

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK-4

MARCH
2021

MAINS

PRELIMS

GS-I

Sand Mining and its impacts

Issue of Marriageable Age for Women

GS-2

Afghanistan's peace plan

Myanmar's Protest and what led to Military Coup in Myanmar

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Privatization of Banks

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- Rakhigarhi to be developed as one of the five identified iconic Archaeological Sites

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- Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers
- Uttarakhand wants Centre to withdraw ILP from Niti, Nelong valley
- Electoral Bonds
- Mullaperiyar dam case

ECONOMY

- India to set up development finance institution to fund infra projects
- Universal basic income
- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- Adenovirus antibodies reduce vector vaccine efficacy

GS SCORE

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— Disclaimer —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 4 (MARCH, 2021)

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PATHWAYS
for **UNDER GRADUATES**
3 & 2 Year IAS FOUNDATION
PROGRAMME



15 MARCH
2021

IAS 2022
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1 Year & 2 Year PROGRAMME



15 MARCH
2021

SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

SAND MINING AND ITS IMPACTS

CONTEXT

In recent development, the state government of Bihar issued an order banning sand mining around bridges in rivers and those under construction across the state. The move has been taken to check illegal sand mining that threatens bridges in the rivers.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Sand mining is a pan-India problem.
 - It is prevalent in the Garo Hills in Meghalaya, the Sutlej in Punjab, Yamuna in Delhi, the Ganga in Haridwar, Urmil and Betwa in Bundelkhand, Kosi in Bihar, the Chambal and Narmada in Madhya Pradesh, Ojat in Gujarat, the Subarnarekha in Odisha, Musi in Telangana, Netravati and Phalguni rivers in Karnataka, Godavari and Krishna in Andhra Pradesh, and Cauvery in Tamil Nadu.
- A United Nations study calculates that humankind's total consumption of sand—more than 40 billion tons a year—is now **double the number of sediments being replenished** naturally on the Earth by the sum of the world's rivers.
- UNEP in its report '**Sand and Sustainability**' highlighted that the demand for sand has increased three-fold over the last decades, driven by shifting consumption patterns, growing populations, increasing urbanisation and rapid infrastructure development.

◎ ANALYSIS

Overview and geology of sand

- **Sand** is a granular material composed of finely divided rock and mineral particles.
- **Composition of sand** is highly variable, depending on the local rock sources and conditions, but the most common constituent of sand in inland continental settings and non-tropical coastal settings is silica (silicon dioxide, or SiO₂), usually in the form of quartz.
- Sand is classified as a "**minor mineral**", as per The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulations) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act).
- **Sand mining** is the extraction of sand, mainly through an open pit (or sand pit) but sometimes mined from beaches and inland dunes or dredged from ocean and river beds.

Minor Minerals

- The central government has the power to notify "minor minerals" under the MMDR Act, 1957.

- Under the MMDR Act, the legal and administrative control over minor minerals vests with the State Governments, who have the powers to make rules to govern minor minerals.

Major Minerals

- Major minerals are those specified in the first schedule appended in the MMDR Act 1957 and the common major minerals are Lignite, Coal, Uranium, iron ore, gold etc. It may be noted that there is no official definition for "major minerals" in the MMDR Act. Hence, whatever is not declared as a "minor mineral" may be treated as the major mineral.
- The policy and legislation relating to the major minerals are dealt by the Ministry of Mines under the Union /Central Government.

Why the world is running out of sand?

- Sand is the most-consumed natural resource on the planet besides water. Today's modern civilization is built on sand, where some of its uses include:
 - Brick, Concrete and Mortar - Thus, sand becomes an important component for the Construction Industry.
 - Glass - Sand rich in **silica** is the principal component in common glasses.
 - Paint
 - Paved Roads
 - Petroleum Fracking
- River sand is always preferred as Desert sand is largely useless to us. Grains of desert sand are often too rounded to serve as industrial binding agents, and marine sand is corrosive.
- The quantity of natural generation of sand is static. Moreover, production of sand is not uniform across seasons with a shortage faced in many jurisdictions.
- Due to uncertainties and inadequateness in supply, the selling rate of the material varies significantly **leading to black marketing and illegal mining** of the mineral.

Impact of Sand Mining from rivers

(A) On Environment

- **Alteration of Rivers:** Excessive sand mining can alter the river bed, force the river to change course, erode banks and lead to flooding.
 - It leads to deepening of rivers and estuaries, and the enlargement of river mouths and coastal inlets.
 - It may also lead to saline-water intrusion from the nearby sea.
- **Damage River Biodiversity:** Instream mining can have other costly effects beyond the immediate mine sites. Many hectares of fertile streamside land are lost annually, as well as valuable timber resources and wildlife habitats in the riparian areas. Degraded stream habitats result in loss of fisheries productivity, biodiversity, and recreational potential.
 - Sand Mining in Chambal has impacted the population of Gharials (National Chambal Sanctuary has been established for their conservation), a critically endangered species. The mining hurts wildlife by removing basking and egg-laying habitat.
- **Alter Sediment Budget:** As the amount of sand reaching Oceans changes, rivers are not able to replenish the sand on beaches and in deltas.

Sediment budget refers to the balance between **sediment** added to and removed from the coastal system.

- **Lead to poor water quality:** Increased riverbed and bank erosion increases suspended solids in the water at the excavation site and downstream. Suspended solids may adversely affect water users and aquatic ecosystems.

Impact on	Description
Biodiversity	Impacts on related ecosystems (for example fisheries)
Land losses	Both inland and coastal through erosion
Hydrological function	Change in water flows, flood regulation and marine currents
Water supply	Through lowering of the water table and pollution
Infrastructures	Damage to bridges, river embankments and coastal infrastructures
Climate	Directly through transport emissions, indirectly through cement production

Landscape	Coastal erosion, changes in deltaic structures, quarries, pollution of rivers
Extreme events	Decline of protection against extreme events (flood, drought, storm surge)

(B) Socio-Economic Impacts

- **Worsen water scarcity:** Sand mining transforms the riverbeds into large and deep pits; as a result, the **groundwater table drops** leaving the drinking water wells on the embankments of these rivers dry.
- **Threat to Coastal Communities:** Massive sand mining erodes river deltas, exposing coastal communities to severe land loss, and worsening the effects of climate change-induced sea level rise.
- **Damage Public and Private Property:** Channel incision caused by gravel mining can undermine bridge piers and expose buried pipelines and other infrastructure.

Provisions for Sand Mining in India

- As **sand is a Minor Mineral**, different State Governments have made different rules for awarding, regulating and administering the sand concessions.
- To curb Illegal mining, there have been various **judicial interventions** by the Supreme Court (SC) and National Green Tribunal (NGT).
- The National Green Tribunal in August 2013 passed an order **banning sand mining without proper environment clearance**.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released "**Sustainable Sand Mining Management Guidelines 2016**" to promote scientific mining of sand and encourage environmental friendly management practices.
- Indian government's Ministry of Mines has also developed a **Mining Surveillance System (MSS)** to use space technology for facilitating State governments in curbing illegal mining activities in the country.
- Under **Sections 120B read with Section 34 of Indian Penal Code, 1860**, extraction of sand without a legal permit is a punishable offence.

What measures are needed?

- **Strengthen Policy Framework:** Regulations that have been bought, have not worked properly, mainly due to lackadaisical implementation.

◉ Alternatives to Sand

- ▶ M-sand - is sand made from rock by artificial processes, usually for construction purposes in cement or concrete

- ▶ Sand segregation from overburden of coal mines

- Import of sand



◉ Reducing consumption of sand

- ▶ By optimizing the use of existing buildings and infrastructure.
- ▶ Using recycled buildings and quarry dust material as a substitute for sand.

◉ Reducing the negative consequences of extraction

- ▶ By calculating the total annual bedload and restricting mining activities up to that value or less.

◎ CONCLUSION

Sand and gravel represent the highest volume of raw material used on earth after water. Their use greatly exceeds natural renewal rates. Moreover, the amount being mined is increasing exponentially, mainly as a result of rapid economic growth. To sustain the economic growth in future, it becomes important that the resource is used judiciously.

ISSUE OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE FOR WOMEN

CONTEXT

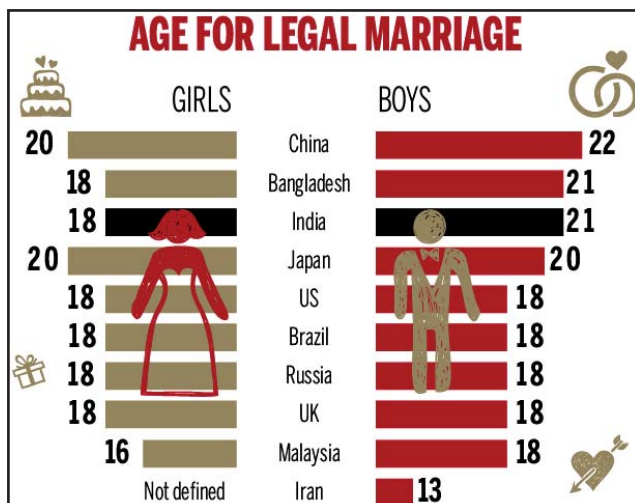
The debate of the marriageable age of women began after the Independence Day speech of Prime Minister in which he announced that the government will soon decide on the age of marriage of women.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The whole issue arose after a task force was set up by the **Union Ministry for Women and Child Development** to examine issues like-
 - age of motherhood among girls
 - the correlation between age of marriage and **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB), Total Fertility Rate (TFR), and Child Sex Ratio (CSR), etc.**
- The committee is headed by former **Samata Party president Jaya Jaitely** and its members include NITI Aayog Member (Health) and several Secretaries to the Government of India.
- It will also examine the possibility of increasing the age of marriage for women from **18 years to 21 years**.

◎ ANALYSIS

Issue of Child Marriages in India



- **Near about 650 million girls & women** alive today were married as children, and by **2030, almost 150 million girls** under the age of 18 will be married.
- India has contributed to a **50 % decline in child marriage in South Asia—to 30 % in 2018**, the region still accounts for the largest number of child marriages.
- In India, among girls married by **age 18, 46 %** were also in the lowest income bracket.
- According to **UNICEF**, at least 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 are married in India each year.

India has the largest number of child brides in the world i.e. 1/3rd of the global total.

What are the possible reasons of marrying girls at Low Age?

- **Lack of education:** Under-age marriages are prevalent in those regions and groups where there is a lack of quality schooling and opportunities for higher education.
- **Social norms:** There is a social norm in India which expects women to be younger than men at the time of marriage.
- **Other reasons include-**
 - Poverty
 - lack of quality education
 - economic prospects
 - security concerns

How early marriage impacts?

- **Multiple diseases:** The nutritional needs are high in **late adolescence (15-19 years)** and a fair measure of adolescent girls suffer from multiple forms of undernutrition, from chronic energy deficiency, iron deficiency to micronutrient deficiency.
 - The **marriage** and delivery during adolescence drain their already poor nutritional reserves and also lead to child stunting and mortality to multiple diseases at a later stage.
- **Toll on mental health:** Psychologically, women married as children are more likely to suffer from symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms of depression.
- **Low access to education:** Marriage dramatically limits a girl's access to education.
- **Domestic violence:** According to the **International Council of Research On Women (ICRW)**, women with low levels of education and married adolescents between the ages of 15-19 years old are at a higher risk of domestic violence than older and more educated women.

Assessing pros & cons of increasing the marriageable age

(A) Arguments in favor

- **Reduced maternal deaths:** It will help in lowering maternal deaths and improving nutrition levels

in the near term by putting more number of girls in college and enabling them to achieve greater financial independence in the long-term.

What are the Laws/Acts says?

- The law of the land prescribes the **minimum age of marriage should be 21 years and 18 years** for men and women respectively.
 - **Special Marriage Act, 1954 and Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:** Prescribed 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.
 - **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 Section 5(iii):** 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
 - **Age of Consent Bill, 1927:** It amended the provision of rape in 1927 and declared the marriage with a girl under 12 invalid.
 - **Sarda Act** was amended in 1978 and it prescribed 18 and 21 years as the age of marriage for a woman and a man respectively.
 - **In the 1880s** a legal framework for the age of consent for marriage began.
 - **The Indian Penal Code, 1860:** Criminalised sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of 10.
 - **In Islam**, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.
- **Keeping population in check:** Helpful in controlling the population as it may help in keeping the population in check.
 - **Improved health:** It would be helpful for Children's health and Women's overall development as the children who are born to mothers who tend to get married at an early age may develop health problems.
 - **Equality:** Increasing the age of marriage will make the marriage age equal for both men and women.
 - The National Human Rights Commission, 2018 recommended that there should be a uniform age of marriage for boys and girls.
 - **Women's Health:** Increasing the Marriage age can reduce Mortality Rates and can reduce the diseases like anaemia among them. (young mothers are more susceptible to anaemia)
 - **Enormous opportunities:** Increasing women's legal marriage age will give more power and legal support to all women so that they can choose the opportunities to educate and empower themselves, before being burdened with marriage and motherhood.
 - **Increased participation in labour force:** India will get a large number of labour forces by increasing the marriageable age. In India Female labour Force

participation is too low as compared to world average.

(B) Arguments against

- **Issue of girl's right: An increase in age to 21 years** would mean girls will have no say in their personal matters until they are 21. **Hadiya case is an apt example**, where an adult woman's decision to marry was challenged by her parents.
 - The elementary right of minors such as right to be heard and the right for their views to be considered, can be denied to girls up till 21.
 - **Girls do become sexually active before 21** and if the government increases the age, several of them would not avail the formal healthcare system for their reproductive or sexual rights.
 - **The cases of child marriage can go up since the legal age for marriage will increase from 18 to 21.**
 - At the current age of marriage for women and men, the implementation of the child marriage law is very hard.
- **Laws preventing child marriage can be misused:**
 - The **child marriage law is mostly used by parents against eloping daughters.**
 - It becomes a weapon for parental control and for punishment of males whom girls choose as their husbands.
 - **Most of the cases that are taken to court are self-arranged marriages.** Only one-third of the cases relate to arranged marriages, which are sometimes brought by parents or husbands to dissolve or to nullify marriages that have broken down because of domestic violence, dowry or compatibility issues.
- **Marriage age of boys can be reduced to attain Equality:**
 - The age of marriage should be uniform for men and women but not by increasing the age but by reducing the age for boys.
 - **Indian Majority Act, 1875:** It grants the right to vote, and to enter into contracts, for those who attain the age of 18. And they are equal for men and women.
 - **In the 'Independent Thought case' the Apex Court**, declared that it's accepted universally that a child is someone who's under the age of 18, and that should be the age of marriage.
 - **The international Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women** recommends 18 as the age of marriage.
- **Child Marriage is declining** in India therefore there is no rationale to raise the age of marriage.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006

- The **PCMA sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years** for women and at **21 for men**.
- According to this an underage marriage is valid as long as the minors involved in the marriage want it to remain valid.
- It allows the minor party to repudiate the marriage or to have it nullified right up till two years of attaining majority.
- **Some definitions under the Act:**
 - **'child'** means a person who, if a male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age;
 - **'child marriage'** means a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child;
 - **'Contracting party'**, in relation to a marriage, means either of the parties whose marriage is or is about to be thereby solemnized.

Child marriage is a social issue as well as an economic issue which can be tackled through educating the girls and not by increasing the age. Introducing criminal law and punishment may not work in favour of Women.

Rather debating over increasing the age of marriage, the focus should be on issues like age of sexual consent and repudiation of marriage by girls.

WAY FORWARD

Better education and giving better nutritional level can only change some issue on ground level.

To change things in favour of women there is a need of changes in societal behaviour, parents' attitude and whole ecosystem.

◎ CONCLUSION

Apart from revising the marriageable age there are many issues which must be looked upon first to improve the status of women in Indian society. It is not sure that increasing age will ensure that they are getting the right opportunities, right skills and right kind of education as well. There is a need to increase the awareness and educational status among girls so that they can decide what is best for them.

AFGHANISTAN'S PEACE PLAN

CONTEXT

A new Peace plan has been prepared by the United States administration to curtail the ongoing civil war between Afghanistan and Taliban.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The U.S. and Taliban signed an agreement for "Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" on February 29, 2020, at Doha. (Also called Doha agreement).
- Features of Doha Agreement
 - ▶ **Troops Withdrawal:** The US and NATO will withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. All the troops will be out of Afghanistan within 14 months.
 - ▶ **Taliban:** Taliban will not allow any of its members to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
 - ▶ **Prisoners:** Exchange of prisoners between the Afghan government and the Taliban will be done to build trust.
 - ▶ **Sanctions Removal:** As per the Doha agreement, US and UN sanctions on the Taliban leaders will be removed.
- Following the deal, the Taliban escalated violence, seeking to seize as much territory as possible. It has also failed to deliver on promises to evict transnational jihadist groups, like al-Qaeda, from its ranks.
- The United States and the international community for months have called for violence levels to be reduced.
- Now, one year later, the US has proposed a regional conference under the United Nations auspices with foreign ministers of the USA, India, Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran to discuss a "unified approach" on Afghanistan.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the American proposal?

- **Involving other Stakeholders:** US has proposed an UN-led conference of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. "to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan".
- **Written Proposal to enhance Trust:** US will share written proposals with the Afghan leadership and the Taliban to accelerate talks.
- **Comprehensive Ceasefire and Inclusive government:** US has urged both sides to reach a

consensus on Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements; find a road map to a new "inclusive government"; and agree on the terms of a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".

- **Negotiations in third country:** US has also proposed a senior level meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey to discuss power sharing, reduction of violence and other specific goals.

Why a new Afghan peace plan was much needed?

- The Taliban had warned that if the US does not abide by the Doha agreement deadline (May 1, 2021), the Taliban will step up fighting.
- On the other hand, the Afghan Army lacks the capacity to control the Taliban without US support.
- Further, the Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha last year, but no solution has reached.
- Hence, a new plan was desired to break the deadlock and prevent the complete takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

Why the U.S. is making this peace push?

- **Review of Strategy:** The Biden administration is currently reviewing its Afghan strategy. While the review is not completed, there is a consensus within the administration that "accelerating the peace process" is the best way to advance the shared interests of the U.S. and the Afghan government.
- **Doha Agreement (US Withdrawal plan):** According to the agreement the U.S. signed with the Taliban in February 2020, American troops – currently some 2,500 troops are in Afghanistan – are set to leave the country by May 1. The Taliban have warned that if the U.S. troops are not out by the deadline, they will step up fighting.
- **Slow pace of peace talks:** The Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha in September 2020 but reached no breakthrough. The Biden administration is concerned about the slow pace of the talks.
- **Restraining Taliban and Regional Stability:** The U.S. assessment is that if American troops are

pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban would make quick gains and the security situation will worsen. It hopes that the best way to prevent a complete Taliban takeover is a regional peace process and an interim unity government. The Taliban are yet to respond to America's proposal.

What is the Afghan government's stand?

- **Critical of US's direct talks with Taliban:** The Ghani administration has consistently been critical of the U.S.'s direct outreach to the Taliban. The Trump administration held direct talks with the Taliban, excluding the government. Later, US put pressure on Kabul to release Taliban prisoners as part of Doha agreement.
- **Against making concession to Taliban:** Even when the Doha talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government were underway, Mr. Ghani made it clear that he, as elected President, is the only legitimate representative of the Afghan people and he resisted making concessions to the Taliban.
- **Democratic Process and Internal Interference:** President Ghani reiterated his opposition to any transfer of power except through elections. Afghanistan Vice President Amrullah Saleh, a hardline critic of the Taliban, said the U.S. "can make a decision on their troops, not on the people of Afghanistan".

What is India's stake in Afghan peace?

- **Security:** A stable Afghanistan is crucial for regional and domestic security and stability for India.
- **Connectivity:** The most important role of Afghanistan is always considered as India's gateway to Central Asia. It implies continental outreach.
 - For instance, Connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia is the primary reason for India's engagement with Iran to develop Chabahar port.
- **Strengthening regional foothold with the diversification of engagements:** Increasing strategic engagements with Afghanistan is beneficial for India in widening the engagement with other countries in the region.
 - For example, India's relations with Iran at present are dominated by oil. By engaging with Afghan and Iran India can diversify its trade interests.
- **Energy ambitions:** Peaceful Afghan is essential to address the energy needs of India. This is evident by Afghanistan's essential position in the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) pipeline.

- **Trade:** Afghanistan can help India export its products to Europe and help in gaining foreign exchange. The railway line from Chabahar to Zahedan in Afghanistan envisages connecting New Delhi with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe.

Challenges associated to Peace deal

- The Afghan government as well as Taliban are unwilling for any power sharing.
- Taliban is even not willing to give up its sanctuaries in Pakistan. Nor will it accept any dilution of the strict Islamic system that it wants to enforce.
- Also, the Taliban is fragmented or divided internally. It is composed of various regional and tribal groups acting semi-autonomously.
- Therefore, some of them may continue to engage in violence impacting the peace process and dialogue.

What can be the suggestive measure?

- While the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban is well known, it is not clear whether Mr. Ghani could continue to resist American pressure, especially if the U.S. brings regional powers, including India, on board.
- If the US decides to stick to the Taliban deal and withdraw troops by May, Mr. Ghani would be in a tougher spot. He doesn't have any good options. If he rejects the American offer, the war will continue forever.
- The Taliban have already taken over much of the country's hinterlands and are breathing down the neck of its cities.
- If Afghanistan President Ghani accepts the proposal, he will have to share power with the Taliban and discuss amendments to the Constitution and the future governance framework.
- India must step up to assist materially to those who want to defend the Afghan republic. This will mark the arrival of India as the superpower and as an arbiter in settling international disputes.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the Afghan peace process should be to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations. The world leaders must cooperate to ensure an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process. Because that only will bring lasting peace in the region and strengthen regional security.

MYANMAR'S PROTEST AND WHAT LED TO MILITARY COUP IN MYANMAR

CONTEXT

Weeks of demonstrations and a deadly crackdown have roiled Myanmar since a February coup brought back full military rule following years of quasi-democracy.

◎ BACKGROUND

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has suffered decades of repressive military rule, poverty due to years of isolationist economic policies, and civil war with ethnic minority groups.

- **1948:** Myanmar has been ruled by a military junta for many of the years since it gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.
- The Union of Burma began as a parliamentary democracy, like most of its newly independent neighbors on the Indian subcontinent.
- **1962:** But representative democracy only lasted until 1962, when General U Ne Win led a military coup and held power for the next twenty-six years.
 - ▶ Ne Win instituted a new constitution in 1974 based on an isolationist policy and a socialist economic program that nationalized Burma's major enterprises.
- **1988:** By 1988, widespread corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar's currency, and food shortages led to massive student-led protests.
 - ▶ In August 1988, the army cracked down on protesters, killing at least three thousand and displacing thousands more.
 - ▶ In the aftermath of the 1988 crackdown, Ne Win resigned as chairman of his party, although he remained active behind the scenes as another military junta took power.
- **1989:** In 1989, the new military regime changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the capital, Rangoon, was renamed Yangon.
- **2005:** In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital to Nay Pyi Taw, a city it built in central Myanmar.
- **2007:** In 2007, the so-called **Saffron Revolution**, widespread anti-government protests that were sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-colored robes worn by participating Buddhist monks—and international pressure prompted shifts in Myanmar.
- **2008:** The junta pushed forward a new constitution in 2008, which is still in place today, that gave the

military widespread powers even under civilian rule.

- The military junta unexpectedly officially dissolved in 2011 and established a civilian parliament for a transitional period, during which former army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed president.
- **2015:** Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty elections—considered to be the freest and fairest elections in decades—since the country's transition away from military rule.
 - ▶ **Suu Kyi** became Myanmar's de facto leader in 2015.
- **2021 February:** Government overthrown in military coup.

The country profile

- Myanmar, also known as Burma, is in South East Asia. It neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India.
- The country gained independence from Britain in 1948.
- It was ruled by the armed forces from 1962 until 2011 when a new government began ushering in a return to civilian rule.
- The ruling military changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989.



◎ ANALYSIS

What is happening now?

- In 2020, Myanmar held its second national elections under civilian rule, which Ms Suu Kyi's NLD party overwhelmingly won.
 - ▶ The military suffered a major blow in the elections: the USDP won just 33 of 476 available seats, while the NLD won 396.

- Military leaders alleged voter fraud, and after the country's election commission rejected the military's claims, it staged a coup in February 2021.
- The military is now back in charge and has declared a **year-long state of emergency**.
- It seized control on 1 February following a general election which Ms Suu Kyi's NLD party won by a landslide.
- The coup took place as a new session of parliament was set to open.

Who is Aung San Suu Kyi?

- Aung San Suu Kyi, 75, is the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, Gen Aung San who was assassinated just before the country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.
- She remained popular with the public despite spending years under house arrest.
- She was released in 2010, and in November 2015 she led the NLD to a landslide victory in Myanmar's first openly contested election for 25 years and became de facto leader.

What about 'human rights'?

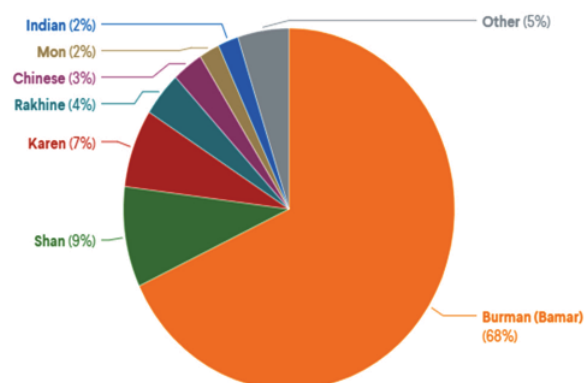
- The people of Myanmar, young and old, from all walks of life, have a vision: freedom, democracy and human rights.
- Human rights are natural rights which cannot be restrained by human laws. It includes Right to life, liberty and property.
- These are the requirements of a person to fully grow into a social being. Individuals are the fundamental contributors of the Nation. Only when their rights are protected they will be able to contribute the best of himself to the country.
- Olden times fulfilling the country's law by any means was the end of a country. With time, people became the centrality of a Nation.
- Laws and public administrators now become the means to protect an individual's interest from injustice. Towards such an end, international organizations such as UN were established.

Universal Declaration of human rights

The **United Nations Charter** sets forth the "inherent dignity" and the "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family." Upholding these human rights principles as "the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" is fundamental to every undertaking of the United Nations.

Why has Myanmar endured so many ethnic conflicts?

Myanmar's Ethnic Groups - 2021



- Myanmar is a diverse country, with the state recognizing more than one hundred ethnic groups.
- Forming roughly two-thirds of the population, ethnic **Burmans**, known as the **Bamar**, have enjoyed a privileged position in society and hold a majority of government and military positions.
- Many ethnic minority groups, on the other hand, have faced systemic discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities and development in their regions, minimal representation in government, and abuses at the hands of the military.
- Since independence, discrimination has been ingrained in Myanmar's laws and political system.
- Anti-Muslim sentiment has also been on the rise in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar.
- Buddhist extremists, who promote the supremacy of Buddhism, have attacked Muslims and spread hate speech.
- Is the world moving towards dictatorship?
- Democracy now finds itself in a Hobbesian state (the natural condition of mankind), for people have willingly submitted themselves to the government in fear.
- Dictatorship often starts in the face of a threat. Earlier it was the invisible and distant threat of terrorism that demanded obedience, now the threat is closer to home – that is pushing people to give away their rights on a platter.
- The question is for how long.
- The imposition of any kind of emergency, formal or informal, without an expiry date spells doom for democracy.

What has been the International reaction?

Numerous countries have condemned the military takeover.

- **US and UK:** The United States and the United Kingdom have responded with sanctions on military officials.
- **China:** China blocked a UN Security Council statement condemning the coup, but has backed calls for the release of Ms. Suu Kyi and a return to democratic norms. The country has previously opposed international intervention in Myanmar.
- Southeast Asian countries have been pursuing diplomatic efforts to end the crisis.

What is India's stand?

- India expressed "deep concern" over the reports of an unfolding military coup in Myanmar.
- India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar.

- The country believes that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld.
- India had shown a commitment to building robust relationships with Myanmar over the past two decades which intensified after the democratic process began in 2011.

◎ CONCLUSION

No one possesses a magic wand of solutions. But there is one consistent lesson, that no change is irreversible, particularly in a context where military leadership scripted the meaning of democracy, and domestic forces and geopolitics continuously fail to deter its actions and impulses to rule.

PRIVATIZATION OF BANKS

CONTEXT

Recently NITI Aayog released its last round of consolidation plans. In that, the NITI Aayog listed 6 banks for the privatization plan.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The Union Budget 2021 has announced the privatization of two public sector banks and one general insurance company in the upcoming fiscal 2021-22.
- The Government has fast-paced the privatization of PSBs (Public Sector Banks).
- The government front-loaded Rs 70,000 crore into government-run banks in September 2019, Rs 80,000 crore in FY18, and Rs 1.06 lakh crore in FY19 through recapitalization bonds. In 2019, the government merged ten PSU banks into four.
- Now, the NITI Aayog listed 6 banks for the privatization plan.
- The government aims to keep a bare minimum presence in the strategic sector. The final number of Public Sector entities in strategic sectors (including banking) will be determined by a group of ministers.

◎ ANALYSIS

What are the reasons for the privatization of banks?

- **Degrading Financial Position of Public Sector Banks:**
 - Years of capital injections and governance reforms have not been able to improve the financial position of public sector banks significantly.
 - Many of them have higher levels of stressed assets than private banks and also lag the latter on profitability, market capitalization, and dividend payment record.
- **Issue of Dual Control: At present PSBs are under the dual control of RBI and Dept. of Financial Services of Min of Finance.**
 - The RBI handles the governance side of the PSBs under the RBI Act, 1934
 - On the other hand, the Dept of Financial Services under the Finance Ministry maintains the regulation of PSBs under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
 - Thus, RBI does not have the powers to revoke a banking license, shut down a bank, or penalize

the board of directors for their faults. The Privatization will provide the powers to RBI to control them effectively.

- **Part of a Long-Term Project**

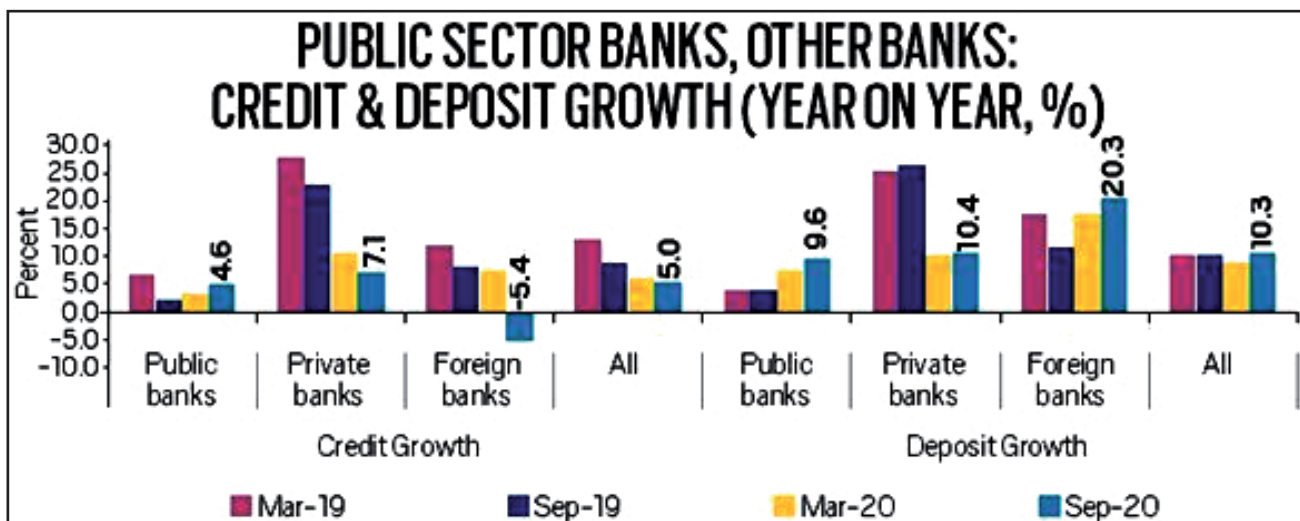
- Privatization of two public sector banks will set the ball rolling for a long-term project that envisages only a handful of state-owned banks, with the rest either consolidated with strong banks or privatized.
- The initial plan of the government was to privatize four. Depending on the success with the first two, the government is likely to go for divestment in another two or three banks in the next financial year.
- This will free up the government, the majority owner, from continuing to provide equity support to the banks year after year.
- Through a series of moves over the last few years, the government is now left with 12 state-owned banks, from 28 earlier.

- **Reduced performance:** The PSBs in the past failed to perform effectively when compared to Private Banks. This will result in a loss for the government at the end of the day.

- For example, The PSBs had almost 71% of the overall lending ratio in 2005. But in 2020 their overall lending ratio came below 57% due to intense competition from the Private Banks.
- Public sector bank boards are still not adequately professionalized. Further, the Bank Board Bureau is not fully functional. So the government still decides board appointments. This creates an issue of politicization and interference in the normal functioning of Banks.

- **Impact of Covid:**

- After the Covid-related regulatory relaxations are lifted, banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses.
- As per the RBI's recent Financial Stability Report, the gross NPA ratio of all commercial banks may increase from 7.5% in September 2020 to 13.5% by September 2021.
- This would mean the government would again need to inject equity into weak public sector banks.



What was the Contribution of PSBs so far?

According to RBI data, there were only 1,833 bank branches in rural areas in the country in 1969. But after the nationalization in the 1970s, the rural branches increased to 33,004 by 1995 and continued to grow over the next decades. This provided various benefits to economic development. Such as,

- **Agricultural growth:** PSBs expanded agricultural credit, short-term agricultural credit ('crop loans'). According to an estimate, the PSBs in 2017-18 account for a total of Rs 622,685 crores of Agricultural credit.
 - ▶ Further, The PSBs also played a huge role in making the country self-sufficient by supporting the green, blue, and dairy revolutions.
- **Priority sectors:** The PSBs pioneered the concept of 'priority sector lending'. This provided credit to certain priority sectors which were earlier deprived of credit such as housing, etc.
- **Solution for poorest:** The Differential Rate of Interest (DRI) loans are the brainchild of public sector banking. Under this poorest section of people will receive the loan at a very marginal interest rate.
- **Women empowerment:** The PSBs extended loans to women's self-help groups under various programs. This contributed to women's empowerment in India.
- **Rural growth:** PSBs also funded rural infrastructure projects through the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund.

In conclusion, the PSBs provided access to a formal banking network for all and facilitated financial inclusion in India.

Views against the Privatization of PSBs

The supporters of PSBs provide many arguments against the privatization of PSBs. Such as,

- **Credibility of Private Sector Banks:** The Private sector bank is not always efficient. On a global level, many private banks have failed, thus challenging the idea of private banks are efficient. For example, the recent YES Bank problem in India.
- **Reason for NPA's:** The present NPA problem lies majorly with the PSBs. But the NPA's increased due to the credit provided to the private corporate entities. So the private corporate entities have to be regulated and not the PSBs.
- **Against inclusive banking:** The Private Sector focussed on profit motive might restrict the credit to rural, agricultural, women, poor sections of society, etc. Thus, after Privatised PSBs the remaining PSBs have to take care of all of such credits. This might stress the remaining PSBs also.
- **Governance and policy issue of RBI:** Restructuring schemes such as strategic debt restructuring and schemes for sustainable structuring of stressed assets, initiated by RBI, are the major reasons for delayed recognition of bad loans from banks. This applies to all banks irrespective of ownership (public as well as private) of the banks.

For these reasons only the Former governor of RBI, Raghuram Rajan also opposed the Privatization of PSBs. He also mentioned that India at present needs changes in banking regulation.

What are the challenges associated with increasing the Privatisation of Banks?

- **Private Banks are not without faults**
 - ▶ In the last couple of years, some questions have arisen over the performance of private banks, especially on governance issues.
 - ▶ ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar was sacked for allegedly extending dubious loans.
 - ▶ Yes Bank CEO Rana Kapoor was not given an extension by the RBI and now faces investigations by various agencies.

- ▶ Lakshmi Vilas Bank faced operational issues and was recently merged with DBS Bank of Singapore.
- ▶ Former Axis Bank MD Shikha Sharma too was denied an extension.
- ▶ Moreover, when the RBI ordered an asset quality review of banks in 2015, many private sector banks, including Yes Bank, were found under-reporting NPAs.
- **Dangers of private banks repeating the mistakes of the 1960s**
 - ▶ There is a widespread perception that the private sector then was not sufficiently aware of its larger social responsibilities and was more concerned with profit.
 - ▶ This made private banks unwilling to diversify their loan portfolios as this would raise transaction costs and reduce profits.
 - ▶ The expansion of branches was mostly in urban areas, and rural and semi-urban areas continued to go unserved.
- ▶ The government can split the Chairman and Managing Director roles. Further, the state can allow them a fixed tenure of 3 to 5 years.
- **Recommendations of Narashimham committee**
 - ▶ The government can review the Banking Regulation Acts.
 - ▶ India can explore the concept of Narrow Banking. Under this weak PSBs will be allowed to place their funds only in the short term and risk-free assets. This will improve the performance of PSBs.
 - ▶ Apart from that, the government has to create strong recovery laws and taking criminal action against wilful defaulters.
 - ▶ The government has to rectify the challenges in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. This will provide a faster resolution process.
 - ▶ In the meantime, the government can explore alternate steps such as the concept of Bad Banks.

Suggestive Measures

To improve the governance and management of PSBs, there is a need to implement the recommendations of the **PJ Nayak committee**. The government must properly implement the recommendations of various committees. Such as,

- **Recommendation of PJ Nayak Committee:**
 - ▶ Though the government approved the Bank Board Bureau, the government has to provide enough support for proper functioning.

◎ CONCLUSION

The majority of the Committees appointed by the government including the PJ Nayak Committee supported the reduction of government stake in PSBs. So, the government has to strike a balance on how much privatization of PSBs is essential for financial inclusion and credit to essential sectors like infrastructure, rural, etc. Instead of providing arbitrary numbers, the government have to provide the rationale behind the bare minimum presence in the strategic sectors including PSBs

ETHICAL ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL FUNDING

CONTEXT

Recently, the Prime Minister of India said in the Parliament that the country needs to be cautioned against the influences from abroad, which he referred to as the new FDI i.e. "foreign destructive ideology". He was trying to highlight how International agents today are playing an important role in shaping a countries' value system.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The **farmers' protest** against the government's newly-enacted farm laws has gone international. Tweets by renowned pop-star Rihanna and Swedish climate-activist Greta Thunberg favoring the agitating farmers have stirred up a hornet's nest with the opposition parties calling it a hit at India's reputation.
- Last year, the government tightened the **FCRA rules** through which NGOs garner foreign funding. The argument is that foreign-funded NGOs toe lines of foreign actors and slows down development activities.
- Known for its campaigns against India's coal-fired power plants, **Greenpeace** has been barred from receiving foreign donations since 2015.
- Recently, after a successful eight-year run in India addressing several crucial human rights violations on issues like the Delhi riots of 2020 and the use of excessive force in Kashmir, **Amnesty International** India has decided to shut its operations in the country, allegedly due to government repression.
- Civil Societies have played a crucial role in the development of the nation, but recently their funding from foreign partners is being highlighted as detrimental to the nation.
- In this regard, we shall understand **ethical issues surrounding international funding in general**.

in demarcating resources in the world's oceans equitably to all Nations.

Some sources of International Ethics

- UN Declaration of Human Rights
- Geneva Convention for humanitarian treatment in War
- Common but differentiated responsibility under Paris Climate Deal of UNFCCC

Importance of International Ethics

- **Legitimacy:** Ethics grants and withdraws legitimacy. Practices have sprung up or gotten abolished based on the core values of the society.
- **Rights and Responsibilities:** There have been many attempts at forging general agreement on the composition of human rights—the best known being the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions, and additional international agreements such as the Refugee Convention.
- **Peace and Harmony:** Ethics aims at "Peaceful World", "Respect for All" & "Equality" while forming international organizations, declarations & forums.
 - ▶ E.g.: The demand for equality in IMF & UNO shows the demand for adhering to ethics in a way.
- **Solidarity:** Natural disasters and refugee crisis situations require a more compassionate view of the global community. These are not isolated events and rather, the duty of every global citizen to help in times of crisis.
 - ▶ E.g.- Aid during natural disasters (Nepal earthquake)
- **Fairness:** Fairness addresses normative standards for appropriate contribution, equal regard, and just desert.
 - ▶ E.g. Amartya Sen's "capabilities approach".

◎ ANALYSIS

Ethics is the study of the moral code of conduct or the ideal behavior to be sought by human beings. It guides to the realm of international relations as well.

International Ethics:

- **International ethics** is an area of **international relations theory** that concerns the extent and scope of **ethical obligations** between states in an era of globalization.
- It provides an understanding of how nations and other entities treat other nations and their people.
- It guides the international community on ways to tackle global challenges. Eg. UNCLOS has helped

International Ethics and foreign funding

- It is widely argued that international funding helps in building the capacity and empowering local development actors (like NGOs) in developing countries. This is an inclusive and democratic approach to development.

- When there are places in the world with no opportunities, economic insecurity, war, instability, hunger, and overwhelming hopelessness, it's a natural breeding ground for terrorism. So one of the best ways to tackle global terrorism is to lift people out of poverty. International funding is a way to achieve this.
- It is anticipated that the complexities of responding to climate change require partnerships between international and local NGOs and CSOs.

Despite several such needs, many countries including India are wary of international funding due to the following reasons.

Issues with International funding

- **Suppress Sovereignty of Nation**

- **Conditional Funding:**

- The donors shape the policy framework and strategies through impositions, seriously undermining the rights, choices, and decisions of the people to determine their demands and actions needed for their development.
 - **Local societal diversities and local ownership are ignored by conditionality.**
 - Eg.: The IMF loans to India after the 1991 economic crisis came with severe conditions on macroeconomic policy.

- **Debt-Trap Funding:** Foreign funding to governments in the form of loans to infringe on national sovereignty has also come to light due to **China's debt-trap diplomacy.**

- Eg. China provides loans to Pakistan for 'One Belt One Road', as Pakistan is not able to pay back, it is entangled in China's debt trap.

- **Funding to NGOs**

- There has been an increasing fear that by funding local NGOs, giving their ideas unwarranted prominence, and underwriting their activities, foreign government donors seek to shift the target government's policies and serve their interests.
 - It has been alleged that **Foreign agents use NGOs to carry forward their objectives** like creating social disturbances, slowing down development works, etc.
 - Eg. Greenpeace serving western interest by slowing coal power projects.

- Many argue that **foreign funding is undemocratic** because it contradicts the principle of government "of the people, by the people, for the people."
 - From this perspective, civil society, progressive or otherwise, is legitimate when it can raise funds at home, but NGOs relying on foreign funding, however, pervert the will of the people.

- **Hamper National Security**

- Funding **terrorist organizations**. Eg. Pakistan's ISI has been actively supporting radical organizations to create social disharmony, radicalize local youths, and hire them for terror activities.
 - In the age of Information technology, foreign funding to technology (software and hardware) companies creates a **cyber-security risk**.
 - Example: Last year, India banned several Chinese apps and made FDI through government routes mandatory for investments from neighboring countries.

- **Decrease legitimacy of Elections**

- Electoral Bonds are allowed to receive foreign funds. This opens a new and more direct way of **foreign influence on local politics.**
 - There have been allegations by some western countries against covert Russian meddling in their elections. Such incidents can happen in India as well.

- **Funding for Clinical trials**

- Many western countries have been accused of funding voluntary clinical trials in poor countries of Africa and Asia.
 - This is a clear **violation of human rights.**

◎ CONCLUSION

Though international funding entails with itself various ethical issues, it is still a need for the development of any nation. This funding if you used correctly can take the Nation on a positive trajectory of growth and prosperity. It is the need of the hour to **ensure an international framework is devised** by International organizations and Governments to ensure an ethical approach is taken to give and receive funds internationally. India can use its position, as a member of UNSC, to nudge the International community towards such a goal.



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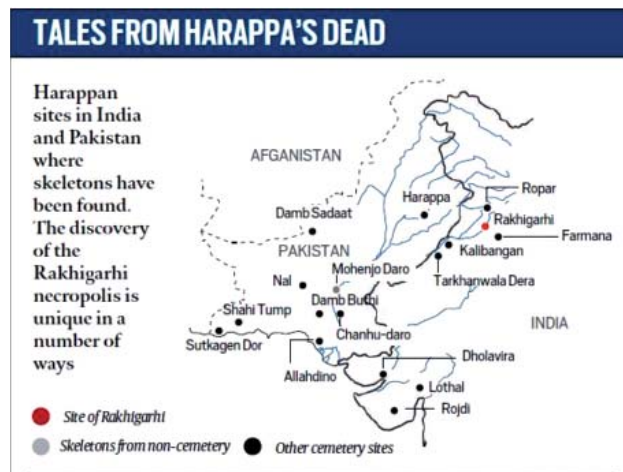
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RAKHIGARHI TO BE DEVELOPED AS ONE OF THE FIVE IDENTIFIED ICONIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

◎ **CONTEXT:** The proposed development of five iconic archaeological sites located across five states, including Rakhigarhi, Haryana was conceptualized in the Union budget of 2020.

◎ **ABOUT:** Rakhigarhi

- **Representation of Harappan Culture:** The site has yielded various stages of Harappan culture.



- It is by far **one of the largest Harappan** sites in India.
- Seven (07) mounds are located here.
- **Collective Site:** The ancient site of **Rakhi-Khas and Rakhi-Shahpur** are collectively known as Rakhigarhi.
- **Location:** It is located on the right bank of the now dried-up **Palaeo-channel of Drishadvati** (Saraswati basin).
- **Some important discovered features:**
 - **Infrastructure:** paved roads, drainage system, large rainwater collection, storage system, terracotta bricks.
 - **Art:** statue production, and skilled working of bronze and precious metals have been uncovered.
 - **Jewelry,** bangles made from terracotta, conch shells, gold, and semi-precious stones.
 - **Fire altars** and apsidal structures were revealed in Rakhigarhi

Five places to be developed as "iconic sites"

- The government proposes to set up an Indian Institute of Heritage and Conservation under the **Ministry of Culture**.
- Under this five archaeological sites will be developed as "iconic sites":
 - Rakhigarhi (Haryana)
 - Hastinapur (Uttar Pradesh)
 - Sivsagar (Assam)
 - Dholavira (Gujarat)
 - Adichanallur (Tamil Nadu)

BILL TO DEFINE DELHI L-G'S POWERS

◎ **CONTEXT:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) moved a bill in the Lok Sabha where it proposed that "government" in the national capital territory of Delhi means the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.

◎ **ABOUT:** What are the proposed provisions under the bill?

- **Amendments:** The Bill proposes to amend Sections 21, 24, 33, and 44 of the Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) 1991 Act.
- **Discretionary powers to L-G:** The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G of Delhi even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.
 - The proposed legislation also seeks to ensure that the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunity" to give her/his opinion before any decision taken by the Council of Ministers (or the Delhi Cabinet) is implemented.

Constitutional Status of Delhi

- **UT with a legislature:** Delhi is a Union Territory with a legislature.
- **Constitutional Amendment:** It came into being in 1991 under Article 239AA of the Constitution inserted by the Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991.
- **Legislative Powers:** As per the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly of Delhi has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police, and land.

The reason behind the Bill

- It states that Section 44 of the 1991 Act deals with the conduct of business
 - no structural mechanism for effective time-bound implementation
 - no clarity over the proposal or matters which are required to be submitted to Lieutenant Governor before issuing the order.

Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and its Powers

- The **Lieutenant Governor of Delhi** is the constitutional head of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
 - The post was first **established in September 1966**, when The Delhi Administration Act, 1966 came into effect.
 - The 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991, added article 239AA to the constitution.
 - **Section 44 of the 1991 Act** says that all executive actions of the L-G, whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the L-G.
 - **Article 239AA** of the Constitution says the Council of Ministers will aid and advise the L-G in matters where the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws except where the L-G can exercise discretion.

Discretionary Powers of L-G

- Matters which falls outside the purview of the powers conferred on the Legislative Assembly but in respect of which powers or functions are entrusted or delegated to him by the President; or
- He is required by or under any law to act at his discretion or to exercise any judicial or quasi-judicial functions.
- If any question arises as to whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Lieutenant Governor is by or under any law required to act at his discretion, the decision of the Lieutenant Governor thereon shall be final.

- If any question arises as to whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Lieutenant Governor is required by any law to exercise any judicial or quasi-judicial functions, the decision of the Lieutenant Governor thereon shall be final.

UTTARAKHAND WANTS CENTRE TO WITHDRAW ILP FROM NITI, NELONG VALLEY

◎ **CONTEXT:** The Uttarakhand government had sought withdrawal of the “inner-line permit” (ILP) system in Niti Valley of Chamoli district and Nelang Valley of Uttarkashi district for better border management and expansion of tourism and other economic activities in villages located there.

◎ **ABOUT:** About “inner-line permit” (ILP) System

- The concept originates from the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFR), 1873**.
- **Official document: Inner Line Permit (ILP)** is an **official travel document issued** by the concerned state government to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period.
- **Obligatory:** Indian citizens from outside those states must obtain a permit for entering into the protected state.
- **Regulation:** The document is an effort by the government **to regulate movement** to certain areas located near the international border of India.
- **Different from PAP:** An ILP is usually significantly easier to obtain than the analogous Protected Area Permit (PAP) which is the document required by non-citizens to enter the same areas.

Why it is demanded?

- In Uttarakhand, tourists have to obtain ILP for locations near the China border, at least in the three districts of Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh, and Chamoli.
- To increase economic activities
- increase border surveillance by villagers
- It will also stop outward migration owing to a lack of livelihood opportunities.

Most visiting Tourist sites in these districts

- **Nelong Valley, Uttarkashi**
 - Nelong valley is an inner line area (India-China border) opened to domestic tourists only during the day.
 - Tourists visit Nelong valley every year and most of them turn up during Char Dham yatra when portals of Gangotri shrine are opened.
- **Niti village, Chamoli**
 - Located at an altitude of around 3600 meters, Niti village in Joshimath in Chamoli district is visited for religious purposes.
- **Milam village, Munsiri, Pithoragarh**
 - Tourists visit here for the Milam glacier trek. Villagers in Milam migrate to lower reaches in winters as this area receives heavy snowfall.
- **Vyas valley, Dharchula, Pithoragarh**
 - More than 1000 tourists visit Vyas valley annually, by obtaining ILP to see “Om Parvat from Naabhi village and AdiKailash from Kuti”.

Other states where ILP is required

- Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram are protected by the Inner Line, and lately, Manipur was added.

ELECTORAL BONDS

◎ **CONTEXT:** **A case was filed with regard to Electoral Bonds about the sanctity of the electoral process. It is not understood why the Supreme Court is delaying the verdict.**

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- They can be purchased by any Indian Citizen or a body incorporated in India.
 - They can be bought for any amount in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh, and Rs. 1 Cr.
 - The donor gives the electoral bond to the political party of his choice, within 15 days after issuance of the bond.
 - The validity is 15 days.
 - These are intended to increase transparency in political funding i.e., clean money.

Electoral Bonds

- These are the bearer bonds issued by the State Bank of India.
- Normally, the bearer bonds are issued by the RBI; in this case, these are issued by SBI.
- Rightly RBI flagged the risks to the Government of India.
- There is no limit on the purchase of electoral bonds.
- Indian subsidiary of a multi-national company can also purchase electoral bonds.

Donor Is Anonymous from Voter's Perspective

- Government knows the donor because details through "Know Your Customer" are collected by the SBI. SBI can also ask for additional information from the donor.
- The rules also allow the information to be given to investigation agencies or courts, if necessary.
- Hence the donor is not anonymous from a Government perspective.

Major criticism faced by these bonds

- Anonymous from the voter's perspective.
- MNCs with Indian subsidiaries can donate unlimited amounts and the common man never knows about it.
- Government can pressurize corporates to give donations.
- Government can also pressurize corporates not to give donations to opposition parties.
- Corporates can influence public policy.
- Increases anonymous money power in politics.
- Strikes at the root of the representative democracy.

Other similar kinds of bonds**Masala bonds**

- Masala bonds are bonds issued outside India but denominated in Indian Rupees, rather than the local currency.

- Masala is an Indian word and it means spices.
- The term was used by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to evoke the culture and cuisine of India.
- Unlike dollar bonds, where the borrower takes the currency risk, Masala bond makes the investors bear the risk.
- The first Masala bond was issued by the World Bank-backed IFC.

Samurai bond

- A samurai bond is a yen-denominated bond issued in Tokyo by non-Japanese companies and is subject to Japanese regulations.
- These bonds provide the issuer with access to the Japanese capital, which can be used for local investments or financing operations outside Japan.
- Foreign borrowers may want to issue in the Samurai market to hedge against foreign currency exchange risk.
- Another intention may be simultaneously exchanging the issue into another currency, to take advantage of lower costs.

Panda bonds

- A Panda bond is a Chinese renminbi-denominated bond from a non-Chinese issuer, sold in the People's Republic of China.
- The first two Panda bonds were issued on the same day by the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

Blue bonds

- These aim to preserve and protect the oceans.
- The first blue bond program in the world was the Seychelles Sovereign Blue Bond.

Green Bonds

- A green bond is a fixed-income instrument designed specifically to support specific climate-related or environmental projects.
- Green bonds typically come with tax incentives to enhance their attractiveness to investors.
- The World Bank issued the first official green bond.

MULLAPERIYAR DAM CASE

◎ CONTEXT:

Supreme Court adjourns hearing in Mullaperiyar Dam case.

◎ ABOUT:

- Mullaperiyar dam issue is between two south Indian States is between Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- The dam belongs to the state of Kerala but it was given on lease to Tamil Nadu.
- The disputed state that is Tamil Nadu depends on the water of the Periyar River in fulfilling its needs in agriculture and basic needs therefore they are asking to raise the water level of the dam.
- In this dispute, Kerala is not opposing giving more water but it opposes providing more water to Tamil Nadu because there is a threat to 119 years old dam by raising the water level to a higher extent.
- The dam is also declared as endangered construction and any further addition into the water pressure may result in the collapse of the dam.

History of Mullaperiyar Dam

Provisions for the Distribution of Water in the Indian Constitution

- The relevant provisions of the Indian Constitution are:
 - Entry 17 in the State List,
 - Entry 56 in the Union List, and
 - Article 262
- On 29 October 1886, a lease agreement for 999 yrs was made between the Maharaja Travancore, Viakham, Thirunal Rama Varma, and the British Secretary of state for India for Periyar irrigation work.
- The lease agreement granted full right, power, and liberty to the secretary of state for India to construct.
- After independence in 1947, the Kerala government said that the earlier agreement signed between British Raj and Travancore was invalid and needed to be renewed.

Committees Appointed To Look Into the Issue

- **Supervisory Committee**
 - A three-member supervisory committee was appointed by the center and the Supreme Court in 2006 which was headed by a senior Central Water Commission (CWC) officer.
 - The commission consisted of one representative each from both the states.
 - It was constituted to make periodic visits to inspect the dam before and after the monsoon and to supervise the safety of the dam.
 - The committee was empowered to oversee the repair work and allowed to take the required necessary safety measures for the benefit of both the states and the dam.
- **A.S. Anand committee**
 - It was set up by the Supreme Court in 2010 during an argument in Tamil Nadu's suit questioning the law enacted by Kerala to restrict the water level of the dam to 136ft.
 - The committee was constituted to look into the dispute and prepare a report within six months.
 - The committee was mandated to study all the aspects of the 119 yrs old dam including its safety.
 - Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu government also requested to scrap the idea of the formation of a new committee which the Supreme Court refused to do.

The Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956

Pursuant to the power conferred by the Constitution (article 262), Parliament has enacted the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956. Its main features can be thus summarized:

- A State Government which has a water dispute with another State Government may request the Central Government to refer the dispute to a tribunal for adjudication.
- The Central Government, if it is of opinion that the dispute cannot be settled by negotiation, shall refer the dispute to a Tribunal.
- The Tribunal's composition is laid down in the Act. It consists of a Chairman and two other members, nominated by the Chief Justice of India from among persons who, at the time of such nomination, are Judges of the Supreme Court.
- The Tribunal can appoint assessors to advise it in the proceedings before it.
- On the reference being made by the Central Government, the Tribunal investigates the matter and makes its report, embodying its decision. The decision is to be published and is to be final and binding on the parties.

- Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and other courts in respect of the dispute referred to the Tribunal is barred.
- The Central Government may frame a scheme, providing for all matters necessary to give effect to the decision of the Tribunal. The scheme may, inter alia, provide for establishing authority for implementation.

INDIA TO SET UP DEVELOPMENT FINANCE INSTITUTION TO FUND INFRA PROJECTS

◎ **CONTEXT:** India's cabinet approved the establishment of a development financial institution (DFI) with a fund worth 200 billion rupees (\$2.8 billion) to boost investment in infrastructure projects.

◎ **ABOUT:** About the Development Finance Institution (DFI)

- The Development Finance Institution (DFI) are **organizations that are either owned by the government or by charitable institutions to finance infrastructure projects that are of national importance but may or may not meet commercial return standards.**
- **Types of Finances by DFIs:**
 - **Medium**(1-5 years)
 - **Long term**(>5 years)
- **DFIs Categories:**
 - **National Development Banks** such as IDBI, SIDBI, ICICI, IFCI, IRBI, and IDFC.
 - **Sector-specific financial institutions** such as TFCL, EXIM Bank, NABARD, HDFC, and NHB.
 - **Investment Institutions** such as LIC, GIC, and UTI.
 - **State-level institutions** such as State Finance Corporations and SIDCs.

Significance of the initiative

- **Fundraising:** The DFI would seek to raise funds from the global pension and insurance sectors.
- **Long-term financing:** It will help in raising funds for the length which is a must for the infrastructure sector.
- **Tax benefits:** It will help for investment in new projects with certain tax benefits.
- **Boost GDP:** It will help to cut logistics costs of GDP.
- **Saving of companies cost:** It will help hundreds of companies save on transport costs and boost sales once demand picks up.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

◎ **CONTEXT:** US-based researcher says Universal Basic Income is the 'vaccine' for poverty.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Universal basic income (UBI) is a government program in which every adult citizen receives a set amount of money regularly.

- The goals of a basic income system are to alleviate poverty and replace other need-based social programs that potentially require greater bureaucratic involvement.
- The idea of universal basic income has gained momentum in the U.S. as automation increasingly replaces workers in manufacturing and other sectors of the economy.

Negative income tax

- For low earnings, there is no income tax in the negative income tax system.
- They receive money, in the form of a negative income tax, but they don't pay any tax.
- Then, as their labor income increases, this benefit, this money from the state, gradually decreases.
- That decrease is to be seen as a mechanism for the poor, instead of the poor paying tax.

Understanding Universal Basic Income (UBI)

- The idea of providing a basic income to all members of society goes back centuries.

What Countries Have Universal Basic Income?

There are many cities, states, and countries that are experimenting with a universal basic income. The universal income's simplicity makes it an attractive alternative to welfare programs.

- United States
- Canada
- Finland
- Kenya
- Scotland
- Taiwan

- Experiments with negative income tax took place in the 1960s and the 1970s in the United States and Canada and were followed by an increased debate in Europe from the 1980s and forward.
- Basic income is generally viewed as an alternative kind of welfare state, so it can then be seen in the perspective of the development of that, where social insurances are a core feature.

Pros and Cons of Universal Basic Income

• Pros

- Workers could afford to wait for a better job or better wages.
- May help remove the "poverty trap" from traditional welfare programs.
- Citizens could have simple, straightforward financial assistance that minimizes bureaucracy.
- The government would spend less to administer the program than with traditional welfare.
- People would have more money to start families in countries with low birth rates.
- The payments could help stabilize the economy during recessionary periods.

• Cons

- Inflation could be triggered because of the increase in demand for goods and services.
- There won't be an increased standard of living in the long run because of inflated prices.

- A reduced program with smaller payments won't make a real difference to poverty-stricken families.
- Free income may not incentivize people to get jobs, and could make work seem optional.
- Free income could perpetuate the falling labor force participation rate.

THE MINES AND MINERALS (DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2021

◎ **CONTEXT:** Lok Sabha passes the bill to amend the Mines and Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- The bill is to streamline the renewal of the auction process for minerals and coal mining rights.

Major Amendments

- **Removal of restriction on end-use of minerals:** The Act empowers the central government to reserve any to be leased through an auction for a particular end-use. Such mines are known as captive mines. The Bill provides that no mine will be reserved for particular end-use.
- **Sale of minerals by captive mines:** The Bill provides that captive mines may sell up to 50% of their annual mineral production in the open market after meeting their own needs. The central government may increase this threshold through a notification.
- **Auction by the central government in certain cases:** Under the Act, states conduct the auction of mineral concessions. Mineral concessions include mining lease and prospecting license-cum-mining lease. The Bill empowers the central government to specify a period for completion of the auction process in consultation with the state government.
- **Transfer of statutory clearances:** The Bill replaces the provision to require or obtain fresh clearances within two years and instead provides that transferred statutory clearances will be valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee.
- **Allocation of mines with expired leases:** The Bill adds that, whose lease has expired, may be allocated to a government company in certain cases. The state government may grant a lease for such a mine to a government company for a period of up to 10 years or until the selection of a new lessee, whichever is earlier.
- **Extension of leases to government companies:** The Bill provides that the period of mining leases of government companies may be extended on payment of additional amount prescribed in the Bill.
- **Non-exclusive reconnaissance permit:** The Act provides for a non-exclusive reconnaissance permit. Reconnaissance means preliminary prospecting of a mineral through certain surveys. The Bill removes the provision for this permit.

Conditions for lapse of mining lease

The Act provides that a mining lease will lapse if the lessee:

- Is not able to start mining operations within two years of the grant of a lease, or
- Has discontinued mining operations for two years.

However, the lease will not lapse at the end of this period if a concession is provided by the state government upon an application by the lessee.

Significance of the amendment

- It would lead to greater transparency in the auction process.
- High level of flexibility would help in maximizing the output of the mines.
- It will speed up the process of implementation of projects.
- It will create an efficient energy market.
- It will bring more competition as well as reduce coal imports.
- India will benefit from the high level of technology that would be gained for underground mining which is used by different countries.

Main Methods of Mining:

- **Underground Mining**
 - Relatively costly and frequently used to get to deeper deposits.
 - Underground mining involves digging down into the earth and creating tunnels and shafts that reach the deposits of resources.
 - Ore and other resources can then be brought up to the surface for processing, while waste rock can be removed for disposal.
- **Surface Mining**
 - Surface mining involves the removal of plant life, soil, and potentially bedrock to be able to access resource deposits.
 - It is normally used for fairly shallow, non-precious deposits.
 - The two foremost kinds of surface mining are open-pit mining and strip mining.
- **Placer Mining**
 - Placer mining is generally done in riverbeds, sands, or other sedimentary environments and involves sifting valuable materials from sediments.
 - Famously, "panning for gold" can be part of the placer mining process.
 - In placer operations, the extracted sedimentary material is rinsed and sluiced to pull out the desired minerals.
- **In-Situ Mining**
 - Also referred to as solution mining.
 - In-situ mining does not involve removing intact ore from beneath the earth's surface.
 - Instead, it involves pumping chemicals underground to dissolve resource-containing ore and then pumping what is known as the "pregnant solution" back up to the surface, where it can be processed to recover minerals.
 - This technique is mainly used in uranium mining.

DIGITAL GREEN CERTIFICATE PROPOSED BY EU

◎ **CONTEXT:** The European Commission proposed to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe and free movement of citizens within the European Union (EU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- A Digital Green Certificate is proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result, or has recovered from COVID-19.

Key Features of this proposal

- **Digital or paper format:** The key features of the certificate are that it will be in digital or paper format complete with a QR code and will be free of charge.

- **Multiple authorities:** The certificate can be issued by authorities, including hospitals, testing centers, and health authorities.
- **Accepted in all EU countries:** Once the proposal for digital certificates is finalized, it will be accepted in all EU countries and will help to ensure that the restrictions imposed in different areas within the EU can be lifted in a coordinated manner.
- **For third-country nationals too:** All EU citizens or third-country nationals who are legally staying in the EU will be able to use these digital certificates and thereby will be exempted from free movement restrictions.
- **Notification:** In case an EU member country requires a person to quarantine or undergo a test, it will have to notify the Commission and all other member states justifying its decision.
- **Brand:** Significantly, the brand or kind of anti-COVID vaccine received does not matter for the certificate to be issued.

Need for this reform

World Health Organisation (WHO) says on this matter:

World Health Organisation (WHO) had advised against using such certificates because of lack of evidence that a person infected with Covid-19 could not get the infection again.

- In the EU and across the world, the tourism industry has been severely impacted due to the spread of the disease.
- **Israel** became the first country to issue certificates called “**vaccine passports**” that will allow vaccinated individuals to use some facilities and attend events.
- **Denmark** also said that it was in the process of rolling out digital passports that would act as proof for those individuals who have been vaccinated.
- **Chile** had proposed “**release certificates**” meant for those who had recovered from COVID-19.

The European Union (EU)

- The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe.
- The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardized system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one.
- EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital within the internal market.
- The EU and European citizenship were established when the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993.

ADENOVIRUS ANTIBODIES REDUCE VECTOR VACCINE EFFICACY

◎ **CONTEXT:** Studies have shown that using the same adenovirus subtypes for repeated vaccination might result in reduced efficacy.

◎ **ABOUT:** What is an Adenovirus antibody?

- **Adenoviruses**(family *Adenoviridae*) are medium-sized (90–100 nm)viruses.
- **They are**-enveloped (without an outer lipid bilayer) viruses.



- They are icosahedral nucleocapsid containing a **double-stranded DNA genome**.
- **Adenoviruses:** These are a group of common viruses that infect the lining of the eyes, airways, and lungs, intestines, urinary tract, and nervous system.
 - They're common causes of fever, coughs, sore throats, diarrhea, and pink eye.
 - The immune system generated against the adenovirus infection causes the antibodies formation.

How these antibodies illicit response action against vector-based vaccine?

- Pre-existing antibodies cause the relatively low efficacy of the adenovirus-based vaccine in some people.
 - It affects the development of antibodies against the new target.
 - Pre-existing antibodies against adenoviruses will stop the adenovirus particles from getting into cells and making the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein they carry the code for.

Adenovirus as Vector

- **Adenoviruses are excellent vectors** for delivering genes or vaccine antigens. Adenovirus-based vectors offer several **advantages** over other viral vectors such as:
 - a broad range of tissue tropism
 - well-characterized genome
 - ease of genetic manipulation including acceptance of large transgene DNA insertions
 - inherent adjuvant properties
 - ability to induce robust transgene-specific T cell and antibody responses
 - non-replicative nature in host
 - ease of production at large scale

Vector-based Vaccines

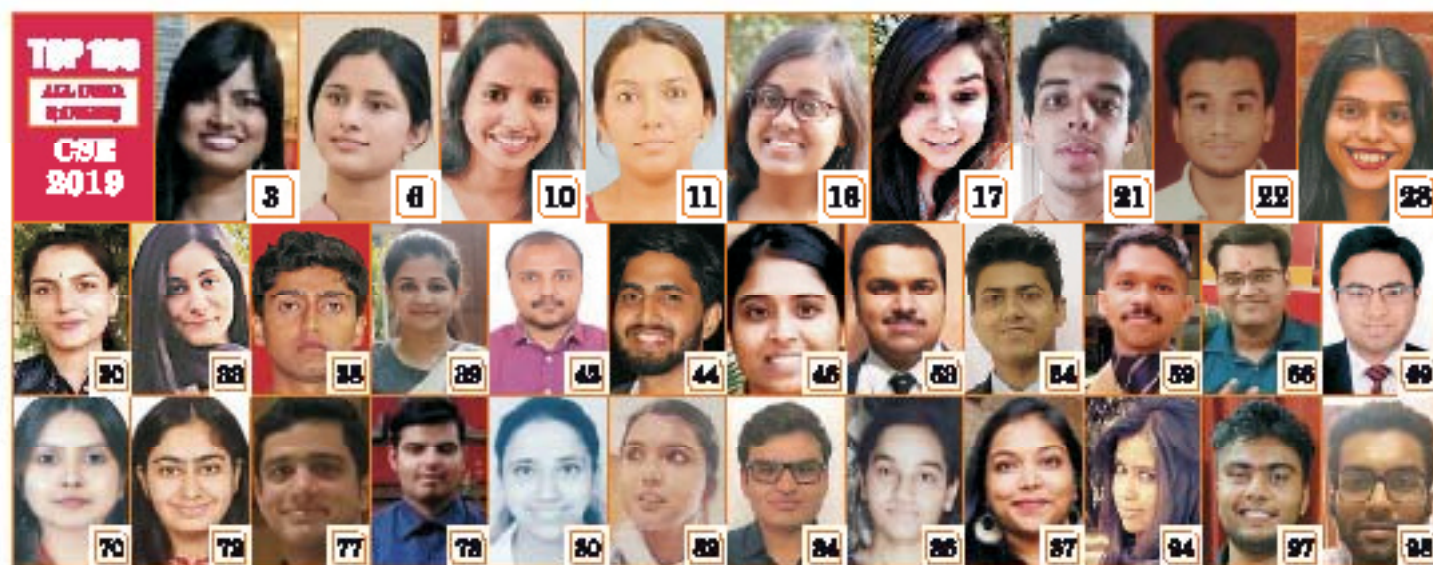
- **Viral vectors are** tools commonly used to deliver genetic material into cells.
 - This process can be performed inside a living organism (*in vivo*) or in cell culture (*in vitro*).
 - **As a medium of transport:** Viruses have evolved **specialized molecular mechanisms** to efficiently transport their genomes inside the cells they infect.
 - **Functioning:** They are then inserted into the genome of a **non-pathogenic organism**, where they are expressed on the organism's surface and can elicit an immune response.

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