

ASTRA

COMPLETE COVERAGE OF MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

NOVEMBER 2021



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Why in the news?

- Devasahayam Pillai is the first Indian layman to be declared as saint. He is to be declared as saint by the Vatican in May 2022.
- About Devasahayam Pillai
- Devasahayam Pillai was baptized in 1745. He then took the name Lazarus. Lazarus means "God is my help". After his conversion, he was removed from his post in the royal administration. He was imprisoned and punished with harsh persecution. Devasahayam Pillai preached about equality. This aroused hatred among the higher classes.

About his sainthood

- The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India and the Tamil Nadu Bishop Council recommended Devasahayam for beatification. Beatification is the declaration by the Pope that a dead person is in the state of bliss. Three hundred years after his birth, he was declared eligible for sainthood in 2020.

Why in the news?

- Some families of Kadar tribe has got pattas for homestead inside the Anaimalai Tiger Reserve (ATR).

About the tribe

- Kadar is a small tribe of southern India residing along the hilly border between Cochin in Kerala and Coimbatore in Tamil Nādu. Kadars are one of the five primitive tribal groups in Kerala, where they constitute nearly 5% of the State's total
- tribal population. The Kadar live in the forests and do not practice agriculture. Modern kadars like to known as Hindus. Their favourite deities are Ayappan, Kali and Malavazhi. Primitive polytheism and the worship of invisible gods have considerably disappeared. But a few elders still worship the rising sun. Their customs and conventions indicate that they had been strong animists not long ago. The Kadar tribe has been listed as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Kerala, but not in Tamil Nadu. A tribe listed in the PVTG allows the tribe to have habitat rights under the Forest Rights Act 2006.

Why in the news?

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has selected Srinagar as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) under the Crafts and Folk Arts category.

About

- Launched in 2004 to promote cooperation among cities which recognized creativity as a major factor in their urban development.
- It aims to foster mutual international cooperation with and between member cities committed to invest in creativity as a driver for sustainable urban development, social inclusion and cultural vibrancy.
- The Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.
- The network now includes 295 cities covering around 90 countries.
- As of November, 2019, there are five Indian cities in UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as follows □
 - Jaipur - Crafts and Folk Arts(2015).
 - Varanasi - Creative city of Music (2015).
 - Chennai - Creative city of Music(2017).
 - Mumbai - Film (2019).
 - Hyderabad - Gastronomy (2019).

Janjatiya Gaurav Divas

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved declaration of 15th November as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas dedicated to the memory of brave tribal freedom fighters so that coming generations could know about their sacrifices.

About

- It is dedicated to **remember the contributions of tribal freedom fighters** for the country.
- This day will now be **celebrated every year**. It would **recognize the efforts of the tribals** for the preservation of cultural heritage and would help the coming generations know about the sacrifices made by the tribals for the country.
- A **tribal freedom fighter museum at Ranchi** would be inaugurated by the Prime Minister.
- 15th November** also marks the **birth anniversary of Birsa Munda** who is revered as God by tribal communities across India.

Rani Kamlapati

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- The name of Bhopal's Habibganj railway station has been changed to Rani Kamlapati station.

About Rani Kamlapati

- Rani Kamlapati was the **Gond queen of the Bhopal region** in the **18th century**.
- She was **one of the seven wives of Gond ruler Nizam Shah**.
- Kamlapati is known to have **shown great bravery** in facing aggressors during her reign after her husband was killed.
- Kamlapati was the **"last Hindu queen of Bhopal"**, who did great work in the area of water management and set up parks and temples.

Pochampally Village

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- The Pochampally Village in Telangana State has been selected as one of the best Tourism Villages by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

About Best Tourism Villages Initiative

- It is a **Pilot initiative by UNWTO** to highlight those villages where **tourism preserves cultures and traditions, celebrates diversity**, provides opportunities and safeguards biodiversity.
- It aims to award those villages which are **outstanding examples** of **rural destinations and showcase good practises** in line with its specified nine evaluation areas.
- It also aims to support villages to **enhance their rural tourism potential** through training and access to opportunities for improvement.

Pochampally Village

- Pochampally is a town in **Nalgonda district of Telangana**.
- Pochampally is often referred to as the **Silk City of India** for the exquisite sarees that are woven through a unique style called **ikat**. It is a **dyeing technique used** to create a distinct style of textile patterns. Ikat received a **Geographical Indicator(GI) tag** in **2004**.
- Pochampally is also known as **Bhoodan Pochampally** to commemorate the **Bhoodan Movement** that was launched by Acharya Vinobha Bhave from this village on April 18th, 1951.
- Currently, a two-room **Vinobha Bhave Mandir** exists within the village, which was earlier the place where Vinobha Bhave resided during his visit to the village.

United Nations World Tourism Organisation

- It is the United Nations **Specialised Agency** responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. Established in **1975** with headquarters at **Madrid, Spain**.
- UNWTO encourages the implementation of the **Global Code of Ethics for Tourism**, to maximize tourism's socio- economic contribution while minimizing its possible negative impacts.



Puri Heritage Corridor Project

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- The Odisha Government is expected to soon lay the foundation stone of the Puri heritage corridor, which is being developed at a cost of Rs 800 crore.

About

- Conceived in **2016**.
- Project aims to **transform the holy town of Puri into an international place of heritage**.
- A total of **22 different projects** will be executed in a phased manner.
- Funds have been allocated under the state government's Augmentation of Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage and Architecture at Puri (**ABADHA**) **scheme**.
- The project includes **redevelopment of Puri lake and Musa river revival plan**.

Rani Gaidinliu

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- Union Home Minister laid the foundation stone for the 'Rani Gaidinliu Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum' in Manipur.

About

- Born on **January 26, 1915** at **Luangkao village in Manipur**, Rani Gaidinliu was a **spiritual and political leader** of the Rongmei Naga tribe.
- She **preserved the identity and culture of her community** - Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui - a cognate of tribes referred to as Zeliangrong and are spread across Assam, Manipur & Nagaland.
- At 13, she became associated with freedom fighter and religious leader, **Haipou Jadonang**, and became his lieutenant in his social, religious and political movement.
- Jadonang, who was also a Rongmei, started **the 'Heraka movement'**, based on ancestral Naga religion, and envisioned an **independent Naga kingdom** (or Naga-Raja). Rani Gandiliu's association with Jadonang **prepared her to fight the British**. After the execution of Jadonang, she took up the **leadership of the movement** — which slowly turned political from religious. Rani started a **serious revolt against the British** and was eventually **imprisoned for life**. She was released after 14 years, in 1947.
- Acknowledging her role in the struggle against the British, Jawaharlal Nehru called her the **"Daughter of the Hills"** and gave her the title **"Rani"** or queen. Indian Coast Guard commissioned a Fast Patrol Vessel **'ICGS Rani Gaidinliu'** in 2016.

Bharat Gaurav Scheme

History & Culture

Why in the news?

- To tap the huge potential of tourism, the Railways has announced the 'Bharat Gaurav' Scheme.

About the scheme

- Under this Scheme, **theme-based tourist circuit trains**, on the lines of the Ramayana Express, can be **run either by private or State-owned operators**.
- By theme-based tourism (circuits), the railways means **trains like Guru Kripa** that **goes to all places related to Guru Nanak** or a Ramayan-themed train to touch upon places related to Lord Ram.
- Till now, the Railways had passenger **segments and goods segments**. Now, it will have a third **segment for tourism** under the Bharat Gaurav.
- These trains are **not regular trains** that will run as per a timetable but will be more on the lines of the Ramayana Express being run by the IRCTC.
- Anyone, **from societies, trusts, consortia** and **even state governments can apply** to take these trains and run them on special tourism circuits based on a theme. Service Provider will offer **all inclusive packages to tourists** including rail travel, hotel accommodation, sightseeing arrangement, visit to historical/heritage sites, tour guides etc.
- Benefits of such Scheme These trains will help **realise India's rich cultural heritage** and **magnificent historical places** to the people of India and the world.

Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Project

Geography

Why in the News?

- Recently, the Power Minister inaugurated the diversion of the Marusudar River of Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Project.

About the project

- River Marusudar**, a tributary of Chenab in district Kishtwar of UT of J & K.
- Chenab Valley Power Projects Limited**, a joint venture company of NHPC Ltd and JKSPDC.
- Significance:** The Project will contribute significantly in **fulfilling the target of 450 GW renewable energy by 2030**.
- It will be a **boon to the overall development** of the region and lead to improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the people.

Marusudar River

- It is the **largest tributary of the Chenab River**. Its source is the **Nunkun Glacier** located in Warwan valley.
- It runs for **133 kilometres**.

Kameng River

Geography

Why in the news?

- Recently, Studies have indicated that landslides caused by an earthquake of 3.4 magnitude close to the border with China led to mass fish death in the Kameng river in Arunachal Pradesh.

About the river

- It is the **right-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra river**.
- It **risers in the Tawang district** in the eastern Himalayas. It **forms the border** between the East Kameng district and the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- In Assam, it **flows through the Sonitpur district** before joining the Brahmaputra at Tezpur.
- The Kameng River consists of **two sections**- the west consisting of the **Akka hills and resided by the Akka tribes** and the east consisting of the **Dafla hills resided by the Daphla tribe**.
- The **Kaziranga National Park** and **the Pakkhui Wildlife Sanctuary** are located near the Kameng river.

National Interlinking of Rivers Authority

Geography

Why in the news?

- The Government of India is planning to set up a National Interlinking of Rivers Authority(NIRA).

About

- NIRA is supposed to be an **independent autonomous body** for planning, investigation, financing and the implementation of the river interlinking projects in the country.
- The authority is to be headed by a **Government of India Secretary-rank officer**.
- NIRA will **replace** the existing **National Water Development Agency** (NWDA).

Inter-Linking of Rivers Programme

- The idea was **first mooted** during the **British Raj when Sir Arthur Cotton**, a British general and irrigation engineer suggested linking the Ganga and the Cauvery for navigational purposes.
- The InterLinking of Rivers programme (ILR) programme is aimed at **linking different surplus rivers** of the country **with deficient rivers** so that the excess water from surplus regions could be diverted to deficient regions.



Why in the news?

- November 18 marks the 59th anniversary of the Battle of Rezang La. A memorial was inaugurated on the occasion.

About the battle

- Troops from the **13 Kumaon Regiment defeated** several waves of the Chinese People's Liberation Army **in 1962**.
- Despite being heavily outnumbered, soldiers of the regiment **fought to the last man standing**, under freezing temperatures, and **with limited ammunition**.

Rezang La

- It is a **mountain pass** on the Line of Actual Control **in Ladakh**.
- It is located **between village of Chushul and the Spanggur Lake** that stretches across both Indian & Chinese territories.
- It had also been the site of a **heroic battle on 18 November 1962**.
- Significance of the region** : Rezang La is **vital for the defence** of the crucially important Chushul. Any invader reaching there would have had a free run to Leh



Taiwan Strait

Geography

Why in the news?

- Recently, USA's Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius passed through the Taiwan Strait.

About the strait

- The Taiwan Strait is a **110-mile-wide channel** that separates mainland China from the island of Taiwan.
- It is also known as the **Formosa Strait** or the **Tai-hai** (the Tai Sea).
- The Taiwan Strait makes up **part of the South China Sea**, and its northern portion is linked to the East China Sea.
- The strait borders the south **eastern part of China** and runs along the **eastern part of China's Fujian Province**.

Why in the News

- Recently, the state of Punjab is set to start the Census of Indus River dolphin.

About Indus Water Dolphins

- They are freshwater Dolphin & act as an indicator of the health of freshwater ecosystem.
- The species does not have a crystalline eye lens, rendering it effectively blind. Navigation and hunting are carried out using echolocation.
- They are found in Pakistan and River Beas, a tributary of the Indus River in Punjab, India.
- IUCN Red List Status: **Endangered**
- In 2019, Indus River dolphin was declared as the State aquatic animal of Punjab.
- Threats**
 - Declining water in the river, putting more pressure on the dolphins to manage their life cycle.
 - The increasing pollution due to large scale discharge of industrial and municipal waste, siltation.
 - Mechanised boats pose one of the biggest threats.
 - They frequently fall prey to poachers.

Gangetic River Dolphin

- It is primarily found in the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers and their tributaries in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. It was recognized as National Aquatic Animal in 2009
- They also act as an indicator of the health of freshwater ecosystem as they can only live-in freshwater. They are also called 'susu'.
- IUCN Red List Status: **Endangered**
- Wildlife (Protection), Act 1972: Schedule I

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Climate Equity Monitor dashboard has been launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

About the Climate Equity Monitor

- It provides an online dashboard for assessing, at the international level, equity in climate action, inequalities in emissions, energy and resource consumption across the world, and ongoing climate policies of several countries. The website has been conceptualized and developed by independent researchers from India -- the Climate Change Group at the M.S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering department at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) Bengaluru, with other independent researchers.

Significance

- To monitor the performance of Annex-I Parties under the UNFCCC (developed countries) based on the foundational principles of the Climate Convention, namely equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). T
- The performance and policies of the Non Annex-I Parties (developing countries) will be also provided for comparison.
- To build awareness, especially among the public of the global South, that climate action is a global collective action problem.
- To debunk the narrative provided by many developed countries, and global non-government organizations that focus attention continually on what developing countries must do, constantly demanding greater commitment and action from them.

Why in the news?

- A number of environmentalists have come together to form a forum called Movement Against Biological Invasions (MABI) to curb the spread of invasive alien species (IAS).

About MABI

- MABI is a green movement aimed at systematically charting and rooting out invasive species.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines IAS as "an alien species whose introduction and spread threaten ecosystems, habitats, or species with socio-cultural, economic and environmental harm and harm to human health".
- The local food chain gets afflicted with the IAS competing for space & light with native flora. It is also a large threat to livestock health as it hampers the growth of native grasses which are fodder species for herbivores & livestock.
- It is baneful for soil health as it is prone to faster deterioration. *Cosmos sulphureus*, *Lantana camara* are some of the IAS species that cost huge sum of the farmers' budget in eradicating them through spraying of insecticide.

Global Methane Pledge**Environment****Why in the news?**

- Recently, Global Methane Pledge was launched at UN COP26 climate conference in Glasgow.

About Global Methane Pledge

- It is an effort led jointly by the United States and the European Union.
- It is essentially an agreement to reduce global methane emissions.
- One of the central aims of this agreement is to cut down methane emissions by up to 30 per cent from 2020 levels by the year 2030.
- The pledge covers countries which emit nearly half of all methane, and make up 70% of global GDP.
- Over 90 countries have signed this pledge so far.

Methane & its sources-

- Methane is the second-most abundant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, after carbon dioxide.
- It is also a component of natural gas.
- Around 40% of CH₄ comes from natural sources such as wetlands but the bigger share now comes from a range of human activities, ranging from agriculture such as cattle and rice production to rubbish dumps.
- Human sources of methane include landfills, oil and natural gas systems, agricultural activities, coal mining, wastewater treatment, and certain industrial processes, the US Environmental Protection Agency notes.
- The oil and gas sectors are among the largest contributors to human sources of methane.
- Human sources of methane are responsible for 60 per cent of global methane emissions.
- These emissions come primarily from the burning of fossil fuels, decomposition in landfills & the agriculture sector.

Methane Contributes To Global Temperature

- Methane is the third-most abundant greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, after water vapour & carbon dioxide.
- As per Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, methane accounts for around half of the 1.0 degrees Celsius net increase in global average temperature as compared to pre-industrial era.
- UN notes that methane has a global warming potential that is 80 times greater than carbon dioxide, about 20 years after it has been released into the atmosphere. As per UN, 25% of the warming is because of methane.

Infrastructure for Resilient Island States**Environment****Why in the news?**

- Recently India, along with UK launched 'Infrastructure for Resilient Island States' (IRIS) on the side-lines of the COP 26 climate summit in Glasgow.

About IRIS

- The IRIS is a part of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).
- Under this, ISRO will build a special data window for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). With this, SIDS will continue to get timely information about cyclones, coral-reef monitoring, coast-line monitoring etc through satellite.



Need for IRIS

- The biggest threat from climate change disasters is to the SIDS. It is a challenge to their existence.
- In such countries, climate change is a major challenge not only for the security of their lives, but also for their economies, such countries depend a lot on tourism, but due to natural calamities, even tourists are afraid to come there.
- The United Nations Office for Project Services report says that around 20% of global biodiversity are in small island countries and they are facing severe climate change impacts. On the other hand, they are responsible for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Significance of IRIS
- The launch of IRIS, gives a new hope, a new confidence. It gives the satisfaction of doing something for the most vulnerable countries.
- Sustainable and resilient infrastructure is the only solution to the problem to the sinking island countries. Therefore, there is need to focus on their overall infrastructure across all sectors such as transport, energy, digital communication, water, waste water, solid waste and buildings.

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

- CDRI is an international coalition of countries, United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, private sector that aims to promote disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- It was launched by the India at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit.
- Headquarters: New Delhi, India.
- The coalition will not create any new infrastructure rather, it will serve as a 'knowledge centre' for member countries to share and learn best practices with respect to disaster-proofing of infra.

Sustainable Cooling Handbook for Cities

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Sustainable Urban Cooling Handbook is a report published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Findings of the report

- The world cities are heating up at twice the global average. This is mainly due to urban heat island effect.
- Urban population exposed to hot temperatures (more than 35 degrees Celsius) are to increase by 800% by 2050 as compared to 2016. Around 1.6 billion urban population is to face this heat.
- With increase in temperature in cities, the low-income countries, especially in western Africa and southern Asia will be worst hit. Such regions are to lose 5% of working hours.
- The electric grid failures during extreme weather are increasing. This along with increasing heat waves will expose large population to severe heat stress.
- The energy requirement for space cooling is predicted to triple from 2016 to 2050 as millions of households in developing countries acquire air conditioners in the coming decades.

Leopards at A Risk of Extinction

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently published study said that the leopard (IUCN status - Vulnerable) faces of risk of extinction in North India due to roadkill.

Key Findings

- The leopard (*Panthera pardus*) faces an 83% increased risk of extinction in North India due to roadkill, according to a new international study that quantifies the threat posed by roads to the survival of animal populations around the world.
- Other populations found highly vulnerable include the lion-tailed macaque (*Macaca silenus*) and sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*) in South India.
- For the North Indian leopard population, the study site covered Uttarakhand's Rajaji National Park and Haridwar Conservation area.
- If at least 20% of the population has been killed by roadkill, the risk of local extinction can increase by 10%.

Significance of this study

- Results of this study have implications for mammalian conservation and road mitigation worldwide.
- It brings attention to the need of thoughtful future road development and road mitigation.

About Leopard

- The leopard is one of the five extant species in the genus *Panthera*, a member of the cat family.
- It occurs in a wide range in sub-Saharan Africa, Western and Central Asia, Southern Russia, and on the Indian subcontinent to Southeast and East Asia.
- The highest concentration of the leopard in India is estimated to be in Madhya Pradesh followed by Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- As per a recent report 'Status of leopards in India, 2018' released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, there has been a 60% increase in the population count of leopards in India from 2014 estimates of 8,000 to 12,852.
- In Indian subcontinent, poaching, habitat loss, depletion of natural prey and conflict are major threats to leopard populations.

Climate Change Performance Index 2022

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently the 17th edition of Climate Change Performance Index was released.

About Index

- It is compiled by German Watch along with New Climate Institute and Climate Action Network.
- It monitors climate mitigation progress of 60 countries and the European Union.
- It is released on the basis of 14 indicators under 4 parameters:
 - Green House Gas Emissions (40%)
 - Renewable Energy (20%)
 - Energy Use (20%)
 - Climate Policy (20%)

Indian Flapshell Turtle

Environment

Why in the news?

- An international forest forensic investigator, had a chance encounter with the rarely found species of Albino Indian Flapshell turtle in the Sirnapalli forest in Telangana's Nizamabad.

Indian Flapshell turtle

- The **Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*)** is a freshwater species of turtle.
- It is found in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, Burma. "*Lissemys punctata*" has been introduced to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It is also found in the desert ponds of Rajasthan where hundreds are killed every year during the dry summers.
- The race "**andersoni**" is found in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- The "flap-shelled" name comes from the presence of femoral flaps located on the plastron.
- They live in the shallow, quiet, often stagnant waters of rivers, streams, marshes, ponds, lakes and irrigation canals, and tanks.
- These turtles prefer waters with sand or mud bottoms because of their tendency to burrow.
- Its IUCN status is Vulnerable.

Clydebank Declaration

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Clydebank Declaration was signed at the COP26 Climate summit held in Glasgow.

About Clydebank Declaration

- Under the declaration, the signatories agreed to work together to establish zero emission maritime routes.
- These routes are called green shipping corridors.
- 22 countries including the US, Japan, Australia and Canada have signed the Clydebank Declaration to develop at least six green shipping corridors between two or more ports by 2025 and "many more" by 2030.
- This declaration has not been yet adopted by India.

Global Resilience Index Initiative (GRII)

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently, a global coalition of ten organisations launched the Global Resilience Index Initiative (GRII) during the COP 26.

About GRII

- It aims to build a universal model for assessing resilience to climate risks.
- GRII will be a open-source resource offering high-level metrics across the built environment, infrastructure, agriculture and societal exposures.
- It will be using cross-sector risk modelling experience, including public-private partnerships between governments, academia, insurance and engineering.

GRII Goals

- To provide reference risk data developed using insurance risk modelling principles.
- To provide shared standards and facilities applicable to a wide range of uses: Corporate climate risk disclosure, national adaptation planning and reporting, and the planning of pre-arranged humanitarian finance.

Cryptocarya Muthuvariana

Environment

Why in the news?

- Recently, Cryptocarya Muthuvariana, a new plant species has been discovered from the Southern Western Ghats, Kerala.

About The Species

- It grows to a height of about 10 to 15 metres. It can be identified by its 'not-too-broad leaves'.
- Cryptocarya genus belongs to the Lauraceae family. It comprises over 300 species, widely distributed over South America, South Africa, Madagascar, Asia, Australia, and Oceania.
- It has been named in honor of a local tribe, Muthuvar. It is also the first time, a species has been named after a tribe.
- The Mathuvar tribe is known to play a significant role in the conservation of forests.
- According to the researchers, the Western Ghats is home to around nine species of the genus Cryptocarya.
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Muthuvar Tribal Community

- The Muthuvan tribal community belonged to the Madurai dynasty.
- They live on the border hill forests of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- The highest concentration of the tribe is on the Anamudi hills (highest peak of Western Ghats).



Why in the news?

- The union minister for Jal Shakti has launched the River Cities Alliance.

About the alliance

- The Alliance's initiatives will be organized around three primary themes: networking, capacity building, and technical support.
- Although the Alliance began with the cities of the Ganga River, it was expanded to include cities outside the basin. River Cities Alliance is comprised of the following cities:
- Dehradun, Jangipur, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Mathura-Vrindavan, Srinagar, Begusarai, Bhagalpur, Patna, Berhampore, Hooghly-Chinsurah, Howrah, Varanasi, Maheshtala, Rajmahal, Sahibganj, Hyderabad, Ayodhya, Bijnor, Farrukhabad, Pune, Kanpur, Mirzapur, Prayagraj, Aurangabad, Chennai, Bhubaneswar, Munger, Udaipur, and Vijayawada. The RCA was launched in collaboration with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the National Institute for Urban Affairs (NIUA).

Objectives

- To provide a forum for member cities to discuss and exchange knowledge about critical areas of sustainable urban river management.
- To work toward the adoption and localization of national policies and instruments addressing critical river-related directions.
- To design city-specific urban river management plans and sectoral strategies that are necessary for sustainable urban river management.

Significance

- It will allow cities to learn from one another's achievements and failures, while also connecting people to rivers.
- It has the potential to be a critical link between cities and their rivers, as well as a model for all cities in the Basin and beyond to replicate.
- It will enable municipal administrators and their staff to take path-breaking initiatives while also learning from and inspiring one another.
- It enables towns to strengthen governance features of river cities and improves their liveability in order to attract external economic investment, gain access to cutting-edge knowledge and frameworks, and serve as a site for innovative demonstration projects.

Why in the news?

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has published its Statement of Commitment to Support NGFS [Network for Greening the Financial System] declaration. The declaration aims to contribute to the global response required to meet the climate goals.

About the financial system

- It is a group of central banks and supervisors willing to share best practices and contribute to the development of environment and climate risk management in the financial sector. It was created at the Paris One Planet Summit in December 2017. It is hosted by the Banque de France.
- It also seeks to mobilise mainstream finance to support the transition towards a sustainable economy.
- It includes central banks and financial supervisors.
- RBI join NGFS
- Reserve Bank of India(RBI) has joined the Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS) as a Member in April,2021.
- RBI expects to benefit from the membership of NGFS by learning from and contributing to global efforts on Green Finance which has assumed significance in the context of climate change.

Why in the news?

- Recently, a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) has finalised and adopted the draft report on The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019.

About the bill

- It was **introduced in Parliament** for the **first time in 2019** and sent to the JPC for scrutiny at the time.
- The Bill was drafted in response to the Supreme Court's August 2017 **Puttaswamy judgement**, which established the 'Right to Privacy' as a fundamental right.
- Objective:** The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals, and establishes a **Data Protection Authority** for the same.
- Applicability:** The Bill governs the processing of personal data by: (i) government, (ii) companies incorporated in India, and (iii) foreign companies dealing with personal data of individuals in India.
- Obligations of data fiduciary:** All data fiduciaries must undertake certain transparency and accountability measures such as:
 - Implementing security safeguards** (such as data encryption and preventing misuse of data),
 - Instituting grievance redressal mechanisms** to address complaints of individuals.
- Rights of the individual:** The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual (or data principal). These include the right to:
 - Obtain confirmation from the fiduciary** on whether their personal data has been processed and **Seek correction** of inaccurate, incomplete or out-of-date personal data
 - Have personal data transferred** to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances.
 - Restrict continuing disclosure** of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn.
- Grounds for processing personal data:** The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, **personal data can be processed without consent**. These include: (i) if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual, (ii) legal proceedings, (iii) to respond to a medical emergency.
- Social media intermediaries:** Intermediaries which enable online interaction between users and allow for sharing of information, which have users above a notified threshold, and whose actions can impact electoral democracy or public order, have certain obligations, which include providing a voluntary user verification mechanism for users in India.
- Data Protection Authority:** It may take steps to protect interests of individuals, prevent misuse of personal data and ensure compliance with the Bill. It will consist of a chairperson and six members, with at least 10 years' expertise in the field of data protection and information technology.
- Transfer of data outside India:** Sensitive personal data may be transferred outside India for processing if explicitly consented to by the individual, and subject to certain additional conditions. However, such sensitive personal data should continue to be stored in India.
- Exemptions:** The central government can exempt any of its agencies from the provisions of the Act:
- In interest of security of state**, public order, sovereignty and integrity of India and friendly relations with foreign states, and
- For preventing incitement to commission of any cognisable offence** relating to the above matters.
- Processing of personal data is also exempted** from provisions of the Bill for certain other purposes such as: (i) prevention, investigation, or prosecution of any offence, or (ii) personal, domestic, or (iii) journalistic purposes. However, such processing must be for a specific, clear and lawful purpose, with certain security safeguards.
- Sharing of non-personal data with government:** The central government may direct data fiduciaries to provide it with any: (i) non-personal data and (ii) anonymised personal data (where it is not possible to identify data principal) for better targeting of services.
- Amendments to other laws:** The Bill amends the **Information Technology Act, 2000** to delete the provisions related to compensation payable by companies for failure to protect personal data.

About Clause 35/Exemption clause

- The committee retained the Clause with minor modifications.

- It gives the government the ability to shield any of its agencies from the law.
- The Clause, in the name of "public order," "sovereignty," "friendly relations with foreign states," and "security of the state," exempts any agency under the Union Government from all or some of the law's provisions.
- The clause is intended to serve "certain legitimate purposes," and precedent exists in the form of reasonable constraints on an individual's liberty, as guaranteed by article 19 of the Constitution and the Puttaswamy ruling.

Issues associated with the bill

- **Against fundamental rights:** A Bill that seeks to provide blanket exemptions either in perpetuity or even for a limited period to the 'state' and its instrumentalities, it is **ultra vires of the Fundamental Right to privacy** as laid down by the Supreme Court of India in Puttaswamy (2017) judgement.
- **Need for localization: Security and government access are not achieved by localisation.** Even if the data is stored in the country, the **encryption keys may still be out of reach of national agencies.**
- **Lack of scrutiny from private entities:** In case of data transfer to fiduciaries or data collectors outside India, it states that the Central Government by notification can permit such fiduciaries to work outside India after consulting from the authority. But again, it **does not state any criteria or on what grounds such companies, agencies or data fiduciaries will be permitted to process the data.**
- **Starts up issues: Protectionism may backfire on India's own young startups** that are attempting global growth, or on larger firms that process foreign data in India, such as Tata Consulting Services and Wipro.
- **Data security issues :** The Data Protection Authority is to determine whether a **data breach needs to be reported to the affected individuals or not.** Further, the draft Bill **does not specify any timeline** for notification once the breach is identified. In the case of GDPR, for instance, it is **72 hours** once the breach is identified.

About clause 35/exemption clause

- The committee retained the Clause with minor modifications.
- It gives the government the ability to shield any of its agencies from the law.
- The Clause, in the name of "**public order**," "**sovereignty**," "**friendly relations with foreign states**," and "**security of the state**," exempts any agency under the Union Government from all or some of the law's provisions.
- The clause is intended to serve "certain legitimate purposes," and precedent exists in the form of reasonable constraints on an individual's liberty, as guaranteed by article 19 of the Constitution and the Puttaswamy ruling.

Recommendations

- **Data Localization Policy:** Development of an indigenous alternative financial system for cross-border payments along the lines of Ripple (US) and INSTEX (EU), and that the Central Government, in cooperation with all sectoral regulators, must prepare and promulgate a comprehensive data localisation policy.
- **Digital Device Certification:** The government should work to establish a formal certification process for all digital and IoT (Internet of Things) devices that will assure their data security integrity.
- **Social Media Accountability:** It has urged that all social media platforms that do not function as intermediaries be recognised as publishers and held liable for the content they contain, as well as for content posted on their platforms by unverified accounts. Additionally, the government should establish a user threshold for key social media platforms and a voluntary user verification process.
- **Data Sharing:** The panel advises that the government determine the method in which a data fiduciary can exchange, transfer, or transmit personal data to any person as part of any business transaction under clause 94, previously clause 93, which deals with granting the government the authority to make rules. A data fiduciary is an individual or an entity that determines the manner and purpose of personal data processing.

Vanniyar Reservation

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- **Madras high court** has declared as unconstitutional a legislation granting **10.5%** reservation to the Vanniyar community within the **existing 20% quota for the most backward classes (MBC)** in Tamil Nadu.

About Vanniyars

- They were one of the largest and most consolidated backward communities that had a consistency in retaining political representation from 1940s and 1950s. They were in the backward classes list for many years. The community, constituting a significant percentage in the State's northern districts, consists predominantly of



agricultural labourers. They had raised massive protests in the mid-1980s demanding 20% reservation in the state, and 2% in central services.

Reasons For The Court's Judgment

- The exclusive quota for one community was criticised on the ground that it was done with an **eye on the Assembly election**.
- The separate reservation for one caste amounted to **discrimination against all the other castes** in the same MBC category.
- Further, the State had **produced no quantifiable data to back its claim** that the Vanniyars were so far behind the other communities. In the absence of such data, it amounted to **legislation solely on the ground of caste**.
- The Act was unconstitutional mainly on the ground that the Assembly had **no legislative competence to pass the law on the date of the enactment**. This was because the **102nd Amendment to the Constitution** (which created the National Backward Class Commission and empowered the President to notify the backward classes list for each State) was in force in February 2021.

Whistle-Blower Portal

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- Recently, the **Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA)** has launched a 'whistle-blower Portal', as a part of 'Vigilance Awareness Week 2021'.

About the Whistle Blower Portal

- Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. (IREDA), a PSU under the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) today launched a 'Whistle blower Portal'. Through this portal, IREDA employees can raise concerns related to fraud, corruption, abuse of power etc.

Who is a Whistle-blower

- A **whistle-blower (whistle-blower or whistleblower)** is a person who reveals any information or action within a private or public institution that is judged unlawful, unethical, or incorrect. Whistleblowing, according to the **Companies Act of 2013**, is an action intended at calling stakeholders' attention to instances of unethical activities in an organisation.

Provisions of whistleBlower Protection Act, 2014

- It protects people who bring charges of corruption, purposeful misuse of power, or the commission of a criminal offence against a public servant to the attention of the authorities.
- The **Whistle blower Protection Act** contains procedures for hiding a whistle blower's identity.
- The legislation protects the complainant and anybody who assists in the investigation from being victimised.
- The law, on the other hand, **empowers the necessary authorities** to provide them with protection, including police protection and retribution against those who victimise them.
- The act establishes a mechanism to receive complaints related to disclosure of allegations of corruption or wilful misuse of power or discretion, against any public servant, and to inquire or cause an inquiry into such disclosure.
- The act also provides adequate safeguards **against victimization of the person** making such complaints.
- The law does not allow **anonymous complaints** to be made and clearly states that no action will be taken by a competent authority if the complainant does not establish his/her identity.
- The maximum time period for making a complaint is **seven years**.
- The act is not applicable to the **Special Protection Group (SPG)** personnel and officers, constituted under the Special Protection Group Act, 1988.
- Any person aggrieved by any order of the Competent Authority can make an appeal to the concerned High Court within a period of sixty days from the date of the order.
- **Any person who negligently or mala-fidely reveals the identity of a complainant will be punishable with imprisonment for a term extending up to 3 years and a fine which may extend up to Rs 50,000.**
- If the disclosure is done mala-fidely and knowingly that it was incorrect or false or misleading, the person will be punishable with imprisonment for a term extending up to **2 years and a fine extending up to Rs. 30,000.**

- The Competent Authority prepares a consolidated annual report of the performance of its activities and submits it to the Central or State Government that will be further laid before each House of Parliament or State Legislature, as the case may be.
- The Whistleblowers Act overrides the **Official Secrets Act, 1923** and allows the complainant to make public interest disclosure before competent authority even if they are violative of the later act but not harming the sovereignty of the nation.

Provisions of Whistle Blowers Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2015

- The bill establishes a **process for receiving and investigating public interest** disclosures including acts of corruption, willful misuse of power or discretion, or criminal offences committed by public officials.
- The bill **makes it illegal to submit a corruption-related** disclosure if it fits into one of ten categories.
- These categories include: (i) economic, scientific, and national security interests of India; (ii) Cabinet proceedings; (iii) intellectual property; (iv) information obtained in a fiduciary position, and so on.
- The **Official Secrets Act (OSA)**, enacted in 1923, prohibits certain disclosures. The Bill changes this, making it illegal to make disclosures that are covered by the OSA.
- If any public interest disclosure received by a **Competent Authority** falls into one of the ten forbidden categories, it will be reported to a government-authorized authority. This authority will make a final decision that will be legally binding.

Various committees that emphasized on whistleblower protection.

- The necessity for **whistleblower protection** was originally emphasised in a 2001 report by the **Law Commission of India**. The Committee went so far as to propose a law to address the problem.
- The **Hota Committee** (Committee on Public Service Reforms) considered protecting civil officials who submit sensitive information about power and authority abuses in 2004. It did not, however, make any recommendations.
- In response to **Satyendra Dubey's plea**, the government issued the 'Public Interest Disclosure and Protection of Informers Resolution (PIDPIR)' in 2004, which empowered the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) to act on complaints from whistle-blowers.
- In addition, the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission's report** from 2007 stated that a law protecting whistle-blowers was needed.

Issues faced by Whistleblowers

- **Whistleblowers** are disliked by the government, corporations, and even society to some level, with some countries even referring to them as "traitors." **The storey of Wikileaks'** Julian Assange and Edward Snowden exemplifies this idea.
- **Whistleblowers face legal action**, criminal accusations, social disgrace, and the possibility of being fired from any position, office, or job.
- Character assassination, **official reprimand**, and difficult legal processes are all examples of vindictive strategies used to make an individual's work more difficult and/or insignificant.
- Whistleblowers are nonetheless **in a precarious position** in a, despite the high fines, because whistleblower cases generally contain a complex combination of facts and job history.

National Legal Services Day 2021

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- National Legal Services Day is marked across the country annually on 9 November. The day is observed to commemorate the enactment of the **Legal Services Authorities Act** and to create awareness about the various provisions related to the act.

About the Legal Services Authorities Act

- It was enacted in 1987 to provide competent and **free legal aid** to people who belonged to **marginalised socio-economic communities** in the country. The Act also mentions the **setting up of Lok Adalats** for the settlement of disputes amicably.

- Act provides free legal aid to a person if any of the **following criteria** are met:
 - a member of a **Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe**.
 - a woman, child, **specialty-abled or mentally challenged**.
 - a **victim of human trafficking or beggar**.
 - an **industrial workman**.
 - Have an **annual income of less than Rs 9,000** or any such amount laid down by the government.
 - A **victim of "a mass disaster**, ethnic violence, caste atrocity", natural or industrial disaster.
 - In custody, juvenile home or protective custody or in a psychiatric nursing home or hospital.
- The **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)** will bear the costs of filing or defending the case, as well as provide the person with counsel at the expense of the state.

NALSA

- It has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society.
- The **Chief Justice of India is the Patron-in-Chief** and the Senior most Hon'ble Judge, Supreme Court of India is the Executive Chairman of the Authority.

NALSA and constitution

- 14 – Makes it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law.
- 21– Right to free legal aid or free legal service is FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.
- 22(1) – Right to consult and to be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice in case of arrest.
- 39A (Part IV DPSPs) – of the Constitution of India provides for justice for all and free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society. (Added by 42nd CAA 1976)

OBJECTIVES

- To realize constitutional goals, the Legal Services Authorities Act (1987) was enacted by the Parliament to establish a nationwide uniform network.
- Providing free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society on the basis of equal opportunity.
- The NALSA lays down policies, principles, guidelines and frames effective and economical schemes for the State Legal Services Authorities to implement the Legal Services Programmes throughout the country.

STRUCTURE

- **Supreme Court Legal Services Committee** – has been constituted to administer and implement the legal services programme in so far as it relates to the SUPREME COURT.
- **State Legal Services Authority** – In every State have been constituted.
- **High Court Legal Services Committee** – In every HIGH COURT have been constituted.
- **District Legal Services Authorities** – In every district have been constituted
- **Taluk Legal Services Committees** – constituted in most of the Taluks to provide free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalat in the State.

COMPOSITION OF NALSA

- **NALSA** shall consist of the CJI who shall be the Patron-in-Chief and a serving or retired Judge of the SC to be nominated by the President, in consultation with the CJI, who shall be the Executive Chairman.
- **Persons eligible for getting free legal services includes –**
 - Women and children
 - Members of SC/ST
 - Industrial workmen
 - Victims of mass disaster, violence, flood, drought, earthquake, industrial disaster.
 - Differently abled persons.
 - Victims of trafficking in human beings or begar.



FUNCTIONS OF NALSA

- Spreading legal literacy and awareness à Information – Education – Communication (IEC) approach
- Undertaking social justice litigations.
- To organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- Providing free and competent legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society.
- To promote deliverable justice on the basis of equal opportunity.
- Victim compensation.

LEGAL AID AS A HUMAN RIGHT

- Under 21 of Indian constitution right to free legal aid or free legal service is fundamental right.
- 39A of constitution (added through 42nd Amendment Act along with Art. 39, 43A, 48A) provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society and ensures justice for all.
- Legal aid as a human right is envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

MPLAD Scheme

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- Union Cabinet restored the **Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)** that was suspended for two years (2020-21 & 2021-22) for managing adverse impacts of covid 19.

About Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

- The MPLADS is a Plan Scheme **fully funded by the Government of India**. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is Rs. 5 crore.
- It was introduced in December 1993.
- **Lok Sabha Members** can recommend works within their Constituencies
- Elected Members of **Rajya Sabha** can recommend works within the State of Election.
- **Nominated Members** of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the country.

Objective:

- The objective is to enable the Members of Parliament (MP) to suggest and execute developmental works of capital nature based on locally felt needs with emphasis on creation of durable assets.

Administration:

- The **Ministry of Rural Development** initially administered the scheme.
- Since October 1994 it has been transferred to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (henceforth, the Ministry). The Ministry prepared guidelines of the scheme and amended this from time to time.

Development of Areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe:

- There is a greater need to develop areas inhabited by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in order to give special attention for the infrastructure development of such areas.
- M.Ps are to recommend every year, works costing **at least 15 percent of the MPLADS entitlement** for the year for areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste population and **7.5 per cent for areas** inhabited by S.T. population.
- In other words, out of an amount of Rs.5 crores, a M.P. shall recommend for areas inhabited by S.C. population, Rs.75 lacs and Rs.37.5 lacs for areas inhabited by S.T. population.
- In case there is **insufficient tribal population** in the area of Lok Sabha Member, they may recommend this amount for the **creation of community assets** in tribal areas **outside of their constituency** but within their State of election.

Infrastructure quality:

- All works to meet locally felt infrastructure and development needs, with an emphasis on creation of **durable assets** in the constituency are permissible under MPLADS.

Authority:

- It shall be the responsibility of the **district authority** to enforce the provision of the guideline.
- The extant provisions of State and Central Government's will be used to declare areas eligible for utilization for funds meant for the benefit of SC & ST population.
- District Collector/District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner will generally be the District Authority to implement MPLADS in the district.
- If the District Planning Committee is empowered by the State Government, the Chief Executive Officer of the District Planning Committee can function as the District Authority.
- In the case of Municipal Corporations, the Commissioner/Chief Executive Officer may function as the District Authority.
- In this regard, if there is any doubt, the Government of India in consultation with the State/UT Government, will decide the District Authority for the purpose of MPLADS implementation.

Problematic transferring Land Property:

- In the Tribal areas and notified Scheduled areas where transferring land title is not possible, the MPLADS works for the creation of community assets may be guided by the same practice through which the State Government undertake the creation of all other public works like schools, hospitals, roads, etc. under other Central/State Government developmental scheme.

Database maintenance:

- The District Authorities should maintain information and data on implementation of the provision for SC/ST areas including interchangeability of funds and also furnish the same on quarterly basis to the nodal department of the State Government.

Natural & Man-made Calamities:

- MPLADS works can also be implemented in the areas prone to or affected by the calamities like floods, cyclone, Tsunami, earthquake, hailstorm, avalanche, cloud burst, pest attack, landslides, tornado, drought, fire, chemical, biological and radiological hazards.

Rehabilitation Works:

- The Nodal Department shall identify the rehabilitation works within a period of one month of commitment of MPLADS funds and the rehabilitation works should be completed by the concerned District Authority within 8 months of the approval of the works.
- In the event of "**Calamity of severe nature**" in any part of the country, an MP can recommend works up to a maximum of Rs.1 crore for the affected district.
- Whether a calamity is of severe nature or not, will be decided by the Government of India. The funds in this regard will be released by the District Authority of Nodal district of the MP concerned to the District Authority of the affected district to get permissible works done.

Significance

- The entire population across the country stands to benefit through the creation of durable assets of locally felt needs, namely drinking water, education, public health, sanitation and roads etc.
- Until 2017, nearly 19 lakh projects worth Rs 45,000 crore had been sanctioned under the MPLAD Scheme.
- Third-party evaluators appointed by the government reported that the creation of **good quality assets** had a "positive impact on the local economy, social fabric and feasible environment".
- Further, 82% of the projects have been in rural areas and the remaining in urban/semi-urban areas.

Challenges

- **Unwise Allocation of Funds:** Most of the MPs while allocating funds to individual works seem to be thrifty, despite the fact that there is a large unspent balance of MPLADS.
- **Maintenance of assets:** Maintenance of assets created is another area of weakness of the scheme. This seems to have received less attention than it deserves.
- **Monitoring:** It is difficult to assess the design, implementation and impact of the scheme, and identify the areas of its weakness, and strength.

- **Corruption associated with allocation of works:** The Comptroller and Auditor General has on many occasions highlighted gaps in implementation.
- **Against Spirit of Constitution:** It is inconsistent with the spirit of the Constitution as it co-opts legislators into executive functioning. The workload on MPs created by the scheme diverted their attention from holding the government accountable and other legislative work.
- **Awareness about scheme:** There is a widespread lack of awareness about the scheme among the people. Awareness among the people is must for successful implementation of the scheme.
- **Various Recommendations:** The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2000) and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007), recommended discontinuation of the scheme. In 2010, the Supreme Court held that the scheme was constitutional.

Bribery Risk Matrix 2021

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- **India has slipped to 82nd position** in 2021, five places down from 77th rank last year, in a global list that measures business bribery risks.

About the index

- The list by **TRACE**, an anti-bribery standard setting organisation, measures business bribery risk in 194 countries, territories, and autonomous and semi-autonomous regions. It compiles data from a variety of public-interest and international organizations, including the United Nations, World Bank, V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg, and the World Economic Forum.

Methods of Calculation: Four factors are used to compute the score:

- Anti-bribery deterrence and enforcement
- Business Interactions with government
- Transparency in government and the civil service.
- Capacity for civil society monitoring, including the role of the media.

Performance of India and the world

- **India:**
 - **India** has dropped five spots to **82nd place in 2021**, down from 77th place last year.
 - India was ranked 77th in 2020 with a score of 45 but was ranked 82nd this year with a score of 44.
 - India scored better than Pakistan, China, Nepal, and Bangladesh, its neighbours. Bhutan, on the other hand, was ranked 62nd.
- **World:**
 - The countries with the highest risk of commercial bribery are North Korea, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, and Eritrea, while the countries with the lowest risk are Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and New Zealand.
 - When compared to global trends, the business bribery risk environment in the United States has deteriorated significantly over the last five years.
 - The commercial bribery risk increased **across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** countries from 2020 to 2021

Bhumi Samvaad

Polity & Governance

Why in News?

- Recently, the Ministry of Rural Development inaugurated 'Bhumi Samvaad' – National Workshop on Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme (DILRMP).

About Bhumi Samvaad

- It is a Central Sector scheme that has been extended to 2023-24, to complete its original targets as well as expand its ambit with a slew of new schemes.
- It attempts to build upon the commonalities that exist in the arena of land records in various States to develop an



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appropriate Integrated Land Information Management System (ILIMS) across the country, on which different States can also add State-specific needs as they may deem relevant and appropriate.

- ILIMS: The system contains information on parcel ownership, land use, taxation, location boundaries, land value, encumbrances and many more.
- It is being implemented by the Department of Land Resources (Ministry of Rural Development).
- **Aim:** To usher in a system of updated land records, automated and automatic mutation, integration between textual and spatial records, inter-connectivity between revenue and registration, to replace the present deeds registration and presumptive title system with that of conclusive titling with title guarantee.

Components:

- Computerization of land records.
- Survey/re-survey.
- Computerization of Registration.
- Modern record rooms/land records management centres at tehsil/taluk/circle/block level.
- Training & capacity building.

Benefits:

- Real-time land ownership records will be available to the citizen.
- Free accessibility to the records will reduce interface between the citizen and the Government functionaries, thereby reducing rent seeking and harassment.
- Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode of service delivery will further reduce citizen interface with Govt. machinery, while adding to the convenience.
- The single-window service or the web-enabled "anytime-anywhere" access will save the citizen time and effort in obtaining RoRs (Record of Rights), etc.
- Automatic and automated mutations will significantly reduce the scope of fraudulent property deals.
- Conclusive titling will also significantly reduce litigation.
- Certificates based on land data (e.g., domicile, caste, income, etc.) will be available to the citizen through computers.
- This method will permit e-linkages to credit facilities.
- Information on eligibility for Government programs will be available, based on the data.

Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Report

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (**International IDEA**) released GSoD.

About the Report

- The reports refer to three main regime types: **democracies, hybrid and authoritarian regimes. Hybrid and authoritarian regimes are both classified as non-democratic.** The Global State of Democracy 2021 reviews the state of democracy around the world over the course of 2020 and 2021, with democratic trends since 2015 used as contextual reference.
- It is based on analysis of events that have impacted democratic governance globally since the start of the pandemic, based on various data sources, including International IDEA's Global Monitor of Covid-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, and International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices.
- The GSoD Indices provide quantitative data on democratic quality for the same countries, based on 28 aspects of democracy up until the end of 2020.

Highlights of the Report

- The number of countries moving towards authoritarianism in 2020 was higher than that of countries going in the other direction, towards democracy. 20 countries moved in the direction of authoritarianism, seven countries moved towards democracy.
- The pandemic has prolonged this existing negative trend into a five-year stretch, the longest such period since the start of the third wave of democratisation in the 1970s.
- Democratically elected Governments, including established democracies, are increasingly adopting authoritarian tactics.

Performance analysis of various studies

- The report highlighted the case of Brazil and India as "some of the most worrying examples of backsliding". However, India remained in the category of a mid-level performing democracy as it has since 2000.
- The United States and three members of the European Union [Hungary, Poland and Slovenia] have also seen concerning democratic declines.

- International IDEA is a Stockholm based intergovernmental think-tank that works to boost democracy globally.
- **India is one of the founding members** of this organisation.
- The GSoD 2021 report assesses 165 countries on 116 indicators spread across five identified core attributes of democracy:
 - Representative government
 - Fundamental rights
 - Checks on Government
 - Impartial administration
 - Participatory engagement

Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs)(scheme)

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** has started finalising its recommendation to provide integrated **Command and Control Centres (ICCCs)** as a service to states and smaller cities.

About Integrated Command and Control Centres

- Setting up ICCCs for each city is a critical step in **the Smart Cities project**, which aspires to build 100 citizen-friendly and self-sustaining urban settlements.
- **These ICCCs were developed to let authorities track the status of various facilities in real-time.**
- Initially, the system was **intended to control and monitor water and electricity supply**, sanitation, traffic flow, integrated building management, city connectivity, and Internet infrastructure.
- However, these centres will now monitor a variety of additional parameters and will be linked to the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)' sections (Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems) network.**
- The MoHUA plans to finalise the ICCC model and pilot it in **six states:** Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu.
- These ICCCs have been operationalized in 69 cities so far, with Agartala, Indore, and Vadodara ranked best for the **sustainable business strategy** of these centres.

Smart City Mission

- It is an innovative programme led by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** that aims to boost economic growth and improve people's quality of life by supporting local development and using technology to achieve smart outcomes for citizens.
- **Goal:** To encourage cities that provide basic infrastructure and provide a decent quality of life for their residents, as well as a clean and sustainable environment and Smart Solutions application.
- **Focus:** Create a replicable model that will operate as a lighthouse for other aspiring cities, with a focus on sustainable and inclusive development and a focus on compact regions.
- **Strategy:**
 - At least one Smart Solution is implemented city-wide as part of a pan-city initiative.
 - With help of these 3 models, develop areas one by one:
 - Retrofitting.
 - Redevelopment.
 - Greenfield.
 - The Mission will operate in 100 cities for five years, beginning in financial year (FY) 2015-16 and ending in financial year (FY) 2019-20.
 - It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Why in the News?

- A district autonomous council in Meghalaya has announced that it would introduce the 'Khasi Inheritance of Property Bill, 2021'.

About Provisions

- The proposed Bill is envisaged to provide the "**equitable distribution**" of parental property among siblings – both male and female.
- The Bill would **let parents decide** who they want to will their property to.
- It would **prevent a sibling from getting parental property** if they marry a non-Khasi and accept the spouse's customs and culture.
- If implemented, the proposed Bill would **modify an age-old customary practice of inheritance** of the matrilineal Khasi tribe. Moreover, the Bill has also brought into focus the **practise of matriliney in Meghalaya**.

Matrilineal System of Inheritance

- The three tribes of Meghalaya — **Khasis, Jaintias, and Garos** — practise a **matrilineal system of inheritance**.
- In this system, **lineage and descent** are **traced through the mother's clan**. In other words, children take the **mother's surname**, the husband moves into his wife's house, and the **youngest daughter** (khatduh) of the family is handed over the **full share of the ancestral** — or the clan's — property.
- The khatduh becomes the "**custodian**" of the land and assumes all responsibility associated with the land, including taking care of aged parents, unmarried or destitute siblings.
- The **khatduh cannot sell the property** without the permission of her mother's brother (maternal uncle).
- Moreover, this inheritance tradition applies **only to ancestral** or **clan/community property** which has been with the family for years. On the other hand, the self-acquired property can be distributed equally among siblings.

Issues with the bill

- Use property as Collateral: Many times, boys are not able to take loans because there is no collateral to show.
- Litigations: Sometimes, when a couple has no children, and there is no genuine heir, the clan takes over the property, as per custom. It leads to a number of lawsuits by children against their parents.
- Inequitable resource distribution: Over the years, a few groups have protested the system of property inheritance, saying it "disinherits" men.

Draft Mediation Bill**Polity & Governance****Why in the News?**

- The government has issued a Draft Mediation Bill for Public Consultation.

About the bill

- The draft Bill proposes for **pre-litigation mediation** and at the same time **safeguards the interest of the litigants** to approach the competent adjudicatory forums and courts in case an urgent relief is sought.
- As per the draft Bill, the successful outcome of mediation in the form of the **Mediation Settlement Agreement** has been made **enforceable by law**.
- Since the Mediation Settlement Agreement is out of the consensual agreement between the parties, the **challenge to the same has been permitted on limited grounds**.
- As per the draft bill, the mediation process **protects the confidentiality of the mediation** undertaken and provides for immunity in certain cases against its disclosure.
- The draft bill also says that registration of Mediation Settlement Agreement has been **provided for with State, District and Taluk Legal Authorities within 90 days** to ensure maintenance of authenticated records of the settlement so arrived.
- It also provides for the establishment of the **Mediation Council of India**.

Why in the News?

- A chief whip of the largest party in opposition in the Rajya Sabha has moved a privilege motion against Culture Minister over the appointment of the chairperson of the National Monuments Authority.

About Parliamentary Privileges

- Parliamentary Privileges are **certain rights and immunities** enjoyed by members of Parliament, **individually and collectively**, so that they can "**effectively discharge their functions**".
- Article 105 of the Constitution expressly mentions two privileges, that is, **freedom of speech in Parliament** and **right of publication of its proceedings**.
- Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.
- Motion against breaches :**
 - When any of these rights and immunities are **disregarded**, the offence is called a **breach of privilege** and is **punishable under law of Parliament**.
 - A notice is moved in the **form of a motion** by **any member of either House** against those being held guilty of breach of privilege.
 - Its purpose is to **censure the concerned minister**.
- Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairperson**
 - The Speaker/RS chairperson is the **first level of scrutiny** of a privilege motion.
 - The Speaker/Chairperson can decide on the **privilege motion himself** or **herself** or **refer it to the privileges committee** of the Parliament.
 - If the Speaker/Chairperson gives **consent under relevant rules**, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.
- Applicability :**
 - The Constitution **also extends** the parliamentary privileges to those persons who are **entitled to speak** and **take part in the proceedings** of a House of Parliament or any of its committees. These include the **Attorney General of India**.
 - The parliamentary privileges do **not extend to the President** who is also an integral part of the Parliament. Article 361 of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.

Tenure of ED, CBI

Polity & Governance

Why in News?

- The Government of India has brought two ordinances to extend the tenure of Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) directors up to 5 years.

About the ordinance

- Currently, the tenure of chiefs of ED and CBI is **two years**. While they can **not be removed** (with some exceptions) **before their tenure ends**, an extension can be given by the government.
- The Delhi Special Police Establishment (**DSPE**) **Act, 1946** and the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act, 2003** have been **amended**.
- Key provisions of the ordinances :
 - The CBI or ED director can be **appointed first for a period of two years**. But if needed, the tenure can be **extended for three more years**. This will require three **separate annual extensions**.
 - However, **no extension** can be granted to an ED or CBI chief **after a period of five years**.

Supreme Court Observation on Such Practices

- the court had declined to interfere with the government's order, saying that the provision in The CVC Act, 2003 that chiefs of the ED shall hold office for "not less than two years", could not be read to mean not more than two years.



- no further extension shall be granted" to ED Chief beyond November 2021.
- extension of tenure granted to officers who have attained the age of superannuation should be done only in rare and exceptional cases.
- Reasonable period of extension can be granted to facilitate the completion of ongoing investigations only after reasons are recorded by the Committee constituted under Section 25 (a) of The CVC Act.
- Any extension of tenure granted to persons holding the post of Director of Enforcement after attaining the age of superannuation should be for a short period.

Challenges

- Amending the Acts through Ordinances will not obliterate the judgement of the Supreme Court. The judgement is law under Article 141.
- this ordinance is against the crux of Prakash Singh judgment, 'fixed tenure' for Police Chief.
- It will lead to politicization of the institutions.

Central Bureau of Investigation

- Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is an anti-corruption body in the country.
- It looks the matters related to crime and it is also the Interpol agency in India.
- The CBI has its Academy located at Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.
- Non-statutory and non-constitutional body.
- The establishment of the CBI was recommended by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962–1964).
- It derives its powers from the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
- Motto: "**Industry, Impartiality, and Integrity**"

Structure of C.B.I.

- The CBI is headed by a director, an IPS officer with a rank of Director General of Police or Commissioner of Police (State). The director is appointed for a term of two years.
- The amended Delhi Special Police Establishment Act empowers a committee to appoint the director of CBI.
- The committee comprises of the following people:
 - Prime Minister (Chairperson)
 - Leader of Opposition
 - Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court Judge recommended by the Chief Justice.

Functions of CBI

- The broad function of the CBI is to investigate:
- Cases of corruption and fraud committed by public servants of all Central government, Departments, Central Public Sector Undertakings, and Central Financial Institutions.
- Economic crimes, including bank frauds, financial frauds, Import-Export & Foreign Exchange violations, large-scale smuggling of narcotics, antiques, cultural property, and smuggling of other contraband items, etc.
- Special Crimes, such as cases of terrorism, bomb blasts, sensational homicides, kidnapping for ransom, and crimes committed by the mafia/the underworld.

Enforcement Directorate (ED)

- In 1956, Enforcement Directorate (ED) was established.
- Its Headquarters is situated in New Delhi.
- ED is responsible for enforcement of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA), and certain provisions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

Functions of the Enforcement Directorate:

- ED investigates suspected violations of the provisions of the FEMA.
- ED collects, develops, and disseminates intelligence information related to violations of FEMA, 1999. The ED receives intelligence inputs from Central and State Intelligence agencies, complaints, etc.
- ED has the power to attach the asset of the culprits found guilty of the violation of FEMA.



- To undertake, search, seizure, arrest, prosecution action, and survey, etc. against offender of PMLA offense.
- To provide and seek mutual legal assistance to/from respective states in respect of attachment/confiscation of proceeds of crime and handed over the transfer of accused persons under the Money Laundering Act.
- To settle cases of violations of the erstwhile FERA, 1973 and FEMA, 1999, and to decide penalties imposed on the conclusion of settlement proceedings.

Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996

Polity & Governance

Why in News?

- One-day National Conference on provisions of the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996 (PESA) in New Delhi.

About PESA

- The Parliament enacted a special legislation called Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) in 1996 and came into force on 24th December 1996.
- It is now applicable in the Fifth Schedule areas, which deals with the administration of the districts dominated by the tribal communities, and is in force in 10 states of the country.
 - These states include Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Telangana.
- **Objectives**
 - To extend the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution relating to the Panchayats to the Scheduled Areas with certain modifications.
 - To provide self-rule for the bulk of the tribal population.
 - To have village governance with participatory democracy and to make the Gram Sabha a nucleus of all activities.
 - To evolve a suitable administrative framework consistent with traditional practices.
 - To safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of tribal communities.

Gram Sabha's Importance in the PESA Act

Polity & Governance

Democratic Decentralization:

- PESA empowers gram sabha to approve development plans and govern all social sectors through **democratic decentralisation**. This includes the supervision of:
 - Jal, jangal, and zamin resources (water, forest and land)
 - Minor forest produce
 - Processes and persons who implement policies are referred to as human resources.
 - Local market management
 - Preventing land encroachment
 - regulating intoxicants

Preserving Cultural Identity:

- Gram Sabha have authority over cultural identity and tradition, as well as control over schemes that affect tribals and natural resources within a village's boundaries.

Conflict Resolution:

- The PESA Act gives gram sabha safety net over their rights and surroundings in the face of external and internal problems.
- The gram sabha would be given the authority to oversee and restrict the manufacture, transportation, sale, and consumption of intoxicants inside the village limits.

Issues in the implementation of PESA

- State governments are required to establish state laws in accordance with this national law for their Scheduled Areas. As a result, the PESA was only partially implemented. In Adivasi areas, like Jharkhand, partial implementation has harmed self-governance.



- Many experts have claimed that PESA failed to deliver because of a lack of clarity, legal flaws, bureaucratic apathy, a lack of political will, opposition to change in the power hierarchy, and so on.
- Social audits undertaken across the state revealed that numerous developmental programmes were approved on paper by Gram Sabha without any discussion or decision-making.

Section 7 of POCSO Act

Polity & Governance

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court quashed a Bombay High Court decision to acquit a man charged with assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) solely on the grounds that he groped the child over her clothes without "skin-to-skin" contact.

About this section

- **Section 7 mandates** that "whoever with sexual intent touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person, or does any other act with sexual intent which involves physical contact without penetration is said to commit sexual assault".
- "The act of touching a sexual part of the body **with sexual intent** will **not be trivialised** and **not excluded** under Section 7 of the POCSO Act," the Bench held.
- It also observed that the "**purpose of law is not to allow the offender to sneak out of the mesh of law**".
- The court said limiting the ambit of "touch" to a narrow and pedantic definition would lead to an "**absurd interpretation**". The Bench noted that the most important ingredient in Section 7 was the **sexual intent of the offender** and **not skin-to-skin contact**.
- The conclusion that "**sexual intent**" mentioned in the provision should be **ex facie skin to skin** would **defeat the object of the provision**. It would, rather than giving effect to the rule, destroy it.

About POSCO Act:

- **The POCSO act was enacted in 2012** especially to protect children aged less than 18 from sexual assault sexual abuse, sexual harassment and pornography.
- The act mandates that investigation in the cases is to be completed in two months (from the date of registration of FIR) and trial in six months.
- The Act **defines** a child as any person below eighteen years of age.
- POCSO states **a sexual assault** is to be considered aggravated if-
 - The abused child is mentally ill or,
 - When the abuse is committed by
 - A member of the armed forces or Security forces
 - A public servant
 - A person in a position of trust or authority of the child, like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor or a person-management or staff of a hospital – whether Government or private.
- It prescribes **rigorous imprisonment** for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and also fine as punishment for aggravated penetrative sexual assault.
- It also makes provisions for **avoiding the re-victimisation** of the child at the hands of the judicial system.
- The Act also makes it **mandatory to report** such cases.
 - It makes it the legal duty of a person aware of the offence to report the sexual abuse.
 - In case he fails to do so, the person can be punished with six months imprisonment or fine.
- It also prescribes punishment to the people who **traffic children** for sexual purposes.
- The Act also provides for **punishment against false complaints** or untrue information.
- The act was **amended** in 2019.
- Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape.
- A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the **rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority**, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others.
- Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This means that **any sex with a minor is rape**.

Why in News?

- NITI Aayog under the Indo-German Cooperation released the inaugural Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Urban Index and Dashboard 2021–22.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Urban Index and Dashboard 2021-22

- Under the aegis of Indo-German Development Cooperation, the index and dashboard are the product of a cooperation between the **NITI Aayog-Germany's International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) and the BMZ** to drive SDG localization in our cities.
- It evaluates **56 urban areas** based on 77 SDG indicators across 46 SDG targets.
- At the city level, it will promote SDG localization and implement effective SDG monitoring.

The scale of evaluation:

- On a scale of 0-100, urban areas are ranked.
- A score of 100 indicates that the urban area has met the 2030 targets; a score of 0 indicates that it is the least likely of the selected urban areas to meet the targets.
- The overall or composite urban area scores are then calculated from the Goal-wise scores to assess the urban area's overall performance.
- Based on their composite score, urban areas have been categorised as follows:
 - 0–49: aspirant
 - Performer: 50–64
 - 65–99 front-runner
 - 100: Achiever

State Wise Performance:

- Top performers include: **Shimla, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi** are all the top performers.
- Worst performers include: **Dhanbad, Meerut, Itanagar, Guwahati, and Patna** are all the worst performers.

Mysuru Declaration

Polity & Governance

Why in the news?

- The Participants from 16 States signed the Mysuru Declaration and resolved to roll out the Common Minimum Service delivery by Panchayats across the country from April 1, 2022.

About the declaration

- The Mysuru declaration is aimed at recognising **Citizen Centric Services** as the "Heart of Governance".
- This declaration talks about **both the services delivered by panchayats directly and services of other departments** that are facilitated by panchayats through a monitoring mechanism.
- It aims to recognise the efforts to **promote inclusive and accountable Local Self Governments** in delivery of services, in consonance with the priorities and the aspirations of our citizens.
- As part of the declaration, participating states have committed to:
 - **Increase the availability of Citizen Services at the grassroots levels** in a timely and efficient manner, commencing with offering of the following basic, statutory and/ or essential services at the Gram Panchayat level from 1st April 2022
 - Implement the **highest standards of professional integrity** and **accountability** towards timely delivery of Public Services
- Note: The Ministry of Panchayat Raj in association with National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Hyderabad and Abdul Nazir State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Mysuru had organised a **National Consultative Workshop on Citizen Charter and Delivery of Services by Panchayats**.
 - During the workshop, participants from 16 States **signed the Mysuru Declaration**.

Why in the news?

- The Union Education Minister has launched the Bhasha Sangam Initiative for schools, Bhasha Sangam Mobile App and Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Quiz App.

About Bhasha Sangam Initiative

- It is an **initiative of the Ministry of Education** under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, **to teach basic sentences of everyday usage in 22 Indian languages** (Eighth Schedule languages).
- It is **developed by** the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- The idea is that people should acquire **basic conversational skills** in an Indian language other than their mother tongue.
- It is **available on DIKSHA, ePathshala** and **through 22 booklets**.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated this scheme for Support for Marginalized Individuals.

About

- It is a new Scheme after the **merger of existing Schemes for Beggars and Transgenders**.
- "SMILE stands for **Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise**".
- Focus** : Focus of the scheme is on **rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counseling**, basic documentation, education, skill development, economic linkages etc.
- It includes sub scheme : '**Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation** of persons engaged in the act of Begging'.
- Implementation** : The scheme would be **implemented with the support of** State/UT Governments/Local Urban Bodies, Voluntary Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) , institutions and others.
- Beggars In India** : According to the Census 2011 total number of beggars in India is **4,13,670** (including 2,21,673 males and 1,91,997 females) and the **number has increased from the last census**.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is preparing to soon roll out a National Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars.

About the scheme

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had launched a **pilot project** on the Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons engaged in the act of Begging.
- The pilot project was **launched in 10 cities** namely Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Indore, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, Patna and Ahmedabad.
- Implementation** : The projects are being implemented by **State Governments/UTs/Local Urban Bodies** and

Voluntary Organizations

- Features** : Several comprehensive measures taken under this project include **survey and identification of beggars, mobilization, basic hygiene and medical facilities, providing basic documentation, counselling, rehabilitation** etc
- Based on this pilot project, the Government is **planning to launch a National Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Beggars**.
- This scheme will be **part of the SMILE Scheme** (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise). It will also include a **separate scheme** for welfare of transgender persons.

Status of Beggars in India

- According to the 2011 Census, the total number of beggars in India are around 4,13,670 (2,21,673 males and 1,91,997 females), an increase from the last census.
- **West Bengal is at the top of the chart**, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which are ranked second and third, respectively. According to the 2011 census, Lakshadweep has two vagrants.
- New Delhi has the largest number of beggars (2187) **among the union territories**, followed by Chandigarh with 121.
- Assam topped the list among the **northeastern states** with 22,116 beggars, while Mizoram came in last with 53

National Health Accounts (NHA) Estimates for India

Society & Reports

Why in the news?

- **The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare released findings of the National Health Accounts (NHA) Estimates for India for 2017-18 recently.**

About NHA estimates report & key findings-

- This is the fifth consecutive NHA report produced by National Health Systems Resource Centre (NHSRC), designated as National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat (NHATS) in 2014 by the Union Health Ministry.
- The NHA estimates are prepared by using an accounting framework based on the internationally accepted System of Health Accounts (SHA) 2011, provided by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The 2017-18 NHA estimates not only show government expenditure on health exhibiting an increasing trend but also growing trust in the public health care system.
- With the present estimate of NHA 2017-18, India has had a continuous Time Series on NHA estimates for both government and private sources for five years since 2013-14.
- The NHA estimates for 2017-18 clearly show that there has been an increase in the share of government health expenditure in the total GDP of the country from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.35% in 2017-18.
- Additionally, the share of Government Health Expenditure in total health expenditure has also increased overtime. In 2017-18, the share of government expenditure was 40.8%, which is much higher than 28.6% in 2013-14.
- The findings also show that the Government's health expenditure as a share of total Government expenditure has increased from 3.78% to 5.12% between 2013-14 and 2017-18, clearly indicating Government's priority for the health sector in the country.
- In per capita terms, the government health expenditure has increased from Rs 1042 to Rs.1753 between 2013-14 to 2017-18.
- There has been an increase in share of primary and secondary care in case of Government health expenditure.
- In the case of the private sector, the share of tertiary care has increased but primary and secondary care show a declining trend.
- The share of social security expenditure on health, which includes the social health insurance program, Government financed health insurance schemes, and medical reimbursements made to Government employees, has increased.
- The foreign aid for health has come down to 0.5%, showcasing India's economic self-reliance.
- The out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure came down to 48.8% in 2017-18 from 64.2% in 2013-14.
- One of the factors attributing to this decline is the increased utilisation and reduction in cost of services in government health facilities.

Global Nutrition Report

Society & Reports

Why in the news?

- **The Global Nutrition Report, 2021 (GNR) has been released recently.**

About the report

- It is a multi-stakeholder initiative, consisting of a Stakeholder Group, Independent Expert Group and Report Secretariat.

- The report is the world's leading independent assessment of the state of global nutrition. It provides a concise data-focused update on the state of diets and nutrition in the world.

Key highlights of the report-

- **Global Nutrition Targets:** Globally and in most countries, global nutrition targets will not be met by 2025 at the current rate of progress.
- **Data Availability Variation:** Data availability and progress toward global nutrition targets differ significantly across 194 nations. Only 7 countries are on track to meet four of the six maternal, newborn, and young child nutrition targets by 2025, while no country is on track to stop the rise in adult obesity or achieve a 30% decrease in salt/sodium intake.
- **Covid-19's Impact:** Covid-19 pandemic is obstructing progress on global nutrition targets. Globally, an estimated 155 million people have been driven into extreme poverty, and persons with diet-related chronic diseases have worse Covid-19 outcomes.
- **Dietary Progress has been slow:** Dietary improvements have been slow over the last decade, and poor diets are responsible for a quarter of all adult deaths.
- **Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Food production today accounts for more than a third of all global greenhouse gas emissions and consumes significant and growing amounts of environmental resources.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** No region is on track to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to reduce the health and environmental costs of diets and food systems. In fact, no country in the world was 'on course' to achieve the target for obesity.

India's performance-

- As per the GNR, **India has made no progress on anaemia.**
- There has been a rise in anaemic Indian women (age group 15-49 years) since 2016. In 2016, 52.6 per cent of Indian women were anaemic. But in 2020, 53 per cent were found to be anaemic.
- India is '**on course**' to meet three targets for maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN).
- India is also among 23 countries that have made no progress or are worsening on reducing 'childhood wasting'. Wasting refers to children whose weight is low-for-their height.
- Over 17 per cent of Indian children under 5 years of age are affected. This figure is much higher than the average for Asia where close to 9 per cent of children are affected.
- India is 'off-course' in meeting 7 of the 13 global nutrition targets.
- These include sodium intake, raised blood pressure (both men and women), obesity (both men and women) and diabetes (both men and women).
- Some 6.2 percent of adult (aged 18 years and over) women and 3.5 percent of adult men are living with obesity in the country.
- India is among 53 countries 'on course' to meet the target for stunting. But over 34 per cent of children under 5 years of age are still affected.
- This figure is higher than average for Asia, where close to 22 per cent are affected by stunting.
- The country is also among 105 countries that are 'on course' to meet the target for 'childhood overweight' and among 53 countries 'on course' to meet the target for 'exclusive breast feeding'.
- Some 58 per cent of infants in the age group 0-5 months are exclusively breastfed in India.
- India does not have adequate data on prevalence of 'low birth weight'.

National Family Health Survey-5

Society & Reports

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the findings of NFHS- 5 phase II.

About NFHS-5

- The NFHS provides estimates on key indicators related to population, family planning, child and maternal health, nutrition, adult health, and domestic violence, among others.
- NFHS-5 was conducted in two phases between 2019 and 2021, and covered 650,000 households from 707 districts of the country.
- The main objective of successive rounds of the NFHS is to provide reliable and comparable data relating to health and family welfare and other emerging issues.

- International Institute for Population Sciences(IIPS), Mumbai is the nodal agency, responsible for providing coordination and technical guidance for the survey.
- The funding for different rounds of NFHS has been provided by USAID, DFID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, UNFPA, and MOHFW, GOI.

Key findings of NFHS-5

- The Total Fertility Rates (TFR), an average number of children per woman has further declined from 2.2 to 2.0 at the national level and all 14 States/UT's ranging from 1.4 in Chandigarh to 2.4 in Uttar Pradesh.
- All Phase-II States have achieved replacement level of fertility (2.1) except Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.
- Overall Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) has increased substantially from 54% to 67% at all-India level and in almost all Phase-II States/UTs with an exception of Punjab. Use of modern methods of contraceptives has also increased in almost all States/UTs.
- Unmet needs of family Planning have witnessed a significant decline from 13 per cent to 9 per cent at all-India level and in most of the Phase-II States/UTs.
- The unmet need for spacing has come down to less than 10 per cent in all the States except Jharkhand (12%), Arunachal Pradesh (13%) and Uttar Pradesh (13%).
- Full immunization drive among children aged 12-23 months has recorded substantial improvement from 62 per cent to 76 per cent at all-India level. 11 out of 14 States/UTs have more than three-fourth of children aged 12-23 months with fully immunization and it is highest (90%) for Odisha.
- On comparing NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 data, the increase in full immunization coverage is observed to be expeditious in many states and UTs; More than 50 per cent of Phase-II States/ UTs are sharing over 10 percentage points during the short span of 4 years.
- This can be attributed to the flagship initiative of Mission Indradhanush launched by the government since 2015.
- There is an increase from 51 per cent to 58 percent of women receiving the recommended four or more ANC visits by health providers at all-India level.
- Also, all the Phase-II States/UTs have shown improvement except Punjab between 2015-16 to 2019-20.
- Institutional births have increased substantially from 79 per cent to 89 percent at all-India Level. Institutional delivery is 100 percent in Puducherry and Tamil Nadu.
- There has also been a substantial increase in C-section deliveries in many States/UTs especially in private health facilities.
- Child Nutrition indicators show a slight improvement at all-India level as Stunting has declined from 38 per cent to 36 per cent, wasting from 21 per cent to 19 per cent and underweight from 36 per cent to 32 percent at all India level.
- In all phase-II States/UTs the situation has improved in respect of child nutrition but the change is not significant as drastic changes in respect of these indicators are unlikely in a short span period.
- More than half of the children and women (including pregnant women) are anemic in all the phase-II States/UTs and all-India level compared to NFHS-4, in spite of substantial increase in the composition of iron folic acid (IFA) tablets by pregnant women for 180 days or more.
- Exclusive breastfeeding to children under age 6 months has shown an improvement in all-India level from 55 percent in 2015-16 to 64 percent in 2019-21. All the phase-II States/UTs have also showed considerable progress.
- India now has 1,020 women for every 1000 men. According to NFHS-3, conducted in 2005-06, the ratio was equal, 1000: 1000; it went down to 991:1000 in 2015-16 in NFHS-4. This is the first time, in any NFHS or Census, that the sex ratio is skewed in favour of women.
- Women's empowerment indicators portray considerable improvement at all India level and across all the phase-II States/UTs.
- Significant progress has been recorded between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 in regard to women operating bank accounts from 53 percent to 79 percent at all-India level.
- For instance, in the case of Madhya Pradesh the increase was to the tune of 37 percentage point from 37 per cent to 75 per cent.

Why in the news?

- **The Union Minister for Labour and Employment recently launched the first ever All India Survey on Domestic workers (DWs) being conducted by the Labour Bureau, Chandigarh.**

About the All India survey-

- This survey is aimed to estimate the number and proportion of domestic workers at National and State level, percentage distribution of domestic workers with respect to Live-in/Live-out, formal/ Informal Employment, Migrant/Non-Migrant, their wages and other socio-economic characteristics.
- This survey will cover all types of domestic services like cook, driver, housekeeping, tutor (for children), watchman, etc.
- The main objectives are:
 - Estimate the number/proportion of DWs at National and State level.
 - Household Estimates of Live-in/ Live-out DWs.
 - Average number of DWs engaged by different types of households.

About Labour Bureau-

- It is a premium organization in the field of labour statistics and is engaged in the collection, compilation and publication of price indices, employment, unemployment, wages, earnings, absenteeism, labour turnover, industrial relations and working and living conditions of different segments of labour.
- It was set up as an attached office of the Ministry of Labour & Employment on October 03, 1920.
- The two main wings of the Labour Bureau are at Chandigarh and Shimla with four Regional Offices at Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Kolkata and Chennai and a Sub-Regional Office at Mumbai.
- The organisation is headed by the Director General, a Higher Administrative Grade Officer from the Indian Economic Service (IES).

Five All India Surveys conducted by Labour Bureau are-

- All-India Survey of Migrant Workers.
- All-India Survey on Domestic Workers.
- All-India Survey on Employment generated in the Transport Sector.
- All-India Survey of Employment Generated by Professionals.
- All-India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey (AQEES).

Why in the news?

- **Pratham foundation has released the 16th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 (Rural) recently.**

Key highlights of the survey-


- ASER reports on the schooling status of children in the 5-16 age group across rural India and their ability to do basic reading and arithmetic tasks.
- The survey tries to find out how children in the age group of 5-16 studied at home since the onset of the pandemic and the challenges that the schools and households now face as schools reopen across states.
- As field-based surveys could not be conducted due to the Pandemic, ASER 2021 has followed the format of a phone-based survey, conducted in September-October 2021.
- ASER 2021 focused on four main areas: school enrollment patterns, incidence of tuition patterns, availability and access to smartphones, and learning materials and support for learning at home.
- According to the report, there has been an overall increase in the proportion of children enrolled in govt schools between 2018 and 2020 i.e from 64.3% to 65.8%.
- However, in the year 2021, the enrollment suddenly went up to 70.3%.
- The enrolment rate in private schools has however grown down from last year.
- In 2020, the enrolment rate was 28.8% and in 2021 the enrolment rate went down to 24.4%.
- About 73.1% school respondents have received training for implementation of COVID prevention measures in 2021.


- Even though the availability of smartphones increased from 36.5% in 2018 to 67.6% in 2021, more children in private schools had smartphones at home (79%) compared to government school going children (63.7%).
- Bihar and West Bengal showed below 60 percent smartphone penetration and Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have near universal availability of these devices in households.
- The financial distress caused by the pandemic is the reason behind the increase in govt school enrollments.

About Pratham Organization–

- It is an innovative learning organization created to improve the quality of education in India.
- As one of the largest non-governmental organizations in the country, Pratham focuses on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education system.
- Established in 1995 to provide education to children in the slums of Mumbai, Pratham has grown both in scope and geographical coverage.

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Why in the news?

- The Union Government will introduce a Bill to regulate cryptocurrency and ostensibly ban all private cryptocurrencies, along with 25 other pieces of legislation, in the winter session of Parliament that begins on November 2021.

India and Cryptocurrency

- India has always been an attractive market for cryptocurrency along with the rest of the world. There are over 500,000 cryptocurrency wallets in India with around \$3 billion worth of crypto circulating.
- The country is still developing its digital currency industry and officially legalizing cryptocurrencies. India is progressing with cryptocurrency, and one of the benefits is that they are currently drafting their official digital currency bill, 2021.
- The draft aims to provide a legal framework for digital currencies and will be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- India is now one of the most important nations in the cryptocurrency world. Though many countries have banned cryptocurrencies, India has been leading the way to making them legal and usable. The country has seen a lot of progress and it's only going to grow.

Why does the government want to outlaw cryptocurrencies:

- **Consumer protection:** Cryptocurrencies pose a threat to consumers. They are not legal tender since they lack a governmental guarantee.
- **Market volatility:** Because of their speculative nature, they are extremely volatile. Bitcoin, for example, has dropped in value from USD 20,000 in December 2017 to USD 3,800 in November 2018.
- **Risk in the field of security:** If a user's private key is lost, they lose access to their cryptocurrency (unlike traditional digital banking accounts, this password cannot be reset).
- **Malware threats:** In some circumstances, technical service providers (cryptocurrency exchanges or wallets) store these private keys, which are vulnerable to malware or hacking.
- **Laundering of funds.**

Details of the bill

- The draft Bill **defines cryptocurrency** as any information, code, number or token, generated through cryptographic means or otherwise, which has a digital representation of value and has utility in a business activity, or acts as a store of value or a unit of account.
- The draft Bill seeks **to prohibit** mining, holding, selling, trade, issuance, disposal or use of cryptocurrency in the country.
- Under the draft Bill, mining, holding, selling, issuing, transferring or use of cryptocurrency is **punishable** with a fine or imprisonment of up to 10 years, or both.
- A person must **declare and dispose** of any cryptocurrency in his possession, within 90 days from the commencement of the Act.
- The draft Bill permits the use of processes or technology underlying any cryptocurrency for experiment, research, or teaching.
- The central government, in consultation with the RBI, may issue **digital rupee as legal tender**.
- The RBI may also notify a digital currency recognised as legal tender in a foreign jurisdiction, as a foreign currency.

Key Issues

- The draft Bill **bans all cryptocurrencies** based on the risks associated with them such as potential use for money-laundering, risks to consumers and threat to the country's financial stability. This move is a blanket ban.
- The Bill defines cryptocurrency to include information, code or token which has a digital representation of value and is generated through cryptographic means, or otherwise. This **definition may be too broad** and include various forms of digital tokens which have not been generated through cryptography.
- The **penalties** prescribed for certain offences under the Bill may be disproportionately higher compared to other similar economic offences in the country.

Why in the news?

- Recently, India and UK has jointly launched the **Green Grids Initiative** - One Sun One World One Grid, the first international network of global interconnected solar power grids, **at COP26**.

About the grid

- The concept was first floated by the Prime Minister of India in 2018 during the first assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- It is a transnational solar power grid that will be projected as a game-changer to help meet climate change goals by supplying solar power across the globe.
- Purpose: It can generate round the clock electricity from the sun as it sets in one part of the world but rises in another part. The sun never sets for the entire earth.
- Features: According to the draft plan of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), the ambitious OSOWOG will connect 140 countries through a common grid that will be used to transfer solar power.
 - The blueprint for the OSOWOG will be developed under the World Bank's technical assistance programme that is implemented to accelerate the deployment of grid-connected rooftop solar installations.
- Three Phases of Plan: The first phase will entail interconnectivity within the Asian continent; the second phase will add Africa and the third phase will globalize the whole project.

Significance

- Asset utilization for all the participating entities: India can generate round the clock electricity from the sun with the help of OSOWOG.
 - The proposed integration would lead to reduced project costs, higher efficiencies and increased asset utilization for all the participating entities.
 - It will allow national renewable energy management centres in India to grow as regional and global management centres.
- Growth of India:** It will allow national renewable energy management centres in India to grow as regional and global management centres. Several African nations are devoid of reliable electricity supply and that makes them a ready market for electricity infrastructure.
- Economic benefits:** This will have economic benefits that would positively impact poverty alleviation and support in mitigating water, sanitation, food and other socio-economic challenges.
- Counter to China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI):** This is seen as India's counter to China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI) which is primarily an economic diplomacy strategy to boost its domestic economy by improving connectivity and cooperation among the current 78 partner countries.

Issues**Geopolitical issues:**

- The initiative is viewed as an Indian bid for global leadership, but given the uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, the geopolitical ramifications of ventures like OSOWOG are difficult to understand.
- The cost-sharing method will be difficult to implement, given the divergent interests of participating countries according to their socioeconomic status.

Globalisation vs. Deglobalisation:

- OSOWOG will prove to be an expensive, difficult, and extremely slow-moving project.
- The strategic benefits of a single grid, if any, will be annihilated in the event of a geopolitical crisis.
- In India, the primary challenge for renewable energy providers is navigating many state governments and, consequently, multiple laws and regulations.
- Additionally, the initiative runs against the Prime Minister's Aatmanirbhar Bharat agenda, as it expands reliance on a critical strategic entity, energy supply, to other countries via this grid.

Centralised vs. Distributed Generation:

- In most regions, the grid's voltage, frequency, and specifications vary.
- Maintaining grid stability solely through renewable energy would be technically challenging.

Real Time Market In Electricity In India

- It is an organised market platform enabling **buyers and sellers** to meet their energy requirement closer to real time operation.
- It helps in **Grid management** due to intermittent and variable nature of renewable energy generation (especially solar and wind energy).
- It ensures optimal utilization of surplus electricity by those discoms which are facing supply shortage.
- Under this, auctions will be held 48 times a day, **once every half an hour**.
- It became operational on two platforms:

Indian Energy Exchange (IEX)

- **Power Exchange India Limited (PXIL)**
- (IEX) is the first energy exchange in India, providing automated trading platform for delivery of electricity, Renewable Energy Certificates, and Energy Saving Certificates.
- (PXIL) is India's first institutionally promoted power exchange providing electronic platform for transactions in power and allied products
- **POSOCO** will route electricity from **supply sources to consumption point** with help of **RLDC**.

SWAMIH Fund

Economy

Why in the news?

- The SWAMIH (Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing) fund has completed its first complete exit from a Mumbai residential project investment. It has now finished over 1,500 homes across seven projects and plans to build at least 10,000 homes every year.

About SWAMIH fund

- This is a government-backed debt fund that was launched in 2019 as a Category-II AIF (Alternative Investment Fund) registered with SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India).
- The real estate sector's liquidity crunch and the cash-trap situation in 2019 made things difficult, pushing the government to propose this initiative.
- A liquidity squeeze, sometimes known as a cash trap, occurs when interest rates are so low that investors would rather save than invest.
- The Fund's investment manager is SBICAP Ventures, a wholly-owned subsidiary of SBI Capital Markets, which is itself a wholly-owned subsidiary of the SBI.
- On behalf of the Government of India, the Fund is sponsored by the Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.

Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)

- As per, **Regulation Act, 2012** of SEBI, AIF is any fund incorporated in India which is a **privately pooled investment vehicle**.
- It collects funds from both Indian and foreign investors. Generally, high net worth individuals and institutions invest in AIFs as it requires a high investment amount, unlike Mutual Funds.
- It can be established in the **form of a company or a corporate body or a trust or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)**.
- AIFs are divided into 3 unique categories – **Category I, Category II and Category III**.
- **Category-II AIF** are funds that do not borrow money other than to meet day-to-day operational requirements. Real estate funds, private equity funds (PE funds), funds for distressed assets are all Category-II AIF funds.
- **Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA)**
- Established under Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 to enhance accountability & transparency with respect to housing transactions & real estate.
- The Act establishes RERA in each state for regulation of the real estate sector and also acts as an adjudicating body for speedy dispute redressal.



Why in the news?

- The Union Minister of Cooperation has launched the Dairy Sahakar Scheme.
- About the scheme
- It aims to encourage the cooperative dairy businesses in the country which will help realize the vision of "from cooperation to prosperity". National Cooperative Development Corporation(NCDC) under the Ministry of Cooperation.
- The scheme will **provide financial support** extended by NCDC **to eligible cooperatives** for activities such as bovine development, milk procurement, processing, quality assurance, value addition, marketing and branding, exports etc. Period of loan will be for 5-10 years, including 1-2 years of moratorium on repayment of principal, depending on the type of project and revenue streams. There is no minimum or maximum limit on financial assistance to projects by eligible cooperatives. Various central schemes will also be converged with that of state governments, Union Territory administrations, development agencies and others for the benefit of the beneficiaries. This is the first ever and the only dairy focused comprehensive framework from NCDC utilising different schemes of the Union Government.

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)

- (NCDC) was established as a **statutory corporation** by an Act of Parliament in 1963 under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- Its **objectives** are planning and promoting programmes for production, processing, marketing, storage, export and import of agricultural produce, foodstuffs, industrial goods, livestock etc. on cooperative principles.
- It gives **loans and grants** to state governments for financing primary and secondary level cooperative societies and direct funding to the national level and other societies having objects extending beyond one State.
- It can also give direct funding to projects under its various schemes of assistance.

Revised Prompt Corrective Action

Economy

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India recently revised the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework. The revised PCA framework will be effective from January 1, 2022.

About the the action

- In early 2018, there were 12 banks under PCA framework. Of these, 11 were PSBs. Due to recapitalization & corrective measures there were only six banks (all PSBs) under the PCA framework as of March 2019.
- Prompt Corrective Action or PCA is a framework under which financial institutions with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
- Until now, the RBI had imposed PCA only on banks. This is the first time PCA framework is extended to NBFCs.
- The move comes in the wake of large NBFCs such as IL&FS, DHFL, SREI Group and Reliance Capital getting into financial trouble over the last few years.
- The PCA framework for NBFCs comes into effect from October 1, 2022, based on their financial position on or after March 31, 2022.
- The framework will apply to all deposit-taking NBFCs, excluding government companies, and all non-deposit taking NBFCs in the middle, upper and top layers.
- This is a welcome move as it will stop bad lenders from going worse rather than brushing the issue aside.
- Safer NBFCs will translate to a safer overall financial system.
- The PCA framework for NBFCs will be reviewed after 3 years.

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister has recently launched an **integrated ombudsman scheme**. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) launched the **Complaint Management System (CMS)** in 2019 to enhance the customer experience during the banking services grievance redressal process. The Prime Minister has also launched the RBI's Retail Direct Scheme.

About the scheme

- RB-IOS integrates the existing **three Ombudsman schemes of RBI**:
- **Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006**
- **Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies, 2018**
- **Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions, 2019**
- The **Integrated ombudsman scheme** will provide redress for customer complaints about deficiency in services rendered by RBI-regulated entities, namely banks, NBFCs, and pre-paid instrument players if the customer complaint is not resolved satisfactorily or the regulated entity does not respond within a 30-day period.
- It also covers the nonscheduled **Primary Co-operative Banks** with a deposit size of Rs 50 crore and above. The integrated scheme ensures that the approach is "**One Nation, One Ombudsman**" and jurisdiction-neutral.

Features of the Scheme

- The Scheme provides '**deficiency in service**' as a ground for registering a complaint, subject to a specified set of exclusions. As a result, the complaints would no longer be dismissed only on the grounds that they are "**not covered under the grounds listed in the scheme.**"
- The initiative is **jurisdiction-neutral**, and the centralized receipt and processing centre in Chandigarh has been established to handle initial complaints in any language.
- The RBI established a framework for the **use of artificial intelligence techniques** to enable banks and investigative agencies to collaborate more fastly.
- Through a single email address, bank customers will be able to make grievances, submit documents, check their status, and provide feedback.
- Additionally, a **multilingual toll-free number** will be provided to give all necessary information regarding grievance redress.
- **The regulated entity will have no appeal rights in circumstances where the ombudsman issues an award against it for failing to provide sufficient and timely information.**

India Tops Remittance Inflows

Economy

Why in the news?

- Remittances to low- and middle-income countries are projected to have grown a strong 7.3 percent to reach \$589 billion in 2021. These are the estimates from the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief released recently.

Key Findings

- **India** is projected to receive USD 87 billion in 2021 in remittances, making it the **largest recipient of remittances**. India had received over USD 83 billion in remittances in 2020.
- United States was the biggest source for India, accounting for over 20% of funds in 2021. India is followed by China, Mexico, Philippines and Egypt.
- **Europe and Central Asia**
 - By 5.3% to \$67 billion
- **Middle East and North Africa**
 - By 9.7% to \$62 billion
- **Sub-Saharan Africa**
 - By 6.2% to \$45 billion
- Remittances to **low- and middle-income countries** are projected to have grown a strong 7.3% to reach USD 589 billion in 2021.

About Remittances

They are usually understood as financial or in-kind transfers made by migrants to friends and relatives back in communities of origin.

- These are basically sum of two main components – Personal Transfers in cash or in kind between resident and non-resident households and Compensation of Employees, which refers to the income of workers who work in another country for a limited period of time.
- Remittances help in stimulating economic development in recipient countries, but this can also make such countries over-reliant on them.

World Bank's Migration and Development Brief

- Produced twice a year, the brief provides updates on developments in the area of migration and remittance flows and related policies over the past six months.
- It also provides medium-term projections of remittance flows to developing countries.

Staff Accountability Framework For NPA Accounts

Economy

Why in the news?

- The Finance Ministry has issued new guidelines to guide state-owned banks in adopting a uniform Staff Accountability Framework for non-performing assets (NPAs) up to Rs 50 crore.

About the News

- The aim of the new norms is to protect employees for their bona fide actions and at the same time make them accountable for any wrongdoing or any inaction on their part.
- The guidelines will be implemented with effect from April 1, 2022, for accounts that turn NPAs beginning the next financial year.
- It advises public-sector banks to revise their staff accountability policies and frame procedures with approval of their respective boards.

About the new framework

Amount	Staff accountability
Up to Rs 10 lakh	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff accountability need not be examined in NPA accounts with outstanding up to Rs 10 lakh.• Most loans up to Rs 10 lakh are "template-based" and do not constitute a major percentage of the NPA portfolio by amount.• Such accounts can turn into NPA even due to a slight change in circumstances including a family health crisis or a shutdown, leading to disruption in cash flows.
Rs 10 lakh–Rs 1 crore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For examining staff accountability, banks may decide on a threshold of Rs 10 lakh or Rs 20 lakh, depending on their business size.• Staff accountability is to be examined by a committee formed at regional/controlling offices.
Rs 1 crore–50 crore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NPA accounts in this range should undergo a preliminary examination by a committee constituted at one level higher than the sanction level — an account sanctioned at the regional office will be taken up at the zonal level, those at the zonal level by circle office or head office, and so on.• Accounts in this range are mostly credit facilities sanctioned to business units warranting examination by a specialized unit within the banks.
Accounts above Rs 50 crore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For NPA accounts in this range, staff accountability is to be examined as per the existing guidelines.• However, the RBI has set a framework under which banks must initiate and complete a staff accountability exercise within six months from the date of classification as a fraud.• Details of the exercise and the action taken be intimated to the RBI at quarterly intervals.

Need for the new framework

- **Slow decisions on credit sanctions:** Series of frauds led to an environment in which PSU banks became extremely cautious and risk-averse on decisions on credit sanctions.
 - Bankers fear the 3Cs – CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation), CVC (Central Vigilance Commission) and CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General) as they may come after them if the accounts turn NPA.
- **Protect Bonafide action:** To protect bankers from undue harassment from probes into their lending decisions and remove their fears of being investigated for bona fide business decisions gone wrong.
- **Stalling credit growth:** Bankers reluctance about taking exposure in new units or projects stalled credit deployment as small units. This has adversely affected the economic growth.
- **Strain on bank's resources:** The above fears puts a huge strain on the bank's resources as punitive action needs to be taken against the officers having mala fide intent/involvement, but it is also essential to ensure that bona fide mistakes are dealt with compassion.
- **No uniform framework:** Currently, different banks are following different procedures for staff accountability exercises in respect of all accounts that turn NPA.



Why in the news?

- NITI Aayog recently released the inaugural Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Urban Index and Dashboard. It has been developed by **NITI Aayog** in collaboration with German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) under the Indo-German Development Cooperation.

About Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Evaluation

- On a scale of 0-100, urban areas are ranked.
- A score of 100 indicates that the urban area has met the 2030 targets; a score of 0 indicates that it is the least likely of the selected urban areas to meet the targets.
- The overall or composite urban area scores are then calculated from the Goal-wise scores to assess the urban area's overall performance.
- Based on their composite score, urban areas have been categorised as follows:
 - 0-49: aspirant
 - Performer: 50-64
 - 65-99 front-runner
 - 100: Achiever

State Wise Performance:

- Top performers include: Shimla, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi are all the top performers.
- Worst performers include: Dhanbad, Meerut, Itanagar, Guwahati, and Patna are all the worst performers.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana**Why in the news?**

- Under this special scheme (PMGKAY), around 80 Crore NFSA beneficiaries covered under both categories of NFSA, namely Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Households (PHH), will be provided with an additional quota of free-of-cost foodgrains (Rice/Wheat) at a scale of 5 Kg per person per month, over and above their regular monthly entitlements under NFSA.

Eligibility under the scheme

- Families belonging to the Below Poverty Line - Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Households (PHH) categories will be eligible for the scheme.
- PHH are to be identified by State Governments/Union Territory Administrations as per criteria evolved by them.
- AAY families are to be identified by States/UTs as per the criteria prescribed by the Central Government:
- Households headed by widows or terminally ill persons or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence or societal support.
- Widows or terminally ill persons or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more or single women or single men with no family or societal support or assured means of subsistence.
- All primitive tribal households.
- Landless agriculture labourers, marginal farmers, rural artisans/craftsmen such as potters, tanners, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, slum dwellers, and persons earning their livelihood on daily basis in the informal sector like porters, coolies, rickshaw pullers, hand cart pullers, fruit and flower sellers, snake charmers, rag pickers, cobblers, destitutes and other similar categories in both rural and urban areas.
- All eligible Below Poverty Line families of HIV positive persons.

National Food Security Act, 2013

- In PUCL vs Union of India, SC said Right to food is essential to Right to Life (Art 21). Hence NFSA has a rights based approach. Objective is to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach.
- All the above schemes PDS, RPDS, TPDS are merged except Antyodaya Anna Yojana which will continue to give 35 kg to poorest of poor.
- It covers 67% population (75% Rural and 50% Urban). Beneficiaries will be taken from SECC.
- People will get 5 kgs of foodgrains per person per month upto 5 family members at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains. It uses TPDS mechanism.

- Special nutritional support to women and children.
 - It includes meal to Pregnant women and lactating mothers during pregnancy and 6 months after child birth. They are entitled to a nutritious "take home ration" of 600 Calories and a maternity benefit of \geq Rs 6,000 for 6 months. Hence, PMMVY is merged. 5000 + 1000 rs under Janani Suraksha Yojana.
 - Children upto 14 years will get nutritious meals.
- If there is no supply in 15 days, then beneficiaries will get Food Security Allowance.
- Grievance redressal mechanism at District and State levels. Transparency and Accountability to be ensured.
- Food fortification = Rice with Protein; Wheat with Zinc and Coarse Cereals with Iron.
- Utilisation of Dryland area agriculture which is 52% land.
- Development of Wasteland to generate 250 million tonnes additional production.
- In Chandigarh, Puducherry and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, act is implemented in cash transfer mode and they will have the choice to buy foodgrains from open market.
- The eldest woman in a household, \geq 18 years, shall be the head of the household for the purpose of issuance of a ration card.

All-India Survey on Domestic Workers

Economy

Why in the news?

- The first All-India Survey on [Domestic Workers](#) was recently flagged off.

About the survey

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment recently launched the **All-India Survey on Domestic Workers (DW)**, covering 37 states and UTs. It is the first such survey in independent India and will cover 1.5 lakh households in 742 districts across the country. It will be conducted by the **Labour Bureau**.

Details of the Survey

- The survey will cover all types of domestic services like cook, driver, housekeeping, tutor (for children), watchman, etc.
- **Domestic worker:** As per the survey, if the frequency of visits by the worker to the household is at least four days during the last 30 days and the goods and/or services produced by the worker is consumed by the members of the household against payment.
- The survey is aimed at estimating:
 - Number and proportion of DWs at the national and state level
 - Proportion of domestic workers who live-in/live-out, engaged in formal/informal employment and migrant/non-migrant status
 - Their wages and other socio-economic characteristics
- The result of the survey is expected in one year.

Benefits

- The survey will help the government understand significant issues on certain special and vulnerable segments of labour. It will also help the government to develop **evidence-based data-driven policies**.

Draft National Policy on domestic workers:

- A draft National Policy on domestic workers is under consideration of the Central Government. The policy, if finalised, will benefit 50 lakh domestic workers in the country including maids and drivers amongst others.

Salient features of the policy:

- Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations.
- Domestic workers will have the right to register as workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits accruing to them as workers.
- Right to form their own associations, trade unions.
- Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence.
- Right to enhance their professional skills.
- Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation.
- Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc.
- Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of concerned placement agencies.

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry recently released the 3rd edition of **Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) Report 2021**.

About the report

- Launched in 2018, with the objective of ranking States and UTs on the efficiency of their logistics ecosystem. The first version of the report, LEADS 2018, focused on export-import trade. The second edition, covered both international and domestic trade.
- The LEADS 2021 exercise has gone one-step ahead in **analysing domestic and EXIM logistics ecosystem** of the state.
- LEADS 2021 examines the **three dimensions** which collectively influence logistics ease i.e.
 - Infrastructure**
 - Services**
 - Operating and Regulatory Environment**
- The rankings include parameters such as the competitiveness of pricing, timeliness and availability of infrastructure and services, among others. The perception-based survey was conducted through four different categories of **logistics stakeholders**

National Company Law Tribunal**Economy****Why in the news?**

- The Government of India has appointed eight judicial and ten technical members at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

About The tribunal

- NCLT is a quasi-judicial body constituted under section 408 of the Companies Act, 2013 in 2016.
- The tribunal was established based on the recommendation of the V. Balakrishna Eradi committee
- on the law relating to insolvency and the winding up of companies.
- The tribunal deals with matters mainly related to companies law and insolvency law.
- The Companies Act fixes the term of office of chairperson and members of all NCLTs at five years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- Decisions of the NCLT may be appealed to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The decisions of NCLAT may further be appealed to the Supreme Court of India on a point of law.

Community Resource Persons-Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EP)**Economy****Why in News?**

- As part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', under Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme(SVEP), 102 Community Resource Persons – Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EPs) were certified.

About SVEP

- SVEP is a sub-scheme under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission(DAY-NRLM).
- The program supports the Self-Help Group (SHG) members and their family members to set up small enterprises in the non-farm sector.
- The program supports them by developing an ecosystem for enterprise development in rural areas, consisting of Community Enterprise Fund (CEF) for enterprise funding and Cadre of Community Resource Persons-Enterprise Promotion(CRP-EP) for providing Business Support Services.
- What does the Cadre of Community Resource Persons-Enterprise Promotion(CRP-EP) do?
 - CRP-EP provides Business Support Services in rural areas. The services provided by them include preparation of business plans, training, and accessing loans from Banks.
 - They are selected from the community where the program is being implemented, as they understand the local context and their familiarity with the NRLM ecosystem.
 - Moreover, they are also trained before they start working with the entrepreneurs.

Why in the News?

- Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has omitted the Rule 5 of the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities), Rules 2011 defining the Schedule II prescribing the pack sizes of various types of commodities.

About the rules

- A new provision has been introduced to indicate the **unit sale price on pre packed commodities**, which will allow easier comparison of the prices of the commodities at the time of purchase.
- Earlier, the **month and year** in which the commodity is manufactured or pre-packed or imported was **required to be mentioned in the package**. Representation from Industry and associations in this respect has been **received to remove this ambiguity**.
- For reducing compliance burden and removing the ambiguity of declaration of date on pre packed commodities for consumers, the **declaration has now been required to the month and year** in which the commodity is manufactured for the pre packed commodities.
- The provisions of **declarations of MRP has been simplified** by **removing illustration** and providing for making the mandatory declaration of MRP in Indian currency inclusive of all taxes. This has allowed the manufacturer/packer/importer to **declare the MRP on the pre packed commodities in a simplified manner**.

G.N. Bajpai Committee**Economy****Why in the news?**

- The committee has now submitted its report to the Chairperson, IFSCA.

About the committee

- The **International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA)** had constituted an Insurance Committee. It is under **Mr. G.N. Bajpai**, former Chairman LIC and SEBI.
- The mandate of the committee was to **identify key areas for the development of insurance and reinsurance business** from IFSC.

Key recommendations of the committee

- IFSCA has developed an **eco-system for Aircraft Leasing and Financing** which can be utilized to develop Aviation Insurance Hub and Trade Credit Insurance at IFSC.
- IFSC can develop a **framework for enabling operations of Captive insurance model**.
- Investment framework** may be **redesigned** to give more avenues for insurers to mobilize their funds to ensure more returns and flexibility.

LINAC-NCDC Fisheries Business Incubation Centre**Economy****Why in the news?**

- Union Minister of Fisheries has inaugurated the country's first-of-its-kind, dedicated business incubator to be known as LINAC- NCDC Fisheries Business Incubation Centre(LIFIC) in Haryana's Gurugram.

About the centre

- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)**.
 - NCDC is the End **Implementation Agency for Cooperatives** under the flagship scheme Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) of the Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.
- To **nurture fisheries start-ups** under real market-led conditions.
- Services Provided by the LIFIC
 - The centre will **provide hand holding** such as training, converting entrepreneurial ideas into business models.
 - It will also **share seed money to the new as well as existing business entrepreneurs** who are keen to make big in the fisheries segment.



Why in the news?

- The Union Cabinet approved the continuation of the umbrella scheme "Ocean Services, Modelling, Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)" of Ministry of Earth Sciences, for implementation during the period from 2021-26.

About the scheme

- It is launched by **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- Objectives of the scheme
 - To **provide forecasts and services** based on the continuous observation of oceans
 - To **develop technologies and exploratory surveys** for the sustainable harnessing of oceanic resources (both living and nonliving).
 - and **promotion of front-ranking research** in ocean sciences.
- Sub-schemes The scheme includes seven sub-schemes – 1) Ocean Technology 2) Ocean Modelling and Advisory Services (OMAS) 3) Ocean Observation Network (OON) 4) Ocean Non-Living Resources 5) Marine Living Resources and Ecology (MLRE) 6) Coastal Research and Operation and 7) Maintenance of Research Vessels.
- Implementation The sub-schemes are being implemented by **autonomous/attached institutes of the Ministry of Earth Sciences** namely: National Institute of Ocean Technology (**NIOT**), Chennai; Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (**INCOIS**), Hyderabad; National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (**NCPOR**), Goa, Center for Marine Living Resources and Ecology (**CMLRE**), Kochi; and National Centre for Coastal Research (**NCCR**), Chennai.
- Significance of the Scheme The **extensive research and technology development activities** under the scheme would augment the **capacity building** of the nation in the oceanographic field at the international level.

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Why in the news?

- Recently, a bipartisan effort from US Senators and India Caucus Co-Chairs John Cornyn and Mark Warner urged President Biden to waive CAATSA sanctions against India for procuring military hardware from Russia.

About Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

- The US has imposed sanctions on Russia under the CAATSA for manufacturing S-400 Triumf.
- The law also provides for **punitive action against countries purchasing defence hardware from Russia.**
- The law passed in 2017 also imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea.
- It was passed in the wake of Russian interference in the U.S. 2016 presidential election, and was designed to punish Russia by discouraging trade with its defense and intelligence sectors.
- The CAATSA Sanctions represent the implementation of multiple legal authorities.
- Some of these authorities are in the form of executive orders issued by the President and some other authorities are public laws (statutes) passed by the Congress.
- These authorities are further **codified by Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)** in its regulations which are published in Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).
- OFAC has been charged with enforcing the provisions of the law.

Why in the news?

- Recently the Indian Prime Minister attended the 18th Asean-India Summit via video conferencing.

About the recent summit

- This Summit **reviewed the status of Asean-India Strategic Partnerships** & also reviewed the progress made in key areas including Covid-19 and Health, Trade and Commerce, Connectivity, and Education and Culture.
- This summit was **chaired by the Sultan of Brunei.**
- The summit theme was **"We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper"**
- During his address, the Prime Minister pointed out that the year **2022 will complete three decades of India-Asean partnership** and this milestone will be celebrated as the 'Asean-India Friendship Year'.
- He also addressed the 16th East Asia Summit a day before this summit**, where he reaffirmed India's focus on a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and the principle of Asean Centrality in the region.
- The **summit is held every year** and provides an opportunity for India and Asean to engage at the highest level.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN)-

- ASEAN was **established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand**, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- Brunei Darussalam (1984), VietNam (1995), Lao PDR and Myanmar (1997), and Cambodia (1999), joined the ASEAN later.
- Its fundamental Principles are derived from **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, 1976.**
- The **ASEAN charter entered into force in 2008** and became the legally binding agreement.
- ASEAN community consists of 3 pillars: **Political-security community, Economic community, Socio-cultural community.**
- The United States became a Dialogue Partner country of ASEAN in 1977.**
- In 1994, ASEAN took the lead in establishing the **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**, which now has 27 members and meets each year at the ministerial level.
- The up-gradation of the relationship into a **Strategic Partnership in 2012** was a natural progression to the ground covered since India became a Sectoral Partner of the ASEAN in 1992, Dialogue Partner in 1996 and Summit Level Partner in 2002.
- ASEAN is **India's fourth largest trading partner.**
- The **ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)** is the highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism in ASEAN.
- The ADMM+ brings together Defence Ministers from the 10 ASEAN nations plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States on a biannual basis.

The East Asia Summit-

- It is a premier leaders-led forum for discussions on important strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific.
- It was started in 2005.
- It has played an important part in the strategic and geopolitical evolution of East Asia.
- Besides the 10 Asean member countries, the East Asia Summit includes India, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Russia (in total 18 members).
- The EAS calendar culminates in the annual Leaders' Summit, which is usually held alongside ASEAN Leaders' meetings in the fourth quarter of every year.
- It is also an important platform for furthering practical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific by building upon the convergence between ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative (IPOI).

G20 Summit 2021

International Relations

Why in the news?

- The two-day G20 summit concluded with the **G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration**. Italy being the chair hosted the summit. Indonesia will host the 2022 summit while **India will host in 2023**.

Key Outcome Of The Declaration

- It asked leaders of the world's largest economies to present their action plans to address the global climate change challenge at COP 26.
- This is an important step forward in the upcoming **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow, Scotland**.
- **Restricting Aid to Coal-Fired Power Plants**: It includes a pledge to stop financing coal-fired power plants in other countries by the end of this year (2021).
- **PPP Finance Mobilization Model**: Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are the only method to mobilise the billions of dollars in annual investment required to transition to clean, sustainable energy sources and reduce global warming.

Declaration made by India

- **Addressing Vaccine Inequity**: India is on track to produce over 5 billion vaccine doses by the end of next year, highlighting the need to address vaccine inequity around the world (2022). India also made a strong priority on vaccine research, development, and innovation.
- **One Earth, One Health**: The concept of "One Earth, One Health," or the need for international collaboration in the fight against the pandemic.
- **Resilient Global Supply Chains**: India emphasised the need of resilient global supply chains and asked G-20 countries to partner with India in the recovery and diversification of supply chains.
- **Support for a Global Minimum Tax**: India applauded the G-20's decision to enact a 15% minimum corporation tax in order to make the global financial system "more just and fair." India has expressed its support for the European Union's Indo-Pacific strategy, as well as French leadership in it.

12th Ministerial-level Meeting of the India-US Trade Policy Forum (TPF)

International Relations

Why in the news?

- 12th Ministerial-level meeting of the India-United States Trade Policy Forum (TPF) was held in New Delhi. It was held after a gap of 4 years.
- The goal of this meeting was to develop an ambitious, shared vision for the future of the trade relationship and resolve trade and investment issues between the two countries.

Significance of The Forum

- **India-United States Trade Policy Forum (TPF)**
 - India-United States TPF is a premier forum to resolve trade and investment issues between the two countries. The forum is co-chaired by the Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry and U.S. Trade Representative. The forum has five focus groups – agriculture, investment, innovation and creativity (intellectual property rights), services, and tariff and non-tariff barriers



- **Key highlights of the meeting**

- The bilateral trade between India and the US stood at \$80.5 billion in 2020-21. India has received \$13.8 billion foreign direct investment from the US during 2020-21.
- The Forum has decided to sign an agreement to facilitate U.S. market access for mangoes, grapes, and pomegranates, pomegranate arils from India, and reciprocate with similar access in the Indian market to cherries, pork/pork products from the United States.
- India has sought restoration of the GSP (Generalized System of Preferences) benefits by the U.S.
- The countries have decided to negotiate a Social Security Totalisation Agreement. The totalisation agreement would allow workers from both countries to move their retirement savings. A lack of such an agreement particularly affects Indian IT workers in the USA, who lose billions of dollars in statutory U.S. social security contributions that they cannot repatriate home.
- US has expressed an interest in supplying ethanol to India for its goal of 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2025.

Sydney Dialogue

International Relations

Why in the news?

- The **Prime Minister** recently via video conferencing delivered the keynote at the inaugural of the **Sydney Dialogue**. He spoke about the **progress and revolution of technology in India**.

About the recent Dialogue

- The following are some of the highlights of the speech:
- The international order should take measures to **prevent cryptocurrencies from falling into the wrong hands**.
- The PM recently called for progressive and forward-thinking initiatives, citing the **unregulated nature of the cryptocurrency market**.
- **Private investment** is open to India's space sector, while the **agriculture sector** is benefiting from the **digital revolution**.
- The **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe)** was constituted in 2020 to create a level playing field for private companies interested in **using Indian space infrastructure**.
- The leaps in India's digital revolution, which has redefined politics, economy, and society, were highlighted.
- The digital age, on the other hand, has raised new questions about **sovereignty, ethics, governance, law, rights, and security**.

About Sydney Dialogue

- It is an initiative of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.
- It bring together political, business and government leaders to debate, generate new ideas and work towards common understandings of the opportunities and challenges posed by emerging and critical technologies.
- The Sydney Dialogue is an annual summit of cyber and critical technologies to discuss the fallout of the digital domain on the law and order situation in the world.

Africa's Sahel Crisis

International Relations

Why in the news?

- While speaking at a UN Security Council meeting on the **G5 Sahel force**, the UN peacekeeping chief has warned that **the crisis in Africa's Sahel region remains volatile**.

About the region

- It is semiarid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to Sudan.
- It forms a transitional zone between the arid Sahara (desert) to the north and the belt of humid savannas to the south.
- The region is witnessing insurgency by armed militants.
- Thousands of civilians from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria are killed every year in bloody inter-communal violence.
- Many more are caught up in deadly overlapping conflicts that are spinning out of control.



Why in the news?

- India, U.S. held 11th Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) group meeting.

About DTTI

- Launched in **2012**.
- The DTTI meetings are **normally held twice a year** alternating between India and the U.S. However, this meeting was
- held virtually**.
- It aims to bring **sustained leadership** focus to the **bilateral defence trade relationship** and create opportunities for co-production and co-development of defence equipment.
- The initiative is **led by the Undersecretary of Defence for Acquisition and Sustainment** from the United States and **Secretary for Defence Protection** from India.

- India and the US have **signed a deal** to **jointly develop air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles**(UAVs).
- A virtual expo of the **Defence Industry Collaboration Forum** was also conducted. The forum offers an opportunity for Indian and U.S. industries to be **directly involved in DTTI** and **facilitates dialogue** between government and industry on issues that impact industrial collaboration.
- Four Joint Working Groups** focused on land, naval, air and aircraft carrier technologies had been **established under DTTI** to promote mutually agreed projects.

Green Energy Collaboration**International Relations****Why in the news?**

- Union Minister of Science & Technology, Dr Jitendra Singh held an online meeting with the Science Minister of United Kingdom, George Freeman on November 25, 2021.
- About the collaboration
- India-UK Science & Technology (S&T) collaboration has been **growing rapidly**, while the joint research programme of both the countries has **gone from zero base to 300-400 million pounds now**.
- According to Indian Minister, UK has emerged as the **second largest international research & innovation partner** of India.

India-UK Initiatives

- Science and Innovation Council(SIC)**
 - It is the **apex body** to review overall **bilateral scientific cooperation** (except strategic sector) between India and UK.
 - It is held **once in two years**, alternatively in India and the UK. The last SIC meeting was held in New Delhi on 26th July 2018.
- Newton-Bhabha Fund**
 - Supported by the **UK and Indian governments**.
 - To **promote science and innovation partnerships** between the two countries.
 - Industry-Academia Partnership Programme ★
 - It has been set up **under the Newton-Bhabha Fund**.
 - This initiative looks to **harness links and spur networks to industry and UK expertise amongst Tier 2 and 3 engineering universities** in India to build capability and improve their teaching, research and innovation outcomes.

Why in the news?

- Union Minister launched the first-ever Mentorship Programme for Young Innovators to mark the 75th Year of India's independence.

About the programme

- The programme aims to have a 'Star College' in every district of the country supported by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
- Under the programme, the Star Status Colleges will mentor the newer colleges through hand-holding and peer learning and bringing them under the aegis of Star College Scheme.

Star College Scheme

- Initiated by the Department of Biotechnology(DBT) in 2008 to support colleges and universities offering undergraduate education to improve science teaching across the country.
- It aims to improve critical thinking and encourage 'hands on' experimental science at undergraduate level in basic science subjects. It also aims to encourage more students to take up higher education in science.
- Through this scheme the DBT identifies colleges with potential for excellence and provides support for developing infrastructure for academics and laboratory activities. This support is in turn expected to invigorate teaching and provide unique exposure of students to experimental science.

Why in the news?

- New Research has found that the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine (Cervarix) reduces the risk of Cervical Cancer significantly in women

About Cervical Cancer:

- It is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix – the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.
- Various strains of the Human papillomavirus (HPV) play a role in causing most cervical cancer.
- When exposed to HPV, the body's immune system typically prevents the virus from doing harm. In a small percentage of people, however, the virus survives for years, contributing to the process that causes some cervical cells to become cancer cells.
- The HPV vaccine (Cervarix) protects against two of the cancer-causing strains, which are HPV 16 and 18.

About Human Papillomavirus:

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common viral infection of the reproductive tract.
- There are more than 100 types of HPV.
- More than 40 types of HPV are spread through direct sexual contact.
- Out of these 40, two cause genital warts, while about a dozen of HPV cause different types of cancer including cervical, anal, oropharyngeal, penile, vulvar and vaginal.

Why in the news?

- Recently, the UK drug regulator approved the first oral antiviral for treatment of Covid-19.

About Molnupiravir

- It was jointly developed by U.S.-based Merck & Co Inc and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics.
- Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) recommended the drug, for use in people with mild to moderate COVID-19.
- It will be administered as soon as possible following a positive COVID-19 test and within five days of the onset of symptoms.



- The green light is the **first for an oral antiviral treatment for COVID-19 and the first for a COVID-19 drug that will be administered widely in the community.**
- The pill, which **will be branded as Lagevrio in Britain**, is designed to introduce errors into the genetic code of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and is taken twice a day for five days.
- In clinical trials the pill, **originally developed to treat flu, cut the risk of hospitalisation or death by about half.**
- Drugs in the same class as molnupiravir have been linked to birth defects in animal studies.
- It **targets an enzyme that the virus uses to make copies of itself**, introducing errors into its genetic code.
- It could **halve the chances of dying or being hospitalised** for those most at risk of developing severe COVID-19 when given early in the illness.

Leonids Meteor Shower

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Recently, annual Leonids Meteor Shower has begun. This year's shower was active between November 6 and 30.

About Leonids Meteor Shower

- Meteor showers are named after the constellation they appear to be coming from.
- The Leonids originate from the constellation Leo the Lion– the groups of stars that form a lion's mane.
- They emerge from the comet Tempel-Tuttle, which requires 33 years to revolve once around the Sun.
- These meteors are bright and among the fastest moving– travelling at speeds of 71 km per second.
- During this year's showers, peaks of around 10 to 15 meteors are expected to be seen every hour.
- The Leonid showers include fireballs– bright and large meteors than can last longer than average meteors, and "earthgazers"– meteors which appear close to the horizon with colourful and long tails.

- Meteors are bits of rock and ice that are ejected from comets as they manoeuvre around their orbits around the sun.
- Meteor showers are witnessed when Earth passes through the trail of debris left behind by a comet or an asteroid.
- **Differences Between An Asteroid, Comet, Meteoroid, Meteor and Meteorite**
 - **Asteroid:** A relatively small, inactive, rocky body orbiting the Sun.
 - **Comet:** A relatively small, at times active, object whose ices can vaporize in sunlight forming an atmosphere (coma) of dust and gas and, sometimes, a tail of dust and/or gas.
 - **Meteoroid:** A small particle from a comet or asteroid orbiting the Sun.
 - **Meteor:** The light phenomena which results when a meteoroid enters the Earth's atmosphere and vaporizes; a shooting star.
 - **Meteorite:** A meteoroid that survives its passage through the Earth's atmosphere and lands upon the Earth's surface.

INS Vela

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Recently, INS Vela, the country's fourth **Scorpene-class submarine**, was delivered to the Indian Navy.

About INS Vela

- The **first** INS Vela was first commissioned on August 31, 1973, in the Indian Naval Service and continued to serve for 37 years.
- It was the country's oldest submarine when it was decommissioned on June 25, 2010
- The **diesel-electric** submarine was built under **Project 75** by Mazagoan Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) in Mumbai.
- It can attack using torpedoes and tube launch anti-ship missiles, whilst on surface or underwater.



DART(Double Asteroid Redirection Test) Mission

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- NASA will launch the agency's first **planetary defence test mission** named the **Double Asteroid Redirection Test**

About DART Mission

- It is a planetary defence-driven test of technologies for preventing an impact on Earth by a hazardous asteroid.
- It will be the first demonstration of the **kinetic impactor technique** to change the motion of an asteroid in space.
- The spacecraft will be launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.
- A moonlet called **Dimorphos** which is 160 metre in diameter will be made to collide with the spacecraft when it is hovering at a distance of about 11 million kilometres from the Earth.

Noravirus

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Kerala health minister issued guidelines after norovirus, a highly contagious stomach bug that causes a range of symptoms, was confirmed in the state's Wayanad district.

About Noravirus

- Norovirus is an animal-borne disease transmitted through contaminated water and food.
- Norovirus causes gastrointestinal illness, including inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines, severe vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Norovirus does not significantly affect healthy people but it can be serious in young children, the elderly and people with comorbidities.
- Norovirus is easily transmitted through close contact with people who have been infected, or by touching contaminated surfaces. It can also be spread by eating food that has been prepared or handled by someone with the stomach bug.
- The virus is spread through the excrement and vomit of an infected person.

INS Visakhapatnam

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Indian Navy commissioned, Indian Naval Ship (INS) Visakhapatnam, built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited in Mumbai.

About INS Visakhapatnam

- INS Visakhapatnam is one of the four **stealth guided-missile destroyer ships** under **Project 15B**.
- It is propelled by four powerful Gas Turbines, in a Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) configuration.
- It is a 7,500-tonne warship whose main offensive armament is the **BrahMos surface-to-surface missile**. It is packed with medium and short-range guns, anti-submarine rockets and advanced electronic warfare and communication suits.
- The ship is also equipped to fight under nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) warfare conditions.

Significance of INS Visakhapatnam

- With the commissioning in service, it will further augment the Indian Navy's reach and flexibility, and mobility. This will help deal with emerging challenges in the Indian Ocean Region.
- It will further strengthen maritime security and India's primary objective to keep the Indo-Pacific open, safe & secure.

Swarna Jayanti Fellowship Scheme

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Seventeen scientists from scientific institutions across India have been awarded the Swarnajayanti Fellowships for their innovative research ideas.

About Scheme

- It was instituted by the Government of India to **commemorate India's fiftieth year of Independence**.
- It provides special **assistance and support** to a selected number of young scientists with a proven track record to



- **enable them to pursue basic research in frontier areas of science and technology.**
- Under the scheme the awardees are facilitated by the Department of Science & Technology, GOI with support for all the requirements for performing the research including a **fellowship of Rs. 25,000/- per month for five years.**
- In addition, **DST supports** the awardees by giving them a **research grant of 5 lakh Rupees for 5 years.** The fellowship is provided in addition to the salary they draw from their parent Institution.
- In addition to fellowship, **grants for equipment, computational facilities, consumables, contingencies, national and international travel** and **other special requirements**, are covered based on merit.

Kamo'oalewa

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- Scientists have observed a quasi-satellite named Kamo'oalewa, tracking the Earth's orbit around the Sun, could be a fragment from the moon.

About the Kamo'oalewa

- The asteroid Kamo'oalewa is a **quasi-satellite of the Earth.**
- It is Earth's wobbly companion that was **spotted in 2006 by the PanSTARRS telescope** in Hawaii.
- It is a **near-Earth object (NEO)** that orbits the Sun and gets as close as about 9 million miles from Earth.
- Scientists named it **Kamo'oalewa**, a word that is **part of a Hawaiian chant**, and alludes to an offspring that travels on its own.
- Because of its **small size** (about 50 metres wide), this quasi-satellite has been **difficult for scientists to study.**
- The study suggests that there is one possibility that Kamo'oalewa was a **part of the Earth's Moon**, that could have **broken away from the Moon** due to a possible impact. Second possibility is that Kamo'oalewa was **captured in its Earth-like orbit** from the general population of **Near Earth Objects.** Third possibility is that it originated from an **undiscovered quasi-stable population** of **Trojan asteroids** of the Earth.

Grey Matter

Science & Technology

Why in the news?

- A research supported under the SATYAM program by Department of Science & Technology has found that daily home- based meditation can increase the amount of grey matter in brains of patients with mild Alzheimer's disease.

About Grey Matter

- Grey matter refers to **unmyelinated neurons and other cells** of the Central Nervous System.
- It is **present in the brain, brainstem and cerebellum**, and present throughout the spinal cord.
- It is referred to as the grey matter due to its **greyish appearance**. The **neuron cell bodies** are concentrated here giving the colour.
- **Functions**
 - Grey matter in the brain is involved in **muscle control**, and **sensory perception** such as seeing and hearing, memory, emotions, speech, decision making, and self-control.
 - Also, the grey matter **in the spinal cord** is involved in **muscle movement** (motor neurons), and **receiving and sending sensory information** from the body (sensory neurons).
- White matter consists of **fibres of the tracts covered with the myelin sheath**, which gives an opaque white appearance to the layer.

Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation (SATYAM) programme

- It was conceptualized in **2015 by the DST** under its **Cognitive Science Research Initiative (CSRI).**
- **Aims:** To foster **scientific research on the effects of yoga and meditation** on physical & mental health and on cognitive functioning in healthy people as well as in patients with disorders.
- **Eligibility:** a) **Scientists/academicians** with research background in Yoga and Meditation and b) **Practitioners involved in yoga and meditation** can also apply in collaboration with research institutions.

Why in the news?

- The third edition of Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) is being hosted by the Indian Navy.

About the conclave

- GMC 2021 is focused on 'winning everyday peace' in the maritime domain by fostering a shared understanding of the emerging non-traditional threats and in the maritime sector and by developing a 'common perspective'.
- At the conclave, Indian Navy is hosting Chiefs of Navies/ Heads of Maritime Forces from 12 Indian Ocean Region countries comprising Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.
- The theme for GMC 2021 is "Maritime Security and Emerging Non-Traditional Threats: A Case for Proactive Role for IOR Navies".
- It is symbolic of India's constructive engagement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- India has been continuously taking efforts in reaching out to the nations in the region bilaterally and under the framework of IONS, IORA, BIMSTEC, Colombo Security Conclave and other structures.

Why in the news?

- Recently, a 3-day Rashtra Raksha Samarpan Parv was organised in Jhansi. The Rashtra Raksha Samarpan Parv is part of the ongoing **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav** celebrations. Ministry of Defence organised the Parv jointly with the Uttar Pradesh government.

- SITMEX 21**-A trilateral naval exercise involving Singapore, India and Thailand was held recently in the Indian Ocean. The 2021 edition was hosted by the Thai Navy. SITMEX has been held each year since 2019 to help improve maritime relationships and interoperability between the three countries
- Shakti 2021**- The 6th Edition of **Indo - France joint military exercise** "Ex SHAKTI 2021" was held in France. India and France carry out three biennial training exercises:
 - Garuda** with the Indian Air Force,
 - Varuna** with the Indian Navy and
 - Shakti** with Indian Army.
 - Exercise Desert Knight-21, between the Air Forces of these two nations, was held in January 2021.
- Sagar Shakti**- Recently, Sagar Shakti military exercise conducted in the Creek sector of the Kutch peninsula. It witnessed participation of the Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force, Indian Coast Guard, Border Security Force, Gujarat Police and the Marine Police. The aim of this high intensity exercise was to test the combat readiness of the agencies in a real-time scenario.

Why in the news?

- The Union Minister visited the Indian Subcontinent's Pioneer Research Vessel, Ship "SagarNidhi" and interacted with the Scientists on the deck.

About the vessel

- It was commissioned in **2008** for the country's marine research programme.
- It is the **third research vessel** after **Sagar Purvi** and **Sagar Paschimi**.
- Oceanographic Research Vessel(ORV) Sagar Nidhi is an **ice-strengthened multidisciplinary vessel** operated by the National Institute of Ocean Technology(**NIOT**).
 - An ice-strengthened ship is a ship **made of steel**. These ships are made to get through the ice in Antarctica and the Arctic.

- **Purpose :**
 1. Exploring the ocean resources
 2. Participation in search and rescue operations and in implementation of Deep Ocean Mission,
 3. Carrying out geoscientific, meteorological and oceanographic research.
- **Significance**
 - First Indian flagged research ship that reached the Antarctic waters.

EX SHAKTI 2021

Defence & Security

Why in the news?

- The 6th Edition of the biennial training exercise "EX SHAKTI 2021" is being conducted from 15 to 26 November 2021 in Frejus, France.

About

- Exercise SHAKTI will focus on Counter Terrorism operations in backdrop of semi-urban terrain under United Nations Mandate with an aim to enhance military cooperation and inter-operability between the two Armies.
- The exercise aims at enhancing understanding, cooperation and interoperability between the two Armies.
- A platoon strength of a Gorkha Rifles Infantry Battalion is representing the Indian Army in this bilateral exercise and the French side is being represented by troops of 21st Marine Infantry Regiment of 6th Light Armoured Brigade.
- Defence Exercises between **India and France:**
 - Exercise GARUDA with Indian Airforce
 - Exercise VARUNA with Indian Navy a
 - Exercise SHAKTI with Indian Army.

Exercise SITMEX

Defence & Security

Why in the news?

- Recently, the third edition of the trilateral naval exercise Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise (SITMEX) has been conducted in the Andaman Sea of the Indian Ocean.

About

- It is a trilateral annual maritime exercise between India, Singapore and Thailand.
- Aim : To enhance mutual interoperability and imbibing best practices between the Indian, Singapore and Thailand Navy.
- The first edition of the exercise was hosted by India at Port Blair in 2019.
- The third edition of the exercise is being hosted by Thailand in the Andaman Sea.
- The 2021 edition of the exercise is being conducted as a 'non-contact, at sea only' exercise in view of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Other Military Exercises between India and Thailand
 - MAITREE (Army)
 - SIAM BHARAT (Air Force)
 - Indo-Thai CORPAT (Navy), which was conducted recently.
 - Other Military Exercises between India and Singapore
 - Bold Kurukshetra (Army)
 - Joint Military Training (Air Force)
 - SIMBEX (Navy).



Why in the news?

- The 7th edition of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs is being hosted by the French Navy at Paris from 15th-16th Nov 21.

About the symposium

- The IONS is a **voluntary and inclusive initiative** that brings together navies of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states to increase maritime co-operation and enhance regional security.
- IONS is a **biennial forum** conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008.
- The chairmanship of IONS has been held by **India** (2008-10), **UAE** (2010-12), **South Africa** (2012-14), **Australia** (2014-16), **Bangladesh** (2016-18) and **Islamic Republic of Iran** (2018-21).
- France** assumed the **Chairmanship in June 2021 for a two-year tenure**.
- Members of IONS** : IONS includes **24 nations** that hold territory within the Indian Ocean and **8 observer nations**. The members have been geographically grouped into the following four sub-regions:
 - South Asian Littorals** : Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and United Kingdom (British Indian Ocean Territory)
 - West Asian Littorals** : Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates
 - East African Littorals** : France (Reunion), Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania.
 - Southeast Asian and Australian Littorals** : Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste.
 - Observer Nations** : China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, the Netherlands, Russia, and Spain.

Deep Dive Training program

Defence & Security

Why in the news?

- The National e-Governance Division under the Ministry of Electronics and IT is conducting a six-day Deep Dive Training program.

About underground workers

- National e-Governance Division**, Ministry of Electronics and IT **under the Cyber Surakshit Bharat initiative**.
- Aim**: It is a **six day training programme** that aims to **create awareness around cyber security** and develop an empowered and strong cyber ecosystem in Government organisations in India.
- Coverage** : It is a training program for **Chief Information Security Officers** (CISOs) and **frontline IT officials** from various Ministries & Departments, Government & Semi-Government organisations from Central and State Governments, PSUs, banks, among others.
- Significance** : This type of training empowers them to **secure their organisations** from cyber threats and for smooth delivery of e-Gov services and functioning of production units.

Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative

Defence & Security

About the initiative

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** (MeitY) in **2018**.
- It aims to **spread awareness about cybercrime** and **build capacity for safety measures** for Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) and frontline IT staff across all government departments.
- The initiative will be operated on the **three principles** of **Awareness**, **Education** and **Enablement**.
- It is the **first of its kind public-private partnership** that leverages the expertise of the IT industry in cybersecurity along with MeitY's organisations such as CDAC, CERT-In, NIC and STQC as the knowledge partners.



Why in the news?

- India recently unveiled its First Manned Ocean Mission, Samudraa in Chennai.

About the mission

- It is **India's first unique manned ocean mission** that aims to **send men into the deep sea** in a submersible vehicle for deep-ocean exploration and mining of rare minerals.
- It will send **three persons** in a manned submersible vehicle **MATSYA 6000 to a depth of 6000 metres** into the sea for deep underwater studies.
- It is a **part of the Rs 6000-crores Deep Ocean Mission**.
- Note: India completed the **preliminary design** of MATSYA 6000 and **started the realization of the vehicle**. The deepwater manned submersible will be ready for trials by the second quarter of 2024.
- With this, India will **join the elite club** of nations such as the **USA, Russia, Japan, France** and **China** to have such underwater vehicles for carrying out subsea activities.

MATSYA 6000

- It is an **indigenously developed manned submersible vehicle**.
- It will have a **titanium alloy personnel sphere, Human support and safety system** in enclosed space, low-density buoyancy modules, Ballast and Trim System.
- It will also have an operational to **support emergency insurance** up to **96 hours**.
- It will facilitate the MoES in **conducting deep ocean exploration of resources** such as gas hydrates, polymetallic manganese nodules, hydro-thermal sulfides, and cobalt crusts which are located at an approximate depth between 1000 and 5500 metres.
- Polymetallic nodules**, also called manganese nodules, are mineral concretions on the sea bottom formed of concentric layers of iron and manganese hydroxides around a core.

Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW)

Defence & Security

Why in the news?

- Recently, DRDO and Indian Air Force (IAF) have carried out successful flight tests of Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW).

About SAAW

- SAAW project was approved by the Government of India in 2013. The first successful test of the weapon was conducted in May 2016.
- It is an indigenously developed by DRDO.
- It is long-range **lightweight** high precision-**guided anti-airfield weapon**.
- It is designed to destroy especially enemy runways, bunkers, aircraft hangers, radars and other reinforced structures at a maximum range of 100 kilometres.
- Two different configurations have been successfully tested which are based on:
 - The electro-optic sensor: has been developed indigenously. Electro optical configuration of the system is equipped with Imaging Infra-Red (IIR) Seeker technology enhancing the precision strike capability of the weapon.



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