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# WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

**MARCH 2022**

**4th WEEK**

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## POLITY

### ARTICLE 355

#### Context:

Congress party in West Bengal has demanded that the law and order situation in West Bengal is completely broken and **Article 355** should be invoked to ensure the State is governed as per the provisions of the Constitution.

#### What's the issue?

On 21st March 2022, there was a violent fight between two groups of the ruling party in Bogtui village in Birbhum district.

- The Deputy Pradhan, Shri Bhadu Sheikh was killed and in retaliation houses in the area were attacked and set on fire resulting in 12 deaths including that of women and children. All the members belong to the minority community.

#### What is Article 355?

Article 355 refers to the provision in the Constitution that states that "It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and **to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution**".

There are several angles to the second part of this duty – to ensure that the Government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

#### 1. The law & order angle:

The "public order" and "police" are state subjects and states have exclusive power to legislate on these matters.

#### 2. Alleged justification of emergency:

Although this article has been seldom used; it is seen as an instrument to justify imposition of emergency under articles 352 and 356.

While article 352 empowers the centre to impose emergency when an armed rebellion occurs, such proclamation cannot be for internal disturbance – thus said **SC in SR Bommai Case**.

- So, the Supreme Court interpretation was that article 355 itself does not give power to the centre to impose emergency because mere internal disturbance short of armed rebellion cannot justify a proclamation of emergency under Art. 352 nor can such disturbance justify issuance of proclamation under Art.

### APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF CHIEF MINISTER

#### Context:

Pushkar Singh Dhami recently took oath as the 12th chief minister of Uttarakhand.

- Since, according to the constitution, the chief minister is appointed by the governor, the swearing in is done before the governor of the state.



## Appointment of CM:

The Chief Minister is **appointed by the governor**.

- **164 of the Constitution** provides that there shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at its hand to aid and advise the governor.

## Who can be a Chief Minister?

After general election to the State Legislative Assembly, the party or coalition group which secures majority in this House, elects its leader and communicates his name to the Governor. The Governor then formally appoints him as the Chief Minister and asks him to form his Council of Ministers.

- When no party gets a clear majority in the State Legislative Assembly, the Governor normally asks the leader of the single largest party to form the government.

## Tenure:

Theoretically, the Chief Minister holds office during the pleasure of the Governor. However, in actual practice the Chief Minister remains in office so long as he continues to be the leader of the majority in the State Legislative Assembly.

- The Governor can dismiss him in case he loses his majority support.
- The State Legislative Assembly can also remove him by passing a vote of no-confidence against him.

## Powers and Functions of the Chief Minister:

- To Aid and Advise the Governor.
- The Chief Minister is at the Head of the Council of Ministers.
- He is the Leader of the House.
- He has to communicate to the Governor all the decisions of the council of ministers relating to the administration of the states.
- All the policies are announced by him on the floor of the house.
- He recommends dissolution of legislative assembly to the Governor.
- He advises the Governor regarding summoning, proroguing the sessions of State Legislative Assembly from time to time.

## Insta Curious:

Did you know that Section 11 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, allows the Election Commission to reduce or remove disqualification “for reasons to be recorded”? Know more about this here.



## CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS

### Context:

Aiming to make comprehensive changes in criminal laws, the government has initiated the process of amendment to laws such as Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act in consultation with all stakeholders.

### Suggestions invited:

The Ministry of Home Affairs has sought suggestions from Governors, Chief Ministers, Lieutenant Governors and Administrators of Union Territories, Chief Justice of India, Chief Justices of various High Courts, Bar Council of India, Bar Council of various States, various universities, law institutes and all MPs regarding comprehensive amendments in criminal laws.

### Current concerns/challenges:

1. The delay in disposal of cases was leading to human rights violations of the under-trials and convicts.
2. Despite the Supreme Court's directions on police reforms, there had been hardly any changes on the ground.
3. Court orders convicting a person are also taking years to implement.

### Suggested Reforms:

- Special laws and fast-track courts could replace certain offences under the Indian Penal Code in order to reduce the piling up of cases at every police station.
- Digitisation of documents would help in speeding up investigations and trials.
- The construction of new offences and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence which have substantially altered in the past four decades.
- The classification of offences must be done in a manner conducive to management of crimes in the future.
- The discretion of judges in deciding the quantum and nature of sentence differently for crimes of the same nature should be based on principles of judicial precedent.

### Criminal law in India:

The Criminal law in India is contained in a number of sources – The Indian Penal Code of 1860, the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

- Criminal Justice System can impose penalties on those who violate the established laws.
- The criminal law and criminal procedure are in **the concurrent list of the seventh schedule of the constitution.**
- **Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay** is said to be the chief architect of codifications of criminal laws in India.



## Need for reforms:

1. Colonial era laws.
2. ineffectiveness.
3. Pendency of cases.
4. Huge undertrials.

## Committee For Reform In Criminal Law:

- **The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has constituted a national level committee for reform in criminal law.
- The committee has been constituted under **Ranbir Singh** and several other members.
- The committee would be gathering opinions online by consulting with experts and collating material for their report to the government.

## Previous committees:

**Madhav Menon Committee:** It submitted its report in 2007, suggesting various recommendations on reforms in the Criminal Justice System of India (CJSI).

**Malimath Committee Report:** It submitted its report in 2003 on the Criminal Justice System of India (CJSI).

## **FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS**

### Context:

A Foreigners' Tribunal in Assam's Cachar district has served a notice to a deceased person, asking him to appear before it by March 30 as he had failed to produce valid documents to prove his Indian citizenship.

### What is a Foreigners tribunal?

Foreigners' Tribunals are **quasi-judicial bodies** established as per the Foreigners' Tribunal Order, 1964 and the Foreigners' Act, 1946.

**Composition:** Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) Retired IAS of ACS Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.

### Who can set up these tribunals?

The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered **district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies)** to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.

- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.

### Who can approach?

The amended order (Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019) also empowers **individuals to approach the Tribunals.**

- Earlier, only the State administration could move the Tribunal against a suspect.



## Who is a declared foreigner?

A declared foreigner, or DF, is a person marked by Foreigners' Tribunal (FT) for allegedly failing to prove their citizenship after the State police's Border wing marks him or her as an illegal immigrant.

## SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

### Context:

According to the parliamentary standing committee report on water resources:

- Only 12% of the villages that were supposed to get infrastructure for liquid waste management this year have achieved their goal under **the second phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission**.
- The implementation of solid waste management infrastructure also lagged behind, with only 22% of target villages covered during 2021-22 until February 7.

### Background:

In its first phase, the Swachh Bharat Mission aimed to provide a toilet in every rural household and claimed to have achieved its goal in 2019.

### Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0 (SBM-U):

- To make all cities 100% 'garbage free' from current 70%.
- Ensure grey and black water management in all cities other than those covered under AMRUT.
- Make all urban local bodies as ODF+ and those with a population of less than 1 lakh as ODF++.
- Focus on source segregation of solid waste by utilizing the principles of 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).
- Scientific processing of all types of municipal solid waste and remediation of legacy dumpsites for effective solid waste management.

## MIDDAY MEAL SCHEME

### Context:

Congress President Sonia Gandhi Wednesday made a strong demand for restarting mid-day meals in schools as they open after the long closure due to the Covid pandemic.

### What's the issue?

The mid-day meal scheme was stopped when schools were shut down due to the Covid pandemic. Children were given dry rations during the pandemic and food grains were also provided under **the National Food Security Act**. But for children, dry ration is no substitute for hot cooked meals.

### About the Mid-Day meal scheme:

The scheme **guarantees one meal to all children in government and aided schools and madarasas supported under Samagra Shiksha**.

- Students **up to Class VIII** are guaranteed one nutritional cooked meal at least 200 days in a year.



- The Scheme comes under the Ministry of HRD.
- It was launched in the year 1995 as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP – NSPE), a centrally sponsored scheme. In 2004, the scheme was relaunched as the Mid Day Meal Scheme.
- The Scheme is also covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

### Objective:

Address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.

### The MDM rules 2015, provide that:

- The place of serving meals to the children shall be school only.
- If the Mid-Day Meal is not provided in school on any school day due to non-availability of food grains or any other reason, the State Government shall pay food security allowance by 15th of the succeeding month.
- The School Management Committee mandated under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 shall also monitor implementation of the Mid-day meal Scheme.

### Nutritional norms:

In terms of calorie intake, as per the MDM guidelines, the children in primary schools must be provided with at least 450 calories with 12 grams of protein through MDM while the children in upper primary schools should get 700 calories with 20 grams of protein, as per MHRD.

The food intake per meal by the children of primary classes, as provided by MHRD is 100 grams of food grains, 20 grams of pulses, 50 grams of vegetables and 5 grams of oils and fats. For the children of upper-primary schools, the mandated breakup is 150 grams of food grains, 30 grams of pulses, 75 grams of vegetables and 7.5 grams of oils and fats.

## ARTICLE 371 OF THE CONSTITUTION

### Context:

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu is planning to lead an all-party delegation to New Delhi soon to seek amendment of **Article 371 (H)** which has special provisions pertaining to the state in order to place it at par with special provisions meant for Nagaland enshrined in **Article 371 (A)** of the constitution.

### Other demands:

The special provision with respect to the state should be further strengthened by amending **Article 371(H)** by inserting provisions for protection of religious or social practices of the tribes of the state, customary law and procedure of the state's tribes, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to customary laws of the tribes and including provisos to protect local ownership and transfer of land and its resources.



## This is necessary to protect tribal rights and customary laws.

### What is Article 371 all about?

Articles 369 through 392 appear in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions'.

Article 371 of the Constitution includes "special provisions" for 11 states, including six states of the Northeast.

Articles 370 and 371 were part of the Constitution at the time of its commencement on January 26, 1950; Articles 371A through 371J were incorporated subsequently.

### Significance:

All these provisions take into account the special circumstances of individual states, and lay down a wide range of specific safeguards that are deemed important for these states.

In these range of Articles from 371 to 371J, Article 371I, which deals with Goa, stands out in the sense that it does not include any provision that can be deemed "special". Article 371E, which deals with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, too, is not that "special".

## UGC's Common Entrance Test for Undergrad Admissions

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has announced that admission into undergraduate courses in all centrally-funded universities will henceforth be solely on the basis of a Common University Entrance Test (CUET).

### What does this mean for the students and the universities?

- All 45 central universities will have to admit students on the basis of their scores on the test.
- Class 12 Board Exam marks will no longer be considered.

### What is CUET?

- The CUET will be a computerised test to be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).
- Following the exam, the NTA will prepare a merit list on the basis of which these universities will admit students.
- This entrance test is compulsory for all the central universities and may also be adopted by the state/private/deemed to be universities.
- The entrance exam will be offered in 13 languages.
- International students are exempted from CUET; their admissions will be carried out on the existing supernumerary basis.

### Need for:

- To level the playing field for aspirants as different examination boards in the country may mark students differently (Some Boards are more generous than others in marking and this gives their students an unfair advantage over others).
- It will save students from the "stress of impossibly high cut-offs for admission". Last year, eight DU colleges had set cut-offs at 100% marks for 11 courses.





- It is expected to reduce financial burden on parents and students, as candidates will only have to write one exam.

### About NTA:

In pursuance of the Budget Announcement 2017-18, the Union Cabinet, in November 2017, approved creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.

### Constitution:

- NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by MHRD.
- The CEO will be the Director General to be appointed by the Government.
- There will be a Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions.
- The Director General will be assisted by 9 verticals headed by academicians/ experts.

### Finances:

NTA will be given a one-time grant of Rs.25 crore from the Government of India to start its operation in the first year. Thereafter, it will be financially self-sustainable.”

## PM CARES

### Context:

The Supreme Court has refused to entertain an appeal challenging an Allahabad High Court order which rejected a challenge to the constitutional validity of **the PM-CARES Fund**.

### What's the issue?

- The High Court had dismissed the PIL which challenged the validity of **the PM-CARES Fund and the Prime Minister National Relief Fund** in the backdrop of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- The petitioner had contended that the fund was established without statutory backing and was kept beyond the scrutiny of the RTI Act.

### Issues surrounding the fund and its functioning:

PM CARES has been under a cloud of suspicion ever since it was announced, with opposition parties demanding transparency over the handling of the funds.

### About PM-CARES:

The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund was set up to accept donations and provide relief during the Covid-19 pandemic, and other similar emergencies.

### PM-CARES Fund:

- PM-CARES was set up as a public charitable trust with the trust deed registered on March 27, 2020.
- It can avail donations from the foreign contribution and donations to fund can also avail 100% tax exemption.
- PM-CARES is different from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF).



## Who administers the fund?

Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.

- In 2021, the Delhi High Court was informed that **the PM CARES Fund is not a Government of India fund** and that the amount collected by it does not go to the **Consolidated Fund of India**.

## **MEKEDATU WATER PROJECT**

### Context:

Karnataka Assembly has adopted a unanimous resolution seeking clearance for the Mekedatu project.

- This was in response to the resolution adopted by Tamil Nadu opposing the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project proposed by the State.

### Demand by Karnataka:

- Karnataka Legislative Assembly urges the Central Water Commission and MoEF to approve the Mekedatu project at the earliest.
- The House urges the Central authorities not to finalise the DPR of the Godavari, Krishna, Pennar, Cauvery, Vaigai, and Gundar river-linking project till the share of riparian States is decided and till Karnataka gives its approval.
- It also urges them not to approve the illegal projects of Tamil Nadu and to instruct Tamil Nadu to desist from continuing them.

### Reasons given by Karnataka for taking up the Mekedatu project:

Mekedatu project, the resolution said: “The Supreme Court has modified the judgement of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and prescribed confirmation of release of 177.25 tmcft of water at Biligundlu (water gauge) in a normal water year.

- To ensure allocation of 24 tmcft for Bengaluru Metropolitan city and consumptive use of 4.75 tmcft as per the Supreme Court’s verdict and also in turn provide for hydel generation, the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project has been planned.

### About the Project:

- Mekedatu is a multipurpose (drinking and power) project.
- It involves building a balancing reservoir, near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district in Karnataka.
- The project once completed is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighboring areas (4.75 TMC) and also can generate 400 MW power.
- The estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore.



## DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

### Context:

#### The bill will be tabled in the Parliament.

- It aims to merge the Capital's three municipal corporations — South, North and East — ten years after the trifurcation of the civic body.
- In 2011, the state government had proposed the trifurcation for better efficiency.

### Need for:

- **Problems of trifurcation:** Uneven distribution of property tax between three civic bodies, inefficient management and growing losses, etc.
- **Gap in the resources available:** Trifurcation was uneven in terms of the territorial divisions and revenue-generating potential of each corporation.

### Constitutional Provisions related to Municipal Corporations:

- In the Constitution of India, no provision was made for the establishment of local self-government, except the incorporation of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy.
- The 74th Amendment Act, 1992 has inserted a new Part IX-A into the Constitution which deals with the administration of Municipalities and Nagar Palikas.
- It consists of Article 243P to 243ZG. It also added a new twelfth schedule to the Constitution. The 12th schedule consists of 18 items.

## HINDUS CAN GET MINORITY STATUS IN SOME STATES

### Context:

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking minority status for Hindus in Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Kashmir etc.

### What the plea seeks?

**Minority status for Hindus:** Hindus were a minority in 10 states as per the 2011 Census. Therefore, they are not able to avail the benefits of schemes meant for minorities.

1. Scrap the National Commission for Minority Education Institution Act, 2004: Section 2(f) of NCMEI Act confers power to the Centre to identify and notify minority communities in India. Therefore, it gives unbridled power to the Centre and is “manifestly arbitrary, irrational, and offending”.
2. Violation of Fundamental Rights: Denial of benefits to the “real” minorities and the “arbitrary and unreasonable” disbursements under schemes meant for them to the absolute majority infringe upon their fundamental rights (Articles 14 and 21).
3. Citing Article 30 of the Constitution, the plea said that minorities whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish-administer educational institutions of their choice.

### What has the Centre said on these?

States too have the power to declare any religious or linguistic community, including Hindus, as ‘minority’.



Matters concerning whether followers of Hinduism, Judaism, Bahaimism can establish and administer educational institutions of their choice in the said states and those related to their identification as minority within the state may be considered at the state level.

Minority welfare schemes are for underprivileged students and economically weaker sections of the minority community and are not for everyone belonging to the minority community. These schemes are only enabling provisions so as to achieve inclusiveness and therefore cannot be held to suffer from any infirmity.

### **Several state governments have given minority status to some communities. These include:**

- Maharashtra government has notified 'Jews' as a minority community within the state.
- The Karnataka government has notified Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, Tulu, Lamani, Hindi, Konkani and Gujarati languages as minority languages within the state of Karnataka.

### **Article 29:**

- It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, shall have the right to conserve the same.
- It grants protection to both religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities.
- However, the Supreme Court held that the scope of this article is not necessarily restricted to minorities only, as use of the word 'section of citizens' in the Article includes minorities as well as the majority.

### **Article 30:**

It says all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

### **Special rights enjoyed by religious minority institutions are:**

**Under Art 30(1)(a)**, such institutions enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere.

**Under Article 15(5)**, they are not considered for reservation.

**Under Right to Education Act**, they are not required to provide admission to children in the age group of 6-14 years upto 25% of enrolment reserved for economically backward section of society.

**In St Stephens vs Delhi University case, 1992**, SC ruled that these institutions can have 50% seats reserved for minorities.

### **Insta Curious:**

The Supreme Court, in the TMA Pai Foundation case ruling, had said that the state can introduce a regulatory regime in the national interest to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to achieve excellence in education.

## **NPPA HIKES PRICES OF 800 ESSENTIAL DRUGS FROM 1 APRIL**

### **Context:**

The **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** has announced a hike in prices of around 800 essential drugs from 1 April. These drugs are included in **the National Essential List of Medicine (NELM)**.

- The rise in drug prices works out at around 10.76% based on **the Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**



## Basis:

The clause 16 of Drugs Price Control Order 2013, allows NPPA to revise the ceiling price of scheduled formulations as per the annual wholesale price index (WPI) for the preceding calendar year on or before 1 April of every year and notify the same on the first day of April every year.

## About the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM):

Under the provisions of Drug Prices Control Order, 2013, only the prices of drugs that figure in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are monitored and controlled by the regulator, the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority**.

- Essential medicines are those that satisfy the priority healthcare needs of the majority of the population.
- The primary purpose of NLEM is to promote rational use of medicines considering the three important aspects i.e. cost, safety and efficacy.

## About NPPA:

- NPPA was constituted by the Government of India in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- It was made to fix/revise prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce price and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995-2013 (DPCO).

## **PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN ANN YOJANA**

### Context:

In keeping with the concern and sensitivity towards poor and vulnerable sections of society, the Government has extended the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) scheme for another six months** i.e., till September 2022 (Phase VI).

- **The Phase-V of PM-GKAY scheme** was to end in March 2022.
- It may be recalled that the PM-GKAY has been under implementation since April 2020, **as the largest food security program in the world**.

### About PMGKAY:

During the ongoing crisis owing to Covid-19 Pandemic, Union Government announced Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) providing free food grains to the affected population.

PMGKAY is a **part of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP)** to help the poor fight the battle against Covid-19.

- **Its nodal Ministry** is the Ministry of Finance.
- It was initially announced for a three-month period (April, May and June 2020), covering 80 crore ration cardholders. Later it was extended till November 2020.
- However, in April 2021, the government had announced its decision to restart the scheme as PMGKAY-III.



## The salient features of the scheme are:

- 80 crore individuals, i.e, roughly two-thirds of India's population would be covered under this scheme.
- Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh per health worker fighting COVID-19 to be provided under Insurance Scheme.
- 80 crore poor people will to get 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months.
- 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get Rs 500 per month for next three months.
- Increase in MNREGA wage to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182 to benefit 13.62 crore families.
- Government to front-load Rs 2,000 paid to farmers in first week of April under existing PM Kisan Yojana to benefit 8.7 crore farmers.

## Expenditure:

Government of India will bear all expenditure of over Rs. 26,000 crore on account of food subsidy and Central assistance to states/UTs on account of intra-state transportation etc.

## Challenge:

- A key issue is that the beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act are based on the last census (2011).
- The number of food-insecure people has increased since then and they remain uncovered.

## **CHANDIGARH EMPLOYEES TO BE UNDER CENTRAL CIVIL SERVICES RULES**

### Context:

The Central Government has announced that the central civil services will now apply to the employees of the Chandigarh administration.

- The Union Territory of Chandigarh is the common capital of Punjab and Haryana.

### Implications:

1. Enhancement of retirement age from current 58 years to 60 years.
2. Women employees will now have two years of child care leave from the existing one year.
3. It will have other benefits like an increase in child education allowance.
4. Those with the education department, their retirement age will enhance to 65.

### Opposition to this decision:

The decision has invited sharp criticism from Punjab leaders who, cutting across party lines, termed it "an encroachment on Punjab's rights".

- This is in violation of the spirit of Punjab Reorg Act and must be reconsidered.

### Chandigarh status:

So far, the UT employees were covered under Punjab Civil services rules.



- In 1966, when Punjab was split into Punjab and Haryana, with some territory to Himachal Pradesh, both states claimed Chandigarh as their capital. Pending a resolution, the Centre declared Chandigarh a Union Territory.
- As per the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, Chandigarh was to be governed by the Centre but laws in force in undivided Punjab were to be applicable to the UT.
- In 1984, the Punjab governor was made administrator of the city at a time when the region was battling terrorism.

## Administration of UTs:

Articles 239 to 241 in Part VIII of the Constitution deal with the union territories and there is no uniformity in their administrative system.

- Every union territory is administered by the President through an administrator appointed by him.

## Power of parliament to make laws:

- The Parliament can make laws on any subject of the three lists (including the State List) for the union territories.
- The President can make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu.
- A regulation made by the President has the same force and effect as an act of Parliament.

## **CRIMINAL PROCEDURE BILL**

### Context:

The **Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill** has been introduced in the Lok Sabha.

- After the introduction, the Opposition sought a division, resulting in 120 votes in favour and 58 votes against the Bill.

### Key Provisions:

1. It seeks to repeal the Identification of Prisoners Act 1920. The said Act, in its present form, provides access to a limited category of persons whose body measurements can be taken.
2. It authorises law enforcement agencies to collect, store and analyse physical and biological samples of convicts and other persons for the purposes of identification and investigation in criminal matters.
3. The Bill also authorises police to record signatures, handwriting or other behavioural attributes referred to in **section 53 or section 53A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973**, for the purposes of analysis.
4. As per the Bill, any person convicted, arrested or held under any preventive detention law will be required to provide “**measurements**” to a police officer or a prison official.
5. **Any state government of Union Territory administration may notify an appropriate agency to collect, preserve and share the measurements of a person of interest in their respective jurisdictions.**



6. Resistance to or refusal to allow the taking of measurements under this Act shall be deemed to be an offence under section 186 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

### The Bill seeks to:

1. Define “measurements” to include finger impressions, palm-print and foot-print impressions, photographs, iris and retina scan, physical, biological samples and their analysis, etc.
2. Empower the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to collect, store and preserve the record of measurements and for sharing, dissemination, destruction and disposal of records.
3. Empower a Magistrate to direct any person to give measurements; a Magistrate can also direct law enforcement officials to collect fingerprints, footprint impressions and photographs in the case of a specified category of convicted and non-convicted persons.
4. Empower police or prison officers to take measurements of any person who resists or refuses to give measurements.

### Need for and significance of the Bill:

- The Bill states that it is necessary to expand the “ambit of persons” whose measurements can be taken as this will help investigating agencies gather sufficient legally admissible evidence and establish the crime of the accused person.
- The Bill will not only help investigation agencies but also increase prosecution. There is also a chance of an increase in conviction rates in courts through this.

### Opposition:

Opposition members in parliament have termed it as “draconian” and “illegal”.

- It infringed upon **the right to privacy**.
- It violated **Article 20 (3) of the Constitution** that safeguards the rights of citizens by providing that “no person accused of an offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself”.
- The proposed law, that also provides for retaining the people’s measurements for 75 years from the date of collection, was in “violation of **the Right to be Forgotten** enshrined in the **Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution**”.

## GHAR GHAR RATION YOJNA

### Context:

The new scheme was announced by the Punjab Government recently.

### Highlights of the new Scheme:

- It provides for home delivery of foodgrains to beneficiaries.
- The government gives 5 kg wheat to every individual beneficiary per month at Rs 2 per kg.
- The Centre will fund the scheme under **the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013** for 1.43 lakh beneficiaries (comprising 36 lakh families).

### Beneficiaries:

- The beneficiaries of **the Atta-Dal Scheme** of the state government, which is a tweaked version of **the Centre’s Food Security Act**, will get ration at their doorsteps.





- The scheme will be optional and all those who do not want to queue up outside the fair price shops or the ration depots can opt for it.
- There are 1.54 crore individual beneficiaries (in 43 lakh families) of the Atta-Dal scheme in Punjab.

## **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:**

The objective is to provide for food and nutritional security in the human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.

### **Key features:**

**Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS):** The TPDS covers 50% of the urban population and 75% of the rural population, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, the poorest of the poor households will continue to receive 35 kg of food grains per household per month under **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**.

**Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision:** For a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act, Food grains under TPDS will be made available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains.

**Identification of Households:** The identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs under TPDS determined for each State.

**Nutritional Support to women and children:** Children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years and pregnant women and lactating mothers will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Malnourished children up to the age of 6 have been prescribed for higher nutritional norms.

**Maternity Benefit:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be receiving maternity benefit of Rs. 6,000.

**Women Empowerment:** For the purpose of issuing of ration cards, eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above is to be the head of the household.

**Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Grievance redressal mechanism available at the District and State levels.

**Cost of transportation & handling of food grains and Fair Price Shop (FPS) Dealers' margin:** the expenditure incurred by the state on transportation of food grains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers' margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose and assistance to states will be provided by the Central Government to meet the above expenditure.

**Transparency and Accountability:** In order to ensure transparency and accountability, provisions have been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, **social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees.**

**Food Security Allowance:** In case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals, there is a provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries.

**Penalty:** If the public servant or authority fails to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer, penalty will be imposed by the State Food Commission according to the provision.



## DELIMITATION COMMISSION

### Context:

A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court by two Kashmir residents challenging the Centre's decision to constitute **the delimitation commission** for redrawing the assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

### What's the issue?

The plea sought declaration that the increase of number of seats from 107 to 114 (including 24 seats in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) in Jammu & Kashmir is Ultra vires the Constitutional Provisions such as **Articles 14, 81, 82, 170, 330 and 332 and Statutory Provisions particularly under Section 63 of the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.**

- The plea said that while **Article 170 of the Constitution of India** provides that **the next delimitation in the country will be taken up after 2026** then why has the UT of Jammu and Kashmir been singled out?

### When the was Delimitation Commission set up?

On March 6, 2020, **the Union Government, Ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative Department)** had issued a notification in exercise of power under **Section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002**, constituting a Delimitation Commission, with **former Supreme Court judge (Retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai as Chairperson**, for the purpose of delimitation of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies **in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland**, for a period of one year.

### Constitutional Provisions:

- Under **Article 82**, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.
- Under **Article 170**, States also get divided into territorial constituencies as per Delimitation Act after every Census.

### Insta Curious:

The last Delimitation Commission was set up on July 12, 2002, in exercise of powers conferred by Section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002, after the 2001 Census to carry out the exercise throughout the country.

## NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

### Context:

In a move to make legal aid more accessible for women, **the National Commission for Women (NCW)** in collaboration with **Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLISA)** has launched a **legal aid clinic** which will act as a single-window facility for resolving grievances of women by offering them free legal assistance.

- NCW is also planning to set up similar legal services clinics in other State Commissions for Women.

### About the legal aid clinic:

Under the new legal aid clinic, counseling will be provided for walk-in complainants, women in distress will be given legal assistance, advice and information on various schemes of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)/ DSLISA, assistance in mahila jansunwai, free legal aid, hearings in matrimonial cases and other complaints registered with the Commission will be provided among other services.



## About NCW:

- Set up in 1992 under the National Commission Act.
- It was established to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women.
- It enjoys all the powers of a civil court.

## Presentation of Reports:

It table reports to the central government, every year and at such other times as the commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.

## Suo motu notice:

It looks into complaints, and takes Suo Motto notice of matters relating to – deprivation of women's rights, Non-implementation of the laws and Non-compliance of the policy decisions guaranteeing the welfare for women society.

## Major limitations of National Commission for Women making it toothless:

1. The NCW is **only recommendatory** and has no power to enforce its decisions.
2. Commission **lacks constitutional status**, and thus has **no legal powers to summon police officers or witnesses**.
3. It has **no power to take legal actions** against the **Internal Complaint Committees** that prevent grievance redressal of women facing harassment.
4. **Financial assistance** provided to the Commission is very less to cater to its needs.
5. **It does not have the power to choose its own members**. The power selecting members is vested with the Union government leading to political interference at various levels.

## **RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN**

### Context:

In the absence of a central law, several local courts have ruled recently that **the right to be forgotten, or to be left alone, is inherent to the right to privacy**, which was recognised as a **fundamental right by India's Supreme Court in 2017 (Puttaswamy Judgment)**.

- It has become a hot-button issue worldwide with the explosive growth in social media and other online platforms, but few countries have legislation that enshrines it.
- A long-awaited **data protection bill** addresses the right to be forgotten.

### Background:

In December, the Centre told the Delhi High Court that **"right to be forgotten" is part of the fundamental right to privacy**, but added it has no significant role to play in the matter.

- Petitions across courts have been seeking enforcement of this "right" — a legal principle that is not yet backed by statute in India.

### What is the right to be forgotten?

It allows a person to seek deletion of private information from the Internet. The concept has found recognition in some jurisdictions abroad, particularly the European Union.



## What is the 'Right to be Forgotten' in the Indian context?

- The Right to be Forgotten falls under the purview of an individual's right to privacy, which is governed by the Personal Data Protection Bill that is yet to be passed by Parliament.
- In 2017, the **Right to Privacy was declared a fundamental right (under Article 21)** by the Supreme Court in its landmark verdict (Puttuswamy case).
- The court said at the time that "the right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution".

## Need for its recognition:

At least eight petitions are pending before Delhi High Court seeking removal of private information from the Internet, court records of previous convictions and proceedings, and news reports of past events. Only a few have been able to get that relief from courts so far.

## Which countries have such laws?

- European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Russia in 2015 enacted a law that allows users to force a search engine to remove links to personal information on grounds of irrelevancy, inaccuracy and violation of law.
- The right to be forgotten is also recognised to some extent in Turkey and Siberia, while courts in Spain and England have ruled on the subject.

## **PM-YUVA SCHEME**

### Context:

The Government has decided that the **books selected under the PM-YUVA Scheme are translated into different Indian languages** to ensure the exchange of Indian culture and literature in order to promote 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.

### What is PM Yuva Yojana?

**Pradhan Mantri – Mentorships's Scheme for Young writers (PM-YUVA)** has been launched by the Ministry of Education on 29 May 2021 **for young writers up to the age of 30 years.**

- Aim of this scheme is **to create young aspiring writers** into skilled writers representing the rich heritage of India.
- **Through the scheme**, new writers will be allowed to participate and become future writers through a mentorship program.

### Key objectives of the scheme are:

1. Engage youth of the country in rich Indian history and culture.
2. Creating a pool of young authors in the country who will be the modern/ young ambassadors of our Indian Literature.
3. Create young learners for future leadership roles to represent the country on an international level.



- To help young authors project their ideas on an international platform, therefore allowing them to promote Indian literature and culture globally.
- Building skilled writers from new aspiring authors in various genres by providing expert mentoring.

### **Implementation:**

The scheme would be **implemented by the National Book Trust** under the Ministry of Education. The scheme would be implemented in a **phase-wise structure**.

- In Phase I**– training, the selected candidates would be provided by the NBT for three months.
- In Phase II**– The candidates selected would expand their understanding and also hone their skills through an interactive process at various events internationally organized, such as book fairs etc.

## **MENSTRUATION BENEFIT BILL 2017**

### **Context:**

For five years, **Ninong Ering**, a Congress MLA from Pasighat West in Arunachal Pradesh, has championed legislating menstrual leave into law.

- In November 2017, as a Lok Sabha MP, Ering introduced **the Menstruation Benefit Bill 2017**, a private member's bill, in the Lok Sabha.
- Now again, as an MLA, Ering has tabled the same private member's bill on the first day of the 2022 Budget Session in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

### **Highlights of the Bill:**

It seeks to provide leave for menstruating school and college-going girls, women in jobs, better facilities for rest at the workplace during menstruation, and better hygiene provisions for women and adolescent girls.

### **Need for paid leave:**

Menstruating can be exhausting and disturbing for women, especially on the first day. Indian states such as Bihar and Kerala already provide the paid leave facility.

### **Significance:**

Given that sanitation and menstrual health are essential components of a woman's life, one can reasonably infer that they also come within **Article 21**, mandating the provision of necessary conditions for women to work with dignity. The case for granting menstrual leave is, thus, a fundamental rights issue and should receive due diligence.

### **Who is a Private Member?**

Any MP who is not a Minister is referred to as a private member.

- The purpose of private member's bill is to draw the government's attention to what individual MPs see as issues and gaps in the existing legal framework, which require legislative intervention.

### **Admissibility of a private member's Bill:**

The admissibility is decided by the Chairman for Rajya Sabha and Speaker in the case of Lok Sabha.



- Its rejection by the House has no implication on the parliamentary confidence in the government or its resignation.

### **The procedure is roughly the same for both Houses:**

- The Member must give at least a month's notice before the Bill can be listed for introduction.
- The House secretariat examines it for compliance with constitutional provisions and rules on legislation before listing.

### **Are there any exceptions?**

While government Bills can be introduced and discussed on any day, private member's Bills can be introduced and discussed only on Fridays.

### **Has a private member's bill ever become a law?**

As per PRS Legislative, no private member's Bill has been passed by Parliament since 1970. To date, Parliament has passed 14 such Bills, six of them in 1956. In the 14th Lok Sabha, of the over 300 private member's Bills introduced, roughly four per cent were discussed, the remaining 96 per cent lapsed without a single dialogue.

## **LABOUR CODES**

### **Context:**

The long-awaited introduction of four labour codes, originally scheduled to happen at the beginning of the current fiscal year, may take at least three more months because all states have not framed rules on them.

### **What's the issue?**

Labour is on the Concurrent List of the Constitution. As many as 23 states have framed rules on the codes. Seven states are left.

### **Background:**

The **four** labour codes are on wages, social security, occupational safety and industrial relations.

- Under these new codes, a number of aspects related to employment and work culture, in general, might change – including the take-home salary of employees, working hours, and the number of weekdays.

### **Opposition:**

- Trade unions, however, have planned to intensify their agitation this week against the codes in the wake of the government's decision to repeal the three farm laws.

### **What are the demands by trade unions?**

The two codes we accepted — on wages and social security — be implemented immediately and the two to which we had objections — industrial relations and occupational safety — be reviewed.

### **About the labour codes:**

The new set of regulations consolidates 44 labour laws under 4 categories of Codes namely, Wage Code; Social Security Code; Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code; and the Industrial Relations Code.



- The Parliament has already passed all the four Codes and it has also received the President's assent.

### **The 4 codes are:**

1. The Code on Wages, 2019, applying to all the employees in organized as well as unorganized sector, aims to regulate wage and bonus payments in all employments and aims at providing equal remuneration to employees performing work of a similar nature in every industry, trade, business, or manufacture.
2. The Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020 seeks to regulate the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments with 10 or more workers, and in all mines and docks.
3. The Code on Social Security, 2020 consolidates nine laws related to social security and maternity benefits.
4. The Code on Industrial Relations, 2020 seeks to consolidate three labour laws namely, The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947: The Trade Unions Act, 1926 and The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946. The Code aims to improve the business environment in the country largely by reducing the labour compliance burden of industries.

### **Issues with these codes:**

- The work hours provisions for regular workers do not provide flexibility to fix work hours beyond eight hours a day.
- The codes have also missed laying down uniform provisions for part-time employees.
- There are also provisions that impact employee wages.
- The labour codes also chalk out fines on businesses for non-compliance of provisions, second offences and officer-in-default. In the current pandemic situation, a majority of small businesses are in no position to adopt and implement the labour code changes.



## ECONOMY

### EXPORT PREPAREDNESS INDEX

#### Context:

NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the Institute of Competitiveness, has released the second edition of the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021.

- The first Index was launched in August 2020.

#### About the Index:

- The Export Preparedness Index is a comprehensive analysis of India's export achievements.
- It aims to identify the fundamental areas critical for subnational export promotion.
- The coastal states have been adjudged as the best performers in the index.

#### How were states ranked?

The index ranked states on **four key parameters** – policy; business ecosystem; export ecosystem; export performance.

- **The index also took into consideration 11 sub-pillars** — export promotion policy; institutional framework; business environment; infrastructure; transport connectivity; access to finance; export infrastructure; trade support; R&D infrastructure; export diversification; and growth orientation.

#### Performance of various states:

- Gujarat has topped NITI Aayog's Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021 for the second consecutive time.
- Maharashtra has been ranked second and Karnataka has been ranked third.

### STABLECOIN

A stablecoin is a type of cryptocurrency that is typically pegged to an existing government-backed currency.

The majority of the dozens of stablecoins that currently exist use the dollar as their benchmark asset, but many are also pegged to other fiat currencies issued by governments like the euro and yen.

As a result, the price of stablecoins fluctuates very little, unlike high-profile cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and ethereum that are prone to sudden ups and downs.

Stablecoins are useful because they allow people to transact more seamlessly in cryptocurrencies that function as investments, such as Bitcoin. They form a bridge between old-world money and new-world crypto.

The first stablecoin, created in 2014, was Tether, which many other stablecoins are mo





## ASSAM-MEGHALAYA BORDER DISPUTE

### Context:

Assam and Meghalaya have partially resolved a 50-year-old border dispute in six of the 12 sectors along their 885-km boundary.

- Both states signed a “historic” agreement for a closure in six disputed sectors that were taken up for resolution in the first phase.

### The six disputed sectors are:

Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pillangkata and Ratacherra under the Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro) and Cachar districts of Assam and the West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and East Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya.

### What’s the dispute?

**Assam and Meghalaya share an 885-km-long border.** Meghalaya was carved out of Assam under the Assam Reorganisation Act, 1971, a law that it challenged, leading to disputes.

- As of now, there are 12 points of dispute along their borders. These include the areas of Upper Tarabari, Gazang reserve forest, Hahim, Langpih, Borduar, Boklapara, Nongwah, Matamur, Khanapara-Pilangkata, Deshdemoreah Block I and Block II, Khanduli and Retacherra.

### LANGPIH:

A major point of contention between Assam and Meghalaya is the district of Langpih in West Garo Hills bordering the Kamrup district of Assam.

- Langpih was part of the Kamrup district during the British colonial period but post-Independence, it became part of **the Garo Hills and Meghalaya**.
- Assam considers it to be part of **the Mikir Hills in Assam**. Meghalaya has questioned Blocks I and II of the Mikir Hills -now Karbi Anglong region – being part of Assam. Meghalaya says these were parts of erstwhile United **Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts**.

### Efforts to solve the dispute:

- Both Assam and Meghalaya have constituted **border dispute settlement committees**.
- Recently, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma decided to set up two **regional committees** to resolve the border disputes in a phased manner.
- Sarma recently said **five aspects were to be considered in resolving the border dispute**. They are historical facts, ethnicity, administrative convenience, mood and sentiments of the people concerned and the contiguity of the land.

### Assam and border issues:

- The states of the Northeast were largely carved out of Assam, which has border disputes with several states. Assam’s border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are pending in the Supreme Court.
- Assam’s border disputes with Meghalaya and Mizoram are currently in the phase of resolution through negotiations. The border dispute with Mizoram recently turned violent, leading to intervention from the Centre.



## INDIA'S SPACE ECONOMY

The estimated size of India's space economy, as a percentage of the GDP, has slipped from 0.26% in 2011-12 to 0.19% in 2020-21.

In relation to GDP, India's spending is more than that of China, Germany, Italy and Japan, but less than the U.S. and Russia.

The Indian space sector has been globally recognized for building cost-effective satellites, launching lunar probes and taking foreign satellites to space.

The global space economy is estimated at ~US\$ 423 billion. Currently, India constitutes 2-3% of the global space economy and is expected to enhance its share to >10% by 2030 at a CAGR of 48%.

## SHRINKFLATION

Shrinkflation is the practice of reducing the size of a product while maintaining its sticker price.

It is a form of hidden inflation.

Raising the price per given amount is a strategy employed by companies, mainly in the food and beverage industries, to stealthily boost profit margins or maintain them in the face of rising input costs.

Shrinkflation is also referred to as package downsizing in business and academic research.



## INTENTIONAL RELATIONS

### EXPORTS CROSS \$400- BN ANNUAL TARGET

India's annual goods exports crossed the \$400 billion mark for the first time ever, buoyed by an increase in shipments of merchandise including engineering products, apparel and garments, gems and jewellery and petroleum products.

#### Key Drivers:

A massive rise in oil prices, across-the-board uptick in global prices of industrial commodities, a resurgent agri-sector and a higher share of manufactured goods are the main reasons behind India reaching the government's annual export target.

Expansionary monetary policy by developed economies in response to the economic impact of the pandemic has also boosted demand for Indian exports.

### BUCHAREST NINE

#### Context:

The envoys to India of **nine Eastern European countries called Bucharest Nine** jointly wrote to acquaint the Indian public with the basic facts on the ground" about the "premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression in Ukraine".

- **The B9 countries** have been critical of President Vladimir Putin's aggression against Ukraine since 2014, when the war in the Donbas started and Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula.

#### What is Bucharest Nine?

The "Bucharest Nine" is a **group of nine NATO countries in Eastern Europe** that became part of the US-led military alliance after the end of the Cold War.

- The B9 was founded on November 4, 2015, and takes its name from **Bucharest, the capital of Romania**.
- The group was created on the initiative of **Klaus Iohannis**, who has been President of Romania since 2014, and **Andrzej Duda**, who became President of Poland in August 2015.

#### Members:

Romania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

- All members of the B9 are part of the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- All nine countries were once closely associated with the now dissolved Soviet Union, but later chose the path of democracy.

#### Functions of B9:

- The B9 offers a platform for deepening the dialogue and consultation among the participant allied states, in order to articulate their specific contribution to the ongoing processes across the North-Atlantic Alliance.



- It works in total compliance with the principles of solidarity and indivisibility of the security of the NATO Member States.

### Insta Curious:

Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria are former signatories of the now-dissolved Warsaw Pact military alliance led by the Soviet Union.

## **BIMSTEC**

### Context:

**BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** completes 25 years of the journey this year that began in Bangkok in June 1997.

- The fifth summit of BIMSTEC will be held in Colombo on March 30.

### WHAT IS BIMSTEC?

In an effort to integrate the region, the grouping was **formed in 1997**, originally with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and later included Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. BIMSTEC, which now includes five countries from South Asia and two from ASEAN, is a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It **includes all the major countries of South Asia, except Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan.**

### Why the region matters?

- Over one-fifth (22%) of the world's population live in the seven countries around it, and they have a combined GDP close to \$2.7 trillion.
- The Bay also has vast untapped natural resources. One-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year.

### Why is BIMSTEC important for India?

As the region's largest economy, India has a lot at stake.

- BIMSTEC connects not only South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
- For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of 'Neighborhood First' and 'Act East'.
- For New Delhi, one key reason for engagement is in the vast potential that is unlocked with stronger connectivity. Almost 300 million people, or roughly one-quarter of India's population, live in the four coastal states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal).
- From the strategic perspective, the Bay of Bengal, a funnel to the Malacca straits, has emerged a key theatre for an increasingly assertive China in maintaining its access route to the Indian Ocean.
- As China mounts assertive activities in the Bay of Bengal region, with increased submarine movement and ship visits in the Indian Ocean, it is in India's interest to consolidate its internal engagement among the BIMSTEC countries.



## BRICS

### Context:

Leading media groups from the five BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have put together a three-month long training programme for journalists.

- The programme was an initiative of the **BRICS Media Forum**.

### About the BRICS Media Forum:

- The Forum was established in 2015 by media organisations from the five countries, including The Hindu, Brazil's CMA Group, Russia's Sputnik, China's Xinhua and South Africa's Independent Media.
- The Forum was "conceived and developed so that it can function as **an independent initiative and set of practical activities undertaken within the broad framework of BRICS cooperation**".

### What is BRICS?

BRICS is the group composed of the five major emerging countries – **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**.

- It together represents about **42% of the population, 23% of GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade**.
- The acronym **BRIC was coined by economist 'Jim O'Neill' of Goldman Sachs in 2001** to indicate the emerging powers that would be, alongside the United States, the five largest economies of the world in the 21st century.
- In 2006, BRIC countries started their dialogue, which since 2009 takes place at annual meetings of heads of state and government.
- **In 2011, with South Africa joining the group**, the BRICS reached its final composition, incorporating a country from the African continent.

## HOUTHIS AND THE WAR IN YEMEN

### Context:

Iran has offered its support for a ceasefire plan put forward by rebels it backs in Yemen's war, saying it could be an "appropriate platform" for ending the conflict.

- The Houthi rebels have announced the proposal and offered peace talks on condition Saudi Arabia stops its air strikes and blockade of Yemen and removes "foreign forces".

### Need for ceasefire:

The Yemen war has killed hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly and displaced millions, creating what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

### Who are the Houthis?

- Founded in the 1990s by **Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi**, a member of Yemen's Shia majority.
- It is a group of **Zaidi Shia Muslims** who ruled a kingdom in the province for nearly 1,000 years.



## What's the issue?

One of the Arab world's poorest countries, **Yemen has been devastated by a near seven-year civil war**, which started after Houthis captured the capital Sana'a, following which **Saudi-led forces intervened and fought the rebels** with the aim of ending Iranian influence in the region and restoring the former government.

- **The UAE joined the Saudi campaign in 2015** and has been deeply involved in the conflict ever since, despite announcing the formal withdrawal of its forces in 2019 and 2020.

## The war in Yemen: Background:

- The conflict has its roots in the **Arab Spring of 2011**, when an uprising forced the country's long-time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy, **Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi**.
- The political transition was supposed to bring stability to Yemen, one of the Middle East's poorest nations, but President Hadi struggled to deal with various problems including militant attacks, corruption, food insecurity, and continuing loyalty of many military officers to Saleh.
- Fighting began in 2014 when the Houthi Shia Muslim rebel movement took advantage of the new president's weakness and seized control of northern Saada province and neighbouring areas.

## Why is Saudi Arabia in Yemen?

Saudi Arabia interfered in Yemen after the Shia Houthi rebels captured Sana'a, the capital city, and the internationally recognised government of President Hadi moved to the country's south.

- The rapid rise of the Houthis in Yemen set off alarm bells in Saudi Arabia which saw them as Iranian proxies.
- **Saudi Arabia started a military campaign in March 2015**, hoping for a quick victory against the Houthis. But the Houthis had dug in, refusing to leave despite Saudi Arabia's aerial blitzkrieg.
- With no effective allies on the ground and no way-out plan, the Saudi-led campaign went on with no tangible result. In the past six years, the Houthis have launched multiple attacks on Saudi cities from northern Yemen in retaliation for Saudi air strikes.

## SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

### Context:

The violations of international law, as well as foreign interference in the disputed waters of **the South China Sea** by China, has led many South-East Asian nations to oppose Beijing's military activities in the area.

- Countries that share the South China Sea, such as Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Taiwan, feel that China's "hegemonic" actions affect their economic prospects as well as threaten sovereign rights.
- The conflict is likely to escalate due to the dispute over undecided boundaries.

### Recent faceoffs:

- Vietnam took a strong exception to the military drill by Chinese forces, as they were carried out in an area that overlaps with Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf.



- The Philippines had confronted China over intrusion in EEZ after domestic pressure demanded retaliation.

## What's the issue?

Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with several Southeast Asian states in the South China Sea.

- China claims almost all of the resource-rich sea, through which trillions of dollars in shipping trade passes annually, with competing claims from **Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.**
- Beijing has also been accused of deploying a range of military hardware, including anti-ship missiles and surface-to-air missiles there, and ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its historical claim over most of the waters to be without basis.

## Where is the South China Sea?

- The South China Sea is an arm of western Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia.
- It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo.
- It is connected by Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea and by Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.
- **Bordering states & territories:** the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

## Strategic Importance:

- This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (**Strait of Malacca**).
- According to the United Nations Conference on Trade And Development (UNCTAD) one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.

## Contesting Claims Over Islands:

- **The Paracel Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- **The Spratly Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei and Philippines.
- **The Scarborough Shoal** is claimed by the Philippines, China and Taiwan.

Since 2010, China has been converting uninhabited islets into artificial islets to bring it under UNCLOS (For example, Haven Reef, Johnson South Reef and Fiery Cross Reef).

## 2016 ruling:

The international tribunal in The Hague in 2016 ruled that the said 'Line' had no legal basis.

However, after refusing to accept the ruling, China continued with its activities including the creation of artificial islands.



## UAE'S GOLDEN VISA

### Context:

Bollywood A-lister Ranveer Singh was bestowed the UAE golden visa on March 29 in Abu Dhabi. He's the latest Bollywood talent to be granted the ten-year permit.

- So far, more than 10 Bollywood actors have got their UAE golden visas.

### What is it?

In 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, thereby enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor and with 100 per cent ownership of their business.

### So, what does the Golden Visa offer?

The Golden Visa system essentially offers long-term residency (5 and 10 years) to people belonging to the following groups:

- investors, entrepreneurs, individuals with outstanding talents the likes of researchers, medical professionals and those within the scientific and knowledge fields, and remarkable students.

### Eligibility requirements (Have a brief overview; need not mug up):

#### For investors:

- A deposit of at least AED (United Arab Emirates Dirham) 10 million worth of public investment, either in the form of an investment fund or a company.
- 60% of the total investment must not be in the form of real estate.
- The invested amount must not be loaned, or in case of assets, investors must assume full ownership.
- The investor must be able to retain the investment for a minimum of three years.
- May be extended to include business partners, providing that each partner contributes AED 10 million.
- Can also include the holder's spouse and children, as well as one executive director and one advisor.

#### For individuals with specialized talents:

The category includes doctors, researchers, scientists, investors and artists. These individuals may be granted a 10-year visa following accreditations granted by their respective departments and fields. The visa also extends to their spouses and children.

#### Eligibility for a 5-year visa:

- The investor must invest in a property of a gross value of not less than AED 5 million.
- The amount invested in real estate must not be on loan basis.
- The property must be retained for at least three years.

#### Outstanding students:

- Outstanding students with a minimum grade of 95% in public and private secondary schools.





- University students within and outside the country having a distinction GPA of at least 3.75 upon graduation.

### Reasons Behind the Move:

The UAE's economy has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic and low oil prices, prompting many expatriates to leave.

- The move intends to **bring them back now and keep the “talented people and great minds” in the Gulf country and help in nation-building.**
- It will **attract talented professionals** from various fields of expertise and further encourage innovation, creativity and applied research, adding to the appeal of a career in the UAE for the world's brightest minds.

### Significance for India:

- It would attract more Indian professionals and businessmen to the Gulf nation and strengthen the India-UAE Relations.
- It will also facilitate the return of Indians who want to resume work after the relaxation of Covid-19-related restrictions, for which India had requested the members of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** in early November 2020.

GUIDANCE IAS



## SOCIAL ISSUES

### **KERALA GOVT ISSUES 'DIES-NON' ORDER**

Hours after the Kerala High Court directed the Left administration in the state to take steps to prevent its employees from abstaining from duty as part of the two-day nationwide strike, the government has issued a 'dies-non' order.

The "unauthorised absence of employees participating in the strike will be treated as dies-non", under Rule 14 A of Part 1 of Kerala Service Rules.

#### **What is dies-non?**

As per Rule 14 (A) of Part I of Kerala Service Rules, the period of unauthorised absence of an officer on account of participation in a strike shall be treated as dies-non (no work, no pay).

#### **Background:**

The strike — on March 28 and 29 — has been called by the joint platform of central trade unions against "the anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national policies" of the central government.

### **RAJASTHAN GOVT'S LAW TO CURB CHEATING IN EXAMS**

The state government has tabled The Rajasthan Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, 2022 to deter use of unfair means in public examinations with strict provisions of punishment up to 10-year imprisonment and penalties in the form of fine up to Rs 10 crore and attachment/confiscation of property.

#### **Need for:**

A fair and reasonable process of selection to posts, subject to the norm of equality of opportunity under Article 16 (1) of the Constitution, is a constitutional requirement.

A fair and reasonable recruitment process is a fundamental requirement of Article 14 as well.



## DEFENCE

### BATTLE OF REZANG LA AND THE AHIR REGIMENT DEMAND

#### Context:

Members of the **Ahir community** have been demanding an **Ahir Regiment in the Indian Army**.

#### Legacy:

- The Ahirwal region includes the southern Haryana districts of Rewari, Mahendragarh, and Gurgaon, and is associated with Rao Tula Ram, the Ahir hero of the revolt of 1857.
- The community was brought into national limelight after the story of the bravery of the Ahir troops of Haryana in the **Battle of Rezang La** in 1962 was widely known.
- The region has traditionally contributed soldiers to the Indian Army in large numbers.

#### What's the demand?

Members of the community have long argued that the Ahirs deserve a full-fledged Infantry Regiment named after them, not just two battalions in the Kumaon Regiment and a fixed percentage in other regiments.

#### What has been the Army's response to the demand?

The Army has rejected the demand for any new class or caste based regiment. It has said that while the older regiments based on castes and regions like the Dogra Regiment, Sikh Regiment, Rajput Regiment, and Punjab Regiment will continue, no new demands on the lines of an Ahir Regiment, Himachal Regiment, Kalinga Regiment, Gujarat Regiment or any tribal regiment would be entertained.

#### Background:

November 18 this year marked the 59th anniversary of the Battle of Rezang La. A memorial was inaugurated on the occasion.

#### Where is Rezang La?

Rezang La is a **mountain pass** on the Line of Actual Control in **Ladakh**.

It is located between village of Chushul and the **Spanggur Lake** that stretches across both Indian and Chinese territories.

It had also been the site of a heroic battle on 18 November 1962.

#### About the battle:

- Troops from the 13 Kumaon Regiment defeated several waves of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1962.
- Despite being heavily outnumbered, soldiers of the regiment fought to the last man standing, under freezing temperatures, and with limited ammunition.

#### Significance of the region:

Rezang La is vital for the defence of the crucially important Chushul. Any invader reaching there would have had a free run to Leh.



## THE GSAT 7B AND INDIA'S OTHER MILITARY SATELLITES

### Context:

**GSAT-7B satellite**, which recently got the acceptance of necessity from the Defence Ministry, will be a dedicated **satellite for the Indian Army**.

- The satellite would help the Indian Army enhance its surveillance in border areas.

### Significance of the satellite:

- The GSAT 7B will primarily fulfil the communication needs of the Army.
- The use of such a satellite would also mean that the Army's vast array of radio communication equipment could come under a single platform.

### GSAT 7 Satellite series:

They are advanced satellites **developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** to meet the communication needs of the defence services.

- The **GSAT 7** satellite has a footprint of nearly 2,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean region.
- The **GSAT 7 (Rukmini)** is India's first military satellite. It provides a gamut of services for military communication needs, which includes low bit voice rate to high bit rate data facilities, including multi-band communications.
- The **GSAT 7A**, launched in 2018, helps in boosting the connectivity between the ground radar stations, airbases and the airborne early warning and control aircraft (AEW&C) of the IAF.

## MEDIUM RANGE SURFACE TO AIR MISSILE (MRSAM)

It is a high response, quick reaction, vertically launched supersonic missile, designed to neutralize enemy aerial threats – missiles, aircraft, guided bombs, helicopters.

This MRSAM version is a Surface-to-Air Missile developed jointly by DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Israel for use by the Indian Army.

## MALABAR REBELLION OF 1921

### Context:

The **Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR)** has deferred its decision on a recommendation to remove the 1921 Malabar Rebellion martyrs, including **Variamkunnaathu Kunhamad Haji and Ali Musliyar**, from the list of India's freedom fighters.

### What's the issue?

- The panel was of the view that the rebellion that took place at Malabar was a one-sided attack on Hindus. Just two Britishers were killed during the unrest and hence the rebellion could not be considered as part of the freedom struggle.
- The subcommittee had recommended the removal of the Malabar Rebellion leaders, mostly Muslims, from the list. This is viewed by some as an attempt to distort history.



## What was the Mapilla rebellion?

The **Mapilla rebellion or Moplah Rebellion (Moplah Riots) of 1921** was the culmination of a series of riots by Moplahs (Muslims of Malabar) in the 19th and early 20th centuries against the British and the Hindu landlords in Malabar (Northern Kerala).

- The year 2021 will mark the 100th year anniversary of the uprising.

## Causes and outcomes of the revolt:

1. The resistance which started against the British colonial rule and the feudal system later ended in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.
2. **Gandhiji along with Shaukat Ali**, the leader of the Khilafat movement in India, visited Calicut in August 1920 to spread the combined message of non-cooperation and Khilafat among the residents of Malabar.
3. In response to Gandhiji's call, **a Khilafat committee was formed in Malabar** and the Mappilas, under their religious head Mahadum Tangal of Ponnani who pledged **support to the non-cooperation movement**.
4. Most of tenants' grievances were related to the security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other unfair exactions of the landlords.
5. The British government responded with much aggression, bringing in Gurkha regiments to suppress it and imposing martial law.

## Wagon Tragedy:

A noteworthy event of the British suppression was the wagon tragedy when approximately 60 Mappila prisoners on their way to prison, were suffocated to death in a closed railway goods wagon.

## **P – 8I**

Navy recently commissioned second P-8I squadron INAS 316 'Condors' in Goa.

The Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 316, will operate four P-8I aircraft procured as part of the optional clause in 2016 in a deal worth over \$1 bn.

The squadron has been named 'Condors', one of the largest flying land birds with a massive wingspan.



## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### APHASIA

It is a brain disorder that leads to problems with speaking, reading and writing.

A stroke, tumor, head injury or other damage to the language centers of the brain can cause aphasia. A brain infection or Alzheimer's disease can trigger it.

### ALOPECIA AREATA

Alopecia areata is a condition that causes sudden hair loss in patches. The condition is developed after the immune system attacks the hair follicles, resulting in hair loss, which cannot be observed easily.

It mostly occurs in people who have a family history of auto-immune conditions, such as diabetes and thyroid.

### WHAT IS EARTH HOUR

#### Context:

Every year, **Earth Hour is observed on the last Saturday of March at 8:30 pm.** And while previously it brought the public out onto the roads to mark the hour, this year the famous environmental initiative went digital as many countries are in lockdown.

**The topic for Earth Hour 2022 will be "Shape Our Future."** This is a pivotal year for everyone and our world. It is up to us to #ShapeOurFuture by raising awareness about the serious issues impacting our world today.

#### What is Earth Hour?

Dating back to 2007, Earth Hour is an annual event **organized by the World Wildlife Fund** that promotes conservation and sustainable energy. During this time, civilians are encouraged to switch off their lights for one hour to help reduce the effect of global warming and raise awareness for climate change and wildlife conservation.

#### Background:

It was famously started as a lights-off event in Sydney, Australia in 2007. Since then it has grown to engage more than 7000 cities and towns worldwide. Today, Earth Hour engages a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues. The one-hour event continues to remain the key driver of the now larger movement.

#### What's the difference between Earth Hour and Earth Day?

Whereas Earth Hour stands as a climate change initiative where people reduce their electricity usage, **Earth Day (April 22)** celebrates our natural environment by inspiring people to plant trees, recycle regularly and keep the planet tidy.

#### Why do we need earth hour?

- Global warming and climate change have dominated the scientific discourse in the past more than one decade. With ever rising population of the world, the climate change has put the humankind at a great risk along with other species.



- Global warming, rising levels of pollution due to ever increasing industrialisation, declining forest cover and rising sea levels are some of the dangers that drastically affect the workings of life on the earth.
- Though the largest polluters are big industries, the WWF tries to make the masses more and more aware about the impending dangers of adverse climate so that they could put pressure on the respective governments to frame environment-friendly policies and laws.
- With Earth Hour, the WWF aims to engage people across the globe to adopt more sustainable lifestyle. Turning off lights for an hour is just an annual reminder that if the world does not mend its ways, it will be heading to a dark age, literally.

## **POLAR SCIENCE AND CRYOSPHERE**

The **Polar Science and Cryosphere (PACER) scheme** has been approved for continuation during 2021-2026.

### **The PACER scheme:**

- Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (PACER) scheme **comprises the Antarctic program, Indian Arctic program, Southern Ocean program and Cryosphere and Climate program.**
- It is being implemented successfully through **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)**, an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

### **What is the cryosphere?**

#### **The cryosphere is the frozen water part of the Earth system.**

- These are places on Earth that are so cold that water is frozen solid. These areas of snow or ice, which are subject to temperatures below 0°C 32°F for at least part of the year, **compose the cryosphere.**
- The term “cryosphere” comes from the Greek word, “krios,” which means cold.

#### **Ice and snow on land are one part of the cryosphere.**

- This includes the largest parts of the cryosphere, the **continental ice sheets found in Greenland and Antarctica**, as well as ice caps, glaciers, and areas of snow and permafrost.
- When continental ice flows out from land and to the sea surface, we get shelf ice.

The other part of the cryosphere is ice that is found in water. This includes frozen parts of the ocean, such as waters surrounding Antarctica and the Arctic. It also includes frozen rivers and lakes, which mainly occur in polar areas.

### **Significance of Cryosphere:**

#### **The components of the cryosphere play an important role in the Earth’s climate.**

- Snow and ice reflect heat from the sun, helping to regulate our planet’s temperature.
- Because polar regions are some of the most sensitive to climate shifts, the cryosphere may be one of the first places where scientists are able to identify global changes in climate.

#### **PACER encompasses the following six components.**

1. Construction of polar research vessel
2. Construction of the third research base in Antarctica



3. Indian scientific endeavours in the Arctic
4. Polar expeditions-Antarctica
5. Replacement of Maitri station
6. Southern Ocean

**Objective of PACER scheme:** To improve our understanding of Polar Science and cryosphere system.

**Major achievements of the PACER scheme in the recent three years are:**

1. Executed 39<sup>th</sup> & 40<sup>th</sup> Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica.
2. 41<sup>st</sup> Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica is ongoing.
3. Clear-air atmospheric observatories containing automatic weather stations, a suite of sensors to measure aerosol and greenhouse gas concentrations has been established at **Maitri and Bharati stations**.
4. **Twenty-three research projects** related to glaciology, marine science, polar biology, and atmospheric science were successfully carried out during 2019-20 Arctic Expedition.
5. **IndARC mooring system** along with Hydrophone system was successfully retrieved and deployed in Kongsfjorden, Svalbard.
6. **Glaciological field campaigns were carried out in six benchmark glaciers** in Chandra basin of Lahaul-Spiti region of Western Himalaya.

## NASA VOYAGER SPACECRAFT

**Context:**

Both Voyager spacecraft are rushing away from Earth and into interstellar space. Yet for a portion of every year, both spacecrafts' distances to Earth decrease.

**Why is it so**

- The answer is that for a few months each year, Earth in its orbit moves toward the spacecraft faster than they're moving away. Earth's motion around the sun is faster than the motion of the Voyager spacecraft.
- Earth moves through space at a speed of 67,000 miles per hour (30 km/s). Voyager 1 moves at a speed of 38,210 miles per hour (17 km/s). Voyager 2 moves at a speed of 35,000 miles per hour (15 km/s).
- So, for a portion of the year, Earth comes around the side of the sun and is speeding toward the spacecraft faster than they're moving away.

Therefore their distances to Earth are getting closer, if only temporarily. They never change their outward motion. It is we who change.

**About Voyager mission:**

- Launched in the 1970's, and the probes sent by NASA were only meant to explore the outer planets – but they just kept on going.
- Voyager 1 departed Earth on 5 September 1977, a few days after Voyager 2 and left our solar system in 2013.





- The mission objective of the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM) is to extend the NASA exploration of the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun's sphere of influence, and possibly beyond.
- The Voyager spacecraft are the third and fourth human spacecraft to fly beyond all the planets in our solar system. Pioneers 10 and 11 preceded Voyager in outstripping the gravitational attraction of the Sun but on February 17, 1998, Voyager 1 passed Pioneer 10 to become the most distant human-made object in space.

### Accomplishments so far:

Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys.

It is the second man-made object to leave our planet.

Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune's mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa's ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

### What is Interstellar space

Scientists use the heliopause to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth's orbit.

### The Heliosphere:

The heliosphere is a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind. That heliosphere is the region influenced by the dynamic properties of the sun that are carried in the solar wind—such as magnetic fields, energetic particles and solar wind plasma. The heliopause marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.

## **GSLV-F10 LAUNCH AND EOS-03 SATELLITE**

### Context:

The GSLV-F10/EOS-03 mission, which lifted off from Sriharikota on August 12 last year failed due to 'deviation in the performance' of the cryogenic upper stage (CUS) of the launch vehicle, a national-level Failure Analysis Committee (FAC) constituted in the aftermath has found.

- GSLV-F10 was ISRO's eighth flight with indigenous cryo, 14th GSLV flight and 79th launch from Sriharikota.

### What is EOS-03

1. EOS-3 was the first state-of-art agile Earth Observation Satellite which would have been placed in a geo-synchronous orbit around the Earth.
2. It was expected to provide near real-time imaging, which could be used for quick monitoring of natural disasters, episodic events and any short-term events.
3. The mission life of the satellite was 10 years.

### What is a GSLV Rocket

1. The GSLV expands to a geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle.
2. The GSLV Mark II is the largest launch vehicle built by India.



- As its name suggests, it can launch satellites that will travel in orbits that are synchronous with the Earth's orbit.
- These satellites can weigh up to 2,500 kg and are first launched into transfer orbits that have a distance from Earth of 170 km at closest approach and about 35,975 km at furthest approach which is close to the height of the geosynchronous orbit.

### **Difference between PSLV and GSLV:**

India has two operational launchers- Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).

- PSLV was developed to launch low-Earth Orbit satellites into polar and sun synchronous orbits. It has since proved its versatility by launching geosynchronous, lunar and interplanetary spacecraft successfully.
- On the other hand, GSLV was developed to launch the heavier INSAT class of geosynchronous satellites into orbit. In its third and final stage, **GSLV uses the indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage.**

### **Geosynchronous vs Sun- synchronous:**

- When satellites are about 36,000 km from the Earth's surface, they enter what is called the high Earth orbit. Here, it orbits in sync with the Earth's rotation, creating the impression that the satellite is stationary over a single longitude. Such a satellite is said to be geosynchronous.
- Just as the geosynchronous satellites have a sweet spot over the equator that allows them to stay over one spot on Earth, polar-orbiting satellites have a sweet spot that allows them to stay in one place. This orbit is a Sun-synchronous orbit, which means that whenever and wherever the satellite crosses the equator, the local solar time on the ground is always the same.

### **INS VALSURA**

President Ram Nath Kovind recently presented the President's Colour to INS Valsura, the Navy's premier technological training establishment.

The President's Colour is bestowed on a military unit in recognition of the exceptional service rendered to the nation, both in peace and in war.

INS Valsura, is a premier technological training institution, of the Indian Navy based in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

### **DARE2ERAD TB**

Union Minister of Science & Technology announced the launch of Data-Driven Research to Eradicate TB- "Dare2eraD TB" by the Department of Biotechnology, M/o Science & Technology, on the occasion of World TB Day (March 24).

Dare2eraD TB will be the umbrella TB program of DBT comprising of following key initiatives:

InTGS – Indian Tuberculosis Genomic Surveillance Consortium.

InTBK Hub- Indian TB Knowledge Hub- Webinar Series.

Host Directed therapies against TB and developing an evidence-based regimen for treating extra-pulmonary Tuberculosis

### **DOXXING**

It is publishing and analysing others' personal information on the internet with a malicious intent that can reveal the person's real identity making them victims of harassments and cyber-attacks.



## ENVIRONMENT

### MANDA BUFFALO

It is found in the Eastern Ghats and plateau of Koraput region of Odisha.

The Manda are resistant to parasitic infections, less prone to diseases and can thrive on modest resources.

The National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR) had, in 2021, recognised the Manda buffalo as the 19th unique breed of buffaloes found in India.

### WAYANAD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The sanctuary is a component of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (5,520 sq km) and is a vital component of the Elephant Reserve No. 7 of South India.

It is the only sanctuary of Kerala where sightings of four-horned antelopes have been reported.

Presence of Egyptian vulture, Himalayan griffon, and Cinereous vultures are also reported in the sanctuary and the two species of vultures, red-headed and white-backed vultures, once common in Kerala, are now restricted to the Wayanad plateau.

The Nagarhole-Bandipur-Mudumalai-Wayanad forest complex is also one of the most important tiger habitats in the country.

The forests of the wildlife division form the major catchments for the tributaries of the Kabini river system.

### WORLD WATER DAY

#### Context:

- **Observed on** 22 March every year.
- **Observed since**
- **Coordinated by** UN-Water – the UN’s inter-agency collaboration mechanism for all freshwater related issues – in collaboration with governments and partners.
- **The World Water Development Report** is also released by the UN every year around World Water Day.
- **Theme of World Water Day 2022:** “Groundwater, making the invisible visible” is the theme for this year’s World Water Day.

#### Water, a human right:

- In 2010, the UN recognized “**the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right** that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”
- The human right to water entitles everyone, without discrimination, to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use; which includes water for drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, and personal and household hygiene.

People are left behind without safe water for many different reasons. Some of them include:



1. Sex and gender.
2. Race, ethnicity, religion, birth, caste, language, and nationality.
3. Disability, age and health status.
4. Property, tenure, residence, economic and social status.
5. Other factors, such as environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, conflict, forced displacement and migration flows can also disproportionately affect marginalized groups through impacts on water.

### Why conserve groundwater?

1. Groundwater reserves are already under pressure as the global population explodes and crop production rises in lockstep.
2. Extreme weather events such as drought and record rainfall — have both made worse by our heating planet — could have another long-lasting impact on how quickly reserves replenish.
3. Only half of all groundwater supplies are likely to fully replenish or re-balance within the next 100 years — potentially leading to shortages in drier areas.
4. The process through which rainwater is filtered through bedrock and accumulated underground can take centuries and varies greatly by region.
5. As climate change delivers longer droughts and bigger superstorms, the extremes of rainfall become more pronounced, impacting groundwater reserves for generations to come.

## **MERCURY POLLUTION**

### Context:

Consensus is building among various stakeholders meeting in Bali, Indonesia, to adopt a **non-binding declaration** that will enhance international cooperation and coordination for combating illegal trade in mercury, a major pollutant globally.

- The Government of Indonesia as well as the United Nations have sought support and commitment from parties to the **Minamata Convention for a Bali Declaration on combating Global Illegal Trade of Mercury**.

### The non-binding declaration calls upon parties to:

1. Develop practical tools and notification and information-sharing systems for monitoring and managing trade in mercury.
2. Exchange experiences and practices relating to combating illegal trade in mercury, including reducing the use of mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
3. Share examples of national legislation and data and information related to such trade.

### Basics- about Mercury:

**Sources:** Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is found in air, water and soil. Released into the atmosphere through natural processes such as weathering of rocks, volcanic eruptions, geothermal activities, forest fires, etc. Mercury is also released through human activities.

**Mercury may have toxic effects** on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.



**Chemical of major public health concern-** Mercury is considered by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as one of the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern.

**Minamata Disease:** A disorder caused by methylmercury poisoning that was first described in the inhabitants of Minamata Bay, Japan and resulted from their eating fish contaminated with mercury industrial waste.

### **About the Minamata Convention:**

- The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury and its compounds.
- It was agreed at the **fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in Geneva, Switzerland 2013**. It entered into force in 2017.
- **Controlling the anthropogenic releases** of mercury throughout its lifecycle is one of the key obligations under the Convention.
- It is a **UN treaty**.
- The Convention also addresses **interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues**.
- **India** has ratified the Convention.

## **DISASTER MANAGEMENT ACT**

### **Context:**

Since March 24, 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been issuing orders and guidelines for the containment of Covid-19 under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

### **Under what section of The Disaster Management Act has the MHA been issuing orders on containment measures for Covid-19?**

It is under **Section 10 of The Disaster Management Act** that the Union Home Ministry has been issuing guidelines for the containment of Covid-19.

**Section 10 of The Disaster Management Act** deals with the powers and functions of this national executive committee.

- This section also empowers the National Executive Committee to lay down guidelines for or give directions to, the concerned Ministries or Departments of the Government of India, the State Governments and the State Authorities regarding measures to be taken by them in response to any threatening disaster situation or disaster.

### **About the Disaster Management Act, 2005:**

- The stated object and purpose of the DM Act is to manage disasters, including preparation of mitigation strategies, capacity-building and more.
- It came into force in India in January 2006.
- The Act provides for “the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”
- The Act calls for the establishment of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), with the Prime Minister of India as chairperson.



- The Act enjoins the Central Government to Constitute a National Executive Committee (NEC) to assist the National Authority.
- All State Governments are mandated to establish a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA).

### **Powers given to the Centre:**

Power bestowed by DM Act on Central Government and NDMA are extensive.

- The Central Government, irrespective of any law in force (including over-riding powers) can issue any directions to any authority anywhere in India to facilitate or assist in the disaster management.
- Importantly, any such directions issued by Central Government and NDMA must necessarily be followed the Union Ministries, State Governments and State Disaster Management Authorities.
- In order to achieve all these, the prime minister can exercise all powers of NDMA (S 6(3)). This ensures that there is adequate political and constitutional heft behind the decisions made.

### **WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT**

THE **2021 World Air Quality Report** was released, the report presented an overview of the state of global air quality in 2021.

- **Released by** IQAir, a Swiss group that measures air quality levels based on the concentration of Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5.

### **Key findings:**

- Bangladesh was the most polluted country in the world in 2021. Bangladesh recorded an average PM2.5 level of 76.9 micrograms per cubic metre in 2021 against the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended maximum permissible level of 5 micrograms per cubic metre.
- Earlier, in 2018, 2019 and 2020 also Bangladesh was found to be the most polluted country in the world.
- The data reveals that not a single country in the world managed to meet the WHO's air quality standard in 2021.
- All over the world, 93 cities reported PM 2.5 levels at 10 times the recommended level.
- Among the cities, Dhaka was the second most polluted city in the world with a PM 2.5 level of 78.1 just below New Delhi which had a PM 2.5 level of 85.1 in 2021.

### **Performance of India:**

- New Delhi continues to be the world's most polluted capital city for the fourth consecutive year.
- As per the report, in 2021, India was home to 11 of the 15 most polluted cities in Central and also in South Asia.
- 35 Indian cities have been listed by the index under the worst air quality tag for 2021.
- Bhiwadi, Rajasthan topped this list and was followed Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.



## Concerns associated with air pollution:

- Air pollution is now considered to be the world's largest environmental health threat, accounting for seven million deaths around the world every year.
- Air pollution causes and aggravates many diseases, ranging from asthma to cancer, lung illnesses and heart disease.
- The estimated daily economic cost of air pollution has been figured at \$8 billion (USD), or 3 to 4 per cent of the gross world product.

## What can governments do?

1. Decrease air pollution emissions.
2. Pass legislation to incentivize the use of clean air vehicles for personal and industrial use.
3. Invest in renewable energy sources.
4. Provide financial incentives, such as trade-in programs, to limit the use of internal combustion engines.
5. Provide subsidies to encourage the use of battery and human-powered transportation methods.
6. Expand public transportation and power with clean and renewable energy sources.

## **LEAD POISONING**

### Context:

Recently, high levels of lead were found in the blood of thousands of children living around the Kabwe mine in Zambia.

### How lead affects children?

1. Lead is a **potent neurotoxin** that causes **irreparable harm to children's brains**.
2. It is particularly **destructive to babies and children under the age of 5** as it damages their brain before they have had the opportunity to fully develop, causing them lifelong neurological, cognitive and physical impairment.
3. Childhood lead exposure has also been linked to **mental health and behavioural problems and an increase in crime and violence**.
4. Older children suffer severe consequences, including increased risk of kidney damage and cardiovascular diseases in later life.

### How it costs countries?

Childhood lead exposure is estimated to cost lower- and middle-income countries almost USD \$1 trillion due to lost economic potential of these children over their lifetime.

### Factors contributing to lead poisoning:

1. Informal and substandard recycling of lead-acid batteries.
2. Increase in vehicle ownership, combined with the lack of vehicle battery recycling regulation and infrastructure.



3. Workers in dangerous and often illegal recycling operations break open battery cases, spill acid and lead dust in the soil.
4. They also smelt the recovered lead in crude, open-air furnaces that emit toxic fumes poisoning the surrounding community.

### Need of the hour:

#### A coordinated and concerted approach across the following areas:

1. Proper Monitoring and reporting.
2. Prevention and control measures.
3. Management, treatment and remediation.
4. Public awareness and behaviour change.
5. Legislation and policy.
6. Global and regional action.

### Conclusion:

It is clear from evidence compiled that lead poisoning is a much greater threat to the health of children than previously understood. Although much more research needs to be conducted, enough data have recently emerged for decisive action to begin – and it must begin now.

### Insta Facts:

1. **Lead in the body is distributed to the brain, liver, kidney and bones. It is stored in the teeth and bones, where it accumulates over time.**
2. **Lead in bone is released into blood during pregnancy** and becomes a source of exposure to the developing foetus.
3. WHO has identified **lead as 1 of 10 chemicals of major public health concern.**
4. WHO has joined with the United Nations Environment Programme to form **the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint.**

## H20000H

It was launched by UNESCO in July 2021, jointly with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and others.

H20000H! is a unique program crafted for Indian school students from Standard 1-8.

### Objectives:

It aims to increase awareness about the limited availability of water, its sustainable use, its conservation, its exploitation and much more.

It seeks to enable the students to share their own experiences and proposals for the protection of the environment.

Divided in three phases, the project aims to spur creativity and raise awareness on water conservation and its sustainable use for students between the age of 6-14 years, by providing training and encouraging them to submit paintings and story ideas for the animated short films.





## PENSILUNGPA GLACIER

- The Pensilungpa Glacier is located in Zaskar, Ladakh.
- It is retreating due to an increase in the temperature and decrease in precipitation during winters.
- The Zaskar Range is a mountain range in the union territory of Ladakh that separates Zaskar from Ladakh.
- Geologically, the Zaskar Range is part of the Tethys Himalaya.
- Marbal Pass and many other passes which connect Ladakh with Kashmir are in this area.
- 13000 feet high Zojila Pass is in the extreme northwest of Zaskar range.

## OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES

- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- They inhabit warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- These turtles, along with their cousin the Kemps ridley turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.

Rushikulya rookery coast in the Ganjam district of Odisha, Gahirmatha beach and the mouth of the Debi River, are the major nesting sites in Odisha.

### IUCN status:

Every year, the Indian Coast Guard's "Operation Olivia", initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.

## PERMANENT BODY CONSTITUTED TO PREVENT ELEPHANT DEATHS ON RAILWAY TRACKS

### Context:

The Union Environment Ministry has constituted a **"permanent" coordination committee** that includes the Ministry of Railways and the Environment Ministry to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks.

### Background:

19 elephants were killed across the country on railway tracks in 2018-19, 14 in 2019-20 and 12 in 2020-21.

### Concern:

Railway collisions were the second-largest reason for the unnatural deaths of elephants despite tracks being specifically demarcated and notified as elephant passages.

### Key measures taken:

1. Setting up of a Permanent Coordination Committee between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.
2. Clearing of vegetation along railway tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots.
3. Using signage boards at suitable points to alert loco pilots about elephant presence.
4. Moderating slopes of elevated sections of railway tracks.
5. Setting up underpass/overpass for safe passage of elephants.



6. Regulation of train speed from sunset to sunrise in vulnerable stretches.
7. Regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches of railway tracks by frontline staff of the Forest Department and wildlife watchers.

### Eco Bridges as a solution:

1. Eco Bridges are wildlife corridors also known as wildlife crossing that are a link of wildlife habitat which connects two larger areas of similar wildlife habitat.
2. It connects wildlife populations that would otherwise be separated by human activities or structures such as roads and highways, other infrastructure development, or logging and farming, etc.
3. Eco Bridges aims at enhancing wildlife connectivity.
4. These are made up of native vegetation i.e., it is overlaid with planting from the area to give a contiguous look with the landscape.

## **WHAT CAUSES CORAL BLEACHING AT THE GREAT BARRIER REEF**

### Context:

Scientists have warned that **the Great Barrier Reef** will face a critical period of heat stress over the coming weeks, following the most widespread coral bleaching the natural world has ever endured.

### About Great Barrier Reef:

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which spreads across a length of over 2,300 km and is roughly the size of Italy, is home to about 3,000 coral reefs, 600 continental islands, 1,625 type of fish, 133 varieties of shark and rays and 600 types of soft and hard corals.

It is a **world heritage site**.

### What are Coral reefs?

Coral reefs are important hotspots of biodiversity in the ocean. Corals are animals in the same class (Cnidaria) as jellyfish and anemones. They consist of individual polyps that get together and build reefs.

### Significance:

Coral reefs support a wide range of species and maintain the quality of the coastal biosphere.

Corals control the level of carbon dioxide in the water by converting it into a limestone shell. If this process does not take place, the amount of carbon dioxide in the ocean water would increase significantly and affect ecological niches.

### Threats:

- Coral reefs are threatened by climate change.
- When the sea surface temperature increases beyond a tolerable limit, they undergo a process of bleaching.

### What is bleaching?

Basically bleaching is when the corals expel a certain algae known as **zooxanthellae**, which lives in the tissues of the coral in a symbiotic relationship. About 90% of the energy of the coral is provided by the zooxanthellae



which are endowed with chlorophyll and other pigments. They are responsible for the yellow or reddish brown colours of the host coral. In addition the zooxanthellae can live as endosymbionts with jellyfish also.

When a coral bleaches, it does not die but comes pretty close to it. Some of the corals may survive the experience and recover once the sea surface temperature returns to normal levels.

## AMARNATH YATRA

- Amarnath cave is a Hindu shrine located in Jammu and Kashmir, India.
- Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims make the trek up to the shrine.
- Location: The cave is situated at an altitude of 3,888 m about 141 km from Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Inside the Amarnath cave, a stalagmite is formed due to freezing of water drops that fall from the roof of the cave on to the floor and grow up vertically from the cave floor. It is considered to be a Shiva Linga by Hindus.

### According to a Hindu religious beliefs:

- This is the place where Shiva explained the secret of life and eternity to his divine consort, Parvati.
- The Amarnath temple is one of 18 Maha Shakti Peethas, that commemorate the location of fallen body parts of the Hindu deity Sati.

## UNESCO'S CITY OF LITERATURE

- Kozhikode was proposed by the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) to be branded as a 'City of Literature' with the help of UNESCO.
- UNESCO's City of Literature programme is part of the wider Creative Cities Network.
- The Network was launched in 2004, and now has member cities in seven creative fields.
- The other creative fields are: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Media Arts, and Music. A city designated as 'Creative City of Literature' must have a sufficient number of institutions taking care of its literary life.

## OCTOBER 5 TO BE DESIGNATED AS NATIONAL DOLPHIN DAY

October 5th has been designated as National Dolphin Day to be celebrated every year as a historic step in creating awareness for conservation of Dolphins.

The decision to designate a National Dolphin Day was taken by the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

## INTERACTION BETWEEN LA NIÑA AND THE WARM ARCTIC

### Context:

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) declared the season's first heat wave and severe heat wave March 11 and the first depression March 3.



- Experts say this is early compared to previous years and may be because of an unexpected climatic anomaly which could, in turn, be linked to **global warming**.

### According to experts:

The reason behind early heat waves, early depressions and the weird dust storms is the continued **persistence of a north-south low pressure pattern** that forms over India during winters when a **La Niña phenomenon** is occurring in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

- The last time we had a La Niña persisting for three years was during 1998-2000 and 2000 also had a cyclone in March.

### Impact of La Niña:

- The sea surface temperatures over the east and central Pacific Ocean become cooler-than-average during La Niña.
- This affects the trade winds flowing over the ocean surface through change in wind stress.
- The trade winds carry this weather disturbance elsewhere and affect large parts of the world.
- In India, the phenomenon is mostly associated with wet and cold winters.

### Larger concern:

If the interaction between the La Nina and the warm Arctic is in fact happening then it is an impact of global warming induced by human greenhouse gas emissions.

### What are the Niño and La Niña?

They are two natural climate phenomena occurring across the tropical Pacific Ocean and influence the weather conditions all over the world.

- While the El Niño period is characterised by warming or increased sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, a La Niña event causes the water in the eastern Pacific Ocean to be colder than usual.
- Together, they are called **ENSO** or El Niño-Southern Oscillation.

### What causes el nino?

1. El Nino sets in when there is an anomaly in the pattern.
2. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America.
3. The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition.

### Weather Changes Because Of La Nina:

1. The Horn of Africa and central Asia will see below average rainfall due to La Niña.
2. East Africa is forecast to see drier-than-usual conditions, which together with the existing impacts of the desert locust invasion, may add to regional food insecurity.
3. It could also lead to increased rainfall in southern Africa.
4. It could also affect the South West Indian Ocean Tropical Cyclone season, reducing the intensity.



5. Southeast Asia, some Pacific Islands and the northern region of South America are expected to receive above-average rainfall.

6. In India, La Niña means the country will receive more rainfall than normal, leading to floods.

### **Insta Curious:**

In March 2022, for the first time in 130 years two depressions were formed. Both depressions intensified into deep depressions and the second one threatened to even intensify into a rare March cyclone.

### **THE FRONTIER 2022 REPORT**

The UNEP Annual Frontier Report 2022 was released recently.

It was titled 'Noise, Blazes and Mismatches'.

#### **Highlights of the report:**

Dhaka has been ranked as the noisiest city in the world which is followed by Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Five Indian cities have been ranked in this list of being among the noisiest cities of the world which are Asansol, Jaipur, Kolkata, New Delhi, and Moradabad.

Irbid, Jordan has been ranked as the world's quietest city and it is followed by Lyon, France, and Madrid, Spain.

### **ONE-HORNED RHINO**

- The population of one-horned rhinoceros increased by 200 over the last four years in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.
- The rhino counts at Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve stood at 2613 comprising 866 males, 1049 females, 273 unsexed, 279 juveniles and 146 calves.

#### **About Rhinoceros:**

- Only the Great One-Horned Rhino is found in India.
- Also known as Indian rhino, it is the largest of the rhino species.
- It is identified by a single black horn and a grey-brown hide with skin folds.
- They primarily graze, with a diet consisting almost entirely of grasses as well as leaves, branches of shrubs and trees, fruit, and aquatic plants.

#### **Protection Status:**

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix I (Threatened with extinction and CITES prohibits international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, for instance for scientific research).

Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I.



## Other Conservation Efforts by India:

The five rhino range nations (India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia) have signed a declaration 'The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019' for the conservation and protection of the species.

The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has begun a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country.

National Rhino Conservation Strategy: It was launched in 2019 to conserve the greater one-horned rhinoceros.

## **SARISKA TIGER RESERVE**

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Located in: This tiger reserve is located in Alwar district, Rajasthan.

It became part of India's Project Tiger in 1978.

Tiger relocation: It is the first reserve in the world with successfully relocated tigers.

It is an important biodiversity area in the Northern Aravalli leopard and wildlife corridor.

It is rich in mineral resources, such as

It is a part of the Aravalli Range and the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests eco-region.

## **ECUADOR GRANTS LEGAL RIGHTS TO WILD ANIMALS:**

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Ecuador, a South American country has become the first country in the world to give legal rights to wild animals.



## CULTURE

### Bamiyan Buddhas

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan has said it would protect the ancient Buddha statues in Mes Aynak, also the site of a copper mine where the Taliban are hoping for Chinese investment.

Previously, they brought down the centuries-old Buddha statues in Bamiyan using artillery, explosives, and rockets.

The apparent change of heart over the Mes Aynak statues seems to be driven by economic interests, with the regime in desperate need of the income Chinese investment in the copper mines could generate.

### The ancient Bamiyan Buddhas:

The Bamiyan valley, in the Hindu Kush mountains and along the river Bamiyan, was a key node of the early Silk Routes, emerging as a hub of both commercial and cultural exchange.

The Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.

They are said to date back to the 5th century AD.

They were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.

They were called Salsal and Shamama.

Salsal means “light shines through the universe”; Shamama is “Queen Mother”.

UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003.

### HARICHAND THAKUR:

On the occasion of the 211th birth anniversary of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the Matua community virtually, during the opening of the “Matua Dharma Maha Mela 2022”.

Harichand Thakur worked among the untouchable people of the Bengal presidency.

He was born in 1812 in Orakandi, Bangladesh.

The family of Thakur was Vaishnavite Hindus who founded a sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism known as Matua.

Members of the Namasudra community adopted this, and they were then also called by the common pejorative name of Chandalas. They were considered untouchables.

This sect opposed caste oppression and later attracted adherents from other communities that were marginalised by the upper castes, consisting of Malis and Telis.

The followers of Thakur consider him God and also call him Thakur, an avatar of Vishnu or Krishna. Therefore, he came to be known as Sri Sri Harichand Thakur.

### MALABAR REBELLION OF 1921

#### Context:

The **Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR)** has deferred its decision on a recommendation to remove the 1921 Malabar Rebellion martyrs, including **Variamkunnaathu Kunhamad Haji and Ali Musliyar**, from the list of India’s freedom fighters.



## What's the issue?

- The panel was of the view that the rebellion that took place at Malabar was a one-sided attack on Hindus. Just two Britishers were killed during the unrest and hence the rebellion could not be considered as part of the freedom struggle.
- The subcommittee had recommended the removal of the Malabar Rebellion leaders, mostly Muslims, from the list. This is viewed by some as an attempt to distort history.

## What was the Mappila rebellion?

The **Mapilla rebellion or Moplah Rebellion (Moplah Riots) of 1921** was the culmination of a series of riots by Moplahs (Muslims of Malabar) in the 19th and early 20th centuries against the British and the Hindu landlords in Malabar (Northern Kerala).

- The year 2021 will mark the 100th year anniversary of the uprising.

## Causes and outcomes of the revolt:

1. The resistance which started against the British colonial rule and the feudal system later ended in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.
2. **Gandhiji along with Shaukat Ali**, the leader of the Khilafat movement in India, visited Calicut in August 1920 to spread the combined message of non-cooperation and Khilafat among the residents of Malabar.
3. In response to Gandhiji's call, a **Khilafat committee was formed in Malabar** and the Mappilas, under their religious head Mahadum Tangal of Ponnani who pledged **support to the non-cooperation movement**.
4. Most of tenants' grievances were related to the security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other unfair exactions of the landlords.
5. The British government responded with much aggression, bringing in Gurkha regiments to suppress it and imposing martial law.

## Wagon Tragedy:

A noteworthy event of the British suppression was the wagon tragedy when approximately 60 Mappila prisoners on their way to prison, were suffocated to death in a closed railway goods wagon.

## KUKI TRIBE

The Kuki people are an ethnic group native to the Mizo Hills (formerly Lushai) in Mizoram.

In northeast India, they are present in all states except Arunachal Pradesh.

The Kuki Rising, 1917-1919' — also seen as the anti-colonial freedom struggle of the Kukis — was fought against the British to preserve their land. During WWII, the Kukis joined the Indian Army to fight the British again.

**Demand for a separate State:** The community today feels that despite never bowing to the British, their contribution in overthrowing the colonialists has never been acknowledged, rather it has left them vulnerable even after India gained Independence.