



UPSC

MONTHLY
CURRENT
AFFAIRS
CAPSULES

FEBRUARY 2021

BUDGET 2021-22 SPECIAL EDITION



e-Book February 2021

It is the time to start and target the UPSC CSE preparation for Prelims 2021. To ease the preparation we are providing monthly basis important news (section wise) and with that some expected questions, best strategy to prepare and tips for the beginners. Also, at the end we have provided the detailed syllabus of UPSC Prelims 2021.

"Every day is a chance to begin again. Don't focus on the failures of yesterday, start today with positive thoughts and expectations." Catherine Pulsifer

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NATIONAL NEWS

Rehabilitation Schemes for Ex-Servicemen

Why in news?

Following Resettlement, schemes are run by Directorate General Resettlement (DGR) to provide resettlement opportunities to Ex-Servicemen (ESM) of three Armed Forces Services.

Key points are:

- Placement Assistance through on-line registration at DGR
- DGR Sponsored Security Agency Scheme
- Management of CNG Station by ESM in NCR
- Allotment of BPCL/IOCL COCO Outlets Pan India
- Allotment of Mother Dairy Milk Booths and Fruit & Vegetable (Safal) Shops in NCR
- Allotment of Regular LPG Distributorship
- LPG Agency under Rajiv Gandhi Gramin LPG Vitrak (RGGLV) Scheme
- Retail Outlet Dealership (Petrol/Diesel)
- DGR ESM Employment Seminars/Job Fairs, etc.
- As many as 2,21,180 Ex-Servicemen, Widows/Disabled ESM have benefitted under different schemes of resettlement since 2015.
- Director General Resettlement (DGR) Schemes are based on vacancies in PSUs, subsidiaries of Coal India Limited, Indraprastha Gas Limited/MNGL & Mother Dairy. Once the vacancies are released to DGR by the concerned agencies, they are utilised fully.

Aero India 2021

Why in news?

The Chiefs of Air Staff Conclave began at Aero India 2021 at Air Force Station, Yelahanka on February 03, 2021. Chiefs of Air Staff (CAS) of more than 24 countries are attending the conclave physically and 16 virtually.

Key points are:

- The theme of the two-day event is "Leveraging Aerospace Power for Security and Stability".

- Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh in his address, said that Aero India 2021 is intended to showcase India's intent to be among the top countries in defence and aerospace industries citing the example of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) that has been successfully operationalised and inducted into the Indian Air Force (IAF) with state-of-the-art weaponry.
- He said that the LCA Mk-1A will be indigenously designed, developed and manufactured and would bolster the "Make in India" initiative of the nation.
- He added that close to 500 indigenous design and production agencies are involved in the manufacture of the LCA.
- The IAF has launched a major indigenisation drive for the sustenance of all aircraft fleets and maintenance aspects and expressed a belief that this will prove to be the growth engine for Indian's domestic aerospace manufacturing capability.
- The country has reached an inflection point in domestic defence manufacturing and the trajectory from here on would only be upwards.


Budget 2021: Infrastructure Highlights

Why in news?

The Minister of Finance recently presented the Union Budget 2021-22. This was the first digital budget. Here we are covering proposals related to Infrastructure.

TEST SERIES

Bilingual



**UPSC 2021
PRELIMS**
(Paper-I + Paper-II)

30 TOTAL TESTS

**Key points are:**

- Production Linked Incentive scheme (PLI):
- Rs. 1.97 lakh crore in the next 5 years for PLI schemes in 13 Sectors to create and nurture manufacturing global champions for an AatmaNirbhar Bharat.

Textiles:

- Mega Investment Textiles Parks (MITRA) scheme to be introduced.

Infrastructure:

- National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) expanded to 7,400 projects.
- Measures in three thrust areas to increase funding for NIP:

Creation of institutional structures:

- Set up and capitalise a Development Financial Institution (DFI).
- Daily Gist of 'The Hindu', 'PIB', 'Indian Express' and Other Newspapers: 29 January, 2021
- Big thrust on monetizing assets.
- Enhancing the share of capital expenditure.

Roads and Highways Infrastructure:

- Rs. 1,18,101 lakh crore, highest ever outlay, for Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- New Economic corridors and Expressways being planned.
- Advanced Traffic management system in all-new 4 and 6-lane highways.

Railway Infrastructure:

- National Rail Plan for India (2030) to create a "future-ready" Railway system by 2030.
- 100% electrification of Broad-Gauge routes to be completed by December, 2023.
- Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) and Eastern DFC to be commissioned by June 2022.
- Measures for passenger convenience and safety:
- Aesthetically designed Vista Dome Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coach on tourist routes for better travel.
- High-density network and highly utilized network routes to have an indigenously developed automatic train protection system, eliminating train collision due to human error.

Urban Infrastructure:

- Expansion of metro rail network and augmentation of city bus service.
- 'MetroLite' and 'MetroNeo' technologies will be used to provide metro rail systems at much lesser cost with similar experience.

Power Infrastructure:

- A comprehensive National Hydrogen Energy Mission 2021-22 to be launched.
- Rs. 3,05,984 crore over 5 years for a revamped, reforms-based and result-linked new power distribution sector scheme.

Ports, Shipping, Waterways:

- Rs. 2,000 crore worth 7 projects to be offered in Public-Private Partnership (PPP)-mode in Financial Year (FY) 2021-22 for the operation of major ports.

Petroleum & Natural Gas:

- Extension of Ujjwala Scheme to cover 1 crore more beneficiaries.
- A new gas pipeline project in Jammu & Kashmir.
- An independent Gas Transport System Operator to be set up for facilitation and coordination of booking of common carrier capacity in all-natural gas pipelines on a non-discriminatory open access basis.

15th Finance Commission Recommendations on Resource Allocation
Why in news?

The government accepted the 15th Finance Commission's recommendation recently to maintain the States' share in the divisible pool of taxes to 41% for the five-year period starting 2021-22.

Key points are:

- The Commission's Report was tabled in the Parliament.



Horizontal Devolution (Allocation Between the States):

- For horizontal devolution, it has suggested 12.5% weightage to demographic performance, 45% to income, 15% each to population and area, 10% to forest and ecology and 2.5% to tax and fiscal efforts.

Vertical Devolution (Devolution of Taxes of the Union to States):

- It has recommended maintaining the vertical devolution at 41% the same as in its interim report for 2020-21.
- It is at the same level of 42% of the divisible pool as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission.
- It has made the required adjustment of about 1% due to the changed status of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Revenue Deficit Grants to States:

- Revenue deficit grants emanate from the requirement to meet the fiscal needs of the States on their revenue accounts that remain to be met, even after considering their own tax and non-tax resources and tax devolution to them.
- Revenue Deficit is defined as the difference between revenue or current expenditure and revenue receipts, that includes tax and non-tax.
- It has recommended post-devolution revenue deficit grants amounting to about Rs. 3 trillion over the five-year period ending FY26.
- The number of states qualifying for the revenue deficit grants decreases from 17 in FY22, the first year of the award period to 6 in FY26, the last year.

Performance-Based Incentives and Grants to States:

- These grants revolve around four main themes.
- The first is the social sector, where it has focused on health and education.
- Second is the rural economy, where it has focused on agriculture and the maintenance of rural roads.
- The rural economy plays a significant role in the country as it encompasses two-thirds of the country's population, 70% of the total workforce and 46% of national income.

- Third, governance and administrative reforms under which it has recommended grants for judiciary, statistics and aspirational districts and blocks.
- Fourth, it has developed a performance-based incentive system for the power sector, which is not linked to grants but provides an important, additional borrowing window for States.

Grants to Local Governments:

- Along with grants for municipal services and local government bodies, it includes performance-based grants for incubation of new cities and health grants to local governments.
- In grants for Urban local bodies, basic grants are proposed only for cities/towns having a population of less than a million. For Million-Plus cities, 100% of the grants are performance-linked through the Million-Plus Cities Challenge Fund (MCF).

Why in news?

- As per the United Nations (UN) report "Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk", over 1,000 large dams in India will be roughly 50 years old in 2025 and such ageing embankments across the world pose a growing threat.

Key points are:

- The report, compiled by Canada-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health, says the world is unlikely to witness another large dam-building revolution as in the mid-20th century, but dams constructed then will inevitably be showing their age.
- The analysis includes dam decommissioning or ageing case studies from the USA, France, Canada, India, Japan, and Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- Most of the 58,700 large dams worldwide were constructed between 1930 and 1970 with a design life of 50 to 100 years.
- By 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them already operating at or beyond their design life.



- At 50 years, a large concrete dam “would most probably begin to express signs of ageing.”
- 32,716 large dams (55% of the world’s total) are found in just four Asian countries: China, India, Japan, and South Korea - a majority of which will reach the 50-year threshold relatively soon.
- Ageing signs include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam’s functionality and effectiveness “strongly interconnected” manifestations.
- India is ranked third in the world in terms of building large dams.
- Of the over 5,200 large dams built so far, about 1,100 large dams have already reached 50 years of age and some are older than 120 years. The number of such dams will increase to 4,400 by 2050.

Vaghai-Bilimora Heritage Line

Why in news?

The Western Railway has decided to not stop the services of three trains, including the 107-year-old narrow gauge heritage train between Vaghai and Bilimora, in Gujarat permanently.

Key points are:

- Other two narrow gauge trains run between Miyagam, Choranda and Malsar, and Choranda junction and Moti Karal.
- In rail transport, track gauge or track gauge is the spacing of the rails on a railway track.
- The Ministry of Railways, previously issued a letter to the Western Railway ordering permanent closure of 11 “uneconomic branch lines” and narrow gauge sections of the Western Railway, including three from Gujarat.

About the Vaghai-Bilimora Train

- It started in 1913, was a remnant of Gaekwad dynasty who ruled the princely state of Baroda. Tribal people from the interior commute by this train regularly. The train covers a distance of 63 kilometres.

- At the instance of Gaekwad rulers, the British laid railway tracks and it was operated by Gaekwad Baroda State Railway (GBSR) owned by Sayajirao Gaekwad III.
- The Gaekwad jurisdiction was spread across parts of Saurashtra, Mehsana in north Gujarat, and Bilimora in South Gujarat.
- The founder of the dynasty was Damaji I who had risen to power by 1740. The last Gaekwar, Sayaji Rao III, died in 1939.

HAL Signs MoU with MIDHANI

Why in news?

- Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited (MIDHANI) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for development and production of composite raw materials during the Aero India 2021 in Bengaluru on 4 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- This is the first time that such an MoU has been signed for composite raw materials.
- The MoU was signed by Chairman and Managing Director, HAL Shri R Madhavan and Chairman and Managing Director, MIDHANI Dr S K Jha in the presence of other senior officials.
- Mr R Madhavan said composites are one area where HAL will collaborate. Composites raw materials, mainly in the form of prepregs used in platforms like Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) and Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) are currently imported.
- The CMD of MIDHANI Shri S K Jha said, this is the major step forward in the area of composite materials. The HAL is not only taking care of frontline aircraft production but also raw materials.
- There is no equivalent proven Indian approved/qualified supplier for various types of prepregs (carbon, aramid, glass types, etc) for the aircraft applications.

- This creates a dependency on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). Aligned with “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative, efforts need to be made to develop and manufacture such preregs in India through collaboration, he added.
 - The usage of composites in the aerospace is going to exist and increase, particularly for fighter aircraft/helicopter because of its inherent advantages over metallic raw materials.
 - In addition, the similar requirement exists for other aerospace and defence programmes, including those of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) and National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL).
- The MoU with Zomato was exchanged between Shri Sanjay Kumar, Joint Secretary, MoHUA and Shri Mohit Sardana, Chief Operating Officer, Zomato, in the presence of Shri Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA, and officials of Zomato and Ministry.
 - State Mission Directors of DAY-NULM from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Punjab and Municipal Commissioners of Bhopal, Ludhiana, Nagpur, Patna, Raipur, Vadodra also participated in the ceremony through video conferencing facility.
 - Covid-19 pandemic has restricted consumers from stepping out and forced them to follow physical distancing norms.

MOHUA Joins Hands with Zomato

Why in news?

As a part of Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme, MoHUA entered into MoU with Zomato, one of the largest online platforms for ordering and delivery of food in India, to onboard street food vendors on its food-tech platform.

Key points are:

- This will give street food vendors online access to thousands of consumers and help these vendors grow their businesses.
 - Further, MoHUA launched the Mobile Application for PMSVANidhi se Samriddhi Socio-economic profiling of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families to link them to various Central Government Schemes.
- In the given scenario it is important to connect Street Food Vendors with technology-enabled platforms to help them grow their business, thus helping them gain financially.
 - In a first of its kind initiative, MoHUA entered into an MoU with Swiggy on 5 October, 2020 and it is now joining hands with Zomato to empower Street Food Vendors with digital technology and facilitate greater income-earning opportunities by being present on popular food-tech platforms.
 - MoHUA has coordinated with the key stakeholders including Municipal Corporations, fssai, Zomato and GST officials to ensure that street food vendors are facilitated in completing the necessary prerequisites for this initiative.
 - Under the MoU, initially, MoHUA and Zomato will run a pilot program by on-boarding 300 vendors across six cities namely - Bhopal, Ludhiana, Nagpur, Patna, Raipur, Vadodara.
 - The street vendors will be helped with PAN and fssai registration, training on technology/ partner app usage, menu digitization and pricing, hygiene and packaging best practices.
 - Upon the successful completion of the pilot, MoHUA and Zomato plan to expand this initiative across the country in phases.



- A mobile application under PMSVANidhi se Samriddhi was launched today to assist city officials to conduct door to door data collection. MoHUA launched the program PMSVANidhi se Samriddhi – socio-economic profiling of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families in 125 select cities, on 4th January 2021, as an additional component of PMSVANidhi Scheme.
- This mobile application is available on Google Play store.
- The application will enable ULB field functionaries to conduct the socio-economic profiling activity even without any internet connection as well. Quality Council of India implementing partner for this program, partnered with MoHUA to develop this mobile application.
- The program aims to map the socio-economic profile of the PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families, assess their potential eligibility for various Central welfare schemes and facilitate the linkages to these schemes, for their holistic development and socio-economic upliftment.
- As on February 4th, 2021, data collection of over 95,000 PMSVANidhi beneficiaries along with their 50, 000 family members is done. The first batch of Camps is ongoing in the select cities (1st to 6th February 2021) to facilitate linkages of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families to eligible Central Schemes.
- On timely/ early repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy @ 7% per annum will be credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) on a quarterly basis.
- There will be no penalty on early repayment of a loan. The Scheme promotes digital transactions through cash-back incentives up to an amount of Rs. 1,200 per annum.
- Street Vendors can fulfil their aspiration of climbing up the economic ladder by availing the facility of the enhanced credit limit on timely/ early repayment of the loan.
- As on February 4, 2020, over 36.40 lakh loan applications have been received under the PM SVANidhi Scheme. Out of these, over 18.80 lakh loans have been sanctioned and over 14.04 lakh loans disbursed.

Ganga Amantran Abhiyan

Why in news?

- The information about Ganga Aamantran Abhiyan, Namami Gange Programme, etc. was given by the Minister of State for Jal Shakti & Social Justice and Empowerment Rattan Lal Kataria in Lok Sabha on 4 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- Ganga Aamantran Abhiyan, a rafting and kayaking expedition on the Ganga River from Devprayag to Ganga Sagar, was organised between 10th October 2019 to 12th November 2019.
- The expedition encompassed five Ganga basin States, i.e. Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal with stops at 34 locations including Rishikesh, Haridwar, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Sonapur and Kolkata.
- The expedition was undertaken through an adventure sporting activity to connect people to the river and to spread the message of river rejuvenation & water conservation on a massive scale.

Background :

- The Ministry is implementing PM SVANidhi Scheme, since June 01, 2020, for providing affordable working capital loan to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to Covid-19 lockdown.
- This Scheme targets to benefit over 50 lakh Street Vendors who had been vending on or before 24 March, 2020 in urban areas, including surrounding peri-urban/ rural areas.
- Under the Scheme, the vendors can avail a collateral-free working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, of one year tenure.



- During the expedition, public awareness campaigns were organised and interactions with people, in particular, youth and students of the village/city made on the various locations to spread the message of river conservation.
- With the aim to integrate people's participation and economic development for Ganga rejuvenation with various stakeholders who have a key role to play in this initiative including Agriculture, Power, Tourism, Energy, Water, AYUSH, Environment, Forest & Climate Change etc., NMCG is working in an integrated manner with concerned Ministries/Departments and Government agencies to boost economic activities and tourism in the river Ganga.
- Documentation of intangible cultural heritage in the Ganga basin is also being carried out by INTACH, which includes inventorization of heritage culture, spirituality, yoga/Ayurveda/wellness, eco-tourism, cuisine, fairs & festivals, interpretation/ heritage walks as a part of the project.
- Namami Gange Programme is conceptualised not only as a sewerage infrastructure development programme but also includes components of Communication and Public Outreach which are important for its sustainability.
- For this purpose, dedicated voluntary groups like Ganga Vichar Manch, Ganga Doots, Ganga Prahari, Ganga Mitra including NCC, NSS, NYKS etc. at the grassroots level have been formed and their resources are channelized for engagement of the community and public at large.
- Under the Namami Gange Programme, a number of public campaigns and events are organised like Swachhta Pakhwada, Swachhta Hi Sewa, Ganga Yatra, Rafting Expedition, Ganga Utsav, Plantation Drives, Ganga Run etc.
- Mass Congregation of devotees on the occasion of Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela & Chhath Pooja etc. gives an opportunity to demonstrate and describe activities being undertaken in the project for awareness generation and public participation.

- Online Quiz competition is also organised to enhance the knowledge and involvement of the youth and students regarding Ganga and its ecosystem.

Uniform Minimum Age for Marriage

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court (SC) decided to examine a plea to transfer to itself cases pending in the Delhi and Rajasthan High Courts to declare a "uniform minimum age" for marriage recently.

Key points are:

- The Union government has also set up a committee to reconsider the minimum age of marriage for women, which is currently 18.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) issued notice to the government on a plea, which was filed to "secure gender justice, gender equality, and dignity of women".
- The plea sought a direction to the Union government to remove the anomalies in the minimum age of marriage and make it 'gender-neutral, religion-neutral and uniform for all citizens'. Various laws state that the minimum age to get married should be 18 for women and 21 for men.
- The SC has the power under Article 139A to transfer to itself, cases involving the same or substantially the same questions of law pending before two or more high courts.
- It has been argued that the different ages for marriage violated the fundamental rights of equality (Article 14), protection against discrimination (Article 15), and dignity of life (Article 21) of citizens and went against India's commitment under the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW).
- Socio-economic Fronts: Increasing the legal age for the marriage of women has enormous benefits on social and economic fronts including: Lowering the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR). Improvement of nutrition levels.



- On the financial front, opportunities will be opened up for women to pursue higher education and careers and become financially empowered, thus resulting in a more egalitarian society.

Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana

Why in news?

- Employee's State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has decided that in cases where the employer has shown "Zero" contribution in respect of an employee for some months before exiting him from the system, the relief under ABVKY for such period of "Zero" contribution, shall also be allowed.

Key points are:

- It was brought to the notice of ESIC that in some cases employers have struck off their employees from the rolls a few months after actually terminating them from service.
- During this period, ESI contribution was also not filed by the employers for these employees in the system.
- As the relief under Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana is available only in case of unemployment of the Insured Persons, such employees though terminated from service became ineligible for relief under this scheme.

About the scheme:

- It is a welfare measure being implemented by the Employee's State Insurance (ESI) Corporation.
- It offers cash compensation to insured persons when they are rendered unemployed. The Scheme was introduced in 2018.

In 2020, eligibility criteria for availing the relief were relaxed, as under:

- The payment of relief has been enhanced to 50% of the average of wages from earlier 25% of average wages payable up to maximum 90 days of unemployment.
- Instead of the relief becoming payable 90 days after unemployment, it shall become due for payment after 30 days.

- The Insured Person can submit the claim directly to ESIC Branch Office instead of the claim being forwarded by the last employer and the payment shall be made directly in the bank account of IP.

Skill Development Fund and Employment Opportunities

Why in news?

- The information about NSDF was given by the Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Raj Kumar Singh in a written reply in Rajya Sabha on 5 February, 2020.

Key points are:

- The National Skill Development Fund (NSDF), has been helpful in increasing skilling of youth, enabling increased employment opportunities for them.
- NSDF meets its objectives through National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), which is an industry-led 'Not For Profit Company' set up for building skill development capacity and forging strong linkages with the market.
- NSDC acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies and organizations that provide skill training.
- It also develops appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.
- NSDC promotes the establishment of a model and aspirational skill centres known as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) for imparting skill training in every district throughout the country.
- A financial assistance of Rs. 231 Crore has been provided by NSDF to NSDC for setting up of PMKKs. 738 PMKKs have been established till date.

Taxing Interest Incomes on EPF

Why in news?

- The Union Budget 2021-22 proposed to tax the interest income on Provident Fund (PF) contributions by employees exceeding Rs. 2.5 lakh a year.

**Key points are:**

- The Ministry of Finance expressed concerns over investments as much as Rs. 1 crore each month into PF and suggested it was unfair that they get tax concessions as well as an assured return.
- The Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme is managed under the aegis of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- EPFO is a government organization that manages the provident fund and pension accounts for the workforce engaged in the organized sector in India.

About the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme :

- The Employee Provident Fund is open for employees of both the Public and Private Sectors. Additionally, any organisation that employs at least 20 individuals is mandatorily liable to extend benefits of EPF to its employees.
- Both employer and employee contribute 12% of an employee's monthly salary (basic wages plus dearness allowance) to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) scheme.
- Of the employer's share of 12%, 8.33% is diverted towards the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS).
- EPF scheme is mandatory for employees who draw a basic wage of Rs. 15,000 per month.
- The EPF interest rate is declared every year by the EPFO.
- EPFO implements the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.
- This savings scheme offers tax exemption under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**Why in news?**

- The scheme has crossed 1.75 crores, eligible women, till the financial year 2020.

Key points are:

- PMMVY is a Maternity Benefit Programme that is implemented in all the districts of the country in accordance with the provision of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

- Under PMMVY, pregnant women and lactating mothers (PW&LM) receive ₹5,000 on the birth of their first child in three instalments, after fulfilling certain conditionalities.
- It excludes those PW&LM who are in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.
- The direct benefit cash transfer is to help expectant mothers meet enhanced nutritional requirements as well as to partially compensate them for wage loss during their pregnancy.
- The scheme was announced on December 31, 2016.
- The eligible beneficiaries would receive the incentive given under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for Institutional delivery and the incentive received under JSY would be accounted towards maternity benefits so that on an average a woman gets Rs 6000 /-.

PM Modi lays foundation stone and inaugurates various projects in Kochi, Kerala
Why in news?

- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid foundation stone of various projects in Kochi Kerala on 14 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- Governor of Kerala, Chief Minister of Kerala, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Ministers of State Mansukh Mandaviya , V. Muraleedharan were present on the occasion.
- Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister said that the works inaugurated today cover a wide range of sectors. They will energise the growth trajectory of India.
- He said that Propylene Derivative Petrochemical Project (PDPP), inaugurated today, will help strengthen India's journey towards being Aatmanirbhar as it will save foreign exchange.
- A wide range of industries would gain and employment opportunities would be generated.

- Similarly, with Ro-Ro Vessels, a distance of almost thirty kilometres on road will become 3.5 kilometers through waterways leading to less congestion and more convenience, commerce and capacity-building.
- The Prime Minister asserted that the Government of India is undertaking many efforts to improve tourism related infrastructure in Kerala. The inauguration of Sagarika, the International Cruise Terminal in Kochi is one example of this.

India Maps the 21st Century

Why in news?

- The Department of Science and Technology is announcing sweeping changes to India's mapping policy, specifically for Indian companies.

Key points are:

- Maps and accurate geospatial data are crucial for national infrastructure projects such as linkages of rivers, creation of industrial corridors and deploying smart power systems.
- Emerging vibrant technologies like Digital India, Smart Cities, eCommerce, autonomous drones, delivery, logistics and urban transport require a leap forward in mapping with greater depth, resolution and precision.
- In every economic endeavor, spanning agriculture, finance, construction, mining and local enterprise, India's farmers, small businesses and corporations alike stand to gain tremendously from the application of innovative technologies based on modern geospatial data technologies and mapping services.
- The Hon'ble Prime Minister observed however, that the existing regime imposed significant restrictions on the mapping industry from creation to dissemination of maps, requiring Indian companies to seek licenses, follow a cumbersome system of pre-approvals and permissions.
- Compliance with these regulatory restrictions has subjected startups in India to unnecessary red tape, hindering Indian innovation in map technologies for decades.

- To realise India's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and the goal of a 5 trillion-dollar economy, the regulations that apply to geospatial data and maps henceforth stand radically liberalised.
- Furthermore, our corporations and innovators are no longer subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals before they collect, generate, prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital Geospatial Data and Maps within the territory of India.
- India is emerging as a mapping power, creating next generation indigenous maps of India and taking these new technologies to the rest of the world.

India's first full-fledged international cruise terminal

Why in news?

- India's first full-fledged international cruise terminal is inaugurated in Kerala.

Key points are:

- Kochi is a city of trade and commerce. The people of this city understand that time is of the essence. They also appreciate the importance of proper connectivity.
- Two important factors that shape economic development are: Capacity Building and Making infrastructure modern for future needs. The next two development works are related to these themes. 'Vigyan Sagar', is the new knowledge campus of Cochin Shipyard.
- This year's Budget has devoted significant resources and schemes that will benefit Kerala. This includes the next phase of the Kochi Metro. This metro network has come up successfully and has set a good example of progressive work practices and professionalism.

Disqualification of 7 Nagaland MLAs

Why in news?

- The Kohima Bench of the Gauhati High Court has dismissed two interlocutory applications filed by the Naga People's Front (NPF) that sought to keep seven of its suspended MLAs off the 60-member Nagaland Assembly.

Background

- The applications were dismissed pending a final verdict on a plea by the seven MLAs challenging the maintainability of a writ petition relating to their disqualification.

About the issue:

- The NPF filed disqualification petitions on 24 April, 2019, against its seven suspended MLAs for “wilfully” defying its collective decision to support the Congress candidate in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.
- NPF claimed the seven MLAs had willfully given up their party membership, thereby attracting provisions under the 10th Schedule (anti-defection law) of the Constitution.
- These MLAs, however, said as the NPF’s decision to support the Congress candidate was “against the principle of regionalism”, they said they had backed the other candidate. The NPF had not contested the polls.

Arbitration & Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021**Why in news?**

- Lok Sabha Passes Arbitration & Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021. It is already in force by way of an Ordinance promulgated on 4th November, 2020.

Key points of the Bill are:

- It seeks to amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 so as to (i) enable automatic stay on awards in certain cases and (ii) specify by regulations the qualifications, experience and norms for accreditation of arbitrators.
- Seeks to ensure that stakeholder parties can seek an unconditional stay on enforcement of arbitral awards in cases where the “arbitration agreement or contract is induced by fraud or corruption.”
- Also does away with the 8th Schedule of the Act that contained the necessary qualifications for accreditation of arbitrators.

- Added a provision in Section 36 of the Arbitration Act and will come into effect retrospectively from October 23, 2015. As per this amendment, if the Court is satisfied that a prima facie case is made out that the arbitration agreement or contract which is the basis of the award was induced or effected by fraud or corruption, it will stay the award unconditionally pending disposal of the challenge made to the award under Section 34.

Doubling Farmers Income

- Recently, the Central Government admitted that no actual assessment of farm income has been carried out since 2013.

Key points are:

- The Government of India in its Annual Budget 2016-17 set a policy target of doubling farmers’ income by 2022.
- Agriculture sustains livelihood for more than half of India’s total population. Doubling farmers’ income in such a short period is an overwhelming task for decision makers, scientists and policy makers because of its continued role in employment, income and most importantly in national food security.
- Doubling farmers’ income is possible through increasing total output and better price realization in the market, reduction in production costs, diversification of product, efficient post-harvest management, value addition, etc.

Some institutional reforms taken by the Government are:

- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Soil health card, and Prampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana: Aiming to raise output and reduce cost.
- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana: To provide insurance against crop and income loss and to encourage investment in farming.
- Interlinking of rivers To raise output and farm incomes.
- Operation Greens: To address price volatility of perishable commodities like Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP).
- PM Kisan Sampada Yojana: To promote food processing in a holistic manner.

Some Technological Reforms are:

- Initiating E-NAM: The National Agriculture Market (eNAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the existing Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities.
- Technology mission on cotton: Its objective is to increase the income of the cotton growers by reducing the cost of cultivation as well as by increasing the yield per hectare through proper transfer of technology to the growers.
- Technology Mission on Oilseeds, Pulses and Maize (TMOPM): Few schemes implemented under TMOPM are: Oilseeds Production Programme (OPP), National Pulses Development Project (NPDP), etc.
- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH): It is a scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.

Maharaja Suheldev Memorial and development work of Chittaura Lake**Why in news?**

- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of Maharaja Suheldev Memorial and development work of Chittaura Lake at Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh via video conference on 16 February, 2021. The Prime Minister also inaugurated the medical College building named after Maharaja Suheldev. Governor and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh were present on the occasion.

Key points are:

- The Prime Minister said history of India is not only the history written by colonial powers or those with colonial mindset. Indian History is what has been nurtured by the common people in their folklore and taken forward by the generations.

- He lamented the fact that the people who sacrificed their all for India and Indianness have not been given their due importance.
- The Prime Minister cited examples of celebrating the contribution of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose from Red Fort to Andaman Nicobar, Sardar Patel in Statue of Unity and Baba Saheb Ambedkar through Panch Teerth.
- The Prime Minister said that Maharaja Suheldev's contribution to protect Indianness was similarly ignored.
- Maharaja Suheldev has been kept alive in the hearts of people by the folklore of Awadh, Tarai and Poorvanchal despite being ignored by the textbooks.
- The Prime Minister expressed the hope that the memorial for Maharaja Suheldev, will inspire the generations to come and said that with establishment of the medical college and expansion of the health facilities, will make life for people in this aspirational district and nearby areas better.

Key projects of oil & gas sector in Tamil Nadu**Why in news?**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate to the nation and lay the foundation of key projects of the oil & gas sector in Tamil Nadu on 17th February 2021 via video conferencing.

Key points are:

- Prime Minister will dedicate to the nation the Ramanathapuram Thoothukudi natural gas pipeline and Gasoline Desulphurisation Unit at Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited, Manali.
- He will also lay the foundation stone of Cauvery Basin Refinery at Nagapattinam.
- These projects will result in substantial socio-economic benefits and will boost the country's march towards Urja Aatmanirbharta. Governor and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, and Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas will also be present on the occasion.

About the Projects

- The Ramanathapuram - Thoothukudi section (143 km) of the Ennore-Thiruvallur-Bengaluru-Puducherry-Nagapattinam-Madurai-Tuticorin Natural Gas Pipeline has been laid at the cost of about Rs. 700 crores.
- It will help utilise gas from ONGC Gas fields and deliver natural gas as feedstock to industries and other commercial customers.
- The Gasoline Desulphurisation Unit at Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL), Manali has been constructed at the cost of about Rs. 500 crore. It will produce low sulphur (less than 8 ppm) environment-friendly gasoline, help reduce emission and contribute towards a cleaner environment.
- The Cauvery Basin Refinery to be set up at Nagapattinam will have a capacity of 9 million metric tonnes per annum. It will be set up through a Joint Venture of IOCL and CPCL at an estimated project cost of Rs. 31,500 crore.
- It will produce Motor Spirit and Diesel meeting BS-VI specifications, and Polypropylene as a value-added product.

Pey Jal Survekshan under Jal Jeevan Mission

Why in news?

- A Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan under Jal Jeevan Mission Urban has been launched by Shri Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA on 15 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- Providing details of the Pilot, Shri Mishra informed that Pey Jal Survekshan will be conducted in cities to ascertain equitable distribution of water, reuse of wastewater and mapping of water bodies with respect to quantity and quality of water through a challenge process.
- "As the first step, Ministry has decided to launch a pilot on Pey Jal Survekshan in 10 cities namely Agra, Badlapur, Bhubaneswar, Churu, Kochi, Madurai, Patiala, Rohtak, Surat and Tumkur. Based on the learnings of the pilot, this survekshan will be extended to all the AMRUT cities", he further informed.

- Data on drinking water, waste water management, non-revenue water and condition of 3 water bodies in the city will be collected through face-to-face interviews with citizens and municipal officials as per the approved questionnaire, on-call interviews, water sample collection and laboratory testing, and field survey for non-revenue water.
- Mission will be monitored through a technology-based platform on which beneficiary response will be monitored along with progress and output-outcome.
- Funding from Government for projects will be in three tranches of 20:40:40. Third instalment will be released based on functional outcomes achieved and credible exclusion will be exercised while funding.

About Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) (JJM (U))

- It is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with SDG Goal6.
- Also, sewerage/septage management in 500 AMRUT cities with the objective of making them water secure are the major focus areas under JJM (U).
- Estimated gap in urban household tap connections is 2.68 crore and estimated gap in sewer connections/septage in 500 AMRUT cities is 2.64 crore, which is proposed to be covered in JJM (U).

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- Rejuvenation of water bodies to augment sustainable fresh water supply and creating green spaces and sponge cities to reduce floods and enhance amenity value through an Urban Aquifer Management plan are other focus areas.
- JJM (U) will promote circular economy of water through development of city water balance plan for each city focusing on recycle/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation. 20% of water demand to be met by reused water with development of institutional mechanism.
- A Technology Sub-Mission for water is proposed to leverage latest global technologies in the field of water. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign is proposed to spread awareness among masses about conservation of water.
- Mission also has a reform agenda, under which City Water Potability Index, reduction in non-revenue water, municipal finance reforms, rain water harvesting, recycle water to meet at least 20% total water demand by 2025 and rejuvenating three water bodies per ULB are the key proposed reforms.
- The total outlay proposed for JJM (U) is ₹2,87,000 crore which includes 10,000 crore for continuing financial support to AMRUT Mission. In order to promote Public Private Partnership, it has been mandated for cities having million plus population to take up PPP projects worth minimum of 10 percent of their total project fund allocation.
- For North East and Hill States, central funding for projects will be 90%. For Union Territories, central funding will be 100%. For cities with less than 1 lakh population, central funding will be 50%; for cities with 1 lakh to 10 lakh population, central funding will be one third; and for cities with million plus population, central funding will be 25%.

Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme

Why in news?

The scheme is being implemented in 32 States and UTs.

Key points are:

- Launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare on December 5, 2015.
- Under the scheme, village level Soil Testing Labs will be set up by youth having education in agriculture, Women Self Help Groups, FPOs etc.
- The scheme also focuses on enabling employment generation after appropriate skill development.

About Soil Health Card (SHC)

- SHC is a printed report that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings.
- Soil Health Card provides two sets of fertilizer recommendations for six crops including recommendations of organic manures.
- It will contain the status of his soil with respect to 12 parameters, namely: pH, Electrical Conductivity (EC), Organic Carbon (OC), Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), Sulphur (S), Zinc (Zn), Boron (B), Iron (Fe), Manganese (Mn), Copper (Cu) of farm holdings.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020

Why in news?

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020 was passed in Lok Sabha in March 2020, and is likely to be brought before Rajya Sabha during the ongoing Budget Session.

Key points are:

- The Bill proposes several amendments, including the constitution of a Medical Board in every State and UT.
- The board will decide on pregnancies beyond 24 weeks in cases of foetal abnormalities.
- Each board will have one gynaecologist, one radiologist or sonologist, one paediatrician, and other members prescribed by the State/UT government.

**About the present issue**

- As per the latest study, creation of this board is “unfeasible” as 82% of posts are lying vacant in the country.

Highlights of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020:

- It seeks to extend the upper limit for permitting abortions from 20 weeks to 24 under special circumstances.
- The “special categories of women” include rape survivors, victims of incest, the differently abled and minors.
- The Bill proposes requirement of opinion of one registered medical practitioner (RMP) for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation.
- It also provides for the requirement of opinion of two RMPs for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks.

What is the need for overhaul?

- The present abortion law, which is about five decades old, permits abortion up to a maximum foetal gestation period of 20 weeks.
- In recent years, there have been strong demands to raise the foetal gestation period for abortion beyond 20 weeks.

Chabahar Port

Why in news?

- India delivers 2 cranes for Chabahar. This is part of a bilateral contract between India and Iran signed in May 2016 for \$85 million to equip and operationalise the port. Amid talks with Iranian authorities, it signals a push to the port project.

Key points are:

- Significance: India’s plans to invest further in the port project are seen as an indicator that the government expects some easing up in U.S. sanctions in the upcoming months, once the new Biden administration begins to address its policy on re-entering the Iran nuclear deal.

Location of Chabahar Port

- Located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country.

Why Chabahar port is important for India?

- With this, India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.
- It will also boost India’s access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- It also helps India counter Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- Trade benefits: With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

Corruption Perception Index 2020

Why in news?

- Corruption Perception Index 2020 has been released. It is prepared by Transparency International.

Key points are:**About Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)**

- It is a composite index that draws from 12 surveys to rank nations around the globe.

- It has become a benchmark gauge of perceptions of corruption and is used by analysts and investors.
- The index is also based on expert opinions of public sector corruption and takes note of range of factors like whether governmental leaders are held to account or go unpunished for corruption, the perceived prevalence of bribery, and whether public institutions respond to citizens' needs.
- How are the countries ranked?
- It ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and business people.
- It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.
- India's performance:
- India slipped six places to 86th position this year.
- India's score is below the average score of the Asia-Pacific region (31 countries) and global average.
- India's overall score is also two points less than that of China, which docked at 78th position.
- Overall best and worst performers:
- The list was topped by New Zealand and Denmark (88 each).
- South Sudan and Somalia were at the bottom of the global ranking, with scores of 12 each.

Corruption and COVID-19:

- The latest edition of CPI highlighted the impact of corruption on government responses to COVID-19, comparing countries' performance in the index to their investment in health care and the extent to which democratic norms and institutions have been weakened during the pandemic.

Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahostav

Why in news?

- The three day Cultural Festival of the 11th Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahostav in Rajbari of Cooch Behar, West bengal concluded on 16 February, 2021 with programs performed by Dohar, a popular Bengali band, other renowned artists and local troupes .

Key points are:

- The Mahostav organised for the Rajbari, the magnificent palace grounds witnessed performances by renowned artists and musicians; folk artists highlighting the rich cultural diversity.
- A big draw was singer and music composer Shri Kailash Kher, Kathak dancer Souvik Chakroborty while tabla mastero, Bikram Ghosh performed at the inauguration.
- Icons from music to classical performers performed during the last three days giving the local people glimpses of the heritage and also be a platform to encourage and preserve the local arts. A handicraft Mela was also held on the occasion.
- The festival held in West Bengal was inaugurated by the Governor Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar in the presence of the Minister of State (I/C) Culture, Shri Prahlad Singh Patel on 14th February.
- The second leg of the program will now be held in Darjeeling from 22nd to 24th February.
- The RSM which is being organized in the State will enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

About Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahostav (RSM)

- RSM, the flagship festival of this Ministry of Culture has been organized since 2015 with the active participation of Seven Zonal Culture Centres has been playing a pivotal role to take the vibrant culture of India out to the masses instead of confining to auditoria and galleries.
- It has been instrumental in showcasing, folk and tribal art, dance, music, cuisines & culture of one state in other states reinforcing the cherished goal of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" and at the same time providing an effective platform to the artists and artisans to support their livelihood.
- Ten editions of RSM have been held till date since November, 2015 in various states and cities such as Delhi, Varanasi, Bengaluru, Tawang, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tehri and Madhya Pradesh.

- Organized by the Ministry of culture and the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre Kolkata it has brought all the seven zonal cultural centres together to bring culture to the masses and also reinforce the goal of Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat.

PM-Kisan Scheme

Why in news?

- The PM-Kisan scheme, launched with an aim to ensure a life of dignity and prosperity for farmers has completed two years on 24 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- In a series of tweets the Prime Minister said, "On this day, 2 years ago the PM-Kisan scheme was launched with an aim to ensure a life of dignity as well as prosperity for our hardworking farmers, who work day and night to keep our nation fed. The tenacity and passion of our farmers is inspiring.
- Over the last 7 years, the Government of India has taken many initiatives for transforming agriculture. From better irrigation to more technology, more credit and markets to proper crop insurance, focus on soil health to eliminating middlemen, the efforts are all-encompassing.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Telecom and Networking Products

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, has approved Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Telecom and Networking Products with a budgetary outlay of Rs. 12,195 crore.

Key points are:

- The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme intends to promote manufacture of Telecom and Networking Products in India and proposes a financial incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract investments in the target segments of telecom and networking products in order to encourage Make in India.

- The scheme will also encourage exports of telecom and networking products 'Made in India'.
- Support under the Scheme will be provided to companies/entities engaged in manufacturing of specified telecom and networking products in India.
- Eligibility will be further subject to achievement of a minimum threshold of cumulative incremental investment over a period of four years and incremental sales of manufactured goods net of taxes (as distinct from traded goods) over the Base Year 2019-2020.
- The cumulative investment can be made at one go, subject to annual cumulative threshold as prescribed for four years being met.
- Globally Telecom and Networking Products exports represent an US\$100 billion market opportunity, which can be exploited by India.
- With support under the scheme, India will augment capacities by attracting large investments from global players and at the same time encourage promising domestic champion companies to seize the emerging opportunities and become big players in the export market.
- With this scheme, India will be well positioned as a global hub for manufacturing of Telecom and Networking Products. Incremental production around Rs. 2 Lakh crore is expected to be achieved over 5 years. India will improve its competitiveness in manufacturing with increased value addition.
- It is expected that scheme will bring more than Rs. 3,000 crore investment and generate huge direct and indirect employments.



India 'out of recession'**Why in news?**

- As per the National Statistical office (NSO), India's economy is out of recession but still a long way from returning to rates of growth seen before the pandemic.

Key points are:

- IndiaAsia's third biggest economy recorded a rise in gross domestic product of 0.4% in the final three months of 2020, compared with the same period a year earlier.
- Last year, the country plunged into recession for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century, with economists warning that it would struggle to recover from the slump.

Key takeaways from Q3 GDP data:

- Manufacturing revival.
- Agriculture growth accelerates.
- Financial, real estate sectors rebound.
- Consumer confidence still low.
- Government spending picks up.
- Investment demand rises.
- Recession is a macroeconomic term that refers to a slowdown or a massive contraction in economic activities for a long enough period, or it can be said that when a recessionary phase sustains for long enough, it is called a recession.
- Depression is a deep and long-lasting period of negative economic growth, with output falling for at least 12 months and GDP falling by over 10% or it can be referred to as a severe and prolonged recession.

NASSCOM Technology and Leadership Forum**Why in news?**

- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi addressed the NASSCOM Technology and Leadership Forum (NTLF) on 17 February, 2021 through video conferencing.

Key points are:

- The Prime Minister lauded the IT industry for their resilience during the Corona period. "When the chips were down, your code kept things running" said the Prime Minister. He noted 2 percent growth in the sector and addition of 4 billion dollars in revenue amidst the apprehensions of de-growth.
- The Prime Minister noted that today's India is eager for progress and the Government understand this feeling. He said aspirations of 130 crore Indians inspire us to move forward with rapid speed. He emphasized that expectations related to the new India are there from the private sector also as they are from the government.
- The Prime Minister listed the steps taken in recent times such as National Communication Policy, policy to make India Global Software Product Hub and Other Service Provider" (OSP) guidelines which were issued during Corona period.
- He noted that inclusion of Information services into 12 champion service sectors has started bearing fruit. Recent liberalization of maps and geo-spatial data will strengthen the tech start up ecosystem and the wider mission of Aatmnirbhar Bharat.
- The Prime Minister emphasized that young entrepreneurs should have the freedom to leverage the new opportunities.
- The Government has full faith in the start up and innovators, said the Prime Minister. Steps like self-certification, use of IT solutions in Governance, data democratization through Digital India have taken the process forward.

Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine (SMPPQ)**Why in news?**

- The Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare performs regulatory, monitoring, surveillance and Human Resource Development functions through a scheme "Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine (SMPPQ)".

Key points are:

- The aim of minimizing loss to quality and yield of agricultural crops from the ravages of insect pests, diseases, weeds, nematodes, rodents etc. and to shield our bio-security from the incursion and spread of alien species.
- Revalidation of more than 1200 pack houses, rice mills, processing units, treatment facilities, fumigation agencies, post entry quarantine facilities etc to facilitate agri export has been done.
- To promote Integrated Pest Management and judicious use of Pesticides, 14 crop specific and pest specific Package of Practices have been issued to the States during the lockdown period.
- To promote Make in India, 6788 Certificates of Registration (CR) have been issued to indigenous manufacturers of pesticides and 1011 CRs issued for export of pesticides.
- The Destructive Insect and Pests Act, 1914 and the Insecticides Act, 1968 provide the legal framework for the regulatory function.
- During 2020-21, India became the first country in the world to control locusts by using drones after finalizing protocols and Standard Operating Procedures.
- The largest locust control operation in Indian history has been conducted by the Central Government in collaboration with the States.
- Locust attack was controlled in more than 5.70 lakh hectare area of 10 States.
- Control capabilities of Locust Circle Offices (LCOs) have been strengthened by deploying helicopters for aerial spraying of pesticides for locust control. Till now control operations against locusts were carried out in an area of 2,87,986 hectares by LCOs and 2,83,268 hectares by State Governments.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare relaxed the conditions for Import of Onions into India during 2020 in order to stabilize the price and availability of Onion in the local market.

- Market access was obtained for carrot seeds from Iran, wheat flour, basmati rice and pomegranate seeds from Uzbekistan, pomegranate from Australia, mango, basmati rice and sesame seeds from Argentina and peanuts from Peru during 2020-21.

National Polio Immunisation Programme**Why in news?**

- The National Polio Immunisation programme in India began on Sunday, 31 January 2021.

Key points are:

- The National Immunisation Day (NID) is commonly known as Pulse Polio Immunisation Programme.
- Polio drops are given to children in the age group of 0 to 5 years.
- The polio vaccination programme is conducted twice in a year, usually in the early months.
- The pulse polio programme always begins on a Sunday, known as Polio Ravivar.

"Hunar Haat"**Why in news?**

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on 21 February, 2021 formally inaugurated the 26th "Hunar Haat" of indigenous artisans and craftsmen from across the country at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

Key points are:

- Lok Sabha MP Smt. Meenakshi Lekhi graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. Secretary, Union Minority Affairs Ministry, Shri P. K. Das, other senior officials and dignitaries were also present on the occasion.
- On the occasion, Rajnath Singh Ji said that "Every region of the country has an amazing talent and brilliance. The artisans of "Hunar Haat" are not only "Ustad" of art and craft; they are also "Ustad" of destiny.



- "Hunar Haat" has been playing an important role in strengthening the country's economy. It brings together indigenous artisans and craftsmen from across the country.
- It is a beautiful exhibition of our traditional art and craft and more importantly our "cultural mosaic". "Hunar Haat" is doing branding of traditional legacy of artisans, craftsmen and is playing important role towards "Aatmnirbhar Bharat".
- The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs is organising the 26th "Hunar Haat" on the theme of "Vocal for Local" from 20th February to 01st March 2021.
- More than 600 artisans and craftsmen from more than 31 States and UTs are participating in the "Hunar Haat" in New Delhi. Artisans and craftsmen from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal etc are participating in "Hunar Haat".
- Exquisite indigenous handmade products such as Applique work, dry flowers, jute-cane, brass products, wooden and clay toys, Ajrakh Block Print, Blue Art Pottery, Pashmina Shawl, Khadi products, Banarsi Silk, Wooden Furniture, Chikankari Embroidery, Chanderi Silk, Lac bangles, Rajasthani jewellery, Phulkari, Oil Painting, Leather products, Khurja pottery, Sandalwood artefacts from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Jute products from West Bengal etc are available for sale and display at "Hunar Haat".

Railway Projects in West Bengal

Why in news?

- The Union Minister of Railways, Commerce & Industry and Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Piyush Goyal on 21 February, 2021 dedicated to the Nation various infrastructure development and passenger amenity related works in North Bengal area through video conferencing in presence of other dignitaries at different locations.

Key points are:

- Ms. Debasree Chaudhuri, Hon'ble Minister of State of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India was also present along with other dignitaries at various locations.
- Speaking on the occasion, Shri Piyush Goyal said, "Railways is serving the nation in an extraordinary way. Railways has taken up on itself to contribute big time to the mission of Sonar Bangla. Railways would be fully electrified in 3 years in West Bengal and all on going projects will be completed at the earliest."
- 126 Route Kilometer newly electrified section from New Jalpaiguri to New Coochbehar dedicated today is part of the Railway electrification work which is going on to achieve 100% electrification of Indian Railways' network.
- This section is vital for train movement towards northeastern states. With electrification making steady progress in this area more trains carrying freights and passengers can be operated in an environment friendly manner with less carbon emission.
- This project costing about Rs. 287 Crs will lead to huge savings in consumption of fossil fuels. It may be mentioned here that railway electrification of the whole of N.F. Railway was sanctioned in the budget of 2018 and it is targeted to be completed by December, 2023.
- The Haldibari station bordering Bangladesh has been constructed considering the need of future economic development of this area. The new station has 3 passenger platforms with 26 coach capacity and 2 goods line.
- The entire construction of the new station building at Haldibari along with other works like construction of new circulating area, running rooms, signaling system was constructed at a cost of about Rs. 82.72 crs.
- Electronic Interlocking at Haldibari and Jalpaiguri stations have also been provided to enhance safety of train operations in this section.

- Gangarampur is an important town in the South Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The station here has been converted to a crossing station with provision of High level platform and modern Electronic Interlocking at a cost of about Rs. 09.09 crs, which fulfilled a long standing demand of the local populace.
- With an aim to provide better amenities and convenience to passenger, the Alipurduar Jn station has been re-developed to meet the operational requirement. The New Station building with improved aesthetics in pursuant to local culture was built at a cost of Rs. 8.11 Cr.
- Indian Railway has been providing new lifts and escalators in all important stations for the benefit of passengers.
- Construction of two new lifts for use of passenger at the Alipurduar Jn station, built at a cost of about Rs. 80.8 lacs will prove to be very helpful for passengers especially Senior citizen and Divyangs to move from platform 1, 2 & 3 to other platforms.
- Madarihat station falling in the Dooars section of North Bengal is an important tourist place.
- The provision of a new Foot Over Bridge in between PF No. 1 & 2 which has been provided at a cost of Rs 1.13 Crores will provide safe passage to passengers for boarding / de-boarding trains stopping at PF 2 of the station.
- Indian Railway is installing high mast flags in all important stations throughout the country. One such high mast flag installed at the New Coochbehar station has also been dedicated to the Nation.

6 Years of UJALA and SLNP

Why in news?

- The UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All) and SLNP (Street Lighting National Programme) completed six years of successful implementation. The two programmes revamped household and public lighting systems across the country.

Key points are:

- Both schemes have been implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of PSUs under the Ministry of Power.
- These programmes have bagged global awards like the South Asia Procurement Innovation Award (SAPIA) 2017, Global Solid State Lighting (SSL) award of excellence for the transformational contribution to the LED sector, etc.

About Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA)

- UJALA is a zero-subsidy scheme launched by the Government in 2015. It is touted as the world's largest domestic lighting project. Also known as the LED-based Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (DELP), it aims to promote the efficient usage of energy for all i.e., its consumption, savings and lighting.
- Every domestic household having a metered connection from their respective Electricity Distribution Company is eligible to get the LED bulbs under the Scheme.
- Under UJALA, EESL has distributed over 36.69 crore LED bulbs across India. This has resulted in estimated energy savings of 47.65 billion kWh per year with avoided peak demand of 9,540 MW and estimated GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emission reduction of 38.59 million tonnes CO₂ per year.
- It has helped in the growth of domestic LED (Light-Emitting Diode) markets.
- It has helped to bring down the average household electricity bills by 15%.

About Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP)

- The SLNP, launched in 2015, is a government scheme to promote energy-efficiency in India.
- Under the programme, EESL replaces the conventional street lights with LEDs at its own costs, with no upfront investment by the municipalities, thereby making their adoption even more attractive.
- This scheme is expected to enable peak demand reduction of 500 MW, annual energy savings of 190 crore kWh, and reduction in 15 lakh tons of CO₂.

- The SLNP has plans to bring investment of Rs. 8,000 crores by 2024 to cover the entire rural India.
- Over 1.14 crore smart LED streetlights have been installed till date, enabling an estimated energy savings of 7.67 billion kWh per year with an avoided Peak demand of 1,161 MW and an estimated greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction of 5.29 million tons CO₂ annually.
- With the help of the scheme, the municipalities were able to save 5,210 crores of Rupees in their electricity bills.

Second phase of Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav (RSM)

Why in news?

- The second phase of the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav will be inaugurated by the Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism (Independent Charge) Shri Prahlad Singh Patel on 22nd February 2021 at Raj Bhawan in Darjeeling, West Bengal.

Key points are:

- The festival is being held from 22nd February to 24th February. The Governor of West Bengal, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar will grace the closing ceremony on 24th February 2021.
- The Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is organised to promote the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
- The 3-day event in Darjeeling will begin with a choreographic presentation by Odissi Vision and Movement Centre, followed by recitals by Dona Ganguly (Odissi), Michael (Saxophone), Shayne Hyrapiet (Band).
- On second day, there will be a Rabindra Sangeet recital by Sounak Chattopadhyay, a creative dance recital by Sapphire Dance troupe, the North eastern band of Daniel Engti and Kamran and the Boyz Band.
- -Last day will begin with Bail songs by Anuttam Baul, followed by Kathak Ballet by Sanskriti Sreyaskar and a dance drama.
- On all days local artistes will be given an opportunity to perform on the RSM stage. There will be 20 crafts stalls from all over the country showcasing genuine hand-crafted products.

- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav (RSM), the flagship festival of this Ministry organized since 2015 with the active participation of Seven Zonal Culture Centres has been playing a pivotal role to take the vibrant culture of India out to the masses instead of confining to auditoria and galleries.
- It has been instrumental in showcasing, folk and tribal art, dance, music, cuisines & culture of one state in other states reinforcing the cherished goal of “Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” and at the same time providing an effective platform to the artists and artisans to support their livelihood.
- Ten editions of RSM have been held till date since November, 2015 in various states and cities such as Delhi, Varanasi, Bengaluru, Tawang, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tehri and Madhya Pradesh.
- Renowned artists including local artists will be a part of this major festival. The Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav-2021 will cover a profusion of folk-art forms and it would offer the chance to experience the best in established and emerging virtuosity.
- The RSM will reconnect the people, especially the youth, with their indigenous culture, its multi-faceted nature, magnificence, opulence and historical importance in the context of India as a Nation over the millennia.
- This RSM which is being organized in West Bengal will enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2021

Why in news?

- Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2021.

Key points are:

- The Bill seeks to replace the ordinance promulgated in November last year that seeks to curb religious conversions carried out by fraudulent or any other undue means.

- It makes religious conversion for marriage a non-bailable offence.
- The onus will be on the defendant to prove that conversion was not for marriage.
- The notice period to the district magistrate for the religious conversion is two months.
- In case of conversion done by a woman for the sole purpose of marriage, the marriage would be declared null and void.
- Violation of the provisions of the law would invite a jail term of not less than one year extendable to five years with a fine of 15,000.
- If a minor woman or a woman from the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribes communities was converted through the said unlawful means, the jail term would be a minimum of three years and could be extended to 10 years with a fine of ₹25,000.
- The Bill also lays down strict action, including cancellation of registration of social organisations conducting mass conversions.
- The ordinance, passed in November 2020, comes days after the Allahabad high court said in a verdict (Salamat Ansari-Priyanka Kharwar case) that the right to choose a partner or live with a person of choice was part of a citizen's fundamental right to life and liberty.
- The verdict also said earlier court rulings that 'religious conversion for marriage was unacceptable' was not good in law.
- The Supreme Court of India, in both the Lily Thomas and Sarla Mudgal cases, has confirmed that religious conversions carried out without a bona fide belief and for the sole purpose of deriving some legal benefit do not hold water.

One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme

Why in news?

- The review of One Rank One Pension (OROP) has been pending since June 2020. The issue was discussed during the recent parliamentary panel meet.

Key points are:

- There are certain 'loopholes' which need to be fixed in the scheme. A committee has been constituted to look into the issue by the Defence Ministry to work out the modalities of the revision but no announcement has been made on when the revision would be undertaken.
- OROP implies uniform pension to personal based on rank and length of service, irrespective of the date of retirement.
- The Government had implemented the long pending demand of veterans in November 2015 and as per the notification, it is to be revised every five years.
- Armed Forces Personnel who had retired till 30th June 2014 are covered under it.
- The implementation of the scheme was based on recommendation of the Koshiyari committee.

Liberalization of geospatial policies will boost innovation in the sector

Why in news?

- Secretary, Department of Science & Technology (DST) Prof Ashutosh Sharma highlighted that liberalization of geospatial policies, announced a few days ago by the Government of India, will help to boost innovation in the sector and create a level playing field for the public as well as private sector, at the National Geospatial Awards Felicitation Ceremony recently.

Key points are:

- "We aim to utilize the power of geospatial technology to revive various sectors of the Indian economy," he said, speaking via webinar at the online felicitation ceremony organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI).
- The Guidelines for acquiring and producing Geo-Spatial Data and Geo-Spatial Data Services, including Maps, was recently released to facilitate access to such data across sectors.

- National Informatics Centre (NIC) received the Geospatial Excellence in Governance award for project Creation of Multi-Layer GIS for E-governance & PlanningBharat Maps.
- At the award ceremony, Prof Sharma appealed to all stakeholders to share recommendations, insights and advice about various aspects of geospatial data and how to bring the entire ecosystem in place to give it full muscle for strengthening the policy.

No postal ballots for NRIs this time

Why in news?

- The Election Commission has said that postal ballots facility would not be extended to NRIs for the upcoming elections to the Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and West Bengal Assemblies.

Key points are:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) had written to the Law Ministry on November 27, 2020 with the proposal of extending postal ballots to overseas electors.
- EC's note was further referred to the Ministry of External Affairs. The MEA was of the opinion that a wider meeting of stakeholders should be held.
- Under ETPBS, postal ballot is sent electronically to a service voter.
- The voter downloads it and uses a specific envelope to return it to the returning officer of his constituency.

- The postal ballot should reach the returning officer by 8 am on the day of the counting. Counting of votes begin with counting of postal ballots at 8 am.

Amendments:

- To extend the voting facility to overseas voters, Government needs to only amend the Conduct of Election Rules 1961, and doesn't require Parliament's nod.

The current process of voting for Indian citizens living abroad is

- Voting rights for NRIs were introduced only in 2011, through an amendment to the Representation of the People Act 1950.
- An NRI can vote in the constituency in which her place of residence, as mentioned in the passport, is located.
- She can only vote in person and will have to produce her passport in original at the polling station for establishing identity.
- According to a UN report of 2015, India's diaspora population is the largest in the world at 16 million people.

States/UTs roll out Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0


Why in news?

- Various States and UTs have started implementation of the Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0, a campaign aimed to reach those children and pregnant women who have been missed out or been left out of the Routine Immunisation Programme.

Key points are:

- This is aimed to accelerate the full immunization of children and pregnant women through a mission mode intervention. The first phase has been rolled out from 22nd Feb 2021 for fifteen days.
- The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan, launched the campaign on 19th February, 2021 and urged the States and district functionaries to reach each and every child and attain maximum Full Immunization Coverage.

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- The campaign has exemplified ownership of the immunization program by top most leadership at the state level also.
- The campaign in Uttar Pradesh was inaugurated by the Chief Minister, Shri Yogi Adityanath on 21st February 2021.
- The campaign was kicked off in Rajasthan with its Health Minister Dr Raghu Sharma inaugurating the programme on 22nd February 2021.
- In Madhya Pradesh, Dr Prabhu Ram Choudhary, State Health Minister inaugurated the campaign in a function held at Bhopal on 22nd February 2021.
- The campaign is scheduled to have two rounds of immunization lasting 15 days (excluding Routine immunization and holidays).
- It is being conducted in pre-identified 250 districts/urban areas across 29 States/UTs in the country.
- As per the Guidelines released for IMI 3.0, the districts have been classified to reflect 313 low risk; 152 as medium risk; and 250 as high risk districts.
- As per data reported till 1700 hrs. on 22nd February, nearly 29,000 children and 5,000 pregnant women were vaccinated (data provisional).
- About IMI 3.0 campaign
- IMI 3.0 campaign spearheaded by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), will be implemented in mission-mode with support from key departments, as well as a strong network of partners and civil society organizations, youth groups, and community members.
- It will be taken as an opportunity to catch up on any immunization gaps that might have emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Square Kilometre Array

Why in news?

- On 4th Feb, the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Council held its maiden meeting and approved the establishment of the world's largest radio telescope.

Key points are:

- SKAO is a new intergovernmental organisation dedicated to radio astronomy and is headquartered in the UK.
- At the moment, organisations from ten countries are a part of the SKAO.
- These include Australia, Canada, China, India, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK.
- About Radio telescopes
- Unlike optical telescopes, radio telescopes can detect invisible gas and, therefore, they can reveal areas of space that may be obscured by cosmic dust.
- The first radio signals were detected by physicist Karl Jansky in the 1930s.
- The Arecibo telescope in Puerto Rico, which was the second-largest single-dish radio telescope in the world, collapsed in December 2020. The telescope was built in 1963.

About SKA Telescope:

- The telescope is proposed to be the largest radio telescope in the world.
- It will be located in Africa and Australia whose operation, maintenance and construction will be overseen by SKAO.
- The completion is expected to take nearly a decade at a cost of over £1.8 billion.

Media Platform Bill

Why in news?

- Australia has reached out to India among several countries, including Canada, France and the UK, in a move to stitch a global coalition against tech giants Google and Facebook amid a faceoff over compensation for sharing news content from media companies on their platforms.

Key points are:

- Australia's proposed law, News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020, mandates a bargaining code that aims to force Google and Facebook to compensate media companies for using their content.

- The Bill is expected to set a precedent in regulating social media across geographies.
- Payment to News Outlets: Big tech and social media giants like Facebook and Google will have to pay local news outlets for using their content.
- Big Tech firms will have to negotiate how much they pay local publishers and broadcasters for content that appears on their platforms.
- Provision of Arbitration and Fine: An arbiter is mandated to adjudicate if no agreement is reached and there are also provisions of heavy fines if agreements are not done.

Money Bills

Why in news?

- In a pre-emptive move, the Congress has written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, urging him not to bypass the Rajya Sabha by declaring seven key Bills, including one on the privatisation of two public sector banks, as money Bills.

Key points are:

- The Rajya Sabha has limited powers to legislate on a money Bill.
- The Lok Sabha is free to accept or reject amendments made by the Rajya Sabha on a money Bill.

About Money Bill

- A money bill is defined by Article 110 of the Constitution, as a draft law that contains only provisions that deal with all or any of the matters listed therein.
- These comprise a set of seven features, broadly including items such as the imposition or regulation of a tax; the regulation of the borrowing of money by the Government of India; the withdrawal of money from the Consolidated Fund of India; and so forth.
- In the event a proposed legislation contains other features, ones that are not merely incidental to the items specifically outlined, such a draft law cannot be classified as a money bill.

- Article 110 further clarifies that in cases where a dispute arises over whether a bill is a money bill or not, the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision on the issue shall be considered final.

More financial powers for senior officers

Why in news?

- The Cabinet has approved enhanced delegation of financial powers for capital procurement to senior officers below the rank of Vice-Chief of armed forces.

Key points are:

- The delegation of power will help in the modernization of Armed forces.

About DAP 2020

- It was unveiled in September 2020.
- The new policy superseded the Defence Procurement Procedure of 2016 from October 1, 2020.
- The DAP contains policies and procedures for procurement and acquisition from the capital budget of the MoD in order to modernise the Armed Forces including the Coast Guard.

Highlights of the new policy:

Reservations for Indigenous firms:

- The policy reserves several procurement categories for indigenous firms.
- DAP 2020 defines an "Indian vendor" as a company that is owned and controlled by resident Indian citizens, with foreign direct investment (FDI) not more than 49 per cent.
- New Buy (Global-Manufacture in India) category:
- This stipulates indigenisation of at least 50 per cent of the overall contract value of a foreign purchase bought with the intention of subsequently building it in India with technology transfer.
- Greater indigenous content:
- It promotes greater indigenous content in arms and equipment of the military procures, including equipment manufactured in India under licence. In most acquisition categories, DAP-2020 stipulates 10 per cent higher indigenisation than DPP 2016.



- Import embargo list:
- The “import embargo list” of 101 items that the government had promulgated has been specifically incorporated into DAP 2020. (An embargo is a government order that restricts commerce with a specified country or the exchange of specific goods.)

Offset liability:

- The government has decided not to have an offset clause in procurement of defence equipment if the deal is done through inter-government agreement (IGA), government-to-government or an ab initio single vendor.
- The offset clause requires a foreign vendor to invest a part of the contract value in India.

IIT Council's Recommendations

Why in news?

- Recently, the Institute of Technology (IIT) Council has constituted four working groups to look at greater autonomy for the IITs.

Key points are:

- The decision is in line with the National Education Policy recommendation.
- The IITs are seeking autonomy on the lines of what was granted to the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).
- The IIT Council is headed by the Education Minister. It includes the directors of all IITs, and the chairs of each IIT's Board of Governors (BoG).

Its objectives are:

- It is meant to advise on admission standards, duration of courses, degrees and other academic distinctions.
- It lays down policy regarding cadre, methods of recruitment and conditions of service of employees of all IITs.
- Working Groups of the Council:
Group-1: Graded Autonomy, Empowered & accountable BoG and Director.
Group-2: Grooming distinguished academics for directorship of IITs.

Group-3: Reform and restructuring of Academic Senate.

Group-4: Innovative funding mechanisms.

- To constitute a task force to review use of technology at all IITs and also to accelerate deployment of digital tools, Such as Blockchain, AI (Artificial intelligence), ML (machine learning), and Cloud Computing.

Kerala government annuls agreement with U.S. firm

Why in news?

- The Kerala government has invalidated a controversial agreement that the Kerala Shipping and Inland Navigation Corporation (KSINC) had reached with a U.S.-based firm, EMCC International, to build and operate a deep-sea trawling fleet to harvest the marine wealth off the State's coast.

Key points are:

- Opposition called this deal as a bid to sell off the state's marine wealth, endangering the livelihood of lakhs of fishermen in the state.
- One of the stated objectives of the deal was deep sea fishing with state-of-the-art technology.
- The components of the project were building 400 deep sea fishing trawlers as per the design proposed by EMCC.
- The EMCC would train and deploy 1.60 lakh fishermen in deep sea fishing. Their skills would be upgraded, and the local fishing community would benefit in terms of direct and indirect employment opportunities.
- The Union Government had in 2017 withdrawn permission given for foreign trawlers for deep sea fishing in the exclusive economic zone of the country.
- The EEZ of the country extends up to 370 km from the coastline. Illegal fishing by foreign vessels in Indian waters is punishable under provisions of Maritime Zone of India (Regulation of Fishing by Foreign Vessels Act) 1981.



Consecration ceremony of Mahamrityunjayatemple

Why in news?

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah attended the consecration ceremony of Mahamrityunjayatemple in Naugaon, Assam on 26 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- Amit Shah said that it was a privilege to participate in the consecration ceremony of the world's tallest 126 feet high Shivling in the Mahamrityunjaya temple.
- The vow of Shri Bhargugiri Ji Maharaj has been fulfilled. The Union Home Minister said that he prayed to Mahadev for the good health and prosperity of all countrymen.
- Amit Shah also visited Boroduapilgrimage, the birthplace of MahapurushShrimantShankardev.
- ShrimantShankardev started the new Vaishnav tradition from this holy land and made the Vaishnavite tradition vibrant. It was from here that Shri Shankardev started to give a new devotional culture to Assam and Shri Madhavdev took it forward.
- Besides starting the Bhakti Movement, ShrimantShankardevinitiated several steps for the unity of India.
- Amit Shah also said that Mahatma Gandhi had said during the Freedom Movement that "Assam is very fortunate that Shankardevwas born here 500 years ago, who gave the people of Assam a model that revived the concept of Ram Rajya."

2nd Khelo India National Winter Games

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the inaugural address at 2nd Khelo India National Winter Games through video conference.

Key points are:

- Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister said the second edition of Khelo India-Winter Games is starting from 26 February, 2021.

- This is a major step towards making Jammu and Kashmir a major hub with India's effective presence in the Winter Games.
- The Prime Minister said that sports has a global dimension and this vision has been guiding the recent reforms in the sports ecosystem. There is a holistic approach from the Khelo India Campaign to Olympic Podium stadium.
- Hand holding of sports professionals is being done from recognition of talent at grassroot level to bringing them to the highest global platform.
- The Prime Minister informed that Institutes of Higher education and Sports University are being established for sports.
- He emphasized the need to take sports sciences and sports management to the school level as that will improve the career prospects of the youth and will enhance India's presence in the sports economy.

E-Daakhil portal

Why in news?

- E-Daakhil portal for Consumer grievance redressal is now operational in 15 States/UTs. Department of Consumer Affairs is now proactively following up with the states to launch e-filing portal at their ends.

Key points are:

- E-Daakhil portal, launched by National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC) on 7th September, 2020, for online redressal of consumer grievances now operational in 15 States/UTs.
- Total 444 locations covered including NCDRC, State Commissions and District Commissions.
- Process to file consumer complaints made easy and simple through e-daakhil portal.
- Digital Portal will streamline consumer complaints redressal system.
- To facilitate Rural Consumers, the Common Service Centres to be integrated with e-daakhil portal.
- Department of Consumer Affairs proactively following up with the States/UTs to launch e-filing portal.



- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which has come into force from 20th July, 2020, has provision for e-filing of consumer complaints in the Consumer Commissions and online payment of the fees for filing a complaint.
- To facilitate the rural consumers for e-filing, it has been decided to integrate the Common Service Centres (CSC) with the e-daakhil portal.
- As many consumers at Gram Panchayat level may either not have access to electronic modes of communication or unable to use the tools, they may avail the services of CSCs in filing their complaints in the Consumer Commission.
- The work for integration of this portal with CSC is in under process.
- E-filing was launched by National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC) on 7th September, 2020.
- Delhi was the first state to implement it on 8th September, 2020. Later Maharashtra, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Chandigarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka & Haryana implemented facility of e-filing in their respective States/UTs.

Go Electric Campaign

Why in news?

- The central government has launched the "Go Electric" Campaign to spread awareness on the benefits of e-mobility and EV Charging Infrastructure as well as electric cooking in India.

Key points are:

- To push the country towards 100% e-mobility and clean and safe e-cooking.
- To create awareness at PAN-India level and reduce the import dependence of the country.
- To move ahead on the path of a low carbon economy, thereby saving the country and the planet from the adverse impact of climate change.
- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the aegis of the Ministry of Power has been mandated to undertake an awareness drive for promoting public charging, e-mobility & its ecosystem.

- E-mobility moves away from existing carbon-emitting fossil fuels to using energy from electrical power sources (e.g. the National Grid) through external charging capability.
- Presently, India is using 94 million tonnes of oil and petroleum products for transportation only which is expected to double by 2030.
- For fossil fuels, India currently has an import bill of Rs. 8 lakh Crore.
- It encompasses the use of fully electric, conventional hybrid, plug-in hybrid as well as hydrogen-fuelled vehicles.
- The government of India has undertaken multiple initiatives to promote manufacturing and adoption of electric vehicles (EV) in India. One such initiative is 'Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME-India)' Scheme.

Various development projects in Puducherry

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for 4 laning of NH45-A covering Karaikal District and Medical College Building at Karaikal New Campus Phase I, Karaikal District (JIPMER).
- He also laid the foundation stone for development of Minor Port at Puducherry under Sagarmala Scheme and Synthetic Athletic Track, Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, Puducherry.

Key points are:

- Narendra Modi inaugurated the Blood Centre at Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education & Research (JIPMER), Puducherry and a 100 bed girls' hostel at Lawspet, Puducherry for female athletes.
- He also inaugurated the reconstructed Heritage Marie Building.
- The Prime Minister said this land of Puducherry has been home to sages, scholars and poets and also to revolutionaries like Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi and Sri Aurobindo.



- Admiring Puducherry as a symbol of diversity, he said here people speak different languages, practice different faiths but live as one.
- The Prime Minister said India that four laning of NH 45-A would cover Karaikal District and improve the connectivity to the holy Saneeswaran Temple and also provide easy interstate connectivity to the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health and Nagor Dargah.
- Laying the foundation of Puducherry Port Development under Sagarmala Scheme, the Prime Minister hoped that once completed, it will help the fishermen who have been using this port for venturing into sea for fishing operations.
- It will provide much needed sea connectivity to Chennai. This will facilitate the cargo movement for industries of Puducherry and ease load on Chennai port. It will open up possibilities of passenger traffic among the coastal cities, he said.
- The Prime Minister said Direct Benefit Transfer has helped beneficiaries under various welfare schemes. He said this makes people empowered for making their choices.

Ram Nath Kovind performed Bhoomi Pujan (ground breaking ceremony) of a huge sports enclave in Ahmedabad

Why in news?

- The President Shri Ram Nath Kovind performed Bhoomi Pujan (ground breaking ceremony) of a huge sports enclave in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on 24 February, 2021 named after Bharat Ratna and brave son of Gujarat, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Key points are:

- President also inaugurated the world's largest sports stadium, 'Narendra Modi Cricket Stadium', this largest cricket stadium in the world is part of the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel sports complex.
- 1.32 lakh spectators will be able to enjoy the match in the stadium, the stadium has 11 pitches, unrivalled by any stadium in the world.

- It will be the largest sports enclave in the country to be built on 233 acres of land and will have world class sports facilities.
- Ahmedabad will be known as Sports City of India
- More than 600 schools in Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad rural district will be connected to the sports enclave and children of schools that do not have their own playgrounds will be able to avail of sports facilities.
- Accommodation for 250 coaches and 3,000 children will be available to make them able to train together.
- Prime Minister believes that youth cannot achieve things until they progress in sports, that's why he started Khelo India.

36th PRAGATI Meeting

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 24th February, 2021 chaired the 36th PRAGATI meeting.

Key points are:

- In the meeting, ten agenda items were taken up for review including eight projects, grievance relating to one scheme and one programme.
- Among the eight projects, three were from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, two from Ministry of Railways, one each from Ministry of Power, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Ministry of Home Affairs.
- These eight projects, with a cumulative cost of about ₹44,545 crore, pertained to 12 states viz., West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Meghalaya.
- The Prime Minister expressed his concerns in delays being observed in execution of some of the projects, and directed the officials concerned that all pending issues should be resolved in a time-bound manner, and wherever possible, in Mission Mode.

- During the interaction, the Prime Minister reviewed the programme for elimination of single use plastic. Review of grievances related to Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana was also taken up.
- In the previous 35 PRAGATI interactions, 290 projects having a total cost of about ₹13.60 lakh crore, along with 51 programmes / schemes and grievances pertaining to 17 different sectors have been reviewed.

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS**Military seizes power in Myanmar coup****Why in news?**

- Myanmar's military has seized power in a coup against the democratically elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Key points are:

- The Army said it had carried out the detentions in response to "election fraud".
- For India, the return to military rule by Myanmar's Tatmadaw (Army) and the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the political leadership of the National League of Democracy (NLD) are a repeat of events 30 years ago.

About Myanmar's military Constitution

- It was the military that drafted the 2008 Constitution and put it to a questionable referendum in April that year.
- The Constitution was the military's "roadmap to democracy", which it had been forced to adopt under increasing pressure from the west.
- It was also due to its own realisation that opening up Myanmar to the outside world was now no longer an option but a dire economic necessity.
- But the military made sure to safeguard in the Constitution its own role and supremacy in national affairs.
- Under its provisions, the military reserves for itself 25 per cent of seats in both Houses of Parliament, to which it appoints serving military officials.
- Also, a political party which is a proxy for the military contests elections

UK Visa Scheme For Hong Kong Residents**Why in news?**

- Recently, the UK has launched a special visa scheme that will allow the Hong Kong residents a chance to migrate and eventually apply for British citizenship.

Key points are:

- The move came months after China imposed a national security law over Hong Kong enabling it to curb 2019 pro-democracy like protests in future and also to override the powers of the government in Hong Kong.
- The move is considered the UK's most generous welcoming of foreign workers since the entry of new European Union (EU) citizens in 2004 when 10 countries were added to the bloc at a time when the UK was also a member. The UK officially left the EU on 31st January 2020.

Background

- Since July 2020, after the national security law was implemented, the British government has already allowed around 7,000 people from Hong Kong to move to its shores.
- These were allowed permission to migrate not through the visa scheme, but through government action on compassionate grounds.
- In response to the Law, Australia, Britain and Canada have also suspended their extradition treaties with Hong Kong.
- The visas will be issued to those in Hong Kong holding a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents and will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.
- Applicants who get the visa can live and work in the UK for 5 years, after which they apply for settlement. Twelve months after this, they can apply for citizenship.

1st India-Bahrain Joint Working Group meeting**Why in news?**

- The 1st meeting of the Joint Working Group in the field of Renewable Energy between India and the Kingdom of Bahrain held on 4 February, 2021 in a virtual format.

Key points are:

- H.E. Dr. Abdul Hussain bin Ali Mirza, President of Sustainable Energy Authority led the Bahraini delegation.

- The Indian delegation was led by H.E. Mr. Dinesh Dayanand Jagdale, Joint Secretary, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy. H.E. Sh. Piyush Srivastava, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Bahrain also participated in the meeting.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between India and Bahrain was signed in July 2018 for promoting bilateral cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy.
- It was a very productive meeting, in which both sides underscored the importance of renewable energy to meet climate change goals, and presented the initiatives taken, progress made and future targets set by their respective governments as well as opportunities available in this sector.
- They agreed on sharing experience, expertise and best practices.
- Both sides agreed to forging deeper engagement in capacity building and focused cooperation between concerned agencies as well as the private sector of the two countries in this sector, particularly in the field of solar, wind and clean hydrogen.

UN Human Rights Council

Why in news?

- In his address to the United Nations Human Rights Council, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said:
- Terrorism continues to be one of the gravest threats to humankind and a crime against humanity, which violates the most fundamental human rights namely the right to life.
- Human rights violations and gaps in the implementation of human rights should be addressed in a “fair and just manner” with objectivity, non-selectivity and transparency and with due respect with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and national sovereignty.

Key points are:

- India had last month presented an eight-point action plan to deal with the scourge of terrorism in which India asked the world to crack down on countries sheltering and harbouring proscribed terrorists. The action plan also includes cracking the whip on terror financing.

About UNHRC

- UNHRC was reconstituted from its predecessor organisation, the UN Commission on Human Rights to help overcome the “credibility deficit” of the previous organisation. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The UNHRC passes non-binding resolutions on human rights issues through a periodic review of all 193 UN member states called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- It oversees expert investigation of violations in specific countries (Special Procedures).

Military Coup in Myanmar

Why in news?

- Recently, the Myanmar military has grabbed power in a coup the third time in the nation's history since its independence from British rule in 1948.

Key points are:

- A one-year state of emergency has been imposed and democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained. ‘Coups’ is generally described as a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.
- In the November 2020 parliamentary election, Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD) secured the majority of the seats.
- In the Myanmar's Parliament, the military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.

- When the newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to hold the first session of Parliament in 2021, the military imposed a state of emergency for one year citing massive voting fraud in the parliamentary elections.
- The USA President threatened to reimpose sanctions on Myanmar following a coup by the country's military leaders and called for a concerted international response to press them to relinquish power.
- China: 'All parties in Myanmar will properly handle their differences under the constitution and legal framework to maintain political and social stability'.
- ASEAN Countries: ASEAN's current chair, Brunei, called for 'dialogue among parties, reconciliation and the return to normalcy'.
- India supports the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. Though India has expressed deep concern over recent developments in Myanmar, cutting off from the Myanmar military is not a viable option as India has significant economic and strategic interests in Myanmar and its neighbourhood.

International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD)

Why in news?

- International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) Symposium on Sustainable Development of Dams & River Basins inaugurated.

Key points are:

- The symposium is being organised by ICOLD in collaboration with the Central Water Commission (CWC), Dam Rehabilitation Improvement Project (DRIP) and National Hydrology Project (NHP) in New Delhi.
- The symposium is being organised to provide an excellent opportunity to Indian Dam Engineering Professionals and Agencies to share their experiences, ideas and latest developments in new materials and construction technologies, advancement in investigation techniques, best engineering practices, dam safety issues, etc.

- About International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD):
- The International Commission On Large Dams (ICOLD) is a non-governmental International Organization which provides a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience in dam engineering.
- ICOLD was founded in 1928 and has National Committees from more than 100 countries with approximately 10000 individual members.
- The members are mostly practising engineers, geologists and scientists from governmental or private organizations, consulting firms, universities, laboratories and construction companies.
- ICOLD leads the profession in setting standards and guidelines to ensure that dams are built and operated safely, efficiently, economically, and are environmentally sustainable and socially equitable.
- It is headquartered in Paris, France.

First country to receive COVAX vaccines

Why in news?

- Ghana became the first country to receive vaccines under COVAX an initiative to reduce vaccine disparity between high and low-income countries with 600,000 doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine arriving in the capital Accra.

About COVAX

- It is a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO) and two international groups the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) which aims to send vaccines to developing countries.
- The majority of its funding has come from high-income countries and international organisations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"2003 Ceasefire agreement"

Why in news?

- India and Pakistan have issued a joint statement to strictly observe the 2003 Ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC).

Key points are:

- The ceasefire agreement was reached in November 2003, four years after the Kargil War.
- On November 26, 2003 the ceasefire took effect along the entire stretch of the India-Pakistan frontier.
- It facilitated the opening of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawalkot routes, paving the way for bus and truck services linking the two Kashmiris for the first time in six decades and encouraging cross-LoC contacts, exchanges, travel, and trade.
- The ceasefire also enabled India to complete the construction of a fence near the LoC to prevent Pakistan's infiltration of terrorists into Kashmir, a project that it had begun a couple of decades earlier but had to suspend due to Pakistan's artillery fire.
- This is not the first time that India and Pakistan have agreed to give peace a chance on the LoC to make the lives of civilians living along the line easy.
- The 2003 ceasefire agreement remains a milestone as it brought peace along the LoC until 2006. Between 2003 and 2006, not a single bullet was fired by the jawans of India and Pakistan.
- But since 2006, ceasefire violations became the norm with increasing frequency. Recent years have seen an increasing number of ceasefire violations despite an agreement reached in 2018 to adhere to the 2003 ceasefire agreement.

- This puts a question mark on how long the fresh commitment to ceasefire along the LoC can hold especially with summers approaching. As a matter of annual routine, terror infiltration bids from Pakistan increase as summer begins in the Kashmir Valley. Melting of ice on the high mountains offers Pakistan an opportunity to foment terrorism in the Valley.


India & Mauritius**Why in news?**

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.

Key points are:

- The India-Mauritius CECPA is the first trade agreement signed by India with a country in Africa.
- CECPA is a kind of free trade pact that aims to provide an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- Under this agreement, countries reduce or eliminate the duties on the products. The countries also give relaxation in the norms to promote the services trade.
- India-Mauritius CECPA: It is a limited agreement that will cover only select sectors. It will cover Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, etc.
- Benefit to India: More than 300 domestic goods from agriculture, textiles, electronics and other sectors will get market access at concessional customs duties in Mauritius.
- Indian service providers will have access to around 115 sub-sectors from the 11 broad service sectors, such as professional services, computer related services, research & development, other business services, etc.

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- Benefit to Mauritius: It will benefit from preferential market access into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.
- India has offered around 95 sub-sectors from the 11 broad services sectors, including professional services, R&D, other business services, telecommunication, environmental, health, etc.

1st India-EU High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment

Why in news?

- The 1st High-Level Dialogue (HLD), co-chaired by the Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and the European Union Executive Vice-President & Trade Commissioner Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis, was held on 5th February 2021.

Key points are:

- Commitment to the establishment of this Dialogue was a major outcome of the 15th India-EU Leader's Summit held in July 2020, with an objective for Ministerial level guidance towards the bilateral trade and investment relations.
- During the discussions, in the HLD, the Ministers emphasized the importance of global cooperation and solidarity in a post-COVID-19 era and agreed for further deepening of bilateral trade and investment relationship through a series of regular engagements, aiming at quick deliverable for the businesses in these tough times.
- The Ministers also agreed to meet within the next three months, with an objective for reaching consensus on a host of bilateral trade & investment cooperation issues viz. a bilateral Regulatory Dialogue; an India-EU Multilateral Dialogue to explore further possibilities of cooperation; etc.
- In a significant step forward, regular interactions for re-initiation of bilateral trade and investment agreements, with an interim agreement, to start with, were also discussed.

- The Ministers concluded with the confidence and commitment towards a renewed India-EU commercial and economic partnership reflecting the full potential of bilateral commercial relations.

8th Meeting of ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers'

Why in news?

- The Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism, Shri Prahlad Singh Patel co-chaired the 8th Meeting of ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers meeting with Minister of Tourism of Cambodia H.E. Dr. Thong Khon through video conferencing on 5 February, 2020. The Meeting was in conjunction with the 24th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers (M-ATM).

Key points are:

- At the outset, the Ministers expressed their sympathy for the loss of lives and livelihood for people in the region as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.
- The Ministers reiterated the need for cooperative efforts in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector.
- Prahlad Singh Patel appreciated the efforts of the Prime Minister for not only containing COVID-19 pandemic but also lending a helping hand to other countries by supplying of medicines and medical equipment.
- Shri Patel highlighted India's historical and cultural links with ASEAN countries and reiterated that ASEAN is a key market for Buddhist Tourism in India which generates major tourist traffic for the Buddhist Circuit and Ministry of Tourism has invested in a major way to upgrade infrastructure in the circuit.
- The Ministry of Tourism, organises the International Buddhist Conclave (IBC) to create awareness about India's Buddhist Heritage and to increase foreign tourist traffic to Buddhist sites and invited the ASEAN member countries to participate in the same as and when held.

- Minister also touched upon the Ministry's road map to revive tourism activities post-Covid by highlighting initiatives such as SAATHI (System for Assessment, Awareness & Training for Hospitality Industry) and the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator (IITF) Certification Programme, an Online learning platform with the objective of creating a pool of well trained and professional Tourist Facilitators across the country.
- The initiative by Ministry of Tourism to organize a series of webinars under the theme Dekho Apna Desh to showcase the diverse culture, heritage, undiscovered destinations and unusual facets of popular tourist spots has become very popular.
- Minister expressed satisfaction over the deliberations and look forward to strengthening ASEAN-India partnership and cooperation in tourism.

World Pulses Day

Why in news?

- February 10 is a designated global event to recognize and emphasize the importance of pulses and legumes as a global food.

Key points are:

- The UN General Assembly adopted 2016 as the International Year of Pulses (IYP). World Pulses Day 2021 Theme is #LovePulses.
- India is the biggest producer and consumer of pulses in the world and it has almost achieved self-sufficiency in pulses.
- India accounted for 62% of world's total pulses production in 2019-20.
- In the last five-six years, India has increased pulses production from 140 lakh tonnes to more than 240 lakh tonnes.

Background

- Burkina Faso (a landlocked country in West Africa) proposed the observance of World Pulses Day. In 2019, the General Assembly announced February 10 as the World Pulses Day.

Comprehensive Economic cooperation and Partnership Agreement

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has approved signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.

Key points are:

- The India-Mauritius CECPA will be the first trade Agreement to be signed by India with a country in Africa.
- The Agreement is a limited agreement, which will cover Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons, Telecom, Financial services, Customs Procedures and Cooperation in other Areas.

Impact or benefits:

- CECPA provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- The CECPA between India and Mauritius covers 310 export items for India, including food stuff and beverages (80 lines), agricultural products (25 lines), textile and textile articles (27 lines), base metals and articles thereof (32 lines), electricals and electronic item (13 lines), plastics and chemicals (20 lines), wood and articles thereof (15 lines), and others.
- Mauritius will benefit from preferential market access into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.
- As regards trade in services, Indian service providers will have access to around 115 sub-sectors from the 11 broad service sectors such as professional services, computer related services, research & development, other business services, telecommunication, construction, distribution, education, environmental, financial, tourism & travel related, recreational, yoga, audio-visual services, and transport services.

- India has offered around 95 sub-sectors from the 11 broad services sectors, including professional services, R&D, other business services, telecommunication, financial, distribution, higher education, environmental, health, tourism and travel related services, recreational services and transport services.
 - Both sides have also agreed to negotiate an Automatic Trigger Safeguard Mechanism (ATSM) for a limited number of highly sensitive products within two years of the Signing of the Agreement.
 - The Agreement will be signed by the concerned from both the countries on a mutually convenient date and will come into force from 1st date of the following month.
- He suggested that educating a child in a language that is not spoken at home can be a big impediment to learning especially at the primary stage.
 - Referring to multiple studies, Shri Naidu said that teaching through the mother tongue in the initial stages of education can boost a child's self-esteem and enhance his or her creativity.
 - Calling the New Education Policy a visionary and progressive document, he urged for implementing the Policy in letter and spirit.
 - Addressing the participants Shri Dhotre said that consequent to the declaration of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day, (Matribhasha Diwas) UNESCO in 1999, this day is being celebrated every year since 2015 in a grand manner by involving all the higher educational institutions/schools across the country to organize various activities like Debating, Singing, Essay Writing and Painting competitions, Music and Dramatic performances, Exhibitions etc
 - Shri Dhotre highlighted that the purpose of the celebrations is to promote the preservation and protection of all languages spoken by the people globally and also to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism of the languages.
 - He further said that the Government has adopted a proactive approach to promote all Indian languages and strengthen the mother tongue in the Indian education system.

International Mother Language Day

Why in news?

- Vice President of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu on 21 February, 2021 inaugurated the Webinar on the occasion of 'International Mother Language Day'.

Key points are:

- The Webinar on 'Fostering Multilingualism for Inclusion in Education and Society' is being organised jointly by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and IGNC.
- The Vice President also inaugurated the International Virtual Calligraphy Exhibition. Union Minister for Education, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'; Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Culture Shri Prahlad Singh Patel; Minister of State for Education Shri Sanjay Dhotre and Member Secretary, IGNC, Dr. Sachidanand Joshi were also present through the virtual medium.
- All the speakers spoke in length about the importance of the Mother tongue and the need for its preservation which will be a treasure for our future generations.
- The Vice President, M Venkaiah Naidu also called for making mother tongue the primary medium of instruction, at least until Grade 5.

Transatlantic Alliance

Why in news?

- The USA President Joe Biden in his first address to the annual Munich Security Conference declared that the 'transatlantic alliance is back' and stressed the need to defend democracy around the world.

Key points are:

- The USA President intended to improve the strained relationship between the USA and other European allies.

- The Munich Security Conference is an annual conference on international security policy that has taken place in Munich, Bavaria (Germany) since 1963.
- The Transatlantic Alliance has been the cornerstone of the post-World War II world order. It is a real-world expression of West of a sense that both sides of Atlantic are in it together.
- It is the foundation on which the collective security and shared prosperity of the USA and Europe are built. However, this historic, long-established friendship between the world's two largest economies has become strained in recent years.

About Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP)

- It is an ambitious, comprehensive, and high-standard trade and investment agreement being negotiated between the United States and the European Union (EU).
- The TTIP negotiations were launched in 2013 and ended without conclusion at the end of 2016.
- It will be a cutting edge agreement aimed at providing greater compatibility and transparency in trade and investment regulation, while maintaining high levels of health, safety, and environmental protection.

Quad Meeting

Why in news?

- Recently, India joined Australia, Japan and the United States for a ministerial meeting under the Quadrilateral grouping (Quad) and discussed issues across Indo-Pacific and the military takeover in Myanmar.

Key points are:

- Discussed contemporary challenges, especially the impact of Covid-19 and agreed to enhance access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment.
- Discussed countering disinformation, counter-terrorism, maritime security, and the "priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region".

- Emphasised their commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes.
- Reiterated their "common vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, with clear support for ASEAN cohesion and centrality", and noted that the Indo-Pacific concept had "gathered growing international support, including in Europe".
- Discussed climate change and cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and supply chain resilience.
- Agreed on holding ministerial meetings of the Quad at least once a year and meetings at senior and working levels on a regular basis to bolster cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- The meeting, held in the backdrop of the ongoing withdrawal of Chinese forces from positions along the Line of Actual Control, underlines that India's interest in the Quad is not tactical but profoundly strategic.
- For India, the Quad is also about addressing the growing power imbalance with China that has manifold consequences for India's security and prosperity as well its regional and international standing.

About Quad:

- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is an informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.

- In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's "Democratic Security Diamond" involving Australia, India, Japan and the USA to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, India, the USA, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).
- In 2020, all four Quad Countries Japan, India, Australia and the USA took part in the Malabar exercise.
- Malabar exercise is an annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA which is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Government of India and World Bank Sign Project

Why in news?

- The Government of India, Government of Nagaland and the World Bank on 23rd February, 2021 signed a \$68 million project to enhance the governance of schools across Nagaland as well as to improve teaching practices and learning environments in select schools.

Key points are:

- The "Nagaland: Enhancing Classroom Teaching and Resources Project" will improve classroom instruction; create opportunities for the professional development of teachers; and build technology systems to provide students and teachers with more access to blended and online learning as well as allow better monitoring of policies and programs.
- Such an integrated approach will complement conventional delivery models and help mitigate the challenges posed by COVID-19. About 150,000 students and 20,000 teachers in the government education system in Nagaland will benefit from the statewide reforms in schools.

- C.S. Mohapatra, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India said that human resources development plays a key role in any development strategy and the Government of India has taken several concrete steps to transform the education landscape in India.
- He added that the education project in Nagaland will address the critical gaps faced by students and teachers and play an important role in the development of the state.
- The agreement was signed by Shri Mohapatra on behalf of the Government of India; Mr Shanavas C, Principal Director, Department of School Education on behalf of the Government of Nagaland; and Mr Junaid Ahmad, Country Director, India on behalf of the World Bank.
- As part of that strategy, approximately 15 out of Nagaland's 44 higher secondary schools will be developed into school complexes that operationalize the envisioned learning environment during the project period.
- The \$68 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a final maturity of 14.5 years including a grace period of 5 (five) years.

UN Peacekeepers

Why in news?

- India to gift 2 lakh vaccine doses to UN peacekeepers. The announcement was made by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during his remarks at a UN Security Council open debate on the implementation of resolution 2532 (2020), passed last year.



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**Key points are:****The resolution:**

- Demands a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda" (i.e., those already identified by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)).
- Calls for all parties engaged in armed conflicts (i.e., including those not specifically on the UNSC agenda) to "engage immediately in a durable humanitarian pause for at least 90 consecutive days".
- Specifically excludes UNSC designated terrorist groups, e.g., the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

About peacekeeping and its significance

- United Nations Peacekeeping is a joint effort between the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support.
- Every peacekeeping mission is authorized by the Security Council.
- The financial resources of UN Peacekeeping operations are the collective responsibility of UN Member States.
- According to the UN Charter, every Member State is legally obligated to pay their respective share for peacekeeping.

Composition:

- UN peacekeepers (often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets) can include soldiers, police officers, and civilian personnel.
- Peacekeeping forces are contributed by member states on a voluntary basis.
- Civilian staff of peace operations are international civil servants, recruited and deployed by the UN Secretariat.
- UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles:
 - Consent of the parties.
 - Impartiality.
 - Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

India Maldives**Why in news?**

- Recently, India and the Maldives have signed a defence Line of Credit agreement worth USD 50 million.

Key points are:

- The agreement was signed during the visit by the External Affairs Minister of India to Maldives.
- Defence Line of Credit was signed pursuant to the request by the Government of Maldives in April 2013 for India's support and cooperation in enhancing the capability of the Maldives Defence Forces in maritime surveillance, and subsequent requests in October 2015 and March 2016.
- It is seen as key to India's and Maldives' strategic interests, particularly given China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean Region.
- A dockyard will be developed at the Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) Naval Base with Indian assistance, a few miles northwest of Male, which will strengthen the Maldivian defence capabilities.
- The agreement is part of the defence action plan signed in 2016 by then Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom during a visit to India.
- Indicating deepening security cooperation, an agreement to develop, support and maintain a Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour at Sifavaru was also signed.
- India will also support development of other infrastructure needed for the harbour, support the development of communications resources and radar services, and provide training.
- A number of India-backed infrastructure projects including the National College of Policing and Law Enforcement Studies
- Noted progress on institutionalising linkages between the police organisations to support collaboration and cooperation in training management and exchange of trainers and trainees.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Stardust 1.0

Why in news?

- Stardust 1.0, the first rocket to run on biofuel was launched on Jan 31st from Loring Commerce Centre in Maine, US.

Key points are:

- It has become the first commercial space launch powered by biofuel, which is non-toxic for the environment as opposed to traditionally used rocket fuels.
- Stardust 1.0 is a launch vehicle suited for student and budget payloads.

About Biofuels

- Any hydrocarbon fuel that is produced from an organic matter (living or once living material) in a short period of time (days, weeks, or even months) is considered a biofuel.
- Biofuels may be solid, liquid or gaseous in nature. Examples are:
Solid: Wood, dried plant material, and manure.
Liquid: Bioethanol and Biodiesel.
Gaseous: Biogas.

Sub-Mission on Seeds & Planting Materials

Why in news?

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare is implementing farmer's welfare scheme 'Sub-Mission on Seeds & Planting Materials'.

Key points are:

- The aim is to produce and supply quality seeds to farmers to enhance production and productivity in the country through various components namely Seed Village Programme, Establishment of Seed ProcessingcumSeed Storage Godowns at Gram Panchyat Level, National Seed Reserve, Boosting Seed Production in Private Sector and Strengthening of Quality Control Infrastructure Facilities.

Some of the major achievements under the scheme from 2014-15 to 2020-21 are as under:

- Under Seed Village Programme, 4.29 lakh numbers of Seed Villages have been created wherein 38.01 lakh qtls. of foundation/certified seeds were distributed at concessional rates to 170.86 lakh farmers.
- To encourage farmers to take up Seed production of Pulses, Oilseeds, Fodder and Green Manure crops locally and make available required certified seeds at village itself, 1.05 lakh qtls. of foundation /certified seeds have been distributed at 75% subsidised rates to 2.61 lakh farmers.
- Financial support provided to the States to establish 517 no. of Seed Processing-cum-storage godown Units each of 500 Mt. capacity at Gram Panchayat level, for creating 25.85 LQ more capacity each for Seed Processing and for Seed storage, to make available required crop variety seeds locally to farmers to make them self-sufficient.
- Financial assistance provided for movement of 10.37 lakh qtls. of seeds for making timely availability at affordable price of certified/quality seeds to the farmers of North-Eastern States, UT of J&K, Laddakh, H.P., Uttarakhand and hilly/remote areas of West Bengal.
- Under National Seed Reserve, 17.01 lakh qtls seeds of short and medium crop varieties kept to meet the requirement of farmers for re-sowing during natural calamities and unforeseen conditions i.e. drought, cyclone and flood etc.
- Subsequent to flood damaging paddy crop in Kerala in August, 2018, 3900 MT seeds kept under National Seed Reserve made available to the farmers for re-sowing, so that farmers of the State didn't face seed scarcity.
- In order to alleviate malnutrition in the country, 71 bio-fortified varieties (nutritionally enriched with protein, Iron, Zinc, amino acids, Pro vitamin-A & vitamin-C etc.,) of different crops (rice, wheat, maize, pearl millet, lentil, mustard, soybean, cauliflower, sweet potato and pomegranate etc.) developed.



- The breeder seeds of bio-fortified varieties have been allotted to the States for further multiplication for enhancing availability of seeds to the farmers in the country.
- 3436 registration certificates for plant varieties issued by PPVFR Authority for intellectual proprietary rights purpose. These include under Farmers' Variety, the varieties which are traditionally cultivated and evolved by the farmers in their fields, and the wild relative or landrace of a variety about which the farmers possess common knowledge.

E-Chhawani Portal & Mobile App

Why in news?

- Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh launched E-Chhawani portal and mobile app in New Delhi on 16 February, 2021.

Key points are:

- The portal has been created to provide online civic services to over 20 lakh residents of 62 Cantonment Boards across the country.
- Through the portal, the residents of cantonment areas will be able to avail basic services like renewal of leases, application for birth & death certificates, water & sewerage connections, trade licences, mobile toilet locators and payment of different types of taxes and fees, with just a click of a button.
- The portal, jointly developed by eGov Foundation, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Directorate General Defence Estates (DGDE) and National Informatics Centre (NIC), provides a platform to the residents to avail these services from the comfort of their home.
- The E-Chhawani portal is an innovative effort to transform the functioning of Cantonment Boards, in line with the vision of 'New India'.
- The portal will ensure effectiveness and transparency of the services distribution system of the Cantonment Boards and provide time-bound solutions to the residents.

14 New Minor Forest Produce Items Included Under MSP Scheme

Why in news?

- The government has decided to include 14 new minor forest produce items under the mechanism for marketing of minor forest produce through a minimum support price scheme.

Key points are:

- Newly included items are Tasar Cocoon, elephant apple dry, bamboo shoot, malkangani seed and wild dry mushroom among others.

About the Scheme:

- The Central government had introduced a minimum support price for a selected list of minor produce items through mechanism for marketing of Minor Forest Produce through Minimum Support price and development of Value Chain of MFP Scheme in 2011.
- It aims to provide a social safety net to these underprivileged forest dwellers, and to aid in their empowerment.

Implementation:

- The responsibility of purchasing MFP on MSP will be with State designated agencies.
- To ascertain market price, services of market correspondents would be availed by the designated agencies particularly for major markets trading in MFP.
- The scheme supports primary value addition as well as provides for supply chain infrastructure like cold storage, warehouses etc.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs will be the nodal Ministry for implementation and monitoring of the scheme. The Minimum Support Price would be determined by the Ministry with technical help of TRIFED.

About MFP

- Section 2(i) of the Forest Rights Act defines a Minor Forest Produce (MFP) as all non-timber forest produce of plant origin and includes bamboo, brushwood, stumps, canes, cocoon, honey, waxes, Lac, tendu/kendu leaves, medicinal plants etc.

Gangwar to launch Software Applications**Why in news?**

- Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Labour & Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar will launch Software Applications and release instruction manuals with questionnaire for five All India Surveys being conducted by Labour Bureau in Chandigarh on 18 February, 2021.
- Secretary L&E Apurva Chandra and Senior Labour & Employment Advisor and Director General, Labour Bureau Shri DPS Negi will be present on the occasion.

Key points are:

- These five surveys being undertaken by Labour Bureau are
 - All India Survey on Migrant workers,
 - All India survey on Domestic Workers,
 - All India survey on employment generated by Professionals,
 - All India survey on employment generated in Transport Sector and
 - All-India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey.
- The objective of the All India Survey on Domestic Workers would be to estimate the proportion of DW in the workforce by major states and all-India and percentage distribution of these DWs / households that employ them by important socio-demographic key characteristics.
- The objectives of the survey on Migrant Workers are to estimate the number of migrant workers in India and also to collect information on their living conditions, working conditions and other socio-economic conditions.
- The objectives of all-India Survey on Employment Generated by Professionals are essentially two-fold (i) To estimate the total number of active professionals in the country & (ii) To capture the employment generated by these professionals.
- Objective of the survey on employment generated in Transport Sector is to assess the employment generated in Transport Sector in India.

- The main objective of the All-India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey is to measure relative change in employment situation over successive quarters in sizeable segment of Non-Farm economy covering 8 important sectors of the Indian economy.
- The surveys are significant in terms of the path-breaking initiative being taken by Bureau in terms of use of Information Technology (IT) in the entire chain of data collection to report generation. The results of these surveys will be declared within 7-8 months including 6 months of field work.
- Labour Bureau, an attached office of Ministry of Labour & Employment, has been at the forefront in fulfilling the data needs of various stakeholders in the field of labour and employment since 1920.

New material found can efficiently convert waste heat to electricity**Why in news?**

- Scientists have found a new Lead (Pb) free material which can efficiently convert waste heat to power our small home equipment and automobiles.

Key points are:

- Thermoelectric energy conversion allows generation of electrical voltage when one end of a material is heated while keeping the other side cold.
- Finding an efficient material to realize this scientific principle has been a daunting task for scientists.
- It entails fitting in three seemingly different properties into a single material high electrical conductivity of metals, high thermoelectric sensitivity of semiconductors, and low thermal conductivity of glasses.
- Most efficient thermoelectric materials developed by scientists so far use Lead (Pb) as a major constituent element, restricting their use for mass-market applications.

- Scientists from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, an autonomous institution of the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India led by Prof. Kanishka Biswas have now identified a lead-free material called Cadmium (Cd) doped Silver Antimony Telluride (AgSbTe₂).
- This material can efficiently allow recovery of electricity from 'waste heat' marking a paradigm shift in the thermoelectric puzzle. They have reported this major breakthrough in the journal Science.
- Prof. Kanishka Biswas and his group doped (internally introduced) Silver Antimony Telluride with Cadmium (Cd) and used an advanced electron microscopy technique to visualize the resultant ordering of atoms in nanometer scale.
- The nanometer-scale atomic ordering scatters phonons that carries heat in a solid and enhances electrical transport by delocalizing the electronic state in the material.

66th Convocation of IIT Kharagpur

Why in news?

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the 66th Convocation of IIT Kharagpur on 23 February, 2021 through a video conference.

Key points are:

- Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and Union Minister of State for Education Shri Sanjay Dhotre were present on the occasion.

- The Prime Minister said the need of the day is to work while anticipating the needs of the future, to make innovations for tomorrow.
- He urged the students to find solutions which can improve and save the lives of millions and can save the country's resources.
- Narendra Modi asked the students to adopt the mantra of Self 3 to overcome their self doubts and obstacles in the future.
- He said Self 3 is Self-awareness, Self-confidence and Selflessness. He advised the students to recognize their potential and move forward, move ahead with full confidence, move ahead with selflessness.
- The Prime Minister emphasized the need for significant innovation for Industry 4.0. He lauded the efforts of IIT Kharagpur to transform academic research related to AI at industrial level, Internet of things and modern construction technology.

Influenza A(H5N8) virus

Why in news?

- Russia says it detected first case of H5N8 avian flu in humans, alerts WHO.


Key points are:

- There are different subtypes of avian influenza viruses. While the highly contagious strain H5N8 is lethal for birds it has never before been reported to have spread to humans.

About Influenza A(H5N8) virus

- According to Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health, H5N8 avian influenza is a disease of birds, caused by Type "A" influenza viruses, which can affect several species of domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, ducks, as well as pet birds, wild migratory birds and water fowl.
- There are no known cases of H5N8 in human beings.
- Risk to general public is very low. There is also no evidence that consumption of poultry meat or eggs could transmit the virus to humans.

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- But necessary precautions are required while handling sick/dead birds and contaminated material during control and containment operations.
- It is considered safe to eat properly cooked poultry products.
- Culling is usually undertaken to control the infection when it is detected in animals.
- Besides culling, safe disposal of all such culled animals and animal products is also important.
- The authorities also need to strictly enforce decontamination of infected premises and undertake quarantine of contaminated vehicles and personnel.

Conclusive Land Titling

Why in news?

- Recently, as many States have failed to send in their feedback on a Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling, the Centre has warned that their agreement would be presumed. The Bill was prepared by the NITI Aayog.

Key points are:

- Land Titling is the generic term used to describe the programs implemented by the government to enable individuals and government to efficiently trade in rights in land and property.
- Recently, the Supreme Court held that a citizen's right to own private property is a human right.
- India currently follows a system of presumptive land titling. It means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions.
- It is established on the basis of current possession. Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.

Carbon Watch

Why in news?

- Chandigarh became the first state or Union Territory in India to launch Carbon Watch.

Key points are:

- Carbon Watch is a mobile application to assess the carbon footprint of an individual
- Carbon footprint is the amount of greenhouse gases-especially carbon dioxide-released into the atmosphere by a particular human activity.

How the app works?

- As a person downloads the application, they will need to fill details in four parts Water, Energy, Waste Generation and Transport (Vehicular movement). In each category, they will be required to inform about their respective consumptions and waste generations.
- With the mentioned information, the mobile application will automatically calculate the carbon footprint of the individual.
- The application will also provide information such as the national and world average of the emission, and the individual's level of emission generation.
- The mobile application will suggest methods to reduce the carbon footprints. The application will suggest ways as per the information furnished by the individuals.

NASA Perseverance

Why in news?

- After a seven months' journey from Earth, the NASA Perseverance is in its final stretch towards destination Mars.

Key points are:

- Launched on July of 2020.
- It is expected to touch down on Mars at the Jezero Crater.
- The primary task of Perseverance is to seek signs of ancient life and collect samples of rock and regolith to possibly return these to Earth.
- Perseverance is fueled by electrical power by using heat of plutonium's radioactive decay.
- NASA Perseverance gets shape memory alloys to remain steady on surface of Mars.
- Armed with drills, cameras and lasers, Perseverance is set to explore Mars.



- Importance of the mission
- Perseverance will carry a unique instrument, MOXIE or Mars Oxygen ISRU Experiment: which for the first time will manufacture molecular oxygen on Mars using carbon dioxide from the carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere (ISRU means In Situ Resource Utilization: or the use of local resources to meet human needs or requirements of the spacecraft).
- It will carry Ingenuity, the first ever helicopter to fly on Mars. This is the first time NASA will fly a helicopter on another planet or satellite.

Previous Mars Missions by NASA

- NASA has been sending rovers on Mars since 1997 when the Mars Pathfinder Mission was initiated.
- As the mission turned out to be successful, NASA decided to continue going to Mars to find evidence.
- Second time, the space organization sent twin rovers, Spirit and Opportunity to Mars in 2003.
- The third attempt was by sending Curiosity in 2012.

JNCASR Scientists develop a new molecule

Why in news?

- Scientists have developed a small molecule that disrupts the mechanism through which neurons become dysfunctional in Alzheimer's disease (AD).

Key points are:

- The molecule could be a potential drug candidate to halt or cure the leading cause of dementia (70-80%) worldwide.
- In the Alzheimer's brain, abnormal levels of naturally forming protein clump together to form plaques that collect between neurons and disrupt cell function.
- This is caused by production and deposition of the amyloid peptide (A β) that accumulates in the central nervous system.

- The multifactorial nature of Alzheimer's disease (AD) attributed to multifaceted amyloid toxicity has kept researchers from developing effective treatment.
- A team of scientists led by Professor T. Govindaraju from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, designed and synthesized a set of novel small molecules and identified a lead candidate which they found could reduce the toxicity of Amyloid Beta (A β) toxicity.
- The detailed studies established the molecule called TGR63 as the lead candidate to rescue neuronal cells from amyloid toxicity. Remarkably, the molecule was also found to reduced amyloid burden in the cortex and hippocampus, or a complex part embedded deep into the temporal lobe, thereby reversing cognitive decline.
- This research has been published recently in the journal Advanced Therapeutics.
- Currently available treatments provide only temporary relief, and there are no approved drugs that directly act on the disease mechanisms of Alzheimer's disease. Thus, there is an unmet need to develop drug candidates to halt or cure Alzheimer's disease.
- Mice brain affected with Alzheimer's disease when treated with TGR63 showed a significant reduction of amyloid deposits, validating its therapeutic efficacy.
- The mice also showed reduction of learning deficiency, memory impairment, and cognitive decline as revealed by distinct behavioural tests.
- These key attributes have validated the potential of TGR63 as a promising drug candidate for the treatment of AD.
- AD severely affects the patients, families, caregivers and hence is a major societal and economic burden globally.
- The novel drug candidate TGR63 developed by the JNCASR team has potential as a promising drug candidate for AD treatment.



Kodaikanal Solar Observatory Digitized Data

Why in news?

- Scientists have estimated how the Sun has rotated over a century from data extracted from old films and photographs that have been digitized.

Key points are:

- This estimation would help study magnetic field generated in the interior of the Sun, which causes sunspots and results in extreme situations like the historical mini-ice age on Earth (absence of sunspots). It could also help predict solar cycles and their variations in the future.
- The Sun rotates more quickly at its equator than at its poles. Over time, the Sun's differential rotation rates cause its magnetic field to become twisted and tangled.
- The tangles in the magnetic field lines can produce strong localized magnetic fields. When the Sun's magnetic field gets twisted, there are lots of sunspots.
- The sunspots which form at the surface with an 11-year periodicity are the only route to probe the solar dynamo or solar magnetism inside the Sun and hence measure the variation in solar rotation.
- Researchers led by Mr. Bibhuti Kumar Jha, a Ph.D. student from the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), an autonomous institute under Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India, along with the collaborators from Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Goettingen, Germany and Southwest Research Institute, Boulder, USA have studied the solar rotation by tracing sun spots from century-old digitalized films and photographs.
- The old films and photographs were taken at the Kodaikanal Solar Observatory (KoSO) of Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), an autonomous institute of DST, and have now been digitised.
- The team compared the consistent digitized data with manual data of rotation taken earlier and said that they have been able to differentiate the behaviors of the bigger and smaller solar spots for the first time.

- Such digitized data and differentiation of bigger and smaller sun spots can improve understanding of solar magnetism and sun spots, paving the path towards predicting solar cycles in the future.

Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)

Why in news?

- First Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) case of the year suspected in Muzaffarpur.

Key points are:

- Usually AES, locally called chamki bukhari, surfaces during summer in the flood-prone districts of north Bihar.
- AES cases were reported from five north Bihar districts in 2019. More than 150 children died. More than 600 children suffering from AES were admitted in the hospitals, including SKMCH and nearly 450 recovered.
- Acute encephalitis syndrome is a basket term used for referring to hospitals, children with clinical neurological manifestation that includes mental confusion, disorientation, convulsion, delirium, or coma.
- Meningitis caused by virus or bacteria, encephalitis (mostly Japanese encephalitis) caused by virus, encephalopathy, cerebral malaria, and scrub typhus caused by bacteria are collectively called acute encephalitis syndrome.
- The disease most commonly affects children and young adults and can lead to considerable morbidity and mortality.

Its symptoms are:

- It is characterized as acute-onset of fever and a change in mental status (mental confusion, disorientation, delirium, or coma) and/or new-onset of seizures in a person of any age at any time of the year.

Indradhanush 3.0 launched

Why in news?

- Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0 launched to expand immunization coverage across the country.

Key points are:

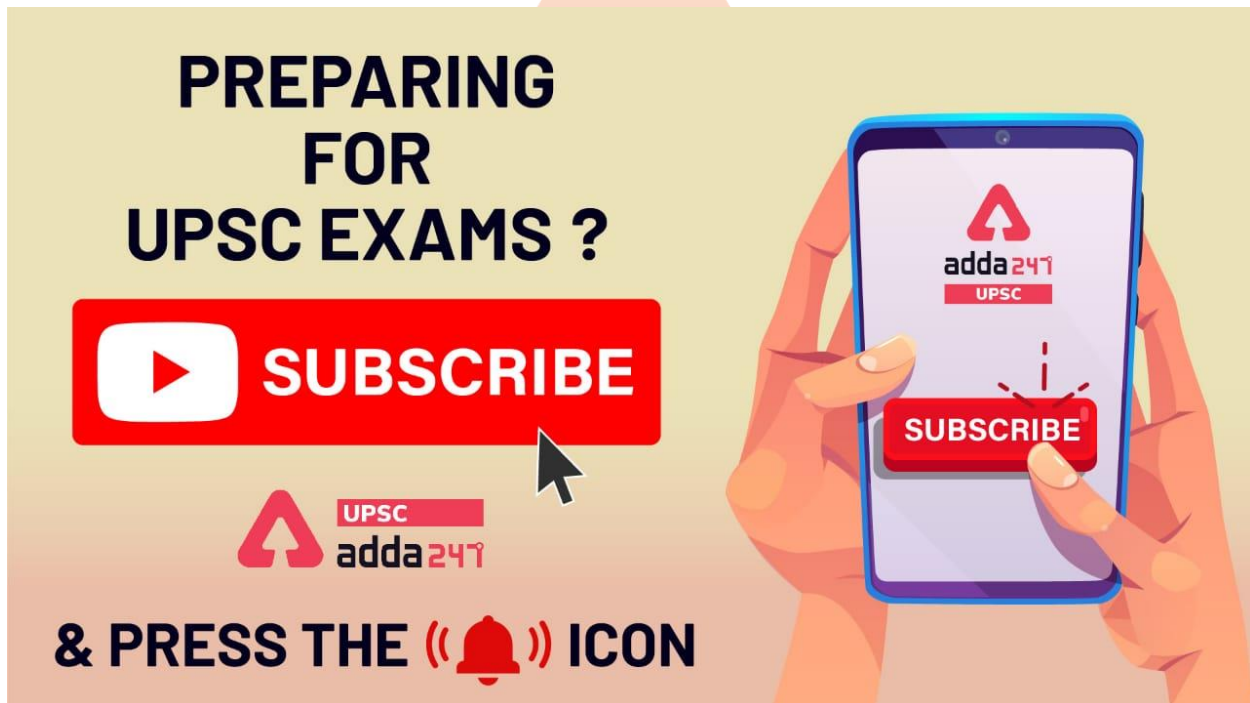
- The focus of IMI 3.0 will be on children and pregnant women who missed their vaccine doses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

About Mission Indradhanush:

- To strengthen and re-energize the programme and achieve full immunization coverage for all children and pregnant women at a rapid pace, the Government of India launched “Mission indradhanush” in December 2014.
- The ultimate goal is to ensure full immunization with all available vaccines for children up to two years of age and pregnant women.
- It provides vaccination against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD) i.e. diphtheria, Whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, meningitis and pneumonia,


Hemophilus influenza type B infections, Japanese encephalitis (JE), rotavirus vaccine, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and measles-rubella (MR).

- However, Vaccination against Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B is being provided in selected districts of the country.
- To further intensify the immunization programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Intensified Mission (IMI) on October 8, 2017.
- With this, the Government of India aims to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunization programme/UIP.



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IMPORTANT PLACES IN NEWS**Simlipal Biosphere Reserve****Why in news?**

- The Simlipal forest reserve area frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions.

Key points are:

- Similipal, which derives its name from the 'Simul' (silk cotton) tree, is a national park and a tiger reserve situated in the northern part of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district.
- Similipal and the adjoining areas, comprising 5,569 sq km, was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India on June 22, 1994, and lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.
- It includes three protected areas – Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadgarh Wildlife Sanctuary with 191.06 km² (73.77 sq mi) and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It is the abode of 94 species of orchids and about 3,000 species of plants.
- The identified species of fauna include 12 species of amphibians, 29 species of reptiles, 264 species of birds and 42 species of mammals, all of which collectively highlight the biodiversity richness of Similipal.
- Sal is a dominant tree species.

Mount Sinabung**Why in news?**

- Indonesia's Mount Sinabung volcano sent a cloud of hot ash as high as 3 km today, in its first big eruption since August last year.

Key points are:

- It is a Pleistocene-to-Holocene stratovolcano in the Karo plateau of Karo Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia.
- It is created by the subduction of the Indo-Australian Plate under the Eurasian Plate.
- It erupted in 2010 after a 400-year-long hiatus and has been continuously active since September 2013.

Lake Chad**Why in news?**

- One of Africa's largest freshwater bodies, Lake Chad, has shrunk by 90 per cent.

Key points are:

- Lake Chad in the Sahel spans the countries of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon and is home to 17.4 million people.
- It is blessed with rich aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.
- The Chari River, fed by its tributary the Logone, provides over 90% of the lake's water, with a small amount coming from the Yobe River in Nigeria/Niger.
- Despite high levels of evaporation, the lake is freshwater.
- The Lake Chad basin comprises biosphere reserves, World Heritage and Ramsar sites as well as wetlands of international conservation importance.

Mawsynram**Why in news?**

- Mawsynram is a wettest place on Earth sees a decreasing trend in rainfall. A recent study that looked at the rainfall pattern in the past 119 years found a decreasing trend at Cherrapunji and nearby areas.

Key points are:

- Mawsynram is a town in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya state in northeastern India, 60.9 kilometres from Shillong.
- Mawsynram receives the highest rainfall in India.
- It is reportedly the wettest place on Earth, with an average annual rainfall of 11,872mm but that claim is disputed.
- According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Mawsynram received 26,000 millimetres (1,000 in) of rainfall in 1985.

Mandarin Duck

Why in news?

- A rare Mandarin duck was observed floating in the Maguri-Motapung beel (or wetland) in Assam's Tinsukia district for over a week is spectacular.

Key points are:

- IUCN status: Least Concerned
- Considered the most beautiful duck in the world, the Mandarin duck, or the (*Aix galericulata*) was first identified by Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758.
- The eBird website, a platform that documents birds world over, describes it as a "small-exotic looking bird" native to East Asia.
- It's very beautiful, with majestic colours and can be spotted from a distance.

Shahtoot Dam

Why in news?

- India and Afghanistan have signed an agreement to build the Shahtoot Dam in Kabul to provide drinking water facility in the Afghan capital.

Key points are:

- It is a proposed dam in the Kabul river basin, one of the five river basins in Afghanistan.
- This project will provide drinking, irrigation and Environmental water for Kabul province.
- The dam will provide potable water to more than 2 million residents of Kabul, in addition to the irrigation of 4000 hectares of land in the district of Charasiab and Khairabad.
- The dam will also provide water for irrigation to nearby areas, rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network and help in flood protection and management efforts.
- The project is expected to produce electricity for the region.

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PERSON IN NEWS

Subrahmanyam appointed Chairman of National Safety Council

Why in news?

- S. N. Subrahmanyam has been appointed Chairman of the National Safety Council for a period of three years.
- His experience is likely to guide the National Safety Council which has a major role to play to ensure safety in workplaces under new Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020

Key points are:

- The National Safety Council will assist DGFASLI in re-writing the regulations governing OSH in the country which have not been updated for over 50 years.
- The NSC will also be involved in framing the scheme for third party audit and certification under the OSH Code.
- The NSC is already working on the safety rating of establishments based on their OSH readiness and performance which can be extended through the country and linked to the inspection system.
- The CEO and Managing Director of L&T Ltd, Shri Subrahmanyam is an eminent engineer who has spearheaded the infrastructure business of L&T for several years making it the country's largest construction organization and 14th in the world. L&T is also one of the largest engineering companies in the country with interest in heavy engineering, defence, shipbuilding, etc.

Justice (Retd.) M. Rama Jois

Why in news?

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has expressed grief over the demise of Justice (Retd.) M. Rama Jois.
- In a tweet, the Prime Minister said, "Justice(Retd.) M. Rama Jois was a towering intellectual and jurist. He was admired for his rich intellect and contributions towards making India's democratic fabric stronger. Saddened by his demise. My thoughts are with his family and admirers in this sad hour. Om Shanti."

Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan Ji Punya Tithi

Why in news?

- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has paid tributes to Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan Ji on his Punya Tithi on 25th February, 2021.
- In a tweet, the Prime Minister said, "Tributes to Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan Ji on his Punya Tithi. We recall his long lasting contributions towards social welfare and youth empowerment. His rich thoughts continue to motivate many."

New chief for National Commission for SCs

Why in news?

- New chief for National Commission for SCs has been appointed namely Vijay Sampla.

Key points are:

- In order to provide the Scheduled Castes of Indian society safeguards against exploitation and to promote their social, economic, educational and cultural development, the Commission was set up by the Government of India.
- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) was established by amending Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003.
- By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) from February, 2004.
- It consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three other members. They are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Why in news?

- Okonjo-Iweala has become the first woman and African to hold the position at WTO.


- The former Finance Minister of Nigeria, Ngozi OkonjoIweala has become the next Chief of the World Trade Organisation after US President Joe Biden's administration gave her its complete support on February 5, 2021.
- She will hold the position from March 1, 2021, to August 31, 2025.

Kaja Kallas


Why in news?

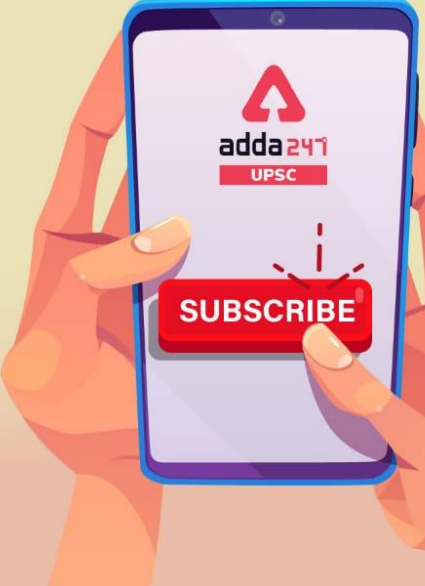
- The former Member of the European Parliament, Kaja Kallas has become the first female Prime Minister of Estonia as the new two-party coalition government was sworn in on January 26, 2021.
- The Baltic Nation will be led by the first woman PM, ever since it regained independence in 1991

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IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UNION BUDGET 2021

- **An Expenditure Budget:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has found space for imparting a fiscal impulse in 2021-22. Compared with a capex of Rs 4.12 lakh crore in Revised Estimate (RE) of 2020-21, she has hiked it 34.46 per cent to Rs 5.54 lakh crore in 2021-22.
- **A Reform Signal:** Two public-sector banks and one state-owned general insurance company to be lined up for disinvestment. FDI in insurance to be hiked to 74% from 49% now. LIC IPO.
- **No Populism, But Focus on Growth:** Despite being a tough year for the aam admi, the FM has avoided giving any income tax relief. No increase in standard deduction, no raise in the tax slabs.
- **Health Gets Its Due:** In a year when the world was ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, FM gives health the attention it merited. Health allocation jumped 137% to Rs 2,23,846 crore in 2021-22 compared with Rs 94,452 crore in 2020-21. She provided Rs 35,000 crore for the Covid-19 vaccine, and promised to provide further funds, if required.
- **Bad Bank A Good Idea:** After dithering for almost six years, the government has finally decided to set up an asset reconstruction company that will take over the bad loans of banks, giving them flexibility to finance the economic recovery.
- **Development Finance Institutions (DFI) Reborn:** The idea was dead with most earlier DFIs including IDBI and ICICI turning into banks. To provide debt to long gestation projects, a new DFI with a capital of Rs 20,000 crore. It will have statutory backing, but will be professionally managed. Lending portfolio of Rs 5 lakh crore within three years.
- **Asset Monetisation Will it Gather Pace:** This is an ongoing exercise, where the government hasn't done much to inspire confidence. National Monetisation Pipeline of potential assets of NHAI, PGCIL, Railways, airports, warehouses, sports stadiums.
- **Eye on Elections Not Unexpected:** Four poll-bound states get major highway projects: Tamil Nadu (3,500 km Rs 1.03 lakh crore), Kerala (1,100 km Rs 65,000 crore), West Bengal (675 km Rs 25,000 crore) and Assam (1,300 km Rs 34,000 crore).
- **Strategic Disinvestment Again, Needs Political/Bureaucratic Push:** NITI Aayog asked to short list non-core PSUs for strategic sale. After a poor show in 2020-21, the government has estimated disinvestment receipts at Rs 1,75,000 crore.
- **Growth Vs Prudence Tilting Towards Growth:** Fiscal deficit estimated at 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2021-22; it is estimated to touch 9.5% in 2020-21. It will be brought down to 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26.

**EXPECTED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR UPSC 2021 PRELIMS**

Consider the following statements regarding the National Hydrogen Energy Mission.

1. Focus on generation of hydrogen from solar sources.
2. The usage of hydrogen will not only help India in achieving its emission goals under the Paris Agreement, but will also reduce import dependency on fossil fuels.

1. Which of the following statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (d)

2. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about the ICOLD?

1. It stands for International Commission on Large Dams.
2. It is a non-governmental International Organization which provides a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience in dam engineering.
3. It was founded in 1928 and has National Committees from more than 100 countries with approximately 10000 individual members.

Choose the correct answer

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans. (d)

3. Which of the following became the first country to receive COVAX vaccines?

- (a) Ghana
- (b) Japan
- (c) Australia
- (d) Iraq

Ans. (a)

4. Who is considered as an accredited investor?
1. Also known as qualified investors or professional investors.

2. They are those who have an understanding of various financial products and the risks and returns associated with them.

Choose the correct answer

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (c)

5. Who are Uighurs?

1. A Shia minority community concentrated in China's northwestern Xinjiang province.
2. They claim closer ethnic ties to Turkey and other central Asian countries than to China.

Choose the correct answer

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (b)

6. Which state has recently passed Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2021?

- (a) Rajasthan
- (b) Madhya Pradesh
- (c) Tamil Nadu
- (d) Uttar Pradesh

Ans. (d)

7. Match the following

1. Senkaku Islands: Japan
2. Diaoyu Islands: Taiwan
3. Tiaoyutai Islands: China

Choose the correct answer

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) Only 1
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) Only 3

Ans. (b)

8. Consider the following statements regarding the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA).

1. In this type of agreement, two or more partners give preferential right of entry to certain products. This is done by reducing duties on an agreed number of tariff lines.

2. Tariffs may even be reduced to zero for some products even in a PTA.

Which of the following statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (c)

9. Who is the new chief for National Commission for SCs?

- (a) Dileep Singh
- (b) Thawar Chand Gehlot
- (c) Vijay Sampla
- (d) H. Hanumanthappa

Ans. (c)

10. Consider the following statements regarding the PM Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Scheme.

1. It is announced in the Union Budget 2021-22.

2. It aims to develop capacities of primary, secondary, and tertiary care health systems even in the last miles of the nation.

3. Its Duration is 5 years.

Which of the following statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans. (a)

11. Consider the following statements regarding the Khajuraho Dance Festival.

1. The six-day Khajuraho Dance Festival was started on February 21, 2021.

2. The dance festival is being organised at the Khajuraho Temple in Madhya Pradesh.

Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (c)

12. Consider the following statements regarding the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav.

1. The Governor of West Bengal inaugurated the 13th edition of 'Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav' on February 22, 2021.

2. It was inaugurated at Cooch Behar Palace in West Bengal.

Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (b)

13. Consider the following statements.

1. The Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama has recently launched his new book "The Little Book of Encouragement".

2. The book comprises of 130 quotes.

3. The book has been edited by Renuka Singh.

4. It is published by Penguin Random House.

Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans. (d)

14. Consider the following statements.

1. A study was published in the journal Frontiers in Microbiology that some microbes that are found on Earth might temporarily survive on the Mars.

2. The endurance of the microorganisms was tested by the researchers from NASA and German Aerospace Center.

3. It was tested by launching them into stratosphere which represents some the key conditions of the Red Planet.

4. 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. Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans. (d)

15. Consider the following statements regarding the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID).

- 1. The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill 2021 is to be introduced in the Budget session.
- 2. The government is set up a National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), which will facilitate the infrastructure financing of the country.
- 3. The developmental financial institution (DFI) will act as a principal financial institution and development bank to support infrastructure projects.

Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) 3 only

Ans. (c)

16. Consider the following statements regarding the Covovax.

- 1. Serum Institute of India has announced that it would launch a new COVID-19 vaccine under the brand name Covovax.
- 2. It would be developed in partnership with American vaccine developer Novavax, by the month of June.
- 3. The company's Covishield has been developed in partnership with the Oxford University and British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca.

Choose the correct answer from given options:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans. (d)

17. In which of the following India's neighboring countries, military has taken control?

- (a) Myanmar
- (b) Pakistan
- (c) Sri Lanka
- (d) Bangladesh

Ans. (a)

18. The popular art form Pattachitra belongs to which of the following states/UT?

- (a) Lakshadweep
- (b) Kerala
- (c) Odisha
- (d) Jammu and Kashmir

Ans. (c)

19. Which of the following Kingdoms were associated with the life of the Buddha?

- 1. Avanti
- 2. Gandhara
- 3. Kosala
- 4. Magadha

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 3 and 4 only
- (b) 2 and 4
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) 1, 3 and 4

Ans. (a)

20. Every five years, Harshavardhana used to donate all his possessions at an assembly at which of the following places?

- (a) Ujjain
- (b) Banaras
- (c) Prayag
- (d) Kannauj

Ans. (c)

21. Which among the following states has become the first Indian State that has tabled the paperless budget?
 (a) Uttar Pradesh
 (b) Haryana
 (c) Madhya Pradesh
 (d) Bihar
 Ans. (a)
22. Consider the following statements and choose correct option:
 (a) The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, has announced to rename the Hoshangabad city of MP as Narmadapuram.
 (b) This announcement was made by him while he was addressing the Narmada Jayanti programme that was held in Hoshangabad.
 (c) Hoshangabad city was named after Hoshang Shah who was the first ruler of Malwa.
 (d) All of the above
 Ans. (d)
23. Consider the following statements.
 1. The first-ever National Toy Fair will be held in India
 2. It will be organized in the virtual format.
 3. The Centre for Creative Learning (CCL) will showcase its 75 toy creations in the fair.
 Choose the correct answer from given options:
 (a) 1 only
 (b) 1 and 2 only
 (c) 1, 2 and 3
 (d) 3 only
 Ans. (c)
24. Which of the following statements is/are incorrect regarding the World Day of Social Justice?
 (a) It is observed on February 22 every year.
 (b) The day is dedicated to advantages and issues which can be tackled by Social Justice.
 (c) In the year 2021, the day was celebrated under Theme "A call for social justice in the Digital Economy."
 (d) All of these
 Ans. (a)
25. The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has prepared a report on two-way mass migration of the blue earthworms in which of the state?
 (a) Nagaland
 (b) Meghalaya
 (c) Manipur
 (d) Assam
 Ans. (b)

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