



# CURRENT AFFAIRS FEBRUARY 2021

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## **1. Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will receive the CERAWEEK Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award for his commitment to expanding India's leadership in sustainable development to meet the country's, and the world's, future energy needs.
- The award will be given to him during an annual international energy conference, which will be held virtually from March 1 to 5, 2021.
- The conference will be organised by IHS Markit.
- It is an American-British information provider. The organisation is based in London and it was established with the merger of HIS Inc. & Markit Ltd. in 2016. The organisation combines the information, analytics and expertise in order to provide solutions for government, business and finance.

## **2. IAF gifts 1971 war helicopter to Bangladesh:**

- Commemorating 50 years of defeating Pakistan in the 1971 war, Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief RKS Bhaduria gifted a legacy Alouette III helicopter to Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and got a legacy F-86 Sabre aircraft as a return gift from Dhaka.
- It was gifted during the four-day trip of Indian Air Force to Bangladesh where he visited different airbases and interacted with the top military leadership of that country.

## **3. Facebook lifts news blockade in Australia:**

- Facebook Inc ended a one-week blackout of Australian news on its popular social media site and announced preliminary commercial agreements with three small local publishers.
- The moves reflected easing tensions between the US company and the Australian government, after the country's parliament passed a law forcing it and Alphabet Inc's Google to pay local media companies for using content on their platforms.

## **4. Conference on Opportunities and Challenges for Bamboo in India:**

- The NITI Aayog and Invest India have associated with the National Bamboo Mission to conduct the National Conference on Opportunities and Challenges for Bamboo in India.
- The National Conference on Opportunities will be organised with the aim to discuss on the bamboo ecosystem in order to promote holistic growth of the sector across the entire value chain system.
- The discussion by experts and stakeholders from several fields will further accelerate the efforts of National Bamboo Mission in order to bring about solutions regarding the issues that sector is facing.
- Conference was inaugurated by Union Minister of MSME, Nitin Gadkari, on February 25, 2021.
- This conference provided benefit because of participation of eminent professionals related to bamboo farming, innovation, research, industry, entrepreneurs, and attendees from research institutes, farmers and entrepreneurs.
- It held discussions on all subjects related to bamboo industry starting from planting material to high end engineered products & marketing.
- The topics of discussion in the conference include:
  1. Bamboo for Atma Nirbhar Bharat,
  2. Promoting Exports & Global Branding,

3. Availability of Feedstock & Plantations,
4. Innovations, Research & Development,
5. Skill Development and
6. Access to Institutional Credit & International Cooperation.

#### **Suggest of the Conference:**

- To adopt the agroforestry models by farmers in order to avoid the initial 3-4 years gestation period of bamboo plantation.
- It suggested the intercropping with pulses, ginger, lemon grass, etc.
- To use credible planting material and to adopt improved agronomic practices in order to increase yields.
- Plantations on the culturable wastelands should be encouraged.
- Integrated primary processing units should be set up for complete utilization of bamboo in order to comply with zero waste policy.
- To overcome the issue of high transport cost, use of waterways and exploration of transport subsidy options.

#### **5. Guru Ravidas Jayanti:**

- The Bhakti Movement Saint Guru Ravidas Jayanti is being observed on February 27, 2021 across the country.
- Ravidas was an Indian poet-sant of the Bhakti movement. He founded the Ravidassia religion in the 15th to 16th century CE. He is respect as a guru in the region of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.
- He was a social reformer and a spiritual saint. The poems of Ravidas have also been included in the Panch Vani text of the Dadupanthi tradition within Hinduism.
- The saint taught the removal of social divisions of caste and gender. He also promoted the unity in the light of personal spiritual freedoms.
- The saint is contemporary to Kabirdas while Mirabai was a disciple him.
- Ravidas Jayanti finds a special significance among the people following Ravidassia religion.
- The saint also finds importance in the Sikhism which is denoted by the fact that 40 poems by Ravidas were included in sacred ure of Sikhism called Adi Granth.
- Ravidas or Raidas was born in Seer Goverdhanpur village of Uttar Pradesh near Varanasi. His birthplace is now called as Shri Guru Ravidas Janam Asthan. His parents belonged to a leather-working Chamar community so they belonged to the untouchable caste.

#### **Bhakti Movement:**

- It is the theistic devotional trend that spread in the medieval Hinduism. The movement later acted as a de facto catalyst in the formation of Sikhism.
- The movement was originated in eighth-century south India and spread northwards. It covered the east and north India in 15th century and onwards. It developed around the gods and goddesses.

#### **6. G20 Central Bank Governors' Meet:**

- The Finance Minister of India, Nirmala Sitharaman, attended the G20 Central Bank Governors' meeting on February 26, 2021. This was the first ever G20 Central Bank Governors' meeting that was held under the Italian Presidency.
- During the meeting, the finance minister highlighted regarding the India's policy response with respect to COVID-19 pandemic and the world's largest inoculation drive with their G-20 counterparts.

- She further stated that, India's domestic policies is based broadly on the supporting citizens using the measures like direct transfer, credit guarantees, economic stimulus packages, food guarantees and accelerating structural reforms.
- She also spoke regarding the vaccination drive in India. It is the world's largest and ambitious vaccination drive. She also mentioned that India has extended its vaccine support to several countries.
- The meeting also held discussions on the policy actions for the transformative and equitable recovery.
- They also discussed the issues like financial sector issues, global economic outlook, financial inclusion and sustainable finance.
- The G20 Finance Ministers and the Central Bank Governors also held discussion regarding the implications of climate change on global growth and financial stability.

#### **G20 Grouping:**

- It is an international forum for governments and central bank governors coming from the 19 countries and European Union (EU). The grouping was founded in the year 1999. It was established with the aim of discussing the policy regarding the promotion of the international financial stability.
- The grouping has also extended its agenda since 2008 from heads of government or state to the foreign ministers, finance ministers and think tanks.
- In the grouping, the EU is represented by European Commission & European Central Bank. The G20 economies account for 90 percent of the gross world product collectively.

#### **7. ISRO's PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission:**

- PSLV-C51, the first dedicated launch for NSIL, successfully launches Amazonia-1 and 18 Co-passenger satellites from Sriharikota.
- This is the 53rd Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle mission of the ISRO.
- This mission is also the first dedicated commercial mission of commercial nodal agency of ISRO called "New Space India Limited (NSIL)".
- NSIL is working on this mission in accordance with the commercial agreement with the Spaceflight Inc.
- Spaceflight Inc. is a satellite rideshare and mission management provider. It is based in US' Seattle Out of the 18 co-passenger satellites, 14 will be sent by NSIL.

#### **About Amazonia-1:**

- Amazonia-1 is being sent by National Institute for Space Research, Brazil. The satellite is an optical Earth observation satellite. The satellite will work to provide strength to the existing structure.
- It will also share the remote sensing data so as to monitor the deforestation in the Amazon region of Brazil. Further, the satellite will provide analysis of the diversified agriculture across Brazil.

#### **ISRO's Co-Passenger:**

- The PSLV Vehicle will be carrying four co-passengers from the nodal agency called Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe).
- IN-SPACe is an independent agency working under the Department of Space. It allows the private sector to take part in the space activities.
- The satellites from this agency include three UNITYsats along with one satellite from the Satish Dhawan Sat.

#### **8. Saras Aajeevika Mela-2021 Starts:**



- Saras Aajeevika Mela 2021 was started on February 26, 2021 and will conclude on March 14, 2021. It is being organised by the Ministry of Rural Development. In the event, more than 300 rural self-help groups and craftsman from 27 states have participated.

#### **SARAS Aajeevika Mela:**

- It is an initiative that was started by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).
- The event was launched with the objective of bringing the rural women Self Help Groups (SHGs), which are formed with the help & support of DAY-NRLM, under one platform.
- This platform provides the SHGs Women to showcase their skills and sell their products. It helps them to build their linkages with bulk buyers.
- Through the event, the rural SHG women are exposed at the vital national level that in turn help them to understand the demand and taste of the urban customers.
- The event is organised by “Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)” which is the marketing arm of Ministry.
- Under the event, workshops are conducted for the rural SHG women. This workshop helps them to boost their knowledge and sharpen their skills in bookkeeping, product design, GST, packaging, communication skills, marketing or e-marketing etc.

#### **9. NSO’s GDP Forecast- Highlights:**

- The National Statistical Office (NSO) recently released its data on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the financial year 2021.
- As per the NSO, the Indian economy will be expanded by 0.4% in the December quarter. Thus, with this, the economy will be emerged from the recession which was induced by the covid-19 pandemic.
- The report also highlights that, the recovery of the economy is expected to strengthen because the vaccination programme in India is progressing smoothly. Because of this, public has gained the confident to shop, dine out and travel.
- It further highlights that, the expansion in gross domestic product (GDP) was weaker than 0.6% as estimated by economists in the Bloomberg survey.
- It also highlights that the economy has managed to turn around after two successive quarters of record contraction.
- As per the data, the GDP contractions have been revised to 24.4% and 7.3% for the quarters of June and September as opposed to the earlier estimates of 23.9% and 7.5% for same quarter.
- NSO proposes for a deeper 8% contraction.

#### **How did economy revive?**

- The economic growth was revived with the help of resumption of the economic activity after the government lifted the lockdown restrictions and boosted the spending. Further, the vaccination programme in India has further boosted the confidence that the economy will grow stronger in the fiscal year 2021-22. However, the economy will face the challenge of containing a surge in new infections.

#### **National Statistical Office (NSO):**

- NSO as an agency that was formed on the recommendation of the Rangarajan Commission. The office was set up to implement and maintain the statistical standards and coordinate the statistical activities of Central and State agencies in accordance with the National Statistical Commission (NSC).
- The Rangarajan Commission had also recommended to set up the NSC. NSC is headed by a person having a “Minister of State-Level designation”. NSC will serve as a nodal body for all core statistical activities in India.

- NSO was formed after merging the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and Central Statistics Office (CSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

#### 10. CSE's State of Environment Report- Highlights:

- The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has released its State of Environment Report, 2021 on February 25, 2021. The report highlighted how the Covid-19 pandemic will impact the children across world.
- The report highlighted that the pandemic will impact the 375 million children across the world.
- Children including from newborns to 14-year-olds will suffer long-lasting impacts.
- These children will be vulnerable to being underweight, stunting and increased child mortality.
- Their education and work productivity will also be impacted.
- As per the report, pandemic has forced over 500 million children out of school globally. Out of the total children, India accounted for more than half.
- The report further highlighted that; 115 million additional people might get pushed into extreme poverty due to pandemic. Most of the poorer people live in South Asia.

#### Where does India stand?

- As far as sustainable development is concerned, India ranked 117 among 192 nations.
- Further, India's air, water and land have become more polluted in between the year 2009 and 2018.
- The Central Pollution Control Board highlighted that, out of 88 major industrial clusters in the country, 35 went through environmental degradation, 33 went through worsening air quality, 45 clusters comprised of polluted water and while 17 clusters had land pollution
- Tarapur in Maharashtra was the most polluted cluster.

#### What does data show?

- The experts from the Centre for Science and Environment highlighted that the data shows that action has not been taken in the past three years control and reduce the pollution even in those areas that were already polluted.

#### Centre for Science and Environment (CSE):

- CSE is a not-for-profit public interest research and advocacy organisation. It is based in New Delhi. The organisation was established in the year 1980.
- The organisation works on the poor planning, environment-development issues, climate shifts in India and advocate for policy changes & better implementation of existing policies.

#### 11. Govt puts 'significant social media intermediary' threshold at 5 mn registered users:

- Govt puts 'significant social media intermediary' threshold at 5 mn registered users
- The government on February 26, 2021 specified 5 million registered users in India as the threshold for a social media intermediary to be considered a significant social media intermediary in the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021.
- The rules make a distinction between social media intermediaries and significant social media intermediaries, who have a large number of users.

#### 12. Task force on river-linking approves:

- The task force on Interlinking of Rivers has approved the Mahanadi-Godavari Link on February 25, 2021. Approval was given to the preparation of final detailed project report on proposed Mahanadi -Godavari link

#### Highlights

- The linking project was approved by ensuring the utilisation of allocated Godavari waters by the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
- The decision was taken at the 13th meeting of the task force on interlinking of rivers which was held in New Delhi.
- In the meeting, three proposals were discussed and put forward by the task force chairman, Sriram Vedire.
- The proposals were based on draft detailed project report that was prepared with respect to the diversion of water from Godavari basin to Cauvery basin.
- The task force also emphasised on the several priority links under the interlinking of rivers programme by the central government.
- The draft detailed project report was prepared on Godavari-Cauvery link the National Water Development Authority (NWDA).

**National Water Development Agency (NWDA):**

- It is a Registered Society working under the Ministry of Irrigation which is now called as Ministry of Water Resources. The agency was set up in 1982. The agency is involved in carrying out the detailed studies, surveys and investigations with respect to the Peninsular Component of National Perspective for the Water Resources Development. Later its function was modified to include the Himalayan Component of National Perspective for Water Resources Development in the year 1994. The composition of Society and Governing Body was also modified in the year 2003 & 2004 respectively. The NWDA was authorised to explore the feasibility of linking sub-basins of rivers in States such as Bihar in the year 2006. It then worked for preparation of Detailed Project Report of Ken-Betwa river link in accordance with the priority links under Peninsular Component of National Perspective Plan.

**13. Pakistan to remain on Grey List of FATF:**

- The Global anti-terrorism watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) decided to maintain Pakistan into Grey List till June 2021 on February 25, 2021.
- This decision by the FATF was taken in the light of country's failure to fully comply with the 27-point action plan of to combat the terrorism.
- This decision was taken following a virtual plenary session that was over three days.
- The FATF has decided to keep the Pakistan into the grey list and will remain under the increased monitoring because serious deficiencies were observed with respect to the terror financing.
- Though, Pakistan has taken several steps but it needs to act upon three important points out of 27 action points.

**What does FATF said?**

- FATF said that, Pakistan needs to work on implementing following three remaining items out of 27 items:
- It needs to demonstrate the Terror funding investigations and prosecutions targeting the persons & entities acting on behalf of the designated persons or entities.
- It needs to demonstrate that Terror funding prosecutions results in to Proportionate, effective and dissuasive sanctions.
- It needs to demonstrate the effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all the UN Security Council resolution 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists.

**Background:**

- The FATF had also kept the Pakistan into grey list in October, 2020 and decided that FATF will continue to make it difficult for Pakistan to get aid from World Bank, Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, and European Union.

- India being a member of FATF also has repeatedly asked Pakistan to take necessary steps comply with the international standards to stop the financial crimes.

#### **United Nations Security Council resolution 1267:**

- This resolution was adopted on October 15, 1999. Under this resolution, Council had designated Osama bin Laden and the associates as terrorists. The council established a sanctions regime in order to cover the individuals and entities who are associated with the Al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden or Taliban.

#### **14. RBI's Report on Currency and Finance 2020-21:**

- A Currency and Finance (RCF) report by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) official has recommended that, the time span that was considered to measure whether monetary policy-setting panel has failed in achieving its objectives or not should be of four quarters rather than current time period of three-quarter. However, RBI made it clear that the report does not represent any institutional view with respect to it.

#### **Key Findings:**

- The report also recommends that roll the terms for the members in six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in order to moderate the political influence at the place of current appointments for the fixed term.
- The recommendations in the report have come after a period when the inflation target constantly touches upper-end of 6 per cent headline inflation target for several months.
- The expert also points out that, the Monetary policy committee should explain in this regard except for the lack of appropriate field visits to arrive at data during the lockdown.
- Report highlights that, the definition for failure of MPC needs to be revised from the present three-quarter horizon.
- According to the report, the failure can be redefined as inflation overshooting or inflation undershooting the upper and lower tolerance bands around the set target for time span of four consecutive quarters.
- Report also said that; in the emerging markets which faces food and fuel inflation, for many central banks, failure is also conditional with respect to the inflation exceeding the tolerance limit for a specified time span and not immediately.
- Report emphasised that, there should be a greater flexibility for monetary policy and MPC in order to go through sharp movements in food prices which are brought about by transient factors.
- The report further states that, the definition of failure that balances two objectives will help in preventing the volatility in the output growth which is brought by the policy responses.
- Report stated that, there happens to be no failure of the MPC in accordance with the three-quarter definition till March 2020.

#### **15. Central Team Report on Odisha Elephant Deaths:**

- In the month of January-February six elephants died at the Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary in Kalahandi. Following that, a central team was set up by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- The team in its preliminary report highlighted that, the elephants died because of haemorrhagic septicaemia which is caused by bacteria *Pastuerella multoceda*.

#### **Highlights:**

- The report further highlights that, the elephants might have contracted the bacteria from cattle residing at Tentulipada village.
- Tentulipada village is a small hamlet of 12 households in Odisha.

- The team had conducted the post-mortems and RNA extraction tests at the Orissa Veterinary College to come to the conclusion however, samples have been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute in Bareilly, UP for final confirmation.
- The elephants are supposed to be died in between January 29 and February 14, 2021. Their carcasses found near water bodies. A total of seven elephants comprising of five adults and two calves died and all of them were females.
- Preliminary tests confirm that, all of them had very high levels of *Pasteurella multocida*.

**Pasteurella multocida:**

- It is a Gram-negative, nonmotile, penicillin-sensitive coccobacillus that belongs to the family Pasteurellaceae. Strains of this species are classified into five serogroups namely A, B, D, E, F. they have subdivided into five groups on the basis of capsular composition and 16 somatic serovars.
- This germ causes several diseases in the mammals and birds. Some of the diseases include fowl cholera in poultry, bovine hemorrhagic septicemia in cattle & buffalo and atrophic rhinitis in pigs.
- It also causes a zoonotic infection in humans because of bites or scratches from domestic pets. Mammals such as domestic cats & dogs and birds harbour it under their normal respiratory microbiota.

**Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary:**

- This wildlife sanctuary is located in Kalahandi district which is a popular tourist attraction of Odisha in India. It is located at this distance of 15 km from Bhawani Patna (district headquarters).
- It covers an area of 175 square kilometres. It lies in the Eastern Highlands moist deciduous forests. The sanctuary is home to leopard, tiger, nilgai, sambar, mouse deer, barking deer etc.

**16. New Guidelines on Social Media Regulation:**

- The Central government has notified the new guidelines on social media regulations on February 25, 2021. It is being called as "Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021".

**Highlights:**

- The new guidelines have been notified with the aim of regulating social media and OTT platforms.
- These rules were put into public by the union Ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Prakash Javadekar.
- The Union Ministers also said that social media platforms have empowered the ordinary Indians. They praised these platforms for gaining popularity and huge users.
- They also welcomed the move by social media platforms to do business in India.
- Why new rules have been framed?
- The government has notified the new rules on digital media and OTT with the aim of empowering the ordinary users regarding the social media.
- With the new rules, the government wants to set up a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievance.
- The new rules are progressive, liberal and contemporaneous.
- It seeks to address varied concerns of people.
- It also wants to remove any misapprehension with respect to the restrictions on creativity and freedom of speech & expression.

- The rules were framed depending upon the difference of the viewership in a theatre & television as compared to viewership on Internet.

**Facts regarding new rules:**

- The new guidelines on social media were framed in accordance with the section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- These guidelines were released after having an elaborate consultation with the public as well as the stakeholders. They were consulted to negate the concerns regarding accountability, transparency, and rights related to digital media.
- Part- II of the guidelines will be administered by Ministry of Electronics and IT.
- Part-III of the guidelines will be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. This part is related to the Code of Ethics & procedure. It also safeguards the relation with the digital media.

**17. State of School Feeding Worldwide Report- Highlights:**

- The United Nations World Food Programmes (WFP) has released its report titled “The State of School Feeding Worldwide on February 24, 2021

**Key Findings:**

- As per the report, the COVID-19 pandemic risks have reversed the efforts that were made worldwide in a decade to provide nutritious food to the most vulnerable children across the globe.
- The report highlights that, one in two school children that would count as around 388 million children worldwide received the school meals when the pandemic was at its peak. This accounts for the highest number in history.
- When the pandemic was at its peak around April 2020, 199 countries had closed their schools. Because of which, 370 million children were suddenly deprived of nutritious meal of the day.
- The report highlighted that, the lockdown threw spotlight on the critical role that school plays in feeding vulnerable children and protecting their futures.

**Recommendations by the report:**

- It proposes to strengthen the global action in order to get the coverage to the pre-pandemic levels.
- It also proposes to reach around 73 million vulnerable children who were not getting the nutritious meals even before the pandemic.

**UN World Food Programme:**

- WFP is food-assistance branch of United Nations that was founded in the year 1961. It is the world’s largest humanitarian organization that focuses on hunger and food security. This organisation is also the largest provider of school meals.
- WFP is headquartered in Rome and also has offices across 80 countries. The organisation has served 97 million people across 88 countries as of 2019.
- The organisation also provides technical assistance and development aid including building capacity for emergency preparedness and managing supply chains and logistics etc. It is also providing direct cash assistance and medical supplies. It was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for its efforts in providing food assistance in the areas of conflict.

**18. IRDAI sets up panel to relook Guidelines on Cybersecurity:**

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has set up the working group committee so as to relook its information and security guidelines. The need to set up the panel was felt in the aftermath of exponential increase in cyberattacks across the world amid the ongoing covid-19 pandemic.

**Highlights:**

- The economic situation particularly the financial sector has seen an exponential increase in cyber-attacks amid the pandemic.
- The rising threat of the cyberattacks has necessitated the Regulators to relook into the Cyber Security Guidelines.
- These guidelines will be applicable to all the regulated entities to protect financial systems.
- What are those guidelines?
- As per the guidelines, the Insurers' Risk Management Committee will be responsible for an annual comprehensive assurance audit.
- The committee will also be responsible for conducting the Vulnerability Assessment & Penetration Test (VA&PT).
- After the audit has been done, they are required to report the findings to IRDAI.

**Background:**

- The regulators had issued guidelines on cybersecurity in April 2017 under its governance mechanism. The guidelines also included the Board-approved Information & Cyber Security Policy, Information Security Committee (ISC), Cyber Crisis management plan (CCMP) and Appointment of Chief Information Security Officer (CISO).

**19. India begins BRICS Chairship:**

- India has started its BRICS Chairship with the inaugural three-day-long Sherpas' meeting on February 25, 2021.
- Recently, the spokesperson of Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that the Secretary (CPV & OIA) chaired the meeting and highlighted the themes, priorities, and calendar for the BRICS 2021.
- Earlier, the External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had launched India's BRICS 2021 website at Secretariat of BRICS at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan.
- President of China, Xi Jinping, might also visit India later for the BRICS summit.
- China had also provided its supports to India in hosting the meeting and is willing to work with the BRICS countries so as to expand its cooperation in the fields of politics, economy and people-to-people exchanges.

**About BRICS:**

- It is the acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These members are known for their significant influence in the region. The respective government of the BRICS state meet annual formal summits starting from 2009. The 12th BRICS Summit was held by the Russia on November 17, 2020 virtually amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- BRICS have a combined area of 39,746,220 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of about 3.21 billion. It accounts for around 26 % of the world land surface and 41% of world population. All the members of BRICS are also the members of G20 grouping.
- The countries account for around 23% of gross world product (GWP). The Bilateral relations between the BRICS states runs on the principles of equality, non-interference and mutual benefit.

**Background:**

- The term "BRIC" is believed to be coined in 2001 by Jim O'Neill who was the then-chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management. But this term was actually coined by Roopa Purushothaman. The first meeting of the grouping was held in Yekaterinburg in June, 2009.

**20. TRIPS waiver on Covid-19 Vaccines:**

- The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is under pressure to consider the India's proposal of Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on Covid-19 vaccines.
- Pressure increased on WTO after several European Union lawmakers and group of least developed countries (LDC) provided their support to India's proposal of waiving the TRIPS on vaccines.
- The European Commission and the European Council put forward a declaration after a group of 115 members of European Parliament asked them to drop their opposition to India's proposal at WTO.
- Further, a group of lawmakers from the Democratic Party is also seeking from US President Joe Biden to support the India's proposal.
- As of now, around 90 countries have extended their supported the TRIPS waiver proposal.
- However, wealthy countries such as US, Britain and the European Union are against this proposal.

#### **Why wealthy nations are opposing the proposal?**

- The wealthy nations are of the view that, TRIPS Waiver at WTO will choke the innovation at pharmaceutical companies. Because, it will put off their incentive in order to make huge investments for research and development. In turn, this move will be counterproductive in the current pandemic situation because it requires the drug makers to keep on researching to deal with a mutating virus.

#### **Why does India seek TRIPS Waiver?**

- India put forward the proposal of TRIPS waiver at the WTO because, The TRIPS Waiver will reduce the cost of vaccines substantially.
- It will also make an environment for the free flow of medicines and technology transfer with other countries.

#### **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS):**

- The TRIPS Agreement is a multilateral agreement on intellectual property rights including the patents, copyright, protection of undisclosed information or trade secrets and industrial designs. This agreement came into effect in January 1995.

#### **21. Australia passed "News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code":**

- The parliament of Australia has passed the landmark legislation called the "News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code" on February 25, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- This legislation mandates the global digital platforms to pay for publishing the Australian news content on their respective platforms.
- The legislation mainly targets Facebook and Google.
- The law easily passed the tech giants (Facebook and Google) signed agreements with the government to pay Australian news organisations.
- The agreement was signed in order to avoid the tough mandatory bargaining rules under the new regulation.
- This legislation will ensure that news businesses "are fairly paid for their content". It will also help in sustaining the "Public Interest Journalism" in the country.

#### **Background:**

- The Parliament in Australia had proposed this legislation targeting Google and Facebook. Under this legislation, they are required to make payment negotiations with the media companies in order to use their content. However, Facebook & Google had pointed out that these media industry were already benefiting from the traffic routed to their websites through these digital platforms.



- Facebook stated that this legislation will cause “unmanageable levels of financial risks as well as the operational risk” for them. Following this, Facebook also blocked the Australian users from reading and sharing local and international news on its platform, recently.
- Facebook initiated this move against the legislation and stated that this law fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between Facebook and publishers who share news content using the platform.
- Google already started to ink agreements on the revenue-sharing with the publishers.

#### **Similar International Legislation:**

- The Parliament of France had passed the legislation called the “GAFA Tax” (acronym for Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) in 2019. This legislation was passed in a bid to impose a 3% levy on sales which is generated in the country by non-tax paying online giants.
- Similarly, the European Union passed the “Digital Services Act” and “Digital Markets Act” that seeks to limit the powers of global tech giants such as Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon in the European market.
- Under it, the larger firms have been designated as ‘digital gatekeepers’ and they are subject to strict regulations in case they violate the market norms.

#### **22. PM to inaugurate Second Edition of Maritime India Summit:**

- The ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways informed that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the second edition of the Maritime India Summit (MIS) in the virtual mode on March 2, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- Apart from that, the ministry has already started signing several Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with various entities.
- Recently, the Mumbai Port Trust signed MoUs worth ₹7,400 crores.
- As a part of this summit, ₹20,000 crore worth MoUs will be signed.
- Opening session of the summit will mark the ministerial-level participation. The participants will be joining from Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Armenia.
- The summit will also hold discussions on ‘Development of Port Infrastructure and Boosting Business through Trade, Promotion and Regional connectivity’.
- It will also provide a unique platform which will mark the participation of stakeholders in the maritime sectors like sector experts, policy planners, senior government officials, shipping line owners, domestic and international investors and representatives of major ports from several parts of the world along with the governments of maritime states in India.
- Summit will also be hosting the forums for interaction and collaboration with Indian and International Ports, Shipping and Maritime Companies and Investors.
- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is organising the summit in collaboration with the FICCI as an Industrial Partner and EY as a Knowledge Partner.

#### **Objective of the Summit:**

- The Maritime India Summit is being organised with the objective of pushing India to the forefront of the Global Maritime Sector.
- Union Minister of Shipping recently launched a brochure and a website called [www.maritimeindiasummit.in](http://www.maritimeindiasummit.in) for the second edition of Maritime India Summit. This year summit will be held in virtual mode because of COVID-19 pandemic. The registration for exhibitors and visitors for the summit was started on February 11, 2021.

#### **23. Private Banks to Participate in Government Business:**

- The finance ministry has allowed all the private sector banks to participate in business related to government such as small savings schemes and collection of taxes pension payments.
- Currently, only some of the big private sectors are allowed to conduct government-related businesses.
- So, now embargo has been lifted and this move will enhance the customer convenience and simulate the competition.
- It will also simulate the higher efficiency in standards of customer services.
- Private banks remain at the forefront of imbibing and implementing the latest technology and innovation in banking. Now they have become the equal partners in the development of Indian economy.
- Now, bar has also been lifted on RBI to authorize the private sector banks along with the public sector banks for Government business and Government agency business.

#### **Background:**

- Government in the budget 2021-22 had announced to privatise two public sector lenders other than IDBI Bank.
- Government also announced that privatisation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) is a part of the disinvestment drive to generate Rs 1.75 lakh crore.
- Apart from privatisation of two Public Sector Banks, announcement was also made to privatise the General Insurance company in financial year 2021-22.
- Also, central government had merged 10 public sector banks into four in March 2017. Thus, the total number of PSBs came down to 12 from 27.

#### **Merger of the PSBs:**

- Under the merger plan, the United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of Commerce were merged with Punjab National Bank. It thus became the second largest PSB.
- Syndicate Bank was merged with Canara Bank.
- Allahabad Bank was subsumed under Indian Bank.
- Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank were merged with Union Bank of India.
- SBI also merged five of its associate banks namely, state Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Travancore and Bharatiya Mahila Bank.
- In 2019, Bank of Baroda merged the Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank.

#### **24. Cabinet approves President's Rule in Puducherry:**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to impose President's Rule in Puducherry. This proposal was approved days after the Congress-led government in the union territory lost power after a vote of confidence.
- This decision was taken because no party had claimed to form a government in Puducherry after the chief minister resigned.
- Following the resignation, Lieutenant General recommended President's Rule in Puducherry which was approved by the Union Cabinet.
- The model code of conduct will also come into effect after the Election Commission announced the dates for elections.

#### **President's Rule:**

- The President's Rule in India is the **suspension** of state government and imposition of Union government rule. The President's rule is imposed in accordance with the **Article 356** of the Constitution.

- The President's rule is imposed when a state government is unable to function as per the Constitutional provisions. Following this, the executive authority is exercised by the centrally appointed governor. The governor can also appoint other administrators to assist them.
- Under the President's rule, the council of minister is dissolved and the office of chief minister is vacated. Also, the Vidhan Sabha is either prorogued or dissolved and it is reconstituted only after the election. As of now, Chhattisgarh and Telangana are the only states where President's rule has not been imposed.

#### **Vote of no confidence:**

- It is a statement or vote regarding a person in a position of responsibility when that person is no longer deemed fit to hold that position. The person is declared unfit for the position when they are inadequate in some aspect and are failing to carry out any obligations.

#### **25. ICOLD Symposium on Sustainable Development of Dams & River Basins:**

- The International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) Symposium on Sustainable Development of Dams & River Basins was inaugurated by the Minister for Jal Shakti, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, on February 24, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The Symposium on Sustainable Development of Dams & River Basins is being organised by the International Commission on Large Dams (INCOLD) in association with the Dam Rehabilitation Improvement Project (DRIP), Central Water Commission (CWC) and National Hydrology Project (NHP).
- The event will be organised at New Delhi as Hybrid event starting from 24th February to 27th February 2021.
- The event will be participated by more than 300 delegates from India and abroad.
- The symposium is being organised with the objective of providing an opportunity to Indian Dam Engineering Professionals and Agencies to share their experiences, ideas and latest developments.
- With the help of this platform, they will be sharing new materials and construction technologies, best engineering practices, advancement in investigation techniques, dam safety issues etc.
- The event will also provide opportunity to network with the world-renowned dam experts from across the world who are involved in Dam Construction, management, operation and maintenance.

#### **Dam Rehabilitation Improvement Project (DRIP):**

- Under the event, the achievement of the Dam Rehabilitation Improvement Project (DRIP), that was launched to improve the safety and operational performance of large dams and its appurtenances structures, will be presented to the Global Dam Community who are looking forward to India's development.
- The Dam Safety Bill which was approved by Lok Sabha, to put the regulatory mechanism and proper surveillance, operation, inspection and maintenance of all dams in India will also be publicised.

#### **26. ARHMD System for Indian Army:**

- The Indian Army is in process of acquiring niche technology by procuring quantity 556 Augmented Reality Head Mounted Display (ARHMD) System. The army will procure it under Make-II Category.

#### **Highlights:**

- The ARHMD System is seen as a capability enhancement for the Land Based Air Defence Weapon Systems.

- The land-based air defence weapon systems include ZU 23mm 2B AD Gun System and the IGLA shoulder fired Infra-Red Homing Air Defence Missile System. These systems will provide operator with radar and Thermal Imaging (TI) sight outputs.
- The proposed system seeks to enhance engagement capability during night.
- It will also enhance the conditions of inclement weather.
- The system will also be enhancing the day-time engagements through the increased reaction times, integration of output of TI sight and data computation for decision support.
- The vendor responses were evaluated after which Project Sanction Order (PSO) was issued on February 22, 2021 to six vendors to develop the prototype.
- The contract will finally be placed with one of the firms after they successfully develop the prototype in accordance with the provisions of Buy (Indian-IDDMM) category of DAP 2020.

#### **Make-II Projects:**

- In the Defence procurement procedure, the provision of 'Make' category of capital acquisition is the key pillar of realising the visions of 'Make in India' initiative. This category fosters the indigenous capabilities by design & development of required defence equipment, product or systems by public as well as the private sector industry.
- 'Make' Procedure is divided into two sub-categories:
  1. Make-I– Projects under this sub-category involves the Government funding of 90%. The funding from the government is released in a phased manner. It is released as per the terms agreed between MoD and the vendor.
  2. Make-II– Projects under this sub-category involves the prototype development of equipment, system or platform. It also involves the upgradation of the equipment or system. For the development of prototype, no Government funding is provided.

#### **27. Cabinet approves PLI Scheme for IT hardware & pharma sectors:**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the production-linked Incentive scheme for IT Hardware on February 24, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The PLI scheme proposes an incentive to boost the domestic manufacturing.
- It also proposes to attract large investments in value chain of IT Hardware.
- The proposed scheme includes the target segments like tablets, laptops, all-in-one PCs and servers.
- Total cost of the proposed scheme is around Rs.7,350 crore for 4 years.
- The budget includes an incentive outlay of Rs.7,325 crore besides the administrative charges of Rs 25 crore.
- Under the scheme, a total production of worth Rs 3,26,00 crore will be achieved out of which 75 per cent will be achieved through the exports.
- This scheme has a potential to generate direct and indirect employment of over 1,80,000 in over 4 years.
- It will provide also provide impetus to Domestic Value Addition for IT Hardware for which there is an expectation that it will rise to 20% – 25% by 2025.

#### **Why this scheme was launched?**

- Currently in India, laptops of worth Rs 30,000 crore and tablets worth Rs 3,000 crore are sold in India. Out of them, 80 per cent of are imported. Thus, this new PLI scheme was launched with which, government hopes to pull the top 5 global companies to India which controls 50 per cent of the international market.

#### **PLI in Pharma sector:**

- Government has also extended the PLI scheme of worth Rs 15,000 crore for pharmaceuticals. This move was taken in order to reduce the imports and boost the domestic production. Currently, the Indian pharmaceutical industry is \$40 billion and it contributes around 3.5 per cent to the global market. But the high-end patented drugs are still imported. The extension of PLI Scheme to pharmaceuticals will make it globally competitive.

#### **About PLI Scheme:**

- This scheme is an outcome oriented as well as output-oriented scheme in which the incentives are paid only if the manufacturers make the goods.
- It provides cash incentives for five to seven years. Under this scheme all the important sectors are covered ranging from automobiles, food processing, advanced chemistry, Pharma, Solar PV manufacturing etc.

#### **28. President inaugurates world's largest stadium in Gujarat:**

- The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, has inaugurated the world's largest Stadium at Motera, in Gujarat on February 24, 2021.
- The old Motera Stadium was demolished in the year 2016 which had the sitting capacity of 54,000 spectators. So, the foundation stone for the new cricket stadium was laid down in January 2018. The foundation stone was laid by the Gujarat Cricket Association. Its construction has been completed in two years.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The Motera stadium was later renamed as the Narendra Modi Stadium.
- This stadium has surpassed the Melbourne Cricket Ground and became the largest stadium in the world.
- This stadium is going to make history by hosting the second home pink-ball test match on February 24 between India and England.
- Facilities at the Stadium
- The newly built stadium was built by equipping all the modern facilities and technologies which is required for present-day cricket.
- It comprises of four dressing rooms which is required nowadays for hosting twenty-twenty matches back-to-back.
- The stadium was built in over 63 acres.
- It has a seating capacity of 1.10 lakh people surpassing the seating capacity of 90,000 people by the Melbourne stadium.
- It was built at an estimated cost of Rs. 800 crores.
- It was constructed by Larsen & Toubro.
- The stadium also comprises of 76 corporate boxes with a seating capacity of 25 each.
- Apart from that, it has an indoor academy, an Olympic level swimming pool, four dressing rooms for athletes, GCA clubhouse and food courts.
- At the cricket stadium, 11 clay pitches of five black soil and six red soil have been prepared.
- This is the first stadium that uses both coloured clay for the practice and main pitches.
- One of its key features is that, in rain the pitch can be dried in only 30 minutes.

#### **29. Australia's oldest Aboriginal rock Art:**

- Recently, a kangaroo painting was identified in Australia with the help of some ancient wasps. The kangaroo painting was created over 17,000 years ago by Aboriginal community artists. The painting was identified as Australia's oldest intact rock art.

#### **Highlights:**

- The painting is a two-metre-long artwork.

- It was discovered on the sloped ceiling of rock shelter in Kimberley region of Western Australia.
- This artwork was painted in an early naturalistic style.
- The naturalistic style often features the life-sized renderings of animals.
- The kangaroo painting is somewhat 17,500 and 17,100 years old.
- The team discovered around 27 mud wasp nests along 16 different paintings from across the eight rock shelters.

#### **Indigenous Australian art:**

- This art includes the art made by Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- This art form comprises of the works in a wide range of media such as paintings on leaves, wood carving, bark painting, watercolour painting, rock carving, ceremonial clothing, sculpting and sand painting.
- This is the art by Indigenous Australians that dates back to pre-European colonisation by thousands of years.

#### **Aboriginal Australians:**

- They are the Indigenous peoples of Australian mainland and its islands like Fraser Island, Tasmania, Tiwi Island, Hinchinbrook Island and Groote Eylandt. This term refers to the Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders jointly.

#### **Rock art:**

- The rock art includes the painting and carving which can be found at sites throughout Australia. The oldest rock art is found in Pilbara region of the Western Australia and Olary district of South Australia. These arts are estimated to be around 40,000 years old.

#### **Kimberley Region:**

- It is the northernmost region among the nine regions of Western Australia. The region is bordered by Indian Ocean to the west, Timor Sea to the North, Great Sandy to the south. It was named after Secretary of State for the Colonies John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley by the government surveyor Alexander Forrest in 1879.

### **30. New Alpine Plant Species Discovered:**

- A group of scientists of three institutes have discovered a new species of alpine plant in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The details were published in Biodiversitas: Journal of Biological Diversity.

#### **About the New Alpine Plant Species:**

- The new species of plant belongs to the family of Himalayan sunflower.
- It has been named as *Cremanthodium indicum*.
- This species of plant generally flowers from July to August.
- It is endemic to the Penga-Teng Tso Lake of Tawang district.
- As per the IUCN Guideline, this alpine plant species has been listed as critically endangered.
- Alpine Plants
- The plants that grow in the alpine climate. Many of the plant species and taxon grow as a plant community in such alpine tundra including perennial grasses, forbs, sedges, mosses, cushion plants and lichens. These plants are adapted to harsh alpine climatic of environmental conditions such as dryness, low temperatures, wind, drought, ultraviolet radiation, poor nutritional soil and a short growing season.

#### **Alpine climate:**

- Typical weather for the regions that occurs above the tree line. It is also called as the mountain climate or highland climate.

#### **Tree line:**

- It is the edge of habitat at which trees are capable to grow. Tree line is found at high elevations and high latitudes. It the line beyond which the trees cannot tolerate environmental conditions like extreme snowpack, cold temperatures, or associated lack of moisture.

**Tawang District:**

- It is the smallest districts out of the 16 administrative districts of Arunachal Pradesh. It has a population of 49,977 which makes the state as eighth least populous district in India. This district is inhabited by the Monpa people.

**31. Two Years of PM KISAN Scheme:**

- The flagship scheme of the central government, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM KISAN) has completed its two years on February 24, 2021
- Highlights
- The PM-KISAN Scheme was formally launched by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on February 24, 2019.
- The scheme was launched at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

**PM KISAN Scheme:**

- The scheme was launched with the objective of PM of augmenting the income of the farmers by giving all the landholding farmer's family an income support all across the country.
- Under this scheme, an amount of 6000 rupees per year is transferred to the bank accounts of farmers directly.
- This amount is transferred to them in three instalments of 2000 rupees.
- This scheme was initially launched to provide income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families who are holding the cultivable land up to 2 hectares.
- Later, the scheme was expanded to cover all farmers' families irrespective of the size of their land holdings.
- However, Affluent farmers have been excluded from this scheme.
- Till date, more than 1 lakh 10 thousand crore rupees have been transferred to the farmers' income.

**Background:**

- The scheme was announced by Piyush Goyal during the Interim Union Budget of 2019 and was formally announced on February 24, 2019. It has cost ₹75,000 crore per annum. The scheme came into effect from December 2019.
- This scheme was first conceived and implemented by the Telangana government as "Rythu Bandhu scheme". Under this scheme, certain amount is given directly to eligible farmers.
- The scheme also received support from various organisations including the World Bank for its implementation.

**Rythu Bandhu scheme:**

- This scheme is also called as Farmer's Investment Support Scheme (FISS). It is a welfare scheme that provides direct support to farmers investment for two crops in a year. Under this scheme, the Telangana government is providing 58.33 lakh farmers a support of ₹5000 per acre per season twice in a year.

**32. U.S' International Anti-corruption Champions Award:**

- An Indian social activist, Anjali Bhardwaj, who works on issues of transparency and accountability has been selected for the "United State International Anti-Corruption Champions Award" along with the other 11 anti-corruption champions. These names were announced by Joe Biden administration.

**Highlights:**

- Biden administration is of the view that, these issues can be tackled only by working in coordination with the committed partners.

**These partners could be:**

- Courageous individuals, who champion the anti-corruption efforts and
- Countries, which are working to fulfil their commitments with respect to the international anti-corruption standards.
- Thus, this new International Anti-Corruption Champions Award was announced that recognised individuals who have worked tirelessly against transparency & corruption in order to ensure the accountability in their own countries.

**Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014:**

- The act comprises of the provision to receive the complaints related to corruption or wilful misuse of power or discretion against any public servant. It also provides for the mechanism to inquire or cause inquiry into such complaints. Further, this act provides provisions of safeguards for the person who makes complaints against victimization.

**33. Draft National Migrant Labour Policy:**

- The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) recently published its draft national policy on migrant labours.
- The policy was prepared in association with the working subgroup of officials and members of civil society.
- This draft policy is inspired by the rights-based approach which gain momentum during the return migration of around 10 million migrant workers from cities to their respective village during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- Facts regarding draft national migrant labour policy
- The draft migrant workers policy describes two approaches regarding the policy design.
- The first approach focusses on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations for the labours.
- The other approach seeks to enhance the agency and capability of community. Thus, in turn removes any of the aspects coming in the way of natural ability of the individual to prosper.
- The policy further rejects the handout approach and opts for a rights-based framework.
- Policy also seeks to remove the restrictions on true agency and potential of the migrant workers.
- The policy was formulated with the goal of “not providing any temporary or permanent economic aids as well as the social aids”.
- The policy further maintains that, “Internal Migration should be considered as an integral part of the development and government’s policies should be formulated in such a way that it facilitates the migration”.

**What was the need of new policy?**

- This draft policy was formulated in the light of flaws in the existing laws. A report of 2017 also stated that the migrant workers should be integrated with all other workers so as to overarch the exploitation of workers by contractors. Further, in India the size of the unorganised sector is huge so a comprehensive policy was required to provide them a social protection.

**34. Japan Appoints Loneliness Minister to Check Suicide Rate:**

- Japan has appointed the first ever Minister for Loneliness amid the increasing suicide rates in Japan.
- Suicide rates in Japan has increased for the first time in 11 years in the current COVID-19 pandemic situation.



- Japan has appointed the loneliness minister on the line of United Kingdom which became the first country in world to create a similar position in the country in 2018.
- Tetsushi Sakamoto, who is in charge of combating Japan's falling birth rate and revitalising regional economies, was also appointed as the Loneliness minister.
- Japanese government has also created an "isolation or loneliness countermeasures office on February 19, 2021 within its cabinet.
- This office will look after the issues like suicide and child poverty which have increased amid the ongoing pandemic.

#### **Suicide in Japan:**

- Suicide is considered a major social issue in Japan. In the year 2017, the country had witnessed seventh highest suicide rate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- The suicide rates had increased by 34.7% during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The rates were at peak in 2003 after that, the rates have been decreasing.
- The rates were at its lowest in the year 2019. However, the monthly suicide rates in Japan increased by 16% in between July and October 2020 because of COVID-19.
- Among the total cases, seventy percent of suicides are male. Suicide has become the leading cause of death for man in the age group of 2- years to 44 years.

#### **Tetsushi Sakamoto:**

- He is a Japanese politician who was appointed as the Minister of Loneliness on February 12, 2021. He is also a member of the House of Representatives in national legislature of Japan called Diet. He represents the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan.

### **35. National Urban Digital Mission Launched:**

- The Central government has launched the 'National Urban Digital Mission' on February 23, 2021
- The National Urban Digital Mission was launched by the Union Housing & Urban Affairs Minister, Hardeep Singh Puri and Minister of Electronics & IT, Ravi Shankar Prasad.
- While launching the mission, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry (MoHUA) stated that, this mission will institutionalise the citizen-centric and ecosystem-driven approach for the urban governance and service delivery in cities by the year 2022. It will also be providing these service deliveries in all cities and towns by 2024.
- Initiatives like Smart-Code, India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX), Smart Cities 2.0 website, and Geospatial Management Information System (GMIS) were also launched at this virtual event.
- "India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX)" initiative has been developed by the Smart Cities Mission in partnership with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.

#### **National Urban Digital Mission:**

- This mission was launched in order to create a digital infrastructure for all the cities in country.
- This mission will help in creating a shared digital infrastructure which in turn can be used to consolidate and cross-leverage the several digital initiatives of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The mission will also enable the cities and towns to benefit from holistic and diverse forms of support with respect to the needs and local challenges of the towns and cities.
- India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX)
- It is an open-source software platform facilitating a secure and authenticated exchange of data across several data platforms, data producers, 3rd party applications and consumers. IUDX will provide full control to the data owners regarding the sharing of data. They could control as to what data needs to be exposed and to whom.

#### **Smart Cities Mission:**

- It is an urban renewal and retrofitting program that seeks to develop smart cities across India so as to make cities citizen friendly and sustainable. This mission is being implemented by Union Ministry of Urban Development in association with the respective state governments. It initially included 100 cities that will be completed in between 2019 and 2023.

### 36. Flower Processing Centre:

- The Horticulture Department of Karnataka will set up a flower processing centre in collaboration with the International Flower Auction Bangalore (IFAB). The centre will be set up in order to convert the unsold flowers into its useful products.

#### Highlights:

- The flower processing centre will process the flowers and convert them into value-added products like floral arts, natural dyes, incense sticks, floral papers, floral embedded works, flower petal powder for cosmetic usage and silica-stored flowers.
- This flower processing facility was needed because flower farmers are suffering with huge losses whenever there is market disruption.
- Thus, with the establishment of this facility, the farmers can learn the art of flower processing from the centre.
- This unit will be used to process all kinds of flowers.

#### Flower Production in Karnataka:

- Lotus is the state flower of Karnataka. Karnataka is the leading state in floriculture. It accounts for 75% of total flower production in India. The state has highest area under modern cut flowers and it comprises of 40 flowers growing and exporting units. The state also has India's first and only flower auction centre. It has 18,000 hectares of land under flower cultivation. It accounts for 14% of total area under flower cultivation in India.

#### Biodiversity in Karnataka:

- Karnataka comprises of rich diversity of flora and fauna. The total recorded forest area of the state is 38,720 km<sup>2</sup>. It accounts for 20.19% of the total geographical area of State.
- The forest is home to 25% of elephant population and 10% of tiger population of India.
- Western Ghats which is a biodiversity hotspot includes the region of western Karnataka.
- Talacauvery and Kudremukh are two clusters of Western Ghats in Karnataka finds its place in the tentative list of World Heritage Sites of UNESCO.
- Indian roller is the state bird and Indian elephant is the state animal.
- Sandalwood is the state tree of Karnataka.

### 37. National Cooperative Development Corporation:

- Recently, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) have signed an MoU to promote the Export-Oriented Marine Product.

#### National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC):

- It is a statutory Corporation that was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1963. The corporation was set up with the objective of planning and promoting the programmes related to the production, processing, storage, marketing, export and import of the agricultural produce, industrial goods, foodstuffs, livestock and other notified commodities.

#### Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA):

- This authority was established by the Marine Products Export Development Authority Act 1972. It is headquartered at Kochi.

- The role of the MPEDA ranges from covering fisheries of all kinds, increasing exports, specifying standards, marketing, extension and processing. It functions under the Department of Commerce.

### **38. China becomes India's top Trade Partner:**

- China has again become India's top trading partner in the year 2020. The reason was that India was still dependent on the import of heavy machines, telecom equipment and home appliances from China.

#### **Highlights:**

- The provisional data from the trade between both the countries in the year 2020 stood at \$77.7 billion.
- However, the trade had decreased as compared to the 2019 trade total of \$85.5 billion.
- The imports of heavy machines etc outweighed India's efforts to cut down its dependence on trade.
- As a result of which, the bilateral trade gap of India with China was \$40 billion in the year 2020.
- Total imports from China stood at \$58.7 billion which was more than India's combined imports from U.S. and U.A.E.
- The data further highlights that, India was able to lower the imports from its Asian neighbors despite there were demand disruptions amid the coronavirus pandemic.
- Background
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi had banned several Chinese apps and slowed the approvals on investments from China in a bid to make India self-reliant following a deadly clash with China at the Galwan Valley in the disputed Himalayan border.

#### **India-China Relation:**

- The relationship between both the countries has varied over time. Both the countries have sought economic cooperation with each other despite having several conflicts like border disputes and economic nationalism.
- The modern relationship between India and China began in 1950 when India ended the formal ties with Republic of China (Taiwan). It then recognized People's Republic of China as legitimate government in the mainland China. Both the countries are two major regional powers in the Asia region.
- They are also the fastest growing major economies. The growth in diplomatic and economic arena has further increased the importance of the bilateral relationship between both the countries.

### **39. Bangladesh bans all known Vulture-Toxic Drugs:**

- Bangladesh has become the first country that has banned the painkiller ketoprofen. This painkiller is used widely to treat the cattle. But this painkiller is toxic to vultures.

#### **Highlights:**

- Earlier, veterinary diclofenac was also banned some 10 years ago.
- This is a landmark move to save the remaining population of globally threatened vultures.
- Experts says, similar steps need to be taken by India, Pakistan, Nepal and Cambodia in order to save the population of vultures.
- What this ban was put?
- The Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) report states that ketoprofen is now widely used as a main anti-inflammatory drug by vets in Bangladesh. But, Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) such as diclofenac and ketoprofen are a major threat to vultures

of South Asia. These drugs led to the catastrophic 99.9 per cent declines of white-rumped vultures in this region.

**Steps taken by other countries:**

- Indian government had banned the use of diclofenac for veterinary purpose in the year 2006. However, this step is not that effective since there are other toxic drugs are in use.
- In the December 2020, Oman became the first country in Arabian Peninsula to ban the veterinary use of diclofenac in order to conserve the endangered species such as vultures.

**About Indian Vultures:**

- The scientific name of the vulture is *Gyps indicus*. This vulture is native to India, Pakistan and Nepal. It breeds in the hilly regions of central and peninsular India.
- The population of three out of nine Indian species of vultures namely – white-rumped vulture, long-billed vulture and the slender-billed vulture, have declined by 90 percent during the mid-1990s. This, the vulture had been listed since 2002 as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

**40. Mumbai's Undersea Tunnel- Key Facts to know:**

- Mumbai will start the first undersea tunnel of India in 2023 which is being constructed as part of Coastal Road project of Mumbai.
- The tunnel will start from the Priyadarshani Park and will terminate at the Netaji Subhash Road in Marine Drive.

**Mumbai Coastal Road Project:**

- It is a 10.58-km long road project that starts from the Marine Drive and terminates at the Worli-end of Bandra-Worli Sea Link.
- It comprises of land-filled roads, bridges and tunnels.
- This project was started under the plan of linking South Mumbai with North Mumbai with a toll-free road.
- It will also ease the traffic run in the city.

**Challenges:**

- The construction of the tunnel is challenging because it will be built under sea. The major challenges include:
- Flow of sea water into the tunnel.
- Tunnel will exert pressure of the sea so there will be fear of tunnel caving.
- However, the tunnel is being constructed near the coast so it has eased the construction process. Further, all the safety measures are being taken to ensure stability of tunnel.

**41. Microbes from Earth could survive on Mars:**

- Recently, a study was published in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiology* that some microbes that are found on Earth might temporarily survive on the Mars.

**Highlights:**

- This study is significant for the success of future MARS missions.
- The endurance of the microorganisms was tested by the researchers from NASA and German Aerospace Center.
- It was tested by launching them into stratosphere which represents some the key conditions of the Red Planet.
- New way to expose bacteria and fungi on Mars-like conditions has been tested by using a scientific balloon to carry the experimental equipment up to stratosphere.
- During the trip it was found that, some microbes particularly the spores from black mold fungus, were able to survive even when they were exposed to high ultraviolet radiation.

**Key Facts about Mars:**

- It is the second-smallest planet in the solar system. The planet carries the name of Roman god of war.
- It is also called as the Red Planet because of presence of iron oxide on Mars's surface. Iron Oxide provides reddish appearance.
- It has a thin atmosphere. Some of the surface features resembles the impact craters of Moon, and deserts, valleys, & polar ice caps of Earth.
- Days and seasons are similar to Earth because its rotational period and tilt of the rotational axis are similar to that of Earth.
- It is also a site of Olympus Mons. Olympus Mons is the largest volcano and highest known mountain on any planet.
- It is also the home to Valles Marineris which is the largest canyons in Solar System.
- It has two moons named Phobos and Deimos.
- Mariner 4 was the first spacecraft launched by NASA in 1964 to MARS.

#### **Stratosphere:**

- This layer lies in between the troposphere and mesosphere. It is the stratified (layered) in temperature. The warmer layers are at height while the cooler layers close to Earth. Ozone Layer is also a part of this layer of atmosphere.

#### **42. VL-SRSAM missile System Successfully Launched:**

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully launched the two indigenously designed and developed Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) on February 22, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The missiles were launched with the help of static vertical launcher.
- They were launched from Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the Odisha Coast.
- Launch of the missiles were monitored by the senior scientists from the labs who helped in developing and designing the system.
- Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM)
- VL-SRSAM was indigenously developed and designed by DRDO.
- Missiles have been launched for the Indian Navy.
- They will neutralize the various aerial threats including the sea-skimming targets.
- DRDO has performed two trials in order to demonstrate the vertical launch capability.
- Both the missiles intercepted the simulated targets with pinpoint accuracy.
- These missiles were also tested for its minimum range and the maximum range.
- VL-SRSAM with the Weapon Control System were also deployed during the trials.
- During the missile testing, vehicle performance and flight path parameters were also monitored. These parameters were monitored through the flight data that was captured using the range instruments.

#### **Features of the Missile:**

- The missiles feature the mid-course inertial guidance along with the terminal active radar homing. It will replace the older Barak-1 surface to air missile system.
- It will be used as short-range air defence system in the Indian navy and Indian Air Force.
- Missiles have been developed from 2006 pre-design of Astra Mark 1 comprising of four short-span long-chord wings. But it also comprises additional jet vane driven thrust vector control that enables the quick reaction vertical launch. The missile has a 360° interception capability.

#### **43. India & Mauritius signs Limited Trade Pact Agreement:**

- India and Mauritius have signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA). This was first ever trade agreement with any African country.
- It was signed in the presence of Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnauth and the external affairs minister of India, S Jaishankar.
- CECPA was approved by the Indian Cabinet on February 17, 2021. It will come into effect from March, 2021.

**Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA):**

- As per this limited agreement, India will be given preferential access to the markets in Mauritius and vice versa.
- India will get access to 310 products on the other hand, Mauritius will get access to 615 products.
- India will also get access to 115 sub-sectors in the 11 broad services sectors.
- India will get access to goods like food & beverages, farm products, textiles & garments etc while Mauritius will get access to frozen fish, biscuits, speciality sugar, fresh fruits, juices
- These sectors include financial services, software, and telecommunications.
- The agreement also allows unrestricted movement of skilled professionals.

**Significance of the Agreement:**

- This is the first trade agreement that India signed after it launched “Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Initiative”.
- Also, this was the first ever agreement that India signed with any African Nation where China has its economic dominance. Thus, this pact becomes significant as a counter to China. Further, the pact will set stage for more such pacts with other African Nations.

**India-Mauritius Trade relation:**

- The Bilateral trade between India and Mauritius have increased from \$207 million in 2005-06 to \$690 million in the Financial Year 2020.
- This accounts for 233% increase in the trade. Also, India’s exports to Mauritius have increased from \$199 million to \$662 million in the same period. It accounts for 232% increase.
- On the other hand, India’s imports from Mauritius have just increased from \$7 million to almost \$28 million.

**44. Nasa releases first audio from Mars:**

- The United States space agency, NASA, released the first audio from Mars on February 22, 2021. It was a faint crackling recording of the wind that was captured by Perseverance rover.

**Highlights:**

- NASA has also released the first video of landing of the rover.
- The rover is on a mission to search if there is any sign of past life on the MARS (RED Planet).
- The rover sent a high-definition video clip of about three minutes and 25 seconds.
- Video shows deployment of a red-and-white parachute having 70.5-foot-wide canopy.
- Video further reveals the heat shield is dropping away after protecting Perseverance while it was entering into the MARS’ atmosphere.
- It also reveals that the rover touched-down the MARS surface in a cloud of dust in its Jezero Crater which lies to the north of MARS’ equator.

**Background:**

- NASA had launched the Perseverance rover on July 30, 2020. The mission landed on MARS on February 18, 2021. The prime mission is of just over two years however it will remain operational beyond that. The Predecessor of the Perseverance, Curiosity, is still functioning that was launched eight years back on Mars.

**About Perseverance:**

- This rover equals the size of an SUV and it weighs a ton. The rover was also equipped with a seven-foot-long robotic arm. It comprises of 19 cameras, 2 microphones and a suite of cutting-edge instruments.
- The mission was launched with the objective of collecting 30 rocks and soil samples in a sealed tube that will be sent back to Earth in the 2030s for lab analysis. It will determine whether MARS was actually inhabited in the past.
- The first sample drilling will begin this year in summer. In the process, it will be deploying new instruments in order to scan the organic matter, zap rocks to study vapour and map chemical composition.

**45. Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease with NPCDCS:**

- The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan, has launched the operational guidelines to Integrate the Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) with National Programme for Prevention & Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS).

**Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD):**

- It is an abnormal condition where fat accumulate in liver in the absence of secondary causes of fatty liver including the viral hepatitis, alcohol use or medications.
- It is a serious health concern as it encircles a spectrum of liver abnormalities. It can lead to more advanced liver abnormalities like non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), cirrhosis or Liver cancer from a simple non-alcoholic fatty liver or simple fatty liver disease.
- In the last two decades global burden of NASH has doubled.
- NASH led to the 40 lakh cases of compensated cirrhosis in 1990 globally. This burden increased further to 94 lakhs in the year 2017.
- It is also emerging as an important cause of liver disease in India.
- As per the "Epidemiological studies", the prevalence of NAFLD is around 9% to 32% of the general population in India.
- The prevalence is higher in those with overweight or obesity and those with diabetes or prediabetes.
- Studies also highlights that, the people with NAFLD have a greater chance of developing cardiovascular disease.

**Concerns:**

- Once the NAFLD develops, there is no specific cure for it. However, health promotion & prevention aspects which targets to the weight reduction, healthy lifestyle and control of risk factors are mainstays for the progression & prevention of the mortality & morbidity caused due to NAFLD.

**Preventive Measures:**

- India has become the first country in the world that has identify the need for action to control NAFLD. Following measures are being taken by the government as a preventive measure:
  1. Behaviour and lifestyle changes.
  2. Early diagnosis and management of NAFLD,
  3. Capacity building at various levels of healthcare to prevent, diagnose and treat the NAFLD.

**National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS):**

- This programme was launched in the year 2010 so as to prevent and control major NCDs. The programme focuses on human resource development, strengthening the infrastructure, early diagnosis, health promotion, management and referral.

- Under this, NCD Cells are being established at National, State and District levels to manage the programme. The programme is also establishing the NCD Clinics at the District and CHC levels for early diagnosis and treatment.

#### 46. Narmadapuram:

- The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, has announced to rename the Hoshangabad city of MP as Narmadapuram.

##### Highlights:

- This announcement was made by him while he was addressing the Narmada Jayanti programme that was held in Hoshangabad.
- He stated that, the proposal to change the name will be sent to the centre.
- The decision was taken after asking the gathering on the banks of Narmada.

##### Background:

- Hoshangabad city was named after an attacker Hoshang Shah who was the first ruler of Malwa.
- This district was the part of Nerbudda (Narmada) Division and Berar.
- It became the state of Madhya Bharat and later the Madhya Pradesh after India attained its independence in the year 1947.
- Hoshangabad is famous for its beautiful ghats along the river Narmada river.
- The major attraction is the Sethani ghat.

##### New Name of the city:

- The Hoshangabad will now be named as Narmadapuram named after River Narmada. River Narmada is the lifeline of Madhya Pradesh. The river is the 5th largest river across India. It flows through the rift valley. It also forms an estuary at its mouth.
- Cities like Jabalpur, Hoshangabad, Mandla, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar Narsinghpur, Badwabuare and Jhabua, are situated on the bank of river Narmada.

##### Narmada River:

- The river is also known as Reva River. Earlier it was also known as Narbada (Nerbudda). It is located in states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. The River is often called as the "Life Line of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat".
- It rises from the Amarkantak Plateau in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh. It forms a boundary between North India and South India. It is a west flowing river. The total length of the river is 1,312 km. It drains into the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Khambhat.

#### 47. Rare Birds sighted in Mangalore University:

- The rare birds namely the Yellow-Billed Babbler, Green Sandpiper and Grey-Necked Bunting Were spotted in the Mangalore University.

##### Highlights:

- The team of birdwatchers spotted 108 species of birds in Mangalore University while they were running the campus bird count (CBC).
- The campus bird count is the part of the Great Backyard Bird Count which is organised by the Bird Count of India.
- The bird count was conducted from February 12 to February 15, 2021.
- Yellow-Billed Babbler, Green Sandpiper, and Grey-Necked Bunting are new additions to the avian that are found in the campus.
- With this addition, CBC has recorded a total of 146 species in the campus within six years so far.
- Other birds that were recorded this year are the Black Drongo, Black Kite, Plum-Headed Parakeets, Brahminy Kite, Common Iora, Jungle Babbler, Purple-Rumped Sunbird, Red-Whiskered Bulbul and White-Cheeked Barbet.



- The campus bird count in the Mangalore University had recorded 77 species in the 2016. In 2017, 95 species were recorded, in 2018, 110 species were recorded while 107 species were discovered in 2019 besides 103 species in the year 2020.

#### **Bird Count of India:**

- It is an informal partnership of organizations and groups that working together so as to increase the collective knowledge regarding the distribution of birds and their populations. The organization works with them aim of documenting the distributional range and abundance birds in India.

#### **Yellow-billed babbler:**

- It belongs to the family Leiothrichidae. The bird is endemic to southern India and Sri Lanka. Scrub, cultivation and garden land are the habitat of the bird. The bird is not migratory.

#### **Grey-necked bunting:**

- Its scientific name is *Emberiza buchanani*. It is also called as the grey-hooded bunting. This species belongs to the family *Emberizidae*.
- It breeds in the range from Caspian Sea to Altai Mountains in Central Asia and in winters it also breeds in the parts of Southern Asia.

#### **48. First-ever National Toy Fair to start from Feb 27:**

- The first-ever National Toy Fair will be starting from the February 27th, 2021. The festival will conclude on March 2, 2021. It will be organized in the virtual format.

#### **Highlights:**

- IIT Gandhinagar is the only IIT in the country which is running this centre for creative learning.
- The CCL helps in developing the scientific temperament in the students and teachers by developing various scientific and educational toys.

#### **About the toy fair:**

- The toy fair is being organised by the Ministry of Textiles.
- Ministry of Education and ministry of commerce & industry has also associated to organise the fair.
- This virtual toy fair will be organised with the aim to provide a joyful learning for the children.
- It will engage the children in teaching, learning and promoting indigenous toy industry.

#### **Some of the toys that CCL will showcase includes:**

- Robot made using a DC motor.
- Hydraulic JCB controlled using syringes.
- Periscope to look beyond the wall.
- Explaining textbook trigonometry through a sine wave car.
- Easy learning of geometry through lamps.
- The fair would also showcase 75 exhibition stalls of the Ministry of Education, National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL).

#### **Background:**

- The idea of toy fair emerged from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat address on August 30, 2020. He had highlighted the huge potential of toys market and the opportunities that can be used to promote indigenous toys. Recently, on February 11, 2021, the government had launched a website for the toy fair.

#### **49. ICGS C-453 Interceptor boat commissioned:**

- The Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICG) named as C-453 was commissioned into services in Chennai on February 19, 2021. This was the 17th interceptor boats out of the 18 which are being indigenously built by Larsen & Toubro Ltd.

#### **ICGS C-453:**

- It is a 27.80-m-long interceptor boat.
- The boat has a displacement of 105 tonnes.
- It can attain a maximum speed of 45 knots (85 kmph).
- It is capable to undertake the multifarious tasks such as surveillance, close-coast patrol, interdiction, and search & rescue.
- It will also provide assistance to the boats and craft in case of distress at sea.
- It comprises of the advanced navigation and communication equipment.
- The ship is commanded by Assistant Commandant Animesh Sharma.
- Interceptor boat will be based in Chennai under operational control of Commander of the Coast Guard Region (East).

#### **Functions of the interceptor Boat:**

- The ship will be deployed to do surveillance of the Exclusive Economic Zone and other duties in accordance with the Coast Guard Charter. This will help in safeguarding the maritime interests of India.

#### **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):**

- As per the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, the EEZ is an area in the sea for which a sovereign state owns a special right for the exploration and use the marine resources like energy production from water and wind.
- It includes the area from the baseline out to the 200 nautical miles (nmi) from the coast of any state. It can also include the continental shelf. However, it does not comprise of the territorial sea or continental shelf beyond the 200 nmi limit.
- This area is different than the territorial sea in the light that, this zone provides “sovereign right” which means rights of the coastal state below the surface of the sea.

#### **Territorial Sea:**

- It is the area from the baseline in which a state has a full sovereignty over the waters. It is a belt of coastal waters that extends up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline of the coastal state. In this zone, foreign vessels are allowed for innocent passage.

#### **50. February 20: World Day of Social Justice:**

- The World Day of Social Justice is observed on February 20 every year. The day is dedicated to advantages and issues which can be tackled by Social Justice. In the year 2021, the day was celebrated under Theme– “A call for social justice in the Digital Economy.

#### **Why this day is observed?**

- The day is observed to show its fight for the greater good which can be achieved by fighting the unemployment, poverty, by upholding the human rights and by promoting Gender Equality.
- It also talks about the equal opportunities that is needed in all aspects.
- The day is specifically dedicated to those who have been denied from their basic rights and have been discriminated on various accounts.
- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) started gave its approval to observe the World Day of Social Justice on November 26, 2007. In the 63rd session of the UNGA, February 20th was selected as the World Day of Social Justice.

#### **Significance of the day:**

- In the year 2021, this day became more significance amid the covid-19 pandemic. The global pandemic has brought the entire nation to a standstill. Some part of the world is still struggling with the covid-19 cases caused due to different variants of the virus.
- While, there are several countries where healthcare systems are at work and have started vaccination.
- As a result, world has been bifurcated into two parts. One part of the world is getting all the services they need while major portion of the world has not enough resources to avail the services. Thus, the social justice becomes more important.

#### 51. Mass Migration of Blue Earthworms in Meghalaya:

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has prepared a report on two-way mass migration of the blue earthworms in the state of Meghalaya.

##### Key Facts:

- The blue earthworms, measuring up to 1.6 feet in length, migrate up and down to 300 metres in the East Khasi Hills of the state.
- Uphill migration of the earthworms starts in April-May. With the onset of monsoon, they emerge from the rivers and streams.
- Downhill migration occurs during September-October when the vegetation starts to dry and temperature & humidity drop.
- The locals in the state beat them when they observe these earthworms because of they play a major role in enhancing the fertility of soil.
- Further, it helps in shifting the locals to ecologically sustainable organic farming.

##### Concerns:

- There are some areas in the state where the unsustainable land-use practices have drastically reduced the population of earthworms. The damage has been caused mostly by the stone quarry and heavy earth-cutting.
- The factors including the developmental activities, erratic weather patterns, predation, and climate change results into the mass migrations of earthworms.

##### Blue Earthworm:

- The scientific name of the blue earthworm is *Perionyx excavates*. It is also called as composting worms, blues, or Indian blues. The species is known for its ability to create the fine worm castings so quick.
- The species have become popular in North America recently where it is used for composting purposes. Scientists believe that its origins are in the Himalayan mountains. It is also suited for vermicomposting in tropical and subtropical regions.

#### 52. Uttarakhand Brings Ordinance to Give Co-ownership Rights to Women:

- The Uttarakhand government has put forward an ordinance providing the co-ownership rights to women in the ancestral property of their husband.
- The ordinance was put forward in the backdrop of large-scale migration of men from hill areas of the state to look for livelihood.
- It was passed with the aim of providing financial independence to women who are left behind at home and get dependent on agriculture to sustain themselves.
- Uttarakhand has become the first state that provides co-ownership rights to women in ancestral property of their women.

##### Significance of the decision:

- In the state, specifically in the hilly regions, husbands and wives both are involved in farming for their livelihood.

- But it is usually observed that husbands do the heavy-labour intensive work like ploughing the field.
- On the other hand, women are involved in the 90 percent of farming-related work. Despite that, women's hard work is not recognised and they don't get any form of ownership right on the land.
- Thus, the decision of the Uttarakhand government will facilitate the ownership right to the women who works in the fields owned by their husbands which usually was transferred to the men and then to their sons.
- Further, it will help the women to get loan for farm related work since when they had no ownership rights, they were not able to take any form of loan.

#### **Women's property rights in India:**

- The property rights of women in India vary with respect to the religion and tribe. Usually, the right is subject to a complex mix of law and custom. However, Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 is a step towards granting the women equal legal property rights.
- Further, the Hindu personal laws of 1956 which is applicable to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains provides the women rights to inheritances.

#### **53. Khajuraho Dance Festival 2021- Key Facts:**

- The six-day Khajuraho Dance Festival was started on February 21, 2021. The dance festival is being organised at the Khajuraho Temple which is a UNESCO World Heritage site in Madhya Pradesh and known for its ancient Hindu temples as well as Jain temples.
- The festival is being held in the temple premises after 44 years.
- The permission was granted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to organise the festival at the site.
- This year, the fee has also been waived off to organise the festival.
- It is organised by the Department of Culture of Madhya Pradesh Government.

#### **Background:**

- The dance festival was started being organised at this site some 46 years ago in 1974 with the objective of promoting the heritage and tourism. ASI cancelled the permission after two years in 1976 following the reports of destruction of monuments and defacement of idols present in the premise. So, the festival was organised in an open garden for the past 44 years.

#### **Khajuraho Dance Festival:**

- This dance festival is organised by the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad annually from February 20th to February 26th. It is a one-week festival of classical dances.
- It is organised in the premise of the Khajuraho temples in Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh.
- The dance festival showcases the richness of Indian classical dance styles including the Odissi, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, and Kathakali. Recently, the Modern Indian dance was also added to the festival.

#### **Khajuraho temple:**

- Khajuraho is the group of monuments comprising of Hindu temples and Jain temples. It is located in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. It is located at around 175 kilometres southeast from the Jhansi.
- It is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list. Khajuraho temples are famous for nagara-style architectural symbolism. Most of the temples were built between 885 AD and 1050 AD by Chandela dynasty.

#### **54. NCBC Chairman on sub-categorisation of OBCs:**

- The chairman of National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), Bhagwan Lal Sahni, said that the NCBC is in favour of four subcategories of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This move complies with the recommendation of the Justice Rohini Commission.
- Justice Rohini Commission
- It was constituted on October 2, 2017. This commission has been appointed in order to study and report about the sub-categorisation of OBCs. The commission will be submitting the report by July 2021. The panel's terms of reference are to study the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among castes or communities. The panel will also work out on the mechanism, criteria and parameters for sub-categorisation within the OBCs.

#### **Sub-Categorisation of OBCs:**

- The sub-categories of the OBCs will be done by keeping those sections in mind which have either benefited adequately or less benefited from the reservation.
- While the two other categories will be for the least benefited and those who have not been benefited from present reservation structure of the OBCs.
- Existing OBC categorisation
- The subcategorization of OBCs is already in place in Bihar. Bihar has subcategorised it as OBCs and EBCs.

#### **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC):**

- NCBC was constituted on August 14, 1993 in the aftermath of commission was the outcome of Indra Sawhney & Ors. Vs. Union of India case.
- It was given the status of constitutional body in accordance with the 123rd constitutional amendment bill 2017 and the 102nd amendment of 2018. Article 338B of the Indian Constitution deals with the NCBC.
- The body works under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. NCBC was established to pursue the provisions of National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.

#### **Article 338 B:**

- As per this article, the commission comprises of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and three other Members. The appointment, conditions of service and tenure of office of all of them is decided by the President.

#### **55. Saudi Arabia opens up Armed Forces for Women:**

- Saudi Arabia has opened up the armed forces for Women. Following the order, the female recruits can now trade their abayas for military uniforms.
- Women will now be recruited as soldiers, lance corporals, corporals, sergeants, and staff sergeants.
- The government has also added some additional criteria for female applicants.
- This move aims to increase the rights of women in the country.
- The plan to allow women in the armed forces was first announced in the year 2019.

#### **Women's rights in Saudi Arabia:**

- Rights of the women in Saudi Arabia have been limited when compared to the rights of women in many of its neighbouring countries.
- There is a strict interpretation and application of sharia law in the country. However, in the year 2017, Mohammed bin Salman was appointed the Crown Prince. Since then, he has been bringing a series of social reforms witnessing the women's rights.

#### **Status of Women:**

- As per the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, the Saudi Arabia was ranked at 141 out of 144 countries with respect to gender parity.

- The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had elected Saudi Arabia to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women for 2018–2022. This move was also widely criticised by the international community. As of 2019, Women just constituted 34.4% of the native workforce in the country. In the recent times, they have started various campaign that resulted in the improvements to their status.

#### **Key decisions for women empowerment in Saudi Arabia:**

- In the year 2015, Women were allowed to vote in elections.
- They were also allowed to be appointed in the consultative assembly in 2015.
- In 2017, women were allowed to access the government services like health and education.
- The government allowed women to drive in 2017.
- In 2019, women were given right to register the divorce.
- In 2019, marriage age was capped at and above 18 years.
- In 2021, it was decided that women can now be appointed as court judge.

#### **56. UP to export 'Kala Namak Rice' to Singapore:**

- The state of Uttar Pradesh is all set to export a consignment of 20 tonnes of Kala Namak rice to Singapore. This move is a major boost to the farm exports from the state.

#### **Highlights:**

- Consignment of 20 tonnes will be sent to Singapore from Siddharth Nagar.
- Rice is being packaged in glass jars which also mentions the qualities of rice on it.
- The packaging of the rice comprises the popular quote of Mahatma Buddha as: "The unique aroma of the rice will remind people about me".
- Soon, the state will start observing the Kala Namak Rice festival on the line of the Strawberry Festival.
- The government has also planned to set up a Kala Namak Rice Research Centre at Siddharth Nagar in association with the International Rice Research Centre, Varanasi.
- The state government has also declared the rice as Once District One Product of Siddharth Nagar. While, the central government has declared it as once district one product of Gorakhpur, Basti, Maharajganj and Sant Kabir Nagar. This declaration would help in production, processing, packaging and branding of the rice.

#### **Kala Namak Rice:**

- This rice is also called as Buddha Rice.
- It is one of the finest varieties of aromatic rice that are grown in India.
- The rice is also referred to as 'Buddha ka Mahaprasad' (an offering to Lord Buddha).
- The rice was offered to the Buddhist monks so as to promote the rice in Buddhist countries.
- It is mainly cultivated in Deoria, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Gonda, Maharajganj, Siddharth Nagar, Balrampur, Sant Kabir Nagar, Bahraich, Shravasti. The Geographical Indications (GI) claims that these regions share a similar climate.

#### **One District One Product (ODOP):**

- It is an initiative which has been initiated as a transformational step forward so as to realize the true potential of a district. This initiative will also fuel the economic growth and generate employment and rural entrepreneurship to achieve the goals of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
- The initiative is operationally merged with the 'Districts as Export Hub' initiative. It is being implemented by Department of Commerce along with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) which is acting as a major stakeholder

#### **57. RBI brings State Bank of Sikkim under its regulatory purview:**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has brought the State Bank of Sikkim under its regulation.

### **State Bank of Sikkim:**

- It is a state-owned banking institution.
- The headquarter of the bank is at Gangtok, Sikkim.
- It operates under the jurisdiction of the State of Sikkim.
- The bank handles the banking services as well as the treasury functions of State Government of Sikkim.
- The bank is an autonomous body working under the Government of Sikkim.
- It was established in the year 1968 five years before Sikkim was made a part of India in 1973.
- It was established by the State Bank of Sikkim Proclamation, 1968.
- It has currently 42 branch offices and it operates three revenue counters.
- It was not regulated by Reserve Bank of India unlike other banks until February 21, 2021.
- However, with this regulatory amendment, the structure of bank's ownership will not change.

### **Why this bank was not regulated by RBI?**

- The state of Sikkim was made an associate state and then given the status of a state at a later stage. It was made a part of India following a referendum in the year 1973. Thus, this state enjoys a special status under article 371F. Following which, Banking Regulation Act 1949 and Companies Act does not extend to Sikkim. It still follows the old laws as per the Article 371F of the Constitution.
- The central direct taxes are also not extended to Sikkim. As per Sec 10(26AAA) any income arising to the Sikkimese through any source in the State or through the dividend or interest on securities are not included in the total income. The people are also not subject to Income Tax. This, the RBI had limited agreement to manage the public debt of the bank.

### **58. Passport services with Digi Locker:**

- The Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan has launched a new scheme that integrates the Passport services with the Digi Locker. With the launch of this scheme, the passport application in India had now been made even easier.

#### **Significance of the move:**

- Now the applicants can benefit from the DigiLocker platform while applying to passport-related services from anywhere in India.
- The new scheme would provide link to the specific documents of the applicants while applying for passport that they have uploaded in the Digilocker.
- Thus, the applicants can now upload their documents in paperless mode. They need not carry the original documents.
- Once the passports are also uploaded in DigiLocker, the authorized users can access their passport from any location. This would help the users in case the passport is lost.

#### **Passport Seva Program:**

- The passport programme was introduced in the year 2010 to improve the delivery of passport services. Further, this programme has introduced a major digital transformation in the last six years.

#### **DigiLocker:**

- Digilocker is a key initiative under the Digital India Mission. This initiative aims to transform India into the digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. This platform provides citizens a private space on a public cloud which is sharable.
- It enables the availability of all documents and certificates which has been uploaded on this cloud. This initiative targets at the paperless governance. Since, through this platform, documents can be issued and verified in a digital way.

#### **ePassport:**

- Apart from this, the ministry would also come up with the ePassport for its citizens. The ePassport will increase the security and improve the facilitation of the immigration processes at foreign airports.
- Further, in the Passport Seva Programme V2.0, the government will make use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), chat-bot, Machine Learning, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Analytics. This would ease the citizen experience and service delivery.

#### 59. PASSEX Exercise:

- The Indian and the Indonesian navies held the PASSEX military exercise in the Arabian sea on February 18, 2021. This military exercise was organised in order to enhance the operational interoperability and the overall cooperation.
- INS Talwar represented the Indian naval ship.
- The Indonesian Navy was represented by the multirole corvette KRI Bung Tomo.
- India's maritime cooperation
- India's maritime cooperation with Indonesia have gained a momentum in last few years. Indian Navy also participated in the several maritime exercise notwithstanding the covid-19 pandemic.
- It held the maritime exercises with countries like Russia, Japan, Australia and the US.
- Recently, in November 2020, India hosted the Malabar exercise. In the exercise, the navies of US, Japan and Australia took part.
- India had also invited Australia for the Malabar exercise in November 2020 to make the Malabar drill for all the Quad members.

#### Quadrilateral Security Dialogue:

- It is also called as the Quad or Asian NATO. It is an informal strategic forum comprising of Japan, Australia, United States and India. The grouping held semi-regular summits and military drills involving the member countries.
- The grouping was established with the aim of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific region. By the free and open Indo-pacific region it means to make the region free from the China's growing influence. This grouping was formed in the backdrop of increasing Chinese military assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### Exercise Malabar:

- It is a trilateral naval exercise between United States, Japan and India This drill was started in 1992 as a bilateral exercise involving India and United States. Japan was made a permanent partner in the exercise in year 2015.
- The exercise is often joined by the non-permanent members like Singapore and Australia. The exercise held a number of activities like fighter combat operations from aircraft carriers, anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, diving salvage operations, counter-piracy operations etc.

#### 60. Hydrogen Research:

- The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and the Greenstat Norway signed an agreement to set up the Centre of Excellence on Hydrogen. This agreement was signed some days after India unveiled its national hydrogen mission.

#### Highlights:

- The National Hydrogen Mission was unveiled by the Indian government to accelerate their plans to generate the carbon-free fuel from renewable sources.
- The government has also pledged in the Union Budget for 2021-22 to focus on generating hydrogen from the green power sources.
- The government also pledged to build more diverse and efficient energy infrastructure.



- Centre of Excellence on Hydrogen (CoE-H)
- The Indian oil associated with the Greensat Norway with the aim of developing a Centre of Excellence on Hydrogen (CoE-H).
- CoE-H was launched with the objective of facilitating the transfer and sharing of technology.
- It will also share the experience through the green hydrogen value chain and other technologies such as hydrogen storage and fuel cells.
- This platform will act as a vehicle to promote R&D projects in Green and Blue Hydrogen between the R&D institutes and universities of both the countries.
- The centre will work closely with the industry and governments of both the countries.
- It will also move its intellectual strengths in order to develop the cost-efficient and sustainable technological solutions.
- It will act as a think-tank for the developing codes and standards of the best industrial practices, product protocols, safety and regulations in the fields of hydrogen and fuel cells.
- National Hydrogen Mission
- The National Hydrogen Mission was announced by the Finance Minister in her Union budget for 2020-21. This mission was announced with the aim of generating hydrogen from the green power resources.

#### **Hydrogen Fuel:**

- It is a zero-emission fuel when burned with oxygen. The fuel can be used in the fuel cells or in the internal combustion engines. It is also be used as fuel for spacecraft propulsion.

#### **61. 11th India-EU Macroeconomic dialogue:**

- The 11th India-European Union macroeconomic dialogue was held in the virtual mode on February 19, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The Indian Delegation was led by the Secretary of Economic Affairs, Tarun Bajaj.
- Director-General of Economic and Financial Affairs, European Commission led the European Union delegation.
- Indian delegation also comprised of the representatives from Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Revenues.
- The press release from the Finance Ministry stated that the bilateral relation between India and European Union has evolved into a multifaceted relation over time.
- The European Union is also one of the largest trading partners of India.
- It is also the largest investors and an important source of technology, innovation and best practices.

#### **Takeaways from the dialogue:**

- The 11th India-European Union macroeconomic dialogue held discussions on all the dimensions of mutual interest including the political, economic, environmental, research & innovation, trade & investment and security.
- Both the countries also shared their experiences so as to enable both the countries on aspects such as G20 Framework Working Group Deliverables, debt-related issues, collaboration in the G20 on finance track matters, International taxation of the digital economy and G20 Action Plan.
- They also discussed the medium-term fiscal strategy and fiscal policy response besides the financial or structural reform priorities.
- India also shared with the EU, its policy response to the COVID-19 crisis and discussed the initiatives taken to revive the economy.

- The European Union side mentioned about the economic challenges and the outlook of their economy due to the adverse impact of the Coronavirus pandemic in the European Union countries. They also mentioned about their recovery plan and macroeconomic policy response.
- Lastly, the dialogue ended with the plan of strengthen the bilateral relations by several bilateral cooperation agreements of mutual interest for both the countries.

## 62. Kerala to build 'smart' Anganwadis:

- The government of Kerala has sanctioned ₹9 crore for the conversion of conventional anganwadis into "smart" anganwadis with better amenities.

### Smart Anganwadi Scheme:

- Under this scheme, the Department of Women and Child Development has granted 48 anganwadis of the states to construct its new buildings.
- The smart anganwadis will be built in order to provide early childhood care in a phased manner.
- These facilities will be established with the aim of make it more child-friendly. This way these facilities will help to nurture mental and physical development of children.
- To construct 48 anganwadis, a total of nine crore rupees has been sanctioned.
- The local bodies will also share ₹74 crore for the construction of the smart structures.
- The smart anganwadis are being designed and constructed under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).
- Background
- The government had decided to construct the unified model for the anganwadis in the state from April, 2019.
- **Anganwadi Scheme:**
- It is a type of rural child care centre that was started in the year 1975 by the Indian government. This scheme runs under the Integrated Child Development Services program.
- It seeks to combat the child hunger and malnutrition. These centres work in villages where they provide basic health care under the Indian public health care system.
- The basic health care activities are nutrition education, contraceptive counselling & supply. These centres are also involved in the preschool activities.

### Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):

- It is a government program that provides food, primary healthcare, preschool education, health check-up, immunization, and referral services of the children aged under 6.
- The ICDS was launched in 1975. During 1978 it was discontinued but the scheme was again launched by the Tenth Five Year Plan. The Tenth five-year plan linked ICDS scheme to Anganwadi centres.

## 63. Atal Paryavaran Bhavan:

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar, inaugurated the Atal Paryavaran Bhavan at Lakshadweep on February 19, 2021.

### Highlights:

- While inaugurating the Atal Paryavaran Bhavan, the minister said that, Lakshadweep will undergo a comprehensive development that too without compromising the UT's commitment to nature.
- The minister attended high level meetings with the Secretaries of various departments in UT's administration.
- He will also attend programmes at Suheli, Kadmat and Bangaram islands and evaluate major innovative initiatives of the Forest and Environment Department of the Union Territory.

### Suheli Par:

- It is a coral atoll in Lakshadweep. This atoll is an oval-shaped and 17 km long. It is surrounded by a zone of rich marine fauna. It is located South-West of Kavaratti and 76 km to south of Agatti. It is located 139 km to west of Kalpeni and 205 km to NNW of Minicoy island. The Nine Degree Channel runs between these islands. It has an area of 87.76 km<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Nine Degree Channel:**

- It is a channel in the Indian Ocean located between the Islands of Kalpeni and Suheli Par, and Maliku Atoll. This channel is around 200 km wide and is having a depth of 2597 metres.

#### **Kadmat Island:**

- It is also known as Cardamom Island. It is a coral island that belongs to Amindivi subgroup of islands. It is 9.3 kilometres in length. Coral reef with seagrass and marine turtles which nestle are the marine features of this island.

#### **Lakshadweep:**

- This group of islands is located 200 to 440 km off the southwestern coast of India. It is administered as a union territory and a district of India. It has a total surface area of 32 km<sup>2</sup>. It comprises of 10 subdivisions. The capital of the island is Kavaratti. This region comes under jurisdiction of Kerala High Court.

### **64. India-Ethiopia:**

- India and Ethiopia have signed two agreements on February 20, 2021. These agreements are related to visa facilitation and leather technology.

#### **Highlights:**

- These agreements were signed in the presence of Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.
- The deputy prime minister of Ethiopia is on a 4-day visit to India.
- Both the countries had useful and productive discussions on several of bilateral and regional issues.
- The ministers also agreed to expand the bilateral agenda with respect to the economy, defence, S&T, digital and cultural cooperation.

#### **India-Ethiopia Relation:**

- The bilateral relation between India and Ethiopia has its foundation in the civilizational ties and cultural bonds. The relation between both the countries dates back to about 2,000 years of history.

#### **Trade Relation:**

- India is amongst top development, trade and investment partner in Ethiopia. India is also the third most important trading partner for Ethiopia. India's exports to 11% of all the imports in Ethiopia which mainly comprises primary and semi-finished iron and steel products.
- India also exports drugs & pharmaceuticals, machinery & instruments, plastic chemicals, metal, transport equipment and electrical materials.
- While, India imports cotton, pulses and spices that annually amounts to US \$ 30 million. In 2018-19, the bilateral trade between both the countries stood at USD 1.28 billion. Out of this, Indian exports to Ethiopia stood at USD 1.23 billion and imports stood at USD 55.01 million.

#### **Other Cooperation:**

- Further, Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of concessional Lines of Credit by India among all the African countries. India is also the second largest foreign investor in the country.
- Around 40% of the Indian investment is done in the field of agriculture. India also plays a major role in the field of education, Science & Technology and Defence.

### **65. US officially re-joined the Paris Climate Deal:**

- The United States has officially re-joined the Paris climate accord on February 19, 2020. It has joined the deal again after 107 days it left.

**Highlights:**

- With the rejoining of US, the world leaders expects that now the country will prove its seriousness as it was mostly absent for four years.
- The countries are also waiting for the announcement from Washington on the US's goal to cut emissions of heat-trapping gases by 2030.
- The president of US, Joe Biden, had signed the executive order to reversed the withdrawal ordered by former President, Donald Trump.

**Background:**

- In the year 2019, the Donald Trump administration had announced its withdrawal from the Paris accord. This order came into effect on November 4, 2020, the day after the election, because of provisions in the agreement.

**Paris Climate Agreement:**

- It is an agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This agreement was signed in 2016 and deals with the climate change mitigation, adaptation, and finance. This agreement was negotiated by the representatives of 196 states.
- It was signed at the 21st Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC in France. The agreement was later adopted by consensus in December 2015. Currently, 190 members of the UNFCCC are parties under the agreement. Countries like Turkey, Iran, and Iraq are not parties to it.

**Goals under Paris Agreement:**

- Under the Paris Agreement, there is a long-term goal of keeping the average temperature to well below 2 °C above the pre-industrial levels. It also seeks to put efforts in order to limit the increase to 1.5 °C. This will help in reducing the risks and impacts of climate change.
- The agreement further aims to increase the ability of parties so as to adapt with the adverse impacts of climate change. It also seeks to make the flow of finance towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

**66. Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0:**

- The Union Health Minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan, has launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0.

**Highlights:**

- The mission will be conducted in two rounds.
- The first round will start from February 22, 2021 while the second phase will start from March 22, 2021.
- It will run across 250 districts or urban areas across the 29 States or Union Territories.
- Apart from that, the Minister also launched the IMI 3.0 portal and released Operational Guidelines for it.
- He also launched the awareness material or IEC package developed under the campaign.

**Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0:**

- The IMI 3.0 initiative was launched by central government in order to provide immunization to the pregnant women and children free of cost in India.
- The scheme will strengthen and re-energize immunization programme.
- It will help in achieve full immunization coverage for children and pregnant women rapidly.
- This mission also aims to reach the unreached population. It will reach to them with all the available vaccines under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

**Mission Indradhanush:**

- This Mission was launched in December 2014 with the aim of fully immunizing unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children under UIP.
- The scheme targets children aged under 2 years and pregnant women for immunization.
- The mission incorporated immunization programme against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD) namely, Whooping cough, diphtheria, polio, tetanus, meningitis, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, pneumonia, Haemophilus influenzae type B infections, rotavirus vaccine, Japanese encephalitis (JE), measles-rubella (MR) and pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV).
- The rate of immunization coverage under the initiative has increased to 6.7% per year through the first two phases of 'Mission Indradhanush'.

#### **Intensified Mission Indradhanush:**

- This mission was launched in 2017 to reach child aged under two years and pregnant women who were left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme. Under this mission, greater focus was given on urban areas which was left under the Mission Indradhanush.

#### **67. Agri Ministry to use Drones to support PMFBY:**

- The agriculture ministry was allowed to use drones for the purpose of remote sensing data collection under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

#### **Highlights:**

- The conditional permission was granted to use the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Directorate General of Civil Aviation.
- The RPAS will be used by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoAFW) for remote sensing data collection in the agricultural areas of 100 districts.
- It will be used at the gram panchayat level yield estimation.
- This conditional exemption will be valid for one year after the date of issue or until the operationalisation of the Digital Sky Platform.
- The use of the drones will still require to obtain necessary clearances from the local administration.

#### **Uses of Drones in Agriculture:**

- Drones collect the raw data and translate it into useful information. Thus, they can be used to monitor following parameters in agriculture:
  - It can monitor the crop health such as damage made by pests and change in the colour of crops because of pest infection.
  - It can also look after vegetation indices such as anomaly detection, leaf area, yield, treatment efficacy and phenology.
  - It can monitor the plant height and density.
  - It can identify water-stressed parts of the field or the orchard that needs watering.
  - It can also perform soil analysis and nutrient availability for a better plant nutrient management.

#### **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV):**

- UAV is also known as a drone or a Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS). It is an aircraft which runs without any human pilot on board. It is a component of the unmanned aircraft system (UAS).
- The flight of UAV is operated either under remote control by human operator or by onboard computers autonomously.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):**

- This scheme was launched in February 2016. It is an insurance service for farmers to secure their yields. This scheme was launched under the theme of "One Nation—One Scheme".

- It replaced the two schemes namely the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS). The scheme was launched with the aim of reducing premium burden on farmers. It also seeks to ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim.

#### **68. Road Transport Ministry's 'Go Electric Campaign':**

- The Union Minister of Road, Transport & Highways, Nitin Gadkari, had launched the 'Go Electric Campaign' on February 19, 2021.

##### **Highlights:**

- This campaign was launched in order to spread awareness with respect to the benefits of Electric Vehicles Charging Infrastructure.
- The campaign would also raise awareness regarding e-mobility and electric cooking across India.
- Go Electric campaign is the future of India. It will help in promoting the environmental-friendly, cost-effective and indigenous electric products in the country.
- While launching the campaign, the power minister, R.K. Singh, also stated that this energy transition is the need of the hour so as to reduce the dependency on the imported fossil fuels. The minister also urged the people to adopt the electric appliances.

##### **Go Electric Campaign:**

- The Go Electric Campaign was launched with the objective of helping India in reducing its fossil fuel import dependence in upcoming years. This campaign was also launched as a step forward towards a greener and cleaner future. This campaign also aims to create awareness at the PAN-India level.
- It is expected that the campaign will boost the confidence of Electric Vehicle manufacturers.

##### **Logo of 'Go Electric' campaign:**

- The launch of the Go electric campaign also marked the launch of the logo of 'Go Electric'. The logo for the campaign depicts the evolution of the e-mobility ecosystem. The audio-visuals creatives have also been specifically designed in order to enhance the consumer awareness. These creatives were screened during the launch event.
- Apart from that, the Industry players organized the exhibition which displayed different electrical vehicles such as e-buses, e-cars, 2-wheelers, 3-wheelers. It also displayed charging options including the slow chargers and fast chargers.

##### **How Electric fuel is a significant option in India?**

- The Electric fuel is an important alternative for fossil fuels. Because it will help in reducing the import bill of India raised with the import of fossil fuels. The import bill stands at Rs. 8 lakh crores. Further, the electric fuel reduces the emissions and has a low cost as compared to the fossil fuels.

#### **69. G-7 & Munich Summit:**

- Joe Biden has offered Group of Seven (G7) allies and other foreign leaders a part into his plans of dramatically reshaping the US foreign policy.
- This move will be taken by him even as he is dealing with a number of international crises.
- Biden will be giving virtual appearances at a G-7 meeting and Munich Security Conference.
- The New administration has announced major reversals of Trump administration policies.

##### **Major Announcements and policy reversal:**

- White House has sought that the new administration will quickly be moving to reorient US away from Donald Trump's "America First" mantra.

- The State Department also announced that the United States stands ready to re-join talks regarding re-entering into the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear deal. This deal was earlier abandoned by Trump administration.
- At the G-7, the US government will also announce to that the US will soon start releasing USD 4 billion towards an international effort to arrange the purchase and distribution of coronavirus vaccine for the poor nations. This programme was also rejected by Trump.
- US also officially re-joined the Paris climate agreement which is the largest international effort for curbing the global warming. Earlier, Trump in 2017, had announced the withdrawal from the deal.
- The new President will also encourage the G-7 partners in order to make good on their pledges for the COVAX initiative by WHO which Trump had withdrawn and refused to join the 190 countries in the COVAX program.

#### **Group of Seven (G7):**

- It is an intergovernmental organization comprising of France, Canada, Italy, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and United States. At the annual G7 meeting, the heads of government from the member states and the representatives of the European Union meet and discuss several issues.

#### **Munich Security Conference:**

- It is an annual conference on international security policy. It is organised in Munich, Bavaria since the year 1963. It is world's largest gathering.

#### **70. India-Australia Circular Economy Hackathon (I-ACE):**

- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, addressed the India-Australia Circular Economy Hackathon (I-ACE) on February 19, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- During the hackathon, Narendra Modi said that there is a need to look at India's consumption patterns.
- India also needs to look upon how to reduce their ecological impact.
- The prime minister further said that the Circular Economy can be a key step to solve many of the challenges with respect to the consumption pattern.
- Prime Minister further highlighted that once should must make the recycling & reusing things, eliminating waste and improving resource efficiency a part of the lifestyles.
- Modi also highlighted that; the innovations that were showcased at the hackathon will inspire both the countries to take lead in circular economy solutions.
- He urged people to find ways so as to scale-up and incubate these ideas.
- During the hackathon, Waste reduction solutions were provided by 200 percipients from 72 teams of the students and start-ups.

#### **India Australia Circular Economy Hackathon (I-ACE):**

- The India Australia Circular Economy Hackathon was launched by the NITI Aayog Atal Innovation Mission (AIM). This hackathon was launched in association with the commonwealth scientific and industrial research organisation (CSIRO) of Australia. It focuses on identification and development of the innovative technology solutions provided by students, MSMEs and start-ups from both the countries. It will help in encouraging a sustainable circular economy. This hackathon was launched with the aim of increasing long-term health and resilience.

#### **Themes of the I-ACE:**

- The I-ACE was organised under the four key themes namely,
- Innovation in food supply chains avoiding waste.
- Innovation in packaging reducing packaging waste.

- Creating opportunities for plastics waste reduction.
- Recycling critical energy metals and e-waste.

**Circular Economy:**

- It is an economic system which aims to eliminate the waste and continual use of resources. This system employs the reuse, repair, sharing, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling in order to create closed-loop system. It helps in minimising the use of resource inputs.
- It also minimises the creation of pollution, waste and carbon emissions.

**71. Arrow-4 System:**

- Israel has announced in February 18, 2021 that it is developing a new ballistic missile shield named “Arrow-4” in collaboration with the United States. This missile is being developed as another layer in the defensive system by keeping an eye towards Iran.

**Key Facts:**

- The Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 interceptors of Israel are already operational under the multi-layered system.
- This system can destroy the incoming missiles in the atmosphere and in space.
- The development of Arrow-4 in collaboration with the United States will result in the technological and operational leap forward.
- It will prepare the countries for the future battlefield and the evolving threats in Middle East and beyond.
- Though, the Israeli leaders are describing the Iran’s ballistic missile programme as a threat to Israel and world. But Iran stated that the missile is being developed as a defensive measure and it aims to deter the attack.

**Arrow or Hetz:**

- It is a family of anti-ballistic missiles. It has been designed to make the Israeli missile defense system more effective against the ballistic missiles in comparison to other surface-to-air missile that country has procured. These missiles are being jointly funded and produced by Israel and United States.
- The missiles started developing in the year 1986. The missile system is overseen by Israeli Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Missile Defense Agency. The missile system comprises of joint production of hypersonic Arrow anti-missile interceptor and Israel Aerospace Industries Brown Hazelnut.

**Ballistic Missile:**

- This missile follows a ballistic trajectory in order to deliver one or more warheads. These missiles are guided for relatively brief periods. Most of its flight is unpowered. Short-range ballistic missiles lie within the Earth’s atmosphere. However, the intercontinental ballistic missiles are launched on the sub-orbital trajectory.

**72. SWAMIH Fund-Recent development:**

- The SWAMIH Fund is all set to deliver its first finished apartments in the year 2021. It is a 250-billion-rupee fund set up by Indian government. This fund was created to complete the stalled housing projects. The fund offers a solution of the problem that hindered savings of home buyers and bankrupted developers.

**Highlights:**

- The fund will hand over 16 projects comprising of more than 4,000 homes in the financial year 2021-2022.
- The SWAMIH fund was announced in November 2019.



- SWAMIH stands for 'Special Window for Completion of Construction of Affordable and Mid-Income Housing Projects'.

#### **Why this fund was launched?**

- In the year 2019, India had an estimated \$63 billion of stalled projects. The stalled projects were the result of the economic slowdown and a credit crisis in the real estate sector. Many of the builders were unable to service their loans. They were forcing banks to write off debts. Thus, this fund was created as one measure to deal with the credit crisis.

#### **SWAMIH Investment Fund:**

- This fund was created to complete the construction of stalled, RERA-registered affordable and mid-income category housing projects. It credits the money in the projects which are stuck because of lack of funds. It was created as Category-II Alternative Investment Fund debt fund which is registered with SEBI.

#### **Money Approved through the fund:**

- This fund has approved around 159 projects with the investment of 145 billion rupees. This investment will help in completing 100,000 homes. Out of these projects, 47 projects have been given final approval.

#### **Investors under the fund:**

- This fund has a total of 14 investors. The government has 50% share in the fund. The Life Insurance Corp. and State Bank of India are having the share of 10%. Rest of the shares are met by other public and private-sector players.

### **73. India to appeal against Cairn Energy arbitration award:**

- The Indian government has decided to appeal against the international arbitration award of worth \$1.2 billion that was won by Cairn Energy Plc. in tax dispute.

#### **Highlights:**

- India's decision to appeal against the award shows the government's commitment to defend the sovereign rights in taxation.
- The government has also kept the possibility of a resolution open within the existing Indian laws.
- This also indicates the India's willingness to settle tax dispute under the Vivad Se Vishwas scheme. This scheme provides relief on interest and penalty if the principal tax demand has been paid.

#### **What is the issue?**

- The Cairn Energy Plc. Had made transactions in 2006-07 that involved the entities in Jersey. It led to capital gains for Cairn UK Holdings. This gain is taxable in India.
- So, the government alleges the company that the offshore transaction that was executed by Cairn was done with the aim of evading taxes.
- India had a tax demand of some Rs 104 billion and an equal amount in penalty and interest accrued.
- The Cairn states that the Indian government has seized residual shares in the company which is acquired by Vedanta Resources.
- The company also claims that, India also seized the tax refund due with the firm.
- Both of the seizures amount to approximately Rs10,570 crore.
- But because of international arbitration the company secured an award of \$1.2 billion besides the interest and cost. This amount will now be contested by the Indian government.

#### **Vivad se Vishwas Scheme:**

- This scheme gives a complete waiver on interest and penalty for the taxpayers in case they pay their pending taxes or disputed tax amount by March 31. This scheme was launched with the

aim of benefiting those whose tax demands are undergoing dispute at multiple forums. It aims to resolve 483,000 direct tax-related disputes pending with appellate forums.

#### **74. Hyderabad- 2020 Tree City of the World:**

- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Arbor Day Foundation have recently recognized Hyderabad as a 2020 Tree City of World. Hyderabad was selected for the recognition following its commitment to grow and maintain the urban forests.

#### **Highlights:**

- This recognition was a testament for city's sustained and institutional efforts of planting, nurturing and celebrating trees.
- It also marks the development of the urban and peri-urban forestry actions, projects besides the strategic planning & commitment of building healthy city.
- Other cities which were recognised by the organisation includes 120 cities from across 63 countries. Most of the cities were from United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.
- After this recognition, Hyderabad will join a network of like-minded cities who recognise the importance of trees.
- Hyderabad got the recognition in the second year of the program organised by the foundation.

#### **UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):**

- It is a specialized agency of United Nations. FAO leads the international efforts of defeating hunger and improving the nutrition security as well as the food security. The organisation was founded by UN in October 1945. It is headquartered in Rome, Italy. It has its regional and field offices around the 130 countries.
- FAO coordinate with the governments and development agencies to improve and develop the agriculture, fisheries, forestry, land resources and water resources. It comprises of 197 member states. It organises a biennial conference representing each member country.

#### **Arbor Day Foundation:**

- It is a not-for-profit conservation and education organization. The organisation was founded in the year 1972 by John Rosenow in Nebraska, United States. This organisation is the largest not-for-profit membership organization which is dedicated to tree planting.
- It works with the corporate mission of "inspiring people to plant, nurture, and celebrate the trees. Dan Lambe, is the current President of the foundation.

#### **75. Third India Tourism Mart organised by FAITH:**

- The Third India Tourism Mart was organised on February 18, 2021. It was addressed by the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan.
- The event was organised by the Federation of Associations in India Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) through video conferencing.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The event was participated by over 250 delegates from 60 countries virtually.
- It will be held from February 18, 2021 to February 20, 2021.
- The event will bring together a mix of right buyers from world and right exhibitors from India.
- It will provide the platform to connect with several buyers and exhibitors.
- The buyers and exhibitors will be brought together with common spirit of curiosity and desire in order to do business together.
- The third India Tourism Mart is significant as it is being organized at a time when the world is emerging from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was also significant since the countries are now contemplating to open up the travel with all health & security precautions measures in place.

**Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH):**

- It is the policy federation of all the national associations. It represents the complete tourism, travel and hospitality industry of India. It was launched in the year 2013.
- When the FAITH was established Indian tourism was ranked at 68th in the World Economic Forum Tourism Competitiveness index. Following this, the FAITH worked on many initiatives in collaboration with the Ministry of tourism. Thus, in the year 2019, India was ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in the World Economic Forum tourism competitiveness index.

**76. PM to chair NITI Aayog Governing Council Meeting:**

- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, will chair NITI Aayog Governing Council meeting on February 20, 2021.

**Highlights:**

- During the meeting, issues with respect to agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure and human resource development will be discussed.
- This will be the sixth meeting of the Governing Council.
- The meeting will be joined by Ladakh for the first time.
- Jammu and Kashmir will also participate as a Union Territory this year.
- Other Union Territories which are headed by the administrators will also join the meeting.
- Meeting will also be attended by the ex-officio members of the Governing Council; vice chairman and union ministers.
- Members & CEO of NITI Aayog and other senior officials of Government of India will also be joining the meeting.

**NITI Aayog:**

- It is a policy think tank in India which was established in 2015 by replacing the planning commission.
- The body was established with the aim of achieving the sustainable development goals with the cooperative federalism. Some of the initiatives of the Aayog includes- “15-year road map”, AMRUT, “7-year vision, strategy, and action plan”, Atal Innovation Mission, Digital India, Medical Education Reform, agriculture reforms, Transforming India Lecture Series etc. The Prime Minister is the Chairman of the think tank.

**Members of NITI Aayog:**

- The Prime Minister is the Chairperson of the Aayog.
- It also comprises of a Governing Council which include Chief Ministers of all the States and Union territories with Legislatures and lieutenant governors of Union Territories. However, Delhi and Puducherry are excluded.
- It also has Regional Councils which is composed of Chief Ministers of States and Lt. Governors of Union Territories.

**Governing Council:**

- It is the apex body of NITI Aayog. The council comprises of all the chief ministers, lieutenant governors of Union Territories (UTs), other union ministers and senior government officials. Council meets regularly. The first meeting of the council took place on February 8, 2015.

**77. NASA’s Perseverance Rover Landed on Mars:**

- The science rover Perseverance of NASA landed on the Red Planet (MARS) on February 18, 2021. This rover is the most advanced astrobiology laboratory that has been ever sent another planet. It will firstly search the traces of ancient microbial life on the Planet.

**Highlights:**

- The rover sailed through space for nearly seven months.

- It covered the distance of 293 million miles or 472 million km before entering to the Martian atmosphere.
- It entered the MARS with a speed of 12,000 miles per hour or 19,000 km per hour.
- The most challenging part of the robotic vehicle was its self-guided descent and landing during a complex series of maneuver. It was called as 'seven minutes of terror' by NASA.
- The project is worth \$2.7 billion.
- It was launched with the primary aim of launching the bechioenis in order to search for possible fossilized signs of microbes.

#### **MARS 2020 Mission:**

- It is a Mars rover built by Mars Exploration Program of NASA. It comprises of the Perseverance rover and an Ingenuity helicopter drone. The mission was launched on an Atlas V 541 launch vehicle from Earth on July 30, 2020. The mission was announced by NASA in December 2012 during a fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union at San Francisco.

#### **Perseverance rover:**

- The rover will observe the astro-biologically relevant ancient environment on the planet. It will also look after its surface geological processes and history. The rover will also do the assessment of past habitability and possibility of past life on it.
- The design of the rover is influenced from the Curiosity rover. It uses components that have been already fabricated and tested. It comprises of 19 cameras and two microphones. Thus, it will also record the audio of the environment on MARS.

#### **78. Why Facebook restricted new contents in Australia?:**

- The tech-giant Facebook has recently blocked the Australian users from reading and sharing any local and international news. Facebook has initiated this move in the backdrop of the dispute over new media payment law that Australia has initiated.

#### **Highlights:**

- The Facebook has retaliated over the new legislation that was brought by Australian government. This legislation pushes the tech companies to pay publishers for the news content they share.
- With this act, the Australian government wants the tech giants like Google and Facebook to pay for the news which is shared on their platform.
- The government had reported that the advertising revenue that earlier supported the publishers is now depleting.
- So, this new legislation forces them to make deals with media companies separately or to set fees for them.
- But Facebook has initiated this move to oppose the legislation stating that the proposed law fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between Facebook and publishers who use the platform to share news content.
- Facebook has also dealt with the Google to challenge Australian parliament for the proposed law.
- On the other hand, Google has also started to sign agreements on revenue-sharing with the publishers.

#### **Implication of the move:**

- This move by Facebook has sparked outrage in the country. Because, with this move several government and emergency response pages such as fire services, health authorities and police were removed from platform.
- Now, the users in Australian will not have access on the news content on Facebook coming from the Australian and international media.

- Also, the international users will not have the access news content coming from Australia on Facebook.
- The media houses and Independent publishers from Australia will be restricted from sharing or posting their content on Facebook Pages.

#### **Background:**

- The Parliament in Australia has proposed a legislation following which the Google and Facebook will require to make payment negotiations with the media companies for using their content. However, the Facebook & Google have argued that these media industry were already benefiting from traffic routed to them through the digital platforms.
- The tech giants also stated that, this legislation result into “unmanageable levels of financial risks as well as the operational risk” for them.

#### **79. Oldest DNA recovered from the Teeth of Siberian mammoths:**

- The Scientists have recovered the oldest DNA on record from the teeth of Siberian Mammoths.

#### **Highlights:**

- The DNA was extracted from the molars of mammoths.
- These mammoths were found in the north-eastern Siberia some 1.2 million years ago.
- DNA was recovered and sequenced from the remains of three individual mammoths.
- The mammoths were among the large mammals who dominated Ice Age landscapes.
- The remains of the mammoths were discovered in the early 1970s. However, since then, new scientific methods were required to extract the DNA.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The oldest of the three mammoths was discovered near Krestovka river.
- This mammoth was 1.2 million years old.
- Another mammoth was discovered near the Adycha river and is 1 to 1.2 million years old.
- While, the third mammoth was recovered from Chukochya river. It is around 7,00,000 years old.
- It is the species of extinct elephantid of genus Mammuthus. The mammoth was equipped with the long, curved tusks and a covering of long hair. They were found from the Pliocene epoch to the Holocene some 4,000 years ago.
- The species existed in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. They belonged to the family Elephantidae. The family also comprises of two genera of modern elephants and their ancestors.

#### **What is DNA?**

- It is Deoxyribonucleic acid which is composed of two polynucleotide chains. These chains are coil around each other and form the double helix.
- The helix carries the genetic instructions for the growth, development, functioning, and reproduction of organisms and viruses. It is a self-replicating material carrying the genetic information of the living organisms.

#### **80. QUAD Grouping: 3rd Ministerial Meeting over inclusive Indo-Pacific:**

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) will hold its 3rd ministerial meeting on February 18, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The meeting will be held to exchange their views on global and regional issues.
- It will focus on the practical areas of cooperation in order to maintain an open, free and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.
- The 3rd ministerial meeting of the Quad members namely, India-Australia-Japan-US will involve the participation of their foreign ministers. They all will be presenting different agendas during the meeting.

- This meeting is the continuation of the views that were exchanged in the 2nd QUAD meeting of October 6, 2020 that was held in Tokyo.
- The first meeting of Quad was organized in the year 2019 in New York.

**Agenda of the meeting:**

- The Foreign Ministers of Australia, India, the USA, and Japan will exchange their views on the global and regional issues during the meeting.
- They will also discuss the ongoing efforts of combating the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The ministers will also be discussing and addressing the global climate change and other issues of mutual interest.
- It is expected that, the initiative would put an end to growing economic influence of China.
- The cooperation with Japan and other allies will help in countering the Chinese development assistance and its domination in the region including the Indo-Pacific.

**Background:**

- During the second meeting of Quad in October 2020 former US-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had disapproved China for using the economic power so as to increase its domination in the neighboring countries across South China. He also brought the attention of the grouping to China's corruption, exploitation and coercion in the neighboring countries.

**Quadrilateral Security Dialogue:**

- This grouping is also called as Quad or Asian NATO. It is an informal strategic forum comprising of Japan, United States, Australia and India. The grouping held semi-regular summits, military drills and military information exchanges between the member countries.

**81. ISA to Launch World Solar Bank:**

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) have planned to launch the World Solar Bank (WSB) at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow that is scheduled for November 2021.

**Highlights:**

- The development of the World Solar Bank will support India's attempt to secure its leadership in the climate arena.
- The development of the bank is significant because the green finance will be one of the priority themes at the climate meet called COP-26.
- COP-26 will be organised in the backdrop of US re-joining the Paris climate accord.
- The headquarter of the World Solar Bank is expected to be set up in India. It will be first multilateral development bank (MDB) that will be set up in India.
- The WSB have planned to disburse around \$50 billion to the member countries of ISA over next 10 years.

**Why WSB will be launched?**

- The WSB will be launched because many member countries of the ISA face the challenge of raising finances on their own. Further, it was launched to assist the 800 million people who do not have access to power.

**International Solar Alliance:**

- The ISA was co-founded by India. It was founded at 2015 climate change conference in Paris. It is the first treaty-based international government organization which is headquartered in India. It is the nodal agency to implement the global electricity grid plan of India called "One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG)".

**One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG):**

- This plan was launched with the objective of transferring the solar power generated in one region to feed the electricity demands of another region.

- Under the OSOWOG vision, India aims to replicate its global solar leadership through phased development of a single globally connected solar electricity grid. This would have multiple benefits such as Low cost, Zero pollution.

### **82. IIF Report: World's debt to increase in 2021:**

- The Institute of International Finance (IIF) has reported that, the world has never been more indebted before and the debt will further rise in the year 2021 with more borrowing ahead amid the covid-19 led economic crisis.

#### **Key Findings of IIF:**

- As per the IIF, governments, companies and households have raised \$24 trillion in 2020 in order to offset the economic toll.
- This has resulted into the all-time high increase in the global debt.
- As of year, 2020, the World's debt stands at \$281 trillion.
- This accounts for more than 355 per cent of global GDP.
- The IIF further stated that, this debt will increase as a result of more borrowings.
- IIF also estimates that, governments are facing the challenge of big budget deficits.
- This will increase by another \$10 trillion in the year 2021 since the political and social pressures pushes for more spending. This in turn will increase the debt load past \$92 trillion with the end of 2021.
- IIF also states that, both mature and emerging markets will look for a perfect balance. The economic recovery may push the governments to start developing strategies in order to roll back the stimulus. This could increase the default and bankruptcy risk.

#### **Institute of International Finance (IIF):**

- It is the trade group for global financial services industry. IIF was established in the year 1983 by 38 banks of leading industrialized countries. It was created in the aftermath of the international debt crisis of 1980s. The group now represent around 450 firms across 70 countries.
- The members of the IIF include asset managers, commercial & investment banks, sovereign wealth funds, insurance companies, central banks, hedge funds and development banks. The group supports the financial industry in managing the risks.

### **83. India-Mauritius Agreement:**

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has approved the signing of a comprehensive economic cooperation and partnership agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius. This approval was given on February 17, 2021

#### **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation agreement:**

- It is a kind of a free trade agreement between India and Mauritius.
- This agreement was signed with the aim of liberalising the norms to boost a two-way commerce.
- This agreement will cover 310 export items for India such as foodstuff & beverages, textile & textile articles, base metals, agricultural products, electricals & electronic items, plastics & chemicals, wood & its articles.
- Mauritius will also get preferential market access into India for some 615 products. These products would range from specialty sugar, biscuits, frozen fish, mineral water, fresh fruits, juices, beer, alcoholic drinks, medical & surgical equipment, soaps, bags and apparel.
- This agreement is India's first such trade agreement with any African nation.

#### **Significance of the agreement:**

- In the comprehensive economic cooperation agreement, the two trading countries cut or eliminate the duties on the products and liberalize the norms to promote the services trade.

- Under the agreement, a mutually convenient date will be finalized in order to sign the agreement.
- It will cover trade in goods, trade in services, rules of origin, sanitary & phytosanitary measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, dispute settlement, financial services, telecom, customs procedures and movement of natural persons.
- **India-Mauritius Trade Relation:**
- India exports cereals, cotton, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery, and clothing accessories to Mauritius currently.
- While, Mauritius export pearls, iron & steel, precious or semi-precious stones, optical instruments, photographic instruments and precision instruments. The bilateral trade between both the countries has reduced to USD 690 million in 2019-20. In the year 2018-19 the trade stood at USD 1.2 billion in 2018-19.

**Mauritius:**

- It is an island nation in the Indian Ocean with its capital at Port Louis. Its distance is about 2,000 kilometers off the southeast coast of African continent in the east of Madagascar. It comprises of the main island that is Mauritius, Agalega, Rodrigues, and St. Brandon.
- The islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues along with the Reunion Island makes the part of Mascarene Islands.

**84. Mahabahu-Brahmaputra initiative:**

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually launch 'Mahabahu-Brahmaputra' initiative in Assam on February 18, 2021.

**Highlights:**

- He will lay the foundation stone for the Dhubri Phulbari Bridge.
- PM will also perform the bhumi puja for the construction of Majuli Bridge in Assam.
- PM while announcing the details stated that, it will be a landmark day in the development journey for Assam as Mahabahu-Brahmaputra initiative is going to be launched.

**Mahabahu-Brahmaputra initiative:**

- Launch of the Mahabahu-Brahmaputra initiative is going to be marked with the inauguration of the Ro-Pax vessel operations.
- The Ro-Pax vessel operations will be launched in between the Neamatighat & Majuli, Dhubri-Hatsingimari and North-South Guwahati.
- This initiative also includes the inauguration of the Inland Water Transport Terminal at Jogighopa.
- Initiative will also be marked with the inauguration of various tourist jetties at four locations in order to promote the river tourism and employment across the state.
- This initiative is being started with the aim to provide a seamless connectivity to Eastern Parts of India.
- It also comprises of various development activities for people living across the Barak and Brahmaputra rivers.

**Ro-Pax Service:**

- The Ro-Pax services will be launched in the state under the Mahabahu-Brahmaputra initiative. The RO-Pax Vessel operations will help in reducing the travel time. It will also facilitate the connectivity between banks. It will also reduce the distance travelled by road.

**Dhubri Phulbari Bridge:**

- The PM will also lay the foundation stone for a four lane Dhubri Phulbari bridge. This bridge will be constructed on NH-127B. The bridge will start from the Srirampur on NH-27 which is the East-West Corridor.



- It will terminate at Nongstoin on NH-106 in the state of Meghalaya. It will be constructed over the Brahmaputra River connecting Dhubri in Assam to Phulbari, Tura, Rongram, and Rongjeng in Meghalaya. Total cost of the project would be 4997 crores.

#### **85. TIGER X-1: Hyundai's New Concept Vehicle:**

- The Hyundai Motor Group have designed a walking car concept robot. It is being called as TIGER which stands for transforming intelligent ground excursion robot.
- The robot comprises of the wheels having capability to adapt to navigate in the challenging terrain.
- The ultimate mobility vehicle (UMV) uses its ability to walk when it gets stuck or when required to travel in the difficult terrain not only on Earth but on other planets as well.

#### **About TIGER X-1:**

- This is the first version of TIGER. The robot is based on the modular platform architecture.
- The robot has 360-degree directional control which helps in surface evaluation in disaster prone areas.
- The vehicle does not carry passengers but it can carry cargo and sensors to remotely observe the surroundings.
- TIGER has been designed to operate autonomously.
- It comprises of a sophisticated leg and wheel locomotion system.
- This UMV have the features of both the robotic technology and the wheeled locomotion technology. Thus, the vehicle is capable of traversing the difficult terrain.
- Further, it can connect with the drones. Drones can help in charging the UMVs and delivering it to inaccessible locations.
- TIGER can be used to carry goods for the delivery or delivery of the aid packages in emergency situations.
- TIGER is the second UMV by Hyundai Motor Group.
- The first UMV by the Hyundai Motor Group was launched at the 2019 consumer electronics show. It comprises of the features like moveable legs. It could Elevate and was designed to carry the passengers.

#### **Hyundai Motor Company:**

- It is a South Korean multinational automotive manufacturer. It is headquartered in Seoul. The company was established in 1967.

#### **86. Amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 approved:**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the amendments to the Juvenile Justice Care and Protection of Children Act, 2015 on February 17, 2021.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The amendment proposes that, the DMs, ADMs will monitor the functioning of agencies which are implementing this act in each district.
- After this amendment, the Child Protection Unit of districts will function under the District Magistrate (DMs).
- Now, the DMs can independently evaluate Child Welfare Committee, and the Specialised Juvenile Police Unit.
- He can check the capacity and background of the Child Care Institute, following which they will be recommended for registration.
- The amendments authorise the District Magistrate along with Additional District Magistrate to issue the adoption orders in accordance with Section 61 of the Juvenile justice act.
- It will now ensure the speedy disposal of cases and also enhance the accountability.

- The amendments also empower the District Magistrates to ensure its smooth implementation and garner the synergized efforts to support the children in distress conditions.

#### **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:**

- The act was passed by Parliament of India by replacing the Indian juvenile delinquency law called the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.
- This act allows the juveniles, aged 16 to 18 who are in conflict with Law and are involved in Heinous Offences, to be tried as adults.
- It also seeks to create a universally accessible adoption law in India. The Act came into force in 2016.
- In order to smoothen the procedures for orphan, abandoned and surrendered children the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) was given the status of statutory body.

#### **Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA):**

- It is an autonomous and statutory body under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It was established in 1990. CARA is the nodal body of the adoption of Indian children. It also monitors and regulate the in-country and inter-country adoptions.

#### **87. PLI scheme for Telecom Sector:**

- The government of India has approved the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) norms for the telecom sector on February 17, 2021.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The approval of the PLI scheme was given for telecom and network equipment manufacturing in a bid to boost the local manufacturing of the components.
- PLI scheme on telecom sector will be effective from April 1, 2021.
- The Department of Telecom (DoT) now be given the final approval from the Union cabinet.
- Now, the DoT will invite the companies for applications.
- Under the PLI scheme, Telecom manufacturing will be boosted for over 5 years in order to enhance the production of more than Rs 2.4 lakh crore.

#### **Objectives of the Decision:**

- The Cabinet decision to approve the PLI scheme for telecom sector aims to make India a global hub of manufacturing telecom equipment.
- The government also aim to make India a hub of 4G/5G Next Generation Radio Access Network, core transmission equipment, and Wireless Equipment as well.
- This move will also boost the local manufacturing of telecom gear in the domestic market as well as for exports.
- The scheme will cater to the core transmission equipment, 4G/5G and next-generation radio access network & wireless equipment, Internet of Things (IoT) access devices, access and customer premise equipment (CPE) and enterprise equipment like switches and router.
- It will also pull the Intellectual Property (IP) and design-led manufacturing in order to make the Indian industry globally competitive.
- The policy also seeks to boost the research and development pool and talent across India.

#### **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme:**

- This scheme was launched in the March 2020 in a bid to boost the domestic manufacturing. It also seeks to cut down on import bills. The scheme was launched with the aim of giving the companies incentives on incremental sales of the domestically manufactured products.
- This scheme does not stop any foreign companies to set shop in India. But, it also encourage the local companies to set up or expand the existing manufacturing units.

#### **88. Draft Blue Economy Policy:**

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences has asked for suggestions on the Draft Blue Economy Policy for India. The stakeholders such as NGOs, industry, academia and citizens have been asked to submit their inputs and ideas by 27th February 2021.

#### Key Facts:

- The Draft Blue Economy Policy was created by the government outlining the vision and strategy that can be adopted to utilize the oceanic resources that are available with the country.
- The policy was drafted with the aim of enhancing the contribution of the blue economy to India's GDP.
- It also seeks to improve the lives of coastal communities and preserve the marine biodiversity.
- It will also maintain the national security of the marine areas and resources.
- The draft blue economy document has recognised the seven thematic areas such as:
  1. National accounting framework of the blue economy and ocean governance;
  2. Coastal marine spatial planning and tourism;
  3. Marine fisheries, fish processing, and Aquaculture
  4. Manufacturing, services, trade, technology, and skill development;
  5. Logistics, infrastructure and shipping
  6. Coastal & deep-sea mining and
  7. Offshore energy & security, strategic dimensions and international engagements.
- Thus, the blue economy of India is a subset of national economy that caters to the entire ocean resources system.
- The policy also caters to the human-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime, and onshore coastal zones in India's jurisdiction.
- The policy is also linked with the production of goods and services which is ultimately linked with the economic growth, environmental sustainability, and national security.
- The draft policy also suggests to offer the Blue Economy related educational programs comprising of various technical and managerial skills in universities and technical institutes along the coastal states of India.

#### What is Blue Economy?

- The concept of the blue economy aspires to promote the economic growth and social inclusion. It is also involved in the preservation or improvement of livelihoods.
- It also seeks to ensure the environmental sustainability in the oceans and coastal areas.
- It comprises of the sectors for which the returns are linked to living renewable resources in the oceans like fisheries. It also comprises the sectors whose return comes from non-living & non-renewable resources including the seabed mining, dredging and offshore oil & gas extractions.

#### **89. MoHUA Launches 'Pey Jal Survekshan':**

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched a Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan. This was launched under the Jal Jeevan Mission- Urban (JJM-U).
- This sarvekshan will be conducted in cities to ensure the equitable distribution of water and reusing the wastewater.
- The sarvekshan will also help in mapping the water bodies.
- The mapping of the water body will be done with respect to quantity and quality of water with the help of the challenge process.
- The sarvekshan will be launched across 10 cities including Badlapur, Agra, Churu, Bhubaneswar, Madurai, Kochi, Patiala, Surat, Rohtak, and Tumkur.

#### **Jal Jeevan Mission- Urban:**

- The Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) was announced in the Union Budget 2021-22.
- The mission was announced under the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.

- It seeks to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households with functional taps.
- The universal coverage will be done in all the statutory towns. The mission has been launched in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal- 6.
- Budget 2021-22 has proposed an outlay of 2 lakh 87 thousand crore rupees for the mission. It includes 10 thousand crore rupees to continue the financial support for AMRUT Mission.
- The mission also complements the Jal Jeevan Mission (Rural) that was launched to ensure the supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every household in rural areas. It will provide Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) in the rural areas by 2024.

**AMRUT Mission:**

- This mission was launched in June 2015 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The mission seeks to ensure that every household has access primarily to tap water followed by a sewerage connection.
- It also seeks to increase amenity value of cities by creating green spaces and well-maintained open spaces. The mission was launched to reduce pollution by switching to public transport. It also seeks to construct facilities for non-motorized transport such as walking and cycling.

**90. Iran-Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021:**

- India has joined the “Iran-Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021” which is a two-day naval exercise. The exercise is being held in the northern part of the Indian Ocean.
- The drill was participated by the forces and vessels from navy divisions of both the Iranian army and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).
- Several vessels from the Russian navy also participated in the drill.
- Indian Navy has also joined the exercise with selected vessels.
- The drill will also be participated by the Chinese Navy.
- It will cover an area of 17,000 square kilometres.
- The naval exercise will carry the range of activities including the shooting at sea targets, air targets, liberation of the hijacked ships, anti-piracy operations and search & rescue operations.

**Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC):**

- It is a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces. The branch was founded after the Iranian Revolution in April 1979. The IRGC was founded by the order of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. It defends the Iranian borders and maintains the internal order. The Iranian Constitution has tasked the Revolutionary Guard with the work of protecting the country’s Islamic republic political system. It also helps in preventing the foreign interference and coups.

- The Revolutionary Guards had 250,000 military personnel as of 2011. It includes ground forces, aerospace forces and the naval forces. The Naval forces are the primary forces having operational control of the Persian Gulf. The naval force also controls the paramilitary Basij militia. Sepah News is the media arm of the IRGC.

#### Persian Gulf:

- It is the Mediterranean Sea in the West Asia. The gulf is an extension of the Indian Ocean. It is extended through the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz. This water body is situated between Iran in the northeast and the Arabian Peninsula in the southwest.

#### 91. Sandes- India's new instant messaging platform:

- The National Informatics Centre (NIC) has launched an app called Sandes. This instant messaging platform is similar to WhatsApp. It can be used for any type of communications by anyone. It requires a mobile number or an email id to get registered with the app.

#### Highlights:

- The need to launch the app was felt to ensure a secure communication between the employees because the "Work from Home" culture has gained the momentum in the backdrop of nationwide lockdown that was imposed in March 2020 amid the spread of Covid-19.
- NIC released the first version of the app in August 2020.
- The app can be used by central and state government officials for intra-organisational and inter-organisational communication.
- This app was initially launched for Android users and mainly for government officers.
- Later, the service was also extended to iOS users and it is now available for the common public as well.
- This app is a part of the government strategy to push the use of India-made software.
- It will help in building an ecosystem of indigenously developed software and products.
- The ministry of home affairs in the year 2020 had issued the advisory for the government employees to not use the platforms like Zoom for official communications because of security concerns. Before that, the Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In) had also issued an advisory against Zoom with respect to the safety and privacy concerns.

#### Features:

- The interface of the application is similar to other applications that are available in the arena. This app has no option to transfer chat history between two platforms. However, the chats on



the government instant messaging systems (GIMS) or the Sandes App can be backed up with a users' email.

- The app requires a valid mobile number or email id to register the user. It comprises of the features like broadcast message, group making, message forwarding and emojis. It also has an additional safety feature. The platform allows the user to mark the message as confidential. Thus, it makes the recipient aware that the message should not be forwarded to other users.

### 92. Anti-Radicalism Bill:

- The lower house of the French parliament has approved the Ant-Radicalism bill in a bid to fight the Islamic radicalism.
- The bill seeks to strengthen the government oversight of mosques and religious schools.
- It will also take strong actions against the polygamy and forced marriage.
- The bill provides for measures with the aim of rooting out the Islamic radicalism.
- It is a part of the broader French efforts that it initiated with the aim of fighting extremism.
- It will also promote respect for French values.

#### Background:

- The bill was passed in the backdrop of fighting extremism in the country. This fight against extremism gained momentum after a teacher was beheaded in October 2020.

#### How Muslims are reacting?

- Many of the French Muslims stated that this draft law will limit the religious freedom. They are of the view that this bill unfairly targets them since there are already enough laws to fight the terrorist violence in the country.
- Further, the critiques are of the view that this bill was passed keeping in view the Presidential election of 2021 in order to win the support from conservative and far-right voters.

#### French Parliament:

- The French Parliament is a bicameral legislature of the French Republic. It comprises of the Senate and the National Assembly. Both of the assembly conducts the legislative sessions at different locations in Paris.
- The senate holds the sessions at the Palais du Luxembourg while the National Assembly holds the sessions at Palais Bourbon. Both the houses have their own regulations and rules of procedure.

#### Radicalism:

- It was a historical political movement of the 18th and 19th centuries in the domain of liberalism. This movement is a precursor to the social liberalism.
- The movement seeks to transform or replace the fundamental principles of society through the social change, revolution, structural change or radical reform.

### 93. PiMo- eBike launched by IIT Madras-Incubated start-up:

- The Pi Beam, which is an IIT Madras-incubated start-up, recently launched the electric two-wheeler called 'PiMO'.

#### Highlights:

- The electric two-wheeler can charge faster than a smartphone.
- The sustainable and affordable bike has a range of 50 km.
- The e-bike was launched for the personal and commercial needs.
- It has been priced at Rs. 30,000.
- It does not require licence or registration.
- The e-bike will offer the green and easy mobility on Indian roads.

- 90 per cent of the components of bike such as crucial batteries and controllers were manufactured in India.
- Thus, it is among few EVs in the local market that follows the spirit of 'Make in India' spirit.
- The e-bike stands between an electric bicycle and the entry-level electric scooter. It has a top speed of 25 kmph. The e-bike provided a higher travel range when compared to the electric bicycle category. The bike also offers a Battery Swapping' Technology.

#### **Battery Swapping Technology:**

- Using this technology, a drained battery can be exchanged with a fully charged battery at the designated locations.

#### **Pi Beam Electric:**

- It is an IIT Madras-incubated start-up. The company provides for a range of green, stylish, affordable and easy-to-use EV solutions for personal and commercial uses.
- IT also offers an end-to-end micro-mobility sustainable EVs. The EVs are data-driven that augment the productivity for the last-mile logistics and transportation.

#### **94. ECOPact: New Low-Carbon range of Concrete:**

- ACC Ready Mix Concrete has recently introduced its new low carbon range of concrete called ECOPact. It is a "Green Concrete" that has been introduced for a high-performing, sustainable and circular construction.
- ECOPact was launched in Mumbai and Hyderabad in the first phase.
- It will be rolled out across the country in a phased manner with in a few weeks.
- The ECOPact was rolled out with the objectives of enhancing the transition towards low-carbon and circular construction.
- The innovative manufacturing process of the ECOPact will reduce the CO2 emissions by up to 100 percent.
- It will also enhance the sustainable products offerings in the construction industry.
- It is a concrete that comprises 30-50 percent lower embodied carbon content as compared to the reference concrete which is designed with OPC.
- This innovative range uses CO2 reduced binders.
- It was manufactured using the optimized mix designs in order to reduce the carbon footprint.
- It is suitable for all structural components ranging from foundations including elements such as columns, external or internal walls, beams, slabs, driveways and walkways.

#### **Significance:**

- The ECOPact range will help the developers to obtain the Green Points from Indian Green Building Council (IGBC).
- The concrete has superior durability and finish as compared to conventional concrete.
- Types of the ECOPact range products
- The customers can choose the concrete on the basis of desired level of CO2 reduction and sustainability objectives.
- ECOPact PRIME- It offers CO2 reduction up to 50-70 percent.
- ECOPact MAX- It offers CO2 reduction greater than 70 percent.
- ECOPact ZERO- It is a combination of concrete technology excellence and climate action. Thus, it offers the elimination of carbon footprint of concrete. Thus, reduces the overall carbon footprint of any structures.

#### **The Indian Green Building Council (IGBC):**

- It is a part of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). It was established in 2001. The council seeks "To enable a sustainable built environment for all". It also seeks to make India a global leader in sustainable built environment by 2025.

### 95. Third Edition of Indian Sign Language dictionary:

- The ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment will release the third edition of the Indian Sign Language (ISL) Dictionary on February 17, 2021. The new edition will comprise of 10,000 terms of daily. It will also include the academic, legal, medical technical, administrative and agricultural terms in it.
- The second edition of the Indian Sign language was released in the year 2019. It comprised of 6,000 terms while its first edition was released in the year 2018 with 3,000 terms.
- The launch of the ISL dictionary is a step towards fulfilling needs of hearing and speech impaired in accordance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016.
- It also complies with the initiative by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) called "Accessible Digital Textbooks for All". The ISL will be essential in enhancing the vocabulary and the capabilities to understand concepts of the impaired.

#### What is Indian Sign Language (ISL)?

- It is a set of hand and facial gestures that is used to communicate. It is commonly used by the hearing and speech impaired. The ISL has its own grammar, syntax and regional dialects. It comprises of different gestures for same word or sentiment. The sign language is a recognized official language in many countries including USA.

#### Impairing in India:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) report states that, prevalence of hearing impairment in India is around 6.3% as of 2018. It means around 63 million people are suffering from auditory loss. Further, the adult-onset deafness in India accounts for 7.6% while the childhood-onset deafness accounts for 2%.

#### Government initiatives to prevent disability:

- The government had started the accessibility of news and educational videos by incorporating sign language or written text subtitles and transcripts.
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 was passed to Include provisions for hearing impaired.
- New Education Policy, 2020 also contain provisions of universalization of education for all including the disabled with 100% Gross Enrolment ratio from preschool to secondary level by 2030.
- National Program for Prevention and Control of Deafness (NPPCD) was launched in 2006 to tackle high incidence of deafness.

### 96. Privatisation of PSBs: Govt to bring Two Amendments:

- The government will bring about amendments in the two acts in order to facilitate the privatisation of public sector banks (PSBs).

#### Key Facts:

- Amendments will be made in the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970 and Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1980.
- These two acts had facilitated for the nationalisation of banks in two phases.
- Now, in order to privatise the PSU Banks, provisions of these acts have to be changed.

#### Background:

- The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced about the privatisation of PSBs, while presenting Union Budget 2021-22.
- PSBs will be privatised as a disinvestment drive in order to generate Rs 1.75 lakh crore.
- Three banks including the IDBI banks will be privatised as per the announcement.

#### Recent Merger of Banks:

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- The government had also merged 10 public sector banks into four in the year 2020. Thus, the total number of PSBs came down to 12 from 27.
- Under the plan, the United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of Commerce were merged with the Punjab National Bank (PNB). This made PNB the second largest PSB.
- Further, the Syndicate Bank was merged with Canara Bank.
- Allahabad Bank was merged under the Indian Bank.
- Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank were merged with the Union Bank of India.
- In 2019, the Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank were merged with the Bank of Baroda.
- In April 2017, SBI had merged five of its associate banks namely, the State Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Travancore and the Bharatiya Mahila Bank.

#### **Banking Companies (Acquisition and transfer of undertakings) Act, 1970:**

- This act deals with the merger of banks. It provides for the acquisition and transfer of undertakings of certain banks with respect to their size, coverage, resources, and organization so as to control heights of the economy.

#### **97. Credit Default Swap:**

- The Reserve Bank of India revealed the credit default swaps (CDS) and has allowed the retail users to do the transactions in permitted credit derivatives in order to hedge their underlying credit risk.

#### **Key Highlights:**

- As per the guidelines, the non-retail users will be allowed to do the transactions in credit derivatives for the purpose of hedging as well as other purposes.
- The person who is resident in India and a non-resident can participate in the market.
- As per the guideline, the exchanges can offer standardised single-name CDS contracts by specifying guaranteed cash settlement.
- The commercial papers, listed or unlisted rated rupee corporate bonds, Unrated bonds issued by the special purpose vehicles, certificates of deposit and non-convertible debentures of maturity up to 1 year are eligible to be a reference or deliverable obligation in the CDS contract.

#### **What is Credit Default Swap?**

- It is a derivative or contract that permits the investor to swap or offset his credit risk with another investor.
- It is a financial swap agreement where the seller of CDS will compensate buyer in case of a debt default.
- In such agreement, the seller of CDS insures the buyer against asset defaulting.
- Here, the buyer of CDS makes a series of payments to the seller and expect to receive payoff in case of asset defaults.
- In case of asset default, buyer of the CDS receives compensation while the seller of CDS takes possession of the defaulted loan.
- The CDS can be purchased by anyone even those buyers who do not hold the loan instrument can buy CDS.

#### **What is Hedging?**

- It is a risk management strategy that is employed to offset losses in investments. The losses are offset by taking an opposite position in the defaulted asset. Hedging though reduces the risk associated with the assets but it also reduces the potential profits.

#### **98. United Nations Capital Development Fund:**

- The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has appointed Preeti Sinha as its Executive Secretary. She is an Indian-origin investment and development banker.
- The executive secretary will work with her focus on providing the micro-finance assistance to women, youth, small and medium-sized enterprises belonging to the underserved communities.
- The Executive Secretary is the highest leadership rank in the UNCDF.
- The UNCDF was established in the year 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly to promote the economic development across the world.
- It is headquartered in New York. The organisation helps in providing the micro-finance access to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- It also has the mandate to unlock full potential of public and private finance. The organisation makes public and private finance work for the poor in 47 least developed countries (LDCs) of the world.

#### **Least developed countries (LDCs):**

- It is a list of developing countries that shows the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development. The list is prepared by the United Nations. The countries with the lowest Human Development Index ratings across the world are listed in the LDCs.
- This concept was originated in 1960s. The UN has listed the first group of LDCs in its resolution 2768 (XXVI) that was passed in 1971.

#### **99. Sanctuary Lifetime Service Award 2020:**

- S. Theodore Baskaran who is a writer, a historian, a naturalist and an activist has won the Sanctuary Lifetime Service Award, 2020. The award was instituted by the Sanctuary Nature Foundation.
- Theodore Baskaran was chosen for the award in the light of his dedication to the wildlife conservation. He won the award for his writing prowess in English and Tamil contributing towards the conservation discourse. He was also chosen for the award in the backdrop of inspiring the young naturalists.

#### **100. Defence Minister launches e-Chhawani Portal:**

- The Defence Minister of India, Rajnath Singh, has launched the e-Chhawani portal on February 16, 2021.
- E-Chhawani Project
- With the launch of this portal, the residents of Cantonment areas can now register their complaints with respect to the civic issues.
- The portal would also help in resolving the complaints regarding the civic issues from home.
- This portal will work with the objective of refining the system and improving the Ease of Living for people.
- The e-Chhawani project was launched with the aim of providing online municipal services for more than 20 lakh citizens.
- The services would be provided across 62 Cantonment Boards using the multi-tenancy central platform.
- The portal can be used to file online application for renewal of leases and for getting the online registration of births and deaths.
- It can also be used to file online application for water and sewerage connection in a simpler manner.

#### **Cantonment Board:**

- The cantonment board is a civic administration body. It functions under the Ministry of Defence in India. The board is constituted of the elected members, ex-officio members and nominated members in accordance with the Cantonments Act, 2006.
- The member of the board is elected for five years. The board comprises of the eight elected members and three nominated military members. It also comprises of the three ex-officio members namely, the garrison engineer, station commander and the senior executive medical officer besides one representative from the district magistrate.

#### Categories of Cantonments board:

The cantonments are categorised into four categories:

1. Category I – where population exceeds 50,000.
2. Category II – where population stands between 10,000 to 50,000.
3. Category III – where population stands between 2500 to 10000
4. Category IV – where population stands below 2500.

#### 101. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project:

- The Union External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar recently said that the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is in the final stages however, the project was delayed because of various challenges.
- The external affairs minister further said that the Sittwe Port is now operational for some time.
- The minister also stated that, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project was delayed because of road building. He stated that the region faces the challenges of some law and order. However, now the countries will be able to push through the challenges.
- The Kaladan project which costs \$484 million was supposed to be completed and operation by 2014.

#### Kaladan Road Project:

- It is a US\$484 million project that connects the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State, Myanmar through the sea route.
- The project will link the Sittwe seaport in Myanmar to Paletwa in Chin State through the Kaladan river boat route. Then the project will connect the Paletwa by road route to the Mizoram in Northeast India.
- Currently, the Sittwe port, river dredging and Paletwa jetty projects are completed. This project is also seen as an important component of India's Act East Policy that seeks to link up India with Southeast Asia through Myanmar.



#### Why this project got delayed?

- The route of the project along the Paletwa and Kaladan river is troubled because of the Chin conflict and the Rohingya conflict. It is also troubled because of militant groups like Arakan Army. Because of these conflicts the project got delayed.
- Paletwa route accounts for less than 20 km along the Bangladesh border.

#### Sittwe:

- It is the capital of Rakhine State, Myanmar. The city is located on an estuarial island. It lies at the confluence of rivers Kaladan, Mayu, and Lay Mro.

#### **102. First Woman to lead WTO:**

- The Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo Iweala has been appointed as the head the World Trade Organization. She has become the first woman to take this position. She has also become the first African to hold this charge amid rising protectionism.
- Okonjo-Iweala was named as the director-general by the representatives of the 164 member countries of WTO.
- The WTO is the organisation dealing with the rules of trade between the nations on the basis of negotiated agreements.
- The appointment of the African woman came after the US President Joe Biden approved her candidacy. The appointment will come into effect on March 1, 2021.

#### **Background:**

- The former US President, Donald Trump had blocked the candidacy earlier.
- The United States had also blocked the appointment of any new judges to the WTO's appellate body.
- It had frozen the WTO's ability to resolve the extended and complex trade disputes.

#### **Why US blocked the appointment?**

- The US government had blocked the appointment by arguing that the world trade organization is slow-moving and bureaucratic. The government also highlighted that it is ill-equipped to handle the problems posed by the state-dominated economy of China.

#### **World Trade Organization (WTO):**

- It is an intergovernmental organization. The body deals with the regulation of international trade between the nations. It was established in January 1995 in accordance with the Marrakesh Agreement.

#### **Marrakesh Agreement:**

- This agreement was signed after the Marrakesh Declaration in April 1994. It was signed in Marrakesh, Morocco. The agreement was signed by 123 nations in April 1994.
- The Marrakesh Agreement had replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The agreement is supplemented by agreements on issues like sanitary and phytosanitary measures, trade in services, intellectual property rights etc.

#### **103. Foundation Stone for Maharaja Suheldev Memorial:**

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually lay the foundation stone of the Maharaja Suheldev Memorial on February 16, 2021. Apart from that, the foundation stone for the development work of Chittaura Lake in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh will also be laid down.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The project comprises of the installation of the equestrian statue of Maharaja Suheldev and development of various tourist amenities including a guest house, cafeteria, and the children's park.
- The prime minister will also unveil the programmes of beautification of Shravasti, Chittaura Lake, and Bahraich.
- The event will also highlight the historical and mythological significance of Bahraich district.
- Statue of Maharaja Suheldev
- The foundation stone of the Statue of Maharaja Suheldev will also be laid down by the Prime Minister in Bahraich. The foundation stone will be laid down in order to mark the birth anniversary of Suheldev.

**Background:**

- A statue of Suheldev was also unveiled earlier in February 2016 by the then BJP Chief time Amit Shah. He had also launched a book on him. The central government also released a stamp and started a running superfast train in the name of Suheldev.

**Who was Suheldev?**

- He was an Indian king from Shravasti. He is popular because he defeated and killed Ghaznavid general Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud.
- He defeated the Ghaznavid general at Bahraich in 1034 CE. Suheldev also finds mention in the 17th century Mirat-i-Masudi which is a Persian-language historical romance. The Hindi nationalist groups characterize him as a Hindu King who had defeated the Muslim invader.

**Bahraich:**

- It is a city and a municipal board in Uttar Pradesh. The city is located on the Saryu River which is a tributary of Ghaghara river. The city share an international border with Nepal.

**104. Intelligence Unit to tackle Frauds:**

- The Union telecom ministry has decided to set up an intelligence unit and a consumer protection system. These systems will be set up in the effort to tackle the threats associated with the pesky calls. It would also help in taking strict action against the financial frauds that happens using telecom resources.
- The union telecom ministry decided to set up such system following a direction from the telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.
- The minister chaired a high-level meeting to find ways in order to address the rising concerns of consumers regarding the unsolicited messages on mobile phones, harassment through SMS pertaining to loan transactions in fraudulent ways. This move of the government aims to making digital transactions more safe and secure.

**Stricter norms:**

- The Minister of Communication has directed officials to take strict action against telemarketers and individuals who are involved in harassment cases.
- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) also has regulations to check pesky calls. However, unregistered telemarketers still make calls to people causing fraudulent incidents.
- Delhi High Court has also directed Trai on February 3, 2021 to ensure complete and strict implementation of the regulation of 2018 to curb the Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC).

**What is the plan?**

- Following the direction of ministry, a nodal agency called Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU) will be set up. It will be tasked to coordinate with various Law Enforcement Agencies, financial institutions and telecom service providers in order to investigate any fraudulent activity that involves the telecom resources.
- Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFMCP) system will also be created at the level of license service area. Thus, the system will help in strengthening the trust of people in the digital ecosystem which in turn will promote the Digital India mission.

**Unsolicited Commercial Communication (UCC):**

- Any Commercial Communication that a subscriber opts not to receive are called UCC. However, it does not include any transactional message or any message transmitted as per the directions of Central Government or State Government or any agencies authorized by the government.

**105. Kochi Water Metro project: First Route Inaugurated:**

- The Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan, has inaugurated the first route and terminal buildings of Kochi Water Metro.

**Key facts:**

- This project connects the islands across the city with the help of state-of-the-art boats.
- The metro route ranges from Vyttila to Kakkanad.
- Vyttila is one of the busiest traffic hubs in Kerala while, Kakkanad is the IT hub.
- Commercial operations of the metro will start in March 2021 after it gets the statutory clearance certificate.
- The first phase of the Kochi Water Metro project is 520 km long.
- Apart from the metro, the Chief Minister also opened the Panamkuttu Bridge. It is also known as Petta Bridge which was launched for traffic. It will enable a traffic free journey in between the Petta Junction and SN junction. The bridge is 250 metre in length. Out of this, 70 metre is over the Poorna river.
- He also launched the Integrated Urban Regeneration and Water Transport System (IURWT) project. IURWT project will renew and rejuvenate the six major canals of 34 km in Kochi.

**IURWT Project:**

- It is an Integrated Urban Regeneration and water transport system project. It has been proposed for the development of the Edappally Canal (11.23 km), Chilavanoor Canal (9.88 km), Thevara – Perandoor Canal (11.15 km), Market Canal (0.664 km) and Thevara Canal (1.405 km) in Kochi. All these canals are highly silted and polluted because of domestic & commercial waste, construction waste etc.
- Under the IURWT project activities such as, Cleaning of Canals, Bank Protection, Dredging & Cutting, Sanitary Sewer Line & STP, Jetties and Reconstruction of Cross Structures and Foot Over Bridges will be carried away. The total cost of the project is Rs.1418 crores. It has been launched for the period of 10 years. The project related construction will be completed in 3 years.

**106. Nesting of Olive Ridley begins:**

- The mass nesting of the Olive Ridley turtles has finally began in Puducherry coastline. Though, the traditional migration season of the turtles has delayed possibly due to climate change or change in the climatic conditions because of the influence of Cyclones Nivar and Burevi.
- Now, the female Olive Ridley turtles are leaving hundreds of eggs at nesting spots. So far, the team has collected over 4,000 eggs.

**Key Facts:**

- Puducherry coastline is among the migratory route to Odisha which are used by these turtles.
- The coastline is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- The Olive Ridley
- The scientific name of the turtle is *Lepidochelys olivacea*. It is commonly known as Pacific ridley sea turtle. The species belongs to the family Cheloniidae. It is second smallest and most abundant among all the sea turtles found across the world. The turtles are found in warm and tropical waters. It is primarily found in Pacific and Indian Oceans. It is also found in the warm waters of Atlantic Ocean.

**Characteristics:**

- These turtles are best known for their unique mass nesting. The mass nesting is termed as arribada. In the process, the female turtles come together in huge number on the same beach and lay eggs.
- They lay their eggs in conical nests which is one and a half feet deep.

- The nests are laboriously dig by the turtles with their hind flippers. These turtles are carnivorous and they prey on jellyfish, sea urchins, tunicates, snails, bryozoans, bivalves, crabs and shrimp etc.

**Conservation:**

- The turtles have been classified as vulnerable in the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). It is also listed in Appendix I of CITES. These listings have halted the large-scale commercial exploitation and trade of the skin of turtles.

**107. India Liberalised the Regulation on Geospatial Data:**

- India has liberalised its regulations on geospatial data starting from February 15, 2021. It has now allowed the private companies to conduct surveying and mapping without getting government approvals in advance.
- The new policy has allowed to share the data for various applications ranging from the logistics and transport to road safety and e-commerce.
- Further, the geospatial data generating from government agencies like Survey of India and Indian Space Research Organisation will be made available to public and private companies.
- It also restricts the terrestrial mapping and survey to public and private Indian entities.

**Significance:**

- This decision will provide a huge impetus to Digital India.
- Liberalising of the policies that governs the acquisition and production of geospatial data is a significant step in attaining the objectives of Atma nirbhar Bharat mission
- The change in the policies will bring about tremendous opportunities for startups, public sector, private sector and research institutions in India.'
- It would help in driving the innovations and build scalable solutions.
- The policy would also help in generating the employment and accelerating the economic growth.
- Further, the policy would increase scale, speed, and accuracy of the mapping.
- With the new policy in effect, the Indian entities will require no prior approvals, security clearances and licenses in the acquisition and production of geospatial data, geospatial data services and maps.
- Objectives of guidelines

**The new guidelines have been framed with the objectives of:**

- Easing the process of collecting, using and sharing the geospatial data.
- Deregulating sector and allowing the private entities to survey and map all the physically accessible areas without approvals in advance.
- Sharing geospatial data collected by government agencies with the public and industries.
- Geospatial data
- It is also known as spatial data. It is used to describe those data which represents the features or objects on the surface of Earth. It can be both man-made or natural data.

**108. Cargo Ship to International Space Station:**

- Russia has launched a new progress cargo ship into orbit in February 14, 2021. The cargo ship was launched in order to deliver the cargo to the seven crew members in the International Space Station (ISS).

**More in news:**

- The space agency of Russia, Roscosmos, launched the Progress MS-16 cargo ship. It is also called Progress 77.

- The cargo ship was launched using the Soyuz rocket from Site 31 of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.
- The cargo ship will arrive the ISS on February 15, 2021.
- The progress 77 was launched and is carrying approximately 2,460 kg of cargo and supplies.
- It includes 1,400 kg of research and crew supplies such as food and clothing.
- It also carries a supply of fresh water, nitrogen gas and propellant for the Zvezda service module propulsion system of the ISS.

#### **Soyuz Rocket:**

- It is a 152-foot-tall or 46-meters launch vehicle comprising of the three-stages. The rocket will head on a north-easterly trajectory to reach the ISS. The second stage of the rocket which is also called the core stage has been is powered by one RD-108A engine.
- The second stage is designed in a way that it continues firing for approximately three more minutes before shifting to the third stage of the rocket called the RD-0110 engine.

#### **International Space Station (ISS):**

- It is a modular space station or a habitable artificial satellite. It has been installed in low Earth orbit. It is a multinational collaborative project that involves the participation of five space agencies namely, NASA from United States, Roscosmos from Russia, JAXA from Japan, ESA from Europe, and CSA from Canada.
- Intergovernmental treaties and agreements are signed between the countries in order to establish the ownership and uses policies. The station is divided into two parts.
- The first part is the Russian Orbital Segment (ROS) which is operated by Russia and the second part of United States Orbital Segment (USOS) which is run by the United States in association with other nations.

#### **109. Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship Programme:**

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship recently rolled out the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme in all the districts India.
- The programme was earlier working across 69 districts.
- Fellows under the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship will acquire the academic expertise and technical competency.
- The expertise will help them to understand the overall skill ecosystem.
- It will also help the fellows to get attached to District Skill Committees.
- The ministry of skill development has also joined hands with Kerala Institute of Local Administration so as to conduct the capacity building programmes for district officials from the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Lakshadweep.
- The partnership between the two will be more focused towards strengthening the overall quality of skill training.
- The ministry highlighted that, this fellowship programme along with the recent launch of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 and other academic partnerships with IITs, IIMs, KILA and GIZ-IGVET under the SANKALP scheme will help in empowering the districts and ensure the demand-driven skilling.

#### **About SANKALP Scheme:**

- The SANKALP scheme stands for the “Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion”. This programme is assisted by the World Bank loan. The scheme was launched with the objective of strengthening the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs).

#### **Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme:**



- MGNF is a two-year fellowship programme. It was launched with the objective of boosting the skill development at the district level.
- It has been designed under the SANKALP scheme.
- The scheme was launched with the aim of addressing the challenge of non-availability of personnel in order to implement the programmes at district, state and national levels. Under the programme, the fellows should be aged between 21 to 30 years to get enrolled.

#### 110. AI 'Ramanujan Machine':

- A new artificially intelligent "mathematician" which is called as the "Ramanujan Machine" have the potential to reveal the hidden relationships between numbers.
- Ramanujan machine comprises of the algorithms that seek out the mathematical conclusions. These mathematical conclusions are likely to be true but have not been proved.
- The set of algorithms has been named after the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan.
- The new AI mathematician has been designed to pull out promising mathematical patterns from large sets of potential equations.
- The Ramanujan Machine has been designed with the goal to identify the promising conjectures in the first place.

#### Srinivasa Ramanujan:

- He was Born in the year 1887. He was a child prodigy who put forward many mathematical conjectures and proofs.
- He has also put forward the solutions to equations that had never before been solved or considered unsolved.
- He was an Indian mathematician lived during the British Rule in India.
- He had no formal training in pure mathematics but he made substantial contributions to mathematical analysis, infinite series, number theory and continued fractions.
- He initially developed his own mathematical research in isolation and compiled around 3,900 results.
- In 1918, he was elected as a Fellow of The Royal Society London.
- He thus became the second Indian man to be inducted in the Royal Society of London after the marine engineer Ardaseer Cursetjee in 1841.
- He died in the year 1920.
- He had an innate feel for numbers and he kept his eyes for patterns

#### Machine learning:

- In the machine learning, an algorithm detects the patterns in large amounts of data. The detection of pattern is done with minimal direction from programmers. Machine learning finds its use in a variety of pattern-finding applications. It is used in the image recognition as well as in the discovery of drug.

#### 111. Commercial Jute Seed Distribution Scheme:

- The Union Textile Minister, Smriti Irani, has launched the commercial Jute seed distribution scheme on February 15, 2021.

#### Key Facts:

- The Commercial Jute Seed Distribution Scheme was launched in the backdrop of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Jute Corporation of India and the National Seeds Corporation.
- The MoU was signed in the year 2020 for the commercial distribution of 1 thousand Metric Tonne certified jute seeds in the year 2021-22.

- The Union Minister while rolling out the scheme highlighted that the central government has also increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Jute in order to help Jute farmers in the country.
- MSP has been increased by nearly 76 per cent in the period of last 6 years.
- Currently, the MSP for Jute has been kept at 4 thousand 225 rupees in the financial year 2020-21. This price has been doubled when compared to MSP of 2 thousand 400 in the year 2014-15.
- The textile minister also stated that the highly productive variant of Jute seeds will help to enhance the income of nearly 5 lakh Jute farmers across the country.

#### **Recent Developments:**

- The textile minister also said that both the Agriculture Ministry and the Textile Ministry has been working and enhancing the synergy in order to extend its support to the Jute growing farmers.
- Recently, the centre took the decision of mandatory packaging in jute materials. This move will benefit over 4 lakh farmers. It will also help nearly 40 lakh Agri-based households. Further, excavation for Jute-retting tanks has been included under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This move will help in creating 46 lakh days of work for the farmers.

#### **About Jute:**

- It is a natural fibre having a golden, soft, long, and silky shine. Jute is the cheapest fibre which is procured from skin of the plant's stem. Jute is also called as the golden fibre.
- The Golden Fibre Revolution in India is associated to the jute production. Jute industry is one among the oldest textile industries in India that involved directly or indirectly a large chunk of people.

#### **112. India Gifted Rice to Syria:**

- The Indian government has gifted 2000 metric tonnes of rice to Syria in a bid to strengthen the food security with the Middle East countries.

#### **Highlights:**

- A statement from the Ministry of External Affairs highlights that the first consignment of 1000 metric tonnes of rice has been handed over to Syria.
- The consignment was handed over by Hifzur Rahman who is India's ambassador to Syria.
- From the Syrian side, the consignment was received by Hussain Makhoulf who is the Minister of local administration and head of the Supreme Relief Committee.
- The ministry further stated that, consignment of 1000 metric tonnes is remaining and it will reach Syria on February 18.
- India is providing the help to Syria following the request from the government of Syria for emergency humanitarian assistance.

#### **India-Syria Relation:**

- The Ministry of external affairs stated that; India has always stood in solidarity with the people of Syria. The bilateral relation between both the countries continued through the development and capacity buildings project in Syria. It continued even during the internal conflicts in the country. India has provided understated grants to Syria in the recent times:
- India gifted 10 metric tonnes of medicines to Syria as a COVID assistance in July 2020.
- India had organised artificial limbs fitment camp in Damascus in January 2020. More than 500 Syrians had benefited from the camp. This camp was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in partnership with Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti.

- Study in India initiative: During the academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, scholarships were extended to around 1000 Syrian students in order for them to pursue the bachelors, masters, and post-doctoral programmes in the Indian universities.
- India is also establishing a NextGen Centre for Information Technology in Damascus. For this, the preparatory work has already started.

### **113. Inter-caste marriage:**

- The Supreme Court of India in a recent judgement said that, the educated youngsters are showing a way forward to reduce caste and community tensions across India by involving into the Inter-caste marriage.
- Supreme court made this judgment in the backdrop of a case filed by a woman who tied the knot with a man against her family's wishes. The investigating officer had directed her to leave her husband and be present at the police station. The investigating officer directed her to so following a complaint filed by her relatives.

#### **What did the court say?**

- The court rejected the case against the couple.
- The apex court further directed the police authorities to counsel the investigating officers.
- SC also asked the authorities to devise a training programme in order to deal with such cases in a way that it benefits the police personnel.
- The SC Bench while hearing the judgement, referred to the Hadiya case. In this case, privacy of an individual was declared a fundamental right under Article 21 (Right to life) of Constitution.
- As per the judgement, Consent of the family or community or clan is not required, once two adult individuals have agreed to enter into knot. Further, their consent has to be given primacy.
- SC also quoted B. R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste where he agrees with the fact that, "real remedy is intermarriage".

#### **Special Marriages Act, 1954:**

- This legislation is used to register the inter-religious and inter-caste marriages in the country. It includes all the marriages belonging to Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. The act also allows two individuals to solemnise their marriage by a civil contract.

### **114. All Digital Insurance Policies to be issued via Digilocker app:**

- The Insurance sector regulator Insurance Regulatory Authority of India (IRDAI) has advised all the Insurance companies to issue digital insurance policies using the government's Digilocker app.

#### **Highlights:**

- Issuance of the policies through the Digilocker app will result in to better customer experience.
- Using this app, claims processing and settlement of the policies will be faster.
- This app will also reduce the disputes and reduction in fraud.
- To promote the of adoption of Digi locker in the insurance sector, IRDAI have advised all the insurers to enable their IT systems so as to interact with Digi locker facility.
- It will also enable the policyholders to preserve all their policy documents.
- Necessary technical guidance and logistic support to facilitate the adoption of Digi locker will be provided by the Digilocker team in National e-Governance Division (NeGD) under MeITy.

#### **Digilocker Initiative:**

- It is an initiative under the Digital India program. This programme is run by the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY). Under this initiative, citizens can get the authentic documents or certificates in digital format.

- The certificates can be generated from original issuers of these certificates. The initiative was launched with the aim of eliminating or minimising the use of physical documents.
- It seeks to enhance the effectiveness of service delivery by making it hassle-free and citizens friendly.

#### **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI):**

- It is an autonomous and statutory body in India. The body does the task of regulating and promoting the insurance and reinsurance industries.
- It was established by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999. It is headquartered in Hyderabad, Telangana. It is a 10-member body comprising of a chairman, five full-time members and four part-time members.

#### **115. Vigyan Jyoti Programme:**

- The second phase of Vigyan Jyoti programme was started on February 11, 2021. It was started on the occasion of International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

##### **Key Facts:**

- The Vigyan Jyoti Programme will spread the programme to encourage the girls to take interest in science.
- It would also encourage them to build a career in STEM.
- The programme would spread to 50 more districts in addition to the 50 more districts across India.
- It would improve by learnings of the past one year and will be expanded to more districts in country in order to empower the women.
- The programme was started because women are under-represented and is a multi-dimensional problem. This problem is needed to be seen from all the angles.
- In the line, the New Education Policy and the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy would also help in removing the constraints.
- These policies would also help in making best use of the demographic dividend so as to progress long in a short time. This in turn would help in increasing the number of women in science.

##### **Vigyan Jyoti programme:**

- It is a new initiative that seeks to encourage girls to take interest in science and build career in this field. The programme was launched by the Department of Science & Technology (DST) in December 2019. It was launched with the objective of creating a level-playing field for the meritorious girls who want to pursue STEM.
- The programme is currently running successfully in 50 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNV). In the year 2021-22 it will be expanded to 50 more JNVs. It addresses the underrepresentation of women in various areas of STEM. The programme at first cater to the girls at school level of Class IX to Class XII in order to encourage and empower them to pursue STEM courses.

#### **116. Digital Agriculture: National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGPA):**

- The National e-governance plan in agriculture (NeGPA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. The scheme was initially launched in the year 2010-11 in 7 States. Recently, this scheme was extended up to March 31, 2021.

##### **Key Facts:**

- The scheme was launched with the aim of achieving the rapid development in India by using Information & Communication Technology (ICT).
- It helps in timely access of the agriculture related information to the farmers.
- In the year 2014-15, scheme was extended to cover all the remaining States and 2 UTs.
- Phase-II of the scheme

- Under this phase, the funds were released to the States in order to carry out the activities such as,
  1. Site preparation of offices to install the hardware
  2. To establishment of computer training labs
  3. Procurement, installation and accounting of the system software.
  4. To back-up power arrangements.
  5. To set-up the State Project Management Unit (SPMUs) and
  6. To hire manpower on contractual basis
  7. Data Digitization Customization of applications as per the requirement in the State and UTs.

#### **Recent Developments under the scheme:**

- The NeGPA guidelines were amended in 2020-2021 in order to infuse the modern information technologies in the farm sector. For that matter, funds were also released to sanction the projects in order to customize and shift the web & mobile applications to the platform that were to be developed using digital or the emerging technologies.
- Further, the initiatives such as Unified Farmers Service Platform (UFSP) was launched in order to bring a paradigm change in accessing the data related to farmers.

#### **Unified Farmer Service Platform (UFSP):**

- UFSP is a combination of Core Infrastructure, Applications & tools and Data. The platform helps in seamless interoperability of various public and private IT systems in the agriculture domain. It acts as a central agency in the agri ecosystem such as UPI in the e Payments does. It also enables the Registration of Service Providers.

#### **117. Indian Astronomers detect huge Optical Flare in Astronomic Object:**

- Indian Astronomers have detected one of the strongest optical flares in one of the oldest astronomical objects that is supermassive black hole or blazar called BL Lacertae.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The analysis of the coming out from the blazar will help in tracing the mass of the black hole.
- It would also help in tracing the source of this emission.
- The analysis is significant in providing a lead to probe into mysteries and useful in tracing the events of evolution of the Universe.

#### **About Blazars:**

- Blazars are the feeding supermassive black holes situated in the heart of distant galaxies. The blazars receive a lot of attention due to their complicated emission mechanism. They emit jets of charged particles.
- The jets travel equally at the speed of light. They are the one among the most luminous and energetic objects found in the Universe.

#### **BL Lacertae blazar:**

- This blazar is situated 10 million light-years away from the Earth. It is one among the 50 most prominent blazars that can be seen with small telescope.
- This blazar was predicted to be experiencing flares with the help of the Whole Earth Blazar Telescope (WEBT).
- It is a type of active galactic nucleus (AGN) or a galaxy which has been named after its prototype, BL Lacertae.
- They are characterized by a rapid and a large-amplitude flux variability.
- They also show significant optical polarization.
- These properties of the blazar are very similar to that of variable star.
- It comprises of spectra which is dominated by a featureless non-thermal emission continuum.

#### **BL Lacertae:**

- It is a highly variable and extragalactic active galactic nucleus. It was first observed and discovered by Cuno Hoffmeister in the year 1929. It was earlier given a designation of a variable star in the Milky Way galaxy.

#### 118. Earthquake of magnitude 6.3 hits Tajikistan:

- An earthquake of magnitude 6.3 hit Tajikistan on February 12, 2020. The tremors were felt in Delhi-NCR, Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh. The seismology department at first gave the epicentre as Amritsar because of software error later confirmed epicentre as Tajikistan.

#### What is an Earthquake?

- Shaking of the surface of the Earth because of a sudden release of energy in the lithosphere of earth is called as earthquake. It results into the formation of seismic waves.
- When the epicentre of the earthquakes is on surface, it results into shaking and displacing the ground. If the epicentre is located offshore, it results into the displacement of the seabed causing a tsunami.
- Earthquakes are usually caused by rupture of geological faults. But it may also be caused due to volcanic activity, landslides, nuclear tests and mine blasts.

#### Hypocentre or focus:

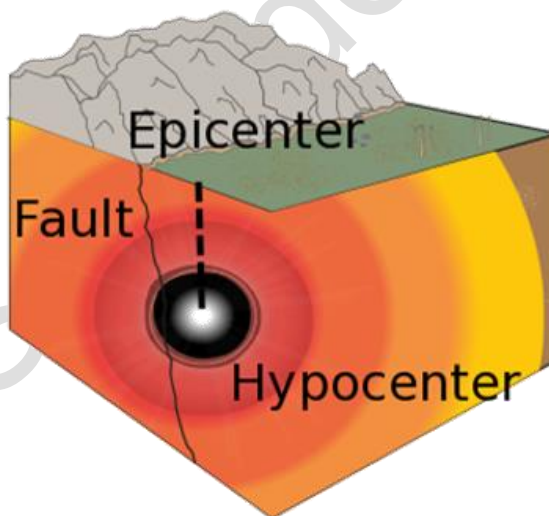
- It is the point of initial rupture of an earthquake. In seismology, epicentre is synonym of the focus.

#### Epicentre:

- The point on the ground or surface directly above the hypocentre is called epicentre.

#### Types of Earthquake:

1. **Fault Zones:** Fault means a sharp breakage in the crustal rock. Through this fault, energy releases. As a result, the rocks along the fault starts moving in opposite directions. With time, the blocks get deformed and slide past each other abruptly. This in turn causes earthquake.
2. **Tectonic Earthquakes:** This is the most common earthquake. When a large & thin plate of the Earth's crust and upper mantle gets stuck while moving past each other, pressure builds up beneath the zone. When this pressure is released, earthquakes occur.
3. **Volcanic Earthquake:** Special class of tectonic earthquake in the areas of active volcanoes are called as volcanic earthquakes. It occurs because of injection or withdrawal of magma beneath the Earth's surface.
4. **Human Induced Earthquakes:** Such earthquakes are caused as a result of intense mining activity, explosion of chemical or nuclear devices.



#### 119. US-Mexico Border Wall Project:

- The President of United States, Joe Biden, has revoked the emergency order that was issued by former President Donald Trump to construct the US-Mexico border wall. The order was revoked on February 11, 2021.

#### Key Facts:

- The President Biden revoked the order given by former President Donald Trump by announcing that it shall be the policy of the new administration that American taxpayers' money will not be diverted to construct a border wall now at the United States' border with Mexico.
- The president will also direct a careful review of all the resources that have been appropriated or redirected for this purpose.

#### What was the issue?

- The idea to construct a US-Mexico border was put forward by the former President of United States Donald Trump in 2016 during the presidential campaign trail.
- After this, he had been repeatedly asking Mexico to pay for the construction of the border wall.
- In the year 2019, the Trump administration had signed the executive order that declared the national emergency so as to build US-Mexico border wall. This order was passed on February 15, 2019. The emergency was announced after repeated clash with the lawmakers with respect to the funding for the project.
- Later in 2020, the Customs and Border Protection reported that it had found USD 11 billion as fund in order to construct the wall.
- Following that, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the USD 2.5 billion in Department of Defense spending that was diverted to the complete construction of the US-Mexico wall.
- After that, the proclamation of emergency landed the Trump's administration in court.

#### Mexico–United States barrier or border wall:

- It is a series of vertical barriers at the Mexico–United States border. The border seeks to reduce the illegal immigration from the Mexico to the United States from Mexico.
- The barrier is not a continuous structure. It is a series of obstructions comprising of the fences or walls. Along the border, security is provided by virtual fence of cameras, sensors, and other surveillance equipment.



#### 120. India Lost Crops on 18 Million Hectares during 2017-2019:

- The government has shared data on Lok Sabha on February 11, 2021 that India has suffered a huge crop loss on 18.176 million hectares of land.

#### Key Facts:

- The crop loss on the 18.176 million hectares land amounts to roughly 8.5 per cent of the total gross cropped area.
- The crop loss occurred due to floods in the year 2017 to 2019.
- Out of the losses, around 10.68 million hectares of land was affected in 2019 alone.
- In 2018, 2.515 million hectares of land were affected while in the year 2017, 4.973 million hectares of cropped area were lost.
- The government further highlighted that; the intensity of extreme floods has increased in India. The flood has also impacted the newer areas that were not flood-prone.

- As per the data, flood-prone states of Bihar, Assam and Uttar Pradesh observed the extreme floods.
- Extreme floods were also witnessed in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. The floods were caused due to excess or large excess rainfall in the states.
- Madhya Pradesh was the hardest-hit in all the states. The states had zero crop loss in 2017 and 2018 but, in 2019 it suffered the highest loss of 6.047 million hectares of land. The state had made the second highest claims in 2019 after Maharashtra under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for crop insurance by the farmers.
- The states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam, Rajasthan and West Bengal also witnessed severe crop loss.

#### **Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP) scheme:**

- The minister further highlighted that the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP) scheme was working in the entire country for flood management. Under this scheme, the government has released the central assistance of Rs 6,409.96 crore till March, 2020.
- This scheme was launched during Eleventh five year Plan period to provide central assistance to the state governments in order to take up the works related to river management, flood control, drainage development, anti-erosion, anti-sea erosion works and restoration of the damaged flood management works. The programme continued till Twelfth five year Plan.

#### **121. Concentration of Small Black Holes discovered:**

- The astronomers have discovered a concentration of smaller black holes in the cluster NGC 6397. Small black holes were discovered instead of one massive black hole at the heart of the cluster.

#### **Key facts:**

- The Globular clusters are a dense stellar system that host the closely packed stars.
- Such systems are typically very old. For instance, the cluster NGC 6397 is as old as the universe.
- NGC 6397 cluster is located around 7,800 light-years away.
- Thus, it is one of the closest globular clusters to the Planet Earth.
- This cluster is also known as Core-Collapsed Cluster because of its very dense nucleus.
- The precise measurement of the stars in the cluster's core was made with the Hubble Space Telescope.

#### **NGC 6397:**

- The cluster is also known as Caldwell 86. It is a globular cluster lying in the constellation Ara. The cluster is located around 7,800 light-years from Earth.
- It comprises of around 400,000 stars. The cluster can be observed with naked eye under the good observing conditions. This cluster is one among the at least 20 globular clusters in the Milky Way Galaxy which has gone through the core collapse. Core collapse means the core has contracted to a dense stellar agglomeration.

#### **Milky Way:**

- It is the galaxy comprising of our Solar System. It is a hazy band of light that can be seen in the night sky.
- It is formed from stars and cannot be individually distinguished with the naked eye. It appears as a band when seen from earth because its disk-shaped structure.
- The first person to revolve around the band of light was Galileo Galilei. He moved around the individual stars with his telescope in the year 1610.

#### **122. Vijayanagara- 31st district of Karnataka:**



- The Karnataka Government recently notified that, the Vijayanagara has become the 31st district of Karnataka officially. The district has its headquarter at Hosapete.

**Key Facts:**

- Vijayanagara is located in Hyderabad-Karnataka region.
- The district also be the home to UNESCO World Heritage sites namely the Hampi and Virupaksha Temple.
- Vijayanagara district has been named after the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire.
- The district was established out of the ore-rich Ballari district in accordance with the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964.
- The district will comprise of six taluks namely the Hosapete, kotturu, Kudligi, Hagaribommanahalli, Harapanahalli and Hoovina Hadagali.

**Background:**

- The Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa had announced his plan of creating a new Vijayanagara district in the month of September, 2019. The Chief Minister had cited it is required to create a new district for the administrative reasons. He was of the view that. Creation of the new district will help in promoting the tourism to the places like Hampi temple. He also said, the move will help in the development of six talukas that are part of the district. Thus, the Karnataka Cabinet formally approved the creation of a new vijayanagara district on November 18, 2020.
- The plan of creating the new district was highly criticised and faced opposition from the ruling party.
- Further, the move was criticised because of the view that division of the Ballari district to create a new district could lead to a linguistic dispute in between Telugu speaking people and Kannada speaking people with in the district.

**Hampi or Hampe:**

- It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site which is located in east-central Karnataka. The site is a pilgrimage centre of the Hindu religion.
- The Hampi region used to be the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire in 14th century. Hampi-Vijayanagara was the second-largest medieval-era city of the world following Beijing.

**123. About Vijayanagara District:**

- The Union Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, inaugurated 57,000 water structures under the “Jalabhishekam Water Conservation Campaign” on February 11, 2021 virtually from New Delhi.

**Key Facts:**

- These water structures were constructed in Madhya Pradesh.
- The Water conservation work is being carried in the Madhya Pradesh by the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan with participation of public in it.
- The conservation work will help to achieve the goal of water conservation and build a self-reliant Madhya Pradesh.
- The Defence Minister highlighted that the ‘Jalabhishekam’ Campaign is fulfilling the aim of ‘water for every farm and work for every hand’. The campaign would be helpful in the betterment of the villages.
- The campaign becomes significant in the light of climate change.
- More than 57000 water structures were constructed during COVID era. The construction work for the water structure was carried by linking it with the MNREGA scheme.

**National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005:**

- It is an Indian labour law and social security measure. The act was passed with the aim to guarantee the 'right to work'. The act was passed in 2005 by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.
- The act seeks to enhance the livelihood security in rural areas. It provides at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year. It provides work to every household in which the adult members volunteer to do the unskilled manual work.
- The World Bank termed this act in its World Development Report 2014 as a "stellar example of rural development". The act is implemented mainly by gram panchayats. Under the act, involvement of contractors to look after the labours is banned.

**Significance of the act:**

- The act provides the economic security and create the rural assets. It also helps in protecting environment and empowering the rural women.
- The act guarantees 100 days of work this in turn reduces the rural-urban migration.
- It also mentions the principles and agencies to implement it and list of allowed works. It has also mentioned the financing pattern, monitoring and other measures in order to ensure the transparency and accountability.

**124. Mandarin Duck spotted after 118 years in Assam:**

- The Mandarin duck which is a colourful duck from eastern Asia was spotted in Assam recently after 118 years.
- Spotting of the Mandarin has raised hopes for the wetland which was affected by a blowout and inferno at a natural gas well in the year 2020.
- The Mandarin duck was spotted by the team of avian specialists in the Maguri-Motapung Beel of Tinsukia district in eastern Assam.
- Mandarin duck is the habitat of eastern China and southern Japan. It landed in Assam too by accident.
- The duck does not come regularly to India. But some of the ducks may join other migratory birds and follow their migration path.
- The spotted duck accompanied a flock of Indian spot-billed duck that was migrated either to China or Japan.
- The last Mandarin duck was spotted in Assam in the year 1902.

**Mandarin duck:**

- The scientific name of mandarin duck is *Aix galericulata*. It is a perching duck species which is native to the East Palearctic. The duck is medium-sized with 41–49 cm in length and 65–75 cm of wingspan. The duck is closely related to North American wood duck.

**Population of the duck:**

- The ducks were once widespread in East Asia region. But they were exported on large-scale so the population reduced in the eastern Russia and China.
- Further, the destruction of its forest habitat further accelerated the reduction in population so much so that the population reduced below 1,000 pairs in each of Russia and China. Japan has an estimated population of around 5,000 pairs.

**Breeding:**

- The duck usually prefers the dense breeding grounds. It usually breeds into the shrubby forested edges of rivers and lakes in low-lying areas. It can also breed in valleys at altitudes of 1,500 m. It also breeds in marshes, flooded fields, and open rivers during winters.
- The duck prefers fresh water but are also seen wintering in the coastal lagoons and estuaries.

**125. TIFAC launches SAKSHAM portal and Seaweed Cultivation Mission:**

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- The Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) have launched a job portal called SAKSHAM to map the skills of workers as required by the MSMEs. It also launched a Seaweed Cultivation Mission.

**Key Facts about SAKSHAM Portal:**

- TIFAC highlighted that the Saksham portal will help in eliminating the middlemen and labour contractors.
- It will also help to identify the skill proficiency level.
- The portal will also help in the development of skill cards for 'shramiks' (workers).
- This initiative will facilitate the placement of 10 lakh blue-collar jobs across India.
- The portal will directly connect the workers with MSMEs and eliminate the need of the middlemen or labour contractors.
- This portal will also reduce the hardship of workers to find the jobs in nearby MSMEs.
- The portal is significant because it would help the labourers to find work who were compelled to return to their native place amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Seaweed Cultivation Mission:**

- The Seaweed Cultivation is also called as the kelp farming. It is the practice of cultivating and harvesting the seaweed. The process comprises of management of naturally found batches in the simplest form. While in the advanced form, the process comprises of fully controlling the life cycle of the algae.
- As per the estimate of the department, if seaweed cultivation is done in 10 million hectares or in the 5% of the Exclusive Economic Zone area in India, it would help in providing employment to 50 million people.
- Thus, with this objective, TIFAC will showcase a model, in collaboration with other in-line ministries, of the commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing. Seaweed Cultivation would help in boosting the economy.

**Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC):**

- It is an autonomous organization. It was set up in the year 1988. It works under the Department of Science & Technology. The organisation works in the technology domain and assess technology trajectories. It strives for the development of technology by leveraging the technology innovation

**126. NDB to invest \$100 Million into NIIF Fund of Funds:**

- The New Development Bank (NDB) has announced to invest \$100 million into the NIIF Fund of Funds (FoF).

**Key Facts:**

- With the NDB's investment of \$100 million, the NIIF FoF has now secured \$800 million in commitments.
- NDB has joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Government of India (GoI) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) as an investor in the NIIF FoF.
- The investment by the NDB is the first equity investment by it into India. It is also the first-ever investment into a Fund of Funds by the NDB.

**NIIF Fund of Funds (FoF):**

- The FoF was established in the year 2018. It was established with the objective of providing the access of the homegrown Indian private equity fund managers to the institutional investor that operates at scale with focus on India.
- The FoF has made commitments to four funds till date. The aggregate commitment stands over ₹2,750 crore.

**National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF):**

- It is India's first infrastructure specific investment fund. It is also called as a sovereign wealth fund. This fund was set up by the Government of India in February 2015.
- It was set up with the objective of maximizing the economic impact through infrastructure investment in both Greenfield and Brownfield projects which are commercially viable.

#### **New Development Bank (NDB):**

- It was earlier known as the BRICS Development Bank. NDB is a multilateral development bank that was established by the BRICS nations namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The bank supports the public or private projects through loans, guarantees and equity participation.

#### **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB):**

- This bank was established with the aim to improve the economic and social outcomes in the Asia region. It currently has 103 members and 21 prospective members from across the world. The bank started operation on December 25, 2015.

#### **127. Tianwen-1 probe enters the Mars Orbit:**

- A Chinese spacecraft named Tianwen-1 has successfully entered the orbit around Mars on February 10, 2021.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The probe entered the MARS Orbit after making the journey of 6 and a half month from the Earth.
- This mission is China's first independent mission on the red planet.
- After reaching near to the orbit, robotic probe initiated and completed its 15-minute burn of the thrusters.
- Burning of the thrusters slowed down the speed of the spacecraft so that it could be captured by the gravity pull of the MARS.

#### **Objective of the mission:**

- Tianwen-1 mission will attempt to send a landing capsule which is carrying a 240-kilogram rover in a rapid seven-minute descent. The rover will be sent to the northern hemisphere of Mars called as Utopia Planitia.
- After the rover is landed successfully, the solar-powered rover will be exploring the Martian surface for 90 days.
- The rover will study the soil and study if any signs of ancient life, is present there.
- It would also trace the sub-surface water and ice using the ground-penetrating radar.

#### **Tianwen-1:**

- Tianwen-1 is an interplanetary mission by the China National Space Administration (CNSA). Under the mission, the CNSA sent a robotic spacecraft to Mars.
- The spacecraft consists of an orbiter, a deployable camera, a lander and a rover. The spacecraft was successfully launched on July 23, 2020 from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site.
- It was launched from a Long March 5 heavy-lift launch vehicle. The spacecraft has been named Tianwen-1 means "Questions to Heaven" following the Chinese poem that was written two millennia ago. It is China's first independent MARS mission after its probe that was co-launched with Russia failed in the year 2011.

#### **128. US announces Sanctions on Myanmar's Military Leaders:**

- The President of United States, Joe Biden, announced sanctions on the military leaders in Myanmar on February 10, 2021.

#### **Key facts:**

- The sanctions were put by the Biden's administration in order to prevent the Myanmar's generals from accessing the \$1 billion of government funds which is held in the US.
- The government would identify the first round of sanctions targets and impose the export controls.
- Biden also asked the Myanmar military to release detainees immediately.
- Why Sanctions have been put?
- The Biden administration has put the sanctions on military leaders in Myanmar in the backdrop of Military rule in Myanmar.

#### **Military Rule in Myanmar:**

- The military in Myanmar took over the control in the country and announced one-year state of emergency on February 1, 2021. The military also detained the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other government leaders. This step was taken by the military in the backdrop of victory of Suu Kyi's party in election that was held in November 2020. The military took over the country as it found the victory a result of frauds.
- Following that, the Myanmar Civil Disobedience Movement has been started in opposition to the military's takeover.

#### **How did military get the power?**

- The state emergency was announced after the Suu Kyi's government was failed in tackling the situation of the country amid the Corona Pandemic. Despite that, the Suu Kyi's party won the election again in November 2020. Thus, the military took over in the country in accordance with the Article 417 of the Myanmar's constitution. This article gives power to the military to take over the country in times of emergency.
- The military had framed the constitution of Myanmar in 2008. Thus the military retains the power under the charter at the expense of democratic and the civilian rule.

#### **129. Exercise TROPEX-21:**

- The biennial Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX 21) which is the largest wargame of the Indian Navy was started in January 2021. The exercise is still underway and it will end in the third week of February 2021.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The exercise is observing the participation of all operational units of Indian Navy such as submarines, ships and aircraft.
- The units of Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard are also participating in the biennial exercise.
- The exercise is being held in the Indian Ocean Region and its adjunct waters.
- The exercise is being looked by the Naval Headquarters along with the participation of all three Commands of Indian Navy besides the Tri-Services Command.
- The exercise is being held with the aim of testing the combat readiness of the Navy for the complex multi-dimensional scenario amid the tight geo strategic environment.
- It is also aimed at validating the Indian Navy's offensive-defence capabilities.
- It seeks to safeguard the national interests in maritime domain so as to promote the stability and peace in Indian Ocean Region.
- The exercise seeks to Navy's transition from peacetime to hostilities.

#### **First Phase of the Exercise:**

- In the first phase, exercise 'Sea Vigil' was conducted from January 12-13, 2021. The exercise was conducted with the aim of validating the coastal defence setup of India.
- The exercise was participated by the Indian Navy, Marine Police of 13 coastal States and Union Territories and the Coast Guard, besides the stakeholders in the maritime domain.

**AMPHEX-21:**

- The Tri-Service joint amphibious exercise AMPHEX-21 was held after the exercise Sea Vigil. It was held in the Andaman and Nicobar from January 21-25, 2021. It was held with the aim of validating India's capabilities so as to safeguard the territorial integrity of its Islands.

**Weapon Workup Phase of TROPEX:**

- This phase observed the multiple on-target ordnance deliveries such as torpedoes, missiles and rockets from frontline aircrafts, warships and submarines. It demonstrated the firepower of the Indian Navy.

**130. Deep-Sea Fishing Vessels Design and Specifications:**

- The government of India has set up a Nodal Authority in order to frame the Approved Standardised Deep-Sea Fishing Vessels Design and Specifications (ASDDS).
- It would help the fisheries departments of states to implement the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).

**Key Facts:**

- ASDDS will provide a framework of minimum basic design parameters. The vessels would be constructed under the prescribed framework.
- It will cover the basic design aspects including the Outline Specifications, Basic Calculation, General Arrangement and Basic Structural Drawings.
- ASDDS will be prepared by Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL).
- It will technically be vetted by Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT).
- The 'In Principle' approval will be given by the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS).

**About DSFV:**

- Deep-Sea Fishing Vessels (DSFV's) was also constructed in compliance with the ASDDS.
- DSFV was promulgated by the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways.
- DSFV will also be eligible for subsidy under the PMMSY scheme.
- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana
- It is a flagship scheme that focuses on the sustainable development of the fisheries sector. It will be implemented for a five-year period. The scheme was launched on April 1, 2020 in all States and Union Territories under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Package.

**Budget outlay:**

- The PMMSY was launched with an estimated investment of Rs 20,050 crores. Out of this amount, an investment of about Rs 12,340 crores is allocated for the beneficiary-oriented activities in Inland fisheries, Marine and Aquaculture. Rs 7,710 crores was allocated for fisheries infrastructure.

**Nodal Authority:**

- The nodal authority will be headed by the director of CIFT. It would also comprise of the representatives from the Naval Architecture Department of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur or IIT Madras; Cochin Shipyard Ltd and the Indian Register of Shipping.

**131. 'Specialty Steel' included under the PLI Scheme:**

- The Union Minister for Steel, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, said in a written reply in Parliament that the Government has given its approval for inclusion of 'Specialty Steel' under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme.

**Highlights:**

- For this purpose, a 5-year financial outlay of Rs 6322 Cr has also been approved.

- This move was taken by the government in order to promote the manufacturing of 'Specialty Steel' within the boundary of the country.
- The manufacturing can be promoted by attracting the capital investment, promoting the technology up-gradation and by generating employment in steel sector.
- This move by the government would help to improve the availability of 'Specialty Steel' in India by making the country Atmanirbhar with respect to the domestic demand.
- How Price is determined?
- In a deregulated and open market scenario, the domestic steel price is determined through the market forces of demand and supply. It also depends upon the trends in prices of raw materials. The price of the steel is also influenced by the global steel trade conditions.

#### **Benefits of PLI Scheme:**

- Coverage of the sectors under the scheme makes the Indian manufacturers globally competitive. It also attracts the investment in the core competency and cutting-edge technology areas. The scheme also ensures the efficiency and creates the economy of scale.
- The scheme strengthens the exports with the aim of making India a part of global supply chain.

#### **Specialty steels:**

- These are also called as alloy steels. They are composed of the additional alloyed materials that results into special properties of the final product. The steels are engineered so as to provide a superior performance under specific conditions.

#### **132. Uttarakhand Glacier Burst:**

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has released the first images of the glacier burst that happened in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.
- The glacial burst has so far caused 32 lives. After the incident, more than hundred people are still missing.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The satellite images show that flash floods were reported in Rishi Ganga and Dhaul Ganga river catchment areas.
- The flash floods were caused due to major snow avalanche closer to the Raini village of Chamoli district.
- The images show that power plants located at Raini and Tapovan have went through the maximum damage in the glacial burst.
- One image shows the deposition of debris in Dhaul Ganga.
- Other image shows the damage occurred to the dam infrastructures at Tapovan and Raini.
- These images were captured by the ISRO's advanced earth imaging and mapping satellite CARTOSAT-3.

#### **What caused the glacial burst?**

- The scientists are still investigating about the reason for the glacial burst or the avalanche or the release of the accumulated water. Bu the experts are pointing that climate change can be blame. This is so because, the warming temperatures is resulting into the shrinking of glaciers across the world.

#### **CARTOSAT-3:**

- It is an advanced Indian Earth Observation satellite. The satellite has been built and developed by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- It replaced the IRS series. The satellite comprises of a panchromatic resolution of 0.25 metres. Thus, it is the imaging satellite having highest resolution in the world. It has Mx of 1 metre with a high-quality resolution.

#### **Uses of CARTOSAT-3:**

- Satellite is used to map the weather, in the cartography or defence, and in the strategic applications

#### **Features of CARTOSAT-3:**

- The satellite has a resolution of 25 cm. It uses 1.2 m optics. The satellite uses the optical devices, adaptive optics, and in-orbit focusing using MEMs. The age of the satellite is 5 years.

#### **133. BioAsia 2021:**

- The 18th edition of BioAsia event will be held in between February 22, 2021 to February 23, 2021. It will be organised under the theme: 'Move the Needle'.

#### **Key Facts:**

- This year, the BioAsia event will focus on Covid-19, pharma, medtech and global health.
- The event would comprise of a wide array of panels.
- The panel will focussing on how Covid-19 pandemic has resulted into various changes in the life sciences industry.

#### **About BioAsia 2021:**

- The event will provide a platform to discuss on topics of importance for the life sciences industry.
- One of the sessions of the event will be focusing on the prospects of Medical Technologies that is becoming the next big opportunity for India.
- The medical technologies have the potential to accelerate the journey for India from being an importer to become a large-scale exporter.
- The event will also have analysis on the supply chain resilience, access to innovative medicines and innovation & research.

#### **Significance of the event:**

- This event is significant because, India is all set to become the world's most populous country of the world. With the increase in the population, the burden of disease is also increasing. Thus, this becomes important because, it is attended by the investors, researchers, start-ups, conglomerates and health care representatives who discuss the needs of evolving Life Science industry. Further, the event would give a boost to India's biotechnology sector.

#### **India's Biotechnology Sector:**

- India has become the third largest biotechnology destination in the Asia Pacific region. India have more than 500 United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) approved Indian owned biotechnology plants which is the second highest number across the world.
- India is also the largest supplier of vaccines of BCG, DPT and measles.

#### **134. Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs):**

- The Government of India has launched a new Central Sector Scheme called the "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)".

#### **Key Facts:**

- The scheme has been launched with a clear strategy and committed resources in order to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs across India.
- For the making of FPOs, Rs 6865 crore have been allocated.
- The scheme has been launched because, the agriculture sector plays a crucial role in economic development and Nation building. The country is also be at the forefront in the development of agriculture across the world.
- Further, India wants to double its agricultural export by 2022. But, more than 86% of farmers in India are small and marginal.



- They need the facilities of improved technology, better input, credit, and more markets in order to incentivize them. It would help them to produce better quality commodity. Thus, if these small, marginal and landless farmers are aggregated into FPOs, it would help them to enhance the economic strength & market linkages of farmers. This in turn will help in enhancing their income.

#### About FPOs Scheme:

- This is a Central Sector Scheme which receives funding from Government of India.
- FPOs will be developed in produce clusters.
- In the FPOs, agricultural and horticultural produces will be grown and cultivated to leverage the economies of scale.
- It will also improve the market access for members.
- Further, "One District One Product" cluster will be created to promote specialization.
- Under this scheme, the formation & Promotion of FPOs will be done with the help of Implementing Agencies (IAs).

#### Implementing Agencies (IAs):

- There are presently nine implementing agencies namely,
  1. Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC),
  2. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD),
  3. National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC),
  4. North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC),
  5. Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium Haryana (SFACH),
  6. National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED),
  7. Watershed Development Department (WDD)- Karnataka
  8. Tamil Nadu-Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (TN-SFAC) and
  9. Foundation for Development of Rural Value Chains (FDRVC)- Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).
- These IAs will engage the Cluster Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) to aggregate, registered and provide the handholding support to each FPOs. The support will be provided for a period of 5 years.

#### 135. United States to re-join UNHRC:

- The Joe Biden administration in United States is all set to re-join the UN Human Rights Council. The United States had withdrawn from the council in the year 2018 under Presidency of the Donald Trump.
- Donald Trump withdrew from the world body's main human rights because of its disproportionate focus on Israel.
- Israel had received the largest number of critical council resolutions so far with respect to any other country.
- So, the Trump administration discussed the issue with the body's membership.
- The members include Cuba, China, Russia, Eritrea and Venezuela. All these countries have been accused of human rights abuses.

#### About UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR):

- UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the UN system.
- The agency is involved in strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights across the world.
- It looks after the situations of human rights violations and recommends on the situations.
- The council was created in the year 2006 by the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251.
- The first session of the council took place in 2006 three months after its establishment.

- The agency is involved in discussing all the thematic human rights issues.
- The UNHRC was created after replacing the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).
- The council comprises of the 47 UN Member States. The member states are elected by the UNGA by a direct and secret ballot.

#### **UNHRC Sessions:**

- The UNHRC held three regular sessions in a year. The session lasts for a total of 10 weeks. The session take place for four weeks in the month of March, three weeks in the month of June and three weeks in the month of September. The sessions are held at the UN Office Geneva in Switzerland.

#### **136. HOPE: UAE's Mars Mission:**

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has put a probe called Hope in the orbit around the MARS. By doing so, UAE has become the fifth country to launch the spacecraft into the orbit of MARS after United States, Soviet Union, Europe and India.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The spacecraft had left the Earth seven months ago.
- It then made a braking manoeuvre in order to be captured by Mars' gravity on February 9, 2021.
- With the successful launch of spacecraft in orbit, UAE scientists can now study the planet's atmosphere.
- The spacecraft carries three instruments with it to observe how neutral atoms of Oxygen and Hydrogen leak into space. The hydrogen and oxygen came into the MARS' atmosphere are the remnants from Mars' once abundant water.
- The Hope spacecraft will bring the spectacular, high-resolution, full-disk images of MARS.

#### **Emirates Mars Mission:**

- It is a UAE Space Agency space exploration mission to Mars. In the process UAE had launched the Hope orbiter 19 July 19, 2020. The orbiter reached Mars on February 9, 2021.
- It was launched from the Tanegashima Space Center in Japan. The orbiter was launched with the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries H-IIA launch vehicle which is a Japanese launcher.

#### **Design and Development:**

- The design, development, and operations of the MARS mission are led by the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC).
- It was developed by MBRSC in collaboration with the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics (LASP) at the University of Colorado Boulder. The mission was also developed with the help of Arizona State University (ASU). Lastly, the spacecraft was assembled at the University of Colorado.

#### **Purpose of the Mission:**

- The space mission will carry the study on daily and seasonal weather cycles and weather events such as dust storm in the lower atmosphere. It will study how weather varies in different regions on the MARS. The spacecraft also seeks to study why the planet is losing the hydrogen and oxygen into space.

#### **137. Sahtoot Dam:**

- India and Afghanistan have inked the deal to build a dam, called Sahtoot dam, in order to supply water to the Kabul City. Following the deal, the prime minister of India called for a ceasefire in Afghanistan in order to end a spike in violence.
- **Sahtoot Dam** is a proposed dam in the Kabul river basin.

- Construction of the dam will provide drinking, irrigation and Environmental water in the Kabul province of Afghanistan.
- The dam will be completed at the cost of about US\$120 to \$305 million.
- This dam will be constructed by India.
- The design of the dam will be completed by Iranian firm. For this, the ministry of water and power have inked an agreement with the Poyab Company of Iran.
- The dam will be constructed in order to provide potable water to around 2 million residents of Kabul.
- It will provide waters to irrigate 4000 hectares of land in Charasiab and Khairabad districts of Kabul.
- Further, the dam will provide drinking water to a New City at Deh Sabz.
- Shahtoot dam is the second major dam which will be built by India in Afghanistan. India has also built the Friendship Dam or Salma dam which was inaugurated in June 2016.

#### **India-Afghanistan MoU:**

- In order to start the project, External affairs minister of India, S Jaishankar and the Afghan counterpart Haneef Atmar have signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) to build the Lalandar or Shatoot dam.

#### **Significance of the project:**

- The project is significant for both the countries. It shows the India's continuing commitment to support Afghanistan. The signing of the agreement becomes more significant in the backdrop of the troubled peace process with the Taliban and the violence that targets journalists, officials and civil society activists across the country.
- It also shows India's strong and long-term commitment of the socio-economic development in Afghanistan.

#### **India-Afghanistan Relation:**

- India and Afghanistan are close neighbours and strategic partners. Both the countries have committed for a region free from terrorism and extremism. India also supports the "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" peace process to negotiate with the Taliban.

#### **138. Index-Linked Insurance Policies:**

- Recently, a committee was set up by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) on the request of some insurers.
- The committee has recommended to introduce the index-linked insurance policies (ILIPs).

#### **Index-linked insurance policies (ILIPs):**

- The returns coming from the ILIPs will be linked to benchmark indices.
- ILIPs are the Insurance products linked with the benchmark indices. It includes 10-year Sovereign Bond Index, Sensex or Nifty etc.
- The ILIPs linked with the government bonds are less risky while those linked with the equity-based indices will go through the fluctuation in returns in accordance with the stock market performance.
- ILIPs are the alternative or complementary option to the current conventional guaranteed products such as annuities and savings products.
- It can also be used as the unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs) with respect to the volatile markets and stressed interest rates.
- The ILIPs can be regarded as a life insurance policy under Section 10(10D) and taxability of the Insurance Policy Act.

#### **Significance of the ILIPs:**

- The ILIPs offer a greater transparency. Index-linked products can fit in between the traditional products with less transparency and the Unit-linked products with higher transparency. In the ILIPs the investment risks will be completely borne by the policyholders as in the cases of Unit-Linked products.

**Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI):**

- IRDAI is an autonomous, statutory body. It regulates and promotes the insurance and re-insurance industries of India. The body was established under the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999. Its headquarters are in Hyderabad, Telangana. The headquarter moved from Delhi to Telangana in 2001. IRDAI comprises of 10-member namely the chairman, five full-time members and four part-time members who are appointed by the government of India. Presently, Dr. Subhash C. Khuntia is the chairman of the body.

**Unit Linked Insurance Plan (ULIP):**

- It is a product offered by insurance companies. The product provides the investors both the insurance and the investment under an integrated plan. The policy holders can customize the investment plan according to them. In India, the first ULIP was launched by the Unit Trust of India (UTI).

**139. Denmark to construct World's First Energy Island:**

- The Denmark has recently given its approval for the plan to construct the first energy field island of the world. The energy island will be constructed in the North Sea.
- The energy island will be used to produce and store enough green energy to meet the electricity demands of around 3 million European households.
- The artificial island in the North Sea will be equal to the size of the 18 football fields.
- The energy island will be linked to hundreds of offshore wind turbines so as to supply power to the households.
- It will also be used to supply green hydrogen to use in heavy transport, shipping, aviation and industry.
- The decision to build the energy island was taken in the backdrop of the European Union's plan to transform its electricity system to rely on the renewable energy and to increase its offshore wind capacity 25 time by 2050.

**Energy Island:**

- The energy island will be constructed in the North Sea. The project will cost around 210 billion Danish crowns. It will be constructed 80 kms off the west coast of Denmark. The energy island will be surrounded by the wind turbines and it will have an initial capacity of 3 gigawatts. The country has planned to make the energy island operational by 2033.

**Denmark's renewable energy policy:**

- Denmark has taken the decision to construct the energy island as a significant part of country's target to cut down the greenhouse gas emissions up to 70% by 2030 as compared to the levels in 1990. This target is the most ambitious targets of the country which is legally binding.

**North Sea:**

- It is a sea of the Atlantic Ocean. The sea is surrounded by the Great Britain comprising of England & Scotland besides, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The sea connects to the ocean by an English Channel to the south and Norwegian Sea to the north.

**140. Glacial Lake Outburst Flood:**

- Recently, a massive glacier burst occurred at Chamoli in Uttarakhand. The exact reason for the burst is not yet known. But the incident has brought the focus again to the dangers of climate change. This incident is also being seen as the Glacial Lake Outburst flood.

#### **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood:**

- A type of the outburst flood which occurs when the dam comprising a glacial lake gets fail.
- The failure of the dam can happen because of water pressure, erosion, earthquake, avalanche in rock or heavy snow or volcanic eruptions under the ice.
- It can also occur because of the huge displacement of water in a glacial lake because of collapse of any glacier into it.
- Other reasons for the glacial burst include the construction activities, anthropological activities and climate change.
- Subglacial Lake
- It is a lake found under a glacier. It is usually formed beneath an ice cap or ice sheet. It is formed at the boundary between ice and the underlying bedrock. At this boundary, the gravitational pressure decreases the pressure melting point of ice.

#### **Proglacial Lakes:**

- The Proglacial lakes are the lakes formed at the tips of the glacial as a result of the retreating glaciers. They are often bound by sediments and boulders In the Himalayas, majority of the glaciers are known to be receding. So, there are several proglacial lakes in the regions.

#### **Concerns:**

- Breach in the boundaries of the proglacial lakes can lead to large amounts of water to rush down to nearby streams and rivers. The water gains the momentum on its way by coming in contact with the sediments, rocks and other materials. This causes flooding downstream.

#### **Avalanche:**

- The falling masses of snow and ice for which the speed increases as they move down the slope is called as an Avalanche.

#### **141. Anganwadi beneficiaries dropped by 2 crores in 7 years:**

- As per data submitted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in the Parliament, the number of beneficiaries under the government's Anganwadi programme has declined in the number of by nearly two crores.

#### **Key Facts:**

- There were some 10.45 crore pregnant women, lactating mothers and children aged six months to six years who were enrolled at nearly 14 lakh Anganwadi centres during 2014-2015.
- This number has declined and dropped to 8.55 crore by March, 2020.
- The number of children has also declined from 8.49 crore in 2014-2015 to 6.86 crore in March 2020.
- The number of pregnant women and lactating mothers declined from 1.95 crore in 2014-15 to 1.68 crore in March 2020.
- The reason for this decline was not highlighted by the government.
- Why number of enrolled children has declined?
- Though the actual reasons for the declines in the number of children is unknown, some of the possible reasons for the decline could be:
  1. Those children who were unable to submit Aadhaar might have been knocked out as 'fake'.
  2. The genuine fakes could have been identified with the help of Aadhaar.
  3. Census 2011 shows that the absolute population in the younger age groups was declining in States with a low fertility rate. So, the number might have declined because of changing demographics.

**Anganwadi:**

- It is a kind of rural child care centre in India. These centres were started by the Indian government in the year 1975.
- The centres were established under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program to combat the child hunger and malnutrition.

**Integrated Child Development Scheme:**

- This scheme was launched in the year 1975. Though in 1978, Morarji Desai government had discontinued it but in the Tenth Five Year Plan it was relaunched.
- The scheme comprises of a package of six services which are administered at various Anganwadi centres. The services include the immunisation, supplementary nutrition, pre-school non-formal education, health check-up, health education, and referral services.

**142. Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization Scheme:**

- In the Union Budget 2021, Rs. 1050 crore budget has been allocated for Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) for the financial year 2021-2022.

**About SMAM Scheme:**

- The SMAM scheme was launched in the year 2014-15.
- The scheme was launched by the government of India with the aim of 'reaching the unreached'.
- The scheme seeks to reach to the unreached by making the farm machines accessible and affordable for the small and marginal farmers (SMFs).
- It makes the machines accessible to the SMFs by,
- Establishing the Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs),
- Creating Hubs for hi-tech & high value farm equipment and
- Establishing the Farm Machinery Banks.
- Under the scheme, the distribution of various subsidized agricultural equipment and machines are done to individual farmer.

**Why this scheme was launched?**

- The Agricultural mechanization is crucial for the agriculture sector because this helps in improving the efficiency and effectivity of the inputs that are used in the crop production. It also helps in increasing the productivity of crops. Thus, this scheme was launched with the objective of increasing the efficiency, effectivity and productivity of the crops.

**Components of the scheme:**

- The scheme makes the SMFs to connect with the hiring institutes that enables the SMFs to hire the machines because, purchasing the farm machines for SMFs is not financially feasible.
- It also raises awareness among the stakeholders by demonstrating the machine operations and skill development of farmers and youth.
- Further, the performance testing and certification of machines at the designated testing centres ensures the farm machinery effectively and efficiently.

**Achievements under the scheme:**

- Ever since the scheme was launched in 2014, Rs.4556.93 crores of funds have been released under the scheme for the States during the financial year 2014-2015 to 2020-2021. Under the scheme, around 13 lakh agricultural machines have been distributed so far.
- Also, 27.5 thousand Custom Hiring Institutions have been established as of now. The programs and schemes on farm mechanization have also increased the availability of the farm power per unit area. This power is used to perform various agricultural operations.

**143. World Sustainable Development Summit 2021:**

- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, will inaugurate the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021 on 10th of February through video conferencing.
- The World sustainable development summit will be organised under the theme- 'Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All'.

#### Key Facts:

- The year will mark the 20th edition of summit.
- It will be held in between 10th to 12th February 2021.
- This summit is organised by the Energy and Resources Institute's (TERI).
- The summit will be organised with the aim to bring together a wide number of governments, academicians, business leaders, climate scientists, civil society and youth to fight against climate change.
- The summit will be held the discussions on the topics ranging from the Climate finance, circular economy, Energy & industry transition, adaptation & resilience, nature-based solutions, clean oceans and air pollution.
- The key partners of the summit are Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change and the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- The summit will be attended by the Speaker of the People's Majlis of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea James Marape, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Amina J. Mohammed, President of Guyana Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and Union Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar.

#### World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS):

- It is the annual flagship event that is organised by the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). The summit is organised with the aim of providing the long-term solutions to benefit the global community.
- It seeks to benefit by assembling various stakeholders on a single platform to initiate a step for the constructive action to combat the issues of the future of humanity. The summit is organised in accordance with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

#### Sustainable Development Summit in Delhi:

- Energy and Resources Institute annually organises the Sustainable Development Summit in Delhi since 2001. It is an international platform that facilitate the exchange of knowledge covering the aspects of sustainable development.

#### 144. FSSAI Caps Trans Fats in Foods:

- Recently, rules have been amended by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to put cap on trans fatty acids (TFAs) in the food products. This decision was taken one week after it amended the norms for oils and fats.

#### Key Facts:

- Under the new regulations, in the food products which comprises of the edible oils and fats as an ingredient the total amount of the industrial trans fats should not exceed 2% of the total oils or fats present in the product.
- This regulation will be applicable from January 1, 2022.
- Background
- FSSAI, in December 2020, had capped the amount of the TFAs in oils and fats to 3% that needed to be done by 2021. It has also capped it to 2% by 2022 from the present level of 5%.

#### What is Trans-fat?

- The acids which are created in an industrial process by adding hydrogen to the liquid vegetable oils in order to make them more solid is called the Trans-fat. Addition of the Trans-fat in to the

fat increases the shelf life of food items. They are highly used as adulterant as they are very cheap. Trans-fats are present in baked, fried and processed foods. It is also present in adulterated ghee that becomes solid at room temperature. Such fats are considered as the most harmful form of fats since they clog the arteries. Its intake can cause the hypertension, heart attacks and several other cardiovascular diseases.

**WHO data on Trans-fat:**

- World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that, around 5.4 lakh deaths happen each year globally as a result of the intake of the industrially produced trans fatty acids. The WHO aims to eliminate the industrially-produced trans fatty acids from the food supply by 2023.

**Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):**

- It is an autonomous body that works under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. It was established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The body is responsible for protecting and promoting the public health by the regulation and supervision of food safety.
- It is headed by a non-executive Chairperson. The chairperson is appointed by the Central Government.

**145. Judicial Activism:**

- NITI Aayog orders to study the ‘Economic impact of Judicial Decisions’:
- The NITI Aayog has ordered the Jaipur-based research organisation Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International to study the “economic impact” of judgments delivered by Supreme Court (SC), high courts (HCs), and quasi-judicial bodies like the National Green Tribunal (NGT). It has also asked to study the “judicial activism” of such courts and tribunals.

**Key Facts:**

- The Judicial decisions have far-reaching economic impacts.
- These impacts are usually not taken into account at the time of decision making.
- This study will be completely funded by the NITI Aayog.
- The study will be conducted with the aim of “sensitising the judiciary on the economic impact of their decisions”.
- The findings from the study will be used as the “training input for judges of the SC, HCs, commercial courts and NGT”.
- The total cost of the project initially was Rs 24.8 lakh. However, it is likely to go higher.

**CUTS role:**

- CUTS International will study the economic impact of five different decisions by the SC and the NGT.
- The five judgements include:
- Economic impact of the ban imposed by the SC in March 2019 on construction of a greenfield airport at Mopa, Goa.
- SC’s February 2018 ban on iron ore mining in Goa.
- NGT ban on sand mining in the Yamuna river in Gautam Buddha Nagar in the year 2013.
- SC ban on construction of buildings in Delhi and National Capital Region
- SC’s decision to reject the opening of Vedanta’s Sterlite copper plant.

**Purpose of the study:**

- The study will provide an objective cost-benefit analysis of the economic impact of the decisions made by the judiciary.
- The study is also a part of the umbrella project of the NITI Aayog under which the think tank wants to establish a judicial performance index. This index will be used to measure the performance of judges at district courts and subordinate levels.



**146. Samagra Shiksha to be renamed:**

- The Ministry of Education has decided that the Schools and hostels under the Samagra Shiksha scheme will now be renamed after Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

**Key Facts:**

- The renaming of the scheme will help to create awareness regarding the facility of these residential schools and hostels in difficult areas.
- It will also inspire these schools to achieve the high standards of quality education.

**Samagra Shiksha Scheme:**

- It is an integrated scheme for school education.
- The scheme extends from the pre-school to class XII.
- It ensures the inclusive and equitable quality education for all at all levels of school education.
- The scheme was launched after subsuming three schemes namely, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Teacher Education (TE), the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA).
- Under the scheme, the school education is treated holistically as a continuum from Pre-school to Class 12.
- The scheme emphasizes on improving the quality of school education by focusing on two T's that is Teacher and Technology.
- Further, the Ministry of Education under the scheme provides the financial assistance to states and union territories to open and run the residential schools and hostels in hilly terrain.
- It also provides financial assistance for opening schools and residential in small and less populated areas for children who are in need of shelter and care.

**Residential facilities:**

- The residential facilities are provided under the scheme to the migrant and child labour rescued children. It is also provided to the children who got separated from their families and those who are without adult protection. So far, a total of 1,063 residential facilities including the 383 residential schools and 680 hostels have been sanctioned to states and union territories under the scheme.

**Skill Training:**

- Under the scheme, specific skill training, medical care, physical self-defence, community participation and monthly stipend are also provided to children.

**147. International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation:**

- The "International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation" was observed on 6 February. This year the day was observed under the theme – "No Time for Global Inaction, Unite, Fund, and Act to End Female Genital Mutilation."

**Key facts:**

- The day is observed every year to spread the awareness and put more efforts to eradicate the Female Genital Mutilation.
- The day was first introduced in the year 2003 by the United Nations.
- This day is observed to amplify the ways and attempts taken to stop the practice of Genital Mutilation.
- This day encourages the civil society, government and several organizations to raise awareness and take actions against Female Genital Mutilation.
- The programme to raise awareness on this practice is undertaken by the UNFPA-UNICEF.

**What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?**

- This practice is forced on girls aged 4 to 14 years as a ritual. In this practice, external female genitalia are removed partially or completely. This practice is considered to be the violation of

human right since it can cause physical damage, psychological trauma and irreversible problems to the girls. This practice has been into force for over a thousand years.

- The government aims to completely eradication this practice by 2030. Thus, the movement began to protect girls and women from violence and to protect their physical health. The data from the world health organisation (WHO) reveals that about 120 to 140 million women have been subject to FGM in three years. Presently, at least 3 million girls are at risk of FGM every year.

#### **Background:**

- Zero Tolerance towards the Female Genital Mutilation was first declared by the First Lady of Nigeria and spokesperson for the Campaign Against Female Genital Mutilation, Stella Obasanjo, in the year 2003.
- In that year, a conference was held by the “Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)”. Following the conference, the United Nations adopted this day as an international awareness day.

#### **148. NCAER’s Business Confidence Index:**

- The Business Confidence Index (BCI) was recently published by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

#### **Highlights:**

- The index has rose 29.6 per cent between second and third quarter of the financial year 2020-2021.
- It has rose in the backdrop of the COVID-19 vaccination drive in several countries including India.
- The respondents also expects that the ‘overall economic conditions will improve in the next six months.
- They expect that it will be increased by 4.8 percentage points in the quarter three of the financial year 2020-2021. That is, from 29.8 per cent in the year quarter two of 2020-2021 34.6 per cent in Q3.
- They also expect that the ‘financial position of firms will improve in the next six months’. There is an expectation that it will be increased by 3.1 percentage points in the quarter 3 of 2020-2021.

#### **About BES findings:**

- The BES findings are based on the responses of 500 firms. The reports are based on the 115th round of BES which was carried out in December 2020. The findings further highlight that,
- Though covid-19 vaccine were rolled out in Europe and North America. But it was accompanied by the discovery of new mutations of the coronavirus.
- In Indian, approval of Covishield and Covaxin vaccines for restricted use was given on January 3, 2021.
- Indian economy is following the recovery path and will show a positive growth in the quarter 3.
- In India, the business sentiments have also shown the V-shaped pattern of recovery.
- The report further states that, the fiscal stimulus under Aatmanirbhar 2.0 and 3.0 schemes will accelerate the public investment. However, the private investment will remain sluggish because of low-capacity utilisation.

#### **National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER):**

- NCAER is a New Delhi based non-profit economic think tank. The NCAER do research in the field of economics. It was established in the year 1956. Currently, Nandan Nilekani is president of the governing body. The director general of the think tank is Dr Shekhar Shah.

**149. Chamoli tragedy: Glacial Breach Triggered Floods:**

- An avalanche and flash floods triggered in Alaknanda river in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand following a glacial breach.

**Key Facts:**

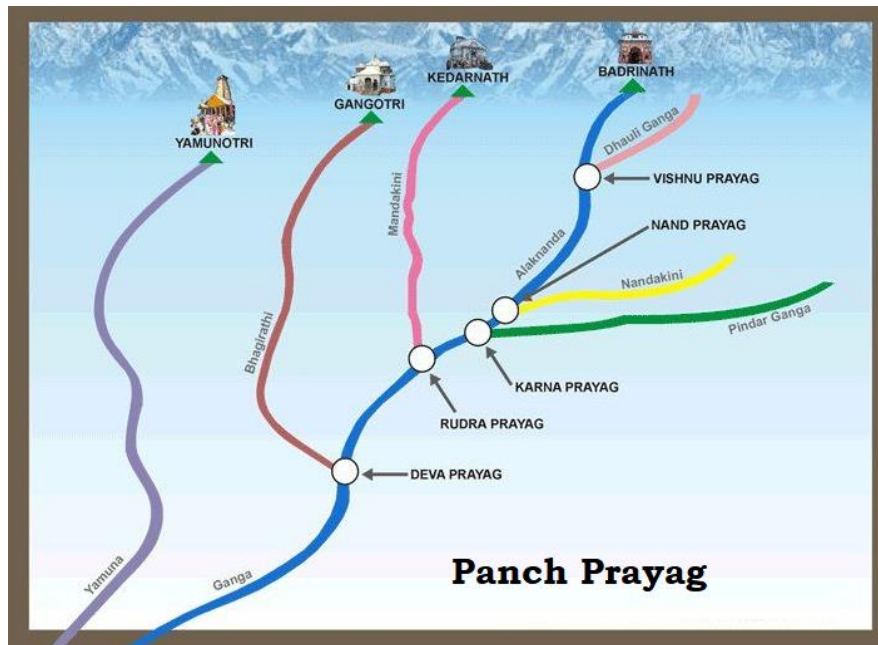
- Snow and Avalanche Study Establishment (SASE) is investigating the matter.
- SASE works under the nodal head Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)
- Exact reason for the flooding is not yet known.
- Experts points that, this avalanche was caused probably due to glacial breach. The glacial breach also breached a lake in the Raini village in Chamoli district.
- The raini village is situated on the boundary of Nanda Devi biosphere reserve.
- The breach has resulted into increase in water levels in the Dhauliganga river and the Rishiganga, one of the tributaries of Dhauliganga river.
- The avalanche has destroyed the Rishi Ganga hydel plant on the Rishiganga river.

**Alaknanda River:**

- It is a Himalayan river in Uttarakhand.
- It is one of the two headstreams of River Ganga. The other is the Bhagirathi.
- River Alaknanda is also called as the source stream of the Ganges because of its greater length and discharge.
- But in Hindu mythology and culture, Bhagirathi is called as the source stream of Ganga.
- There are five main tributaries of Alaknanda in order namely the River Dhauliganga, River Nandakini, River Pindar, River Mandakini and River Bhagirathi. All of them rise in the northern mountainous regions of Uttarakhand.
- It is one of the best river for river rafting in the world because of its high rafting grade.

**Holy confluence of rivers:**

- At Vishnuprayag, Dhauliganga River meets Alaknanda River.
- At Nandaprayag, Nandakini River meets Alaknanda.
- At Karnaprayag, Pindar River meets Alaknanda.
- At Rudraprayag, Mandakini River meets Alaknanda.
- At Devprayag, Bhagirathi River meets Alaknanda and it officially becomes River Ganges.
- Dhauliganga
- It is among the six source streams of the River Ganges river. The river meets the river Alaknanda at Vishnuprayag in Joshimath.



#### 150. Ladakh to get India's first Geothermal Power Project:

- The first geothermal power project of India will be established at Puga village of eastern Ladakh.
- This decision was taken because, Puga village was identified as the hotspot of geothermal energy by the scientists.
- The project will be completed in four phases.
- A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish and implement the first phase was signed on 6th February, 2021 between ONGC Energy; LAHDC, Leh and the Power Department of UT Ladakh
- This geothermal project is known as Geothermal Field Development Project.
- It will be commission by the end of 2022.

#### First phase of project:

- The first phase of the project will result into the generation of one megawatt (MW) power.
- In the first phase, the pilot project will be implemented by the ONGC-OEC.
- ONGC-OEC will explore within the depth of 500 metres.
- Under the first phase, it was planned that 24 hours free power supply would be given to 10 neighbouring villages which are not connected with the northern grid to get the power.

#### Second Phase of the project:

- In the second phase, deeper and lateral exploration of geothermal reservoirs will be done by drilling the optimal number of wells.
- Under this phase, higher capacity demo plant will also be set up in Ladakh.
- This phase of the project will be the Research and Development stage or demonstration of the project.
- Third phase of the project
- Under the third phase, joint ventures and commercial projects will be promoted.

#### Puga Village:

- In the Puga Village, scientists have discovered a potential of more than 100 mw of geothermal energies. It lies in the south-eastern part of Ladakh. The village is a part of the Himalayan geothermal belt. The region has shown the evidence of geothermal activity in various form

including the mud pools, hot springs, sulphur deposits and borax deposits. The talk of the potential geothermal project in the Puja Village has been into news since 2008. The region has the potential to produce about 40% of the energy requirements.

#### **151. Srivilliputhur–Megamalai–5th Tiger Reserve in TN:**

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has approved the creation of the fifth tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu.
- The tiger reserve will surround the Meghamalai and the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuaries within it.
- The approval was given in the backdrop of the demand by the environmental activists.
- The activists were demanding for the creation of a tiger reserve linking the two sanctuaries in the adjoining areas of Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala.
- They also demand to connect the tiger reserve with the Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuary and the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve.
- The environmentalists seek to make a contiguous corridor for the tigers to move.
- The tiger reserve will spread to 1.48 lakh hectares of land comprising of the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary, Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary and Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The establishment of the tiger reserve will help in the protection of the wildlife and it will also rejuvenation the Vaigai river by protecting the origins of the river in the tiger reserve.

#### **Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary:**

- It is also known as the Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary (GSWS). The sanctuary was established in the year 1988 with the objective of protecting the Near threatened grizzled giant squirrel. It is bordered by the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the southwest.
- The sanctuary is also called as one of the best-preserved forests lying south of the Palghat Gap.

#### **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):**

- It was established in December 2005. The authority was set up on the recommendations of Tiger Task Force constituted by the Prime Minister of India with the objective of protecting the tigers.
- It was established under section 38 L (1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The authority gets the power from section 38 O (1) of the act of 1972.

#### **152. First women team of CoBRA commando unit:**

- Recently, a maiden contingent of 34 CRPF women personnel were inducted into the specialized jungle warfare commando force called CoBRA. The contingent would now be deployed in the anti-naxal operations grid of India.

#### **Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA):**

- CoBRA is a special operation unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) of India.
- The operation unit is skilled in the guerrilla tactics and jungle warfare.
- It established in the year 2009 to counter the Naxalite problem.
- It is deployed to tackle the insurgent groups who are engaged in asymmetrical warfare.
- Currently, there are ten battalions of CoBRA.
- The battalions are one of the most experienced and successful law enforcement units.
- Till now, the battalions were an all-male unit. First time, a contingent of women personnel has been inducted into it.
- The commandos of the CoBRA are required to be mentally and physically tough. They are mostly deployed in the Maoist violence-affected states of the country. They are also deployed for the insurgency operations.

#### **First Women CoBRA Unit:**

- The induction of the first women CoBRA Unit was marked by a ceremony that was held in Kadarpur village. In the ceremony, the chosen women personnel performed the combat drills. A member of 34 CRPF women personnel contingent have been selected from 6 all-women battalions of CRPF. They will now undergo pre-induction training for 3 months. After that, they will be deployed with the units in Naxal violence-affected districts in the state of Chhattisgarh.

#### **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF):**

- It is largest Central Armed Police Force in India. The force works under Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- It assists the State or Union Territories in the police operations to maintain the law & order and counter insurgency. It was established as the Crown Representative's Police in July 1939. After Indian Independence, it was renamed as CRPF in accordance with the CRPF Act.

#### **153. China to set up Public Platform to track Polluters:**

- The Environment Ministry of China recently announced to set up a new Public Information Platform that will allow the public to track emissions from the polluting enterprises. The platform will come into effect on March 1, 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

- The Public Information Platform will help the authorities to prosecute the public who will break the rules.
- It will also prosecute the public in case they try to evade supervision.
- Under the plan, around 2.36 million companies, industrial facilities and institutions in the nation will require to obtain permits so as to emit pollutants including the Sulphur dioxide or wastewater.

#### **Why this platform has been launched?**

- China in the past has struggled often to collect the information that are required to make the system work. It has also faced obstruction and data fraud from many of the polluting firms. Thus, this platform will be launched in order to get the information about the polluting firms and in turn will help in penalize them with the motive of reducing the emission of pollutants.

#### **How the new system will help?**

- The new information platform will permit the authorities and members of the public to monitor the real-time emission levels. It will also allow to check the historical data. This in turn will help in determining whether rules are being breached.
- After the authorities are done with the monitoring, they will take action against firms that causes pollution without authorisation. Further, penalties will be issued on daily basis for the illegal behaviour such as discharge of pollution without permits.

#### **China's Environmental Policy:**

- China's Environmental Policy is highly criticized. The critics often highlights the government's lack of willingness to protect the environment as a common problem.
- China mainly focuses on the economic growth that ultimately overrides the environmental concerns. If the recent measure to penalize the polluters are applied strictly it might dismantle the local economy that rely highly on the heavy industry.

#### **154. World's Largest Radio Telescope- Square Kilometre Array:**

- The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Council recently held its meeting. During the meeting, the council has approved the setting up of the world's largest radio telescope.

#### **About SKAO:**

- The Square Kilometre Array Observatory is a new intergovernmental organisation.
- It is dedicated to the radio astronomy.

- It is headquartered in the United Kingdom.
- Currently, the Square Kilometre Array Observatory comprises of the organisations from the ten countries namely, Canada, China, Australia, India, New Zealand, Italy, Sweden, South Africa, United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

#### **About Radio telescopes:**

- The Radio Telescopes can be used to detect the invisible gas and it has the potential to reveal areas of space that might have covered by the cosmic dust.
- It is different than the conventional optical telescopes in this regard.
- The Square Kilometre Array is the largest radio telescope across the world.
- The telescope will be set up in Africa and Australia.
- The setting up of the telescope will take a decade to complete.
- The operation, maintenance and construction of the telescope will be overseen by SKAO.
- Astronomers uses the radio telescopes ever since the discovery of the radio signals in the 1930s. They used it to detect the radio waves emitting from different objects in the universe. However, the field of radio astronomy got evolved after the World War II.

#### **Significance of the telescope:**

- The telescope will help the astronomers to know details regarding how the universe began to grow, how & when stars were born. It would also help in knowing the life-cycle of a galaxy. It will make exploring whether there is any technologically-active civilizations anywhere else in the galaxy easier for the astronomers.
- It would also help in understanding from where the gravitational waves come. Further, the As NASA highlighted that this telescope will boost the scientific goals by measuring the neutral hydrogen in the cosmic time. It would also help in accurately timing the signals from pulsars from the Milky Way. Lastly, it would help to detect many galaxies.

#### **155. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:**

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has informed to the parliament that the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana which is central government's maternity benefit scheme has crossed 1.75 crore eligible women till the financial year 2020.
- The central government initial estimate states that the government had the aim of covering 51.60 lakh women per year under the scheme.
- As per the written reply to the Parliament, sum total of ₹5,931.95 crore has been paid to the 1.75 crore eligible beneficiaries in the financial year 2018 to 2020.
- In the fiscal year 2020-2021, ₹2,063.70 crore was paid to 65.12 lakh eligible beneficiaries.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):**

- PMMVY scheme was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- The scheme comprises of the provision of assisting the pregnant women and lactating mothers with Rs 5,000 on the birth of their first child.
- This amount is paid in three instalments after certain conditions are fulfilled.
- What are the conditions for beneficiaries?
- The PMMVY scheme targets only those women who are delivering their first child.
- Further, the pregnant women are required to do the registration early.
- The women should have at least one ante-natal check-up and registration of child birth.
- The maternity benefits are not provided to women in the regular employment with the Central Government or State Government.
- Women employed in any Public Sector Undertaking or who are receiving similar benefits under any law are not eligible for the maternity benefits.
- Objectives of the scheme

- The scheme was launched with the objective to provide the partial compensation for the wage loss so that the woman can take proper rest before and after delivery of the first living child and to provide the cash incentives in order to improve the health seeking behaviour and raise awareness regarding the health benefits among the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.

#### 156. First Thunderstorm Research Testbed of India:

- India's first thunderstorm research test-bed will be established in Balasore, Odisha.

##### Objective of test-bed:

- The Thunderstorm Research Testbed is being established with the objective to minimize the human fatalities and loss of property because of the lightning strikes.

##### Highlights:

- This announcement was made by the Director-General of India Meteorological Department, Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.
- He also announced that a Monsoon Testbed will also be set up near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. The monsoon testbed would also be first-of-its-kind. Both of these projects are in the planning stage.

##### Thunderstorm testbed:

- The Thunderstorm testbed will be established in a collaboration among the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Ministry of Earth Sciences, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- All of these organisations have established their units in Balasore.
- The observatories will be set up to cater to the adjoining areas.
- The testbed would be conducting the studies on thunderstorms.
- The testbed will comprise of several observational networks, radar, auto-station, a full-fledged observatory, a wind profiler and a microwave radiometer.

##### What is the need of testbed?

- Many lives are lost in Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand because of lightning strikes during the months of April to June every year. On an average, more than 350 people are killed in Odisha because of lightning strikes.
- As per a report, in the span of nine years (till 2020), 3218 people have died due to lightning. Thus, there is a need to set up the testbed to predict the thunderstorm and save life.

##### India Meteorological Department (IMD):

- IMD was established in the year 1875. It is an agency which is responsible for weather forecasting, meteorological observations, and seismology. The agency works under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- The headquarter of IMD is in Delhi.

#### 157. 26 more Green Zone sites for Drones approved:

- The central government has recently given the approval for 26 more green zone site for drones.
- The approval was given in the light of facilitating the operations by No-Permission-No-Take-off (NPNT) compliant drones.
- The approval was given by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Defence.
- The ministry has also given its nod for six green zone sites earlier.
- This order was issued by Amber Dubey who is the Joint Secretary of Ministry of civil aviation.
- These approved sites will be enabled on the Digital Sky Platform now.
- After that, all Unique Identification Number holders would be given instant flight permissions online.



**What is NPNT?**

- NPNT is an automated green signal. Without this green signal, drones are not authorised to fly. To handle such automatic flight authorisation, the Digital Sky is currently being developed.

**What are those Green Zones?**

- In the Green Zones for which nod was given-
- Uttar Pradesh has the maximum number of eight
- Six sites were approved in Jharkhand
- Four in Chhattisgarh
- Two in Telangana
- One in each of Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Gujarat; Odisha, Mizoram and Tamil Nadu.
- RPAS operators or remote pilots will require to file a flight plan in order to get the flying permission. To flying in the 'green-zones', intimation of the time and location of the flights will be required through the portal or the app. To fly in the yellow zone, permissions will be required but, no flights will be allowed to fly in the 'red zones'

**What are Drones?**

- Drones are also called as the Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems. These are a technology platform having a wide-ranging application. India had announced the release of its Civil Aviation Regulations in order to provide safe flying environment to the RPAS in August 2018.
- Drones can be proved beneficial for farmers and infrastructure entities such as roads, railways, ports, factories and mines. It will also benefit the sectors such as photography, insurance and entertainment.

**158. Zomato partnership under the PM SVANidhi:**

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MOHUA) and Zomato have signed a MoU under the Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atmanibhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme.

**Key Facts:**

- Under the MoU, it was decided to onboard the street food vendors on the food-tech platform of Zomato.
- This would help the street food vendors to access online the thousands of consumers.
- It will also help these vendors to grow their businesses.
- What is the plan?
- As per the MoU, the MoHUA and Zomato will be running a pilot program initially by on-boarding 300 vendors.
- These vendors will be selected from across six cities namely, Patna, Bhopal, Nagpur, Ludhiana, Vadodara and Raipur.
- The street vendors will be empowered with the PAN and FSSAI
- They will also be given training on technology & partner app usage, menu digitization % pricing and hygiene & packaging.
- Background
- On October 5, 2020 the MoHUA also signed a MoU with the Swiggy to empower Street Food Vendors with digital technology. It was also signed with the objective of facilitating the greater income earning opportunities to the street-vendors through these food-tech platforms.

**PMSVANidhi se Samridhhi Application:**

- The ministry also launched the Mobile Application called "PMSVANidhi se Samridhhi". The application will do the Socio-economic profiling of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families and help them to link with the Central Government Schemes. The application will assist city officials to collect the door-to-door data.

**PM SVANidhi Scheme:**

- This scheme was launched on June 01, 2020. It was launched in order to provide the affordable working capital loan to street vendors. The scheme was launched to help vendors to resume their livelihoods that was affected due to Covid-19 lockdown. It seeks to benefit over 50 lakh Street Vendors. The scheme provides the vendors a collateral free loan of up to Rs. 10,000, of one year.

#### **159. Stardust 1.0- First rocket that runs on Biofuel:**

- Recently, the launch vehicle Stardust 1.0 was launched from a former military base in US called Loring Commerce Centre.
- The launch of the vehicle is significant in the light that this is the 1st commercial space launch that is powered by biofuel.
- Launching the Stardust 1.0 is also significant for Maine because, it is the first commercial rocket launch for the state.

#### **About Stardust 1.0:**

- The launch vehicle Stardust 1.0 is suitable for student and budget payloads.
- It is 20 feet in height and approximately 250 kg in weight.
- The launch vehicle can carry a maximum payload mass of 8 kg.
- In its first launch, the rocket carried three payloads including,
- A metal alloy which is designed to lessen vibrations,
- A CubeSat prototype which was built by high school students, and
- A CubeSat that was procured from software company Rocket Insights.
- The launch vehicle will be used to launch the small satellites called CubeSats into space. The satellite will be launched in less toxic and relatively cheaper manner as opposed to the traditional rocket fuel
- The Stardust rocket launch vehicle has been manufactured by bluShift.

#### **BluShift Company:**

- It is an aerospace company based in Maine, US. This company is involved in developing the rockets powered by bio-derived fuels.
- Blushift was manufacturing the Stardust 1.0 launch vehicle since 2014.
- The company is also developing other rockets such as Stardust Gen. 2, Starless Rouge, and Red Dwarf.

#### **Biofuel:**

- Fuel produced through the contemporary processes from biomass which can directly be converted into liquid fuels. It is not produced by the usual slow geological processes of formation of fossil fuels like oil.

#### **Maine State:**

- The state is situated in the New England region of North-eastern United States (US) having its capital city Augusta. It is bordered by New Hampshire in the west, Atlantic Ocean in the southeast and Canadian provinces of New Brunswick and Quebec respectively in the northeast and northwest. The state is the 12th-smallest by area. The most populous city of the state is Portland.

#### **160. EIU Democracy Index 2020:**

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) recently released its report titled “Democracy in sickness and in health?” and also published the Democracy Index 2020.

#### **Key Findings:**

- The Democracy Index report 2020 by the covers the 167 countries.

- It has classified the economies in categories such as flawed democracies, full democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes.
- The report highlights that, 23 countries are full democracies, 52 are flawed democracies, 35 countries are hybrid regimes while 57 countries are authoritarian regimes out of total 167 countries.
- In the Democracy Index, Norway has topped.
- The 2nd 3rd 4th and the 5th ranks have been secured by Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Canada respectively in the index.
- India's rank has degraded by two places from the previous year ranking. This year India has been ranked at 53rd place.
- Sri Lanka was placed at 68th position. It is also classified as a flawed democracy.
- Pakistan was ranked at 105th position. It has been classified as a 'hybrid regime'.
- Other Hybrid regime countries include Bangladesh which has been ranked at 76th position and Bhutan which has been ranked at 84th
- Afghanistan has been ranked at 139th position and it has been classified as an 'authoritarian regime'.

#### **Why India's rank has declined?**

- The report highlights that, multiple instances of "crackdowns" on civil liberties and the "democratic backsliding" by authorities has degraded the India's ranking. However, India was ranked higher than most of its neighbouring nations. In the index, India has been classified as a 'flawed democracy'. The other flawed democracies include U.S., France, Brazil and Belgium.

#### **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)**

- The EIU has been headquartered in London, United Kingdom. It is the leading resource that provides the forecasting and advisory services through the economic and business research across the world.

#### **161. Lithium deposits found in Karnataka:**

- The Central Government has confirmed in a written reply to Lok Sabha about the presence of 1600 tonnes of lithium deposits in Mandya district of Karnataka. However, the significance and the quantity of the lithium in the region can only be confirmed after exploring the entire area.
- Further, commercial exploitation for the deposits can start only after the technical, social and economic feasibility studies are done.

#### **Highlights:**

- The survey was done on the surface and limited subsurface in the pegmatites of Marlagalla – Allapatna area.
- Survey was done by the Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD).
- AMD is a constituent unit under the Department of Atomic Energy.

#### **About Lithium:**

- Lithium is a significant element for new technologies.
- It is useful in ceramics, telecommunication, glass and aerospace industries.
- Other known uses of lithium are in optical modulators for mobile phones, lithium-ion batteries, high energy additives to rocket propellants and lubricating grease.
- It is also used as a converter to tritium and used as a raw material in fusion reaction.
- Thus, as the demand for lithium-ion batteries has increased, the requirement of lithium has also increased over time.
- The demand has also increased in the light of Indian government's call of becoming one of the largest electric vehicle market in the world.

- Because of increasing demand, India is spending a considerable amount on Lithium import. The huge import of lithium has increased the import bill of Lithium by three-fold in between 2017 to 2020.
- India is relying heavily Japan, China, and Taiwan for its electric battery supply and other lithium-based equipment.
- Thus, the presence of lithium on Indian soil becomes important to reduce the import dependency and for the proper functioning of the India's first lithium plant.

#### **India's first Lithium plant:**

- The first Lithium plant of India has been set up at Gujarat in the year 2021. This refinery will be set up with the help of investment of Rs 1000 crore made by the Manikaran Power Limited. This refinery will make use of Lithium ore to produce the base battery material and make Gujarat a hub for Lithium-ion batteries.

#### **India-Argentina deals on Lithium:**

- Indian firm, Khanij Bidesh India Limited and Argentinian firm had signed an agreement in the year 2020 to jointly prospect the lithium in the South American nation. The South American nation has 17 million tonnes of lithium metal reserves.

#### **162. RBI makes Risk-Based Internal Audit Mandatory:**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on has introduced a risk-based internal audit (RBIA) system. It has made it mandatory for select non-banking financial companies and urban co-operative banks (UCBs).

#### **What has changed now?**

- As per the norms, all the deposit-taking non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with the asset size of Rs 5,000 crore will have to implement this system.
- Also, the UCBs having asset size of Rs 500 crore will have to implement the system.
- The system is required to be implemented by March 31, 2022.
- The performance of the RBIA system will be looked by the board of the entity or its audit committee. The board of the entity is already responsible to look after the internal audit function of the organisation.

#### **What is the need of new system?**

- Though NBFCs and UCBs already have internal audit systems. But it usually focuses to test the transaction, to check the accuracy & reliability of accounting records and to make financial reports etc. but, the risk-based internal audit system will enhance the efficacy of internal audit systems and processes which are followed by both the entities.
- Further, these entities have grown in size over time and has become systemically important. So, the different audit systems for lending entities were creating inconsistencies, risks and gaps. Thus, the need of new system felt.

#### **What is RBIA System?**

- It is an audit methodology that links the overall risk management framework of an organisation. It also provides an assurance to the board of directors and the senior management regarding the quality and effectiveness of risk management, internal controls and systems & processes related to the governance.
- RBI had also introduced the RBIA system for the scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) in the year 2002.

#### **How the RBIA system will work?**

- RBIA system will evaluate the internal risk management systems and control procedures in various aspects of operations in the NBFs and UCBs. It will also test the transaction in order to anticipate risks and mitigate it.

### 163. Kaliveli Wetlands:

- Recently, the Villupuram district administration in Tamil Nadu has issued the first declaration under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The declaration was issued in a bid to declare Kaliveli wetlands as a bird sanctuary.

#### Key Facts:

- This decision is highly appreciated by the Forest Department officials and conservationists since it will boost their efforts to protect the wetland which is home for diverse flora and fauna.
- The first declaration was issued under the Section 18 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

#### The Kaliveli wetlands:

- The Kaliveli Wetlands is the second-largest brackish water lake in South India. The first largest is the Pulicat lake.
- The wetland is ecologically important.
- It is located near to the Marakkanam on the East Coast Road of the Kaliveli Lake.
- The wetland is spread over an area of 670 sq.km.
- The Kaliveli lake is connected to the Bay of Bengal through the Uppukalli Creek and the Edayanthittu sanctuary.
- Southern part of the wetland was declared a reserved land in the year 2001.

#### Why it is being converted to bird sanctuary?

- As per the 2004 report by the Indian Bird Conservation Network and Bird Life International, the Kaliveli wetlands supports around 20,000 birds every year. The lake also works as a feeding ground for long-distance migrants who migrates from the cold subarctic Central Asia and Siberia. Some of the migratory birds include Black-tailed Godwits, White Stork, Eurasian Curlew, Ruff and Dublin. This is why, there is a demand to covert the wetlands into a bird sanctuary.

#### Significance:

- The declaration will ensure that no construction take place in the surroundings.
- The declaration will help in maintaining the natural biosphere and biodiversity of the area.
- It will also create jobs for the local residents through eco-tourism.
- Further, the wetlands have large area that will help in recharging the ground water table.

#### What are the Challenges?

- Creation of check-dam downstream could impact the water levels and salinity in the wetlands. Further, the Creation of the check-dam will have negative impact on the plan of creating a fishing harbour in the estuary of the lagoon system.

### 164. GOBARDHAN Scheme:

- Recently, an application has been launched for monitoring the progress of GOBARDHAN activities in India.

#### Key Points:

- It is an important component of Swachh Bharat Mission Phase-2.
- The mission is used for the organic solid waste management.
- Open Defecation Free Plus goal that has been outlined in the Phase 2 of Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) is dependent on the performance of Gobardhan scheme.
- The initiative will address the solid waste management challenge and also increase the livelihood opportunities.
- Further, it seeks to increase the household earnings of farmers and people living in rural areas.

- This initiative is aimed at supporting the villages effectively to manage the cattle dung and other organic waste.

**GOBARDHAN Scheme:**

- This scheme was launched by the Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation GOBAR-DHAN scheme stands for Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources – DHAN scheme.
- This scheme is the part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). The scheme has its focus on keeping the villages clean, increasing the income of rural households. It also seeks to generate energy from cattle waste.

**Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin):**

- This mission comprises of the two main components in order to create clean villages. Two components include- to create open defecation free (ODF) villages and to manage the solid & liquid waste in villages.
- Under the scheme, 3.5 lakh villages, 374 districts and 16 States or Union Territories of the country have been declared ODF till date. Thus, time has come to set up the ODF-plus activities. The ODF-plus comprise of the measures so as to enhance Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). The GOBARDHAN scheme is also an element under the ODF-plus strategy.

**165. Yudh-Abhyas: Indo-US joint military exercise:**

- The 16th edition of Indo-US joint military exercise 'Yudh Abhyas' will begin in Rajasthan from February 8 and it will be concluded in February 21, 2021.

**About Yudh Abhyas 2021:**

- The exercise will be held near the India-Pakistan border.
- It will be held with the aim of enhancing the cooperation and interoperability between the armies of India and USA.
- The exercise will also focus on the counter-terrorism operation in accordance with the mandate of United Nations.
- The drill between India and USA will be held in the backdrop of the five days drill between air forces of India and France in Rajasthan in January 2021.
- The bilateral training exercise of the two armies will be held at the Foreign Training Node in the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges.

**Who will represent the Armies?**

- Indian Army will be represented by the 11th Battalion of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles which is the part of the South Western Command.
- US Army will be represented by the troops of 2nd battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment. These troops belong to the 1-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Respective brigade headquarters will also represent the army along with the troops.

**Yudh Abhyas:**

- Yudh Abhyas between two armies is held since 2004. The exercise has been designed to promote the cooperation between both the armies. Both the sides share their training techniques, their culture and build the joint operating skills.

**Significance of the exercise:**

- The Yudh Abhyas between the Indian and the US army is significant with respect to the security challenges, like terrorism, faced by both the nations of global terrorism.
- This exercise will be held with the objective of enhancing the level of defence cooperation between both armies. This in turn will also boost the bilateral relations of both the nations.
- The exercise also signifies the key role that India plays into the Indo-Pacific region. The exercise is also significant with respect to the recent development on the northern border with China.

**166. MCA amends the Definition of Small Companies:**

- The ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) has amended definition of the small companies by amending the Companies Rules. The new amendment allows the non-resident Indians (NRIs) to incorporate one person companies (OPCs) in India.

**Highlights:**

- The changes were announced by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the presentation of Union budget.
- These changes will come into effect from April 1.
- The notification also highlights that the paid-up capital and the turnover of the small company shall not exceed respectively rupees two crores and rupees twenty crores.
- Earlier, the definition was based on the thresholds defined by the Companies Act.
- The companies act had mentioned a maximum paid up capital of Rs 50 lakh and turnover of Rs 2 crores.

**Amendment of 2018:**

- In the year 2018, amendments were made to the companies act. It contained provisions of increasing the paid up capital and turnover thresholds for small companies respectively up to Rs 10 crore and Rs 100 crore.

**Significance of the changes:**

- The Finance Minister highlights that, the change in the threshold will lighten the compliance burden of about 200,000 companies.

**Amendments regarding the OPCs:**

- The notification contains several amendments regarding the OPCs. It has substituted the words “whether resident in India or otherwise” in the clause. The rule earlier had the provision that only an Indian resident can incorporate an OPC.
- Further, the latest notification also reduces the number of days a person has to stay in India so as to qualify as a resident as opposed to the earlier provision of 120 days.
- Apart from that, the ministry has also allowed the voluntary conversion of OPCs to a private or public company. However, it is subject to the minimum requirements of board members and paid-up capital in accordance with the Companies Act.

**167. India’s first Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management:**

- This Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management will be set in a bid to address the knowledge gaps and specific research needs for the conservation and management of wetlands.
- The Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM) will be set up by the central government in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- This conservation centre would be a part of the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management. This national centre is an institution under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- The CWCM will play a significant role to design and implement the regulatory frameworks and policies. It will also help in monitoring, management planning and targeted research in a bid to conserve the wetlands.
- The conservation centre will also act as a knowledge hub.
- It will enable the exchange between the wetland authorities in States or Union Territories, managers, wetland researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and users.
- The centre will further help in building the networks and partnerships with the relevant international and national agencies.

**What are wetlands?**

- Wetland are a distinct ecosystem that are flooded by water. They are flooded either permanently or seasonally. In such ecosystems, oxygen-free processes prevail.
- Wetlands helps in water purification, water storage, processing of carbon and the stabilization of shorelines. It also provides support to the plants and animals.
- They are the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems. They occur naturally on every continent and the water in the can be either freshwater, brackish, or saltwater.

#### **Wetlands in India:**

- India has 42 Ramsar sites that have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance. They cover around 4.6% of Indian landmass.

#### **World Wetlands Day:**

- In a bid to conserve the wetlands, February 2 is observed as World Wetlands Day. In the year 2021, the day marked the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. This convention was signed at Ramsar in Iran in the year 1971.

#### **168. India's First 'Amputee Clinic':**

- The PGIMER, Chandigarh has launched its 'PGI Amputee Clinic' which is also the first such clinic in India.
- The launch of the clinic is a collective effort of various experts and departments of the institute who seeks to provide social, mental and physical support to the patients.
- The clinic was inaugurated by the PGIMER Director Prof. Jagat Ram.
- The clinic was set up to improve the amputation patient care by providing them a host of services under one roof and with significant coordination.
- Under this initiative, the amputee will be sent as a near normal functional human being to society.
- The Amputee Clinic would also attempt to unify all the diverse sections in PGIMER, with some upgradations where needed.
- It will provide appropriate management to the amputees so as to guide them in their path of rehabilitation in society.

#### **What was the need of such clinic?**

- There is a need of such clinics in order to assess the recovery and co-morbidities of patients who undergo amputation. This is done with a team of occupational therapists and a psychologist who gets involved in patient care immediately.
- With this clinic, the patient will not be forced to fall out of the rehabilitation process because of stress and anxiety.

#### **Significance of the clinic:**

- The clinic involves the development of a comprehensive database. This would provide a platform for future research and give the essential information about the burden, long-term complications and rehabilitation issues of the amputees. These clinics would also offer a forum for these patients where they can bring their problems and discuss with the team.

#### **What is Amputation?**

- It is the removal of a limb by trauma, medical illness, or surgery. It is used to control the pain or a disease process in the affected limb. Sometimes, it is carried out on individuals as a preventive surgery. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran amputation is currently used to punish people who committed crime.

#### **169. Nari Shakti Puraskar-2020:**



- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has recently extended the last date for submission of nomination for Nari Shakti Puraskar-2020. The last date has been extended till February 6, 2021.

#### **About Nari Shakti Puraskar:**

- Nari Shakti Puraskar are conferred every year on the occasion of International Women's Day.
- The award is conferred by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It is conferred for recognizing the exceptional work done by individuals in the area of empowering the women.
- The Nari Shakti Puraskar is awarded to individuals or groups or NGOs or institutions.
- The award encourages the women to participate in decision making roles, skill development in traditional and non-traditional sectors among the women.
- It also facilitates the basic amenities for rural women and promote the women in non-traditional sectors such as science and technology, sports, culture, art and for other significant work towards safety & security, education, life skills, health & wellness, respect & dignity of women.
- The award comprises of a citation and a cash reward of Rs. 2 Lakh.

#### **Who are eligible for the award?**

- As per the Guidelines of ministry, any individual of at least 25 years of age and institutions that have worked in the relevant field for at least 5 years are eligible to apply.

#### **Why this award is given?**

- This award is given to acknowledge the achievers who have not allowed age, geographical barriers or inaccessibility to resources to hinder their dreams. Their spirit inspires society at large specially the young Indian minds. The award further encourages the society to stand up against gender inequality and discrimination. These awards also recognized the women as equal partners in the advancement of society.

#### **International Women's Day:**

- The day is celebrated on the March 8, every year across the world. The day signifies the movement for women's rights. United Nations started celebrating the day in the year 1977.
- The UN theme for International Women's Day for the year 2021 is "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world".
- The theme highlights the impact that girls and women worldwide had amid the COVID-19 Pandemic as health care workers, caregivers, innovators and community organizers. The hashtag for the day will be #IWD2021 and #InternationalWomensDay.

#### **170. NITI Aayog's plan for Little Andaman:**

- The NITI Aayog has recently released its plan for Little Andaman. The plan is named as "Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island Vision Document". It has been planned for the sustainable and holistic development of the island in Andaman and Nicobar.
- The Little Andaman is a 680 sq km fragile Island in the Andaman and Nicobar island group. The fragile environment of the island has raised alarm among conservationists. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, also declared in the year 2020 that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will be developed as a "maritime and start-up hub". The document by NITI Aayog has been formulated in that context only.

#### **Objectives of the document:**

- The NITI Aayog has prepared the Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island Vision Document with following objectives:
- To invest in the strategic location and natural features of the island because this island is critical for India's security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

- To provide a better infrastructure and connectivity to the island that will, in turn, help India to enhance its military and naval strength in the islands.

#### **What is the plan?**

- NITI Aayog has planned to:
- Build a new greenfield coastal city. It has planned to develop the city as a free trade zone. It will also compete with Singapore and Hong Kong.
- The developmental plan has been divided into three zones:
- Zone 1: It is being developed as the monetary district and is spread over 102 sq km in the east coast of Little Andaman. It would also comprise of medi metropolis and can embody an aerocity, tourism and hospital district.
- Zone 2: It is a leisure zone that is spread over 85 sq km of pristine forest. It would comprise of movie metropolis, a residential district and a tourism Special Economic Zone (SEZ).
- Zone 3: It would be a nature zone and spread over 52 sq km of pristine forest.

#### **About Little Andaman:**

- The little Andaman is the part of the Little Andaman Group. This is the fourth largest island in Andamans. It is famous for its main village and the largest settlement on the island called Hut Bay also known as the Kwate-tu-kwage.
- The island is at about a distance of 120 Kilometers by sea from the Port Blair. The island is home to Onge Tribes apart from other multilingual settlers of Bengali, Telugu, Tamil and Ranchi communities.

#### **171. New Protein based Biosensors created for Quick COVID-19 test:**

- Recently, a team of researchers led by David Baker, who is the professor of biochemistry and director of the Institute for Protein Design at UW Medicine, have created a new protein-based biosensor that will detect the Coronavirus.

#### **Key Facts:**

- The protein-based biosensors will detect the proteins that make up the pandemic coronavirus.
- It would also help in detecting the antibodies against it.
- The biosensor will glow when mixed with components of the virus or specific COVID-19
- Thus, it will enable the faster and more widespread testing.

#### **How this technique is different than the RT-PCR?**

- The RT-PCR technique to detect the virus is used by most of the medical laboratories today. This technique amplifies the genetic material from the virus in order to make them visible.
- But the RT-PCR technique requires specialized staff and equipment.
- Further, the technique consumes the lab supplies that are now in high demand across the world.
- These supply-chain shortfalls have also slowed the COVID-19 test results.
- This, in order to directly detect the coronavirus in patient samples without any genetic amplification used the computers to design new biosensors.
- These protein-based biosensors will recognize the specific molecules on the surface of the virus. The protein will bind to them and then emit the light through a biochemical reaction.

#### **How this test is different then the antibody testing?**

- Antibody testing reveals whether a person had COVID-19 in the past. This test is used to track the spread of the pandemic. But this technique also requires complex laboratory supplies and equipment. But, the newly developed sensors glow when mixed with COVID-19 antibodies. These sensors do not react to other antibodies present in the blood.

#### **Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR):**

- It is a laboratory technique comprising of the reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and the amplification of specific DNA targets through a polymerase chain reaction (PCR). This technique is used to measure the amount of a specific RNA.

### 172. MITRA Scheme to be Launched:

- The Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced during the Union Budget 2021 presentation that the Government has proposed a “Mega Investment Textiles Parks (MITRA) scheme”.

#### Highlights:

- The scheme will enable the textile industry to become globally competitive.
- It will help the industries to attract large investments and boost employment generation besides boosting the exports.
- The scheme will help in creating a world class infrastructure with plug and play facilities. This in turn will create global champions in exports.
- MITRA scheme will be launched in addition to the Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI).

#### Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:

- It is a Central Sector scheme. The scheme was notified in April 2020 for the Large-Scale Electronics Manufacturing. This was notified with the objective of providing the financial incentives for domestic manufacturing of goods.
- The scheme also seeks to attract large investments. It was initially launched for the domestic manufacturing of Mobile Phones and Specified Electronic Components. In the later phase, it was rolled out for the pharmaceutical ingredients and medical devices.

#### Incentive offered under PLI Scheme:

- This scheme provides 4% to 6% incentive on incremental to the eligible companies who are manufacturing goods for 5 years period.
- The companies that are registered in India and involved in the manufacturing of goods are covered under the Target Segments of the scheme. These companies are eligible for the incentives under the scheme.

#### Textile Industry in India:

- Textile and apparel industry is the earliest industries in India. It has an inherent and unique strength of incomparable employment potential.
- This sector is the biggest employer after agriculture. It directly provides employment to 4.5 crore people and 6 crores employments in the allied sectors.
- India is the second-largest manufacturer of textiles and clothing across the world. It is also the second-largest exporter of textiles and apparel. It has a share of 5% in the global trade.

### 173. Social Security for India’s Gig Economy Workers:

- The Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget 2021 has announced that the government has put forward the proposed to launch a portal to formulate social security scheme for the workers of the India’s gig economy.

#### Highlights:

- The framework for the scheme will be formulated by collecting the relevant information on gig workers and the the migrant workers population.
- This announcement has been made ahead of the implementation of labour codes.
- Social Security scheme for the gig workers will help in increasing the compliance for on-demand companies like e-commerce and ride-hailing firms.
- This proposed scheme has potential to kick off the expansion in the human resource management sector for blue-collar workers.

- This is the first time across the world that a social security benefits will be extended to the gig and platform workers.
- Under the scheme, minimum wages will apply to all categories of workers.
- The workers will also be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation.

#### **What is Gig Economy?**

- A gig economy is a free market system where temporary positions are common. In such system the organizations hire the independent workers for short-term commitments.
- The gig economy includes the work arrangements including the independent contractors, Project-based workers, freelancers, and temporary or part-time hires.
- It is part of a shifting cultural and business environment including the sharing economy, gift economy and barter economy.

#### **Who makes the gig economy?**

- The gig economy comprises of the companies, gig workers and consumers. The types of organizations that the gig economy can apply ranges from the technical positions to transportation positions.

#### **Who are blue collar workers?**

- Blue-collar workers are the working-class person who performs the manual labour. These workers could be skilled or unskilled.
- Blue-collar workers are usually involved in the work including the warehousing, manufacturing, excavation, mining, farming, logging, electricity generation, power plant operations, food processing, waste collection and disposal, oil field work, construction, driving, shipping and so on.

#### **174. The Little Book of Encouragement book by Dalai Lama:**

- The Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama have recently launched his new book “The Little Book of Encouragement”. The book comprises of 130 quotes. The book has been edited by Renuka Singh while published by Penguin Random House.

#### **Highlights:**

- The Dalai Lama while launching the book highlighted that, he is one among more than seven billion human beings who are alive today amid the COVID-19 pandemic. So, he has committed to promote the human happiness.
- He further highlights that; we think happiness comes from money and power. But little we know the role of the mind or that the key to happiness is inner peace.
- He has asked the readers to discuss the thoughts from the books with friends and put these thoughts in day-today life practice.
- He further termed the climate change and global warming as very serious issue, apart from the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **Dalai Lama’s take on Sino-India ties:**

- He wrote on the Sino-India relation that, both India and China have developed a sense of competition in the recent times. The countries have high population and are powerful nations. Yet, they cannot destroy each other and have to live side-by-side.
- Further, on Tibet issue he suggested the Tibetans to consider the Chinese as brothers and sisters than as enemy.

#### **About Dalai Lama:**

- Dalai Lama title has been given by the Tibetan people to the foremost spiritual leader of the Gelug or “Yellow Hat” school of Tibetan Buddhism.

- Tenzin Gyatso is the current and 14th Dalai Lama. He lives in India as a refugee. The Dalai Lama is considered to be the successor tulkus. The tulkus are considered to be the incarnations of Avalokiteśvara (a Bodhisattva of Compassion).

#### **Tenzin Gyatso:**

- He is also known as Tenzin Gyatso. He was born on July 6, 1935. He is considered as the living Bodhisattva, an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. He is the current Dalai Lama.

#### **175. SpaceX announced First All-Civilian Mission to Space:**

- The SpaceX of Elon Musk has recently announced to launch its first all civilian mission to the space.

#### **Highlights:**

- The SpaceX is planning for the launch of Inspiration4 on Falcon 9.
- This would be the first all-commercial astronaut mission in the world.
- The spacecraft will start orbiting in the fourth quarter of this year.
- The mission will be launched from the Launch Complex 39A at the NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

#### **About the mission:**

- The mission has been named as Inspiration4.
- The name recognises the four-person crew's mission that inspire the support for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.
- It also seeks to send a humanitarian message of possibility.
- Jude's multi-billion-dollar expansion aims to accelerate the research advancements and save children worldwide.
- The commercial astronaut training will be provided to the Inspiration4 crew on the Falcon 9 launch vehicle by the SpaceX.
- They will also be provided training on Dragon spacecraft by the orbital mechanics, zero gravity, operating in microgravity and other stress testing.
- This mission will orbit the Earth every 90 minutes along a customized flight path.

#### **Space Exploration Technologies Corp. (SpaceX):**

- It is an American aerospace manufacturer and space transportation services. SpaceX is headquartered in Hawthorne, California. It was founded in 2002 by Elon Musk.
- It was founded with the objective of reducing the space transportation costs in order to enable the colonization of Mars.
- It has developed several launch vehicles, Dragon cargo spacecraft and Starlink satellite constellation. It has also flown humans to the International Space Station on the SpaceX Dragon 2.

#### **SpaceX Dragon:**

- It is also known as Dragon 1 or Cargo Dragon. It is a reusable cargo spacecraft developed by SpaceX. The Dragon 1 spacecraft was launched into orbit by the Falcon 9 launch vehicle so as to resupply the International Space Station (ISS).

#### **176. Pattachitra Art – Key facts:**

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi applauded a girl from Odisha named Bhagyashree in his Mann Ki Baat programme. The girl has mastered the art of creating Pattachitra on various themes using the soft stones.
- The girl boosted her skill during the lockdowns and created pattachitra art works on unused bottles, electric bulbs and various glass and plastic materials.

#### **About Pattachitra:**

- Pattachitra or Patachitra term generally used for the traditional, cloth-based scroll painting.
- The art form is based in the states of Odisha and West Bengal.
- The art form is known for the intricate details and the mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it.
- This is an ancient art form in Odisha which is created for ritual use and as souvenirs for pilgrims to temples.
- These art forms are a component of an ancient Bengali narrative art.
- The literal meaning of the word “Pajtta” is “cloth” and “Chitra” means “picture” in Sanskrit.
- The colours used in the Paintings are natural and the paintings are made in old traditional way by Chitrakaras (Odiya Painter).
- The painting done on canvas comprising of the rich colourful application, creative motifs, and designs.

**Theme of the paintings:**

- The paintings are based on Hindu mythology.
- It is highly inspired by Jagannath and Vaishnava sect.
- Thus, the theme of Odia painting is kept around Lord Jagannath and the Vaishnava sect.
- The subject matter of the paintings are mythological, religious stories and folk lore.
- The individual paintings of gods and goddesses are done.
- Pattachitra style of painting is the mix of both folk and classical elements. Dress style in the paintings has Mughal influences.

**Categories of the paintings:**

- The pattachitra paintings of Odisha is divided into three categories based on the medium namely, Paintings on cloth or ‘Patta Chitra’, Paintings on walls or ‘Bhitti Chitra’ and Paintings on the palm leaf or “Tala Patra Chitra’.

**GI Tag:**

- The Geographical indication of Patachitra is registered differently in both the states because style and motif of the paintings in both the state are different. Patachitra of Odisha is registered as Orissa Pattachitra while that of West Bengal is registered as Bengal Patachitra.

**177. Neptune Declaration:**

- Recently, the Maritime body MUI urged the government to take cognisance of “Neptune Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing and Crew Change” in order to formulate the Maritime India Vision 2030.

**Highlights:**

- The “Maritime India Vision 2030” will be formulated by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways of India.

**Neptune Declaration:**

- The Neptune Declaration was signed by more than 450 organizations.
- The declaration highlights the main actions that are required to be taken in order to resolve the crew change crisis.
- The daily lives and wellbeing of seafarers was highly impacted due to COVID-19 pandemic. It led to a humanitarian crisis at sea.
- This declaration has mentioned four main actions that is needful to address the crew change crisis:
- To recognize the seafarers as the key workers and provide them priority access to Covid-19 vaccines.
- To establish and implement the gold standard health protocols which are based on the existing best practice.

- To increase the collaboration between the ship operators and charterers so as to facilitate the crew changes.
- To ensure the air connectivity between the key maritime hubs for seafarers.

#### **Maritime Union of India (MUI):**

- The Marine Union of India is the oldest marine office. It represents the Merchant Navy Officers who are its members. The office is affiliated to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), London, United Kingdom.
- It has around 700 unions that represents over 4.5 million transport workers from 150 countries. The office is also affiliated to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), New Delhi. The office work with the primary objective of working for and ensuring the fairness of work and wage conditions for the members. It also has Branch office in Kolkata, Chandigarh, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, and Tuticorin. The office also looks after the implementation of the international regulations such as Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006.

#### **178. State of emergency announced in Myanmar:**

- The military of Myanmar has taken control of the country and a one-year state of emergency has been announced. Further, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other government leaders have been detained.

#### **Why emergency has been announced?**

- The state emergency was announced because the government was failed in tackling the situation of Covid-19 pandemic.
- Further, the military suspected the landslide victory of the Suu Kyi's party in November 2020 elections.
- So, the military took over in the country in accordance with the Article 417 of the Myanmar's constitution.
- Article 417 gives power to the military to take over in times of emergency.
- The military had framed the constitution of Myanmar in 2008 and retains power under the charter at the expense of democratic, civilian rule.
- Military highlights that, there were millions of irregularities in the voter lists in the November 2020 elections in which Suu Kyi's party had won 396 out of 476 seats. However, the election commission had rejected the claims of military.

#### **Implications of the military control:**

- Now in Myanmar, telecommunications have been halted. Internet and phone access have also been blocked. Social media accounts of many people have been temporarily suspended.
- Barbed wire road blocks were set up and the military units have overtaken the government buildings. Further, there is a fear of crackdown on human rights defenders, journalists, and others critics of the military because, even before the military takeover, journalists, free speech advocates and critics of the military have faced legal actions many times.

#### **About Myanmar:**

- It is a country in Southeast Asia which is bordered by Bangladesh and India in the northwest, China in the northeast, Laos and Thailand in the east and southeast while Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in the south and southwest.
- Myanmar is the largest country in Mainland Southeast Asia while it is the 10th largest in Asia by area. The capital city of the country is Naypyidaw.
- Yangon (Rangoon) is the largest city of Myanmar. Myanmar have border with the Indian States of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

#### **179. Agricultural Infrastructure and Development Cess:**

- The Finance Minister of India, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced an agricultural infrastructure and development cess (AIDC) on some goods while presenting Union Budget 2021. AIDC was announced to provide support to those sector that has been one bright spot amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Highlights:

- AIDC will be applied on a small number of items.
- Under the norms, no additional burden will be placed on consumers on most items.
- AIDC was announced because there was an immediate need to improve the agricultural infrastructure in order to produce more along with conserving and processing agricultural output efficiently.
- This cess would also ensure enhanced remuneration for the farmers.

#### Impact on Consumers:

- Cess on petrol and diesel will not amount any additional burden on consumers because unbranded petrol was earlier attracting a basic excise duty (BED) of Rs 2.98 apart from a special additional excise duty (SAED) of Rs 12 per litre.
- The BED and SAED has now been reduced respectively to Rs 1.4 and Rs 11 per litre. Thus, the net consumer will not pay anything extra. Similarly, alcoholic beverages charges 150 per cent BED which now has been cut to 50 per cent. This in addition with the proposed AIDC of 100 per cent will not put any extra burden on consumers.

#### 180. 15th Finance Commission's final report:

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission of India have submitted its final report fir a five-year duration. The report has been submitted with the objective of transforming the financial governance of India's municipalities.
- The interim report for Financial Year 2020-21 was tabled in Parliament along with Budget 2020-21.
- The final report for Financial Year 2021-22 to Financial Year 2025-26 was tabled along with the Budget 2021-22.

#### Key Highlights of the report:

- The 15th FC has significantly raised its bar on financial governance of the India's municipalities in the interim report.
- The final report also maintains these four specific agendas. The four agendas include:
- The 15th FC has tried to increase the overall outlay for municipalities. It has set 29,000 crores for FY 2020-21. It has also indicated the intent to raise the share of municipalities in the total grants of local bodies from 30 per cent to 40 per cent.
- Two entry conditions have been set for any municipality in India to receive FC grants namely, the publication of audited annual accounts that would help in boosting the financial accountability and notification of floor rates for property tax that would help in raising the revenue enhancement.
- The 15th finance commission has adopted the approach of distinguishing between million-plus urban agglomerations and other cities.
- It also recommends a common digital platform for municipal accounts, a consolidated view of municipal finances and the sectoral outlays at the state level apart from digital footprint of individual transactions at source.
- These four aspects of the interim report highlight that the 15th finance commission aims to bring the logical culmination municipal finance reforms. However, the foundation for bringing about these reforms were also laid by thirteenth and fourteenth finance commission.



**181. 8th India International Silk Fair:**

- The Textiles Minister of India, Smriti Irani, inaugurated the 8th India International Silk Fair on the Virtual Portal.

**Key Facts:**

- This fair is the biggest silk fair of India.
- The fair is being held under one roof of the virtual platform of Indian Silk Export Promotion Council.
- The fair is a five days long event.
- More than 200 overseas buyers have already registered.
- Further, around 200 overseas representatives in India will interact with more than 100 renowned and big Indian companies who are engaged in manufacturing and trading the silk and silk blended products.

**Silk in the India:**

- Silk is a luxury good in India. Around 97% of the raw mulberry silk is produced in five states namely, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Gujarat.
- Mysore and North Bangalore will also become the site of a US\$20 million Silk City.
- In Tamil Nadu, mulberry silk cultivation is concentrated in Salem, Erode and Dharmapuri districts.
- Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and Gobichettipalayam in Tamil Nadu were some of the first locations to establish the automated silk reeling units.
- India is the 2nd largest producer of Silk after China.
- India is also the largest consumer of silk across the world.
- India is also the only country across the world that produces all the four major varieties of silk – Mulberry, Eri, Tassar, and Muga.
- The cultivation of silk, or Sericulture, date back to the Indus valley Civilization between 2450 BC to 2000 BC. In the Harappa and Chanhu-daro sericulture was employing wild silk threads from the native silkworm species. Indus silks were obtained from species called Antheraea and Philosamia (eri silk).

**Eri silk:**

- Eri silk is found in northeast India and some parts of China and Japan. In 1974, it was imported to Thailand. This is a woolly white silk and is often referred to as the fabric of peace since it is processed without killing the silkworm.

**Tassar silk:**

- It is produced from larvae of several species of silkworms living in the wild forests in trees. The silk is valued for its rich texture and natural deep gold colour. It is produced in China, Japan, India, and Sri Lanka.

**182. Bhashan Char Island:**

- The Bangladesh Authorities recently moved around 1,750 Rohingya Muslims to a controversial island in the Bay of Bengal called the “Bhashan Char Island”. This move by Bangladesh was opposed by the refugees already living on the island.
- The island is also known as Char Piya. It is in Hatiya Upazila, Bangladesh. The island is located in the Bay of Bengal at about 6 kilometres from Sandwip island and 60 kilometres from the mainland. It has an area of 40 square kilometres.
- The island was formed in the year 2006 by Himalayan silt.

**Recent development by Bangladesh on Island:**

- The Government of Bangladesh have planned to construct 1,440 buildings on the island.
- The building will also include 120 cyclone shelters.

- The buildings were constructed with the objective of relocating the 100,000 Rohingya refugees from the mainland camps of Cox's Bazar.
- Recently, in August 2019, Ashrayan Project (Ashrayan-3) was expended to build 100,000 homes on the island.

#### **Cox's Bazar:**

- It is a city, fishing port, tourism centre and district headquarters of the southern Bangladesh. This city is famous for long natural sandy beach. It is also known as the Panowa.

#### **Sandwip island:**

- It is an island along the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh in Chittagong District. The island is a part of Sandwip Upazila.

#### **Rohingya people:**

- They are a stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic group who follow Islam. They reside in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. Around 1.4 million Rohingyas lived in Myanmar until a displacement crisis of 2017 when 740,000 fled to Bangladesh. They are called as the most persecuted minorities in the world. They are denied citizenship under the 1982 Myanmar nationality law. They do not have the freedom of movement, state education and civil service jobs in Myanmar.

#### **183. 14 Minor Forest Produce Items included under MSP Scheme:**

- The government has decided to include 14 new minor forest produce items under the mechanism for marketing of minor forest produce by the minimum support price scheme.
- This new mechanism will help to provide remunerative and fair prices to tribal gatherers of forest produces.
- The items which have been included in the scheme include-Tasar Cocoon, bamboo shoot, elephant apple dry, wild dry mushroom and malkangani seed.
- Minimum Support Price (MSP)
- It is an agricultural product price which is set by the Government of India to purchase directly from the farmer.
- MSP is not enforceable by law.
- This MSP rate is decided to safeguard the farmer to a minimum profit for the harvest in case the open market has lesser price than the cost incurred.
- Price is set for 23 commodities twice a year.
- It is set on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) since 2009.
- The Minimum Support Price was announced for the first time in the year 1966-67 for wheat. The MSP was decided in the light of Green Revolution and extended harvest in order to save the farmers from depleting profits.

#### **Minor Forest Produce (MFP):**

- It includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin. It also includes bamboo, fodder, leaves, canes, waxes dyes, gums, resins and many forms of food like nuts, honey wild fruits, lac, tusser etc. MFP It provides both subsistence and cash income for people living in or near the forests.

#### **MFP through MSP scheme:**

- It is a centrally sponsored scheme. The scheme ensure that the tribal population gets remunerative price for the MFP and seeks to provide them alternative employment avenues.
- The mechanism for marketing of minor forest produce through minimum support price and development of value chain for MFP' scheme is done by the State designated agencies. To assure the market price, the services of market correspondents are availed by the designated agencies.

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