Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs October 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
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Defence Offsets

- **Syllabus:** GS II - Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

**Why is it in News?**
- The new Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 removes the clause for offsets for certain kinds of defence contracts.

**CAG definition of Defence offsets:**
- Offsets as a mechanism generally established with the triple objectives of -
  1. partially compensating for a significant outflow of a buyer country’s resources in a large purchase of foreign goods.
  2. facilitating induction of technology.
  3. adding capacities and capabilities of domestic industry.
- An offset provision in a contract makes it obligatory on the supplier to either -
  1. Reverse purchase, execute export orders or.
  2. Rnvest in local industry or
  3. In research and development in the buyer’s domestic industry.

**Why do we need offsets?**
- The key objective of the Defence Offset Policy is to leverage capital acquisitions to develop Indian defence industry by –
  1. Fostering development of internationally competitive enterprises.
  2. Augmenting capacity for Research, Design and Development related to defence products and services.
  3. Encouraging development of synergistic sectors like civil aerospace, and internal security.
- Policy was adopted on the recommendations of the Vijay Kelkar Committee in 2005.

**Provisions:**
- The foreign defence entities were mandated to spend at least 30% of the total contract value in India.
- It can be done through procurement of components, transfer of technologies or setting up of research and development facilities.
- This condition was for all contracts worth more than Rs 2,000 crore.
- Offset obligations of 30% could be increased or decreased by the DAC (Defence Acquisition Council).

**Government suggested ways to fulfil obligations:**
- Direct purchase of, or executing export orders for, eligible products by Indian enterprises;
- Foreign Direct Investment in joint ventures with Indian enterprises;
- Investment in ‘kind’ in terms of transfer of technology (TOT) to Indian enterprises;
- Investment in ‘kind’ in Indian enterprises in terms of provision of equipment for manufacture or maintenance of products & services;
- Provision of equipment and/or Transfer of Technology to government institutions;
(6) Technology acquisition by DRDO in areas of high technology.

**New Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020:**

- **Aim:**
  1. To make DAP aligned with the vision of the government's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.
  2. To empower Indian domestic industry through 'Make in India' projects.
  3. To make India a global manufacturing hub.

- **Provisions:**
  1. **Which contracts will not have offset clauses?**
     - Government-to-government agreements (G2G),
     - Ab initio single vendor contracts or.
     - Inter-governmental agreements e.g. Rafale deal.
  2. **Which contracts will still have offset clause?**
     - All other international deals that are competitive, and have multiple vendors vying for it,
       will continue to have a 30% offset clause.

- **Why offset clause removed?**
  1. **To reduce burden on vendor:**
     - There are “administrative costs” involved in discharging offset obligations.
     - These costs are paid by the vendors.
  2. **Criticism by CAG:**
     - Foreign vendors made various offset commitments to qualify for the main supply contract.
     - But they were not honest about fulfilling these commitments later.
     - the claimed discharge of the offset obligation by the vendors during 2007-2018 was Rs 11,396 crore as against CAG calculation Rs 19,223 crore.
     - There is no a single case where the foreign vendor had transferred high technology to the Indian industry.

- **Concerns:**
  1. **Setback to Domestic Industries;**
     - Since 2005, offset policy had helped to attract huge outflow of India’s resources, facilitated induction of technology.
     - It added capabilities and capacities to domestic industry.
  2. **Flawed expectations about vendors’ cost reduction:**
     - Removal of the offset clause itself and expect a vendor to reduce costs is a naïve concept.
  3. **Compromise on strategic autonomy and security:**
     - In the long term, without domestic industries development, India’s security will be compromised.
     - Foreign vendors dominance might affect India’s strategic autonomy in the world matters.

- **Way Forward:**
  1. **Review than outright elimination:**
     - Though offset policy had some drawbacks, it could be better to review it rather than outright elimination of clause.
     - Offset policy had helped to strengthen domestic industries capacity.
     - Offset is very important in the background being a second largest arms importer in the world.
  2. **Improvisation of system:**
     - Universalization of credit multipliers.
     - give additional incentives for offset discharge.
(3) better regulation & facilitation to avoid corruption and enforce vendors commitments.

- **Other:**
  1. Ministry of External Affairs should convince the foreign government for G2G concessions.
  2. Government should frame clear roadmap for transfer of technology through offsets to make India globally competitive in future.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, NDTV, Deccan Herald, the Print,

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### 2 GST Compensation Cess Issue

- **Syllabus:** GS 3- Indian Economy.

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), in its latest audit report has observed that Centre transferred money from the Compensation Cess Fund to the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI).
- The CAG’s finding has raised a debate surrounding the cess accounting.

**More from the CAG report**
- Centre violated the law by retaining Rs 47,272 crore of GST compensation cess in the CFI during 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- The Centre used this money for “other purposes”.
- The short-crediting was a violation of the GST Compensation Cess Act, 2017.
- There are instances of non-transfer of entire amounts of other cesses to their respective Reserve Funds, including the Road and Infrastructure Cess, Cess on Crude Oil etc.

**About Cess:**
- Cess is an earmarked tax that is collected for a specific purpose and ought to be spent only for that.
- It needs Parliament’s approval via enabling legislation.
- Art 270 - Cess not part of divisible pool, unlike taxes.

**GST Compensation cess:**
- The GST Act has provision to compensate the States for loss of revenue arising out of implementation of the GST.
- Compensation cess was introduced as relief for States for the loss of revenues.
- States were guaranteed a 14% tax revenue growth in the first five years (till 2022).
- Compensation cess is levied on products considered to be ‘sin’ or luxury goods.

**What are the Cess funds?**
- The cess is credited to a non-lapsable fund called the GST Compensation Cess Fund.
- It is part of the Public Account and used to provide compensation to states in the event of loss of revenue.
- Any surplus in the compensation cess fund to be kept in the fund for future shortfalls.
- Legally, the surplus fund cannot be used for any other purpose and the Centre cannot transfer it.
- As per the CAG, the transfer of surplus to the consolidated fund violated the law.

**Implications of the diversion to CFI**
Role of Parliament in India

- **Syllabus:** GS2: Parliament.
- **Question:** Analyse the role of Parliament in Indian democracy.

Why is it in news?
- In a recent session of Parliament, various bills were passed without discussion.
- This has made many to question the role of Parliament.

Facts:
- **Number of days:** from 120 in 1960 to 60 in 2011.
- Budget discussion from 130 hours in the 1950s to 29 hours in 2017.
- Women representation in Parliament 14% against 24% of global.
- Number of bills referred to the Parliamentary Committee decline from 70% (15th Lok Sabha) to 25% (16 Lok Sabha).

Reason for Declining Role of Parliament:
- **Executive Activism:** Government often takes the route of money bill or ordinance to bypass the
scrutiny of Parliament.

- **Destructive Opposition:** The amount of time lost due to interruptions and adjournments have increased from 5.28% during the 11th Lok Sabha to 41.6% during the 15th Lok Sabha.

- **Criminalization of politics:**
  1. ADR: 43% of MPs have criminal charges against them (2019), 34% in 2014.
  2. 17% in 2014 to 19% in 2019, there has been a consistent increase in the proportion of candidates with criminal cases.

- **Anti-Defection Law:** Anti Defection law prevents the Member of Parliament from an independent view against his or her political party.

- **Increasing use of money and muscle power:** This makes it difficult for genuine politicians to enter Parliament through elections.

- **Politicization of speaker and chairman:**
  1. Constitution makers had envisaged free and independent office of Speaker and Chairman.
  2. But in practice, they seem to have become a stooge of the political party in power.

- **Poor training:** Many members of Parliament do not know about the Constitution of India and Parliamentary procedure.

- **From People’s democracy to electoral Democracy:** Politicians are more concerned about winning the election rather than representing citizens and welfare.

**Importance of Parliament:**

- Reconciliation of conflicts through debate and dialogue.
- Forum for discussion.
- Representation of Diversity.
- Watch on Judiciary and Executive.
- Election of President and vice president.
- Approval budget.
- Represents Federal structure of India through Rajya Sabha.
- Symbol of national integration.

- **Accountability of government:** zero hour and question hour.
- Law making.

**Impact:**

- **Demographic deficit:** Citizens are losing faith in Parliamentary democratic procedures.
- **Judicial activism:** Failure of Parliament on acting on societally pressing issues is leading to judicial activism women entry into temples.

- **Policy paralysis:**
  1. Authoritarian culture: Parliamentary democracy tends to move towards authoritarian leadership whenever there is a decline of parliament.
  2. Wastage of Financial Resources: It is reported that it takes 2.5 lakh/min to run the parliamentary sessions.

**Way forward:**

- Training and Capacity Building of MPs.
- **Inter-Party Reforms:** For Example, Biju Janata Dal nominated one-third of women for lok sabha seats during the last elections.
- Fixed Minimum Days of Parliamentary Sessions: National Commission on Working of Constitution recommended minimum days should be fixed.
Voice to Opposition: Opposition should be allowed to set agenda for the house on certain days.

Electoral Reforms: There urgent need for electoral reforms to reduce the use of money and muscle power in elections.

Empowering Legislature to Call Session: Presently executive decides timing and day of Parliamentary sessions.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, The Wire.

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Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

Syllabus: Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

Why is it in News?

- Recently the Prime Minister presented IBC code as a major economic reform in India that ensured Ease of Doing Business for Investors.
- Improvement in India’s ranking in the Resolving Insolvency Index to 52 in 2019 from 108 in 2018.

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) 2016:

- A uniform and comprehensive insolvency legislation encompassing all companies, partnerships and individuals.

Aim:

1. Reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals.
2. Reorganization and insolvency resolution in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons.

It suggests two options:

1. Restructuring if the firm is viable.
2. Liquidation if the firm is not financially viable.

Time Limit:

1. The IBC fixes the deadline for resolution to 330 days.
2. However, Supreme Court held that, the deadline of 330 days is not sacrosanct.

Background & Need:

- Incoherent laws:
  1. There were various incoherent laws relating to insolvency and bankruptcy previously such as SARFAESI, Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 and Companies Act.
  2. It caused confusion and results into ineffective results with undue delays.

- Lack of timeline:
  1. Previously there was no time limit or its implementation if mentioned.
  2. Lack of clarity regarding the preference of secured financial creditors over operational creditors delayed the process.

Objectives of IBC:

- To simplify all existing insolvency laws and proceedings.
- To protect the interest of creditors.
To revive the company in a time-bound manner.

To prepare a timely recovery procedure for the financial institutions or individuals.

To set up an Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India.

To maximize the value of assets of corporate persons.

Organizational structure:

- National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body in India that adjudicates issues relating to Indian companies.
- Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT).

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI):
  (1) It is a unique regulator as it regulates a profession as well as processes.
  (2) It has regulatory oversight over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies, Insolvency Professional Entities and Information Utilities.

Critical appraisal:

- Dimensions:
  (1) Shift from the existing 'Debtor in possession' to a 'Creditor in control' regime.
  (2) Consolidation of existing insolvency related laws.
  (3) Resolution in time-bound manner e.g. the evaluation and viability determination must be completed within 180 days.
  (4) Introduction of a qualified insolvency professional (IP) as intermediaries to oversee the Process.
  (5) Establishment of IBB as national board.
  (6) Improved confidence of investors.

- Impact:
  (1) Improvement in recovery rate from 26.5% (2018) to 71.6% (2019).
  (2) Reduction of time taken for recovery from 4.3 (2018) to 1.6 years (2019).

- Issues and Concerns:
  (1) Judicial:
    ➢ Difficulty in faster resolution due to slow judicial process.
    ➢ Inadequate benches at NCLT to resolve disputes.
    ➢ Decreasing performance of NCLT due to increased load of cases.
  (2) Poor performance:
    ➢ Only 10% recovery rate in defaulted loans since IBC.
    ➢ Higher mortality rate e.g. 780 out of 970 cases were liquidated.
    ➢ Higher banks’ haircut (57% of their loans) and recovery of only 43% of the loans.
  (3) Other:
    ➢ Concern for MSMEs which compelled to supply goods to companies under examination.
    ➢ No mandatory period and only directive in nature.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

- It amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

- Provisions:
  (1) Prohibition on the initiation of CIRP for certain defaults: Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) cannot be initiated by either the company or its creditors for defaults arising during the six months from March 25, 2020.
  (2) Increase in the threshold: Bill increased threshold for initiating insolvency proceedings from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1 crore which would protect micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)
Land Reforms in India


Why is it in news?
- The Central government has launched Swamitva scheme which has triggered debate around land reforms in India.
- Also there has been a debate over the judgment of a Constitution Bench interpreting the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013.
- A SC bench headed by CJI Bobde raised concern over the Constitution bench judgment on the Act that allowed the government to retain acquired land indefinitely without paying due compensation.

About Swamitva Scheme:
- Launched in pilot mode in 6 states.
- To map rural inhabited lands using drones and latest survey methods.

Benefits:
- Streamlined planning, revenue collection and clarity over property rights.
- Help in applying for loans from financial institutions.
- Easy settlement of property disputes through the title deeds allotted through this scheme.

About Land Reforms:
- These are institutional measures for altering the existing pattern of ownership, tenancy and management of land.
- It includes measures and policies relating to redistribution of land, regulation of rent, improving the conditions of tenancy, cooperative organisation etc.
Land is a State subject but land acquisition is in the Concurrent list.

Background:
- Land reform is a part of heritage of the country’s freedom movement.
- The agrarian structure inherited from the British was feudalistic & exploitative.
- Zamindars - intermediaries-moneylenders played a big role in exploiting the masses.
- Until Independence, a large part of agricultural land was held by the intermediaries.
- Consequently, the tenants were burdened with high rents, unproductive cultivation and other forms of exploitation.
- It is in this background that land reform measures aim not only at raising agricultural productivity but are also viewed as a tool for social uplift.

Issues:
- Land was concentrated in few hands and there was a proliferation of intermediaries who had no vested interest in self-cultivation.
- Leasing out land was a common practice.
- The tenancy contracts were exploitative.
- 4 important components of land reform after independence -
  1. abolition of intermediaries.
  2. tenancy reforms.
  3. fixing ceiling on land holdings.
  4. consolidation of land holdings.

Land Reform Phases in India:
- First phase (1950 - 72):
  1. Efforts to abolition of the intermediaries, Tenancy reform, the redistribution of land using land ceilings.
  2. The first was relatively successful, but the other two met with less success.
- Second phase (1972 - 85) shifted attention to bringing uncultivated land under cultivation.
- Third phase (1985 - 95):
  1. Focussed on water and soil conservation through the Watershed Development, Drought-Prone Area Development (DPAP) and Desert-Area Development Programmes (DADP).
  2. A central government Waste land Development Agency was established to focus on wasteland and degraded land.
- Fourth phase (1995 onwards) centres on improving land revenue administration especially, clarity in land records.

Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation & Resettlement Act, 2013:
- The Act provides for land acquisition as well as rehabilitation and resettlement. It replaces the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.
- All acquisitions require rehabilitation and resettlement to be provided to the people affected by the acquisition.
- Compensation for the owners of the acquired land shall be four times the market value in case of rural areas and twice in case of urban areas.
- In case of acquisition of land for use by private companies or public private partnerships, consent of 80% of the displaced people required.
- Purchase of large pieces of land by private companies will require provision of rehabilitation and
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resettlement.

● The provisions of this Act shall not apply to acquisitions under 16 existing legislations including the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005, the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, the Railways Act, 1989, etc.

**Arguments over Land Reforms and Legal changes**

● The Indian Constitution originally recognized the right to property as a fundamental right.

● That right came under attack beginning with the first amendment in 1951.

● The Morarji Desai government eventually scrapped the fundamental right to property with the forty-fourth amendment in 1978.

● Replaced by Article 300-A that makes it possible for a citizen to be dispossessed without compensation through an act of legislation.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Yojana, LiveMint, Planning Commission.

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**Manual Scavenger**

- **Syllabus:** GS II - Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes.

**Why is it in News?**

- Delhi Sanitation workers protested due to death of five young men who were employed to clean a septic tank in New Delhi.

- Death of five workers in septic tank in Odisha recently was another major incident.

**Background:**

- Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers.

- It is linked to India’s caste system and considered as job of lower castes.

**Facts:**

- There were around 18 million manual scavenging households in rural areas - Socio-Economic and Caste Census.

- There are approx. 12,226 manual scavengers in 12 states.

- 80% of India’s sewage cleaners die before age 60, due to infectious diseases.

**Reasons for Prevalence of Manual scavenging:**

- **Obsolete latrines & drainage system:**
  1. Continued presence of insanitary latrines results into manual scavenging.
  2. Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual.
  3. Bad design of open drainage which allows people to dump solid waste into them.

- **Social:**
  1. Strongly connection with the caste system.
  2. Lack of support by society to eliminate this most inhuman profession.
  3. Lack of education and humanity.

- **Political & Governance:**
(1) Lack of budget support for rehabilitation which makes it slow.
(2) Lack of Political will to make strong law against its practice.
(3) Lack of voice of Manual scavengers in political and government structures as they are not an organized group.

**Economical:**
(1) Lack of employable education among the community.
(2) Lack of exposure to other works.
(3) Lack of willingness to upgrade skills and their training for alternative works.

**Issues Related to Manual Scavenging:**

**Stigma and discrimination:**
(1) Though it may have ended as a form of employment, the stigma and discrimination associated with it still exists.
(2) Denial of access to places of worship, public sources of water still exists.

**Economic insecurity:**
(1) It creates difficulty in finding secure alternative livelihoods.
(2) Identification of manual scavengers remains a key challenge.

**Government Initiatives:**

**2-pronged strategy:**
(1) Eliminating insanitary latrines through demolition & conversion into sanitary latrines.
(2) Developing a comprehensive rehabilitation package for manual scavengers through a survey.

**Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993:**
(1) Prohibited the employment of a person for manually cleaning dry latrines.
(2) Prohibited the construction of dry toilets.
(3) Provided for imprisonment of up to a year and a fine.

**Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:**
(1) Prohibits the construction or maintenance of insanitary toilets.
(2) Prohibits the employment of anyone as a manual scavenger.
(3) Offences under the Act are cognizable and non-bailable.
(4) Calls for a survey of manual scavengers in urban and rural areas within a time-bound framework to ensure rehabilitation.

**The National Policy on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management, 2017:**
(1) Employment of manual scavengers is illegal.
(2) But it does not suggest mechanical alternatives to unclog septic tanks, drains and sewers.

**National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK):**
(1) It is a statutory body under National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993.
(2) It deals with the grievances of persons engaged in manual scavenging and their rights & welfare.

**Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS):**
- In 2019, the Delhi government employed 200 sewer cleaning machines.

**Proposed Manual Scavenging Prohibition Bill:**
- It intends to amend the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
- **Provisions:**
  (1) It proposes to completely mechanise sewer cleaning and provide better protection at work.
(2) It provides compensation in case of accidents.
(3) It intends to increase both the imprisonment term and the fine amount from current imprisonment of up to five years or a fine of Rs 5 lakh or both.

- **Concerns:**
  (1) Previous such promises made and broken.
  (2) This is counterproductive as hesitation of judge to convict an offender of this Act if the prison sentence is higher.
  (3) It doesn’t address issues related to open defecation, community latrines, public toilets, water connection.
  (4) Bill is silent on the core issue: caste as sanitation remains a caste-based occupation.

**Way Forward:**
- **Complete Mechanization:**
  (1) Government should go for complete mechanisation of sewage cleaning with immediate effect.
  (2) We should promote use of bio-toilets which convert human waste into gases and manure.
  (3) All political parties should come together to create strong will to eliminate it.

- **Future city planning:**
  (1) Smart cities should not be given any recognition without elimination of manual scavenging.
  (2) Separate fund allocation should be done for mechanization of sewage to local bodies.

- **Education and alternative livelihood:**
  (1) Government should ensure education and skill development programs for these people and their children with special focus on women.
  (2) We should create awareness and promote people to give them an alternative work choice.

- **Psychological:**
  (1) We should encourage and increase confidence level of these people.
  (2) We should work to break their mentality about its their occupation.

- **Civil society and NGOs:**
  (1) Government & people should work with NGOs like Safai Karmachari Andolan.
  (2) NGOs involved are Rashtriya Garima Andolan, Association for Rural and Urban Needy (ARUN) and Sulabh International.

**Sources:** Indian Express, The Hindu, The wire, Downtoearth, the week, The Economic times.
India – USA Foundational Agreements

- Syllabus: GS II- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India.

Why is it in News?
- India and the USA signed the BECA Agreement (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation) during the recent 2+2 Ministerial dialogue.

What is BECA agreement?
- An agreement related to geospatial intelligence, and sharing information on maps and satellite images for defence.
- It will allow India to use the US’s advanced geospatial intelligence and enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- It will give access to topographical and aeronautical data and products that will aid navigation and targeting.
- This could be key for Air Force-to-Air Force cooperation.

Four foundational Agreements for strengthening defence ties:

- General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002:
  (1) Allows the sharing of classified information from the U.S. government and American companies with the GOI and Défense Public Sector Undertakings.
  (2) A follow-up extension agreement - Industrial Security Annex (ISA) - was signed in 2019.

- The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016:
  (1) It allows the military of each country to replenish supplies, spare parts and services from the other’s land facilities, air bases, and ports.
  (2) It is extremely useful for Navy-to-Navy cooperation in Indo-Pacific.
  (3) Concerns:
    - It would compromise India’s strategic autonomy and foreign policy.
    - It will hamper India’s non-alliance and might convert India into USA military base.
    - It might affect relations with Russia and China.

- The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018:
  (1) It allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems.
  (2) It will help Indian and US military commanders, aircraft and ships to communicate through secure networks in peace and war.
  (8) It will facilitate “interoperability” between both forces.
  (9) Concerns:
    - It might affect India’s military decisions and sovereignty.
    - Though information will not be shared without India’s consent, granting the U.S. access to Indian military communication might compromise India’s defence secrecy.
    - US military may penetrate India’s strategic areas like the nuclear command.


How will it impact China?
- It will help to counter China’s growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
The BECA will help to narrow India's military gap with China.

Recent challenges faced by the US-India relationship

- Revocation of special trade status by USA:
  1. Generalised System of Preferences allowed India the duty-free imports of goods up to USD 5.6 billion into the US.
  2. It was revoked on the grounds that India had not assured the US that it will provide equitable and reasonable access.

- Imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminium and reaction:
  1. USA imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium imported from India on the grounds of national security in 2018.
  2. India responded to these moves by imposing tariffs of USD235 million on the US goods worth USD1.4 billion.

- Other irritants:
  1. Trump's America First' policy.
  2. USA immigration policy changes.
  3. India' ties with Iran and India’s purchase of S-400 from Russia.
  4. No talks on trade deficit which was approx. $ 21 billion in 2018.
  5. US’ sanctions on Russia through CAATSA – Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act – are threatening India’s strategic interests.
  6. US’ policy in Afghanistan which is jeopardizing India’s security and interest in the region.

Why India Matters for USA?

- Geographically – India’s strategic location
  1. It is sandwiched between 2 imp regions:
     - First stretch from Africa to middle east- Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is unstable and base of extremist organizations.
     - Second is Indo-Pacific region and challenge of China had become evident.
  2. India is located at the heart of Indian Ocean which controls 50% of lines of communication and 70% of trade volume (China and String of Pearls theory).

- India’s soft and cultural diplomacy is positive relations in these areas.

Why USA matters for India?

- To counter rise of China and China-Pakistan nexus.
- India’s Aspirations of UNSC permanent membership.
- Defence partner.
- USA FDI in infrastructure, transportation, energy and defence which bring managerial expertise, capital and technology.
- Important for service sector in India.
- Critical for global fight against climate change.
- Need support for efforts to prevent spread of weapons of mass destructions.

India-USA Trade relations

- Bilateral trade in goods and services:
  1. From $ 104 billion in 2014 to $114 billion in 2016.
  2. $126 billion in 2017 but problem of Trade deficit need to resolve.
  3. Commitment to increase trade to $ 500 billion.
  4. Fifth largest source of FDI in India which is rising by 15%. 
Urban Floods

**Syllabus:** GS III - Disaster and Disaster Management.

**Why is it in News?**
- Hundreds of families were affected due to floods in Hyderabad caused by record heavy rainfall in the city.

**Causes of urban flooding:**

- **Natural causes:**
  1. Erratic or irregular Rainfall Pattern due to climate change.
  2. Cyclones.
  3. Interstate Rivers and Dam heights.
  4. Sediment deposition on wetlands in cities.

- ** Anthropogenic causes:**
  1. Indiscriminate deforestation which don’t hold water.
  2. Poor Solid Waste Management System which blocks drainage system.
  3. Unplanned Urbanization and encroachments on natural drainage.
  4. Inefficient river flow.
  5. Old and ill maintained drainage System.
  6. Policy & mitigation failure and neglect of Pre-Disaster Planning.

**Why floods occur in Hyderabad?**

- **Hyderabad is a system of catchments.**
  1. The western edge is in the Godavari river basin.
  2. To the east, it’s in the Krishna River basin.
- Increase in encroachments.
- Erratic rainfall pattern due to climate change.
Low-lying localities and colonies built on the lake beds and nullahs.
Neglect the dimension of flood regulation of lakes in the city.
Blocking of drainages by solid wastes and chemical wastes.

**Impact of Urban Flooding:**

- **Impact on lives:**
  1. Loss of life & physical injury.
  2. Increased stress and psychological trauma.
  3. Economic Loss.
- **Disease outbreak:**
  1. Contamination of water supplies leading to diseases.
  2. Rise in mosquito & sanitation borne diseases.
- **Impact on Economy:**
  1. Damage to buildings, roads and other infrastructures.
  2. Disruptions to industrial production.
  3. Disruptions to utility supplies.
  4. Financial burden of Rescue and rehabilitation.
- **Impact on Transport and Communication:**
  1. Increased traffic congestion.
  2. Disruption in rail & bus services.
  3. Disruption in communication via telephone, internet.
- **Impact on environment:**
  1. Loss of tree cover & urban habitat.
  2. Impact on animals in zoo, stray animals.
  3. Spread of contamination of water & soil due to manmade garbage.

**Organizational structure in India**

- It is operational at two levels — central level and state level.
- **Central Level:**
  1. Central Water Commission (CWC),
  2. National Disaster Management Authority,
- **State level:**
  1. Water resource department,
  2. Flood control board,

**Few Initiatives in India:**

- **IFL OWS-Mumbai:** It is an Integrated Flood Warning system to enhance the resilience of Mumbai by providing early warning for flooding.
- **CFLOWS-Chennai:** CFLOWS is a complete web GIS-based decision support system that can be used both for mitigation planning operations before flooding and in real time to for aspects like relief work.

**Way forward:**

- **Technology:**
  1. Strengthen Early Warning System and real-time communication system.
  2. Improve forecasting models to strengthen preparedness e.g. Mumbai has installed automatic weather stations for recording the rainfall every 15 minutes.
Right to Information Act

- Syllabus: GS2: Governance.

Why is it in news?
- RTI Act completed 15 years of its implementation.

About RTI Act:
- It became operational on 12th October 2005.
- Empowered Indian citizens to seek information from Public Authorities.
- Aim - Making government and its functionaries more accountable and responsible.

Amendment in 2019:
- Central government will notify the term of office of Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioner at Central and state level.
- Salary, allowances and other service conditions of Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioner at Central and state level will be determined by Central government.

Recent Changes or Initiatives under RTI Act:
- Jan Suchna Portal: Rajasthan Government launched online portal to disclose information regarding various measures under the RTI Act.
Judiciary under the RTI Act:
(1) Supreme Court in its recent judgement held that judges as public authority under RTI Act.
(2) It means information regarding judges can be demanded through RTI.

Challenges in Implementation of RTI Act:

Administrative Issues:
(1) No Punishment for Government Officials:
   - The government officials face hardly any punishment for violating the law.
   - Non-imposition of penalties in deserving cases by commissions sends a signal to public authorities that violating the law will not invite any serious consequences.
   - This destroys the basic framework of incentives built into the RTI law and promotes a culture of impunity.

(2) Record keeping: There are no centralized database of RTI (at the State/Centre level) applicants available.

(3) Independence of Information Commissioners: With RTI Amendment 2019 Act, Information Commissioners have become more dependent of Central government for service conditions.

Issues faced on the demand side
(1) Low public awareness:
   - Section 26 of the RTI Act: Government may develop and organize educational programmes to advance the understanding of the public, especially disadvantaged communities, regarding how to exercise the rights contemplated under the Act.
   - However, as per the survey, only 15% of the respondents are aware of the RTI Act.

(2) Inconvenient submission channels for RTI application:
   - As per Section 6(1) of the Act a citizen can make a request in writing or through electronic means in English or Hindi or in the official language of the area.
   - However, inadequate efforts have been made to receive RTI applications through electronic means i.e., on email/ website etc,
   - Harassment of RTI Activist: Various RTI activist are physically and mentally harassed which demotivates RTI Activism.

Issues on supply side:
(1) To provide information within 30 days:
   - As per the Act, the information has to be provided within the stipulated time (30 days).
   - But this is hardly followed.

(2) Inadequate trained PIOs and First Appellate Authorities:
   - RTI implementation is still in the process of evolution, resulting in new dimensions being added routinely.
   - Hence RTI refresher training or central knowledge repository needs to be available to the PIOs.

(3) Lack of Behavioural training: During the information provider survey, it was observed that the training provided to the PIOs is restricted to RTI Act.

(4) Denial of Information By government: There is increase trend of refusing to disclose the information under National Security clause.

Way forward:

Digitisation of Information:
(1) Digitisation of information will help in disclosure of information with RTI Act within mandated 30 days.

(2) While doing so, threat of cyber security should not be overruled.
• **Suo Moto Disclosure of Information:**
  1. Section 4 of RTI Act mandates suo moto disclosure of information, but this is hardly done.
  2. Jan Suchna Portal of Rajasthan government is right in that direction.

• **Independence of Information Commissioners:**
  1. RTI Amendment Act 2019 seems to have compromised independence of Information Commissioners.
  2. Immediate steps should be taken to restore it.

• **Engagement with Civil Society:**
  1. Civil society has played important part in making RTI successful in India.
  2. Information commissioners should engage with civil society to make governance more transparent.

**Conclusion:**
- The Right to Information Act was made to achieve social justice, transparency and to make accountable government.
- Government in this respect should work with other political parties and RTI activists.
- Right to information has been seen as the key to strengthening participatory democracy and steering in people centred governance.

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

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**TRP Issue**

• **Syllabus: GS 3- Security:** Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.

**Why is it in the news?**
- Mumbai police recently claimed to have busted a Television Rating Points (TRP) manipulation racket.
- An alleged TRP scam revealed by the Mumbai Police has sparked a debate regarding the media industry in India.

**What are TRPs All About?**
- TRPs denote how many people, from which socio-economic categories, prefer watching which shows for how much time during a particular period.
- TRPs are measured through “barometers” installed in select houses.
- The duration of a show could be for an hour, a week or even a day. The data is usually made public every week.
- The viewership ratings are released by Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC).

• **BARC:**
  1. It is an industry body jointly owned by ad agencies, advertisers and broadcasting companies.
  2. It owns and manages inclusive TV audience measurement system.

• **TRP Calculations:**
  1. BARC has installed barometers in over 45,000 empanelled households.
  2. These households are classified into 12 categories under the New Consumer Classification System (NCCS).
The categories are based on the education level of the main wage earner.

While watching a show, members of the household register their presence by pressing their viewer ID button. Every person in household has a separate ID.

**Significance of TRPs**

- **Data Assessment:**
  1. It captures the duration for which the channel was watched and by whom.
  2. It provides data on viewership habits across age and socio-economic groups.

- **Popularity & Advertisement:**
  1. TRPs reflect the popularity or unpopularity of a channel.
  2. TRPs are vital for advertisers to decide which channel to advertise on by calculating the CPRP (cost-per-rating-point).

- **Programme Influencer:**
  1. On the basis of audience assessment data, ratings are assigned to various programmes on television.
  2. Television ratings influence programmes produced for the viewers.
  3. Better ratings promotes a programme while poor ratings discourages the programme.

**The Other Side:**

- **Not Truly Representative:**
  1. For TRPs, it does not matter what the entire country is watching.
  2. Only 45,000-odd households supposed to represent TV viewership of the country.

- **Real News Compromised:**
  1. Incorrect ratings often leads to production of programmes which may not be content-rich and the good programmes may be left out.
  2. Sensation is given priority over sense by most media houses who try to rig viewer’s mind in order to get higher TRPs.
  3. Professionalism and media ethics in India have taken a back seat.

- **Prone to Manipulations:**
  1. The broadcasters can bribe the households to watch their channels if they find the households where devices are installed.
  2. Broadcasters can ask cable operators to ensure their channel is available as the “landing page” when the TV is switched on.
  3. The cable network operators could make or mar a channel, as they can decide upon the order of the channels on their networks.
  4. Mumbai Police has accused three channels, including Republic TV, of manipulating the ratings data by paying households to keep their television sets tuned to their channels.

- **Political and Commercial Leanings:**
  1. Since the earnings of broadcasters are mostly depends on TRPs, they tend to deviate from their core democratic responsibilities.
  2. In order to earn more and get more viewership, news channels seems to project politically motivated and ideologically inspired news.

- **Absence of Legal Framework:**
  1. There is absence of any specific law through which the suspects involved in panel tampering/infiltration could be penalised.
  2. The BARC in the past has filed FIRs in various cases involved in panel tampering, but its efforts have been hampered due to absence of any legal framework.
Facial Recognition

- **Syllabus: GS 3: Security and Technology.**

**Why is it in news?**
- Telangana has tested facial recognition technology in recent local body polls.
- The Union Home Ministry has approved the automated facial recognition system (AFRS).

**What is Facial recognition technology and how it works?**
- AFRS uses a database of photos to identify people in security photos and videos.
- It uses biometrics to map facial features and help verify identity through key features of the face.
- The most key feature is the geometry of a face such as the distance between a person's foreheads to their chin, the distance between a person's eyes etc.
- This then creates what is called a "facial signature."
- It is a mathematical formula that is then compared to a database of known faces.

**Applications of AFRS:** It is used everywhere from airports, venues, shopping centers and by law enforcement.

**Current Applications:**
- Facial authentication could help you unlock your phone.
- Validating your identity.
- Auto-tagging digital photos to find missing persons.
- Targeted advertising.

**Challenges/issues**
- **Not Infallible:**
  1. Facial recognition is not fool-proof, and there have been instances of misidentification.
  2. As per research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, facial recognition algorithms consistently misidentify faces.
  3. Misidentifying someone can lead to wrongful convictions and may impinge on a core democratic right to vote.
Privacy concerns:
(1) AFRS’s indiscriminate and large-scale recording, storing and analyzing of our images undermine privacy.
(2) The people under scanner can no longer do anything in public without the state knowing about it.

Fear of Surveillance:
(1) Facial recognition technology brings monitoring to new levels.
(2) It can be very damaging to our society by being abused by law enforcement for things like constant surveillance of the public.
(3) China’s reported use of facial recognition technologies for surveillance in Xinjiang is an example of how it is problematic.
(4) The technology of control is symptomatic of the state’s mistrust of its citizens.

Impact on Democratic Political Culture:
(1) Blanket surveillance can deter individuals from attending public events.
(2) It can stifle participation in political protests and campaigns for change and can discourage dissent.
(3) This goes against the right to freedom of assembly, association and expression.

The already vulnerable groups can be targeted:
(1) The technology can be deployed selectively, for example, to identify migrants and refugees.
(2) The use of handheld mobile devices with a facial recognition app by police forces raises the specter of enhanced racial profiling.
(3) As per the multiple studies, accuracy rates of facial recognition algorithms are particularly low in the case of minorities, women and children.

Lack of safeguards: India currently does not have a data protection law. The Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 is yet to come into force.

Way forward:
Safeguards: AFRS’s deployment for security and law enforcement should come with strong safeguards against misuse.
Surveillance should be restricted to the pursuit of serious crime instead of enabling the unjustified interference into our liberty and rights.
Strict Regulation instead of banning it:
(1) Instead of simply banning an entire category of technologies with so many possible applications, policymakers should employ precision regulation.
(2) Without proper regulation of these systems, we risk creating a police state.

Debate and Scrutiny: There is a desperate need for a more prominent conversation on its impact on our rights and civil liberties.

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

- **Syllabus:** GS 3 - Technology: Awareness in the fields of IT, robotics, Nano-technology, biotechnology.
- **Question:** Until genome editing is deemed safe through research, it should not be used for clinical reproductive purposes. Critically analyze.

**Why is it in the news?**
- The 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry has been awarded to Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna for development of a method for genome editing.
- They discovered the Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPER)-Cas9 genetic scissors- one of gene technology’s sharpest tools.
- The tool has contributed to important discoveries like basic research and in medicine.

**About Genes**
- Genes contain the bio-information that defines any individual or species.
- Physical attributes like skin, height or hair colour, more subtle features like intelligence or eyesight, susceptibility to certain diseases can be attributed to information encoded in the genetic material.

**Gene Editing**
- Genome editing is a method that lets scientists change the DNA of many organisms.
- It locates the specific area in the genetic sequence, cuts it out, and replaces it with a new and correct sequence.
- Editing has been used in the field of agriculture, where several crops have been genetically modified to provide particular traits.
- Scientists use different technologies for gene editing. CRISPER is one of them.

**CRISPR-Cas9 technology:**

A DNA editing technique, called CRISPR/Cas9, works like a biological version of a word-processing programme’s “find and replace” function.

**HOW THE TECHNIQUE WORKS**

A cell is transfected with an enzyme complex containing:
- Guide molecule
- Healthy DNA copy
- DNA-cutting enzyme

A specially designed synthetic guide molecule finds the target DNA strand.

An enzyme cuts off the target DNA strand.

The defective DNA strand is replaced with a healthy copy.

**CRISPR technology** is a tool for gene “editing” developed in the last one decade.

**The technology allows for adding, altering and deleting the genomic code in living beings.**
• It behaves like a cut-and-paste mechanism on DNA strands that contain genetic information. It acts like a pair of scissors.
• Other genome editing systems like TALENs and Zinc-Finger Nucleases can do similar jobs. However the CRISPER is considered sharpest.

Significance of Gene Editing Technology

• Disease Prevention:
  (1) The technology can be used to treat or even cure inherited diseases.
  (2) It holds promise to treat more complex diseases, such as cancer, heart diseases, mental illnesses etc.
  (3) Genetic sequences of disease-causing organisms can be altered to make them ineffective.

• For Agriculture and plant species:
  (1) Genes of plants can be edited to make them pest resistant, or improve their tolerance to drought or temperature.
  (2) It is widely practiced in agriculture, to increase productivity or resistance to diseases.

• Enhancement of human features:
  (1) Intelligence, beauty, strength, etc., can be enhanced through editing technology.

• Helping in Research:
  (1) The tool has contributed to many important discoveries in basic research and in medicine.
  (2) Clinical trials of new cancer therapies are underway.

• CRISPER:
  (1) CRISPER-Cas9 is considered to be a simple, effective and precise technology.
  (2) The technology has potential to revolutionise human existence in future.

Issues/ Concerns

• Possibility of Misuse:
  (1) CRISPER could be used to create designer babies.
  (2) Last year, a Chinese scientist He Jiankui was jailed, after creating the world's first gene-edited human babies.

• Unknown Consequences:
  (1) Tampering with the genetic material can have unintended or unknown mutations.
  (2) It is not known how these mutations will play out over the child's lifetimes or over future generations.

• Ethical and Social Issue:
  (1) Genetic engineering is against the natural or supernatural order.
  (2) It invites discrimination against persons with disabilities.
  (3) It may open new forms social inequality (on the basis of race, beauty, strength etc.), creating classes of genetic haves and have-nots in society.

• Precision and Safety concerns:
  (1) The technology is very precise, but not 100% precise every time.
  (2) There is a possibility that some other genes also get targeted.
  (3) There is also a possibility of off-target effects or mosaicism (when some cells carry the edit but others do not).

Way Ahead

• Ensure safety:
  (1) It is yet to reach the level of precision required to be sure that it does not cause unintentional
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Delhi Air Pollution

- **Syllabus:** GS III- Environmental pollution and degradation.

**Why is it in News?**
- The AQI of Delhi is expected to be in the ‘poor’ to ‘very poor’ category and is likely to worsen thereon, as per SAFAR.
- Air pollution control measures under the “very poor” and “severe” categories of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) have been enforced in the NCR cities.

**Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region**
- Centre has set up the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region to curb air pollution in Delhi and adjoining areas through ordinance route.
- Aim - Coordination b/w states, planning and execution of policy and interventions, operations of industry, inspection etc.
- It will replace the over 2-decade old EPCA.
- It will be a statutory authority that will supersede Central and state pollution control boards. (Delhi, PB, HR, UP and RJ.)
- It will have representation from states.
- It will have powers to issue orders to these state govt.

**Why pollution spikes in Winters?**
- **Climate:**
  1. As temperatures start dropping in winters, the height of the layer adjacent to the ground reduces.
  2. It traps the pollutants closer to the ground.
  3. Even if emissions remain constant, pollution levels will increase.
  4. Low-speed winds bring dust from the Gulf.
Delhi’s Geography:
(1) Landlocked, flat, fertile plain of Delhi is bounded by the Himalayas.
(2) It blocks the movement of air, particularly in winter.
(3) Colder air coming off the mountains creates a lid effect.

Huge Sources of Dust & smoke:
(1) Transportation is the largest source of Delhi’s air pollution, contributing 18-39% to its pollution.
(2) Road dust is the second largest source contributes 18-38%.
(3) Industries contribute 2-29%.
(4) Coal-fired power plants contribute about 3-11%.
(5) Constant construction contributes 8%.

Poverty:
(1) Poor households still rely on biomass like wood and dung for cooking.
(2) Poor Farmers can’t use costly machines to prepare fields and instead prefer burning off the rice stubble.

Election:
(1) Government’s cheaper diesel than petrol results into diesel-powered vehicles fill Indian cities.
(2) Cheaper electricity promises and pushing for self-sufficiency in energy have favoured coal-fired power over cleaner plants.

Stubble Burning in NW rice belt of India:
(1) Changing rainfall patterns leave farmers with an extremely short window to clear land for the sowing of winter crops.
(2) Insufficient machinery to clear farms & little demand for biomass plants.
(3) When farmers burn rice stubble and with no wind to disperse it, the smoke drifts idly south-east, converging in the skies over Delhi.

Burning Firecrackers in Diwali:
(1) It largely influences pollution spike in winters.

Public Policy:
(1) Poor implementation;
(2) Poorly designed schemes. e.g. odd-even does not cover two-wheelers which emit 32% of total transport pollution in Delhi.

Recent Initiatives:
• PUSA Decomposer -
  (1) Innovative method developed by IARI.
  (2) A set of 4 tablets made by extracting fungi strains that helps paddy straw to decompose at a much faster rate than usual.

• Red Light on, Gaadi Off campaign:
  (1) Delhi government and the police started ‘Red Light On, Gaadi Off’ (red light on, ignition off) campaign to reduce vehicular emission.
  (2) This will be an awareness campaign and drivers will not be penalised for not turning off their engines.

• Law to check stubble burning:
  (1) Centre informed Supreme Court that it will bring law to address air pollution as well as check stubble burning in Delhi as well as the surrounding National Capital Region.
(2) After Centre’s assurance, SC suspended its earlier decision to have a Justice Lokur committee to monitor stubble burning.

Way forward:

- **Recognize its not only winter problem:**
  1. **Year-round air pollution level:** remains 3 times the national standard.
  2. Governments need to take year-round air pollution reduction drives across sectors.

- **Transport:**
  1. Carpooling, use of bicycles, encouraging the use of and improving the public transport system, expanding & supporting metro, overhead rail etc.
  2. Encourage CNG vehicles.
  3. RO-RO on roads: Roll-on-Roll-off scheme launched by Indian Railways to carry loaded trucks on goods train to decongest Delhi roads & to reduce air pollution should be made compulsory for trucks.

- **Policy Interventions:**
  1. Reduce road tax & sales tax on CNG vehicles;
  2. Discourage new registrations.
  3. Expedite conformity to BS VI norms in Delhi.

- **Odd-Even scheme:**
  1. Include two-wheelers into the odd-even scheme.
  2. Encourage other neighbouring cities to adopt it.

- **Improvise GRAP for early action:** Graded Response Action Plan recommends action only after pollutants soar and when judiciary intervenes.

- **Judiciary intervention:**
  1. Direct police to take punitive action against stubble burners;
  2. Ensure Government environmental accountability.

- **Review Indian Standards for pollution levels:**
  1. As per current AQI, good is anything below 50. It is not good as per WHO.
  2. AQI gives a false sense of security.
  3. When pollution levels drop to moderate (100-200), people think it’s good to breathe but on the contrary it’s not.

- **Other:**
  1. Distribute LPG cylinders to poor effectively.
  2. Link programmes like NCAP (National Clean Air Programme), Ujjwala, Smart City Missions.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Livemint, The Print, Business Standard, Economic Times.
Code on Social Security 2020

Syllabus: GS 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to employment.

Why is it in the news?
- The Parliament recently passed the Code on Social Security 2020.
- The 2019 Code on Social Security was withdrawn and new code was introduce in 2020 with some changes.
- The Code on Social Security 2020 replaces nine laws related to social security.

Background
- Labour falls under the Concurrent List of the Constitution. Both Parliament and state legislatures can make laws regulating labour.
- The central government wants to codify 44 central labour laws into four broad codes.

Besides Code on Social Security, following are the other three:
2. Industrial Relations code - Passed by Parliament.

Key Provisions of Social Security Code 2020:

Social security fund:
1. Central government will set up a social security fund.
2. The funds will be used to provide welfare benefits such as pension, medical cover, death and disablement benefits to all workers.
3. All workers include unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers.
4. State governments will set up and administer separate social security funds for unorganised workers.
5. Aggregators (the digital intermediaries employing gig workers), will have to set aside at least around 1-2% of their annual turnover for the purpose of this fund.

Gratuity on a pro-rata basis:
1. The Bill seeks to make fixed-term contract workers eligible for gratuity on a pro-rata basis.
2. The code has removed the mandatory minimum gratuity threshold of five years.
3. The code has introduced a different threshold structure for various category of workers.
4. It reduces the gratuity period from five years to three years for working journalists.

Extending the reach of EPFO:
1. EPFO’s coverage would be applicable on all establishments having 20 workers.
2. Option to join EPFO is also being given to establishments having less than 20 workers.
3. Maternity Benefit: There is provision of maternity benefits such as prohibition from work during certain periods, provision of nursing breaks, crèche facility etc.
4. For Building workers: The code provides for levying and collecting cess for social security and welfare of building workers.
5. Digitisation: All records and returns have to be maintained electronically.

Threshold Lowered:
(1) Firms with 10 or more workers will have to provide multiple benefits to employees such as health and pension.

(2) Firms with less than 10 workers can do it voluntarily.

- **Penalties:**
  (1) Any failure to deposit employees’ contributions will attract a penalty of Rs 100,000.
  (2) There is provision of imprisonment of one to three years.

**Significance of Code on Social Security 2020**

- **Governance:**
  (1) The code provides for maximum benefits under minimum governance.
  (2) It reflects uniformity in approach across the four labour codes.

- **Better Compliance and Ease of doing Business:**
  (1) The Codification removes multiplicity of laws and definitions.
  (2) Flexibility in running any business is considered most valuable asset available to an enterprise.

- **Wide coverage of workers:**
  (1) The code covers organised, unorganised, contractual, gig workers, platform workers etc.
  (2) The gig workers may soon get life and disability insurance, health and maternity benefits among others.
  (3) The contract workers or the fixed-term employees will come under the gratuity law now (on pro-rata basis).
  (4) **Consumption Push:** The reduction in EPF rate for employees to get higher take-home pay may boost consumption.

- **Other Benefits:**
  (1) The code provides for maternity benefit to the woman employees.
  (2) It provide compensation to the employees in case of the accidents while commuting from residence to place of work and vice-versa.

- **Digitization to help:**
  (1) All records and returns will be maintained electronically. It will help in exchange of information among various stakeholders / funds set up by the Government.
  (2) It will ensure compliance and also facilitate governance.

**Criticism**

- **Lack of Clarity:**
  (1) The Code talks about social security, but does not specify how universal social security will be achieved.
  (2) No concrete scheme has been spelt out in this direction so far.
  (3) It is not clear on who will provide benefits for gig workers- the state or the entrepreneurs who are promoters of the platform/enterprise.

- **On Social Security:**
  (1) Many proposed initiatives in the draft code to universalize social security have been left to the states to decide.
  (2) The code is silent on whether it can merge all social security schemes, to create one social security scheme for both informal and formal workers.

**Final Word:**

- **Comprehensive and Clear Policy needed:**
- There should be more clarity on Social security laws and on the laws made for unorganized/gig
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workers.

- **Awareness and Impact assessment:**
- Employers should be aware of all related provisions and assess the impact on their organizations.
- Aggregators should look at the impact on account of the proposed contribution to social security fund.
- The employer needs to ensure smooth transition to the new Code.

Sources: PRS, The Hindu, Mint, Financial Express, ET.

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### Air India Crisis

- **Syllabus:** GS 3- Economic Development- Infrastructure.

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Union Government revised its bidding parameters for 100% stake sale in Air India.
- This is the government’s third effort to woo buyers, as the previous attempts failed.

**Background**
- The government is in the process of disinvesting the debt-laden Air India.
- The Union Cabinet in 2018 gave its ‘in-principle’ nod to divest stakes in Air India.
- The initial attempts to sell 49% and then 76% of stakes failed to draw any bidder.
- Government now has decided to sell its entire 100% stake in Air India.

**Major Reasons behind the fall of Air India**

- **Decreasing Passenger Revenue:**
  - Air India witnessed falling revenues on year-on-year basis.
  - The airline is failing to meet the revenue targets despite meeting load factor targets.
  - It points out to the inefficiencies like lack of aircraft availability and faulty deployments.

- **Mismanagement of Manpower:**
  - According to the requirement, the company had 11,433 employees as against the envisaged requirement of 7,245.
  - There was underutilisation of pilots and cabin crews which led to losses.

- **Declining Market Share:**
  - Air India has witnessed a fall in the market during last four decades.
  - After the entry of other private players, Air India started facing competition after a long period of monopoly.

- **Debt:**
  1. Air India currently has a debt of about Rs 58,000 crore.
  2. The debt has been pushing Air India towards making losses for a substantial period of time.

- **Other decisions that led to airline’s descent:**
  1. Acquisition of aircraft in numbers far more than what it could afford or gainfully deploy.
  2. The merger with Indian Airlines. Air India has not registered profit since then.
  3. Mismanagement in granting bilateral agreements with foreign countries:
  4. The then administration granted more than required bilateral seats to carriers of foreign
countries.

- As a result, traffic carried by foreign airlines rose significantly which had an adverse impact on Air India’s business prospects.

**Why Divesting Air India?**

- **Loss and Failing Revival Attempts:**
  - Government is not willing to cope with Air India’s debt of Rs 58,000 crore.
  - Government’s attempts to turn around the finances of Air India have failed.
  - The government has already transferred nearly Rs 30,000 crore of the airlines’ debt.

- **Taxpayer’s money being used to keep Air India:**
  - The losses are a drain on the national exchequer.
  - The government money would be much better used to fund social and infrastructure programmes.

**Other Factors:**

- **Mismanagement:** The airline’s survival depends on the induction of a professional management with an effective leadership.

- **Inadequate Packages:** The survival depends on sound financial package that does not come with political interference in its day-to-day operations.

- **Marketing:** To evoke interest in a product that still commands a sizeable market share, the government also needs marketing skills.

**Counter argument to privatization**

- **National Pride:**
  1. The parliamentary panel had opinion of not divesting government stake in Air India.
  2. The panel wanted grant of five more years to revive and its debt written off.
  3. Air India has always helped in the times of calamities, social or political unrest in India or abroad.

- **Job Security:**
  1. The parliamentary panel had expressed apprehension over job loss.

**Issues/Challenges**

- **Lack of strategic direction:**
  1. The government focused on a financial package, instead of tackling the core problem like the lack of a strategic/operational direction.
  2. The bailout package of over Rs. 30,000 crore being infused so far, has not helped Air India evolve into a robust carrier.

- **Debt Burden:**
  1. Air India is saddled with heavy debt and accumulated losses in excess of Rs 50,000 crore.
  2. The buyers are hesitant to take over Air India along with its huge debt.
  3. Government has tried to reduce this burden, but to no avail.

- **Security of Employees:**
  1. The legitimate grievances of other stakeholders has not being paid much attention.
  2. Government hasn’t as yet firmed up as to how it will address the medical related concerns of serving and retired employees.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard.
Office of Governor

- **Syllabus: GS2:** Constitutional bodies, issues and challenges to federal structure.
- **Question:** Discuss the need for Governors in the Indian States. Is there a need to reform the role of Governors in India? If so suggest measures for reforming the Governor’s office.

**Why is it in news?**
- Recently, the Governor of Maharashtra wrote a letter to the Chief Minister publicly.
- Many academicians and politicians have criticized the content of the letter as against the basic tenets of the Constitution and promote a particular ideology.

**Significance of Governor:**
- **Bridge connecting the Union and the States:** Governors represent the State at the Centre & the Centre in the State.
- **President’s rule:** In situations like the breakdown of constitutional machinery in a state, there remains no CM and it is the Governor who runs the State.
- **Role in Government formation:** It is the governor who invites the elected party to form government in a State after elections, uses his discretion to invite parties. If not him who is going to discharge this function.
- **Protection of Legality of laws passed by state assemblies:**
  1. He is the one who checks if the law violates constitutional provisions or not.
  2. He reserves it for president or sends it back to the state government for reconsideration.

**Issues / Challenges:**
- Governor’s Office has turned as a retiral residence for politicians. For ex: a politician not needed in the politics of a state is made the governor of another state by the ruling govt.
- Non-Neutrality of the Office of the Governor: As an agent of the center, the governors try to favor the ruling party in the center over issues of the state where they are appointed.
- **Undemocratic Nature of appointment:** Governor, though is a public office, is neither directly nor indirectly elected by the people, not even by a panel. Yet he becomes “head of the State”.
- **Misuse of Powers:**
  1. Constitution though has given powers under Article 154 to Governor but has not clearly defined the extent and the procedure to use them. The loopholes are hence misused at the will of the Central govt.
  2. For example, the power to withhold assent to bills passed by the state Legislative assembly is wide and unguided.
  3. **Qualifications under Article 157:** The constitution mentions only two qualifications for Governor: (a) Citizen of India & (b) Should be above 35 years of age. This gives powers in the hands of its appointees for misuse.

**Recommendations by Sarkaria Commission**
- **No Active politicians:** Active politicians should not be appointed as governors.
- Governor should not belong to the Ruling Party at the center.
- Retiring governors should be debarred from accepting any office of profit.
It rejected the demand for the abolition of the office of governor as well as his selection from a panel of names given by state governments.

**Recommendations by Punchhi Commission:**

- **Limit Discretionary Powers of Governor:** There should be clear guidelines on the appointment of the Chief Minister to limit the Governor’s discretionary powers.
- **Appointment to the post of Governors:** Incumbent politicians should have stayed away from active politics for at least 2 years before his appointment, even at the local level.
- **Allow CM to have a say in the appointment of the governor.**
- **Committee for the appointment of Governors:** It may comprise of the Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, CM of concerned state & Vice President.
- **Removal of the Governors:** Delete Phrase “during the pleasure of the President”: He should not be removed at the will of the central govt.

**Way forward:**

- **Power to reserve Bills:**
  1. This power should be exercised only in unusual cases and not with malicious intent.
  2. He/she can be legally made to obtain the view of High Courts before reserving the Bill.
- **Independence of Governor’s office:**
  1. Provide Fixed tenure: Arbitrary dismissal of governors should be done away with.
  2. An Impeachment process could be introduced to ensure the security of tenure and teeth in functioning.
  3. Should not be allowed to acquire political positions for a certain period after leaving the post.

**Conclusion:**

- **Time to reform:** It is necessary to reform the role of governor to put an end to continuous misuse for partisan political ends that threatens federalism & democracy in our country.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Reforms should ensure that the powers and privileges attached to the office of Governor must be partnered with accountability, liability, scrutinization, and transparency as expected from all public offices.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express.
1. Right to Information Act

Why is it in news?
• According to a report by the Satark Nagrik Sangathan and the Centre for Equity Studies, more than 2.2 lakh cases are pending at the Central and State Information Commissions.

Details:
• Reason for Pending Cases:
  (1) Most commissions are functioning at a reduced capacity, including the Central Information Commission (CIC), which has been headless since August.
  (2) Government officials face hardly any punishment for violating the law.
  (3) Penalties were imposed in only 2.2% of cases that were disposed of, despite previous analysis showing a rate of about 59% violations which should have triggered the process of penalty imposition.
• At the current rate of disposal, the Odisha commission would take more than seven years to dispose of all pending complaints, while the CIC would take more than two years.

Right to Information Act 2005:
• It mandates to established Central and State Information Commissions in respective states with 1 chairman and not more than 10 members.
• Recently RTI act was amended to make the service condition of Information Commissioners at the discretion of the Central government.

2. Krishna and Godavari River Management Board

Why is it in news?
• 2nd council meeting of river management board was recently held.

Details:
• The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014 provides for establishment of two separate river management boards for Krishna and Godavari River.
• Their main function is to regulate the water from projects on these rivers.
• In recent council meeting it was decided that the Central government will determine jurisdiction of these River Management Boards.

3. Public spaces cannot be occupied, says SC
Why is it in news?
• The Supreme Court held indefinite “occupation” of a public road by the Shaheen Bagh protesters as unacceptable.

Details:
• The judgement upheld the right to peaceful protest against a law but public ways and public spaces cannot be occupied, and that too indefinitely.
• Democracy and dissent go hand in hand, but the demonstrations expressing dissent have to be in designated places alone.
• These rights are subject to reasonable restrictions imposed in the interest of sovereignty, integrity and public order.

4. India designates 18 persons based in Pak. as terrorists

Why is it in news?
• The Union Home Ministry on Tuesday designated 18 more individuals, all based in Pakistan, as “terrorists” under the amended UAPA.

About UAPA:
• 
  UAPA 1967: It was enacted by the Indira Gandhi government in 1967. Its main purpose was to deal with secessionist movements and protect the integrity of the nation.
• 2004 Amendment: After the repeated misuse of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act were repealed. Then UAPA act was amended to deal with terrorist organisations.
• 2019 Amendment: It gives power to designate individual as terrorist.

1) Approval for seizure of property by NIA:
(a) An investigating officer is required to obtain the prior approval of the Director General of Police to seize properties that may be connected with terrorism.
(b) If the investigation is conducted by an officer of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of such property.

2) Investigation by NIA: Empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases.

3) Insertion to schedule of treaties:
(a) The Schedule lists nine treaties, including the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997), and the Convention against Taking of Hostages (1979).

5. PM SVANidhi

Why is it in news?
• Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday interacted via video-conferencing with street vendors from Uttar Pradesh who had availed of loans under the PM Street Vendors Atmanirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi).

PM Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)
• Implementation Agency: SIDBI.
• **Aim:** To facilitate collateral free working capital loan upto Rs.10,000/- of one-year tenure, to approximately, 50 lakh street vendors, to resume their businesses.

• Incentives in the form of interest subsidy (@ 7% per annum) and cash back (upto Rs.1,200/- per annum) are being provided to promote good repayment behaviour and digital transactions respectively.

• It is a part of the government’s economic relief package announced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 6. Govt. hikes poll spend ceiling by 10%

**Why is it in news?**

• The government has amended Conduct of Elections Rule to increase election spending.

**Details:**

• The last time the expenditure ceiling was enhanced was in 2014 just ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

• Over a month ago, the EC had recommended a 10% increase in expenditure for all elections to be held during the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping in mind the problems that candidates may face while campaigning under the various COVID protocol laid down by the poll panel.

• The notification that amended the Conduct of Elections Rules, however, does not mention that the limit has been increased in the wake of the pandemic or if it is only for the COVID-19 period.

### 7. Social Media Rules

**Why is it in new?**

• The Central government has informed Delhi High Court that the rule to tackle fake news of social media platforms have been framed.

**Details:**

• These guidelines have been framed under Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules.

• According to new rules, any unlawful content on social media platforms like Facebook, Google and Twitter, can be removed either by an order of the court, or a government notification or by the company’s grievance officers.

• The grievance officer under the IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules is bound to redress any complaint relating to unlawful content within one month.

### 8. Gupkar pact

**Why is it in news?**

• Various political leaders in Jammu and Kashmir are organising meetings on Gupkar declaration.

**Details:**

• Gupkar Declaration: A pact to fight for the restoration of J&K’s special status.
1. RBI appeals to SC to allow NPA classification

**Why is it in news?**
- The RBI has appealed to the country’s top court to let banks classify loans as non-performing.

**Details:**
- In order to help borrowers weather pandemic-related stress, the RBI has let banks offer a moratorium on loan payments for up to six months and permitted a one-time restructuring of accounts.
- According to RBI, the ban imposed to help borrowers in the COVID-19 pandemic could greatly harm the nation’s financial system.

**Background:**
- The RBI’s measures ensured that accounts that were standard prior to the implementation of the nationwide lockdown in late March, would not be classified as NPAs.

2. NABARD to refinance Rs. 800-cr. loans

**Why is it in news?**
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has announced a special refinance facility of Rs. 800 crore for FY21.

**Details:**
- The bank credit will also be extended to NBFCs-MFIs and other MFIs (Societies, Trusts)
- The facility has been announced to support the Government of India’s Water, Sanitisation and Hygiene (WASH) programme.
- NABARD will provide concessional refinance to all eligible financial institutions including commercial banks, regional rural banks and cooperative banks with a repayment period of up to 36 months.

### Government Policies and Taxation

3. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme

**Why is it in news?**
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT has approved 16 proposals by electronics manufacturers, including Samsung, under its Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme.

**Details:**
The Unique Academy

- The firms include five international mobile phone makers and five domestic firms.
- The companies would bring additional investment in electronics manufacturing to the tune of Rs. 11,000 crore.
- It will generate more than two lakh direct employment opportunities in the next five years.

About PLI Scheme:
- IT ministry had notified the scheme to give incentives of 4-6 per cent to electronics companies which manufacture mobile phones and other electronic components.
- The companies that make mobile phones which sell for Rs 15,000 or more will get an incentive of up to 6 per cent on incremental sales of all such mobile phones made in India.
- In the same category, companies which are owned by Indian nationals and make such mobile phones, the incentive has been kept at Rs 200 crore for the next four years.
- PLI is a part of the National Policy on Electronics.

4. Cabinet nod for reforms in natural gas marketing

Why is it in news?
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved ‘natural gas marketing reforms’.

Details:
- **Aim:** To standardise the procedure to discover the price of gas sold in the market.
- The policy has permitted affiliate companies to participate in the bidding process in view of the open, transparent and electronic bidding.
- The policy will grant marketing freedom to Field Development Plans of those Blocks in which Production Sharing Contracts already provide pricing freedom.

Significance:
- This will facilitate and promote more competition in marketing of gas.
- The policy would bring uniformity to the bidding process across various contractual regimes and policies to avoid ambiguity and contribute towards ease of doing business.

About Natural Gas:
- Natural gas is a superior fuel as compared with coal and other liquid fuels being an environment friendly and cheaper fuel.
- Currently, almost 50% of the consumption requirement is met through imported gas.
- India is targeting to raise share of natural gas in its energy basket to 15 percent by 2030 from 6.2 percent currently.

5. Study for Data on Migrant Workers

Why is it in news?
- The Labour Ministry has asked the expert group of the Labour Bureau to finalise the survey on migration at the earliest.
- Finalising the survey would help to compile the data on the number of migrant workers.

Details:
- The expert group has been set up for a period of three years to provide technical advice to the Labour Bureau regarding the surveys.
- The survey on domestic workers would be a first of its kind.

Significance:
- The data provide authentic estimates of the number of migrant workers in the country.
• It will help the government to identify the problems faced by domestic workers in order to formulate policies for their benefit.

6. Interest during the moratorium waived

Why is it in news?
• The Government has told the Supreme Court that it has decided to waive compound interest on MSME and personal loans up to Rs 2 crore for the six-month period.

Details:
• The waiver would be applicable to MSME loans and personal loans up to Rs. 2 crore.
• The categorisation includes education, housing, auto, consumption and consumer durable loans, personal loans to professionals and credit card dues of up to Rs 2 crore.

Significance:
• This is a big relief to MSME and personal loan borrowers.
• However, borrowers will have to pay the interest on their outstanding loans for the moratorium period they opted for.
• Banks won’t add that interest component to the principal outstanding at the end of the moratorium to calculate fresh EMI at current interest rate.

7. CPI-IW Base Year Revised

Why is it in news?
• The Labour and Employment Ministry revised the base year of the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW).

Details:
• The base year of CPI-IW is revised to 2016 from 2001.
• The change will reflect the changing consumption pattern.
• It will give more weightage to spending on health, education, recreation and other miscellaneous expenses.
• It will reduce the weight of food and beverages.
• CPI inflation is also called as retail inflation as the prices are quoted from retailers.
• Two Ministries- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) and Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) are engaged in the construction of different CPIs for different groups/sectors.
• Following are the various CPIs.
  1. CPI for all India or CPI combined.
  2. CPI for Agricultural Labourers (AL).
  3. CPI for Rural Labourers (RL).
  4. CPI for Industrial Workers (IW)
• The CPI(IW) and CPI(AL& RL) measures changes in the retail price of the basket of goods and services consumed by the specific occupational groups in the specific centres.
• CPI-IW is also used to regulate the dearness allowance (DA) of government staff and industrial workers, as well as to revise minimum wages in scheduled employments.

8. Govt. unveils proposals to spur demand

Why is it in news?
• The Union Finance Ministry unveiled a mini-stimulus of sorts.
• The Ministry is hoping to spur fresh demand of about Rs. 1 lakh crore in the second half of the year.

Details:
• The mini-stimulus comprises incentives for the government and public sector employees to spend more on consumer durables and services.
• It offers interest-free loans of Rs. 12,000 crore to the States for a 50-year tenure to finance capital expenditure.
• It enhanced the Centre’s own capital expenditure plans by Rs. 25,000 crore, from the earlier allocation of Rs. 4.13 lakh crore.
• The Centre is supposed to spend it on roads, urban development, water supply and defence infrastructure.

9. Centre allows additional borrowing by 20 States

Why is it in news?
• The Union Finance Ministry permitted 20 States, including Maharashtra, to raise Rs. 68,825 crore through open market borrowings.
• The move came day after the GST Council failed to arrive at a consensus on the mode of borrowings to meet compensation shortfalls to the states.

Details:
• States could borrow Rs. 1.1 lakh crore from the market.
• The principal and interest payments to be paid out of GST cess collections whose levy has been extended beyond 2022.
• Some states have acceded to this option, wherein several States had sought that the Centre borrow from the market and pay them.

Background
• The Goods and Service Tax (GST) law has provision to compensate the States for loss of revenue arising out of implementation of the GST.
• Compensation cess was introduced as relief for States for the loss of revenues.
• States were guaranteed a 14% tax revenue growth in the first five years (till 2022).
• Any shortfall against it is supposed to be compensated by the Centre using the funds specifically collected as compensation cess.
• Compensation cess is levied on products considered to be ‘sin’ or luxury goods.
• The states and the Centre facing GST shortfall due to slowdown and the lockdowns.
• The states have been demanding their dues from the Centre.
• The GST Act prohibits withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund. Hence the Centre is proposing several borrowing options.

10. GST: Centre to borrow for States

Why is it in news?
• The Centre decided to borrow from the market to pay the GST compensation shortfall of Rs 1.1 lakh crore to states.
• The move is a sharp departure of centre from its stance that States should undertake market borrowings.

Details:
The total shortfall in collection of GST estimated at Rs. 2.35 lakh crore. Out of the total shortfall, Rs. 1.1 lakh crore is on account of GST shortfall.

The amount borrowed will be passed on to the states as back-to-back loan in lieu of GST compensation cess.

This new arrangement will not reflect in the fiscal deficit of the Centre and will appear as capital receipts for state governments.

**Significance:**

- The move may help break the impasse between the Centre and States over the issue of borrowings to recompense states
- The borrowing from Centre on behalf of states is likely to ensure that a single rate of borrowing is charged and this would also be easy to administer.

**11. PSUs to consider for Buy-Backs**

**Why is it in news?**

- The Government has asked at least eight state-run companies to consider share buy-backs in the fiscal year to March 2021.

**Details:**

- The firms asked include miner Coal India, power utility NTPC, minerals producer NMDC and Engineers India Ltd.

**What is Buy-Back?**

- A Buyback is when a company buys its own outstanding shares to reduce the number of shares available in the open market.
- A buyback is also known as a share repurchase.
- The companies buy back the shares from the existing shareholders by utilizing free reserves and other permitted sources of funds.
- Companies may choose to buy back when there are no other opportunities to utilize available cash with them in investment projects.
- Buyback of shares may also be used by companies as a signal that they see the shares as undervalued by the markets.

**12. AYUSHMAN SAHAKAR scheme**

**Why is it in news?**

- Union Minister of State for Agriculture launched AYUSHMAN SAHAKAR scheme.
- It is a unique scheme to assist cooperatives play an important role in creation of healthcare infrastructure in the country.
- The scheme is being formulated National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
- NCDC is an apex autonomous development finance institution under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- The scheme aligns itself with the focus of the National Health Policy, 2017.

**Significance:**

- There are about 52 hospitals across the country run by cooperatives.
- They have cumulative bed strength of more than 5,000.
- The NCDC fund would give a boost to provision of healthcare services by cooperatives.
- NCDC would extend term loans to prospective cooperatives to the tune of Rs.10,000 Crore in the coming years.
General Economy

13. Surge in FDI

Why is it in news?
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry released Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) data for the first five months of the current financial year.

Details:
- During April-August 2020 period, India received the highest total FDI for the first five months of any financial year.
- Total FDI inflows surged from $11.51 billion between April and June to $35.73 billion by the end of August.
- Equity FDI more than quadrupled from $6.5 billion between April and June to $27.1 billion by August.
- The increased FDI is a result of FDI policy reforms, investment facilitation and ease of doing business.

More about FDI:
- FDI is an investment made by a company or individual in a country.
- It could be in a form of either establishing business operations or acquiring business assets in the other country.
- The ability to attract large scale FDI into India has been a key driver for policy making by the Government.
- Since 1991, the regulatory environment in terms of foreign investment has been consistently eased to make it investor-friendly.

14. World Bank’s GDP Contraction Forecast

Why is it in news?
- The World Bank expects India’s economy to contract by 9.6% in 2020-21.
- World Bank revised its earlier estimate in June that output will shrink by just 3.2% amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

More from World Bank:
- The revision reflects the impact of the national lockdown and the income shock experienced by households and firms.
- There will be a rebound to 5.4% growth in 2021-22, based on the assumptions that the pandemic-related restrictions are completely lifted by 2022.
- The Bank mooted continuation of critical reforms to reverse the sudden and steep impacts of COVID-19.

Context:
- India’s gross domestic product (GDP) contracted 23.9% in the first quarter of this year.
- Official estimates for the second quarter are expected at end-November.

15. RBI Keeps Repo rate Unchanged

Why is it in news?
The Reserve Bank of India extended its accommodative policy stance, as it held key policy rates unchanged in the face of high inflation.

RBI reiterated its resolve to revive growth impulses in the economy and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic’s worst impacts.

More from RBI:

- The real GDP is projected to contract by 9.5 per cent for the full fiscal year.
- The economy is likely to witness a recovery from 4th quarter (Q4).

16. India’s economy to contract by 10.3%: IMF

Why is it in news?

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF), released its 'World Economic Outlook' report 2020.
- According to the report, India’s economy is expected to contract 10.3% in the current fiscal year.

More from IMF Report:

- The Global output is projected to shrink 4.4% in 2020.
- The projection for India is a downgrade of 5.8% from its June forecast.
- India is expected to rebound in the fiscal year beginning in April 2021 with 8.8% growth.
- Consumer prices in India are expected to grow at 4.9% this year.
- The current account balance is projected to grow by 0.3% this year.
- After 2021, global growth is expected to ease off at 3.5% in the medium term.

About IMF:

- The IMF, also known as the Fund, was conceived at a UN conference in Bretton Woods, United States, in July 1944.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an organization of 189 countries, headquartered in Washington, D.C.
- The IMF’s primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system.

17. Impact of Pandemic on Start-ups

Why is it in news?

- According to a report, about 15% of start-ups in India had to discontinue their operations since March, due to the impact of pandemic and lockdowns.

Details:

- The overall funding of start-ups dipped by about 50% during the lockdown as compared to pre-COVID levels.
- The report noted that India exited 2019 as the third largest start-up ecosystem in the world with more than 38,000 active start-ups and receiving $14.5 billion in funding.
- In the second quarter of 2020 (April-June), the total funding declined 48% to $1.3 billion as against $2.5 billion in the same quarter last year.
However, the report expects a good pace of recovery in terms of demand once the economy opens.

### 18. Public Debt Ratio

**Why is it in news?**

- According to IMF, India’s public debt ratio is projected to jump by 17% to almost 90% because of an increase in public spending due to COVID-19.

**Details:**

- India’s public debt ratio has remained stable at about 70% of the GDP since 1991, before it increased due to covid-19.
- The increase in public spending, in response to the pandemic, and the fall in tax revenue and economic activity, will make public debt jump by 17%.
- However, it is projected to stabilise in 2021.

### 19. GST Cess will stay: Finance Panel Chief

**Why is it in news?**

- According to the chairperson of the Fifteenth Finance Commission N.K. Singh, the levy of compensation cess on GST may have to be extended.
- N.K. Singh has indicated the extension till as late as 2025-26.

**Details:**

- The core mandate of the Finance Commission is to determine the devolution of tax proceeds between the Centre and states.
- The 15th Commission’s report for the five-year period of 2021-22 till 2025-2026, will be submitted to the government soon.
- It will factor in unpaid compensation dues while working out States’ revenue flow calculations beyond 2022.

**Compensation Cess:**

- Compensation cess was introduced as relief for States for the loss of revenues arising from the implementation of GST.
- States were guaranteed a 14% tax revenue growth in the first five years after GST implementation by the Central government.
- Any shortfall against it is supposed to be compensated by the Centre using the funds specifically collected as compensation cess.
- Compensation cess is levied on products considered to be ‘sin’ or luxury goods.

### 20. Forex Reserves

**Why is it in news?**

- The country’s foreign exchange reserves touched a lifetime high of $555.12 billion after it surged by $3.615 billion in the week ended October 16.

**Forex Reserves:**

- Foreign exchange reserves are reserve assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies, used to back liabilities on their own issued currency as well as to influence monetary policy.
- The forex reserve is also kept as a cushion against any potential balanced of payment related crisis.
• India’s foreign exchange reserves comprises of (i) Foreign currency assets (FCA), (ii) Gold, (iii) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and (iv) Reserve tranche position (RTP) in the International Monetary Fund.

21. Fall in Rupee

Why is it in news?
• The rupee declined by 23 paise to close at a two-month low of 74.10 against the U.S. currency.

Details:
• The rupee breached the 74 level for the first time since August 26.
• On 28 October, the rupee had depreciated by 16 paise.
• Investors cut riskier bets after the imposition of fresh lockdowns in Europe to control resurging COVID-19 cases.
• General Consequences of Fall in Rupee Value:
  • Inflationary Pressure: It leads to higher landed cost for commodities imported into the country. Ex. Crude oil and Gold.
  • Increase in Exports: On the other hand, fall in rupee make Indian products cheap and increases export revenues in rupee terms.
  • CAD: The decline in value may also lead to widen India’s current account deficit further (CAD).

22. Fiscal Deficit Widens

Why is it in news?
• As per the official data, fiscal deficit widened in September 2020.

Details:
• The Fiscal Deficit reach Rs. 9.1 lakh crore. It is almost 115% of the budget target of Rs. 7.96 lakh crore for 2020-21.
• The Revenue Deficit hit 125.2% in the first half of the year.
• The revenue receipts continuing to suffer in view of lower economic activity due to COVID-19.

More about Fiscal Deficit:
• It indicates 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 indicates 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.

23. NAFED to import onions

Why is it in news?
• The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) is expected to begin importing onions in a bid to tame soaring prices.

Details:
• The government is currently facilitating import of onions by private traders.
• Around 7,000 tonnes of the bulb already having arrived in the country. Another 25,000 tonnes expected to arrive before Deepavali.

About NAFED:
• It is an apex organization of marketing cooperatives for agricultural produce in India.
• It was established on the day of Gandhi Jayanti on 2nd October 1958.
• It is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.
• Objective: To promote Co-operative marketing of Agricultural Produce to benefit the farmers.
• Agricultural farmers are the main members of Nafed, who have the authority to say in the form of members of the General Body in the working of Nafed.

24. OPEC hopeful of Demand Recovery

Why is it in news?
• The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is hoping that lockdowns and curfews in some countries will not dent global energy demand.

More from RBI:
• There is a risk of a second or third wave of COVID-19 infections in western countries.
• However, OPEC is hoping that the demand will not dent during the fresh waves of infection in the second quarter of this year.

About OPEC:
• The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a group of world’s major oil-exporting nations.
• OPEC was founded in 1960 at the Baghdad Conference by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.
• OPEC had 14 members, but Ecuador recently quit the group, leaving the group with 13 member nations.
• OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. Later it moved to Vienna, Austria in 1965.

Objectives of OPEC:
• To co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers.
• To provide member states with technical and economic aid.
Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

1. 13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue

Why is it in news?

• 13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Japanese counterpart Motegi Toshimitsu were held in Tokyo.

Details:

• India, Japan finalized text of pact for AI, 5G Cybersecurity agreement to promote cooperation between two countries
• The agreement promotes cooperation in capacity building, research and development, security and resilience in the areas of Critical Information Infrastructure, 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence.
• The Ministers reiterated that the Indo-Pacific region has become more important in the current global circumstances, and reaffirmed similarities in their vision

2. MEA defends free press after Chinese note on Taiwan event

Why is it in news?

• Chinese Embassy has emailed journalists to not to refer Taiwan as a “country” or a “nation” while covering a special event on October 10, organised by the Taipei Economy and Cultural Centre (TECC) in India.

Details:

• The Ministry of External Affairs reiterated that the Indian media is free and it reports on issues on merit.
• Email asked media to follow “One China Principle” with regard to the upcoming celebration of the “109th” anniversary of the “national” day of Taiwan.
• Beijing does not recognise Taiwan as an independent country or a nation.
• India has officially followed the “One-China principle”

3. Oli move on Nepal map hints at softer stand

Why is it in news?

• The PM of Nepal shared old map which does not show the region of Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura as a part of Nepal, which is part of India’s Pithoragarh district.

Background:

• Treaty of Sagauli 1816: It had considered this area as a part of Nepal. However, this understanding was changed subsequently.
• Practice during British Rule: Since 1870s itself the Survey of India showed this as part of India and
the Nepalese kings never objected to it.

- **Establishment of Constitutional Democracy in Nepal in 2008**: After the start of Constitutional democracy in Nepal, its leadership has considered the area as disputed.

- **2015 India – China Trade Deal**: It showed Lipulekh as one the trading pass between India and China. Nepal protested it as against its sovereignty.

- **New Political Map of India 2019**: Made after the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) showed Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura as part of Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand state Nepal protested strongly.

- **Inauguration of road at Lipulekh to Mansarovar in May 2020**: Nepal considered the decision to be unilateral and the subsequent inauguration of road further added fuel to the fire.

### 4. India to sign geo-spatial cooperation deal with U.S.

**Why is it in news?**

- Defence minister said that India and USA will sign India and the U.S. will sign the last foundational agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA) during the 2+2 ministerial dialogue.

**Details:**

- BECA is the fourth and final "foundational" understanding the US has with India.
- BECA will give India access to classified geo-spatial data as well as critical information having significant military applications.
- Under BECA, the two countries can exchange maps, nautical and aeronautical charts, commercial and other unclassified imagery, geophysical, geomagnetic and gravity data.
- The agreement will allow the US to share sensitive satellite and sensor data that would help India in striking military targets with pinpoint accuracy.
- India will be able to keep a close watch on the movements of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean.

### 5. India, Central Asian republics call for destruction of terror ‘safe havens’

**Why is it in news?**

- The External Affairs Minister attended second meeting of the India Central Asia Dialogue.

**Details:**

- The Central Asian republics joined India in demanding destruction of “safe havens” of terrorism.
- India strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirmed the determination of their countries to combat this menace by destroying terrorist safe-havens, networks, infrastructure and funding channels.
- India described the Central Asian region as India’s “extended neighbourhood”.
- India announced an additional $1 billion Line of Credit by India for the Central Asian countries which will be spent for major infrastructural and connectivity projects.
6. Iran Nuclear Deal

Why is it in news?
- Recently Chinese and Iranian officials extended support to Iran Nuclear Deal and proposed new forum for the diffusion of tensions in West Asia.

Background:
- Iran has been locked in an acrimonious relationship with Saudi Arabia, the other major West Asian power, over the war in Yemen, Iranian influence in Iraq and Saudi support for Washington’s sanctions on Tehran.
- China proposed to build a regional multilateral dialogue platform with equal participation of all stakeholders.

Iran Nuclear Deal:
- It is also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.
- Signed in 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
- Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.
- It was negotiated by the Obama administration but ultimately abandoned by Donald Trump.

7. Pak. action on terror funding insufficient

Why is it in news?
- Financial Action Task Force (FATF) observed that Pakistan's measures against money laundering and terror financing are not yet sufficient to justify a re-rating.

About FATF
- It is the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- The inter-governmental body sets international standards that aim to prevent these illegal activities and the harm they cause to society.
- As a policy-making body, the FATF works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- The FATF has developed the FATF Recommendations, or FATF Standards, which ensure a co-ordinated global response to prevent organised crime, corruption and terrorism.
- The FATF reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and continuously strengthens its standards to address new risks, such as the regulation of virtual assets, which have spread as cryptocurrencies gain popularity.
- The FATF monitors countries to ensure they implement the FATF Standards fully and effectively, and holds countries to account that do not comply.

8. Russia kicks off Caspian war games

Why is it in news?
- Russia said its Navy had begun military exercises in the central waters of the Caspian Sea north of the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

Details:
- The war games are taking place north of Azerbaijan’s Absheron peninsula, where Baku is located, and will include artillery and rocket fire
• Russia insisting that there was no threat to neighbouring states as Armenia and Azerbaijan battle over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.
• Russia has so far kept its distance from the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.
• But Armenia, unlike Azerbaijan, is a member of the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) military alliance and Yerevan has made clear it is hoping for Russian backing.

9. Iran hails lifting of UN arms embargo

Why is it in news?
• UN embargo on Iran for sales to and from Iran came to an end in line with a 2015 landmark nuclear deal

Details:
• Iran can now purchase weapons from Russia, China and elsewhere.

Iran Nuclear Deal:
• It is also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.
• Signed in 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
• Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.
• It was negotiated by the Obama administration.
• U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018.
• But Washington suffered a setback in August when it failed to win support from the United Nations Security Council to indefinitely extend the arms embargo.

10. China passes law to safeguard national security, sensitive tech

Why is it in news?
• China has passed a new law restricting sensitive exports to protect national security.

Details:
• It is formulated to safeguard national security and interests which adds to China’s regulatory toolkit which also involves a restriction catalogue of tech exports and an unreliable entity list.
• It allows Beijing to take reciprocal measures against countries that abuse export controls and pose a threat to national security.
• It is particularly seen as targeting against USA.

11. Azerbaijan and Armenia conflict

Why is it in news?
• A region disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has resulted in the death of at least 100 civilians and Armenian combatants.
• While the two countries have fought over the region for decades, the current conflict is being seen as one of the most serious in recent years.

More about the Dispute:
• The two former USSR states- Armenia and Azerbaijan have a dispute about the mountain region of Nagorno-Karabakh.
• It is an Armenian-controlled enclave.
However, the enclave is recognised internationally from the past three decades as a part of Azerbaijan.

Elections organised in the spring of 2020 by the self-declared government of Armenia was viewed as a provocation by Azerbaijan.

On September 27, Azerbaijan allegedly launched air and artillery attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, claimed that it was conducting a “counter-offensive in response to the military provocation.”

### International Institutions

#### 12. United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR)

**Why is it in news?**
- Recently election for UNHCR members were held.

**Details:**
- **UNHCR:**
  1. UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.
  2. It is 47 members body elected for 3 years.
- A coalition of human rights groups from Europe, the U.S. and Canada oppose the election of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, saying their human rights records make them unqualified.

#### 13. India at chairmanship of the Governing Body of ILO

**Why is it in news?**
- After 35 years, India has assumed the Chairmanship of the Governing Body of International Labour Organization.
- The Governing Body (GB) is the apex executive body of the ILO which decides policies, programmes, agenda, budget and elects the Director-General.

**International Labour Organization (ILO):**
- ILO was founded in 1919 to promote social justice.
- The ILO is responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labor standards.
- It is the only tripartite United Nations agency that brings together representatives of governments, employers, and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes promoting decent work for all.
- The ILO has 187 member states.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
1. Human-leopard conflict has increased threefold in Karnataka

Why is it in News?
• Threefold increase in leopard capture after GoI guidelines to mitigate Human-leopard conflict has been witnessed.

Details:
• The number of leopards captured per month increased from 1.5 to 4.6 after the human-leopard policy guidelines were brought out in 2011.
• There was an increase in the number of leopards translocated per month from 1 to 3.5.
• The highest number of translocations occurred into Bandipur Tiger Reserve (22.5%), followed by Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (20.6%) and Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (15%).

Indian Leopard:
(1) It is listed as ‘Vulnerable’ on IUCN list.
(2) It is listed in CITES Appendix I.
(3) Its populations have declined following habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching for the illegal trade of skins and body parts, and persecution due to conflict situations.
(4) The Indian leopard is one of the big cats occurring on the Indian subcontinent, apart from the Asiatic lion, Bengal tiger, snow leopard and clouded leopard.
(5) The Indian leopard is distributed in India, Nepal, Bhutan and parts of Pakistan.
(6) Highest population is recorded in MP (1817) followed by Karnataka (1129) as per 2014 census.

2. Transfer of Asiatic Lions

Why is it in News?
• Maharashtra Government requested Telangana to transfer two pairs of breeding lions to increase the animal population at Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

Details:
• Currently, there are three sibling lions in SGNP.
• Since inbreeding of wild cats is not allowed by the Central Zoo authority, SGNP has requested for a breeding pair of lions.

Asiatic Lion:
(1) It is currently located in Gir National Park, Gujarat.
(2) It is categorized as ‘Endangered’ under IUCN list due to its small population size and area of occupancy.
(3) In June 2020, an estimation exercise counted 674 Asiatic lions in the Gir forest region, an increase of 29 per cent over the 2015 census figure.
(4) The Gir lion is similar in size to the Central African lion and smaller than large African lions.
(5) In general, the Asiatic lion differs from the African lion by a less developed mane.
6. Asiatic lions mate foremost between October and November.
7. During these days, they usually do not hunt, but only drink water. Gestation lasts about 110 days.

### 3. Amazon risks changing from forest to savanna

**Why is it in News?**
- Study shows that approx. 40% of the Amazon risks crossing a tipping point from rainforest to savanna.

**Details:**

- **Reasons:**
  1. Greenhouse gas emissions reduce the rainfall needed to sustain its unique ecosystem.
  2. Forests are particularly sensitive to changes that affect rainfall for extended periods.
  3. As forests shrink, we get less rainfall downwind and this causes drying, leading to more fire and forest loss: a vicious cycle.
  4. 83% increase in forest fires in 2019 compared to 2018.

- **Savanna-like environment:**
  1. It witnesses far fewer trees.
  2. It is a mix of woodland and grassland.
  3. It also characterized by far less biodiversity.

- **Rain forests:**
  1. A rainforest is typically made up of four key layers: emergent, upper canopy, understory, and forest floor.
  2. In the top emergent layer, trees as tall as 200 feet (60 meters) grow far apart and tall, their branches reaching above the canopy.
  3. The upper canopy, a deep layer of vegetation roughly 20 feet (6 meters) thick, houses most of the rainforest's animal species.
  4. It forms a roof that blocks most light from reaching below.

- **Amazon rainforest:**
  1. It is a moist broadleaf tropical rainforest that covers most of the Amazon basin of South America.
  2. Amazonia is the largest river basin in the world, and its forest stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the tree line of the Andes in the west.
  3. The majority of the forest is contained within Brazil, with 60% of the rainforest, followed by Peru with 13%, Colombia with 10%.
  4. It covers minor amounts in Bolivia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela.
  5. It is one of Earth's last refuges for jaguars, harpy eagles and pink dolphins.
  6. Tree-dwelling species include southern two-toed sloths, pygmy marmosets, saddleback and emperor tamarins, and Goeldi's monkeys.

### 4. Dust responsible for snowmelt at higher elevation in western Himalayan Region

**Why is it in News?**
- A study published in the journal Nature Climate Change has found that dust has a large role to play in melting of snow, particularly at higher elevations.

**Details:**
Black carbon has a large effect on snow darkening and resultant melting of snow.

**Transportation:**
1. Dust particles get transported from as far as Saudi Arabia.
2. Westerlies transport dust particles as elevated aerosol layers at maximum intensities mostly during the pre-monsoon period.
3. It gets deposited in the Western Himalayan Region — Hindu Kush, Karakoram and western Himalaya ranges.

Black carbon emission is mostly a surface phenomenon and influences melting of snow from surface to about 3 km elevation.

**Black carbon Vs Dust:**
1. Black carbon has a larger snow albedo darkening effect than dust due to a larger mass absorption efficiency.
2. The radiative effects of dust deposited on snow are comparable to black carbon in the Western Himalayan Region at higher elevations.
3. This is mainly because the deposition of dust by mass is 100-1,000 times more than black carbon.

5. **Daring Cities 2020**

**Why is it in News?**
- CM Arvind Kejriwal will be among the five urban leaders from the world to speak at the prestigious ‘Daring Cities 2020’.

**Daring Cities 2020:**
- ICLEI and the Federal City of Bonn is organizing Daring Cities 2020.
- It is a virtual, global forum on climate change for urban leaders tackling the climate emergency, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Daring Cities showcases and catalyzes exemplary local climate action to tackle the climate emergency, including ambitious resilience-building and climate mitigation efforts.
- **It will explore:**
  1. Linkages between Global Climate and Nature Advocacy Agendas
  2. The role of digital technology in climate resilience
- ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development.
- Daring Cities builds upon the experience and network established during the Resilient Cities Congresses convened annually from 2010 to 2019 by ICLEI and the Federal City of Bonn.

6. **New crab species – tribute to Namdapha forests and Abor Hills**

**Why is it in News?**
- New crab species, Abortelphusa Namdaphaensis, is named after Arunachal Pradesh’s pristine forests.

**Details:**
- **About Crab:**
  1. It is a freshwater crab species.
  2. It is the first Gecarcinucidae family to be found in the Himalayan region.
  3. Potamidae species have a broad triangular abdomen, whereas in Gecarcinucidae, the abdomen is mostly T-shaped.
While the Gecarcinucidae is found in the peninsular region, Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats, Potamidae are found in the Himalayan region.

- **Namdapha**:  
  (1) It is located in Arunachal Pradesh.  
  (2) It is the largest protected area in the Eastern Himalayan Biodiversity Hotspot.  
  (3) It is believed to be the rare area that harbours four large cats: tigers, snow leopards, clouded leopards and leopards.

- **Abor Hills**:  
  (1) It is another rich biodiversity hotspot in Arunachal Pradesh.  
  (2) It is bordered by the Mishmi Hills and Miri Hills.  
  (3) They are historically known for the Abor Expedition — a punitive expedition against the Abors in the North-Eastern Frontier Agency from October 1911 to April 1912.  
  (4) Expedition revealed new floral and faunal species, making it a zoological and botanical expedition as well.

### 7. India- world’s highest sulphur dioxide producer

**Why is it in News?**  
- According to a report from Greenpeace India and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), though significant decline of 6% in 2019 compared to 2018, India is world’s highest sulphur dioxide producer

**Details:**  
- The data on sulphur emissions was sourced from the NASA Ozone Monitoring Instrument (OMI), a satellite-based device.  
- It has been monitoring air quality from space since 2004.

**Report:**  
(1) In 2019, India emitted 21% of global anthropogenic (human-made) SO2 emissions.  
(2) Russia and China occupied 2nd and 3rd position respectively.  
(3) the biggest emission hotspots in India, are thermal power stations (or clusters of power stations) at Singrauli, Neyveli, Sipat, Mundra, Korba, Bonda, Tamnar, Talcher, Jharsuguda, Kutch, Surat, Chennai, Ramagundam, Chandrapur, Visakhapatnam and Koradi.  
(4) Most coal plants in India are lacking in flue-gas desulfurization (FGD) technology, which is necessary to scrub emissions clean off sulphur.

**Sulphur dioxide:**  
(1) It is a colourless, bad-smelling, toxic air pollutant.  
(2) SO2 is emitted by the burning of fossil fuels — coal, oil, and diesel — or other materials that contain sulphur.  
(3) SO2, are emitted by the burning of fossil fuels — coal, oil, and diesel — or other materials that contain sulphur.  
(4) It can contribute to respiratory illness by making breathing more difficult, especially for children, the elderly  
(5) It increases the risk of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and premature death.

### 8. 3 contenders for national butterfly status

**Why is it in News?**  
- Krishna Peacock, Indian Jezebel, and Orange Oakleaf are 3 contenders for National butterfly status.
Details:

- **Krishna Peacock:**
  1. It is found in large numbers in the Himalayas.
  2. It has a peculiarly large swallowtail.
  3. It has iridescent green scales diffract light to coat itself in radiance.

- **Orange Oakleaf:**
  1. It is commonly known as ‘dead leaf’.
  2. It is due to its ability to camouflage as a dry autumn leaf while striking a stationary pose with its wings closed.
  3. It enables the species to prevent it from being devoured by birds.
  4. It is found in the moist forests of northern Western Ghats, central, northern and northeastern parts of India.
  5. It is known to exhibit polyphenism as it assumes specific colour and size during dry and wet seasons.

- **Indian Jezebel:**
  1. It is a medium-sized pierid butterfly.
  2. It is found in many areas of south and southeast Asia, especially in the non-arid regions of India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.
  3. They are generally found all over India, except in the desert tracts, and up to an altitude of 7,000 feet (2,100 m) in the hills.

**9. ‘Blue Flag Beach’**

**Why is it in News?**

- 8 beaches in India bagged the eco-label ‘Blue Beach’ from the international agency, Foundation for Environmental Education, Denmark.

  **‘Blue Flag Beach’:**
  - It is an eco-tourism model to provide tourists clean & hygienic bathing water, amenities, safe and healthy environment, sustainable development of area.

  **Criteria:**
  1. Environmental education and information
  2. Bathing water quality
  3. Environment management and conservation
  4. Safety & services in the beaches
  - The beaches that have been awarded the Blue Flag are Shivrajpur (Gujarat), Ghoghla (Diu), Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Odisha) and Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands).

**10. Pakistan butterfly and Chinese dragonfly now listed in India**

**Why is it in News?**

- The Butterfly ‘Spialia Zebra’ and Dragonfly ‘Athratothemis reelsi’ have been listed into indigenous species’ list.

**Details:**

- ‘Zebra skipper’:
  1. It has been added to the richness of Rajasthan’s orchid belt comprising Phulwari ki Nal wildlife sanctuary and Sita Mata wildlife sanctuary.
(2) It is very small and flies rapidly low over the ground.

- **Athratothemis reelsi:**
  (1) It is found in Arunachal Pradesh’s Namdapha Tiger reserve.

## 11. Protection of lesser flamingos

### Why is it in News?
- On World Migratory Bird Day on 10 October, experts from Mumbai came together to discuss ways to protect lesser flamingos.

### Details:
- After the loss of 2,000 hectares of wetlands for the Navi Mumbai International Airport and JNPT expansions, the habitat for flamingos and wetland birds has shrunk to 20% of original area.
- Presently, Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary is the last refuge for 1.5 lakh birds.

#### Lesser Flamingo:
- (1) It is a species of flamingo occurring in sub-Saharan Africa and northwestern India.
- (2) It is the smallest species of flamingo.
- (3) Most of the plumage is pinkish white.
- (4) The clearest difference between this species and the greater flamingo, the only greater flamingo, is the much more extensive black on the bill.
- (5) Presence of flamingo groups near water bodies is indication of sodic alkaline water which is not suitable for irrigation use.
- (6) In IUCN list, it is classified as near threatened due to its declining population and the low number of breeding sites.

## 12. Biological plant-virus ‘arms race’

### Why is it in News?
- A new study has discovered a new step in this arms race between the virus called Synedrella Yellow Vein Clearing Virus and the plants it attacks.

### Details:
- The virus first attacks the plant, and the plant has defences that are actually counter-attacks – mechanisms that seek to destroy the virus.
- In turn, the virus develops a counter-counter-attack by trying to escape being destroyed by the plant’s mechanisms.

#### Study:
- (1) The virus was isolated by the researchers from a plant named Synedrella nodiflora, and it was able to infect tobacco and tomato plant in their studies.
- (2) Without BetaC1, a viral protein, the virus will not be able to defeat the host attacks and also will not be able to completely infect the plant.
- (3) In turn, the plant develops defence mechanisms to destroy the virus. It targets the protein called BetaC1 made by the virus which helps in successful infection and intracellular movement within the plant.

## 13. Kerala Bird Atlas

### Why is it in News?
- Over 1000 birders worked together to create Kerala Bird Atlas for 5 years.

### Details:
• It is the largest project of its kind in Asia.
• It is conducted jointly by Kerala Agriculture University, Bird Count India and supported by Kerala Forest Department.
• It maps the distribution and abundance of birds of an entire Indian state for the first time.
• Kerala has the distinction of having six bird monitoring schemes, which includes recording common birds, heronries, water birds, pelagic (sea) birds, and forest birds.

14. Bhubaneswar’s Nandankanan zoo revives ‘adopt-an-animal’ scheme

Why is it in News?
• The Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) in Bhubaneswar suffered a huge loss following its closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
• It has revived its innovative ‘Adopt-An-Animal’ programme to mobilise resources for animals.

Details:
• The NZP is one of the leading zoos in the country in terms of its fauna population and species diversity.
• When one adopts an animal or a bird, the contribution goes to its care, feeding, enclosure enrichment and renovation.
• NZP:
  (1) It is a zoo and botanical garden in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.
  (2) It was established in 1960 and opened to the public in 1979.
  (3) It became the first zoo in India to join World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) in 2009.
  (4) Nandankanan, literally meaning The Garden of Heaven.
  (5) To help involve the general public in animal conservation and raise money, the zoo started the Adopt-an-Animal programme in 2008 for all of its animals.

15. Stubble Burning and Delhi

Why is it in News?
• Supreme Court bench appointed Justice Lokur one-man committee to monitor and prevent instances of stubble burning by 3 neighbouring states.

Details:
• About committee:
  (1) Justice Lokur will be helped by student volunteer forces to patrol highways and fields and ensure that no fires started in the fields.
  (2) The Supreme Court’s own Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) would consult with the committee on issues related to stubble-burning.
  (3) The committee will file its status reports with the court at least every fortnight.
• Reasons for Stubble Burning in north west rice-belt of india:
  (1) Changing rainfall patterns: leave farmers with an extremely short window to clear land for the sowing of winter crops.
  (2) Insufficient machinery: on ground to clear farms,
  (3) Little demand for biomass power plants.
  (4) No assurance: that early maturing seeds will ensure high yields.
  (5) Fall in ground water levels: forced farmers to delay planting until well into the monsoon.
delay pushed back the harvest.
(6) When farmers burn rice stubble, the tail of the monsoon has already passed. With no wind to disperse it, the smoke drifts idly south-east, converging in the skies over Delhi.

### 16. Delhi’s Green Crackers

**Why is it in News?**
- Green crackers will be made available for Diwali 2020 in Delhi after 2018 ban on fireworks.

**Details:**
- A ban on fireworks was imposed in 2018 and in 2019 only ‘green’ crackers were allowed.
- Pollution levels and Covid-19 will impact scare supply & demand this year.
- **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.

### 17. Dissolution of EPCA

**Why is it in News?**
- Centre has set up the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region to curb air pollution in Delhi and adjoining areas through ordinance route.

**Details:**
- It will replace the over 2-decade old Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA), which was responsible for curbing pollution.
- **Commission:**
  1. It comprises 18 members.
  2. Commission will comprise of representatives from the Union Ministries of Environment and Forests, Road Transport, Commerce, Science & Technology, Power and Agriculture.
  3. It will also comprise of the Union Cabinet Secretary, bureaucrats from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana; and members from ISRO, CPCB and the NIC.
  4. The Commission can lay down guidelines, and ask state governments to curb pollution and stubble burning.
  5. It is empowered to inspect any premises, order disconnection of water and electric supply, or close down any industry causing pollution.
  6. The central body will have to submit a yearly report in Parliament.
  7. Its orders can be challenged only in the National Green Tribunal (NGT), and no other civil court.

### 18. Graded Response Action Plan for Delhi Pollution
Why is it in News?
- Air pollution control measures under the “very poor” and “severe” categories of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) have been enforced in the NCR cities.

Details:
- The Supreme Court-appointed Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority (EPCA) had written to various States to implement the GRAP measures.
- If the pollution of Delhi further increases, then GRAP measures under “severe+ or emergency” category.
- The GRAP is a set of emergency measures to be taken to reduce air pollution.

GRAP Measures:
1. stopping entry of trucks into Delhi,
2. stopping construction activities
3. implementing the odd-even scheme.

The severe+ measures are implemented when –
1. The PM2.5 level crosses 300 microgram per cubic metre or PM10 level crosses 500 microgram per cubic metre
2. And persist for 48 hours or more.

Delhi government special measures:
1. It has been carrying out an anti-dust campaign and has imposed fines as high as ₹50 lakh on a single violator.
2. The government has also created a dedicated war room to monitor air pollution levels.
3. The Delhi pollution control committee has identified 13 pollution hotspots in the city.
(4) It announced Electric Vehicle policy under which incentives and benefits are extended to those buying electric vehicles.

- **Other measures:**
  1. Anti-smog guns at construction sites, a dedicated air monitoring cell, and night patrolling are some of the new initiatives taken by the Gurugram pollution control board.
  2. It has put into place the measures that includes ban on diesel generator sets, monitoring of open burning of the waste and mechanised sweeping of the roads.
  3. 45 devices are installed for monitoring of air emission in ‘red category’ industrial units and the real time data provided on the HSPCB and Central Pollution Control Board server for monitoring.

### 19. Air Pollution is biggest health risk in India

**Why is it in News?**
- According to ‘State of Global air 2020’ report, air pollution is the biggest health risk in India.

**Details:**
- Report is released by US based ‘Health Effects Institute’.

**Findings:**
1. Air pollution contributed to the death of 16.7 lakh people in India in 2019.

- **Infant deaths:**
  a. Outdoor and household particulate matter pollution contributed to the death of more than 1,16,000 Indian infants in their first month in 2019.
  b. More than half of these deaths were associated with outdoor PM2.5.
  c. Others were linked to the use of solid fuels such as charcoal, wood, and animal dung for cooking.

- **Long-term exposure to outdoor and household air pollution:**
  a. It contributed to over 1.67 million annual deaths.
  b. It is from stroke, heart attack, diabetes, lung cancer, chronic lung diseases, and neonatal diseases, in India in 2019.

- **Air pollution key factor:**
  a. There has been a slow and steady reduction in household reliance on poor-quality fuels.
  b. But air pollution from these fuels continues to be a key factor in the deaths of these youngest infants.

- **Low- and middle-income countries:**
  a. Addressing impacts of air pollution on adverse pregnancy outcomes and newborn health is important for these countries.
  b. South Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal, featured among the top 10 nations with the highest PM2.5 exposures in 2019.

- **Government Initiatives:**
  a. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana Household LPG programme and other schemes have helped to expand access to clean energy, especially for rural areas.
  b. The National Clean Air Programme has spurred action on major air pollution sources in cities and states around the country.

### 20. Water Grid to overcome flood crisis

**Why is it in News?**
- Union Minister Nitin Gadkari suggests formation of State Water Grid in Maharashtra to overcome...
flood crisis in the State.

Details:

- **Water Grid:**
  (1) Idea is to divert the flood water from the one river basin to the other river basin in the drought prone area.
  (2) Its ultimate aim is to solve the problem of flooding in some parts and water shortages in other parts along with the generation of hydroelectricity.

- **National Water Grid:**
  (1) The National Water Grid is a large scale engineering proposal for the management of water resources in India.
  (2) It will be done by the interlinking of the Indian rivers through networks of reservoir and canals.

- **Arguments in favour of it:**
  (1) Equalling unequal water distribution
  (2) Reduction in inter-state water disputes
  (3) Flood management.
  (4) Reduction in dependency of erratic monsoon
  (5) Moreland under cultivation and irrigation
  (6) Increase in productivity and revenue
  (7) Clean energy source
  (8) Water transport

- **Arguments against it:**
  (1) Costly affair
  (2) Environmental concerns
  (3) Rehabilitation issues
  (4) Salination.

21. Celebrating skinks

Why is it in News?

- Zoological Survey of India lists 62 species of Skinks.

Details:

- **ZSI findings:**
  (1) It is the first monograph on this group of lizards in the India.
  (2) About 57% of all the skinks found in India (33 species) are endemic.
  (3) Of the 16 genera of skinks found in India, four genera are endemic.
  (4) Sepsophis and Barkudia are limbless skinks found in the hills and coastal plains of the eastern coast.
  (5) Barkudia insularis is found only in the Barkud Island in Chilka lake in Odisha.
  (6) Barkudia melanosticta is endemic to Visakhapatnam.
  (7) Sepsophis punctatus is endemic to the northern part of Eastern Ghats.
  (8) Five species of Kaestlea (blue-tailed ground skinks) are endemic to the Western Ghats.
  (9) Four species of Ristella (Cat skinks) also endemic to the southern part of Western Ghats.

- **Skinks:**

Image Source: The Hindu
The Unique Academy

(1) Skinks are lizards belonging to the family Scincidae.
(2) Skinks are highly alert, agile and fast moving.
(3) They depend for food on a variety of insects and small invertebrates.
(4) Large species are herbivorous and consume fruits of various kinds.
(5) Some species lay eggs, while others give birth to fully developed young.
(6) The reduced limbs of certain skink species or the complete lack of them make their slithering movements resemble those of snakes.
(7) They are represented throughout most of the world but are especially diverse in Southeast Asia

22. Finance Ministry’s recommendation to divest Wildlife Institute of India

Why is it in News?
• The Finance Ministry recommended to divest the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) of its status as an autonomous body of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
• It has triggered anxiety among scientists at the organisation.

Details:
• Events:
  (1) The Finance Ministry moves follows a review by its Expenditure Department of 194 autonomous bodies across 18 Ministries.
  (2) Of them, 109 bodies must be merged into 26, and government must “disengage” from 23, one which is the WII.
• Finance Ministry:
  (1) In the case of WII, the government will cut funding to the WII by 25% every year.
  (2) It could become a ‘Deemed University’ engaged in teaching and research.
  (3) The Central government could continue to access WII advisory and training services as a “client.”
• WII stand:
  (1) There were too few students and courses offered by the institute for it to qualify as a Deemed University.
  (2) It had twice been rebuffed by the University Grants Commission on these grounds.
  (3) The major responsibility of this Institute is to provide advice to MoEFCC based on scientific information on policy and management of the country’s Wildlife Resources.
  (4) This role can only be performed and remains relevant as long as the institute remains a part of the MoEFCC
• WII:
  (1) The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate change.
  (2) It was established in 1982.
  (4) The institute is based in Dehradun, India.

23. Environmental clearance to Kaleshwaram is in violation of law- NGT

Why is it in News?
• The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has held that environmental clearance (EC) to Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) was granted ex post facto, after completion of substantial work.

• Such clearance by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) is “in violation of law”.

Details:

• NGT:
  (1) Accountability needs to be fixed and remedial measures be taken.
  (2) For that purpose, it has directed the ministry to constitute a seven-member expert committee.
  (3) Committee can be constituted preferably out of expert appraisal committee (EAC) members
     with relevant sectorial expertise to go into the matter.
  (4) Expert committee could assess the extent of damage caused in going ahead with the project
     without EC during the period from 2008 to 2017.
  (5) Committee will identify the necessary restoration measures.

• Kaleshwaram project:
  (1) It is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari River in Kaleshwaram, Telangana.

  ![Diagram of Kaleshwaram project](Deccan Herald)

  KALESHWARAM, INDIA'S LARGEST MULTI-STAGE LIFT IRRIGATION PROJECT
  1,531 km Gravity canal
  203 km Tunnel routes
  98 km Pressure mains/ Delivery mains
  19 Reservoirs
  20 Lifts
  141 TMC Storing capacity of reservoirs
  4992.47 MW Electricity required

  Image: Deccan Herald

  irrigation, Hyderabad municipal water, miscellaneous industrial uses and drinking water in
  nearby villages

24. CPCB flags unsafe disposal of cattle

Why is it in News?
• Central Pollution Control Board issues guidelines for incineration and calls for better use of
  remains for fertilizers.

Details:

• Observations:
  (1) About 30% of India’s dead cattle and 40% of goats weren’t skinned and nearly nine million
     bovine hides were “lost annually due to non-recovery.
  (2) Carcasses, especially those that result from the animal slaughter, are an ‘environmental
     hazard’.
  (3) There were nearly 25 million head of cattle including buffalo that died of natural causes and
there wasn't any organised system of disposal.
(4) While the hide was mostly removed for leather, the carcasses were frequently left to in the open.
(5) It attracted “vultures and dogs polluting the environment and creating environmental hazards. (6) This open dumping attracted birds which can cause air accidents

• **Guidelines:**
  (1) The draft guidelines require carcasses of livestock to be disposed off in incinerators
  (2) Municipal authorities must ensure that such facilities are set up and made available.
  (3) There is a need of setting up more ‘carcass utilisation plants’ where the parts of the animal could be used to make tallow, nutritional supplements and fertilizer.
  • However, the Board has not specified and deadline for the implementation of the guidelines.

### 25. Massive habitat decline for Himalayan Brown Bear by 2050

**Why is it in News?**
- The study carried out in the western Himalayas by scientists of Zoological Survey of India, predicted a massive decline of about 73% of the bear’s habitat by the year 2050.

**Details:**
- **Study:**
  (1) These losses in habitat will result in loss of habitat from 13 protected areas (PAs),
  (2) Eight of them will become completely uninhabitable by the year 2050.
  (3) It will be followed by loss of connectivity in the majority of PAs.
- **Why Himalayan Brown Bear study?**
  (1) ZSI has taken the Himalayan brown bear as an example because it is a top carnivore of the high-altitude Himalayan region.
  (2) The elevation gradient in which the brown bear is distributed is most vulnerable to global warming.
- **Himalayan brown bear:**
  (1) It is one of the largest carnivores in the highlands of Himalayas.
  (2) It occupies the higher reaches of the Himalayas in remote, mountainous areas of Pakistan and India, in small and isolated populations.
  (3) It is extremely rare in many of its ranges.
  (4) It is the largest mammal in the region, males reaching up to 2.2 m (7 ft) long while females are a little smaller.
  (5) While the brown bear as a species is classified as Least Concern by the IUCN, this subspecies is highly endangered.
  (6) It is ‘Endangered’ in the Himalayas and ‘Critically Endangered’ in Hindu Kush.

### 26. India is safe against Tsunami Threat

**Why is it in News?**
- India Is much safer against tsunami threat than it was in 2004 : INCOIS director

**Details:**
- In 2007, India had established state-of-the-art tsunami early warning system established at Indian National Centre for Ocean Information System (INCOIS).
- It can detect large under sea earthquakes in real-time.
- It provides a tsunami warning in 10 – 20 minutes after the earthquake occurrence.
The Unique Academy

• Recent focus areas:
  (1) Enhancing community awareness and response through several capacity building activities;
  (2) Conducting biennial Indian Ocean wide tsunami drills;
  (3) Piloting of the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready initiative to provide a structured framework to build and measure capacities of coastal communities to respond effectively to tsunamis.

• INCOIS:
  (1) It stands for ‘Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services’.
  (2) It is an autonomous organization of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, located in Hyderabad.
  (3) It is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services. It provides services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focussed research.

Social Issues

1. Global Hunger Index

Why is it in news?
• According to the latest Global Hunger Index 2020, India ranks 94 among 107 countries.
• India’s rank was 102 out of 117 countries last year.

More from the Report:
• The report has termed the level of hunger in India as “serious”.
• India features behind Nepal (73), Pakistan (88) and Bangladesh (75) among others.
• About 14% of India’s population is undernourished.
• India recorded a child stunting rate of 37.4%.

At Global Level:
• Globally, nearly 690 million people are undernourished.
• The world is not on track to achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal — known as Zero Hunger by 2030.
• At the current pace, approximately 37 countries will fail even to reach low hunger by 2030.

About the Index:
• The Global Hunger Index calculates the levels of hunger and undernutrition worldwide.
• The report, prepared jointly by Irish aid agency Concern Worldwide and German organisation Welt Hunger Hilfe.
• The score is calculated on four indicators- undernourishment, Child wasting, Child Stunting and Child Mortality.

2. STARS project

Why is it in news?
• The Union Cabinet approved the STARS project under the new National Education Policy 2020.
• Aim: To support states in strengthening the school education system

More about STARS project:
• STARS stands for Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS).
• STARS is a project with a total project cost of Rs 5718 crore.
• It also has the financial support of World Bank amounting to US $ 500 million.
• The project seeks to support the states in developing, implementing, evaluating and improving interventions with direct linkages to improved education outcomes and school to work transition strategies for improved labour market outcomes.
• The project would be implemented as a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme under Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education.

3. ASER Report

Why is it in news?
• The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), is recently released by NGO Pratham.
• The survey is conducted in September, the sixth month of school closures due to COVID-19 across the country.

Major Findings of the Report:
• About 20% of rural children have no textbooks at home.
• A third of children with smartphone access still did not receive any learning materials.
• A majority of the country’s 25 crore students are still at home after seven straight months.

Learning hit
Some highlights from the Annual Status of Education Report’s September survey:

- 5.3% of rural children aged 6-10 years are not enrolled in school this year, in comparison to just 1.8% in 2018
- Around 20% of rural children did not have textbooks at home by September
- About 70% of rural children did some learning activity. Of these, only 11% had live online classes
- Less than 36% of rural children received some learning materials or activities from the school.
- Almost 75% of such school interaction was via Whatsapp

Image Source: The Hindu

• Only 35% of children had textbooks.
• Only 60% had textbooks in Rajasthan.
• More than 98% had textbooks in West Bengal, Nagaland and Assam.

About ASER Report:
• ASER is a nationwide survey of rural education and learning outcomes in terms of reading and arithmetic skills.
• ASER focuses on a different aspect of children’s schooling and learning in alternate years.
• The survey is conducted by the NGO Pratham since 2005.

4. School Closure to Affect India Financially: World Bank
Why is it in news?
• According to the World Bank, school closures amid the COVID-19 pandemic could dent India’s future earnings.
• India could face loss anywhere between $420 billion and $600 billion, as depleted learning levels of students will translate into poorer productivity going forward

More from World Bank:
• As many as 5.5 million students could drop out of schools across South Asia.
• Dropouts, combined with substantial learning losses, would cost South Asia as much as $622 billion in future earnings and gross domestic product.
• South Asian governments spend only $400 billion a year on primary and secondary education.
• The average child in South Asia may lose $4,400 in lifetime earnings, once having entered the labour market.

Social Consequences of Lockdowns:
• World Bank has flagged “far-reaching consequences” of lockdowns, apart from the damage to businesses.
• Hardships over consumption patterns on poor and vulnerable households, especially urban migrants and informal workers.
• Labour productivity will also be hit from COVID-19 than most previous natural disasters, due to the disruptions in training and education.

5. Those facing sex abuse charges not to receive Bonus

Why is it in news?
• The new Code on Wages rules lays down norms for annual bonus dues that accrue to employees.

Details:
• Those indulging in sexual harassment of any form could run the risk of losing out on bonus dues from their employers.
• The Code on Wages lays down norms for annual bonus by replacing the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965.
• The new Code includes ‘conviction for sexual harassment’ as a ground for denying bonus payouts to employees.
• As per the extant law, bonus dues are barred only in case of employees dismissed for fraud, violent conduct and theft or sabotage.

6. India gained in life expectancy

Why is it in news?
• According to the latest study published in the Lancet journal, life expectancy in India has risen from 59.6 years in 1990 to 70.8 years in 2019.

More from the study:
• State-wise the life expectancy ranges from 77.3 years in Kerala to 66.9 years in Uttar Pradesh.
• The main improvement we see in almost every country, including in India, is a decline in infectious diseases and more rise in chronic diseases.
• While many parts of the world have also controlled infectious diseases through immunization, some countries still struggle to manage these epidemics.
• In the South Asia region, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) now contribute to more than half of
the years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death.

7. Rights of Domestic Workers

Why is it in news?
• According to a survey done in Bengaluru, a staggering 91% of domestic workers lost their salaries for April.
• Among 2,400 domestic workers during the first two weeks of May showed that 87% of the workers were told not to come to work after the lockdown.

Problems faced by Domestic workers during Pandemic and Lockdown:
• Denial of salaries and loss of employment.
• Harassment by employers and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)
• Anxiety over job security.

Science and Technology

1. 2020 Nobel Prize in Physics

Why is it in News?
• Three scientists won Nobel Prize in Physics for black holes.

Details:
• Discovery:
  (1) The formation of black holes was possible, based heavily on Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity.
  (2) There was “an extremely heavy, invisible object that pulls on the jumble of stars, causing them to rush around at dizzying speeds.”
• Black Holes:
  (1) A black hole is a place in space where gravity pulls so much that even light cannot get out.
  (2) The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space.
  (3) This can happen when a star is dying.
  (4) On 11 February 2016, the LIGO Scientific Collaboration and the Virgo collaboration announced the first direct detection of gravitational waves, which also represented the first observation of a black hole merger.
• How did we locate black holes?
  (1) When a black hole and a star are close together, high-energy light is made.
  (2) This kind of light cannot be seen with human eyes.
  (3) Scientists use satellites and telescopes in space to see the high-energy light.

2. Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) system

Why is it in News?
• India successfully conducted the flight test of a Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo
The Unique Academy

(SMART) system developed by DRDO.

Details:

- **What is SMART system?**
  1. SMART system comprises a mechanism by which the torpedo is launched from a supersonic missile system with modifications.
  2. It would take the torpedo to a far longer range than its own.
  3. Before, Torpedoes, self-propelled weapons that travel underwater to hit a target, are limited by their range.

- **Significance:**
  1. SMART is a game-changing technology demonstration in anti-submarine warfare.
  2. It is crucial in light of China’s growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

### 3. 2020 Nobel Prize for Chemistry

**Why is it in News?**

- Emmanuelle Charpentier, Jennifer Doudna share Nobel Prize for scissors to edit genes.

**Details:**

- **Discovery:**
  1. The CRISPR stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats.
  2. It is the technology for gene-editing which first developed in 2012.
  3. Though gene editing or modifying gene sequences is not new, CRISPR has made it easy and more efficient.

- **How it works?**
  1. Technology locates the specific area in the genetic sequence which has been diagnosed to be the cause of the problem.
  2. It cuts it out, and replaces it with a new and correct sequence that no longer causes the problem.
  3. An RNA molecule is programmed to locate the particular problematic sequence on the DNA strand.
  4. A special protein called Cas9, genetic scissor, is used to break and remove the problematic sequence.
  5. A DNA strand, when broken, has a natural tendency to repair itself.
  6. But the auto-repair mechanism can lead to the re-growth of a problematic sequence.
  7. Scientists intervene during this auto-repair process by supplying the desired sequence of genetic codes, which replaces the original sequence.
  8. Because the entire process is programmable, it has a remarkable efficiency.

### 4. Rudram Missile

**Why is it in News?**

- India’s first indigenous anti-radiation missile, Rudram was successfully flight-tested from a Sukhoi-30 MKI jet.

**Details:**

- **Anti-Radiation Missile:**
  1. It is designed to detect, track and neutralise the adversary’s radar, communication assets and other radio frequency sources.
  2. Navigation mechanism comprises –
(a) An inertial navigation system — a computerised mechanism that uses changes in the object’s own position
(b) GPS, which is satellite-based.
(3) It can detect, classify and engage radio frequency sources over a wide band of frequencies as programmed.

• Rudram:
  (1) Rudram is an air-to-surface missile.
  (2) It is designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
• Why name ‘Rudram’?
  (1) It includes the letters ARM (the acronym for anti-radiation missile).
  (2) The word in Sanskrit describes a “remover of sorrows” (one of its meanings).
• Significance:
  (1) It will enhance IAF’s Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) capability.
  (2) Anti-radiation missiles are used mainly in the initial part of air conflict to strike at the air defence assets of the enemy.
  (3) In later parts, it will lead to higher survivability to a country’s own aircraft.

5. FELUDA paper-strip test

Why is it in News?
• CSIR Director General announced that Feluda test to be commercially available by month-end.

Details:
• FELUDA stands for FNCAS9 Editor-Limited Uniform Detection Assay.
• It is a coronavirus detection test developed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and to be commercialised by Tata Sons.
• It still requires a nasal swab to be collected and sent to a lab.
• It promises to be quicker than the gold-standard test because it doesn’t need the expensive RT-PCR machine.
• A smaller, cheaper more portable machine called a thermocycler is employed.
• Once the viral RNA is extracted, it takes anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour to confirm presence of the virus.
• It uses a CRISPR-cas9 based system and therefore more accurate in detecting the virus.
• CRISPR-cas9 is a genome-editing tool.
• It showed 95% sensitivity (100% sensitivity means all positive samples return positive results).
• It also showed 98% specificity (100% specificity means all negative samples return negative results).
• Either saliva or blood is taken as a sample though saliva is preferred for testing.
• This is nucleic acid test and not a protein-based test.

6. Declining star formation in Milky Way

Why is it in News?
• New research sheds light on declining star formation in Milky Way.

Details:
• About research:
  (1) Research was carried out by the Pune-based National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA-TIFR) and Raman Research Institute (RRI) in Bengaluru.
(2) It used the upgraded Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) to measure the atomic hydrogen content of galaxies seen.
(3) These galaxies were eight billion years ago when the universe was young.

- **Findings:**
  (1) Galaxies in the universe are made up mostly of gas and stars, with gas being converted into stars during the life of a galaxy.
  (2) Galaxies formed stars at a higher rate when the universe was young than they do today.
  (3) The star formation activity in galaxies peaked about 8-10 billion years ago and has been declining steadily till today.
  (4) The cause of this decline was unknown as there had been no information regarding the amount of atomic hydrogen gas in galaxies in these early times.
  (5) Hydrogen is the primary fuel for star formation.

### 7. COVIRAP

**Why is it in News?**
- ICMR gave nod to new diagnostic test ‘COVIRAP’ for COvid-19.

**Details:**
- It is developed by IIT Kharagpur.
- Test is based on RNA samples from nasal swabs.
- It can deliver the result within an hour.
- It employs isothermal nucleic acid amplification method which did away need of thermocycler.

### 8. Final user trail of Nag anti-tank missile

**Why is it in News?**
- DRDO executes final user trial of 3rd generation Anti Tank Guided Missile (ATGM), Nag.

**Details:**
- It was launched from NAG Missile Carrier, NAMICA.
- As per DRDO, with this final user trial, NAG will enter into production phase.
- **NAG:**
  (1) It is also called “Prospina” for the land-attack version.
  (2) It is an third-generation, all-weather, fire-and-forget, lock-on after launch, anti-tank guided missile (ATGM).
  (3) It has an operational range of 500 m to 20 km.
  (4) It has a single-shot hit probability of 90%.
  (5) Development of the Nag is part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP) of DRDO.
  (6) The missile will be produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), while Ordinance Factory, Medak will produce NAMICA.

### 9. Satellite EOS-01

**Why is it in News?**
- ISRO would launch its latest earth observation satellite EOS-01 in November.

**Details:**
- This is the first launch by the Indian Space Research Organisation since the COVID-19-induced
lockdown.

- **EOS-01:**
  1. It is an Earth Observation satellite.
  2. It is intended for applications in agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
  3. It will be launched with PSLV.

### 10. LIGO and Virgo’s gravitational-wave catalog

**Why is it in News?**
- LIGO and Virgo announce new detections in updated gravitational-wave catalog.

**Details:**
- **Catalog:**
  1. An updated catalog of gravitational wave detections has been released by the LIGO Scientific Collaboration and the Virgo Collaboration.
  2. The catalog contains 39 new signals from black-hole or neutron-star collisions detected.
- **Gravitational Waves:**
  1. These were first detected in September 2015.
  2. A gravitational wave is an invisible (yet incredibly fast) ripple in space.
  3. Gravitational waves travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second).
  4. These waves squeeze and stretch anything in their path as they pass by.
  5. Einstein had predicted that something special happens when two bodies—such as planets or stars—orbit each other. He believed that this kind of movement could cause ripples in space.
  6. The most powerful gravitational waves are created when objects move at very high speeds.
  7. **Some examples of events that could cause a gravitational wave are:**
     a. When a star explodes asymmetrically (called a supernova)
     b. When two big stars orbit each other
     c. When two black holes orbit each other and merge

- **LIGO:**
  1. It stands for Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory.
  2. It is a large-scale physics experiment and observatory to detect cosmic gravitational waves.
  3. Two large observatories were built in the United States with the aim of detecting gravitational waves by laser interferometry.
  4. These observatories use mirrors spaced four kilometers apart which are capable of detecting a change of less than one ten-thousandth the charge diameter of a proton.

### 11. SHUKRAYAAN

**Why is it in news?**
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has proposed a mission to Venus dubbed ‘Shukrayaan-1’.

**Details:**
- The Shukrayan will orbit the planet and focus on to study its atmosphere.
- The mission is expected to be launched by 2025.
1. DRDO tests anti-radiation missile

Why is it in news?
• A new-generation anti-radiation missile, RudraM-I, was successfully flight-tested by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
• This is the first indigenous anti-radiation missile.

Details:
• Anti-radiation missile: Anti-radiation missiles are designed to detect, track and neutralise the adversary's radar, communication assets and other radio frequency sources, which are generally part of their air defence systems.
• **Rudram:**
  (1) Rudram is an air-to-surface missile.
  (2) While the system has been tested from a Sukhoi-30 MKI, it can be adapted for launch from other fighter jets too.
  (3) An official said the Sanskrit name Rudram was given in keeping with tradition, because it includes the letters ARM (the acronym for anti-radiation missile) and the word in Sanskrit describes a “remover of sorrows” (one of its meanings).

2. PASSEX

Why is it in news?
• The Indian Navy is holding a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier group.

Details:
• It is a naval exercise between India and USA with major focus on freedom of navigation.


Why is it in news?
• The Union Home Ministry has asked all NGOs seeking foreign donations to open a designated FCRA account at the State Bank of India’s New Delhi branch by March 31, 2021.

Details:
• In September, the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2020 was amended by Parliament and a new provision that makes it mandatory for all NGOs and associations to receive foreign funds in a designated bank account at SBI’s New Delhi branch was inserted.
• As of now there are 22,434 such NGOs and associations active under the FCRA.
• The order said an NGO will have to report the amount and source of foreign remittance received to the authorities.

Infodemic
Why is it in news?
• According to Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, World Health Organization (WHO), managing the “infodemic” has been a serious challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic.
• About Infodemic: Having too much information, including false or misleading information, particularly on social media, which leads to confusion, risk-taking and ultimately mistrust towards governments and the public health response.

4. Hybrid model of ‘smart’ fence being tested along the LoC

Why is it in news?
• The Army is test Smart fence along the LOC
Details:
• The new hybrid model of the smart fence being tested will cost around Rs. 10 lakh per km and 60 km is being attempted this year.
• The earlier proposal for a hi-tech fence was to cost around Rs. 10 crore for 2.4 km. A Rs. 10 crore type trial was done in the Army’s 19 Division last year, but it was too expensive so no more contracting was done
• The fence will be integrated with LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) sensors, infrared sensors and cameras among others.

5. Malabar Exercise

Why is it in new?
• Malabar exercise is going to start from next week.
Details:
• The exercise consisting of India, Japan and the U.S., to be held next month.
• Australia had first requested to join more than three years ago.
• This year, the exercise had been planned on a ‘non-contact - at sea’ format.
• The decision to include Australia will bring all Quad countries together as part of the annual war games.

More about Malabar Exercise:
• Malabar began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992, and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
• Australia had made repeated requests for admission into this exercise.

6. Indian Coast guard Vessel Kanaklata Barua

Why is it in new?
• A Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) named ICGS Kanaklata Barua was commissioned in the Indian Coast Guard, in Kolkata.
Details:
• It is named after a teenage freedom fighter who was shot dead in Assam during the Quit India Movement.
• It is the fifth and last in a series of FPVs built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) Ltd.
• GRSE is a shipbuilding company in India under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defense and located in Kolkata.
The other four are ICGS Priyadarshini (named after Indira Gandhi), ICGS Annie Besant, ICGS Kamala Devi (after Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay), and ICGS Amrit Kaur.

About Kanaklata Barua:
- One of the youngest martyrs of the Quit India Movement, Kanaklata Barua has iconic status in Assam.
- Barua, then 17, led the Mukti Bahini, a procession of freedom fighters to unfurl the Tricolour at Gohpur police station on September 20, 1942.
- When police did not let them move forward, an altercation led to firing, killing Barua at the head of the procession.

7. Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) system

Why is it in new?
- India successfully conducted the flight test of a Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) system developed by DRDO.

What is SMART system?
1. SMART system comprises a mechanism by which the torpedo is launched from a supersonic missile system with modifications.
2. It would take the torpedo to a far longer range than its own.
3. Before, Torpedoes, self-propelled weapons that travel underwater to hit a target, are limited by their range.

Significance:
- SMART is a game-changing technology demonstration in anti-submarine warfare.
- It is crucial in light of China’s growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

8. 'Vigraha'

Why is it in news?
- The seventh offshore patrol vessel (OPV) of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), 'Vigraha' was formally launched at Kattupalli.

Details:
- The vessel built by Larsen and Toubro is the last in the series of seven OPVs.
- The OPVs were contracted to Larsen and Toubro by the Ministry of Defence in 2015.
- It was for the first time that a private sector shipyard has undertaken the design and construction of offshore patrol vessel class of ships.
- OPVs are long-range surface ships, capable of operation in maritime zones of India, including island territories with helicopter operation capabilities.
1. Tanjavur Art Plate

Why is it in News?
- Makers of the Tanjavur Art Plate are coming together for its cultural and commercial rejuvenation.

Tanjavur Art Plate:
- History:
  1. It is also known as Thanjavur kalai.
  2. It incorporates embossing, etching, engraving and filigree on metallic surfaces.
  3. It was patronised by Maratha ruler Serfoji II (1777-1832).
  4. Thanjavur Art Plate was given a Geographical Indications (GI) tag in 2007.
- How is it made?
  1. A hot paste of pungaliya tree resin and brick powder or red sand is poured into orifices of vessels which solidifies as it cools.
  2. It allows the artisan to work on the outer surface without denting the base.
  3. Once the design is finished, the solid paste is carefully removed from the interiors.
  4. The silver that use in these plates is 99.9% pure, because foil work cannot be done alloyed metal.
- Design:
  1. Religious motifs such as Ashtalakshmi (eight avatars of Goddess Lakshmi) and Dasavatharam (10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu), are commonly used on Thanjavur Art Plates.
  2. But designs can be varied to include corporate logos and Nature themes also.

2. Bommai Golu

Why is it in News?
- South Indian Navaratri tradition ‘Bommai Golu’ is being celebrated virtually due to covid-19 crisis.

Bommai Golu:
- It is the south Indian tradition of displaying dolls.
- These displays are typically thematic, narrating a legend from a Hindu text or a secular cultural issue.
- They are also known as Kolu, Gombe Habba, Bommai Kolu or Bommala Koluvu.
- Each displayed item in a golu display is sometimes called golu doll or equivalent.
- These are typically made by rural artisans from clay and local materials then brightly painted.
- They are generally arranged in an odd number of padis (tiers) to tell a story.
- It includes inviting guests home to sing together, sharing bowls of piping hot sundal and go golu hopping.
- Major Hindu temples such as the Meenakshi temple arrange elaborate golu displays each year for Navaratri.
- Originally a Tamil Brahmin practice, Golu displays are now popular in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and
3. Malayalam Poet Akkitham passed away

Why is it in News?
• ‘Mahakavi’ Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri died.

Details:
• He was honoured with Jnanpith Award recently.
• Akkitham
  (1) He became the sixth writer to bring Jnanpith Award to Malayalam literature.
  (2) He is the only living poet being called Mahakavi (great poet) in Malayalam.
  (3) His famous works are Pathalathinte Muzhakkam, Irupatham Noottandinte Ithihasam, and Balidarshanam.
  (4) He was awarded Padmashri in 2017.
  (5) He was the co-editor of Mangalodayam and Yogakshemam journals.

PIB GIST

1. First UN Biodiversity Summit

Why is it in News?
• United Nations(UN) held Biodiversity Summit on the occasion of 75th anniversary of the UN General Assembly.

Details:
• UN had celebrated Decade on Biodiversity during 2011-2020.
• The summit is first of its kind ever taken place on Biodiversity in the United Nations General Assembly.
• India:
  (1) “There is an urgent need to accelerate action to conserve biodiversity”
  (2) India commits to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
  (3) India’s forest and tree cover, over the decade, encompassed nearly 25% of its geographical area.
  (4) India had doubled its tiger count (from 2010) ahead of the prescribed deadline of 2022.

2. 100-days Mission Mode Campaign

Why is it in News?
• Union Minister of Jal Shakti launches 100-days Mission Mode Campaign to provide potable piped water supply in Schools & Anganwadi Centres.

Details:
• It will ensure piped safe water in schools and anganwadi centres across the country.
• Ensuring safe water to children is a priority, as they are the most vulnerable to water-borne
3. Diamond jubilee of Shipping Corporation of India

Why is it in News?
- Government virtually launched diamond jubilee celebration of Shipping Corporation of India, on the occasion of its foundation day.

Details:
- SCI completed its 59 glorious years and entering into 60th year.
- SCI:
  1. It is a Government of India Public Sector Enterprise.
  2. It operates and manages vessels that services both national and international lines.
  3. It was established on 2 October 1961 by the amalgamation of Eastern Shipping Corporation and Western Shipping Corporation.
  4. SCI was awarded the prestigious "Navratna" status by the Indian Government in 2008.
  5. In 2019, the Government of India approved the privatisation of SCI.
  6. Services:
     a. Cruise liner and Passenger services
     b. Bulk carrier and tanker services
     c. Offshore services

4. RAISE 2020 summit

Why is it in News?
- RAISE 2020- ‘Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020’ summit is being held in Delhi.

Details:
- It is a first-of-its-kind, global meeting of minds on Artificial Intelligence to drive India's vision and roadmap for social transformation, inclusion and empowerment through responsible AI.
- It was organized by Government of India along with Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and NITI Aayog.
- The Prime Minister wished India to become a global hub for Artificial Intelligence.
- National Educational Technology Forum will create an e-Education unit to boost the digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity.
- National Programme on Artificial Intelligence will be dedicated for solving problems of society.

5. Ratification of seven Persistent Organic Pollutants

Why is it in News?
- The Union Cabinet has approved the Ratification of seven (7) chemicals listed under Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

Details:
- The Cabinet further delegated its powers to ratify chemicals under the Stockholm Convention to Union Ministers of External Affairs (MEA) and Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MEFCC).
• This delegation is in respect of POPs already regulated under the domestic regulations.
• The regulation prohibited the manufacture, trade, use, import and export seven chemicals.
• **Seven chemicals:**
  (1) Chlordecone
  (2) Hexabromobiphenyl
  (3) Hexabromodiphenyl ether & Heptabromodiphenylether (Commercial octa-BDE)
  (4) Tetrabromodiphenyl ether and Pentabromodiphenyl ether (Commercial penta-BDE)
  (5) Pentachlorobenzene
  (6) Hexabromocyclododecane
  (7) Hexachlorobutadiene
• **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants:**
  (1) It is an international environmental treaty, signed in 2001 and effective from May 2004.
  (2) It aims to eliminate or restrict the production and use of persistent organic pollutants (POPs).
  (3) India had ratified the Stockholm Convention in 2006.
• **POPs:**
  (1) POPs are identified chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate in living organisms.
  (2) It adversely affect human health/ environment and have the property of long-range environmental transport (LRET).
  (3) Exposure to POPs can lead to cancer, damage to central & peripheral nervous systems, diseases of immune system, reproductive disorders and interference with normal infant and child development.

### 6. Physical distribution of Property Cards under the SVAMITVA Scheme

**Why is it in News?**
• Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched physical distribution of property cards under SVAMITVA scheme through video conferencing.

**Details:**
• 1 lakh beneficiaries from Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have been handed over the legal papers of their houses.
• **SVAMITVA scheme:**
  (1) SVAMITVA stands for Survey of villages and mapping with improvised technology in village areas.
  (2) Scheme is a new initiative of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
  (3) It aims to provide rural people with the right to document their residential properties so that they can use their property for economic purposes.
  (4) The scheme is for surveying the land parcels in rural inhabited area using Drone technology.
  (5) The survey shall be done across the country in a phase wise manner over the period of four years (2020 -2024)

**6) Objectives:**
(a) To bring financial stability to the citizens in rural India by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
(b) Creation of accurate land records for rural planning.
(c) Determination of property tax, which would accrue to the GPs directly in States where it is devolved or else, add to the State exchequer.
(d) Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS maps that can be leveraged by any department.
The Unique Academy

for their use.
(e) To support in preparation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) by making use of GIS maps.
(f) To reduce property related disputes and legal cases

7. ADB and India

Why is it in News?
• ADB and India signed loan for Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Details:
• MP:
  (1) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India signed a $270 million loan.
  (2) Loan is intended to develop water supply and integrated storm water and sewage management infrastructure and strengthen capacities of urban local bodies (ULBs).

• Rajasthan:
  (1) The Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a $300 million loan.
  (2) Loan is intended to finance inclusive and sustainable water supply and sanitation infrastructure and services in 14 secondary towns of the Rajasthan.

8. Exercise Suraksha Kavach

Why is it in News?
• Exercise Suraksha Kavach- Joint Anti-Terrorist Exercise by Army and Police was organized.

Details:
• The exercise involved participation of Quick Reaction Teams, Dog Squads and Bomb Disposal Teams of Army as well as Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and Quick Reaction Team of Maharashtra Police.
• Joint action to neutralize terrorists involved room intervention drill, search of room for any unidentified items/explosives by Dog squads and their neutralization/ diffusion by Bomb Disposal Units.

9. Re-election as President of International Solar Alliance (ISA)

Why is it in News?
• India and France re-elected as President and Co-President of the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

Details:
• India and France were re-elected for a term of two years.
• The International Solar Alliance (ISA):
  (1) It is a treaty based inter-governmental organization.
  (2) It is working to create a global market system to tap the benefits of solar power and promote clean energy applications.
  (3) It is an alliance of 121 countries initiated by India.
  (4) Most of countries are sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
  (5) This initiative was first proposed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a speech in November 2015 at Wembley Stadium, in which he referred to sunshine countries as Suryaputra ("Sons of the Sun")
10. Work begins at Zozila tunnel

Why is it in News?
• Union Minister for Road Transport, Highways and MSMEs initiated the ceremonial blasting for Zozila Tunnel in J&K.

Zozila tunnel:
• It will provide all-weather connectivity between Srinagar valley and Leh (Ladakh plateau) on NH-1.
• It will bring about an all-round economic and socio-cultural integration of Jammu & Kashmir.
• It involves construction of a 14.15 Km long tunnel at an altitude of about 3000 m under Zozila pass.

11. Maritime Exercise SLINEX-20

Why is it in News?
• Indian Navy (IN) – Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) bilateral maritime exercise SLINEX-20 started at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

SLINEX-20:
• SLINEX-20 aims to enhance inter-operability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations between both navies.
• The exercise will showcase capabilities of our indigenously constructed naval ships and aircraft.
• Surface and anti-air exercises include weapon firing, seamanship evolutions, manoeuvres and cross deck flying operations.

12. Country's first multi-modal logistic park in Assam

Why is it in News?
• Union Minister for Road Transport, Highways and MSMEs laid the foundation stone for country’s first Multi-modal Logistic Park in Assam.

Details:
• It will be located at Jogighopa in Assam.
• It will be developed under the Bharatmala Pariyojana of the Government of India.
It will be connected to road, rail, air and waterways.

13. India and Nigeria space cooperation

Why is it in News?
• Cabinet approves MoU between India and Nigeria on Cooperation in the Exploration and uses of outer space for peaceful purposes.

Details:
• **Areas of cooperation:**
  1. Remote sensing of the earth;
  2. Satellite communication and satellite-based navigation;
  3. Space science and planetary exploration;
  4. Use of spacecraft, launch vehicles, space systems and ground systems;
  5. Practical applications of space technology including geospatial tools and techniques;

14. Bundi Architectural Heritage

Why is it in News?
• Ministry of Tourism organises a webinar on “Bundi: Architectural Heritage of a Forgotten Rajput Capital” under Dekho Apna Desh Webinar Series.

Bundi Architectural Heritage:
• Bundi erstwhile capital of Hada Rajput province known as Hadauti located in south-eastern Rajasthan.
• Bundi is also known as City of stepwalls, blue city and also as Chotti Kashi.
• Garh Mahal became the focus and an imposing landmark on skyline of Bundi was visible from the valley below.
• Best example of medieval Indian city exhibiting water harvesting methods adopted at settlement level as well as finest examples of water architecture.

15. India and Japan MoU

Why is it in News?
• Cabinet approves Memorandum of Cooperation between India and Japan.

Details:
• MoU is related to cooperation in the field of Information and Communication Technologies.
• It will serve as a strategic initiative for India as Japan is an important partner with “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” status.
• **Cooperation areas between two countries:**
  1. 5G network, telecom security,
  2. Submarine cable, standard certification of communication equipment,
  3. Utilization of latest Wireless Technologies and ICTs,
  4. ICTs capacity building,
  5. Public Protection and Disaster Relief,
  6. Artificial Intelligence (AI) / Block Chain,
  7. Spectrum Chain, Spectrum Management etc.
1. Nobel Peace Prize 2020

Why is it in news?
- Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize 2020 to the United Nation’s (UN) World Food Programme (WFP).
- WFP has been awarded for its efforts to combat hunger and for its contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict-affected areas.
- The Nobel Peace Prizes have been awarded since 1901 and was not awarded on 19 occasions including 1914-1916, 1918, 1939-1943 among some other years.

More about World Food Programme (WFP):
- It is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations.
- WFP is also world’s largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- It was established by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and the United Nations General Assembly in 1963.
- In 2019, the WFP provided assistance to close to 100 million people in 88 countries who are victims of acute food insecurity and hunger.

2. Successful bidder cannot withdraw offer: NCLAT

Why is it in news?
- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has said that once a resolution plan for a debt-ridden company is approved by the lenders, the successful bidder cannot be permitted to withdraw its offer.

More from NCLAT:
- The sanctity of the resolution process has to be maintained.
- The withdrawal by a successful bidder ‘frustrates’ the entire exercise of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process.
- There is also no express provision in the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code to allow any successful resolution applicant to ‘stage a U-turn’.

About NCLT and NCLAT:
- The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body in India adjudicating issues concerning companies in the country.
- It was formed in 2016, as per the provisions of the Companies Act 2013 (Section 408) by the Indian government.
- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) was constituted under Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of (NCLT).

3. Invest India Conference in Canada
Why is it in news?
• Prime Minister Modi delivered a keynote address at the Invest India Conference in Canada.
• The conference was organised to strengthen business ties between India and Canada.

Details:
• Prime Minister invited Canadian investors to invest in India.
• Prime Minister gave references of his government’s latest labour, education and agriculture reforms, saying they will make doing business in India easier.

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.
• It provides sector-specific and state-specific information to a foreign investor, assists in expediting regulatory approvals, and offers hand-holding services.
• 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.

4. Atal Tunnel

Why is it in new?
• Prime Minister Modi inaugurated Atal Tunnel in Rohtang, Himachal Pradesh.

Details:
• Atal Tunnel is the highest altitude tunnel in the world and has strategic significance.
• The decision to construct a strategic tunnel below the Rohtang Pass was taken in 2000 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister.
• The 9.02 km long tunnel connects Manali to Lahaul-Spiti valley.
• The tunnel is in the Pir Panjal range of Himalayas at an altitude of 3000 metres (10,000 feet).

Image source: Indian Express

5. Nobel Prize in Economics

Why is it in news?
• The U.S. economists Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson won the Nobel Economics Prize for 2020.

Details:
• The American duo won the prize for their work on commercial auctions, including for goods and services difficult to sell in traditional ways such as radio frequencies.
• The duo was honoured “for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats.
• The Nobel Prize in Economics is been awarded by Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

More:
• Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson, have studied how auctions work.
• They have also used their insights to design new auction formats for goods and services that are difficult to sell in a traditional way, such as radio frequencies.
• Their discoveries have benefitted sellers, buyers and taxpayers around the world.

6. Bio-decomposer solution

Why is it in news?
• The Delhi Chief Minister kick-start the process of spraying a newly developed bio-decomposer solution on 700-800 hectares of paddy fields in Delhi.

Details:
• The bio-decomposer solution is developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI).
• The solution promises to turn crop residue into manure without having to burn the stubble.
• The solution is useful to overcome the problem of stubble burning and subsequent air pollution.

7. Australia to take part in Malabar

Why is it in news?
• The Ministry of Defence announced that Australia will join the Malabar 2020 naval exercise.

Details:
• The exercise consisting of India, Japan and the U.S., to be held next month.
• Australia had first requested to join more than three years ago.
• This year, the exercise had been planned on a ‘non-contact - at sea’ format.
• The decision to include Australia will bring all Quad countries together as part of the annual war games.

More about Malabar Exercise:
• Malabar began as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992, and was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
• Australia had made repeated requests for admission into this exercise.

8. U.K. to partner for developing GIFT City

Why is it in news?
• The United Kingdom has entered into a strategic partnership to develop the GIFT City.
• U.K. also agreed to set up a new Fund of Funds to be managed by the State Bank of India (SBI) group.

Details:
• GIFT city is India’s fledgling international financial services centre.
• The new Fund of Funds would be set up in order to route the U.K.’s future capital investments into India.
• India and the U.K. signed off on a new infrastructure finance and policy partnership.
• The policy partnership to help India execute its National Infrastructure Pipeline that envisages investments worth $1.4 trillion.

India-U.K. Trade Relations:
• Bilateral trade between India and the U.K. stood at £24 billion in 2019.
• India is now the second-largest project investment source for the U.K.
• U.K. and India announced a joint investment of £8 million.
• The joint investment to help combat the pandemic and further the research to understand and address the factors leading to the severity of the novel coronavirus.

9. Red Light on, Gaadi Off campaign

Why is it in News?
• Delhi government and the police started ‘Red Light On, Gaadi Off’ (red light on, ignition off) campaign to reduce vehicular emission.

Details:
• It will urge drivers to turn off their ignition to reduce vehicular emissions.
• This will be an awareness campaign and drivers will not be penalised for not turning off their engines.
• The campaign will be carried out at 100 traffic signals identified by the traffic police.
• The government estimates that nearly 15-20% vehicular pollution can be controlled, if people cooperate and participate in this mass campaign.

10. First-ever ‘asteroid mining robot’

Why is it in News?
• China will soon out the world’s first mining robot into space by November 2020.

Details:
• A private Beijing company, Origin Space, will send out the robot—termed as an ‘asteroid mining robot’ into space.
• The robot will, however, not do any actual mining.
• The mission will be a preliminary assessment of the asteroid mining robot’s capabilities of identifying and extracting valuable resources, aimed at the eventual mining of asteroids.

11. Kerala became the First Digital State in Public Education

Why is it in News?
• Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has declared the state public education sector completely digital as Kerala has become the first state in the country to have high-tech classrooms in all its public schools.

More:
• The high-tech classroom project was implemented by Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE).
• The policy partnership to help India execute its National Infrastructure Pipeline that envisages investments worth $1.4 trillion.

India-U.K. Trade Relations:
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