WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

MARCH 2022

3rd WEEK

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POLITY

SUPPLEMENTARY DEMAND FOR GRANTS:

Context:

- The government has sought approval from Parliament to spend an extra ₹1.07 lakh crore in the current fiscal year.

- The additional spending of Rs1.58 trillion is required for expenditure commitments towards settling loans taken from National Small Savings Funds for PM Awas Yojana and higher fertiliser subsidy outgo.

What are Supplementary Demands for Grants?

The supplementary demand for grants is needed for government expenditure over and above the amount for which Parliamentary approval was already obtained during the Budget session.

Constitutional provisions:

Supplementary, additional or excess grants and Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants are mentioned in the Constitution of India 1949.

Article 115: Supplementary, additional or excess grants.

Article 116: Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants

WEARING HIJAB IS NOT ESSENTIAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, SAYS KARNATAKA HIGH COURT:

Context:

The verdict has come on petitions filed by Muslims girls seeking the right to wear hijabs or head scarves along with uniforms inside classrooms.

What has the court ruled?

An essential religious practice: Wearing of the hijab by Muslim women does not make up an essential religious practice in Islamic faith.

A reasonable restriction: The prescription of a school uniform is a reasonable restriction constitutionally permissible which the students cannot object to.

The government has the power to restrict the wearing of hijabs in colleges where uniforms are prescribed.

Therefore, the prescription of school uniform does not violate the petitioners fundamental rights guaranteed under article 19 1 a of the constitution that is freedom of expression and article 21 that is privacy.

What constitutes an essential religious practice? Who decides on it?

Shirur Mutt case in 1954: The doctrine of "essentiality" was invented by the Supreme Court. The court held that the term "religion" will cover all rituals and practices "integral" to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.

What constitutes a reasonable restriction?

- Sovereignty and integrity of India.

- Security of the state.

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- Friendly relations with foreign states.

- Public order.

- Decency or morality.

- Contempt of court.

- Defamation.

- Incitement to an offence.

COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA:

Context:

The Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022 has been introduced that aims to improve regulatory set-up by increasing the CCI's accountability, giving it flexibility and enforcement efficiency.

Key Changes mentioned in the bill:

Increasing transparency and strengthening the accountability:

A board with part-time members to supervise CCI activities.

This would bring its regulatory architecture at par with that of financial regulators.

CCI to mandatorily issue penalty guidelines and give reasons in case of any divergence.

It will give much-needed certainty in regulatory environment.

Enforcement efficiency:

CCI could engage in structured negotiations with parties and arrive at mutually-workable solutions without having to go through lengthy formal proceedings.

This will bring powers of CCI on par with Sebi, which has been passing settlement orders for over a decade.

Previously CCI was only empowered to take action for abuse of dominance or anti-competitive agreements in the form of final orders in proceedings before it.

CCI can make appeals to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal conditional on a pre-deposit of up to 25% of the penalty imposed by the CCI.

This change is likely to deter frivolous appeals.

Shortening of the merger review period from 210 to 150 days

Introduction of a green channel for merger applications: Certain categories of mergers that had to wait for CCI approval would be allowed to attain full consummation without any standstill obligation under the new green-channel process.

Flexibility:

Previously, only those agreements are allowed if agreements made between businesses at the same level of production (such as competitors that form a cartel) or businesses that are in a directly upstream or downstream market (such as agreements between a manufacturer and distributor). If the parties do not fall in either of these brackets, anti-competitive agreements between them can go unchecked.

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But the bill also recognizes other forms of cartels such as hub-and-spoke cartels, it also has a catch-all provision to enable the CCI to deal with anti-competitive pacts irrespective of the structural relationships between parties.

Limitations:

The bill does little to address competition concerns in digital markets. E.g., mergers concern in digital markets between entities that do not have significant assets or turnover, but are still very significant (such as Facebook-WhatsApp). The flexibility to introduce new thresholds will let the CCI review such mergers.

No effective clause for regulating anti-competitive conduct by digital platforms.

Delayed: It was released for public comments in 2020, and given the rapid developments in digital markets and global regulatory responses, it seems to have got dated already.

INDIA's DRAFT MEDICAL DEVICES POLICY:

Context:

Recently, the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers released an Approach Paper for the Draft National Policy for the Medical Devices, 2022.

Highlights of the Draft:

- Building Competitiveness through fiscal and financial support for stimulating the development of the local manufacturing ecosystem with private sector investments.

- Incentivise core technology projects and exports through tax refunds and rebates.

- Adopt Public-private partnerships to reduce the cost of healthcare and drive efficiency.

- Create a single-window clearance system for licensing medical devices.

- Identify critical suppliers and promote local sourcing.

- Encourage cross-industry collaboration.

- Increase the share of medical technology companies in research and development to around 50%.

- A dedicated fund for encouraging joint research involving existing industry players, reputed academic institutions and startups.

- Incorporate a framework for a coherent pricing regulation to make available quality and effective medical devices to all citizens at affordable prices.

Need for and significance of the policy:

Nearly 80% of the medical devices currently sold in the country are imported, particularly high-end devices. This new policy aims to reduce India's import dependence to nearly 30% in the next 10 years.

The policy aims to increase India's per capita spending on medical devices. India has one of the lowest per capita spend on medical devices at $3 compared to the global average of per capita consumption $47.

Government initiatives so far:

PLI Scheme for promoting domestic manufacturing of Medical Devices.

Promotion of Medical Devices Parks.

Medical devices has been recognised as a sunrise sector under the 'Make in India' campaign in 2014.

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PAR – TAPI – NARMADA RIVER LINKING PROJECT:

Context:

The tribals in Gujarat are protesting against the Centre's Par Tapi Narmada river-linking project.

About the Project:

Envisioned under the 1980 National Perspective Plan.

It proposes to link three rivers:

- Par, originating from Nashik in Maharashtra and flowing through Valsad.

- Tapi from Saputara that flows through Maharashtra and Surat in Gujarat.

- Narmada originating in Madhya Pradesh and flowing through Maharashtra and Bharuch and Narmada districts in Gujarat.

The project proposes to transfer river water from the surplus regions of the Western Ghats to the deficit regions of Saurashtra and Kutch. The surplus water proposed to be diverted through the estimated Rs 10,211 crore Par-Tapi-Narmada link project is expected to irrigate an area of 2,32,175 hectares, of which 61,190 ha is en route to the link canal.

Why is this project being opposed?

According to a report by the NWDA, about 6065 ha of land area will be submerged due to the proposed reservoirs.

A total of 61 villages will be affected, of which one will be fully submerged and the remaining 60 partly.

The total number of affected families would be 2,509 of which 98 families would be affected due to the creation of the Jheri reservoir, the only one in Maharashtra, spread over six villages.

In Gujarat, around 2000 families will be affected by the project. The districts where the project will be implemented are largely dominated, by tribals who fear displacement.

Benefits of interlinking:

- Enhances water and food security.

- Proper utilisation of water.

- Boost to agriculture.

- Disaster mitigation.

- Boost to transportation.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES:

Context:

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has been dysfunctional for the last four years and has not delivered a single report to Parliament, a parliamentary committee has said in a recent report.

The pending reports include:

A study by the Commission of the impact of the Indira Sagar Polavaram Project in Andhra Pradesh on the tribal population.

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A special report on rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced tribals because of the Rourkela Steel Plant.

Challenges/issues associated with the functioning of NCST:

Manpower and budgetary shortage.

Less number of applicants as the eligibility bar is set too high.

Its rate of pendency of resolution of complaints and cases that it receives is also close to 50 per cent.

About NCST:

NCST was established by amending Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003.

By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- (i) the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and (ii) the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

Composition: The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge.

The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.

They are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.

At least one member should be a woman.

The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson and the other Members hold office for a term of 3 years.

The members are not eligible for appointment for more than two term

DISASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN OF MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ:

Context:

Union Minister of Panchayati Raj has released the "Disaster Management Plan of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (DMP-MoPR)".

Areas covered under the Plan:

1) Institutional arrangement for Disaster Management.

2) Hazard Risk, Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis.

3) Coherence of Disaster Risk Management across Resilient Development and Climate Change Action.

4) Disaster Specific Preventive and Mitigation Measures-Responsibility Framework.

5) Mainstreaming of Community Based Disaster Management Plan of Villages and Panchayats and so on.

Highlights of the plan:

- It aims to develop a culture of disaster resilience at the grassroots level among the Panchayats and Rural Local Bodies.

- It seeks to establish a framework to align the disaster management measures in rural areas to that of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

- Under the Plan, every Indian village would have a "Village Disaster Management Plan" and every Panchayat would have their Disaster Management Plan.

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- All stakeholders including PRIs, elected representatives and functionaries of Panchayats etc. would participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

Need for Panchayati Level Plans:

Panchayat-level and village-level Disaster Management Plans to mitigate the challenges in the event of disaster form a foundational level.

The **Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI),** the representative body of the people, is the most appropriate institution from village to the district level in view of:

- Its proximity.

- Universal coverage.

- Enlisting people's participation on an institutionalised basis.

- Their close involvement will be able to make people more prepared for countering natural disasters as well as involve them in all possible preventive and protective activities so that the impact of the disasters are mitigated and the people are able to save their lives and property.

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ECONOMY

AGRISTACK:

Context:

The government is working on a digital 'stack' of agricultural datasets, with its core as land records.

But, such a centralised stack will use old and inaccurate land records; farmers' personal and financial details will be used without a strong data protection law; and rural areas have a low level of digital literacy. Hence, experts say such an 'AgriStack' is problematic.

What is AgriStack?

The AgriStack is a collection of technologies and digital databases proposed by the Central Government focusing on India's farmers and the agricultural sector.

The central government has claimed that these new databases are being built to primarily tackle issues such as poor access to credit and wastage in the agricultural supply chain.

Features and significance:

Under AgriStack', the government aims to provide 'required data sets' of farmers' personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for 'smart and well-organized agriculture'.

The digital repository will aid precise targeting of subsidies, services and policies, the officials added.

Under the programme, each farmer of the country will get what is being called an FID, or a farmers' ID, linked to land records to uniquely identify them. India has 140 million operational farm-land holdings.

Issues with the move:

Agriculture has become the latest sector getting a boost of 'techno solutionism' by the government.

But it has, since then, also become the latest sector to enter the whole debate about data privacy and surveillance.

Since the signing of the MoUs, several concerns related to sharing farmers' data with private companies are raised.

The development has raised serious concerns about information asymmetry, data privacy and consent, profiling of farmers, mismanaged land records and corporatization of agriculture.

The formation of 'Agristack' also implies commercialization of agriculture extension activities as they will shift into a digital and private sphere.

Why such concerns?

The project was being implemented in the absence of a data protection legislation.

It might end up being an exercise where private data processing entities may know more about a farmer's land than the farmer himself.

Without safeguards, private entities would be able to exploit farmers' data to whatever extent they wish to.

This information asymmetry, tilted towards the technology companies, might further exploit farmers, especially small and marginal ones.

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Need:

At present, the majority of farmers across India are small and marginal farmers with limited access to advanced technologies or formal credit that can help improve output and fetch better prices.

Among the new proposed digital farming technologies and services under the programme include sensors to monitor cattle, drones to analyse soil and apply pesticide, may significantly improve the farm yields and boost farmers' incomes.

MICROFINANCE REGULATIONS:

Context:

RBI has released new microfinance lending norms. As per these norms:

All entities, banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and microfinance institutions (MFIs) are subject to the same regulations.

A microfinance loan is defined by the RBI as a 'collateral-free' loan granted to a household with an annual household income of up to Rs 3 lakh.

All collateral-free loans offered to low-income households, regardless of the end-use and mode of application/processing/disbursal, are considered microfinance loans.

The financial entities should have a board-approved policy to provide the flexibility of repayment periodicity on microfinance loans as per borrowers' requirements. They should also have a board-approved policy for the assessment of household income.

What is Microfinance?

Microfinance is a form of financial service which provides small loans and other financial services to poor and low-income households.

MFIs are financial companies that provide small loans to people who do not have any access to banking facilities.

The definition of "small loans" varies between countries. In India, all loans that are below Rs. 1 lakh can be considered as microloans.

Microcredit is delivered through a variety of institutional channels viz:

Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) (including small finance banks (SFBs) and regional rural banks (RRBs)).

Cooperative banks.

Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

Microfinance institutions (MFIs) registered as NBFCs as well as in other forms.

Significance of Proposal:

RBI has reposed faith in the maturity of the microfinance sector with this step.

This is a forward-looking step where the responsibility is of the institution to fix a reasonable interest rate on transparent terms.

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UNEMPLOYMENT IN INDIA:

Context:

According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the National Statistical Office (NSO):

India's urban unemployment rate jumped to 12.6 per cent in the April-June quarter of 2021, compared to 9.3 per cent in the January-March quarter.

It, however, eased from the 20.8 per cent level seen during the first wave of the Covid pandemic.

Impact of the pandemic:

The biggest casualty of the pandemic will be joblessness. The country's unemployment rate has risen through much of April, having hit 7.4%, and threatens to climb further to around 8% significantly higher than the 6.5% in March, according to CMIE.

Steps Taken by Government:

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched in 1980 to create full employment opportunities in rural areas.

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM): This scheme was started in 1979 with objective to help unemployed rural youth between the age of 18 and 35 years to acquire skills for self-employment. Priority was given to SC/ST Youth and Women.

RSETI/RUDSETI: With the aim of mitigating the unemployment problem among the youth, a new initiative was tried jointly by Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Educational Trust, Syndicate Bank and Canara Bank in 1982 which was the setting up of the "RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SELF EMPLOYMENT TRAINING INSTITUTE" with its acronym RUDSETI near Dharmasthala in Karnataka. Rural Self Employment Training Institutes/ RSETIs are now managed by Banks with active co-operation from the Government of India and State Government.

By merging the two erstwhile wage employment programme – National Rural Employment programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) was started with effect from April, 1, 1989 on 80:20 cost sharing basis between the centre and the States.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA): It is an employment scheme that was launched in 2005 to provide social security by guaranteeing a minimum of 100 days paid work per year to all the families whose adult members opt for unskilled labour-intensive work. This act provides Right to Work to people.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), launched in 2015 has an objective of enabling a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood.

Start Up India Scheme, launched in 2016 aims at developing an ecosystem that promotes and nurtures entrepreneurship across the country.

Stand Up India Scheme, launched in 2016 aims to facilitate bank loans between Rs 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore to at least one SC or ST borrower and at least one women borrower per bank branch for setting up a greenfield enterprise.

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REFORMS - BASED & RESOURCE – LINKED, REVAMPED DISTRIBUTION SECTOR SCHEME:

Context:

REC and PFC, the state-run lenders that are the nodal lending agencies for the Rs 3.03 lakh crore revamped distribution sector scheme (RDSS) launched by the Union ministry of power in August last year, will release the first tranche of funds to a host of states including Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya by March 31.

The funds will be disbursed in the form of ad hoc 10% of grant from the central government, while the rest of the disbursal will depend on the discoms concerned fulfilling various conditions under the scheme.

About the scheme:

It is worth Rs. 3.03 trillion scheme wherein the Centre's share will be Rs. 97,631 crore.

It aims to improve the operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of discoms (excluding Private Sector DISCOMs).

Highlights of the scheme:

- It is a reforms-based and results-linked scheme.

- It seeks to improve the operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of all DISCOMs/Power Departments excluding Private Sector DISCOMs.

- The scheme envisages the provision of conditional financial assistance to DISCOMs for strengthening supply infrastructure.

- The assistance will be based on meeting pre-qualifying criteria as well as upon the achievement of basic minimum benchmarks by the DISCOM.

- The scheme involves a compulsory smart metering ecosystem across the distribution sector—starting from electricity feeders to the consumer level, including in about 250 million households.

- Scheme also focuses on funding for feeder segregation for unsegregated feeders.

- The Scheme has a major focus on improving electricity supply for the farmers and for providing daytime electricity to them through solarization of agricultural feeders.

Implementation:

Existing power sector reforms schemes such as Integrated Power Development Scheme, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana will be merged into this umbrella program.

Each state would have its own action plan for implementation of the scheme rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Nodal agencies for the scheme's implementation are Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Limited and Power Finance Corporation (PFC).

The scheme's cost is borne by the Centre and state governments in a 3:2 ratio. The state governments will be free to borrow from either REC-PFC or from other financial institutions to mobilise the funds.

Objectives of the scheme:

Reduction of average aggregate technical and commercial loss to pan-India levels of 12-15% by 2024-25.

Narrow the deficit between the cost of electricity and the price at which it is supplied to zero by 2024-25.

Developing institutional capabilities for modern DISCOMs.

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Improvement in the quality, reliability, and affordability of power supply to consumers through a financially sustainable and operationally efficient distribution sector.

INDIA PLANS FOR RS24,000 CRORE SOVEREIGN GREEN BOND ISSUANCE:

Context:

India will issue at least Rs 24,000 crore ($3.3 billion) in sovereign green bonds as the country marks a shift towards a low-carbon economy.

Need for:

India's maiden foray into the green bond space comes as it plans to fund renewable energy projects that will help meet its goal of net-zero emissions by 2070.

The planned issuance comes amid a global boom in sustainable investments.

India is the world's third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases and plans to more than quadruple its renewable power generation capacity by 2030.

What Is a Green Bond?

A green bond is a type of fixed-income instrument that is specifically earmarked to raise money for climate and environmental projects.

These bonds are typically asset-linked and backed by the issuing entity's balance sheet, so they usually carry the same credit rating as their issuers' other debt obligations.

Green bonds may come with tax incentives to enhance their attractiveness to investors.

The World Bank is a major issuer of green bonds. It has issued 164 such bonds since 2008, worth a combined $14.4 billion. In 2020, the total issuance of green bonds was worth almost $270 billion, according to the Climate Bond Initiative.

What is the Significance of Sovereign Guarantee to Green Bonds?

Sovereign green issuance sends a powerful signal of intent around climate action and sustainable development to governments and regulators.

It will catalyze domestic market development and provides impetus to institutional investors.

It will provide benchmark pricing, liquidity and a demonstration effect for local issuers, helping to support the growth of a local market.

FAME INDIA SCHEME:

Context:

Under FAME-India Scheme, incentives are provided to buyers of electric vehicles in the form of an upfront reduction in the purchase price of electric vehicles.

As per the information received from Department of Revenue, at present the GST rate on electric vehicles is 5%.

The GST rates are prescribed based on the recommendations of the GST Council.

Electric vehicles are already at the lowest rate slab of 5%.

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Following steps have been taken by the Government for adoption of electric vehicles in the country:

The Government on 12th May, 2021 approved a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing of Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) in the country in order to bring down prices of battery in the country. Drop in battery price will result in cost reduction of electric vehicles.

GST on electric vehicles has been reduced from 12% to 5%; GST on chargers/ charging stations for electric vehicles has been reduced from 18% to 5%.

Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) announced that battery-operated vehicles will be given green license plates and be exempted from permit requirements.

MoRTH issued a notification advising states to waive road tax on EVs, which in turn will help reduce the initial cost of EVs.

FAME India scheme:

FAME-India Scheme is implementing by Department of Heavy Industry in order to promote manufacturing of electric and hybrid vehicle technology and to ensure sustainable growth of the same.

FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan.

Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies.

(FAME-India) Scheme proposes to give a push to electric vehicles (EVs) in public transport and seeks to encourage adoption of EVs by way of market creation and demand aggregation.

SOCIAL STOCK EXCHANGE:

Context: Government has come out in support of Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) crackdown on unregistered advisors making stock-related suggestions on social media platforms.

What's the issue?

Many social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, telegram where advisors which are not registered with SEBI are offering advice on stock markets.

Now, SEBI is going to tighten its hold on such advisors as this often misleads the investors and harm the market.

Background:

The proposal to set up SSEs in the country was first floated during the Union Budget in 2019.

In September 2019, Sebi constituted a working group under the chairmanship of Tata group veteran Ishaat Hussain.

In September 2020, Sebi set up the TG as it felt further expert advice and clarity was needed on the WG's recommendation.

Recommendations made by SEBI's technical group (TG) on social stock exchanges (SSEs):

Eligibility:

Both for-profit (FP) and not-for-profit organisations (NPO) should be allowed to tap the SSE provided they are able to demonstrate that social intent and impact.

Corporate foundations, political and religious organisations should be made ineligible to raise funds using the SSE mechanism.

Modes available for fundraising:

For NPOs, it shall be equity, zero coupon zero principal bond (ZCZP), development impact bonds, social impact fund, currently known as social venture fund (SVP) with 100 per cent grants-in grants out provision, and donations by investors through mutual funds.

For FP enterprises, it will be equity, debt, development impact bonds, and social venture funds.

Corpus size of the fund:

Minimum corpus size for such funds be reduced from Rs 20 crore to Rs 5 crore and the minimum subscription amount be reduced from Rs 1 crore to Rs. 2 lakhs.

The capacity building fund for SSE:

It should have a corpus of Rs 100 crore. This fund should be housed under Na bard. Exchanges and other developmental agencies such as SIDBI should be asked to contribute towards this fund.

List of broad activities based on those identified by Niti Aayog under sustainable development goals that SEs can engage in:

These include eradicating hunger, poverty malnutrition and inequality; promoting gender equality by empowerment of women and LGBTQIA+ communities; training to promote rural sports; and slum area development, affordable housing.

What is social stock exchange (SSE)?

It is a novel concept in India and such a bourse is meant to serve private and non-profit sector providers by channelling greater capital to them.

As per the proposal, SSE can be housed within the existing stock exchange such as the BSE and/or National Stock Exchange (NSE).

Significance:

With this, Social welfare enterprises and non-profits could soon get to raise so-called social capital on a transparent electronic platform, aiding the process of rebuilding livelihoods ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

These recommendations, if implemented as a package, can result in a vibrant and supportive ecosystem, enabling the non-profit sector to realise its full potential for creating social impact.

Need for social capital:

India will need a significant amount of patient capital to repair and rebuild those livelihoods, which are the bedrock of her economy. Conventional capital that prioritises financial returns will not be able to carry such a burden all by itself.

Social capital, on the other hand, is more suited for this role. It is not only patient but its goal is precisely to support and fortify social structures that are in danger of collapsing because of COVID-19.

What is a social enterprise?

A social enterprise is a revenue-generating business. Its primary objective is to achieve a social objective, for example, providing healthcare or clean energy.

This in no way means that a social enterprise can't be highly profitable. In fact, most social enterprises look and operate like traditional businesses. The only catch is that the profit these entities generate is not necessarily used for payouts to stakeholders, but reinvested into their social programmes.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ACT EAST POLICY:

Context:

A webinar was recently organised on "Act East Policy".

What is the 'Act East Policy'?

- India's 'Act East' policy is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.

- It is considered as the modern version of the 'Look East Policy' which was launched in 1991 by then Prime Minister V. Narasimha Rao.

- The main focus of 'Look East Policy' was to shift the country's trading focus from the west and neighbors to the booming South East Asian countries.

- The "Act East Policy" was launched at the East Asia Summit in Myanmar in November 2014.

- Under the "Act East Policy" the government is relying on the 3 C's (Culture, Connectivity, and Commerce) to develop better relations with ASEAN nations.

Key differences between "Look East Policy" and "Act East Policy":

The focus of the "Look East Policy " was to increase economic integration with the South East Asian countries and the area was confined to SouthEast Asia only.

On the other hand the focus of the "Act East Policy" is economic and security integration and the focus area increased to South East Asia as well as East Asia.

Objectives of 'Act East Policy':

- Promote economic cooperation, cultural ties, and develop a strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at regional, bilateral, and multilateral levels.

- To increase the interaction of the North-Eastern Indian states with other neighboring countries.

- To find out the alternatives of the traditional business partners like; more focus on the Pacific countries in addition to the South East Asian countries.

- To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region.

Significance:

- Under the Act East Policy (AEP), the India-Japan strategic partnership has been lifted to an entirely new level, underscoring the importance of Indo- Pacific cooperation.

- India believes in an Indo-Pacific that is free, open and inclusive, and one that is founded upon a cooperative and collaborative rules-based order.

- ASEAN's centrality remains the abiding contemporary characteristic of the Indo-Pacific at the regional level.

- India has placed the 'Indo-Pacific' at the heart of its engagement with the countries of South, Southeast and East Asia. Gradually, Act 'East' is getting transformed into Act 'Indo-Pacific'.

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INDIA'S ARCTIC POLICY:

Context: The Centre released India's Arctic Policy, with the aim of enhancing the country's cooperation with the resource-rich and rapidly transforming region.

Need for such a Policy : The relevance of Arctic for India can be broadly explained under three categories:

(A) Scientific Research, Climate Change and Environment

Monsoons: The changes occurring in the Arctic are yet to be understood fully, but it is clear that they have been impacting global weather, climate and ecosystems including the monsoons in India.

During the monsoons, India receives over 70 per cent of its annual precipitation. India's agriculture, which is the primary source of livelihood for about 58 per cent of India's population and contributes around 20 per cent to the GDP,4 is directly dependent on monsoons.

Rising Sea Level: The ice loss in the Arctic is a major contributor to global sea-level rise6 and it can have a significant impact on India, especially over its 1,300 island territories and maritime features

Himalayas: The Arctic and the Himalayas, though geographically distant, are interconnected and share similar concerns. The Arctic meltdown is helping the scientific community to better understand the glacial melt in the Himalayas, which has often been referred to as the 'third pole' and has the largest freshwater reserves after the North and South poles. The study of Arctic is therefore critical to Indian scientists.

(B) Economic and Human Resources

Mineral Resources and Hydrocarbons: Arctic region has rich deposits of coal, gypsum and diamonds and also substantial reserves of zinc, lead, placer gold and quartz.10 Greenland alone possesses about a quarter of world's rare earth reserves.

India is the third-largest energy-consuming country in the world, the third-largest oil importer (83 per cent) and the fourth-largest importer of gas which caters to almost half of the total gas consumption. Arctic can therefore potentially address India's energy security needs and deficiency of strategic and rare earth minerals.

India's Arctic Policy

The six pillars of the Policy are as follows:

- Science and Research
- Economic and Human Development Cooperation
- Climate and Environmental Protection
- Transportation and Connectivity
- Governance and International Cooperation
- National Capacity Building

The Objectives of the Policy:

- Strengthening national capabilities and competencies in science and exploration, climate and environmental protection, maritime and economic cooperation with the Arctic region. Institutional and human resource capacities will be strengthened within Government and academic, research and business institutions.

- Inter-ministerial coordination in pursuit of India's interests in the Arctic.

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- Enhancing understanding of the impact of climate change in the Arctic on India's climate, economic, and energy security.

- Contributing better analysis, prediction, and coordinated policymaking on the implications of ice melting in the Arctic on India's economic, military and strategic interests related to global shipping routes, energy security, and exploitation of mineral wealth.

- Studying linkages between polar regions and the Himalayas.

- Deepen cooperation between India and countries of the Arctic region under various Arctic forums, drawing expertise from scientific and traditional knowledge.

- Increase India's participation in the Arctic Council and improve understanding of the complex governance structures in the Arctic, relevant international laws, and geopolitics of the region.

India's Arctic Policy is timely and is likely to provide a direction to India's policy-makers on contours of India's engagement with the region. It is the first step towards developing a whole-of-government approach on India's engagement with the region.

The Policy is likely to have a multiplier effect towards a more synergised and focused scientific research including an enhanced understanding of linkages between monsoons and climate change in the Arctic, and between polar studies and the Himalayas.

Thus, India's Arctic Policy is deftly dovetailed, enmeshed and in synergy with the broader policy framework of the Government of India.

INTERNATIONAL DAY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA:

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to proclaim March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

However, India expressed concern over phobia against "one religion being elevated to the level of an international day".

IAF TO EMPLOY 'DIRECT TACTICAL PLANNING' FOR S-400

Context:

The S-400 Triumf long-range air defence system, currently being inducted by India, and remains a potent weapon for the neighbour, the Indian Air Force will counter it based on "direct tactical planning", an IAF representative informed the parliamentary standing committee on defence

What is S400?

In October 2018, India had signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems,

It is a modern long-range surface-to-air missile (MLRSAM) system developed by Russia which will be delivered to India by 2025

Missile system integrates a multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti- aircraft missile systems, launchers, and command and control centre. It can provide a layered defence as it is capable of firing three types of missiles

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S-400 Triumf can engage all types of aerial targets such as aircraft, ballistic and cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), which are within the range of 400km, at an altitude of up to 30km

S400 and CAATSA

The U.S. State Department spokesperson has said that there will be no "blanket" waiver for India, indicating that even if S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft missiles system deal is not sanctioned, other "significant" military and nuclear transactions between India and Russia could still trigger sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

What's the concern?

There has been unease in Washington ever since 2016 when India announced the deal with Russia, which remains New Delhi's biggest defence partner.

Now, the S-400 deal could attract sanctions under US' CAATSA law. The US has already sanctioned China and Turkey over similar purchases.

What is CAATSA, and how did the S-400 deal fall foul of this Act?

Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) 's core objective is to counter Iran, Russia and North Korea through punitive measures.

Enacted in 2017.

Includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.

What sanctions can possibly be imposed?

Prohibition on loans to the sanctioned person.

Prohibition of Export-Import bank assistance for exports to sanctioned persons.

Prohibition on procurement by United States Government to procure goods or services from the sanctioned person.

Denial of visas to persons closely associated with the sanctioned person

Significance of the deal:

The S-400 decision is a very strong example of how advanced our defence and strategic partnership is, and how strong Indian sovereignty is, to choose its international partners, especially when it comes to issues of national interest and national security.

UKRAINE WAR COULD CUT 1% OFF GLOBAL GROWTH: OECD

Context:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently reported that the Russian invasion of Ukraine could reduce the global growth rate by a percentage this year and increase inflation by two-and-a-half percentage points.

What were the other important observations made by OECD?

War's impact on European Union could be high because of its high dependence on Russia's energy imports

OECD countries through increased government spending by 0.5% could lessen the impact of inflation on these countries

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About OECD

Origin

Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was founded in 1948 to help administer the Marshall Plan

In 1961, the OEEC was reformed into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and membership was extended to non-European states

Headquarter — Paris, France

It works through consensus to develop policy recommendations and other "soft law" instruments to encourage policy reform in member countries

Membership

Currently, it has 38 members

India is not a member but a key partner

It is a forum of countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy

Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries

It provides a platform to compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members.

Resources — funded by contributions from member states at varying rates

Governance

OECD Council — provide direction and guidance to the work of the Organisation. Each member country is represented.

OECD Substantive Committees — oversee all the work on each theme (publications, task forces, conferences, and so on)

OECD Secretariat — led by the Secretary-General provides support to Standing and Substantive Committees

Special bodies and entities associated with OECD

- International Transport Forum (ITF) (formally known as the European Conference of Ministers of Transport)
- International Energy Agency
- Nuclear Energy Agency
- Partnership for Democratic Governance (PDG)
- Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC)

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EXTINCTION REBELLION:

Context:

World over activists of Extinction Rebellion are staging protests in various formats.

What is the Extinction Rebellion, also referred to as 'XR'?

Initially, launched in the United Kingdom on October 31, 2018, as a response to a report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Now, it is a global movement which seeks to "rebel", and asks groups to "self-organise", without the need for anyone's permission, to come up with collective action plans as long as they adhere to the group's core principles and values.

It is a decentralised, international and politically non-partisan movement using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The group has "three core demands" of governments around the world.

It wants governments to "Tell the Truth", to "Act Now", and to "Go Beyond Politics" in order to confront the climate and ecological emergency that the world is faced with.

What activities have XR done so far?

The group had announced a "Declaration of Rebellion" at launch, involving a public act of civil disobedience in London, demanding that the government reduce carbon emission to zero by 2025.

The eventual plan was to coordinate actions in other countries and to engage in an "International Rebellion" in March 2019.

The XR global website, however, states that the movement is "strictly non-violent", and that they are "reluctant law-breakers".

In April 2019, Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish climate activist, lent her support to the group by speaking to its members in London.

XR and India:

The movement claims to have been inspired by 15 major civil disobedience movements around the world, including, apart from Women's Suffrage and the Arab Spring, India's struggle for Independence.

It refers to Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March in 1930.

XR's website says there are 19 groups in the country, including in the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and Chennai.

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT:

Context:

India may be one of the fastest growing economies of the world, but it is among the least happy countries.

Ahead of the UN International Day of Happiness, observed on March 20, the World Happiness Report 2022 ranked India 136th — tenth from the bottom of the list.

The World Happiness Report:

The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network powered by the Gallup World Poll data.

The report, which is in its tenth year, uses global survey data to report on how people evaluate their own lives, besides economic and social parameters.

The rankings are based on average data of a three-year period of 2019-2021.

World Happiness Report evaluates levels of happiness by taking into account factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation.

Highlights of the report:

Finland topped the list for the fifth time in a row, according to the 10th edition of the World Happiness Report.

Finland was followed by Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

Among other western countries, while the United States managed to bag the 16th position, Britain was ranked 17th and France 20th.

India continued to fare poorly in the world happiness index, with its position marginally improving to 136 as against last year's 139.

Among the South Asian nations, only Taliban-ruled Afghanistan fared worse than India.

Afghanistan was named the most unhappy country in the world, ranking last on the index of 146 countries.

Nepal (84), Bangladesh (94), Pakistan (121) and Sri Lanka (127) managed to get better ranks in the list.

The Happiness report also stated that India was one among the countries that witnessed, over the past 10 years, a fall in life evaluations by more than a full point on the 0 to 10 scale.

Significance:

Over the years, happiness has become a key metric to track for not just countries but corporates as well.

The goal behind the report is to identify key determinants of well-being.

This information is expected to help countries to craft policies aimed at achieving happier societies.

Interconnections between law, governance and happiness: Why do these connections matter?

Happiness has come to be accepted as a goal of public policy. And this discourse has given a fillip to a new narrative where the interconnections between law, governance and happiness are being searched.

Experiences from several nations confirm that the countries with higher GDP and higher per capita income are not necessarily the happiest countries and there exists a link between the state of happiness and rule of law.

The WHRs, over the years, confirmed that people tend to have:

Poor mental health.

A low score of subjective well-being.

Poor perception about the governance and law and order, despite high income levels

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SOCIAL ISSUES

Maternal Mortality Rate:

Kerala tops in maternal and child health, recording the lowest Maternal Mortality Ratio in the country.

It has 30 per one lakh live births in the country. Kerala is way ahead of the national MMR of 103.

Overall, the MMR of India has declined by 10 points. It has declined from 113 in 2016-18 to 103 in 2017-19 (8.8 % decline).

The country had been witnessing a progressive reduction in the MMR from 130 in 2014-2016, 122 in 2015-17, 113 in 2016-18, and to 103 in 2017-19.

MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MGNREGA):

Context: A Parliamentary Standing Committee has asked the Rural Development Ministry to replace caste-based NREGS payment with the earlier mechanism of generation of single Fund Transfer Order

Key observations:

Parliament's Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj has asked the government to roll back the system of caste-based wages, under which NREGS workers are paid based on whether they belong to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, or Others.

It wants government to revert back to the earlier system by which a single Fund Transfer Order was generated without "any sort of segregation on the basis of caste".

Create caste rift: NREGS workers are part of the "economically weak populace and can come from any religion/caste, [and] creation of such payment system wherein one specific community is preferred over the other solely on the ground of caste will only give rise to resentment and create rift among the beneficiaries of MGNREGA"

What is the caste-based payment system?

- Under the new system, if 20 individuals (say, six SCs, four STs and 10 others) work together at a site under MG-NREGA, a single muster roll would be issued, but payment would be done by issuing three separate Fund Transfer Orders (FTOs), one for each of the three categories.

- It came into force on April 1, 2021.

- Beneficiaries in the 'Others' category, which includes the 'General' and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories, especially complained of delays.

Why was the system of caste-based wage payment introduced?

According to the Ministry, the system of category-wise payment of wages was introduced to "accurately reflect on the ground flow of funds to various population groups". Last October, a process of "streamlining" of the new system was taken up.

About MGNREGA:

The scheme was introduced as a social measure that guarantees "the right to work". The key tenet of this social measure and labour law is that the local government will have to legally provide at least 100 days of wage employment in rural India to enhance their quality of life.

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Key objectives:

- Generation of paid rural employment of not less than 100 days for each worker who volunteers for unskilled labour.

- Proactively ensuring social inclusion by strengthening livelihood base of rural poor.

- Creation of durable assets in rural areas such as wells, ponds, roads and canals.

- Reduce urban migration from rural areas.

- Create rural infrastructure by using untapped rural labour.

The following are the eligibility criteria for receiving the benefits under MGNREGA scheme:

- Must be Citizen of India to seek NREGA benefits.

- Job seeker has completed 18 years of age at the time of application.

- The applicant must be part of a local household (i.e., application must be made with local Gram Panchayat).

- Applicant must volunteer for unskilled labour.

Key facts related to the scheme:

- The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

- Individual beneficiary-oriented works can be taken up on the cards of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, small or marginal farmers or beneficiaries of land reforms or beneficiaries under the **Indira Awaas Yojana** of the Government of India.

- Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, wage employment will be provided to the applicant.

- Right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.

- Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory, which lends to accountability and transparency.

- The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands.

- It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

SCHEME FOR WOMEN FARMERS:

Context:

In order to familiarize women with the latest techniques in agriculture and allied sectors, trainings are being imparted to women farmers under schemes of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Rural Development.

The guidelines of the various beneficiary-oriented schemes of the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), provide that States and other Implementing Agencies to incur at least 30% expenditure on women farmers.

Following schemes have specific components for the welfare of women farmers:

- National Food Security Mission,

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- National Mission on Oilseed & Oil Palm,

- National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture,

- Sub-Mission for Seed and Planting Material,

- Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization and

- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):

- The Department of Rural Development, launched a specific scheme namely 'Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)'.

- It is a subcomponent of DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana — National Rural Livelihoods Mission).

- This scheme is being implemented since 2011.

- Objectives: To empower women by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also create sustainable livelihoods of rural women.

- Implementation: The program is implemented in project mode through State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) as Project Implementing Agencies.

Need for promotion of women farmer:

- Agriculture support system in India strengthens the exclusion of women from their entitlements as agriculture workers and cultivators.

- Rural women form the most productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. More than 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture activities for their livelihoods.

- About 20 per cent of farm livelihoods are female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male emigration.

- Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.
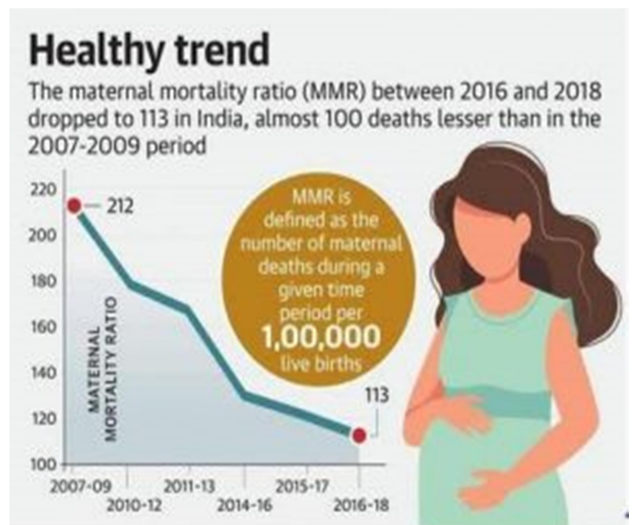
Maternal Mortality Rate:

Kerala tops in maternal and child health, recording **the lowest Maternal Mortality Ratio in the country.**

- It has 30 per one lakh live births in the country. Kerala is way ahead of the national MMR of 103.

Overall, **the MMR of India has declined by 10 points. It has declined from 113 in 2016-18 to 103 in 2017-19 (8.8 % decline).**

- The country had been witnessing a progressive reduction in the MMR from 130 in 2014-2016, 122 in 2015-17, 113 in 2016-18, and to 103 in 2017-19.

Maternal mortality is the maternal death of a woman during pregnancy or after pregnancy, including post-abortion or post-birth periods.

Healthy trend
The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) between 2016 and 2018 dropped to 113 in India, almost 100 deaths lesser than in the 2007-2009 period

MMR is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 1,00,000 live births

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Prevention of sexual harassment or POSH Act:

Context: Kerala High Court has asked organisations associated with the film industry to take steps to constitute a joint committee to deal with cases of sexual harassment of women, in line with **the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013.**

About the Vishaka guidelines:

The Vishaka guidelines **(legally binding)** were laid down by the Supreme Court in a judgment in 1997. This was in a case filed by women's rights groups, one of which was Vishaka.

- The guidelines defined sexual harassment and imposed three key obligations on institutions — prohibition, prevention, redress.

- The Supreme Court directed that they should establish a Complaints Committee, which would look into matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

- The **2013 Act broadened these guidelines.**

About the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013:

The law against sexual harassment is commonly known as **the prevention of sexual harassment or POSH Act,** passed by Parliament in **2013.**

Definition of sexual harassment:

- Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act, 2013 defines sexual harassment:

- **It includes "any one or more" of the following "unwelcome acts or behaviour"committed directly or by implication:** Physical contact and advances, Sexually coloured remarks, Showing pornography, A demand or request for sexual favours, Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Key provisions of the act:

1. This Act lays down the procedures for a complaint and inquiry and the action to be taken.

2. It mandates that every employer constitute an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at each office or branch with 10 or more employees.

3. It lays down the procedures and defines various aspects of sexual harassment.

4. A woman can be of any age, whether employed or not, who "alleges to have been subjected to any act of sexual harassment", that means the rights of all the women working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity, are protected under the Act.

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought to be known to be unwelcome, based on the prohibited grounds of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. In some cases, one incident could be serious enough to be sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Asking for sex in exchange for a benefit or a favour
- Degrading words and comments
- Degrading pictures or objects
- Making unnecessary physical contact, including unwanted touching
- Calling people sex-specific derogatory names
- Repeatedly asking for dates, and not taking "no" for an answer
- Making sex-related comments about a person's physical characteristics or actions
- Saying or doing something because you think a person does not conform to sex-role stereotypes
- Posting or sharing pornography, sexual pictures or cartoons, sexually explicit graffiti, or other sexual images (including online)
- Making sexual jokes
- Bragging about sexual prowess
- Refusing to refer to a person by their self-identified name or personal pronoun
- Requiring a person prove their gender

Sources: Ontario Human Rights Commission, Sexual harassment in employment (fact sheet)
City of Toronto, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. August 2016.

Employer's Responsibility

- Create a safe and respectful work environment
- Develop a policy and procedures
- Promptly and appropriately respond to issues as they arise
- Educate managers about their roles and responsibilities
- Ensure senior managers lead by example

If it happens to you

- Remember it's not your fault
- Talk to someone you can trust
- Document incidents
- Learn about your rights and options for getting the behaviours to stop

Your options for resolution

- If it is safe and if you are comfortable, speak to the harasser
- Speak to your manager or Human Resources
- Go to the next person in authority if the harassment continues
- Make a formal complaint
- If you are threatened or assaulted, contact the police

If it happens to someone else

- Object when you see sexual harassment -- Tell the person this behaviour is not okay
- Educate yourself on the issue
- Support co-workers who disclose they've been sexually harassed
- Respect whatever choice the person makes
- Request that your organization develops clear policies and procedures

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Need for stricter provisions:

- The 2013 Act has entrusted **the powers of a civil court to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** without specifying if the members need to have a legal background. This was a major lacuna given that the ICC formed an important grievance redressal mechanism under the framework of the act.

- The 2013 act **only imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on employers for non-compliance with respect to the constitution of the ICC.** This proved to be insufficient in ensuring that the employers constituted the ICC in a time-bound.
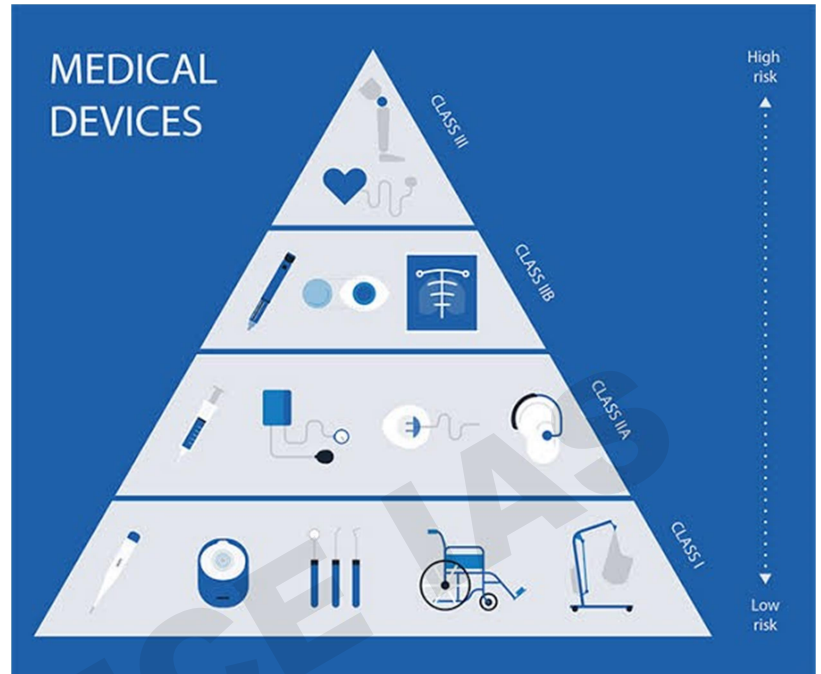
India's draft medical devices policy:

Context: Recently, **the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP)**, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers released an Approach Paper for **the Draft National Policy for the Medical Devices, 2022.**

Highlights of the Draft:

1. **Building Competitiveness** through fiscal and financial support for stimulating the development of the local manufacturing ecosystem with private sector investments.

2. **Incentivise** core technology projects and exports through tax refunds and rebates.

3. **Adopt Public-private partnerships** to reduce the cost of healthcare and drive efficiency.

4. Create **a single-window clearance** system for licensing medical devices.

5. Identify critical suppliers and **promote local sourcing.**

6. Encourage **cross-industry collaboration.**

7. Increase the share of medical technology companies in **research and development to around 50%.**

8. **A dedicated fund** for encouraging joint research involving existing industry players, reputed academic institutions and startups.

9. Incorporate **a framework for a coherent pricing regulation** to make available quality and effective medical devices to all citizens at affordable prices.

This Policy envisions that by 2047:

1. India Will be having few National Institutes of Medical Devices Education and Research (NIMERs) on the lines of National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education & Research (NIPERs).

2. It will be home & originator to 25 high-end futuristic technologies in MedTech (Medical Technology).

3. It will have a MedTech Industry of USD100-300 Bn size with 10-12% of Global Market Share.

Need for and significance of the policy:

- **Nearly 80% of the medical devices currently sold in the country are imported,** particularly high-end devices. This new policy aims to reduce India's import dependence to nearly 30% in the next 10 years.

- The policy aims **to increase India's per capita spending on medical devices.** India has one of the lowest per capita spend on medical devices at $3 compared to the global average of per capita consumption $47.

Government initiatives so far:

1. **PLI Scheme** for promoting domestic manufacturing of Medical Devices.

2. Promotion of **Medical Devices Parks.**

3. Medical devices has been recognised as **a sunrise sector under the 'Make in India' campaign in 2014.**

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RSS Resolution for Labor-Intensive Economic Model:

Context: The RSS has passed a resolution calling for **a labour-intensive Bharatiya Economic Model** in view of rising unemployment in the country.

What does the resolution say?

1. Society must come forward and participate in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat where the economic model is based on Indian values.

2. The model should be human-centric, labour intensive, eco-friendly and lay stress on decentralisation and equitable distribution of benefits.

3. It should augment village economy, microscale, small scale and agro-based industries.

4. Thrust areas as rural employability, unorganised sector employment and employment of women as solutions to unemployment.

5. It also urged the youth to come out of the mentality of seeking only jobs. An environment conducive to encouraging entrepreneurship should be created by educating and counselling people, especially youth.

Need for:

- India's unemployment rate has been rising, and when the effects of demonetisation and the pandemic have hit the economy and dried up opportunities.

- The unemployment rate went up to 7.91% in December 2021 from 6.3% in 2018-19 and 4.7% in 2017-18.

- The manufacturing sector is said to have lost 9.8 million jobs between 2019-20 and December 2021.

What needs to be done?

- By pushing the government to support small and medium enterprises in the manufacturing sector.

- By working with the youth at the grassroots to "help them engage into entrepreneurial ventures through agri-allied activities and other self-employment opportunities".

- There are ample opportunities for creation of jobs in rural India through industrialisation, food processing, agri-allied activities such as animal husbandry, bamboo farming, pisciculture etc.

'Meri Policy Mere Haath' campaign:

Context: 'Meri Policy Mere Haath' campaign was launched recently in Hassan, Karnataka.

About the Campaign:

- The campaign is **part of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.**

- It is aimed at **motivating all farmers in the country to insure their crops.**

- Under this program, every farmer who has taken insurance under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) will get the policy documents at their doorstep.

Significance:

- The campaign empowers the farmers through crop insurance awareness and by bringing the insurance policy to their doorsteps.

- The campaign will also help in increasing the direct communication between the farmers and insurance companies.

About PMFBY:

- The **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** has successfully entered its seventh year of implementation with the upcoming Kharif 2022 season, completing six years of its implementation since its announcement on 18 February 2016.

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- It is in line with **the One Nation – One Scheme theme-** It replaced **National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).**

- Launched in 2016.

- **Coverage:** All food & oilseed crops and annual commercial/horticultural crops for which past yield data is available.

- **Premium:** The prescribed premium is 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all rabi crops. In the case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium is 5%.

PMFBY to PMFBY 2.0 (overhauled PMFBY):

Completely Voluntary: It has been decided to make enrolment 100% voluntary for all farmers from 2020 Kharif.

Limit to Central Subsidy: The Cabinet has decided to cap the Centre's premium subsidy under these schemes for premium rates up to 30% for unirrigated areas/crops and 25% for irrigated areas/crops.

More Flexibility to States: The government has given the flexibility to states/UTs to implement PMFBY and given them the option to select any number of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses.

Penalising the Pendency: In the revamped PMFBY, a provision has been incorporated wherein if states don't release their share before March 31 for the Kharif season and September- 30 for rabi, they would not be allowed to participate in the scheme in subsequent seasons.

Investing in ICE Activities: Insurance companies have to now spend 0.5% of the total premium collected on information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

World Happiness Report:

Context: India may be one of the fastest growing economies of the world, but it is **among the least happy countries**.

- Ahead of the **UN International Day of Happiness, observed on March 20,** the **World Happiness Report 2022 ranked India 136th** — tenth from the bottom of the list.

The World Happiness Report:

The World Happiness Report is a **publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network powered** by the Gallup World Poll data.

- The report, which is in its tenth year, **uses global survey data to report** on how people evaluate their own lives, besides economic and social parameters.

- The rankings are based on average data of a three-year period of 2019-2021.

- World Happiness Report **evaluates levels of happiness** by taking into account factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation.

Highlights of the report:

- **Finland topped the list for the fifth time in a row**, according to the 10th edition of the World Happiness Report.

- Finland was followed by **Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands**.

- Among other western countries, while the **United States managed to bag the 16th position**, Britain was ranked **17th and France 20th.**

- India continued to fare poorly in the world happiness index, with its position marginally improving to 136 as against last year's 139.

- Among the South Asian nations, **only Taliban-ruled Afghanistan fared worse than India**.

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- **Afghanistan was named the most unhappy country** in the world, ranking last on the **index of 146 countries.**

- Nepal (84), Bangladesh (94), Pakistan (121) and Sri Lanka (127) managed to get better ranks in the list.

- The Happiness report also stated that India was one among the countries that witnessed, over the past 10 years, a fall in life evaluations by more than a full point on the 0 to 10 scale.

Interconnections between law, governance and happiness: Why do these connections matter?

- Happiness has come to be accepted as a goal of public policy. And this discourse has given a fillip to a new narrative where the interconnections between law, governance and happiness are being searched.

- Experiences from several nations confirm that the countries with higher GDP and higher per capita income are not necessarily the happiest countries and there exists a link between the state of happiness and rule of law.

The WHRs, over the years, confirmed that people tend to have:

- Poor mental health.

- A low score of subjective well-being.

- Poor perception about the governance and law and order, despite high income levels.

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ENVIRONMENT

Yamuna river pollution:

Context: According to estimates made by **the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB),** Delhi generates 3,800 million litres of sewage per day. NMCG is looking into ways to prevent this.

Background: The over 1,300-km-long **Yamuna** is among the most polluted rivers in the country and also provides water to more than half of the national capital.

- Just 2% or 22 km of Yamuna falls in Delhi, but 98 % of pollution in the Yamuna comes from the national capital due to untreated or semi-treated industrial effluents or sewage that is being discharged into the river in the 22 km stretch.

Why is Yamuna so polluted?

1. **The sewage treatment plants** of Delhi are major contributors of the Pollutants being discharged in the river.
2. **Pollutants discharge** from different types of industry is also a major issue.
3. **Agriculture activities** along the banks of the river in Delhi contributes to river pollution.
4. **Agricultural waste and pesticide discharge** from the Haryana field also contributes to the pollution.
5. **The low volume of water flow** in the river causes the pollutants to accumulate and raise the pollution level.

About Yamuna River:

- The river Yamuna is a major tributary of river Ganges.
- Originates from the Yamunotri glacier near Bandarpoonch peaks in the Mussoorie range of the lower Himalayas in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
- It meets the Ganges at the Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh after flowing through Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi.
- Tributaries: Chambal, Sindh, Betwa and Ken.
-

Rejuvenation Of 13 Major Rivers Through Forestry Interventions:

Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate Change and Union Minister of Jal Shakti has released **the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs)** on Rejuvenation of thirteen Major Rivers through Forestry Interventions.

- **The rivers identified for forestry interventions include** Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, Luni, Narmada, Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna, and Cauvery.
- The 13 rivers collectively represent **45% of the geographical area of the country.**
- **Funded by:** The project will be funded by the National Afforestation and Eco-development Board.

The river rejuvenation project seeks to achieve the following four goals:

1. Sustainable management of rivers and their landscapes.
2. Biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration.
3. Improving sustainable livelihoods.
4. Knowledge management.

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What is Extinction Rebellion?

Context: World over activists of Extinction Rebellion are staging protests in various formats.

What is the Extinction Rebellion, also referred to as 'XR'?

- Initially, launched in the United Kingdom on October 31, 2018, as a response to a report by **the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).**

- Now, it is a global movement which seeks to "rebel", and asks groups to "self-organise", without the need for anyone's permission, to come up with collective action plans as long as they adhere to the group's core principles and values.

- It is a decentralised, international and politically non-partisan movement using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The group has **"three core demands" of governments around the world.**

- It wants governments to "Tell the Truth", to "Act Now", and to "Go Beyond Politics" in order to confront the climate and ecological emergency that the world is faced with.

What activities have XR done so far?

- The group had announced **a "Declaration of Rebellion"** at launch, involving a public act of civil disobedience in London, demanding that the government reduce carbon emission to zero by 2025.

- The eventual plan was to coordinate actions in other countries and to engage in an "International Rebellion" in March 2019.

- The XR global website, however, states that the movement is "strictly non-violent", and that they are "reluctant law-breakers".

- In April 2019, Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish climate activist, lent her support to the group by speaking to its members in London.

XR and India:

- The movement claims to have been inspired by 15 major civil disobedience movements around the world, including, apart from Women's Suffrage and the Arab Spring, India's struggle for Independence.

- It refers to Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March in 1930.

- XR's website says there are 19 groups in the country, including in the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and Chennai.

First cyclone of 2022 named Asani:

- A low pressure area that formed over the **southwest Indian Ocean** is expected to intensify into a cyclone this week.

- The Cyclone has been named The **name was suggested by India's southern neighbour Sri Lanka.**

- It is expected to travel along and off the coast of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands before it intensifies into a depression.

Cheetah reintroduction project:

Context: The cheetah, which became extinct in India after Independence, is all set to return with the Union Government launching an action plan.

Under **the 'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India'**, 50 of these big cats will be introduced in the next five years.

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- The action plan was launched at the 19th meeting of **the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.

What is reintroduction and why reintroduce Cheetah now?

- 'Reintroduction' of a species means releasing it in an area where it is capable of surviving.

- Reintroductions of large carnivores have increasingly been recognised as a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions.

- The cheetah is the only large carnivore that has been extirpated, mainly by over-hunting in India in historical times.

- India now has the economic ability to consider restoring its lost natural heritage for ethical as well as ecological reasons.

Facts:

- The cheetah, **Acinonyx jubatus,** is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to **the Miocene era**.

- The cheetah is also **the world's fastest land mammal.**

- **African Cheetah** is listed as **vulnerable in IUCN red listed species.**

- The country's last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.

- The Asiatic cheetah is classified as **a "critically endangered" species** by the IUCN Red List, and is believed to survive only in Iran.

Cheetah reintroduction programme in India:

The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹260-crore cheetah re-introduction project seven years ago.

- India has plans to reintroduce cheetahs at the **Kuno National Park** in Sheopur and Morena districts of **Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior-Chambal region.**

- This could be the world's first inter-continental cheetah translocation project.

Reasons for extinction:

- The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man's interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.

- The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse.

- With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.

What has the Supreme Court said?

The 2013 order of the Supreme Court quashed plans to introduce African cheetahs in India and more specifically at Kuno national park in Madhya Pradesh.

- African cheetahs are not required to perform the role of the top predator in these habitats when the site (Kuno) that they have identified already has a resident population of leopards, transient tigers and is also the site for the translocation of Asiatic lions as ordered by the Supreme Court.

- Last year (2021), the Supreme Court lifted its seven-year-long stay on a proposal to introduce African Cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

What are White Phosphorus bombs?

Context: Allegations of **white phosphorus munitions** being used by Russia and Ukraine are emerging.

What is white phosphorus?

- It is **a colourless, white or yellow, waxy solid.**

<u>Occurrence</u>: **It does not occur naturally.** It is **manufactured using phosphate rocks.**

- It is **a highly combustible substance** that reacts with oxygen in the air.

- It can catch fire at temperatures as low as 10 to 15 degrees above room temperature.

- Due to its combustible nature, every country has strict regulations regarding its manufacturing and handling.

Applications:

It is used mainly in the military, and other applications may include as a component in fertilisers, food additives and cleaning compounds. Initially, it was also used in pesticides and fireworks, but many countries have banned its use in several sectors.

Is White Phosphorus an incendiary or chemical weapon?

WP has **not been categorised as an incendiary or chemical weapon by international agencies.**

- The **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons,** which is an intergovernmental organisation and the implementing body for **the Chemical Weapons Convention,** has **not listed WP in any of the three Schedules of Chemical Weapons.**

However, **the United Nations considers it as an incendiary chemical.**

The general regulations of Protocol III on **Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons** may apply when it is used in military actions.

- **Protocol III** specifically mentions it is not applicable on munitions that are illuminants, tracers, smoke or signalling systems thus making it confusing for many if the use of WP can be considered a war crime or not. **Protocol III** specifically does not ban the use of White Phosphorous in military action. It only restricts its use near the civilian population.

Concerns:

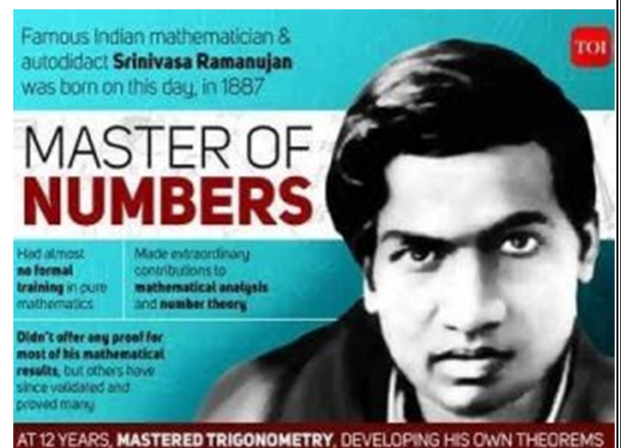The main reason behind WP being considered incendiary is its effect on humans.

- When WP comes in contact with the human skin, it can cause both thermal and chemical burns.

- It can produce several chemicals when it comes in contact with the skin, such as phosphorus pentoxide that reacts with water in the skin and produces phosphoric acid that is highly corrosive.

National Mathematics Day?

Context: Celebrated every year on **December 22.**

It is **observed to honor the birth anniversary of the famous mathematician <u>Srinivasa Ramanujan</u>** who greatly contributed towards mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series and continued fractions.

- 2021 marks **134th birth anniversary of Dr Ramanujan.**

Famous Indian mathematician & autodidact **Srinivasa Ramanujan** was born on this day, in 1887

MASTER OF NUMBERS

Had almost **no formal training** in pure mathematics

Made extraordinary **contributions to mathematical analysis** and **number theory**

Didn't offer any proof for most of his mathematical results, but others have since validated and proved many

AT 12 YEARS, MASTERED TRIGONOMETRY, DEVELOPING HIS OWN THEOREMS

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Highlights of Srinivasa Ramanujan's life:

- In 1911, Ramanujan published the first of his papers in the Journal of **the Indian Mathematical Society**.

- Ramanujan traveled to England in 1914, where Hardy tutored him and collaborated with him in some research.

- He worked out **the Riemann series, the elliptic integrals, hypergeometric series, the functional equations of the zeta function, and his own theory of divergent series**.

- The number **1729 is known as the Hardy-Ramanujan number** after a famous visit by Hardy to see Ramanujan at a hospital. It is **the smallest number which can be expressed as the sum of two different cubes in two different ways.**

- Hardy observed Ramanujan's work primarily involved fields less known even amongst other pure mathematicians.

- Ramanujan's home state of Tamil Nadu celebrates 22 December as **'State IT Day',** memorialising both the man and his achievements, as a native of Tamil Nadu.

- Ramanujan compiled around 3,900 results consisting of equations and identities. One of his most treasured findings was his infinite series for

Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):

Context: The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is all geared up for the maiden flight of its mini rocket launcher – **Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) –** in May.

About the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):

- The **indigenously developed mini-rocket-launcher** is specially designed to carry smaller commercial satellites into **the low-earth orbit (LEO)** from 200-2,000 km above the Earth's surface.

- It has **a payload capacity of upto 500 kg.**

- Designed **to bolster the agency's partnership with the private sector for the launch of commercial satellites.**

- The SSLV is **the smallest vehicle at 110-ton mass at ISRO.**

- It will take only 72 hours to integrate. Only six people will be required to do the job.

- The cost will be only around Rs 30 crore.

- It is best suited for launching multiple microsatellites at a time and supports multiple orbital drop-offs.

Need for?

Launch of **small satellites into low earth orbits** has become significant in recent years on account of the need for developing countries, private corporations, and universities for small satellites.

- About 15 to 20 SSLVs would be required every year to meet the national demand alone.

What is PSLV?

The launch of small satellites has until now been dependent on 'piggy-back' rides with big satellite launches on **ISRO's work-horse – the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle** which has had over 50 successful launches so far.

- PSLV can launch satellites weighing in the range of 1000 kg. But, it takes **70 days to integrate this launch vehicle.**

- It is the third generation launch vehicle of India. It is **the first Indian launch vehicle to be equipped with liquid stages**

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Coronal Mass Ejections:

Context: Indian researchers have developed a simple technique of separating the constant background of **the Solar Corona and revealing the dynamic corona.**

- The technique has been developed jointly by **the Aryabhatta Research Institute and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.**

What is the technique? (NOT MUCH RELEVANT FROM THE EXAMINATION POINT OF VIEW).

The simple approach of subtracting the constant background can improve efficiency of identification of **Coronal Mass Ejections (CME).**
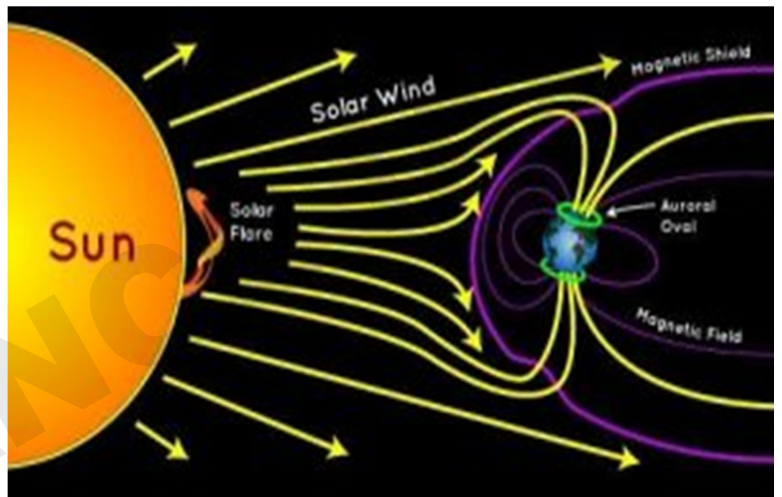
What are Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs)?

Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs) are large expulsions of plasma and magnetic field from the Sun's corona.

- They can eject billions of tonnes of coronal material and carry an embedded magnetic field (frozen in flux) that is stronger than the background solar wind interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) strength.

Speed:

- CMEs travel outward from the Sun at speeds ranging from slower than 250 km per second (km/s) to as fast as near 3,000 km/s.

- The fastest Earth-directed CMEs can reach our planet in as little as 15-18 hours. Slower CMEs can take several days to arrive.

- They expand in size as they propagate away from the Sun, and larger CMEs can reach a size comprising nearly a quarter of the space between Earth and the Sun by the time it reaches our planet.

Impacts:

- They cause radio and magnetic disturbances on the Earth.

- They can drive the Space Weather in near-Earth space.

Gallium Nitride:

CONTEXT: Gallium Nitride Ecosystem Enabling Centre and Incubator (GEECI) has been set up in Bengaluru.

The facility has been jointly set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and IISc Bengaluru. It is aimed at establishing GaN based Development Line Foundry facility, especially for RF and power applications, including strategic applications.

About Gallium Nitride:

Gallium Nitride (GaN) is believed to be the second most important material after silicon for electronics chips.

Properties of Gallium Nitride: High heat capacity, Sensitivity to ionizing radiation is low, faster-switching speed, higher thermal conductivity and lower on-resistance.

Applications:

- GaN is a semiconductor commonly used in blue light-emitting diodes (LEDs).

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- Gallium Nitride Technology is of strategic importance with its application in the field of 5G, space and defense.

- Gallium Nitride (GaN) plays a key role in enabling e-vehicles and wireless communication.

What is ExoMars?

Context: The **European Space Agency's ExoMars 2022** mission has been delayed after the agency suspended all cooperation with Russia's space program Roscosmos.

About ExoMars:

It was **a joint endeavour between ESA and the Russian space agency, Roscosmos.**

- The primary goal of the ExoMars programme is **to address the question of whether life has ever existed on Mars.**

Components of the mission:

The **programme comprises two missions.**

- The first launched in March 2016 and consists of the **Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO)** and **Schiaparelli**, an entry, descent and landing demonstrator module.

- **TGO's main objectives are** to search for evidence of **methane and other trace atmospheric gases** that could be signatures of active biological or geological processes. The **Schiaparelli** probe crashed during its attempt to land on Mars.

- The second, **comprising a rover and surface platform,** is planned for 2022. Together they will address the question of whether life has ever existed on Mars.

Objective:

- The primary aim of the mission is to check if there has ever been life on Mars and also understand the history of water on the planet.

- The main goal is to land ESA's rover at a site which has high-potential for finding well-preserved organic material, particularly from the history of the planet.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY

National Register of Citizens (NRC):

Context: The **Assam Government** has formed a cabinet subcommittee to look into the problem of 19 lakh people, whose names were not included in the supplementary list **National Register of Citizens (NRC),** published in August, 2019.

What's the issue?

The biometric details of these people are locked and could not get Aadhaar cards thereby they are not able to get welfare scheme benefits. Therefore, there's a need to resolve the issue at the earliest.

Background:

- More than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam were excluded from the final draft register published on August 31, 2019, which cost ₹1,220 crore.

- The government had rejected the NRC in its current form and demanded re-verification of at least 30% names in areas bordering Bangladesh and 10% in the rest of the State.

- The Supreme Court had monitored the exercise of updating the NRC of 1951 in Assam. About 19.06 lakh out of 3.3 crore applicants were excluded from the updated draft.

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About NRC:

- At its core, **the NRC is an official record of those who are legal Indian citizens.** It includes demographic information about all those individuals who qualify as citizens of India as per **the Citizenship Act, 1955.**

- The register was first prepared after the 1951 Census of India and since then it has not been updated until recently.

NRC in Assam: So far, **such a database has only been maintained for the state of Assam.**

- The exercise was a culmination of **Assam Accord of 1985** signed between the Centre and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) for detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners.

Why was NRC updated for Assam?

In 2013, the SC ordered the updation of the NRC, in accordance with Citizenship Act, 1955 and Citizenship Rules, 2003 in all parts of Assam. The process officially started in 2015.

Issues present:

- **Lakhs of people** were left out of the complete draft of Assam's **National Register of Citizens (NRC) published in 2018.**

- **As per the Supreme Court** mandated rules, those left out of the draft NRC list had to **mandatorily submit their biometrics during the hearings of 'claims' (to include themselves in the NRC) and 'objections'** (to object to someone else's inclusion) process.

- **27 lakh people** who were left out from the list published in **2018** submitted their **biometric details** and amongst these **only 8 lakh people** made it into the draft list published in 2019. However, these 8 lakh people are struggling to get Aadhaar, and concerned about benefits linked to it

- **Lack of clarity and inability to enjoy the full benefits** emanating from Aadhar has caused significant mental pressure on individuals.

- This situation has arisen primarily due to the lack of clarity over the NRC exercise since the government is withholding assigning Aadhar to these newly added individuals since the **complete and final NRC list is yet to be published.**

Major upgrade for India infrastructure along LAC:

Context: According to the report of the department-related parliamentary standing committee on home affairs:

- **The infrastructure on the Indo-China border** is undergoing a major upgrade, more so in the aftermath of the border row that led to skirmishes with the Chinese troops in Galwan in 2020.

- 18 border roads are already complete and operational, 7 are about to be completed and work on 8 roads under Phase 11 of **the Indo-China Border Roads project.**

- Under **the vibrant village initiative** under **the border area development programme,** development will be pushed in the border villages by building roads, mobile towers, banks etc.
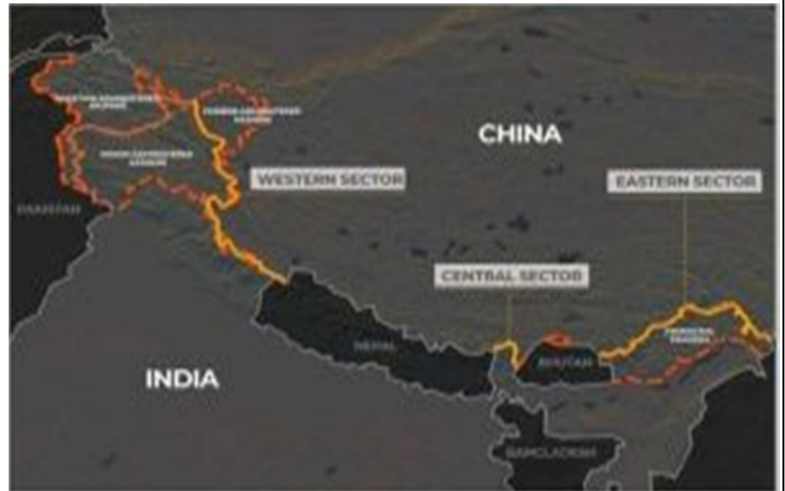

BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE: REALITY CHECK

The 430-m bridge built by BRO over River Shyok, lionking Durbuk & Daulat Beg Oldie, at an altitude of 15,000ft in Eastern Ladakh

AIR
PLAN
➤ Upgrade forward airbases & advanced landing grounds
STATUS | GOOD PROGRESS
➤ ALGs in eastern Ladakh (Nyoma, DBO & Fukche) and Arunachal (Pasighat, Mechuka, Walong, Tuting, Along & Ziro) activated

RAIL
PLAN
➤ Construct 14 'strategic' railway lines on fronts with China (9 lines) & Pakistan (5 lines)
➤ Approved by defence ministry in 2010
➤ Army identified 3 lines in northeast & one in J&K as top priority
STATUS | ZERO PROGRESS

ROAD
PLAN
➤ Construct 73 'strategic' roads (totalling 4,643-km) along LAC for better troop mobility
➤ First approved in 1999. Decided in 2006 to complete all 73 roads by 2012
STATUS | MEDIUM PROGRESS
➤ 35 of 61 (3,417-km) roads under BRO fully completed till now
➤ 11 more targeted for completion in 2020
➤ All 61 roads by Dec 2022

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Why is infrastructure development along the LAC significant?

Latest border tensions with China at multiple points along **the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** are more serious than past incidents, indicating China's planning and the likelihood of a protracted stand-off.

- Therefore, the creation of infrastructure "would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders".

India- China Border:

- **India and China share a 3,488 km long boundary.** Unfortunately, the entire boundary is disputed. The line, which delineates the boundary between the two countries, is popularly called **the McMahon line,** after its author Sir Henry McMahon.

- In 1913, the British-India government had called **a tripartite conference,** in which the boundary between India and Tibet was formalized after a discussion between the Indian and the Tibetans. A Convention was adopted, which resulted in the delimitation of **the Indo-Tibetan boundary.** This boundary is, however, disputed by China which terms it as illegal.

- In **1957, China occupied Aksai Chin** and built a road through it. This episode was followed by intermittent clashes along the border, which finally culminated in the border war of 1962.

- The boundary, which came into existence after the war, came to be known as **Line of Actual Control (LAC).** It is a military held line.

The Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- The BADP was **launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1986-87** as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.

- It was initiated for ensuring balanced development of border areas through development of infrastructure and promotion of a sense of security among the border population.

- The States covered are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.