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## Russia Withdraws from Open Sky Treaty after US Departure

### **Context:**

● In another setback to the world's arms control framework, Russia has decided to withdraw from an international treaty that allows surveillance flights over military facilities after the U.S. exit from the pact.

### **Reasons for withdrawal of Russia:**

- Russia said that the pact was seriously compromised by the withdrawal of the United States. It significantly upended the balance of interests of signatory states.
- Russia has raised concerns that despite leaving the treaty Washington could potentially retain access to over flight intelligence gathered by allies who remain members in the treaty.
- Moscow had tried to get guarantees from other countries that they would not share such intelligence with the U.S. but had not been given any assurances.

### **Background:**

- The United States left the Open Skies arms control and verification treaty in November 2020.
- The US accused Russia of non-compliance with OST protocols, blaming Moscow of obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
- Moscow has warned that the U.S. withdrawal will erode global security by making it more difficult for governments to interpret the intentions of other nations.
- The European Union has urged both U.S. and Russia to reconsider and called on Russia to stay in the pact and lift flight restrictions.

### **About Open Skies Treaty**

- It was first proposed in 1955 by former US President Dwight Eisenhower as a means to de-escalate tensions during the Cold War.
- The landmark treaty was eventually signed in 1992 between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of the Soviet Union.
- It went into effect in 2002 and currently has 35 signatories along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- Under the treaty, a member state can "spy" on any part of the host nation, with the latter's consent.
- The information gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to be shared with all member states.

### **Objectives of the Treaty:**

- The treaty was intended to build trust between Russia and the West by allowing reconnaissance flights over each other's territories to collect information about military forces and activities.
- The treaty aimed at fostering transparency about military activity and helping monitor arms control and other agreements.
- The treaty aims at building confidence among members through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war

### **Significance of the Open Skies Treaty**

- The OST was signed in 1992, much before the advent of advanced satellite imaging technology which is currently the preferred mode for intelligence gathering.

- The surveillance aircraft provide key information that still cannot be gathered by satellite sensors, such as thermal imaging data.
- Also, since only the US has an extensive military satellite infrastructure, other NATO members relied on Washington to obtain classified satellite data.
- OST data was gathered and used during the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict

**Impact of withdrawal:**

- Russia's departure would adversely impact Washington's European allies, which rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region.
- The demise of the Open Skies Treaty follows the U.S. and Russian withdrawal in 2019 from the Intermediate-Range **Nuclear Forces Treaty**—another security agreement that had been credited with curtailing the arms race in Europe towards the end of the Cold War.

**Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty):**

- The INF Treaty, which was signed in 1987 by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.
- The treaty limited the use of medium-range missiles, both conventional and nuclear.
- Under the INF treaty, the US and formerly Soviet Union agreed not to develop, produce, possess or deploy any ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles that have a range between 500 and 5,500 km.

**Importance of the (INF) Treaty in U.S.-Russia relations:**

- The treaty helped mitigate the possibility of military escalation and operational miscalculation.
- It helped to shift the logic of MAD [mutually assured destruction] to the higher “more sensitive” political level.
- It also built some trust between Washington and Moscow and contributed to the end of the Cold War.

The OST exit is only the most recent example in the list of important pacts that Washington has stepped away from during the Trump presidency, such as the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal. Experts are now contemplating the fate of the much larger US-Russia ‘New START’ nuclear arms control agreement, which is slated to expire in February 2021. The US administration stated that they would not renew the treaty unless China joins.

**About New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START):**

- New START is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms.
- It is a successor to the START framework of 1991 that limited both sides to 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles and 6,000 warheads.
- New START was signed in 2010 by the U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.
- It entered into force on 5th February, 2011.
- It limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.
- By encouraging increased communication between the two countries, the treaty reduces the risk of miscalculation.
- It will lapse in February 2021 unless extended for a five-year period.

# Pmkvy 3.0 Launched To EMpower Youth With New-Age Skills To Boost Employability

## **Context:**

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) launched the third phase of its flagship skilling scheme Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 3.0).

## **Background:**

- “Skill India Mission” has gained tremendous momentum through the launch of its flagship scheme PMKVY to unlock the vision of making India the ‘Skill Capital’ of the world.
- PMKVY was launched in 2015 as a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- It aims to train over 40 crore people in India in different skills by 2022.
- It aims at vocational training and certification of Indian youth for a better livelihood and respect in the society.
- Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- PMKVY is implemented by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) under the guidance of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

## **Objectives of PMKVY 2016-20:**

- Enable and mobilize a large number of youths to take up industry designed quality skill training, become employable and earn their livelihood.
- Encourage standardisation of the Certification process and put in place the foundation for creating a registry of skills.
- Benefit 10 million youth over the period of four years (2016- 2020).

## **About PMKVY 3.0:**

- Launched in 717 districts, 28 states/8 UTs, PMKVY 3.0 marks yet another step towards & Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
- It envisages training 8 lakh candidates over the scheme period of 2020-2021 with an outlay of Rs 948.90 crore.
- It envisages training of eight lakh candidates over a scheme period of 2020-2021.
- It will be launched in 600 districts across all states of India.
- The 729 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) will be rolling out PMKVY 3.0 training to build a robust pool of skilled professionals.
- The role of PMKVY 3.0 will be a propagator of vocational education at an early level for youth to capitalize on industry-linked opportunities.

## **Features of PMKVY 3.0:**

- The newer version of the scheme tries to match the current policy doctrine and energize the skilling ecosystem affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The scheme is designed towards making skill development more demand-driven and decentralised in its approach.
- The focus is on bridging the demand-supply gap by promoting skill development in areas of new-age (digital technology) and Industry 4.0 job roles.
- It aims to empower the country’s youth with employable skills by making

- It aims to empower the country's youth with employable skills by making over 300 skill courses available to them.
- It will be implemented in a more decentralized structure with greater responsibilities and support from states/UTs and districts.
- It will be a propagator of vocational education at an early level for youth to capitalize on industry-linked opportunities.
- The new scheme will be more trainee- and learner-centric addressing the ambitions of aspirational Bharat.
- District Skill Committees (DSCs) will be formed under the guidance of State Skill Development Missions (SSDM). It shall play a key role in addressing the skill gap and assessing demand at the district level.

#### Significance of PMKVY 3.0:

- By taking the bottom-up approach to training, it will identify job roles that have demand at the local level and skill the youth, linking them to these opportunities (Vocal for Local).
- It will encourage healthy competition between states by making available increased allocation to those states that perform better.

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#### Additional Informations:

##### PMKVY 1.0:

- India's largest Skill Certification Scheme - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) - was launched on 15th July, 2015 (World Youth Skills Day).
- It aims to encourage and promote skill development in the country by providing free short duration skill training and incentivizing this by providing monetary rewards to youth for skill certification.
- Implementation: Key Components: Short Term Training, Special Projects, Recognition of Prior Learning, Kaushal & Rozgar Mela, etc.
- Outcome: In 2015-16, 19.85 lakh candidates were trained.

##### PMKVY 2.0:

- It was launched by scaling up both in terms of sector and geography and by greater alignment with other missions of the Government of India like Make in India, Digital India, Swachh Bharat, etc.
- The scheme broadened the skill development with inclusion of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and focus on training.

#### Implementation so far:

- More than 1.2 Crore youth have been trained/oriented through an improved standardized skilling ecosystem in the country under PMKVY 1.0 and PMKVY 2.0.

The skilling is not an objective, but a necessary prerequisite for the economic growth of the country. As a young nation, we're poised to seize the opportunities that will make India the skill capital of the World. We need to move with speed and scale if we are to fulfill the vision of making India the skill capital of the world and from there, the industrial capital of the world.

## Petroleum Ministry launches 'SAKSHAM' Campaign

### **Context:**

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has launched a month-long mass awareness campaign titled 'SAKSHAM' to spread awareness about green and clean energy.

### **Background:**

- The campaign has been organised by the Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA), to motivate consumers to switch to cleaner fuels and bring in behavioural change to use fossil fuel intelligently.
- Last year's edition of SAKSHAM saw over 1.48 crore school children participating in PCRA's flagship National Competitions that were organized to disseminate important messages of fuel conservation, energy efficiency and environment protection amongst youngsters.



### **About SAKSHAM:**

- SAKSHAM stands for Sanrakshan Kshamata Mahotsav.
- The campaign will highlight the adverse health and environmental impacts of increasing carbon footprints.
- 'SAKSHAM's idea is to convince consumers to switch to cleaner fuels and bring in behavioral change to use fossil fuel intelligently.
- The pan-India campaign would include various activities such as cyclotron, farmer workshops, seminars, painting competition, CNG vehicle driving contest, etc to spread awareness among masses about the advantages of using clean fuels.
- The key drivers include moving towards:
  - moving towards a gas-based economy
  - increased use of cleaner fuels like Hydrogen
  - greater reliance on domestic sources to drive biofuels
  - increased use of electric vehicles to decarbonize mobility
  - digital innovation across all energy systems.

## PM Modi launches Rs 1,000-crore 'Startup India Seed Fund'

### **Context:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched Rs 1,000-crore 'Startup India Seed Fund' recently. With the objective to help in setting up new startups and promote their growth.
- It would support startups in need of initial capital to start and grow their business and help budding entrepreneurs pursue innovative ideas.

### Background:

- India is home to the world's third largest startup ecosystem which has helped several budding entrepreneurs to come up with innovative technologies and become big corporations.
- The government has been implementing the Fund of Fund Scheme to help startups raise equity capital. Going forward, the government will also help startups in raising debt capital.
- The new seed fund for startups comes after the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology had initiated a similar fund to identify startups and give them financial help.
- In August, the ministry had launched a fund to identify 300 startups which would be provided seed funds of up to Rs 25 lakh and other facilities as well.

### About Startup India Seed Fund Scheme:

- It is a Rs 1,000-crore seed fund for startups.
- The scheme will help startups with the initial capital for growth and operations.
- The government will provide guarantees to help startups raise debt-capital in order to build a startup ecosystem which functions on the 'of the youth, by the youth, for the youth' mantra.
- It is the need of the hour that the technologies of the future come out of the lab of Asia and the entrepreneurs of the future should be prepared from here.

### Additional Information

#### Fund of Fund Scheme:

- It is a scheme that invests in units of other Mutual Fund (MF) schemes.
- The FoF is an MF scheme but one that does not invest directly in stocks or securities but in other MF schemes.
- It gives the investor an opportunity to invest in different schemes managed by different fund managers.

## NASA targets final test of 'world's most Powerful rocket'

### Context:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is looking to carry out the eighth and final test in its "Green Run" test series.

### About the "Green Run":

- The 212-foot-tall SLS core stage includes the liquid hydrogen tank and liquid oxygen tank can hold 733,000 gallons of propellant to power the RS-25 engines.
- It is the rocket that NASA projects will be carrying a new generation of astronauts to the moon and handle missions beyond the scope of existing commercial crew vehicles.
- This rocket is a little shorter than the Saturn V rockets but is more powerful.
- This new rocket will be producing 15% greater thrust during liftoff in comparison to Saturn V. When the engines are fired up, 1.6 million pounds of thrust will be generated.
- When the 4 RS-25 engines at the bottom of the SLS are ignited, the period of testing for the rocket will close.
- This core includes oxygen and liquid hydrogen tanks, 4 engines and computers, and avionics of the rocket.
- All these will be turned on as 2.6 million litres of supercooled propellant will be loaded into the rocket and ignited. However, the rocket will remain fixed at the Stennis Space Center of NASA.



### Significance:

- This eighth stage termed “hot fire,” will bring to an end a series of tests which will gradually bring together the core stage of the Space Launch System (SLS) to life for the very first time.
- The core stage of the SLS will form the backbone and will be the “most powerful rocket in the world” and will power its next-generation human Moon Missions.

## G7 Summit

### Context-

Recently the United Kingdom has invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the 47th G 7 summit as a guest which is scheduled in the month of June 2021.

**India is not part of G7 Country**

### About G7 summit-

- This is an intergovernmental organisation which was formed in 1975.
- The group meets annually to discuss the issues which was of common interest such as international security, Global trade, Terrorism and Governance.
- Sometimes it has been observed the group works in a collective way to solve the Global problems.
- The group does not have any formal constitution as ASEAN nor it has any Headquarter.
- The decisions taken by the group are non-binding in nature.

**Canada, USA, Germany, UK, Italy, Japan and France are part of G7**

### About The Members-

- The group member countries are industrialised democracies. Earlier it was G8, Russia is also a part of it.
- Russia was expelled from the group in 2014 because of its annexation policy in the Crimea region.

## Harike Wetland

### Context-

Recently in the Punjab’s Harike wetland winter migratory birds have started making a beeline using the Central Asian Flyway.

### About The Harike Wetland-

- Harike wetland which is situated in Punjab is one of the largest wetland of North India.
- It is situated in Tarn-Taran district of Punjab.
- The wetland was formed in 1952 after the construction of barrage near the Sutlej- Beas Confluence.

### Migratory Birds-

- The wetland becomes a very significant spot for the migratory birds as in every winter these birds make their way here via the central Asian flyway which covers a large continental area of Europe and Asia.
- Some birds such as Greylag goose, Bar headed goose and Gadwall etc are some prominent birds that could be sighted at Harike wetland.

## Fauna

- Faunas like Indus River Dolphin, Smooth Coated otter and seven species of rare freshwater turtle are found here.
- Harike was accorded the wetland status in 1990 by Ramsar convention.

### **Ramsar Convention-**

It is the Convention on Wetlands which is of International Importance; It is an international agreement which promotes the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Ramsar convention is the only global treaty which is focusing on a single ecosystem.

## Indian Star Tortoise

### **Context-**

Recently the government has seized Indian star Tortoise while being smuggled from Andhra Pradesh to Odisha.

### **About Star Tortoise-**

- It's scientific name is Geochelone Elegans
- It is inhabited in a variety of dry vegetation types, including grasslands, deserts, agricultural landscapes of fields.
- The tortoise is found across the Indian sub continent specifically in the Central and southern parts of India, in Sri Lanka and Western Pakistan

### **Conservation Status-**

- Wild life Protection Act 1972- Schedule 4
- IUCN status- Vulnerable
- Convention on International Trade Species (CITES)- Appendix 1

### **Threats-**

Illegal smuggling for use of exotic Pets



## Conservation Efforts-

Recently India has proposed it to transfer it from Appendix 2 To Appendix 1 in CITES

### **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme**

#### **Context-**

Recently Prime Minister Of India has said that The Government will launch a Startup India Seed Fund Scheme for the new Startups. The fund has been set up to provide initial capital to the startups. After that Startups will be provided with the Government Guarantee which will help them to raise the debt capital Recently Prime Minister Of India has said that The Government will launch a Startup India Seed Fund Scheme for the new Startups.

#### **Objective-**

The fund has been set up to provide initial capital to the startups. After that Startups will be provided with the Government Guarantee which will help them to raise the debt capital.

**Coverage-**

The fund would offer financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, market entry and commercialisation of products.

**Funding Plan-**

The scheme will offer startups up to Rs. 20 Lakhs as a grant and upto Rs 50 Lakhs can be availed through convertible debentures.

**Need of the scheme-**

It is needed to provide a platform to the emerging Technologies to make India a lab of Asia where entrepreneurs of the future will be prepared.

## Covid-19: An Overview of India's coronavirus vaccines

**Context:**

- India's drug regulator has given permission to Covishield (the local name for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine developed in the United Kingdom) and Covaxin, locally-manufactured by Indian pharma company Bharat Biotech.
- It is being manufactured locally by the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer.

**India is a vaccine powerhouse:**

India is home to a large number of pharma manufacturing companies and develops more than 60% of the world's vaccines. India has launched the world's largest vaccination drive recently.

**How does Covishield work?**

- The vaccine, which is known as Covishield, is made from a weakened version of a common cold virus (known as an adenovirus) from chimpanzees.
- When the vaccine is injected into a patient, it prompts the immune system to start making antibodies and primes it to attack any coronavirus infection.
- The jab is administered in two doses given between four and 12 weeks apart.
- It can be safely stored at temperatures of 2C to 8C. This makes it easier to distribute than some of the other vaccines.

**How effective is Covishield?**

- International clinical trials showed it is highly effective when people are given full doses.
- It is backed by phase III clinical trial data from other countries like Brazil and the United Kingdom.
- But patients rights group, All India Drug Action Network, says its approval has been rushed because the manufacturer has not completed a bridging study of the vaccine on Indians.
- The company has said it will try to conduct the bridging trial of the vaccine in India in February.

**What about Covaxin?**

- It is being developed by Bharat Biotech.
- It is an inactivated vaccine, made up of killed coronaviruses, thus making it safe to inject into the body.
- Bharat Biotech used a sample of the coronavirus, isolated by India's National Institute of Virology.
- When administered, immune cells can still recognise the dead virus, prompting the immune system to make antibodies against the pandemic virus.
- The two doses are given four weeks apart. The vaccine can be stored at 2C to 8C.
- Bharat Biotech has developed a stockpile of 20 million doses of Covaxin

### What is the controversy around Covaxin?

- The vaccine had been allowed for restricted use in emergency situations in public interest.
- It's problematic as its trials are still underway.
- Both the manufacturer and drug regulator believe Covaxin is safe and provides a robust immune response.
- It has promised to provide efficacy data for the vaccine by February.

### Challenges Ahead:

- Difficulty in fulfilling the domestic vaccine requirements.
- Managing finance in subsidizing vaccines and helping neighbouring countries.
- As India cooperates with many developed countries on vaccine development, it won't be an easy task for India to always get the support of other partner companies.

### Any other vaccine candidates?

The other vaccines which are in different stages of trials in India to test safety and efficacy include:

- ZyCov-Di, being developed by Ahmedabad-based Zydus-Cadila.
- HGCO19, India's first mRNA vaccine made by Pune-based Genova, using the genetic code to cause an immune response.
- A nasal vaccine has been developed by Bharat BioTech.
- The Sputnik V vaccine is being developed by Dr Reddy's Lab and in collaboration with Russia.
- American vaccine development company Novavax collaborated with Serum Institute of India to develop another vaccine.

Company	Type	Doses	How effective	Storage
 Pfizer-BioNTech	RNA	 x2	90%*	-70C 
 Moderna	RNA (part of virus genetic code)	 x2	95%*	-20C up to 6 months 
 Oxford Uni-AstraZeneca	Viral vector	 x2	Strong immune response**	Regular fridge temperature 
 Gamaleya (Sputnik V)	Viral vector (genetically modified virus)	 x2	92%*	Regular fridge temperature 

\*preliminary phase three results, not yet peer-reviewed  
 \*\*phase two results, peer-reviewed and published

Source: Respective companies, WHO 

### About Vaccine diplomacy

Less than a week after launching it, India has shipped tens of thousands of free doses of Covid-19 vaccines to neighbouring countries. It is being widely described as vaccine diplomacy.

- India has also allowed commercial exports of the Covishield vaccine to Brazil.
- The free delivery of the Covishield vaccine to neighbouring countries reflects India's unique strengths in the robust vaccine industry.
- The foreign ministry says India will continue to supply vaccines all over the world after taking into account domestic requirements and international demands and obligations.

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- The free delivery of the Covishield vaccine to neighbouring countries reflects India's unique strengths in the robust vaccine industry.
- The foreign ministry says India will continue to supply vaccines all over the world after taking into account domestic requirements and international demands and obligations.
- Some of the vaccine will also be supplied to the Covax initiative supported by the WHO to distribute vaccines to underdeveloped countries.

#### **About COVAX Initiative:**

- It is one of three pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator.
- It was launched by the WHO, the European Commission and France as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic in April 2020.
- It aims to ensure everyone gets the Covid-19 vaccines as and when they are available irrespective of their financial situations.

#### **About Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance:**

- It is a global Vaccine Alliance, to bring together and encourage both public and private sectors to ensure access to all the new and underused vaccines for children living in undeveloped nations.
- It was launched in 2000.
- Its core partners include the WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Bill Melinda Gates Foundation.
- In June 2019,
- The board approved a new 5 year strategy 'Gavi 5.0' in 2019.
- It envisioned universal immunization by ensuring access to vaccines for people living in poor countries.
- It aims to ensure equitable and sustainable use of vaccines.

#### **India's vaccine diplomacy in south Asia pushes back against China:**

- In order to help the poorer countries to combat the pandemic, many countries are using vaccine supply as a way to increase their soft power and enhance their global influence.
- Indian government seems to be leading it and has been the first to deliver vaccine doses as a gift to neighboring countries in South Asia.
- India's production capacity of vaccines is relatively strong in comparison to other developing countries, India has the ability to offer a helping hand to neighbors.
- If India provides free vaccines, the image of India would improve in these countries and earn goodwill from the neighbouring countries.
- It will also help in countering the Chinese influence in India's backyard.

## **INDIA INNOVATION INDEX: 2020**

#### **Context:**

India Innovation index 2020 was recently released by NITI Ayog in which karnataka retained its top position in the major states category.

#### **Report Highlights:**

**Categories:-** The innovation index is divided into 3 categories: major states, Union Territories, and hill and North East states.

- **Major states-** Karnataka topped with a score of 42.5. High number of venture capitals, FDI inflows are the main reasons behind its success.
- **Bottom States-** Bihar ranked last with 14.5 points
- **Hill and Northeast states-** Himachal Pradesh topped the rankings of hill and Northeast states, followed by uttarakhand, Manipur and Sikkim.
- **Union Territories/Small states-** Delhi has scored highest on the index with a score of 46.6, while Lakshadweep has the lowest score at 11.7.

Rank	Major States	Score
1	Karnataka	42.5
2	Maharashtra	38.03
3	Tamil Nadu	37.91
4	Telangana	33.23
5	Kerala	30.58
6	Haryana	25.81
7	Andhra Pradesh	24.19
8	Gujarat	23.63
9	Uttar Pradesh	22.85
10	Punjab	22.54

## Best performers

Four of the five highest scoring major States in the India Innovation Index are from the south



### About India Innovation Index:

- NITI Ayog along with Institute for competitiveness releases this report.
- The index has been developed on the lines of the Global Innovation Index.

### Approach:

Publication in scientific journals, percentage of GDP spending on research, Demographic dividend etc are the parameters to measure states of Innovation Index.

### Indicators Used:

- Number of PhD students and knowledge intensive employment
- Enrollment in engineering and technology and number of highly skilled professionals
- Investment in R&D and number of patents and trademark applications filed
- Internet subscribers
- FDI inflows, business environment and safety and legal environmen

## Question Hour

### Context-

Recently Government has said that the Question hour which has been suspended during the monsoon session will be conducted when Parliament meets for the Budget Session from January 29 2021.

### About The Question Hour-

- Every year The first hour of every Parliamentary sitting is called Question Hour.
- During this one hour, Members of Parliament ask questions to the ministers to hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.
- The question can also be asked to Private Members.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS- Member of Parliament who are not Ministers**

**Procedures-**

- The Question Hour has been mentioned in the Rules of Procedure of the House.
- In the process presiding officers of both the houses are the final authority.

**Question Which can be asked-**

**Starred Question-** This requires an oral Answer hence supplementary questions can be asked.

**Unstarred Question-** This requires a written answer and hence supplementary questions cannot be asked.

**Short Notice Question-** It can be asked by giving a short notice of ten days. These are answered Orally.

**Frequency-**

The question hour is held in both the houses. It is held on all days of the session. Two exceptions are there-

1. In the beginning of session President speech takes place that day it can't be performed
2. On the Day when the Finance Minister is presenting the budget.

## Global Innovation Index

**About:**

It is released by World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Theme of the Global Innovation Index, 2020 was "Who will finance innovation?"

**Report Highlights:**

- India ranked 48th (52nd Position in 2019 ranking) among 131 economies
- Switzerland, Sweden, U.S, U.k and the Netherlands are top countries under this ranking and are the world's most innovative economies.
- The WIPO had also accepted India as one of the leading innovation achievers of 2019 in the central and south asian regions.
- India is the lower middle income economy with the highest innovation due to universities like IIT Delhi and Bombay, IISc Bengaluru and other top scientific publications.

## Naval Innovation and Indianisation Organisation(NIIO)

**Context-**

Recently the defense minister of India has launched the Naval Innovation and Indianisation Organisation.

**Objective-**

It's objective is to foster innovation for self reliance in the Defense sector in India and Fulfillment the vision of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

**Naval Innovation And Indianisation Organisation-**

- It's a 3 tier organisation.
- Naval Technical Acceleration Council (NTAC) provides apex level direction into this.
- A working group will work under NTAC for the implementation of the projects.
- It will put into place dedicated structures for the end user to interact with academia and industry towards fostering innovation and indianisation for Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

## Demand for WhatsApp Ban

### **Context:**

CAIT (Confederation of All India Traders) has demanded the Government of India to ban WhatsApp over their new data sharing policy.

### **Recent Development:**

WhatsApp sent a notification to its users that they are going to either share their data with Facebook (parent company) or delete your WhatsApp Account.

### **What is going to be shared?**

As per the new data sharing policy of WhatsApp, it will share Account Registrations, Phone numbers, IP addresses etc. with Facebook and not the personal chats and images as it is end to end encrypted.

### **How will Facebook use the shared data?**

- As per the WhatsApp version, the data will be used to improve the experience of the users, by providing them customised advertisements and friend suggestions.
- Facebook has not yet revealed their version of the data use.

### **About (Confederation of All India Traders):**

- It is an apex body of the trading community of India, comprising prominent trade bodies of India.
- It was formed in the year 1990.

### **Objective:**

- To work for the development of trade and traders.
- It represents the business community of India.

### **CAIT's opinion:**

Basically, CAIT has argued that Facebook is trying to use the data for commercialisation and has proven that Data is the new oil.

### **Other opinion:**

Already these informations have been shared by WhatsApp with Facebook and it is not a new phenomenon.

## India needs data protection law

### **Context:**

- Recently WhatsApp has updated its privacy policy. The new policy allows them to permit the data with Facebook (the parent company) and third-party apps. If one does not agree with the updated privacy policy they are left with no choice except option to quit WhatsApp.
- There is a great possibility of misuse of personal data for the commercial purposes and political vendetta.

### **Need for data protection law in India:**

- The present COVID-19 situation has expedited our dependence on digital platforms and increased our vulnerability.
- The updated privacy policy of WhatsApp would not be applicable in the European Region as they have their own General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

- Right to privacy has been declared as a fundamental right under Article 21 by the Supreme Court in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India case in 2017.
- There is a lack of grievance redressal mechanism in case of misuse of data.
- There is no proper regulatory framework to deal with privacy concerns of citizens.

### **Current laws prevalent in India:**

India lacks comprehensive personal data protection law to protect personal data and information. The Information Technology Act, 2000/8 and IT rules defined in 2011 deals with cybercrime and electronic commerce. But the existing legal framework is insufficient to deal with the challenges of personal data protection.

### **Limitations of existing Provisions:**

- The IT Act 2000/8 doesn't define sensitive personal information directly and only provides guidance for reasonable security practice and due diligence.
- The scope and coverage of the Information Technology Act and Rules are limited.
- The current data protection rules do not lay out penalties for violations.
- There are no rules with respect to data localisation. In order to address these limitations, India needed a comprehensive data privacy law.

### **The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019:**

After the Supreme Court's landmark judgment, the government constituted the B.N.Srikrishna committee. The committee submitted a draft on personal data protection.

### **The Salient features of the Bill:**

- It tries to develop a system of trust between persons and those operating the database.
- It tries to regulate the domains of application of personal data.
- It ensures the rights and privacy of individuals are protected.
- It aims to regulate transfer of personal data.
- Accountability of entities is ensured for application of personal data.
- Remedies are provided for unauthorised and harmful processing
- The Data Protection Authority of India will be created as an apex body to look into data protection issues. The government should understand the gravity of the issue and come up with a comprehensive data protection and privacy law in this regard.

## **World Food Price Index**

### **Context:**

The Food and Agricultural Organisation has released its December report of World Food Prices.

### **About the Report:**

- In its report it has been pointed out that the food price has been increased for continuously 9 months as compared to 2019.
- It is released by The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the

### **United Nations.**

- Base Period is 2014-16.
- It was started in 1996, it is a monthly report.
- This report measures and helps in monitoring the developments in the global agricultural commodity market.
- It includes cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and Sugar.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION

**World Food Price Index 2021**

**The Food and Agriculture Organization:**

- The Food and Agriculture Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations that conducts research, provides technical assistance to projects, operates educational and training programs.
- Its Headquarters are in Rome Italy.
- It was formed in 1945 and its parent body is the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
- The United Nations Economic and Social Council is one of the Six principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for coordinating the economic and social fields of the organization, specifically in regards to the 15 specialised agencies, the eight functional commissions and the five regional commissions under its jurisdiction.

## Bird flu outbreak in India:

**Context:**

Many states have confirmed unusual deaths of huge numbers of birds — wild, migratory and also poultry. It's raised the fear of an epidemic of Bird flu or avian influenza.

**What is Bird Flu?**

- It is a viral infection that is found mostly in birds.
- Symptoms: tremors, diarrhoea, head tilt, and paralysis.
- Most common strain of the virus: Influenza Type-A virus, primarily H5N1, which is considered a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) variant.
- H5N1 is the worst as it can transfer from birds to mammals.

**How does bird flu spread?**

- The disease spreads quickly and has the potential to affect humans and other animals.
- It generally coincides with the season of arrival of migratory birds.
- The avian influenza virus can be easily transmitted from migratory species to domestic birds.
- Spread to poultry farm birds through fomites or infected surfaces with wild birds, migratory waterfowl species carrying H5N1 virus (bird flu).
- It can also spread to forests, triggering concerns about safety of endangered species.

**Threat to humans beings:**

- The H5N1 can mutate and pose a pandemic threat among humans.
- According to the WHO data, 862 cases of bird flu among humans have been recorded in 17 countries since 2003.
- The human cases of bird flu occur “occasionally” but when it happens, the mortality rate is about 60 percent, according to WHO.

**Economic impact:**

- The poultry sector of India is worth Rs 1.75 lakh crore. There is consumption of nearly 30 crore eggs and 900 crore chickens sourced from poultry farms per month in India.
- **Effect of Covid-19 outbreak:** The poultry industry in India has already seen a 10 to 15 percent slump in demands since the outbreak. It had lost out around \$1 billion due to speculation and rumours about birds being a possible carrier of coronavirus.
- **Fall in the demand and price of poultry products:** The livelihood of crores involved in the industry is set to be impacted as the bird flu scare will discourage more and more people from consuming poultry and poultry products.
- **Challenge to the growth of Poultry sector:** Pose a challenge to the poultry sector to achieve the target of projected annual growth of 16.2 percent between 2019 and 2024.
- **Loss of livelihood:** Around 3 crore farmers and farm workers are engaged in the unorganised sector of poultry. The outbreak can directly affect their livelihood. The compensations given by the government do not cover the profit that they could have earned from regular business.

- **Loss of India's Export:** India exports processed poultry products such as egg powder, yolk powder, chicken products and also pharmaceutical ingredients from the poultry sector worth hundreds of crores every year.
- **Fear of spread of another virus outbreak:** The people fear the consequences of yet another virus outbreak, avian influenza.

#### **Government Initiatives:**

- The central government has issued an alert to all states warning of the possibility of transmission to humans.
- The practice of building biosafety bubbles has been adopted around poultry farms to mitigate the chances of wild birds coming in close contact with reared birds.
- Several steps announced by the state government includes:
  - Mass culling of the birds in affected areas. Poultry farmers are compensated for the loss caused due to culling.
  - Ban on live birds markets to ensure that infection does not come from other states through poultry products.
  - Restriction on chicken and related food materials.
  - Arrangement of adequate stock of PPE kits and accessories required for culling operations.

#### **Way Forward:**

- Follow all the guidelines issued under the National Action Plan for Prevention, Control and Containment of Avian Influenza 2021.
- Strict vigil on the migratory birds including wetlands for any mortality or outbreak signs.
- Prepare action plans for monitoring migratory birds and for dealing with any emergency.
- Use protective gear like rubber gloves, eye gear, or face shield, and to disinfect hands and surfaces and take antiviral drugs.
- Involve other agencies like the department of fisheries involved in controlling the spread.
- Issue safety guidelines for eating eggs and chickens as it is safe to consume poultry products that are properly cooked at over 60-70 degree Celsius.
- Proper handling of dead birds with utmost caution.
- Checking the spread of rumours and misinformation regarding the transmission of bird flu to humans and consumers should not be scared.
- Precautions must be taken in zoos.
- Scientific supervision and surveillance should be extended to all the habitats where there is a possibility of interaction of migratory birds and poultry such as backyard poultry.

# Importance of Current Affairs in UPSC Preparation

- Indirectly more than half of the GS answer requires current development knowledge.
- All these questions can be answered only from the understanding of the present development.
- Newspaper and magazine articles are the best sources for these types of questions.
- Thus the importance of newspaper reading and the current affair is increased much fold.

## Sources of Current Affairs

- Newspapers are the best source for current affairs
- The Hindu, Indian Express and Livemint editorials frequently comment on various topics mentioned in UPSC syllabus TOPICS.
- Yojana and Kurukshetra magazines
- Rajya Sabha TV Debates
- Discussions AIR News Analysis
- PIB, PRS and other Government Sites

## Strategies to Prepare Current Affairs Notes:

Make issue-wise notes: note down any new policies, plans, bills and acts, committees, Supreme court judgment, etc.

- Questions from current issues have a very high weight in the paper. Do not ignore these at any cost.
- You will also need to quote facts/examples/ideas from the editorials quite often in your answers

# Current Issues in the News

- Russia Withdraws from Open Sky Treaty after US Departure
- PMKVY 3.0 Launched To Empower Youth with New-Age Skills To Boost Employability
- Petroleum Ministry launches 'SAKSHAM' campaign
- PM Modi launches Rs 1,000-crore 'Startup India Seed Fund'
- NASA targets final test of 'world's most powerful rocket'
- G7 Summit
- Harike Wetland
- Indian Star Tortoise
- Covid-19: An Overview of India's coronavirus vaccines
- INDIA INNOVATION INDEX: 2020
- Global Innovation Index
- Question Hour
- Naval Innovation and Indianisation Organisation(NIIO)
- Demand for WhatsApp Ban
- India needs data protection law
- World Food Price Index
- Bird flu outbreak in India
- India at UN high table: Opportunities & challenges
- Reforming the Mining Sector
- Institution of Eminence
- 'THE LINE' city of Saudi Arabia
- Severe cold wave conditions in North India
- Deteriorating Delhi's air quality index (AQI)
- IAF-LCA Tejas deal: A big boost for India's self-reliance and defense preparedness
- Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) designation and Specially Designated Global Terrorists.
- 2020 Adaptation Gap Report released
- WHO team reaches Wuhan to investigate COVID-19 origins
- US Unveils Plan To Counter China With India's Rise

