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JUNE 2021

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GDP SHRINKS

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 7.3% in 2020-21, as per provisional National Income estimates released by the National Statistical Office.

About:

- The Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy shrank 6.2% in 2020-21, compared to a 4.1% rise in the previous year.
- Only two sectors bucked the trend of negative GVA growth — agriculture, forestry and fishing, which rose 3.6%, and electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services (up 1.9%).
- GVA for trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting¬related services saw the sharpest decline of 18.2%, followed by construction (¬8.6%), mining and quarrying (¬8.5%) and manufacturing (¬7.2%).
- This is the bleakest performance on record for the economy, the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2020-21 helped moderate the damage, with a higher-than-expected growth of 1.6% in GDP.
- This marked the second quarter of positive growth after the country entered a technical recession in the first half of the year.

Source: PIB

RBI'S LATEST CIRCULAR ON CRYPTOCURRENCIES

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India has informed all banks and regulated entities that its April 2018 circular should not be referred to caution their customers against trading in cryptocurrencies.

About:

What did the RBI say and what was the trigger?

- State Bank of India and HDFC Bank cautioned their customers against dealing in virtual currencies such as Bitcoin citing the April 2018 order of the RBI.
- Banks also warned customers that failure to adhere to the advisory may lead to cancellation or suspension of their cards.

- The Supreme Court lifted the banking ban last year.So, the RBI intervened and asked banks to stop being notorious.

The Policy Position for Cryptocurrency Holders:

- As many Indians have invested in cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum, the RBI move will be a big respite for them and their money – estimated to be around Rs 10,000 crore — won't be blocked.
- The RBI's 2018 position was more restrictive" In view of the associated risks, it has been decided that, with immediate effect, entities regulated by the Reserve Bank shall not deal in VCs or provide services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling VCs,"

Way forward to Banks:

- Banks, may continue to carry out customer due diligence processes in line with regulations governing standards for Know Your Customer (KYC), Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Combating of Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and obligations of regulated entities under Prevention of Money Laundering Act, (PMLA), 2002 in addition to ensuring compliance with relevant provisions under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) for overseas remittances,

SECOND POSITIVE INDIGENISATION

Syllabus Section: Defence and Security

Why in News?

Ministry of Defence (MoD) has notified 'Second Positive Indigenisation List' of 108 items to promote indigenisation in the Defence sector and defence exports.

About:

- The second list (enclosed) lays special focus on weapons/systems which are currently under development/trials and are likely to translate into firm orders in the future.
- Like the first list, import substitution of ammunition which is a recurring requirement has been given special focus.

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- The 'Second Positive Indigenisation List' comprises complex systems, sensors, simulator, weapons and ammunitions like Helicopters, Next Generation Corvettes, Air Borne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) systems, Tank Engines, Medium Power Radar for Mountains, MRSAM Weapon Systems and many more such items to fulfil the requirements of Indian Armed Forces

Significance:

- It is an endeavour of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and to boost indigenisation in the Defence sector,
- This will give further boost to indigenisation with active participation of public and private sector for fulfilling the twin objectives of achieving self-reliance and promoting defence exports.
- It will also invigorate impetus to domestic Research &Development by attracting fresh investment into technology and manufacturing capabilities.
- This list also provides an excellent opportunity for 'start-ups' as also MSMEs which will get tremendous boost from this initiative.

Source: PIB

DEFINE LIMITS OF SEDITION

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court on Monday said "it is time to define the limits of sedition."
- Presently, the Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws constituted by the Union Home Ministry to suggest reforms to the British-era Indian Penal Code (IPC), is attempting for the first time to define Hate speech.

About:
Issue:

- Supreme Court protected two Telugu channels from any coerciveaction by the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led Andhra Pradesh government for their reportage of the COVID¬19 pandemic in the State.

Supreme Court Ruling:

- A three¬judge Bench flagged indiscriminate use of the sedition law against critics, journalists, social media users, activists and citizens for airing grievances about the governments' COVID¬19 management, or even for seeking help to gain medical access, equipment.

Sedition Law Interpretation:

- SC said that, the ambit and parameters of the provisions of Sections 124A (sedition), 153A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code 1860 would require interpretation.
- IPC Section 153 A: Punishes acts promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.
- IPC Section 505: Makes the publication and circulation of content which may cause ill-will or hatred between different groups an offence.

Punishment for the Offence of Sedition:

- Sedition is a non-bailable offence. Punishment under the Section 124A ranges from imprisonment up to three years to a life term, to which fine may be added.
- A person charged under this law is barred from a government job.
- They have to live without their passport and must produce themselves in the court at all times as and when required.

Source: The Hindu

INDEX OF EIGHT CORE INDUSTRIES (ICI)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News:

- The Office of Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade released the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) for the Month of April, 2021.

About:

- ICI measures combined and individual performance of production in selected eight core industries viz. Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement and Electricity.

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- The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 percent of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- The combined ICI, increased by 56.1 per cent (provisional) as compared to the Index of April 2020.
- This high growth rate in April 2021 is largely due to low Index base in April 2020 consequent to the low industrial production across all sectors caused by nationwide lockdown imposed to contain spread of Covid-19 last year.
- The growth rate of ICI during April-March 2020-21was (-)6.5% (P) as compared to the corresponding period of last FY.

Source: PIB

VILLAGE RICE

Syllabus Section:Agriculture

Why in News?

Two consignments of patented 'village rice' sourced from Kumbakonam, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu was exported to Ghana & Yemen.

About:

- 'Village rice' sourced directly from farmers of Thanjavur (Rice Bowl of Tamil Nadu) is enriched with protein, fibre, and minerals.
- Previously, the first consignment of 'red rice' from Assam was exported to the USA.
- The government had set up the Rice Export Promotion Forum (REPF), under the aegis of the APEDA to provide stimulus to the rice exports.

Rice Export Promotion Forum

- Rice Export Promotion Forum (REPF) was set up under the aegis of the Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Promotion Development Authority (APEDA).
- REPF was been set up by the Government of India to provide stimulus to the rice exports.
- It has representations from rice industry, exporters, officials from APEDA, Ministry of Commerce and directors of agriculture from major rice producing states.
- It will monitor, identify and anticipate the developments related to production and exports and put forward various policy measures.

Source: PIB

CLIMATE BREAKTHROUGHS SUMMIT

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

UN calls for swift zero carbon recovery action at climate summit.

About:

Climate Breakthroughs Summit:

- It is a collaboration between the following. World Economic Forum, Mission Possible Partnership, United Nations Climate Champions and the United Kingdom Climate Change Conference (COP26) Presidency.
- It aims to demonstrate progress in critical sectors of the global economy. This includes sectors such as steel, shipping, green hydrogen and nature. It also aims to discuss the breakthroughs needed to achieve a net-zero world in time.
- The United Nations made a call for coordinated action to secure global net-zero emissions. UN also demands to fulfil the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels by 2050.

Race To Zero Campaign:

- It is a global campaign to rally leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery. As the recovery will prevent future threats, creates decent jobs and unlocks inclusive, sustainable growth.
- The campaign is committed to halving its emissions by 2030. This is in line with achieving the long-term goal of full decarbonisation under the Paris Agreement, 2015.
- The campaign mobilises support of 708 cities, 24 regions, 2,360 businesses, 163 investors, and 624 higher education institutions to move towards zero-carbon recovery for a sustainable future.

Source: Down To Earth

COVID-19 VACCINE POLICY

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

The Supreme Court questioned the Centre on Covid-19 vaccine policy. It has also said that there needs to be a single price for vaccines across the Nation.

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About:

- Currently, the Central Government procures just 50% of the vaccines while leaving the States to buy their own.
- The Supreme court asked the Centre on the rationale for the dual pricing of vaccines for the Centre and States.
- It said that there needs to be one price for vaccines across the Nation.
- The court also referred to Article 1 of the Constitution that says that India, that is Bharat, is a Union of States. It said that when the Constitution says that we follow the federal rule. Then the Government of India has to procure the vaccines and distribute them to states.

Supreme Court Questions:

- The Supreme Court asked the Central Government about the rationale for giving different treatment to the age group 18-44 years as the Centre is giving free vaccines only to the 45+ age group.
- The court also pointed out that it is the 18-44 age group which got badly affected in the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The court pointed out the question over COWIN registration and asked the government to realise the digital divide prevailing in rural India. It said that the vaccination policy is entirely exclusionary of the rural areas.

Source: The Hindu

RED TOURISM' PROMOTED BY CHINA

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

- The rapid rise of 'red tourism' in China.

About:

What is Red Tourism?

- In China, 'red tourism' refers to visiting sites which have a modern revolutionary legacy.

Purpose:

- Launched in 2004, the purpose of the project is to promote locations with historical and cultural significance to the ruling Communist Party's history while also providing an impetus to tourism and local businesses.
- 'Red tourism' seeks to spread awareness about the history of the Communist Party of China starting from its origins.

- Red tourism' reminds people of the sacrifices made by the leaders of the Communist party to forge a modern China

The Famous Sites Covered by 'Red Tourism':

Some of the most famous sites covered by 'red tourism' include

- Yan'an, Mao Zedong's revolutionary base area where the Red Army arrived after the Long March;
- Shaoshan, which is the birthplace of Mao;
- Jinggangshan, where leading members of the Communist Party of China established their first rural base for the revolution in 1927;
- Nanchang, the capital city of Jiangxi Province which witnessed a significant Uprising in 1927 led by Zhou Enlai and He Long (China's supreme commander);
- Jinggang Mountain in Jiangxi Province where the revolution led by the Communist Party of China began in October, 1927;
- Zunyi in Guizhou Province which is dominated by ethnic minorities.

How has it helped the economy?

- The tourism sites are a big attraction for the young Chinese population that loves to travel and learn more about the country's history.
- People aged between 21 to 30 account for 40 per cent of the tourists.
- The government has over the years invested heavily on 'red tourism' — 2.64 billion yuan ($370 million) was budgeted between 2016 and 2020 for the project.
- And the big investments are starting to pay rich dividends.
- Red tourism' has also helped in the robust recovery of the tourism market in China after the pandemic.
- 'Red tourism' sites across China had more than 1.4 billion visits in 2019.
- Apart from the growing revenues for the government departments and private tourism companies, 'red tourism' is hugely popular because it supports a whole host of ancillary businesses, starting from antique shops selling Communist memorabilia to malls, restaurants and hotels.
- The project has given birth to an entire ecosystem of businesses that form the very crux of the country's booming economy.

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Criticism:

- It seeks to educate people about the country's past often indulges in one-sided story-telling.
- It can tend to gloss over the failures and misdeeds of the Communist leaders of the country, thus peddling a version of history which can suit the party's interests.
- More than fostering the spirit of research and academic scholarship in history, ideological indoctrination is at the heart of this project.

Source: Indian Express

K.P. KRISHNAN EXPERT COMMITTEE

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

- Dr. K.P. Krishnan headed expert committee on Variable Capital Company has submitted its report on the feasibility of Variable Capital Companies in the International Financial Services Centres in India to the Chairperson of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA).

About:

- The IFSCA set up this Committee to explore the potential for allowing another legal structure – popularly known as a variable capital company (VCC) – as an additional option through which asset managers could pool the investors' funds.
- The VCC structure dispenses with some of the key limitations of companies and LLPs and provides for higher regulatory standards than those applicable to trusts.
- The Committee assessed the features of a VCC or its equivalent, in other jurisdictions such as the UK, Singapore, Ireland and Luxembourg.
- The Committee recommended the adoption of a VCC-like legal structure for the purpose of conducting fund management activity in IFSCs.
- The Committee recognized that the legal framework governing entities that undertake fund management should provide for certainty and clarity to investors.

Source: PIB

SATAT SCHEME

Syllabus Section: Government Initiatives

Why in News?

Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas presided over a virtual ceremony in which a number of initiatives were launched to provide major fillip to the SATAT initiative.

About:

- his included signing of a Cooperation Agreement by Oil and Gas majors including IndianOil, HPCL, BPCL, GAIL and IGL, for the promotion and development of the SATAT (Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation) scheme.
- The SATAT scheme aims to set up Compressed Bio-Gas production plants and make CBG available in the market for use as a green fuel.
- 'SATAT', launched on 1.10.2018, envisages to target production of 15 MMT of CBG from 5000 plants by 2023.
- Besides the potential to boost availability of more affordable transport fuels, better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste, the 5000 CBG plants will provide an investment of 1.75 lakh crore, an additional revenue source to farmers, and 75,000 direct job opportunities and lakhs of indirect jobs.
- The minister also laid the foundation stones of 5 upcoming CBG Plants.
- He also inaugurated the first injection of CBG into the CGD pipeline network at Govardhannathji Energies into Gujarat Gas CGD network at Nadiad Kheda Distt., Gujarat

Source: PIB

INDIA'S EFFORT TO FIND A SOLUTION IN WTO FACES CHALLENGE

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

- India's attempt to get a permanent solution to make its minimum support price (MSP) programmes for public stock-holding non-actionable at the WTO this year is facing a serious challenge from the US, the EU and Australia-led Cairns group, who are objecting to many of its crucial suggestions.

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About:

- The EU and Cairns group opposed a standalone permanent solution pushed by India and other members of the G-33 group (an alliance of developing countries with defensive interest in agriculture) for an early decision on the matter, and instead proposed that public stock-holding should be part of the structured solution on domestic support in general.

- The G33 (or the Friends of Special Products in agriculture) is a coalition of developing countries, established prior to the 2003 Cancun ministerial conference, that have coordinated during the Doha Round of World Trade Organization negotiations, specifically in regard to agriculture.

- When rich governments can afford to heavily subsidize their agriculture, predatory dumping can undermine a poorer country's agricultural economy.

- Developing countries aim to balance power through tariffs, in order to manage their own food security, stabilize of the livelihoods of their farming populations, and strengthen rural development.

- The group has advocated the creation of a "special products" exemption, which would allow developing countries to exempt certain products from tariff reductions, and also a "special safeguard mechanism" which would permit tariff increases in response to import surges.

Source: Business Line

AMENDED PENSION RULES FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

- The Centre has amended its pension rules putting new restrictions of officials of intelligence and security organisations after retirement.

About:

The government has amended the CCS Pension Rules-1972.

New Rule:

- Under amended Rule-8(3)(a): "No government servant, who, having worked in any intelligence or security-related organisation included in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act, shall, without prior clearance from the Head of the Organisation, make any publication after retirement, of any material relating to and including:

1. domain of the organisation, including any reference or information about any personnel and his designation, and experience or knowledge gained by virtue of working in that organisation;

2. sensitive information, the disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state, or relation with a foreign state or which would lead to incitement of an offence."

The Organizations Covered Under Second Schedule of RTI :

- The Second Schedule of the RTI Act covers 26 organisations including the Intelligence Bureau, R&AW, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, CBI, NCB, BSF, CRPF, ITBP and CISF.

Existing Provisions:

- The pension of government servants is already subject to their conduct after retirement.

Why amend the rules then?

- The move was prompted by concerns arising out of the fact that some high-profile retired officers had written books on their tenure, and some of these had revealed information.

- This was in process for around four years after the Committee of Secretaries recommended it.

Restrictions on Government Employees Under While in Service:

- Rule 7 of the CCS Conduct Rules: restricts government servants from resorting to or abetting any form of strike or coercion.

- Rule 8: restricts them, except with government sanction, from owning or participating in the editing or management of any newspaper or other periodical publication or electronic media.

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- Rule 9: restricts a government servant from making statements of fact or opinion in writing or in a telecast or a broadcast which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the Central Government or a State Government"
- Rule 26: Death-cum-Retirement Benefits Rules, restricts a pensioner from any commercial employment for one year after retirement, except with previous sanction of the central government.

About Political Activity While in Service:

- The Conduct Rules bars government servants from being associated with any political party or organisation, and from taking part or assisting any political activity.
- An amendment on November 27, 2014 added a few clauses to Rule 3(1), one of which said, "Every government employee shall at all times maintain political neutrality" and "commit himself to and uphold the supremacy of the Constitution and democratic values.
- There is no rule to stop government servants from joining politics after their retirement.
- In 2013, the Election Commission had written to the DoPT and Law Ministry, suggesting a cooling-off period for bureaucrats joining politics after retirement, but it was rejected

Source: Indian Express

DIGITAL SERVICES TAXES

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

The United States government announced further suspension of punitive tariffs for six months on India, Austria, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

About:

The Issue:

The USTR report found the DST to be discriminatory on two counts.

o First, it states that the DST discriminates against US digital businesses because it specifically excludes from its ambit domestic (Indian) digital businesses.

o Second, according to the report, the DST does not extend to identical services provided by non-digital service providers.

- The US has conducted a year-long investigation into digital services taxes imposed by countries, stating that they are against tech companies like Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook.
- The investigation began in June 2020 and in January 2021, following investigations the USTR determined that the digital services taxes adopted by Austria, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom discriminated against US digital companies and were inconsistent with principles of international taxation and burdened US companies.

What's the case against India?

- The USTR's proposed course of action includes additional tariffs of up to 25 per cent ad valorem on an aggregate level of trade that would collect duties on goods of India in the range of the amount of DST that India is expected to collect from US companies
- This includes shrimps, basmati rice, cigarette paper, cultured pearls, semi precious stones, silver powder and silver articles of jewelry, gold mixed link necklaces and neck chains and certain furniture of bentwood.

Digital Services Taxes in India

- In the Finance Bill 2020-21 the government imposing a 2 per cent digital service tax on trade and services by non-resident e-commerce operators with a turnover of over Rs 2 crore
- It effectively expanded the scope of equalisation levy that, till last year, only applied to digital advertising services.
- The new levy that became applicable from April last year has expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operators involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services.

Source: Indian Express

MODEL TENANCY ACT

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister, approved the Model Tenancy Act (MTA) to be sent to the States and Union Territories to enact legislation or amend laws on rental properties.

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About:

- The MTA would prescribe the norms for lease agreements, deposits, dispute handling and other aspects of rental properties.
- The Act will be applicable prospectively and won't affect the existing tenancies.
- It would set up separate rent authorities, courts and tribunals in each district to settle disputes.
- It also makes it mandatory for there to be a written agreement between the property owner and the tenant. It would be submitted to the concerned district 'Rent Authority'.
- It puts a maximum limit for security deposits paid by tenants at 2 months' rent for residential properties and 6 months' rent for non-residential spaces (Commercial property).
- Tenant will not be evicted during the continuance of tenancy agreement unless otherwise agreed to in writing by both the parties.
- Significance - The Act will create adequate rental housing stock for all the income groups thereby addressing the issue of homelessness.
- It will enable institutionalisation of rental housing by gradually shifting it towards the formal market.

Source: The Economic Times

INDIA CYCLES4CHANGE

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

The India Cycles4Change challenge is beginning to gain momentum in Indian cities.

About:

- The challenge was launched under the Smart Cities Mission by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on 25th June, 2020, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic was making inroads across the country, cycling saw a huge rise in demand.
  - o The lockdown restrictions had significantly affected the commuters of public transport, who saw cycling as a personal and COVID-safe alternative for short and medium distance commute.
  - o Moreover, cycling was also seen as a means of staying healthy- physically and mentally by the people who were confined to their homes.
- In this backdrop, with the launch of India Cycle4Change challenge, 107 cities registered to be a part of the cycling revolution and 41 cities undertook initiatives vis. surveys, discussions, pop-up cycle lanes, safer neighbourhoods, open street events, cycle rallies, or online campaigns that were aimed at creating a cycle friendly city.
- The Smart Cities Mission, in association with Institute for Transport and Development Policy (ITDP) conducted training modules and other capacity building initiatives to guide 107 cities on various cycling initiatives.

Source : PIB

NITI AAYOG'S SDG INDIA INDEX 2020-21

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

- Recently, NITI Aayog has released the third edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index 2020-21.
- It evaluates progress of states and Union territories on social, economic and environmental parameters.

About:
Background:

- The NITI Aayog launched its index in 2018 to monitor the country's progress on the goals through data-driven assessment, and foster a competitive spirit among the States and Union Territories in achieving them.
- NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the adoption and monitoring of the SDGs in the country, and also promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs.

SDG India Index:

- A composite SDG India Index score was computed for each State and UT of India based on their aggregate performance across 13 of the 17 SDGs.
- The value of the score indicates the average performance of the State/UT towards achieving the 13 SDGs and their respective targets.

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- The score ranges between 0 and 100 percent.
- If a State achieves a score of 100 percent, it signifies that the State has achieved the national target set for 2030.
- If a State achieves a score of 0, it signifies that the State was the worst performer.
- The higher the score of a State, the greater the distance to target achieved.
- Based on the score, the States and UTs were classified into four categories, namely Achiever, Front Runner, Performer and Aspirant. This criterion of classification is as follows:
- Achiever – when SDG India Index score is equal to 100
- Front Runner – when SDG India Index score is less than 100 but greater than or equal to 65
- Performer – when SDG India Index score is less than 65 but greater than or equal to 50
- Aspirant – when SDG India Index score is less than 50

Highlights of This Year's Index:

Top performers
- Kerala: 75 points
- Himachal Pradesh: 74 points
- Tamil Nadu: 74 points

States at the bottom of table
- Bihar: 52 points
- Jharkhand: 56 points
- Assam: 57 points

Top performing Union Territories
- Chandigarh: 79
- Delhi: 68
- Lakshadweep: 68

Top gainers
- Mizoram: 12 points gained
- Haryana: 10 points gained
- Uttarakhand: 8 points gained

New front runners (Score between 65 and 99)
Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh

- As per the report, Tamil Nadu and Delhi have done well on improving per capita income of individuals, Gujarat and Delhi given best performance in the health sector, while Kerala an and Chandigarh have done well in education.

- The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points - from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020–21.
- Currently, there are no states in the aspirant and achiever category; 15 states/UTs are in the performer category and 22 states/UTs in the front runner category.
- The SDG India Index 2020–21 is more robust than the previous editions on account of wider coverage of targets and indicators with greater alignment with the National Indicator Framework (NIF).
- The 115 indicators incorporate 16 out of 17 SDGs, with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17, and cover 70 SDG targets.
- This is an improvement over the 2018–19 and 2019–20 editions of the index, which had utilised 62 indicators across 39 targets and 13 Goals, and 100 indicators across 54 targets and 16 Goals, respectively

Source: Times of India

OPERATION SAGAR AARAKSHA II

Syllabus Section: Defence and Security

Why in News:
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG), in coordination with Sri Lankan authorities, has been tirelessly engaged in fighting a major fire onboard the Chemical laden container vessel MV X-Press Pearl anchored off Colombo since 25 May 2021.

About:
- The coordinated joint operation between India and Sri Lanka undertaken to respond to potential environmental danger has been christened as Sagar Aaraksha-II.
- Indian Coast Guard ships, including the specialised pollution response vessel Samudra Prahari and offshore patrol vessel Vajra are standby in vicinity to respond to the developing situation.
- The ICG being an active member of South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) remains committed to its responsibility of safeguarding of the ocean environment in the region.

Source: PIB

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SAGE (SENIORCARE AGING GROWTH ENGINE) INITIATIVE

Syllabus Section: Society

Why in News?

The Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, has virtually launched the SAGE (Seniorcare Aging Growth Engine) initiative and SAGE portal for elderly persons

About:

- SAGE portal has been launched with a view to help such persons who are interested in entrepreneurship in the field of providing services for elderly care.
- India's elderly population is on the rise, and as per surveys, the share of elders, as a percentage of the total population in the country, is expected to increase from around 7.5% in 2001 to almost 12.5% by 2026, and surpass 19.5% by 2050.
- The SAGE portal will be a "one-stop access" of elderly care products and services by credible start-ups.
- The SAGE portal will be opened for applications from 5th June, 2021 onwards.
- The start-ups will be selected on the basis of innovative products and services, which they should be able to provide across sectors such as health, housing, care centers, apart from technological access linked to finances, food and wealth management, and legal guidance.

Significance:

- The Ministry has designed SAGE programme as per the suggestions of the Empowered ExpertCommittee (EEC) on start-ups for the elderly to solicit the involvement of youth and their innovative ideas for elderly care.
- This will help to make the programmes for elderly care a national movement than just a government programme.
- The Ministry will act as a facilitator, enabling the elderly to access the products through these identified start-ups.
- The EEC report has highlighted that the business opportunities in this space could emerge from social enterprises (non-profits, informal networks), technology start-ups (fintech, adtech, foodtech, healthtech, wealthtech), legal and financial services (planning solutions, insurance, medico-legal) and infrastructure and managed-care systems (senior housing, living facilities, care centres).

Source: PIB

SINOVAC

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

- The World Health Organization approved China's SINOVAC Covid vaccine for Emergency Use Listing, EUL. This makes SINOVAC the 8th vaccine to receive EUL from the WHO.

About:

- WHO's Emergency Use Listing (EUL) is a prerequisite for COVAX Facility vaccine supply and international procurement. It opens the door for the jab to be used in the COVAX programme, which aims to ensure fair access to vaccines.
- The vaccine is produced by the Beijing-based pharmaceutical company Sinovac.
- The Sinovac-CoronaVac product is an inactivated vaccine (The disease-carrying virus or bacterium, or one very similar to it, is inactivated or killed using chemicals, heat or radiation).
- Its easy storage requirements make it very manageable and particularly suitable for low-resource settings.

Source: All India Radio

CALLS FOR CENTRALISED VACCINE PROCUREMENT, DECENTRALISED VACCINATION

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik wrote to chief ministers of all states, for a consensus on centralised procurement of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines by the Centre, in view of the challenges faced by the states.

About:

- Patnaik wrote, the best option available to the Union government was to centrally procure the vaccines and distribute them to the states so that citizens were vaccinated at the earliest.
- He also asked for, the execution of the vaccination programme to be decentralised and states should be allowed the flexibility to determine their own mechanisms to ensure universal vaccination,"

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Problems for State in Procuring the Vaccine

1) Supply Constraints:

- Global vaccine manufacturers are looking forward to the Union government for clearances and assurances. They are unwilling to get into supply contracts with the state governments,
- The domestic vaccine manufacturers were having supply constraints and were not able to commit required supply.

2) High Procuring Cost:

- State governments, which have no prior experience in procuring vaccines, will end up spending 27 per cent of their health budget on an average.
- But if the central government is procuring at scale, the cost would be reduced.

3) Negotiation Price:

Immunisation in India has always been carried out centrally, under the Universal Immunisation Programme, for children below one. States only had to execute the programme. Experts said lack of expertise in procurement may not help states negotiate prices with suppliers.

4) Technical Issue

- States have freedom to float global tenders for acquiring Covid-19 vaccines from any drug manufacturer, but they cannot inoculate their citizens with such vaccines that have not been approved by the Union government, which could emerge as a major technical issue,

5) Limited Supplier:

- There are limited suppliers and they too are apprehensive of regulatory issue. India is not their first option; hence any large-scale procurement is full of challenges.
- 5. Until date, India has administered 22.86 crore doses, with 18.38 crore people having received one dose, and 4.48 crore people both the doses.

Source: Hindustan Times.

LIVELIHOODS OF ODISHA'S PUPPETEERS HANGING BY A THREAD

Syllabus Section: Society/ Art and Culture

Why in News?

Travel restrictions during the state-wide lockdown leaves puppetry community with fears of financial strain like last year.

About:

Problems Puppeteers are Facing:

- The second wave of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has robbed Odisha's puppeteer community of a chance of revival.
- The puppet artists and ventriloquists are invited to perform in religious gatherings, weddings and other ceremonies across the state. But such gatherings were banned since the onset of the pandemic.
- The state has around 5,000 puppeteers, mainly concentrated in Kendrapara, Jajpur, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Angul and Dhenkanal districts
- Four forms of puppetry are usually practiced in Odisha: Glove (sakhikundhei), shadow (ravanachhaya), rod (kathikundehi) and string (gopalilakundhei).

Glove Puppet(sakhikundhei):

- The string puppets of Orissa are known as Kundhei.
- Made of light wood, the Orissa puppets have no legs but wear long flowing skirts.
- They have more joints and are, therefore, more versatile, articulate and easy to manipulate.
- The puppeteers often hold a wooden prop, triangular in shape, to which strings are attached for manipulation.
- The costumes of Kundhei resemble those worn by actors of the Jatra traditional theatre.
- The music is drawn from the popular tunes of the region and is sometimes influenced by the music of Odissi dance.

Shadow Puppets (RavanaChhaya):

- Shadow puppets are flat figures.
- They are cut out of leather, which has been treated to make it translucent.
- Shadow puppets are pressed against the screen with a strong source of light behind it.
- The manipulation between the light and the screen make silhouettes or colourful shadows, as the case may be, for the viewers who sit in front of the screen.
- This tradition of shadow puppets survives in Orissa. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

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Rod Puppets (kathikundehi):

- Rod puppets are an extension of glove-puppets, but often much larger and supported and manipulated by rods from below.
- This form of puppetry now is found mostly in West Bengal and Orissa.

String Puppets(gopalilakundhei):

- India has a rich and ancient tradition of string puppets or marionettes.
- Marionettes having jointed limbs controlled by strings allow far greater flexibility and are, therefore, the most articulate of the puppets.
- Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are some of the regions where this form of puppetry has flourished.

PERFORMANCE GRADING INDEX (PGI)

Syllabus Section: Health Disease

Why in News?

Union Education Minister, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' approved the release of Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2019-20 for States and Union Territories.

About:

- The Indian school Education System is one of the largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools, nearly 97 lakh teachers and more than 25 crore students1 from varied socio-economic backgrounds.
- The system strives to maintain standards and uniformity across the country while giving ample scope for the country's diverse culture and heritage to grow and flourish.

Grade/ Scores	Names of States/ UTs
Level I 9951 - 1000)	Nil
Level II (901 - 950), Grade I ++	Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu
Level III (851 - 900) Grade I+	Dadra * Nagar Haveli, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, NCT of Delhi, Ppuducherry, Rajasthan
Level IV (801-850) Grade I	Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Daman & Diu, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh
Level V (751 - 800) Grade II	Goa, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Manipur, Sikkim, Telangana
Level VI (701 - 750) Grade III	Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram
Level VII (651 - 700) Grade IV	Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Nagaland
Level VIII (601 - 650) Grade V	Meghalaya
Level XI (551 - 600) Grade VI	Nil
Level X (0 - 550) Grade VII	Ladakh

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About Performance Grading Index 2020

- The Performance Grading Index was first published in the 2019 for the years 2017-18
- The index was developed as a concept that aims to assess evaluate multi-pronged interventions which can help various states and administrations to achieve their desired goals in the field of Education
- The report also works as a credible source of information for other states to understand the best practices followed by top performing states and UTs.
- The end goal of releasing the index is to point out areas of strengths as well as concerns and decode learning gaps and launch initiatives to effectively bridge them.

Source: PIB

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MARKET BASED ECONOMIC DESPATCH (MBED)

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

Power Ministry circulates Discussion Paper to seek comments on Market Based Economic Despatch (MBED),

About:

- MBED will ensure that the cheapest generating resources across the country are despatched to meet the overall system demand and will thus be a win-win for both the distribution companies and the generators and ultimately result in an estimated annual savings in excess of INR 12,000 crores for the electricity consumers.
- MBED shall also facilitate larger integration of variable renewable energy by enlarging the balancing area to the national level and is also expected to optimize the need for reserves and ancillary service.
- Security constrained economic despatch (SCED) was such an attempt towards optimisation of the system cost.
- This has already yielded substantial saving in system cost.
- This was followed by the Real Time Market - a half-hourly market, which provided for an opportunity for the buyers and the sellers to buy and sell through an organised market closer to real time.
- The full benefit of physical integration would be realisable when India transits to an optimisation at the national level and a country-wide balancing area instead of the siloed self-scheduling and balancing mechanisms currently followed within state or regional boundaries.
- Thus, the next step in reforming electricity market operations is to implement Market Based Economic Despatch (MBED), in moving towards a "One Nation, One Grid, One Frequency, One Price" framework.

Source: PIB

MODEL PANCHAYAT CITIZENS CHARTER

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Union Minister of Panchayati Raj released A Model Panchayat Citizens Charter.

About:

- It has been prepared by Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in collaboration with National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR)
- It is a framework for delivery of the services across the 29 sectors, aligning actions with localised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Aim: Establishing a Citizen Charter is to Provide Services to the People in a Time Bound Manner, Redressing Their Grievances and Improving Their Lives.
- It is expected that the Panchayats will utilise this framework to draw up a Citizens Charter and adopt it through a resolution of the Gram Sabha by 15th August, 2021.
- Panchayats are responsible for delivery of basic services as enshrined under article 243G of the Constitution of India, specifically in the areas of Health & Sanitation, Education, Nutrition, Drinking Water.

Source: PIB

SEA SNOT OUTBREAK IN TURKEY

Syllabus Section: International Issues

Why in News?

Turkey's Sea of Marmara, that connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, has witnessed the largest outbreak of 'sea snot'.

About:

- Sea snot' is marine mucilage that is formed when algae are overloaded with nutrients as a result of water pollution combined with the effects of climate change.
- It, is a slimy layer of grey or green sludge in the country's seas, which can cause considerable damage to the marine ecosystem.
- Turkey's Sea of Marmara, that connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, has witnessed the largest outbreak of 'sea snot'.
  o The sludge has also been spotted in the adjoining Black and Aegean seas.
  o As the slimy layer spreads across the country's seas, there are urgent calls now to tackle the crisis.
- A 'sea snot' outbreak was first recorded in the country in 2007. Back then, it was also spotted in the Aegean Sea near Greece.

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- But the current outbreak in the Sea of Marmara is by far the biggest in the country's history.

Causes of SeaSnot:

- The nutrient overload occurs when algae feast on warm weather caused by global warming.
- Water pollution adds to the problem.
- Overproduction of phytoplankton caused by climate change and the uncontrolled dumping of household and industrial waste into the seas has led to the present crisis.
- Discharge of untreated water from cities like Istanbul, which is home to 16 million people, into the seas.

Threat to Marine Ecosystem:

- The growth of the mucilage, which floats up on the surface of the sea like a brown phlegm, is posing a severe threat to the marine ecosystem of the country
- It has caused mass deaths among the fish population, and also killed other aquatic organisms such as corals and sponges.
- The mucilage is now covering the surface of the sea and has also spread to 80-100 feet below the surface.
- If unchecked, this can collapse to the bottom and cover the sea floor, causing major damage to the marine ecosystem.
- The 'sea snot' outbreak has also affected the livelihoods of fishermen
- sludge is getting collected in their nets, making them so heavy that they break or get lost.
- The mucilage coating the strings make the nets visible to fish and keep them away, catching getting decreased over the years.
- Brown mucilage floating in the seas of Turkey is a sign of how the marine ecosystem can be damaged and the effect it can have on the environment as a whole if serious steps are not taken to tackle the twin crisis of pollution and global warming.

Steps Being Taken By Turkey To Solve The Crisis:

- Entire Sea of Marmara will be turned into a protected area.
- Steps are being taken to reduce pollution and improve treatment of waste water from coastal cities and ships.
- Turkey's biggest maritime clean-up operation is being launched.

- Turkey has planned to reduce nitrogen levels in the sea by 40%, which would help tackle the crisis.
- Erdogan government to approve the Paris Agreement on climate change which aims to cut down on carbon emissions and reduce global temperatures.

Source: Indian Express

G7 CORPORATE TAX

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Advanced economies making up the G7 grouping have reached a "historic" deal on taxing multinational companies.

About:

What are the decisions taken

- The first decision that has been ratified is to force multinationals to pay taxes where they operate.
- The second decision in the agreement commits states to a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% to avoid countries undercutting each other.

Why Minimum Corporate Tax?

- The decision to ratify a 15% floor rate follows from a declaration of war on low-tax jurisdictions around the globe announced by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen,
- It was urged to the world's 20 advanced nations to move in the direction of adopting a minimum global corporate income tax.
- To address the low effective rates of tax shelled out by some of the world's biggest corporations, including digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet and Facebook, as well as major corporations such as Nike and Starbucks.

Problems with the plan?

- A global minimum rate would essentially take away a tool that countries use to push policies that suit them.
- For instance, in the backdrop of the pandemic, IMF and World Bank data suggest that developing countries with less ability to offer mega stimulus packages may experience a longer economic hangover than developed nations.
- A lower tax rate is a tool they can use to alternatively push economic activity.
- A global minimum tax rate will do little to tackle tax evasion.

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India's stand:

- The government is open to participate and engage in the emerging discussions globally around the corporate tax structure.

INDIA ELECTED TO UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL FOR TERM 2022-24

Syllabus Section: International Relation

Why in News?

- India has been elected to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC for the term 2022-24.

About:

- India was elected to UN ECOSOC in the Asia-Pacific States Category along with Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and Oman in the elections which were held on June 7, 2021.
- From the African States, Eswatini, Cote d' Ivoire, Mauritius, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Tunisia were elected.
- From Eastern European states, the Czech Republic and Croatia were elected to the UN body and from the Latin American and the Caribbean States, Chile, Belize, and Peru were elected.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC):

- The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the 6 principal organs of the United Nations System established by the UN Charter in 1945

- It consists of 54 Members of the United Nations elected by the General Assembly.
- ECOSOC coordinates economic, social, and related work of the fourteen United Nations specialized agencies, functional commissions and five regional commissions.
- It serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system.
- It is responsible for:
- promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress;
- identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems;
- facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and
- encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Source: Hindustan Times

RETURN OF SUPERSONIC FLYING

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

- United Airlines announced it was ordering 15 planes with the ability to travel at Mach 1.7, faster than the speed of sound, from the Denver-based startup Boom.

About:

- If the deal gets through, the new supersonic "Overture" aircraft will become the world's fastest commercial airliner, reducing travel time by about half of today's planes.

Supersonic Plane:

Supersonic aircraft are planes that can fly faster than the speed of sound.

- The technology for supersonic flights is actually over 70 years old, but only recently has been used for commercial flying.
- Before 1976, when the first commercial supersonic flight took off, the planes were used entirely for military purposes.

Usually, supersonic planes can travel at the speed of around 900 kmph, twice the speed of normal aircraft.

Boom's Overture Supersonic Plane:

- The Overture aircraft would travel at the speed of Mach 1.7 or 1,805 kmph with a range of 4,250 nautical mile.

> - **Concorde, the British-French turbojet**-powered commercial airliner, was the first aircraft to carry passengers at supersonic speed,
> - Eventually had to discontinue, due to cost and other concern.

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○ It could carry 65 to 88 passengers and reach an altitude of 60,000 ft.
○ The company has expressed confidence in getting an "experimental" jet ready by 2022, start rolling out aircraft by 2025 and eventually open them for passengers by 2029
○ The Overture will also not be noisy as supersonic planes in the past were, it aims for "*zero overland noise.*

> *Zero Overland Noise* means aircraft will cruise at supersonic speeds only over water, ensuring that no sonic boom or excessive noise reaches the surfaces where people live

Challenges With Supersonic Planes:
- Firstly, the costs of making "sustainable" supersonic planes are extremely high.
- The very nature of its flying — using excessive amounts of fuel and energy — is likely to have high environmental costs.
- Secondly the very speed of the planes results in producing excessive amounts of noise pollution in the environment.
- The "Sonic Boom" created by these planes feels like an explosion to the human ear. This, thus, limits where and when the supersonic planes can fly. They can only reach their actual speed until they are far enough from people and completely over the ocean.
- It would not be economically feasible for everyone. Only the very rich can afford supersonic planes, as a ticket is likely to be way costlier than a first-class ticket of a regular plane.

What were the problems before?
- High economic losses. Since it used excessive amounts of jet fuel, the flights became very expensive to operate.
- High amounts of maintenance costs. With over three decades in service, its operational and revamping costs became difficult to maintain.
- Intolerable amounts of noise. The noise issue prevented other airliners from ordering Concorde planes, stalling its expansion on a large scale.
- Very limited international routes, as it could operate at supersonic speeds only with certain regulations.

Source: Indian Express

WORLD BANK APPROVES 500 MILLION DOLLAR PROGRAM

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?
The World Bank has approved a USD 500 million program to help boost India's MSME sector.

About:
- The MSME sector is the backbone of the country's economy, contributing 30 percent of India's GDP and 40 percent of exports.
- Out of some 58 million MSMEs in the country, more than 40 per cent lack access to formal sources of finance.
- The programme targets improvements in the performance of five lakh 50 thousand MSMEs. Out of some 58 million MSMEs in the country.
- The USD 500 million Raising and Accelerating Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Performance (RAMP) Program is the World Bank's second intervention in this sector.
- The first being the Rs 750 million MSME Emergency Response Program, approved in July last year
- The RAMP program will provide better access to finance and working capital for MSMEs by strengthening the receivable financing markets.
- It will also scale up online dispute resolution mechanisms to address the problem of delayed payments.

Source: All India Radio

ANTI-HAIL GUNS THE ANSWER TO HIMACHAL'S PROBLEM OF CROP DAMAGE

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?
- To help out horticulturists who face crop damage due to hailstorms, the Himachal Pradesh government will be testing the use of indigenously developed 'anti-hail guns'.

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About:

Anti-Hail Guns:

- An anti-hail gun is a machine which generates shock waves to disrupt the growth of hailstones in clouds, according to its makers.

- It comprises a tall, fixed structure somewhat resembling an inverted tower, several metres high, with a long and narrow cone opening towards the sky.

- The gun is "fired" by feeding an explosive mixture of acetylene gas and air into its lower chamber, which releases a shock wave (waves which travel faster than the speed of sound, such as those produced by supersonic aircraft).

- These shock waves supposedly stop water droplets in clouds from turning into hailstones, so that they fall simply as raindrops.

How do they 'prevent' a hailstorm?

- It is this hail formation process that the shock waves from anti-hail guns try to disrupt in a radius of 500 meters, so that the water droplets fall down before they can be lifted by the updrafts.

- The machine is repeatedly fired every few seconds during an approaching thunderstorm.

- However, the effectiveness of anti-hail guns has remained a contentious issue.

How do Hailstorms occur?

- Hail is produced by cumulonimbus clouds, which are generally large and dark and may cause thunder and lightning.

- In such clouds, winds can blow up the water droplets to heights where they freeze into ice.

- The frozen droplets begin to fall but are soon pushed back up by the winds and more droplets freeze onto them, resulting in multiple layers of ice on the hailstones.

- This fall and rise are repeated several times, till the hailstones become too heavy and fall down.

Why is hail a big issue in HP?

- Every summer from March to May, frequent hailstorms in the fruit-growing areas of Himachal destroy apples, pears and other crops, causing massive losses to farmers.

- In some hail-prone areas such as Narkanda and Theog, the entire apple crop in an orchard may sometimes get destroyed during such storms.

- The state government has subsidised anti-hail nets but even these can fail in the face of storms.

Source: Indian Express

I-FAMILIA

Syllabus Section: Internal Security

Why in News?

Recently, the Interpol has launched a new global database named "I-Familia" to identify missing persons through family DNA and help the police solve cold cases in member countries.

About:

TWO TYPES OF DNA MATCHING

DIRECT MATCHING — KINSHIP MATCHING

DNA from missing person: prior medical sample or personal item

DNA from unidentified body or human remains

DNA from biological relatives of missing person

INTERPOL DNA Database
SINCE 2004
PROVEN SUCCESS

I-Familia
Family DNA matching service
FROM 2021
OPENING NEW POSSIBILITIES

INTERPOL
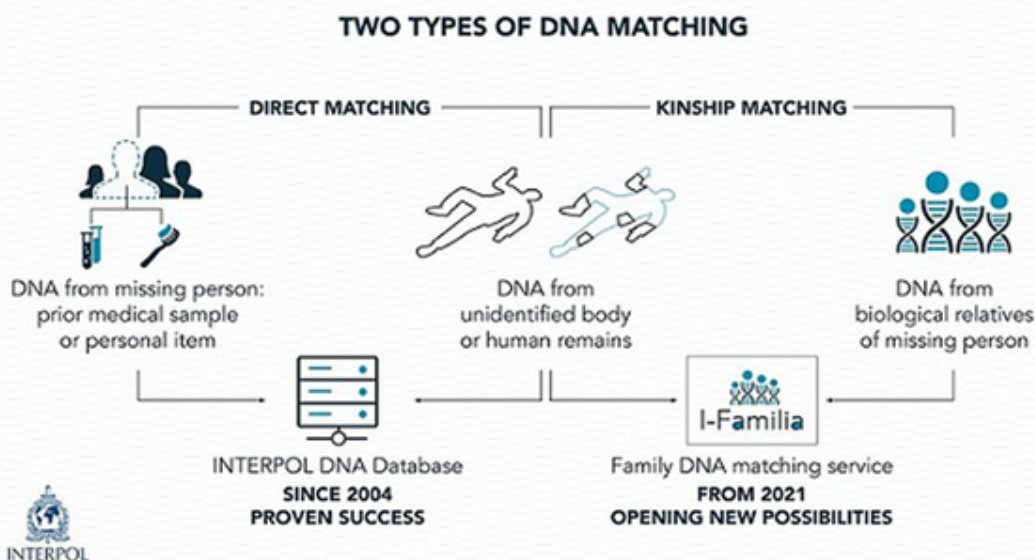
- I-Familia is the first global database for identifying missing persons based on international DNA kinship matching.
- "Family members must give their consent for their data to be used for international searching.
- It builds on Interpol's long-standing success in direct DNA matching.
- I-Familia has three components:
    o A dedicated global database to host the DNA profiles provided by relatives, held separately from any criminal data;
    o DNA matching software called Bonaparte, developed by Dutch company Smart Research;
    o Interpretation guidelines developed by Interpol.

Source: The Hindu

NEW COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India will shift to centralised procurement of Covid-19 vaccines, after several states had faced difficulties in procuring and managing the funding of vaccines.

About:

New Policy:

- For Centre: The Centre will directly procure 75% of the doses manufactured by vaccine companies.
- For States:States will no longer have to pay vaccine companies for the same.
- State governments will now receive their allocated vaccine doses from the federal government based on the population of those states, the level of disease, vaccination progress and population
- Private Hospitals:
- Private hospitals will have exclusive access to the remaining 25%.
- The service charges that private hospitals charge will be capped at 150.
- Non-transferable electronic vouchers, approved by the RBI, will be introduced.
- This would enable people to financially support vaccination of economically weaker sections at private centres.
- The voucher can be used only for the person to whom it has been issued.
- Common People:
- Vaccines will continue tobe free for all those who choose to get their shot at government centres
- Healthcare workers and frontline workers will continue to get top priority at government centres.

- States will also have to prioritise the vaccination of citizens above 45 since this category accounts for 80% of Covid-related mortality.
- They will have also have to prioritise the vaccination of those whose second dose has become due, the revised guidelines recommend.

Old Policy:

- States were allowed to procure 25% of the vaccines manufactured and the Centre 50%.

Earlier Practices:

- Health has traditionally been within the purviewof States, and it stands to reason that they would invariably have to deal with the challenges that vaccination throws up.
- Immunisation in India has always been carried out centrally, under the Universal Immunisation Programme.

Problems in the Old Policy

- Irrational and arbitrary
- States had to procure them on the open market, and so the financial burden on some of the poorest states such as Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh significantly increased.
- Supply Constraints: Global vaccine manufacturers are looking forward to the Union government for clearances and assurances. They are unwilling to get into supply contracts with the state governments,
- High Procuring Cost for the State.
- Leading tovaccine hesitancy, the problem of transportation, the availability of trained personnel and the existing capacity at health¬care sites

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Positives in the New Policy:

- These changes in total could be the beginning of a smoother, more efficient vaccine roll¬out.
- The ceiling price on vaccines in hospitals will bringpredictability and be hugely beneficial to citizens.

Source: The Hindu

NEW TECHNIQUE TO DETECT TROPICAL CYCLONES FOR BAY OF BENGAL BASIN

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

- Novel technique could help detect tropical cyclones for Bay of Bengal Basin earlier than satellites.

About:

- A team of Scientists IIT Kharagpur, with support from the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India under the Climate Change Programme (CCP), devised a novel method using Eddy detection technique.
- It will investigate the formative stages and advance detection time of tropical cyclogenesis in the North Indian Ocean region
- It aims to identify initial traces of pre-cyclonic eddy vortices in the atmospheric column and track its Spatio-temporal evolution.

Atmospheric Instability during Cyclone Formation:

- Prior to the formation of cyclonic system over the warm oceanic environment, the initial atmospheric instability mechanism, as well as the vortex development, is triggered at higher atmospheric levels
- These cyclonic eddies are prominent features in the vertical atmospheric column encompassing the disturbance environment with a potential to induce and develop into a well-marked cyclonic depression over the warm ocean surface.
- They could be used for detection of prediction of cyclones.

Significance:

- A larger time gap between the detection and the impact of the cyclone could help preparation activities.
- Early detection of Tropical cyclones has wide socio-economic implications.

- Help in minimising the losses.

Source: DD News

CIRCLE LEVEL DAK ADALAT IN MUMBAI

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Chief Post Master General, Maharashtra Circle, will be holding the 115th Circle Level Dak Adalat on 25.06.2021.

About:

- Complaints/Grievances regarding Postal Services pertaining to the Maharashtra and Goa states, which have not been settled within 6 weeks will be entertained in the Dak Adalat.

What is Dak Adalat?

- The adalat will cover cases of complaints and disputes related to the postal services particularly concerning mails, parcels, registered letters, electronic money order, counter services, Speed Post, savings bank account, postal life insurance and others.
- In order to redress the grievances in an effective manner, the Department periodically organizes Dak Adalat where functionaries of the Department meet the aggrieved customers, gather details about their complaints and try to settle them at the earliest.
- All types of complaints related to Postal services are considered during the Dak Adalat.

Need For Dak Adalat:

- While the Department of Posts strives its best to render the service to the fullest satisfaction of its customers, however communication gaps and service faults do occasionally happen, resulting into grievances and complaints.
- Postal Services form an integral part of the socio economic life of the country, touching the lives of virtually every citizen.

Source: PIB

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GENES TO IMPROVE FERTILISER NITROGEN USE EFFICIENCY IN RICE

Syllabus Section: Science and technology/ Agriculture

Why in News?

Indian biotechnologists have identified candidate genes for nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) in rice.

About:

- NUE is controlled by too many genes and shortlisting them is very important for crop improvement towards NUE,
- Using a series of genetic and bioinformatic tools, 62 genes have been identified, most of which were located on chromosome 1 and 3.

Why NUE in Rice is Needed?

- India is emerging as one of the global hotspots of nitrogen pollution of water and air, adversely affecting our health and climate change.
- Every year, urea worth Rs 50,000 crore is lost from Indian farms, with rice and wheat accounting for about two-thirds of it.
- Rice is important for NUE, as it consumes 37 per cent of all N-fertilisers in India, the highest among all crops on account of its lowest NUE.
    - Fertilisers like urea emit ammonia, which can deposit on particulate matter and impact human health.
- Half of the solution lies *in biological crop improvement*, while the other half can come from improving *fertiliser formulations and cropping practices*.
- Rice is an ideal target crop for this, but the main challenge was the lack of identified or predicted gene targets for crop improvement.

> Nitrogen (N) use efficiency (NUE) of crops is examined by taking into account both plant N uptake efficiency, focusing on the recovery of fertilizer-N, and the utilization efficiency of the absorbed N.

Source: Down To Earth

SINGLE USE PLASTICS

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

Environment Minister launches awareness campaign on Single Use plastics.

About:

- GIZ, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) along with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, are organizing the two-month long awareness campaign.
    - The minister launched a two-month awareness generation campaign on plastic waste management and elimination of identified single use plastic items.
- It will comprise of four on-line regional events and a social media campaign to spread the message of mitigation plastic pollution to wider audience.

> Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.

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Previously Taken Steps:

- Government of India has already banned import of plastic waste in the country.
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for the first time brought out Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, for handling plastic waste in an environmentally sound manner.
- Under the rules plastic carry bags below 50 microns have been banned.
- Many states/UTs have also banned identified single use plastic items.
- Further, the Ministry has issued a draft notification in March 2021 for amending the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, with respect to prohibiting identified 12 single use plastic items such as disposable plastic cutlery etc.

Source: PIB

AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY AND EXPORT PROMOTION MEASURES

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Export of agriculture and allied products during 2020-21 jumped to USD 41.25 billion, indicating an increase of 17.34%.

About:

- The first ever Agriculture Export Policy (AEP) was introduced by the Government in December 2018.
- As a part of the process of implementation of AEP, eighteen States viz. Maharashtra, U.P., Kerala, Nagaland, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Mizoram and Uttarakhand and the 2 UTs viz Ladakh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands have finalized the State specific Action Plan.

1) Cluster Development

- As part of the Agriculture Export Policy, 46 unique product-district clusters have been identified for export promotion.29 Cluster Level Committees have been formed in different clusters.
- Cluster activation for export:DoC intervened through APEDA for linking FPOs & exporters for activation of clusters. After the said linking, transportation/logistics issues were solved and exports took place from land locked clusters.
- Following are some of the success stories:
- Varanasi cluster (Fresh Vegetables): Till date, 48 MT of Fresh Vegetables (green chilly, long guard, green peas & cucumber), 10 MT of Mangoes (Banarasi, Langra, Ramkheda&Chausa) and 532 MT of Black rice have been exported from the cluster through FPOs.
- Ananthpur Cluster (Banana): During the recent season (Jan-April 2021), 30,291 MT of banana have been dispatched from Ananthpur in Andhra Pradesh through 9 reefer rail movements and exported to Middle East.
- Nagpur cluster (Orange): 115 MT of Nagpur Oranges and 45 MT of Ambiyabahar season Oranges have been exported to Middle East Countries by sea (for the first time) and supplied to top supermarkets i.e. Lulu Super mart, Safari Mall, Nesto, etc.
- Lucknow cluster (Mango): 80.25 MT of mangoes (Dasheri, Langra, and Bombay green) have been exported to Middle East countries.
- Theni cluster (Banana): During the last one year till date, 2400 MT of Cavendish and 1560 MT of G9 &Nendran banana have been exported from the cluster.

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- Pomegranate Cluster, Maharashtra - Export of Pomegranates from Solapur cluster was 32,315 MT during the year 2020-21.

- Mango Cluster, Andhra Pradesh - In the current season, a consignment of Banganapalli (GI certified) & Survarnarekha mangoes sourced from farmers in Krishna & Chittoor cluster districts was exported to South Korea. Total 109 MT mangoes was exported to Middle East, EU, UK, and New Zealand from the cluster. During this mango season, a total quantity of 4000MT of mangoes was transported from Krishna cluster district, Andhra Pradesh to Delhi by rail.

- Mango Cluster, Telangana - So far, more than 100 MT of fresh mangoes have been exported to EU, UK, Middle East.

- Rose Onion cluster, Karnataka - Around 7168 MT of Rose onions have been exported to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka from October 2020 to December 2020.

- Banana Cluster, Gujarat - From April 2020 till date, 6198.26 MT of fresh banana has been exported to Middle East countries-. Bahrain, Dubai, Georgia, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE, Iraq etc. from the cluster comprising Surat, Narmada & Bharuch.

- Banana Cluster, Maharashtra - During 2020-21, 3278, 280 & 90 containers of Banana have been exported from Solapur, Jalgaon & Kolhapur respectively.

- Onion Cluster, Maharashtra - During January to 15April 2021, 10,697 MT of fresh Onions has been exported to multiple destinations in SE Asia, Middle East, Bangladesh.

- Grapes Cluster, Maharashtra - During 2020-21, so far, 6797 containers of 91,762 MT of fresh grapes have been exported to EU from Nasik cluster district. 1013 containers of 13,884 MT and one container of Raisin have been exported from the cluster district of Sangli to EU and other countries.

2) Country specific agri export strategy reports: An interaction was carried out with 60 Indian Missions and stakeholders to identify the products, their potential and way forward for preparing the country-wise agri-export strategy.

3) Report on product-specific measures: A detailed analysis was carried out to address the requirements of SPS/TBT issues existing in trade, for boosting exports of India. The report titled "Tariff Disadvantages of India's Agricultural Exports" is based on the potential export products identified for boosting exports under AEP.

4) Virtual Buyer Seller Meets - Twenty four V-BSMs have been organized with UAE, Kuwait, Indonesia, Switzerland, Belgium, Iran, Canada (Organic products), UAE & USA (GI products), Germany, South Africa, Australia, Thailand, Oman, Bhutan, Azerbaijan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Netherlands, Brunei and Cambodia (Animal products). E-catalogues were released while each BSM having details of participant exporters, importers, Trade associations.

5) Virtual Trade Fair (VTF) -APEDA took an initiative to develop its own Virtual Trade Fair (VTF) application. The virtual platform will provide an opportunity for agri importers of several countries and our exporters to interact through participation. The first Virtual Trade Fair was organized for Cereals product sector during 10-12thMarch 2021. The VTF for Fresh fruits and vegetables was held from 27-29thMay2021.

6) Agri Cells at different Embassies of India-APEDA is consulting 13 Agri Cells in our Missions in different countries seeking inputs on real-time basis to further strengthen the existing Market Intelligence cell. The consolidated reports received from Agri Cells are being referred to while preparing the strategy pertaining to the specific countries.

7) Farmer Connect Portal: A Farmer Connect Portal has been set up on APEDA's website for providing a platform for FPOs/FPCs, cooperatives to interact with exporters. Around 2360 FPO/FPCs and 2324 exporters have been registered so far.

8) Ensuring adherence to EU norms for export of Basmati rice to EU

- Pesticide residue problems have affected Basmati rice exports to EU due to stringent norms imposed by EU for chemicals like Tricyclazole and Buprofezin, which are extensively used in rice cultivation in India

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- The Government of Punjab imposed a ban on sale of 9 chemicals, including tricyclazole and buprofezin, during the Kharif season 2020.

Source: PIB

AGRICULTURE EXPORTS DURING 2020-21

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

During the media interaction, Secretary, department of Commerce, informed that after remaining stagnant for the past three years (USD 38.43 billion in 2017-18, USD 38.74 billion in 2018-19 and USD 35.16 billion 2019-20), the export of agriculture and allied products (including marine and plantation products) during 2020-21jumped to USD 41.25 billion, indicating an increase of 17.34%.

About:

Despite COVID-19, balance of trade in agriculture has improved by 42.16% from USD 14.51 billion to USD 20.58 billion.

1. The export of agriculture and allied products witnessed, the increase 22.62% with exports during 2020-21 amounting to Rs. 3.05 lakh crore as compared to Rs. 2.49 lakh crore during 2019-20

2. Import: India's agricultural and allied imports during 2019-20 were USD 20.64 billion, and the corresponding figures for 2020-21 are USD 20.67 billion.

3. Growth in Agriculture Products excluding marine and Planation Products: the growth is 28.36% with exports of USD 29.81 billion in 2020-21 as compared to USD 23.23 billion in 2019-20.

- India has been able to take advantage of the increased demand for staples during the COVID-19 period.

6. Cereal Export: Huge growth has been seen in export of cereals with export of non-basmati rice growing by 136.04% to USD 4794.54 million; wheat by 774.17% to USD 549.16 million; and other cereals (Millets, Maize and other coarse gains) by 238.28% to USD 694.14 million.

7. Agricultural Products, Which Registered Significant Increase in Exports:as compared to 2019-20,oil meals (USD 1575.34 million -growth of 90.28%), sugar (USD 2789.97 million - growth 41.88%), raw cotton (USD 1897.20 million - growth 79.43%), fresh vegetables (USD 721.47 million - growth 10.71%) and vegetable oils (USD 602.77 million- growth 254.39%) etc.

Largest Market for Indian Agriculture Product:

- Largest markets for India's agriculture products are USA, China, Bangladesh, UAE, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Nepal, Iran and Malaysia. Exports to most of these destinations have registered growth, with highest growth being recorded for Indonesia (102.42%), Bangladesh (95.93%) and Nepal (50.49%).

Export of Spices:

- Export of spices like ginger, pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, turmeric, saffron etc., which have known therapeutic qualities, has also grown substantially.
- During 2020-21, export of pepper increased by 28.72% to USD 1269.38 million;
- cinnamon by 64.47% to USD 11.25 million; nutmeg, mace and cardamom by 132.03% (USD 189.34 million vs USD 81.60 million); and
- Ginger, saffron, turmeric, thyme, bay leaves etc. by 35.44% to USD 570.63 million.
- Export of spices touched highest ever level of around USD 4 billion during 2020-21.

Organic Export:

- The organic exports during 2020-21 were USD1040 million as against USD 689 million in 2019-20, registering a growth of 50.94%.
- Organic exports include oil cake/ meals, oil seeds, cereals and millets, spices and condiments, tea, medicinal plant products, dry fruits, sugar, pulses, coffee etc.

Source: PIB

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INDO-THAI COORDINATED PATROL (CORPAT)

Syllabus Section: Defence

Why in News?

The 31stedition of India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (Indo-Thai CORPAT) between the Indian Navyand the Royal Thai Navyis is being conducted from 09 – 11 June 2021.

- Indian Naval Ship (INS) Saryu (an indigenously builtNaval Offshore Patrol Vessel) and Thailand Frigate HTMS Krabi, an offshore patrol vessel along with Dornier Maritime Patrol Aircraft from both the navies participated in the 31st edition.

About:

- India and Thailand have been carrying out CORPAT along their International Maritime Boundary Line twice a year since 2005.
- It is a bi-annual exercise.

Aim:

- To keep the vital part of the Indian Ocean safe and secure for international trade.
- to prevent and suppress unlawful activities like Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and piracy.
- To ensure effective implementation of the United Nations Conventions on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Significance:

- CORPAT builds up understanding and interoperability between navies and facilitates institution of measures to suppress unlawful activities.
- It further helps enhance the operational synergy by exchange of information for prevention of smuggling, illegal immigration and forconduct of SAR operations at sea.
- The 31stIndo-Thai CORPAT will contribute towards Indian Navy's efforts to consolidate inter-operability and forge strong bonds of friendship with Royal Thai Navy.

In line with India's SAGAR Vision

- As part of Government of India's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region), the Indian Navy has been proactively engaging with the countries in the Indian Ocean Region towards enhancing regional maritime security.

- This has been through bilateral and multilateralexercises, Coordinated Patrols, Joint EEZ Surveillance, andHumanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.

Other Military Exercises between India and Thailand:

- Exercise MAITREE (Army).
- Exercise SIAM BHARAT (Air Force).

Source: PIB

CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

Why in News?

The head of the international chemical weapons watchdog told the U.N. Security Council that Syria had likely or definitely used chemical weapons in 17 cases.

About:

Chemical Weapons Convetion:

- The Chemical Weapons Convention is officially known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.
- It is an arms control treaty administered by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), an intergovernmental organization based in The Hague, The Netherlands.
- This multilateral treaty entered into force in 1997.
- Members:
- It has 192 state parties and 165 signatories.
- India signed the treaty in 1993.
- The Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits,
1. Large-scale use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, or retention of chemical weapons and their precursors
2. Transferring of chemical weapons and their precursors
3. Assisting other States to indulge in activities that are prohibited by the CWC
4. Using riot-control devices as 'warfare methods'.
- The convention allows the above for very limited purposes (research, medical, pharmaceutical or protective).
- Main obligation of member states under the convention is to effect this prohibition, as well as the destruction of all current chemical weapons.

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- All destruction activities must take place under OPCW verification.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

- Headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands, it is an independent, autonomous international organisation that implements the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).
- It has a working relationship with the United Nations (UN).
- By the Relationship Agreement (2001) between the OPCW and the UN, the OPCW reports on its inspections and other activities to the UN through the office of the Secretary General.
- Functions of the Organisation include,
1. Performs inspections to verify that signatory states are complying with the convention. This includes a commitment to grant inspectors full access to chemical weapons sites.
2. Performs testing of sites and victims of suspected chemical weapons attacks.
3. Provides for assistance to and protection of States attacked or threatened with chemical weapons, cooperation in the peaceful use of chemicals.
- It was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

Source: The Hindu

DELHI'S MASTER PLAN 2041

Syllabus Section: Polity andGovernance

Why in News?

Recently, the Delhi Development Authority gave its preliminary approval to the draft Master Plan for Delhi 2041.

About:

Meaning of Master Plan:

- A master plan of any city is like a vision document by the planners and the land-owning agency of the city, which gives a direction to the future development. It includes analysis, recommendations, and proposals keeping in mind the population, economy, housing, transportation, community facilities, and land use.
- The current master plan of Delhi — Master Plan 2021 — expires this year.

Master Plan 2041 for Delhi:

- It seeks to "foster a sustainable, liveable and vibrant Delhi by 2041.

- Housing sector, it talks about incentivising rented accommodation by inviting private players and government agencies to invest more, keeping in mind the large migrant population
- Parking Problems:parking problems and suggests a 'user pays' principle, which means users of all personal motor vehicles, except for non-motorised ones, have to pay for authorised parking facilities, spaces and streets.
- Vehicular Pollution:The draft plan aims to minimise vehicular pollution through key strategies, including a switch to greener fuels for public transport and adoption of mixed-use of transit-oriented development (also known as TOD).
- Water Issues: It also addresses improving the quality of water, which is taken from the Yamuna River as well as various lakes, natural drains and baolis.
- The draft lays a clear boundary of the buffer zone near the Yamuna river and explores how to develop it.
- As per the plan, a green buffer of 300-metre width shall be maintained wherever feasible along the entire edge of the river.

How Master Plan 2041 different from the 2021 Master Plan?

- The Master Plan 2041 aims to develop common community spaces to provide refuge spots, common kitchens and quarantine space in an emergency.
- To improve the nighttime economy, the plan focuses on cultural festivals, bus entertainment, metro, sports facilities, and retail stores included in Delhi Development Authority (DDA)'s Night Life Circuit plan.
- It also proposes to reduce vulnerability to airborne epidemics through decentralised workspaces, mandatory creation of open areas, better habitat design and green-rated developments to reduce dependence on mechanical ventilation systems.

Challenges

- Confrontation from political wings
- Lack of resources and funds,
- corruption in different departments,
- Lack of political and bureaucratic will and multiplicity of agencies.
- Despite talks of increasing surface parking, removing junk vehicles, imposing fines for dumping debris, garbage burning, and segregation of waste, a lot of these things could never be implemented.

Source: Indian Express

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SUPREME COURT RELEASES DRAFT MODEL RULES FOR LIVE-STREAMING AND RECORDING OF COURT PROCEEDINGS

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

The e-Committee of Supreme Court of India has released the Draft Model Rules for Live-Streaming and Recording of Court Proceedings and has invited feedback on them.

About:

- The right of access to justice, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution encompasses the right to access live court proceedings.
- The e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India along with the Department of Justice, Government of India is working under the National Policy and Action Plan for implementation of Information and Communication Technology ICT in the Indian Judiciary.
- According to the draft rules, all proceedings in high courts can be telecast except for cases relating to matrimonial disputes, gender-based violence, those involving minors and "cases, which in the opinion of the Bench, may provoke enmity amongst communities likely to result in a breach of law and order".
- "The final decision as to whether or not to allow the Live-streaming of the Proceedings or any portion thereof will be of the Bench, however, the decision of the Bench will be guided by the principle of an open and transparent judicial process. The decision of the Bench shall not be justiciable."

Source: PIB

FARM MECHANIZATION - A MANDATORY CHANGE

Syllabus Section: Agriculture

Why in News?

- Recently, to empower the farmers through Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) scheme, Government of India has released funds for various activities of Farm Mechanization.

About:

- Government of India has released funds for various activities of Farm Mechanization like Establishment of Custom Hiring Centres, Farm Machinery Bank, High-tech Hubs and distribution of various agricultural machinery etc to different states.

Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

- Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has launched a Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) in 2014-15
- Objective:
- To increase the reach of farm mechanization to small and marginal farmers and to the regions & difficult area where farm power availability is low.
- To promote 'Custom Hiring Centres' and 'Hi-tech Hubs of High-Value Machines' to offset the adverse economies of scale arising due to small and fragmented landholding and high cost of individual ownership;
- Creating awareness among stakeholders through demonstration and capacity building activities
- Ensuring performance testing and certification of agricultural machines at designated testing centres located all over the country.
- Significance:
- Mechanization helps in improving the utilization efficiency of other inputs
- One of the most important segments of the agriculture sector to boost the income of farmers and growth of the agricultural economy.

Source: PIB

FASTLY

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

- Fastly reported problems with their CDN service which caused many major websites, such as Reddit, gov.uk, Twitch, Spotify and Amazon, along with major news sources such as The New York Times, The Guardian, CNN and the BBC, to become unavailable.

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About:

- Fastly is an American cloud computing services provider.
- It describes its network as an 'edge cloud platform', which is designed to help developers extend their core cloud infrastructure to the edge of the network, closer to users.
- The Fastly edge cloud platform includes their content delivery network (CDN), image optimization, video and streaming, cloud security, and load balancing services.
- A content delivery network is an arrangement that allows customer websites to store data such as images and videos on various mirror servers across countries so that the data is closer to users, and thus shows up faster.
- Customers rely on Fastly and its rivals to host and protect their website data from denial-of-service attacks and disruption from spikes in traffic.

Source: Indian Express

GROUP OF SEVEN (G7) SUMMIT

Syllabus Section: International Institutions

Why in News?

G7 leaders meet in UK to discuss Covid, climate change.

About:

G7

- The Group of 7 (G7) is an informal group of seven countries — the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom
- Together the member countries represent 40% of global GDP and 10% of the world's population.
- Unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has no legal existence, permanent secretariat or official members.
- It also has no binding impact on policy and all decisions and commitments made at G7 meetings need to be ratified independently by governing bodies of member states.

Background:

- The G7 draws its roots from a meeting between the current G7 members, excluding Canada, that took place in 1975.

- Global economy was in a state of recession due to the OPEC oil embargo. As the energy crisis escalating, US decided that it would be beneficial for the large players on the world stage to coordinate with each other on macroeconomic initiatives.
- After this first summit, the countries agreed to meet annually and a year later, Canada was invited into the group which marked the official formation of the G7 as we know it.
- European Commission join the meeting in 1977 and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and a subsequent thaw in relations between the East and West, Russia was also invited to join the group in 1998.
- Thereafter the group was named the G8 until 2014, when Russia was expelled for its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Presidency:

- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries in turn, each year.
- The country holding the presidency is responsible for organising and hosting the meeting.
- This year, India, South Korea and Australia have been invited to attend the G7 summit as participating guests.
- At the end of the summit, the UK will publish a document called a communique which will outline what has been agreed upon during the meeting.

Agenda:

- G7 summit provides a forum for member countries to discuss shared values and concerns.
- Initially focused on international economic policy, in the 1980s, the G7 extended its mandate to include issues related to foreign policy and security as well.
- In recent years, G7 leaders have met to formulate common responses to challenges encompassing counterterrorism, development, education, health, human rights and climate change.

Key Developments:

- The G7 Summit has been the birthplace for several global initiatives.
- In 1997, the G7 countries agreed to provide $300 millionto the effort to contain the effects of the reactor meltdown in Chernobyl.

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- At the 2002 summit, members decided to launch a coordinated response to fight the threat of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- This led to the formation of the Global Fund, an innovative financing mechanism that has disbursed more than $45 billion in aid.
- The Global Apollo Program was launched out of the 2015 G7 summit meeting.
- It was designed to tackle climate change through clean energy research and development

Source: Indian Express

HERITAGE TREES

Syllabus Section: Environment

Why in News

- The Maharashtra government will make amendments to the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act of 1975, to introduce provisions for the protection of 'heritage trees'.

About

- A tree with an estimated age of 50 years or more shall be defined as a heritage tree.
- It may belong to specific species, which will be notified from time to time.
- In addition to the age, the state climate change department (which will be implementing the Tree Act), should also consider a tree's rarity, its botanical, historical, religious, mythological and cultural importance in defining a heritage tree.
- The local Tree Authority will have to ensure tree census to be carried out every five years along with counting of heritage trees

How is the age of the tree determined?

- Dendrochronology – or tree-ring dating: Each year, roughly a tree adds to its girth, the new growth is called a tree ring.
- By counting the rings of a tree, the age can be determined.

Why was the concept of heritage tree introduced?

- The tree's age will determine the number of trees to be planted as part of the compensatory plantation – that is anyone cutting a heritage tree will need to plant trees in the same numbers as the cut tree's age.

Syllabus Section: Indian Express

THE EAGLE ACT

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

- US Congressman has introduced new legislation named the "Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement" or Eagle Act, that aims to counter the policy challenges posed by China.

About:

- The bill proposes to phase out the seven per cent per-country limit on employment-based immigrant visas.
- The bill also seeks to raise the seven per cent per-country limit on family-sponsored visas to 15 per cent.
- Explaining the logic behind introducing the bill, Lofgren said that due to the cap, a person from a large-population country with extraordinary qualifications who could contribute greatly to US economy and create jobs waits behind a person with lesser qualifications from a smaller country.
- "It makes no sense. Because of this, recruiters from outside America luring those with the highest skills away from the US. That hurts US economy
- The basic framework for allocating immigrant visas dates back to the middle of the 20th century and was last seriously updated in 1990, when the Congress established the worldwide numerical limits on visas and the seven per cent per-country cap that still exists today.
- Over time, these limitations have led to backlogs.
- The EAGLE Act's predecessor, the Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act, was passed in the House in the 116th Congress with a resounding bipartisan vote of 365 to 65.

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High-Skilled Immigrants Act (HR1044):
- Passed by the House of Representatives in July 2019.
- The bill sought to implement similar provisions which would remove the seven per cent cap on per-country employee-backed immigrant visas
- **Problematic Area in that bill:**
  - A new cap of sorts for the next decade on the overall number of immigrants on H-1B visas who can receive green cards.
  - Tighter restrictions for Chinese nationals seeking immigration.

Indian and the New Act:

- It may expedite the petitions for those applying for employment-based green cards, as the per-country cap would be removed.

Source: Hindustan Times

EnVisionMISSION

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?
- Following NASA's footsteps, the European Space Agency (ESA) recently announced that it has selected EnVision as its next orbiter that will visit Venus sometime in the 2030s

About:
- EnVision is an ESA led mission with contributions from NASA. It is likely to be launched sometime in the 2030s.
- Once launched on an Ariane 6 rocket, the spacecraft will take about 15 months to reach Venus and will take 16 more months to achieve orbit circularisation.
- The spacecraft will carry a range of instruments to study the planet's atmosphere and surface, monitor trace gases in the atmosphere and analyse its surface composition.
- EnVision will follow another ESA-led mission to Venus called 'Venus Express' (2005-2014) that focussed on atmospheric research and pointed to volcanic hotspots on the planet's surface
- Japan's Akatsuki spacecraft has also been studying the planet's atmosphere since 2015.

Why are scientists interested in studying Venus
- How Earth and Venus evolved so differently from each other considering that they are roughly of the same size and composition?

Source: Indian Express

ALL INDIA SURVEY ON HIGHER EDUCATION (AISHE) 2019-20

Syllabus Section:Education

Why in News?
- Union Education Minister announces release of Report of All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20

About:
- In the last five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20, there has been a growth of 11.4% in the student enrolment
- The rise in female enrolment in higher education during the period is 18.2%.

Key features of All India Survey on Higher Education Report 2019-20
1. Total Enrolment in Higher Education stands at 3.85 crorein 2019-20 as compared to 3.74 crore in 2018-19, registering a growth of 11.36 lakh (3.04 %).
2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), the percentage of students belonging to the eligible age group enrolled in Higher Education, in 2019-20 is 27.1% against 26.3% in 2018-19 and 24.3% in 2014-2015.
3. Gender Parity Index (GPI) in Higher Education in 2019-20 is 1.01 against 1.00 in 2018-19 indicating an improvement in the relative access to higher education for females of eligible age group compared to males.
4. Pupil Teacher Ratio in Higher Education in 2019-20 is 26.
- In 2019-20: Universities: 1,043(2%); Colleges: 42,343(77%) and stand-alone institutions: 11,779(21%).

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5. Enrolment in higher education

- 38 crore Students enrolled in programs at under-graduate and post-graduate levels.
- Out of these, nearly 85% of the students (2.85 crore) were enrolled in the six major disciplines such as Humanities, Science, Commerce, Engineering & Technology, Medical Science and IT & Computer.
6. The number of students pursuing PhD in 2019-20 is 2.03 lakh against 1.17 lakh in 2014-15.
7. The Total Number of Teachers stands at 15,03,156 comprising of 57.5% male and 42.5% female.

AISHE

- AISHE was established by the Ministry of HRD for conducting an annual web-based survey, thereby portraying the status of higher education in the country.
- The survey is conducted for all educational institutions in India on many categories like teachers, student enrolment, programs, examination results, education finance, and infrastructure.
- This survey is used to make informed policy decisions and research for the development of the education sector.
- This Report provides key performance indicators on the current status of Higher education in the country.

Source: PIB

CANADIAN HYDROGEN INTENSITY MAPPING EXPERIMENT (CHIME)

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

- Scientists with the Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment (CHIME) Collaboration have assembled the largest collection of fast radio bursts (FRBs) in the telescope's first FRB catalogue.

About:

- CHIME is an interferometric radio telescope.
- It is located in British Columbia, Canada.
- It consists of four antennas consisting of 100 x 20 metre cylindrical parabolic reflectors with 1024 dual-polarization radio receivers suspended on a support above them.
- The antenna receives radio waves from hydrogen in space at frequencies in the 400–800 MHz range.

Source: The Hindu

CENTRAL ATHLETE INJURY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports launched the Central Athlete Injury Management System (CAIMS).

About:

- It is a first-of-its-kind initiative by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- It is for streamlining the sports medicine and rehabilitation support offered to the athletes for Olympics 2024 and beyond.
- CAIMS aims to provide the best of sports injury management support nearest to the athlete's geographical location. CAIMS will help to standardize appropriate injury treatment protocol for athletes across the country.
- It will start with support for athletes who are a part of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) development group expected to participate in 2024 and beyond.
- CAIMS will have the following four structures: Athlete Wellness Cell, On-Field Sports Medicine Experts, National Resource Referral Teams and a Central Core Team.
- The core committee of CAIMS includes eminent top of the line experts such as Dr. SKS Marya, Dr.DinshawPardiwala, Dr. BV Srinivas and Shrikant Iyengar.

Source: All India Radio

TURTLE RESEARCHERS OPPOSES NITI AAYOG'S PLANS TO DEVELOP TWO ISLANDS IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR

Syllabus Section: Environment

Why in News?

Turtle researchers have banded together to launch a signature campaign against the NITI Aayog's plans to develop two islands in the Union Territory (UT) of Andaman and Nicobar.

About:

- The campaign has been launched under the leadership of the Students' Sea Turtle Conservation Network (SSTCN), Chennai, to oppose the plans for Little Andaman and Great Nicobar islands.

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- The islands provide nesting sites for leatherback turtles and are also home to indigenous peoples like the Shompen and the Onge.
- This made these nesting sites globally significant and internationally important for marine ecological health and global leatherback numbers in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean, the letter added.
- Besides Little Andaman Island, Great Nicobar Island holds one of the most important global leatherback nesting sites: Galathea Bay, within the Galathea Bay wildlife sanctuary.
- The National Marine Turtle Action Plan released February 1, 2021, has listed Galathea Bay as one of the 'Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas' and 'Important Marine Turtle Habitats' in India.

Source: The Hindu

BEED MODEL OF CROP INSURANCE

Syllabus Section: Agriculture

Why in News?

- Maharashtra Chief Minister asked Prime Minister for a state-wide implementation of the 'Beed model' of the crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yogna (PMFBY).

About:

- Beed model - Located in the drought-prone Marathwada region, the district of Beed presents a challenge for any insurance company.
- Farmers here have repeatedly lost crops either to failure of rains or to heavy rains. Given the high payouts, insurance companies have sustained losses.
- The state government had a difficult time getting bids for tenders to implement the scheme in Beed in the 2020 kharif season.
- In a normal season where farmers report minimal losses, the state gets back money that can form a corpus to fund the scheme for coming year.
- However, the state government would have to bear the financial liability in case of losses due to extreme weather events.
- Significance - The reason why Maharashtra is pushing for this scheme is that in most years, the claims-to-premium ratio is low with the premium being paid to the company.

- In the Beed model, the profit of the company is expected to reduce and the state government would access another source of funds.
- Reimbursed amount can lead to lower provisioning by the state for the coming year, or help in financing the paying the bridge amount in case of a year of crop loss.
- For farmers, however, this model does not have any direct benefit.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yogna

- Launched in 2016, the flagship PMFBY insures farm losses against inclement weather events.
- Farmers pay low rate of the premium 1.5-2% with the rest borne by the state and central governments.
- It is a central scheme implemented by state agriculture departments as per central guidelines.
- Prior to 2020, the scheme was optional for farmers who did not have loans pending, but mandatory for loanee farmers. Since 2020, it has been optional for all farmers.

Source: The Hindu

BEED MODEL OF CROP INSURANCE

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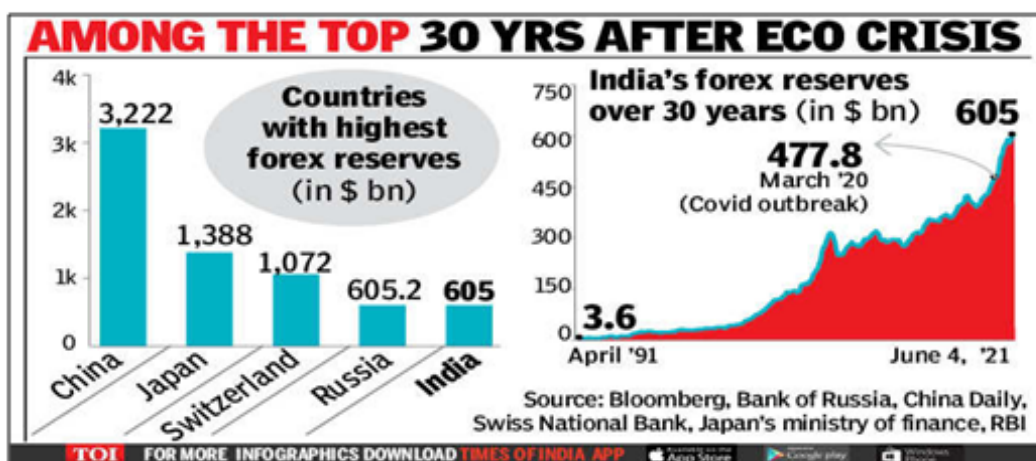
Source: The Hindu

INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News: India's forex reserves cross record $600 billion-mark for first time.

About the report
- The reserves surged to a record USD 605.008 billion in the reporting week, helped by a rise in foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves, as per weekly data by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.
- Gold reserves declined by USD 502 million to USD 37.604 billion.
- The special drawing rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dipped USD 1 million to USD 1.513 billion.
- The country's reserve position with the IMF also dropped by USD 16 million to USD 5 billion in the reporting week.

AMONG THE TOP 30 YRS AFTER ECO CRISIS

Countries with highest forex reserves (in $ bn): China 3,222; Japan 1,388; Switzerland 1,072; Russia 605.2; India 605

India's forex reserves over 30 years (in $ bn): 3.6 (April '91), 477.8 March '20 (Covid outbreak), 605 (June 4, '21)

Source: Bloomberg, Bank of Russia, China Daily, Swiss National Bank, Japan's ministry of finance, RBI

Significance

The current level of forex reserves is enough to cover nearly 16 months of imports. The central bank has enough ammunition to meet challenges arising out of "global spill overs", a reference to any sudden policy changes in the US or geopolitical shifts that could lead to funds exiting India.

About Forex Reserves
- Forex reserves are external assets that are readily available to and controlled by monetary authorities for direct financing of external payments imbalances, for indirectly regulating the magnitudes of such imbalances through intervention in exchange markets to affect the currency exchange rate, and/or for other purposes.

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- External assets are in the form of gold, SDRs (special drawing rights of the IMF) and foreign currency assets (capital inflows to the capital markets, FDI and external commercial borrowings) accumulated by India and controlled by the Reserve Bank of India.
- The Reserve Bank functions as the custodian and manager of forex reserves, and operates within the overall policy framework agreed upon with Government of India. The RBI uses its forex kitty for the orderly movement of the rupee. It sells the dollar when the rupee weakens and buys the dollar when the rupee strengthens.

Source- Economic Times, Times of India

OPERATION OLIVIA

Syllabus section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

Every year, the Indian Coast Guard's "Operation Olivia", initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.

About the Operation

- For optimal results, round-the-clock surveillance is conducted from November till May utilising Coast Guard assets such as fast patrol vessels, air cushion vessels, interceptor craft and Dornier aircraft to enforce laws near the rookeries.
- From November 2020 to May 2021, the Coast Guard devoted 225 ship days and 388 aircraft hours to protect 3.49 lakh turtles that laid eggs along the Odisha coast.

The Olive Ridley

- The Olive Ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea) is listed as vulnerable under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red list.
- All five species of sea turtles found in India are included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and in the Appendix I of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which prohibits trade in turtle products by signatory countries.
- The Olive Ridley has one of the most extraordinary nesting habits in the

natural world, including mass nesting called arribadas. The 480-km-long Odisha coast has three arribada beaches at Gahirmatha, the mouth of the Devi river, and in Rushikulya, where about 1 lakh nests are found annually.
- Sea turtles generally return to their natal beach, or where they were born, to lay eggs as adults. Mating occurs in the offshore waters of the breeding grounds and females then come ashore to nest, usually several times during a season.
- They crawl ashore, dig a flask-shaped nest about 1.5 to 2 foot deep, and lay 100 to 150 eggs in each clutch. Hatchlings emerge from their nests together in about seven to 10 weeks.

Why in danger

Studies have found three main factors that damage Olive Ridley turtles and their eggs —

1) Heavy predation of eggs by dogs and wild animals,
2) indiscriminate fishing with trawlers and
3) Gill nets, and beach soil erosion.

Dense fishing activity along the coasts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal, especially ocean-going trawlers, mechanised fishing boats and gill-netters pose a severe threat to turtles.

Efforts

- Odisha has also formulated laws for protecting Olive Ridley turtles, and the Orissa Marine Fisheries Act empowers the Coast Guard as one of its enforcement agencies.
- Coordination of efforts is done at various levels, the officer explained, including enforcing the use of turtle excluder devices (TED) by trawlers in the waters adjoining nesting areas; prohibiting the use of gill nets on turtle approaches to the shore; and curtailing turtle poaching.

Source: The Hindu

PASIPHAE

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?

An ambitious sky-survey project, planned and conducted by an international team of astrophysicists, is looking to clear the way towards confirming a fundamental theory in astronomy – inflation.

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About PASIPHAE

- Polar-Areas Stellar-Imaging in Polarisation High-Accuracy Experiment (PASIPHAE) is an international collaborative sky surveying project. Scientists aim to study the polarisation in the light coming from millions of stars.
- The name is inspired from Pasiphae, the daughter of Greek Sun God Helios, who was married to King Minos.
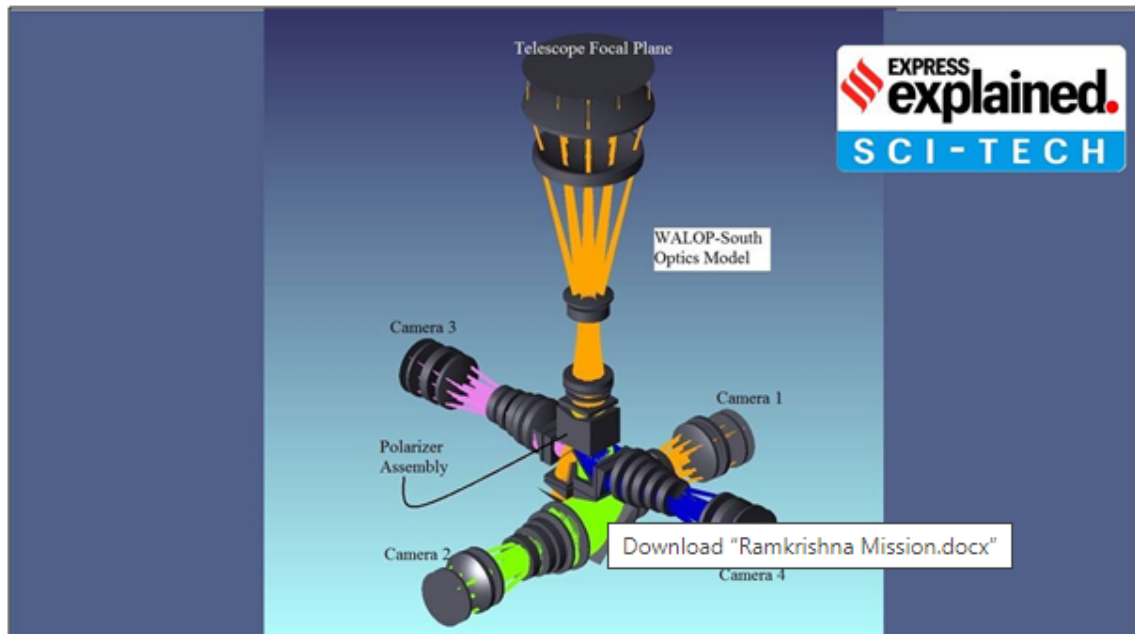
- The survey will use two high-tech optical polarimeters to observe the northern and southern skies, simultaneously.
- It will focus on capturing starlight polarisation of very faint stars that are so far away that polarisation signals from there have not been systematically studied. The distances to these stars will be obtained from measurements of the GAIA satellite.
- By combining these data, astronomers will perform a maiden magnetic field tomography mapping of the interstellar medium of very large areas of the sky using a novel polarimeter instrument known as WALOP (Wide Area Linear Optical Polarimeter).
- Scientists from the University of Crete, Greece, Caltech, USA, Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), India, the South African Astronomical Observatory and the University of Oslo, Norway, are involved in this project, steered by the Institute of Astrophysics, Greece.
- The Infosys Foundation, India, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Greece and USA's National Science Foundation have each provided a grant of $1 million, combined with contributions from the European Research Council and the National Research Foundation in South Africa.

Why is PASIPHAE important?
- Since its birth about 14 billion years ago, the universe has been constantly expanding, as evidenced by the presence of Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) radiation which fills the universe.
- Immediately after its birth, the universe went through a short inflationary phase during which it expanded at a very high rate, before it slowed down and reached the current rate.
- However, so far, there have only been theories and indirect evidence of inflation associated with the early universe.
- A definitive consequence of the inflationary phase is that a tiny fraction of the CMB radiation should have its imprints in the form of a specific kind of polarisation (known scientifically as B-mode signal).
- All previous attempts to detect this signal met with failure mainly due to the difficulty posed by our galaxy, the Milky Way, which emits copious amounts of polarised radiation.

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- Besides, it contains a lot of dust clouds that are present in the form of clusters. When starlight passes through these dust clouds, they get scattered and polarised.
- The PASIPHAE survey will measure starlight polarisation over large areas of the sky.
- This data along with GAIA distances to the stars will help create a 3-Dimensional model of the distribution of the dust and magnetic field structure of the galaxy.
- Such data can help remove the galactic polarised foreground light and enable astronomers to look for the elusive B-mode signal.

Note

WALOP: Wide Area Linear Optical Polarimeter (WALOP) is an instrument, when mounted on two small optical telescopes, that will be used to detect polarised light signals emerging from the stars along high galactic latitudes.

Source: Indian Express
RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION
Syllabus Section: History and Culture

Why in News?
- Vice-President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission Swami Shivamayananda died at a city hospital due to COVID-19 related complications.
- Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Math was actively involved in a wide range of community service initiatives focused on social empowerment.

About Ramakrishna Mission
- It is a Hindu religious and spiritual organization, which forms the core of a worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna Movement or the Vedanta Movement.
- The mission is named after and inspired by the Indian saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and founded by Ramakrishna's chief disciple Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897.
- The organisation mainly propagates the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta–Advaita Vedanta and four yogic ideals– Jnana, bhakti, karma, and raja yoga.
- The mission bases its work on the principles of karma yoga, the principle of selfless work done with dedication to God.
- Vivekananda was greatly influenced by his guru (teacher) Ramakrishna.

- It was in 1898 that Swami Vivekananda acquired a large piece of land at Belur where the Ramakrishna Math was finally shifted and registered as such. The monastic order is open to all men without discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.

Source: The Hindu

SURAKSHIT HUM SURAKSHIT TUM ABHIYAAN

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?
The NITI Aayog and Piramal Foundation launched 'Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan' in 112 Aspirational Districts to assist district administrations in providing home-care support to COVID-19 patients who are asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.

About Abhiyaan
- The campaign will provide covid home-care support to 20 lakh citizens.
- The Abhiyaan is part of a special initiative in which local leaders, civil societies and volunteers work with district administrations to address emerging problems across key focus areas of the Aspirational Districts Programme.
- The campaign will be led by district magistrates in partnership with over one thousand local NGOs, which will enlist and train over one lakh volunteers to connect with patients through inbound and outbound calls.
- Piramal Foundation will work with district magistrates to support the training of NGOs and volunteers.

Significance:
- It is a significant initiative and it will provide long-term support to India's poorest communities in the Aspirational Districts by addressing the lasting impact of COVID-19.
- The campaign is expected to play a key role in district preparedness for managing nearly 70 per cent of COVID cases at home, reducing pressure on the health system, and stemming the spread of fear amongst the people.
- The campaign will also undertake capacity building of citizens for correct usage of Oxygen concentrators that have been supplied to these districts.

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- NGOs will mobilize local volunteers to provide home-care support to those affected, based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Volunteers will be trained to support 20 affected families each by educating caretakers to follow COVID protocols, provide psycho-social support and timely updates about patients to the administration.

Source: newsonair.com

FAST RADIO BURSTS

Syllabus Section:Science and Technology-developments and their applications

Why in News?

Scientists with the Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment (CHIME) Collaboration, who include researchers at the Pune-based Tata Institute for Fundamental Research (TIFR) and the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), have assembled the largest collection of fast radio bursts (FRBs) in the telescope's first FRB catalogue.

About: Fast radio bursts

- FRB is considered a rare thing in the field of radio astronomy.
- Prior to the CHIME project, radio astronomers had only caught sight of around 140 bursts in their scopes since the first FRB was spotted in 2007.
- FRBs are oddly bright flashes of light, registering in the radio band of the electromagnetic spectrum, which blaze for a few milliseconds before vanishing without a trace.
- These brief and mysterious beacons have been spotted in various and distant parts of the universe, as well as in our own galaxy.
- Their origins are unknown and their appearance is highly unpredictable.

CHIME project

- It is a large stationary radio telescope in British Columbia, Canada.It has been a game-changer and has nearly quadrupled the number of fast radio bursts discovered to date.
- With more observations, astronomers hope soon to pin down the extreme origins of these curiously bright signals.
- The telescope has detected a whopping 535 new fast radio bursts in its first year of operation itself, between 2018 and 2019.
- Before CHIME, different telescopes had observed a handful of FRBs each, but with their own selection criteria and software.
- But now, with the help of CHIME, one can observe a large swathe of the sky round the clock and were able to detect FRBs at an unprecedented rate.

- Scientists have identified 18 FRB sources that burst repeatedly, while the rest appear to be one-offs.
- From the FRBs that CHIME was able to detect, the scientists calculated that bright fast radio bursts occur at a rate of about 800 per day across the entire sky — the most precise estimate of FRBs overall rate to date.
- CHIME comprises four massive cylindrical radio antennas, roughly the size and shape of snowboarding half-pipes, located at the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory, operated by the National Research Council of Canada in British Columbia.
- The telescope receives radio signals each day from half of the sky as the Earth rotates.

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- While most radio astronomy is done by swivelling a large dish to focus light from different parts of the sky, CHIME stares, motionless, at the sky, and focuses incoming signals using a correlator — a powerful digital signal processor that can work through huge amounts of data, at a rate of about seven terrabytes per second, equivalent to a few per cent of the world's Internet traffic.
- Digital signal processing makes CHIME able to reconstruct and 'look' in thousands of directions simultaneously.
- As the telescope detects more FRBs, scientists hope to pin down exactly what kind of exotic phenomena could generate such ultra-bright, ultra-fast signals.

Source: The Hindu

RAJA PARBA FESTIVAL

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

In a major boost to exports of Geographical Indications (GI) certified agricultural produce, a consignment of fibre and mineral rich 'Jalgaon banana' has been exported to Dubai.

The twenty-two metric tonnes of GI certified Jalgaon banana were sourced from progressive farmers of Tandalwadi village, part of Jalgaon district of Maharashtra, a banana cluster identified under Agri Export Policy.

About Jalgaon Banana

In 2016, Jalgaon Banana got GI certification which was registered with Nisargraja Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Jalgaon. India's banana export has been rising sharply because of adoption of farm practices as per the global standards.

Significance:

- India's banana exports grew both in terms of volume as well as value from 1.34 lakh metric tonne valued at Rs 413 crore in 2018-19 to 1.95 lakh metric tonne valued at Rs 660 crore in 2019-20. During 2020-21 (April-February), India has exported banana worth of 1.91 lakh tonne valued at Rs 619 crore.
- India is the world's leading producer of bananas with a share of around 25% in total output. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh contribute more than 70% of the country's banana production.

APEDA: It promotes exports of agricultural & processed food products by providing assistance to the exporters under various components of its scheme such as Infrastructure Development, Quality Development and Market Development. In addition, APEDA also conducts international Buyer Seller Meets, Virtual trade fairs with importing countries to promote agricultural & processed food products.

GI Tag

- A geographical indication or GI is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- Geographical Indications are part of the intellectual property rights that comes under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.
- In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999.
- Geographical indications are typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products.
- It is basically an assurance that the product is coming from that specific area. It's kind of trademark in the international market.

Source: PIB

JIVAN VAYU

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar has developed a device 'Jivan Vayu' which can be used as a substitute of CPAP machine. However, this is Nation's first such device which functions even without electricity and is adapted to both kinds of oxygen generation units like O2 cylinders and oxygen pipelines in hospitals. These provisions are not available in otherwise existing CPAP machines.

About the Festival

- Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) is a treatment method for patients having breathing problems during sleep called sleep apnea. The machine uses mild air pressure to keep the airways open for easy breathing.

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- It is also used to treat infants whose lungs have not fully developed. The machine blows air into the baby's nose to help inflate his or her lungs.
- The treatment is all the more necessary during early stages of the Covid-19 infection. It reduces lung damage and allow patients to recover from the inflammatory effects.
- Fulfilling all the medically required parameters, this leak-proof, low-cost CPAP delivery system, "Jivan Vayu' is designed for a 22mm CPAP closed circuit tube. It can even be customized as per the size of the tube. Since it can run during power failures, this can be used to safely transport a patient.
- It has an inbuilt viral filter at the air entrainment end which has a viral efficacy of 99.99%". The viral filter ensures that the air does not bring in any pathogens from the environment. The device has been manufactured using 3D printing and has also been tested mechanically.

Significance

- This was the need of the hour during the present Covid pandemic when power supply is the key concern for saving lives of those on medical equipments such as ventilators and oxygen concentrators.
- 'Jivan Vayu' can deliver high flow oxygen (20–60 LPM) while maintaining a continuous positive pressure of up to 20 cm H2O. The device is designed to maintain an FiO2 of above 40% with a PEEP (positive end-expiratory pressure) of 5-20 cm H2O.
- The device is ready for medical testing and mass manufacturing.

Source: https://www.aninews.in/

RARE EARTH METALS

Syllabus Section: International Affairs

Why in News?

Rare earth metals at the heart of China-U.S. rivalry. Beijing's dominance in these minerals, key to the future of manufacturing, is a cause for concern for the West.

Why important

- At a time of frequent geopolitical friction among those three powers, Washington and Brussels want to avoid this scenario by investing in the market for 17 minerals with unique properties that today are largely extracted and refined in China.

- These minerals are essential for running electric vehicles, wind turbines and drones.
- The expected exponential growth in demand for minerals that are linked to clean energy is putting more pressure on U.S. and Europe to take a closer look at where the vulnerabilities are and the concrete steps.

Heavy dependence

- In 2019, the U.S. imported 80% of its rare earth minerals from China.
- The EU gets 98% of its supply from China.
- Amid the transition to green energy, in which rare earth minerals are sure to play a role, China's market dominance is enough to sound an alarm in western capitals.

What are Rare Earths?

- Rare Earth Elements or Rare Earth Metals are a set of 17 chemical elements in the periodic table — the 15 lanthanides, plus scandium and yttrium, which tend to occur in the same ore deposits as the lanthanides, and have similar chemical properties.
- The 17 Rare Earths are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- Despite their classification, most of these elements are not really "rare". One of the Rare Earths, promethium, is radioactive.

What are Rare Earths used for?

- These elements are important in technologies of consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, clean energy, advanced transportation, healthcare, environmental mitigation, and national defence, among others.
- Scandium is used in televisions and fluorescent lamps, and yttrium is used in drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis and cancer.
- Rare Earth elements are used in space shuttle components, jet engine turbines, and drones. Cerium, the most abundant Rare Earth element, is essential to NASA's Space Shuttle Programme.

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- According to the Rare Earth Technology Alliance (RETA), the estimated size of the Rare Earth sector is between $10 billion and $15 billion.
- About 100,000-110,000 tonnes of Rare Earth elements are produced annually around the world.

Source: The Hindu

TULU LANGUAGE

Syllabus Section: Art and Culture

Why in news?

Various organisations initiated a Twitter campaign demanding official language status to Tulu in Karnataka and Kerala.

About Tulu Languages

- Tulu is a Dravidian language spoken mainly in two coastal districts Dakshina Kannada and Udupi of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala.
- As per the 2011 Census report, there are 18,46,427 Tulu-speaking people in India. Some scholars suggest Tulu is among the earliest Dravidian languages with a history of 2000 years.
- The Tulu speakers, mainly in Karnataka and Kerala, have been requesting the governments to give it official language status and include it in the eighth schedule to the Constitution.
- Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri are the 22 languages presently in the eighth schedule to the Constitution.
- The Karnataka government introduced Tulu as a language in schools a few years ago. According to the state education department, in the year 2020, a total of 956 children from Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts wrote Tulu as the third optional language in SSLC (Class 10) examination.
- In 2014-15, 18 students chose the language as the third optional when it was introduced. Last year, 'Jai Tulunad' conducted an online campaign demanding to include Tulu in the new National Education Policy (NEP). The organization started a 'Tweet Tulunad' campaign with the hashtag #EducationInTulu.

- Tulu has a rich oral literature tradition with folk-song forms like paddana, and traditional folk theatre yakshagana. Tulu also has an active tradition of cinema with around 5 to 7 Tulu language movies produced a year.
- Tulu films are being screened every day in Mangaluru and Udupi in at least one theatre.

Source- Indian Express

DEFICIT FINANCING

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in news?

Former RBI governor Subbarao said that the current situation does not call for the RBI directly monetising the deficit.

About Deficit Financing or Monetization of Deficit

Deficit financing means generating funds to finance the deficit which results from excess of expenditure over revenue. The gap being covered by borrowing from the public by the sale of bonds or by printing new money.

Current status of India: India's economy contracted by less-than-expected 7.3% in the fiscal ended March 2021. For 2021-22, the deficit has been put at 6.8% of the GDP, which will be further lowered to 4.5% by 2025-26.

- Significance: For developing countries like India, higher economic growth is a priority. A higher economic growth requires finances. With the private sector being shy of making huge expenditure, the responsibility of drawing financial resources rests on the government.
- Often both the tax and non-tax revenues fail to mobilize enough resources just through taxes. The deficit is often funded through borrowings or printing new currency notes.
- Pitfalls of deficit financing: Printing new currency notes increases the flow of money in the economy. This leads to increase in inflationary pressures which leads to rise of prices of goods and services in the country. Deficit financing is inherently inflationary. Since deficit financing raises aggregate expenditure and, hence, increases aggregate demand, the danger of inflation looms large.

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- Retail inflation in India already shot up to a five-and-a-half-year high of 7.35% in December, breaching the central bank's tolerance limit of 6% and confirming fears raised by some economists that India is entering a phase of slow growth and rising prices.
- Effects on investment: Deficit financing effects investment adversely. When there is inflation in the economy employees demand higher wages to survive. If their demands are accepted it increases the cost of production which de-motivates the investors.

Source: Economic Times

MUCORMYCOSIS

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology / Governance

Why in news?

- A sudden increase in the demand has been observed in some States for Amphotericin-B, which is being actively prescribed by the physicians to the patients suffering from Mucormycosis, which has been seen as a post COVID complication.
- Through active measures to augment production, and import and ensure equitable distribution, Government has been able to mobilise over 6.67 lakh vials of the Amphotericin B for patients in the states and UTs and Central Health Institutes, in addition to other drugs such as Amphotericin Deoxycholate and Posaconazole being used for treatment of this disease.

Steps Taken by the Government
Production enhancement

- In order to augment the domestic manufacture, the Government is continuously engaging with the manufacturers to resolve their issues related to raw materials.
- Department of Pharmaceuticals and the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) have actively coordinated with the industry for identification of manufacturers, alternate drugs and expeditious approvals of new manufacturing facilities.

Import facilitation

- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is playing an important role in reaching out to various players abroad. Through its missions all over the world, MEA has identified new sources of Amphotericin B/ Liposomal Amphotericin B injections and alternative drugs for treatment of Mucormycosis.
- Out of the identified sources, the MoHFW has called upon MEA to take steps to procure Liposomal Amphotericin-B from Australia, Russia, Germany, Argentina, Belgium and China.
- MEA has also been actively working on ensuring supplies of key excipient, HSPC and DSPG-NA from sources abroad for production of Liposomal Amphotericin B in India.

Making allocation

- In order to ensure equitable distribution of the limited stocks, it was decided to make allocation of limited stocks among states, which would ensure that all states with patients of Mucormycosis would get a fair chance of accessing a share of the supplies.
- The allocation by the Central Government is being done only in respect of Lyposomal Amphotericin-B, barring one manufacturer Bharat Serum, which produces Lyposomal, Lipid and emulsion form of the drug.
- The allocation of Conventional Amphotericine is also being done since 14th June 2021, after assessing the demand and availability.

Ensuring supply

- Supply arrangements are being monitored by the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA) under the Department so as to ensure expeditious availability of the drug to the needy.
- NPPA has put in place a strongly responsive system to ensure timely supplies of allocated volumes and maintains continuous contact with States / UTs and suppliers to trouble shoot any issues in reaching the drugs to the Health Departments of States/ UTs.

Source: PIB

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SHENZHOU-12

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

A Chinese spacecraft will blast off from the Gobi Desert on a Long March rocket in the coming days, ferrying three men to an orbiting space module for a three-month stay, the first time China has sent humans into space for nearly five years.

About

- Shenzhou-12, meaning "Divine Vessel", will be the third of11 missions needed to complete China's space station by 2022.
- Among them, four will be missions with people on board,potentially propelling up to 12 Chinese astronauts into space -more than the 11 men and women that China has sent since 2003.
- Chinese astronauts have had a relatively low international profile. A U.S. law banning NASA from any connection with China means its astronauts have not been to the more than two-decade-old International Space Station, visited by more than240 men and women of various nationalities.
- China, which aims to become a major space faring power by2030, in May 2021 became the second country to put a rover on Mars,two years after landing the first spacecraft on the far side of the moon.
- It also plans to put astronauts on the moon - the farthest celestial body that humans have travelled to.

Source: The Hindu

SMART ENFORCEMENT APP FOR TRUCKS

Syllabus Section: Governance/ Science and Technology

Why in news?

- As a strategy to reduce logistics costs on road transportation, the Government of India, Department of Commerce, Logistics Division has developed a risk-based approach on the implementation of smart enforcement of rules and regulations related to road-based violations by trucks. It has also developed anIT based solution to make enforcement mechanism technology driven.

- In a meeting with the officials of the State governments held today, the risk-based approach was shared and the IT-based Smart Enforcement App was unveiled. The meeting was attended by over 100 senior officials from related departments such as commercial tax and the transport departments of the state governments.

About

- On an average, a truck in India covers 50,000-60,000 km a year, compared to over 300,000 km in advanced nations such as the United States.
- One of the key reasons is delays due to random stoppages for physical checking of vehicles and verification of documents etc.
- While GST has helped improve the situation, there is a long way to go to reach the advanced country levels.
- There are over 60 different instances of potential violations of various rules and compliances that enforcement agencies need to watch out for.
- The responsibility for this enforcement lies with state governments departments, namely Commercial tax, transport, police and other agencies.

The key features of the integrated smart solution are:

1. An IT application that would fetch data related to goods being carried on the truck from the existing Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) database, and the information related to the vehicle from the VAHAN database
2. Make this data available to enforcement officers on the road in advance for approaching trucks
3. Based on a risk matrix that uses historical patterns, the app assigns a risk profile to the truck helping the officers decide whether to stop it for further scrutiny
4. It requires the officer to issue all fines, penalties, or any other punitive measure through the app, ensuring transparency
5. The app includes features that keep records and help reduce ad-hoc implementation of these rules and regulations
6. The application would have the ability to integrate with all the sensors, Weigh in Motion, and cameras available with the state government or National Highway Authority to allow remote enforcement.

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7. This would significantly reduce the need to deploy officers on the ground since the app would be able to alert officers whenever a vehicle is in violation.

The benefits that would accrue from the adoption of the App will be as follows:

1. Lead to decrease in number of physical checks of commercial vehicles by the enforcement officers
2. Overall reduction in the number of cash challan by issuing e-challan using the system
3. Reduction in deployment of work-force on Roads leading to better manpower utilization
4. Higher revenue collection due to reduced human intervention
5. Improved targeting of offenders
6. Reduction in Logistics Cost (currently at 13% of GDP).

Source: PIB

THE DEEP OCEAN MISSION

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology/ Economy

Why in news?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) on "Deep Ocean Mission", with a view to explore deep ocean for resources and develop deep sea technologies for sustainable use of ocean resources.

AboutThe Deep Ocean Mission

The Deep Ocean Mission consists of the following six major components:

1. Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining, and Manned Submersible: A manned submersible will be developed to carry three people to a depth of 6000 metres in the ocean with suite of scientific sensors and tools. Only a very few countries have acquired this capability. An Integrated Mining System will be also developed for mining Polymetallic Nodules from 6000 m depth in the central Indian Ocean. The exploration studies of minerals will pave way for the commercial exploitation in the near future, as and when commercial exploitation code is evolved by the International Seabed Authority, an UN organization. This component will help the Blue Economy priority area of exploring and harnessing of deep sea minerals and energy.

2. Development of Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services: A suite of observations and models will be developed to understand and provide future projections of important climate variables on seasonal to decadal time scales under this proof of concept component. This component will support the Blue Economy priority area of coastal tourism.

3. Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity: Bio-prospecting of deep sea flora and fauna including microbes and studies on sustainable utilization of deep sea bio-resources will be the main focus. This component will support the Blue Economy priority area of Marine Fisheries and allied services.

4. Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration: The primary objective of this component is to explore and identify potential sites of multi-metal Hydrothermal Sulphides mineralization along the Indian Ocean mid-oceanic ridges. This component will additionally support the Blue Economy priority area of deep sea exploration of ocean resources.

5. Energy and freshwater from the Ocean: Studies and detailed engineering design for offshore Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) powered desalination plant are envisaged in this proof of concept proposal. This component will support the Blue Economy priority area of off-shore energy development.

6. Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology. This component is aimed as development of human capacity and enterprise in ocean biology and engineering. This component will translate research into industrial application and product development through on-site business incubator facilities. This component will support the Blue Economy priority area of Marine Biology, Blue trade and Blue manufacturing.

Significance

- Oceans, which cover 70 per cent of the globe, remain a key part of our life. About 95 percent of Deep Ocean remains unexplored.

- For India, with its three sides surrounded by the oceans and around 30 per cent of the country's population living in coastal areas, ocean is a major economic factor supporting fisheries and aquaculture, tourism, livelihoods and blue trade. Oceans are also storehouse of food, energy, minerals, medicines, modulator of weather and climate and underpin life on Earth.
- Considering importance of the oceans on sustainability, the United Nations (UN) has declared the decade, 2021-2030 as the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. India has a unique maritime position. Its 7517 km long coastline is home to nine coastal states and 1382 islands.
- The Government of India's Vision of New India by 2030 enunciated in February 2019 highlighted the Blue Economy as one of the ten core dimensions of growth.

Source: PIB

UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION ACT, 1967

Syllabus Section: Indian Polity and Constitution

Why in news?

- Delhi HC calls out misuse of UAPA, raises bar for State to slap terror tag. It is the first instance of a court calling out alleged misuse of the UAPA against individuals in cases that do not necessarily fall in the category of "terrorism" cases.
- According to data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Parliament in March, a total of 1126 cases were registered under UAPA in 2019, a sharp rise from 897 in 2015.
- Section 15 of the UAPA defines "terrorist act" and is punishable with imprisonment for a term of at least five years to life. In case the terrorist act results in death, the punishment is death or imprisonment for life.

About

- This law is aimed at prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Its main objective was to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India. The Act provides special procedures to deal with terrorist activities, among other things.

- Under the Act, the central government may designate an organisation as a terrorist organisation if it:
  - (i) commits or participates in acts of terrorism,
  - (ii) prepares for terrorism,
  - (iii) promotes terrorism, or
  - (iv) is otherwise involved in terrorism.
- It empowers the government to designate individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.
- **Approval for seizure of property by NIA:**
  - o Under the Act, an investigating officer is required to obtain the prior approval of the Director General of Police to seize properties that may be connected with terrorism.
  - o If the investigation is conducted by an officer of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of such property.
- **Investigation by NIA:**
  - o Under the Act, investigation of cases may be conducted by officers of the rank of Deputy Superintendent or Assistant Commissioner of Police or above.
  - o It empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases.
- **Insertion to schedule of treaties**
  - o The Act defines terrorist acts to include acts committed within the scope of any of the treaties listed in a schedule to the Act.
  - o The Schedule lists nine treaties, including the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997), and the Convention against Taking of Hostages (1979) and International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005).

Source: Indian Express

WOMEN SCIENTISTS SCHEME (WOS)

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

- An inspiring journey of 100 women scientists who returned to science after a break in career has been documented into a book form. The women scientists featured here had to discontinue their pursuit of career in science due to family responsibilities and social reasons.

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- The book, which chronicles their journey to restart their career despite several obstacles, can be a beacon of light for moreIndian women in similar situations.

About

- Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) division (now WISE-KIRAN) of the Department of Science & Technology (DST) supports women with break-in careers to return to science through the Women Scientists Scheme (WOS).
- Through various components of Women Scientists Scheme (WOS), DST addresses challenges confronted by those women who had a break in their career and desire to return to mainstream science.
- The booklet presents select stories of women who completed their training under WOS-C component of this scheme and are now achieving greater heights in their careers.
- Booklet contains 100 success stories of women scientist scheme trainees which captures the lives of women who succeeded despite all odds in life. Booklet is available in both digital and print versions. I know there are many more success stories in the scheme which will be made visible to all in coming years.
- Besides the women's journey, the book includes details like qualification, specialization, present employment status, experience, and information about technical qualification in Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) attained by each woman after completing training.

WOS-C

- WOS-C is a flagship scheme of the department and a recipient of Nari Shakti Puraskar, 2015 (Rani Lakshmibai Award) conferred by the Hon'ble President of India.
- WOS-C is implemented by TIFAC, New Delhi, an autonomous organization under DST.
- Inthe program, one-year long training is provided to women, having qualifications in science/engineering/medicine or allied areas in the field of IPRs and their management. Selection is through an All-India level online examination followed by an interview.

- Women between the age ranges of 27 to 45 years can avail the benefit of this scheme. Women are trained in nuances of patent filing and prosecution as well as other patent-related work.
- Training has successfully developed a pool of women geared to create, protect and manage Intellectual Property in India.
- About 800 women have been trained in 11 batches, and about 270 women are registered Patent Agents. Many women have started their own IP firms as well and have become entrepreneurs.
- The scheme has made the women technically and financially confident, and many women of the Middle Ages who were earlier sitting at home are now beaming IP professionals.

Source: PIB

ADI PRASHIKSHAN Portal

Syllabus Section: Economy/ Science and Technology/ Social Issues

Why in news?

Minister of Tribal Affairs, Sh. Arjun Munda launched ADI PRASHIKSHAN portal and inaugurated a three-day training programme on "Capacity Building Training of Master Trainers for ST PRI Members" as part of Azadi ka AmritMahotsav in New Delhi.

About

- ADI PRASHIKSHAN portal developed by the Ministry.
- It would act as a Central Repository of all training programs conducted by Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs), different divisions of Ministry, National Society for Education of Tribal Students (NESTS), Centre of Excellences funded by Ministry of Tribal Affairs and National Tribal Research Institute.
- Adi Prashikshan will transform the various ongoing training initiatives under different units of the Ministry like TRIs, COEs and converge the initiatives for better skill and knowledge building.
- It will also catalyse and improve the processes of conducting training by making it online and accessible to all.
- Unified open platform will give users access to authentic knowledge products.

Source: PIB

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CHILDREN AND DIGITAL DUMPSITES

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology/e-Waste

Why in news?

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its recent report "Children and Digital Dumpsites" has highlighted the risk that children working in informal processing are facing due to discarded electronic devices or e-waste.

About the Report

- It is the first ever WHO report on electronic waste and child health.
- E waste refers to old, end-of-life or discarded electronic items and their parts.
- More than 18 million children and adolescents working at e-waste dumpsites in low- and middle-income countries are potentially at the risk of severe health hazards.
- As many 18 million children as young as five years and about 12.9 million women work at these e-waste dumpsites ever year, the report said. The e-waste from high-income countries is dumped in the middle- or low-income countries for processing every year.
- This e-waste is dismantled and recycled by children. It contains over 1,000 precious metals and other substances like gold, copper, mercury and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. The processing is done in low-income countries, which do not have proper safeguarding regulation and which makes the process even more dangerous.
- Children are especially preferred at these dumpsites because of their small and dexterous hands. Several women, including expectant mothers, also work there. Processing e-waste exposes them as well as their children to these toxins, which can lead to premature births and stillbirth.
- The hazardous impact of working at such sites is also experienced by families and communities that reside in the vicinity of these e-waste dumpsites.
- Children are particularly more exposed to the toxic chemicals used and released during the processing of e-waste. They are less likely to metabolise or eradicate pollutants absorbed.

- The report stressed that children working at these 'digital dumpsites' are more prone to improper lung function, deoxyribonucleic acid damage and increased risk of chronic diseases like cancer and cardiovascular disease.
- According to the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership, the volume of e-waste generated is surging rapidly across the globe. About 53.6 million tonnes of e-waste was generated in 2019.
- Only 17.4 per cent of this e-waste was processed in formal recycling facilities. The rest of it was dumped in low- or middle-income countries for illegal processing by informal workers.
- This is likely to increase in the coming years because of the rise in the number of smartphones and computers.
- The report also called for the monitoring, safe disposal of e-waste and raising awareness about its outcomes on the health of children and women working at these dumpsites.

Source: Downtoearth.org.in

INNOVATIONS FOR DEFENCE EXCELLENCE (IDEX)

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved the budgetary support of ₹498.8 crore to Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) challenge under the Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO) for the next five years.

About

- The iDEX framework and establishment of the DIO by the Department of Defence Production (DDP) is aimed at promoting innovation and indigenisation in the aerospace and defence sector at the start-up level.
- The DDP will release funds to the DIO for setting up and managing the iDEX network in the form of Partner Incubators (PI), communicating with innovators, start-ups, technology centres of MSMEs through the PIs, hackathons to shortlist potential technologies and entities and evaluating technologies and products developed by innovators, start-ups in terms of their utility and impact on the defence and aerospace setup.

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- The scheme, with budgetary support of 498.8 crore for the next five years, is aimed at providing financial support to nearly 300 start-ups, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), individual innovators and 20 partner incubators under the DIO framework.

Significance

It aims at empowering a culture of technology co-creation and co-innovation in the sector and boosts innovation among the start-ups and encourages them to be a part of the ecosystem.

Source: The Hindu

ORDNANCE FACTORY BOARD

Syllabus Section: Defence and Security

Why in news?

In a major decision of the Union Cabinet, the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), first set up by the British in 1775, now under the Ministry of Defence will cease to exist.The Union Cabinet approved a plan to corporatize the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB).

About

- 7 separate companies are planned to be created, each doing a specific manufacturing role.
- The existing 41 factories under the OFB will be subsumed under one or the other of the seven new companies, all 100 per cent government owned public sector undertakings (PSU).
- Once implemented, the OFB will cease to exist.
- There will be no change in service conditions of the employees.
- Seven separate companies are planned to be created, each doing a specific manufacturing role.
- The existing 41 factories under the OFB will be subsumed under one or the other of the seven new companies, all 100 per cent government owned public sector undertakings (PSU).

Significance of the Move

- The restructuring is aimed at transforming the Ordnance Factories into productive and profitable assets; deepen specialisation in the product range; enhance competitiveness; improving quality and cost-efficiency

- The new structure is aimed to overcome various shortcomings in the existing system and provide these companies opportunities in the market including exports.
- The prime customers of Ordnance Factories are the Indian Armed Forces. The requirements of other customers like Central Paramilitary Forces, State Police Forces for arms, ammunition, clothing, bulletproof vehicles and mine protected vehicles are also met from the OFB.
- The government has also decided to delegate the authority of the Cabinet to the Empowered Group of Ministers, constituted under the minister of defence, to decide upon the matters related to implementation of the aforesaid government decisions and other incidental matters.

Source: https://www.tribuneindia.com

WORLD GIVING INDEX 2021

Syllabus Section: Important Current Events

Why in news?

- World Giving Index 2021 report says, India is 14th most charitable country. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown 'giving' trends across the world.
- Released by the Charities Aid Foundation's (CAF), this year's survey highlights the impact of lockdowns on charitable giving.

About

- India is now in the Top 20 most generous countries in the world. This is up from the 10-year global rank of 82.
- Australia and New Zealand, where the survey was undertaken in the weeks before the first wave of the pandemic took hold, maintained their top 10 rankings.
- Communities around the world mobilised to help fellow citizens during the pandemic, resulting in the highest 'helped a stranger' figures since 2009.
- More than half (55 per cent) of the world's adults – or 3 billion people – reported helping someone they didn't know in 2020.
- The report says, Scores for India rapidly improved between 2017 and 2019, and this improvement was maintained during 2020.

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- The improvement in India is seen across all the age groups and amongst both men and women. 61 per cent of Indians helped strangers; 34 per cent volunteered; and 36 per cent donated money.

Source: http://newsonair.com/

DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION ATLAS

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in news?

Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Changereleased the latest version of "Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India.

About

- It has been published by Space Application Centre, ISRO, Ahmedabad.
- The Atlas provides state wise area of degraded lands for the time frame 2018-19. It also provides the change analysis for the duration of 15 years, from 2003-05 to 2018-19.
- India has been at the forefront of bringing the issue of land degradation to the core of relevant international alliances for protection and conservation of environment.
- The government of India has adopted collective approach for making progress towards achieving the national commitments related to land restoration.
- Salient findings of this Atlas are useful as a ready reference and will also be helpful in strengthening the envisaged National Action Plan for achieving land restoration targets by providing important baseline and temporal data and technical inputs.

India

- India hosted the 14th session of Conference of Parties (COP 14) of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019.
- India is striving towards achieving the national commitments of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and restoration of 26 Million ha of degraded land by 2030, which focus on sustainable and optimum utilisation of land resources.
- India has been at the forefront of bringing the issue of land degradation to the core of relevant international alliances for protection and conservation of environment.

- The government of India has adopted collective approach for making progress towards achieving the national commitments related to land restoration.

Source- PIB

SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag Kit

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

Under the aegis of COVID-19 Research Consortium, DBT-BIRAC supported product 'SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag kit' has been developed by Ubio Biotechnology Systems Pvt. Ltd. for qualitative detection of SARS CoV-2 Nucleocapsid Protein with an assay time of 15 minutes.

About

- The samples are collected using nasopharyngeal swabs from the suspected individual. This ICMR approved kit is a chromatographic immunoassay, which allows the healthcare personnel to visually read the test result.
- The test works on the principle of sandwich immunoassay and utilizes a pair of monoclonal antibodies which when bound to COVID-19 specific antigen, result in the appearance of a coloured line.
- The kit exhibits sensitivity and specificity of 86% and 100%, respectively and has a shelf life of 24 months. SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag Kit has been successfully commercialised.

Significance

- Such quick tests allow healthcare professionals to detect infected individuals quickly, saving their time and allowing them to provide better advice and treatment to the infected individual.
- The entire world has been severely affected with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The severity of symptoms that occur during the COVID-19 infection can range from undetectable to life-threatening.
- The quick testing procedure involves antigen testing which provides the result for hundreds of samples within a short span of time. The efforts of the Government of India have been commendable for making such rapid tests accessible and available to the citizens of our country.

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- Several innovators and entrepreneurs have been working tirelessly for developing accurate, affordable and accessible testing kits for not only providing aid to the healthcare workers in such tough times for easy detection but also for boosting the biotechnology ecosystem in India.

About DBT

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science and Technology, promotes the growth and application of biotechnology in agriculture, healthcare, animal sciences, the environment, and industry in India.

About BIRAC

Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a not-for-profit Section 8, Schedule B, Public Sector Enterprise set up by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, acts as an Interface Organization to strengthen and facilitate the evolving biotechnology industry to execute strategic research and development activities with respect to the product development needs of the country.

Source: PIB

SPACE-TIME INDUCES NEUTRINO OSCILLATIONS

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

Scientists have shown that the geometry of space-time can cause neutrinos to oscillate.

About

- Neutrinos are mysterious particles, produced copiously in nuclear reactions in the Sun, stars, and elsewhere.
- They also "oscillate"-- meaning that different types of neutrinos change into one another – as has been found in many experiments. Probing of oscillations of neutrinos and their relations with mass are crucial in studying the origin of the universe.
- Neutrinos interact very weakly with everything else – trillions of them pass through every human being every second without anyone noticing; a neutrino's spin always points in the opposite direction of its motion, and until a few years ago, neutrinos were believed to be massless.
- It is now generally believed that the phenomenon of neutrino oscillations require neutrinos to have tiny masses.

- Professor Amitabha Lahiri of S N Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences (SNBNCBS) an autonomous institute under the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India showed in a paper published along with Subhasish Chakrabarty, his student, that the geometry of space-time can cause neutrino oscillations through quantum effects even if neutrinos are massless. It was published in the journal 'European Physical Journal C'.
- Einstein's theory of general relativity says that gravitation is the manifestation of space-time curvature. According to the SNBNCBS team, neutrinos, electrons, protons and other particles which are in the category of fermions show a certain peculiarity when they move in presence of gravity. Space-time induces a quantum force in addition to gravity between every two fermions.
- This force can depend on the spin of the particles, and causes massless neutrinos to appear massive when they pass through matter, like the Sun's corona or the Earth's atmosphere. Something similar happens for electroweak interactions, and together with the geometrically induced mass it is enough to cause oscillation of neutrinos.

Source: PIB

SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag Kit

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in news?

Under the aegis of COVID-19 Research Consortium, DBT-BIRAC supported product 'SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag kit' has been developed by Ubio Biotechnology Systems Pvt. Ltd. for qualitative detection of SARS CoV-2 Nucleocapsid Protein with an assay time of 15 minutes.

About

- The samples are collected using nasopharyngeal swabs from the suspected individual. This ICMR approved kit is a chromatographic immunoassay, which allows the healthcare personnel to visually read the test result.
- The test works on the principle of sandwich immunoassay and utilizes a pair of monoclonal antibodies which when bound to COVID-19 specific antigen, result in the appearance of a coloured line.

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- The kit exhibits sensitivity and specificity of 86% and 100%, respectively and has a shelf life of 24 months. SENSIT Rapid COVID-19 Ag Kit has been successfully commercialised.

Significance

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Source: PIB

WORLD COMPETITIVENESS INDEX 2021

Syllabus Section: International Affairs

Why in news?

The IMD World Competitiveness Ranking ranks 64 economies and assesses the extent to which a country promotes the prosperity of its people by measuring economic well-being through hard data and survey responses from executives. This year, the rankings expose the economic impact of the pandemic across the globe.

About

- India maintained 43rd rank on an annual World Competitiveness Index compiled by the Institute for Management Development (IMD) that examined the impact of COVID-19 on economies around the world this year. The 64-nation list was led by Switzerland, while Sweden has moved up to the second position (from sixth last year), Denmark has lost one place to rank third, the Netherlands has retained its fourth place and Singapore has slipped to the fifth place (from first in 2020).
- t eighth, Taiwan reached the top-10 for the first time since the ranking began 33 years ago (moving up from 11th last year). The UAE and the USA remain in their same spots as last year (9th and 10th, respectively).
- The top-performing Asian economies are, in order, Singapore (fifth), Hong Kong (seventh), Taiwan (eighth) and China (16th).
- Among the BRICS nations, India is ranked second after China (16), followed by Russia (45th), Brazil (57th) and South Africa (62nd).
- India has maintained its position for the past three years but this year, it had significant improvements in government efficiency

Source: The economic Times

FLAG SATYAGRAHA

Why in News?

The Minister for Culture and Tourism Shri Prahlad Singh Patel led the programme organised to observe the Flag Satyagraha in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

About:

- Flag Satyagraha was a campaign of peaceful civil disobedience during the Indian independence movement.

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- It was focused on exercising the right and freedom to hoist the nationalist flag and challenge the legitimacy of the British Rule in India through the defiance of laws prohibiting the hoisting of nationalist flags and restricting civil freedoms.
- According to the records, the outline of the Jhanda Satyagraha was prepared in the year 1922 in a meeting held in the Town Hall of Jabalpur.
- Flag Satyagrahas were conducted most not only in the city of Jabalpur and Nagpur in 1923 but also in many other parts of India.
- On 31 December 1929 the Congress concluded the adoption of the Purna Swaraj declaration of independence with Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru hoisting the nationalist flag along the banks of the Ravi River in Lahore.
- Other notable flag satyagrahas were organised in Mysore (now in Karnataka) in 1938 known as ShivapurDhwaja Satyagraha, under leadership of T.Siddalingaih president of Mysore Congress.

Source: PIB

IPDS SCHEME OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

As part of the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', a 50 kWp Solar roof top was inaugurated in Solan, Himachal Pradesh under the Integrated power development scheme of Ministry of Power, Government of India.

About:

The 50 kWp Solar roof top project is commissioned by Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd (HPSEBL).

Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS)

- The "Integrated Power Development Scheme" (IPDS) was launched by Ministry of Power, in 2014.
- Objectives:
- Strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution network in the urban areas;
- Metering of distribution transformers / feeders / consumers in the urban areas.
- IT enablement of distribution sector and strengthening of distribution network as per CCEA approval

- Eligible Utilities: All Discoms will be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.
- Significance:
- The scheme will help in reduction in AT&C losses;
- establishment of IT enabled energy accounting / auditing system,
- improvement in billed energy based on metered consumption
- improvement in collection efficiency.

Source: PIB

JUNETEENTH

Syllabus Section: History and Culture

Why in News?

US President Joe Biden soon going to sign a law, making June 19, or "Juneteenth", a national holiday.

About:

- "Juneteenth", a national holiday recognised by the federal government, commemorating the end of slavery after the American Civil War (1861-65).
- Juneteenth will be the first new federal holiday created in almost four decades, and will now enjoy the same status as the 10 existing annual holidays
- The day is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US and is observed on June 19.
- It is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day.

Background:

- Then-president Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, on January 1, 1863,which declared that "all persons held as slaves" within the states in rebellion "are, and henceforward shall be free."
- Even so, over 2.5 years after Lincoln's proclamation, many slave owners continued to hold their slave's captive by hiding this information from them and holding them slaves for one more harvest season.
- On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery.
- Since then, Juneteenth has become a largely symbolic date representing freedom for African Americans.

Source: Indian Express

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NDPS ACT (1985), Section 27A

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

Tripura High Court, in a significant verdict, discovered that an oversight in drafting the 2014 amendments to the NDPS Act, 1985 had unintentionally rendered a key provision of the Act inoperable.

About:

- The NDPS Act, 1985 is the principal legislation through which the state regulates the operations of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- It provides a stringent framework for punishing offences related illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through imprisonments and forfeiture of property.
- Section 27A of the NDPS Act, 1985, prescribes the punishment for financing illicit traffic and harbouring offenders.
- The text of the provision says that offences mentioned under Section 2(viiia) sub-clauses i-v are punishable through Section 27A.
- Section 2 (viiia) sub-clauses i-v, which is supposed to be the catalog of offences, does not exist after the 2014 amendment.
- The error was noticed in 2016, an accused sought bail before a special judge in West Tripura in Agartala citing this omission in drafting.
- The Law Ministry had argued that the court must overlook the omission and read the legislation as a whole.
- The Tripura HC agreed with the government's view, but said that it may not be the best solution.
- The amendment is yet to take place. However, criminal laws cannot be amended retrospectively.
- Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees protection against double jeopardy.
- Article 20(1) says that no person shall be convicted of any offence except for violation of the law in force at the time of the commission of the act charged as an offence, nor be subjected to a penalty greater than that which might have been inflicted under the law in force at the time of the commission of the offence.

What was the 2014 amendment?

- In 2014, a key amendment was made to the NDPS Act to allow for better medical access to narcotic drugs.
- The 2014 amendment essentially removed state-barriers in transporting, licensing drugs classified as "essential narcotic drugs", and made it centralised.
- It was done by first introducing a provision in Section 2 that defines essential narcotic drugs, and subsequently in Section 9 allowing the manufacture, possession, transport, import inter-State, export inter-State, sale, purchase, consumption and use of essential narcotic drugs.
- The drafters missed amending the enabling provision in Section 27A to change Section 2(viii)a to Section 2(viii)b.

Source: Indian Express

THE CABLE TELEVISION NETWORKS (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2021

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Cable Television Network Rules Amended To Provide Statutory Mechanism To Redress Citizen's Grievances.

About:

- The notification amending the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 will provide a statutory mechanism for redressal of grievances/complaints of citizens relating to content broadcast by television channels in accordance with the provisions of the Cable Television Network Act, 1995.
- At present, there is an institutional mechanism by way of an Inter-Ministerial Committee to address grievances of citizens relating to violation of the Programme/Advertising Codes under the Rules.
- The Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 2021, provides for a three-level grievance redressal mechanism —
- self-regulation by broadcasters,
- self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the broadcasters, and
- oversight by an Inter-Departmental Committee at the level of the Centre.
- A viewer could file a complaint directly to the broadcaster, who would have to respond within 15 days.

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- If the complainant was not satisfied with the response, the complaint could be escalated to the self-regulating bodies set up by TV channels, which should deal with the case in 60 days.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the self-regulating body, he may, within 15 days of such decision, prefer an appeal to the Central government for its consideration under the Oversight Mechanism.
- Such appeals would be dealt with by the Inter-Departmental Committee set up under the Oversight Mechanism.

Source: Business Standard

NATIONAL SICKLE CELL CONCLAVE ON 'SICKLE CELL DISEASE'

Syllabus Section: Science and Tech

Why in News?

- The Minister of Tribal Affairs inaugurated the Second National Sickle Cell Conclave on 'Sickle Cell Disease'. The Conclave is being held to mark the World Sickle Cell Day observed on 19thJune 2021 every year.

About:

- It is characterized by a modification in the shape of the red blood cell from a smooth, donut-shape into a crescent or half-moon shape.
- These cells lack plasticity and can block small blood vessels, impairing blood flow. This condition leads to shortened red blood cell survival, and subsequent anaemia, often called sickle-cell anaemia.
- This leads to chronic acute pain syndromes, severe bacterial infections, and necrosis (tissue death).
- Anaemia is a medical condition in which the red blood cell count or hemoglobin is less than normal. Symtoms of anemia include Fatigue, Shortness of breath, Hair loss etc.
- Treatment: It can be managed by simple procedures including:
- High fluid intake
- Healthy diet
- Folic acid/Iron supplementation
- Pain medication
- Vaccination and antibiotics for the prevention and treatment of infections

- A number of other therapeutic measures.

Indian Scenario:

- Sickle cell disease (SCD), which is the most prevalent inherited blood disorder, is widespread amongst many tribal population groups in India
- The disease in India is prevalent predominantly in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, western Odisha, eastern Gujarat and in pockets of the Nilgiri Hills in north Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Source: PIB

DELIMITATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Delimitation exercise kicks off in Jammu & Kashmir

About:

What is Delimitation?

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time
- Exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.

Delimitation exercise in J&K:

- Delimitation exercises in J&K in the past have been slightly different from those in the rest of the country because of the region's special status — which was scrapped by the Centre in August 2019.
- Until then, delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in J&K was governed by the Constitution of India, but the delimitation of the state's Assembly seats was governed by the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- Assembly seats in J&K were delimited in 1963, 1973 and 1995.
- The last exercise was conducted by the Justice (retired) K K Gupta Commission when the state was under President's Rule and was based on the 1981 census, which formed the basis of the state elections in 1996.

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- There was no census in the state in 1991 and no Delimitation Commission was set up by the state government after the 2001 census as the J&K Assembly passed a law putting a freeze on the fresh delimitation of seats until 2026

- After the abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019, delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in the newly-created Union Territory would be as per the provisions of the Indian Constitution.

- As per the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, the number of Assembly seats in J&K would increase from 107 to 114, which is expected to benefit the Jammu region.

- The government set up the Delimitation Commission, in March 2020 headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, which was tasked with winding up delimitation in J&K in a year.

- The Commission wasgranted a year's extension.

Source: Indian Express

NATIONAL FINANCIAL REPORTING AUTHORITY (NFRA)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

NFRA has invited suggestions from public on consultation paper on NFRA's engagement with its stakeholders.

About:

- NFRA is an independent regulatory body set up under Section 132 of the Companies Act.

- It was established by the Central Government in October 2018.

- After the Satyam scandal took place in 2009, the Standing Committee on Finance proposed the concept of the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) for the first time in its 21st report.

Mandate

- It oversees compliance with Accounting and Auditing Standards by companies that can be described as Public Interest Entities (PIEs). This group includes all listed companies, and large unlisted companies.

- To discharge this mandate, NFRA is in the process of creating a verified and accurate database of companies and auditors that come under the regulatory ambit of NFRA.

Composition: NFRA consists of one chairman, three full-time members and one secretary. Former IAS officer Rangachari Sridharan was appointed as the first chairman of the body in October 2018.

Source: PIB

NEW CORONAVIRUS VARIANT IN INDIA

Syllabus Section:Science and Technology

Why in News?

- Over 20 cases of Delta Plus infections have been found in Maharashtra.

About:

- The variant was first seen in Europe in March this year.

- According to scientists, the Delta variant (B.1.617.2) has further mutated to form the Delta Plus (AY.1) variant.

- Delta Plus is considered highly infectious.

- Delta Plus has the mutation called K417N — first found in the Beta variant (South Africa).

- It also possesses all other features of its predecessor Delta, might make the latest variant a lot more transmissible.

- The K417N mutation is within the receptor-binding domain of the spike protein, and this change is noteworthy because this mutation is also found in the B.1.351 or Beta variant of concern.

- INSACOG is currently studying the potential transmissibility/severity of the new variant.

Source: Indian Express

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VIDARBHA TIGER CORRIDORS

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

- In a first-of-its-kind project, radio telemetry has been deployed to identify corridors used by tigers in the Vidarbha landscape, tracking their actual movement.

THE TIGER TERRITORY

□ State boundary
□ Vidarbha districts
■ Protected Areas
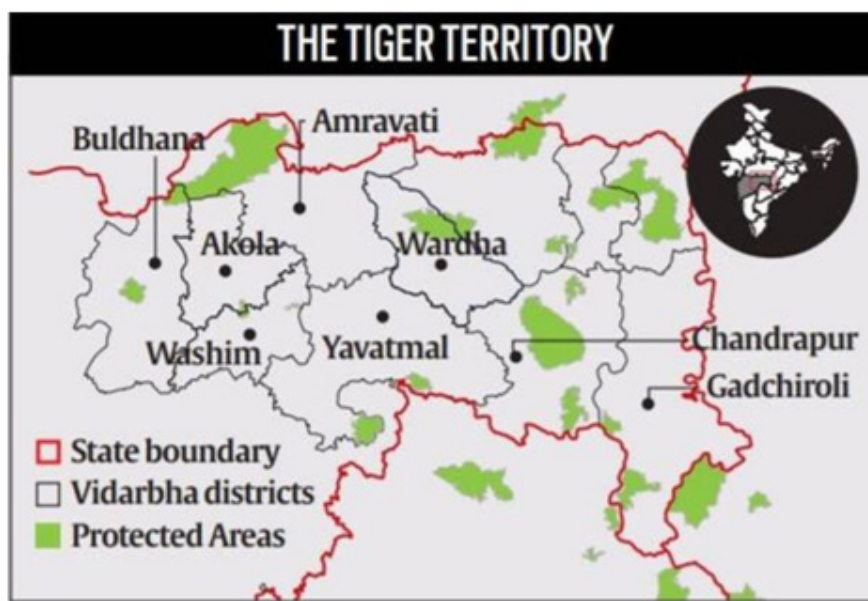
About:

- The study indicates that the animals are moving in a much wider swathe of area outside the protected areas than previously known.
- The investigators belonged the Maharashtra Forest Department and Wildlife Institute of India (WII),
- Vidarbha has 331 tigers in a forest area of around 26,775 sq km, dissected by 84,202 km of roads, apart from irrigation canals and other projects. There have been growing instances of man-tiger conflict in the region.
- The project, carried out between 2017 and 2020 using radio signals, identified 37,067 sq km, in all, of tiger corridors.
- They tracked the epic journey of Walker (as the tiger was dubbed) over 3,000 km from Tipeshwar Sanctuary in Yavatmal district to Dnyanganga Sanctuary in Buldhana district.

Source: Indian Express

GM RUBBER SAPLING PLANTED IN ASSAM

Syllabus Section: Agriculture

Why in News?

- World's first GM rubber sapling planted in Assam.

About:

- A Rubber Board researchfarm on the outskirts of Guwahati now sports theworld's firstgenetically modified (GM) rubber plant tailored for the climatic conditions in the Northeast.
- The GM rubber has additional copies of the geneMnSOD, or manganese-containing superoxide dismutase.
- It is expected to tide over the severe cold conditionsduring winter — a major factor affecting the growth ofyoung rubber plants in theregion.
- The plant was developedat the Kerala-based RubberResearch Institute of India(RRII)
- Northeast,is one of the largestproducers of rubber in India.

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- Natural rubber is anative of warm humid Amazon forests and is not naturally suited for the colderconditions.

Source: The Hindu

PETER PAN SYNDROME

Why in News?

- During the hearing of a rape case the accused had told the court he suffered from "Peter Pan Syndrome",

About:

- People who develop behaviours — of living life carefree, finding responsibilities challenging in adulthood, and basically, "never growing up" — suffer from Peter Pan Syndrome.
- Peter Pan is a fictional character created by Scottish novelist James Matthew Barrie in the early 1900s.
- World Health Organization does not recognise Peter Pan Syndrome as a health disorder, but experts believe it is a mental health condition that can affect one's quality of life.
- There aren't clearly-defined symptoms or characteristics or even reasons which cause it.
- But, according to HealthLine, it could affect one's daily routine, relationships, work ethic, and result in attitudinal changes.

Source: Indian Express

PYGMY HOGS RELEASED IN MANAS NATIONAL PARK

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology

Why in News?

- 8 rare pygmy hogs released in Manas National Park .

About:

- Eight of 12 captive¬bred pygmy hogs, the world's rarest and smallest wildpigs, were released in the Manas National Park of western Assam.
- This is the second batch tohave been reintroduced into the wild under the Pygmy Hog co-nservation Programme (PHCP) in a year.
- The reintroduction programme began in 2008with the Sonai¬Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary (35 hogs),Orang National Park (59)and Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary (22).

Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme

- It is a collaborative project of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, IUCN/SSC Wild Pig Specialist Group, Forest Department, Govt. of Assam and the Ministry of Environment & Forest, Govt. of India.
- It is implemented in Assam by the Rare & Endangered Species Conservation Unit (RESCU) of Ecosystems-India.

Pygmy Hog

- The smallest and the rarest member of pig family, pygmy hog (Porculasalvania) belongs to a unique monospecific genus with no surviving close relative.
- It is one of the few mammals in the world that constructs a 'house' or nest to live.
- Currently, it is restricted to a single viable population in the wild in Manas Tiger Reserve and three reintroduced populations in Orang National Park, SonaiRupai and Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuaries, all in north-western Assam.
- IUCN Status: Critically Endangered
- It is listed in the Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.

Source: The Hindu

SPECIAL PROCEDURES BRANCH OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Syllabus Section:International Institutions

Why in News?

- Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva has responded the concerns raised by Special Procedures Branch of the Human Rights Council regarding India's Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

About:

- The term 'special procedures' refers to the list of mechanisms established by the Human Rights Council to report and advise on human rights from a thematic and country-specific perspective.
- Special procedures cover all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social as well as issues relating to specific groups.

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- Special procedures mandate-holders are either an individual (called a Special Rapporteur (SR) or Independent Expert (IE)) or a Working Group (WG) of five members.
- Mandate holders serve in their personal capacities, they are not UN staff and do not receive salaries or other financial remuneration for their work.
- A mandate-holder's tenure in a given function, whether it is a thematic or country mandate, is limited to a maximum of six years.
- They are non-paid and elected for 3-year mandates that can be reconducted for another three years.
- Mandate holders are appointed by the Human Rights Council and their work is supported by the OHCHR.
- As part of their mandates, special procedures examine, advise and publicly report on human rights issues and situations.
- Special procedures report annually to the Human Rights Council; the majority of the mandates also report annually to the General Assembly.

Source: PIB

AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet, has approved anAgreement between the Republic of India and Saint Vincent and The Grenadines for the Exchange of Information and Assistance in Collection with respect to Taxes.

About:

- This is a new Agreement between the Republic of India and Saint Vincent and The Grenadines. There was no such agreement in past between the two countries.
- Agreement mainly proposes to facilitate exchange of information between the two countries and to provide assistance to each other in collection of tax claims.

- Agreement also contains tax examination abroad provisions which provide that a country may allow the representatives of the other country to enter its territory (to the extent permitted under its domestic laws) to interview individuals and examine records for tax purposes.

Impact:

- It will help in facilitating the exchange of information between the two countries including sharing of information held by the banks and other financial institutions encompassing the information regarding the legal and beneficial ownership.
- It will also facilitate the assistance in collection of the tax claims between the two countries.
- It will strengthen India's commitment to fight offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance practices leading to generation of unaccounted black money.

Background:

- There was no such agreement with Saint Vincent and The Grenadines in the past and India was negotiating this agreement since a long time.

Source: The Hindu

DIVYANGTA KHEL KENDRAS

Syllabus Section: Government Initiatives

Why in News?

Union minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thaawarchand Gehlot announced establishment of five 'Divyangta Khel Kendras' in different parts of country.

About:

- They have been established while looking at the interest towards the sports among the Divyangjan of the country and their good performance in Paralympics.
- He also distributed aids and assistive devices to 'Divyangjan' under the Assistance to Disabled Persons (ADIP) Scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- ADIP is one of the most popular schemes for providing assistive aids and appliance to Divyangjans.

- It is organized by Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), a Public Sector Undertaking under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The Corporation started manufacturing artificial aids in 1976.

Source: PIB

BRICS GREEN HYDROGEN SUMMIT

Syllabus Section: Environment

Why in News?

- NTPC anchors two-day BRICS Green Hydrogen Summit.
- The event offers a platform to share their respective Green Hydrogen initiatives and views on how to take it to the next level in their own countries.

About:

What is Green Hydrogen?

- Hydrogen, when produced by electrolysis using renewable energy, is known as green hydrogen.
- It has no carbon footprint. This gives hydrogen the edge over other fuels to unlock various avenues of green usage.

Significance of Green Hydrogen:

- Green hydrogen energy is vital for India to meet its Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) Targets.
- Hydrogen is poised to play a vital role and build on the rapid scale-up of renewable resources across the world
- In terms of mobility, for long distance mobilisations for either urban freight movement within cities and states or for passengers, Green Hydrogen can be used in railways, large ships, buses or trucks, etc.

Applications of green hydrogen:

- Green Chemicals like ammonia and methanol can directly be utilized in existing applications like fertilizers, mobility, power, chemicals, shipping etc.
- Green Hydrogen blending up to 10% may be adopted in CGD networks to gain widespread acceptance.

Source: PIB

JUDGES RECUSAL

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Recently, two Supreme Court judges — Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice Aniruddha Bose — have recused themselves from hearing cases relating to West Bengal.

About:

- When there is a conflict of interest, a judge can withdraw from hearing a case to prevent creating a perception that she carried a bias while deciding the case.
- The practice stems from the cardinal principle of due process of law that nobody can be a judge in her own case.
- Any interest or conflict of interest would be a ground to withdraw from a case since a judge has a duty to act fair.
- The decision to recuse generally comes from the judge herself as it rests on the conscience and discretion of the judge to disclose any potential conflict of interest.
- There are no formal rules governing recusals, although several Supreme Court judgments have dealt with the issue.
- Once a request is made for recusal, the decision to recuse or not rests with the judge.
- Since there are no formal rules governing the process, it is often left to individual judges to record reasons for recusal. Some judges disclose the reasons in open court; in some cases, the reasons are apparent.

Source: Indian Express

NISHTHA – NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOL HEADS' AND TEACHERS' HOLISTIC ADVANCEMENT

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

To fulfil the long-standing vision of Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) to achieve academic excellence in Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs), 120 EMRS teachers and principals from 3 states completed a 40 days' NISHTHA Program.

About:

- In August 2019, Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister launched NISHTHA to build capacities of 42 Lakh government teachers across the country.

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- What is it? NISHTHA is the world's largest teachers' training programme of its kind in the world.
- Objective: To motivate and equip teachers to encourage and foster critical thinking in students.
- Features: Under it, teachers will develop their skills on various aspects related to Learning Outcomes, School Safety and Security, ICT in teaching-learning including Artificial Intelligence, Environmental Concerns and School Based Assessment in a joyful learning manner.
- Coverage: It aims to build the capacities of around 42 lakh participants covering all teachers and Heads of Schools at the elementary level in all Government schools, faculty members of SCERTs, DIETs as well as Block Resource Coordinators and Cluster Resource Coordinators in all States/UTs.
- Strategy: Training will be conducted directly by 33120 Key Resource Persons (KRPs) and State Resource Persons (SRP) identified by the State and UTs, who will in turn be trained by 120 National Resource Persons identified from NCERT, NIEPA, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS), CBSE and NGO.

Source: PIB

TAX INSPECTORS WITHOUT BORDERS (TIWB) PROGRAMME

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

Recently, a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), launched Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) in Bhutan.

About:

- India was chosen as the Partner Jurisdiction and has provided the Tax Expert for this programme.
- This programme is expected to be of about 24 months' duration through which India in collaboration with the UNDP and the TIWB Secretariat.
- The focus of the programme will be in the area of International Taxation and Transfer Pricing.

- It aims to aid Bhutan in strengthening its tax administration by transferring technical know-how and skills to its tax auditors, and through sharing of best audit practices.

Significance:

- This programme is another milestone in the continued cooperation between India and Bhutan.
- Milestone in India's continued and active support for South-South cooperation.

TIWB Programme:

- The TIWB Programme aims to strengthen tax administrations of developing countries by transferring technical know-how and skills to their tax auditors, and through the sharing of general audit practices and dissemination of knowledge products with them.
- The TIWB Programme complements the efforts of the international community to strengthen cooperation on tax matters and contribute to domestic tax mobilisation efforts of developing countries.

Source: PIB

OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS (OSP)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Department of Telecommunication has further liberalized the guidelines for Other Service Providers (OSPs).

About:

- These entities are business process outsourcing (BPO) organisations giving Voice based services, in India and abroad.
- The Guidelines issued today further liberalized the special dispensation given to OSPs in addition to the major measures already announced and implemented in November, 2020.

The main features of the liberalised guidelines:

- Distinction between Domestic and International OSPs has been removed. A BPO centre with common Telecom resources will now be able to serve customers located worldwide including in India.

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- EPABX (Electronic Private Automatic Branch Exchange) of the OSP can be located anywhere in the world. OSPs apart from utilising EPABX services of the Telecom Service Providers can also locate their EPABX at third Party Data Centres in India.
- With the removal of the distinction between Domestic and International OSP centres, the interconnectivity between all types of OSP centres is now permitted.
- Remote Agents of OSP can now connect directly with the Centralised EPABX/EPABX of the OSP/ EPABX of the customer using any technology including Broadband over wireline/ wireless.

Source: Business Standard

AGRISTACK

Syllabus Section: Agriculture

Why in News?

The Department of Agriculture, is planning of creating 'AgriStack'.

About:

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft Corporation to start a pilot project in 100 villages of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.
- The MoU requires Microsoft to create a 'Unified Farmer Service Interface' through its cloud computing services.
- This sets in motion the ministry's plan of creating 'AgriStack'
- AgriStack is a collection of technology-based interventions in agriculture.
- It aims to provide 'required data sets' of farmers' personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for 'smart and well-organised agriculture'.

Source: Down to Earth

INTEGRATED THEATRE COMMANDS

Syllabus Section: Defence

Why in News:

Recently, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat held a meeting with the Vice Chiefs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, and representatives of the Ministries of Home and Finance, National Security Council, Integrated Defence Staff, and Department of Defence.

About:

What are integrated theatre commands?

- It is a unified command under which all the resources of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force are pooled, depending on the threat perception.
- The commands could be geographical — like looking at a border with a particular country — or thematic, like a command for all maritime threats.
- A model with 4 to 5 tri-Services integrated theatre commands is under discussion, with each command headed by a three-star officer.
- The Theatre Commander will report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), which includes the three Service chiefs. The COSC is headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as its permanent chairman.
- The Service chiefs currently have all the operational control over their forces; operational powers will now move to the COSC.
- The proposed commands are:
- Maritime Theatre Command - To take care of all the maritime security needs of India on both the eastern and western seaboards, and will include air strike assets and amphibian forces of the Army.
- Air Defence Command - To be mandated with air defence across the country and beyond. The fighter jets will have reconnaissance and surveillance assets as well.
- Two or three land-based commands - There will be one command each for India's borders with China and Pakistan.

How many commands are there now; are any of them tri-Service commands?

- As of now, the three forces have 17 commands between them.
- The Army has seven commands: Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western, Central, Southwestern and Army Training Command (ARTRAC).
- The Air Force has seven as well: Western, Eastern, Southern, Southwestern, Central, Training, and Maintenance commands.
- The Navy has three: Western, Eastern and Southern, of which Southern is largely about training.

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- These commands operate in the same region, but they are not co-located, and their areas of operational responsibility are not necessarily the same.

Source: Indian Express

WATER MANAGEMENT POLICIES THROUGH VIRTUAL WATER ANALYSIS

Syllabus Section: Governance

Why in News?

Recently, researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati have paved the way for better water management policies in India using virtual water analysis.

About:

What is virtual water?

- Virtual Water (VW) is the water involved in the production and trade of food and non-food commodities and services. It is that 'invisible' water that has been consumed throughout the lifecycle of the product or service.

Background:

- The concept of VW was first conceived in the 1990s.
- It was used to understand how water-stressed countries could provide their people with items such as water-intensive products like food, clothing, and shelter, which can define their trade characteristics

Significance:

- Reduce water wastage
- Reducing pressure on freshwater resources
- Help in framing evidence-based water policy
- Can provide an alternative to river interlinking projects

Source: Economics Time

FULL SHIP SHOCK TRIALS

Syllabus Section: International Relations

Why in News?

- The US Navycarried out a 'full ship shock trial'(FSST) on the USS Gerald R Ford.

About:

- In FSSTs, an underwater explosive charge is set off near an operational ship, and system and component failures are documented.

- During World War II, American warships suffered severe damage from enemy mines and torpedoes that had actually missed their target, but exploded underwater in close proximity.
- The US Navy has since worked to improve the shock proofing of their ship systems to minimise damage from such "near miss" explosions.
- The FSST "probes whether the components survive shock in their environment on the ship; it probes the possibilities of system failures, and large components that could not be otherwise tested,"
- Such trials are usually conducted on ships that are the first of a new class to be built – like the Gerald R Ford.

Source: Indian Express

INLAND VESSELS BILL, 2021

Syllabus Section:Governance

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet gave the nod to the Inland Vessels Bill, 2021.

About:

- It will replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917.
- The Bill will regulate safety, security and registration of inland vessels.
- A key feature of the Bill is a unified law for the entire country, instead of separate rules framed by the States.
- The Bill provides for a central data base for recording the details of vessel, vessel registration, crew on an electronic portal.
- It requires all mechanically propelled vessels to be mandatorily registered. All non-mechanically propelled vessels will also have to be enrolled at district, taluk or panchayat or village level.
- The certificate of registration granted under the proposed law will be deemed to be valid in all States and Union Territories, and there will be no need to seek separate permissions from the States.

Source: Indian Express

REFORM-LINKED WINDOW

Why in News?

- The Delhi High Court, while granting bail to the three students, gave the Delhi Police a dressing-down for "casually" invoking provisions of anti-terror laws against the three students who had protested against the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

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About:

- The High Court ruled that no offence under the anti-terror law — Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) — is made out against any of the three students.
- The phrase 'terrorist act' cannot be permitted to be applied in a cavalier manner to criminal acts that fall squarely within the definition of conventional offences as defined inter alia under the IPC [Indian Penal Code].
- The Bench said that protests against governmental and parliamentary actions were legitimatethough such protests were expected to be peaceful and non-violent

UAPA

- The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was enacted in 1967.
- Section 15 of the UAPA defines "terrorist act" and is punishable with imprisonment for a term of at least five years to life. In case the terrorist act results in death, the punishment is death or imprisonment for life.
- The 2004 amendment was to ban organisations for terrorist activities, under which 34 outfits, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, were banned.
- The 2019 amendment gave the Home Ministry the power to designate individuals as terrorists.
- In September 2019, the four individuals to be first designated as terrorists were JeM chief Masood Azhar, LeT's Hafiz Saeed, his deputy Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, who planned and executed the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts.

Source: The Hindu

MFI FRAMEWORK PLAN

Syllabus Section: Economy
Why in News?
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a new regulatory framework for microfinance institutions (MFIs).

About:
Proposed New Regulatory Framework

- RBI has suggested a common definition of microfinance loans for all regulated entities, it has not fixed any ceiling on interest rates.

- Microfinance loans should mean collateral-free loans to households with annual household income of Rs 1,25,000 and Rs 2,00,000 for rural and urban/semi urban areas, respectively.
- 'Household' means a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen," the RBI said.
- RBI has mooted capping the payment of interest and repayment of principal for all outstanding loan obligations of the household as a percentage of the household income, subject to a limit of maximum 50%.
- Capping the outflow on account of repayment of loan obligations of a household to a maximum of 50 per cent of the household income and no pre-payment penalty or requirement of collateral, along with greater flexibility of repayment frequency for all microfinance loans.
- It has proposed withdrawal of some of the guidelines presently applicable to only NBFC-MFIs, including stipulations related to :
- sub-limits on loan amount (Rs 75,000 in first cycle, exclusion of loans towards education and medical expenses from overall limit),
- tenure (minimum tenure of 24 months for loans above Rs 30,000) and
- purpose (minimum 50 per cent of loans for income generation activities).
- It has also mooted the withdrawal of two-lender norm for lending by NBFC-MFIs and all pricing related instructions.

Source: Indian Express

LIDAR SURVEY OF FOREST AREAS

Syllabus Section: Environment and Ecology
Why in News?

- Recently, detailed Project reports of LIDAR survey of forest areas in 10 states for water and fodder augmentation released.
- The 10 mapped states are Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura.

About:

- The project was awarded to WAPCOS in July 2020 at a cost of Rs.18.38 Crore/- for implementation in 26 states over 261897 hectare.

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- WAPCOS, is a PSU under the aegis of Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India
- It is a first of its kind and a unique experiment using LiDAR technology which will help augment water and fodder in jungle areas thereby reducing human-animal conflict.help in groundwater recharge, help local communities
- States will be given Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds to use in this project.

- CAMPA is meant to promote afforestation and regeneration activities as a way of compensating for forest land diverted to non-forest uses.
- CAMPA was established to manage the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) and it acts as the custodian of the CAMPA fund.
- One major ridge inside a forest block is identified in these states with an average area of 10,000 ha selected in each State; the area should have average rainfall of the state, and requires assisted natural generation.

LiDAR Technology:

The INS (Inertial Navigation System) records the precise orientation of the scanner. **INS**

GPS The GPS (Global Positioning System) gives the precise location of the scanner.

The **laser scanner** emits infrared laser pulses, then captures and records the returned pulses that are reflected from the surface of the earth and objects.

GPS base station
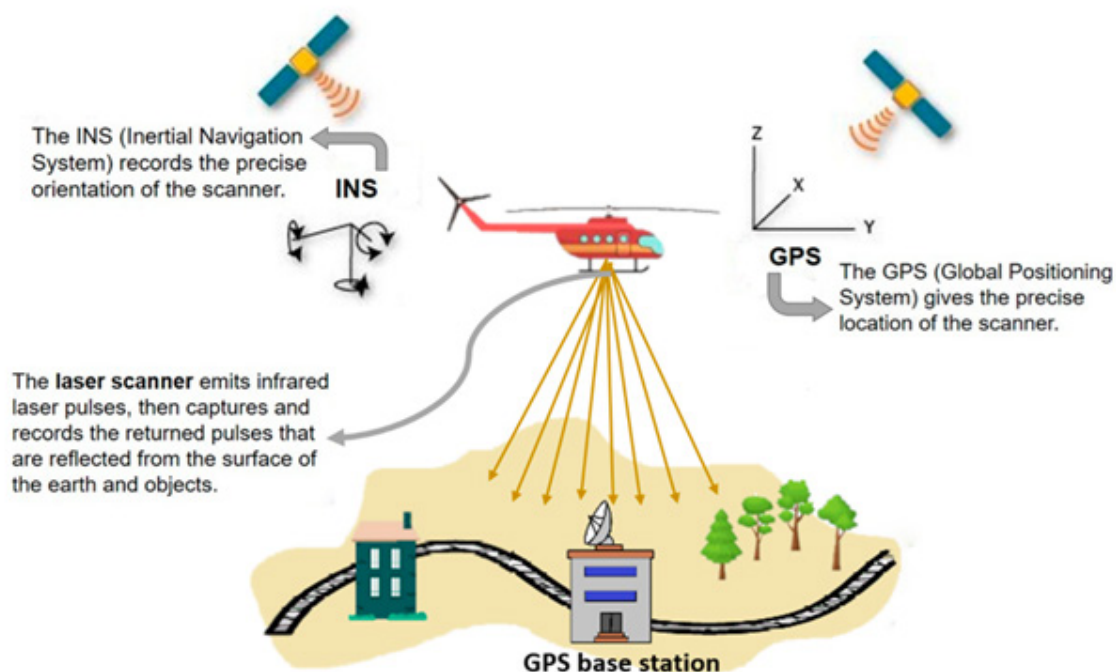
- Lidar is a method for measuring distances (ranging) by illuminating the target with laser light and measuring the reflection with a sensor.
- Differences in laser return times and wavelengths can then be used to make digital 3-D representations of the target.
- It has terrestrial, airborne, and mobile applications.
- Lidar sometimes is called 3-D laser scanning, a special combination of a 3-D scanning and laser scanning.
- Lidar is commonly used to make high-resolution maps, with applications in surveying, geodesy, geomatics, archaeology, geography, geology, geomorphology, seismology, forestry, atmospheric physics,[6] laser guidance, airborne laser swath mapping (ALSM), and laser altimetry.

MARITIME STATE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (MSDC)

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Union Minister of State (I/C) for Port, Shipping and Waterways chaired the 18th meeting of the Maritime State Development Council (MSDC) through a video conference organized by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

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About:

- MSDC is an apex advisory body for the development of the Maritime sector and aims to ensure integrated development of Major and non-Major Ports.
- The MSDC was constituted in May 1997 to assess in consultation with State Governments, the future development of existing and new Minor Ports by the respective Maritime States either directly or through captive users and private participation.

Source: PIB

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN HOME-BASED LEARNING

Why in News?

The Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education releases the Guidelines for parent participation in home-based learning during school closure and beyond.

About:

- These Guidelines aim to provide information on the 'why', 'what', and 'how-to' of participation and engagement in supporting children during the school closure, irrespective of their literacy levels.
- These guidelines are meant not only for parents but also for caregivers, other family members, grandparents, community members, older siblings who all are engaged in promoting the welfare of children.
- The guidelines provide many simple tips for parents and others to facilitate children in Home based learning. These suggestive activities are in accordance with the various stages of school education as per NEP 2020.
- Age-appropriate art activities have been categorized on basis of 5+3+3+4 system viz
  - o Foundation Stage (Age 3-8yrs);
  - o Preparatory Stage (Age 8-11 yrs);
  - o Middle Stage (Age 11-14yrs); and
  - o Secondary Stage: From Adolescent to Adult age (Age 14-18 years).
- The Guidelines appreciate the role of Art as a therapy for children under stress or trauma.
- A separate chapter has been included in the Guidelines for supporting parents with low/no literacy. Schools, teachers and volunteers may take the suggestive steps to provide support to low-literacy parents.

Source: PIB

U.P RANKED BEST UNDER SMART CITIES MISSION

Syllabus Section: Governance:

Why in News?

Under the Smart Cities mission's India Smart Cities Awards Contest (ISAC) 2020, the Union ministry of housing and urban affairs has ranked Uttar Pradesh as top performer.

About:

- The awards were announcedto commemorate 6 years of the three urban transformative missions of the Central government -- Smart Cities Mission (SCM), Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U).
- These were launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 25, 2015.
- These awards were given across the themes of social aspects, governance, culture, urban environment, sanitation, economy, built environment, water, urban mobility.
- Some new themes were also added this year for Sustainable Business model of Integrated Command and Control Centres, and Innovation award specially in Covid management.
- There are a total of five award categories in ISAC 2020.
- Uttar Pradesh emerged on the top among all states, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu under the Smart City award, 2020.
- Chandigarh bagged the award for union territories, while Indore won the "Innovative Idea Award".
- List of winning Smart Cities under the different categories:

1. Social Aspects

Tirupati: Health Benchmark for Municipal Schools

Bhubaneshwar: Socially Smart Bhubaneswar

Tumakuru: Digital Library Solution

2. Governance

Vadodara: GIS

Thane: Digi Thane

Bhubaneswar: ME app

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3. Culture

Indore: Conservation of Heritage

Chandigarh: Capitol Complex, Heritage Project

Gwalior: Digital Museum

4. Urban Environment

Bhopal: Clean energy

Chennai: Restoration of water bodies

Tirupati: Renewable Energy Generation

5. Sanitation

Tirupati: Bioremediation & Bio-Mining

Indore: Municipal Waste Management System

Surat: Conservation through Treated Wastewater

6. Economy

Indore: Carbon Credit Financing Mechanism

Tirupati: Boost Local Identity & Economy through Design Studio

Agra: Micro Skill Development Centre

7. Built Environment

Indore: Chappan Dukan

Surat: Canal Corridor

8. Water

Dehradun: Smart Water Metering Water ATM

Varanasi: Eco-Restoration of Assi River

Surat: Integrated and Sustainable Water Supply System

9. Urban Mobility

Aurangabad: Majhi Smart Buses

Surat: Dynamic Scheduling Buses

Ahmedabad: Man-less parking system and automatic ticket dispensing machines AMDA Park

10. Inovative Idea Award

Indore: Carbon Credit Financing Mechanism

11. Covid Innovation Award

Kalyan-Dombivali and Varanasi

VANDANA AGGARWAL COMMITTEE

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

- International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has constituted a committee to examine global best practices in ship financing and leasing, identify opportunities and devise a roadmap to enable such activities from GIFT IFSC.

About:

- This committee, to be chaired by Vandana Aggarwal, former Senior Economic Advisor, Government of India
- India is strategically located on the world's shipping routes and has a large coastline of approximately 7500 kms
- India also has 12 major and over 200 minor ports. Ministry of Shipping suggests that 95 percent of India's trading by volume and 70 percent by value is done via maritime transport.
- India is yet to develop as an international shipping hub, in spite of significant exposure to shipping.
- IFSCA aims to provide an enabling regulatory framework and facilitative environment so that GIFT IFSC can become an international hub for Ship Financing & Leasing activities.

Source: PIB

'itat e-dwar', AN E-FILING PORTAL

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?

Union Minister for Law & Justice, Communications and Electronics & IT, formally launched the e-filing portal of Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), 'itat e-dwar',

Aboutitat e-dwar

- Itat e-dwar is a larger narrative of transformation that India is undergoing through digital medium.
- It would enable the parties to file their Appeals, Miscellaneous Applications, documents, paper books, etc., electronically.
- It will result into economization of use of paper, savings in costs and rationalization of fixation of cases which in turn help in quicker disposal of cases.
- It will enable innovation & empowerment and open new avenues for growth.

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- As per the minister, data of more than 18 crore cases are available in National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG). He suggested to integrate cases of ITAT with NJDG.

Source: PIB

WORLD DRUG REPORT 2021

Syllabus Section: International Reports

Why in News?

According to the World Drug Report 2021 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's, the lockdown restrictions during COVID-19 may have accelerated drug trafficking using the Internet.

About:

- Findings - Between 2010 and 2019, the number of people using drugs increased by 22%, as there was an increase in the global population.
- Opioids account for the largest burden of disease attributed to drug use.
- In last 24 years, cannabis potency had increased by four times in some parts of the globe. Percentage of adolescents who perceived drug as harmful has reduced by 40%.
- A rise in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs was observed during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Darknet markets - In Asia, China and India are the most frequently mentioned countries linked to shipment of drugs sold on the 19 major darknet markets analysed over 2011-2020.
- Access to drugs has become simpler than ever with online sales, and major drug markets on the dark web are worth $315 million annually.
- The use of private planes for drug trafficking and contactless transactions, such as through the mail, are also on the rise.
- Although this is a "tiny fraction" of overall drug sales, the trend of using dark web on the rise, with a fourfold increase in annual sales from the beginning of the 2010s to more recent years.
- While cannabis dominates darknet sales, marketing on the so-called clear web often involves new psychoactive substances.

Source: The Hindu

DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDORS IN INDIA

Syllabus Section: Defence

Why in News?

During a webinar on India-Sweden Defence Industry Cooperation, Rajnath Singh invited Swedish firms to invest in Defence Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

About:

- To support the growth of the Defence sector and enhance manufacturing capacity in the sector, Two Defence Industrial Corridors are being set up in India, one in Uttar Pradesh and another in Tamil Nadu.

- Promoting Make in India, the Defence Industrial Corridors will catalyse indigenous production of defence and aerospace-related items. This will reduce our imports and promote the export of these items to other countries.

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- **Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor** consists of the following six nodal points with the potential to develop defence industries in the corridor: Agra, Aligarh, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow.
- **The Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor,** being set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu, consists of the following five nodal points: Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur, Salem and Tiruchirappalli

Source: PIB

INDIA'S FIRST VSC BASED HVDC SYSTEM

Syllabus Section: Economy

Why in News?
POWERGRID has fully commissioned India's First Voltage Source Convertor (VSC) based High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) System.

About:
- It has commissioned Monopole-I of the 2000 Mega-Watt (MW), Pugalur (Tamil Nadu) – Thrissur (Kerala) Voltage Source Convertor (VSC) based High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) System.
- This Project strengthens the power system of Southern Region of our Country.
- Monopole-II of the project was inaugurated by PM Modi in February, 2021 and with the commissioning of Monopole-I, the project has attained its full capacity.
- The Pugalur-Thrissur HVDC system, costing Rs. 5070 crore, is a part of the Raigarh-Pugalur-Thrissur 6000 MW HVDC system and enables transfer of 2000 MW to Kerala through the VSC HVDC station at Thrissur.

Voltage Source Convertor (VSC)
- An HVDC converter converts electric power from high voltage alternating current (AC) to high-voltage direct current (HVDC), or vice versa.
- Electronic converters for HVDC are divided into two main categories.
- Line-commutated converters (HVDC classic) are made with electronic switches that can only be turned on.
- Voltage-sourced converters are made with switching devices that can be turned both on and off. It uses transistors, usually the Insulated-gate bipolar transistor (IGBT).

Benefits
- The VSC technology significantly reduces the land requirement compared to the conventional HVDC systems and is particularly suitable for areas, where land is scarce.

- It also facilitates development of smart grid and improves system resilience under various operating conditions.
- The state-of-the-art VSC Technology has been brought to India for the first time by POWERGRID through this Project.

Source: PIB

MULTI-DRUG RESISTANCE

Syllabus Section: Science and Technology

Why in News?
New research from the Population Biology Lab at IISER Pune could hold a key ,why only some bacteria develop multi-drug resistance?

About:
- When bacteria become fit in one environment, they either lose fitness or fail to increase fitness in other environments. "Our study is showing that when the environment is fluctuating, large (but not small) populations can by-pass this effect.

Multiple drug resistance (MDR)
- Multiple drug resistance (MDR), multidrug resistance or multi resistance is antimicrobial resistance shown by a species of microorganism to at least one antimicrobial drug in three or more antimicrobial categories.
- Antimicrobial categories are classifications of antimicrobial agents based on their mode of action and specific to target organisms.
- The MDR types most threatening to public health are MDR bacteria that resist multiple antibiotics; other types include MDR viruses, parasites (resistant to multiple antifungal, antiviral, and antiparasitic drugs of a wide chemical variety).
- Recognizing different degrees of MDR in bacteria, the terms extensively drug-resistant (XDR) and pandrug-resistant (PDR) have been introduced.

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- Extensively drug-resistant (XDR) is the non-susceptibility of one bacteria species to all antimicrobial agents except in two or less antimicrobial categories.
- Within XDR, pandrug-resistant (PDR) is the non-susceptibility of bacteria to all antimicrobial agents in all antimicrobial categories.

Source: The Hindu

DRAFT CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY (EMPLOYEE'S COMPENSATION) (CENTRAL) RULES 2021

Syllabus Section:Social Issues

Why in News?

Ministry of Labour and Employment has notified the draft rules relating to Employee's Compensation under the Code on Social Security, 2020 for suggestions.

About:

- The Code on Social Security, 2020 amends and consolidates the laws relating to social security to extend social security to employees and workers in the organised as well as unorganised sectors.
- Chapter VII (Employee's Compensation) of the Social Security Code, 2020 envisages, inter-alia, provisions relating to employer's liability for compensation in case of fatal accidents, serious bodily injuries or occupational diseases.

The draft Employee's Compensation rules notified by the Central Government provide for the

- provisions relating to manner of application for claim or settlement,
- rate of interest for delayed payment of compensation,
- venue of proceedings and transfer of matters, notice and manner of transmitting money from one competent authority to another and
- arrangements with other countries for the transfer of money paid as compensation.

Source: PIB

ENFORCING CONTRACTS PORTAL

Syllabus Section: Polity and Governance

Why in News?

Recently, justice department launches "Enforcing Contracts Portal".

About:

- Aim: It aims to promote ease of doing business and improve 'Contract Enforcement Regime' in country
- The portal is envisioned to be a comprehensive source of information pertaining to the legislative and policy reforms being undertaken on the "Enforcing Contracts" parameters
- It will provide easy access to latest information on commercial cases in Dedicated Commercial Courts of Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata
- The portal will also provide access to repository of commercial laws for ready reference.
- The portal will also host online reporting by all High Courts regarding the Mediation and Arbitration centres annexed to the Commercial Courts in order to monitor and promote institutional mediation & arbitration by way of Pre-institution Mediation and Settlement (PIMS) of commercial cases.
- PIMS has been introduced with the aim of reducing pendency of cases and to promote mediation as a viable dispute resolution alternative in commercial cases.

What is Enforcing Contracts?

- The "Enforcing Contracts" indicator is one such essential area that measures time and cost to resolve a standardized commercial dispute as well as a series of good practices in the judiciary.

Source: PIB

NEW GENERATION AGNI P BALLISTIC MISSILE

Syllabus Section: Defence/ Science and Technology

Why in News?

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested a New Generation Nuclear Capable Ballistic Missile Agni P from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Odisha, Balasore.

About:

- Agni P is a new generation advanced variant of Agni class of missiles.
- It is a canisterised missile with range capability between 1,000 and 2,000 kms
- It can be launched from rail and road and stored for a longer period.

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- It can be transported across the length and breadth of the country, as per requirements.
- It also comes with the technologies found in the 4000-kilometre range Agni-IV and 5000-kilometre range Agni-V.
- The new Agni P can be used to target enemy warships in the Indo-Pacific.

Background:
- Agni I, India's first intermediate-range ballistic missile, was successfully test-fired for the first time in May 1989.
- It was inducted into service in 2004.
- It has a range capability between 700 and 900 kilometres.

Source: PIB

PUBLIC HEALTH SUMMIT 2021

Syllabus Section: Health Issues

Why in News?
Recently, 2nd Public Health Summit 2021 has been organized by CII.

Highlights:
- COVID has strengthened Public-Private Partnership model in India's healthcare system with a win-win situation for both.
- Telemedicine facility, need to be given a desired attention in the country. As this aspect was not given desired attention in the country and now the time has come to revive it in a big way for free consultation from home particularly in rural areas
- Ayushman Bharat Yojana is a unique and successful health insurance scheme launched by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2018,
  - The scheme has come at a critical juncture and COVID treatment was also included under the Yojana.
  - With affordable and accessible quality health care, the Ayushman Yojana is the "world's largest government funded healthcare program" targeting more than 50 crore beneficiaries.
- National Digital Health Mission would revolutionise the health sector in the country.

- NDHM will be a completely technology-based initiative and every Indian would get a Health ID card that would contain all relevant information about an individual's medical conditions.
- Public Health should be driven by technology and data for effective surveillance and monitoring of diseases and for its successful management.
- National Health Authority said in his address that CoWIN portal for vaccination is unique in the world in terms of portability, scalability and inclusivity and it is a citizen-centric platform.

Source: PIB

ROCK PHOSPHATE

Syllabus Section: Geography

Why in News?
To improve the availability of phosphatic fertilisers (DAP and NPK) and to reduce the dependence on imports, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers chaired a meeting. Government ready with Action Plan to make India Aatmanirbhar in Rock Phosphate.

About:
- Rock phosphates or phosphorites are sedimentary phosphatic deposits comprising fine-grained mixture of various calcium phosphates, most important being hydroxylapatite, carbonateapatite, fluorapatite and their solid solutions.
- About 80% phosphate production in the world is derived from phosphate rocks (phosphorite)
- Rock Phosphate is the key raw material for DAP and NPK fertilisers and India is 90% dependent on imports.
- Of the total reserves/resources, 34% are in Jharkhand, 31% in Rajasthan, 19% in Madhya Pradesh, 8% in Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand each , respectively. Meagre quantities of resources are also located in Gujarat and Meghalaya.

Source: The Hindu

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