



News Analysis (17 Jul, 2020)

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India Lifted 271 Million People Out of Poverty

Why in News

According to India's **Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** at least **271 million** people were **lifted out of multi-dimensional poverty** between 2005-06 and 2016-17.

The **VNR of SDGs** has been presented by the **Niti Ayog** at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Key Points

- **Related Data:**

- The estimates presented were drawn from the 2019 **global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)** released in July 2019.
- Over **640 million people** across India were in multidimensional poverty in 2005-2006.
- The number of people living under **poverty decreased to around 369.55 million** by 2016-2017.
- However, 27.9% of India's population was still poor in 2016-17

- **Poverty Reduction:** In rural areas poverty reduction has outpaced that in urban areas.

Multidimensional Poverty Index

- The Multidimensional Poverty Index was launched by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in 2010.
- MPI is based on the idea that **poverty is not unidimensional** (not just depends on income and one individual may lack several basic needs like **education, health** etc.), rather it is **multidimensional**.
- The index shows the **proportion of poor people** and the **average number of deprivations** each poor person experiences at the same time.

- MPI uses three dimensions and ten indicators which are:
 - **Education:** Years of schooling and child enrollment (1/6 weightage each, total 2/6);
 - **Health:** Child mortality and nutrition (1/6 weightage each, total 2/6);
 - **Standard of living:** Electricity, flooring, drinking water, sanitation, cooking fuel and assets (1/18 weightage each, total 2/6)
 - A person is **multidimensionally poor** if she/he is deprived in one third or more (means 33% or more) **of the weighted indicators** (out of the ten indicators). Those who are deprived in one half or more of the weighted indicators are considered living in **extreme multidimensional poverty**.
 - MPI is significant as it recognizes poverty from different dimensions compared to the conventional methodology that measures poverty only from the income or monetary terms.

Way Forward

- As the **Covid-19** feared to make the country poorer, India would need to recount its poor.
- Therefore, measuring and monitoring progress under the goal to reach '**zero poverty by 2030-Goal 1 of the SDGs**', needs a reality check on India's poor.
- While **consumption surveys** provide **important indicators required to estimate poverty**, the all-India survey on household consumption expenditure for the period July 2017-June 2018 was scrapped by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation citing "**data discrepancies**".
- Hence, there is a need to incorporate **data quality refinements** in the survey process for conducting the next **Consumer Expenditure Survey** in 2020-2021 and 2021-22.

Source: DTE

Grant in Aid for Rural Local Bodies

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Finance has released a part of grants-in-aid of **Rs. 15187.50 crore** for around **2.63 lakh Rural Local Bodies (RLBs)** of 28 States.

- This has been made on the recommendations of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** and the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, **Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- This forms part of the **Tied Grant** as recommended by the **15th Finance Commission (FC)** for the **Financial Year (FY) 2020-2021**.

Key Points

- **Recommendation of 15th FC:** It recommended the grant in aid of **Rs. 60,750 crore** for (FY 2020-21) the RLBs which is the **highest ever allocation** made by the Finance Commission in any single year.

- **Allocation:** It will be allocated in two parts, namely **Basic Grant and Tied Grant** in **50:50%** mode.
 - **Basic Grant:** These grants are **untied** and can be used by RLBs for **location-specific needs**, except for salary or other establishment expenditure
Untied funds are utilised for the works of **emergent nature** which are **normally not covered under the schemes** decentralized at the district level.
 - **Tied Grants:** These are used for the **basic services** of:
 - Sanitation and maintenance of **Open-Defecation Free (ODF)** status.
 - Supply of drinking water, rain water harvesting and water recycling.
 - The RLBs shall, as far as possible, earmark one half of these grants each to these two critical services.
 - However, if any RLB has fully **saturated the needs of one category** it can utilize the **funds for the other category**.
- **Distribution:** The **State Governments** will be distributing the grants to all the tiers of of the **Panchayati Raj** -village, block and district including the traditional bodies of **5th** and **6th** **Schedule** areas based on the accepted recommendations of the latest **State Finance Commission (SFC)** and in conformity with the recommendations of the **15th FC**.
- **Assistance:** The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** would support the states in effective utilization of the grants by providing **Web/IT enabled platforms for planning, monitoring, accounting / auditing** of the works and funds flow at the level of each of the RLBs.
- **Significance:**
 - **Fighting Covid 19:** It would help RLBs in **providing employment**. E.g. migrant laborers who have returned to their native places owing to **Covid-19 pandemic** situation.
 - **Delivery of Basic Services:** Availability of this fund will **boost RLBs effectiveness** in delivery of basic services to the rural citizens.
 - **Rural Infrastructure:** It will augment the **rural infrastructure in a constructive way** e.g construction of roads, supply of water etc.

Finance Commission

- It is a **constitutional body**, that determines the **method and formula for distributing the tax proceeds** between the **Centre and states** and among the states as per the constitutional arrangement and present requirements.
- Under **Article 280** of the Constitution, the President of India is required to constitute a **Finance Commission** at an interval of five years or earlier.
- The **1st FC** was set up in 1951 and there have been fifteen so far.
- The **15th FC headed by N.K. Singh** was constituted by the President of India on **27th** November 2017, against the backdrop of the abolition of the **Planning Commission** and the introduction of the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**.
- In November 2019, the Union Cabinet approved the **15th FC** to submit its first report for the first **fiscal year 2020-21** and to extend its tenure to provide for the presentation of the final report covering Financial Years 2021-22 to 2025-26 by 30th October, 2020.

Source: PIB

Dichotomy in Animal Sacrifice: SC

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court** has issued a notice to the Kerala government on a plea challenging the **Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act, 1968**.

- The Act **prohibits sacrifice** of animals and birds in temples to **‘please’ the deity**.
- It also **criminalises the intent behind the animal sacrifice** and **not animal sacrifice** per se.

If the sacrifice is not for pleasing any deity but for personal consumption even in the precincts of the temple, it is not forbidden.

Key Points

- **Background:**
 - The plea **challenged the 16th June 2020 Kerala High Court order** upholding the 1968 Act.
 - **Essential Practice:** The petitioners, who are **Shakthi worshippers**, appealed that animal sacrifice is an integral part of the worship and an essential religious practice.
 - They are **unable to perform “Bali” rituals** after the ban which they believe is diminishing the family deity’s power.
 - Shaktism or Shakthi tantric practice is a major tradition of Hinduism and as per its scriptures and practices, animal sacrifice is essential and unavoidable.
 - **Discriminatory:** It was also argued that the **Act applies only to Hindus but does not stop other religions from practising** it which is **arbitrary** and **violative of Article 14 (Right to Equality before the Law)** of the Constitution.
 - Petitioners referred to **bird sacrifice at a Church in Kochi and the festival of Bakrid** which have not been banned.
 - According to the state assembly, killing animals in **other religious practices cannot be considered as a sacrifice because the animals are later cooked and consumed**.
 - **Enforce Blanket Prohibition:** They held that if the killing of animals and birds was to be prohibited, it **should be for all purposes, religious or otherwise**.
- **Supreme Court’s Reaction:**
 - The SC **highlighted the dichotomy in animal protection law** which allows the killing of animals for food but does not permit the killing of animals as an offering to a deity.
 - The court raised an important question of **“Is killing, not cruelty?”** and highlighted the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960** which **allows the killing of animals but prohibits cruelty to animals**.

According to the SC, there may be a point in saying that taking lives is permissible in certain circumstances but cruelty is not.

Source: TH

India - Iran

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has confirmed that **India is no longer involved in the Farzad-B gas field project of Iran.**

- Further, it said that India has **not received any response from Iran** since December 2019 on the future of the **Chabahar-Zahedan railway project as well.**
- It cited **policy changes by the Iranian government, Iran's uncertain finances, and the USA sanctions situation** as the reasons behind the decisions on Indian infrastructure projects in Iran.

Key Points

TIMELINE: CHABAHAR AND FARZAD-B

Dec 25, 2002: A consortium of ONGC Videsh, IOC and Oil India signs contract for carrying out exploration at Farzad-B block

Jan 25, 2003: Former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then Iran president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami sign a deal to develop Chabahar port complex and Chabahar-Fahranj-Bam railway link

June, 2009: Farzad-B contract expires

May 6, 2015: Union minister Nitin Gadkari signs an MoU with Iran

May 22, 2016: PM Narendra Modi visits Tehran; discusses Chabahar and Farzad with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani

Dec 3, 2017: Rouhani inaugurates first phase of port

Jan 2018: Iran and India sign pact worth \$2 bn for cooperation in rail

Feb 10, 2018: Iran signs agreement to lease the operational control of Chabahar port

Jul 2020: Iran shows the door to India in both Chabahar and Farzad-B projects

- **Farzad-B Gas Field:**



- It is located in **Persian Gulf (Iran)**.
- The contract for exploration of the field was signed in 2002 by Indian **consortium** comprising ONGC Videsh, Indian Oil Corporation and Oil India.
- The contract expired in 2009 after declaration of commerciality of the field, based on the gas discovery.
 - It has **gas reserves of more than 19 trillion cubic feet**.
 - ONGC has invested approximately **USD 100 million**.
- Since then, the consortium has been trying to secure the contract for development of the field.
 - The major dispute between India and Iran was over setting up of two pipelines, and also over money to be quoted on the development plan.
 - Around 75% of the deal was finalised by May 2018, when the **USA unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal** and announced sanctions on Iran.
- In **January 2020**, India was informed that in the immediate future, **Iran would develop the field on its own** and would like to **involve India appropriately at a later stage**.



- **Chabahar-Zahedan Railway Project:**

- In the ‘**New Delhi Declaration**’ signed in 2003, both countries had decided to jointly develop the Chabahar Port complex.
 - The Port development was exempted from the sanctions.
 - India’s main investment in the Chabahar Port where it has taken over **operations of one terminal**, had progressed well in the last few years, handling 82 ships with 12 lakh tonnes of bulk cargo in 8200 containers since December 2018.
- A contract to **develop the 628-km railway line (Chabahar-Zahedan)** along the Iran-Afghanistan border was signed in **2016**.
 - IRCON was appointed by the Government of India to assess the feasibility of the project. It was working with CDTIC, an Iranian company.
 - It had completed the site inspection and review of the feasibility report. The Iranian side was to nominate an authorised entity to finalise outstanding technical and financial issues. India waited for the same.
 - However, Iran started work on the railway project in July 2020.
 - India is **not part of this project** as of now since there is lack of clarity on whether it will attract the USA sanctions. However, it has conveyed to Iran that it is open to joining the project later.

- **Concerns for India:**

- Iran’s growing proximity to China.
- Further, Iran seems to be sceptical of India’s diplomatic ties with the USA.
- **Farzad-B gas Field:**
 - India needs gas and Iran remains one of the best options as geographically, Iran is closest to India of all the countries in the Persian gulf region.
 - Further, it could have improved India-Iran ties as the crude oil import from Iran remains impacted due to the USA sanctions.
- **Chabahar** is not only a key to maritime relations between both the countries, but also provides an opportunity to India to reach Russia and Central Asia.
 - Further, it allows India to bypass Pakistan which had blocked Indian aid to Afghanistan and all trade over land.

Way Forward

- India needs to play a balancing act between the USA and Iran.
- Further, India needs to closely watch the space created by its exit.
- In a world where connectivity is seen as the new currency, India's loss on account of these projects can become gain for some other country, especially China.

Source: IE

Agreement on Scientific Cooperation Between India and EU

Why in News

Recently, India and the European Union (EU) agreed to **renew** the **Agreement on Scientific Cooperation** for the **next five years (2020-2025)** during the virtual **15th India-EU Summit**.

European Union

- **European Union (EU)**, is an international organization comprising **27 European countries** and governing common economic, social, and security policies.
- The EU was created by the **Maastricht Treaty**, which entered into force on November 1, **1993**.
- The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by **creating a single currency (the euro)**, a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs.



Key Points

- **Renewal of Agreement on Scientific Cooperation:**
 - India and the EU have agreed to further collaborate in research and innovation based on the **principles of mutual benefit and reciprocity**, as established in the **India-EU Agreement on Science and Technology (2001)** which **expired** on 17th May 2020.
 - Both parties are also committed to launch the **renewal procedure** for the above agreement and **acknowledge 20 years of cooperation on research and innovation.**

- **Significance:**
 - It is expected to enhance research and innovation cooperation in different fields like Water, Energy, Healthcare, Agritech & Bioeconomy, Integrated Cyber-Physical Systems, Information and Communication Technologies, Nanotechnology, and clean technologies, etc.
 - It will also **strengthen the institutional linkages** in research, exchange of researchers, students, startups and attract co-investment of resources for co-generation of knowledge.
- **India-EU Science and Technology Cooperation:**
 - **Science and Technology:** India-EU Science & Technology Steering Committee meets **annually** to review scientific cooperation.
 - The **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** and the **European Commission (EC)** have established a Co-Funding Mechanism (CFM) to support joint research projects selected under European Research & Innovation Framework Program ‘**Horizon 2020**’ related to **climate change and polar research**.
 - **Space Technology:** **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has had a long standing cooperation with the European Union, **since the 1970s**.
 - ISRO and the European Space Agency are working towards enhancing cooperation in earth observation. It also involves the **Copernicus programme** signed in 2018.
 - Copernicus is the **European Union's Earth observation programme**.

India-EU Relations

- **Evolution of Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India being amongst the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community in **1962**.
 - The **first India-EU Summit** was held in **Lisbon (Portugal)** in **2000**. Since then, fifteen annual bilateral Summits have been held between India and the EU.
 - The relationship was **upgraded to a ‘Strategic Partnership’** during the **5th India-EU Summit** held at the **Hague (Netherlands)** in **2004**.
 - The bilateral Strategic Partnership encompasses dialogue mechanisms covering a wide range of issues including trade, energy security, science & research, non-proliferation and disarmament, counter terrorism, cyber security, counter-piracy, migration and mobility, etc.
- **Trade and Investment:**
 - The **EU as a whole** was **India’s largest trading partner** while **India** was EU’s **9th** largest trading partner in **2018**.
 - India is also the **fourth largest service exporter** to the EU and the **sixth** largest destination for **service exports** from the EU.
 - EU is the **largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** into India.
 - Over the period April 2000 to June 2018, FDI equity flows from the EU countries into \$ 90.7 billion, which is about **24% of the total FDI inflows to India**.
 - Among countries, **Singapore** is the **largest source of FDI** in India during 2019 with \$ 14.67 billion investment followed by **Mauritius** (\$ 8.24 billion).
 - India and the EU are in the process of negotiating a bilateral **Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** since **2007**.

Way Forward

- India and the EU are ideal partners to make a difference in an international environment that is increasingly shaped by strategic rivalry between the USA and China.
- They have a common interest in avoiding a bipolarised world and developing the rules-based international order.
- The effort has to be to make the India-EU partnership rise to its potential and provide a new model for international relations today.

Source:PIB

Decline in Maternal Mortality Ratio

Why in News

Recently, the **Office of the Registrar General's Sample Registration System (SRS)** has released a **special bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2016-18**.

As per the **World Health Organization**, maternal death is the **death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy**, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

The Office of the Registrar General

- It is under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- Apart from conducting the **Population Census** and monitoring the implementation of the **Registration of Births and Deaths** in the country, it has been giving **estimates on fertility and mortality** using the **Sample Registration System (SRS)**.
- SRS is the **largest demographic sample survey** in the country that among other indicators provide direct estimates of maternal mortality through a nationally representative sample.
- **Verbal Autopsy (VA) instruments** are administered for the deaths reported under the SRS on a regular basis to yield a **cause-specific mortality profile** in the country.

Key Points

- **Maternal Mortality Ratio of the Country:**
 - MMR has **declined to 113** in 2016-18 **from 122** in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016.
 - MMR is defined as the **number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 1,00,000 live births** during the same time period.
 - The target **3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** set by the United Nations aims at **reducing the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 1,00,000 live births**.
- **MMR of Various States:**
 - **Assam (215), Uttar Pradesh (197), Madhya Pradesh (173)**, Rajasthan (164), Chhattisgarh (159), Odisha (150), Bihar (149), and Uttarakhand (99).
 - The southern States registered a lower MMR — Karnataka (92), Andhra Pradesh (65), **Tamil Nadu (60), Telangana (63) and Kerala (43)**.

- **Government Initiatives:**

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana** under the **National Health Mission** to link cash assistance to institutional deliveries.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)** provides a fixed day for assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care free of cost to pregnant women on 9th of every month.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana** and **LaQshya Guidelines**.

Way Forward

- Maternal mortality in a region is a **measure of reproductive health of women** in the area.
- The WHO has already appreciated India's efforts in reducing the maternal mortality rate. India needs to give a special focus to states with higher maternal mortality ratio.

Source: TH

Delimitation in North-east Illegal: Former EC Expert

Why in News

Recently, a former legal advisor to the **Election Commission** (EC) has held that the Centre's order for setting up a **Delimitation Commission** for **Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Assam and Nagaland** is “**unconstitutional**” and “**illegal**”.

- The **government constituted** a Delimitation Commission to redraw Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies of the **Union Territory Jammu and Kashmir** and the four northeastern states on **6th March 2020**.
- It is headed by the former **Supreme Court** judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.

Key Points

- **Background:**

- **Last delimitation exercise (2002-08) kept out** Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland because the **data used for it from 2001 Census was challenged for being defective**.
- The **tribal communities** in the four states feared that the delimitation exercise **would change the composition of seats reserved for them**, hurting their electoral interests.
- The **Delimitation Act of 2002** was amended on **14th January 2008**, to empower the President to **postpone the exercise in these states** after violence erupted.
- Subsequently, **Parliament decided that EC would carry out the delimitation exercise** in the four states and introduced the **Section 8A of the Representation of the People (RP) Act 1950** for this purpose.

The decision of Parliament was based on **earlier precedence of the EC being vested with the authority to redraw boundaries** of constituencies including when **Delhi was delimited into 70 seats in 1991-92** and **Uttarakhand into 70 seats in 2000**.

- **Issue:**
 - The Centre's order for setting up a Delimitation Commission is **illegal because it violates the Representation of the People Act 1950.**
 - Section 8A of the RP Act 1950, introduced by Parliament in 2008, states that delimitation in the four northeastern states would fall within the EC's remit.
 - Hence, any delimitation exercise by the new Delimitation Commission would be **declared void and result in wastage of huge public funds.**

Delimitation

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies to represent changes in population and is done on the basis of the preceding Census.
- **Need:**
 - To provide **equal representation to equal segments** of a population.
 - **A fair division of geographical areas** so that one political party does not have an advantage over others in an election.
 - To **follow the principle of “One Vote One Value”.**

Delimitation Commission

- **Establishment:** It was appointed by the President of India and works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India.
- **Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 82** provides the Parliament to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census. The **Census Act of 1948** provides for the permanent scheme of conducting population Census. It is carried out in a ten years interval.
 - **Article 170** provides division of State into territorial constituencies as per Delimitation Act after every Census.
 - Once the Act enacted by the Parliament is in force, the Union government sets up a Delimitation Commission.
- **Composition:** It is usually composed of the retired Supreme Court judge, Chief Election Commissioner and respective states' Election Commissioners.
- **Functions:**
 - It determines the number and boundaries of constituencies to make the population of all constituencies nearly equal.
 - It also identifies the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, wherever their population is relatively large.

Source: IE

Clinical Trial of Covid-19 Vaccine: ZyCoV-D

Why in News

Recently, India has started phase I/II **clinical trials** of **Covid-19 vaccine - ZyCoV-D**, designed and developed by **Zyventus** (a pharmaceutical company) with **support from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).**

- The adaptive phase I/II clinical trials will assess the **safety, tolerability and immunogenicity** of the vaccine.
- The **other indigenously developed** vaccine - Covaxin - produced by Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech is also underway to start clinical trials.

Key Points

- **Description:** ZyCoV-D, a **plasmid DNA vaccine**, comes under the **Vaccine Discovery Programme** supported by the Department of Biotechnology under the **National Biopharma Mission**.
Plasmids are **circular deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) vectors** that can be used as vaccines to prevent various types of diseases.
- **Pre-Clinical Phase:** It was found to initiate a **strong immune response** in multiple animal species like mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits.
 - The **antibodies** produced by the **vaccine** were able to **neutralize the wild type virus** indicating the protective potential of the vaccine candidate.
 - No safety concerns were observed in repeat dose by both **intramuscular** (directly into muscles) and **intra-dermal** (superficial injection into skin) routes of administration.
- **DNA Vaccine Platform:** The development of ZyCoV-D has established the **DNA vaccine platform** in the country which is simple to deploy, temperature stable, and consistently manufacturable- thus lowering costs and enhancing the effectiveness of a vaccine.
 - It provides ease of manufacturing the vaccine with **minimal biosafety requirements**.
 - It has shown much improved **vaccine stability and lower cold chain requirements** making it easy for transportation to remote regions of the country.
 - Furthermore, the platform can be **rapidly used to modify the vaccine** in a couple of weeks in case the virus mutates.

National Biopharma Mission

- It is an **industry-academia collaborative mission** for accelerating biopharmaceutical development in the country.
- It was **launched in 2017** at a total cost of **Rs. 1500 crore** and is 50% co-funded by **World Bank** loan.
- It is being implemented by the **Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC)**.
BIRAC is a **Public Sector Enterprise**, set up by the **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)**, Ministry of Science & Technology.
- Under this Mission, the **Government has launched Innovate in India (i3) programme** to create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the biopharma sector.
- **Objectives:** Development of **vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics and biotherapeutics** besides, strengthening the **clinical trial capacity** and building technology transfer capabilities in the country.

Source: PIB

Online NISHTHA Programme

Why in News

Recently, the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement (**NISHTHA**) programme has been launched for the **first time in online mode** in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**.

Key Points

- Initially, the NISHTHA programme was launched **in 2019** through face-to-face mode **to improve learning outcomes at the elementary level** in the country.
- **Covid-19 pandemic situation and lockdown** has affected the conduct of this programme in face-to-face mode. Therefore, NISHTHA has been customized for online mode to be conducted through **Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA)** and **NISHTHA portals**.
- **Aim:**
 - **National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA)** is a **capacity building programme** for improving the quality of school education through integrated teacher training.
 - It aims to **build competencies among all the teachers and school principals** at the elementary stage.
- **Implementation:**
 - The functionaries (at the state, district, block level) will be trained in an integrated manner on learning outcomes, school based assessment, learner – centred pedagogy, new initiatives in education, addressing diverse needs of children through multiple pedagogies, etc.
 - It is being organized by constituting **National Resource Groups (NRGs)** and **State Resource Groups (SRGs)** at the National and the State level who will be training **42 lakhs teachers** subsequently.

Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing

- DIKSHA Portal was launched by the **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** in **2017**.
- It provides a **digital platform for teachers** giving them an opportunity to learn and train themselves and connect with the teacher community.
 - It is built considering the whole teacher's life cycle - from the time student teachers enroll in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) to after they retire as teachers.
 - It also provides access to NCERT textbooks and lessons, following the regular school curriculum.
- States, government bodies and even private organisations, **can integrate DIKSHA into their respective teacher initiatives** based on their goals, needs and capabilities.

Source:PIB

National Thermal Power Corporation Limited

Why in News

Recently, the **National Thermal Power Corporation Limited** (NTPC Ltd.) has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)**, acting through the **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited** (NIIFL).

It will explore opportunities for investments in areas like **renewable energy** (RE), power distribution among other areas of mutual interest in India.

Key Points

- NTPC Ltd. is a **central Public Sector Undertaking** (PSU) under the **Ministry of Power**.
- It is **India's largest energy conglomerate** with roots planted way back in 1975 to accelerate power development in India.
- **Aim:** To provide reliable power and related solutions in an economical, efficient and environment-friendly manner, driven by innovation and agility.
- It became a **Maharatna company** in **May 2010**.
- It is located in **New Delhi**.
- **Few Recent Initiatives:**
 - **Creation of public charging infrastructure** in various cities and battery charging and swapping stations for electric 3-wheelers have been commissioned.
 - **Providing electric buses to state/city transport undertakings.** For example, e-bus solutions for Andaman and Nicobar Administration are under implementation.
 - Launch of its new project involving **hydrogen Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles** (FCEV) to run in Delhi and Leh.

National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited

- It is a **collaborative investment platform for international and Indian investors**, anchored by the **Government of India**.
- It was set up in **December 2015** to catalyse funding into the country's core sector.
- It invests across asset classes such as infrastructure, private equity and other diversified sectors in India, with the **objective to generate attractive risk-adjusted returns** for its investors.
- It has a **targeted corpus of Rs. 40,000 crore** to be raised over the years.
 - **49%** of which will be funded by the government at any given point of time.
 - **Remaining 51%** is to be raised from domestic and global investors, including international pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and multilateral/bilateral investors.
- It was registered with the **Securities and Exchange Board of India** (SEBI) as a **Category II Alternate Investment Fund** on **28th December 2015**.
- NIIF manages over **USD 4.3 billion of equity capital commitments** across its **three funds** which are **Master Fund, Fund of Funds and Strategic Opportunities Fund**, each with its distinct investment strategy.

The NIIF **Master Fund** is the **largest infrastructure fund in the country** and invests in core infrastructure sectors such as transportation and energy.
- A **Governing Council chaired by the Finance Minister** has been set up to act as an advisory council to the NIIF.

Source: PIB

Indian Council of Agricultural Research

Why in News

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) celebrated its **92nd foundation day on 16th July 2020.**

Key Points

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) was **established on 16 July 1929** as a **registered society** under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860.**
- It is an **autonomous organisation** under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**, Government of India.
- It is **headquartered at New Delhi.** With 102 ICAR institutes and 71 agricultural universities spread across the country this is one of the largest national agricultural systems in the world.
- It is the **apex body** for coordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country.
- The ICAR has played a pioneering role in **ushering Green Revolution** and subsequent developments in agriculture in India through its research and technology development that has enabled the country to increase the **production of foodgrains by 5.6 times, horticultural crops by 10.5 times, fish by 16.8 times, milk by 10.4 times and eggs by 52.9 times since 1950-51 to 2017-18.**

Note:

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) will start a **Farmers Innovation Fund.**
- The **'Kisan Diwas' or National Farmers Day** is observed across the country on **23rd December** to celebrate the birth anniversary of **Chaudhary Charan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India.**
- **Dr. Norman E. Borlaug was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970** for his work in global agriculture. He is also known as the **Father of the Green Revolution.**
- The World Food Prize is also known as the **"Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture". Dr. Rattan Lal** has been declared the winner of the **World Food Prize 2020.**
Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the father of India's green revolution, was the **first recipient of this award in 1987.**

Source: PIB
