

## CURRENT AFFAIRS : DECEMBER 2021

### I. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### BALANCE OF RIGHTS AND DUTY

Rights and Duties in Present India

- The Constitution of India is the main document, defining rights and duties of people. E.g., Part III of the Indian Constitution covers Fundamental Rights and Part IVA covers the Fundamental Duties, i.e., the core duties that every citizen is expected to perform.
  - Some rights are outside Part III as well. E.g., Right to Property (Article 300A) which is a constitutional right and not a fundamental right
- Though both are indispensable, duties have taken backstage in present India in comparison to rights.
  - E.g., whether it is 'Right to Life' or 'Freedom of Speech and Expression', both remain in focus quite frequently. But in terms of duties, except few like "corporate social responsibility", others are talked about little.



## PART IVA FUNDAMENTAL DUTIES

(First 10 were introduced by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 and 11th through 86th Amendment in 2002)

### 51A. Fundamental duties-It shall be the duty of every citizen of India-

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;	(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
(c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;	(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;	(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
(g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures;	(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;	(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
	(k) who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Centennial celebrations of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) were held recently.

### About Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

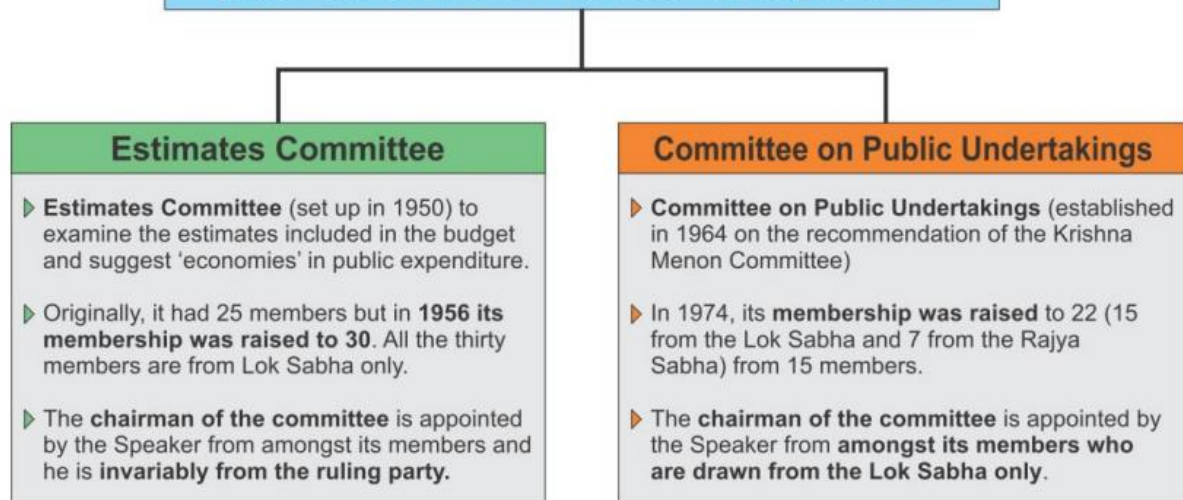
- It is the oldest Parliamentary Committee and was first constituted in 1921 under the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1919 (in the wake of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms).

- Committee consists of 22 Members; 15 Members are elected from Lok Sabha and 7 Members from the Rajya Sabha are associated with it.
- The Speaker is empowered to appoint the Chairman of the Committee from amongst its members.
- It is constituted by Parliament each year for examination of accounts showing the appropriation of sums granted by Parliament for expenditure of Government of India, the annual Finance Accounts of Government of India, and such other accounts laid before Parliament as the Committee may deem fit such as accounts of autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies.
  - o Accounts of those of Public Undertakings and Government Companies which come under the purview of the Committee on Public Undertakings are exempted.

#### **CAG and PAC**

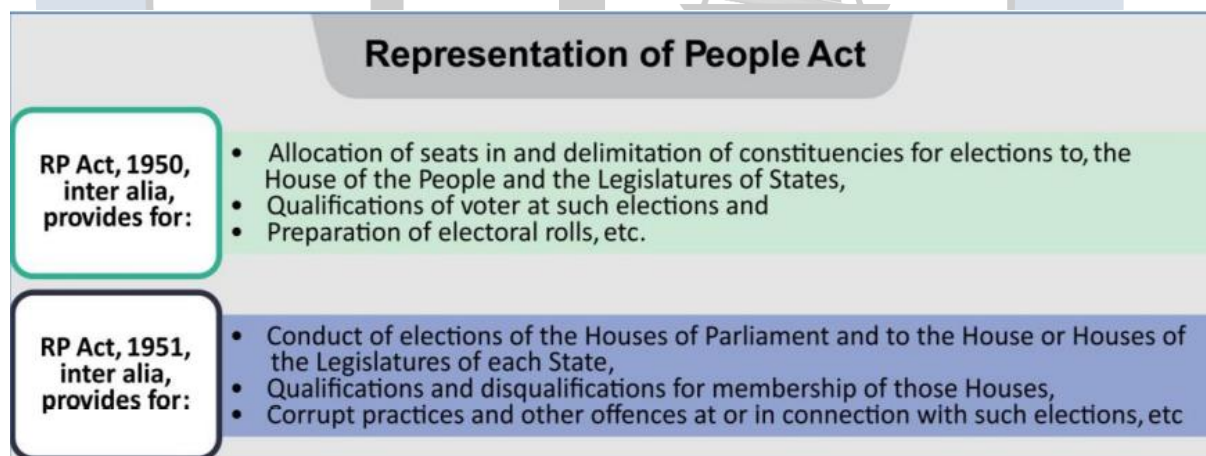
- Article 148 provides for an independent office of CAG. He is the **head of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department.**
- **CAG submits three audit reports to the President:**
  - o Audit report on appropriation accounts,
  - o Audit report on finance accounts, and
  - o Audit report on public undertakings.
- The **President lays these reports before both the Houses of Parliament.**
- After this, the **Public Accounts Committee examines them** and reports its findings to the Parliament.

## Other Parliamentary Committees for oversight on public finances and Government's expenditure



## ELECTION LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL

The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was passed by the Parliament.



### About the bill

- The Bill amends the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (the RP Act, 1950) and the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (the RP Act, 1951) to implement certain electoral reforms.



Area	Existing provisions	Changes brought
Linking electoral roll data with Aadhaar (by amendment of section 23 of the RP Act, 1950)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1950 Act provides that a <b>person may apply to the electoral registration officer</b> for inclusion of their name in the electoral roll of a constituency.</li> <li><b>After verification</b>, if the officer is satisfied that the applicant is entitled to registration, he will <b>direct the applicant's name to be included in the electoral roll</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The electoral registration officer <b>may require a person to furnish their Aadhaar number</b> for establishing their identity.</li> <li>If their name is already in the electoral roll, then the Aadhaar number may be required <b>for authentication</b> of entries in the roll.</li> <li>Persons will <b>not be denied inclusion</b> in the electoral roll or have their names deleted from the roll, if they are <b>unable to furnish Aadhaar number</b> due to <b>sufficient cause</b> as prescribed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such persons <b>may be permitted</b> to furnish alternate documents <b>prescribed by the central government</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Qualifying date for enrolment in electoral roll (by amendment of clause (b) of section 14 of the RP Act, 1950)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under the 1950 Act, the <b>qualifying date for enrolment</b> in the electoral roll is <b>January 1</b> of the year in which such roll is being prepared or revised.</li> <li>This implies a person who turns 18 (i.e., eligible to vote) <b>after January 1</b> can enrol in the electoral roll only when the <b>roll is prepared/ revised the next year</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Bill amends this to provide <b>four qualifying dates</b> in a calendar year, which will be <b>January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1</b>.</li> </ul>
Gender-neutral provisions (by amendment of section 20 of the RP Act, 1950 and section 60 of the RP Act, 1951)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1950 Act permits certain persons who are <b>ordinarily resident</b> in a constituency to register in electoral rolls. Such persons include those holding a <b>service qualification</b>, such as members of the <b>armed forces or central government</b> employees posted outside India.</li> <li>The wives of such persons are also <b>deemed to be ordinarily residing</b> in the same constituency if they reside with them.</li> <li>The 1951 Act enables the wife of a person holding a service qualification to <b>vote either in person or by postal ballot</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Bill replaces the term <b>'wife'</b> with <b>'spouse'</b> in both the Acts.</li> </ul>
Requisitioning of premises for election purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1951 Act permits the state government to requisition premises needed or likely to be needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Bill <b>expands the purposes</b> for which such premises can be requisitioned.</li> </ul>

## Significance of the Bill

- To stop bogus voting: Linking of electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem will help in curbing the menace of multiple enrolments of the same person in different places. The bill allows the electoral registration officers to authenticate the persons already included in the electoral roll to identify registration of same person in more than one constituency or more than once in the same constituency.

- o Thus, it will help in cleaning the electoral roll to a great extent and facilitate elector registration in the location at which they are 'ordinarily resident'.

- o A Parliamentary Standing Committee report had advocated linkage of unique Aadhaar ID Card number with voter I-card which would streamline alterations in Electoral photo ID card (EPIC) during change of ordinary residence by the electors.

- Improving the accessibility to voting: Linking the two databases will allow the ECI to track migrant workers and improve their election participation.
- Multiple cut-off dates: The January 1 cut-off date deprived several youth from participating in the electoral exercise held in a particular year. Multiple cut-off dates will allow more eligible people to be registered as voters.
- Gender neutral: Under existing provisions, an Army man's wife is entitled to be enrolled as a service voter, but a woman Army officer's husband is not. The bill seeks to redress discrimination against male spouses of female armed services employees.

## **ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS**

The Karnataka legislative Assembly passed The Karnataka Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021, commonly referred to as the anti-conversion Bill. The Bill will now go to the Karnataka Legislative Council.

### **Key features of the bill**

- Prohibition: It prohibits conversion from one religion to another by misrepresentation, force, fraud, allurement, or marriage. However, it exempts a person who "reconverts to his immediate previous religion" as the same shall not be deemed to be a conversion under this Act.
- Nature of offence: The offence of conversion has been deemed to be a cognizable and non-bailable.
- Penalties: Jail terms and fines have been proposed.

### **States that have anti-conversion laws**

Currently, there are at least nine states in the country where legislations on unlawful conversions are in force:

Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

## Legal challenges to anti-conversion laws and pertinent verdicts on the subject

- **Rev. Stainislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh & Ors (1977):** It examined the **earliest anti-conversion statutes in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa**. Court **upheld the constitutionality of both the Acts** on the ground that these efforts to restrain the conversion are for **securing freedom of conscience and public order**.
  - **Freedom to propagate** one's religion, as stipulated under Article 25 (1), **did not grant a fundamental right to convert another person**. The bench ruled that a **purposive conversion would impinge on the "freedom of conscience"** guaranteed to all citizens.
  - It also held that the Anti- Conversion Acts fall within the purview of **Entry I of List II of the Seventh Schedule** as they are meant to **avoid disturbances to the public order** by prohibiting conversion from one religion to another in a manner **reprehensible to the conscience of the community**.
- **Sarla Mudgal case (1995):** Supreme Court held that conversion to Islam was not valid if done only in order to be **able to practise polygamy**.
  - This position was reaffirmed by the apex court's judgment in the **Lilly Thomas case in 2000**, which clarified that **prosecution for bigamy was not a violation of the freedom of religion** under Article 25.
- **Lata Singh Vs State of UP:** The apex court highlighted the **need for stringent punishment** over acts of violence or threats in cases of inter-caste and inter-faith marriages.
- **M Chandra Vs M Thangamuthu & Another, 2010**, the Supreme Court laid down the test to prove conversion: First, there **has to be a conversion** and second, **acceptance into the community** to which the person converted. It also stated that the **need of a conversion** cannot be altogether done away with.
- **Ga Arife alias Arti Sharma Vs Gopal Dutt Sharma, 2010**, and in **Faheem Ahmed Vs Maviya, 2011**: The Delhi high court lamented that religious conversions are **increasingly used for anything but the primary reason for conversion i.e., spiritual advancement**.

## SACRILEGE

Punjab government has written to centre for assent to state's bill that proposes life imprisonment for desecration of religious scriptures of four religions.

- Request has been made in the backdrop of a sacrilege incident at the Holy Sikh temple in Amritsar.

- The Punjab Vidhan Sabha in 2018 had passed 'The Indian Penal Code (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2018 and The Code of Criminal Procedure (Punjab Amendment) Bill 2018' as states can amend parts of IPC and CrPC to suit local practices and circumstances.

o Bills provide for punishment up to life imprisonment for whoever causes injury, damage or sacrilege to Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Srimad Bhagwat Gita, Holy Quran and Holy Bible with the intention to hurt the religious feelings of the people.

### About Sacrilege

- Also termed as Blasphemy, it means treating a religious object or place without the respect that it deserves.
- Unlike other countries like Pakistan, India being a secular state protects all the religions by blasphemy laws.
- Sections 295 and 295A, 296, 297, 298 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) presently deals with blasphemy incidents.
  - o **Section 295** deals with punishment if any person intentionally damages, destroys or defiles any religious object deemed to be sacred by followers of any religion in India, including objects other than idols and books.
  - o **Section 295A** deals with punishment if a person maliciously by words spoken or written or signs or by visible representation insults or attempts to insult religious sentiments.
- However, concerns have also been raised as blasphemy laws may be used to hound individuals from religious minorities and even fellow religious mates for sectarian and personal motives.

### **JUDICIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA**

Chief Justice of India has proposed creation of a National Judicial Infrastructure Authority of India (NJIAI).

### About NJIAI



- The NJIA's objective will be to take control of the budgeting and infrastructure development of subordinate courts in the country.
- Key features of the proposed body
  - o It will be established on the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) model, where by it would work as a central agency with each State having its own State Judicial Infrastructure Authority.
- ✓ NALSA provides free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society having overall national body along with similar entities at state and district levels.
  - o The Chief Justice of India would be the patron-in-chief of the NJIA and it would be placed under Supreme Court of India, unlike NALSA which is under Ministry of Law and Justice.
  - o In the NJIA there would be a few High Court judges as members, and some Central Government officials.

## 75 YEARS OF THE HISTORIC FIRST SITTING OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (CA)

- CA met for the first time in New Delhi on December 9, 1946 in the Central Hall of Parliament House.
  - o **Cabinet Mission Plan, 1946** (comprising of Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stanford Cripps and A.V. Alexander) created the CA of India.
- ✓ The Assembly was recognized by Section 8 of the Indian Independence Act, 1947.
- Composition: Members were chosen by indirect election by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, according to the scheme recommended by the Cabinet Mission.
  - o The arrangement was
    - ✓ 292 members were elected through the Provincial Legislative Assemblies
    - ✓ 93 members represented the Indian Princely States and
    - ✓ 4 members represented the Chief Commissioners' Provinces. (Total membership of 389).

o However, as a result of the partition under the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June, 1947, a separate Constituent Assembly was set up for Pakistan and representatives of some Provinces ceased to be members of the Assembly. As a result, the membership of the Assembly was reduced to 299.

- First sitting of the Assembly was presided over by Dr Sachchidananda Sinha.
- CA took two years, eleven months and seventeen days for drafting the Constitution for Independent India.

## **DELIMITATION COMMISSION (DC) PROPOSES SIX ADDITIONAL SEATS FOR JAMMU, ONE FOR KASHMIR VALLEY**

- DC was set up under the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 after Centre abrogated Article 370 and revoked Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) special status in August 2019.
  - o If the proposal is cleared, total Assembly constituencies in J&K to rise from 83 to 90, with 43 in Jammu (earlier 37) and 47 in Kashmir (earlier 46).
  - o An additional 24 seats are proposed to be reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- Delimitation is the process of fixing boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country or a state having legislative body.
- It is assigned to a high-power body known as DC or a Boundary Commission.
  - o Under Article 82, Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census establishing a DC.
  - o Under Article 170, States get divided into territorial constituencies.
- DC has been constituted 4 times in 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002.
  - o It is appointed by the President and its orders have force of law and cannot be challenged before any court.
- Composition: Three members:
  - o A serving or retired judge of Supreme Court as chairperson,

- o Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or Election Commissioner nominated by CEC.
- o State Election Commissioner of concerned state/UT.

## **GOOD GOVERNANCE INDEX 2021 LAUNCHED ON GOOD GOVERNANCE DAY (25<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER)**

- GGI assesses the State of Governance across States and UTs which enables ranking of States/Districts and provides a comparative picture while developing competitive spirit for improvement.
  - o It is a bi-annual exercise by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances.
- Objective is to create a tool that can be used uniformly across States/UTs to assess the impact of various interventions taken up by the Central and State Governments.
  - o Ten sectors were identified for the GGI 2020- 21.
  - o States have been categorised into four groups: North-East and Hill States, UTs, Other States –Group A and Group B.
- Key Highlights of the Index
  - o Twenty states have improved their composite GGI scores over the 2019 index scores.
  - o In Group A states, Gujarat has topped the composite ranking while Madhya Pradesh topped in Group B states.
  - o Delhi topped the UT category ranking.
  - o In North-East and Hill States category, Himachal Pradesh topped the ranking

## MADHYA PRADESH ANNOUNCED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A POLICE COMMISSIONERATE SYSTEM IN BHOPAL AND INDORE

Dual System	Command	Commissionerate System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Magistrate (DM) and Superintendent of Police (SP) share powers and responsibilities in a district.</li> <li>• A 'dual system' of control exists, in which SP has to work with DM for supervising police administration. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ DM is entrusted with issuing arrest warrants, licenses while SP has powers and responsibilities to investigate crime and make arrests.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• It is designed to ensure a lower concentration of power and making the police more accountable to DM at district level.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioner of Police (CP) is the head of a unified police command structure, is responsible for the force in the city, and is accountable to the state government.</li> <li>• The office also has magisterial powers, including those related to regulation, control, and licensing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ CP is drawn from the Deputy Inspector General rank or above, and is assisted by Special/Joint/Additional/Deputy Commissioners.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Such officers are provided with powers of preventive arrest, imposing Section 144 and also initiating chapter proceedings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Police also have power to prevent people from entering and removing a person from their jurisdiction for a maximum of two years.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• It is supposed to allow for faster decision-making to solve complex urban-centric issues.</li> </ul>

### DEFAULT BAIL

- National Investigation Agency has approached Supreme Court against a Bombay High Court order granting bail to activist Sudha Bharadwaj.
- Default or statutory bail is a right (regardless of the nature of crime) to bail that accrues when police fail to complete investigation within a specified period in respect of a person in judicial custody.



o It is enshrined in Code of Criminal Procedure.

- For most offences, police have 60 days to complete the investigation and file a final report before the court.

o However, for some offences there is a 90 days or 180 days limit also



## II. INTERNATIONAL

### G20

Recently, India joined the G20 'Troika' and is set to take over its presidency in 2022.

- Troika refers to the top grouping within the G20 that consists of the current, previous and the incoming presidencies — Indonesia, Italy, and India.

o India will assume the G20 presidency on 1st December 2022 from Indonesia and will convene the G20 Leaders' Summit for the first time in India in 2023.

### About G20

- It is a strategic multilateral platform connecting the world's major developed and emerging economies.



## **WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION DISPUTE PANEL RULES AGAINST INDIA'S SUGAR EXPORT SUBSIDIES**

- Australia, Brazil and Guatemala had complained that domestic support provided by India to sugarcane producers was in excess of the limit allowed by WTO and India also provides prohibited export subsidies to sugar mills.
  - o As a result, panel found that India was acting inconsistently with its obligations under Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).
- AoA provides specific commitments to reduce support and protection in areas of domestic support, export subsidies and market access.
  - o Domestic support to sugarcane producers is provided through measures like Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP), State-Advised Prices (SAPs), state level incentives etc.
- ✓ FRP requires paying a mandatory minimum price to the sugarcane producers. While, SAPs are state specific mandatory minimum price to producers.
  - o India's export subsidy for sugarcane producers includes Production Assistance Scheme, Buffer Stock Scheme and Marketing and Transportation Scheme.
- In its response to WTO members, India said the support given was largely to small and marginal farmers and was in accordance with its commitments at WTO.

## **UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONFERS OBSERVER STATUS ON THE INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE (ISA)**

- Granting of the status would help provide for a welldefined cooperation between the Alliance and UNthat would benefit global energy growth and development.
  - o It will also provide a choice to ISA to have permanent office in the UN HQ (New York).
- About Observer status of UN
  - o It started in 1946 with the Swiss Government as first permanent observer, a number of regional and international organizations are given observer status by UNGA.

- o Other observers include non-member states (e.g. Holy See); Intergovernmental and other organizations (e.g. ISA by resolution 76/123); and Specialized Agencies (e.g. FAO).
- ISA is an intergovernmental treaty-based international organisation (Secretariat: Gurugram), jointly launched by India and France at COP21 of the UNFCCC at Paris, 2015.
  - o It works as a collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies.
  - o It aims to bring energy access, ensure energy security, and drive energy transition in its member countries.
  - o It has 101 signatories (US as last signatory) with 80 signatories who have ratified the ISA Framework Agreement.

## INDIA-SRI LANKA FISHERIES DISPUTE

- Recently Sri Lankan authorities have detained 68 Indian fishermen and 10 boats on charges of alleged poaching and illegal fishing in the island nation's waters.
  - o India has taken up the issue of early release of the Indian fishermen and boats with the government of Sri Lanka.
- Reasons behind India- Sri Lanka fisheries dispute:
  - o Lack of defined maritime boundary: Though India and Sri Lanka signed four Maritime Boundary Agreements between 1974-76, there is no well-defined maritime boundary between the two countries.
- ✓ The 1974 agreement between the two nations ceded the resource-rich Katchchativu islet to Sri Lanka, which the Tamil fishermen had traditional fishing rights for centuries.
  - o Tightened surveillance: Since 2009, the Sri Lankan navy has tightened surveillance of its northern maritime boundary to halt a potential return of Tamil insurgents.
  - o Depletion of marine resources along the Tamil Nadu coast (due to incessant bottom-trawling) has meant that the Indian fishermen are drawn to the relatively resource-rich Sri Lankan waters.



- ✓ Sri Lanka has banned bottom-trawling in their waters in 2017.



## NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)

- Egypt is the fourth new member admitted into NDB, after Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uruguay, further expanding the bank's global outreach.
- Headquartered in Shanghai, the NDB was established in 2015 by the BRICS nation.
- NDB aims to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS countries and other emerging economies and developing countries to complement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

## OPERATION DEVI SHAKTI

- It is rescue operation being conducted by Indian Government to evacuate people from Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

### III. ECONOMY

#### PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

Finance secretary recently said that the government will “eventually” privatise most of the Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and keep its presence to a bare minimum.

- Finance Minister in the Union Budget 2021-22 announced that two PSBs would be privatised as part of the government's disinvestment target.
- The government had listed the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 to be taken up during the Winter Session of Parliament.
- The bill intends to amend the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Acts of 1970 and 1980, and the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to create enabling legislation for privatisation of public sector banks.
- Centre is yet to shortlist the name of two public sector banks (PSBs) that are likely to be privatised in FY22.

#### PAYMENTS BANK

- Recently, Paytm Payments Bank was accorded scheduled bank status by the Reserve Bank of India.

#### Benefits of getting scheduled bank status

- Scheduled banks refer to those banks which have been included in the Second Schedule of Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
  - o Other payments banks that have been added are Fino Payments Bank and India Post Payments Bank.
- With the scheduled bank status, Paytm Payments Bank can explore new business opportunities; take part in Request for Proposals issued by the government and other large corporations, primary auctions, fixed-rate and variable rate repos and reverse repos.
- It can also participate in Marginal Standing Facility and will be eligible to partner in government-run financial inclusion schemes.

## **PINAKA EXTENDED RANGE (PINAKA-ER)**

- Pinaka-ER Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher System (MBRLS) was successfully tested at Pokharan range.
- New Pinaka ER gives it a range of around 70 km, over the 45 km existing range of the missile.
  - o Pinaka can fire a salvo of 12 rockets over a period of 44 seconds.
  - o It has been designed by DRDO Armament Research and Development Establishment laboratory and Pune-based High Energy Materials Research Laboratory.
- Also, Successful tests of Area Denial Munitions (ADM) and indigenously developed fuzeshave been carried out.

## **STAND-OFF ANTI-TANK (SANT) MISSILE**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Air Force (IAF) flight-tested the indigenously designed and developed Helicopter launched SANT Missile from Pokhran ranges.
- SANT missile is equipped with a state-of-the-art millimetre wave (MMW) seeker which provides high precision strike capability from a safe distance.
  - o It can neutralise targets in a range up to 10 kms.
  - o This is the third in the series of indigenous standoff weaponsto be tested in recent times after long range bomb and smart anti airfield weapon (SAAW) for strengthening IAF.

## **SUPERSONIC MISSILE ASSISTED TORPEDO (SMART)**

- Recently, DRDO tested a long-range SMART from Wheeler Island in Odisha.
- SMART is a next-generation missile-based standoff torpedo delivery system.

- It has been designed to enhance anti-submarine warfare capability far beyond the conventional range of the torpedo.

## **AGNI PRIME**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully test-fired the new generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from APJ Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Odisha in Balasore.
- It is the sixth missile in the Agni series, it has a range of 1,000-2,000 kilometres making it capable of covering vital targets all across Pakistan. It weighs 50% less than the Agni 3 missile and can be launched from rail or road. It can be stored for a longer period and has easy movability.

## **CONTROLLED AERIAL DELIVERY SYSTEM-500 (CADS-500)**

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)'s Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE) in Agra, conducted a flight demonstration of its CADS-500.
- CADS-500 can be used for precise delivery of payloads up to 500 kilograms at a predetermined location by making use of manoeuvrable capabilities of Ram Air Parachute (RAP).
- It autonomously steers its flight path using waypoint navigation towards target location by operating controls.

## **VERTICAL LAUNCH SHORT RANGE SURFACE TO AIR MISSILE (VL-SRSAM)**

- India successfully test-fired the missile for the second time from Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.
  - o Launches were carried out for demonstration of vertical launch capability.
- It is meant for neutralising aerial threats at close ranges, including sea-skimming targets.



o Sea skimming targets are those assets that fly as close as possible to sea surface to avoid being detected by the radars onboard warships.

- It is indigenously designed and developed by DRDO for the Indian Navy.

## **PRALAY MISSILE**

- Launched by Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), maiden flight test of Pralay missile was successfully conducted.
- About Pralay
  - o Indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile.
  - o Has a range of 150-500 kilometres with an accuracy of less than 10 metres.
  - o Has a guidance system that includes state-of-the-art navigation mechanisms and integrated avionics.

## **ARMY SECURE INDIGENEOUS MESSAGING APPLICATION (ASIGMA)**

- Launched by: Indian Army
- It is an in-house messaging service to meet real time data transfer and messaging requirements of the Army.
  - o It is being deployed on the Army's internal network as a replacement of Army Wide Area Network(AWAN) messaging application.
- It has a variety of contemporary features including multi-level security, message prioritisation and tracking, dynamic global address book and various options to meet the Army's requirements.

## IV. ENVIRONMENT

### BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2021

The Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was recently introduced in Lok Sabha and then referred to a joint parliamentary committee (JPC).

#### About Biological Diversity Act, 2002

- It was enacted to provide for the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of biological resources and knowledge.
- Aim: To fulfill India's obligations under the Convention of Biological Diversity and Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing.
- It provides for a decentralised three-tiered mechanism (see infographic) for implementation of the Act.
- Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) are responsible for preparing People's Biodiversity Registers which keep a record of all flora and fauna including details of traditional knowledge available in their region.

#### Key Provisions of the Proposed Amendments

- Extension of Exemptions: Registered AYUSH medical Practitioners, people accessing codified traditional knowledge, cultivated medicinal plants and its products, people who are practicing indigenous medicine including Indian systems of medicine for sustenance and livelihood are exempted from giving prior intimation to SBB for accessing biological resource from certain purposes.
- Simplifying access to biological resources and intellectual property rights (IPR):
  - o Certain entities must seek approval from the NBA for obtaining biological resources, including organisations registered in India, with any non-Indian shareholding or management, which has been changed to any foreign-controlled company registered in India.

- o Applicants can now obtain NBA's approval before the grant of IPR and not before applying for IPR.
- o Anyone who does not need approval from NBA to access biological resources must give prior intimation to the concerned SBB. Further, they must- register with the NBA before the grant of IPR, and get prior approval of the NBA before commercialising the granted IPR.
- Reduction of certain offences: The provision which made offences under the act cognizable and non-bailable was deleted. However, penalties may extend upto ₹1 crore.
- Provisions related to BMC: State government will prescribe the composition of BMCs, whose strength has been fixed between seven to eleven members. Further, state governments may also constitute BMCs at the intermediate or district Panchayat level.
- States can declare Threatened species: Central government can delegate the power to notify any species which is near-extinction as a threatened species to the state government.
  - o However, before notifying any threatened species, the state government must consult the NBA.
- Expansion of NBA: 11 additional members to be added to NBA, including:
  - o 6 ex-officio members dealing with wildlife, forestry research, and Panchayati Raj
  - o 4 representatives from SBBs (on a rotational basis), and
  - o 1 Member-Secretary (must have experience in biodiversity conservation), who will be the chief coordinating officer of the NBA.

## **WILD LIFE (PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2021**

A bill to amend the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 was recently introduced in Lok Sabha.

### **About Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA)**

- The act provides for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants with a view to ensuring the ecological and environmental security of the country.
- It empowers the State to declare protected areas, under four categories- National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves.

- Important bodies established under the act includeo National Board for Wildlife
  - o National Tiger Conservation Authority
  - o Central Zoo Authority
- The act has created 6 schedules for specially protected plants (one), specially protected animals (four), and vermin species (one), which gave varying degrees of protection to classes of flora and fauna

### **Proposed Amendments in the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021**

- Rationalisation of the Schedules: The Bill reduces the total number of schedules from 6 to 4 by:
  - o reducing the number of schedules for specially protected animals to two (one for greater protection level),
  - o removing the schedule for vermin species, and
  - o inserting a new schedule for specimens listed in the Appendices under CITES (scheduled specimens).
- Wild animals to be declared as Vermin by the way of notification by the Central Government for any area and for a specified period.
- Controlling Invasive alien species: Empowers the central government to regulate or prohibit the import, trade, possession or proliferation of invasive alien species. An officer can be authorised to seize and dispose the invasive species.
  - o Invasive alien species refers to plant or animal species which are not native to India and whose introduction may adversely impact wild life or its habitat.

### **DAM SAFETY ACT, 2019**

Recently, Rajya Sabha passed the Dam Safety Bill, 2019.



- Act proposes to help all states and UTs adopt uniform dam safety procedures and seeks to set up an institutional mechanism to ensure the safe functioning of specific dams in the country.
- It provides for adequate surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of all the large dams in the country so as to prevent dam failure related disasters.
- It was earlier passed by Lok Sabha in 2019

#### About Dams

- Dams are **artificial barriers on rivers which store water** and help in irrigation, power generation, flood moderation, and water supply.
- As on June 2019, **India has 5,745 large dams** (includes dams under construction).
  - After China and USA, **India is the 3rd largest dam-owning nation** in the world.
  - Most of the dams in India are **constructed and maintained by the states**, while some of the bigger dams are managed by autonomous bodies such as Damodar Valley Corporation or Bhakra Beas Management Board of Bhakra-Nangal Project.
- **Over 75% of these dams are more than 20 years old** and about 220 dams are more than 100 years old.
- **Most of these large dams are in Maharashtra** (2394), Madhya Pradesh (906), and Gujarat (632).

## PROTECTION OF PLANT VARIETIES AND FARMERS' RIGHTS ACT

Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA) under the PPV&FR Act has revoked a plant variety protection certificate granted to PepsiCo India Holding on FC-5 potato variety (also called as FL-2027) on multiple grounds.

### About the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act

- The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, was enacted in 2001 under Article 27(3) (b) of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

- The Act introduced intellectual property protection in Indian agriculture and is the world's only IPR legislation which grants intellectual property rights not only to the plant breeders but also to the farmers.

- Rights under the Act:

<b>Breeders' Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breeders will have <b>exclusive rights to produce, sell, market, distribute, import or export the protected/registered variety.</b></li> <li>• Breeder can appoint agent/ licensee and may exercise for civil remedy in case of infringement of rights.</li> </ul>
<b>Researchers' Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher <b>can use any of the registered variety under the Act for conducting experiment or research.</b></li> <li>• This includes the use of a variety as an initial source of variety for the purpose of developing another variety but repeated use needs prior permission of the registered breeder.</li> </ul>
<b>Farmers' Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A farmer who has evolved or developed a new variety is <b>entitled for registration and protection</b> in like manner as a breeder of a variety.</li> <li>• <b>Section 39(1) of the Act</b> allows all farmers cultivating a registered new variety the right to "save, use, sow, resow, exchange, share or sell farm produce including seeds" except the branded seeds.</li> <li>• <b>Section 39 (2) of the Act provides for compensation</b> to the farmers for non-performance of variety.</li> <li>• Farmer shall <b>not be liable to pay any fee</b> in any proceeding before the Authority or Registrar or the Tribunal or the High Court under the Act. It will be paid through National Gene Fund.</li> </ul>

## HAIDERPUR WETLAND

- India has designated the Haiderpur wetland as the country's 47th Ramsar site.
  - o Ramsar is a wetland site designated under the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental environmental treaty which came into force in 1975.
- Haiderpur Wetland is situated on the MuzaffarnagarBijnor border in Uttar Pradesh.
- It was formed in 1984 by the construction of Madhya Ganga Barrage at the confluence of Solani and Ganga rivers and is a part of Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary.

## ELECTRICITY CAPACITY FROM NON-FOSSIL FUEL

- India has achieved the ambitious target of 40% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.
- According to Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, total installed non-fossil fuel-based capacity stands at 156.83 Giga Watts and the total installed electricity capacity is 390 Giga Watts.



- Government has further announced at CoP 26 in Glasgow a target of achieving 500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.



## V. SOCIAL ISSUES

### MARRIAGE AGE OF WOMEN

Recently, the Prohibition of Child Marriage or PCMA (Amendment) Bill, 2021, that proposes to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years — the same as men, was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

#### Key highlights of the draft Bill

- o The draft bill would amend the PCMA, 2006.
- o Aim: To bring women on a par with men in terms of marriageable age, overriding all existing laws, including any custom, usage or practice governing the parties pertaining to marriage.
- o Laws that will be superseded:
  - ✓ The Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872,
  - ✓ The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936,
  - ✓ The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937,
  - ✓ The Special Marriage Act, 1954,
  - ✓ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and
  - ✓ The Foreign Marriage Act, 1969,
- o **Definition of child:** “Child” means a male or female who has not completed 21 years of age’.
- o The amendment has been proposed to fulfil the spirits of the Constitution by as it would ensure and gender neutrality when it comes to marriage and also facilitate women empowerment.

### BETI BACHAO, BETI PADHAO SCHEME

Recently, the committee report titled "Empowerment of Women through Education with Special Reference to Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme" was tabled in Lok Sabha.

### Achievements of BBBP so far:

During the last 6 years since its inception, the progress in terms of monitorable targets as per Health Management Information System (HMIS) of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are as follows

Parameter	Details	Status
Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In 2021, SRB has improved by 19 points from 918 to 937.</li><li>Some districts which have shown huge improvement are Mau (Uttar Pradesh), Karnal, and Mahendergarh, Rewari (Haryana), Patiala (Punjab).</li></ul>	Improved
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Percentage of institutional deliveries has shown an improving trend from 87% to 94% in 2019-20.</li></ul>	Improved
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of girls in the schools at secondary level and percentage of schools with functional separate toilets for girls has improved.</li></ul>	Improved

### **SURROGACY (REGULATION) ACT, 2021**

The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 was passed by the parliament recently.

#### Key Features of Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021

- Defines surrogacy: Surrogacy is a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intention to hand over the child after the birth to the intending couple.

- New bodies created for regulation:

- o Constitution of **National Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Board**: With chairman as Minister incharge of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Its functions include:

- ✓ advising the Central Government on policy matters relating to surrogacy;

- ✓ to review and monitor the implementation of the Act,

- ✓ to lay down the code of conduct of surrogacy clinics

- Regulation of surrogacy:



- o Prohibits commercial surrogacy, but allows altruistic surrogacy.
- o Surrogacy is permitted when it is
  - ✓ for intending couples who suffer from proven infertility;
  - ✓ only for altruistic surrogacy purposes;
  - ✓ not for producing children for sale, prostitution or other forms of exploitation;
  - ✓ for any condition or disease specified through regulations.
- o Registration of surrogacy clinics has been made compulsory
- Eligibility criteria for surrogate mother: Lady should be
  - o a married woman having a child of her own and 25 to 35 years old;
  - o a surrogate only once in her lifetime;
  - o possess a certificate of medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy.
- Eligibility criteria for couples: The intending couple should have a 'certificate of essentiality' and a 'certificate of eligibility' issued by the appropriate authority.
- Other features
  - o A child born out of a surrogacy procedure will be deemed to be the biological child of the intending couple.
  - o An abortion of the surrogate child requires the written consent of the surrogate mother and the authorisation of the appropriate authority. This authorisation must be compliant with the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

## SHRESTHA YOJNA

- Launched today, marking the 66<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (Mahaparinirvana Diwas)
  - o To be implemented by Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

o Aim is to aid socio-economic upliftment and overall development of the Scheduled Castes students by providing quality residential education in reputed private schools.

## **SHAKTI CRIMINAL LAWS (MAHARASHTRA AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020**

- The Bill was cleared by Maharashtra Assembly to curb crimes against women and children.
- Important provisions of the bill
  - o introduces death penalty for offences such as causing grievous hurt by use of acid, rape, and gang rape.
  - o reduces the time for completion of investigation, trial, and disposal of appeal for offences committed against women and children
  - o places the onus on social media platforms and Internet data providing companies to share data for the police investigation.
- The Bill is modelled on the Disha Act of Andhra Pradesh.

## VI. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY (ART) REGULATION ACT 2021

Recently, Parliament has passed the ART Regulation Act 2021 that provides for the safe and ethical practice of ART services.

#### Key provisions of the Act

- Definition of ART: ART to include all techniques that seek to obtain a pregnancy by handling sperm or oocyte (immature egg cell) outside human body and transferring gamete or embryo into the reproductive system of a woman.
- Regulation of ART clinics and banks: Every ART clinic and bank must be registered under the National Registry of Banks and Clinics of India.
  - o National Registry established will act as a central database with details of all ART clinics and banks in the country.
  - o State governments will appoint registration authorities for facilitating the registration process
- ✓ Registration Authority will have the chairperson, who will be an officer above the rank of Joint Secretary in the Health Department.
  - o ART bank is an organisation that is set up to supply sperm or semen, oocytes, or oocyte donors to ART clinics or their patients.
- Rights of a child born through ART: Child born through ART will be deemed to be a biological child of commissioning couple and will be entitled to rights and privileges available to a natural child of the commissioning couple.
  - o A donor will not have any parental rights over the child.
- National and State Boards: These are constituted under the Act to regulate ART services.
  - o State Boards will coordinate enforcement of the policies and guidelines for ART as per the recommendations, policies, and regulations of the National Board.

## GREEN HYDROGEN MICROGRID PROJECT

- Recently, NTPC awarded India's first Green Hydrogenbased Microgrid Project at Simhadri, Andhra Pradesh.

- o It would be a precursor to large scale hydrogen energy storage projects.

- Green hydrogen is produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using an electrolyzer powered by renewable energy sources such as wind and solar
- Project offers benefits of decarbonising far-off regions(e.g. Ladakh) and meet the clean energy goals because of its features like sustainability, easy to store etc.



## VII. MISCELLANEOUS

### DURGA PUJA

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, recently, put "Durga Puja in Kolkata" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The List of the ICH elements from the UNESCO website includes 14 entries from India		
	ICH element	Year of Recognition
1.	Durga Puja of West Bengal	2021
2.	Kumbh Mela	2017
3.	Yoga	2016
4.	Nowruz	2016
5.	Traditional Brass and Copper Utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab	2014
6.	Sankirtana of Manipur	2013
7.	Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh	2012
8.	Chhau Dance of Seraikella, Purulia and Mayurbhanj	2010
9.	Kalbelia dance of Rajasthan	2010
10.	Mudiyettu of Kerala	2010
11.	Ramman festival of Garhwal, Uttarakhand	2009
12.	Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre of Kerala	2008
13.	Ramlila	2008
14.	Vedic Chanting	2008

### APATANI TEXTILES

- Recently, GI tag application has been filed for the Arunachal Pradesh Apatani textile product.
  - o Woven fabric by the Apatani tribe is known for its geometric and zigzag patterns.
  - o They predominantly weaves shawls known as jigjiro and jilan or jackets called supuntarii.
- Apatani Tribe:
  - o They are settled in the village of Ziro (Arunachal Pradesh).
  - o They are known for their fish and paddy culture, along with cane and bamboo crafts.



## SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARDS (SAA)

- Sahitya Akademi announced SAA in 20 languages.
  - o Awards in Gujarati, Maithili, Manipuri and Urdu languages will be announced later.
- It is a literary honour, conferred annually on writers of most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the major Indian languages.
  - o Besides 22 languages enumerated in Constitution, English and Rajasthani language are also recognised.
  - o Award includes a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque, a shawl and an amount of Rs. 1,00,000/-.
- Sahitya Akademi functions as an autonomous organisation. It is registered as a society under Societies Registration Act, 1860.

## ORDER OF THE DRUK GYALPO

- It is Bhutan highest civilian award.
- The award was honoured upon the Indian Prime Minister on the occasion of the Bhutan's National Day.
  - o It was awarded in recognition of a lifetime of service to the people and Kingdom of Bhutan.

## Places in News: India

### DELHI

- Nizamuddin Basti bagged the UNESCO's Award.

### PUNJAB

- Gharials were reintroduced in the Beas Conservation Reserve.

### MADHYA PRADESH

- Cabinet approved implementation of Ken-Betwa river linking project.

### GUJARAT

- Seaplane operations between Sabarmati River Front & Statue of Unity.

### TELANGANA

- Albino Indian Flapshell turtle spotted in Simapally Forest.

### KERALA

- Kerala government has raised concerns over Tamil Nadu releasing water from the Mullaperiyar Dam.
- Protests against Silver Line railway Project.

### UTTAR PRADESH

- Haiderpur wetland designated as the country's 47th Ramsar site.
- Cabinet approved the funding and implementation of Ken-Betwa river linking project.
- Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor inaugurated.

### ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- China issues 'official' names for 15 places.

### NAGALAND

- Hornbill festival celebrated.
- Killings of civilians in Mon district in an army operation.

### WEST BENGAL

- Tiger spotted in Buxa tiger reserve after at least 23 years.
- Durga Puja inscribed on Representative List of ICH of Humanity

### ODISHA

- Cyclone Jawad struck Odisha and Andhra Pradesh coasts.

### ANDHRA PRADESH

- Polavaram Dam project has raised concern of development induced displacement.
- Rare black rock art depictions found at Kurnool district.

### TAMIL NADU

- Government declared Kazhuveli wetland as Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary.
- Construction began of unit 6 of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.