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# Current Events

December 2021

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The Current Events are tailored to the latest RTs trends and requirements of UPSC. To optimize exam performance, focus on the following key points:

- Cover current events from the past 18 months only, up to the date of the exam. For periodic events, such as the Budget, Economic Survey, Nobel Prize, or Tournaments, refer to only the latest ones. For instance, for an April 2023 exam, study the 2023 budget, not the 2022 budget.
- The UPSC RT exam is factual, so don't delve into details or implications.
- The Return on Investment (ROI) for studying current affairs is generally low. Therefore, devote an appropriate amount of time to them while prioritizing other topics that have a higher ROI. For instance, studying 100 pages of current affairs may result in solving only 5 questions, while studying 100 pages of Polity could yield 14-15 questions.
- A few questions will always be unsolvable, no matter how much you've studied. Don't get discouraged by them, as they won't affect your selection.
- Based on experience, you can expect to answer approximately 60-70% of question in exam, from these concise current affairs booklets.
- Current affairs for UPSC RT exams are purely factual, so self-study is better than coaching classes. In fact, coaching classes are counterproductive, as a teacher may only cover 10 events in 60 minutes, while you can cover 35-40 events in the same time frame.

Finally, note that these files are specifically prepared for RT exams of UPSC and should not be used for Civil Services Preliminary exam (GS Paper 1).

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## December 2021

### 1. Sports and Games

#### **Ballon d'Or Winner**

Lionel Messi has won the Men's Ballon d'Or for a record 7<sup>th</sup> time. Apart from him, Barcelona's Alexia Putellas won the women's Ballon d'Or. She was also named as UEFA women's player of the year.

The *Ballon d'Or* (Golden Ball) is an annual football award presented by French news magazine 'France Football', which is one of the oldest and generally regarded as the most prestigious individual award for football players.

#### **Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships 2021**

Weightlifter Sanket Mahadev Sargar has won a gold medal in Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships 2021 held at Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He lifted the weight of 113kg. With this lift, he also created the new snatch national record. Also, Indian weightlifter Jhilli Dalabehera has won the gold medal in the women's 49kg category.

#### **Kidambi Srikanth becomes first Indian male to claim silver at World Badminton Championships**

Kidambi Srikanth has become the first Indian male shuttler to claim a silver medal in the World Badminton Championships (held in Huelva, Spain), losing to Singapore's Loh Kean Yew in the men's singles final. The maiden silver also put Srikanth alongside PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal. Sindhu had won the coveted gold in 2019, two silver and two bronze, while Saina bagged the silver at 2015 Jakarta and a bronze at 2017 Glasgow. Also, Akane Yamaguchi (Japan) has won the women's title.

#### **Himachal Pradesh wins maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy**

Himachal Pradesh has won their maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy beating Tamil Nadu in the final in Jaipur.

Vijay Hazare Trophy, also known as the Ranji One-Day Trophy, was started in 2002-03 as a limited-overs cricket domestic competition involving state teams from the Ranji Trophy plates. It is named after the legendary Indian cricketer Vijay Hazare. Tamil Nadu is the most successful team having won the trophy 5 times.

## 2. Science and Technology

### **MeitY launched RUDRA – India’s first indigenous Server**

The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology has launched India’s first indigenous Server— RUDRA developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) supported by MeitY and Department of Science & Technology (DST).

*Rudra Server* is Secure, Reliable, Dual Socket based on current generation of Intel Xeon scalable processor technology and supports accelerated computing. It is an outcome of NSM Phase-3 deliverable which aims at Design and Manufacturing of Supercomputers in India.

The *National Supercomputing Mission* was launched in 2015 to enhance the research capacities and capabilities in the country by connecting them to form a Supercomputing grid, with National Knowledge Network (NKN) as the backbone. The NSM is setting up a grid of supercomputing facilities in academic and research institutions across the country.

PARAM Shivay, the first supercomputer assembled indigenously, was installed in IIT (BHU), followed by PARAM Shakti, PARAM Brahma, PARAM Yukti, PARAM Sanganak at IIT-Kharagpur IISER, Pune, JNCASR, Bengaluru and IIT Kanpur, IIT Hyderabad, NABI Mohali, CDAC Bengaluru respectively.

### **What is Web 3.0?**

Indian venture capital firms have been betting on Web 3.0 startups as they view such companies as developers of products for the next stage of the internet.

*Web 3.0* is the next stage of the web evolution that would make the internet more intelligent or process information with near-human-like intelligence through the power of Artificial Intelligence systems that could run smart programs to assist users. The goal of Web 3.0 is to create more intelligent, connected, and open websites.

*Web 1.0*, also called the Static Web, which started in the 1990s enabled easy access to information. However, the information was largely disorganised and difficult to navigate.

The Social Web, or *Web 2.0*, made the internet a lot more interactive because of the advancements in web technologies like JavaScript, HTML5, CSS3, etc., which enabled developers to build interactive web platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia and many more.

### **World’s First living robots – Xenobots**

Scientists have created the world's first living, self-healing robots using stem cells from frogs. Named Xenobots after the African clawed frog (*Xenopus laevis*) from which they take their stem cells. The machines are less than a millimeter (0.04 inches) wide -- small enough to travel inside human bodies. They can walk and swim, survive for weeks without food, and work together in groups. These are neither a traditional robot nor a known species of animal. It's a new class of artifact: a living, programmable organism.

*Stem cells* are unspecialized cells that have the ability to develop into different cell types. The researchers scraped living stem cells from frog embryos and left them to incubate. Then, the cells were cut and reshaped into specific “body forms” designed by a supercomputer.

### **What is Pegasus software?**

The Supreme Court has stayed all proceedings before the Justice Madan B Commission of Inquiry appointed by the West Bengal Government to probe into the Pegasus software.

*Pegasus*: It is a spyware tool developed by an Israeli firm, the NSO Group. Spyware spy on people through their phones. Pegasus works by sending an exploit link, and if the target user clicks on the link, the malware or the code that allows the surveillance is installed on the user's phone. Once Pegasus is installed, the attacker has complete access to the target user's phone. Pegasus can "send back the target's private data, including passwords, contact lists, calendar events, text messages, and live voice calls from popular mobile messaging apps".

A *zero-click attack* helps spyware like Pegasus gain control over a device without human interaction or human error. So, all awareness about how to avoid a phishing attack or which links not to click are pointless if the target is the system itself. Most of these attacks exploit software which receive data even before it can determine whether what is coming in is trustworthy or not, like an email client.

*Malware* is defined as a software designed to perform an unwanted illegal act via the computer network. It could be also defined as software with malicious intent.

### **What is NavIC?**

ISRO has signed an agreement with Mobile company Oppo to strengthen the Research and Development (R&D) of the NavIC messaging service, an Indian satellite navigation system.

*Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)*: IRNSS (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System) is an independent Regional Navigation Satellite System being developed by India. It is designed to provide accurate position information service to users in India as well as the region extending up to 1500 km from its boundary, which is its primary service area. It provides 2 types of services, namely, Standard Positioning Service (SPS) which is provided to all the users and Restricted Service (RS), which is an encrypted service provided only to the authorized users. The satellite is functional since April 2018.

Note that, earlier in September 2019, Global standards body 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), which develops protocols for mobile telephony, approved India's Regional Navigation System (NavIC).

### **DRDO successfully tested Pinaka Extended Range**

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully tested extended range Pinaka (Pinaka-ER) Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher System at Rajasthan's Pokhran Range. The Pinaka - ER is the upgraded version of the earlier version of Pinaka which has been in service with the Indian Army for the last decade. It has been designed by DRDO Armament Research and Development Establishment laboratory and Pune-based High Energy Materials Research Laboratory. New Pinaka ER gives it a range of around 70 km, over the 45 km existing range of the missile. Pinaka can fire a salvo of 12 rockets over a period of 44 seconds.

### **DRDO, IAF successfully tested Stand-off Anti-Tank Missile (SANT)**

DRDO and Indian Air Force flight-tested the indigenously designed and developed Helicopter launched SANT Missile from Pokhran ranges.

The *SANT missile* has been designed and developed by Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad in coordination with other DRDO labs and participation from industries. This is the third in the series of indigenous stand-off weapons to be tested. SANT missile is equipped with a state-of-the-art MilliMetre Wave (MMW) seeker which provides high precision strike capability from a safe distance. It can neutralise targets in a range up to 10 kms.

### **DRDO successfully tested Supersonic Missile Assisted Torpedo**

DRDO has tested a long-range Supersonic Missile Assisted Torpedo (SMART) from Wheeler Island in Odisha. SMART is a next-generation missile-based stand-off torpedo delivery system. It has been designed to enhance anti-submarine warfare capability far beyond the conventional range of the torpedo.

### **DRDO successfully tested Agni Prime**

DRDO has successfully test-fired the new generation surface-to-surface nuclear-capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha in Balasore.

*Agni Prime* (6<sup>th</sup> in series) is a new generation advanced variant of the Agni class of missiles with range capability between 1,000 and 2,000 km. The missile is a two-stage canisterised solid propellant ballistic missile with dual redundant navigation and guidance system. It weighs 50% less than the Agni III missile and can be launched from rail or road. It can be stored for a longer period and has easy movability.

### **DRDO successfully conducted Pralay Missile test on consecutive days**

DRDO has successfully conducted flight-test of indigenously developed conventional Surface-to-Surface missile 'Pralay' from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha. For the first time, two consecutive flight tests of a ballistic missile have been conducted successfully on two consecutive days.

*Pralay* is an indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile. The missile is powered by a solid-propellant rocket motor. It has a range of 150-500 kilometres with an accuracy of less than 10 metres. It has a guidance system that includes state-of-the art navigation mechanisms and integrated avionics.

### **Indian Army launched messaging application named – ASIGMA**

Indian Army has launched a contemporary messaging application named, ASIGMA (Army Secure Indigenous Messaging Application) which is a new generation, state of the art, web-based application developed entirely in-house by team of officers of the Corps of Signals of the Army. The application is being deployed on the Army's internal network as a replacement of Army Wide Area Network (AWAN) messaging application which has been in service for past 15 years. 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.



### 3. Environment

#### **India's First Green Hydrogen Microgrid Project**

National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has awarded India's first Green Hydrogen-based Microgrid Project at Simhadri, Andhra Pradesh. 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 (ex-Ladakh) and meet the clean energy goals because of its features like sustainability, easy to store etc.

#### **47<sup>th</sup> Ramsar Territory designated – Haiderpur Wetland**

India has designated the Haiderpur wetland as the country's 47<sup>th</sup> Ramsar site. Haiderpur Wetland is situated on the Muzaffarnagar-Bijnor 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.

The *Ramsar Convention* is an international agreement promoting the conservation of wetlands. The Convention was adopted at Ramsar in Iran in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

#### **India co-chaired Global Methane Initiative virtual meeting**

India has co-chaired GMI Steering Leadership virtual meeting. India is one of the members since its inception and has taken up Vice-Chairmanship for the first time in the Steering Leadership along with USA. The Chairperson of the Steering Leadership is from Canada.

#### **India achieved its target of installed electricity capacity from Non-Fossil Fuels**

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.

#### **Ministry of Coal sets up Mission Coking Coal (MCC)**

Ministry of Coal has set up Mission Coking Coal to evolve a road map for increasing production and utilization of domestic coking coal. This was done based on the recommendation of Inter-Ministerial Committee formed to strategize augmentation of coking coal production in India. *Coking coal* is used in manufacturing of steel through blast furnace route. Domestic coking coal is high ash coal (between 18% to 49%) and is not suitable for direct use in blast furnace. Therefore, it is blended with imported coking coal (< 9% ash).

*Coking* refers to the coal's ability to be converted into coke, a pure form of carbon that can be used in basic oxygen furnaces.

#### **What are flex fuels?**

Union Government has issued an advisory to car makers to introduce flexible car engines in vehicles within 6 months so that cars can also run-on ethanol in the future. Flex-fuel, or flexible fuel, is an alternative fuel made of a combination of gasoline and methanol or ethanol. Government has also advanced target date for achieving 20% ethanol-blending with petrol by 5 years to 2025.

Flex Fuel Vehicle is a modified version of vehicles that could run both on gasoline and blended petrol with different levels of ethanol blends. These are currently being used successfully in Brazil, giving people the option to switch fuel (gasoline and ethanol).

*Ethanol*, or ethyl alcohol, is a liquid that has several uses. At 95% purity, it is called rectified spirit and is used as the intoxicating ingredient in alcoholic beverages. At 99%-plus purity, ethanol is used for blending with petrol. Both products are made from molasses, a by-product of sugar manufacturing.

### **How Cyclone Formed?**

Cyclonic Storm Jawad was a weak tropical cyclone that caused major disruptions over Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal in India while bringing heavy rainfall and strong winds over these states as a weakened system. The name 'Jawad' has given by the Saudi Arabia. The meaning 'Jawad' is liberal or merciful. This carries significance as this cyclonic storm was not as severe as the previous ones.

### **Eco-Sensitive Area and Western Ghat – Kasturirangan Committee**

Karnataka Chief Minister has informed the Central Government that the State is opposed to the Kasturirangan Committee report on Western Ghats. The Karnataka's Government is of the opinion that declaring Western Ghats as Economic Sensitive Area would adversely affect the livelihood of people in the region.

In August 2012, then Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to examine the Gadgil Committee report in a "holistic and multidisciplinary fashion". The Kasturirangan report seeks to bring just 37% of the Western Ghats under the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) zones — down from the 64% suggested by the Gadgil report.

The *Western Ghats* is an extensive region spanning over 6 States – Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is the home of many endangered plants and animals. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is one of the 8 "hottest hot-spots" of biological diversity in the world.

*Eco-Sensitive Areas (ESAs)* are located within 10 kms around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries. ESAs are notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) under Environment Protection Act 1986.

### **What is Ring of Fire?**

A 7.3-magnitude earthquake has struck eastern Indonesia. Indonesia sits along the Ring of Fire region, an area where most of the world's volcanic eruptions occur. Indonesia is at the meeting point of 3 major continental plates – the Pacific, the Eurasian and the Indo-Australian plates – and the much smaller Philippine plate. As a result, several volcanoes on the Indonesian islands are prone to erupting.

The Ring of Fire, also referred to as the Circum-Pacific Belt, is a path along the Pacific Ocean characterized by active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. It is largely a result of Plate Tectonics where massive Pacific Plate interacts with less-dense plates surrounding it. The majority of Earth's volcanic eruptions and earthquakes take place along the Ring of Fire. The region is home to over 450 volcanoes, including 3 of the world's 4 most active volcanoes – Mount St. Helens in the USA, Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines

### **Chillai Kalan begins in Kashmir after Winter Solstice**

On 21<sup>st</sup> December (winter solstice), one of the harshest winter periods of 40 days, called Chillai Kalan, has begun in Kashmir. Chillai Kalan is a Persian term which means '*major cold*'. This is followed by a 20-day-long '*Chillai Khurd*' and 10-day-long '*Chillai Bacha*'.

The *Winter Solstice* happens every year when the Sun reaches its most southerly declination of  $-23.5$  degrees. In other words, it is when the North Pole is tilted farthest away from the Sun, delivering the fewest hours of sunlight of the year. The Sun is directly overhead of the Tropic of Capricorn in the Southern Hemisphere during the December solstice and is closer to the horizon than at any other time in the year. The day after the winter solstice marks the beginning of lengthening days, leading up to the summer Solstice in June.

## 4. Schemes and Programmes

### **Incentive Scheme to Promote RuPay Debit Cards Approved**

Union Cabinet has approved an incentive scheme worth for promotion of RuPay debit cards and low value (up to Rs. 2,000) BHIM-UPI transactions (Person-to-Merchants (P2M)) in the country.

Under the scheme, acquiring banks will be incentivised by the Government, by way of paying percentage of value of transactions (P2M) done through RuPay Debit cards and low-value BHIM-UPI modes of payments for a period of 1-year w.e.f. April 01, 2021. This scheme will facilitate acquiring Banks in building robust digital payment ecosystem and promoting RuPay Debit card and BHIM-UPI digital transactions, across all sectors and segments of the population and further deepening of digital payments in the country.

### **Government approves continuation of ACROSS Scheme for next 5 years**

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a scheme called Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS) to be continued for next 5 years.

#### *ACROSS*

The scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). It addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc. Each of these aspects is incorporated as 9 sub-schemes under the umbrella scheme “ACROSS” and is implemented in an integrated.

### **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM)**

According to the Performance analysis of the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission, Telangana stood first in the implementation of the scheme.

*Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission:* Launched in 2016, the programme is designed to deliver catalytic interventions to rural areas on the threshold of growth. It is now a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. Funding is shared between the Centre and the State in a ratio of 60:40 for Plain area States and 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States. Main objective of the scheme is bridging the rural-urban divide-viz: economic, technological and those related to facilities and service.

## 5. Polity

### **Centennial celebration of Public Accounts Committee was held**

Centennial celebration of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was held.

*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. W M Hailey was its first President, and Bhupendra Nath Mitra its first Indian President. The last President before Independence was Liaquat Ali Khan.

#### *Major Functions of PAC:*

- It scrutinizes the Appropriation Accounts of the Government of India and the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.
- It examines the statement of accounts showing the income and expenditure of State Corporations, trading and manufacturing schemes, projects and autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies.

### **Parliament passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021**

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

*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.

#### *Key Provisions*

- Act constituted the *National Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Board* with Chairman as Minister in-charge of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to advise the Central Government on policy matters relating to surrogacy.
- Constitution of State Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Boards in each State & UT level.
- Prohibits commercial surrogacy but allows altruistic surrogacy.
- Registration of surrogacy clinics has been made compulsory.

#### *Eligibility criteria*

- Lady should be a married woman having a child of her own and 25 to 35 years old.
- a surrogate is allowed only once in her lifetime.
- possess a certificate of medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy.

*Altruistic surrogacy:* It involves no monetary compensation to the surrogate mother other than the medical expenses and insurance coverage during the pregnancy. It was first legalised in India in 2002. Government has banned surrogacy for foreign nationals in 2015.

### **Parliament passed the ART Regulation Act 2021**

Parliament has passed the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Regulation Act 2021 that provides for the safe and ethical practice of ART services.

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.

### *Key Provisions*

- Every ART clinic and bank must be registered under the National Registry of Banks and Clinics of India.
- National Registry established will act as a central database with details of all ART clinics and banks in the country.
- 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.
- ART bank is an organisation that is set up to supply sperm or semen, oocytes, or oocyte donors to ART clinics or their patients.
- 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.
- A donor will not have any parental rights over the child.
- National and State Boards are constituted under the Act to regulate ART services.
- No court will take cognisance of offences under the Act, except on a complaint made by the National or State Board or any officer authorised by the Boards.

### **China's One Country Two Systems Approach**

Hong Kong authorities are pursuing new laws to tighten the city-state's grip on public discourse critical of its Beijing-aligned government. Hong Kong is ruled under One Country Two Systems Approach.

As per the policy, the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions, both former colonies of Britain (Hong Kong till 1997 & Macau till 1999), can have different economic and political systems from that of mainland China, while being part of the People's Republic of China. Both regions became Special Administrative Regions of China. The regions would have their own currencies, economic and legal systems, but defence and diplomacy would be decided by Beijing. Their Mini-Constitutions would remain valid for 50 years — till 2047 for Hong Kong and 2049 for Macau.

### **Women Judges in the Supreme Court**

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana has promised to take up with the Supreme Court Collegium the demand for more women judges. In the 71 years of history of the Supreme Court, there have been only 8 women judges — the first was Justice Fathima Beevi, who became the first woman judge of Supreme Court in 1989.

Also note that, former Karnataka High Court Justice Nagarhna is reportedly in line to become the first woman Chief Justice of India in September 2027.

### **Government to tabled bill for raising women's marriage age**

The Union Cabinet has decided to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. The aim is to bring uniformity in the marriageable age of men and women. For this, a Bill to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 will be introduced in the Parliament. The decision is based on the recommendation of a four-member task force led by former Samata Party chief 'Jaya Jaitly'.

### **Right to be forgotten**

The Central Government has notified the Delhi High Court that the "right to be forgotten" is part of the fundamental right to privacy, but added it has no significant role to play in the matter.

The *Right to be Forgotten* falls under the purview of an individual's right to privacy, which is governed by the Personal Data Protection Bill that is yet to be passed by Parliament. In 2017, the Right to Privacy was declared

a Fundamental Right (*under Article 21*) by the Supreme Court in its landmark verdict (Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union of India).

**USA's first Summit for Democracy**

USA has virtually organized 'Summit for Democracy' which is also attended by the Prime Minister of India.

*Summit for Democracy:* It is a 2-stage flagship Presidential initiative from the USA to put democracy and human rights at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. It brought together leaders from democratic governments, civil society, and private sector. It aims to bolster democracy from local to global levels through its three Pillars of focus.

*3 Pillars:* Strengthening Democracy and Countering Authoritarianism, Promoting Respect for Human Rights, Fighting Corruption.

## 6. Governance

### **Good Governance Index 2021 launched on Good Governance Day**

Good Governance Index (GGI) 2021 was launched on Good Governance Day. The Day is observed annually on 25<sup>th</sup> December on the birth anniversary of former - Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

#### *Key Highlights of the Index*

- 20 states have improved their composite GGI scores over the 2019 index scores.
- In Group A states, Gujarat has topped the composite ranking while Madhya Pradesh topped in Group B states.
- Delhi topped the UT category ranking.
- In North-East and Hill States category, Himachal Pradesh topped the ranking.

### **Who is Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)?**

Chief of Defence Staff, along with his wife, an Army Brigadier, and 10 others were killed when an Indian Air Force helicopter carrying them crashed into the Coonoor Ghat in the Nilgiris in western Tamil Nadu. Gen. Bipin Rawat was appointed as the country's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

### **Union Cabinet approved Ken-Betwa River Inter-linking Project**

The Union Cabinet has approved the funding and implementation of the Ken-Betwa River interlinking project. The project involves transferring of water from the Ken River to the Betwa river through the construction of Daudhan dam and a canal linking the two rivers, the Lower Orr Project, Kotha Barrage and the Bina Complex Multipurpose Project. Ken and Betwa rivers originate in MP and are the tributaries of Yamuna. Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda district of UP and with Betwa in Hamirpur district of UP. Ken River passes through Panna tiger reserve.



## 7. International Relations

### **21<sup>st</sup> annual India-Russia Summit held**

21<sup>st</sup> annual India-Russia summit was held. It was attended by Indian Prime Minister and Russian President. Alongside, the inaugural 2+2 ministerial meeting was also held. The meeting saw the signing of 28 agreements across sectors from defence to energy to space exploration, science and technology, heavy engineering, to trade and investment.

*The 2+2 dialogue:* It is held between the foreign and defence ministers of 2 countries and is generally seen to be aimed at creating a mechanism under which the bilateral relationship takes a decisive strategic turn with greater integration of defence, security and intelligence apparatus.

### **EU launches global infrastructure financing – Global Gateway**

The European Commission has launched ‘Global Gateway’. It is a European Union strategy on global infrastructure financing with the aim to mobilize up to €300 billion (\$340 billion) in investments between 2021-2027.

Similarly, the G7 (Group of Seven) Countries proposed a ‘*Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative*’ at the recent 47<sup>th</sup> G7 summit held in July 2021. It aims to address the infrastructure investment deficit in developing and lower income countries. This infrastructure plan is being led by the United States.

In the year 2013, China also launched its global investment strategy known as Belt and Road Initiative.

### **India joined G20 Troika**

India has joined the G20 ‘Troika’ and is set to take over its Presidency in 2022. The G20 Troika consists of Indonesia, Italy, and India – the current, previous and incoming G20 Presidencies, respectively. India will assume the G20 presidency on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022 from Indonesia and will convene the G20 Leaders’ Summit for the first time in India in 2023.

### **India hosts 8<sup>th</sup> edition of Indian Ocean Dialogue**

India has virtually hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Indian Ocean Dialogue under the theme ‘Post Pandemic Indian Ocean: Leveraging Digital Technologies for Health, Education, Development and Trade in IORA Member States’. This is with the assistance of the Indian Council for World Affairs and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretariat.

### **ISA to get Observer Status by UNGA**

UN General Assembly has conferred observer status to International Solar Alliance (ISA). It will provide a choice to ISA to have permanent office in the UN Headquarters at New York.

ISA is an intergovernmental treaty-based international organisation (Secretariat: Gurugram), jointly launched by India and France at COP21 of the UNFCCC at Paris, 2015. It works as a collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies.

### **Egypt to become new member of New Development Bank (NDB)**

Egypt is the 4<sup>th</sup> new member admitted into National Development Bank (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 nations.

### **What is Operation Dev Shakti?**

Operation Dev Shakti is the rescue operation being conducted by Indian Government to evacuate people from Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

**India-ADB signed loan agreement to improve urban services**

India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a \$350 million loan to improve access to urban services. Under it, ADB will provide knowledge and advisory support to Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It will also support ULBs particularly in select low-income states.

**UAE's Golden Visa**

Actor Tusshar Kapoor has awarded Golden Visa by UAE. He joins a growing list of Indian actors, including Mohanlal and Shah Rukh Khan, who have received the coveted 10-year residency. In 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, thereby enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor and with 100 % ownership of their business.

**India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership**

India and European Union (EU) have conducted a meeting of India-EU Energy Panel. During the meet, both sides have agreed to step up their Clean Energy and Climate Partnership. They jointly agreed on a detailed work programme until 2023 to implement the 2016 India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership.

**Defence exercise held between India & Maldives**

11<sup>th</sup> Edition of Exercise EKUVERIN between India & Maldives was conducted at Kadhdhoo Island, Maldives. Ekuverin means "*Friends*" in the Dhivehi language, which is the national language of Maldives.

## 8. Awards and Recognition

### **Sahitya Akademi Awards and Jnanpith Award**

Sahitya Akademi has announced the Sahitya Akademi Award 2021 in 20 languages. The Akademi also announced Yuva Puraskar and Bal Sahitya Puraskar for 2021.

*Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar* is given to an author based on his/her total contribution to children literature and relates to books first published during the 5 years immediately preceding the year of Award.

*Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar* relates to books published by an author of the age of 35 and below.

### **Bhutan's Order of the Druk Gyalpo conferred to Indian Prime Minister**

On the occasion of National Bhutan's Day, King of Bhutan – Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck – has conferred Order of Druk Gyalpo, to the current Prime Minister of India – Shri. Narendra Modi. The award was conferred in recognition of his contribution to India-Bhutan relations and his services to Bhutan and its people. It is the highest civilian award in Bhutan, awarded in recognition of a lifetime of service to the people and Kingdom of Bhutan.

The day aims to commemorate the Coronation of the First King of Bhutan, Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuck on December 17, 1907. The Druk Gyalpo is the official title of the head of state of Bhutan, meaning Dragon King in Dzongkha.

### **Parag Agrawal to be new CEO of Twitter**

Indian-origin technology executive Parag Agrawal was appointed the new Chief Executive Officer of Twitter after the Twitter's co-founder Jack Dorsey stepped down. He is an alumnus of IIT Bombay.

### **Royal Gold Medal 2022**

Ahmedabad-based Balkrishna Doshi will receive the Royal Gold Medal 2022 by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the world's highest honour for architecture. The Royal Gold Medal is approved personally by Her Majesty, The Queen and is given to a person or group of people who have had a significant influence on the advancement of architecture.

### **India's Harnaaz Sandhu won Miss Universe 2021**

Chandigarh's Harnaaz Sandhu has won the 70<sup>th</sup> Miss Universe title at a ceremony held in Israel. India has got this title of Miss Universe after 21 years. Earlier this title was given to India in the year 1994 by actress Sushmita Sen and in the year 2000 by actress Lara Dutta. The event was held in Eilat, Israel.

### **South African icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu died at age of 90 years**

South African anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu, described as the country's moral compass, was died at the age of 90 years. The Archbishop won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for combating white minority rule in South Africa. He coined the term "Rainbow Nation" to describe South Africa when Nelson Mandela became the country's first black President in 1994. Former U.S. President Barack Obama, the country's first black leader, hailed Tutu as a "moral compass".

### **World Athletics awarded Anju Bobby George Woman of the Year Award**

Indian Athlete Anju Bobby George has won the Woman of the Year Award by World Athletics for grooming talent and encouraging young girls in India to take up sports and fight for gender equality. She is the only Indian to have won a medal in the World Championships with a long jump bronze in the 2003 edition.

**Rukmini Banerji received 2021 Yidan Prize**

Rukmini Banerji was awarded the world's highest education accolade the 2021 Yidan Prize, for Education Development, for her work in improving learning outcomes. She is the CEO of Pratham Education Foundation.

**TIME Magazine Person of the Year 2021 – Elon Musk**

Tesla Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk was named Time magazine's 2021 "Person of the Year". Elon Musk is also the founder and CEO of rocket company SpaceX and leads brain-chip Startup Neuralink and infrastructure firm The Boring Company.

TIME is an American weekly news magazine and news website published and based in New York City.

**Fortune India's Most Powerful Women List 2021**

Nirmala Sitharaman has topped the Fortune India's Most Powerful Women List 2021. She is followed by Reliance Foundation Chairperson and Goodwill Ambassador Nita Ambani in 2<sup>nd</sup> position, and Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, World Health Organization (WHO) at 3<sup>rd</sup>. Nirmala Sitharaman is the 28<sup>th</sup> Finance Minister of India.

## 9. Social Development

### **MoE PRAGYATA Guidelines**

Ministry of Education has issued advisory to citizens regarding use of caution against EdTech Companies. The Ministry advises the citizens to go through the child safety guidelines mentioned in the PRAGYATA guidelines by Ministry of Education before using any ed-tech platform. *PRAGYATA* are the Ministry of Education child safety guidelines for digital education.

The Ministry suggested that the duration of online classes for:

- Pre-primary students - not be for more than 30 minutes a day
- For Classes 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> - not more than 2 online sessions of upto 45 minutes each
- For Classes 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> - maximum of 4 sessions of upto 45 minutes each

The PRAGYATA guidelines include 8 steps of digital learning that is, *Plan- Review- Arrange- Guide- Yak (talk)- Assign- Track- Appreciate*.

### **NCW launched SHE is a Changemaker Programme**

National Commission for Women has launched a Pan-India Capacity Building Programme 'She is a Changemaker' for Women in Politics. It aims to improve leadership skills of grassroot women political leaders.

### **NITI Aayog releases NER District SDG Index & Dashboard**

NITI Aayog has released the first edition of the North-Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index Report and Dashboard 2021–22. It is a collaborative effort by NITI Aayog and Ministry of DoNER, with technical support from UNDP, is the first of its kind in the country as it focuses on the North-Eastern Region. It is a step toward Localisation of SDG in India.

### **Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA)**

Ministry of Education has announced the Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) 2021. As per it, IIT Madras ranked at top, followed by IIT Bombay, and IIT Delhi for 2021. *ARIIA* is an initiative of Ministry of Education (MoE) to systematically rank all major higher educational institutions in India on indicators related to innovation, start-up and entrepreneurship development amongst students and faculties.

### **Government launched Shreshtha Yojana on Mahaparinirvan Diwas**

Government of India has observed Mahaparinirvan Diwas on December 6, 2021. It is the occasion of the death anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. On the occasion of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has launched Shreshtha Yojana which aims to aid socio-economic upliftment and overall development of the Scheduled Castes students by providing quality residential education in reputed private schools.

### **WHO releases 3<sup>rd</sup> progress report on Global trans-fat elimination 2021**

World Health Organisation (WHO) has released the 3<sup>rd</sup> progress report on Global trans-fat elimination 2021 titled 'Countdown to 2023'. As per it, India and the Philippines became the first and second lower-middle-income countries to pass a best-practice policy. In our diet, the major sources of artificial TFAs are the Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable Oils (PHVO) / Vanaspati / margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

They come from either natural or industrial sources:

- Naturally occurring trans-fat come from ruminants (cows and sheep).

- Industrially produced trans-fat are formed in an industrial process that adds hydrogen to vegetable oil converting the liquid into a solid, resulting in “Partially Hydrogenated” Oil (PHO).

### **Hong Kong’s Pillar of Shame dismantled by Chinese Authorities**

Pillar of Shame, a memorial to the victims of the Tiananmen crackdown situated in Hong Kong, was dismantled by China. The *Pillar of Shame* is an 8-metre-tall sculpture showing intertwined bodies with hollowed eyes and open mouths — an anguished mass of humanity. It was created by Danish Artist Jens Galschiot as a tribute to the victims of China’s crackdown in Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

### **NITI Aayog launches Vernacular Innovation Program**

Vernacular Innovation Program was launched by Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog. It is an initiative to lower the language barrier in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship such that it will systematically decouple creative expressions and languages of transaction. It seeks to enable innovators and entrepreneurs to have access to the innovation ecosystem in 22 scheduled languages.

### **NITI Aayog released State Health Index for 2019-20**

NITI Aayog has released the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of its State Health Index for 2019-20. The “Health Index” is part of a report commissioned by the NITI Aayog, the World Bank and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

#### *Performance of States in the latest index*

- For the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row, Kerala has topped.
- Uttar Pradesh has come in at the bottom.
- Tamil Nadu and Telangana are at 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places respectively.
- Mizoram topped the health index among smaller states while Nagaland was ranked at the bottom.
- Among Union Territories, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu was ranked at the top and Andaman & Nicobar was ranked at the bottom.

### **New Zealand’s lifetime-ban on cigarettes**

New Zealand is planning to ban anyone aged 14 or below from buying cigarettes for life. It is one of the toughest approaches in the world to curbing smoking deaths. It means anyone born after 2008 will not be able to buy cigarettes or tobacco products in their lifetime.

## 10. Economy

### **RBI issues 24<sup>th</sup> Financial Stability Report**

Reserve Bank of India has released the 24<sup>th</sup> issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR), a bi-annual report that reflects risks to financial stability and the resilience of financial system. It reflects the collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on risks to financial stability, and the resilience of the financial system in the context of contemporaneous issues relating to development and regulation of the financial sector.

The *Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)* is a non-statutory apex council under the Ministry of Finance constituted by the Executive Order in 2010. The Raghuram Rajan committee (2008) on financial sector reforms first proposed the creation of FSDC. The objective of FSDC is to strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism for maintaining financial stability, enhancing inter-regulatory coordination and promoting financial sector development. It also intends to monitor macro-prudential supervision of the economy

*Composition:* It is chaired by the Finance Minister and its members include the heads of all Financial Sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA & IRDA), Finance Secretary, Secretary of Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary of Department of Financial Services (DFS), and Chief Economic Adviser. FSDC sub-committee is headed by the Governor of RBI

### **InFinity Forum – a leadership Forum on FinTech**

Prime Minister has inaugurated InFinity Forum – a leadership Forum on Financial Technology (FinTech) through video conferencing. It was hosted by the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) under the aegis of the Government of India in collaboration with Gujarat International Financial Tec-city (GIFT) City and Bloomberg. Indonesia, South Africa and the U.K. are partner countries in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Forum. The agenda of the Forum will focus on the theme of ‘*Beyond*’; with various sub themes including – FinTech beyond boundaries, FinTech beyond Finance and FinTech Beyond Next.

### **RBI accorded Scheduled bank status to Paytm Payments Bank**

Reserve Bank of India has accorded scheduled bank status to Paytm Payments Bank. Other payments banks that have been added are Fino Payments Bank and India Post Payments Bank.

*Scheduled banks* refer to those banks which have been included in the Second Schedule of Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

*Payments Bank:* They were created on recommendations of RBI’s Committee on Comprehensive Financial Services for Small Businesses and Low-Income Households headed by Nachiket Mor in 2013. They are registered under Companies Act, 2013 and licensed under Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

### **What is D-SIIs?**

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC) and New India have been identified (like in 2020-21) as D-SIIs for 2021-22.

*D-SIIs* are identified on an annual basis by Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). D-SIIs refer to insurers of such size, market importance and domestic and global inter connectedness, whose distress or failure would cause a significant dislocation in the domestic financial system. They are perceived as insurers ‘too big or too important to fail’.

Similarly, RBI identifies domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs) or banks that are considered as “too big to fail”. SBI, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank were identified as DSIBs for 2020-21.

### **What is Algo Trading?**

Securities and Exchange Bank of India is seeking to regulate Algo Trading.

*Algorithmic trading* or Algo trading is a computer assisted buying and selling of stocks. Under it, pre-programmed computer strategies execute buy and sell trades depending on set parameters, instructions or market pattern and conditions.

### **DPIIT launched ULIP Hackathon – ‘LogiXtics’**

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has launched the Unified Logistics Interface Platform’s (ULIP) Hackathon – ‘LogiXtics’ in order to crowdsource more ideas which will benefit the logistics industry.

*Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)* is designed to enhance efficiency and reduce logistics cost in India by creating a transparent platform that can provide real time information to all stakeholders and remove all asymmetry information.

The ULIP Hackathon – LogiXtics is organised by NITI Aayog and Atal Innovation Mission and supported by National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC) and NICDC Logistics Data Bank Services Limited (NLDSL).

### **NSE Prime**

National Stock Exchange (NSE) has launched a new corporate governance initiative ‘NSE Prime’. NSE Prime is a framework that prescribes higher standards of corporate governance for listed companies than those required by regulations.

### **What is Tokenization?**

RBI has deferred the implementation of tokenisation of cards for online transactions by 6 months i.e., till June 30, 2022.

*Tokenisation* is a process by which card details are replaced by a unique code or token, allowing online purchases to go through without exposing card details.

Also note that, PayPhi became the first certified tokenization service for NPCI Tokenization system (NTS) supporting tokenization of RuPay cards.

### **Negative Import List for Defence**

The Government has brought in few changes in its negative imports list policy. This includes the armed forces will now be able to import defence equipment in certain circumstances even if it figures in the negative import list. There is also a provision now to review or remove items mentioned in the negative import list, which was first formulated in August 2020.

*Negative Import List:* Introduced in August 2020, the negative list essentially means that the Armed Forces—Army, Navy and Air Force—will only procure such items from domestic manufacturers. The manufacturers



could be private sector players or Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU). The Defence Ministry notified the second negative import list, in May 2021.

As per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India has been the second largest importer of defence equipments between 2014 and 2019 with US \$16.75 billion worth of imports during this period.

### **What is Bank for International Settlements (BIS)?**

Bank for International Settlements (BIS) is an international financial organisation owned by 63-member central banks, representing countries from around the world including India. It fosters international monetary and financial cooperation and serves as a bank for Central banks. It carries out its work through its meetings, programmes and through the Basel Process – hosting international groups pursuing global financial stability and facilitating their interaction. Its headquarter is in Basel, Switzerland. The BIS was established in 1930 by an intergovernmental agreement between Germany, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, the United States, and Switzerland. It has 2 representative offices: in Hong Kong SAR and in Mexico City, as well as Innovation Hub Centres around the world.

### **What is World Gold Council?**

As per World Gold Council ‘Bullion Trade in India’ report, imports made up 86% of India’s gold supply between 2016-2020, and inbound shipments continue to grow despite high import duty.

*World Gold Council* is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold. It is an association whose members comprise the world’s leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard. Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

### **Minimum Support Price (MSP)**

A Member of Parliament has introduced a private bill for Minimum Support Price of crops in Parliament.

*Minimum Support Price* is the rate at which the government buys grains from farmers. Currently, it fixes MSPs for 23 crops grown in both Kharif and Rabi seasons. The MSP is the rate at which the government purchases crops from farmers and is based on a calculation of at least one-and-a-half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers. The MSP is fixed twice a year on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), which is a statutory body and submits separate reports recommending prices for kharif and rabi seasons.

The CACP considers both ‘A2+FL’ and ‘C2’ costs while recommending MSP.

- A2 costs cover all paid-out expenses, both in cash and kind, incurred by farmers on seeds, fertilisers, chemicals, hired labour, fuel and irrigation, among others.
- A2+FL covers actual paid-out costs plus an imputed value of unpaid family labour.
- The C2 costs account for the rentals and interest forgone on owned land and fixed capital assets respectively, on top of A2+FL.

### **Deposit Insurance Credit Guarantee Scheme**

The Central Government has highlighted the significance of increase in bank deposit insurance cover, in case of problems occurring such as closure, from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakhs.

*Deposit Insurance* is providing insurance protection to the depositor’s money by receiving a premium. The government has set up Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) under RBI to protect

depositors if a bank fails. DICGC charges 10 paise per Rs. 100 of deposits held by a bank. The premium paid by the insured banks to the Corporation is paid by the banks and is not to be passed on to depositors. Note that, DICGC last revised the deposit insurance cover to Rs. 5 lakhs in February 2020, raising it from Rs. 1 lakh since 1993.

### **Asia Power Index 2021**

Asia Power Index 2021 was released by Sydney-based Lowy Institute.

*Asian Power Index* ranks 26 nations and territories. India has risen as the 4<sup>th</sup> most powerful country in the Asia-Pacific region for comprehensive power with an overall score of 37.7 out of 100. India's overall score declined by 2 points compared to 2020.

### **What is Co-Lending Model?**

In September 2018, the RBI had permitted the banks to co-lend with all registered NBFCs (including HFCs) to increase lending to the priority sector based on a prior agreement. Following this, several banks have entered into co-lending 'master agreements' with NBFCs.

*Co-Lending Model* allows for a joint contribution of credit at the facility level by both the lenders, as also sharing of risks and rewards. It aims to improve the flow of credit to the unserved and underserved sector of the economy. For instance, SBI signed a deal with Adani Capital, a small NBFC, for co-lending to farmers to help them buy tractors and farm implements.

### **RBI allows PCA Framework for NBFCs**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). The PCA framework for NBFCs will come into effect on October 1, 2022 on the basis of their financial position on or after March 31. The objective of the framework is to enable supervisory intervention at the appropriate time and require the supervised entity to initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner, to restore its financial health.

### **What is MDR?**

The Union Cabinet has announced that it has approved a scheme to provide incentives of small amounts for transactions done through the RuPay Debit Card and BHIM UPI. The Government will reimburse transaction charges levied on digital payments made by persons to the merchant as part of the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR).

*Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)* is basically a fee that a merchant is charged by their issuing bank for accepting payments from their customers via credit and debit cards. In Union Budget 2020-21, the government prescribed zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), the rate merchants pay to scheme providers, for RuPay and UPI, both NPCI products, to popularise digital payments benefiting both customers and merchants.

### **What is Cryptocurrency?**

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist has made a strong case for regulating cryptocurrencies, saying it will always be a challenge to ban them as they operate from offshore exchanges; and feels it to be more attractive to adopt cryptocurrencies and assets in emerging economies than in advanced economies.

*Cryptocurrency* is a type of digital currency that uses cryptography for security and anti-counterfeiting measures. It is normally not issued by any Central authority, making it immune to Government interference or

manipulation. The control of each cryptocurrency works through Distributed Ledger Technology called 'blockchain'. Examples include Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple etc.

Note that, in 2017, Japan accepted Bitcoin as legal currency and even officially recognised exchanges dealing in the cryptocurrency.

### **Odisha's Kendu Leaves**

Kendu leaf pluckers, binders and workers have staged a demonstration in Sambalpur, Odisha demanding the abolition of GST on Kendu leaves. A GST of 18% is imposed on Kendu leaves which is against the Forest Rights Act-2006 and the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA). Besides, the government has imposed a GST of 28% on bidi which is a finished product made of Kendu leaf.

*Kendu leaf* is called the green gold of Odisha. It is a nationalised product like bamboo and Sal seed. It is one of the most important non-wood forest products in Odisha. The leaves are used to wrap bidis, a popular smoke among the locals. Odisha is the 3<sup>rd</sup>-largest producer of Kendu leaf, after Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

### **What is Development Induced Displacement (DID)?**

The Polavaram irrigation project, set to be operationalised by April 2022, will displace the highest number of people in India's history of such projects i.e., about 1 lakh families in Andhra Pradesh, upon completion.

Polavaram irrigation project is to be built on Godavari River. The areas which are already submerged and will be submerged by next year due to the project are scheduled areas, with predominant tribal population.

### **What is Agricultural Photovoltaic?**

Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) has developed large-scale agri-voltaic farming which is the largest of its kind in the country.

*Agricultural Photovoltaic* (Agri-PV), also known as agri-voltaics, is an evolving practice in sustainable development that combines the production of food and energy. The land here is used for both agriculture and solar power generation at the same time.

### **ADB to give loan for National Industrial Corridor Development Program**

Asian Development Bank has signed a pact with the Government of India to provide a loan of USD 250 million to support the country's National Industrial Corridor Development Program (NICDP).

National Industrial Corridor Development Program (NICDP) aims to develop world-class industrial nodes that are buttressed by efficient urban agglomerations and multimodal connectivity, including international gateways like ports and airports and inclusive, climate resilient, and sustainable infrastructure.

### **Global Unicorn Index 2021 released**

Hurun Research Institute has released the Global Unicorn Index 2021. As per it, India is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest Unicorn/Startup ecosystem in the world (replacing UK). The USA is on top followed by China on second. The report shows that Bengaluru has most unicorns in the country.

Unicorns are unlisted companies with a valuation of 1 billion US dollars or more.

## 11. Important Days

### National Energy Conservation Day

Ministry of Power has celebrated the National Energy Conservation Day on 14<sup>th</sup> December. On the occasion, following documents were released by the Ministry:

1. Standard and Labelling Programme for High-Energy Lithium-Ion Traction Battery Packs and Systems
2. Standard and Labelling Programme for Tyres covering tyres for Passenger Cars (C1), Light duty vehicles (C2) & Heavy-duty vehicles (C3), meant for manufactured, imported and sold in India. Star label criteria are based on Rolling Resistance Coefficient (RRC) of tyres.
3. 'Shunya' Labelling Programme for promoting Net Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) and Net Positive Energy Buildings (NPEB). Based on Energy Performance Index (EPI), i.e., total energy consumed in a building over a year divided by total built up area, the buildings having:
  - $10 \leq \text{EPI} \leq 0$  kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year, will be awarded by Shunya Label
  - $\text{EPI} < 0$  kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year will be awarded by Shunya+ label.
4. Guidebook on Awareness Generation on Energy Efficient & Thermally Comfort Building
5. Cloud Based Data Analytical Tool for SMEs
6. 10 lakhs LED bulb distribution in a single day across villages in 5 states – Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.

### 60<sup>th</sup> Goa Liberation Day and What is Operation Vijay?

60<sup>th</sup> Goa Liberation Day was celebrated on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021 in commemoration of the Indian armed forces freeing Goa from Portuguese colonial rule.

*Background:* Although India attained independence from British rule back in 1947, Goa was still the Portuguese colony till 1961. On December 19, 1961, Indian armed personnel managed to wrest control of Goa from the Portuguese, ending around 450 years of colonial rule.

*Operation Vijay:* Portuguese were the first ones to colonize parts of India and were the last to leave. The Portuguese invaded Goa in the year 1510. Operation Vijay began on December 17, 1961, when the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru ordered the invasion. With a force of almost 30,000, the Indian attack overpowered the ill-prepared Portuguese 3,000-member army. With minimal bloodshed, the attack was successful and was carried forward to retrieve the other Portuguese-controlled areas, Daman and Diu. At this point on December 18, the Portuguese Governor General Manuel António Vassalo e Silva gave up control of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu.

### National Mathematics Day

National Mathematics Day is celebrated in India every year on December 22. It is observed to honour the birth anniversary of the Mathematician Srinivas Ramanujan who greatly contributed towards mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series and continued fractions. Ramanujan's home state of Tamil Nadu celebrates 22 December as 'State IT Day', memorialising both the man and his achievements, as a native of Tamil Nadu.

### *Srinivas Ramanujan*

- In 1911, Ramanujan published the first of his papers in the Journal of the Indian Mathematical Society.
- Ramanujan compiled around 3,900 results consisting of equations and identities. One of his most treasured findings was his infinite series for  $\pi$ .
- Ramanujan travelled to England in 1914.
- He worked out the Riemann series, the elliptic integrals, hypergeometric series, the functional equations of the zeta function, and his own theory of divergent series.
- The number 1729 is known as the Hardy-Ramanujan number after a visit by Hardy to see Ramanujan at a hospital. It is the smallest number which can be expressed as the sum of 2 different cubes in two different ways.
- The Actor Dev Patel-starrer 'The Man Who Knew Infinity' (2015) was a biopic on Ramanujan.

### **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) is celebrated every year on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The day was instituted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1992. It aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities

The theme for IDPD in the year 2021 was "Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world."

### **National Armed Forces Day**

National Armed Forces (also known as the National flag day of India) is celebrated every year on 7<sup>th</sup> December. The aim to observe this day as the national armed forces day is to collect funds from the people for the betterment of armed forces.

### **SAARC Charter Day**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Charter Day is observed annually on 8<sup>th</sup> December to commemorate the adoption of the SAARC Charter. This year marks the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the regional group. The charter was signed by the Leaders of SAARC Countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the First SAARC Summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

### **Human Rights Day**

Human Rights Day observed every year on 10<sup>th</sup> December to mark the anniversary of the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

Theme in 2021: "*EQUALITY - Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights*"

### **UNICEF Day**

UNICEF Day is observed every year on December 11, to spread awareness on saving children's lives, defending their rights and helping them fulfil their potential from childhood to adolescence. The United Nations General Assembly announced this day on December 11 in year 1946.

The UN's International Children's Emergency Fund was established in the aftermath of World War II. Their mandate was to help people whose lives and futures were at risk, no matter what role they played during the war. The programme focuses on providing supplies, assistance and also improving the health, nutrition, education and general welfare of children. The organisation became a permanent agency of the UN in 1953.

### **Vijay Diwas**

In India, Vijay Diwas (also called Victory Day) is celebrated every year on 16th December. The day is observed to commemorate the service, valour, and sacrifices of the gallant men of the Indian Armed Forces' victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war. On this day, we pay homage to all the soldiers who had defended the nation in the war.

### **Kisan Diwas**

Kisan Diwas or National Farmers' Day is celebrated across the nation on 23<sup>rd</sup> December to commemorate the birth anniversary of the fifth Prime Minister of India, Chaudhary Charan Singh. Chaudhary Charan Singh brought farmer-friendly policies and worked towards the welfare of the farmers. He served the country as Prime Minister from July 1979 to January 1980.

### **National Consumer Rights Day**

National Consumer Rights Day is celebrated every year on 24<sup>th</sup> December. The Day is celebrated to commemorate December 24, 1986, when the Consumer Protection Act received assent of the President of India. The purpose of the day is to make consumers aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Theme in 2021: "*Tackling Plastic Pollution*".

## 12. Culture

### **National Conference on 'Indian Independence Movement & the Role of Science' was organized**

A two-day National Conference on 'Indian Independence Movement & the Role of Science' was organized by CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication & Policy Research (CSIR-NIScPR) in association with Vigyan Prasar, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India and Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA). The conference was focused on science as tool for subjugation and liberations, the roles of scientists, institutions, movement, policy and planning and the vision of scientists were also discussed.

### **150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo Ghose**

The High-Level Committee (HLC), constituted to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo Ghose, held its first meeting under the chairmanship of Prime Minister. Constituted by the Ministry of Culture, the HLC includes 53 members from different walks of life such as politicians, governors, spiritual leaders, artists etc. The purpose is to provide policy direction and guidelines for the formulation of programmes for his birthday celebrations at the national and international level.

Celebration Period: *January 2022 to March 2024.*

#### *Sri Aurobindo Ghose*

- Born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) on 15 August 1872 as Aurobindo Ghose, he received his early education from a convent school in Darjeeling.
- He joined a secret society working for India's freedom, sometimes known as Lotus and Dagger.
- In 1893, he joined the State Service of Maharaja of Baroda (Sayajirao Gaekwad III) and learnt about Indian culture, languages (e.g., Sanskrit) etc. during his work.
- He joined the Indian freedom struggle in 1902 in indirect manner by inspiring revolutionaries through committees such as Anushilan Samiti.
- After the 'Partition of Bengal' in 1905, he became active in the Indian political movement. He joined the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1906 and worked as principal of Bengal National College.

### **Renovated Sri Ramna Kali Mandir inaugurated in Dhaka**

President of India has inaugurated the renovated Sri Ramna Kali Mandir in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The temple was destroyed by Pakistan forces during their Operation Searchlight in March 1971, the crackdown that led to the Bangladesh War of Liberation. The original Ramna Kalibari was built during the medieval era and was famous for its tall structure.

### **What is Paika Rebellion?**

Minister of Culture has pointed out that the 1817 Paika rebellion of Odisha could not be called the first war of Independence but considering it as the beginning of a popular uprising against the British.

*Paikas:* They are recruited since the 16<sup>th</sup> century by kings in Odisha from a variety of social groups to render martial services in return for rent-free land (*nish-kar jagirs*) and titles. They were the traditional land-owning militia of Odisha and served as warriors.

*Paika Rebellion:* When armies of the East India Company overran most of Odisha in 1803, the Raja of Khurda lost his primacy and the power and prestige of the Paikas went on a decline. So, they rebelled back. In response, the British set up a commission under Walter Ewer to look into the issue. Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra Bharamarbar Rai, the highest-ranking military general of King Khorda Mukund Dev II, led the Paikas to join the uprising. Although initially the Company struggled to respond they managed to put down the rebellion by May 1817.

### **Nagaland Government cancelled Hornbill Festival**

The State Government has decided to call off the ongoing Hornbill Festival in protest against the killing of 14 civilians by security forces.

Nagas celebrates Hornbill festival to revive, protect, sustain and promote the richness of the Naga heritage and traditions. It occurs during 1-10 December on an annual basis. It is also called the “Festival of Festivals”. The festival pays tribute to Hornbill, the most admired and revered bird for the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and grandeur. It is organized by State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments and also supported by Union Government. Hornbill Festival was established on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963.

### **Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) turns 100 years**

The formation of Shiromani Akali Dal has passed 100 years.

*Shiromani Akali Dal* was formed as a volunteer group on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1920, to free gurdwaras from the control of mahants. It launched a peaceful struggle that lasted 4 years and resulted in the death of 4,000 protesters, who were attacked both by mahants and by the British administration. The Morcha finally led to the enactment of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925, which brought gurdwaras under the control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). It also pitched the party against the colonial government, paving the way for its alliance with Congress party.

### **List of the ICH elements from UNESCO**

UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has 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 includes 14 entries from India:

<b>List of Indian ICH elements from UNESCO website</b>		
	<b>ICH element</b>	<b>Year of Recognition</b>
<b>1</b>	Durga Puja of West Bengal	2021
<b>2</b>	Kumbh Mela	2017
<b>3</b>	Yoga	2016
<b>4</b>	Nowruz	2016
<b>5</b>	Traditional Brass and copper utensil making among the Thaterras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab	2014
<b>6</b>	Sankirtana of Manipur	2013
<b>7</b>	Buddhist chanting of Ladakh	2012
<b>8</b>	Chhau Dance of Seraikella, Purulia and Mayurbhanj	2010
<b>9</b>	Kalbelia dance of Rajasthan	2010
<b>10</b>	Mudiyettu of Kerala	2010
<b>11</b>	Ramman festival of Garhwam, Uttarakhand	2009
<b>12</b>	Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre of Kerala	2008
<b>13</b>	Ramlila	2008
<b>14</b>	Vedic Chanting	2008

### **National Anthem**

27<sup>th</sup> December marks the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first time Jana Gana Mana, India’s national anthem, was sung publicly at the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress in 1911. Jana Gana Mana was later adopted as



the national anthem by India's Constituent Assembly on January 24, 1950. Rabindranath Tagore composed '*Bharata Bhagyo Bidhata*'. The first stanza of it, Jana Gana Mana, is now India's National Anthem.

