



CURRENT AFFAIRS : SEPTEMBER 2021

PEOPLE'S PLAN CAMPAIGN

Union government launched People's Plan Campaign 2021- Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas and Vibrant Gram Sabha Dashboard.

About People's Plan campaign

- The People's Plan Campaign (PPC) is an effective strategy for ensuring the preparation of GPDP in a campaign mode. During the campaign, structured Gram Sabha meetings will be held for preparing Panchayat Development Plans for the next financial year 2022–2023.
- The meetings will involve physical presence and presentation by frontline workers/supervisors on 29 sectors.
- Special efforts have been made to ensure maximum participation of vulnerable sections of society like SC/ST/Women etc.
- The Panchayat Development Plan aims to strengthen the role of elected representatives of Panchayats and SHG Women under DAY-NRLM in effective Gram Sabha. There are 31.65 lakh elected Panchayat representatives across the country in which 14.53 lakh are women.

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and its importance

- Article 243G of the Constitution of India mandates the Gram Panchayats (GPs) to prepare and implement GPDP for economic development and social justice. The GPDP does three essential things:
 - o It provides a VISION of what the people would like their village to look like;
 - o It sets out clear GOALS to achieve that vision, and
 - o Gives an ACTION PLAN to reach those goals.
- The GPDP should be comprehensive and based on participatory process involving the community particularly Gram Sabha, and in convergence with schemes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments related to 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

- The convergence assumes greater significance in view of the fact that Panchayats can play an important role for effective implementation of flagship schemes on subjects of National Importance for transformation of rural India.
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj has prepared model guidelines for GPDP and circulated the same to all the States where part IX of constitution is applicable.

DEPUTY SPEAKER OF LOK SABHA

Recently, the Delhi High Court sought Lok Sabha Secretariat reply to a petition on the vacant post of deputy speaker for over 2 years.

More about the Deputy Speaker and his election

- The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are the Presiding Officers of the Lok Sabha.
- While the office of Speaker is vacant or during the absence of the Speaker from any sitting of the House, the duties of the office shall be performed by the Deputy Speaker.
- Under Article 94, the speaker resigns from his office by writing to the Deputy Speaker.
- Under Article 93, "The House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker thereof and, so often as the office of Speaker and Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the House shall choose another member to be Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be."
- Though no timeline on election is provided under Article 93, being an important constitutional office, the election is usually held on next sitting after Speaker selection as President fixes date for Speaker election and after being elected the Speaker fixes the date for Deputy Speaker election.

Why has the office remained vacant?

For 17th Lok Sabha, the date of elections for Deputy Speaker is pending even after more than two years of Lok Sabha constitution in 2019.

The post of deputy speaker (since Morarji Desai Government) is conventionally given to the biggest opposition party in the house, with few exceptions. As the combined opposition

lacks in strength to elect a member of their choice in present Lok Sabha, the choice for Deputy Speaker falls on the government of the day to either-

- Continue with parliamentary convention and elect Deputy Speaker from biggest opposition party, or
- Reach settlement with any other party in Lok Sabha for choice of Deputy Speaker. E.g., in 16th Lok Sabha it was held by AIADMK.

AMENDMENT IN ALL INDIA SERVICES (AIS) (CONDUCT) RULES, 1968

- Amendment will allow IAS, IPS and IFoS officers to retain gifts received from foreign dignitaries while being members of the Indian delegation.
 - o Presently there are no provisions under the AIS (Conduct) Rules, 1968, with regard to receipt/retention of gifts from foreign dignitaries.
- Existing rules allowed these officers to accept gifts from their near relatives or from personal friend sharing no official dealings with them, on occasions such as weddings, anniversaries, funerals and religious functions.
 - o However, they are supposed to report to the government if the value of such gift exceeds ₹25,000.

PRIME MINISTER'S CITIZEN ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS (PM-CARES) FUND

- Centre has informed Delhi High Court that PM-CARES Fund, charitable trust, is not a government fund as the amount collected by it does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India.
 - o It was made in response to a petition seeking that PM-CARES Fund be declared as 'The State' under Article 12 of the Constitution.
- The Prime Minister is Chairperson (ex-officio) 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.

AN INSTITUTION'S RIGHT TO GOVERNMENT AID IS NOT A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT: SUPREME COURT

- The remark was made in a judgment where top court upheld a 2010 policy decision of the Uttar Pradesh government to outsource appointment of Class IV employees in all state-run and aided institutions and schools.
- Key highlights of the judgement to Government aid to an institution is a matter of policy and it is not a fundamental right: If the government made a policy call to withdraw aid, an institution cannot question the decision as a “matter of right”.
- ✓ Policy depends on various factors including financial constraints and deficiencies, the interests of the institution itself etc.
 - o Article 30 of the Constitution is subject to reasonable restrictions: For aided institutions, there cannot be any difference between a minority and non-minority one, but if an institution does not want to accept and comply with the conditions accompanying such aid, it is well open to it to decline the grant and move in its own way.
- ✓ Article 30(2) states that state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

FIRST QUAD SUMMIT

Recently, first ever in-person meeting of the Quad was held.

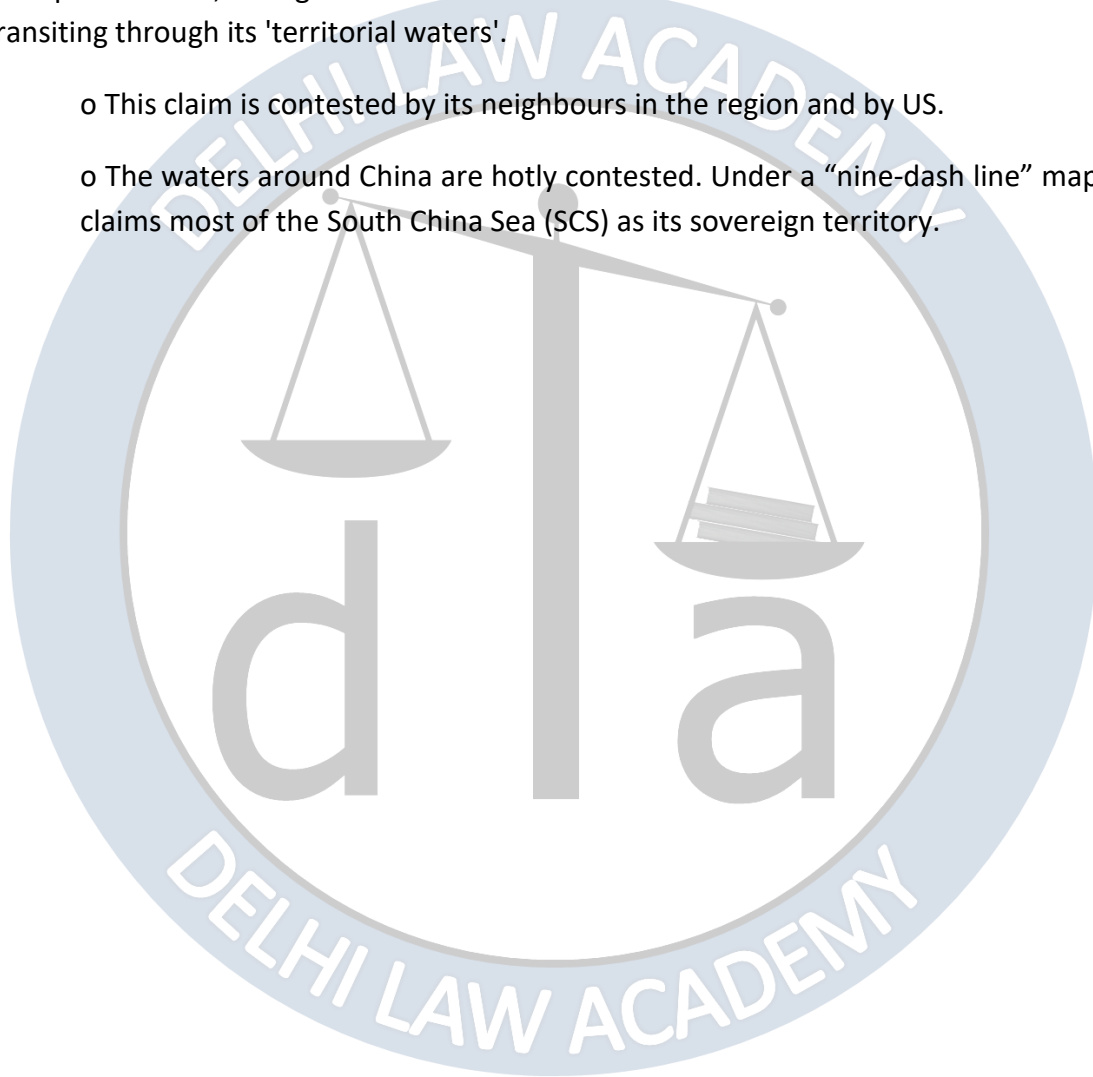
About Quad

- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is an informal association of India, the United States, Australia, and Japan. The group met for the first time in 2007 on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- o Its origin can be traced back to the evolution of Exercise Malabar and the 2004 Tsunami when India conducted relief and rescue operations for itself and neighboring countries and was later joined by the US, Japan and Australia.

- Set up to counter the growing might of China economically and militarily, this version eventually dissipated in 2008.

China's new maritime law comes into force

- As per this law, foreign vessels will have to submit details to Chinese authorities when transiting through its 'territorial waters'.
 - o This claim is contested by its neighbours in the region and by US.
 - o The waters around China are hotly contested. Under a “nine-dash line” map, China claims most of the South China Sea (SCS) as its sovereign territory.



SIGNIFICANCE OF QUAD



Japan

- ▶ Japan depends heavily on **open sea lanes for its trade** with the world.
- ▶ **China's assertion of its sovereignty in the South China Sea**, as well as Chinese provocations towards islands China and Japan both claim in the East China Sea, has **made Japan wary of China's military build-up**.



Australia

- ▶ China's rapid rise is **changing the calculus for Australia** in Indo-Pacific and it has relied on US to play the role of external balancer in the region.
- ▶ Quad **complements Australia's other bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation**, including with ASEAN.



US

- ▶ **Indo-Pacific is important to U.S. maritime interests**. In 2019, \$1.9 trillion worth of U.S. trade passed through the region.
- ▶ **China's growing willingness to challenge the regional status quo** worries U.S.

FORMATION OF AUKUS

Recently, Australia, UK and US have announced a new trilateral program AUKUS.

About AUKUS

- AUKUS, by Australia, UK and US, is a new security alliance that aims for deeper cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and greater sharing of defence capabilities within the alliance.
- The plan is to give access to cutting edge military technology to Australia by its two partners, including futuristic capabilities like artificial intelligence and quantum technologies.
 - o As part of the pact, Australia will abandon its US \$43 billion plan to build French conventional submarines, and instead build vessels based on US-UK technology.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS (FTAS)

To fast-track free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with several countries like the UK, Australia, the European Union, and Canada, India is keen to conclude an “early harvest” trade deal with some of these countries.

What are FTAs and other types of trade agreements?

- FTAs are arrangements between two or more countries or trading blocs that primarily agree to reduce or eliminate customs tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.
- FTAs, normally cover trade in goods (such as agricultural or industrial products) or trade in services (such as banking, construction, trading etc.), but can also cover other areas such as intellectual property rights (IPRs), investment, government procurement etc.

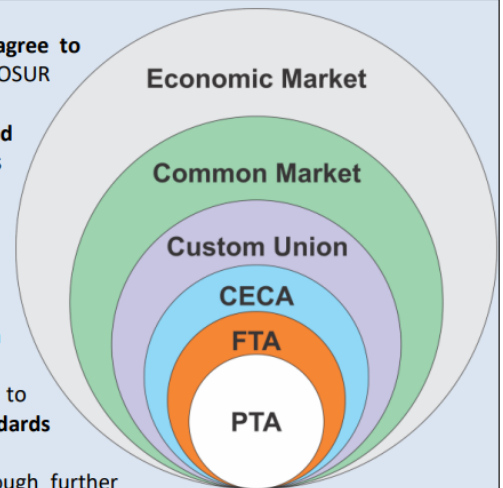
How Early harvest scheme (EHS) is different from an FTA?

- Early harvest scheme is a precursor to an FTA between two trading partners. This is to help the two trading countries identify certain products for tariff liberalisation pending the conclusion of FTA negotiation. It is primarily a confidence building measure.

- A good example of an EHS is the one between India and Thailand which was signed in October 2003, wherein several products were identified to be reduced to zero in a phased manner.

Other types of trade agreements

- **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** In a PTA, two or more partners agree to reduce tariffs on agreed number of tariff lines. For example, India MERCOSUR PTA.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) and Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** These terms describe agreements which consist of an integrated package on goods, services, and investment along with other areas including IPR, competition etc. The India Korea CEPA is one such example.
- **Custom Union:** In a Customs union, partner countries may decide to trade at zero duty among themselves, however they maintain common tariffs against rest of the world. An example is Southern African Customs Union (SACU).
- **Common Market:** A common market is a Customs Union with provisions to facilitate free movements of labour and capital, harmonize technical standards across members etc. European Common Market is an example.
- **Economic Union:** Economic Union is a Common Market extended through further harmonization of fiscal/monetary policies and shared executive, judicial & legislative institutions. European Union (EU) is an apt example of this type.



INDIA AND MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS

Recently, the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) admitted Bangladesh, UAE, and Uruguay as its new members as part

of its extensive membership expansion program.

More about NDB

- NDB is a Multilateral Development Institution (MDI) established during the 6th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit in Fortaleza (2014).
- **Purpose:** With an authorized capital of US\$ 100 billion, NDB supports public and private infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS nations, and other emerging and developing economies
- **Governance Structure:** It functions through a Board of Governors, a Board of Directors, a President and VicePresidents, with the President being elected from one of the founding members on a rotational basis.

What are Multilateral Development Institutions (MDIs)?

Starting from Bretton Woods Institutions to rebuild war-ravaged nations and stabilize the global financial system, MDI is defined as “an international financial institution chartered by two or more countries for the purpose of encouraging economic development in poorer nations”.

- The primary goal of MDIs is to issue grants and low-cost loans for improvement in the social and economic conditions of impoverished or developing nations.
- Traditionally an initiative from developed countries, in the last few decades emerging economies have also started building MDIs. For example, NDB, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) etc.
- They help developing countries to fund capital intensive activities like infrastructure, energy, education, and environmental sustainability.

Major Global and Regional MDIs with Indian Membership

Name of MDI	Year of Formation	Headquarter	Total Member	Type of Financing
World Bank Group *	IBRD-1944, IFC-1956, IDA-1960 MIGA-1988	Washington D.C., USA	IBRD-189, IFC-185 & IDA-173 MIGA-182	Concessional and Non-concessional loans, equity investments, Grants and loan guarantees with some differences within the sub-institutions.
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	1944	Washington D.C., USA	190	Mainly Policy-based loans with financing in exchange of particular policy reform like Privatization, Agricultural or electricity policy reforms.
African Development Bank Group (AFDB)	AFDB-1964, African Development Fund-1972	Abidjan (Ivory Coast)	81	Non-concessional and concessional loans, equity investments, and loan guarantees Grants by African Development Fund.
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	ADB-1966, Asian Development Fund-1973	Mandaluyong of Metro Manila (Philippines)	68	Non-concessional and concessional loans, equity investments, and loan guarantees Grants by Asian Development Fund.
New Development Bank	2014	Shanghai, China	** 8 (after latest expansion)	Guarantees, syndicated loans with private investors, equity investments, project bonds and co-financing arrangements with other MDIs.
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	2016	Beijing, China	103	Loans, investing in the equity capital of an enterprise, and guaranteeing with open option of underwriting.

*The World Bank Group includes the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), The International Development Association (IDA), The International Finance Corporation (IFC), The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The term World Bank is collectively referred for IBRD and IDA.

Note that India is not part of ICSID.

**Please note that UAE and Uruguay are prospective members and will officially become a member country once they deposit their instrument of accession.

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

- 21st Meeting Of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Council Of Heads of State was held in Dushanbe
- The Heads of State Council is the highest decision making body in SCO.
- o The SCO is a permanent intergovernmental political, economic and military organization founded in Shanghai in 2001.

- Key Highlight of the meet

o Iran joined as a permanent SCO member with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar as new dialogue partners of SCO.

✓ Experts observe that Iran's inclusion as a member makes SCO 'a more organic part of the larger Central Asia-Middle East system'.

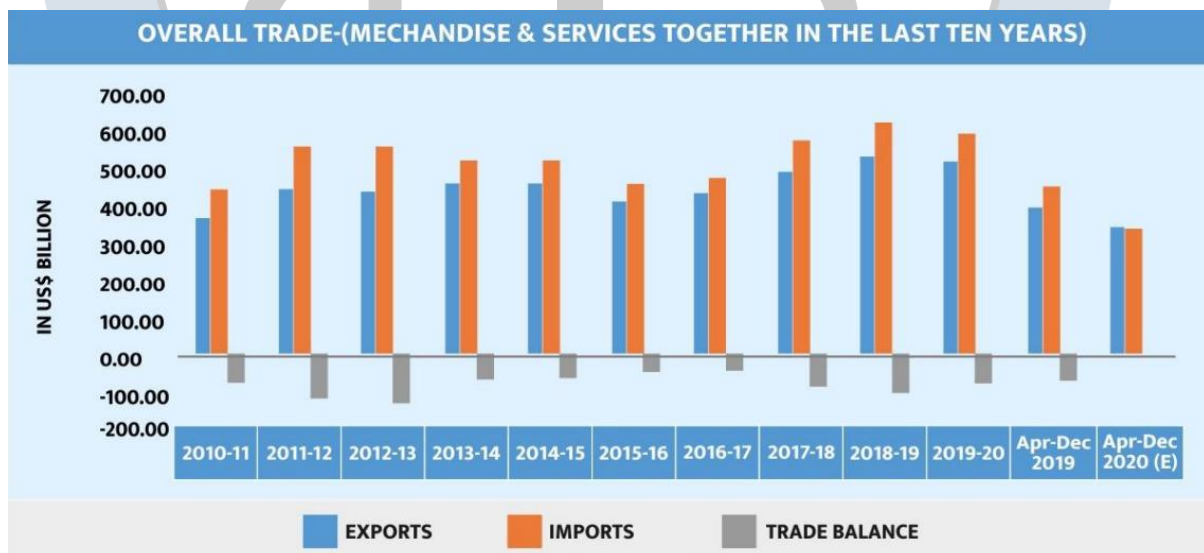
INDIA AND USA SIGN PROJECT AGREEMENT FOR AIR-LAUNCHED UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLE (ALUAV)

- The Project Agreement for ALUAV is under the umbrella Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).

INDIA'S EXPORTS

Recently various developments took place in India's exports sector.

- India's quarterly exports cross \$100 bn mark for the first time as a result of sector specific interventions taken by the government during the COVID crisis.



Trends in India's overall trade

- India's overall exports (merchandise and services combined) in 2019-20 were US\$ 526.6 billion as against US\$ 538.1 billion in 2018-19.

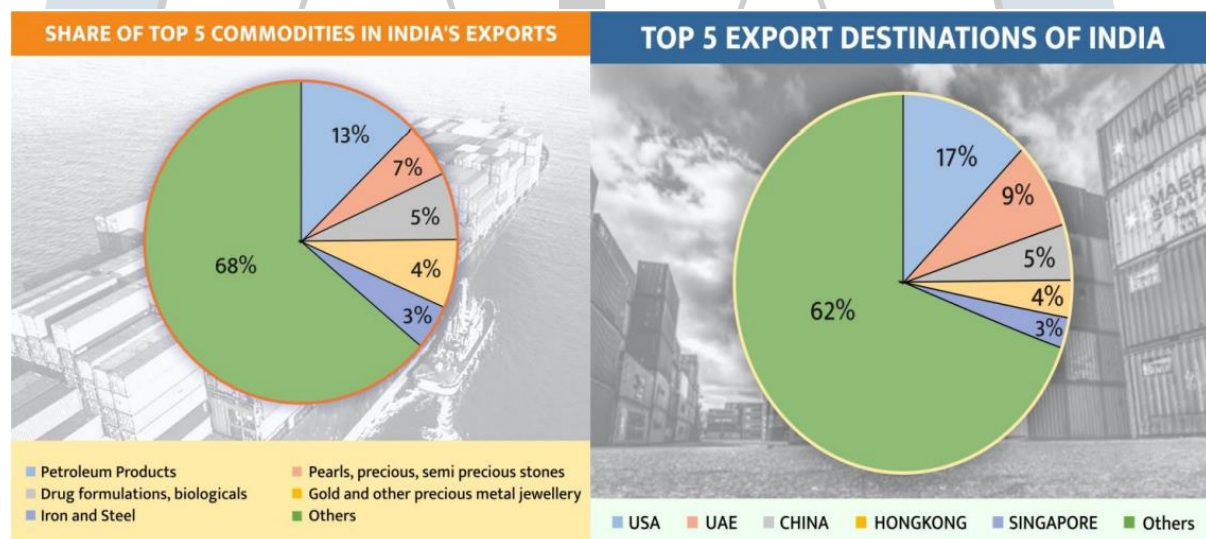
- o Decline in exports has been mainly due to the ongoing global slowdown, which got aggravated due to the current Covid-19 crisis. The latter resulted in large scale disruptions in supply chains and demand resulting in cancellation of orders.

- India's share in world exports has increased from 0.6% in 1991 to 1.7% in 2018 but remains paltry compared with China's ~13% and US' ~9%.

- o India ranked 18th on the list of the top exporting countries worldwide in 2019.

- As percentage of GDP, India's exports are about 18 per cent of GDP.

- India's services trade has been a major driver of its exports due to its high growth and services trade surplus has been financing almost 50% of India's merchandise trade deficit.



EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

Recently, World Bank Group announced that it has decided to discontinue publication of its 'Doing Business' rankings of country business climates.

About Ease of Doing Business Rankings

- Doing Business project, launched in 2002, provided objective measures of business regulations and their enforcement across 191 economies and selected cities at the subnational and regional level.
 - o It looks at domestic small and medium-size companies and measures the regulations applying to them through their life cycle (refer infographic)
- The Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) index is a ranking system established by the World Bank Group wherein the 'higher rankings' (a lower numerical value) indicate better, usually simpler, regulations for businesses and stronger protections of property rights.
- India moved to 63rd position (from 142nd in 2014) on Ease of Doing Business Ranking 2020.

Some Ease of Doing Reforms implemented by India to improve its ranking

- Make in India led to launch of reforms like getting FDI, foster business, alleviate the business environment from outdated policies and regulations, infrastructure development etc.
- Launch of web-based SPICe+ and AGILE-PROform has enabled new company incorporation in 3-steps as compared to the 14 steps process in 2014.
- Establishment of a modern insolvency regime through Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016 as part of a comprehensive strategy to reform corporate law.
- One stop shop portal has been launched in Mumbai & Delhi
- Easy procedure for filing GST returns, elimination of incorporation fees for small businesses etc.
- Number of days required for getting electricity connection reduced from 105 days in 2014 to 53 days in 2019 in India.
- Dedicated Commercial Courts with modern facilities in Delhi and Mumbai have been established for early redressal of commercial disputes.

- Single window for all import and export transactions, integration of all stakeholders such as port and terminal operators at a common platform and fast-tracking clearances of consignments at ports.
- Passage of the Taxation laws (amendment) Act, 2021 which scrapped the retrospective taxation bringing certainty in taxation laws.

DIGISAKSHAM

- Ministry for Labour and Employment has launched DigiSaksham- a digital skills programme to enhance the employability of youth by imparting digital skills that are required in an increasingly technology driven era.
 - o This is a joint initiative with Microsoft India.
- Free of cost training in digital skills including basic skills as well as advance computing will be provided to more than three lakh youths in the first year.
 - o Jobseekers can access the training through National Career Service (NCS) Portal.
 - o It gives priority to job-seekers of semi-urban areas belonging to disadvantaged communities.

RAIL KAUSHAL VIKAS YOJANA (RKVY)

- Ministry of Railways launched RKVY, under the aegis of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.
- Aim of RKVY is to impart training skills to the youth in various trades to bring qualitative improvement.
 - o Candidates who are 10th passed and between 18-35 years shall be eligible to apply.
- Training will be provided to 50000 candidates over a period of three years.

- Training will be provided in four trades viz. Electrician, Welder, Machinist and Fitter and will comprise of initial basic training of 100 hours.

INDIA'S FIRST EVER EURODENOMINATED GREEN BONDS

- The €300 million 7-year Euro Green Bond were issued by Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC), the leading non-banking finance corporation (NBFC) in power sector.
- In green bonds, the money raised by the issuer are earmarked towards financing 'green' projects like renewable energy, clean transportation etc.
 - o In 2007, green bonds were launched by development banks such as European Investment Bank and World Bank.
 - o For India, Yes Bank was the first bank to come out with green bonds in 2015.

INDIA JUMPS 2 SPOTS TO 46TH RANK IN THE GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX (GII) 2021

- Co-published by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), Cornell University and INSEAD, the report provides an annual ranking of innovation capabilities and performance of 131 countries and economies around the world.
 - o Its 80+ indicators explore broad vision of innovation, including political environment, education, infrastructure and business sophistication.
 - o Theme of GI 2021 is 'Tracking Innovation through the COVID-19 Crisis'.

OVERGROUND WORKERS (OGWS)

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) police recently arrested three overground workers (OGWs) for a grenade attack on a Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF) camp.

Who are overground workers?

- The Jammu and Kashmir Police categorize "anybody who supports the militants" as an OGW.

o A person providing a safe house, passage, information or acting as a messenger for suspected militants automatically is categorized as an OGW.

- OGWs are often described as 'militants without weapons'.

THEATRE COMMANDERS WILL REPORT TO CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF (CDS)

- For the first time India's CDS publicly described the Indian military's deliberations on reorganising itself into Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs).

o ITC seeks to integrate the capabilities of the three services (army, air force and navy) and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.

o The idea of Integrated Theatre commands has been proposed by both the Kargil review committee as well as D B Shekatkar committee.

- The 17 single-service commands that currently exist would be combined into just four geographical commands.

o **Western theatre command**: For the border against Pakistan.

o **Northern theatre command**: For the border with China.

o **Maritime command**: For Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

o **Island command**: It is already functional, called the Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC). It would project power into the eastern Indian Ocean.

o **Air space and cyber war** would be the 5th and 6th ITCs.

HELINA (HELICOPTER BASED NAG)

- HELINA has completed all the trials.
- It is a third-generation fire and forget class anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system mounted on the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH).
- It is being inducted into the Indian Army and its variant called DHRUVAstra is being inducted into the Indian Air Force.

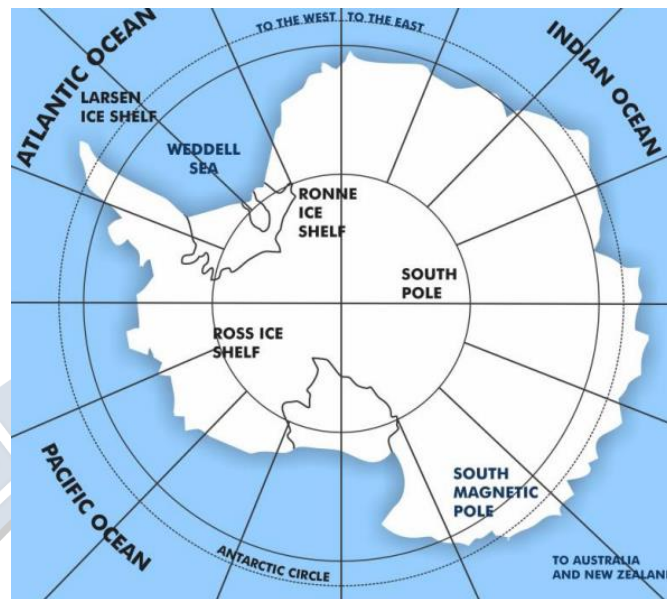
- Features: All weather day and night capability. It can defeat battle tanks with conventional armour as well as explosive reactive armor. It has a minimum range of 500 m and a maximum range of 7 km.

MILITARY EXERCISES IN NEWS

- **ZAPAD Exercise**: It is one of the theatre level exercises of Russian armed forces and will focus primarily on operations against terrorists. India is amongst one of the participating countries.
- **SIMBEX**: 28th edition of Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise was held in the South China Sea as an 'at-sea only' exercise without any physical interactions due to COVID 19 pandemic.
 - o Initiated in 1994, SIMBEX is the Indian Navy's longest uninterrupted bilateral maritime exercisewith any foreign navy.
- **Exercise Surya Kiran**: It is a joint Military Training Exercise between Indian Army and Nepali Army.
- **AUSINDEX**: It is the Biennial maritime warfare exercises between the Royal Australian and the Indian navies. It is being held this year in Australia.
- **Samudra Shakti**: India and Indonesia navy participates in the 3rd edition of Bilateral Exercise 'Samudra Shakti'.
- **SCO Exercise Peaceful Mission 2021**: 6th edition of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) Exercise Peaceful Mission 2021 started at Orenburg Region of South West Russia.
 - o The participants SCO member states, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan.

PROTECTING THE ANTARCTIC ENVIRONMENT

Recently, India Extended support for protecting Antarctic environment and for designating East Antarctica and Weddell Sea as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).



About Antarctica

- Antarctica is not a country. It has no government and no indigenous population. Instead, the entire continent is set aside as a scientific preserve.
- The Antarctic Treaty was signed in Washington on 1 December 1959 by the twelve countries whose scientists had been active in and around Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-58.
 - o These 12 countries are: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, USSR (now Russia) the UK, and the US.
 - o The total number of Parties to the Treaty is now 54 (including India).
 - o The Treaty entered into force in 1961 and has since been acceded to by many other nations.

TAMIL NADU TO SET UP INDIA'S FIRST DUGONG CONSERVATION RESERVE

- Recently, the Tamil Nadu government announced India's first conservation reserve for Dugongs in Palk Bay.

o They face threats of habitat loss, entanglement in fishing nets, hunting for meat and oil etc.

About Dugong

o Dugongs, also known as Sea Cows, are the only herbivorous marine mammals and the only member of the family Dugongidae, making it one of the four surviving species in the Order Sirenia (other is Trichechidae, or the manatee family).

o Classified as Vulnerable by IUCN and included in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 as well as Appendix I on CITES; they are mainly found in shallow areas as they survive mainly on seagrass.



UNESCO DECLARES WORLD'S FIRST 5-COUNTRY BIOSPHERE RESERVE IN "AMAZON OF EUROPE"

- Biosphere reserve covers 700 kilometres of the Mura, Drava and Danube (MDD) rivers and stretches across Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia.

o Reserve is home to floodplain forests, gravel and sand banks, river islands, oxbows and meadows.

- The World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) of the MAB Programme consists of a dynamic and interactive network of sites of excellence.

- WNBR includes 727 biosphere reserves in 131 countries, including 22 transboundary sites; building international, regional, sub-regional and ecosystem-specific cooperation.
- There are 12 UNESCO designated Biosphere reserves in India: Nilgiri, Gulf of Mannar, Sunderban, Nanda Devi, Nokrek, Pachmarhi, Simlipal, Achanakmar, Amarkantak, Great Nicobar, Agasthyamala, Khangchendzonga, Panna.

HYBODONT SHARKS

- Teeth of a species of hybodont shark of Jurassic age (approximately, between 160 and 168 million-years-old) have been reported for the first time from Rajasthan's Jaisalmer.
- o Hybodont, an extinct group of sharks, was a dominant group of fishes in both marine and fluvial environments during the Triassic and early Jurassic time.

PRIME MINISTER (PM) DEDICATES TO THE NATION 35 CROP VARIETIES WITH SPECIAL TRAITS

- Crop varieties have been developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to address the twin challenges of climate change and malnutrition.
- o 35 varieties include
 - ✓ Climate resistant crops like drought tolerant variety of chickpea, wilt and sterility mosaic resistant pigeonpea, early maturing variety of soybean, disease resistant varieties of rice etc.
 - ✓ Crops with high nutrition content like bio-fortified varieties of wheat, pearl millet, maize and chickpea etc.

GREEN VOYAGE 2050 PROJECT

- Launched in May 2019, it is a partnership project between Norway and International Maritime Organisation (IMO).
- Aim is to transform the shipping industry towards a lower carbon future.

- o It is supporting developing countries in meeting their commitment towards relevant climate change and energy efficiency goals, for international shipping,
- India has been selected as the first country under this project for conduct of a pilot project related to Green Shipping.

CHILD MARRIAGE

The Odisha government has rolled out a plan to make the state completely free of child marriage by 2030.

About child marriage

- Child marriage can be described as a formal marriage, or an informal union entered into by an individual before attaining the prescribed eligible age.
- o As per the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the marriageable age is 21 for males and 18 for females.
- Severity of prevalence of child marriages in India
- o India has the largest number of brides in the world : one- third of the global total.
- o Nearly 16% adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married.
- o The problem of child marriage is widely spread across the country, however, it is most common in northern, eastern and western India like in Jharkhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, among others.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006

The Act makes contracting a marriage by a man who is over 18 years of age with a woman under 18 years, a cognizable and non-bailable offence punishable with imprisonment of two years and a fine of Rs one lakh, but recognizes the union as valid.

It sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for women and at 21 for men.



It treats underage marriages as valid, but voidable which means that an underage marriage is valid as long as the minors involved in the marriage want it to remain valid.

Efforts to curtail child marriages before independence

- **Ram Mohan Roy** created the **Bramho Samaj** in **1828** that sought to break the shackles of the caste system, and the fight against Sati that saved the lives of many women. He also advocated for **property rights for women** and **fought child marriage**.
- **Rukhmaibai**, born in 1864, **contested her husband's claim to conjugal rights** in an iconic court case **Dadaji Vs Rukhmabai** that led to the passage of the Age of Consent Act in 1891. **In this case she was helped by Behramji Malabari**.
- **The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929/Sharda act** passed in the Imperial Legislative Council of India, fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE) RELEASES INDIA RANKINGS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES (HEIS), 2021

- This is the sixth consecutive edition of India Rankings of HEIs in India by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).
- NIRF has been accepted by the MoE in September 2015. This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
 - o It is the first-ever effort by the government to rank HEIs in the country. Before NIRF, HEIs were usually ranked by private entities.
 - o Participation in the NIRF was made compulsory for all government-run educational institutions in 2018.

THE TOP 5			
Rank	Overall	Universities	Colleges
1	IIT Madras	IISc	Miranda House, Delhi
2	IISc	JNU	SRCC, Delhi
3	IIT Bombay	BHU	Loyola College, Chennai
4	IIT Delhi	Calcutta University	St Xavier's, Kolkata
5	IIT Kanpur	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Howrah

SAATH INITIATIVE

- Saath was recently inaugurated by the Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor.
 - o It is a Rural Enterprises Acceleration Programme for women associated with Self Help Group (SHGs).
 - o It will stress on mentoring and market linkages of products created by women associated with SHGs.

o Also, these women would be imparted knowledge about marketing, packaging and branding.

- This initiative aims to impart skills and convert such women's' businesses into Higher Order Enterprises.

CENTRE ANNOUNCES UNIFORM SPECIFICATIONS FOR FORTIFIED RICE

- The Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD), under the Consumer Affairs Ministry had issued uniform specifications for fortified rice kernels (FRK) for Grade A and common rice for procurement of fortified rice stocks, wherein 1% of FRK should be blended with normal rice.

o Fortified rice is to be distributed under various government schemes including public distribution system and midday meals in schools by 2024.

- According to the FSSAI norms, 1 kg fortified rice shall contain iron (28mg-42.5mg), folic acid (75-125 microgram) and Vitamin B-12 (0.75-1.25 microgram).

o In addition, rice may also be fortified with micronutrients such as zinc, Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B3 and Vitamin B6.

Initiatives taken in India for promotion of technology in agriculture sector

- Government's free app, Kisan Suvidha, provides farmers information on current weather, market price, dealer info, plant protection, and more.
- ISRO's Geo-platform, Bhuvan, which provides valuable data on the plantation, pest surveillance and weather.
- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has established a network of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) in the country mandated with Technology Assessment and Demonstration for its Application and Capacity Development (TADA-CD).

o KVKs organize demonstrations, training programs and skill development programs for the benefit of farmers and farm women, rural youth and in-service extension personnel.

- e-sagu: It provide expert suggestions to the farmers. With the use of the internet and audio-visual communication facility, the advice is provided to the farmers regularly

regarding the various techniques to increase farm productivity.

SPACE PROGRAMMES IN NEWS

- **Inspiration4**: It is the first orbital trip where none of the people aboard is a professional astronaut.
 - o The crew used a Dragon capsule provided by SpaceX rocket company.
 - o Apart from fundraising for charity, the mission aims to study the biological effects of deep space on the astronauts' bodies.
- **NASA's Lucy mission**: It will be the first space mission to study Jupiter's Trojan asteroids to gain new insights into the solar system's formation 4.5 billion years ago.
 - o Trojan asteroids associated with Jupiter are thought to be remnants of the primordial material that formed the outer planets.
 - o Trojans orbit the Sun in two loose groups, with one group leading ahead of Jupiter in its path, the other trailing behind.

BLUE STRAGGLER

- Indian researchers have carried out the first-ever comprehensive analysis of blue stragglers.
- Blue stragglers are bigger and bluer star formed when one star eats up another.
 - o These stars are primarily present in the older and massive star clusters.
 - o More than 54% of blue stragglers are formed through mass transfer from a close binary companion star, 30% are likely formed through collisions of 2 stars, and 10-16% are formed through interactions of more than 2 stars.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES AYUSHMAN BHARAT DIGITAL MISSION (ABDM)

- ABDM aims to create a seamless online platform that will enable interoperability within the digital health ecosystem.

o Currently, ABDM is being implemented in a pilot phase in six union territories.

Key features

o Digital Health ID for every citizen that will work as their health account, to which personal health records can be linked and viewed through mobile application.

✓ The mission will enable access and exchange of longitudinal health records (LHR) of citizens with their consent.

▪ LHR is an electronic medical record of patient health information generated by one or more encounters in any care delivery setting.

o Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR) and Healthcare Facilities Registries (HFR) that act as repository of all healthcare providers across modern and traditional systems of medicine.

o ABDM Sandbox, will act as a framework for technology and product testing.

PARYUSHAN AND DAS LAKSHAN

• U.S. President extended Paryushan and Das Lakshan wishes to Jain community.

o These are festivals for celebrating the qualities and essence of the Soul.

o They are marked by strict observance of the ten cardinal virtues: Forgiveness, Charity, Simplicity, Contentment, Truthfulness, Self-restraint, Fasting, Detachment, Humility and Continence.

• **Paryushan:** An annual 8-10 days period of fasting and meditation for Jain worshippers observed by Shwetamabar Jains.

• **Das Lakshan:** A 10-day festival that takes place after Paryushana and observed by Digambar Jains

NATIONAL MISSION ON CULTURAL MAPPING (NMCM)

- Having made little progress since its launch in 2017, NMCM has now been handed over to Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA).

- o IGNCA will soon start cultural mapping in 75 villages.

- NMCM was set up to compile data of artists, art forms & geo location with inputs from Central Ministries, State Governments & art and culture bodies.

GI TAG TO JUDIMA RICE WINE

- Judima, a home-made rice wine of Assam's Dimasa tribe has become the first traditional brew in all of northeast to bag a geographical indication (GI) tag.

- o A GI tag is awarded to products associated with a specific geographical origin.

- To produce Judima, Dimasa tribe uses a glutinous rice called Bora (indigenous to the region) and bark of a plant called Thembra (Acacia pennata) collected from forests surrounding the region.

- Some other registered GI tagged products from Assam: Muga Silk, Joha Rice, Tezpur Litchi

MEENAKARI

- Prime Minister has gifted 'Meenakari' chess set to US Vice President.

About Meenakari

- o It is the process of painting and coloring the surfaces of metals and ceramics through enamelling.

- o It usually involves intricate designs and is applied as a decorative feature to serving dishes, containers, vases, frames, display ornaments and jewelry.

- o It was introduced to India by the Mughals. Raja Man Singh of Mewar is regarded as the patron of the meenakari art in 16th century Jaipur.