

OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 13 | 22nd August to 28th August, 2021



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) North-Eastern Region District SDG Index

What's in the news?

- NITI Aayog has released the first edition of the North-Eastern Region District Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Index.
- It is designed and developed by NITI Aayog in collaboration with the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) with technical inputs from the United Nations Development Programme and consultations with all the north-eastern States – who are the primary stakeholders of this tool.

SDG Index

- The Index measures the performance of the districts of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura on the SDG and their corresponding targets, and ranks the districts based on the same.
- These goals include no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, and reduced inequality.
- The index is based on NITI Aayog's SDG India Index – the principal and official tool for monitoring progress on SDGs at the national, State, and Union Territory level.
- The index offers insights into the social, economic, and environmental status of the region and its districts in their march towards achieving the SDGs.

Rankings

- East Sikkim, with a score of 75.87, ranks first in the region followed by districts Gomati and North Tripura (score 75.73) at the second position.
- The North Eastern Region District SDG Index will help in evidence-based

planning, resource allocation, both financial as well as others, and effective supervision and monitoring of developmental efforts for focused and balanced regional development.

- Of the 103 districts considered for ranking, 64 districts belonged to the front runner category (scored between 65-99) while 39 districts were in the performer category (50-64) in the composite score and ranking of districts.
- All districts in Sikkim and Tripura fell in the front runner category, while there were no districts in the aspirant (0-49) or achiever(100) categories.

2) AERA Bill, 2021

What's in the news?

- In the monsoon session, Parliament passed the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021.
- The Bill seeks to broaden the category of airports for which the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) of India can determine tariff by amending the definition of major airports.

Why has the definition of a major airport been amended?

- The AERA regulates tariffs and other charges for aeronautical services rendered at 'major' airports.
- Under the AERA Act, 2008, a major airport is one which "has, or is designated to have, annual passenger throughput in excess of three-and-a-half million or any other airport as the Central Government may, by notification, specify".
- However, it does not provide for determination of tariff for a group of airports.
- The Amendment Bill has amended the definition of a major airport to include "a group of airports" after the words "any other airport". The government hopes the

move will **encourage development of smaller airports and make bidding for airports with less passenger traffic attractive.**

- It plans to **club profitable airports with non-profitable ones and offer them as a package** for development in public-private partnership mode to expand connectivity.

Was there a need to amend the AERA Act?

- The Airports Authority of India (AAI) awarded six airports — Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram and Guwahati — for operations, management and development in public private partnership mode in 2019.
- Later that year, the AAI Board approved leasing of another six airports — Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Amritsar, Raipur, Indore and Tiruchi — for undertaking operations, management and development in public private partnership mode.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation plans to **club each of these airports with nearby smaller airports for joint development.** The move follows Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget Speech this year, in which she said the **government planned to monetise airports in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.**

How did AERA come into existence? What tariffs does it determine?

- The AERA Act was enacted in **2008** and an **independent economic regulator**, i.e., the

AERA was established in 2009 for determining the tariff for aeronautical services rendered at major airports.

- According to the AERA website, there are 25 major airports. For the remaining non-major airports owned by AAI, the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** approves the charges for aeronautical services.

What are the apprehensions?

- Though this Bill proposes to make changes which appear to be lucrative for the aviation sector, however, there is a **lack of clarity regarding what will be the criterion for deciding which airports get clubbed together.**
- This clarity needs to be brought in to achieve the objective of the Bill and the government will also have to ensure that a monopoly situation is not created in the airport operating business while awarding a group of airports to the same entity.
- Whether the government succeeds in balancing the interests of the private sector and the government's objective of privatising smaller airports will also depend on how the airports are packaged and if there are enough growth prospects, economic activity or tourist attractions near the non-profitable airports that will be clubbed.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) International Union for Conservation of Nature

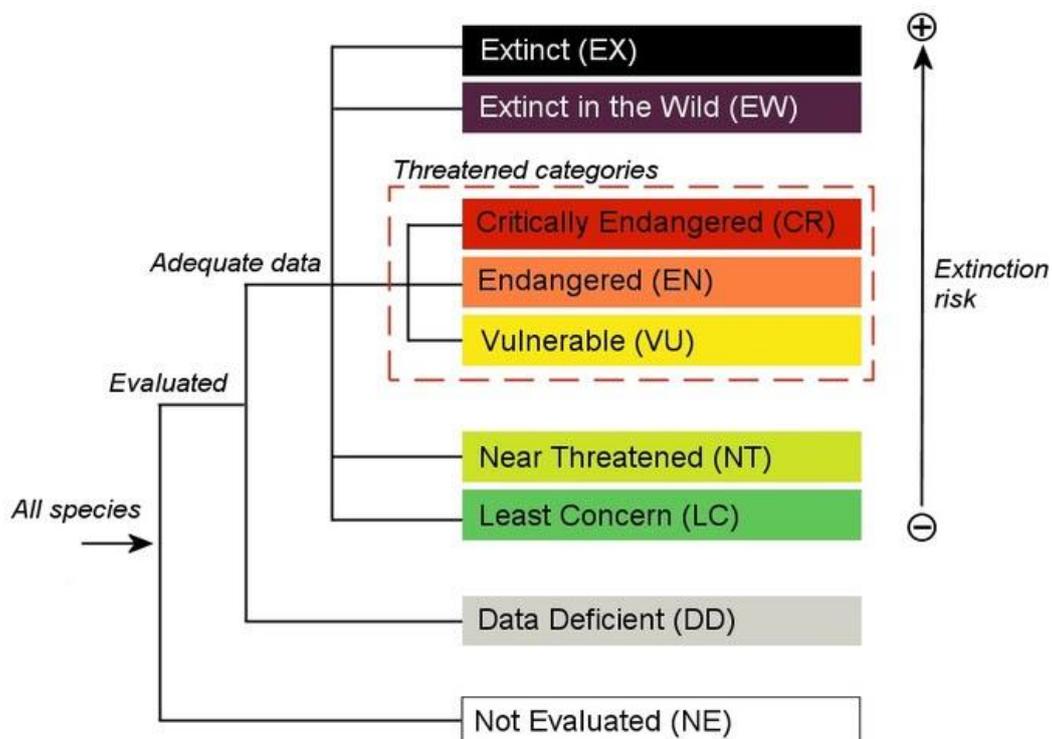
About IUCN

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership union composed of both government and civil society organisations.
- IUCN has **observer and consultative status** at the United Nations.
- As the first global environmental union, it brought together **governments and civil society organisations** with a shared goal to protect nature making itself the **world's largest and most diverse environmental network**.
- **Aim:** To encourage international cooperation and provide scientific knowledge and tools to guide conservation action.

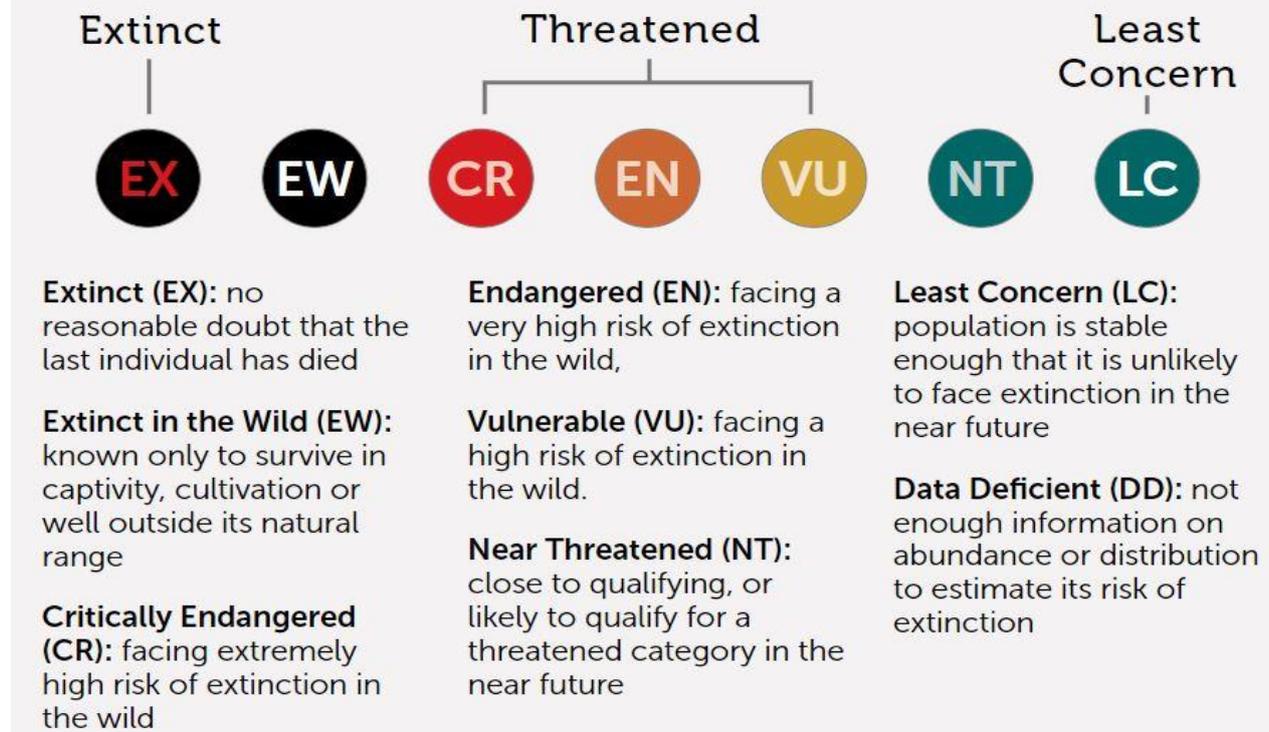
IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

- The IUCN Red List is a critical **indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity**.

- It is a powerful tool to inform and catalyze action for **biodiversity conservation** and policy change, critical to protecting the natural resources we need to survive.
- It provides information about **range, population size, habitat and ecology, use and/or trade, threats, and conservation actions** that will help inform necessary conservation decisions.
- The IUCN Red List divides species into nine categories: **Not Evaluated, Data Deficient, Least Concern, Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered, Extinct in the Wild and Extinct**.
- Currently, there are more than **134,400 species** on The IUCN Red List, with more than 37,400 species **threatened with extinction**, including 41% of amphibians, 34% of conifers, **33% of reef building corals**, 26% of mammals and 14% of birds.



THE RED LIST CATEGORIES



Why in News?

- Recently, the LIFE, an organization that works on environmental law, has asked IUCN to scrap the 'least concern' species category in assessment.
- LIFE's point about species of least concern and scrapping this category is valid, because it gives us a false sense of security.

2) National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

About NTCA

- National Tiger Conservation Authority is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- It performs functions as provided in the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- It is chaired by the **Minister in charge of the MoEF&CC**.
- NTCA has been at the forefront of **tiger conservation** work in India extending from the ground protection initiatives to science based monitoring of tigers and their habitat.
- NTCA in collaboration with the State Forest Departments, Conservation NGOs and the

Wildlife Institute of India (WII), conducts a National assessment for the "Status of Tigers, Co-predators, Prey and their Habitat" also known as **Tiger Census every four years (quadrennially)**.

Corbett Tiger Reserve

- Corbett is located on the foothills of Himalayas in **Uttarakhand**.
- The rivers **Ramganga, Pallaen and Sonanadi** flow through the valleys.
- The reserve is spread over **Bhabar and lower Shivalik region**.
- Project Tiger** was launched in 1973 from the **Dhikala zone of Corbett National Park in India** as a part of **Corbett Tiger Reserve**.
- The reserve has the **highest tiger density** in the country.

Why in News?

- The Delhi High Court has asked the National Tiger Conservation Authority to consider a petition to stop the **alleged illegal construction of bridges and walls** within tiger breeding habitat of the **Corbett Tiger Reserve**.

3) SUJALAM Campaign

What's in the news?

- The **Jal Shakti Ministry** has launched “**SUJALAM**”, a **100 days campaign** as a part of the ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ celebrations to create more and more **Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus villages** by undertaking waste water management at village level particularly through **creation of 1 million Soak-pits and also other Grey water** (domestic wastewater generated in households or office buildings) **management activities**.
- The **disposal of waste water and clogging of waterbodies** in the villages or on the outskirts of the villages remain one of the major problems.
- The effort of the campaign would be directed towards achieving the **ODF plus status** for villages across the country in an accelerated manner in a short time.
- The campaign will not only build desired infrastructure but will also aid in **sustainable management of water bodies**.
- It would boost the momentum of **Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin phase II** activities through community participation and it will increase awareness about ODF-plus activities.



About Swachh Bharat Mission

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), launched on 2nd October 2014, is a massive **mass movement** that aimed to create a Clean India by October 2, 2019 (150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi).
- **It has 2 components - urban and rural.**
- **SBM Urban** aims for the elimination of open defecation, conversion of unsanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradication of manual scavenging, municipal solid waste management and bringing about a behavioural change in people regarding healthy sanitation practices.
- **SBM Rural (Phase I)** aims to make India an open defecation free country. It seeks to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.
- The urban component of the mission is implemented by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**, and the rural component by the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- **Phase II of SBM Rural**
- In 2020, the Union Cabinet approved the **Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)** till 2024-25.
- It will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). The program will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.
- **ODF+ and ODF++**

- The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) launched the **ODF+ and ODF++** programmes towards sustaining and maintaining the toilets built under SBM Urban.
- It aims to further scale up and sustain the work undertaken by the cities after achieving the ODF status under Phase I of the SBM-Urban.
- Cities that have been certified ODF at least once, on the basis of the ODF protocols, are eligible to declare themselves as SBM-ODF & SBM-ODF++.
- While ODF+ focuses on **toilets with water, maintenance and hygiene**, ODF++ focuses on toilets with **sludge and septage management**.

4) Sambhar Lake needs faster restoration

About Sambhar Lake

- Sambhar Lake is the country's **largest inland saline water body** situated 80 km south-west of **Jaipur in Rajasthan**.
- The 230 sq.km. shallow, elliptical wetland straddles the districts of **Jaipur, Nagaur and Ajmer**.
- The water is fed to the lake mainly from the river **Mendha and Runpangarh**.
- Sambhar lake has been also designated as a **Ramsar site (wetland of international importance)**.
- It attracts thousands of **migratory birds** like Flamingos and other birds which migrate from Northern Asia every year.
- Birds like Beautiful pink flamingos, storks, pelicans, redshanks, sandpipers and black-winged stilts are worth a vision.

Why in News?

- According to an Expert study undertaken by a research team of the Central University of Rajasthan's School of Earth Sciences, the Sambhar Lake which is constantly **shrinking with the degradation of soil and water quality** and a decline in the population of migratory birds, needs a faster **restoration** for conservation of its wetland and salt brine worth \$300 million.

News in Detail

- The death of more than **20,000 birds** belonging to about 10 species which migrate annually to the lake died due to avian botulism due to which urgent action

to restore the lake's ecosystem for protecting the **birds and biodiversity** is recommended.

- Around **30%** of the Sambhar Lake's area had been lost due to **mining and other activities, including the illegal salt pan encroachments**.
- The past trends showed a **reduction of wetland from 30.7% to 3.4%** at a constant rate with its conversion into saline soil, which increased by 9.3% while the future predictions had depicted a **loss of 40% of wetland** and 120% of saline soil with net increase of 30% vegetation, 40% settlement, 10% salt pan and 5% barren land.

5) Notification on Eco-Sensitive Zone

What are Eco-Sensitive Zones ?

- As a general principle, **land falling within 10 kms** of the boundaries of the National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries are categorised as Eco-Fragile Zones or Eco-sensitive Zones.
- They are declared under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- The purpose of declaring Eco-sensitive Zones around National parks and Sanctuaries is to create some kind of **"Shock Absorber"** for the Protected Areas. They would also act as a **transition zone** from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
- The activities in the eco-sensitive zones would be of a **regulatory nature rather than prohibitive nature**, unless and otherwise so required.

Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary

- Deepor Beel (Beel means wetland or large aquatic body in Assamese) located about **10 km Southwest of Guwahati** city is considered as one of the **large and important riverine wetlands in the Brahmaputra Valley of lower Assam**.
- Deepor Beel is an open **freshwater lake** basin connected with a set of inflow and outflow channels.
- Deepor beel is the **State's only Ramsar Site** designated in 2002.
- It has been selected as one of the **Important Bird Area (IBA)** sites by Birdlife International.

- It is considered one of the staging sites for **migratory birds** in India; and for some of the large congregations of aquatic birds in Assam during winter.
- The wetlands expand up to 30 sq. km in summer and reduce to about 10 sq. km in winter.
- The wildlife sanctuary measures **4.1 sq. km within this wetland.**

Why in News?

- The Central government had notified an area around the boundary of Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary as an Ecosensitive Zone (ESZ) to prohibit industries or class of

industries and their operations and processes.

- The eco-sensitive zone of Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary will comprise an area of 148.9767 sq km.
- Prohibited activities within the ESZ will include commercial mining, stone quarrying, soil excavation, sand mining, crushing units, setting up of industries causing pollution, major hydro-electric projects, discharge of untreated effluents in either water or land, new wood-based industries, brick kilns, etc.

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ECONOMY

1) G-SAP 2.0

What's in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India has said it will conduct an open market purchase of government securities worth ₹25,000 crore under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 2.0).
- The RBI had conducted an open market purchase of government securities of Rs 1 lakh crore under the G-SAP 1.0 in the first quarter of the financial year 2021-22.

What is G-SAP?

- Under G-SAP, RBI commits to a **specific amount of open market purchases of government securities** with a view to **enabling a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve**.
- G-SAP is running alongside RBI's regular operations including **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF), open market operations (OMOs) and Operation Twist**.

What is Government Security (G-Sec)?

- G-Sec is a tradable instrument issued by the **Central Government or the State Governments**. It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation.
- Such securities are **short term** (usually called **treasury bills**, with original maturities of **less than one year**) or **long term** (usually called **Government bonds or dated securities** with original maturity of **one year or more**).
- In India, the **Central Government issues both**, treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the **State Governments issue only bonds or dated securities**, which are called the **State Development Loans (SDLs)**.
- G-Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called **risk-free gilt-edged instruments**.

2) Govt. cautions savers against Nidhi firms

About Nidhi companies

- Nidhi companies carry on the business of **accepting deposits and lending the same on demand amongst its members**. Their main objective is **cultivating the habit of thrift and saving amongst its members**.

- It is a **type of Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)** registered under the Companies Act 2013.
- One of the key features of a Nidhi company is the **limitation of its services to its members only**. This reduces the risk of non-payment of loans as the Company accepts deposits and offers loans to its members only.
- These companies are **not entitled to carry on** the business of Hire Purchase Financing, Insurance, Chit Funds and Acquisition of securities or Issue of any Debt Instruments.
- Nidhi Companies are regulated by the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**.
- Since Nidhi's come under one class of NBFCs, **RBI is empowered to issue directions** to them in matters relating to their deposit acceptance activities. However, in recognition of the fact that these Nidhi's deal with their shareholder-members only, RBI has **exempted the notified Nidhi's from the core provisions of the RBI Act and other directions applicable to NBFCs**.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has warned people against parking savings in Nidhi companies, after it found that a large number of entities operating as Nidhi companies had not applied to be recognised under **section 406 of the Companies Act, 2013** and the **amended Nidhi Rules of 2014** and were thus in violation of the law.
- The ministry urged people to verify the background of such entities before investing in them.

2) Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

About the Scheme

- In 2014, the government launched Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) to bring about **comprehensive financial inclusion** in the country.
- PMJDY envisages universal access to banking facilities with **at least one basic banking account for 'every adult', financial literacy, access to credit, insurance and pension facility**.

Features of PMJDY

- Under the scheme, a **basic savings bank deposit (BSBD) account** can be opened in any bank branch or Business Correspondent (Bank Mitra) outlet, by persons not having any other account.
- There is **no requirement to maintain any minimum balance** in PMJDY accounts.
- **Interest** is earned on the deposit in PMJDY accounts.
- **Rupay Debit card** is provided to PMJDY account holders.
- **Accident Insurance Cover** of Rs.1 lakh (enhanced to **Rs. 2 lakh** to new PMJDY accounts opened after 28.8.2018) is available with RuPay card issued to the PMJDY account holders.
- An **overdraft (OD) facility up to Rs. 10,000** to eligible account holders is available.
- PMJDY accounts are eligible for Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Bank (MUDRA) scheme.
- As per extant RBI guidelines, a PMJDY account is treated as inoperative if there are no customer induced transactions in the account for over a period of two years.

Why in News?

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has completed seven years of implementation.
- As on August 18, 2021, the **number of total PMJDY accounts stood at 43.04 crore**. Of this, **55.47 per cent** (23.87 crore) Jan-Dhan account holders are **women** and **66.69 per cent** (28.70 crore) holders are in **rural and semi-urban areas**.
- Out of total 43.04 crore PMJDY accounts, 36.86 crore or 85.6 per cent are operative, and the **average deposit per account is Rs 3,398**. Increase in average deposit is another indication of increased usage of accounts and inculcation of saving habit among account holders.

3) Fair and Remunerative Price

What's in the news?

- Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) is an arrangement for the **price to be paid to sugarcane farmers by the Sugar Mills** and

is announced each year by the Centre, on the advice of **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)** and after consultation with State Governments.

- The system **assures margins on account of profit and risk to farmers**, irrespective of the fact whether sugar mills generate profit or not and is not dependent on the performance of any individual sugar mill.
- Under the FRP system, the price paid to farmers for sugarcane is **not linked to the profits** generated by sugar mills. Instead, **FRP is based on the recovery rate of sugar from sugarcane**.
- In order to ensure that higher sugar recoveries are adequately rewarded and considering variations amongst sugar mills, the **FRP is linked to a basic recovery rate of sugar**, with a **premium payable to farmers for higher recoveries of sugar from sugarcane**.

What is the State Advised Price?

- State Advised Price or SAP is the price **announced by the state government, over and above the FRP**.
- Since sugar pricing comes under the **concurrent list**, the Supreme Court has held that both the centre and the state have the power to fix sugarcane prices — while the centre's price is the minimum price, states can set an SAP that is **usually higher than the centre's FRP**.

How are FRP and SAP different from MSP?

- While FRP and SAP are different versions of the **price for sugarcane that need to be paid by the mills to farmers**, **MSP or Minimum Selling Price** is the **assured price of sugar for mills**.
- **Prices of sugar are market driven** and depend on demand & supply of sugar. However, to ensure that the industry gets, at least, the minimum cost of sugar production so as to clear cane price dues to farmers, the concept of sugar MSP has been introduced since 2018.
- MSP of sugar is fixed taking into account the components of Fair & Remunerative Price of sugarcane and minimum conversion cost of the most efficient mills.

How is Fair and Remunerative Price calculated?

- Factors that are taken into account for calculating FRP, other than sugar recovery, include —

1. Cost of production of sugarcane,
 2. General trend of agricultural commodities' prices,
 3. Availability of sugar to consumers at a fair price.
- Reasonable margins for sugarcane growers are also to be taken into consideration, as per the amended provisions of the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966.

Why in News?

- The Central government has hiked the Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane by ₹5 a quintal, setting the FRP at ₹290 a quintal for the 2021-22 sugar season, which runs from October to September.
- Despite demands from sugar mills, however, the Centre refused to hike the Minimum Selling Price that they can sell the processed sugar, citing consumer interests.
- The FRP is **linked to the basic recovery rate of sugar (10%), and those with a recovery rate higher than 10% get a higher FRP.**

4) Corporate Social Responsibility

What is CSR?

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a business philosophy that dictates that companies around the globe should deviate from the narrow path of chasing only financial gains and wealth buildup and embark on a journey of **sustainable development.**
- It includes community welfare, ethical corporate conduct, climate action, defending the socio-economic rights of marginalised sections of society, among other aspects.

CSR in India

- India harbours one of the earliest and richest traditions of CSR in the world in the form of philanthropy.
- We can find **Chanakya**, also called Kautilya, the cardinal force behind Mauryan Imperialism, commenting and emphasising on the importance of observing ethical practices and principles while conducting commercial activities.
- Our scriptures have also repeatedly echoed the importance of sharing business earnings with the deprived segments of the society.

- In modern India, CSR was attributed with a whole new dimension with the **“Trusteeship Theory” of Mahatma Gandhi**, which considered the businessmen of India as trustees of trusts that looked after public welfare.

Legal Provisions

- **India is the first country** in the world to make CSR **mandatory**, following an amendment to The Company Act, 2013 in 2014.
- Any company that has a **net worth of at least Rs 500 crore, a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or a net profit of Rs 5 crore** is obliged to spend **2% of its average profits** over the last three years on CSR.
- Businesses can invest their profits in areas such as education, poverty, gender equality, and hunger as part of their CSR compliance, as regulated by the law.

Latest Amendments

- In January 2021, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs amended the rules of CSR.
- According to the new rules, non-compliance to the CSR rules and obligations **will no longer be treated as a criminal offence.** These will now be treated as civil wrongs.
- A company may engage **International Organisations** for designing, monitoring and evaluation of the CSR projects and for capacity building of their own personnel for CSR.
- Any **surplus income** being generated through a company's CSR activities can not form part of the company's profit. The surplus shall be reinvested into the same project or shall be transferred to the Unspent CSR Account.
- Any CSR expenditure that exceeds the required amount can be carried **forward to the next three years.**

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs recently said that businesses need not restrict their Corporate Social Responsibility expenditure to local projects and **must balance local area preferences specified in the law with 'national priorities'.**
- The Ministry clarified that paying for the overseas training of Indian sports personnel representing any State or Union Territory at a national or international level, is the only instance where activities

undertaken by firms outside India will be permitted as a CSR project.

- The first provision to Section 135(5) of the Companies Act says a **company shall give preference to local areas and areas around which it operates**, in its mandatory CSR spending.

5) National Monetisation pipeline

What's in the news?

- The government has unveiled a four-year National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) worth an estimated **Rs 6 lakh crore**. It **aims to unlock value in brownfield projects** (where investments have already been made) by engaging the private sector, transferring to them revenue rights in the projects, and **using the funds generated for infrastructure creation across the country**.
- The planned sales are in line with **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic divestment policy**, under which the **state will retain presence in only a few identified sectors with the rest privatized**.
- The government has announced that the **asset monetisation does not involve selling of land and it is about monetising brownfield assets**.
- The end objective of this initiative is to **enable infrastructure creation through monetisation** wherein the public and private sector collaborate, each excelling in their core areas of competence, so as to **deliver socio-economic growth and quality of life to the country's citizens**.
- The NMP has been announced to provide a clear framework for monetisation and give potential investors a ready list of assets to generate investment interest.

What is Monetisation?

- In a monetisation transaction, the government is basically **transferring revenue rights to private parties for a specified transaction period** in return for upfront money, a revenue share, and commitment of investments in the assets.
- Real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs), for instance, are the key structures used to monetise assets in the roads and power sectors. These are also **listed on stock**

exchanges, providing investors liquidity through secondary markets as well.

- While these are a structured financing vehicle, **other monetisation models on PPP (Public Private Partnership) basis include:** Operate Maintain Transfer (OMT), Toll Operate Transfer (TOT), and Operations, Maintenance & Development (OMD). OMT and TOT have been used in the highways sector while OMD is being deployed in case of airports.

What is the government's plan?

- **Roads, railways and power sector assets will comprise over 66% of the total estimated value of the assets** to be monetised, with the remaining upcoming sectors including **telecom, mining, aviation, ports, natural gas and petroleum product pipelines, warehouses and stadiums**.
- The NMP will run **co-terminus with the National Infrastructure Pipeline** of Rs 100 lakh crore announced in December 2019.

What is the list of assets?

- The assets on the NMP list include: 26,700 km of roads, railway stations, train operations and tracks, 2,8608 circuit kilometer worth of power transmission lines, 6 GW of hydroelectric and solar power assets, 2.86 lakh km of fibre assets and 14,917 towers in the telecom sector, 8,154 km of natural gas pipelines and 3,930 km of petroleum product pipelines. In the roads sector, the government has already monetised 1,400 km of national highways worth Rs 17,000 crore.
- Also, 15 railway stations, 25 airports and the stake of central government in existing airports and 160 coal mining projects, 31 projects in 9 major ports, 210 lakh MT of warehousing assets, 2 national stadia and 2 regional centres, will be up for monetisation.

What are the challenges?

- Among the key challenges that may affect the NMP roadmap are: lack of identifiable revenues streams in various assets, level of capacity utilisation in gas and petroleum pipeline networks, dispute resolution mechanism, regulated tariffs in power sector assets, and low interest among investors in national highways below four lanes.

- While the government has tried to address these challenges in the NMP framework, **execution of the plan remains key to its success. Structuring of monetisation transactions** is being seen as key.
- The slow pace of privatisation in government companies including Air India and BPCL, and less-than-encouraging bids in the recently launched PPP initiative in trains, indicate that attracting private investors' interest is not that easy.

6) Strategic Crude Oil Reserves

What are SPRs?

- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) are **huge stockpiles of crude oil** stored in the **underground rock caverns** (considered safest for storage of Hydrocarbons) to tackle emergency situations and allow a country to tide over short-term supply disruptions.

- They represent a **defence against any event of downfall in future oil production**, including physical or economic actions which disrupt any part of the production process from exploration and development through refining.

Importance of Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) programme

- The **Gulf War in 1990** led to a sharp rise in oil prices and a huge increase in India's imports. During the **post-1991 Indian economic crisis**, foreign exchange reserves could barely finance three weeks' worth of imports, while the government came close to defaulting on its financial obligations. India was able to address the crisis through **policies that liberalized the economy**.
- However, India continued to be affected by volatility in oil prices. In 1998, former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee administration proposed the creation of petroleum reserves as a long-term solution for managing the oil market.



पेट्रोलियम एवं प्राकृतिक गैस मंत्रालय
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STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVES



Boosting India's energy security

Govt has set up 5.33 MMT of strategic crude oil storages in SPR Phase-I at the following 3 locations:

- Vishakhapatnam- 1.33 MMT**
- Mangalore: 1.5 MMT**
- Padur: 2.5 MMT**

Another **6.5 MMT** of strategic crude reserves is being planned in **SPR Phase-II** at :

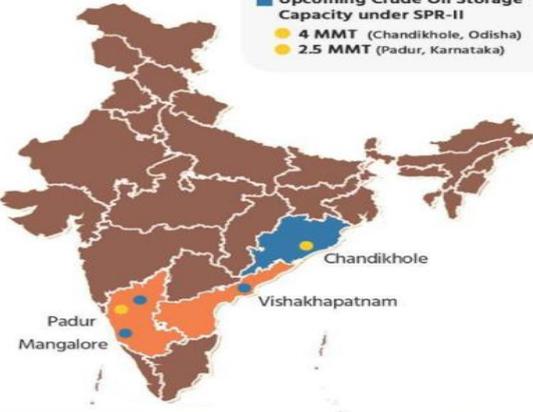
- Chandikhole, Odisha - 4MMT**
- Padur , Karnataka - 2.5 MMT**

Existing Crude Oil Storage Capacity

- 1.33 MMT (Vishakhapatnam, AP)
- 1.5 MMT (Mangalore, Karnataka)
- 2.5 MMT (Padur, Karnataka)

Upcoming Crude Oil Storage Capacity under SPR-II

- 4 MMT (Chandikhole, Odisha)
- 2.5 MMT (Padur, Karnataka)



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Current Status

- In India, Strategic Petroleum Reserves are maintained by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited**, a Special Purpose

Vehicle - wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

- Strategic crude oil storages are situated at **Mangalore (Karnataka), Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) and Padur (Karnataka)** as per Phase I of India's SPR programme. They have fuel storage of a total 5.33 MMT (Million Metric Tonnes) and all the storage facilities have been filled with crude oil. As per the consumption pattern of 2019-20, the total capacity is estimated to provide for about **9.5 days of crude oil requirement**.
- In addition, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) in the country have storage facilities for crude oil and petroleum products for **64.5 days**, thus the current total national capacity for storage of crude oil and petroleum products currently is **74 days**.

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

Why in the news?

- Under the second phase of the Petroleum Reserves programme, the government has recently approved the setting up of two additional commercial-cum-strategic facilities with a total storage capacity of **6.5 MMT** underground storage at **Chandikhol in Odisha** (4 MMT) and **Padur** (2.5 MMT), on Public-private partnership (PPP) Mode.
- The request for proposal for building these storage facilities is under finalisation.
- This would raise India's strategic reserve capacity to **11.83 MMT**, and in times of crisis, India can manage its oil requirement for a specific time period.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Chagos Archipelago Dispute



What is the Chagos Islands dispute about?

- Chagos Islands is a **disputed territory between Mauritius and the United Kingdom**.
 - **Mauritius** has argued that the Chagos Islands has been a part of its territory since at least the 18th century, till the United Kingdom broke the archipelago away from Mauritius in 1965 to form the **British Indian Ocean Territory**.
 - After Mauritius gained independence from the UK in 1968, the United Kingdom refused to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius claiming that the island was required to use certain islands in the Indian Ocean for **defence purposes**.
 - The largest island on the Chagos Islands archipelago, **Diego Garcia**, is where **the US and the UK operate a large military base**.
 - In 2019, the **International Court of Justice** ruled that **Britain should give up control of the islands**.
 - Later that year, the **UN General Assembly** adopted a resolution recognising that **“the Chagos Archipelago forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius”** and urged UN agencies **“to support the decolonisation of Mauritius”**.
- The **Universal Postal Union (UPU)**, a UN agency in charge of the world's postal policies, voted to **block the use of UK stamps from the Chagos Islands**. All posts from the Chagos Islands must now bear stamps from Mauritius.
 - Mauritius has welcomed the postal agency's decision, calling it a victory for the island nation in its dispute with London.
 - Although Mauritius became independent in 1968, the Chagos archipelago **remained under British control**, sparking protests by Chagossians, who accuse London of carrying out an “illegal occupation” and barring them from their homeland.
 - Britain insists the archipelago belongs to London and has renewed a lease agreement with the U.S. to use Diego Garcia, the largest of the islands, until 2036.

2) Greater Malé Connectivity Project

What's in the news?

- India is set to sign the largest-ever infrastructure project in the Maldives known as the Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP).

What's in the news?

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- GMCP is not only the **biggest project India is doing in the Maldives but also the biggest infrastructure project in the Maldives overall**. This iconic project will give a major boost to the Maldivian economy.
- The 6.7 km Greater Malé Connectivity Project will be the **largest civilian infrastructure project** in the Maldives, connecting **Malé** with three neighbouring islands -- **Villingili, Gulhifahu and Thilafushi**.
- The project will be bigger than the **Sinamalé Bridge** that was built under Chinese assistance. The Sinamalé Bridge is 1.4-kilometre-long. It connects Malé with Hulhulé and Hulhumalé and was completed in 2018.
- India will fund the implementation of the Greater Malé Connectivity Project through a **\$ 400 million Line of Credit (LOC) and \$ 100 million grant**.
- *LOC is a preset borrowing limit that can be tapped into at any time. The borrower can take money out as needed until the limit is reached, and as money is repaid, it can be*

borrowed again in the case of an open line of credit.

- The GMCP project is considered as the economic lifeline for the Maldives and will provide a major boost to connectivity between the four islands accounting for about half of the Maldivian population.

Strategic significance

- Amid New Delhi's growing concern over China's growing influence in the region, the ties with the Maldives have remained under sharp focus.
- The GMCP project is emblematic of the strong development partnership which is multi-faceted and designed to meet the specific requirements of the government and people of Maldives.
- India deeply appreciates the Maldives government of President Solih for its '**India First**' foreign policy. This is reciprocated in full measure by India's '**Neighbourhood First**' policy in which the Maldives enjoys a very special and central place.

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DEFENCE

1) Malabar Exercise

Why in News:

- The Quad countries — **India, the U.S., Australia and Japan** — are set to conduct the next edition of the Malabar naval exercise off the coast of Guam.

About the exercise

- The **Malabar-21** would witness exercises among destroyers, frigates, corvettes, submarines, helicopters and long-range maritime patrol aircraft of the **participating navies**.
- Complex **surface, sub-surface and air operations** including live weapon firing drills, anti-surface, anti-air and anti-submarine warfare drills, and joint manoeuvres and tactical exercises will be conducted during the exercise.

History of the exercise

- The Malabar exercise **started in 1992** as a **bilateral drill between the Indian Navy and the U.S. Navy** in the Indian Ocean.
- **Japan** became a **permanent member** of the exercise **in 2015**.
- Following India's invitation, **Australia participated** in the Malabar exercise in 2020, which effectively **made it a drill by all four member nations** of the Quad.

Significance of the exercise

- There have been **mounting global concerns over China's growing military assertiveness** in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- India, the U.S., Australia, Japan and many other like-minded countries are working towards **ensuring a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific**.
- The exercise will provide an opportunity for **common minded navies to enhance inter-operability**, gain from best practices and develop a common understanding of procedures for **maritime security operations**.
- *To read about stealth frigates:*
<https://officerspulse.com/stealth-frigates/>

- *To read about Quad:*
1) <https://officerspulse.com/quad-grouping/>

2) Krivak Frigates

What are they?



- They're mostly used to carry out a variety of **naval operations**, such as finding and **destroying enemy submarines** and **huge surface ships**.
- The frigate **supports naval forces during air, surface and sub-surface missions**.
- Krivak-III class frigates will be **armed with the BrahMos anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM)**, reinforcing their reputation as the world's most-heavily armed 4,000-tonne warships.

History

- In **2016, India and Russia signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** for four Krivak or Talwar class stealth frigates — two to be procured directly from Russia and two to be built by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
- **Why in News:**
- The first of two additional Krivak class stealth frigates being built by Russia is expected to be delivered to India in the middle of 2023.

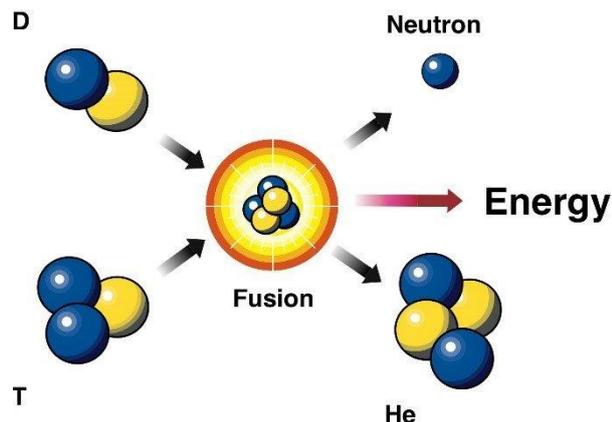
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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Nuclear fusion

How atomic energy works?

- **Atomic energy** can be **released** in two ways – **either by breaking up heavy nuclei, like uranium**, into smaller fragments, releasing a lot of energy in the process, **or by fusing together light nuclei like hydrogen** to form heavier stable nuclei and high-energy neutrons which carry a lot of energy that can be harnessed.
- The **former process** is **nuclear fission**, and it is what happens in established nuclear reactors around the world.
- The **second route** is **nuclear fusion**, and this is the way stars generate energy. In **Sun**, for example, hydrogen is being converted into helium, releasing huge amounts of energy.
- **What is nuclear fusion?**



- It is a **nuclear process**, where **energy is produced by smashing together light atoms**. It is the opposite reaction of fission, where heavy isotopes are split apart.
- **Fusion** is the process by which the **sun and other stars generate light and heat**.
- In a fusion reaction, **two light nuclei merge to form a single heavier nucleus**. The process releases energy because the total mass of the resulting single nucleus is less than the mass of the two original nuclei.
- The leftover mass becomes energy. Einstein's equation ($E=mc^2$), which says in part that mass and energy can be converted into each other, explains why this process occurs.

- It's **most easily achieved on Earth** by combining **two isotopes of hydrogen: deuterium and tritium**.
- **Nuclear fusion is a clean and green route to producing energy**, as it **does not involve any remnant radioactive waste products**.
- Fusion reactions power hydrogen bombs.

Why in News?

- An experiment at the U.S. National Ignition Facility (NIF), has come close to demonstrating the nuclear fusion energy in its lab.
- So far, fusion devices that show a net energy gain have not been demonstrated in labs. This is the first time, a lab has come close to demonstrating a nuclear energy fusion.

2) HIV vaccine

Why in News:

- Moderna, the Massachusetts-based American biotechnology company, has indicated that it may begin human trials for a vaccine for HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).

What is HIV?

- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
- There is currently **no effective cure**. Once people get HIV, they have it for life.

How does the proposed vaccine work?

- Formally known as **mRNA-1644**, it is **made in a way to stimulate the B cells of the immune system**.
- B cells are a **class of white blood cells that produce antibodies** which can **bind to invading bacteria and viruses**.
- The larger purpose of stimulating the B cells is to generate what are called broadly **neutralising antibodies (bnAbs)**, which are specialised blood proteins that attach to the **surface proteins of HIV and disable them** by accessing key but hard-to-reach regions on the virus.

The good and bad of m-RNA vaccine

- RNA-based immunogens are believed to be a promising alternative because they **do not involve the use of a live virus**, can be **made relatively easily**, can be **quickly deployed and safely administered**.
- But, the **challenge with m-RNA vaccines** is that they are **sensitive to temperature in storage**, and is a challenge for developing countries.

What is the present treatment for HIV?

- The treatment for HIV is called **antiretroviral therapy (ART)**. ART involves taking a combination of HIV medicines (called an HIV treatment regimen) every day.
- ART is recommended for everyone who has HIV. People with HIV should start taking HIV medicines as soon as possible. ART can't cure HIV, but HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of HIV transmission.
- A **main goal of HIV treatment** is to **reduce a person's viral load** to an undetectable level. An undetectable viral load means that the level of HIV in the blood is too low to be detected by a viral load test. People with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their HIV-negative partners through sex.

3) S-400 Triumf

What is it?



- It is an **air defence missile system developed by Russia**, which integrates a **multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, launchers, and command and control centre**.
- It is essentially one of the best **Modern Long-Range Surface to Air Missile (MLR SAM)** in the world, considered much ahead

of the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).

- It is capable of firing three types of missiles to create a **layered defence**.
- Within a **range of 400 kilometres and at a height of up to 30 kilometres**, the system can engage all types of **aerial targets, including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and ballistic and cruise missiles**.
- It can **track 100 airborne targets and engage six of those airborne targets at the same time**, and it can be integrated into existing and future air defence units of the air force, army, and navy.
- The command post is equipped with LCD consoles to **process the air space surveillance** data of the individual batteries.
- It **controls and monitors long-range surveillance radar, tracks airborne threats, prioritises the threats, and coordinates other batteries**.

Significance of acquiring S-400 Triumf

- India and Russia signed a \$5 billion contract for the procurement of S-400 air defence systems during the 2018 annual bilateral summit.
- For the **Indian Air Force (IAF)**, the high-end technology S-400 would give a fillip and **make up for its falling fighter aircraft** squadrons in the medium-term.
- **China has also agreed to purchase** six battalions of the S-400 Triumf from Russia, thus India should be ready to confront it.
- The S-400 system's acquisition by China has been dubbed a "game changer" in the region. Its usefulness against India, however, is limited. Experts say Delhi would be at the end of its range even if stationed right on the India-China border and relocated into the Himalaya mountains.

Why in News?

- Russia has confirmed that the delivery of the S-400 air defence systems deal is on schedule and will be delivered by the end of 2021.

4) Blackholes

Why in News:

- A rare merging of three supermassive black holes has been spotted by a team of astrophysicists in India.

What is a blackhole

- A **black hole** is a place in space where **gravity pulls so much that even light can not get out**. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a star is dying.
- Because no light can get out, **people can't see black holes**. They are **invisible**. Space telescopes with special tools can help find black holes.
- **Albert Einstein first predicted** the existence of **black holes in 1916**, with his **general theory of relativity**.
- The term "black hole" was coined many years later in 1967 by American astronomer John Wheeler.
- **Black holes form when massive stars die and their cores collapse**. The most **common way** of black hole formation is **when a star runs out of fuel and collapses** into its gravitational pull.
- There are **four different types of black holes** - **stellar, intermediate, supermassive, and miniature**.

How do we identify them

- A way in which the universe showcases a black hole is when the **black hole interacts with its surroundings**.
- When the **dust particles and matter from the surroundings fall onto a supermassive black hole**, it engulfs a part of the surroundings but some of the **matter is converted into energy and emitted as electromagnetic radiation** that makes the black hole appear very **luminous**.
- This **luminosity can be detected** on earth thus, giving more insights into these occurrences.

What did the Indian scientists find?

- **Scientists** were observing the merging of two galaxies named NGC7733 and NGC 7734 and they **detected unusual emissions** from the centre of the latter and a movement of a large bright clump within it, having a different velocity than that of NGC7733. Inferring that this was a separate galaxy, the scientists named it NGC7733N.
 - The scientists observed that **there are three supermassive black holes from three galaxies merging to form a triple active galactic nuclei (AGN)**
1. There are **supermassive blackholes**, which are several million solar masses in

size, **at the centres of galaxies, and these are known as Active Galactic Nuclei**. Active galactic nucleus (AGN) is a **small region at the centre of a galaxy** that **emits a prodigious amount of energy** in the form of radio, optical, X-ray, or gamma radiation or high-speed particle jets.

2. A **supermassive black hole** is the **largest type of black hole**, with mass on the order of millions to billions of times the mass of the Sun.

Significance of this finding

- It **can solve the final parsec problem**
- If two galaxies collide, their black hole will also come closer by transferring the kinetic energy to the surrounding gas. The **distance between the blackholes decreases with time** until the separation is around a **parsec (3.26 light-years)**. The two black holes are then unable to lose any further kinetic energy to get even closer and merge. This is known as the **final parsec problem**. The **presence of a third black hole can solve this problem**.
- Many **Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN, supermassive black hole at the centre of a galaxy)** pairs have been detected in the past, but **triple AGN are extremely rare**, and only a handful has been detected before using X-ray observations.

Additional Details

Will the sun become a blackhole?

- The **Sun would need to be about 20 times more massive to end its life as a black hole**. In some 6 billion years it will **end up as a white dwarf** — a small, dense remnant of a star that glows from leftover heat. The process will start about 5 billion years from now when the Sun begins to run out of fuel.
- The Sun will start to run out of hydrogen in its core to fuse, and it will begin to collapse. This will let the Sun start to fuse heavier elements in the core, along with fusing hydrogen in a shell wrapped around the core. When this happens, the Sun's temperature will increase, and the outer layers of the Sun's atmosphere will expand so far out into space that they'll engulf Earth.
- **Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar**, an eminent Indian scientist proved that there was an **upper limit to the mass of a white dwarf**. This limit, known as the **Chandra limit**, showed that stars more massive than

the Sun would explode or form black holes as they died.

- In 1983, Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar was awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physics** for his work on the physical processes

involved in the structure and evolution of stars.

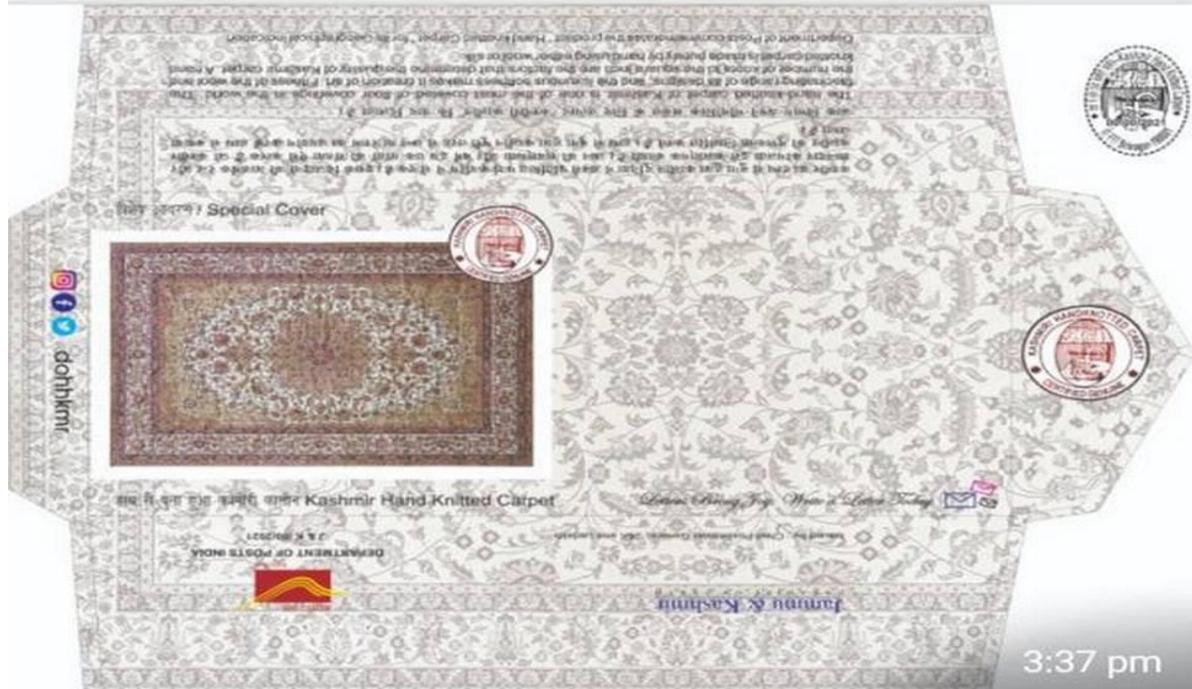
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ART AND CULTURE

1) Hand Knotted Carpet of Kashmir

Why in News:

- Indian Postal Service has released a special cover of Kashmir's famed **hand-knotted carpet**.



Significance

- This comes as a boost for the J&K Handicrafts and Handloom Department's efforts to **push for the Geographical Indication (GI) certification**, upscale the dwindling trade, and restore its lost glory.
- The inclusion of Kashmir's hand-knotted carpet as a postal cover **will help educate people about GI tagging and reach a wide audience**.
- The situation demands the building of **trust and restoring consumer confidence** to buy our authentic carpets

Historical Importance

- The origin of hand knotted carpets locally known as "**Kal baffi**" dates back to the 15th century.
- Kashmir's carpet industry witnessed a boom under the 15th century ruler **Zain-ul-Abidin**, with weavers travelling from Persia and Central Asia to Kashmir, and the craft dominating western markets with its laborious and exquisite artwork.

Where the challenge lies

- The Kashmir carpet faces tough **competition internationally** from carpet-

exporting countries like China, Turkey and Belgium, and internally from carpets manufactured in Jaipur, Agra, Bhadohi and Amritsar.

- Silk carpets are in the luxury bracket. However, **lack of silk processing units in Kashmir** forced the weavers to buy silk from outside, which added to the cost of the carpet.

Additional Information Zain-ul-Abidin

- Eighth sultan of Kashmir, also known as the "**Akbar of Kashmir**"
- He was known by his subjects as **Bod Shah ('Great King')**.
- He **allowed Hindus and Buddhists to practice their religion**, and had many temples restored. He constructed lakes and canals.
- Zain-ul-Abidin was also a patron of art, literature, and poetry.

- To know about GI tag: <https://officerspulse.com/jamakkalam-weavers/>

2) Madur Mat

Why in News:

- Two women from Sabang in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district have been given



the National Handicraft Award in recognition of their skills in making Madur floor mats that are unique to West Bengal.

What are Madur Mats

- Madur floor mats are **unique to West Bengal**.
- An intrinsic part of the Bengali lifestyle, Madur mats are **made of natural fibres**.
- Madhurkathi** was awarded the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** by the Geographical Indication Registry in 2018. Madurkathi is a **rhizome-based plant** (Cyperus tegetum or Cyperus pangorei) found abundantly in the alluvial tracts of Purba and Paschim Medinipur.
- The **origin** of the craft in West Bengal dates back when 'Masland' mats of superfine variety with fine cotton as weft were produced under royal patronage.
- Mats were **collected as revenue of the Jaigirdari system**. In 1744, Nawab Alibardi Khan issued a charter to the Jaigirdars in this regard and as a result, it was obligatory to supply 'Masland' mats for use in the collectorate.
- Jagirdari** system is a **form of land tenancy** developed in India **during the time of Muslim rule (beginning in the early 13th century)** in which the **collection of the revenues** of an estate and

the power of governing it were bestowed on an **official of the state**.

Significance of Madur Mats

- About 80% to 90% of the entire **workforce** engaged in this traditional craft were **women**.
- This cottage industry contributes **significantly to village household income**.
- Mats are an **integral part of the social fabric of rural Bengal**, and Madurkathi mats are popularly used to sit on and as bedding.
- The mats are **non-conductive and sweat-absorbing**, making them an essential household item in West Bengal's hot and humid climate.
- These mats are also used for **religious purposes**.
- To know about GI tag: <https://officerspulse.com/jamakkalam-weavers/>

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) SAMRIDH Programme

What's in the news?

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has announced the **Startup Accelerator for Product Innovation, Development & Growth (SAMRIDH)** programme, which aims to **help growing startups in India.**

About SAMRIDH

- SAMRIDH will create a conducive platform for Indian software product startups to enhance their products and secure investments for scaling their business.
- The SAMRIDH initiative will not only provide **funding support to startups**, but will also help in **bringing skill sets** together which will help them become successful.
- The SAMRIDH programme will **focus on accelerating 300 start-ups** by providing customer connect, investor connect, and international expansion opportunities in the next three years.
- Also, an **investment of up to Rs 40 lakh to startups**, based on their current valuation and growth stage will be provided through selected **startup accelerators.**
- *Startup accelerators provide early-stage companies that already have a minimum viable product with the education, resources and mentorship needed to promote what might otherwise be several slow years of growth into a few short months.*
- The programme aims to further the Indian startup growth which has seen the emergence of **63 unicorns** (Startups with over \$1 billion valuation), making **India the third largest unicorn hub globally** with a total valuation of \$168 billion.

2) PRAGATI platform

About the platform

- PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance And Timely Implementation) is a ICT based multi-purpose and multi-modal platform launched in **2015** by the **Prime Minister's office (PMO).**
- It is aimed at **addressing common man's grievances** and simultaneously **monitoring and reviewing important**

programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

- It is also a robust system for bringing **e-transparency and e-accountability** with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders.
- It also promotes **cooperative federalism** as it brings on one platform the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.

Who designed it?

- The system has been designed in-house by the **PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).**

Key features of PRAGATI application

- It is a **three-tier system** (PMO, Union Government Secretaries and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- The Prime Minister will hold a **monthly programme** where he will interact with the Government of India Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries through video-conferencing enabled by data and geo-informatics visuals.

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently chaired the meeting of the 37th edition of PRAGATI.

Related Information

About NIC

- The National Informatics Centre under the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** is the technology partner of the Government of India.
- It was established in 1976 with an objective to provide technology-driven solutions to Central and State Governments in various aspects of development.
- NIC has been instrumental in adopting and providing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and eGovernance support to the Central Government.

3) Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana

About DDUGKY

- The **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD)** launched the Deen Dayal

Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas in 2014.

- DDU-GKY is tasked with the **dual objectives** of **adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families** and **cater to the career aspirations of rural youth**.
- As a **part of the Skill India campaign**, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.

Beneficiaries

- DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on **rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families**.
- Over 180 million or 69% of the country's youth population between the ages of 18 and 34 years, live in its rural areas. Of these, the bottom of the pyramid youth from poor families with no or marginal employment number about 55 million.
- There are several challenges preventing India's rural poor from competing in the modern market, such as the lack of formal education and marketable skills.
- DDU-GKY bridges this gap by funding training projects benchmarked to global

standards, with an emphasis on placement, retention, career progression and foreign placement.

Implementation Model

- DDU-GKY follows a **3-tier implementation model**.
- The **DDU-GKY National Unit** at MoRD functions as the policy-making, technical support and facilitation agency. The **DDU-GKY State Missions** provide implementation support; and the **Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs)** implement the programme through skilling and placement projects.

Why in News?

- Around 1183 'mobilisation camps' were organised across the country under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) programme between 13th and 19th August, 2021, to commemorate 75 years of Indian independence.
- The camps not only succeeded in generating interest in the DDU-GKY programme but also succeeded in enrolling close to 75660 candidates for upcoming training.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) SVEEP Program

What is it?

- **Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program**, better known as **SVEEP**, is the flagship program of the **Election Commission of India** for **voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India**.
- Since **2009**, the Election Commission through its SVEEP program has been working towards preparing India's electors and equipping them with basic knowledge related to the electoral process.
- SVEEP's primary goal is to **build a truly participative democracy in India** by encouraging all eligible citizens to vote and make an informed decision during the elections.
- The programme is based on multiple general as well as targeted interventions which are designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

Why in News?

- The Election Commission recently conducted a two-day SVEEP Consultation Workshop to review State SVEEP Plans for the forthcoming elections.

2) EASE 4.0

What's in the news?

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has unveiled the fourth edition of the **EASE (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence) reforms agenda for public**

sector banks (PSBs) with a focus on deepening the customer-centric digital transformation of the lenders.

- The reforms agenda is aimed at **institutionalising clean and smart banking**. The first edition of EASE 1.0 was launched in **2018**, while EASE 3.0 was unveiled in **2020**, aimed at enhancing the ease of banking across all customer experiences, employing analytics, technology, and alternate data.

About EASE 4.0

- With mobile and internet banking gaining currency amidst the pandemic, EASE 4.0 commits PSBs to **tech-enabled, simplified and collaborative 24x7 banking**.
- Under EASE 4.0, the **theme of new-age 24x7 banking with resilient technology** has been introduced to ensure **uninterrupted availability of banking services** by ensuring 24x7 availability of select banking channels, improving the reliability of technology platforms, and aligning internal processes in the PSBs to deliver such services.
- In addition to the aforementioned new themes, several other new reforms will be added to existing themes, such as increased use of digital and data for agriculture financing through partnerships with third parties for alternative data exchange, driving impetus on digital payments in semi-urban and rural areas, at-scale adoption of doorstep banking services for PSB customers, etc.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Focusing on diseases sidelined by COVID-19

GS-3 Health, Government Policies & Interventions ; GS-3 Infrastructure

CONTEXT

▪ **The rapid spread of COVID-19** has severely tested primary healthcare systems, which perform multiple functions, across the world.

○ Maternal healthcare services, immunisation, health surveillance, and the screening and management of **non-communicable diseases** (NCDs) have all been severely disrupted.

WHAT ARE NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES?

▪ A non-communicable disease is a **disease that is not transmissible directly from one person to another.**

○ **Hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, cancer etc.** are some examples of such diseases.

RISK OF NCDs

Globally:

▪ **Nearly 71% of all deaths worldwide occur due to non-communicable diseases** (NCDs).

▪ **Cardiovascular diseases** such as stroke, heart attacks and coronary artery disease **are the top cause of global deaths.**

○ **One out of every four deaths** occurs due to cardiovascular diseases, especially among younger patients.

Indian sub-continent:

▪ In the Indian subcontinent, there is **early onset and rapid progression of NCD diseases**, and a **high mortality rate.**

○ **Premature loss of life** due to NCDs in the age group of 30-69 years is also very high among Indians.

○ **Half the deaths** due to cardiovascular diseases occur in the age group of 40-69 years.

▪ In India, those with NCDs find that **productive years of life are lost and there is high-out-of-pocket expenditure on treatment.**

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

▪ To address the growing burden of NCDs, **the National Health Mission launched the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke, in 2010.**

▪ The programme focusses on **strengthening infrastructure, promoting good health, human resource development, early diagnosis, management and referral.**

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NCD SERVICES

Disruption of NCD services

Globally:

▪ A **World Health Organization (WHO) survey** in 2020, conducted among 155 countries found that:

○ **Low-income countries were the most affected by this disruption.**

○ Thus, outcomes in COVID-19 patients with pre-existing cardiovascular disease risk factors or with established cardiovascular disease can be worse than others.

▪ In most countries, **staff working in the area of NCDs were reassigned to support patients with COVID-19**, and public screening programmes were postponed.

▪ **Shortage of medicines, diagnostics and technologies** were the main reasons for discontinuing services in one-fifth of the surveyed countries.

India:

▪ Data from **the National Health Mission's Health Management Information System** in India show that:

○ Emergency services for cerebro-vascular diseases dropped by about 14%.

○ **Among NCDs, persons with diabetes** are at an exceptionally higher risk of severe clinical outcomes of COVID-19.

▪ A recent study reported that **nearly one in every two Indians living with diabetes is unaware of their condition.**

○ They are at **higher risk of dying if they contract COVID-19** because of uncontrolled glucose levels in their blood.

Physiological impact:

▪ Lockdowns and reduced physical interactions have led to **loneliness among the people.**

- This resulted in mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression.
- It has also **increased exposure to NCD risk factors** as people became more likely to increase their consumption of alcohol and tobacco and adopt an unhealthy diet.

SOLUTIONS

- **Access to essential NCD medicines and basic health technologies in all primary healthcare facilities** is essential to ensure that those in need receive treatment and counselling. For this **multidisciplinary approach is imperative-**

Cessing Tobacco:

- As tobacco consumption has been indisputably linked to hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and stroke, the global response plan to address the growing burden of NCDs **must include tobacco cessation activities.**

Use Telemedicine:

- Those countries which are reporting service disruptions, must bring telemedicine facilities in use.
- This will also help in effective data collection on the number of COVID-19 patients who also have a NCD and can reduce travel expenses, thus lowering patients' expenditure burden.

Policy making:

- There is an urgent need for national and State health policymakers to draw up a road map which gives equal weight to patients living with NCDs.

NGOs Network:

- Utilising the existing network of NGOs while respecting local factors will go a long way in tackling the growing burden of NCDs.

Awareness campaigns:

- Campaigns on maintaining a healthy lifestyle need innovation; the monotony of broadcasting the same message over and over again must be broken.

Incentivising ASHA:

- Screening for NCDs at the grassroots level and the delivery of locally relevant and contextual messages for health promotion and primordial prevention of NCDs can be significantly improved by incentivising the already overburdened ASHA workers.

CONCLUSION

- An urgent action is needed using the '**all of society approach**' to achieve the WHO goal of a **25% relative reduction in overall mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory diseases by 2025.**
- This can be achieved by **strengthening the primary health system** to prevent, diagnose and provide care for NCDs in the future, especially during health emergencies such as a pandemic.

2) Tauktae, Yaas and planning for the next

GS-1 Cyclone, Important Geophysical Phenomena; GS-3 Disaster Management NEWS

- With a rise in the frequency of devastating cyclones, India needs to look at long-term mitigation measures.

CONTEXT

- The severe cyclones, **Tauktae and Yaas, which battered India earlier this year**, made landfall on the country's western coast, Gujarat, and the eastern coast, Odisha.
- Both storms caused **massive damage to infrastructure, the agricultural sector, and houses.**

REPORT OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ON THE IMPACT OF CYCLONES

- According to Government of India reports estimates-
 1. **199 lives were lost, 37 million people were affected, and economic losses stood at ₹320 billion (U.S.\$4.3 billion).**
 2. **a crop area of 0.24 million hectares was affected**, and around 0.45 million houses were damaged.
 3. **million people were evacuated** to cyclone shelters and relief camps in the affected States.
 4. **large-scale uprooting of trees in the urban areas** have affected already depleting green cover.
- Thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these cyclones caused additional financial responsibility for State governments. The health costs need to be measured too.

CONCERNS FOR INDIA

- According to the **Global Climate Risk Index report 2021, India ranks the seventh worst-hit country globally in**

2019 due to the frequent occurrence of extreme weather-related events.

Long coastline:

- The Indian coastline is **around 7,500 km**; there are 96 coastal districts (which touch the coast or are close to it), **with 262 million people exposed to cyclones and tsunamis.**

Increasing frequency:

- According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), 2013 data-
- **Increasing sea surface temperatures** in the northern Indian Ocean and the **geo-climatic conditions** in India have led to a rise in the frequency of devastating cyclones in the coastal States accounting for 7% of the global tropical cyclones.

Compounds with other disasters:

- **The World Bank and the United Nations (2010)** estimate that **around 200 million city residents would be exposed to storms and earthquakes by 2050 in India.**

Economic costs:

- Among the natural disasters, **cyclones constituted the second most frequent phenomena that occurred in 15% of India's total natural disasters over 1999-2020.**
- Also, **cyclones are the second most expensive in terms of the costs incurred in damage**, accounting for 29% of the total disaster-related damages **after floods (62%).**
- India lost around **2% of GDP and 15% of total revenue over 1999-2020.**
- The **Asian Development Bank's report in 2014** estimated that India would suffer a loss of around 1.8% of GDP annually by 2050 from climate-related events.

Disrupts government's fiscal policy:

- Cyclones also led to an increase in the fiscal burden of governments **through increased spending to implement effective cyclone preparation measures.**
- As a result, direct government expenditure on natural calamities increased 13 times.

BETTER MANAGEMENT

- Cyclones are the **third most lethal disaster in India after earthquakes (42%) and floods (33%).**
- However, **fatalities due to cyclones declined from 10,378 in 1999 to 110 in 2020.**

- This significant drop can be majorly attributed to the **improved early warning systems, cyclone forecasting, and better disaster management** activities such as **timely evacuation, rehabilitation and relief distributions.**

MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE

- Though with improved measures the rate of fatalities has dropped, measures are **not adequate to achieve a zero-fatality approach and minimise economic losses from cyclones.**
- Between 1999 and 2020, cyclones inflicted **substantial damage to public and private properties**, amounting to an increase of nine times in losses.
- This increase can be attributed to the **absence of long-term mitigation measures in the risk mitigation plan.**

MEASURES TAKEN BY ODISHA

- **In the aftermath of the 1999 super cyclone, the Government of Odisha took up various cyclone mitigation measures which included:**
 1. Installing a disaster warning system in the coastal districts,
 2. Construction of evacuation shelters in cyclone-prone districts,
 3. Setting up of the odisha state disaster management authority (osdma),
 4. Conducting regular cabinet meetings for disaster preparedness,
 5. Building the odisha disaster rapid action force (odraf).
- All these activities have **helped to minimise the toll** from cyclonic storms such as **Hudhud, Fani, Amphan, and Yaas.**

WAY FORWARD

- Despite all the measures taken by Odisha, **it's disaster management model is inadequate** to minimise the economic losses that result from cyclones. Therefore, **the Government of India should adopt a few measures to minimise disaster damage and fatalities:**
 - **improving the cyclone warning system and revamp disaster preparedness.**
 - **widening the cover under shelterbelt plantations and help regenerate mangroves** in coastal regions to lessen the impact of cyclones.
 - **adopting cost-effective, long-term mitigation measures**, including building cyclone-resilient infrastructure such as

constructing storm surge-resilient embankments, canals and improving river connectivity to prevent waterlogging in low-lying areas.

- **installing disaster-resilient power infrastructure in the coastal districts**, providing concrete houses to poor and vulnerable households.
- **creating massive community awareness campaigns** are essential.
- **healthy coordination between the Centre and the States concerned** to collectively design disaster mitigation measures.
- **It is only such a collective mitigation effort by the Centre and States that can help reduce the fiscal burden of States and also be effective in minimising disaster deaths.**

3) Finding a healthy way to cook

GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions;
GS-3 Food Security

NEWS

- As questions arise over the Ujjwala scheme's success, it would be prudent to introduce alternative clean sources of energy.

CONTEXT

- Launched in 2016, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana is a scheme of the **Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas** which aims to safeguard the health of women & children by providing free LPG connections to economically weaker families.
- Under the scheme, **cash assistance of Rs. 1600** is given to the beneficiaries to get a deposit-free new connection.
- The Prime Minister of India has recently introduced **Ujjwala 2.0**.
- Under Ujjwala 2.0, **one crore additional PMUY connections aim to provide deposit-free LPG connections to those low-income families who could not be covered under the earlier phase of PMUY.**
- Also under it, **migrants will not be required to submit ration cards or address proof.**
- The amount allocated for this purpose is ₹14,073 crore this year.

CONCERNS RELATED TO CLEAN COOKING IN INDIA

High usage:

- In India (especially in rural areas), many **women in poor households use firewood or dung cakes for cooking.**
- Official data show that **48% rural households used LPG (2018) but only partially.**

Waste of women's time:

- The use of firewood and dung cakes requires **spending long hours collecting firewood and making dung cakes.**

Jeopardise health of the family:

- It affects health and puts the safety of the women in jeopardy, as they have longer exposure to indoor pollution.
- Using firewood and dung cakes also **leads to indoor pollution**, as chulhas (firewood-based stoves) using these sources of energy release carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.
- Both these gases have an adverse impact on the **health of the family members.** They **also impact the environment.**

PREVIOUS EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENT IMPROVED CHULHAS

- Earlier the solution to this problem — **smokeless or fuel-efficient chulhas for cooking** — was introduced in the 1980s.
- The **National Programme on Improved Chulha** was launched in 1984.
- This was backed by **training programmes for making and maintaining these chulhas.**
- **But these programmes failed due to following reasons:**
 1. Subsidies to the programme were withdrawn,
 2. Governments lost interest,
 3. People could not be convinced to use the new chulhas and did not participate,
 4. Target beneficiaries were not properly identified,
 5. Little quality control efforts were made.

INTRODUCING LPG

PAHAL scheme:

- The Indian government then introduced **Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) in June 2013 under the PAHAL scheme** on an experimental basis.
- It was expected that access to clean energy would alleviate the public health burden posed by household air pollution on women.

- Also it would **improve women's access to education, leisure, and the labour market**, and also **improve the environment, climate, and human health**.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMYU):

- **In 2016, the government launched the LPG scheme as the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana.**
- Under this scheme, NITI Aayog laid out a road map for **universal access to LPG by 2025**.
- The subsidy for LPG was increased from ₹12,000 crore in 2016-17 to ₹21,000 crore in 2017-18, and 94% of all households had an LPG connection as of September 2019, an increase from 56% in 2014-15.
- But as per evaluation studies, **many LPG connection holders were found to still be using other fuels like firewood and dung cakes.**

FINDINGS OF STUDIES ON CLEAN COOKING

- Studies found that the **poor use LPG mainly for making tea or snacks** while they continue to use firewood or cow dung for their main cooking, **as these sources of fuel are free of cost and easily available.**
- Also the ill usage of LPG can be attributed to the fact that- **men**, who usually make the decision of buying the refill, **often do not agree to a refill which is expensive for the poor.**
- Usually, as **low value is attached to women's time in production, the opportunity cost of women's labour is low** even when a capital subsidy is available, and women have to depend on traditional fuels.
- LPG is used for cooking when the opportunity cost of women's labour is considered high, such as in the peak season in farming.
- **LPG cylinders are not a priority for the poorest.** They sometimes even **sell the cylinder** to meet their urgent needs.
- The other problems in accessing LPG are administrative and include the **distance to LPG distribution centres, long waiting time, and rising costs of LPG cylinders.**

PROBLEM WITH UJJWALA 2.0

- Introduction of Ujjwala 2.0 indicates that- **the planners have not looked at the evaluation studies of Ujjwala 1.0** and the

official data on the performance of the scheme.

WAY FORWARD

- There is no doubt that crores of poor and middle class women need better sources of cooking energy that are time saving, healthy, easily accessible and affordable.
- But it is to be noted that LPG works well, but only for non-poor households.
- **The poor need affordable alternatives to choose from**, such as solar energy and solar cookers, smokeless chulhas, biogas plants and electric cookers where electricity is cheap.
- Hence, **good research and development efforts need to be made** in the public and private sectors to explore these alternatives.
- **As one solution may not fit all, there is a need to offer a set of energy sources to households so that each of them finds a suitable energy for itself.** Women in India can achieve energy security for cooking only through cheaper and efficient alternatives.

4) Caste counts

GS-1 Social Justice; GS-2 Government Policies & Interventions, Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States

CONTEXT

- Recently the voices for a fresh caste census are getting louder in the country after the Bihar Chief Minister led a delegation of 10 political parties of the State to meet the Prime Minister.
- No political party in the country has publicly opposed the demand as yet, and most have supported the call.
- Predictably, there will be more political mobilisation on the issue.

LAST CASTE CENSUS

- The last time **India's population was enumerated on the basis of caste was in 1931, when it was under colonial rule.**

AGAINST THE CASTE CENSUS

- There is a strong argument that the **colonial census was about creating and reinforcing caste and religious categories in India** rather than recording them in a benign manner.

- Sceptics also fear that repeating the practice again will only **widen social rifts**.
- They also point to the **multitude of practical problems such an exercise will encounter**.

IN FAVOUR OF THE CASTE CENSUS

- The supporters of a caste census cite following reasons in favour:
 - **Effective governance** requires robust data on the governed.
 - As the democratisation of society deepens, **questions are being raised regarding the status of Dalits, tribal communities** and a large section of the population that is **characterised in the Constitution as Socially and Educationally Backward Classes**.
 - **Political representation of these communities has increased** and their participation in government jobs has risen.
 - It is assumed that **particular groups within each category have benefited disproportionately** from political and job reservations, and there are demands for **sub-quotas**.
- This **inequitable distribution of power and wealth endangers the stability of any society**.
- Many communities are **demanding inclusion** in one category or the other, while some are **feeling short-changed** by the affirmative action steps of the state.
- With the role of the Government as a big employer diminishing, there is a **demand for affirmative action in the private sector**.
- **All these questions are being debated without adequate and reliable data, leading to conflicting and often misleading claims.**

CONCLUSION

- **Partisan political gains should not be the motivation** for a fresh census.
- **A renewed vision for a just and united India**, where all divides are reduced must guide the discussion on a caste census.

5) It's time for Industry 4.0

GS-3 Industrial Growth, Industrial Revolution

NEWS

- Adopting Industry 4.0 technologies would make MSMEs more efficient and competitive.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR INDUSTRY 4.0

First industrial revolution

- **Starting in the late 18th century in Britain**, the first industrial revolution helped enable mass **production by using water and steam power instead of purely human and animal power**.
- Finished goods were built with machines rather than painstakingly produced by hand.

Second industrial revolution

- **A century later**, the second industrial revolution introduced **assembly lines and the use of oil, gas and electric power**.
- These new power sources, **along with more advanced communications via telephone and telegraph**, brought mass production and some degree of automation to manufacturing processes.

Third industrial revolution

- The third industrial revolution, which **began in the middle of the 20th century**, added **computers, advanced telecommunications and data analysis to manufacturing processes**.
- The digitization of factories began by embedding programmable logic controllers (PLCs) into machinery to help automate some processes and collect and share data.

Fourth industrial revolution (4IR or Industry 4.0)

- The term 'Industry 4.0' was coined by the **German government** in 2011.
- It is the ongoing revolution, which is **characterized by increasing automation and the employment of smart machines and smart factories**. **Informed data helps to produce goods more efficiently and productively across the value chain**.
- **Additive manufacturing, Internet of Things, Cyber Physical Systems, Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality and data analytics** are some of the technologies associated with Industry 4.0.

BENEFITS OF THE ONGOING REVOLUTION

- With the help of these technologies, the **manufacturing industry will be able to make data-driven decisions**.
- The reduced costs of electronics like sensors, transmitters, and cloud have

allowed us to capture the data produced during operational activities.

- With the availability of advanced algorithms, this captured data can be analysed for decision-making in real time.
- Thus, **Industry 4.0 integrated 'data' with manufacturing and Information Technology.**
- To take advantage of data-driven decision-making, the governments of other countries also coined their own industrial initiatives like Industry 4.0. For example, **the U.S. calls it Smart Manufacturing, China calls it Made in China 2025, and India refers to it as Make in India or Digital India.**

THE POTENTIAL OF MSMEs

- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are expected to become the **backbone of India as the economy grows larger.**
- MSMEs form **more than 95% of the industries in India, produce more than 45% of the total manufacturing output and employ more than 40% of the workforce.**
- According to the **Economic Survey 2020-21, over 6 crore MSMEs employ more than 11 crore people and contribute roughly 30% to the GDP and half of the country's exports.**
- MSMEs are also contributory to larger enterprises, **leading to a seamless supply chain integration.** Thus, **making MSMEs more efficient will be advantageous for the whole economy.**

CHALLENGES IN THE WAY

- MSMEs face challenges when it comes to adopting new technologies such as Industry 4.0:
 - First, they **lack awareness regarding Industry 4.0 and its benefits.**
 - They **consider such technologies disruptive** and have the potential to demolish their existing system.
 - However, Industry 4.0 believes in improving the existing system. Scientific literature provides evidence that sensors and WiFi networks being integrated with old machines improve their performance.
- Second, MSMEs will **need to make major financial investments to adopt Industry 4.0.**

- Investing in the right set of technologies will **need experts and consultants as well.**
- Third, for any new technology to be adopted, **an organisation requires a positive organisational culture and the support of people.**
- MSMEs need to believe in the advantages that Industry 4.0 technologies can offer.
- Fourth, the **frameworks and steps that can assist MSMEs** in adopting Industry 4.0 technologies have been missing.
- In this regard, MSMEs **need to understand the data they are producing from all their operational activities.**
- Based on such data, their readiness can be evaluated.
- Finally, MSMEs should **develop their own vision of Industry 4.0 technologies** that they want to adopt and **identify the relevant tools and practices** they need for such a tailored vision.

TRANSCENDING IMPEDIMENTS

- Though adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies by MSME is difficult task to be done but, if done, it will make them more competitive, as:
 - MSMEs **will be able to offer world-class quality products to customers.**
 - **Delivery timings and the flexibility to meet different needs will improve.**

CONCLUSION

- As India joined the group of top 50 countries in the global innovation index for the first time in 2020, it is imperative for its MSMEs to embrace Industry 4.0 technologies without any hesitation.
- **Proper sensitisation of the Government of India, higher education institutions, practitioners, entrepreneurs, industrial associations, trade unions, venture capitalists, consultants and research agencies** would help to speed up this task.
- **Given the manufacturing challenges abruptly posed by the COVID-19 pandemic** when most of the healthcare infrastructure in India is MSME-dependent, Industry 4.0 becomes imperative for the MSMEs.

6) Helping and hindering justice

GS-2 Judiciary, E-Governance

CONTEXT

- Back this year, **while dealing with issues arising in connection with the CoWIN portal, the Supreme Court pointed out some of the major impediments in the delivery of vaccines** to the people at large. They were:
 - inadequate digital literacy across the country,
 - inadequate digital penetration,
 - serious issues of bandwidth and connectivity, particularly in remote and inaccessible regions
- Thus, despite the ambition of bringing the benefits of vaccination to every human being in the country, the policy was falling short of its goal because of the inherent difficulties pointed out.
- The premise in the observations of the court was that **relying solely on digital transformation may not be a sound idea**.
- It could **result in exclusion of a large section of the population** on account of the enumerated shortfalls.
- Soon after this, the government said that **CoWIN registration would no longer be mandatory for vaccination**.

SIMILAR IS THE CASE WITH JUDICIARY

- While pointing out the impediments in delivery of vaccines through digital portals, the court also observed that **the case is equally true for the delivery of justice in the country**.

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

- In the wake of the pandemic, **courts began using facilities like e-filing with sincerity**.
- In May 2020, the Supreme Court also introduced another innovation: **a new system of e-filing and artificial intelligence-enabled referencing**.
- This was meant to boost the efficiency, transparency and access to court delivery services for every user.
- The efforts made seek to harness technology in overcoming and resolving the ills that have for long dogged the judiciary. These include:
 - the massive backlog of cases
 - unacceptable levels of judicial vacancies across the country at all levels.
- The India Justice Report 2020 pegs vacancies in the High Court at 38% (2018-19) and in lower courts at 22% for the same period.

- More than four out of every 10 posts of High Court judges remain vacant as of 2021.

CHALLENGE STILL EXISTS

- Although the courts have risen to the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, by **using existing technology at an unprecedented scale and speed, it is proving to be an uphill task**.
- **As an over-reliance on technology is not a panacea to all the ills plaguing the courts and if done without forethought, could become counterproductive**.
- Evidence shows that **despite considerable investment to digitalise judicial infrastructure and administration, beginning with Phase 1 of the eCourts in 2007, the judiciary's performance during the pandemic period has left a lot to be desired**.
- Data show that **pendency reached an all-time high during this year of virtual functioning of the courts**.
- In the case of district courts, pendency rose sharply by 18.2% between December 31, 2019 and December 31, 2020, **according to the National Judicial Data Grid**.
- Across the 25 High Courts, pendency witnessed its sharpest increase of 20.4% in 2019-2020.

WAYFORWARD

- Even though the pandemic posed significant challenges to all the institutions, **it needs to be seen as an opportunity to make lasting changes that could transform the creaking justice delivery system in India**.
- The next **course of action needs to be evidence-based**. For instance, we need to study and understand why video conferencing in criminal cases has neither shortened trials nor reduced the number of people awaiting trial.
- Also, there is a need to **address uneven digital access**.
- While mobile phones are widely owned and used throughout the country, the **access to the Internet remains limited to urban users**.
- As a result **lawyers in semi-urban and rural districts find online hearings challenging**, mostly due to **connectivity issues and an unfamiliarity** with this way of working.

- No matter how advanced, **technology cannot be a substitute for judges of whom there remains a big shortfall.** Hence, vacancies in the courts need to be fulfilled as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

- If deployed with adequate data-based planning and safeguards, technological tools can be a game changer.
- However, **technology is not immune to biases, therefore it must be properly evaluated** for us to see whether it works to increase the power imbalance between citizens and the state or whether it affirms and furthers citizens' rights.

7) Asset monetisation — execution is the key

GS-3 Mobilization of Resources, Fiscal Policy, Government Policies & Interventions

CONTEXT

- The Government has announced an **ambitious programme of asset monetisation.**
- Under this programme, it hopes to **earn ₹6 trillion in revenues over a four-year period.**
- Asset monetisation will happen mainly in three sectors: **roads, railways and power.**
- Other assets to be monetised include: airports, ports, telecom, stadiums and power transmission.

ASSET MONETISATION

- Under asset monetisation, **the Government gives up control of its assets, such as roads, coal mines — for a specified period of time in exchange for a lump sum payment.**
- At the end of the period, the assets return to the Government.
- Unlike in privatisation, **no sale of government assets is involved.**
- Thus, by monetising assets it has already built, the Government can earn revenues to build more infrastructure.

FOCUS OF THE PROGRAMME

- Two important statements have been made about the asset monetisation programme.
- One, the focus will be on **under-utilised assets.**

- Two, **monetisation will happen through public-private partnerships (PPP) and Investment Trusts.**

Monetising under-utilised assets

- This is a **win-win situation for both the Government and the private player.**
- The Government gets a 'fair' value for its assets and the private player gets its return on investment.
- Also the economy benefits from an increase in efficiency.
- Thus, monetising under-utilised assets has much to commend.

Monetisation through Investment Trusts

- The other form of monetisation the Government has indicated is creating **Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT)** to which monetizable assets will be transferred.

1. **InvITs are mutual fund-like vehicles** in which investors can subscribe to units that give dividends.
 2. The sponsor of the Trust is required to hold a minimum prescribed proportion of the total units issued.
 3. InvITs offer a portfolio of assets, so investors get the benefit of diversification.
 4. Usually, assets can be transferred at the construction stage or after they have started earning revenues.
- But in the **InvIT route to monetisation, the public authority continues to own the rights to a significant portion of the cash flows and to operate the assets.**
 - So, the **issues that arise with transfer of assets to a private party — such as incorrect valuation or an increase in price to the consumer — are less of a problem.**

CHALLENGES DURING ASSETS MONETISATION

Monetisation of well-utilised assets:

- In case of properly utilised assets, the private player has little incentive to invest and improve efficiency.

Understanding through an example:

- **Let's take an example of a highway that has good traffic.**
- In this case, the **private player has little incentive to invest and improve the efficiency of the highway.** It simply needs to operate the assets as they are.
- The private player may value the cash flows assuming a normal rate of growth of traffic. Therefore, it will pay the Government a

price that is the present value of cash flows minus its own return.

- The Government in this case earns badly needed revenues but these could be less than what it might earn if it continued to operate the assets itself.
- **Suppose the private player does plan to improve efficiency in a well-utilised asset** by making the necessary investment and reducing operating costs.
- But in this case the **reduction in operating costs need not translate into a higher price for the asset than under government ownership.**
- As the cost of capital for a private player is higher than for a public authority.
- A public authority needs less equity capital and can access debt more cheaply than a private player.
- Thus, the **higher cost of capital for the private player could offset the benefit of any reduction in operating costs.**

Preference for well-utilised assets:

- The benefits to the economy are likely to be greater where under-utilised assets are monetised. However, **private players will prefer well-utilised assets to assets that are under-utilised.**
- That is because, **in the former, cash flows and returns are more certain.**
- Thus, in this case of choice, **private incentives in asset monetisation may not accord with the public interest.**

Valuation and issues:

- It is very difficult to get the valuation right over a long-term horizon.
- Over a long term period it is difficult to estimate the factors on which the utilisation of an asset depends.
- These factors can be- **the growth rate of the economy, the level of economic activity in the area, the prices of fuel and vehicles, alternative modes of transport and their relative prices, etc.**
- Hence, there is always a possibility of over or under assessment in valuing the asset.
- **In case of under valuation:** the Government will lose the revenue, while

the private operator will reap windfall gains.

- **In case of over valuation:** the winning bidder will raise the toll price steeply, in order to pay the overrated price for the asset. Thus, the consumer ends up bearing the cost.

Asset monetisation virtually amounts to sale:

- There is **no incentive for the private player to invest in the asset towards the end of the tenure of monetisation.**
- The life of the asset, when it is returned to the Government, may not be long. In that event, asset monetisation virtually amounts to sale.
- Thus, **Monetisation through the PPP route is thus fraught with problems.**

CONCLUSION

- Following are the conclusions that can be drawn from the above:
- **First,** a public authority has inherent advantages on the funding side.
- In general, **the economy is best served when public authorities develop infrastructure and monetise these.**
- **Second,** monetisation through InvITs is likely to prove less of a problem than the PPP route.
- **Third,** monetising under-utilised assets is better than assets that are well utilised for the consumers.
- **Fourth,** to ensure proper execution, **there is a case for independent monitoring of the process.**
- The Government may set up an Asset Monetisation Monitoring Authority staffed by competent professionals.
- The authority must put all aspects of monetisation under the scanner — valuation, the impact on price charged to the consumer, monetisation of under-utilised versus well-utilised assets, the experience across different sectors, etc.
- **Hence, it can be concluded that- Asset monetisation is fine if executed properly.**

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Vehicle Scrappage Policy and its key features

Context:

- The government has recently introduced a vehicle scrappage policy to phase out old and defective vehicles.

The key features of the new policy:

- When an old vehicle is scrapped, the owner of such vehicle will receive the **scrap value** given by the scrapping centre, which is around **4-6 percent** of the ex-showroom price of the new vehicle they buy.
- The scheme will provide **incentives to the owners** of the old vehicles to scrap their unfit vehicles through registered scrapping centres, which shall provide the owners with a scrapping certificate.
- The policy advises automobile manufacturers to provide a **discount of 5 per cent on the purchase of a new vehicle** against the scrapping certificate.
- The new policy also advises offering a **road-tax rebate of up to 25 per cent for personal vehicles and up to 15 per cent for commercial vehicles.**
- The new vehicle scrappage policy proposes **Private Vehicles** to be **de-registered after 20 years** if found unfit or in case of a failure to renew registration certificate. As a disincentive measure, increased re-registration fees will be **applicable for private vehicles 15 years** onwards from the date of initial registration.
- For **commercial vehicles**, the **de-registration process starts after 15 years** in case of failure to get the fitness certificate.
- In addition, the **registration fees may also be waived for the purchase of a new vehicle against the scrapping certificate.**
- **Mandatory fitness testing of commercial vehicles** is likely to start from April 1, 2023, while for personal vehicles it is

expected to begin from June 1, 2024, in a phased manner.

Benefits

- To help vehicle owners find a reason to retire old vehicles, the government envisages that the scrappage certificate will entitle the owner with something extra, such as a tax rebate, sops, and a discount on the new car.
- The certificate is tradable, which means it can be used by anyone and not necessarily by the owner of the scrapped vehicle.

Does it help the economy?

- Globally, a scrappage policy has been followed by a boost in demand in the auto manufacturing sector, especially in Europe and the US.
- This has also been a tool to deal with economic slowdown in the manufacturing sector and consumption due to recession. Besides, there are spelt-out benefits vis-à-vis the environment since newer cars come with better emission standards and better fuel efficiency.

Concept of circular economy

- A circular economy depends on reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling of resources to create a closed-loop system, minimising the use of resources, generation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.
- When a car is scrapped, apart from metals including iron and steel, many other parts may emerge that can be refurbished and ploughed back into use.
- Recycled steel from scrap, even seats and plastic parts, have value in the scrap economy. It is similar to the economic activity of scrapping of old ships, like in **Alang shipbreaking yard in Gujarat.**
- In a circular economy, products, materials, equipment and infrastructure are kept in use for longer, thus improving productivity.



2) E-Shram portal: A database for unorganised sector workers

What's in the news?

- The government has unveiled the e-shram portal which aims to **register 38 crore unorganised workers**, such as construction labourers, migrant workforce, street vendors and domestic workers, among others.
- The workers will be issued an **e-Shram card containing a 12 digit unique number**, which, going ahead, will help in including them in social security schemes.

How will the registration for workers happen on the portal?

- The registration of workers on the portal will be coordinated by the Labour Ministry, state governments, trade unions and Common Services Centers (CSC). Awareness campaigns would be planned across the country to enable nationwide registration of workers.
- Following the launch of the portal, workers from the unorganised sector can begin their registration from the same day. A national toll free number — **14434** — will also be launched to assist and address the queries of workers seeking registration on the portal.
- A worker can register on the **portal using his/her Aadhaar card number** and bank account details, apart from filling other necessary details like date of birth, home town, mobile number and social category.

3) India's New Drone Rules and Regulations

What's in the news?

- The central government has notified the **Drone Rules 2021**, a much more liberalised regime for unmanned aircraft systems than what existed previously.
- Under the new rules, several requirements and approvals have been abolished and this is expected to make drone operations simpler for civilian drone operators.

Main changes from the previous framework that regulated drone operations

- To begin with, the **total number of forms that were to be filled has been reduced from 25 to five.**
- The **total number of fees** that are to be paid before being able to operate drones has been reduced from **72 to just four.**
- The **various approvals** that were required, such as unique authorisation number, unique prototype identification number, certificate of manufacturing and airworthiness, certificate of conformance, certificate of maintenance, remote pilot instructor authorisation, and drone port authorisation etc **have been abolished.**
- In addition to this, the **quantum of fees**, which was earlier linked to the size of drone, has been **reduced and delinked from the size.**
- For example, the remote pilot license fee, which was Rs 3,000 for a large size drone,

has been reduced to Rs 100 — which is the fee for all categories of drones.

What are the other various relaxations?

- The Civil Aviation Ministry said the **Digital Sky platform** that it envisaged earlier will be developed as a single-window platform for the clearances that are required.
- To add to this, an interactive airspace map will also be displayed on the platform that will show the three zones — **yellow, green and red**.
- These zones have been demarcated to tell drone operators where they can and cannot fly their aircraft systems.
- Even in these zones, the government has significantly liberalised the rules.
- For example, the yellow zone, which was earlier a 45 km zone from the airport perimeter, has now been reduced to a 12 km zone, meaning that outside of a 12 km radius of an airport perimeter, it would be a green zone, where drone operators no longer need permission to fly.

Are there security relaxations too?

- Earlier, prior to issuance of a registration or licence, a security clearance was necessary. Now, the government has **done away with the need for this clearance**.

- Also, on the part of companies operating drones, **foreign ownership has been allowed**. However, the import of drones will continue to be **regulated by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade**.
- Significantly, the **coverage of these rules has been increased to cover drones up to 500 kg in weight from 300 kg earlier**, thereby bringing drone taxis under the fray too.

What is the significance of these new drone rules?

- The liberalised regime for civilian drones marks a clear shift in policy by the government to allow operations of such drones and highlights the government's intent to allow the use of drones while at the same time ensuring security.
- The new Drone Rules will help start-ups and youth working in this sector. It will open up new possibilities for innovation & business. It will help leverage India's strengths in innovation, technology & engineering to make India a drone hub.

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INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

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Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019



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About the Bill

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DECEMBER
2019



LOK SABHA

The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2019. The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals, and establishes a Data Protection Authority for the same.



Highlights of the Bill

Applicability

The Bill governs the processing of personal data by: **(i) government, (ii) companies incorporated in India, and (iii) foreign companies dealing with personal data of individuals in India.**



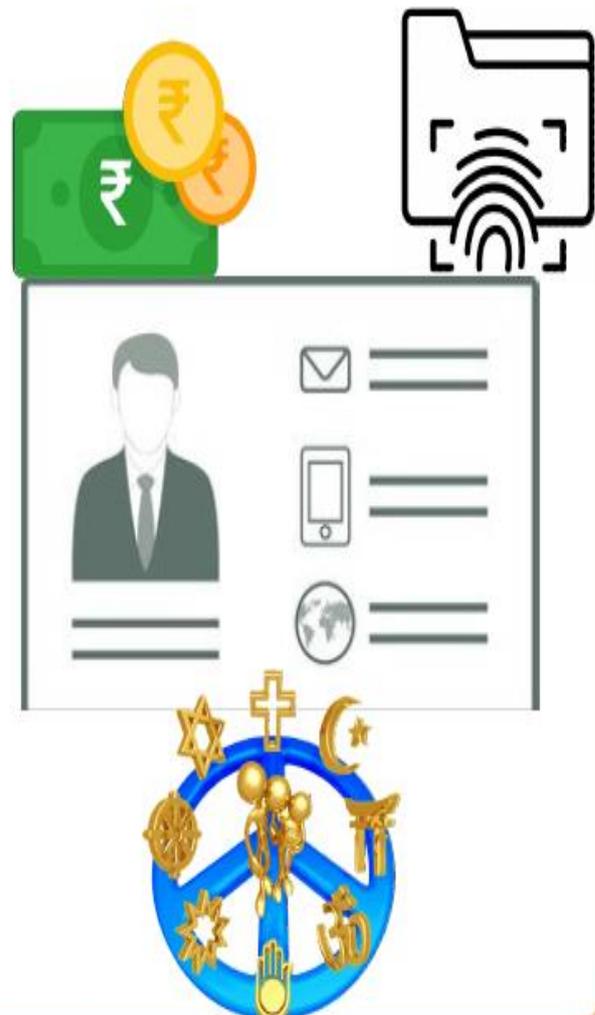
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Personal data is data which pertains to characteristics, traits or attributes of identity, which can be used to identify an individual.

The Bill categorises certain personal data as **sensitive personal data**. This includes financial data, biometric data, caste, religious or political beliefs, or any other category of data specified by the government, in consultation with the Authority and the concerned sectoral regulator.

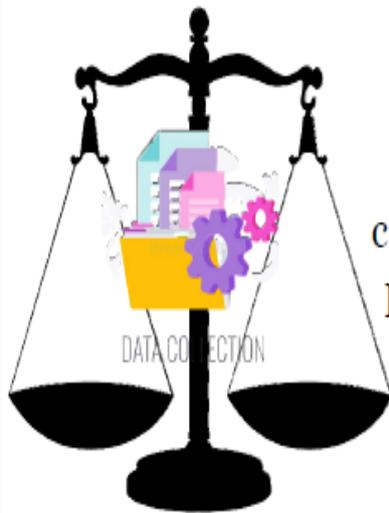


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Obligations of Data Fiduciary

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A data fiduciary is an entity or individual who **decides the means and purpose of processing personal data**. Such processing will be subject to certain purpose, collection and storage limitations. For instance, personal data can be processed only for specific, clear and lawful purposes.



Additionally, **all data fiduciaries must undertake certain transparency and accountability measures** such as: (i) implementing security safeguards (such as data encryption and preventing misuse of data), and (ii) instituting grievance redressal mechanisms to address complaints of individuals. They must also institute **mechanisms for age verification and parental consent when processing sensitive personal data of children**.



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Rights of the Individual

The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual (or **data principal**). These include the right to: (i) obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether their personal data has been processed, (ii) seek correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data, (iii) have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances, and (iv) restrict continuing disclosure of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn.



Fiduciary

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Grounds for Processing Personal Data

The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries **only if consent is provided by the individual.**

However, in **certain circumstances**, personal data can be processed **without consent.** These include: (i) if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual, (ii) legal proceedings, (iii) to respond to a medical emergency.

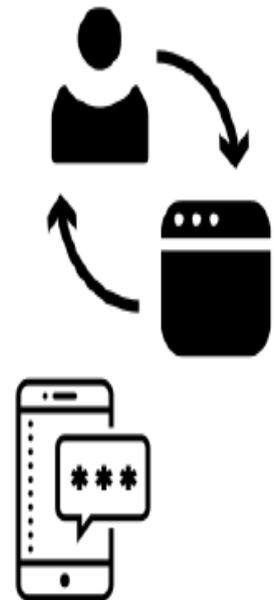


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Social Media Intermediaries

The Bill defines these to include **intermediaries which enable online interaction between users and allow for sharing of information**. All such intermediaries which have users above a notified threshold, and whose actions can impact electoral democracy or public order, have **certain obligations**, which include providing a voluntary user verification mechanism for users in India.



Data Protection Authority

The Bill sets up a Data Protection Authority which may:

- (i) take steps to protect interests of individuals, (ii) prevent misuse of personal data, and (iii) ensure compliance with the Bill.



It will consist of a **chairperson and six members**, with at least 10 years' expertise in the field of data protection and information technology.



Orders of the Authority can be appealed to an **Appellate Tribunal**. Appeals from the Tribunal will go to the **Supreme Court**.

Transfer of Data Outside India

Sensitive personal data may be transferred outside India for processing **if explicitly consented to by the individual**, and subject to **certain additional conditions**.



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However, such sensitive personal data **should continue to be stored in India.**



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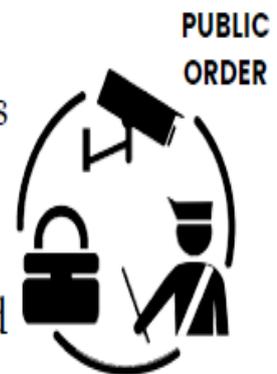
Certain personal data notified as **critical personal data** by the government can only be processed in India.

Exemptions

The **central government** can exempt any of its agencies from the provisions of the Act: (i) in the interest of the security of the state, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India and friendly relations with foreign states,

and

(ii) for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence (i.e. arrest without warrant) relating to the above matters.



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Processing of personal data is also exempted from provisions of the Bill for certain other purposes such as: (i) prevention, investigation, or prosecution of any offence

or (ii) personal, domestic, or (iii) journalistic purposes.



OFFENCE



However, **such processing must be for a specific, clear and lawful purpose, with certain security safeguards.**

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Offences

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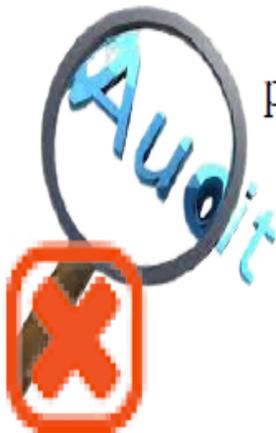
Offences under the Bill include: (i) processing or transferring personal data in violation of the Bill,



punishable with a fine of Rs 15 crore or 4% of the annual turnover of the fiduciary, whichever is higher, and



(ii) failure to conduct a data audit, punishable with a fine of five crore rupees or 2% of the annual turnover of the fiduciary, whichever is higher.



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Re-identification and processing of de-identified personal data without consent is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, or fine, or both.



3 YEARS

Sharing of Non-Personal Data with Government

The central government may direct data fiduciaries to provide it with any: (i) non-personal data and (ii) anonymised personal data (where it is not possible to identify data principal) for better targeting of services



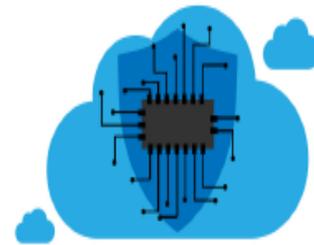
non-personal data

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Amendments to Other Laws

The Bill amends the **Information Technology Act, 2000** to delete the provisions related to compensation payable by companies for failure to protect personal data.



Information Technology Act, 2000

Why in News?



Joint Parliamentary Committee



The Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP) deliberating on the Personal Data Protection (PDP) bill was given its fifth extension to submit its report on the bill.

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The JCP is now expected to submit the report in the first week of the Winter Session, which usually commences around the last week of November.

The PDP bill was first brought to the Parliament in 2019 and passed on to the JCP for examination.



**PERSONAL DATA
PROTECTION BILL
2019**



Joint Parliamentary Committee

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