

OFFICERS' PULSE

Issue no. 14 | 29th August to 4th September, 2021



**AT A GLANCE
& IN DEPTH.**

COVERAGE.

The Hindu

The Indian Express

PIB

Rajya Sabha TV

All India Radio

Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

Science and Tech

Culture

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



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) National Register of Citizens

What is it?

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the register containing names of Indian citizens.
- NRC was prepared first in **1951** after the conduct of the Census of 1951.
- It is being updated and that too **only in Assam**.
- Under NRC, one has to link oneself to a family member whose name had appeared either in the **NRC of 1951**, or to any of the **state's electoral rolls prepared till midnight of 24th March 1971**.
- If the applicant's name is not on any of these lists, he can produce any of the **12 other documents dated up to March 24, 1971**.

Why 1971?

Assam Accord

- Popular movements between 1979 and 1985 against undocumented immigrants in Assam led to the Assam Accord.
- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on **15 August 1985**.
- As per the accord, all migrants who came to Assam prior to March 24, 1971, would be given citizenship, after fulfilling certain criteria.
- Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971, shall continue to be **detected, deleted and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners**.
- However, the provisions in the Assam accord were not implemented for a long time.
- Finally the **Supreme Court**, which is supervising the entire process, set a hard deadline of August 31, 2019, for the final NRC.

Final Draft

- The final draft of NRC was released in August 2019 which **excluded 19 lakh of the 3.3 crore applicants in Assam**.
- Each excluded person can file an appeal in **Foreigners Tribunals**.
- The appellant then has the option of approaching the **High Court and Supreme Court**.

Foreigners Tribunal

- The foreigners tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies, unique to Assam, to determine if a person staying illegally is a "foreigner" or not.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964**, and has empowered **district magistrates** in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.

Current Status

- The NRC was published two years back, however, the **Registrar General of India is yet to notify it**. At the same time, the Supreme Court has not heard the matter since January 6, 2020. The Assam government too has failed to accept the NRC and wants the list amended.

Why in News?

- Lakhs of people living in Assam, who had their names registered in the National Register of Citizens in 2019, have not received their Aadhaar numbers yet. As a result, they are unable to avail of the benefits that come with linking bank accounts with Aadhaar number.
- In August 2019, 27 lakh people provided their biometrics, but around 19 lakh of them did not find their names in the NRC. Several of those who got registered in the NRC too have failed to get Aadhaar so far.
- The problem exists because of confusions that prevail in the NRC exercise.

Related Information

Registrar General of India

- The office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India was founded in 1961 by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** for arranging, conducting and analysing the results of the demographic surveys of India, including census and linguistic survey.

2) How was the backward classes policy restored?

Context

- The **105th Constitution Amendment** was notified recently after it received the assent of President Ramnath Kovind. It is aimed at **restoring to the States their power to identify socially and educationally backward classes.**
- The Amendment became necessary to undo the effect of a **Supreme Court verdict** that States had lost their power to include or exclude communities in the 'Backward Classes' list **after Parliament enacted the 102nd Constitution Amendment.**

Why was the Amendment required?

- Through the 102nd Constitution Amendment, Parliament created a **National Backward Classes Commission**, vesting it with the power to be consulted by the Centre as well as the States in **all matters concerning the 'socially and educationally backward classes' (SEBCs).**
- In a bid to provide the Commission with the same powers as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Parliament used **wording identical to the existing provisions relating to the SC/ST Commission.**
- Thus, under **Article 342A**, it was laid down that the **President shall notify a list of SEBCs** in relation to each State and Union Territory in **consultation with the Governors.** This was called the '**Central List**', and once it is notified, **only Parliament alone could make changes** to it.
- Based on this, the Supreme Court, while considering a challenge to the Maratha reservation in Maharashtra on various grounds, concluded that after this Amendment came into force, **States can no more notify or identify backward**

classes, and only the President could do so, and further changes could be made by Parliament.

What was the reaction of political parties?

- The Union government had argued in court that **neither the Centre nor Parliament intended to take away the State's power to identify SEBCs.** The use of the term, 'Central List', meant that what the President notified was a list of backward classes for the **purpose of the Central government and its instrumentalities, and did not affect the lists maintained by the various States.**
- As there was a political consensus that the Supreme Court's interpretation required to be undone by law, it was decided to amend the Constitution once again to clarify the State's role in identifying SEBCs.
- It was introduced as the Constitution (127th Amendment) Bill, 2021. After its passage and on receiving presidential assent, it was notified as the **Constitution (105th Amendment) Act, 2021.**

What does the 105th Amendment do?

- Parliament adopted fresh legislation to undo the effects of the Supreme Court's interpretation. Therefore, it contains specific clauses that seek to **restore the original intention of having a 'Central List' for the purposes of the Union and letting States retain their respective lists.**
- It first adds a proviso to the effect that the requirement that the **National Backward Classes Commission should be consulted on policy matters will not apply to the State lists of SEBCs.**
- It specifies that the **list of SEBCs notified by the President shall be only for the purposes of the Central government alone,** and that the 'Central List' means only the list "prepared and maintained by and for the Central Government".
- Further, the 105th Amendment clarifies that **every State or Union Territory may, by law, prepare and maintain for its own purposes a list of SEBCs and this may be different from the Central List.**
- Finally, to end all debate on how SEBCs are defined, the latest Amendment also **changed the definition** given in the 102nd Amendment. Originally, "**socially and educationally backward classes**" were

described as “such backward classes as are so deemed under **Article 342A** for the purposes of this Constitution”, that is, those found in the List notified by the President under Article 342A.

- This has now been changed to the effect that SEBCs are those **so deemed under the same Article for the purposes of the Central government, or the State or the Union Territory.**

3) What has the Supreme Court ruled on ‘creamy layer’?

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court observed that **economic criterion cannot be the sole basis for identifying the ‘creamy layer’** of a backward class, and that **other factors like social advancement, education, employment, too, matter.**
- The judgment came on a writ petition filed by a group from Haryana, challenging two notifications issued by the State government in 2016 and 2018, under the Haryana Backward Classes (Reservation in Services and Admission in Educational Institutions) Act, 2016.

What were the notifications?

- The 2016 notification identified as **‘creamy layer’ backward class members whose gross annual income exceeded ₹6 lakh.** It said backward class sections whose families earn **less than ₹3 lakh would get priority** over their counterparts who earn more than ₹3 lakh but less than ₹6 lakh.
- The Supreme Court struck down the notifications as a violation of the 2016 Act. It said Section 5 (2) of the Act required the State to **consider social, economic and other factors together** to identify and exclude backward class members as ‘creamy layer’.

Who belongs to the ‘creamy layer’?

- The ‘creamy layer’ concept was introduced in the Supreme Court’s **Indra Sawhney judgment**, delivered by a nine-judge Bench on **November 16, 1992.**
- Though it **upheld the government’s decision based on the Mandal Commission’s report to give 27% reservation to Other Backward Classes**, the court found it necessary to **identify sections of backward classes** who were

already “highly advanced socially as well as economically and educationally”.

- The court believed that these wealthy and advanced members form the **‘creamy layer’ among backward classes.** The judgment **directed the State governments to identify the ‘creamy layer’ and exclude them from the purview of reservation.**
- However, certain States like Kerala did not promptly implement the judgment. This led to the **Indra Sawhney-II case in 2000.** In this, the court went to the extent of **determining the ‘creamy layer’** among backward classes.
- The judgment held that persons from backward classes who **occupied posts in higher services** such as IAS, IPS and All India Services had reached a higher level of social advancement and economic status, and therefore, were not entitled to be treated as backward. Such persons were to be treated as ‘creamy layer’ without any further inquiry.
- Likewise, **people with sufficient income** who were in a position to **provide employment to others** should also be taken to have reached a higher social status and be treated as “outside the backward class”.
- Other categories included persons with **higher agricultural holdings or income from property.** Thus, a reading of the Indra Sawhney judgments shows that **social advancement, including education and employment, and not just wealth,** was key to identifying the ‘creamy layer’.

Why is it difficult to draw the line?

- The identification of ‘creamy layer’ has been a thorny issue. The basic question here is how rich or advanced should a backward class section be to invite exclusion from reservation.
- Justice Jeevan Reddy, in the Indra Sawhney judgment, pointed out that “The basis of exclusion **should not merely be economic, unless, of course, the economic advancement is so high that it necessarily means social advancement**”.
- Justice Reddy highlighted the pitfalls of identifying the creamy layer merely on economic basis. For example, a member of backward class, say a member of the carpenter caste, goes to the Middle East and works there as a carpenter. If you take his

annual income in rupees, it would be fairly high from the Indian standard. Is he to be excluded from the Backward Class? Are his children in India to be deprived of quota benefits? Situation may, however, be different, if he rises so high economically as to become — say a factory owner himself. In such a situation, his social status also rises. He himself would be in a position to provide employment to others.

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in **Jarnail Singh versus Lachhmi Narain**

Gupta (2008) noted the necessity of applying the creamy layer concept. The court said unless the creamy layer principle was applied those genuinely deserving reservation would not access it. The apex court held that the **creamy layer principle was based on the fundamental right to equality.**

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Leaded Petrol Eradicated

About Leaded Petrol

- Vehicles have been running on leaded fuel since 1922, when the compound **tetraethyl lead** was added to gasoline to boost engine performance.
- By the 1970s, almost all petrol produced worldwide contained lead. The **health impacts have been catastrophic**, but the **environment has suffered too, with air and soil contamination just two examples**.
- Most high-income nations had prohibited leaded petrol use by the 1980s, but almost all low and middle-income countries were still using it as late as 2002.
- That same year, the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** began the **Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV)** which brought together all stakeholders, and its activities included raising awareness and overcoming resistance from local oil dealers and producers of lead, as well as investing in refinery upgrades and providing technical assistance.
- **India** was among those countries that took early action to phase out leaded petrol which started in 1994 and was completed by **2000**.

Issues related with Leaded Petrol

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **lead is toxic**, affects multiple body systems and is particularly harmful to young children.
- It affects the **brain, liver, kidneys and bones**.
- Leaded petrol causes **heart disease, stroke and cancer**.
- More recent research has indicated that lead can damage the **infant brain** even at blood levels as low as 5 microunit per decilitre (μ /dl).

Why in News?

- After a 20-year campaign, the use of leaded petrol or gasoline has ended worldwide.
- According to the United Nations Environment Programme, **Algeria** is the last country to use the fuel and exhausted

its supplies last month, thereby **completely eradicating the use of Leaded Petrol**.

- UN Secretary-General António Guterres called the eradication of leaded petrol an "**international success story**". It will prevent more than **1.2 million premature deaths** and save world economies over **\$2.4 trillion** annually.

Additional Information

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

- UNEP is the **leading global voice on the environment**.
- It provides **leadership and encourages partnership** in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

2) Birds of Prey facing Global Decline

What's in the news?

- A new analysis of data from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and BirdLife International has highlighted the issue of decline of Birds of Prey despite a few high-profile conservation success stories.
- *Birds of prey, also known as raptors, include species of bird that primarily hunts and kills other animals, especially vertebrates, for food.*

Key Findings

- Around **30% of 557 raptor species** worldwide are considered near threatened, vulnerable or endangered or critically endangered.
- **Eg:** Eighteen species are critically endangered, including the **Philippine eagle, the hooded vulture and the Annobon scops owl**.
- Other species are in danger of becoming **locally extinct in specific regions**, meaning they may no longer play critical roles as top predators in their ecosystems.
- Of threatened birds of prey that are active mostly during the day including **hawks, eagles and vultures, 54% are falling in population** and the same is true for 47% of

threatened nocturnal raptors, such as owls.

- Globally, the biggest threats to these birds are **habitat loss, climate change and toxic substances.**
- **Eg:** The **Andean condor** is declining due to exposure to pesticides, lead and other toxic substances.
- Widespread use of an **anti-inflammatory drug in livestock** led to the rapid decline of **vultures in South Asia**, shrinking the population of some species by **95%** in recent decades.
- In East Asia, many raptor species are **long-distance migrants** and they breed in northern China, Mongolia or Russia and travel down the eastern coast of China to spend summers in Southeast Asia or India and the sites that are bottlenecks for migration, with thousands of birds passing through, are **important to protect.**
- Of **4,200 sites** identified by conservation groups as critical for **raptor species** globally, most “**are unprotected or only partly covered by protected areas**”.
- A 2018 study in the journal Biological Conservation found that **52% of all raptor species** worldwide are **decreasing** in population.
- In particular, **raptor species** that require **forest** are more likely to be **threatened and declining** and the greatest concentrations of threatened species are found in **South and South-East Asia.**

3) UN Report on Impact of Plastic Pollution

Why in News?

- According to a UN report, **Migratory Species** are most Vulnerable to Plastic Pollution.
- The report released by the **United Nations Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**, focused for the **first time** on the **impacts of plastic pollution** on animals, birds, and aquatic beings in the **Asia-Pacific region.**

Key Findings of the Report

- Plastic pollution poses a **major threat to migratory species that dwell on land and in freshwater habitats**, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

- The study focussed on the **Ganges and Mekong river basins**, which together contribute an estimated **200,000 tonnes** of plastic pollution to the **Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean** every year.
- It showed that pollution from plastics **increases the vulnerability** of already endangered species such as **Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins, Asian elephants, and Black-footed Albatrosses.**
- Plastic pollution can also impact other **migratory and resident species** that live in freshwater environments including fish, through entanglement as well as through the ingestion of microplastics that can in turn impact species of the food web.
- The study found that species protected under the CMS are impacted by plastic pollution in **river ecosystems and on land**, including freshwater species, land animals, and birds and especially **air-breathing freshwater mammals** are particularly at risk from plastic pollution.
- The report found that **migratory species** are likely among the **most vulnerable** to plastic pollution.
- With nearly 500 species, **birds represent over 80%** of the CMS-listed species in the Asia-Pacific region and there is significant evidence for bird interaction with plastics.
- The report pointed out that **discarded fishing gear and kite strings** are among the **major threats especially for the aquatic species** and also for mammals and birds which encounter these discarded materials on land.
- According to a recent study, **by 2030** up to **53 million metric tonnes of plastics** could enter **aquatic ecosystems** annually, and if no improved measures are taken, this figure could reach **90 million tonnes annually** meaning global environmental contamination is likely to continue to increase dramatically.

Key Species Vulnerable to Plastic Pollution

- With an estimated **3,500** individuals remaining in the wild, the **Gangetic dolphins** were recently rated as the second-most vulnerable species at risk of **entanglement** and negative effects from discarded fishing gear in the Ganga river.
- In the **Mekong delta**, the drowning of **Irrawaddy dolphins**, estimated to be less

than 100, owing to entanglement in nets is rampant

- Both these species of dolphin are classified as '**endangered**' on the IUCN Red List.
- **Dugong**, another marine mammal protected by the CMS in the Asia-Pacific region, is often seen to drown after getting **entangled in fishing nets or ingesting microplastics**, with India and Thailand contributing to most of their deaths.
- The **Asian Elephant** has been observed scavenging on rubbish dumps in Sri Lanka and ingesting plastic in Thailand.
- Migratory seabirds, such as **Black-footed Albatrosses and Laysan Albatrosses**, may not be able to tell plastic from prey when flying over the ocean and can accidentally eat floating debris.
- Migratory birds such as the **Black-faced Spoonbill and the Osprey** have been observed making nests out of plastics.

Additional Information

About CMS

- The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), also known as the **Bonn Convention**, is an **environmental treaty** of the United Nations that provides a global platform for the **conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats**.
- CMS brings together the **States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States**, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.
- As the **only global convention specializing in the conservation of migratory species**, their habitats and migration routes, CMS complements and co-operates with a number of other international organizations, NGOs and partners in the media as well as in the corporate sector.
- Migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on **Appendix I** of the Convention.
- **India has been a party to the CMS since 1983.**

4) National Green Tribunal

About NGT

- It is a **statutory body** established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010.
- It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to **handle environmental disputes** involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be **guided by principles of natural justice**.
- The Tribunal is vested with the **powers of a civil court** under the Code of Civil Procedure for discharging its functions but it can make its own rules.
- It provides speedy environmental justice and helps reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- **New Delhi** is the Principal Place of Sitting of the Tribunal and **Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai** shall be the other four places of sitting of the Tribunal.

Tribunal's composition

- The Tribunal has a presence in **five zones**- North, Central, East, South and West. The Principal Bench is situated in the North Zone, headquartered in **Delhi**.
- The Central zone bench is situated in Bhopal, East zone in Kolkata, South zone in Chennai and West zone in Pune.
- The Tribunal is headed by the **Chairperson** who sits in the Principal Bench and has **at least ten but not more than twenty judicial members and at least ten but not more than twenty expert members**.

Tribunal's Jurisdiction

- The NGT deals with civil cases under the seven laws related to the environment, these include
 1. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
 2. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
 3. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
 4. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
 5. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
 6. The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 and
 7. The Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- Two important acts - **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** and **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** have been kept out of NGT's jurisdiction.

- The Tribunal has jurisdiction **over all civil cases involving a substantial question relating to the environment**. Additionally, any person aggrieved by an order/direction of any of the Appellate Authorities under the legislations mentioned above can also challenge them before the National Green Tribunal.

Are decisions of the Court binding?

- **Yes**, decisions of the Tribunal are binding. The Tribunal's orders are enforceable as the powers vested are the same as in a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

Are decisions of the Tribunal final?

- The Tribunal has powers to review its own decisions. If this fails, the decision can be challenged before the **Supreme Court within ninety days**.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change told the Supreme Court that the National Green Tribunal **does not possess suo motu powers** (take cognisance of a matter on its own) as it is not there in the statute. However, it can act on letters or communication addressed to it raising environmental concerns.

5) Winged visitors begin reaching Pulicat Lake

About Pulicat Lake

- It is the **second-largest brackish water lake** in the country (next to **Chilika in Odisha**) located at the border of the states of **Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu** on the Barricade Island of Sriharikota.
- The barrier island of **Sriharikota** separates the lagoon from the Bay of Bengal and is home to the Satish Dhawan Space Centre.
- The lagoon encompasses the **Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary and is a Ramsar site**.
- Also called **Pazhaverkadu**, the lake is popular as a **flamingo-watching site** and for water activities.
- The prime season to visit is between October and March as during that time over **20,000 migratory birds** come to the lake for breeding purposes.

Why in News?

- Due to comfortable storage in the major reservoirs in Nellore district of Andhra

Pradesh, **migratory birds** have started arriving at the picturesque Pulicat Lake.

- The arrival of greater flamingos and pelicans has just begun. Pulicat is an **ideal breeding site** for spot-billed pelicans.
- It is also home for black-headed ibis, Asian openbill, black-crowned night heron, and little cormorant.

6) Gainful use of Paddy Stubble

What is Stubble Burning ?

- Stubble burning is the **deliberate setting fire of the straw stubble** that remains after wheat and other grains have been harvested.
- The period from **15 October to 15 November** is when stubble burning instances spike because **paddy crops** are harvested during this time and the residue left behind **needs to be cleared to sow wheat**.
- Stubble burning is mainly practiced in Punjab and Haryana and it is cited to be one of the major causes for Delhi Air pollution.

Why do Farmers Burn Stubble?

- The high yield producing crops also produce a lot of straw, this makes it more difficult for the farmers to **incorporate the straw** into the soil.
- So it has become a traditional practice for farmers to burn the Straw in some areas.
- It's estimated that **15 million tonnes** of paddy straw are burnt every year in Punjab.

What are the Implications?

- Open burning of Stubble is **Incomplete Combustion** in Nature & large Amount of the **Methane, Carbon monoxide, Volatile Organic Compound** are Emitted.
- It also produces large amounts of **PM 2.5 and PM 10** (tiny toxic dust particles), the most common **primary pollutants** in the country.
- It causes **air pollution** across the northern states of India particularly in Delhi.

Government Response to the Stubble Burning

- **The National Green Tribunal has fixed penalties** for Landowners who were involved in the stubble burning.
- Punjab Government recently set up a **paddy straw challenge fund** for the technological solutions on crop residue management.

- Punjab Government is also providing **Agro-Machines** such as mulchers & choppers at Subsidised rates to farmers & co-operatives societies for crop residue management.

Why in News?

- In order to prevent burning of crop residue that worsens air pollution, **Punjab** is **promoting paddy straw as a “resource to create wealth”** that can be used in **mills, distilleries and breweries**.

News in Detail

- The government recently decided to permit certain categories of industries to install **paddy straw fired boilers**, for which the industries will be given **fiscal incentives**.
- The industries included in this scheme are **sugar mills, pulp and paper mills**, etc.
- New and existing units of **distilleries and breweries**, proposing replacement of old boilers or expansion with installation of new boilers, are required to use **paddy straw as fuel in boilers**.

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ECONOMY

Clarification:

Dear students,

- In Pulse Issue no 2, under RAMP Program topic, it is given as "The MSME sector is the backbone of India's economy, contributing 30% of India's GDP and 4% of exports". It is an error. MSME sector contributes more than 40% of India's exports. Error is regretted.

1) Financial Stability and Development Council

About FSDC

- Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is an apex-level body constituted in **2010** to strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism for maintaining financial stability.
- It is **not a statutory body**.
- It is chaired by the **Union Finance Minister of India**.
- Its members include the heads of financial sector regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA, IRDA), Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, and Chief Economic Adviser.
- The Council **monitors macro prudential supervision of the economy**, including functioning of large financial conglomerates, and **addresses inter-regulatory coordination and financial sector development issues**.
- It also focuses on financial literacy and financial inclusion.
- **No funds are separately allocated** to the Council for undertaking its activities.

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman recently chaired the 24th meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council.
- The meeting deliberated on the various mandates of the FSDC, viz., Financial Stability, Financial Sector Development, Inter-regulatory Coordination, Financial Literacy, Financial Inclusion, and Macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates etc.

2) Infrastructure Investment Trusts

About InvITs

- **Infrastructure and real estate** are the two most critical sectors in any developing economy. A well-developed infrastructural set-up **propels the overall development of a country**. It also facilitates a **steady inflow of private and foreign investments**, and thereby **augments the capital base** available for the growth of key sectors in an economy, as well as its own growth, in a sustained manner.
- Given the importance of these two sectors in the country, and the **paucity of public funds** available to stimulate their growth, it is imperative that **additional channels of financing are put in place**.
- An Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvITs) is **Collective Investment Scheme similar to a mutual fund**, which enables direct investment of money from individual and institutional investors in infrastructure projects to earn a small portion of the income as return. The objective of InvITs is to **facilitate investment in the infrastructure sector**.
- The InvIT is designed as a **tiered structure** with Sponsor setting up the InvIT which in turn invests into the eligible infrastructure projects either directly or via **special purpose vehicles (SPVs)**.
 - *SPV is an entity which is formed for a single, well-defined and narrow purpose. An SPV can be formed for any lawful purpose.*
- InvITs can be established as a **trust** and registered with **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**.
- The InvITs are **regulated by the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014**.

Why in News?

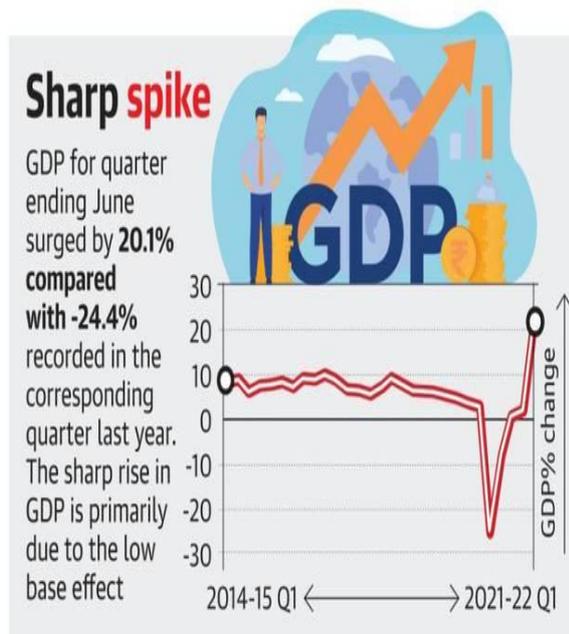
- Financial experts have noted that changes to the Infrastructure Investment Trusts structure and regulations are among crucial modifications required to attract retail investors to the National Monetisation Pipeline.

- They suggested the government to **extend Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code provisions** to InvITs which would help lenders access a faster and more effective debt restructuring and resolution option.
- Refer Pulse Issue no. 10 for more information about Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

3) Economy grows 20.1% in Q1

What's in the news?

- According to the data released by the **National Statistical Office**, the Indian economy **grew at a record pace of 20.1 per cent in April-June 2021** compared with the corresponding period last year, when a national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic had nearly halted all economic activities. The GDP had **contracted 24.4 per cent in April-June 2020**.
- The first quarter's high growth rate, however, has come despite a brutal second wave of the pandemic which peaked in April-May.
- This is the **fastest quarterly growth** witnessed by India since such data began to be released in the mid-1990s.
- The jump in GDP numbers is mainly due to a weak base last year and also a rebound in consumer spending during the quarter.



What is meant by 'low base effect'?

- One of the major reasons for this phenomenal jump in GDP is the low base effect. That means the **base year or month with which the figure is being compared**.
- For quarterly or annual GDP data, comparison is always made with the **same quarter last year or growth over last year's GDP**.
- The Q1 GDP growth of 20.1% per cent is, therefore, in comparison to that GDP data recorded in the same quarter last year.
- When the pandemic struck in 2020, the government imposed a strict nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the virus. This had a massive impact on the Q1 GDP growth which slumped by a record 24.4 per cent to Rs 26.95 lakh crore as compared to Rs 35.7 lakh crore reported in Q1 of 2019-20.
- As for the period under consideration, the GDP figure stands at Rs 32.38 lakh crore, up 20.1 per cent from Rs 26.95 lakh crore reported in Q1 of 2020-21.
- However, the GDP at Constant (2011-12) prices in Q1 of 2021-22 (Rs 32.38 lakh crore) is **still 9% lower than the GDP in the same period during the pre-Covid year 2019-20** (Rs 35.7 lakh crore).

Other indicators

- Apart from the low base effect, there are other significant reasons too which suggest a recovery in the economy.
- The GDP data shows that **sectors including 'agriculture, forestry and fishing' and 'electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services' are above the levels of the pre-Covid year of 2019-20**.
- Many sectors like **retail, auto sales, farm output, construction and exports** have picked up since June.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) New Development Bank

About NDB

- The New Development Bank (NDB) was established by the **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries**. It formally came into existence at the Ufa Summit (Russia) in **2015**.
- It was established with the objective of financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions toward global growth and development.
- In 2018, the NDB received **observer status** in the UN General Assembly.
- **Voting power** of each member is equal to the number of its subscribed shares in capital stock.
- All members of the United Nations could be members of the bank, however the share of the BRICS nations can never be less than **55% of voting power**.

Why in News?

- The New Development Bank has approved the **United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Bangladesh** as its new members in its first expansion push.
- The NDB Board of Governors initiated the negotiation to **expand its membership in**

2020. It has now approved the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Bangladesh as its first new member countries.

- Since the beginning of its operations, NDB has approved about 80 projects totaling a portfolio of USD 30 billion. Projects in areas such as transport, water and sanitation, clean energy, digital infrastructure, social infrastructure and urban development are within the scope of the Bank.

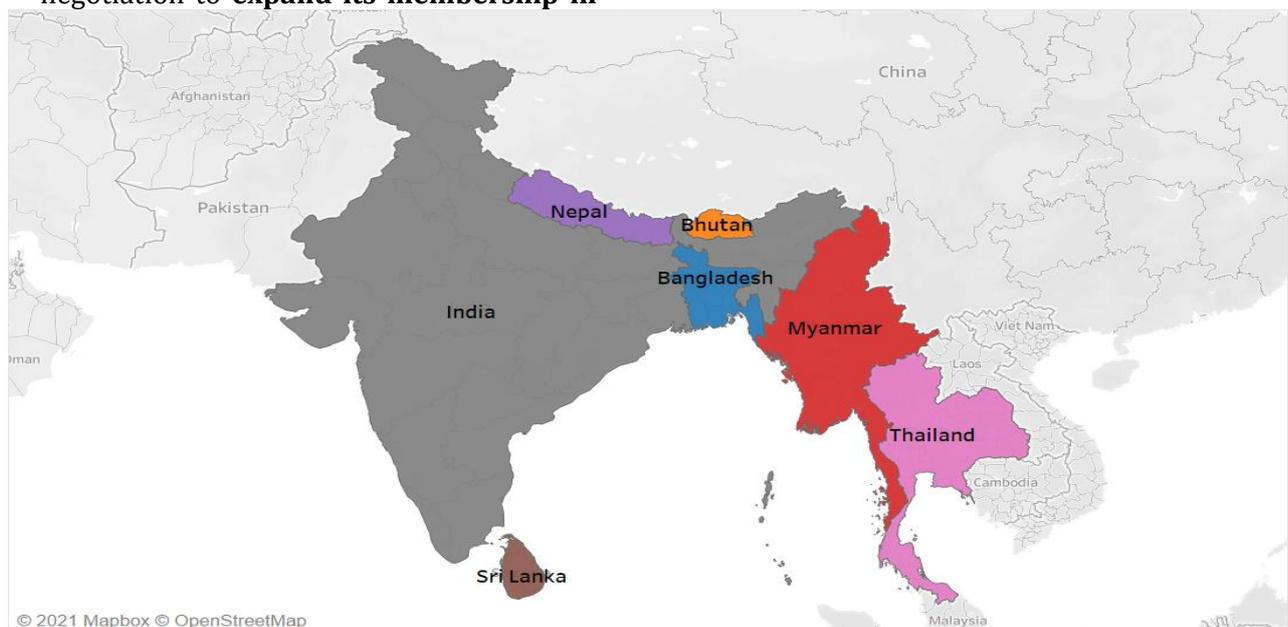
2) BIMSTEC

What's in the news?

- India recently hosted the 8th Meeting of Agriculture Experts of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Countries virtually.

About BIMSTEC

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional organisation that comprises **seven member states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal**.
- It includes: five deriving from South Asia, including **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka**, and two from Southeast Asia, including **Myanmar and Thailand**.
- It is headquartered in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**.



Background

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- BIMSTEC came into existence on June 6, 1997 through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- Initially, the economic bloc was formed with four Member States with the acronym '**BIST-EC**' (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation)
- Following the inclusion of **Myanmar** on 22 December 1997, the group was renamed 'BIMST-EC'.
- With the admission of **Nepal and Bhutan** in 2004, the name of the grouping was changed to 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (BIMSTEC).

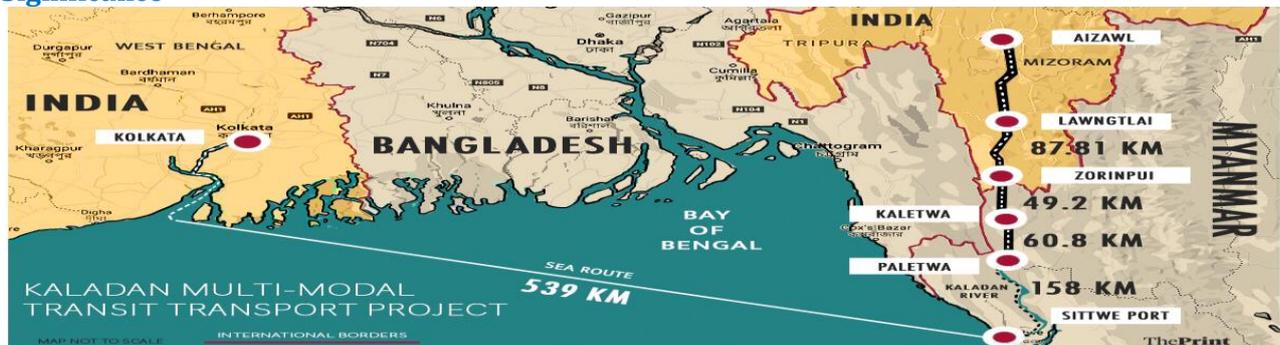
Priority Sectors

- **BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization.**
- BIMSTEC has **14 priority areas** of cooperation, namely (i) Trade and Investment (ii) Technology (iii) Energy (iv) Transportation and Communication (v) Tourism (vi) Fisheries (vii) Agriculture (viii) Cultural Cooperation (ix) Environment and Disaster Management (x) Public Health (xi) People-to-People Contact (xii) Poverty Alleviation (xiii) Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime and (xiv) Climate Change.

Founding Principles

- The founding principles of BIMSTEC are as follows:
 1. Cooperation within BIMSTEC will be based on respect for the **principle of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, no-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit.**
 2. Cooperation within BIMSTEC will constitute an addition to and not be a substitute for bilateral, regional or multilateral cooperation involving the Member States.

Significance



- Another important project is the **Asian Trilateral Highway** connecting **India and**

- The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.7 trillion.
- The objective of BIMSTEC is to harness shared and accelerated growth through mutual cooperation in different areas of common interests.
- The regional group constitutes a **bridge between South and South East Asia** and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries.
- BIMSTEC has also established a platform for **intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.**

What is India's interest in the grouping?

- The two Southeast Asian countries in the grouping, Myanmar and Thailand, have a crucial place for India's ambitious connectivity plans for the **North-Eastern region.**
- **India's Act East Policy**—within it, BIMSTEC, in particular—is seen as a critical alternative to the country's non-participation in the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A crucial driver of this policy is India's Northeast, as seen in a renewed infrastructure push in the region.
- In terms of connectivity, BIMSTEC has several projects that, when finished, could transform the movement of goods and vehicles through the countries in the grouping.
- For eg: **Kaladan Multimodal project.** The project envisages connecting **Kolkata to Sittwe port** in Myanmar, and then Mizoram by river and road. India and Myanmar had signed a framework agreement in 2008 for the implementation of this project. It's yet to be finished.

Thailand through Myanmar. The highway will run from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot

in Thailand via Myanmar and represents a significant step in establishing connectivity between India and Southeast Asian countries. The project is expected to be completed soon.



- With the India-Pakistan disputes coming in the way of a smooth functioning of the **SAARC**, groupings such as BIMSTEC can take forward the concept of regional cooperation in a different manner.

Untapped potential

- Better connectivity projects would help India leverage the untapped potential of BIMSTEC's possible trade linkages.

- Currently, **intra-BIMSTEC trade** has grown at a meagre rate of 0.62% annually. The **absence of free trade agreements** and the **lack of seamless movement of goods and services** within the region explain these low levels of intra-regional trade.
- Apart from improving connectivity and enhancing regional trade, BIMSTEC could also help in partially addressing **India's growing energy requirements**. India, along with other BIMSTEC countries, is exploring energy opportunities at the Rakhine coast of Myanmar in the northern part of the Bay of Bengal.
- In this context, BIMSTEC has already established an **energy centre in New Delhi** to provide logistic, technical and research support.
- There has been a view that the proliferation of commitments via 14 priority areas didn't yield tangible results over the past two decades and the regional grouping **should trim its list of priorities**.

Way Forward

- Being the largest and most developed country in this grouping, the onus of steering the organisation forward lies with India. However, if India pursues an approach of selective usage, it restricts the ability of the organisation to live up to its full potential.
- The benefits from greater regional integration are much higher than simply using BIMSTEC as a diplomatic tool for isolation within the region.

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DEFENCE

1) ICGS Vigraha

Why in News:



- The Indian Coast Guard Ship Vigraha was recently commissioned by the Minister for Defence at a programme held in Chennai.

What are the functions of Vigraha

- ICGS Vigraha can **carry one twin-engine helicopter and four high-speed boats for boarding operation, search and rescue, law enforcement and maritime patrol.**
- The ship is also capable of **carrying pollution response equipment to contain oil spills** at sea.
- It was **indigenously built** by L&T Ship Building Limited.
- It is fitted with advanced technology **radars, navigation and communication equipment**, sensors and machinery capable of operating in tropical sea conditions.
- The vessel is armed with a 40/60 Bofors gun and fitted with two 12.7 mm Stabilised Remote Control Gun with fire control system.
- **Advance Light Helicopter (ALH)** manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited **can be operated on this ship.**

Significance

- Specific **threats to maritime security – piracy, terrorism, illicit trafficking of arms and narcotics, human trafficking, illegal fishing and damage to environment.**
- The ship, on joining the Coast Guard Eastern fleet, will be deployed **extensively for exclusive economic zone (EEZ)**

surveillance and other duties as enshrined in the Coast Guard Charter to **safeguard** the **country's maritime interests.**

- The **Indian Ocean region**, where **more than two-thirds of the world's oil shipments** take place, **one-third of bulk cargo and more than half of container traffic**, serves as a key route in achieving the world's own interests.
- To read about ALH and Coast guard: <https://officerspulse.com/indian-coast-guard-icg/>

2) President's Colour

What is it?

- It's the **highest honour** bestowed **on a military unit** in **recognition** of its **exceptional service to the nation.**

Why in News:

- President Ram Nath Kovind awarded the President's Colour to the Indian Naval Aviation.

About Indian Naval Aviation

- India's Naval Air Arm came into being with acquisition of the first Sealand aircraft in 1951 and the commissioning of INS Garuda, the first Naval Air Station.
- Over the past decades, it had transformed into a modern, technologically advanced

and highly potent force, with more than 250 aircraft comprising carrier-borne fighters, maritime reconnaissance aircraft, helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft (RPA).

- **Naval Aviation** has played a **major role** in operations such as
- **Operation Cactus**- India launched an Operation Cactus to help the Maldives as the country faced a mercenary invasion

- **Operation Jupiter**- Indian Peace Keeping Operations in Sri Lanka
- **Operation Vijay**- Operation by the Military of India that led to the capture of Goa, Daman and Diu and Anjediva Islands
- **Operation Parakram**- launched in the wake of the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Gaganyaan space suit

About Gaganyaan

- It is an **Indian crewed orbital spacecraft** intended to be the formative spacecraft of the **Indian Human Spaceflight Programme**.
- It is expected to be launched in 2022, the year of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence
- It is designed to have 3-7 crew members spend 3-7 days in space in a 400-km orbit (Low Earth Orbit or LEO).
- **GSLV Mk III** will be used to launch Gaganyaan
- The Gaganyaan Programme envisages undertaking the demonstration of human spaceflight to **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** in the short-term and will lay the foundation for a sustained Indian human space exploration programme in the long run.
- The objective of Gaganyaan programme is to **demonstrate indigenous capability** to undertake human space flight mission to LEO.
- With this, **India could potentially become the fourth country** to send a man to space, after the erstwhile USSR, the US and China

Important Sub Missions of Gaganyaan- Already Completed

- **Reentry capsule-** A reentry capsule is the portion of a space capsule which returns to Earth following a spaceflight.
- **ISRO Pad Abort Test** - ISRO Pad Abort Test is a **launch escape system** test of its crew module as part of Indian Human Spaceflight Programme.
- **Launch escape system-** A **launch escape system (LES) or launch abort system (LAS)** is a crew-safety system connected to a space capsule that can be used to **quickly separate the capsule** from its launch vehicle in case of an emergency requiring the abort of the launch
- **Vyommitra** - is a **female-looking spacefaring humanoid robot** being developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation to function on-board the Gaganyaan. Vyommitra is expected to be **onboard uncrewed Gaganyaan missions** to perform microgravity experiments,

monitor module parameters, and support astronauts in crewed missions by simulating functions exactly like humans.

Why in news?

- Indian Air Force (IAF) officers who completed a year-long training in the Russian Space Academy as part of India's Gaganyaan human space flight programme are set to return to Russia to get their space suits made as per individual specifications.

What are space suits?

- Space suits serve as "self-contained spaceships that **protect astronauts from extreme temperatures, micrometeoroids and the nearly pure vacuum of space** for hours at a time, so that they can take a stroll outside the confines of their spacecraft or do a walk on the Moon.
- Space suits shouldn't be confused with the pressure suits worn by astronauts, test pilots and others during launch and landing.

2) BCG vaccine

What is TB?

- **Tuberculosis (TB)** is a **disease** caused by **bacteria** called **Mycobacterium tuberculosis**. TB is an **ancient disease** and has been documented to have existed in Egypt as early as 3000 BC.
- The bacteria **usually attack the lungs**, but they can also damage other parts of the body.
- TB **spreads through the air** when a person with TB of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, or talks
- About **one-quarter of the world's population has a TB infection**, which means people have been infected by TB bacteria but are not (yet) ill with the disease and cannot transmit it.
- People infected with TB bacteria have a 5–10% lifetime risk of falling ill with TB. Those with **compromised immune systems**, such as **people living with HIV, malnutrition or diabetes**, or people who use tobacco, have a **higher risk** of falling ill.
- Common symptoms of TB are:
 - Cough for three weeks or more, sometimes with blood-streaked sputum
 - Fever, especially at night

- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite

Who is at risk?

- Over 95% of cases and deaths are in developing countries.
- People who are infected with HIV are 18 times more likely to develop active TB. The risk of active TB is also greater in persons suffering from other conditions that impair the immune system. People with undernutrition are 3 times more at risk.
- People living with HIV are 18 (15-21) times more likely to develop active TB disease than people without HIV.

TB Statistics

- **A total of 1.4 million people died from TB in 2019** (including 208 000 people with HIV). Worldwide, TB is one of the top 10 causes of death and the leading cause from a single infectious agent (above HIV/AIDS).
- In 2019, an estimated **10 million people** fell ill with tuberculosis (TB) worldwide. 5.6 million men, 3.2 million women and 1.2 million children. TB is present in all countries and age groups. But **TB is curable and preventable**.
- In 2019, **1.2 million children fell ill with TB globally**. Child and adolescent TB is often overlooked by health providers and can be difficult to diagnose and treat.
- In 2019, the 30 high TB burden countries accounted for 87% of new TB cases. Eight countries account for two thirds of the total, with India leading the count, followed by Indonesia, China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and South Africa.

Treatment for TB

- **Directly Observed Treatment Short-course (DOTS)** is the strategy followed for **treatment** of TB. Tuberculosis treatment requires at least 6 months of treatment.
- **Vaccination** - Currently, **BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guerin)** is the only licensed vaccine available for the prevention of TB.
- One fascinating feature about **BCG** is that it **works well in certain places but not so well in others**. In general, the **efficiency is higher when the country is farther from the equator**.
- BCG gives excellent protection against severe forms of tuberculosis in children.

What is Multidrug-resistant TB?

- Anti-TB medicines have been used for decades and **strains that are resistant** to

one or more of the medicines have been documented in every country surveyed. Drug resistance **emerges when anti-TB medicines are used inappropriately**, through incorrect prescription by health care providers, poor quality drugs, and patients stopping treatment prematurely.

- **Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB)** is a form of TB caused by **bacteria that do not respond to isoniazid and rifampicin**, the 2 most effective first-line anti-TB drugs. MDR-TB is treatable and curable by using second-line drugs. However, second-line treatment options are limited and require extensive chemotherapy (up to 2 years of treatment) with medicines that are expensive and toxic.

India and TB

- According to the **WHO's Global TB Report, 10 million people developed TB in 2019 with 1.4 million deaths. India accounts for 27% of these cases**.
- BCG was first introduced in a limited scale in 1948 and became a part of the National TB Control Programme in 1962.
- India is committed to eliminate TB as a public health problem by 2025.
- **National Strategic Plan for 2017- 25** for TB elimination in India;
- **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP)**- Eliminating TB by 2025 in India- It is crafted in line with other health sector strategies and global efforts, such as the draft National Health Policy 2015, World Health Organization's (WHO) End TB Strategy, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).
- **The Nikshay Ecosystem**: It's the National Tuberculosis Information System for managing patient data and tracking programme activities and performance across the country.
- **Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)**: financial support to TB patients for their nutrition.
- **The Saksham Project**: Project by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) for psycho-social counselling to DR-TB patients.

Why in News?

- 2021 marks the 100th year of the first use of BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guerin), the **vaccine** against tuberculosis (TB) in humans.

3) Vande Bharat express

What is it?

- Also known as **Train 18**, it is **India's first indigenously built engineless semi-high speed train**, rolled out by the **Integral Coach Factory in Chennai**.
- It has passenger amenities like **On-board wifi** entertainment, **GPS** based passenger information system, **CCTVs**, **bio-vacuum toilets**, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards.
- In a **bio-vacuum toilet**, **human waste is discharged into a biodegradable tank** system and **converted into organic** matter through **composting**, which **reduces** the

bad odour as well as the consumption of water.

- It also has **Divyang-friendly facilities** (differently-abled friendly facilities).
- Equipped with an **intelligent braking system** with power regeneration, it provides better **energy efficiency** thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.

Why in News?

- The Railways plans to operate 102 Vande Bharat trains by March 2024.

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ART AND CULTURE

1) Saroop of Guru Granth Sahib

What is it?

- **Saroop** is a **physical copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib** (holy religious scripture of Sikhism), **also called Bir** in Punjabi. Every Bir has 1,430 pages, which are referred to as Ang.
- The Sikhs consider the **saroop of Guru Granth Sahib a living guru** and treat it with utmost respect.
- They believe that all the 10 Gurus were the same spirit in different bodies, and the **Guru Granth Sahib is their eternal physical and spiritual form.**
- The **first Bir** first was **compiled by the fifth guru, Guru Arjan** (1564–1606) in 1604, and installed at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.
- **Guru Gobind Singh** (the tenth and the last Sikh Guru), added verses penned by the ninth master (his father) Guru Tegh Bahadur, and compiled the Bir for the second and last time.
- In **1708 Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the living Guru of the Sikhs.**
- Guru Granth Sahib is a compendium of hymns written by six Sikh gurus, 15 saints, including Bhagat Kabir, Bhagat Ravidas, Sheikh Farid (Sufi Saint) and Bhagat Namdev. The verses are composed in 31 ragas.

Why in News:

- Many saroops of the Guru Granth Sahib in war-torn Afghanistan are being shifted to India.

2) Pashmina Shawl

Why in News:

- A Centre For Excellence has been set up in Jammu & Kashmir to restore lost glory of Pashmina shawls.

What are Pashmina shawls?

- **Changthangi Goat** is a special breed of **indigenous goat** found 15000 feet above sea level in **Ladakh - Jammu and Kashmir.**
- They are **used for cashmere wool**, known as **Pashmina** once woven.
- In **Mughal times**, this was used as an indicator of rank and nobility.

Issues

- **Poor wages** among artisans.
- **Machines** have played a role in driving away women who used to spin the finest yarns in the world. **Women's participation** in shawl weaving has come down significantly from **one lakh to just around 10,000** in the Kashmir Valley.

3) Jallianwala Bagh

History behind the Jallianwala Bagh massacre

- During World War I, both extremists and moderates in the Indian National Congress supported British efforts in the hopes that India would be granted self-government after the war.
- The **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919** promised self-government but it was a sham. The improvements were termed "disappointing" and "unsatisfactory," according to the Indian National Congress.
- Further, the **Rowlatt Act (Black Act)** was passed on March 10, 1919, **authorizing the government to imprison or confine, without a trial, any person associated with seditious activities.** This led to nationwide unrest.
- Mahatma Gandhi initiated Satyagraha to protest against the **Rowlatt Act.**
- On April 7, 1919, Gandhi published an article called **Satyagrahi**, describing ways to oppose the Rowlatt Act.
- The British authorities discussed amongst themselves the actions to be taken against Gandhi and any other leaders who were participating in the Satyagraha.
- Orders were issued to prohibit Gandhi from entering Punjab and to arrest him if he disobeyed the orders.
- On the day (**April 13, 1919**) of what became the **Jallianwala Bagh massacre (Massacre of Amritsar)**, it was also the **festival of Baisakhi.**
- People had gathered at the site to **protest** against the **arrest of freedom fighters Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal** a few days earlier.

- Forces under the command of **General Reginald Dyer** opened fire on the unarmed crowd.

Implications of Jallianwala Bagh massacre

- It made a turning point in India's modern history, as it left a permanent strain on the Indo-British relations and was the driving force to **Mahatma Gandhi's full commitment to the cause of Indian nationalism and independence from Britain.**
- **Rabindranath Tagore renounced the knighthood**
- **Mahatma Gandhi gave up the title of Kaiser-i-Hind** (which was given by the British for his work during the Boer War.)

- On October 14, 1919, **the Disorders Inquiry Committee** was formed to inquire about the massacre. It later came to be known as the **Hunter Commission**. Dyer's actions were unanimously denounced by the committee. But, on the other hand, received no punishment or disciplinary action from the Hunter Committee.

Why in News:

- The government has unveiled the Jallianwala Bagh monument after renovations.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) POSHAN Abhiyaan

About the scheme

- POSHAN Abhiyaan (also known as **National Nutrition Mission**) is a flagship programme of the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** that aims to improve nutrition amongst children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.
- Launched in 2018, it is a multi-ministerial convergence mission with the vision to ensure attainment of **malnutrition free India by 2022**.
- The mission targets to reduce **stunting, under-nutrition, anemia** (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce **low birth weight** by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- The mission also strives to achieve a reduction in **Stunting** from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022 (**Mission 25 by 2022**).

Significance

- Amongst India's most serious yet marginally addressed development challenges is malnutrition, which contributes significantly to the country's disease burden.
- Even as **National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4)** data shows that the country's malnutrition rates have gone down, half of all children from families in the lowest income quintile are still stunted (51 percent) or underweight (49 percent).
- Today, India is home to the largest number of stunted children (46.6 million) and wasted children (25.5 million) in the world. **More than a third of children under five suffer from stunting and wasting and 40% of children between one and four are anaemic.**
- According to the NFHS-4, **over 50% of pregnant and non-pregnant women were found to be anaemic.**

Poshan Maah

- To ensure community mobilisation and bolster people's participation, every year the month of September is celebrated as Rashtriya Poshan Maah under POSHAN Abhiyaan across the country.
- The activities in the Poshan maah are focussed on **Social Behavioural Change**

and Counselling (SBCC). The broad themes are: antenatal care, optimal breastfeeding (early and exclusive), complementary feeding, anaemia, growth monitoring, girls' education, diet, right age of marriage, hygiene, and sanitation, eating healthy and food fortification.

Why in News?

- A series of "Poshan Jagrukta Abhiyaan" (Nutrition Awareness Campaign) programmes under "Poshan Maah" is being organised at various places in the country to carry out special dedicated activities ushering in behavioural change in the society.

2) Exercise SIMBEX

About SIMBEX

- SIMBEX is the **Maritime Bilateral Exercise between Singapore and India.**
- Initiated in **1994**, SIMBEX is the **Indian Navy's longest uninterrupted bilateral maritime exercise with any foreign navy.**

Why in News?

- The three-day long 28th edition of Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise SIMBEX concluded recently.
- Sustaining the continuity of this significant engagement despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic further underscores the strength of bilateral defence ties between both countries.
- The success of SIMBEX-2021 is yet another demonstration of the mutual resolve on both sides to strengthen the bilateral partnership further in the years ahead.

3) National Education Policy 2020

Background

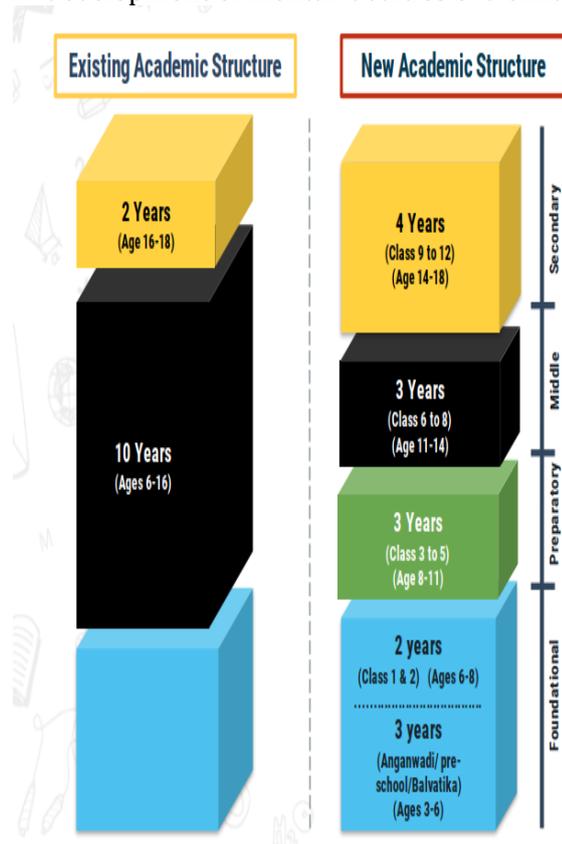
- Last year, the Union Cabinet approved the National Education Policy 2020. The new policy aims to pave way for transformational reforms in school and higher education systems in the country. This policy will replace the 34 year old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986.
- The policy is based on the pillars of **"access, equity, quality, affordability,**

accountability” and will transform India into a vibrant knowledge hub.

Highlights of the Policy

Early Childhood Care & Education

- The current 10+2 system to be replaced by a new **5+3+3+4 curricular structure** corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively. This will bring the hitherto uncovered age group of 3-6 years under school curriculum, which has been recognized globally as the crucial stage for development of mental faculties of a child.



- The new system will have **12 years of schooling with three years of Anganwadi/ pre schooling.**
- New Policy aims for **universalization of education from preschool to secondary level with 100 % Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030.**
- NEP 2020 will bring 2 crore out of school children back into the mainstream through an open schooling system.

Reforms in school curricula and pedagogy

- The school curricula and pedagogy will aim for holistic development of learners by equipping them with the key 21st century skills, reduction in curricular content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking and greater focus on experiential

learning. Students will have increased **flexibility and choice of subjects.**

- There will be no rigid separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams.
- **Vocational education** will start in schools from the 6th grade, and will include internships.
- A new and comprehensive **National Curricular Framework for School Education, NCFSE 2020-21**, will be developed by the NCERT.
- NEP 2020 calls for the setting up of a **National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** by the Education Ministry. States will prepare an implementation plan for attaining **universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools for all learners by grade 3 by 2025.**

Medium of instruction

- The policy states, the medium of instruction until at least class 5 (and preferably till class 8) should be **“home language or mother tongue or local/regional language”**. The policy gives the freedom to the state, region, and child to choose **three languages** to be learned. However, at least two of the three languages should be native Indian languages.
- Assessment reforms with **360 degree Holistic Progress Card, tracking Student Progress for achieving Learning Outcomes.**

NCFTE 2021

- A new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, NCFTE 2021, will be formulated by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in consultation with NCERT.
- By 2030, the **minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree.**
- Every state/district will be encouraged to establish **"Bal Bhavans"** as a special daytime boarding school, to participate in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities.

Higher Education

- **Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to be raised to 50 % by 2035;**

3.5 crore seats to be added in higher education.

- The policy envisages broad based, multi-disciplinary, holistic Undergraduate education with flexible curriculum, creative combinations of subjects, integration of vocational education and multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification.
- **UG education can be of 3 or 4 years with multiple exit options and appropriate certification within this period.**
- Academic Bank of Credits to be established to facilitate Transfer of Credits.
- **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)**, at par with IITs, IIMs, to be set up as models of best multidisciplinary education of global standards in the country.
- The **National Research Foundation** will be created as an apex body for fostering a strong research culture and building research capacity across higher education.
- A **National Mission for Mentoring** will be established, with a large pool of outstanding senior/retired faculty – including those with the ability to teach in Indian languages – who would be willing to provide short and long-term mentoring/professional support to university/college teachers.

Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)

- HECI will be set up as a single umbrella body for the entire higher education, excluding medical and legal education. Public and private higher education institutions will be governed by the same set of norms for regulation, accreditation and academic standards.
- Also, HECI will be having four independent verticals namely,
 - National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation,
 - General Education Council (GEC) for standard setting,
 - Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding,
 - National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation.

- Affiliation of colleges is to be phased out in 15 years and a stage-wise mechanism is to be established for granting **graded autonomy to colleges.**
- Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university.
- **Internationalization of education** will be facilitated through both institutional collaborations, and student and faculty mobility and allowing entry of top world ranked Universities to open campuses in our country.

Others focus areas

- The policy aims to achieve **100% youth and adult literacy.**
- An autonomous body, the **National Educational Technology Forum (NETF)**, will be created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration.
- NEP 2020 emphasizes setting up of **Gender Inclusion Fund, Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions** and groups
- A new National Assessment Centre, **PARAKH** (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), will be set up as a standard-setting body.
- New Policy **promotes Multilingualism** in both schools and higher education.
- **National Institute for Pali, Persian and Prakrit, Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation** to be set up.
- The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in the **Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.**

Why in News?

- Union Education and Skill Development Minister Dharmendra Pradhan recently said that the National Education Policy-2020 will turn India into a global knowledge superpower.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) International Atomic Energy Agency

About IAEA

- The International Atomic Energy Agency is the **world's central intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical co-operation in the nuclear field.**
- Widely known as the world's "**Atoms for Peace and Development**" organization, IAEA works for the safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology, contributing to international peace and security and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- The IAEA is an **autonomous international organization within the United Nations system.** It partners with more than a dozen UN organizations, thereby helping extend the reach of its services.
- **IAEA reports annually to the UN General Assembly.**
- Created in **1957**, the IAEA Secretariat is headquartered in **Vienna, Austria.**
- Total Membership: 173 (including **India**).
- The main functions of the IAEA are to:
 - encourage and assist research, development and practical application of atomic energy for peaceful uses throughout the world;
 - establish and administer safeguards designed to ensure that such activity assisted by the Agency is not used to further any military purpose;
 - apply safeguards to relevant activities at the request of Member States;
 - apply, under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other international treaties, mandatory comprehensive safeguards in non-nuclear weapon States (NNWS) Parties to such treaties.

Why in News?

- The International Atomic Energy Agency has reported that North Korea appears to have restarted its **Yongbyon nuclear**

reactor that is widely believed to have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons.

- The IAEA has no access to North Korea since the country expelled its inspectors in 2009. The country then pressed ahead with its nuclear weapons programme and soon resumed nuclear testing. Its last nuclear test was in 2017.
- The IAEA now monitors North Korea from afar, largely through satellite imagery.

2) C-DOT

About C-DOT

- Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) is an **autonomous Telecom R&D Centre of the Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications.** It was established in **1984.**
- It is a registered society under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860.**
- In the initial years, C-DOT triggered a telecom revolution in rural India that was responsible for all-round socio-economic development. Over the years, C-DOT has evolved into a full-fledged telecom R&D institution and has capabilities to undertake large-scale state-of-the-art telecom technologies development programs.
- C-DOT as a torch bearer of indigenous telecom R&D continues to develop latest technology products in areas like Optical, Switching, Wireless, Security and Network Management while also working on futuristic technologies like M2M/IOT, 5G, AI, etc.

Why in News?

- The Centre for Development of Telematics observed its 38th Foundation Day recently.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Towards a more humane police force

GS-2 Executive; GS-3 Various Security Forces & Agencies & Their Mandate

CONTEXT

- Recently, the Chief Justice of India expressed concern at the degree of human rights violations in police stations in the country.
- He said that **“the threat to human rights and bodily integrity is the highest in police stations”**.
- He also said that **“in spite of constitutional declarations and guarantees, lack of effective legal representation at the police stations is a huge detriment to detained persons”**.

PICTURE IS NOT SO BLEAK

- A reality check shows that the picture is not so bleak and **efforts are being made to improve the human rights protection regime in police stations.**

Deaths in police custody:

- **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data** reveal that though the number of custodial deaths varies year to year, **on average of about 100 custodial deaths have taken place every year between 2010 and 2019.** Of them:
 - about 3.5 persons allegedly died due to injuries caused by policemen,
 - 8.6 while escaping from custody,
 - 28.1 due to suicide,
 - the rest due to various reasons like illness and injuries caused in road accidents.
- A judicial inquiry, which is mandatory for every suspicious custodial death, was conducted in 26.4 cases.

Number of arrests:

- NCRB data show that, **despite an increase in total IPC offences, the ratio of the number of arrests to the number of IPC offences has decreased from 1.33 in 2010 to 0.96 in 2019.**

Punishment for misconduct:

- Custodial death is **indeed one of the worst crimes in a civilised society governed by the rule of law.** Therefore, the guilty must be punished severely for his misconduct and criminal act.

- **NCRB data show that** on average about 47.2 criminal cases were registered annually against policemen in the last 10 years.
- **Departmental action against errant officers is a rule in the police force,** rather than an exception.
- The **National Human Rights Commission also oversees deaths in custody** due to human rights violations and recommends compensation in appropriate cases.

Active role of Judiciary:

- There have been many changes after the Supreme Court judgment in **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1996).**
- In its judgement SC laid down **guidelines to check custodial torture and increase transparency and responsibility of the police officer effecting arrest.**
- Most of these guidelines such as **providing information to a friend or relative about the arrest, medical examination, and permission to meet a lawyer** have now been incorporated in the CrPC.
- Further, in order to check the violation of human rights, **CCTV cameras have been installed** in police stations.
 - **In Paramvir Singh v. Baljit Singh (2020),** the Supreme Court has directed **States to cover more area of each police station under CCTV cameras** and have storage facilities of audio-video recording for 18 months.
- An **independent committee shall study the footage** and periodically publish reports of its observations.
 - Thus, sufficient steps are being taken to ensure that the abuse of human rights is minimised.

WAY FORWARD

Reduce the number of arrests:

- The law on arrest says that **arrest for offences punishable up to seven years of imprisonment should be made only when the police officer is satisfied that such arrest is necessary** to prevent the person from tampering with evidence, to prevent the person from committing any further offence, etc.

- The Supreme Court in several judgments has held that **each arrest must be necessary and justified; having the authority to arrest is alone not sufficient.**
- In **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)**, it was held that despite the offence being non-bailable under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which relates to torture for dowry, arrest is not mandatory as per Section 41 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).
- In **Special Action Forum v. Union of India (2018)**, the Court further held that the police officer shall furnish to the magistrate the reasons and materials which necessitated the arrest for further detention of the accused. The purpose of these checks is to ensure that the police do not abuse the power of arrest.

Separation of investigating wing:

- **The National Police Commission (1977-81), the Law Commission in its 154th report (1996) and the Malimath Committee Report (2003)**, among others, and **the Supreme Court in Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**, have recommended that-
 - The **investigating police should be separated from the law-and-order police** to ensure better expertise in investigation.
 - It is believed that a separate wing will do more professional investigation and will not use unwarranted methods to extract confession from the accused. For example, **the Central Bureau of Investigation and the National Investigation Agency** have already earned the reputation of the country's premier investigation agencies.
 - Though efforts have been made by some States in this direction, **more resources are required in policing to implement the Court's directions.**

Increase sanctioned police strength:

- One of the alleged reasons for using extreme methods is to extract a quick confession from the suspect, as the civil police mostly remains **over-burdened.**
- Hence, there is a need to **increase the number of investigating officers in proportion to the number of serious offences.**
- According to the **Malimath Committee's recommendation** that an investigating

officer should **preferably investigate no more than 10 cases every.**

- Similarly, with the **increase of newer types of crime** like white collar crime and cybercrime, **subject experts are needed to assist the police in the investigation.**

Sensitisation of the police force:

- The police officers must know that their mandate is to protect human rights and not violate them.
- Hence, they **need to be sensitised regularly and encouraged to employ scientific tools of interrogation and investigation** like the **lie detection test, narco test and brain fingerprinting test.**

State Governments and police authorities:

- The Home Ministry has recently **linked the 'police modernisation scheme' with police reforms.** But **unless sufficient action is taken by the State governments and the police authorities**, incentives in the form of additional funds will not be released.

Awareness of human rights:

- Recently, the CJI of India has suggested to install **display boards on human rights to disseminate information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services** may deter police excesses.

CONCLUSION

- **Deaths in police custody are indeed a matter of grave concern.** Hence, every death in custody needs to be prevented and suspicious deaths which bring disrepute to the police system must be rooted out completely.

2) Marital rape: an indignity to women

GS-1 Salient Features of Indian Society, Issues Related to Women

NEWS

- The marital rape exception is antithetical to women's dignity, equality and autonomy.

CONTEXT

- Recently the High Court of Chhattisgarh had **decided on a criminal revision petition challenging the charges framed against the applicant husband.**

BACKGROUND

- Initially, based on the allegations of the wife, charges were framed by a trial court against the husband.
- The charges were framed under **Section 376 (rape), Section 377 (carnal intercourse against the order of nature) and Section 498A (cruelty towards wife by husband or his relatives) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).**
- The High Court then upheld charges under Sections 498A and 377 **but discharged the husband under Section 376 on the ground that by virtue of Exception 2 to Section 375 (the definition of rape), sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife (provided she is over the age of 18) would not amount to the offence of rape.**

MARITAL RAPE

- **Marital rape or spousal rape** is the act of sexual intercourse with one's spouse without the spouse's consent. The lack of consent is the essential element and need not involve physical violence. Marital rape is considered a **form of domestic violence and sexual abuse.**

ISSUES WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MARITAL RAPE

Inconsistent Provisions:

- A husband may be tried for offences such as sexual harassment, molestation, voyeurism, and forcible disrobing in the same way as any other man.
- Even husband separated from his wife (though not divorced) may even be tried for rape (Section 376B).
- However, the **marital rape exception is inconsistent with other sexual offences**, which make no such exemption for marriage.

Patriarchal beliefs:

- The marital rape exception is **an insult to the constitutional goals of individual autonomy, dignity and of gender equality enshrined in fundamental rights such as Article 21 (the right to life) and Article 14 (the right to equality).**
- **In Joseph Shine v. Union of India (2018)**, the Supreme Court held that the offence of **adultery was unconstitutional** because it was founded on the principle that a **woman is her husband's property after marriage.**

- The marital rape exception betrays a similar patriarchal belief- that upon marriage, a wife's right to personal and sexual autonomy, bodily integrity and human dignity are surrendered.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EXCEPTION

- A commonly cited rationale for preserving the marital rape exemption is that **recognising marital rape as a criminal offence would 'destroy the institution of marriage'.** This was the government's defence in **Independent Thought v. Union of India (2017).**
- However the Supreme Court had rejected this claim and observed that, **"Marriage is not institutional but personal – nothing can destroy the 'institution' of marriage except a statute that makes marriage illegal and punishable."**
- Hence, there is a need for withdrawing the marital rape as an exception.
- Another argument frequently raised is that since **marriage is a sexual relationship, determining the validity of marital rape allegations would be difficult.**
- But even if the argument, that marriage is necessarily a sexual relationship is accepted, the argument does not hold water, **as it is not marriage that creates a problem in adjudication but the dangerously erroneous belief that consent may simply be assumed from a woman's clothes, her sexual history, or indeed, her relationship status.**
- Thus, while the current law seems to operate under this misconception, marriage does not signify perpetual sexual consent.
- Therefore, the determination of consent or lack thereof in the context of a sexual interaction within marriage would be the same as in any other context.
- It is shocking that **Exception 2 to Section 375 of the IPC survives to this day.**
- Despite being **antithetical to the liberal and progressive values of our Constitution, and violative of India's international obligations** under instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the provision underlines women's subordination to men, especially within marriage.

CONCLUSION

- **In 2017, the Supreme Court, in Independent Thought, increased the age of consent for sexual intercourse within marriages to 18.** Prior to the ruling, sexual acts by a husband on his wife, where the wife was above 15 years of age, did not constitute rape for the purpose of criminal law.
- The court read down the exception so that husbands who raped their minor wives could no longer hide behind it.
- Though the judgment was just a small step towards striking down the legalisation of marital rape, yet it signals that it is high time that adult women are afforded the equal protection and dignity in marriage.
- Hence, legislature needs to take cognisance of this legal infirmity and bring marital rape within the purview of rape laws by eliminating exceptions in Section 375 (Exception) of IPC.

3) It's time to build BRICS better

GS-2 Important International Institutions, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Regional Groupings

CONTEXT

- The 13th BRICS summit is set to be held this year, in September, in digital format under India's chairmanship.

BRICS

- BRICS is an **acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.**
- **History:** It was launched by a **meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2006** and riding on the political synergy created by regular summits since 2009, **BRIC turned itself into BRICS in 2010, with the entry of South Africa.**
- **Objective:** The grouping seeks to **deepen, broaden and intensify cooperation within the grouping and among the individual countries for more sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial development.**
- **Significance:** The importance of BRICS is self-evident: it represents **42% of the world's population, 30% of the land**

area, 24% of global GDP and 16% of international trade.

- **Annual meetings:** The **BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually** and the Chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GROUPING

- The grouping has gone through a reasonably productive journey since its start in 2006:
 - It strove to serve as a **bridge between the Global North and Global South.**
 - It developed a **common perspective on a wide range of global and regional issues;**
 - It established the **New Development Bank;**
 - It created a financial stability net in the form of **Contingency Reserve Arrangement;**
 - It is on the verge of setting up a **Vaccine Research and Development Virtual Center.**

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

- As the current chair, India has outlined four priorities of the grouping:
 - **The first is to pursue reform of multilateral institutions**
 - These institutions range from **the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to the World Trade Organization and now even the World Health Organization.**
 - However, this is not a new goal for BRICS. It has had very little success so far.
 - Reform **needs global consensus which is hardly feasible** in the current climate of strategic contestation between the **U.S. and China** and the **devastation caused by COVID-19** to health, lives and livelihoods.

The second is the resolve to combat terrorism

- **Terrorism is an international phenomenon** affecting Europe, Africa, Asia and other parts of the world.
- Tragic developments concerning Afghanistan have further stressed on the **need to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action.**
- In this context, BRICS is attempting to pragmatically shape its counter-terrorism strategy by **crafting the BRICS Counter Terrorism Action Plan containing specific measures to fight radicalisation,**

terrorist financing and misuse of the Internet by terrorist groups.

- This plan is expected to be a key deliverable at the forthcoming summit and may hopefully bring some change.
- **Third is to Promote technological and digital solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals:**
 - In the times of pandemic, when **mobility throughout the globe has been to its lowest**, digital tools have helped a world adversely hit by the pandemic.
 - India has been at the forefront of using new technological tools to improve governance amidst the health crisis.
 - **Fourth is to Expand people-to-people cooperation**
 - Despite the opportunities and great potential, intra-BRICS trade and investment flows are very low.
 - In order to remove these trade barriers, policymakers have been encouraging an **increase in intra-BRICS cooperation in diverse areas** like agriculture, disaster resilience, digital health, traditional medicine and customs cooperation.
 - BRICS nations can also employ measures like: having a single BRICS visa for other nations, removing visa requirements for member nations to improve otherwise restricted people to people cooperation amidst the covid pandemic.

CONCLUSION

- **The idea of BRICS – a common pursuit of shared interests by the five emerging economies from four continents – is fundamentally sound and relevant.**
- The five-power combine has succeeded, though up to a point, but it now confronts **multiple challenges:**
 - **China's economic rise** has created a serious imbalance within BRICS;
 - **Beijing's aggressive policy**, especially against India, puts BRICS solidarity under exceptional strain;
 - BRICS countries have **not done enough to assist the Global South to win their optimal support for their agenda.**
 - Hence, it is **necessary for leaders, officials and academics of this grouping to undertake serious discussions and find a way out of the present predicament.**

4) A hydro onslaught the Himalayas cannot take

GS-2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; GS-3 Environment Conservation

NEWS

- There is rock solid scientific evidence to demand the cancellation of many upcoming and approved hydel projects.

CONTEXT

- **Policymakers are permitting projects and large-scale infrastructure** in the already fragile and vulnerable Ganga-Himalayan basin, despite the recurrent disasters in the region.
- The most recent example is the **Rishi-Ganga valley disaster** in Uttarakhand, in February this year which claimed over 200 lives as the river turned into a flood carrying a heavy load of silt and debris and demolishing hydropower projects along its course.

BACKGROUND

- Recently, an affidavit has been filed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in an ongoing matter in the Supreme Court of India, **recommending the construction of seven partially constructed hydroelectric projects in the Uttarakhand Himalaya.**
 - The affidavit reveals that the Government is inclined towards **construction of 26 other projects.**
 - This essentially goes against the core mandate of the Ministry — **which is to conserve the country's natural environment.**
 - Also, it goes against one of the prominent electoral promises of the Government, **the rejuvenation of one of the country's major rivers, the Ganga.**

CONCERNS

- **Indifferent towards scientific findings:**
 - Recurrent disasters in the last decade in the State of Uttarakhand have been studied and analysed.
 - In the study it was found that in every disaster, **the increasing anthropogenic pressure in this area has been found to be a direct or an indirect contributor.**

- Thus, while science and logic press on with conservation and protection in these sensitive areas, the government policies for the region are in the opposite direction.

Sidelining the recommendation of expert committee:

- After the Kedarnath tragedy of 2013, in suo motu cognisance by the Supreme Court, an **expert body (EB-I)** was constituted to investigate whether the “mushrooming of hydro-power projects” in the State of Uttarakhand was linked to the disaster.
- In its findings, EB-I said there was a **“direct and indirect impact” of these dams in aggravating the disaster.**
- On the contrary, in order to pave the way for the projects, the Ministry (MoEFCC) formed committee after committee until it got approval for these projects with some design changes.

Politicians in collusion with private developers:

- The collusion between the two bent upon going ahead with such projects for short-term monetary gains despite the dire warnings of climate change threats and environmental challenges.

Indication by the International organisations:

- It must be noted that the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has special significance in the context of fragile mountainous ecological regimes.

DANGEROUS REVERALS IN THE FUTURE

Question on sustainability of the dams:

- The **sustainability of the dams** to be constructed in the long term is highly questionable as hydropower solely relies on the excess availability of water.
- Climate change models are clear about the **cascading impacts of global warming trends on the glaciers of the Himalaya** — the main source of water in the region that sustains the drainage network within the mountain chain.
- **Temperatures across the region are projected to rise by about 1°C to 2°C on average by 2050.**
- Thus, retreating glaciers and the alternating phases of floods and drought will impact the seasonal flows of rivers.

Sediment hotspot paraglacial zones:

- Another most crucial aspect is the **existence of sediment hotspot**

paraglacial zones, which at the time of a cloud burst, contribute huge amounts of debris and silt in the river, thereby **increasing the river volume and the devastation downstream.**

- The flash floods in these Himalayan valleys do not carry water alone; they also carry a massive quantity of debris.

Risk-laden artifacts:

- An extensive research on the hydropower development in northeast India, says that the **dams in the mountainous regions that are exposed to earthquakes, floods, extreme rainfall, avalanches and landslides, are “risk-laden artifacts”.**
- Hence, the clichéd discourses on hydropower as a renewable source of green energy promoted by the dam lobby, deliberately ignore the contentious externalities such as **social displacement, ecological impacts, environmental and technological risks.**

Anthropogenic activities:

- These dam projects further exacerbate ecological vulnerability, in a region due to **the intense anthropogenic activities associated with the proliferation of the hydroelectric projects in these precarious regions accelerate the intensity of flash floods, avalanches, and landslides.**

Element of climate change:

- As per the studies, **about 15% of the great earthquakes** (of magnitudes greater than 8) of the 20th century took place in the Himalaya and **many of its segments are likely to see a period of intense earthquake activity in the future.**
- The **2015 Nepal earthquake is a case in point.** Several dams were damaged in that event destroying a third of Nepal's hydropower.

High production cost:

- An absurd amount of money is being wasted in the construction of these dams that will always function much **below their efficiency, cause the loss of water and forests, and render the area fragile.**
- By the time they are constructed, **the cost of electricity generated will also be phenomenally high and would have no buyers.**

WAY FORWARD

The river must flow free:

- The recent events such as the **Rishi Ganga tragedy and the disasters of 2012 (flash floods)** are examples of how hydroelectric projects which come in the way of high-velocity flows aggravate a disaster and should be treated as a warning against such projects in the disaster-prone Uttarakhand river valleys.

Conscious policymaking:

- Considering the environmental and cultural significance of these areas, it is imperative that the **Government should refrain from the economically challenged predatory**

construction of hydroelectric projects and declare the upper reaches of all the headstreams of the Ganga as eco-sensitive zones.

- **Thus, it is high time the MoEFCC formulates a written position on climate change adaptation with respect to the hydropower sector, after a thorough public discourse.**

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) Why is there a push for asset monetisation?

Context

- Recently, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), which is expected to **fetch around ₹5.96 lakh crore to the government**.
- Following through on the **Budget's plan to monetise public assets to fund fresh capital expenditure on infrastructure**, the government released a list of projects and facilities to be offered to private investors over the next four years through structured leasing and securitisation transactions.

What is the National Monetisation Pipeline?

- The NMP names a **list of public assets that will be leased to private investors. Only brown-field assets**, which are assets that are **already operational**, are planned to be leased out under the NMP. So, to give an example, an airport that is already operational may be leased out to an investor.
- Assets that are yet to be developed, such as an undeveloped piece of land, for example, may not be leased out. Importantly, there **won't be any transfer of ownership** from the government to the private sector when assets are leased out.
- The government only plans to **cede control over its assets for a certain period of time**, after which the assets must be returned to the government unless the lease is extended.

Will NMP help the economy?

- The government believes that leasing out public assets to private investors will help **free capital that is stuck in these assets**. For example, say the government has invested thousands of crores in a road project. It may take the government decades to recover its investment through the annual toll revenues. Instead, the government can recover a good chunk of its investment by leasing out the right to collect toll for the next 30 years to a private investor.

- The government can use this money, in turn, to **build fresh infrastructure under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)**. In fact, the proceeds from the NMP are expected to account for **about 14% of the total outlay for infrastructure under the NIP**.
- The government believes all this spending will **boost economic activity**. Analysts also believe that the government has now through the NMP found the right model for infrastructure development.
- The government is best suited to **tackle the ground-level challenges in building infrastructure**, while the private sector can **operate and offer indirect finance to these projects** through the NMP.

What are the risks?

- The allocation of assets owned by governments to private investors is often **subject to political influence**, which can lead to **corruption**. In fact, many in the Opposition allege that the NMP will favour a few business corporations that are close to the government.
- The expected boost to economic activity due to higher government spending may also need to be **weighed against the opportunity costs**.
- *Opportunity cost is the loss of other alternatives when one alternative is chosen.*
- For one, the money that the government collects by leasing out assets comes from the pockets of the private sector. So **higher government spending will come at the cost of lower private spending**.
- The NMP also **does not address the various structural problems** such as legal uncertainties that hold back private investment in infrastructure.
- However, it is worth noting that economists generally believe that **scarce assets are better managed and allocated by the private sector than by the government**. So to the extent that the NMP frees assets from government control, it can help the economy.
- There are also concerns that the leasing of airports, railways, roads and other public utilities to private investors **could lead to**

higher prices for consumers. If the government merely cedes control of public utilities to private companies without taking steps to foster greater competition, it can indeed lead to **poor outcomes for consumers.**

What lies ahead?

- The success of the NMP will depend on the **demand for brown-field government assets among private investors.** The government's past disinvestment projects such as the sale of Air India did not catch the fancy of investors owing to the stringent conditions set by the government.
- In the case of Air India's sale, the buyers were supposed to possess a certain minimum net worth and stay invested in the airline for at least three years. Many analysts also believed that the government was expecting buyers to pay too much for a debt-ridden airline.
- The **pricing of assets and the terms of sale** will thus determine the level of interest that private investors show for assets leased under the NMP.
- In the past, doubts have been raised about the allocation of airports and other assets to certain private business groups. So the **process that the government adopts** this time to allocate assets may come under scrutiny. There is likely to be the **demand for an open, competitive auction of assets.**

2) Nipah virus in Kerala

What's in the news?

- A child mortality in Kerala has been reported, after being infected with the **Nipah virus** recently.

What is Nipah virus?

- **Nipah virus (NiV)** is a 'zoonotic' virus, that is, it is transmitted to human beings from animals. The virus can also be transmitted through contaminated food, or directly between people.
- The pathogen that causes NiV encephalitis is an **RNA virus** of the **family Paramyxoviridae, genus Henipavirus,** and which is closely related to the **Hendra**

virus (HeV), which was isolated in Australia in 1994.

- The animal host reservoir for both HeV and NiV is the **fruit bat**, which is commonly known as the 'flying fox'.
- Infected fruit bats can spread the disease to other animals as well, such as pigs — and also dogs, cats, goats, horses and sheep.
- **Human beings can get infected if they come in close contact with the infected animal** — bats or other animals such as pigs or its body fluids such as saliva or urine.
- The initial jump of the virus from animal to human is known as a 'spillover' event in an outbreak.
- Once the infection has moved to humans, **person-to-person spread of NiV can occur.**

Nipah virus: What are the symptoms, and how dangerous is it?

- NiV infection can cause a **mild to severe disease**, which in the latter situation sees a major swelling in the brain (**encephalitis**), and can lead to death.
- Symptoms of the infection can appear at any time from four days to two weeks after exposure to the virus. Patients usually report a fever and headache that can last from three days to a couple of weeks, accompanied by symptoms of respiratory illness such as cough, sore throat, and difficulty in breathing.
- If the disease progresses to encephalitis, the patient may experience drowsiness, disorientation, and mental confusion, which can then progress very quickly to a coma within 1-2 days.
- **Between 40 per cent and 75 per cent of cases can lead to death**, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). However, the fatality rate in the 2018 outbreak in Kozhikode was well over 90 per cent.
- Those who have survived the disease have reported long-term side effects, among them persistent convulsions and, in some cases, changes in personality.

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INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) NGT

NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL

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ABOUT NGT

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) is a **statutory body** that was established in 2010 by the National Green Tribunal Act.



2010



The principal bench of the NGT is located in **Delhi**, with other benches sitting in Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai.

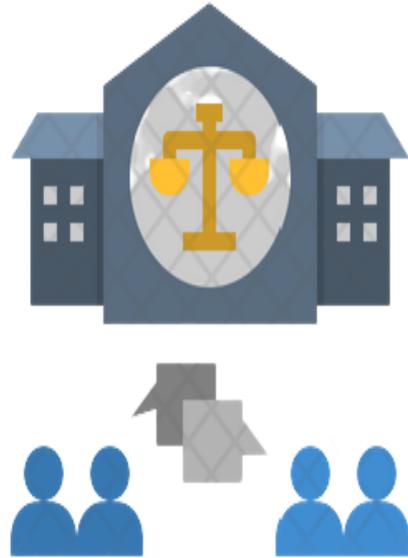
- ⦿ **Delhi**
- ⦿ **Bhopal**
- ⦿ **Pune**
- ⦿ **Kolkata**
- ⦿ **Chennai**

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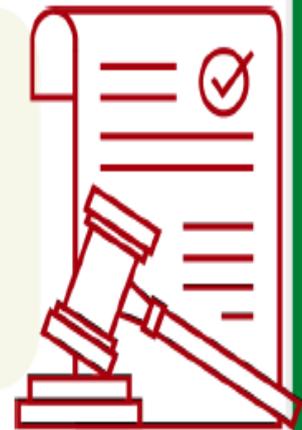
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The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.



The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally **within 6 months of filing** of the same.



CPC 1908

The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by **principles of natural justice.**



Principles of Natural Justice

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The NGT deals with civil cases under the seven laws related to the environment, these include



The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974



The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977

The Forest (Conservation) Act,
1980



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The Air (Prevention and Control
of Pollution) Act, 1981



The Environment (Protection)
Act, 1986



The Public Liability Insurance Act,
1991 and

The Biological Diversity Act, 2002



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Two related acts – Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 **have been kept out of NGT's jurisdiction.**



WHY IN THE NEWS



NGT has given direction to Kerala state forest department to send a report on steps taken for prevention of forest fires.

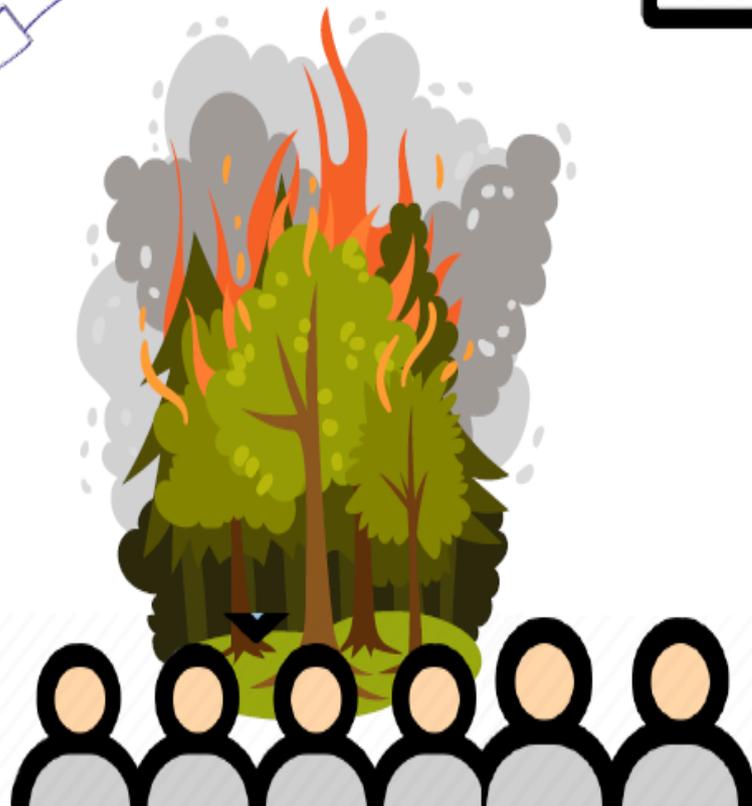
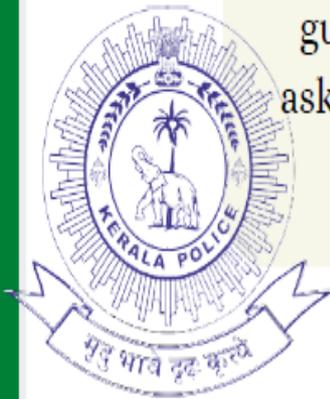


STOP FOREST FIRES

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In february 2020, a forest fire in kerala took the lives of 6 forest guards. In this enquiry, NGT has asked the government of Kerala to file a report .



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