

**CURRENT EVENTS
AND
ANALYSIS
(August 2020)
PART-2**

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CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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NATIONAL POLITY

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Contempt of Court:

Prashanth Bhushan Convicted for Criminal Contempt of Court

- The Supreme Court of India initiated suo motu proceedings for criminal contempt of Supreme Court and convicted noted Supreme Court lawyer and human rights activist Prashant Bhushan on August 14, 2020 for the two tweets he made on the functioning of the Supreme Court and Chief Justices.

What is Contempt of Court?

- In legal terms, contempt means being **disobedient to or disrespectful to a court of law and its officers.**
- Contempt of court is **a legal mechanism to protect judicial institutions from motivated attacks and unwarranted criticism** as such incidents lower the dignity and authority of these institutions.

Contempt of Court is of two types.

1. Civil contempt, and
 2. Criminal contempt
- Civil contempt is committed when someone **wilfully disobeys a court order, or wilfully breaches an undertaking** given to court.
 - **Criminal contempt** consists of **three forms:**
 - Words, written or spoken, signs and actions that
 - a) "scandalise" or "tend to scandalise" or "lower" or "tends to lower" the authority of any court.
 - b) prejudices or interferes with any judicial proceeding, and
 - c) interferes with or obstructs the administration of justice.
 - Here, it may be noted that fair criticism on the merits of a judicial verdict is not considered as a contempt of court.

Constitutional and Legal Backing to Contempt:

- Article 129 of the Constitution conferred on the Supreme Court the power to punish contempt of itself.
- Article 215 conferred a corresponding power on the High Courts.
- The **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**, gives statutory backing to the above constitutional provisions.

Punishment:

- The punishment for contempt of court is **imprisonment for a term up to six months or a fine of up to Rs. 2,000 or both.**
- The accused may also be discharged if he submits an apology to the Court.

Why was Contempt of Court introduced?

- The objective for contempt of Court is to safeguard the interests of the public.
- **If the authority of the Court is denigrated, public confidence in the administration of justice is weakened or eroded.**

Origin of the Contempt of Court:

- It has origins in British Monarchy when the King of England had judicial powers and he himself delivered judgements.
- Over the centuries, this power was passed on to the Judges.

What is criticism over Contempt of Court in India?

- The definition of criminal contempt in India is **extremely wide, and can be easily invoked.**
- The wide definition of contempt offers scope for **subjective interpretation** and can be **used to stifle freedom of speech and expression.**
- Showing extreme deference to judges does not fit well with the idea of a democracy
- Suo motu powers of the Court to initiate contempt proceedings further complicate matters.
- Even truth and good faith were not recognised as valid defences in Contempt of Court cases until 2006. These were recognised when the Contempt of Courts Act was amended in 2006.

Contempt of Court proceedings in Prashant Bhushan Case:

- Supreme Court lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan was convicted for criminal contempt of the Supreme Court for the two tweets he made on the functioning of the Supreme Court and Chief Justices.
 - In his tweets, Prashant Bhushan was critical of the present Chief Justice and the last 4 Chief Justices.
 - The two tweets are given below.
1. "CJI rides a 50 Lakh motorcycle belonging to a BJP leader at Raj Bhavan Nagpur, without a mask or helmet, at a time when he keeps the SC in Lockdown mode denying citizens their fundamental right to access justice!"
 2. "When historians in future look back at the last 6 years to see how democracy has been destroyed in India even without a formal Emergency, they will particularly mark the role of the Supreme Court in this destruction, & more particularly the role of the last 4 CJIs."

Judgement of the Supreme Court:

- The 3 Judge Bench of the Supreme Court, consisting of Justice Arun Mishra, Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice Krishna Murari, found above tweets as scandalous attack on Supreme Court. These have **brought the administration of justice in disrepute and are capable of undermining the dignity and authority of the Institution of Supreme Court** in general and the office of the Chief Justice of India in particular, in the eyes of public at large.
- The Bench also made the following statements:
- "Free speech cannot be used to scandalise the institution. Unlike fair criticism based on authentic material, attributing motives to judges, who cannot resort to a public platform to clear their names, amounted to contempt and cannot be ignored'.

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- "When criticism tends to create apprehension in the minds of the people regarding integrity, ability and fairness of the judge, it amounts to contempt and not protected under free speech".
 - "Judicial ethics prevents a judge from defending himself against attacks on public platforms. Judges have to be the silent sufferers of such allegations,"

Punishment:

- Prashant Bhushan was convicted for Contempt of Court for his tweets.
- He was punished with nominal fine of Rs.1. In the event of default he would have to serve a three-month simple prison term and would be debarred for three years from legal practice.
- The Supreme Court stated that it is showing magnanimity and not imposing any severe punishment (imprisonment).

Prashant Bhushan's Defence of His Tweets:

During the virtual hearings in the Supreme Court, Prashant Bhushan defended his tweets.

He stated that open criticism of any institution is necessary in a democracy, to safeguard the constitutional order.

On First Tweet:

- He stated that the first tweet was made primarily to underline his anguish at the non-physical functioning of the Supreme Court for the last more than three months, as a result of which **fundamental rights of citizens, such as those in detention, those destitute and poor, and others facing serious and urgent grievances were not being addressed or taken up for redressal.**
- He stated that it was made to highlight the incongruity of the situation where the CJI on one hand keeps the court virtually in lockdown due to COVID fears, (with hardly any cases being heard and those heard, also by an unsatisfactory process through video conferencing) and on the other hand is seen in a public place with several people around him without a mask.
- He stated that expressing his anguish by highlighting this incongruity cannot be said to constitute contempt of court. If it is regarded as a contempt, it would stifle free speech and would constitute an **unreasonable restriction on the right of a citizen under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.**

On Second Tweet:

- Regarding the second tweet, he said that it was his considered opinion that democracy has been substantially destroyed in India during the last six years; Supreme Court has played a substantial role in allowing the destruction of the democracy and the last 4 Chief Justices had role in allowing such destruction. He stated that **such an expression of opinion, however outspoken, disagreeable or however unpalatable to some, cannot constitute contempt of court.**
- It is further contended, that the Chief Justice is not the Supreme Court and that raising issues of concern regarding the manner in which a CJI conducts himself during court vacations, or raising issues of grave concern regarding the manner in which four CJIs have used, or failed to use, their powers does not amount to "scandalising or lowering the authority of the court".

Truth as a defence:

- Mr. Prashant Bhushan also pleaded '**truth as a defence**' for his tweets. The Contempt of Court Act, 1971 allows 'truth as a defence'.
- When truth is pleaded as defence, the party concerned must be given a reasonable opportunity to establish the truthfulness of his act or words or publication or tweet. **Such defence is permitted if words/tweets/remarks are bona fide and made in public interest.**
- Mr. Bhushan pleaded for opportunity to prove the truth behind his tweets. The Supreme Court stated that the tweets were short and the reply filed by Mr. Bhushan in his own defence contained "reckless allegations", which only served to aggravate the contempt.

Legal and Civil Society Luminaries Express Anguish over the Verdict:

- Though the punishment awarded to Prashant Bhushan is mild, it reflected the institution's intolerance to criticism. There is an opinion that the Supreme Court should have shrugged off the criticism.
- **More than 3000 legal and civil society luminaries** (which included former judges of Supreme Court like Justice Ruma Pal, Justice Sudharshan Reddy, Justice GS Singhvi, etc.) issued a joint statement expressing anguish over the conviction of Prashant Bhushan for criminal contempt for tweets. The following are the major concerns and opinions expressed by them.
- The **tweets were a bona fide expression of concern** regarding the functioning of the Supreme Court, which is the **fundamental right of every citizen.**
- The intention of that expression was to urge the apex court to restart physical hearings, particularly of matters of national importance.
- Such criticism, however fiercely expressed, is in fact a plea to the system to engage with these public concerns. Bona fide criticism, especially by a senior member of the bar, must be taken in the spirit in which it is made - to **introspect and thereby strengthen the institution of the judiciary.**
- To hold that such criticism shakes the foundations of the judiciary and needs to be dealt with an iron hand appears to be **a disproportionate response** which could, in fact, diminish the reputation of the Court. If a tweet by an individual is perceived by the judiciary as destroying public confidence in the institution, it speaks **poorly of the judiciary's confidence in itself.** As former Chief Justice Bharucha has said, the **court should have broad shoulders to ignore such criticism even if it thinks it is unfair and unwarranted.**
- Every institution in a democracy has to earn the public's affection and respect, and the **hallmark of a strong institution is its openness to public scrutiny and commentary.** The judgment will have a **chilling effect on people expressing critical views on the functioning of the judiciary. Stifling of criticism by stakeholders does not bode well for any institution, especially the highest court in the country.**

Need to Revisit the Contempt Law:

- There is opinion among the legal experts that there is need to revisit the law on criminal contempt.
- An excessively **loose use of the test of 'loss of public confidence' for contempt of court, combined with a liberal exercise of suo motu powers, can be dangerous.** It can

amount to the Court signalling that it will not suffer any kind of critical commentary about the institution at all, regardless of how evidently problematic its actions may be

- The wide definition of contempt and the suo motu power to initiate contempt are rooted in colonial times and are not sync with modern democracies. The wide definition offers scope for subjective interpretation and can be used to stifle freedom of speech and expression
- The test for contempt needs to be evaluated.
- Contempt test should be whether the contemptuous remarks in question actually obstruct the Court from functioning.
- It should not be allowed to be used as a means to prevent any and all criticism of an institution.

Approach of Courts towards contempt in various countries:

- Contempt has practically become obsolete in foreign democracies though it exists in law.
- Courts in these countries recognise that it is an archaic law, designed for use in a bygone era.
- Hence, its use is highly limited or not used.
- **Canada** ties its test for contempt to real, substantial and immediate dangers to the administration.
- **USA courts** also no longer use the law of contempt in response to comments on judges or legal matters.
- **In England**, too, from where India inherited the unfortunate legacy of contempt law, the legal position has evolved.
- In 2016, the Daily Mail newspaper ran a photo of the three judges who issued the Brexit ruling with the caption "Enemies of the People". (The three Judges of the Supreme Court ruled that Parliament approval is needed to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty to exit from European Union though the proposal was approved in the referendum.)
- Many considered the caption of the newspaper excessive, the Supreme Court judiciously and sensibly ignored the story, and did not commence contempt proceedings.

UK Law Commission Recommends Abolition of Law of Contempt:

- The U.K. Law Commission in a 2012 report recommended the abolition of the law of contempt. It said that the law was originally intended to maintain a "blaze of glory" around courts.
- It stated that while the objective of contempt of court was preventing the public from getting the wrong idea about judges, it also prevents the public from getting the right idea when the shortcomings of judges are not allowed to be criticised.

RESERVATIONS:

Sub categorisation:

States Can Sub Categorise SCs and STs: Supreme Court

- In August 27, 2020, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Arun Mishra ruled that **States can sub-classify Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central List to provide preferential treatment to the "weakest out of the weak"**.
- The judgment is significant as it fully endorses the push to extend the creamy layer concept to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Seven Judge Bench to Decide on Sub Categorisation:

- However, the present judgement of the Supreme Court is contrary to a 2004 judgment delivered by another Constitutional Bench of five judges in the E.V. Chinnaiya case where it had held that allowing States to unilaterally "make a class within a class of members of the Scheduled Castes" would amount to tinkering with the Presidential list.
- Now with two numerically equal Benches of judges holding contrary viewpoints, the issue has been referred to a seven-judge Bench of the court.

Why the Supreme Court Ruled in Favour of Sub Categorisation in the Present Judgement:

The Supreme Court made following arguments to support sub categorisation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

1. The Supreme Court held that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central List do not constitute a "**homogenous group**". There are numerous sub castes in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
2. **Reservation has created inequalities within the reserved castes itself.**
3. **There is a "caste struggle" within the reserved class as benefit of reservation is being usurped by a few.**
4. The question is how to **trickle down the benefit to the bottom rung.**
5. **Caste, occupation, and poverty are interwoven.** The State cannot be deprived of the power to take care of the **qualitative and quantitative difference between different classes.**
6. **Citizens cannot be treated to be socially and educationally backward till perpetuity.** Those who have come up must be excluded like the creamy layer.

On the Powers of States to Sub Categorise:

- The **Central List of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is notified by the President under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution.** The consent of the Parliament is required to exclude or include castes in the List. In short, States cannot unilaterally add or pull out castes from the List.
- **But sub-classifications within the Presidential/Central List does not amount to "tinkering" with it.** No caste is excluded from the list. **The States only give preference to weakest of the lot in a pragmatic manner based on statistical data.**

Right to Equality:

- Preferential treatment to ensure even distribution of reservation benefits to the more backward is a facet of **the right to equality.**
- **When reservation creates inequalities within the reserved castes itself, it is required to be taken care of by the State** by making sub-classification so that State largesse does not concentrate in few hands and equal justice is provided to all,"

Context of Present Judgement:

- The present judgment is based on a reference to the Constitution Bench the question of law involving Section 4(5) of the Punjab Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006. The legal provision in the Act allows 50% of the reserved Scheduled Castes seats in the State to be allotted to **Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs.**

EWS Reservation:

10 Per cent Reservation to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) Referred to Five Judge Constitutional Bench

- On August 15, 2020, the Supreme Court of India referred petitions challenging the 10 per cent reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the general category to a five-judge constitutional bench citing the matter involves interpretation of substantial question of law.

Background:

- Through Constitution (103rd amendment) Act, 2019, the Union Government amended Article 15 and Article 16 of the Constitution of India to enable centre and state governments to provide reservation on the basis of economic backwardness.

Till then, reservations were provided on the basis of social and educational backwardness to SCs (15 per cent), STs (7.5 per cent), and OBCs (27 per cent)

- Through Constitution (103rd amendment) Act, 2019, 10 per cent reservation was provided in government jobs and educational institutions to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the general category.

Criteria for EWS Reservation:

- Persons who are not covered under any reservation and whose family is having annual income below Rs. 8 lakhs.

Exclusions: The following are excluded irrespective of family income. Persons whose families have

- 5 acres of agricultural land and above;
- Residential flat at of 1000 sq ft. and above;
- Residential plot of 100 sq. yards and above in notified municipalities;
- Residential plot of 200 sq. yards and above in areas other than the notified municipalities.

Reservation Challenged:

- Petitions were filed in the Supreme Court challenging the reservations to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) on various grounds.

1. Economic Criteria Cannot be the Basis:

Reservation should not be given on the basis of economic criteria. The rationale behind reservations to certain castes is to address social and educational backwardness not economic backwardness.

2. Breaches 50 per cent Cap:

Reservation also breaches the 50 per cent cap on reservations fixed by the Supreme Court in 1992 in the Indira Sawhney case.

3. Violation of Basic Structure:

The reservation also violates the basic structure of the constitution (Right to Equality: Article 14 and 16).

4. Reservation Cannot Be Limited to General Category:

Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation cannot be limited those in general category.

The Supreme Court refused to pass interim order on the petitions challenging the EWS reservations and reserved its verdict in 2019. Now, this issue has been referred to the 5-Judge Constitutional Bench.

Implementation of EWS Reservation:

- The Central Government is implementing 10 per cent reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in Central Government jobs and educational institutions.
- Over 2 lakh additional seats have been created in educational institutions like IITs, NITs, AIIMS, IIMs, Law schools, etc.
- Implementation in States has been left to State Governments. Amendment to Article 15 and 16 of the Constitution for providing reservation to Economically Weaker Sections are only enabling provisions. State Governments have discretion in implementation of EWS reservation. The same applies to reservations to SC, STs OBCs.
- While SC, STs OBCs has been implemented by States, EWS reservation is not being implemented in all the States.
- Gujarat became the first state to implement EWS reservation. States like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are yet to implement the EWS reservation.
- Tamil Nadu is hesitant to implement EWS reservation as the State already provides 69 per cent reservation. Though 50 per cent reservation was breached, the Tamil Nadu Government under the then Chief Minister Jayalalitha got its Reservation Act placed in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution in 1994 shielding it from judicial review.
- Karnataka is yet to implement EWS reservation as there are already existing demands for increasing reservation for SCs and STs which have also been studied and recommended by Committees set up by the State Government.
- Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are also yet to implement EWS reservation.

PM-CARES Fund:

Supreme Court Rejects Plea for Transferring PM-CARES Fund to NDRF

- The Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) filed Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court pleading for a direction to the Central Government to transfer funds collected so far by the PM-CARES Fund to the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).
- The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund was set up on March 27, 2020 as a public charitable trust to accept donations and provide relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, and other similar emergencies.
- 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.
- The PM CARES Fund collected more than Rs. 3,076 crore in the first five days after it was set up.

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- Publicly announced donations include over Rs. 1,000 crore from public sector oil and gas companies, Rs. 500 crore from employees of the Defence Ministry and the armed forces, as well as Rs. 500 crore each from the Tata Group and Reliance Industries.

What are the concerns with PM-CARES Fund?

- (PM CARES) Fund can receive voluntary funds from public and private organisations.
- Public can also make individual contributions.
- The Fund received huge contributions after it was set up.
- Public organisations and private organisations made huge donations.
- Corporate companies, both public and private, were allowed to make contributions using corporate social responsibility funds.
- Employees of Central Government contributed their one day salary.
- The Fund was also allowed to receive foreign contributions.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability:

- While the PM-CARES Fund received huge funds from both public and private organisations, there is **no transparency** and **accountability** in the functioning of the Fund.
- How much amount is received and how it is spent is not available in the public domain.
- **Requests under Right to Information (RTI) Act** for information on the contributions and pattern of utilisation were not disclosed stating that PM-CARES Fund is not a public authority under the RTI Act and only Public Authorities are obligated to disclose the information.
- (Public authority means any institution or organisation which receives Government Funds through budget allocations of the Centre or State Governments. Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) which receive substantial funding by Government (Central or State Governments) is also a public authority under the RTI Act.)
- The PM-CARES Funds are also **not audited by Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)**.
- Since the PM-CARES Fund is receiving substantial funds both from public and private organisations, the PIL called for transferring the amount in the PM-CARES Fund to the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) so that it can be audited by the CAG and also public can know the utilisation of Fund.

Supreme Court Judgement:

- On August 18, 2020, the Supreme Court rejected the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and **refused to give instruction to the centre for transfer of PM-CARES Funds to the NDRF**.
- It stated that PM CARES was a public charitable trust and there is no reason for issuing any direction to transfer the said funds to NDRF. The fund consists entirely of voluntary contributions from individuals/organisations and does not get any budgetary support. No government money is credited.
- The Centre, however, could transfer PM-CARES funds to the NDRF, if it so wanted, and use them for Covid-19.

Congress and CPIL Express Disappointment at the Verdict:

- The Congress party and noted activist and Lawyer Prashant Bhushan of Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) expressed disappointment at the verdict of the Supreme Court stating that the verdict is a body blow to transparency & accountability of Government to the people. Transfer of funds from PM CARES to NDRF would have ensured transparency and public scrutiny as NDRF falls within the ambit of the RTI Act and is subject to an audit by the CAG.
- Prashant Bhushan stated that it is unfortunate that the Supreme Court allowed **the non-transparent and unaccountable PM-Cares Fund** rather than transferring such funds to the **Statutory NDRF which is accessible under RTI & audited by CAG.**

Rs. 3, 100 Allocation for COVID-19 Management and Relief:

- Recently, Rs.3, 100 crore have been sanctioned from the PM CARES Fund to be spent on **ventilators, migrant worker welfare and vaccine development.**
- But, there is no information in the public domain about the aggregate funds in the PM-CARES Fund.

Official Languages:

Supreme Court Suggests Centre to Consider Amending Official Languages Act

- On August 18, 2020, the Supreme Court of India suggested the Central government to consider amending the Official Languages Act of 1963, to include **scheduled languages** other than **Hindi and English as official language of the Government of India,**
- It stated that people in various parts of the country might not know either English or Hindi and communication by the Central government in vernacular languages will come to their aid.
- Scheduled languages are those languages which are listed in the **8th schedule of the Constitution** and are given official recognition and encouragement by the Central government.
- However, all official communication and publication of rules and notifications by the Central government are in Hindi and English.

Context:

- The Supreme Court made this suggestion while hearing an appeal filed by the Centre against a judgment passed by the Delhi high court directing the Centre to translate the draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2020 into **twenty-two scheduled languages.**
- The Central government submitted that as per **Article 343 of the Constitution, the official language of the Union is Hindi along with English.**
- The Union Government stated that the **Constitution of India does not have any provision which states that all the languages mentioned in the 8th schedule of the Constitution would be used as official languages of the Union.**
- Further, it was also pointed out that section 3 of the **Official Languages Act** states that Hindi and the English shall be used for resolutions, general orders, rules, notifications, administrative or other reports made by the Central government or any of its ministries or departments.
- The Supreme Court after examining the high court judgment observed that the arguments raised by the Centre before the Supreme Court were not raised before the high court.

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- It, therefore, directed the Centre to withdraw the petition before the top court and file a review petition before the high court.
 - The draft EIA notification was issued by the Centre on March 23 and was published on the website of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for the information of stakeholders and public inviting their comments and objections.
 - Environmentalist, Vikrant Tongad approached the Delhi high court regarding the language in which the EIA notification was issued. The draft has been published only in English and Hindi, whereas it is proposed to have effect all over India and to several industries and comments have naturally be elicited from all over the country.
 - The high court allowed the plea holding that EIA notification should be translated and published in all the scheduled languages.
 - The Centre challenged this high court order before the Supreme Court stating that such direction by high court apart from causing **massive procedural and administrative difficulties** is also devoid of any statutory requirement.

EXECUTIVE:

Independence Day Address:

Prime Minister's Independence Day Address

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the Nation on the occasion of the 74th Independence Day on August 15, 2020.

Major Initiatives Announced by the Prime Minister:

Optical Fibre Network:

Every village in the country (around 6 lakh villages) will be connected with optical fibre cable in the next 1000 days.

New Cyber Security Policy:

A New Cyber Security Policy will be unveiled to effectively combat risks to society and economy from the cyberspace.

National Digital Health Mission:

The National Digital Health Mission would be launched.

Every Indian who wishes to have digital health record will be given a Health ID. This Health ID will contain information about medical data, physicians consulted, prescriptions and diagnostic reports, and summaries of previous discharge from hospitals for ailments.

Agriculture:

One lakh crore rupees would be spent for agriculture developing infrastructure. This will result in better prices for the farmers produce.

Special economic zones will be created in rural areas. A web of agriculture and non-agriculture industries will be created.

10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are being created. These will ensure farmers better access to quality input, technology, credit and better marketing access and better incomes.

Push to Infrastructure:

Government is focussing on improving the overall infrastructure for faster development.

Under National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), over Rs 110 lakh crore would be invested more than 7,000 projects.

'Project Lion' and 'Project Dolphin':

India is committed towards the promotion and conservation of its Biodiversity and has successfully implemented Project Tiger and Project Elephant.

The Government announced two more projects: 'Project Lion' for the Asiatic Lions and 'Project Dolphin'. Focus will be on both types of dolphins living in the rivers and in the seas. This will also give a boost to Biodiversity.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS:

Right to Internet:

Parliamentary Panel Discusses Ways to Minimise Internet Disruptions

- On August 11, 2020, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology discussed ways to minimise internet shutdowns in the country and prioritise more logical ways to order an internet shutdown.
- The members of the committee felt that internet shutdowns should be decreased but should be balanced against national security issues.
- The panel's observations came in the backdrop of a high-speed internet shutdown that has been in place in the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir for over a year now.
- The Union Government imposed high-speed internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir on the night of August 4, 2019 just a few hours before the abrogation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and bifurcating the State into two Union Territories: Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2020
- The internet shutdown was imposed in Jammu and Kashmir for national security reasons.

Increasing Internet Shutdowns:

- There is also an increase in the number of Internet shutdowns in the country which are resorted for law and order, or security considerations.
- According to the Software Freedom Law Centre,
- 385 Internet shutdowns were recorded between January 2012 and March 15, 2020;
- 237 were observed to be preventive -- restrictions were imposed in anticipation of law and order problems and 148 were reactive and imposed to contain ongoing breakdowns.
- Of these, nearly 100 incidents were recorded in 2019.
- Most shutdowns were localised, extending to a district or a few districts, and, in the rare case, a state or union territory.

How Internet is a Security Threat in Jammu and Kashmir:

- Internet has extensive reach and impact.
- Social media like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc are used to incite violence and abet terror activities.

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- Many hash-tags are being used in Twitter by Pakistani handles to glorify Pakistan Army, terror outfits and terrorists.
 - Particularly, 4G Internet speed allows swift uploading and posting of provocative videos and other heavy data files. It also decreases the time of circulation of various photographs, videos, propaganda audios.
 - As a result, the reaction time for law enforcement agencies to stop them from going viral would be less. This leads to law and order problems and disturbs peace in the region.

Effect of Internet Shutdown:

- The internet shutdown affects the normal life of people in many ways.
- Educational institutions, Hospitals, businessmen, etc depend on internet in their day to day activities.
- Thus, internet shutdown imposes restrictions on fundamental rights
- Article 19 (1) a: Right to freedom of speech and expression, and
- Article 19 (1) g: Right to carry on trade, business, and profession on internet.
- But, all fundamental rights under Article 19 are subject to reasonable restrictions for protecting public order, security of the state, etc.

Supreme Court Ruling on Internet Shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir:

- The internet shutdown in erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir State was challenged in the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court, in January 2020, ruled that indefinite suspension of the internet is not permissible and repeated shutdowns amount to an abuse of power.
- It also stated that freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to practice any profession or carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of internet enjoys constitutional protection under Article 19(1) (a) and Article 19(1) (g).
- The court also held that the restrictions on internet have to follow the principles of proportionality under Article 19(2).
- The Supreme Court made it mandatory for the government to publish orders suspending the Internet services. Publication of these orders would now enable affected persons to challenge their legality in the Courts.
- It asked the Government to review all the restrictions imposed immediately and stated that restrictions must be proportionate to the level of emergency.

Progress after Supreme Court Verdict:

- 2G and broadband services have slowly been brought back in stages.
- 4G mobile internet continues to be restricted.

Additional Information:

Judgements on Right to Internet:

- The Supreme Court has been expanding the scope of fundamental rights in recent times.
- In its judgement on internet shutdown in erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir State, the Supreme Court stated that Right to Internet is protected under Article 19 (1) (a) and Article 19 1(g).

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- In 2019, the Kerala high court, in Faheema Shirin v. State of Kerala, ruled that Right to Internet is a Fundamental right under Article 21 (Right to privacy) and Right to Education under Article 21 A.
 - The Right to Privacy itself was recognised as part of Article 21 (Personal Liberty) in 2017 by the Supreme Court.

CONSTITUTIONAL BODIES:

CAG:

Issues in the Appointment of CAG

- On August 6, 2020, the Union Government appointed ex-Gujarat cadre IAS officer G.C. Murmu as Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) a day after he resigned as the Lieutenant-Governor of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Murmu succeeded Rajiv Mehrishi who completed his term. Rajiv Mehrishi was a 1978-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre. He will hold the office for a term of six years or 65 years of age whichever is earlier.
- The appointment of IAS officers as Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) has come under criticism in the recent times.

Issues in the Appointment of the CAG:

1. Executive Discretion:

The financial accountability of the Executive to the Parliament is enforced through the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG).

But, the executive (Government) enjoys the exclusive power of appointment of the CAG. It is a strange situation where enforcer of financial accountability of Government is appointed by the Government.

2. Lack of Objective and Transparent Criteria:

There is lack of objective and transparent criteria in the appointment of CAG.

3. Lack of Professional Expertise:

The Government is appointing generalist IAS officers as CAG who **lacks professional expertise in accounting of Government spending**. An IAS officer with no knowledge and background of audits and accounts cannot be expected to give leadership to the complex responsibilities of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department (IAAD). CAG heads the IAAD.

4. Post Retirement Reward:

Retired IAS officers with political connections are appointed as CAG as a **post retirement reward** for the services rendered by them.

5. Conflict of Interest:

The appointment of officers who served in the Government also enforcer of financial accountability also leads to conflict of interest.

Indian Audit and Accounts Department (IAAD) under CAG undertakes evaluation of Government's financial functioning and brings out lapses in various issues like defence deals, poor outcome of development schemes and malfeasance on the part of public officials causing loss to the

exchequer, etc. A person who served the Executive cannot be expected to impartially enforce accountability of Government as the CAG.

Practice in Developed Countries:

UK:

- In the UK, whose parliamentary traditions India follows, the hundred-year-old Exchequer and Audit Act was amended in 1983. The CAG is appointed **only after an address is presented in the House of Commons by the prime minister acting in agreement with the chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts.**
- Before the recommendation is made, a high-level search committee under the chairman, Committee of Public Accounts selects the suitable candidate, after issuing an open advertisement.

Australia, Canada and New Zealand:

- Commonwealth countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand have adopted procedures similar to Britain, and the auditor general is appointed on the recommendation of the Committee of Public Accounts and approval of House of Representatives.

USA:

- In the USA, the president appoints the head of the General Accountability Office on the **advice and consent of the Senate**, which makes recommendations after taking into account recommendations by a commission consisting of members of the House of Representatives as well as the Senate.
- **Germany, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and South Africa:**
- Countries with widely divergent political systems such as Germany, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and South Africa all have legal provisions that the head of the supreme audit institution will be appointed with the **approval of one or both houses of parliament.**

Practice in India:

- The Constitution does not prescribe any criteria and selection procedure for the appointment of CAG. Article 148 of the Indian Constitution simply states that Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) shall be appointed by the President of India.
- So the present criteria in India is the person to be selected as CAG should have been a Secretary to the Government of India.

Suggestions for Reform:

- There is need for **transparent and objective criteria** in the appointment of CAG as it an important constitutional body for enforcing financial accountability of the Government and institutional integrity of this constitutional body has to be protected.
- Parliamentarians like Ram Naik, Murali Manohar Joshi K.V. Thomas who served as Chairmen of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) suggested reform to the selection process of the CAG. The PAC scrutinises the CAG reports.
- The prime minister and leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha should jointly select the CAG.
- A selection panel may be constituted to shortlist the names of eligible candidates and the executive's role in the CAG's appointment be minimised, if not altogether eliminated.

Suggestion from Indian Audit and Accounts Department:

- Serving and retired officers of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department (IAAD) are of the opinion CAG should be selected from their department.
- CAG's job needs a great deal of expertise, which comes from years of grind and experience. The officers of the IAAD are more suited due to their experience.
- They opine that continued appointment of 'outsiders' as CAG would demoralise the officers of IAAD.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Facebook Ignored Hate Speech in India: Investigative Report

- On August 14, 2020, Wall Street Journal, an international daily newspaper published from New York, published an investigative report stating that Facebook has been **reluctant to apply its rules against hate speeches** on ruling BJP party leaders in India in order to **avoid straining relationship with the Government and damage to its business prospects**.
- India is the biggest market for Facebook with around 34 crore users. Facebook earns money through advertisements on its platform.
- Global digital advertising market is worth over \$350 billion (in 2020).
- Google and Facebook together control about three-quarter of the global digital advertising.
- Ankhi Das, head of public policy for Facebook in India, South and Central Asia, opposed applying the hate-speech rules to T Raja Singh, BJP MLA from Telangana, and other leaders like BJP MP Ananth Kumar Hegde and Delhi BJP leader Kapil Mishra.

Details:

- Facebook has developed its own rules to check hate speeches by the users of its platform. It has dedicated teams to check content which spreads hatred against communities.
- It removes the content which is found to be spreading hatred and also blocks accounts for repeated violations of its guidelines.
- But, the Wall Street Journal investigation found out that these guidelines are not followed uniformly in India and the hate speeches of some of the ruling BJP leaders are tolerated in order to protect its business interests.
- Raja Singh is known for his anti-Muslim rhetoric. In his Facebook posts, he had demanded that Muslim Rohingya refugees be shot, called India's Muslims traitors and threatened to demolish mosques.
- In March 2020, Facebook employees responsible for policing the platform found Raja Singh had violated their rules against hate speech and suggested banning his account.
- But Ankhi Das refused to act against Raja Singh, who has tens of thousands of followers on Facebook and the company-owned Instagram, telling staff members that **punishing violations by politicians from ruling party would damage the company's business prospects**, the newspaper reported quoting unnamed current and former employees.
- The report also mentioned two other BJP leaders BJP MP Ananth Kumar Hegde and Delhi BJP leader Kapil Mishra, whose incendiary posts were reportedly deleted from the platform after the newspaper approached them for a response.

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- After the controversy over its alleged bias in implementing its own hate speech rules in India, Facebook banned BJP leader T. Raja Singh from its platforms for 'violating its policy on content promoting violence and hate'.

Congress Party Calls for Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) Probe:

- The Congress Party called for Joint Parliamentary Probe (JPC) to go into details of the revelations of Wall Street Journal.
- Social media platform need to maintain political neutrality.
- Selective treatment of hate speeches threatens the democracy.

Additional Information:

- Facebook is a social media platform set up with a mission to **make the world more open and connected and promote free speech and self expression**. It was set up in **2004 by Mark Zuckerberg**.
- It **provides a platform where people can engage in meaningful conversations and exchanges with their friends, family and communities online**.
- But, this platform is also being used to spread hatred by some users across the world.
- **Legally, Facebook is not liable for such hateful content**.
- **Section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act, 1996** has safe harbour provision for social media companies. It protects online platforms from having to take legal responsibility for what their users upload or post. Its parallel in India is **Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000**.
- However, Facebook has formed **community guidelines to make its platform safe and respectful for all communities**.
- Hence, it prohibits content deemed to be directly harmful. Harmful content could be organizing real world violence, theft, or property destruction, or that directly inflicts emotional distress on a specific private individual (e.g. bullying), etc.
- It also prohibits hate speech. Hate speech has been defined as the one which attacks on any category of people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease. Such content is removed.

ELECTORAL REFORMS:

PMO Discusses Possibility of Common Electoral Roll

- In August 2020, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) held a meeting with representatives of the Election Commission and the Law Ministry to discuss the possibility of **having a common electoral roll for elections to the panchayat, municipality, state assembly and the Lok Sabha**.
- The BJP has promised a single voters list in 2019 election manifesto.
- However, the pitch for a single voters list is not new.
- The Law Commission recommended it in its 255th report in 2015.
- The Election Commission of India too adopted a similar stance in 1999 and 2004 for the following reasons.

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1. Separate preparation of electoral rolls by the ECI and the State Election Commissions (SECs) causes **duplication of the same task between two different agencies**. It leads to **duplication of effort** and the **expenditure**.
 2. **Common electoral roll would** save an enormous amount of effort and expenditure
 3. Separate electoral rolls lead to **confusion among voters**, since they may find their names present in one roll, but absent in another.

Present Status:

- Articles 243K and 243ZA deal with elections to panchayats and municipalities respectively in the states. These give the power of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of these elections to the State Election Commission (SEC).
- On the other hand, Article 324(1) of the Constitution empowers the EC to supervise, direct, and control the preparation and revision of electoral rolls for all the elections to Parliament and state legislatures.
- In other words, the State Election Commissions are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the Election Commission of India.
- Currently, a majority of the states use the EC's voters list, instead of their own, to elect their municipalities and panchayats. However, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir have their own electoral rolls for local body polls.

Two Options Discussed:

- First, a constitutional amendment to Articles 243K and 243ZA that would make it mandatory to have a single electoral roll for all elections in the country.
- Second, to persuade the state governments to tweak their respective laws and adopt the Election Commission's (EC) voters list for municipal and panchayat polls.

GOVERNANCE:

NRA:

National Recruitment Agency (NRA) to Be Set up

- On August 19, 2020, the Union Government approved to set up National Recruitment Agency (NRA).

Need for National Recruitment Agency (NRA):

- Currently, Government job seekers appear for multiple examinations conducted by multiple recruiting agencies like **Staff Selection Commission, Railway Recruitment Board and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection**.
- Candidates pay fee to multiple recruiting agencies.
- They also travel long distances for appearing in various exams.
- Approximately 1.25 lakh government jobs are advertised every year for which 2.5 crore aspirants appear in various examinations.
- A common eligibility Test would enable these candidates to appear once and apply to any or all of these recruitment agencies for the higher level of examination.

Functions of National Recruitment Agency (NRA):

- The NRA will conduct the Common Eligibility Test (CET) for recruitment to non-gazetted posts in the Central government.
- This would be a **first level screening level test (Tier one)**. Bulk of the candidates will be screened out in the Common Eligibility Test (CET).
- Based on the results of the screening test, respective recruitment agencies will conduct specialised tests for final selection.
- Initially the scores would be used by the three major recruitment agencies viz. **Staff Selection Commission, Railway Recruitment Board and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection**. This will be expanded in a phased manner.
- Over a period of time, other recruitment agencies in the Central Government would adopt the same. In the long run, the CET score could be shared with other recruiting agencies in the Central Government, State Governments/Union Territories, Public Sector Undertaking and Private Sector. This would help such organizations in saving costs and time spent on recruitment.

Other Salient Features:

- The Common Eligibility Test will be held twice a year.
- To facilitate recruitment to vacancies at various levels, there will be different CETs for
 - Graduate level,
 - 12th Pass level, and
 - 10th pass level
- **Multiple Languages:** The CET will be conducted in 12 major Indian languages. This is a major change, as hitherto examinations for recruitment to Central Government jobs were held only in English and Hindi.
- **More Centres:** CET will be held in 1,000 centres across India in a bid to remove the currently prevalent urban bias.
- There will be an **examination centre in every district of the country**. There will be a special thrust on creating examination infrastructure in the 117 aspirational districts.
- **Shortening the recruitment cycle:** A single eligibility test would significantly reduce the recruitment cycle. Some Departments have indicated their intention to do away with any second level test and go ahead with recruitment on the basis of CET scores, Physical Tests and Medical examination. This would greatly reduce the cycle and benefit a large section of youth.
- **Validity:** CET score will be valid for three years.
- There shall be no restriction on the number of attempts to be taken by a candidate to appear in the CET subject to the upper age limit.
- Age relaxation for SC/ST and OBC candidates as per existing rules will apply.

Advantages for students:

- Removes the hassle of appearing in multiple examinations.
- Single examination fee would reduce financial burden that multiple exams imposed.

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- Since exams will be held in every district, it would substantially **save travel and lodging cost for the candidates**. Examination in their own district would encourage **more and more women candidates also to apply for government jobs**.
 - Applicants need to register only on a single Registration portal.
 - There is no need to worry about clashing of examination dates.

Advantages for Institutions:

- Removes the hassle of conducting preliminary / screening test of candidates,
- drastically reduces the recruitment cycle,
- brings standardization in examination pattern, and
- reduces costs for different recruiting agencies. Rs 600 crore savings expected.

Additional Information:

- National Recruitment Agency would be headed by a Chairman of the rank of the Secretary to the Government of India.
- It will have representatives of Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance/Department of Financial Services, the SSC, RRB & IBPS.
- NRA would bring in the state-of-the-art technology and best practices to the field of Central Government recruitment.
- The Government has sanctioned a sum of Rs. 1517.57 crore for the National Recruitment Agency (NRA).

SOCIAL ISSUES:

WOMEN:

Property Rights:

**Daughters in Hindu Families Have Equal Rights in Ancestral Property:
Supreme Court**

- On August 12, 2020, a three judge bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice Arun Mishra ruled that the 2005 amendment to Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which gave a daughter the same rights as the son in ancestral property of Hindu Undivided Families, would also apply irrespective of whether she was born before or after the amendment.

Background:

- The Mitakshara school of Hindu law was codified as the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 after independence.
- It governed succession and inheritance of property but only recognised males as legal heirs. The law applied to everyone who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion. Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and followers of Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj are also considered Hindus for the purposes of this law.
- **As per the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 a daughter ceased to be a coparcener (equal shareholder while inheriting properties) in her father's Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) upon her marriage.**

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- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 was amended in 2005 to remove this gender discriminatory provision and make **daughters joint legal heirs to ancestral property**.
 - It made daughters **coparceners (equal shareholder while inheriting properties)** in Hindu undivided family by birth, giving them the same right as sons. However, it did not expressly provide for retrospective operation of law.
 - Many daughters approached high courts claiming benefit under this law but were denied on the ground that their fathers were not alive as on September 9, 2005.
 - This interpretation became the law of the land in 2016 when the Supreme Court held in the Prakash v Phulwati case that father must be alive for daughters to claim succession rights.
 - However, in 2018, Supreme Court of India, Danamma v Amar case, upheld the right of a daughter to be entitled to an equal share as a son in an ancestral property, including daughters who were born before the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 ("HSA") came into force.
 - The present three judge bench verdict resolves the conflict.

Supreme Court Verdict:

- The three judge bench overruled the 2016 judgement.
- It stated that since the right in coparcenary is by birth, it is not necessary that father coparcener should be living as on September 9, 2005 (the date when the law came into force).
- It further made the law applicable to even daughters born prior to the commencement of the Act.
- Thus, the judgement gave retrospective effect to the 2005 amendment.
- The court fixed six months as an outer limit for courts where related suits are pending to pronounce the final decree.

Analysis of the Judgement:

- The Judgements upholds gender equality as envisaged in the constitution and promotes Right to Equality.
- However, in practice, most daughters do not claim a share in their ancestral property and relinquish it in favour of their brothers, often for little or no compensation.
- **Societal and family pressures force women** to give up property rights, and this is unlikely to change in the medium term.
- Only when property issues are taken to courts, they can avail these rights on property.
- But, awareness on nuanced issues on family property laws is very limited in our society.
- Moreover, as a coparcener, a married daughter has to share the liabilities of father including family debt along with rights on property.

Additional Information:

- Prior to the 2005 Act, several states, including Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, introduced state amendments in the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 extending equal rights to daughters in Hindu coparcenary property.
- Marriage, Divorce, succession are in concurrent list. Hence, both Centre and State can make laws on these subjects.

Menstrual Leave:

Menstrual Leave for Women

- In August 2020, Zomato, online restaurant guide and food ordering platform, introduced up to ten days of paid 'period leaves' in a year for all women employees.
- The objective is to build a more inclusive work culture in the organisation.
- There is no legal obligation to provide in India to provide period leave or menstrual leave to its employees.
- A few companies are taking the initiative to give menstrual leaves.
- In 2017, Culture Machine Media, Mumbai based digital media company, also announced their 'First Day of Period' leave policy. The initiative gives women the first day of their period off; with the goal of making the workplace more women-friendly.
- Chennai-based Magzter also offers its women employees paid menstrual leave each month.
- Nike, a multinational footwear and apparel company, has been offering their employees paid menstrual leave since 2007.
- Bihar State provides two days menstrual leave every month to its women employees.

Debate over Menstrual Leaves:

- There is debate around whether women need to be given menstrual leaves. Some believe it is necessary for supporting women while those opposing it opine that it does more harm to women and organisations.

Support for Menstrual Leaves:

- Women not only face physical discomfort during menstruation but also see a decline in productivity on the first and second days of their cycle.
- Therefore menstrual leave is desirable from the perspective of both female employees and their employers.

Opposition to Menstrual Leaves:

- Regressive: Those opposing menstrual leave view that such a move is regressive. Such leaves could perpetuate gender bias in the hiring process. Men would not require this time off and thus it would be ideal for the company to hire them over women.
- Such leaves may severely impact employability of women by small businesses which are always cash-starved and looking to maximise resources.
- Instead some flexibility in the workplace to work from home is a better option.
- Menstrual leaves are seen as a **tokenism**. Women in any case have the option of taking a sick leave or personal day off should they really require this support.

Menstruation Benefit Bill 2017:

- Menstruation Benefit Bill 2017, a private member bill, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2017 by Ninong Ering, Lok Sabha MP from providing for two days paid leave every month to employees in private sector and public sector.
- It was rejected by the Lok Sabha.

Global Approach:

- Globally, some countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Indonesia grant leave on the basis of a medical certificate or allot three days a year for it.
- Among countries, Japan was one of the first ones to allow women to avail leaves for painful menstrual cycles. However, they do not have a fixed policy for the number of days that can be taken and individual companies decide on that.

Entrepreneurship:**Kerala to Set up India's First International Women Trade Centre**

- In August 2020, Kerala State announced that it would set up India's first International Women Trade Centre in Kozhikode by 2021.

Benefits of International Women Trade Centre:

- This initiative aims to accelerate women entrepreneurship and secure gender parity by providing women with a safe place away from home to start new businesses, set up or expand, and get their products marketed globally.
- It would help women to harness and nurture their entrepreneurial capabilities by setting up their ventures in the Centre.
- They can participate in international trade and enhance their competitiveness to tap market opportunities.
- Special emphasis will be laid on hand-holding and bringing economically backward women, marginalized groups, women with disabilities and transgenders to the forefront by helping to harness and nurture their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Facilities at the International Women Trade Centre:

The Centre will have

- women's start-up and incubation centre,
- retail fashion and technology outlets,
- health & wellness centers,
- business centres and offices,
- conference/convention/exhibition spaces,
- performing arts centre,
- residential suites and day care for seniors and children.

Swatchh Bharat (Sanitation):**Indore Ranked the Cleanest City in Swatchh Sarvekshan Rankings 2020**

- Indore was ranked the cleanest city in the country in the Swachh Sarvekshan Rankings - 2020 released by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on August 20, 2020.
- **About Swachh Sarvekshan Rankings:**
- These were launched in 2016 by Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to assess the level of cleanliness in cities and towns.

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- The objective of the survey is to create cleaner cities and towns by encouraging healthy competition among cities and towns.
 - The number cities and towns being ranked is gradually increasing from 2016.
 - In 2016, Swachh Sarvekshan Ranking covered 73 cities.
 - The ranking coverage increased gradually.

2017: 434 Urban Local Bodies -ULBs (cities and towns)

2018: 4203 ULBs

2019: 4237 ULBs

2020: 4242 ULBs

In 2020 ranking, Cantonment Boards were also included.

Criteria for Ranking:

1. Services rendered by municipal bodies like sanitation, sewerage, efforts made to cities and towns Open Defecation Free (ODF), etc.
2. Direct observation, and
3. Citizen Feedback. Over 1.87 crore citizens gave feedback during the survey on rankings.

Highlights:

Top 5 Cities Swachh Survekshan Rankings 2020 (with population above 10 lakh).

Rank	City
1.	Indore
2.	Surat
3.	Navi Mumbai
4.	Vijayawada
5.	Ahmedabad.

Top 5 Cities Swachh Survekshan Rankings 2020 (with population of 1 to 10 lakh).

Rank	City
1.	Ambikapur (Chhattisgarh)
2.	Mysore (Karnataka)
3.	New Delhi (Central Delhi district)
4.	Chandrapur (Maharashtra)
5.	Khargone (Madhya Pradesh)

Other Highlights:

- Chhattisgarh won the prestigious title of the Cleanest State of India in the > 100 ULB category.
- Jharkhand was adjudged the Cleanest State of India in the <100 ULB category.

Transgender:

National Council for Transgender Persons Constituted

- On August 24, 2020, the Central Government constituted National Council for Transgender Persons. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 mandates the constitution of such council.
- A transgender is a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth.
- According to the 2011 Census there are more than 4.80 lakh transgenders in the country.
- Transgender persons are often discriminated and face humiliation in public for being transgender.
- The Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment will be Chairperson (ex-officio) and Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment will be Vice-Chairperson (ex-officio).
- The other members of the Council include representatives of various Ministries/Departments, five representatives of transgender community, representatives of NHRC and NCW, representatives of State Governments and UTs and experts representing NGOs.
- A Member of National Council, other than ex officio member, shall hold office for a term of three years from the date of his nomination.

Functions:

- advise the Central Government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons;
- monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons;
- review and coordinate the activities of all the departments of Government and other Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations which are dealing with matters relating to transgender persons; and
- redress the grievances of transgender persons.

Major Provisions of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

- The **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**
- gives recognition of identity of Transgender Persons and confers upon them right to self perceived gender identity.
- prohibits discrimination against a Transgender Person in educational institutions, employment, healthcare services etc.
- gives right of residence with parents and immediate family members.
- provides for formulation of welfare schemes and programmes for education, social security and health of Transgender Persons.
- National Council for Transgender Persons should be set up to advice, monitor and evaluate measures for the protection of their rights.

Tribals:

COVID-19 Spread Among Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- COVID-19 has spread to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Groups in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Orissa.
- Nine members of the dwindling Great Andamanese tribe have tested Covid-19 positive.
- Andaman and Nicobar islands is home to five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Groups : Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges, Sentinelese and Shompens.
- Among the five PVTGs, some of the Great Andamanes live in capital city Port Blair, while most live in Strait Island reserved for the tribe.
- How Great Andamanes Got COVID-19: Some members of the tribe travel between Port Blair and Strait Island and a few do odd jobs in the city. Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded 2,985 COVID cases. Infection could have spread due to their stay in Port Blair city.

COVID-19 among PVTGs in Orissa:

- COVID-19 has also spread to tribal areas in Orissa.
- Five persons of **Didayi**, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in Odisha's Malkangiri district have tested positive for COVID-19 in August 2020.
- Four members of **Bondas**, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) who live in small hutments in the hills of the Khairaput block in Malkangiri district in Odisha, also tested positive for COVID-19.
- Odisha is home to 62 tribal communities - the largest diverse groups of tribal population in India. Thirteen of them are PVTGs.

Who are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)?

- **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are the most vulnerable among the tribal groups.**
- In 1973, the Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups. In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)
- At present, **75 tribal groups have been categorized categorized by Ministry of Home Affairs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).**
- PVTGs reside in 18 States and UT of A&N Islands. for identifying Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.

Criteria:

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are classified on the following criteria.

1. Pre-agricultural level of technology,
2. a declining or stagnant population,
3. low level of literacy, and
4. economic backwardness.

Welfare of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs administers 'Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG)' scheme for specifically for the PVTG population.
- The scheme covers the 75 identified PVTGs in 18 States, and Union Territory of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- The scheme aims at planning their socio-economic development in a comprehensive manner while retaining the culture and heritage of the communities by adopting habitat level development approach.
- Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided to the State/UT Governments based on their proposals for development of tribal people in the sectors of education, housing, land distribution, land development, agricultural development, animal husbandry, construction of link roads, installation of non-conventional sources of energy for lighting purpose, social security or any other activity meant for the comprehensive socio-economic development of PVTGs.

STATES & UT's:

Arunachal Pradesh:

Arunachal Pradesh Assembly Passes Resolution for Inclusion of the State in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution

- On August 27, 2020, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly passed a unanimous resolution for
- Inclusion of the State in the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India and
- Amendment of Article 371(H) to protect the rights of its indigenous population.

What is sixth schedule of the Constitution?

- The sixth schedule of the Constitution has special provisions regarding administration of Tribal areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- It provides for **administrative, legislative autonomy, financial** and **judicial autonomy** to the tribals in these states.
- Tribal Autonomous Districts and Tribal Autonomous Regions (if the area has many tribal groups) are created.
- There is **District Council** for each Tribal Autonomous District and **Regional Council** for each Tribal Autonomous Region. These are elected bodies with a five year term and are responsible for administration of these areas. Each body consists of 30 members out of which 4 are nominated by the Governor and remaining are elected.

Law Making Powers:

District Councils and Regional Councils have power to make laws on following subjects

- Management of unreserved forest,
- Regulation of jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation)
- Establishment of village and town councils or committees and their powers
- Inheritance of property

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- Marriage and divorce,
 - Social customs, etc.

Taxation Powers:

- The District Councils and Regional Councils have power to assess and collect land revenue and also impose taxes on professions, trades, entry of goods, vehicles, animals, boats, tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries.
- They can also levy taxes for maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads.

Judicial Powers:

- District Councils and Regional Councils, with the approval of Governor, can set up Village Courts for trial of cases in their jurisdictions in some cases. They can appoint suitable members presiding officers of the Village Courts and also decide the procedure to be adopted in trial of such cases.
- District Councils and Regional Councils or courts constituted on their behalf will hear appeals over village courts verdicts.

Powers to Establish Primary Schools, etc.:

- District Councils and Regional Councils may establish, construct, or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads, road transport and waterways with the previous approval of the Governor.
- They can also make regulations prescribing the language and the manner in which primary education shall be imparted in the primary schools in the district.

District and Regional Funds;

- District Fund and Regional Fund are constituted for each autonomous district and for each autonomous region.
- All moneys received respectively by the District Council for that district and the Regional Council for that Autonomous region are credited to these funds.
- Governor would make rules regarding management of the above Funds i.e. receiving, withdrawal, custody, etc.

Why Arunachal Pradesh is demanding Inclusion in Sixth Schedule:

- Arunachal Pradesh has many tribes but there are no adequate laws to protect tribal rights.
- There are no laws to protect tribal rights and customary laws.
- Inclusion in the sixth schedule contributes to safeguarding their rights.

Demand for Amendment to Article 371(H):

- Article 371(H) was inserted into the constitution of India after Arunachal Pradesh was made a State through the Arunachal Pradesh Statehood Act of 1987.
- But, Article 371(H) does not grant tribal rights for the people of Arunachal Pradesh. It gives Governor of Arunachal Pradesh special responsibility with respect to law and order
- Article 371(H) does not provide any protect the indigenous community of the State which are deprived of the rights unlike Mizoram which is under Article 371(G).

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- For instance, under Article 371(G), the Acts of Parliament regarding religious and social practices of Mizos, Mizo customary laws and procedures, ownership and transfer of land apply to Mizoram only when Mizoram State Legislative Assembly passes a resolution agreeing to adopt them.
 - Hence, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly passed a resolution for amending Article 371(H) of the Indian Constitution to give special safeguards to the State by inserting provisions for
 1. protection for religious or social practices of the tribes of the State,
 2. customary law and procedure of the States tribes,
 3. administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to customary law of the tribes and
 4. ownership and transfer of land and its resources.

Additional Information:

Fifth Schedule of the Constitution:

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides special provisions for tribals in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution contains provisions regarding tribal areas in the rest of India. These are called Scheduled Areas in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.
- The term **Scheduled Areas is not defined in the** Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. But, the Constitution vests the power in the President to declare the Scheduled Areas.

Criteria for Declaration of Scheduled Areas:

- The Criteria for the declaration of Scheduled Areas has been notified in the Constitutional Orders issued by the President of India since 1950 which is as given below.
 1. Preponderance of tribal population (at least 50 per cent tribal population)
 2. Compactness and reasonable size of the area,
 3. A viable administrative entity such as a district, block or taluk, and
 4. Economic backwardness of the area as compared to the neighbouring area.

Special Provisions for Tribals under the Fifth Schedule:

- The Safeguards for tribals under Fifth Schedule are not as extensive as in the Sixth Schedule given for tribals in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Fifth Schedule has following provisions for promotion of interests of the Tribals.
 1. The Governor of each State having Scheduled Areas shall make a report to the President regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas in that State.
 2. The executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions to the State as to the administration of the Scheduled Areas.
 3. A Tribes Advisory Council consisting of not more than twenty members shall be established
 4. Governor may by public notification direct that any particular Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall not apply to a Scheduled Area or any part thereof in the State.

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5. A notification can also be issued by the Governor stating that the Act of Parliament or State Legislature shall apply to a Scheduled Area or any part thereof in the State subject to such **exceptions and modifications**.
6. The Governor may make regulations to
- prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by or among members of the Scheduled Tribes in such area;
 - regulate the allotment of land to members of the Scheduled Tribes in such area;
 - regulate money-lender business by persons who lend money to members of the Scheduled Tribes.
- Thus, it is clear that the safeguards under the fifth schedule are not as extensive as those in the Sixth Schedule. Sixth Schedule provides **administrative, legislative autonomy, financial and judicial autonomy** to the tribals in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

States with Scheduled Areas:

- At present, Scheduled Areas have been declared in the States of **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan**.
- Tribal habitations in the states of **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir** have not been brought under the Fifth or Sixth Schedule.

Andaman & Nicobar Islands:

Submarine Fibre Optic Cable Connectivity to Andaman and Nicobar Islands Inaugurated

- On August 10, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the submarine Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) connecting Andaman & Nicobar Islands to the mainland through video conferencing.
- The foundation stone for this about **2300 kilometers under the sea project** was laid by the Prime Minister on December 30, 2018 at Port Blair.

Benefits:

- It enables faster and cheap mobile and internet connectivity in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- It will advance the goal of Digital India through faster access to online education, tele-medicine, banking system, online trading, etc.
- It also gives boost to tourism.

Government Committed to Ease of Living:

- The Prime Minister stated that the Government is committed to provide modern facilities to every citizen and every sector so that there is ease of living.
- He said that this Optical Fibre Project which links A&N Islands with the rest of the country is an example of the commitment of the Government towards ease of living.

Island Development Agency:

- The Prime Minister stated that the Government is working to further improve physical connectivity through road, air and water apart from providing for better internet & mobile connectivity in the islands of the country.

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- Island Development Agency was formed 3 years ago to speed up the holistic development of islands.
 - High Impact Projects are being implemented in 12 islands of Andaman and Nicobar.
 - **Two major bridges** and the NH-4 are under implementation in order to improve the road connectivity of North and Middle Andaman.
 - **Port Blair Airport** is being enhanced to handle a Capacity of 1200 passengers. Along with this, the **airports are ready** for operations in **Diglipur, Car Nicobar and Campbell - Bay**.
 - **4 Ships being built at Kochi Shipyard** will be delivered soon to improve the Water connectivity between the islands and the mainland.
 - **Blue economy** - Fisheries, Aquaculture and Seaweed farming in the island - will be expanded along with the modern infrastructure in Andaman and Nicobar.

FOREIGN RELATIONS:

Indo-Pakistan:

India Pakistan Differences over Ratle Hydroelectric Project

- In August 2020, India refused a request by Pakistan to hold a meeting on issues around the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) at the Attari checkpost near the India-Pakistan border. In March 2020, India had suggested a virtual conference due to COVID-19 but Pakistan had insisted on a physical meeting.
- The last such meeting between the two countries was in October 2019 in Islamabad.
- Indus Water Treaty (IWT) meetings are led by Indus Water Commissioners from both countries to discuss issues on construction of new dams and hydropower projects concerning the Indus river system.

Dispute over Ratle run-of-the-river (RoR) Project:

- Among the key points in the current discussions was evolving a procedure to solve differences on technical aspects governing the construction of the **Ratle run-of-the-river (RoR) hydro electric project on the Chenab River in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- India has called for the appointment of a 'neutral' party while Pakistan favours a Court of Arbitration to agree upon a final resolution on the design parameters of this hydropower project.
- According to the terms of the Indus Water treaty (IWT), India has the right to build run-of-the-river (RoR) projects on the three 'western' rivers - the **Chenab, Jhelum and Indus** - provided it does so without substantially impeding water flow in Pakistan downstream.
- **Pakistan believes that the project's current design does pose a serious impediment** and has told the World Bank that it wants a Court of Arbitration (CoA) set up to decide on the issue. India says this is only a technical issue and mutually solvable. It has agreed to a 'neutral party'.

About Indus Water Treaty:

- Indus Water Treaty was signed in 1960 with mediation by World Bank. It is also a signatory to the treaty
- The treaty gave the waters of the western rivers - the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab - to Pakistan and those of the eastern rivers - the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej - to India.

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- Though the Pakistan has right over the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab), India has been allowed to build Run of the River (RoR) hydroelectric projects subject to certain conditions.
 - The treaty provided for creation of a Permanent Indus Commission, with a commissioner from each country, in order to maintain a channel for communication and to try to resolve questions about implementation of the treaty.
 - The Treaty also sets forth distinct procedures to handle issues which may arise: "questions" are handled by the Commission; "differences" are to be resolved by a Neutral Expert; and "disputes" are to be referred to a seven-member arbitral tribunal called the "Court of Arbitration."
 - As a signatory to the Treaty, the World Bank's role is limited and procedural. In particular, its role in relation to "differences" and "disputes" is limited to the designation of people to fulfill certain roles when requested by either or both of the parties.

Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project:

- In 2018, India completed another hydroelectric project called **Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project on the Jhelum River**.

Indo-Maldives:

India Announces US \$ 500 Million Package for Maldives

In August 2020, India announced a series of connectivity measures for Maldives which include

- a direct ferry service between Kochi and Male,
- a submarine cable for telecom connectivity; and
- assistance for the Greater Male Connectivity project (GMCP) to connect Male to three neighbouring islands, the biggest such project thus far.

Greater Male Connectivity project (GMCP):

- India would support the implementation of the GMCP in Maldives, through a financial package consisting of a grant of USD 100 million and a new Line of Credit (LoC) of USD 400 million.
- The GMCP would be the largest civilian infrastructure project in Maldives.
- It would connect Male with the islands of Villingili, Gulhifahu, where a port is being built under an Indian line of credit, and Thilafushi, where a new industrial zone is coming up.
- The project, which will consist of a number of bridges and causeways to connect Male to Villingili, Thilafushi and Gulhifahu islands that span 6.7 km, taking much of the pressure of the main capital island of Male for commercial and residential purposes.
- When completed, the project would render the 1.39-km Maldives-China Friendship Bridge, currently the most visible infrastructure project in Male, "insignificant in comparison.
- The US \$400 million Line of Credit comes in addition to a previous LoC of \$800 million that was announced by New Delhi in December 2018.
- At present, India-assisted projects in the region include water and sewerage projects on 34 islands, reclamation project for the Addl island, a port on Gulhifalhu, airport redevelopment at Hanimadhoo, and a hospital and a cricket stadium in Hulhumale.

India-UN

India Contributes US \$ 15.46 Million to UN-India Development Partnership Fund

- In August 2020, India contributed \$15.46 million to the India-U.N. Development Partnership Fund.
- Out of \$15.46 million, \$6 million would be to the overall fund, in which all the developing countries are eligible for partnership, and \$9.46 million dedicated to the Commonwealth countries.

Details:

- **India-U.N. Development Partnership Fund was set up in 2017** to support the developing countries towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The Fund is managed by the **United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation**.
- The Fund **supports sustainable development projects across the developing world**, with a focus on **Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)**. United Nations agencies implement the Funds projects in close collaboration with partnering governments.
- The India-UN Development Partnership Fund has already supported **59 projects in 48 countries, through \$47.8 million in contributions** from a \$150 million multi-year pledge by India.
- The Fund responds directly to the national priorities and development objectives of partner countries, contributing financial resources and technical knowledge.

United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation:

- **India-U.N. Development Partnership Fund has been set up as a dedicated facility within United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation (UNFSSC)**.
- United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation (UNFSSC) was setup in 1996 as a Voluntary Fund to promote South-South Cooperation. South-South cooperation refers to cooperation among developing countries of the Global South.

Additional Information:

Least Developed Countries:

- The least developed countries represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. They comprise more than 880 million people - representing about 12 per cent of world population- but account for less than 2 per cent of world gross domestic product.
- have low level of socioeconomic development characterized by weak human and institutional capacities, low and unequally distributed income, and scarcity of domestic financial resources. Their largely agrarian economies are affected by a cycle of low productivity and low investment, keeping LDCs in a poverty trap.
- International support helps the LDCs to overcome the poverty trap and also achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Small Island Developing States:

- Small island developing states (SIDS) are particularly vulnerable developing countries, which face specific social, economic and environmental challenges.

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- SIDS tend to confront similar constraints in their sustainable development efforts, such as a narrow resource base depriving them of the benefits of economies of scale; small domestic markets and heavy dependence on a few external and remote markets; high costs for energy, infrastructure, transportation, communication; long distances from export markets; little resilience to natural disasters; growing populations; limited opportunities for the private sector and a proportionately large reliance of their economies on their public sector; and fragile natural environments.
 - SIDS most significantly benefit from South-South cooperation with middle income countries, such as India, which faces similar development challenges but enjoys a larger economy and institutions that supported the development of solutions, technologies and practices.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:

Abraham Accord:

Israel, UAE, Bahrain Sign Abraham Accord

- United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, two Gulf countries which are also part of Arab League, signed Abraham Accord with Israel.
Abraham is a religious figure who is revered by three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- UAE was the first country to announce the signing of the Accord with Israel on August 13, 2020. Later, Bahrain followed.
- The UAE will be the third Arab country (after Egypt and Jordan) and the first in the Gulf region to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.
- United States President Donald Trump mediated the signing of the Accord. USA has good relations with the Gulf countries as well as Israel.

Main Features of the Accord:

- United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain will formally recognise the state of Israel.
- In return, Israel would halt its plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank of Palestine.
- Muslims around the world can visit and pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam.
- In the coming months, UAE and Bahrain would sign bilateral agreements with Israel for cooperation in the areas of investment, tourism, connectivity through direct flights, security, telecommunications, technology, energy, healthcare, culture, the environment.
- Embassies would be established on reciprocal basis by the three countries for mutual benefit.

Implications of the Abraham Accord:

- The Arab countries have strongly stood by the cause of Palestine for establishment of independent sovereign state of Palestine.
- The Accord leaves the Palestinians in a difficult spot.
- If more Arab countries make peace with Israel without addressing the question of occupation, the Palestinians, already weak and divided, will be left with themselves in their quest for freedom and sovereignty.

History of Israel Palestine Conflict:

- Palestine territory is considered the holy place by three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Throughout history, Palestine has been ruled by numerous groups, including the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Fatimids, Seljuk Turks, Crusaders, Egyptians, Mamelukes and Islamists.
- From about 1517 to 1917, the Ottoman Empire ruled much of the region.
- In the First World War (1914-18), Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Turkey based Ottoman Empire) lost to the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan and the United States).
- Palestine which was ruled by Ottoman Empire was given by the League of Nations as a Mandated Territory to the Great Britain to prepare Palestine for self rule gradually.

Return of Jews to Palestine:

- The Jews who consider Palestine as their homeland migrated to many countries over a period of time.
- They became a prosperous community in the migrated countries.
- But, some of the Jews began returning to their ancient homeland of Palestine from 1880's onwards to set up a separate Nation for themselves as they were facing persecution in Europe mainly Russia. Anti-Jews pogroms (violent armed attacks leading to massacres) took place under Russian Czar. Many of the Jews also migrated to USA from Europe.
- By the onset of First World War, Palestine has a significant Jews population who migrated from Europe. They were around 90,000.
- Great Britain wanted to enlist their support in the First World War against Ottoman Empire.
- Hence, the British Government announced support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people (Israel) in Palestine.

(British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour made this announcement through a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community. Hence, this came to be called as Balfour Declaration as it was declared by Arthur Balfour).

- In 1929, the World Zionist Organisation (an organisation established to seek support of Jews settled in various countries for the separate State for Jews in Palestine) established the Jewish Agency as its operative branch. The Agency became the de facto administration of the settlers in Palestine.
- After the end of the Second World War, United Nations was established in 1945.
- In 1947, the United Nations proposed a plan to partition Palestine into
 1. an independent Arab state,
 2. an independent Jewish state, and
 3. an international Jerusalem (in view of its significance to the three major religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

Response to the Partition Plan:

- The partition plan was welcomed by the Jews but rejected by the Arabs.
- Hence, the partition plan could not be implemented.
- **Declaration of Israel Independence:**
- On May 14, 1948, the last day of the British mandate over Palestine, David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, declared the establishment of the state of Israel.
- Israel was admitted to United Nations as a member country.

First Israel-Arab War - 1948:

- There was raging violence between Jewish militias and Palestinian militias since the announcement of partition plan by United Nations. The declaration of Israel independence led to the first Arab-Israeli war.
- In 1948, a coalition of five Arab nations - **Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq** - launched war on the nascent Jewish state Israel.
- The war ended in a UN brokered ceasefire with Israel capturing 23 per cent more territory than envisaged under the Partition Plan, including **western Jerusalem**.
- Jordan annexed West Bank and eastern Jerusalem. Egypt occupied Gaza.

Suez Crisis 1956-57:

- Tensions rose when Egypt nationalised the Suez canal which was owned by British and French firms. Ships from Israel were barred from entering Suez Canal. Suez Canal is a vital transportation link between Asia and Europe. Egypt also blocked Elat, the southern port of Israel.
- Israel, with support from Britain and France, invaded Sinai Peninsula of Egypt in order to re-open canal to Israeli shipping and end armed incursions by Palestinians from Sinai.
- After the joint Anglo-French intervention, a UN buffer force set up in Sinai. Egypt dropped blockage of Elat port. Israeli shipping was allowed through Suez Canal.

1967 Six Day War:

- Israel and Arab countries (Jordan, Syria and Egypt) clashed for the **third time** in 1967 (June 5th to 10th) due to series of border disputes.
- Six-Day War led to decisive victory for Israel.
- They took control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria and drove Jordanian forces from the West Bank. Importantly, Israel took control of eastern Jerusalem (also called old city of Jerusalem). With this, the Israelis took sole control of entire Jerusalem as they were already in possession of western Jerusalem
- The status of these territories subsequently became a major point of contention in the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- The Six-Day War also marked the start of a new phase in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, since the conflict created hundreds of thousands of refugees and brought more than one million Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli rule.

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- The United Nations passed a Resolution which called for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it had captured in the war in exchange for lasting peace. That resolution became the basis for diplomatic efforts between Israel and its neighbours, including the Camp David Accords (1979) with Egypt and the push for a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

1973 Yom Kippur War (Fourth Israel Arab War):

- Sporadic fighting continued after the six day war in 1967 which led to full scale war in 1973. Syria and Egypt launched coordinated attacks on Israel on October 6, 1973 to win back territory lost to Israel.
- October 6th was the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur means the Day of Atonement when Jews confess their sins and achieve reconciliation with God.
- The war also drew both the United States and the Soviet Union into indirect confrontation in defense of their respective allies Israel and Egypt & Syria.
- The war ended in ceasefire after the United Nations passed a resolution calling for end in fighting.

Camp David Accord:

- Later, on March 26, 1979, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty called Camp David Accord formally ending the state of war that had existed between the two countries for 30 years. (Camp David Accord is a US Presidential Retreat in Maryland, USA. Since the negotiations took place there with the mediation of USA, the accord got that name)
- Under the terms of the Camp David Accord, **Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt**, and, in return, **Egypt recognized Israel's right to exist**.
- The two countries subsequently **established normal diplomatic relations**.

The Rise of Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO):

- The weakening and retreat of Arab nations (Egypt, Syria, Jordan) after the 1967 war also led to the rise of Palestine militias.
- The **Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO)**, formed in 1964, emerged as the torch-bearer of Palestinian nationalism.
- The PLO, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, initially operated from Jordan. But when King Hussein cracked down on the Palestinian guerillas in September 1970 (Black September), the PLO moved to Lebanon. The Israelis went after them. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, finally forcing the PLO to leave Lebanon.
- Arafat shifted to Tunis (capital of Tunisia), and called for an intifada (uprising). The residents of the West Bank and Gaza rose against the Israel occupation in 1987 making it extremely difficult for Israel to continue the status quo. This set the stage for the Oslo peace process.

Oslo Accords:

- In 1993 Oslo Accords were signed between PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and Israel Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin in 1993. (The talks were carried on Norway capital. Hence, the accords were called Oslo Accords. The United States was not actively involved in the negotiations.)

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- Israel agreed to the formation of a provisional government (the Palestinian Authority) in West Bank and Gaza. It included provisions for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from six West Bank cities and about some towns.
 - Israel also agreed to holding elections to Palestinian Legislative Council within nine months and also establishment of Palestinian Police Force. The question of Jerusalem was left undecided.
 - The plan was to take the Oslo process to a final settlement based on the two-state solution.
 - After the Oslo agreement, Yasser Arafat returned to Palestinian territory, the Palestinian Authority was established and Israeli withdrawals began. However, the agreement was denounced by hardline Israelis and Palestinians. In 1995, Israel Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated.
 - U.S. President Bill Clinton hosted a peace talk in Camp David between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2000.
 - The talks ended in failure and led to the violent second intifada (uprising) in West Bank and Gaza.
 - 2002 March - Arab League countries which have been supporting the cause of Palestine unveiled "Arab League Peace Plan" offered to recognise Israel in return for its full withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967, agreement to a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and "fair solution" to refugee question
 - In the same year, the Quartet - the U.S., the UN, the EU and Russia - unveiled the three-phase Roadmap for Peace. None of these led to a final solution.

Outstanding Issues in the Dispute:

Primarily, there are three outstanding issues.

1. Boundary:

- The Palestinians and Arab countries say a Palestinian state should be formed based on the 1967 border. But Israel has already redrawn this border on the ground by building huge security walls that cut into Palestinian territories. It has setup Jewish settlements deep inside the West Bank.

2. Capital:

- The Palestinians see East Jerusalem as their future capital, but the entire city is under Israeli control.
- The East Jerusalem (also called Old City) is home to the following religiously important places.
- Church of Holy Sepulchre (Christians believe the church stands on the hill where Jesus was crucified);
- Haram al-Sharif (or Temple Mount), which houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam; and
- Dome of the Rock, from where the Prophet is believed to have ascended to heaven on a winged horse called Buraq; and
- Wailing Wall, which is believed to be the remains of the Second Temple of Jews, which, according to the Hebrew Bible, was constructed after the destruction of first temple i.e. Solomon's Temple.

3. Refugees:

- The first Arab-Israeli war has led to the displacement and exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, which they call Nakba (catastrophe). Israel has never accepted their right to return, because if they return, it would alter the demographics of the Jewish nation. The Palestinians, on the other side, insist on the right to return.

Major Developments after 2002:

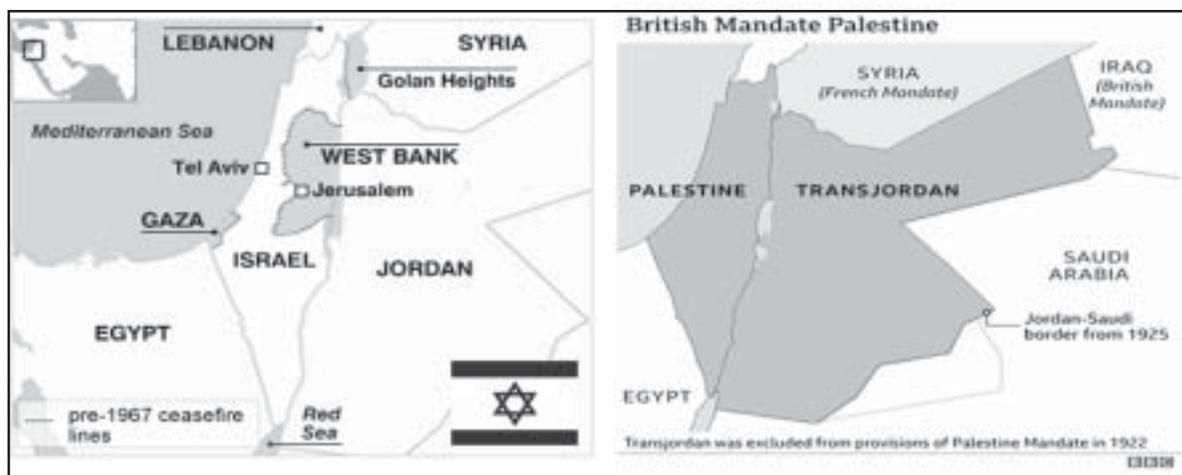
- In 2005, Israel unilaterally announced withdrawal from Gaza by removing the Jewish settlements and taking back military personnel posted in Gaza to advance peace efforts. However, it retained control over Gaza airspace, coastal waters and border crossings.
- In 2006, Hamas Islamist group won Palestinian parliamentary elections in Gaza. Rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza escalated. Hamas gunmen from Gaza took Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit hostage, demanding release of Palestinian prisoners. Major clashes between Israel and Hamas in Gaza follow.
- In 2008 Israel launched month-long full-scale invasion of Gaza to prevent Hamas and other groups from launching rockets.
- In 2013, talks resumed between US and Palestinian Authority with the initiative of the US. The peace talks hit roadblock after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas forged a reconciliation agreement with the Hamas to form a unified national Palestinian government. (The political leadership of Palestine got split between Fatah and Hamas parties in 2007. While Hamas ruled the Gaza Strip, Fata party ruled West Bank).
- In 2019, weeks before the Israeli legislative election in April, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he had plans to annex the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.
- This annexation plan has been extremely controversial because it would mean **Israel unilaterally declaring sovereignty over parts of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank**. Such a move is also contrary to the two-state solution and has the potential to trigger further conflict in the region.
- In August 2020, Israel signed Abraham Accords with UAE and Bahrain under it agreed to suspend annexation of Israeli settlements in West Bank in return for normalisation of relations with UAE and Bahrain.

Analysis of Abraham Accords:

- The Accords shows how the Arab countries are gradually decoupling themselves from the Palestine question.
- The UAE offered full diplomatic recognition in return for Israel's suspension of a planned annexation, not for any relaxation of the actual occupation. The Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by Saudi Arabia in 2002, and endorsed by the Arab League calls for normalising relations between the Arab world and Israel, in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from the territories it captured in the 1967 war, including the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights, a "just settlement" of the Palestinian refugee issue and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

- By normalising relations outside this framework of 'land for peace', the two states have broken with a decades-old Arab consensus on the Palestinian issue, and effectively endorsed Israel's military occupation over the Palestinians. There is also speculation that more Arab countries, from Morocco to Sudan and Oman, may follow in the footsteps of the UAE and Bahrain.
- This leaves the Palestinians more isolated than ever, and further weakens the already-dim prospect of a two-state solution.

Map of Israel



Additional Information:

Arab League:

- The Arab League is a union of Arab-speaking African and Asian countries. It was formed in Cairo in 1945 to promote the independence, sovereignty, affairs and interests of its member countries.
- It has 22 countries including Palestine which it considers as an independent State.
- Member Countries: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
- Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively.
- There are over 300 million Arabs.

Gulf States:

- The Arab States around Persian Gulf are called Gulf States. These are six countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. These six countries formed Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981.
- Though Iran is also part of Persian gulf, it is not part of Gulf Cooperation Council as it is a Shia majority country while the six countries are Sunni majority countries.

Second World War:

75th Anniversary of First Atomic Bomb Attack

- Japan observed the 75th anniversary of world's first atomic bomb attack on August 6, 2020.
- The US dropped its first atomic bomb nicknamed "**Little Boy**" on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945, destroying the city and killing 140,000 people.
- The US dropped a second bomb nicknamed '**Fat Man**' three days later on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945 killing another 70,000 people.
- Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945 ending World War II.

Survivors Call for Nuclear Disarmament:

- On the 75th anniversary, elderly survivors, whose average age now exceeds 83, lamented the slow progress of nuclear disarmament
- Keiko Ogura, 84, who survived the atomic bombing at age 8, wants non-nuclear states to pressure Japan into signing the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty 2017.
- **Shinzo Abe, the then Prime Minister of Japan**, in his speech at the ceremony said that Japan is committed to nuclear weapons ban but a nuclear free world cannot be achieved overnight and that it has to start from dialogue. He pledged to work for the realisation of a world without nuclear weapons and peace.
- **Hiroshima mayor Kazumi Matsui** warned **against the nationalism that led to World War II** and urged the world to come together to face global threats, like the coronavirus pandemic. We must never allow this painful past to repeat itself. **Civil society must reject self-centred nationalism and unite against all threats**, the mayor said.
- **U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres**, who addressed the gathering by video message because of the pandemic, warned that the **only way to totally eliminate nuclear risk is to totally eliminate nuclear weapons**.

Historical Assessment of the Bombings Remains a Subject of Controversy:

- The historical assessment of the bombings remains the subject of some controversy.
- **The United States of America has never apologised for the bombings**. Many see this as having brought an end to the war.
- Japan announced its surrender just days later on August 15, 1945. Some historians argue the **bombings ultimately saved lives by avoiding a land invasion** that might have been significantly more deadly.
- **But in Japan, the attacks are widely regarded as war crimes because they targeted civilians indiscriminately and caused unprecedented destruction**.
- In 2016, **Barack Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Hiroshima**, where **he offered no apology but embraced survivors and called for a world free of nuclear weapons**.
- Hiroshima and Nagasaki were key stops on Pope Francis's first trip to Japan last year (2019), where he denounced the "**unspeakable horror**" of the attacks.

Dwindling Number of Bomb Survivors:

- The landmark anniversary underscored the dwindling number of bomb survivors, known in Japan as "**hibakusha**", many of whom suffered physically and psychologically after the attack.
- Those who remain were mostly infants or young children at the time, and their work to keep the memory of the bombings alive and call for a ban on nuclear weapons has taken on increasing urgency as they age.
- Activists and survivors have created archives of everything from the recorded testimony of hibakusha to their poems and drawings.
- But many fear interest in the bombings is **fading as they recede beyond the horizon of lived experience and into history.**

Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty 2017:

- The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted by 122 countries during the Conference United Nations on 7 July 2017.
- It prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons.
- A nation that possesses nuclear weapons may join the treaty, so long as it agrees to destroy them in accordance with a legally binding, time-bound plan. Similarly, a nation that hosts another nation's nuclear weapons on its territory may join, so long as it agrees to remove them by a specified deadline.
- It opened for signature on 20 September 2017.
- It will come into force 90 days after 50 countries deposit instrument of ratification.
- So far 84 countries have signed the treaty and 44 countries have ratified and became parties to the Treaty.
- Survivors of atomic bomb attacks want Japan to sign and ratify the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty 2017.

Role of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons:

- The **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**, a global civil society coalition played a key role for more than a decade in advocacy and campaign for **Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty** highlighting the **catastrophic, and widespread humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons.**
- International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons received the **Nobel Peace Prize 2017** for its efforts.

China-Bangladesh:

China Offers US \$ One Billion to Bangladesh for Teesta River Management Project

- China has offered around US \$1 billion to Bangladesh for a comprehensive management and restoration project on the Teesta, a river Bangladesh shares with India.

Background:

- River Teesta originates in Tsolamo (Sikkim). It flows through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh.

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- It is one of the 54 rivers that enter Bangladesh from India.
 - Teesta waters are used for irrigation in North-western Bangladesh. In the five districts falling in Rangpur Division - Nilphamari, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Rangpur - nearly 63 per cent of the crop area is irrigation-dependent.
 - India and Bangladesh have been engaged in a long-standing dispute over water-sharing in the Teesta.
 - India as an upper riparian state controls the flow of water from River Teesta in West Bengal.
 - Bangladesh blames reduced dry season flows from December to May, as well as flash floods in the monsoon, on India's unilateral control of water flow at the Gazaldoba Barrage upstream in North Bengal.
 - Bangladesh has been demanding a greater share of the Teesta during December and May when the water tends to dry up in parts which creates difficulties for agriculture sector of northern Bangladesh.
 - An agreement to minimise economic losses in Bangladesh by regulating seasonal water flows has been in negotiation for a long time.
 - In September 2011, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was ready to sign the Teesta water-sharing agreement during his visit to Dhaka. The formula was equal sharing of water during the lean season.
 - However, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee prevented the accord, hinting that irrigation in Bengal would be affected, even though it was clear that her state would not be able to use the 75 per cent water retained at Gazaldoba. To scuttle the agreement she also cited inadequate consultation by the Centre.
 - Since then the accord has been in limbo despite a visit to Dhaka in June 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Mamata Banerjee.
 - As there was no forward movement with India on finding a solution, Bangladesh decided to find ways to Teesta river basin water.
 - Bangladesh had approached the World Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency for project finance to take up the construction of irrigation project in Bangladesh so the water can be efficiently managed by storing the inflows from Teesta River during the floods.
 - Bangladesh turned to China when above attempts failed.

Qatar:

Qatar Reforms Labour Laws; Indian Migrant Workers to Benefit

- In August 2020, Qatar announced changes to its labour laws.

Highlights:

- Minimum wage has been increased by 25 per cent to 1,000 riyals (around Rs 20,000).
- Companies must also provide accommodation and food or a combined monthly stipend of 800 riyals.
- 'Kafala' system which required workers to take the consent of their employers before switching jobs has been abolished.
- With this, workers in Qatar now have the freedom to change jobs without obtaining a no-objection certificate or NOC first.

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- Either party must provide one month written notice in the first two years of the contract or two months' notice beyond the second year of the contract.
 - Qatar is the first country in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to announce labour reforms for immigrants. It is heavily dependent on foreign labour. There are over 6,30,000 Indian migrants in Qatar.

Why Reforms Have Been Announced:

- In 2010, Qatar won the bid to host the World Cup Football Tournament 2022.
- This led to a sharp increase in the number of people migrating from various countries including India to Qatar to join the labour force for building stadiums for the world cup.
- However, the country faced a scathing attack from across the world for exploiting its labour force.
- Without adequate resources, many of the workers are forced to live in the country's overcrowded labour camps - infamous for their dismal living conditions.
- Now Qatar has made it mandatory for companies to provide their employees with accommodation and food worth a minimum of 800 riyals.

Turkey:

Turkey Discovers Natural Gas Reserve off Black Sea

- In August 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the discovery of a large natural gas reserve (estimated at 320 billion cubic meters) off the Black Sea coast.

Details:

- The discovery of the natural gas in the Black Sea comes as a welcome respite for the country, which depends on Iran, Iraq and Russia for its energy and is grappling with economic woes (high inflation and widening current account deficit).
- In 2019, energy imports of Turkey were worth \$41 billion.
- The gas discovery will help reduce the country's dependence on imports.
- Gas extraction is expected to begin by 2023.
- The discovery also comes at a time when tensions between NATO allies Turkey and Greece are running high over oil and gas exploration in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean.
- Turkey is exploring for natural gas reserves both in Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea.
- While Black Sea is located in the north of Turkey, Mediterranean Sea is located south of Turkey.
- In the explorations in the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey has disputes with Cyprus as well as Greece over territorial jurisdictions.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY:

SPACE:

ISRO Successfully Test-fires Scramjet Engine

- The first experimental mission of the indigenously-developed Scramjet Engine was successfully conducted from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh, Indian Space Research Organisation on August 30, 2020.
- Two scramjet engines were tested during the flight from Sriharikota.

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- India is the fourth country to demonstrate the flight testing of Scramjet Engine after the US, Russia and European Space Agency.

Significance of Scramjet Engine:

- Usually rocket engines carry both **fuel and oxidiser on board for combustion.**
- But newly developed scramjet engines have air-breathing propulsion system.
- It uses **hydrogen as fuel and oxygen from the atmosphere air as the oxidiser.**
- This will reduce the lift-off mass of the vehicle and bring down the launch cost.
- The amount of oxidiser to be carried along with the fuel will be reduced.
- Scramjet engine is an important milestone in ISRO's endeavour towards its future space transportation system.
- It will be used to power ISRO's reusable launch vehicle at hypersonic speed.

DEFENCE:

Draft Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy

- In August 2020, the Defence Ministry released the Draft Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy.
- The policy aims at
 - manufacturing turnover of \$25 billion (Rs.1,75,000 crore), including exports of \$5 billion (Rs.35,000 crore) in aerospace and defence goods and services by 2025.
 - developing a dynamic, robust and competitive Defence industry, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding industry to cater to the needs of Armed forces with quality products.
 - reducing dependence on imports and take forward "Make in India" initiatives through domestic design and development.
 - promoting export of defence products and become part of the global defence value chains.
 - creating an environment that encourages R&D, rewards innovation, creates Indian Intellectual Property (IP) ownership and promotes a robust and self-reliant defence industry.

Measures that would be Taken:

1. Negative List:

A negative list of weapons/platforms would be notified with year-wise timelines for placing an embargo on import of such items from those dates.

This list would be updated periodically, without compromising on the operational requirements of the Services, to allow lead-time to industry to prepare itself for any such procurement which is likely to come up, subsequent to the indicated embargo date.

2. Project Management Unit (PMU):

Defence procurement is a highly specialized activity that requires prior estimation of the development and production lead times specifications and technologies involved, life cycle costs and maintenance requirements etc. of the platforms, equipment and weapon systems.

In order to make the above assessment, a Project Management Unit (PMU), with representation from the Services, would be set up to support the acquisition process and facilitate management of the contracts.

3. Overhaul of the Trials and Testing Procedures:

Procurement of indigenously developed products/systems involves conducting a number of tests and trials and consumes a considerable amount of time as a result of which placement of orders is delayed and industry finds it difficult to carry out advance production planning. A comprehensive review and overhaul of the trials and testing procedures would be done to reduce the procurement cycle time.

4. Government to Government agreements and Lines of Credit/Funding:

Domestically manufactured defence products will be promoted through Government to Government agreements and Lines of Credit (by giving loans at concessional interest rates).

ENERGY:

Assembly of the Largest Ever Thermonuclear Fusion Reactor Begins

- Assembly of the **world's largest experimental thermonuclear fusion reactor, Tokamak**, began in **France** on July 28, 2020.
- It is a collaborative project of 35 countries including India, European Union, China, USA, Japan, South Korea, etc.
- The objective of the project is to **demonstrate the possibility** of large scale energy generation through nuclear fusion.
- So far, the world record for fusion power is held by the European tokamak JET. In 1997, JET produced 16 MW of fusion power from a total input heating power of 24 MW ($Q=0.67$). This means it has **not produced net energy**.
- ITER is designed to produce a ten-fold return on energy ($Q=10$), or **500 MW of fusion power from 50 MW of input heating power**.

What is Fusion?

- Fusion is the energy source of the Sun and stars.
- In the tremendous heat and gravity at the core of these stellar bodies, hydrogen nuclei collide, fuse into heavier helium atoms and release tremendous amounts of energy in the process.
- The tokamak at France is an experimental machine designed to harness the energy of fusion. Inside a tokamak, the energy produced through the fusion of atoms is absorbed as heat in the walls of the vessel. Just like a conventional power plant, a fusion power plant will use this heat to produce steam and then electricity by way of turbines and generators.
- If the experiment is successful, it opens the doors for non-fossil based source of energy and secure energy needs of the world.

RENEWABLE ENERGY:

ISA:

ISA Amends Framework Agreement to Enable All UN Member States to Join

- International Solar Alliance (ISA) framework agreement was amended in July 2020 enabling all member states of the United Nations to join the grouping.

Background:

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries (which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn) to address their special energy needs.

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- **India and France played a key role in setting up International Solar Alliance** to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels by increasing the use of renewable solar power and thereby contribute to the efforts to address the climate change. (India has set a target to generate 40 percent of its total energy requirements in 2030 by non-fossil fuel sources).
 - The ISA has 122 sun-belt countries that lie between the two tropics as its prospective member countries and currently boasts a membership of 86 countries globally.
 - Now, the framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) has been amended to allow all member States of the United Nations.

Detailed objectives of International Solar Alliance are to

- **collectively address key common challenges to scale up solar energy applications** in line with their needs;
- **mobilize investments of more than USD 1000 billion by 2030,**
- take coordinated action through programmes and activities, on a voluntary basis, for better harmonization, aggregation of demand, risk and resources, for promoting solar finance, solar technologies, innovation, R&D, capacity building etc.,
- reduce the cost of finance to increase investments in solar energy in member countries by promoting innovative financial mechanisms and mobilizing finance from Institutions;
- scale up applications of solar technologies in member countries, and
- facilitate collaborative research and development (R&D) activities in solar energy technologies among member countries, and
- promote a common cyber platform for networking, cooperation and exchange of ideas among member countries.

Others:

"One Sun, One World, One Grid" (OSOWOG)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address on August 15, 2020 mentioned about the mega vision of **"One Sun, One World, One Grid" (OSOWOG)**.

Details:

- One Sun, One World, One Grid" (OSOWOG) aims at trans-national electricity grid supplying solar power across the globe.
- The idea was first floated by Modi in 2018 during the first assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- In June 2020, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy came out with a Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire consultants for converting this idea into policy.
- According to the draft plan prepared by the MNRE, the ambitious OSOWOG will connect 140 countries through a common grid that will be used to transfer solar power.
- The vision behind the OSOWOG mantra is "the Sun never sets" and is a constant at some geographical location, globally, at any given point of time.
- With India at the fulcrum, the solar spectrum can easily be divided into two broad zones viz. far East which would include countries like Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia and far West which would cover the Middle East and the Africa Region

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- The plan is divided into three phases: the first phase will connect the Indian grid with the Middle East, South Asia and South-East Asian grids to share solar and other renewable energy resources.
 - The second phase will connect the first phase nations with the African pool of renewable sources. The third phase will be the concluding step of global interconnection,
 - Several African nations which are devoid of reliable electricity supply at affordable prices can benefit from the "One Sun, One World, One Grid" initiative.

HEALTH:

First Vaccine Against Covid-19:

Russia Registers Sputnik-V, World's First Vaccine Against Covid-19

- On August 11, 2020, **Russia became the first country to officially register a vaccine against Covid-19.**
- The vaccine named **Sputnik-V** has been declared ready for use.
- The first dose of the vaccine-Sputnik-V was administered to Russia's President Mr. Putin's daughter. Mr. Putin claimed that the vaccine has proven efficient during tests, offering a lasting immunity from the coronavirus.
- The vaccine has been developed by the Gamaleya National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology of the Russian Healthcare Ministry.
- Russian officials stated that large-scale production of the vaccine will start in September 2020, and mass vaccination may begin as early as October 2020.
- Medical workers, teachers and other risk groups will be the first to be inoculated.
- Russian President Mr. Putin stated that the **vaccination will be voluntary.**

Criticism against Russia's Vaccine:

- Scientists at home and abroad cautioned that the rush to start using the vaccine before Phase 3 trials could backfire.
- The efficacy and safety of the vaccine is not predictable in the absence of data.
- A vaccine undergoes three phase trials before it is made available to general public.
- Safety (side effects of vaccine) and efficacy (ability of the vaccine to generate adequate antibodies to provide immunity) are tested through these trials.
- The trials are conducted over three phases and data is collected from the individuals who have undergone vaccine trial on safety and efficacy
- A conclusion on the safety and efficacy is drawn based on this data.
- Phase 3 trials involve testing the vaccine candidate on thousands of volunteers and waiting for two months to see whether they get any viral infection or not.
- There is criticism that Russia has not conducted proper phase 3 trials. It has not made the data of the trials public.
- Rakesh K Mishra, Director of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), India, stated that the vaccine ought to be carefully evaluated before it goes to people and any country or company not releasing the data with respect to vaccine was bad.

Russia's Stand on Vaccine:

- Russia stated that it got a head start because its work on **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)-related coronavirus vaccine which is actually ready.**
- **COVID-19 is 80% similar to MERS.**
- So, Russia was able to use a very safe approach.
- The Russian vaccine is based on the already **existing human adenoviral-vector platform where inactivated adenoviruses act as vectors or vehicles**, delivering genetic material from S-protein, which forms the spike of coronavirus into a human cell to induce an immune response.
- Russia stated that at present **human adenoviral-vector platform** is the safest mechanism for introducing the genetic code of the virus spike into the human body as it has been thoroughly studied not only in Russia but also internationally. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian researchers have focussed on extracting a spike-coding gene from the novel coronavirus and implanting it into a familiar adenovirus vector for delivery into a human cell.
- Russia stated that compared to other candidate vaccines, human adenoviral vectors tested on tens of thousands people worldwide **do not have impact on fertility and carcinogenic effects.** Many novel vaccine approaches are not tested on those effects.
- It stated that clinical trials demonstrated that 100% of volunteers developed immunity within 21 days. After the second vaccination, the immunity response was further boosted and provided for long-lasting immunity. Russia stated that all the volunteers are feeling well; no unforeseen or unwanted side effects were observed. Not a single participant of the clinical trials has caught COVID-19 after being administered with the vaccine.

Saliva Test for Covid-19:

FDA Approves Rapid, Inexpensive Saliva Test for COVID-19

- On August 15, 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was granted an emergency use authorisation for a new diagnostic test 'SalivaDirect' for detecting COVID-19 virus. The test detects COVID-19 infection through processing saliva samples.
- The Saliva test has been developed by the Yale School of Public Health.

Advantages of Saliva Direct Tests:

- Saliva Direct is a simple test as it uses saliva to detect the virus.
- Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and Rapid Antigen Tests use nasal swabs to detect the infection. These tests are done by collecting samples in the nasopharyngeal region which requires a swab to be inserted into the back of the nostrils. This very often causes irritation leading to sneezing and coughing. These tests expose healthcare workers to the virus.
- Saliva Test reduces the need for trained healthcare workers to collect the samples.
- It also reduces the risk of virus spread to healthcare workers at the time of sample collection.
- The test also has high sensitivity of 93 per cent. (i.e. it detects the virus correctly in 93 cases out every 100 infected cases).
- The test can detect when the number of virus copies in the saliva sample is as low as six-12 copies per microlitre

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- Even after eight months of the pandemic, U.S. and other countries have been struggling to test large number of people quickly and efficiently using a reliable test that is also inexpensive.
 - Public health experts welcomed the FDA emergency use authorisation for 'SalivaDirect test'.

ENVIRONMENT:

Snow Leopard:

India's First Snow Leopard Conservation Centre to Come up in Uttarakhand

- Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat announced that the state will set up **India's first conversation centre for snow leopards** in Uttarakashi district.
- According to estimates, Uttarakhand has around 86 snow leopards.
- In Uttarakhand, snow leopards are found in Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Gangotri National Park, Askot Wildlife Sanctuary and other places of altitude between 3000-4500 meters.
- The animal is considered to be one of the most enigmatic wild cat species due to its reclusive nature which has earned it a title of 'Ghost of the Mountains'.

Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Program:

- The global population of the big cat estimated between 4000-6500.
- Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Program has been started by 12 countries where Snow Leopard is found.
- The 12 counties are India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- This global snow leopard project seeks to identify at least 20 landscapes and secure them as protected areas for the species by the end of 2020.
- In India, Snow Leopard is found in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- These have been clubbed into three landscapes ranging around 47,000 sq km of area- Hemis-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, Gangotri-Nanda Devi in Uttarakhand, and Kanchendzonga-Tawang in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

Dholes:

Conservation Plan for Dholes, Asiatic Wild Ass, Proposed

- A Conservation Plan has been proposed for endangered Dhole, also known as Asiatic Wild Ass, by the Scientists from Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), India, University of Florida (USA), Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), and National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS).

Why Conservation of Dhole?

- India is a biologically mega diverse country, yet many threatened and endangered species do not have scientific conservation plans.
- Dholes play an important role as **apex predators in forest ecosystems**.
- Asiatic Wild Ass is categorised as an **endangered species in the IUCN Red List of threatened species**. (IUCN : International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN))

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- Endangered species means a species considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild because of a sudden rapid decrease in its population or a loss of its critical habitat.
 - Besides tiger, dhole is the **only large carnivore** in India that is under International Union for Conservation of Nature's 'endangered' category.
 - India perhaps supports the highest number of dholes in the world. But still, it does not have targeted management plans.
 - Despite their endangered status, there is a persistent lack of resources and policy focus on dhole conservation.

Recommendations:

- The Scientists evaluated state-wise conservation capacity using multiple criteria, like GDP share, poverty levels, state and central budgetary allocations for forest and wildlife sectors, and rejection rate of forest clearances. The researchers first made a detailed assessment of current status of dholes in each state. Based on this, following recommendations have been made.
- Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh ranked very high on the priority scale. These States are adequately equipped to maintain status quo consolidate forest habitats, and recover dhole population by increasing prey densities and reducing pressures on forests.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana and Goa will need to increase financial investments towards forest and wildlife sectors, and also reduce the ease of granting forest clearances for infrastructure projects.
- Improving habitat conditions and prey densities in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha would strengthen the link between dhole population in Western Ghats and Central India.

Dolphins:

Project for Conservation of Gangetic Dolphins Announced

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a Conservation Plan for Gangetic Dolphins on August 15, 2020.
- The 'Project Gangetic Dolphin' aims to give a stronger impetus for the conservation of the aquatic mammal in the lines of 'Project Tiger' and 'Project Elephant.'
- Gangetic dolphin, the national aquatic animal of India, has been declared **endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.

Details:

- Gangetic Dolphins are freshwater species primarily found in the **Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems**.
- These are found **India, Bangladesh and Nepal** but 80 per cent of them are found in India
- In India, these dolphins are sighted in long deep river reaches in Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- There are around, 2500 to 3000 Gangetic River Dolphins in Indian River systems.
- They feed on several species of fishes, invertebrates etc.

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- The Dolphin Conservation Project envisages to address conservation concerns and empower the stakeholders such as the river-dependent population in reducing the pollution and allowing sustainable fishery and river-based other livelihood options through scientifically oriented conservation methods.
 - As river dolphins act as indicators of healthy river ecosystems, their conservation would also ensure controlling river pollution and improving the availability of fishes and enhancing economies of local communities through sustainable fishery.

Mangroves:

Sonneratia alba Declared as State Mangrove Tree by Maharashtra

- In August 2020, the Maharashtra Government declared *Sonneratia alba* (mangrove apple), an evergreen mangrove species found along the state's coastline, as state mangrove tree.
- There are 60 mangrove species recognised globally. Maharashtra has 20.
- *Sonneratia alba* has been declared as State Mangrove Tree to spread awareness of this important mangrove species and promote its conservation.

Sonneratia alba (mangrove apple):

- It is salt-tolerant mangrove species. It is known as white chippi in Marathi.
- It grows up to five feet and bears white flowers with a pink base as well as green fruits that resemble apple. **These fruits are used to make pickles.**
- They often grow on newly-formed mudflats and play an important role in combating land erosion. The flowers, which bloom at night, are pollinated by nocturnal creatures like bats.
- Distribution of this mangrove species is confined to the west coast and some parts of Orissa.
- In Maharashtra, this species is found along wetlands in Thane creek, Bhandup, Vasai and Dombivli along major mudflats.

Need for Conservation:

- *Avicennia marina* is the dominant mangrove species in Maharashtra at present.
- Close to 75% of mangrove cover across Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane is dominated by the *Avicennia marina*. But it is relative short. So there is threat to it from the sea level rise.
- *Sonneratia alba* is a tall mangrove species. So, it could act as a defence mechanism to fight future sea level rise.

Polar Bears:

Polar Bears Could Go Extinct by 2100

- A research study published in 'Nature Climate Change' Journal stated that polar bears could become extinct by 2100.

Reasons:

- Climate Change.
- The polar bear is a **carnivorous animal**. It preys on seals in the arctic sea. The seals need sufficient ice sheets to give birth to their offspring and rear them.
- But, due to climate change, the ice cover in arctic sea is declining leading to declining seals.

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- The availability of prey has declined due to declining seals.
 - The weight of polar bears is also shrinking due to inadequate availability of prey.
 - A male bear, for example, in the West Hudson Bay population that is 20% below its normal body weight. When it has to fast due to unavailability of seals, it survives by burning its fat. The ability to survive by burning fat has come down to about 125 days rather than 200 days for males.
 - New-born cubs survival is even less especially when mothers have not fattened up enough to provide nourishing milk.
 - Females without offspring, however, have the greatest capacity to withstand long periods without food.
 - As a result of less sea ice, Polar bears are also staying longer on the land bringing them in closer contact with the local people in arctic villages. This is leading man animal conflict resulting in people and bears killing in self defence.
 - The scientists also stated that polar bear's 'vulnerable' status on the IUCN Red List of endangered species does not accurately reflect their plight,
 - There are around 25,000 polar bears left in the wild today.

Forest Fires:

Fires in Pantanal Wetlands

- The Pantanal, one of the largest wetlands in the world, suffered its worst fires in more than two decades.
- The Pantanal, whose name derives from the Portuguese word for "swamp," sprawls over more than 150,000 sq km in **Brazil and also extends into Bolivia and Paraguay.**
- The fires have destroyed some 25,000 square kilometres.
- Fires are common in the dry season (May to September) in these wetlands. But, the number of fires increased recently. Fires occur due to lightning strikes or due to clearing of the land for farming by farmers.
- The Pantanal is home to roughly 1,200 vertebrate animal species, including 36 that are threatened with extinction
- It is home to dozens of threatened species such as the giant armadillo, giant anteater, giant otter, marsh deer and the hyacinth macaw, the largest species of parrot.
- The densest concentration of jaguars is also found in Pantanal.
- It has been recognised as A UNESCO heritage in 1993.

Landslides:

More Than 60 People Killed in Landslide in Idukki District, Kerala

- More than 60 people lost lives on the night of August 6, 2020 due to landslide in Pettumudi hamlet, near Rajamala hills in Idukki district, Kerala. The victims lost lives as their houses were buried under the debris of the landslide.
- The victims were tea plantation workers in the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company (P) Ltd.
- The landslide area is also located near Eravikulam National Park.

Reasons for landslide:

- The location where the landslide was triggered in Rajamala hills has a 40° slope.
- Any slope above 20° is vulnerable to slipping during heavy rain (Kerala Geological Department).
- The soil has a high content of sand, which absorbs more water, takes a loose form, and is at risk of slipping down.
- The houses of the plantation workers were located at the bottom of the Rajamala hill.
- Rajamala hills received heavy rainfall in August 4 (195 mm) and August 6 (309 mm) which led to the landfall.
- The houses of the plantation workers were located at the foot of the Rajamala Hills. The workers lost lives as the huge debris from the landslide covered their houses.

Kerala prone to Landslides:

- Due to its geographical terrain (uneven topography due to Western Ghats and hills), Kerala is prone to landslides.
- Out of Kerala's 39,000 sq km area, hills having slopes of over 10 degree constitute about 19,000 sq km. (Geological Survey of India data).
- Except Alappuzha district, all the 13 districts are considered landslide-prone.
- Idukki, Wayanad and Malapuram are highly landslide prone districts.
- There were 1,362 landslides and 700 landslides in these two years, respectively. Idukki district, with 1,048 landslides, topped the vulnerability chart in this period.
- Landslides claimed a total of 177 lives in two years (2018 and 2019) in Kerala.

Causes for Landslides:

- Deforestation (rainwater leaks into soil substrata leading to formation of a slippery layers) of hill slopes for cropping,
- Quarrying (it blocks the natural hydrological pathways leading to build up of stress in the underlying area),
- Unscientific road construction on hills,
- Hill slope modification.
- Prolonged and intense rainfall in these areas triggers landslides.
- Climate Change leading to torrential rains is the main trigger in Kerala .
- Kerala has been witnessing unusually high rainfall since 2018.
- This has destabilised the already vulnerable hill slopes in the high ranges.
- Some of the hill slopes, which have not seen landslides in the past, are now becoming potentially vulnerable to heavy sliding.

Measures to Be Taken to Address the Problem of Landslides:

- Human activity exacerbates the vulnerability caused by climate change.
- There is need for formulation of appropriate land use management policies in vulnerable areas.
- People living in the vulnerable areas need to be relocated to prevent loss of lives.
- Relocation has limitations in States like Kerala which is land scarce and has high density of population. The people in the lowlands (Valleys) and the highlands (Hills) cannot be relocated

to the relatively safer mid-lands considering the large population that would require relocation. Just about 20% to 30% of the land is habitable in Kerala and it's the mid-lands.

- Hence, developing an accurate landslide susceptibility map and deploying early warning systems based on rainfall thresholds will help in mitigating the impact of landslides.

Solid Waste Management:

Only 1 Per cent of Construction and Demolition Waste Recycled

- India manages to recover and recycle only about 1 per cent of its construction and demolition (C&D) waste as per the analysis report released by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in August 2020.
- Rest of it remain strewn across, in landfills, or in plain sight leading to air and water pollution and other environmental damages

Details in the Report:

- India generates 150 million tonnes of construction and demolition (C&D) waste annually according to official estimates of Building Material Promotion Council (BMPTC), a body under the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- But the official recycling capacity is a meagre 6,500 tonnes per day (TPD) -- just about 1 per cent.
- By 2017, 53 cities were expected to set up recycling facilities to recover material from the waste. Only 13 cities have done it till date.
- There is no uniformity among cities to quantify and characterise C&D waste to know what and how to segregate.

Need for Recycling of Construction and Demolition (C&D) Waste:

- Construction and Demolition Waste leads to air and water pollution.
- Concrete, bricks and metal waste from construction are choking water bodies, green areas and public spaces in cities. Toxic dust particles from the debris are polluting air,
- A significant proportion of construction waste can be recycled and reused and brought back to construction to substitute naturally sourced material. This demands a circular economy that can turn C&D waste into a resource.
- Recycling can help reduce energy intensity and environmental footprints of buildings and infrastructure.

Government Efforts to Address the Problem of Building and Construction Waste:

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has allowed the use of concrete made from recycled material and processed C&D waste.
- The Construction and Demolition Waste Rules and Regulations, 2016 have mandated reuse of recycled material.
- Swachh Bharat Mission has recognised the need for C&D waste management. Ranking points for C&D waste management for Swachh Survekshan 2021 have been doubled to 100 points. 50 points are given for management infrastructure and 50 points for waste processing efficiency.

Recommendations:

Need Robust Estimation of C&D Waste:

- Cities need comprehensive assessment and quantification of C&D waste generation, utilization and disposal to plan adequate infrastructure and systems for management.

Land Identification for Collection and Recycling:

- Cities need to prioritise identifying land for intermediate collection points and storage of C&D waste instead for a recycling facility.

Learning from global practices:

- In some European countries, high waste tax has achieved a significant level on C&D waste reduction. High level of landfill taxes in Denmark and the Netherlands demonstrated a low dependency on landfill and a high level of waste recovery. Hong Kong has one of the most aggressive C&D waste fee regimes in the world to reduce waste generation in the city. These are combined with stringent in-situ management norms.

AGRICULTURE:

Pokkali Rice:

Pokkali Rice of Kerala

- Farmers in South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal are growing the pokkali variety of rice from Kerala on experimental basis to tide over a crisis-like situation created by severe seawater incursion into paddy fields in vast areas of the Sundarbans after the cyclone Amphan hit West Bengal on May 2020.

About Pokkali Rice:

- The Pokkali variety of rice is known for its saltwater resistance. (Pokkali means Stands Tall in Malayalam).
- It can pokkali variety of rice withstand floods and offsets ground water salinity.
- It is grown in the water-logged coastal areas (wetlands) of Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts in Kerala.
- The crop grows up to five feet and resists sea erosion.
- Pokkali variety of rice is popular as organic food. Pesticides and fertilizers are not used in its cultivation.
- It is also famous for its peculiar taste and its high protein content.

Problems in Pokkali Cultivation:

- It is labour intensive cultivation. Labour is scarce in Kerala.
- The Productivity of Pokkali Rice is low.
- It does not fetch high prices for the farmers when compared with other types of agriculture produce.
- Pokkali received Geographical Indication (GI) status in 2008, but is farmed only in 1,500 hectares now. The area was 20,000 hectares 30 years ago.

-
- The farming season for Pokkali Rice is April to October and fields are given over to prawn and shrimp cultivation for the rest of the year. But, prawn farming is lucrative whereas pokkali rice productivity is low. Hence, many farmers are opting to shift to prawn farming completely. But this poses the danger of turning the soil entirely saline.

Measures to Conserve Pokkali Rice:

- To make it lucrative to farmers, now emphasis is being laid on value added products of Pokkali rice. For instance, toothpaste is being made from the husk of pokkali rice.
- The rice is also being marketed as organic food.
- **Vyttila-11:** Kerala Agricultural University has developed the Vyttila-11, a new variety of Pokkali rice, by crossing with the Jyoti variety of rice popular in Kerala
- It promises better yield of about 5 tonnes per hectare than the previous varieties.
- The crop duration is about 110 days.

Significance of Pokkali Rice Variety for West Bengal:

- About 80% of the rice fields in the Sundarbans is facing the problem of saltwater incursion.
- If the pokkali experiment succeeds, it would be a good step to turn around the fortunes of the farmers.
- Vyttila-11 variety of Pokkali rice has been sown in Sunderbans in West Bengal.

Ban on Import of GM Foods Crops:

'No-GM' Certificate Mandatory for 24 Imported Food Crops from January 2021

- From January 1, 2021, importers of 24 major food crops will have to mandatorily declare that the products are Not Genetically Modified (No GM) and that they also have a non-GM origin.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued this order, in August 2020, to ensure that only non-GM food crops come into the country.
- The 24 food crops include apple, eggplant, maize, wheat, melon, pineapple, papaya, plum, potato, rice, soyabean, sugarbeet, sugarcane, tomato, sweet pepper, squash, flax seed, bean plum, and chicory.
- Every consignment of these imported food crops shall be accompanied with a non-GM-origin-cum-GM-free certificate issued by the competent national authority of the exporting country.
- Environmental groups have been complaining that imported foods often contain genetically modified organisms (GMO).
- The FSSAI is in the process of framing regulations on GM foods. The latest order, in the interim, is expected to tighten safety assessments of imported food crops at ports.
- For the implementation of the order, the FSSAI needs to take up widespread testing and also take the assistance of alert citizens by acting on complaints related to suspected GM imports.

Questions for Practice:

Mains Practice Questions:

1. Are social media companies like Facebook legally liable for hate speeches of its users? How is hate speech regulated by social media companies?
2. Comment on the need for common electoral in India? What are the hurdles in its implementation?
3. Discuss to what extent the recent Supreme Court Judgement giving daughters in Hindu families status of coparceners in inheritance of ancestral properties promotes gender equality.
4. Explain the reasons for the demand of Arunachal Pradesh State in the Sixth Schedule. What are the benefits of such inclusion?
5. The safeguards provided to tribals under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution are more extensive than those in the Fifth Schedule. Elaborate.
6. Comment on the need for sub categorisation of reservations extended to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in education and employment opportunities.
7. Subjective interpretation of criminal contempt of court due to wide definition, combined with a liberal exercise of suo motu powers, can be dangerous in a democracy as it can be used to stifle freedom of expression. Examine.
8. The law on contempt of court in India needs to be revisited to enable fair criticism of the working of the judicial institutions. Discuss.
9. Executive discretion in the appointment of Comptroller and Auditor General of India affects the independent, impartial and efficient functioning of the office of CAG. Examine.
10. The appointment procedure of Comptroller and Auditor General of India needs reform. Substantiate.
11. While Right to Internet has been recognised as fundamental right by the Supreme Court, reasonable restrictions are inevitable for protecting public order and security of the State. Discuss.
12. Internet shutdowns impose unreasonable restriction on the fundamental rights of citizens. Critically examine.
13. The setting up of National Recruitment Agency has numerous benefits both to the government job seekers and recruitment agencies. Comment.
14. The setting up of National Recruitment Agency marks a significant progress over the current recruitment methods for Government jobs. Elucidate.
15. All voluntary funding by the public and private organisations for providing relief or any other assistance during disasters and pandemics should be collected through statutory mechanisms like National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) rather than public charitable trust in the interest of transparency and accountability in the utilisation of such funds collected. Discuss.
16. Elucidate the efforts of India in promoting sustainable development of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing Countries.
17. What are the reasons for landslides? Explain the measures needed to address the problem of Landslides?
18. How is construction and demolition (C&D) waste a threat to environment? What measures have been taken by the Government to address the problem?

Prelims Practice Questions:

1. Consider the following statements regarding Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India?

1. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are found only in Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar and LakshawEEP.
2. There are a total of 25 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

2. Which of the following is/are the criteria for classification of a tribal group as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India?

1. Pre-agricultural level of technology
2. Declining or stagnant population.
3. Low level of literacy
4. Economic backwardness

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 and 2 b) 2 and 3
c) 2, 3, and 4 d) 1, 2, 3, and 4

3. Who among the following is/are from the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India?

1. Bondas
2. Didayis
3. Great Andamanes
4. Onges

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1, 2, 3, 4 b) 2, 3, 4
c) 1 and 2 d) 2 and 4

4. Which of the following States have Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution?

1. Telangana
2. West Bengal
3. Himachal Pradesh
4. Jammu and Kashmir.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 and 2 b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3 d) 2 and 4

5. District Councils and Regional Councils established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have following powers

1. Judicial Powers
2. Taxation Powers
3. Law making powers
4. Power to set up primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 and 2 b) 1, 2 and 3
c) 2, 3, and 4 d) 1, 2, 3, and 4

6. Tribal Advisory Councils are set up under the following Schedule of the Constitution

- a) Sixth Schedule b) Fifth Schedule
c) Third Schedule d) Seventh Schedule

7. District Councils and Regional Councils established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have power to make laws on following subjects.

1. Regulation of jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation)
2. Establishment of village and town councils or committees and their powers
3. Inheritance of property
4. Marriage and divorce
5. Social customs

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1, 2, 3 b) 2, 3 and 4
c) 1, 2, 3, and 4 d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

8. Consider the following statements regarding Contempt of Courts Act, 1971.

1. Only criminal contempt is punished under the Act.
2. The Act provides for imprisonment up to 3 years for criminal contempt.
3. Civil contempt is excluded from the Act.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) 1 and 3 d) None of the above

9. Which of the following statements is not correct regarding Contempt of Courts Act, 1971?

- a) Both civil contempt and criminal contempt are covered under the law.
- b) Fair criticism on the merits of a judicial verdict is not considered as contempt.
- c) The Act provides for imprisonment up to six months for contempt of court.
- d) 'Truth as defence' is not allowed if it is bona fide and is in public interest.

10. Consider the following statements regarding Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

1. CAG is appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of the panel consisting of Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Union Home Minister.
2. The Constitution of India mandates expertise in accounting and audit as the criteria for appointment as CAG.

Choose the correct answer using codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

11. Consider the following statements regarding criteria for availing reservation in Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)

1. Annual Family income of Rs. 8 lakhs.
2. Ownership 5 acres of agricultural land.
3. Residential at of 1000 sq ft.
4. Residential plot of 200 sq. yards in areas other than the notified municipalities.

To avail reservation under Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) which of the above is the criteria?

Choose the correct answer using codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 1 and 2
c) 2 and 3 d) 1,2, 3 and 4

12. Right to Internet has been recognised as part of the following fundamental rights under the Constitution by various court judgements.

1. Article 19 (a)
2. Article 19 (g)
3. Article 21
4. Article 21A

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 and 2 b) 1, 2, 3, and 4
c) 3 and 4 d) 1, 2, 3

13. Which of the following is/are the official languages the Government of India?

- a) Hindi
- b) English
- c) Both Hindi and English
- d) All the scheduled languages.

14. Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' which were in news recently refer to

- a) Advanced computer chips developed by Intel Corporation
- b) New species of mammals discovered in Africa
- c) Atomic bombs dropped on Japan during the Second World War
- d) None of the Above

15. UN-India Development Partnership Fund supports

- a) Infrastructure development in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries.
- b) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) projects in Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing Countries.
- c) Skill Development and Technology transfer to African Countries
- d) Renewable energy projects of International Solar Alliance

16. The Rattle hydro electric project is being constructed by India on the following river.

- a) Jhelum b) Chenab
- c) Indus d) Ravi

17. Consider the following statements regarding Pokkali Rice.

- 1) It is unique rice variety grown in Tamil Nadu.
- 2) The crop can withstand floods
- 3) The rice has high protein content.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 1 and 3
- c) 2 and 3 d) 1, 2 and 3

18. Consider the following statements regarding Asiatic Wild Ass.

- 1. It is a carnivorous animal.
- 2. It is found only in the Central India and Eastern India
- 3. It has been categorised as critically endangered species in the IUCN Red List of threatened species.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 1 and 2
- c) 2 and 3 d) 1, 2 and 3

19. Consider the following statements regarding Gangetic Dolphins.

- 1. They are found in India, Bangladesh and Bhutan
- 2. They feed on fishes, invertebrates etc.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

20. Consider the following statements regarding Sonneratia alba.

- 1. It is mangrove species found in Gujarat and Goa.
- 2. It is short mangrove species.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

21. The snow leopards are found in the following States in India.

1. Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh
2. Himachal Pradesh
3. Uttarakhand
4. Sikkim
5. Arunachal Pradesh

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 b) 1, 3 and 5
c) 2, 3, and 4 d) 1, 3, and 5

22. Consider the following statements.

- 1) Globally, Snow leopards are found only in 12 countries.
- 2) In India, Snow leopards are found only in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

23. Pantanal wetlands which were in news recently are spread over the following countries.

- a) Brazil, Argentina, Chile
- b) Bolivia and Paraguay
- c) Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay
- d) Brazil and Peru

24. Consider the following statements regarding International Solar Alliance (ISA).

1. The membership of International Solar Alliance is open to all the members of the United Nations.
2. ISA aims to mobilize investments USD 100 billion by 2030 into solar energy.
3. India and Germany played a key role in setting up the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) 1 and 3 d) 2 and 3

25. Consider the following questions regarding scramjet engine.

- 1) Scramjet engines use Oxygen as fuel and Hydrogen from the atmosphere as the oxidiser.
- 2) India is the second country in the world to demonstrate scramjet technology.

Choose the correct answer using codes given below.

- a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 Nor 2

26. Consider the following statements regarding assembly of the largest ever experimental thermonuclear fusion reactor, Tokamak, which began recently in France.

- 1) The experimental reactor is aimed at demonstrating the new technology in nuclear fission.
- 2) The reactor is located in Germany.
- 3) India is partner country in the experiment.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

- | | |
|-----------|----------------|
| a) 1 Only | b) 2 and 3 |
| c) 3 Only | d) 1, 2, and 3 |

MISCELLANEOUS (PERSONS, AWARDS, SPORTS)

INTERNATIONAL PERSONS

John Hume (83), the Northern Irish politician who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 for his pivotal role in ending decades of violence in the Northern Ireland, died on August 3, 2020.

Mr. Hume, the former leader of the Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), shared the Nobel with David Trimble of the Ulster Unionist Party after they helped forge the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement.

Born in the Northern Irish city and republican stronghold of Londonderry in 1937, Mr. Hume joined the province's civil rights movement in the late 1960s launched by Catholics against inequalities in housing, voting, employment, etc when compared with Protestants.

There was high unemployment among Catholics. They were underrepresented in employment. Their voting rights were also restricted as only those who paid local taxes were given voting rights. Most of the Catholics were poor and did not pay local taxes; and thus poor Catholics were denied voting rights. Similarly, they faced discrimination in allotment of public housing. Those who paid local taxes were given preference. This benefitted Protestants. All these discriminations led to the start of Civil Rights Movement in 1960's.

Kamala Harris (55), U.S. Senator from California, has been named running mate of Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden on August 10, 2020.

Ms. Harris is the first woman of Indian descent and black woman to be nominated for running as Vice Presidential candidate. She is the daughter of Shyamala Gopalan, a cancer researcher originally from Chennai, and Donald Harris, an economics professor from Jamaica.

Ms. Harris has decades of public service to her name. In 2010, she became California's Attorney General, the first black woman to hold the position. In 2016, she was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Chadwick Boseman (43), African-American actor best known for his films like 'Black Panther' 'Captain America: Civil War,' and 'Wakanda Forever' among others, passed away on August 29, 2020. He was suffering from colon cancer since 2016.

NATIONAL PERSONS

Pranab Mukherjee (84), former President of India, passed away on August 31, 2020 after developing a lung infection at the Army's Research and Referral Hospital. He was admitted for brain surgery in the hospital. He had also tested COVID-19 positive.

Mukherjee, in his decades-long political career, served as a Member of Parliament seven times, serving in the cabinet of several prime ministers. In 2012, Mukherjee was elected President of India.

He was awarded Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian Award, in 2019 in recognition of his service to the Nation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his tribute to Pranab Mukherjee described him as a scholar par excellence and a towering statesman who was admired across the political spectrum and by all sections of society.

Manoj Sinha, former Minister of State for Railways, was appointed the Lieutenant-Governor of Jammu and Kashmir on August 6 2020 after incumbent G.C. Murmu resigned.

Girish Chandra Murmu, former Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Lieutenant-Governor (L-G), took over as the new Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on August 8, 2020. He succeeded Rajiv Mehrishi who completed his tenure. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is appointed for a period of six years or 65 years whichever is earlier. The financial accountability of the Government to the Parliament and through it to the people is ensured through CAG. The reports of the CAG are scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee(PAC) of the Parliament.

Rakesh Asthana, 1984-batch Gujarat-cadre IPS officer, was appointed as the Director-General (D-G) of the Border Security Force (BSF) on August 17, 2020. Presently, he is working as Director General of Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS).

Ashok Lavasa, Election Commissioner of India, submitted his resignation on August 31, 2020 as he was appointed as Vice-President at the Asian Development Bank.

Mr. Lavasa, a retired IAS officer of the 1980 batch, was appointed Election Commissioner in 2018 and was in the running to become the Chief Election Commissioner when Sunil Arora retires in April 2021. However, the Manila-headquartered ADB announced his appointment as the Vice-President for private sector and public-private partnerships.

Dr Padmavati Sivarama Krishna Iyer (103), country's first woman cardiologist, passed away on August 30, 2020 in Delhi.

She was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1967 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1992. She was also the recipient of Harvard Medical International Award, Dr BC Roy Award and Kamla Menon Research Award. After retiring from Government of India in 1981, she was the founding director of the National Heart Institute in Delhi.

Pandit Jasraj (90), renowned Indian classical vocalist, passed away in the U.S. after a cardiac arrest on August 17, 2020. He was also Padma Vibhushan awardee.

Sadia Dehlvi (63), renowned author and activist, passed away due to cancer on August 6, 2020.

Sadia, who hailed from the royal 'Shama' family, edited Bano, an Urdu women's journal. A woman of many talents, Sadia also produced and scripted documentaries and television programmes, including "Amma and Family" (1995), starring Zohra Sehgal, a veteran stage actor.

Nishikant Kamat (50), filmmaker-actor, died in Hyderabad on August 17, 2020. He was suffering from liver cirrhosis for the last two years.

In 2004, he made his debut as an actor in 'Hava Aney Dey' and as a filmmaker in 2005 with the commercially successful Marathi film Dombivali Fast. The film won him a National Award. He made his entry into the Tamil film industry with Evano Oruvan (2007) starring R. Madhavan, a remake of Dombivali Fast.

The filmmaker also directed Mumbai Meri Jaan (2008), Force (2011), Lai Bhaari (2014), Madaari (2016) and Rocky Handsome (2016).

Amar Singh (64), Rajya Sabha MP, passed away in Singapore on July 31, 2020. He was under treatment at a hospital in Singapore for the last seven months for kidney related ailments.

Ebrahim Alkazi (94), theatre director who revolutionised Indian theatre and was the longest-serving director of the National School of Drama, passed away on August 3, 2020.

In his tenure as director of NSD from 1962 to 1977, he mentored students who went on to become great actors, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri.

SPORTS PERSONS

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, former captain of Indian Cricket Team under whom India won the Cricket World Cup in 2011, announced his retirement from international cricket in August 2020.

Under his leadership, India won the 2007 ICC World T20 Cup, 2011 World Cup in One Day Internationals (ODIs) and 2013 ICC Champions Trophy.

He scored 10773 runs in One Day Internationals (ODI), and 1617 runs in T20 internationals. He has a combined international tally of 378 catches and 157 stumpings.

Suresh Raina, 33 year old left hand batsman, announced retirement from international cricket in August 2020. He made 5615 runs in 226 ODIs at a stunning strike-rate of 93.50. Raina played his role in India's triumphant World Cup campaign in 2011.

Chetan Chauhan (73), former Indian cricket player, passed away on August 16, 2020 due to COVID-19 infection.

Chauhan remained Sunil Gavaskar's most trusted partner and the two formed one of India's most durable opening pairs.

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Food Vision 2050 Prize for Naandi Foundation

USA based Rockefeller Foundation selected Naandi Foundation, Hyderabad-based non-profit, as one of the 'Top 10 Visionaries' in the world for the Food Vision 2050 Prize.

The award, announced in New York in August 2020, carries prize money of \$ 200,000.

The foundation recognised the Arakunomics model of Naandi Foundation.

In the Araku valley, the Foundation is empowering the tribal farmers in the production of world class coffee while ensuring environmental sustainability and fair profits for farmers.

Apart from Araku, the foundation is also working with farmers in Wardha and New Delhi.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India:

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, was another recipient of 'Top 10 Visionaries' Award from India.

The foundation recognised 'Eat Right India' initiative of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India which focuses on creating a national movement towards healthier diets through a systems-based approach of reducing food waste; improving hygiene and sanitation across the value chain; and increasing access to and affordability of healthy foods.

SPORTS AWARDS

National Sports Awards 2020:

- The following Sports Awards are given every year to recognise and reward excellence in sports.
- **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award** for the spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over a period of four years;
- **Arjuna Award** for consistent outstanding performance for four years;
- **Dronacharya Award** for the coaches for producing medal winners at prestigious international sports events;
- **Dhyan Chand Award** for life time contribution to sports development;
- **Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar** for the corporate entities (both in private and public sector) and individuals who have played a visible role in the area of sports promotion and development;
- **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy** for overall top performing university in inter-university tournaments.
- **Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award:**
- In addition to these Sports Awards, the Ministry also recognises the spirit of adventure among the people of the country by bestowing the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award.

2020 Awardees:

The National Sports Awards were announced in August 2020.

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1. Mr. Rohit Sharma | Cricket |
| 2. Mr. Mariyappan T. | Para Athletics |
| 3. Ms. Manika Batra | Table Tennis |
| 4. Ms. Vinesh | Wrestling |
| 5. Ms. Rani | Hockey |

Dronacharya Awards

Life- Time Category

Name of the Coach	Discipline
Dharmendra Tiwary	Archery
Purushotham Rai	Athletics
Shiv Singh	Boxing
Romesh Pathania	Hockey
Krishan Kumar Hooda	Kabaddi
Vijay Bhalchandra Munishwar	Para Powerlifting
Naresh Kumar	Tennis
Om Prakash Dahiya	Wrestling

Regular Category

Name of the Coach	Discipline
Jude Felix Sebastian	Hockey
Yogesh Malviya	Mallakhamb
Jaspal Rana	Shooting
Kuldeep Kumar Handoo	Wushu
Gaurav Khanna Para	Badminton

Arjuna Award:

Arjuna Award was given to 27 persons.

Atanu Das (archery), Deepak Hooda (kabaddi), Deepika Thakur & Akashdeep Singh (hockey), Divij Sharan (tennis), Ishant Sharma & Deepti Sharma (cricket), Manish Kaushik & Lovlina Borgohain (boxing), Manu Bhaker & Saurabh Chaudhary (shooting), Sandesh Jhinghan (football), Dattu Bhokanal (rowing), Rahul Aware & Divya Kakran (wrestling), Dutee Chand (athletics), Shiva Keshavan (winter sports), Madhurika Patkar (table tennis), Manish Narwal (para shooter), Sandeep Chaudhary (para athlete), Suyash Jadhav (para swimmer), Chirag Shetty & Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (badminton), Vishesh Bhriguvanshi (basketball), Ajay Sawant (tent-pegging), Aditi Ashok (golf), and Sarika Kale (kho kho).

Dhyanchand Award:

Dhyanchand Award was given to 15 sport persons.

Jincy Philips & Kuldeep Singh Bhullar (athletics), Trupti Murgunde & Pradeep Gandhe (badminton), N. Usha & Lakha Singh (boxing), Sukhwinder Singh Sandhu (football), Ajeet Singh (hockey), Manpreet Singh (kabaddi), Manjeet Singh (rowing), Sachin Nag (posthumous, swimming), Nandan Bal (tennis), Netar Pal Hooda (wrestling), Satyaprakash Tiwari (para badminton), and J. Ranjit Kumar (para athletics).

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy was given to Punjab University.

Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar was given to five institutions:

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Air Force Sports Board, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Army Sports Institute, Lakshya Institute, and International Institute of Sports Management.

Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award was given to eight sports persons:

Anita Devi, Col. Sarfraz Singh, Taka Tamut, Narender Singh & Keval Hiren Kakka (all land adventure); Satendra Singh (water); Gajanand Yadava (air); Late Magan Bissa (lifetime achievement).

Zaheer Abbas, Kallis and Sthalekar in ICC Hall of Fame

Pakistan batsman Zaheer Abbas, legendary South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis and Pune-born former Australian women's team captain Lisa Sthalekar were inducted into the International Cricket Council's Hall of Fame.

The ICC Cricket Hall of Fame recognises the achievements of the legends of the cricket game.

The Hall of Fame now includes 27 Australians, 28 England players, six India cricketers, three from New Zealand, four from South Africa, one Sri Lankan and 18 from the West Indies.

SPORTS

Golf:

2020 PGA Championship at San Francisco, US (August 2020)

Collin Morikawa - Winner

Dustin Johnson - Runner

Tennis:

Western & Southern Open at Mason in Ohio state of USA (August 2020)

Novak Djokovic - Winner

Milos Raonic - Runner

Formula One:

British Grand Prix at Silverstone, United Kingdom (August 2020)

Lewis Hamilton - Winner

Verstappen - Runner

Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona, Spain (August 2020)

Luis Hamilton - Winner

Verstappen - Runner

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