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WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

MARCH 2022

2nd WEEK

GUIDANCE IAS



POLITY

GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS

Context: The customary governor's address on the opening day of the budget session of a state assembly was mired in controversy recently in West Bengal and Telangana.

What happened in West Bengal? The governor of West Bengal, Jagdeep Dhankhar, was unable to deliver his address at the Vidhan Sabha on the first day of the budget session, amid sloganeering, chaos and protests.

What happened in Telangana? In Telangana, the budget session of the state assembly commenced without the customary governor's address, and the incumbent, Tamilisai Soundararajan, expressed discontent over the state government's decision to not have the governor's address at the beginning of the session.

Governor's Address: Article 176(1) of the Constitution of India enjoins that the Governor shall Address both the Houses assembled together at the commencement of the first Session after each general election to the Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year and inform the Legislature of the causes of its Summons.

What does it contain? The Address of the Governor contains a *review of the activities and achievements of the Government during the previous year* and *their policy with regard to important internal problems* as well as a brief account of the *programme of Government Business for the session*.

Discussions on Governor's address:

- On the first day on which the discussion on the Address of the Governor begins, a copy of the Address of the Governor is laid on the table of the House. The Speaker, in consultation with the Business Advisory Committee, allots time for discussion of the matters referred to in the Governor's Address.
- The occasion provides for General Discussion in respect of any aspect of administration and also the matters referred to in the address.
- Members may move Amendments to the Motion of Thanks in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker.

DONATE A PENSION INITIATIVE:

Context: Launched recently by the Labour Ministry

Key features of the programme:

- Launched under Pradhan Mantri – Shram Yogi Manthan Yojana for people to contribute to the pension fund of their support staff.
- Under this, citizens can donate the premium contribution of their immediate support staff such as domestic workers, drivers, helpers etc.

PM-SYM:

- It is a 50:50 voluntary and contributory pension scheme in which the beneficiary makes a stipulated age-specific contribution and the Central Government matches it.
- **Implementation:** The Ministry of Labour and Employment will oversee PM-SYM, which will be implemented by Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSC e--Governance Services India Limited (CSC SPV).
- **Eligibility:** Workers working in the unorganised sector in the age group of **18-40 years** can register themselves and deposit a minimum of Rs 660 to 2400 every year depending on their age.
- They **should not be covered** under **New Pension Scheme (NPS)**, Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.

Benefits: After attaining the age of **60 years** they will receive the minimum assured pension of Rs 3,000 per month.



Beneficiaries: The unorganised workers mostly engaged as home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, own account workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio-visual workers and similar other occupations whose monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less.

WOMEN IN JUDICIARY:

Context: Chief Justice of India **N.V. Ramana** has dubbed it “unfortunate” that only 17 of 37 women recommended by the Supreme Court collegium were appointed as judges in high courts while the rest still remain pending with the government.

Suggestions made by the CJI:

- The appointment of women judges should not be reduced to a mere “symbolic” gesture.
- Women judges add rich experience and bring to the table a nuanced understanding of the differing impacts that certain laws may have on both men and women.

Status of women in judiciary:

- In the 71 years of history of the SC, there have been only 11 women judges (Source: Wikipedia) — the first was Justice **Fathima Beevi**, who was elevated to the bench after a long gap of 39 years from the date of establishment of the SC.
- The 25 high courts in the states have 81 women among 677 judges – five of them do not have a single female judge.

Benefits of diversity and gender representation in Supreme court:

- Increased Transparency, inclusiveness, and representation.
- By their mere presence, women judges enhance the legitimacy of courts, sending a powerful signal that they are open and accessible to those who seek recourse to justice.
- By elucidating how laws and rulings can be based on gender stereotypes, or how they might have a different impact on women and men, a gender perspective enhances the fairness of the adjudication.
- Women judges bring those lived experiences to their judicial actions, experiences that tend toward a more comprehensive and empathetic perspective.
- Improving the representation of women could go a long way towards a more balanced and empathetic approach in cases involving sexual violence.

Challenges of women in judiciary:

- The eligibility criteria to take the entrance exams:
 - Lawyers need to have *seven years of continuous legal practice* and be in the age bracket of 35-45.
 - This is a disadvantage for women as many are married by this age.
- Further, the long and inflexible work hours in law, combined with familial responsibilities, force many women to drop out of practice and they fail to meet the requirement of continuous practice.



ONE NATION – ONE ELECTION

Context: Chief Election Commissioner **Sushil Chandra** has said that the Election Commission is ready to hold simultaneous elections or One nation one election.

Earlier this year, on National Voters' Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address had raised the topics of 'One Nation, One Election' and 'One Nation, One Voters' list', and had said that the continuous cycle of election results is affecting development works.

What is 'One Nation, One Election'?

- It refers to holding elections to Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban local bodies simultaneously, once in five years.

What are the challenges posed by frequent elections?

- Massive expenditure.
- Policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time.
- Impact on delivery of essential services.
- Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.
- Puts pressure on political parties, especially smaller ones, as elections are becoming increasingly expensive.

Benefits of Simultaneous Elections:

- **Governance and consistency:** The ruling parties will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever.
- Reduced Expenditure of Money and Administration.
- Continuity in policies and programmes.
- **Efficiency of Governance:** Populist measures by governments will reduce.
- The impact of black money on the voters will be reduced as all elections are held at a time.

Impact on Regional parties:

- There is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in power in the state and at the Centre in case the Lok Sabha polls, and the state elections are held together.
- Therefore, the State parties will be at loss.

Changes Required in the Constitution and Legislations for Simultaneous Elections:

- **Article 83** which deals with the duration of Houses of Parliament need an amendment.
- **Article 85** (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president).
- **Article 172** (relating to the duration of state legislatures).
- **The Representation of People Act, 1951 Act** would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies. This should include the following crucial elements:
 - Restructuring the powers and functions of the ECI to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
 - A definition of simultaneous election can be added to **Section 2 of the RPA, 1951 act**.



MODEL TENANCY ACT:

Context: The long-awaited Chandigarh Tenancy Act will now be in queue for enactment by the Parliament.

The UT administration has decided to send the proposed Act, based on Centre's Model Tenancy Act, 2021, to the Union government for approval and enactment.

Background:

- The Union Cabinet, in June 2021, approved the Model Tenancy act.
- States and Union territories can now adopt the Model Tenancy Act by enacting fresh legislation or they can amend their existing rental laws suitably.

Highlights of the Model Law:

- Applicable prospectively and will not affect the existing tenancies.
- Written agreement is a must for all new tenancies. The agreement will have to be submitted to the concerned district 'Rent Authority'.
- The law also speaks about roles and responsibilities of landlord and tenants.
- No landlord or property manager can withhold any essential supply to the premises occupied by the tenant.
- If tenancy has not been renewed, the tenancy shall be deemed to be renewed on a month-to-month basis on the same terms and conditions as were in the expired tenancy agreement, for a maximum period of six months.
- **Compensation in case of non-vacancy:** On the expiry of extended period of six months of agreed tenancy period or the termination of tenancy by order or notice, the tenant shall be a tenant in default and liable to pay compensation of double of the monthly rent for two months and four times of the monthly rent thereafter.
- A landowner or property manager may enter a premise in accordance with written notice or notice through electronic medium served to the tenant at least twenty-four hours before the time of entry.

Significance:

It is an important piece of legislation that promises to ease the burden on civil courts, unlock rental properties stuck in legal disputes, and prevent future tangles by balancing the interests of tenants and landlords.

Need for a law in this regard:

- Young, educated job seekers migrating to large metropolises often complain of onerous tenancy conditions and obscene sums of money as security deposits that they are asked to fork out to lease accommodation. In some cities, tenants are asked to pay security deposits amounting to 11 months of rent.
- Also, some house owners routinely breach tenants' right to privacy by visiting the premises unannounced for sundry repair works.
- Whimsical rent raises are another problem for tenants, many of whom complain of being squeezed as "captive customers".
- Besides, tenants are often accused of "squatting" on the rented premises, or trying to grab the property.



ECONOMY

RBI's 5 BILLION \$ DOLLAR – RUPEE SWAP AGREEMENT

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has conducted a \$ 5 billion dollar-rupee swap auction as part of its *liquidity management initiative*, leading to infusion of dollars and sucking out of the rupee from the financial system.

Dollar–Rupee Swap auction:

- It's a forex tool whereby the central bank uses its currency to buy another currency or vice versa.
- In a Dollar–Rupee buy/sell swap, the central bank buys dollars (US dollars or USD) from banks in exchange for Indian Rupees (INR) and immediately gets into an opposite deal with banks promising to sell dollars at a later date.

Why do Central Banks engage in it?

Forex swaps help in liquidity management. It also, in a limited way, helps in keeping the currency rates in check. A dollar–rupee buy/sell swap injects INR into the banking system while sucking out the dollars, and the reverse happens in a sell/buy swap.

Why is RBI resorting to it now?

Surplus liquidity in the system is pegged at Rs 7.5 lakh crore, which needs to be curbed to keep a tab on inflation. Usually, the central bank will resort to traditional tools such as increasing the repo rate or increasing the cash reserve ratio (CRR), but this can have a negative implication on the economy. Therefore, the RBI used a different toolkit – variable rate reverse repo auction (VRRR) last year.

Impacts:

- Forex swaps are intended for liquidity management. Therefore, their impact on currency is only incidental.
- The RBI's selling of USD in two tranches will keep a **check on Rupee's volatility** and help **curb its depreciation** to some extent.
- For the bond market, the exercise may have a pronounced impact.
- **Bonds yields** are already on an incline. Liquidity intervention through swaps indicates the RBI's plan to use a different toolkit rather than the traditional ones, and this leaves room for the Central Bank to buy bonds when needed. Consequently, the strategy will contain bond yields.

EQUALISATION LEVY

Context: Justifying the **2 per cent** Equalisation levy (EL) imposed by India **on the supply of services** by multinational enterprises, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that it is a sovereign right to tax revenues earned from operations in the country.

About the Equalisation Levy:

Equalisation Levy was introduced in India in 2016, with the intention of taxing the digital transactions i.e. the income accruing to foreign e-commerce companies from India. It is aimed at taxing business to business transactions.

Equalisation Levy is a **direct tax**, which is withheld at the time of payment by the service recipient. The **equalization levy** is aimed at **taxing foreign companies** which have a significant **local client base in India** but are billing them through their **offshore units**, effectively **escaping the country's tax system**.

India was the one of the first countries to introduce a **6 per cent equalisation levy** in 2016, but the levy was restricted to **online advertisement services**. However, India introduced the **digital tax in April 2020** for foreign companies selling goods and services online to customers in India and showing annual revenues more than INR 20 million.



Why was it imposed?

The equalisation levy was imposed “to give level playing field between Indian businesses who pay tax in India and foreign e-commerce companies who do business in India but do not pay any income tax here.

Applicability:

- India has expanded the scope of the equalisation levy over the last few years, to tax **non-resident digital entities**.
- While the levy applied only to digital advertising services till 2019-20 at the rate of 6 percent, the government in April 2020 widened the scope to impose a 2 per cent tax on **non-resident e-commerce players** with a turnover of Rs 2 crore.
- The scope was further widened in the Finance Act 2021-22 to cover e-commerce supply or service when any activity takes place online.
- Since May 2021, this also includes any entity that systematically and continuously does business with more than 3 lakh users in India.

When will the tax not apply?

Offshore e-commerce firms that sell through an Indian arm will not have to pay. This means if the goods and services sold on a foreign e-commerce platform are owned or provided by an Indian resident or Indian permanent establishment, they will not be subject to the two percent equalization levy.

Which other countries impose such a levy on digital sellers?

- France imposes a three percent digital services tax.
- In the ASEAN region, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia impose a digital service tax with Thailand announcing forthcoming plans to tax its foreign digital service providers.

Why the United States Trade Representative (USTR) says that this tax is discriminatory?

- First, it states that the DST discriminates against US digital businesses because it specifically excludes from its ambit domestic (Indian) digital businesses.
- USTR also says the DST is discriminatory because it does not extend to identical services provided by non-digital service providers.

Why India says Digital services tax is not discriminatory? And why is it needed?

- Business models employed by non-resident digital service providers *obviate the need for a physical presence* in India and *profits earned here could easily escape the Indian income tax net*. Hence, this kind of taxation is necessary.
- *Changing International Economic Order*: Countries such as India which provide large markets for digital corporations seek a greater right to tax incomes.

Associated Concerns:

- Eventually the tax may become a burden for Digital Consumers.
- It could invite retaliatory tariffs , as similar tariffs were imposed by the US on France.
- It would also result in double taxation.

Did you know?

- In October 2021, G20 countries approved a global deal to adopt a **15 per cent minimum corporate tax** and reallocate taxing rights for large profitable multinational enterprises (MNEs) to countries where they sell products and services.



UPI 123 PAY

Context: The Reserve Bank of India has launched a new Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments solution for feature phone users dubbed 'UPI123Pay'.

What is UPI123Pay?

- UPI '123PAY' is a three-step method to initiate and execute services for users which will work on simple phones.
- It will allow customers to use feature phones for almost all transactions except scan and pay.
 - It doesn't need an internet connection for transactions. Customers have to link their bank account with feature phones to use this facility.

The new UPI payments system offers users four options to make payments without internet connectivity:

Interactive Voice Response (IVR): Users would be required to initiate a secured call from their feature phones to a predetermined IVR number and complete UPI on-boarding formalities to be able to start making financial transactions like money transfer, mobile recharge, EMI repayment, balance check, among others.

App-based functionality: One could also install an app on feature phone through which several UPI functions, available on smartphones, will be available on their feature phone, except scan and pay feature which is currently not available.

Missed call facility: The missed call facility will allow users to access their bank account and perform routine transactions such as receiving, transferring funds, regular purchases, bill payments, etc, by giving a missed call on the number displayed at the merchant outlet. The customer will receive an incoming call to authenticate the transaction by entering UPI PIN.

Proximity sound-based payments: One could utilise the proximity sound-based payments option, which uses sound waves to enable contactless, offline, and proximity data communication on any device.

Significance:

Users will be able to make payments to their friends and family, pay their utility bills, recharge FASTags, pay mobile bills and also check their account balances, the central bank said, adding customers will also be able to link bank accounts, set or change UPI PINs.

What is UPI?

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system, allowing users to transfer money on a real-time basis, across multiple bank accounts without revealing details of one's bank account to the other party.

UPI is currently the biggest among the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) operated systems including National Automated Clearing House (NACH), Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS), Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS), RuPay etc.

The top UPI apps include PhonePe, Paytm, Google Pay, Amazon Pay and BHIM, the latter being the Government offering.

PROMOTING INLAND WATERWAYS IN THE COUNTRY

Context: Pandu in Guwahati recently received the maiden voyage of food-grains from Patna via Bangladesh, ushering new age for inland waterways in Assam as **Brahmaputra (NW2) gets connected with Ganga (National Waterway-1) via Indo-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route.**

MV Lal Bahadur Shastri carrying 200 MT of foodgrains for Food Corporation of India (FCI) completed the maiden pilot run from Patna.

Inland waterways in India:

- To promote inland water transport in the country, 111 'inland Waterways' has been declared as 'National Waterways' under the **National Waterways Act, 2016.**
- Inland water transport in the country is being promoted as an economical, environment friendly supplementary mode of transport to rail and road.



- Under **Entry 24 of the Union List of the Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution, the central government can make laws on shipping and navigation on inland waterways which are classified as national waterways by Parliament by law.

Important National Waterways of India:

National Waterway 1:

- From Allahabad to Haldia with a distance of 1620 km.
- The NW1 run through the Ganges, Bhagirathi and Hooghly river system with having fixed terminals at Haldia, Farrakka and Patna.
- Floating terminals at the riverside cities like Kolkata, Bhagalpur, Varanasi and Allahabad.
- It is the longest National Waterway in India.

National Waterway 2:

- Brahmaputra River from Sadiya to Dhubri in Assam state.
- The NW2 is the third longest Waterway with a total length of 891 km.

National Waterway 3:

- The West Coast Canal or NW3 is in Kerala state and run from Kollam to Kottapuram.
- The 205 km long West Coast Canal is India's first waterway with all-time navigation facility.
- The NW3 is consisting of West Coast Canal, Champakara Canal and Udyogmandal Canal.
- It runs through Kottappuram, Cherthala, Thrikkunnapuzha, Kollam and Alappuzha.

National Waterway 4:

- NW4 connects Kakinada to Pondicherry.
- The NW4 is the second longest waterway of India.
- Total length of 1095 km in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

National Waterway 5:

- NW5 connects Odisha to West Bengal.
- It runs through the stretch on Brahmani River, East Coast Canal, Matai River and Mahanadi River.
- The 623 km long canal system handle the traffic of cargo such as coal, fertilizer, cement and iron.

National Waterway 6:

- NW6 is the proposed waterway in Assam.
- It will connect Lakhipur to Bhanga at River Barak.
- The 121 km long waterway will boost trade between Silchar (Assam) to Mizoram.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PARAM Ganga:

The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) has deployed “PARAM Ganga”, a supercomputer at IIT Roorkee, with a supercomputing capacity of 1.66 Petaflops. The system is designed and commissioned by C-DAC under Phase 2 of the build approach of the NSM.

A petaflop is a **measure of a computer's processing speed** and can be expressed as: A quadrillion (thousand trillion) floating point operations per second (FLOPS), or a thousand teraflops.

The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM):

It is being steered jointly by the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeiTY)** and the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** and implemented by **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)** and **Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore**.

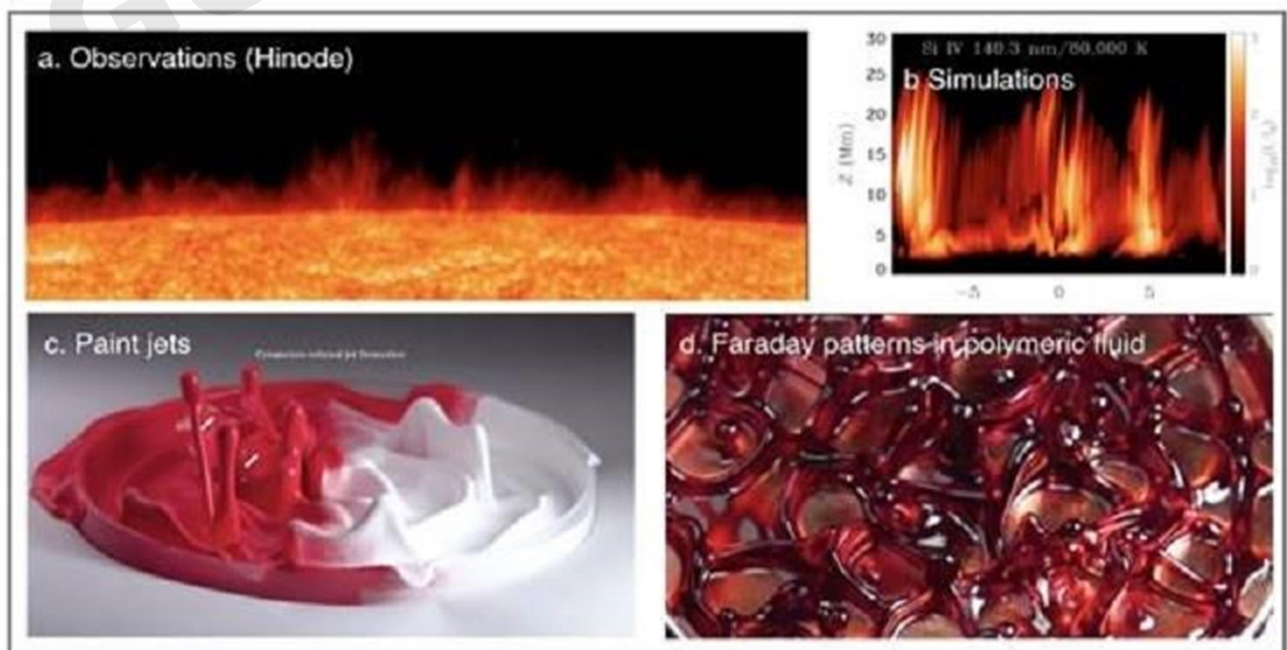
The **four major pillars** of the NSM are, namely, **Infrastructure, Applications, R&D, and HRD**.

JETS OF PLASMA OVER SUN'S CHROMOSPHERE

Context: Scientists have unravelled the science behind the jets of plasma – the **fourth state** of matter consisting of **electrically charged particles** that occur just about everywhere in the sun's **chromosphere**, which is the atmospheric layer just above the Sun's visible surface.

What are the jets of plasma?

- The jets, or spicules, appear as thin grass-like plasma structures that constantly shoot up from the surface and are then brought down by gravity.
- The amount of energy and momentum that these spicules can carry is of fundamental interest in solar and plasma astrophysics.





How are they formed? What are the recent findings?

- Astronomers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics conducted an experiment to understand the science behind this. They found that the physics underlying paint jets when excited on a speaker is analogous to the solar plasma jets.
- When a liquid is placed above a speaker and the music is turned on, the free surface of the liquid becomes **unstable beyond a particular frequency and starts vibrating**.
- The researchers realized that the physics underlying these paint jets must be analogous to the solar plasma jets.
- The scientists elaborated that the plasma right below the visible solar surface (photosphere) is perpetually in a state of convection, much like boiling water in a vessel heated at the bottom.
- This is ultimately powered by the nuclear energy released in the hot-dense core. The convection serves almost periodic but there are strong kicks to the plasma in the solar chromosphere.
- The chromosphere is 500 times lighter than the plasma in the photosphere. Therefore, these strong kicks from the bottom shoot the chromospheric plasma outward at ultrasonic speeds in the form of thin columns or spicules.

ARGON -40 IN LUNAR EXOSPHERE

Context: Recently, **Chandra's Atmospheric Composition Explorer-2 (CHACE-2)**, a payload onboard Chandrayaan-2, has made the first-of-its-kind discovery on the distribution of one of the noble gases, **Argon-40**. India launched Chandrayaan-2, its second lunar exploration mission after Chandrayaan-1, from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota in July 2019.

Major Findings

The gas found in the lunar exosphere is believed to have escaped from the lunar surface. The CHACE-2 observations reveal that the distribution in Ar-40 has significant spatial heterogeneity. There are localised enhancements (termed as Argon bulge) over several regions including the KREEP [potassium (K), Rare-Earth Elements, and Phosphorus (P)] on South Pole Aitken terrain (impact crater on the far side of the Moon).

What is the Chandrayaan-2 Mission?

Chandrayaan-2 is an integrated 3-in-1 spacecraft consisting of an Orbiter of the Moon, Vikram (after Vikram Sarabhai), the lander and Pragyan (wisdom), the rover, all equipped with scientific instruments to study the moon.

Failure of Lander: Vikram lander's descent was as planned and normal performance was observed up to an altitude of 2.1 km from Lunar surface in September, 2019. A successful soft-landing would have made India the **fourth country** after the erstwhile Soviet Union, the United States, and China to do so.

Orbiter: It is equipped with different kinds of cameras to create high-resolution three-dimensional maps of the surface. It will study the mineral composition on the moon and the lunar atmosphere, and also to assess the abundance of water.

Objective: The mission sequence involves meticulous planning of a series of Earthbound manoeuvres, trans-lunar injections, series of lunar burns, lander separation, lander descent, and touchdown and subsequent rover rolling out of the lander on the Moon surface.



DEFENSE

Rashtriya Raksha University:

Context: PM Narendra Modi recently dedicated the building of Rashtriya Raksha University[near Gandhinagar], to the nation.

Rashtriya Raksha University- an institution of National Importance is established by the Act of Indian Parliament. The University aims to become an academic-research-training ecosystem for national security and police.

Dharma Guardian:

Exercise Dharma Guardian is an annual exercise between Indian Army and Japanese Ground Self Defence Force. The latest edition was concluded at Belgaum recently. To promote military cooperation between India and Japan, the first edition of the Dharma Guardian was held at Counter Insurgency Warfare School of the Indian Army at Vairengte in November 2018.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MOTOR VEHICLE AGREEMENT of the sub-regional BBIN grouping

Context: A meeting was recently held between three countries – **Bangladesh, India and Nepal**, to discuss the next steps in operationalising the Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) of the sub-regional **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN)** grouping for the free flow of good and people between them.

- Bhutan has already announced that it is unwilling to sign this agreement.

Outcomes of the recent meet: officials finalised the wording of two separate protocols on passenger and cargo movement with an “enabling” agreement.

About MVA:

- The original BBIN MVA was signed by all four countries in June 2015, but after objections in Bhutan over sustainability and environmental concerns, the Bhutanese parliament decided not to endorse the plan.
- As per the agreement, member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions. Customs and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.
- **Asian Development Bank** has supported the project as part of its *South Asian Subregional Economic Cooperation programme*.

Why Bhutan has remained out?

Given Bhutan’s “current infrastructure” and top priority to remaining a “carbon-negative” country, it said it would not be possible to consider joining the MVA.

Significance:

Operationalising the MVA by concluding the **Passenger and the Cargo Protocol** will help realise the full potential of trade and people to people connectivity between the BBIN countries by fostering greater sub-regional cooperation.

SLINEX:

- The Ninth Edition of India – Sri Lanka Bilateral Maritime Exercise SLINEX (Sri Lanka–India Naval Exercise) is being conducted at **Visakhapatnam**.
- It aims to enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations between both navies.

Other Exercises between India and Sri Lanka

- Exercise **MITRA SHAKTI** (Military Exercise).
- **Dosti** Trilateral Exercise (Coast guard India, Maldives and Sri Lanka).

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Context: Talks on the revival of the Iran nuclear deal have become a casualty of the war in Ukraine after an indefinite pause was announced over last-minute Russian demands.

What’s the issue?

An agreement on the nuclear deal to bring the US and Iran back into compliance would have led to a swathe of US sanctions on Iran being lifted, including Iranian crude oil exports and petrochemicals, in return for limits on Tehran’s nuclear activity. In the past week, however, Moscow has insisted Washington pledge not to impose sanctions on any trade between Russia and Iran once an agreement is signed.



Concerns ahead:

Russia has been a key broker of the painstaking talks in Vienna, which have lasted for almost a year. If the impasse is prolonged there is likely to be a debate over whether Moscow can absolutely use its UN veto on the agreement known as the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA).

Russia and JCPOA:

Russia's most important role in JCPOA implementation would be as the importer of Iran's excess enriched uranium stockpile, which would be transported to Russia via ship and exchanged for natural uranium.

About the Iran Nuclear Deal:

- Also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, or the EU).
- Under the deal, Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

Significance of the deal for India:

Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar port, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity. This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.

Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (IFAD)

Context: The government of Madhya Pradesh in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) proposed two inexpensive and ingenious ideas to encourage **women to cook balanced meals**.

These are:

The '7 days 7 plots' programme:

- Here, women from the village are taught how to grow different vegetables in their own gardens, seven to be exact, one for each day of the week.
- By the end of the week, the first plot is ready to be harvested again. This way, families get to eat fresh, affordable vegetables that they can consume for longer and in greater quantity, as against buying from the market, and so reduce sickness.
- This scheme is an adjunct to the Tejaswini Rural Women Empowerment Programme implemented by the UN-affiliated IFAD in MP.

About IFAD:

- It is a specialized United Nations agency created in 1977 engaged in providing grants and loans with low interest for allied projects.
- The IFAD works with rural people allowing them to enhance their food security, improve nutrition and raise their incomes.
- It also helps people to expand their businesses.
- The organization is an outcome of the World Food Conference of 1974.
- It is headquartered in Rome and headed by a President.
- It has 177 member countries.
- IFAD brings out the Rural Development Report every year.

The objectives of the IFAD are three-fold:

- To increase the productive capacity of poor people.
- To increase benefits for them from market participation.
- To strengthen the environmental sustainability & climate resilience of their economic activities.



MOST FAVOURED NATION STATUS:

Context: The United States, the European Union, Britain, Canada and Japan are planning to move jointly to revoke Russia's "most favoured nation" (MFN) status over its invasion of Ukraine.

What is MFN Status?

- Most Favoured Nation is a treatment accorded to a trade partner to ensure non-discriminatory trade between two countries vis-à-vis other trade partners.
- Under WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners. If a special status is granted to a trade partner, it must be extended to all members of the WTO.

GENEVA CONVENTIONS DURING WAR TIME:

Context: Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine starting February 24 has set off a steady escalation in hostilities on Ukrainian soil, and in many cases civilian infrastructure and non-combatants have been impacted. There is growing concern surrounding the issue of **human rights violations**.

What next?

- As the evidence of casualties in the civilian population continues to mount, the world will increasingly look to the Geneva Conventions for standards to which the invading Russian forces can be held.
- Ultimately, if there is a compelling case for prosecuting combatants for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression, it is not inconceivable that evidence would be collected for an investigation and trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

What are they?

The Geneva Conventions is a *body of Public International Law*, also known as **the Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts**, whose purpose is to provide minimum protections, standards of humane treatment, and fundamental guarantees of respect to individuals who become victims of armed conflicts.

Importance of Geneva Conventions in today's world of uncertainty:

- The Geneva Convention reminds us to look at the individual even in spaces such as war between nations.
- The agreement set down the rules for the treatment of prisoners taken in a war situation, explicitly putting down that prisoners of war (POWs) would be prisoners of the Power which holds them, and not of the unit that had captured them; and that they must be treated with honour, and allowed to live in humane conditions.
- The protocol also established that prisoners of war need only truthfully give their names and ranks, and that they cannot be coerced to reveal other details about themselves or the operations they have been involved in.
- All these caveats are to establish the individual as the linchpin of humanity.
- The Geneva Conventions that originally only addressed the treatment of combatants was later expanded to include non-combatants and civilians as well.

Monitoring:

- The Geneva Conventions have a system of "Protecting Powers" who ensure that the provisions of the conventions are being followed by the parties in a conflict. In theory, each side must designate states that are not party to the conflict as their "Protecting Powers". In practice, the International Committee of the Red Cross usually plays this role.
- Which countries are signatories?
- The Geneva Conventions have been ratified by 196 states, including all UN member states.



- The four conventions and first two protocols of the Geneva Conventions were ratified by the Soviet Union, not Russia, hence there is a risk of the Russian government of the day disavowing any responsibility under the Conventions in toto.

RELAUNCH OF CEPA BETWEEN INDIA AND CANADA

Context: India – Canada have agreed to re-launch the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations to unlock full potential of bilateral trade.

They are also considering an **Interim Agreement or Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA)** that could bring early commercial gains to both the countries.

India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):

In September 2008, the India-Canada CEO Round Table recommended that India and Canada would benefit enormously from CEPA by elimination of tariffs on a substantial majority of the bilateral trade.

CEPA would cover trade in goods, trade in services, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade and other areas of economic cooperation.

Difference between CECA, CEPA and FTA:

CECA – Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.

CEPA – Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.

- The major “technical” difference between a CECA and CEPA is that CECA involve only “tariff reduction/elimination in a phased manner on listed/all items except the negative list and tariff rate quota (TRQ) items.
- CEPA also covers the trade in services and investment and other areas of economic partnership”.
- So CEPA is a wider term than CECA and has the widest coverage.
- Usually, CECA is signed first with a country and after that, negotiations may start for a CEPA.
- It is a kind of free trade pact which covers negotiation on the trade in services and investment, and other areas of economic partnership.
- It may even consider negotiation on areas such as trade facilitation and customs cooperation, competition, and Intellectual Property Rights.
- Partnership agreements or cooperation agreements are more comprehensive than Free Trade Agreements.
- CEPA also looks into the regulatory aspect of trade and encompasses an agreement covering the regulatory issues.



SOCIAL ISSUES – HEALTH AND EDUCATION

UNIFIED DISTRICT INFORMATION SYSTEM for EDUCATION PLUS

Context: The Ministry of Education has released a detailed report on **Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+)** 2020-21 on school education of India.

About UDISE+:

- The **UDISE+** system of online data collection from the schools was developed by Department of School Education & Literacy in the year 2018-19.
- It was aimed to overcome the issues related to erstwhile practice of manual data filling in paper format and subsequent feeding on computer at the block or district level in the UDISE data collection system since 2012-13.
- In UDISE+ system, improvements have been made particularly in the areas related to data capture, data mapping and data verification.

Highlights of the report:

Students and Teachers in schools: In 2020-21 total students enrolled in school education from primary to higher secondary stood at 25.38 crore. There is an increase of 28.32 lakh enrolments as compared to the 25.10 crore enrolment in 2019-20.

The GER: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) which measure the general level of participation has improved in 2020-21 at all levels of school education compared to 2019-20.

Level wise GER in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20 are: 92.2% from 89.7% in upper primary, 99.1 % from 97.8% in elementary, 79.8% from 77.9% in secondary and 53.8% from 51.4% in higher secondary respectively.

- 96.96 lakh teachers are engaged in school education during 2020-21.
- This is higher by about 8800 in comparison with number of teachers in school education in 2019-20.

The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR): In 2020-21 the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) stood at 26 for primary, 19 for upper primary, 18 for secondary and 26 for higher secondary, showing an improvement since 2018-19.

- The PTR for primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary was 28, 20, 21, and 30 respectively during 2018-19.
- In 2020-21 over 12.2 crore girls are enrolled in primary to higher secondary showing an increase of 11.8 lakh girls compared to the enrolment of girls in 2019-20.

School Infrastructure: Schools with functional electricity have made impressive progress during 2020-21 with net addition of 57,799 schools provided electricity.

- Now 84% of the total schools have functional electricity facility in comparison with 73.85% in 2018-19 showing remarkable improvement of 10.15% during the period.
- Percentage of the schools with functional drinking water has increased to 95.2 % in 2020-21 from 93.7 % in 2019-20.
- Percentage of the school with functional girl's toilet facility has increased to 93.91 % in 2020-21 in comparison with 93.2 % in 2019-20 by adding the facility in additional 11,933 schools during the year.
- Number of schools having functional computers increased to 6 lakh in 2020-21 from 5.5 lakh in 2019-20 showing an increasing of 3 %. Now, 40% of the schools have functional computers.
- Number of schools having internet facility increased to 3.7 lakh in 2020-21 from 3.36 lakh in 2019-20 with an increase of 2.6%.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on enrolment:

During 2020-21, 39.7 lakh students of government aided, private school students shifted to Government school.



NUTRACEUTICALS PRODUCTS:

Context: Aimed at providing accessible, standardised and affordable generic medicines, the **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) Kendras** have added **nutraceuticals products**, including protein powder and bar, malt-based food supplements and immunity bar for its customers.

About Nutraceuticals:

- Nutraceuticals is a broad umbrella term that is used to describe **any product derived from food sources with extra health benefits in addition to the basic nutritional value found in foods.**
- They can be considered non-specific biological therapies used to promote general well-being, control symptoms and prevent malignant processes.
- The term “nutraceutical” combines two words – “nutrient” (a nourishing food component) and “pharmaceutical” (a medical drug).

WHO GLOBAL CENTRE FOR TRADITIONAL MEDICINE:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO GCTM) in Jamnagar, Gujarat by signing a Host Country agreement between the Government of India and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The WHO GCTM will be established in Jamnagar under the Ministry of AYUSH.
- This would be the first and only global outposted Centre (office) for traditional medicine across the globe.

KANYA SIKSHA PRAVESH UTSAV SCHEME:

Context: On the eve of International Women’s Day, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched ‘**Kanya Shiksha Pravesh Utsav**’ scheme to bring back the out-of-school girls back to the education system.

Key features of the scheme:

- Launched by the **Women and Child Development Ministry** in partnership with the Education Ministry.
- This scheme will fulfil the target of **Right to Education** act that says to bring out-of-school girls back to the education system.

Issues in women education:

- **Gap in upper primary and secondary schooling:** While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling.
- **High drop-out rates:** Increased female enrolment is, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children.

Inter-state variations: There are also considerable inter-state variations in gender parity. While the greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh.

Son preference: Some studies suggest that girls are over-represented in the government schools, demonstrating continuing son preference where boys (highlighted in economic survey 2018) are educated in private and better schools which are of (perceived) better quality.

Various government efforts towards women education in India:

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme: It aims to generate awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services for the girl child. The initial aim of the campaign was to address the declining child sex ratio but it also include propagating education, survival and protection of the girl child.



Digital Gender Atlas: Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a digital gender atlas for advancing girls' education in India.

National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE): The objective of the scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce the drop outs and to promote the enrolment of girl children in secondary schools.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: In order to ensure greater participation of girls in elementary education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has targeted interventions for girls which include opening of schools, appointment of additional women teachers, separate toilets for girls, teachers' sensitisation programmes etc. In addition, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas has been opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs).

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA): It envisages enhancing the quality of education by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, improving quality of education imparted at secondary level, removal of gender, socio-economic and disability barriers.

Udaan: CBSE has launched 'Udaan' to provide free online resources to girl students of Class XI and Class XII for preparation. The special focus of the scheme is to address the low enrolment ratio of girl students in prestigious institutions.

STEM education: To increase the participation of women in STEM education, supernumerary seats have been created in the IITs and NITs.

GUIDANCE IAS