Current Affairs Update (Nov 1-14)

National

UNESCO creative cities network (UCCN)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has picked **Srinagar** among 49 cities as part of **the creative city network under the Crafts and Folk Arts category.**

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was **created in 2004** to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

Objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.

The Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.

Indian cities in UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) are:

1. Jaipur-Crafts and Folk Arts(2015).

2. Varanasi-Creative city of Music (2015).

3. Chennai-Creative city of Music(2017).

4. Mumbai – Film (2019).

5. Hyderabad – Gastronomy (2019).

Nine states & UTs celebrate formation day

In India, seven states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab & Madhya Pradesh and two union territories Lakshadweep & Puducherry are celebrating Foundation Day on November 1, 2021.

Matriliny in Meghalaya

The three tribes of Meghalaya — **Khasis, Jaintias, and Garos** — practise **a matrilineal system of inheritance.** In this system, lineage and descent are traced through **the mother's clan.** Here, children take the mother's surname, the husband moves into his wife's house, and **the youngest daughter (khatduh)** of the family is bequeathed the full share of the ancestral — or the clan's — property.

Custom also dictates that **the khatduh cannot sell the property, without permission of her mother's brother (maternal uncle)** — since he technically belongs to the mother's clan, through which descent is traced. **This inheritance tradition applies only to ancestral or clan/community property,** which has been with the family for years.

In this traditional set-up, **if a couple does not have any daughters,** then the property goes to the wife's elder sister, and her daughters. If the wife does not have sisters, then the clan usually takes over the property.

Why in news? Last week, **a district autonomous council** in Meghalaya announced that it would introduce **the 'Khasi Inheritance of Property Bill, 2021.** It is aimed at **"equitable distribution" of parental property among siblings in the Khasi community.** If implemented, the proposed Bill would modify an age-old customary practice of **inheritance of the matrilineal Khasi tribe.**

Why is Tamil Nadu opposed to NEP?

- Tamil Nadu's arguments: NEP being recommended by the Centre was "for elites" and the education "will be confined and limited to a few sections".
- Besides the opposition to three-language policy, the state has also questioned the prominence given to Sanskrit over and above Tamil and other languages.
- Above all, NEP intrudes into a crucial domain of the state – education. **Education is in the concurrent list,** not in the union list.
- Therefore, NEP is being viewed as a policy against social justice, federalism, pluralism and equality.

Kameng River

Studies have indicated that landslides caused by an earthquake of 3.4 magnitude close to the border with China led to mass fish death in **the Kameng river in Arunachal Pradesh. The Kameng River** is the right-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra River.

The landslips dumped several tonnes of mud and rock into the river, substantially reducing the flow of water. The river turned blackish due to very high turbidity resulting in low dissolved oxygen that killed the fish.

SMILE Scheme

- The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has formulated this scheme for Support for Marginalized Individuals.
- "**SMILE** stands for Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise".
- **Focus of the scheme is** on rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities, counseling, basic documentation, education, skill development, economic linkages etc.

- It **includes sub scheme** – 'Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of Begging'.
- The scheme would be implemented with the support of State/UT Governments/Local Urban Bodies, Voluntary Organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) , institutions and others.

International

Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

India and the European Union (EU) are set to resume negotiations for a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) by December. Trade with India formed under 3% of the E.U.'s global trade, which is "far below" what was expected of the relationship. Conversely, the E.U. is India's largest trading partner and investor, and accounts for 11% of India's global trade.

Background: In June 2007, India and the EU began negotiations on a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in Brussels, Belgium. These negotiations are pursuant to the commitment made by political leaders at **the 7th India-EU Summit held in Helsinki on 13th October 2006** to move towards negotiations for a broad-based trade and investment agreement on the basis of the report of India-EU High Level Technical Group.

Issue areas: Negotiations have been languishing since 2013 when the talks collapsed over **certain demands from the EU** such as greater market access for automobiles, wine and spirits, and further opening up of the financial services sector such as banking, insurance and e-commerce.The EU also wanted labour, environment and government procurement to be included in the talks.

India's demand for easier work visa and study visa norms as well as data secure status, that would make it easier for European companies to outsource business to India, were also not received enthusiastically by the EU countries.

China to build military base in Tajikistan

- China will take full control of a military base in Tajikistan near the Afghan border that it has been quietly operating and will also build a new base for the Tajik Government.The new base would be owned by Tajikistan's Rapid Reaction Group or special forces, and financed by China for a cost of $10 million.
- It will be located in **the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province near the Pamir mountains,** and Chinese troops will not be stationed there.
- **Russia and India are among countries that already have a military presence** in bases in Tajikistan.

- **The base,** once full control has been transferred, will become only **the second known overseas Chinese security facility, after Djibouti near the Horn of Africa.**

G-20 Summit adopts Rome Declaration

The Rome Declaration consists of 16 mutually agreed principles, which aims to guide joint action for preventing future health crises and to build a safer, equitable and sustainable world. 16 principles are as follows:

1. Supporting and enhancing the existing multilateral health architecture for detection, response, prevention and preparedness.

2. Working towards monitoring & implementation of multi-sectoral, evidence-based One Health approach in a bid to address risks emerging due to interface between human, animal & environment.

3. Fostering all-of-society and health-in-all policies.

4. Promotion of multilateral trading system

5. Enabling equitable, affordable and global access to high-quality, safe & effective health systems.

6. Supporting low and middle-income countries in a bid to build expertise, and develop local & regional manufacturing capacities.

7. Focus on data sharing, capacity building, voluntary technology and licensing agreements.

8. Enhancing support to existing preparedness and prevention structures.

9. Investing in worldwide health & care workforce

10. Investing in adequate resources, training, and staffing of diagnostic public & animal health laboratories.

11. Investments for developing and improving inter-operable early warning surveillance, information, and trigger systems

12. Investments in domestic, international & multilateral cooperation for the purpose of research, development & innovation

13. Increasing effectiveness of preparedness & response measures by extending support and promoting meaningful & inclusive dialogue

14. Ensuring effectiveness of financing mechanisms

15. Coordination on pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures and emergency response with respect to sustainable and equitable recovery

16. Addressing the need of streamlined, enhanced, sustainable and predictable mechanisms for financing pandemic preparedness, prevention, detection and response in long term.

Global Drug Policy Index

- The inaugural Global Drug Policy Index was released by the Harm Reduction Consortium.
- The Global Drug Policy Index is a data-driven analysis of drug policies and their implementation across the world. The index comprises of 75 indicators and it run across five broad dimensions of drug policy namely- criminal justice, health & harm reduction, access to internationally controlled medicines, extreme responses, and development.
- In this index, **Norway, New Zealand, Portugal**, the UK and Australia are the five leading countries with respect to humane and health-driven drug policies.
- Five lowest-ranked countries are **Brazil, Uganda, Indonesia**, Kenya, and Mexico.
- India has been ranked at **18th position** out of 30 countries. India got an overall score of 46/100.

Science-Tech & Environment

Pneumococcal 13-valent Conjugate Vaccine (PCV)

- The government has launched a nationwide expansion of **Pneumococcal 13-valent Conjugate Vaccine (PCV)** under the **Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP)** as a part of **'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'.**
- It was for the first time in the country that PCV would be available for universal use.
- **PCV13** protects against 13 types of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease.
- Pneumonia caused by pneumococcus is the most common cause of severe pneumonia in children.
- Pneumonia was a leading cause of death among children under five, globally and in India. Around 16% of deaths in children occur due to pneumonia in India.
- Under UIP, free of cost vaccination is provided against twelve vaccine-preventable diseases i.e. Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis B, Pneumonia and Meningitis due to Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib), Measles, Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Rotavirus diarrhoea.

Punjab to begin Census of Indus River Dolphin

The state of Punjab is set to start the Census of one of the world's most threatened cetaceans, Indus River dolphin. It is a freshwater dolphin, found in **river Beas**. In the IUCN red list, Indus River dolphin is

classified as **endangered** by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In 2019, Indus River dolphin was declared as the **State aquatic animal** of Punjab.

Toxic Foam in Yamuna River

Major reason behind froth formation is presence of phosphates and surfactants in untreated sewage generating from Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Phosphates and Surfactants components comprise of 1 percent of the froth, while 99 per cent is air and water.

Sources of pollution that cause foam formation include untreated sewage containing soap-detergent particles, organic matter from decomposing vegetation, industrial effluents and presence of filamentous bacteria. Pollution from paper and sugar industries in Uttar Pradesh travel through Hindon canal is also a major reason of pollution in the Yamuna.

Why is Yamuna so polluted?

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

Covaxin gets WHO nod for emergency use

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has given **pre-qualification, or Emergency Use Listing (EUL)** for Bharat Biotech's **Covaxin** vaccine.
- **The WHO has already approved six vaccines for emergency use:** AstraZeneca's Covishield, Moderna's mRNA-1273, Sinopharm's BBIBP-CorV, Sinovac's CoronaVac, Pfizer/BioNTech's Comirnaty, and Johnson & Johnson's vaccine.
- Covaxin is a whole **virion-inactivated vaccine** against SARS-CoV-2, developed in partnership with the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Virology, Pune.

Destroyer Visakhapatnam

- Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) delivered the first ship of "Project 15B Class Destroyer Visakhapatnam" to the Indian Navy. It is among the largest destroyers that are constructed in India.
- It is equipped with Barak-8 long range surface-to-air missiles and supersonic surface-to-surface Brahmos missiles.

- It is fitted with indigenously developed anti-submarine weapons as well as sensors for undersea warfare capability.
- It has all-round capability against enemy submarines, anti-ship missiles, surface warships and fighter aircraft which in turn will enable it to operate without a bevy of supporting vessels

COP26's First Major Deal

In the COP26 climate summit's first major deal, 100 world leaders are set to make promise to end and reverse deforestation by 2030. Brazil will be among the signatories. In Brazil stretches of the Amazon rainforest have been cut down. The countries who will be signing the pledge include Brazil, Canada, Russia, China, Democratic republic of Congo and Indonesia. They cover about 85% of the world's forests.

The pledge includes around $19.2bn of public and private funds.

Deforestation contributes to climate change as it depletes forests that absorb significant amounts of global warming gas CO_2.

New climate goals for India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged a new climate goal for India — net-zero emissions by 2070. India accounts for 17 per cent of the world's population. However, it only contributes five per cent of emissions.

Key highlights:

- India will achieve net zero emissions latest by 2070.
- By 2030, India will ensure 50% of its energy will be sourced from renewable sources.
- India will also reduce its carbon emissions until 2030 by a billion tonnes.
- It will also reduce its emissions intensity per unit of GDP by less than 45%.
- India would also install systems to generate 500 gigawatt of renewable energy by 2030, a 50 GW increase from its existing target.

India has promised to cut its emissions to net zero by 2070-a significant step by the world's third largest emitter to avoid catastrophic global warming.

Vinisha Umashankar from Tamil Nadu recently spoke on clean energy at a meeting that discussed clean technology and innovation as part of **the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow.** She is one of the finalists for the Earthshot Prize. She is the founder of the solar-powered ironing cart, which would replace the conventional charcoal ironing box.

OSOWOG

This project is about setting a 'trans-national electricity grid to supply solar power across the world. The vision behind OSOWOG is 'The Sun Never Sets'. It is a constant at some geographical location, across the

globe, at any given point of time. This is the most ambitious schemes undertaken by India and is significant in terms economic benefits. It has been taken up under the technical assistance program of the World Bank. This plan will also leverage the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Three Phases of the OSOWOG

- First Phase: It will involve interconnectivity within the Asian continent.

- Second Phase: Africa will be added.

- Third Phase: It will involve global interconnection.

Significance of OSOWOG

- OSOWOG project will help all the participating countries in attracting investments in renewable energy sources. It will also help in utilizing finances, skills and technology.

- It will lead to lesser project costs, higher efficiencies and increased asset utilization across all the participating entities.

- Economic benefits arising out of the project will result into poverty alleviation. It will also support in mitigating water & sanitation, food and other socio-economic challenges

US joins International Solar Alliance as a member country
- United States of America (USA) became the 101st member country to join International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- Most of the member countries are sunshine countries, lying either partly or completely between Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn.
- Countries that do not lie within the Tropics can also join ISA and enjoy all benefits as other members. However, they do not get voting rights.

Infrastructure for Resilient Island States
This initiative has been launched by India for developing the infrastructure of small island nations vulnerable to climate change. The new initiative is the result of cooperation between India, the U.K. and Australia and included the participation of leaders of small island nations such as Fiji, Jamaica and Mauritius.

The IRIS initiative is a part of **the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)** that would focus on building capacity, having pilot projects, especially in small island developing states.

Need for:

- The last few decades have proved that no one is untouched by the wrath of climate change. Whether they are developed countries or countries rich in natural resources, this is a big threat to everyone. But, **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** face the biggest threat from climate change.
- One-third of the entire population of SIDS lives on lands that are less than five metres below the sea level. This makes them highly vulnerable to sea-level rise, storm surge and coastal destruction.
- These countries contribute to only 1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and yet are among the first to experience the worst impacts of climate change.
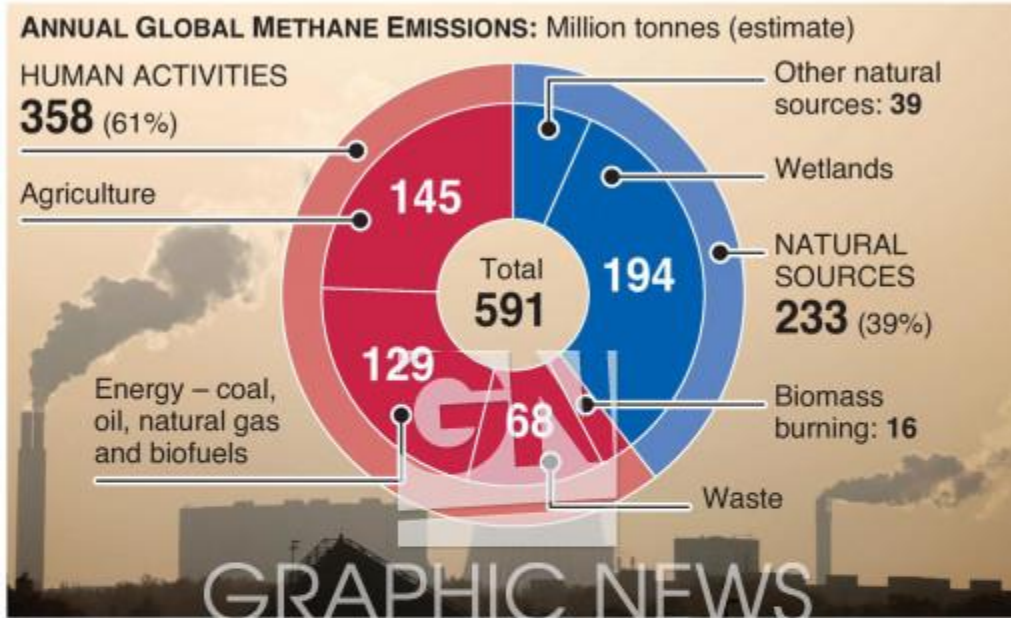
What is the Global Methane Pledge?

- The Global Methane Pledge was launched on November 2, 2021 at the ongoing UN COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. As of now, more than 90 countries have signed this pledge.
- Global Methane Pledge is an effort led by the United States and the European Union, jointly. This pledge is significant because Methane is the second-most abundant greenhouse gas present in the atmosphere.
- The Global Methane Pledge was first announced in September 2021 by the US and EU. It is an agreement to reduce global methane emissions. This pledge was announced with the aim of reducing methane emissions by 30 per cent by the year 2030, as compared to 2020 levels.
- Human sources of methane comprise of oil & natural gas systems, landfills, coal mining, agricultural activities, wastewater treatment, and industrial processes. Human sources accounts for 60 percent of the global methane emissions, among which Oil & gas sectors are the largest contributor.

Why is dealing with methane important for climate change?

- According to **the International Energy Agency (IEA),** while methane has a much shorter atmospheric lifetime (12 years as compared to centuries for CO2), it is a much more potent greenhouse gas simply because it absorbs more energy while it is in the atmosphere.
- In its factsheet on methane, the UN notes that methane is a powerful pollutant and has a global warming potential that is 80 times greater than carbon dioxide, about 20 years after it has been released into the atmosphere.
- Significantly, **the average methane leak rate of 2.3 per cent "erodes much of the climate advantage gas has over coal".**
- The IEA has also said that **more than 75 per cent of methane emissions can be mitigated with the technology that exists today,** and that up to 40 per cent of this can be done at no additional costs.
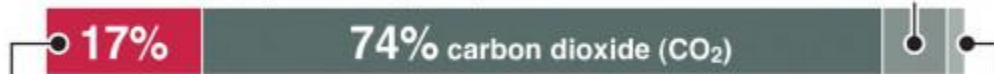
Pledge to slash planet-warming methane

Countries joining the Global Methane Pledge commit to a collective goal of reducing worldwide emissions of the potent greenhouse gas by at least 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030

ANNUAL GLOBAL METHANE EMISSIONS: Million tonnes (estimate)

HUMAN ACTIVITIES
358 (61%)

Agriculture — 145

Total **591**

194

129

68

Energy – coal, oil, natural gas and biofuels

Other natural sources: **39**

Wetlands

NATURAL SOURCES
233 (39%)

Biomass burning: **16**

Waste

GRAPHIC NEWS

GLOBAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY GAS
Measured as CO_2-equivalents (2018)

Nitrous oxide: **6.5%**

17%   74% carbon dioxide (CO_2)

Methane: More than 25 times as potent as CO_2 at trapping heat but breaks down faster in atmosphere – so cutting methane emissions can have rapid impact on global warming

Fluorinated gases: **2.5%**

TOP FIVE METHANE EMITTERS
Million tonnes of CO_2-equivalent (2018)

418	623	669	853	1,239
Brazil	U.S.	India	Russia	China

Global Methane Pledge
More than 100 countries have joined U.S.- and EU-led effort, including Brazil. China, Russia and India have yet to sign pledge

Sources: Climate Watch, IEA, Reuters   Picture: Getty Images   © GRAPHIC NEWS

First Chinese woman to walk in space

Astronaut Wang Yaping has become the first Chinese woman to walk in space. Team of Wang Yaping completed a six-hour stint outside Tiangong space station. Tiangong is a space station being constructed in low Earth orbit by China. It is being constructed between 340 and 450 km above the surface.

Climate Change Performance Index

The **17th edition of the Climate Change Performance Index** was released recently. It is compiled by Germanwatch, the New Climate Institute, and the Climate Action Network

The CCPI assesses countries' performance in four categories:

- "GHG Emissions" (40% of overall score).
- "Renewable Energy" (20% of overall score).
- "Energy Use" (20% of overall score).
- "Climate Policy" (20% of overall score).

The top performers in the list of 60 countries were Denmark(rank 4), Sweden(rank 5) and Norway(rank 6) (No country qualified to be eligible for ranks one to three)

The last five in the ladder were Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Canada and Taiwan.

India, however, maintained its 10th rank like last year. It continued to be among the top-performing countries within Group of 20.

CLIMATE CHANGE PERFORMANCE INDEX

Rank	Country	Score
4.	Denmark	76.92
5.	Sweden	74.46
6.	Norway	73.62
7.	UK	73.29
8.	Morocco	71.64
9.	Chile	69.66
10.	India	69.22
11.	Lithuania	69.06
12.	Malta	64.39
13.	Germany	63.82
14.	Finland	62.74
15.	Switzerland	61.98
16.	Portugal	61.45
17.	France	61.33
18.	Luxembourg	61.03
19.	Netherlands	60.81
20.	Ukraine	60.52

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Rank	Country	Score
4.	UK	33.93
5.	Sweden	33.84
6.	Mexico	32.85
7.	Chile	32.69
8.	Malta	31.56
9.	Morocco	29.35
10.	India	31.42
11.	Denmark	31.22
12.	Morocco	30.71
13.	Norway	30.50
14.	Switzerland	30.03
15.	Germany	29.12
16.	Philippines	28.80
17.	Ukraine	27.38
18.	Romania	27.37
19.	Finland	27.21
20.	France	26.97

No rankings allotted from 1 to 3 because "no country performed well enough in all categories to achieve an overall very high rating, or did enough to lower their gas emissions"

Economics

What are Technical Textiles?

Technical textiles are defined as textile materials and products manufactured primarily for their technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics.

Depending upon their application areas, **Technical Textiles products are divided into 12 broad categories:** Agrotech, Buildtech, Clothtech, Geotech, Hometech, Indutech, Mobiltech, Meditech, Protech, Sportstech, Oekotech, Packtech.

About the National Technical Textiles Mission:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) had, in 2020, approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at an total outlay of ₹1,480 Crore.

Aim: To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.

The Mission will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components:

1. The first component will focus on **research and development and innovation** and will have an outlay of ₹1,000 crore. The research will be at both, fibre level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.

2. The second component will be for **promotion and development of market** for technical textiles. The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to $40 billion to $50 billion by 2024.

3. The third component will focus on **export promotion so that technical textile exports** from the country reach from the ₹14,000 crore now to ₹20,000 crore by 2021-2022 and ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.

4. The last component will be on **education, training and skill development.**

Why in news? The Centre is targeting five times' increase in export of **technical textiles** in three years.

RBI panel on ARCs

The RBI had set up a committee **headed by Sudarshan Sen** to undertake a comprehensive review of the working of **asset reconstruction companies (ARCs)** in the financial sector ecosystem and recommend suitable measures for enabling them to meet the growing requirements.

Suggestions:

1. Create an online platform for the sale of stressed assets.

2. Allow ARCs to act as resolution applicants during the IBC process.

3. The scope of Section 5 of the SARFAESI Act be expanded to permit ARCs to acquire financial assets from all regulated entities, including AIFs, FPIs, AMCs making investment on behalf of MFs and all NBFCs including HFCs.

4. For accounts above ₹500 crore, two bank-approved external valuers should carry out a valuation to determine liquidation value and fair market value.

5. Also, the final approval of the reserve price should be given by a high-level committee that has the power to approve the corresponding write-off of the loan.

Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC): It is a specialized financial institution that buys the Non Performing Assets (NPAs) from banks and financial institutions so that they can clean up their balance sheets. This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities. Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value. The asset reconstruction companies or ARCs are **registered under the RBI.**

Legal Basis: The **Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002** provides the legal basis for the setting up of ARCs in India.

Competition Commission of India

Fair trade regulator **CCI will identify measures to enhance competition in the country's pharmaceutical sector** for ensuring affordability of drugs after analysing findings of its market study.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was established under **the Competition Act, 2002** for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act, and was duly constituted in March 2009. Chairman and members are appointed by the central government.

Challenges that need to be addressed:

Dependence: Indian pharmaceutical industry is highly dependent on China for pharmaceutical raw materials. These raw materials are called the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API), also known as bulk drugs. Indian drug-makers import around 70% of their total bulk drug requirements from China.

Fake versions of high value and/or high volume brands of the pharmaceutical companies in India are adversely affecting their business performance posing another major challenge. It also creates a negative impact to the end consumer and a huge health hazard.

Chamba 'chappal' gets Geographical Indications tag

Intricately embroidered leather 'chappal' of Chamba have been registered under the Geographical Indications (GI), which will help prevent its cheap imitation elsewhere in the country. The GI tag has been given under the **Geographical Indications (GIs) of Goods Act, 1999**, from the Registrar, Geographical Indications.

Benefit: The grant of the GI tag would economically benefit the craftsmen and go a long way in helping them market their product, especially abroad, as the GI tag would ensure authenticity and quality of the product.

GI tag products of HP: With this, the total number of products from Himachal which have got the GI tag has risen to nine. This includes **Lahaul's knitted socks and gloves, Kullu shawl, Kangra tea, Chamba rumal, Kinnaur's shawl, Kangra painting, 'chulli oil' and 'kala zeera'**.

LEADS 2021 Index

- The Logistics Ease Across Different States 2021 Index was recently published by Ministry of Commerce & Industry. This is the third edition of Index.
- The index ranks states in terms of logistical support to promote goods trade. Ranking is done on the basis of parameters like competitiveness of pricing, availability of infrastructure and services.
- **Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab** were emerged as best performing states with respect to mobility of goods and efficiency of logistics chain.
- Within Himalayan UTs, **Jammu & Kashmir** emerged as top ranker.
- In North Eastern States, **Sikkim and Meghalaya** emerged as topper.
- **Delhi** was ranked at top position among "other United Territories" category.

Current Affairs Update (Nov 15-21)

National

Rani Kamlapati

The name of Bhopal's Habibganj railway station has been changed to **Rani Kamlapati** station. The station has been redeveloped at a cost of around Rs 100 crore with private participation — **a first such large-scale PPP model in station redevelopment in India,** in the works for the past few years.

Rani Kamlapati was the widow of Nizam Shah, whose **Gond dynasty** ruled the then Ginnorgarh, 55 km from Bhopal, in the 18th century. Kampalati is known to have shown great bravery in facing aggressors during her reign after her husband was killed. Kamlapati was **the "last Hindu queen of Bhopal",** who did great work in the area of water management and set up parks and temples.

Birsa Munda

Birth anniversary of **Birsa Munda** was observed on **November 15th**. In recognition of his impact on the national movement, the state of Jharkhand was created on his birth anniversary in 2000.

Bisra Munda was a folk hero and a tribal freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe. He was a spearhead behind the Millenarian movement that arose in the Bihar and Jharkhand belt in the 19th century under British colonisation. He is also known as **'Dharti Abba' or the Earth Father.**

Bisra started a movement called **'Ulgulan', or 'The Great Tumult'.** His struggle against the exploitation and discrimination against tribals led to a big hit against the British government in the form of **the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act being passed in 1908.** The act restricted the passing on of land from the tribal people to non-tribals.

Ordinance to extend terms of CBI, ED chiefs

- Government of India has brought two ordinances to extend tenure of directors of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) for up to five years.
- Presently, the tenure for the chiefs of both the agencies is two years. A CBI or ED director can be appointed first for a period of two years. However, the tenure can be extended for three more years, if needed.
- Extended three years terms will require three separate annual extensions.

Steps taken by the Government to spread awareness about cyber crimes

1. **Online cybercrime reporting portal** has been launched to enable complainants to report complaints pertaining to Child Pornography/Child Sexual Abuse Material, rape/gang rape imageries or sexually explicit content.

2. A scheme for establishment of **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** has been established to handle issues related to cybercrime in the country in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

3. Establishment of **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)** for protection of critical information infrastructure in the country.

4. All organizations providing digital services have been mandated to report cyber security incidents to **CERT-In** expeditiously.

5. **Cyber Swachhta Kendra** (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) has been launched for providing detection of malicious programmes and free tools to remove such programmes.

6. **Formulation of Crisis Management Plan** for countering cyber attacks and cyber terrorism.

Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)

1st Audit Diwas was celebrated on November 16. Audit Diwas is being celebrated to mark the historic origin of the institution of CAG and the contribution it has made to the governance, transparency and accountability over the past several years.

- The Constitution of India provides for an independent office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in **chapter V under Part V.**
- The CAG is mentioned in the Constitution of India under **Article 148 – 151.**
- He is **the head of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department.**
- He is **the guardian of the public purse and controls the entire financial system of the country** at both the levels- the centre and state.
- His duty is **to uphold the Constitution of India and the laws of Parliament in the field of financial administration.**
- The CAG is **appointed by the President of India** by **a warrant under his hand and seal.**
- He holds office for a period of six years or upto the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

What is the "Kartarpur Corridor" project?

- The corridor – often dubbed as **the "Road to Peace" –** will connect Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Kartarpur with Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Gurdaspur district.
- **The Kartarpur corridor agreement** allows pilgrims to travel **visa free** through the corridor.
- Indian pilgrims of all faiths and persons of Indian origin can use the corridor.

- Pilgrims need to carry only a valid passport;Persons of Indian Origin need to carry OCI card along with the passport of their country.
- The Corridor is open from dawn to dusk. Pilgrims travelling in the morning will have to return on the same day.

ASER 2021 Report

16th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 (Rural) was published by **Pratham foundation**. ASER provides report on schooling status of children in the **age group of 5-16** years across rural India including the ability to do basic reading & arithmetic tasks.

Key Findings of the report:

- As per report, there was an overall increase in proportion of children enrolled in govt schools in between 2018 and 2020. Enrolment increased from 64.3% to 65.8%. But in 2021, enrolment suddenly increased to 70.3%.
- Enrolment rate in private schools has decreased as compared to last year. In 2020, enrolment rate was 28.8% which decreased to 24.4% in 2021.
- In 2021, 73.1% school respondents received training to implement Covid-19 prevention measures.
- Even though availability of smartphones increased to 67.6% in 2021 as compared to 36.5% in 2018, around 79% of children in private schools had smartphone at home as opposed to 63.7% children in government school.
- Number of school-going children taking tuition increased by 40% during closure of their schools.
- 52% of the respondents cited financial distress caused by covid-19 pandemic as the reason of increase in enrolments in government school.

International

Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan

- A regional security summit was recently hosted by India. The summit was attended by eight nations including Iran and Russia.
- This is the third meeting of **the Regional Security Dialogue** (the earlier two meetings were held in in Iran, in 2018 and 2019).
- Conference was represented by the national security advisors of each country.
- During the conference, it was announced that **Afghanistan & its territories cannot be used to shelter or train terrorists, or to finance any act of terrorism.**
- Countries issued a joint statement, dubbed as **"Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan".**

- The Declaration emphasized on: Secure and Stable Afghanistan, condemning terrorism, Ensuring Fundamental Rights, collective Co-operation and the role of UN.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

New Zealand is hosting this year's **Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.** The **21 APEC members** will be seeking areas where members can cooperate on easing barriers to trade and economic growth instead of trying to settle longstanding feuds.

APEC: It is **a regional economic forum established in 1989** to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.

Aim: to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.

Significance: In all, APEC members account for nearly 3 billion people and about 60% of the world's GDP. They span the Pacific rim, from Chile to Russia to Thailand to Australia.

Members: APEC's 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Vietnam.

India gets re-elected to UNESCO Executive Board

India was re-elected to the executive board of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) for the term of 2021-2025.

UNESCO Executive Board is one among the three constitutional organs of the UN agency. It is elected by the General Conference. The board acts under the authority of General Conference. It examines the programme of work for organisation and corresponding budget estimates, which is submitted by Director-General. The board comprises of 58 member-states, each having a four-year term of office.

UNESCO was founded in 1945 by succeeding the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. It comprises of 193 member states and 11 associate members besides partners in intergovernmental, non-governmental, and private sector. The agency is headquartered at World Heritage Centre in Paris, France.

Science-Tech & Environment

Next COP venues

The 2021 UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, concluded recently at Glasgow. At the end of the conference, the council decided that **the 2022 edition of the Conference of Parties, or the 27th COP, will take place at Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, and the 28th edition in 2023 will be held in the UAE.**

Cord Blood Banking

Cord blood (short for **umbilical cord blood**) is the blood that remains in the umbilical cord and placenta post-delivery. It contains special cells called **hematopoietic stem cells** that can be used to treat some types of diseases.

What is Cord blood banking?

Cord blood banking is **the process of collecting the cord blood and extracting and cryogenically freezing its stem cells and other cells of the immune system for potential future medical use.**

- Globally, cord blood banking is recommended as **a source of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for haematological cancers and disorders where its use is recommended.**

- For all other conditions, the use of cord blood as a source of stem cells is not yet established.

What Can It Be Used For?

The **umbilical cord fluid is loaded with stem cells.**

- They can treat cancer, blood diseases like anemia, and some immune system disorders, which disrupt your body's ability to defend itself.

- The fluid is easy to collect and has 10 times more stem cells than those collected from bone marrow.

- Stem cells from cord blood rarely carry any infectious diseases and are half as likely to be rejected as adult stem cells.

Concerns associated with stem cell banking:

- Over the past decade, stem cell banking has been aggressively marketed even as its use is still in experimental stages. But **these companies charge enormous fees from parents to preserve cells.**

- The concern here is that **it is merely by emotional marketing that companies convince parents to bank the cells for several years promising future therapeutic use.**

World's largest solar power park

Bhadla Solar Park, located in Rajasthan, is the World's largest solar power park. It is spread over an area of 5,700 hectares in Bhadla, Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. Park has a total capacity of 2245 MW. It had witnessed the lowest bid for solar power in India at Rs 2.44 per kilowatt-hour. Because of its climate, this region is described as "almost unlivable". Normal temperatures of the region are between 46-48 °C while, hot winds & sand storms occur frequently.

Rice blast disease in Wayanad

A fungal infection affecting paddy called Rice blast, is affecting farmers who had grown "**Manuvarna rice**". The blast illness is caused by the fungus Pyricularia oryzae. Manuvarna rice is a brand-new rice selection, that Kerala Agricultural College has launched across more than 250 acres in Wayanad district.

Norovirus

First case of Norovirus was confirmed in **Wayanad district** of Kerala. It is transmitted through **contaminated water and food**. Norovirus are a group of viruses, causing **gastrointestinal** illness. Virus causes inflammation in lining of the stomach & intestines, severe vomiting and diarrhoea. The virus does not significantly affect healthy people. However, it can seriously affect elderly, young children, and people with other comorbidities.

It spread from infected people to others when direct contacts occur, as well as through contaminated foods & surfaces.

Kaiser-i-Hind: Arunachal's State butterfly

State Cabinet of Arunachal Pradesh, headed by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, approved "Kaiser-i-Hind" as state butterfly. Kaiser-i-Hind is scientifically known as Teinopalpus imperialis. In literal terms, it means Emperor of India. The butterfly is having a wingspan of 90-120 mm.

The Kaiser-i-Hind is protected under Schedule II of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Despite that, they are hunted for the supply to butterfly collectors.

Shakti 2021

Indian Army is set to conduct the sixth edition of the biennial training exercise with French Army. Shakti 2021 will be conducted in Frejus, France

Direct-Ascent Anti-Satellite (DA-ASAT) test

A direct-ascent anti-satellite (DA-ASAT) missile was tested by **Russia**. DA-ASAT missile struck a Russian satellite called **COSMOS 1408**, as a result, debris field in low-Earth orbit. This test has generated about 1500 pieces of trackable orbital debris, so far.

As per initial assessment of USSPACECOM, these debris will remain in orbit for years. As a result, it poses a significant risk for the crew on the International Space Station.

ASAT are space weapons, that have been designed to incapacitate or destroy satellites for strategic or tactical purposes. No ASAT system has yet been used in warfare. But, countries like India, US, Russia and China have successfully shot down their own satellites to demonstrate capabilities of their ASAT.

Clean Ocean Manifesto

Clean Ocean International Expert Group of UN Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, is going to present its short list of activities & goals as well as "Clean Ocean Manifesto"

The group has set up two aims, in order to help United Nations in attaining the goal of clean ocean:

1. Reducing marine debris by 50-90 per cent

2. Globe circling & high-tech system of monitors.

The statement notes direct route to a clean ocean, highlighting following objectives for 2030:

1. Enlarge understanding of pathways for spread & fate of pollutants,

2. Reduce and remove top-priority forms of pollution up to 90 per cent and

3. To prevent recurrence, reduce sources or emission of pollutants.

Economics

New RBI initiatives

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched two customer-centric initiatives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI):

1. The RBI Retail Direct Scheme.

2. The Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme.

What is the RBI Retail Direct Scheme?

The Scheme is aimed at **enhancing access to the government securities market for retail investors.**

- It offers them **a new avenue for directly investing in the securities** issued by the Centre and the state governments.
- Investors will be able to easily open and maintain their government securities account online with the RBI, free of cost.
- The scheme offers a portal avenue to invest in central government securities, treasury bills, state development loans and Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs).

- The scheme places India in **a list of select few countries offering such a facility.**

What is the Reserve Bank-Integrated Ombudsman Scheme?

- It is aimed at further improving the grievance redress mechanism for resolving customer complaints against entities regulated by the central bank.
- The central theme of the scheme is based on **'One Nation-One Ombudsman'** with one portal, one email and one address for the customers to lodge their complaints.
- The RBI has decided **to integrate the three ombudsman schemes into one** and also simplified the scheme by covering all complaints involving deficiency in service by centralising the receipt and initial processing of complaints to enhance process efficiency.
- **RB-IOS will do away with the jurisdictional limitations as well as limited grounds for complaints.** RBI will provide a single reference point for the customers to submit documents, track status of complaints filed and provide feedback.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** has approved continuation of **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)**-I and II up to September, 2022, and **Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Affected Areas** up to March, 2023.

About PMGSY: Launched on: 25th December, 2000.

Objective: To provide connectivity, by way of an all-weather road to unconnected habitations.

Eligibility: Unconnected habitations of designated population size (500+ in plain areas and 250+ in North-Eastern States, Himalayan States, Deserts and Tribal Areas as per 2001 census) in the core network for uplifting the socio-economic condition of the rural population.

Funding: The Union Government bears 90% of the project cost in respect of projects sanctioned under the scheme in North-Eastern and Himalayan States, whereas for other states the Union Government bears 60% of the cost.

Challenges:

- Lack of dedicated funds.
- Limited involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Inadequate execution and contracting capacity.
- Less working season and difficult terrain particularly in Hill States.
- Scarcity of the construction materials.
- Security concerns particularly in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) areas.

Current Affairs Update (Nov 22-30)

National

Puri heritage corridor

- Puri heritage corridor is being developed at a cost of Rs 800 crore in Odisha. Conceived in 2016, the Project aims to transform the holy town of Puri into an international place of heritage.
- It is an important **Vaishnavite temple** dedicated to Jagannath, a form of Sri Krishna in Puri in Odisha.
- The temple is believed to be constructed in the 12th century by **King Anatavarman Chodaganga Deva** of **the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.**
- Jagannath Puri temple is called **'Yamanika Tirtha'** where, according to the Hindu beliefs, the power of 'Yama', the god of death has been nullified in Puri due to the presence of Lord Jagannath.
- This temple was called **the "White Pagoda"** and is a part of Char Dham pilgrimages (Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameswaram).
- The Puri temple is famous for its annual **Ratha Yatra,** or chariot festival, in which the three principal deities are pulled on huge and elaborately decorated temple cars.

How can the government repeal a law?

- The government can **repeal the laws in two ways** — it can either **bring a Bill to repeal the three laws** or **promulgate an ordinance** that will have to be subsequently replaced with a Bill within six months.
- For repeal, the **power of Parliament is the same as enacting a law** under the Constitution.
- **Article 245 of the Constitution** which gives Parliament the power to make laws also gives the legislative body the power to repeal them through the Repealing and Amending Act.
- The Act was first passed in 1950 when 72 Acts were repealed.
- A **law can be repealed either in its entirety**, **in part, or even just to the extent** that it is in contravention of other laws.

Registration of political parties

Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.**

A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Election Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within the said period following the date of its formation as per

guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by **Article 324 of the Commission of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.**

Guidelines:

- As per the existing guidelines, the applicant is asked to publish the proposed name of the party in two national newspapers and two local dailies.
- It should also provide two days for submitting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from the publication.
- The notice for publication is also displayed on the website of the Election Commission.

What is 'lateral entry' into government?

- Recommended by NITI Aayog, in its three-year Action Agenda.
- The induction of personnel will take place at the middle and senior management levels in the central government.
- These 'lateral entrants' would be part of the central secretariat which in the normal course has only career bureaucrats from the All India Services/ Central Civil Services.

Need for and significance:

1. Lateral entrants have specialised knowledge and expertise in the domain area.

2. Meets the twin objectives of bringing in fresh talent as well as augment the availability of manpower.

3. It provides stakeholders such as the private sector and non-profits an opportunity to participate in governance process.

4. It will help in bringing change in organisation culture in Government sector culture.

Why is lateral entry sometimes criticised?

- There is no reservation in these appointments.
- They are seen as back doors for a political party to bring its own people openly.

Will you ban convicts from polls, asks SC

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre whether it was "willing" to favour **a lifetime ban on contesting elections for people convicted of offences.** A petition has been filed in the court urging the need for a level playing field. He said if a convicted person cannot be a government clerk, the same rule should apply to a politician.

The Government, in an affidavit filed by the Law Ministry in the court in December 2020, had rejected the idea of a lifetime ban on convicted persons contesting elections or becoming an office-bearer of a political party.

Why is the Centre against the lifetime ban?

- The Ministry had reasoned that **MPs and MLAs were not bound by specific "service conditions".** They are bound by oath to serve citizens and country. They are bound by propriety, good conscience and interest of the nation.

- The Supreme Court in **Public Interest Foundation case of 2019** said "though criminalisation of politics is a bitter manifest truth, which is a termite to the citadel of democracy, be that as it may, the court cannot make the law".

- The government has maintained that disqualification under **the Representation of the People Act of 1951** for the period of prison sentence and six years thereafter was enough for legislators.

OP SANKALP

- INS Trikand is currently deployed in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman **as part of Operation Sankalp.**
- **Operation Sankalp** was started in June 2019 after there were explosions on board two oil tanker ships in the Gulf of Oman amid increased tensions between Iran and the U.S.
- **It is the Indian Navy's effort** to maintain a frontline ship in the region to ensure safe and secure movement of trade, instill confidence in the maritime community and contribute to regional maritime security.

Rezang La

Rezang La is **a mountain pass on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh.** It is located between village of **Chushul and the Spanggur Lake** that stretches across both Indian and Chinese territories. It had been the site of a heroic battle **'the Battle of Rezang La'** on 18 November 1962. Troops from the 13 Kumaon Regiment defeated several waves of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1962. A memorial was inaugurated on the occasion.

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

JPC retains exemption clause, adopts personal data Bill

The **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** on **the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019** has submitted its report.

Key recommendations made:

- **Stricter regulations for social media platforms:** The Committee recommended that all social media platforms, which did not act as intermediaries, should be treated as publishers and be held accountable for the content they host, and should be held responsible for the content from unverified accounts on their platforms.

- It said no social media platform should be allowed to operate unless **the parent company handling the technology sets up an office in India and that a statutory media regulatory authority,** on the lines of the Press Council of India, may be set up for the regulation of the contents on all such platforms irrespective of the platform where their content is published.

- **Some of the other recommendations** of the committee included development of an alternative indigenous financial system for cross-border payments on the lines of Ripple (U.S.) and INSTEX (European Union).

- **Clause 35,** in the name of **"public order", "sovereignty", "friendly relations with foreign states" and "security of the state",** allowed any agency under the Union Government exemption from all or any provisions of the law. This was one of the widely debated clauses in the panel meetings.

Rationale behind the retention of this clause:

- A secure nation alone provides the atmosphere which ensures personal liberty and privacy of an individual whereas multiple examples exist where without individual liberty and privacy, national security itself gives rise to autocratic regimes.

- The report noted that this clause was for "certain legitimate purposes" and also said there was precedent in the form of the reasonable restrictions imposed upon the liberty of an individual, as guaranteed under **Article 19 of the Constitution** and **the Puttaswamy judgment.**

Concerns raised against certain provisions:

- The Bill did not provide adequate safeguards to protect the right to privacy and gave an overboard exemption to the Government. Clause 35 was open to misuse since it gave unqualified powers to the Government.

Other Key provisions:

Data principal: As per the bill, it is the individual whose data is being stored and processed.

Social media companies, which are deemed significant data fiduciaries based on factors such as volume and sensitivity of data as well as their turnover, should develop their own user verification mechanism.

4

An independent regulator **Data Protection Agency (DPA)** will oversee assessments and audits and definition making.

Each company will have **a Data Protection Officer (DPO)** who will liaison with the DPA for auditing, grievance redressal, recording maintenance and more.

The bill also grants individuals **the right to data portability, and the ability to access and transfer one's own data.**

The right to be forgotten: This right allows an individual to remove consent for data collection and disclosure.

AK-203 deal

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has granted permission for mass production of AK-203 rifles, providing fire power to the standard weapon profile of armed forces. Manufacturing of the Kalashnikov Rifles or AK-203 will be done in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh. It will be manufactured jointly by Indo-Russia Rifles Pvt Ltd (IRRPL). IRRPL was created as a joint venture between Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) of India and Rosoboronexport & Concern Kalashnikov of Russia. OFB is holding 50.5 per cent stake in the concern, while Russian entities is holding the remaining 49.5 per cent share.

Ganga Expressway project

State-level environmental impact assessment committee in Uttar Pradesh (UP) has given Environmental Clearance (EC) for construction of ambitious Ganga Expressway project of UP government.

The Ganga Expressway Project is a **greenfield six-lane expressway** project. It is being built at an estimated cost of Rs 36,230 crore. The expressway connects Meerut in west UP to Prayagraj in east UP.

Ganga expressway will pass through **12 districts** in Uttar Pradesh. These districts are: Meerut-Hapur-Bulandshahar-Amroha-Sambhal-Badaun-Shahjahanpur-Hardoi-Unnao-Raebareli-Pratapgarh-Prayagraj, from west to east in that order.

National Family and Health Survey (NFHS)-5

The **National Family and Health Survey (NFHS)-5,** the most comprehensive survey on socio-economic and health indicators in the country, has been released. The previous four rounds of the NFHS were conducted in 1992-93, 1998-99, 2005-06 and 2015-16.

Highlights of the Report:

Women outnumber men, fertility has decreased, and India is getting older: There were 1,020 women for 1000 men in the country in 2019-2021. This is the highest sex ratio for any NFHS survey as well as since the first modern synchronous census conducted in 1881.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has also come down below the threshold at which the population is expected to replace itself from one generation to next. TFR was 2 in 2019-2021, just below the replacement fertility rate of 2.1.

Children's nutrition improved but at a slower pace: The share of stunted (low height for age), wasted (low weight for height), and underweight (low weight for age) children have all come down since the last NFHS conducted in 2015-16. However, the share of severely wasted children has not, nor has the share of overweight (high weight for height) or anaemic children.

India might be food secure, but nutrition is a problem for adults too: Though India might have achieved food security, 60% of Indians cannot afford nutritious diets.

International

13th ASEM Summit

13th edition of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit is scheduled to held on November 25 and November 26, 2021. In the summit, the Indian delegation will be led by Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu.

The summit is titled as "Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth". It will be held in virtual mode, by including all 51 member countries. Apart from members, ASEAN and the European Union will also take part.

Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM)

ASEM is an Asian–European political dialogue forum, that works to enhance relations and several forms of cooperation between its partners. It was established on March 1, 1996 at 1st ASEM Summit (ASEM1) in Bangkok, Thailand. It was established by the 15 Member States of the EU & European Commission and 7 Member States of the ASEAN, besides individual countries of Japan, China, and South Korea.

Members of ASEM

Several EU Member States, India, Pakistan, Mongolia and the ASEAN Secretariat joined ASEM in 2008. In 2010, Australia, New Zealand and Russia joined. While, Bangladesh, Norway, and Switzerland joined in 2012. In 2014, Croatia & Kazakhstan joined ASEM. Turkey is the newest member of ASEM, that joined in 2021.

What is the Istanbul Convention?

- It is also called as **the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.**
- The treaty is **the world's first binding instrument** to prevent and tackle violence against women.
- It is **the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to tackle violence against women and girls, covering** domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called honour-based violence, and forced marriage.
- When a government ratifies the Convention, **they are legally bound to follow it.**
- The convention was adopted by **the Council of Europe Committee** of Ministers on 7 April 2011. The Convention sets minimum standards for governments to meet when tackling violence against women.

Why in news? Turkey has withdrawn from the convention despite the alarmingly high rates of violence and femicide in the country. The country ranks 133 out of 156 countries in **the Global Gender Gap report 2021**

El Salvador's Bitcoin city

- El Salvador, **the only country to recognise Bitcoin as a legal tender,** is planning to build an entire city based on the largest cryptocurrency Bitcoin.
- El Salvador's "Bitcoin City" would be funded with the issuance of a $1 billion Bitcoin Bond.
- The city will be located along the Gulf of Fonseca near **Conchagua volcano.**
- El Salvador is already running a pilot Bitcoin mining venture at another geothermal power plant beside the Tecapa volcano.

Science-Tech & Environment

"Draft Food Safety and Standards (Genetically Modified or Engineered Foods) Regulations, 2021"

Issued by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The draft regulation will be applicable to:

1. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

2. Genetically Engineered Organisms (GEOs)

3. Living Modified Organisms (LMOs)

- It was issued for direct use as food or for processing.

- It will be applicable to Food or Processed food comprising of Genetically Modified ingredients produced from but not containing GMOs, LMOs or GEOs.

Provisions of the draft regulations

- No person will manufacture, store, sell, distribute, or import any food or food ingredient derived from Genetically Modified Organisms, in country, except with prior approval from Food Authority.
- Under the regulation, any food laboratory that has been notified in accordance with section 43 of Food Safety & Standards Act, 2006 can be designated for Genetically Modified Foods Testing.
- **Form-I** of the regulation specifies "Application for approval of food or processing aid comprising of **Living Modified Organism** (LMOs)" in the end product.
- **Form-II** of the regulation specifies "Application for Approval of food or processing aid derived from **Genetically Modified Ingredients** and not comprising of Living Modified Organism (LMOs).

Zircon hypersonic cruise missile

- Russia has carried out another succesful test of its Zircon hypersonic cruise missile, one the latest additions to the country's arsenal of weapons called "invincible" by President Vladimir Putin.
- Hypersonics can travel more than five times the speed of sound and manoeuvre in mid-flight, making them much harder to track and intercept than traditional projectiles.

Cryptocarya Muthuvariana

- A group of scientists has identified a new plant species from the forest area of Idamalakkudy colony in Idukki, where Muthuvar tribal community resides. Scientists including from University of Kerala and Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanical Garden & Research Institute (TBGRI), identified the plant.
- New species of the plant has been named as 'Cryptocaria Muthuvariana', named after the Muthuvar tribal community. Muthuvar Traibal community plays a significant role in conserving the forest.
- For the first time, any plant species has been named after a local tribal community in the state.

Delhi pledges to clean Yamuna by 2025

Chief Minister of Delhi, pledged to clean Yamuna River completely by 2025 recently. Chief Minister announced understated six-point action plan:

1. **Sewer Treatment**– Government will construct new sewage treatment plants.

2. Capacity of existing sewer treatment plants will be increased. This move will increase sewage treatment capacity from 600 million gallons of wastewater per day to 750 MGD-800 MGD.

Waste water from four major drains, Najafgarh, Badshahpur, Supplementary & Ghazipur, falling in the Yamuna is being treated in-situ.

3. Old treatment plants will be upgraded and its technology will be changed.

4. Industries discharging industrial waste into the Yamuna will be shut down.

5. Wastewater in "jhuggi jhopri clusters" currently flows through stormwater and drains into the Yamuna. These drains will be connected to sewer network now.

6. Sewer connections will be installed in areas where people haven't taken sewer connections, at nominal charges. Government will provide household connections in areas having a sewer network. Earlier, people had to get such connection themselves.

Land handed over for first LIGO project in India

Hingoli income division handed around 225 hectares of land right in Maharashtra to the authorities of Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) venture.

LIGO is a massive observatory to detect cosmic gravitational waves and to carry experiments. Its main objective is to make use of gravitational-wave observations in astronomical studies. This project currently operates three gravitational-wave (GW) detectors. Out of three, two are at Hanford in Washington while one is at Livingston in Louisiana.

The LIGO India project was proposed with the aim of moving one advanced LIGO detector to India, from Hanford. This project is piloted by Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). This project in India will be coordinated and executed jointly by three Indian research institutions namely, Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology (RRCAT) in Indore, Department of Atomic Energy organisations: Institute for Plasma Research (IPR) in Gandhinagar and Inter-University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune.

INS Vela

The Indian Navy commissioned Scorpene-class submarine INS Vela at the naval dockyard in Mumbai. INS Vela is the fourth **Scorpene-class submarine** to be commissioned under **Project 75**. It has been built by **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders** Ltd in collaboration with M/s Naval Group of France.

Vela is named after a decommissioned **submarine Vela**, which served the Navy from 1973 to 2010. The earlier Vela belonged to Foxtrot class submarine of Soviet origin.

Dosti

The 15th edition of **the biennial trilateral coast guard exercise 'Dosti'** involving **India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka** is underway in the Maldives. 2021 marks 30 years since these exercises were first launched.

Economics

New Crypto Bill

The **Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021** will be introduced in the winter session of Parliament. Cryptocurrencies are digital currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank. **Examples: Bitcoin**, Ethereum etc.

Key Provisions:

- It seeks to regulate cryptocurrency and ostensibly ban all private cryptocurrencies.
- It seeks to create a facilitative framework for creation of the official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India.

Why the govt wants to ban cryptocurrencies?

1. **Sovereign guarantee:** Cryptocurrencies pose risks to consumers. They do not have any sovereign guarantee and hence are not legal tender.

2. **Market volatility:** Their speculative nature also makes them highly volatile. For instance, the value of Bitcoin fell from USD 20,000 in December 2017 to USD 3,800 in November 2018.

3. **Risk in security:** A user loses access to their cryptocurrency if they lose their private key (unlike traditional digital banking accounts, this password cannot be reset).

4. **Malware threats:** In some cases, these private keys are stored by technical service providers (cryptocurrency exchanges or wallets), which are prone to malware or hacking.

5. Money laundering.

Core Sector Industries

- **The eight core sector industries include** coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity
- The eight core industries **comprise nearly 40% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).**
- The eight **Core Industries in decreasing order of their weightage:** Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.

Labour codes

The new set of regulations consolidates 44 labour laws under 4 categories of Codes namely, Wage Code; Social Security Code; Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code; and the Industrial Relations Code. The Parliament has already passed all the four Codes and it has also received the President's assent.

The 4 codes are:

1. **The Code on Wages, 2019,** applying to all the employees in organized as well as unorganized sector, aims to regulate wage and bonus payments in all employments and aims at providing equal remuneration to employees performing work of a similar nature in every industry, trade, business, or manufacture.

2. **The Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020** seeks to regulate the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments with 10 or more workers, and in all mines and docks.

3. **The Code on Social Security, 2020** consolidates nine laws related to social security and maternity benefits.

4. **The Code on Industrial Relations, 2020** seeks to consolidate three labour laws namely, The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947: The Trade Unions Act, 1926 and The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946. The Code aims to improve the business environment in the country largely by reducing the labour compliance burden of industries.

Issues with these codes:

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