

**CURRENT EVENTS  
AND  
ANALYSIS  
(February 2021)  
PART-2**

**Editor**

**R.C. Reddy**

**R.C. REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE**

**H.No. 3-6-275, Opp. Telangana Tourism Development Corporation,  
Near Telugu Academy, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad - 500 029.**

**Phone No. : 040-23228513; 040-27668513; 040-27612673;  
9346882593; 9573462587**

**Email : rcredyiasstudycircle1989@gmail.com**

# CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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# **NATIONAL POLITY**

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## **Guidelines for Social Media, Digital Media, and OTT Platforms Released**

- On February 25, 2021, the Union Government released the guidelines for regulation of all the digital platforms i.e.

### **1. Social Media,**

### **2. Digital News Media, and**

### **3. Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms.**

- Technically, these guidelines are called 'The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines, and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- These guidelines have been issued by the Government under the powers conferred on it in Information Technology Act, 2000.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

### **What is Social Media?**

- Social Media refers to platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, etc. which function with the aid of internet.
- Penetration of internet and advent of smartphones contributed to the widespread use of these social media applications (Apps).

### **What is the Significance of Social Media?**

- Social Media **empowered common citizens.**
- It facilitates **exchange of ideas and information** with the larger community.
- **Freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of the Constitution** have been greatly expanded by Social Media. These platforms are being used to build opinions on issues of public concern including those critical of the Government.

### **Guidelines for Social Media:**

- Platforms like WhatsApp, and Telegram **should identify the "originator" of "unlawful" messages.**
- They should
  - a) set up grievance redressal mechanism to address the complaints of its users,
  - b) take down unlawful messages within a specific time-frame, and
  - c) assist government agencies in investigation.

### **Details:**

#### **Due Diligence To Be Followed By Intermediaries:**

- Social media intermediaries must follow due diligence.

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- In case, due diligence is not followed by the intermediary, **safe harbour provision** will not apply to them.

### **What is Safe Harbour Provision?**

- Globally, social media firms are protected by the "safe harbour provision".
- This provision protects the social media intermediaries (Twitter, Facebook, etc) from being penalised for harmful or unlawful content uploaded or posted on its platforms. This provision has been given as they are only intermediaries i.e. facilitators of sharing content and information and not original creators of the content.
- The Information Technology Act, 2000 also provides for a safe harbour provision. Under this provision (Section 79 of the Act), social media intermediary is not legally responsible for the content posted by its users on its platform. Thus, the provision gives immunity from legal proceedings against them.

### **What is Due Diligence?**

- The social media intermediaries shall frame the following rules and regulations, privacy policy or user agreement for its users and inform them by publishing on its website and mobile App.
- Users of their platforms **should not post information or content** which
  - a) threatens the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of India, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or causes incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence or prevents investigation of any offence or is insulting other nation;
  - b) is patently false and untrue, and is written or published in any form, with the intent to mislead or harass a person, entity or agency for financial gain or to cause any injury to any person;
  - c) is defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another's privacy, including bodily privacy,
  - d) insulting or harassing on the basis of gender, libellous, racially or ethnically objectionable,
  - e) relates to or encourages money laundering or gambling,
  - f) harmful to child;
  - g) infringes any patent, trademark, copyright or other proprietary rights;
  - h) impersonates another person; etc.

### **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**

- Social media intermediaries should establish a **grievance redressal mechanism** for receiving and resolving complaints from the users of their platforms.
- Intermediaries shall appoint a **Grievance Officer** to deal with such complaints. They shall share the name and contact details of such officer.
- Grievance Officer shall acknowledge the complaint within twenty four hours.
- He shall resolve it within fifteen days from its receipt.
- **Ensuring Online Safety and Dignity of Users, Especially Women Users:**

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- If a complaint pertains to the issue of dignity of women (i.e. complaint against uploading nude photos, sexual acts, morphed images, etc.), social media intermediaries shall remove such content within 24 hours.
  - Such a **complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf.**

**Additional Due Diligence to Be Followed by Significant Social Media Intermediary:**

- The Government rules made a distinction between social media intermediaries and significant social media intermediaries.
- Significant social media intermediaries would be those which have above threshold number of users notified by the Government. Those having users below the threshold number would be called as social media intermediaries.
- The Rules require the significant social media intermediaries to follow certain additional due diligence. These are mostlikely to be applicable to WhatsApp, Facebook, etc which have significant users in the country.

Social Media Platforms in the Country and Number of Users.

Social Media Platforms	No. of Users
WhatsApp	53 Crore
YouTube	44.8 Crore
Facebook	41 Crore
Instagram	21 Crore
Twitter	1.75 Crore

**Chief Compliance Officer:**

- Chief Compliance Officer should be appointed by significant social media intermediaries **for ensuring compliance with Rules.** Such a person should be a resident in India.

**Nodal Contact Person:**

- A Nodal Contact Person should also be appointed **for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.** Such a person shall be a resident in India.

**Resident Grievance Officer:**

- A Resident Grievance Officer should be appointed who shall perform the functions mentioned under Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Such a person shall be a resident in India.

**Monthly Compliance Report:**

- Significant social media intermediaries should **publish a monthly compliance report** mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints as well as details of contents removed proactively by the significant social media intermediary.

**Identification of the First Originator of the Information:**

- Significant social media intermediaries providing services primarily in the nature of messaging shall enable **identification of the first originator of the information** for

- 
- purposes of prevention, investigation, prosecution of an offence related to sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, and public order
  - an offence related to rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than five years.

#### **Physical Contact Address:**

- Significant social media intermediary should have a **physical contact address** in India published on its website or mobile app or both.

#### **Removal of Unlawful Information:**

- A social media intermediary upon receiving actual knowledge in the form of an order by a court or being notified by the Appropriate Government or its agencies through authorised officer should not host or publish any information which is prohibited under any law in relation to the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, friendly relations with foreign countries, etc.

#### **Why These Guidelines have been Issued for Social Media Intermediaries?**

##### **1. Fake news:**

The proliferation and widespread use of social media platforms has led to the problem of fake news.

Fake news means false or misleading information presented as news

##### **2. Rampant Abuse of Social Media:**

There is also rampant abuse of social media which threaten the dignity of women.

Morphed images of women and contents related to porn are being shared which threaten the dignity of women.

There is no robust complaint mechanism offered by the Social Media for the redressal of grievances of such victims of morphed images.

##### **3. Refusal of Social Media Platforms to Heed Government's Request:**

The government has also been at loggerheads with WhatsApp for over two years on the issue of tracing the originator of messages on the platform.

WhatsApp has been **refusing to comply with the government's request** to trace the origin of a fake message, stating that the move will **undermine the private nature of the platform**.

**Similarly, the Government recently** asked twitter to block certain accounts during the farm protests stating that they are spreading false and misleading information about farmers protests against new agriculture laws.

However, Twitter refused to block the accounts citing freedom of speech and expression. Facebook also states that it is not an **'arbiter of truth'** for refusing to block accounts.

##### **4. Law and Order Problems:**

Fake news and hate news on social media are also leading to law and order problems in society.

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## 5. Notices from Supreme Court:

The Supreme Court also issued notices to the Union Government on a plea filed before it seeking a mechanism to prevent the spread of fake news, hate news, and anti India posts on social media platforms.

Due to above reasons, the Government felt that a framework of rules is necessary to make the social media platforms accountable.

### What is the Impact of these Guidelines?

#### 1. Right to Privacy:

Private nature of the platforms will be compromised due to traceability of origin of messages.

#### 2. End-to-End Encryption:

Traceability requirement for messages to tackle fake news and child sexual abuse material would entail breaking end-to-end encryption.

End to End Encryption ensured privacy and security to the users. Only the two persons who are using the platform can see the contents i.e. either messages or videos shared. Even the social media platform which connects the two people cannot see the contents.

Tracing the originator of content would not be possible without breaking end-to-end encryption.

#### 3. Safe Harbour Provision:

The new guidelines also lead to an erosion of the safe harbour protection given to intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act.

## REGULATIONS FOR OTT PLATFORMS

### What is OTT (Over-The-Top) Content?

- Conventionally entertainment content (movies, serials, etc) is consumed through either in theatres or through Televisions (cable TV subscriptions or Satellite TV subscriptions).
- Over-The-Top (OTT) content refers to **video content streamed directly to viewers using internet as a medium.**
- Thus, an over-the-top (OTT) media bypasses theatre broadcast, cable and satellite television platforms.
- To stream OTT, customers only require an internet connection and a compatible hardware device.
- A compatible hardware device could be
  - a) Smartphones and tablets,
  - b) Personal computers, and
  - c) Smart Televisions which can connect to internet.

### Popular Over-The-Top (OTT) Players:

- Amazon Prime, Netflix, SonyLiv, MX Player, Jio Cinema, Eros Now, Alt Balaji, Arre, HoiChoi, Hungama, Shemaroo, Discovery Plus, Aha and Lionsgate Play, etc.

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### **Size of the Indian OTT Market:**

- Indian OTT market is expected to reach **\$5 billion in size by 2023.**
- This growth is being driven by **rising middle class incomes, and increase in internet penetration.**

### **Why OTT platforms are being Regulated?**

#### **1. Lack of Regulation:**

OTT players have become significant players in the media industry.

Video streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have gathered millions of subscribers and became key distributors for new movies and entertainment content

**But their content is not regulated like** films released in theatres. Films released in theatres have to get through the certification process of the **Central Board of Film Certification**. OTT players are **operating on the basis of self regulation till now.**

#### **2. Hurting Religious Sentiments:**

There are increasing complaints that the some of the **content is hurting religious sentiments, provoking sectarian violence.**

#### **3. Obscenity:**

**There is also obscenity in some of the OTT content.**

Hence, regulations have been brought in to bring level playing field between Digital Players (OTT players) and non-digital players (Theatres).

### **Regulations for OTT Platforms:**

#### **Code of Ethics:**

- Code of Ethics has been formulated for OTT platforms.
- It prescribes the guidelines to be followed by Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms.
- As per the Ethics Code, a publisher shall exercise due caution and discretion in relation to the content which
  - a) affects the sovereignty and integrity of India;
  - b) threatens, endangers or jeopardises the security of the State;
  - c) is detrimental to India's friendly relations with foreign countries; and
  - d) is likely to incite violence or disturb the maintenance of public order.

#### **Classification of Content:**

- The OTT platforms should self-classify the content into five age based categories- U (Universal), U/A 7+ years, U/A 13+ years, U/A 16+ years, and A (Adult). U/A certification content can be watched by children only under parental guidance. This has been subcategorised according to age categories of children.
- Platforms should implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher.

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- They should adopt reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as "A".
  - OTT players should prominently display the classification rating specific to each content or programme informing the user about the nature of the content at the beginning of every programme enabling the user to make an informed decision, prior to watching the programme.

#### **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**

- A three-level grievance redressal mechanism will be established.

Level-I: Self-regulation by OTT platforms;

Level-II: Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the OTT platforms;

Level-III: Oversight mechanism by the Central Government.

- Any person having a grievance regarding content published by a publisher in relation to the Code of Ethics may furnish his grievance on the grievance mechanism.
- The first level grievance redressal will be at the level of each OTT provider. Each complaint will have to be addressed within 15 days.
- If the complaint is not satisfactorily addressed, then the complainant can scale it up to a self-regulatory body collectively established by the OTTs. This body will be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, a High Court, or an independent eminent person from the field of media, broadcasting, entertainment, child rights, human rights or other relevant fields. This self-regulatory body also has "censuring" powers in case of any incriminating content.
- To top this, at the third tier, the government has equipped itself with overriding powers in the form of "**oversight mechanism**". An inter-ministerial committee will perform this function and it will largely have the same powers as the collective self regulatory body of the OTTs.

#### **Impact of New Guidelines on OTT Platforms?**

##### **1. Excessive Regulation:**

The three tier grievance mechanism is seen as excessive regulation for an industry which thrives on creativity.

##### **2. Potential for Misuse:**

These rules give any individual to complain against the content which might open the floodgates for misuse and increase the compliance burden for the OTT players.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR PUBLISHERS OF NEWS ON DIGITAL MEDIA**

##### **What are Digital News Platforms?**

- Digital news platforms refer to online news and current affairs platforms **which use internet medium for publishing news and opinions.**
- Conventional media publishes news in print format i.e. by printing in physical copies and circulating them to the readers.
- **Digital News platforms publish content only in electronic format. These can be accessed using internet.** No physical copies are printed. Content is published both in text and video format.

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- **Examples of Digital News Platforms: the Wire, the Print, The Quint, Scroll.in, etc.**
  - 'The Wire' was founded in 2015 by Siddharth Varadarajan, former editor of The Hindu, Sidharth Bhatia, and M. K. Venu. The Print was founded by Sekhar Gupta, a well-known journalist.

#### **Guidelines for Digital News Platforms:**

- Publishers of news on digital media would be required to observe
- Norms of **Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India** and
- **Programme Code** under the **Cable Television Networks Regulation Act** which is applicable to offline (Print, TV).
- Publishers should take into consideration that the content does not "affect the sovereignty and integrity of India" or "jeopardises the security of the State", among other things.

#### **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**

- A three-level grievance redressal mechanism has been established for grievance redressal.
- Level-I: Self-regulation by the publishers;
- Level-II: Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the publishers;
- Level-III: Oversight mechanism by the Central Government for hearing complaints against digital news platforms.
- **Any person having a grievance regarding content published by a publisher may furnish his grievance on the grievance mechanism.**
- A digital news publisher shall establish a grievance redressal mechanism and shall appoint a Grievance Officer based in India, who shall be responsible for the redressal of grievances received by him.
- Grievance Officer should take a decision on every grievance received within fifteen days, and communicate the same to the complainant within the specified time.
- At a higher level, there would be self-regulating bodies of the publishers and oversight mechanism by the Central Government.
- The senior official in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will also have **emergency powers to order blocking of content.**

#### **Concern over the New Guidelines for Digital News Media:**

##### **1. Overriding Powers to the Government:**

Digital news media representatives expressed concern over the new guidelines stating that these provide **overriding powers** to the Government.

##### **2. Aimed at Censuring Critical Content:**

They stated that these are aimed at **censuring content which is critical of the Government.**

##### **3. Discriminatory:**

The Grievance Redressal Mechanism is not there for the print media but only targeted at digital news media which is seen as **discriminatory.**

Hence, these guidelines have been challenged in the Courts.

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## **Disha Ravi Booked on Sedition Charges for Sharing Social Media Toolkit**

- Disha Ravi, 22 year old Bangalore-based Environmental activist, was arrested on February 13, 2021, by the Delhi Police. A First Information Report (FIR) was filed on charges of sedition, criminal conspiracy, and promoting hatred.
- Disha Ravi is a founder-member of the 'Fridays for Future (FFF)' campaign in India. The campaign is aimed at creating climate-related awareness and the dangers of global warming.

### **Why Was She Arrested?**

- Pro-Khalistan sympathisers (of Poetic Justice Foundation based in Canada) prepared a toolkit outlining measures to protest against farm laws. (The Khalistan movement was a militant separatist movement by some Sikhs for Khalistan - a Sikh homeland).
- She started a WhatsApp group to make the Toolkit in collaboration with the pro-Khalistani organisation Poetic Justice Foundation.
- She also shared the toolkit with Swedish teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg.
- Delhi Police also claimed that the toolkit has details of January 26 protests and stated that Ms. Ravi was working with separatists to create disaffection against India

### **What is a Toolkit?**

- A toolkit is a document used for social media campaigns.
- It contains basic information about the issues or causes. It is used for spreading awareness about the issue, mobilising the support of people and organising protests.

### **Toolkits Used Globally:**

- Toolkits are popularly on social media across the world.
- Toolkits were used to mobilise and inform supporters during the **'2011 Occupy Wall Street'** protests against economic inequality, Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 in USA, the **'Hong Kong protests of 2019'** against a proposed legislation that would have allowed extradition to China, the 'climate change protests in 2018', and the **anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protests** in India as well.
- During the Hong Kong protests in 2019, toolkits recommended several tools, equipment, clothing and messaging methods to supporters.
- During the Climate Change Strike in 2018 - started by Thunberg - several toolkits were circulated to offer guidelines on where to protest on the ground and on social media. It also provided information on the climate change movement and how it needed urgent action.
- In the ongoing farmers' protest against three farm laws passed by the government, the purported 'toolkit' was meant to guide readers - even those abroad - on how they could support those demonstrating against the farm laws in India.
- The idea behind promoting a toolkit by protestors is to
  - a) facilitate both online and on-ground support for protests,
  - b) unite supporters scattered far and wide and also to
  - c) coordinate relief and rescue work at protest sites during police action.

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### **What was there in the Toolkit Prepared by Disha Ravi?**

- The toolkit has information about the farmers' protests.
- The toolkit called those interested to tweet their support to farmers to use the hashtags #FarmersProtest and #StandWithFarmers.
- It also provided links to the blog on the number of farmers who have allegedly died during the protests since late November.
- It also called for
  - sharing solidarity photos and video messages on farm protests, and
  - protests near Indian Embassies globally, Government offices, and Media houses,
- But, according to the police, the toolkit has a role in violence that erupted in Delhi on January 26, 2021 during the protesting farmers' tractor rally.

### **Is a Toolkit Used By Only Protestors?**

- It is not just by protesters, but also by government organisations.
- For instance, the Government of India's Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has a toolkit on how to implement Intellectual Property Rights.

### **Criticism on Police Action:**

- However, the arrest of Disha Ravi also drew a lot of criticism.
- Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG), an association of 300 retired civil servants (IAS, IPS, etc.), eminent persons expressed concern over the arrest of Disha Ravi. They expressed the following opinions.

#### **1. Toolkits are Not Illegal or Unconstitutional:**

Toolkits are not illegal or unconstitutional, but a measure adopted by all protest movements.

To hold demonstrations outside an embassy is part of the fundamental right. To demonstrate for a just cause does not make you an anti-national.

#### **2. Anti-Government stand does not mean anti-national stand (against the country) :**

The Police should distinguish between one who is anti-national and one who is anti-government. Opposing a policy of the government does not make one anti-national.

Protesting against Government policies should not be construed as conspiracy against the country. Hence, she should not have been booked under the draconian sedition provisions under the law.

#### **3. Youth Should Be Engaged:**

Youth by nature are "radical and revolutionary" and should not be viewed as "violent or anti-nationals". Hence, Police officers should engage and partner with the youth instead of alienating them. Ms. Disha Ravi should have been advised to join the investigation. If concrete evidence emerged that is criminal in nature, then her arrest would have been justified.

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#### **4. Role of NGOs in a Society is to Scrutinise Government Policies:**

**One of the important roles of NGOs in a society is to scrutinise government policies.** NGOs have a legal right to point out that they do not agree with these laws and policies. Ms. Ravi was expressing solidarity with the protesting farmers and was in touch with Ms. Thunberg and a foreign NGO (Poetic Justice Foundation based in Canada). However, her role is being construed as a conspiracy. This is not a war on our country.

#### **Court Grants Bail to Disha Ravi:**

A Delhi Sessions Court granted bail to Disha Ravi on the following grounds.

- Creation of a WhatsApp Group or being an editor of toolkit does not amount to an offence.
- There is nothing on record to suggest that Disha Ravi subscribed to any secessionist idea.
- Citizens are conscience keepers of the Government. They cannot be jailed simply because they chose to disagree with the State policies.
- There is no call for violent protests in the toolkit which occurred on January 26, 2021.
- The difference of opinion, disagreement, and dissent are recognised legitimate tools to infuse objectivity in State policies.
- Right to dissent is firmly entrenched in Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.
- Freedom of Speech and Expression under Article 19 of the Constitution includes Right to seek global support for a peaceful cause.

#### **UPSC Issues Notification for Lateral Entry**

- In February 2021, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) issued notification for recruitment in 30 positions at the Joint Secretary and Director level in the Central administration through lateral entry.

#### **What is Lateral Entry by UPSC?**

- It refers to recruitment of **domain experts in key sectors** such as finance, revenue, agriculture and infrastructure by the UPSC at the level of joint secretaries, directors in the Union Government Ministries, Departments, on contract basis of 3 to 5 years.
- The term lateral entry is used to distinguish the lateral entrants from career bureaucrats.
- Generally, the officials at the level of Director in the Central Government Ministries and Departments are staffed under the central staffing scheme by career bureaucrats i.e. IAS and other central services like Indian Economic Service, Indian Forest Service, Indian Revenue Service, etc.
- These officials are recruited by the UPSC for a fixed career through competitive exam. Once selected, they can serve the Government till the age of retirement i.e. 60 years. They become eligible for serving as Directors and Joint Secretaries after they complete around 18 years of service.
- In lateral entry, persons with domain experience are recruited on contract basis for specific period of 3 to 5 years.

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### **Second Notification for Lateral Entry:**

- The present notification is the second notification issued by UPSC for lateral entry.
- Through a first notification issued in 2018, UPSC recruited 10 experts at the Joint Secretary level against a total strength of about 500 joint secretaries in the Central government.
- In the latest round, of the 30 positions advertised by the UPSC, three are for Joint Secretary, and 27 are for the Director level.
- The contractual appointment would be for a period of three years and extendable up to five years depending on performance.
- For the Joint Secretary level, the lateral entry positions have been opened in the Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers' welfare, Commerce and Industry, and Finance, while for the Director level, the applications have been invited for more than half-a-dozen Departments and Ministries.

### **Qualification for Lateral Entry:**

- The basic qualification for a Joint Secretary lateral entrant is 15 years of work experience, and for Directors it is 10 years of work experience apart from professional qualification in the relevant domain.
- For instance, for the post of Joint Secretary in the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, an applicant should possess a Masters Degree in Economics or Commerce or Finance or Business Administration or professional experience in Chartered Accountancy. Besides, they should have work experience in any of the following fields Income Tax, Customs, Goods and Services Tax, etc.
- Final selection is based on the interview by USPC from the eligible shortlisted candidates.

### **Recommendation of NITI Aayog:**

- Lateral entry was also recommended by NITI Aayog.
- NITI Aayog, in its three-year Action Agenda, and the Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance in its report submitted in February 2017, recommended the induction of personnel at middle and senior management levels in the central government. These 'lateral entrants' would be part of the central secretariat which in the normal course has only career bureaucrats from the All India Services/ Central Civil Services.
- A Joint Secretary, appointed by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), has the third highest rank (after Secretary and Additional Secretary) in a Department, and functions as administrative head of a wing in the Department. Directors are a rank below that of Joint Secretary.

### **Why Lateral Entry?**

- Government has **twin objectives** behind lateral entry i.e. improving efficiency in governance delivery and meeting the shortage of officers at the middle level.

#### **1. Improving Efficiency and Creating Competition in Governance Delivery:**

Government aims at **improving efficiency and create competition in governance delivery** by inducting specialists.

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## 2. Shortage of IAS Officers at the Middle Level:

There is shortage of middle-level IAS officers with 18 to 25 years of seniority.

This is because the annual recruitment to the IAS in the 1990s was curtailed to just about 60-70 as against the present recruitment of about 180 per batch. This was done under the assumption that **economic liberalisation** would vastly reduce the need for central staffing.

However, the reverse happened. Enhanced revenues of the Government expanded its role not only in the social sector, such as anti-poverty programmes, education, health, and tribal welfare but also in many new emerging sectors such as telecommunications, information technology (IT), climate change, and road transport.

Due to the overall shortage of officials, most states are unwilling to release senior IAS officers for central deputation leading to a strange situation where an Indian Railway Traffic Service officer works as joint secretary in the health department, and an Indian Ordnance Service official finds himself in the ministry of tribal affairs.

### What Are Arguments Against Lateral Entry?

#### 1. Demoralising to Career Bureaucrats:

Recruitment of lateral entrants will demoralise the career bureaucrats as they are recruited as Joint Secretaries after 15 years of work experience.

#### 2. No Reservations:

Lateral entry subverts the reservation system in Government jobs.

The Government is not implementing reservation system in recruitment through lateral entry. Hence, this measure leads to injustice to disadvantaged and backward segments of society i.e. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

However, the Government defended the move to recruit lateral entrants in open quota stating that each post is seen as a separate individual post and reservation is not given when the recruitment is for single posts. The UPSC notification mentions each post separately for lateral recruitment.

#### 3. No Long term Stakes in Governance:

The advantage with the current civil service is that career bureaucrats as policymakers have long-term interests in government. They also have a tradition of fairness and stake in the government. Private sector individuals brought on contract of three or five years have no long-term stake in the government.

#### 4. Conflict of Interests:

Individuals who worked in corporate houses and were part of lobbies and advocacy groups to push for laxer government norms and controls are being catapulted to the seat of power from where they can formulate those very norms and controls. After the government stint, that individual will most likely go back to the industry and benefit from those same rules that they formulated. There is a clear **conflict of interest**.

For instance, Amber Dubey was selected as Joint Secretary for the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2019 through the first notification for lateral entry.

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He had served as Partner and Head of KPMG in Aerospace and Defence and, as such, was a domain expert. But he had also been member and co-chair of the Confederation of Indian Industry, the U.S.-India Business Council, the American Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India, all, essentially, lobbies.

Similarly, Sujit Kumar Bajpayee was selected as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. He used to work with the NHPC as manager, environment. He was responsible for the overall planning of new hydropower projects, secured clearances for them from the Environment Ministry and supervised the implementation and monitoring of various environmental the reservation system in Government jobs.

The Government is not implementing reservation system in recruitment through lateral entry. Hence, this measure leads to injustice to disadvantaged and backward segments of society i.e. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

However, the Government defended the move to recruit lateral entrants in open quota stating that these are single cadre posts i.e. each post is seen as a separate individual post and reservation is not given when the recruitment is for single posts. The UPSC notification mentions each post separately for lateral recruitment.

### **5. Specialisation Should Be Encouraged:**

It is largely true that IAS officers too lack the necessary domain knowledge essential for effective policymaking and delivery.

Once they join the civil service in the states, they are shuffled after short tenures from one to the other department. They hardly get an opportunity to develop an understanding of technical aspects of a problem, or acquire the necessary professional expertise.

But, there is also a conflict of interest in the recruitment of those with experience in private sector for Government positions. Hence, the government needs to promote internal specialisation. An IAS officer who has seen the plight of patients at the district level and has also worked in the state medical department would be a far more effective joint secretary in the ministry of health and family welfare than a doctor with specialisation in just one narrow subject.

Therefore, after the first 10 years of service, each IAS officer should be encouraged to specialise in one or two chosen sectors by giving them reasonable tenures and permitting them to join academic or research organisations where they could improve their intellectual skills.

### **Additional Information:**

#### **Response to First Notification for Lateral Entry:**

- The first notification for the Joint Secretary-level appointments, issued in early 2018, attracted 6,077 applications.
- Nine individuals were recommended by UPSC for appointment in nine different Ministries/ Departments in 2019.
- One of these individuals, Kakoli Ghosh, did not join; the rest - Amber Dubey, Rajeev Saksena, Sujit Kumar Bajpayee, Dinesh Dayanand Jagdale, Bhushan Kumar, Arun Goel, Saurabh Mishra and Suman Prasad Singh - were appointed on a three-year contract. Arun Goel resigned in December 2020 to return to the private sector.

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## **Supreme Court Issues Notice to Centre on Transfer Plea Against Grant of Minority Status to 5 Communities**

- On February 9, 2021, the Supreme Court sought government's reply on a plea, seeking transfer of cases from several high courts to it against the Centre's notification to declare five communities - **Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsees** - as minorities even in those states and UTs where they are in majority.

(It may be noted that in addition to the above 5 communities, Jains were declared as a minority community in 2014 by the Union Government).

- A bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian issued notices to Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice and Ministry of minority affairs.
- The plea was filed by lawyer and BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay seeking transfer of all cases from high courts to the apex court for an **authoritative pronouncement on the issue**.
- This would also **avoid multiplicity of litigations and conflicting views from the High Courts**.

### **Details:**

- At present, the High Courts at Delhi, Meghalaya and Guwahati are seized of the petitions challenging the Constitutional validity of **section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992**, under which the notification was issued on October 23, 1993.
- The **1993 notification had declared the five communities** - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsees - as Minorities.
- There is **no scientific criteria for declaration of minorities**.
- The Central Government has been given power to declare any community as minority community under the section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.

### **Impact of the 1993 Declaration:**

- Majority population of Sikhs in Punjab and Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir are availing of the benefits meant for minorities.
- **Hindus**, who are a majority community according to national data, **are a minority in several north-eastern states besides Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir**.
- However, the **Hindu community is deprived of the benefits that are available to the minority communities** in these states, the plea said, adding that the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) should reconsider the definition of minority in this context.

### **What are the Objections to the Present Status?**

- Section 2(C) of National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 gives **unbridled power to the Centre to declare any community minority arbitrarily**.
- **Arbitrary and irrational disbursement of minority status to majority infringes upon the fundamental right** to the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

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### What Did the Petitioner Seek?

- The plea has **sought to declare section 2(c) of the NCM Act 1992 void and inoperative** for being arbitrary, unreasonable and offending.
- The **definition of minority under Article 29-30 of the Constitution is not cleared defined.** It gives a loose definition of minority which could be on the basis of religion or language. This is being misused for political benefits.
- **Minority status should be granted to Hindus in states where the number of the community members has decreased.**
- **Minority status should be granted for Hindus in six states and two Union territories,** where the number of the community members has fallen according to Census 2011.
- According to the 2011 Census, Hindus are a minority in six states: Mizoram (2.75 per cent), Nagaland (8.75 per cent), Meghalaya (11.53 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (29 per cent), Manipur (31.39 per cent), Punjab (38.40 per cent) and in the Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir (28.44 per cent) and Lakshadweep (2.5 per cent).
- In the above states, minority rights are being siphoned off illegally and arbitrarily to the majority population because neither the Centre nor the state governments have notified Hindus as a "minority" under the National Commission for Minorities Act.
- **Christians are in majority** in Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland and there is a significant Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, but they are treated as a minority community.
- Likewise, Sikhs are in majority in Punjab and there is a significant Sikh population in Delhi, Chandigarh and Haryana, but they are treated as a minority community.
- **Muslims are a majority in Lakshadweep** (96.20 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir (68.30 per cent) and there is a significant representation of the community in Assam (34.20 per cent), West Bengal (27.5 per cent), Kerala (26.60 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (19.30 per cent) and Bihar (18 per cent).
- However, they are enjoying the minority status and communities, which are real minorities, are not getting their legitimate share, jeopardising their basic rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.

### What are the Benefits Available to Minorities in India?

- Minorities have right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice under Article 30 of the Indian Constitution.
- The Union Government is implementing various welfare and development schemes for the socioeconomic development of minorities. These include scholarships for education, financial support to take coaching for competitive exams, interest subsidy on educational loans for overseas studies, livelihood initiatives for school dropouts, skill development initiatives, etc.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)** is also being implemented in the minority concentrated block to improve housing, sanitation, roads, drinking water facilities, etc.

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## **India Ranked 53rd in the Democracy Index 2020; Categorised as Flawed Democracy**

- India's rank slipped from 51 in 2019 to 53rd in 2020 and continued in the 'Flawed Democracy' category in the 'Democracy Index 2020' released by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), the research and analysis division of the international magazine, 'The Economist'.
- Democracy Index 2020 provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide in 165 independent states.
- This is the 13th edition of the Democracy Index, which began in 2006.

### **What is the Criteria for Democracy Index?**

The Democracy Index is based on five categories:

1. electoral process and pluralism,
  2. functioning of government,
  3. political participation,
  4. political culture, and
  5. civil liberties.
- **Electoral Process and Pluralism** refers to free and fair elections, universal adult suffrage, equal campaigning opportunities, etc.
  - **Governance** refers to influence of elected representatives in determining government policy, supremacy of the legislature, etc.
  - **Political participation** takes into consideration voter turnout, share of women parliamentarians, etc.
  - **Political culture** refers to popular support for democracy, a strong tradition of separation of Religion and State, etc.
  - **Civil liberties** include freedom of the press, freedom to protest, unrestricted access to the Internet, an independent judiciary, religious tolerance, equal treatment of all citizens, and basic security.
  - Based on the scores on a range of indicators within these five categories, countries have been classified into one of four types of regime:
  - Democracy Index is based on the ratings for 60 indicators, grouped into above five categories. Each category has a rating on a 0 to 10 scale, and the overall Index is the simple average of the five category indexes.
1. **Full democracies:** scores greater than 8
  2. **Flawed democracies:** scores greater than 6, and less than or equal to 8
  3. **Hybrid regimes:** scores greater than 4, and less than or equal to 6
  4. **Authoritarian regimes:** scores less than or equal to 4.

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## Explanation of the Above Terms:

### Full democracies:

- Countries in which not only basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected, but which also tend to be underpinned by a political culture conducive to the flourishing of democracy. The functioning of government is satisfactory. Media are independent and diverse. There is an effective system of checks and balances. The judiciary is independent and judicial decisions are enforced.
- There are only limited problems in the functioning of democracies.

### Flawed democracies:

- These countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

### Hybrid regimes:

- Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair.
- Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies - in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists and the judiciary is not independent.

### Authoritarian regimes:

- In these states, state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed.
- Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships. Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair. There is disregard for abuses and infringements of civil liberties. Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship. There is no independent judiciary.

### Highlights of the 2020 Democracy Index:

- Only about half (49.4%) of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort.
- Only 8.4% reside in a "full democracy".

**Democracy Index 2020**

Type of Democracy	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	23	13.8	8.4
Flawed democracies	52	31.1	41.0
Hybrid regimes	35	21.0	15.0
Authoritarian regimes	57	34.1	35.6

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### Top Five Countries in the Democracy Index 2020:

Country	Overall Score	Rank
Norway	9.81	1
Iceland	9.37	2
Sweden	9.26	3
New Zealand	9.25	4
Canada	9.24	5

### Bottom Five Countries in the Democracy Index 2020:

Country	Overall Score	Rank
Chad	1.55	163
Syria	1.43	164
Central African Republic	1.32	165
Congo	1.13	166
North Korea	1.08	167

### Other Details:

- **Three countries (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan)** moved from the "flawed democracy" category to be **classified as "full democracies"** and one country, Albania, was upgraded to a "flawed democracy" from a "hybrid regime" previously.
- **El Salvador and Hong Kong** were relegated from the "flawed democracy" classification to that of **"hybrid regime"**.
- Algeria, Burkina Faso and Mali lost their status as "hybrid regimes" and are now designated as "authoritarian regimes".

### Best Performing Country:

- The star-performer in 2020 Democracy Index, measured by the change in both its score and rank, is Taiwan, which was upgraded from a "flawed democracy" to a "full democracy", after rising 20 places in the global ranking from 31st place to 11th.

### Worst Performing Country:

- Mali, in west Africa, was the worst-performing country in the 2020 Democracy Index, being downgraded from a "hybrid regime" to an "authoritarian regime". Mali does not have full control over its territory, and rampant insecurity precipitated a coup in August 2020 by military officers aggrieved by a lack of progress against jihadist insurgents. A military junta has since established a transitional government, nullifying the outcome of parliamentary elections held in March 2020

### USA Retains Flawed Democracy Status:

- US retained its "flawed democracy" status. Increased political participation was the main positive: **Americans have become much more engaged in politics** in recent years, and

several factors fuelled the continuation of this trend in 2020, including the politicisation of the coronavirus pandemic, **movements to address police violence and racial injustice**, and elections that attracted record voter turnout. The **negatives** include **extremely low levels of trust in institutions and political parties**, increasing threats to freedom of expression, and a degree of societal polarisation that makes consensus almost impossible to achieve. **Social cohesion** has collapsed. The new president, Joe Biden, faces a huge challenge in bringing together a country that is deeply divided over core values.

#### Additional Information:

#### Ranking of India and Its Neighbours in the Democracy Index 2020:

Country	Overall Score	Rank	Type of Democracy
India	6.61	53	Flawed Democracy
Sri Lanka	6.14	68	Flawed Democracy
Bangladesh	5.99	76	Hybrid
Bhutan	5.71	84	Hybrid
Nepal	5.22	92	Hybrid
Pakistan	4.31	105	Hybrid
Myanmar	3.04	135	Authoritarian
China	2.27	151	Authoritarian

#### **Elderly Abuse a Growing Concern in India**

- At least five per cent of India's elderly population (aged 60 years and above) stated they experienced ill-treatment in 2020, according to Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) findings released in February 2021.
- Bihar records highest share of elderly persons ill treated in India

#### **Background:**

- The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare launched the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) in 2016.
- LASI is a national survey for scientific investigation of the **health, economic, and social determinants and consequences of population ageing in India.**
- The LASI covered a sample of 72,250 individuals aged 45 and above and their spouses including 31,464 elderly persons aged 60 and above and 6,749 oldest-old persons aged 75 and above from all States and Union Territories (UTs) of India (excluding Sikkim).

#### **Population of Elderly People in India:**

- As per the 2011 census, the 60+ population accounted for 8.6% of India's population, accounting for **103 million (10.3 crore)** elderly people.
- Growing at around 3% annually, the number of elderly age population will rise to 319 million **(31.9 crore) in 2050.**

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- 75% of the elderly people suffer from one or the other chronic disease.
  - 40% of the elderly people have one or the other disability and 20% have issues related to mental health.

#### **What is the Significance of LASI?**

- The findings of the Survey will be used for designing **policies** and **programmes** for the older population.
- These would cover broad domains of **social, health, and economic well-being** of older population.
- A range of **preventive and health care programmes** would be launched for older population and most vulnerable among them under the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly.

#### **Major Findings of the Survey:**

- Abuse of the elderly is a growing problem with several manifestations in different countries and cultures. It is **a fundamental violation of human rights and leads to several health and emotional problems.**
- The **abuse** can be classified as **physical, sexual, psychological or financial.** Abuse is relatively more frequent among elderly women and those living in rural areas.
- At least five per cent of India's elderly population (aged 60 years and above) stated they **experienced abuse (ill-treatment)** in 2020, according to Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI).
- **A lot of women loose support as they loose their partners to old age.** This group of people generally has **no income source or economic activity.**
- The pervasiveness of the practice (abuse) among the elderly was proportionately more in Bihar (12 per cent), Karnataka (10 per cent), West Bengal (8 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (6 per cent), Chandigarh (6 per cent) and Chhattisgarh (6 per cent).

#### **Verbal/ Emotional Abuse:**

- Among the elderly who felt ill-treated, 77.3 per cent complained of verbal / emotional ill-treatment that can **harm their self-worth or emotional well-being.**
- Examples include **name-calling, causing embarrassment, not letting them see friends and family.**
- The emotional harm that may emerge from verbal or emotional abuse includes sorrow, fear, **perverse emotional discomfort, and loss of personal pride.**

#### **Physical Abuse (Ill Treatment):**

- Almost a fifth of those surveyed experienced **physical ill-treatment (23.7 per cent).** This occurs when an elderly person is wounded due to hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, burning, or other show of force.

#### **Economic Exploitation:**

- Close to a quarter experienced **economic** exploitation (26.5 per cent), which **means misuse of an elderly person's money, property and assets.**

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**Neglect:**

- More than half experienced neglect (52.6 per cent).
- Among those who reported as experiencing ill-treatment, the victims of physical ill-treatment were the highest in Arunachal Pradesh (45 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (43 per cent), Tamil Nadu (40 per cent) and Puducherry (41 per cent).
- At the same time, elderly respondents experiencing **verbal / emotional ill-treatment** was the highest in the states of Uttarakhand (100 per cent), Chhattisgarh (97 per cent), Tripura (94 per cent), Tamil Nadu (89 per cent), and Andhra Pradesh (85 per cent).
- More elderly experienced **economic exploitation** in Chhattisgarh (53 per cent), Delhi (52 per cent), and Uttar Pradesh (48 per cent).
- Elderly persons experienced neglect more in southern states such as Andhra Pradesh (87 per cent), Telangana (68 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (69 per cent).

**Conclusion of the Survey:**

- **The obstacle of elder abuse cannot be adequately solved if older people's essential needs food, shelter, protection and access to healthcare are not met.**

**Draft National Policy on Migrant Labour**

- Imposition of countrywide lockdown in March 2020 due to COVID led to a migrant crisis with an estimated 10 million (one crore) labourers returning to their homes.
- Responding to demands from a cross-section of states, experts and civil society, for a nationwide migrant workers policy, the Labour Ministry requested NITI Aayog to lead the initiative.
- The NITI Aayog prepared a draft National Policy on Migrant Policy.

**Major Findings and Recommendations in the Draft Policy:**

Migrant labourers are vulnerable due to following reasons.

- They are **politically and socially excluded** as they **do not have voting rights** in the place of migration.
- Their **work arrangements are informal**.
- They are **subject to exploitation and denial of labour rights**.
- They **lack collective voice due to absence of unions**.
- They are **excluded from social protection arrangements, formal skills, health, education, and housing**.

**Recommendations:**

- **Employers** should be **transparent and formalise work contracts** with migrant workers.
- There should be facility **for portability of social protection, and voting rights**. Portability of voting rights will enhance accountability of political leadership towards welfare of migrant workers.

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- They should have access to **health, education, and housing facilities.**
  - **Ministry of Labour** should be the **nodal ministry** and a dedicated unit under it shall act as a focal point for inter-ministerial and Centre-state coordination.
  - Each state should establish a **migrant workers section in their Labour department.**
  - Inter-state migration management bodies to cover the nation's key migration corridors: Uttar Pradesh and Mumbai; Bihar and Delhi; Western Odisha and Andhra Pradesh; Rajasthan and Gujarat, and Odisha and Gujarat.
  - Source states of migration should send nodal officers to destination states to work collectively with the labour officers.

#### **Education:**

- Ministry of Education should take measures under the Right to Education Act, 2009, to mainstream migrant children's education, map migrant children, and provide local-language teachers in migrant destinations.

#### **Housing:**

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should set up night shelters, short-stay homes, and seasonal accommodation for migrants in cities.

#### **Grievance Handling:**

- Grievance handling cells have also been proposed. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Ministry of Labour have been suggested to set up cells that will **fast-track legal responses for trafficking, minimum wage violations, workplace abuses and accidents among migrant workers.**

#### **National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW)**

- The Ministry of Labour & Employment has proposed to develop **National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW).**
- It will be a **comprehensive database of the unorganised workers and migrant workers, seeded with Aadhaar.**
- It will have details of **name, occupation, address, occupation type, educational qualification, skill types and family details.**
- The details would be used for optimum realisation of their employability and extend the benefits of the social security schemes to them.

#### **Who are Unorganised Workers?**

- Unorganised workers means wage workers, self employed and those working in the enterprises which employ less than 10 workers.
- Unorganised workers do not have access to social security benefits like health insurance, provident fund (which takes care of expenses after retirement), maternity leave benefit, gratuity, etc. There are available to those working in the organised sector i.e. enterprises employing more than 10 people.

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# **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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## **India and Pakistan Agree on Ceasefire**

- In a significant development, India and Pakistan agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors after hotline discussions by their Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMO).
- The decision by the two countries came into effect from the midnight of February 24/25, 2021.

### **What is ceasefire?**

- During a ceasefire agreement, both the parties to the conflict agree not to resort to firing and shelling and maintain peace.

### **Why do Ceasefire Violations Occur?**

- India states that Pakistan is responsible for ceasefire violations as it resorts to firing for providing cover for terrorists infiltrating into India. India retaliates to ceasefire violations by Pakistan.

### **What are the consequences of ceasefire violations?**

- Ceasefire violations lead to loss of lives both civilian and military personnel as both countries resort to indiscriminate firing of ammunition.

### **Extent of Ceasefire Violations:**

- A total of 10,752 cases of ceasefire violations have taken place along India's border with Pakistan (International Border and the Line of Control) in the last three years (2018, 2019, 2020), in which 72 security personnel and 70 civilians were killed.
- Similarly, 364 security personnel and 341 civilians were injured in cross-border firings along the International Border and the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir in 2018, 2019 and 2020.
- India shares a **3,323-km border with Pakistan**, of which **221 km of the International Border (IB) and 740 km of the Line of Control (LoC) fall in Jammu and Kashmir**.

### **What is the significance of present ceasefire announcement?**

- Civilians inadvertently become target of firing from both sides.
- Civilians in the border areas live in constant fear of firing and shelling.
- Shelling and firing along the LoC and the International Border (IB) results in casualties, damage to houses, schools, health centres and religious places.
- If both sides adhere to the ceasefire agreement, peace and tranquillity can be ensured along the border areas. Civilians who live on border areas of both the countries can lead a peaceful life.

### **Bilateral Relations After the 2003 Ceasefire Agreement:**

- Both the countries announced ceasefire agreement in 2003 four years after the Kargil war in 1999. The then Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the then Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, played a key role in the ceasefire agreement.

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- The 2003 ceasefire agreement ensured peaceful borders from 2003 to 2006.
  - However, after that both the countries did not strictly adhere to the ceasefire agreement.
  - The 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack froze bilateral relations.
  - After 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an effort to improve bilateral relations. In 2015, he visited Lahore in an unannounced visit, met the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and attended the wedding of Mr. Sharif's granddaughter.
  - But terrorists carried out an attack on Pathankot airbase on January 2, 2016, which was followed by the attack at the garrison in Uri.
  - India responded with a surgical strike along the border.
  - Bilateral ties continued to nose-dive because of the Pulwama terror attack of February 14, 2019, and the subsequent Balakot operation by India.
  - Indian Air Force warplanes hit a Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terror training camp in Balakot on February 26, 2019 to avenge the killing of 40 CRPF personnel in the Pulwama terror attack. Pakistan Air Force retaliated the next day but the IAF foiled the attack.

#### **Counter Terrorism Operations to Continue:**

- Indian Army reiterated that there would be "no let-up" in counter-terror operations as a result of the ceasefire agreement.
- The Army stated that agreement with Pakistan was "an attempt to bring violence levels down", but it retained the "right to respond" in case there is a terror attack in the future.

#### **India and Mauritius Sign Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement**

- India and Mauritius signed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) during the visit of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in February 2021.
- The India-Mauritius CECPA is the first trade Agreement to be signed by India with a country in Africa.
- The Agreement will cover Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons, Telecom, Financial services, Customs Procedures and Cooperation in other Areas.

#### **Benefits to India:**

- The CECPA between India and Mauritius covers 310 export items for India, including food stuff and beverages, agricultural products, textile and textile articles, base metals, electrical and electronic items, plastics, chemicals, etc.
- As regards trade in services, Indian service providers will have access to sectors such as professional services, computer related services, research & development, other business services, telecommunication, construction, distribution, education, environmental, financial, tourism & travel related, recreational, yoga, audio-visual services, and transport services.

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**Benefits to Mauritius:**

- Mauritius will benefit from preferential market access into India for its 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.
- India has offered to open up 11 broad services sectors, including professional services, Research and Development (R&D), other business services, telecommunication, financial, distribution, higher education, environmental, health, tourism and travel related services, recreational services and transport services.

**Background:**

- Since 2005, India has been among the largest trading partners of Mauritius, and has been one of the largest exporters of goods and services to Mauritius.
- In 2019, the main import partners of Mauritius were India (13.85%), China (16.69%), South Africa (8.07%), and UAE (7.28%).
- The bilateral trade between India and Mauritius has registered a growth of 233% from USD 206.76 million in 2005-06 to 690.02 million in FY 2019-20.
- India's exports to Mauritius surged 232% from US \$ 199.43 million in 2005-06 to 662.13 million in 2019-20, while India's imports from Mauritius increased 280% from US \$ 7.33 million in 2005-06 to 27.89 million in 2019-20.
- The India-Mauritius CECPA will further cement the already deep and special relations between the two countries

**Development Partnership:**

- Mauritius is an important development partner of India. India had extended a 'Special Economic Package' of US \$ 353 million to Mauritius in 2016.
- The new Supreme Court building project is one of the five projects being implemented under this package and was jointly inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Mauritius PravindJugnauth in July 2020. In October 2019, Prime Minister Modi and the PM of Mauritius had jointly inaugurated the Phase -I of the Metro Express Project and the 100-bed state of the art ENT hospital project in Mauritius, also built under the special economic package.

**India and Afghanistan Sign MoU for construction of the Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam in Afghanistan**

- India and Afghanistan signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the construction of the Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam in Afghanistan during the visit of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on February 9, 2021.
- The project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan. As a part of our Development Cooperation with Afghanistan, India has completed more than 400 projects covering all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. India is one of the largest donor for Afghanistan and has pledged US \$ 3 billion assistance (grants and concessional loans) for Afghanistan.

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### **About Lalander (Shatoot) Dam:**

The Lalander (Shatoot) Dam would

- meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City,
- provide irrigation water to nearby areas,
- rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network,
- aid in flood protection and management, and
- also provide electricity to the region.

### **Second Dam Built by India:**

- This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan after the India- Afghanistan Friendship Dam [Salma Dam], which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.
- Signing of the MoU on Lalandar [Shatoot] Dam is a reflection of **India's strong and long-term commitment towards the socio-economic development of Afghanistan** and the enduring partnership between two countries.
- The Prime Minister, in his remarks, highlighted the civilisational relationship between India and Afghanistan and gave an assurance of India's continued support for a **peaceful, united, stable, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan**.
- Afghanistan President Mr. Ashraf Ghani said that India-backed projects - including Salma dam, the Parliament building, 1,000 annual scholarships and power transmission lines - have changed the lives of people in Afghanistan.

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **Unites States of America Ends Support to Yemeni Government**

- On February 4, 2021, President Joe Biden of USA announced the end of military support to war in Yemen. Yemen, one of the Arab world's poorest countries, has been devastated by a civil war since 2014.
- So far, the US has been backing the Yemeni government and its Saudi-led allies in their war against the Houthis in Yemen. The six-year war is widely seen as a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- US has been supporting offensive operation in Yemen by providing military, logistical and intelligence support to the Saudi Arabia and its allies.
- United States has sold fighter jets and advanced weapons like precision- guided bombs to these countries.
- Intelligence support extended by US included support to Saudi Arabia's Military Command and Control to minimise civilian casualties during aerial strikes.

### **Why US Supported Saudi-led Allies War in Yemen?**

- In 2015, the then President Obama extended support to the Saudi-led campaign, partly to ease the Kingdom's anger over the Iran's nuclear deal.

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## Background of Yemen War?

- Ali Abdullah Saleh who ruled Yemen for three decades began losing his grip on power during the Arab Spring protests in 2011. (Details of Arab Spring explained in additional information)
- Protests broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread to other countries including Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria. Mass protests began against the rule of . He ultimately agreed to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, in 2011. But, the political transition did not bring stability to Yemen.
- Mr Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems. There were attacks by jihadists, a separatist movement in the south, corruption, unemployment and food insecurity.
- The Houthi movement (known formally as Ansar Allah), which supports Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority and fought a series of rebellions against Saleh during the previous decade, took advantage of the new president's weakness by taking control of their northern heartland of Saada province and neighbouring areas.
- Disillusioned with the transition, many ordinary Yemenis - including Sunnis - supported the Houthis, and in late 2014 and early 2015 the rebels gradually took over the capital Sanaa.
- ? The Houthis and security forces loyal to Saleh then attempted to take control of the entire country, forcing Mr Hadi to flee abroad in March 2015.

## International Coalition Against Houthis?

- Alarmed by the rise of Houthis which is backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at defeating the Houthis, ending Iranian influence in Yemen and restoring Mr Hadi's government.
- The coalition received **logistical and intelligence** support from the **US, UK and France**.

## Why Did Saudi Arabia and its Allies Launch Offensive Against Houthis?

- Saudi Arabia and its allies fear the **Houthis could grow as powerful as Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah** militant group and **pose a threat to regional stability if they get control over Yemen**.
- The Houthis already launched drone and missile attacks deep into the Saudi kingdom.

## Who are Houthis?

- Those showing allegiance to Houthi Movement are called Houthis informally.
- The Houthi movement is formally known as Ansar Allah. It champions Zaidi branch of Shia Muslim.
- Their history stretches back to the early 1990s, when a group called Shabab al-Muminin (the Believing Youth) worked to raise awareness about the Zaydi branch of Shiite Islam, which had dominated Yemen for centuries but was sidelined after a civil war in the 1960s.
- Hussein al-Houthi, one of the leaders of the Believing Youth, began staging anti-American protests after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. When Hussein Houthi was killed by government forces in 2003, his supporters renamed their group after him and continued a shift from religious protest to armed insurgency.

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### Support from Iran:

- Houthis are backed by Iran, the regional super power which is a Shiite majority, as Houthis are also followers of branch of Shia sect, the Zaidi.
- Iran has been providing assault rifles, and missiles to Houthis.
- There is **struggle for religious and political supremacy in the Arab World between Sunnis and Shias** (Further details given in additional information at the end of the article.)

### Present Status in Yemen:

- Houthi rebels remain firmly entrenched in the country's north and hold its capital, Sanaa.
- The rest of the country is being held by competing tribal, regional and political alliances, backed overall by the Saudi-led coalition.
- Al-Qaeda and Islamic State jihadist groups also have some territories under their control.
- Mr. Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi who resigned in January 2015 and fled to Saudi Arabia when Houthi Shia rebels took over the capital, Sanaa, returned to set up a temporary capital in the main city in the south of Yemen, Aden, with the support of loyalist forces and Saudi-led troops.
- The Houthis claim that their revolutionary council in Sanaa, headed by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, is the legitimate government, but the international community backs Mr Hadi.

### Consequences of Civil War?

- United Nations has stated that the civil war in Yemen has resulted in the **world's largest humanitarian crisis**.
- The war has killed some 130,000 people, including over 17,000 civilians.
- There is **widespread hunger and poverty** in Yemen.
- **80 per cent of the population** is surviving on international aid.

### Impact of the War on Saudi Arabia?

- At the start of the war, Saudi Arabia and its Allies forecast that the war would last only a few weeks. But after six years, there seems to no end to the conflict.
- Houthis have been targeting critical infrastructure in Saudi Arabia like oil and natural gas installations.
- Saudi Arabia and its allies have been trying to find ways to get out of this war.
- The UAE pulled out its ground forces in 2019 and has been urging a negotiated settlement to the war.

### Additional Information:

#### Shias and Sunnis:

- Muhammad, the Founder of Islam, in 632 AD. He had **no male heir** and died **without appointing a successor** to lead the Muslim community, and **disputes arose over who should be the successor of his political and religious legacy**.
- Some believed that a new leader should be chosen by consensus; others thought that only the prophet's descendants should become caliph. Majority of the followers agreed to Abu

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Bakr, a trusted companion of Mohammed Prophet, as the Caliph (successor to Mohammed Prophet).

- However, a minority wanted Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, to be the Caliph (the successor of Mohammed Prophet). Ali eventually did become caliph after Abu Bakr's two successors were assassinated.
- After Ali also was assassinated, with a poison-laced sword at the mosque in Kufa, now Iraq, his sons **Hasan and then Hussein** claimed the title. But Hussein and many of his relatives were massacred in Karbala, Iraq, in 680.
- Hussein's martyrdom became a central tenet to those who believed that Ali should have succeeded the Prophet. (It is mourned every year during the month of Muharram, the first calendar month in Islam). The followers became known as Shias, a contraction of the phrase Shiat (followers) Ali, or followers of Ali.
- The **Sunnis**, however, regard the **first three caliphs before Ali** (Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan) as rightly guided and themselves as the true adherents to the Sunnah, or the Prophet's tradition.
- Sunni rulers embarked on sweeping conquests that extended the caliphate into North Africa and Europe. The last caliphate ended with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War-I.

#### **Sunni and Shia Population:**

- **More than 85 per cent of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims are Sunnis.**
- Sunnis dominate the Muslim world, from West Africa to Indonesia.
- Shiites represent the **majority of the population in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan** and sizable population in **Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.**
- The Saudi royal family, which practices an austere and conservative strand of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism, controls Islam's holiest shrines, Mecca and Medina.
- **Karbala, Kufa and Najaf in Iraq are revered shrines for the Shias.**
- **Saudi Arabia** is the most powerful purveyor of Sunni Islam. Iran is the heart of Shia Islam.

#### **How do their beliefs differ?**

- One of the most crucial differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims is the importance that the Shiites give to Ali, whom the Sunnis do not recognise as being the Prophet's rightful successor.
- Shias consider Ali and the leaders who came after him as Imams. Most believe in a line of 12 Imams, the last of whom, a boy, is believed to have vanished in the ninth century in Iraq after his father was murdered. Shias known as Twelvers anticipate his return as the Mahdi, or Messiah.
- Sunni Muslims rely on the Sunnah, a record of the teachings and sayings of the prophet Muhammad to guide their actions, the Shiites rely on their ayatollahs, whom they see as a sign of God on earth. While there are many ayatollahs, one of the most well-known is Ayotollah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini, the political and religious leader of Iran.

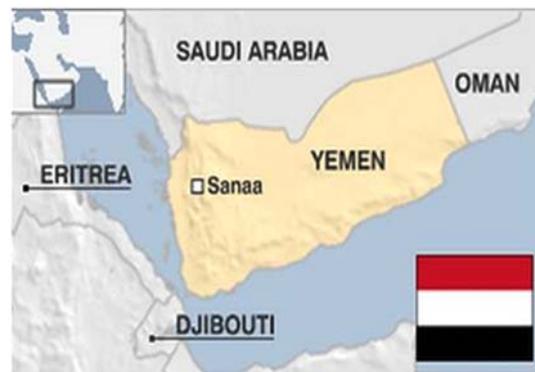
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- Sunnis **emphasise God's power in the material world**, sometimes including the public and political realm, while **Shias value martyrdom and sacrifice**.
  - One of the most important dates for Shia Muslims is the tenth day of the holy month of Muharram (the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar). Shia Muslims observe the anniversary of the death of Husseain ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and son of Ali.

### What do Sunnis and Shiites have in common?

- Both Sunnis and Shiites read the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet.
- Both believe Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah. And both follow the five tenets of Islam: Faith, Fasting, Prayers, Pilgrimage, and Giving alms.
- They **fast** during Ramadan, pledge to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, practice ritual prayer (which includes five prayers each day), give charity to the poor, and pledge themselves to their faith.

### What is Arab Spring?

- Arab spring refers to a series of mass uprisings in the Arab countries in 2011 against dictatorial leaders demanding their resignation and transition to democracy. The protests began in Tunisia first with the **self immolation of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi due to police harassment for bribes**. The protests led to the resignation of the dictator of Tunisia President Ben Ali who ruled the country for 23 years. Soon protests spread to other Arab countries like Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.



### U.S. Imposes Sanctions, and Visa Bans on Saudis Involved in the Killing of Journalist Khashoggi

- On February 26, 2021, the United States announced sanctions and visa bans on select individuals of Saudi Arabia for their role in the killing of Saudi Arabian Journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, Turkey in 2018.
- He was lured into Saudi Arabia embassy in Turkey on the pretext of signing some papers regarding his marriage and killed by a team of operatives linked to Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). After killing, his body was dismembered. His remains have never been found.

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### Why was Khashoggi Killed?

- Jamal Khashoggi wrote regular articles in the 'Washington Post' which were critical of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. He was killed in an apparent bid to suppress dissidence against Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).

### US Intelligence Report Findings:

- U.S. Intelligence Report which was released after long delay accused Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of approving Khashoggi's murder in Istanbul in 2018.
- The public censure of the Prince and a slew of U.S. sanctions on dozens of Saudi officials marks a sharp departure from the policy of former President Donald Trump, who sought to shield the kingdom's de facto ruler. The report was withheld after being completed under Mr. Trump.
- The report singled out the role of Saudi Royal Guard's Rapid Action Force in the killing of Khashoggi.
- It stated that the killing fits a pattern of the **crown prince's support for using violent measures to silence dissidents abroad.**

### What U.S. Sanctions Involve:

- The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the former deputy Saudi intelligence chief, Ahmed al-Asiri, and announced sanctions on the Saudi Royal Guard's Rapid Intervention Force (RIF).
- The move freezes any U.S. assets that the Saudi individuals held.
- Sanctions bar Americans from dealing with the sanctioned individuals.

### What Does Visa Ban Mean?

- The United States also announced visa restrictions against 76 Saudi citizens involved in surveillance and killing of Khashoggi.
- These restrictions have been imposed on them for carrying out activities against journalists and dissidents beyond their borders. Such activities include efforts to suppress, harass, surveil, threaten or harm them.

### Crown Prince Spared From Sanctions:

- Though the U.S. Intelligence Report mentions about the role of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the U.S refrained from placing Crown Prince under sanctions (asset freeze and visa ban) as
- United States sought to **avoid a diplomatic rupture with Saudi Arabia** by placing sanctions on Crown Prince. United States has a long standing partnership with Saudi Arabia and it is an important ally in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is also a major oil producer in the world.
- Hence, it adopted a **delicate balancing act of recalibration of ties** by sanctioning individuals associated with the killing of Journalist Khashoggi and at the same time preserve a working relationship with the crown prince, the kingdom's de facto leader, even though U.S. intelligence concluded that he approved the operation to capture or kill Khashoggi.

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### **Message of U.S. Sanctions:**

- Through the sanctions, the U.S. conveyed the following message to the Saudi Arabia:
- Extraterritorial threats and assaults by Saudi Arabia against activists, dissidents, and journalists must end.
- U.S does not support gross human rights violations.

### **Human Rights Foundation Calls for Sanctions on Crown Prince:**

- President Joe Biden's decision not to impose sanctions on international Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince over journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder has frustrated human rights campaigners.
- New York-based Human Rights Foundation urged the U.S. and the European Union to impose sanctions on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to render complete justice to Khashoggi.

### **Additional Information:**

#### **Saudi Arabia Accepts Murder of Khashoggi:**

- Saudi Arabia, though initially denied its involvement in the killing of Khashoggi, eventually admitted that Khashoggi was killed in a "rogue" extradition operation that has gone wrong, but denied any involvement of the crown prince.
- Five men were given the death penalty for the murder in 2019. But, their sentences were commuted to 20 years in prison after being forgiven by Khashoggi's family.
- But the manner of trial which was conducted closed door dented the credibility of the judicial process. There was wide consensus internationally, including the U.S. intelligence report and UN Report, that the crime of this nature cannot be committed without the approval from highest political leadership and involvement of high ranking intelligence officials especially Saud al-Qahtani, top adviser of Crown Prince and Ahmed al-Assiri, the former deputy intelligence chief.

### **U.S. and Russia Extend New START Treaty for 5 More Years**

- On February 3, 2021, the United States and Russia extended the nuclear arms control treaty known as the **New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)** with Russia for the next five years i.e. up to 2026.
- The New START Treaty entered into force on February 5, 2011 and was to expire on February 5, 2021 unless agreed for a five year extension by both the countries.

#### **Details:**

#### **What is New START Treaty?**

- The deal was negotiated between by then-President Barack Obama and Russia's then-president Dmitry Medvedev in 2010, New START came into effect the following year i.e. 2011.
- The treaty limits each nation to deploying 700 intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers with nuclear weapons.
- It also limits both nations to deploying 1,550 nuclear warheads (nuclear bombs) on those platforms.

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- The agreement also included a five-year extension clause that allowed both nations to extend the pact with the approval of both presidents.

#### **Strong Verification Mechanism:**

- The treaty also has provisions for strong verification confidence building measures.
- It provides for 18 on-site inspections per year for U.S. and Russian inspection teams.
- Both the countries should notify location, movement, and disposition of strategic nuclear weapons
- Annual data exchange on Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) launches is mandatory.

#### **Why is the Treaty Called New START Treaty?**

- USA and Russia are the world's largest nuclear nations. More than 90 per cent of the nuclear weapons are held by both these countries.
- In 1991, both the countries signed Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) for reduction of nuclear weapons.
- START I established an aggregate limit of 1,600 delivery vehicles and 6,000 nuclear warheads (nuclear bombs) for each party (a reduction from 12,000 warheads in 1991).
- It remained in force till December 5, 2009. The treaty contained the option of extending the operation of the for five year periods. But, both U.S. and Russia were against extension as the negotiations were under way for a new treaty to replace this treaty.
- The new treaty called **New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)** was signed in 2010 and came into force in 2011.

#### **What is the significance of the Extension of the Treaty?**

- Extending the New START Treaty makes the United States, U.S. and the world safer. An **unconstrained nuclear competition would endanger the world.**
- Had the United States and Russia not extended the pact, **the world would have returned to an era without substantive, verifiable limits on the world's two largest nuclear powers.**

#### **Relocation of Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char Island by Bangladesh**

- Bangladesh has been relocating Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Bhasan Char Island

#### **Who are Rohingyas ?**

- The Rohingyas are a mostly-Muslim minority ethnic group in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. (Further details are given in additional information)
- More than one million Rohingyas fled from Rakhine State in Myanmar since 2017 due to crackdown by Myanmar army.
- The Myanmar government **sees them as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and has not granted them citizenship. It has even excluded them from the census of 2014.**
- The United Nations has described the Myanmar Army's crackdown as 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing'.

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### Where is Bhasan Char Island?

- Bhashan Char is an island of 13,000 acres. It is located 39 kilometers from Naokhali district on the mainland of Bangladesh.
- It takes a **four-hour naval journey from the port city of Chittagong** to reach the island.

### Why is Bangladesh Relocating Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char Island?

- Most of the Rohingyas who fled from Rakhine State in Myanmar due to army crackdown are living in the refugee camps (Kutupalong and Balukhali) in Cox's Bazar town in Bangladesh.
- But, the current refugee camps in Cox's Bazar are **overcrowded and unhygienic**. Disease and organised crime are rampant.
- Bangladesh opines that **overcrowding** in refugee camps **fuels crime**.
- Hence, Bangladesh is relocating **1,00,000 refugees** to Bhasan Char Island to **reduce the pressure of overcrowding in Cox's Bazar**.
- Refugees are being relocated by the Bangladesh Navy in batches.
- The fourth batch was shifted to Bhashan Char on February 15, 2021. The first batch was moved on December 4, 2021.
- So far, around 14,000 Rohingyas have been relocated to the island in four phases.

### What are the concerns over Relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char?

#### 1. Uninhabited and Prone to Flooding:

Bhasan Char island is low lying area which is not suitable for habitation. (Char means sediment in Bengali and Bhasan Char means 'floating island' in Bengali)

Bhasan Char surfaced only a few years ago and was never inhabited.

It surfaced in 2006 from the sediment deposited by the river Meghna. A Google Earth view shows part of its sedimentation under water.

Hence, Bhasan Char island is **vulnerable to erosion and floods**. Much of it is submerged during the monsoon.

(Bangladesh has several char islands historically occupied by vulnerable communities despite the environmental risks. During the monsoon season, the river flow increases, washing over the chars and **damaging the shelters, crops and livestock**. As the river recedes, often new chars emerge.)

Hence, there are concerns that the **lives of the Rohingyas are under threat in Bhasan Char island**.

#### 2. Forced Relocation:

International human rights activists raised concerns that Rohingyas are forcefully relocated without the consent of the refugees to an isolated place

#### 3. Other Challenges:

**Providing education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities** for Rohingyas is also a challenge.

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## **Bangladesh Government's Response:**

### **1. Safety Concerns Addressed:**

Bangladesh **dismissed safety concerns over the island.**

It stated that it has **built flood embankments and cyclone shelters** on the Bhasan Char island.

### **2. Infrastructure Facilities Provided:**

It also stated that other **infrastructure like** schools, Mosques, playgrounds, roads, solar power facilities, water supply system have been provided at the Bhasan Char island.

**Bangladesh stated that it has spent around US \$ 350 million on its own** for providing housing and other infrastructure facilities.

### **3. Relocation Voluntary:**

It also denied that Rohingyas are forcefully relocated and stated that **relocation is voluntary.**

### **4. Livelihood Opportunities:**

The Bangladesh government has **assured to provide livelihood opportunities** at Bhasan Char, including agricultural work; fish, poultry and dairy farming; apiculture; and handicrafts.

Shops will also be set up in the designated market place. The government is partnering with Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to buy the works produced by the Rohingyas on the island and sell them on the mainland.

## **Additional Information:**

### **How the Rohingya Refugee Problem Started?**

- The current crisis started in 2017 after a Rohingya Islamist terrorist group called 'Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)' in Myanmar attacked more than 30 police posts.
- The ARSA which is active since 2016 is fighting for a " democratic Muslim state for the Rohingyas. The group has been targeting Myanmar armed forces.
- In response to the attack by ARSA, Myanmar troops, often backed by local mobs, burned villages and killed thousands of civilians in the Rakhine State of Myanmar inhabited by Rohingyas. There have also been reports of sexual violence against Rohingya girls and women.
- The attacks forced lakhs of Rohingya to flee Myanmar and take shelter in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar refugee camps.
- Global rights groups and the U.N. called the Military campaign by Myanmar as ethnic cleansing which involved rapes, killings and torching of thousands of homes.
- In November 2019, Gambia, with backing from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), took Myanmar to the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** for violating the **1948 Genocide Convention**. State counsellor Aug San Suu Kyi represented Myanmar at the hearings.
- In January 2020, the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** passed a provisional order directing Myanmar to take "all measures within its power" to prevent atrocities against members of the minority Rohingya Muslim community, in accordance with its obligations under the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**.

### **About Rohingyas:**

- Rohingyas are **an ethnic group, largely comprising Muslims.**
- They predominantly live in the Western Myanmar province of Rakhine.

- They **speak a dialect of Bengali**, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language.
- Though they have been living in the South East Asian country for generations, Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to their land during the Colonial rule.
- So, **Myanmar has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship**. According the 1982 Burmese citizenship law, a Rohingya (or any ethnic minority) is eligible for citizenship only if he/she provides proof that his/her ancestors have lived in the country prior to 1823. Else, they are classified as "resident foreigners" or as "associate citizens" (even if one of the parents is a Myanmar citizen).
- **Since they are not citizens, they are not entitled to be part of civil service**. Their movements are also restricted within the Rakhine state.



## RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

### UNITED NATIONS

#### U.S. Seeks Re-election to UN Human Rights Council

- United States sought re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council in February 2021.
- Addressing the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council on February 24, 2021, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken asked for the support of the United Nations member States for the 2022 to 2024 term. He stated that the **U.S. was placing democracy and human rights at the centre of its foreign policy** and therefore seeking to rejoin the Council.

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### Withdrawal of U.S. from UN HRC:

- In 2018, the then U.S. President Donald Trump announced withdrawal of United States stating that UN HRC was
- biased against Israel, and
- had members who were human rights abusers.

### Details of U.S. Secretary of State Address at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council:

- **Reaffirmation of America's Commitment to Respect and Defend Human Rights:**
- Mr. Antony Blinken **reaffirmed America's commitment to respect and defend the human rights of all people, everywhere.** He quoted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclamation: **all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated.**
- He stated that **United States is placing democracy and human rights at the centre of our foreign policy, because they are essential for peace and stability.** This commitment is firm and grounded in U.S.'s own experience as a democracy.

### On the Role Played by UN HRC:

- The U.S. Secretary of State stated that the UN Human Rights Council has played a meaningful role in protecting fundamental freedoms by documenting atrocities to hold wrongdoers accountable, helping provide the framework to address past atrocities, and supporting transitional justice. And the Council's special emergency sessions - most recently on Burma (Myanmar) - quickly focus attention on unfolding crises and ensure that those who are voiceless have a place to be heard.
- He stated that, still, institutions are not perfect. As the United States reengages, he urged the Human Rights Council to look at how it conducts its business. That includes its disproportionate **focus on Israel.** He called for treating the human rights situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories the same way as this body handles any other country.
- He also stated that **those with the worst human rights records should not be members of this Council.**

### On Tackling Racial Injustice:

- Mr. Antony Blinken stated that any pledge to fight for human rights around the world must begin with a pledge to fight for human rights at home. People of colour in the United States deal every day with the consequences of systemic racism and economic injustice.
- He stated that UN HRC must do more to advance racial justice globally.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. And yet the rights of women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI people, religious minorities, and members of other minority groups are often violated or abused.

### Ending All Kinds of Discrimination:

- Mr. Antony Blinken stated that **U.S. is committed to advancing gender equality and uplifting the rights of women and girls** and will pursue a policy **to end violence and**

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**discrimination of all kinds**, including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

- He stated that United States does not claim to be perfect but it strives every day to improve, to hold ourselves accountable, to become a more perfect union.?"We confront our own challenges openly, transparently, for the entire world to see. Sometimes it's painful, sometimes it's ugly, but we deal with our problems openly and fully" Mr. Antony Blinken stated..
- He stated that there?is no moral equivalence between the actions of the?United?States, which are subject to robust, impartial, and transparent accountability mechanisms -?and those of authoritarian regimes, which violate and abuse human rights with impunity.

#### **About UN Human Rights Council:**

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for
  - strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe,
  - addressing situations of human rights violations, and
  - make recommendations on them.
- It discusses all human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva.
- The UN Human Rights Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006. It replaced the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

#### **Membership of the UN Human Rights Council:**

- The Council is made of **47 Member States, which are elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly of the United Nations** through direct and secret ballot.
- The General Assembly takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows:
  - African States: 13 seats
  - Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
  - Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
  - Western European and other States: 7 seats
  - Eastern European States: 6 seats
- Members of the Council serve for a period of three years, and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- As of 1 January 2020, 117 UN member States have served as Human Rights Council Members, reflecting the UN's diversity and giving the Council legitimacy while speaking out on human rights violations in all countries.

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## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **PSLV-C51 Launches Amazonia and 18 Other Satellites**

- On February 28, 2021, India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C51 successfully launched Amazonia-1 along with 18 co-passenger satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- Out of 18 co-passenger satellites, 13 are from U.S. and 5 were built by students from various universities.

#### **About Amazonia-1:**

- Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite (remote sensing satellite) of Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE).
- **Uses:**
- It would be used for **monitoring deforestation** in the Amazon region, and
- monitoring agriculture diversity across Brazil.

#### **First Commercial Mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL):**

- Amazonia-1 is the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under Department of Space.
- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) is a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) and commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

#### **342 Foreign Satellites Launched By ISRO:**

- With today's launch, the total number of customer satellites from foreign countries placed in orbit by PSLV is 342 satellites from 34 countries.

#### **Additional Information:**

##### **'Anand' Satellite Launch Called off:**

- Pixel India, a start-up from Bengaluru, has planned a vast constellation of 30 earth-imaging satellites by 2023 that would continuously monitor every part of the globe and beam high-resolution imagery and other data. This data can be used for a variety of applications related to climate change, agriculture, and urban planning.
- The first of these satellites, called Anand, was supposed to be on the PSLV-C51 rocket.
- But less than a week before the launch, the company announced that due to "certain software issues" during testing, it would not go ahead with the launch of the satellite at that time.

##### **Geo-spatial Data Policy Liberalised**

- Geo-spatial data (location information) policy has been liberalised by the Union Government in February 2021.
- The liberalisation is critical for location-based services such as e-commerce, logistics, urban transport, etc.

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### What is the Significance of Geo-spatial data ?

- Geospatial data is used by private entities like navigation apps such as MapMyIndia, e-commerce websites like Amazon, food delivery apps like Swiggy, Zomato and transport apps like Uber and Ola among others.
- The liberalisation reform will benefit country's start-ups, private sector, public sector and research institutions to drive innovations and build scalable solutions.

### What are the problems in the present policy?

- There is heavy regulation of geo-spatial data (collection, generation, storage and publication).
- There were several restrictions around using geospatial data by agencies other than a few government departments.
- Even for Government purposes, there is lengthy approval process. In spite of being a government institution, even the **Survey of India has to seek permission from the Ministries of Defence and Home, the Intelligence Bureau** and others to carry out activities it was supposed to do on a regular basis. Such approvals often take several months to come, severely affecting the productivity of the institution.

### What Changes Have been announced to the Geo-spatial data policy?

- The Government has completely **deregulated Geospatial data sector**.
- There is no need for approvals, security clearances or licences needed for acquisition and production of geospatial data for **both public and private sectors**.

### What are the benefits of the new policy?

- Boosts entrepreneurship.
- New job opportunities will be created.
- Improved services to the public.
- The government estimated the domestic geospatial market at Rs. 1 lakh crore with employment potential of nearly 22 lakh people.

### **Arjun Battle Tank Handed Over to Army**

- On February 14, 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army at a ceremony in Chennai.

#### Details:

- Arjun Main Battle Tank (Mk-1A) is indigenously designed, and manufactured by Combat Vehicles Research & Development Establishment (CVRDE), a unit of the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) along with 15 academic institutions, eight labs and several Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
- The army will purchase 118 units of the Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) at a cost of Rs. Rs 8,400 crore.

#### **Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A), An Improved Version:**

- The Arjun Main Battle Tank project was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.

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- The Indian Army received the first batch of 16 tanks in 2004.
  - In 2009, the first Arjun regiment of the Indian Army had 45 tanks.
  - By 2011, over 100 tanks had been delivered.
  - In 2010, the Indian army ordered another 124 Arjuns.
  - Now, the Ministry of Defence ordered another 118 units of the Arjun Mk-1A.
  - The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version.

### **World Sustainable Development Summit 2021**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated World Sustainable Development Summit 2021, the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), via video conferencing on February 10, 2021. The theme of the Summit was 'Redefining our common future: Safe and secure Environment for all'.
- Addressing the event, the Prime Minister emphasised on climate justice for fighting against climate change. ( Climate Justice means fair treatment of all people, and the freedom from discrimination in the creation of policies and projects that address climate change )
- He stated that when each and every one of us understands our individual and collective duties, climate justice will be achieved. He also stated that climate justice also means giving the developing countries enough space to grow.

#### **India's Contribution to Sustainable Development:**

- The Prime Minister stated that **India is committed to reduce emissions intensity of GDP by 33 to 35 percent from 2005 levels.**
- India is making steady progress on its commitment to **Land Degradation Neutrality.**  
Land Degradation is a global concern. It refers to reduction or loss of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of land, reducing carbon storage in soil and vegetation, driving the loss of biodiversity and accelerating climate change.  
Land degradation neutrality is achieved when the area of productive land, (and therefore sustainable land use), remains stable or increases globally or in a given landscape or terrestrial ecosystem.
- Renewable energy like Solar Energy is also picking speed in India and the country is on track to setting up **450 giga watts of Renewable Energy** generating capacity by 2030.
- The Prime Minister said that sustainable development is incomplete without equitable access. In this direction too, India has made good progress. India achieved nearly 100 % electrification.
- Through the **Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) program**, 367 million LED bulbs became a part of people's lives. This reduced over 38 million tonnes carbon dioxide per year.
- Through the **PM Ujjwala Yojana more than 80 million house-holds below poverty line** have access to clean cooking fuel.

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- India is also working to **increase the share of natural gas in India's energy basket from 6 percent to 15 percent.**
  - The Prime Minister also mentioned about India's contribution to sustainable development through **International Solar Alliance.**

#### **Additional Information:**

#### **What is Sustainable Development?**

- Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the **1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)** set up by United Nations.
- The WCED report titled '**Our Common Future**' defined sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- The WCED report also known as the **Brundtland Report** as the WCED was headed by the then Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland,
- The WCED explored the causes of environmental degradation, attempted to understand the **interconnections between social equity, economic growth, and environmental problems**, and developed policy solutions that integrated all three areas.

#### **Srivilliputhur - Megamalai, Fifth Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu**

- In February 2021, the Tamil Nadu organised the Srivilliputhur - Megamalai Tiger Reserve, the fifth tiger reserve in the State.
- An area of 1,01,657.13 hectares in Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel Sanctuary and Megamalai Wildlife Sanctuary have been combined to create the tiger reserve.
- The new tiger reserve will not only lead to wildlife protection of the tigers but will also result in the rejuvenation of the Vaigai river by protecting the river's origins in these forests.
- Now, tigers from the neighbouring Periyar Tiger Reserve and the Annamalai Tiger Reserve regions can find significant habitats and breeding and home ranges in the highly undulating terrains of Srivilliputhur and Megamalai hilly tracts.

#### **Benefits of Tiger Reserves:**

##### **Saving of Rivers:**

- Declaring a tiger reserve restricts human movement and development activities. This helps the rivers to rejuvenate and makes them perennial rivers.
- Formation of tiger reserves have made many rivers perennial like Tamirabarani river because of Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR), Bhavani and Moyar rivers because of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

##### **Climate Change Mitigation:**

- Tiger conservation offers immense ecological services in terms of carbon storage value. Forests have to be saved to ensure that carbon storage is achieved. Climate change is sought to be addressed by using forests as carbon sinks. Poaching or killing of large bodied vertebrates such as tigers results in increase of herbivore population, which in turn results in forests getting decimated.

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## NASA's Perseverance Rover Lands on Mars

- 'Perseverance', most sophisticated rover ever to Mars planet launched by NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of USA, landed safely on Mars on February 18, 2021.
- Perseverance was launched as part of NASA's **Mars Exploration Programme** with Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida on July 30, 2020.
- ? NASA scientists have described Perseverance as the most ambitious of nearly 20 U.S. missions to Mars launched so far beginning with the Mariner spacecraft in 1965.
- Perseverance will build on previous findings that liquid water once flowed on the Martian surface and that carbon and other minerals altered by water and considered precursors to the evolution of life were present.
- Perseverance's immediate predecessor, the rover **Curiosity**, landed in 2012 and remains in operation, as does the stationary lander **InSight**, which arrived in 2018 to study the deep interior of Mars.
- The descent and landing of the Perseverance rover was the most challenging feat in the history of robotic spaceflight.
- Perseverance, the robotic vehicle, sailed through space for nearly seven months, covering 293 million miles (472 million km) before piercing the Martian atmosphere at 12,000 miles per hour (19,000 km per hour) to begin its approach to touchdown on the planet's surface.
- Entering the Martian atmosphere at about 19,000 km per hour, the mission had to bring the Perseverance rover to a halt on the surface in just seven minutes. Since it takes 11 minutes for a radio signal to reach the earth from Mars, the mission control of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory near Los Angeles could not really guide the landing, and the rover had to complete this process by itself. During the complicated landing process, using a camera eye, the rover checked the ground below to avoid hazardous terrain, and landed safely on the Jezero crater in a breathtaking 7 minutes (dubbed by NASA as 'seven minutes of terror').

### About the Perseverance Rover:

- The rover is a **six wheeled robot** and weighs about **1040 kilograms**.
- It is equipped with 25 cameras, a pair of microphones, drills and lasers. It is also equipped with a small helicopter called 'Ingenuity' that will attempt to fly - a first on another planet
- The rover landed on the **Jezero Crater** on Mars on February 18, 2021.
- **Why was the Jezero Crater chosen?**
- The **Jezero Crater** was chosen for study based on an earlier aerial survey, it was found to be home to an ancient delta. **It has diverse geology, boulders, cliffs, dunes and possibly rocks bearing signs of microbes**, making the crater a good place to search for life's existence.

### Objectives of the Perseverance Rover:

- The rover has been launched with four main objectives:
- **Looking for signs of ancient microbial life,**

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- knowing about the geology and climate of Mars planet,
  - collecting the rock and soil sediments of the planet, and
  - test oxygen production for future human exploration.
  - The rover has MOXIE (Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilisation Experiment) instrument. It is designed to demonstrate the possibility of converting Martian carbon dioxide into oxygen.

### **Caracal Included in the List of Critically Endangered Species**

- The National Board for Wildlife has approved inclusion of the caracal in the list of **critically endangered species**. A species facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild is categorised as critically endangered species.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists caracals as a species of 'least concern', mainly due to their large numbers in Africa.

#### **Details:**

- The caracal is a medium-sized wild cat native to Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and India.
- It has a slender build, long legs, a short face, long tufted ears and long canine teeth.
- In India it is found in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The main threat to the species is the loss of habitat.
- Infrastructure projects such as the building of roads lead to the fragmentation of the caracal's habitat and disrupted its movement.
- The loss of habitat also affects the animal's prey which includes small ungulates and rodents.

#### **Recovery Programme for Critically Endangered Species:**

- Ministry of Environment provides financial assistance to State /Union Territory Governments for the recovery programme of critically endangered species.
- First population estimation is carried out and a study of their habitat will also be undertaken.
- Once these findings are available, a habitat improvement and breeding programme will be taken up.

#### **UNEP Releases 'Making Peace with Nature' Report**

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released 'Making Peace with Nature' Report in February 2021.

#### **Highlights:**

##### **The Current Mode of Development Degrades the Earth's Finite Capacity:**

- Human well-being critically depends on the Earth's natural systems. Yet, the **economic, and technological advances have also led to a reduction of the Earth's capacity to sustain current and future human well-being**.
- Over the last 50 years, the global economy has grown nearly fivefold, due largely to a tripling in extraction of natural resources and energy that has fuelled growth in production and

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consumption. The world population has increased to 7.8 billion people. Though on average prosperity has also doubled, about **1.3 billion people remain poor and some 700 million are hungry.**

- The increasingly **unequal and resource-intensive model of development drives environmental decline** through pollution, **climate change**, **biodiversity** loss, and resource degradation.
- Future human prosperity relies on the wise use of the planet's finite space, and remaining resources, as well as on the protection and restoration of its life-supporting processes and capacity to absorb waste.

#### **Society is Failing to Meet Most of Its Commitments to Limit Environmental Damage:**

- Society is not on course to fulfil the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to further limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.
- At the current rate, warming will reach 1.5°C by around 2040 and possibly earlier.
- Taken together, current national policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions put the world on a pathway to warming of at least 3°C by 2100.
- Human-induced current warming of more than 1°C has already led to shifts in climate zones, changes in precipitation patterns, melting of ice sheets and glaciers, accelerating sea level rise, **and pollution threatening people and nature.**

#### **The Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is Threatened :**

- Current and projected **changes in climate, pollution, and biodiversity loss make achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** even more challenging.
- For example, even small increases in temperature, along with associated changes in weather, precipitation, heavier rainfall events, extreme heat, drought and fire, increase risks to health, food security, water supply and human security, and these risks increase along with warming. In 2018 alone, damages from climate-related natural disasters costed about US\$155 billion.
- The **burden of environmental decline is felt by everyone, but disproportionately** by the poor and vulnerable.
- **Environmental changes are already undermining hard-won development gains and impeding** progress towards ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable economic growth, work for all and peaceful and inclusive societies. Land degradation, for instance, adversely affects more than 3 billion people.

#### **There is an Urgent Need for a Clear Break with Current Trends of Environmental Decline:**

- The costs of inaction on limiting environmental change far outweigh the costs of action. Global aggregate impacts from climate change are estimated to be very high by the end of the century unless cost-effective mitigations strategies are undertaken.
- Transforming humankind's relationship with nature is the key to a sustainable future.
- Human knowledge, ingenuity, technology and cooperation can transform societies and economies and secure a sustainable future

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- To prevent extinctions and maintain nature's life-supporting contributions, biodiversity conservation and restoration must be integral to the many uses of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems, and coupled with an expanded and better-managed global network of interconnected protected areas designed to be resilient to climate change.
  - Limiting global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to further limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C requires rapid implementation and a significant strengthening of pledges under the Paris Agreement. Globally, net carbon dioxide emissions need to decline by 45 per cent by 2030 compared with 2010 levels and reach net zero by 2050 to put the world on a pathway to 1.5°C

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