



## IS THE ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT PAST ITS EXPIRY DATE ?



### Context

- ◆ The recent killing of civilians in Nagaland by the Indian armed forces has put the spotlight on the efficacy of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) of 1958. If its justification was to quell militancy and make way for the peaceful integration of insurgency-hit regions, has it served its purpose? Article discusses the moral, legal and political questions pertaining to the controversial legislation and its impact.

### Assessment

- ◆ The Santosh Hegde Committee, appointed by the Supreme Court noted in its report in 2013 that the “continuous use of the AFSPA for decades in Manipur has evidently had little or no effect on the situation”. In Nagaland, because of the peace talks, most of the outfits have come under one umbrella, the NSCN(I-M) [National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)]
- ◆ The Supreme Court said that a grave situation of law and order must occur for a region to be declared a ‘disturbed area’ and that Section 3 of the AFSPA cannot be construed as conferring power to issue a declaration without any time limit. The Disturbed Areas Act is reviewed every six months because without it in place, you cannot have the AFSPA. In 2015, the Tripura Chief Minister, cited a drop in militancy to revoke the Disturbed Areas Act, with which the AFSPA too went away.

- ◆ However, the normalisation of the situation in many parts of the country — be it in Mizoram; Tripura; or areas south of the Pir Panjal in Jammu and Kashmir — was made possible by the armed forces. They couldn’t have done this without the legal provision for their deployment in counter-insurgency areas.
- ◆ But despite this, the final solution to insurgency or terrorism is not military in nature, it is political and economical. The army has normalised the situation many times in J & K and the Northeast. But the State governments, and to a certain extent the Central government, have not been able to carry forward the political process.
- ◆ The prolonged deployment of the armed forces for internal security duties is not desirable. No one wants to be fighting their own people. The State governments must review the security situation and see if they need the presence of the Army and the Assam Rifles in their States. They need to see if their police forces are capable of handling the situation.
- ◆ If they don’t feel the need to have the army or the Assam Rifles, they should ask for the withdrawal of these forces. The AFSPA is just a tool; it’s the legal provision for the army to operate in these areas however, State police forces should be enabled to control the situation on their own. The army should be preparing all the time for war against external aggression.

## WRONG FORUM

- ◆ Currently, all matters related to climate change are being discussed in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a specialized agency. And with over 190 members, its framework has made progress in tackling climate change. It is this process that led to the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement and the recent COP26 summit, and has put in place an international approach to combat global climate change.
- ◆ Now a resolution by Ireland and Niger argued that the climate is creating security risks in the world, which will exacerbate in the future with water shortage migration and a destruction of livelihoods. Germany had circulated a similar draft last year which was never put to vote in the Security Council as the Trump administration opposed it. Now, with support from the Biden administration, the developed world is pushing to include what they call ‘climate security’ in the agenda of the UNSC.

- ◆ However, the resolution was voted down by India and Russia — it has veto powers — while China abstained.
- ◆ While the urgency to take action to take climate change is appreciated, the attempt to securitise the climate agenda could have unintended consequences. Bringing the issue under the UNSC will also give more powers to the world's industrialised countries, which hold a veto power, to decide on future action on climate related security issues.

## ENFORCING AGE OF MARRIAGE



- ◆ Personal laws that govern marriage and other personal practices for communities prescribe certain criteria for marriage, including age of the bride and groom.
- ◆ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, sets a minimum age of 18 for the bride and 21 for the groom. This the same for Christians under the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872 and the Special Marriage Act. For Muslims, the criteria is attaining puberty, which is assumed when the bride or groom turns 15.
- ◆ Child marriages are illegal but not void, It is voidable at the option of the minor party. However, if a court find a minor was coerced into marriage by parents or guardians, the provision of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of children) Act come into effect to keep the custody of the minor until he or she attains majority and can make a decision on the marriage.
- ◆ Laws are to be amended - First, the age limit in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act will have to be changed. The government had indicated this will be followed by necessary changes in personal law. The Hindu Marriage Act, the Indian Christian Marriage Act and the Special Marriage Act will also have to be change consequently. However, changes in the Muslim law could raise significant legal issues.
- ◆ Experts have been opposing a raised age of marriage on two broad counts. First, the law to prevent child marriages does not work. While child marriage has declined, it has been marginal : from 27% in 2015-16 to 23% in 2019-20, according to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5. The decreases was, however, dramatic in NFHS 4, from 47% in NFHS 3.

The marriage age at 18 was set in 1978, but child marriage started to decline only in the 1990s, when the government stressed primary education of the girl child and took measures to reduce poverty.

- ◆ The second objection being raised is the criminalisation of a large number of marriages that will take place once the law comes into effect. While 23% of marriages involve brides under age 18, far more marriages take place under age 21.

## SUPERSONIC MISSILE-ASSISTED TORPEDO SYSTEM TESTED DRDO



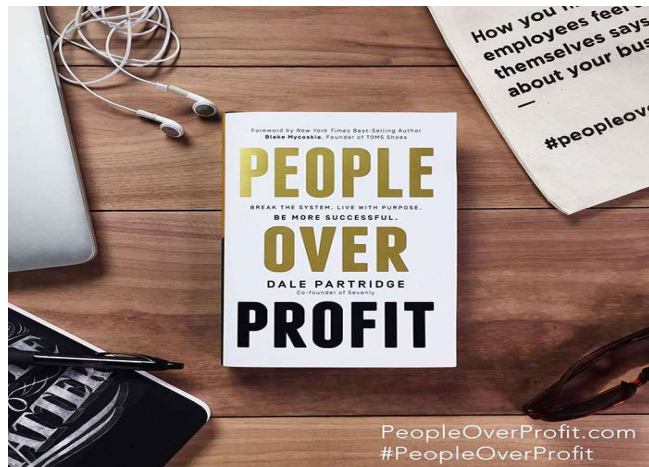
- ◆ Torpedo is a cigar-shaped, self-propelled underwater weapon, Launched from a submarine, surface vessel, or airplane and designed for exploding upon contact with the hulls of surface vessels and submarines.
- ◆ When launched from a warship or truck-based coastal battery, takes off like a regular supersonic missile.
- ◆ It covers most of its flight in the air at lower altitudes with two-way data link from the warship or an airborne submarine target destruction system and provides the exact location of the hostile submarine to correct its flight path midway.
- ◆ Just when it approaches close enough to the submerged submarine, the missile will eject the torpedo system into the water and the autonomous torpedo will start moving towards its target to take out the submarine.

## PRINCIPLES OVER PROFIT

- ◆ Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has set a powerful precedent, In suspending tournaments in China and Hong Kong due to ongoing concern about one of its own former stars, Peng Shuai.
- ◆ Ms. Peng, a Grand Slam doubles, champion from China, accused a former government official there of sexual assault. her Social media post detailing the assault disappeared within minutes.

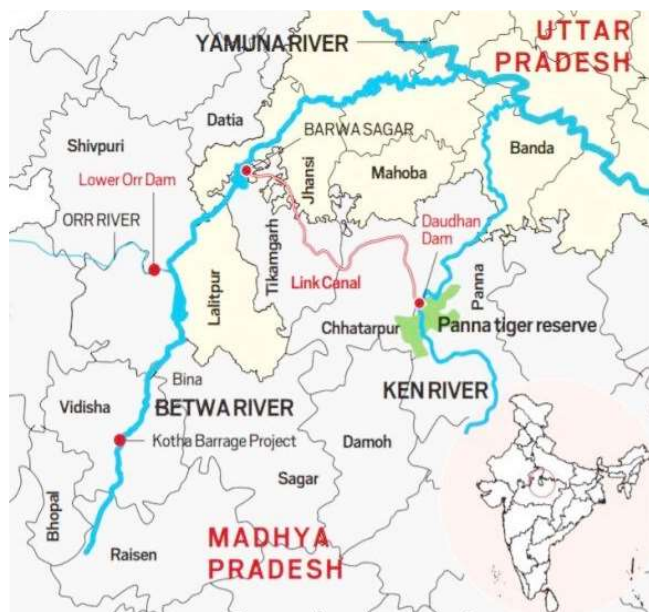


- ◆ By placing the interests of its athletes before financial gain, the women's Tennis Association has set a powerful precedent.



- ◆ In 2018, the WTA signed a magnum deal to host its prestigious year-end Tour Finals in Shenzhen for 10 years. The buy-in was estimated to bring about a billion dollars in revenue for a sport that is now struggling financially.
- ◆ The men's tour, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), While backing the WTA's Stance, is yet to announce any suspension of tennis in China.
- ◆ International Olympic Committee (IOC), has been pursuing its own form of 'quiet diplomacy', releasing photos of video calls with Ms. Peng which showed her to be in good spirits. The IOC has failed to realise that it is not quite diplomacy that is the need of the hour, but loud calls for action.

## KEN-BETWA INTER-LINKING PROJECT



- ◆ Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the funding and implementation of **Ken-Betwa inter-linking of rivers project**.
- ◆ The project envisages transferring water from the Ken river to the Betwa river, both tributaries of the **Yamuna**. The project will be completed in eight years.

### Key Facts



- ◆ **About :** It is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan** for interlinking of rivers. The Ken-Betwa Link Canal will be 221 km long, including a 2-km long tunnel.

### Ken and Betwa Rivers :

- ◆ Ken and betwa rivers **originate in MP** and are the **tributaries of Yamua**.
- ◆ **Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda** district of UP and with **Betwa in Hamirpur** district of UP.
- ◆ Rajghat, Paricha and Matatila dams are over Betwa river.
- ◆ Ken River Passes through **Panna tiger reserve**.
- ◆ **Background :** The idea of linking Ken with Betwa got a major push in Agust 2005, When a tripartite memorandum of understading for preparation of a **detailed project Report (DPR)** was signed among the Centre and governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- ◆ **In 2008, the Centre declared KBLP a National Project.** Later, it was included as part of the Prime Minister's package for development of droguht-prone Bundelkhand region.
- ◆ In 2021, a memorandum of agreement was signed for implementation of this project among the ministry of Jal Shakti and the two states.
- ◆ **Implementing Agency :**
  - ◆ A special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) called **Ken-Betwa Link Project authority : (KBLPA)** will be set up to implment the project :
  - ◆ **The National Inrterlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA)** has the powers to set up SPV for individual link projects.

- ◆ **Phases of the Project** : The project has two phases, with mainly four components.
  - ◆ **Phase-I** : Will involve one of the components : **Daudhan Dam Complex** and its subsidiary units such as Low level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa Link Canal and Power houses.
  - ◆ **Phase-II** : will involve three components : **Lower or Dam, Bina complex Project and Kotha Barrage.**
- ◆ **Benefits** : The project lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spread across **13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.**
  - ◆ According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project will be of Immense benefit to this water starved region.
  - ◆ **Further, it will pave the way for more interlinking or river projects** to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.
  - ◆ According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, Ministry, the project is expected to provide **annual irrigation** of 10.62 lakh hectares, **supply drinking water** to about 62 lakh people, and generate 103 MW of **hydropower** and 27 MW of **solar power.**

◆ **Associated Challenges :**

- ◆ **Submergence of Panna Tiger Reserve :** According to the National Water Development Agency, the reservoir of Daudhan Dam will involve 'a submergence of 9000 ha. area, out of which 5803 ha comes under **Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR)**'
  - To mitigate this, three **Wild Life Sanctuaries (WLS)**, viz nauradehi, **Rani Durgawati** of MP and **Ranipur WLAS** of UP are planned to be **integrated with PTR.**
- ◆ **Several Clearances Required :** Various Types of clearances are required, such as :
  - **Techno-economic clearance :** To be given by the Central Water Commission;
  - **Forest clearance and environmental clearance :** To be given Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
  - **Resettlement and Rehabilitation plan of tribal population :** To be given by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

**History of Interlinking of Rivers in India**

- ◆ **Colonial Idea :**
  - ◆ The Idea was first mooted during the British Raj when **Sir Arthur Cotton**, a British general and irrigation engineer suggested **linking the Ganga and the cauvery for navigational purposes.**
- ◆ **Projects undertaken by the British :**
  - ◆ In the past, several river linking projects have been taken up For instatnce, **the Periyar Project**, under which transfer of water from **Periyar basin to Vaigal basin** was envisaged, was commissioned in 1895.

- **Other projects** such as Parambikulam Aliyar, Kurnool Cuddapah Canal, Telugu Ganga, Project, and Ravi-Beas-Sutlej too were undertaken.



- ◆ **National water Grid :**
  - ◆ In the **1970s**, the **idea of transferring surplus water from a river to a water-deficit area was mooted** by the then Union irrigation Minister **Dr. K. L. Rao.**
  - ◆ He suggested construction of a National Water Grid for transferring water from water-rich areas to water-deficit areas.
- ◆ **Garland Canal :**
  - ◆ Later, **Captian Dinshaw J. Dastoor** proposed a **Garland Canal to redistribute the water from one area to another.** However, the government did not pursue these two ideas further.
- ◆ **National Perspective Plan :**
  - ◆ It was not until August 1980 that the **Ministry of Irrigation prepared a National Perspective Plan for water resoruces development** envisaging inter-basin water transfer.
  - ◆ **The NPP comprised two components : Himalayan River Development, and Peninsular Rivers Development.**
  - ◆ Based on the NPP, the **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** identified 30 river links-16 under the Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component.
  - ◆ The **Ken-Betwa Link Project is one of the 16 projects** under the peninsular component.



# MONETARY POLICY REPORT : RBI

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** Has released the **Monetary Policy Report (MPR)** for the month of December 2021.

- ♦ It kept the policy rate unchanged for the Ninth time in a row maintaining an **accommodative stance**.

## Key Facts

- ♦ **Unchanged Policy Rates :**
  - ♦ Repo Rate : 4%
  - ♦ Reverse Repo Rate : 3.35%
  - ♦ **Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) : 4.25%**
  - ♦ **Bank Rate : 4.25.**
- ♦ **GDP Projection :**
  - ♦ **Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) :** growth for 2021-22 has been retained at 9.5%.
- ♦ **Inflation :**
  - ♦ RBI has retained the projection for Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at 5.3%.
- ♦ **Variable Reverse Repo Rate (VRRR) :**
  - ♦ It increased the amount of money it will absorb VRRR to Rs. 7.5 lakh crore by the end of December 2021.
    - In order to absorb additional liquidity in the system, the RBI announced conducting, A VRRR program in August 2021 because it has higher yield prospects as compared to the fixed rate overnight reverse repo.
- ♦ **Accommodative Stance :**
  - ♦ RBI decided to continue with an **accommodative stance until there is sustainable recovery in the economy**.
    - An accommodative stance means the MPC is willing to either lower rates or keep them unchanged.
- ♦ **Significance :**
  - ♦ It encourages **more spending from consumers and business by making money less expensive** to borrow through the lowering of short-term interest rates.
  - ♦ When money is easily accessible through banks, the **money supply in the economy increases**. This leads to increased spending.
  - ♦ It allows the **fiscal reserve to increase in relation to national income** and the positive function of money demand.
  - ♦ It helps energize the national money stock and prevent a weak aggregate demand obviating an **economic recession**.
  - ♦ Therefore it can be said that an accommodative stance will **help improve India's growth**.

- ♦ **No Permission for Infusing Capital :**
  - ♦ The RBI allowed **banks to infuse capital in their overseas branches** as well as repatriate profits without seeking its prior approval, subject to fulfilling certain regulatory capital requirements.
    - **At present**, banks incorporated in India can infuse capital in their overseas branches and subsidiaries, retain profits in these centres and repatriate/transfer the profits with prior approval of the RBI.
  - ♦ With a view to **providing operational flexibility to banks**. It has been decided that banks need not seek prior approval of the RBI **if they meet the regulatory capital requirements**.
- ♦ **Monetary Policy Report :**
  - ♦ It is **published by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of RBI**. It is a statutory and institutionalized framework under the **RBI Act, 1934**, for maintaining price stability, while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
  - ♦ It **determines the policy interest rate (repo rate) required to achieve the inflation target of 4% with a leeway of 2% points on either side**. The Governor of RBI is ex-officio Chairman of the MPC.

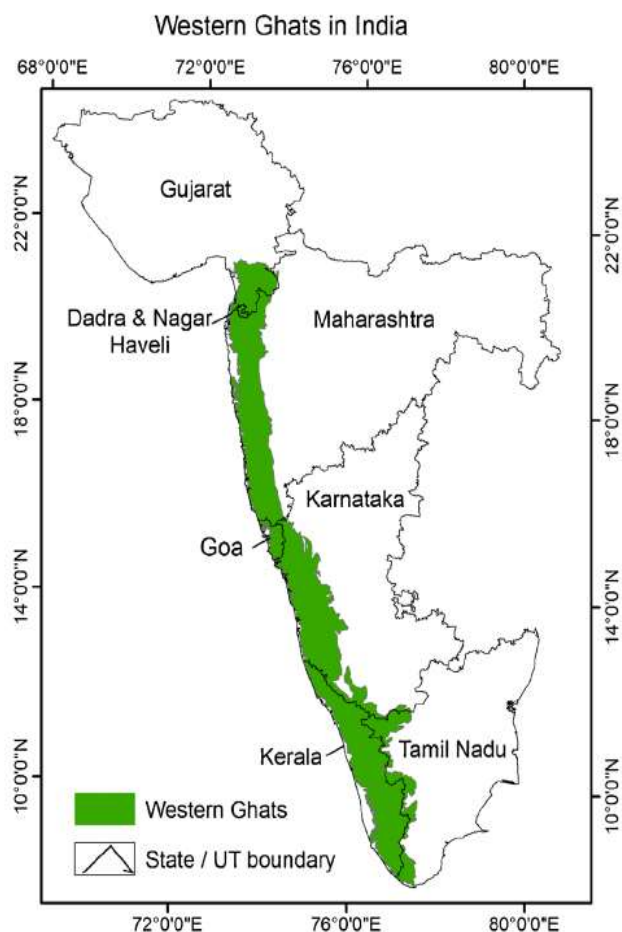
## Key Terms

- ♦ **Repo and Reverse Repo Rate :**
  - ♦ Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country (RBI in case of India) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds. Here, the central bank purchases the security.
  - ♦ **Reverse repo rate :** is the rate at which the RBI borrows money from commercial banks within the country.
- ♦ **Bank Rate :**
  - ♦ It is the **rate charged by the RBI for lending funds to commercial banks**.
- ♦ **Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) :**
  - ♦ MSF is a window for **Scheduled banks** to borrow overnight from the RBI in an emergency situation when interbank liquidity dries up completely.
- ♦ **Open Market Operations :**
  - ♦ These are **market operations conducted by RBI by way of sale/purchase of government securities** to/from the market with an objective to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis.
- ♦ **Government Security :**
  - ♦ A G-SEC is tradable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the government's debt obligation.

◆ **Consumer Price Index :**

- ◆ It measures price changes from the perspective of a retail buyer. It is released by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**.
- ◆ The CPI **calculates the differences in the price of commodities and services such as food medical care education, electronics etc.** which Indian consumers buy for use.

## KASTURIRANGAN COMMITTEE ON WESTERN GHATS



Recently, the **government of Karnataka** has informed the Centre government that the state is opposed to the **Kasturirangan Committee report** on Western Ghats.

- ◆ The Kasturirangan committee report has proposed **37% of the total area** of Western Ghats to be declared as **Eco-sensitive Area (ESA)**.
- ◆ The Karnataka's Government is of the opinion that declairnig **Western Ghats as ESA** would **adversly affect the livelihood of people in the region**.

### Key Points

◆ **About Eco-Sensitive Areas :**

- ◆ **Eco-Sensitive Area (ESAs)** are located within **10 kms around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries**.
- ◆ ESAs are notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) under **Environment Protection At 1986**.
- ◆ The basic aim is **to regulate certain activities** around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries so as to **minimize the negative impacts of such activities** on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.

◆ **About Recommendations of The Kasturirangan Committee Report :**

- ◆ **Area to be Covered :** The Kasturirangan Committee report proposes **roughly 60,000 square kilometers, to be declared as eco-sensitive area (ESA)**.

- Out of this, **20,668 sq km of the area falls** in Karnataka covering **1,576 villages**.
- The boundary of the sites, are in most cases, **boundaries of the legally demarcated national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves and forest divisons** and therefore, already accorded with high level of protection.

- ◆ **Desired and banned Activites :** The report recommended a **blanket ban** on mining, quarrying, setting up of red category industries and thermal power projects.

- It also states that the **impact of infrastructural projects on the forest asnd wildlife should be studied** before permission is given for these activities.

- ◆ **UNESCO Tag :** It also stated that the **UNESCO Hertiage tag** is an opportunity to build global and domestic recognition of the enormous natural wealth that exists in the Western Ghats.

- The 39 sites are located across the Western, Ghats and distributed across the states (Kerala 19), Karnataka (10), Tamil nadu (6), and Maharashtra (4).

- ◆ **Role of State Governments :** The state governments should view this development and build a plan to protect, conserve and value the resources and opportunites of the region.

◆ **Opposition of Karantaka Government**

- ◆ **Impeding Developmental Progress :** Karnataka has extensive forest cover and the government has taken care to protect the biodiversity of Western Ghats.

- ◆ The state government belives that **implementation of the report will halt the developmental activites in the region**.

- ◆ **People-Centric Development Model :** The Kastuirangan report has been prepared based on the satellite images, but the ground reality is different.

- People of the region have adopted **agriculture and horticultural activities in an eco-friendly manner.**
- Priority has been accorded for environment protection under the **Forest Protection Act 1980.**

### Futuristic

- ◆ **Preventive Approach :** Considering the changes in climate, which would affect the livelihood of all people and hurt the nation's economy, it is prudent to **conserve the fragile ecosystems.**
  - ◆ This will cost less compared to the situation prone to calamities than spending money/resources for restoration/rejuvenation.
  - ◆ Thus, **any further delay in the implementation will only accentuate degrading** of the most prized natural resource of the country.
- ◆ **Engaging with All stakeholders** a Proper analysis based on scientific study followed by consensus among various stakeholders by addressing respective concerns is required urgently.
  - ◆ Holistic view of threats and demands on the forest land, products and services, devising strategies to address these with clearly stated objectives for the authorities involved must be taken.

## **NIPER AMENDMENT BILL, 2021**



Recently, **Rajya Sabha** passed the **National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) Amendment Bill, 2021.**

- ◆ It seeks to amend the **National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and research Act, 1998** which established the **National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research** at Mohali in Punjab and **declared it an institution of National Importance.**

### Key Points

- ◆ **About the Bill :**
  - ◆ **Status of Institute of National Importance:**
    - It seeks to accord the status of **'Institutes of national importance'** to six more institutes of pharmaceutical education and research institutes : NIPERs situated in Ahmedabad, Hajipur, Hyderabad, Kokata, Guwahti and Raebareli.
  - ◆ **Establishment of Advisory Council :**
    - ◆ The council will be a (central body, to coordinate the activities of all the institutes) to ensure coordinated development of pharmaceutical education and research and maintenance of standards.
    - ◆ The **functions** of the council include :
      - It **Advising on matters related to course duration, formulating policies for recruitment, examining and approving development plans of the institutes, examining annual budget estimates** of the institutes for recommendations to the central; government for allocation of funds.
  - ◆ **Rationalizes the Board of Governors :**
    - ◆ The Bill **rationalises the Board of Governors of each NIPER** from its existing strength of 23 to 12 members and widens the scope and number of courses run by the institutes
  - ◆ **Significance :**
    - ◆ The NIPERs would be governed on the lines of the IITs.
    - ◆ NIPERs will help **in research that could bring more patents for India**, which in turn, would mean the **nation can produce high-cost pharmaceuticals.**
  - ◆ **Issues with the Bill :**
    - ◆ **State government along with Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989 (SC/ST Act), OBC and women** have not been included in the apex council of the NIPERs.
    - ◆ Issues like **autonomy and over centralisation of power** have also been raised.
    - ◆ It has been said that the **proposed council has been empowered with excessive powers** with regard to **financial, administrative and managerial matters** of these institutes, which has to be looked, into very carefully.
    - ◆ The Bill **potentially compromises the institutes autonomy** as the council will mostly be composed of central government bureaucrats and some MPs, wherein it may take decisions that may not be in a particular institute's best interest.



### **National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPERs) :**

- ◆ They are the **institutes of national importance** under the aegis of the Department of Pharmaceutical, Ministry of Chemical and Fertilizers.
- ◆ **Any institution of National Importance** is an **autonomous body/institute** with the power to hold examinations and grant educational certificates/degrees.
  - They get **funding from the central government**.
- ◆ The institute is **conceived to provide leadership in pharmaceutical sciences** and related areas not only within the country, but also to the countries in South-East Asia, South Asia and Africa.
- ◆ NIPER, Mohali is a **member of Association of Indian Universities** and Association of **Commonwealth Universities**.
  - ◆ Association of Indian Universities (AIU), formed in 1925 as **Inter-University Board (IUB)**, is an association of all universities in India. It is actively engaged in the growth and development of higher education.
  - ◆ The **Association of Commonwealth Universities** is an international organisation dedicated to building a better world through higher education in over 50 countries across the **Commonwealth**.

## **NDPS (AMENDMENT) BILL : 2021**



Recently, the **NDPS (Amendment) Bill, 2021** was introduced in the **Lok Sabha**.

- ◆ The bill will amend the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985**.

### **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985**

- ◆ The Act **regulates certain operation** : such as manufacture, transport and consumption related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- ◆ Under the Act, **financing certain illicit activities** such as cultivating cannabis, manufacturing narcotic drugs or harbouring persons engaged in them is an offence.

- ◆ Persons found guilty of this offence, will be punished with rigorous **imprisonment of at least 10 years - extendable up to 20 years - and a fine of at least Rs. 1 lakh**.
- ◆ It also **provides for forfeiture of property** derived from, or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- ◆ It also provides for death penalty in some cases where a person is a great offender.
- ◆ The **Narcotics Control Bureau** was also constituted in 1986 under the Act.

### **Key Highlights**

- ◆ **About the Bill :**
  - ◆ The bill would **replace an ordinance promulgated earlier this year (2021)** to correct a **drafting error in a 2014 amendment to the Act**.
    - Before the 2014 amendment, **clause (Viii-a) of Section 2 contained subclauses (i) to (v)**, which defined the term **'illicit traffic'**.
  - ◆ In 2014, The Act was amended and the clause number of the **definition for such illicit activities was changed**.
    - However, the **section (27A) on penalty for financing these illicit activities was not amended** and continued to refer to the earlier clause number of the definition.
  - ◆ The ordinance amended the section on penalty to change the reference to the new clause number.
    - In a recent judgement, **Tripura High Court has held that 'until the appropriate legislative change occurs by amending Section 27A of the NDPS Act : appropriately, sub-clauses (i) to (v) of clause (viii-a) of section 2 of the NDPS Act shall suffer effect of deletion**.

### **Section 27A of the NDPS Act**

- ◆ The provision reads that **whoever indulges in financing**, directly or indirectly, any of the activities specified in sub-clauses (i) to (v) of clause (viii-a) of section 2 or harbours any persons engaged in any of the aforementioned activities.
- ◆ He shall be **punishable with rigorous imprisonment** for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to twenty years and shall also be liable to fine which shall not be less than one lakh rupees but which may extend to two lakh rupees.
  - ◆ Provided that the court may, for reasons to be recorded in the judgement, impose a fine exceeding two lakh rupees.

### **Reason of Section 27A getting Inoperable**

- ◆ The text of the provision says that **offences mentioned under Section 2 (viii-a) sub-clauses i-v** are punishable through Section 27A.



- ◆ However, **Section 2 (viiiia) sub-clauses i-v**, which is supposed to be the catalog of offences, **does not exist after the 2014 amendment.**
- ◆ So, if section 27A penalises a blank list or a non-existent provision, it can be argued that it is virtually inoperable.
- ◆ **Objective of the Bill :**
  - ◆ To **help victims of drug abuse** to come out of addiction.
  - ◆ To **Decriminalise possession of a limited quantity of drugs** for personal use while regulating certain operations such as manufacturing, transport and consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- ◆ **Concerns Related to the Bill :**
  - ◆ The new provision is **giving retrospective effect** from **1<sup>st</sup> may 2014.**
    - That means a criminal provision is given, which will not hold in good law.
  - ◆ It also **violates the fundamental rights in Article 20** because a person can be punished for an offence for which there is a law in existence at the time of commission of the offence.
    - Article 20 grants protection against arbitrary and excessive punishment to an accused person, whether citizen or foreigner or legal person like a company or a corporation.

## SAMPANN PROJECT



Over one lakh people have received pensions directly in their bank accounts through the **SAMPANN (System for Accounting and Management of Pension)** project.

### Key Highlights

- ◆ **About :**
  - ◆ It was **launched in 2018.** it is a seamless **online pension processing and payment system** for Department of Telecommunications pensioners.
  - ◆ It **provides direct credit of pension** into the bank accounts of pensioners.
  - ◆ It is an ambitious project being **implemented by the Ministry of Communications.**
  - ◆ It has helped the Department in **faster settlement of pension cases, improved reconciliation/auditing and ease of accounting.**

- ◆ It has also been instrumental in settling close to 76,000 BSNL Voluntary Retirement Scheme 2019 cases in a short span of 6 months.
- ◆ It is a system with a flexible design which enables it to accommodate ever expanding requirements.
- ◆ **Benefits :**
  - ◆ It provides **e-Pension payment orders which make the payment process easier and hassle-free.**
  - ◆ Timely settlement of pension cases.
  - ◆ Every pensioner gets **access to key information like payment history** along with a login option.
  - ◆ Login for each pensioner enables access to key information like payment history.
  - ◆ Online submission of grievances and timely SMS alerts.

## BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO SCHEME



A **parliamentary committee on empowerment of women** has flagged under utilization of central funds for schemes related to programmes targeted at the girl child-particularly the flagship **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme** from 2014 to 2019.

### Key Points

- ◆ **Findings of the Committee :**
  - ◆ **Poor Utilization of Funds :**
    - **Since the inception of BBBP in 2014-15** till 2019-20. the total Budgetary allocation under **the scheme was Rs. 848 crore**, excluding the Covid-stricken financial year of 2020-21.
    - During this period, **an amount of Rs. 622.48 crore was released** to the States but **only 25.13% of the funds** has been spent by the States and Union Territories.
  - ◆ **Improper Spending of Funds :**
    - ◆ A whopping **80% of funds** under the flagship BBBP scheme **was spent of media campaigns.**
    - ◆ The massive spend on advertisements was **despite the clearly laid down formula for utilization of funds** – Rs. 50 lakh per year is earmarked for a district for utilization under six different components.

- ◇ Of the Rs. 50 lakh, 16% of funds are for inter-sectoral consultation or capacity building, 50% for innovation or awareness generation activities, 6% for monitoring and evaluation, 10% for sectoral interventions in health, 10% for sectoral interventions in education and 8% as flexi funds.

◇ **Recommendation :**

- ◇ The government should **reconsider spending on advertisements** under the BBBP scheme and should **focus on planned expenditure allocation** for sectoral interventions in education and health.

**BBBP Scheme :**

◇ **About :**

- ◇ It was **launched in January 2015** with the aim to address **sex selective abortion and the declining child sex ratio** which was at 918 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2011.
- ◇ This is a **joint initiative** of the Ministry of Women and child Development, Ministry of health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resources Development.
- ◇ The programme is being **implemented across 405 districts in the country.**

◇ **Main objectives :**

- ◇ Prevention of gender-biased sex-selective elimination.
- ◇ Ensuring survival and protection of the girl child.
- ◇ Ensuring education and participation of the girl child.
- ◇ Protecting rights of Girl children.

◇ **Performance Analysis :**

◇ **Sex Ratio at Birth :**

- **Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)** has improved by **16 points from 918 (2014-15) to 934 (2019-20)**, as per the **Health Management Information System (HMIS)** data.

◇ **Notable Examples (Districts) :**

- Mau (Uttar Pradesh) from 694 (2014-15) to 951 (2019-20).
- Karnal (Haryana) from 758 (2014-15) to 898 (2019-20).
- Mahendergarh (Haryana) from 791 (2014-15) to 919 (2019-20), etc.

◇ **Health :**

- ◇ **ANC Registration :** Percentage of 1st Trimester ANC (AnteNatal Care) Registration as shown an improving trend from 61% in 2014-15 to 95% in 2019-20.
- ◇ **Institutional Deliveries :** Percentage of Institutional Deliveries has shown an improving trend from 87% in 2014-15 to 94% in 2019-20.

◇ **Education :**

- ◇ **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) :** GER of girls in the schools at secondary level has **improved from 77.45 (2014-15) to 81.32 (2018-19)** as per Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) Provisional data.
- ◇ **Toilet for girls :** Percentage of schools with functional separate toilets for girls has shown improvement from 92.1% in 2014-15 to 95.1% in 2018-19.
- ◇ **Attitudinal Change :**
  - ◇ The BBBP schemes has been **able to bring the focus on importance issue** of female infanticide, lack of education amongst girls and deprivation of their rights on a life cycle continuum.
  - ◇ Beti Janmotsav is one of the key programmes celebrated in each district.

**Other Initiatives for Girl Children**

- ◇ **UJJAWALA :** To tackle the problem of trafficking, it is a Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-Integration of Victims of Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
- ◇ **Kishore Health Card :** To record the information about the weight, height, Body mass Index (BMI) of Adolescent Girls (AGs). These health cards for AGs are maintained at the Anganwadi Centers (AWCs).
- ◇ Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG).
- ◇ Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, etc.

**BUXA TIGER RESERVE  
(West Bengal)**



Recently, a Royal Bengal tiger was sighted at the Buxa reserve - a first such sighting in 23 years.

- ◇ Historically, tigers were distributed throughout the reserve including the southernmost ranges and fringe areas. However, **the reserve has a low tiger density at present.**



**Key Points**

- ◆ **About :**
  - ◆ Buxa Tiger Reserve is **situated in the Alipurdaur Sub-division of Jalapaiguri District, West Bengal.** it was **created in 1983** as the **15<sup>th</sup> tiger reserve of India.**
    - It was **declared as a National Park in January 1992.**
  - ◆ The northern boundary of Buxa Tiger Reserve runs along the **international border with Bhutan.** The **Sinchula hill range** lies all along the northern side of the Buxa National Park and the Eastern boundary touches that of the Assam State.
  - ◆ The **main rivers** flowing across the Tiger Reserve are **Sankosh, Raidak, Jayanti, Churnia, Turturi, Phashkhawa, Dima and Nonani.**
- ◆ **Tiger Corridor :**
  - ◆ The reserve has **corridor connectivity across the border** with the forests of Bhutan in the North, on the east it has linkages, with the Kochugaon forests, Manas Tiger Reserve and on the West with the Jaldapara National Park. The following corridor links are important :
    - **Buxa-Titi (via Torsa) :** Connecting Rangamati Reserve Forest area of Buxa Tiger Reserve With Titi Reserve Forest
    - **Buxa-Titi (via Beech and Bharnabari Tea estate) :** Connecting Bhanabari Reserve Forest of Buxa tiger Reserve and Titi Reserve Forest situated south of Dalsingpara tea estate by passing through Bharnabari tea estate and Each tea estate.
    - **Nimati-Chilapata (Buxa-Chilapata) :** Facilitating elephant movement between Nimati Range of Buxa Tiger Reserve and Chilapata Reserve Forest, thereby maintaining elephant movement between Buxa Tiger Reserve and Jaladapara Wildlife Sanctuary (West Bengal).
    - **Buxa-Ripu at Sankosh (Sankosh) :** This corridor is a contiguous forest that connects Buxa Tiger Reserve of West Bengal with the Ripu Reserve Forest of Kachugaon Forest Division, Assam.
  - ◆ The **corridors mentioned above form part of North East and Brahmaputra Valley tiger landscape, providing crucial linkages** for the dispersal of tigers to various protected areas like, Buxa, **Manas Tiger Reserve (Assam)**, Phipsoo Wildlife Sanctuary in Bhutan and Jaldapara National Park.
- ◆ **Flora :**
  - ◆ The forests of the reserve can be broadly classified as the **'Moist Tropical Forest'**.
- ◆ **Fauna :**
  - ◆ Some important species found in the reserve are **Indian Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Clouded Leopard (*Neophiles nebulosa*), Hog badger (*Arctonyx collaris*), Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*)** etc.

◆ **Other Protected Areas in West Bengal :**

- ◆ Gorumara National Park
- ◆ Sundarbans National Park
- ◆ Neora Valley National Park
- ◆ Singalila National Park
- ◆ Jaldapara National Park

**Tiger :**◆ **Conservation Status :**

- ◆ **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 :** Schedule I
- ◆ **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List :** Endangered.
- ◆ **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) :** Appendix 1.
- ◆ **Tigers in India :**
  - ◆ India is home to over **70% of the tiger population globally.**
  - ◆ India is home to **53 tiger reserves spread across 18 states** and the 1st tiger census of 2018 showed a rise in the tiger population.
  - ◆ India **achieved the target of doubling the tiger population four years** ahead of schedule (2022) of the **St. Petersburg Declaration** of tiger conservation.
  - ◆ India's strategy of tiger conservation attaches **topmost importance to involving local communities.**
- ◆ **Tiger Conservation Projects in India :**
  - ◆ **Project Tiger 1973 :** Project Tiger is a Centrally Sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and climate Change (MoEFCC) launched in 1973. It provides havens for tigers in the country national parks.
    - **Recently, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** has designated the combined areas of the Guru Ghasida National Park and Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary as the 53st Tiger Reserve in India.
  - ◆ **National Tiger Conservation Authority :** It is a statutory body under the MoEFCC and was established in 2005 following the recommendation of the Tiger Task Force.

## GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD (GIB)

Recently, the Centre has approached the Supreme Court seeking **modification of its order directing** that all transmission cable in the habitat of the **Great Indian Bustard (GIB)** be laid underground.

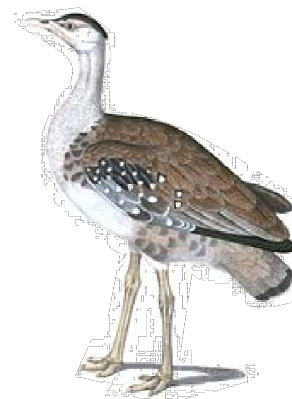
### Key Points

- ◇ **Background :**
  - ◇ Earlier this year (2021), in a **bid to check the dwindling numbers** of the **endangered Great Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican**, a Supreme Court bench directed that **overhead power lines be laid underground**, wherever, feasible, passing along the habitat of the birds in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- ◇ **Concerns Raised :**
  - ◇ **Implication for the Power Sector in India :**
    - The area falling in Rajasthan and Gujarat **contains a large proportion of the country's total solar and wind energy potential.**
    - Laying power lines underground will **escalate the cost of renewable energy production** and **hurt India renewable energy cause.**
      - **Energy transition is essential for reducing emission** and controlling climate change and India has made international commitments including under the agreement signed in Paris in 2015 under the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** for transition to non-fossil fuels and for emission reduction.
      - India has set a **target to achieve installed** renewable energy capacity (excluding large Hydro) of 175 GW by 2022 and 450 GW by 2030.
  - ◇ **Chances of Renewable Energy to Remain Untapped :**
    - So far, **only a miniscule 3%** of the estimated potential of around 263 GW renewable energy in this area has been tapped.
    - If the remaining potential stays untapped, an additional **93,000 MW of coal fired capacity** will be **needed to replace the unutilised renewable energy in the future** which would cause an adverse direct impact on the environment.

### Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- ◇ **About :**
  - ◇ It is the **State bird of Rajasthan** and is considered India's most critically endangered bird.

- ◇ It is considered the **flagship grassland species**, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- ◇ Its population is **confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat**. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- ◇ The bird is **under constant threats due to collision/electrocution** with power transmission lines, hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan), habitat loss and alteration as a result of widespread agricultural expansion etc.
- ◇ **Protection Status :**
  - ◇ **International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List :** Critically Endangered.
  - ◇ **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) :** Appendix 1
  - ◇ **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) :** Appendix I
  - ◇ **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 :** Schedule 1.
- ◇ **Measures taken to protect GIB :**
  - ◇ **Species Recovery Programme :**
    - It is kept under the **species recovery programme** under the **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats** of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
  - ◇ **National Bustard Recovery Plans :**
    - It is currently being implemented by conservation agencies.
  - ◇ **Conservation Breeding Facility :**
    - MoEF&CC, Rajasthan government and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have also established a **conservation breeding facility** in **Desert National Park** at Jaisalmer in June 2019.
    - The objective of the programme is to build up a captive population of Great Indian Bustards and to release the chicks in the wild for increasing the population.
  - ◇ **Project Great Indian Bustard :**
    - It has been launched by the Rajasthan government with an **aim of constructing breeding enclosures** for the species and developing infrastructure to reduce human pressure on its habitats.
  - ◇ **Eco-Friendly Measures :**
    - **Task Force for suggesting eco-friendly measures** to mitigate impacts of power transmission lines and **other power transmission infrastructures** on wildlife including the Great Indian Bustard.





## SEDITION LAW



Recently, a journalist was **charged with Sedition** by the Assam Police for allegedly promoting animosity between the Assamese and Bengali-speaking people of Assam.

### Key Highlights

- ♦ **Historical Background :**
  - ♦ Sedition laws were enacted in **17<sup>th</sup> century England** when lawmakers believed that **only good opinions of the government should survive**, as bad opinion were detrimental to the government and monarchy.
  - ♦ The law was **originally drafted in 1837 by Thomas Macaulay, The British Historian-politician**, but was inexplicably omitted when the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** was enacted in 1860.
  - ♦ Today the Sedition is a crime **under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.
- ♦ **Sedition Law Today :**
  - ♦ **Section 124A IPC :**
    - It defines **sedition as an offences committed when** “any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection **towards the government established by law in India.**”
    - Disaffection includes **disloyalty and all feelings of enmity**. However, comments without exciting attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.
  - ♦ **Punishment for the Offence of Sedition :**
    - It is a non-bailable offence. Punishment under the Section 124A ranges from **imprisonment up to three years to a life term**, to which fine may be added.
    - A person charged under this law is **barred from a government job**.
      - They have to live without their passport and must produce themselves in the court at all times and when required.

### ♦ Significance of Sedition Law :



- ♦ **Reasonable Restrictions :**
  - The constitution of India **prescribes reasonable restrictions (under Article 19(2))** that can always be imposed on this right in order to ensure its responsible exercise and to ensure **that it is equally available to all citizens**.
- ♦ **Maintaining Unity and Integrity :**
  - Sedition law helps the government in **combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements**.
- ♦ **Maintaining Stability of State :**
  - It helps in **protecting the elected government from attempt to overthrow** the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the stability of the State
- ♦ **Issues With Sedition Law :**
  - ♦ **Relic of Colonial Era :**
    - Colonial administrators used sedition to **lock up people who criticized the British policies**.
    - Stalwarts of the freedom movement such as **Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhagat Singh**, etc. were convicted for their ‘seditious speeches, writings and activities under British rule.’
    - Thus, rampant use of the sedition law recalls the colonial era.
  - ♦ **Stand of Constituent Assembly :**
    - The **Constituent Assembly did not agree to include sedition in the Constitution**, the members felt it would curtail freedom of speech and expression.
    - They **argued that the sedition law can be turned into a weapon to suppress people's** legitimate and constitutionally guaranteed right to protest.
  - ♦ **Disregarding Supreme Court’s Judgement :**
    - Supreme Court in **Kedar Nath Singh Vs State of Bihar case 1962**, Limited application of sedition to ‘**acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence.**’

- Thus, invoking sedition charges against academicians, lawyers, socio-political activists and students is in disregard of the Supreme Court's order.
- ◇ **Repressing Democratic Values :**
  - Increasingly, India is being described as an elected autocracy primarily because of the callous and calculated use of sedition law.
- ◇ **Recent Developments :**
  - ◇ **In February 2021, the Supreme Court (SC) protected a political leader and six senior journalists** from arrest, for allegedly tweeting and sharing unverified news, in **multiple sedition FIRs** registered against them.
  - ◇ **In June 2021, the SC** while protecting two Telugu (language), news channels from coercive action by the Andhra Pradesh government **emphasized on defining the limits of sedition.**
  - ◇ **In July 2021, a petition** was filed in the **SC**, that sought a relook into the Sedition Law.
    - The court ruled that **“a statute criminalizing expression based on the unconstitutionally vague definitions of ‘disaffection towards Government’ etc. is an unreasonable restriction on the fundamental right to free expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) and causes constitutionally impermissible ‘Chilling Effect’ on speech.**

### Way Forward

- ◇ Section 124A of the IPC has its utility in combating anti-national secessionist and terrorist elements. However, **Dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of robust public debate in a vibrant democracy.** They should not be constructed as sedition.
- ◇ The higher judiciary should use its supervisory powers to **sensitize the magistracy and police to the constitutional provisions protecting free speech.**
- ◇ The **definition of sedition should be narrowed down**, to include only the issues pertaining to the territorial integrity of India as well as the sovereignty of the country.
- ◇ Civil society must take the lead to **raise awareness about the arbitrary use of Sedition law.**
- ◇ India is the largest democracy of the world and the right to **free speech and expression is an essential ingredient of democracy.** The expression or thought that is not in consonance with the policy of the government of the day should not be considered as sedition.
- ◇ The word **‘sedition’ is extremely nuanced** and needs to be applied with caution, it is like a cannon that ought not to be used to shoot a mouse. but the arsenal also demands possession of cannon, mostly as a deterrent, and on occasion for shooting.

## ARCs FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR

To improve recovery of bad loans in the **agriculture sector.** leading banks have made a pitch for setting up an **Asset reconstruction Company (ARC)** specifically to deal with collections and recovery of farm loans.

- ◇ With a government backed ARC having been recently set up to deal with bank NPAs to the industry, this **idea has acceptability among banks.**
- ◇ Some member banks of the **Indian Banks Association** suggested the need for the Central government to bring legislation on agriculture land somewhat like the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (**SARFAESI Act, 2002.**

### Key Points

- ◇ **About the Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) :**
  - ◇ **Objective :** It is a specialized financial institution that buys the Non performing Assets (NPAs) from banks and financial institutions so that they can clean up their balance sheets.
    - This **helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities.** Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.
  - ◇ **Legal Basis :** The **SARFAESI Act, 2002** provides the legal basis of the setting up of ARCs in India.
    - The Act helps reconstruction of bad assets without the intervention of courts. since then, a large number of ARCs were formed and were registered with the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** which has got the power to regulate the ARCs.
  - ◇ **Funding :** To meet its funding requirements, and **ARC can issue bonds, debentures and security receipts.**
  - ◇ **National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL) :**
    - In the **Budget 2021-22, ARC** has been proposed to be set up by state-owned and private sector banks, and there will be not equity contribution from the government.
    - The ARC, which will have an **Asset Management Company (AMC)** to manage and sell bad assets, will look to resolve stressed assets of Rs. 2-2.25 lakh crore that remain unresolved in around 70 large. accounts.
    - This is being considered as the governments version of a **bad bank.**



- ♦ **Need of ARC for Farm Loans :**
  - ♦ **NPAs of Banks :** As per the latest Financial Stability Report, June 2021, **banks gross NPA ratio for the agriculture sector** was at 9.8% whereas for industry and services it was at 11.3% and 7.5% respectively, At March-end 2021.
- ♦ **Outstanding Loans :** As per data from the **'Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019**, even as the percentage of **agricultural households indebted has come down from 52% in 2013 to 50.2% in 2019**, the average debt has jumped by more than 57% from Rs. 47,000 in 2013 Rs. 74,121 in 2019.
  - ♦ The survey data shows that **69.6% of the outstanding loans by agricultural households** were taken from institutional sources such as banks, cooperative societies, and other government agencies.
  - ♦ The survey is conducted by the **National Statistical Office's (NSO)**.
- ♦ **Farm Loan Waivers :** The **announcement of farm loan waivers** by states around elections leads to **"deteriorating credit culture."**
  - ♦ **Since 2014, at least 11 states have announced farm loan waivers.** These include Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.
  - ♦ The **Uttar Pradesh government will provide additional incentive** such as subsidised interest rates on farm loans, promotion of farm-based industries as well as development of farm infrastructure under the Centre's **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund**.
    - The **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund** aims to provide medium-long term debt financing facilities for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets.
  - ♦ Ahead of Assembly election in seven states in 2021, **there is a concern among banks that NPAs may rise in the farm sector.**
    - While genuine hardship could be one reason for delay in repayments, the possibility of waivers also leads to recovery challenges for the banks.
- ♦ **Challenges :**
  - ♦ **Availability of Funds :** First and foremost, the requirement of the ARC is to have sufficient availability of funds to match the huge amount of the NPA market.
    - It will be welcomed if the government **establishes ARC with an equity contribution from the government itself** and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to strengthen its capital base.
    - Thus ARC will have sufficient funds to deal with the NPA problem.
- ♦ **Absence of a Vibrant Distressed Debt Market :** Even if sufficient funds are available with ARC, the price expectation mismatch between selling banks(s) and buying ARC and agreement on an acceptable valuation of the bad assets will also create a challenge for ARC.
  - ♦ It is the **absence of a vibrant distressed debt market in India**. It is also difficult to sell NPA assets in the market.
- ♦ **Absence of Professional Expertise :** The absence of professional expertise for a turnaround in ARC is very common.
  - ♦ The professional such as bankers, lawyers and chartered accountants who join ARCs usually expect some extra return.
  - ♦ But due to regulatory issues, this is not possible easily and ARC is deprived of professionals, service of experts which may help it tremendously.
- ♦ **Absence of Mature Secondary Market :** There is the absence of a mature secondary market for security receipts (SR) issued by ARC to Qualified Institutional Buyers.
  - ♦ This further leads the Banks to buy SRs backed by their own stressed assets.
  - ♦ It is observed that currently over 80% of SRs are held by seller banks themselves only.
- ♦ **Regulatory Constraints :** Currently, **all ARCs are subject to the regulation and scrutiny of the regulator** i.e., the RBI and it is observed that some stringent regulations have hampered their growth and viability. Thus, the ARC is not being able to function with all its potentials.

### Current Mechanism to tackle NPAs of Agri-Sector

- ♦ At present, there is **neither a unified mechanism** to tackle NPAs in the farm sector nor a single law that deals with enforcement of mortgages created on agricultural land.
- ♦ Agriculture being a state subject, the recovery laws, wherever agricultural land is offered as collateral-varies from State to State.
- ♦ Enforcement of provisions on mortgaged farm land is generally done through the **Revenue Recovery Act of states, Recovery of Debt and Bankruptcy Act, 1993**, among other state-specific regulations.
  - ♦ These are often time consuming and in some states revenue recovery laws covering bank loans have not been enacted.

### Futuristic

- ♦ It is utmost necessary for a rigorous and a realistic approach to pricing between the banks and ARCs.
  - ♦ Therefore, **it is an urgent need for all stakeholders, including the regulator, to come together to make the entire process of NPA sale, resolution, recovery and revival fast and smooth.**

- ◇ Banks have their hands tied when it comes to recovery of loans in the agriculture sector. There is also a problem of anticipated farm loans waivers, which makes, recovery difficult.
- ◇ The **ARC has a very vital role to play in the current scenario and it should be strengthened to solve the massive NPA problem** prevailing in the Indian banking industry.
- ◇ However, ARC cannot be the sole response. The most efficient approach would be to **design solutions tailor-made for different parts of Indian's bed loan problem** and use ARC only as a last resort once all other methods fail.

## PRADHAN MANTRI SHRAM YOGI MAAN-DHAN PENSION SCHEME

According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, nearly 46 lakh Unorganized Workers (UW) have been resituated under the **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) pension scheme**.

### Unorganized Workers



- ◇ UWs are **mostly engaged** as rickshaw pullers, street vendors, **mid-day meal** workers, head loaders, bricks kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, home based workers, own account workers, agriculture workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio-visual workers or in similar other occupations.
- ◇ There are estimated **45 crore such unorganized workers in the country**.

### Key Points

- ◇ **About :**
  - ◇ **PM-SYM** is a **Central Sector Scheme** administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and community Service Centers (CSCs).
    - LIC (Life Insurance Corporation) is the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.
- ◇ **Eligibility :**
  - ◇ Should be an Unorganized Worker (UM).
  - ◇ Monthly Income Rs. 15,000 or below.

- ◇ Entry age between 18 and 40 years.
- ◇ Should possess a mobile phone, saving bank account and Aadhaar number.
- ◇ Should not be covered under **New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' States Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme** or **Employees Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)**.
- ◇ Should not be an income tax payer.

### ◇ **Salient Features :**

#### ◇ **Minimum Assured Pension :**

- Each subscriber shall receive a minimum assured pension of **Rs. 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years**.

#### ◇ **Family Pension :**

- During the receipt of pension, if the subscriber dies, **the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary as family pension**. Family pension is applicable only to spouses.
- If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and died due to any cause (before age of 60 years), his/her spouse will be entitled to join and continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or exit the scheme as per provision of exit and withdrawal.

#### ◇ **Contribution :**

- The subscriber's **contributions shall be made through 'auto-debit facility' facility** from his/her savings bank account/Jan-Dhan account.
- PM-SYM functions on a **50 : 50 basis** where prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government.

### ◇ **Other Government Schemes for Unorganized Sector :**

- ◇ Labour Reforms
- ◇ Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)
- ◇ PM SVANidhi : Micro Credit Scheme for Street Vendors.
- ◇ Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan
- ◇ Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Urban Livelihoods Mission.
- ◇ PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY)
- ◇ One Nation One Ration Card
- ◇ Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana
- ◇ Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi
- ◇ World Bank Support to India's Informant Working Class.



## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Recently, the US intelligence reports said the tension on the **Russia-Ukraine** border represents a **major security crisis for the region**, with the potential to snowball into a broader conflict.

- ♦ Ukraine says that **Russia has amassed around 90,000 troops at the border.**



### Key Points

#### ♦ Background :

- ♦ Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of **cultural linguistic and familial links.**
  - For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, the **shared heritage of the countries** is an emotional issue that has been exploited for electoral and military purposes.
- ♦ As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the **second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia**, and was **crucial strategically, economically and culturally.**

#### ♦ Cause of Conflict :

- ♦ **Balance of Power :** Ever since Ukraine split from the Soviet Union, both Russia and the West have vied for greater influence in the country in order to keep the balance of power in the region in their favour.
- ♦ **Buffer zone for Western Countries :** For the US and the **European Union**, Ukraine is a crucial buffer between Russia and the West.
- ♦ As tensions with Russia rise, the US and the EU are increasingly determined to keep Ukraine away from Russian control.

#### ♦ Russian interest in Black Sea : The **unique geography of the Black Sea region** confers several geopolitical advantages to Russia.

- ♦ Firstly, it is an **important crossroads and strategic intersection** for the entire region.
- ♦ Access to the Black Sea is **vital for all littoral and neighboring states.** and greatly enhances the projection of power into several adjacent regions.
- ♦ Secondly, the region is an **important transit corridor for goods and energy.**

#### ♦ Protests in Ukraine :

- ♦ **Euromaidan Movement :** Euromaidan (European Square) was a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began in November 2013 with public protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv, Ukraine.



- The protests were sparked by the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union, instead, choosing closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union.

#### ♦ Separatist Movement : The Donbass region (the Donetsk and Luhansk regions) of eastern Ukraine has been facing a **pro-Russian separatist movement since 2014.**

- ♦ According to the Ukrainian government, the movement is actively supported by the Russian government and Russian paramilitaries make up between 15% to 80% of the separatists fighting against the Ukraine government.

#### ♦ Invasion of Crimea :

- ♦ Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in what was the **first time a European country annexed territory from another country since World War-2.**
- ♦ The annexation of Crimea from Ukraine followed a **Russian military intervention in Crimea** that took place in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and was part of wider unrest across southern and eastern Ukraine.
- ♦ The invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea have given Russia a **maritime upperhand in the region.**

#### ♦ Ukraine's NATO Membership : Ukraine has urged the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** to speed up his country's membership in the alliance.

- ♦ Russia has declared such a move a **"red line"**, and worried about the consequences of the US-led military alliances expanding right up to its doorstep.
- ♦ The Black Sea is bordered by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. All these countries are NATO countries.
- ♦ Due to this faceoff between NATO countries and Russia, the Black sea is a region of strategic importance and a potential maritime flashpoint.

### ◆ Minsk Agreements :



- ◆ **Minsk I** : Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists agreed a **12-point ceasefire deal in the capital of Belarus** in September 2014.
  - Its provisions included prisoner exchanges, deliveries of humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.
  - The agreement quickly broke down with violations by both sides.
- ◆ **Minsk II** : In 2015, an open conflict was averted after the 'Minsk II' peace agreement was signed, under the mediation of France and Germany.
  - It was **designed to end the fighting in the rebel regions** and hand over the border to Ukraine's national troops.
  - It was signed by Representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** and the leaders of two pro-Russian separatist regions.
    - OSCE is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and fair elections.
- ◆ **Current Situation** :
  - ◆ Russia is **seeking assurances** from the US that Ukraine will **not be inducted into NATO**. However, the US is not prepared to give any such assurance.
    - This has left the countries in a stand-off, with tens of thousands of Russian troops ready to invade Ukraine.
  - ◆ Russia is **keeping the tensions high at the Ukraine border** in order to get **sanctions relief and other concessions from the West**.
  - ◆ Any kind of military action by the US or EU against Russia would **precipitate a major crisis for the whole world**, and has so far not been mooted by any of the parties involved.
- ◆ **India Stand** :
  - ◆ India **did not join the Western powers' condemnation of Russia's intervention in Crimea** and kept a low profile on the issue.
  - ◆ In November 2020, **India voted against a Ukraine-sponsored resolution in the United Nations (UN)** that condemned alleged human rights violations in Crimea thereby backing old ally Russia on the issue.

### Black Sea

- ◆ The Black Sea is located between Eastern Europe and Western Asia.
- ◆ It is surrounded by the Pontic, Caucasus, and Crimean Mountains in the south, east and north respectively.
- ◆ The Black Sea is also connected to the **Sea of Azov** by the **Strait of Kerch**.
- ◆ The **Turkish straits system** : the Dardanelles, Bosphorus and Marmara Sea : forms a transitional zone between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.
- ◆ **Bordering countries of Black Sea are** : Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.
- ◆ There is a significant **absence of oxygen** in the water (anoxic waters).

### Futuristic

- ◆ A practical solution for the situation is to revive the Minsk peace process. Therefore the **West (US and Other western Countries) should push both sides to resume talks and live up to their commitments** as per the Minsk agreement to restore relative peace on the border.

## EXERCISE EKUVERIN

Recently, the 11<sup>th</sup> Edition of Joint Military **Exercise EKUVERIN** between India and Maldives has been started at Kadhdhoo Island, Maldives.

- ◆ Earlier, the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the biennial **trilateral Coast Guard Exercise 'Dosti'** involving **India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka** was held in the Maldives.



### Key Points

- ◆ India and Maldives have been conducting **Exercise Ekuverin meaning 'Friends' in the Maldivian language since 2009**.
- ◆ The **14 days Joint Exercise** is held alternatively in **India and Maldives**.
- ◆ It **focuses on enhancing interoperability** between the two forces for carrying out counter insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in a semi-urban environment under the United Nations mandate.



- ♦ This year's exercise will also include cultural and sports activities to enhance **defence cooperation and bilateral relations**. The exercise will go a long way in strengthening India's relations with Maldives amidst emerging security dynamics in the **India Ocean Region**.

## MOUNT SEMERU VOLCANO



Recently, **Mount Semeru volcano of Indonesia** erupted which killed at least 14 persons and left dozens injured.

- ♦ The last time it erupted was in **December 2020**.

### Key Points

- ♦ **About Semeru Volcano :**
  - ♦ Semeru, also known as **the Great Mountain** : is the **highest volcano in Java** and one of the most active.
  - ♦ Semeru volcano is also the **part of the island arcs** formed by the subduction of the Indo-Australian plate below **Sunda Plate (part of Eurasian Plate)**.
    - The trench formed here is called **Sunda trench** whose major section is the Java Trench.
- ♦ **Volcano in Indonesia :**
  - ♦ Indonesia, with the **maximum number of active volcanoes in the world**, is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific's Ring of Fire.
- ♦ **Pacific's Ring of Fire :**



- ♦ The **Ring of Fire**, also referred to as the **Circum-Pacific Belt**, is path along the **Pacific Ocean characterized by active volcanoes** and frequent earthquakes.

- ♦ Its length is **approximately 40,000 kilometers**. It traces boundaries between several tectonic plates : including the Pacific, Cocos, Indian-Australian, Nazca, North American, and Philippine Plates.
- ♦ **75% of Earth's volcanoes** i.e., **more than 450 volcanoes are located along the Ring Fire**. 90% of Earth's earthquakes occur along its path, including the planet most violent and dramatic seismic events.
- ♦ **Other major Volcanoes of Indonesia :**
  - ♦ Mount Merapi
  - ♦ Mt. Sinabung

## NATIONAL MISSION ON EDIBLE OILS -OIL PALM (NMEO-OP)

- ♦ **NMEO-OP was launched to augment the availability of edible oil** in the country by harnessing area expansion, increasing crude palm oil production to **reduce the import burden**.
  - ♦ During 2020-21, **India imported 133.5 lakh tonnes of edible oil**, out of which the share of palm oil was around 56%.
- ♦ NMEO-OP proposes to **cover an additional area of 6.5 lakh hectare for oil palm till the year 2025-26** and thereby reaching the target of 10 lakh hectares ultimately.
  - ♦ **Oil palm requires less water** compared to crops like rice, banana and sugarcane.
- ♦ NMEO-OP **will subsume the current National Food security Mission-Oil Palm programme**. There is a sunset clause for NMEO-OP which is 1st November 2037.
- ♦ **Major focus of the scheme**
  - ♦ **Price assurance** (in form of a viability price) to oil palm growers for their Fresh Fruit Bunches (FFBs). Presently FFBs prices are linked to the international CPO prices fluctuations.
  - ♦ **Increase assistance of inputs/interventions** (including plantation, maintenance and inter-cropping interventions).
- ♦ Under NMEO-OP, there will be a **special focus on North east and Andaman and nicobar Islands**

## WORLD MIGRATION REPORT (WMR) 2020 RELEASED BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)

- ♦ IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization (India is a member) promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. WMR is published every second year by IOM.
- ♦ **Key Highlights of WMR**
  - ♦ There were around 281 million international migrants in 2020, accounting for 3.6% fo the global population.



- Europe and Asia hosted 61% the global international migrant flow.
- ◇ Number of internally displaced persons rose to 55 million in 2020 from 21 million in 2000.
- ◇ More people are being displaced persons rose to 55 million in 2020 from 21 million in 2000.
- ◇ More people are being displaced by disasters (caused by changing climate) than conflicts. In 2020, 30.7 million new displacements were triggered by disasters.
- India reported nearly four million new displacements due to disasters.
- ◇ There were 26.4 million refugees globally in 2020 up from 26 million in 2019.
- ◇ COVID-19 paradox: While billions of people have been effectively grounded by COVID-19, tens of millions have been displaced within their own countries.
- ◇ Overall increase in remittances, from \$126 billion in 2000, to \$702 billion in 2020.
- India, China, Mexico, Philippines and Egypt were top five remittance recipient countries.

## EUROPEAN UNION (EU) PLANS €300 BILLION INFRASTRUCTURE FUND TO COUNTER CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)

- ◇ Named Global Gateway, plan is meant to bring in necessary investment to manage worldwide challenges, such as fight against climate change and security of supply chains.
- ◇ Plan promises to promote high social, environmental, fiscal and labour standards.
- ◇ It will help poorer countries build highways, pipelines and broadband networks.
- ◇ China's BRI seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth.
- ◇ However, lack of transparency of BRI agreements and mounting debt to China by smaller countries has raised global concerns.
- ◇ Recently, China also relabeled BRI with focus on green finance and inclusive development.
- ◇ Other initiatives for Infrastructure development
  - ◇ Build Back a Better World (B3W) initiative: launched during the G-7 meet, is a values-driven and transparent infrastructure partnership to help narrow USD 40+ trillion infrastructure needs in the developing world.
  - ◇ Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: An Indian-Japanese collaborative vision regarding development, connectivity and cooperation between Asia and Africa.

## MINISTER OF STATE, HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE CHAIRED THE WORLD AIDS DAY CELEBRATION ON 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER

- ◇ On the occasion, government also released various guidelines on Anti Retroviral Treatment (ART) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis under the National AIDS Control Program.
  - ◇ ART and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis are medication/prevention course for HIV.
- ◇ HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that weakens a person's immune system by destroying important cells that fight disease and infection.
  - ◇ There is currently no effective cure for HIV. But with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled.
  - ◇ If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
- ◇ In India, there were estimated 23.48 lakh People Living with HIV (PLHIV) in 2019.
  - ◇ Mizoram was estimated to have the highest adult HIV prevalence followed by Nagaland and Manipur.
- ◇ Initiatives taken by government
  - ◇ National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to oversee policies related to HIV and AIDS.
  - ◇ National AIDS Control Program.
  - ◇ HIV & AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 to address discrimination against PLHIV.
  - ◇ National Strategic Plan 2017-24 and Mission SAMPARK for tracing under ART services.
  - ◇ Training and sensitization programmes for various stakeholders.

## GOVERNMENT EXTENDS SMART CITIES MISSION (SCM) TIMELINE TO 2023 FROM 2021 DEADLINE

- ◇ This move comes in the backdrop of stalled development due to COVID 19 pandemic and also on the basis of NITI Aayog's report recommending the same in August.
  - ◇ NITI Aayog has found that many of the SDGs were being met by the Smart Cities projects and the work needed to be "deepened".
- ◇ **About SCM**
  - ◇ Launched by: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
  - ◇ Objective: To promote cities that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions'.
  - ◇ There is no standard definition of a smart city.

- ♦ It is operated as Centrally Sponsored Scheme. Central Government will give Rs. 48,000 crores over 5 years i.e. on an average Rs. 100 crore per city per year.
  - An equal amount is provided by State/ULB.
- ♦ **Current status of SCM**
  - ♦ **49% of over 5,000 projects for smart cities unfinished**
  - ♦ **Only about 23% of funds have been released** for which tenders have been issued.
- ♦ **Issues in SCM** : Institutional and structural issues, funding roadblocks, understaffed and unskilled manpower, lack of citizen participation etc.

## RAJYA SABHA PASSES 'DAM SAFETY BILL (2019)'

- ♦ Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 2nd August 2019, however it was sent to a parliamentary select committee.
  - ♦ Currently in the absence of a central law, the safety regulations vary from state to state.
  - ♦ Water is under the state list, the Centre has brought the legislation under Article 246 of the Constitution related to inter-state rivers and river valleys.
- ♦ **Key features of the Bill**
  - ♦ Provides for adequate surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of all the large dams in the country so as to prevent dam failure related disasters.
  - ♦ Dam owners are required to provide resources for timely repair and maintenance of the dam structure.
  - ♦ Addresses dam safety on account of emerging climate change related challenges.
  - ♦ Provides for stringent penalties in case of violations.
- ♦ **Significance of this law**
  - ♦ Large number of dams: India is the 3rd largest dam-owning nation in the world after China and USA.
  - ♦ Protect ageing dams: 80% of India's large dams are already over 25 years old, hence ageing of dam assets warrants serious concern.
  - ♦ Protect Critical infrastructure : Safeguarding huge public investment in critical physical infrastructure.

## RAJYA SABHA FLAGS ONLINE GAMING ISSUE

- ♦ During Zero hour in the Rajya Sabha, it was highlighted that during pre-Covid, the weekly time spent on mobile gaming was 2.5 hours which increased to 4 hours during lockdown.
- ♦ Concerns were also raised about crores of youngsters becoming addicted to the menace of online gaming.

- ♦ Online games refer to games that are played over some form of computer network, most often the Internet like Ludo Kings, Rummy, Poker, Dream 11.
  - ♦ India's online gaming industry is expected to be worth Rs. 15,500 crore by 2023 (All India Gaming Federation).
  - ♦ India had the second largest number of gamers after South Korea (2019 survey by the U.S. based Limelight Networks).
- ♦ **About gaming disorder**
  - ♦ The World Health Organization (WHO) categorised gaming disorder as a mental health condition in 2018.
  - ♦ According to the WHO's definition, a person who has gaming disorder will show the following characteristics for at least 12 months
    - lacking control over their gaming habits
    - prioritizing gaming over other interests and activities
    - continuing gaming despite its negative consequences
  - ♦ Gaming disorders cause **physical, social and emotional damages, impairing sleep, appetites, careers and social lives.**

## UNDP PLANS TO DRASTICALLY EXPAND PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT (PWM) IN INDIA

- ♦ The The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) PWM (2018-2024) programme aims to almost triple its PWM to 100 cities in India by 2024.
  - ♦ UNDP launched this project, in partnership with Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited, Hindustan Unilever Limited among others, for building on existing systems to reduce the impact of plastic waste on the environment in India.
  - ♦ It promotes collection, segregation and recycling of all kinds of plastics to move towards a circular economy.
  - ♦ So far, 83,000 metric tonne of plastic waste has been collected.
  - ♦ The project has reached out to 5500 Safai sathis, in an effort to institutionalize workers from the informal sector.
  - ♦ "Utthaan", a social protection programme was launched to help 9000 safai sathsi.
  - ♦ However, the programme suffered a setback after the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread increase in waste, including medical plastic waste.
- ♦ The UNDP is also working with NITI Aayog and have jointly developed a 'handbook' model for local municipalities as well as the private sector.
  - ♦ The handbook provides a comprehensive overview of PWM by representing and discussing components of the entire plastic waste value chain.

## FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) HIGHLIGHTS THREAT OF SOIL SALINIZATION TO GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

- ◇ On the occasion of World Soil Day (5 December), FAO highlighted threat posed by soil salinization.
  - ◇ Unsustainable agricultural practices and overexploitation of natural resources as well as a growing population are putting increased pressure on soils and causing alarming rates of soil degradation globally.
  - ◇ Over 833 million hectares of soils worldwide are already salt-affected and more than 10% of cropland is salt-affected, which poses a major risk to food security worldwide.
- ◇ Saline soils contain an excessive amount of soluble salts that reduces the ability of plants to take up water from soil.
  - ◇ It can occur naturally, for example in deserts due to lack of water and intense evaporation, or as a consequence of human activity.
  - ◇ Impacts of soil salinization : Significant decreases in agricultural productivity, water quality, soil biodiversity, and soil erosion.
- ◇ **Recommendations**
  - ◇ Integrated approach, embracing sustainable soil and irrigation and drainage management, selection of salt-tolerant crops and plants including halophytes, which are able to grow well in such environments.
  - ◇ Continuous investment in soil laboratories to provide reliable data for taking decisions to ensure sustainable soil management.
- ◇ **Initiatives taken in India**
  - ◇ Reclamation of Problem Soils- as a sub scheme of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.
  - ◇ IMD has provided a country-wide soil moisture forecast, for better irrigation planning, and understanding crop patterns.
  - ◇ Soil Health Cards.

## LANDSLIDE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (LEWS) UNDER TRIAL

- ◇ LEWS, being developed by Geological Survey of India (GSI) under the aegis of Britain's LANDSLIP project, is based on rainfall thresholds since 2017.
  - ◇ LANDSLIP is working to develop understanding of the factors which trigger landslides, including weather regimes, rainfall and geological conditions.

- ◇ Landslide is the movement of rock, earth, or debris down a sloped section of land.
  - ◇ Major causes of landslides : Geological (weak or fractured earth or rock), Morphological (Slopes that lose their vegetation to fire or drought are more vulnerable), Human Activity (deforestation, excavation etc).
  - ◇ About 12.6% of Indian land mass is prone to landslides, with Himalaya and Western Ghats regions particularly prone.
- ◇ Since the 2020 southwest monsoon, GSI has started issuing daily landslide forecasts to district administrations in Darjeeling and Nilgiris.
  - ◇ Also, GSI plans to add five more - Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram - by 2022 under LEWS.
- ◇ Other initiatives taken in India
  - ◇ GSI's landslide susceptibility mapping in different parts of the country.
  - ◇ NDMA guidelines for Landslide Hazard Zonation.

## WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION (WTO) NEGOTIATIONS ON SERVICES REGULATIONS CONCLUDE

- ◇ Recently, several member countries (including US, China, EU etc) of WTO concluded negotiations on Services Domestic Regulations (SDR) aimed at
  - ◇ Making it easier for foreign service providers to follow procedures for getting authorisations or licenses for operating in the host country.

GATS mode of supply	Description
<b>Mode 1</b> : Cross-border delivery	Delivery of education services from exporting country A to importing Country B
<b>Mode 2</b> : Consumption abroad	Movement of students from importing country B to exporting country A to obtain education services
<b>Mode 3</b> : Commercial presence	Establishment of local unit of institution from exporting country A to importing country B
<b>Mode 4</b> : Presence of natural persons	Temporary movement of teachers, lecturers and education personnel from country A to country B to provide education services

- ◇ Be assured of legal certainty, predictability, regulatory quality and facilitation.



- ◆ Under General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), WTO member countries can determine extent of market access they will grant in various service sectors and treat foreign entities differently from the domestic entities.
  - ◆ Many service providers complained that processes for applying and obtaining licenses are not clear in many countries.
- ◆ SDR does not alter the commitments of member countries under GATS and only deals with procedures. It is supposed to provide benefits like:
  - ◆ Improving business climate by enhancing transparency, efficiency and predictability of regulatory frameworks.
  - ◆ Lowering trade costs and providing other trade benefits that could result in annual savings of about USD 150 billion globally.
- ◆ Some WTO members, including Indian and South Africa, have questioned the legal status of SDR and expressed concern over how these will be integrated into WTO framework.

## 100 YEARS OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (PAC)

- ◆ Marking the occasion, the Vice President stressed on the need for wise, faithful and economical utilization of the monies granted by the Parliament to ensure that every rupee is spent for realizing the stated socio-economic outcomes.
- ◆ **About PAC :**
  - ◆ It is the oldest Parliamentary Committee and was first constituted in 1921.
  - ◆ It is one of the three Financial Parliamentary committees, the other two are the Estimates Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings.
  - ◆ It is constituted by Parliament each year for scrutinizing the Appropriation Accounts of Government and the reports of Comptroller and Auditor General of India thereon.
    - It can call upon the Ministry/ Department if a case of proved negligence resulting in loss or extravagance.
    - The functions of the Committee extend, however, beyond the formality of expenditure to its wisdom, faithfulness and economy, thus examining cases involving losses, nagatory expenditure and Financial irregularities.
  - ◆ It can also examine accounts of autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies. However, Public Undertakings and Government Companies do not come under its purview.
- ◆ It consists of 22 Members, 15 Members from Lok Sabha and 7 members from Rajya Sabha are associated with it.
  - ◆ The Speaker is empowered to appoint the Chairman of the Committee from amongst its Members.
  - ◆ As per convention Chairperson is from the opposition party.

## MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS LAYS DATA IN PARLIAMENT ON IMPROVEMENTS IN QUALITY OF LIFE OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

- ◆ **Major Highlights**
  - ◆ **Education :**
    - Literary rate for STs has improved from 47.1% in 2001 to 59% in 2011 and is presently around 70.1% (June 2020).
  - ◆ **Health :**
    - Infant Mortality Rate has declined from 62.1 (2005-06) to 44.4 (2015-16).
    - Under Five Mortality Rate has declined from 95.7 (2005-06) to 57.2 (2015-16).
    - Institutional Delivery has Increased from 17.7% in 2005-06 to 68.0% in 2015-16.
  - ◆ **Standard of living :**
    - Percentage of ST people living below the poverty line in rural areas has declined from 62.3% in 2004-05 to 45.3% in 2011-12.
- ◆ **Steps taken by government to promote Tribal Welfare :**
  - ◆ Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-scheme (SCA to TSS) for activities related to education, health etc.
  - ◆ Grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution for promoting the welfare of STs.
  - ◆ Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) for imparting quality education.
  - ◆ Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain.
  - ◆ Support to National/State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations (NSTFDC/STFDC).
- ◆ **About Tribals :**
  - ◆ According to the 1991 Census, Scheduled Tribes (STs) account for 67.76 million representing 8.08 percent of the country's total population. Of these, 1.32 million (1.95%) belong to Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs).
  - ◆ STs inhabit in all the States except Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry.

## RAJYA SABHA PASSES SURROGACY (REGULATION) BILL, 2020

- ◆ Bill had earlier been passed by the Lok Sabha, but was referred to a Select Committee by the Rajya Sabha which suggested 15 major changes to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019.

◆ **Key provisions of the bill :**

- ◆ Defines surrogacy as a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intension to hand over the child after birth to the intending couple.
- ◆ Prohibits commercial surrogacy, but allows altruistic surrogacy.
- ◆ Only Indian couples can opt for surrogacy in the country.
- ◆ Allows any 'willing' woman to be a surrogate mother and proposes that widows and divorced women can also benefit from its provisions, besides infertile Indian couples.
- ◆ Surrogacy is permitted when intending couples suffer from proven infertility, for any condition or disease specified through regulations etc.
- ◆ Deleted the definition of 'Infertility' as the inability to conceive after five years of unprotected intercourse on the ground that it was too long a period.
- ◆ Child born out of surrogacy will be deemed to be the biological child of the intending couple.
- ◆ Abortion of surrogate child requires written consent of surrogate mother and authorisation of appropriate authority.
- ◆ Defines penalties for contravention of its provisions.

**Altruistic surrogacy** involves no monetary compensation other than the medical expenses and insurance coverage during the pregnancy.

- ◆ Need for legislation
  - ◆ Issue of nationality of child.
  - ◆ ill treatment of surrogate mother.
  - ◆ Ethical issue of breaking the bond of mother and child.
- ◆ Reasons for India emerging as a surrogacy market
  - ◆ Comparatively lower costs of surrogacy.
  - ◆ Availability of women who could rent their wombs.
  - ◆ Lack of stringent legislation.
  - ◆ Availability of advanced technology.

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## CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION OF PRADHAN MANTRI AWAAS YOJANA – GRAMIN (PMAY-G) TILL MARCH, 2024

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- ◆ **Ministry** : Ministry of Rural Development.
- ◆ Cabinet has approved continuation of PMAY-G beyond Marth 2021 till March 2024 as per the existing norms to complete remaining houses within a cumulative target of 2.95 crore houses.

- ◆ Presently, only 1.65 crore PMAY-G houses have been constructed, therefore to achieve the target, the scheme needs to be continued till March, 2024.
- ◆ Various other concerns in scheme : Non-availability of funds, slow implementation of scheme, etc.

◆ **About PMAY-G :**

- ◆ **Objective** : "Housing for all by 2022" to all rural houseless households and those living in kutcha and dilapidated hours by providing financial subsidies.
- ◆ Social welfare program through which the Government provides, financial assistance to houseless beneficiaries identified using SECC 2011.
- ◆ Allows for construction using local materials and local house design.
- ◆ Gram Sabha identifies beneficiaries.
- ◆ Provides convergence with other schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission, PM Ujjawala and MGNREGS.

◆ **Significance :**

- ◆ Housing is universally recognized as a basic human need, hence it improves quality of life and helps in poverty alleviation.
- ◆ Specific housing provision for differently abled people, old age and left-wing extremist affected areas, is a step towards inclusive growth.

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## 75 YEARS OF THE HISTORIC FIRST SITTING OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (CA)

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- ◆ CA met for the first time in New Delhi on December 9, 1946 in the Central Hall of Parliament House.
- ◆ Cabinet Mission Plan, 1946 (comprising of Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stanford Cripps and A.V. Alexander) created the CA of Indian.
- ◆ **Composition** : Members were chosen by indirect election by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, according to the scheme recommended by the Cabinet Mission.
  - ◆ The arrangement was
    - 292 members were elected through the Provincial Legislative Assemblies.
    - 93 members represented the Indian Princely States and
    - 4 members represented the Chief Commissioners 'Provinces'. (Total membership of 389).
- ◆ However, as a result of the partition under the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June, 1947, a separate Constituent Assembly was set up for Pakistan and representatives of some Provinces ceased to be members of the Assembly. As a result, the membership of the Assembly was reduced to 299.

## CENTRE ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR USING DRONES TO SPRAY PESTICIDES

- ◇ Move will help **reduce risk of greeting exposed to hazardous chemical and also ensure judicious usage** of these insecticides in the corps.
- ◇ **Key guidelines :**
  - ◇ Operators are required to **obtain a Unique Identification Number and Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit** from Director General of Civil Aviation before any operation.
  - ◇ Local authorities will have to be intimated before operation and all safety precautions

- (not spraying near a water body, maintaining in a buffer zone between target and non-target prior notice to public etc.) have to be followed.
- ◇ **Role of drones in farming includes :** Soil and field planning crop monitoring, crop protection from weeds, pests and diseases, precision crop spraying, irrigation management, locust control, for remote sensing data collection under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) etc.
  - ◇ **Benefits of using drones :** Reducing manpower requirement, reducing time of application, reducing volume of water, quantity of chemicals, increased efficiency and precision etc.
  - ◇ **Challenges :** Regulatory framework for monitoring drone operations is still under formulation, limited flight time and range, smaller farm holdings, etc.

# Prelims Boosters

### India's GDP expands 8.4%

- GDP for the second quarter of the financial year grew by 8.4% from a year ago, **one of the fastest rates among major economies.**
- **On the supply side, agriculture growth provided support**, along with a pick-up in service sector growth as **contact-intensive services improved** along with financial and real estate sectors.
- **On the demand side, investment growth provided support.**

### Core Sector Industries

- Eight-industry core sector **grew 7.5 per cent in October.**
- **Eight core sector industries are** (In the order of weightage from highest to lowest): Refinery Products, Electricity, Steel, Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Cement, Fertilizers.
  - These account for **40.27% of the weight** of items included in the **index of industrial Production (IIP).**
- Since these eight industries are the essential basic and/or intermediate ingredient in functioning of the broader economy, **mapping their health provides a fundamental understanding of state of the economy.**

### Periodic Labour force Survey (PLFS) by National Statistical Office

- **Key highlights of PLFS (For January-March 2021)**
  - **Labour force participation rate (LFPR)** in urban areas for persons of 15 years of age and above was **47.5%, down from 48.1% a year ago.**
    - LFPR is **percentage of persons in labour force** (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population.
  - **Unemployment rate (UR)** (age 15 and above) in **urban areas rose to 9.3%**
    - UR is **percentage of persons unemployed** among the persons in the labour force.

### Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act

- Uttarakhand government announced withdrawal of the Act, leading to the **abolition of Uttarakhand Char Dham Devasthanam Management Board (UCDDMB).**
- UCDDM was constituted, under Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act, **as the highest governing body for the management of the temples** with powers to frame policies, execute provisions of the Act etc.
- **Under this board, there were 53 temples, including four shrines** – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri – and other temples located around these shrines.



### State-level Scheme Sanctioning Committee

- Drinking water supply schemes were approved for Rajasthan in the SLSSC.
- Under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), there is provision for **constitution of SLSSC for consideration and approval of schemes** to be taken up for provisioning tap water supply to rural households.
- SLSSC acts as a State-level Committee to consider water supply schemes/projects**, and a nominee of the National JJM is a member of the said committee.

### Responsible AI for Youth Program

- Minister of State for Electronics & Information Technology **interacted with creators of top 20 projects** under Responsible AI for Youth program.
- It is a **national program for Government Schools** (classes 8-12) that was initiated in May 2020 by National e-Governance Division (MeitY) and Intel India.
- Aim of this program is **to empower youth to become 'AI ready' and help reduce the AI skill gap** in India.
- It is designed to reach out to students from the government schools pan India and **Provide them with an opportunity to become part of the skilled workforce** in an inclusive manner.

### Places in News

#### Barbados

- Barbados became the world's newest republic after it **removed Queen Elizabeth II as the head of the state**.
- Location**
  - It is an island country in the **southeastern Caribbean Sea with Bridgetown as capital**.
  - Its neighbours include** Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.
  - Geographical features** : Surrounded by coral reefs, **Mount Hillaby** is the highest point, no significant rivers or lakes and **only a few streams, springs, and ponds are found**.

#### Sabarmati river

- Ministry of Civil Aviation is **taking steps for making seaplane operations viable** between Sabarmati River Front & Statue of Unity.
- Origin** : monsoon-fed river that originates in the Aravalli hills of Rajasthan.
- Tributaries**: Hamav, Guhai, Hathmati, Khari, Meshwo, Mazam, Watrak, Mohar and shedhi.
- Other features**: Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat and Ahmedabad are located on its banks.

### Kyhytysuka sachicaram

- It is a **new marine reptile**, one of the last surviving **ichthyosaurs of early Cretaceous epoch** some 130 million years ago.
- Its **fossil was found** in central Colombian region.

### India joined G20 Troika

- With this move, **India has started the procedure for taking over the G20 presidency** on December 1, 2022.
- Troika refers to the **top grouping within the G20 that consists of the current, previous and the incoming presidencies** – Indonesia, Italy and India.
- G20 is a strategic **multilateral platform connecting the world's major developed and emerging economies**.
- Together, the G20 members represent more than **80% of world GDP, 75% of international trade and 60% of the world population**.

### Global treaty to strengthen pandemic prevention

- World Health Assembly (WHA) agreed to form a global treaty to **"strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response"** aimed at protecting the world from future infectious diseases crises.
- An **intergovernmental negotiating body will be responsible for drafting and negotiating a treaty** under Article 19 of WHO Constitution.
  - Article 19 provides WHA with the authority** to adopt conventions or agreements on any matter within WHO's competence.
  - Sole instrument established under Article 19** to date is **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control**.

### World Inequality Report 2022

- Report is compiled and **written by a team of world-leading economists including Thomas Piketty**.
- Key findings**
  - Richest 1% have** since the mid-nineties **captured 38% of wealth growth globally**.
  - Richest 10% own around 60-80% of wealth** and the poorest half less than 5% of wealth.
  - Currently **women earn just one-third of all incomes** from work.
- Report **suggested developing new forms of wealth taxation on multimillionaires**, including a progressive rate of wealth tax with tax rates according to the value of the total amount of wealth owned.

### National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC)

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) has been vocal in pushing the proposal** for establishing the NJIC to uniformly improve judicial facilities and access to justice.
- Courts in the country lack basic infrastructure** for judges, court staff, and litigants, which ends up **contributing to arrears and backlog of cases**.
- CJI had said that NJIC **would bring the uniformity and standardisation required** to revolutionise judicial infrastructure.

### Undertrials can't be detained indefinitely

- ⊙ **Recently, Supreme Court held that it would ordinarily be obligated to grant bail if timely trial is not possible** and the accused has been in jail for long.
- ⊙ An undertrial is **an unconvicted prisoner who is on trial** in a court of law
- ⊙ **An estimated 70% of prison inmates are undertrials in India**, resulting in overcrowding, delayed medical attention, unhygienic conditions and malnutrition in prisons.
  - ⊙ At the end of 2019, 3.28 **lakh prison inmates were undergoing trial**, while 1.42 lakh were convicted.

### Common entrance test for central varsities

- ⊙ From the 2022-23 academic session, a **common entrance test may be implemented across central universities in India** for admissions to undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
- ⊙ Development comes at a time when **unrealistic cutoffs for admission to premier institutions like Delhi University have underlined the need** for alternatives.
- ⊙ **A Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) was launched in 2010**, but was optional and universities continued screening based on Class 12<sup>th</sup> marks.

### Nairobi Declaration

- ⊙ Recently, **Nairobi declaration was adopted by African ministers** and heads of delegations.
- ⊙ Declaration underlined the **need to deliver commitments on the Programme of Action (PoA) for implementing the Sendai Framework** in Africa.
  - ⊙ PoA outlines how Africa aims to implement Sendai Framework on the continent.
- ⊙ Sendai framework provides for a pathway in **guiding countries and communities to substantially reduce the effects of shocks caused by natural and human-induced hazards** by 2030 compared to 2005-2015.

### India-ITU Joint Cyberdrill 2021

- ⊙ Department of Telecommunications and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have Commenced the Cyberdrill.
  - ⊙ ITU is the **United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies**.
- ⊙ Cyberdrill is **intended for Indian entities especially Critical Network Infrastructure operators** in order to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ⊙ This event where cyber-attacks, information security incidents, and other disruptions are simulated, **help to test an organization's cyber capabilities**.

### 1160 Elephants killed in a decade

- ⊙ Information was provided by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- ⊙ While **electrocution claimed the lives of 741 elephants, train hits led to the death of 186 pachyderms, followed by poaching and poisoning**.
- ⊙ According to Ministry **India had a total of 29,964 wild elephants as per an estimate done in 2017**.
  - ⊙ **Southern region** (comprising Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra) **accounted for the highest population – 14,612 elephants**.
  - ⊙ **Karnataka had the highest number** of elephants.

### Centre set to rejig privatisation process for non-strategic sectors

- ⊙ According to the new Public Sector Enterprises (PSE) policy for Atmanirbhar Bharat, **companies in non-strategic sectors** such as steel, tourism, urban development, and healthcare, would be considered for **privatisation, wherever feasible or else they would be closed**.
- ⊙ The new **PSU privatisation policy** announced in **the Union Budget 2021-22** divides **PSE into strategic and non-strategic ones**.
- ⊙ **Strategic sector** includes atomic energy, space and defence, transport and telecommunications, power, petroleum, coal and other minerals, and banking, insurance and financial services.

### Electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel

- ⊙ India has achieved the ambitious **target of 40% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources**.
- ⊙ According to Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, **total installed non-fossil fuel-based capacity stands at 156.83 Giga Watts** and the total installed electricity capacity is 390 Giga Watts.
- ⊙ Government has further announced at CoP 26 in Glasgow a target of achieving **500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030**.

### Neo Banks

- ⊙ Neo-banks **are online-only financial technology (fintech) companies** that operate solely digitally or via mobile app. Ex. Razorpay X, EpiFi etc.
  - ⊙ They have disrupted the traditional banking system by **leveraging technology and artificial intelligence (AI)**.
- ⊙ As a related concept, **Challenger banks also leverage technology to streamline the banking process**. However, they also maintain a brick and mortar physical presence.
  - ⊙ They are different from traditional banks in the sense that their **presence is much smaller**.

### Indian SARS-COV-2 genome consortium (INSACOG)

- ⊙ INSACOG has **recommended that boosters (or third doses) “be considered” in those above 40.**
- ⊙ INSACOG is jointly initiated by the **Union Health Ministry of Health, and department of Biotechnology** with Council for Scientific & Industrial Research and Indian Council of Medical Research.
- ⊙ It is a **consortium of 28 National Laboratories to monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2.**
- ⊙ The network carries out **whole genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 virus across the nation**, aiding the understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves, and provides information to aid public health response.

### Mullaperiyar Dam

- ⊙ **Kerala government has raised concerns over Tamil Nadu releasing water** from the Mullaperiyar Dam without sufficient warning.
- ⊙ **About Mullaperiyar Dam**
  - ⊙ It is a 123-year-old dam located on the **confluence of Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Kerala.**
  - ⊙ It is **operated and maintained by the Tamil Nadu** following an 1886 lease indenture for 999 years.
  - ⊙ Dams purpose is to **divert the waters of the west-flowing River Periyar** eastward to the arid rain shadow regions of Tamil Nadu.

### Cyclone Jawad

- ⊙ **Odisha government is bracing for Cyclone Jawad**, which is likely to strike the Odisha and Andhra Pradesh coasts.
- ⊙ The name Jaward is as per the suggestion from **Saudi Arabia and means generous or merciful in Arabic.**

### Paika rebellion

- ⊙ Recently, Centre stated that the **Paika rebellion cannot be called the first War of Independence.**
  - ⊙ At present, the **Indian Mutiny of 1857 is called the first war of Independence against British Rule.**
- ⊙ **Paika rebellion** was an armed rebellion that took place in Odisha against the British East India Company.
  - ⊙ Paikas were the **traditional landed militia of the Gajapati rulers of Odisha.**
  - ⊙ Paikas **owned rent—free land that had been given to them for their military service to Kingdom of Khurda.**
  - ⊙ The advent of the British and establishment of colonial rule **brought new land revenue settlements**, which led to the Paikas losing their estates.
  - ⊙ They were mobilized in 1817 **under Bakshi Jagabandhu.**

### Two UNESCO awards for Nizamuddin Basti

- ⊙ The conservation initiative at Delhi’s Nizamuddin Basti bagged the **UNESCO’s Award under 2 categories ‘Award of Excellence 2021’ and ‘Special Recognition for sustainable Development Award’.**
  - ⊙ Project restored over 20 historic monuments clustered around the **14th century mausoleum of Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.**
- ⊙ **The award recognizes :**
  - ⊙ Outstanding achievement in placing heritage at the heart of the sustainable development agenda.
  - ⊙ **Overcoming major socio-economic challenges and improved health, education and well-being, particularly for women and youth** through an innovative People-Public-Private partnership model.

### Hornbill Festival

- ⊙ It is one of the largest celebrations of the **indigenous warrior tribes of Nagaland** organized every year in the first week of December.
- ⊙ The aim of the festival is to **revive and protect the rich culture of Nagaland** and display its extravaganza and traditions.
- ⊙ The festival is named after **Hornbill, one of the most venerated bird species in the state** whose importance is reflected in a **number of tribal cultural expressions, songs and dances.**

### National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- ⊙ Government introduces this bill with an **aim to establish a governing council and its composition, board of governor for National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research.**
- ⊙ The bill also proposed to establish an additional National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research as Institutions of National Importance. These institutes are located in : (i) Ahmedabad, (ii) Hajipur, (iii) Hyderabad, (iv) Kolkata, (v) Guwahati, and (vi) Raebareli
- ⊙ An **Institution of National Importance** refers to an autonomous institute established under an Act, with the power to hold examinations, grant degrees, diplomas and other academic distinctions or titles.

### e-Voting

- ⊙ There is no proposal to introduce electronic voting in the upcoming general elections, Law minister informed the Lok Sabha.
  - ⊙ **e-voting** allow electors to **vote from faraway cities without going to the designated polling station** of their constituencies.



- ⊙ The encrypted remote votes cast **are validated at the pre-counting stage to ensure that they have neither been decrypted nor tampered with or replaced.**
- ⊙ **Benefits**-Breaks the geographical barriers, More Flexible for voters and helps in inclusion of eligible voters and increases turnout in voting numbers.
- ⊙ **Concerns**- Issues of Reliability, cyber risks and Issue of privacy.

### North Eastern States Roads Investment Programme

- ⊙ Approved in 2011 **it envisages construction/upgradation of total 433.42 Km long roads in 6 North Eastern States** of Assam, manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura **by August, 2022.**
- ⊙ It is approved at estimated cost of 1353.83 crore **with assistance from Asian Development Bank to the tune of US \$ 200 million.**
- ⊙ **ministry of Development of North East Region** is the Executing Agency.
- ⊙ According to latest update, all road projects are completed except one road in Tripura which going to be completed by February, 2022 under NESRIP.

### Supplementary grant

- ⊙ According to The **Supplementary Demand for Grants** tabled before Parliament, the government has sought Parliament's nod to infuse over **'62,000 crore to its company that holds Air India's debt, liabilities and some non-core assets.**
  - ⊙ This company was set up to clean the airline's balance sheet ahead of its privatisation.
- ⊙ The **additional grant required to meet the required expenditure** of the government is called **Supplementary Grants.** This grant is mentioned under **Article 115** of the Constitution.

### National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

- ⊙ NCMC convenes meeting on preparedness for cyclone JAWAD.
  - ⊙ **Cylone JAWAD is named by Saudi Arabia it means generous or merciful.**
- ⊙ **NCMC** is a committee set up by the Government in the **wake of a natural calamity for effective coordination** and implementation of relief measures and operations.
  - ⊙ It is headed by **Cabinet Secretary.**

### Lesser Floricans

- ⊙ The **longest in-country migration route of Lesser Floricans** has been tracked for the first time from Rajasthan to Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district.

- ⊙ Lesser florican birds **belong to the bustard group, found in tall grasslands.** The Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun has launched a **recovery programme** for them. They are observed in **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and some other regions.** They breed during the monsoon season and later disappear with their chicks to unknown places.
- ⊙ **IUCN Red List status** : Critically endangered

### Winter Olympics

- ⊙ **U. N. urges truce during Winter Olympics in Beijing in February.**
- ⊙ A resolution adopted by consensus by the 193-nation world **body recalled the ancient Greek tradition of ekecheiria, calling for an "Olympic Truce,"** to encourage a peaceful environment and ensure safe passage and participation of athletes in the games.
  - ⊙ The Winter Olympic Games is a **major international multi-sport event held once every four years for sports practiced on snow and ice.**
  - ⊙ The first celebration of the Winter Olympics was held in Chamonix, France, in 1924.

### Personalities in News

#### St. Francis Xavier

- ⊙ The PM has greeted the people of Goa on the day of the feast of St. Francis Xavier.
- ⊙ He was one of the **founders of the Society of Jesus**, who arrived in Goa in 1542.
- ⊙ **Personality Traits** : Religious Philosophy, service of God and humankind, spirit of harmony and brotherhood.
- ⊙ Xavier established a **network of Jesuit mission centres.**
- ⊙ 3rd December marks the anniversary of St Francis Xavier's death.
- ⊙ At the Basilica of Bom Jesus church, mortal remains of St. Francis Xavier still exist.

### Default Bail

- ⊙ National Investigation Agency has approached Supreme Court **against a Bombay High Court order granting bail to activist Sudha Bharadwaj.**
- ⊙ Default or statutory bail **is a right** (regardless of the nature of crime) **to bail that accrues when police fail to complete investigation within a specified period** in respect of a person in judicial custody.
  - ⊙ It is **enshrined in Code of Criminal Procedure.**
- ⊙ For most offences, **police have 60 days to complete the investigation** and file a final report before the court.
  - ⊙ However, for some offences **there is a 90 or 180 days limit also.**

### RBI weighs priority sector loans for electric vehicles

- ⊙ Proposal has been **put forward by NITI Aayog to categorise loans to purchase electric vehicles (EVs) under priority sector lending (PSL) segment.**
  - ⊙ Under PSL, **40% of lenders' total credit must be compulsorily loaned to specific sectors.** Sectors included are mostly cash starved like agriculture, small businesses, export credit.
- ⊙ It can help in **reducing cost of finance and also increase penetration of EVs.**
  - ⊙ EVs are **significant in reducing emission of greenhouse gases** and helping India in its fight against climate change.

### Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees)

- ⊙ Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) **has replicated the project in Assam** (after its success in Karnataka).
- ⊙ Under Project RE-HAB, **Bee-fences are created by setting up bee boxes in the passage ways of elephants** to block their entrance to human territories.
  - ⊙ Boxes are connected with a string so that when elephants attempt to pass through, **a tug or pull causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds** and dissuade them from progressing further.
- ⊙ It is a **cost-effective way of reducing human-wild conflicts** without causing any harm to the animals.

### Canary black bee

- ⊙ **About 50 days after** Cumbre Vieja volcano in the Canary Islands erupted, **tens of thousands of bees were found alive inside hives that had been covered in volcanic ash.**
- ⊙ Honeybees **use propolis** (a resin like mixture sometimes known as bee glue), **produced from substances they collect from plants and buds, to plug tiny gaps in hive** from gases of the volcano.
- ⊙ Generally, propolis is used by honey bees to **protect it from rainwater and drafts.**

### Culture mapping of 80 villages kicks off

- ⊙ Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts has started a **pilot project for mapping of villages associated with noted personalities in history** (particular freedom movement), **unique crafts and festivals.**
- ⊙ Project would lead to a **national register and interactive database of artists and art practices.**
  - ⊙ Each artist would be given a **unique ID and an e-commerce platform set up.**
- ⊙ Key sites selected include **Shringverpur** (associated with Lord Rama) in UP; **Ettayapuram** (birthplace of poet Subramania Bharathi) and **Thiruchigadi** (a village of women potters)- both in TN; **Sempore or Pandrenthan** (associated with 14<sup>th</sup> Century mystic Lal Ded or Lalleshwari) in J&K.

### Konyaks tribes

- ⊙ Tribe is **at the centre of the recent violence that erupted in Nagland** after Indian forces 'mistakenly' killed civilians.
- ⊙ Konyaks, **the largest tribal group in Nagaland** (settled in around hundred villages in the Mon district), are also found in **Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.**
- ⊙ Recognized by **their tattooed faces**, they are **traditional hunters and warriors** but now their main occupation is **agriculture.**
- ⊙ They were the **last to give up the practice of head-hunting**, severing heads of enemies after attacking rival tribes.

### Ciprian Foias Prize (CFP)

- ⊙ **Indian-American mathematician Nikhil Srivastava has been jointly selected** for the inaugural CFP.
  - ⊙ Two other awardees are **Adam Marcus and Daniel Spielman.**
- ⊙ It is **awarded by the American Mathematical Society (AMS)** for work in Operator Theory.
- ⊙ They **developed methods for understanding characteristic polynomial of matrices**, namely iterative sparsification method and the method of interlacing polynomials.

### Sandhayakt

- ⊙ It is the **first of the four Survey Vessels** (Large) Project being built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.
- ⊙ These ships **will replace the existing Sandhayak Class survey ships** and are equipped with new generation hydrographic equipment to collect oceanographic and geophysical data.

### EXEKUVERIN

- ⊙ It is a **joint training exercise between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force.**

### Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) 2.0

- ⊙ The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs signed a MoU with UNDP to **strengthen the waste management sector** in India under the overall ambit of **SBM-U 2.0.**
- ⊙ Launched on **02 October 2021 with a vision of achieving Garbage Free status** for all cities, SBM-U 2.0 will be implemented from **2021-22 to 2025-26** in all **statutory towns** for
  - ⊙ **100% scientific management of all fractions of waste**, including safe disposal in scientific landfills.
  - ⊙ **SBM-U 2.0** will do this through segregation of waste by **all households and premises** and **100% door to door collection** of segregated waste.

### Export band of PPEs kits

- ⊙ **SC has upheld** RBI's rules on export ban of PPEs kits.
  - ⊙ **RBI imposed this ban under the Revised Guidelines on Merchanting Trade Transactions (MTT)** issued in January 2020.
  - ⊙ However, SC observed that **democratic interests that secure the well-being of the masses cannot be judicially aborted** to preserve the unfettered **freedom to conduct business of the few**.

### Digital Berlin Wall

- ⊙ International Monetary Fund (IMF) director warned **world may soon face a 'digital berlin Wall'** whereby **European Union, US and China all adopt discordant (different) technology standards**.
- ⊙ This may **force poor nations to 'choose sides'** leading to **balkanization of the digital economy** and risk as much as a **6% hit to global economic output**.

### The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, (CAF) 2016

- ⊙ ₹ 48,000 crore released to 32 States for afforestation under the (CAF) Act 2016.
- ⊙ **About the CAF Act 2016 :**
  - ⊙ The **Forest Act, 1980 provide compensation in the form of economic value** (as Net Present Value) when a forest land is **diverted for non-forestry purposes, for this, CAF act 2016** provides institutional arrangement.
  - ⊙ It established **national Compensatory Afforestation Fund (NCAF) under the public account of India and State Compensatory Afforestation Funds** under public accounts of states.

### Acute bladder snail (*Physella actuta*)

- ⊙ **An invasive species**, it is tiny snail with a striking pellucid golden-yellow shell.
  - ⊙ Considered **native to North America** but is now found in all continents except Antarctica.
  - ⊙ It is the **first time that this snail has been reported in Kerala**.
  - ⊙ The discovery is worrying as the **snail plays host to worms that can cause food-borne diseases and skin itches in Humans**.

### ACE2 Protein

- ⊙ The ACE2 protein in human is where the **coronavirus latches on to, in order to enter the cell**.
  - ⊙ However, It is **plant-growth protein and can be manufactured using a patented plant-based production system**.

- ⊙ Research are working on creating **chewing gum laced with ACE2 protein which can serve as a 'trap' for the virus and ultimately reduce transmission load**.

### Shreshtha Yojna :

- ⊙ Launched today, marking the **66th Death Anniversary of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (Mahaparinirvana Diwas)**.
  - ⊙ To be implemented by **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**
  - ⊙ Aim is to aid **socio-economic upliftment and overall development of the Scheduled Castes students** by providing quality residential education in reputed private schools.

### Places in News :

- ⊙ **Mount Semeru :**
  - ⊙ Mount Semeru, the highest volcano of Java Island (Indonesia), erupted once again recently.
  - ⊙ Semeru, also known as **Mahameru (Great Mountain) is located within the Bromo tenger semeru-Arjuno, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**.
  - ⊙ One of more than **100 active volcanoes** of Indonesia due to its location in the **Pacific Ring of Fire**, a 40,000 km arc of Volcanoes and oceanic trenches to partly encircle the Pacific Ocean.
- ⊙ **Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary, Villupuram (Tamil Nadu) :**
  - ⊙ Recently, the Tamil Nadu government declared the 5,151.60 ha of **Kazhuveli wetland as Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary (16th of Tamil Nadu) under section 18 of the Wildlife (Protection) ACT, 1972**.
  - ⊙ Kazhuveli, the **second largest brackish water wetland** in South India, is one of the **largest waterfowl congregation sites** in Tamil Nadu.
  - ⊙ Part of The **Central Asian migratory path of birds**, it is known as a **raptor roosting site** for species like the **Eastern Imperial Eagle, Greater, Spotted Eagle, Red-necked Falcon** etc.
  - ⊙ The **Grey-tailed Tatler, a rare migratory wader**, has been recorded only here and in **Pulicat (largest brackish water lake in South India)**
- ⊙ **Antarctica :**
  - ⊙ Recently, Antarctica experienced a **total solar eclipse**, i.e. when the Moon passes between the Sun and the Earth, completely blocking out the light from the Sun.
  - ⊙ Antarctica is **the southernmost and only continent with no permanent human habitatiojn**.
  - ⊙ **Lichens, mosses and terrestrial algae are its vegetation species** with krill, leopard, seal and penguins as main animals.
  - ⊙ As part of the **Indian Antarctic Programme**, India built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named **Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri and Bharati**, with **Maitri and Bharati as operational currently**.



### SEBI proposes 'one commodity one exchange' policy

- ⊙ It is being proposed **with the objective of reducing fragmentation of liquidity** and help every stock exchange to **develop an exclusive set of un-fragmented liquid contract**.
- ⊙ It will be applicable on **narrow agricultural commodities**, out of the three agricultural commodities, out of the three agricultural commodities categories viz, **sensitive, broad, and narrow**.
- ⊙ **Pros : Development of commodity derivatives market; Gain position to influence the global benchmark pricing** of such commodities; **Higher efficiency and low cost** in long run etc.
- ⊙ **Cons: Creating artificial barriers** for increased overall costs; **Risk of product blocking** by exchanges with no development etc.

### Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)-III

- ⊙ As a significant progress around **25% of sanctioned roads under PMGSY-III has already been built**.
- ⊙ **Chronology of the PMGSY**
  - ⊙ PMGSY-I envisaged constructing **all-weather connectivity** to eligible unconnected habitations in rural areas.
  - ⊙ PMGSY-II : further planned to **upgrade 50,000 km rural roads**.
  - ⊙ PMGSY-III : in 2019 to consolidate **1,25,000 km road length by 2025**. About 72,000 km road length has been sanctioned under PMGSY-III, out of which 17,750 km has been completed.
- ⊙ **Significance** : bring **isolated parts** into the **mainstream of development**, facilitate better goods distribution, promote the development of market centres, provide an incentive to farmers to generate a more **marketable surplus**.

### RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) bi-monthly policy meeting

- ⊙ **Major decision by MPC :**
  - ⊙ Allowed banks to make **one-time pre-payment** with respect to Targeted Long Term Repo rate (TLTRO).
    - Through TLTRO, banks can invest in specific sectors through debt instruments to push the credit flow in the economy.
  - ⊙ Increased the amount of **variable rate reverse repo (VRRR)**.
  - ⊙ Allowed widely accepted **interbank rate or alternative reference rate (ARR)** for external commercial borrowings and trade credits.
    - ARR is **benchmark interest rate used to determine other interest rates**. For example, like LIBOR provides an indication of average rates for interbank lending.

- ⊙ Bank will be allowed to **infuse capital in their overseas branches** as well as repatriate profits without seeking its prior approval.
- ⊙ **UPI will be extended to feature phone users**, presently it is available only for smartphones.

### Transgender Welfare Boards/Commissions

- ⊙ According to information provided in the parliament, **only 12 states and UTs have constituted the Transgender Welfare Boards**.
- ⊙ This is constituted as per **Transgender persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020** to assist in fulfilling the objective of ensuring welfare of transgender persons.
- ⊙ 2020 Rules were framed under **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** by Ministry of social justice and Empowerment to **provide for measures to be taken for protection of rights of transgender persons and their welfare**.

### Stockholm International Peace Research institute (SIPRI) Arms Sales Report

- ⊙ As per report, **3 Indian companies** (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Indian Ordnance Factories, and Bharat Electronics Limited) has **1.2% share of global arms sale** in 2020.
  - ⊙ USA companies top at **\$285 billion or 54%**, followed by China (**13%**) and UK (**7.1%**).
- ⊙ In 2020, India announced a phased ban on imports of more than a hundred different types of military equipment to **support domestic companies and enhance self-reliance** in arms production.
- ⊙ SIPRI is an **independent international institute** dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.

### Boesenbergia albolutea and Boesenbergia rubrolutea

- ⊙ These two species of plants **are now Extinct in The wild (EW)** under IUCN which were discovered around 125 years ago.
- ⊙ Boesenbergia rubrolutea was **endemic to Khasi Hill** : Meghalaya while Boesenbergia albolutea was endemic to **Andmand Island**.
  - ⊙ Classified under the **genus Boesenbergia**, the species belong to the **family Zingiberaceae**, the **ginger family of flowering plants**.
- ⊙ Possible reason for their disappearance include **climate change, human interference and over-exploitation, or natural calamities**.

### Polavaram Dam :

- ⊙ Operation of Polavaram Dam project due in 2022 has raised the **concern of development induced displacement**.
- ⊙ It is a **multi-purpose irrigation project** located on river Godavari near Ramayyapet village of West Godavarti district in **Andhra Pradesh**

- ⊙ It provides diversion of **Godavari River waters to Krishna River Basin**.
- ⊙ It will irrigate in **districts of Krishna, East and West Godavari and Visakhapatnam** through two major canals.
  - ⊙ **Concern : Under-evaluation of Compensation to locals, Problems in resettlement sites (not suitable to tribals needs), livelihood, lacks local consultation, submergence of settlement area, project lies in notified scheduled areas-recognition of their forest rights.**

### Personalities in news

#### General Bipin Rawat (16 March 1958 - 08 December 2021)

- ⊙ He joined the army in 1978 and went on to **become General of Indian Army in 2016 and first Chief of defense Staff (CDS) in 2019**.
  - ⊙ CDS is in the rank of a four-star General to **provide “effective leadership at the top level”** to the three wings of the armed forces.
- ⊙ His contributions include the **modernisation of the armed forces, controlling insurgency in the north east, leading, a United nations peacekeeping mission**.
- ⊙ **Personality Traits** : An outstanding soldier, he is known for virtues of integrity, strong determination, selfless service, courage and honor.

#### Sarada Menon (05 April 1923-05 December 2021)

- ⊙ She was the **first woman psychiatrist of India and the recipient of Padma Bhushan award**.
- ⊙ **Significant Contribution** :
  - ⊙ **Changed perspective on mental health** by removing old taboos.
  - ⊙ **Rehabilitation of mentally challenged people** through participation of social organisations in rehabilitation.
  - ⊙ Worked towards removing stigmas attached to mental health.
- ⊙ Her significant quality traits include **selfless service, devotion, courage, team building and motivation**.

### Centre Revised guidelines for Coarse Grains

- ⊙ **Centre revised guidelines for procurement, allocation, distribution and disposal of Coarse Grains**.
- ⊙ Under the new guidelines, the **distribution period of Jowar and Ragi has been increased to 6 and 7 months respectively to increase procurement and consumption** of these commodities.
  - ⊙ Previously **coarse grains procured by states from farmers at Minimum support Price (MSP), were to be distributed within 3 months** from the end of procurement period.
- ⊙ Coarse cereals are a **broad sub-group of several Kharif crops, and along with Maize/Corn, include Barley, Jowar (Sorghum), Bajra (Pearl Millet), Ragi (Finger Millet), etc.**

### Scheduled status to Banks

- ⊙ Recently, **Paytm Payments bank has been given scheduled status** as it has emerged as one of the **largest enablers of digital payments in the country**.
  - ⊙ Bank is included in the **Second Schedule to the Reserve bank of India Act, 1934**.
- ⊙ **Advantages** : Participate in primary auctions, fixed-rate and variable rate repos, and reverse repss, along with participation in Marginal Standing Facility.
  - ⊙ Also be **eligible to partner in government-run financial inclusion schemes**.

### Global Health Security Index (GHSI) 2021 :

- ⊙ **GHSI measures capacities of 195 countries to prepare for epidemics and pandemics**.
  - ⊙ It was jointly released by non-profits Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), and Johns Hopkins Centre for Health Security.
- ⊙ **Key Findings** :
  - ⊙ Countries across all income levels remain **dangerously unprepared to meet future epidemic and pandemic threats**.
  - ⊙ **World’s overall performance of GHSI score slipped** to 38.9 (out of 100) in 2021 (40.2 in 2019). India also slipped
  - ⊙ Most countries **have not made dedicated financial investments** in strengthening epidemic or pandemic preparedness.

### Haiderpur Wetland

- ⊙ India has designated the **Haiderpur wetland as the country’s 47th Ramsar, site**.
  - ⊙ Ramsar is wetland site **designated under the Ramsar Convention**, an intergovernmental environmental treaty which came into force in 1975.
- ⊙ Haiderpur Wetland is **situated on the Muzaffarnagar-Bijnor border in Uttar Pradesh**.
- ⊙ It was formed in 1984 by the **construction of Madhya Ganga Barrage at the confluence of Solani and Ganga rivers** and is a part of Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary.

### Dragonflies

- ⊙ According to the **first global assessment of these species in the updated IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**, results show that 16% out of 6,016 species are at risk of extinction.
- ⊙ **About Dragonfly** :
  - ⊙ They are **highly sensitive indicators of the state of freshwater ecosystem**.
  - ⊙ **Major threats to them include** clearing of forests for residential and commercial construction, Disruption to river flow as a result of hydropower plant, dam and reservoir construction and water extraction for agriculture.

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### **Certification Course on Home Energy Audit**

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- ⊙ Course was **launched by Bureau of Energy Efficiency.**
- ⊙ HEA **enables appropriate accounting, monitoring, and analysis of energy use** of various energy-consuming equipment and appliances in a house.
- ⊙ It also provides a **technical report with feasible solution and recommendations** for improving energy efficiency so as **to reduce energy bill and the carbon footprint of the consumer.**

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### **Royal Gold Medal 2022**

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- ⊙ It is the **world's highest honor for architecture** and **given out by Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).**
- ⊙ The award is **approved personally by the British Queen** and is given to a person or group of people who have had a significant influence on advancement of architecture.
- ⊙ **Balkrishna Doshi from India has been chosen for the award, 2022.**
  - ⊙ He has **worked with Le Corbusier** and his works include the **Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and Aranya Low Cost Housing (1989), Indore.**
  - ⊙ He has also been facilitated with **Pritzker Award and Aga Khan Award.**

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### **Priority category for Para-sports**

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- ⊙ Para sports have been placed in the **'Priority'** category for financial assistance to differently-abled sportspersons by the Government.
- ⊙ Also, all necessary **assistance is provided for training and competitive exposure through various schemes** such as :
  - ⊙ Promotion of Sports among Persons with Disabilities (One of the verticals of Khelo India Scheme).
  - ⊙ Assistance to National Sport Federations.
  - ⊙ National Sports Development Fund

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