparity in the country.

4) Getting back in business in the Indo-Pacific

GS-2 International Relations

CONTEXT

- Recently three top officials of the United States - **Deputy Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State** have visited many crucial countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- These visits by the officials are the part of a deliberate strategic re-focus of the United States, **away from the 20 years of Afghanistan and Iraq and towards maritime Asia**, where COVID-19, climate change and China are the compelling challenges.

IN EAST ASIA AND OMAN

- The countries which were covered in this region are **Japan, South Korea and Mongolia and China**.
- Throughout the trip, the officials reaffirmed the **U.S. commitment to working with allies and partners for the promotion of peace and prosperity and upholding a 'rules-based order'**, the code word critical of China's behaviour.
- Also the discussions with Japanese, covered not only the **present state of the Japan-U.S. alliance** but also **other issues including Myanmar and COVID-19**.
- In addition to this, a **trilateral meeting involving Japan and South Korea** took place in a bid to smoothen tensions afflicting the two east Asian neighbours.
- The **visit to Mongolia marked the first such high profile visit since 2016**.

- The visit gains all the more importance given the fact that Mongolia enjoys a close relationship with China.
- In the China visit, it was conveyed that **the U.S. welcomed competition but did not seek confrontation with China**.
- Also the dismal human rights situation in Xinjiang was discussed during the visit.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN DYNAMICS

- The visit in this region covered three important ASEAN member-states — **Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines**.
- The visits turned out to be the most productive, as it **reiterated the necessity for a U.S. military presence in the region**.
- The visit listed China's objectionable actions, including **"Beijing's claim to the vast majority of the South China Sea which has no basis in international law, and aggression against India"**.
- Clear indications were given by the U.S. administration that, **though it does not seek confrontation it will not flinch when their interests will be threatened**.
- Also in a joint statement, **Singapore and the U.S.** agreed that **America's presence in the region is "vital for its peace, prosperity and stability"**.
- The U.S. side appreciated Singapore's logistical support to U.S. military aircraft and vessels.
- The visit also focussed on developing closer defence cooperation of Vietnam with the U.S.
- As a result of the visit, **the Philippines agreed to full restoration of the Visiting Forces Agreement with the U.S.**
 - Visiting Forces Agreement provides the legal foundation for the U.S. military presence in the Philippines.

IN SOUTH ASIA AND KUWAIT

- The India visit was more in the **nature of a consultative**, confirmatory dialogue rather than one that results in signing of new agreements.
- The discussions with the Prime Minister, the National Security Adviser and the External Affairs Minister, clearly brought out **that the areas of convergence between the two nations are expanding and the areas of divergence are shrinking**.
- **On the Afghanistan issue, the proximity of perceptions was emphasised**, although

this did not conceal the differences in their perspectives.

- **On the Indo-Pacific**, however, the convergence was clear, with the two Foreign Ministers agreeing to **cooperate on a range of geopolitical and geo-economic issues**.
- The visit also clarified that the **Quad was not “a military alliance”**. It defined the **Quad as four like-minded countries “coming together to work collectively on regional challenges, while reinforcing international rules and values”**.

THE TAKEAWAYS

- The three visits by the U.S. officials signals towards:
- **First**, that America’s China policy and the Rest of the Indo-Pacific policy will run in tandem, with inner consistency.
- **Second**, Washington maintains a tough attitude towards Beijing, but it desires to keep the doors open for dialogue.
- The relationship with China is marked by three characteristics — adversarial, competitive and cooperative — and is likely to stay that way.
- **Third**, the U.S. is willing to resist and counter China firmly, but with the full engagement of and contribution by the like-minded states of the region.

CONCLUSION

- The visits indicate that the **U.S. is back and is willing to lead — but the region will have to seriously step up too** and participate actively to maintain peace and prosperity. Asia can ill-afford to be an introverted bystander.

5) No fundamental right to strike

GS-2 Fundamental Rights, Government Policies & Interventions

CONTEXT

- Recently, the Parliament has passed the Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021.

ANALYSING THE BILL

- The bill introduced intends to:
 1. **provide for the maintenance of essential defence services** so as “to secure the security of the nation and the life and property of the public at large”.
 2. **prevent staff of the government-owned ordnance factories from going on strike**.

The Bill seeks to:

- **empower the government to declare services mentioned in it as “essential defence services” and prohibit strikes and lockouts in any industrial establishment or unit engaged in such services.**
- However, the Minister had orally assured the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) employees that their service conditions will not be affected.

STATES ALREADY HAVE SIMILAR PROVISIONS

- This is not the first time that strikes by government employees are being made explicitly illegal by the government.
- **The Madhya Pradesh (and Chhattisgarh) Civil Services Rules, 1965**, prohibit demonstrations and strikes by government servants and direct the competent authorities to treat the durations as unauthorised absence.
- A strike under this rule includes **“total or partial cessation of work”, a pen-down strike, a traffic jam, or any such activity resulting in cessation or retardation of work**.
- Other States too have similar provisions.

PROVISIONS IN FAVOUR OF SUCH LEGISLATION

- Under **Article 33** of the Constitution- **Parliament, by law, can restrict or abrogate the rights of the members of the armed forces or the forces charged with the maintenance of public order so as to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and maintenance of discipline among them**.
- Thus, for the armed forces and the police, where discipline is the most important prerequisite, even the fundamental right to form an association can be **restricted under Article 19(4) in the interest of public order and other considerations**.

STANCE OF SUPREME COURT

- The Supreme Court in **Delhi Police v. Union of India (1986)** upheld the restrictions to form association by the members of the non-gazetted police force after the Police Forces (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1966, and the **Rules as amended by Amendment Rules, 1970**, came into effect.
 1. It upheld that- **while the right to freedom of association is fundamental,**

recognition of such association is not a fundamental right.

2. Thus, the court held- Parliament can by law regulate the working of such associations by imposing conditions and restrictions on their functions.

▪ In **T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu (2003)**, the Supreme Court held that the **employees have no fundamental right to resort to strike.**

1. It held that there is **prohibition to go on strike under the Tamil Nadu Government Servants' Conduct Rules, 1973.** Also, **there is no moral or equitable justification to go on strike.**

2. The court further said that **government employees cannot hold the society to ransom by going on strike.**

CONCLUSION

▪ There is **no fundamental right to strike under Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution.

▪ Strikes cannot be justified on any equitable ground.

▪ Strike as a weapon is mostly misused which results in chaos.

▪ Therefore, though the employees of OFB have threatened to go on strike, **Parliament, which has the right to restrict even the fundamental rights of the armed forces, is well within its right to expressly prohibit resorting to strike.**

6) India-Nepal flood management needs course correction

GS-1 Geographical Features and their Location, Disaster Management

CONTEXT

▪ Despite the efforts made by the Bihar government on the ground, people in the north Bihar (the Mithilanchal region) continue to suffer from perennial flooding.

▪ Already facing a humanitarian crisis following the **novel coronavirus pandemic**, this year the situation in the region has worsened due to **the extra rainfall.**

▪ Unfortunately, this chronic issue which is making over five crore people of the north Bihar in India and Terai in Nepal so vulnerable, **does not seem to get the attention it deserves by policymakers on both sides of the border.**

FUNDAMENTALS OF FLOODING

▪ Historically, **Bihar has been known to be India's most flood-prone State.**

▪ The Flood Management Improvement Support Centre (FMISC), Department of Water Resources, Government of Bihar estimates that **76% of the population in north Bihar faces the recurring threat of flood devastation.**

▪ About **73.06% of the land area** is flood affected.

▪ A large part of north Bihar, adjoining Nepal, is drained by a number of rivers that have their catchments in the steep and geologically nascent Himalayas.

○ Originating in Nepal, the high discharge and sediment load in the **Kosi, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla Balan, Mahananda and Adhwara Group** wreak havoc in the plains of Nepal's Terai and Bihar.

▪ The FMISC says- **About 65% of the catchment area of these rivers falls in Nepal/Tibet and only 35% of the catchment area lies in Bihar.**

▪ A review by Kale (1997) indicated that the plains of North Bihar have recorded the highest number of floods during the last 30-years.

1. The total area affected by floods has also increased during these years.

2. The Flood of 2004 demonstrates the severity of the flood problem when a vast area was badly affected by the floods of Bagmati, Kamla & Adhwara groups of rivers causing loss of about 800 human lives, even when Ganga, the master drain was flowing low."

EFFORTS MADE BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT

▪ The government in Bihar has made few noticeable structural changes, **with renewed approaches in infrastructure augmentation for dams and reservoirs, detention basins, embankments and channel improvement** in the last few years.

▪ Non-structural measures were also adopted in later years such as **floodplain management, flood forecasting and warning, flood insurance and financial compensation.**

▪ This year, Bihar's Disaster Management Department released two documents titled:

“Pre-Flood Preparedness” and “Flood Control Order 2021”.

- The aim was to **help the local administration** in terms of **preparedness and having in place a relief support system**.

CONCERNS

- Unfortunately, this chronic issue which is making over five crore people of the north Bihar in India and Terai in Nepal so vulnerable, **does not seem to get the attention it deserves by policymakers on both sides of the border**.
- **Indifferent attitude shown by Kathmandu** on matters of floods and water management in recent years.

COOPERATION OF THE PAST

- Unlike the indifference shown by Kathmandu on matters of floods and water management in recent years, **the history of cooperation between India and Nepal for embankments starting in the 1950s is worth looking at**.
- When work on the Kosi embankments started in January 1955, a group of retired Nepali soldiers came over voluntarily to join hands with Indian volunteers and start the work.
- Such a progressive government-citizen interface could not sustain itself and water cooperation between the two countries for a common cause waned.
- Consequently, not much has happened barring the use of water resources for hydroelectric generation.

WAYFORWARD

- **The solution to the issue of chronic flooding lies in revisiting the old plans and arrangements between India and Nepal**.
- This is because flood control in Bihar is just not possible till a **dedicated intergovernmental panel is formed through a bilateral mechanism between India and Nepal**, which in turn can study, assess and offer solutions to this shared crisis.
- In the mainstream political and policy establishments, greater **attention needs to be given to this annual calamity and its devastating effects** on lives and livelihoods.
- With a **long-term strategy of water management cooperation** India and Nepal

need to be in dialogue to end the crisis of flooding every year.

- Also there is a need for **greater sensitisation on climatic imbalances and sustainable development**.
- The same flood-affected regions also face the issue of drought and a sinking water table.
- **Hence, the course correction is needed to re-establish water cooperation as a common cause and draw inspiration for joint action from the 1950s**.

7) South Asia’s emerging digital transformation

GS-3 Technology, Digital Transformation

CONTEXT

- The Covid-19 has resulted in a shift to remote work and online education.
- This has resulted in an unprecedented spike in Internet penetration. Even smaller nations such as Nepal recorded almost an **11% increase in broadband Internet users**.
- The pandemic-induced suspension of bricks-and-mortar businesses spurred South Asia’s **embrace of e-commerce, boosted by digital payment systems**. Bangladesh alone witnessed an **increase of 70-80% in online sales in 2020, generating \$708.46 million in revenues**.
- Not only in internet services, there has been unprecedented **digitisation of health-care services** to provide novel solutions to the public health crises.
- For example, In India COVID-19 accelerated the launch of the **National Digital Health Mission** which enhanced the **accessibility and the efficiency of health-care services** by creating a unique health ID for every citizen.
- Pandemic have transformed other sectors like e-commerce boosted by digital payment systems. For example, Bangladesh alone during the period witnessed an increase of **70-80% in online sales in 2020, generating \$708.46 million** in revenues.

CHALLENGES DUE TO DIGITAL DIVIDE

- Biggest challenge that exists includes the **issue of digital access and affordability**.
- For example, despite having the world’s second largest online market, **50% of**

India's population are without Internet with 59% for Bangladesh and 65% for Pakistan.

- **51% of South Asian women** were excluded from social protection measures during the pandemic due to **monetary and health assistance schemes** distributed online.
- Children are also at the receiving end of the digital divide with **88% lacking access to Internet powered home schooling**. There is fear that this disruption could permanently put **children out of school, place girls at risk of early marriage, and push poor children into child labour costing economies billions of dollars in future earnings**.
- Businesses too have **paid a heavy price for the gap in digital solutions**, with many South Asian firms failing to embrace **e-commerce or other cloud-based technologies** to survive the financial chaos of the novel coronavirus pandemic. For example: the region **recorded a 64% decline in sales, with small and women-led firms faring the worst**.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION- THE INEVITABILITY

- With adoption of advanced technologies such as **cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the Internet of things, Big Data, etc.**, digital transformation is inevitable.
- At the forefront of Asian digitalisation are countries such as **Singapore, Japan, and South Korea** recognised as global technological hubs.
- The digital boom in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economies is pushing a **"common market" initiative**, fostering regional economic integration and enhancing global competitiveness.
- South Asia has also made significant **strides in the adoption of digital technologies** with countries like **Bangladesh (Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021)**, India taking the lead.
- E-commerce has potential to drive the post-pandemic growth in South Asia, providing new business opportunities and access to larger markets.
- Covid digital transformation has shown that **timely, inclusive, and sustainable digital**

transformation can not only **bolster productivity and growth** but also serve as a panacea for some of the region's socio-economic divides.

WAY FORWARD

- To reap the dividends of digital transformation, South Asia needs to **address legal, regulatory and policy gaps as well as boost digital skills**.
- Regulatory roadblocks need to be addressed as **e-commerce regulations are weak in South Asia**. Focus has to be there in **customer protection, digital and market access regulation, etc**.
- Governments and businesses need to come together to revamp the education system to meet the demand for digital skills and online platforms as there would be **no digital revolution without universal digital literacy**.
- There also needs to be stringent cybersecurity measures as **crossflow of data and personal information results in vulnerabilities**.
- There is also a need to address constraints in **interregional trade flow like regulatory barriers on currency flows** which inhibits online payment to transport-related constraints for cross-border e-commerce activities. In South Asia, only a **third of the inter-regional trade potential** has been exploited, losing out on \$23 billion in revenues
- There is a need to enhance concerted collaboration at all levels between eight south Asian nations which was seen during the pandemic. During the pandemic, South Asian nations joined hands to **collectively battle the crises by contributing towards a COVID-19 emergency fund, exchanging data and information on health surveillance**, sharing research findings, and developing an online learning platform for health workers.

8) India's school children need their childhood back

GS -2 Health and Education

NEWS

- With improvement in Covid condition, there is a need to open schools in India.

CONTEXT

- With improvement in Covid situation, the economy is open. **Malls, bars, restaurants, and some offices are open**, but schools have been closed for **16 months and counting citing safety of the schools as reasons**.
- There have been sporadic openings for the **higher grade students, and the Board examinations**, the focus on school education is missing.
- Although focus on higher education is justified as it determines the college, career and chance for a good life for many, neglect of the school needs to be avoided.

IMPACT OF CLOSED SCHOOL

- School education teaches children to **share, wait for their turn, negotiate, and compromise**. Close schools deprive children of their social contact and hence deprive them of essential learning and development.
- For children from economically weak backgrounds, schools are a **key source of nutrition and safe spaces from the chaos** of their homes. For those whose parents can't afford home tutors, **denial of education results in learning losses** and, ultimately, denial of a chance to earn a livelihood.
- For parents, school closures have **added to childcare and teaching duties**.

EXPERT OPINION ON OPENING OF SCHOOL

- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) believes that it will be **wise to open primary schools first and then secondary schools** as children are at low risk of developing severe COVID-19 compared to adults. But before that we have to ensure that all support staff whether it be school **bus drivers, teachers and other staff in the school** need to be vaccinated
 - Experts like Dr. Randeep Guleria, AIIMS Director says that in less than 18 years of age group, it was found that more than **50 per cent of children and in some areas, more than 80 per cent of children from both urban and rural areas had antibodies**.
1. This means they were **already infected and developed antibodies**. Hence there is a need to start schools where the community level of infection is low. A **one-**

size-fits-all approach across India will not work.

2. Thus, in the states like **Kerala or Maharashtra**, where COVID-19 cases could be surging again, students should stay home, while their counterparts in other States **where positivity rates are lower, can start going to school**.

MEASURES THAT NEED TO BE TAKEN

- Schools can't be opened overnight. A large amount of preparation is required and this can be done by collecting **input from recommendations given by various committees including World Bank, SRCC Children's Hospital, Mumbai and the Lancet COVID-19 Commission India Task Force**.
- As immediate measures, governments should **call for lists of school staff and procure full vaccination for them**. There is also a need to undertake public campaigns to make **school staff and parents aware of the low risk of transmission in schools** and low severity in children.
- Scientists should confirm if the gap between doses can be made shorter akin to health-care workers. Also there is need to work on aspects like
 1. issuing guidance for **staggered re-opening of primary schools**.
 2. upgrade school infrastructure to **facilitate a hybrid system of learning** where parents who do not wish to send their children to school have the choice to continue with online learning.
 3. train **school teachers in hybrid learning**.
 4. formulate and issue guidance on COVID-19 protocols to be adopted by schools with detail plan like
 - distancing to the extent possible
 - outdoor classes weather-permitting
 - masking, hand hygiene, and proper ventilation
 - finalise **logistics such as packed meals and transport**.
 - ensure **availability of medical consultation so that staff and parents need not scramble for assistance**.

WAY FORWARD

- It is high time that as parents we recognise the **costs of isolation and online learning** for our young children. We **cannot wait for**

children to get vaccinated because this may take years.

- It is true that we cannot expect **schools to provide a 100% guarantee** that our children will be safe. We must **build mutual trust among governments, schools, and citizens**.
- 1. Each of us **must implement and adhere to COVID-19** safety protocols recommended by scientists.
- 2. Each of us must **be vigilant and responsible, ensure all adults in our**

households are fully vaccinated and ensure children stay home if sick or exposed.

- We cannot let the **status quo continue any longer**. We need to stop asking whether **schools are safe and start acknowledging that in-person school is essential**. We need to come together to fix that problem and give our young children their childhood back.

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Why cloudbursts could become more frequent?

What's in the news?

- Recently, seven people were killed, 17 injured and over 35 missing after a cloudburst hit a remote village of Jammu and Kashmir. Cloudburst events have been reported from several places in J&K, Union Territory of Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

What is a cloudburst?

- Cloudbursts are **short-duration, intense rainfall events over a small area**. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), it is a weather phenomenon with unexpected precipitation **exceeding 100mm/h over a geographical region of approximately 20-30 square km**.
- A study published last year studied the meteorological factors behind the cloudburst over the Kedarnath region.
- They analysed atmospheric pressure, atmospheric temperature, rainfall, cloud water content, cloud fraction, cloud particle radius, cloud mixing ratio, total cloud cover, wind speed, wind direction, and relative humidity during the cloudburst, before as well as after the cloudburst.
- The results showed that during the cloudburst, **the relative humidity and cloud cover was at the maximum level with low temperature and slow winds**.

Will we see more such cloudbursts?

- Several studies have shown that **climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of cloudbursts in many cities across the globe**.
- In May, the **World Meteorological Organization** noted that there is about a **40% chance of the annual average global temperature temporarily reaching 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level in at least one of the next five years**.
- It added that there is a **90% likelihood of at least one year between 2021 and 2025 becoming the warmest on record and dislodge 2016 from the top rank**.
- As temperatures increase the atmosphere can hold more and more moisture and this

moisture comes down as a short very intense rainfall for a short duration probably half an hour or one hour resulting in flash floods in the mountainous areas and urban floods in the cities.

- Also, there is evidence suggesting that globally short duration rainfall extremes are going to become more intense and frequent.
- According to experts, with warming climate or climate change, the future years will surely witness these cloudburst events in increased frequency in the future.

2) Samagra Shiksha

About the scheme

- Samagra Shiksha is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from **pre-school to class 12**. The **centrally sponsored scheme** has been prepared with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes.
- It subsumes the three Schemes of **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE)**.
- The Integrated Scheme **envisages the 'school' as a continuum** from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels.
- It was introduced in the Union Budget, 2018-19.

Objectives

- The major objectives of the Scheme are
 - Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students;
 - Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education;
 - Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education;
 - Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions;
 - Promoting Vocationalisation of education and
 - Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009;

Measures taken

- **Bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education** is one of the major objectives of the scheme. The scheme reaches out to **girls and children** belonging to SCs, STs, minority communities and transgender. The scheme also gives **attention to urban deprived children, children affected by periodic migration and children living in remote and scattered habitations**.
- Acknowledging that issues such as lack of toilets in schools and unavailability of schools within a short distance play a big role in school dropouts, especially among girls, the scheme supports states for **strengthening of school infrastructure including in rural areas**.
- Under Samagra Shiksha, various interventions have been targeted to promote education, which include opening of schools in the neighbourhood, provision of free text-books up to Class VIII, uniforms to all girls and SC, ST, BPL boys up to class VIII, provision of gender segregated toilets in all schools, teachers' sensitisation programmes to promote girls' participation, construction of residential quarters for teachers in remote/hilly areas/in areas with difficult terrain.
- In addition, there is a provision for **twinning of schools** under which well-functioning private or government schools in urban or semi-urban areas are linked with schools located in rural areas for interaction and exchange of experience.
- The Department of School Education and Literacy is also implementing the **component of vocational skills training** under the umbrella of Samagra Shiksha.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **extension of the centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha scheme from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2026** with an estimated outlay of around ₹3 lakh crore.
- The scheme is in accordance with **Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG-4)** and has now been **aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** to ensure inclusive and equitable, quality and holistic school education.
- The scheme covers 11.6 lakh schools, over 15.6 crore students and 57 lakh teachers of

government and aided schools (from pre-primary to senior secondary level).

New Interventions

- Keeping with the NEP's recommendations on encouraging Indian languages, the revamped scheme has a **new component for appointment of language teachers**, which includes salaries, and training costs as well as bilingual books and teaching learning material.
- In accordance with NEP's recommendation on pre-primary education, Samagra Shiksha will now include **funding to support pre-primary sections at government schools**, both in terms of teacher training as well as ₹500 per child per year for teaching and learning materials, indigenous toys and games and play-based activities. **Master trainers** for pre-primary teachers and anganwadi workers will be supported under the scheme and in-service teacher **training for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**.
- Another new component is the **NIPUN Bharat initiative for foundational literacy and numeracy**, which will get an annual provision of ₹500 per child for learning materials, ₹150 per teacher for manuals and resources and ₹10-20 lakh per district for assessment.
- As part of digital initiatives, there is a provision for **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs and smart classrooms**, including support for digital boards, virtual classrooms and DTH channels which have become more important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic is likely to cause more school dropouts as well, so it is important that Samagra Shiksha now includes a provision to **support out of school children from age 16 to 19 with funding of ₹2000 per grade to complete their education via open schooling**.
- The Centre also plans to pay students their **Right to Education entitlements such as textbooks, uniforms and transport allowance in the form of direct benefit transfer (DBT)**.
- There will also be a **greater focus on skills and vocational education**, both for students in school and dropouts.

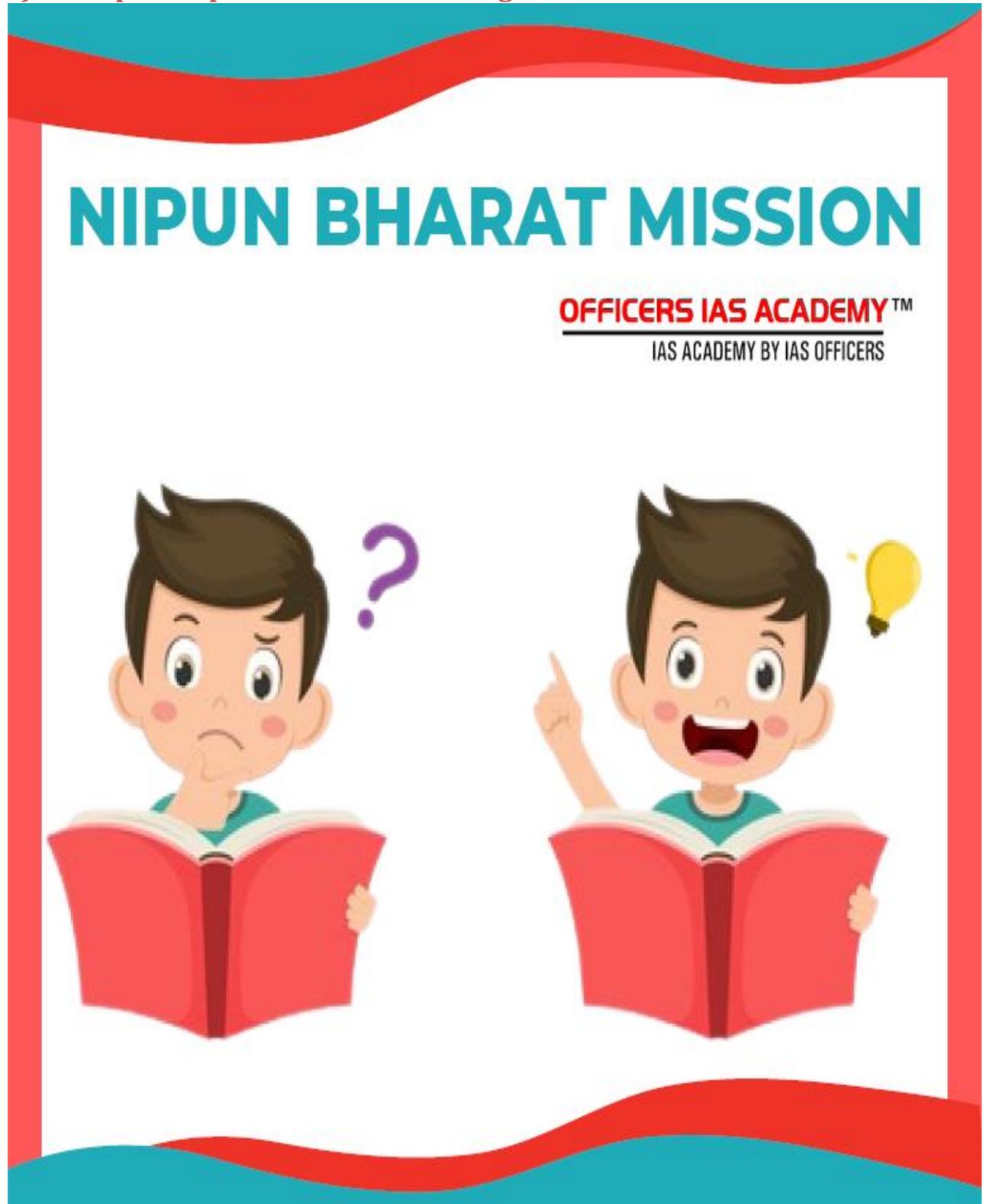
- Other features of the revamped scheme includes:
- 1. **Incinerator and sanitary pad vending machines** in all girls' hostels;
- 2. training for 3 months for inculcating self-defence skills under '**Rani Laxmibai Atma Raksha Prashikshan**';

3. **additional Sports grant of up to Rs. 25,000 to schools** in case at least 2 students of that school win a medal in Khelo India school games at the National level.

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INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) Microplastic pollution in River Ganga



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WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Ministry of Education has launched the **National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN)**.



सत्यमेव जयते

Ministry of Education
Government of India



Reading



Understanding



Expressing
Understanding

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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.



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NEWS IN DETAIL



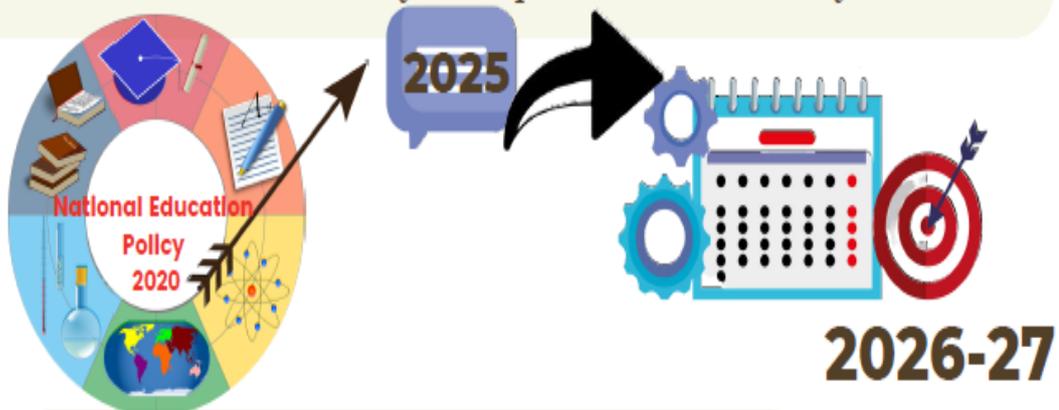
NIPUN Bharat will be implemented by the **Department of School Education and Literacy** and a **five-tier implementation mechanism** will be set up at the National- State- District- Block- School level in all States and UTs, **under the aegis of the centrally sponsored scheme of Samagra Shiksha.**



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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.

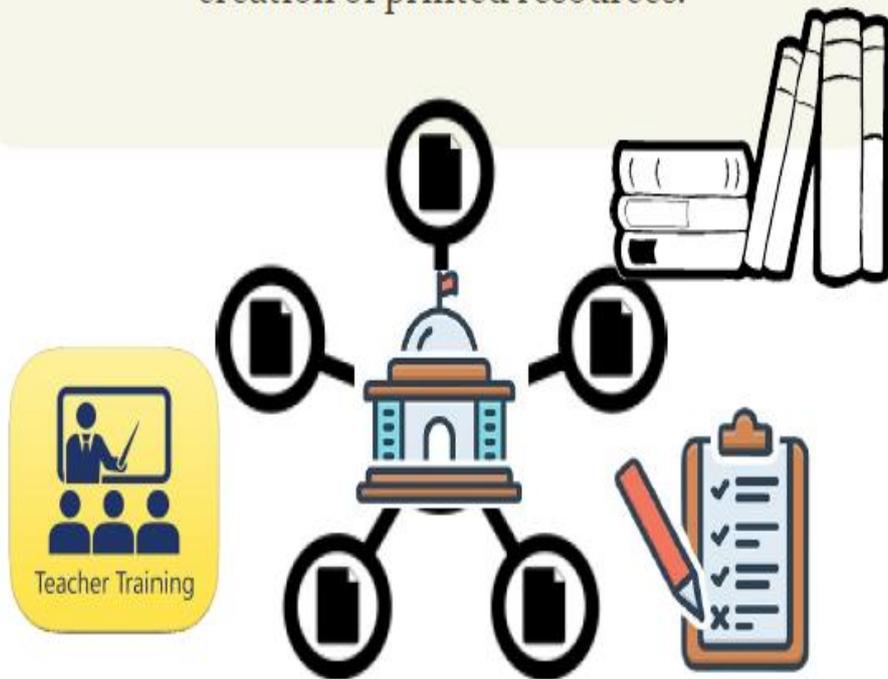


**SAMAGRA
SHIKSHA**

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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.



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It subsumes three existing schemes: **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shikskha Abhiyan (RMSA)** and **Teacher Education (TE)**.

SAMAGRA SHIKSHA SCHEME



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The aim of the scheme is to **treat school education holistically, from pre-school to Class XII.**



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