

9pm

Compilation

July, 2021 (Second Week)

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General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Challenging negative social norms

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 1 – Population and Associated Issues

Synopsis:

India touches a demographic milestone this World Population Day, wherein half of its population is below 29 years of age. However, a prudent realisation of this demographic dividend is possible only when every citizen (especially women) enjoys a robust degree of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This enjoyment in turn demands challenging negative social norms in Indian Society.

Background:

- World Population Day (July 11) brings some positive news to India. The country has entered a **demographic sweet spot that will continue for another two to three decades**.
- Half of India's population is under 29 years of age. This means a greater proportion of young people will drive India's economic growth and social progress.

How should the population be developed?

- They must not only be healthy, knowledgeable, and skilled but must also be provided **with the rights and choices to develop to their fullest potential**.
- **This includes imparting a sufficient degree of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).**
 - A comprehensive definition of SRHR by the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission encompasses a broader range of issues.
 - These include SRHR and issues such as violence, stigma and respect for bodily autonomy. It greatly impacts the psychological, emotional and social well-being of individuals.

Trends in India's population growth:

- India's **population growth is now stabilising**. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), presently at 2.2 children, will soon reach replacement level (2.1).
 - TFR refers to the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime.
- However, the TFR remains higher than the national average of 2.2 children among women who live in rural areas.

Challenges in giving SRHR and controlling TFR:

- **First**, rural women have **little formal education** and are **in the lowest income quintile** — a majority of them live in the poorer States.
- **Second**, the **prevailing social norms** doesn't allow women to have a say in choosing their family size.
- **Third**, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed **weaknesses in healthcare systems**. This has led to serious gaps and challenges in the provision of information and services on sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

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India's performance with SRH indicators:

Positive:

- Sample Registration System's (SRS) data shows progressive policies for maternal health have resulted in improved rates of institutional delivery and a decline in maternal mortality ratio (MMR).
 - It declined from 327 in 1999-2001 to 113 per 100,000 live births in 2016-18.
- **National Health Family Survey 5** for the year 2019-20 (NFHS-5) shows contraceptive prevalence has improved in most States.
- Programs such as **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** have made some efforts to challenge existing social norms. It has underlined that investments in social causes must go alongside economic progress.

Negative:

- In girls aged 15-19 years, 22.2% had an unmet need for contraception, according to NFHS-4. This points to inadequate information and access to SRH services for this age group.
- **Girls are still marrying too young — 26.8% of women aged 20-24 years are married before they turn 18.** Further they often have their first child within the first year of marriage.
- India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries **in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report (2021)**. It is now the third-worst performer in South Asia.

Way Ahead:

- India's population stabilisation strategy must be adjusted, keeping in mind the rights of women and girls. Placing youth, women and girls at the centre of policymaking and services could trigger a **positive ripple effect**.
 - **Young people, and adolescent girls, in particular, should have access to education, relevant skills, information and services to make healthy choices.**
 - They should be empowered to exercise their rights, and have access to opportunities for employment.
- Research and practical experience shows that **societies are healthier and more productive when women are empowered to make informed choices**.
 - A woman who has control over her body gains not only in terms of autonomy but also through advances in health, education, income and safety. She is more likely to thrive, and so is her family.
 - The **UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)** calls upon stakeholders to help build a new set of social norms to drive this mission.

Terms to know:

- [Total Fertility Rate \(TFR\)](#), [Replacement Level Fertility](#), [International Conference on Population and Development \(ICPD\)](#), [Maternal Mortality Ratio \(MMR\)](#), [UNFPA](#), [Beti Bachao Beti padhao](#), [Global Gender Gap report](#)

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. World without narrow domestic walls

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – International Relations

Relevance: This article depicts the main reasons behind increasing vaccine nationalism.

Synopsis:

The current world order operates under the principle of national sovereignty and national interest, as witnessed by emerging vaccine nationalism during the pandemic. Nonetheless, a better world can be created if the international order is redesigned around the concept of humanity.

Background:

- The international world order is currently built around the principles that were first enunciated in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This brought the 30 and 80-year overlapping wars in Europe to an end.
- The principles were again reaffirmed in the Articles of Association of multilateral agencies like the UN, WTO and WHO created in the post the Second World War.

About the principles:

- The **central thrust of these principles** was that countries have an exclusive right of control over all matters arising within their territorial boundaries.
- Further, this “right” is not compromised by their signed commitments to multilateral governance. They centered around the concept of national sovereignty and national interest.

Role in influencing decisions:

- **First, vaccine nationalism** was observed in the distribution of Covid vaccines. Scientists did collaborate across national boundaries to develop the vaccine, but when it came to distribution, the politicians first secured supplies for their domestic constituency. After storing sufficient quantities, they shared supplies with the developing world.
- **Second**, the G7 leaders have often committed to financially support the efforts of the poorer countries in tackling climate change with a \$100 billion package. However, domestic economic considerations have refrained them from meeting this commitment.
- **Third, China is continuing to build new coal plants**, which may jeopardise its carbon emission targets. Similarly, President Joe Biden has reportedly backtracked from his pre-election campaign to stall the construction of oil pipelines in his push for clean energy. He is allowing just such a project to continue in Minnesota.

Why do politicians mainly focus on national interest?

- Politics today is a hard-nosed, 24/7, winner-takes-all, and opportunist profession. With the narrowing margins between electoral victory and possible political oblivion, today’s politicians have no option but to remain continually in election mode.
- They cannot afford to rest on their laurels even in the aftermath of victory, or pause to reflect on the longer-term ramifications of their decisions. They have to keep running to stay ahead of the opposition.
- Likewise, they know that their political future depends on fragmenting the opposition by stoking separatist identities and harnessing nationalistic sentiments.

Way Ahead:

- The countries must work with each other in a humane manner. This involves cooperation **built on trust, compassion, friendship, and conversation** that can create a more equitable world.
- There should be redesigning of the Westphalian principles and the current hardware of electoral politics. This would be crucial for tackling global warming, environmental degradation, cross-border conflicts, social injustice and other problems.

2. Without Aadhaar, without identity

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Relevance: Aadhaar number will help the residents to avail various services provided by banking, mobile phone connections and other Govt and Non-Govt services.

Synopsis: Despite the large scale usage, the Aadhar system still has some inherent disadvantages.

Disadvantages of Aadhar system:

- The problem is that the **only record many people have of their Aadhaar number is their Aadhaar card**. If they lose the card, then they might not be able to retrieve their Aadhaar number.
 - The UIDAI website gave clear instructions on how to retrieve a lost Aadhaar number, but only for those who have a registered mobile or email address in the Aadhaar database.
 - The Right to Information Act information also reveal that “If mobile number and e-mail id are not registered with his/her Aadhaar, Resident can visit any Permanent Enrolment Centres for updation (mobile number and e-mail id)”. But the RTI information does not mention what if a person forget mobile number and email address also.
- **Private agencies** that deal with Aadhaar enrolment and updation at the local level are run by unaccountable data operators. Their misdeeds include
 - **Overcharging for services,**
 - **Irresponsible handling of important documents, misplacing them,**
 - **Turning away poor people** who bring difficult queries.

3. India to divert excess waters under Indus treaty to irrigate own land

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Relevance: Indus Water Treaty is an important aspect in India-Pakistan relations

About the news:

Recently Jal Shakti minister said that, “India is working on exercising its rights to stop excess water flowing to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 to irrigate its own lands”. He also mentioned that **India has the right to stop the water** required to irrigate two lakh hectares of land, by exercising our rights under Indus Waters Treaty.

About Indus Waters Treaty in 1960:

After nine years of negotiations, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty, with the World Bank also being a signatory. The treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation

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and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of six rivers—Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

Why India needs to stop the excess water flow?

- This is also of strategic importance to India, given that control over river water flow **acts as a force multiplier** during times of aggression.
- India's plans to fully utilize its share of water under the treaty. It assumes **strategic importance against the backdrop of China** developing the controversial China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in the region.
- India is also expediting **other strategically important hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir**, following the reorganization of the terror-hit state.
- The Ravi, Beas and Sutlej have **some tributaries whose water remains untapped** because of geographical adversities and flows into Pakistan. For instance, the Ujh river.
 - Ujh's confluence is along with the Ravi river downstream. The Ravi river enters and exits Pakistan's territory 17 times. It crisscrosses like this, and at most of the places, it's Ravi that is the line of division between the two countries. So, because of that, one couldn't get an appropriate location to divert it.
 - The Ujh multi-purpose project is to have a 186MW capacity for electricity generation and will also provide water to irrigate 16,743 hectares and 20 cusecs for drinking.
 - India is working on a **plan to divert the waters of Ujh**, which is one of the main tributaries of the Ravi river that flows into Pakistan.

How Pakistan will react?

- Pakistan has **previously objected to India's hydroelectric power project plans**. While it had raised its objections on the 330MW project on the river Kishanganga, a tributary of Jhelum, the International Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled in India's favour in 2013.
- Pakistan had also raised objections on the 850 MW Ratle, 1,000MW Pakal Dul and 48MW Lower Kalnai hydroelectric projects on River Chenab.

India's response to Pakistan objections:

- Rivers Ravi, Beas and Sutlej were allocated to India for exclusive use under the Indus waters treaty. So, Pakistan can't raise a question. Even if they do, it would be illegal.

Terms to Know:

- [Indus Waters treaty](#)

4. Crafting a unique partnership with Africa

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Relevance: African region is full of untapped opportunities. China has made a strong base in the region. India can also make use of this opportunity.

Synopsis:

The African continent presents an opportunity for enhancing India- Africa ties in the domain of agriculture. India should proactively provide funds and other resources to unleash this potential to contain the rising Chinese influence in the region.

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Background:

- New Delhi's engagement with the African continent has been multifaceted. Multiple projects have been implemented under Indian lines of credit and capacity-building initiatives.
- There has been robust cooperation in a range of sectors, amongst which agricultural cooperation holds immense significance.

India- Africa Agriculture partnership:

- India is an importer of fruits, nuts, grains and pulses from the continent.
- India-Africa agricultural cooperation currently includes institutional and individual capacity-building initiatives such as
 - India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development in Malawi,
 - Extension of soft loans, supply of machinery,
 - Acquisition of farmlands and the presence of Indian entrepreneurs in the African agricultural ecosystem.
 - **Indian farmers have purchased over 6,00,000 hectares** of land for commercial farming in Africa.
- The Kerala government is trying to meet its steep requirement for raw cashew nuts by imports from countries in Africa. The state's production capacity is currently limited to 0.83 lakh tonnes, compared to the requirement of 8 lakh tonnes.

Scope of increasing cooperation in Agriculture:

- The African continent has **65% of the world's uncultivated arable land**. It employs over 60% of the workforce and accounts for almost 20% of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP. This testifies the importance of agriculture in improving India- Africa relations.
- Further, the **African Continental Free Trade Area agreement** is expected to improve cost competitiveness by removing tariffs.
- There are also proposals to create a jointly-owned brand of **Africa-Kollam cashews**. Similar ideas could encourage State governments and civil society organisations to identify opportunities and invest directly.
- The transformative power of innovative and disruptive technology has been evident in the African agri-tech sector. The startup ecosystem in the continent enjoyed a 110% growth between 2016 and 2018. This presents **an opportunity for Indian industries to tap into African agri-business** value chains.
- However, China's influence in the region is a cause of concern for India- Africa relations.

China- Africa relations:

- Today, China is amongst Africa's largest trading partners. It is also Africa's single biggest creditor.
- Access to Africa's natural resources, its untapped markets and support for 'One China Policy' are primary drivers of Chinese engagement with Africa. However, there are other factors at play.
 - Chinese-built industrial parks and economic zones in Africa are attracting low-cost, labour-intensive manufacturing units that are relocating from China.
 - Chinese operations in Africa are **important to accumulate global experience in management, risk and capital investments**.
 - China is willing to overlook short-term profits in order to **build 'brand China' and push Chinese standards** in the host countries.

Way Ahead:

- While India's Africa strategy exists independently, it is important to be cognisant of China's increasing footprint in the region. India should learn from China's mistakes and try to avoid it. These include:
 - **Operation in silos** by the Chinese and African experts working in ATDCs.
 - **Existence of a critical gap** between skills transferred in China and the ground realities in Africa.
 - Large commercial farms are run by Mandarin-speaking managers, and there is a presence of small-scale Chinese farmers in local markets. This has **aggravated socio-cultural stress**.
- A thorough impact assessment needs to be conducted of the existing capacity-building initiatives in agriculture for India to stand in a strong position.
- This could include detailed surveys of participants who have returned to their home countries. **Country-specific and localised curriculum** can be drawn up, making skill development demand-led.

5. Will a national judiciary work?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Relevance: The article analysis the idea of an All India Judicial Service through various judgments and recommendations of committees.

Synopsis:

The idea of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS) is surrounded by impairment of federal powers, language barriers, and debatable efficacy in addressing pendency. Thus, a cautious analysis needs to be done by constitutional experts and legal professionals before its establishment.

Background:

- The Union government appears to be devoted in its resolve to implement reforms in recruitment and appointment to the subordinate judicial services.
- In 2019, it spearheaded a consultative process for the creation of the All India Judicial Service (AIJS).
 - Initially, only four States and two High Courts supported the proposal. Eight States rejected it, five suggested changes, and 11 are yet to respond.

Constitutional Perspective on Subordinate Judicial Services:

- **Article 233(1) of the Constitution:** It states that appointments, posting, and promotion of district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the state's High Court.
- The **42nd Constitutional amendment** in 1976 amended **Article 312 (1)** empowering Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services. This included the creation of an AIJS common to the Union and the States.
 - However, Clause 3 of Article 312 places a restriction that **such a service shall not include a post inferior to that of a district judge**.
- The amendment also brought about a significant change in the Seventh Schedule. Entry 3 of List II in its entirety was placed as Entry 11A in List III.
 - **Entry empowers the parliament to enact laws** with regard to 'Administration of Justice; constitution and organisation of all courts, except the Supreme Court and the High Courts'.

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- **Judgements, Opinions, and Commissions over the formation of AIJS:**
- The **11th law commission deliberated upon the objections.**
 - The primary fear was that promotional avenues of the subordinate judiciary would be severely curtailed.
 - 50% of the posts of district judges are to be filled by promotion from the subordinate judicial service. It leaves the remaining posts open for direct recruitment.
 - Another fundamental concern was the language barrier. An outsider would face difficulties in understanding the local language and local concerns.
 - Similarly, taking away the fundamental power of the States to govern the appointment of district judges would be **against the principle of federalism and the basic structure doctrine.**
- Some experts believe that **the AIJS will not reduce judicial delays.** Because the reason behind delays is the existence of large vacancies and not the poor quality of judges.
- The **First National Judicial Pay Commission (headed by Justice K. Jagannatha Shetty)** found that it would be in the interest and the health of the judiciary to form an AIJS. The report supported and reiterated the recommendations of the 14th Law Commission.
- The issue was again discussed in **All India Judges Association Vs. Union of India (2002)**. The court accepted most recommendations of the Shetty Commission and directed the government to implement the judgment.
- The Union Law Minister has supported AIJS to be **an ideal solution for equal representation of the marginalised and deprived sections of society.**
 - Most States already have a reservation policy in force. Tamil Nadu provides for a roster-based reservation of 69%, of which 30% is for women.
 - Uttar Pradesh merely provides 20% reservation for women and the AIJS may therefore benefit States like U.P.

Way Ahead:

- The feasibility of the AIJS in the current context requires to be studied, especially when reliance is placed upon archaic reports of the Law Commission.
- It is for the Union to dispel doubts and at the same time give wings to the aspirations of all stakeholders when implementing the proposal.

Terms to Know:

- [Shetty Commission](#)

6. How India and China are shaped by the idea of national humiliation

Source: [Indian express](#)

GS3: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Relevance: China used its historic national humiliation for strengthening the country. However, India could not do that due to the prevalence of inequality.

Synopsis: China uses national humiliation to legitimise authoritarian rule. Whereas, India's lack of egalitarianism (Equality) makes it harder for national humiliation to be owned equally.

How China used the idea of humiliation?

- Firstly, Chinese nationalism is the **centrality of the idea of humiliation.**
 - From the First Opium Wars to the Nanjing massacre, it is an organising principle of historiography in China.

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- President Xi Jinping's address at the Party centenary begins with a reminder and resolve that China will never be humiliated again.
- Secondly, national humiliation is central to education policy.
 - For instance, public monuments remind people of sites of national humiliation.
- Thirdly, the idea of humiliation has a **legitimizing function**.
 - The Communist Party makes a claim for its fitness to rule on its ability to position itself as the **agent that overcomes China's humiliation**.
- Fourth, the theme of humiliation became an organising frame for foreign policy.

How the concept of humiliation worked in Indian nationalism?

- Firstly, In India's **post-colonial trauma**, the psychological sense of humiliation is present.
 - After the Rowlatt Bills, Gandhi declared April 6, 1919, as National Humiliation Day, but that was almost a one-off event.
 - At an ideological level, the onset of colonialism was also welcomed by many constituencies.
 - For some Hindus, it was an opportunity to come out from under the yoke of the Mughal Empire.
 - For many Dalits, it was an opportunity for shaking up oppressive social structures.
- Secondly, modern India's **ruling class and identity was created as much by collaboration with colonialism**, as resistance to it.
 - India's ruling structure comes out as being embedded in the colonial project.
 - Families from the Tagores to the Tatas, the Indian Army, the Indian civil service, the legal profession, and pretty much any part of the ruling establishment **displayed more continuity than discontinuity**.
 - Even post-Independence, the persistence of English and new elites reinforced this.
- Thirdly, **Indian political ideologies and cultural practice** is less politically authoritarian and are far less egalitarian. So it is difficult for national humiliation to be owned equally.
 - The real source of India's humiliation is still abiding and crushing poverty.
- Fourth, the **nature of traumas is different**. India's traumas turned out to be more **self-inflicted**.
 - The Chinese construction of humiliation was directly structured around military defeats.
 - No war defines Indian victimhood or trauma. But it is **1962 that is marked as a national humiliation**.
 - However, its suffering and trauma cannot be deployed in the same way in which the Chinese deploy memories of WW II.
- Fifth, as **VS Naipaul** wrote that due to humiliation by British rule, there will be **ideas of country's pride and historical self-analysis**.
 - The presence of the Hindu-Muslim question in Indian politics meant that humiliation **became a source of divisiveness**.
 - Humiliation is more easily deployed against pre-British, Mughal and Sultanate rule, than as a unifying ideology.
- Lastly, calling **India a Vishwaguru and then adoption of new aggressive nationalism** are signs of a repressed sense of humiliation that is unable to confront its true sources. It shows India's powerlessness and its inability to give most of its citizens a dignified life.

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- The practical and moral necessity of playing down national humiliation may not be a bad thing but how countries deal with their own constructs of humiliation will determine their future.

Terms to know:

- **Egalitarianism:** Egalitarianism is a trend of thought in political philosophy. This thought believes that all people were created equal and should be treated equally in fundamental worth or moral status.

7. Gauging pandemic mortality with civil registration data

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS-2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Synopsis: The **Civil Registration System** (CRS) is still an imperfect system, with potential sources of error.

Background

- Recently, Indian journalists from across the country assessed and reported on State-level all-cause mortality from the **Civil Registration System** (CRS) of various states.
- The data shows a large rise in **excess mortality** in the surge months of the second wave of April and May 2021.
- The increase in mortality ranges from reported deaths climbing to five times the usual monthly data in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Whereas in Tamil Nadu and Kerala there has been a modest increase.
- Though the CRS data has highlighted the undercounting of COVID-19 deaths in India and remains the best source of data on all-cause mortality. There are some known sources of error that exist with the data.

Why the data from Civil Registration System is considered inaccurate?

- First, the CRS numbers underestimate total mortality.
 - For example, The Union government last published annual Civil Registration System data for 2019.
 - This data shows that India registered 92 of every 100 deaths as of 2019. But there was a large variation between States. Bihar, for instance, registered just half of all deaths.
 - Additionally, the online portals show lower numbers than what was published by the Union government for 2018 and 2019.
- **The second possible source of error.** If mortality was either naturally increasing over time, or if registration was getting better, or if both were taking place. If any of these three phenomena was taking place, the magnitude of excess mortality in 2020 and 2021 could be moderated by these processes.
 - For instance, let us assume that Madhya Pradesh achieved 100% registration by May 2021.
 - Given the flattening of mortality in the State, let us assume that the total mortality in 2021 in 'normal' times would have been about the same as the total estimated deaths for 2019 5.53 lakh deaths.
 - Even then, the numbers for Madhya Pradesh show over 1.18 lakh excess deaths in 2021, which is over 26 times the official COVID-19 death toll for the same period.

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- The other States, too, show excess mortality in 2021 even assuming full registration.
- These sources of error indicate that the total number of deaths in India during the pandemic reported using Civil Registration System data might be underestimated.

Terms to know:

- [Excess Deaths](#)
- [Civil Registration System \(CRS\)](#)

8. What India must keep in mind when it comes to Turkey

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Relevance: India – Turkey relations are important for India's engagement in West Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Synopsis:

Turkey, Qatar, and China have become critical players in post-America Afghanistan. So, India needs to improve its relations with Turkey.

How Turkey is engaging in Afghanistan?

- Afghanistan and Turkey have recently **celebrated the centennial of the establishment of diplomatic relations**. Through this century, Turkey has engaged purposefully with Afghanistan over a wide domain.
- While it **joined the NATO military mission** in Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban at the end of 2001, Turkey avoided any combat role and **differentiated itself from the Western powers**.
- Turkey has contributed to the **training of the Afghan military and police forces**. It has also undertaken much independent humanitarian and developmental work.
- Turkey's **"Heart of Asia" conference or the Istanbul Process** has been a major diplomatic vehicle for attempted Afghan reconciliation in the last few years.
- Turkey has been **running Kabul airport security** for a while. Further, Turkey is in negotiations with the US on taking charge of the Kabul airport, which is **critical for an international presence in Afghanistan**.

Challenges in improving India – Turkey relations

- Turkey's **growing role in Afghanistan opens a more difficult phase** in relations between India and Turkey.
- Turkey's deepening **bilateral military-security cooperation with Pakistan** made it even harder for Delhi to take a positive view of Ankara.
 - Pakistan and Turkey were part of the Central Treaty Organisation that was set up in 1955 by the British. Although CENTO eventually wound up in 1979, Turkey and Pakistan remained close partners in a number of regional organisations and international forums like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.
 - Turkey's **Islamist internationalism** has inevitably led to its deeper alliance with Pakistan, greater meddling in South Asia, and a sharper **contraction with India**.
 - Turkey has become the **most active international supporter of Pakistan on the Kashmir question**. Apart from that, Turkey even condemned the Bangladesh government's hanging of a senior Jamat e Islami leader in 2016.

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- The **shared secular values** between Delhi and Ankara in the pre-Erdogan era were **not enough to overcome the strategic differences** between the two in the Cold War.
 - Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation since the early 1950s.

How India can engage with Turkey?

- Turkey has carefully modulated its confrontation with major powers by avoiding a breakdown in relations. This shows that Turkey has learnt to take advantage of the alliance without **sacrificing its “strategic autonomy”**. So, India needs to engage in Turkey’s strategic sectors.
 - Turkey has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation since the early 1950s. But recently, Turkey bought S-400 missiles from Russia in defiance of NATO.
 - Further, Turkey was the first Muslim-majority nation that established full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- Turkey’s good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan have given space for Turkey to **present itself as a mediator between the warring South Asian neighbours**. India can utilise Turkey’s role.

9. The complex geopolitics of our times offers us a big opportunity

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: Effects of globalization on Indian society and Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

Relevance: Understanding the present phase of Globalization is important to understand the future of Global countries.

Synopsis:

India could play a leadership role by helping set common standards for the democratic world in this new era of globalization

About the new era of globalization

The Globalisation puzzle that is unfolding is multidimensional. There are two superpowers (the US and China), traditional powers ([G7 countries](#)), emerging players and important states recalcitrant to the traditional powers and moving towards the emerging superpower. Understanding this new form of globalization requires us to make sense of the complex tapestry of geopolitics today.

The level of globalisation at present

1. The superpowers do not agree on the underlying values on which agreements are built. Further, these are **areas of the fundamental difference between the US and China**. These areas include principles of governance, the purpose of the state, the concept of privacy and its extent, an understanding of ‘public good’, the rule of law, etc.
2. Today, the **primary conflict is around technology** and its growing primacy in life—business, health, education, financial services and payments, etc. These are all areas where digital technology is becoming vital. **Similar trends are clear in espionage and cyber warfare**.
 - This makes **global cooperation in respect to data** (all forms of it, be it for storage, use or sharing), **technology** ([quantum computing](#), biotech and cyber), **communications** ([5 G and beyond](#)) and the surrounding standards.

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- The divergence in them has resulted in an **inability to agree on global standards for technology** that are likely to emerge.
- 3. **Competition in the traditional areas of globalization**—tariffs, taxation, immigration and capital flows—**will get more intense**.
 - The existing multilateral arrangements on trade may get replaced by regional or bilateral arrangements.
 - The G7 move for minimum global taxation signals cooperation.
 - Immigration has got politically polarized as an issue in some parts of the world.
 - Essentially, competition will get accentuated, and global interests might be superseded by various national interests
- 4. Globalisation in areas like **climate change, health, space and possibly even nuclear weapons**.
 - **Climate Change**: The need to address global warming is on every country's agenda. Moves to contain the growth of fossil fuel usage by the introduction of carbon taxes, incentives for renewable energy and investments in storage are gathering pace. The 26th Conference of Parties (better known as **COP26**) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides a forum for deliberations.
 - **Space**: The private sector has got into this sector in a big way, there is cooperation on sharing international stations, and conflict does not seem likely.
 - **Health**: With the advent of the Pandemic, the world largely understands global risk.
 - **Nuclear arsenal**: the build-up of nuclear arsenals has slowed. All countries armed with such weapons recognize that their current stockpiles are enough to destroy the world and superpowers mostly use their influence to try and rein in countries that violate international protocols

New Globalisation and India

- India **needs to recognize the emerging world order** and begin to actively navigate it, **especially around technology**.
 - The time is ripe for a **Quad-plus formulation**(Including Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam apart from **Quad members**) in **creating data protocols, laying out 'monopoly' definitions** for large tech firms, and **forging standards for taxation, cyber coalitions and privacy**.
- Further, India will need to shed some of its traditional inhibitions and align itself. The country should **work judiciously and take the lead in creating common technology standards** for its bloc (hopefully with the US).
- India should work to **create institutions and fair protocols** that allow for some give-and-take thereafter.
- The country must also **avoid getting caught in the kind of standoff it is currently having with Big Tech** (Amazon, Google, Facebook, Apple, Twitter). Both the US and India are concerned with many aspects of Big Tech, and **creating joint standards for the democratic world** will be an important move for India.

10. Unpacking China's game plan

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations

Relevance: After the 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese forces, keeping an eye on the Chinese movement becomes very important.

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Synopsis:

China is upgrading defence infrastructure in the Tibetan plateau to nullify the disadvantages that its airpower has in comparison to the Indian airpower. This would afford them a layered air defence setting and affect the balance of power in the medium to long term.

Background:

- Aviation websites are abuzz with reports of a rapid up-gradation of aviation infrastructure in Tibet.
 - Upgradation of airfields, construction of hardened aircraft shelters, new runways, aprons, underground storage and tunneling into mountainsides, etc. is happening at a **rapid pace**.
- China realised its **shortcomings in airpower during the 2020 clash** in eastern Ladakh.
 - India did not yield any ground and actually occupied vantage points in the south Pangong Tso area to balance out some sectoral disadvantages.
 - This firmness was backed by deterrent Indian Air Force (IAF) firepower, and it was clear to the Chinese that they were on a weak wicket in the air.

Deterrent power of IAF:

- The IAF is equipped and trained for offensive action. In all the previous conflicts the IAF conducted aggressive strikes, besides providing active close support to ground forces.
- The odd exception was the 1962 India-China conflict where the IAF's substantial strike potential was nullified by a political decision to not use it.
- The equipment accretion profile is a pointer to the offensive role as seen by the acquisition of Jaguars, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi, and now the Rafale. Seen from the prism of airpower doctrine, this points to India's strategy of deterrence by punishment: **don't mess with us, as we have the means and power to hurt you**.

Reasons behind China's weak airpower in 2020 clash:

- Indian Air Force's (IAF) aircraft enjoys the advantage of a string of airfields all along the foothills of the Himalayas. They are at low altitudes which permit carrying of a full armament load.
- Chinese airfields in Tibet were few, widely spaced out, and hence not mutually supportive. There were gaps in the air defence structure too, that the IAF would utilise to interdict targets in the rear.
- Most Tibetan airfields are at altitudes above 10,000 ft, severely restricting the payload of People's Liberation Army Air Force's (PLAAF) aircraft.

Way Ahead:

- The air defence up-gradation drive is surely being monitored, but that is not enough. If status quo ante on the ground is not obtained soon, it may be too late a year or two from now.
- The future talks should be aimed at a skillful counter of dubious Chinese intentions. India's posture and demands at the talks must reflect its understanding of China's game plan.

11. Seeking a paradigm shift in mental health care

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Relevance: Mental health-related issues have become a major aspect of the health care structure in India. Reading all aspects linked to it are important from an exam point of view.

Synopsis:

Persons with mental health conditions need a responsive care system that inspires hope and participation, without which their lives are empty.

Background:

- Recently, a High Court suggested that **homeless persons with mental health conditions** be branded with a permanent tattoo when vaccinated against COVID-19. This would enable the tracking of a floating population.
 - Earlier judgments have also suggested ‘round ups’ of such persons to facilitate pathways into care.
- These are well-intended directives, but may create hardships for the homeless. They might get pushed into overcrowded shelters without their consent in order to control the virus spread.

Challenges faced by Mental Health care patients:

- **Deplorable conditions:** In many countries, persons with severe mental health conditions live in shackles in their homes, in overcrowded hospitals, and even in prison. On the other hand, many persons with mental health issues live and even die alone on the streets.
- **Inadequate Laws:** Far-sighted changes in policy and laws have often not taken root, and many laws fail to meet international human rights standards. Many also do not account for cultural, social, and political contexts, resulting in moral rhetoric that doesn't change the scenario of inadequate care.
- **Social Exclusion:** The attitude of society is based on traditional prejudices. This results in an “othering” of persons who seem different from dominant groups.
- **Poor degree of Care:** It is largely based on a colonial mindset. Individual preference and indigenous culture were substituted with what the coloniser thought was appropriate.
 - For instance, doctors interpreted a patient's refusal to wear clothing as a sign of morbidity, and clothing became a way of civilising the savage.

Learn from best practices – The Guidance on Community Mental Health Services:

- It was recently launched by the World Health Organization. The Guidance addresses the issue from ‘the same side’ as the mental health service user.
- It focuses on the co-production of knowledge and on good practices built around the key themes of crisis services, peer support, supported living, community outreach, hospital-based services, and comprehensive mental health service networks.
- Drawn from 22 countries, these **models balance care and support with rights and participation.**
 - **Tupu Ake**, a New Zealand-based recovery house service, welcomes ‘guests’ from various ethnicities.
 - **Atmiyata** in Gujarat employs a stepped-care approach using community-based volunteers. They identify persons in distress, offer counseling support, and enable access to social care benefits.

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- **Naya Daur** in West Bengal works with local networks and volunteers who support homeless persons through their outreach programme. This enables access to food, clothing, counseling, shelter, and housing.
- **Home Again**, a programme of The Banyan in Tamil Nadu, facilitates residence options in regular neighbourhoods. It also offers graded levels of supportive services for persons with severe disabilities.
 - It emphasizes **socio-cultural participation, 'neurodiversity', and normalisation of mental health conditions.**

Way Ahead:

- The government should adopt **an inclusive and harmonious approach for vaccinating and monitoring homeless people** having mental health conditions. It should provide a network of services –
 - soup kitchens at vantage points
 - mobile mental health and social care clinics,
 - non-intimidating guest homes at village panchayats with access to toilets and the comfort of a welcoming team, and
 - Well-being kiosks that offer a basic income and/or facilitate livelihoods.
- **Small emergency care centers and long-term inclusive living options** should be made available for valuing diversity and celebrating social mixing. This will reframe the archaic narrative of how mental health care is to be provided.

Terms to know:

- [World Health Organisation](#), [Mental Health](#).

12. Vacancies send a wrong signal

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Appointment to various Constitutional Posts

Relevance: Civil Services and other important services are backbones of governance in India. Vacancies on the top-level posts will affect the quality of governance.

Synopsis: Leaving top posts in the government unoccupied, affects governance and is demoralizing for officers

Delays in the appointment of personnel to important posts affect governance

- The vacancies in the Central government and the States in recent years have had a deleterious effect on governance.
- The post of the **Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission** was kept vacant until June this year. Even though the previous Chairman, retired in December 2020.
- Similarly, the post of the **Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** too was kept vacant until the recent appointment of Subodh Kumar Jaiswal. The post had been vacant since February.
- The **National Council of Educational Research and Training**, which is largely responsible for planning the education policy of the country, is headless.
- Of the 40 Central universities across the country, nearly half are without regular Vice-Chancellors.
- Apart from vacancies, there are many examples of officers holding additional charge. For instance, Rakesh Asthana after his appointment as Director-General (DG) of the Border Security Force in August, continues to hold a charge of the NCB as DG. He assumed additional charge of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) from December 2019.
- Similarly, Kuldeep Singh, DG of the Central Reserve Police Force, now also heads the National Investigation Agency.

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- Delays in promotions and appointments not only affect the organisations but also tend to demoralise the officials who await promotions after vacancies arise.

Alternative method suggested for the appointment of CEC

- Recently, the Centre appointed Anup Chandra Pandey as the new Election Commissioner in June.
- Meanwhile, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court.
- ADR demands the appointment of Election Commissioners by a committee, as is done in the case of appointment of the Director of the CBI, and not by the Centre.
- ADR has referred to the **255th Report of Law Commission** that had recommended that Election Commissioners be appointed by a high-powered committee.
- The high-powered committee headed by the PM has two members, the **Chief Justice of India** and the **Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha**.
- However, the Opposition leader has a little say in the selection process. If the Prime Minister decides on a candidate and the CJI consents, the Opposition leader's dissenting note carries no weight.
- Therefore, there is a need, to expand the high-powered committee to include at least two more members of eminence with proven integrity for the selection process.
- Preferably a retired police officer and a Chief Minister of a State governed by a party other than that of the party of the Prime Minister.

13. When we lost oxygen

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Relevance: The period of the Covid Pandemic needs proper analysis of what worked and what went wrong.

Synopsis: Second COVID wave was marked by an Oxygen crisis in India. The number of deaths caused due to lack of Oxygen was also underestimated. Hence, there is an urgent need to establish mechanisms of accountability within the public health system.

Background

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of India's healthcare systems. While several factors were responsible for the damage, an easily preventable dimension of the disaster is deaths caused due to shortages of oxygen in hospitals.

- Lack of proper official record-keeping, undercounting and denial continue to be recurring themes of the pandemic since the first wave.
- Relevant points
- The Goa bench of the Bombay High Court observed that **any loss of life due to lack of oxygen** is an infringement of the **right to life under Article 21** of the Constitution
- There's an urgent need to establish mechanisms of accountability within the public health system, along with efforts to improve health infrastructure and oxygen supply.

Also Read: [Issue of medical oxygen in India - Explained](#)

Terms to know:

- [Medical Oxygen](#)

14. Let's chalk out a plan to reopen our schools before it gets too late

Source – [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus – GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Relevance – Education is an important aspect of social and economic development.

Synopsis – With 15 months of learning loss, Government must start a dialogue on how and when to get children safely back in school.

Introduction

- The pandemic caused more than 15 months of learning loss for an entire student generation in India. Because schools had been closed since the outbreak began.
- Countries around the world have opened schools safely and with minimal risk to children's health. However, India has yet to make headway in this direction.

Impact of Pandemic on children and everyone in the education sector-

- **Learning loss** – According to UNESCO estimates, children have lost two months for every month they haven't attended school, that's approximately 30 months of learning loss from the start of the pandemic.
- **Digital divide-** Not all students have smartphones with proper internet connection. The Lancet Covid-19 Commission India Task Force noted that only 24% of Indian households have access to internet facilities.
 - Rural parents and teachers also lack digital literacy.
- **Parental fears-** According to a study, 62% of parents will not take their children to school even if it is reopened on government instructions. Fearing a probable third wave
- **Psychological impact on children's mental health** – Since May 2020, one-third of primary and half of the secondary students' parents have reported that their child's mental and socio-emotional health has been affected by the pandemic.
 - The number of children who are hungry, isolated, abused, anxious, living in poverty, and pushed into marriage has increased.
- **Impact on teachers-**
 - More than 80% of teachers said it was difficult to establish an emotional connection with students online. 90% said they couldn't adequately measure development.
 - **Salary loss**– Almost one in two teachers have suffered a pay cut, while 11% lost their jobs.
- **Plan for reopening of schools-**
- **Learn from others' experiences-** Government should find a way to reopen schools based on the experience of other countries and the opinion of experts. As 90% of the world's countries operated schools in some capacity.
 - **Reopening with limited capacity-** Starting with as low as 25% of students coming to school on a given day. Experience has shown that even one in-person touch-point each week may significantly improve our children's involvement.
- **Proper safety measures** – School teachers and employees must be vaccinated as soon as possible because many of them have been exposed to COVID due to election responsibilities, as well as other potentially unsafe environments.
- **Alleviating parental fear of the 3rd wave** – There is no scientific evidence which states that the 3rd wave would affect children more than any other age group.

Way forward-

Government should start the complex process of preparing to reopen schools by putting safety precautions in place and alleviating parental fears.

Terms to know:

- [UNESCO](#), [National Education Policy](#), [AISHE](#),

15. Let's keep pace with the world on covid research

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Awareness in the fields of biotechnology.

Relevance: Covid-19 research is essential for controlling the pandemic.

Introduction:

India has been behind the curve on tracing virus variants by their genomes. However, a new brain-study initiative points to the potential of forging ahead with work on Covid's pathology.

About India's Covid-19 research capability:

So far, India has mostly been behind the curve on pandemic research. For example, India learned only later that the Delta variant caused a deadly second wave of infections that overwhelmed hospitals and revealed other inadequacies. By contrast, other countries have been tracking the virus's variants closely. Further, British endeavors revealed many pieces of information about the Delta variant.

About the Covid-19 impact on the human body:

During the early stages of the outbreak, the Covid-19 thought to invade the lungs, chiefly, causing potentially fatal pneumonia, 'cytokine storms' in severe cases. But later, the researchers found that **no organ of the human body was beyond the scope of its virulence**. The bug can hit the pancreas, heart, liver, intestines, kidney, brain, and gall bladder.

The global surveys on Covid-19 impact on the brain:

Covid is observed to increase 'oxidative stress', with healthy cells impaired by 'free radicals' created by excessive oxidation, while **depletion of antioxidants has been associated with neurological problems** like rapid aging, memory loss, and brain fog.

- A recent study in the UK found **Covid causing a loss of gray matter**, which could meddle with various functions of the brain. It compared several hundred brain scans of covid survivors with pre-covid records held in a database.
- An American survey released in April had said that **every third person who'd had the disease displayed a psychiatric or brain disorder within six months** of infection.

Indian initiatives to find Covid-19 impact on brain:

- India proposed a **brain-mapping study** of infected individuals who have either recovered or shown no symptoms.
- Neuroscientists at the state-run **National Brain Research Centre (NBRC), Gurugram**, aim to delve into covid's impact on the most vital organs.

Steps India needs to do:

- India needs to redeem its reputation as a country. India needs to research the fundamental work on what covid does to the human body and how best to counter it.

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- Since little is known about covid's pathology, especially its extended effects, uncovering its trail of ailments as the virus evolves is a health imperative

Terms to know:

- [Delta Variant](#)

16. UAPA should go the way of TADA & POTA

Source: [TOI](#)

Syllabus: GS 2

Relevance: Misuse of UAPA to curb political dissent.

Synopsis: Right to fair trial is being consistently violated under the UAPA provisions. This law should be repealed like TADA and POTA.

Background

Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Jesuit priest, known for his service and activism in the cause of Adivasis, died nine months into his unjust imprisonment. He was charged of being a part of a Maoist plot to overthrow the government.

- His age and deteriorating health drew no sympathy from either the prosecuting agency or the trial court. Despite being a fit case for bail, he was **denied bail**, mainly due to the statutory bar on bail under the anti-terrorism law invoked against him.

Evidence against him

As per prosecution,

- He was in contact with Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao and Arun Ferreira, all accused of terrorism and criminal conspiracy in the Elgar Parishad case. It is instructive to note that the main accused Varavara Rao is out on bail for medical reasons. But the same yardstick was seemingly not applied to Swamy.
- **Communist literature was found** on a hard drive. This was deemed sufficient to keep Father Swamy in jail despite his failing health.
 - The NIA court observed that in light of the seriousness of the charges against him, the collective interest of the community would outweigh Swamy's right of personal liberty and his old age.

Problems with UAPA provisions

Laws such as the UAPA are meant to be repressive, to be deployed at the slightest inconvenience to the state.

- The provisions of this Act have **an extremely wide ambit. For example:** Membership of a banned organization can be deduced simply by possessing literature of an organization. The Act gives the police **sweeping powers** and makes it nearly impossible for people to get bail.
- Given the snail's pace at which the criminal justice system works, the UAPA has become **merely a tool to incarcerate people**. It keeps them entangled in the legal system for as long as the state desires. The process itself is the punishment.
 - According to the National Crime Records Bureau, as of 2019, **over 95% of cases under the UAPA are pending** before various courts in India. This amounts to 2,244 cases with at least as many accused, if not many more. The conviction rate under this Act stands at a mere 29%.

Conclusion

Indian Penal Code (IPC) is more than sufficient to handle incidents of terror, disaffection, unlawful associations, whatever they may be. It is time for the UAPA to meet the same fate as its predecessors – TADA and POTA – and be repealed.

Also Read: [Unlawful Activities Prevention Act \(UAPA\) – Explained](#)

Terms to know:

- [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act, 1967 \(UAPA\)](#), [National Investigation Agency \(NIA\)](#)

17. How Radio Dhimsa is helping Odisha's tribal students?

Source: DowntoEarth

Syllabus: GS2 – Governance

Relevance: Can be used as an example in GS and Essay.

Synopsis: Radio Dhimsa is bringing school lessons to the poor tribal students in Odisha's Koraput district who don't have internet access or cannot afford a smartphone. The endeavor attempts to close the digital divide in imparting education amid the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Radio Dhimsa

- It is a community radio station set up by South Odisha Voluntary Action (SOVA), a Koraput based non-profit.
- Radio Dhimsa started broadcasting educational content for students in 2016. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 and when classroom studies had to be stopped, special education programme for children was started.
- It broadcasts educational content to over 2,000 students of **classes I-V** in 62 villages of six panchayats in Koraput and Lamptaput blocks.
- Most of the beneficiaries are the children of **Paraj**, one of the tribal communities in the state
- The organisation has developed education programs on **Mathematics** and **English** for primary levels. The program has been designed with the help of **school teachers** and **education experts** of the district resource group.
- All programmes are designed in **Odia** and **Desiya dialects** as entire tribes and non-tribes do use Desiya as a common communication dialect.
- The channel also has shows to create **awareness on COVID-19 appropriate behaviour** and **vaccination programme** in collaboration with the Koraput administration.

Why was Radio Dhimsa set up?

- **Lack of internet connectivity:** Odisha State School Education Programme Authority started streaming live classes on YouTube from June 21, 2021. But hundreds of students, mostly in the tribal districts like Koraput, Kandhamal, Gajapati, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keoinjhar, however, do not have the internet connectivity to access the lessons.
- **Expensive smartphones:** Poor tribals could not afford expensive smartphones

Also Read: [Bultoo Radio](#)

18. A long road for migrant workers

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services

Relevance: In the wake of the pandemic-induced migrant crisis, many developments took place. It is important to keep a track of all such important developments.

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Synopsis:

The guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court are welcome, but they require robust systems. The bulk of guidelines seems declaratory rather than mandatory which warrants active cooperation between the States and the Centre for efficient realisation of the court's directive.

Background:

- The Supreme Court on June 29 pronounced its judgment in the migrant labourers case. The case was initiated last year after the national lockdown was announced on March 24.
 - Thousands of landless laborers had started **walking towards their home States due to the loss of employment and income.**
- The Supreme Court **took cognizance of the matter on May 26 that year** and acknowledged the plight of the workers in light of the strict lockdown.

Supreme Court's Directives for Migrants:

- The court has laid down **numerous guidelines** to provide relief to workers and efficiently tackle the problem till the threat of COVID-19 subsides.
- In the orders pronounced **in May this year** that **dry ration** be provided to migrants who want to return to their homes.
 - Further, the court said that **identity proof should not be insisted** upon by the governments since the labourers might not be able to furnish it.
 - The court called upon the State governments to **arrange transportation for workers** who need to return to their homes.
 - The Supreme Court fixed **July 31 as the deadline for the States to implement the 'One nation One Ration Card'** scheme.
 - Under this scheme, the States are to complete the registration of migrant workers in order to provide dry ration to them
 - The top court also directed the State governments to **run community kitchens** for migrant workers.
- In the **order passed on June 29**, the court affirmed **the Right to Food** under Article 21 of the Constitution.
 - In furtherance of this, the court asked **the States to formulate their own schemes and issue food grains to migrants.**
 - This is an indispensable step to keep more than a fourth of the population of the country safe and healthy during the pandemic.
 - The court directed the Ministry of Labour and Employment to ensure that the National Database for Unorganised Workers is updated by July 31.
 - Finally, the top court **recognised the need for direct cash benefit transfer** to workers in the unorganised sector. But it did not issue any guidelines for the same, as the workers need to be covered by the States themselves.

Challenges in implementing the Judgment:

- **First**, it is unlikely that a standardised system can be developed by states for implementing the ONORC scheme within the deadline prescribed by the court.
- **Second**, many States **do not have the necessary infrastructure** to run and maintain community kitchens on such a large scale.
- **Third**, migrant workers keep moving in search of employment, and therefore it is difficult to cover all of them under state government schemes.

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Way Ahead:

- The Supreme Court has given a purposive declaration in the case, but the bulk of the judgment seems **declaratory rather than mandatory**. In order to efficiently implement the orders of the court, the State governments need to work with the Centre closely.
- With the **third wave of COVID-19 infections looming**, it is imperative to ensure that government machinery works to its full potential and robust systems are developed to withstand the challenges.

Terms to know:

- [One nation, One ration card scheme](#), [National Food Security Act](#), [National Database of Unorganized Workers](#)

19. Confronting Xi: India should engage both the Dalai Lama and Taiwan

Source: [TOI](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations

Synopsis:

China has adopted a confrontational attitude against India as seen from last year's unilateral aggression in the Galwan Valley region of Eastern Ladakh. In this scenario, India needs to recalibrate its China strategy and engage with both the Dalai Lama and Taiwan.

Background:

- The Dalai Lama's 86th birthday made headlines after the Indian PM **greeted the Tibetan spiritual leader**.
- The public acknowledgement is a **subtle recalibration in the China policy** as he's persona non grata for China.
 - In literal terms, the phrase is Latin for "an unwelcome person." The term in a diplomatic sense refers to a foreign person whose entering or remaining in a certain country is prohibited by that country.

Dismal state of India- China relations in recent times:

- Last year, China unilaterally invaded the Eastern Ladakh region and violated the border agreements.
- India negotiated a disengagement this year at one friction point – Pangong Tso. However, there has been no progress on disengagement in Demchok, Gogra, Hot Springs and Depsang.
- Chinese President's speech, delivered on the occasion of centenary celebrations of Communist Party of China (CPC), signalled a strong confrontational attitude against India.
- China's actions and their scale have altered the bilateral relationship. Due to this, the Indian Government has begun to **scale back the economic engagement**. Noticeably, in keeping China out of the forthcoming 5G transition and parts of the tech market.

Lesson for India:

- An important takeaway for India is that the size and the sophistication of the domestic economy matters in securing strategic interests.
- China's increasing belligerence has accompanied its growing economic clout that is backed by a \$14.7 trillion GDP.

Way Ahead:

- As India works on its economic transformation, it should **deepen its ties with Taiwan**, a global leader in semiconductors. Deepening ties will simultaneously serve India's economic interests and send China a message.
- Military commanders from both the countries are scheduled **to meet for the 12th time**. The meeting should be duly leveraged by India to work out a disengagement plan from the remaining friction points on the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

20. A geopolitical roadmap in uncertain times

Source: [The Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: The centrality of the India-China-US triangle is an important topic for International Relations

Synopsis:

The book India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, the Present offers a magisterial insight into the complex dynamics of our changing world.

Recent geopolitical developments around the world:

- Indian and Chinese troops are engaged in a year-long border standoff that has taken the lives of soldiers on both sides.
- China's naval vessels patrol the Indian Ocean, while it consolidates partnerships in South Asia and across Eurasia.
- The US is struggling to regain its superpower image, after the term of former President Trump.

The growth of China and its future policies:

According to the book, **China is central to the world economy**. This is because,

- China manufactures **one-fourth of global industrial production**,
- **Consumes a fourth of the world's energy**
- Consumes around 59 percent of the world's cement and half the world's steel and copper
- China has **used its wealth for domestic development**, to **modernize its armed forces**, and **expand its economic, political and military footprint** in areas of strategic importance — the East and South China Seas, the Eurasian landmass, and the Indian Ocean.

In 2012 Chinese president set the **goal of the "Double Hundred"**: Doubling of per capita income to \$10,000 by 2021, the hundredth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. By 2049, the centenary of the Peoples' Republic, China aims to become a "modernised, fully developed, rich and powerful" nation.

China's growth in US prism:

The US views China's rise as a challenge to its dominance for over seven decades and is shaping its foreign policy to prevent the emergence of a global competitor. Previous President of US **impose restrictions on China's access to US technology and markets**.

The current President is **mobilizing initiatives and allies**. The US has given up on competing with China in Eurasia and is **focused on restricting Chinese activity in the maritime sphere**. For instance,

- It has **accepted the concept of "Indo-Pacific"** — the notion that the security interests of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean are inter-linked.

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- The US has pulled India as a robust partner into the US-led alignment, the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(Quad\)](#) to restrain Chinese assertiveness in these waters. India is the only Quad member that shares a land frontier with China.

Geopolitics of India:

- Several of India's South Asian neighbors share borders with China — Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. So these states have also become areas of political competition between the two countries.
- Conscious of China's increasing economic and military prowess, India has, from 2008, been **deepening security and defense ties**. For instance,
 - India signed several agreements with the US that have included increasing defense purchases, agreements on the interoperability of their armed forces.
 - A proliferation of joint military exercises of defense forces, intelligence-sharing, and regular high-level interactions.
- The centrality of the India-China-US triangle:
- The book recognizes the centrality of the India-China-US triangle in determining the regional security scenario.
- The rapid expansion of Indo-US security relations **possibly encouraged China to initiate the Ladakh standoff** in May last year as a rude geography lesson to remind India where its serious security concerns lie.

Suggestions to improve India's relations:

- India's goal should be "to be **closer to both China and the US** than they are to each other". Clearly, the present state of Indo-US ties has violated this norm, while providing few strategic benefits to India.
- **More engagement and more strategic autonomy and issue-based coalitions** of the willing will provide India with the **ability to manage the changes taking place in world** affairs, particularly the rise of new players — China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and Iran.
- "India's strategy" for the future has to be more modest, more realistic, and has to be more valuable over the longer term. Domestic effort and external engagements can transform "India into a prosperous, strong and modern country."

Read More:

- [Disengagement agreement at Pangong Tso Lake – Explained](#)

Terms to know:

- [QUAD](#)

21. Puzzle out how to make vax ring-fences succeed

Source: [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Health and associated issues

Relevance: A forest fire-based ring-fence approach is useful to contain Covid spread also.

Synopsis: The concept of using vaccine rings to prevent Covid flare-ups deserves a try.

Introduction

For the past two months, the deadly 2nd wave of Covid has been waning, but the number of daily infections is alarmingly high. Over the previous week, India reported an average of more than 42,000 daily new cases, approximately a tenth of our peak of over 414,000 on May 6.

What is ring vaccination?

The ongoing public immunisation program, which aims to reach all adults, is critical, but it will require twice the daily rate of a little over 4 million shots reported over the previous week.

- Thus, center has written to states, requesting that **“ring vaccination” be carried out in places where more than a tenth of all covid tests are positive.**
 - **This will include selecting high-case zones** within a wide radius of each outbreak. People here will be vaccinated on a priority basis. When a high-risk zone is surrounded by covid-resistant people, the virus will not be able to travel too far in any direction.
- A ring-fence like this appears to **be modeled after what is done in some countries to confine forest fires.** Trees are chopped and an inert ‘moat’ is set around a wildfire to keep the flames from spreading.

What needs to be done?

- **Firstly, unique vaccine allotments and precise calculations** of the size of a circle to vaccinate are needed, if the idea of a vax ring is to be tested.
- **Secondly**, every flare speed up will have to be calculated and evaluated against the creation of antibodies. **The time between dosages needs to be shortened** because the latter is a much slower process. To maximize the effort, a lot of charting and planning would be required.
- **Thirdly, ring-fences rely on accurate data** and their success would depend on the accuracy of the approach. At the time of the last count, India had 73 districts with a covid positivity rate of 10% or higher, with three-fifths in the northeast and a few in Kerala. Vaccines should be delivered quickly to these locations.
 - A diagnostic scale-up will help, but we must also work to reduce the ‘image’ motivation for states to under count instances.
- **Lastly, we’d also require supporting data sources.** Aarogya Setu app’s **analysis** of all-India data was supposed to provide us with early warnings of local outbreaks, but it has fallen short of that promise. This digital tracker could still be helpful if we rebuild it.

22. Ideas drawn from nudge theory could weaken a third covid wave

Source: [Live mint](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Relevance: This article highlights the importance and effectiveness of behavioral interventions to bring about social change.

Synopsis:

Well-designed behavioral interventions that guide people to make safe choices could potentially help India in the fight against pandemic. The use of nudge theory will help in combating vaccine hesitancy and lockdown fatigue. Thereby it will ensure greater vaccination and Covid appropriate behavior in the country.

Background:

- India is **augmenting the availability of medical supplies and healthcare infrastructure across the country** in order to combat the 3rd wave of Covid 19.
- But the experience of other countries (Italy in April 2020, the UK in January 2021) shows that virus can cripple even the most well-equipped health systems. Once a wave emerges, it can quickly spiral into chaos.

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- Therefore, initiatives to bolster India's healthcare infrastructure must be accompanied by actions to reduce the intensity of the wave itself.

Reducing the intensity of waves:

- India should focus on two key actions – **administering vaccines and enforcing covid appropriate behavior** until a substantial share of the population has been inoculated.
- However, two obstacles will hinder the actions: **Vaccine hesitancy and lockdown fatigue**. Across the world, these two remain especially wicked problems—hard to break down, harder yet to solve.
- Nonetheless, these hindrances can be tackled using behavioral economics—specifically, the nudge theory.

About Nudge Theory:

- Nudges are subtle interventions that help people make better decisions without restricting their choices.
 - **For instance**, the UK moved from a sign-up to an opt-out process for pension accounts in 2012. This simple change-induced more than 10 million people in the country to save for their retirement.
- Nudge units are entities that work with governments to apply behavioral science to public policy. They help in formulation of effective nudging strategies as every detail counts: Text, visuals, colours, font size, placement, and communication channel.
 - **Visuals**: McKinsey's research indicates that images of non-smokers playing with their grandchildren on cigarette packs can deter smokers more effectively than images of damaged lungs.
- Nudges can be dramatically **cost-effective**. For instance, Virgin Atlantic famously spent only about \$2,500 on a nudging intervention that helped it save \$5.5 million in airline fuel costs over 8 months in 2014.
- To be successful, nudges must effectively **speak to the cultural and socioeconomic realities** of their target audience.
- Many countries have used them both before and during the pandemic to drive behavioural change at scale.

Use of Nudge Theory in tackling the Pandemic:

- Last year's **'Happy Birthday' sing-along nudge** helped millions wash their hands long enough to make them virus-free.
- Similarly, many nudge units are now running studies to discover which nudges might help overcome vaccine hesitancy.
 - A recent study in Colombia by the UK's nudge unit indicated the potential to increase vaccination numbers by 2.4 million or nearly 5% of that country's population.
 - For this, **messages should be sent to people that countered their concerns** about vaccine safety or appealed to their deep psychological needs.

How to use Nudge theory in India for tackling the Pandemic?

- The project should be anchored by an **independent team of experts** convened by the center. This includes behavioural economists, neuroscientists, design thinking experts, researchers, digital marketers, etc.
- Considering time will be of the essence, this **team will need to be agile**. It should add new capabilities and partners as it progresses.

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- Further, it should adhere to a **sprint approach**: rapidly prototyping, testing, refining and then deploying the most promising solutions.
- Given its scale, the effort would need all hands on deck.
 - **Telecom and e-commerce companies could provide a platform** to directly connect with large sections of the population;
 - Large media spenders could amplify messages;
 - **Social-sector organizations** could work on grassroots activation;
 - Influencers could power viral social media outreach;
 - India Inc could provide the required tech infrastructure.
- If successful, this effort could sow the seeds for **the creation of India's own nudge unit**. In the long term, this unit could recommend and implement interventions to solve many complicated developmental challenges faced by our nation.

23. Tracking fugitives everywhere

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive

Relevance: India's criminal handling system should be aligned to catch fugitives within the country. Because once they leave the country, it becomes difficult to bring them back.

Synopsis:

In the absence of a coordinated database, criminals can go undetected. Hence, robust tracking of fugitives demands the creation of a nationwide database of wanted persons, which should be accessible by the government agencies and the public.

Background:

- Indian law on extradition is spread across the Indian Penal Code as well as various laws pertaining to narcotic drugs, Information Technology, hijacking, and so on.
- Theoretically, there exists a system of tracking criminals worldwide through Interpol Notices and the sharing of immigration databases of different countries.
- However, there is **no coordinated system or database** for tracking criminals or wanted persons domestically.
 - Some police stations do initiate proceedings for attachment of property and declaration of the accused as proclaimed offenders.
 - But the number of cases where coordinated efforts are made to pursue fugitives (domestically or internationally) are hardly documented.

Impact of not having a Domestic Database:

- It is **relatively easy for criminals from one police station/jurisdiction** to mix into the population in any other area without being detected.
- The absence creates a **tendency to close investigations** once the accused have absconded. This reduces the pendency of cases but undermines the administration of justice.

What should be done?

- A **nationwide database of wanted persons** should be created, which could be accessible by the government agencies and the public.
 - The Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) and the National Intelligence Grid are efforts in the right direction, but more integration is desirable.
- A nationwide **system of 'Wanted Person Notices'**, similar to Interpol Notices, is required to track fugitives domestically. Countries like the US already have functional inter-State extradition and fugitive tracking systems.

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- The integration between immigration agencies, State police agencies, Interpol-New Delhi, the External Affairs Ministry, and Home Ministry should be enhanced.
- Further India needs to sign **more bilateral and multilateral conventions** on criminal matters and extradition.
 - All relevant legal processes and requirements should be incorporated into one consolidated law on international cooperation. This would restrain criminals from absconding abroad.
- The entire gamut of activities pertaining to fugitives, from investigation to extradition, needs to be incorporated into a **specialized setup** with an Integrated International Cooperation Division (**IICD**) at the top.
 - The IICD should have linkages with proposed fugitive tracking units at the State level. This would ensure the creation of desired forward-and-backward linkages.

Terms to know:

- [red and blue corner notices](#)
- [Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems \(CCTNS\)](#)
- [National Intelligence Grid](#)

24. The judicious choice

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Judiciary

Relevance: This article emphasises ensuring the independence of the judiciary.

Synopsis:

Selection of deserving judges is essential to ensure independence of the judiciary. The Collegium must do its best in this task in order to uphold the constitutional spirit and democratic ethos.

Background:

- India is the largest democracy in the world thanks to the sacrifices of millions of freedom fighters.
- Amongst the constitutional institutions designed to protect democracy, the judiciary occupies a significant place. However, there is little doubt that the judiciary is being challenged, from within and outside.
- The judiciary must **shield itself from further erosion of its independence** and competence by carefully following the law, as declared by the Supreme Court (SC) itself.

Judicial Pronouncements:

- **Second Judges Case (1993):** The SC held that no appointment of SC or HC judge can be made unless it conforms with the opinion of the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- A Collegium system was devised for recommending the appointments; consisting of the CJI and the four senior-most judges of the SC and high courts.
- This ensured that the opinion of the CJI **is not merely his individual opinion**, but an opinion formed collectively by a body of men at the apex level in the judiciary.
- Further, the decision would **preserve the independence of the judiciary** which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- **National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC) Case (2016):** The SC struck down NJAC. It strongly **disapproved of any role for the political executive** in the final selection and appointment of judges.

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- As per SC, NJAC may generate reciprocity and feelings of payback to the political executive, which would have been disastrous to the independence of the judiciary.

Dismal performance of Judiciary:

- Candidates lacking in essential attributes have been appointed routinely, which has raised serious questions over the integrity of Collegium members.
- Sadly, instead of selecting the best from amongst those available, **compromises appear to have been repeatedly made in the past.**
- As per Justice HR Khanna, one of the new trends in judiciary **is growing tilt in favor of upholding the orders of the Government.**
- The scenario is pointing towards the compromise of judicial independence, thereby undermining democracy and basic structure of the constitution.

Way Ahead:

- Judiciary must realize that there is a heavy burden on its shoulders. It should function in an independent and objective manner.
- The judiciary should work to the best of its abilities and in consonance with the constitutional oath. This will help in upholding the rule of law and ensure prudent administration of justice.

Terms to know:

- [Collegium system](#)
- [National Judicial Appointments Commission](#)

25. Repeal UAPA

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Gs2: Important Aspects of Governance

Synopsis: The Statute of UAPA has no place in Democracy.

Background

- The death of the priest Stan Swamy, who was arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, or UAPA, offers the government an opportunity to revisit this 54-year-old law.
- In its current form, the UAPA is out of sync with the country's democratic credentials.

What are the issues with UAPA?

The UAPA in its current form is an inversion of basic legal precepts.

- One, it enables the state to arrest and incarcerate citizens almost indefinitely.
- Two, Bail under the [law is extremely difficult to obtain](#), since courts are required to depend on police documents to presume the guilt of the accused.
 - Recent amendments extended the pre-charge sheet custody period from 90 days to 180 days but even this time period is observed more in the breach.
 - For instance, Stan Swamy was arrested under UAPA for alleged links with Maoist terror organisations, has been in prison for three years.
- Three, it potentially reduces the economic ability of the accused to fight a legal case.
 - Because UAPA allows courts to provide for the attachment of property equivalent to the proceeds of terrorism involved in the offense.
- Four, prone to be misused by the state.
 - According to the home ministry data, there has been a 72 percent increase in the number of arrests made under the UAPA between 2015 and 2019.

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- However, the conviction rate has only been roughly 2 percent, underlining the weak grounds on which these cases are built.

How Subsequent amendments strengthened UAPA?

1. The UAPA became a terror law after amendments were introduced in 2004. But successive amendments between 2008, after the Mumbai terror attacks, and 2019 significantly expanded the scope of the Act.
2. Currently, in its present form, the UAPA resembles the two previous and hugely controversial terror laws.
 - **One, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act (TADA).**
 - It was passed against the backdrop of the turmoil in Punjab. However, It was allowed to lapse in 1995 after being criticized by human rights activists for giving the security agencies the freedom to arrest and torture citizens.
 - **Two, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).** It allowed, among other things, confessions obtained by the police to be submitted in evidence. Even this law was allowed to lapse in 2004 due to rising criticism against its misuse by some states.
3. The 2019 amendment strengthened the UAPA more. It allowed the government to name individuals as terrorists. Previously, only organizations could be given this tag.

Court's View

- Recently, the Delhi High Court granted bail to three student protesters arrested under this law.
- In its ruling, the court reminded the government of the distinction between protests, which are a legitimate activity in a functioning democracy, and an act of terrorism.
- India is increasingly being placed in the same league as regimes in Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, and the Philippines for its authoritarian rule. Repealing the UAPA would be a good way of regaining the country's reputation.

26. Troubling prospects in Afghanistan

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS2: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Relevance: Resolution of the Afghan issue is important for ascertaining peace in South Asia. India will also suffer from the spillover of this issue.

Synopsis: An air of uncertainty surrounds Afghanistan, and it needs to think over the future of its land.

Background:

- The United States recently handed over the Bagram airbase to the Afghan authorities.
- It marked a symbolic end to its military presence of the U.S.A.
- However, forces completed their withdrawal ahead of the September 11 deadline, announced by the American President.

What are the consequences of the USA's intervention?

- First, it was a **costly misadventure** of the USA.
 - No one predicted that the USA's military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 would get embroiled in an endless war for 20 years and
 - Now to exit safely, it negotiated with the Taliban.

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- Secondly, the war effort has cost over billions and the USA has also **spent on reconstruction, security forces**, governance and on counter-narcotics and humanitarian relief works.
- Third, the **real price of war has been paid by the Afghans**.
 - Afghans bear the brunt of 130 daily Taliban/IS Khorasan (IS-K) attacks.
- Lastly, **socio-economic developments are at risk due to the growth of Taliban**.
 - Today, eight million children attend school and a third are girls.
 - Literacy is up from 12% in 2002 to 35%.
 - Life expectancy from 40 to 63 years.
 - Urbanisation is 26%.
 - Today, tarred roads cover 10,000 miles.
 - Infant mortality rates are down from 20% by over half.
 - With a median age of 18.5 years, a majority of Afghans have grown up in a post-Taliban era.

How Taliban gained legitimacy?

- Firstly, the **objective was to build a stable, strong, effectively governed Afghanistan**.
 - However, the U.S. shifted from counter-terrorism to counter-insurgency, Afghanistan turned into Vietnam.
 - Eventually, U.S. President Barack **Obama diluted the objective** to preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for global terrorism.
 - He oversaw a successful operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden in 2011, implemented an unsuccessful military surge concluding with an end to combat operations in end-2014 and Taliban opened the Doha office in 2013.
- Secondly, **S. President Donald Trump saw himself as a deal-maker** and initiated direct negotiations with the Taliban by setting out four elements.
 - A ceasefire.
 - Cutting ties with al Qaeda and other terrorist groups.
 - Intra-Afghan peace talks.
 - A withdrawal of all foreign military forces,
- Thirdly, slowly the Taliban had cut down the U.S. demands and **got a withdrawal timeline** not linked to the other factors.
- Lastly, the U.S. President Joe Biden was convinced that the U.S. had to exit from its forever wars.
- This way the U.S. ended up legitimising the Taliban at the expense of the government.

Challenges ahead:

- **Civil war due to hasty withdrawal:** The U.S. commander in Afghanistan indicated that Civil war is certainly a path that can be visualised.
- **Increasing Taliban presence:** The Taliban military strategy has been to target districts that enable them to surround provincial capitals.
- **Power sharing:** there is no clue about changes in Taliban ideology and Taliban unity as the distances have grown between the Quetta shura, the Doha negotiators and the fighters who want to guard their individual preserves.
- **Question about integrity:** If opportunistic leaders are tempted to strike their own deals with the Taliban, it will hasten the collapse.
- **The Pakistan factor:** there are question about Pakistan's role and its persuading abilities.

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- **Is** Pakistan still seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan, or has it realised that a Taliban-dominated Kabul will home be for extremists.
- Hence, hasty withdrawal of the USA has left the Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours in an uncertain scenario.

Terms to know: [Durand line](#)

27. The bar on criticism that muzzles the advocate

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Judiciary

Relevance: Bar Council of India is a statutory body. Keeping an eye on its functioning of national importance is important from an exam point of view.

Synopsis:

The new Bar Council of India rules undermines the constitutional guarantees of free speech and freedom of profession guaranteed under Article 19 of the Indian Constitution. They should be duly reviewed and changed in consonance with the spirit of fair criticism in a democracy.

Background:

- On June 25, 2021, amendments to the Bar Council of India rules were announced. These rules govern the professional conduct and etiquette of advocates.

About the new rules:

- They render advocates **liable for disciplinary proceedings** for making derogatory statements about a court, judge, the Bar Council of India (or State Bar Councils), or its members. The consequences include suspension and disbarment.
- The amendments clarify that healthy and bona-fide criticism, made in good faith, shall not be treated as a ‘misconduct’.

Rationale behind their introduction:

- The bar introduced the amendments **as the current framework was not able to prevent the sanctity of the courts and bar council of India.**
 - For instance, in May 2020, some lawyers wrote an open letter urging the Supreme Court of India to intervene in the migrant crisis. Later, a former SC judge condemned SC’s inaction on the letter.
 - The Bar Council of India (BCI) characterised the criticism as a sustained and synchronized attack on the SC by disgruntled members of the bar and some unhappy former judges.
 - Similarly, BCI was seen criticising a live law article wherein the reputation of the Chairman of BCI was jeopardised and the use of office was portrayed in a bad light.
- The new rules will **save the judiciary’s time** that is spent by the institution on hearing cases related to contempt of court.
 - The Court spent a significant amount of time charging individuals (including advocating Prashant Bhushan) with criminal contempt even during the pandemic.

Problems associated with new rules:

- **First**, it undermines **basic constitutional guarantees of free speech and the freedom of profession** under Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.

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- **Second**, they **perpetuate the fiction** that the authority of these public institutions rests on the fragile foundation of 'public faith'. As per this notion, the dissent would reduce the ability of powerful institutions such as courts and government bodies to carry out their duties.
- **Third**, it would **impair the exercise of fair criticism** that is essential to hold public institutions accountable.
- **Fourth**, the pain of the disciplinary process and the possible consequences, for the careers of advocates, **would have a chilling effect**.
 - Chilling effect is the inhibition or discouragement of the legitimate exercise of natural and legal rights by the threat of legal sanction.

Way Ahead:

- The Bar Council of India has kept the rules on hold, pending a review by a committee comprising senior advocates, members of bar associations, and the Bar Council of India.
- The amendments also require the Chief Justice of India's approval before coming into effect, which has not yet been obtained.
- Thus, the Chief Justice of India along with the Committee reviewing the new rules still have an opportunity to prevent a further assault on free speech by rejecting the amendments.

Terms to know: [Bar Council of India](#)

28. The Afghan knot

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and Neighbourhood relations

Synopsis:

India is entangled in the Afghan Knot, as the ground situation is fast turning in favour of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The future course will be full of complexities and challenges post the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Background:

- The United States Armed Forces are scheduled to be withdrawn from Afghanistan by August 31, 2021.
- The Taliban are on the brink of capturing Afghanistan. They remain in contact with al Qaeda, as documented by a UN report earlier this year.
- The chaos the US leaves behind in Afghanistan for the second time in 30 years poses a **heightened risk of instability** in the entire region.

Why is the US leaving?

- The withdrawal is the result of a bad deal made between the former US president (Donald Trump) and Taliban.
- The US had **already spent millions of dollars** but was unable to establish sustainable democracy in Afghanistan.
- The war is **now unwinnable**, it had been going on for too long and claimed too many American lives.
 - The only success which the US can claim is elimination of Osama bin Laden (on Pakistani soil).
- Further, as per Joe Biden (current US president), **nation-building was never an objective** and this task should be undertaken by the Afghan people.

Future course of action for India:

- India now faces the prospects of dealing with the Taliban, largely a proxy of Pakistan, as a potentially powerful force in the neighborhood.
 - **Fellow travellers such as the Haqqani network, Laskhar e Toiba and Jaish e Mohammed are waiting in the wings.**
- Delhi could either forget the collusion between Pakistan and Taliban, and incidents such as **the IC 814 hijack** and do business with the Taliban, or
- The country must be ready to face a potentially destabilising force. This would add a multiplier element to the two-front threat on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Terms to know:

- [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#),

29. Sedition law has no place in a modern democracy

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 2 – Structure, Organization, and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

Relevance: There should be a fine balance between fundamental rights and statutes.

Synopsis:

The sedition law was born out of an authoritarian mindset and a zeal to ensure the fixation of order. It's been done away within most of the world (including U.K and U.S) and should be removed from India as well owing to its persistent misuse.

Background:

- Justice D Y Chandrachud commented that the law on sedition needs to be relooked, especially in the context of increasing **incarcerations of media persons under this law.**
- The comment holds immense significance, as this is the first instance in recent times when a sitting judge of the Supreme Court has publicly “questioned” this questionable law.
- However, it covers only a myopic view of misuse against media persons and ignores repeated instances of misuse against the common masses.

About Sedition Law:

- In India, Sedition falls under section 124A of the IPC (Indian Penal Code).
- It is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring contempt or hatred towards the government of India.
- Sedition cases are punishable with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.
- **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code**, or the sedition law, is the illegitimate child of two fathers — one is a monarchy and the other a fixation with “order”. Both aim to quash dissent for maintaining the status quo and order in society.
- Sedition was retained by the Supreme Court in the Kedar **Nath Versus State of Bihar Case**. The court said:
 - This species of offence against the State was not an invention of the British Government in India, but has been known in England for centuries.
 - Every State, whatever its form of Government, has to be armed with the **power to punish those** who, by their conduct –
 - jeopardise the safety and stability of the State, or
 - disseminate such feelings of disloyalty as to have the tendency to lead to the disruption of the State or to public disorder.

Misuse of Sedition against media persons:

- In June, the Supreme Court quashed sedition charges against media person Vinod Dua.
- However, more than six months ago, a journalist from Kerala, Siddique Kappan, was charged with sedition (among other things) by the UP police. His bail application is still not accepted as he is not a high-profile journalist.

Why should the Sedition law be abolished?

- **First**, it is **prone to misuse**, as police officers and lower courts are more concerned with the law as it exists on the books. Further, the Kedar Nath judgment hasn't been added to the Indian Penal Code.
 - A decade ago, **Binayak Sen was convicted of sedition and imprisoned**. His case clearly did not meet the requirement of the Supreme Court's reading down in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar.
 - Yet, neither the district nor the High Court thought it prudent to grant him bail and later on bail was granted by the Supreme Court.
- **Second**, democracies thrive on chaos, but an authoritarian mind seeks to control, and the overarching quest for an order is primarily **anti-democratic**.
 - The fixation with order is, therefore, primarily an intolerance of difference of opposing points of view, of dissent.
- **Third**, the **UK has done away with sedition as has the US and most of the world**.
 - In 1962, India was a newly independent state and was paranoid about separatist tendencies. However, now it is armed with a spate of laws that can deal with the issues that the sedition law was supposed to deal with.

Way Ahead:

- **Sedition should have no place in democracies which** thrive on criticism of an existing government.
- It ought to have no place in societies that recognise that states of existence are temporary and the truth is multi-dimensional.

And so, not just mediapersons, but writers, thinkers, artists, and the millions who are voiceless people **must be protected from this regressive law**.

Terms to know:

- [Section 124 A or Sedition law](#)

30. Falling government school enrolment is alarming and it needs to be addressed soon

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Gs2: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Relevance: Articles highlight the need for reforms in India's education system.

Synopsis: Need reforms on governance, performance management, and English instruction to strengthen public education in India.

Background

- The proportion of India's children attending a government school has now declined to 45 percent.
- Whereas this number is 85 percent in America, 90 percent in England, and 95 percent in Japan.

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- This enrollment decline happened despite higher teacher salaries, teacher qualifications, and government spending.
- This needs to be addressed because a quality, free and regular school education represents our most potent infrastructure of opportunity, a fundamental duty of the state.

Challenges and Issues

1. There is an issue of a huge dropout ratio and poor learning outcomes. For instance, only 50 percent of Grade 5 children being able to read a grade 2 text.
2. There are too many schools and 4 lakh schools have less than 50 students. Whereas China with a similar total student has only 30 percent of our school number.
3. Only 26 per cent of kids studies in English. Though, English has remained a significant factor for higher education pathways and employability.

What needs to be done?

1. Performance management, currently equated with teacher attendance, needs evaluation of scores, skills, competence, and classroom management. Scores need continuous assessments or end-of-year exams.
2. Teacher competence should be evaluated on child interaction, knowledge, planning capacity, communication, feedback abilities, and collaboration.
3. Classroom management needs assessment by classroom observation of learning, physical set-up, instructional differentiation, and communication.
4. Governance must shift from control of resources to learning outcomes. It includes learning design, responsiveness, teacher management, community relationships, integrity, fair decision-making, and financial sustainability.
5. Apart from reading, writing, and arithmetic, our education system should stress the need for competency and English awareness.
6. Currently, Education Policy is into Lists I (Centre), II (State), and III (concurrent jurisdiction). This fragmentation needs to be revisited because it tends to concentrate decisions that should be made locally.

31. Undead section

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Gs2: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Relevance: This article is an example of a non-implementation of the Supreme Court's judgment at ground level.

Synopsis: The invalid Sec. 66A is often invoked out of ignorance and is used as a tool of harassment.

What is the issue?

- Section 66A of the IT Act was struck down as unconstitutional six years ago. For the second time in two years, the supreme court has been informed that Section 66A of the IT Act, is still being invoked by the police and in some trial courts.
- It is surprising that the police headquarters and prosecutors in the various States had not disseminated the effect of the Court ruling among officers manning police stations.
- There were also instances of courts framing charges under Section 66A even after lawyers had cited the 2015 judgment. The PUCL has said as many as 745 cases are still pending in district courts in 11 States.

Shreya Singhal (2015) case vs Section 66A of the IT Act

- Section 66A made messages, which are deemed to be offensive to anyone, or those that caused annoyance, a criminal offence. If these messages were sent through a computer or computer resource. It prescribed a prison term of up to three years on conviction.
- In its landmark judgment in Shreya Singhal (2015), the Court ruled that the provision was vague and violated the freedom of free speech.
- Further, the court observed that the provision upsets the balance between the exercise of the free speech right and the imposition of reasonable restrictions on it.

What needs to be done?

- Police officers who receive complaints and register them as First Information Reports may not be aware of the judgment (Shreya Singhal).
- However, Ignorance of the law is no excuse for the citizen, and it must equally be no excuse for police officers who include invalidated sections in FIRs.
- Police chiefs and the directorates of prosecution must proactively begin a process of conveying to the lower courts and investigators about all important judgments.

32. In defence of India's noisy democracy

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS-2: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Relevance: The article compares the much talked about Chinese authoritarian model with India's democratic model of governance.

Synopsis: Rather than looking into China's authoritarian model, it is time to defend the noise of Indian democracy.

Background

- China's development over the last century has been impressive. Hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty and also social indicators have improved dramatically.
- Whereas, India's developmental record has been much more mixed. Since the 1990s, the Indian economy has grown impressively, but it remains far behind China in its global competitiveness.
- Moreover, improvements in basic social development indicators have lagged. Recently, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen have pointed out that India has actually fallen behind Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- Many educated Indians think India's problem is that it is just too democratic. Unlike China, making and implementing key decisions about public investment and various reforms is problematic and challenging in a democratic setup.
- However, the claim that less democracy is good for development does not stand up to comparative, theoretical, and ethical scrutiny.

Why democratic regimes are better than non-democratic regimes?

- **One, Authoritarian states barring China have not performed better than democracies.**
 - Africa and West Asia, where authoritarian governments have dominated, remain world economic laggards.
 - Similarly, the Latin American military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s had a terrible economic and social record. It was with the return of

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democracy and the “pink wave” of Left populist parties that prosperity and social progress were ushered in.

- In Taiwan and South Korea, their transitions to democracy saw their economies moving up to the next level and become much more inclusive.
- **Two, examples from Indian states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu suggest that democracies nourish inclusive society.**
 - Kerala and Tamil Nadu have done more to improve the lives of all their citizens across castes and classes than any other State in India.
 - Both states have also had the longest and most sustained popular democratic movements and intense party competition in the country.
 - In contrast, in Gujarat, where a single-party rule has been in place for nearly a quarter century, growth has been solid. But it is accompanied by increased social exclusion and stagnation in educational achievement and poverty reduction.
- **Third, the assumption that the authoritarianism model of decision-making can rise above the challenges in a democratic setup is false.**
 - Democracies are in fact more likely to meet the necessary conditions for successful decision-making.
 - Because, elected representatives, need to answer to a broad electorate if, they want to win elections.
- **Fourth, democracy allows for forms of negotiation and compromise that can bridge across interests and even balance otherwise conflicting imperatives for growth, justice, sustainability, and social inclusion.**
 - The Welfare policies such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Right To Information, the right to food, and other programs are a testament to how democracy can master even the most complex policy goals.
- **Fifth, democracy promotes equality by endowing all citizens with the same civic, political and social rights even as it protects and nurtures individuality and difference.**
 - Whereas in China (authoritarian state) the cost of development is huge.
 - The party-made great famine took some 35 million lives.
 - Cultural Revolution has made enemies out of neighbors
 - One child policy devastated families and erased a generation.
 - Ongoing violent, systematic repression of the Uyghur Muslim and Tibetan minorities
 - Conversely, India’s democracy has opened social and political spaces for subordinate groups and has built a sense of shared identity and belonging in the world’s largest and most diverse society.
 - It has preserved individual liberties, group identities, and religious and thought freedoms.

33. COVID-19 vaccines: Too many hurdles, still

Source: [Down to Earth](#)

Syllabus: GS2 – Health

Relevance: Vaccination is the only way we can control the pandemic.

Synopsis: The road to complete vaccination in India is riddled with various challenges. Where we are going wrong and what can be done!

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Background

Here is how things have gone so far wrt vaccination drive in India:

- **Development of indigenous vaccine:** India was one of the very few countries that managed to develop an indigenous vaccine in record time. By December 2020, the country was all set with its COVID-19 operational guidelines to ensure a smooth rollout of the vaccines.
- **Vaccine shortage:** More than 60 million doses to be exported or donated to other countries between January and March.
- **Vaccination extended to cover all adults under 18 years:** While people across the country struggled to secure vaccination slots on the national [CoWin dashboard](#), the Centre worsened the situation by deciding to extend the vaccination net to include all adults under the age of 18 years.
- **States fail to procure vaccines:** It was decided that the additional vaccines will be procured by the state governments, which clearly failed because of the global shortage and the fact that states have never procured vaccines in the past. Some of the states even unsuccessfully tried to float global tenders to forge deals with vaccine manufacturers. When the desperation peaked, the **Supreme Court had to step in**.
- **Universal vaccination announced:** On June 7, amid criticism of the government's confused vaccine policy, the Centre announced universal vaccination.
- Present situation
- **Target:** India has the daunting task of vaccinating its entire adult population of nearly one billion by the end of this year. This will require almost **two billion doses**.
- **Actual situation:** In the first six months, the country has managed **only 0.25 billion doses**.
- **Requirement:** To be able to deliver the 1.75 billion more doses in the remaining half of the year, the country needs at least 250 million doses a month.
- However, according to a Press Information Bureau release, **only 120 million doses have been sanctioned for June**, suggesting that the progress remains slow.
- Challenges with vaccination drive
- Major challenges are associated with timely delivery and rollout of the vaccines in India.
- **Uncertainty in delivery:** India is relying on Serum Institute of India, Bharat Biotech and import of Sputnik V vaccines. But, the delivery of Sputnik V vaccine has already been delayed from June to August.
- **Speedy delivery of doses:** Under the current universal immunisation programme, the country administers some 390 million doses to newborns and pregnant mothers in a year. For COVID-19 relief, the country will need to deliver an additional 250 million doses a month for the rest of 2021.
- **Requirement of new infrastructure:** The country will need new infrastructure and more importantly skilled health personnel to deliver the extra doses. A vaccination center needs at least five people, including a trained vaccinator.
- **Increase rate of vaccine delivery:** India will also have to ramp up its rate of vaccine delivery. Rolling out COVID-19 vaccination without fixing the delivery challenges will lead to distinct problems: the vulnerable population will be left out (which can lead to possible mutations) and vaccine quality will take a hit due to limited availability of cold storage facilities and human resources.

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Suggestions/Measures

The five pillars on which the global vaccination policy should rest

Ensure adequate supply

- Free up technologies through TRIPS waiver, C-TAP (**COVID-19 Technology Access Pool** by WHO for sharing intellectual property, technology and data to increase access to medical products)
- Increase production facilities
- Promote collaborations for raw materials
- **Dose stretching:** The government has the option of dose stretching to reduce the demand. For example, studies now show that people who have been infected by the virus might remain safe by taking a single dose.

Set a system for equitable distribution via COVAX

- Restrict hoarding
- Fund the facility
- Increase transparency on industry deals

Protect people

- Increase transparency in trials
- Set up a system for monitoring adverse effects
- Set up a compensation system

Improve delivery

- Provide the vaccine free of cost
- Ensure access and increase rate of delivery
- Manage issues around the digital divide

Improve pandemic preparedness

- Monitor variants
- Provide rational treatment
- Promote pandemic-appropriate behavior to control spread

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Brazen gaming of bankruptcy process on

Source – [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus – GS Paper 3 – Industries and industrial policies

Relevance – Resolution process under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is suffering from many problems. Streamlining this process is very important for Indian Economy.

Synopsis: Public Sector Banks should be the focus area of the reforms in resolution process. otherwise hard-earned money of taxpayers will be wasted without anything in return.

Introduction

Many big and small industrialists have criticised cases of bad loan write-offs by public sector banks (PSBs). There are allegations that new bankruptcy process is being misused by many promoters. They are stashing the money away and getting concession under bankruptcy process from banks. Thus, National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under IBC requires reforms.

However, main issue is not promoters or NCLT, it is Public Sector Banks, that require reforms.

What are the issues linked to PSBs in bankruptcy process?

According to the data from the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), in over 363 major NCLT resolutions since 2017, banks have taken an average loss of 80 per cent.

Whereas only 8 per cent cases have been resolved and 30% cases resulted into liquidation under bankruptcy process. It means banks were not able to recover money after giving concessions.

According to few sources, the size of the bad loan was almost Rs. 20 trillion. Almost all of it was with PSBs. However, bad loan resolution is still ineffective, which is evident from the poor

financial results and stock prices of most of the PSBs.

This massive accumulation of bad loans was made possible by deep corruption and the nexus between bankers, businessmen, and politicians in PSBs.

What are the promoters related issues in bankruptcy process?

Indian promoters don't want to give up control over their assets, even after a very bad mismanagement of the business. Hence, in one case after another, promoters were at the forefront of acquiring control over the same assets through the new bankruptcy mechanism.

Reforms introduced by government

Willful defaulters have been barred from bidding. **Section 29A** was amended to stop willful defaulters from regaining control of their company by forcing creditors to take massive haircuts.

Section 12A was added by a 2018 amendment, which allows the parties to close an insolvency case with the approval of 90 per cent of the committee of creditors (CoC).

Terms to Know

- [National Company Law Tribunal](#)

2. How Chhattisgarh has stalled a historic judgment

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Linkages between Development and Spread of Extremism

Synopsis:

The Salwa Judum judgment was delivered 10 years ago, but it has not been effectively implemented by the government. The tribals are still facing many hardships and there has been no prosecution of security forces for human rights violations.

Background:

- The Supreme Court (SC) delivered a historic judgment on 5th July 2011 in **Nandini Sundar and others versus the State of Chhattisgarh case**.
- The judgment was aimed to curb the misuse of power by the government and protect tribal rights.

About the Judgment:

- The court **banned Salwa Judum**. It was a vigilante movement started in 2005 and sponsored by the Chhattisgarh and Central government. The movement ostensibly aimed to fight against the Maoists.
- The judges also ruled that the use of **surrendered Maoists and untrained villagers in frontline counter-insurgency operations** as Special Police Officers (SPOs) was unconstitutional.
 - It directed that the existing **SPOs be redeployed in traffic management or other such safe duties**.
- **Other matters like** prosecution of security forces for human rights violations, and rehabilitation of villagers who had suffered violence, **were left pending**. The State had been asked to submit comprehensive plans for this.

Situation before the judgement:

- At its peak between 2005 and 2007, the Judum involved forcing villagers into government-controlled camps.
- Those who refused were punished by having their villages burnt. Hundreds of people were killed, and their deaths were not even recorded as 'encounters'.
- Villagers fled to neighbouring States or into the forests around their villages. Sangham members (active but unarmed Maoist sympathisers) were either jailed or compelled to join the security forces as SPOs.

Implementation of judgment by the state:

- **Ten years on, nothing has been done to implement the judgment**. Instead, the State government has merely renamed the SPOs. They are now known as the District Reserve Guard (DRG).
- Most DRGs are captured or surrendered Maoists and are given automatic weaponry as soon as they join the police force. Some of them get one-three months of training, and some not even that.
- **They commit excesses against their former fellow villagers, suffer the most casualties in any operation. However, they are paid much less than the regular constabulary**. Due to this apprehension, judges had outlawed their use.

Situation after the judgment:

- Today, **the Judum camps are virtually empty with only the former SPOs and their families, staying** in now permanent houses. Villagers split between those who went to the camp and those who went to the forest are now reconciled.

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- People have come back and started cultivation. An entire generation has grown up and **across the region, villagers are demanding schools and health centres**. Instead, what they have got in abundance are CRPF camps.
 - These have come up at intervals of less than 5 km, and roads are being bulldozed through what were once dense forests.
- **The security forces have vacated the schools** as per SC directive. However, they undertook a larger takeover of public land and private fields.
- **No steps have been taken to prosecute government officials or security forces** for their atrocities on tribals. For instance, CBI filed a charge sheet in 2011 against security forces for burning tribal villages, but they were not punished.
- The **innocent villagers are still arrested** as suspected Maoists and spend long years in jail before their acquittal. This was even evident during the pandemic times.
- Deaths in encounters between jawans and Maoists periodically hit the national headlines. **But extrajudicial killings of villagers and Maoists and killings of suspected informers by Maoists continue at a steady pace**, rarely hitting any high publicity note.

Way Ahead:

- T.R. Andhyarujina and Ashok Desai, the lawyers **who argued for the villagers pro bono in the Supreme Court, have passed away**. Similarly, many other activists have died, are in jail facing contested charges or have given hope of a sustainable solution.
- Unless both sides get serious about peace talks, another 10 years will pass. The 2011 Supreme Court judgment will be rendered even more meaningless, as will the idea of justice or the rule of law ever being possible in this land.

3. The heavy footprint of a light rail

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Relevance: This article depicts the harmful impacts of rapid development of transportation system in India.

Synopsis:

The light rail project of Kerala government connecting Thiruvananthapuram and Kasargod would inflict severe environmental damage in the state. The government should look for alternative options like a sea ferry that can ensure seamless transportation and significantly reduce environmental degradation.

Background:

- The Government of Kerala is planning to construct a **light rail project**. It will reduce the travel time between the two extremities of the State – the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram in the south and the town of Kasargod in its north.
- Currently, it has drawn criticism from environmental groups owing to its adverse impact on the region's ecology, but there are economic concerns as well.

Concerns associated with of yet another rail line:

- **First**, the land chosen for railway construction is of an undulated topography combined with an often rocky surface that is prone to crumbling when dislodged.
 - Excessive quarrying and construction have already left it vulnerable to torrential rain, as seen in the devastating landslides recorded across the

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State in recent years. Therefore, the construction will **severely impact the stability of the earth's surface** along its course.

- **Second**, its construction will submerge various wetlands of the state, which may **deter the fresh water supply** to nearby communities.
- **Third**, the wetland consists of paddy fields as well. Hence, submergence would hamper the **livelihood of farmers and impact food security of the region**, as paddy is the staple food of Malayalees.

Way Ahead:

- The government should listen to citizens' concerns on the plan to install a light railway across the State.
 - Two years ago it had dismissed protests by the villagers of Keezhattur in Kannur District against a highway project that would destroy their paddy fields.
- The government should look for alternate options for connectivity. The state already has a well-connected road, railway and airway transportation system.
 - It can now build a sea-borne ferry service connecting Thiruvananthapuram with Kasargod, and all the ports in between. This would leave the land untouched.

Terms to Know

- Light Rail

4. SEBI's new rules for Independent directors

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS2: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

Synopsis: The new rules for independent directors aim to ensure checks and balances.

Background:

- The recent controversy over the issuance of preference shares by PNB Housing Finance has raised concerns over the role of independent directors in India.
- Such concerns over the independence of independent directors are not new.
- Questions have repeatedly been raised **over the appointment and selection** process of independent directors, their compensation, and to what extent they are "distanced" from the promoters.
- Matters of **propriety and conflict of interest** have also been raised over the manner in which regulators, are appointed to boards of private companies they used to oversee.

Issues related to independent directors?

- Firstly, an investigation by Indian express has revealed that in the last 11 years, at least **six heads of top regulatory bodies and two senior associates took directorships with private firms** that fell within their regulatory domain.
- Secondly, even the cooling-off period is ignored in some cases.
 - But it's not just the private sector.
 - Of the 172 independent directors in 98 public sector entities, at least 86, serving on 67 PSU boards, are linked to the ruling party.
- Thirdly, two years ago, the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs noted that "the selection of independent directors for PSUs has not remained independent.

To address some of these concerns, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) introduced new rules.

New rules issued by SEBI:

- It seeks a more robust framework for independent directors.
- As per the new rules, which will come into effect from **January 1, 2022**, the appointment or removal of independent directors has to be carried out through a **special resolution of shareholders**.
 - The earlier ordinary resolution was required with a simple majority.
- However, a higher threshold for the appointment and removal of independent directors is a deviation from the discussion paper released by SEBI earlier this year on this issue.
 - It had suggested that the appointment/removal be subject to a **dual approval process**.
 - Greater say will be given to the non-promoter shareholders.
- The new rules also seek to **populate important committees with independent directors**.
 - Two-thirds of the members of the nomination and remuneration committee have to be independent directors.
- All related party transactions have to be approved by independent directors on the audit committee.

Independent directors play a critical role in corporate governance. That is why ensuring their independence will protect their ability to differ from the promoter, and look out for the interests of the non-promoter and minority shareholders.

Read more:

- [Norms related to independent directors](#)

5. The problem now with the military synergy plan

Source: [The Hindu](#)

GS3: Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

Relevance: Establishment of theatre command is one of the foremost aims of top leadership of security forces.

Synopsis: There is need to address the structural gaps before the creation of theatre commands.

Background:

- The Indian military continues to work in silos.
- Thus, Prime Minister issued directions to bring about jointness among forces. First Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of India was assigned with this task.
- However, as per media reports, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is resisting the formation of theatre/functional commands.

Possible reasons for such demands by IAF:

1. Firstly, the IAF has been objecting because **air power being seen as a supplementary force** to the two surface forces. Further, if IAF is divided into penny packets, it would seriously degrade the effectiveness of air operations.
2. Secondly, the **Army-Air Force silo**. Historically, the Indian Army has always kept the IAF out of the information loop and demonstrated a penchant to 'go it alone'. The use of offensive air power close to the Line of Control requires that the **force leadership be kept informed**.
 - After Kargil, the Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) himself admitted that information was not shared even between the Director General of Military Operation

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(DGMO) and the Director General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) within Army headquarters, much less with the IAF.

3. Third, the **proposed air defence command conflicts with the domain commands** in seamless employment of air power.
 - The IAF does not wish to see its limited resources frittered away in fighting frontal defensive battles by a land force commander with little expertise in employment of air power.
 - The Army fails to realise that offensive air power is best not seen. It should engage the enemy air force elsewhere while giving own surface forces the freedom to manoeuvre and operate with impunity, as shown in 1971.
4. Lastly, the Chinese incursion into Eastern Ladakh last year is reminiscent of Kargil.
 - Use combat air power, as against 1962, has significantly contributed in deterring China.
 - However, such intent and a joint strategy would have been forcefully signalled by the presence of air force representatives in the ongoing negotiations to restore status quo ante.

What needs to be done before creation of Integrated theatre commands?

- Firstly, it is essential to **first define the political objectives** and a **national security strategy**.
 - For instance, the failures of the mightiest militaries in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Indian misadventure in Sri Lanka bear testimony to the lack of clear political objectives and appropriate military strategies.
 - It can define the types of contingencies, appropriate military strategies, doctrines and required capabilities.
- Secondly, **identify duplication, wasteful resources** and practices.
 - A large, manpower-intensive army with unusable armour formations would then also come into focus.
- Thirdly, theatre or any lower structure requires **an institutionalised higher defence organisation**, which has been missing since the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) became defunct in the 1950s.
 - It is leading to little regular dialogue between the political and military leadership, except in crises resulting in knee-jerk responses.
 - In the current proposal, it appears that the CDS, as the permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), would also exercise operational control of the theatre/functional commands.
 - It is unlikely to be palatable to the politico-bureaucratic leadership and which has, called for further deliberations.
- Hence, there is need of an adequate deliberations and discussions with all stakeholders to evolve an appropriate military strategy in a nuclear backdrop.

6. Rural Economy Recovery

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS-2: Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes

Relevance:

Synopsis: The government has changed its fiscal strategy. It went all out last year to shield the rural economy and households by way of free food, free gas, front-loading PM-Kisan payments, increasing MGNREGA allocation, moratoriums etc.

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Background:

- A large part of the resilience of the rural economy last year stemmed from government support.
- Now, the government is providing support in a **targeted and calibrated manner**.
- For example, free food rations have been extended till November.
- The government also increased the amount of subsidy on fertilisers unexpectedly.
- This loss of lives coupled with the loss of livelihood can make rural spending more cautious.

Trends in rural India:

1. Firstly, rural India has been **devastated** by the **vicious second wave**.
 - At its peak last year in August-September, rural districts accounted for 2.28 million new cases.
 - In April and May this year, this rose to 7.61 million.
 - During August-September 2020, approximately 28,101 Covid-19 deaths occurred in rural districts.
 - In April-May this year, the reported number was up 198 per cent at 83,863.
2. Secondly, rural India has been displaying signs of a **“Fast-in Fast-Out”** phenomenon in the last few weeks.
 - For example, the **CMIE rural sentiment index** is up 2 per cent in June from the trough in May, even as the urban index is down nearly 3 per cent.
 - Similarly, average daily registrations of agricultural equipment like tractors, trailers, and harvesters are up 237 per cent in June as compared to May.
3. Thirdly, rural India now seems to be more optimistic as compared to urban India.

Way forward:

- The government needs to **cut taxes on fuel and edible oils** (it has been cut recently).
- **Investment in commodities** to enhance supplies.
- **Simple supply-side responses** to solve much of the problem related to sharp jump in food items of mass consumption.
 - Pulses have always been a bugbear in terms of their impact on inflation.
- **Nudge NAFED** to sell/release at least 15 per cent of the stock in 10 days. It will help cool the market.
 - In this context, the “SUPPLYCO” model, as currently prevalent in Kerala, could be effectively remodelled for NAFED to transfer maximum benefits to consumers and farmers in the entire crop-to-cash cycle.

That is why any signs of a nascent rural recovery have to be supported by government intervention through aggressive supply-side and compassionate measures.

7. Bharat-Net fails to enter fast lane – Both phases staring at delay amid COVID

Source- [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus- GS 2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance: Bharat-Net project is very important for digitisation of rural India

Synopsis – The Union cabinet revised the Bharat-Net implementation strategy to speed up the rollout of high-speed optical fiber-enabled broadband.

Introduction-

The Bharatnet project was meant to cover all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats [GM] with high-speed optical fiber-enabled broadband. It should have been completed by March 2019. Almost two years later, the government has only been able to connect up to 1.56 lakh GM.

What is Bharat-Net project and the reason behind its delay?

Bharat-Net project- The Project began in 2011 as the National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN), and was renamed Bharat-Net in 2015.

However,

- In March 2020, the deadline for both the phases was pushed back to August 2021. Later it was again pushed beyond August 2021 due to COVID.
- **Major reason for Delay-**
- **Poor implementation-**
 - Lack of approved detailed project report.
 - Non-existent project implementing agencies- no agency made responsible for project implementation.
- **Non-availability of required funds.**
- **Right of way [RoW] challenge** – RoW permission from Forest department, railways, and NHAI.
- **COVID pandemic** – The pace of the project was affected by the lockdown and movement curbs imposed due to COVID.
- **Linear architecture**– During phase 1, only single fibre path from the nearest exchange is available for endpoint connection at the gram panchaya [GP]. The GP site is isolated in the event of a failure due to the lack of a backup path.

What is the revised implementation strategy of the Bharat-Net project?

The government changed the scheme's implementation strategy and decided to rope in private players to finish the pending work of the Bharat-Net project.

Read more –

- [Revised Bharat Net Project](#)

8. India's OECD tax deal may have revenue implications, say experts

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources

Relevance: Equalisation Levy and Global minimum Tax rate aim to tax digital services at the global level.

Synopsis:

Agreeing to the Global minimum Tax rate will impact India's Equalisation Levy and create revenue implications.

About the Deal:

India recently joined the [OECD-G20 framework for a global minimum tax](#). But the deal will bring certain challenges to India.

Under the agreed outline of the OECD multilateral solution, a portion of profits of companies with Euro 20 billion revenues and a profit margin above 10 percent would be taxed in jurisdictions where they have sales.

Between 20 per cent and 30 percent of profits above a 10 percent margin may be taxed.

The pact will bring **only the top 100 digital companies** like Google, Facebook, and Netflix into the global taxation pact. So, this might have revenue implications for India.

What India is demanding?

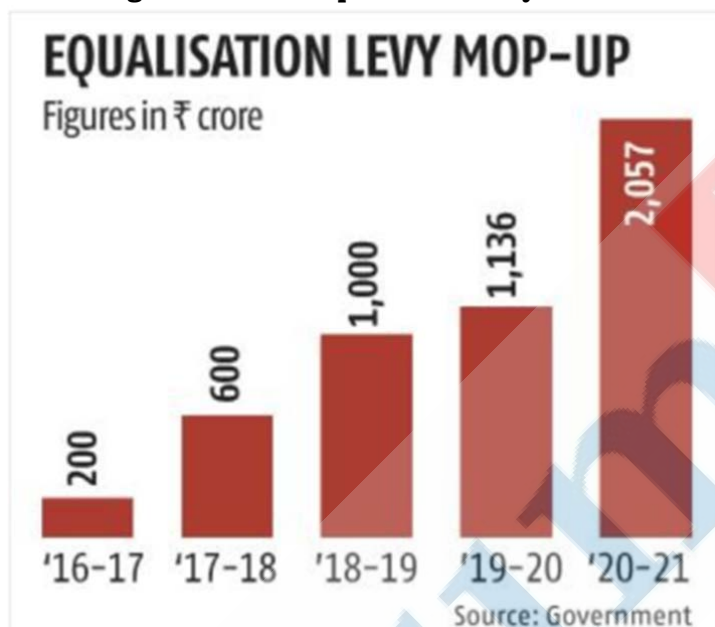
India and other developing countries were fighting to include companies with at least Euro 1 billion in revenues as against the final proposal of Euro 20 billion revenues and a profit margin above 10 per cent. This will cover at least 5,000 global entities.

Challenges with the deal:

As per the deal, India needs to **withdraw the contentious 2 percent equalisation levy** on e-commerce operators **by 2023**. The levy will most definitely go by 2023 if the proposal comes into effect, unless India can think of some other way of augmenting the tax.

- The equalisation levy has a much **lower annual revenue threshold** of Rs 2 crore (Euro 0.2 million) as against Euro 20 billion agreed by 130 countries at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- India collected Rs 2,057 crore from the equalisation levy in 2020-21, an 85 per cent growth over Rs 1,136 crore in the previous fiscal. But, the OECD deal will not give the same amount of revenue.

The background of the Equalisation levy:



The equalisation levy or EL was introduced at the rate of 6 per cent in 2016 for digital advertising services, which led to a Rs 200 crore collection.

- The scope was widened in April 2020 to impose a 2 per cent tax on non-resident e-commerce players. The scope was further expanded in the Budget 2021-22 by way of clarifications.
- In May, India also notified a **revenue threshold of Rs 2 crore** and a **limit of three lakh users** for non-resident technology firms to pay tax in India under new or revised bilateral tax pacts. This is a part of the significant economic presence (SEP) principle. SEP, introduced in the Finance Bill 2018-19.

Challenges with the Equalisation Levy:

- The EL has been a bone of [contention between India and the United States](#), with the latter deciding to impose additional tariffs on a slew of Indian imports, including basmati rice, seafood, jewellery, bamboo, semi-precious stones and pearls, among others.
- However, the tariffs will remain suspended for six months with an expectation of a multilateral solution to the issue of digital taxation.

Suggestions:

India will have to take an aggressive stance to protect its rightful tax base, and need to reach a fair consensus to protect the Indian tax base.

Read more:

- [Issue of Digital Services Tax between India and US – Explained](#)
- [Base erosion and profit shifting \(BEPS\)](#)
- [Global Minimum Corporate Tax & India – Explained](#)

9. Despite so many feats, GST still a work in progress

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources

Relevance: GST is a comprehensive indirect tax (IDT) that comprises a majority of India's IDT.

Synopsis:

The GST is still a work in progress. Hopefully, the GST Council will rediscover the spirit of cooperative federalism and move forward.

Improvements after the GST:

- Due to the introduction of GST, Voluntary tax compliance increased, tracking tax evasions quickly and faster movement of goods through various states.
- After several slip-ups, the [GST Network \(GSTN\)](#), the digital platform through which almost all processes are carried out, is now functioning smoothly
- The e-invoice details and reports from the GSTN help the taxpayers chase the vendors who don't promptly report the supply details.
- The exporters get refunds automatically and more quickly than earlier.

Present challenges are associated with the GST system:

- A major issue is the hold up of a conveyance due to minor defects in the e-way bill.
- Most decisions of the [GST Council](#) have been unanimous, but that is now getting more difficult. Because of the adverse effects of some compromises made to attain consensus by appeasing the States are now showing up. For instance,
 - **“Principle of equivalence”** (to fix the GST rate for an item at the aggregate of excise duty and sales tax in the earlier regime) **was abandoned**. This resulted in lower tax rates for many items and a consequent shortfall in tax revenues.
- The governments have responded by borrowing, raising the Customs duties, imposing fresh cesses and surcharges, increasing the excise duty and sales tax on fuel and so on.
- The Central government is unable to keep its promise to compensate the states for the shortfall in the projected increase in revenues.
 - Thus, apparently, the **consumers** have gained through lower GST rates, but they have to pay in other ways to **make up for the revenue shortfall**.
- The states have been given jurisdiction over 90 per cent of the taxpayers. But many GST authorities in the states are **not as familiar with the complexities of the import and export trade or taxation of services**.
- Further, the States **tax collection efforts are also relatively sloppy**, as the States are assured of compensation for the shortfall in projected revenues. **Rigorous tax audits have not taken place** due to the pandemic. So, many compliance issues have not yet shown up.
- A centralised authority for the advance ruling has not been set up. **GST appellate tribunals have also not been constituted**.

Read more:

- [GST Compensation Issue: Analysis](#)

- [Analysis of GST regime in India – Explained, Pointwise](#)

10. Three economic risks in need of mitigation plans

Source: [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus: GS- 3

Synopsis: RBI's Financial Stability Report listed Inflation, a reversal of capital inflow, and lenders' mounting bad assets are all listed as potential threats. All three should be avoided.

Introduction

Many central banks throughout the world have recently taken various measures to deal with economic pressures.

- **Markets have become agitated as a result of their attempts** to increase production growth through extended periods of cheap interest rates and liquidity infusion.
- The matrix of hazards washing up on Indian shores has suddenly become considerably more complex and scary. The US Federal Reserve recently stated that it may start hiking interest rates sometime in 2023. **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor must keep an eye** on threats emanating from global markets as well as those emerging in the home economy.
- **The current Financial Stability Report (FSR)** from the central bank attempts to acknowledge all of them.
 - A restoration to pre-pandemic levels of economic activity would take longer than previously predicted, as the Indian economy is facing variable speed of covid vaccination and the asymmetric opening up across regions.
- **It will take time to repair supply-side capacities that have been harmed.** On the demand side, increased employment rates and households' confidence in converting precautionary savings into consumption are critical.

What are the potential threats listed in the RBI's Financial Stability Report?

Three vulnerabilities that have an impact on systemic and financial stability stand out in the research and need to be addressed. Commodity inflation and global capital flow curtailment are two external factors. The third concern is our domestic banking sector's developing fault lines.

- Capital will be critical in weathering a bad-loan catastrophe. If credit demand rises in pace with our economic openness, **there are concerns that banks will not only have enough capital to back new lending**, but also to cover a rising wave of bad loans.
- The government, which is the sector's primary source of capital, **has limited resources that are being tugged in various ways.**

What should be done?

- **Firstly**, there is no clear risk-mitigation strategy insight. One of them is to **use the RBI's growing foreign exchange reserves for infrastructure investment**, which is unwise. Foreign currency reserves will be needed to balance any "taper tantrum" if and when capital inflows revert.
- **Secondly, the danger of imported commodity inflation will require more careful monitoring and management.** Surveys already show increased inflationary expectations among households, and the RBI should be willing to adjust its rate policy.
 - Long periods of low loan rates have assisted indebted wholesale borrowers, but not capital investment or economic growth.

- **Thirdly, to improve the health of the banking sector, the near-term option may be selling modest portions of new shares to individual and institutional investors, rather than complete bank privatisation.** State-owned banks would be able to raise money in this way, and the government's interest in them would be valued more favourably.

11. Why liberal democracies have a distinct edge on cyber capability

Source- [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, biotechnology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Synopsis – Key finding of Cyber Capabilities and National Power Reports.

Relevance – Cyber capability is a new domain of competition among nations. The report ranks countries, which will provide a clear picture of, how capable are countries in this domain.

Introduction-

The International Institute of Strategic Studies net assessment of Cyber Capabilities and National Power compares countries across seven criteria-

- Strategy and doctrine
- Governance, command and control
- Core cyber-intelligence capability
- Cyber empowerment and dependence
- Cyber security and resilience
- Global leadership in cyberspace affairs
- Offensive cyber capability.

The report has divided the 15 countries into three tiers of cyber power-

- **First Tier** – The US is the only country with world-leading strengths in all categories.
- **Second Tier**– Countries each of which have world-leading strengths in some of the categories. This Include China, Russia, UK, France, Canada, Israel and Australia.
- **Third Tier** – Countries that have strengths or potential strengths in some categories but significant weaknesses in others. The countries in the early stages of their cyber power development like India, Japan, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and North Korea.

India specific observation according to the report-

India's approach towards institutional reform of cyber governance has been slow and incremental compared to other countries.

India also lacked the history of an intelligence apparatus that older powers like the UK and France had which needed to be built up from scratch.

Key finding of the report-

Doctrinal difference between liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes – liberal democracies did not have to worry about defending their ideological borders like authoritarian states.

- **Liberal democracies** do not have to use their resources on controlling what their citizens think.
- **Authoritarian regimes** on the other hand such as China and Russia, have focused on **hiding information** in order protect their citizens from foreign ideas and also erect psychological barriers in their minds. They have **established a system of censorship [Firewall], coercion and information control** to protect its authoritarian regime from being threatened by their citizens.

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- This allows Liberal democracies to focus on offensive capabilities to achieve the desired effect in a sharp and surgical manner.
- While Authoritarian regimes likely to spend a lot more on its Great Firewall than on its offensive cyber units.

Open societies must ensure that technology does not become a Trojan horse for both cyber attackers and illiberal values.

12. Haircuts and Settlements

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Economy

Relevance: The insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) is an important mechanism to protect the economy from NPA and failed businesses. Any issue in this mechanism will act as a big hurdle in the economic development of the country.

Synopsis:

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) allows for a system of haircuts and settlements. However, experts have expressed concerns over their misuse which demands a robust reformation of the IBC process.

Background:

- India's bankruptcy process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) is relatively new and should be seen as a work in progress.
- Experts have expressed concerns about the magnitude of haircuts that banks are taking under the IBC resolution process. Also, the system of one-time settlement (OTS) is harmful.

Issue of Haircuts:

- In finance, a haircut refers to the reduction applied to the original loan amount during the insolvency resolution settlement.
- Overall, **haircuts have been in the 80 percent range**. Banks have lost four-fifths of the money they have lent to companies that have entered the IBC process.
- Even the National Company Law Tribunal recently expressed surprise that Vedanta's Anil Agarwal was "**paying almost nothing**" to take over Videocon Industries.

Issue of One-time Settlement (OTS) Mechanism:

- Under IBC, 90 percent of the committee of creditors (CoC) can decide to give the firm back to the promoter.
 - The recent OTS between the promoter of Siva Industries and Holdings Ltd and its creditors is one such example. The promoter paid Rs 500 crore against a Rs 5,000 crore loan and got back the firm.
- The mechanism is beneficial as:
 - It **preserves capital** and involves an agreement of the original lenders,
 - It also takes the **pressure off the tribunal**, which is clogged up with cases.
- However, the OTS mechanism to settle cases can be open to subversion as the mechanism attracts minimum legal oversight.
 - The promoters could borrow money from banks, take it out of the company, and then use the OTS mechanism to have the banks take a massive haircut on the loans.

Way Ahead:

- Any further reform of the IBC process must take into **account the basic motivation for its introduction:**
 - Firstly, to preserve the companies as far as possible.
 - Secondly, to ensure that capital is not wasted or locked up in legal proceedings.
 - Third, to introduce some market discipline in bank's corporate lending.

The ideal solution is the development of an **incentive-compatible banking sector** that lends more carefully. But until public sector banking in India occupies a far smaller share of corporate lending, such incentive compatibility is a distant dream.

Read more – [Brazen gaming of bankruptcy process on](#)

13. With no subsidy, cooking fuel burns a hole in consumers' pocket

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Gs2: Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger.

Relevance: Price of LPG cylinders is increasing after the removal of subsidy.

Synopsis: Government's cut on LPG subsidies will adversely affect nearly 290 million households with LPG connections.

What is the issue?

- Lack of global demand due to lockdowns had led to a crash in both prices of crude oil and petroleum products.
- Seizing the opportunity, the Central government phased out the LPG subsidy that successive governments had maintained.
- When international LPG prices began to rise in 2021, the oil-marketing companies also hiked the subsidised prices.
- The pressure was shifted onto the consumers who had to bear a Rs 140 increase in the price of a cylinder, irrespective of their income slab.
- This LPG subsidy disbursement was fine-tuned with the introduction of the direct benefit transfer program.
- It was further enhanced to voluntary removal of beneficiaries through the **Give It Up program** and finally the exclusion of those with a taxable income above Rs 10 lakh in 2016.
- The subsidy on LPG was done away with and what remained was some freight subsidy, which comes to Rs 20-30 a cylinder. This move of the government came after subsidies on diesel were phased out.
- This leaves more money in the hands of the government, which is tightening its purse. However, it adds to the woes of nearly 290 million households that have LPG connections but are battling high inflation, salary cuts, and job losses.

14. How cryptocurrency turbocharged the cybercrime racket: Explained

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS3 – S&T, Cyber-security

Relevance: Cryptocurrency is an emerging sector. As a UPSC aspirant one needs have knowledge about its pros and cons.

Synopsis: Use of cryptocurrencies for ransomware attacks by hackers and related challenges.

Must Read: [What is a ransomware?](#)

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How is crypto used in cybercrime?

A typical ransomware attack on a company or organization might proceed like this: Executives realise their business website is down or systems inaccessible, and administrator overrides don't work. A ransom demand arrives via email, providing a Bitcoin address where the payment must go if the company wants its systems operational again, along with a deadline. The victim calls up the Bitcoin address, which is 26 to 34 characters in length, when signing onto a cryptocurrency exchange to make the deposit.

What makes crypto attractive to criminals?

The **anonymity** built into the **blockchain**, which forms the foundation of cybercurrencies, can be utilized through a variety of ways.

- **Coin mixer:** A ransom paid in Bitcoin can be swiftly run through a so-called cryptocurrency mixer or coin mixer, which obscures the trail of ownership by pooling it with other people's holdings. (*While the practice itself is not considered illegal, mixer operators can get into trouble if found to have laundered illegally gotten money.*)
- **Conversion to a different cryptocurrency:** Another option is to convert the ransom payment to a different cryptocurrency via a crypto exchange. So-called money mules (*a person who transfers illegally obtained money between different payment accounts*) can be recruited on dark web forums and directed to withdraw Bitcoins out of certain accounts.

In 2020, victims paid more than \$406 million in cryptocurrency to attackers, according to blockchain analysis firm Chainalysis Inc. This year, groups had taken at least \$81 million from victims as of May, the firm said. Hackers who specialize in ransomware are said to be actively seeking out targets that have insurance.

Can payments made in cryptocurrency be traced?

Yes, at least at first. All Bitcoin transactions, while anonymous, are available for anyone to see, so someone tracking a particular Bitcoin wallet can observe when cash arrives. But accessing the money inside the wallet requires a private key, essentially a password, and that's something ransomware groups do not normally share with anyone outside their operation.

What steps can be taken?

Regulation is the key. In April, the Ransomware Task Force, a private-public partnership created by the Institute for Security and Technology, published an 81-page report with recommendations for how governments can protect against and deal with ransomware attacks.

- The group urged governments to **extend Know Your Customer (KYC), Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating Financing of Terrorism (CFT) requirements** — which national and international authorities enforce against banks around the world — to **crypto exchanges, kiosks** (crypto's version of automated teller machines) and **over-the-counter trading desks**.
- Calls to ban Bitcoin altogether have been quieted by the currency's gradual acceptance by the financial industry.

Terms to know:

- [What is a coin mixer?](#)

15. COP26 offers a chance to revise zero-emission targets

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: GS3 – Environment

Relevance: Annual meeting of the UNFCCC (COP) is an important event where critical policy decisions related to global environment are deliberated upon. As a UPSC aspirant one must be aware of the outcomes of such events.

Synopsis: COP26 (UNFCCC) assumes importance since the last COP meeting could not be held due to pandemic

- The United Kingdom will be hosting the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in early November, 2021.

Why COP26 is important?

COP26 is important because

- **First 5-year assessment:** It will feature the first quinquennial (after every 5 years) ‘global stock take’. It will also feature opportunities for countries to strengthen commitments to new NDC plans and ‘ramp up’ their contributions since it is likely that there will be a global shortfall.
- **US rejoined Paris Agreement:** COP26 is important also because the US returns to the table after a gap of several years. Under President Joe Biden, **the US rejoined the legally binding Paris Agreement** this February. President Biden has climate change at the top of his agenda, and the US will likely play a large role in COP26.
- **Unequal impact of COVID:** While widespread lockdowns dramatically reduced emissions, economic policy responses around the world have not been uniformly green. The unequal impact of the pandemic on poor countries and the poor within each country is likely to worsen any future impact of extreme weather events and climate change. One major consequence of the pandemic is that health and environmental policy will have to go hand in hand.

[What is IPCC and its importance?](#)

Impact of a 1.5°C and a 2°C scenario

In a landmark report released in 2018, the IPCC evaluated the potential impact of a 1.5°C temperature rise compared to 2°C. The Special Report concludes that

Findings of the special report of a 2018 IPCC report	
A global warming which is limited to 1.5°C,	Will reduce – increases in ocean temperatures, associated increases in ocean acidity and decreases in ocean oxygen levels; risks to marine biodiversity, fisheries and ecosystems chances of an ice-free Arctic summer.
	Will prevent – Small islands from sinking into the ocean Millions of poor people from having to face the adverse impacts of extreme weather
	Will increase climate-related health risks to Health Livelihoods Food security Water supply

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	Human security economic growth
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The negative consequences of 1.5°C global warming will be further amplified if global temperatures rise to 2°C.

Way forward for India

As the **3rd largest emitter of carbon** and one of the fastest growing economies in the world, India will have to do its part and step up its NDC (Nationally-Determined Contribution) ambitions.

- India has taken strong steps, including the setting of an ambitious goal renewable electricity generation goal. India's NDC goals include a reduction of **33-35% in emissions** by 2030 from 2005 levels, the creation of an **additional carbon sink of 3 billion tonnes** CO₂ equivalent through forest cover, and the **use of transferred technology** for mitigation and adaptation in the years ahead.
- Amongst Indian corporates, however, very few have specific net-zero goals right now.

Also Read: [UNFCCC Summits](#)

Terms to know:

- [UNFCCC](#)
- The IPCC's **Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (TFI)** develops and refines an internationally agreed methodology and software for the calculation and reporting of **national greenhouse gas emissions** and removals, and encourages the use of this methodology by countries participating in the IPCC and by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- **Net zero emissions vs Carbon Neutral:**
 - Carbon neutral means that any CO₂ released into the atmosphere is balanced by an equivalent amount being removed.
 - Net-zero emissions are reached when **anthropogenic emissions** of GHGs in the atmosphere are balanced by **anthropogenic removals** over a specific period. Net-zero emissions strategies include **every type of greenhouse gases** (GHGs).

16. Shibboleths of the 'ideal' tax system

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Economy

Relevance: The old idea that direct taxes are “progressive needs a relook as all ideas and principles should be implemented as per a country's requirements.

Synopsis:

The principle of focusing on direct taxes is worth questioning in the current era. This is an example of the mindless application of “universal” principles that have begun to fail even in the soils in which they were originally nurtured. Therefore, the focus should be on using a strategy that works best as per the country's society and economy.

Background:

- All the things that we took for granted in the 20th century have started to crumble under the weight of their own contradictions.
- Belief in free trade, globalisation, electoral democracy, capitalism, communism or Keynesian macroeconomics **has never been lower**. The principles underlying them have proved to be flawed and are not working.
 - As per Hegelian thesis, every proposition contains within it the seeds of its own destruction.

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- Marx's predictions **have failed primarily because they expected human and economic progress to move linearly**. However, in reality, they moved in cycles as Hegel's proposition or karma theory suggest.

Crumbling of traditional outlook and propositions:

- Capitalism is under attack in Western Europe and America, and communism has collapsed in the regions of its dominance in the last century.
- One can be certain that authoritarian capitalism of the Chinese variety will also have a sell-by date.
- The United States now believes that **all companies must pay a minimum amount of tax** (currently deemed to be around 15 percent) that most rich nations seem to agree with.
 - Ideas are portrayed as universal only as long as they work for the US. The country supported capitalism and free markets when they saw benefit in them. However, now it has changed tack and wants to make sure that the capital which had flown out of the US to low-tax jurisdictions comes back.
- The US preached the **virtues of technology** when it was the top dog. This enabled technology companies like google and facebook to become market leaders.
 - Today, the US wants to rein these technology giants at home through antitrust suits. However, the US has no problems with tech colonisation elsewhere, as long as it serves US interests.

Considering this evolving and changing nature of traditional propositions, **one can also question** the two time-hallowed tax principles.

Principle one – it is good to raise the tax-GDP ratio in general

- This ratio is the result of not just tax policies, but levels of compliance and levels of economic activity achieved. It is a derivative number, and should not be a focus area for action.
- The focus should be on having a rate where compliance is maximised, and economic activity is least impeded. It is time we stopped obsessing over the wrong goals.
- **Principle Two – one must not raise too much from indirect taxes**
- The basis of this principle is the regressive nature of indirect taxes. As per the principle, focus should be on direct taxes which are “progressive.
- The recent provisional data put out by the Office of the Controller General of Accounts showed that the Centre's collection of indirect taxes exceeded collections from direct taxes in 2020-21.
 - Due to this, many economists are expressing caution about regressive taxes overtaking progressive ones.
- This reasoning is flawed in the Indian context **for our goods and services tax (GST). It is actually progressive in nature**, as less GST is imposed on basic goods and more on luxury goods.
- Further, focusing purely on direct tax will **allow the rural rich to escape the tax net due to a negatively taxed agriculture setup**.
- On the other hand, it is not always true that **direct taxes have to be progressive**. A state that levies a flat rate of income tax will be regressive.
 - Therefore, **we must understand that whether a tax rate is regressive or progressive depends** not on the tax itself, but the rate structure.

Way Ahead:

- In a diverse country like India, taxpayers and social security beneficiaries may come from different communities. Thus, the **willingness to comply will always be low**.

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Hence, a need for tax terrorism arises however this may induce high net worth individuals to move elsewhere.

- Therefore, indirect taxes are the right way to make people pay more taxes, without anybody worrying about who is paying them or benefiting from them. Bearable indirect taxes with near zero rates for wage-goods are the way to go for India.
- With reference to Global Taxation, India should insist that actual tax flows from global companies must be monitored to check if the minimum tax proposal is beneficial to all or not.

Terms to know:

[tax-GDP ratio](#), [Goods and Service Tax](#)

17. Drone policy set to be relaxed as IAF goes for counter-rogue tech

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Gs3: Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

Relevance: After a small attack by drones on the Indian Army's base, drone policies are being reconsidered.

Synopsis: India is expected to further liberalise drone regulations. It will be easing the process of getting licence as well as doing business for operators.

Background

- The decision to simplify the licensing requirements, relax operational curbs and reduce penalties for operators was taken at a meeting chaired by PM last week. The decision came just days after terror attack in Jammu using drones.
- The new rules will supersede the **Unmanned Aircraft Systems Rules 2021**, that came into effect only in March. This move will open up the sector more.
- The Indian Air Force has been tasked with procuring and developing **counter drone technology** to tackle the problem of **rogue drones**.
- DRDO has developed a counter-drone technology that uses methods like jamming and hard kill systems to detect and neutralise the danger from such aerial attacks.
- The IAF has sought to purchase 10 Counter Unmanned Aircraft System (CUASs) known as anti-drone systems in common parlance specifically from Indian vendors.

Why the government is working on liberalised drone rules?

- **First**, though there were concerns about the security aspect of drones. Top government officials perceive that restricting the drone industry would hamper the growth of a sunrise sector that holds significant promise for future.
- **Second**, there were multiple complaints from the drone industry that the current rules were not convenient and instead increased compliance burden for operators.
- For instance, under the regulations that were unveiled in March, a drone operator required 23 permissions from multiple government agencies to operate a drone.
- Even for testing a drone, permission was required from the police and Indian Air Force.
- Such provisions lead to **administrative bottlenecks** and a never-ending process of obtaining approvals.
- **Third**, the current rules also mandate high technical requirements like geo fencing capability and collision avoidance system. Such systems are costly for manufacturers as most of them have started business around five to six years ago.
- **Fourth**, the concept of safety by certification, similar to manned aircraft has not been considered. For instance, a helicopter does not have any equipment for its

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main rotor but is still certified to fly over people in complex urban environments. Such a consideration seems to have been ignored for drones.

- **Fifth**, the new policy is also likely to reverse the ban on commercial use of drones for food or good delivery, according to sources.

Way forward

- Stricter regulations would only prove to be detrimental for the nation's plan to develop advanced technological capabilities.
- No strict or liberal drone regulations can stop any miscreants from assembling a drone and using it for malicious activities.
- Drones are the future of aviation, logistics, surveillance and warfare. The government should offer continued support to the drone ecosystem.

Terms to know:

- [Counter Unmanned Aircraft System \(CUASs\)](#)

18. Let's not politicise the Central Vista project

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Relevance: Central Vista project is an important topic under Infrastructure.

Synopsis: People are also questioning the purpose and benefits of the Central Vista Project. But The questions are short-sighted.

About the Central Vista Redevelopment Project:

The initiative to build a new Parliament building was taken by the then Lok Sabha in 2012. Under the Central Vista project, the offices of the vice-president, the prime minister and the 51 ministries will be housed under one roof. MPs will have offices.

For more info on central vista – [Central Vista project](#)

Challenges with the present Parliament Building:

- Many of the **present Parliament buildings are dilapidated and difficult to work** in. Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House, North Block, and South Block, and the National Museum building were built in 1931. After that, Nirman Bhawan, Shastri Bhawan, Udyog Bhawan, Rail Bhawan and Krishi Bhawan were constructed between 1956 and 1968.
- The legislature sits in the Parliament House whereas the president, vice-president, prime minister, and the officials of 51 ministries sit in different places. Today, 39 ministries are housed in different buildings in the Central Vista area, while **12 ministries are occupying rented premises** outside.
 - The **annual rent for these buildings is about Rs 1,000 crore**, and they are located far from the PMO and other ministries. Obviously, the **administrative work gets hampered**.
- When the buildings were built in Central Vista and its surrounding areas, there was **no digitalisation, unlike today. Now**, along with the security of Parliament House and the ministries, the protection of **digital files also matters**. Building a new complex will ensure better security for both.
- Need for Central Vista Project:
- India is a **rising power in the world today**. Our priorities are changing, so it is very important that the entire central government should be accommodated in a cluster of buildings equipped with modern technology, so that **ministers can easily reach out to each other, meet and interact**.

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- India's **population is growing**, so the number of MPs will have to be increased too in the future. So, to accommodate the large number of MPs in the future, the new project is essential.
 - The **office of our Prime Minister** should also be state-of-the-art, equipped, and secure **like the parliamentary and presidential buildings of the USA, Russia, Britain**, and other developed countries.
 - Major criticism and its counter:
 - Many people are of the view that Rs 20,000 crore of the Central Vista project **should be spent on helping the poor and providing healthcare** facilities during the pandemic. But this is wrong for two reasons.
1. The government is **not diverting any funds allotted for welfare schemes**. Also, the government is **not rolling back any welfare scheme** meant for the poor to implement the project.
 2. The Central Vista Project is a **plan for the future**. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and all other Indian leaders have planned for the future and that is why India occupies its current prime position. The Central Vista project is one such project that aims to fulfill India's present and future needs of the Indian Parliament.

Terms to know:

- [Central Vista project](#)
- [National Archives of India](#)

19. What four years of GST have taught us about this tax regime

Source – [Live Mint](#)

Syllabus – GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Relevance: GST is one of the most important debt-free sources of revenue. An aspirant must know about the issues and challenges in its smooth implementation.

Synopsis – An analysis of 4 years of India's GST regime

Myths regarding GST regime-

- **First**, GST will increase GDP growth by 1-2 percentage points –
 - However, GDP growth is only possible in case there is more income that gets spent. GST cannot increase GDP by itself, though it can statistically include the unorganized sector to an extent.
- **Second**, Inflation would come down with GST implementation
 - However, with deep contradictions in our tax structure, inflation will remain beyond the grasp of GST.
- **Third**, Government revenue would increase after GST implementation.
 - However, GST is a consumption-based tax, for government revenue to rise, the economy has to keep moving along and people have to spend.

Concerns with GST regime-

- **Compensation to states**- Due to the lockdown in 2020-21, States were concerned about tax shortfalls because of the implementation of GST.
 - The compensation cess was levied, and any compensation was to be paid from the compensation cess revenue. However, the [lockdown] situation is different due to the revenue shortfall because of the coronavirus outbreak.
 - **GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017**- States were guaranteed compensation for loss of revenue on account of implementation of GST for a transition period of five years [2017-22].

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- **Exclusion of petroleum from GST regime caused higher inflation-** The government had kept petroleum goods out of GST regime to raise taxes to protect revenue.
 - Currently, taxes on petroleum goods are levied by both the Centre and the states. While the Centre levies excise duty (Rs. 33 per litre), states levy value added tax (VAT) (30% in Delhi).
 - This has to change, as an unintended consequence has been higher inflation.
 - **Unintended consequence –**
 - Prices of all commodities increase once transport costs increases.
 - Higher fuel cost leads to higher prices of food-grains and manufactured goods alike.
- **Multiple rates for each product group –** Globally, most regimes have a single rate. India has adopted a four-tier tax structure of 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% makes it complex like earlier regime.
 - Single rate for one product group will bring simplicity in the structure and make implementation easier.

Way forward-

The Government should continue to take measures to fulfill its promise such as-

- Petroleum to be brought under GST, both Centre and States taxes would be merged and fuel prices across the country would be uniform.
- There is need to reduce multiple GST rates into a single slab.

20. The pandemic gave us a sandbox for real-world trials

Source: [Live mint](#)

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Science and tech**

Synopsis: Covid-mandated testing on everything from ecological systems to BPO laws has generated valuable information.

Introduction

The impacts of noise on sea life have been studied by marine scientists. The sound of onboard motors can affect fish feeding habits and cause migratory patterns to shift at sea. The solar hum of container ships has become so widespread that researchers are concerned that entire kinds of aquatic critters have been rendered silent.

- The Covid pandemic resulted in a significant drop in marine traffic. For scientists, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to assess the extent to which sound has harmed marine life.
- Early findings from these researches appear to show that noise levels have been reduced by more than half in various regions around the world. It allows large animals to inhabit more of the ocean than they might otherwise have been capable of.

What were the findings of these real-world experiments?

Scientists have been presented with the ideal natural experiment due to the pandemic. Marine biologists, conservationists, environmental scientists, and seismologists have seized the opportunity to experiment and the results have been astounding.

- **Firstly, during citywide lockdowns, pollution scientists observed a significant reduction** in atmospheric pollution. It was particularly in large metropolitan cities such as Mumbai (40 percent reduction in the particulate matter) and New Delhi (70 percent reduction in NO₂ levels). This accurately measured the impact of human activities on the environment.

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- **Secondly**, seismologists were able to exploit the lack of human disturbance to create baseline noise levels for the natural environment. It allows them to **identify low magnitude occurrences** such as minor earthquakes and landslides more accurately.
- **Thirdly**, wildlife experts discovered that a number of **animals formerly assumed to be nocturnal were actually diurnal**. They were venturing out during the day in the absence of human activities.

What were the other regulatory experiments?

The epidemic has provided an opportunity to conduct regulatory experiments. National and municipal governments were forced to ease various limitations that had been in place for decades.

- **Firstly**, regulations that prohibited restaurants from delivering cocktails were relaxed during the pandemic. **Customers could pick cocktails along with takeaway orders**. Food delivery businesses delivered alcoholic beverages along with food orders in more than 30 states across the United States.
 - These prohibitions have been in place since prohibition and were designed to limit the unlicensed drinking of alcohol. **Officials in many states are considering making these exemptions permanent**, as the business benefits outweigh the potential dangers.
- **Secondly, regulations preventing telemedicine in the United States had to be eased** in order for patients to consult doctors they could not physically meet. This is likely to be permanent.
- **Thirdly**, in India, lockdown compelled **business process outsourcing firms to shift from providing services in-office to have workers work from home**. It became the dominant method of carrying out BPO operations.
 - After six months of allowing BPO staff to work from home, **it was clear to all that the regulator's early concerns were unwarranted**. Work from home would not result in a widespread toll bypass, as had been expected.
 - On the contrary, **it allowed BPO businesses to make better use of their staff** and contemplate expanding their operations into the country's exhausted II and tired III towns.
- **Lastly, the Indian government proposed major modifications to its OSP legislation** in November 2020, giving its remote work liberalisation a permanent stamp. The rules were liberalised even further a few weeks ago.

Suggestions

- **Empirical policy formulation is required**. Using a regulatory sandbox, an environment in which restrictions can be relaxed for a limited time and under certain conditions will help us to be more careful in policy design.
- The pandemic compelled us to develop restrictions in the sandbox. **We should make this a permanent practise**.

21. HC: Govt free to act against Twitter for IT rules violation

Source: [Times of India](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.

Relevance: New IT rules aim to regulate social media, digital news media, and Over-The-Top (OTT) content providers.

Introduction:

The Delhi high court recently said that the government was “free to take action” against microblogging site Twitter for not following the [new IT Rules](#) and warned the platform it would be “in trouble” if it fails to comply.

About the case:

As per the New IT Rules, significant Social media intermediaries like Twitter, WhatsApp has to appoint a Chief Compliance Officer, Nodal Contact Person, and a Resident Grievance Officer (RGO) in India. All of them should be Indian Residents.

The HC was currently hearing a plea alleging failure by Twitter to comply with the Centre’s new Information Technology Rules. The Court also observed that the three-month window was given to the intermediaries to comply with the rules.

Despite the time window, the HC pointed out that only an interim RGO was appointed by Twitter. The Court observed this as a violation of Government rules.

The Government argument in the case:

The Central government has approached the SC seeking transfer of all petitions challenging the constitutionality of the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021, from various high courts to the top court. This is due to the following reasons,

- The Centre has filed a transfer petition saying several HCs including Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Kerala, are seized of the issue, and the issue be adjudicated by the apex court.
- Several pleas challenging the validity of the new IT rules are pending adjudication in various courts.

Read more:

- [New IT Rules for Social Media and its challenges – Explained, Pointwise](#)

Terms to know:

- [new Information Technology Rules,](#)

22. [Canada’s Wildfires are a Warning to India: Here is how we must shore up our cities against heatwaves](#)

Source: [Times of India](#)

Syllabus: GS 3 – Disaster and disaster management

Relevance: With the increasing frequency of Heatwaves in India, it needs adequate attention for mitigation.

Synopsis: The frequency of Heatwaves is increasing in India. The existing measures are not enough for mitigating it.

For decades, scientists have warned that the climate crisis will increase the frequency and intensity of [heat waves](#). However, Canada is not one of the countries predicted to be severely impacted. But the recent Wildfires, caused by the extreme heat, have reduced Canada’s tiny town of Lytton to ash.

Global Heat Wave projections:

- Lethal heatwaves are projected to bring death and destruction across the Middle East, South Asia, and portions of Africa and China.
- Deadly heatwaves will become commonplace across South Asia even if global warming is contained to 1.5 °C; The consequences would be **far worse if 1.5 °C is breached**.
- **Heat waves in India:**
 - Researchers from IIT-Gandhinagar published a study in Environmental Research Letters in 2017 that convincingly proved a considerable [rise in the frequency and severity of heatwaves from 1951 to 2015](#). It also revealed that the **five most severe heatwaves occurred after 1990**.

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- IIT-Gandhinagar's projections suggest that the **frequency of severe heatwaves will increase 30-fold by 2100** if the global temperature increases by 2°C.
- Another study reveals that the **mortality rate due to heatwaves has increased by 62.2% in the last 50 years.**

How Heatwaves are declared in India?

Only in 2015 did the Indian government declare the **heatwave a natural disaster under the National Disaster Management Act of 2005.**

IMD declares a heatwave based on temperature. A heatwave is proclaimed when the highest temperature at a station surpasses 45°C; if it exceeds 47°C, it is referred to as a severe heatwave. Heatwaves in coastal and hilly locations are declared using similar criteria.

How human body react to heatwaves?

The human body **reacts to a combination of heat and humidity** known as the '**wet-bulb temperature**'. Wet-bulb temperature can be high even when the temperature is relatively low. Only a few humans can tolerate a wet-bulb temperature exceeding 35°C because their bodies can no longer cool themselves.

- For example, if the temperature is 35°C and the relative humidity is 80%, the wet-bulb temperature will be 32°C, which is considered dangerous for manual labour. Similarly, if the temperature is 40°C and the relative humidity is 75%, the wet-bulb temperature is about 36°C.
- Many **regions of India now experience wet-bulb temperatures exceeding 32°C** during certain parts of the year. However, we are not declaring such days to be heatwaves, endangering the lives of people engaged in manual labour.

Development of Heat Action Plans in India:

Many cities and states have acknowledged the threat and **developed Heat Action Plans.** For example, in 2013, **Ahmedabad became the first city to implement a HAP** to raise public awareness, identify high-risk groups, issue heatwave alerts, and improve inter-agency collaboration. So far, 30-odd cities have adopted similar HAPs.

State-wide HAPs have also been introduced in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Odisha.

Suggestions to mitigate Heatwaves in India:

- **Prepare a national heat code:** A heat code will outline the criteria for declaring heatwaves and will develop SOPs to be used during heatwaves. Further, It will also give the district administration the authority to declare an emergency, halt outdoor activities, and allocate resources for heat relief.
- **Plan to cool our cities:** Our existing building codes and urban planning are worsening heatwaves by magnifying the [heat island effect](#). To reduce heatwaves, India needs to **modify urban planning standards and building bylaws** to enhance green areas and water bodies and **promote cool roofs and green buildings**, among other things.
- **Recognise the Emergency:** The central government has to acknowledge heatwaves as a real threat and **assists states and districts in implementing heat codes and HAPs.** Moreover, scientists and planners will also have to **update the definition of a heat emergency and the guidelines** for dealing with it

Read more:

- [What is a heat dome? – Explained](#)

23. Albino palm civet sighted in Satkosia Tiger Reserve

Source: [DowntoEarth](#)

What is the news?

The common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) has been sighted in Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve after 129 years.

Common palm civet

- It is also known as Asian palm civet or Indian palm civet.
- A partial albino common palm civet, Saliapatani, was last sighted in 1891 in the forests of Kandhamal district.
 - **Albinism** is a hypo-pigmentary disorder with a total **lack of both melanins** in hair, eyes and skin due to the heritable **absence of functional tyrosinase enzyme** in pigment cells affecting skin and hair. This resulting in a total white plumage / fur with red eyes. Albinism is **controlled via inheritance** by an autosomal recessive gene in all animal species
- The common palm civet is a **small mammal** belonging to the family **Viverridae**.
- It is thought to lead a solitary lifestyle, except for brief periods during mating.
- It is **both terrestrial and arboreal**, and shows a **nocturnal activity pattern**.
- **Habitat:** It can be found in southern and southeastern Asia.
- **Conservation status:**
 - **IUCN Red list** = Least Concern (LC)
 - **Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972** = Schedule II
 - **CITES** = Appendix III

Also Read: [Classifications under IUCN red list, CITES & India's Wildlife Protection Act 1972](#)

Satkosia Tiger Reserve

- Satkosia was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1976. It is spread along the magnificent gorge over the mighty **river Mahanadi** in Odisha.
- The name Satkosia originates from two words; sat meaning seven and kos meaning two miles, indicating the length of the gorge as 14 miles or 22 km.
- The area was declared as Satkosia Tiger Reserve in 2007, comprising two adjoining wildlife sanctuaries; the **Satkosia Gorge sanctuary and Baisipalli sanctuary**. The Reserve is spread over 4 districts like; Angul, Cuttack, Nayagarh and Boudh.
- Core area of the reserve is also a part of the **Mahanadi elephant reserve**. Satkosia is the meeting point of two bio-geographic regions of India; **the Deccan Peninsula and the Eastern Ghats**, contributing immense biodiversity.
- **Species found:** The area of Satkosia Tiger Reserve supports moist deciduous forest, dry deciduous forest and moist peninsular **Sal forest**.
 - This area is the home for Tiger, Leopard, Elephant, Gaur, Sambar, Spotted deer, Mouse deer, Nilgai, Chousingha, Sloth bear, Wild dog etc.
 - Varieties of resident and migratory birds, reptilian species(Gharial, Magar, Crocodile, Fresh Water turtle, Poisons & Non poisons snakes etc.)
- The Forest Department of the Government of Orissa with technical support from the UNDP and FAO decided to start a breeding programme of crocodiles during March 1974. As a part of this joint conservation initiative, the **Gharial Research and Conservation Unit (GRACU)** was started during March 1975.

24. Centre must step up cash flows to the states

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Synopsis: Borrowing by states via state development loans has been low in the first quarter of the present financial year. Reasons are discussed.

State Development Loans (SDLs)

A predominant source for state governments to raise money to finance their **fiscal deficit** is via SDLs or bonds. RBI facilitates the auctioning of SDLs.

- SDLs are dated securities issued by various state governments (*Security is just a piece of paper in which the borrower promises to repay the amount with or without interest. Bonds, g-secs, shares, etc. are all types of securities*)

Lower issuance of SDLs

In the first quarter (Apr – May – June) of the current financial year, the gross issuance of bonds stood at Rs 1.4 trillion.

- **This amount is 14% lower than the bonds issued last year** (Rs 1.7 trillion) when state governments' cash flows had undergone a sharp disruption during the nationwide lockdown.
- This is also around 20% lower than what states had initially indicated they would borrow (Rs 1.8 trillion)

Lower bond issuance means state governments have sought lesser money via the SDL route, despite the economic slowdown due to COVID. But, why? Read on to find out.

Why state borrowings have been lower?

Lower state borrowings were a consequence of three major factors which boosted state governments' cash inflows.

- **Additional tax devolution by the Centre:** First, an additional tax devolution of Rs 450 billion from the Centre in late March. This amount was in excess of the Rs 5.5 trillion tax devolution that had been included in the revised estimates for 2020-21, presented during the budget in February.
- **Record-high GST collections:** Second, record-high GST collections in April. The amount that the states received through state GST and their upfront share of integrated GST doubled to Rs 1.3 trillion in the first quarter of this year, up from Rs 0.6 trillion in the same period last year.
- **Grants from the Centre:** Third, receipt of substantial grants from the Centre adding up to Rs 436 billion in April-May related to the recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

Thus, gross bond issuances in **April-May 2021** were Rs 476 billion **lower** than indicated. However, the situation reversed in June 2021, with the **issuance being 20% higher** than the indicated amount. This increase may reflect some **emerging stress in the states' revenue collections** in June, as widening state-level restrictions in May curtailed economic activity.

25. Behest lending can give rise to a NPA problem

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy

Relevance: A lesson from the 2008 global financial crisis that can help India tackle post-pandemic situation better

Synopsis: Aggressive lending to MSME sector can result in a NPA problem in the future.

Background

Response to 2008 financial crisis

Central banks and governments across the developed world adopted extraordinary policy measures to avoid panic and to boost growth.

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- **Central bank policy rates were slashed to historic lows.** Markets were flooded with liquidity (money supply). The US Fed Funds rate was cut from 5% to 0%. Japan and Switzerland took policy rates below 0%.
- In addition, governments stepped up their spending, resulting in high fiscal deficits all around the world.

Policy response of India

India's policy response was similar to the world governments.

- The Reserve Bank of India slashed policy interest rates from 7% to an effective low of 3.25%.
- Moreover, the central government expanded the fiscal deficit from 2.5% of GDP in FY08 to 6% in FY09, and 6.5% in FY10.

All these steps resulted in recovery too, but things went sour after 2011. Fiscal spending alongside low-interest rates led to **inflation** and increased **imports**. After dipping sharply in 2008, India's **WPI and CPI** entered into double-digits beyond 2010. Twin deficits (Current Account Deficit & Fiscal Deficit) and inflation caused India's growth rate to return to the pre-crisis level in FY12 through FY14 (FY = Financial Year).

Present situation – impending problems

Two problems that can have long-term consequences need to be looked at carefully. One is linked directly to the actions of the central bank (RBI followed these steps post-2008 crisis too) and the other is linked to the action of the government and PSBs.

Inflation: To initiate a speedy recovery of the Indian economy post-COVID, RBI has slashed interest rates this time too. So, are we going to see a repeat of the post-2008 financial crisis scenario? Signs are visible.

- At 6.3%, inflation in May 2021 has already crossed the upper end of RBI's tolerance band of 6%.
- **Behest-lending:** This problem has not received appropriate attention so far. This is the phenomenon of **behest-lending by public sector banks (PSBs) at the order of the government**, and its side effect, **a rise in non-performing assets (NPAs)**.
- The post-2008 period saw banks **increase lending to the infrastructure sector**, we now also see PSBs being exhorted to **lend to the MSME sector** (micro, small and medium enterprises) by the finance minister.
- Aggressive lending to the infrastructure sector post-2008 crisis ultimately led to the problem of NPAs, as banks lent without any sound sense of judgment. Hence, this time, authorities should exercise some restraint and leave lending decisions to the commercial judgment of banks.

Impact of lending to MSMEs

Once again, the government is pushing banks to lend, this time to MSMEs rather than infrastructure projects. Banks have been urged to restructure loans under various schemes. Already, the impact of aggressive lending is visible.

- **Dramatic rise in net credit inflow to MSMEs:** Boosted by schemes like the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS), net credit flow to stressed MSMEs during March 2020-February 2021, has risen dramatically.
- **Findings of RBI's financial stability report:** RBI's Financial Stability Report of July 2021 released last week warns: *“Despite re-structuring (to the tune of ₹56,866 crore), stress in the MSME portfolio of PSBs remains high. Banks face prospects of a possible rise in non-performing loans, particularly in their small and medium enterprises (SME) and retail portfolios, especially as regulatory support starts getting reduced.”* Also, banks' exposures to better-rated large borrowers are declining.

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All this could lead to increased NPA problems in the future.

Shortcomings of credit schemes

On paper, schemes like ECLGS might seem just like what should be done in a pandemic.

But the danger is two-fold.

- One, with pressure from the government, PSBs could end up **lending to unviable borrowers/ventures** in the MSME sector.
- Second, on paper, the ECLGS guarantee is 100%, but there is nothing automatic about it. The National Credit Guarantee and Trustee Company (NCGTC) is committed to giving only 75% of an 'eligible' claim preferred by the bank within 30 days. The balance 25% is paid at the conclusion of recovery proceedings or when the decree gets time-barred, whichever is earlier. *(Read about [ECLGS scheme](#) to better understand this point)*

As with the earlier Credit Guarantee Corporation (the NCGTC's predecessor, prior to 2014), claims could be turned down on various grounds. In which case, it will be back to the vicious cycle of high NPAs, leading to high provisioning, capital impairment, and finally capital infusion in PSBs at taxpayer expense.

Also Read: [Govt extends ECLGS Scheme](#)

26. Oil on the boil

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Syllabus: GS3 – Infrastructure: Energy

Relevance: Understanding how global crude oil prices impact India

Synopsis: India should gradually move away from an over-reliance on imports for its crude oil and gas requirements. Possible solutions.

Impact of energy demand

Energy prices are likely to stay elevated due to demand from a rapidly recovering global economy, even if the energy exporters agree to an increase in production. This means, **pressure on India's external account** (foreign exchange reserves) and **higher inflation** (due to increased prices of petrol and diesel).

Countering increased demand

This increased demand for energy can not be countered by an associated increase in the supply of crude oil till August. The reason behind this problem is that the Saudis and the UAE have not been able to agree on the methodology for national quota allocation.

Impact on India

India is enduring **record retail prices of petrol and diesel**. Apart from **hikes in retail prices** by the oil marketing companies, there are **high taxes and duties** on petroleum products.

- The states and the Centre combined realized over Rs 6.7 trillion in tax revenues from the petroleum sector in 2020-21. This was higher than the Rs 5.5 trillion realized in 2019-20.
- Suggestions/measures
- High crude and gas prices invariably put pressure on the trade account, since India imports over 85% of its crude, and 50% of its gas requirements. Hence, the government should take steps towards the gradual reduction of this over-reliance. Here are possible measures:
- **Imposition of duties:** High duties, even in times of low global crude oil prices, act as a carbon tax. This creates an incentive to shift away to less environmentally damaging energy sources.

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- Capacity building in renewable sources.
- Policymakers should look at ways to **ram up the domestic production of oil and gas**
- Encouraging companies such as ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) to **search for energy sources abroad**. Presently, the domestic production of oil and gas has stagnated for five years. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) have not made any new major discoveries, and existing fields are ageing
- **Reducing red tape and simplifying tax structure:** Successive auctions under the [New Exploration Licensing Policy \(NELP\) and its successor, the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy \(HELP\)](#), have met with a lack of enthusiasm.
 - Overseas energy firms claim there is still a daunting amount of red tape to be negotiated before foreign direct investment can enter.
 - In addition to a review and possible simplification of tax and foreign direct investment norms, there is also the **need to review the track record of state-run firms** like ONGC, OVL, and OIL.
- The **upstream energy public sector units must be encouraged** and given the necessary resources to improve their track record in exploration and production.
 - **Upstream** is a term for the stages of the operation in the oil and gas industry that involve exploration and production. Upstream firms deal primarily with the **exploration and initial production stages** of the oil and gas industry.

27. India must show global leadership on climate crisis by adopting a holistic approach to energy

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Relevance: Renewable energy and its issues are direct topics on Energy.

Synopsis:

Meeting the Energy demands of people and government policy on them have to address some critical issues to achieve energy security.

Global countries on Climate Change:

Political leaders of Western nations express alarm and make promises about the climate crisis, but do precious little to tackle it.

- G7 countries are also announcing [“net zero carbon” targets](#) that hide the continued reliance on destructive technologies to pursue ever-increasing energy generation.
- The rapid increase in renewable energy (RE) capacity and partnerships like the International Solar Alliance have won global appreciation.
- US President launched [India-US Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership at the Leaders’ Summit on Climate](#).

India-US Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership:

According to the partnership statement: “The United States has set an economy-wide target of reducing its net greenhouse gas emissions by 50-52 percent below 2005 levels in 2030. India has set a target of installing 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030.”

The Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership will aim to

- Mobilise finance and speed clean energy deployment;
- Demonstrate and scale innovative clean technologies needed to decarbonise sectors including industry, transportation, power, and buildings;
- Build capacity to measure, manage, and adapt to the risks of climate-related impacts.

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Challenges with Energy projects in India

1. While substantially increasing Renewable Energy(RE), India is also **expanding fossil fuel extraction and use**. In the middle of the pandemic, the government has auctioned 60 new coal mining blocks, and several new thermal power stations are being considered. This includes mining in some of the most biodiverse forests in Central India.
 - In effect, total carbon emissions, which is what impacts climate, will keep going up even as RE's share rises.
 - While public transportation has been given more investment in the 2021 budget, there is **no discouragement of private cars, and fossil fuel use** continues to rise.
 2. India includes **mega-hydropower in RE, despite the ecological and social havoc** it causes. For instance, Despite the recent flood tragedy in Uttarakhand, the government is pushing for mega-hydro projects.
 3. The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** has announced mega-park type RE production in 10,000 sq km in seven states. These projects have **serious ecological and social impacts** but do **not even need an environmental impact assessment**. This is because of the **faulty assumption that RE is necessarily "clean" and eco-friendly**.
 - About **60,000 hectares of Kachchh's ecologically fragile** grassland-desert ecosystem have been allotted to energy mega-parks.
 - The government's target of 100 GW by 2022 also included **40 GW of rooftop solar**, but **poor policy back-up** has stymied it.
 - Such an approach also undermines democracy. People who protest the forcible acquisition of their lands for mega-projects are labelled anti-development.
 4. **Electricity demand was met in all possible ways** (including dangerous nuclear power). But this is simply unsustainable.
 - For instance, a shift from petrol-diesel to electric cars will significantly expand devastating mining (for electricity production) across the world. This also ignores biodiversity loss and pollution.
 - Unless luxury and wasteful consumption is eliminated, unsustainability and people's displacement are inevitable.
- How India can adapt to energy demands?
 - **Integrated power micro-grids** can provide adequate power for entire villages and urban neighbourhoods, and be locally managed. Viable alternatives have been demonstrated across the world.
 - The **Delhi government supports 150 government schools to generate rooftop solar energy**, helping them save Rs 8.8 crore on electricity and earning Rs 8.5 crore from selling power back to the grid.
 - A study in the US shows that **rooftop solar can create 30 times more jobs** than mega-solar parks.
 - Similarly, alternatives to energy-guzzling sectors like **urban construction and privatised transportation** also exist.
 - **National Energy Policy should include few essential tasks**. Such as,
 - Changing Consumer behaviour to curb wasteful and luxury power usage.
 - Redistributing power to those who do not have enough power.
 - People have the right to demand energy. But more and more demand will create unsustainable and inequitable ways to produce and distribute energy. So, the demand has to be just. Without which the planet will not sustain us.

Read More:

- [Net Zero Emissions Target for India – Explained, Pointwise](#)
- [Phasing Out Coal in India – Explained, Pointwise](#)
- [Grid-connected Rooftop Solar Scheme](#)

28. The sentiment boost that India's economy is in need of

Source-[Live Mint](#)

Syllabus- GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development

Relevance: The article explains the areas, the government should focus, for achieving desirable economic growth.

Synopsis – A more rapid vaccination drive, greater government spending, and a reduction in fuel cess might help in the economic recovery and uplifting the public sentiment.

Factors that could boost sentiment and play a crucial role in strengthening the economic recovery-

- **First, Faster vaccination is critical for economic recovery** – If India is able to vaccinate two-thirds of its population and attain herd immunity, the economic outlook will be brighter.
 - **Possible Solution:** This can be achieved by increasing the vaccination rate to 6 million per day in the second quarter of 2021-22 and increased to 8 million in the third. Then all adult populations should receive both vaccine doses by early February 2022.
- **Second, Government spending** – The government spent Rs.2.7 trillion in April 2021, which was 26 percent less than the Rs.3.07 trillion it spent in the year-ago month. The government's revenue spending fell by 35.6 percent y-o-y to roughly Rs.1.8 trillion in April 2021.
 - Furthermore, despite record tax collections, the government reduced the state's share in Central taxes. Lower devolution of taxes by the Centre [in April 2021] has affected the ability of the state governments to spend.
 - **Possible solution:** If the monthly devolution is increased by the Centre to the states, it may encourage states to accelerate capital spending.
- **Third, Reduction in fuel cess can boost sentiment** – Fuel cess reductions would provide a monetary policy with more room to support a recovery in growth.
 - Lowering fuel prices would also help to mitigate some financial burdens on consumers, allowing for a more rapid recovery in consumer sentiment and spending.
 - **Possible Solution:** According to ICRA, The GOI will get Rs.40000 Crore revenue through higher collection of cess. If the government decides to forego this additional cess collection, it can reduce the cesses by Rs 4.5 per litre, and help contain the inflation situation.

Terms to know: [Monetary Policy Committee](#)

29. Civil society must accept its failure to hold government accountable

Source: [Indian Express](#)

GS-Paper -2: Development Processes and the Development Industry — the Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Relevance: Civil societies work as an important pillar for strengthening democracy and governance.

Synopsis: Not strengthening civil society organisations and the deepening of checks and balances work will result in governance failure. This address must be resolved immediately.

Introduction

India's civil society consists of

1. **Grassroots organisations** that connect to the last mile and provide essential services
2. **Think tanks and academic institutions** that produce new policy ideas and generate evidence.
3. **Advocacy organisations** that build support for causes
4. **Large impact funds and philanthropists** who decide how these organisations get funded.

What are the issues with the functioning of Civil society organisations in India?

- First, successive governments in India have significantly curtailed the kind of activities that civil society actors can engage in. For instance,
 - Philanthropists and donor organisations often find themselves unable to support initiatives that strengthen India's democracy and its accountability mechanisms, for fear of retribution.
- Second, many civil society actors focus on engaging with narrow policy problems by ignoring the politics around policy and focussing disproportionately on technocratic solutions. For instance,
 - A report by **McKinsey and Company** estimated that close to 90 percent of total donor interest in India was targeted towards primary education, primary healthcare, rural infrastructure, and disaster relief.
 - Whereas, areas such as human rights and governance are left with minimal funding.

What needs to be done?

- Need to re-examine parliamentary rules that are heavily tilted in favour of the ruling government.
- Need to strengthen the judiciary, bolster federalism and the independent media.
- Further, need to create transparency in decision-making within the executive.
- Philanthropists need to fund initiatives that empower citizens, build fair processes, call for responsive policy, strengthen information and communication networks, and bolster social cohesion.
- Civil society organisations too, need to broaden their agenda. It should include issues that strengthen India's institutions by demanding more transparency and accountability in all areas and levels of policymaking.

30. Will drones change the way we deliver medicines?

Source: [Livemint](#)

Syllabus: GS3 – S&T

Relevance: Using drones to solve logistical challenges related to medicine delivery.

Synopsis: Vaccinating huge population of India is indeed a big challenge. Leveraging drone tech for medicine delivery will certainly help. Progress of the research and challenges involved.

Background

Recently, images of healthcare workers carrying covid-19 vaccines to remote villages in hilly Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir went viral on social media. In some cases, they had to trek for hours through arduous terrain.

It's possible to hope that such treks may soon no longer be required, if experiments to deliver vaccines, and other life-saving medical payloads, with drones are successful.

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Present situation

Presently in India, multiple private startups are now working with the government to test the feasibility of using drones to deliver medical payloads over longer distances.

At present, it is said, they may not prove to be cost-effective—though this is still being worked on—but they certainly would be time-efficient.

Usage in medicinal logistics

Drone technology in India is being leveraged in two ways for medicinal logistics:

1. One is for **direct delivery** wherein the medicines or blood samples are delivered directly to an individual or a hospital. In this case, the entire distance is covered by the drone.
2. Other method is using drone only for the **last-mile delivery**. In this case, drones are used as a bridge between medical warehouses and government primary health centres, or PHCs. This case entails usage of a combination of a four-wheeler vehicle and a drone. The vehicle carries the drones and payloads (10-15kg), covering large parts of the distance to a location. The drone is used for last-mile delivery.

BEAM Committee

Two years ago, Union govt. set up the BEAM (BVLOS Experiment Assessment and Monitoring) committee. The government had constituted the BEAM committee' to invite Expression of Interest (EOI) to undertake BVLOS experimental flights of drones.

- EOI from more than 30 entities and selected 20 consortiums for the experiments.
- Recently, the Union ministry of civil aviation granted **conditional exemption** to these consortiums from the [Unmanned Aircraft System \(UAS\) Rules, 2021](#) to conduct “Beyond Visual Line of Sight”, or BVLOS, experimental flights to test out the use of drones for delivery of food and medical packages.

Approvals required

The main requirements to enable the use of [drones](#) for delivery or logistics is permission to fly beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS operations) and permission to carry and drop payloads.

- The rules do not place an outright prohibition on the use of drones for delivery but these types of operations are permitted only with very **specific approvals from the DGCA** (director general of civil aviation)
- Another route is through **conditional exemptions**, which can be granted by the ministry of civil aviation.

Challenges

- **High-wind speeds:** A key challenge is operating the drones in high wind speeds.
- **Poor internet connectivity:** The other issue is operating in a bad internet connectivity region. Currently, 4G networks are used to send commands to the drones.
- **Temperature control:** Apart from weather and network constraints, the trickiest logistical challenge in medicine delivery is temperature control. A medicine delivery drone will need temperature-control mechanisms to maintain the shelf life of supplies. Take, for instance, the covid-19 vaccines: Vials of both Covishield and Covaxin need to be kept at a storage temperature range of 2-8 degrees Celsius.
- The government and drone operators will also have to reach **an agreement on emergency airspace usage** for vaccine transportation.

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Global examples

- Internationally, **Zipline**, a US-based drone delivery startup founded in 2014, has changed the way blood and medical supplies are delivered to remote communities in Rwanda. In early 2021, Zipline announced that it was partnering with the government of Ghana to deliver covid-19 vaccines.

Way forward

India must look beyond the current regulations. Once there is enough regulatory support for long-range drones that can fly up to a range of 100km, for example, and bigger payloads, trucks and four-wheelers will become redundant. We need is to create a favorable ecosystem where things can actually go forward.

Conclusion

Vaccinating over a billion people is a huge challenge for the government, which is primarily relying on the extensive railway network, besides road and air transport to distribute vaccines even to the remotest parts of the country and hilly regions. Drones can come in handy.

Also Read: [Facing up the drone challenge – Explained](#)

Terms to know:

- [BVLOS](#),
- [BEAM \(BVLOS Experiment Assessment and Monitoring\)](#)