UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs November 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

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Banking Licenses to Corporate Houses

- **Syllabus**: GS III - Indian Economy.

**Why is it in News?**
- RBI Internal Working Group (IWG) to ‘review extant ownership guidelines and corporate structure for Indian private sector banks’ by amending Banking Regulation Act 1949 submitted its report.
- It recommended to allow large corporate/industrial houses to be promoter of private banks.

**Why Group was constituted?**
- **Incapability to meet credit demand of growing economy:**
  1. Very less cost-efficient banking system in India.
  2. Increasing NPAs of Public Sector Banks and resultant less capacity to provide credit, particularly in the Post-Covid situation.
  3. Less support from the government to PSBs due to strained public finances.
- **Moody’s Report:**
  1. The challenging economic and credit conditions stemming from COVID-19 will weigh on ASEAN and Indian banks’ asset quality and profitability.
  2. Asset quality and profitability will deteriorate from good levels in 2019 across most banking systems.
  3. While government support measures will offset some of the pressure on banks, they will not fully eliminate the negative impact.
- **Low Balance Sheets of Banks:**
  1. The total balance sheet of banks in India constitutes less than 70 per cent of the GDP.
  2. China’s bank balance sheets have 175% of the GDP.
- **Less Credit flow to Private Sector:** It is 50% in case of India while it is up to 150% in China & Japan.

**Recommendations:**
- Allow large corporate/industrial houses to be promoter of private banks.
- Convert big NBFCs into banks and hike in promoters’ stake to 26 per cent from 15 per cent.
- Increase the minimum capital for new banks from Rs 500 crore to Rs 1,000 crore.
- NBFCs with an asset size of ₹50,000 crore and above, may be considered for conversion into banks subject to completion of 10 years of operations.
- The single window clearance system will enable the potential investor to interact with all the Ministries whose approvals are required.
- Before corporate houses are allowed to enter banking, the RBI must be equipped with a legal framework to deal with interconnected lending and a mechanism to effectively supervise conglomerates that venture into banking.

**Why Large Corporate houses?**
- **Background:**
  1. Strained government finances and worsening situation of PSBs
  2. Declining revenues for the government in post-covid situation
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- **Capital and expertise:**
  (1) Large Corporates have financial resources to push economic growth.
  (2) It can bring capital and expert human resource to banking management and will give strategic direction.
  (3) It will improve Credit-to-GDP ratio.
  (4) It might increase investment to drive goal of $5 trillion economy.

- **Financial inclusion and benefits to consumers:**
  (1) Infusion and improvement of network of banking might lead to financial inclusion such as Jan Dhan Yojana and DBT.
  (2) It will help rationalize costs across many areas including branches, people, technology etc.
  (3) Customers would be able to get better service and better product suite.

**Concerns:**
- Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan and ex-Deputy Governor Viral Acharya: It will lead to connected lending. It may further increase the concentration of economic (and political) power in certain business houses.
- **Inadequate Banking Quality oversight:** The RBI can only react to interconnected lending after substantial exposure to the entities of the corporate house has happened. It is unlikely to be able to prevent such exposure.
- **Conflict of interest & favouritism:** It might end into loan to themselves/their businesses, suppliers, customers etc. Such misuse was evident before 1969 nationalization of banks. They can use banks to route funds through India and abroad entities of banks.
- **Issue of connected lending:** Connected lending is a situation where the bank’s controlling owner extends loans of inferior quality at lower interest rates to himself or his connected parties. India has inadequate supervisory mechanism to deal with connected lending and associated risks. e.g. failure of Yes Bank and Laxmi Vilas Bank. Tracing of connected lending is not full-proof in Indian context.
- **NPA risks:** Risk exposure of the non-bank entities of the group might increase NPAs count.
- **Future burden on public finances:** In case of bank crisis, Government supports it to protect consumers of the bank. It will increase burden on public finance due to selfish interest of corporate houses.

**Way forward:**
- **Strengthen banking Governance:**
  (1) Indian banking supervision is not ready to allow banking licenses to large corporate houses.
  (2) Before allowing, we should strengthen banking supervision and governance.
  (3) RBI should strictly monitor activities of Banks in the background of failure of Yes bank and Laxmi Vilas Bank.
- **Improve audit standard:**
  (1) As per Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Indian audit is poor in standard compared to International standards.
  (2) RBI should supervise and audit of major banks including cooperative banks on regular basis.
  (3) RBI should devise a way to prevent interconnected lending phenomenon.
- **Strengthen Private banks:**
  (1) We should encourage creation of private banks for credit needs of expanding economy.
  (2) We should improve checks while providing bank licenses.
- **Improve governance of PSBs:**
(1) We should rethink about strategy about revival of profit making PSBs to attract credit flow. 
(2) Government should avoid using PSBs as their own banks to avoid increase in NPAs. This will increase credit flow.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Economic Times, Business Herald, Outlook

Gig Economy/Platform Economy

- Syllabus: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources

Why is it in News?
- Covid-19 crisis has disrupted growth of Gig Economy and manifested lack of security of gig workers.
- During covid-19 crisis, unions of gig workers have seen many protests across the country.

Gig Economy:
- It is defined as a work engagement between service seeker & service provide for specific task.
- It visualizes hiring of services on a short-term basis.
- Gig workers include self-employed, freelancers, independent contributors and part-time workers.

Facts and trends:
- Global Gig Economy Index report has ranked India among the top 10 countries.
- Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Telangana witnessed opportunities in terms of growth for the gig-workers.
- An estimated 56% of new employment in India is being generated by the gig companies.
- Few examples such as –
  (1) Taxi services (Uber, Ola),
  (2) Short-term accommodation (Airbnb, Oyo),
  (3) Programming services (Upwork).

Reasons for rise:
- Cost efficient:
  (1) Reduction of permanent employees and relevant cost due to avoidance of payments during slack season and work specific payments during peak season.
  (2) Reduction of operational cost due to specific targets & ‘work from home’ type of work.
- Seasonal demand:
  (1) Many works are seasonal in nature.
  (2) Contract base of such work is beneficial to both service seeker and service provider.
- Technology and Digital Age:
  (1) Increased network of transport has given access to labour from different region.
  (2) Internet penetration has helped to communicate service seeker and provider directly.
- Other:
  (1) Changing lifestyles has resulted to new type of works.
  (2) Work-life balance has forced people to look for flexibility.

Advantages of Gig Economy:
Efficiency:
(1) Employees’ performance is improved due to increased competition & performance-based continuation of contract.
(2) Companies’ operational efficiency is improved due to reduction in costs, particularly ‘work from home’ type of work.

Flexibility: As work is short term and with mutual agreement, work flexibility w.r.t working hours and methods is tremendous.

Increased number of opportunities:
(1) Many companies have opened different gig work without experience criteria.
(2) This helped individual to work according to his/her choice of work.

Level-Playing field:
(1) Work is allotted to ‘who suits the best?’ criteria.
(2) This helped to bring all people senior, junior, working & retired persons on same plane.

Challenges:
- Lack of job security due to short-term contract-based nature of job.
- Absence of guaranteed social security benefits.
- Unfair termination of contract by companies due to lack of clarity about company policy & absence of regulation by government.
- Overburdening and stress to workers due to low wages, higher workload and increased competition for work on account of rising unemployment.
- Very less salaries/wages due to short term nature of work & increased competition.
- Credit Availability: Reluctance to provide credit by banks/financial institutions as income is not stable.
- Lack of Labour Laws: Difficulty in formation of unions/organization to protect labour rights.
- Concentration in Urban Areas: Inability to create gig works in rural areas.

New Labour codes:
- New labour codes passed by Parliament recognizes gig work as a ‘new kinds of work’.
- Code on Social Security, 2020:
  (1) Gig workers are now eligible for social security benefits.
  (2) It includes maternity benefits, life and disability cover, old age protection, provident fund, employment injury benefits etc.
- Concerns/Issues:
  (1) In India, Industrial Labour rights are protected under different legislations such as Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Factories Act, 1948, Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, Payment of Bonus Act, 1965.
  (2) Code doesn’t recognize gig workers as future industrial workers. So, though benefits are given, labour rights of gig workers have not guaranteed any legislation.
  (3) Demand for better & stable pay and access to court w.r.t benefits mentioned in the code has not addressed.
  (4) It is not clear on who will provide benefits for gig workers- the state or the entrepreneurs who are promoters of the platform/enterprise.
  (5) How Government will regulate the Gig Companies for employee protection or against employee exploitation is not addressed.

Way forward:
Focus on employee welfare: Employees should be protected from exploitation on account of salaries and wages. Social security benefits should be guaranteed.

Need of clear policy: Employer should frame clear policy about hiring and contract termination. Contract should be transparent.

Role of government: Government should regulate this sector like industrial sector to protect interests of labour. Fines should be included in case of underpaid, non-payment of dues.

Grievance Redressal Mechanism: Government should make it mandatory for companies to provide grievance redressal mechanism.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Firstpost, Dnaindia, Economic Times, InvestIndia.gov.in, Livemint

Fertilizer Sector Reforms


Why is it in the news?
Government recently announced additional fertilizer subsidy of ₹ 65,000 crore under Atma Nirbhar Bharat package 3.0.

Details:
- The government had allocated Rs 71,309 crore in the Budget, for 2020-21 fiscal.
- The additional subsidy of Rs. 65,000 crore is expected to ensure adequate availability of fertilisers to farmers.
- The decision can solve the issue of subsidy delays being faced by the fertiliser industry.
- Some experts see it as a precursor to deeper structural reforms in the sector.

Subsidy Mechanism of Fertilisers in India
- Fertilisers accounts for large fiscal subsidies (about 0.73 lakh crore or 0.5% of GDP). It is the second-highest after food.
- The urea- main source of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potash (K) fertilizers fall under pricing control.
- MRP of each fertilizer controlled at a low level and excess of cost of production/distribution over MRP is reimbursed to manufacturers as subsidy.
- Presently, manufacturers of P&K fertilizers get subsidy under the Nutrient Based Scheme (NBS).
- For urea, manufacturers get unit-wise subsidy under the New Pricing Scheme (NPS).
- Urea is widely-used fertilizer. It accounts for nearly half of India’s total fertiliser consumption.

Issues/ Concerns regarding fertiliser subsidy in India
- Imbalanced Dispensation:
  1. The policy dispensation appears biased towards urea.
  2. Urea subsidy accounts for 50-75% of production cost.
  3. In case of P&K fertilizers, subsidy is only 25-30% of the cost.
  4. This has led to excessive use of urea in agriculture.
- Disproportionate use of fertilisers:
(1) The desirable ratio of N-P-K application is 4:2:1. It is 31.4:8:1 in Punjab.
(2) This imbalance leads to the detriment of the soil and declining productivity.
(3) It may eventually result in reduced efficiency of fertilisers, low yields and low profitability for farmers.

● **Black Market:**
(1) Urea is only subsidised for agricultural uses.
(2) The high subsidy on agricultural urea creates a large price gap which leads to diversion of urea to other industries such as chemical, automobiles etc.
(3) The urea is also diverted across the border to Bangladesh and Nepal.

● **Small Farmer Inability to derive full benefits:**
(1) The black market hurts small and marginal farmers more, as higher percentage of them are forced to buy urea from the black market.
(2) Large farmers are better connected and therefore able to secure scarce subsidised urea.
(3) Out of the total subsidy provided, only 35% of total fertiliser subsides reaches small farmers.

**Key measures by government in recent times**
● In 2015, Government included neem-coating to prevent diversion of urea to industries.
● Government introduced gas-pooling to induce efficiency in domestic production.
● In 2018, Government made disbursal of subsidy to manufacturers conditional upon actual sales to farmers and sales getting registered on POS machines.
● In 2020, Government restricted purchase to 100 bags per transaction by each purchaser. It was 999 bags earlier.

**Way Ahead**
● **Reforms:**
(1) The fertilizer sector needs reforms that can address the various problems such as leackages.
(2) Reforms can be introduced to increase domestic availability via less restrictive imports (decanalisation).

● **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)/ Use of JAM:**
(1) The direct benefit transfer to the farmers in fertilisers will reduce leakages to the black market.
(2) Technology (JAM) could be used to improve targeting of fertiliser subsidies.
(3) This would help the poor farmers and also reduce the government’s subsidy burden.
(4) Subsidy can be credited to poor farmers account using the database under PM–Kisan scheme.

● **Opportunity during Covid-19 crisis:**
(1) DBT of fertilizer subsidy to farmers and decontrol of urea has been on the radar of our policy makers, but, no government has dared to go for it.
(2) The economic crisis triggered by Covid offers an opportunity to do it.

● **Balanced use of fertilisers:**
(1) Government should encourage balanced use of all types of fertilisers.
(2) Decontrolling urea will promote balanced fertiliser use and improved soil health.
(3) Excessive use of chemical fertilisers should be discouraged.
(4) Efforts should be made to promote the use of bio-fertilisers, organic manure and city compost.

**Source:** The Hindu, Down to earth, Economic Survey.
Voting rights for NRI

- **Syllabus**: GS2: Parliament and State legislature.
- **Question**: Prime Minister of India has repeatedly pitched for simultaneous elections in India. Examine its challenges and give way forward.

**Why is it in news?**
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again raised the pitch for “One Nation, One Election”.

**Concept of One Nation One Election/Simultaneous elections:**
- It envisages a mechanism where elections to all states and the Lok Sabha will be held together.
- It would enable voters to cast their vote for electing members of Lok Sabha and state assemblies on a single day, at the same time (or in a phased manner as the case may be).

**Background:**
- Simultaneous elections were a norm until 1967.
- After the dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 and of the Lok Sabha in December 1970, elections to State Assemblies and Parliament were held separately.
- Law Commission recommends amendments to at least five Constitutional Provisions and Electoral Law in its working paper brought out in April 2018.

**Proposed Plan:**
- Make the shift to simultaneous polls in a phased manner where general elections, elections to few of State Assemblies and a Union Territory may be synchronised.
- Elections to the remaining State Legislative Assemblies and Union Territory with Legislature be synchronised later.
- The election schedules are to be drawn so that elections to the Lok Sabha, all the State Legislative Assemblies and Union Territories (with legislatures) will be held simultaneously from 2024.
- It requires political consensus and transitional provisions for extension of the term up to six months in some states and amendments to the Constitution have to be made.

**Need for ONOE:**
- **Reduction in Election Cost:**
  1. The move will reduce the enormous costs involved in separate elections.
  2. However, for ONOE Election Commission of India need to procure additional EVMs which would cost Rs 4,500 crore.
  3. But this expenditure incurred will eventually even out in the long run.
- **Efficient Governance**: The mechanism will help ruling parties focus on governance instead of constantly being in election mode.
- **Increased in Voters turn out**: Law Commission suggests that simultaneous polls will boost voters’ turnout in simultaneous elections.
- **End to Policy Paralysis**: It will also end policy paralysis witnessed due to multiple impositions of
the Model Code of Conduct in the five-year tenure of government.

**Challenges:**
- **Different Issues of Elections:** Fundamental National and state issues are different and holding simultaneous elections is likely to affect the judgment of voters.
- **The threat to Regional Parties:** Gains made by regional parties will be lost in favor of the national parties. Regional parties can bargain a better deal for their states compared to national parties.
- **Reduces Accountability:** Due to multiple elections at various levels, politicians are made more accountable to citizens.
- **Disturbance in Federal Structure:** The threat of subversion of democracy and federalism because of the proclamation of President’s rule in states until the synchronized phase.
- **Against Various Parliamentary Procedures:** The constitutional provision relating to no-confidence motion and related issues may jeopardize the future of synchronized elections.

**Way Forward:**
- **Expenditure Limit For Individual Candidates:**
  1. To allay the fear of undue advantage to the national party under the ONOE mechanism regional parties could work towards putting a cap on expenditure by political parties.
  2. As of now, expenditure limits apply to individual candidates’ expenditures.
- **State Funding of Elections:** The possibility of state funding of elections based on their poll performance can also be explored to support small and regional parties.
- **Reducing the Time Span for General Elections:**
  1. Appointment of additional Central armed police forces to reduce the poll duration of two-three months to about 33 to 35 days as has been suggested by Mr. Krishnamurthy (former CEC).
  2. Reduction in duration will do away with the undesired fallout on developmental activities and governance on implementation of Moral Code of Conduct.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express.
**Voting rights for NRI**

- **Syllabus:** GS 2 - Constitution, Polity: Functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

**Why is it in news?**
- The Election Commission (EC) has recently approached the government to permit Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to cast their votes through postal ballots.

**Background**
- At present, voters residing abroad can only cast their votes in person in their respective constituencies.
- In 2015, EC had proposed proxy voting (the voter appoints a proxy to vote on her behalf) and postal ballots for Indians residing abroad.
- In 2018, the government tried to grant proxy voting rights to overseas electors by introducing a Bill. The Bill has lapsed with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha.
- The Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) is currently available to service voters only.
- To extend this facility to other NRIs, the government will require to amend the Conduct of Election Rules 1961.

**What is the current strength of NRI voters?**
- According to a 2015 UN report, India’s diaspora population is the largest in the world at 16 million.
- Registration of NRI voters, in comparison, has been very low, as a little over 1 lakh overseas Indians registered as voters.
- In the last Lok Sabha elections, roughly 25,000 of them flew to India to vote.

**If approved, what would be the process for NRIs to vote?**
- Any NRI interested in voting through the postal ballot, will have to inform the Returning Officer (RO) at least five days after the notification of the election.
- After receiving the information, RO will dispatch the ballot paper electronically.
- The NRI voters will mark their preference on the ballot printouts and send it back.
- The envelopes will be segregated constituency-wise and then be sent to the Chief Electoral Officer of the state concerned for onward transmission to the RO.

**Need of extending ballot to all eligible NRIs**
- **To reduce logistical complexities:**
  1. A voter can only vote in person and will have to produce her passport in original at the polling station.
  2. Coming to India is expensive and onerous task, given the logistical and practical problems involved.
- **Professional engagements:**
  1. It is difficult for many NRIs to leave their country of residence owing to specific compulsions of employment, education or other engagements.
  2. Supreme Court also upheld the rights of such voters to be able to participate in the democratic process.
electoral process.

Issues/ Challenges

- **Less Registration of NRI voters:**
  1. EC has no estimate of how many of the total NRIs qualify as voters.
  2. Out of over 15 crores overseas Indians, a little over 1 lakh registered as voters.
  3. One major reason for low registration is that the NRIs have to be physically present in India for voting.

- **Issues with setting up of polling booths at India's embassies abroad:**
  1. Some experts have suggested the setting up of polling booths at India's embassies to permit Indian citizens there to cast their votes.

- **Response of Ministry of External Affairs over the suggestion:**
  1. Embassies do not have the necessary logistical means to handle attestation for a large number of overseas electors.
  2. Embassies would have to seek the permission of the host country for organising such activity, which may be difficult in non-democratic countries.

- **Domestic migrants in the picture:**
  1. A person of one state who has migrated to other states in search of a job or education is not entitled to vote from his place of residence.
  2. Some experts have raised concerns over giving voting privileges to NRIs while denying the same to domestic migrants. They consider it as discriminatory.
  3. The right to vote is not a fundamental right whereas the right to equality is.

- **Privacy and Security Concerns:**
  1. According to some experts, the proposal of dispatching the ballot paper electronically is prone to manipulation.
  2. Protecting the secrecy and integrity of the ballot which will be received by the individual elector, will be challenging.

**Way Ahead**

- With the proposal of granting voting rights to NRIs, domestic migrants should also be considered.
- Objective should be to ensure a more inclusive democracy.
- The security and privacy concerns involved must be addressed with a strong framework ensuring transparency.

**Source:** Indian Express, The Hindu, The wire.

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**Interfaith Marriages**

- **Syllabus:** GS 2- Social justice- Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections.

**Why is it in the news?**

- Several Indian states are mulling to bring laws to check interreligious marriages.
- The said objective of the states is to control forced religious conversions.
Background

- The census does not record interfaith marriages. There is no official data to find out the number of interfaith marriages.
- However, a study based on statistics from 2005 India HDI survey, suggested about 2.21% interfaith marriages in India.
- Indian statutes allows interfaith marriage under the Special Marriage Act.

Special Marriage Act (SMA) 1954

- The law provides a special form of marriage for the people, irrespective of the religion followed by either party.
- Any Indian can tie the knot without giving up their religion.
- The law also guarantees provisions for divorce including by mutual consent, custody of children, and alimony.

The recent controversy over conversions

- According to the State governments mulling the laws to check the interreligious marriages:
  1. There is coercion involved in some marriages for conversion of one into another faith.
  2. There have been instances where some men have concealed their religious identity before marrying women of other religions.
- However, such instances are sporadic and terming them as 'conspiracy' appears to be not backed by data.

Legal Challenges to anti-conversion laws

- Constitutional Provisions:
  1. Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees right to life and personal liberty.
  2. Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.
  3. If any adult decides to convert from his or her religion out of choice, the constitution gives them the right to do so...
  4. The proposed laws appears to be in conflict with Article 21 and Article 25.
  5. Such laws could be misused if marriage is against the family or societal approval.

- Against the pluralistic nature of the constitution:
  1. Some activists fear that anti-conversion laws will damage India's secular and pluralistic character.
  2. Secularism or pluralism is part of the basic structure of Indian constitution.

- The controversial terminology of “Love Jihad”:
  1. The term is used by few groups to name the relationship between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy.
  2. However, the term 'love jihad' is not defined under any existing law and no case has been reported by any central agency.

- Concerns:
  - Such terminologies demonizes minorities and polarizes people.
  - It appears to strengthen patriarchal hold over the identity & sexuality.

Other Issues/Challenges regarding Inter-faith Marriages

- Social Stigma and Moral Policing:
  1. Society by and large is still reluctant to recognize inter-faith marriages.
  2. At many places it leads to violence or assault against interfaith couples by self-appointed
moral police.

- **Issues with Special Marriages Act:**
  1. The Act is not as facilitating as it should be.
  2. There are provisions like issuing public notice one month before registration.
  3. It also includes making public the address or contact of couple.
  4. The Act should be made simpler by either amending or doing away with certain provisions.

**Various Judgments and findings**

- The Supreme Court had in 2018, overturned the decision of the Kerala High Court which had annulled the marriage of an interfaith couple (Hadiya Case).
- Allahabad High Court recently said that two adults are free to choose their partner and it is their right to freedom of choice.
- A probe by NIA in 2018 examined 11 interfaith marriages in the state of Kerala and found no proof of coercion.

**Conclusion**

- Sociologists believe that inter-faith and inter-cast marriages help in socio-cultural assimilation and better integration of society.
- Interfaith couples present the diversity and syncretism that is unique to India’s identity.
- Marriage is a matter of personal liberty and laws that curb it, may be challenged in the court.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express.

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**Reservation in Private Sector Jobs**

- **Syllabus:** GS 2- Governance: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States.
- **Why is it in the news?**
  - Haryana government approved the bill for reserving 75% of private-sector jobs for locals.
- **Developments in recent times:**
  - Madhya Pradesh Government recently announced that state government jobs would only be open to residents of the state.
  - In July, 2019 the Andhra Pradesh assembly passed a Bill that makes it mandatory for industries to reserve 75% jobs for Andhraites.
  - In November 2019, Maharashtra announced that it would reserve 80% of private-sector jobs for Maharashtrians.

**Introduction:**

- Locals first policy demand has time and again raised its head in different states in India.
- It reflects the fear of some locals who believe that their jobs are being taken away from outsiders.
- It is also a result of a job crisis or rising unemployment in many states.

**Constitutional Provisions:**

- The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of movement and consequently employment within India through several provisions.
- **Article 14** provides for equality before law irrespective of place of birth.
• **Article 16** guarantees no birthplace-based discrimination in public employment.
• **Article 19** ensures that citizens can “move freely throughout the territory of India”.
• **Exception:** Article 16(3) of the Constitution says that Parliament may make a law “prescribing” a requirement of residence for jobs in a particular state.

**State having jobs reserved for locals:**
• The Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act abolishes all existing residence requirements in the states with some exceptions only in the case of Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.
• Constitutionally, some states have special protections under Article 371.
• Andhra Pradesh under Section 371(d) has powers to have “direct recruitment of local cadre” in specified areas.
• In Uttarakhand, class III and class IV jobs are reserved for locals.
• Some states, which conduct official business in their regional language, require the proficiency of that local language. Ex. West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

**Issues/ Concerns**
• **Legal challenge:**
  (1) As per the constitution, only the Parliament is allowed to put in a residence requirement for jobs and not a state legislature.
  (2) There is a 50% cap on quotas set by Supreme Court.
• **Against National Integration:**
  (1) Son of the soil sentiments may give rise to sub-nationalism or regionalism.
  (2) If pursued by other states, it will lead to a collective race to the bottom.
  (3) Restrictions on labour movement may weaken the advantage of diverse labour pool and exchange of skills.
• **Doing Business:**
  (1) The job restrictions may discourage companies to invest or expand in a particular state.
  (2) This will in turn hamper the growth, development and employment prospects.
• **Political Escape:**
  (1) It may also be used for inciting local passions to divert public attention from the real challenge of employment generation.
  (2) It also shows a lack of focus on the current unemployment crisis.
• **Nature of Private Sector:**
  (1) Private employers do not go on an annual recruitment drive to fill vacancies but hire as and when required
  (2) The state can recommend a preference to locals but ensuring that it is followed would be difficult.

**Supreme Court Judgments:**
• **Dr Pradeep Jain vs Union of IND, 1984** - Held that such reservation based on place of birth or residence would be unconstitutional.
• **Sunanda Reddy vs State of AP, 1995** - Affirmed the view of Pradeep Jain case and struck down the state govt policy which gave 5% extra weightage to candidates who had studied with Telugu as medium of instruction.
• Allahabad HC in 2019 struck down notification of UP Sub Service Selection Commission prescribing preference for women who are ‘original residents’ of the state.
Way Ahead:

- **Focus on Employment Generation:**
  1. The first and foremost step should be more job creation with the help of private sector.
  2. As unless adequate jobs are created for the large labor force, the sentiments like son of the soil of is not likely to be contained.

- **Striving towards economic revival and job creation:**
  1. The rising farm distress especially in states like Maharashtra and Haryana is making farming less attractive to the newer generation among others.
  2. Many groups historically tied to the land are now seeking favourable treatment while seeking entry into non-farm work.
  3. Education, Skill development and capacity building of locals to them competent in local labor market.

- **A Framework to facilitate interstate migration:**
  1. A safe interstate migration should be facilitated and portability of social security benefits should be provided.
  2. It could provide more opportunities to remedy regional disparities.
  3. Matching skills seamlessly across geographies would facilitate the ease of doing business.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint

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**Issue of Alimony for Women**

- **Syllabus:** GS 2- Social justice - Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection of vulnerable sections.

**Why is it in the news?**

- Supreme Court delivered a judgment on the issue of payment of maintenance by a man to his wife, upon separation.
- It was based on a plea under Section 125 of CrPC.
- The judgment laid down comprehensive guidelines for family courts, magistrates and lower courts over the maintenance issue.

**Key takeaways of the Supreme Court Judgment -**

- **Entitlements of Women:**
  1. The deserted wives and children are entitled to alimony from the date of application.
  2. Women deserted by husbands were left in dire straits, often reduced to destitution, from lack of means for women to sustain themselves and their children.

- **Asset discloser:** Both the applicant wife and the respondent husband have to disclose their assets and liabilities in a maintenance case.

- **Education expenses:**
  1. Education expenses of the children must be normally borne by the father.
  2. If the wife is working and earning sufficiently, the expenses may be shared proportionately
between the parties.

- **Permanent alimony:**
  1. It would not be equitable to order a husband to pay his wife permanent alimony.
  2. However, the duration of a marriage should be accounted for while determining the permanent alimony.

- **Moral duty:** The plea of the husband that he does not possess any source of income ipso facto does not absolve him of his moral duty to maintain his wife.

- **Punishment:** The court said a violation would lead to punishments such as civil detention and even attachment of the property.

**Background**
- Alimony is monetary compensation granted to a spouse who is unable to support himself/herself.
- Permanent alimony is a provision that comes into effect upon the dissolution of the marriage.
- Primary object of maintenance laws is to protect a deserted wife and dependent children from destitution.
- However, despite of various maintenance laws, women are left empty-handed for years.

**Laws enacted to deal with the issue of Alimony**
- **Special Marriage Act, 1954:** Under the provisions of this Act, the wife is entitled to claim maintenance, if she does not have sufficient independent income to support her and for legal expenses.
- **Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956:** A Hindu wife may claim maintenance under the provisions of this Act.
- **Section 125 of the Cr.P.C 1973:** Husband may be directed by the Magistrate to pay maintenance to wife, provided husband has sufficient means and wife is unable to maintain herself.
- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:**
  1. The Act provides relief to an aggrieved woman who is subjected to domestic violence.
  2. The aggrieved woman is entitled to the right of residence in a shared household.

**Issues/Challenges**
- **Overlapping jurisdiction:**
  1. The nature or purpose of different Acts are distinct and independent.
  2. The simultaneous operation of different Acts often leads to multiplicity of proceedings and conflicting orders.

- **Delay in disposal of cases:**
  1. In spite of time frames being prescribed by various statutes, cases take years to be disposed of in reality.
  2. The prolongation is largely due to a vast majority of cases and the legal loopholes.

- **Complexity in estimating Interim Maintenance:**
  1. The issue of interim maintenance is decided on the basis of pleadings.
  2. Mostly the parties submit scanty material and do not disclose the correct details.
  3. This makes it difficult for the Courts to make an objective assessment for grant of interim maintenance.

- **Enforcement of orders of maintenance:**
  1. Enforcement of the various orders of maintenance is the most challenging issue.
  2. In many cases the maintenance is not paid in timely manner.

**Significance of the Supreme Court Judgment**
Financial Security: Granting maintenance from the date of application will enable the wife to overcome the financial crunch which occurs on separation from the husband.

Uniformity:
(1) Supreme Court has framed uniform guidelines on overlapping jurisdiction under different enactments.
(2) It will help to resolve the issue of overlapping jurisdiction and conflicting orders.
(3) It will also enable the Court to take into consideration the maintenance already awarded in the previous proceeding, and grant an adjustment.

Conclusion - Ensuring Enforcement: The agencies involved should ensure that judicial orders for grant of maintenance are duly enforced by the parties involved.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint.

Anti-Microbial Resistance

Why is it in News?
World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (18 to 24 November) was observed to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance.

What is the Antimicrobial Resistance?
Anti-microbial resistance is the resistance acquired by any microorganism (bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasite, etc.) against antimicrobial drugs.
Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is the result of changes in bacteria, viruses, fungi.
It is making infections difficult to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread.

Facts:
Global Public Health Threat: WHO has declared that AMR is one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity. Viz. MDR-TB is resistant to the two most powerful anti-TB drugs.
Interdependence of Bacterial drugs: Several fields of modern medicine depend on the availability of effective antibiotic drugs such as chemotherapy for cancer treatment, organ transplantation, hip replacement surgery, intensive care for pre-term newborns.
Rise in Deaths Due to Resistance: According to WHO’s report, anti-biotic resistance may cause a rise in the death of Indians to 20 lakhs per year by 2050

Causes of Antimicrobial resistance:
Misuse and overuse of antimicrobials.
Spread of microbes due to lack of clean water, sanitation and infection prevention.
Poor access to quality, affordable medicines, vaccines, and diagnostic.
Lack of awareness and knowledge and flawed prescription to get well soon.
Self-medication for smaller illnesses.
Lack of enforcement of legislation.
Costly hospital stays and lack of beds forces doctors to prescribe a higher dose.
Incremental dose due to slow development of resistance for low doses.
Antibiotic consumption in the community and in hospital settings.
Use of antibiotics in food-producing animals and agriculture.

Impact:
Increase in mortality due to the ineffectiveness of drugs.
Increase in public health cost due to its rapid spread.
Increased economic cost due to more expensive & increased dose, specialized equipment, longer hospital stays.
Loss of productivity due to regular illness

Global initiatives:
Antimicrobial Resistance Multi-Partner Trust Fund to fill a major funding gap.
WHO’s Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS) to fill knowledge gaps and to inform strategies at all levels.
Annual World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) since 2015 to raise awareness of antimicrobial resistance worldwide and encourage best practices among the general public, health workers and policymakers

Indian Initiatives:
ICMR’s National Anti-Microbial Resistance Research and Surveillance Network: It is to enable the compilation of National Data of AMR at different levels of Health Care.
Amendment to The Drugs and Cosmetic Rule, 1945: Rules were amended in 2013 to incorporate a new Schedule H1 which are to be sold on prescription only.
National Action Plan and Policy:
(2) 6 Strategic priorities under the NAP-AMR:
- Improving awareness and understanding of AMR.
- Strengthening knowledge and evidence through surveillance.
- Reducing the incidence of infection through effective infection prevention & control.
- Optimizing the use of antimicrobial agents in health, animals and food.
- Promoting investments for AMR activities, research and innovations.
- Strengthening India’s leadership on AMR.

AMR and Covid-19
Uncertainty over the effectiveness and multiple therapies increased does of antibiotics.
There is a possibility of an effect on each other’s ability of virus SARS-CoV-2 and bacteria in the lungs to cause damage and worsen the outcome.
WHO fears that it will increase the global threat of AMR as patients receive antibiotics as part of their treatment regime.

Way forward
Multisectoral Approach:
(1) The One Health approach should bring together multiple sectors and stakeholders engaged in human, terrestrial and aquatic animal and plant health, food and feed production and the environment.
(2) It should communicate and work together in the design and implementation of programs, policies, legislation and research.
Assist low- and middle-income countries (LMICs):
(1) We should assist LMICs to develop sustainable sanitation, secure nutrition, and access to
proper health care.
(2) We should provide funds and technical assistance.

- Legislation:
  (1) All countries should limit or restrict the use of antibiotics through legislation.
  (2) We must ensure its implementation through strict monitoring.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Economic Times, WHO, Down to Earth

10 Person with Disabilities: Issues and challenges in India.

- Syllabus: GS II - Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and the States and the performance of these schemes.

Why is it in News?
- Annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities, December 3, has been celebrated all over the world.

Definition:
- WHO: Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.
- "Person with disability" (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016):
  (1) A person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment.
  (2) It hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.

Person with benchmark disability:
(1) A person with not less than 40% of a specified disability where specified disability has not been defined in measurable terms.
(2) It includes a person with a disability where specified disability has been defined in measurable terms, as certified by the certifying authority.

Facts related to Disability in India:
- Census of India 2011:
  (1) It constitutes 2.21% of our population.
  (2) 69% of the disabled population is in rural areas.

Issues and Challenges:
- Health:
  (1) Most of the disabilities from medical issues during birth, maternal conditions, malnutrition, as well as accidents and injuries are preventable.
  (2) The poor and inadequate Health sector infrastructure of India, particularly in rural areas hinders this.
  (3) Lack of affordable health care and timely attention.
  (4) Poorly trained health-workers in rehabilitation.
- Education:
  (1) The inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular schools has remain a major challenge.
(2) Inadequate special schools, poorly trained teachers and availability of educational material is another challenge.

- Employment:
  (1) Difficulties in physical access to the workplace.
  (2) Non-friendly building structures of offices.
  (3) Inadequate transport system for traveling to the workplace.
  (4) Non-flexible working hours.
  (5) Lack of variety of jobs which are suitable for disabled persons.
  (6) Lower pay for the same work

- Identification and political issues:
  (1) Lack of sympathetic behavior for issuance of a certificate of disability
  (2) The lack of rigorous and comparable data and statics further hinder the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
  (3) Lack of political representation due to vote-bank issues and political apathy.

- Poor socio-economic development:
  (1) Development is the result of health and education and employment opportunities.
  (2) Health, education and employment obstacles prevent development.
  (3) Poverty and lack of financial support hampers access to different development prospects such as costly education and health.

Steps/Provisions by the Government:
- Article 41 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP): State shall make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance for disable people.
- Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016;
  (1) It defines disability based on an evolving concept.
  (2) The types of disabilities have been increased from 7 to 21.
  (3) The Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.
- Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS): Financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing various services to Persons with Disabilities, special schools, vocational training centers, etc.
- National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities (RGMF) to increase opportunities for higher education.

Way Forward:
- Health, Education, and infrastructure:
  (1) We should invest more in health and education for a person with disabilities.
  (2) We should create accessible infrastructure, particularly at government buildings.

- Remove Social stigma:
  (1) We should change the approach of society through community awareness.
  (2) We should inculcate empathetic values through sensitive training at the workplace.
  (3) Schools must inculcate sensitivity towards disability among children early in their lives.

- Representation and employment:
  (1) Special provisions should be made for promoting the representation of persons with disabilities in policymaking.
  (2) Investment in skill development programs for increasing employment prospects should be made.
The Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) issued a gazette notification allowing postgraduate (PG) Ayurvedic practitioners to receive formal training for a variety of general surgeries. The Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016, has been amended to allow PG students of Ayurveda to practice general surgery. However, the decision has sparked outrage from allopathy or modern medicine practitioners. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has also opposed the new notification.

**Details**
- CCIM is a statutory body set up under the AYUSH Ministry to regulate Indian systems of medicine.
- As per the notification, Ayurveda doctors will now be allowed to perform a variety of general surgeries like ENT, ophthalmology, and dental procedures - a total of 58 surgical procedures.
- The notification is specific and does not allow Shalya and Shalakya Postgraduates to take up any other types of surgery.
  1. **Shalya Tantra** - general surgeries and para-surgical procedures.
  2. **Shalakya Tantra** - deals with diseases situated above the clavicle, including disorders of the ears, nose, throat, eyes, [teeth], head and neck.

**What is the Controversy?**
- The Allopathy or modern medicine practitioners took objection to the use of modern terminology in the CCIM notification.
- IMA has alleged that the government is mixing two different streams of medicines.
- IMA alleged that the CCIM has the dubious reputation of prescribing modern medicine textbooks to its students.
- IMA has also objected to the use of technical terms, techniques and procedures of modern medicine.
- IMA urged CCIM to develop its own surgical disciplines from ancient texts and not claim surgical disciplines of modern medicine as its own.

**Clarification from AYUSH Ministry**
- The notification is specific to these specified surgical procedures and does not allow Shalya and Shalakya Postgraduates to take up any other types of surgery.
- Shalya and Shalakya are independent departments in Ayurveda colleges.
- Shalya and Shalakya postgraduates are already learning the surgical procedures in their departments in Ayurvedic medical colleges.
- The notification was issued to streamline some of the regulations concerning postgraduate Ayurveda education by adding clarity and definition to the same.
• The use of modern terminology is to facilitate effective communication among different stakeholders.
• CCIM is committed to maintaining the authenticity of Indian systems of medicine and is against any mixing of Ayurveda with Modern Medicine.

Issues/ Concerns
• Concerns of Modern practitioners:
  (1) It is hard to ascertain whether Ayurvedic surgeons possess sufficient proficiency to conduct the surgeries safely.
  (2) There are no set standards by which one can judge their skills. Surgical proficiency cannot be judged by different standards in one country.
  (3) The less-educated patients could be at risk as they rather save money than question a surgeon’s qualifications.
• Dilution of Ayurveda:
  (1) Some experts allege that CCIM has subjugated the curriculum of Ayurveda to nurture more and more replicas of Allopathy doctors.
  (2) It may substitute the ancient, time-honored system of Ayurveda by teaching students to imbibe as much allopathy as possible.
  (3) This may dilute the knowledge, purity, and goodness of classical Ayurveda.
• Issue of Training and Practice:
  (1) In surgery perfection comes from rigorous training and continuous practice and not from mere knowledge.
  (2) The practice requires clinical material and most Ayurvedic hospitals do not have enough surgical patients.
  (3) Due to the limited scope for training and access to gaining hands-on practice, it will be risky to allow Shalya/Shalakya postgraduates to undertake surgical procedures.

Conclusion
• Detailed Enquiry Required:
  (1) The postgraduate Ayurvedic surgical training is a formal three-year course.
  (2) Whether the surgeries conducted in Ayurvedic colleges and hospitals have tested standards and outcomes, requires detailed formal inquiry in the interest of patient safety.
• Focus on Training and Practice:
  (1) When it comes to surgery, the only benchmark should be the duration of hands-on training received.
  (2) The surgeries should have been counted under the supervision and being judged through external evaluation.
• Complementarity of two systems:
  (1) Ayurvedic treatments could be a better alternate for rural areas, where there is a lack of availability of Allopathic doctors.
  (2) Government and the medical institutions should take responsibility to ensure a sick person receives well-tested, good-quality medical care.
  (3) Rather than mixing AYUSH with modern medicine, an attempt should be made to make one system complementary to the other.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint.
**Syllabus:** GS II - Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

**Why is it in News?**
- Government brought digital/online media platforms under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from the Ministry of Electronics and IT.
- Government included films on OTT, and audio-visual programs, digital web-based news portals, YouTube channels in digital/online media.

**Government submitted Affidavit in SC:**
- While in a mainstream media the publication / telecast is a one-time act, the digital media has faster reach from wider range of viewership.
- It has the potential to become viral because of several electronic applications like WhatsApp, tweeter, Facebook.
- It termed the digital media as “parallel media” and is ‘completely uncontrolled’.
- It claimed that digital web-based news portals and YouTube channels as well as OTT platforms should be included in the mainstream media.
- Regulation is necessary to curb the spread of fake news and misinformation.
- It also cautioned about regulation which might have the undesired impact of media organisations which are publishing similar unregulated content on digital platforms.

**Current Scenario:**
- Currently, while electronic media in India is regulated by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995, digital content is not regulated under any law or by autonomous body.
- **Government** - These platforms should create a self-regulatory body on the lines of the News Broadcasting Standards Authority

**Need for regulation:**
- Wide reach compared to other media due to internet and mobile penetration.
- **Lack of oversight:**
  1. There is an absence of governing law or supervisory body to restrain content.
  2. People use it for spreading hatred and violating others’ fundamental rights.
  3. Unlike print media/electronic media, digital content has no editorial control.
- **Fake News:**
  1. Rise in fake news or hatred campaign due to rise of social media.
  2. User-Generated content is large and most of the time without authenticity.
  3. It might lead to disruption of law & order, communal hatred or lynching. e.g. lynching in Maharashtra in 2018.
  4. Fake news’ are impacting process of election, in turn democratic system itself.
- **Psychological war:**
  1. Possibility of foreign countries (Especially enemy countries) interfering.
  2. Malicious campaign might lead to derailment of international relations.

**Concerns about regulation:**
• **Freedom of expression and reasonable restrictions:**
  (1) Freedom of individual can be suppressed in the name of regulation, particularly in case of anti-government content.

• **Increasing burden of courts:**
  (1) Such regulation and resultant petition might divert attention of courts from important constitutional issues such as J &K, electoral bonds.

• **Regulation to overregulation:**
  (1) Regulation power to public authorities might result into overregulation.
  (2) It might give undue advantage to ruling party which frames regulation rules.

• **Technical limitation:** Public authorities’ have limited knowledge of technology which limits the effective regulation.

**Way Ahead:**

• **Promote ethics:**
  (1) National digital media body should self-regulate the content.
  (2) It should enforce the core principles like truth and accuracy, transparency, independence, fairness and impartiality, responsibility and fair play.

• **Role of Supreme Court:**
  (1) It should create guidelines to enforce regulation in four areas - elections, harmful content, privacy and data portability.
  (2) It should reinforce that freedom of speech are subject to reasonable restrictions with special focus on person’s privacy.

• **Role of Government:**
  (1) Government should improve Digital Literacy.
  (2) Government should improve capacity building governance to tackle technology led challenges.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Livemint, Outlook, The Wire, Hindustan Times.

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**Bru Migration**

• **Syllabus:** GSII: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.

**Why is it in News?**

• In January this year, a quadripartite agreement was signed between the Union Government, the Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.

• Now Brus in Tripura demanding Schedule Tribes as promised the agreement which is opposed by native people.

**About Brus:**

• Bru (Reang in Tripura) are an indigenous tribe living in Northeast India, mostly in Tripura, Mizoram and Assam.

• They are a nomadic tribe and a large number of them depend on jhum cultivation.

• Their language is known as Kaubru. A good percentage of them are followers of Vaishnavism.
They are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Tripura.

Background:
- 1947: Bru (Hindu Tribe) went to Mizoram after being displaced due to a hydro project.
- 1995: First signs of conflict as Mizo organisations demanded that Brus be left out of the state’s electoral rolls as they were not an indigenous tribe.
- 1996: Amid pushback by Mizos against demand, Bru take up arms and formed Bru National Liberation Front.
- 1997: Ethnic Violence Breaks out, around 5,000 families comprising over 30,000 Bru tribal were forced to flee the state and seek shelter in Tripura, where they were housed in temporary camps at Kanchanpuri.
- 2005: BNLF lays down arms after Mizoram promises to repatriate refugees
- 2018: Centre signs deal to repatriate Brus with financial aid, but deal falls through later that year.

Provisions of the Agreement:
- Living Choice:
  1. Bru community given choice of living in either the state of Tripura or Mizoram.
  2. The Bru who returned to Mizoram in the eight phases of repatriation since 2009, cannot however, come back to Tripura.
- Fixed Deposit for Each Family: The government has provided that each family will receive approx. 4 lakh in fixed deposit for a period of two years.
- Scheme for Investment: The government will, then, devise a scheme on how they should invest it further.
- Housing Provision: plans for land and housing assistance grants have been made.
- Cash Assistance for 2 years: A relief of Rs. 5,000 per month as cash assistance to these families for two years from the date of their shifting to their new location.
- Free Ration: The families will be given free ration for two years from the date of their resettlement in Tripura.
- Special Development Project: The Centre will implement a special development project for the resettled Bru. This will be in addition to the Rs 600 crore fund announced for the process, including benefits for the migrants.

Significance Of the Agreement
- Permanent Solution: This agreement will bring a permanent solution for the rehabilitation of thousands of Bru-Reang people in Tripura.
- Easy Absorption in Tripura: The Brus were displaced to Mizoram because of hydroelectric projects in Tripura.
- Elaborate Rehabilitation Plan Avoids bureaucratic whims: Bru people have been provided a cushion from what could have ended up becoming a long process, subject to bureaucratic whims.
- ST Certificates: The agreement makes it mandatory for the government of Tripura to issue the Bru people ST certificates because they figure among the 21 STs of Tripura. This will help them secure govt. jobs and other special privileges.
- Voting Rights: They will get voting rights in Tripura and would be able to benefit from the social welfare schemes of both Central and State govts.
- Residential Schools: The government promised them Eklavya tribal residential schools in villages which will ensure education to their children and equip them with greater exposure and life-skills.
- Refugee Status: Now they will not be addressed as refugees in their own country, but will now be
recognized as the citizens of India.

- **First Line of Defence:** Brus are all along the rivers and Indo-Bangladesh border. The fact is that Reangs are one of those tribes, which is the first line of defence for India.

**Issues Not Addressed by the Agreement**

- **Diversion of Forest Lands:**
  1. **ISFR 2019:** Tripura although not much has shown little decrease in forest cover in the State compared to the previous assessment reported in ISFR 2017. Main reasons being shifting cultivation and development activities.
  2. Settlement of Brus would decrease the forest cover even more.
  3. Already the tribe practices shifting cultivation.

- **No Resettlement of Brus who repatriated to Mizoram:**
  1. Those who repatriated in the earlier phases will not be allowed to resettle in Tripura under this agreement.
  2. That means those in Mizoram will still have to fear tribal tensions.
  3. They are demanding a package similar to the one for Brus in Tripura.
  4. If not settled in Tripura they may still demand for autonomous district council in Mizoram.

- **BNLF Militancy:** The militancy may harm local bengali-speaking people in tripura, it already has during the anti-CAB movement.

- **Ethnocentric States:** The agreement to settle Bru tribal people in Tripura and not in Mizoram from where they were displaced, could encourage the creation of ethnocentric States in the northeast.

- **Conflicts with Indigenous tribes:** Activists argue that the “solution” has the potential of creating conflicts between the Brus and indigenous communities of Tripura and also in Assam especially when Assam NRC is in progress.

- **Inter-Tribe conflicts:** Northeast has had a history of ethnic conflicts, not only between the “indigenous” and “settlers” but inter-tribe too — and issues could also arise within smaller sub-groups within the same tribe.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint.

14 Indo Pacific

**Indo Pacific**

- **Syllabus:** GS2: International Relations

**Why is it in news?**

- China’s assertiveness in Indo Pacific has triggered the debate around Indo Pacific.
- Various initiatives such QUAD with a special focus on Indo Pacific have been started recently.

**Importance of Indo Pacific for India:**

- India has a 7500 km maritime border opening in the Indian ocean.
- India produces 40% oil production from offshore and imports 80% of its oil demand from sea routes.
India’s Trade: 95% by volume and 68% by value of India’s trade happens through the sea.

Significance:

Conduit of International Trade:
(1) It enjoys a privileged location at the crossroads of global trade, connecting the major engines of the international economy in the Northern Atlantic and Asia-Pacific.
(2) The Indo-Pacific ocean system carries an estimated 65 per cent of world trade and contributes 60 per cent of global GDP.

Densely populated: More than 65% of world population lives around Indo Pacific.

Mineral Resources:
(1) 40% of the world’s offshore oil production takes place in the Indian Ocean.
(2) Fishing - almost 15 per cent of the world’s total fishing.

India’s Vision for Indo Pacific:

Recent Use:
(1) The term is believed to have used as far back as the 1990s, “Indo-Pacific” is a fairly recent addition to the geopolitical lexicon.
(2) India has used it in joint statements with a series of partner countries. It figures in India’s meetings with ASEAN and has helped advance the Quad consultations.

Establishment of Indo Pacific Division: Ministry of External Affairs has set up an Indo-Pacific Division and placed it under the Additional Secretary level officer, shows India’s commitment to Indo Pacific.

Geographical Extent:
(1) For India, the Indo-Pacific is that vast maritime space stretching from the western coast of North America to the eastern shores of Africa.

SAGAR doctrine:
(1) Prime Minister Narendra Modi described it in Singapore in 2018 as an acronym for “Security and Growth for All in the Region”.
(2) It implies following:
   - Securing end-to-end supply chains in the region;
   - No disproportionate dependence on a single country;
   - Ensuring prosperity for all stakeholder nations;
   - Guided by norms and governed by rules, with freedom of navigation, open connectivity;
   - Respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states.

Recent Initiatives by India:
(1) Colation for Disaster Risk Reduction.
(2) Indian Navy’s Information Fusion Center at Gurgaon.
(3) Asia Africa Growth Corridor.

Challenges:

Disasters:
(1) It is vulnerable to natural or environmental disasters.
(2) Recent Example: 2004 tsunami that killed 228,000 people and Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in 2008 and took 138,300 lives.

Piracy: Some of the regions of Indo-Pacific are prone to piracy such as Somalian piracy.

China’s Assertiveness: China is trying to increase its sphere of influence in the Indo Pacific region and in turn transgressing all the democratic principles.
Way Forward:
- **For India:** India should strengthen security and freedom of navigation by becoming a net security provider for instance in peacekeeping efforts or anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR): Indo-Pacific is a vast stretch of ocean that is very susceptible to disasters. There is a need to build a strong HADR system
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Covid 19 has demonstrated the vulnerability of supply chains and the dominance of China. These supply chains need to be diversified and strengthened.

RCEP

Syllabus:
- GS 2- International relations- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.
- GS 3- Economic Development

Why is it in the news?
- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a mega trade bloc came into existence on 15 November 2020.
- India would have to write expressing intention to join RCEP to restart negotiations for membership.

About RCEP
- RCEP is a mega trade pact between the 10-member ASEAN bloc, along with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
- Aim of RCEP: To lower tariffs, open up trade in services and promote investment.
- RCEP negotiations were launched by ASEAN leaders and the six other countries during the 21st ASEAN Summit 2012.
- Objective of launching RCEP negotiations was to achieve a modern, comprehensive and mutually beneficial economic partnership agreement among the members.

RCEP and India
- India had been party to RCEP negotiations since the beginning.
- India quit the negotiations last year, over some of its concerns not being addressed in the deal.

Significance of RCEP
- RCEP is a strategy aimed at maintaining regional growth by ensuring the markets of participating countries remain open and competitive.
- In order to make 'Make in India' a success, India needs to be part of the Asian value and supply chain.

India’s concerns that led to its withdrawal from RCEP
- **China factor:**
  1. RCEP would have resulted in giving greater market access to Chinese products.
  2. Inflow of Chinese goods may have impacted India's labour-intensive industries.
  3. Ex. China has been dumping iron and steel products in India at a much lower price than that of the domestic industry.
India already having FTAs with most members:
(1) India already has separate FTA with ASEAN block, Japan and S.Korea.
(2) India is negotiating separate FTA with Australia and New Zealand.
(3) Signing RCEP would have majorly amounted to signing FTA with China.

Key areas of contention:
(1) RCEP countries were demanding lower customs duties on a number of products and greater access to the market, which India was unwilling to provide.
(2) More developed RCEP countries such as Australia and Singapore were unwilling to accommodate India’s demands to liberalise their services regime and allow freer mobility of Indian workers.

Trade deficit:
(1) India had $105 billion trade deficit with RCEP members.
(2) There was apprehension that trade pact would lead to more import, thus widening the deficit.

Farmers’ concerns:
(1) RCEP may permanently bring down import duties on most agricultural commodities to zero.
(2) E.g. the dairy products from Australia and New Zealand may have flooded Indian markets with low cost.
(3) It would have mainly affected the unorganised and inefficient small-scale Indian producers.

Possible implications for India for not joining RCEP
Economic Implications:
(1) During the time when WTO’s relevance and its powers are diminishing, India should engage itself in FTAs or in regional blocks.
(2) India currently does not have FTA with many major group including U.S, EU and the Gulf economies.
(3) Without larger FTAs, India is likely to struggle to keep exports competitive in global market. It may also impact ‘Make in India’ project.
(4) By not joining RCEP, India may lose investments and its consumers may end up paying more than they should.

Political Implications:
(1) Not joining RCEP may cut India out of the rules-making process in the region and India may locked out from Asia.
(2) It may give China further space in the regional trade and security architecture.

Way Ahead:
Balancing Act:
(1) India should be a part of global value chain or Asian value chain for promoting its make in India programme.
(2) It will contribute to economic growth by building up India’s manufacturing sector.
(3) At the same time, interest of domestic industries and interest of farmers should be taken into account.

Improving competencies:
(1) Domestic industries should strive for quality and make its products globally competitive.
(2) For a competitive industry, a mega-trade agreement like the RCEP offers a barrier-free regional market.
(3) Some measures that can help improve the competitiveness:
Spending more in research and development.
Strengthening environment and labor laws.
Improving and expediting the certification process of farm products on sanitary and phyto-sanitary grounds.
Reforms on export front.
Reforms to improve ease of doing business environment.

Sources: The Hindu, LiveMint, The week.

India-Canada relations

- Syllabus: GS2: International Relations

Why is it in news?
India-Canada ties have deteriorated in recent times, given the view that the current Justin Trudeau administration is soft on individuals and organizations that support the demand for Khalistan, a separate Sikh homeland.
Canadian PM expressed concerns regarding farmers' protests in India, which has been seen by India as interference in internal affairs.

India Canada Relations:
- Education Sector: Post-secondary enrolment by Indian students at Canadian universities and colleges rose over 140-150 % between 2012 and 2018. Over 124,000 Indian students currently study in Canada.
- Trade and economy:
  - Statistics: Bilateral trade between the two reached US$ 6 in 2016 and FDI reached US$ 2.9 billion.
  - Bilateral negotiations: These are underway towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA).
- Energy sector:
  - Canada is a resource-rich country. India expressed an interest in Canadian oil and gas as an energy solution.
  - India secured a landmark nuclear energy deal with Canada for the supply of 3.2 million kilograms of uranium over five years.
- Security and Defence: Both collaborate closely in international forums particularly through the UN, Commonwealth and G-20, mutual ship visits, cooperation on counter terrorism, etc.
- Science & Technology: Canada and India have a Joint Working Group and have cooperation agreement on Science and Technology.
- Food security: India is a significant market for Canadian pulses; about 27.5% of Canadian pulse exports went to India.
- Space sector: Both cooperate in space science, earth observation, satellite launch services, etc.

Areas of Concerns:
Involvement in Internal Affairs:
(1) Canadian PM expressed concerns regarding farmers' protests in India, which has been seen by India as interference in internal affairs.
(2) Many have claimed this as appeasement of Sikh voters in Canada.

Khalistan Issue: Current Justin Trudeau administration is soft on individuals and organizations that support the demand for Khalistan, a separate Sikh homeland. It’s becoming a major issue between the two.

Slow development in bilateral trade: India accounts for only 2% of Canada’s global trade. Free trade negotiations, which began in 2010, are still going on without a conclusion.

Free-trade agreement issue: Canada’s insistence on ‘progressive’ free-trade agreements and India’s insistence in protecting certain sectors like agriculture may continue to prolong these critical talks.

Way Forward:
• Clear stand on Khalistan separatist movement: Canada will need to clearly outline its stance on the Khalistan separatist movement.
• Mutual benefit & changing global scenario: India needs good relations with Canada for its energy security whereas Canada needs India given changing global scenarios like Brexit, protectionist policies by U.S-Canada’s largest trading partner, and disruption in global trade with the U.S.-China trade war.

Institutional collaboration & Intelligence sharing:
• It is the need of the hour for tackling terrorism and extremism.
• On the security front, a stable balance of power in the wider Indo-Pacific will serve both Indian and Canadian interests.

Inclusive, mutually agreed FTA:
• Both need to conclude FTA which is in negotiation for a long time to have strong economic integration.
• India remains a critical market for Canadian products such as lentils, peas, lumber, and potash, especially as India remains the world’s fastest-growing major economy

Constitution/Legislature

1. Kerala withdraws general consent accorded to CBI to probe cases

Why is it in news?
- Kerala has decided to withdraw the general consent accorded to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to operate in Kerala voluntarily.

Details:
- The Kerala government has invoked the provisions of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, which governs the CBI.
- The law clearly states that law and order and crime investigation are State subjects.
- The CBI could probe local cases or charge-sheet suspects only with the permission of the State administration.
- General consent is given by States to CBI to avoid need for permission every time investigation is going in the state.

2. Panel mulls if MPs can teach at universities

Why is it in news?
- The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Office of Profit deliberated on whether an MP can continue to teach at a university and if this draws the provisions of “Office of Profit” rules.

Details:
- Under Article 102 (1) and Article 191 (1) of the Constitution, an MP or an MLA (or an MLC) is barred from holding any office of profit under the Central or State government.

3. PM pitches for ‘One Nation, One Election’

Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister pitched for ‘One Nation, One Election’. He was addressing the concluding session of the 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference via videoconference.

Details:
- He said it is the need of the country as elections taking every few months hamper development works.
- He also asked the presiding officers attending the meet to apply their mind to simplify the language of statute books and allow for an easier process to weed out redundant laws.

Judgements
4. **SC stays EC order revoking ‘star campaigner’ status of Nath**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Supreme Court stayed the October 30 order of the Election Commission (EC) revoking the ‘star campaigner’ status of former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath.

**Details:**
- CJI said the Election Commission had no power to determine who should be the ‘star campaigner’ of a political party.

**Background:**
- On October 30, the EC found Mr. Nath guilty of violating the model code of conduct in place for the byelections.
- The EC revoked his name on the basis of a complaint from the BJP that Mr. Nath derogatorily referred to its candidate, Imarti Devi, as an “item” during a campaign rally at Dabra in Gwalior district.
- **Section 77(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**: Selection/revocation of ‘star campaigners’ the sole prerogative of the political party.

5. **‘It is in public interest to set up courts to try lawmakers’: SC**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Supreme Court bench was considering report by Madras High Court.
- Madras High Court had raised reservations over the setting up of special courts to exclusively try legislators for various offences.

**Details:**
- The SC observed purpose of this adjudication is in public interest and to maintain public faith in judiciary by making sure that long-pending cases against sitting and former MPs and MLAs are decided without delay.
- **View of Madras High Court:**
  1. It said that special courts cannot be “offender-centric”.
  2. It reasoned that an MP/MLA, who commits an offence under POCSO Act (or other Special Acts like Prevention of Corruption Act, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act) can only be tried by a Special Court created under the POCSO Act (PC Act, NDPS Act).
  3. There cannot be another Special Court exclusively for trial of an MP/MLA, who commits POCSO offence.

6. **Protect right of ordinary people to bail: SC to judges**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Supreme Court gave a clarion call to judges to protect personal liberty and the right of ordinary people to bail, saying “liberty is not a gift for the few”.

**Details:**
- Common citizens without the means or resources to move the High Courts or the Supreme Court are languishing in jails as undertrials.
- It is through the instrumentality of bail that our criminal justice system’s primordial interest in preserving the presumption of innocence finds its most eloquent expression.
- Courts are the “first line of defence” against the deprivation of citizens’ personal liberty.
• 91,568 bail pleas were pending in high courts, while 1.96 lakh bail applications were awaiting a hearing in the district courts.

Policy

8. OTT channels come under I&B Ministry

Why is it in news?

• The government has brought “Over the Top” (OTT) platforms or video streaming service providers like Netflix, Amazon Prime and others under the ambit of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Background:

• Currently, there is no law or autonomous body governing digital content.
• This will give the government control over the OTT platforms, which were unregulated till now.
• From time to time, the government had indicated the necessity to monitor these platforms.

Self-Regulatory Guidelines:

(1) The government wanted the platforms to come up with a self-regulatory body on the lines of the News Broadcasting Standards Authority.

(2) Anticipating the government’s intervention in January 2019, eight video streaming services had signed a self-regulatory code that laid down a set of guiding principles for the content on these platforms.

(3) The code adopted by the OTTs in January last prohibited five types of content.
   ➢ Content which deliberately and maliciously disrespects the national emblem or national flag;
   ➢ Any visuals or story lines that promotes child pornography;
   ➢ Any content that “maliciously” intends to outrage religious sentiments;
   ➢ Content that “deliberately and maliciously” promotes or encourages terrorism;
   ➢ Any content that has been banned for exhibition or distribution by law or by a court.

9. Questionnaire of NPR being finalised: RGI

Why is it in news?

• The office of the Registrar-General of India (RGI) has said the schedule, or the questionnaire, of the National Population Register (NPR) is “being finalised”.

Details:

• The NPR is a list of "usual residents" of the country.
• It is compulsory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.
• This includes both Indian citizens as well as a foreign citizen.
• The objective of the NPR is to create a database of every usual resident in the country.
• It is being prepared at the local (village/sub-town), sub-district, district, state and national level under provisions of the Citizenship Act 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
• The data for National Population Register was first collected in 2010 by the then UPA government and it is to be done every 10 years.
• It was postponed indefinitely until further orders on March 25 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
• According to the Citizenship Rules framed in 2003, the NPR is the first step towards compilation of the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC), or the NRC.
10. Roshni Act

Why is it in news?
• Beneficiaries of Roshni Act have filed the petition in Supreme Court.

Details:
• Roshni Act was passed by J&K legislature in 2001 to confer ownership rights on occupants of State land to raise ₹25,000 crore for hydel projects, but only ₹76 crore was collected.
• In 2018, the then Lieutenant Governor Satyapal Malik repealed the Act. Later, the High Court also scrapped the Act and directed the authorities to retrieve the land from the occupants.

11. Haryana clears Bill on right to recall panchayat member

Why it is in news?
• The Haryana Assembly passed Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Bill, 2020.

Details:
• Major Provisions:
  (1) Provides for right to recall members of Panchayati Raj institutions to those who elected them.
  (2) Gives women 50% reservation in these rural bodies.
  (3) Proposed 8% reservation to the “more disadvantaged” among the Backward Classes.
• The amendment is aimed at increasing their accountability to the voters.
Banking Sector and Monetary Policy

1. Banks told to credit ‘interest on interest’ to borrowers

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has told the Supreme Court that it has issued a notification to banks on refund of extra money to the borrowers.

Details
• RBI has advised commercial banks, coop. banks, financial institutions and non-banking financial companies to comply with the government’s payback scheme.
• The central government had asked the banks to credit into the accounts of eligible borrowers the difference between compound and simple interest collected on loans of up to Rs 2 crore during the RBI’s loan moratorium scheme by November 5.
• The government scheme is meant to bring “additional relief” to borrowers affected by the pandemic-induced financial distress.

2. Raise private bank promoter cap: RBI panel

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) panel has recommended raising the cap on promoters’ stake in private sector banks to 26% in the long run (15 years).
• The holding is currently mandated at 15% of the paid-up voting equity share capital of the bank.
• The panel was constituted to review the extant ownership guidelines and corporate structure for private sector banks in India.

More from the Panel:
• Large corporate or industrial houses be allowed as promoters of banks only after necessary amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
• NBFCs with an asset size of ₹50,000 crore and above, may be considered for conversion into banks subject to completion of 10 years of operations.
• For Payments Banks intending to convert to a Small Finance Bank (SFB), their track record of three years should be considered sufficient.
• Minimum initial capital requirement for licensing new banks be enhanced from ₹500 crore to ₹1,000 crore for universal banks.

3. RBI announced a Co-Lending Model (CLM) scheme

Why is it in news?
• The Central bank came out with a Co-Lending Model (CLM) scheme for banks.
• CLM seeks to provide greater flexibility to the lending institutions.
Details:
• Under the CLM, banks can provide loans along with NBFCs to priority sector borrowers based on a prior agreement.
• The co-lending banks will take their share of the individual loans on a back-to-back basis in their books.
• However, NBFCs shall be required to retain a minimum of 20% share of the individual loans on their books.
• The scheme is rechristened as "Co-Lending Model", considering the lower cost of funds from banks and greater reach of the NBFCs.
• It’s primary focus is to improve the flow of credit to the unserved and underserved sector of the economy and make available funds to the ultimate beneficiary at an affordable cost.
• NBFCs will be the single point of interface for the customers and shall enter into a loan agreement with the borrowers.

4. RBI’s monthly bulletin and technical recession

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its monthly bulletin reports that India has entered a technical recession for the very first time.

Details:
• A technical recession is when the economy contracts for two consecutive quarters.
• The Indian economy contracted for the second straight quarter.
• India’s real GDP fell to 7.5% in the July-September quarter compared to a contraction of 23.9% in the three months ended June.

Government Policies and Taxation

5. Production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme

Why is it in news?
• Union government unveiled a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to encourage domestic manufacturing investments in 10 more sectors.

Details:
• The scheme has an estimated outlay of about ₹1.46 lakh crore over the next five years.
• The 10 sectors had been identified on the basis of their potential to create employment and make India self-reliant.
• The sectors include food processing, telecom, electronics, textiles, speciality steel, automobiles and auto components, solar photo-voltaic modules and white goods, such as air conditioners and LEDs.
• Individual Ministries in charge of these sectors would implement the scheme.

Significance:
• The scheme will make Indian manufacturers globally competitive.
• It will attract investment in the areas of core competency and cutting-edge technology.
• It will ensure efficiencies and create economies of scale.
• It will also enhance exports and make India an integral part of the global supply chain.

6. Government rolls out new stimulus package
Why is it in news?
- The Government announced a fresh set of measures, worth around Rs 1.2 lakh crore, as a new stimulus package under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The latest measures include:
- Extending the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to 26 stressed sectors.
- Additional funding for housing and infrastructure sector.
- A new scheme to promote job creation and additional outlay for rural employment.
- Changes are being made in tax laws to help clear unsold inventory of residential housing units up to Rs 2 crore.

Aims and Objectives:
- To support the economic recovery process.
- To boost job creation.
- Provide liquidity support to stressed sectors.
- Encourage economic activity in housing and infrastructure areas.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana:
- Under the scheme, government will provide subsidy for provident fund contribution for adding new employees to establishments registered with EPFO.
- This scheme is estimated to cover over 99% of the establishments and 65% of all employees in the formal sectors.

Other Key Measures:

7. Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana:

Why is it in news?
- The Employee's State Insurance (ESI) Corporation has extended Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana from July 2020 to June 2021.

Details:
- It is decided to enhance the rate of relief under the scheme from present 25% of the average daily earning to 50% of average daily earning.
- It also decided to relax the eligibility conditions for the period March 2020 to December 2020 to provide relief to the workers who have become unemployed during COVID-19 Pandemic.

About Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana:
- Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana is a welfare measure being implemented by the Employee's State Insurance (ESI) Corporation.
- It offers cash compensation to insured persons when they are rendered unemployed.
- The scheme provides relief to the extent of 50% of the average per day earning during the previous four contribution periods to be paid up to maximum 90 days of unemployment once in lifetime of the Insured Person.

8. Social infra PPPs eligible for viability gap funding

Why is it in news?
The Union government expanded the provision of financial support in infrastructure projects to include critical social sector investments.

Details:
- Government has expanded the provision of financial support by means of viability gap funding for public private partnerships (PPPs) in sectors such as health, education, water and waste treatment.
- The Cabinet also approved the continuation of the scheme for financial support to PPPs in infrastructure that has been in place since 2006, till 2024-25.
- A total of Rs. 8,100 crore has been allocated under this programme between 2020-21 and 2024-25, of which Rs. 2,100 crore will be devoted to social sector projects.
- Under the new schemes, private sector projects in areas like waste water treatment, health and education, could get 30% of total project cost from the Centre.

9. Finance panel for PPPs on health infra

Why is it in news?
- The 15th Finance Commission has mooted a greater role for public private partnerships to ramp up health infrastructure.

More From Finance Commission:
- Finance Commission seeks to scale up public spending on health from 0.95% of the GDP to 2.5% by 2024.
- While public outlays should focus on primary health care at the panchayat and municipality levels, private players should be relied on for specialty healthcare.
- The commission has recommended steps to fix the skewed availability of healthcare across India as poorer States have the worst facilities.

10. Single window approval for FDI

Why is it in news?
- As per a government official, a new, unified single window clearance system for foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals would be in place by March 31.
- The move is expected to make approvals transparent and expeditious.

Details:
- The single window clearance system will enable the potential investor to interact with all the Ministries whose approvals are required.
- The system is expected to be place by March-end of next year.
- Centre’s industrial information system for potential investors now includes details of land availability in as many as 14 States.

11. India to double oil refining capacity in five years: PM

Why is it in news?
- While addressing a petroleum university’s convocation, Prime Minister said India plans to almost double its oil refining capacity in the next five years.

Key points of PM’s address:
- India’s oil refining capacity could jump to 450-500 million tonnes in 10 years from the current level of about 250 million tonnes.
- Work is being done to nearly double the country’s oil refining capacity in the next five years.
India was also aiming to raise the share of natural gas in its energy-consumption mix by up to four times.

The cleaner fuel 'natural gas' currently accounts for about 6% of the energy consumed in the country.

India would achieve its target of increasing renewable energy capacity to 175 gigawatts by 2022, and 450 gigawatts by 2030, ahead of schedule.

The country had renewable energy capacity of about 75 gigawatts at the end of 2018.

12. National Database of Unorganised Sector

Why is it in news?

- The Finance Ministry given its approval for the creation of the first ever national database of unorganized and migrant workers.

Details:

- Government is to count rickshaw pullers, street-side vendors and hawkers, and other unorganised workforce.
- The National Statistical Commission will help to compile data on the size, distribution and economic contribution of these unorganised workers.
- Workers will be encouraged to enrol on the website. Common Service Centre can be used in this process.

Significance:

- There are estimated 450 million informal sector workers in India.
- Nearly 90% of the country’s workforce is in the informal sector with no minimum wages or any kind of social security.
- The survey is expected to yield crucial employment data on the informal sector, filling a vital gap in India’s statistics.
- It will help to track movement of labour in a situation like a Covid-induced lockdown so they can be assisted when in desperation.

13. Sahakar Pragya

Why is it in news?

- Union minister for agriculture and farmers welfare unveiled the Sahakar Pragya initiative launched by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).

Details:

- As part of the initiative, 18 regional training centres and 45 training modules for primary cooperatives were launched. The NCDC will run these training centres across the country.
- The Minister called upon the cooperative sector to play a role in making the village-poor-farmers Atma Nirbhar.

Background:

- India boasts a huge network of over 8.50 lakh cooperative societies with about 290 million members.
- Around 94% of the farmers in India are member of at least one cooperative society.
- Cooperatives have a major role in Atma Nirbhar Bharat and it lends strength to farmers to minimize risks in agriculture and allied sectors.
- The cooperatives aslo act as shield against exploitation by unscrupulous traders.
14. NPCI approved WhatsApp payment services

Why is it in news?
- The social media giant WhatsApp unveiled a payments services in India.

Details:
- Whatsapp, owned by Facebook introduced the service after the approval by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- WhatsApp had started testing its UPI-based payments system in 2018.
- Whatsapp payments services will compete with players such as Paytm, Google Pay, Amazon Pay and PhonePe.

About National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI):
- NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- It is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks’ Association (IBA).
- It was established under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India (for both physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems).
- It has been incorporated as a “Not for Profit” Company under the provisions of Companies Act.
- Headquarter- Mumbai.

15. Dumping by Vietnam hits Indian pepper

Why is it in news?
- Due to the unrestricted dumping of Vietnamese pepper, Indian pepper has suffered a sharp erosion in domestic prices.

Details:
- The Indian pepper that commanded a price as high as ₹694 per kg in 2016-17 had been hovering in the Rs. 350-400 range in the last couple of years.
- Vietnam dumping its pepper in India via Nepal and Sri Lanka has gained momentum in the last couple of years.
- India could import 2,500 tonnes of pepper a year from Sri Lanka without duty, and above the quota, a duty of 8%, under SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area).

Other Causes behind the drop in prices:
- Increasing inputs.
- Low production owing to various diseases affecting pepper vines
- Climate vagaries.

16. CCI to probe Google’s ‘abuse’ of position

Why is it in news?
- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) ordered a detailed probe against Google for ‘abuse’ of its dominant position.

Details:
- The probe is primarily with regard to its digital payments application GPay.
- **CCI will carry forward the investigation into two of these instances:**
(1) Re-installation of GPay on Android OS smartphones.
(2) Use of Google Play’s in-app billing as the method of payment by developers.

About Competition Commission of India (CCI):
• It is a statutory body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India.
• The following are the objectives of the Commission:
  (1) To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
  (2) To promote and sustain competition in markets.
  (3) To protect the interests of consumers.
  (4) To ensure freedom of trade.

17. Bloomberg New Economy Forum

Why is it in news?
• Prime Minister Modi recently addressed the Bloomberg New Economy Forum.

Key points of PM’s address:
• The pandemic had exposed the vulnerabilities of cities that served as the world’s growth engines till now.
• The global community need to work towards setting new protocols in every field in the post-Covid world.
• India as the most attractive investment destination for those looking to invest in urbanisation, mobility, innovation and sustainable solutions.
• India and some African nations will witness the biggest wave of urbanisation in future.

Mission of Bloomberg New Economy Forum:
• To realize the potential of a healthy New Economy by enabling global leaders from East and West to forge common ground.

18. Fiscal deficit breaches annual target

Why is it in news?
• According to official data released, Union Government’s fiscal deficit widened to ₹9.53 lakh crore, at the end of October of the current fiscal.
• It is close to 120% of the annual budget estimate.

Details:
• The deficit widened mainly due to poor revenue realisation.
• The lockdown imposed to curb spread of the virus had significantly impacted business activities.
• The fiscal deficit or gap between the expenditure and revenue had breached the annual target in July this year.

More about Fiscal Deficit:
• It indicate the excess of government expenditure over receipts except borrowing.
• Fiscal deficit = Total Expenditure – Total Receipts except borrowings.
• Fiscal deficit represents the total borrowing requirements of the central government.
• It indicate the financial health of the budget and that of the government.
• Higher fiscal deficit becomes a matter of concern. On the other hand, a manageable fiscal deficit is a welcome sign.
1. India, U.S. keen on training peace missions

Why is it in news?
• The USA and India are working on joint peacekeeping mission in Southeast Asian countries.

Details:
• In 2016, India and the U.S. began a joint annual initiative “UN Peacekeeping Course for African Partners” to build and enhance the capacity of African troop and police-contributing countries to participate in the U.N. and regional peacekeeping operations.
• While this is going on, the U.S. is keen on a similar initiative for South East Asian nations like Vietnam and others.
• India has consistently been among the top troop contributing nations to the UN and is the fifth largest with 5,424 personnel in eight countries.
• The U.S. on the other hand has never contributed ground troops but contributes 27% of the U.N. peacekeeping budget.
• China contributes 12% of the UN regular general budget and 15% of the peacekeeping budget. India’s contribution to the regular budget is 0.83% and 0.16% of the peacekeeping budget.
• India has so far participated in 51 of the 71 missions and contributed over 2 lakh personnel.

2. Gilgit-Baltistan to be a full province: Pak. PM

Why is it in news?
• Prime Minister of Pakistan has declared that part of the contested Kashmir region will provisionally become a full province of Pakistan.

Details:
• Pakistan has administered the area now known as Gilgit-Baltistan since shortly after the country’s birth in 1947.
• But New Delhi asserts the mountainous territory bordering China and Afghanistan is an integral part of Kashmir.
• The move comes after New Delhi last year revoked the special status of Kashmir, upending a decades-long status quo and drawing strong condemnation from Islamabad.
• Any change in status would require a constitutional amendment. If finalised, it would make Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan’s fifth province.
• Chinese role: China has spent years building infrastructure projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, home to an estimated 1.3 million people, including a long stretch of the Karakoram Highway, a key component to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
• India’s Response: India called Pakistan’s control over Gilgit Baltistan as ‘illegal occupation’ and
such move will bring material changes to a part of Indian territory.

3. India won’t accept shifting of LAC: CDS

Why is it in news?
- Chief of Defence Staff addressed National Defence College.

Details:
- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat said that India will not accept any “shifting” of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the possibility of unprovoked tactical military actions “spiralling into a larger conflict cannot be discounted.”
- Following the developments on the south bank of Pangong Tso (lake) in August, when the Indian Army occupied several dominating features that were lying vacant, China has been pressing for discussing the south bank first and other friction areas later.

4. Months after starting Chabahar rail project without India, Iran seeks help

Why is it in news?
- Iran has requested equipment from India for Chabahar Rail project.

Details:
- India is not a part of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway at present, but as Iran begins the second phase of the 628-km project, Tehran hopes New Delhi will help it procure equipment to run the rail line from the Chabahar port to the Afghan border.
- It has difficulty in procuring them directly due to the U.S.-imposed sanctions.
- Iran has also asked to activate a $150 million credit line that had been offered by India during Iranian President Rouhani’s visit to Delhi in 2018 to pay for the purchases.
- Gas field development: Delays due to sanctions have also taken a toll on the Indian interest in developing the Farzad-B gas field, where ONGC Videsh made a discovery in 2008.

5. India, Maldives sign four MoUs to boost ties

Why is it in news?
- New Delhi and Male signed four agreements, including a $100 million Indian grant for an ambitious connectivity project, during Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla’s visit to the Maldives.

Details:
- The MoUs are part India’s “$500 million package” for the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP).
- Last month, the two governments inked a deal for a $400 million line of credit from the Exim Bank of India.
- Amid New Delhi’s growing concern over China’s growing influence in the region, the ties with the Maldives have remained under sharp focus.
- India first policy:
  1. The government of India appreciated the government of President Solih for its ‘India First’ foreign policy.
  2. This is reciprocated in full measure by our ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy in which the Maldives enjoys a very special and central place.
- Further, India reiterated its support for Maldivian Foreign Minister Shahid’s candidature for the
6. China begins work on rail line up to Arunachal border

Why is it in news?
- China has begun work on a strategically significant railway line — its second major rail link to Tibet — that will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi, which lies near the border with India’s Arunachal Pradesh.

Details:
- Like the Qinghai-Tibet railway line, which in 2006 connected Lhasa to the hinterland, this will be the second such route linking the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) to the hinterland.
- It will run right up to Nyingchi near the border with India, which it will link to both Lhasa and Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan.
- The entire line will run from Chengdu to Lhasa, connecting the two capitals of TAR and Sichuan and cutting the journey from 48 hours to 13 hours.

7. India, Sri Lanka, Maldives to improve intel sharing

Why is it in news?
- National Security Adviser in Colombo called on Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and participated in the discussions with the Indian Ocean neighbours.

Details:
- India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives agreed to expand the scope of intelligence sharing, including terrorism and cyber security, after a meet in which they discussed “common security threats”.
- The three countries also exchanged views on common security threats and agreed to broad-base cooperation by expanding the scope to improve intelligence sharing.
- It included issues like terrorism, radicalisation, extremism, drugs, arms and human trafficking, money laundering, cyber security and effect of climate change on maritime environment, according to the statement.

8. India and Israel for cooperation in health and medicine

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of an MoU between India and Israel for cooperation in the field of health and medicine.

Details:
- The MoU covers areas of cooperation such as exchange and training of medical doctors and other health professionals, assistance in development of human resources and setting up of health care
facilities and exchange of information.
- It also includes sharing expertise for vulnerability assessment for health of citizens against climate risk.
- It seeks public health actions targeted towards mitigation and adaptation, sharing of expertise for facilitating climate resilient infrastructure.
- It includes providing support for development of ‘Green Healthcare’ (climate resilient hospitals) and promoting mutual research in various relevant areas.

### International Institutions and Agreements

#### 9. In APEC speech, Xi touts China’s economy as base of free trade

**Why is it in news?**
- President of China, Xi Jinping has addressed the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

**Major Points from his address:**
- China as the pivot point for global free trade, vowing to keep its “super-sized” economy open for business and warning against protectionism as the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Asia-Pacific is the “forerunner driving global growth” in a world hit by “multiple challenges.”
- He vowed “openness” to trade and rejected any possibility of the “decoupling” of China’s economy.

**About APEC:**
- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.
- **Aim:** To create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.
- It brings together 21 Pacific Rim countries, accounting for about 60% of global GDP.
- India is not the part of this group.

#### 10. G 20

**Why is it in news?**
- G20 summit was recently held virtually.

**Details:**
- G-20 leaders vowed to share information and the material needed for research, to exchange epidemiological and clinical data, and to strengthen health systems.
- They also promised to work together to increase funding for vaccine research.
- The Saudi monarch touted G-20 efforts to inject more than $11 trillion into the global economy this year as stimuli to support businesses and the most vulnerable.

**About G20:**
- It is the premier forum for international economic cooperation.
- The G20 brings together the leaders of both developed and developing countries from every continent.
- Collectively, G20 members represent around 80% of the world’s economic output, two-thirds of global population and three-quarters of international trade.
- Throughout the year, representatives from G20 countries gather to discuss financial and socioeconomic issues.

#### 11. India, ASEAN to expand trade despite RCEP walkout
Why is it in news?

- India and ASEAN countries said they would explore ways to increase trade between them despite India’s exit from the 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement.

Details:
- The RCEP free trade agreement, which India walked out from a year ago, was signed recently, between China, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and 10 Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) Nations.
- Mr. Modi also announced $1 million contribution to the ASEAN COVID-19 recovery fund.
- India’s “Indo-Pacific policy” considered as an area of convergence for ASEAN and India and rules-based order in the region including through upholding adherence to international law, especially the UNCLOS.

12. India-GCC Political Dialogue

Why is it in news?

- India and the GCC Troika held their annual Political Dialogue today in virtual mode.

Details:
- India thanked the GCC countries for taking care of the large Indian diaspora in their countries during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- India had also taken special care to ensure the return of Indian health professionals to GCC countries and for supply of medicines and other essential items during the pandemic.
- The GCC welcomed India’s inclusion in the UNSC as a non-permanent member from January 2021.

About GCC:
- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.
- The GCC was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 1981.
- The purpose of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Arab and Islamic cultures.
- Presidency of the council rotates annually.

13. India-OPEC Energy Dialogue

Why is it in news?

- The Petroleum and Natural Gas minister co-chaired the 4th high-level meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue along with Secretary-General of OPEC Secretariat.

Details:
- Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister has invited OPEC member countries to invest in India, especially in the efforts to transform the country into a manufacturing hub which will be at the heart of the global value chain.

About OPEC:
- OPEC is a permanent intergovernmental organization of 13 oil-exporting developing nations that coordinates and unifies the petroleum policies of its Member Countries.
- The OPEC Secretariat is the executive organ of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Located in Vienna, it also functions as the Headquarters of the Organization, in accordance with the provisions of the OPEC Statute.
1. Local Visitors in Kaziranga

Why is it in News?
• Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve reopened after 7 months.

Details:
• As domestic and international tourists avoided Kaziranga, local tourists attracted to Elephant safari.
• Kaziranga:
  (1) It is a National Park in Assam.
  (2) It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.
  (3) It has two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses.
  (4) Kaziranga is declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006.
  (5) Kaziranga is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.
  (6) It has populations of large herbivores include elephants, gaur and sambar.
  (7) Kaziranga has the largest population of the Wild water buffalo anywhere accounting for about 57% of the world population.
  (8) Small mammals include the rare hispid hare, large Indian civet, small Indian civets, Bengal fox, golden jackal, sloth bear, Chinese pangolin, Indian pangolins, Chinese ferret badgers, and particoloured flying squirrel.

2. USA formally left Paris Agreement

Why is it in News?
• USA formally left Paris agreement on Climate Change framed in 2015.

Paris Agreement:
• USA:
  (1) President Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the agreement in 2017 and formally notified the United Nations in 2019.
  (2) The US exited the pact after a mandatory year-long waiting period.
  (3) It criticised the agreement as economically detrimental and it might cost the country 2.5 million jobs by 2025.

• Facts:
  (1) Paris Agreement UNFCCC adopted in 2015 to improve upon and replace the Kyoto Protocol.

• Aims:
  (1) Limit the increase of global temperatures to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C.
  (2) Reach global peaking of GHG emissions & rapid reductions thereafter.
  (3) Achieve a balance after 2050 between atmospheric inputs of greenhouse gases by emission
sources and removal into sinks.

- **Recognitions:**
  1. Need of LDCs to improve their economies and reduce poverty, which made immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions difficult.
  2. Need for developing & developed to meet their emission reduction targets.
  3. No new funding targets but noted that developed countries should provide financial resources to help LDCs.

- **Issues and concerns:**
  1. Little progress on finance, technology transfer and capacity development.
  2. Issue of transferring funds from developed countries to LDCs is critical as developed countries did not want to be the only ones paying the costs.
  3. Non-ambitious and not enough targets as targets might not help to limit temperature increase of 2 °C.
  5. Conflict over the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" between developing and developed countries.

- **Performance:**
  1. India (9th Rank), for the first time, ranks among the top 10 in Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).
  2. India received an overall medium rating in the renewable energy category.
  3. China, the largest global emitter slightly improves its ranking in the index.
  4. All G20 except UK (7th) & India (9th), are in the worst category of index.

3. **Inter-state Elephant smuggling**

**Why is it in News?**
- Kerala police with Bihar police unveiled inter-State elephant smuggling racket.

**Details:**
- Smuggling of elephant tusks, ivory articles and tiger teeth, and other animal parts out of India to various countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar is matter of concern.

**Laws to prevent smuggling:**

**The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:**
  1. Prohibition of hunting of wild animals and birds and imposing punishment for violating the same.
  2. Protection and management of wildlife habitats.
  3. Establishment of protected areas.
  4. Regulation and control of trade in parts and products derived from wildlife.
  5. Management of zoos.
  6. Providing security to animals that are not in danger of becoming extinct.

4. **Performance targets to get pollution funds**

**Why is it in News?**
- Central government released only half of the budgetary allotments for combating air pollution.
- It is intended to link money disbursement with ‘Performance Targets’.
Details:

- Allocation for large cities having population above one million is ₹4,400 crore for 2020-2021.
- Centre released only 2200 crore to 15 states based on the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission.
- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):**
  1. It envisages 102 of India’s most polluted cities reducing air pollution by 20-30% by 2024.
  2. It will be with a reference year of 2017.

  (3) **Organizational structure:**
     - steering committee headed by the Chief Secretary.
     - a monitoring committee headed by principal secretary (environment).
     - an implementation committee headed by either district magistrate or commissioner of the municipal corporation.

5. **4 more biodiversity heritage sites in Karnataka**

Why is it in News?

- The Karnataka Biodiversity Board has decided to declare four more areas in the State as biodiversity heritage sites.

Details:

- **Areas to be declared:**
  1. Antaragange Betta in Kolar;
  2. Aadi Narayana Swamy Betta in Chickballapur;
  3. Mahima Ranga Betta in Nelamangala, Bengaluru;
  4. Urumbi area on the Kumaradhara river basin in Dakshina Kannada.

- **Biodiversity heritage site:**
  1. These are unique and fragile ecosystems.
  2. These can be marine ecosystems, coastal and inland waters, or terrestrial areas.

  (3) **It has rich biodiversity comprising of any one or more of the following components:**
     - richness of wild as well as domesticated species or intra-specific categories
     - high endemism.
     - presence of rare and threatened species.
     - keystone species.
     - species of evolutionary significance.
     - wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species or their varieties,
     - past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds.

  (4) It has significant cultural, ethical or aesthetic values.

  (5) These are important for the maintenance of cultural diversity, with or without a long history of human association with them.

6. **Plea on Western Ghats ESA draft notification,**

Why is it in News?

- A Kerala-based NGO for farmers filed plea in the the Supreme Court to declare unconstitutional a draft notification.

Details:

- **Notification:**
  1. Centre will demarcate 56,825 sq km spread across six States as ‘Western Ghats Ecologically
Sensitive Area’.
(2) It covered Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
(3) It might declare 123 agricultural villages in Kerala as ecologically sensitive area (ESA) villages.
(4) The recommendations are based on Kasturirangan report. (and earlier Gadgil report)

• Petition:
  (1) It sought to declare unconstitutional a draft notification.
  (2) It also sought a direction to the government to not implement the Madhav Gadgil and K. Kasturirangan committees’ reports.
  (3) Reports are based on the conservation of Western Ghats and demarcation of ‘no-go’ zones.
  (4) As per NGO, draft notification would affect 22 lakh people and the economy of Kerala.
  (5) These 123 villages form the backbone of the cultivation of rubber, coffee, black pepper, cardamom, etc.

7. Guwahati zoo becomes home for rescued exotic animals

Why is it in News?
• Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden in Guwahati became the home for rescued Non-Asian exotic animals.
• Hengrabari Reserve forest in Guwahati is being used for the same.

Details:
• Species rescued:
  (1) birds and monkeys native to Central and South America.
  (2) Aldabra tortoises, one of the largest species from the Seychelles group of islands.
  (3) A kangaroo from Australia.
• They were being smuggled in to Kolkata via Guwahati from Myanmar.

8. NGT ban on firecrackers

Why is it in News?
• The National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed that there would be a total ban on sale or use of all kinds of firecrackers between November 10 and 30.
• It will be applicable in all cities and towns across the country where the average ambient air quality in November fell under the ‘poor’ and above category.

Details:
• Only green crackers would be permitted to be sold.
• Timings restricted to two hours for bursting of crackers.
• Several States, including Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Delhi and Chandigarh had prohibited the sale and use of firecrackers.
• It is intended to protect vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, persons with co-morbidities among others.
• Why?
  (1) NGT agreed for ‘pollution aggravates COVID-19’.
  (2) Where air quality is poor and above, it may result in deaths and diseases.
  (3) It has to be avoided even if there is financial loss.
• In addition, NGT took view that all State pollution control boards and committees must take special initiative to contain air pollution by regulating all other sources of pollution.

9. Ban on Firecrackers and Green crackers
Why is it in News?
• Ban sale, use of firecrackers – High Court tells Telangana.
• Clarify ‘what green crackers are?’ – High court tells Karnataka.

Details:
• Festivals may be important, but people’s lives are more important – Telangana HC.
• Infected lungs might be more dangerous in covid-19 situation.
• Green Crackers:
  (1) These are developed by the CSIR-NEERI.
  (2) These include flower pots, pencils, sparkles, and chakkar.
  (3) ‘Green’ crackers have a small shell size compared to traditional crackers.
  (4) They are produced using less harmful raw materials and have additives which reduce emissions by suppressing dust.
  (5) They don’t contain banned chemicals such as lithium, arsenic, barium and lead.
  (6) They are called Safe Water Releaser (SWAS), Safe Thermite Cracker (STAR) and Safe Minimal Aluminium (SAFAL) crackers.
  (7) Green crackers release water vapour and don’t allow the dust particles to rise.
  (8) They are designed to have 30% less particulate matter pollution.
  (9) Pyrotechnic is used due to which Sulphur dioxide and Nitrogen oxide does not occur.

10. Meghalaya’s illegal coal mining

Why is it in News?
• Meghalaya based NGO accused that Meghalaya government is encouraging illegal coal mining in contempt of a Supreme Court order.

Details:
• Course:
  (1) The National Green Tribunal (NGT) had in April 2014 imposed the ban on rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya.
  (2) In 2018, SC upheld NGT order.
  (3) The State government later claimed tonnes of already extracted coal lying around various mining sites.
  (4) It inflated the figures of extracted coal.
• Rat hole mining:
  (1) It is a primitive and hazardous method of mining for coal.
  (2) It comprises tunnels that are only 3-4 feet in diameter. So, it’s called rat-hole.
  (3) It is leading to pits ranging from 5-100 sq. mt deep.
  (4) There are two types of rat-holes:
    ➢ When dug into the ground these are vertical shafts leading to the mines where horizontal tunnels are dug;
    ➢ Where horizontal holes are dug directly in the hillsides to reach coal seams (bed of coal).
  (5) The coal is taken out manually, loaded into a bucket or a wheelbarrow and dumped on a nearby un-mined area.
  (6) From here, it is carried to larger coal dumps near highways for trade and transportation.

11. New species of Vine Snake

Why is it in News?
Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have discovered new species of vine snakes in the region.

**Vine Snakes:**

- These are most common snakes in peninsular India.
- They found also in peri-urban areas wherever there is some greenery, and in the Western Ghats.
- **Asian vine snakes, distributed throughout the continent, belong to the genus Ahaetulla and the recently described Proahaetulla.**
  - (1) They found four distinct small-bodied and short-nosed species in Western Ghats rainforests:
    - the Northern Western Ghats vine snake,
    - Farnsworth’s vine snake,
    - Malabar vine snake,
    - Wall’s vine snake,
  - (2) The venom is moderately potent and can cause swelling, pain, bruising, numbness and other local symptoms.

12. **Willow Warbler sighted for the first time**

**Why is it in News?**

- Willow Warbler has been sighted for the first time in the country at Punchakkari in Thiruvananthapuram.

**Willow Warbler:**

- It is one of the longest migrating small birds.
- It breeds throughout northern and temperate Europe and the Palearctic.
- The birds migrate to sub-Saharan Africa during early winter.
- While the bird weighs around 10 g, its long wing feathers that help fly long distances makes it peculiar.
- The nest is usually built in close contact with the ground, often in low vegetation.

13. **G20 Summit - integrated approach to combat climate change**

**Why is it in News?**

- PM Modi called for integrated approach to combat climate change during side event — ‘Safeguarding the Planet: The Circular Carbon Economy Approach’ at G20 Summit.

**Details:**

- The entire world can progress faster if there is greater support of technology and finance to developing nations. – PM
- **PM mentioned initiatives:**
  - (1) India has made LED lights popular and saved 38 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emission per year.
  - (2) Smoke free kitchens have been provided to over 80 million households through our Ujjwala Scheme.
  - (3) India is making efforts to eliminate single-use plastics.
(4) India aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 and is encouraging a circular economy.
(5) The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is among the fastest growing international organisations, with 88 signatories.

14. Cyclone Nivar

Why is it in News?
• Tamil Nadu got heavy rainfall due to cyclone Nivar formed over Bay of Bengal.

Details:
• Cyclone might hit Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in coming days.
• Nivar name is proposed by Iran.
• Cyclone:
  (1) A Tropical cyclone is an intense circular storm.
  (2) It originates over warm tropical oceans.
  (3) It is characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds, and heavy rain.
  (4) It has anticlockwise rotation in the northern hemisphere and clockwise in the southern hemisphere.
  (5) Cyclones in Bay of Bengal side of the north Indian Ocean are more frequent and stronger than those on the Arabian Sea side.
  (6) Meteorologists opined that cold waters of the Arabian Sea doesn’t create strong cyclones compared to Bay of Bengal side.

15. New species of gecko

Why is it in News?
• The smallest known Indian gekkonid has been found in the Eastern Ghats.

Details:
• About new species:
  (1) It belongs to the genus Cnemaspis.
  (2) Males of the species lacked femoral pores while most variants of lizards have femoral pores in both the sexes.
  (3) It is the 12th species found outside the Western Ghats.
  (4) It is also the first species from the Velikonda Range in Andhra Pradesh.
• Cnemaspis:
  (1) It is very diverse group and widely spread over the peninsular India.
  (2) 34 out of 45 species of Cnemaspis found in Western Ghats.
  (3) The secretions from femoral pores play a role in communication.
16. Pilibhit Tiger Reserve gets global award for doubling tiger population

Why is it in News?
• The Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR) have bagged the first-ever international award, TX2, for doubling the number of tigers in four years against a target of 10 years.

Details:
• PTR was the first to receive the award among 13 tiger range countries.
• Its tiger increased from 25 in 2014 to 65 in 2018.
• TX2 award:
  (2) It set the global target of doubling the tiger population in 2010.
• Pilibhit Tiger Reserve:
  (1) It is situated in the Pilibhit district and Shahjahanpur District of Uttar Pradesh.
  (2) It lies along the India-Nepal border in the foothills of the Himalayas and the plains of the Terai in Uttar Pradesh.
  (3) It is characterized by sal forests, tall grasslands and swamps.
  (4) Pilibhit Tiger Reserve was declared as the 46th tiger reserve of India in June 2014.
  (5) The major faunal species are Bengal tiger, leopard, swamp deer, spotted deer, blackbuck, sloth bear, short-nosed fruit bat, rhesus macaque, porcupine, small Indian civet.

17. Vulture Conservation Plan

Why is it in News?
• The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared a plan for conserving vultures.

Details:
• Reasons for decline:
  (1) Diclofenac is the drug used to treat cattle.
  (2) It was linked to kidney failure in vultures and a decline in the bird’s population.
  (3) Though the drug was banned in 2006, it is reportedly still available for use.
• Facts:
  (1) The long-billed and the slender-billed vultures had declined by 97%.
  (3) These vulture species belong to the genus ‘Gyps’.
• Action Plan for Vulture Conservation 2020-2025:
  (1) It proposes to establish Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
  (2) There would be a conservation breeding programme for the Red Headed vulture and Egyptian vulture.
1. **More children to get fortified rice**

**Why is it in news?**
- The government is planning to distribute fortified rice through the Integrated Child Development Services and Mid-Day Meal schemes across the country.

**Details**
- The fortified rice would be distributed to children in order to combat chronic anaemia and undernutrition.
- The rice would be infused with iron, folic acid and vitamin B-12.
- According to Food Ministry, special focus will be on 112 aspirational districts.

**Pilot Project:**
- The pilot scheme to distribute fortified rice through the PDS is being implemented in 15 districts so far.
- The Centrally sponsored pilot scheme was approved in February 2019.
- The Food Corporation of India has now been asked to scale up the annual supply of fortified rice from the current 15,000 tonnes to at least 1.3 lakh tonnes.

**Fortifying Rice:**
- It involves grinding broken rice into powder, mixing it with nutrients, and then shaping it into rice-like kernels using an extrusion process.
- These fortified kernels are then mixed with normal rice in a 1:100 ratio, and distributed for consumption.
- Currently, there are only 15,000 tonnes of these kernels available per year in India.

2. **Nurturing Neighborhoods Challenge**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Union Ministry Housing and Urban Affairs launched the Nurturing Neighborhoods Challenge.

**Details:**
- The challenge will be open for the 100 Smart Cities, cities with population of more than 5 lakh and State/Union Territory capitals.
- **Aim:** To develop and implement initiatives to improve the quality of life of young children, social issues.
The challenge is a three-year initiative through which selected cities will:

1. Receive technical assistance and capacity-building to re-imagine parks and open spaces.
2. Improve access to early childhood facilities.
3. Adapt public spaces with early childhood-oriented amenities.
4. Create accessible, safe, walkable streets for young children and families.

Ministry also launched Data Maturity Assessment Framework to evaluate data ecosystems of cities, and an on-line training programme for city data officers of smart cities.

Significance:

- About 40% of India’s population is expected to live in urban areas by 2030.
- To cater to this growth, India will have to build 600-800 million square meters of urban space each year, according to estimates.

3. Report on Sex ratio

Why is it in news?

- The data of 2018 report on “Vital statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System” is published by the Registrar-General of India.
- Sex ratio at birth is the number of females born per 1,000 males.

Findings of the report:

- Arunachal Pradesh recorded the best sex ratio in the country, while Manipur recorded the worst.
- Arunachal Pradesh recorded 1,084 females born per thousand males, followed by Nagaland (965) Mizoram (964), Kerala (963) and Karnataka (957).
- The worst was reported in Manipur (757), Lakshadweep (839) and Daman & Diu (877), Punjab (896) and Gujarat (897).
- Delhi recorded a sex ratio of 929, Haryana 914 and Jammu and Kashmir 952.

4. Study highlights online education woes

Why is it in news?

- A field study by the Azim Premji University on the efficacy and accessibility of e-learning, has been revealed recently.
- The study, titled “Myths of Online Education”, was undertaken in five States across 26 districts and covered 1,522 schools.

Findings of the study:

- More than 60% of the respondents who are enrolled in government schools could not access online education.
- More than 80,000 students study in these government schools.
- Non-availability or inadequate number of smartphones for dedicated use or sharing.
- There is also difficulty in using apps for online learning.
- Children with disabilities in fact found it more difficult to participate in online sessions.
- Teachers expressed frustration with online classes.
- More than 80% surveyed said they were unable to maintain emotional connect with students during online classes.

5. Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojana

Why is it in news?
• Rajasthan Chief Minister launched a maternity benefit scheme.
• The Rajasthan government scheme is called Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojana.

Details:
• The scheme was launched in four districts under which mothers will get ₹6,000 for the second child.
• This will supplement the Centre’s Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) under which mothers get ₹5,000 for their first child.
• Government has a target of reaching 70,000 pregnant women and lactating mothers per year over the next five years.

• More about the scheme:
  (1) The scheme will be implemented in the areas where nutrition indicators among children and anaemia levels among mothers are worse than the average for the State.
  (2) Beneficiaries will receive cash in three or five instalments upon meeting certain conditions.
  (3) Beneficiaries will receive cash in five instalments upon meeting certain conditions.
  (4) However, unlike the Central scheme they will not have to submit an Aadhaar card for the State scheme and the money will be transferred directly to their bank accounts.

6. Progress Toward Regional Measles Elimination-Worldwide Report

Why is it in news?
• According to a report by World Health Organization (WHO) and the US’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), India is among six countries with the highest number of infants who did not received the vaccine against measles.
• The report is titled “Progress Toward Regional Measles Elimination-Worldwide, 2000-2019”.

Findings of the report:
• Around 1.2 million children in India did not receive the first dose of the measles vaccine in 2019.
• Measles cases globally had reached a 23-year high to 869,770 in 2019.
• Deaths from measles increased by nearly 50% since 2016 to claim nearly 207,500 lives across all WHO regions.
• India is one of the top six countries accounting for 48% of the global caseload.
• The others are: Nigeria (3.3 million), Ethiopia (1.5 million), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.4 million), Pakistan (1.4 million) and the Philippines (0.7 million).

Measles infection and its prevention:
• Measles is a highly-contagious virus and spreads rapidly in unvaccinated children, causing symptoms from rash to blindness, pneumonia to death.
• The measles virus spreads via infected people to unvaccinated or under-vaccinated populations.
• To prevent outbreaks and deaths, vaccination coverage using MCV1 and MCV2 must reach at least 95% of the population.
• However, the report said that MCV1 coverage has been stagnant globally for over a decade at 84-85%, and despite a steady increase in MCV2 coverage it was only at 71%.
1. D614G mutation in coronavirus

Why is it in News?
• While novel coronavirus is undergoing many mutations, one particular mutation - D614G has become the dominant variant in the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:
• Mutation:
  (1) When the virus enters an individual’s body, it tries to create copies of itself.
  (2) When it makes an error in this copying process, we get a mutation.
• D614G mutation:
  (1) The virus replaced the aspartic acid (D) in the 614th position of the amino acid with glycine (G).
  (2) This mutated form of the virus was first identified in China and then in Europe.
  (3) This particular mutation aids the virus in attaching more efficiently with the ACE2 receptor in the human host.
  (4) So, it is more successful in entering a human body than its predecessors.
  (5) This mutation found in 78% of the sequences between April 1 and May 18.

2. Launch of earth observation satellite EOS-01

Why is it in News?
• India successfully launched its latest earth observation satellite EOS-01 from Shriharikota.

Details:
• This is the first launch by the Indian Space Research Organisation since the COVID-19-induced lockdown.
• EOS-01:
  (1) It is a Earth Observation satellite.
  (2) It is intended for applications in agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
  (3) It was launched with PSLV.

3. Kerala’s Genome Survey

Why is it in News?
• The Kerala government has tied up with the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) for a survey.

Details:
• Survey is intended to better understand the genomic variation in the strains of SARS-CoV-2.
• The genome sequencing uses an approach called ‘NextGen’ sequencing.
• NextGen sequencing:
  (1) Simultaneous analysis of 1000s of individual genomes.
(2) Picking up of rare variations, sometimes missed by the gold standard RT-PCR test.

- **Genome & Genome Sequencing:**
  1. A genome is defined as an organism’s complete set of Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid (DNA), including all of its genes.
  2. Each genome contains all of the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
  3. Every human cell contains a pair of chromosomes, each of which has three billion base pairs or one of four molecules that pair in precise ways.
  4. Sequencing a genome means deciphering the exact order of base pairs in an individual.
  5. It has been known that the portion of the genes responsible for making proteins called the exome occupies about 1% of the actual gene.
  6. The genome has to be mapped in its entirety to know which genes of a person’s DNA are “mutated”.

### 4. India- Australia Space Cooperation

**Why is it in News?**
- The ISRO and space agency of Australia were working together to host Indian tracking facilities in Australia temporarily.

**Details:**
- It is intended to deepen cooperation in civil space activities.
- Activities include earth observation and data analytics, robotics, and space life sciences.
- This would support India’s planned human space flight programme.
- **GaganYaan mission:**
  1. Mission will be operated by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
  2. It is human space flight mission by 2022.
- **India-Australia MoU, 2012:**
  1. It is related to space cooperation.
  2. It was to deepen support data calibration and laser ranging for Indian satellites, launching Australian satellites, and conducting joint research.

### 5. China’s unmanned lunar spacecraft

**Why is it in News?**
- China is going to launch an unmanned spacecraft to bring back lunar rocks.

**Details:**
- It will be the first attempt by any nation to retrieve samples from the moon in four decades.
- The name Chang’e-5 probe is named after the mythical Chinese moon goddess.
- If it became successful, China will be only the third country to have retrieved samples from the moon.
- The U.S. and the Soviet Union had brought samples in the 1960s and 1970s.

### 6. Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope & IEEE ‘Milestone’ status

**Why is it in News?**
- The Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) has been selected as a ‘Milestone’ by IEEE.

**Details:**
- IEEE:
(1) It is the US based organization.
(2) It is the world’s largest technical professional organisation w.r.t electrical and electronics engineering.
(3) It works for advancing technology in all areas related to electrical and electronics engineering.
(4) IEEE Milestones programme honours significant technical achievements which have global or regional impact.

- **India and milestones:**
  (1) GMRT is the 3rd Indian recognition.
  (2) **The previous two:**
    - The generation and reception of radio waves by Sir J.C. Bose in 1895 (recognised in 2012),
    - ‘Scattering of light’ phenomenon observed by Sir C.V. Raman in 1928.

- **GMRT:**
  (1) It is located in Pune.
  (2) It is used for radio astronomical research at metre wavelengths.
  (3) It is array of thirty fully steerable parabolic radio telescopes of 45 metre diameter.
  (4) It has made important discoveries in domains such as pulsars, supernovae, galaxies, quasars, and cosmology.
  (5) It has enhanced our understanding of the Universe.
  (6) It is operated by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), a part of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.

### 7. Sea Sparkle and Marine Food Chain

**Why is it in News?**
- According to Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), ‘Sea sparkle’ has affected marine food chain.

**Details:**
- Karnataka coast witnessed bloom of sea sparkle.
- It has displaced microscopic algae called diatoms, which form the basis of the marine food chain.
- It affected planktivorous fish which are dependent on diatoms for food.
- It also accumulate ammonia which affects activities of creatures.

- **Sea Sparkle:**
  (1) Its scientific name is ‘Noctiluca Scintillans’.
  (2) It depends on other micro-organisms such as larvae, fish eggs, and diatoms.
  (3) But the unicellular phytoplankton that live inside it can photosynthesise and turn sunlight into energy.
  (4) They help their host cell survive even when food was scarce. Thus, it acts as both a plant and an animal.

### 8. AI & Robotics Technologies Park (ARTPARK)

**Why is it in news?**
- An AI & Robotics Technologies Park (ARTPARK) set up in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

**Details:**
- ARTPARK will promote technology innovations in AI (Artificial Intelligence) & Robotics.
- It will help in R&D projects in healthcare, education, mobility, infrastructure, agriculture, retail and cyber-security focusing on problems unique to India.
The Unique Academy

- ARTPARK, is a unique not-for-profit foundation established by Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru with support from AI Foundry in a public-private model.
- It has got seed funding of Rs. 170 Cr from Department of Science & Technology (DST), Govt. of India, under the National Mission on Inter-disciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS).
- It will bring about collaborative consortium of partners from industry, academia and government bodies.
- This will lead to cutting edge innovations in terms of new technologies, standards, products, services and intellectual properties.


Why is it in News?

Details:
- It was organised by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- Theme was ‘Innovations for Sustainable Energy Transition’.
- Aims:
  1. To accelerate the worldwide effort to scale up development and deployment of renewable energy.
  2. To connect the global investment community with Indian energy stakeholders.
1. **SITMEX 2020**

Why is it in news?
- 2nd edition of SITMEX 2020 exercise was recently concluded.

Details:
- **Area:** Andaman.
- **Members:** India, Thailand and Singapore trilateral.
- It is being conducted as a ‘non-contact, at sea only’ exercise in view of COVID-19 pandemic, highlights growing synergy, coordination and cooperation in the maritime domain between the three friendly navies and maritime neighbours.
- The first edition of the exercise was hosted by the Indian Navy and was held off Port Blair in the month of September last year.

2. **Dual-Use Facilities**

Why is it in news?
- Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) has called for dual use facilities.

Need for Dual use facilities:
- Contracting envelope of the defence budget.
- Segregated nature of defence and commercial industry ecosystems restricts our capabilities and capacities in making defence equipment.
- Integrating civil and military technology efforts is the way forward towards for self-reliance.

3. **Govt. bans 43 more apps citing threat to security**

Why is it in news?
- The government has blocked 43 mobile apps, including major Chinese ones such as AliSuppliers, AliExpress, Alipay Cashier, CamCard and DingTalk.

Details:
- **Reasons:** Threat to national security, integrity and sovereignty.
- The move taken under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act blocking which allows government to take such actions.

4. **Navy inducts 2 drones on lease from the U.S.**

Why is it in news?
- The Indian Navy has inducted two MQ-9B Sea Guardian unarmed drones procured from the U.S. on lease.

Details:
- The recently released Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 has introduced an option for
leasing military platforms.

- As part of its force restructuring to offset budgetary constraints, the Navy has been looking to induct more unmanned solutions, both aerial and underwater.
- As part of this, the requirement of additional P-8I maritime patrol aircraft has been cut down from 10 to six and was to be offset by procurement of long-endurance drones.

5. **Scorpene class submarine Vagir launched**

**Why is it in news?**

- The fifth Scorpene conventional submarine, Vagir, being built by the Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) with technology transfer from France was launched.

**Details:**

- The first two submarines of Project-75 have been commissioned into the Navy and the third and fourth ones are in various stages of sea trials.
- The MDL is manufacturing six Scorpene submarines with technology assistance from Naval Group of France under a $3.75 bn deal signed in October 2005.
- The first one, Kulvari, was commissioned in 2018 and delivery of all the six is expected to be completed by 2022.

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8 **Culture**

1. **Sabarimala reopens for pilgrimage**

**Why is it in News?**

- Sabarimala temple is reopened for annual mandalam-Makaravilakku season.

**Sabarimala Temple:**

- It is located inside the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the Pathanamthitta district, Kerala, India.
- The temple is dedicated to a Hindu celibate deity Ayyappan.
- According to belief, he is the son of Shiva and Mohini, the feminine incarnation of Vishnu.
- The traditions of Sabarimala are a confluence of Shaivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, and other Śramaṇa traditions.
- The temple is open for worship only during the days of Mandalapooja (approximately 15 November to 26 December), Makaravilakku or "Makara Sankranti" (14 January) and Maha Vishuva Sankranti (14 April), and the first five days of each Malayalam month.

2. **Miya Museum controversy**

**Why is it in News?**

- Constructing a museum “reflecting the culture and heritage of the people living in char-chaporis” in Guwahati’s Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra has created a controversy.

**Details:**

- Char-chaporis:
These are shifting riverine islands of the Brahmaputra.
These are primarily inhabited by the Muslims of Bengali-origin (referred as ‘Miyas’).

**What is controversy?**

(1) Congress MLA that requested the government to expedite the process of constructing a museum in Guwahati’s Srimanta Sankardeva Kalashetra.

(2) Government reply was “There is no separate identity and culture in Char Anchal of Assam as most of the people had migrated from Bangladesh. Obviously, in Srimanta Sankardeva Kalashetra, which is the epitome of Assamese culture, we will not allow any distortion”.

(3) So, there were accusations on BJP government of polarisation of state before 2021 elections.

**Miyas:**

(1) The ‘Miya’ community comprises descendants of Muslim migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam.

(2) The community migrated in waves — starting with the British annexation of Assam in 1826, and continuing into Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War — and have resulted in changes in demographic composition of the region.

(3) Discontent among indigenous people led to the six-year-long (1979-85) anti-foreigner Assam Agitation to drive out the “illegal immigrant”.

**Miya culture:**

(1) It’s different than present day Bangladesh.

(2) It is evolved during last 100 years of assimilation with Assamese society.

(3) The community’s cultural motifs and heritage are related to agriculture and the river.

(4) The community has a variety of songs (bhatiali related to the river, magan geet or harvest songs, noi khelor geet or boat songs etc).

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**PIB GIST**

1. **Mission Sagar-II**

Why is it in News?

• As part of ‘Mission Sagar-II’, Indian Naval Ship Airavat reached Port Sudan.

Mission Sagar-II:

• INS Airavat is carrying a consignment of 100 Tonnes of food aid for the people of Sudan.

• First ‘Mission Sagar’ had undertaken in May-June 2020.

• Under it, India reached Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, and provided food aid and medicines.

• As part of Mission Sagar-II, Indian Naval Ship Airavat will deliver food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.

• It is in line with the Prime Minister’s vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region ‘SAGAR’.

2. **India – Spain MoU**

Why is it in News?

• A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India & Spain is signed to develop scientific
and technical collaborations in astronomy field.

Details:
• It is signed between Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru and the Instituto de Astrofisica de Canarias (IAC) and the GRANTECAN, S.A. (GTC), Spain.
• The activities to be carried out under MoU for:
  (1) New scientific results;
  (2) New technologies;
  (3) Capacity building through increased scientific interaction and training;
  (4) Joint scientific projects;

3. PINAKA Rocket System

Why is it in News?
• Enhanced PINAKA rocket has been successfully flight tested.

Details:
• It is developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
• The design and development has been carried out by Pune based DRDO laboratories –
  (1) Armament Research and Development Establishment, ARDE.
  (2) High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, HEMRL.
• It will replace currently used Pinaka-MK1 missiles.
• Enhaced version has range of 45 km as against earlier 38 km.
• Pinaka:
  (1) It is a multi-barrel rocket launcher system.
  (2) It is named after Shiva’s bow.
  (3) It can fire salvo of 12 rockets over a period of 44 seconds.
  (4) One battery can neutralize 1*1 sq.km area.
  (5) One battery consists of 6 launch vehicles.

4. AIM–Sirius Innovation Programme 3.0

Why is it in News?
• Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Sirius, Russia launched ‘AIM–Sirius Innovation Programme 3.0’.

Details:
• It is a 14-day virtual programme for Indian and Russian schoolchildren.
• It seeks to develop technological solutions for the two countries.
• It will address global challenges across a range of areas in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.
• Areas include culture, distance education, applied cognitive science, health and well-being, sports, fitness, and games training, chemistry, artificial intelligence, and digital financial assets.

5. QRSAM Missile System

Why is it in News?
• Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) System has achieved a major milestone by a direct hit on to a Banshee Pilotless target aircraft at medium range & medium altitude.

Details:
• Weapon system is developed by Defence PSUs BEL, BDL and private industry L&T.
• It is a canister-based system.
• It means that it is stored & operated from specially designed compartments.
• It is a short-range surface to air missile system.
• It consists of –
  (1) Two radars - Active Array Battery Surveillance Radar and the Active Array Battery Multifunction Radar.
  (2) A launcher.

6. Capacity building component of the PM-FME Scheme

Why is it in News?
• Union Minister for Food Processing Industries virtually inaugurated the capacity building component of the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises scheme (PM-FME Scheme).

Details:
• Under the capacity building component of the PM-FME scheme, training of the Master Trainers would be delivered.
• It will be given through online mode, classroom lecture and demonstration, and self-paced online learning material.
• (PM-FME) Scheme:
  (1) The scheme envisages imparting training to food processing entrepreneurs, various groups, viz., SHGs / FPOs / Co-operatives, workers, and other stakeholders associated with the implementation of the scheme.
  (2) It is a centrally sponsored scheme aims to enhance the competitiveness of existing individual micro-enterprises in the unorganized segment of the food processing industry.

7. MoU among BRICS countries

Why is it in News?
• The Union Cabinet approved MoU on Cooperation in the field of Physical Culture and Sport signed among BRICS Countries.

Details:
• It will help in expanding knowledge and expertise in the area of sports science, sports medicine, coaching techniques.
• It will improve performance of our sportspersons in international tournaments and strengthening of bilateral relations with BRICS member countries.

8. India-Finland MoU on environment

Why is it in News?
• India and Finland signed a MOU for cooperation in the field of Environment protection and biodiversity conservation.

Details:
• It will work in areas such as:
  (1) Prevention of Air and water pollution;
  (2) Waste management;
  (3) Promotion of circular economy,
  (4) low-carbon solutions and sustainable management of natural resources including forests;
1. **Semi-high-speed train line**

**Why is it in news?**
- Recently the Kerala government informed the NITI Aayog that the semi-high-speed rail SilverLine, estimated to cost Rs. 63,941 crore, is viable and feasible.
- The cost per kilometre would be of Rs. 120.77 crore for laying the corridor.

**Details:**
- The semi-high-speed rail SilverLine is of 529.45 km and will run from Kochuveli to Kasaragod.
- The project awaiting Central clearance.
- The cost of land along the National Highway and through interior areas was Rs. 18 crore per hectare and Rs. 9 crore per hectare respectively.
- The process of granting administrative sanction for land acquisition had commenced.
- Around 80% of land would be acquired within 18 months.
- The detailed project report (DPR) had been prepared.
- Maximum possible revenue generation would be explored.
- The project was said to be self-sustainable.

2. **Strategic Policy and Facilitation Bureau' (SPFB)**

**Why is it in news?**
- The AYUSH Ministry has planned to constitute a 'Strategic Policy and Facilitation Bureau' (SPFB).

**Details:**
- The AYUSH Ministry will set up SPFB in collaboration with Invest India, to facilitate planned and systematic growth of the Ayush sector.
- The setting up of the SPFB is a step forward to make the Ayush systems future-ready.
- The Ministry said the SPFB will support it in strategic and policy-making initiatives to realise the full potential of the sector and stimulate growth and investment.
- **The SPFB would carry out various activities, including:**
  1. Knowledge creation and management.
  2. Strategic and policy-making support.
- The AYUSH Ministry would fund 'Invest India' for undertaking necessary activities.

**About Invest India:**
- It was set up in 2009 as a non-profit venture under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- The core mandate of Invest India is investment promotion and facilitation.
• Invest India is a joint venture company between Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and State Governments of India.
• Majority of stakes in Invest India is held by FICCI.

3. Gov Tech-Thon 2020

Why is it in news?
• The FitForFuture team from Robert Bosch Engineering and Business Solutions Pvt Ltd secured the first place in the Gov-Tech-Thon 2020.
• The team demonstrated an innovative solution prototype for automating vehicle fitness checks.

Details:
• Gov-Tech-Thon was a 36-hour, pan-India virtual hackathon.
• It was organised by global technical professional organisation IEEE, National Informatics Centre (NIC) and Oracle, under the aegis of the Ministry of Electronics and IT.
• Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) is the world’s largest technical professional organization.
• NIC is an attached office of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). It was established in 1976.
• NIC is a premier technology advisor and ICT solution provider to Government at all levels.

4. Model of anti-satellite missile system

Why is it in news?
• Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated a model of the anti-satellite missile system at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) headquarters in Delhi.

Details:
• The development is seen as a symbol of national technological advancement.
• Earlier, DRDO had successfully conducted an Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile test 'Mission Shakti' from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha on March 27, 2019.
• A DRDO-developed A-SAT Missile successfully engaged an Indian orbiting target satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in a 'Hit to Kill' mode.
• The interceptor missile was a three-stage missile with two solid rocket boosters.

5. Shipping Ministry to be renamed

Why is it in news?
• Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 8, 2020, renamed the Ministry of Shipping as the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways.

Details:
• PM made the announcement during a launch event of Ropax ferry service between Ghogha (Bhavnagar) and Hazira (near Surat) in Gujarat, via video-conferencing.
• An official announcement regarding the same is yet to happen.
• The decision to change the name of the Shipping Ministry is part of government’s efforts to revamp the ports and create world-class Inland Water Transport.

6. FASTag mandatory from 1st of January 2021

Why is it in news?
• Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has issued a notification making FASTags mandatory for all four wheel vehicles from 1st January 2021.

Details:
• As per Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, the FASTag had been made mandatory for all registration of new four wheeled Vehicles since 1st December 2017.
• Renewal of fitness certificate will be done only after the fitment of FASTag for the Transport Vehicles.
• For National Permit Vehicles the fitment of FASTag has been mandated since 1st of October, 2019.
• A valid FASTag is also mandatory while getting a new third Party Insurance through an amendment in certificate of Insurance.
• FASTag mandatory to be available by January 1, 2021 in old vehicles also.

What is FASTag?
• A FASTag is a sticker containing an embedded chip and antenna. It is prepaid rechargeable tags.
• It is affixed on a vehicle’s windscreen to enable automatic collection of toll charges when the vehicle passes through a toll plaza, without the need to stop at the toll booth.
• An activated FASTag works on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. Moreover, these FASTags do not have any expiry date.
• At the back-end, it is connected to your bank account or wallet to enable automatic deduction of charges.

Significance of FASTag:
• It promotes digital payments and makes it easier to keep tabs on vehicles and the toll booths.
• Cost of storage and transportation of cash as well as manpower at the toll booths comes down.

7. US removed Sudan from its State Sponsor of Terrorism list

Why is it in news?
• United States of America removed Sudan from its State Sponsor of Terrorism list.

Details:
• Sudan was a part of the list for over 27 years. Sudan was kept out of the global financial system since 1993.
• Sudan also became the third Arab nation (after UAE and Bahrain) in recent weeks to normalise relations with Israel.

About State Sponsor of Terrorism list:
• The US Secretary of State has been given powers to designate countries that have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism as State Sponsors of Terrorism.

US can place four categories of sanctions on countries part of the list:
(1) Restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance.
(2) A ban on defence exports and sales.
(3) Certain controls over exports of dual use items.
(4) Miscellaneous financial and other restrictions.

• Sanctions can also be placed on countries and persons that engage in certain trade with designated countries.
• After Sudan’s delisting, three countries that remain in the list are: Syria, Iran and North Korea.

8. China sends 'world's first 6G' test satellite into orbit
Why is it in news?
- China sends 'world's first 6G' test satellite into orbit.

Details:
- China has successfully launched what has been described as "the world's first 6G satellite" into space to test the technology.
- It went into orbit along with 12 other satellites from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in the Shanxi Province.
- The telecoms industry is still several years away from agreeing on 6G's specifications, so it is not yet certain the tech being trialled will make it into the final standard.
- It involves use of high-frequency terahertz waves to achieve data-transmission speeds many times faster than 5G is likely to be capable of.
- The satellite also carries technology which will be used for crop disaster monitoring and forest fire prevention.

9. Delhi ranks 62 in list of world’s best cities

Why is it in news?
- Delhi is the only Indian city to feature in the 'World's Best cities' list released in November 2020.

Details:
- Delhi ranked 62, out of 100.
- The ranking has been done by Resonance Consultancy Limited, a Vancouver-based company.
- The ranks have been given to 100 cities from across the world with a population of over 10 lakh.
- The ranking was based on the basis of 25 factors, including diversity, tourist attractions, social media hashtags, number of check-ins, weather etc.
- It also included factors like Covid-19 infections in July, income incongruity and unemployment.
- The world’s 10 best cities for 2021 are:
  (1) London
  (2) New York
  (3) Paris
  (4) Moscow
  (5) Tokyo
  (6) Dubai
  (7) Singapore
  (8) Barcelona
  (9) Los Angeles
  (10) Madrid
- The 100th city is Kracow, Poland.

10. International version of the UMANG application

Why is it in news?
- On the completion of three years of the UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) app, the international version of the app has been launched.

Details:
- The app is launched by Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology in collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs.
- The UMANG international version is for select countries including US, UK, Canada, Australia, UAE,
Netherlands, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

- It will help Indian international students, NRIs and Indian tourists abroad to avail government of India services anytime.
- The international version of the app will help in taking India to the world through 'Indian Culture' services available on UMANG and create interest amongst foreign tourists to visit India.
- The government also announced that it is integrating Common Services Centres service into the Umang app.

11. A.P. scores third in Public Affairs Index

Why is it in news?
- Recently Public Affairs Index 2020 was published.

Details:
- **Published by:** Bengaluru-based Public Affairs Centre (PAC).
- PAI is an annual report prepared on the States’ governance on three broad parameters, namely equity, growth and sustainability in two categories: large States with population exceeding two crores and small States with population less than that.
- Andhra Pradesh stood in the third position.
- Kerala was declared best governed state in the country, while Uttar Pradesh ended at the bottom in the large states category.

12. Operation Thunder 2020

Why is it in News?
- India Customs intercepted an 18-tonne shipment of red sandalwood destined for the UAE.

Details:
- Wildlife and forestry crime is the world's fourth largest illegal trade.
- It has devastating consequences not just for the environment but also for society, public health and global economics.
- It often occurs hand in hand with tax evasion, corruption, money laundering and even murder.
- **Operation Thunder 2020:**
  1. It is the fourth in a series of ‘Thunder’ operations carried out annually since 2017.
  2. It is a month-long police and customs cross border operation coordinated by Interpol and the World Customs Organization (WCO).
  3. It was operated in 103 countries including India.
  4. Participating countries focused on particularly vulnerable species protected under the CITES.

13. Mansar Lake Development plan

Why is it in News?
- Government inaugurated the Mansar Lake Development plan in Jammu through virtual mode.

Details:
- **Mansar Lake Development plan:**
  1. Aim is to double the pilgrims footfall from the present 10 lakh to 20 lakh per year in the Mansar region.
  2. The tourism contributes to 7% of the UT’s GDP.
  3. It has been hit by Covid-19.
• **Mansar Lake:**
  (1) It has religious significance and values.
  (2) It has ancient temples around the lake.
  (3) Most famous of them is the shrine of Lord Sheeshnag, the lord of serpents.
  (4) There are three other famous temples dedicated to Umapati Mahadev, Narasimha and Goddess Durga.
  (5) Local people consider it auspicious to perform all the Hindu ceremonies such as Mundan (first hair cut of the baby), marriage etc., in these temples.

14. **First Solar-Powered Miniature Train**

Why is it in News?
• India’s First Solar-Powered Miniature Train is inaugurated at Veli Village in Thiruvananthapuram.

Details:
• It was the part of projects to elevate the facilities at the panoramic destination to international standards.
• The train has three bogies that can accommodate around 45 people at a time.
• It is the eco-friendly solar-powered 2.5 km miniature railway.
• Artificial steam spouted by the engine of the train, modelled after the vintage steam locomotive, will stir nostalgic feelings.
• It would be a special attraction for children.

15. **Guruvayur ‘Tourist Facilitation Centre’**

Why is it in News?
• Union Minister of State for Tourism & Culture inaugurated the “Tourist Facilitation Centre” facility at Guruvayur.

Details:
• It has been developed under the PRASHAD Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism.
• **Guruvayur:**
  (1) It is a temple town in Kerala.
  (2) It is famous for Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple.
  (3) It is often referred to as Bhuloka Vaikunta (Holy Abode of Vishnu on Earth).
• **PRASHAD:**
  (1) It stands for National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive.
  (2) It was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in the year 2014-15.
  (3) It has an objective of integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations.
  (4) It aimed at infrastructure development such as entry points (Road, Rail and Water Transport), last mile connectivity, basic tourism facilities like Information/Interpretation Centers etc.

16. **Luhri Stage-I Hydro Power Project**

Why is it in News?
• Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the investment of Rs.1810.56 crore for Luhri Stage-I Project.

Details:
• It is 210 MW Hydro Electric Project.
• It is located on river Sutlej.
• It is situated in Shimla & Kullu districts of Himachal Pradesh.
• It is being implemented by Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVNL).
• **Benefits:**
  1. It will help in providing Grid stability.
  2. It will improve the power supply position.
  3. It might reduce 6.1 lakh tons of carbon dioxide from the environment annually.
  4. The Project Affected Families will be provided with 100 units of free electricity per month for ten years.

17. **Best State Award for water management**

**Why is it in News?**
• Tamil Nadu bagged the ‘Best State Award for water management’ for the year 2019.

**Details:**
• Maharashtra bagged the second-best state in water conservation efforts, while Rajasthan got the third position.
• The Sangli district of Maharashtra bagged the top prize in the river revival category for contribution in reviving Agrani river.
• For the second consecutive year, the Maharashtra Water Regulatory Authority (MWRA) won the first prize in the water regulatory authority category.

**National Water Awards:**
(1) The Ground Water Augmentation Awards and National Water Award were launched in the year 2007.
(2) The objective was to encourage all stakeholder for adopting innovative practices of ground water augmentation.
(3) It was to be done through rainwater harvesting and artificial recharge, promoting water use efficiency, recycling & re-use of water and creating awareness.
(4) Stakeholders include the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Gram Panchayats, Urban Local Bodies, Water User Associations, Institutions, Corporate Sector, Individuals etc.