



**EDSTAR**

Achieving Excellence Together

## **OPEN HORIZON**

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**LEARN, REFLECT, INNOVATE**

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“THE PESSIMIST SEES DIFFICULTY IN EVERY OPPORTUNITY. THE OPTIMIST SEES OPPORTUNITY IN EVERY DIFFICULTY.” –  
WINSTON CHURCHILL

## ORGANISATION’S NOTE

**OPEN Horizon** is **EDSTAR’S** monthly publication of contemporary issues and current affairs analysis. It is in fact a collective effort, by experienced educators in varied themes, of identifying current affairs in light of the Competitive Exams, supplementing them with background information, explaining their related dimensions, lending them a generalist viewpoint and thus producing critical notes for the preparation of to-the-point syllabus.

Keeping these things in mind, we, at **EDSTAR**, are always in the process of evolving our self so as to help aspirants counter the challenges put forward by competitive exams.

We hope that the initiative by **EDSTAR** will be to the liking of our students, readers and aspirants.

Thanks

Best Wishes

It is commitment that transforms the vision of success into actual success. Commitment stands first on the list of values and priorities of successful people. Being committed thus requires that a person is fully engaged in her endeavours and remains conscious and persistent enough to realize her life goals.



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## NEWS OF THE MONTH

### NATIONAL AFFAIRS

#### Minimum Support Price scheme for 14 New Minor Forest produce items

Over the past year, due to the unprecedented crisis caused by the ongoing pandemic, the lives and livelihoods of people across all segments, and in particular, the disadvantaged tribal, across the country have been severely disrupted. At such a time, the '**Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP**' has come as a beacon of change. Conceptualised and implemented by TRIFED in association with State Government Agencies across 21 states of the country, the scheme has emerged as a source of great relief for tribal gatherers injecting more than Rs 3000 crores directly in the tribal economy since April 2020. This has been possible mainly due to the Government push and active participation from the States and has provided much needed liquidity in the tribal ecosystem, much needed in the adverse times.



Continuing with its earlier efforts to provide remunerative and fair prices to tribal gatherers of

forest produce, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has revised the MSP for MFP list and has included 14 additional MFPs in the list. This recommendation of additional items is over and above the previous notification issued on **May 26, 2020** (in which the list had been revised to include 23 MFPs) and May 1, 2020 in which the MSP revisions for the MFPs were announced.

The Central government had introduced a minimum support price (MSP) for a select list of MFPs through "**Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce through Minimum Support price and development of Value Chain of MFP**" Scheme in 2011 to provide a social safety net to these underprivileged forest dwellers, and to aid in their empowerment. **TRIFED**, as the apex national organisation involved in the improvement of the livelihood and empowerment of these tribal people, is the nodal agency for the implementation of the scheme. The **Van Dhan tribal start-ups**, also a component of the same scheme, further complements MSP beautifully and has emerged as a source of employment generation for tribal gatherers and forest dwellers and the home-bound tribal artisans.

To ensure that the ground gained is not lost and to strengthen the State level programme implementation and contribute to the empowerment of the tribal population, TRIFED has initiated Phase II of the MSP and MFP scheme and the Van Dhan tribal Start-ups. During this phase, one of the major actions being planned is the convergence of the Van Dhan Yojana with the MSP for MFP Scheme. Together, these two initiatives

offer a comprehensive development package for tribal promoting employment and incomes and entrepreneurship. With the implementation of several planned initiatives in the next year, TRIFED is continuing to work for the complete transformation of the tribal ecosystem across the country.

### **NITI Aayog's plan for Little Andaman raises concerns among conservationists**

A mega financial-tourist complex is proposed to be constructed on Little Andaman Island. It will place at risk a fragile ecosystem and result in habitat loss of the vulnerable **Onge tribe** and **rare wildlife**. This is a plan is for the sustainable and holistic development of the 680 sq. km, fragile Little **Andaman Island** in the Andaman and Nicobar.

#### **NITI Aayog**

**The National Institution for Transforming India**, also called NITI Aayog, was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on **January 1, 2015**. NITI Aayog is the premier policy '**Think Tank**' of the Government of India, providing both directional and policy inputs. While designing strategic and long-term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre and States. The Government of India, in keeping with its reform agenda, constituted the NITI Aayog to replace the Planning Commission instituted in 1950. This was done in order to better serve the needs and aspirations of the people of India. An important evolutionary change from the past, NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform of the Government of India to bring States to act together in national interest, and thereby fosters Cooperative Federalism.



#### **The Proposal**

Under the '**Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island - Vision Document**', the NITI Aayog has proposed to leverage the strategic location and natural features of the island. This, the vision says, will be done by building a new greenfield coastal city there, that will be developed as a free trade zone and will compete with Singapore and Hong Kong. The proposal is pivoted along three development anchors and zones.

**Zone 1:** spread over 102 sq. km along the east coast of Little Andaman, zone 1, will be the financial district and medi city and will include an aero city, and a tourism and hospital district.

**Zone 2:** Spread over 85 sq. km of pristine forest, Zone 2, the leisure zone, will have a film city, a residential district and a tourism SEZ.

**Zone 3:** spread over 52 sq. km of pristine forest, zone 3, will be a nature zone. Zone 3 is further categorised into three districts: an exclusive forest resort, a nature healing district and a nature retreat, all on the western coast.

There will be 'underwater' resorts, casinos, golf courses, convention centres, plug-and-play office complexes, a drone port with fully automated drone delivery system, nature cure institutes and more.

An international airport capable of handling all types of aircraft will be central to this development vision because "**all successful case studies and references**" studied by the visioning team indicate that an international airport is key for development. The only jetty on the island will be expanded and a marina will be developed next to the tourist entertainment district. A 100 km greenfield ring road will be constructed parallel to the coastline from east to west and will be supplemented with a mass rapid transit network with stations at regular intervals.

### India's vehicle scrappage policy

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday, 1 February, **announced a voluntary vehicle scrappage policy** in the Union Budget to phase out old vehicles and to boost the sales of new vehicles. The scrappage policy is a programme that encourages vehicle owners to scrap vehicles older than 15 years old and purchase new ones instead.

A major advantage of such a policy is that it helps reduce air pollution by removing older and more polluting vehicles from the roads. The Finance Minister also mentioned that personal vehicles will have to undergo a fitness test after 20 years from the date of registration, while the same for commercial vehicles will be 15 years.

#### What does the policy aim to achieve?

The idea is to phase out cars and commercial vehicles which are older than 20 or 15 years, respectively. This is being done in a bid to reduce urban pollution levels and galvanise automotive sales, which continue to suffer during India's post-COVID recovery phase. This means that any private vehicle that's older than 20 years will have to undergo a fitness test. A fitness test, according to the Finance Minister, will be conducted at automated fitness centres, which will determine whether the vehicle in question is qualified to run on roads, or headed for the scrap heap.



#### How does fitness test work?

According to the new policy guidelines, a vehicle will have to undergo a fitness test, after the accepted 20-year period. While it's possible for the car to pass a fitness test and acquire a fitness certificate; each fitness test would cost

approximately Rs 40,000. This is in addition to the road tax, and possible "**Green Tax**" that you have to pay while mandatorily renewing your private vehicle's registration after the 15-year period.

Each fitness certificate is applicable for five years, after which the owner of the vehicle will be required to get another fitness test, costing the same. The financial cost of keeping a car in road-ready shape, alone would then dissuade the owner from constantly renewing the certificate.

#### Are there any other costs involved?

Yes. The government has proposed a **Green Tax**, which requires you to pay 10-25 percent of your road tax every time you renew your fitness certificate. This means that, in addition to the fee you're required to shell out for the test, you have to pay a considerable sum, which differs from city to city, based on their pollution levels. In the Delhi-NCR region, for example, the Green Tax, if implemented, would require the customer to pay 50 percent of the road tax, upon renewal of registration.

#### What happens if your vehicle does not pass the fitness test?

According to the law, it is illegal to drive a car that hasn't passed a fitness test, as it is considered unregistered. One cannot circumvent a fitness test while going through the mandatory re-registration process, and if the vehicle fails the test, it is simply not registered, making it illegal to drive it on the road. The policy, which will be in effect from April 1, 2022, would also offer a monetary incentive to the owners sending their vehicles to the scrap heap, although if the vehicle fails the fitness test thrice, they wouldn't be left with much of a choice.

More details, such as the setting-up scrappage docks/yards etc, are awaited. Under the proposed policy, over 51 lakh vehicles, both private and commercial are over 20 years old. Their removal from the roads will not only urge their owners to buy new vehicles, and possibly adopt newer technologies, like EVs, it will also help bring down vehicular pollution by an estimated 25 percent.

### Launch Of First Unmanned Mission Of Gaganyaan Scheduled In December 2021



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her budget speech on February 1, 2021 that **ISRO's first unmanned space mission as a part of Gaganyaan is slated for launch in December 2021**. The unmanned mission was originally scheduled for launch in December 2020 but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Finance Minister informed that four Indian astronauts are being trained in Russia on generic space flight aspects for the main Gaganyaan mission, India's first manned space mission.

#### Key Highlights

The Gaganyaan mission aims to send a three-member crew to space for a period of five to seven days by 2022, the same year when India will complete 75 years of independence. The mission is worth Rs 10,000 crore.

- The ISRO had started planning for the mission accordingly. The first unmanned mission as a part of Gaganyaan was planned in December 2020, the second unmanned mission in June 2021.
- The final and the main component, the manned mission of Gaganyaan, was scheduled six months later in December 2021.
- However, the first unmanned mission got delayed because of the COVID-19 outbreak, which caused disruptions to the space agency's working.

- Other major projects that were affected by the coronavirus pandemic include Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3, the third mission to the moon.
- Many of ISRO's staff members were infected with COVID-19 during the pandemic and only essential and process-related work was going on. Other related industries also got affected due to the coronavirus lockdown.

**Note:** An unmanned space mission is launched without human passengers or crew. When a vehicle is unmanned, it's controlled from far away or by a robotic or autopilot system.

#### Aero India 2021



The Runway to a Billion Opportunities

The world's first 'hybrid' air show – **Aero India** – was organised in Bengaluru from 3 to 5 February. This is the **first-of-its-kind hybrid air show**. This year's event was mainly focussed on India's defence research and technology capabilities with public sector undertakings participating in full strength even as participants from abroad have declined drastically, making the event look muted in comparison to the previous editions. An '**India Pavilion**' that showcases India's strength is among the highlights.

Aero India saw the participation of top aviation firms, while India revealed its indigenous defence capability, with an eye on Africa and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for the export of fighter jets, helicopters and missiles.

## Objective

Aero India provides a unique opportunity for exchange of information, ideas and new developments in the aviation industry. In addition to giving a fillip to the domestic aviation industry it would further the cause of 'Make in India. Aero India is a platform for aerospace enthusiasts, prospective defence industries, aspirant start-ups and all other stakeholders to participate and witness the advances in global defence and aerospace fields and interact with many national and international delegations and industries.



From modest beginnings in 1996, Aero India has come a long way to become Asia's largest defence and aerospace air show over the years. In its 25th year, the government is using it to further geopolitical goals with strategic events.

Apart from global aviation giants such as Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Dassault and Airbus, the show had the participation of top defence firms involved in the aviation sector including Thales, BAE Systems and missile manufacturer MBDA.

## Power ministry to launch manufacturing programme for critical equipment



The Ministry of Power will launch a domestic manufacturing programme for critical power and renewable energy equipment at an outlay of Rs 1,500 crore in the coming financial year. The scheme titled '**Manufacturing Zones under Atmanirbhar Bharat Package**' in the Union Budget would entail setting up three manufacturing zones in a year.

These zones are divided into three categories—**coastal, land-locked and hilly states**. The scheme would call for offers from the states to submit applications to set up these zones. The three selected zones would get Rs 500 crore each for the development of manufacturing hubs.

## Details

A committee will select which state offers the best facilities for these zones. The selection criteria would be based on land, cheap infrastructure facilities such as electricity, water, sewage treatment etc. The Centre would provide common infrastructure and testing facilities at these zones. The equipment testing facility would be set up by **Central Power Research Institute (CPRI)** for power equipment and for renewable equipment, **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)** and **National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE)** would set up testing. The Centre is also planning to give open access power supply to these zones in case the selected states are unable to supply cheaper electricity. The states will form a SPV (**Special Purpose Vehicle**) which would be transferred to the private companies when they set up the manufacturing facilities. The focus would remain on equipment which are manufactured in India but are still imported.

In September 2020, the Union power ministry had released a list 80 items which are imported despite having sufficient domestic capacity. Thus, these facilities are being set up with the aim of setting up the manufacturing of new-age equipment which are not available in Indian market. Further, after the border clashes with China in Galwan valley of Ladakh, the Ministry of Power has also announced the import restrictions on equipment that are used for 'power supply systems and network' because of

security threat and cyber-attacks. Thus, the setting of such facilities becomes significant.

### MOHUA- Zomato partnership under the PM SVANidhi

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MOHUA) and Zomato have signed a MoU under the **Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi** (PM SVANidhi) Scheme. Under the MoU, it was decided to onboard the street food vendors on the food-tech platform of Zomato. This would help the street food vendors to access online the thousands of consumers. It will also help these vendors to grow their businesses.



#### Plan

- As per the MoU, the MoHUA and Zomato will be running a pilot program initially by on-boarding 300 vendors.
- These vendors will be selected from across six cities namely, Patna, Bhopal, Nagpur, Ludhiana, Vadodara and Raipur.
- The street vendors will be empowered with the PAN and FSSAI
- They will also be given training on technology & partner app usage, menu digitization % pricing and hygiene & packaging.

#### Background

On October 5, 2020 the MoHUA also signed a MoU with the Swiggy to empower Street Food Vendors with digital technology. It was also signed with the objective of facilitating the greater income earning

opportunities to the street-vendors through these food-tech platforms.

The ministry also launched the Mobile Application called "**PMSVANidhi se Samridhhi**". The application will do the Socio-economic profiling of PM SVANidhi beneficiaries and their families and help them to link with the Central Government Schemes. The application will assist city officials to collect the door- to-door data.

#### PM SVANidhi Scheme

This scheme was launched on June 01, 2020. It was launched in order to provide the affordable working capital loan to street vendors. The scheme was launched to help vendors to resume their livelihoods that was affected due to Covid-19 lockdown. It seeks to benefit over 50 lakh Street Vendors. The scheme provides the vendors a collateral free loan of up to Rs. 10,000, of one year.

#### Mission Innovation 2.0 begins



Recently, the Union Minister of Science & Technology addressed the **Mission Innovation (MI)** to mark the beginning of phase-2 of the mission or **Mission Innovation 2.0**. India played a leadership role in MI Steering Committee and is a member of the Analysis and Joint Research and Business & Investor Engagement sub-groups.

#### Mission Innovation

Mission Innovation was announced on 30th November 2015, on the side lines of the Paris Climate Agreement to undertake ambitious measures to combat climate change. It is a global initiative of 24 countries and the European Union to accelerate **global clean energy innovation**. Commitment by all members to seek to double their clean energy innovation investments over five years in selected priority areas is its principle. Each member according to its own priorities, policies, processes, and laws independently determines the best use of its funding and defines its own Research

& Development priorities and path to reach the doubling goal. In many cases, MI members prioritise parts of their whole energy innovation budget within their baseline.

### Objectives

- Enhance the public sector investment to a substantial level.
- Increased private sector engagement and investment.
- Increase international collaboration.
- Raising awareness of the transformational potential of innovation.

### Innovation Challenges (IC)

Innovation challenges are a major part of the mission innovation that is aimed at leveraging research, development, and demonstration (RD&D) in technology areas that could ultimately result in effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy security, and creating new opportunities for clean economic growth.

There are 8 innovation challenges under the mission innovation:

**IC1** – smart grids, **IC2** – Off-grid access to electricity, **IC3** – Carbon capture, **IC4** – Sustainable biofuels, **IC5** – Converting sunlight, **IC6** – Clean energy materials, **IC7** – Affordable cooling and heating of buildings, **IC8** – Renewable and clean hydrogen.

The first phase has shown that work done under ICs have mobilized in a relatively short period, relying on members' leadership and voluntary efforts to advance IC objectives. These resources have dramatically accelerated the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix which is clean, affordable, and reliable.

### Mission Innovation 2.0

To achieve the shared goal of accelerating innovation, all the members have agreed to develop a second phase (2.0) that includes:

An enhanced Innovation Platform building on current activities to strengthen the

global clean energy innovation ecosystem and to accelerate learning. New public-private innovation alliances – Missions – built around ambitious and inspirational goals backed by voluntary commitments that can lead to tipping points in the cost, scale, availability, and attractiveness of clean energy solutions.

### Indian Initiatives Aligned with the Mission

**Clean Energy International Incubation Centre:** To support the start-up innovation ecosystem, the Clean Energy International Incubation Centre established by the Department of Biotechnology, India under a Public Private Partnership model has played a crucial role.

**Increased Solar Capacity:** India has increased solar installed capacity by 13 times and expanded its non-fossil fuel-based power generation to 134 Gigawatts, about 35% of total power generation. The National Solar Mission (a part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change) helped India to increase its solar capacity. India has embarked on an ambitious target of having 450 Gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030.

**Biofuels:** India is also working to considerably increase the proportion of the biofuel blend in petrol and diesel.

**Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP):** It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports. The 2018 Biofuel Policy has the objective of reaching 20% ethanol-blending and 5% biodiesel-blending by the year 2030. Five Centres of excellence in Bioenergy supported by Department of Biotechnology in India are working on both fundamental and translational research for advanced bio-fuels like biobutanol, biohydrogen and bio jet fuels.

**Ujjwala Yojana: Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** which is the world's most extensive clean cooking fuel programme was launched in 2016 and is implemented by the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas** through its Oil Marketing Companies. Through PMUY, initially, 5 crores below poverty line (BPL) households were targeted for providing

deposit free LPG connections to BPL households by 31st March, 2019. This target has been achieved. India has released around 150 million connections so far.

**Avoided Emission Framework for a sustainable future:** India and Sweden under a partnership have developed an Avoided Emission Framework for a sustainable future. Under this partnership, eight companies have been selected to demonstrate an initial 100 million tons of potential CO2 emission reduction by 2030.

#### Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)

Agriculture sector plays a very important role in both economic development and Nation building. India is globally in the forefront of development of agriculture. The goal is to achieve doubling of export by 2022. However, more than 86% of farmers in the country are small and marginal. There is a need to facilitate our farmers with access to improved technology, credit, better input and more markets to incentivize them to produce better quality commodity.

For this, Aggregation of small, marginal and landless farmers into FPOs will help enhance economic strength & market linkages of farmers for enhancing their income. Keeping this in mind, Government of India has launched a new Central Sector Scheme titled "**Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)**" with a clear strategy and committed resources to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of Rs 6865 crore.

#### About FPO Scheme

FPOs Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme which receives funding from Government of India. FPOs will be developed in produce clusters. Under this scheme, the formation & Promotion of FPOs will be done with the help of Implementing Agencies (IAs).

FPOs are to be developed in produce clusters, wherein agricultural and horticultural produces are grown / cultivated for leveraging economies of

scale and improving market access for members. "One District One Product" cluster to promote specialization and better processing, marketing, branding & export. Further Agriculture value chain organizations forming FPOs and facilitating 60% of market linkages for members produce.

#### Implementing Agencies (IAs)

There are presently nine implementing agencies namely,

- Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC),
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD),
- National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC),
- North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC),
- Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium Haryana (SFACH),
- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED),
- Watershed Development Department (WDD)- Karnataka
- Tamil Nadu-Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (TN-SFAC) and
- Foundation for Development of Rural Value Chains (FDRVC)- Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).

These IAs will engage the **Cluster Based Business Organizations (CBBOs)** to aggregate, registered and provide the handholding support to each FPOs. The support will be provided for a period of 5 years. CBBOs have been empanelled & engaged by IAs. CBBOs will be the platform for an end-to-end knowledge for all issues related to FPO promotion.

#### Details

During 2020-21, a total of 2200 FPO produce clusters have been allocated for formation of FPOs, which also include specialized FPO produce clusters such as 100 FPOs for Organic, 100 FPOs for Oil seeds etc. Of these, 369 FPOs are targeted for formation

during current year for formation in 115 aspirational districts in the country.

NAFED would form the specialized FPOs which should necessarily be forwardly linked to the market, Agri-value chain, etc. NAFED will provide market and value chain linkages to the FPOs formed by other Implementing Agencies. NAFED has formed & registered 05 Honey FPOs during current year in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar & West Bengal.

FPOs will be provided financial assistance up to Rs 18.00 lakh per FPO for a period of 03 years. In addition to this, provision has been made for matching equity grant up to Rs. 2,000 per farmer member of FPO with a limit of Rs. 15.00 lakh per FPO and a credit guarantee facility up to Rs. 2 crore of project loan per FPO from eligible lending institution to ensure institutional credit accessibility to FPOs.

#### Plan

At district level, a District Level Monitoring Committee (D-MC) is constituted under the Chairmanship of District Collector/ CEO/ Zilla Parishad with representatives of different related departments and experts for overall coordination & monitoring the implementation of scheme in the district including the suggestion for potential produce cluster & development

At National level, **National Project Management Agency (NPMA)** as a professional organization has been engaged for providing overall project guidance, coordination, compilation of information relating to FPOs, maintenance of MIS and monitoring purpose.

#### Training & skill development

There are well defined training structures in the scheme and the institutions like **Bankers Institute of Rural Development (BIRD)**, **Lucknow and Laxman Rao Inamdar National Academy for Co-operative Research & Development (LINAC)**, Gurugram have been chosen as the lead training institutes for capacity development & trainings of

FPOs. Training & skill development modules have been developed to further strengthen the FPOs.

*Formation & promotion of FPOs is the first step for converting Krishi into Atmanirbhar Krishi. This will enhance cost effective production and productivity and higher net incomes to the member of the FPO. Also improve rural economy and create job opportunities for rural youths in villages itself. This was the major step towards improving farmers' income substantially.*

#### Geo Spatial Sector in India

Recently, the **Ministry of Science and Technology** released new guidelines for the Geo-Spatial Sector in India, which deregulates existing protocol and liberalises the sector to a more competitive field. **Geospatial data** is data about objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface of the earth. The location may be static in the short-term, like the location of a road, an earthquake event, malnutrition among children, or dynamic like a moving vehicle or pedestrian, the spread of an infectious disease.

It combines Information on: **Location, Attribute** (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned), **Temporal or time**. The past decade has seen an increase in the use of geo-spatial data.

#### Current State of the Geo-Spatial Sector

**Strict Restriction:** There are strict restrictions on the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data and mapping under the current regime.

**Renewal:** The policy had not been renewed in decades and has been driven by internal as well as external security concerns.

**Dominated by Government:** The sector so far is dominated by the Indian government as well as government-run agencies such as the Survey of India and private companies need to navigate a system of permissions from different departments of the government (depending on the kind of data

to be created) as well as the defence and Home Ministries, to be able to collect, create or disseminate geo-spatial data.

### New Policy

**Open Access:** Open access to its geospatial data and services, including maps, for all Indian entities, with the exception of sensitive defence or security-related data.

**Restrictions Removed:** Indian corporations and innovators are no longer subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals before they collect, generate, prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital geospatial data and maps within the territory of India. There shall be no requirement for security clearance, licence or any other restrictions.

### Reason for Deregulation of Geo-Spatial Data

**Delayed Projects:** System of acquiring licenses or permission, and the red tape involved, took months, delaying projects, especially those that are in mission mode – for both Indian companies as well as government agencies. The deregulation eliminates the requirement of permissions as well as scrutiny, even for security concerns. Indian companies now can self-attest, conforming to government guidelines without actually having to be monitored by a government agency- these guidelines therefore place a great deal of trust in Indian entities.

**Lack of Data:** There is also a huge lack of data in the country which impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses which are data-based. The mapping of the entire country, that too with high accuracy, by the Indian government alone could take decades. The government therefore felt an urgent need to incentivise the geo-spatial sector for Indian companies and increased investment from private players in the sector.

**Changing Needs:** For decades, geo-spatial data has been a priority for strategic reasons and for internal and external security concerns, this priority has seen a shift in the past 15 years. Initially conceptualised as a matter solely concerned with security, geo-spatial data collection was the

prerogative of the defence forces and the government. **Geographic Information System (GIS)** mapping was also rudimentary, with the government investing heavily in it after the Kargil war highlighted the dependence on foreign data and the need for indigenous sources of data. Geo-spatial data has now become imperative for the government in planning for infrastructure, development, social development, natural calamities as well as the economy, with more and more sectors such as agriculture, environment protection, power, water, transportation, communication, health (tracking of diseases, patients, hospitals etc) relying heavily on this data

**Global Push:** There has also been a global push for open access to geo-spatial as it affects the lives of ordinary citizens. Large amounts of geo-spatial data are also available on global platforms, which makes the regulation of data that is freely available in other countries, untenable.

### Impact of Deregulation

**Increased Competitiveness:** By liberalising the system, the government will ensure more players in the field, competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market, and more accurate data available to both the government to formulate plans and administer, but also for individual Indians.

**New Employment:** Start-up and businesses can now also use this data in setting up their concerns, especially in the sector of e-commerce or geo-spatial based apps – which in turn will increase employment in these sectors. Indian companies will be able to develop indigenous apps.

**Increased Public-Private Partnership:** There is also likely to be an increase in public-private partnerships with the opening of this sector with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects.

**Increased Investment:** The government also expects an increase in investment in the geo-spatial sector by companies, and also an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn will boost the economy.

### Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge Cohort Announced



The Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, announced twenty-five(25) shortlisted cities for the ‘**Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge**’ cohort, in collaboration with the **Bernard van Leer Foundation** (BvLF) and technical partner **WRI India**. The Challenge is a 3-year initiative aimed at supporting early childhood-friendly neighbourhoods under the government’s Smart Cities Mission.

The following cities have been selected for the ‘**Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge**’ cohort: Agartala, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Dharamshala, Erode, Hubballi-Dharwad, Hyderabad, Indore, Jabalpur, Kakinada, Kochi, Kohima, Kota, Nagpur, Rajkot, Ranchi, Rohtak, Rourkela, Salem, Surat, Thiruvananthapuram, Tiruppur, Ujjain, Vadodara, and Warangal. The cohort will receive technical assistance, capacity building and scale-up support to experiment, and implement trials and pilots over the next six months to demonstrate early wins, solicit citizen participation, and build consensus around their proposals.

The first stage of the Challenge involved an open call for applications from city agencies and closed on February 7th, 2021. 63 cities from across India submitted applications proposing neighbourhood-level pilot projects in public space, mobility, and access to services to enhance the physical and psychological health of young children and their caregivers. From the list of applicant cities, the evaluation committee chose 25 cities based on the strength of their applications.

Cities proposed a diverse array of pilot projects, including creating toddler-friendly walking corridors in residential neighbourhoods; safer commutes to early childhood services for vulnerable young children and caregivers living in urban slums; increasing opportunities for nature play and sensory stimulation; and adapting underused open spaces within government school grounds into public play areas after school hours. Besides streets and open spaces, other proposed pilots aim to address the need for early childhood amenities in government office premises, bus shelters and transit hubs; developing Anganwadis with nutri gardens and age-appropriate play equipment; and transforming outdoor waiting areas for PHCs with shade, seating, and lactation cubicles.

### Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0 Launched



Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan launched **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0** which will be conducted in two rounds starting from February 22 and March 22 across 250 districts/urban areas identified in 29 States/Union Territories. Both rounds will be for 15 days each. A portal of IMI 3.0 has also been launched besides releasing the Operational Guidelines and the awareness material of the campaign.

#### About Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0

- The mission will be conducted in two rounds.
- The first round will start from February 22, 2021 while the second phase will start from March 22, 2021.
- It will run across 250 districts or urban areas across the 29 States or Union Territories.

- Launched the awareness material or IEC package developed under the campaign
- The IMI 3.0 initiative was launched by the central government in order to provide immunization to the pregnant women and children free of cost in India.
- The scheme will strengthen and re-energize immunization programmes.
- It will help in achieving full immunization coverage for children and pregnant women rapidly.
- This mission also aims to reach the unreached population. It will reach to them with all the available vaccines under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- An IMI 3.0 Portal has been designed to manage the data reporting and analysis. To update the activities of the ministries/departments and will capture pre-campaign activities, during activity achievements, and post campaign indicators with indicators on immunization coverage and of the line ministries.
- **Intensified Mission Indradhanush** will cover low performing areas in the selected districts (high priority districts) and urban areas. Special attention will be given to unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums with migratory population.

#### **Special drive to cover all unvaccinated children and pregnant women from Feb 22**

As many as 41,470 beneficiaries (children aged below two and pregnant women) who have missed their routine immunisation in 13 districts, including Bengaluru Urban (BBMP areas too), Kalaburagi, Belagavi, Bidar, and Davangere will be covered under the first phase of the Centre's "**Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0**" that will be launched on Monday at Kalaburagi. This will be a four-day campaign.

With the goal of increasing full immunization coverage to 90%, sustain it **through Routine Immunization (RI)**, reaching the unreached with all available vaccines for children under 0-2 and pregnant women, Karnataka is implementing IMI 3.0 in 13 selected districts. This campaign will be held in two rounds during February 2021 and March 2021 on four working days starting from 22nd of these two months as scheduled except on routine immunization days.

The identified 41,470 beneficiaries include 33,695 children aged 0-2 and 7,775 pregnant women. The focus will be on slums, brick kilns and construction sites. Following are the 13 districts: Belagavi, Bengaluru Urban including BBMP, Bidar, Davangere, Gadag, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayapura, Bagalkote, Ballari, and Chickaballapura.

#### **About Mission Indradhanush**

- The Government of India is committed to improve immunization coverage and achieve full immunization coverage of 90 percent.
- This Mission was launched in December 2014 with the aim of fully immunizing unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children under Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- The scheme targets children aged under 2 years and pregnant women for immunization.
- The mission incorporated immunization programme against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD) namely, Whooping cough, diphtheria, polio, tetanus, meningitis, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, pneumonia, Haemophilus influenzae type B infections, rotavirus vaccine, Japanese encephalitis (JE), measles-rubella (MR) and pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV).
- Launch of massive routine immunization campaigns, such as Mission Indradhanush (MI) and Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI), in part, reflects the

government's efforts under the Universal Immunization Program to reduce child mortality and morbidity.

### Intensified Mission Indradhanush

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

### ISRO launched iBrazilian, Indian startup satellite in first mission of 2021



The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to launched 19 satellites on **February 28, 2021** as part of the first dedicated commercial PSLV mission for its commercial company New Space India Limited (NSIL). This is **ISRO's first launch in 2021**. One of the nano satellites launched has an engraved picture of **PM Modi on the top panel of the satellite as well as Bhagavad Gita in a flash**.

### Payload

The PSLV-C51/Amazônia-1 mission carried **Brazil's Amazônia-1** as the primary payload, along with 18 other guests' satellites, including five Indian satellites. Among the 18 satellites is also the SAI-1 NanoConnect-2, which is a fully Mexican satellite developed by Institute of Nuclear Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, although ISRO's website lists it as belonging to the US. There was also on board 12 Pico satellites by Swarm Technologies, US, called **SpaceBees** (Basic Electronic Elements). These are the world's smallest two-way communications satellites that are meant

to provide affordable network connectivity and data relay.

### The five Indian satellites flying on the rocket

1. The **Satish Dhawan SAT (SDSAT)** is a nano satellite that will study space weather, magnetosphere, radiation levels, as well as aid in long-range communication. It was built by Space Kidz India, which has also included an engraved picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the top panel of the satellite as well as Bhagavad Gita in a flash. Space Kidz India said they put the picture of PM Modi to **"show solidarity and gratitude for his Atmanirbhar initiative and Space privatisation"**, and enabling ISRO facilities to open up to private players. The Bhagavad Gita was included to honour the **"supreme epic of India"** and the idea of **'Vasudeva Kutumbakam'**.
2. **UNITYsat** is a combination of three satellites that were built by — Jeppiaar Institute of Technology in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, GH Rasoni College of Engineering in Nagpur, and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology in Coimbatore. These satellites will provide radio relay services.
3. **Sindhu Netra** is a defence satellite that was built by Hyderabad-based Imarat research centre, which is a part of DRDO. The satellite will assist in identifying suspicious ships.

### Amozônia-1

Amazônia-1 or SSR-1, for Satélite de Sensoriamento Remoto-1 in Portuguese, is the **first earth observation satellite to be developed fully by Brazil**. Designed, integrated, tested, and will be operated fully by the National Institute for Space Research in Brazil. Weighing 637 the, the satellite carries a wide field imaging camera with a resolution of 60 m over an 850-km swath of area. According to ISRO, the PSLV-C51/Amazônia-1 mission is the **first dedicated commercial PSLV mission for the commercial company NewSpace**

**India Limited** (NSIL), which was set up in March 2019 under the Department of Space. The NSIL facilitated the mission through a commercial agreement with the American company Spaceflight Inc. The rocket will fly in its DL configuration, with two solid strap-on boosters.

## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

### UK applies to join CPTPP free-trade pact

Almost 1 year after exiting the biggest politico-economic bloc of the world – the European Union, United Kingdom had applied to get a membership of the 11-membered CPTPP. UK's International Trade Secretary Liz Truss would make the request to join with further negotiations expected in the spring later this year. CPTPP membership is a key part of the UK Government's plan to position the UK at the centre of a network of modern free trade deals that support jobs and drive economic growth at home. "The UK has been a major beneficiary of the rise of digital trade with over 67% of service exports worth £190.3 billion being digitally delivered. CPTPP will open up new markets for innovative tech SMEs looking to grow and expand beyond our borders," said Julian David, CEO of techUK.

### UK and CPTPP

The UK is applying to join a free trade area made up of 11 Asia-Pacific nations, under its post-Brexit plans. The **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership** – or CPTPP – also includes economic powerhouses Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand. The US was originally in talks to be part of the CPTPP, but former President Donald Trump pulled out when he took office. The UK is the first non-founding country to apply and, if successful, would be its second biggest economy after Japan. UK's trade with the group was worth £111 billion in 2019, growing by 8% a year since 2016.



### How would UK become a part of the bloc?

To start this process, the United Kingdom needs to present a letter to New Zealand, as Depository for the CPTPP, formally expressing its interest in joining the 11-member trade agreement. New Zealand performs the legal 'Depository' functions for the CPTPP. This entails maintaining the legal copies of the Agreement and any amendments, as well as receiving and circulating certain official correspondence concerning the Agreement. Under CPTPP guidelines, the next step will be for all CPTPP members to discuss the United Kingdom's request, and establish a working group to negotiate UK accession to the Agreement. A key part of these discussions will be to understand the UK's situation and to identify how it will meet the standards required under the CPTPP – both under its rules and in respect of market access commitments. However, the accession procedures do not specify a timeframe. But it does call to make a decision on whether or not to establish a working group 'within a reasonable period of time'.

### What is CPTPP?

**There are 11 countries in the CPTPP trade agreement formed in 2018:** Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. In total, it covers a market of around 500 million people, generating more than 13% of the world's income. The main purpose of the deal is to cut trade tariffs (a form of tax, like a border tax) between member countries. It includes a promise to eliminate or reduce 95% of import charges – although some of these charges are kept to protect some home-made products, for example Japan's rice and Canada's

dairy industry. In return, countries must cooperate on regulations, such as food standards. However, these standards and regulations do not have to be identical, and member countries can strike their own trade deals.

#### How would it be beneficial for UK?

It sounds a win-win for both UK and CPTPP member-states: those Pacific Rim nations represent 13% of global income and 500 million people, which would further increase with UK with them and the UK would retain the freedom to strike deals elsewhere. There would be standalone agreements on how standards and regulations are set, but some minimum standards have to be maintained. The UK already has trade deals with seven of the 11 nations – and is pursuing two more. In total, CPTPP nations account for 8.4% of UK exports, a fraction of what goes to the EU.

- This deal would, however, deepen some of those ties –and allow UK manufacturers who source components from multiple nations in the bloc some benefits under “rules of origins” allowances.
- But the real boost could come in the future, if others join - in particular the US, as President Biden has hinted. That would give the UK that hoped-for trade deal with America.
- There would also be the potential for faster and cheaper visas for business people.
- Joining the CPTPP would deepen the UK’s access to fast-growing markets and major economies, including Mexico, Malaysia and Vietnam, for the benefit of UK business.
- Joining the £9 trillion partnership will cut tariffs for UK industries including food and drink, and cars, while also creating new opportunities for modern industries like tech and services, ultimately supporting and creating high-value jobs across the UK.

#### Are new sanctions against Russia and North Korea in the pipeline?

Since the coming of Joe Biden, foreign policy analysts have been predicting an array of possible actions against Russia and North Korea. This was despite Biden, during his campaign speeches had promised to decrease the number of U.S. sanctions on other countries, but domestic pressure had made him to change his stance. Speaking in a television interview, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had said that the Biden administration would consider putting new sanctions against North Korea as well as other possible actions against Russia.



#### What did Blinken said?

Blinken told NBC News, the possible tools aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula include additional sanctions in coordination with U.S. allies, as well as other diplomatic incentives he did not specify. Blinken said he was “deeply disturbed by the violent crackdown” on Russian protesters and arrests of people across the country demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Russia’s Foreign Ministry claimed on Twitter that the U.S. was behind the protests, alleging a “gross intervention in Russia’s affairs,” but the demonstrations show that Russians are fed up with “corruption” and “autocracy,” Blinken told NBC News in his first television interview since he took office last week.

#### U.S. stance with respect to Russia

In the interview, taped on Sunday, Blinken, however did not commit to specific sanctions against Moscow. He just said he was reviewing a

response to the actions against Navalny, as well as Russian election interference in 2020, the Solar Wind Hack and alleged bounties for U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. “President Biden made clear that the United States will act firmly in defense of its national interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies,” the White House said in a statement after the phone call between the two leaders on 26th January, 2021. Biden also discussed a five-year extension to New START, the strategic arms reduction treaty. Biden also reaffirmed the U.S.’s “firm support for Ukraine’s sovereignty,” raised concerns over the Solar Winds hack on the federal government that has been linked by U.S. officials to Russia, and media reports of Russia placing bounties on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

### The strategy of ‘sanctions’

The United States, as of 2019, had 7,967 sanctions in place. Those included sanctions on individual people, like the Mexican drug kingpin Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman; on companies, like Cubacancun Cigars and Gift Shops; and even on entire governments or their branches, like on Iran and its main security force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In light of this number, some experts worry that overuse of sanctions brings long-term risks both for America’s financially dominant role in the world and its leading status in international diplomacy. American willingness to use sanctions unilaterally has even irritated some U.S. allies in Europe, who have participated in some U.S. sanctions efforts but objected to sanctions they see as threatening their own economic interests, such as certain restrictions on doing business with Russia.

### The history of U.S. sanctions

The strength of American sanctions, after all, comes from the centrality of the United States financial system in the global economy, and the dollar’s status as the world’s dominant reserve currency. After 9/11, the U.S. accelerated and expanded its use of sanctions to go after terrorist financing. American policymakers have reached for the tool since the country was founded; perhaps the most prominent modern example is the Cuba embargo of

1962. But the use of sanctions has exploded in the 21st century, especially since 2010 during Obama administration, according to Elizabeth Rosenberg, a former Treasury Department official. Iran is currently by far the largest state target of U.S. sanctions.

### How successful this strategy had been?

According to the U.S. Treasury Department, the success of the sanctions should be measured not by volume but by their impact in achieving specific policy goals. On that score, sanctions have definitely notched some successes. They may have helped drive the North Koreans to negotiate with Trump over their nuclear program, though so far, no deal had been reached. Sanctions also helped push Iran to the table over its nuclear program during the Obama administration.

*Many of Joe Biden’s flurry of executive orders in his first week in office are aimed squarely at undoing Trump-era domestic policies. The statement this week by Blinken may indicate that the administration may effectively pursue continuity in key areas of foreign policy. While this statement may signal that new sanctions are in pipeline, but this may be just an intimidating strategy of U.S. to test the mood of Russia and North Korea over possibility of new sanctions. Just like North Korea showcases its weapon arsenal each time to intimidate other countries, to picturize itself strong and resilient; the same strategy may be at work this time as well.*

### Jarosite, a rare mineral found in Antarctica



**“This is just the first step in linking deep Antarctic ocean with the**

**martian environment.**” These words from leader of the ‘THE FUTURE’ journal have given scientists all over the world a hope to move to new heights in their exploration of possibility of life on the planet Mars. Researchers have discovered a common martian mineral deep within an ice core from Antarctica. The find suggests the mineral—a **brittle, yellow-brown substance known as jarosite**—was forged the same way on both Earth and Mars: from dust trapped within ancient ice deposits. It also reveals how important these glaciers were on the Red Planet: Not only did they carve valleys, the researchers say, but they also helped create the very stuff Mars is made of.

#### When was Jarosite first spotted?

Jarosite was first spotted on Mars in 2004, when the NASA Opportunity rover rolled over fine-grained layers of it. The discovery made headlines because jarosite needs water to form, along with iron, sulphate, potassium, and acidic conditions. These requirements aren’t easily satisfied on Mars, and scientists began to theorize how the mineral could have become so abundant. Some thought it may have been left behind by the evaporation of small amounts of salty, acidic water. But the alkaline basalt rocks in Mars’s crust would have neutralized the acidic moisture, said Giovanni Bacco, a geologist at the University of Milan-Bicocca and lead author on the new study. Another idea was that the jarosite was born within massive ice deposits that might have blanketed the planet billions of years ago. As ice sheets grew over time, dust would have accumulated within the ice—and may have been transformed into jarosite within slushy pockets between ice crystals. But the process had never been observed anywhere in the Solar System.

#### Story of its unexpected finding in Antarctica

On Earth, jarosite can be found in piles of mining waste that have been exposed to air and rain, but it’s not common. No one expected to find it in Antarctica, and Bacco wasn’t hunting for it. Instead, he was searching for minerals that might indicate ice age cycles within the layers of a 1620-meter-long ice core, which record thousands of

years of Earth’s history. But in the core’s deepest ice, he came across strange dust particles that he thought might be jarosite. To confirm the mineral’s identity, Bacco and his collaborators measured how it absorbed x-rays. They also examined grains under powerful electron microscopes, confirming it was jarosite. The particles were also noticeably cracked and devoid of sharp edges, a sign that they had formed and eroded from chemical assaults in pockets within the ice, the researchers report this month in *Nature Communications*.

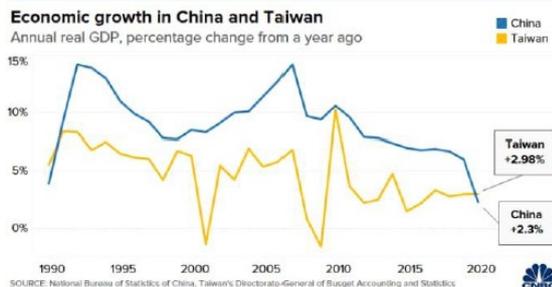
#### Why it is important for study of Mars?

The work suggests jarosite forms the same way on Mars, said Megan Elwood Madden, a geochemist at the University of Oklahoma who was not involved with the research. But she wonders whether the process can explain the huge abundance of jarosite on Mars. “On Mars, this is not just some thin film,” she said. “These are meters-thick deposits.” Bacco conceded that the ice core contained only small amounts of jarosite, particles smaller than an eyelash or a grain of sand. But he explained that there’s much more dust on Mars than in Antarctica, which only receives small amounts of airborne ash and dirt from northern continents. “Mars is such a dusty place—everything is covered in dust,” Bacco said. More ash would favour more jarosite formation under the right conditions, he said. Bacco wanted to use Antarctic cores to investigate whether ancient martian ice deposits were cauldrons for the formation of other minerals. He said jarosite shows how glaciers weren’t just land carving machines, but might have contributed to Mars’s chemical makeup. “This is just the first step in linking deep Antarctic ice with the martian environment.”

#### In a brief about jarosite

Jarosite is a basic hydrous sulphate of potassium and ferric iron (Fe-III) with a chemical formula of  $\text{KFe}_3(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})_6$ . This sulphate mineral is formed in ore deposits by the oxidation of iron sulphides. Jarosite is often produced as a by-product during the purification and refining of zinc and is also commonly associated with acid mine drainage and acid sulphate soil environments.

## First time in 30 years: Taiwan outpaced China to achieve highest economic growth in Asia



China was the economic powerhouse or the engine of economic growth for a larger part of the last 30 years, but that scenario had changed due to the global pandemic. For the first time in 30 years, Republic of China, popularly known as **Taiwan**, which People's Republic of China considers its inseparable part, had outpaced it in terms of GDP growth numbers. Taiwan's economy grew 2.98% in 2020 compared to a year ago, advance estimates by the island's statistics office showed on Friday indicating that the growth outpaced China's 2.3% expansion for the year 2020. Gross domestic product increased by 4.9 per cent in the final three months of 2020 compared with the same period a year earlier. The last time Taiwan's economy grew faster than China was in 1990, when the island's 5.5% growth beat its giant neighbour's 3.9%, official data from both sides showed. It was also Taiwan's fastest quarterly growth since the first three months of 2011.

### Asia's top performer

**Taiwan unexpectedly became the Asia's top-performing economy for the last year.** It beat the 2.58% forecast by its central bank and also edged out Vietnam's 2.9% growth. Some economists had earlier predicted Vietnam would be Asia's fastest-growing economy in 2020. The impressive growth of Taiwan came as strong global demand for the island's tech exports outweighed the hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. Electronic component exports, the lion's share of Taiwan's exports, registered a 21.2 per cent jump in the final three months of the year. The island's strength in exports in the second half of last year — particularly of semiconductors — helped the economy to “easily

offset” any drags from the pandemic, said Hsieh, an economist at British bank Barclays.

### Future prospects

Economist raised their forecast for Taiwan's 2021 growth by 1.2 percentage points to 5.2% — much higher than official projection of 3.83%. Taiwan has long suffered anaemic growth due to its manufacturing industries' exodus to China, where cheaper labour and land costs and looser regulation long gave them a cost advantage for export production. But increasing production costs in China, the erosion of incentives Beijing offered in the past and the Chinese government's support for domestic companies instead have driven Taiwanese companies to divert investment back home and elsewhere recently. Beijing's increasingly hostile attitude towards its small neighbour and other countries has cooled the interest that China generated through its dynamic growth figures.

### Taiwan – leader in semiconductor production

Taiwan is a powerhouse in the production of semiconductors, which are important components powering products from cars to computers and mobile phones. Demand for chips surged globally when the pandemic forced people to spend more time indoors, as the lockdowns triggered an uptick in sales of consumer electronics such as laptops. Economists at research firm TS Lombard estimated that Taiwan and South Korea accounted for 83% of global processor chip production and 70% of memory chip output — which means the two East Asian economies have a near-monopoly status in both segments of the industry. In the near term, China could become more reliant on Taiwan for semiconductors as it cuts out U.S. suppliers, according to TS Lombard.

### Can Taiwan maintain its lead?

“Such is the Mainland dependence on Taiwan, that Beijing is unwilling to apply economic pressure to the island, instead China has adopted ‘grey zone’ warfare tactics, and even talk of military action, all while continuing to purchase TSMC products,” TS Lombard said while referring to the world's largest semiconductor foundry - TSMC in Taiwan. The

downside of Taiwan's economy is that it's reliant on the export of chips where historically it has not been a good thing to rely on any one export. Countering the perception, Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at Dutch bank ING said, "So even if Taiwan arguably depends too much on the electronics sector for economic growth, job opportunities and investment, this is less of a problem given that other economies cannot compete on capacity and technology."

### How Taiwan became the fastest growing economy in Asia?

Taiwan has had relative success in containing the spread of COVID-19, allowing its economy to avoid a strict lockdown experienced by other countries globally. As of 31st January, the island reported only 911 confirmed infections and eight deaths, according to the Taiwan Centres for Disease Control. In stark contrast to most developed countries, the Taiwanese economy was boosted by healthy domestic demand due to its successful containment of the coronavirus pandemic. Residents' consumption in the country increased by 4.3 per cent year on year in the fourth quarter. Taiwan has been a leader in innovation, but its strengths remain concentrated in legacy industries, mostly dominated by hardware. Taiwan is a victim of its past success—dominating important industries, such as semiconductors, but underinvesting in the new fields that will alter the future of work.

Taiwan owes its past success to a three-legged model: **smart government competition policy, aggressive internationalization, and the incubation of an independent innovation capability.** This yielded a highly decentralized and competitive manufacturing ecosystem and promoted Taiwan's leadership in semiconductor design and production. With the rise of China, much R&D remained in Taiwan but many hardware manufacturing supply chains shifted across the Taiwan Strait, especially to the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province and the greater Shanghai region, because of cost advantages and the unique manufacturing ecosystem in Shenzhen. Since then,

China had always been able to maintain a lead over Taiwan when it came to economic performance.

### UAE becomes the first Arab country to reach Mars



**The United Arab Emirates has made history as the first Arab country to reach Mars.** The Emirates Mars mission, named the **Hope probe**. Experts estimated the chance of successfully entering Mars orbit at about 50%, since more than half of all Mars missions actually fail. The crucial time window was a terrifying and suspenseful 27 minutes during which the Hope probe had to dramatically slowdown from its speed of 100,000 kilometres per hour (62,137 mph) to 18,000 kph by firing its six thrusters for 27 minutes exactly. This used up almost half of its fuel, enabling it to be caught by Mars' gravitational pull and entered into its orbit. There was then a roughly 11-minute communication delay back to Earth as the scientists and engineers involved in the project — which include some 200 Emiratis — waited in tense anticipation to find out whether the mission was a success. The operation had to be executed with flawless precision, and the stakes high — the current time period during which Earth is closest to the red planet occurs only once every two years.

### About the mission

The Hope probe, a \$200 million project called **Al-Amal in Arabic**, was launched on July 20 from Japan's Tanegashima Space Station. It will now spend one Martian year — equivalent to 687 days on Earth — studying and gathering data on the red planet's atmosphere. The year 2021 is also significant: **It's the 50th anniversary of the UAE's**

**formation as a country.** The UAE's ambitious project was six years in the making and has made the small Gulf sheikhdom only the **fifth country in the world to reach Mars.** These missions normally take at least 10 years to design and plan, said Sarah al-Amiri, minister of state for advanced technology and chairwoman of the UAE Space Agency. "The first of our challenges was designing a mission to another planet for the very first time," al-Amiri told CNBC's Dan Murphy earlier in the week. "That included mobilizing our team who has been working on Earth observation satellites, but then filling in and bridging the gaps, because spacecrafts that orbit Earth are slightly different from spacecraft that go towards other planets," she said. "The challenges were technical in nature, we needed to ensure that the spacecraft is highly reliable for its journey, it's able to think for itself, that the components within the spacecraft can operate for the duration of the entire mission," she added.

#### **Multi-country effort**

The Emirates Mars Mission partnered with a team from the University of Colorado Boulder to build the spacecraft, drawing on expertise from the university's Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics. But the oil-rich Gulf country itself has spent years investing in space research and development, founding its own space agency in 2014 after launching satellites in 2009 and 2013 developed jointly with South Korean partners. The UAE government has launched various campaigns to expand the country's science, technology, engineering and math sector, and it views its growing space program as an important part of that. **It's also the first country to have a minister of artificial intelligence and is investing heavily in its own indigenous defense industry.** "This will be our drive from this mission onwards over the course of the next five years: to ensure that there is a very well-established and connected-globally connected space sector within the Emirates," al-Amiri said.

## **ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

### **India might ban private cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and develop a national digital coin**

India plans to introduce a law to ban private cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin in the country and provide a framework for the creation of an official digital currency during the budget session of parliament. In the agenda, the legislation seeks to "prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India," but allow "for certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology [blockchain] of cryptocurrency and its uses."

The law also seeks to **"create a facilitative framework for creation of the official digital currency"** that will be issued by the nation's central bank, Reserve Bank of India, the agenda said. **In 2018, an Indian government panel recommended banning all private cryptocurrencies and proposed up to 10 years of jail time for offenders.** The panel also suggested the government to explore a digital version of the fiat currency and ways to implement it. At the time, RBI said the move was necessary to curb "ring-fencing" of the country's financial system. It had also argued that Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies cannot be treated as currencies as they are not made of metal or exist in physical form, nor were they stamped by the government. The 2018 notice from the central bank sent a panic to several local start-ups and companies offering services to trade in cryptocurrency. Nearly all of them have either since closed shop, or pivoted to serve other markets.

This proposal was challenged by several exchanges and traders, who filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court. The nation's apex court ruled in their favour last year. This ruling was seen as "historic" but it did not impact the earlier circular on the policy level.

"Since the government is considering introducing the bill during this session of Parliament, we are sure the government will definitely listen to all the stakeholders before taking any decision," said Sumit Gupta, co-founder and chief executive of CoinDCX, a cryptocurrency exchange in India.

“We are talking to other stakeholders and will definitely initiate deeper dialogue with the government and showcase how we can actually create a healthy ecosystem in unison,” he said.

Since 2018, when the RBI first effectively banned private cryptocurrencies, the global view on these units has changed. Calls from large investment houses has given credence to the view that Bitcoin may be seen as an alternative to gold. JP Morgan Chase & Co. has said that “crowding out of gold as an ‘alternative’ currency implies big upside for Bitcoin over the long term.” Earlier, Bridgewater Associates founder Ray Dalio said Bitcoin is “one hell of an invention” and added that he is considering cryptocurrencies as investments for new funds offering clients protection against the debasement of fiat money. In addition, payment networks such as PayPal, MasterCard and Visa have also moved to set up systems which accept payments via cryptocurrencies. Simultaneously, global central banks have also been exploring the feasibility of central banks backed digital currencies. Earlier, the RBI reiterated that it is exploring whether there is a need for a digital version of fiat currency and in case there is, then how to operationalise it.

### Agricultural Infrastructure and Development Cess

The Finance Minister of India, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced an **agricultural infrastructure and development cess (AIDC)** on some goods while presenting Union Budget 2021. AIDC was announced to provide support to those sector that has been one bright spot amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Highlights

- AIDC will be applied on a small number of items.
- Under the norms, no additional burden will be placed on consumers on most items.
- AIDC was announced because there was an immediate need to improve the agricultural infrastructure in order

to produce more along with conserving and processing agricultural output efficiently.

- This cess would also ensure enhanced remuneration for the farmers.

### AIDC on commodities

The finance minister proposed AIDC on various commodities as stated below:

- Rs 2.5 per litre on petrol.
- Rs 4 per litre on diesel.
- 5 percent on gold, silver and door bars.
- 100 percent on alcoholic beverages.
- 5 percent on crude palm oil.
- 20 percent on crude soyabean and sunflower oil.
- 35 percent on apples.
- 5 percent on coal, lignite and peat.
- 5 percent on specified fertilisers.
- 30 percent on Kabuli chana.
- 20 percent on Lentil (Mosur).
- 50 percent on Bengal Gram/Chick Peas.
- 40 percent on peas.
- 5 percent on Cotton which are not Carded.

### Why the Agri-infra cess will not impact consumers?

The Union Budget has imposed an **Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC)** of Rs 2.5 per litre on petrol and Rs 4 per litre on diesel. But thankfully, these will not result in any additional burden on consumers.

The reason for it is that unbranded petrol was earlier attracting a basic excise duty (BED) of Rs 2.98 and a special additional excise duty (SAED) of Rs 12 per litre. These have now been reduced to Rs 1.4 and Rs 11 per litre, respectively.

Similarly, the BED on unbranded diesel has been cut from Rs 4.83 to Rs 1.8 and the SAED on it from Rs 9 to Rs 8 per litre. So, the overall excise incidence on petrol (BED+SAED+AIDC) will now be Rs 14.9/litre,

which was previously Rs 14.98, while that on diesel is Rs 13.8 (earlier Rs 13.83).

A similar readjustment has been made for alcoholic beverages that currently attract 150 per cent basic customs duty. That basic import duty has now been slashed to 50 per cent, even as the Budget has proposed an AIDC of 100 per cent. Net the consumer does not have to pay anything extra.

### Centre to amalgamate market laws into single code

The Centre introduced establishing of a **Single Security Market Code by consolidating the provisions of SEBI Act, 1992, Depositories Act, 1996, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 and Government Securities Act, 2007**. This was introduced by **Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman**, whereas presenting the Union Budget 2021-22 in Parliament. According to analysts, this transfer will enhance ease of doing enterprise within the nation's monetary markets, minimize down compliances, scale back price and put off friction between varied stakeholders.

In order to instil confidence amongst individuals within the company bond market throughout instances of stress and to usually improve secondary market liquidity, the Budget has proposed to create an everlasting institutional framework.

The proposed physique would buy funding grade debt securities each in careworn and regular instances and assist in the event of the bond market, the Finance Minister said, "Whereas additional particulars on the modus operandi for such a framework is awaited, it can clearly assist to deepen the company bond market which continues to face liquidity challenges," Suman Chowdhury, chief analytical officer, Acuité Scores & Analysis stated.

"In our opinion, this can be pretty optimistic for debt mutual funds significantly credit score funds which had witnessed important outflows final yr. as

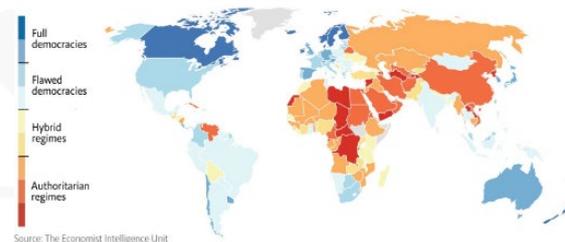
a consequence of poor liquidity in sure company papers," he added.

"This may even assist to scale back the volatility in secondary market yields of comparatively decrease rated bonds within the AA and A class," Mr. Chowdhury stated. The federal government additionally introduced establishing a system of **regulated gold exchanges within the nation**. For this objective, SEBI can be notified because the regulator and the Warehousing Growth and Regulatory Authority can be strengthened to arrange a commodity market ecosystem with preparations together with vaulting, assaying and logistics along with warehousing.

To supply safety to traders, the Finance Minister has proposed to introduce an **investor constitution** for granted of all monetary traders throughout all monetary merchandise. "A big change, the effect of which might be felt throughout industries, is the proposed introduction of the securities market code. Additionally a vital proposal, on anticipated traces, has been the introduction of sure dispute decision mechanisms – discount of the limitation interval to three years ought to assist in bringing certainty to taxpayers," stated Rajeev Dimri, companion and head of Tax, KPMG India.

### EIU Democracy Index 2020

The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2020 Democracy Index  
167 countries scored on a scale of 0 to 10 based on 60 indicators



The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) recently released its report titled "**Democracy in sickness and in health**" and also published the **Democracy Index 2020**.

### Key Findings

- The Democracy Index report 2020 by the covers the 167 countries.
- It has classified the economies in categories such as **flawed democracies, full democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes.**
- The report highlighted that, 23 countries are full democracies, 52 are flawed democracies, 35 countries are hybrid regimes while 57 countries are authoritarian regimes out of total 167 countries.
- In the Democracy Index, Norway has topped.
- The 2nd 3rd 4th and the 5th ranks have been secured by Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Canada respectively in the index.
- India's rank has degraded by two places from the previous year ranking. **This year India has been ranked at 53rd place.**
- Sri Lanka was placed at 68th position. It is also classified as a flawed democracy.
- Pakistan was ranked at 105th position. It has been classified as a 'hybrid regime'.
- Other Hybrid regime countries include Bangladesh which has been ranked at 76th position and Bhutan which has been ranked at 84th
- Afghanistan has been ranked at 139th position and it has been classified as an 'authoritarian regime'.

### Why India's rank has declined?

The report highlights that, multiple instances of "crackdowns" on civil liberties and the "democratic backsliding" by authorities has degraded the India's ranking. However, India was ranked higher than most of its neighbouring nations. In the index, **India has been classified as a 'flawed democracy'**. India's overall score fell from 6.9 in 2019 to 6.61 in the Index that provides a snapshot of the current state

of democracy worldwide for 167 countries. "With mounting pressure on India's democratic norms, India's score fell from a peak of 7.92 in 2014 to 6.61 in 2020 and its global ranking slipped from 27th (in 2014) to 53rd as a result of democratic backsliding" under the current regime, The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said. The other flawed democracies include U.S., France, Brazil and Belgium. **However, India is ranked higher than most of its neighbouring countries.**

### Report

The authorities handling of the coronavirus pandemic led to a further erosion of civil liberties in 2020, the report said. The EIU report said in India and Thailand, "democratic backsliding by the authorities and crackdowns on civil liberties led to a further decline in their global rankings". It further alleged that the Narendra Modi-led government had "introduced a religious element to the conceptualisation of Indian citizenship, a step that many critics see as undermining the secular basis of the Indian state". India was ranked 51st in the 2019 Democracy Index. Among India's neighbours, while Sri Lanka, at 68th rank, is classified as a flawed democracy, Bangladesh (76), Bhutan (84) and Pakistan (105) are classified in the 'hybrid regime' category. Afghanistan is ranked 139th and classified as an 'authoritarian regime' in the index. **The EIU report looks at the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on freedom and democracy around the world.** The Asia and Australasia region includes top-scoring New Zealand, which retained its fourth position in the global ranking (out of 167 countries), and persistent laggard North Korea at the bottom of the global ranking in 167th place, the EIU said in a statement.

The region's overall score fell in 2020 but it now has five "full democracies" with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan moving up the rankings compared with 2019. Australia retains its "full democracy" status and high ranking (9th). Japan and South Korea both returned to the "full democracy" fold for the first time since 2014. Taiwan attained "full democracy" status for the first time following a spectacular jump up the rankings. Despite these upgrades, Asia's average regional score deteriorated to its

lowest level since 2013 as official measures taken to combat the coronavirus pandemic led to some of the most severe constraints on individual freedoms and civil liberties in the world, the EIU said. China, Singapore and others went much further than the rest of the world in tracking and policing their citizens and locking them down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

The EIU Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories. The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

**The EIU has been headquartered in London, United Kingdom. It is the leading resource that provides the forecasting and advisory services through the economic and business research across the world.**

### Reliance gets world's first 'carbon-neutral' oil from US



Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd has sourced the world's first consignment of 'carbon-neutral oil' from the US as it looks to become a net zero-carbon company by 2035. Reliance, which operates the world's largest single location oil refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat with capacity of 68.2 million tonnes a year, got 2 million barrels of consignment. **The Oxy Low**

**Carbon Ventures (OLCV)**, which is a division of US oil major Occidental had delivered the carbon-neutral oil to Reliance. **The transaction is the energy industry's first major petroleum shipment for which greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the entire crude lifecycle, will head through the combustion of end products, have been offset.** It was arranged in conjunction with Macquarie Group's Commodities and Global Markets group (Macquarie).

### How will the oil be carbon-neutral?

The Oxy Low Carbon Ventures and Macquarie will offset carbon dioxide equivalent to that associated with the production, delivery and refining of the crude oil and the use of the resulting product through the retirement of carbon offset credits. This will make the oil '**carbon-neutral**'.

### Details

- A Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) Sea Pearl containing the carbon-neutral oil unloaded the cargo at Jamnagar on January 28.
- The Oxy Low Carbon Ventures stated that the oil was produced in the US Permian Basin by Occidental and delivered to Reliance in India.
- Macquarie had arranged and structured the bundled offset supply and retirement.
- The transaction is a first step in the creation of a new market for climate-differentiated crude oil.
- It is also an immediate executable solution that helps promote investments in longer-term, industrial-scale decarbonisation strategies.
- It will also bridge the development of a further differentiated petroleum product, net-zero oil, which will mark a major step towards fulfilling Occidental's net-zero ambitions and commitment to addressing climate change.

- The net-zero oil will be developed through the capture and sequestration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> via industrial-scale direct air capture (DAC) facilities and geological sequestration.

### Background

Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani had in July 2020 unveiled the plans to turn Reliance into a net carbon zero company by 2035. This can be done by adopting new technologies to convert its carbon dioxide emissions into useful products and chemicals. Occidental, on the other hand, is the first US-based international energy company to announce an ambition to achieve net-zero GHG emissions associated with the use of its products by 2050. The company has been using carbon-dioxide in its enhanced oil recovery operations in the Permian Basin for over 40 years.

### One Nation One Ombudsman approach



The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced that it will integrate the consumer grievances redressal under a single ombudsman as opposed to the three grievance redressal schemes working at present. The central bank has decided to adopt the approach of “One Nation, One Ombudsman” with the objective of making process of redress of grievances easy. The approach will make the grievance process easy by enable the customers to register the complaints under the integrated scheme with a centralised reference point.

### Key facts

- RBI will adopt the ‘One Nation One Ombudsman’ approach to make the alternate dispute redress mechanism simple and more responsive to the users.
- To make the alternate dispute redress mechanism simpler and more responsive to the customers of regulated entities, it has been decided to implement, inter alia, integration of the three Ombudsman schemes and adoption of the ‘One Nation One Ombudsman’ approach for grievance redressal
- The mechanism will cater to all the customers from banks, NBFCs and the non-bank issuers of prepaid payment instruments.
- The e-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme will be rolled out in June 2021
- Currently, there are dedicated ombudsman schemes for the consumer grievance redressal in the banking, non-bank finance companies and digital transactions.
- Now, the bank has decided to integrate the three Ombudsman schemes.
- The central bank has also operationalized the complaint management system (CMS) portal as a one stop solution. This portal will be used for the alternate dispute resolution of the customer complaints which are not resolved by regulated entities.

### Background

In line with the global initiatives on consumer protection, RBI has taken various initiatives to strengthen Grievance Redress Mechanism of regulated entities.

The RBI had operationalised complaint management system (CMS) portal as one stop solution for alternate dispute resolution of

customer complaints not resolved satisfactorily by the regulated entities.

### Banking Ombudsman

**It is a quasi-judicial authority that was created in the year 2006 under the Banking Ombudsman Scheme 2006.** The authority was created to enable the resolution of complaints of bank customers.

### Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006

The Banking Ombudsman Scheme is an inexpensive forum for the redressal of grievances of bank customers. Banking Ombudsman Scheme was first introduced in the year 1995. The scheme was revised in the year 2002. Currently, the Banking Ombudsman Scheme 2006 is operating.

### Retail investors to be able to buy GSecs directly: RBI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would allow retail investors to open gilt accounts with the central bank to invest in government securities directly and without the help of intermediaries. It is proposed to provide retail investors with online access to the government securities market — both primary and secondary — directly through the Reserve Bank (Retail Direct). Government securities or G-Secs are securities issued by the RBI on behalf of the Government of India to meet the latter's borrowing programme for financing fiscal deficit.

### Significance

- Allowing retail participation in the G-Sec market is a bold step towards the financialization of a vast pool of domestic savings and could be a game-changer.
- This will broaden the investor base.
- It would provide retail investors with enhanced access to participate in the government securities market.
- This is a major structural reform placing India among select few countries which have similar facilities.

- This measure together with HTM [hold to maturity] relaxation, will facilitate the smooth completion of the government borrowing programme in 2021-22.

### RBI reiterates growth-supportive stance

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would retain an **accommodative policy stance** into the next financial year to help revive growth on a durable basis even as it held interest rates and vowed to ensure inflation remains within the target.

### Details

- The RBI has announced that it would gradually restore the Cash Reserve Ratio.
  - The CRR had been cut to 4 % in two phases to address the pandemic's fallout, as part of a 'normalisation process'.
- RBI's upper tolerance threshold of 6% was breached for six consecutive months through November 2020.
  - However, CPI inflation had eased to 4.6% in December 2020.
  - Core inflation, excluding food and fuel, however, remained elevated in December 2020 with only a marginal moderation.
- The MPC also estimated real GDP growth at 10.5% in 2021-22, slightly lower than the 11% projected in the Economic Survey and the International Monetary Fund's forecast of 11.5%.

### Monetary Policy Committee

- **The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee constituted by the Reserve Bank of India and led by the Governor of RBI.**

- Monetary Policy Committee was formed with the mission of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (**repo rate**) to restrain inflation within the particular target level.
- Proposed Composition: **It will be a six-member panel, which will include three nominees of the government and three members of the Reserve Bank including the Governor. Each member shall have one vote and in case of a tie, the Governor shall have a casting vote.**

#### Instruments

- **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR):** The share of net demand and time liabilities (deposits) that banks must maintain as cash balance with the Reserve Bank.
- **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) :** The share of net demand and time liabilities (deposits) that banks must maintain in safe and liquid assets, such as, government securities, cash and gold. Changes in SLR often influence the availability of resources in the banking system for lending to the private sector.
- **Refinance facilities:** Sector-specific refinance facilities aim at achieving sector-specific objectives through provision of liquidity at a cost linked to the policy repo rate. The Reserve Bank has, however, been progressively de-emphasising sector specific policies as they interfere with the transmission mechanism.
- **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF):** Consists of overnight and term repo/reverse repo auctions. Progressively, the Reserve Bank has increased the proportion of liquidity injected in the LAF through term-repos. Open Market Operations (OMOs): These include both, outright purchase/sale of government

securities (for injection/absorption of liquidity)

- **Bank Rate:** It is the rate at which the Reserve Bank is ready to buy or rediscount bills of exchange or other commercial papers. This rate has been aligned to the MSF rate and, therefore, changes automatically as and when the MSF rate changes alongside policy repo rate changes. Marginal Standing Facility (MSF): A facility under which scheduled commercial banks can borrow additional amount of overnight money from the Reserve Bank by dipping into their SLR portfolio up to a limit (currently two per cent of their net demand and time liabilities deposits) at a penal rate of interest (currently 100 basis points above the repo rate). This provides a safety valve against unanticipated liquidity shocks to the banking system. MSF rate and reverse repo rate determine the corridor for the daily movement in short term money market interest rates.

#### What is Index-Linked Insurance Policies?



Recently, a committee was set up by the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)** on the request of some insurers. The committee has **recommended to introduce the index-linked insurance policies (ILIPS)**. The committee was formed about four months ago

after requests from insurers for reintroducing ILIPS, which were banned by the regulator in 2013.

#### **IRDAI committee report**

**Product type:** According to the IRDAI Working Group committee report, ILIPS can be an alternative or complementary option to the current conventional guaranteed products (including annuities and savings products) and unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPS), particularly in the context of volatile markets and stressed interest rates. Currently, amid market and interest rate uncertainty, people are increasingly preferring guaranteed products. Despite the returns being linked to indices, there will be guarantees within ILIPS, according to experts.

**Transparency:** ILIPS also promise to offer greater transparency. "Index-linked products could be seen as a category which fits in between traditional products where features can appear less transparent and unit-linked products where transparency is higher but the investment risks are completely borne by the policyholders... ILIP could be seen as a suite of products wherein greater transparency can be facilitated to the customers with respect to product structure and benefits and where risks are in line with the choice made by the customers," said the IRDAI committee report.

The committee believes customer disclosures have to be proportional to the complexity of the product designs. Some of the disclosures could be website displays such as the past and current performance of suggested indices. Also, calculators may be made available to policyholders to indicate the projected future returns to the customers, with caveats such as past performance is not necessarily an indication of future returns and also that returns may not exactly match those given by the particular index linked to the policy. In the customized benefit illustrations, the index's rate of return for a certain period may be shown, in addition to the current standard rate of 4% and 8% per annum, or as is decided by the regulator. A benefit illustration shows the projected return on the basis of assumed rates of interest.

#### **Index-linked insurance policies (ILIPs)**

**The returns coming from the ILIPs will be linked to benchmark indices.** ILIPs are the Insurance products linked with the benchmark indices. **It includes 10-year Sovereign Bond Index, Sensex or Nifty etc.**

The ILIPs linked with the government bonds are less risky while those linked with the equity-based indices will go through the fluctuation in returns in accordance with the stock market performance. ILIPs are the alternative or complementary option to the current conventional guaranteed products such as annuities and savings products.

It can also be used as the unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPS) with respect to the volatile markets and stressed interest rates. The ILIPs can be regarded as a **life insurance policy under Section 10(10D) and taxability of the Insurance Policy Act.**

#### **Significance of the ILIPs**

The ILIPs offer a greater transparency. Index-linked products can fit in between the traditional products with less transparency and the Unit-linked products with higher transparency. In the ILIPs the investment risks will be completely borne by the policyholders as in the cases of Unit-Linked products.

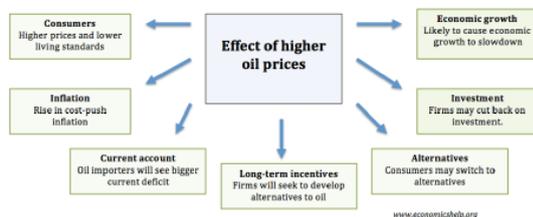
#### **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)**

It is an autonomous, statutory body. It regulates and promotes the insurance and re-insurance industries of India. The body was established under the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999**. Its headquarters are in Hyderabad, Telangana. The headquarter moved from Delhi to Telangana in 2001. IRDAI comprises of 10-member namely the chairman, five full-time members and four part-time members who are appointed by the government of India. **Presently, Dr. Subhash C. Khuntia is the chairman of the body.**

### Unit Linked Insurance Plan (ULIP)

It is a product offered by insurance companies. The product provides the investors both the insurance and the investment under an integrated plan. The policy holders can customize the investment plan according to them. **In India, the first ULIP was launched by the Unit Trust of India (UTI).**

### Impact of Rise in Crude Oil Prices on Indian Economy



Recently, the price of **Brent crude** crossed the USD 60 per barrel mark after over a year. **The rise in prices is because of production cuts by oil-producing countries and expectations of improvements in global demand as the Covid-19 vaccine is rolled out across the world.** In April 2020, the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude slipped below zero for the first time in history, to a negative USD 40.32 per barrel. Two crude oils which are either traded themselves or whose prices are reflected in other types of crude oil include West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Brent.

### Oil Pricing

Generally, the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** used to work as a cartel and fix prices in a favourable band. **OPEC is led by Saudi Arabia**, which is the largest exporter of crude oil in the world (single-handedly exporting 10% of the global demand). **OPEC has a total of 13 Member Countries** viz. Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Angola, and Venezuela.

OPEC could bring down prices by increasing oil production and raise prices by cutting production. The global oil pricing mainly depends upon the

partnership between the global oil exporters instead of a well-functioning competition. Cutting oil production or completely shutting down an oil well is a difficult decision, because restarting it is immensely costly and complicated. Moreover, if a country cuts production, it risks losing market share if other countries do not follow the suit. Recently, OPEC has been working with Russia, as OPEC+ to fix the global prices and supply. In 2016, OPEC allied with other top non-OPEC oil-exporting nations to form an even more powerful entity named **OPEC+ or OPEC Plus.**

### Why has the price of crude oil risen sharply?

Major oil-producing countries had cut oil production last year amid a sharp fall in demand due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However oil-producing countries have continued to limit production despite an increase in prices with Saudi Arabia cutting its own oil production by 1 million barrels per day to strengthen crude oil prices.

Expectations of strong improvements in demand with the global rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine have also put upward pressure on crude oil prices according to experts. "Crude trades near Jan 2020 high supported by Saudi's voluntary production cuts, improvement in virus situation in some US states, vaccination progress and hopes of additional US stimulus," said Ravindra Rao, VP- Head Commodity Research at Kotak Securities.

### How will this impact India?

The rise in the price of Brent crude will lead to an increase in India's import bill. India imports of 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements and the average price of Indian basket of crude oil has already risen to \$54.8 barrel for January. The upward move in crude prices will also put upward pressure on petrol and diesel prices across the country which are already at all-time highs due to the recent rally in international crude prices as well as high central and state levies.

The government had hiked central taxes on petrol and diesel by Rs 13 per litre and Rs 11 per litre in 2020 to boost revenues amid lower economic activity. The increase in taxes had prevented

consumers from getting the benefit of low fuel prices as international prices crashed during the first quarter of this fiscal and is now contributing to record high prices as international prices have recovered. Petrol and diesel prices in India are pegged to the international prices of the two products.

#### Is India's digital service tax discriminatory?

India's DST imposes a 2% tax on revenue generated from a broad range of digital services offered in India, including digital platform services, digital content sales, digital sales of a company's own goods, data-related services, software-as-a-service, and several other categories of digital services. India's DST explicitly exempts Indian companies—only "non-residents" must pay the tax.

#### 'Tax impacts U.S. firms'

USTR has concluded the digital taxes imposed by France, India, Italy and Turkey discriminate against big U.S. tech firms, such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon.com, referred to as the GAFA tax. The issues of contention are the application of taxation to revenue rather than income, extraterritorial application, and failure to provide tax certainty.

#### India's defence

- India has defended the 2% equalisation levy saying that it does not discriminate against U.S. companies as it applies uniformly across all non-resident e-commerce operators.
- The Commerce and Industry Ministry has said the intention of imposing such a levy is to create an ecosystem that fosters fair competition and reasonableness.
- Another reason behind the levy is to exercise the sovereign right of the government to tax businesses that have a close nexus with the Indian market through their digital operations.

- The charge of extraterritorial application is not accurate as it applies only to the revenue generated from India.

#### Govt. to set up Digital Intelligence Unit to deal with telecom frauds



The government of India has recently announced digital Intelligence Unit (DIU). The DIU will communicate with the financial institutions, telcos, and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to investigate fraudulent acts committed through telecom resources. A redressal mechanism is being set up by the government, which will help users facing financial frauds and harassment through pesky calls or SMS file real-time complaints against the telemarketers or individuals. The government will facilitate users with a mobile application as well as a website platform and SMS system to lodge the complaints.

Apart from the DIU a **Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFMCP)** will also be set up at all the 22 license service area levels. It would also ensure strict compliance of the **Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preferences Regulations (TCCPR) 2018** which provides a revised regulatory framework aimed at regulating 'unsolicited commercial communication' (UCC) in India.

**Government Will Block SIM cards and Device of Perpetrators Directly.**

According to an ET Telecom report, the government is setting aside Rs 20 to 25 crore initially for setting up the system. As soon as the complaints start coming in, the government will block the SIM card and the device of the perpetrator directly through its system. This will help the users gain their confidence back in making online transactions primarily through their smartphones. In a meeting, Ravi Shankar Prasad, **India's telecom minister**, ordered strict action against all the telemarketers and individuals who harass mobile users in India.

Telemarketers or individuals who are found victims will also have to pay penalties because of the violation of laws set by the government. Prasad has also directed the telcos and the telemarketers to immediately stop the fraudulent behaviour and harassment towards the telecom subscribers in India.

The government has also asked the telcos to set up and define SMS headers format which every telemarketer or individual sending out bulk messages will have to follow. The telcos extended the last date (January 31, 2021) for implementing the new SMS templates for the businesses until further notice. This is because the new SMS template was hard for around 50% of the businesses, including financial institutions to understand.

### Background

Recently, the Delhi High Court (HC) ordered the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to ensure "complete and strict" implementation of the regulation issued by it in 2018 for curbing Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC). Earlier in November, 2020 TRAI had imposed fines of up to Rs 30 crore on telecom companies such as Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, Vodafone Idea and Reliance Jio Infocomm for not putting enough measures to control UCC, which occurred over their networks between April and June 2020. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had, in its annual report for 2018-19, said frauds related to misuse of credit and debit cards, cloning of identities, and spam amounted to Rs 220 crore in the year. DIU could mitigate this menace.

### Digital Intelligence Unit

**Objective-** To coordinate with various law enforcement agencies, financial institutions and telecom service providers in investigating any fraudulent activity involving telecom resources.

**Significance-** The issue of UCC has been a major area of concern for the Telecom Ministry as well as the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). It has from time-to-time fined telecom operators for not following its directives on stopping UCC.

**Effective Redressal of Complaints-** Along with DIU, a web and mobile application as well as a SMS-based system shall be developed for effective redressal of complaints.

**Instilling Trust In the Digital Ecosystem-** The DIU system will strengthen the trust of people in the digital ecosystem and will make financial digital transactions primarily through mobile more secure and reliable, which will result in promotion of Digital India.

**UCC on over-the-top (OTT) Service Providers-** TRAI is also about to come up with a consultation paper to deal with UCC on over-the-top (OTT) service providers. The launched systems do not address the issue of UCC on over-the-top (OTT) service providers such as WhatsApp. The Telecom Commercial Communication Customer Preference Regulation, 2018 tightened the norms for all stakeholders in the telecom ecosystem to have facilities for users to complain against unsolicited calls or SMS. However, OTT players have thus far remained untethered from regulations as far as UCC is concerned.

### New mapping data policy



The government has “liberalised” policies for mapping and geospatial data to achieve a \$5 trillion economy and the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** or self-reliant India. The government aims to make the geospatial data and modern mapping technologies available to Indian companies. The government realised that the existing regime imposed significant restrictions on the mapping industry, from creation to dissemination of maps, requiring Indian companies to seek licences and follow a cumbersome system of pre-approvals and permissions. Compliance with these regulatory restrictions has subjected start-ups in India to red tape, hindering Indian innovation in map technologies for decades.

Under the old policies, it was not easy for Indian companies to build tools and provide better mapping and geospatial data technologies. The ultimate goal for India is to be self-reliant when it comes to navigation, mapping and geospatial data. **After ISRO launched NavIC as a GPS alternative**, the new policy change will empower Indian companies to get access to accurate maps of Indian territories without going through multiple processes of permissions and approvals. The Department of Science and Technology while announcing the new guidelines for geospatial data said, “What is readily available globally does not need to be restricted in India.” **Geospatial data is information related to any specific location on the Earth's surface.** Accurate geospatial data is crucial during the infrastructure projects such as the creation of industrial corridors or linkages of rivers. They are also essential in developing smart-cities, for any work related to logistics and urban transport.

Under the revised guidelines, the sector will be deregulated and conditions such as prior approvals for surveying, mapping and for building applications have been removed. For Indian entities, there will be complete deregulation with no prior approvals, security clearances, licenses, for acquisition and production of geospatial data and geospatial data services, including maps, as per the guidelines released by the department of science and technology.

### Here are the guidelines issued by the government

**Availability of specific geospatial data is crucial for infrastructure projects in India-** Maps and accurate geospatial data are crucial for national infrastructure projects such as linkages of rivers, creation of industrial corridors and deploying smart power systems.

**High-quality mapping data is required for smart cities, e-commerce, drones and more-** Accurate maps with proper land details is essential for the growth of smart cities, e-commerce, autonomous drones, delivery, logistics and urban transport. The quality of mapping information depends on 3D images, HD quality maps with greater depth and accuracy.

**Better mapping data or land information is also crucial for farming and small businesses-** New geospatial data tools can help farmers get more information about their lands as well as help small businesses to expand.

**Indian companies had to struggle to build tools due to lengthy approval processes-** While Indian start-ups and companies are eager and capable of providing tools that would help in infrastructure projects, the major roadblock has been in getting access to geospatial data. “There were significant restrictions on the mapping industry - from creation to dissemination of maps, requiring Indian companies to seek licenses, follow a cumbersome system of pre-approvals and permissions. Compliance with these regulatory restrictions has subjected start-ups in India to unnecessary red tape, hindering Indian innovation in map technologies for decades,” said the ministry in a press statement.

**The new policy change is exclusively for Indian companies-** The new mapping policy is specifically for Indian companies. Geospatial data that used to be restricted will now be freely available in India for Indian companies. They will no longer be subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals before they collect, generate, prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital geospatial data and maps within the territory of India.

**It used to take months earlier to get access to geospatial data of Indian territory-** Explaining the policy change, Sajid Malik of Genesys International said, "To get a 3D map of a particular region which includes street imagery, the company is required to fly an aircraft, get data, process it and build tools based on that data accordingly. The entire process requires approvals at multiple levels from several ministries as per the project. Sometimes it may even take months to get the necessary approvals. The new policy change will simply allow us to work faster."

**The new policy change may empower India-made navigations apps to fight the likes of Google Maps-** With the new change in policy, Google Maps may not be the only preferred navigation service. Indian companies may also be able to deliver alternatives to Google Maps with as good or even better accuracy particularly when it comes to indoor navigation like inside airports, malls, hospitals and more.

**Indian start-ups will be self-certified to get access to geospatial data-** "Our start-ups and mapping innovators will be trusted to self-certify, apply good judgement and be relied upon to demonstrate adherence to guidelines," said the Department of Science and Technology in a press statement.

**Government wants India to be seen as an "emerging mapping power"-** Government hopes that this policy change will enable Indian innovators to create substantial advances in mapping technologies. "We look forward to India emerging as a mapping power, creating next generation indigenous maps of India and taking these new technologies to the rest of the world," it said.

### Why the maps and geospatial data is significant?

The availability of the maps and accurate geospatial data is highly significant as they are essential for the major infrastructure projects of the country such as linkages of rivers, deploying smart power systems, and creation of the industrial corridors. The accurate maps with the proper land details are important for the growth of e-commerce, smart cities, autonomous drones, delivery, urban transport, and logistics. The quality of the mapping information also depends on the HD quality maps with greater depth and accuracy and 3D images. Better land information and mapping data are also significant for small businesses and farming. Also, the new geospatial data tools can help small businesses to expand and help farmers to get more information about their lands.

### WTO gets new Director General



Nigeria's **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** was appointed as **Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**, the leading international trade body. **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the first African official and the first woman to hold the position.** The WTO is the successor to the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, which was created in 1947. The Uruguay Round (1986-94) of the GATT led to the WTO's creation. WTO began operations on 1st January, 1995. The Agreement Establishing the WTO, commonly known as the "Marrakesh Agreement", was signed in Marrakesh, Morocco in 1994.

## About

WTO is an international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. Main difference between GATT and WTO was that GATT mostly dealt with trade in goods, the WTO and its agreements could not only cover goods but also trade in services and other intellectual properties like trade creations, designs, and inventions. Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland. The WTO has 164 members (including European Union) and 23 observer governments (like Iran, Iraq, Bhutan, Libya etc). India is a founder member of the 1947 GATT and its successor, the WTO.

## Objectives

- To set and enforce rules for international trade.
- To provide a forum for negotiating and monitoring further trade liberalization.
- To resolve trade disputes.
- To increase the transparency of decision-making processes.
- To cooperate with other major international economic institutions involved in global economic management.
- To help developing countries benefit fully from the global trading system.

## Achievements of WTO

**Global Facilitation of Trade:** By building binding rules for global trade in goods and services, WTO has facilitated dramatic growth in cross-border business activity. The WTO has not only enhanced the value and quantity of trade but has also helped in eradicating trade and non-trade barriers.

**Improved Economic Growth:** Since 1995, the value of world trade has nearly quadrupled, while the real volume of world trade has expanded by 2.7 times. Domestic reforms and market-opening commitments have resulted in the lasting boost to national income of nations.

**Increased Global Value Chains:** The predictable market conditions fostered by the WTO, have

combined with improved communications to enable the rise of global value chains, trade within these value chains today accounts for almost 70% of total merchandise trade.

**Upliftment of Poor Countries:** The least-developed countries receive extra attention in the WTO. All the WTO agreements recognize that they must benefit from the greatest possible flexibility, and better-off members must make extra efforts to lower import barriers on least-developed countries' exports.

## Recent Challenges

**China's State Capitalism:** China's state-owned enterprises present a major challenge to the free-market global trading system and the rulebook of the WTO is inadequate for addressing these challenges. It is due to this that USA-China are also engaged in Trade war.

**Institutional Issues:** The Appellate Body's operations have effectively been suspended since December 2019, as the USA's blocking of appointments has left the body without a quorum of adjudicators needed to hear appeals. The crisis with the dispute settlement function of the WTO is closely linked to the breakdown in its negotiation function.

**Lack of Transparency:** There is a problem in WTO negotiations as there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a developed or developing country at the WTO. Members can currently self-designate as developing countries to receive 'special and differential treatment' – a practice that is the subject of much contention.

**E-commerce & Digital Trade:** While the global trade landscape has changed significantly over the past 25 years, WTO rules have not kept pace. In 1998, realizing that e-commerce would play a growing role in the global economy, WTO members established a WTO e-commerce moratorium to examine all trade-related issues relating to global electronic commerce. Recently, however, the moratorium has been called into question by developing countries because of its implications for collecting revenue.

**Agriculture and Development:** Agreement on agriculture is facing issues due to food security and development requirements for developing countries like India.

*Modernizing the WTO will necessitate the development of a new set of rules for dealing with digital trade and e-commerce. WTO members will also have to deal more effectively with China's trade policies and practices, including how to better handle state-owned enterprises and industrial subsidies. Given the pressing issues around climate change, increased efforts to align trade and environmental sustainability could help to both tackle climate change and reinvigorate the WTO.*

#### **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) approved by Union Cabinet with Mauritius**



The Union Cabinet has approved signing of the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)** between India and Mauritius. Addressing a press conference, **Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar** said under the agreement, India will send 310 items to Mauritius and 615 items will be imported from the Indian Ocean island nation and the agreement "will further increase trade between the two countries."

#### **What is included in export items from India?**

It includes foodstuff and beverages (80 lines), agricultural products (25 lines), textile and textile articles (27 lines), base metals and articles thereof (32 lines), electricals and the electronic item (13

lines), plastics and chemicals (20 lines), wood and articles thereof (15 lines), and others.

#### **Economic relations of India with Mauritius**

The release said India and Mauritius enjoy excellent bilateral relations, sustained by historic cultural affinities, frequent high-level political interactions, development cooperation, defence and maritime partnership, and people-to-people linkages. Mauritius is an important development partner of India. India had extended a '**Special Economic Package**' of USD 353 million to Mauritius in 2016. In October 2019, Prime Minister Modi and the PM of Mauritius had jointly inaugurated the Phase -I of the Metro Express Project and the 100-bed state of the art ENT hospital project in Mauritius, also built under the special economic package. Since **2005, India has been among the largest trading partners of Mauritius** and has been one of the **largest exporters of goods and services to Mauritius.**

#### **Background of CECPA between India & Mauritius**

- A Joint Study Group (JSG) constituted in November 2003 to study modalities of the CECPA discussed in detail the complementariness and potential synergies between the two economies and, in its report of November, 2004, identified Investment, Trade in Goods and Services and General Economic Cooperation for developing modalities of CECPA.
- During his visit to Mauritius from March 30-April 2, 2005, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India conveyed India's acceptance of the report by the Joint Study Group on **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement** and both sides agreed to set up a high-powered negotiating team for processing and finalizing the recommendations of this report within a twelve-month period. Accordingly an empowered team was constituted for negotiating a **Comprehensive Economic**

Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with Mauritius. Ten rounds of talks have so far been held by the empowered team.

#### MOUs signed between India & Mauritius

- MOU in the field of Consumer Protection and Legal Metrology.
- MOU between Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB).
- MOU between Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) and Government of Mauritius.
- MOU on Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA).

*The Agreement will be signed on a mutually convenient date and will come into force from 1st date of the following month. The India-Mauritius CECPA will further cement "the already deep and special relations between the two countries".*

#### FinMin Permits All Private Banks to Participate in Govt-Related Business

The government has lifted the embargo on the grant of government business to private sector banks, in a move to enable better efficiency and competition. With the lifting of the embargo, private banks will be able to conduct government-related banking transactions such as taxes and other revenue payment facilities, pension payments and small savings schemes. This step is expected to further enhance customer convenience, spur competition and higher efficiency in the standards of customer services.

#### Highlights

- Currently, only some of the big private sectors are allowed to conduct government-related businesses.
- So, now embargo has been lifted and this move will enhance the customer convenience and simulate the competition.

- It will also simulate the higher efficiency in standards of customer services.
- Private banks remain at the forefront of imbibing and implementing the latest technology and innovation in banking. Now they have become the equal partners in the development of Indian economy.
- Now, bar has also been lifted on RBI to authorize the private sector banks along with the public sector banks for Government business and Government agency business.

Note: For undertaking government agency business, the RBI pays a commission to banks. **The central bank carries out the general banking business of the central and state governments through agency banks appointed under Section 45 of the RBI Act, 1934.** The government transactions eligible to commission are revenue receipts, payments on behalf of the central and state governments, pension payments, and any other item specified by the RBI. The current directive relates to the central government's business.

#### Background

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

#### Merger of the PSBs

- Under the merger plan, the United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of

Commerce were merged with Punjab National Bank. It thus became the second largest PSB.

- Syndicate Bank was merged with Canara Bank.
- Allahabad Bank was subsumed under Indian Bank.
- Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank were merged with Union Bank of India.
- SBI also merged five of its associate banks namely, state Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Travancore and Bharatiya Mahila Bank.
- In 2019, Bank of Baroda merged the Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank.

### An unfair deal to PSBs?

The announcement came as a physical blow to PSBs who have to bear the brunt of social banking. These banks are under pressure to use government schemes from time to time such as the issuance of Jan Dhan accounts, local banks, government-sponsored loan schemes and more.

In return, the only profit these banks had was the float money they used to earn by running various state-owned enterprises. **Float refers to the amount deposited in banks by customers.**

State-owned enterprises include managing the accounts of all PSU businesses, government departments such as Income Tax and other agencies, state-owned trading company, and all Government programs. Regular funding from these institutions helps PSBs to find a float.

As the business is now sought after by the private banks, these benefits will be shared between the private and public banks while the social banking burden continues with the state-owned banks. For example, PSBs have opened about 42 crores in Jan Dhan Yojana's accounts under the Government's investment program.

Contrary to this, private banks have opened only 1.25 crores accounts, according to data shared by

banking unions. Many of these accounts remain unequal and banks have to pay Rs 60-Rs 70 to maintain those accounts.

Also, PSBs are actively working in rural areas to expand banking services while most private banks are banned in the metropolitan area as rural business is unprofitable in these banks. Also, PSBs are the largest lenders in the agricultural sector and MSMEs.

"The government business helps the business to have the float from all these transactions. This used to compensate the cost of doing social banking to an extent. Now that benefit is taken back with this announcement," said CH Venkatachalam, secretary of All India Bank Employee Union (AIBEA).

### PSBs under pressure to do social banking

PSBs have faced significant pressure from the Government during the rollout of government schemes including the recent Rs 3 lakh crore MSME loan scheme. Government typically pushes state-run banks on such schemes to meet targets.

On February 24, the state-level bankers' committee, Madhya Pradesh wrote to the Secretary of Financial Services citing that State Bank of India's Magaria branch was sealed during business hours on 22 February by district authorities.

The bank cited the reason for this as non-disbursement of the proposals under the **Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi, CM Rural Street Vendor Scheme** due to requirement of formality by the beneficiaries after repeated follow up by the Branch.

The branch was sealed by Additional District Magistrate along with several police personnel forcibly evicted the branch staff and sealed the Branch. As per the District Administration, the reason put forth for sealing the Branch is that the Branch is operating from residential property doing commercial business.

### PSUs will suffer a double whammy, say unions

Allowing private banks to run state-owned enterprises will have an impact on PSBs as the

state-owned enterprise of PSBs helps finance the cost of running government programs, Venkatachalam said.

“Public sector bank obligations' social banks are costly. Minimum interest rate on agricultural loans or education loans or MSME, etc. It is a cost to the banks. State-owned enterprises in these Banks assist with financing. Private sector businesses, the ability of public sector banks to borrow weak sectors and priorities at interest rates will be difficult” said Venkatachalam. Unions have demanded the Government to roll back the decision to give government business to private banks. In the past, the Government had mulled giving government business to private banks but the decision wasn't implemented then.

## LEGAL AFFAIRS

### Uniform Minimum Age for Marriage



Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) decided to examine a plea to transfer to itself cases pending in the Delhi and Rajasthan High Courts to declare a “**uniform minimum age**” for marriage. The Union government has also set up a committee to reconsider the minimum age of marriage for women, which is currently 18. A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) issued notice to the government on a plea, which was filed to “secure gender justice, gender equality, and dignity of women”. The plea sought a direction to the Union government to remove the anomalies in the minimum age of marriage and make it ‘gender-neutral, religion-neutral and uniform for all citizens.

Various laws state that the minimum age to get married should be 18 for women and 21 for men. The SC has power under Article 139A to transfer to itself, cases involving the same or substantially the same questions of law pending before two or more high courts. It has been argued that the different ages for marriage violated the fundamental rights of equality (Article 14), protection against discrimination (Article 15), and dignity of life (Article 21) of citizens and went against India's commitment under the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW).

### Current Laws Related to Marriage in India

For Hindus, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, sets 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom. However, child marriages are not illegal even though they can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage. In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.

### Pros of Increasing Marriageable Age for Girls and Making it Uniform

Socio-economic Fronts: Increasing the legal age for the marriage of women has enormous benefits on social and economic fronts including:

- Lowering the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR).
- Improvement of nutrition levels.
- On the financial front, opportunities will be opened up for women to pursue higher education and careers and become financially empowered, thus resulting in a more egalitarian society.

### More female labour force participation

Increasing the marriage age will push the mean marriage age higher and will lead to more females

doing graduation and hence improving the female labour force participation ratio. The percentage of females doing graduation will increase by at least 5-7 percentage points from the current level of 9.8%.

### The benefit for both

Both men and women will gain economically and socially by marrying when they are more than the legal age, but added that the urge of the women is much higher as they always get a higher pay off by becoming financially empowered to take decisions.

### Cons of Increasing Marriageable Age for Girls and Making it Uniform

**Minimum is not mandatory:** Minimum age of marriage does not mean mandatory age. It only signifies that below that age there could be criminal prosecution under the child marriage law.

**Rights of the girls are threatened:** Increasing the age of marriage to 21 years would mean that girls will have no say in their personal matters until they are 21. The elementary right that the Convention of the Right of Children of the United Nation bestows upon minors — the right to be heard, the right for their views to be considered — will be denied to girls right up till 21, beyond adulthood.

**Exploitation of law by parents:** The child marriage law has been used by parents against eloping daughters. It has become a tool for parental control and for punishment of boys or men whom girls choose as their husbands. Most cases that are taken to court are self-arranged marriages. And only one-third of the cases relate to arranged marriages, which are sometimes brought by parents or husbands to dissolve or to nullify marriages that have broken down because of domestic violence, dowry or compatibility issues.

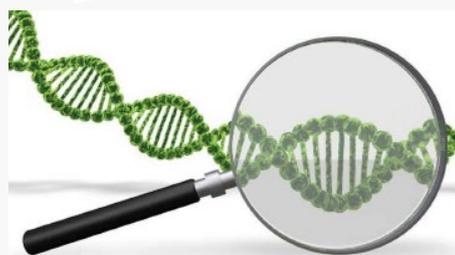
**Social validity of marriages:** Even if the law declares a marriage before the specified age as void, in the eyes of the community, arranged marriages will have social validity. This worsens the condition of the girls who are widowed even before reaching the new legal age for marriage.

**Increased female infanticide:** Moreover, raising the female marriage age in the countries that have high

son preference and high poverty may have the unintended consequence of increasing the prevalence of female infanticide and sex-selective abortion.

Altering the thinking: Any ground-level change will only happen when the psyche of people will alter. No law is effective if change does not occur from within. Erasing the stereotype: Increasing the legal age for marriage is a must, even legally as it should get us out of the stereotype mindset that women are more mature than men of the same age and therefore can be allowed to marry sooner.

### Parliament panel raises concerns over creating national DNA database as proposed under new bill



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change has recommended that the government assuage concerns raised over the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019, including over creation of a national databank of crime scene DNA profiles and fears of communities being targeted. While the Bill speaks of regional databanks apart from a central one, the Parliamentary Standing Committee strongly recommends only one National Data Bank, to minimise chances of misuse of data.

### DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019

The Bill allows the use of the technology to establish the identity of persons in matters of crime, parentage dispute, emigration or immigration and transplantation of human organs. It provides for establishment of national and regional DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) data banks and each

databank will maintain crime scene index, suspects' or undertrials' index and offenders' index separately. The Bill talks of a DNA Regulatory Board that would advise the Centre and state governments on issues such as setting up of DNA laboratories and databanks; and laying down of guidelines, standards and procedures for the same.

#### Concerns Raised by the Committee

- **Over DNA Databanks:** The risk with a national databank of crime scene DNA profiles is that it will likely include virtually everyone since DNA is left at the 'crime scene' before and after the crime by several persons who may have nothing to do with the crime being investigated.
- **Over DNA Profiling:** The DNA profiling to be done under this Bill can be misused to target different segments of the society based on factors like religion, caste or political views. DNA profiling is the process where a specific DNA pattern, called a profile, is obtained from a person or sample of bodily tissue.
- **Storage of DNA Profiles of acquit Persons:** The Bill proposes to store DNA profiles of suspects, undertrials, victims and their relatives for future investigations. The Bill also provides that DNA profiles for civil matters will also be stored in the data banks, but without a clear and separate index. The committee has questioned the necessity for storage of such DNA profiles, pointing out that this violates the fundamental right to privacy and does not serve any public purpose.
- **Perfunctory Consent:** The Bill refers to consent in several provisions, but in each of those, a magistrate can easily override consent, thereby in effect, making consent perfunctory. There is also no guidance in the Bill on the grounds and reasons of when the magistrate can override consent.

- **Absence of Robust Data Protections:** It has questioned the security of a huge number of DNA profiles that will be placed with the National DNA Data bank.

#### Need of the Bill

**Greater Demand for Testing:** DNA testing is currently being done on an extremely limited scale in India, with approximately 30-40 DNA experts in 15-18 laboratories undertaking less than 3,000 cases per year, which represent 2-3% of the total need. The standards of the DNA testing laboratories are not monitored or regulated, in absence of any proper regulation.

**Enables Identification of Missing Persons:** As per the National Crime Records Bureau, annually 1,00,000 children go missing. The Bill will also help in identifying unidentified deceased, including disaster victims and apprehend repeat offenders for heinous crimes such as rape and murder.

#### Global Scenario Regarding DNA Profiling

According to the USA Interpol's Global DNA Profiling Survey Results 2016, as many as 69 countries have a national DNA database, including the USA, Canada and China. The countries hold genetic information of at least 35,413,155 individuals. Different countries have different regulations for collection, removal and retention of DNA samples. Declaration on Human Genetic Data, which was adopted unanimously at UNESCO's 32nd General Conference in 2003, aims to ensure the respect of human dignity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedom in collection, processing, use and storage of human genetic data and biological samples.

#### DNA Profiling and Genome India Project (GIP)

Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology also approved an ambitious gene-mapping project called the Genome India Project (GIP) which aims to sample and sequence 10,000 genomes in the first phase from across India, to arrive at a representative Indian genome. Gene Mapping is different from DNA profiling as DNA profiling uses

small stretches of DNA to identify an individual while gene mapping involves sequencing the whole genome. Gene Mapping is done for scientific and medical uses while DNA profiling is done primarily for forensic and criminal investigation.

*The Committee recommends an enabling ecosystem must be created soon to ensure that DNA profiling is done in a manner that is fully consistent with the letter and spirit of various Supreme Court judgments and with the Constitution. Prior adoption of a privacy or data protection bill would allow individuals some recourse if their rights were not protected. This is particularly important, especially following the Supreme Court's Right to Privacy judgment.*

#### Sedition Laws : Pros and Cons

Recently, the Supreme Court protected a political leader and six senior journalists from arrest in multiple sedition FIRs registered against them.

#### Historical Background of Sedition Law

Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy. **The law was originally drafted in 1837 by Thomas Macaulay, the British historian-politician, but was inexplicably omitted when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860. Section 124A was inserted in 1870 by an amendment introduced by Sir James Stephen when it felt the need for a specific section to deal with the offence.** It was one of the many draconian laws enacted to stifle any voices of dissent at that time.

#### Sedition Law Today

**Sedition is a crime under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).** Section 124A defines sedition as an offence committed when "any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite

disaffection towards the government established by law in India". Disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity. However, comments without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.

#### Punishment for the Offence of Sedition

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

#### Major Supreme Court Decisions on Sedition Law

The SC highlighted debates over sedition in 1950 in its decisions in Brij Bhushan vs the State of Delhi and Romesh Thappar vs the State of Madras. In these cases, the court held that a law which restricted speech on the ground that it would disturb public order was unconstitutional. It also held that disturbing the public order will mean nothing less than endangering the foundations of the State or threatening its overthrow. Thus, these decisions prompted the First Constitution Amendment, where Article 19 (2) was rewritten to replace "undermining the security of the State" with "in the interest of public order".

In 1962, the SC decided on the constitutionality of Section 124A in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar. It upheld the constitutionality of sedition, but limited its application to "acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence". It distinguished these from "very strong speech" or the use of "vigorous words" strongly critical of the government. In 1995, the SC, in Balwant Singh vs State of Punjab, held that mere sloganeering which evoked no public response did not amount to sedition.

#### Arguments in Support of Section 124A

Section 124A of the IPC has its utility in combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements. It

protects the elected government from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the stability of the State. If contempt of court invites penal action, contempt of government should also attract punishment. Many districts in different states face a Maoist insurgency and rebel groups virtually run a parallel administration. These groups openly advocate the overthrow of the state government by revolution. Against this backdrop, the abolition of Section 124A would be ill-advised merely because it has been wrongly invoked in some highly publicized cases.

#### Arguments against Section 124A

Section 124A is a relic of colonial legacy and unsuited in a democracy. It is a constraint on the legitimate exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression. Dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of robust public debate in a vibrant democracy. They should not be constructed as sedition. Right to question, criticize and change rulers is very fundamental to the idea of democracy. The British, who introduced sedition to oppress Indians, have themselves abolished the law in their country. There is no reason why India should not abolish this section. The terms used under Section 124A like 'disaffection' are vague and subject to different interpretations to the whims and fancies of the investigating officers.

IPC and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 2019 have provisions that penalize "disrupting the public order" or "overthrowing the government with violence and illegal means". These are sufficient for protecting national integrity. There is no need for Section 124A. The sedition law is being misused as a tool to persecute political dissent. A wide and concentrated executive discretion is inbuilt into it which permits the blatant abuse. In 1979, India ratified the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (ICCPR), which sets forth internationally recognized standards for the protection of freedom of expression. However, misuse of sedition and arbitrary slapping of charges

are inconsistent with India's international commitments.

*India is the largest democracy of the world and the right to free speech and expression is an essential ingredient of democracy. The expression or thought that is not in consonance with the policy of the government of the day should not be considered as sedition. Section 124A should not be misused as a tool to curb free speech. The SC caveat, given in Kedar Nath case, on prosecution under the law can check its misuse. It needs to be examined under the changed facts and circumstances and also on the anvil of ever-evolving tests of necessity, proportionality and arbitrariness. The higher judiciary should use its supervisory powers to sensitize the magistracy and police to the constitutional provisions protecting free speech. The definition of sedition should be narrowed down, to include only the issues pertaining to the territorial integrity of India as well as the sovereignty of the country. The word 'sedition' is extremely nuanced and needs to be applied with caution. It is like a cannon that ought not to be used to shoot a mouse; but the arsenal also demands possession of cannons, mostly as a deterrent, and on occasion for shooting.*

#### Tribunals: A backbone to Indian judiciary

With Supreme Court at the centre of the Indian judicial system, and various high courts, district and session courts, the Indian judiciary has perhaps the largest justice delivery mechanism in the world. Despite, such complex institutional setup the justice delivered is not as efficient and timely as it should be. It still needed some bulwark to connect the highly complex judicial system and the general public or individuals.

The word tribunal etymologically means 'the authority to judge or adjudicate, or to determine claim or disputes. However, the tribunals perform a wide range of works from adjudicating disputes, determining rights between two parties and making administrative decision. The tribunals were not a part of the original Indian constitution but were a latter addition, it was incorporated in the Indian

constitution by **42nd amendment act, 1976. Article 323**, inserted by the amendment, allowed the government, by enactment of a law, **set up the administrative tribunals for adjudication of disputes and complaints with respect to recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to the public service and posts in connection with the affairs of the union and the states.** The act provides for the establishment of Central Administrative Tribunal and the State Administrative Tribunals. Two or more states in agreement and approved by the central government may establish a Joint Administrative Tribunals.

Each tribunal shall consist a chairman, vice – chairman and members of judicial and administrative members. A person shall not be qualified for appointment as the chairman unless he is, or has been a judge of high court. A person appointed as vice – chairman shall be qualified for the appointment as chairman if such person has held the office of vice – chairman at least for a period of two years. A person shall not be qualified for appointment as administrative member unless he has held for at least two years the post of secretary to the government of India or held a post of additional secretary for five years.

A person shall not be qualified for the appointment as a judicial member, unless he is or qualified to be a judge of high court or at least he has held the post of a secretary to the government of India in the department of legal affairs, or the legislative department including member secretary, law commission of India or held the post of additional secretary to the government of India in the department of legal affairs and legislative department at least for a period of five years. The chairman and every other member of the Center Administrative Tribunal shall be appointed after consultation with the Chief Justice of India by President. Similarly, the chairman and every other member of the State Administrative Tribunal may be appointed by the President after consultation with the Governor of the concerned state. The chairman and every other member of the Joint Administrative Tribunal shall be appointed by the

president after consultation with the governors of the concerned states.

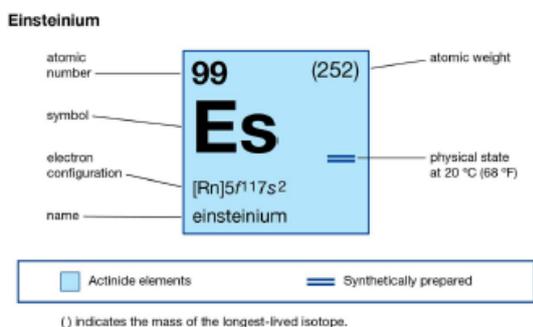
## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### Scientists studying Einsteinium – the most elusive element of periodic table

**Location of Einsteinium the Periodic Table**

The image shows a standard periodic table of elements. The element Einsteinium (Es), with atomic number 89, is highlighted with a purple box. It is located in the actinide series, which is shown as a separate row below the main body of the periodic table. The actinide series includes elements from Actinium (Ac) to Lawrencium (Lr).

First conceived in the combustion of a hydrogen bomb on the South Pacific island of Elugelab in 1952, the heavy element **einsteinium** is one of the shy members of the Periodic Table as it doesn't naturally occur and is so unstable that it's difficult to get enough of the stuff, for long enough, to actually study it. But now, a team of chemists at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and Georgetown University have managed to do just that. They inspected a microscopic amount of **einsteinium-254** in order to better understand the elusive element's fundamental chemical properties and behaviour. Their research had been published in the prestigious journal - Nature. The achievement brings chemists closer to discovering the so-called "island of stability," where some of the heftiest and shortest-lived elements are thought to reside.



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### How did they achieved to capture an elusive element?

Like any other elements in the actinide series — a group of 15 metallic elements found at the bottom of the periodic table — einsteinium is made by bombarding a target element, in this case curium, with neutrons and protons to create heavier elements. The Einsteinium used was made at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory’s High Flux Isotope Reactor as a by-product of biannual californium-252 production (another heavy, lab-synthesized element, but one that has commercial utility.) Technological advancements have meant that these radioactive elements can also be made in laboratory settings. The research team was working with a mere 200 nanograms of einsteinium, an amount about 300 times lighter than a grain of salt.

### What did they find in their study?

The team managed to measure the bond distance of einsteinium-254 using X-ray absorption spectroscopy, in which you bombard the sample with X-rays. The researchers looked at what happened to light that was absorbed by the sample and found that the light that was subsequently emitted was blue shifted, meaning the wavelengths were slightly shortened. This was a surprise, because they had expected a redshift—longer wavelengths—and this suggests einsteinium’s electrons may couple differently than other elements near it on the Periodic Table. Unfortunately, the team was unable to get X-ray diffraction data due to a californium contamination in their sample, which would muddy their results from the method.

Previously, researchers assumed they could extrapolate certain trends seen in lighter elements to the heavier actinide elements, such as how they absorb light and how the size of the atoms and ions of other elements, called lanthanides, decrease as their atomic numbers go up. But the new results suggest that extrapolation might not hold true. Commenting on this, Carter said, “The rules that we’ve kind of developed for smaller things, maybe they don’t work quite as well.” Radio analytical work had been done on einsteinium shortly after its discovery in the 1950s, but at the time, little was studied about actinides in general beyond their radioactive properties). The recent research showed that einsteinium’s bond distances—the average length of the connection between the nuclei of two atoms in a molecule—were a little shorter than expected.

**#99 EINSTEINIUM**  
99 [252]

EINSTEIN	SYNTHETIC	TARGET
Einsteinium's name was agreed while Albert Einstein was still alive; he died before it was announced.	Einsteinium is usually only created in nanogram amounts, and has no uses outside of research.	Einsteinium was the element used as a target for the first synthesis of mendelevium in 1955.

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### The problem with Einsteinium

**Einsteinium-254 has a half-life of 276 days** — the time for half of the material to decay — and breaks down into berkelium-250, which emits highly damaging gamma radiation. Researchers at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico designed a special 3D-printed sample holder to contain the einsteinium and protect the Berkeley Lab scientists from this radiation. “It’s decaying consistently, so you lose 7.2% of your mass every month when studying it,” Carter said. “You have to take this into account when you are planning your

experiments.” “The reason that they can create these elements is because they have this really high flux of neutrons, so they can just kind of push further and further and further out [of their nucleon shells],” said Katherine Shield, a chemist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and co-author of the paper. She said further explaining that “it’s not just about making the element or making the isotope, but also purifying it so that we can do chemistry with it.”

Once a research team gets past the logistical work of safety protocols (to ensure the radioactive elements, like any other lab material, are handled safely), the issues are primarily ensuring they have enough of the material to work with and that the material is pure enough to offer useful results. Like it happened with so many other scientists during this pandemic, the team wasn’t able to conduct the follow-up experiments they had planned. When they finally got back into the lab, most of their sample had decayed. Despite all the trouble they faced in their endeavour, they were able to achieve this incredible feat due to their sheer determination, and we salute them for the same.

## PERSON IN NEWS

### Jay Shah appointed Asian Cricket Council President

**Jay Shah, BCCI Honorary Secretary was elected as the President of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) on January 30, 2021.** He was appointed following the virtual annual general meeting of the regional body. The 32-year-old will be succeeding Nazmul Hussain, Chief of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), who was previously heading the Asian Cricket Council. He has become the youngest administrator to be appointed as the ACC President.

#### What is Asian Cricket Council?

**The Asian Cricket Council is Asia's regional cricket administrative body. It was established in 1983 to promote and develop cricket as a sport in Asia.** The regional body is subordinate to the International

Cricket Council and currently comprises 24 member associations.



### Asian Cricket Council: History

- The Asian Cricket Council was formed initially as the Asian Cricket Conference in New Delhi, India, on September 19, 1983.
- The original members of the Asian Cricket Council included India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore.
- The name was changed to Asian Cricket Council in 1995.
- The ACC headquarters was rotated biennially amongst the home countries of the President and Secretary till 2003.
- The current headquarters of the council is located in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which was officially opened on August 20, 2016.

## GLIMPSES OF HISTORY

### Kalpana Chawla Death Anniversary

The tragic loss of the space shuttle Columbia killed seven astronauts. One of those, Kalpana Chawla, was **the first Indian-born woman in space.** Born in Karnal, India, on July 1, 1961, Chawla was the youngest of four children.

Chawla obtained a degree in aeronautical engineering from Punjab Engineering College

before immigrating to the United States and becoming a naturalized citizen in the 1980s. She earned a doctorate in aerospace engineering from the University of Colorado in 1988, having previously obtained her master's degree from the University of Texas. She began working at NASA's Ames Research Center the same year, working on power-lift computational fluid dynamics.

In 1994, Chawla was selected as an astronaut candidate. After a year of training, she became a crew representative for the Astronaut Office EVA/Robotics and Computer Branches, where she worked with Robotic Situational Awareness Displays and tested software for the space shuttles. Chawla's first opportunity to fly in space came in November 1997, aboard the space shuttle Columbia on flight STS-87. The shuttle made 252 orbits of the Earth in just over two weeks. The shuttle carried a number of experiments and observing tools on its trip, including a Spartan satellite, which Chawla deployed from the shuttle. The satellite, which studied the outer layer of the sun, malfunctioned due to software errors, and two other astronauts from the shuttle had to perform a spacewalk to recapture it.



### Disaster strikes

In 2000, Chawla was selected for her second voyage into space, serving again as a mission specialist on STS-107. The mission was delayed several times, and finally launched in 2003. Over the course of the 16-day flight, the crew completed more than 80 experiments. This image of the STS-107 shuttle Columbia crew in orbit was recovered from wreckage inside an undeveloped film canister. The shirt colours indicate their mission shifts. From left (bottom row): Kalpana Chawla, mission specialist;

Rick Husband, commander; Laurel Clark, mission specialist; and Ilan Ramon, payload specialist. From left (top row) are astronauts David Brown, mission specialist; William McCool, pilot; and Michael Anderson, payload commander. Ramon represents the Israeli Space Agency.

On the morning of Feb. 1, 2003, the space shuttle returned to Earth, intending to land at Kennedy Space Center. At launch, a briefcase-sized piece of insulation had broken off and damaged the thermal protection system of the shuttle's wing, the shield that protects it from heat during re-entry. As the shuttle passed through the atmosphere, hot gas streaming into the wing caused it to break up. The unstable craft rolled and bucked, pitching the astronauts about. Less than a minute passed before the ship depressurized, killing the crew. The shuttle broke up over Texas and Louisiana before plunging into the ground. The accident was the second major disaster for the space shuttle program, following the 1986 explosion of the shuttle Challenger. The entire crew of seven was killed.

### Chawla's legacy

The events of Columbia have been officially investigated and reported on to understand what happened and how to prevent the tragedy from re-occurring in future spaceflights. Examples include the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (2003) NASA's Columbia Crew Survival Investigation Report (released in 2008). Several documentaries have been produced about the Columbia crew. Some examples include "Astronaut Diaries: Remembering the Columbia Shuttle Crew" (2005), and one that focused on Ilan Ramon, called "Space Shuttle Columbia: Mission of Hope" (2013).

### Remembering Khushwant Singh

Khushwant Singh, one of the best-known Indian writers of all times, was born in 1915 in Hadali (now in Pakistan). He was educated at the Government College, Lahore and at King's College, Cambridge University, and the Inner Temple in London. He practiced law at the Lahore High Court for several years before joining the Indian Ministry of External

Affairs in 1947. He began a distinguished career as a journalist with the All-India Radio in 1951. Since then he has been founder-editor of Yojana (1951-1953), editor of the Illustrated weekly of India (1979-1980), chief editor of New Delhi (1979-1980), and editor of the Hindustan times (1980-1983). His Saturday column "With Malice Towards One and All" in the Hindustan times is by far one of the most popular columns of the day.

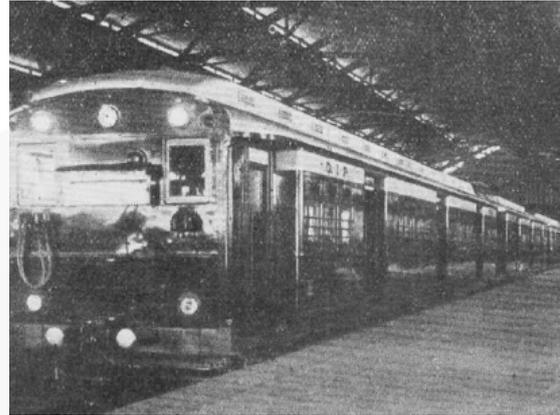
Khushwant Singh's name is bound to go down in Indian literary history as one of the finest historians and novelists, a forthright political commentator, and an outstanding observer and social critic. In July 2000, he was conferred the "Honest Man of the Year Award" by the Sulabh International Social Service Organization for his courage and honesty in his "brilliant incisive writing." At the award ceremony, the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh described him as a "humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil-may-care attitude and a courageous mind." The Indian external affairs minister said that the secret of Khushwant Singh's success lay in his learning and discipline behind the "vener of superficiality."



Among the several works he published are a classic two-volume history of the Sikhs, several novels (the best known of which are Delhi, Train to Pakistan, and The company of women), and a number of translations and non-fiction books on Delhi, nature and current affairs. Khushwant Singh was a member of the Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian Parliament) from 1980 to 1986. Among other honours, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 by the President of India (he returned the decoration in 1984 in protest against the Union

Government's siege of the Golden Temple in Amritsar). Singh died of natural causes on 20 March 2014 at his Delhi residence, at the age of 99.

#### Inauguration of first electric train in India



The **first electric train** ran in India with the inauguration of services between **Bombay VT and Kurla Harbour** on 3rd Feb 1925 on ex-GIP Railway system. The section was electrified on 1500 Volt DC. Electric traction was subsequently extended on Central Railway up to Igatpuri on Northeast line and Pune on Southeast line where heavy gradients on the Western Ghats compelled introduction of electric traction. 1500 Volt DC traction was introduced on the Suburban section of Western Railway between Colaba and Borivali on 05.01.1928 and between Madras Beach and Tambaram of Southern Railway on 15.11. 1931. Thus, before dawn of Independence, India had 388 KM of DC electrification.

In the post-Independence era, the work of electrification of Howrah - Burdwan section of Eastern Railway taken up on 3000 Volt DC during the Period of 1st Five-year Plan was completed in 1958. As a result of the extensive research and trials in Europe, particularly in French Railways (SNCF), 25 kV AC system of traction emerged as an economical system of Electrification. Indian Railways decided in 1957 to adopt 25 kV AC system of electrification as a standard with SNCF as their consultant in the initial stages.

### Here are a few things you must know about Mumbai's Harbour Line, India's first electric rail

1. On 3.2.1925 the first Electric Multiple Unit service with 4-cars was flagged off by Bombay Governor Sir Leslie Orme Wilson.
2. The first service ran from the then Bombay VT (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Mumbai) to Coorla (now Kurla) on harbour line.
3. It ran between Victoria Terminus, now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, and Kurla on the Harbour Line
4. To keep up with Bombay's (now Mumbai) burgeoning population, eight car rakes were introduced in 1927, nine-car rakes in 1961, 12-car rakes in 1986 and 15-car rakes in 2012.
5. Electrical multiple units are the lifeline of Mumbai. During the days of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, the number touched 703 services and 13.2 lakh daily passengers in 1981.
6. Harbour Line today is possibly the fastest growing suburban segment in the country, with an annual passenger growth of over 9% for the past decade.

### Remembering Chauri-Chaura Incident



On 4 February 1922, participants of the Non-cooperation movement clashed with English police resulting in the deaths of about 22 policemen and 3

civilians at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district in the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the Chauri Chaura centenary celebrations through video conferencing on February 4, 2021. The Prime Minister also released a postal stamp related to the Chauri Chaura incident.

### Chaura Incident – Series of Events

The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi had launched the **non-cooperation movement on 1st August 1920**. This was supposed to be a peaceful and non-violent movement wherein people would relinquish their government jobs and titles, stop going to government schools and colleges, not serve in the army and also refuse to pay taxes as an extreme measure. The aim of the party was Swaraj or self-government. The people readily participated in the movement and it saw partial success at least in the participation level. However, an incident at Chauri Chaura changed the course of the movement. On 2

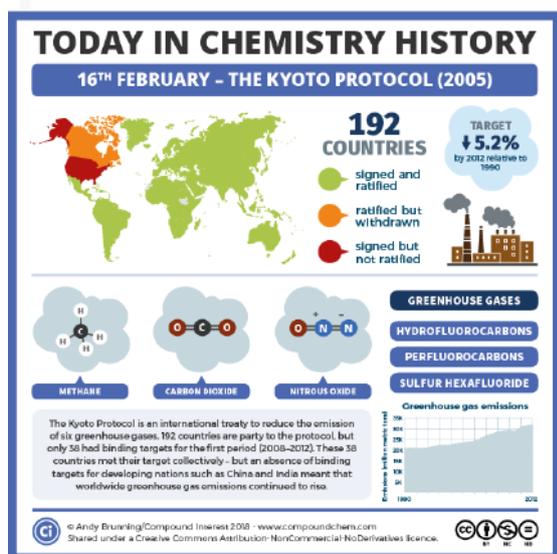
February 1922, people were protesting against high meat prices at the marketplace. They were beaten by the police and many of their leaders were arrested and detained at the Chauri Chaura police station. The volunteers planned another protest against the police.

On 4 February, about 2500 people marched towards the Chauri Chaura market in order to picket a shop selling liquor. One of their leaders was arrested. A group of people then marched towards the police station demanding the release of the arrested leader. The police fired shots in the air hoping to disperse and the crowd. However, the crowd became agitated and started pelting stones at the police. Things were getting out of hand and the sub-inspector at the station came forward and fired at the crowd killing three people. This incensed the people who then charged at the policemen who were heavily outnumbered. The police station was set ablaze by the people and all the policemen and officials inside were charred to death. The British government in response, imposed martial law in the area and arrested

hundreds of people. Gandhi went on a fast for five days after the incident for his 'role' in the event. He withdrew the movement on 12 February officially since he felt that the people were not ready to take up a non-violent movement. He also felt that adequate training was not provided to the people to show restraint in the face of violent attacks.

Many Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru (Born on May 6, 1861) and Chittaranjan Das were against the calling off of the movement as they felt that success was being gained in the country. The government responded promptly bringing to trial about 228 people in connection with the case. 6 of them died in police custody. After the 8 month-long trial, 172 people were sentenced to death. The verdict was met with severe resistance across the country. In 1923, the Allahabad High Court which reviewed the sentences confirmed 19 death sentences, 110 life imprisonments, and the remaining were sentenced to long jail terms. In 1923, the British government constructed a memorial to the dead policemen. In 1973, a Shaheed Smarak was constructed in memory of the 19 executed persons.

#### The Day when Kyoto Protocol came into force



The **Kyoto Protocol** is an **international agreement** that aimed to manage and reduce carbon dioxide emissions and greenhouse gases. The Protocol was adopted at a conference in **Kyoto, Japan, in 1997**

and became international law on **February 16, 2005**.

#### What is the Kyoto Protocol?

The Protocol operationalised the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**. 192 nations committed to reducing their emissions by an average of 5.2% by 2012, which would represent about 29% of the world's total emissions. Countries that ratified the Kyoto Protocol were assigned maximum carbon emission levels for specific periods and participated in carbon credit trading. If a country emitted more than its assigned limit, then it would receive a lower emissions limit in the following period.

#### Developed vs Developing Nations

Recognising that developed countries are principally responsible for the current levels of GHG emissions as a result of more than 150 years of unmitigated industrial activity, the Protocol placed a heavier burden on them. 37 industrialised nations plus the EU were mandated to cut their GHG emissions, while developing countries were asked to voluntarily comply; more than 100 developing countries, including China and India, were exempted from the treaty. The Protocol separated countries into two groups: **Annex I** contained developed nations, and **Non-Annex I** contained developing countries. Emission limits were placed on Annex I countries only. Non-Annex I countries could invest in projects to lower emissions in their countries. For these projects, developing countries earned carbon credits that they could trade or sell to developed countries, allowing the developing nations a higher level of maximum carbon emissions for that period. This effectively allowed developed countries to continue emitting GHGs. The Protocol established a monitoring, review and verification system, as well as a compliance system to ensure transparency and hold parties accountable. All countries' emissions had to be monitored and precise records of the trades kept through registry systems.

### The Doha Amendment

After the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ended in December 2012, parties to the Protocol met in Doha, Qatar, to discuss an amendment to the original Kyoto agreement. **The Doha Amendment** added new targets for the second commitment period, 2012-2020, for participating countries, during which time parties committed to reduce GHG emissions by at least 18% below 1990 levels. This was short-lived; in 2015, all UNFCCC participants signed another pact, the **Paris Climate Agreement**, which effectively replaced the Kyoto Protocol.

### The Paris Climate Agreement

This was adopted by nearly every nation in 2015 to address the negative effects of the climate crisis. Commitments were made from all major GHG-emitting countries to cut their emissions and strengthen these commitments over time. A major directive of the agreement is to cut GHG emissions so as to limit global temperature rise in this century to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while taking steps to limit this to 1.5 degrees. It also provides a way for developed nations to help developing nations and creates a framework for monitoring and reporting countries' climate goals transparently.

### The Kyoto Mechanisms

The Protocol established market mechanisms based on the trade of emissions permits. It allowed countries an additional means to meet their targets by way of three market-based mechanisms: **International Emissions Trading, Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation.** The mechanisms encouraged GHG mitigation in the most cost-effective ways, i.e. in the developing world. The idea was that as long as pollution is removed from the atmosphere, it does not matter where it is reduced, which stimulated green investment in developing countries and included the private sector to develop cleaner infrastructure and systems over older, dirtier technology.

An Adaptation Fund was established to finance adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries that are parties to the Protocol. In the first commitment period, the Fund was financed mainly with a share of proceeds from CDM project activities. For the second commitment period, international emissions trading and joint implementation would also provide the Fund with a 2% share of proceeds.

### How did the Kyoto Protocol Work Out?

In 2005, many countries, including those in the EU, planned to meet or exceed their targets under the agreement by 2011. Others, such as the US and China- the world's biggest emitters- produced enough GHGs to mitigate any of the progress made by countries who met their targets. In fact, there was an increase of about 40% in emissions globally between 1990 and 2009.

### Why did the US not sign the Kyoto Protocol?

The **US dropped out of the agreement in 2001**, calling the treaty unfair because it mandated only developed countries to reduce emissions, and felt that doing so would hinder the US economy. Talks have been marred by politics, money, lack of leadership and lack of consensus. GHG emissions are still rising, and countries are not addressing them quickly enough.

## OBSERVANCES OF THE MONTH

### 45th Raising Indian Coast Guard Day

The **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)** is a **Maritime Law Enforcement and Search and Rescue agency** that protects India's maritime interests and enforces its maritime law, with jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone. The Indian Coast Guard was formally established on **1 February 1977 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978** of the Parliament of India. It operates under the Ministry of Defence.



#### About Indian Coast Guard:

- Founded: 1 February 1977
- Country: India
- Type: Coast Guard
- Role: Law enforcement, coastal patrol, marine border protection, marine search and rescue.
- Size: 15,714 active personnel; 197 vessels; 44 aircraft
- Headquarters: Ministry of Defence, New Delhi
- Motto(s): वयम् रक्षामः (Sanskrit); Vayam Rakṣāmaḥ (ISO); 'We protect'
- Anniversaries: Coast Guard Day: 1 February

#### Vessels:

- 3 Pollution control vessels
- 22 Offshore patrol vessels
- 44 Fast Patrol vessels
- 82 Patrol boats
- 27 Patrol craft
- 18 Hovercraft

#### Aircraft flown:

- 1 x Airbus C-295
- Helicopter: 17 x HAL Chetak; 4 x HAL Dhruv
- Patrol: 36 x Dornier 228

The Coast Guard works in close cooperation with the Indian Navy, the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Revenue (Customs) and the Central and State police forces.

#### Commanders:

- Director General: Director General Krishnaswamy Natarajan, PTM, TM
- Additional Director General: Additional Director General V. D. Chafekar, PTM, TM

- Coast Guard Commander (Western Seaboard): Additional Director General R. Bargetra, PTM, TM
- Coast Guard Commander (Eastern Seaboard): Additional Director General Virender Singh Pathania, PTM, TM

#### Establishment and History:

- The establishment of the Indian Coast Guard was first proposed by the Indian Navy to provide non-military maritime services to the nation.
- In the 1960s, sea-borne smuggling of goods was threatening India's domestic economy. The Indian Customs Department frequently called upon the Indian Navy for assistance with patrol and interception in the anti-smuggling effort.

#### Nagchaudhuri Committee

- The **Nagchaudhuri Committee was constituted with participation from the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force to study the problem.**
- In August 1971, the committee identified the requirement to patrol India's vast coastline, set up a registry of offshore fishing vessels in order to identify illegal activity, and establish a capable and well-equipped force to intercept vessels engaged in illegal activities.
- The committee also looked at the number and nature of the equipment, infrastructure and personnel required to provide those services.
- By 1973, India had started a programme to acquire the equipment and started deputing personnel from the Indian Navy for these anti-smuggling and law enforcement tasks, under the provisions of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act.

- On 31 August 1974, the Defence Secretary submitted a note to the Cabinet Secretary proposing cabinet action on Admiral Kohli's recommendation.
- The discovery of oil off Bombay High further emphasised the need for a maritime law enforcement and protection service.

#### **Interim Indian Coast Guard Establishment:**

- An interim Indian Coast Guard came into being on 1 February 1977, equipped with two small corvettes and five patrol boats transferred from the Navy.
- The duties and functions of the service were formally defined in the Coast Guard Act, which was passed by India's parliament on 18 August 1978 and came into immediate effect.

#### **Interim committee:**

- Vice Admiral V. A. Kamath of the Indian Navy was appointed the founding Director-General.
- Prime Minister Morarji Desai inspected the Guard of Honour at the service's inauguration.
- Vice Admiral Kamath proposed a five-year plan to develop the ICG into a potent force by 1984, but the full potential of this plan was not immediately realised due to an economic resource crunch.

#### **First successful prosecution:**

One of the historic operational successes of the ICG occurred in October 1999, with the recapture at high seas of a Panamanian-registered Japanese cargo ship, MV Alondra Rainbow, hijacked off Indonesia. Her crew were rescued off Phuket, Thailand. The ship had been repainted as MV Mega Rama, and was spotted off Kochi, heading towards Pakistan. She was chased by ICGS Tarabai and INS Prahar (K98) of the Indian Navy, and apprehended.

It was the first successful prosecution of armed pirates in over a century.

The Indian Coast Guard conducts exercises with the other coast guards of the world. In May 2005, the ICG agreed to establish liaison links with Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency (PMSA). In 2006, the Indian Coast Guard conducted exercises with its Japanese and Korean counterparts.

After the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the Indian government initiated a programme to expand the ICG force, assets and infrastructure. The force aims to have 200 ships and 100 twin-engine aircraft by 2023 in its fleet.

There are currently 42 Coast Guard stations which have been established along the coastline of the country. Presently, there is no proposal for setting-up more Coast Guard Stations.

#### **Missions of Indian Coast Guard:**

- Safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations
- Protection and assistance to fishermen and mariners at sea
- Preservation and protection of marine ecology and environment including pollution control
- Assistance to the Department of Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations
- Law enforcement in territorial as well as international waters
- Scientific data collection and support National defence during hostilities (under the operational control of the Indian Navy)

#### **Additional responsibilities of the Indian Coast Guard:**

- **Offshore Security Coordination Committee (OSCC)** – The Director-General of the Indian Coast Guard is the Chairman of OSCC constituted by the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG)**.

- **National Maritime Search and Rescue Coordinating Authority (NMSARCA)** – The Director-General of the Indian Coast Guard is the NMSARCA for executing /coordinating search and rescue (SAR) missions
- **Lead Intelligence Agency (LIA)** – For coastal and sea borders
- **Coastal Security** – The Director-General of the Indian Coast Guard is the commander of coastal command and is responsible for overall coordination between central and state agencies in all matters relating to coastal security

#### Present scenario:

On average, the Coast Guard saves one life every second day at sea.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICG has maintained 24x7 vigil in the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** by deploying about 50 ships and 12 aircraft daily. The deterrence at sea and coordinated air surveillance by the service enabled the seizure of contraband worth about 1,500 crore rupees and apprehension of more than 10 foreign fishing boats with 80 miscreants illegally operating in the Indian EEZ in the year 2020.

The '**Preventive and Measured Response**' stance of operations, introduced just over a year ago, has ensured that over 6,000 fishing boats with about 40,000 fishermen were escorted to safe harbours during the passage of 11 cyclones last year, thus averting loss of lives and property at sea.

In line with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi vision of Security And Growth of All in the Region (SAGAR), the ICG had created maritime history in dousing a raging fire onboard the '333 metric long very large crude carrier motor tanker new diamond' with about 3 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil off Sri Lanka, thereby averting a major ecological disaster.

Further, the ICG also provided pollution response assistance to Mauritius during the grounding of Merchant Vessel Wakashio and provided 30 tonnes of Pollution Response equipment in addition to

training. ICG is also collaborating with littoral countries to combat transnational maritime crimes and enhance maritime safety in its area of responsibility and in the Indian Ocean Region.

To harmonise the Maritime and Civil Aviation Search and Rescue mechanism, ICG conducted National Maritime Search and Rescue Board meeting and followed it up with SAR Exercise-2020 (SAREX-2020) to validate the existing mechanism for undertaking mass rescue operations.

In order to synergise coastal security and intelligence, a maiden seminar was conducted to enhance the effectiveness of intelligence sharing between stakeholders. The service is also working in close coordination with Central and State agencies to put in place a robust coastal security mechanism.

President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the ICG on the completion of 44 glorious years of service to the nation and appreciated the remarkable role played by the service in pursuit of the nation's interests in the Maritime Zones.

#### World Wetlands Day 2021



- World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year on 2nd February.
- This day marks the date of the adoption of the **Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971**, in Ramsar, Iran.
- It was first celebrated in 1997.
- In 2021 World Wetlands Day was celebrated with a theme – '**Wetlands and Water**'.

## Wetlands

- Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated animal and plant life.
- They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by water.
- Wetlands are defined as: "lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic eco-systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water".

**Types of Wetlands:** Coastal Wetlands, Shallow lakes and ponds, Marshes, Swamps, Bogs, Estuaries

## Importance

- Wetlands are highly productive ecosystems that provide the world with nearly two-thirds of its fish harvest.
- Wetlands play an integral role in the ecology of the watershed. The combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients is ideal for the development of organisms that form the base of the food web and feed many species of fish, amphibians, shellfish and insects.
- Wetlands' microbes, plants and wildlife are part of global cycles for water, nitrogen and sulphur. Wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide.
- Wetlands function as natural barriers that trap and slowly release surface water, rain, snowmelt, groundwater and flood waters. Wetland vegetation also slow the speed of flood waters lowering flood heights and reduces soil erosion.
- Wetlands are critical to human and planet life. More than one billion

people depend on them for a living and 40% of the world's species live and breed in wetlands.

- Wetlands are a vital source for food, raw materials, genetic resources for medicines, and hydropower.
- They play an important role in transport, tourism and the cultural and spiritual well-being of people.
- They provide habitat for animals and plants and many contain a wide diversity of life, supporting plants and animals that are found nowhere else.
- Many wetlands are areas of natural beauty and promote tourism and many are important to Aboriginal people.
- Wetlands also provide important benefits for industry. For example, they form nurseries for fish and other freshwater and marine life and are critical to commercial and recreational fishing industries.

## Threats to Wetlands

- **Urbanization:** Wetlands near urban centres are under increasing developmental pressure for residential, industrial and commercial facilities. Urban wetlands are essential for preserving public water supplies.
- **Agriculture:** Vast stretches of wetlands have been converted to paddy fields. Construction of a large number of reservoirs, canals and dams to provide for irrigation significantly altered the hydrology of the associated wetlands.
- **Pollution:** Wetlands act as natural water filters. However, they can only clean up the fertilizers and pesticides from agricultural runoff but not mercury from industrial sources and other types of pollution. There is growing concern about the effect of industrial pollution on

drinking water supplies and the biological diversity of wetlands.

- **Climate Change:** Increased air temperature; shifts in precipitation; increased frequency of storms, droughts, and floods; increased atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration; and sea level rise could also affect wetlands.
- **Dredging:** The removal of material from a wetland or river bed. Dredging of streams lowers the surrounding water table and dries up adjacent wetlands.
- **Draining:** Water is drained from wetlands by cutting ditches into the ground which collect and transport water out of the wetland. This lowers the water table and dries out the wetland.
- **Introduced Species:** Indian wetlands are threatened by exotic introduced plant species such as water hyacinth and Salvinia. They clog waterways and compete with native vegetation
- **Salinization:** Over withdrawal of groundwater has led to salinisation.

### Conservation Efforts

#### Ramsar Convention

- **The Convention came in to force in 1975.**
- The Convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".

#### Three pillars of the Convention are

- Work towards the wise use of all their wetlands.
- Designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance (the "Ramsar List") and ensure their effective management.

- Cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems and shared species.
- India has 27 Ramsar Sites which are the Wetlands of International importance.
- India has over 7 lakh wetlands, covering 4.5% of the country's area, yet none of the wetlands has been notified under domestic laws.

#### Montreux Record

- It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List.
- Montreux Record is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.
- Two wetlands of India are in Montreux Record: **Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan)** and **Loktak Lake (Manipur)**. **Chilika Lake (Odisha)** was placed in the record but was later removed from it.

#### Conservation Efforts by India

##### National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)

- **NPCA is a single conservation programme for both wetlands and lakes.**
- It is a centrally sponsored scheme, currently being implemented by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change.
- It was formulated in 2015 by merging of the National Lake Conservation Plan and the National Wetlands Conservation Programme.
- NPCA seeks to promote better synergy and avoid overlap of administrative functions.

## Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017

- **Nodal authority:** As per the Wetlands Rules, the Wetlands Authority within a state is the nodal authority for all wetland-specific authorities in a state/UT for the enforcement of the rules.

### Prohibited activities

- Setting up any industry and expansion of existing industries,
- Dumping solid waste or discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries and any human settlements, and
- Encroachment or conversion for non-wetlands uses.

### Integrated Management Plan

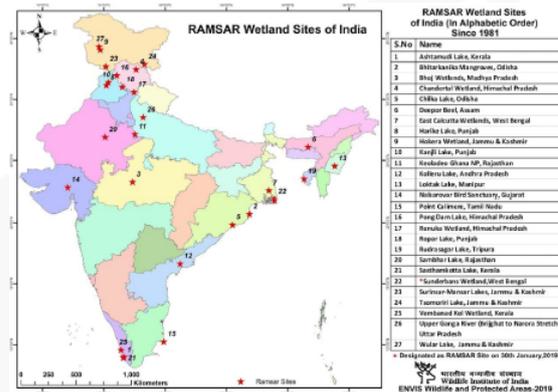
The guidelines recommend that the state/UT administration prepare a plan for the management of each notified wetland by the respective governments.

### Penalties

Undertaking any prohibited or regulated activities beyond the thresholds (defined by the state/UT administration) in the wetlands or its zone of influence, will be deemed violations under the Wetlands Rules. Violation of the Rules will attract penalties as per the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

- To counter unplanned urbanization and a growing population, management of wetlands has to be an integrated approach in terms of planning, execution and monitoring.
- Effective collaborations among academicians and professionals, including ecologists, watershed management specialists, planners and decision makers for overall management of wetlands.

Spreading awareness by initiating awareness programs about the importance of wetlands and constant monitoring of wetlands for their water quality would provide vital inputs to safeguard the wetlands from further deterioration.



## World Interfaith Harmony Week



**World Interfaith Harmony Week is a UN resolution for a worldwide week of interfaith harmony proposed in 2010 by King Abdullah II and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan. The World Interfaith Harmony Week falls in the first week of February of every year and aims to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith. This year it was from February 1 to 7, 2021.**

### UN resolution and world

On September 23, 2010, King Abdullah II of Jordan proposed a World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Plenary Session of the 65th United Nations General Assembly in New York City. In the speech King Abdullah said:

"It is [also] essential to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust especially among peoples of different religions. The fact is, humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments to love God and neighbour; to love the good and neighbour. This week, my delegation, with the support of our friends on every continent, will introduce a draft resolution for an annual World Interfaith Harmony Week. What we are proposing is a special week, during which the world's people, in their own places of worship, could express the teachings of their own faith about tolerance, respect for the other and peace. I hope this resolution will have your support."

On October 20, 2010, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan, Special Advisor and Personal Envoy to the King Abdullah II and author of the resolution, presented the proposal for a World Interfaith Harmony Week before the UN General Assembly in New York where it was adopted unanimously. The basis for the World Interfaith Harmony Week is the A Common Word Initiative which was authored by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad and released in 2007. The A Common Word Initiative and the World Interfaith Harmony Week stem from the idea that humanity is bound together by the two shared commandments of 'Love of God and Love of the Neighbour' or 'Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour'.

In his speech at the UN General Assembly, Prince Ghazi of Jordan stated that the aim of the Interfaith Harmony Week would be fulfilled by: "permanently and regularly encouraging the silent majority of preachers to declare themselves for peace and harmony and providing a ready-made vehicle for them to do so ... if preachers and teachers commit themselves on the record once a year to peace and harmony, this means that when the next interreligious crisis or provocation occurs, they cannot then relapse into parochial fear and mistrust, and will be more likely to resist the winds of popular demagoguery".

### UN Draft and Amendments

The draft resolution World Interfaith Harmony Week Resolution UNGA A/65/PV.34 titled the World Interfaith Harmony Week put forth by Jordan **was sponsored by 29 co-sponsors** - Albania, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Liberia, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Oman, Paraguay, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Yemen.

### The General Assembly, Recalling its resolutions

- 53/243 of 13 September 1999 on the declaration and programme of action relating to a culture of peace,
- 57/6 of 4 November 2002 concerning the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,
- 58/128 of 19 December 2003 on the promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation,
- 60/4 of 20 October 2005 on a global agenda for dialogue among civilizations,
- 64/14 of 10 November 2009 on the Alliance of Civilizations,
- 64/81 of 7 December 2009 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace and
- 64/164 of 18 December 2009 on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief,

### Significance and Aim

- Recognizing that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding,
- Reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;

- Proclaims the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;
- Encourages all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, based on love of God and love of one's neighbour or on love of the good and love of one's neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions;
- Requests the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly informed of the implementation of the present resolution.

**Theme 2021: "The Diaspora-a Force for Positive Change"** citing the ability of immigrant communities of diverse backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities in the United States to live side by side harmoniously bound together by shared values, love of God and love of neighbour.

**Annual Events and Prizes:** Organisation from around the world are invited to set up events promoting interfaith harmony, with the added incentive of 3 annual prizes sponsored by the King of Jordan, in the amount of \$25000, \$15000 and \$5000 with a corresponding gold, silver and bronze medal. The prize, personally presented by the King at a ceremony in Amman, is awarded based on a decision of a jury composed, among other personalities, of Princess Areej Ghazi and Patriarch Theophilus of Jerusalem.

### World Cancer Day 2021



**World Cancer Day** is an international day marked on February 4 to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment. World Cancer Day is led by the **Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)** to support the goals of the World Cancer Declaration, written in 2008. The primary goal of World Cancer Day is to significantly reduce illness and death caused by cancer and is an opportunity to rally the international community to end the injustice of preventable suffering from cancer. The day is observed by the United Nations.

- This year was the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of World Cancer Day and highlights several achievements made over the last two decades and shows that progress is possible. It is we together that can make change.
- According to WHO, 17 people die every minute from cancer in the world. Every year, World Cancer Day is observed with a particular theme.
- The day is organised by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). WHO has designed a guide to cancer early diagnosis. No doubt, to detect cancer early will effectively reduce the mortality associated with cancer.

As we know that cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells anywhere in a body. There are several types of cancer, usually named for the organs or tissues where the cancers form. The world has the highest incidence of this disease. Many Indian celebrities have fought and defeated

cancer. These names include Yuvraj Singh, Sonali Bendre, Lisa Ray, and Manisha Koirala.

### World Cancer Day: History

**First World Cancer Day was celebrated in 1993 in Geneva, Switzerland under the direction of Union for International Cancer Control (UICC).** This was organized by the support of some well-known cancer societies, research institutes, treatment centres, and patient groups.

That time according to the report, approximately 12.7 million people were suffering from cancer, and about 7 million people were losing their lives every year due to cancer. World Cancer Day was observed to control this deadly disease.

UICC was established in the year 1993. It's headquartered in Geneva. It is a membership-based organisation taking care of Cancer around the world and helping in medical research.

### World Cancer Day: Theme

The 2019-2021 campaign theme is '**I Am and I Will**'. The theme seeks to counter the negative attitude and fatalistic belief that nothing can be done about cancer, and instead promotes how our personal actions can be powerful and impactful.

The aim is to reduce the number of premature deaths from cancer and non-communicable diseases by 1/3rd by the year 2030. The UICC tweeted about 2021 World Cancer Day event stating, "This #WorldCancerDay celebrates the extraordinary courage of people living with #cancer and their families, as well as the nurses, doctors, researchers, volunteers and advocates who work to maintain life-saving services during **#COVID19**."

### Key Facts about Cancer

- According to the figures published on the official website of world cancer day, every year about 9.6 million people die from cancer.
- It has also mentioned in its report that at least 1/3 of common cancers are preventable.

- Low middle-income countries are responsible for 70 percent of cancer deaths.
- It is important to implement appropriate strategies because it can save up to 3.7 million lives.
- There are **five types of cancers** – Carcinoma, Sarcoma, Lymphoma and Myeloma, Leukaemia and Brain and spinal cord cancers.

### Global Scenario

- The report has warned that one in five people worldwide would face a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime.
- The overall cancer cases in the world would rise by 60% by 2040 and tobacco use is responsible for 25% of cancer deaths in the world.
- Less than 15% of low- and middle-income countries offer comprehensive cancer treatment services through their public health systems, compared to higher-income countries.
- Better cancer treatment in high-income countries has resulted in a 20% drop in mortality between 2000 and 2015 whereas only 5% drop is observed in the case of low and middle-income countries.
- Thus cancer cases would rise by 81% in low- and middle-income countries by 2040 because of a lack of investment in prevention and care.
- At least 7 million lives could be saved over the next decade, by identifying the most appropriate science for each country's situation by basing strong cancer responses on universal health coverage, and by mobilizing different stakeholders to work together.

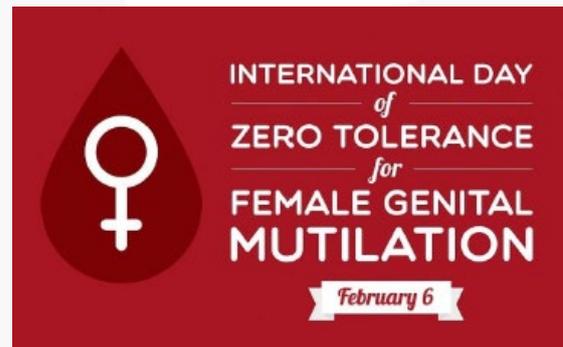
### National Scenario

According to "**India Against Cancer**" a portal which provides information on the leading cancers in India

- 1 in 10 Indians will develop cancer during their lifetime, and 1 in 15 Indians will die of cancer.
- There are an estimated 1.16 million new cancer cases, 7,84,800 cancer deaths in India.
- The six most common cancer types in India are breast cancer, oral cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, stomach cancer, and colorectal cancer. Together, these account for 49% of all new cancer cases.
- Tobacco-related cancers account for 34-69% of all cancers in men and constitute 10-27% of all cancers in women in most regions in India.
- In India, one woman dies of cervical cancer every 8 minutes.
- For every 2 women newly diagnosed with breast cancer, one woman dies of it in India.
- Mortality in India due to tobacco is estimated at upwards of 3500 persons every day.
- Tobacco whether smoked or smokeless is also one of the causes of cancer and accounted for 3, 17,928 deaths (approx.) in men and women in 2018.
- Around 2.25 million people are estimated to live with cancer disease.
- Over 11, 57,294 lakh new cancer patients are registered every year.
- Cancer of the oral cavity and lungs accounts for 25% of deaths in males and about 25% in females of breast and oral cavity cancer.
- According to WHO, In 2018, cancer claimed approx. 9.6 million lives in the world.
- According to the Lancet report about cancer, India is the second biggest killer after heart disease.

### International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 2021

**International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation is celebrated on 6 February** to spread awareness and educate people about the problem's females faced due to genital mutilation. This day spread awareness about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects inequality between the sexes and accounts for a form of discrimination against women. Mostly it is carried out on minors. It not only violates a person's rights to health, security, physical integrity but also cruel, inhuman, right to life when procedures result in death.



#### Aim and Theme 2021

This year the **UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme** on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and the **Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC)** jointly launched the 2021 theme: **"No Time for Global Inaction, Unite, Fund, and Act to End Female Genital Mutilation."** Many countries are experiencing a **"crisis within a crisis"** due to the pandemic including an increase in female genital mutilation. That is why the United Nations call on the global community to reimagine a world that enables girls and women to have voice, choice, and control over their own lives.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively and disproportionately affected girls and women, resulting in a shadow pandemic disrupting SDG target 5.3 on the elimination of all harmful practices including, female genital mutilation. UNFPA estimates additional 2 million girls projected to be at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation by

2030. In response to this disruption, the United Nations, through its UNFPA-UNICEF joint program, has been adapting interventions that ensure the integration of female genital mutilation in humanitarian and post-crisis response.

To promote the elimination of female genital mutilation, coordinated and systematic efforts are needed, and they must engage whole communities and focus on human rights, gender equality, sexual education, and attention to the needs of women and girls who suffer from its consequences. The main **aim of the day is to end Female Genital Mutilation in one decade** and it will require support from every quarter especially youth. Therefore, the theme focuses on mobilizing youth around the elimination of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation.

### Background

Against the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), WHO in 1997 issued a **joint statement together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**. Since then several efforts were made to counteract FGM.

- The Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting was initiated by UNFPA and UNICEF in 2007 to accelerate the abandonment of the practice.
- A statement is issued by WHO together with 9 other United Nations partners in 2008 about the elimination of FGM by calling "Eliminating female genital mutilation: an interagency statement".
- WHO in 2010 published a "Global strategy to stop health care providers from performing female genital mutilation" in collaboration with other key UN agencies and international organizations.
- The UN General Assembly in 2012 adopted a resolution A/RES/67/14 on

the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation is also sometimes known as circumcision in which the external female genitalia are removed partially or completely or another injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Mainly, it is done between infancy and the age of 15. Adult women may also undergo the procedure. Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical reasons and is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights, the health, and the integrity of girls and women.

Girls who undergo female genital mutilation face short-term complications such as severe pain, shock, excessive bleeding, infections, and difficulty in passing urine, as well as long-term consequences for their sexual and reproductive health and mental health.

Although primarily concentrated in 30 countries in Africa and the Middle East, female genital mutilation is a universal problem and is also practiced in some countries in Asia and Latin America. Female genital mutilation continues to persist amongst immigrant populations living in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. FGM is performed mainly in Africa, particularly in North-Eastern, Eastern, and Western Africa. It also takes place in the Middle East, in South-East Asia, and among immigrants in Europe.

**According to WHO, the procedures of female genital mutilation is classified into 4 major types:**

**Type 1 (partial or total removal of the clitoral glans):** It is known as clitoridectomy. In this type, the clitoris is partially or totally removed which is a small, sensitive, and erectile part of the female genitals. In very rare cases only the prepuce that is the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris is removed.

**Type 2 (partial or total removal of the external and visible parts of the clitoris and the inner folds of the vulva):** It is known as excision. In this clitoris is

partially or totally removed and the labia minora that is the inner folds of the vulva, with or without excision of the labia majora, the outer folds of skin of the vulva.

**Type 3 (infibulation, or narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal):** It is known as infibulation. In this process, the vaginal opening is narrowed through the creation of a covering seal.

**Type 4 (picking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterizing the genital area):** It consists of all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for a non-medical purpose. Like pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterizing the genital area.

**The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has categorized the reasons into five categories:** psycho-sexual reasons; sociological or cultural reasons; hygiene and aesthetic reasons; religious reasons; and socio-economic factors.

#### Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation

FGM does not have any health benefits. It just harms girls and women in various ways. It interferes with the natural functions of girls and women's bodies. It is removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue.

After the procedure, the effects often occur immediately and may cause severe bleeding, infections, tetanus, paralysis of the bladder, or blood poisoning and can even result in death. It also transmits AIDS/HIV due to the use of dirty instruments.

Sometimes the victim may face psychological trauma, loss of sexual sensation, long-term pain while urinating and during menstruation, scar tissue and keloid, sexual problems, increased risk of childbirth complications and new born deaths, etc.

#### Female Genital Mutilation Violates

- Sexual and reproductive health
- Security
- Right to be free from torture and cruel
- Inhuman or degrading treatment

- Human rights to live when the procedure results in death.

#### Health risks

Severe pain, excessive bleeding (haemorrhage), shock, genital tissue swelling: due to inflammatory response or local infection, infections, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), urination problems, impaired wound healing: can lead to pain, infections and abnormal scarring, death (can be caused by infections such as tetanus and haemorrhage), and psychological consequences such as trauma (many women describe FGM as a traumatic event.)

#### Long term

Pain, painful urination, menstrual problems, keloids, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), obstetric fistula, perinatal risks, and psychological consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, and depression. Infections are also a common effect of these procedures (often happening more than once), which include chronic genital infections, chronic reproductive tract infections, and urinary tract infections. Female sexual health is also affected in the long term, presenting issues such as decreased sexual desire and pleasure, pain during sex, difficulty during penetration, decreased lubrication during intercourse, reduced frequency or absence of orgasm (anorgasmia).

Lastly, Obstetric complications often result in post FGM procedures, some of which including an increased risk of difficult labour, having a Caesarean section performed, experiencing postpartum haemorrhage, or recourse to an episiotomy.

#### FGM in India

- According to the aforementioned study, the reasons for FGM referred to as "Khafd" in India include continuing an old traditional practice, adhering to religious edicts, controlling women's sexuality, and abiding by the rules stated by the religious clergy.

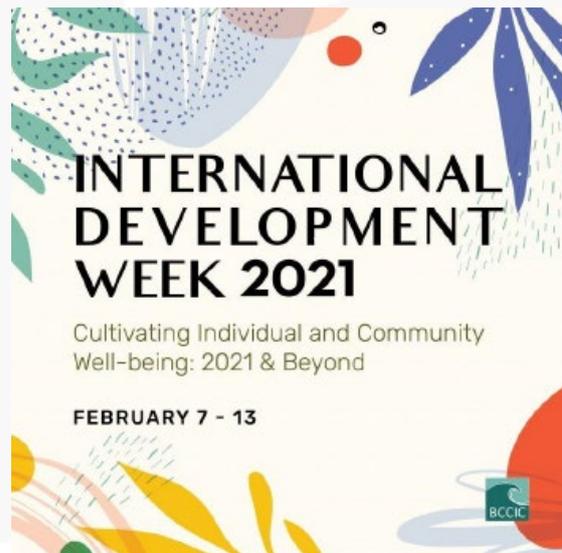
- It also states that the issue first rose to prominence in India because of two international legal cases on FGM against practicing Bohras in Australia and the US.
- In 2018, a bench of then CJJ Dipak Misra referred a petition seeking a ban on FGM among Dawoodi Bohra girls to a five-judge Constitution Bench.
- The Dawoodi Bohra community, on the other hand, maintained that the practice should be allowed since the Constitution grants religious freedom under Article 25.

#### **Female Genital Mutilation: Facts**

- According to the UN, in the world, around 4.1 million girls are at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation in 2020.
- According to UNFPA, the cost of preventing female genital mutilation is \$95 per girl today.
- Female genital mutilation is prevalent in mostly 30 countries experiencing high population growth with at least 30% of girls undergoing female population under the age of 15.
- According to WHO, more than 200 million girls and women faced genital mutilation in 30 countries including Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and are alive today.
- UNFPA estimates there may be as many as 2 million cases of female genital mutilation by 2030 that would have otherwise been averted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2021 alone, there are 4.16 million girls around the world, who are at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation.
- According to a UNFPA (pre-COVID-19) study, the cost of preventing female genital mutilation is \$95 per girl today.

- 30 countries where female genital mutilation is prevalent are experiencing high population growth, with at least 30 percent of girls undergoing female population under the age of 15.
- Around 1 in 4 girls and women, or 52 million worldwide, experienced female genital mutilation, performed by health personnel pointing to an alarming trend in the medicalization of female genital mutilation.

#### **International Development Week - February 7 to 13, 2021**



- International Development Week (IDW) is an annual initiative established in 1991. It is held during the first full week of February.
- We celebrated IDW 2021 from February 7 to 13.
- This is a uniquely **Canadian tradition**. It offers an opportunity to pause and acknowledge contributions to poverty reduction and international humanitarian assistance in the developing world.

International Development Week is a national event promoted by the **Canadian International**

**Development Agency (CIDA).** The Agency is concentrating more and more of its bilateral (country to country) aid in a group of **20 countries** of focus. This concentration does not include programs carried out in other developing countries by multilateral agencies such as UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, and La Francophonie. Neither does it include cases of crisis, conflict, and natural disaster that require fast intervention, as provided by CIDA's strong helping hand. CIDA's headquarter is located in Gatineau, Québec. As well, regional offices are in place across the country to better engage partners, individuals, the private sector, and civil society. It is observed every year in the first full week of February.

IDW is the week to celebrate the difference are making around the world, increase the awareness of the role in international development; learn more about life in developing countries and find out how they can become global citizens, actively involved in international development.

### Theme 2021

International Development Week theme was **“Go for the Goals,”** with a focus on gender equality, health and climate change. Referring to the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this theme illustrates the idea of moving forward in a collaborative and positive way toward a better world.

This way forward is the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for **Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. This Agenda is a global plan of action aiming to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. In other words, it is a path that seeks to shift the world toward a less wasteful, less destructive and more sustainable and equitable mindset. One where no one goes hungry, no one feels unsafe, and no one is left behind.

While this Agenda involves ambitious goals, we can achieve them if we **#GoForTheGoals** together. With less than a decade until 2030, this edition of the International Development Week is an ideal

moment to reflect on how the global goals affect our realities both at home and abroad.

### International Development Association (IDA)

The **International Development Association (IDA)** is a part of the **World Bank Group** and a multinational financial institution providing aid to poor countries in the form of loans.

- The main objective of the IDA is to provide grants and concessional loans to the world’s poorest countries.
- It lends to developing countries with the lowest Gross National Income (GNI), having troubled creditworthiness, & having very low per capita income.
- The IDA seeks to complement the work done by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- Collectively IBRD and IDA are known as the World Bank.

### IDA

- IDA was established with the signing of agreements between 15 countries.
- 173 countries are its members.
- Around 52 nations are donor countries.
- IDA lends to 75 countries, out of which 39 countries are located in Africa.
- IDA replenishes its resources every 3 years.

### International Development Association – Donor Countries

Since the funds of the IDA get eroded, they need to be replenished periodically. The replenishment is provided by different countries. Some important statistics regarding the categorization of donor countries of the IDA are given below.

1. G-7 countries dominate donor contributions. Their contribution comprises 69% of the total funds donated.

2. 26% of the total funds are donated by 11 mid-sized traditional donor countries.
3. 5% of the total funds are donated by 34 small-donor nations.

#### International Development Association – Resource Allocation

The resource allocation by the International Development Association is done after evaluating various metrics which are given below.

1. Only countries meeting the IDA eligibility criteria are allowed to receive funds from it.
2. Allocation of funds is done annually through the Performance-Based Allocation (PBA) System.
3. The performance of a country is measured through Annual Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA).
4. Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.
5. The population of the country.
6. Terms of IDA assistance is determined by the country's risk of debt distress.
7. Special allocations to post-conflict and re-engaging countries.

#### International Development Association – Financial Instruments

There are 3 financial instruments under the International Development Association (IDA) which are given below.

1. Investment Operations – It is used to finance a wide range of physical and social infrastructure necessary to reduce poverty and create sustainable development.
2. Development Policy Operations – This focuses on financial policies and institutional actions that are consistent with the country's economic policies.
3. IDA Guarantees – This comes into the picture when the default is caused by

the Government's failure. Here it mobilizes private sector finance.

#### International Development Association and India

India is one of the founding members of the International Development Association.

1. India got its first investment from IDA for a highway construction project in 1961.
2. In the following decade, the IDA accounted for nearly three-fourths of all WB lending to India.
3. By 1970, India was the largest recipient of IDA funds, accounting for more than two-fifths of all its lending.
4. India is also a donor to the IDA classified as a Part II Donor.
5. In 1980, China joined the World Bank which significantly dropped India's share in IDA.
6. China's claim to limiting the IDA resources also worsened Africa's economic fortunes.
7. Now, India is classified as a Blend Country and is creditworthy for funding from both IBRD and IDA.
8. Blend Country or Blend Borrower can be defined as one in the transition from lower-middle-income to middle-income.

#### Significance for India

- **Global Revival:** As India is playing a leading role in the global revival, it has brought India's ancient culture (AYUSH), universal, peaceful ethos, and the beauty of classical music to the world.
- **Global Audience:** The event as a forum has helped to bring the opportunities in India to a global audience and made the links between India and UK stronger.
- **Trade and Investment:** It would focus on India's trade and foreign investment processes as it has done

many reforms e.g. private investment in the space sector.

- Reforms in agriculture would provide an opportunity to invest in storage and logistics.
- **Invest India Programme:** It will help in improving the Invest India programme. India has recently been reviewing 50 investment proposals from China under its new screening policy which is being done under the new rules.
- **New rules:** India announced new investment rules in April 2020. Under the new rules, all the investments by the entities based in neighbouring countries have to be approved by the Indian Government. This was introduced to curb opportunistic takeovers during the Covid-19-period.
- **Battle against the Covid-19:** As India is fighting a strong battle against the global pandemic it would recognise India's efforts towards revival with care, compassion and sustainability - both for the environment and the economy.

#### Initiatives to fight Covid-19

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Initiative:** It is about being self-sustaining and self-generating. Atmanirbhar Bharat merges domestic production and consumption with global supply chains.
- **Economic Relief Packages:** The package has been targeted to help the poorest with aid of technology and providing free cooking gas, cash in the bank accounts, free food grains to millions.

#### International Epilepsy Day 2021



## International Epilepsy Day

#EPILEPSYDAY

Second Monday in February

International Epilepsy Day, celebrated each year on the **2nd Monday of February**, is an opportunity to raise awareness of epilepsy, what it is, how it can be treated, and what is needed to bring treatment to all people who need it. This year it was celebrated on February 8, 2021.

Epilepsy is a **chronic disorder of the brain** characterized by recurrent 'seizures' or 'fits'. The seizures are caused as a result of sudden, excessive electrical discharges in the neurons (brain cells). The condition can affect people at any age and each age group has unique concerns and problems.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), about 50 million people have epilepsy across the world, out of which 80 percent of people are living in developing countries.

- Although epilepsy is treatable, yet three-fourths of affected people in developing countries do not receive the required treatment.
- In India, about 10 million people suffer from seizures associated with epilepsy.
- Nearly 80% of people with epilepsy live in low- and middle-income countries.
- It is estimated that up to 70% of people living with epilepsy could live seizure-free if properly diagnosed and treated.
- The risk of premature death in people with epilepsy is up to three times higher than for the general population.

It is marked with a goal to generate awareness among people about epilepsy, its symptoms,

diagnosis, and treatment options. On this day, various hospitals also provide free treatment and organize consultation camps for the patients.

### What is Epilepsy Disease?

Epilepsy is a chronic brain disorder that resulted in recurrent 'seizures' or 'fits'. Seizures occur due to the sudden, excessive electrical discharges in the neurons or brain cells. This type of condition can affect people at any age and each age group suffers from different problems.

- Epilepsy is a neurological condition in which the tendency to have seizures starts in the brain.
- Epilepsy is a chronic non-communicable disease of the brain that affects people of all ages.
- Epilepsy is not just one condition but a group of many different 'epilepsies' and the one common thing is to have seizures in the brain.
- Affecting people of any age, gender, or geographical belonging, epilepsy has no identified cause. But doctors believe that certain factors including genetic influence, head trauma, prenatal injury, autism, etc. can potentially contribute to the onset of the condition.

It is diagnosed after a person has had more than one seizure. It is also seen that all seizures are not because of epilepsy. There are several other conditions like very low blood sugar, fainting, etc. which cause seizures. Mostly epilepsy is diagnosed in children and people over age 65.

### Symptoms of epilepsy

- Sudden twitching (uncontrollable jerking motions of the arms and legs)
- Loss of consciousness
- Tingling sensation (feeling of pricking pins or needles) in arms or legs
- Stiffness in muscles of arms or legs or face
- Muscles of arms, legs, or face become stiffed.

- Different types of sensations like sort of pricking pins or needles in arms or legs.
- Uncontrollable jerking motions in arms or legs etc.

### Causes of Epilepsy

- Brain damage from prenatal and perinatal injury (e.g. a loss of oxygen or trauma during birth, low birth weight);
- Congenital abnormalities or genetic conditions with associated brain malformations;
- Brain Infections
- Stroke and Brain Tumours
- Head Injury/ Accidents
- Prolonged high fever during childhood
- During childhood prolonged high fever.
- Infections like encephalitis or meningitis.
- Low oxygen during birth.
- Some genetic conditions like tuberous sclerosis may result in brain injury.

It is seen that 70% of cases of epilepsy do not have any particular cause.

### Treatment of Epilepsy

Epilepsy is usually treated with epilepsy medicines, often referred to as anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs). Epilepsy medicines act on the brain, trying to reduce seizures or stop seizures from happening. Lots of people with epilepsy find that when they have the right medicine, they have fewer or no seizures.

### Other Treatments

If epilepsy medicines do not work for you, there are other treatments that may help, such as:

- Brain surgery
- Vagus nerve stimulation
- The ketogenic diet
- Deep brain stimulation
- Trigeminal nerve stimulation

## Management

- Tips to deal with Seizures
- Do not panic.
- Do not try to restrain the person during a seizure.
- Remove sharp objects or other harmful objects out of the person with seizures.
- Loosen any tight neckwear.
- Gently roll the person onto one side so that any fluid in the mouth can safely come out.
- Put something soft under his or her head.
- Do not put anything into the person's mouth for the fear of swallowing tongue.
- Be with the person until medical help arrives.
- Allow the person to rest or sleep.

Epilepsy is mostly treatable with medications. The critical thing about epilepsy is that one should not delay its treatment. Start the treatment as soon as it is diagnosed. This prevents further deterioration of the condition.

## Tips for Epileptic patients

- If the epilepsy patient does not suffer from seizures then also it is advised to take proper medication as advised by the doctor.
- Don't discontinue medicine without the advice of a doctor.
- Before taking any other medication, it is better to consult or to take advice from the doctor.
- Don't drink alcohol because it provokes seizures.
- Do not discontinue the medications without your doctors' advice.
- Consult your doctor while taking any other medications to avoid possible side effects or any complications.
- Do not drink alcohol as it provokes seizures.

## Facts About Epilepsy

- Epilepsy is not a lifelong disorder. As the person grows older, the episodes of fits or seizures fade away.
- A lot of people think that feeding the person while they are suffering from a seizure can prevent it but that doesn't really help. Forcing food into their mouth can harm them.

Seizures can be divided into three phases - the beginning, middle, and end.

- First, it starts with the smell, sound, or uncommon behaviour.
- The middle part is where the fit happens.
- The end is where the brain recovers itself and the person gets back to their senses. This can take a few minutes or hours.
- Epilepsy is a brain disorder that is incurable. There is a treatment to control this issue but it is not completely curable.
- Even if the person doesn't suffer from seizures, they should be given all the medications advised by the doctor. They shouldn't be given any medication other than the ones suggested by their doctor.
- There is a belief that a person suffering from epilepsy can never get married or have children. However, that's not the case. Epileptic patients can marry and lead a healthy life. It is also possible for a woman suffering from epilepsy to conceive a baby.
- In many parts of the world, people with epilepsy and their families suffer from stigma and discrimination.

### Safer Internet Day 2021



*"The internet has been a boon and a curse for teenagers." – J. K. Rowling*

9 February 2021, **18th edition of Safer Internet Day** with actions took place right across the globe. With a theme once again of **"Together for a better internet"**, the day calls upon all stakeholders to join together to make the internet a safer and better place for all, and especially for children and young people.

UNICEF warned of the dangers posed by online violence, cyberbullying, and digital harassment for the 70.6 percent of young people aged 15 to 24 years old who are online globally and called for concerted action to tackle and prevent violence against children and young people online.

#### About

Safer Internet Day has become a landmark event in the online safety calendar. Starting as an initiative of the EU SafeBorders project in 2004 and taken up by the Insafe network as one of its earliest actions in 2005, Safer Internet Day has grown beyond its traditional geographic zone and is now celebrated in approximately 170 countries worldwide.

From cyberbullying to social networking to digital identity, each year Safer Internet Day aims to raise awareness of emerging online issues and current concerns.

- Safer Internet Day celebrates ensuring the responsible use of online technologies.
- SID was first initiated in 2004 and is as part of the EU's 'Better Internet for

Kids' policy. The SID initiative is now recognized in around 150 countries worldwide.

- To expand the initiative's reach, Safer Internet Day Committees were introduced in 2009. In India, the New Delhi-based NGO DISC (Developing Internet Safe Community) Foundation is the SID Committee.

#### What is the Internet?

The Internet (or internet) is the global system of interconnected computer networks that uses the Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to communicate between networks and devices. It is a network of networks that consists of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope, linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries a vast range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents and applications of **the World Wide Web (WWW)**, electronic mail, telephony, and file sharing.

- On January 1, 1983, ARPANET adopted TCP/IP, and from there, researchers began to assemble the "network of networks" that became the modern Internet.
- Further, from 1990, the online world became more recognizable when computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web.

#### Internet safety

Internet safety or online safety or cyber safety or E-Safety is trying to be safe on the internet and is the act of maximizing a user's awareness of personal safety and security risks to private information and property associated with using the internet, and the self-protection from computer crime.

#### Information security

Sensitive information such as personal information and identity, passwords are often associated with personal property and privacy and may present

security concerns if leaked. Unauthorized access and usage of private information may result in consequences such as identity theft, as well as theft of property. Common causes of information security breaches include:

1. **Phishing:** Phishing is a type of scam where the scammers disguise themselves as a trustworthy source in an attempt to obtain private information such as passwords, and credit card information, etc. through the internet. These fake websites are often designed to look identical to their legitimate counterparts to avoid suspicion from the user.
2. **Internet scams:** Internet scams are schemes that deceive the user in various ways in an attempt to take advantage of them. Internet scams often aim to cheat the victim of personal property directly rather than personal information through false promises, confidence tricks, and more.

### Personal safety

The growth of the internet gave rise to many important services accessible to anyone with a connection. One of these important services is digital communication. While this service allowed communication with others through the internet, this also allowed communication with malicious users. While malicious users often use the internet for personal gain, this may not be limited to financial/material gain. This is especially a concern to parents and children, as children are often target of these malicious users. Common threats to personal safety :

1. **Cyberstalking:** Cyberstalking is the use of the Internet or other electronic means to stalk or harass an individual, group, or organization. It may include false accusations, defamation, slander and libel. It may also include monitoring, identity theft, threats, vandalism, solicitation for sex, or gathering information that may be used to threaten, embarrass or harass.

2. **Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying is the use of electronic means such as instant messaging, social media, e-mail and other forms of online communication with the intent to abuse, intimidate, or overpower an individual or group. In a 2012 study of over 11,925 students in the United States, it was indicated that 23% of adolescents reported being a victim of cyberbullying, 30% of which reported experiencing suicidal behavior.
3. **Online predators:** Online predation is the act of engaging an underage minor into inappropriate sexual relationships through the internet. Online predators may attempt to initiate and seduce minors into relationships through the use of chat rooms or internet forums. In a sample of 216 incarcerated sexual offenders, the behavior characteristics that emerged were categorized into three groups: a) manipulative - typically a child molester; b) Opportunist - typically a rapist and c) Coercive being a mixture of both rapists and child molesters.
4. **Obscene/offensive content:** Various websites on the internet contain material that some deem offensive, distasteful or explicit, which may often be not of the user's liking. Such websites may include internet, shock sites, hate speech or otherwise inflammatory content. Such content may manifest in many ways, such as pop-up ads and unsuspecting links.
5. **Sextortion:** Sextortion, especially via the use of webcams, is a concern, especially for those who use webcams for flirting and cybersex. Often this involves a cybercriminal posing as someone else - such as an attractive person - initiating communication of a sexual nature with the victim. The victim is then persuaded to undress in front of a webcam, and may also be persuaded to engage in sexual behaviour, such as masturbation. The video is recorded by the

cybercriminal, who then reveals their true intent and demands money or other services (such as more explicit images of the victim, in cases of online predation), threatening to publicly release the video and send it to family members and friends of the victim if they do not comply.

### Importance

Cybercrime has grown so enormously over the last few years that it has become a massive issue for both government and private sectors. In fact, cybercrime is expected to rise at an unprecedented rate in 2021. According to a report from Cybercrime Magazine, security experts have predicted that cybercrime will cost the world \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025. And it will cost the global economy \$6.1 trillion annually by 2021.

With the increasing number of cyber activities, it is now time that every organization and individual realize that the implementation of cybersecurity protocols is the need of the hour. Not doing so can result in the loss of money and valuable personal information including transaction details, payment information, browsing history, and even online inquiries. So, this very internet, which has been so helpful in accelerating our growth, can also be the force that tears down everything we have built and achieved.

### Statistics

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden transformation to remote work culture, cybercrimes have risen like never before and are expected to rise even more as we move towards 2021. Following are some outrageous statistics showing just how severely these cyber-attacks are affecting the global economy:

- As per the research conducted by Cybersecurity Ventures, within months of the first lockdown due to the pandemic, more than 4,000 malicious COVID-related sites popped up across the internet.
- According to Cybersecurity Ventures, a cyber-attack incident will occur every 11 seconds in 2021. This is nearly twice the rate in 2019 (every 19

seconds), and four times what it was in 2016 (every 40 seconds).

- As per Cybersecurity Ventures, Cybercrime is expected to cost the global economy \$6 trillion annually by 2021, as compared to \$3 trillion in 2015. This will soon make it the world's third-largest economy, after the United States and China.
- Cybersecurity Ventures predicted that ransomware damages will cost the world \$20 billion by 2021, which is 57 times more than what it was in 2015 (\$325 million). This makes ransomware the most rapidly growing kind of cybercrime.
- According to Cybersecurity Ventures, 91% of cyberattacks are launched through spear-phishing emails, which infect the organizations with ransomware.

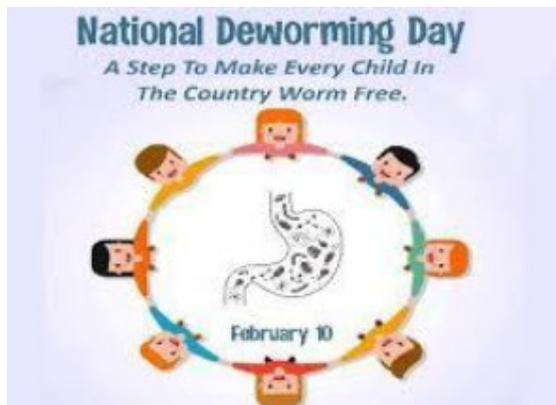
### Protect Yourself from Evolving Cyber Threats

- Enforce a strong password policy
- Look out for phishing scams
- Regularly update the software and hardware
- Educate yourself
- Stay up-to-date
- Google Security Check
- Not Using public computers
- Installing random apps without checking their reliability
- Not locking your computer when you're away
- Sharing sensitive pictures on social media

### India Safer Internet Day Committee - DISC

**Foundation:** The DISC (Developing Internet Safe Community) Foundation is a registered NGO initiated by a group of IT professionals and social engineers from various parts of India and the Middle East. The team comprises global experts on child protection online.

### National Deworming Day



**Soil-Transmitted Helminths (STH)** are a significant public health concern for India. Around 22 crore Indian children aged 1-14 are estimated to be at risk of worm infections. Worms in children interfere with nutrient uptake and can contribute to anemia, malnourishment, and impaired mental and physical development.

To combat this issue, in 2015 the Government of India launched the fixed-day anganwadi and school-based National Deworming Day to deworm all children aged 1-19 years. The National Deworming Day is conducted in all states/UTs on February 10 every year, with a mop-up day on February 15. Some states/UTs also conduct a bi-annual round on 10 August, depending on worm prevalence in their state/UT.

The National Deworming Day is an **initiative of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India** to make every child in the country worm-free. This is one of the largest public health programs reaching a large number of children during a short period.

More than 836 million children are at risk of parasitic worm infections worldwide. According to World Health Organization, 241 million children between the ages of 1 and 14 years are at risk of parasitic intestinal worms in India, also known as Soil-Transmitted Helminths (STH).

- Every year February 10 and August 10 are observed as the National Deworming Days (NDD).
- The days aim at eradicating intestinal worms also known as Soil-Transmitted Helminths (STH), among

children in the age group of 1-19 years.

- NDD is a key intervention of Anemia Mukht Bharat.
- Its success and impact lie in convergence with the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- NDD also presents opportunities to further policy dialogue on health and nutrition as a way of supplementing efforts under POSHAN Abhiyan.

### About STH: Intestinal Worms

- Intestinal worms are parasites that live in the human intestines and consume nutrients and vitamins that a child consumes.
- There are three main types of STH that infect people, roundworm (*Ascaris lumbricoides*), whipworm (*Trichuris trichiura*), and hookworms (*Necator americanus* and *Ancylostoma duodenale*). These worms depend on the human body for their food and survival and while being there, they lay thousands of eggs each day.
- Transmission: STHs are transmitted via eggs in faeces deposited in the local environment, typically through open defecation or lack of proper hygiene.

Helminths (worms) that are transmitted through soil contaminated with fecal matter are called soil-transmitted helminths (Intestinal parasitic worms). Roundworm (*Ascaris lumbricoides*), whipworm (*Trichuris trichiura*), and hookworms (*Necator americanus* and *Ancylostoma duodenale*) are worms that infect people.

It is found that some states in India are more STH prevalence such as,

1. High prevalence (>50%) states are Arunachal Pradesh, UP, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Nagaland, J&K, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Mizoram, Assam, Uttarakhand, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu.

2. Moderate prevalence (20% – 50%) states are Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Jharkhand, Andaman & Nicobar, Bihar, Maharashtra, Goa, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Gujarat, Meghalaya, West Bengal, and Tripura.
3. Low prevalence (<20%) states are Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

So, in order to ensure the safety of children from worm infections, deworming is very necessary. Everyone must involve and support this campaign to make it a successful health program of India and to make this nation worm infection-free.

#### STH transmission

- Adult worms live in human intestines for food and survival and produce thousands of eggs each day.
- Eggs are passed in the feces of infected persons.
- Infected people who defecate outdoors spread worm eggs in the soil.
- Eggs contaminate the soil and spread infection in several ways: –
- Ingested through vegetables that are not carefully cooked, washed, or peeled;
- Ingested from contaminated water sources;
- Ingested by children who play in soil and then put their hands in their mouths without washing them.



STH infections can lead to anemia, malnutrition, impaired mental and physical & cognitive development, and reduced school participation.

#### STH Infections can be prevented by

- Using sanitary toilets, not defecating outside
- Hand-washing, particularly before eating and after using the toilet
- Wearing slippers and shoes
- Washing fruits and vegetables in safe and clean water
- Eating properly cooked food

#### Objective of National Deworming Day

The objective of National Deworming Day is to deworm all preschool and school-age children (enrolled and non-enrolled) between the ages of 1-19 years through the platform of schools and Anganwadi Centers in order to improve their overall health, nutritional status, access to education, and quality of life.

#### Key stakeholders

The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India** is the nodal agency for providing all States/UTs with guidelines related to National Deworming Day (NDD) implementation at all levels.

The program is being implemented through the combined efforts of the **Department of School Education and Literacy** under the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, **Ministry of Women and Child Development**, and **Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation**.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Urban Development, and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) also provide support to deworming program.

#### Deworming tablet and its side effects

Children at the age of (1-2) are given half a tablet of albendazole (400mg), and above the age of 2 are given 1 full tablet of albendazole (400mg) to chew. Albendazole is very safe and has very few side effects and it been with mild side effects like nausea and diarrhea and passes quickly.

### Impact

- Since worms feed on host (human body) tissues, including blood, it leads to loss of iron, and protein, resulting in anemia – reduced oxygen-carrying capacity due to less Hemoglobin (Hb) available in the body.
- Worm infection can also lead to diarrhea; dysentery; loss of appetite; reduced nutritional intake and physical fitness; increased malabsorption – a condition that prevents absorption of nutrients through the small intestine.
- In India, over 22 crore children under 14 years of age are at risk of STH infections.

### Treatment

The WHO recommended medicines – albendazole (400 mg) and mebendazole (500 mg) – are effective, inexpensive, and easy to administer by non-medical personnel (e.g., teachers).

### NDD Implementation

NDD (first round) is conducted on February 10 each year. A biannual round of deworming is recommended in the States where the prevalence of STH infection is more than 20% and the annual round in other (less than 20% prevalence) states. Only two states namely Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have reported less than 20% prevalence and recommended for the annual round. All the remaining States/UTs are implementing a bi-annual round of deworming.

**The first round of NDD was conducted in February 2015** and 8.9 crore children were administered the deworming tablet across 11 states/UTs by achieving 85% coverage. Thereafter 88%, 77%, 88% of children were covered against the set targets in February 2016, August 2016, and February & August 2017 rounds of NDD respectively. 26.68 crore children have been administered albendazole till February 2018, and more than 114 crore doses of albendazole were administered to children 1-19 years, since 2015.

To increase program outreach to private schools and maximize deworming benefits for a large number of children various awareness activities (media mix) are involved under the program. The awareness campaign spreads awareness about the importance and benefits of deworming, as well as prevention strategies related to improved behaviors and practices for hygiene and sanitation.

### International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2021



The International Day of Women and Girls in Science is celebrated on 11th February every year **to promote full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.**

- The **UN General assembly on 22 December 2015** decided to establish the International Day of Women and Girls in Science to recognize the critical role that women and girls play in science and technology, through passing a resolution named A/RES/70/212.
- It is implemented by UNESCO and UN Women to celebrate it on 11 February annually in collaboration with institutions and civil society partners that aim to promote women and girls in the field of science. UNESCO's global priority is gender equality, to support young girls in their education and to provide them an opportunity.
- It is implemented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN-Women, in collaboration with institutions and civil society partners.

- 2021 Theme: **Women Scientists at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19.**
- On 11 February 2021, the 6th International Day of Women and Girls in Science Assembly was held virtually at the United Nations Headquarters. With great momentum and interest to accelerate progress in achieving the 2030 Development Agenda and its 17 Global Goals, the 6th International Day of Women and Girls in Science Assembly theme will be Beyond the Borders: Equality in Science for Society, with a special focus on the value of the social aspects and cultural dimensions in Science, Technology and Innovation to enhance sustainable development programs.

## STEM

**STEM stands for Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics** that refer to the academic disciplines of science. This education starts with young pupils in a learning environment and the curriculum shows that students are taught with some methods that can be applied to everyday life mainly to attract women and girls.

## Worldwide Scenario

### ✓ **Women in STEM**

- UNESCO data from 2014-16 shows that only around 30% of female students select STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)-related fields in higher education.
- Female enrolment is particularly low in information technology (3%), natural science, mathematics, and statistics (5%), and engineering and allied streams (8%).
- According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, just 28.8% of researchers are women. In India, this drops to 13.9%.
- Between 1901 and 2019, 334 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 616

Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, and Medicine, of which just 20 have been won by 19 women.

- UNESCO data from 2014-16 show that only around 30% of female students select STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)-related fields in higher education.
- Female enrolment is particularly low in information technology (3%), natural science, mathematics, and statistics (5%), and engineering and allied streams (8%).

### ✓ **Research as a Profession**

- According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, only 28.8% of researchers are women.
- defines researchers as “professionals engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge”.

### ✓ **Share in Nobel Prizes**

- Between 1901 and 2019, 334 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 616 Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, and Medicine, of which just 20 have been won by women.

### ✓ **Share in Abel Prizes**

- In 2019, the American mathematician Karen Uhlenbeck became the first woman to win the Abel Prize, following 16 male mathematicians.
- The Abel Prize is a Norwegian prize awarded annually by the King of Norway to one or more outstanding mathematicians.

### ✓ **Share in Fields Medals**

- The Fields Medal so far has also been awarded to only one-woman mathematician, the late Maryam Mirzakhani of Iran, as opposed to 59 men since 1936.
- The Fields Medal is awarded every four years by the International Congress of Mathematicians to recognize outstanding mathematical

achievement for existing work and for the promise of future achievement.

### National Scenario

#### ✓ **Women in STEM**

- The female enrolment in science streams rose from 2010-11 to 2015-16.
- According to the NITI Aayog report in 2015-16, 9.3% of female students in Undergraduate (UG) courses were enrolled in engineering, compared to 15.6% across genders. Conversely, 4.3% of female students were enrolled in medical science, compared to 3.3% across genders.
- In India, a 2016-17 NITI Aayog report compared female enrolment in various disciplines over five years, until 2015-16.
- In 2015-16, 9.3% of female students in undergraduate courses were enrolled in engineering, compared to 15.6% across genders.
- Conversely, 4.3% of female students were enrolled in medical science, compared to 3.3% across genders.
- A master's and doctoral levels, female enrolment remained lower than overall enrolment.
- This reflects that moving up from UG to a higher degree and research programs, there is a restricted presence of women in higher studies and research.
- Broadly, women showed a preference for arts; however, female enrolment in science streams rose from 2010-11 to 2015-16.
- The report found that in over 620 institutes and universities, including IITs, NITs, ISRO, and DRDO, the presence of women was 20.0%.

#### ✓ **Research as a Profession**

- Only 13.9% of women are work as a researcher in India. At master's and doctoral levels, female enrolment remained lower than overall enrolment.

#### ✓ **Presence at Technical Professions**

- The NITI Aayog report has also found that in over 620 institutes and universities, including IITs, NITs, ISRO, and DRDO, the presence of women was 20.0% among Scientific and Administrative Staff, 28.7% among Post-Doctoral Fellows, and 33.5% among Ph.D. scholars.

#### Why the gender gap?

- Various studies have found that girls excel at mathematics and science-oriented subjects in school, but boys often believe they can do better, which shapes their choices in higher studies.
- The NITI Aayog report said, "The problem of entry of women in science is not uniform across disciplines.
- A major factor responsible for this is the mindset that boys are better at science and girls are not. Women are still considered less efficient than men when it comes to STEM-related fields is a major misconception.
- Role models many times are a factor in making career choices. However, there are fewer female role models in the fields of science, math, or engineering for young female students to follow. Moreover, our textbooks too rarely talk about these role models.
- Only 11% of colleges in India are exclusively for women, the majority of which offer arts and commerce rather than science.
- When comes the question of pursuing a career in science, the entrenched patriarchy in society holds women back. There are patriarchal attitudes in hiring practices or awarding fellowships and grants etc. A male-dominated work environment and gender insensitivity are additional burdens for women scientists.
- This is another major constraint for women in pursuing science. Even for

families with greater resources, economic considerations affect the pursuit of a science degree as a science that is generally more expensive than an art or a commerce degree.

- Families expect daughters to marry and assume obligations to their husband's family. Many families think that a daughter's education would primarily benefit her in-laws rather than her natal family. Such families traditionally view boys' education differently from girls.
- Interventions aimed at popularizing subjects such as Engineering or the Physical sciences or Chemistry among female students at the school level in both urban and rural areas might be helpful in changing the mind-set.
- *Interventions geared to popularizing subjects such as Engineering or the Physical sciences or Chemistry among female students at the school level in both urban and rural areas might be helpful in changing the mind-set.*
- *Gender equality in science and technical fields is necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 worldwide.*
- *SDG 5 aims for gender equality worldwide.*

#### International Childhood Cancer Day



International Childhood Cancer Day is celebrated annually on **15 February to raise awareness and to express support for children and adolescents with cancer, survivors, and their families.**

Each year, approximately 300,000 children are diagnosed with cancer – a disease that touches countless families and communities in all regions of the world. With access to quality care, more than 80% of children with cancer can survive, living full and healthy lives. However, many children in low-income and middle-income countries do not receive or complete care, and, as a result, over 90% of childhood cancer deaths occur in low resource settings.

#### Statistics

- The term “**childhood cancer**” is most commonly used to designate cancer that arises in children before the age of 18 years. Childhood cancers are rare, representing between 0.5% and 4.6%\* of all cancers.
- The overall incidence rates of childhood cancer vary between 50 and 200 per million\* children across the world.
- More than 215,000 children 14 years and younger and 85,000 adolescents are diagnosed with cancer each year around the world, and many more remain uncounted and unreported due to a lack of childhood cancer registries in a large number of countries.
- Cancer is a leading cause of death for children and adolescents around the world.
- Each year more than 400,000 children are diagnosed with cancer globally. In the Region of the Americas, there were an estimated 32,065 new cancer cases in 2020 in children 0 to 14 years old; of them, 20,855 cases in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- It is estimated that Cancer was the cause of death of 8,544 children under 15 years old in 2020; of them, 7,076 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The vast majority of the children with cancer live in low and middle-income countries (LMIC), where they face unacceptable inequities in early detection, diagnosis, and access to quality treatment and palliative care. The inferior

outcomes suffered by children in LMIC are a threat to social cohesion, economic prosperity, and achievement of global targets included in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A global response is needed to give every child the best chance of surviving cancer-free – to raise awareness, improve access, better understand why and where children are diagnosed with cancer through cancer registries, and offer the best possible treatment, palliative care, and support for children and their families. WHO has highlighted the importance of diagnosing childhood cancer early and improving access to treatment for children and adolescents with cancer.

On International Childhood Cancer Day, we pause to recognize contributions from advocates around the world and call for renewed collaboration to care for children with cancer globally.

## CCI

**Childhood Cancer International (CCI)** is the largest organization of its kind representing families of children with cancer. CCI wants to see a world where the issues faced by children with cancer and their families, both in the short and long-term, are understood by families, healthcare professionals, and the wider community to ensure that children receive the best possible care wherever they are in the world at the time of diagnosis and beyond.

CCI's vision is to advance cure, transform care and instill hope for children and families who are affected by childhood cancer regardless of where they live in the world. João de Bragança is the president of the CCI Board of Trustees.

The 1800 healthcare professionals from 110 countries who are members of the International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP) and the 187 member organizations of Childhood Cancer International (CCI), the largest non-profit patient support organization for childhood cancer urges everyone to come together in solidarity to make sure children and adolescents everywhere have the chance to survive cancer and live long productive and meaningful lives.

## Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (GICC)

In September 2018, WHO launched the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (GICC), with the objective of addressing these profound inequities,

the target is to achieve at least 60% survival for children with cancer by 2030 and to reduce suffering for all.

- To save lives and reduce the suffering of children with cancer, this initiative seeks to
- Increase countries' capacity to provide quality services for children with cancer
- Prioritize childhood cancer nationally, regionally, and globally to spark action
- CureAll, a technical package, guided the countries in carrying out the Global Initiative. CureAll launched on 15 February 2021, on International Childhood Cancer Day.

*In India, childhood cancer contributes to around 4.5 percent to 5.5 percent of the total cancer cases, as per a 2017 study published in the Indian Journal of Medical and Pediatric Oncology. It is also estimated that around 50,000 children of the country between the age group of 0-19 years are likely to surrender to this illness. In fact, it is the 9th most common cause of death among children.*

## World Day of Social Justice 2021



World Day of Social Justice is observed on 20 February to promote gender equality, indigenous peoples, and migrants' rights. This day also **focuses on achieving the goal of full employment and social integration**. This is the day to raise a voice against social injustice and to remove barriers regarding gender, race, inequality, religious discrimination, etc. It also highlights the social injustice done throughout the world and looks into the solutions and improvements. Social injustice is an important principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. To remove the barriers basically that people face about gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or

disability, etc. it is necessary to uphold the principles of social justice.

### 2021 Theme: A Call for Social Justice in the Digital Economy

The digital economy is transforming the world of work. Over the past decade, expansion in broadband connectivity, cloud computing, and data has led to the proliferation of digital platforms, which have penetrated several sectors of the economy and societies. Since early 2020, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to remote working arrangements and allowed for the continuation of many business activities, further reinforcing the growth and impact of the digital economy. The crisis has also laid bare and exacerbated the growing digital divide within, between and across developed and developing countries, particularly in terms of the availability, affordability and use of information ICTs and access to the internet, deepening existing inequalities.

#### 5 key principles of social Justice

- Access to resources
- Equity
- Participation
- Diversity
- Human Rights

#### Important Facts published by the UN over the state of social justice across the world

1. On Employment – The average employment growth is 0.1 per cent annually since 2008. It was 0.9 per cent between 2000 and 2007.
2. On Formal Employment: There is no formal employment contract for almost 60 per cent of all kinds of workers.
3. The share of wage and salaried workers is declining which is substantiated by a fact that less than 45 per cent of such workers are employed on a full-time or permanent basis.
4. On Unemployment – By 2019, the number of people out of work will be 212 million. (World Employment and Social Outlook – Trend 2020 stated that 188 million people were reported to be unemployed in 2019.)

5. On Job Creation – There is a need for the creation of 60 crores of new jobs by 2030.

#### National Science Day 2021



National Science Day is celebrated every year on February 28 in the country to celebrate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect'. India's great scientist CV Raman invented the 'Raman Effect' on this day and won Nobel Prize for the same. The great physicist Sir Chandrashekhara Venkat Raman made an important discovery in the serious subject of physics on February 28, 1928. Now, the Government of India felicitates scientists every year on this day who contributed to the field of science.

**Theme of National Science Day 2021 "Future of STI: Impact on Education Skills and Work"**.

It is used to create awareness about the role of science in society. Schools of Science & Technology, Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management (GITAM), Hyderabad are organizing 'All India Essay Contest on Science and Technology' on the eve of National Science Day. The topics are — Life during Covid-19, Online Teaching: Benefits and limitations and Social Ethics, Morals and Values.

Though we are living in revolutionized society, still there's a need to focus on the latest developments that have been taking place at this current point of time, specifically the methods and technology to curb the Covid19 pandemic. However, Technological Institutes such as Serum and Bharat Biotech are contributing their way better to accommodate the vaccines as per the individual's needs, but it's not over yet as we have to go beyond these discoveries to contain the spread of the virus.

#### Background

Dr. CV Raman officially declared on February 28, 1928, that he has invented the 'Raman Effect.' He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930 for this important discovery. The **National Council for**

**Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC)** proposed to the central government that National Science Day should be celebrated on February 28 every year to mark this discovery. After that, the Government of India accepted that proposal, and the first National Science Day was celebrated on February 28, 1987.

### What is Raman Effect?

The Raman Effect states that when a wave of light comes out of a liquid, some part of this light wave is scattered in a direction that is different from the direction of the incoming light wave. His research shows why the color of seawater looks blue. Raman Effect is about the flexible distribution of photon particles.

It is a phenomenon in which a change in the wavelength of light occurs when a beam of light is deflected by molecules. When a beam of light travels from a dust-free transparent sample of a chemical compound, then a small fraction of the light emerges in the direction other than that of the incident light. Most of the scattered light wavelength is unchanged and in small part, if the wavelength is different from that of incident light it is due to Raman Effect.

### Objectives of National Science Day

The basic purpose of this day is to inspire students to new experiments, attract them to science, and make them aware of science and scientific achievements. Several programs are organized on this day related to scientific activities.

- Invent and implement new technologies for the development of science.
- For human welfare also it is necessary to understand and display efforts and achievements in the field of science.
- To provide an opportunity for people who want to develop his or her carrier in the science field.
- To encourage people and popularize Science and Technology.
- Despite many significant achievements, certain sections of our society are still guided by blind faith

and beliefs, which is reflected in the quality of decision-making on developmental issues that required change.

- To spread the message of the importance of science and its application in the daily life of people this is necessary to accelerate the pace of development.

### Increasing research efficiency

Research and development are time and money-consuming. However, India is giving it less compared to western countries or neighboring countries like China. The problem is the quantum of money spent and the choice of problems. There are a lot of IT companies, innovations, and apps from India which has given it an edge in technology and communication. So, India has been in a strong position in the world as far as software development is concerned. But when it comes to basic researches in physics chemistry and life sciences, it has not yet delved into the careful selection of problems and proportionate investments. Hence, what happens is that in spite of spending money on research and development, not many problems are solved due to the non-selection of actual problems.

As per a report, India lags in submitting research papers. Another research says that only 140 researches per 10 lakh population as compared to the US which has 4000 researches. This is to happen due to high illiteracy in India. 30% of the Indian population is illiterate and hence cannot be researchers. So comparatively, research done is fine. But the research is done in universities and national laboratories and very little research done by the corporate sector. In the US and UK, the best research is done by the private sector. So, this situation needs to be brought to India to see a significant change.

### National Awards

**DST instituted National Awards in 1987** to stimulate, encourage and recognize outstanding efforts in the area of science popularization and communication and in promoting scientific temper. The following awards are being conferred on NSD.

1. National Award for Outstanding Efforts in S&T Communication through Print Media including Books and Magazines. The award consists of Rs.2,00,000/- (Rupees Two lakh), a memento, and a citation.
2. National Award for Outstanding Efforts in S&T Popularization among Children. The award consists of Rs.2,00,000/- (Rupees Two lakh), a memento, and a citation.
3. National Award for Outstanding Efforts in S&T through Innovative and Traditional methods. The award consists of Rs.2,00,000/- (Rupees Two lakh), a memento, and a citation.
4. Augmenting writing skills for articulating research (AWSAR) Award. The award consists of Rs.1,00,000/- (Rupees Two lakh), a memento, and a citation.
5. Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) Women Excellence Award. The awardees are supported with a research grant of Rs. 5 lakh per annum for a period of three years.
6. National Award for young women showing excellence through the application of technology for societal benefits. The award consists of Rs.1,00,000/- (Rupees one lakh), a memento, and a citation.

combined with the excessive market-oriented economy has made life very complicated for the new generation. In order to make the youth of modern India deal with these issues, the need is to inculcate Gandhian values among the youth in earnest to make them more vivacious and active for nation-building.

### Issues With Present Day Youth and Modern Lifestyle

**Growing Intolerance in Society Leading To Violence:** The youth of today is a victim of intolerance, impatience, and misjudged convictions. These factors combine to lead most of them on to a path of violence. The situation deteriorates further when the expectation bar of lifestyle attainments is raised and cannot deliver accordingly.

**Materialism Leading To The Hedonistic Lifestyle:** There is a growing materialistic tendency in society, that compels the individual to look for more and more new items of the material world. This attitude leads to hedonism. A hedonist does not go by any logic, rationale, or need-based accrual of items.

**Education Disparity:** Today's young generation is a victim of an education that envisages certifying him/her to be worthy of the market. However, this led to a dichotomy between the public and private institutions and subsequently resulted in disparity in education and unemployment among the youth.

**Employment Scarcity:** It is one of the most serious concerns among the youth in our country. The employment market is unable to keep pace with ever-growing job-seekers. Moreover, the bigger irony is that the current employment market is a systematic waning of rural-based employment, where the majority of job-seekers exist.

### What Youth Can Learn From Gandhian Ideals

**Tackling Intolerance & Violence:** Intolerance & Violence are two sides of the same coin. Mahatma Gandhi successfully weaponized truth, satyagraha, and peace during India's struggle for independence. These ideals inspired great men across the world,

## THE IDEAS EXPLAINED

### After Martyrs Day

Every year, on the occasion of Martyrs' Day, people in India and worldwide **pay homage to the sacrifices made by Mahatma Gandhi**. Apart from the commitment to the ideal of non-violence, the need to rise above casteism, communalism, regionalism are core values that Mahatma Gandhi professed. However, modernization combined with globalization has changed life in general and the lifestyle of youth in particular in the last few decades, leading to change in social institutions and structures. Besides, the substantive demographic change in terms of population, political decadence, rising unemployment, and eroding value system

including Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Their lives stand as a testament to their indomitable will and the courage to practice the ideals. Therefore, the youth of India must draw inspiration and learn how to tackle intolerance & violence peacefully.

**Selfless Nationalism:** The youth of today must emulate their lives and engage themselves wholeheartedly in serving the nation while scripting the story of India's success. As Mahatma Gandhi aptly remarked: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." With ingenuity and innovation, the nation's youth should chart the course of India's development, lending impetus to the concept of vocal for local.

**Means Over Ends:** The Gandhian maxim of "means are more important than the end" implies that one needs to focus on the means, not merely the achievement of an end at any cost. According to Gandhiji, to accumulate more than is required would be a sort of theft. Therefore, to control hedonism in society, the youth need to be endowed with the Gandhian value of Samthistha. According to Gandhiji Samthistha, it comprises austerity, forbearance, asceticism, spirituality, and the self-effacing spirit of sacrifice. Thus, following Samthistha can help one to dissociate from materialism or hedonism.

**Model of Education:** Gandhiji believed education should be value-based and mass-oriented. He always advocated for true, national education. True education develops a balanced intellect, which presupposes a harmonious growth of body, mind, and soul. This Gandhian principle of education may help resolve this kind of disparity, maybe not entirely, but to a large extent.

**Developing Atma-Nirbharta:** The current unemployment situation warrants a considerable reorientation exercise in the education system and demands entrepreneurs to be hoisted to take care of job requirements both at the national and local levels. In this context, Gandhiji insisted on imparting vocational training to youth to become self-reliant with such training, with education linked with practical experience. The vocational education

will impart necessary skills and help address the unemployment issue, especially in rural areas. This would help to make a Bharat that is Atmanirbhar or self-reliant.

*The youth is very vibrant and energetic, dynamic, and capable of achieving, provided that they remain on the right track. Therefore, India's youth must remember Mahatma Gandhi's words, which stated: "Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny."*

### **FLORICULTURE - NEED FOR THE COUNTRY**

Farmers in India are struggling for more than five decades to boost their income. In recent times Floriculture has immense opportunities to enhance farmers income. Let's understand more about Floriculture.

#### **WHAT IS FLORICULTURE?**

Floriculture or flower farming is the study of growing and marketing flowers and foliage plants.

Floriculture includes cultivation of flowering and ornamental plants for direct sale or for use as raw materials in cosmetic and perfume industry and in pharmaceutical sector.

'Flowers' are symbolic of 3 things: Beauty, Love and Peace. Therefore flowers are mostly used in temples, merry ceremony and other activities and programmes. Flower decoration in houses is gaining momentum with the changing lifestyle of the people in India. Thus flower consumption is growing at a whopping speed. Numerous festivals have added the demands of flowers and made a floral superpower of the future.

#### **WORLD SCENARIO**

Looking at the world the leading producer of flowers is Netherlands while Germany is the biggest importer of flowers. USA and Japan remain highest consumers. So major export destinations are US, Germany, UK, Netherlands and UAE.

It is worthwhile to note here that average annual imports of some of the major importers are USA (232 \$), Japan (192 crores \$), Germany (180\$). Having such a huge market potential still India's is not at all encouraging as India's annual average contribution amounts to just 30 lakhs \$. In recent past Israel has become biggest grower of flowers using modern agro-technique, glass house culture and fertilizer application along with drip irrigation channels.

### **BENEFITS**

Perfumes industries can be established in the country that can help in improving national economy. Flowers can be considered as a commercial commodity and will boost farmers income and also earn a huge foreign currency. Establishment of flowers production farms and perfume industries can help solve unemployment problem to a large extent and bring use of large unused land. Apart from that we have seen that President Mughal garden which opens for few months only attracts large number of tourists every year.

For now states like Karnataka, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana and Tamil Nadu have emerged as major floriculture centres due to adequate weather conditions. Karnataka alone has 29,700 hectares of land under floriculture cultivation and growing at a by fast pace.

### **ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

Meanwhile government is trying to enhance floriculture through its Department of Agriculture and Cooperation under **Ministry of Agriculture** (GoI). These steps are related to development of infrastructure, market development, subsidy on airfreight for export of cut flowers, setting up walk on type cold storage in international airports, etc. It has also identified potential centres for flower production namely Bengaluru, Hyderabad, New Delhi and Pune.

For now we can hope good results for government's programs.

### **Army seizes power in Myanmar**

Announcing on the military-run television, the Myanmar's army said it had taken over the country's reigns in its hands. Reuters called it a coup against the democratically elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with other leaders of her **National League for Democracy** (NLD) party in early morning raids. The army said it had carried out the detentions in response to "election fraud", handing power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing and imposing a state of emergency for one year, according to a statement on a military-owned television station. The military cited an emergency provision in the constitution that permits it, in the event national sovereignty is threatened.

Phone lines to the capital Naypyitaw and the main commercial centre of Yangon were not reachable, and state TV went off air soon after. People rushed to markets in Yangon to stock up on food and supplies while others lined up at ATMs to withdraw cash. Soldiers took up positions at city hall in Yangon and mobile internet data and phone services in the NLD stronghold were disrupted, residents said. Internet connectivity also had fallen dramatically, monitoring service NetBlocks said.

### **Press Statement on developments in Myanmar**

February 01, 2021

We have noted the developments in Myanmar with deep concern. India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. We believe that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld. We are monitoring the situation closely.

New Delhi  
February 01, 2021

### **The background**

The generals made their move hours before parliament had been due to sit for the first time since the NLD's landslide win in a November 8th election viewed as a referendum on Suu Kyi's

fledgling democratic government. Myanmar's most popular leader Suu Kyi, Myanmar's President Win Myint and other NLD leaders were detained in the early hours of the morning, NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt told Reuters. The detentions came after days of escalating tensions between the civilian government and the military that stirred fears of a coup in the aftermath of the election. Political tensions soared last week when a military spokesman declined to rule out a coup ahead of the new parliament convening on Monday, and military chief Min Aung Hlaing raised the prospect of repealing the constitution. Tanks were deployed in some streets last week and pro-military demonstrations have taken place in some cities ahead of the first gathering of parliament.

### The military rule

The military ruled directly for nearly 50 years in the country after a 1962 coup and had long seen itself as the guardian of national unity. As the architect of Myanmar's 2008 constitution, the military enshrined a permanent role for itself in the political system. It gets an unelected quota of 25% of parliamentary seats and its chief appoints ministers of defence, interior and border affairs, ensuring a key stake in politics. Since 2017, a military crackdown in Myanmar drove more than 7,30,000 Rohingya Muslims into neighbouring Bangladesh. In response, the United States imposed sanctions on Min Aung Hlaing and three other military leaders in 2019. General Min Aung Hlaing took over the running of the military in 2011 as the transition to democracy began. Min Aung Hlaing extended his term at the helm of the military for another five years in February 2016.

### Why the coup happened?

In its statement declaring the state of emergency, the military cited the failure of the electoral commission to address complaints over voter lists, its refusal to agree to a request to postpone new parliamentary sessions and protests by groups unhappy over the election as compelling reasons for their move. Suu Kyi's party NLD won 83% of the vote in the second election, held in 2020, since a military junta agreed to share power in 2011.

Myanmar's election commission has already rejected the military's allegations of vote fraud.

### How world reacted to it?

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the detention of Suu Kyi and other political leaders and **"urges the military leadership to respect the will of the people of Myanmar,"** a U.N. spokesman said.

The White House said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the arrests and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on for the leaders' release. U.S. said that it would take necessary steps against those responsible if these steps were not reversed. India's foreign ministry had expressed deep concerns about the coup. A statement from the MEA said that the rule of law and the democratic process in the neighbouring country must be upheld. Noting the developments, China hoped that all sides could properly manage their differences under the constitution and uphold stability.

### What's Happening in Myanmar: An Informative Thread

*As of February 1st, Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior figures in NLD (National League of Democracy) have since been detained.*

*Why is this happening?  
In November of 2020 a general election was held. The NLD won by a landslide and expected to renew Aung San Suu Kyi's position with a new five year term.*

*However, since the results have come out, the military has claimed the results are rigged and alleged to have discovered over 10 million instances of voter fraud.*

### Is China behind this?

Last month the Chinese government's top diplomat, Wang Yi, met military chief Min Aung Hlaing, who has now assumed power, during a visit to Myanmar. China has long played an important role in the former Burma, standing by the country during its previous time as a military dictatorship,

but also working closely with Aung San Suu Kyi when she became leader. China has strategic economic interests in Myanmar, with major oil and gas pipelines running through the country. China is also pushing the **China-Myanmar Economic Corridor**, a network of transport and other projects passing through areas where ethnic minority factions often battle each other and government forces. It is following a pattern here, as similarly, in the previous month, Chinese ambassador visited Nepal and soon a political turmoil followed. Although it is just a speculation, but people are trying to find a pattern around, in light of China's aggressive expansionism in recent times.

#### What lies ahead?

Ten years after her initial release, Suu Kyi now appears to be heading back to where her rise to international prominence began: in detention, her fate at the whims of the Tatmadaw, the military which has ruled over Myanmar for most of the last 50 years. While the military gave up some power in the transition to partial democracy, it maintained a tight grip over defense and security matters. Speaking to CNN Monday, Melissa Crouch, an expert on Myanmar at the University of New South Wales said, "Myanmar has China and Russia on their side, they are not worried about Western democracies," pointing to recent visits by delegations from both Beijing and Moscow ahead of the coup. The biggest challenge to the coup will come internally, Wells said, and will depend on the military's ability to control an activist community and middle class that is considerably empowered since 2015.

#### The Report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission

The final report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission of India for **FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26** was tabled in the Parliament on February 1, 2021 alongside the Union Budget 2021-22. The commission's interim report for **FY 2020-21** was tabled along with Union Budget **2020-21**. The Finance Commissions generally submit their reports for a five-year duration. The **15th Finance Commission**, however, was given an extension of a

year due to uncertainties in key macro-areas such as new monetary policy framework, GST, bankruptcy code and demonetization.

#### Key Highlights

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission (**XVFC**)'s ToR (term of reference) was unique and wide ranging in many ways. The Commission was asked to recommend performance incentives for States in many areas like power sector, adoption of DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer), solid waste management etc.
- Another unique ToR was to recommend funding mechanism for defence and internal security. The XVFC's Report is organised in four volumes.
- Volume I and II, as in the past, contain the main report and the accompanying annexes. Volume III is devoted to the Union Government and examines key departments in greater depth, with the medium-term challenges and the roadmap ahead. Volume IV is entirely devoted to the States.
- In total, main report has 117 core recommendations. Vol-III and IV has numerous suggested reforms for the Union ministries and State governments respectively.

#### 15th Finance Commission's Recommendations

##### Vertical devolution

- In order to maintain predictability and stability of resources, especially during the pandemic, **XVFC** has recommended maintaining the **vertical devolution at 41 per cent** – the same as in our report for 2020-21. It is at the same level of 42 per cent of the divisible pool as recommended by **FC-XIV**. However, it has made the required adjustment of about 1 per cent due to the changed status of the

erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.

- In XVFC's assessment, gross tax revenues for 5-year period are expected to be 135.2 lakh crore. Out of that, Divisible pool (after deducting cesses and surcharges & cost of collection) is estimated to be 103 lakh crores.
- States' share at 41 per cent of divisible pool comes to 42.2 lakh crore for 2021-26 period.
- Including total grants of Rs. 10.33 lakh crore (details later) and tax devolution of Rs. 42.2 lakh crore, aggregate transfers to States is estimated to remain at around 50.9 per cent of the divisible pool during 2021-26 period.
- Total XVFC transfers (devolution + grants) constitutes about 34 per cent of estimated Gross Revenue Receipts of the Union leaving adequate fiscal space for the Union to meet its resource requirements and spending obligations on national development priorities.

#### Horizontal devolution

Criteria	Weight
Population	15.0
Area	15.0
Forest & ecology	10.0
Income distance	45.0
Tax & fiscal efforts	2.5
Demographic performance	12.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

- Based on principles of need, equity and performance, overall devolution formula is as follows. (see the table)

- On horizontal devolution, while XVFC agreed that the Census 2011 population data better represents the present need of States, to be fair to, as well as reward, the States which have done better on the demographic front, XVFC has assigned a 12.5 per cent weight to the demographic performance criterion.
- XVFC has re-introduced tax effort criterion to reward fiscal performance.

#### Revenue deficit grants

Based on uniform norms of assessing revenues and expenditure of the States and the Union, XVFC has recommended total revenue deficit grants (RDG) of Rs 2,94,514 crore over the award period for seventeen States.

#### Local Governments

- The total size of the grant to local governments should be Rs. 4,36,361 crores for the period 2021-26.
- Of these total grants, Rs. 8,000 crores are performance-based grants for incubation of new cities and Rs. 450 crores are for shared municipal services. A sum of Rs. 2,36,805 crores are earmarked for rural local bodies, Rs.1,21,055 crore for urban local bodies and Rs. 70,051 crores for health grants through local governments.
- Urban local bodies have been categorised into two groups, based on population, and different norms have been used for flow of grants to each, based on their specific needs and aspirations. Basic grants are proposed only for cities/towns having a population of less than a million. For Million-Plus cities, 100 per cent of the grants are performance-linked through the Million-Plus Cities Challenge Fund (MCF).

## Health

- XVFC has recommend that health spending by States should be increased to more than 8 per cent of their budget by 2022.
- Given the inter-State disparity in the availability of medical doctors, it is essential to constitute an All India Medical and Health Service as is envisaged under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 1951.
- The total grants-in-aid support to the health sector over the award period works out to Rs. 1,06,606 crores, which is 10.3 per cent of the total grants-in-aid recommended by XVFC. The grants for the health sector will be unconditional.
- XVFC has recommend health grants aggregating to Rs. 70,051 crores for urban health and wellness centres (HWCs), building-less sub centre, PHCs, CHCs, block level public health units, support for diagnostic infrastructure for the primary healthcare activities and conversion of rural sub centres and PHCs to HWCs. These grants will be released to the local governments.
- Out of the remaining grant of Rs. 31,755 crores for the health sector (total of Rs. 1,06,606 crores minus Rs. 70,051 crore through local bodies and Rs.4800 crore state-specific grants), XVFC has recommended Rs. 15,265 crores for critical care hospitals. This includes Rs. 13,367 crores for general States and Rs 1,898 crore for NEH States.
- XVFC has recommended Rs. 13,296 crores for training of the allied healthcare workforce. Out of this, Rs. 1,986 crores will be for NEH States and Rs. 11,310 crores for general States.

## Performance incentives and grants

- XVFC has recommended grants of Rs. 4,800 crores (Rs. 1,200 crore each year) from 2022-23 to 2025-26 for incentivising the States to enhance educational outcomes.
- XVFC has recommended Rs. 6,143 crores for online learning and development of professional courses (medical and engineering) in regional languages (matribhasha) for higher education in India.
- XVFC has recommended that Rs. 45,000 crores be kept as performance-based incentive for all the States for carrying out agricultural reforms
- for amending their land-related laws on the lines of NITI Aayog's model law
- incentive-based grants to States that maintain and augment groundwater stock.
- growth in agricultural exports
- production of oilseeds, pulses and wood and wood-based products
- Apart from above, following is the snapshot of grants. (see the table)

SL.NO	Grant Components	2021-26
1	Revenue Deficit grants	294514
2	Local governments grants	436361
3	Disaster management grants	122601
4	Sector-specific grants	129987
	<i>Sectoral grants for Health</i>	<i>31755</i>
	<i>School Education</i>	<i>4800</i>
	<i>Higher Education</i>	<i>6143</i>
	<i>Implementation of agricultural reforms</i>	<i>45000</i>
	<i>Maintenance of PMGSY roads</i>	<i>27539</i>
	<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>10425</i>
	<i>Statistics</i>	<i>1175</i>
	<i>Aspirational districts and blocks</i>	<i>3150</i>
5	State-specific	49599

**TOTAL 1033062**

### Defence and Internal Security

Keeping in view the extant strategic requirements for national defence in the global context. XVFC has, In its approach, recalibrated the relative shares of Union and States in gross revenue receipts. This will enable the Union to set aside resources for the special funding mechanism that XVFC has proposed.

The Union Government may constitute in the **Public Account of India**, a dedicated non-lapsable fund, **Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security** (MFDIS). The total indicative size of the proposed MFDIS over the period 2021-26 is Rs. 2,38,354 crores.

### Disaster Risk Management

- Mitigation Funds should be set up at both the national and State levels, in line with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act. The Mitigation Fund should be used for those local level and community-based interventions which reduce risks and promote environment-friendly settlements and livelihood practices.
- For SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund), XVFC has recommended the total corpus of Rs.1,60,153 crore for States for disaster management for the duration of 2021-26, of which the Union's share is Rs. 1,22,601 crore and States' share is Rs. 37,552 crores.
- XVFC has recommended six earmarked allocations for a total amount of Rs. 11,950 crores for certain priority areas, namely, two under the NDRF (Expansion and Modernisation of Fire Services and Resettlement of Displaced People affected by Erosion) and four under the NDMF (Catalytic Assistance to Twelve Most Drought-prone States, Managing Seismic and Landslide Risks

in Ten Hill States, Reducing the Risk of Urban Flooding in Seven Most Populous Cities and Mitigation Measures to Prevent Erosion).

### Fiscal consolidation

- Provided range for fiscal deficit and debt path of both the Union and States.
- Additional borrowing room to States based on performance in power sector reforms.
- A threshold amount of annual appropriation should be fixed below which the funding for a CSS may be stopped. Below the stipulated threshold, the administrating department should justify the need for the continuation of the scheme. As the life cycle of ongoing schemes has been made co-terminus with the cycle of Finance Commissions, the third-party evaluation of all CSSs should be completed within a stipulated timeframe. The flow of monitoring information should be regular and should include credible information on output and outcome indicators.
- In view of the uncertainty that prevails at the stage that XVFC have done its analysis, as well as the contemporary realities and challenges, we recognise that the FRBM Act needs a major restructuring and recommend that the time-table for defining and achieving debt sustainability may be examined by a High-powered Inter-governmental Group. This High-powered Group can craft the new FRBM framework and oversee its implementation. It is important that the Union and State Governments amend their FRBM Acts, based on the recommendations of the Group, so as to ensure that their legislations are consistent with the fiscal sustainability framework put in place.

This High-powered Inter-Governmental Group could also be tasked to oversee the implementation of the 15th Finance Commission's diverse recommendations.

- State Governments may explore formation of independent public debt management cells which will chart their borrowing programme efficiently.

### Ageing Dams: Alarm for Future



Recently, a UN University report titled "**Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk**", held that by 2050, most people on Earth would live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them including India's already operating at or beyond their design life, putting lives and property at risk. Ageing signs of dams include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam's functionality and effectiveness. India is ranked third in the world in terms of building large dams. Of the over 5,200 large dams built so far, about 1,100 large dams have already reached 50 years of age, and some are older than 120 years. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of medium and minor dams are even more precarious as their shelf life is even lower than large dams. India's aging dams can threaten water security, affect farmers' income, and increase flooding. Thus, there is an urgent need to tackle this crisis.

### Issues Related to Ageing Dam

**Faster Rate of Storage Loss:** As dams age, soil replaces the water in the reservoirs. Therefore, the storage capacity cannot be claimed to be the same as in the 1900s and 1950s. However, the storage space in Indian reservoirs is receding at a rate faster than anticipated. Reservoirs are poised to become extinct in less than a few decades, with untold consequences already underway. A 2003 report observed that India's iconic Bhakra dam's siltation rate is 139.86% higher than originally assumed. At this rate, the Bhakra dam is now expected to function for merely 47 years, virtually halved from the original estimate of 88 years".

**Impact of Climate Change:** The rising frequency and severity of flooding and other extreme environmental events can overwhelm a dam's design limits and accelerate a dam's ageing process. Thus, it is important to note with increasing floods; climate change will accelerate the dam ageing process.

**Structurally Vulnerable Dams:** Almost every scholarly study on reservoir sedimentation shows that Indian reservoirs are designed with a poor understanding of sedimentation science. Moreover, any large storage structure, be it concrete, masonry, or earth, can become structurally weak with time. Such is the case with a number of old dams in India.

**Lack of Storage Information:** The loss of large dams' storage capacity over time is part of the dam ageing process. However, this information continues to be sporadically documented in India and serves as a blind spot in terms of understanding the true gravity of the water crisis in the country.

### Consequences of Ageing Dams

**Impacting Food Security:** When soil replaces the water in reservoirs, supply gets choked. In this case, the cropped area may begin receiving less and less water as time progresses. As a result, the net sown water area either shrink in size or depends on rains or groundwater, which is over-exploited.

**Impacting Farmers' Income:** As crop yield may get affected severely, it would disrupt the farmer's income. Moreover, water is a crucial factor for crop yield and credit, crop insurance, and investment.

**Increased Flooding:** The flawed siltation rates reinforce the argument that the designed flood cushion within several reservoirs across many river basins may have already depleted substantially, due to which floods have become more frequent downstream of dams. The flooding of Bharuch in 2020, Kerala in 2018, and Chennai in 2015 are a few examples attributed to downstream releases from reservoirs.

India will eventually feel difficulty in finding sufficient water in the 21st century to feed the rising population by 2050, grow abundant crops, create sustainable cities, or ensure growth. Therefore, all stakeholders must come together to address this situation urgently.

**Attracting Global Attention:** There is a need to attract global attention to the issue of ageing water storage infrastructure and stimulate international efforts to deal with this emerging, rising water risk.

**Sustainable Decommissioning:** Decommissioning will also have various positive and negative economic, social, and ecological impacts to be considered in a local and regional social, economic, and geographic context "critical to protect the broader, sustainable development objectives for a region."

**Transparency in Information:** India's water organizations have to be more transparent concerning dysfunctional and deteriorating large dams. Thus, real-time information on the live storage capacity of large storage structures should be made available. A realistic estimate of the country's irrigation potential needs to be made based on this for proper planning and management of available water.

**Alternative Measures:** Water policymakers, planners, and water managers need to think of alternative plans for large storage structures. Some alternatives include: Selecting sites for construction of water harvesting structures of varying capacities;

Building medium or minor irrigation-based small storage structures; Identifying mechanisms to recharge aquifers and store water underground.

### Indian Economy and Infra Push

Presently, the Indian economy is facing an acute economic crisis, triggered Covid-19 pandemic. The National Statistical Office has estimated that the economy would shrink by 7.7%. Against this background, Budget 2021 has provided a reasonable stimulus to infrastructure growth. However, apart from concerns emanating from the rising fiscal deficit, infrastructure development in India has its own issues. Thus, if the Indian economy wants to reap intended benefits and minimize risks of contemplated fiscal stimulus, there is a need to carry out reforms that impede the development of Infrastructure. Some of the Proposed Budget Initiatives Setting up of a **Development Finance Institution (DFI)** with an initial capital of ₹20,000 crores, to serve as a catalyst for facilitating infrastructure investment. The budgeted increase in capital outlay would provide the central government's share to the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP). An important initiative pertains to the launching of a National Monetisation Pipeline. This would be the first practical step towards asset monetization. In order to manage the non-performing assets of public sector banks, there is a proposal to set up a Bad Bank.



### Issues Related To Infrastructure Development

**Revenue Shortfall:** Slippage in revenue estimates may not be ruled out on account of the realization

of lower than anticipated increases in nominal GDP growth, direct tax buoyancy, and disinvestment targets.

**Lesser Funds With States:** The Union government has accepted the 15th Finance Commission report recommendation, according to which vertical share of tax devolution from the centre to states has been reduced 42% to 41%. Moreover, the central government increasingly resort to the imposition of cesses which are almost permanent have reduced the shareable pool.

**Issues Associated With Burgeoning Fiscal Deficit:** Infrastructure development in India will be funded by fiscal stimulus. This can be reflected as the Centre has indicated taking the fiscal deficit to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26. However, the rising fiscal deficit can cause macro-economic stability issues like high inflation, crowding out, a downgrade of international ratings, etc.

**Issues Associated With Bad Bank:** Finding buyers for bad assets in a pandemic hit economy will be a challenge, especially when governments are facing the issue of containing the fiscal deficit. Also, the bad bank idea is like shifting loans from one government pocket (the public sector banks) to another (the bad bank).

**Structural Problems:** Due to land acquisition delays and litigation issues, the rate of implementation of projects is very slow on global standards. Further, getting approvals are very difficult in terms of land access, environmental clearances, impending litigation in court delays the infrastructure projects.

#### Way Forward

**Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** The success of the infrastructure expansion plan would depend on other stakeholders of the pipeline playing their due role. These include State governments and their public sector enterprises and the private sector. In this context, the Fifteenth Finance Commission has recommended the setting up of a High-Powered Intergovernmental Group to re-examine the fiscal responsibility legislations of the Centre and States.

**National Infrastructure Pipeline:** The NIP is a step in the right direction. However, there is a need to facilitate the assimilation of data and information from all the stakeholders like Central and State Governments, Urban Local Bodies, Banks and Financial Institution, PE funds, and private investors, both local and foreign on one platform to increase accountability and transparency in the infrastructure sector.

**Banking Reforms:** So long as Public sector bank managements remain beholden to politicians and bureaucrats, their deficit in professionalism will remain and subsequently, prudential norms in lending will continue to suffer. Therefore, the debate regarding setting up a bad bank must be preceded by proper implementation of holistic reforms in the banking sector, as envisaged under the IndraDhanush plan.

*Huge fiscal stimulus, provided by the government in the Budget 2021 is a step in the right direction. However, it needs to address structural and macroeconomic stability concerns, emanating from high public expenditure.*

#### Development Financial Institution

The budget 2021 has signalled that the Centre Government is banking on long-term infrastructure creation to lift India's economic growth rate sustainably. In this pursuit, the government has proposed to go back to the Development Finance Institution (DFI) idea. Further, DFI makes sense as the Centre government envisages mobilizing nearly ₹100 lakh crore for the ambitious National Infrastructure Pipeline. The idea of DFI looks good in the context of the looming NPA crisis of Banks. However, many economists have pointed out that India should keep the failed experiment with DFI, such as ICICI and IDBI, which leads to the conversion into universal banks.

#### DFI & Background

Development financial institutions provide long-term credit for capital-intensive investments spread over a long period and low yielding rates of

return, such as urban infrastructure, mining and heavy industry, and irrigation systems. Development banks are different from commercial banks, which mobilize short- to medium-term deposits and lend for similar maturities to avoid a maturity mismatch (a potential cause for a bank's liquidity and solvency). In India, the first DFI was operationalized in 1948 with the setting up of the Industrial Finance Corporation (IFCI). Subsequently, **India's Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation (ICICI)** was set up with the World Bank's backing in 1955. The Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) came into existence in 1964 to promote long-term financing for infrastructure projects and industry. However, during the 1970-80s, DFI got discredited for mounting non-performing assets, allegedly caused by politically motivated lending and inadequate professionalism in assessing investment projects for economic, technical, and financial viability. Due to these factors, **Narasimhan Committee (1991)** recommended disbanding of the DFI, and the existing DFI were converted into commercial banks.

#### Need for DFI

**NPA Crisis:** The surge in NPAs in the banking sector, and the need to augment financing of infrastructure for kick-starting the growth cycle have led to a renewed policy attention on setting up DFIs. The gap between banks' assets and liabilities, already increased by bad debts will become unsustainable in infrastructure investment, given the long funding periods of such projects.

**Economic Crisis Triggered By Covid-19 Pandemic:** Alexander Gerschenkron, a Ukrainian economic historian, famously theorized that the greater the backwardness of a country, the greater the role of the state in economic development, particularly in providing long-term finance to catch up with the advanced economies in the shortest possible time. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequality, the poverty gap, unemployment, and the economy's slowing down. Thus, infrastructure building through DFIs can help in quick economic recovery.

**Achieving the Target of \$5 Trillion Economy:** The government has envisaged attaining the target of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025. However, this goal will depend on world-class infrastructure across the country. NITI Aayog has estimated that US\$4.5 trillion will be needed by 2030 to fund infrastructure. DFI is a step in the right direction towards this goal. International Examples: DFIs in China, Brazil, and Singapore has been successful in both domestic and international markets.

**Mobilizing Capital For DFI:** To lend for the long term, DFI requires correspondingly long-term sources of finance. DFIs of the earlier era were over-reliant on cheap government funds and today's commercial banks ran into asset-liability mismatches due to their reliance on retail deposits to fund long-term projects. Therefore, it may be best for new-age DFIs to focus on diversified sources of funding. Presently, DFI can be adequately capitalized by the sovereign-backed funds, alternative routes such as capital gains/tax-free bond issues, external borrowings, and loans from multilateral agencies.

**Specialized DFIs:** Specialised project lenders focussed on specific verticals tend to do better at building project appraisal skills and managing risks than 'supermarket' lenders who fund any project that comes their way. The Centre must therefore be open to the idea of multiple specialized DFIs modelled on the success of refinancing institutions such as NHB and NABARD.

**Ensuring Good Governance:** While freeing a DFI from political interference or crony lending is necessary, merely having private shareholders or professional managers on board isn't sufficient to ensure good governance. This has to be backed by a robust system of external checks and balances such as supervision by RBI and proper due diligence by auditors and rating agencies.

**Ensuring Ease of Doing Business:** In the past, ambitious highway and pipeline projects have been continually held up by local protests and land acquisition woes, retrospective taxes, and poor contract enforcement. The success of DFIs is

contingent on ironing out such issues and removing on-ground impediments to the ease of doing business.

*While boosting investment in the infrastructure sector is imperative for sustained growth, the need for the hour is to resolve persistent issues in the debt market that impede long-term financing flow.*

### Government issues guidelines to regulate social media platforms and OTT platforms

After demands to regulate social media platforms were raised to curb the spread of misinformation and hate speech, the government had moved to issue regulations, through the ministry of information technology, but at the same time, welcomed social media platforms to do business in India and praised them for gaining popularity and a large number of users. They also hailed the platforms for empowering ordinary Indians. “We have framed these rules under the existing IT Act,” **MeITY** minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said during a press conference announcing these rules. “We are trusting the platforms to follow these regulations,” he said. “The focus of this guideline is on self-regulation,” he added. The government says it is empowering the users of social media platforms and other intermediaries through this step.

### The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeITY**) announced its draft Information Technology (**Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code**) Rules, 2021, for social media platforms, OTT players & digital media on 25, Feb, 2021. The Rules would come in effect from the date of their publication in the gazette, except for the additional due diligence for significant social media intermediaries, which shall come into effect three months after publication of these Rules. The proposed new rules will cover social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter, OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, HotStar etc, and also digital news

publications like The News Minute, Scroll, Quint, The Wire, The Cue etc.

### What are the new rules?

- A three-level grievance redressal mechanism has been established under the rules along with two levels of self-regulation.
- The 3 levels include: **Level I** comprise of the publisher and **level II** comprises of the self-regulatory body, while the **third level** is the oversight mechanism under the ministry of information and broadcasting.
- The OTT platforms will need to employ a chief compliance officer, nodal contact person and a resident grievance officer under the new social media regulatory mechanism.
- Along with those, a self-regulatory body which would be created would be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court or of a high court, or by a person of eminence from the relevant field, who can issue advisories to the publisher.
- The action that can be taken at each level of the redressal mechanism includes removal of content, issuance of an apology, giving a warning, changing the rating of the content etc. But, the final decision regarding the grievance lies with the inter-ministerial governmental body at Level III.
- The rules also make a distinction between a significant social media intermediary and a regular social media intermediary. The government is yet to define the user size to determine who will constitute a significant social media intermediary, though the minister indicated players with more than 50 lakh users will be considered for that categorisation.
- Social media platforms upon being asked either by a court order or a

government authority will be required to disclose the “first originator” of mischievous tweet or message as the case may be.

- This should be applicable only in relation to cases regarding sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, public order, relations with foreign states, or rape, sexually explicit content and the likes.
- The social media intermediaries will also have to have a grievance redressal mechanism. They will also have to name a grievance officer who shall register the grievance within 24 hours and ensure disposal in 15 days.
- The intermediary will publish a monthly compliance report mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints as well as details of contents removed proactively.
- The person appointed as chief compliance officer shall be a resident of India. He/she will be responsible for ensuring compliance within the rules and existing Acts. The nodal contact person will be responsible for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- All intermediaries shall have a physical contact address in India published on its website or mobile app or both.
- Intermediaries have been asked to remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals, show such individuals in full or partial nudity or in sexual act or is in the nature of impersonation including morphed images.
- The rules also say that “users who wish to verify their accounts voluntarily shall be provided with an appropriate mechanism to verify their accounts and provided with

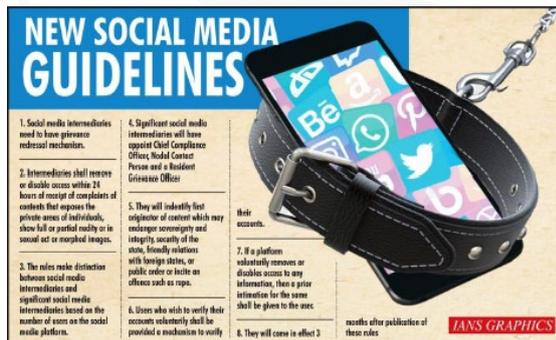
demonstrable and visible mark of verification.”

- All OTT platforms should self-classify its content into five categories based on age, namely: U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult).
- The OTT Platforms will be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as 'A'.
- If the platforms seek to disable access to their content of any social media user, they are required to give him reasons and also hear him out.
- For publishers of news on digital media, they will be “required to observe Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India and the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act thereby providing a level playing field between the offline (Print, TV) and digital media,” according to the government.
- The government wants the digital media as well to appoint a Grievance Redressal Officer based in India who shall be responsible for the redressal of grievances received by it. The officer shall take decision on every grievance received by it within 15 days.
- There maybe one or more self-regulatory bodies of publishers. According to the rules, this body “shall be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, a High Court or independent eminent person and have not more than six members.” It shall be registered with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Further, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting shall formulate an oversight mechanism. It shall publish a charter for self-regulating bodies, including Codes of Practices and

establish an Inter-Departmental Committee for hearing grievances.

### What are the concerns?

Digital media organisations had raised concerns about censorship by the government under the new rules, especially since a multi-ministry governmental body can ultimately decide what content can and cannot be published by these organisations. Speaking to TNM, Apar Gupta, executive director at Internet Freedom Foundation, said, "There is a reasonable chance that it will break end-to-end encryption and it will lock out platforms that deploy this encryption but do not have sizable resources like WhatsApp or Facebook." Many organisations were terming the rules as ultra-vires to the constitution and are planning to challenge it in the courts.



### The need for regulation

The government said that the extensive spread of mobile phones and internet has enabled the social media platforms to expand their footprints in India. India, once world's largest unconnected country, will soon be one of the world's biggest internet-enabled nations, with over 800 million users online. Writing for the LiveMint, **Member of Parliament Rajeev Chandrashekhar believes that**, "For all its power to do good, it has been obvious for several years now that social media can also be misused. Its power to shape or distort narratives and incite public opinion and behaviour has been in full view for some time now. This power can become a dangerous force multiplier when accessed by those who want to spread hate, sow divisions and create violence."

### What are the practices around the world?

**Europe is leading the effort to effectively regulate social media intermediaries.** In 2020, building on its e-Commerce Directive, it introduced a comprehensive Digital Services Act for handling online content, defining liability of intermediaries and protection of the fundamental rights of individuals. Obligations of intermediaries include timely notification to law enforcement agencies in case of illegal content, content takedown obligations, transparency disclosures such as details of account suspensions and content removals, rules on digital advertising, appointment of compliance officers and conducting annual audits. Australia also incorporated stricter rules on social media after the Christchurch terrorist attack. **The Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act, 2019**, mandates social media platforms to remove violent content and imposes a fine up to 10% of the annual turnover of the company, in case of non-compliance.

## AWARDS AND HONOURS

### Nepal government awards hydropower project to India's Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam

The government of Nepal announced that it has granted the contract for the construction of the lower **Arun Hydro Project** of 679 MW to **Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam- SJVN of India**.

As per the Investment Board of Nepal release, a meeting of IBN on January 29, 2021, made the decision of awarding the contract to an Indian company under the BOOT model- Build, Own, Operate, and Transfer.

#### Key Highlights:

- India had put forward the proposal of building lower Arun as per all the conditions set in Arun III.
- According to the Arun III agreement, apart from the shares of the project that will be allocated to the locals and

free power to the particularly affected areas, the government will be getting a royalty of 330 billion over a period of 20 years.

- The project will also be providing 21.9% of generated energy free to Nepal.
- The project cost for Lower Arun has been estimated at over Rs. 100 billion.
- The installed capacity of the hydropower project can be increased to around 1,000 MW if it will be developed as a storage type project.

#### **About Arun Hydro Power Project of Nepal:**

- The proposed Hydro Project has a projected capacity of 679 MW of electricity. It will be situated in the Bhojpur and Sankhuwasabha districts of Province 1.
- The project is located upstream of the proposed Sapt Koshi High Dam Project and downstream of the ongoing Arun-3 SHEP.
- The dam site of the Hydro Project will be located about 34 km upstream while the powerhouse site is 7 km upstream from Tumlingtar Airport.

#### **How India won Nepal's Hydro Power Project?**

Earlier, Power China, a Chinese Stated Owned Company, had shown interest in constructing the Hydro Power Project. The company had even signed an MoU with the Investment Board of Nepal- IBN for developing the project.

However, the Chinese Company decided to withdraw from the project because of its dissatisfaction that the Nepal Government showcased the project at the Investment Summit which was held in March 2019. Meanwhile, the Indian government showed its interest in the hydropower project during the visit of then Nepal's Energy, Water Resources, and Irrigation Minister, Barshaman Pun to India.

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