

**CURRENT EVENTS
AND
ANALYSIS
(June 2021)**

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CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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ECONOMY

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY:

Special Package of Measures Worth Rs. 6.28 Lakh Crores Announced

On June 28, 2021, the Union Government announced a set of measures worth Rs. 6.28 lakh crores to mitigate the impact of second wave of COVID-19 and also revive the economy. These measures broadly fall under three categories

Economic Relief from Pandemic

Strengthening Public Health

Impetus for Growth & Employment

Highlights of the special package:

1. Health Sector:

Rs. 50,000 crore loan guarantee scheme for enhancing medical infrastructure in the **private sector** especially in underserved areas,

Rs. 23,220 crore for strengthening public health infrastructure and human resources in public hospitals, (the amount would be spent in this financial year itself (2021-22) on short-term human resources augmentation by recruiting medical students (interns, residents and final year students) and nursing students; increasing availability of ICU beds, paediatric beds, oxygen supply, ambulance services; enhancing testing capacity, strengthening capacity for surveillance and genome sequencing, etc.)

2. Ensuring Credit Flow:

Expansion of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) aimed at ensuring credit flow to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and other small businesses by **another Rs. 1.5 lakh crores.**

A new scheme to ensure credit flow of **Rs. 7500 crores to 25 lakh** small borrowers through micro-finance institutions.

Loans ranging from **Rs. 1 lakh to 10 lakhs without any collateral** to those engaged in tourism related business.

3. Social Sector:

Employment:

Extension of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana scheme with an estimated expenditure of **Rs. 22, 810 crores** under which the Union Government incentivises new employment creation and reemployment of those who lost employment due to COVID pandemic by contributing to provident fund,

Food Security:

Rs 93,869 crore allocation for supply of free food grains under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) to around 80 Crore National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries till November 2021,

4. Infrastructure:

A new scheme of financial assistance to State Power DISCOMS (Distribution Companies) with an outlay of **Rs. 3, 03,058 crore** for infrastructure creation, capacity building and process improvement, and

Rs. 19,041 crores for expansion of BharatNet project, aimed at providing broadband connectivity in rural areas, to all the inhabited villages.

Details:

ECONOMIC RELIEF FROM PANDEMIC:

1. Loan Guarantee Scheme for COVID Affected sectors:

Health care:

The second wave of COVID placed **enormous stress on the health infrastructure and highlighted the need to enhance public and private investment in health sector.**

There is **need for** additional hospital beds, Intensive Care Units (ICUs), diagnostic centres, oxygen facilities, cold chain facilities for vaccines, ramping up of production of ancillary supplies such as syringes, vials, etc.

Hence, the Government launched a **Rs. 50,000 crore loan guarantee scheme** for enhancing medical infrastructure in the country especially in underserved areas.

How the Loan Guarantee Scheme Works?

Banks would extend a maximum loan of Rs. 100 crore for each project.

Loans will be given for expanding existing facilities in health sector (Brownfield investments) as well as setting up new facilities (Greenfield investments).

Government would give guarantee for 50 per cent of the loan for expansion projects and 75 per cent for new projects.

The guarantee would be 75 per cent for both brownfield and greenfield projects if they are located in aspirational districts (These are districts with poor socio-economic indicators and identified for targeted development by NITI Aayog)

Interest rate will also be lower on these loans at 7.95 per cent due to Government guarantee. Normal interest rates without guarantee for this sector are around 10 to 11 per cent.

Other Sectors:

Government also announced Rs. 60,000 crore loan guarantee scheme for other sectors which are affected by COVID.

2. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) was launched by the Government during the first wave of COVID in May 2021 to ensure additional credit flow of upto Rs. 3 lakh crores to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and other small businesses.

This facility has been extended by another Rs. 1.5 lakh crores now.

How the Scheme Works?

Under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS), Banks would extend emergency credit to MSMEs and Business Enterprises for upto 20 per cent of their outstanding loans. This loan can be accessed as a term loan or for meeting working capital requirements.

The Government provides 100 per cent guarantee to banks for loans sanctioned under Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

3. Credit Guarantee Scheme for Micro Finance Institutions

This is a new scheme announced by the Government to support flow of credit to the small borrowers from Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs).

Banks would provide loans of Rs. 7500 crore to Micro-Finance Institutions. The Government would provide 75 per cent guarantee to Banks on these funds. This means in case of loan repayment default, Government would repay the banks 75 per cent of the loan amount.

Micro-finance Institutions should use these funds for on-lending to small borrowers.

25 lakh small borrowers would benefit from the scheme. Each beneficiary would be eligible for lending up to Rs. 1.25 lakh.

4. Scheme for Tourists Guides/ Stakeholders:

Under new Loan Guarantee Scheme for COVID-affected sectors, working capital/personal loans will be provided to people in tourism sector to discharge liabilities and restart businesses impacted due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Loans ranging from **Rs. 1 lakh to 10 lakhs** would be extended without any collateral to those engaged in tourism related business.

Free one month tourist visa to 5 lakh tourists

5 lakh Tourists Visas will be issued visa free of charge to visit India to provide boost to tourism related business. Government will lose a revenue Rs 100 crore due to this measure.

5. Extension of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana (ANBRY):

The government has decided to extend the date of registration under Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana scheme from 30.6.2021 to 31.03.2022. Estimated expenditure on this scheme is **Rs. 22, 810 crores.**

Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana was launched during the first wave of COVID in 2020 to incentivise new employment creation and reemployment of those who lost employment due to COVID pandemic. The Scheme commenced from 1st October, 2020 and was to remain open for registration of new employees up to 30th June, 2021

Under this scheme, the Central Government contributes to provident fund for two years for new employment created by employers and for reemployment of those who lost employment due to pandemic. Employees drawing a monthly salary of less than Rs.15,000 are eligible under the scheme.

Government pays both the employees' (12% of wages) and employer's (12% of wages) share of Provident Fund contribution, if the establishment is providing employment upto 1000 persons. Government will contribute only employee's share (12% of wages) if the establishment is employing more than 1,000.

6. Free food grains under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY):

Under this special scheme, around 80 Crore National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries covered under both categories of NFSA, namely Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Householders (PHH), will be provided with **an additional quota of free-of-cost food-grains (Rice/Wheat) at 5 Kg per person per month**, over and above their regular monthly entitlements under NFSA.

In the last Financial Year, the government has spent **Rs. 1,33,972** crore under PMGKY to provide free food grains to the poor. The scheme was launched initially for the period from April to June 2020.

In the wake of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the scheme was relaunched in May 2021 to ensure food security of poor. However, keeping in view the need for continuous support to the poor and the needy, the scheme was extended till November 2020.

Estimated financial implications of the scheme will be **Rs 93,869** crore, bringing the total cost of PMGKY to **Rs 2,27,841 crore**.

7. Additional Subsidy for DAP & P&K fertilisers

Under Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) regime, Government only gives fixed subsidy for kg of fertiliser. India is dependent on import of fertilisers and the international prices of fertilisers are rising.

The Government has decided to ensure that farmers get the fertilisers in 2021-22 at the same price as they paid in 2020-21 as a onetime measure.

Towards this end, the Government decided to provide Rs. 9,125 crore additional subsidy for DAP and Rs. 5,650 crore additional subsidy for NPK based complex fertiliser. Thus, the farmers will benefit by an additional amount of Rs. 14,775 crore.

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH

- Besides supporting the private health sector through loan guarantee scheme, a new scheme has been announced for **strengthening public health infrastructure and human resources in public hospitals** with an outlay of Rs. 23,220 crore. This amount will be spent in the current financial year. 2021-22.
- **Funds will be used** for short-term human resources augmentation through medical students (interns, residents, final year students, and nursing students; increasing availability of ICU beds, paediatric beds, oxygen supply at central, district and sub-district level; availability of equipment, medicines; access to tele-consultation; strengthening ambulance services; and enhancing testing capacity and supportive diagnostics, strengthen capacity for surveillance and genome sequencing.

IMPETUS FOR GROWTH & EMPLOYMENT:

1. AGRICULTURE:

Release of Climate Resilient Special Traits Varieties

High yielding crop varieties developed in the earlier decades lacked adequate nutrients, climate resilience and other traits. These varieties are also susceptible to biotic and abiotic stresses.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has **developed bio-fortified crop varieties** having high nutrients like **protein, iron, zinc, vitamin-A**. These varieties are tolerant to diseases, insects, pests, drought, salinity, and flooding, and are also early maturing and amenable to mechanical harvesting.

21 such varieties of rice, peas, millets, maize, soya beans, quinoa, buckwheat, winged bean, pigeon pea & sorghum will be supplied to farmers which would enhance their incomes.

2. Revival of North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC)

North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) was established in 1982 to support farmers of North-East in getting remunerative prices of agri-horticulture produces. It aims to enhance agricultural, procurement, processing and marketing infrastructure in North-East. 75 Farmer Producer Organisations/Farmer Producer Companies are registered with NERAMAC. It has facilitated registration of 13 Geographical Indicator (GI) crops of North-East.

North-Eastern Centre for Organic Cultivation would be set up by NERAMAC to facilitate equity finance to entrepreneurs. The Union Government would provide Rs 77.45 crore NERAMAC.

3. EXPORTS:

Rs. 88,000 crore boost to Export Insurance Cover

Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) promotes exports by providing credit insurance services. Its products support around 30% of India's merchandise exports. It has been decided to infuse equity in ECGC over 5 years to boost export insurance cover by Rs. 88,000 crore

Rs. 33,000 crore Boost for Project Exports through National Export Insurance Account (NEIA)

Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) has also set up National Export Insurance Account (NEIA) Trust to provide adequate credit insurance cover to **long and medium term project exports** against both, political and commercial risks in export markets. **Construction and engineering projects** taken up by Indian contractors in other countries like Roads, Railway lines, Airports, Power plants, etc are termed as project exports.

So far, NEIA Trust has supported 211 projects of Rs 52,860 crore in 52 countries by 63 different Indian Project Exporters till March 31, 2021. The Union Government now announced that it would provide additional corpus to NEIA over 5 years to enable it to underwrite additional Rs. 33,000 crore of project exports.

4. INFRASTRUCTURE:

Broadband Connectivity to Villages:

Out of 2,50,000 Gram Panchayats, 1,56,223 Gram Panchayats have been provided with broadband connectivity by May, 31, 2021 under **BharatNet project**.

The Government announced a revised strategy for implementation of the BharatNet project.

So far, it is being implemented in Gram Panchayats. It will now be extended to **all inhabited villages**. (There are around 6.5 lakh villages in India which have been clubbed in to 2.5 Gram Panchayats. Depending on the size of population, a Gram Panchayat may consist of a single village or a cluster of adjoining villages.)

The project would be implemented in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The Government would provide Rs. 19,041 crore as Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to private players.

Power Sector:

Rs 3.03 lakh crore for Reforms in Power Distribution:

A new scheme of financial assistance to Power DISCOMS (Distribution Companies) was announced for infrastructure creation, capacity building and process improvement of State Power Distribution Companies.

Total outlay for the scheme is Rs. 3,03,058 crore, out of which the Central Government's share will be Rs. 97,631 crore.

New streamlined process for PPP Projects and Asset Magnetisation

Current process for approval of Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects is long and involves multiple levels of approval.

Hence, a new policy will be formulated for appraisal and approval of PPP proposals and monetization of core infrastructure assets.

5. MANUFACTURING:

Extension of Tenure of PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing

Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme provides incentive of 6% to 4% on incremental sales of goods under target segments that are manufactured in India, for a period of five years. Incentives are applicable from 01.08.2020 with base year as 2019-20. However, the companies have been unable to achieve incremental sales condition due to disruption in production activities due to pandemic related lockdowns.

Therefore, it has been decided to shift the base year for calculation of incentives to 2020-21 and extend the tenure of the PLI Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing launched by one year i.e. till 2025-26 (originally valid till 2024-25).

AGRICULTURE:

MSPs

Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for Kharif Crops Hiked

- In June 2021, the Union Government increased the Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) of Kharif crops which would be sold in the 2021-22 marketing season.

What are Minimum Support Prices (MSPs)?

- The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is the floor price that the Central government fixes every year for the kharif and rabi seasons, for major agricultural commodities.
- The MSP is in the nature of an assured market at a minimum guaranteed price offered by the Government.
- The idea behind MSP is
- **to give guaranteed price and assured market to the farmers, and**
- **protect them from the price fluctuations and market imperfections.**
- Traders have to bid at the floor price (MSP) set by the Government for purchasing agricultural commodities. The Government intervenes in the markets when the bidding price falls below the floor price to protect farmers' incomes.

What are the Limitations of MSPs?

- However, **in practice the Government's intervention is restricted to major commodities** like rice and wheat which are supplied to the poor under the **public distribution system** and a few other commodities like pulses, cotton, and oilseeds. Here also the Government does not procure entire produce of the farmers. For instance, in 2019-20, Government through Food Corporation of India (FCI) procured only 43 per cent of Rice and 36 % of wheat.
- Again here also, farmers in only a few States like **Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana** benefit from Government procurement as they have better marketing infrastructure and are the early beneficiaries of Green Revolution initiative of the Government.
- **Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) are also not legally binding on private purchasers (traders).** Farmers Associations have been demanding for legal guarantee for the Minimum Support Prices (MSPs).
- At present, in spite of the limitations of the MSPs, still they **serve some purpose as farmers use MSPs as the benchmark for bargaining** with traders while selling their produce.

Historical Context of MSPs:

- MSPs are part of some of the crucial initiatives taken to boost agriculture production in the country by Government in mid-1960s.
- India faced food shortages during the mid-1960s. There were two consecutive droughts years 1965 and 1966. Food grains production crashed and India faced risk of mass starvation.
- India could not afford to import food grains and hence had to depend on charity. India received 7 million tones food aid from USA after repeated requests. Though this food aid prevented mass starvation, India faced humiliation at the international level.
- This pushed India to **reform its agricultural policy** and accordingly India adopted **significant policy reforms** focused on the **goal of achieving food grains self-sufficiency**.
- Series of **institutional reforms** were undertaken **to boost the agricultural production** and to modernise the farming practices. These included **land reforms, agricultural extension schemes**, introduction of the **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for major agricultural produces**, introduction of new technologies (popularly known as the **green revolution**), strengthening of **agricultural research**, etc

How are Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) Fixed?

- The Union Government announces Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for major agricultural commodities every year for major agricultural commodities based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP).
- CACP was set up in January 1965 as a statutory body under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
- Cost of production is an important factor in determination of MSP, but it is not the only factor that determines MSP. The CACP takes into account the following for recommending MSPs.
 1. cost of production;
 2. a minimum of 50 percent as the margin over cost of production
 3. demand and supply;
 4. price trends in the market, both domestic and international;
 5. inter-crop price parity;
 6. terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture; and
 7. likely implications of MSP on consumers of that product.

The MSP is now applicable on 23 farm commodities:

- **7 cereals** (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley),
- **5 pulses** (chana, arhar, moong, urad and masur),
- **7 oilseeds** (groundnut, soyabean, rapeseed-mustard, sesamum, sunflower, nigerseed and safflower) and
- **4 commercial crops** (sugarcane, cotton, copra and raw jute).

Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for 2021-22 Marketing Season:

- In 2018-19, the Government announced that MSPs would be fixed at a level of at least 1.5 times of the All-India weighted average Cost of Production (CoP) to ensure reasonably fair remuneration for the farmers.

- For 2021-22 kharif marketing season, the highest absolute increase in MSP has been recommended for sesames (Rs. 452 per quintal) followed by tur and urad (Rs. 300 per quintal each).
- MSP of Groundnut and Niger Seed has been increased by Rs 275 per quintal and Rs 235 per quintal respectively.
- The Government is making concerted efforts over the last few years to realign the MSPs in favour of **oilseeds, pulses and coarse cereals** to encourage **crop diversification** and correct demand - supply imbalance in the country. Hence, the MSPs of these crops being increased more than other crops.
- The **expected returns to farmers over their cost of production are estimated to be highest** in case of **Bajra (85%)** followed by **urad (65%) and tur (62%)**. For rest of the crops, return to farmers over their cost of production is estimated to be at least 50%.

MSPs at a Glance (2021-22 Kharif Marketing Season):

Crop	MSP 2020-21	MSP 2021-22	Cost of production 2021-22 (Rs/quintal)	Increase in MSP (Absolute)	Return over cost (in per cent)
Paddy(Common)	1868	1940	1293	72	50
Paddy (GradeA)	1888	1960	-	72	-
Jowar (Hybrid)	2620	2738	1825	118	50
Jowar (Maldandi)	2640	2758	-	118	-
Bajra	2150	2250	1213	100	85
Ragi	3295	3377	2251	82	50
Maize	1850	1870	1246	20	50
Tur (Arhar)	6000	6300	3886	300	62
Moong	7196	7275	4850	79	50
Urad	6000	6300	3816	300	65
Groundnut	5275	5550	3699	275	50
Sunflower Seed	5885	6015	4010	130	50
Soyabean (yellow)	3880	3950	2633	70	50
Sesamum	6855	7307	4871	452	50
Nigerseed	6695	6930	4620	235	50
Cotton (Medium Staple)	5515	5726	3817	211	50
Cotton (Long Staple)	5825	6025	-	200	

Subsidies:

Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime

- In June 2021, the Union Government approved the subsidy rates for the decontrolled fertilisers (P&K Fertilisers and complex fertilisers) under Nutrient Based Subsidy Rates for the year 2021-22.

Fertiliser	Subsidy Per Kg in Rs
N (Nitrogen)	18.7
P (Phosphorus)	45.3
K (Potash)	10.1
S (Sulphur)	2.3-

Importance of Fertilisers in Agriculture:

- Fertilisers like Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potash, and Sulphur are **essential for plant growth and increasing crop yield.**
- Nitrogen supports vegetative growth. Phosphorus improves roots and flowering. Potassium strengthens resistance to environmental stress like extreme temperatures and also resists pest attacks. Sulphur aids in optimum utilisation of nitrogen by plant and formation of chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is a green pigment found in plants. Plants use chlorophyll and light to make food.
- Due to the significance of fertilisers in plant growth and yields, the Government provides fertilisers at subsidised rates to farmers to make them available at reasonable prices.

Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime:

- However, due to rising subsidy burden, the Union Government introduced Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime in 2010 to reduce burden on Government.
- At present, only Urea (fertiliser with high nitrogen content - 46%) is sold at statutory prices fixed by the Government.
- The prices of **P&K and Complex fertilisers are decontrolled.** Government only gives subsidy based on the contents of primary nutrients Nitrogen 'N', Phosphate 'P' and Potash 'K' and Sulphur 'S' in the fertilisers. Hence, it is called Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime.
- Under the NBS regime, Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of P&K fertilisers has been left open and fertiliser manufacturers/marketers are allowed to fix the MRP at reasonable rates.
- At present 22 grades of P&K fertilisers namely DAP (Diammonium Phosphate), MAP (Mono ammonium Phosphate), TSP (Triple Super Phosphate), MOP (Muriate of Potash), Ammonium Sulphate, SSP (Single Super Phosphate) and 16 grades of NPKS complex fertilisers are covered under the NBS Policy. Fertilisers which contain two or more nutrients are called complex fertilisers.
- The subsidy rates under Nutrient Based Subsidy Regime are decided annually by the Government.

Fertiliser Subsidy in 2020-21:

- Government has spent Rs. 1,33,947 crores on fertiliser subsidy in 2020-21.

Import Dependence:

- India is not self sufficient in fertiliser production.

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- As of now, the country has achieved 80% self-sufficiency in production capacity of Urea.
 - Similarly, 50% indigenous capacity has been developed in respect of phosphatic fertilisers to meet domestic requirements. However, the raw-materials and intermediates for the same are largely imported.
 - For potash (K), since there are **no viable sources/reserves in the country**, its **entire requirement is met through imports**.
 - Subsidy being fixed, any fluctuation in international prices has effect on the domestic prices of P&K fertilisers.

INDUSTRY:

E-Commerce:

Draft Consumer Protection E-Commerce Rules

- Central Government had notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 with effect from 23 July 2020 to prevent unfair trade practices in e-commerce.
- However, since the notification of these rules, the Government has received several representations from consumers, traders associations complaining against widespread cheating and unfair trade practices in the e-commerce ecosystem.
- Hence in June 2021, the Union Government released the draft of amended Consumer protection (e-commerce) Rules) under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 with the objective of checking unfair trade practices in the e-commerce ecosystem and protect the consumer interests.

Details:

- E- Commerce means **buying or selling of goods or services** over digital or electronic network.
- The proposed rules apply to **all companies** which sell **goods and services** through electronic network.
- The following are some of the companies which would come under the proposed amendments.
- Online shopping companies like Flipkart, Amazon, Snap deal, Myntra,
- Taxi aggregators such as Ola and Uber,
- Food aggregators like Zomato and Swiggy,
- Online grocery stores such as BigBasket,

Why were the new draft amendments to E-commerce Rules Proposed?

e-commerce companies are adopting **unfair trade practices like**

- manipulating search result to promote certain sellers,
- preferential treatment to some sellers,
- indirectly operating the sellers on their platform,
- impinging the free choice of consumers,
- selling goods close to expiration etc.
- Sometimes an e-commerce company allows a seller operated indirectly by it to conduct flash sales by offering discounts to attract large number of consumers. But the seller conducts flash sale without any inventory of goods. The seller merely collects the orders and fulfils the order by placing back to back bulk order with another seller registered on the e-commerce platform. Though the consumer gets discount in flash sales, this also prevents level playing field for other sellers and also limits consumer choice.

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- Hence the amended rules are proposed to
 - 1. protect the interest of consumers, and
 - 2. encourage free and fair competition for participants
- by tightening the regulations governing e-commerce entities.

Major Features of the Proposed Rules:

1. Listing of Local Alternatives:

E-Commerce companies should mandatorily list local alternatives while selling imported goods and services to enable informed choice by consumers and ensure a fair opportunity to goods and services of domestic firms.

2. Ban on Flash Sale:

The new rules proposed a ban on flash sales by e-commerce companies if such sales are meant to benefit only a specified seller managed by the e-commerce company.

3. Fall Back Liability:

A marketplace e-commerce entity shall be subject to a fall-back liability. This means when a seller registered on its platform fails to deliver the goods or services ordered by a consumer due to negligent conduct and fails to fulfil the duties and liabilities as assured by the e-commerce company to the seller, it will be the liability of the e-commerce company to fulfil such obligations to the customer (buyer).

4. Prohibition of Mis-selling:

Mis-selling has been prohibited i.e selling goods and services by deliberate misrepresentation of information to deceive the customer.

5. Information about Expiry Date:

To ensure that consumers are aware about the expiry date of the products they are buying on the e-commerce platform, all sellers on e-commerce websites should provide best before or use before date to enable consumers to make an informed purchase decision.

6. Other Obligations:

Every marketplace e-commerce entity shall ensure that none of its related parties and associated enterprises are enlisted as sellers for sale to consumers directly.

E-commerce entities are two types:

Inventory e-commerce entity: It owns the inventory of goods or services and sells such goods or services directly to the consumers and shall include single brand retailers and multi-channel single brand retailers;

Marketplace e-commerce entity: It provides an information technology platform on a digital or electronic network to facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers;

7. Registration of E-Commerce Companies:

Every e-commerce company which intends to operate in India should register with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) for allotment of registration number.

The registration number shall be displayed prominently on website as well as invoice of every order of the e-commerce company.

The purpose of registration is to create a database of genuine e-commerce entities and ensure that the consumers are able to verify the genuineness of an e-commerce entity before transacting through their platform.

8. Grievance Redressal Mechanism:

E-commerce companies should appoint Chief Compliance Officer to ensure compliance of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and Rules.

They should also appoint **a nodal contact person for 24x7** coordination with law enforcement agencies, officers to ensure compliance to their orders and

Similarly, a Resident Grievance Officer should be appointed for redressing of the grievances of the consumers on the e-commerce platform.

Criticism on the Proposes Rules:

1. The rules increase the **compliance burden** on e-commerce companies.

For instance, the rules require all e-commerce firms to appoint a grievance officer, a chief compliance officer and a 24x7 nodal officer.

2. The new rules are aimed at micro-managing the e-commerce platforms and inhibit the growth of digital sale of goods and services particularly at a time when e-commerce market is growing rapidly in India. The size of e-commerce market was US \$ 38 billion in 2017. It is expected to grow by more than 5 fold to US \$ 200 billion by 2026.

3. It is **unfair to impose fallback liability on e-commerce companies** as they only provide a market place to buyers and sellers. Hence, they cannot be held liable for discharging duties and liabilities of sellers for customers.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Telecom:

Bharat Net Project

- The Union Government approved **revised implementation strategy** for **BharatNet Project** in June 2021.

What is BharatNet Project?

- It is project of national importance which was launched to provide **broadband connectivity to all the 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats in India.**
- 100 Mbps broadband connectivity is provided to Gram Panchayat offices and public establishments rendering internet based services in education, health, banking, etc.
- Broadband connectivity with speeds of 2 Mbps to 20 Mbps is provided for all households.

Benefits of BharatNet Project:

- The project facilitates delivery of following.
- e-governance services of Central and State Governments,
- e-health,
- e-education,
- e-banking,
- e-commerce
- Internet facility to rural India.

Significance of the BharatNet Project:

- Bridges the rural urban divide,
- contributes to achievement of Digital India, and
- increases direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Revised Implementation Strategy:

In June 2021, the Union Government approved revised implementation strategy for BharatNet Project. The strategy involves

1. involvement of private players in the execution of the project through Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode, and
2. extension of project to all the inhabited villages in the country.

Public Private Partnership (PPP) Mode:

- The Project will be implemented in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- So far, the project is being implemented by the Government through a special purpose vehicle, Bharat Broadband Network Ltd (BBNL), under the telecom ministry. Funds from Universal Service Obligation Funds (USOF) are used by BBNL for implementation of the project. USOF consists of funds collected from mobile service providers and is meant to be used for expanding connectivity in rural areas.

Extension of the Project to All Inhabited Villages:

- The will be extended to **all inhabited villages** instead of **Gram Panchayats**.
- There are more than 6 lakh villages in India and 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats. Many villages which have tiny population have been merged to form a Gram Panchayat to ensure reasonable utilisation of functionaries (Government staff). A Gram Panchayat generally has a population of at least 5000.
- With the extension of the scheme to all inhabited villages, rural households in tiny villages get access to internet facility. This further bridges digital divide.

Why Public Private Partnership (PPP) for Implementation?

- The execution of the project by the Government is at a slower pace. Slow execution escalates the costs of the project.
- The project was started in 2011 with an estimate of Rs. 20,000 crores and was to be completed by 2016. The cost was revised to Rs. 70,000 crores in 2017.
- So far, only 1.53 lakh Gram Panchayats have been provided broadband connectivity.
- Hence, to speed up the implementation of the project, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended involvement of private sector which will expedite the execution of the project. Private players have expertise in marketing and monetising (revenue generation) the assets created.
- It suggested a contract period of 25 years for the private players who should be selected through bidding.
- However, since the viability (revenue generation) of the broadband project in rural area is less when compared with urban areas, the Government decided to extend Viability Gap Funding for the BharatNet project.
- It approved a Viability Gap Funding of Rs. 19,041 crores for BharatNet project under PPP model.
- The PPP model would be implemented in 16 States and cover 3.61 lakh villages.
- The 16 States are Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Power:

Revamped Scheme for Power Distribution Companies (Discoms)

- In June 2021, the Union Government approved a **revamped scheme for State Power Distribution Companies (Discoms) to improve their operational efficiency and financial sustainability** with an outlay of Rs. 3.03 lakh crores.

Background:

- State Power Distribution companies are saddled with huge debts of around **Rs. 5 lakh crore** in 2019-20.
- Huge debts of power distribution companies are due to
- High Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) Losses,
- Inadequate tariff hikes which means electricity has to be billed lower than the cost of supply,
- Metering Billing and Collection (MBC) inefficiencies, and
- Delayed subsidy payments by State Governments for the free power supplied.

What are Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) Losses?

- Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) loss is the percentage of power for which a power distribution company did not receive any payment.
- India's average AT&C losses are about **21% to 22 % in 2019-20** which is very high.
- In countries such as UK and US, AT&C losses are about **6-7%**.
- **Technical loss** is the energy lost as heat when electricity is carried over wires. Poor equipment increases this loss.
- **Commercial losses** are caused by **theft and pilferage of power, and lack of metering and poor billing and collection systems.**

Objectives of the Revamped Scheme are

- Reduction of AT&C losses to pan-India levels of 12-15% by 2024-25.
- Reduction of Average Cost of Supply (ACS)-Average Revenue Realised (ARR) gap to zero by 2024-25.
- Developing Institutional Capabilities of power distribution companies (DISCOMs)

Initiatives under the Revamped Scheme:

1. Installation of Prepaid Smart meters:

- 25 crore consumers would be covered under prepaid smart meters.
- At present around 30 lakh prepaid meters have been installed.
- 10 crore prepaid Smart Meters would be installed by December, 2023 in the first phase.
- A subsidy of Rs. 900 per smart meter (or 15 per cent of the smart meter cost whichever is lower) will be provided for General Category States.
- For Special category States (North Eastern and hilly States), the subsidy would be Rs. 1350 (or 22.5 per cent of the cost of smart meter whichever is lower)

How Prepaid Smart Meters Work?

- Consumers have to pay for electricity before use by recharging the amount through online.
- These meters will operate based on the amount available in the meters and if there is no balance, the electricity will be automatically disconnected

Advantages of smart meters:

- Smart meters will **help consumers to know the real-time usage, bill amount** and also reduce the consumption as per one's affordability.
- This will **put an end to electricity department staffers visiting door-to-door** for spot billing and asking consumers to clear dues.
- Electricity Distribution Company **would record all payments in advance** and there would be no dues from the consumers.
- For power distribution companies, prepaid smart meters would also **enable better load scheduling based on real-time consumption patterns, lower metering errors, and check electricity theft and unbilled consumption.**

2. 10,000 Separate Agriculture Feeders:

- Under the scheme, works of separation of 10,000 agriculture feeders would be taken up through an outlay of almost Rs 20,000 crore.
- Under feeder separation, high tension (HT) feeders for agricultural and non-agricultural consumers are separated. Exclusive feeders are laid for distributing electricity to agricultural consumers.
- Feeder separation helps distribution companies in **better load management**. They can shift the agriculture load to non-peak hours.
- Feeder separation also helps in reducing the **peak power purchase cost** by shifting agricultural load to non peak hours, leading to savings for DISCOMS
- Communicable AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure) meters would be provided for all Feeders and Distribution Transformers to enable energy accounting. This would lead to better planning for loss reduction by DISCOMS

3. Use of Artificial Intelligence:

- Artificial Intelligence would be used to analyse the data on energy consumption by smart meters and AMI meters and enable DISCOMS to take informed decisions on loss reduction, demand forecasting, Time of Day (ToD) tariff, and Renewable Energy (RE) Integration.
- This would contribute a great deal towards **enhancing operational efficiency** and thereby **financial sustainability** of the DISCOMs.
- For works related to feeder separation and use of Artificial Intelligence, the Government would provide assistance of 60 per cent of the approved cost for General Category States and 90% of the approved cost for Special Category States (North Eastern and hilly States)

BALANCE OF PAYMENTS (BoP):

Imports:

Customs Duty Reduced on Palm Oil

- At present, India levies a customs duty of 15 % on crude palm oil and 45 % on refined palm oil.
- On June 30, 2021, the Union Government reduced customs duty on
- Crude palm oil to 10 % from 15 %, and
- Refined palm oil to 37.5 per cent from 45 %

Reasons for Reducing Customs Duty:

- To reduce the prices of edible palm oil in domestic market and increase the supply in the domestic market.

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- Edible oil prices in India have been rising in India for the past one year. This is contributing to food inflation.
 - This is mainly because international prices have been rising as COVID-19 lockdowns reduced production output in Southeast Asia (major producers of palm oil) and also drought in USA and Brazil (major producers of Soya bean) reduced production. The price of palm oil which is the world's most consumed edible oil rose by more than 120 % in the last one year from US \$ 500 to US \$ 1091 for tonne. Similarly, the price of soya bean oil increased from US \$ 306 to US \$ 559 in the last one year.
 - India imports around 60 % of its edible oil requirements. Within this, palm oil imports account for a major share as it is relatively cheap.
 - India is both the world's largest consumer and biggest importer of palm oil.
 - Palm oil is mainly imported from Indonesia and Malaysia.

What are edible oils?

- These are cooking oils which are used daily in households.
- The major edible oils used in India are palm oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, soybean oil, groundnut oil, rice bran oil, mustard oil, rapeseed oil, sesame oil.
- Since India is a vast country, cooking oil use preferences change depending on the geographical location.
- For instance people in the South and Western India use groundnut oil, sunflower oil, coconut oil while people in North and Eastern India use sunflower oil, soyabean oil, musters oil and rapeseed oil.

Gap between production and consumption of edible oil in India:

- India's consumption of edible oils was around 24 Million Tonnes in 2019-20.
- In 2019-20, production of edible oil from all sources (groundnut, sunflower, safflower, oil palm, rapeseed, mustard, sesame, etc.) is 10.6 Million Tonnes. This production is not sufficient to meet the domestic demand.
- Hence, India imported 13.35 Million Tonnes of edible oils. Imports have been rising gradually. They increased from 4 Million Tonnes two decades ago 13.35 Million Tonnes. This is mainly because domestic production failed to keep pace with the demand.
- Amount spent on imports of edible oils was Rs 61,559 crore 2019-20.
- **Imports mainly** comprised
 - Palm oil (7 million tonnes),
 - Soya bean oil (3.5 million tonnes) and
 - Sunflower (2.5 million tonnes).
- The **major sources of these imports** are
 - Palm oil : Indonesia and Malaysia
 - Sunflower oil : Ukraine and Argentina; and
 - Soya bean oil : Argentina and Brazil.

Government Measures to Increase Oil Production:

- Government has been making efforts to reduce the dependence on imports of edible oils by increasing production and productivity of oil seeds in the country.

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- National Technology Mission on Oil Seeds was started in 1986.
 - It was converted into **National Mission on Oil Seeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP) in 2014.**
 - It is being implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme on a cost sharing basis between Central and State Government in the ratio of 60:40 for general category of states, and 90:10 for North Eastern and Himalayan states.
 - The NMOOP scheme has been **subsumed under National Food Security Mission (NFSM)** with effect from 2018-19, and interventions of NMOOP are taken as sub-components of NFSM.

Implementation Strategy:

NMOOP lays emphasis on

- provision of quality seeds to farmers,
- increasing irrigation coverage under oilseeds from 26% to 36%;
- diversification of area from low yielding cereals crops to oilseeds crops;
- inter-cropping of oilseeds with cereals/ pulses/ sugarcane;
- use of fallow land after paddy /potato cultivation;
- expansion of cultivation of Oil Palm in watersheds and wastelands.
- supply of improved farm implements to reduce cost of cultivation,
- training of farmers on efficient farming practices in oil seeds, and
- demonstration of improved farming practices by Research Institutions, and State Agriculture departments, etc.

NATIONAL POLITY

Right to Freedom:

Delhi High Court Grants Bail to Students Arrested on Terrorism Charges under UAPA

- On June 15, 2021, the Delhi High Court granted bail to three university students: Jawaharlal Nehru University students Ms. Devangana Kalita and Ms. Natasha Narwal, along with Jamia Millia Islamia Mr. Asif Iqbal Tanha, who were arrested on **charges of terrorism** under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** in May 2020.

Background:

- Communal clashes broke out in north-east Delhi in February 2020 after violence between the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) supporters and protesters spiralled out of control leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured.
- The three students Ms. Devangana Kalita and Ms. Natasha Narwal and Mr. Asif Iqbal Tanha organised protests against the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). Delhi police booked cases against them under Indian Penal Code (IPC) for unlawful assembly and attempt to murder during the anti-CAA protests
- The Delhi Police also booked separate cases under **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** meant to **deal with terrorist offences**. They were arrested them in May 2020 on the grounds that they were involved in **organising riots** in Delhi and thereby **threatening the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country** which is an act of terror under UAPA.

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- The three students got bail in cases booked under IPC but the trial court denied bail in a case booked under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for their alleged involvement in rioting as there is legal bar on granting bail in UAPA cases
 - The students filed appeals in Delhi high Court challenging a trial court's order dismissing their bail pleas in Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case.

What is the Problem with the UAPA?

1. Wide and Vague Definition of Terrorism:

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) has clauses for dealing with terrorism offences. But the definition of terrorism is **wide** and **vague**. For instance, terror clause in UAPA can be invoked,

not just for the "intent to threaten the unity and integrity but the **likelihood** to threaten the unity, integrity, security, sovereignty of India",

not just for the "the intent to strike terror but the **likelihood** to strike terror.

Similarly, adoption of any methods which cause or **likely to cause**

death of, or injuries to, any person or persons; or

loss of, or damage to, or destruction of, property; or

disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community are also terror offences under the UAPA.

2. Statutory Bar on Granting Bail:

There is a **statutory bar on granting bail** for those booked under terrorism clauses of UAPA.

A Judge should reject the bail petition of the accused if prima facie there are reasonable grounds to believe that the accusations are true.

A judge **cannot undertake detailed analysis of evidence at the bail stage**. Bail can be denied on "**the broad probabilities**" of the case.

Consequences of Above Clauses:

- The provisions of UAPA are being used to **suppress dissent** under the guise of controlling terrorism.
- UAPA is being invoked against **students, social activists, journalists**, etc. and they are arrested by filing cases that their activities constitute acts of terrorism.
- Persons arrested under charges of terrorism are **lingering in jails for long periods** as prima facie there is a bar on granting bail in UAPA cases. For instance, the three students who have been booked under terrorism charges have been languishing in jails for more than a year.

Highlights of the Delhi High Court Judgment:

1. No Factual Basis for Charges:

There is **no factual basis** for the accusations of terror offences under UAPA on the three students.

Police had contended that they were part of a larger conspiracy to threaten the unity, integrity and harmony of the country. But, they failed to provide evidence in this regard.

The Court cited the case of one of the students Ms. Devangana Kalita

A case against her is that she, as part of a women's rights group called Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage), and other groups like Delhi Protests Support Group, the Jamia Coordination Committee,

Warriors, and 'Auraton ka Inquilab' participated in a 'larger conspiracy' which led to violence and rioting.

The court remarked that there is absolutely nothing in the subject charge-sheet by way of any specific allegation to show the possible commission of a 'terrorist act' by her under UAPA.

2. Phrase 'terrorist act' cannot be permitted to be applied casually:

The phrase '**terrorist act' cannot be permitted to be applied casually to criminal acts that fall squarely within the definition of conventional offences** as defined under the **Indian Penal Code**.

The Court again cited the case of Ms. Devangana Kalita. She was booked on the grounds that she made inflammatory speeches, instigated women protestors and gave a call for chakka jams (causing traffic jam by blocking roads). The Court stated that she **may have crossed the line of peaceful protests permissible** under our Constitutional guarantee, that however would **yet not amount to commission of a 'terrorist act' or a 'conspiracy' or an 'act preparatory' to the commission of a terrorist act as understood under the UAPA**.

The Court stated that UAPA is meant to deal with terrorist offences and its application must be limited to acts that can reasonably fall within a plausible understanding of "terrorism". To attract the provisions of the UAPA, the charge sheet must reveal **factual, individualised, and particular allegations linking the accused to a terrorist act**.

3. The Line Between Right to Protest and Terrorist Activity Blurred:

The Delhi High Court ruled that in its anxiety to **suppress dissent**, the State has **blurred the line between the constitutionally guaranteed 'right to protest' and 'terrorist activity' under UAPA**. Democracy would be in peril if Government adopts such an approach towards protests.

It stated that **'Right to protest' is not outlawed and cannot be termed as a 'terrorist act'** within the meaning of the UAPA, unless, the offences against them under UAPA are clearly discernible from the factual allegations contained in charge sheet.

4. Law and Order Problems Not a Terrorist Activity:

The Court also ruled that extent and reach of terrorist activity must travel beyond the effect of an ordinary crime and must not arise **merely by causing disturbance of law and order or even public order**. Such activity must be beyond the capacity of the ordinary law enforcement agencies to deal with it under the ordinary penal law.

Implications of the Judgment:

- The Delhi High Court reasoned that the **more stringent a penal provision, the more strictly it must be construed**. By doing so, it **raised the bar** for the State to book an individual for terrorism under the UAPA.

Appeal in Supreme Court:

- The Delhi Police filed an appeal in the Supreme Court calling for stay on the judgment of the Delhi High Court.
- It stated that Delhi High Court ruling on **interpretation of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)** raised several questions and needs closer examination by the Supreme Court.
- It stated that the High Court ruling will have **pan-India ramifications** and can be used as **precedent** in many other cases registered by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

Ruling of the Supreme Court:

- The Supreme Court **refused to stay the bail granted** to three students arrested on charges of terrorism.
- But it stayed the effect of the High Court order stating that the **ruling cannot be used as a precedent in any other courts.**
- It also **agreed to examine the interpretation** of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) by the Delhi High Court.

Judicial Review:

Supreme Court Takes Suo Moto Notice of Government's Handling of COVID-19 Pandemic

- The Supreme Court initiated a **judicial review of the Union Government's management of COVID-19** in the country particularly during the second wave of COVID-19 through **suo moto proceedings. The Supreme Court raised a number of issues like**
 1. shortage of oxygen supply
 2. digital divide due to CoWIN portal,
 3. clampdown on social media by Governments, and
 4. Vaccine pricing and availability.

Details:

1. Oxygen Supply:

There was shortage of medical oxygen in the country during the second wave of COVID-19. Many deaths were reported as hospitals refused to admit patients due to lack of medical oxygen. The Supreme Court directed the Union Government to address the problem of oxygen shortage in the country in a time bound manner.

It also directed the Central Government to create buffer stocks of medical oxygen which can be used when supply chain of oxygen is disrupted.

A mechanism for displaying real time updates of supply of oxygen from each State to hospitals in each district, along with the remaining stock of oxygen with the hospitals may be maintained. The same may be shared with the citizens to ensure transparency. This will also ensure that citizens can easily identify the hospitals where medical aid can be availed.

2. Clampdown on Social Media:

During the second wave many individuals posted requests on social media seeking help for procuring oxygen, essential drugs, finding hospital beds. Online communities led by individuals and civil society helped people seeking requests through their networks and also amplifying their requests, offering moral and emotional support.

But there were instances where cases were filed on individuals seeking help by alleging that the information posted by them is false and has only been posted in social media to **create panic, defame the administration or damage the "national image"**.

The Supreme Court conveyed to the Central and State Governments that it would not condone such targeting of individuals seeking help. It directed them to immediately cease any direct or indirect threats of prosecution and arrest to citizens who air grievances or those that are attempting to help fellow citizens receive medical aid.

Why Flow of Information in Social Media Should Not Be Curbed?

The Supreme Court stated that flow of information besides serving **personal interests** also serves **national interests**.

Important tool in combating public tragedies:

Sharing information widely is in itself an important tool in combating public tragedies, like the current COVID-19 pandemic. Without the ready availability of such information, it is entirely possible that the COVID-19 pandemic **may turn into a much worse tragedy**.

Collective Public Memory:

Sharing information widely will help in the creation of a "**collective public memory**" of this pandemic. The **presence of collective public memory is important for the creation of knowledge** of the problems plaguing us today, so they may be **passed on across time and this experience will benefit in tackling future pandemics**. For instance, we **discuss about the devastation of 1918 Spanish Flu** because of the availability of the information.

Hence, preventing clampdowns on sharing of information on online platforms **is not just in the interest of individuals** sharing the information, but the **larger democratic structures of our nation**.

3. Digital Divide due to CoWIN:

The Union Government developed CoWIN, a centralised portal, for managing and monitoring the COVID vaccination. It made on-line registration on CoWIN mandatory for persons in the age group 18 to 44 to avail COVID vaccination.

The Supreme Court stated CoWIN would deprive a large class of citizens of vaccination. Marginalised sections of the society would face accessibility barrier as they are not digitally literate and also do not possess lap tops, computers or smartphones with internet connectivity. It recommended allowing walk-in registrations to such people. It also recommended making CoWIN platform **available in regional languages**. CoWIN should also **be made accessible to persons with disabilities**.

4. Vaccine Availability:

The Supreme Court also directed the Central Government to clarify

- a) the **projected availability of vaccines** and **proposed steps** to boost supply and distribution; and
- b) **vaccine pricing** and **distribution** among states.

The Supreme Court stated that giving free vaccines to certain age groups of the society (Those above 45 years) and implementing **paid vaccination** to other age groups (18-44 years age) is prima facie **arbitrary and irrational**.

Has Supreme Court Exceeded Its Jurisdiction?

- The Union Government expressed concerns over the judicial review of the policy measures and initiatives taken by it in handling of COVID pandemic
- The executive is battling an unprecedented crisis and the **government needs discretion** to formulate policy in larger interest and **its wisdom should be trusted**.
- Executive is also operating on expert medical and scientific opinion to tackle a medical crisis. Hence, no interference from judicial proceedings is called for.
- Any over-zealous judicial intervention, in the absence of expert advice or administrative experience, may lead to unintended circumstances where the executive is left with little room to explore innovative solutions.

Supreme Court's Stand:

- The Supreme Court justified its judicial review through suo moto intervention on the following grounds.
- Separation of powers is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- **Policy-making continues** to be in the **sole domain of the executive**. The judiciary does not possess the authority or competence to assume the role of the **executive**, which is **democratically accountable** for its actions and has access to the resources which are instrumental to policy formulation. **However**, this **separation of powers does not result in courts lacking jurisdiction in conducting a judicial review of these policies**.
- Our **Constitution does not envisage courts to be silent spectators when constitutional rights of citizens are infringed** by executive policies.
- Judicial review and **soliciting constitutional justification for policies formulated** by the executive **is an essential function**, which the **courts are entrusted to perform**.
- Judicial review is **not an attempt to delve into the role of the executive** in designing policy choices.

Additional Information:

What is Suo Moto Jurisdiction?

- Article 32 and Article 226 of the Indian Constitution enable the Supreme Court and High Courts respectively to issue any directions to do or refrain to do an act.
- By virtue of these two Articles and also the emergence of Public Interest Litigation has allowed these Courts to take up Suo Moto cases. The rationale for such actions is the desire of the courts to broaden the reach of justice to those who might not be able to access the court and also serve larger public interest.

Supreme Court Observes that Government's Vaccine Policy is Arbitrary and Irrational

- The Supreme Court of India stated that Government's Liberalised Vaccine Policy introduced on May 1, 2021 is prima facie arbitrary and irrational. It stated that the Central Government should consider revisiting its vaccine policy to **ensure that it withstands the scrutiny** of Articles 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution. After the Supreme Court's intervention the Union Government replaced the Liberalised Vaccine Policy Universal Free Vaccination for COVID-19 on June 21, 2021.

Details:

COVID-19 Vaccination Policy:

- The Government launched vaccination for COVID-19 in phases based on prioritization.
- **In phase 1**, Healthcare Workers (HCWs) (starting from 16 January 2021) and Frontline Workers (Police, Municipal workers, etc.) (starting from 2 February 2021) were vaccinated.
- **In phase 2**, persons above 60 years of age and persons over 45 years of age with certain co-morbidities (starting from 1 March 2021) and all persons over 45 years of age (starting from 1 April 2021) were eligible for vaccination.
- This priority was accorded based on **specific vulnerabilities** and a **higher mortality** rate on account of the COVID-19 infection.
- Globally, over 85% of all COVID-19 deaths occurred in the age group over 45 years.

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- The Central Government procured vaccines and administered free of cost to the above mentioned groups.

Liberalised Vaccination Policy:

- The Government launched Liberalised Vaccination Policy from **May 1, 2021**.
- Under this policy, vaccination was opened for all persons aged above 18.
- The Government launched two types of vaccines: **Paid vaccines** and **Free vaccines**.
- Central Government stated that it will continue to provide free vaccines only to Health care workers, Frontline Workers (Police, Municipal workers, etc.) and those above age of 45. Persons aged 45 and above were categorised as **Priority Group** for which Central Government would take **complete responsibility for providing free vaccination** since they are more vulnerable to mortality due to COVID-19.

Paid vaccination:

- **Paid vaccination** was introduced for those in the age group of 18-44.
- Out of the total doses manufactured by vaccine companies, 50 per cent were reserved for Central Government and 50 per cent for State Governments and Private Hospitals (25% each).
- State Governments and Private Hospitals have to **directly negotiate with the vaccine companies** regarding price and supply of vaccines.

Differential Pricing:

- Vaccine companies introduced **differential pricing for vaccines**. While vaccines were supplied at a lower price for Central Government (Rs.150), the same were charged higher price for State Government (Rs.300) and Private Hospitals (Rs.600).

Why Government Introduced Liberalised Vaccination Policy?

- To **spur competition** which would attract more private manufacturers.
- When more private manufacturers start manufacturing vaccines, it could
 - a) eventually **drive down prices of vaccines**, and
 - b) accelerate the vaccination programme.

Supreme Court's Stand:

1. Differential Pricing of Vaccines Questioned:

The Supreme Court also questioned the differential pricing policy of vaccine manufacturers where Central Government procures at a lesser price (Rs.150) and State Governments have to pay a higher price (Rs.300)

Central Government defended the pricing stating that by nature of its large vaccination programme, it places large purchase orders for vaccines as opposed to the State Governments and Private Hospitals. Hence it gets the vaccines at lower prices when compared with State Governments and Private Hospitals.

The Supreme Court asked the Central Government **why this rationale is not being employed for acquiring 100% doses**. The Union Budget for Financial Year 2021-2022 had earmarked Rs 35000 crores for procuring vaccines. It asked the Central Government to clarify how these funds have been spent so far and why they cannot be utilised for vaccinating persons aged 18-44 years.

2. No Prioritisation:

Unlike the prior policy, the Liberalised Vaccination Policy also does not prioritise persons with co- morbidities and other diseases, persons with disabilities, or any other vulnerable groups. This is especially an issue because the experience of the second wave of the pandemic has provided an experiential learning that the COVID-19 virus is capable of mutation and now poses a threat to persons in this age group as well. Persons between 18-44 years of age have not only been infected by COVID-19, but have also suffered from severe effects of the infection, including prolonged hospitalisation and, in unfortunate cases, death.

3. Detrimental to Marginalised Sections:

The policy will result in a **serious detriment** to those in the **age group of 18 to 44 years**, who will have to be vaccinated by the State Governments.

The **marginalised sections** of the persons in this age group 18-44 may not have ability to pay for the paid vaccine.

Whether or not vaccines will be made available to them will depend upon the decision of each State Government, based on its own finances. State Governments would decide on whether or not the vaccine should be made available free or should be subsidised and if so, to what extent. This will create disparity across the nation.

4. Vaccination a Valuable Public Good:

Vaccinations being provided to citizens are a **valuable public good**. **Discrimination** cannot be made between different classes of citizens who are similarly circumstanced.

5. Policy May Not Spur Competitive Prices:

The Liberalised Vaccination Policy may not be able to yield the desired results of spurring competitive prices and higher quantities of vaccines as there are only two vaccine manufacturers and there is limited supply of vaccines

The policy also removes the scope for bargaining by States as the Central Government has stated that each State/UT would have a prefixed pro rata quota based on their population in the 18-44 age group.

State/UT Governments and local municipal bodies have issued tenders and attempted to negotiate with foreign manufacturers **but they have been unsuccessful**, as foreign manufacturers are not inclined to negotiate with individual State/UT Governments and prefer negotiating with federal governments of countries.

Hence, Central Government is better placed to use its monopoly as a buyer (India being the second most populous country) to bargain for higher quantities of vaccines at reasonable prices).

6. Vaccination Policy Prima facie, Arbitrary and Irrational.

In overall assessment, the Supreme Court stated that the Central Government's policy of conducting free vaccination themselves for Healthcare Workers, Frontline Workers and Persons aged 45 and replacing it with **paid vaccination by the State/UT Governments and private hospitals** for the persons between 18-44 years is, **prima facie, arbitrary and irrational**.

The Policy would prima facie result in a detriment to the **right to public health** which is an **integral element of Article 21 of the Constitution**. Therefore, the Supreme Court stated that the Central Government should consider revisiting its current vaccine policy to **ensure that it withstands the scrutiny of Articles 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution**.

What Would Be A Rational Policy?

- The Supreme Court stated that, prima facie, the rational method of proceeding in a manner consistent with the right to life (which includes the right to health) under Article 21 would be for the Central **Government to procure all vaccines and to negotiate the price with vaccine manufacturers.**
- Once quantities are allocated by it to each State Government, the latter would lift the allocated quantities and carry out the distribution. In other words, while procurement would be centralized, distribution of the vaccines across India within the States/UTs would be decentralized.

Government Introduces Universal Free Vaccine:

- The Supreme Court's intervention **prompted the Government to change Liberalised COVID Vaccination Policy.** The Court asked the Central Government to provide clarification on all the issues raised by it on the **Liberalised COVID Vaccination Policy.**
- The Supreme Court also asked for **copies of all the relevant documents and file notings** reflecting Central Government's thinking and culminating in the vaccination policy so that it can look into the rationality of Government's decisions.
- As there was lot of arbitrariness in the Liberalised Vaccination Policy, the Central Government **replaced** it with Universal Free Vaccine on June 21, 2021.
- However, even under the Universal Free Vaccine, Government will purchase only **75 per cent of the vaccines from manufactures** and provide free vaccines. **Paid vaccination continues** for the remaining 25 per cent of the vaccines which will be purchased by private hospitals.

Supreme Court Flags Digital Divide on CoWIN

In June 2021, the Supreme Court raised concerns over digital divide on CoWIN, the exclusive digital portal developed by the Union Government for carrying out vaccination against COVID-19.

Details:

What is CoWIN?

- COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (CoWIN) is a **digital platform for managing COVID-19 vaccination** in the **country.**
- It has been jointly developed by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- CoWIN **facilitates**

registration for vaccination,
scheduling of appointments,
reporting of any adverse events after immunisation, and
downloading digital certificates after vaccination.

- The Government has made **online registration on CoWIN portal mandatory for persons in the age group of 18-44** for availing COVID-19 vaccine. (Persons above 44 years are allowed to register online or walk-in to nearest vaccination centres and register on spot for vaccination.)
- A **mobile number** and **identity proof** are needed for registration.
- The following documents are accepted as identity proof :Aadhaar card; Driving License; PAN card; Passport; Pension Passbook; National Population Register (NPR) Smart Card; Voter ID; Unique Disability ID; and Ration Card.

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- Up to **four people** can be **registered for vaccination using the same mobile number**. But all the four persons should give details of identity proof.

What are the advantages of CoWIN?

1. Transparency:

CoWIN portal also makes the COVID vaccination programme **orderly** and **transparent**. It provides list of authorised vaccination centres and also facilitates **real time monitoring of vaccination progress**.

2. Avoids Overcrowding:

If direct walk-ins are allowed for vaccines, it would lead to overcrowding at vaccination centres as the vaccine supply is scarce. Online registration for vaccination facilitates scheduling of appointments in advance and avoids overcrowding at vaccination centres.

3. Monitoring Second Dose of Vaccine:

Online registration system also facilitates correct immunisation as COVID is a two dose vaccine. The CoWIN portal prompts the users about the second dose of COVID vaccination.

4. Digital Certificates:

Vaccinated individuals can also download digital certificates after the completion of vaccination.

5. Reporting of Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI):

It is also useful in tracking Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) by the Government. The portal provides for reporting of Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)

What are the Concerns over CoWIN?

The Supreme Court flagged the following issues regarding CoWIN.

1. **Universal immunisation** would not be possible **if a vaccination policy exclusively relies on a digital portal** for vaccinating a significant population of this country (between the ages of 18-44) due to digital divide.

(Digital divide means gap between those who have access to smartphones, computers and internet and those who do not have access to them.)

2. **Marginalised sections of** the society would face accessibility barrier due to **digital divide**.
3. Digital divide could have serious implications on the **fundamental right to equality** and the **right to health** of persons within the above age group (18-44)

The court quoted from a National Statistics Office survey of 2018 and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India to explain the digital divide.

4. **Only around 4 per cent of the rural households and 23% of the urban households** possessed a computer (National Statistics Office survey of 2018 data).
5. **Wireless tele density in rural areas is 57.13%** as compared to 155.49% in urban areas (As on March 31, 2019 as per data of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). **This reflects the rural-urban divide** in terms of telecom services' penetration.

Suggestions from the Supreme Court:

1. The Supreme Court made the following suggestions to the Government to address the digital divide in accessing CoWIN Portal.
2. The CoWIN platform should be **made available in regional languages**.
3. CoWIN platform **is not accessible to persons with visual disabilities**. The Government should conduct a disability audit for the CoWIN website to ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities.

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4. Certain vaccination centres may be earmarked for on-site registrations for the population aged between 18-44 years by prioritising those with co-morbidities/disabilities/other socio-economic vulnerabilities. Specific daily quotas may be introduced for on-site registration at each centre or specific centres.

Measures Taken by Government to Address Concerns over CoWIN:

1. Common Service Centres:

All gram Panchayats in the country have Common Service Centres (CSCs). These will enable people residing in rural areas to register online for the vaccination.

Citizens who do not have access to digital resources are encouraged to take help from family, friends, NGOs and Common Service Centres (CSCs).

2. Identity Proofs:

For those not having any identity proofs, the Central Government allowed bulk registration. These are identifiable groups, such as homeless persons who would be identified and registered by the District Immunisation Task Force.

3. On-spot Registration:

Vaccination Centres are also providing for a limited number of on-spot registration slots every day. Beneficiaries aged 45 years and above can schedule appointments online or walk-in to vaccination centres.

Beneficiaries aged 18 years and above can schedule appointments online or walk-in to Government vaccination centres. However, beneficiaries aged 18-44 years should mandatorily register themselves and schedule appointment online if they are going to a Private vaccination centre.

4. CoWIN Portal in Regional Languages:

CoWIN portal was initially available only in English and Hindi. Now, it has been made available in 10 regional languages (Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Telugu, Gujarati, Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Oriya, and Tamil) to make it more accessible.

Families of COVID-19 Victims Entitled to Compensation: Supreme Court

In June 30, 2021, the Supreme Court ruled that

- families of COVID-19 victims are entitled to compensation (ex gratia) under Disaster Management Act, 2005, and
- directed the **National Disaster Management Authority**, headed by Prime Minister, to frame guidelines for providing compensation.

Context:

- Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act provides for payment of ex gratia assistance for loss of life in disasters.
- In 2015, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs also issued the revised norms of assistance from State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)/National Disaster response Fund (NDRF) stating that **Rs. 4 lakhs** shall be provided for ex gratia payment to the families of deceased persons in disasters.

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- In March 2020, the Union Government **notified COVID-19 as a disaster** and allowed the State Governments to use funds available under State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for activities related to COVID-19 management like setting up testing facilities, quarantine centres, providing ventilators, Intensive Care Units, etc.
 - But, funds were not allowed for providing compensation to the COVID-19 victims like in case of other disasters like earthquakes, floods, etc who are being paid Rs. 4 lakhs compensation.

PILs for Compensation:

Two Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been filed in the Supreme Court seeking Rs. 4 lakh compensation to the family members of those who died due to COVID-19.

1. Statutory Obligation:

Disaster Management Act (Section 12) provides for payment ex gratia to the victims of disasters and COVID-19 has been declared as a disaster by the Government. Hence, it is the statutory obligation of the Government to provide compensation for COVID-19 victims.

2. Unfair Treatment:

The petitioners submitted that granting ex gratia for one disaster (like earthquake, floods, cyclones etc.) while denying the same to other disaster (like Covid19) would create unfairness and discrimination.

3. Hardships for Families:

They also submitted that because of Covid-19 pandemic, lakhs of families have not only lost their near and dear but have also lost the sole bread earner who were responsible for taking care of family members from small kids and elderly persons.

Depriving compensation would also cause undue hardship on those families who have lost their loved ones due to Covid-19 virus.

Centre's Stand:

1. Fiscal Constraints:

The finances of both the Centre and states are under severe strain as a result of reduced tax revenues and increased expenditure on health infrastructure because of the pandemic.

2. Burden on State Governments:

Public health is a state subject and the burden would fall on the State Disaster Response Funds (SDRFs) to pay the compensation. For all states combined, the total budget allocated to the SDRF this year is Rs. 22,184 crore.

The magnitude of deceased persons due to COVID-19 is huge (more than 4 lakhs and still continuing). If the entire SDRF funds are consumed on ex-gratia for covid-19 victims, states may not have sufficient funds for organising covid-19 response, for provision of various essential medical and other supplies, or for taking care of other disasters such as cyclones and floods.

Hence, payment of ex-gratia to all deceased persons due to COVID-19 is beyond the fiscal affordability of the State Governments.

3. COVID-19 a Continuing Disaster:

It also stated that COVID-19 is a **continuing disaster**. There is no certainty as to when it will end. A disaster of this kind was not envisaged when the Disaster Management Act, 2005 was enacted.

4. Section 12 of Disaster Management Act only Recommendatory:

The Government also contended that Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act which provides for ex gratia is merely "recommendatory" and not mandatory.

5. Policy Decision:

The government also urged the Supreme Court not to interfere in policy decisions as compensation is a matter that should be performed by the authority (National Disaster Management Authority), to whom it has been entrusted

Supreme Court's Verdict:

1. Direction to Frame Guidelines for Compensation:

The Supreme Court stated that the government cannot simply refuse to pay ex gratia to victims once it has declared COVID-19 as a 'disaster'.

It **directed** the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** to frame the guidelines for fixing the ex gratia meant for these families.

The court, however, left it to the "wisdom" of the NDMA to fix the amount of ex gratia after taking into consideration funds required for other reliefs and priorities, including Covid preparedness, mitigation, prevention and recovery

2. Ex gratia part of Minimum Standards of Relief:

The Court stated that Ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life is part of minimum standards of relief, which has to be provided to persons affected by disaster

It stated that since COVID has been notified as a 'disaster', Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act applies. Section 12 makes it mandatory for the NDMA to recommend guidelines for the "**minimum standards of relief**" to be provided to disaster victims. These include ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life.

3. Section 12 Mandatory not Recommendatory:

The Court also rejected the stand of the Government that Section 12 was only recommendatory in nature. It stated that the provision twice uses the term 'shall' while referring to ex gratia payments to disaster victims, which makes it 'mandatory' in nature.

Response of the Centre to Supreme Court's Verdict:

- The Government accepted the judgment of the Supreme Court and agreed to frame rules to provide compensation for the families of COVID-19 victims but sought extension of time. The Court had initially asked the Government to frame guidelines within six weeks.

Additional Information:

What Does Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act State?

- The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by Prime Minister, **shall** recommend guidelines for the minimum standard of relief to be provided to persons affected by disaster. The guidelines shall include
 - a) Minimum requirements to be provided in relief camps like shelter, food, drinking water, medical cover and sanitation,
 - b) Special provisions for widows and orphans, and
 - c) Ex gratia assistance for loss of life and also assistance for damage to houses and for restoration of means of livelihood.

SOCIAL ISSUES:

SDG's:

NITI Aayog Report on India's Performance in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- In June 2021, NITI Aayog released the 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index and Dashboard 2020-21'.
- Kerala was ranked top performer with a score of 75 out of 100.
- Bihar was ranked at the bottom of the index with a score of 52 out of 100.
- The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points - from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21.
- **Significance of the Report:**
- The data in the report serves the following purposes.
- benchmarking progress of States and UTs on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
- identifying the priority areas and sharing good practices, and
- evidence-based policymaking,

Details:

Background:

- NITI Aayog has the mandate for monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national and sub-national levels.
 - Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 Universal Goals agreed and adopted by all the 193 Member countries of the United Nations in 2015.
 - These **goals aim to create a better world by 2030, by ending poverty, fighting inequality and addressing the urgency of climate change.**
 - They cover the **three dimensions of sustainable development:**
1. **economic growth,**
 2. **social inclusion, and**
 3. **environmental protection.**

(Detailed List of Goals given in additional information)

Highlights of the Report:

- The SDG India Index 2020-21 computes **goal-wise scores on the 16 SDGs** for each State and Union Territory.
- Overall State and UT scores are generated based on their performance across the 16 SDGs.
- The 115 indicators were used which incorporate 16 out of 17 SDGs, with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17.
- These scores range between 0-100.
- If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies it has achieved the 2030 targets.
- The higher the score of a State/UT, the greater the distance to target achieved.
- No State has achieved a score of 100.
- Kerala was ranked top performer with a score of 75 out of 100.
- Bihar was ranked at the bottom of the index with a score of 52 out of 100.

- The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points - from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21.
- This improvement is largely driven by good country-wide performance in
- Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and
- Goal 7(Affordable and Clean Energy), where the composite Goal scores are 83 and 92, respectively.

Top 5 States in the Index:

State	Score
Kerala	75
Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu	74
Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Uttarakhand	72
Sikkim	71
Maharashtra	70

Bottom 5 States in the Index:

State	Score
Chattisgarh, Nagaland, Odisha	61
Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	60
Assam	57
Jharkhand	56
Bihar	52

Overall, States and Union Territories are classified as below based on their SDG India Index score:

Category	Score
Aspirant	0-49
Performer	50-64
Front-Runner	65-99
Achiever	100

There is no State or UT in the **Aspirant category** (Score of 0-49).

Similarly, there is no State or UT in the **Achiever category** (Score of 100).

All the States and UT fall under either **Performer category** (Score of 50-64) or **Front Runner category** (Score of 65-99)

Additional Information:

List of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the 193 Member countries of the United Nations in 2015.

GOAL 1: No Poverty

GOAL 2: Zero Hunger

GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being

GOAL 4: Quality Education

GOAL 5: Gender Equality
GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
GOAL 13: Climate Action
GOAL 14: Life Below Water
GOAL 15: Life on Land
GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal

There are targets under each Goal which are to be achieved by 2030.

For instance under Goal 1 (No Poverty), target is to eradicate extreme poverty in the world (i.e. in all countries) currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

Under Goal 1 (Zero Hunger), target is to end hunger and malnutrition in the world.

Housing:

Model Tenancy Act 2021

Model Tenancy Act, 2021 has been released by the Union Government in June 2021.

Background:

Need for the Model Tenancy Act:

1. Pro-tenant Laws:

Tenancy in India is regulated by a Rent Control Act, 1948. Based on this Central Act, many States pass their own laws. For example, Maharashtra has the 'Rent Control Act 1999', Delhi has the 'Rent Control Act 1958' and Tamil Nadu has the 'Tamil Nadu Buildings (Lease and Rent Control) Act 1960'.

The broad idea covered in each of the Rent Control Act is to **protect tenants from unfair eviction** and exploitation by landlords.

These laws **skewed arrangements towards tenants**, made it difficult to evict them. They specified a ceiling on the rental amount, and put conditions for eviction of the tenant. As a result, these laws led to **low rental yields**, and **disincentivised landlords from investing in rental properties**. (Further details have been provided in additional information).

2. Informalisation of rental market:

The stringent provisions under Rent Control Act also led to informalisation of rental market where the landlord and tenant are entering into informal arrangements. Dispute resolution becomes difficult through informal arrangements.

3. Lack of adequate investments:

Stringent provisions under Rent Control Act also led to inadequate investments in the rental housing market.

4. Huge demand for rental housing:

On the other hand, there is huge demand for rental housing in urban areas due to migration for employment, business, education and other purposes.

The share of urban population is rising continuously.

It increased from 27.82% in 2001 to 31.16% in 2011 and is further projected to be greater than 50% by 2050.

Objectives of the Model Tenancy Act:

1. Balance the interests of both landlords and tenants.
2. encourage formalisation of rental housing market
3. address the huge housing shortage in the country, and
4. encourage private participation in rental housing as a business

Major Feature of the Act:

1. Rental Agreements:

Act **mandates written agreement for all new tenancies.**

The rent and **duration of tenancy** will be fixed by mutual consent between landlord and tenant through a written agreement.

2. Cap on Security Deposits:

The Act also puts a cap on security deposits for residential properties and commercial properties making sure that tenants are not forced to invest hefty sums at the start of the tenancy as is the norm in several large cities such as Mumbai and Bengaluru.

As per the Act, only two months of rent can be taken as advance for residential property, whereas the current norm in metro cities ranges from five to up to 12 months.

For commercial properties, the security deposit has been fixed at six months' rent

3. Eviction:

A tenant can be evicted under the following conditions: refusal to pay agreed upon rent; failure to pay rent for more than two months; misuse of premises despite a written notice, etc

4. Mechanism for Adjudication of Disputes:

The Model Act establishes a three-tier quasi-judicial dispute adjudication mechanism to

ensure speedy dispute resolution, and

establish a fair mechanism to revise rents.

This mechanism is intended to **protect tenants against arbitrary hikes** while also **keeping in view the owners' economic interests.**

The mechanism consists of: (i) Rent Authority; (ii) Rent Court; and (iii) Rent Tribunal. No civil court will have jurisdiction over matters pertaining to provisions under the Model Act.

Rent Authorities and Rent Courts will be established by the District Collector with the approval of the state government.

All written agreements should be submitted to the concerned district 'Rent Authority'.

If a dispute emerges between the owner and tenant, they will have to first approach 'Rent Authority'.

If any party is not satisfied with the Rent Authority's order, 'Rent Court' can be approached, followed by a final and then 'Rent Tribunal'.

5. Prior Notice for Increasing Rents:

Land owners have freedom to increase rents. This is to ensure that they are free to extract market price for their properties.

But they have to provide three months notice to tenants for hike in rentals. This is to ensure that tenants get enough notice to make adequate or alternate arrangements.

6. Liability on Tenants:

According to the Act, if the tenant fails to vacate the premises let out on rent in accordance with the tenancy agreement, he or she will be liable to pay the landlord twice the monthly rent for the first two months and then four times till the latter continues to occupy the said premises.

7. Liability of Landlords:

If the landlord fails to make any refund, he shall be liable to pay simple interest to the tenant at such rate as may be prescribed from time to time on the amount which he has omitted or failed to refund.

Limitations of the Model Tenancy Act:

1. Applicable Prospectively:

Tenancy law will be applicable prospectively and will not affect existing tenancies. This means that owners who have not been able to evict tenants due to the provisions of the previous laws will get no relief unless the state in which they own a property specifically provides provisions for it.

2. Privacy Issues:

Registration of the rent agreements requires Aadhaar number to be submitted. Mandating submission of Aadhaar number to register a rent agreement may violate a Supreme Court judgement on Right to Privacy.

Further, the Authority must upload the details of the agreement and supporting documents on a public portal. This may violate the right to privacy of the contracting parties.

3. Discretion to State Governments:

It is still a matter of choice for states and Union Territories to repeal or amend their existing Acts.

Rental housing is regulated by states as land, land improvement, and control of rents falls under the State List of the Constitution. The Central Government **only proposed uniform law in the overall interests of landlords, tenants and the housing requirements of the country.**

Additional Information:

How is the Rent Control Act, 1948 Stringent and Pro-Tenant?

1. Right against Unfair Eviction:

Landlord cannot evict the tenant without sufficient reason or cause. The rules of eviction are slightly different from state to state. In some states for the landlord to evict a tenant, he/she must **approach the court and obtain a court order** for the same. In some states, the **tenant cannot be evicted if he/she is willing to accept any changes to the rent.**

2. Fair Rent:

The landlord when letting out a house **cannot charge extraordinary amounts in rent.** The valuation of a property for rent is to be dependent on the value of the property. If the tenant feels that the amount of rent that is being asked is too much compared to the value of the property, he/

she may approach the court to seek redressal. Usually, the rent is to be between 8% and 10% of the value of the property, including all costs incurred via construction and fixtures on the property.

3. Restrictions on revision of Rent:

There are also restrictions on revision of rent by the landlord.

For instance, under the 'Delhi Rent Control Act 1958', the standard rent may be increased by ten per cent every three years. The 1958 Act has no mechanism to bring the historical rent to the present market rate and gives a tenant the luxury to pay less rent in perpetuity.

4. Essential Services:

It is the basic right of the tenant to enjoy essential services such as water supply, electricity etc. **A landlord does not have the right to withdraw these services even if the tenant has failed to pay rent.**

5. No Sound Dispute Resolution Mechanism:

There is no sound mechanism to resolve tenant-landlord conflicts.

The only option is expensive and protracted route of filing a civil lawsuit.

Property owners also found it nearly impossible to evict tenants which further created a negative view towards renting.

6. Laws Not Amended For Long:

A serious drawback of the Rent Control Laws is that most State Governments have not amended them in over two decades, ensuring that the rent ceiling remains capped at the levels prevalent in the late 90s. This has certainly discouraged owners from renting out property and has also dampened investor appetite for purchasing second or third homes due to low capital returns.

SOCIAL SECTOR:

Education:

Performance Grading Index (PGI) of States and UTs in School Education

- **Performance Grading Index (PGI)**, which captures the performance of States and Union Territories in School Education, was released by the Union Ministry of Education in June 2021.
- Punjab, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Kerala occupy the highest grade (Grade A++) for 2019-20.
- States whose score is in the range of 901-950 out of 1000 are given Grade A++

Background:

- The Indian school Education System is one of the **largest in the world**.
- It consists of more than **15 lakh schools, nearly 97 lakh teachers and more than 25 crore students** from varied socio-economic backgrounds.
- The school education system **strives to maintain standards and uniformity across the country** while giving ample scope for the country's diverse culture and heritage to grow and flourish.
- The schemes initiated by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL) along with the implementation of the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act**, have resulted in **significant improvement in accessibility**.

- As a logical next step, the **focus** has now **shifted** from access to **ensuring an efficient, inclusive and equitable school education**
- Therefore, Department of School Education has **designed the Performance Grading Index (PGI)** to **catalysetrans formational change** in the field of school education.
- The PGI for the States and Union Territories (UTs) was first published in 2019 for the reference year 2017-18. The PGI for reference year 2018-19 was published in the year 2020. The present publication for the reference year 2019-20 is the third one.
- 70 sub-indicators are been used in the Performance Grading Index (PGI) which broadly cover following indicators

Major Indicator	Score
Learning Outcomes and Quality	180
Access	80
Infrastructure and Facilities	150
Equity	230
Governance Processes.	360
Total	1000

Sub-indicators for above indicators are provided in additional information.

Grading of States:

States are graded based on their overall score.

Level/Grade	Score Range
Level 1	951-1000
Level 2/Grade 1++	901-950
Level 3/Grade 1+	851-900
Level 4/Grade 1	801-850
Level 5/Grade 2	751-800
Level 6/Grade 3	701-750
Level 7/Grade 4	651-700
Level 8/Grade 5	601-650
Level 9/Grade 6	551-600
Level 10/Grade 7	0-550

Significance of the Index:

- It helps the States and UTs to **pinpoint the gaps and accordingly prioritise areas for intervention**. This will ensure that the school education system is robust at every level.
- The index also acts as **a good source of information for best practices** followed by States and UTs which can be shared.

Additional Information:

Criteria used in Indicators of Performance Grading Index (PGI):

1. Governance and Management (Score-360):

- The PGI accords highest importance to **Governance and Management** (score of 360 out of 1000) because compliance with the indicators will lead to critical structural reforms in areas ranging from monitoring the attendance of teachers to ensuring a transparent recruitment of teachers and principals.
- Shortage of teachers and principals and administrative staff, lack of regular supervision and inspection, inadequate training of the teachers, timely availability of finances (all of which are captured in the Governance and Management indicator) are some of the factors plaguing the education system in the country.

Governance and Management indicator takes into account the following sub-indicators.

- % of average daily attendance of students captured digitally,
- % of average daily attendance of teachers recorded in an electronic attendance system
- % of single teacher primary schools,
- % of primary schools having PTR as per RTE norm,
- % Secondary Schools who have teachers for all core subjects, etc

2. Equity (Score - 230):

- **Equity** which has the **second highest weight with a score of 230 takes into account the following**
- Difference in student performance in **Language, Mathematics**, between **Scheduled Castes (SC)** and General category in Govt. and Aided elementary schools: Class 3, 5 & 8,
- Difference in student performance in Language, Mathematics, between **Scheduled Tribes (ST)** and General category in Govt. and Aided elementary schools: Class 3, 5 & 8
- Difference in student performance in Language, Mathematics between **Urban and Rural areas** in Govt. and Aided elementary schools: Class 3, 5 & 8, etc

3. Infrastructure and Facilities (Score - 150):

- Percentage of schools having Computer Aided Learning (CAL) facilities in Upper Primary Level
- Percentage of secondary schools having lab facility
- Percentage of schools having Book Banks/Reading Rooms/Libraries
- Percentage of schools covered by vocational education subject
- Percentage of schools having functional drinking water facility, etc.

4. Access (Score-80):

- Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio (ANER) at elementary level as per entry age of the State/UT,
- Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio (ANER) at secondary level as per entry age of the State/UT,
- Retention rate at primary level,
- Retention rate at secondary level,
- Transition rate from primary to upper-primary level,
- Transition rate from upper-primary to secondary level,

-
- Percentage of identified Out-of-school-children mainstreamed in last completed academic year (Class 1 to 8), etc.

5. Learning Outcomes and Quality (Score - 180):

- % of Elementary schools which have displayed class wise Learning Outcomes
- Average Language, Mathematics scores in Class 3, 5, 8 - Govt and aided schools
- Average Science, Social Science scores in Class 8 - Govt and aided schools, etc.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

G-7 Summit:

G-7 Summit Held in Carbis Bay, United Kingdom

- The G-7 Summit, an informal forum of world's seven industrialised countries established in 1976, was held in Cornwall, United Kingdom in June 2021. G-7 Countries are **United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan.**
- The G-7 Leaders released Carbis Bay Declaration at the end of the Summit.
- At present, the G-7 Member countries together represent **40% of global GDP** (down from 70 per cent in 1973), and 10% of the world's population.

Highlights of the Summit:

The G-7 Leaders

- agreed to provide **one billion vaccine doses** over the next year to countries which need them the most,
- announced "**Build Back Better World**" (**B3W**) project aimed at competing with China's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, which has been widely criticised for saddling low and middle income countries with unmanageable debt,
- agreed to continue discussions to reach consensus on a global agreement for **Global Minimum Tax** of 15 per cent,
- called on China to **respect human rights** in Xinjiang and rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong,
- **urged China** to cooperate with World Health Organisation (WHO) on a "transparent" second-phase probe into the origins of the global coronavirus pandemic,
- stated that they **will work together to challenge the non-market policies and practices of China** which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy, and
- called on Russia to take action against those conducting ransomware attacks, abusing virtual currency to launder ransoms.

Details:

History G-7:

- The roots of G-7 in the **1973 oil crisis**. Global economy was in a state of recession due to oil embargo imposed by Arab member countries of the OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in October 1973
- The embargo both **banned petroleum exports** to the targeted nations and **introduced cuts in oil production.**

-
- Oil exports to the United States, Japan, and western Europe, which together consumed more than half the world's energy, were prohibited by OPEC. OPEC took this decision for two reasons.
 - As retaliation to Western support for Israel against its war with Egypt and Syria, and
 - due to persistent decline in the value of the U.S. dollar (the denominated currency for oil sales), which had eroded the export earnings of OPEC states.
 - The embargo was lifted in March 1974. But the embargo caused the United States and western European countries to reassess their dependence upon Middle Eastern oil. It also led to far-reaching changes in United States domestic energy policy, including increased domestic oil production in the United States and a greater emphasis on improving energy efficiency.
 - US also decided that it would be beneficial for the industrialised countries in the world stage to **coordinate with each other on macroeconomic initiatives**.
 - The first summit was held in 1975 at Chateau de Rambouillet, Paris. France, West Germany, the USA, Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy discussed the oil shock, the financial crisis and the ways out of recession.
 - In 1976 Canada joined the group, which henceforth became known as the G7.
 - The President of the European Commission was asked to join the meetings in 1977.
 - Russia was also invited to join the group in 1998. Thereafter the group was named the G8.
 - However, in 2014 **Russia was expelled** from G-7 for its **annexation of Crimea** from Ukraine.

Agenda of G-7 Countries:

- The G7 summit provides a forum for member countries to discuss **shared values** and **concerns**.
- **Initially**, it focused on international economic policy.
- In the 1980s, the G7 extended its mandate to include issues related to **foreign policy** and **security** as well.
- In recent years, G7 leaders have met to formulate common responses to challenges encompassing **counter terrorism, development, education, health, human rights and climate change**.
- At present, the G7 prides itself **as a group of nations that steadfastly promote liberal democracy and enjoy economic prosperity**, which they seek to institutionalise through multilateral cooperation
- However, unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has **no legal existence, permanent secretariat or official members**.
- The presidency of G7 meetings is held by each of the seven countries in turn, each year.
- The country holding the presidency is responsible for organising and hosting the meeting.

Outcome of the G-7 Summit Held in United Kingdom:

1. Health:

The leaders set a collective goal of ending the pandemic in 2022. This will require vaccinating at least 60 per cent of the global population.

The G-7 committed to providing **one billion** vaccine doses over the next year to countries which need them the most.

The G-7 leaders committed to supporting the manufacture of COVID-19 tools (vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and personal protective equipment) in low-income countries and accelerating their manufacture on all continents.

Tackling Future Pandemics:

The G-7 Leader noted that vaccines for COVID-19 were developed in just over 300 days.

They stated that they have a particular role to play in seeking to make safe and effective diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines even more quickly available in the future.

They stated that in the event of a future pandemic, G-7 countries will seek to create an adequate framework to have safe and **effective vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics available within 100 days.**

2. Infrastructure:

The G-7 countries announced "Build Back Better World" (B3W) project is aimed at competing with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, which has been widely criticised for saddling low and middle income countries with unmanageable debt.

The model adopted by the G-7 countries will be transparent and financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable.

Multilateral Banks and private sector will be involved in executing the infrastructure projects in low and middle income countries.

The initiative will begin with Africa where multilateral banks will extend US \$ 80 billion to the private sector for executing infrastructure projects.

3. Economic Recovery:

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, G-7 countries provided unprecedented support to citizens and businesses, including to retain jobs and support incomes and keep businesses afloat, totalling over \$12 trillion including fiscal support and liquidity measures.

We will continue to support their economies for as long as is necessary, shifting the focus of support from crisis response to promoting strong, resilient, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth into the future.

4. Global Minimum Tax:

The Leaders agreed to continue discussions to reach consensus on a global agreement for Global Minimum Tax of 15 per cent.

5. Future Frontiers:

The G-7 Leaders stated that future frontiers of the global economy and society - from cyber space to outer space - will determine the future prosperity and wellbeing of people all over the world in the decades ahead.

They agreed to work towards a trusted, values-driven digital ecosystem for the common good that enhances prosperity in a sustainable, inclusive, transparent and human-centric manner.

6. Climate Change:

The G-7 Leaders committed to accelerating efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and keep the 1.5°C global warming threshold within reach by strengthening adaptation and resilience and protect people from the impacts of climate change.

The G-7 Leaders committed to ambitious and accelerated efforts to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and by 2050 at the latest. Net zero emissions are achieved

when anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere are balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period.

7. On China:

The G-7 Leaders called on China to **respect human rights** and fundamental freedoms, especially in relation to Xinjiang and rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

The G7 also **urged China** to cooperate with World Health Organisation (WHO) on a "transparent" second-phase probe into the origins of the global coronavirus pandemic.

The Leaders stated that they **will work together to challenge the non-market policies and practices of China** which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy.

8. On Russia:

The G-7 Leaders called on Russia to end its systematic crackdown on independent civil society and media, and take action against those conducting ransomware attacks, abusing virtual currency to launder ransoms.

G-7 Open Societies Summit

- G-7 Open Societies Summit, a Coalition of Democratic Countries led by G-7 countries and **India, South Korea, Australia and South Africa**, was held as part of G-7 Summit. These countries account for half of world's population living in democracies.
- The Leader reaffirmed shared belief in **open societies, democratic values and multilateralism as foundations for dignity, opportunity and prosperity for all** and for the **responsible stewardship** of our planet.
- The Summit is meant to send a message to China. **China's autocratic system and its rising authoritarianism** are seen as a **threat to democracies around the world**.
- The Leaders of Democracies believe that China, as an autocracy does not adhere to multilateral rules and **does not share the same vision of the world that the democracies have**.
- The G-7 countries in particular called on China to protect **human rights** in Xinjiang, freedoms of people in Hong Kong.
- They opposed **unilateral attempts** of China to change territorial status quo in East and South China Sea.
- They also agreed to **challenge the non-market practices** of China in global trade,
- The United States under President Joe Biden is taking the lead in building a coalition of democracies to check the **authoritarianism** are seen as a **threat to democracies around the world**.

Outcome of the Open Societies Summit:

- The Leaders reaffirmed and encouraged others to embrace the following values.
- **Human rights** for all, both online and offline, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- **Democracy**, including each citizen's right to vote in free and fair elections and everyone's right to assemble, organise and associate peacefully, within a system of accountable and transparent governance;

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- **Gender equality** and the political, social and economic empowerment of women and girls,
 - **Freedom of expression**, both online and offline, as a freedom that safeguards democracy and helps people live free from fear and oppression;
 - The **rule of law** and **effective, independent and impartial judicial systems** free from corrupt influence or coercion, so that each person can access justice and benefit from a fair trial;
 - An **effective multilateral system** underpinned by principles of openness, transparency and accountability, including access to free and fair, rules-based trade, as well as collaboration on global challenges, including COVID-19 immunisation, for the good of all;
 - The **importance of civic space and partnership** with diverse, independent and pluralistic civil societies, including human rights defenders, in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Leaders stated that the above founding values define their inclusive way of life and benefit people. They stated that freedom empower people and inspire the innovation and ingenuity needed to maximise opportunities, tackle shared challenges and drive progress for the world. Similarly, openness encourages collaboration that delivers better outcomes than any nation could achieve alone.

U.S.-UK Relations:

New Atlantic Charter Between U.S. and UK

- United States and United Kingdom signed a new Atlantic Charter in June 2021.

Background:

- The first Atlantic Charter was signed by the then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in August 1941.
- It set out common goals for the world after Second World War. Those goals included freer trade, disarmament and the right to self-determination of all people. Both the countries agreed to work together to achieve those goals.
- The Charter was issued as a statement and was therefore non-binding. But, it did have a profound impact on the perception of joint British and American values and marked the beginning of the so-called 'special relationship' between the two countries.
- The two nations have **allied together** during many conflicts including the two World Wars, the Korean War, the Cold War, the Gulf War and the War on Terror.
- US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Johnson signed a new version of the 'Atlantic Charter' in June 2021 to reflect the present realities.

New Atlantic Charter:

The two countries committed to the following under the new Atlantic Charter.

1. **They resolved to defend the principles, values, and institutions of democracy and open societies**, which drive our own national strength and our alliances.
2. **They agreed to strengthen the institutions, laws, and norms that sustain international co-operation** to adapt them to meet the new challenges of the 21st century, and guard against those that would undermine them.
3. **They will remain united behind the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.**
4. They resolved to harness and protect their innovative edge in science and technology to support their shared security and deliver jobs at home and to open new markets.

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5. **They** affirmed **shared responsibility for maintaining collective security and international stability** and resilience against the full spectrum of modern threats, including cyber threats.
 6. **They** committed to continue building an inclusive, fair, climate-friendly, sustainable, rules-based **global economy** for the 21st century.
 7. They agreed to prioritise **climate change issues** in all their international action.
 8. They committed to strengthen collective defences against **global health threats**.

El Salvador:

El Salvador Makes Bitcoin Legal Tender

- El Salvador, a Latin American country, became the first country in the world to adopt bitcoin, a popular cryptocurrency, as legal tender. El Salvador is among the few countries in the world that do not have their own fiat currency, and uses the US dollar as a legal tender.
- In June 2021, Parliament of El Salvador approved proposal of President Nayib Bukele to accept bitcoin as a legal tender.
- Under the law, **bitcoin must be accepted by firms when offered as payment for goods and services** unless they are unable to provide the technology needed to do the transaction.
- Tax contributions can also be paid in the cryptocurrency.
- Its use as legal tender will begin in 90 days, with the bitcoin-dollar exchange rate set by the market.

About Bitcoin:

- It is one of the popular crypto currencies which is gaining popularity.
- Cryptocurrency is a virtual currency or digital currency.
- It is a peer-to-peer system i.e. all transactions take place between people who are willing to send and receive payments. No intermediaries are involved.
- There is no central authority governing cryptocurrency transactions.
- Cryptocurrencies use blockchain technology. Blockchain is a decentralised technology spread across many computers that manages and records transactions.
- The creation of crypto currencies began in 2009 with the theory that excessive printing of the money by Central banks will lead to inflation and loss of value. The amount of cryptocurrency created will be fixed. Hence, there will be no loss of value.
- Cryptocurrencies are created in a process called "mining". It involves individuals or groups using large amounts of computing power to solve complex mathematical equations to build the blockchain and earn rewards in the form of coins.

Concerns:

- For commercial transactions, bitcoin has to be converted into currencies like dollar.
- The price of bitcoin has become **highly volatile**. Bitcoins are **traded in exchanges** and there is **high amount of speculation**. The value of bitcoin depends on confidence of the people in it. It has no underlying asset.
- In 2013, Bitcoin started at around \$13 and spiked to over \$1,000 by December. In 2017, it went from about \$1,000 to around \$20,000. In early 2020, it had sunk below \$4,000 at one point before rising abnormally to nearly **\$45,000 in 2021**.
- Between May15, 2021 to June 15, 2021, it ranged from \$34,259 to \$49,304.

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- Such wide fluctuations are entirely market-driven and there is no scope for policymakers to manage the swings. This makes bitcoin an unsuitable instrument for macroeconomic stabilisation.
 - Hence, critics opine that this is **not suitable as effective currency**.

Why El Salvador Decided to Adopt Bitcoin as a Legal Tender?

- El Salvador's economy relies heavily on remittances (money sent home from abroad), which make up around 20% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).
- More than two million
- live outside the country. They send back more than US \$4 billion each year.
- President Nayib Bukele stated that allowing Bitcoins **will facilitate remittance transfers and considerably reduce transaction costs**.
- He stated that the fees that migrants must pay to send their money home are very high, despite many calls by the United Nations and the G20 to reduce them. According to the World Bank, the average global cost of sending \$200 internationally is approximately \$13, or 6.5%, well above the Sustainable Development Goal target of 3%.
- He stated that the allowing Bitcoins will also **promote tourism** in the country.
- However, he stated that the use of bitcoin will be optional and will not be forced on citizens.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DEFENCE:

Drone Attacks:

Security Threats From Drone Attacks

- Drones have added **a new dimension to security threats** from terror groups to India.
- Two explosive devices were dropped through two drones on the high security Indian Air Force Station in Jammu early on early hours of June 27, 2021. The airbase is around 16 km from the International Boundary with Pakistan
- It was the **first-ever attack in India** where suspected terrorists had used drones. Drones are **unmanned aerial vehicles** which **are operated remotely**.
- Two IAF personnel were injured in the explosions that took place around 1.40 am within six minutes of each other. The first blast ripped off the roof of a single-storey building at the airport. The second one was on the ground in the Air Force Station.
- Initial investigations into the attack showed involvement of non-state actors (Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba terror groups), with the support of Pakistan.
- For the last two years, Pakistan has been using drones to drop **fake currency, arms and ammunition** inside Indian Territory. For the first time, they have been used for **offensive purposes**.
- Over 300 drone sightings have been made along and across the western borders. Defence analysts have been warning about this threat for a few years now.

A New Dimension to Security Threats:

- The **drone attacks** in Jammu have **opened a new front of challenge for the Indian defence forces**.
- In a way, the drone attack is a paradigm shift in **asymmetric warfare** (unconventional warfare when there is a significant difference in capabilities of warring parties).

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- Drones could be used increasingly for **information gathering, weapons supply or for targeted attacks.**
 - Due to **low cost**, they have become **easily accessible** for state and non-state actors (terrorists).
 - Since drones are operated remotely, **terrorists can achieve their objectives without loss of lives.**
 - Explosives are laden to the drones and these drones reach their targets and drop the explosives through signal communication which is undertaken remotely.
 - India, therefore, needs to act quickly to develop and acquire latest systems that are capable of countering this threat.
 - Chief of Indian Army General MM Naravane said that India is working on both offensive use of drones and counter-drone systems to prevent attacks on critical military facilities.

Limitations in tackling the Threat of Drones:

- Small drones have been used to drop explosives on the Air Force Station in Jammu.
- Small drones are extremely difficult to detect as they **are low flying, slow moving objects and miss the radars.**
- **There is no effective counter-technology to tackle the threat of small drones.**
- **India's radar systems are not equipped to counter the threat** posed by **small drones** which fly at low heights. The present radars systems are meant to counter the threat of **high end military unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). Technological advances greatly reduced the cost and size of drones.** As a result these are being used by terrorists and small countries.
- At present, the **only option is to shoot down the drones.** But this can be done only sniper fire (firing bullets through sophisticated rifles) and the drone has to be within range.
- Also, sighting drones during night is not easy. The attacks on Jammu Air Force Station took place during the night.

Measures to Be Taken:

- Drones **will be increasingly used in all sorts of combats** in future by state and non-state actors.
- Future planning will have to take care of threat of drones.
- Intelligence agencies like Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and other State intelligence agencies have to work hand-in-hand to pre-empt attacks.
- Troops are also being sensitised about evolving threat of drones.
- Anti-drone defences have to be provided to key installations.
- Government is focusing on **adopting counter drone technology** to prevent attacks on critical facilities by state and non-state actors.

Counter-Drone Technology Developed by DRDO:

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed a detect-and-destroy technology for drones called counter-drone technology, but it is not yet into mass production.
- The DRDO system, developed in 2019, has capabilities for **hard kill** (destroying a drone with lasers) and **soft kill** (jamming a drone's signals).

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- It has a 360° radar that can detect micro drones up to 4 km, and other sensors to do so within 2 km.
 - Its soft kill range is 3 km and hard kill range between 150 m and 1 km.

Technology Transferred to Bharat Electronics:

- The DRDO has transferred the Counter-drone Technology it developed to Bharat Electronics, Government of India-owned aerospace and defence electronics company, for **commercialization**.

Indian Air Force to Purchase 10 Drones with Counter-Drone Technology:

- After the attack on Indian Air Force Station in Jammu, the Indian Air Force decided to buy 10 Counter-drone Technology aerial vehicles.
- It sought information from Indian companies for **Made-in-India counter-drone system** called Counter Unarmed Aircraft System (CUAS) which would be an end-to-end solution for interception and destruction of hostile drones.
- Counter Unarmed Aircraft Systems should be equipped with Global Navigation Satellite Jammer System (GNSS) and Radio Frequency jammers as a soft kill option and Laser based Directed Energy Weapon (Laser-DEW) as a hard kill option to destroy the drones.
- IAF would deploy these systems at different air bases across the country.
- The entire Counter Unarmed Aircraft System should be transportable by road and air. The design should include modularity for quick deployment and withdrawal.
- The radar should have 360 degree coverage with a range of 5 km.
- A 360 degree radar system should allow precise detection followed by visual tracking by the inbuilt camera.

Rafael's Drone Dome:

- Globally, Rafael's Drone Dome is the most sophisticated.
- Rafael, the defence company behind Israel's famed **Iron Dome missile system**, has also developed 'Drone Dome'. Like the Iron Dome, which identifies and intercepts incoming missiles, the Drone Dome detects and intercepts drones.
- Besides the collection of static radars, radio frequency sensors, and cameras it uses to offer "a 360-degree coverage.
- The Drone Dome is also capable of jamming the commands being sent to a hostile drone and blocking visuals that are being transmitted back to the drone operator.
- It can shoot high-powered laser beams with high precision to bring down targets
- Laser beam is never released unless it is 100 per cent locked onto the target".
- This technology works under **all-weather conditions** and **at night time**.
- But Indian Air Force is choosing Made-in-India drones to promote indigenisation of defence technologies.

Additional Information:

Use of Drones around the World:

- Drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) are used around the world for **military** and **non-military purposes**.

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- Non-military uses are in the fields of agriculture (crop monitoring), law and order (for monitoring large crowds), construction sites, courier services, wild life monitoring, films and photography, etc.

Use of Drones in Military:

- They are used for **surveillance** as well as **carrying out attacks** by dropping explosives.
- Developed countries have high end technology drones. Each drone can stay aloft for up to 17 hours at a time, loitering over an area and sending back real-time imagery of activities on the ground.
- Drones operate under various technologies ranging from remote control by a human operator to using Global Positioning System (GPS) and radio frequencies, and autopilot assistance.
- Now the size of drones varies from 250 g (maximum altitude 2,000 ft and range 2 km) to over 150 kg (300,00 ft and unlimited range).
- **Technological advances** greatly **reduced the cost and size of drones**. As a result these are being used by terrorists and small countries.

Recent Use of Drones:

- Small and medium sized drones are increasingly being used in recent times by terrorists and small countries which cannot afford high end military drones.
- The **Islamic State** has regularly used drones for attacks in Syria and Iraq, while the Taliban has used them for surveillance in Afghanistan.
- **Hezbollah** and **Houthi rebels** too have used them for attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia respectively.
- Similarly drones were also used in **Armenia-Azerbaijan war** in 2020.

Low cost, high dividends Option:

- Small drones have emerged as a low cost, high dividends option for terrorists.
- Generally, terrorists carry out their acts by following methods
- Direct attacks through AK 47 weapons,
- Suicide squads, and
- Planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).
- Use of drones provides terrorists with **cheap, safe and most effective option** when compared with the above methods.
- Advances in technology have made the cost so low that it is cheaper than an AK-47. The cost of commercial drones that is capable of lifting a weapon-sized payload is \$1,000-2,000. The use of drones avoids loss of lives for terrorists.
- At the same time, use of drones ensures **maximum dividends to terrorists**.
- They can be used for assassination of political leaders and military/police personnel; targeting commercial/military aircraft on ground; attacking crowds at political rallies, religious gatherings, and markets; targeting electricity grids and fuel depots.

Missiles:

Agni Prime Missile Successfully Test-fired

- On June 28, 2021, Agni (Prime), a new generation advanced variant of the Agni class of missiles, was successfully test-fired from Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, Orissa, by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Salient Features of the Agni (Prime) Missile:

- It is a **nuclear capable ballistic missile**. (Details of what is a ballistic missile is given in additional information)
- **Range:** 1000 to 2000 km.
- Agni (Prime) has been developed as the existing Agni 1 and Agni 2 missiles were developed almost two decades ago and since then technology has advanced.
- Agni (Prime) has **many advanced technologies** in propulsion system, guidance and control mechanism, and state-of-the-art navigation system. These advanced technologies improved the manoeuvrability and accuracy of the missile. **Manoeuvrability** makes interception of missiles difficult. Accuracy of the missiles in hitting their targets prevents collateral damage.
- It also a **canisterised missile** (i.e. stored in a cylindrical container) like country's first intercontinental ballistic missile, Agni V. Cannisterisation enables its transportation through rail or road and fire it from any place. The canister serves as a launch platform.
- The Agni-P missile will require at least a couple of more "developmental trials", followed by "user trials", before it is ready for induction.
- The missile will gradually replace Agni - 1 (700 km range), Agni -II (2000 km range) and Agni-III (3000 km range) missiles.

About Agni Missiles:

- Agni class of missiles is the mainstay of India's nuclear launch capability.
- So far 5 variants have been developed.
- Agni-1 with a range of 700 km,
- Agni-2 with a range of 2,000 km,
- Agni-3 and Agni-4 with 2,500 km to more than 3,500 km range, and
- Agni-5, with a range of 5000km, is the most advanced in navigation guidance, warhead and engine.
- The Agni series of ballistic missiles is one of the five missiles developed by the DRDO under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme started in 1983.

Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP):

- Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP) was launched in 1983 with the aim of achieving **self-sufficiency in missile technology**. At that time, there was dominance of western nations in missile technology which controlled its access to developing countries through Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- Based on the requirements of the defence forces, the following missiles five missiles were developed under **Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP)**.
- **Prithvi** : Short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile.
- **Agni**: Intermediate range surface-to-surface missile.
- **Trishul**: Short-range low level surface-to-air missile.
- **Akash**: Medium range surface-to-air missile.
- **Nag**: Third generation Anti-tank missile

Details:

1. Prithvi:

Prithvi I was one of the first missiles developed under Government of India's IGMDP. Launched in February 1988, Prithvi I is a single-stage, liquid-fuelled missile. A surface-to-surface missile, it has a range of 150 km and a mounting capability of 1000 kg. It was inducted into the Indian Army in 1994.

2. Agni:

India's first intermediate-range ballistic missile Agni 1 was successfully test-fired in 1989 and inducted into service in 2004. It has a range capability between 700 and 900 kilometres. Since then, four variants of Agni missile have joined the India's arsenal. Agni-V, with its 5,000-plus km range, was developed keeping China in mind.

3. Akash

Akash is a surface-to-air missile with an intercept range of 30 km. It has multi-target engagement capability and is in operational service with the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force.

4. Nag

Nag is a third-generation hit-to-kill anti-tank missile that was first tested in 1990. The two-stage solid propellant weapon uses the lock-on before launch system where the target is identified and designated before the weapon is launched.

5. Trishul

Trishul is a short-range surface-to-air missile equipped with electronic measures against all known aircraft jammers. It has a range of 9 km and is used as anti-sea skimmer from ships against low-flying attacks.

Other Missiles:

Apart from the above missiles under Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP), DRDO took up development of many other missiles subsequently which are given below.

1. BrahMos:

BrahMos is a supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from **land, sea and air**. A missile that travels at speeds between Mach 1 to Mach 3 is called Supersonic missile. BrahMos travels at speed closer to Mach 3.

BrahMos is a two-stage missile with solid propellant booster in the first stage and liquid ramjet in the second stage

has been jointly developed by India, and Russia. The system has been designed with two variants for Anti-Ship and Land-Attack roles. BRAHMOS Weapon Systems has been inducted and is operational with the Indian Navy as well as the Indian Army. The air version of the missile is still under trials.

2. Dhanush

Dhanush is a sea-based missile. It is a short-range version of the Prithvi II ballistic missile. It has a range of 350 km and is capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

3. Shaurya

It is a surface-to-surface hypersonic missile with a strike range of around 1000 km.

It is a land variant of K-15 missile which has a strike range of 700 km to 1000 km

4. Nirbhay

Nirbhay is a nuclear capable subsonic missile, flying at a speed of 0.7 Mach.

It has a range of 800 to 1000 km.

Nirbhay is capable of being launched from multiple platforms on land, sea, and air.

5. Prahaar

Prahaar is a surface-to-surface short-range tactical ballistic missile with a range of 150 km.

It has high manoeuvrability, acceleration and accuracy.

This missile is being developed as a replacement to 150-km range Prithvi ballistic missiles.

6. Astra

Astra is a beyond-visual-range (BVR) air-to-air missile (AAM).

In terms of size and weight, the Astra is the smallest missile developed by the DRDO.

It was envisaged to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft at supersonic speeds within a range of 80 km.

7. K- Series Missiles:

DRDO is also developing 'K' series missiles which are primarily Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). K stands for Dr. Kalam (Abdul Kalam) who played a key role in the launch of Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP).

The most prominent among K series missiles is K-15 Sagarika, which has a range of 750 km.

K-15 has been integrated with India's nuclear-powered Arihant class submarine.

India has also developed and successfully tested multiple times the K-4 missiles from the 'K' series which has a range of 3500 km.

More members of K-family - codenamed K-5 and K-6 - with ranges of 5000 and 6000 km are also under development.

Additional Information:

What is a Ballistic Missile?

- Ballistic missiles are powered by rockets only initially after that they follow a free-falling trajectory toward their targets.
- They are **classified by the maximum distance that they can travel**. The distance travelled by a ballistic missile depends on how powerful the missile's engines (rockets) are and the weight of the missile's payload.
- To add more distance to a missile's range, rockets are stacked on top of each other in a configuration referred to as staging. There are four general classifications of ballistic missiles:
- **Short-range** ballistic missiles, traveling less than 1,000 kilometers
- **Medium-range** ballistic missiles, traveling between 1,000-3,000 kilometers
- **Intermediate-range** ballistic missiles, traveling between 3,000-5,500 kilometers, and
- **Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)**, traveling more than 5,500 kilometers.
- Missiles are also classified by fuel-type: liquid or solid propellants.
- Missiles with solid fuel require less maintenance and preparation time than missiles with liquid fuel because solid-propellants have the fuel and oxidiser together, whereas liquid-fueled missiles must keep the two separated until right before deployment.

Cruise Missiles and Hypersonic Missiles:

- Cruise missiles and hypersonic missiles are two additional categories of missiles.

Cruise Missiles:

- Unlike ballistic missiles which travel into space and reenter into atmosphere, cruise missiles remain within the atmosphere for the duration of their flight.
- Cruise missiles are propelled by jet engines and can be launched from land, air, and sea-based platforms. Due to their constant propellants, they are more manoeuvrable than ballistic missiles, though they are also slower than their ballistic counterparts.

Hypersonic Missiles:

- Hypersonic missiles are currently under development.
- Missiles which travel at speed greater than Mach 5 are called hypersonic missiles. (Mach number describes the speed of aircraft or missile compared with the speed of sound in air. Speed of sound in air is 330 metres per second).
- Hypersonic missiles travel much faster than ballistic and cruise missiles (at speeds faster than 6,115 km per hour). They can deliver conventional or nuclear payloads within minutes.
- They are highly manoeuvrable and do not follow a predictable path as they travel. They combine the speed of ballistic missiles with the manoeuvring capabilities of cruise missiles. The speed makes them hard to track compared to traditional missile technology.
- In March 2020, the United States announced it had successfully tested an unarmed prototype of a hypersonic missile.
- In September 2020, India successfully test-fired the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV).
- **India** became the fourth country in the world after the **US, China and Russia** to develop such technology.

Declassification:

Defence Ministry Approves Policy on Declassification of War Records

- In June 2021, the Defence Ministry approved Policy on archiving, declassification and publication of war/operations histories.

Salient Features of the Declassification Policy:

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) organisations, such as the army, navy, air force, coast guard, Integrated Defence Staff and Assam Rifles should **transfer** their records - including war diaries, letters of proceedings and operational record books - to the ministry's History Division for proper upkeep, archival and **recording of war histories**.
- History Division would **constitute** a committee headed by Joint Secretary, Ministry of Defence (MoD) and comprising of representatives of the Services, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and other organisations and prominent military historians, for compilation of authoritative war/ operations histories.
- The policy also set clear timelines with regard to compilation and publication of war/operations histories. Committee should be formed **within two years of completion of war/operations**. Thereafter, collection of records and compilation should be completed in three years (total five years) and disseminated to all concerned.

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- The compiled history on wars and operations, within five years, **will be for internal consumption first**, and later the **committee may decide to publicly release whole or parts of it**, considering the sensitivity of the subject.
 - However, declassification of records on **older wars** like the 1962 war with China will not be automatic and will be taken up on a **case by case basis** by a committee to be constituted under the policy.

Legal Framework for Classification for Declassification of Records:

- The **Official Secrets Act, 1923** provides the legal framework for classification of record in the national interest. Under this act, official records which are considered sensitive are classified. Public cannot have access to such classified information.
- Depending on the level of sensitivity of the information and the implications of its disclosure for national security they are categorised into the following (i) Top Secret, (ii) Secret, (iii) Confidential and (iv) Restricted.
- **Public Record Act, 1993** provides for declassification of official records.
- The responsibility for declassification of classified records rests with the respective organisations under the Public Record Act 1993.
- Under the Act, records should ordinarily be declassified in 25 years.
- Records older than 25 years should be appraised by archival experts and transferred to the National Archives of India once the war/operations histories have been compiled.

Benefits of Declassification of War Histories:

For Government:

- War histories help in analysing lessons learnt and preventing future mistakes.
- Kargil Review Committee headed by K Subrahmanyam also highlighted the significance of having war histories written with clear cut policy on declassification of war records
- Post Kargil War, Group of Ministers (GoM) recommendations on national security also mentioned the desirability of authoritative war history.

For Public:

- Timely publication of war histories would
- give people accurate account of the past conflicts,
- provide authentic material for academic research.
- For instance, the 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan and the Sino-Indian war of 1962 have official histories, but they **lack any independent historical and rigorous analysis** as the records of these wars have not been declassified.

Practice in Other Countries:

- Several democratic countries have adopted automatic declassification of official records.
- In U.S., official records are automatically declassified after 25 years.
- Similarly, United Kingdom has a 20 year rule and Israel 30 year rule for declassification.

ASTRONOMY:

NASA Announces Two Missions to Venus

- In June 2021, NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), U.S. Space agency, announced the launch of two missions to explore planet 'Venus' between 2028 and 2030.
- These two missions are
 1. DAVINCI+ (Deep Atmosphere Venus Investigation of Noble Gases, Chemistry and Imaging), and
 2. VERITAS (Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography and Spectroscopy).

DAVINCI+:

- **DAVINCI+** will **measure the composition of Venus' atmosphere to understand how it formed** and evolved, as well as determine whether the planet ever had an ocean.
- Scientists believe Venus may once have harboured seas of water potentially suitable for life, before unknown forces triggered its extreme greenhouse effect, vaporising its oceans.
- As per the present scientific understanding, the atmosphere of Venus is made up of 96 % carbon dioxide. The remaining is made of nitrogen and sulphuric acid. The presence of huge carbon dioxide led to green house effect and huge rise in surface temperature of Venus which is **470 degree Celsius**.

VERITAS:

- **VERITAS** will map Venus' surface to **determine the planet's geologic history** and understand why it developed so differently than Earth.

Past Missions to Venus:

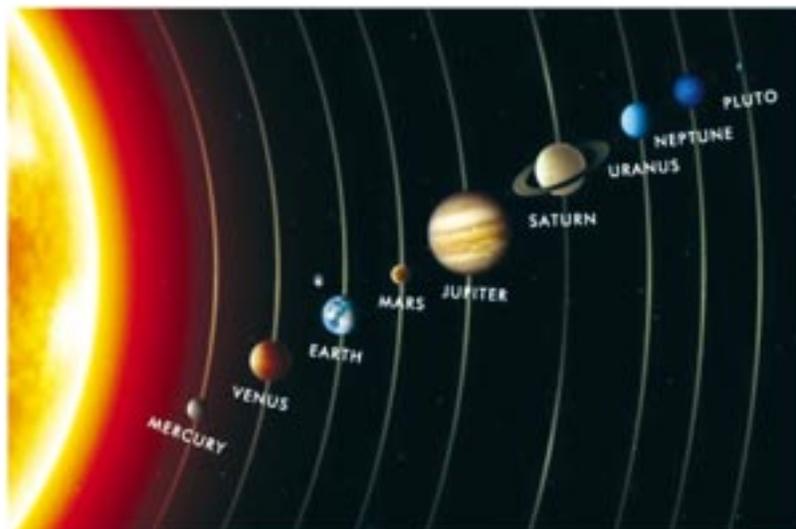
- Venus is Earth's closest planetary cousin and the second planet from the sun.
- Venus is also similar in structure but slightly smaller than Earth and much hotter.
- Due to **extreme surface conditions (high temperature and high pressure)**, exploration missions to Mars were limited. The pressure on the Venus atmosphere is 90 bars which is enough to crush most planetary landers. Hence, missions to Venus have not always gone as per plans. Due to its atmospheric conditions, Venus also received **less scientific attention** when compared with another nearest planet Mars.
- Most of the exploration to Venus planet done so far was carried out by the then Soviet Union between the 1960s and the 1980s. There are some notable exceptions, such as NASA's Pioneer Venus mission in 1972 and the European Space Agency's Venus Express mission in 2006.
- The first landing happened in 1970, when the Soviet Union's Venera 7 crashed due to the parachute melting. But it managed to transmit 20 minutes of data back to Earth.
- The first surface images were taken by Venera 9, followed by Veneras 10, 13 and 14.
- NASA's last dedicated mission to Venus was Magellan spacecraft which reached the planet in 1990.

Additional Information:

Our Solar System:

- Our planetary system is named the "solar" system.
- There are many planetary systems like ours in the universe, with planets orbiting a host star.

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- Our solar system is made up of the sun and everything that orbits around it, including planets, moons, asteroids, comets and meteoroids. The planets that orbit the Sun are **Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto**.



DEEP OCEANS:

India's Deep Ocean Mission

- In June 2021, the Government of India approved 'Deep Ocean Mission' with an outlay of Rs.4000 crore for exploration of **minerals, energy and marine diversity** in the deep oceans.

Why Deep Ocean Mission?

- The **area of the ocean below 200 meters** is known as deep ocean.
- Terrestrial mineral deposits are coming under increasing pressure due to continuously rising global population, industrialisation.
- Hence, to meet the long term demands for minerals, some countries are exploring oceans for minerals.
- **Deep Oceans** have **abundant mineral resources** like **copper, cobalt, iron, manganese, nickel, zinc, gold and rare earth elements**. Rare earth elements are used in a range of new technologies such as memory chips, Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) and batteries for electric vehicles.
- Commercial interest in deep oceans is currently focused on three types of marine mineral deposits.
 1. Polymetallic nodules,
 2. Polymetallic sulphides, and
 3. Cobalt crusts.
- **Polymetallic nodules** occur throughout the ocean. These nodules contain a wide variety of metals like **manganese, iron, copper, nickel, cobalt, lead and zinc**. Minor concentrations of molybdenum, lithium, titanium, and niobium are also found in these nodules.

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- **Polymetallic sulphides** are rich in copper, iron, zinc, silver and gold. Deposits are found at tectonic plate boundaries along the mid-ocean ridges, back-arc ridges and active volcanic arcs, typically at water depths of around 2,000 metres for mid-ocean ridges.
 - **Cobalt crusts** accumulate at water depths of between 400 and 7,000 metres on the flanks and tops of seamounts (Sea Mountains).
 - They contain iron, manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper and various rare metals. Globally, it is estimated that there may be as many as 100,000 seamounts higher than 1,000 metres. The most prospective area for cobalt crusts is located in the Magellan Seamounts in the Pacific Ocean, east of Japan and the Mariana Islands.

Status of Mining in Deep Oceans:

- International Sea Bed Authority (ISA), an international organization set up under **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, regulates **exploration** and **mining** of mineral resources in deep oceans.
- Deep oceans area is called International seabed area. It includes seabed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.
- Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Countries have **national jurisdiction** up to 12 nautical-mile territorial sea;
- Area adjacent to the territorial waters up to 200 nautical miles is called exclusive economic zone.
- Seabed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction is called **International Seabed Area**.
- **50 per cent of the total area of the world's oceans** are under the jurisdiction of International Seabed Authority.
- **Commercial exploitation** of minerals from deep seas has **not started yet**.
- **Currently** International Sea Bed Authority (ISA) is **giving permission** for **exploration** of minerals in the deep seas (The terms deep sea mining and deep ocean mining are being used interchangeably).
- ISA is developing a legal and technical framework for commercial deep sea mining.
- ISA has so far approved 30 **exploration contracts** in the Pacific (Clarion-Clipperton Zone), Indian and Atlantic Oceans, covering more than 1.3 million square kilometres of ocean floor for **exploration** for polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the international seabed area.
- Contracts have been given to China, France, Germany, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the Interoceanmetal Joint Organisation (a consortium of Bulgaria, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Russian Federation and Slovakia). Contracts have also been granted to an increasing cohort of private entities sponsored by both developed and developing States parties, including small island developing States such as the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Singapore and Tonga.

How Much Area is Given for Exploration?

- For polymetallic nodules exploration, an area of 75,000 square kilometres is allotted.
- For polymetallic sulphides, an area of 10,000 square kilometres is allotted.
- For cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts, an area of 3,000 square kilometres is allotted.

Why India is showing interest in Deep Ocean Mining?

- India has been allotted a site of 75,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB).
- This basin is estimated to hold reserves of **380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules**.
- The estimated value of these reserves is **US \$ 110 billion**.
- The technologies required for deep sea mining have been developed by some countries. But since these are of strategic importance, they are not commercially available. Hence, India is focusing on indigenous development of deep ocean technologies.
- Countries like France, Japan, China, and Russia have already developed submersible vehicles to reach deep ocean floors. India is yet to catch up with these countries.
- In November 2020, China manned submersible vehicle named 'Striver' descended over 10,000 metres to the bottom of the Mariana trench in the Pacific Ocean with three researchers.

What are the Initiatives under India's Deep Ocean Mission?

- **Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining, and Manned Submersible:**
- A **manned submersible vehicle** named '**Matsya 6000**' will be developed. It will carry three people to a depth of 6,000 metres in the central Indian Ocean with a suite of scientific sensors and tools.
- An **Integrated Mining System** will be also developed for mining polymetallic nodules at those depths in the central Indian Ocean.
- The exploration studies of minerals will pave way for the commercial exploitation in the near future, as and when commercial exploitation code is evolved by the International Seabed Authority.

Is Deep Sea Mining Economically Viable?

- According to the latest estimate of ISA, deep sea mining will be commercially viable only if about three million tonnes are mined per year.
- More studies are being carried out to understand how the technology can be scaled up and used efficiently.

Other Components of the Deep Sea Mission:

Besides the deep sea mining for polymetallic nodules, the Deep Sea Mission approved by the Government has the following five other components:

1. searching for deep sea flora and fauna, including microbes, and studying ways to sustainably utilise them.
2. exploring and identifying potential sources of hydrothermal sulphides (copper, iron, zinc, etc.) along the Indian Ocean mid-oceanic ridges.
3. developing human resources in the field of ocean biology and engineering to translate research into industrial applications and development of products.
4. studying and preparing detailed engineering design for offshore Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) powered desalination plants.
5. developing observations and models to provide Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services. These models would provide future projections of important climate variables on seasonal to decadal time scales.

MISCELLANEOUS (PERSONS, AWARDS, SPORTS)

INTERNATIONAL PERSONS

Abdulla Shahid, Foreign Minister of Maldives was elected the President of the **United Nations General Assembly** for 2021-22, winning 143 votes or nearly three-fourths of the 191 countries that voted in the annual election in June 2021. His rival, former Afghanistan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul won 48 votes.

The United Nations General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and serves as main policy making organ. All UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly. Each Member State has one vote. Decisions on key issues such as international peace and security, admitting new members and the UN budget are decided by a two-thirds majority of UN general Assembly. Other matters are decided by simple majority.

Satya Nadella, India-born CEO of Microsoft, was appointed as the new chairman of Microsoft on June 17, 2021. He will also continue to hold the post of CEO (Chief Executive Officer). He is only the second person, after founder, Bill Gates to hold the post of both CEO and Chairman.

Satya Nadella was rewarded for transforming the world's largest software company as CEO over the past seven years. When he took over as CEO, Microsoft's flagship product Windows software business was weakening and the Company was struggling with its failures in the mobile and internet search engine markets. Nadella refocused the company around emerging technologies like cloud computing and artificial intelligence. His efforts paid off. Under his leadership the company's profits increased. Market capitalisation of the company reached US \$ 2 trillion and became the second most valued public listed company in the world after Apple.

John McAfee (75), British-born U.S. technology entrepreneur who became famous and successful with creation of anti-virus software McAfee named after him, died by suicide on June 23, 2021 in a Barcelona prison after the Spanish high court authorised his extradition to the United States on tax evasion charges. If convicted, he faced 30 years in prison in the United States.

McAfee worked for NASA, Xerox and Lockheed Martin before launching the **world's first commercial anti-virus** in 1987. Intel bought the business in 2011, when McAfee himself no longer had any involvement. The program **still carries his name** and has **500 million users worldwide**.

In 2019, McAfee said that he had not paid U.S. income taxes for eight years for ideological reasons.

He also launched unsuccessful bids for the Libertarian Party's nomination for the president of the U.S. in both 2016 and 2020.

Jacob Zuma, former President of South Africa, was awarded a 15-month jail term, on June 29, 2021, by the Constitutional Court of South Africa for contempt of court after he refused to appear before an inquiry commission headed by probing wide-ranging allegations of corruption during his tenure from 2009 to 2018. The Enquiry Commission known as Zondo commission named after the Judge heading it.

Mr. Zuma is accused of enabling the plunder of state coffers during his nearly nine-year stay in office.

Most of the graft investigated by a commission involves three brothers from a wealthy business family, the Guptas, who won lucrative government contracts and were allegedly even able to choose Ministers.

NATIONAL PERSONS

Justice Arun Kumar Mishra, former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, was appointed as the Chairman of the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** on June 1, 2021. NHRC has been without a full time head after Justice H.L. Datta retired in December 2020.

Justice Mishra's name was recommended by a **high-powered selection panel** consisting Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Union Home Minister Amit Shah; Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Harivansh; Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla; and the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge.

Justice Mishra became a judge of the Supreme Court in 2014 after having served as Chief Justice of the Rajasthan and Calcutta high courts. He retired from the Supreme Court on September 2, 2020.

The Chairman of the NHRC is appointed for a term of **three years** (reduced from 5 years in 2019 through amendment to the NHRC Act) or until he attains the age of 70 years whichever is earlier. He is eligible for reappointment but will remain in office until the end of his tenure or attains the age of 70 years whichever is earlier.

In 2019, the Parliament had amended the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 to revise the eligibility criteria for the post of chairperson of NHRC and state human rights commissions. While only a retired Chief Justice of India could be appointed as NHRC chairperson earlier, the amended law allowed a judge of the Supreme Court to be considered for the position. The term of office was also reduced to 3 years from 5 years. He was also made eligible for reappointment while the original act did not provide for reappointment.

The selection of Justice Arun Kumar Mishra was criticised by the Congress Party as he openly praised Prime Minister when he was Judge of Supreme Court.

As a sitting judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Mishra, while addressing an international conference, had described Prime Minister Modi as "an "internationally acclaimed visionary who could think globally and act locally".

Buddhadeb Dasgupta (77), renowned filmmaker and poet who helped put Indian cinema on the global stage, passed away on June 10, 2021.

In his illustrious career, the filmmaker received several national and international recognitions for his work. Some of the notable films by Dasgupta include Tahader Katha, Bagh Bahadur, Charachar and Uttara.

He also directed Hindi films such as Andhi Gali and Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa.

He received the National Film Award in several categories including best film, best direction, best screenplay and best feature film in Bengali for his work. He also received international awards at the Venice Film Festival, Locarno Film Festival, Asia Pacific Film Festival and Bangkok International Film Festival among others.

Parassala B. Ponnammal (96), doyenne of Carnatic music and Padma Shri award-winner, passed away in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on June 22, 2021.

Ponnammal started her career as a music teacher by joining the Cotton Hill Girls High School in Thiruvnanthapuram. Later she became the first female member of the teaching faculty in the Swathi Thirunal College of Music in Thiruvananthapuram. She was also the first woman principal to head the RLV College of Music and Fine Arts at Tripunithura.

In 2006, she scripted history by singing at the Navaratri Mandapam in Thiruvananthapuram, breaking a centuries old tradition that forbade women from performing at the famed Navaratri celebrations of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple.

She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2017 for her contributions to Carnatic music. She is also a recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2009).

SPORTS PERSONS

Dingko Singh (42), Asian Games gold medalist in boxing who inspired a generation of Indian boxers with his feat in Bangkok in 1998, passed away at Imphal after a prolonged battle with cancer on June 10, 2021.

For his contribution to sports, he was conferred the Arjuna Award in 1998 and Padma Shri in 2013.

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Pulitzer Prize:

Ms. Megha Rajagopalan from 'BuzzFeed' News and **Neil Bedi** an investigative reporter for the 'Tampa Bay Times' are the two Indian-origin journalists who won the U.S.' top journalism award in June 2021.

Ms. Rajagopalan's Xinjiang series won the Pulitzer Prize in the International Reporting category. Neil Bedi won the award for local reporting category.

Megha Rajagopalan, an Indian-origin journalist, along with two contributors (Alison Killing and Christo Buschek) has won the Pulitzer Prize for **innovative investigative reports** that exposed mass internment camps secretly built by China for detaining hundreds of thousands of Muslims in its restive **Xinjiang** region.

Neil Bedi an investigative reporter for the 'Tampa Bay Times' won for local reporting. Ms. Bedi along with Kathleen McGrory has been awarded the prize for the series exposing a Sheriff's Office initiative that **used computer modelling to identify people believed to be future crime suspects**. About 1,000 people were monitored under the programme, including children.

About Pulitzer Prizes:

Pulitzer Prizes are annual prizes awarded by Columbia University, New York City, for **outstanding public service** and **achievement in American journalism, letters, and music**. Fellowships are also awarded.

The prizes, originally endowed with a gift of \$500,000 from the newspaper magnate **Joseph Pulitzer**, are highly esteemed and have been **awarded since 1917**. The awards are conferred by Columbia University on the recommendation of the Pulitzer Prize Board, composed of judges appointed by the university. The prizes have varied in number and category over the years but currently number **14 prizes in the field of journalism, 6 prizes in letters, and 1 prize in music**.

SPORTS

Tennis:

French Open (Paris, June 2021)

Women's Singles:

Borborakrtjickova (Czech Republic) - Winner

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Russia) - Runner

Men's Singles:

Novak Djokovic (Serbia) - Winner

Stiffens Tsitsipas (Germany) - Runner

Women's Doubles:

Barbora Krejckova & Katerina Siniakova (Czech Republic) - Winners

Bethanie Mattek-Sands (USA) & Iga Swiatek (Poland) - Runners

Men's Double:

Nicolas Mahut & Pierre-Hugues Herbert (France) - Winners

Andrey Golubev & Alexander Bublik (Kazakhstan) - Runners

Mixed Doubles:

Desirae Krawczyk (USA) & Joe Salisbury (Britain) - Winners

Elena Vesnins (Russia) & Aslan Karstev (Russia) - Runners

Cricket:

First World Test championship (England, 2021) :

New Zealand - Winner

India - Runner

New Zealand won by eight wickets to clinch the Inaugural World Test Championship title.

Man-of-the-Final: Jamison.

Formula One:

French Grand Prix (France, June 2021)

Max Verstappen - Winner

Lewis Hamilton - Runner