

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

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# CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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# ECONOMY

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## **AGRICULTURE:**

### ***Essential Commodities Act:***

#### **Parliamentary Standing Committee Recommends Implementation of Essential Commodities Act, 2020 in Letter and Spirit**

- The Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, in its report tabled in the Lok Sabha in March 2021, asked the government to implement in "letter and spirit" the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, one of the three farm laws against which the farmers are protesting at the borders of Delhi since November 2020.
- (The other two Acts are related to allowing contract farming and giving freedom to farmers to sell agricultural commodities outside Government notified Agriculture Produce Market Committees-APMCs)

#### **Recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee:**

- The 30-member Parliamentary Committee headed by Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP, Mr. Sudip Bandyopadhyay asked the government to implement in "letter and spirit" the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act for the following reasons.
- Country has become surplus in most agricultural commodities.
- But farmers have been unable to get better prices due to lack of investment in cold storage, warehouses, processing and export as entrepreneurs get discouraged by the regulatory mechanisms in the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- This has resulted in **farmers suffering huge losses when there are bumper harvests**, especially of perishable commodities, much of which could have been reduced with adequate processing facilities.
- The panel also noted that even the **High Powered Committee for Transformation of Indian Agriculture had suggested that there was a need to create an environment** based on ease of doing business and for removing the fear of frequent statutory controls under the Essential Commodities Act in order to boost immediate investment in agriculture sector, increase competition and enhance farmers' income.
- The Parliamentary Committee stated that it expects the recently enacted 'Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020', which was aimed at addressing the issue, **will become a catalyst for unlocking vast untapped resources in the agriculture sector** by creating an environment for
  - enhanced investments in agriculture sector,
  - fair and productive competition in agricultural marketing and
  - increase farmers' income.

#### **About Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020:**

- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 was passed in the Parliament in 2020. It amended the amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

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- Under the new law, the supply of certain foodstuffs - including cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, potato - can be **regulated only under extraordinary circumstances**, which include an **extraordinary price rise, war, famine, and natural calamity of a severe nature**.
  - In effect, the amendment takes these items out from the purview of Section 3(1) of the Essential Commodities Act, which gave **sweeping powers to the central government** to "control production, supply, distribution, etc., of essential commodities.

### **Conditions for Imposing Stock Limits:**

- While the 1955 Essential Commodities Act did not provide a clear framework to impose stock limits, the amended Act of 2020 provides for a price trigger.
- Agricultural foodstuffs can only be regulated under extraordinary circumstances such as war, famine, extraordinary price rise, and natural calamity.
- However, any action on imposing stock limits will be based on the **price trigger**.
- Thus, in case of horticultural produce, a 100 per cent increase in the retail price of a commodity over the immediately preceding 12 months or over the average retail price of the last five years, whichever is lower, will be the trigger for invoking the stock limit for such commodities.
- For non-perishable agricultural foodstuffs, the price trigger will be a 50% increase in the retail price of the commodity over the immediately preceding 12 months or over the average retail price of the last five years, whichever is lower.
- However, exemptions from stock-holding limits will be provided even under extraordinary circumstances to processors and value chain participants of any agricultural produce, and orders relating to the Public Distribution System.

### **How is an 'Essential Commodity' Defined?**

- There is no specific definition of essential commodities in The Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Section 2(A) states that an "essential commodity" means a commodity specified in the Schedule of the Act.
- The Act gives powers to the central government to add or remove a commodity in the Schedule.
- The Centre, if it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in public interest, can notify an item as essential, in consultation with state governments.
- According to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, which implements the Act, the Schedule at present contains seven commodities -

1. drugs;
2. fertilisers, whether inorganic, organic or mixed;
3. foodstuffs including edible oils;
4. hank yarn made wholly from cotton;
5. petroleum and petroleum products;
6. raw jute and jute textiles; and

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7. seeds of food-crops and seeds of fruits and vegetables, seeds of cattle fodder, jute seed, cotton seed.

- By declaring a commodity as essential, the Union Government can control the **production, pricing, supply, and distribution of that commodity, and impose a stock limit.**
- But, the enforcement/implementation of the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 lies with the State Governments and UT Administrations as the Central Government has delegated these powers to State Governments and UTs.

#### **What is the Rationale behind Essential Commodities Act?**

- The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 was enacted to **ensure the easy availability of essential commodities to consumers** and to protect them from **exploitation by unscrupulous traders.**

#### ***FPOs:***

#### **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**

- The first anniversary of the launch of Central Sector Scheme "Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) " was observed on March 1, 2021. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched this scheme at Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh on February 29, 2020.
- The Government has decided to set up a total of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in the country **to increase the incomes of the farmers through aggregation of their produce and value addition.**

#### **What is a Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)?**

- It is an **organisation set up and collectively owned by farmers** (who are producers) as members to promote their interests.
- It is set up as a legal entity (under the acts of Government). It deals with business activities related to the primary produce of its members and works for the benefit of the member producers.
- It can be set up as **company, cooperative society or trust.**
- Setting up FPO as a legal entity has advantages as it can access to institutional credit and enter into agreements to carry on their business.

#### **Management of FPO:**

- Each FPO will have an elected Board of Management / Board of Directors as per the bye-laws.
- The Board can engage professionals to manage its affairs.
- In the initial years, professional and managerial assistance is usually extended by the Government. As the leaders of the FPO gain experience, they should take over the affairs of the FPO completely.

#### **What is the Need for Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)?**

- 85 per cent of farmers in India are small and marginal farmers with land holdings of less than 2 hectares.

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- Due to small land holdings, small and marginal farmers **face challenges in**
  - marketing their produce,
  - access to technology,
  - quality seed, fertilisers, pesticides, and
  - requisite finances.

### **What are the advantages of Farmers Producer Organisation?**

#### **1. Increased Bargaining Power:**

FPO will also have better bargaining power vis-à-vis the **bulk buyers of produce.**

#### **2. Reduced Input cost:**

By aggregating the demand for inputs, FPO can buy in bulk, thus procuring at cheaper price compared to individual purchase.

#### **3. Breaking the long chain of intermediaries:**

In agricultural marketing, there is a long chain of intermediaries. As a result of long chain the producer receives only a small part of the value that the ultimate consumer pays. Through aggregation, the primary producers can avail the benefit of economies of scale and sell them by reducing the number of intermediaries.

#### **4. Export Opportunities:**

Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs) can also explore **export opportunities by branding and marketing their produce.**

### **What is the Support Extended by the Union Government?**

#### **1. Registration Charges:**

The Union Government bears the registration cost of Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO). For this, it provides up to Rs. 40,000 for each FPO.

#### **2. Contribution to Equity:**

The money needed for setting up an FPO is contributed by members in the form of equity.

The Union Government provides matching equity grant up to Rs. 2,000 per farmer member of Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) subject to maximum limit of Rs. 15.00 lakh fixed per FPO.

This Equity Grant is not in the form of government participation in equity, but only as a matching grant to the FPOs as farmer members' equity.

Government allocated Rs.1,500 crore for 10,000 FPOs for equity contribution.

#### **Objectives of Equity Grant:**

The objectives of Equity Grant are to (i) enhance viability and sustainability of FPOs; and (ii) increase credit worthiness of FPOs.

#### **3. Credit Guarantee Facility:**

Government has set up a dedicated Credit Guarantee Fund (CGF) with Rs. 1,500 crore to enable Lending Institution to provide collateral free credit to FPOs.

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#### 4. Handholding:

In order to form and promote FPOs in uniform and effective manner and make them economically sustainable, the Government has picked up the following three Implementing Agencies.

Small Farmers Agri-business Consortium (SFAC),

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

shall be responsible to form and promote FPOs. 6.1.1 SFAC will form and promote those FPOs to be incorporated under Part IX A of Companies Act. 6.1.2 NCDC will form and promote those FPOs to be registered under any Co-operative Societies Act of the States. 6.1.3 NABARD will form and promote those FPOs which are registered either under Part IX A of Companies Act or registered under any Co-operative Societies Act of States. 6.2

In addition to afore-stated three implementing agencies, if any State/ Union Territory is desirous to have its own implementing agency, State/ UT may approach the Union Government for formation and promotion of FPOs.

Implementing Agencies will set up Cluster-Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) at the State/ Cluster level to form and promote FPOs as per their requirements.

#### **What are the Activities undertaken by Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)?**

- Aggregation and storage of produce,
- primary processing like drying, cleaning and grading,
- brand building, Packaging, Labelling and Standardisation,
- procurement of inputs,
- facilitating finance for inputs,
- disseminating market information,
- dissemination of technology and innovations,
- marketing to institutional buyers, and
- exports.

#### **What is the Size of Each Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)?**

- Each FPO should have a minimum farmer-members' size of 300 to make them economically sustainable and profitable.
- In North-Eastern and Hilly areas, the minimum members of FPO shall be 100.
- Farmer-members located in an area with almost same interest would be mobilised to form a group of 15- 20 Members, called as Farmer Interest Group (FIG) or Self Help Group (SHG), Farmers Club (FC), Joint Liability Group (JLG), Rythu Mitra Group. **20 or more such groups** from a village/ cluster of neighbouring villages will be put together to form an FPO.
- FPOs can **federate at district level and State level** based on their need of processing, branding and marketing of produce/trading of commodities, which are essential for scaling up for survivability and growth in an era of competition. Based on their need, success and product,

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they can **federate at the National level** also to promote packaging/branding and domestic/international trading of quality produce.

***Food Processing:***

**Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry**

- On March 31, 2021, the Union Government approved implementation of "Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry (PLISFPI)" with an outlay of Rs. 10,900 crore.

**Objectives of the Scheme to**

- support creation of global food manufacturing champions,
- extend support to Indian brands of food products in the international markets,
- increase employment opportunities of off-farm jobs, and
- ensure higher income to farmers.
- Food processing industries willing to make minimum stipulated investment for expansion of processing capacity and branding abroad would be eligible to financial incentives under the scheme.

**Products Eligible for Incentives:**

- Food manufacturing industries in four major food product segments will be eligible for incentives. These are
  - Ready to Cook/ Ready to Eat (RTC/ RTE) foods,
  - Processed Fruits & Vegetables,
  - Marine Products, and
  - Mozzarella Cheese.
- The selected applicant will be required to undertake prescribed minimum investment in Plant & Machinery to receive financial incentives.
- Grants for Branding:
  - Under the Scheme, the Union Government would also extend grants for branding and marketing of food products manufactured by the selected industries abroad.

**Implementation Period:**

- Scheme will be implemented over a six year period from 2021-22 to 2026-27.

**Estimated Benefits of the Scheme:**

- The implementation of the scheme would
  - facilitate expansion of processing capacity,
  - generate processed food output of Rs 33,494 crore, and
  - create employment for nearly 2.5 lakh persons by the year 2026-27.

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## ***Millets:***

### **2023 Declared 'International Year of Millets' by UN**

- In March 2021, the 193 member General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted a resolution sponsored by India and supported by over 70 nations declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets.
- The declaration is aimed at
  - a) raising awareness about the health benefits of the millets, and
  - b) encouraging consumption of millets.
- The above measures would also boost incomes of small farmers as millets are largely grown by small and marginal farmers in unirrigated areas (dry land areas) where the land is not so fertile.

### **What are Millets?**

- Millets are coarse grain cereals.
- The most common millets available are
  - Jowar (Sorghum),
  - Bajra (Pearl Millet),
  - Ragi (Finger Millet),
  - Korra (Foxtail millet),
  - Sama (Little millet), and
  - Variga (Proso millet)

### **Health Benefits of Millets:**

- There are myriad health benefits of millets.

#### **1) Diabetics:**

Millets are **low in carbohydrate** and **take longer to digest**.

Since they take longer time to digest, breakdown of glucose is slower.

It takes longer for glucose to enter bloodstream and hence blood sugar levels are stable.

This is beneficial for diabetics who have to control rapid rise and decline of glucose in blood.

Weight Control: Millets are **high on fibre and satiate hunger quickly preventing from overeating**.

#### **2) Rich in Minerals:**

Millets are rich in several beneficial nutrients such as Iron, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, copper, manganese, Zinc, Folic acid, etc.

#### **3) Women:**

Regular consumption of millets is beneficial for postmenopausal women suffering from signs of heart ailments, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. They also help women to combat occurrence of gallstones because they are rich in fibre.

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#### 4) Type 2 Diabetes Reduction:

Consumption of millets also reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes as they are rich in magnesium, which regulates secretion of glucose and insulin.

Type 2 Diabetes is a metabolic condition under which body **does not produce enough insulin or becomes resistant to it**. Causes of Type 2 Diabetes are genetics, ageing, physical inactivity, obesity, etc.

#### In Which States Millets are Grown in India?

- In India millets are grown in tribal and rain-fed areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

#### Impact of Green Revolution on Millets:

- Consuming millets as part of daily diet was popular among the population of central and southern India. Millets were consumed regularly as a staple food.
- But, Green Revolution made rice and wheat more accessible. Millets became sidelined as a staple food grain in India due to the government's lack of recognition. The government proactively pushed rice and wheat in the subsidised public distribution system, de-incentivising farmers from cultivating millets.

#### Changing Preferences:

- Off late, due to health benefits of millets, middle class and rich people are including millets as part of their diet.
- Research on rice, especially polished rice, also found that it is linked to diabetes and weight gain. Polished rice have high glycemic index which means it can cause sudden spike in blood sugar levels.
- Inclusion of millets in the Public Distribution System and mid-day meal scheme, and promotion of millet cropping system among the farming community can further contribute to the widespread adoption of millets. It would also address the problem of malnutrition among the poor.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

#### *Infrastructure Financing:*

#### **National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) Set Up**

- A Bill for setting up of a statutory institution called '**National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID)**' was passed by the Parliament in March 2021.

#### **Why was the Bank Set up?**

#### **Huge Requirement of Funds:**

- India needs significant investments in infrastructure. Under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, the Government has announced that Rs.100 lakh crore would be invested in infrastructure.

#### **Need for Long-term Financing:**

- But, Infrastructure financing requires long-term financing.

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- Infrastructure financing is also inherently risky in nature due to delay in the execution of projects which affects revenue generation.
  - Traditionally, banks and financial institutions in India have been an important source of financing for infrastructure sector.
  - But Banks cannot significant funds to the infrastructure due to risks of asset-liability mismatch.
  - (Here, assets means the loans extended to borrowers on which they earn interest. Liabilities means the deposits in banks on which they have to pay interests.
  - Why does Asset-Liability Mismatch Arise?
  - Banks' primary source of funds is deposits. These deposits typically have short- to medium-term maturities. They need to be paid back to the investor in 3-5 years. In contrast banks have to provide loans for a longer period to infrastructure projects. Providing such loans from much shorter maturity funds to long duration projects is called asset-liability mismatch. It creates risks for banks that need to be managed.)

### **National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID):**

#### **Objectives:**

- NBFID will have both financial as well as developmental objectives.
- Financial objectives will be to directly or indirectly lend, invest, or attract investments for infrastructure projects.
- Developmental objectives include facilitating the development of the market for bonds, loans, and derivatives for infrastructure financing.

#### **Major Functions:**

- extending loans and advances for infrastructure projects,
- taking over or refinancing existing loans of infrastructure projects,
- attracting investment from private sector investors and institutional investors for infrastructure projects,
- facilitating foreign participation in infrastructure projects, and
- providing consultancy services in infrastructure financing.

#### **Funds:**

- The Government would set up NBFID as a corporate body with an authorised capital of Rs. 1 lakh crores.
- Initially, the **central government** will own 100% shares of the institution which may subsequently be **reduced up to 26%**.
- NBFID may raise money in the form of loans or otherwise both in Indian and foreign currencies, or secure money by the issue and sale of various financial instruments including bonds and debentures. It may borrow money from: (i) central government, (ii) Reserve Bank of India (RBI), (iii) scheduled commercial banks, (iii) mutual funds, and (iv) multilateral institutions such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank.
- Government may guarantee the bonds, debentures, and loans issued by NBFID.

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## ***Maritime Sector:***

### **Maritime India Summit 2021**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated 'Maritime India Summit 2021' through video conferencing on March 2, 2021.

#### **'Maritime India Vision-2030' Released:**

- Prime Minister released e-book of 'Maritime India Vision-2030'. Maritime India Vision 2030 is aiming to make the Indian Maritime Industry at par with top global benchmarks in next 10 years.

#### **Investments Sought:**

- Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister invited investors around the world to invest in India's maritime sector.
- He stated that capacity of major ports have increased from 870 million tonnes in 2014 to 1550 million tonnes now.
- Mega ports with world class infrastructure are being developed in Vadhavan (Maharashtra), Paradip (Orissa) and Deendayal Port in Kandla (Gujarat).
- He stated that the Ministry of Port Shipping and Waterways has created a list of 400 investible projects. These projects have an investment potential of Rs 2.25 lakh crores (US \$ 31 billion).

#### **Sagarmala Project:**

- The Prime Minister stated that the Sagarmala project was launched in 2016 for promoting port led development. As part of the Programme, more than 574 projects at a cost of Rs 6 lakh crores (82 billion US Dollars) have been identified for implementation during 2015 to 2035.
- Ship repair clusters will be developed along both coasts by 2022.
- Domestic ship recycling industry will also be promoted to create employment opportunities.

#### **Maritime Information System Launched:**

- Prime Minister also unveiled the e-plaque of '**Sagar-Manthan': Mercantile Maritime Domain Awareness Centre (MM-DAC)**.
- It is a real-time vessel tracking system to help seafarers and fishermen in the times of need.
- Apart from tracking Indian vessels globally, it can also track foreign vessels within 1,000-km of India's coastline.
- It is also useful in organising help in case of emergency.
- India is sharing this system with Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

### **Maritime India Vision 2030 Released**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the Maritime India Vision 2030 on March 2, 2021.
- Maritime India Vision 2030 envisions
- an **overall investment** of Rs. 3,00,000 to 3,50,000 crores across ports, shipping, and inland waterways categories.

- generate **more than Rs. 20,000 crore worth** of potential annual revenue for Indian Ports.
- create approximately **an additional 20 lakh jobs (direct and non-direct)** in the Indian maritime sector.

**Focus Areas of Maritime India Vision 2030:**

- The Maritime Vision focuses on 10 key areas.
- Develop best-in-class Port infra structure:
- Drive E2E (End to End) Logistics Efficiency and Cost Competitiveness
- Enhance Logistics Efficiency through Technology and Innovation
- Strengthen Policy and Institutional Framework to Support all Stakeholders
- Enhance Global Share in Ship Building, Repair and Recycling
- Enhance Cargo and Passenger Movement through Inland Waterways
- Promote Ocean, Coastal and River Cruise Sector
- Lead the World in Safe, Sustainable & Green Maritime Sector
- Become Top Seafaring Nation with World Class Education, Research & Training

**Maritime India Vision 2030 - Key targets**

<b>Targets</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>2030</b>
Major Ports with >300 MTPA cargo handling capacity	-	3
% of Indian cargo transshipment handled by Indian ports	25%	>75%
% of cargo handled at Major Ports by PPP/ other operators	51%	>85%
Average vessel turnaround time (containers)	25 hours	< 20 hours
Average ship daily output (gross tonnage)	16,500	>30,000
Global ranking in ship building and ship repair	20+	Top 10
Global ranking in ship recycling	2	1
Annual cruise passengers	4,68,000	>15,00,000
% share of Indian seafarers across globe	12%	>20%
% share of renewable energy at Major Ports	<10	> 60%

**Major Details of Maritime India Vision 2030:**

**Developing best-in-class Port infra structure:**

- Total traffic handled at Indian Ports rose from 885 MTPA in 2010-11 to 1300 MTPA in 2019-20.
- The 12 Major Indian Ports handled nearly 54 per cent of the total cargo in 2019-20 and have witnessed just about ~4% CAGR growth in overall cargo traffic over last 5 years.

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- Given the evolving global shipping market and 10-year traffic projections across commodities and regional clusters, India needs to upgrade its port infrastructure to increase its market share.
  - Maritime India Vision (MIV) 2030 has identified key interventions across 4 areas:
    - brownfield capacity augmentation;
    - developing world-class Mega Ports;
    - development of transshipment hub in Southern India; and
    - infrastructure modernisation.

### **Driving E2E (End to End) Logistics Efficiency and Cost Competitiveness:**

- The overall logistics cost in India is higher than best-in-class benchmarks, primarily as a result of larger hinterland distances and higher unit costs.
- Port land industrialisation, a means to bring industries closer to ports has started gaining traction with port based Special Economic Zone (SEZ) developed at Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Mumbai and efforts across other ports.
- Sagarmala has outlined 200+ port connectivity projects to improve access to ports via road, rail, coastal & inland routes.
- To be globally competitive, the India Ports must drive mechanisation and adoption of technology to improve productivity and establish ancillary services within port premises to improve evacuation time.
- Key interventions such as operational efficiency improvement, better evacuation, cost reduction, coastal shipping promotion and port land industrialisation to drive competitiveness and efficiency are needed.

### **Enhance Logistics Efficiency through Technology and Innovation**

- With an aim to achieve ~5% share in world exports, India's exports need to grow aggressively in next 5 to 10 years and it is imperative for Indian Ports to strengthen maritime capabilities and improve Ease of Doing Business (EoDB).
- Key interventions identified to enhance efficiency include creation of a National Logistics Portal (Marine), functional processes digitalisation across maritime stakeholders, Digital-led smart ports, and system-driven port performance monitoring.

## **BANKING**

### **IDBI Bank Out of Prompt Corrective Action Framework of RBI**

- In March 2021, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) took out the IDBI Bank from the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA).
- RBI had invoked PCA against IDBI Bank in 2017 in view of high non-performing assets and negative return on assets.
- Under PCA, usually a bank's branch expansion is restricted, and lending is narrowed to relatively less risky segments to nurse it back to good health.

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### **Why was IDBI Bank Taken out of Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework?**

- The financial health of IDBI improved after Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) raised its stake to 51 per cent in IDBI Bank by investing Rs. 21,624 crore in 2019.
- The Bank's Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) also reduced.
- As of 31 December, net NPAs of IDBI Bank stood at 1.94%,

### **What is Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework?**

- The PCA framework was introduced by the RBI in December 2002 as a structured early intervention mechanism to address weak financial health of commercial banks. The PCA Framework is not applicable to co-operative banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)
- These PCA framework regulations were later revised in April 2017.
- The RBI kept 11 out of 20 public sector banks under its Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework in 2017 due to their weak financial health.
- Many Banks were taken out of the PCA framework after their financial health improved.
- Following IDBI Bank's exit, Indian Overseas Bank, Central Bank of India and UCO Bank, remain under PCA.

### **What is the Necessity for PCA Framework?**

- Most bank activities are funded by deposits which need to be repaid.
- Hence, it is imperative that a bank carries a sufficient amount of capital to continue its activities.
- Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework is intended to help alert the regulator (RBI) as well as investors and depositors if a bank is heading for trouble.
- The idea is to head off problems before they attain crisis proportions.
- PCA helps RBI monitor key performance indicators of banks, and taking corrective measures, to restore the financial health of a bank.

### **What is the Criteria to Put a Bank under PCA Framework?**

- The Reserve Bank has specified regulatory trigger points in terms of three parameters for initiation of certain structured and discretionary actions in respect of banks hitting such trigger points. These are

- 1. Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR),**
- 2. Net Non-Performing Assets (NPA),** an indicator of asset quality, and
- 3. Return on Assets (RoA),** an indicator of profitability.

- If a Bank's performance in above indicators is below the levels specified by RBI, then the Bank is placed under Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework.

### **Measures Taken by RBI under PCA Framework:**

Some of the Actions which RBI could take under Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework are

- restrictions on entering into new lines of business, accessing/renewing costly deposits, and making dividend payments.

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- directions to reduce its exposure to sensitive sectors like **capital market, real estate or investment in non-SLR securities, etc.**
  - restriction on branch expansion; domestic or overseas
  - restriction on management compensation and directors' fees
  - RBI could also take steps to
  - bring in **new Management/ Board, appoint consultants** for business/ organizational restructuring, take steps to change ownership, and also take steps to merge the bank if it fails to submit recapitalization plan.

## **INDUSTRY**

### **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021** **Passed by Parliament**

- Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021 was passed by the Parliament in March 2021. The Bill amended the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.

#### **Major Highlights of the Amendments:**

##### **1. Removal of Captive and Non-Captive Distinction:**

The distinction between captive mines and non-captive mines has been removed.

Captive mines are those allotted for exclusive use by the company that owns the mines. These are allotted for for specifies end uses by industries like steel, power generation, etc.

All future auctions of mineral mines without a captive use restriction.

##### **2. Captive Mines Can Sell 50 Per cent of Their Production:**

Existing captive mines may sell up to 50% of their annual mineral production in the open market after meeting their own needs.

The central government may increase this threshold through a notification. The lessee will have to pay additional charges for mineral sold in the open market.

The sale of minerals by captive plants would **increase in production and supply of minerals, ensure economies of scale in mineral production, and bring additional revenue to the States**

##### **3. Auction by the central government in certain cases:**

At present, States conduct the auction of mineral concessions (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals). Mineral concessions include mining lease and prospecting license-cum-mining lease. The Act has been amended to empower the central government to specify a time period for completion of the auction process in consultation with the state government. If the state government is unable to complete the auction process within this period, the auctions may be conducted by the central government.

##### **4. Transfer of statutory clearances:**

Upon expiry of a mining lease (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals), mines are leased to new persons through auction. The statutory clearances issued to the previous lessee are

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transferred to the new lessee for a period of two years. The new lessee is required to obtain fresh clearances within these two years. The Bill replaces this provision and instead provides that transferred statutory clearances will be valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee.

**Objectives of the amendments:**

- a) Ensure Ease of Doing Business,
  - b) allow wider participation of private sector,
  - c) increase production,
  - d) create more employment opportunities, and
  - e) increase the revenues of the States.
- India produces 95 minerals and has same potential like South Africa and Australia, but still import minerals like gold and coal.
  - Mining sector currently contributes 1.75 per cent to the country's GDP.
  - With the present amendments, the contribution of mining industry to GDP is expected to rise to 2.5 per cent and strengthen the economy.
  - Mining sector contributes around 7 to 7.5 per cent of the GDP of countries like South Africa and Australia which are as mineral-rich as India.
  - In India only 10 per cent of the Obvious Geological Potential (OGP) area has been explored so far and out of that, in only 5 per cent of OGP we are mining.
  - In countries such as Australia and South Africa 70 to 80 per cent of OGP is mined. The reason low mining in India is that only government agencies are involved in the process.

**BALANCE OF PAYMENTS**

***FDI:***

**Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Limit in Insurance Increased to 74 Per cent**

- Insurance Amendment Bill 2021 was passed by the Parliament in March 2021. The Bill amended the Insurance Act, 1938.

**Highlights:**

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limit in insurance sector has been increased from 49 per cent to 74 per cent.
- Foreign ownership of insurance companies would also be allowed with certain safeguards.
- Currently, the permissible FDI limit in the life and general insurance stands at 49 per cent with ownership and management control with Indian.
- Under the new structure, the majority of directors on the board and key management persons would be resident Indians, with at least 50 per cent of directors being independent directors.

**Why was FDI Limit Increased?**

- To enhance insurance penetration and social protection in the country.

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**Impact of the Decision:**

- Increase in FDI will help improve insurance penetration in the country.
- Life insurance premium as a percentage of GDP is 3.6 per cent in the country, way below the global average of 7.13 per cent.
- In case of general insurance, premium as a percentage of GDP is even worse at 0.94 per cent of GDP, as against the world average of 2.88 per cent.

**Background:**

- Insurance sector was opened up to foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2000.
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (a) supplements the domestic capital; (b) brings in long term capital into the country along with (c) efficient managerial practices.
- Initially, 26 per cent foreign direct investment was permitted in insurance companies.
- This limit was increased to 49 per cent in 2015.
- After the increase in limit, insurance sector attracted Rs. 26,000 foreign investment.

**100 Per cent FDI in Insurance Intermediaries:**

- The government in 2020 allowed 100 per cent foreign direct investment in insurance intermediaries.
- Intermediary services include insurance brokers, reinsurance brokers, insurance consultants, corporate agents, third party administrators, surveyors and loss assessors.

**Insurance sector in India:**

- The total number of insurance companies in India are 58, of which 24 are life insurers and the rest non-life insurers.

**Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA):**

- The IRDA was incorporated in April, 2000 as an autonomous statutory body to regulate and develop the insurance industry.
- The setting up of IRDA was recommended by RN Malhotra committee which was set up by the Government to propose recommendations for reforms in the insurance sector.
- The committee recommended that the private sector be permitted to enter the insurance industry and that foreign companies be permitted to participate, preferably through joint venture with Indian partners. Since many players will enter the insurance industry with the opening up the sector, it recommended setting of IRDA as a regulatory body.
- The key objectives of the IRDA include promotion of competition in the insurance sector through increased consumer choice and lower premiums, while ensuring the financial security of the insurance market.

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## **WORLD ECONOMY:**

### ***TRIPS :***

#### **India and South Africa Seek Temporary Waiver from Some TRIPS Provisions**

- India and South Africa pressed for a temporary waiver from certain provisions of the TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) agreement for the prevention, containment and treatment of Covid-19 at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) General Council Meeting in March 2021.
- As many as 57 members, mostly developing countries and Least Developing Countries (LDCs), supported the waiver proposal.

#### **Why Waiver is Being Sought?**

- New diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for COVID-19 are being developed.
- But, there are significant concerns as to whether these will be made available promptly, in sufficient quantities and at affordable price to meet global demand.
- Though, vaccines are available for COVID-19, progress on vaccinations has been wildly uneven and unfair.
- More than 100 countries have not received a single dose out of 195 countries affected by COVID-19.
- Rapid scaling up of manufacturing globally is needed to address the timely availability and affordability of medical products to all countries in need.

#### **On Which Provisions of TRIPS Waiver Sought?**

- India and South Africa have called for temporary waiver from following provisions of the WTO TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights)
- Copy Rights and Related Rights (Section 1 of TRIPS Agreement)
- Industrial Design (Section 4)
- Patents (Section 5)
- Protection of Undisclosed Information (Section 7).
- Waiver has been sought from the above provisions for the prevention, containment and treatment of Covid-19.
- Waiver will enable availability of new diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for COVID-19 which are being developed/developed to all the countries particularly the developing and least developed countries which lack the expertise.

#### **Stand of Developed Countries?**

- Developed Countries such as the US, the EU, Switzerland and Japan, are opposed to TRIPS waiver.
- They argue that the waiver will impact the commercial interests of existing Intellectual Property Rights (IP) holders as lot of manufacturing would occur without agreement with the IP holders.

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**Background:****About TRIPS Agreement:**

- The WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), negotiated during the 1986-94 Uruguay Round, introduced intellectual property rules into the multilateral trading system for the first time
- Intellectual property rights are the rights given to persons over the creations of their minds.
- They usually give the creator an exclusive right over the use of his/her creation for a certain period of time.
- TRIPS agreement provides intellectual property rights protection for the following
  1. Copyright and Related Rights
  2. Trademarks
  3. Geographical Indications
  4. Industrial Designs
  5. Patents
  6. Layout-Designs (Topographies) of Integrated Circuits
  7. Protection of Undisclosed Information
  8. Control of Anti-Competitive Practices in Contractual Licences

**Implementation of TRIPS Agreement:**

- World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements entered into force on 1 January 1995.
- The Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement allowed WTO members certain transition periods before they were obliged to apply all of its provisions.
- Developed country members were given one year to ensure that their laws and practices conform to the TRIPS Agreement. Developing country members and transition economies were given five years, until 2000.
- Least-developed countries initially had 11 years, until 2006 - now extended to 1 July 2021 in general.
- In November 2015, the TRIPS Council agreed to further extend exemptions on pharmaceutical patent and undisclosed information protection for least-developed countries until 1 January 2033 or until such date when they cease to be a least-developed country member, whichever date is earlier.

**TRIPS Council:**

- The Council for TRIPS ("TRIPS Council") is the body legally responsible for administering and monitoring the operation of the TRIPS Agreement.
- TRIPS Council serves as a forum for discussion between members on key issues. It is open to all WTO members and observers.

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## ***Rules of Origin:***

### **New Norms for 'Rules of Origin' Implemented by India Questioned at WTO**

- India's new norms for 'Rules of Origin' were questioned at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Policy Review (TPR) when India's free trade partners raised questions over the new rules.
- Countries like Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Malaysia inquired about the background and the objective of the new Rules of Origin.
- These rules have been formed under Customs Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements Rules (CAROTAR) and came into force on September 21, 2020.

### **Background:**

- In September 2020, the Union Government announced new norms for enforcement of 'rules of origin' for imports under Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- India has inked FTAs with several countries, including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members.

### **What are Rules of Origin?**

- 'Rules of Origin' are meant to trace the country of origin of the imported goods.
- The "rules of origin" provision prescribes for the minimal processing that should happen in the FTA country so that the **final manufactured product** may be called originating goods in that country.
- If the product is **agricultural commodity** then the commodity should be produced in that country.

### **Why 'Rules of Origin' Requirement Imposed?**

- To check misuse of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), and
- ensure that the benefits of reduced or zero tariffs are availed only by the manufactures of goods in a country with which there is FTA.

### **Why do Importers Flout Rules of Origin?**

- To make profits by availing tariff concessions.
- Under the Free Trade Agreements, two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate import/customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them.

### **How do Importers Flout Rules of Origin?**

- They import goods from a third country and export them as original products.

### **Example:**

- India has free trade agreement with South Asia Neighbours called **South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)**.
- This agreement which provides for reduced or zero tariffs on most of the goods traded is being misused by the traders.

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- Palm oil, spices, tyres are being imported under zero tariffs through Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh taking advantage of the SAFTA.
  - Pepper from Viet Nam is being routed through Sri Lanka to take advantage of zero tariffs under SAFTA.

#### **What are the New Norms for Rules of Origin?**

- In September 2020, the Union Government announced norms for enforcement of 'rules of origin' for imports under Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to check the misuse of FTAs.
- The new rules which shifts the onus on the importer to verify the country of origin beyond receiving the usual Certificate of Origin (COO) to claim tariff benefits under the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and to possess sufficient origin related information.
- Before the new regulations came into force, the verification of origin in cases of doubt was made through nodal authorities in the respective country.
- However, the new regulations provide that the Indian customs officer can now ask for further documentation proving the country of origin from the importer first.

#### **What are the Concerns over New Norms for Rules of Origin?**

- New norms are an obstacle to the use of benefits under Free Trade Agreements and increase the cost of doing business.

#### **India's Stand:**

- India stated that objections raised by South Korea, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia to the new norms for 'Rules of Origin' pertain to bilateral Free Trade Agreements and does not fall within the purview of WTO Trade Policy Review.

#### ***Economic Freedom Index:***

#### **Singapore Ranked 1st , India 126th in the Economic Freedom Index 2021**

- India was ranked 121st in the Economic Freedom Index-2021 released by the Heritage Foundation, a Washington-based think-tank in March 2021.
- Singapore was ranked 1st out of 178 countries which were given ranking in the Economic Freedom Index.

#### **What factors contributed Singapore's Top Ranking:**

- a) Strong protection of property rights,
- b) effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws,
- c) efficient government which provides good public services,
- d) low tax rates,
- e) openness to global trade and investment,
- f) a more dynamic and competitive financial sector, and
- g) flexible and transparent regulatory environment.

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### What is the Criteria for Economic Freedom Index?

Economic freedom was measured based on 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into following four broad categories of economic freedom:

1. **Rule of Law** (Property Rights, Government Integrity, Judicial effectiveness)
  2. **Government Size** (Government spending, Tax burden, Fiscal health)
  3. **Regulatory Efficiency** (Business freedom, Labour freedom, Monetary freedom)
  4. **Open Markets** (Trade freedom, Investment freedom, and Financial freedom)
- Each of the twelve economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100.
  - A country's overall score is derived by averaging these twelve economic freedoms, with equal weight being given to each.

### Top Ten Countries in the Index:

Rank	Country
1	Singapore
2	New Zealand
3	Australia
4	Switzerland
5	Ireland
6	Taiwan
7	United Kingdom
8	Estonia
9	Canada
10	Denmark

### Ranking of India and Its Neighbours:

Country	Rank
China	107
Bhutan	109
Bangladesh	120
India	121
Sri Lanka	131
Maldives	136
Pakistan	152
Nepal	157

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## Major Issues Debated in the Economic Freedom Index Report:

### 1. Economic Freedom: The Proven Cure for Poverty

The Economic Freedom Index Report stated that over the past decades, those countries that have adopted some version of free-market capitalism with businesses supported by efficient regulations and open to the free flow of goods, services, and capital have broken the vicious cycle of poverty and dependence.

The free-market system that is rooted in empowerment of the individual and open competition has fuelled unprecedented economic growth around the world.

It stated that over the past two-and-a-half decades the global economy has moved toward greater economic freedom. This progress has **lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty**. During this period, the global poverty rate has declined by more than two-thirds.

Opening the gates of prosperity to ever more people around the world, economic freedom has made the world a profoundly better place. **More people are living longer and more fulfilling lives than ever before. The key driver of poverty reduction is dynamic and resilient economic growth.**

### 2. Economic Freedom: The Key to Upward Mobility and Meaningful Social Progress

The report also stated that **massive improvements in global indicators of income and quality of life in recent years largely reflect a paradigmshift in the debate about how societies should be structured economically to achieve the most optimal outcomes.**

It stated that in recent decades, this debate has largely been won by free-market capitalism. Criticisms persist, however, based primarily on **the inequality of outcomes in a system that rewards individual effort and ability**, which differ within any population, and where differences in individuals' starting positions (being born in poor families) can sometimes have a profound effect on their end results.

It stated that **alternatives to free-market capitalism**, such as **socialism or Communism**, have **proven both unequal to the task of eliminating inequality and counterproductive** in that they tend to **slow economic growth** and thus **reduce the resources that society has available to reduce poverty**. Most advanced societies have thus opted for some version of free-market capitalism with various types of government intervention to redistribute resources within society.

## NATIONAL POLITY

### *Electoral Bonds:*

#### **Supreme Court Refuses to Stay Sale of Electoral Bonds**

- On March 26, 2021, the Supreme Court refused to stay the sale of a fresh set of electoral bonds from April 1, 2021.
- The plea for stay on electoral bonds was filed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), an NGO, seeking stay of electoral bonds ahead of in four states and one Union Territory - West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and UT of Puducherry.
- The Supreme Court stated that since the bonds were allowed to be released in 2018 and 2019 and 2020 without interruption, and sufficient safeguards are there, there is no justification to stay the electoral bonds at present.

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- It stated that no applications for stay of electoral bonds will be entertained every time the window for sale of electoral bonds is opened.

#### **Background:**

- Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has challenged the Electoral Bonds Scheme in the Supreme Court in January 2019 on the ground that these bonds **do not promote transparency in political funding**.
- The petitioners sought that either the issuance of electoral bonds be stayed for the time being or the names of donors be made public to ensure transparency in the poll process
- After hearing the versions of the Government and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the Supreme Court passed an interim order **allowing issuing of electoral bonds with some safeguards as an interim arrangement** while it continued hearing of the case.
- The Supreme Court had asked the political parties to furnish all details of all donations they receive, including amounts, names, and bank details of the donors, in a sealed envelope to the poll panel.
- The final judgement is yet to be pronounced on the electoral bonds scheme.

#### **What are Electoral Bonds?**

- The Electoral Bond Scheme was notified by the Union Government on January 2, 2018 for collection of funds by political parties.
- Electoral Bond is a bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note and an interest free banking instrument.
- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India will be eligible to purchase the bond.
- These bonds can be donated to any eligible political party of his/her choice.

#### **What is the Purpose of Electoral Bonds?**

- **Electoral bond can be used for making donations to political parties.**

#### **Who Can Receive Electoral Bonds?**

- Registered political parties which have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last general election to the House of the People or a Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- Electoral Bond (s) would be issued for any value, in multiples of Rs.1,000, Rs.10,000, Rs.1,00,000, Rs.10,00,000 and Rs.1,00,00,000 from the Specified Branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).

#### **Conditions for Buying Electoral Bonds:**

- The purchaser would be allowed to buy Electoral Bond(s) only on due fulfilment of all the Know Your Customer (KYC) norms and by making payment from a bank account.
- Electoral Bond will **not carry the name of payee**.

#### **When Electoral Bonds are Issued?**

- The Electoral Bonds shall be available for purchase for a period of **10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October every year**, as may be specified by the Central

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Government. An additional period of 30 days shall be specified by the Central Government in the year of the General election to the House of People.

### **Validity of Electoral Bonds:**

- Electoral Bonds are **valid only for 15 days from the date of issue** and no payment shall be made to any payee Political Party if the Electoral Bond is deposited after expiry of the validity period.
- The Electoral Bonds shall be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.

### **What is the Criticism over Electoral Bonds?**

#### **1. Anonymity:**

Electoral Bonds Scheme allows anonymity of the donor and the recipient. Electoral Bond will not carry the name of payee. This opens up the possibility of **black money** being donated to parties through shell companies.

#### **2. Transparency Needed to Check Corporate Influence on Political Parties:**

When a corporation donates money to a political party, there is a possibility of quid pro quo. If voters do not know whose money a candidate is using to fund his or her election, they would not know subsequently whether a decision made by the government is based on the interest of the constituents, in national interest, or in the interest of whoever donated the money.

#### **3. Advantageous to Ruling Party:**

Electoral Bonds scheme gives advantage to ruling party as it alone is in a position to identify the donors.

### **How the Government Defends Electoral Bonds?**

#### **4. No Scope for Black Money:**

There is no scope for black money as the bonds are purchased from Banks.

The purchaser would be allowed to buy Electoral Bonds only on due fulfilment of all the **Know Your Customer (KYC) norms** and by making payment from a bank account. Under Know Your Customer (KYC), the customer has to provide various details like full name, nationality, address, marital status, date of birth, proof of identity, occupation, gross annual income, etc.

#### **5. Anonymity well thought out policy consideration:**

**Non-disclosure of the identity (anonymity)** of the donor is the **core objective** of the scheme of electoral bonds. It is meant to safeguard the donor from political victimisation. If the amount of donation is disclosed, there would be competitive pressure from different political parties on donors. Hence, the Government **Non-disclosure of the identity under** electoral bond scheme was driven by well thought out policy considerations.

Electoral bonds will not bear the name of the donor. In essence, the donor and the party details will be available with the bank, but the political party will not be aware of who the donor is.

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### Why Supreme Court Allowed the Issuance of Electoral Bonds as an Interim Arrangement?

- The Supreme Court **ruled out the scope of anonymous transactions as purchasers of bonds** will have to comply with KYC norms and their identities are anyway known to the State Bank of India, which issues the bonds.
- Moreover, if a company makes a donation through electoral bonds, the **Companies Act requires financial statements of registered companies** to be filed with **the Registrar of Companies**.
- Further, the scheme also mandates political parties to **file audited statements of accounts each year with the Election Commission**.

### What is the Stand of Election Commission on Electoral Bonds?

- The Election Commission of India stated in Supreme Court that while it was not opposed to the use of the electoral bonds as an instrument of political funding, it **did not want the donations to remain anonymous**.
- It maintained that the **right to vote also meant the right to make an informed choice**. It said that knowing the candidate was only "half the exercise". The voters should also know the source of funding of political parties who put up these candidates.
- The provisions of the Representation of People Act, the Income Tax Act, the Companies Act and the Reserve Bank of India Act had been amended under the Finance Act, 2017 and Finance Act, 2016 to accommodate the scheme's objective of keeping the donors' identity and details of the political parties receiving the electoral bond anonymous.

### ***Centre-State/UT Issues:***

#### **Parliament Passes Bill Giving Greater Powers to Lieutenant General in Administration of Delhi**

- Parliament passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, in March 2021. The Bill **shifts the balance of power in favour of Lieutenant Governor of Delhi** visa-a-vis elected Government in the administration of Delhi.
- The Bill was passed to override the 2018 Supreme Court judgement which ruled that real authority to take decisions lie in the elected government. It stated that Lieutenant Governor is a Titular head (LG) and has to act in accordance to aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by Chief Minister.

### **Background:**

- There is a tussle between the Lieutenant Governor and elected Government over the **many issues** in the administration of Delhi.

### **Constitutional Position:**

- As per the Constitution (Article 239AA), the Delhi Government has power to make laws on all subjects in the State list (except on public order, police and land) and concurrent list.
- The Council of Ministers shall aid and advise the Lieutenant Governor in the discharge of his/her functions with regard to laws made by the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

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- In the case of difference of opinion between the Lieutenant Governor and Council of Ministers (headed by Chief Minister) on any matter, the Lieutenant Governor shall refer it to the President for decision and act according to the decision given by the President.
  - When a decision from President is pending, Lieutenant Governor can give directions to the Council of Ministers if the matter pending with the President is of urgent nature and immediate action is necessary.
  - Lieutenant Governor can also act at his own discretion when there is a specific law conferring this discretion on him.

### **Issues Between Lieutenant governor and Delhi Government:**

- Administrative tug of war began between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led-Delhi government and then Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Najeeb Jung immediately after the former came to power for a second stint in 2015. The L-G refused to send files regarding three reserved subjects - land, police and public order - to the Chief Minister's office.
- Between early 2015 and mid-August 2016, several orders issued by the Delhi government related to the matters such as transfer of bureaucrats, setting up of **Commissions of Inquiry and the administration of the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB)**, were either declared void or reversed by the L-G citing procedural lacunae i.e. lack of approval from his office or not being constitutionally empowered to take such decisions.
- The matter was taken to the Delhi High Court and later to the Supreme Court by the AAP Government.

### **What are the major provisions of the Amendment Bill, 2021?**

#### **1. LG's Opinion for Executive Actions:**

The Act specifies that **all executive actions by the government**, whether taken on the advice of the Ministers or otherwise, must be taken in the name of the Lieutenant Governor (LG).

The Bill adds that on certain matters the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor must be obtained before taking any executive action on the decisions of the Minister/ Council of Ministers.

**Lieutenant Governor himself** would **specify matters** on which **his opinion must be sought**.

#### **2. Clarity on the Meaning of 'Government' in Laws:**

In the context of legislation passed by the Delhi Assembly, all references to the 'government' would mean the "Lieutenant Governor".

The term "government" referred to in any law made by the Legislative Assembly will imply Lieutenant Governor (LG).

#### **3. Inquiry by the Assembly into Administrative Decisions Prohibited:**

The Bill prohibits the Legislative Assembly from making any rule to enable itself or its Committees to: (i) consider the matters of day-to-day administration of the NCT of Delhi and (ii) conduct any inquiry in relation to administrative decisions.

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## Analysis of the Bill:

### 1. Autonomy of Delhi Government Ended:

By stating that the "government" referred to in any law passed by the Delhi assembly "shall mean the Lieutenant Governor" the amendment ends the autonomy enjoyed by the Aam Admi Party (AAP) Government in Delhi and reduces it to a figurehead. The elected government in Delhi can do nothing, if the Lieutenant Governor (LG) does not permit them to so do.

### 2. Regressive Move:

Granting the Lieutenant Governor extensive powers to intervene in the functioning of the capital city's elected government is being seen as a **regressive move and against the spirit of cooperative federalism**. Delhi got the status of a Union Territory with a legislative assembly in 1991 after a series of campaigns by political parties.

By mandating LG's opinion before any decision is taken, the amendment seeks to override SC's ruling which held that Council of Ministers did not need to obtain LG's "concurrence" on every issue of day to day governance.

### 3. Representative Character of Delhi Government Lost:

The amendments end the representative character of the Delhi Legislative Assembly as extensive powers are vested in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor. In a democracy, the Council of Ministers is held responsible by the Legislative Assembly which consists of representatives elected by people. An unelected Lieutenant Governor cannot be held accountable for his actions.

### 4. Impact on Governance:

An elected government awaiting the opinion of the unelected Lieutenant Governor on administrative decisions will considerably slow down governance.

## Highlights of the 2018 Supreme Court Judgement:

- In 2018, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered a unanimous judgement on the extent and scope of powers of Council of Ministers and Lieutenant Governor in the administration of Union Territory of Delhi.

### 1. Lieutenant Governor has No Independent Decision-making Power:

The Lieutenant Governor has **no independent decision-making power**. He has to either act on the 'aid and advice' of the Council of Ministers except in respect of 'Land', 'Public Order' and the 'Police'. Real and substantive power lies with the elected representatives in a democracy. They owe responsibility to the legislature.

### 2. Meaning of Aid and Advice:

Real authority to take decisions lie in the elected government. This is the **meaning of 'aid and advice.'** LG is a Titular head and has to act in accordance to aid and advice of Council of Ministers headed by Chief Minister.

### 3. Every Matter Should Not Be Referred to President by LG:

Every "trivial difference of opinion" between the Lieutenant General (LG) and the Delhi Government cannot be referred to the President for a decision. The issues referred should be of substantive or national importance.

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4. **Power to refer "any matter" (Article 239AA) to the President by the Lieutenant Governor did not mean that "every matter" should be referred.** The guiding principle should be that **the elected government should not be undermined by the unelected administrator.**

5. **Concurrence of Lieutenant Governor Not Needed for Day-to-Day Governance:**

The NCT government need only to inform the LG of its "well-deliberated" decisions. The government need not obtain his "concurrence" in every issue of day-to-day governance.

6. **Collective Responsibility Negated:**

A freeze on government decisions by the LG **negates the very concept of "collective responsibility."** The LG did give approval to the decisions taken by the Delhi Government on appointment of bureaucrats, mohalla clinic staff, school teachers, etc.

Collective responsibility means government speaking in one voice to the people whose aspirations the government reflects.

***Inter-State Issues:***

### **Ken Betwa Rivers Interlinking Project**

- The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh signed an agreement to link the Ken and Betwa rivers in March 2021

**Benefits of Interlinking:**

- Interlinking of Ken and Betwa rivers will benefit Bundelkhand region which faces water crisis frequently.
- Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen districts of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur districts of Uttar Pradesh would be benefited from the Ken and Betwa rivers interlinking.

**What is Bundelkhand Region?**

- Bundelkhand is a drought prone region spread over northern Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- 'Bundelkhand' comprises **seven districts of southern Uttar Pradesh and six districts of northern Madhya Pradesh** namely
- Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Banda, Chitrakoot districts (Uttar Pradesh), and
- Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Sagar and Damoh districts (all in Madhya Pradesh).
- **Bundelkhand faces water shortage due of its unique granite topography which does not allow rainwater to seep in and recharge the groundwater table.**

**Benefits from Ken Betwa Rivers Interlinking:**

- **Irrigation:** 10.62 lakh hectares would be irrigated.
- **Power Generation:** 103 Mega Watt power would be generated.
- **Drinking Water:** 62 lakh people would get assured drinking water.

**Details of Interlinking:**

- The Ken River in Madhya Pradesh is water surplus.
- The Betwa River in Uttar Pradesh is water deficient.
- Surplus water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh would be transferred to the Betwa River in Uttar Pradesh by interlinking both the rivers.

- A 77-metre tall and a 2-km wide dam would be constructed at Dhaudhan in Madhya Pradesh on Ken River. From the dam a 240, km long canal would be built to transport water to Betwa River in Uttar Pradesh.

#### Additional Information:

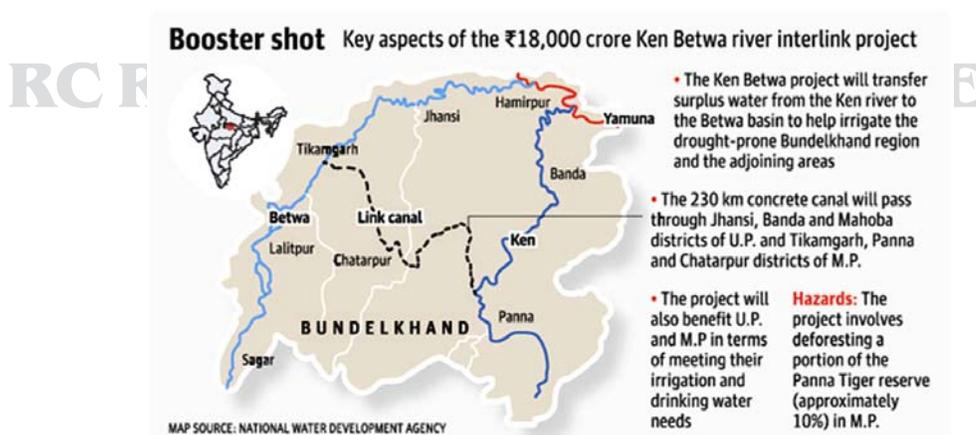
- The Union Government has prepared a **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for interlinking of Rivers in the country. The objective is to transfer water from water surplus basins to water-deficit basins.
- Under the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) has identified **30 links (16 under Peninsular Component & 14 under Himalayan Component)** for preparation of Feasibility Reports (FRs). The Ken Betwa link was one of the indentified projects for interlinking under National Perspective Plan.
- The project is under consideration of both Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh since 2005. But, there was no forward movement due to the following reasons.
  1. Disagreement over water sharing between Madhya Pradesh, and
  2. submergence of part of Panna Tiger Reserve due to the construction of the dam and canal. The habitat of vultures and jackals would also be affected.
- The project was also controversial as it threatened to partly submerge the Panna Tiger Reserve and affect the habitat of vultures and jackals.
- However, the project was cleared the National Board for Wildlife, the apex wildlife-regulator, in 2016.

#### Water sharing:

- Both the States have also agreed on water sharing.
- In a "normal" year, Madhya Pradesh would use 2,350 MCM (Million Cubic Metre) of water and Uttar Pradesh, 1,700 MCM.

#### Steps Ahead:

- The share of Centre and State in funding of the project needs to be finalized. The project is estimated to cost Rs.18,000 crore.
- A new organisation - the **Ken Betwa Link Project Authority** - would be formed to execute the project.
- The project is expected to be completed in 8 years.



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## ***Reservations:***

### **Supreme Court to Consider Setting up Larger Bench to Review 50 Per cent Cap on Reservation Quota**

- On March 9, 2021, the Supreme Court of India decided to examine whether the 1992 verdict by a nine-judge bench capping quota at 50% needed to be revisited in view of subsequent constitutional amendments, judgements and changed social dynamics.
- A five judge bench took this decision while examining the validity of the Maharashtra government's decision to grant reservation to Marathas. It expanded the ambit of the proceedings to settle the 50% ceiling and larger constitutional questions pertaining to reservation and issued notices to all states to clarify their position on the 50% reservation mark.
- This is because over the years, several like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh have passed laws that allow reservation going beyond 50%. The 16 per cent reservation to Marathas also breached the 50 per cent cap. The State already provides 52 per cent reservation and with 16 per cent reservation for Marathas, the total reservation stands at 68 per cent.

(Tamil Nadu Reservation Act, 1993 provides 69% reservation in educational institutions and public employment.

Section 4 of the Act provides 30% reservation to the Backward Classes, 20% for Most Backward Classes and de-notified communities, 18% for Scheduled Castes and 1% for Scheduled Tribes. Thus, a total of 69% reservation is provided. The law has been placed under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to protect reservations from judicial review).

The Central Government also made constitutional amendments to provide 10% quota for the economically weaker sections among those who do not fall under any reservation category. With this move, the Centre has already exceeded the 50% limit, and at present, only 41% of seats or posts are meant for open competition in central employment and educational institutions.

#### **Background of Maratha Reservation:**

- In 2018, **Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission**, headed by Justice M.G. Gaikwad, recommended 12% and 13% reservation for Marathas in educational institutions and appointments in public services, respectively.
- However, the **Maharashtra passed the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2018** and provided 16 per cent reservation to the Marathas in educational institutions and employment opportunities.
- The constitutional validity of the Act was challenged before the Bombay High Court on the ground that reservations breached the 50 per cent cap set by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case in 1993.
- In 2019, the Bombay High Court upheld reservation for Marathas in the State stated that reservation should not exceed 12% for education and 13% for jobs as recommended by the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (MSBCC).
- The judgement of the Bombay high Court was challenged in the Supreme Court.

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- In 2020, a three judge bench of the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the Maratha reservation and referred the issue to a five judge constitutional bench which is presently hearing the case.

### **History of Indra Sawhney Case:**

- The Supreme Court Judgement which capped reservations at 50 per cent is called Indra Sawhney case as she was the petitioner who challenged the reservations. It is also called Mandal Commission Judgement as the reservations were given to backward classes on the recommendation of the Mandal Commission. The following is the brief history of the case.
- In 1979, the Janata Party Government headed by the Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai appointed the second Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal to recommend measures for the upliftment of Socially & Educationally Backward Classes in the country.
- The Mandal Commission, in its report submitted in 1980, identified about 3743 castes as socially & educationally backward classes and **recommended for reservation of 27% in Government jobs**. Subsequent political developments led to the fall of the Janata Party Government and return of the Congress Party to the power. Hence, no action was taken on the recommendations of the report.
- In 1989, the Janata Dal Party came to power. In August 1990, Prime Minister V.P. Singh decided to implement the 27 reservation for Socially & Educationally Backward Classes as recommended by the Mandal Commission and issued a Office Memorandum.
- The implementation of 27 per cent reservation for Socially & Educationally Backward Classes led to anti-reservation agitations across the country. The reservation was also challenged in the Supreme Court challenging the implementing reservation through executive decision.
- Meanwhile, the Janatal Dal Government collapsed due to defections and Congress Government came to power. To pacify anti-reservation agitators, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, in September 1991, announced 10 per cent reservation for the economically backward sections who are not covered under any reservation.
- This reservation was challenged again in the Supreme Court by Indra Sawhney. A nine judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Venkatachaliah gave its verdict in 1993.

### **Why were Reservations Given?**

#### **1. Atonement of historical injustice:**

Caste stratification in Indian society for centuries has led to **segregation, discrimination and lack of equal opportunities** for the **socially backward and marginalised sections of the society**. These people **suffered injustice historically** and continue to suffer even now.

#### **2. Providing a Fair Share in Public Employment:**

Reservations to these sections contribute to more equal society. Due to social and educational difference between forward class and rest of the society, positions in public employment have been monopolised by the forward class.

Socially backward and marginalised sections of the society **cannot to catch up with the standards of competition set up by a well advanced society**.

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To bridge the gap in representation and provide a fair representation in public employment, reservations are necessary.

### **3. Constitutional Objectives:**

The Preamble of the Constitution as well as Directive Principles of State Policy deal with **justice and equality** which can only be attained through reservations.

The Preamble of the Constitution resolves to secure to its citizens Justice (social, economic and political) and Equality (of status and opportunity).

Social and economic justice as well as equality of opportunity and status can only be ensured through reservations for the disadvantaged and marginalised sections.

Similarly Article 38 of the Constitution (under Directive Principles of State Policy) call on the State to strive for '**minimising the inequalities of income**'.

### **4. Not a Violation of Equality under Article 16:**

Article 16 (1) and 16 (2) speak of equality of opportunities in public employment and prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion, place of birth, etc.

But, the very object of Article 16(4) is to **ensure equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and give adequate representation** to those who have been placed in a very disadvantageous position from time immemorial on account of sociological reasons.

### **Why are Reservations Opposed?**

#### **1. Sacrifice of Merit:**

**Merit is sacrificed** due to reservations. Reservations lead to **replacement of meritocracy with mediocrity**.

#### **2. Demoralisation:**

It leads to **demoralisation and discontentment** among the meritorious candidates.

#### **3. Caste System Entrenches:**

Reservations would entrench the caste system and further divide the society.

#### **4. Impact on Efficiency:**

Reservations also affect the efficiency in administration as merit is compromised.

#### **5. Against Article 16 (2) of the Constitution:**

Reservations violate the provisions of Article 16 (2) which prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste among other things.

### **Highlights of the 1993 Supreme Court Judgement:**

#### **1. 27 Per cent Reservation Upheld:**

The Supreme Court upheld the 27 per cent reservation for socially & educationally backward classes.

#### **2. Exclusion of Creamy layer:**

Creamy layer (economically well off) among the socially & educationally backward classes should be excluded from the benefits of reservation.

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A wealthy man irrespective of caste or community needs no crutches. Money more than social status and education have become the index. Therefore, even if a group or collectively is not educated or even socially backward but otherwise rich and affluent then it cannot be considered backward

### **3. 50 Per cent Cap on Reservations:**

Reservations should not breach 50 per cent of the appointments for public employment in any cadre or service in a particular year.

The percentage of reservation at the maximum of 50% is neither based on scientific data nor on any established and agreed formula. In fact, Article 16(4) itself does not limit the power of the Government in making the reservation to any maximum percentage.

50 per cent cap has been kept because a balance has to be maintained between the competing values and the rival claims and interests so as to achieve equality and freedom for all.

Equality of opportunity guaranteed by Clause (1) of Article 16 is to every citizen of the country while Clause (4) of Article 16 - conceived special provision in the interest of certain socially disadvantaged classes of society. **Both must be balanced against each other. Neither should be allowed to eclipse the other.** For the above reason, the Court fixed the reservation at 50 per cent. The Court stated that even Dr. Ambedkar himself contemplated reservation being "confined to a minority of seats"

### **4. Breach of 50 Per cent Cap:**

50 per cent cap can be breached only in **certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas population into mainstream.**

### **5. Economic Backwardness Cannot Be Criteria:**

**Economic backwardness alone** cannot be the criteria for granting reservations. Hence, the Court struck down the 10 per cent reservation for economically backward sections.

### **Why the Supreme Court Did Not Allow Reservation for Economically Backward Sections?**

#### **1. Not a Reasonable Classification:**

Any reservation resulting in curtailing right of equal opportunity under Article 16 (1) should withstand the test of reasonable classification.

Economically backward sections were not subject to historical injustice like segregation and discrimination due to caste stratification.

#### **2. Reservation Not Needed to Tackle Economic Backwardness:**

Hence, economic backwardness is also a not a rational criteria like social backwardness to provide reservations in public employment. Economic differences among forward class can be addressed through addressing their income concerns through some other measures rather than reservations under Article 16.

### **Reservations Can Be Implemented through Executive Order:**

- The Court also ruled that reservations can be implemented through Executive Order (Office memorandum).

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## **Supreme Court to Examine 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act**

- In March 2021, the Constitution Bench of Supreme Court hearing the challenge against 16 per cent reservation to Marathas decided to **examine whether the 102nd Amendment of the Constitution deprives a state legislature of the power to enact a law determining socially and educationally backward classes and to confer reservation benefits on them.**
- Maharashtra has extended 16 per cent reservation to Marathas by classifying them as social and educationally backward class.

### **102nd Amendment of the Constitution:**

- The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act, passed in 2018, had introduced Articles 338B and 342A in the Constitution.
- **Article 338B** provides for establishment National Commission for Backward Classes as a Constitutional Body. The Commission consists of a Chairman Vice-Chairman and three members.
- The **Union and every State Government** shall consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.
- **Article 342A** empowers the President to notify the socially and educationally backward communities for all States in consultation with the Governors. This has raised apprehensions about whether the power of State governments to make inclusions and exclusions from the list of backward classes has been taken away. Since there is no authoritative pronouncement on these amendments, the Supreme Court decided to examine and settle the issue.
- The 102nd amendment is also linked to Maratha reservation as reservation to them has been extended under socially and educationally backward classes. Hence, the Supreme Court wants to examine whether 102nd Amendment deprives States of the power to make laws for socially and educationally backward classes and confer benefits on them.

### **SOCIAL SECTOR**

#### **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi, a Non-Lapsable Fund, Set Up for Health Sector**

- In March 2021, the Union Government approved setting up of **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi**, a single non-lapsable reserve fund for Health from the proceeds of health and Education Cess.

#### **Details:**

#### **What is a Non Lapsable Fund?**

- The Union Government allocated funds to various schemes through regular annual budgets.
- All unspent funds which are allocated through regular annual Budgets have to be surrendered at the end of the financial year by the concerned Ministries of the Union Government.
- When a non-lapsable fund is set up, all the unspent balances at the end of the financial year are not surrendered to Finance Ministry but transferred to a **non-lapsable fund which is set up as an account under Public Account of India.**

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- Some of the Funds operating as non-lapsable funds are Central Road and Infrastructure Fund, Prarambhik Siksha Kosh, Special Railway Safety Fund, Nirbhaya Fund, etc.
  - Some non-lapsable funds get budgetary allocations from the Union Government. Example: Nirbhaya Fund.
  - However, in many cases, the Government levies a cess for allocating funds to the non-lapsable funds. Example: Central Road and Infrastructure Fund cess, Education and Health Cess, etc.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi:**

- This a non-lapsable fund a single non-lapsable reserve fund for Health from the proceeds of health and Education Cess.
- At present, the Union Government is collecting 4% Health and Education Cess.
- The share of Health in the cess would be transferred to Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi.
- In 2020-21, the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi is estimated to receive Rs.45,000 crores.

#### **Usage of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi:**

- The funds under Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi would be utilized for following schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), a health insurance scheme which provides Rs.5 lakh insurance cover to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.
- Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)
- National Health Mission
- Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) (which aims at correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable and reliable tertiary healthcare services by setting up AIIMS like institutions and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country),
- Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies, and
- Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.

#### **Nodal Agency for Operation of the Fund:**

- Administration and maintenance of the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi is entrusted to Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- In any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) would be initially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).

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## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

### ***Food Security:***

#### **NITI Aayog Recommends Revising Beneficiaries under NFSA**

- NITI Aayog, in a discussion paper, recommended reducing the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

#### **What are the Benefits under NFSA?**

- The National Food Security Act, (NFSA) 2013, subsidised food grains are provided to up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population. Overall, 67 per cent of the country's population is covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA)
- Beneficiaries are divided into Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households, who are poorest of the poor, and Priority Households.

#### **Entitlement:**

- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households are entitled to 35 kg of food grains per family per month,
- Priority households are entitled to 5 kg per person per month

#### **Issue Price:**

- Food grains under NFSA were to be made available at subsidised prices of Rs.3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains respectively for an initial period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act (July 13, 2013).
- Thereafter, prices were to be fixed by the Central Government from time to time.
- Government has decided from time to time to continue the above mentioned subsidized prices under NFSA.
- Around 80.60 crore persons are benefitting from NFSA every month.

#### **What are the Recommendations of NITI Aayog?**

- The present coverage of 75 per cent of rural population and 50 per cent of urban population should be reduced to **60 per cent (rural) and 40 per cent (urban) respectively**.
- If this recommendation is accepted, the number of beneficiaries will come down to 71.62 crore (on the basis of projected 2020 population).
- On the other hand, if the rural-urban coverage ratio remains at 75-50, then the total number of people covered will increase from the existing 81.35 crore to 89.52 crore - an increase of 8.17 crore (based on the projected 2020 population. This will result in an additional subsidy requirement of Rs 14,800 crore.

#### **Why NITI Aayog Recommended Revision?**

- Food subsidy is **becoming unmanageably large**. In 2021-22, the food subsidy bill is estimated at Rs. 2.42 lakh crores.
- The **Central Issue Prices of food grains under NFSA have not been revised** since the introduction of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013 though the Act provides for

revision of prices after three years of implementation. On the other hand, the economic cost of food grains is rising due to hike in Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) every year.

- Revision of Central Issue Prices of food grains or reduction in number of beneficiaries under NFSA would lead to **significant savings on food subsidy**.
- The amount saved on Food Subsidy **can be used for other important sectors like health and education**.

**Recommendation of High Level Committee:**

- Earlier, the Shanta Kumar committee set up by the Union Government (on Reorienting the Role and Restructuring of Food Corporation of India), in its report submitted in 2015, recommended reducing the coverage ratio from 67 per cent of overall population to 40 percent. It stated that 40 per cent limit will comfortably cover Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and some even above that.

***Ease of Living:***

**Ease of Living Rankings and Municipal Performance Index Rankings**

- 'Ease of Living Rankings 2020' and 'Municipal Performance Index Rankings 2020' were released by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in March 2021.
- The Ease of Living Index evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.
- **Bengaluru emerged as the top performer in the Million+ population category**, followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, and Surat.
- In the **Less than Million population category**, **Shimla** was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneswar, Silvassa, Kakinada, and Salem.
- 111 cities participated in the assessment exercise that was conducted in 2020.

**Top 10 Cities in the Ease of Living Index:**

Rank	Population more than One Million	Population less than One Million
1	Bengaluru	Shimla
2	Pune	Bhubaneswar
3	Ahmedabad	Silvassa
4	Chennai	Kakinada
5	Surat	Salem
6	Navi Mumbai	Vellore
7	Coimbatore	Gandhinagar
8	Vadodara	Gurugram
9	Indore	Davangere
10	Greater Mumbai	Tiruchirapalli

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### Criteria for Ease of Living Index Rankings:

- The rankings are given on the basis of performance of urban spanning across 13 categories -Education, Health, Housing and Shelter, WASH and SWM, Mobility, Safety and Security, Recreation, Level of Economic Development, Economic Opportunities, Environment, Green Spaces, and Buildings, Energy Consumption, and City Resilience, that account for 70% weightage.
- The assessment also incorporates the residents' view on the services provided by city administration through a Citizen Perception Survey which has **30 per cent weightage**

### Municipal Performance Index Rankings 2020:

- In the Million+ category, Indore has emerged as the highest ranked municipality, followed by Surat and Bhopal.
- In the Less than Million category, New Delhi Municipal Council has emerged as the leader, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.
- The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities across five verticals which comprise of 100 indicators in all totality. The five verticals are **Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance**.

### Top 10 Cities in the Municipal Performance Index:

Rank	Population more than One Million	Population less than One Million
1	Indore	NewDelhi Municipal Council
2	Surat	Tirupati
3	Bhopal	Gandhinagar
4	Pimpri Chinchwad	Karnal
5	Pune	Salem
6	Ahmedabad	Tiruppur
7	Raipur	Bilaspur
8	Greater Mumbai	Udaipur
9	Vishakapatnam	Jhansi
10	Vadodara	Tirunelveli

### Objective of Ease of Living Index Rankings:

- Cities are engines of economic growth.
- No country in the world has achieved significant economic growth without urbanisation.
- The findings from the Ease of Living Index and Municipal Performance Index are useful in following ways.
- They promotes healthy competition among cities, encouraging them to learn from their peers and advance development of their cities..

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- They also guide evidence-based policymaking. Local Governments can identify gaps, tap into potential opportunities, and increase efficiency in local governance. This ultimately improves quality of life in urban areas.

#### **Urban Population in India:**

- As per 2011 Census, 31 per cent of Indian population live in urban areas. In absolute terms, urban population is 37.7 crore.
- As per estimates, share of urban population is estimated to increase to 60 crores (40%) by 2030 and over 80 crores (50%) by 2050.

#### ***Happiness Index:***

#### **Finland Ranked 1st, India 92nd in the World Happiness Index**

- Finland was ranked 1st and India 92nd in the World Happiness Index released in March 2021.
- The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, with data from the Gallup World Poll and Lloyd's Register Foundation.

#### **Top 10 Countries in the World Happiness Index:**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	Finland
2	Iceland
3	Denmark
4	Switzerland
5	Netherlands
6	Sweden
7	Germany
8	Norway
9	New Zealand
10	Austria

#### **Criteria for Happiness Index:**

The ranking are given on the basis of following criteria.

1. levels of GDP,
2. life expectancy,
3. generosity,
4. social support,
5. freedom, and
6. level of corruption.

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The rankings takes into consideration the opinion of citizens in countries through a poll on the above criteria for giving ranks.

### **International Day of Happiness:**

- In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution recognising March 20th of every year as International Day of Happiness
- Since then, the World Happiness Day is being celebrated every year on March 20th.
- Happiness is a profoundly human and subjective experience; and yet, the scientific study of happiness has exploded. Psychologists are interested in understanding how people feel; economists want to know what people value; and neuroscientists seek to understand how the brain responds to positive rewards.

### **STATES**

#### **Haryana Implements 75 Per cent Reservation in Private Sector Jobs for Locals**

- In March 2021, Haryana has notified the State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020 which mandates 75% reservation for local people in private jobs with a monthly salary ceiling of Rs. 50,000.
- The law provides for exceptions to this reservation by allowing employers to seek permission for waivers if there are not enough qualified locals available.
- The law applies to all organisations which employ ten or more people.
- The Act is prospective i.e. only new companies which set up factories and establishments after the Act came into force must implement reservations.
- Andhra Pradesh assembly also passed a similar law in 2019. Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, etc are also considering reserving jobs for locals in private sector.

### **Analysis:**

- The implementation of reservations for locals in private sector raised many concerns.

#### **1. Hurts Ease of Doing Business:**

It hurts **Ease of Doing business** for private sector in Haryana. The state is hub of automobile industry and most of the global Multi National Companies (MNCs) have headquarters in Haryana.

#### **2. Compliance Burden:**

Compliance burden on private sector also increases. Private sector has to obtain permission from Government when they cannot find locals with suitable skills.

#### **3. Scope for Corruption Increases:**

Compliance burden also increases the possibility of corruption by Government officials.

#### **4. Impact on Investments:**

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) cautioned that the Act spells a disaster for industrial development and private investment in Haryana,

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Investors and entrepreneurs need to source the best human resources available in the country to be competitive and successful. If reservations are forced on private sector, industrialists will be forced to look beyond Haryana and this will ultimately hurt the interests of the State.

NASSCOM, an industry body of software companies, also stated that the move would impact the business friendly image of the State and be detrimental to Gurugram's growth as an IT-BPM (Information Technology-Business Process Management) hub. It stated that the growth of the IT-BPM industry was **closely intertwined with the availability of skilled talent on demand and such restrictions would be limiting for the industry.**

#### **5. Against Fundamental Rights:**

The Act also violates the fundamental right of Indians to seek a livelihood anywhere in the country.

#### **6. Undermines National Unity:**

Erecting barriers to labour mobility through reservations also undermines national unity.

#### **7. Focus Should Be on Education and Skilling:**

Job reservation for locals may not enhance their economic opportunities. Instead, raising the standard of education and skilling youth entering the job market is the durable way to increase employment opportunities.

### **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

#### ***Indo-Bangladesh:***

#### **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Visit to Bangladesh**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh from March 26 to 27, 2021 at the invitation of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to participate to join the celebrations of the **Golden Jubilee of the Independence of Bangladesh**, the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. India played a key role in the **liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971.**

#### **Brief History of Bangladesh:**

- During 1947 partition of India, Bangladesh was made part of Pakistan and called as East Pakistan. Though it was made part of Pakistan on the basis of Muslim majority population, geographically they were far apart by 1500 km separated by India. East Pakistan population is also different from Pakistan in terms of culture, ethnicity and language. While West Pakistanis were of **Punjabi and Pashtun ethnicity, East Pakistanis were Bengali speaking Muslims.** As a result, immediately after partition, a movement began by Awami League demanding autonomy for East Pakistan.
- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, co-founder of Awami League, led a series of protests for autonomy from West Pakistan (present Pakistan).
- The first General Elections to the National Assembly of Pakistan were held in December 1970. The elections were fought by two major political parties - Awami League in East Pakistan led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in West Pakistan led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

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- Voting took place in 300 constituencies, of which 162 were in East Pakistan and 138 in West Pakistan.
  - Awami League won 160 seats, all of which were in East Pakistan. The PPP won only 81 seats, all in West Pakistan. PPP secured fewer seats as it faced competition from the conservative factions of the Muslim League - the largest of which was Muslim League (Qayyum), as well as Islamist parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP).
  - However, the National Assembly was initially not inaugurated as the military dictator Yahya Khan and the PPP chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not want a party from East Pakistan heading the federal government.
  - Delay in inauguration of new Government caused **significant unrest** in East Pakistan and the situation escalated into a civil war.
  - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared East Pakistan's independence from West Pakistan on March 26, 1971. The declaration led to entry of West Pakistani military into East Pakistan which resorted to brutal crackdown leading to death of lakhs of people. The Bangladesh freedom fighters were no match militarily for the Pakistan army. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sought India's help.
  - India under then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi provided full support to resulting in the creation of a Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was imprisoned during West Pakistan military crackdown, became the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh after his release in 1972. He ruled the country from 1972 to until his assassination in 1975. The current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

#### **Role of India in Bangladesh Liberation:**

- India played a key role in the **liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971**.
- Around 3900 Indian soldiers laid down their lives in the Bangladesh liberation.

#### **Why Did India Involve in Bangladesh Liberation?**

- India involved in Bangladesh liberation for **strategic reasons**.
- First, breaking up Pakistan would **eliminate the threat** of a **two-front war** in any future confrontation as India was surrounded by West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).
- During the 1965 war with Pakistan, although the eastern front remained largely inactive, substantial military resources have to be deployed that could have been deployed to greater effect in the border with western Pakistan.
- **Second**, even if the new country in the east would not be an "**eternal ally**", it could never pose the kind of threat that 'East Pakistan' posed to Indian security by being part of Pakistan.
- **Third**, New Delhi concluded that if Bangladesh became independent without Indian help, it would bear a **serious grudge against the latter. India had strongly encouraged the Bengali movement for autonomy** through its propaganda and clandestine financial support. To allow the Pakistani military to decimate the Bengali elite would have been viewed as a serious breach of trust by the Awami League leadership, potentially turning it into India's bitter enemy.

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- **Fourth**, New Delhi also recognised that a **long drawn-out civil war in East Pakistan would radicalise** the Bengali population. This could lead to the side-lining of the pro-India Awami League and shift the leadership of the movement to left-wing pro-China parties such as the Bhashani-led National Awami Party and the Communist Party. Guerrilla warfare, inspired by Maoist ideology, would then become a likely prospect. This was not in the interests of New Delhi especially in the context of the Naxalite movement which was then active in eastern India. A Maoist-inspired guerrilla movement in East Pakistan would have provided motivation to the Naxalites which could have seriously destabilised West Bengal and the surrounding region.
  - Due to above reasons, India got involved in the Bangladesh Liberation war.
  - Prior to the commencement of war, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency, played a key role in influencing sections of the East Bengali intelligentsia to rise against the dominating West Pakistani leadership.
  - Indian Army and RAW also trained over 1 lakh East Pakistanis to lead war against West Pakistan.
  - Mukti Bahini (a Bengali term for Freedom Fighters) was formed to fight against the West Pakistan Army. Mukti Bahini also comprised regular police officers and men of the East Bengal Rifles (EBR) who rebelled against the Pakistan Army after the crackdown of March 1971.
  - On 3 December 1971, **Pakistan Air Force had carried out pre-emptive aerial strikes on 11 Indian Air Force stations**. This led to involvement of India in Bangladesh liberation war.
  - The war, which lasted 13 days, ended with the surrender of nearly 90,000 Pakistani soldiers - the largest surrender by an Army since World War-II.
  - Chief of the Pakistani forces, General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, along with 93,000 troops, surrendered to the joint forces of Indian Army and Bangladesh's Mukti Bahini.
  - General A A K Niazi signed the Instrument of Surrender on **December 16, 1971** in Dhaka, marking the **formation of East Pakistan as the new nation of Bangladesh**. Pakistan also lost half of its territory with the birth of Bangladesh.
  - On August 2, 1972, India and Pakistan signed the **Shimla Agreement** under which the former agreed to release all the 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war. (The agreement was signed by then Leaders Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.)

#### **Impact of War:**

- Around **20 to 30 lakh people were killed** in Bangladesh due to military brutalities during the civil unrest which began after West Pakistan refused to accept general election results and the December 1971 war.
- The war also came at a price for India - nearly **3,900 Indian soldiers** were killed and nearly 10,000 others injured, with many left to suffer from life-long disabilities.
- **Around 10 Million people** were displaced. Most of them reached India as **refugees**.

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### **Shimla Agreement:**

- Apart from exchange of prisoners of war and withdrawal of troops, the Shimla Agreement also provided a comprehensive blue print for good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan. The major principles of Shimla Agreement are
- a mutual commitment to the **peaceful resolution of all issues through direct bilateral approaches,**
- to build the foundations of a cooperative relationship with special focus on people to people contacts, and
- to uphold the inviolability of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, which is a most important Confidence Building Measure (CBM) between India and Pakistan, and a key to durable peace.

### **Outcome of Prime Minister's Visit to Bangladesh**

#### **1. Memorial for Indian Soldiers Who Lost Lives in Bangladesh War:**

Bangladesh has decided to establish a memorial at Ashuganj in remembrance of the supreme sacrifices made by the valiant members of the Indian Armed Forces during Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971. Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the Bangladesh for this gesture. Foundation stone for the Memorial was laid during the Prime Minister's visit.

#### **2. Gandhi Peace Prize for Gandhi Peace Prize:**

India conferred Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2020 on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in recognition of his outstanding contributions towards social, economic and political transformation of Bangladesh through non-violent and other Gandhian methods. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thanked India for this gesture.

#### **3. Visit to Hindu Religious Sites:**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also visited to two major Hindu religious sites in Bangladesh : Jeshoreshwari Kali Bari which is one of the 51 Shaktipeethas in this sub-continent, located at Satkhira District of Bangladesh and Orakandi in Gopalganj, the birthplace of Shri Harichand Thakur, the founder of the Matua sect of Hinduism.

#### **4. Scholarships for Bangladesh Students:**

India announced 1000 Shuborno Jayanti Scholarships for Bangladeshi students for pursuing education/courses in India.

#### **5. Agreements:**

Agreements were signed for cooperation in disaster management, sports, education, etc.

#### **6. Water Resources Cooperation:**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated Bangladesh's long-pending request for concluding the interim agreement on the sharing of the waters of the Teesta river.

She underscored that to alleviate the sufferings and save the livelihoods of millions of people dependent on the Teesta river basin, it is necessary that Bangladesh receives its fair share of the Teesta waters, the draft agreement of which has already been agreed upon by both Governments in January 2011. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated India's sincere

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commitment and continued efforts to conclude this agreement, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

India also requested for early finalisation of the draft of the interim agreement for sharing of water of Feni River, pending with the Bangladesh side which had been agreed upon by both sides in 2011.

### **7. Trade:**

To enhance trade between the two countries, both Prime Ministers underscored the need for removal of non-tariff barriers. Bangladesh requested for lifting the new policy of Indian Customs stipulating verification of certificates of origin issued from Bangladesh.

### **8. New Border Haats:**

3 border haats - Nalikata (India) - Saydabad (Bangladesh); Ryngku (India) - Bagan Bari (Bangladesh) and Bholagunj (India) - Bholagunj (Bangladesh) were inaugurated.

Border haats are local markets for cross border trade established on the either side of the borders. They are set up to provide trade opportunities to locally produced goods and increase income generating avenues for people living on either side of the borders. Goods are allowed to be traded duty free. Only local people with prior permission can enter and sell locally-produced goods.

### **9. Rohingyas:**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed appreciation at the generosity of Bangladesh in sheltering and providing humanitarian assistance to the 1.1 million forcibly displaced persons (Rohingyas) from the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina requested India, as a member of the United Nations Security Council, to play a strong role in the early repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas back to Myanmar. India assured its continued support in this regard.

Recognising that terrorism remains a threat to global peace and security, both sides reiterated their strong commitment to eliminating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Prime Minister Modi expressed India's appreciation for the cooperation extended by Bangladesh in security related matters.

### **Issues Between India and Bangladesh:**

#### **1. Teesta River Issue:**

- India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers.
- The Teesta is the fourth largest river shared by India and Bangladesh (The other three rivers are Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna).
- It originates in Tso Lhamo lake in Sikkim and flows through West Bengal and Bangladesh.
- Teesta is a perennial river which is rain-and-snow-fed.
- But the river is characterized by **extreme variability** in flows throughout the year.
- Over 90% of her flow occurs in rainy season from June to September while the rest 10% occurs in the remaining eight months.

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- As a lower riparian country, Bangladesh is completely dependent on India, the upper riparian country, for keeping minimum flows.
  - India has been unilaterally constructing a series of dams which have reduced the river's flows during times of drought, greatly hurting the livelihoods of thousands of farmers, fishermen and boatmen in Bangladesh.
  - Conversely, during monsoon season, Indian dams on the Teesta release excess water, causing heavy floods and again disrupting thousands of livelihoods in Bangladesh.
  - The intensity of damage is particularly more acute in Bangladesh as significant population is dependent on Teesta. Bangladesh has been demanding a fair share of the Teesta waters in lean season and guaranteed minimum flows throughout the year formalized in a treaty signed and ratified by governments of both countries.
  - Negotiations on the Teesta River have been going on for decades and a draft agreement has been prepared, however, the Teesta deal between New Delhi and Dhaka fell through in 2011 after West Bengal Government raised objections, and no concrete progress has been made since.

## **2. Trade Deficit:**

- Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia.
- Trade between both countries was worth US \$ 9.5 billion in 2019-10. But trade is highly in favour of India.
- India's exports to Bangladesh account for more than 85 percent of the total bilateral trade. Some of the major commodities exported to Bangladesh include cotton, electrical machinery, vehicles, iron and steel, plastic and related articles etc. While major imports to India include apparels and clothing, textile fabrics, paper yarn/woven fabrics of paper yarn, animal/vegetable fats and oils, fish etc.
- Bangladesh has been asking for reducing non-tariff barriers for increasing its exports to India and make bilateral trade more balanced.
- Non-tariff barriers are trade barriers that restrict the import or export of goods through means other than tariffs. Some of the non-tariff barriers to trade are import licensing, pre-shipment inspections, rules of origin, custom delayers, etc.

## **3. Bangladesh Participation in Belt and Road Initiative:**

- Bangladesh is participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious infrastructure development programme across Asia, Europe and Africa. This is a cause of concern for India as India is opposed to the BRI. One of the reasons is one of its components - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) - passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

## **4. Citizenship Amendment Act:**

- In December 2019, India passed the Citizenship Act which grants citizenship to religiously persecuted Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Christians and Sikhs from the Muslim-majority nations of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, provided they have resided in India for six years. The cut-off date is December 31, 2014. Bangladesh rejected allegations that minorities are facing persecution in the country.

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***Indo-Finland:***

**India Finland Virtual Summit**

- The virtual summit between India and Finland was held in March 2021 attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finland Prime Minister Ms. Sanna Marin.

**Highlights:**

**1. Investments:**

Both the Prime Ministers agreed that there is great potential for growth **in trade, investments and tourism**, in both directions.

Trade in Goods crossed US \$ one billion (870 million Euros) in 2019.

Trade in services was 1.2 billion Euros in 2019

India's investments in Finland have crossed **US \$ one billion**.

Over 130 Finnish companies have operations in India and 35 Indian companies, mainly in the software and consultancy sector, are working in Finland. Among them are TCS, WIPRO, Infosys, L&T Infotech, HCL Technologies and others.

**2. Energy:**

The two leaders welcomed the strengthening of the cooperation in the field of energy between the two countries and agreed to explore commercial activities, and Research and Development (R&D) cooperation in the field of **gas-based economy, biofuels, renewable energy, waste-to-energy, electricity storage and emerging fuels such as hydrogen**.

**3. Environment**

Both sides stressed the need for promoting an inclusive and fair **circular economy** for combating climate change, protecting biodiversity and achieving sustainable use of our natural resources.

**What is the circular economy?**

**A model of production and consumption**, which involves sharing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible. In this way, the **life cycle of products is extended**.

In practical terms, it implies **reducing waste to a minimum**. When a product reaches the end of its life, its materials are kept within the economy wherever possible. This approach is a departure **from the traditional, linear economic model**, which is based on a **take-make-consume-throw away pattern**.

**4. UN Reforms:**

India and Finland support balanced expansion of United Nations Security Council with both **permanent and non-permanent seats to better reflect current global political and economic realities**.

Finland supported the permanent membership of India in a reformed and expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

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## **5. Digital Partnership:**

The Prime Ministers identified digital domain as one of the most promising sectors for an intensive India-Finland partnership. The emphasis would be in three key future domains as follows:

- a. Future Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), focusing on quantum technologies and computing;
- b. Future mobile technologies, focusing on 6G research & development;
- c. Future education, focusing on digital transformation of teaching and learning.

In this partnership, the companies and universities of both countries can leverage their strengths for mutual benefit. Across all the above three domains, focus would be on utilisation of artificial intelligence, cyber security and block chain technologies.

## **6. Immigration Reform:**

Prime Minister Marin briefed about the on-going comprehensive reforms in Finland's immigration regulations which focus swift processing for applicants like experts in various domains, students and family members of employees working in Finland.

## **7. India to Benefit from Finland's Talent Boost Programme:**

Finland has launched Talent Boost programme. The programme aims to attract retain international talent and help them in immigration to Finland.

The programme has been launched due to following reasons.

Finland has identified that many Finnish companies are facing shortage of skilled people in Finland. For example, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry is currently in need of thousands more skilled workers.

To become leaders in their fields, Finnish companies, universities and innovators must be able to attract the best international talent, or those with the greatest potential. This is a precondition for the growth, internationalisation and innovation activities of Finnish companies but also for their ability to provide jobs for people in Finland.

Attracting best international talent is also crucial to drive the growth, innovation and internationalisation of Finnish companies.

The ageing of the population will also cause a growing shortage of skilled employees in the social welfare and healthcare sector.

**India is one of the main target countries under Finland's Talent Boost programme.**

## **8. People to People Contacts:**

The leaders stressed the importance of people-to-people contacts in all fields, especially in the areas of culture, education and tourism. This could be facilitated by the resumption of direct flights between India and Finland.

## **9. Indian Community in Finland:**

There are around 14,500 persons of Indian origin in Finland. (6751 NRIs and 7739 OCIs in Finland). Most live in the capital Helsinki and surrounding regions. Most Indians who settled during 1980s and 1990s were from Punjab and are engaged mostly in the restaurant business.

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In recent years, Indian professionals are being employed in high-tech companies such as Nokia, Microsoft and Indian IT companies like TCS, WIPRO, L&T, Infosys, HCL, Tech Mahindra, InfoTech, etc. in Finland.

## **SUMMITS**

### **First QUAD Leaders Summit Held Virtually**

- The first QUAD Leaders Summit was held virtually on March 12, 2021.

#### **What is QUAD?**

- It stands for cooperation among four countries - **Australia, India, Japan and United States.**
- The QUAD partnership started as **humanitarian partnership** after the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami. Later it transformed into a Security Dialogue Partnership and finally into QUAD Partnership in 2021.
- Unites States President Joe Biden, Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Suga Yoshihide and Prime Minister of Australia Mr. Scott Morrison participated the first Leaders Summit.

#### **Outcome of the QUAD Summit:**

- QUAD Leaders pledged to strengthen cooperation on the present defining challenges.

#### **Areas Identified for Cooperation:**

- Indo-Pacific Region,
- supporting Rule of Law and promoting democratic values,
- COVID-19,
- climate change,
- cyber space,
- critical technologies,
- counterterrorism,
- quality infrastructure investment, and
- humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief

#### **Details:**

Indo-Pacific Region:

- The Leaders pledged
- to ensure a free, open and ruled based order in the Indo-pacific region and beyond, and
- support for rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in the Indo-pacific Region.

#### **What is Indo-Pacific Region?**

- The term Indo-Pacific Region refers to the region between Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Though the exact geographical region is not clearly defined, it is generally spread from eastern

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Africa to Western Pacific and includes countries like India, China, Japan, Australia, ASEAN countries, USA, etc.

#### **Vaccine Alliance:**

- QUAD countries agreed to provide COVID-19 vaccines to countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- One billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines of US pharmaceutical company Johnson and Johnson would be manufactured in India at Biological E Limited, privately-held biopharmaceutical company based in Hyderabad. These would be manufactured in India as the cost of manufacturing is cheaper in India.
- USA, Japan and Australia will provide financial assistance for manufacturing vaccines. Besides Japan and Australia will also take the responsibility of cold chain storage and distribution of vaccines to Indo-pacific countries.

#### **Critical Technologies:**

- QUAD countries also agreed to cooperate in the area of critical technologies.
- Critical technologies are defined as those
  1. which are critical for national security (or)
  2. those which contribute to economic prosperity of a nation when harnessed.
- Critical technologies span many sectors like **electronics, manufacturing, information and Communication, Biotechnology, Energy, Environment, etc.**

#### **Climate Change:**

- A climate working group would be set up to strengthen climate actions globally on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology, capacity-building, and climate finance.

#### **North Korea:**

- The QUAD leaders called for complete denuclearisation of North Korea in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions.

#### **Myanmar:**

- The QUAD leaders emphasised the urgent need to restore democracy in Myanmar.

#### **Is QUAD Partnership Directed Against China?**

- There is a debate as to whether QUAD partnership is directed against China.
  1. China has emerged as a **threat to US hegemony**. Hegemony refers to dominant influence of a State over others due to its political and economic power.
  2. It has also increased its **aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific Region**. It has maritime territorial disputes with many countries in the Indian Ocean Region like **Philippines, Viet Nam, and Malaysia**. **China's aggressiveness is a threat to peace and security of Indo-Pacific Region**.
- Hence, there is strong opinion that the QUAD Partnership is aimed at checking China's aggressiveness and expansionist ambitions in the Indian Ocean Region.

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- But the QUAD Leaders did not explicitly announce the objective of QUAD as a military or economic alliance against China. Instead, the **laid out a broad agenda for practical cooperation.**
  - However, some of the areas identified for cooperation make it clear that they are determined to check the aggressiveness of China in the long-term.
  - For instance, cooperation on **infrastructure, critical technologies, and Indo-pacific ocean** is clearly aimed at checking China in the long-term.

#### **Infrastructure:**

- Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is building infrastructure projects (roads, ports, airports, telecommunication networks, power plants, oil and natural gas, etc.) in Asia, Africa and Europe. The objective of BRI is to sustain in its economic growth, improve trade and regional integration. But the BRI projects have come under criticism for lack of transparency and unsustainability. All the projects are being executed by Chinese companies. Hence, the QUAD countries in the long-term may evolve credible alternatives to BRI projects of China.

#### **Limitations of QUAD?**

- Though the unstated intention of QUAD partnership is to check China's aggressiveness, the partnership has certain limitations.
- **All the QUAD countries have strong trade and economic partnership with China.**
- **For Japan and Australia, China remains the biggest trading partner. For USA, China is the second biggest trading partner.**
- **Japan and Australia** are also part of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) along with China. The trade relationship between Australia, Japan and Russia will only further grow with RCEP due to reduced or nil duties on most of the traded items.
- (RCEP is a Free Trade Agreement between 10 Member-ASEAN plus China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.)
- India and China are part of **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Group and **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).**

#### **How Does India Perceive QUAD?**

- At the QUAD Leaders Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described QUAD
- as a **force for global good**, (rather than a military coalition against China), and
- announced that India will work together other QUAD countries for **promoting a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.**

#### **Reaction of China to QUAD Summit:**

- China QUAD as the "Asian NATO" and the harbinger of a "new Cold War".

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## **INTERNATIONAL POLITY**

### ***China:***

#### **European Union Imposes Sanctions on Chinese Officials for Human Rights Violations**

- On March 22, 2021, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials accused of responsibility for serious human rights violations against **Uyghur Muslims minorities in China's Xinjiang province**.
- Following EU, United States, Britain, and Canada also imposed sanctions.
- The U.S. sanctioned two officials for serious human rights abuses on **Uyghur Muslims minorities. The sanctions were imposed under U.S. Global Magnitsky Act** (full name of the act is U.S. Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act).
- The U.S. also sanctioned an additional 24 Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing's ongoing crackdown on political freedoms in the semi-autonomous city, including a decision to overhaul Hong Kong's electoral system.

#### **What Does EU Sanctions Involve?**

- The sanctions involve a freeze on assets of the four Chinese officials in the EU, and
- a ban on them travelling in the bloc.
- European citizens and companies are not permitted to provide them with financial assistance.
- The sanctions of United States, Britain, and Canada also involve same above measures i.e. ban on assets in their countries, if any, travel ban into their countries and prohibition of any financial dealings by their citizens and companies.

#### **China's Response:**

- China denied all charges of human rights abuses and stated the EU move severely undermines China-EU relations.
- It states that EU measures harm China's sovereignty and interests and were not based on facts.
- It stated that it would sanction 10 individuals and four entities on the EU side and would take retaliatory sanctions on Britain, Canada and United States.

#### **Background:**

#### **About Uyghurs:**

- The Uyghurs Turkic-speaking Muslims.
- There are about 12 million Uyghurs, who are mostly Muslim, living in north-western China in Xinjiang, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The region borders Kazakhstan
- Culturally and ethnically, they are close to Central Asian nations. Xinjiang borders central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,
- They make up around half of the Xinjiang population which is 24 lakhs.

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- Recent decades saw a mass migration of Han Chinese (China's ethnic majority) to Xinjiang. Uyghurs feel their culture and livelihoods are under threat due to Han Chinese.
  - In the early 20th Century, the Uyghurs briefly declared independence, but the region was brought under the complete control of China's new Communist government in 1949.

### **Accusations on China:**

#### **1. Human Rights Violations:**

Uyghurs are being arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned

China has **detained more than a million Uyghurs** in detention camps in Xinjiang.

China has been accused torture, rape, and genocide of Uyghurs. Genocide means targeted actions aimed at the destruction of particular groups of people.

#### **2. Mass Surveillance:**

China has been adopting mass surveillance tools to track the movements of Uyghurs.

Xinjiang is now covered by an extensive network of surveillance, including police, checkpoints, and cameras that scan everything from number plates to individual faces.

#### **3. Forced Labour:**

They are being used as a forced labour to work in cotton fields (an investigation by BBC confirmed this).

#### **4. Mass Sterilisation:**

China has been forcibly mass sterilising Uighur women to suppress the population.

Uighur children are also separated from their families and put in detention camps.

### **When Did China Start Crackdown on Uyghurs?**

- Anti-Han and separatist sentiment rose in Xinjiang from the 1990s, flaring into violence.
- In 2009 some 200 people died in clashes in Xinjiang due to violence.
- As a result, China launched a crackdown on Uyghurs to suppress dissent.

### **What is China's Version on Uyghur?**

- China denies running detention camps for Uyghur.
- It states that there are only "re-education" facilities for combating terrorism.
- It insists that Uighur militants are waging a violent campaign for an independent state by plotting bombings, sabotage and through civic unrest.
- **It says that it has only launched crackdown on Uyghurs to prevent terrorism and root out Islamist extremism and the camps are an effective tool for re-educating inmates in its fight against terrorism.**

### **Additional Information:**

#### **Definition of Genocide:**

- According to United Nations Convention on genocide, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. It includes the following actions.

- 
- Killing members of the group;
  - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
  - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
  - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
  - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.



### ***Suez Canal:***

#### **Suez Canal Blockage**

- Ever Given, a container ship en route from China to Netherlands, was grounded in the Suez canal for 5 days in March 2021. Heavy winds forced the ship away from its normal course of navigation which changed its direction and ran aground on March 23, 2021 leading to the blockage of Suez canal.
- The grounding of the ship blocked movement of vessels along the Suez canal, a vital international shipping route.
- The 400 metre long ship was refloated after 5 days by removing sand and silt under the Ship and moving it into water with the help of tugboats.

(Tugboats are small secondary but powerful boats which are used for towing or pushing a ship vessel towards port. They are also used as salvage (rescue) boats and ice breakers.)

#### **About Suez Canal:**

- It is a 193 km long man-made canal. It is 24 metres deep and 205 metres wide.
- The canal is in Egypt, connecting **Mediterranean Sea** and **Red Sea**.
- It also connects two important port cities of Egypt - **Port Said** on the **Mediterranean Sea** with the **Port of Suez** on the **Red Sea**

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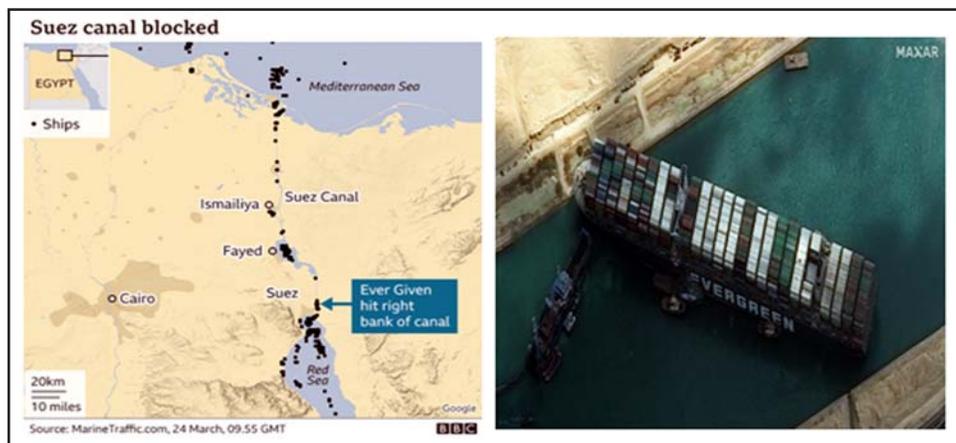
### Significance of Suez Canal:

- The Suez canal is a vital international shipping passage.
- The Suez canal passage enables more direct shipping between Europe and Asia, eliminating the need to circumnavigate Africa. It **reduces distance by up to 7,000 km.**
- 12 per cent of annual global trade passes through Suez canal.
- 20,000 ships pass through it yearly transporting oil and gas, coal, ores, metals, agriculture produce, etc.

### Revenues to Egypt from the Suez Canal:

- Egypt received \$5.61 billion in revenue from canal tolls in 2020.

### Suez Canal



### Construction of Suez Canal:

- In 1858, Universal Suez Ship Canal Company, a French company, signed an agreement with Ottoman Governor Egypt to construct the Suez canal.
- The company was to operate the canal for 99 years, after which rights would be handed to the Egypt
- Construction began in 1859 and took 10 years to complete. The canal was opened for navigation in 1869.
- In 1875, Great Britain became the largest shareholder in the Suez Ship Canal Company after it brought the shares of Ottoman Governor Egypt.
- Seven years later, in 1882, Britain invaded Egypt and brought it under its occupation. The Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 made Egypt virtually independent, but Britain reserved rights for the protection of the canal.
- Britain continued to control the Suez Canal, along with France. This annoyed Egyptians, who felt that this valuable asset in their own country should belong to them.
- In 1954, facing pressure from Egyptian nationalists, the two countries signed a seven-year treaty that led to the withdrawal of British troops.

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- However, in 1956, Egyptian President Abdul Nasser took control of the canal. One major reason was USA and Britain which promised US \$ 70 million aid for building a new High Dam at Aswan in Egypt on the Nile river backed off later due to Egypt's growing close relationship with Soviet Russia.
  - Egyptian President Abdul Nasser nationalised Suez Canal. He announced that tolls collected from ships moving through the canal would be used to build Aswan High Dam.
  - Britain and France invaded Egypt and seized back control of the canal. However, the USA and other nations severely criticised Britain and France and pressured them into pulling out.

### ***Bangladesh:***

#### **UN CDP Recommends Graduation of Bangladesh from Least Developed Country (LDC) Category**

- In March 2021, the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) recommended graduation of **Bangladesh, Laos and Nepal** from the category of Least Developed Country (LDC) as they fulfilled the eligibility criteria for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) to Developing Country

### **Background:**

#### **What are Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?**

- The least developed country (LDC) category was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1971 as a result of the international community's acknowledgment that special support measures were needed to assist the least developed among the developing countries.
- Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are highly disadvantaged and face many impediments in their development process due to **structural, historical and also geographical reasons.**
- These countries are also characterised by their vulnerability to external economic shocks, natural and man-made disasters and communicable diseases. As such, the LDCs are in need of the highest degree of attention from the international community.
- LDCs account for
- 13 percent of the world population (880 million people), but
- **less than 2 percent of world GDP, and**
- only around **1 percent of world trade.**
- **How Many Least Developed Countries Are There in the World?**
- There are currently **46 countries** on the list of Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- The **list of LDCs is reviewed every three years** by the United Nations Committee for Development (CDP).
- Four United Nations Conferences on the LDCs were held in: 1981, 1990, 2001 and 2011. The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries adopted the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 - called Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA).

#### **What is the Criteria for Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?**

- Countries are included and dropped (graduated) from LDC category on the basis of defined inclusion or graduation thresholds of the criteria.

- 
- The criteria is
  - Per capita income,
  - Human assets (Health and Education), and
  - Economic and Environmental vulnerability.

*Further details about the criteria are given in additional information.*

#### **Inclusion into LDC List:**

- A country is included in LDC category if it satisfies the following three criteria
- Per capita income: \$ 1,018
- Human Assets Index: a score of 60 or below
- Economic and Environmental vulnerability Index: 36 or above

#### **Graduation of a Country from LDC List:**

- A country graduated from the LDC category if it satisfies any two of the following three criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews.
- Per capita income: \$ 1, 222 or above
- Human Assets Index: 66 are above
- Economic and Environmental vulnerability Index: 32 or below
- Alternatively, a country graduates from LDC if its per capita is at least twice the graduation threshold in two consecutive triennial reviews. This is called income-only criterion.
- The present income only criteria is \$ 2, 444.
- The **graduation thresholds are set higher than the thresholds for inclusion**. This is to ensure that graduation is sustainable.
- The process of graduation also takes place over a period of years so that graduating countries have time to plan for a smooth transition out of the category.
- The graduation from the LDC category is not equivalent to becoming a middle-income country or to graduation from the concessional windows of multilateral development banks or from eligibility to official development assistance extended by developed countries.

#### **Graduation of Bangladesh, Nepal and Laos:**

- Generally, countries which fulfil the graduation criteria get 3 years time to complete the graduation to ensure that the transition is smooth.
- Due to COVID-19 Pandemic, these three countries have been given another two year time. So these countries get 5 years transition time i.e. up to 2026.

#### **Benefits of Least Developed Country (LDC) Status:**

##### **1. International Trade:**

LDCs get preferential market access for their goods. They can export goods without any duties and quotas (duty free, quota free) or at preferential rates (low duties when compared with exports from other countries). Their exports are also not subject to stringent rules of origin.

## 2. Development Cooperation:

A large share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by developed countries in the form of grants and soft loans (loans at concessional interest rates) are given to Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Developed countries have committed to provide the equivalent of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) in the form of ODA to LDCs.

Several organisations of the United Nations system and international financial institutions like World Bank give particular attention to the development challenges of LDCs and have developed specific initiatives in favour of LDCs.

## 3. Technical Assistance:

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) also conducts internship programmes to LDCs to enable them to benefit from international trade opportunities.

### Consequences of Graduation from LDC Status:

Graduation from LDC has double edged impact on countries.

- They lose the benefits they get by being as Least Developing Countries (LDCs) preferential market access, technical assistance, etc.
- On the other hand, graduating from LDC status would enhance confidence of foreign investors, improve credit rating and might lead to higher Foreign Direct Investment.

### Additional Information:

#### Criteria for Least Developed Countries Identification:

Per capita Income		Human Assets Index	Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index	
	Health Index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Under Five Mortality</li> <li>2. Maternal Mortality Ratio</li> <li>3. Prevalence of Stunting</li> </ol>	Economic Vulnerability Index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Hunting,</li> <li>2. Remote and Landlockedness</li> <li>3. Merchandise Export concentration</li> </ol>
	Education Index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gross Secondary School Enrolment Ratio</li> <li>2. Adult Literacy</li> <li>3. Gender Parity Index for Gross Secondary Enrolment</li> </ol>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Instability of Exports of Goods &amp; services</li> </ol>
			Environmental Vulnerability Index	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Share of population in low elevated coastal zones</li> <li>2. Instability of agriculture production</li> <li>3. Instability of agriculture production</li> <li>4. Victims of Disasters</li> </ol>

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**Present List of Least Developed Countries:**

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan                          | 24. Madagascar            |
| 2. Angola                               | 25. Malawi                |
| 3. Bangladesh                           | 26. Mali                  |
| 4. Benin                                | 27. Mauritania            |
| 5. Bhutan                               | 28. Mozambique            |
| 6. Burkina Faso                         | 29. Myanmar               |
| 7. Burundi                              | 30. Nepal                 |
| 8. Cambodia                             | 31. Niger                 |
| 9. Central African Republic             | 32. Rwanda                |
| 10. Chad                                | 33. Sao Tome and Principe |
| 11. Comoros                             | 34. Senegal               |
| 12. Democratic Republic<br>of the Congo | 35. Sierra Leone          |
| 13. Djibouti                            | 36. Solomon Islands       |
| 14. Eritrea                             | 37. Somalia               |
| 15. Ethiopia                            | 38. South Sudan           |
| 16. Gambia                              | 39. Sudan                 |
| 17. Guinea                              | 40. Timor-Leste           |
| 18. Guinea-Bissau                       | 41. Togo                  |
| 19. Haiti                               | 42. Tuvalu                |
| 20. Kiribati                            | 43. Tanzania              |
| 21. Laos                                | 44. Uganda                |
| 22. Lesotho                             | 45. Yemen                 |
| 23. Liberia                             | 46. Zambia                |

**About Committee for Development Policy (CDP) and Its Working:**

- It consists of 24 members are nominated in their personal capacity by the United Nations Secretary-General and are appointed by UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for a period of three years.
- Every three years, the CDP reviews the least developed country (LDC) category and recommends to ECOSOC which countries should be included into or graduated from the list.
- ECOSOC endorses the recommendations of the CDP.

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- The United Nations General Assembly takes note of ECOSOC endorsement.
  - The CDP also monitors countries that are graduating or have graduated from the LDC list and alerts ECOSOC of any sign of deterioration of their development progress.

***France:***

**France Launches First Military Exercises in Space Codenamed "AsterX"**

- France conducted its first military exercise in space in March 2021. France is the first country in Europe to conduct such exercise in space.
- The objective is to evaluate its ability to defend its satellites and other defence equipment from an attack.
- France has created new Space Command in 2019 to ensure its space security.
- The space exercise has been codenamed "AsterX" in memory of the first French satellite from 1965.

**France Increasing Investments in Space Programmes:**

- France is increasing investments in the space programme to catch up with countries like China, Russia and the United States.
- It is investing 4.3 billion euros (\$5 billion) over the 2019-2025 to **develop anti-satellite laser weapons and new surveillance capabilities.**
- In 2018, France accused Russia of trying to intercept transmissions from a Franco-Italian satellite which is used by both Italian and French armies for secure communications.
- The Russian satellite 'Olymp-K' allegedly approached the Athena-Fidus satellite. France called it "an act of espionage."

***Russia:***

**Russia Launches Its First Arctic Monitoring Satellite Arktika-M**

- On March 1, 2021, Russia launched its first Arctic monitoring satellite Arktika-M.
- Objective is to monitor the **climate** and **environment** in the Arctic.
- The satellite was launched from Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome by a Soyuz rocket.
- Russia plans to send up a second satellite to the Arctic in 2023. These two satellites combined will offer **round-the-clock, all-weather monitoring** of the Arctic Ocean.
- The Arctic region has warmed more than twice as fast as the global average over the last three decades.
- Arctic **region** holds **huge oil and natural gas** reserves. Russia United States, Canada, Norway are keen on exploiting these reserves in future.

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## **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

### **SPACE:**

#### ***NISAR Mission:***

#### **Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) for NISAR Mission Developed By ISRO**

- In March 2021, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) completed the development of Synthetic Aperture Radar for the **NISAR Mission**. NISAR stands for NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar.

#### **What is Synthetic Aperture Radar?**

- A Synthetic Aperture Radar is radar which is capable of producing high resolution images.
- It works on a sophisticated information-processing technique to produce extremely high-resolution images.
- It penetrates clouds and darkness and collects data day and night in any weather.
- The Synthetic Aperture Radar imaging swath is greater than 150 miles (240 kilometers), which allows it to image the entire Earth in 12 days.

#### **About NISAR Mission:**

- It is a **joint earth observation satellite mission** between NASA and Indian space agency **ISRO**.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**) is a U.S. Space agency.
- NISAR will have **two radar frequencies: L band and S band**.

#### **What are L band and S band Frequencies?**

- The radio spectrum used for communication between earth and a satellite is grouped into bands depending on their wavelengths.

#### **L band:**

- L band waves operate in the 1 to 2 GHz (Giga Hertz).
- L band waves are used for Global Positioning System (GPS) services, satellite phones. These can penetrate clouds, fog rain and vegetation (excepting dense vegetation).

#### **S band :**

- S band operates in the 2 to 4 GHz (Giga Hertz).
- It is used by weather radars, ship radars, and some communication satellites. They facilitate real-time data on weather conditions.

#### **ISRO Contribution to NISAR Mission:**

- **S-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)**
- Spacecraft bus,
- Launch vehicle and associated launch services.

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In March 2021, the S-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) was shipped from the Space Applications Centre at Ahmedabad in Gujarat to the jet propulsion laboratory (JPL) at Pasadena in Los Angeles County, California, to be integrated with NASA's L-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) payload.

**NASA Contribution to NISAR Mission:**

- **L-band Synthetic Aperture Radar,**
- a high-rate communication subsystem for science data,
- Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers,
- A solid-state recorder, and
- Payload data subsystem.

**Applications of NISAR Mission:**

- The L&S band microwave data obtained from this satellite will be useful for a variety of applications in the following areas.
- Agriculture,
- Floods,
- Glaciers,
- Landslides,
- Coastal erosion,
- Surface deformation
- Volcanic eruptions
- Earthquakes.
- For instance, They can track subtle changes in the Earth's surface, spot warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions, and track the rate at which ice sheets are melting.
- The radars can assess soil moisture, monitor floods and oil slicks; coastal erosion; coastline changes; surface deformation.
- The images transmitted by radars will be detailed enough to show local changes and broad enough to measure regional trends.
- As the mission continues for years, the data will allow for **better understanding of the causes and consequences of land surface changes**, increasing our ability to manage resources and prepare for and cope with global change.

**Uniqueness of NISAR Mission:**

- NISAR is the **first satellite mission to collect radar data in two bandwidth regions:** the L-band and the S-band.
- It measures changes in the earth's surface even at **less than a centimetre.**

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**Launch of NISAR:**

- NISAR will be launched in 2022 through a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, India.

**Lifespan of NISAR:**

- L band radar will operate for a minimum of 3 years. It will be used for global science objectives such as monitoring earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, coastal erosion, etc.
- S band radar will operate for a minimum of 5 years. It will be used over specified target areas in India and the Southern Ocean.
- All NISAR science data, L-band and S-band, will be freely available and open to the public.

**Ramjet Technology:****Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) Technology**

- On March 5, 2021, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted another test of the Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range, Orissa.

**Significance:**

- This technology is crucial for the indigenous development of long range air-to-air missiles.
- It enables greater range and higher speed of missiles.

**What is Ramjet?**

- A ramjet is an air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion.
- Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites. Since air is used from atmosphere is used for combustion, the amount of fuel to be carried by the engine is reduced. This reduces the weight of the engine and allows faster movement and longer distances.
- A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.
- Ramjets work most efficiently at supersonic speeds around Mach 3 (three times the speed of sound) and can operate up to speeds of Mach 6.

**ENVIRONMENT:****African Cheetah to Be Introduced in India**

- The Supreme Court of India allowed introduction of African Cheetah at a suitable wildlife habitat in India in January 2021.
- Following this, expert wildlife teams from Namibia and South Africa visited India in March 2021 to train Indian forest officers and wildlife experts on handling, breeding, rehabilitation, medical treatment and conservation of the animals.
- Namibia and South Africa have the highest cheetah populations in the world. Namibia has the largest number of individuals of any country, earning it the nickname, "The Cheetah Capital of the World."

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### Background:

- The cheetah is the world's fastest land mammal. It can reach speed of 110 km in just 3 seconds. It catches its prey in less than 30 seconds.
- The cheetah serves a special role in its ecosystem. They keep prey species healthy by killing the weak and old individuals. They also act as a population check which helps plants-life by preventing overgrazing. Without predators like the cheetah, the grassland ecosystem would be threatened and desertification would be accelerated.
- **India's** Asiatic Cheetah was **officially declared extinct** from India in 1952 and is considered the only large mammal that has gone extinct since the country's independence.
- **Overhunting** is a major factor for cheetah going extinct. **Narrowing of prey base** due to acquiring and parcelling off grasslands for agriculture also led to its decline
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** has been planning to introduce **African Cheetah** in Indian wildlife habitats since 2009. It planned to introduce the Cheetah in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh
- But, the plan was stalled by Supreme Court as already there was a plan to reintroduce lions into the Kuno National Park and introduction of Cheetahs into the same park would lead to lack of sufficient prey needed for their survival. It stated that priority has to be given for preservation of native species i.e. lion which was being reintroduced in Kuno National Park.
- However, in January 2021, the Supreme Court on a repeated plea by National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) gave approval introduction of African Cheetah after setting some conditions.
- It set up a three-member committee, comprising former director Wildlife Institute of India Ranjit Singh, Director General of Wildlife Institute of India Dhananjay Mohan, and DIG, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests to 'guide' the NTCA.
- It directed the committee to file a progress report every four months.
- The Supreme Court made it clear that a proper survey should be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs. Every effort should be taken to ensure that they adapt to the Indian conditions. The committee would help, advice and monitor the NTCA on these issues. The action of the introduction of the animal would be left to the NTCA's discretion.

### Six Sites Identified:

- Six sites have been assessed by the Expert Committee for introduction of African Cheetah as one site is not enough for a healthy population of cheetahs in the country.
- These are Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve and Shergarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Kuno National Park, Madhav National Park and Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.
- Of these, an expert committee has identified Kuno National Park as being ready for the relocation. The site has been monitored since 2006 as it had also been identified for relocating the Asiatic Lion. Both animals share the same habitat - **semi-arid grasslands** that stretch across Gujarat-Rajasthan-Madhya Pradesh.
- The larger idea is to relocate **35-40 cheetahs** across the **six identified sites**.

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- The upgradation of sites requires sizable investments to relocate villages, control grazing of goats and cattle, and **augment prey for the cheetah through translocation of blackbuck, chital, chinkara, wild boar, etc.**
  - In Kuno National Park, because of the lion relocation project, the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department had already relocated a number of villages and declared it a 'national park', which led to "remarkable recovery in its habitat, prey abundance and reduction of human impacts.
  - The Park spans across 261 square kilometres and is a part of the Kuno wildlife sanctuary with an area of 1,235 square kilometres. It has a healthy population of chital, sambar, nilgai, wild pig, chinkara. Currently, the **leopard and striped hyena** are the only larger carnivores within the National Park.

#### **Significance of Cheetah Conservation:**

- Reintroduction of large carnivores have increasingly been recognised as a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions.
- As a flagship species, the conservation of the cheetah will contribute **to the revival grasslands and its biomes and habitat**, much like Project Tiger has done for forests and all the species that have seen their numbers go up.
- While there is a lot of emphasis on preservation of forests, grasslands are a hugely neglected habitat in our country. And yet, the largest number of Schedule I protected animals under the Wildlife Protection Act reside in these grasslands. Endangered species like the caracal will fall under the flagship cheetah project and will be conserved in turn.

(Grassland are found in areas where there is not enough rainfall. Grasslands lie between deserts and forests.)

#### **Cheetah**



#### **Vehicle Scrapping Policy**

- Vehicle scrapping policy was announced by the Union Government on March 18, 2021. It is also called Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernisation Program.

#### **What is the Problem with Old Vehicles?**

- They pollute the environment. Their emissions are 10 to 12 times more than fit vehicles.
- Carbon dioxide, Carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxides, particulate matter are some of the pollutants released by vehicles. These pollutants cause respiratory problems and also contribute to global warming as they trap heat.

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- Old vehicles also pose a **risk to road safety**.

### **What are the Objectives of Vehicle Scrapping Policy?**

- The major objectives of the policy are to
- reduce vehicular air pollution
- improve road and vehicular safety by reducing the number of old and defective vehicles, and
- formalise the currently informal vehicle scrapping industry.

### **Number of Old Vehicles in India:**

- India has
- 51 lakh Light Motor Vehicles which are older than 20 years, and
- 34 lakh Light Motor Vehicles which are older than 15 years.
- In addition, there are around 17 lakh Medium and Heavy Commercial Vehicles are older than 15 years without valid fitness certificate.

### **Criteria for scrapping Vehicles:**

- Vehicle scrapping will be based on
- the fitness of vehicles through Automated Fitness Centres in case of commercial vehicles, and
- Non-Renewal of Registration in case of private vehicles.
- A Vehicle failing the fitness test or failing to get a renewal of its registration certificate may be declared as **End of Life Vehicle**.

### **How is Vehicle Fitness Determined?**

- Vehicle fitness will be determined based on emission tests, braking, safety equipment are as per the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989.

### **International Best Practices:**

- The criteria has been adapted from international best practices after a comparative study of standards from various countries like Germany, UK, USA and Japan.

### **Commercial Vehicles:**

- Commercial vehicles be de-registered after 15 years in case of failure to get the fitness certificate.
- If they pass the fitness certificate, they will be given registration for some more years. But as a disincentive measure, increased fees for fitness certificate and fitness test would be made applicable for commercial vehicles 15 year onwards from the date of initial registration.

### **Personal Vehicles:**

- Private Vehicles would be de-registered after 20 years if found unfit or in case of a failure to renew registration certificate.
- If private vehicles pass the fitness test after 20 years, they will be given registration for some more years. But, as a disincentive measure, increased re-registration fees will be applicable for private vehicles 15 year onwards from the date of initial registration.

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### **Scrapping of Government Vehicles:**

- All vehicles of the Central Government, State Government, Municipal Corporation, Panchayats, State Transport Undertakings, Public Sector Undertakings and autonomous bodies with the Union and State Governments may be de-registered and scrapped after 15 years from the date of registration.

### **Incentives for Promoting Vehicle Scrapping:**

The following incentives would be provided to owners of old vehicles to scrap old and unfit vehicles through registered scrapping centres.

1. Scrap Value for the old vehicle would be given by the scrapping centre. This would be approximately 4-6% of ex-showroom price of a new vehicle.
2. The state governments may offer a road- tax rebate of up to 25% for personal vehicles and up to 15% for commercial vehicles
3. The vehicle manufacturers may also provide a discount of 5% on purchase of new vehicle against the scrapping certificate.
4. In addition, the registration fees may also be waived by State Governments for purchase of new vehicle against the scrapping certificate.

### **Response of Automobile Industry:**

- Automobile industry welcomed the vehicle scrapping policy. It has been demanding such policy for long.
- It stated that the policy benefits all the stakeholders (vehicle owners, automobile manufactures and society at large) as it

- 1. increases demand for new automobiles,**
- 2. creates new employment in MSMES (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) due to setting up scrapping centres and**
- 3. reduce operation cost for vehicle owners,**
- 4. improves safety, and**
- 5. supports the environment** by encouraging vehicle owners to exchange their older vehicles for new ones, meeting current emissions norms.

### **Agreements Signed for Implementation of National Clean Air Programme in 132 Cities**

- On March 26, 2021, State Pollution Control Boards and representatives of 132 cities signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the execution of planned actions in time bound manner under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

### **What is Air Pollution?**

- It refers to presence of substances in air which are harmful to the health of humans.

### **What are the Major Air Pollutants?**

- There are 12 air pollutants which are identified as harmful for human health.
- Sulphur Dioxide,
- Nitrogen Dioxide,

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- Suspended Particulate Matter (called PM10),
  - Fine Particulate Matter (called PM2.5),
  - Ozone,
  - Lead,
  - Carbon monoxide,
  - Ammonia
  - Benzene
  - Benzo (a) pyrene
  - Arsenic
  - Nickle.

#### **Particulate Matter:**

- PM10 are inhalable coarse particles, with a diameter between 2.5 and 10 micrometers ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) and PM2.5 are fine particles with a diameter of 2.5  $\mu\text{m}$  or less. Particulates are formed by transformation of gaseous emissions such as oxides of sulphur, oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds.
- Particulates are the deadliest form of air pollutants due to their ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and blood streams unfiltered. The smaller PM2.5 are particularly deadly as it can penetrate deep into the lungs

#### **What are the Causes of Air Pollution?**

Air pollution emission issues are associated with many sectors. Some of them are

- power,
- transport,
- industry,
- construction, and
- agriculture

#### **Diseases Caused by Air Pollution:**

- The most common diseases caused by air pollution are **respiratory infections, asthma, lung cancer, heart diseases, etc.**

#### **What is National Clean Air Programme?**

- The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is a national level strategy to tackle air pollution problem across the country.
- It targets to achieve 20% to 30% reduction in air pollution levels by 2024 (with 2019 as base year).
- Initially, NCAP would be a five year action plan. The programme may be further extended to 20-25 years in the long-term after a mid-term review of the outcomes. This is because international experiences and national studies indicate that significant outcome in terms of air pollution initiatives are visible only in the long-term
- For reduction of air pollution, the NCAP recommends a set of measures aimed at prevention, control and abatement.

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### **1. Extensive Plantation Drive:**

Trees mitigate air pollution primarily by absorbing pollutants via leaf stomata (pores on the outer "skin" layers of the leaf)

One of the efficient and effective options for preventing air pollution is planting trees along roads and highways and at intersecting road junctions. They clean the air originating from the point source pollution. Tree cover traps dust and also assimilates air pollutants.

Hence, Plantation initiatives should be under at pollution hot spots in the cities/towns as part of Green India Mission.

City-specific plantation plans should be executed.

### **2. Technology Support:**

Clean Technologies with potential for air pollution prevention and mitigation shall be supported for Research and Development (R&D), pilot scale demonstration and field scale implementation

### **3. Pollution from Road Dust and C&D:**

Road dust and dust arising from construction and demolition (C&D) are the major contributors to the pollution in Indian cities.

Spraying of water twice per day (before peak hours of traffic) is very effective in reducing airborne dust load. Grassing of open spaces with native grasses also prevent dust pollution and clean air.

Manual sweeping by brooms blows more dust particles in air. Hence, mechanical sweepers should be introduced in cities.

City-specific plans need to evaluate the options of mechanical sweeping, greening, and landscaping of the major arterial roads, etc.

### **4. Controlling Emissions from Power Plants:**

The major emissions from power plants are particulate matter, Sulfur Oxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Mercury.

The Thermal Power Plants shall be steadily replaced with power plants using natural gas and other cleaner fuels.

To reduce the dependence on thermal power plants, the Government is implementing National Solar Mission. India aims to generate 175 GW electricity from renewable sources of energy by 2022, of which, 100 GW will be from solar power.

### **5. Transport Sector Emissions:**

Vehicles are a major source of pollution. They emit nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, etc. Hence, vehicle emission standards were introduced in 2000.

Progressively stringent norms have been rolled out since then.

Since October 2010, Bharat Stage (BS) III norms have been enforced across the country. In the 13 major cities, Bharat Stage IV emission norms have been in place since April 2010 and it is enforced for whole country from April 2017. In 2016, the Indian government announced that the country would skip the BS-V norms altogether and adopt BS-VI norms by 2020 to control air pollution.

Sulphur content in petrol and diesel is expected to reduce from existing 50 ppm (parts per million) in BSIV vehicles to 10 ppm in BSVI vehicles.

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In addition to the BS norms, various other measures have been taken up by the government for control and management of vehicular emission. These measures include emphasis on cleaner / alternate gaseous fuel like CNG, LPG, etc., ethanol blending in petrol in order to reduce vehicle exhaust emissions, promotion of public transport, Pollution under Control (PUC) certificate, lane discipline, vehicle maintenance, etc.

National Clean Air Programme recommended

- a) Stringent implementation of BS VI norms all over India
- b) Stringent implementation of PUC certificate through regular inspection and monitoring
- c) Formulation of a national, state, and city-specific action plan for e-mobility (transport through electric vehicles)

### **Ban on Single Use Plastics**

- On March 12, 2021, the Environment Ministry unveiled draft Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021 to ban several categories of single-use plastic items.
- The ban would be implemented in three stages.
- Single-use plastics are goods that are made primarily from petrochemicals and are meant to be disposed of right after use-often.
- Single-use plastics are most commonly used for packaging and service ware, such as bottles, wrappers, straws, and bags.
- Since plastic is cheap, plastic is used extensively.
- Of all the plastic we use, 40% is used just once.

#### **Environmental Impacts of Plastic:**

- Plastics take many years to decompose.
- When exposed to Sun, they slowly break down into smaller pieces of plastic called microplastics. These end up in oceans and affect marine ecosystem.
- If plastic bags are burned, they release a toxic substance into the air causing air pollution.

#### **Draft Rules:**

- The draft rules on single use plastic are proposed to be implemented in three stages.
- The **first set of rules** has been proposed for plastic bags with effect from September 30, 2021. Under these rules, each sheet of non-woven plastic carry bag shall not be less than 240 microns in thickness.
- A carry bag made of virgin or recycled plastic shall not be less than 120 microns, with effect from the same date.
- The **second stage** will come into effect from January 1, 2022. Six categories of single-use plastic - ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocool) for decoration - will be banned for sale, use, manufacture, stocking, import and distribution.
- In the **third stage** - from July 1, 2022 - the list of banned items will grow.

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- It will include single-use plastic plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping/packing films around sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packets, plastic/PVC banners less than 100 micron and stirrers.

**Enforcement:**

- Local bodies and state pollution control boards will ensure implementation and enforcement of these rules.

**African Forest Elephant Critically Endangered and African Savanna Elephant Endangered**

- In March 2021, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its 'Red List' listed
- **African forest elephant as Critically Endangered, and**
- **African Savanna elephant as Endangered.**
- Till now both the elephants were treated as single species and listed as vulnerable.
- But the IUCN assessed the two species separately due to emergence of new genetic evidence.
- African Forest elephants occur in the tropical forests of Central Africa and in a range of habitats in West Africa.
- They rarely overlap with the range of the African savanna elephant, which prefers open country and is found in a variety of habitats in Sub-Saharan Africa including grasslands and deserts.
- The African forest elephant, which has a more restricted natural distribution, is thought to occupy only a quarter of its historic range today, with the largest remaining populations found in **Gabon and the Republic of the Congo.**

**Decline in Elephants:**

- Both species suffered sharp declines since 2008 due to
- a significant increase in poaching for ivory, and
- shrinking habitat as their habitats are converted into agriculture lands.
- The ivory is often carved into ornaments and jewellery. China is the biggest consumer market for such products.

**Extent of Decline:**

- The population of African forest elephants fell by more than 86% over a period of 31 years.
- The population of African savanna elephants decreased by at least 60% over the last 50 years.
- Combined, around 415,000 remain, at present.

**Conservation Efforts:**

- Despite the overall decline, some populations of African forest elephants is rebounding due to successful conservation measures such as those taken by Gabon and Republic of Congo.
- In Southern Africa's Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, savanna elephant numbers were also stable or growing.

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### **Additional Information:**

#### **IUCN Red List Categories:**

The IUCN Red List threat categories are as follows, in descending order of threat:

##### **1. Extinct (EX):**

This designation is given to species in which the last individual has died or where systematic and time-appropriate surveys have been unable to log even a single individual

##### **2. Extinct in the Wild (EW):**

This designation is given to species whose members survive only in captivity or as artificially supported populations far outside their historical geographic range

##### **3. Critically Endangered (CR):**

Species possess an extremely high risk of extinction as a result of rapid population declines of 80 to more than 90 percent over the previous 10 years (or three generations), a current population size of fewer than 50 individuals, or other factors.

##### **4. Endangered (EN) :**

Species possess a very high risk of extinction as a result of rapid population declines of 50 to more than 70 percent over the previous 10 years (or three generations), a current population size of fewer than 250 individuals, or other factors

##### **5. Vulnerable (VU):**

Species possess a very high risk of extinction as a result of rapid population declines of 30 to more than 50 percent over the previous 10 years (or three generations), a current population size of fewer than 1,000 individuals, or other factors

##### **6. Near Threatened (NT):**

Species are close to becoming threatened or may meet the criteria for threatened status in the near future

##### **7. Least Concern (LC):**

Species are pervasive and abundant after careful assessment.

#### **About IUCN:**

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was **established in 1948**.
- It is the **first global environmental union** and brought together **governments and civil society organisations** with a shared goal to protect nature.
- During the first decade of its existence, IUCN's primary focus was to examine the impact of human activities on nature. It flagged the damaging effects of pesticides on biodiversity, and promoted the use of environmental impact assessments, which have since become the norm across sectors and industries.
- Subsequently in the 1960s and 1970s, IUCN devoted its work to the protection of species and the habitats necessary for their survival. In 1964, **IUCN established the IUCN Red List**

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**of Threatened Species**, which has since **evolved into the world's most comprehensive data source on the global extinction risk of species.**

- IUCN also **played a fundamental role in the creation of key international conventions**, including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), the World Heritage Convention (1972), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, (1974) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992).
- In 1980, IUCN - in partnership with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - published the World Conservation Strategy, a ground-breaking document which helped define the concept of 'sustainable development' and shaped the global conservation and sustainable development agenda.
- In 1999, as environmental issues continued to gain importance at the international stage, the UN General Assembly granted IUCN official observer status.

## **DISASTER MANAGEMENT:**

### ***CDRI:***

#### **Third Annual Conference of Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**

- Addressing the third annual conference on Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) on March 17, 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that infrastructure is developed for the long-term and if we make it resilient, we can prevent disasters not only for ourselves but many future generations.
- He stated that when a bridge is lost, a telecom tower falls, power systems fail, or when a school is damaged, the loss is **not just the direct damage**. We should look at losses holistically. **Indirect losses due to disruptions** to small businesses and interrupted schooling of children may be several times higher. We need the right accounting perspective for a holistic evaluation of the situation. If we make our infrastructure resilient, we will reduce **both direct and indirect losses** and protect the livelihoods of millions, the Prime Minister stated.

#### **Background About Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure:**

- Infrastructure systems are key drivers of economic growth.
- Both physical infrastructure (energy, telecommunication, roads, railways, airports, etc.) and social infrastructure (schools, hospitals, etc.) are crucial for human progress and development.
- However, this infrastructure is inevitably exposed to a range of natural hazards.
- There is a need for promoting the **resilience** of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks. Resilience in infrastructure means the ability of infrastructure asset to withstand the impact of disaster and retain its structural capacity.

### **CDRI:**

- The idea of CDRI was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit held in New York, USA.
- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and academic and knowledge institutions.

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- CDRI envisions **enabling measurable reduction in infrastructure losses from disasters by promoting the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks**, thereby ensuring sustainable development.
  - CRDI contributes to disaster resilient infrastructure through the following initiatives.
  - It acts as a collaborative platform for collection, analysis and dissemination of various good practices in infrastructure building.
  - Member countries share each others' expertise and experience in building disaster resilient infrastructure systems.
  - 35 countries including India are part of the CDRI initiative.
  - CDRI will provide member countries the following
    - technical support and capacity development,
    - research and knowledge management, and
    - advocacy and partnerships to facilitate and encourage investment in resilient infrastructure systems.

#### **Funding:**

- The CDRI does not finance any infrastructure projects as it is an enabling and advocacy partnership. However, some funds are required for running the work of the CDRI and its advocacy campaigns. Hence, Member countries may make voluntary contributions to CDRI Secretariat.

#### **CDRI Secretariat:**

- The CDRI Secretariat is based in New Delhi, India.

#### **ELECTRONICS & COMMUNICATIONS:**

##### ***Supercomputers:***

##### **Fukagu, the World's Fastest Supercomputer, Opened for Shared Research**

- Fukagu, the fastest supercomputer in the world with a capacity of 415.5 petaflops, has been made available for research projects by Japan in March 2021.
- A petaflop is equal to a quadrillion (thousand trillion) floating point operations per second (FLOPS)
- Japanese scientific research institute RIKEN and Fujitsu took six years for the development of Fukagu.
- Fukagu has been installed at the RIKEN Center for Computational Science (R-CCS) in Kobe, Japan.
- Japan's Research Organisation for Information Science and Technology (RIST) has selected 74 projects that will use the supercomputer.

#### **What is a Supercomputer?**

- It is a computer with a **high level of performance** compared to a general-purpose computer.

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- Performance of a supercomputer is measured in **floating-point operations per second (FLOPS)** instead of million instructions per second (MIPS) used for general-purpose computers. Instructions per second is a measure of a computer's processor speed.
  - Supercomputers contain thousands of processors and can perform billions and trillions of calculations or computations per second.

### **What are the Uses of Supercomputer?**

- Supercomputers are used for data-intensive and computation-heavy scientific and engineering purposes.
- Some of areas where supercomputers are used are
  - quantum mechanics,
  - weather forecasting,
  - oil and gas exploration,
  - molecular modelling,
  - physical simulations,
  - aerodynamics,
  - nuclear fusion research, and
- cryptanalysis (studying cryptographic (encrypted) systems to look for weaknesses or leaks of information).

### **Top500 List:**

- The list of fastest supercomputers is released by 'Top 500' every year at the International Supercomputing Conference (ISC). The ranking of the top 500 supercomputers began in 1993.
- Over 80 percent of the world's 500 most powerful machines can be found in just five countries: China USA Japan France and Germany
- China continues to rank first in the Top500 list with 212 supercomputers. USA ranks second with 113 supercomputers.

### **India's Supercomputers:**

- **PARAM-Siddhi** : **REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE**
- India's newest and fastest supercomputer, PARAM-Siddhi AI, has been ranked 63rd in the Top500 list of most powerful supercomputers in the world. This supercomputer was established under the National Supercomputer Mission (NSM) and is going to be installed in the Centre for **Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) unit**.
- PARAM-Siddhi has a capacity of 5.267 Petaflops.
- **Pratyush** and **Mihir** are the other supercomputers in the Top500 list of supercomputers.
- Pratyush is ranking of 67th and has a capacity of **3.7 petaflops**. This supercomputer is at the Indian Institute of Meteorology, Pune.

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- Mihir is ranked 120th and has a capacity of **2.5 petaflops**. This supercomputer is at the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast, Noida.

### ***Cyber security:***

#### **Cyber Attacks on Power Grids**

- In March 2021, the Union Power Ministry stated that "State-sponsored" Chinese hacker groups had targeted various Indian power centres but added that these groups have been thwarted after government cyber agencies warned it about their activities.
- Recorded Future, a US based cyber intelligence firm, in latest report stated that China-linked Group RedEcho targeted the Indian power sector amid heightened border tensions.
- It stated that power outage in Mumbai in October 2020 was part of a coordinated cyber attack by China. Trains, stock markets and hospitals which are dependent on power stopped functioning.
- An investigation has been launched by the Mumbai Police into the 2020 power outage.
- These cyber attack incidents serve as a wake-up call to put in place a more robust cyber security ecosystem in place.

#### **What are Cyber Attacks?**

- Cyber attacks refer to crippling the information networks of an organisation through malware. Malware is short form for Malicious Software.
- Malware is inserted into an organisation's computers by sending fake e-mails to employees or through flash drives. Flash drives containing malware are dropped in an organisation premises. Some unsuspecting employees may pick up the flash drive and insert in office computers.

#### **How Cyber attacks Affected Power Supply in Mumbai?**

- Power sector is extensively using information systems (complex computers) to carry out various functions like knowing the power demand, power usage, power supply, etc. These functions have been automated by adopting information systems. The crippling of information systems by hackers through malware resulted in non-functioning of the information systems which led to power outage in Mumbai in October 2020.

#### **Why do Cyber Attacks Take Place?**

- Lack of adequate training of employees, and
- Poor cyber security measures or loopholes in the cyber security measures adopted by organisations are the reasons for cyber attacks.

#### **What is the Motive for Cyber Attacks?**

1. **For monetary reasons.** Cyber attacks take place for monetary reasons. The attackers cripple the information systems, and restore them after extorting money.
2. **For Espionage:** For stealing commercial information by countries.
3. **Geo-political reasons:**

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Cyber warfare through cyber attacks is also called fifth domain of war - after Land, Sea, Air and space. Non-State actors and State actors launch cyber war to damage or disrupt a country's critical infrastructure.

### **What is the Institutional Mechanism to Tackle Cyber Attacks?**

- India has an institutional mechanism to tackle cyber attacks.
- Two institutions have been set up to deal with cyber threats.
- 1. **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)** to deal with cyber threats to critical information infrastructure, and
- 2. The **Computer Emergency Response Team - India (CERT-IN)** to deal with cyber threats for all non-critical information systems.

### **What is Critical Information Infrastructure?**

The following have been identified as critical information infrastructure by the Government

1. Power & Energy
2. Banking, Financial Institutions & Insurance
3. Telecom,
4. Transportation
5. E-governance
6. Strategic & Public Enterprises.

### **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC):**

- It acts as **national nodal agency** for all measures to protect nation's critical information infrastructure.
- It assists in the development of appropriate plans, adoption of standards, sharing of best practices in respect of protection of Critical Information Infrastructure.

### **Computer Emergency Response Team - India (CERT-IN):**

- It performs the following functions regarding non critical information systems.
- Forecast and alert of cyber security incidents,
- Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents,
- Issuing guidelines and advisories relating to information security practices, procedures regarding prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents, and
- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.

### **How Can India Tackle with Cyber Attacks on Critical Information Systems?**

- Critical infrastructure has become the newest form of **both aggression and deterrence**.
- **Dealing with such cyber-attacks requires** building technical capacity to undertake sophisticated **defensive** as well as **retaliatory measures**. India's cyberspace will remain vulnerable without this approach.

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- **Credible counter-attacks by India would act as deterrence.**
  - Creating offensive and defensive capacity would require a massive expansion of capacity of CERT-in and National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC).

**Cyber Attacks on Critical Information Systems Around the World:**

- Cyber attacks are taking place around the world to achieve geo-political objectives.
- The US, for example, seeded malicious code into Russia's power grid as a warning, after Russia targeted multiple US institutions.
- Moreover, it carries a degree of deniability, which makes it very useful in geopolitics.
- Hackers operating out of Russia, twice took down the Ukrainian power grid, and jammed Georgia's Internet during the Ossetia War.
- A sophisticated worm, Stuxnetm, crippled Iran's nuclear centrifuges. This is said to have been created and deployed via Israeli-US cooperation.
- Russian hackers recently targeted the US power grid, and multiple US government agencies, and the US claimed retaliatory measures.

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## **MISCELLANEOUS (AWARDS, PERSONS, SPORTS)**

### **NATIONAL PERSONS**

**Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair (104)**, Kathakali maestro, passed away on March 15, 2021. He set up one of the first dance schools in Kerala Bharatheeya Nritha Kalalayam in Kannur in 1944 to practice traditional dance forms. He was conferred with Padmashri in 2017 for his contributions.

Kathakali is one of the ancient classical India dance drama form which originated in Kerala. Kathakali combines devotion, drama, dance, music, costumes and make up into a divine experience for all who get to view it. It retells the great stories of the past, mostly from Indian epics.

**M.A. Ganapathy**, a 1986 batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Uttarakhand cadre, has been appointed as Director General (DG) of National Security Guard (NSG) on March 16, 2021. His appointment is up to February 29, 2024. The post of D-G, NSG has been vacant since last October when the then D-G A.K. Singh retired.

**Kuldeep Singh**, a 1986 batch IPS officer of the West Bengal cadre, has been appointed as the new Director General (DG) of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on March 16, 2021. His appointment is up to September 30, 2022 the date of his superannuation.

**G.V. Ramakrishna (91)**, who was the first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) after it became a statutorily empowered markets regulator, passed away on March 20, 2021.

Ramakrishna joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1952 and served in Andhra Pradesh. He held the post of Chief Secretary of the State of Andhra Pradesh.

Ramakrishna was appointed as SEBI's chairman in 1990. During his tenure, he oversaw the transition of the Board into a legally empowered markets regulator following the enactment of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.

To protect investors' interests, he ensured that merchant bankers' prospectus for any capital issue provided accurate and adequate information to investors. He also sought and pushed for increased transparency in the working of India's stock exchanges.

**Sagar Sarhadi (87)**, veteran Bollywood writer-director, passed away on March 22, 2021. Born Ganga Sagar Talwar near Abbottabad city (now Pakistan), his family moved to India after partition. He changed his name to carry an identity of his province with him.

Sarhadi was already a renowned Urdu writer and playwright before he debuted in Bollywood in 1976 with Yash Chopra's romance Kabhi Kabhie, of which he penned the screenplay and dialogues. He penned scripts for movies like 'Kabhi Kabhi', 'Silsila', 'Noori', and the Hrithik Roshan debutant 'Kaho Na Pyar Hai'.

**Lalitha (70)**, eminent Carnatic vocalist and guru, passed away on March 23, 2021 due to cardiac arrest. Ms. Lalitha, along with her sister Haripriya known as Hyderabad Sisters, was an indomitable force on the classical music scene. She was a faculty member at the Government Music College in Hyderabad.

**Kolluri Chiranjeevi (74)**, a protagonist of statehood for Telangana who actively participated in the second phase movement in 1969, died of illness in Hyderabad on March 8, 2021.

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## **INTERNATIONAL PERSONS**

**Nicolas Sarkozy**, former French President, was found guilty of corruption and handed a three-year prison sentence in March 2021.

He was found guilty of offering a judge with the promise of an important position in return for sharing confidential information about the trial that Sarkozy had accepted illegal payments from L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt for his 2007 election campaign.

Nicolas Sarkozy is the second president in modern-day France after Jacques Chirac to be convicted for corruption.

**John Magufuli (61)**, President of Tanzania, passed away on March 18, 2021. As per Tanzania Constitution, Vice- President of Tanzania Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as Tanzania's first female President. Ms. Hassan (61) will finish Magufuli's second five-year term, set to run until 2025.

## **SPORTS PERSONS**

Kieron Pollard, West Indies captain, became the third man to hit six sixes in an over in an international cricket match.

He hit 6 sixes in the over bowled by off-spinner Akila Dananjaya of Sri Lanka in the T20 (20 Overs match) international match between West Indies and Sri Lanka held in March 2021.

The other two players to hit 6 sixes in an over are South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs against the Netherlands in the 2007 World Cup and India's Yuvraj Singh, who also achieved the feat in the 2007 Twenty20 World Cup against England.

## **INTERNATIONAL AWARDS**

### ***Gandhi Peace Prize:***

Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 and 2020 were announced by Union Culture Ministry in March 2021.

The annual award was instituted by the Government of India in 1995 during the commemoration of 125th Birth anniversary of Mahatma

### **2019 Award:**

2019 Gandhi Peace Prize was given to **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, first Prime Minister of Bangladesh** also called Father of the Nation in Bangladesh, in recognition of his outstanding contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods.

### **2020 Award:**

2020 Gandhi Peace Prize was given to the late **Qaboos bin Said Al Said, former Sultan of Oman**, for his leadership in strengthening the ties between India and Oman and his efforts to promote peace in the Gulf region.

Sultan Qaboos was the architect of the special ties between India and Oman. He had studied in India and always maintained a special relationship with India."

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## **Jury:**

The Jury for Gandhi Peace Prize was chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sh Narendra Modi ,and comprises of two ex-officio members, namely the Chief Justice of India and Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha. Two eminent members are also part of the Jury, namely Shri Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and Shri Bindeshwar Pathak, Founder of Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.

## **About Gandhi Peace Prize:**

Gandhi Peace Prize for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence was instituted in the year 1995.

This annual award is **given to individuals, associations, institutions or organisations who have worked selflessly for peace, non-violence and amelioration of human sufferings** particularly of the less-privileged section of society contributing towards social justice and harmony.

The Award is **open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or gender**. Normally, contributions made during ten years immediately preceding the nomination are considered.

## **Prize Money:**

The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.

## **Past Awardees:**

The past awardees include luminaries like Dr. Julius Nyerere, Former President of Tanzania; Dr. Gerhard Fischer, Federal Republic of Germany; Ramakrishna Mission; Baba Amte (Shri MurlidharDevidasAmte); Late Dr. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa; Grameen Bank of Bangladesh; Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa; Shri Chandi Prasad Bhatt & Indian Space Research Organisation. Recent awardees include Vivekananda Kendra, India(2015); Akshaya Patra Foundation, India and Sulabh International (Jointly, for 2016); Ekal Abhiyan Trust, India(2017) and Shri Yohei Sasakawa, Japan(2018).

# **RC REDDY NATIONAL AWARDS CIRCLE**

## **67th National Film Awards**

67th National Film Awards which were given for the films released in the year 2019 were announced in March 2021. The awards which were to be announced in 2020 were delayed due to COVID.

Malayalam film 'Marakkar: Lion of the Arabian Sea' won **Best Feature film award**. It is a period action drama about a 16th century Malayali naval chieftain who fought the Portuguese invasion.

Manoj Bajpayee and Dhanush shared the best actor award, while Kangana Ranaut won the best actress award. Sohini Chattopadhyay won the Best Film Critic Award.

**Details of the Awards:**

<b>S.No</b>	<b>Category of Award</b>	<b>Title Of The Film</b>	<b>Awardee</b>
1	Best Feature Film	Marakkar- Arabikkadalinte Simham (Malayalam)	Director: Priyadarshan
2	Indira Gandhi Award for Best Debut Film of a Director	Helen (Malayalam)	Director: Mathukutty Xavier
3	Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment	Maharshi (Telugu)	Director: Paidipally Vamshidhar Rao
4	Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration	Tajmahal (Marathi)	Director: Niyaz Mujawar
5	Best Film on Social Issues	Anandi Gopal (Marathi)	Director: Sameer Vidwans
6	Best Film on Environment Conser- vation/Preservation	Water Burial (Monpa)	Director: Shantanu Sen
7	Best Children's Film	Kastoori (Hindi)	Director: Vinod Uttreshwar Kamble
8	Best Direction	Bahattar Hoorain (Hindi)	Director: Sanjay Puran Singh Chauhan
9	Best Actor	Bhonsle (Hindi & Asuran (Tamil)	Actor : Manoj Bajpayee & Actor Dhanush
10	Best Actress	Manikarnika -The Queen of Jhansi (Hindi)&Panga (Hindi)	Actress : Kangana Ranaut
11	Best Supporting Actor	Super Deluxe (Tamil)	Supporting Actor: Vijaya Sethupathi
12	Best Supporting Actress	The Tashkent Files (Hindi)	Supporting Actress: Pallavi Joshi
13	Best Child Artist	Kd(A) Karuppu Durai (Tamil)	Child Artist : Naga Vishal
14	Best Male Playback Singer	Kesari (Hindi)	Singer : B Praak Song "Teri Mitti"
15	Best Female Playback Singer	Bardo (Marathi)	Singer : Savani Ravindra Song "Raan Petala"

16	Best Cinematography	Jallikkettu (Malayalam)	Cameraman: Gireesh Gangadharan
17	Best Screenplay	Jyeshthoputro (Bengali)	Screenplay writer (original): Kaushik Ganguly
		Gumnaami (Bengali)	Screenplay writer (adapted): Srijit Mukherji
		The Tashkent Files (Hindi)	Dialogue Writer: Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri
19	Best Editing	Jersey (Telugu)	Editor: Navin Nooli
20	Best Production Design	Anandi Gopal (Marathi)	Production Designer: Sunil Nigwekar & Nilesh Wagh
21	Best Costume Designer	Marakkar - Arabikkadalinte- Simham (Malayalam)	Costume Designer: Sujith Sudhakaran & V. Sai
22	Best Make-up Artist	Helen (Malayalam)	Make-up Artist: Ranjith
23	Best Music Direction	Viswasam (Tamil) Jyeshthoputro (Bengali)	Music Director (Songs): D. Imman Music Director (Background Music): Prabuddha Banerjee
24	Best Lyrics	Kolaambi (Malayalam)	Lyricist: Prabha Varma Song " Arodum Parayuka Vayya"
25	Special Jury Award	Oththa Seruppu SIZE-7 (Tamil)	Producer & Director : Radhakrishnan Parthiban
26	Best Special Effects	Marakkar- Arabikkadalinte- Simham (Malayalam)	Special Effects Creator : Siddharth Priyadarshan
27	Best Choreography	Maharshi (Telugu)	Raju Sundaram
28	Best Action Direction Award(Stunt Choreography)	Avane Srimannarayana (Kannada)	Vikram Mor
29	Best Telugu Feature Film	Jersey	Director: Gautam Tinnanuri

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## **SPORTS**

### **Badminton**

#### ***All England Open (Birmingham, 2021 March)***

##### **Men's Singles:**

Lee Zii Jia (Malaysia) - Winner

Viktor Axelsen (Denmark) - Runner

##### **Women's Singles:**

Nozomi Ikuhara (Japan) - Winner

Pornpawee Chochuwong (Thailand) - Runner

##### **Men's Doubles:**

Yuta Watanabe & Hiroyuki Endo - Winner

Keigo Sonoda & Takeshi Kamura - Runner

##### **Women's Doubles:**

Mayu Matsumoto & Wakana Nagahara - Winner

Sayaka Hirota & Yuki Fukushima - Runner

##### **Mixed doubles:**

Yuta Watanabe & Arisa Higashino - Winner

Misaki Matsutomo & Yuk Kaneko - Runner

#### ***Swiss Open Super 300 Tournament (Basel, 2021 March)***

##### **Women's Singles:**

Carolina Marin (Spain) - Winner

P.V. Sindhu (India) - Runner

##### **Men's Singles:**

Viktor Axelsen (Denmark) - Winner

Kunlavut Vitidsarn (Thailand) - Runner

##### **Tennis:**

#### ***National Hard Court Tennis Championship (Gurugram, 2021 March)***

##### **Men's Title:**

Arujun Kadhe - Winner

Prithvi Sekar - Runner